
TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

REFUGEE REVIEW

THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2007

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: MAREE JOYCE

INTERVIEWEE: FARRAH NASSER

1 MS JOYCE: My name is Maree Joyce. Today's date is the 8th of
2 November 2007 and I'm conducting an interview with Farrah
3 Nasser. The interview is being conducted in Thomastown,
4 Melbourne Victoria. Welcome to the interview can you
5 please tell me your name?
6 MS NASSER: My name is Farrah Nasser.
7 MS JOYCE: Thank you, Farrah.
8 SPEAKER: I'm going to ask you to pause just for a sec.
9 MS JOYCE: Do you have any other names, any nicknames?
10 MS NASSER: No.
11 MS JOYCE: No, when were you born, what's the date of your
12 birth, Farrah?
13 MS NASSER: The 1st of July 1965.
14 MS JOYCE: And your age now?
15 MS NASSER: Forty-two.
16 MS JOYCE: Yes, and what is the city and country of your birth?
17 MS NASSER: Najaf the holy place in Iraq.
18 MS JOYCE: In Iraq, right. Can you spell Najaf for us please?
19 MS NASSER: N-a-j-a-f.
20 MS JOYCE: Thank you. I'd like to begin our conversation now
21 about your story. We'll start with the time before
22 detention, when did you leave Iraq?
23 MS NASSER: I left Iraq at the end of 2000.
24 MS JOYCE: And what was your life like before you left, can you
25 tell us something about your family, your home, home life,
26 education all of those things?
27 MS NASSER: My life was so happy with my husband and my
28 children. I have had a big family and very nice
29 neighbours, helpful. I finish the University in Arabic
30 language and I work as a teacher, an Arabic teacher, for
31 more than 10 years in Iraq Baghdad. There's no problem

1 (indistinct) in Baghdad.

2 MS JOYCE: Can you tell us about your religion, what your
3 religion is and what the practices were that you would
4 engage in?

5 MS NASSER: My religion is a Muslim Shia.

6 MS JOYCE: And what does a family, a Muslim Shia family do, how
7 do they practice their religion, how would your family
8 have lived that?

9 MS NASSER: A lot times, not a lot to do, (indistinct) work you
10 do.

11 MS JOYCE: Right.

12 MS NASSER: Because of the previous regime. Some of them do
13 their religion secret, yeah.

14 MS JOYCE: Was it like that for you?

15 MS NASSER: No, I just - I want to do something at my home,
16 yes.

17 MS JOYCE: Okay. So how did politics affect your life? You've
18 mentioned that you weren't always able to practice your
19 religion the way you wanted to or some in the family
20 couldn't, are there other ways that politics affected your
21 life?

22 MS NASSER: In 1991 my life is changed from good to worse.
23 After the anti father, you know the anti father in Iraq in
24 1991.

25 MS JOYCE: Yes.

26 MS NASSER: So, most of the city in Iraq erupted and my husband
27 he was taken to jail because at that time the security
28 forces were taking everybody in the street at that time
29 with reason, or no reason, especially, people who were
30 Muslim Shia, so my husband was taken in the jail and then
31 executed.

1 MS JOYCE: Were you there when they took him and did they come
2 to your home or was he at work?

3 MS NASSER: In the street, he was in the street on his way to
4 the school, he was a teacher too. So, the security force
5 was still come to (indistinct), to my house, searching if
6 there were weapons hidden in the house, that's the reason
7 to come and harassing us, my children. So, they harassing
8 continuous, I'm fear of my daughter make me let her to
9 marry, even though she was 14 years old, to protect her.
10 I then stopped going to school, me and my children because
11 of the danger. This harassment as I said, continued until
12 1998 so I decided, at that time I decided to leave the
13 country, leave everything, my house, family, everything
14 and to go to everywhere to - for save my - to save my son.

15 MS JOYCE: And did you know what had happened to your husband
16 or you didn't know at the time?

17 MS NASSER: No, 15 years I don't know whether he is still alive
18 or died. So, (indistinct words) collapsed, they found him
19 and other people in the mass grave.

20 MS JOYCE: And were you still in Iraq at that time, or you were
21 here?

22 MS NASSER: No, here.

23 MS JOYCE: You were here by then. Is there anything else you
24 want to tell me about your life before you left Iraq,
25 were you living in Baghdad at that time or Najaf?

26 MS NASSER: Yeah, Baghdad.

27 MS JOYCE: In Baghdad.

28 MS NASSER: Yes, I born in Najaf but I lived in Baghdad.

29 MS JOYCE: So, that must have been a very big decision that you
30 took?

31 MS NASSER: Yeah.

1 MS JOYCE: So, what was it like when you were leaving Iraq, you
2 know, was that a fearful time for you?
3 MS NASSER: Of course, it was fearful for me because I fled
4 with the false passport and I stopped in different,
5 several countries.
6 MS JOYCE: Which countries did you stop in?
7 MS NASSER: Jordan, Malaysia, Indonesia and then Australia.
8 MS JOYCE: And then came to Australia.
9 MS NASSER: By boat.
10 MS JOYCE: When did you arrive in Australia?
11 MS NASSER: I arrived in Australia in 2001.
12 MS JOYCE: And were you immediately in detention, placed in
13 detention then?
14 MS NASSER: Yeah.
15 MS JOYCE: When you arrived?
16 MS NASSER: Yeah.
17 MS JOYCE: And how did you arrive, did you come in by boat or?
18 MS NASSER: Yeah, by boat.
19 MS JOYCE: By boat came to where in Australia?
20 MS NASSER: To Woomera Detention Centre.
21 MS JOYCE: But where did the boat come to?
22 MS NASSER: The boat in Christmas Island, boat and then by
23 plane.
24 MS JOYCE: By plane to Adelaide or?
25 MS NASSER: Adelaide, Woomera - Woomera in Adelaide.
26 MS JOYCE: Into Woomera. So, how long were you in Woomera?
27 MS NASSER: Three months and 20 days.
28 MS JOYCE: Three months and 20 days?
29 MS NASSER: Yeah.
30 MS JOYCE: Farrah I wonder can you tell some stories from your
31 time in Woomera to help us understand what it was like for

1 you?

2 MS NASSER: There are many sad stories.

3 MS JOYCE: Yes.

4 MS NASSER: I can't tell you this time.

5 MS JOYCE: Bit too sad to tell?

6 MS NASSER: Yes, sad to tell.

7 MS JOYCE: I can understand that.

8 MS NASSER: There were routine days.

9 MS JOYCE: Yes. What were the routine days like?

10 MS NASSER: Routine days like, at seven o'clock they - you get

11 up - by the microphone.

12 MS JOYCE: Yes.

13 MS NASSER: Over the microphone to tell us to go to breakfast

14 and at nine, nine o'clock we go to English classes. At

15 12 o'clock lunch time, around six o'clock dinner time and

16 between dinner and lunch you can visit each other.

17 MS JOYCE: Yes.

18 MS NASSER: Yeah, ask for any news about us and they asking

19 about what would happen in the unknown future, yeah. So,

20 it's boring, worries and fear, yeah.

21 MS JOYCE: How were you treated in Woomera?

22 MS NASSER: Some of them treated us nice and the other

23 (indistinct).

24 MS JOYCE: Were you able to practice your religion in Woomera?

25 MS NASSER: Yeah, no one interfere us, very little yeah.

26 MS JOYCE: What are your strongest memories of Woomera, if

27 they're not too sad to tell?

28 MS NASSER: This is terrible.

29 MS JOYCE: Yeah.

30 MS NASSER: One story is still printed in my - my brain, my

31 eyes. So, while we are, while we were waiting in the line

1 to - in front of the restaurant to eat lunch, we hear like
2 screaming, yelling and then fire, fire breakout and the
3 fire and smoke go to our - our rooms. Somebody you know,
4 was many fence many position in the detention centre
5 (indistinct) depressed, some people live a long time and
6 psychology position. So, back then and make them to do
7 something wrong, we know it's wrong, no one accept this
8 (indistinct) so, they lit fire and as I said and the fire
9 broke out and the smoke - sorry. After the police, the
10 police and the staff lock us in and ran off away and left
11 us just the crying men, women, children including me.

12 MS JOYCE: The fire's still going?

13 MS NASSER: Yes, still going. After a while, the police came
14 and they hosed(?) the men who lit the fire with the hot
15 and cold water on their back, the back of the men who lit
16 the fire, to - to control them and arrested them and then
17 bashed them and arrested them and go to - to the prison.
18 So, after that we stayed two or three days without food
19 and water until they fixed the restaurant, so this is - -
20 -

21 MS JOYCE: No food or water?

22 MS NASSER: Yeah, two days I think, two days without food and
23 water.

24 MS JOYCE: Was it very hot?

25 MS NASSER: Very hot, very hard.

26 MS JOYCE: Your rooms were burnt, did you have beds or?

27 MS NASSER: Yeah.

28 MS JOYCE: You did have a bed?

29 MS NASSER: Not my room but many rooms (indistinct) bed.

30 MS JOYCE: But no food and water?

31 MS NASSER: Yeah, like a punishment for us. When they

1 punished, the punishment for all of us.

2 MS JOYCE: Everyone was punished?

3 MS NASSER: Everyone in the detention, yes.

4 MS JOYCE: So, that's still a very strong memory for you?

5 MS NASSER: Yeah, strong memory, yeah. I can't forget it.

6 MS JOYCE: Are there any other strong memories you'd like to

7 share with us?

8 MS NASSER: Yeah, similar, similar this story.

9 MS JOYCE: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about

10 Woomera that you haven't shared so far?

11 MS NASSER: Yeah, terrible life, hard life. Unknown future but

12 I'm lucky you know just to stay for three months and 20

13 days, from there released and come to Melbourne.

14 MS JOYCE: So, when you left Woomera you came to Melbourne and

15 what has your life been like since leaving detention,

16 Farrah?

17 MS NASSER: There's no comparative between life in detention

18 centre and life outside detention, like between heaven and

19 hell.

20 MS JOYCE: It's like?

21 MS NASSER: Like heaven and hell.

22 MS JOYCE: Like heaven and hell?

23 MS NASSER: Yeah.

24 MS JOYCE: Very different.

25 MS NASSER: Very different, yeah, like it's very nice, people

26 they so beautiful, helpful, very kind. (Indistinct) many

27 Australian friends, I want to take on to study English to

28 improve my language, yes it's very nice.

29 MS JOYCE: So, who has assisted you since coming out of

30 detention?

31 MS NASSER: The Foundation House for Survivors of Torture,

1 especially Dr Rosemary Schwarz(?), Therese (Indistinct)
2 sorry - they assist me a lot. The physiotherapist(?)
3 (indistinct).
4 MS JOYCE: Right, so what's the best thing about your new life
5 in Australia?
6 MS NASSER: Is everything is good and I found myself - I found
7 myself in Australia, really I found myself even though I -
8 I am rich - I was rich in Iraq, you know Iraq is a very
9 rich country but I live (indistinct) - I found myself in
10 Australia.
11 MS JOYCE: Can you explain that a little bit, about what
12 finding yourself is like, what that means for you?
13 MS NASSER: Yes, as a human being. We treated here in
14 Australia as a human being, we have the right to say, to
15 speak, to write, to do what we want to do. Not in Iraq,
16 we can't do anything, we're afraid even from our children
17 (indistinct) is at school, we can't say anything against
18 the regime or family (indistinct).
19 MS JOYCE: Is there anything else you'd like to say about life
20 now in Australia after detention?
21 MS NASSER: I happy with my son, my son is working, he
22 completed high school and now he's working. My son's
23 happy, I came to Australia to save my - the reason I came
24 to Australia to save my son - just worried about my - my
25 daughter in Iran with her husband, he is still just
26 (indistinct) after Saddam collapsed.
27 MS JOYCE: Yes.
28 MS NASSER: Now she live in Iran, terrible life.
29 MS JOYCE: Terrible life?
30 MS NASSER: Illegally, yeah, they live illegally.
31 MS JOYCE: M'mm. Are you able to have contact with her?

1 MS NASSER: Yeah.

2 MS JOYCE: I think Farrah when we finish, you have two photo's
3 you'd like to show. Before we do that, is there anything
4 else you'd like to tell us?

5 MS NASSER: I just thanking (indistinct), thank the Australian
6 Government because I - I will become Australian
7 citizenship, I will receive next Monday (indistinct) I
8 will receive the citizenship.

9 MS JOYCE: Well thank you for coming to Australia
10 (indistinct) - - -

11 MS NASSER: (Indistinct), thank you.

12 MS JOYCE: Would you like to show the - - -

13 MS NASSER: And thanks for everybody who assist me.

14 MS JOYCE: We appreciate you telling your story and thank you
15 for that.

16 MS NASSER: Thank you.

17 MS JOYCE: Would you like to show the pictures now
18 (indistinct)?

19 MS NASSER: (Indistinct)

20 MS JOYCE: It is wonderful you have that photo.

21 MS NASSER: Yes.

22 SPEAKER: Okay, I'm recording.

23 MS JOYCE: Farrah you're holding a special photo, can you tell
24 us about the photo?

25 MS NASSER: This is my husband's photo, this is the only one I
26 have. It was very small, but my son make it bigger.

27 MS JOYCE: That's good - and his name?

28 MS NASSER: Abdullah.

29 MS JOYCE: Abdullah and you've told us what happened to
30 Abdullah.

31 MS NASSER: Yes.

1 MS JOYCE: Thank you for showing us that beautiful photo, do
2 you have another photo you want to show?
3 MS NASSER: This is my son's photo.
4 MS JOYCE: And he's name is?
5 MS NASSER: His name is Kavar(?).
6 MS JOYCE: His name is Kavar.
7 MS NASSER: (Indistinct words) Australian.
8 MS JOYCE: Yes, that's good. Thank you Farrah. Thinking about
9 the photos Farrah, I'm wondering if you lost anything in
10 the fire at Woomera, any of your belongings?
11 MS NASSER: Yeah, I lost some photo, special photo.
12 MS JOYCE: What were the special photos you lost in the fire?
13 MS NASSER: My daughter's photo, yeah. My husband photo, there
14 were some relative photo. Some money in my pocket, yeah.
15 MS JOYCE: That must be very hard, did you lose anything else
16 or clothes or papers or books?
17 MS NASSER: No problem, for the clothes.
18 MS JOYCE: What's that?
19 MS NASSER: No problem for the clothes, (indistinct) for money
20 but the pictures.
21 MS JOYCE: The photos?
22 MS NASSER: Yeah, (indistinct).
23 MS JOYCE: Can't replace them.
24 MS NASSER: Yeah, you can't replace them.
25 MS JOYCE: So, that was an added suffering for you?
26 MS NASSER: Yes.
27 MS JOYCE: Thank you for telling us about that.
28 - - -