



Religion & Forced Migration Initiative

Princeton University's Office of Religious Life

Alireza Hirsra

Interviewed by Sabrina Kim through Zoom, 11/07/20

Narrator Location: Los Banos, CA

Interviewer Location: Newark, DE

Transcribed by Sabrina Kim, 11/23/20

(00:08) **Sabrina:** This is Sabrina Kim, interviewing Ali Hirsra on November 7th, 2020. The interview is taking place virtually. I am in Newark, Delaware, and Ali is in Los Banos, California. First, could you tell me a little bit about where you're from?

(00:26) **Alireza:** I was born in Iran—Tehran. I was born in 1967, September 21st. Migrated to the United States when I was eight years old, so somewhere around 1976, 77, not to know the exact date, but somewhere around that year. 77, I want to say. 76, I came, went back, 77 is when I actually started boarding school.

(00:58) **Sabrina:** Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood in Iran and any memories you might have?

(01:08) **Alireza:** Yeah. Believe it or not, I still have pretty—not so vivid—but I do remember the school I went to. Up until third grade, I went to a school called Jahan Koodak which was in the northern part of Tehran. It was a very popular school. Was there up until the third grade. Up until then at which time my dad and my mom decided that it would be best for me to come to the United States. So that's what happened at that point.

(01:47) **Sabrina:** Awesome. And we talked a little bit about this last week, but what was the experience of your parents deciding that it was best for you to come to the United States?

(01:58) **Alireza:** Umm. [LAUGHS] I've been asking that question myself. Me and my brother who's older, six and a half years, we had this conversation many times; although he came before me, he left. And he was in Iran for a long period of time

before he came back again. But honestly, I really don't know the reasons why my dad mostly—who was the decision maker of the family—decided that I come here and stay here without them. That's always been sort of a void in my life that I haven't been able to fill thus far—and to be able to answer open and honestly. His response has always been that he obviously did this for the better of our future and safety. But then it begs the question on my part, to ask, "Well, why not them come along for the ride as well? Why not move the whole family unit here as opposed to just me being an eight-year-old child being separated from them?" And having lost the memories that you would share together as a child with your parents, which, you know, in most cases and families, that tends to be the case, but in my particular case, it wasn't. But like I said, I wrapped my mind around it, but I don't have answers for everything.

(3:41) **Sabrina:** And because the Iranian Revolution was happening at this time, how did that color your family's decisions and your transition to the US?

(3:54) **Alireza:** Well, the revolution didn't really happen until like 1979, 1980, which was three and a half years after I left. So my dad had some sort of a foresight, as far as what was going to happen? I really don't know—I don't think so. We didn't really know any of that. But he wanted, obviously, a better life [for me]. I have to give him props for thinking that way, at least give him credit for that. But I don't know if that – that I'm sure was his excuse at the time—in a hind sight kind of a way, like "I kind of forecasted there was going to be revolution." Well, I don't think anybody would know there would have been a revolution at that point. But regardless, they made that decision. And his reasoning, his true reasoning, I still don't know. But we had heart-to-heart conversations about this, but he sticks to the same story that it was because of, he thought it would be better for us to have you go to boarding school in the United States, so—and he sticks with that. So I'll just take that for face value.

(5:17) **Sabrina:** I see. Last week, we also talked a little bit about your experiences as an eight year old hearing the conversation between your parents. Could you tell me a little bit about your family dynamic right before you came to the US?

(5:36) **Alireza:** Yeah, so – yeah, I had a typical childhood, you know, growing up. Had friends in the street, played soccer in the street with friends. We lived in a pretty affluent area—it was nice, quiet, safe, secure. My mom and dad, you know, my dad was obviously the breadwinner and my mom was the homemaker, so she took care of us, me and my brother, and my dad would be working. The dynamic was a little bit different, culturally speaking, there. Because, you know, as a kid growing up, I didn't see my dad as much because he worked in the morning and he would come home late—sometimes 10, 11—by that time I'd already be in bed. So we didn't really have a lot of memories, in that respect, with each other. I did have a lot of memories with my mom. Because obviously, I was pretty much around her most of the time—

after school, before school. Just weekends; every now and then, we as a family would travel to the north of Tehran. We call it Romsar. Romsar is where we had a villa by the beach—we used to go—and twice a summer, we would probably travel there and stay there for a couple weeks, and enjoy the Caspian Sea and just hang out. It was pretty, you know, pretty average growing up, nothing special or nothing out of the ordinary.

(7:31) **Sabrina:** And what was your mother's opinion on you leaving the family to study in the United States?

(7:41) **Alireza:** She was very much opposed. I know that her and my dad got into big arguments and fights to the point that she decided to hide my passport. And she did, and then that became a big ordeal between them two, at the time. They fought, and my mom would not be willing to bring my passport or show him the passport. To the point that he ransacked the house to find it. He did; he finally found it. [LAUGHS] Obviously, because I'm here. That became a point of contention between them. Growing up—what I guess I didn't mention—at one point there in my when I was younger, when I was five, six, my mom and dad did separate. They divorced. My dad remarried a younger woman for about a year, and that didn't last for them. He brought her here. I was in that picture, with my brother and my family. And that didn't work out because then later, he'd find out that she was much younger than he had thought—at least what he said he was told. He was 42 at the time; I think she was 18 or 19. That, I guess, didn't sit well with him, and she wanted to have kids and my dad didn't want to have kids, so they came back to Iran and they divorced. And then a year later, him and my mom got back together again and they continued their relationship. So that also happened in between—I guess that was a kind of an important thing I should have mentioned. But yeah, that happened. But as far as . . . I'm sorry what was the question? I don't know, I kind of digressed. [LAUGHS] What was the main point of your question?

(9:55) **Sabrina:** I was just asking about your mother, which you answered.

(9:59) **Alireza:** Yeah, she did not care for me moving away. If we were going to move, she kind of made a point to move as a family. And just for me to come by myself, and the fact that I was separated—she had a problem with that. And it was hard for her, and it was very hard for me for the first two years being in a boarding school here. I remember, week after week, we had payphones back then, and you would have to—you couldn't do Zoom or anything—so we had to put \$10 in quarters in a payphone so we can get on a conversation. So we can chat for about five minutes, and then of course, your time is up, then I have to wait until the next week [LAUGHS] to do the same thing again. So that was it.

(10:52) **Sabrina:** And on those payphone calls, what do you remember about the calls? Who were you usually talking to?

(11:00) **Alireza:** It was, for the most part, my mom. My dad would get on the phone and just say "Hi, how you doing?" And my mom would grill me. "How's your living situation? What are you doing? How's your bed? Where are you staying? How many people in the room? How many people in the dormitory?" She'd ask me all these detailed questions, like a typical mother would, and yeah, that would be her way of prying and making sure I got everything I need. Me and her had a very very tight connection, even separated for many, many years, until she passed away last year. But yeah, even though I did not even see her for a good 25 years, we communicated monthly—not monthly—weekly, on the phone. And yeah, we kept a very close relationship, like we were sitting next to each other. So that never changed. Yeah.

(12:02) **Sabrina:** Wow, that's really powerful—the strength of that relationship. How do you think you were so connected to your mother? Do you think it was an action or just an understanding of each other?

(12:22) **Alireza:** Just the love. [TEARING UP] Sorry. [PAUSE] Yeah, her love was just—it would never, never leave me. It will never leave me. She was very selfless when it became to her needs: it was always about, "Are you okay, you're having everything?" She's always worried about me, and meanwhile, I'm a grown man. [LAUGHS] She's still worried about me. Well, she died due to the complications of diabetes that she had last year. And the sad part is, I was not able to go back to get that closure, that chapter close. That was pretty tough. I was able to Zoom and do whatever with her while she was on a bed. But because of my situation here—not because I didn't want to go back—it was because I couldn't, politically speaking, I could not go back. It was pretty tough. And that was a really tough closure for me. But being far away, I guess it made it easier, but really not, because you know, you want to be there for your mom, at least for the last few days. And I was there, maybe not in person, physical sense, but I was definitely there with her. And we did get closure. So I'm happy about that.

(14:38) **Sabrina:** That's so powerful. How do you think your mother has impacted the way you interact with your family today—and maybe not even your physical family, but the community of doctors you work with and those that you interact with daily?

(14:59) **Alireza:** Definitely this whole life experience, when you grow up without parents, you have to kind of – you grow up nonchalantly, I mean you don't have a choice—you have to carry, what they say I guess, strap up your own boots, and pull up your own pants, and just be a man. And it happened a lot quicker, obviously, for me because I had to come to terms with certain things, and that happened a lot

faster. At the same token, it left a lot of things, obviously, unanswered, which kind of put me in a rebellious state, not having to want to be part of life so quickly in terms of—like most of my classmates would, after graduating from high school, they go to college, they get their degrees, they go on with their lives, they start families. For me, that definitely happened later in life. Later, meaning 10 years later. It wasn't like, right off the bat, "Hey, let's get your life going." No, I'm not gonna go to school, I'm going to be rebellious, I'm going to do something different. It was sort of like a school of hard knocks for me, having to live and learn the experiences of life individually as a 16 year old, 17 year old, getting my first apartment by myself, you know, working two, three jobs and not knowing that that's not really the way I should be going. But I was like, "I'm just going to go make money. I don't care how I make it, I don't care I don't have higher education." It was a different outlook until I realized at some point, I hit a barrier because I became ambitious. My ambition, I guess what kind of drove me to say, "Well, if I want to get anywhere in life, I have to make a change; I have to make that shift, make a sacrifice, and do something different." So, I did—that's when I started going to school, getting my degree, first I went to junior college, I went to De Anza [College], I graduated there, then University of Phoenix, did San Jose State. And of course, then I can ended up at chiropractic college, pharmacology College of Chiropractic West, in San Jose. That's where I graduated with my degree for chiropractic. So, yeah, but it was a long, longer haul than it should have been, but it is what it—definitely changed a lot of things in my life. If I were to, I guess, do it all over again, I would have probably had, you know, have someone push you to say, "Hey, dude, come on, let's let's get the ball rolling, don't wait so long." I would have probably gained about 10 years of my life, but that hind sight looking back, I, you know, I'm still happy. Here being where I am. Because at least I learned from that.

(18:10) **Sabrina:** Absolutely. When you were talking about this experience of resettling and adjusting to the United States, while also being a teenager and trying to study, then going through this apart from your family, you were talking a little bit about those challenges that made you have to, maybe, grow up faster than you felt that you wanted to. Do you have any specific experiences that are still in your memory of those challenges?

(18:45) **Alireza:** Yeah. Obviously, being here, as an eight year old, even though English was a part of the curriculum in Iran—up until third grade we had English—but not to the extent or the point of conversation, to be able to have conversations with individuals or with anybody. You understand words, you may understand the alphabet, you understand certain words, a little bit of grammar, but not a lot. But so when I came here, and I went to Harker Academy, I was in the ESL classes for at least two, three years before I could actually catch up and be up to speed in terms of English. But all my other classes, obviously, I excelled. Even though I was in fourth grade here, I was in like seventh or eighth grade math. I was like [INDECIPHERABLE].

So everything was excelled as far as sciences and math, but English was what kept me here, kept me humble there [LAUGHS]. So as far as the experience of having to grow—because there's also a lot of cultural shock that takes place because, you go to a new environment, you're used to a certain way. Iran was very different, in that, people are more social; your friends are more social and more connected, if you will. Whereas here, you're more of an individual. It takes a little bit and of course, then you put the language barrier in there. It definitely labors that any kind of relationship you have with anybody, until you get to know someone and they actually get to know you, not just because of language but based on who you are as a person. So that becomes a challenge. On top of that, I mean you're a kid, eight years old, you got to learn how to do your own laundry. You got to clean your room. You got to do this, that, I think you're doing everything. And on top of that, we had, in Harker, we had cadets, which is kind of like a military school setting, kind of give you a taste, but not really hardcore. But yeah, we got up in the morning, we marched. We participated. I joined the riflery school, where I got my pro-marksman, marksman, marksman first class, sharp shooter, [INDECIPHERABLE]. So you learn about guns and rifles and shooting and archery and different things. So you get definitely exposed, and those kind of memories never—I never forget those. See, as a matter of fact, I still remember a lot of my coaches and counselors, names, faces, still very vivid in my mind about the history of me going to that school, and the experiences I gained. Yeah, definitely made you grow up as a kid and really become an adult quickly. Because you have to do everything on your own. You're taking care of yourself. Even wetting your bed at 10 years old, you had to, in the middle of the night, change your sheets and make sure nobody else knew about it. So that happens too. [LAUGHS] So there you have it. Those experiences definitely impact you, and definitely makes you grow up. At least for me it did—it definitely paved the way of not shying away from hard work and having to do the work to get to where you are.

(22:38) **Sabrina:** Absolutely. Where in the United States is Harker Academy?

(22:47) **Alireza:** Harker originated, I believe, in Saratoga [California]. It's in Saratoga. So that's your neck of the woods, that's Cupertino [LAUGHS].

(22:59) **Sabrina:** Is this the same school which is now called the Harker School?

(23:05) **Alireza:** Yes, it's the same school. As a matter of fact, back then, they didn't have high school. It went from kindergarten all the way to eighth grade. And then, at some point, they added the off-site high school setting. And that just got added later. I went there up until eighth grade.

(23:31) **Sabrina:** I'm really interested in—just to go back a little bit in time—the transition. Do you remember what was going through your mind during the plane flight and the senses that you were feeling during that transition?

(23:56) **Alireza:** Yeah, a lot of emotions were going through my mind. As a child, I was excited. Coming to the United States, I was excited. But as a kid, I don't know how much you really understand about the ramification of this decision as a whole. Because yeah, everything's exciting, you're getting on a plane, it's something new. But once you get here, and the realization sets in that, "Hey, I'm gonna be here, I'm not going anywhere." You're going to be in school, and you're going to be boarding school. Of course, once I got here, I stayed with my uncle, who lived in Moraga at the time, and they kind of prepped me and got everything that I needed to get ready for school. I remember the day—both my uncles were there—when they went to sign me up for school, I met the headmaster, the dean, and Ms. Carly, the administrator. I still remember all their names. The headmaster at the time was Mr. Nicholas. The dean was Dan Gelano. I remember meeting them, it's very vivid in my mind, as a kid, going to the headmaster's office, shaking his hand, and him welcoming me to the school. I remember that very well.

(25:29) **Sabrina:** And what was your impression of the administration of the school?

(25:38) **Alireza:** They were so nice, it was such a different era. I guess you could say, California wasn't what it is today, in terms of its population. 1976—there were not that many kids signing up to go to boarding school. Because it's a private school, it had a sort of a very unique feel of not being overpopulated. And yet, it was very fresh, it was very refreshing, it was different. The whole experience was, I was excited to get started. I just wanted to go to school, I knew that. But didn't really—again, in the back of my mind, obviously, is my mom and dad, parents back home. And how am I going to make this all work out? It's like, mentally, I was just preparing myself to just be ready for school. And somehow I'm gonna be in contact with my parents and everything's gonna be okay. So to speak.

(26:50) **Sabrina:** And was the America or the California that you arrived in the same as you had envisioned it and as your father envisioned it for you?

(27:06) **Alireza:** Yes, a little bit. And I'll say why, because two years prior to coming here to school, I did come with both my parents here to visit my uncles. So I was already in California, so I already had cousins that lived here. So I went and saw my cousins who didn't look anything like me. They were blond hair, blue eyes. Because my all my uncles married Americans, Caucasians. And so all my cousins were blond hair, blue eyes. And I still remember my younger cousin, Shirin chasing me around the backyard, and you know, "Alireza! Alireza!" And I was running away from her

because she was chasing me and I didn't understand a word she was saying, so I was running away [LAUGHS]. But those are the memories that I still have of when I was a kid. And as far as California, so because I was here, and we had gone to Disneyland when we came here, we did some things together, I already had some expectation of what California was about.

(28:17) **Sabrina:** And to you, I would love to know about what California was about in the time that you arrived, and if California is the same to you right now?

(28:31) **Alireza:** Yeah, California is definitely not the same as I remember. California was not as populated. Things were a lot different back then—it was much simpler back then. Over the years, I guess, you get custom of changes and regulations—some for good, some not so great. But it definitely changes and shifts the culture of California. Without putting politics into it, to me, it's different in that it's not the same California that I grew up in where—things were much simpler in the day-to-day things we take for granted back then. And now it's like, "Oh, wow, you can no longer do that anymore." I mean, for example, not to say it's a good thing—but as a teenager and my early adulthood, I rode motorcycles. We never—because there was no helmet law. So we blazed through with no helmet [LAUGHS]. I'm not saying that's a great thing; that's not a good thing. Good thing there is a helmet law. But things were like—just bringing in the context of helmets, things were simpler. We didn't think about too many things and so many regulations for every little thing, then the seatbelt law came in, good thing for that. We have seatbelts now. So it saves a lot of lives. Just to me, it just, those are obviously—I'm talking about the good changes that happened. But as far as the simplicity, obviously, they were not as much developing, there was no Google or, you know, Apple, or any of that. So we didn't have quite a robust infrastructure change, in terms of buildings and apartment complexes, the overcrowdedness of living in the Bay Area, the way it is now. And it was nothing like this. It was mostly—you saw a lot of agriculture, cherry fields, as we go through Sunnyvale, and all it was was cherry fields. It was awesome cherries and that's what I remember [LAUGHS]. Or having frontier village. Yeah, that was way before you, you probably don't even remember that [LAUGHS]. But yeah, things were a lot more easier. And I don't know, I have more memories of things being a little bit more simpler than it is now. Things are a little more complicated—some things for the better, and for better of the society. But I don't know, I guess I appreciate it because it brings me back to my childhood a little bit, and growing up a little bit.

(31:45) **Sabrina:** Resettling in the United States, what role did your uncles play, if any?

(31:57) **Alireza:** I would say, they were there as sort of a support family, in terms of, you know, being there at least once in a while to come pick me up from the

boarding school, maybe once a month or once every two months. But predominantly, not much. Because I was pretty much wrapped up in the school. Even on the weekends, this school was very organized and had all kinds of activities set for us—whether we go on a field trip at the Marin Headlands to learn about the other old bunkers that used to be there and they used for military, or whether we go to Great America for a weekend or we go camping in Yosemite—they always had things for us, no matter what it was. So our weekends are always busy. We're always preoccupied with something. So for the most part, I didn't see much of my family, per se, the my dad's side or mom's side, predominantly, my dad's family's here in California, and not so much on my mom's side. I didn't see them too much. I started being more part of the family when I actually got out of school and became more of an adult. They became more part of my life after that, but not so much as a child.

(33:34) **Sabrina:** I see. Moving to a different topic, how has the idea of faith and religion or spirituality shaped your life or maybe come in and out of your life?

(33:54) **Alireza:** Well, I do remember, as a kid, because my parents are both Muslim. And growing up, I wanted to be a good person. So both my parents at the time when I was younger, when I was five years old, they taught me how to pray in Muslim—the religion, in Islam. So I—for a month or two—I emulated and I learned the words and went through the movements and did everything. And because I want to be this good boy. But it didn't last long for me. Because to me, it was kind of depressing. I don't know why, but that's how I felt about it; I felt like, "Okay, I'm bored with this—what do I do with this? I don't know what I'm saying. I'm praying in Arabic. I speak Farsi. I don't know what the hell I'm even saying. So why am I doing this?" So to speak, you know? [LAUGHS] And it became a point of contention in my mind that, well, I'm not doing anything wrong; why should I have to be following a certain set of rules, in that respect? I mean, long as I respect people, and I don't step on anybody's toes, and I don't break any laws—so faith didn't really come to be part of my life in terms of religion. Now I came here, being both exposed to the, to Islam and the Muslim religion. And here, also while I was going to high school, I did join a Bible group, a bunch of kids, a bunch of my friends who invited me. I went there every Wednesday; they gave me my own Bible with my own name on it, and we'd meet every Wednesday, and I went through that. And as a kid, my aunt, who is American, born here, she used to take me to church with her every Sunday with my cousin Shirin. And we used to go there, and we used to kneel and get up. [LAUGHS] And I didn't understand that either. So there was a lot of things that was—there was a disconnect, but I understood that this is good, because everybody else is doing it, so it must be good, can't be bad. Everybody dress up, we go to church, we come home. So I've been exposed to, I guess, at surface, on both religions, and other religions. But I don't think it really had an effect on me, growing up, and how I view things. I'm more of a pragmatic person, I'm a realist. And I just, I think that religion is good; it

serves for people, when they need guidance, especially if they're lost, and I think it's good for them. So I don't knock anybody for believing whatever they want to believe. If it makes you a better person, it's good for you. But I think back in the days when there was no laws, or rules on humanity, and people so you don't go kill your neighbor, so they set religious boundaries, and they say, "Hey, this is what it takes to be a good person." So I can see where religion played a role in shaping society. And to bring about laws and rules and how you respect and you don't kill thy neighbor, you don't steal from thy neighbor, all the things that are taught in religion. But I think today, since we have laws in place, not maybe religious laws, but laws in place that take into account people's rights and freedoms, and practicing religion. I think religion, for me at least, it plays a much lesser role in my life, because it doesn't really apply to me. Does that mean that I can't help someone? Yeah, I still help people. I still donate, I still do charities, but I just don't feel that I need to necessarily have—believe in a certain belief system or ascribe to a certain belief system to be a good person or be inclusive or anything like that, yeah.

(38:44) **Sabrina:** And these values, which you certainly hold and live through, as a doctor, do you feel like these values are connected to your experience of resettling and transition in any way?

(39:00) **Alireza:** I'm definitely sure there's a lot of truth in that. I think what you're saying is a lot of truth; I'm not saying you're putting words in my mouth, but I'm saying that, yeah, because the lack of religion in my life, as a kid growing up, since it wasn't there. Yeah, so I just did the right thing based on things that I knew was best, outside of religion. Now, if religion was a part of that, then maybe I would have been, maybe different for me. I don't know that that is true. I think because it wasn't there, it's now for me, it's not necessary in order to survive in this life. That's the way I think about it.

(39:53) **Sabrina:** I'm also really interested in how Covid-19 and just all these current events that are really shaping our world—how they affect us all differently as individuals, and I would love to hear about your more recent experiences and thoughts, as of this year, around global health concerns and the election if you want to talk about that. Yeah, just about how today's world is affecting your thoughts lately.

(40:32) **Alireza:** I guess at the beginning of the pandemic, we knew we were in for something different than what we were accustomed to. But I think as a society, we expected something like this was going to come, sooner or later. But we never lived through one to really know the circumstances around it or the consequences of it. Obviously, a lot of people dying [is] never good. Not having a viable vaccine, which again, I don't think that's going to save a lot of people. Because we have flu vaccines,

which is not very effective, most of the time. Some, I still think that people who are immunocompromised and kids should get it, but I don't think this vaccine is going to save anyone, because there are other therapeutics that can help people get through the coronavirus. I ended up getting coronavirus myself, back in April, and for me, it was not that bad, thank goodness; it wasn't that bad. It lasted only a day, I had a high fever one day, and by that evening, I had a 105 fever, it broke, went to 102, I took a Tylenol and it went away. What's residual from that, I would say, is my sense of smell and taste. I still cannot smell the cigar like I used to or taste my food the way I used to. And certain things I still have to ask my girlfriend, "Do you smell something here?" Because I can't even smell anymore [LAUGHS]. So yeah, that has affected me in that way. As for society, I think some people are just fed up with it, because it probably affected them emotionally, psychologically, a lot of people are going through a lot of depression because of it. Because the pandemic is keeping them from seeing family members as frequently as they used to see, and they're not able to see them anymore. I think because we're social beings, I think that affects you, as a person—not being able to connect with another human being. I think all these things play a big role in how society behaves, in a way. As a matter of fact, we had a little interesting thing happened last night at the cigar shop. We're a group of guys sitting around at a cigar shop. We all know, going in there, smoking a cigar, and none of us are wearing masks, social distancing is not really going to save you from that—you're smoking a cigar in a closed environment [LAUGHS]. But that's a choice that we made, and we have an individual who—for lack of better words, a social misfit—he sits by himself somewhere, and he decided to join our conversation, he comes and sits next to me. While he's puffing cigar smoke in my face, he's saying "Oh, everyone should wear a mask, and this and that." And I'm like, "Yeah, but you're here and you're smoking a cigar and blowing in my face. Isn't that kind of hypocritical of you, to say that to me? You're worried about your safety, but you're not worried about mine. You want me to wear a mask when I'm out in public." Because we were having a conversation about, should everyone wear a mask out there? And the answer is of course, yeah. In a work setting, work environment, you should be responsible. You should not affect each other. The mask that I wear protects you, and the mask that you wear protects me, so yeah, you should do the right thing. But it got – where does that stop?, in the sense that, let's say you go to dinner somewhere, in a restaurant. And you walk in with a mask on, and they seat you somewhere, and then you take your mask off for the food. And so where does Covid start and when does it stop? And that's the disconnect that we're having, to have a health policy. I think that it brings ambiguity for a lot of people, and you have individuals like this, who sits next to me, who wants me to wear a mask when I'm out there, but he's not worried about the secondhand smoke that he's smelling and smoking while he's sitting next to me. So there's hypocrisy there. And most people don't put two and two together, and that's where I have a problem [LAUGHS]. With people who don't really understand what this pandemic is doing, what Covid is

doing. And they're not taking it seriously enough, some people are not taking it seriously, some people think it's a joke, or some people think, "Yes, you can get it." Can you live through it? I'm sure a lot of people have, but look at the people who did not live, how many people who lost their loved ones, their family members. That's never a good thing. So we've got to come to a good solution for this problem. That's how I feel about that.

(46:10) **Sabrina:** Thank you so much for sharing and for sharing your time. I don't want to keep you for too long, but I do want to ask, is there anything else you would like to talk about?

(46:24) **Alireza:** Well, you brought up religion, and I want to pose a question to you. [LAUGHS] So you understand that we encounter, based on the military and based on things we've put out there, not to say that they're living amongst us or anything. But we know there's other living creatures on this universe somewhere. And my questions is, do they ascribe to any gods? Do they believe in Jesus? Do they believe in Muhammad? Do they have a cross or do they have Muhammad around their neck? That would be question to the people who judge other people on religions and say, "Oh, you have to believe in Jesus Christ otherwise you're gonna go to hell," or "You have to believe in Muhammad or something's gonna happen to you." So my question to them is, do other beings in the universe ascribe to the same gods as you believe in, and what gods do they believe in?

(47:27) **Sabrina:** That's a really profound question.

(47:32) **Alireza:** [LAUGHS] But it's a good question.

(47:35) **Sabrina:** A good question, and a good one to ruminate over for this weekend [LAUGHS]. And I think it's something that we all need to ask.

(47:47) **Alireza:** Yeah. I just think we should all love each other and not judge each other based on that. I think love—one thing I learned from my mother is love—love is the strongest thing ever. Nothing can touch you, in your soul, like love. Yeah. And I'll leave it with that.

(48:13) **Sabrina:** Okay, we'll leave it at that. Thank you so much for your time. I'm just going to stop the recording right now, and then do a quick debrief.

End