

AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL ARAGE

An Oral History Conducted by Dalton DuPré

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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PREFACE

“I personally felt that I never didn’t fit in anywhere, and I think that’s just because of my parents teaching me to be a leader and to be strong in what you are and be confident in what you do and who you are. I always felt like I was a part of the group. I never felt like I didn’t fit in.”

Born of a Filipino mother and Palestinian father and raised with his older sister near extended family in the multicultural Greater Toronto Area, Ontario, Canada, Michael Arage always felt that he fit in. His immigrant parents, both chemists and both Catholics, met while working at Glaxo Smith Kline in Toronto. At the University of Toronto, where he earned his MBA, his friend group included mostly Muslim Pakistanis. After moving to Los Angeles and marrying there, Michael relocated to Las Vegas in 2012 because his wife found a job with Zappos.

Because he could not work without a green card or Social Security number, both sides of his family gambled, and he was good with numbers, Michael turned to playing poker full time and now works with sports betting. He talks of Filipino and Arabic foods, structural racism, anti-Arab racism, and U.S. v. Canadian Middle East policy. In 2019, Michael founded Nevadans for Palestinian Human Rights, a pluractional community organization for Palestinian human rights. Regarding Las Vegas, he talks of the heat and its physical effects, the low cost of living, Spring Mountain Road (Chinatown), of raising his daughter away from her cousins, and the lack of government-funded healthcare.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Michael Arage
November 12, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Dalton DuPré

Preface.....iv

Michael Arage introduces his family, friends, and childhood experiences. Shares his experience with friends of multicultural backgrounds. Noted some lessons he took from his grandparents, his cousins’ impact on his life, and his parents’ migratiuonu experience.1-5

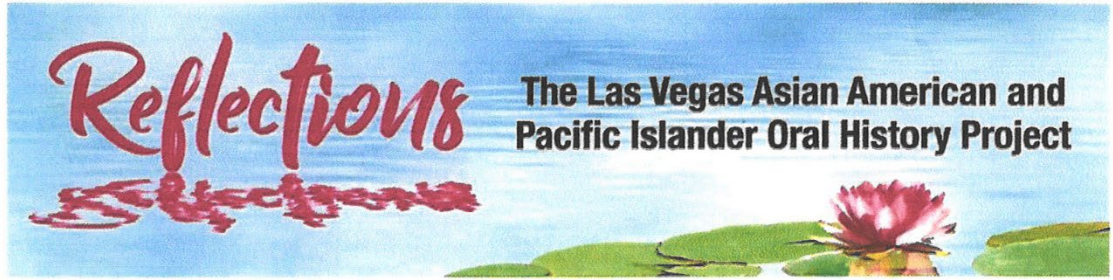
Introduces topic on education. Early childhood experience in education that led to going to the University of Toronto.6-7

Moves to the experiences of moving around that eventually led to Las Vegas. Arage notes his experience of moving from Canada, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. Highlights his wife’s role in the move. Fondest memories, most difficult tribulations, and the pros and cons between living in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.7-10

Arage moves on to move through his career. Passions, work history, and gaming. Arage moves on to religion as a Catholic individual. Cultural differences between living in Canada and Las Vegas. Arage further describes the contrasting healthcare systems.11-14

Arage transitions to the topic of the Filipino experience. This includes his mother’s impact in being Filipino. Notes racial discrimination that he has faced. Arage further elaborates on his experience regarding 9/11 and being of Arab descent.15-19

Moving on, Arage details Asian Americans as a population. Arage discusses prevalent Filipino communities and Asian Americans as a growing population. Arage ends with the importance of projects that collect the cultural experiences of others.20-23



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This is Dalton DuPré on November 12th, 2021, at approximately 1:05 p.m. I'm here with Michael Arage?

Arage.

Arage. Michael, can you pronounce and spell your first and last name, please?

Sure. Michael Arage; M-I-C-H-A-E-L, last name A-R-A-G-E.

Thank you. We're here for the Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander Oral History Project. I'm going to be asking Michael a few questions about his experience as an Asian at this time here in Las Vegas.

We're going to start of pretty bare bones. I want to hear about your childhood, what that experience was like, schooling, recreational activities, your friends, family, vacations, stuff like that. How would you describe your childhood experience?

I had a great childhood. I grew up in Mississauga, Ontario, which is a suburb of Toronto, about twenty minutes outside of Toronto. The great thing about the GTA, the Greater Toronto Area, is that it's a very multicultural city. I guess I should mention that my mother is Filipino, and my dad is Palestinian. Growing up, being born in the '70s and growing up mainly in the '80s and '90s, it was a rare thing to be of a mixed race at that time, but I personally felt that I never didn't fit in anywhere, and I think that's just because of my parents teaching me to be a leader and to be strong in what you are and be confident in what you do and who you are. I always felt like I was a part of the group. I never felt like I didn't fit in. Growing up, I played all sports from hockey, basketball, tennis, golf, so it was a great childhood. I had a lot of cousins on both sides. All holiday and family events were just...that's what I remember is having my cousins around me all the time. Then my group of friends growing up, as we got a little bit older, grades seven, eight, and then into high school, was always of mixed backgrounds. I've had a wide range of friends

from all different cultures. I think all of that combined has led me today to be very aware of different cultures around me and accepting and understanding of different traditions and cultures from each background. If there is anything else more specific you want me to get into, I can.

I would like to know—some of your friends, you say, come from multicultural backgrounds with all your friends and everything. Were there any specific cultures that you remember the most, and something that you saw as eye-opening that differed from your home life and the culture that you grew up with?

That's a good question. I think if we got into the university years, I went to the University of Toronto, so the specific campus that I went to had a lot of Pakistani and Indian people that attended, and my group of friends just happened to be a lot of Muslim Pakistanis. It's just being open or introduced to Islam. Playing basketball during Ramadan where they can't drink water is something that's just like, man, how do you guys even do that? I think things like that. You get to experience a lot of different things when you're around different cultures and religions, so it's pretty cool.

The other thing that was eye-opening, too—again, around that age is when people started dating and stuff—when they start dating different religions, it becomes an issue. It becomes very stressful for the people involved in the relationship because their parents will not approve of them marrying different religions. Yes, all those things are very eye-opening and being around a lot of mixed cultures and religions allows you to see that.

You said you had cousins who were pretty frequent within your early childhood, and from both sides. Were they raised in Canada as well, or would it be something where you would go and see them, vacation, trips?

The closest cousins to me were the ones who were close to me, so they were just a ten-, twenty-minute drive. But I also had cousins, a lot of my dad's side, settled in Detroit, Michigan, and so it was a four-hour drive that we would take for a lot of Christmas and Easter and stuff like that. But my mom's side, most of her brothers and sisters were in Toronto, and, yes, they were always around, for sure.

I want to talk a little bit about your grandparents, if you have any memories with them. Were you close to them? Did you have a good relationship with them? Can you give me some background on them?

My mom's mom actually died a month before I was born, I believe, a month or two, so I never met her, but my grandpa was always around, on my mom's side. He lived in Toronto as well. It wasn't like a close relationship like I see my dad with my kids and my nephews, but it was always a very respectful relationship. He's just like that cozy blanket that's around. But never really a close-close bond with him. On my dad's side, they lived in Detroit, so, again, I wouldn't see them as often, but I felt more of a connection with them even though they were further away. I guess it's just a personal relationship type thing and how you interact with different sets of grandparents, but that's how I felt about both sides.

If there is one big takeaway or something that they instilled in you as a child, what would that be, from your grandparents?

Just to the love of family. I remember my grandmother on my dad's side just being a very strong woman who just took care of everyone, took care of the whole family. She had seven kids and all the grandkids, and she was always taking care of everyone. My grandfather on my dad's side was a big joker; that's what I remember of him. He's always joking around. I don't know if it was a direct lesson that they taught me. It was more just being around them and understanding

what was important to them and how they treated us. On my mom's side, again, he was more of a standoffish person. It would be like, "Hi, grandpa, how are you?" type thing, but you never really get into any deep questions or discussions about anything.

I want to go back quickly to your cousins. Having such a big family, was there ever a time where people within the cousins felt out of the loop, or was it a very well-connected and intertwined family that you had?

Again, good question. I would say depending on which cousin it was or which aunt the kids were from, there is a different relationship. There are always the ones that didn't come as often, so you don't have as strong a relationship with them. I don't know. I don't think there's anything that really stands out that says one was different than another. I think it's just more of the frequency of time spent with them that formulated the relationship with them.

Coming from a mixed background, having your parents from two different ethnicities, did you notice any differences in the way the two families interacted when you had your mom's family come together versus when your dad's family was together? How did those differentiate?

Yes, this is a big one because we always had both sides come to Christmas or Easter or stuff like this, and it was in our house. I would say that the Filipino side tended to stick together. I feel like they were maybe intimidated by the other side when there was no reason to be. They just felt more comfortable hanging out with each other rather than all interacting. Everyone was cordial with each other, but if the Filipino side was sitting in the living room, most of the Filipinos would go there where my dad's side, the Palestinian side, would come and try to interact with them, but it was small talky, and you could tell that they were not as comfortable talking to the other side versus their own. It was a unique dynamic, for sure. As time went on and growing up,

everyone obviously would be seeing each other a lot and becomes more comfortable with each other and starts joking around and stuff like that. But in general, the overriding thing is that the Philippine side seemed to stick to the Filipino side.

I want to touch on your parents, just the base level. How did they meet? How did they both end up in Canada? What were their stories?

Actually, it's kind of a similar story. My mom ended up on just a travel visa and ended up in Canada because her friend was here, and then she decided to stay, and that was probably 1968ish. I think my dad got to Canada around the same time. He applied for a visa to Canada from Jordan at the time—he ended up growing up in Jordan—because he had one friend from high school that came to Toronto. It's kind of a similar thing where they each had a friend there. They had no family at all on both sides.

Once they got to Canada, they end up working for a pharmaceutical company called GlaxoSmithKline. It's still around today. They were both in the lab. It's a joke: It was chemistry. They're both chemists by trade, and that's how they met. Then they end up getting married with basically no family around. It was just their friends. I think my mom's mom flew in from the Philippines, but my dad didn't have any family there, just a couple of his friends from high school and then the coworkers.

You say that family is around now, and they were around during your childhood. After your parents had migrated and moved to Canada, is that when you'd say your aunts and uncles made the move, or when did they find their way over to North America?

I believe it was late '70s, early '80s where my mom's brother and sister came and her dad. Then on my dad's side, one sister came to Toronto, and the rest were in Detroit. But the one sister had six kids, so that was a lot of cousins there. Yes, they came around the early '80s.

You touched on going to the University of Toronto, correct, yourself?

Yes.

What was education like in your household? How did your parents discuss education?

What did they expect from you and your siblings in terms of education, and how did that help you realize University of Toronto is where I want to go and pursue my degree?

It's a running trope, I guess, or stereotype, whatever you want to call it that in an Asian family, education is of upmost importance in the household, and that was definitely the case in my house. Both my parents are university graduates. I have an older sister, seven years older, who graduated from university with a Bachelor of Science in chemistry as well. It was always instilled in me that school doesn't end at high school. It's just a natural progression to go to university.

Both me and my sister went to private schools for high school. I went to an all-boys school called St. Michael's, and it's one of the better schools in Toronto. It's a school that—we were not well off, but we were fine growing up financially. There are private schools where “if you're rich, you just get in” type thing. This was a school where it was middle-class, working families who valued education and the best for their kids and sent them to this school.

That was one of the best experiences I've had in my life, going to that high school. I have a lot of memories from there. I have a lot of friendships from there that still remain today and created the network of people that I know and kind of shaped the person I am today. Valuing education was, again, very important, and them sending me there shows that, and sending my sister to a private school as well demonstrates the importance that they found in education. After that, I went to University of Toronto and finished with an MBA. That's always been very important, yes.

Were you ever interested in the science route having parents as chemists, or you wanted nothing to do with that?

Yes, it's weird, my parents, my sister and me, I never—while I took them in high school, and I could have done that in university, I really had no interest in going the science route or medical route. Business was more my thing and economics, so that's why I chose what I did.

You said that you moved to Nevada in 2012, correct?

Yes.

When you had moved here, what would you say the hardest thing was when you left—did you come straight from Canada to Nevada?

No, it was to L.A. first, actually. The reason that I came to L.A. is because I met my future wife, and that's what made me leave my family and end up with my current wife. We lived in L.A. for about two and a half years after I left Toronto, and then we came to Nevada together.

What would you say both Canada and Los Angeles, what would you say were some of the tougher things in terms of leaving stuff behind and starting fresh in Nevada?

Toronto specifically is the idea of my family being there. That was very difficult. My nephews at the time were ten and three or eleven and four—no, they're closer in age than that. They're four years apart. Like ten and seven, maybe. They're starting up sports and I was going to all their games and stuff, and then I just picked up and left. That was the toughest part is leaving family behind.

Then when you move to Nevada, the thing I missed the most—I won't include L.A. in this sentiment. But when you're in Toronto and you're growing up there, you don't appreciate what the city has to offer because it's second nature that you don't think of these things. But when you leave it, you miss it. The idea of museums and art galleries and Broadway shows and

sports teams and the multicultural nature of the city, the restaurants, all of that that it has to offer, I took for granted when I was there. When I came here, a lot of those things were missing.

The tradeoff is—maybe this leads into your next question—Las Vegas is an easy place to live compared to a big city like Toronto or L.A. in terms of traffic, cost of living, things of that nature. Anytime someone asks me, how is it in Las Vegas? I say it's a lot easier to get by and to build whatever you're trying to build.

Definitely. I was going to ask you, what was it about Nevada or Las Vegas that attracted you? Like myself, I'm originally from Chicago, and I transferred to UNLV from Los Angeles as well. I was at community college. I loved it out there. But coming here, there is a difference. I don't want to say it's a culture shock, almost, but there is a difference of the way of life in Vegas and just overall, I would say, accessibility. You touched on what drew you to Las Vegas.

What kind of role at the time—you were married at the time you moved here, correct?

When I moved to L.A., we weren't married, but when we moved to Las Vegas, we were already married, yes.

Was your wife bored with it at the time, or did it take some convincing, or were you the one—

To move here?

Yes, to move here.

It was because she actually found a job here. I could work from wherever. I just need a computer and a connection. Yes, she found a job with Zappos, actually, out here. She doesn't currently work for Zappos, but that's the reason why I moved to Las Vegas.

Living in both Toronto and Los Angeles, how would you say you keep in touch with people whether it be your relatives in Canada or friends you made in Los Angeles? How does that work for you?

Social media, FaceTime. I FaceTime specifically with my parents every single day almost, if not every other day. Yes, that's the main source of communication, for sure.

You talked about how leaving your family was difficult and tough. When you're here now, present day, what kind of memories come back to you whether it be from childhood, high school, college of your family, some of the first things that come to mind? Were there any specific experiences that would fit that?

I think on a wider scale, again, just like those family gatherings, that's a big memory of my childhood. Now that all my cousins are grown up and they have kids, it's kind of tough to not be around their kids and have my daughter be cousins with their kids. You know what I mean?

That's tough. I think of those family gatherings a lot, and it's something that we don't have here. Both me and my wife don't have any family in Las Vegas, so I think that's the first thing that comes up.

Second, on a lesser scale of importance is the food. There's a lot of food in Toronto that I miss that I cannot get here at all. Those are probably a wide range of things.

When you moved to Vegas, what were some of your earliest memories of moving to Las Vegas whether it was taking in the Strip, seeing the life outside of the Las Vegas everyone knows? What were some of your earliest memories of that?

The heat and the fact that my wife had migraines out of nowhere for the first few months that we lived here. She actually went to the doctor, and they said, "It's probably adjusting to the heat."

We knew it was hot, but living it day to day, it hits you. It ends up being a big part of your daily life and how you manage to do things. I think that's the biggest shock moving here.

Beyond the Strip, I feel like Las Vegas is one big suburb, and it's similar to a lot of other suburbs of cities. It wasn't too much of a shock in that sense. I think the heat is the one that stood out the most.

You touched on it already. Los Angeles to Las Vegas, if you were to make almost a pros and cons list of being in Vegas versus Los Angeles whether it be two or three things for each, what would you say those would be?

In L.A., the pros would be the beach and the ocean, the different types of neighborhoods that are in L.A., and the cultural aspect of it. I guess the negatives in L.A. are the traffic; that's number one. Cost of living, state tax, that type thing. I'm sure this is going to be the standard across the board. There is a similarity in movement. Then the opposite here in Vegas. What attracted us here is the cost of living, no state tax, the ease of it, no traffic.

Vegas gets a bad rap for having people that, *Oh, you've got to watch out; there's a lot of hustlers in town*, a lot of this or that. But once you start building a sense of...you get within your community, and now that my daughter is of age where she's pre-K, getting involved with school events, extracurricular activities that she's involved in, T-ball, soccer, whatever, and then you start meeting different families, you understand that it's like any other city in that sense. I'm lucky enough, like I mentioned to you that I run Nevadans for Policy on Human Rights, and there are a lot of activists from different organizations that come together. I've met so many great people that have great hearts. Even though, like I said, Vegas gets a bad rap for having shallow and not too deep people, there's a lot of great people here.

In your time in Vegas, could you touch on your overall work history since you've lived here; where you've worked, what you've done?

Sure. It's kind of a unique thing. When I moved from Canada, I actually couldn't work until I applied for my green card and my Social Security. As I worked in Canada, I worked for an ad agency, but I always played poker on the side. When I came to the U.S. and L.A., I actually played poker full time, and that's where I made my money. When we moved to Vegas, I played poker for about...so, 2000...yes, six years as my sole source of income, and then I transitioned into this current thing I'm doing with sports betting. It's kind of a unique thing, but Vegas is a great place for that.

Definitely. What was it about poker that drew you into it; that made you fall in love and want to pursue that as a career?

Well, this is—it's funny. You can make some ties to my background. Being of Middle Eastern and Asian descent, there is either you gamble, gambling is a part of your culture, or it's like, no way, you will not gamble. There is no real gray area. You're a real gambler or stay away from gambling. I was around gambling growing up, but just playing cards with the uncles or whatever. My dad would play, and I would sit around and watch, and then my dad would take me to the racetrack and things like that. As I grew up, I was a huge sports fan. I started sports betting. Gambling has always been a part of me.

Then poker eventually became something that was very popular when I got into it, and I could see that if you worked at it, if you learned, if you read books, if you studied, you're playing against an opponent, not versus the casino. You actually have the edge. When you're going and you're playing these table games, like blackjack or slots or whatever, roulette, the

house has such a huge edge. But in poker, you have the edge if you're good and you treat it like a business, so to speak, and build your craft.

Yes, I love the competition aspect of it. Like I said, I grew up playing a lot of sports, and I'm a very competitive person, very analytical person. I'm good with numbers and math. Combine all those things, poker seemed like a natural fit, and it paid the bills for a lot of years. You talked about that not-really gray line; it's like either you gamble, or you don't, and you mentioned your dad. You would say your dad's side of the family was the one that introduced you to the gambling and cardplaying?

Even my mom's side, a Filipino party is like, you will not go there without there being a bingo game breaking out, or some sort of card game. It was on both sides. It was pretty prevalent on both sides growing up, yes.

Growing up—I want to switch into another realm, religion—how did religion play a role in your childhood and what it plays now whether it be celebrating it, et cetera?

Yes, sure. Both of my parents are born and raised Catholic, even my dad even though there are not very many Christian or Catholics grew up in Palestine. My dad was Catholic. In Canada, the school system is a little bit different than here. When I say I went to Catholic school, it doesn't mean private school for the elementary ages. They separate it into Catholic school, but it's funded by the government, so you don't have to pay, and then there is a nondenominational school, so many other religions can go to that school. But again, they're not private schools.

In the Catholic school, you grow up learning about the sacraments. You get First Communion. You get confirmed in grade eight. Then in high school, I went to an all-boys private school run by priests where there was mass offered every day, there was morning prayer,

there were all kinds of things. As a family, though, we were those C and E people type thing, so that's Christmas and Easter you'd go to mass.

I'm in that, yes.

My mom was a lot more religious than my dad, and as I grew up and I started learning, religion is something that is not a part of me, currently. I don't believe in all that stuff, to be honest. Right now, there is no religious aspect to my life. I have no intention of teaching my kid about that. My wife grew up in a very Catholic household. She is Filipino, too, by the way. We never baptized our daughter even though there was pressure from both sides. Religion currently is not a part of our life.

I was raised Catholic as well, and I feel the same to all those things. After growing up for a while, you start to learn your own, you get your own image of what religion is and how you take it.

I was going to say, going back, whether it be cultural, religious, stuff like that, political as well, living in Canada and living in Las Vegas, what would you say some of the biggest differences you've noticed in terms of those realms, whether it be political, religion, cultural, and then overall lifestyle?

Man, that's a very wide-ranging question. Culturally, again, the main difference is that you're just exposed to so much more culture in Toronto. If not the most multicultural city in the world, probably second to New York, perhaps. Coming here, you're either Asian, Mexican, or White or Black. That's how most people will fit you in to different groups whereas there, everything under the sun, and then you have different communities, different places you can go to get different kinds of food. I think that is the biggest difference culturally.

Politically, Canada tends to lend itself to be more liberal, but there's always pockets of conservatives and right-wing people. Here in Nevada, it's the same thing. Democrats won across the board here except one seat, I believe, so there's a lot of liberals, but again, there's a lot of right-wing people. I think it's similar to Canada in that sense.

I guess the biggest thing is health care; that's number one if we wanted to talk about that. I didn't know how deep you wanted to get into these things.

Definitely health care is an interesting subject because I know in Canada it's free for all citizens.

Yes.

And here, it's a completely different story. How would you say the experience was in Canada having that free health care, being publicly available to everyone?

It's something growing up you don't even think about it and how privileged you are to have that because that's just the way of life. It's only when I came here that I realized, what? We have to do this? What? You have to pay when you go to the doctor, even a copay even if you have insurance? We're lucky enough that my wife's job covers both of us and our daughter, but the fact that we still pay a copay is still mind-blowing to me because that doesn't happen in Canada.

When we had our daughter, the nurse came in, "Okay, you're ready to go; you're set to go." Then a financial person came in and handed us a bill. I'm like, "What is this?" Complete shock. Other things, if I felt a pain in my stomach or something here, and I'm like, "Well, how much does it cost to go to the emergency room to check it out? Forget it." That's not a thought in Canada. You just go.

It's just mind-blowing to me even though I've been here, L.A. and Vegas combined, close to ten or eleven years now, it's still not something that I've accepted. It's just complete

nonsense to me that people have to think about this. Us in Canada never thought about it as being an issue. Here, it's so engrained in their culture and their day-to-day lives that paying for the doctors, yes, that's just the way it is. It's like the mindset changed—I don't want to get into that, actually, into the whole healthcare issue. But I think those are the big differences, the mindset and what you actually have to do there versus here to go to the doctor.

I wanted to talk a little bit about your mom's side of the family being Filipino. I wanted to talk about the culture of being Filipino and living in another country. Speaking for your mother if you could, how would you say her experience was being a Filipino coming to Canada, starting this clean slate? What was her experience like?

I wish—I haven't talked to her about that because I don't think I ever really asked her of the pre-us, myself and my sister, what that experience was. How did you adapt? How did you come from a tropical climate to Canada in dead of winter? Those types of things I actually never really spoke to her about or really discussed. It's fascinating that you actually asked that question and me thinking about it. I've never talked to her about it. It's more of...obviously, when we were around, understanding her experiences at work or whatever it may be. But prior to us being born, I don't really know that part of her story.

Would you say, looking back now, growing up with her in terms of the food she had made, was it Filipino food, or was it more traditional Canadian-style food that you would see on a day-to-day basis around you, or did you mom try to keep you guys connected to your Filipino roots at all?

Definitely. That was a big thing. Food, I think, is the number one, tops how cultures instill to the next generation. Yes, she cooked all the Filipino food she could, but also cooked Western food, Arabic food, Italian food. She cooked everything. I was blessed to have exposure to two different

cultures, so the food. My aunts on my dad's side and my grandma would teach my mom how to cook Arabic dishes. I was lucky to have a wide range of food and options growing up from my mom.

That's awesome. I want to talk—like I said before, you can share as much as you want. If you don't want to touch on a certain subject, we'll move on. But this I want to talk about. Growing up and your day-to-day now, were there ever times when you felt you were racially discriminated against, where you felt people a minority that people looked differently at you? Could you speak to some experiences like that?

Me personally, I think I touched upon this in the opening. I never felt that I didn't belong. I never felt any sort of racial bias or anything of that nature or discrimination against me personally. But it's definitely happened in my family. I can tell you a story.

My dad owned a restaurant that was in a food court of a mall. My parents are both heading to work one day, and they're at a light just before you turn into the mall. There's a bus depot in the mall at the same time. At the light, it just so happened that my dad's car stalled. Behind him is a bus driver just blaring on the horn. Finally, they get into work, and it just so happens that the bus driver goes into the bus depot, has to go to the bathroom and passes my parents' store as he's going to the bathroom. He recognizes my dad as the person who was in that car, right? My dad is just opening the store. He walks by and he goes...swearing at him, saying, "Why don't you move your F-ing car?" Blah, blah, blah. My dad is like, *huh?* He is really like, *who are you?* first of all. Then he goes, "Oh, you F-ing immigrants, go back to where you came from."

My dad does not want to take anything of that nature. He hits him, ends up knocking him out. Then the guy presses charges. He presses charges, and my dad goes to court, says his story.

The judge completely agrees with my dad, but says, “Listen, you can’t take matters into your hands. You can’t hit people like that. Even though, listen, I understand completely where you’re coming from. When someone tells you to go back to where you came from, F-ing immigrant,” blah, blah, blah. It goes on his record as a small charge.

Fast forward, four years or five years or so. Like I said, we used to go back and forth to Detroit a lot to visit my dad’s side of the family. We’re crossing the border, and the customs in the U.S. decide to give my dad a hard time, pulled him over. He’s an Arab. We understand the anti-Arab nature of border police and custom police and foreign policy and all that. It’s a thing that we’re used to at the Detroit border as well. He gets pulled over. He’s asking him, “Where are you going?”

“I’m going to visit my brother. We’re only here for a couple of nights.”

Okay, whatever. Then they said—I don’t even know why this came up, but he goes, “Have you ever been charged?” or, “Do you have anything on your record?” My dad completely forgot about this thing. And he said, “No.” Then then caught him in this “I got you” moment, and basically banned him from coming to the U.S.

Every year now, he has to apply for a waiver form to enter the U.S. He has to apply, and the process takes a bit of time. It’s a pain for him to do especially now when you combine the fact that his son and his granddaughter live in the U.S. The waiver process was in its application stages at one point when my daughter was born, and he couldn’t even come for my daughter’s birth.

When you tie that back to what the initial cause of all that was, was a White bus driver, White, Anglo-Saxon man, White male telling my dad to go back to where he came from, you F-ing immigrant, that led to him not being able to see my daughter being born. That’s

discrimination in a nutshell that we face. It's just terrible. I've heard other customs people at the border say, "What's your citizenship?" to my dad, and he would say, "Canadian." And he's like, "No. But where were you born?" And then he says, "Jerusalem, Palestine." And he goes, "Your Canadian citizenship and a dollar will get you a cup of coffee," to me. Things like that, it's just like a nonstop barrage of little comments like that. No matter how long my dad has been in Canada—he's been there longer than a lot of the people that might make racial statements to him. Just because they're White gives them this claim to the land, like this is my country and not your country? Those are the types of things that even though I personally never experienced anything directly to me, it's affected my family, for sure.

I want to know a little bit about your own perspective on the outside looking in growing up in Canada and seeing the United States. For me, especially when I think of the anti-Arab sentiment that has been prevalent throughout America, could you talk about maybe if there was a difference in how Arabs were portrayed? I think of pre and post 9/11 because for me that's the experience where I see for a lot of Americans there was a flip that just automatically switched in their head. I was only four at the time, but I've seen a lot of violent acts towards Arabs whether it be in New York or other places throughout the United States after 9/11. Could you speak to if there was any difference pre and post then because, like you said, you had come in to visit your family in Michigan? I would assume that happened before and after your time living here. If you could say if there was a different...I'm trying to think of the best way to put it...the experience overall, how would that have differed?

Our experience, even though there are incidents of anti-Arabness towards my father—I guess I could be White-passing in a sense, and because my name is Michael, and my dad goes by Sam,

we're not Muslim. Nobody is wearing a hijab or anything like that. They might not be able to identify us as Arabs right away until they see records. That's why a lot of the issues are with customs and the border. That's always been bad. It probably got worse after 9/11, but I think we stopped going a lot towards that time because my grandparents had passed away by then, so we didn't go as often. But it doesn't mean that we weren't aware of what was happening in the U.S. and the anti-Arab and Islamophobia that was rampant during that time after 9/11, and it still is as far as I'm concerned.

As a Canadian, the main thing was the way the U.S. government's policy was towards the Middle East. That's something that I was always aware of. Not to say Canada was any better, but a lot of the Iraq war, they didn't get involved as much as the U.S., obviously. Afghanistan, they were more of a peacekeeping nation rather than occupying Afghanistan. In that sense, I'm more proud to be Canadian, obviously, and always had this anti-American sentiment in a sense because of their foreign policy towards the Middle East. Not just the Middle East. I mean their imperialistic ways with a lot of different countries. I'm not a big fan of the U.S. government, you could say.

I wanted to talk a little bit, too, given the recent pandemic and everything. You said your wife is Filipino as well, correct?

Yes.

Have you two noticed any form of discrimination due to that? I've seen in the news that there have been multiple incidents of Asians being attacked and being blamed for everything that's happening.

Luckily enough, we haven't, my wife, my mother and my aunts, whoever, and on my wife's side as well hasn't experienced anything directly towards them. Again, luckily we can say that. But

obviously you know that there has been a wide number of incidents across the country towards Asians, blaming them for coronavirus.

Asian Americans are one of the fastest-growing population groups within Nevada itself.

What does that mean to you? What do you think of when you see that?

I think it's great. Again, being from Toronto and having that multicultural aspect of it, seeing now in Las Vegas that there are a lot of different communities that are coming up and growing, it's really cool to see. I always don't want to live in a monolith of culture, so having all these different cultures grow is really a blessing for everyone. They should really see it as a blessing. You look at Spring Mountain and the way there's so many different Asian restaurant of every different kind, it's really cool to see. Moving from L.A. to here, you thought you would have missed it, but we don't miss that at all. It's awesome to see that it's growing as quickly as it is.

I think just for my own sake, going back to Los Angeles, for me in terms of an Asian neighborhood, I always thought of Koreatown. That was the one that was probably closest to me. I could go there. For the Filipino community, if you have any idea, where would they have lived, or where was that community most prevalent?

In L.A.?

In L.A., yes.

In L.A., I believe it was Glendale and Eagle Rock, and then there's also historic Filipino Town kind of on the outskirts of downtown L.A. There are a lot of different pockets of highly concentrated Filipino Americans.

I think this is the last question I have. Why do you believe it's important for a university, such as UNLV, to be able to interview people like you and to hear your stories? Why do you think it's important for us?

I think, yes, to expose cultures and experiences of those cultures to people who might not have been privy to that growing up or haven't heard about someone's experiences is always a benefit to enriching your overall being. I think it's a great project that you're involved with and that UNLV has undertaken, and hopefully something can come of it. I don't know what the end goal is of this project? Is it to just tell people stories, or is it to come up with a conclusion of some sort? I think just the idea of letting people tell their stories is really awesome to see.

From what I've been told, it seems like their goal is to have almost this encyclopedia, sort of, just all these different stories within the Ethnic Studies Department. Granted, the course that I'm taking with Professor Winkleman is specifically Asian American Experience, stuff like that. I believe there might be other courses within the Ethnic Studies group that are doing something similar whether it be with Middle Eastern communities or the African communities. I'm definitely going to see what they have to offer because I believe you could definitely add a lot of insight. I think they would have one for the Middle East community.

Oh yes, I would love that.

I think that you would definitely be a great source for them to have.

Thank you. One thing I wanted to let you know, Dalton, as well as that, it seems based on your responses to me that you're interested in politics and different things or issues around the world.

There is our group, Nevadans for Policy on Human Rights that's based in Las Vegas, off campus. We were lucky enough to register as an RSO, as a student group, this year.

Wow.

Yes. So, NPHR UNLV exists currently. I would suggest following their Instagram to follow when their meetings are. I'm still involved with them because they're just getting their feet under

them. We're planning to have a bunch of events, probably in the next semester. Right now, it's just an organizing time and trying to gain momentum and introduce us to the campus. If you are interested in something like that, I would say come out to one of our meetings just to get to know more.

Oh yes, I would love to. For me growing up in Chicago, where I was raised was a small suburb outside of the city, just north of the city. For us, it was almost right down the middle, fifty-fifty split between Catholics and Jewish people. For me growing up, I always had insight from the Jewish perspective based off what's going on right now between the Jews and the Palestinians. Up until I moved to Los Angeles, I hadn't really met anyone who identified as Palestinian and could offer some form of insight into their view into everything that's been happening throughout history. I'd love learning both sides, and I want to learn more about the Palestinians and the struggle you guys have gone through and what you guys are doing nowadays to show people what's really happening.

You're exactly the type of individual who we need in our movement because...I told this to somebody just the other day. Unfortunately, I hate to admit it, but Palestinians are not going to free Palestine. It's going to be a lot of Americans who don't know the issue but have enough empathy in them to listen to our story and to try to understand why we are doing what we're doing. I would love if you could attend. That would be amazing.

Oh, that would be great. I would love to. Lastly, you talked about your wife being Filipino.

Would she be interested in doing an interview like this?

Yes, I think so because her experience is completely different than mine. She grew up in San Diego. She's full Filipino. We always talk about stuff like this, too, that her upbringing is a little bit different than my upbringing, and the experiences, like when I say I never felt anything, any

sort of discrimination against me, she has, and her family has. Yes, I think she would love to do it, too.

Awesome. [Colloquy not transcribed] Thank you so much. I really appreciate you taking the time to do this.

Yes, Dalton, I enjoyed it, so thank you very much.

[End of recorded interview]