

Samia Majeed Interviewed by Sadaf Majeed
October 6, 2019
East Elmhurst, Queens

Sadaf Majeed: My name is Sadaf Majeed and I am interviewing Samia Majeed in her house on Sunday October 6. Do you give me permission to record this oral history?

Samia Majeed: Yes, I do.

Sadaf Majeed: Where did you grow up?

Samia Majeed: I grew up in Mianwali, Pakistan, but when I was four we actually moved to Saudi Arabia, and then came back to Pakistan after spending several months there and then moved to Islamabad, which is the capital of Pakistan and then after that we moved to London, so I've been actually moving around a lot, because of my dad's job. He's a UN diplomat, so we actually moved around a lot.

Sadaf Majeed: Describe your favorite meal growing up?

Samia Majeed: My favorite meals growing up was actually my dad's sandwiches that he used to make on Saturdays or Sundays. That was the only time my dad cooked, and it was pretty special and every time I would for that, I would wait for the weekend so he could make those sandwiches, and it was just I guess special meaning.

Sadaf Majeed: Does a certain food remind you of loved ones?

Samia Majeed: Yes, my mom, she loves to make pancakes and that really reminds me of my mom whenever I eat pancakes. It was my favorite meal growing up, it was my favorite breakfast.

Sadaf Majeed: Do you have any memories in regard to preparing meals with an elder?

Samia Majeed: Yes, so when my dad would make those sandwiches on the weekends all of us kids, I think I was around ten at the time, we would help him cut the vegetables. Yeah, it was special because we'd just lend a hand and it was nice.

Sadaf Majeed: What is currently favorite meal to eat or to make?

Samia Majeed: My current favorite meal to eat is eggplant Manchurian, I always get it from this one restaurant, but to make, I actually like to make all the Pakistani dishes.

Sadaf Majeed: Like what?

Samia Majeed: Mostly I like to make rice because it's just easier to cook. I can't do any of the curry's yet, but I am actually on the path to learn several more dishes.

Sadaf Majeed: Is there any food you will not eat?

Samia Majeed: Yes, I would not eat pork because it's not allowed in Islam. So, the meat has to be kosher, it has to be cut in a certain way, so yeah that's one food I would not eat.

Sadaf Majeed: Are there certain food you only eat on special occasions and what are those occasions?

Samia Majeed: So, there is actually one occasion, it lasts for a month, it's called Ramadan. The foods that we make in that one month, because we fast, my mom makes Pakoras and Samosas and all those foods. We mostly eat those food in Ramadan for one month and you can eat on any other occasions too, but mostly we make them traditionally for every single day in Ramadan.

Sadaf Majeed: Who in your life cooks the best meal and what do they cook?

Samia Majeed: My mom makes the best meals, she cooks all the Pakistani food, she makes a really good Biryani or any other rice. She makes really good Parathas.

Sadaf Majeed: What does eating well mean to you?

Samia Majeed: Eating well means eating healthy, but it also means not spending a lot of money on the food. It's just you can buy a healthy meal with just going to a store and just a buying vegetables and fruits and make a really nice meal out of it. You don't have to spend a lot of money on these fancy restaurants and fancy stores to actually eat well.

Sadaf Majeed: where is your favorite place to eat?

Samia Majeed: My favorite place to eat is around my workplace. It's called Tangra Masala. I've actually worked there for a little more than three years and it's been my constant favorite for around that time.

Sadaf Majeed: What do you order there?

Samia Majeed: I order eggplant Manchurian there.

Sadaf Majeed: How does the food you eat or make who you are?

Samia Majeed: So, the food that we eat makes us healthy and it defines how healthy you are in life. For example, if I eat good meaning vegetables a lot of water, it would make me more active and just makes me healthy overall. But if I start to eat fast food and I've actually tried that, eating fast just makes you lazy and you gain a lot of weight with it. Overall, it's not good for your health.

Sadaf Majeed: If you could go anywhere in the world to try new food, where would you go and why?

Samia Majeed: I would actually go to Turkey, because I do love Turkish food. I've tasted the Turkish food in New York, but I know it's not that authentic. I know it would taste much better when actually it's made in Turkey. So, I would actually love to go there and try their version of the food, not the New York version of their Turkish food.

Sadaf Majeed: How does your income impact your food choices?

Samia Majeed: So yes, it's true that when you earn more you obviously eat well, meaning you spend more money in your food. So, when I was in college, I obviously did not have much to spend on my food. So, I would eat fast food a lot and it was not a good choice. But now that I have a job, I can afford good food, so I try to make my own meals, and try to make my own lunch even when I go to work. So yeah income does define how healthy you eat. But then obviously it's true that good food costs money, so even if your trying to eat healthy, it costs money for some reason. The reason I ate fast food in college was because I did not have enough money, and it just cost less, and it was quick and easy.

Sadaf Majeed: How does the environment or the community you live in impact the food you eat?

Samia Majeed: So, when I obviously go back to Pakistan it's all Pakistani food and there are no other alternatives. Over here when I'm in New York, obviously when I'm eating out, I eat all kinds of foods from different countries like Thai food, Chinese food, and Turkish, Indian. But obviously when I'm home my mom cooks Pakistani food, so your environment does contribute to the food you eat.

Sadaf Majeed: How did you change as an eater since you moved to New York city?

Samia Majeed: So, I got to try different diverse foods. I did not have that option when I was back home. Mainly because I was young, and we didn't eat out that much. I mean there are options available to eat, I mean you can eat Thai food there, but it's just that when I moved to New York, I was a little bit older. I had money to spend and I would go out with my friends, even with my family and just try different foods.

Sadaf Majeed: What is a meal or snack that you can eat all the time and not get tired of?

Samia Majeed: My mom makes me breakfast, it's a Pakistani bread, it's called Paratha and she Friday an egg with that and I crisply love that. I've been eating that as long as I can remember, and I think I'll eat that forever. It's just my favorite meal.

Sadaf Majeed: How do you feel when people appropriate, your food?

Samia Majeed: So, I don't like when people decide what I like to eat. I actually like to decide what I want to eat myself, I guess. Elaborate the question because I'm not really sure.

Sadaf Majeed: Sure, appropriate is like, let's say an American company tries to sell, let's say Pakistani food. How would you feel about that?

Samia Majeed: That's what I mean when I moved to New York. So yes, we do get all these diverse foods but, actually it tastes a lot different if you actually eat it there. So for example Pakistani food, it's very different when you go to the actual country and eat that food and that's what I mean when I said I like Turkish food. I will like to go to Turkey to actually buy that food because it just tastes different. It's the touch that the actual people who are experts in making it brings, it's not the same.

Sadaf Majeed: Do you abide by dietary restrictions because of your culture or religion?

Samia Majeed: Yes, so like I said before we do not eat pork, we do not drink alcohol. So that really what type of drinks we drink and then obviously with the meat we can't eat at any place. I mean we can't just pick a restaurant and go there and eat chicken. We can't go to Wendy's and get chicken wings or something. It has to be halal or Kosher; the animal has to be cut a certain way.

Sadaf Majeed: How do you feel about fast food?

Samia Majeed: I do not like fast food because it's just not healthy for you. It's just makes you makes you lazy overall and yes, it's cheap but it doesn't expand your life beyond so many years. Eventually if you eat fast food all the time your organs will finally give up. So, you need to eat healthy.

Sadaf Majeed: Do you have like a story, like a bad story about fast food or something like that?

Samia Majeed: Yes, several weeks ago I went with my sister Sadaf to get her school supplies and after a while we actually ended up at McDonald's and it was just terrible food. We got some fish sandwiches and it was really bad, it was cold, and it just didn't taste that good. I mean it tasted good when I was in college, but it just didn't taste good.

Sadaf Majeed: is there any food that reminds you of home?

Samia Majeed: Any food that reminds me of home? Biryani reminds me of home because it's mostly cooked there and obviously the Pakistani bread that we eat with almost every meal. That reminds me of home everywhere I eat.

Sadaf Majeed: How is food reflective of your identity?

Samia Majeed: So, I'm very constant when it comes to food. I don't like change much. Like I've said before I worked at this place for three years and I go to the same restaurant for three years and I like the same meal. Almost the same meals, like I have three main dishes that I like, and I like to stay constant. Even if I end up discovering something new, that stays my constant, I don't like change and it's just helps me stay sane and it doesn't waste money. I actually did try to be spontaneous and try different things, but it just did not end not working in my favor. I would just go with my core and buy something different. You know I would say let me try this dish maybe I would like it but I just ended up wasting my money. So that's why I just like to stick with the things that I like. But mostly I make my lunch from home. I ask my mom, or I make it myself. I'd get a bunch of vegetables and fruits and just try to make a meal out of that. It's just healthier and cheaper, so I like that. So, I went back to my country a few months ago and I actually discovered some great foods over there and it's very different from how it is here.

Sadaf Majeed: Is there any question I didn't ask?

SM: No, I think you asked all the questions and we covered pretty much everything.

Sadaf Majeed: OK, thank you so much for joining me.