

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Esther Amini

2015PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Esther Amini conducted by Michelle Patrick on April 27, 2015. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that she is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project

Interviewee: Esther Amini

Location: New York City

Interviewer: Michelle Patrick

Date: April 27, 2015

00:00:01 Q: It's April 27th—

Other Q: Let's start with—also spell both your names.

00:10:09 Q:—April 27th, 2015. This is Michelle Patrick, and I'm interviewing Esther Amini, which is spelled—

Amini: A-m- like Mary, i-n- like Nancy, i-. It's Esther Amini. And Amini is my maiden name, so that's what I go by.

00:00:34 Q: We were speaking about your parents having come from a long, long, long line of repressed and underground people. Could you just sum that up briefly?

Amini: Sure. My parents were raised in the city of Mashhad in Iran, and they were underground Jews. Their ancestors were underground Jews in Iran—they date back 2,700 years. In 1947, my mother had had it. There was a trigger and something happened and she decided she's not going to stay there any longer, in that country.

00:01:23 Q: What was the trigger?

Amini: At that time, my two brothers were already born and around, and they were very young. They were toddlers. And one brother—his earlobe was burnt by a nursery school

teacher, and they were in a private school. It was a private nursery school, and this teacher had taken a—what do you call those rods that you put inside a fireplace?

00:01:58 Q: Skewer?

Amini: Like a skewer. Heated it, pressed it against his earlobe, and called him a dirty Jew. That was my brother David. He was the younger one. He was about two years old.

00:02:13 Q: Oh, my God!

Amini: So he came home with an inflamed earlobe, crying and crying, and my mother had had it. She heard the story and she said, “That does it. We have suffered for so many years. Our ancestors have suffered. I will not raise two boys in this country and have them go through all I went through. We’re leaving.” So to make a long story short, in 1947, they came to the United States—my mother, my father, and my two brothers. I had an older brother, Albert, and a younger brother [second oldest], David. They’re two and a half years apart, and they came. And they came to Manhattan because my mother had a brother living in Manhattan at the time who said, “Come. America is good to the Jews.”.

00:03:11 Q: How old were your brothers at the time?

Amini: By the time they got here—it was quite a journey—it was right after World War II. Leaving Iran was impossible. They didn’t have airplanes that you could just jump on. You had to find a battleship to get on. So they took a train to India, and they went through Afghanistan, and they went to India. They thought they’d stay in India a couple of days and they’d find transport. Didn’t work out that way. They were there 14 months in India. Couldn’t get out. Finally there was a battleship that they were able to get on to—that was

going to go to Shanghai and San Francisco. They went that route, got to California, took the cross-country train. There was this train that went across the country with their two little boys. At this point, by the time they landed in New York, I think Albert was around seven, David was around five, and my Uncle Aaron—this was my mother's brother who'd said, "Come" —was waiting for them on that end. So they lived in Manhattan for a couple of years.

00:04:28 Q: How did they earn a living?

Amini: My father didn't for two years, and he was borrowing and struggling. They lived in a one-bedroom apartment, a rental, on the Upper West Side. And my mother was sewing hems, babysitting, whatever she could do that didn't really require language and education. It's a lengthy story, and I hesitate giving you the punchline because I've written a book about this. But the punchline happens to be that my father found a way to import a very soft fiber that today is called cashmere from Iran. At the time, no one knew what this fiber was, and he imported it from Iran. He took it to many different mills. One mill decided to turn it into yarn, turn it into fabric, and he introduced cashmere to the United States to—in the 1950's.

00:05:44 Q: What was it called?

Amini: I don't know the Persian word for that, but it happens to be the very soft hair that grows on a goat, and it's underneath the spiky hair. So there's soft, fluffy hair, and he was—he was very aware of that hair. He had goats and farms in Iran, and he knew, and he thought, "This is a very soft, warm hair. Maybe it can be turned into a fiber." Anyhow, so what happened was he introduced the United States to cashmere in the 1950s. It became the rage.

Women were wearing cashmere sweaters, cashmere coats, hats, scarves. It was a high-luxury item.

00:06:31 Q: So it's a rags to riches story.

Amini: Right. Rags to riches, but he lost it all, too, because he came from the Old World where it was a handshake. You make a deal and you trust. Someone says, "We're working together," we're working together. "You're my supplier," I'm his supplier. He didn't think in terms of law, documents, contracts, legalizing it, making sure it can't be taken away from him. In Iran, a man's word is a man's word. You lose your reputation—if someone loses trust in you, no one will work with you again. So you don't need contracts. So after he did very well for a few years, I was born before that—I was born in Manhattan, and then we all moved to this house. And after a few years, this company that was working with him said, "We don't need you anymore," and they went directly to the source and they bought their hair, raw hair, directly from Iran. And why should they have the middleman?

00:07:56 Q: So what happened to your dad?

Amini: That's another story because I think we're going to get off track. The point is, he had his ups and downs. They came from a country and a history of persecution, and fear of the outside world, and distrust, and they were Orthodox Jews. So now we're living in Queens. I have two older brothers, and I'm their only daughter and the youngest. And the expectation was that I grow up to marry at a very young age. My mother was 14 when she married my father who was 34—twenty-year age difference. Back in Iran—again in the city of Mashhad, I have to always specify because if you say this, somebody might say, "Oh, in Teheran that wouldn't happen." It happened in Mashhad. This was the norm.

00:08:57 Q: Can you spell Mashhad for us?

Amini: It's M-a-s-h-h-a-d. Mashhad. So she was 14, he was 34, 20-year age difference. My grandmother, my father's mother, was married at the age of nine—premenstrual. And her husband—my paternal grandfather—went on business trips and came back only once he heard she was menstruating. So she moved into her in-law's home and grew up in her in-law's home, which was the norm, so that she would acclimate herself to her husband's family, to her husband's culture—every family has a culture—and belong to them and be very well-suited.

00:10:06 Q: Before she gave birth?

Amini: Oh, yeah. As far as I know, they didn't have sexual relations. I mean, there was that understanding that she was still a child. So he went abroad. And when he found out that now she's menstruating a few years later, he came back, and she started to have children. And that's my grandmother, my father's mother. So she was married at 9. My mother was married at 14. Along cometh me, Esther. Born in the United States, which meant nothing to them, especially to my father. What he wanted was to make sure that I married young and married within the Persian Mashhadi Jewish community for the continuity because this is what he knew and this is what he trusted. And this is what worked, as far as he was concerned.

00:10:56 Q: How long would that community have been here?

Amini: Well, little by little, they started to come, and I would say when we were in Kew Gardens, there were at least 15 families at that time. And they came and lived in Kew Gardens, too. It became a ghetto of its own. They all had the same background, they came from the same city, they were all Jewish. And they all knew each other because of marriage

—first cousins married first cousins. There was a lot of that. Everybody knew the other person's grandfather and great grandfather. There was a sense of “we are all one.” So little by little, the community grew. So his goal for me was to certainly be engaged by the time I'm twelve, thirteen. He did not want me to go to school. He tolerated elementary school. He huffed and puffed over junior high. By the time I was entering high school—and then we were living in Forest Hills, Queens—I was going to public school and I was going to Forest Hills High School. He was against high school. He said, “You don't need this. You know how to read and write. You don't need this.”

00:12:19 Q: Legally, though, don't you have to go? Not really?

Amini: We weren't even taking it there. It was much more of a stance. He was just basically saying—I think he was just trying to say, “Don't expect anything beyond this.” He was objecting to high school. And here I am, preparing for college. Here I am—in my mind—I'm working hard in school, I'm a straight A student. For good reason, I wanted out. It was my passport out. So I wanted to do very well and to get into an Ivy League school, and I had all these dreams for myself. And a lot of it had to do with having older brothers who worked *very* hard in school, who did *very* well—Albert, the eldest, ended up going to Cornell and he was in the architectural school on a full scholarship. David ended up doing very well, and he went to Columbia University. And here I am, third in line, and I wanted what my brothers had. And I wasn't supposed to have what my brothers had. It was a clear understanding: you are a girl, and you are different. Your role in life is different. You are to marry, you are to become a mother, you are to become a homemaker, you are to cook, you are to take care of the home. You're not a man. This was the big statement. If you're developing your mind, you're trying to become a man. You're not a man.

00:13:48 Q: While you're applying to colleges and getting catalogs and applications?—

Amini: Behind his back. Everything was behind his back.

00:13:57 Q: —What did you think was going to happen?

Amini: It's a good question, because here I was, gung ho. My ideal school was Radcliffe—that was my number one choice. I had these fantasies. Who's going to pay for this? I'm sending out applications to Radcliffe, Brandeis, Barnard, and then I used Hunter as my safety. And I'm forging his signature left and right. On my report cards, I forged his signature—and. I was getting A's. And usually when you're not doing well, you're forging your father's signature. And he didn't know how well I was doing until I was in high school. And one day he wanted to see my high school report card. And I was shocked because he was never interested in school. And I had to show it to him. And he had a fit. He had an absolute fit because I was a straight A student.

00:14:59 Q: And what did he think?

Amini: Basically he felt that I had deceived him. I had. It was as if he found me with heroin needles. It was as if he walked into my bedroom and discovered that I was a cocaine addict. He had that kind of rage and fear. And in some way, there was truth to it because I was addicted. I was addicted to getting a very good education and defying his values and being very different from him and wanting something *very* different and going behind his back. There were some parallels. So anyhow, here I am, I'm sending out applications to schools, I'm forging his signature, I don't know how the hell I'm going to pay for anything if I do get in.

00:15:57 Q: Even the applications weren't free. They were \$50. How did you manage to squirrel that away?

Amini: Right, right. Well, I have two older brothers, and the one who's closer—one is ten years older, that's Albert—and the one who's seven years older, that's David, was home at the time, and he was my accomplice. So when I had interviews, I had to go to Massachusetts for a Radcliffe interview. And I had to go to Brandeis. And we scheduled them on the same day—on a Friday—and spaced them apart so that we'd be able to do this trip and come back and be home in time for the Sabbath, for Friday night because we're observing Shabbat, the Sabbath. David drove me early in the morning, secretly, and we went off. We left a note on the kitchen table. We thought they would think I had run away. I left a note saying, "We're taking a trip together. We'll be back before dinnertime." Being very vague. And we went for the interviews. Bottom line, Barnard accepted me, Radcliffe did not. Brandeis did.

And then I had to really say to myself, "What really makes sense given the family I'm from, the culture I'm from. Am I really going to be able to live in Massachusetts? Barnard is in Manhattan and I'm living in Queens and I can stay at home and I can commute. This will give my father safety and security and trust and he'll see me every day. And Barnard's a great school. Affiliated with Columbia." Back then, Columbia was not coed; Barnard was the girl's school for Columbia. Sounded good to me. My brother David went to Columbia. I had attended classes with him. I was turned on to the university, so I said, "Barnard's going to be my place."

00:18:08 Q: Did this encounter less resistance than it might if you'd gone to Radcliffe or—

Amini: Definitely. Definitely. So when it all came out that I was accepted and I planned on going—I was accepted let's say in April and planned on going in September—so when this came out my father was very angry. And he basically said, “I’m not paying for this education, and I don’t believe in it. And I’m against it.” And my brother David stepped up and said, “If you don’t finance her education, I will. I’ll take out the loans. I will find a way.” And that was very exciting because back then, you don’t speak to your father that way. Not a father from Mashhad!

00:19:07 Q: For your father, but for you it must have been—he was your hero.

Amini: David was my hero. Definitely. So my father felt dethroned and he felt David had taken over this leadership of the family. It was like now he’s the patriarch—here he is he’s going to call the shots. So he felt—dethroned. And over a few months, he decided he would pay, provided I live at home. So my father did pay for my tuition, and I went to Barnard. I promised him I would live at home, and I commuted. I was taking three trains back and forth every day. Thrilled that I was going to Barnard. Lapping up the classes. Loving all the different people I was meeting. Feeling *liberated*. And coming home every night.

While this went on for a year and a half, I started to feel itchy. I’m not getting the full college experience, and what I really want is to live in the dorms. So we’re talking about 1968, around then—1968-ish. So I went into the dorm office and said, “I’d like to live in the dorms, and I’m wondering if there is an available room,” and I explained myself, and they said, “Well, actually, we have a double room, and there’s a double, and there’s a vacancy within the double. There’s one person occupying it right now.” I said I’ll take it. Sight unseen: I did not meet my future roommate, I didn’t have to check out the room—I just said, “I’ll take it.”

Came back home and I had rehearsed my speech—what am I going to say tonight? How am I making this next step happen? So I had my parents in the kitchen, and I sat them down, and I said, “I have to tell you—for a year and a half, I’ve been commuting back and forth from Forest Hills, Queens, to Morningside Heights, and working hard, staying in the library sometimes until 12 o’clock midnight. It’s been wearing. I really think I need to sleep in the dorms. And these are all-girl dorms, all-female. They’re safe, and there’s a room available. And I’ll come home every Friday night. I’ll be home for Shabbos, for the Sabbath. Friday night, Saturday. I’ll go back on Sunday. You’ll see me every weekend, but I have to do this.” Once my father heard me say this, he ripped off his jacket, his vest, his tie, raced upstairs, put on his pajamas, lay flat—horizontal—in his bed, and went on a hunger strike. And he said he will kill himself—now is the time to die. He has gone through too much, he cannot tolerate it anymore, because his daughter, Esther—me—will become a whore. And Barnard— i.e. college—turns girls into prostitutes.

00:22:55 Q: How were you feeling throughout this whole time? Furious?

Amini: Every emotion under the sun. I was terrified, I’m shaking, I’m worried about his life—what if he does kill himself? This was a serious man. His word was his word. He wasn’t playing with me. On the other hand, I did want this opportunity. He was insane. I wasn’t going to be a prostitute—I didn’t even have a boyfriend. I wasn’t dating. Far from being promiscuous. And every emotion under the sun that you can imagine. And meanwhile, I actually wrote a book about this and I’m pretty much finished with it, and it’s called *Killing My Father*. And this happens to be one of the chapters, called *Killing My Father*, I felt I was killing my father because I wanted to go to Barnard and live in the dorms. It was the living in the dorms that did him in. Like that was the last straw.

00:24:07 Q: How long did this hunger strike last?

Amini: It lasted for 10 days. He was drinking water, he was sipping through a straw. He was growing his beard, it was turning white. He gave up solid foods. I was still going to school and coming home every day—still living in Forest Hills. He would not look me in the eyes. He would not talk to me—he had cut me off. And he wanted to die. And so my struggle—here I am thinking, “I am killing my father”—which is why the book is called *Killing My Father*. Here I am, killing my father because I want to live in a dormitory? How crazy is that? Maybe I’m the crazy one. Maybe I should pull back and say, “Forget the dorms, I’ll continue living at home.” Can I live with this? Let’s say he does die, let’s say he has a heart attack? For the rest of my life, can I live with the fact that I was responsible for his death, because I wanted to sleep somewhere else? It began to sound so petty and so self-centered of me. How narcissistic of me.

00:25:21 Q: Of you?

Amini: Yes, I kept thinking. Now look what I’m pushing him into. And then there was a part of me which felt, he’s insane! Why can’t we both live in the outside world and have a relationship with one another? Why does it have to be this way? And I spoke to a Barnard friend—a girlfriend. A WASP girlfriend who knew very little about the Persians and the Orthodox background, and I was trying to explain it to her, and she said to me, “Esther, call his bluff.” I said, “You don’t know him.” “It’s bluff. You just move ahead, and you’ll see. He’s not going to kill himself.”

00:26:07 Q: Who was this?

Amini: Oh, I'm not going to give her full name. In case she doesn't want to be identified. She was in our class, 1971. Wonderful friend, and I said to her, "You don't understand the culture. You don't understand the mentality. You're thinking American. You can't think American." And I was explaining it and she said, "Esther, call his bluff." And it's funny— her words lodged inside of me, and I drew from her words. And on the tenth night of his hunger strike, I told my brother David, "I'm moving into that room. It's available now. And I need you to drive me. I've got books and clothing and stuff I've got to get into that room." He said okay.

So we packed the red Valiant, and my mother, who was a very strong character, a very verbal person, was quiet for a change. And decided she's coming along to see this home away from home. Where is her daughter going? So she sat in the back seat of the car. She's all buttoned up. I'm in the front seat next to David, ready to drive. Everything's packed. All of a sudden, I see my father racing out of the house in his pajamas, floppy slippers, hair white and wild, beard grown, racing towards us and jumping into the backseat, and saying, "I have to see the brothel that you are moving into." I'm sweating bullets. We're all quiet. We ride from Forest Hills, Queens, to the Upper West Side of Manhattan to go to Columbia. No one says a word the entire trip. And I'm so worried because I don't know how he's going to behave. . Here he is, so against this, and I didn't know if he'd strangle somebody in the hallway. I didn't know what I was dealing with—he was a wild man at that time.

We get there, and David and I are dragging my things up a few flights. We get to my room. My father's behind me, my mother's behind him. We're in a row, I've got the key to the door. Of course, the door is locked and I expect it to be locked, so I unlock it and it's dark, and I open the door. I say to myself, "In a way, thank God he's here. He's going to see a bedroom. He's going to see books. He's going to see a desk. He's going to say, 'Okay, this is just

another room. A room like hers back in Forest Hills. Things will be fine.’ ” I flick on the light, and to my right is my bed waiting for me and my desk. And to my left is my roommate in bed, naked with a boyfriend.

00:29:38 Q: What happened at that moment?

Amini: I didn’t know what to think. It didn’t bother me personally, but here I was with my father and all of his fears that I’m going to become a whore, and in his mind, it was validated. This was a brothel. So he left screaming bloody murder in Persian, in Farsi—his language—that he knew it all along. And he wasn’t wrong, he said, and he left. And of course, they left my luggage and my clothing, and David went downstairs to drive them home, and they left. And I walked in just baffled. I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. It was just too much that this was the climax, that this was the pinnacle, after all that I’d been through. So later my roommate and I became very dear friends. And she knew the whole story—I told her the whole story, and we laughed and cried over it. Of all nights she had to have her boyfriend—*that* night, in bed, when I came in.

00:31:07 Q: Did your father ever get over that moment?

Amini: It took a long time. He wouldn’t look at me, he wouldn’t talk. I was coming home Fridays, as I had promised. I was spending weekends, as I had promised. Weekdays at Barnard. And so this is the whole background behind coming to Barnard. Now I’m living on this campus, enjoying it tremendously.

00:31:38 Q: Did it meet your expectations? Was there anything that was surprising or shocking or confusing about your adaptation to Barnard? Anything about Barnard that you

thought, “Oh, I didn’t this would happen or that would happen or the emphasis would be on this or that?” In any way—academic or social—did Barnard surprise you?

Amini: I think in many ways Barnard disappointed me. I wouldn’t say surprised. I did come from brothers who were very open-minded, and I had a bohemian side to me because of them. I had been exposed to a lot of art and literature through them. I didn’t have a really shtetel [traditional Eastern European Orthodox Jewish town] mentality. I found Barnard academically to be on a high level, and I enjoyed that. I think socially I was disappointed. I met a lot of wonderful girls who I became friends with, but the coed side disappointed me. I couldn’t meet guys easily because you had to cross Broadway to go to Columbia. It was very apparent that if you were going there to use their library, you were going there to meet the guys.

00:33:12 Q: Mixers—

Amini: I didn’t like those mixers. It felt very superficial and made me feel very uncomfortable. And again, here I come from this background I’m supposed to be match-made at a young age, which of course I did not want to be, and this didn’t feel natural. So the social part didn’t feel natural. I did meet guys through friends—friends who had introduced me to guys. But looking back, I would have liked a coed atmosphere. I would have liked it a lot more. And given my background it would have felt more natural and easier. Less of a hurdle.

00:34:01 Q: You did want a boyfriend?

Amini: I did want a boyfriend. I certainly would not advertise that, and would not bring him home to my father and mother, but I certainly wanted—and I dated. And I didn't tell them about it.

00:34:12 Q: And the dating—was that disappointing or amazing?

Amini: No. I certainly wasn't meeting people that I felt were in tune with me and I was in tune with them and we were on the same level, but it didn't really matter to some degree. It was such a novelty just to date. My expectations at the beginning were low and then little by little, it didn't matter and I stopped thinking about it much. So that part wasn't such a great fit, but academically, it was—it still is—a very strong school. And then it was a revolutionary time. All of a sudden there were demonstrations.

00:34:55 Q: Did you take part in any of that?

Amini: I did not. I did not.

00:35:00 Q: What was your understanding of and feeling about what was happening at the time?

Amini: I was just amazed at it all. I was trying to understand, what are the issues, what's going on? I've always been very curious, so my curious side surfaced. But I wasn't an activist, and I didn't, and I didn't feel the need to demonstrate. I also don't think I fully understood the rage. There was so much anger and climbing into the president's office at Columbia, shutting down the school, women burning bras—there was a lot of rage. And I guess my analytic side was always trying to understand what this was all about—I wasn't feeling the rage.

00:36:01 Q: Was there a feeling of giddiness that you were in a situation where everybody was so free to be able to do these very extreme things, whereas you had been brought up in a very small box?

Amini: No, I wouldn't say giddiness. I wouldn't say giddiness. I think I was watching it partly out of curiosity, trying to understand it. And there was some cynicism inside of me—where is this all going? Was it necessarily the route to change? Is it not? I don't know—we'll only know later on. I was an art history major at the time, and I loved art history. Modern art became my specialty. And I remember there were so many students who were activists, and they'd say, "What are you majoring in?" And I'd say, "Art History," and they'd mock it and say it's irrelevant in this day in age.

And they made it sound so trivial, so—as if I'm living in a bubble and going off looking at paintings and sculptures and writing about them. You're out of touch. If you're not thinking the thoughts we're thinking—why aren't you in poli-sci [political science]? You should have a political orientation. Maybe feminist studies—you should have a political orientation—and if you didn't, in a way, you were the enemy. There was that sort of undertone.

It wasn't always said overtly, sometimes it was just implied. I got a little defensive because this was my passion. What are you telling me? The entire history of art going back to cave man art up until today is irrelevant? It's a form of communication. Human beings are expressing themselves. It's like saying the history of music is irrelevant. So I found a certain narrow-mindedness and criticism—whatever they were believing in was right and anything outside of that was wrong. So that resonated in a way, even though here we are in the modern world, in the free world—in a way, it resonated of my father, if you don't believe in what I

believe in then , you're an outcast. You're dead. And I'm also hearing that in the modern world. So it was the cynical side of me saying—hold it, this is a little too rigid.

00:39:13 Q: Were you aware of the racial elements involved in the entire thing? There was a lot of racial polarization.

Amini: In the country or are you talking about on campus?

00:39:27 Q: Well, both. But on campus, the first building was a “black” building. They said all the white people had to go; your issues are not the same, we don't want to overthrow the United States government. We don't just want to build a building where black people from the community and the white have separate entrances, with separate entrances. That was not acceptable anymore.

Amini: Wait, I'm not following this. You said there was a dorm for the girls?

00:40:04 Q: No. Morningside Heights, Morningside Park—you know that park? The university had planned to build a very big deluxe gym facility. And, yes, it would be open to children, particularly from the community, but the students and faculty from Columbia would have one entrance, and then the black people from the neighborhood would have another entrance. And this was just, just too close to what—we're in the thick of this—we're not having segregation, we're not having for whites only. We'll never have that. And we tried to get that message across. What the press seemed to want to hear was more about the overthrow of the United States. That's not what we wanted—we just wanted equality and fairness. So even to this day, there are people who don't know. That's my pet issue, but you didn't—?

Amini: No. But there are lots of layers. There was a lot going on. We had the Vietnam War going on, so there's the anti-Vietnam demonstrations. There was all this anger towards Columbia.

00:41:44 Q: The students didn't wait until the war ended; you're going to be in those buildings for ten years. You couldn't take over a building until the war ended. At least that's what we thought. But there was a lot. So there was a maze of different points of view, and you were sort of detached from that.

Amini: I was watching it. I understood and I didn't understand. I was more of an observer. And again, I think my ancestors' DNA was pumping inside of me. There was 2,700 years of living underground with a low profile, don't show yourself, don't get involved, be careful. The world is dangerous. There were lynchings, there were rapes, there were all sorts of atrocities over those years. So it was constantly being reaffirmed to lay low, lay low. So I think, unconsciously, I was laying low, kind of watching it. Not getting too involved.

00:43:11 Q: So you managed to lay low politically at least throughout your four years at Barnard. Who was your first friend that you made?

Amini: The first friend that I made at Barnard was Michael Hart. Do you know Michael?

00:43:31 Q: I interviewed her four years ago. Yes. And when you say Michael, I always think a man. But, of course—

Amini: No, she went by that name. By Michael.

00:43:41 Q: I know. I interviewed her four years ago. I have a long, very long—she's part of this program. She was kind of free and fun, wasn't she?

Amini: Yes, and I think that was very much the attraction. Very bright, highly articulate, gorgeous, very open-minded, very interested in my background, and I was very interested in hers because we were so different—our backgrounds were so different, but our interest in people was very much the same, that we should understand and know. And she was very warm and embracing and she was, I think, I would say, she was the first real solid friend. Of course I met a lot of people that I was friendly with, but the one that I confided in and shared stories with—

00:44:41 Q: Would you stay up all night smoking cigarettes and telling stories, or what did you and Michael do together?

Amini: We talked a lot. It was a lot of talking. The East End Bar was a hangout.

00:44:57 Q: West End?

Amini: West End, I'm sorry. The West End Bar was our hangout, and she introduced me to the West End Bar. She felt like she had to bring me into the world, and I was very willing. She didn't have to do much coaxing. So we'd go together, we'd have drinks there, she'd introduce me to friends of hers, she was outgoing and knew a lot of people very quickly and easily. Mainly a lot of talking, we did a lot of talking.

00:45:36 Q: Did she meet your parents?

Amini: Did she meet my parents? I have this fuzzy feeling that she did at some point. I'm not positive, but I have a fuzzy feeling.

00:45:52 Q: You don't remember what your parents thought of her? Whether they looked at her and said, "Danger, danger?"

Amini: No. But I had another friend, Carol Olivar, I don't know if you knew Carol.

00:46:07 Q: Yeah, I know her from the yearbook.

Amini: Okay, and she came from Spain, and she was also Jewish. Understood my background very well, and I did bring Carol home and introduced her to my parents. I also thought that it would be comfortable for my parents, too, because it wasn't too far away from who they were, and she understood that sensibility and that whole need for respect, and my father needed it a lot. My mother didn't need it so much.

00:46:44 Q: Did that work out well?

Amini: Yeah. It was wonderful. I remember Passover [eight-day Jewish holiday], she came home and spent the first two nights and slept over at our house in Forest Hills and did Seders [ritual and meal held the first night of Passover] with us. Susan Mailer was another dear friend of mine, who I've stayed in touch with, and Susan came for Passover with Carol.

00:47:08 Q: So by now your father's out of his pajamas

Amini: Yes, by now he's out of his pajamas. He's resumed life.

00:47:18 Q: Not his office as CEO necessarily, but his life. Was there anything—what was the first, if any—a moment of greatest joy at Barnard? Of greatest happiness or happiness, or belly laugh—a feeling of exhilaration? Was there any moment like that—a period of time like that that you could recall?

Amini: Well, I had a good amount of fun with certain girlfriends—I can remember sitting around, having belly laughs, enjoying them. But I think what comes to mind right away is art

history and having had moments of just feeling exhilarated by it, a class, by a professor. Barbara Novak was the head of the art history department at the time. I took all of her classes, and she was my guru. I wanted to become an art historian, just like her.. And my dream was to teach within a university, just as she was teaching. And I took seminars at the end during senior year with Barbara Novak, and when she would write comments on my paper and tell me how wonderful they were and praise my work, and tell me I had to go on to graduate school, those were my highs—I was elated. It was all worth it. To have Barbara Novak say, “You’ve got what it takes. Move forward.” Someone recognizing my insights and evaluating my insights, and someone I *wanted* to value my insights. Someone who I felt was an expert in the field and could be an accurate yardstick of my insights.

00:49:29 Q: Did you in fact go on to art history grad school?

Amini: I did, and then I left it. I moved to Jerusalem, I went to Hebrew University, I went on for a master’s degree there in art history and did that for a couple of years. I was part of their program, and then I decided I’m coming back. That’s a different chapter in my life. It’s another story because I ended up right after college, right after Barnard—I did marry a Persian man.

00:50:02 Q: I wanted to get to the subject of your marriage. When I knew you, which you don’t remember but I did, you were engaged.

Amini: Right. That was senior year. Senior year of Barnard.

00:50:16 Q: Yes. And your roommates were Bonnie Behrman and Betty Wilde and Leslie Thomas. And these girls were kind of wild girls, do you know what I mean? They were not shrinking violets, I should say. They had an apartment that they rented off campus so that

they could have parties and get high. They were pretty advanced. Were you aware of what they were doing around you?

Amini: Well, I had had my friends prior to that year. That year I wanted a single room, and I was brought into that suite, and I didn't know any of those girls. So it's not like I hung out with them and this was my crowd. So I didn't care. I had my single room. I was engaged to get married to a Persian from the city of Mashhad just as my father had wanted. And so I was not really that involved. I mean, on a superficial level we said hi, we were friendly. We had our chores, cleaning the bathroom. We did what we had to do, but I didn't socialize with them.

00:51:27 Q: So you didn't say, "Oh gosh, I wish I were more like them"?

Amini: No, I had a very traditional vein running through me. As much as I was open to the outside world, I was critical of the outside world. So it wasn't like anything open and free, I'm going for.

00:51:50 Q: Well, that's what I mean. Were you critical of your roommates? They were certainly not as disciplined.

Amini: I think I was already in a different mindset. I was engaged—to a Persian man who wanted to move to Jerusalem. This was my senior year, I was going to finish up my classes. I spent as much time with him as I could. He was a few years older and he was working already.

00:52:16 Q: Were you happy about being engaged?

Amini: I was happy, and I wanted to get married, and I wanted to make my parents happy, and I thought we could make everyone happy. I could feel complete, and they could feel complete, and they would feel like they didn't lose me. That I'm back in the fold.

00:52:33 Q: How did you meet your fiancé?

Amini: He was a friend of the family's, and you know, these Jews from Mashhad who moved to New York to Queens, they all knew each other. So my father grew up with them and knew his parents and his grandparents and knew the whole lineage. And my father was very interested in him and felt that he would be good for me. And having him over on certain weekends, on Saturdays.

00:53:01 Q: Was he from Columbia?

Amini: No. He was about six, seven years older than me, so he was already working as an architect in Manhattan living in Queens. So my father had him over for Sabbath lunch, sometimes, knowing that I'd be there, hoping that we would click. And on the surface everything looked fine to me. He had that American side, he'd gone to college in the United States. I thought he understood the American psyche which was very much a part of me. And he also understood the roots that we all came from. There was no explaining it.

00:53:51 Q: So you were happy.

Amini: I thought I had found a good blend. That he would fit right in, and at the same time, he would be able to expand my modern side.

00:54:03 Q: You were a virgin, of course?

Amini: Yes.

00:54:07 Q: And that was always planned. You knew you would not sleep with anyone until you got married.

Amini: Yeah, and that was also part of being an orthodox Jew. So the Judaism was in there. The Persian expectations were in there. So that was part of it, and psychologically, I was so much engaged and getting married that I wasn't so involved in the dorm situation senior year. Years prior to that I was very close to the different people that I was living with, and I was selecting suitemates. That last year I didn't select, it didn't matter. So at the end of that year, I graduated from Barnard and it was—I don't know—a few days later, we had the wedding and we moved to Israel. And this was his dream—to move to Jerusalem, to work there as an architect. And I was starry-eyed and very impressionable.

00:55:19: So moving to Jerusalem was fine with you.

Amini: I mean, if he'd said, "Let's move to Afghanistan," it would have been fine. If he'd said, you know, Thailand, I wasn't thinking. I wasn't examining. I didn't have a firm sense of what I am and what I need. I was malleable: I love this person, it'll be great. Why does it matter where we are? That was the thinking back then. So when we were there in Israel, that's when I picked up again and went to graduate school and tried to use that time to get another degree, but I was not happy and the marriage did not work out.

00:56:03 Q: Was that for reasons of culture or just personality?

Amini: I think both—I think culture and personality.

00:56:12 Q: In what way were you culturally at odds?

Amini: Certainly, I was much more of a free thinker and much more open to people and places, and not a domestic person. Not a domestic person.

00:56:42 Q: He wanted the ironing of the shirts and—

Amini: The wish for domesticity was coming out more and more. Be it the cooking, be it the cleaning—attending. Attending to things at home. And my need to enter the world of thought and mind and creativity—he didn't block it, but he wasn't a proponent, and we clashed. We clashed a lot. And our personalities were very different. Very, very different in terms of tolerance. In terms of patience.

00:57:26 Q: He was rigid?

Amini: He had a temper, and that was something that frightened me.

00:57:36 Q: Was he violent?

Amini: No, he wasn't violent, but I felt that he had the capacity. And so I had come from a home where my father was a very angry man, and he was never physically violent, but he terrified me and it was something—I just didn't want to live in terror, I didn't want to live in fear. So whatever.

He didn't know that I was feeling a lot of this, and I knew that he would not easily give me a divorce. And suddenly it's time to come back to the United States because he had grown and done very well in Israel, and he wanted more. And America offered him more. So he wanted to come back and we did, and I was glad that we were coming back. This was after two years in Israel. So we came back, and that's when I filed for divorce. Because I felt here I could

make it happen. In Israel, back then—this was 1973—back then, you could not easily divorce your husband. You had to go through the rabbinical courts.

58:51:14 Q: The get?

The get—which you still have to do here too. The odds are against you. The guy has to *want* to give it to you, he has to *want* to divorce you, otherwise it's quite a battle. So I saved all of that for New York. We came back to New York; I told him I wanted out.

00:59:13 Q: Was he surprised?

Amini: I think so. Even though I often expressed our differences and my unhappiness. But he was still surprised that I would take it that far. And I didn't want anything from him. It wasn't as if monetarily I said, "I want your money," or "I want your house," or that—it was more I wanted out. I wanted out. And we didn't have children, which I was very grateful for because it makes it easier. And it's a clean cut. So it was a struggle because he did not want to give me a get. And I had to hire a very high-power attorney who knew how to get it out of him, and I got the get and I got out. Not that I was saying to myself, "I have to get a get because I have to marry an Orthodox Jew." I didn't know what my future held. I didn't know what was ahead of me.

01:00:11 Q: I would imagine that was for your parents.

Amini: I just wanted the freedom of nothing holding me back, and wherever I choose to go next, I can go next, and not feeling like, "Oh, because I didn't get the get years ago, now I'm stuck."

01:00:26 Q: It didn't have anything to do with your parents? I would have thought the get was to appease your parents.

Amini: No, it's something that I really wanted because I am an observant Jew, and who knows? Maybe I will marry an observant Jew in the future. So I didn't want not to have it. I wanted the freedom to be able to marry again if I want to. And if I don't marry an observant Jew—okay. But just to have options. Just to know I got my options. So I started fresh, and so it's—the interesting part of that story is that here I am defying my father, going into Barnard, he goes on that hunger strike because I'm living there, and I come right back to him. And I marry who he wants me to marry—in order to appease him—and going right back into the fold.

And I understand the reasons. I have compassion for myself when I think back to those days because I wanted everyone to be happy. I wanted to be happy, I wanted them to be happy, I thought I found a way. But it didn't work out that way. And my father was very upset when I was divorcing only because he said—and he had these ideas that went back to medieval Iran —“A divorced woman will never be married again. No one will want you. You're considered used material.” He saw a doom and gloom for me and he was very worried about me.

My mother, on the other hand, she was quite a character. And though she was uneducated, she was in an unhappy marriage, she was with my father from the age of 14, they were mismatched, night and day opposites. He was very repressed and fearful of the outside world and a man of silence. She was all talk and she was curious, a party lady, hysterical, outrageous, defiant, a rebel at heart. They were totally mismatched. So she turned to me and she said, “Esther, I will help you in in whatever way you need to get you your divorce, and I

will tell you why.” —In Persian—she said to me, “I was burnt, and I don’t want to see you burnt.”

01:03:17 Q: And by “burnt?”

Amini: Burnt means her life was burnt. It was predestined. She didn’t have control. She couldn’t not marry him. She said she didn’t want him but got forced into it. There was no saying no. She didn’t have options.

01:03:32 Q: Burnt as like etched in fire or something?

Amini: She felt that her life had been burnt, that she’d never had a full life. It had been robbed, stolen from her, from a very young age. Never educated, she felt robbed in that way. A man that was wrong for her, robbed. And then living with him her entire life, and she experienced him as suffocating, even though she was also very difficult. She was very difficult, and she made his life very difficult. So it was both sides—they did not work well together. And so she said to me, “It was one thing for me to have a life that was burnt. I don’t want your life to be burnt. You have a chance to start all over again, and you don’t have children, thank God. It’s fresh. You don’t have any ties to him, you can start all over again. I’m going to pay for your attorney. I’m going to help you all the way through.”

And she did. She helped me verbally, emotionally—she stood behind me—and monetarily, she paid for whatever expenses I had. And for that, I’m so grateful. I think of her often. They both have passed away. And I started a brand new life, and I decided to go back to graduate school and get an MSW. I was always very interested in therapy, and went on to an analytic institute, became a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, and I’ve been in private practice for about 35, 36 years. And I supervise other therapists.

01:05:23 Q: Do you have children?

Amini: I'm married to an American, and I have two grown children who each have a child, so I'm a grandmother. And a lot has come out—of all of that—a lot of good has come out. And I have a wonderful husband. And it's been quite a journey. It's been quite a journey.

01:05:49 Q: When—going back a little bit—I'm sure you recall, but when we were in college, the women's movement was just sort of peeking its first little branch out from the earth. What was your reaction to that, or did it just seem irrelevant to you?

Amini: No, it didn't seem irrelevant. It spoke to me.

01:06:12 Q: Can you remember the first time you realized, “Oh, this is an important issue that applies to me?”

Amini: Well, I thought of my mother a lot and how she was repressed and held back. And she had quite a brain. I mean, if this woman was born here and raised here, whew, she would have been a powerhouse—a Hillary Clinton type in terms of being very strong and opinionated, and she also had a very whacky side to her, a colorful character. So I thought of my mother a lot, of how there was zero opportunity for women for generations in Mashhad, and here women are still fighting for rights, and I was all for it. Whether it's the right to have an abortion, or whether it's sexual freedom, whether it's equal opportunity at work. Whatever it was, I was certainly for it.

01:07:16 Q: You had no need for birth control before your marriage.

Amini: I didn't have need for it because I wasn't engaged in sex, but many of my friends were, and I was very supportive of it. I certainly understood and felt that women had the right

to have sex before marriage—I felt the right should be there, it should be a choice—if I choose not to, it’s my choice. But I want those who want to have it, to have it. And so there was a feminist that lived inside of me. A quiet one. I wasn’t running around burning bras, I wasn’t being overt about it, but I certainly sided with them.

01:08:00 Q: I found during that period of time—and you may or may not have—but people, men who took you out to dinner, anybody that ordered half a cup of coffee, expected you to sleep with them, and I found this very disheartening. You didn’t find yourself under that pressure?

Amini: I didn’t. I mean I did date off and on. I didn’t feel because they paid for my dinner that I had to sleep with them.

01:08:31 Q: Well, neither did I, but they did.

Amini: I’m sure there were men who did. I’m not saying they didn’t. I personally didn’t feel like, Oh, if I had dinner with them then we have to spend the night together. Maybe it was the way I came across, like I made it clear that that wasn’t my intent. I guess a lot has to do with the vibrations that go back and forth personally, but culturally, yes, of course. Culturally that was an expectation.

01:09:06 Q: And it was annoying. I mean, I found it annoying. Please don’t assume that because I’m going to have dinner with you—

Amini: What I remember is, during our day, the way out was to “go Dutch” [share the cost of a date].

01:09:19 Q: Is that what happened?

Amini: That sent the message. Okay, we'll go to dinner, we'll go Dutch. And that was really saying, "I owe you nothing."

01:09:32 Q: I don't think I ever did go Dutch. I wonder why I didn't think of it. Anyway, was there ever a moment of absolute despair at Barnard?

Amini: Despair. There were moments of despair. I think prior to senior year where I was already engaged, so prior, I had moments when I felt very lonely.

01:10:03 Q: Was that because you didn't have a boyfriend or because your friends were not available or engaged elsewhere?

Amini: I had some wonderful female friends, so I didn't feel lonely in terms of female companionship, but certainly in terms of having a boyfriend and I think it went beyond that. At the time I would have said, "Having a boyfriend." But when I think about it now, I was still so unformed. There wasn't a sense of identity, a strong sense of "this is me." Today I can say "this is me." I can tell you who this me is. Back then, I was amorphous, amoeba-like; the shape was constantly changing. And I think that can also create a feeling of uncertainty, and feeling lost, and kind of this ambiguity and emptiness when you don't have a container—you don't feel contained.

01:11:06 Q: So what would your worth be if you can't even carry it from place to place? The price of air. Did you find that you kind of molded yourself to fit the image or desires of the men that you had a crush on at the time. You like Pre-Raphaelites—oh I can be a Pre-Raphaelite. You like Zelda Fitzgerald? I can be Zelda Fitzgerald. Did you have any of that?

Amini: Oh, I'm sure. Because it's a real adolescent quality that I think most girls go through, and college is still adolescence in America. So definitely. I went out with musicians, and I always found them so interesting, and I love music, so I thought, "Okay, I'll be the kind of girl that looks like the musician's girlfriend." And we all had long hair then. Straight, long hair, and went makeup-less. And bellbottom jeans. It was a look, and I liked the look. I wasn't forcing myself—I certainly liked the look. But there was a blending in and wanting to be loved. Definitely. But I think it's very much part of growing up, too. I don't think it's just that era. I think when you're 18, 19, 20, you're still trying to figure out who you are and you want someone else to tell you who you are. And very often you want a guy that you like to tell you who you are and who to be and what to look like.

01:13:07 Q: Yes. I think that's been true most of the time. I think—and you may not agree with me—but the range of possible personae that you could be was broad and it was confusing. We knew in 1965 what was supposed to happen. You went to school, you got engaged, you got married. All of a sudden, that all changed with the pill [oral contraceptive first approved in the U.S. in 1960], and suddenly it's scary. What are the rules? What are the new rules? You didn't find that to be true?

Amini: I'm sure I did. I'm sure I did. And maybe that's why I married Persian. Because it took me right back to tradition and something that was a known quantity and that my parents felt worked. And everything else—who knows whether it works or it doesn't work, right? Just like you said, you don't know where that's going. It's all brand new. It has just been hatched. So I think that's why I went back to the familiar.

01:14:19 Q: Makes perfect sense. Do you remember your first date?

Amini: My first date. Not really. There wasn't a first date where I say this one stands out.

01:14:37 Q: Were you ever frightened, scared?

Amini: Of what?

01:14:39 Q: That would be up to you to answer.

Amini: I mean, everyone's frightened. Sure, I've had moments of being afraid.

01:14:48 Q: I mean, afraid of an academic situation, afraid of getting involved in the '68 situation, afraid of perhaps associating with someone who—because drugs were very much in the air—afraid of being with somebody and realizing, “Oh, no. They're not in their right mind.” The range of things to be afraid of: I've made a friend who's crazy, I have to get out of it—you know?

Amini: Right. Let's start with academics. I was afraid that I was in a school that was way beyond me and that I wouldn't be able to do well here, even though I had done very well in high school, but it was a public high school, and a lot of these girls were coming from private high schools, finishing schools, had spent their summers in France, that were speaking French fluently, and I came in feeling ill equipped. So how well would I do? I was working hard, but again, how well will I do? And there was anxiety about that for sure.

01:16:11 Q: When did that go away?

Amini: When I didn't have to take any of the required courses anymore [both laugh]. I got rid of that, because some I did well in, some I didn't do well, so let's get that behind us—so all of a sudden I'm on this track of art history which was and continues to be a passion and I was

acing it, and so it was what was right for me. So until then, it was difficult. Other fears? You know, my judgement was poor. When I look back at situations that I was in and how I felt safe. And then I look back and think, You felt safe? How come you felt safe?

01:16:59 Q: Could you tell me about a couple of those?

Amini: Well, certainly. I mean, I can think of people I've dated who were high on drugs but serious drugs, and alone with them.

01:17:15 Q: What serious drugs?

Amini: There were people on speed. Speed was very popular. Cocaine was not unheard of. Pot, I don't consider Pot serious. Pot was like alcohol.

01:17:29 Q: It was opium at the time, I remember.

Amini: Opium. Everything was fine. Nothing happened, but when I think back, I mean, I was vulnerable. These guys were allowed in our dorm rooms, so we could bring them up. We could be alone with them. So I was alone, we would be talking. Sometimes we'd be making out. But could I have been raped? Sure? Did I ever think of that? No. Was I raped? No. But when I look back, my older self would not have put myself in certain situations. And back then I wasn't even thinking those thoughts. They were the furthest thoughts from me.

01:18:20 Q: You were never in a position where somebody really tried to push it beyond where you drew the line.

Amini: No, but I could have been. And that's what I tell myself—I could have been. What made you feel so safe? It was this childlike way of thinking that because I feel safe, I'm safe. You could be telling yourself one thing and the environment could be different. So fearful of

my future, not knowing what I'm going to do, where I'm going to go after I get this BA. That also pushed me into getting married. What do I do next? I'm not coming from a family where they're saying "Rah, rah! Go for a graduate degree." No way. Could I move into an apartment with a girlfriend and get a job? Doing what? And could I pay the rent? Would my parents speak to me? Would they cut me off emotionally? Is it worth it? My fears of the future were very much there.

01:19:36 Q: When you came back from Jerusalem, did you live with your parents?

Amini: When I came back from Jerusalem, we were still married, so we came back as a married couple, and we lived in Queens for a full year. So that was my third year of marriage. No, I didn't live with my parents, I lived with my husband, and it was then when I said, after that third year, that this had to end. And when it did end, I lived alone in that apartment. He moved out. So I never moved back into my parent's home, but they were physically not far away in Queens.

01:20:21 Q: So that was less terrifying?

Amini: But I was also older by then, you know? I had been married for three years, I had lived in Jerusalem. I was ready to be self-sufficient, I got a job. My rent was very low, I was able to handle it. I had a different mindset. I wasn't the same person as the person who had gotten married three years ago.

01:20:44 Q: You were not afraid to live alone.

Amini: Not at all. Not at all.

01:20:51 Q: What do you think the worst mistake you ever made was? What's the worst mistake you've ever made?

Amini: You know, everything that I would call a mistake has turned into something phenomenal. Phenomenal. Wonderful. And at the time, the pain was excruciating. However, it led to something else. I might say my first marriage was a mistake, I should not have married young. On the other hand, I did. I came out of it. It became clear as to who I was and what I needed. I went on to graduate school. I decided to go for my MSW, and that whole program involves self-exploration. I entered therapy. I got to know myself better. I was very careful in terms of who am I getting involved with, who am I not, why am I selecting these kinds of people—it all led to growth.

And I didn't rush into marriage. It took many years until I met my present husband. I refused—he wanted to get married—I refused. I said, we have to live together for a few years—we lived together for a few years. I had to check him out and see his highs and his lows and his mood swings and everything. And he's a wonderful man, a wonderful man. And it all led to marrying Ira, who I'm married to today. And then we had—we have—two fabulous kids, a daughter and a son. Loved raising them. So it all came out of what we would call a mistake. But that *mistake* forced me to think differently and take charge of my life, and not rely on what others think is right for me. And grow up—it forced me to grow up.

01:23:02 Q: What was the best move you ever made for yourself? The best decision you ever made for yourself?

Amini: It's hard to say. I mean, there are so many decisions.

01:23:17 Q: The three best.

Amini: The three best decisions that I made for myself? I think one was to be becoming a psychoanalyst because it gives me deep, deep satisfaction—I love the work. Another one was to be marrying Ira because he's a superb human being. And the third best was probably to have my children. They're wonderful people—I'm always learning from them and having a wonderful time with them.

And I think I have to throw in a fourth: The fourth-best is writing this book that I'm writing right now. This is another high. It's like I'm creating another child—I'm creating this book—I'm going back to the beginning. I'm going back to my parents and their history and their roots in Mashhad, Iran, and living the double identity. I know so much because my mother talked endlessly, and I just know their entire story, so I just put it all out there: my birth and the culture clash and growing up straddling Mashhad and New York. And then having to break through Mashhad and get to Barnard, and having a lot of compassion for all the characters involved, even though my father stood in my way, he was a very good man. He was ethical, he was a man of integrity, he was honest. And later on in life, he was very, very proud. So he was very proud of me.

01:25:02 Q: Oh, that's good that he got to see that. And you got to see that. That's a blessing.

Amini: So he would go around introducing me to his friends as “my daughter the doctor.” — I'm not a doctor—“my daughter the doctor.” The status of being educated is what I was hearing. Here's the man who felt I was joining a brothel by going to college, and goes around proud of “my daughter the doctor”—I'm thinking, “Who is he?” So it's quite a story, and writing that book, which I am right now calling *Killing My Father*, has been a number four high. It's been very big.

01:25:52 Q (other Q): I have a question. How was your background that you've been talking about the whole time, affected your parenting of your own kids?

Amini: That is a very good question. That's a very good question. I've taken parenting super seriously, and I think if the kids were here sitting around this table right now, they would agree, and they would say—our son is 32 going on 33 and our daughter is 27—and I think they would say that what I worked on really hard was communication and getting them to express themselves. Feeling that they can be heard, and they can be understood—doesn't always mean I will agree. I don't have to agree, but I can understand what they're saying and where they're coming from.

And that's something I've worked hard on, and they're both superb communicators in terms of expressing emotions, their feelings, their conflicts, their angst, their highs, their lows, feeling safe, putting it out and having me hear it and join them and help them with it a little bit. So I think because I could not live above ground—I also lived underground—and I lived underground hiding who I am and what I want in this world, and where I'm going, my true identity—just as my parents hid their true identity, there's a continuity here—I didn't want our children to hide. And whoever they are—whatever they are—I wanted it above ground and for it to be respected. That was *very* important to me.

Throw in I'm a traditional mom. There are the do's and the don'ts and what's right and what's not, and not hurting other people's feelings and being respectful and speaking correctly and express yourself but you don't have to denigrate somebody when you're expressing yourself. So there were rules. It wasn't just a free for all. So there was always a structure, and within the structure there was always that freedom. So I took it very, very

seriously, and I wanted our daughter in particular—our son did very well and he went off to college and he went to U of Penn and he went to law school and he's done phenomenally well—and our daughter has done phenomenally well, but because she's a girl, I wanted her to have every opportunity our son had and more. And it was a chance for me to repair my childhood. So she has been encouraged. She has been strongly encouraged. So she went off to U of Penn just like her brother and she went on and got an MBA at NYU and she was working, and she actually stopped right now because she just gave birth to a son. So she has a little baby boy who's only six weeks old. But she's strong and I wanted her to feel the world was her oyster. That was very important to me, and I didn't care what she did. I mean, she could become a ceramist. It wasn't like she had to get an MBA—anything, but just go for it full force, and that's what I was pumping in the home constantly—because I didn't get that at home.

01:29:59 Q: Is there anything, any area, that I haven't tapped here? Any expectations? Well, you answered that? Bob, what do you think?

01:30:18 Q (other Q): Yeah, I think it was really incredible, actually.

01:30:21 Q: Well, she's incredible.

Amini: Well, thank you. I appreciate this time. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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