

Name of Interviewee: Bechara Nammour

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Name of Interviewer: Bill Yeingst

Length of Interview: 66 minutes

BY: I like to begin by saying your name, when we are, when you were born and where you were born?

BN: My name is Bechara Nammour, I am a Lebanese origin, born in November 1946, being Scorpio, it's very important. We are today in Washington D.C., on 2121 [unintelligible] place which is our home.

BY: That's great! Today we're here to talk about your background, your journey to the United States, and how your life unfolded when you came here. So, you would you begin by telling me a little bit about your family background, your childhood...

BN: Sure, sure.

BY: ... the community, where you were born and where you grew up.

BN: I was born in Saida, Seiden in fact which is called Saida today. Which is a provincial town where people sleep at night, no one on the streets. Within have at the time Christians or Muslims but we were maybe 1% of the population and I was going to the Fred [??] Marist School, until the age of eight and I was spoiled a lot [??] by six women in the house, so I was very bad in everything. And when my father died, it created a reaction in my head I think, they put me in a boarding school in the [unintelligible] boarding school in Beirut, which is far away from—I mean, which is maybe forty miles from Saida and I was there for the age of seventeen in the boarding school. The Jesuits, the last two years, didn't want to have boarding school anymore, but because I was in Saida, they had six people like that. They took a house for us, near the school, is called the home loose. And they put a professor in charge of us. And I was the head of the-- for the student. And I spend the two last year that, classical studies majors like Philosophy we called mad mass and I left the school and they went to [unintelligible] school after that which is Jesuit University Saint Joseph to do, a law school.

BY: I want to go back to your childhood home for a minute and have you talk a little bit about growing up Christian in this very diverse and culturally rich nation of Lebanon. Were

you-- you grew up in this environment that was made up of people from many different cultures and what was that like?

BN: As I said you know, I wouldn't feel Christian and Muslim at the time. In Lebanon everybody within even ask about each region. But you know, but the Muslims woman at the time that had the scarf black about their head and the Christian didn't have one. Until the certain time the Christian man force their wife to either face. At the time because he said: "Why the other guys don't want to show us the face of the woman. We're going to have their face." But it didn't last long you know. So, I was born in there in a family which was a like agricultural land owners. My father did orange groves and planted the watermelon and a lot of watermelon. And faba beans and everything. So I was born in an earthy environment you know, and I was forced to go. Even though-- I didn't go with pleasure, to go there as a young man because I had to learn, and they had to be there, and I had to show that I'm the male of the family. At the time, you know and I talked to the people used to work the land. And it was fine I [unintelligible] I think. I discovered that afterwards in Lebanon, we had a system like a socialist system, which was not in fact the land owner had one sort of the crop. The guy who paid for the planting of sorts and the person who cultivate the land one sort. So they used to everyone give its work and divide by three at the end. So anyhow. I was born like that, I'm budgeted like a farmer you know in my head. One by one makes two. And that's how I spend my use over there. At school, which saves me and really made me when I moved to school to Jesuit school it was very tough. Because I was coming I told you, was not really didn't go to school, jump classes etc. But I want to very you know Jesuits-- was like classes you know, and I started Latin and it was we are going to mass every day at six o'clock. So it gave me enough in the future, not to miss some Sunday Mass because I had reserved. And what's really save me over there was I was good in Arabic. I learned [unintelligible]. Which helped me a lot. I don't know why I felt at the age of twelve years old, I was reading Gibran the Prophet and plays Gibran on all the books in Arabic. I did tell me to be the first in my class in Arabic and taking care in Arabic of the—how did you call that? [Unintelligible] They used to do it at school like, a book a booklet with pictures and the articles opening. And then I became a sporty, a sports guy. I was a champion of Lebanon, when I was... in [19] 63, when I was maybe fourteen, old category. So I did the 100 meters, the 200 meters the 400 meters. At certain times, I want maybe 17 [unintelligible] a year. And I was spending my life on the other sports on the track. The field I went through the University and this give me assurance too, and give me strands and achievements you know, 400 meters is not an easy race, you hear the "boom" and then you run until the end, you close your eyes until you hit the line.

BY: With this away people from different cultural backgrounds came together through sports?

BN: Yeah. In Lebanon and in especially in my school, Jesuit School, which is extraordinary at the time. They used to make people pay three tarrif: A, B and C. So they have different classes. You choose what you want to pay, the rich people pay the most, middle class paid less and the people paid less. So they supported their class. The other class so we

had a lot of drivers people with us. It was a mixture of both it's not like in elite school. We had everything. We had the people from the Army, we had Muslims, we had Christians and they made the point to have maybe 20-30% of Muslims at school. So it's a melting pot. And it's melting pot for classes. It was, I think it's a great idea.

BY: Today when you... Food is very much a part of your life. When you look back to...

BN: Boarding School food?

BY: [unintelligible] were growing. No, no before you went to boarding school. Think about, you know that sort of touched on to that culture through food and clothing or music. Are there things that are very distinct memories?

BN: Yeah, the food, food in Saida was very good you know, it's was known. A lot best dessert came from Saida. Still come from Saida and the people had recipes from grandmother to mother through son, through daughter. So it was really, we had lunch and dinner was common on the community table, called the mesa. Or you come home, you sit down with your parents to eat. Didn't have T.V. in the beginning. On [19]61 the T.V. came to Lebanon, not before. So it was. It was, Saida was a really sleepy town, nothing, movies finish at seven o'clock no more, no one on the street. You know it's... So my youth was really calm and in the boarding school is the same, until you get to the university and then you become free.

BY: So what happened when you finished with the boarding school?

BN: I finished and then went to the University registers in the law school, which is big school. Like maybe, I don't know, southern [??] [unintelligible] in the university at the time which is was enormous and it was a melting pot again, because it was Beirut, we have people from everywhere, [unintelligible] Beirut was attracting, they did have University at that time and anything in [unintelligible] so everyone was coming to Beirut looking for... to be educated. So the University was full of foreign folks, we have even French people coming because was affiliated to [unintelligible] School of law, Jesuits. I mean, once you get your license from Beirut to get the French license at the same time, because they had... they used to give some French law and the equivalence, [unintelligible] the equivalence on that. But again, Beirut was a car full at the time, lots of people of diverse nationality, diverse mentality, people from the mountains, people from the cities, you know they had... it was free, nearly, Nearly it was expensive as a school because of Jesuits. So it was really accessible to everyone.

BY: Where did your interest in law come from?

BN: At the time, to be frank, it was to be. You have to be a doctor, a lawyer or engineer. Coming from a literature, literature background and philosophy. I can only be a lawyer. It's to be candid.

BY: So you saw your future?

BN: I mean. Law means you, leads you to everywhere, it leads you to politic or [unintelligible]. And we had some economy, we have economy too at the school. It was not the program like, it's slow. We had the first three years like you were doing economy even. They give you the same courses. We didn't have the right to pick classes at that time. They put the classes in the French system, so they picked the courses for you. And I was the... then I became the president of student council. And something I don't like to. We close the University for... You remember the May. What happened in France in the, in May in [19]...When May in Paris where they occupied for the students the protest. And you know, we had some like that. And at the end of my 4th year. I was president of student council. I don't know how why I decided. I didn't like present themselves so I said I want to be the guy. He should not be a president. And you know. And I was elected member of the 4th year and they elected me as president. But if, they was putting a law, at the end of four years, we had to go see and do some training at the lawyer, then you can be [unintelligible] So seven years which is long for a lawyer. So they... remember of following all lawyers and seeing all these lawyers coming every year out of school. They try to put a law, where they... we had to do two years after school of... I don't know they created diploma. You cannot be a lawyer. So we [unintelligible] you want to do it, you don't do it retroactive, I'm in the 4th year. If I knew it was ten years, I want to have done it. You know, the law. Anyhow, we went there, they didn't accept so we did like a small revolution, we went on the street. We invaded the parliament. I was at the... At the head of the in people coming in, I have to tell the story. And they change the law, you know. They stop the law. We... Jesuit's guy called me the president he said: "You know, you have to thought about the other guys when you stop for three months the studies" I said "ok, you know this is... don't forget what happening in May in Paris, we are students, we are alone[??] and I have pictures with the [unintelligible] summing [unintelligible] of the five, five people." Then, that's the story of my culmination of the presiden of the student council. We beat the two years extra for us.

BY: What did your family think of your political...?

BN: I was a rightist by the way, I was not the leftist. Because why? Let me tell you why. Because I was Christian in the University at the time. They start the Palestinian decided to bother, to bother us and the Palestinian side to the leftist of the Palestinian because it was a good cause but it was not the Lebanese cause. The cause was not in Lebanon was in Palestine against Israel maybe. But not to become a Lebanon. So we all became you know like against the Palestinian cause at the time. And we don't want them to be in

Lebanon and stop us at the street and ask us for our I.D.'s. So I was within this, this movement. So it was like a leftist group or something it was like no, I mean it's not fair to put at the end of two years more to our studies and we used our democratic expression to within [unintelligible] us, we have only our [unintelligible] speeches and things like that.

BY: So what happened next, when you completed your degree?

BN: At that time, I was working the land in Saida. We had... I inherited a role at, which and limited stuff because it's not only [unintelligible] is not only plain. So we used to and Lebanon had the program where they help you, they give you the tractors and the John Deers and the contra pillars[??] at a very low price to fix the land, so we used to [unintelligible] I used to go. My boots. You know, at the 2nd year of law and go on my weekends over there and work. And you tell us is it. And you go under the on the land. You take that good, good earths[??] And you put it on top of the rocks. Like one meters and it became it an irrigator that became [unintelligible]. So I did maybe like 100 acres at that time.

BY: So you were agriculture.

BN: Agriculture. So I didn't take low very seriously, I was just for educating.

BY: Did you learn that from your father or your uncles, family?

BN: I mean yeah, I used to stop. I used to watch the guy doing it and controlling it and paying them and you know like that. I took responsibilities early, that what's makes you too know. At the age of 18. So I had to take decisions.

BY: So this was [unintelligible] that your father, also farmed.

BN: Not farm. He had it, he found maybe 20% of it and he died at the age of 50. 54. So I had to take over and then completed everything we had. And did they became productive land not open land or a mountains or like that.

BY: And were your parents and their families both from Saida?

BN: Saida. My mother and my father.

BY: OK. And their parents...

Bn: Parents too from Saida.

BY: Grandparents....

BN: Even my gran, grandfather was from Saida.

BY: OK. So you are... you have an orange grove, you have a law degree. What happened next? How do they come together?

BN: Business. I used the land, because you had land. So your bankable in Beirut. So I took my first loan at the age of 24. I want to buy a piece of land which was horse shoe in our land. I didnt have the money, I went to the bank, I said: "I want the money" They said: "Yeah, show me, how old are you?" I said: "24". What? What do you have? OK, come back in two months. I said: "No, I need the money tomorrow." Because it was the sale, if I [unintelligible] of a bank, He lookd at me. He said: "I want to trust you, take the money, it was 100, maybe 27 dollars at that time. And I took my first loan. And then this same guy. Saw me at a show at the casino [unintelligible] He called me, he said: "Bechara, if I see you at the casino, in other time, I stop all my dealing with you". I said: "I wasn't not gambling. I was at the show. And he said if is the show is ok, but if you gamble, you can't get a penny from the bank" and I said: "Ok sure". And I bought this pice of land which was great at the time.

BY: So, how you making a living?

BN: From the land. No my parents. Again. My parents when my father died we were, we a million Lebanese [unintelligible] dead at the time. And my mother and my aunt really lived in... They didn't want to sell land. There's really very tight. You know because I was costing like [unintelligible] Lebanese [unintelligible] at that university boarding school at the time, which is the southern [unintelligible] I guess. And my two sisters were going to the sister's school the same and they were living very normal life. Then, my aunt had a great idea, had some people from a country, from a land, from a town what they do bananas, banana trees. And these people didn't have landing anymore the land so they came to the south. They used to be you may be like \$10 dollars per... \$40 dollars per acre a year. They plant their bananas, they plant their orange trees. So the orange trees does not give you anything before the age of seven but they took advantage, you know when they irrigate them and put the thing, they do the same for the orange trees, so

after seven years they leave you, you know because banana is like vegetable, the grow every year. They cut the banana. They take the banana when the trees, when the [unintelligible] grows up and then you have your grove. Which cost you nothing, that's what my aunt that she said: "I'm building you that so you know it's because your income grows with your expenses." So at the age of 18, 19 we had a good income from the gross. And then it was for me too, then I went I [unintelligible] out of the supermarket like the delicatessen, I open the night club, not night club, night place. I opened a restaurant, you know I went into the aluminum factory, glass factory, it was France.

BY: What year was that? When you...

BN: [19]73, 74, 75.

BY: The years leading up to the Civil War.

BN: Civil war happened in [19]75. We had the best life everly between '70 and '75. It was the Senate of the Middle East. All the other petro dollars where they are being invested in Lebanon being and you know this was the beginning of Saudi Arabia. And American and the foreign used to leave the family in Lebanon. Go and work and come back on the weekends from the [unintelligible] in Lebanon. Because they had schools in Lebanon, they had good life. We were luck really.

BY: Do you have the sense the war was eminent?

BN: No.

BY: Or it was a surprise?

BN: First, I mean building the Palestinian it was the problem of Lebanon. Palestinian goals, otherwise... And it was throughout that it has to it and I because it has a lot of clashes between classes too. But labor was not a fit because there because when it's transformed in self way to religious. There's no more classes of the beginning. So the rich and the poor are in the same, same branch of against others who wants to take over Lebanon.

BY: So you... when the Civil War broke out, you... you were you living in Beirut?

BN: I was living in Beirut in a Christian area. You know. And I mean, I can't go to any more to the south. Because I was [unintelligible] Christian, blonde hair, blue eyes, they can spot you at any you know, any barrier, any checkpoint. And they used to take to kidnap people of the time but the huge thing which I really appreciate and I owe them a lot. They used to sell and take care of my land and send me the most people over there, the Lebanese the [unintelligible] all the people of Saida not the Palestinian and send us the money to Beirut. Which is incredible [unintelligible] anyway place of the world. And they sub guarded the land and one occupied except [unintelligible] the land, I told you I both from the bank. It had [unintelligible] for the American pilot. Because he had the top line. He had the all the patrols because you didn't have a port. They used to drive them. Bring them to the shore. And they were living here. It was like a piece of heaven. All [unintelligible] when the Palestinian when, the Israelis came I said OK. They save me I'm going to go and visit my [unintelligible]. I went there it was one whole whole grade. It was a Palestinian base I think which was bombed. The first thing that came with a vacuum I think I'm sure because there was nothing just powder, gray powder. That's what the land was still there. That's only thing which happened.

BY: So you, at that moment... when the work [unintelligible] out. Did you feel the need to flee?

BN: No. we were, we were guarding our each one was in its own quarters. Not quarter. What do you used to live? At night. At night we used to do the guards, so no one can come, no foreigners. That's it. No defense. I lived in my house, I never wanted to leave. Then when it's at the end I went to Paris. You know it stopped it close up close and you get what I am going you know nothing. This is [unintelligible] I need to discovered, I went to Paris [unintelligible] in Paris, bought an apartment, very small apartment.

BY: Why? Why Paris? Do you had connections?

BN: Because I'm French educated, Jesuits single, [unintelligible] they teach us. Because it was French school. Like the Lebanese and French and then we know the words. And I felt. French cultivated. We had all the. I know all the poets all of I did philosophy you know and poet and so. So you had [unintelligible]

BY: Cultural.

BN: Cultural thing. I mean I'm very, I consider as a French, another culture like any French guy. So, I went there, but no work there. Then I want I got [unintelligible] my parents my in-laws proposed to me to work with them.

BY: How did you meet your wife?

BN: In Beirut. And they had a big, they had to move from Beirut to London [unintelligible]. At the big office. He said you want... my father in law was part of the three brothers. And they asked me did I say I work one year said. So I'm not going to work with my in-laws. Said at least you know I have my, my boys 10 years old. Something happened to me I want someone to know their business. So the OK. I'll do it for one year. I did. I was assistant to the president for years. And then we went to the States. It we went to invest in the State I was living in London for 44 years. And then I moved to the States.

BY: Where?

BN: I moved to Washington. To New York for the first three-four months and then I came to Washington, D.C. To Hillandale by the way. Across from Georgetown Hospital. Because my wife was afraid because they said in America you know, open land they can still, she wanted to have a community, gated community. She was afraid at night someone can come in, because in Beirut you live in homes with the door and close door. So that's cult...culturally she was not ready for that so we want to have a community gated community.

BY: That... What year was that?

BN: [19]87.

BY: OK. But that wasn't your first visit to the United States?

BN: No I start. I invested. J. Paul I bought J. Paul in [19]83 and I invested since [19]78. I invested in land development in Atlanta. That's how you do it normally. You're a foreigner. You don't know anything. So you go with the group. Your decided partner. You're not the managing partner your minority party. But you go, you look you was for 4-5 years I was like that. Then I went I did what I know, the orange groves, which teach me a big lesson. Did I told you the story? I don't need to say it right?

BY: Yeah, yeah.

BN: So knowing groves. My father, my father had, my father in law had friends in Texas before they were working. Definitely catering for all companies. So he was from Harlingen Texas. Harlingen it is like Padre Island and you cross to Metamoro,

Matamoros in 10 minutes to the Mexican border. So I went there, because it was too big for me America, and so they introduced me that, I went there, I bought groves, red ruby, like the... And it was especially to over there so we both maybe I don't know 50-70 acres. It was a [unintelligible] dollars an acre we paid 25% and the rest over 10 years. Anyhow, so we did that and the first year, we made [unintelligible] dollars an acre was just 300 [unintelligible] so I paid for 25% return on money. Woo!! I want more. We found within for the lot we found another 100 acre we bought it. I did this [unintelligible] I want more. And I [unintelligible] the frost lost the crop. So we lost 300. 4th year, we had the frost was the trees. We had to replanted to pay [unintelligible] so what they say there's three ways to get poor, the nicest way on women, [unintelligible] and gambling. The longest and most assuredly is agriculture.

BY: So you came here for economic reasons.

BN: In the beginning? Yeah, yeah. You know because I was in London you know I was in Paris I was in Beirut so it's not like.

BY: And what was your... what was your first impression in the United States?

BN: I love it. I love it because I went there, I bought the hotel which is at the time from the [unintelligible] that it was going under about a hundred rooms' hotel at a million dollar. It was a Sheraton. You know like they build them no elevators, swimming pool [unintelligible] and it was like heaven. You smell those things at night. It like from my hometown in Saida. Because this [unintelligible] you never forget the smell of the orange flowers when they blossom of the orchid. It's unbelievable as an experience at night especially. So I bought that and I put some apartments it's called Arroyo States. And I was a part of a small bank and then that's it. Then I moved somewhere else moved to Atlanta with the same invested, one of the investors taught me. Taught me to Atlanta. This was a big disaster. Even though in Atlanta we made money in the rent development before I knew Atlanta. Because we lent you made with people and I developed it with Atlanta was really...still at the newly stage of development. As you made a lot of money but not me. I was a profit or. Because I was silent partner. So when we did this hotel, what it was called the Stadium [??] Hotel. I didn't know what the difference is they do you mean it's always like of the periphery of African-American and white population so no one wanted to go there. So what the brave were doing well fulfilled on the weekends. As we had financed it and I read that revamp to put our mother in sign on it. It was called [unintelligible] the beginning. And I got caught for 10 years. Losing money every year until the Olympic Games came and I was able to sell it because it wasn't the middle of the city of Olympic City. But still we lost money on. This is the fail. This is my biggest failure in States. Like its 10 billion [??] dollars a loss at the time. But what's really in America. I'm still thinking adventure of this law still today. Really! Because this is not operating losses for the same company. It's [unintelligible] so that gives you the

opportunity to re-coup you know. I mean logical but we think we could 20-30% but at least it's you know. It's not totally lost.

BY: So which your wife with you at that time? Were you're leaving?

BN: No. when I came here no.

BY: OK.

BN: She moves with me when I came here to New York when I'm permanently moved here.

BY: And when was that?

BN: It's [19]87, 87. I think it is [19]85.

BY: So you were living in New York City?

BN: I lived for a 3-4 months and then I moved. I bought a house here. I'll give you the days later but I don't I'm not good in this day but that the job to be precise I give you the date.

BY: So you move there...

BN: I moved one house, two house, this is my 3rd house here. My second house was at [unintelligible] which has half gated community, because the house were close to each other and then I build this one here.

BY: What was the first neighborhood like?

BN: Beautiful. Mixed community, were very well located. Nice homes, I never lived in a house like that it was a fourth floor building, attached with their garage, I mean, American living ,you know in that we're not used to that. We lived in apartments in...

BY: So how many children.

BN: 4.

BY: You have 4 children.

BN: 4 children.

BY: And at that time...?

BN: Yeah. We had 2 born in England and at that time we had 2 born here. One in Georgetown Hospital, the other one in unintelligible[??] Maryland. Because I had a friend [unintelligible] who was at Johns Hopkins. So we went through with him.

BY: And would did you find fellows Lebanese people in the community or in Washington?

BN: A lot.

BY: How did you make those connection?

BN: Lebanon is a tiny. It's a small world after all you know. And nobody went to church but my people I know don't go to church. I go to church from you know maybe once every 3-4 months. I'm not... I mean I'm a believer but I am not religious.

BY: Is that true for your wife as well?

BN: Yeah. My wife is Protestant by the way. She is a Protestant. Is Protestant? Her mother was, you know. She's Latin and her father is Latin. [unintelligible] are the worst kind of Christian you know, the people met the [unintelligible] in Lebanon. They come from the mountains, they are poor, they were poor. But there's the mountain people not the cities and not city boys. They it was a rough life. And the present level has to be modernized by the way. You cannot be left in Christian Orthodox politics or politically there are vary engaged in Lebanese politics and Lebanese church. What I wasn't a matter of [unintelligible] half half [unintelligible] I'm not I'm not like that because I'm come from the border. I come from the city not from the mountains. Because in mountains they old [unintelligible] living which in themselves. Between them self serving you know playing club things themselves.

BY: So let's talk about traditions and identity a little bit. Do you consider yourself tri-cultural? I mean Lebanese, your're French.

BN: 100%, 100%.

BY: English, American?

BN: No, whenever I go. It's funny. Here I feel American, 100%. I got there... Even I dream in... You're going to laugh, but if I dream, I dream in English, if I dream in Lebanon, I dream in Arabic. And you know there's different of consciousness I don't know if you haven't noticed that In America, they say it's not kosher from the same thing. In Paris they say it's not Catholic. And in Beirut they some Orthodox. The same word. You know. With the influence of the things of the cities here on the city. So here. It's not [unintelligible] or a Lebanon is not Orthodox.

BY: So, where did these world intercept for you?

BN: I don' know it's it comes here its goes in a [unintelligible]. And it's I feel whatever I go I feel at home. I feel very at home in America. I feel very at home in Paris. I with a small people and the big people and mainly, mainly small people. I may... I interfere face more with the... with the normal people than the high hierarchy billionaire or millionaire because I love the... I love talking to people, I love interaction with the people.

BY: What about how the ritual of celebration. Do you... Lebanese traditions?

BN: No, we do here the Thanksgiving. We don't even fried turkey. Not even. [unintelligible]. We order somewhere else but from [unintelligible] is fried turkey.

BY: And you [unintelligible] with the turkey?

BN: No, no, no, no, no. We do Christmas. In fact, we do Christmas. A Christmas normally we used to go to Lebanon, [unintelligible]. Every Christmas I used... I spent in Lebanon.

BY: Are there any distinctive Lebanese celebrations that you...?

BN: We have Christmas dinner and Christmas lunch the next day. You do the rice and the chicken and the soup. It's tradition Lebanese, tradition. Like yeah, like what we have here for Thanksgiving. And then this other two things we do. [unintelligible] Easter, in Easter we do the eggs for the kids, they color them, they brak them, we hide them.

BY: Are there other things you do to keep connected to your Lebanese heritage?

BN: I visit every... I visit every, every year.

BY: Every year.

BN: Every year.

BY: So you still have family and...

BN: My sisters are in Lebanon and my mother was in Lebanon. She passed away two year ago. I was going periodically to see her.

BY: Do you con... What do you consider yourself? And why? You [unintelligible] you see yourself as a diversity of citizen of the world.

BN: Citizen? Not of the world. Oh no. I have Lebanon in my life and America where I live. Paris is transit. Now I don't live in Paris, I stopped and going home for 3-4 days in Paris and then I continue to Lebanon, so I have two homes.

BY: Here.

BN: Here and Beirut.

BY: Beirut.

BN: I'm spending most of the time you know. I don't know, like Beirut is...my mother I used to visit and my mother away. So I would be here maybe 4 months, 5 months. I'm showing the house. By the way too.

BY: When are times when you feel particularity American?

BN: Well, politically, economically. We are pro-western, pro-America. You know, I mean everywhere. Because is freedom, is democracy, it what you believe in, it's not because you're American. It happened that America is, is like that and we think like that. We are democratic, we are freedom of the things. Make sure that everyone has a right to live and to succeed and to compete you know. I think for me you know. I have a lot of people who came and worked for me and I know they're going to leave and then help them leave understudies themselves that people has to grow, you know. If there is an Arabic saying out that it's on the head of the palm of the Lebanon. If it stays with you, it doesn't cost of the others. Which means you know if you stay, if this place this stays with you, how could it go to the other? so it's showing [unintelligible]life, you know. Is turning life, you know. So it has to change you know. So each one has detour.

BY: Are there times when you have you feel that your family stood out and switched to them.

BN: What is stood out?

BY: You were, you felt different. You felt perhaps discrimination, or...

BN: Here? No way. No. Maybe the color of my head helps. But I mean.

BY: Ok.

BN: I mean, I think this place is the only way we don't feel discrimination, everybody is as you say, raise your hands whether you know this thing. Everybody is, that's what's good about here for you know even New York my wife was explaining to someone today. Said yeah. To my sister said I was at it. "So the New York. You feel like America like any other guy. Because everybody is a foreigner in New York in origin. I am...Mexican-American, I am Bangladesh-American."

BY: So can you talk a little bit about experiences that you've had here that you could not have had also?

BN: Sure, sure. First, what you know... in American what you know this is the scale of business. Which you have nowhere else. Sky first, you know. Sky's the limit. In Paris

you can buy maybe a hotel and then that's it. 14 rooms here, you can buy 10 hotels every day. The scale of chances to hear you can borrow 80%, 90% for a project in Europe and in Lebanon you can borrow 10, 15, 20% max. That's why they didn't have the bubble by the way. Because they don't, you know. Lending is not. This is over the land of opportunity. I mean it's you feel you can do I can do everything. You know giving, giving you know if you have. If you have the knowhow, and if you're straight, I think you can make it here. Which is not the rule. You can have all the know how you have if you must have money and financing and help. And government help and things it's not, it's not easy. So here, we were I was able to do and I was able to bring people you know, investors. We used to do, like I used to doing in the beginning, I started to be an investor and I did these when I had investors from overseas. From Lebanon. From... when investor let me work with the [unintelligible]. Like you know you, you divide them and you sell them as a. you sell them to builders and promotion.

BY: You were in very successful international entrepreneur, talk a little bit about how your background shaped your impact.

BN: The eye. Because my eye in the... coming from Europe and London. I think. Taste is educational you will not born with it, it's grows on you, it's an education, it's educational. You acquire it, by acquire by looking at my sayings, by looking at nice pictures by visiting by looking at buildings, by looking that... I think that's what helped me a lot. And when I came here with a restaurant. We did our first restaurant Paulos, was the only open kitchen. The first open kitchen in America. Not from [unintelligible] not in California, the east coast. And was only open doors to the outside, the restaurant used to be dark. I opened doors, all the doors, so you can open them in the good weather. Because I'm coming from Mediterranean place from Europe where you have to [unintelligible] they didn't have it here, you know. So the first two [unintelligible] really unbelievable not American. American food, but the Italian, Paulos was Italian-American. So was not Italian, as like Italian-Californian they called at that time. Understand why. You know, so it's, it's... that's what bring me, and the eyes and the beauty and I like to, I like to make things perfect. That's why I brought with me too, because it's not like your open restaurant, no you have to operate the restaurant, and everything has to be perfect. Décor has to be nice, you have to put paintings, you have to put your lighting, you have to put... which was not at the time it was like. And we did the River Club which was really... I haven't for a, for a, a...and with it opened maybe I don't know, 10 restaurants and 8 in George town at the town what it was really the recession. Going on.

BY: So how do you define success?

BN: You can't, you can't argue success. If you make it. Success. You know. Success if you create something beautiful and doesn't sell, it's nice but it's not success. Success it's, if it's, if it's brings something maybe, if brings another a sister company or it brings a money or you know people copy your, you sell your, your patent.

BY: You have been investing in communities.

BN: Yeah.

BY: In your community in Lebanon, here in Washington and around the country. So, talk a little bit about your... your role and terms of giving back to community.

BN: Bringing back. Yeah sure.

BY: Helping to...

BN: This is what they took from me by the way to Lebanon. Business. It was, it was in newspaper one day business face back, something way that. When I opened, when I went to Lebanon, president [unintelligible] asked me to go. We opened 26 restaurants and 4 hotels in 5 years, 4 year. It was not... we had nothing in Beirut. So I had the restaurant and he called me, "Why don't you come and help your country?" And I said you know, and one guy told me I took it from him, I put it like it was mine but it guy [unintelligible]. He said: "You come to your country when it's three stars and you turned into five stars. You don't wait for the country to be five stars to come back. So shall you have to come first, fix your country. You know, and then you come back to America if you want." So we went there for 7 years, 6-7 years. And I was, I was doing like in the community I had like on one street four restaurants, and I was bothering you know because you had... when you're in a community, you have cars at night, you have people stopping, people coming to their home are going to be bothered wait for the valet open the car for the guys come down. So I said you know, business space back, what can I do? Beirut is rent controlled. That's what's bothered me too. So people did what we had beautiful the street, beautiful building like 1930, Italian architecture. I said we need to like them. So, when you come by the street you see all this what wonderful architecture. I want to do something to the community. Owners [unintelligible] improve my building. I cannot get out anymore. I want them to die. OK we said did you know, we're going to plant. This is not green. We've planted the trees. It was too short, to narrow the street. They did... they refuse. At the end, I painted the buildings, I offered the whole buildings like nice colors that the whole street the whole street. So different colors, like all color like yellow, like pink, like all the, all colors to bring it back and then in Beirut became... so it become A la modè. How did you say A la modè...becomes trendy. So I did the first thing like that.

BY: So it's Beirut going through a [unintelligible] today?

BN: No, not anymore it's... It's on the back [unintelligible] in our time, because it was the demolished. So we had every single arc... major architecture in the world, working in Beirut, every major newspaper coming to Beirut, everyone coming to Beirut because it was money coming and fixing buildings, fixing things.

BY: I'm curious what have you found most challenging...

BN: Here?

BY: In your life.

BN: In my life? To continually doing something boring. Administration first. I'm a creator. I like to create, but once I create, I want to run the hell out of the deal. Which is bad sometimes you know. If you have good people running it for you you'll be champion. If you fall on the bad guy, you'll look you look as bad as him. That's me, I mean that's what I and here you need to, you know to look after that this is a business where he made with pennies, you know. That's something we do a lot if you ok...

BY: What are you post proud of?

BN: My life. No, no. Proud that I live the life I want. That I didn't never, never did any efforts to live differently. That's what I want to do at the time, I want to do it, really. It's, it's when your hobby is your business, you're the king of the world. You know, you're happy. And it's good. I'm lucky, I didn't have to do something I didn't like in my life.

BY: What advice would you give for a future generations? What advice did you give to your relatives?

BN: Come to America, come to America. Land of opportunities. Be smart, study. Be different any how, we have to be different in America to succeed. If you like Mr. [unintelligible] and something like that, you're salary man. Jump. Take risk in the beginning, I mean calculated risk. And because I told the Lebanese, you want to go to America to be employed, don't go. Because it's going to cost you more, your salary is up to your cost of living in America. Don't you think you can make it? If you make this a \$100,000 in California, if you make \$40,000 in Detroit. You are going to live the same life. So if you go to America come to be an entrepreneur, don't come to be a... you know, a bank salary or.... now is this leads to somewhere else? Yes. For instance, I had

my nephew, worked at the World Bank doing \$130,000 dollars, no tax. His [unintelligible] he knows what to do, I... was pushing him, leave the bank. It's comfortable. You don't want to be comfortable. You know, you get, you get bored, you get bad habits. Jump. He had to jump. I mean.

BY: So, talk a little bit about the difference between your generation and your children. Are they Lebanese, or are they American or they are bi-cultural?

BN: No. I think... Lebanese I don't think so, because they are not mercantile. You know, Lebanese are mercantile, you know like, they ask me [unintelligible] how much it makes 2 and 2. He said it depends if you want to sell or to buy. No, they're square, their engineers. All of them, the four. So it's we get what you see you know. And I'm having difficulty that they want to change my life, my business you know they seem to completely different from me. He doesn't do a project if he doesn't have the money, the seed money, the money [unintelligible] and what happened if it didn't work for the first three years. Have the money already in the bank, in case it doesn't happen. I said, things don't go like that. Maybe I'm wrong, I don't know. I said sometimes I bought building. I bought a building here for instance. I had no money. I had the building like where the Pole is, building in the Georgetown. I put \$50,000 dollars down payment is used to belong to a club. I didn't have the rest. This building was a \$750,000 dollars. I said, I put the money if I lose it, don't worry. If I make it, I make it big. I was able, you know. They want to move their [unintelligible] so I... they give me the contract to move their [unintelligible] so it took me a year. So I move the kitchen made [unintelligible] dollars on it, I put them in a deal. You know. Then I you know, another year, yeah that's how old generation do you know. The new ones wants to have it you know in front you don't see in front of them. On their paper. Maybe they're right.

BY: And do they visit Lebanon?

BN: Yeah. I mean, my son [unintelligible] ten days per year, holidays. He's been work since 2 years with the [unintelligible] but he got fifty something thousand dollars, this year so it's ok.

BY: If you walk into their homes and look around here in your home. We look around and we see touch [unintelligible] to your culture. Do you see that in their homes?

BN: Depends, two boys. One boy yes, because he was married to an Iraqi woman. He doesn't care about that. You come into their home you know, you know when they were in New York you don't want to [unintelligible]. I can show the first floor, is my boys now. Before you go, it's sure you see the difference.

BY: Ok.

BN: No, it's good. It's small, it's not like that, they hate this. But here they like the colors. They don't like this furniture. Now. You know I have maybe 50 carpets I cannot use where they don't let me use carpeting. We have only one of my father that I insisted. No one wants the silver, no one wants carpet, no one wants old, I have old paintings, I put them down in this. I send them to Lebanon, storage. The young people, they don't want that anymore, you know. They want to sleep nice, comfortable. Their jeans everyday, you know.

BY: But they speak Arabic?

BN: Yeah. Fluent.

BY: Thanks to you, right?

BN: They speak English, they speak French. And my fourth son studying Spanish. He went to Spain and he's having this class. Because in the [unintelligible] of business, he said if you won't [unintelligible] you have to speak Spanish. David is the youngest one. [unintelligible] So he speaks Spanish fluently now. He just went to Mexico for a week, he went to Barcelona for 4 months. Here you go, he liked he liked the Spanish, is a drummer. To all the drama is...

BY: So did you still practice law at all or have you...?

BN: I have science skills. I make any contact there by a lawyer. But it helps you. It helped me in my life a lot. You know, what you know about law, not to be taking advantage of, you know. I read the big lines, I know where to look and over to read, it's all right.

BY: So is there anything else you'd like to add? Do you have any future projects you'll like to talk about? Any...

BN: I might yeah, bringing maybe a French concept, you know Paul I brought it here. You're [unintelligible] because this was great, I had with it at the opening [unintelligible] came and the French ambassador and the Lebanese ambassador and they said you know this is

a [unintelligible] ambassador of French culture into the America. It was great. [unintelligible] was growth. You know, in restaurant, and restaurant you know, restaurant is not 100% it's Virginia you know. So I played with the game a little bit, so I did [unintelligible] a Greek letter. One of the Greek letter and it's always called with trending grill. No to attract the masses. So...and... I did a lot for ame... I didn't want to do anything, I didn't want to do a Lebanese restaurant by the way, the [unintelligible] because the restaurant was done here by... Lebanese restaurant used to be mamma and papa restaurant. You don't want to kill them. If you open a bigger restaurant you know. I was lucky doing American restaurant because where you cater to 99% of the population in fact, which is smart. So I was American 100%. I it pay sometimes to be honest, not honest, let me tell you the story. We had the [unintelligible] edition. Did you remember [unintelligible] edition in Georgetown?

BY: Yeah, oh yes.

BN: 4 years ago. So this is Georgetown owners. I was going to lose this lease. So the... this was what 7 years ago. The broker came to see me he said: "You like this location?" I said: "Yes sure I want to live next to the restaurant". So this for lease. We started discussing with landlord, we got calls a guy who's to work [unintelligible] for twenty days in Paul. You know Paul, is been on plenty of beards, he was the image of the company for 20 years. I didn't want to a period. I was... I don't like speeches, I don't like articles, I don't like, anything. So he said Paul, why are you competing with me it's my only restaurant and you know you have a 8-10 restaurants you know, he called me as [unintelligible] he's right. Paul we pulled from the, from the conversation with the landlord then 4 months after that, it was the best deal for me. I making money with this, more than I did in any other deal. He came to me said: "Bechara, I'm getting old, I don't have money to fix it. Why don't you a venture? Now I renewed my lease." So we did the venture 50-50, I put... I didn't give them the money. I put the money into the renovating the space. Made maybe eight hundred, nine hundred [unintelligible] dollars per year on [unintelligible]. You know every discotheque at the end. Guys and they caught... I was...had the money to...they caught one time 20 under-age drinking. So the liquor board [unintelligible] he said "Hey guys your capital restaurant you're not momma and popa restaurant, you don't want that [unintelligible]" So I went to [unintelligible] now, [unintelligible] is a mixing of us that belonging to one of big chef, called Sandoval. Sandoval is from Peru Mexican, he has maybe 25 restaurants all over the world. In Dubai, in Mexico, in L.A., big Mexican chef. So we made... I kept my partner and we did one [unintelligible], one [unintelligible], one [unintelligible]. Now we're doing out five million dollars season this place. All this from because I pull from the [unintelligible] I did cost me nothing at the time. Except the investment I put on it. And so it comes back to you.

BY: Do you have a wish or a vision for Beirut for the United States?

BN: I want Beirut to have the same but its impossible now, the same democracy and freedom. But we still free in Lebanon. I mean, is funny enough the Christian there, and some [unintelligible] I am not going to generate like this. You have 50, 60, 70% of the people who are citizen of freedom and liberty and will not give up anything. The Druze are like us, because their minority. Like I told you [unintelligible].Lebanon is made by the way of... the ir no majority in Lebanon, is made of 15 minorities. 15 minorities. We have 26 religious, not religious, you know orthodox, if you are catholic, your Christian but you're catholic orthodox. Community or anyhow. They all live [unintelligible] except now we have the Iranian. Fighting this [unintelligible]. We're always had proxy wars in Lebanon. So I wish. But may I want to, I want make it's to stay here. But visit Lebanon but this is the future of [unintelligible]. Because what make America is the people of America. There's not one voice, its multiple voices. Not anyone can do anything to America goes back to the people to decide. You know, you do bad, you get judge you not elected good bye. In Beirut you do bad or good you re-elected. You know really. There's no, no liability and nothing.

BY: It's a very nice statement. That you just made. Objects service touch [unintelligible] to people on our culture?

BN: I would.

BY: You talked about your father's rug.

BN: Yeah.

BY: Do you want to talk about a little bit about that and why you still have it?

BN: I just send them back to Beirut. I had it here for 10 years hoping to put it here. No one wanted it here. And it's too small roof for this. So I took it back to Lebanon, but if you want a carpet small, I can give you carpet small or anything. I have a big collection. So whatever I can do for the museum on that you know. I want to show... this 2 seats you want lights too or no? Hanging lights like a... beautiful. No? Smaller?

BY: Too large.

BN: Too large?

BY: Yes.

BN: Why you have a high seating over there. Not like this, Arabic. This is Russian. Arabic like a... with [unintelligible] and brass and strass and glass and condoms. Did you seen them? I have... If you want to see your designer is welcome.

3rd: We will talk about.

BY: Good. I think we covered a lot. I don't know if there's anything you like to add?

BN: Do you want to know what did I bring to the States or what the States bring to me. Is that the subject? Normally?

3rd: Yes.

BN: Normally? It bring me a lot to me. You know I think American, I think Arabic, I think liberty you know, and I go to the bank. I lay my cause no hiding, you get what you see because you know, and especially when you a foreigner in a country [unintelligible] like more than any American because is not my country in the beginning. In Beirut I can do something maybe not close to the lord or something, I don't know. So it's a... And we did a lot for Georgetown, you see the... anti-culture too. It change...some European, it was in fact European touch and Lebanese, like European taste, you know bcause Lebanon, if you go to Lebanon is built by Italians. Like Russia... Italian architects in 1930 was building what was built in Europe in 1920. It took 10 years to get to our country. And I change people to here who was in the work with me you know, best guy has the best restaurant in Washington, in New York now. I sponsored him, I sponsor a lot of people to here. A lot of Lebanese, maybe 10-15 people.

3rd: Wow.

BN: To get the green card, to get the [unintelligible] is the minimum we can do. Legally, you know, you get sponsored to the proper channel and they pay for their things and they get the visa and they come back. We don't employ here, we cannot afford to employ. Because people you know they go. Even if you want to do it. They go and tell the...

BY: Did you also involved with the Children's Cancer Center in Beirut?

BN: Saint Jude.

BY: Can you talk about that?

BN: Yeah. St. Jude. St. Jude as you know was founded here by Danny Thomas. And the [unintelligible] of Syrian Lebanese origin. And I knew them here. From my church. [unintelligible] was the president and the other the other doctors too was... They were all on the board of [unintelligible]. So we want to do something to Lebanon at the time. From here, American doing something for Lebanon. So we pushed them and then we went and we made a deal with the American investor in Beirut and we open the center here where like they treated in Memphis. They get the family, no one pays a penny. It's [unintelligible] and they get maybe now, I don't know 60, 70 children. And now we raising money in [unintelligible] you know, everywhere. So it's 25, it's a big board now. Starting with twenty now we are I think a hundred people.

BY: So it's one of the ways you giving back to Beirut?

BN: I want to get back to Beirut and when I want and help building there, you know, help building the... not the civilization, the appearance. Because they had in Beirut in the war something they've never seen. You know what was coming from the States. It was a great concept. You know and open... open books in Beirut, so we don't open the books in America you know, here you calculate to the penny have you going to make it back. You know and we did something really at the point where journalists said, "Nammour is a cheater." That's what the article, headline. I read it, he said cheater because he made people believe that Lebanon was civilized, was on the top of industry and if you look really well below, behind to his restaurants you find...you don't find this is the [unintelligible] he build the [unintelligible] for Lebanon which is great but behind nothing change in Lebanon. So I cheated to the people of problems in the Arabic they said "it was cheat problem to believe that Lebanon was on the top of the world." Now we are... we have the best restaurant in Lebanon...the best hotels creating beauty that's what in fact. [unintelligible] wanted to write the book, the create of beauty because was beauty is created with the money too. You know it's not like...

3rd: Well you like a copy?

BY: Well thank you very much.

BN: Don't forget the cape.

[END OF AUDIO]