

Sara Saleh, Freshman, Chemical Engineering Major/ Pre-Med

(TC: 1:31) I was born in Beirut; I'm from southern Lebanon, that's where my family is from, I came to the US when I was about a year old and I went back to Lebanon when I was seven and a half and I stayed there for about 10-11 years and I came back now for college, but my mom lives in Lebanon and my brother does

(TC: 2:21) That day I was exercising with my friend and we were done and we walked outside for her mom to pick us up and there were fireworks everywhere, and we were like, why are people using fireworks and stuff, and we thought there was something wrong, and her mom comes and she picks us up and she was like Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and there are a lot of people who are celebrating. And we were like, oh ok, so I go home that day and I'm just like sitting and my mom's like Sara pack your stuff, Israel said they're going to bomb Beirut. And I'm like, that's interesting, so I run and I try to get ready and stuff and I walk into the kitchen and my mom's cooking and cleaning the kitchen, I think it was like a panic attack so she like stopped functioning, and she tried to do something normal to like make her feel better, and I started panicking then because they're going to bomb Beirut. We live in the suburbs of Beirut so we don't live anywhere near where Hezbollah headquarters are but we're not safe enough to be call in like the capital of Beirut, which is where Israel didn't bomb during the war, and they didn't bomb that day, but it was the next morning we woke up at six in the morning to the sound of bombing, they bombed the airport. I was kind of excited because in Lebanon there's this thing, you're used to conflict and you're used to excitement and so we're like oh this is another thing because it had gone a while and there was nothing happening and we thought that was kind of weird for Lebanon, and so we're were excited something was happening but we didn't think it would last for 33 days, and the bombing got worse and they started bombing the suburbs.

(TC: 4:09) They bombed the suburbs from the sea at the beginning and we live right by the sea, so I could see the ships from my bedroom window which was interesting, especially at night when you could see the fire, you could see the things going all the way to the airport because the airport is near my house and it got worse when they bombed the suburbs more than the airport and they started using airplanes instead because the sound got so much louder and they started bombing more at night than during the day and more during the day, and we couldn't sleep all night, there was one particular night that was the worst and I didn't sleep all night there was just bombing bombing bombing and it's interesting that I live near the Iranian embassy and we're like this is bad because we live right next to the Iranian embassy if Israel wants to bomb the Iranian embassy. It would be stupid but you never know like this is politics and nothing really makes sense in politics, and we were kind of scared and there's just a moment, bombing doesn't sound anything like you imagine it would sound, bombing up close is a million times louder, it literally destroys your soul, it makes you...I lost the will to live, I was like, you know god, I don't want to deal with this anymore, I'd rather just go ahead and die I don't; want to hear this anymore, there's nothing I could do anything about it though I was stuck where I was and we just dealt with it all night, the next day we're like screw it we're leaving Beirut, we don't know where we're going we just got into a car we drove to the suburbs of Beirut which was worse, the heart of the suburbs so we could pick up my family, and we drove to some area in the mountains where we have one relative and we stayed in her two room house for two nights and two days and she was kind enough to let us stay until we found a house where I think it was 25 people in an apartment because there was nobody else to go to, and we stayed there during the war and that's where we observed everything happening, there wasn't bombing there.

(TC: 6:36) It was much, much safer because it was a Christian area and they were targeting the southern part of Lebanon mostly and Beka?? Which is the eastern part and the suburbs of Beirut and all those places they have a lot of Shia Muslims and Hezbollah is Shia and so apparently during the war all Shia Muslims became a part of Hezbollah, I'm a Shia Muslim, I'm not Hezbollah, why were they doing that so in the Christian areas a lot of areas are safe, in the Sunni areas I couldn't say the same, there were a lot of Sunni areas that were being attacked too, but we were safe in that part that

we fled to, and there was one morning where Israel bombed there and I remember it was the worst feeling, because one day you're like we're safe for now and then you just wake up to bombing and we're like what's happening, and I felt like my heart started beating so fast, it never happened in Beirut, there was nowhere to run and just like a helpless feeling again.

(TC: 7:57) We thought it was something that would last a day or two that they were only going to bomb the south, and that's it, but as the days went by we realized it was going to last for a long time, it was a time where I thought it was going to last until Christmas, and we're going to stay in Beblus??, which is where we went during the war, we were going to stay in Beblus until Christmas and we weren't going to be able to go back home they were going to bomb our houses, but it just lasted for 33 days and I'm grateful that it was that short, it wasn't a short war but It was shorter than I anticipated it to be.

(TC: 8:41) I think the third night of the war, because I was in the middle of the fire, I was between the ships that were throwing the bombs in the area they were bombing I was right in the middle between those two.

Geri: So you went back to your home, was it clean was it broken.....?

(TC: 9:06) Sara: My home in Beirut was intact, it was dusty the fridge, the food was rotting in the fridge but that's not bad because a lot of people had left their homes without anything and they had left meat in their fridge and when they got back it was pretty nasty, that's the people who didn't lose their homes, there are a lot of people who went back and here was nothing, so a lot of them just went to their relatives, a lot of them just put tents up in front of their apartments or buildings because in Beirut you don't live in a house you live in a building because it really crowded. Yeah I got back home and it was an amazing feeling, there's nothing like going home, you appreciate home during the war

Geri: What's your opinion of Hezbollah?

(TC: 10:02) Sara: Hezbollah is a political party in Lebanon it has a major role in whether its politics whether people like it or not. I can't really say I have an opinion towards them because I never really went deep all I know is that they say their purpose is to free Lebanese land that's occupied by Israelis and that's what they're saying to the world, I don't know what their intentions because I don't really have contacts, people assume since I'm a Shia Muslim that I immediately have contacts with Hezbollah, no that's not true, Shia Muslims belong to different groups and some of them don't want anything to do with politics, which is like me, because in Lebanon you get to be really sick of politics because it's tearing the country apart, but during the war, this is what Israel did wrong, because they were sending out flyers to the Lebanese people, they were like Hezbollah is destroying your country they caused this war and they sent out flyers to a city or a town and they're like we're going to bomb in like half an hour so like you want to run away, people go like oh, they want people to think that they're nice enough to tell us that they're going to bomb our town. What they actually did, and this is what I saw with my very own eyes, they just created a bigger audience for Hezbollah and because people were frustrated, ok we have a house in the south, and our family has no political relations whatsoever, and there was a hole in the roof, like they sent down a bomb or something and I'm like why, we have nothing to do with this, so it was pretty obvious they were bombing everyone and not just Hezbollah, which is why some people sided with them because they're like oh now they're defending us, they kind of forgot the party that they kind of caused the war by kidnapping the two soldiers.

(TC: 12:16) There is no black and white in this world, it's true that the people who may seem as the terrorists of today may become the freedom fighters of tomorrow or the opposite way around. But I think people should understand both sides of the story, because I can't say that they're totally good or totally bad, I don't think they're as evil as Al Qaida because they don't go around chopping people's heads off, because I think that's where you draw the line, but at the same time, look at the war, look at Lebanon, the politics, and you start to understand the shadiness where the gray comes in

Gerri: Did you see any media coverage of the war, maybe American coverage?

(TC: 13:21) Yeah I saw a bit of CNN and the rest was just like...there was this one channel that people used to watch, it was called New TV, they were pretty objective because there were two other channels that were broadcasting, like two Lebanese channels, like in Lebanon there was NNR? Which is the Hezbollah television which was totally biased even Hezbollah's were like, this is so biased, people who support it were saying that, and there was another one which was LBC, Lebanese broadcasting channel I think, and they were also very biased against Hezbollah, so we're like what do we do, because nobody is telling us what's happening 100 percent, so we put it on this channel that was supposed to be in between and they just tell you what's happening and sometimes they would criticize but I'd mostly pay attention to what's happening I want to know what's happening because other channels were mostly criticizing what was happening. I think I only saw one part of the war on CNN; it was when Israel sent a bomb down on Shia, which is where my family lives and it was live then and I was like oh now they put it...because I am very critical of the American media because I don't think they are showing exactly what they need to show and I became more aware of that during the war because when you're in war you want people to feel with you, you want them to know what you're going through, but nobody knows except the people who are in the war, who have gone through war, and I felt frustrated even at other Arab channels.

Gerri: What advice would you give journalists covering the war and the Middle East?

(TC: 15:18) Journalists covering the Middle East....you have to be brave, this is another part on CNN I think his name was Nick.....CNN journalist.....he went into the suburbs of Beirut with a guy who said he was from Hezbollah, I think that's pretty brave, going to the suburbs of Beirut which are being bombed and you're going with a guy you don't trust, that is brave and you're getting insider's view, you have to be brave to go to those places and at the same time you have to show as many sides because there aren't only two sides, this is what people say, there are only two sides, there aren't two sides, there are so many sides you have to capture as many sides as you can, because people say that it's black and white again, there's no black, there's no white, there are different shades of gray, you have to try to get all that, to show the world that there are people who have opinions and journalists have to capture that, and they can get voices heard that way.

Gerri: Are you critical of the American media in general or their coverage of this war?

(TC: 16:36) No not in general, not all American media, because I can't say that because there's nothing that's 100 percent good or bad, like I was saying again, and the American media tends to give it's people what the people want to hear and it tends to cover a lot of stuff or not give as much attention like there's a massacre in this village in southern Lebanon called Kana, I don't think the media gave it as much attention as it deserves, it was a house with families, children and mothers, like I believe that if they'd covered it right American would have stood up and said something about it to stop, to say something about the war, like sure there are Arab Americans in Dearborn and in every Arab filled city in America and were standing up against the war, but there are also not just the Arabs who stand up for what's right, that would be wrong, ordinary everyday Americans who would stand up for something that they saw was right, they would stand up for justice, and that didn't happen, I don't think that happened as much as it should of, and that in my opinion the American media is not, not all American media, but like the mainstream, main channels, they're not just showing the whole story, they're covering a lot of it.

Gerri: Do you think that the media stereotypes Muslims?

(TC: 18:39) They're beginning to understand them more, they're beginning to understand differences, before, Islam used to be terrorism because of a group of some people that would go and blow up things, the whole world would say, oh they're Muslim therefore they're terrorists, and now it's becoming different, I think it's because of the war in Iraq because now people are understanding that there's Al Qaida, there are different sets of Islam, there are different interpretations, therefore it's not just Islam, it's the interpretation of Islam more than religion as a whole, and I think that's being covered more by the media, so its decreasing the stereotypes of Muslim around the world. I think there's these ideas in people's heads and they start out and they go on with them and that's

where they start their career with, and not the career like they try to see the world from that point of view, for example I don't like Al Qaida, I don't like them at all, but if you as a journalist go out to the world with the idea that Al Qaida is bad, I have to try to find a story around that, then you're not going to get the real stuff, although it might be true, it might not be true, it's with those stereotypes sometimes there like they have stereotypes about Islam or some Islamic countries, and that's where they start broadcasting things differently than they probably are in reality.

(TC: 20:27) I went to MSU because it's in Michigan, that's where my friends are, I didn't want to go to U-M Dearborn because they didn't have chemical engineering, I didn't want to go to Ann Arbor because they are too expensive and I have to write four essays which I am too lazy to do so I was like, I'll just go to MSU, and it has an amazing campus. It was one of the really good choices I had here and it seemed like what I wanted, it was big but not too big and I heard that they had a diverse community, so I kind of felt safe, like when I found out about the MSA, the Muslim Student Association, I was like oh there are Muslims on campus I won't be the only one.

Geri: How have you been treated on campus?

(TC: 21:32) It's not bad at all, it's actually better than in Lebanon, it's what a lot of people find surprising, in Lebanon now there's this big division because of politics, if you're Lebanese, just by looking at me you'd probably be able to tell that I'm a Shia, and because of the stereotype that all Shia's are Hezbollah, because of their political affiliations would think oh she's Hezbollah so they treat me really nasty, like they give you the eye in Lebanon, here I don't get it because people don't really know anything, they're like oh she has a thing on her head, she's Muslim, period.

(TC: 22:53) I get treated on campus better than some places in Lebanon, in Lebanon you get stereotyped because I look like a Shia, therefore they go like, oh she's part of Hezbollah she supports Hezbollah, therefore, if they're against Hezbollah they hate my guts and they give me the eye, and like oh you're ruining our country and stuff, I'm like I have nothing to do with what's happening in this country. Here on campus people don't really know any of that, even though I'm Lebanese, they just know oh she's a Muslim, I think people are more aware here that because campus is so diverse they're more open to different ideas and the fact that there's more than one truth out there, so they become more accepting, and I don't really get any bad attitudes towards my Hijab?. People look funny sometimes and they ask me questions and I answer everything they want to know, I have no problem whatsoever with answering anything, and in the end they're surprised, they're like oh you answered all my questions, you have no problem, like why would I have a problem, like you're asking a question, I'm doing this therefore I must have an answer, if not I'd be pretty stupid to do it.

Geri: What kind of questions do they ask you?

(TC: 24:23) What do you wear Hijabs, and then I go into women's rights because I believe that Hijab is part of women's rights in some I believe it brings more rights than it takes away, and then they start asking about women's rights and some as a whole and I just answer their questions, and they're surprised most of the time that I would answer whatever they want to ask I have no problem whatsoever

Geri: How large is the Muslim Student Association?

(TC: 25:14) From what I've seen it has a decent number of students, not all the Muslims on campus are part of it, there are a lot of Muslim who don't have a clue I think that it exists, but it's pretty big and it's making an impact on campus I believe.

Geri: When are you going back there?

(TC: 25:44) I was there last week so I don't think I'll go back until 2009 I guess.

(TC: 26:03) It depends, this is the funny part, this is what I also believe, this is a mistake I believe Israel made, they bombed people's houses, civilian houses to make people hate Hezbollah, the Lebanese government which is backed by the United States didn't give a single penny to have those

houses rebuilt or the roads fixed. Do you know who's fixing the houses and the roads in Lebanon? It's Hezbollah, they're just getting more support that way, Israeli's didn't think that through when they were bombing the houses I don't know what they were thinking, and because the government isn't supporting so it all depends on Hezbollah so they're doing a pretty decent job of like, they're taking care of what happened I think they feel responsible and there's responsibility to the people that got bombed, and they have to do that whether they like it or not, but at the same time it's the government's job because if you think about it like in any country around the world, if something happens to the people the government is supposed to take care of the people no matter what or who destroyed the country, it's the government, and the government didn't do that, I think there are some areas that are supported by the government, they got aid or help, if the roads got fixed, I don't know exactly where it happened but compared to the damage, because we went to the suburbs of Beirut that got bombed right after the war, you couldn't walk because of the buildings, like the rock was everywhere, a lot of roads were just gone, bridges were gone, that's another thing, Israeli targeted roads and bridges, they said they did that so that Hezbollah wouldn't be able to transport weapons, and right now I think most of those are fixed, so it's not bad but I think if it was in any other country in the world it would have been done much faster.

(TC: 28:33) I just want to make it clear that Lebanon is very diverse and this isn't what everybody thinks, I'm not representing the whole Lebanese population, I'm just showing you part of my experience, my beliefs and my thoughts because I'm sure there are a lot of Lebanese people who would watch this and say I don't agree with that, I just want to make it clear that I'm not trying to represent the Lebanese people I'm just trying to get my experience across.

Question: Are there any large misconceptions about Hezbollah that a lot of people hold especially Americans?

(TC: 29:20) I don't know what the Americans know about Hezbollah, that's the thing, if you gave me ideas I'd be able to tell you, at the same time I'm not part of Hezbollah so I wouldn't be able to tell you if everything was right or wrong but from what I see, because they're part of Lebanese politics, and lately because they're reconstructing and they're working among the people, you see them more outside, usually you don't, but now you like oh that's a Hezbollah dude, it's really normal in Lebanon, here people think, oh my god I'm going to Lebanon, I'm going to Hezbollah and they freak out, even the people who hate Hezbollah in Lebanon I don't think they freak out when they walk into a Hezbollah area, I think that's something people should know, they're not going to like bomb you like Al Qaida, they're smarter than that, they're more organized than that, what is true is that they're fighting Israelis that are occupying Lebanon, they were fighting during the war, they did bomb some areas, they don't have planes so they shot rockets I think, but I don't know what the Americans know about it.

Geri: When did you start wearing the veil?

(TC: 30:35) I wore this when I was eight and three months, I was so excited, my mom wouldn't let me at first, I was like, please let me wear it, she was like why, I'm like I just want to wear it, back then I didn't know the real purpose of it, my parents hadn't taught me why, I just did it because I know I was going to eventually have to, it's not, this is the thing....*(Geri starts coughing and goes to get some water)*

Question: So why were you excited to wear the veil?

(TC: 31:22) I was excited I think it was because I wanted to fit in because I had just come from America and I was surrounded by Lebanese people, I could barely speak Arabic and I kind of wanted to fit in, and as I grew older I was like why am I wearing it, and I like went deeper into things and I read about it and then I was like, ok now I know and now I'm happy. It becomes easier, it's much easier when you do it as a child than if you do it as a teenager because you don't have to think about attracting the boys or what people think because you already have it on your head.

Question: And what is the purpose?

(TC: 32:06) The purpose of Hijab is, I like how there's this scholar, he put it this way, he's like so a woman can go out to the world not as a female being but as a human being so people when she's trying to communicate or go out to society they have nothing really to look at so they're like screw it, there's nothing to divert their attention I guess, and people also says it's a form of modesty, ok modesty, but I'm more towards the women's rights so people can take us more seriously and not be like staring at cleavage or something the whole time.

Question: Have you noticed any of the stuff from Hezbollah or anything translate back to the United States?

(TC: 33:21) If I was to talk to CNN or any American channel, I would not talk to them in Arabic, because the translation sucks basically, I remember I was watching CNN and this was when the former prime minister (Raffia? Kari?) was assassinated. And this guy was describing it in Arabic and he was saying something about the wind I heard the part and then the translation was completely different, I was just staring at the screen, I was like oh my god, you people, like I know you talk in Arabic so you can respect your language but you can't guarantee that they're going to translate right so translations aren't always that accurate and I'm sure that because of stereotypes they're going to want to try to change things.

(TC: 34:31) I didn't really listen to any translations of any people speaking or speeches or anything, but then there was one television in the house, and I'm the only one who likes to watch CNN, everybody is watching Arabic news so the only time I could watch CNN was the middle of the night and so I didn't really get a chance to do that. Like once maybe.

(TC: 35:04) People don't really know, so when I tell them I'm from Lebanon they go like oh, and then very few people know that there was a war there a year and a half ago, and if they know anything about it, they'll go like oh there's a war between Israel and Lebanon, I don't think they would know that it was between Israel and Hezbollah and not Israel and Lebanon, because people don't really pay attention here so, and that's what frustrated us during the war because we knew that a lot of people weren't paying attention and we were going through so much then and that's when you want the attention to come towards you, but you can't really do anything about it. Now I know how people feel like in places like Darfur and Gaza and Afghanistan where they're suffering daily and people don't really know what's happening; now I can relate to that and I'm thankful that I know what I feels like now because maybe I can stand up and try to make a difference now.

(TC: 36:37) I started going to sleep every night after the war thanking god that there wasn't a war. I used to thank god for a lot of things, but at the end one of the things on my list was peace, I was like thank god for peace, there is no peace in the Middle East, but like relative peace like they weren't bombing our heads that you could go to sleep without hearing airplanes flying right over the house, that was one of the things. Another thing was that when you're getting bombed and you lie lose the will to live, because of the sound you either panic like crazy or you just go into like this deep depression, I was the depression person, my brother was the panicky person. The only thing that kind of kept me going was that, I don't know how this thought came into my head, I just thought that, I remembered how in the Koran it describes that how god used to get angry at people and his anger would go down and I'd hear the bombs and saying, this sound is being made by human beings? It's going to stop one day, it has no meaning in the universe, it's not god's anger, there's nothing to worry about, and if I die, I think god knows that I was killed, I have no reason to get killed and he's going to treat me pretty nicely I guess, so that like kind of kept me going at that moment and it was all I had to hold on to and I was pretty grateful for that thought.