

**Sali Janem**

Where: Sali's Market and Deli

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Sali Janem, originally from Palestine, lives in Charleston, West Virginia and with her dad is the owner of Sali's Market and Deli on Central Avenue on the West Side of Charleston. She talks about the daily work running the market, her goal of becoming an immigration lawyer, her family's own immigration to the United States, and her favorite customer, Levi Phillips.

Janem was interviewed by WYPR producer Aaron Henkin with state folklorist Emily Hilliard as part of the *Out of the Blocks* podcast's two episodes on Charleston's West Side. Learn more: <https://wvfolklife.org/2020/01/17/out-of-the-blocks-podcast-highlights-charlestons-west-side-west-virginia-folklife-hosts-listening-party-february-12/>

SJ: Sali Janem  
AH: Aaron Henkin  
EH: Emily Hilliard  
LP: Levi Phillips

Sali Janem 0:00 My name is Sali Janem we're at Sali's Market and Deli and the address is 829 Central Avenue.

Aaron Henkin 0:08 Tell me about this place. Tell me what's in here. What you do. What's for sale? What you cook. What's on the menu?

Sali Janem 0:16 Okay, um, we it's like a convenience store. We sell everything. We sell cigarettes, blunts, candy. We have a menu. We sell Philly cheese steaks, burgers, hot dogs, Rubens, gyros.

AH: All right. (sound of machinery).

SJ: I knew that was gonna happen.

SJ Here's the landlord's maintenance, man.

Aaron Henkin 1:14 (laughs) All right. Tell me a little bit about... here, come stand on this side of me if you would.

SJ: Okay!

AH: There, right there. That's perfect. Tell me a little bit about, about yourself, about your family, about your roots.

Sali Janem 1:24 I'm originally from Palestine. I'm from a little city called Tulkarem. I moved here when I was four years old. We moved to Dallas, Texas, with my whole family. And we've been living here ever since. And we moved to West Virginia. And now we live here.

Aaron Henkin 1:46 What brought your family to West Virginia?

SJ: 1:49

My dad actually went to college here in like, in the 1990s, I think. He's an... he's an engineer. And I have a sister here.

Aaron Henkin 2:03 Tell me about... Tell me about your childhood growing up with your dad in shops. It sounds like you've got a lot of experience in places like this.

SJ: 2:18 Yes, ever since I was young, I was helping my dad. When I was younger, my dad actually used to own a restaurant too. He used to own Sahara Restaurant downtown. So ever since then, I've been helping him work around convenience stores and restaurants.

Aaron Henkin 2:37 Sali's Market. It's named after you, belongs to you. This is your spot!

SJ: Yes, it is.

AH: Talk to me about the pluses and minuses of owning a business like this.

SJ: It's very stressful...is the...

AH: (sound of machinery) Hold on. I'll let you think about it. SJ: Right here.

AH: Yeah.

SJ: There's a customer.

AH: Oh, okay, go ahead. We'll get this done in bits and pieces.

SJ: Hopefully! (conversation with customer, cash door opens and closes)

AH: Alright. Stand over here.

SJ: If you want to get back here, I don't care.

AH: Well, there's...

SJ: There's the coolers right?

AH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's...we can work around this. Here while he's working. Tell me what, tell me what's going on right here. You're getting some repairs done this morning.

SJ: Yes. It's an older building. So things keep falling apart (laughs).

Aaron Henkin 4:13 What's this fellow working on?

SJ: He's fixing the tile.

AH: Yeah. Reinforcing the floor over there?

SJ: How old is this building, Ray? How old is this building?

Ray: A hundred and twenty--it'll be 121 this January.

SJ: Happy birthday, huh.

Ray: (laughs)

AH: 121-year-old building.

SJ: Yep. So it's an old building! It's hanging in there!

EH: How do you know that?

SJ: He's been the maintenance man for a long time. But yeah. (conversation with customer) These or these? These are the Tropical Storm. These are 169. Those are not on sale. Alright. The other ones were 129, that's why. Alright.

Customer: A lot of people get 'em?

SJ: To be honest, I mean they sell but the silver ones...you like fruity flavors, so yeah, you're, you'd like you would like them.

Customer: All right.

SJ: Alright, bye.

EH: What was their last name [the family that owned the building]

Ray: Shar (sp?)

SJ: Shar.

EH: Shar, okay.

SJ: It's the Shar Building?

EH: Okay.

Ray: Where he had to have the brick re-laid around the front and the side.

SJ: Yeah, this is the Shar building. And his wife...or the guy that used to own this place, his wife lived, Noha? Yeah, she lives down the street from here. I mean, she just recently moved to a nursing home but she's older.

Ray: They run it for 50 years.

SJ: Yeah, they they've run it...

Ray: They started leasing it out.

SJ: They've run it... She, she lives right down the street. Actually, I used to take care of her right after work every day for about... ever since I started here for a year and a half now. I take care... but this is recently just a month ago I haven't---stopped because she's gotten really bad.

Aaron Henkin 6:38 We're gonna do some circular saw now? Okay.

Ray: Just for a second.

AH: Yep, yep, take your time. Take care of what you need to take care of. I'm not about to get in the way of anyone's work that needs to be done.

Ray: (laughs) I've been trying to...

SJ: I almost fell through that hole! (saw sounds) 07:11

AH: Not gonna make that mistake again.

SJ: Yeah, everybody hits their head.

AH: Alright. So you've been around this building a lot longer than Miss Sali here.

Ray: Oh yeah. Yeah, around this building here. Yeah, I run... I worked bar here from like...for 14 years. I'm a disabled handyman! (laughs)

AH: Well you look pretty able to me.

Ray: It's killing my back right now to do this. I'm just gonna put the filler on. (saw sounds). I fell off a roof back in '96. I've been on disability really ever since. I've been doing help, helping my friends when I can.

AH: So you fell off a roof, huh? (drill sounds)

Ray: Yeah, up there at the bottom of Kanawha City bridge. (drill sounds)

AH: And that did a number on your back.

Ray: (laughs) On my back...I had both arms in casts for over a year. Whole lot of concussions. (drill sounds) I ain't going down there. (drill sounds).

SJ: (talks on phone to family member)

09:49

(talks to customer)

SJ: When did you get it-- from my dad?

Customer: Yeah!

SJ: Okay, that's okay...

AH: I like this sign here.

SJ: Oh, yeah.

AH: Read that sign for me. What does that... what's that say?

SJ: Be humble, stay hungry, always hustle.

AH: You put that slogan up there?

SJ: 10:40 Yeah, I seen it one day and I really liked it. I mean, it makes a lot of sense to me--if you're not humble, you really can't make any money. And especially with this crowd here, you can't, you can't act like you're better than them. You have to kind of, you know, make them feel like they're at home, which this is their neighborhood, you can't just come in here and say, Hey, I'm better than you, you won't get any business like that.

Aaron Henkin 11:08 Come on back here while we get a chance here.

SJ: While Ray's not here.

AH: Um, so I had, I think I had just asked you to talk a little bit about the pluses and minuses of being here...let me have you stand right over this way. Perfect. ...The pluses and minuses of being the owner of a business like this.

SJ: 11:28 Um, some of the minuses is where, like, it's hard to find an employee, you know, you're always here at the place. And if nobody's going to take care of your business, like you would. I mean, obviously, you know, nobody. It's sad to say, but nobody's gonna care as much as you will, you know? So, that's one of the minuses, that's... But a plus is that you don't have a boss, you don't like... I was running late, nobody's gonna get on to me for that. I mean, you know. So I mean, some of those things, like, I worked for people for a while, like, five, six years, you know, as a server. So, you know, I was never late, I was always on time. And, you know, managers was always demanding, and stuff like that. So, I mean, that's one of the pluses that I don't have anybody telling me what to do.

Aaron Henkin 12:18 Talk about how much how much time and attention it takes to keep this operation running.

SJ: 12:25 Oh, so much time. Like you...(sighs) I mean, even when I do get to go home, or if something comes up, you have to come back. It's not like you... It's like you taking a break. No. You have to be here. It's always you're here. If I'm not here I'm sometimes watching the cameras, you know, what's going on? You know? So it's just, that's, that's how it is.

Aaron Henkin 12:50 What are the hours here and how many days a week?

SJ 12:52 We open 10 days, I mean, 10 days a week--seven days a week. We open from 8:30-9 'till 10 every day, but Sunday, we stay open till nine.

Aaron Henkin 13:06 And it's just you.

SJ: 13:07 It's just me, and we have somebody... My husband comes in here helps me sometimes. My dad does. I mean, you know, we--we have some friends here and there that come and help us. But that's pretty much it.



Aaron Henkin 13:20 Is this? Is this your ultimate goal? I mean, what's, what's in the future for you?

SJ 13:26 No... I hopefully, I want to finish school, go into law school and become a lawyer, hopefully, like an immigration lawyer or just a criminal defense lawyer or something like that. You know, that's my, my goal. But I need time to do that.

Aaron Henkin 13:48 Talk to me about what you've studied so far. I mean, you've been, you've been studying!

SJ: 13:53 Yeah, I have a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

Aaron Henkin 13:58 What... What's your interest in that in that field? Particularly where you want to go next law, immigration law?

SJ: 14:06 Well, there's not much immigration laws... I mean, immigration lawyers in West Virginia, so I wouldn't have too much competition if I wanted to stay in West Virginia. And they're... surprisingly, there is a lot of immigrants here. I mean, you'd be surprised that they don't have an immigration lawyer. And for example, I had to go through that. I had to find a lawyer in Florida to go through my immigration. My dad had to give me the American passport. Which, you know, wasn't just you know, this is recently, like, maybe five, six years ago, I just got my American passport. But I had to go through a really long process, and I had to get it from a lawyer in Florida. So there's not a lot... there's not lawyers, immigration lawyers here...there's rarely any. So you know, that's why I would like to do something like that. There's a lot of Hispanics and stuff. You know, a lot of Syrians that come here and don't, don't have an immigration lawyer to talk to or get help from, you know, to guide them in the right way.

Aaron Henkin 15:08 I just heard you talking on the phone. What language were you speaking?

SJ: Arabic. Yeah.

AH: Who are you talking to?

SJ: My dad.

AH: So I just heard you talking to your dad on the phone, speaking Arabic. Talk to me about-- you came over here to the US, you say when you were four years old?

SJ: Yes.

AH: Yeah, but you've, you... It sounds like you talk to me about...

SJ 15:34 I do speak Arabic fluently.

AH: Yeah.

SJ: Yeah, I speak Arabic fluently. But I don't... I don't know how to read and write it that well. I mean, I can kind of, you know, catch a little bit because, but I, when I was younger, when I was for like, two, three years old, my grandma and my grandpa, they don't speak any English. So that...all they spoke to me when I was younger was Arabic. So that's how I caught on. And my siblings, they, they understand it, but they don't speak it fluently because they grew up mostly here, because I'm the oldest, other than my half-sister. But you know, she doesn't speak English. I mean, speak Arabic at all, so... or understand it. But we all understand it. And I'm the one... my brother speaks a little bit. And my sister speaks it a little bit. But my other brother, he doesn't speak it at all. They all understand it, though.

Aaron Henkin 16:23 Do you? Have you traveled back to Palestine to where you're from?

SJ: 16:27 Oh, yeah, I traveled like three years ago. That's actually where I met my husband. He's from there. And I had to go through the immigration process with him. And that's why it was a hassle too, because the lawyer, it was the same lawyer for me. He was the guy from Florida. But yeah, it was a hassle to get him here. It took like two years to get him here. But I met him like four... five years ago. Yeah. So. And I travel a lot back there. But my first time traveling there was I think, in 2013. (customer enters)  
17:20

SJ: Is somebody sick (to customer).What's wrong, baby?

Customer: I got a head cold.

SJ: 17:26 Not going to work?

Customer: No, school. No. So the good thing about it...the notes that I have, I could do it and, what you call that. It's a camera...

SJ: Screenshot?

Customer: It's a camera you can take so you sent it and it would send to them.

SJ: Oh yeah, like an online class.

Customer: Yeah.

SJ: That's cool!

Customer: Yeah, so.

SJ: 25 cents, hun. Thank you. What do you need a filter tip?

Customer: No, just a, I wanted 2 cigarettes.

SJ: Okay.

Customer: Thank you!

SJ: You're welcome.

SJ: 18:09 In the morning, it gets really slow here.

AH: Yeah.

SJ: It's slow till about 12. But this season, it's actually slower than the summer, spring. should I say like, spring it...that's when it picks up because income tax time. And you know, everybody gets paid.

Aaron Henkin 18:26 Right. Um, let me ask you. Let me ask you to talk about the parade of characters that come in and out your door every day and the relationships that you build with them and just sort of, it must be an interesting sort of parade of humanity that you, that you meet and interact with every day.

SJ 18:53 Oh, yeah! There's all kinds of different kinds of people like, there's, I mean... there's a lot of people that's why when I studied criminal justice, there's a lot of people that have like drug offenses and stuff like that, and they talk to me about it, because I did an internship and some of the, in Lakin, Lakin Prison. And I did an internship in Mount Olive. And I went in there and like, it was like, in the mental health part. And, you know, I got to see all kinds of different people. These people are just... I mean, they're just regular people. I thought, like, you know, when you go into prison, everybody's locked up. No, they have just so much...You know, so much. What's the word? Okay, let me get that customer.

AH: Oh yeah, there's someone here. Oh I'm sorry

SJ: 19:46 Let me think of that word, 'cause...Well, they have so much to do there. They, I thought everybody was just locked up. They're not! There's like a cosmetology school. Just so many things. (to customer) But what do you want? cigarettes? Oh, yeah. Newports?

Customer: Yeah.

SJ: Okay, changing it up!

Customer: It's my momma. SJ: Oh, alright. And what do you need anything else? All right. (cash door). Are you home for the weekend?

Customer: Yes.

SJ: Alright, hon. Have a good day. I also let people get tabs here. And you know, some, some people do come pay me back, some of them don't.

Aaron Henkin 20:33 You get a bunch of slips in there of what people owe ya?

SJ: 20:35 Yeah. I mean, I try to help them as much as I can. Because not everybody has... you know, mostly, I don't like to give people cigarettes. If they ask me for something to eat, then okay, but if you want cigarettes, no. Because I don't make any money on cigarettes. And I think, food if you're hungry, I don't mind to feed you. But if you take advantage, you know, (laughs) then it's different. But yeah, cigarettes-- I don't like giving people cigarettes because they don't come back. Some of them, you know?

Aaron Henkin 21:06 Well, it's part of making relationships with your customers.

SJ: Yeah. Hey, how you doing (to customer) Hi. Hey!

Customer: Let me get a Sweet Cream.

SJ: What you doing Mina?

Customer: Say hi Miss Sali!

SJ: Aw, she grouchy this morning, huh? What did you want the black sweet?

Customer: No, sweet cream. SJ: Sweet Cream. The Irish fusion? What do you do...is this for you? What happened to you gettin' these?

Customer: The Irish?

SJ: You didn't like 'em?

Customer: No, I like 'em. I told you, it's the different.

SJ: You just switching it up!

Customer: You got to switch it up with the different.

SJ: He said you got hooked on those. Pat told me. He said... I said she used to smoke those.

Customer: I did! Thank you for reminding me. Thank you. Sali. (laughs) Tell Miss Sali bye. Oh, there you go, Sally. That's why I...

SJ: Hey those went up by the way, the Winston? Give there the purple one.

Customer: Tell Miss Sali thank you! You tell Miss Sali thank you.

Little girl: Thank you!

SJ: Bye!

Customer: Say I love you Miss Sali.

Little girl: I love you!

SJ: 22:31 I love you too! Aw. She was carrying a full conversation the other day. She's so smart.

Customer: Oh girl, she runs it!

SJ: Yep.

Customer: Bye-bye. Bye Sali, Thank you!

SJ: 22:43 You're welcome. (to other customer) You need anything else from?

Customer: No, I'm good.

SJ: Did you want to know? Did you tell my dad-- my dad's over there, by the way.

Customer: Yeah, I'll swing back by and let him know.

SJ: Yeah 'cause about those [unintelligible]. Okay, what's up Ray?

Ray: I'm going down the road to have a cold one, I'll come back and put a towel down. All I gotta do is glue the towel down.

SJ: Okay, it's done?

Ray: I'm gonna let the filler dry.

SJ: Okay, that's cool.

Ray: Then I gotta put the towel down but I gotta wait for the filler to dry before.

SJ: All right. Okay, no problem. See ya.

Customer: I'll swing by there.

SJ: Yeah, he's over there. You know, you can't catch him but Friday.

Customer: Oh yeah, that's why I swung by here. I was doing a reset on one of the other stores.

SJ: Okay. Now he's gone. All set?

AH: Yeah, right.

SJ: 23:29 Waiting for this to dry. That was quick. He does an alright job even though it messes up after a couple months, but he does all right. I mean, this is crappy. I just let him do it whenever he wants, you know, whenever he wants to come in.

Aaron Henkin 23:46 Who's next? Oh, that's my part...That's our partner, Wendell.

SJ: Oh, okay.

AH: That's my co-producer. Hey, good morning! Um so yeah, I was just about to... it was interesting. You were talking about sort of some of the revelations you had about people's lives... who... oh, you got someone else

SJ: 24:15 (talks with stock man) Because the Dollar Store has 'em for like six even, so that's how much I sell 'em for. Or they probably sell 'em cheaper [unintelligible] because honestly, I don't have

[unintelligible] for 'em and there's just one customer that buys them. I buy them for him. There's nobody else and actually they're selling. 'Cause, I mean...

Stock man: Those are big in Ohio. Those are the USA Golds.

SJ 24:41 Oh, wow. Because we sell so much. Stock man: 24:43 So like you come over here, USA flies off the shelf. Mavericks don't. If you go over to Ohio, it's completely the opposite.

SJ: Well, is it cheaper?

Stock man: They're around that 15... they're about the same price as USA gold.

SJ: Because people ask what's the cheapest cigarettes to buy?

Stock man: [unintelligible] I have to look at an invoice. But yeah, that should be [unintelligible] SJ: Okay. [unintelligible] Alright, you need anything else from me?

Stock man: No, I'm fine.

SJ: Alright.

Aaron Henkin 25:24 All right. So here's the...this is I think gonna be a good way to sort of streamline things. I know you've got things to do. Let me ask you, I'll put it to you this way. Standing behind the counter here at this shop...

SJ: Okay, you're fine. See ya.

AH: Perfect. Standing behind the counter here at this shop, you see so many people come in and out the door, I'm sure you hear so many stories about people's lives. Talk about the stories you hear and sort of the understanding it gives you about this neighborhood, about what daily life is like here.

SJ: 26:12 Daily life here is, I mean, some of their stories are actually really sad. I mean, some of these people actually want to have a better life and some don't care. They like how they're living. And they really don't care at all, like, they keep doing the same. I mean, obviously, there's a lot of drug dealers around here, and I can't do anything about it. I mean, you know, you do what you want to do, that's not my business, as long as you don't bring it in my store. But a lot of people, they don't want to change their lives. They, they come out right out of prison, and they do the same thing over. So I don't feel bad for those people. And if they get caught, that's, you know, up to them. But there is some families, really nice families, like the lady that just came in with her, with her husband, they come in here every day. And they're a really nice couple, they come in by wings every, every evening. And they're, you know, those are just some of the people that come in here. There's actually a guy that lives right, right behind me. His name is Levi [Levi Phillips, see interview with Phillips] and he comes in here all the time. And anything I need, if I need a delivery taken, if I need some, you know, to pick up my medicine, or anything! I need, I

can call him and ask him. If he doesn't have like, he goes to dialysis here and there. So if he doesn't have dialysis, he'll come in here. And, you know, if I'm sad or in a bad mood, he comes and cheers me up. He's such a good add to the neighborhood and he refuses to move. Like he lives right behind. And he's, he's an older guy, but he's such a good person. Like, you know, he actually makes my day go by. You know, sometimes when he comes in here. He's such a good person. So that's one of the customers that I really, like, you know, and his family. I know his son; he comes in here sometimes. And his wife is a teacher at Stonewall, I think or Capital? I don't know, but it's a really good family. You know, different kinds of customers, you know, that I see every day.

Uh, Let me get this.

AH: Yeah!

SJ: Regular? Thank you, have a good one! Yeah, in the mornings, everybody buys blunts, and cigarillos, I guess, to get that in, in the mornings. But that's my number one seller in the morning. I sell a breakfast sandwich here and there, but not much. You know, I usually get busy in the evenings for food, because everybody obviously gets high and comes back to eat (laughs). And that's...that's the only way I could state that, but...

Aaron Henkin 28:48 Yeah, talk to me... It must be interesting. You must, you sell different stuff at different points in the day. Talk about, like, walk me through the day by sort of what what people are coming in to buy.

SJ 28:58 Well, people usually come in the mornings to buy cigarettes. Some people come in, I'm surprised there's like three or four guys that usually come in here and get coffee. And they come and get cigarettes and blunts and they leave. And they come back later and get something to eat, you know, it just depends on which day sometimes. Like Sundays, I usually will get a couple breakfast sandwiches and coffee too. But during the week, you know, everybody's usually going to work, getting on the bus, you know? But that's pretty much it. You know?

Aaron Henkin 29:32 How about like, I're there certain, like talk about over the course of a month? Like are there certain times that are busier than others?

SJ: 29:40 Yeah, usually the beginning of the month, obviously because most of this, most of these people in the community get paid around the first and the third of the month. Sometimes I'll stay a little later open because I know they get paid and they have money to spend so I stay over, open. I mean it's convenient for me and convenient for them. I don't really care, you know, to stay open. But yeah, during the end of the month, actually, right now, they're most everybody's mostly broke right now (laughs) like, you know, so usually they'll come in here and you know, some of them buy a whole box of blunts. But now when it's like the 15th, 16th coming, you know, they won't. They already spent all their money, by the fifth or sixth, they're all broke. I mean, it's bad. And then they come and ask for, you know, help, if they're short on some things, I let them go. But some of them you know, if they're hungry, I feed them, you know, I feel bad. So that's, that's one of my weakness is that I feel bad. And my dad tells me, you can't...actually he's the same way. So I mean, it's kind of hard, but he'll let people go for a couple \$100 in a month, you know, and they'll come back, some of them come back. But you know, there's always that chance that they don't come back. And there has been customers that don't come back, so. And some of them don't even come into the store anymore, because they owe us some money. And I'm like, are you



serious? Like, it's seven bucks, dude, you can come back, it's fine. But some of them are like that, you know,

Aaron Henkin 31:12 So much of running a successful business like this has got to be learning how to deal with different kinds of people. I mean, you think about a business like this, and you figure like, oh, and you just sit behind a counter and ring people up. But I mean, it's about making relationships, it's about drawing boundaries. Talk about what you've learned about, about people and about how to... I mean, I mean, you must be kind of a... need to be kind of like a psychologist as well!

SJ: 31:43 Well, you have to be very patient. I mean, these customers, you can't be rude. Because they'll feel that and they, they have other options, they can go to other stores. I mean, you know, there's a dollar store, like a couple streets down. There's a Parmar that just opened. I mean, they have, they have other options, so you want the customer to come back. You don't want them, you know, some of them, they do call me rude, because, or they call me, you know, I don't want to say it, but they, because the reason is because I don't like people taking advantage, like, you know, because I'm a small person, and I'm a female, you know, it's just, it's just how it is. You know, they try to take advantage. And I told them, I tell some of them, like, you know, it is what it is! You know, you come in here, you respect me, show me respect, and I show you respect, period, you know, I mean. And it's, it's gone a long way, you know, some of them had to really get used to me, because they really thought that I was just being mean, but I was just trying to tell them, there's, there's boundaries, you know. You can't pass, you know, there's a line. And they I mean, it's just the same regular customers every day, they come usually most of them buy the same things. I know what they want, you know, some of them. They buy, if they buy something different then I know, because, I'm like, who are you buying this for? Or, you know, you're not buying this for yourself. Because I've been here so long. It's just, I know, my customers now, it's how it is. And they're not used to something different. You know, when I, when different person is in here, they don't like it because they don't know what they want. And they don't know how to ask them, "Hey, can I get this? And I'll come back later," you know? I don't know. That's just how the...

Aaron Henkin 33:30 Um, tell me more about, about your family about your dad about sort of what he told you about? I mean, do you remember-- you were four years old--do you remember coming here to the US? Or, like, what has your dad told you about the story of, of how and why your family came here?

SJ: 33:57 Well, main reason is we came back here is because you know, there's not... My dad actually owned a business back home. And it was actually really, doing really good. And we left and just mainly, main reason is because, you know, it's just start...business started going down and my half-sister actually lived here. That's why we moved to West Virginia from Dallas, you know, and my dad wanted to take care of her more. And be in her life. So we came back here and, you know, he--My dad just wanted me to come in, you know, see how life is, have a better life... because there with...Actually my husband, he's a dentist and you know, he...there a dentist is not... doesn't make as much as money as a dentist here, obviously. So he's trying to get recertified and he wanted me... My dad wanted me to just go ahead and get into the school system here and learn because I'll have so much more opportunities. Because now with my degree, I know I can go to another country and probably make much more money. But I'd just rather stay in the US and just, you know, finished my schooling become, you know, a lawyer, hopefully. But yeah, I just, I don't know, it's, it's different. It was it... My dad always taught me to be a hard worker. And, you know, all my siblings work. My sister is actually in WVU, she's graduating in May. She's actually a criminology major too. And she works from like, six in the morning, every day almost. And she has like, 21 hours in school. So she's doing pretty good. And my brother works. My other brother, he's in Marshall. So, you know, he, he taught us all that you have no other option, you're going to college, and you're going to have a job. And that's what my dad showed us, is that you have to be a hard worker. And my mom. My mom actually helps my dad over there at the store sometimes. And, you know, and there's actually an

employee that comes there to here sometimes and helps us out. So, I mean, we're trying to manage it, you know.

Aaron Henkin 36:08 Is there something you did that your dad tells you over and over again? Like a thing that he always says to you? SJ: 36:14 Yeah, don't give up because I was close to like, in schooling, I started as a bio major. And I was thinking I was gonna go become a dentist, and I was like, "Oh, this is not for me." So I...[Levi Phillips walks in] That's Levi.

AH: Okay.

SJ: Come here, Levi! This is one of my favorite customers, guys. That's the one I was just telling you about. He just came out of dialysis. Did you just come out dialysis? Yeah, he's a little weak right now. So well, talk to him.

Aaron Henkin 36:42 Yeah, sure. Hey, good morning, Mr. Levi. My name is Aaron. This is Emily.

EH: Hi! I saw you at the Triangle District talk at Reverend Watts' church.

LP: Yeah, yeah.

EH: So he was one of the activists against the urban renewal to break up the Triangle District and gave a great talk at Reverend Watts' church about that.

Aaron Henkin 37:03 We just spent an hour talking interviewing Reverend Watts yesterday afternoon.

LP: Oh, did you?

AH: Yeah, really great guy.

LP: Really smart person.

AH: Yeah. We're here for a week actually, interviewing all kinds of folks from around the West Side, including Sali here, who Sali was speaking very highly of you. She says you make her day, sometimes when you come in here.

LP: I don't know why!

AH: Let me give you a chance to say a few words about Sali--about your relationship with her, sort of your interactions with her.

SJ: Look at his shirt! [Levi is wearing a Levi's shirt]

LP: 37:36 She is my...she's my granddaughter. I consider her family. She's a really good person. She really is. Her dad is too. As a matter of fact, I think opening this store really helped this community, because we don't have a store. You know, and if you just want to come out and get some milk or something, instead of going all the way to Kroger's, and a lot of people in this community don't have cars. This is a... lower class. I don't know how to, how to say it, but the fact that they opened this store, you can have a walk rather than having to find a car, find somebody to, to give you a ride to Kroger's, or over there. But this is a really nice girl.

Aaron Henkin 38:37 How would you describe Sali's personality?

LP: 38:40 Sali has a personality that lets her get along with all types of people. She's going to be a lawyer. And when she is a lawyer, I'm gonna use her. But (laughs) she has a...

AH: She set a chair up for you there.

LP: I just got out of dialysis.

AH: Yeah, yeah. Take, take a rest.

LP: Oh, my car's out there running!

Aaron Henkin 39:09 Oh, you know, I'll let you go.

LP: I remember you from Rev. Watts' church.

EH: Yeah.

LP: Were you up here then too?

AH: No, I'm only here for the week. I'm actually here from Baltimore.

LP: You had a couple of guys with you.

EH: Yeah, I didn't know them, but I just came to the talk.

LP: Oh did you?

EH: Yeah. And are you a lawyer too?

LP: No. I barely graduated from college.

SJ: Oh, shut up, you have your Master's!

EH: (laughs)

AH: You need some help up?

LP: Yes. I need so

AH: Ready?

SJ: He was a good basketball player too!

AH: Yeah?

SJ: Well, still is probably.

LP: No, I'm 68 years old. I couldn't even bounce a basketball.

SJ: Aw.

39:52

END OF TAPE

00:00

AH: How long have you been here behind the counter?

SJ: Almost a year, yeah a year and a half. A year and a half. We opened like in June 2017. Yeah.

AH: How do you think this past year and a half of your life has changed you as a person?

SJ: It definitely taught me, like I said, patience because I wasn't, you know, you know, I'm very patient with the customers. A little bit more, uh, what's the word...more you know, I'm more understanding because just seeing other people's lives. Because when I used to serve I mean there's a different kind, you know, you get your low class, you get your high class, middle class people--you would see everybody. This is mostly of a low class, you know, area right here. I mean I don't know how to state that other than that you know. It's just, they really, some of 'em are just so sweet, you know, but some of them are just, I just learned a lot. You know, I'm very grateful. I'm very grateful for what I have and what I worked for and I got the opportunity to have a mom and dad. Most of these people don't have parents and don't have parents to lead them in the right way. When you see growing up your dad just selling drugs or doing whatever, what are you gonna do? What do you think is right? So I mean, I'm grateful that I had great parents and I'm grateful for my dad so much because he's the one that pushed me through to go into college and stay in college and you know, so I'm very grateful. Just seeing these people makes me appreciate everything I have and that's it, you know. That's all. I'm very grateful that I have the opportunity to open up my own little business with my dad's help cause a lot of people don't have that. And you know, so, that's it.

AH: Beautifully said. [phone rings] Look at that. Alright.

SJ: [answers phone, speaks in Arabic]

02:22

He said he was putting in the order so I said let me talk to you later.

AH: That was your dad on the phone?

SJ: Yep, yep.

AH: He keeps a pretty good close eye on you and helps you out with the business?

SJ: Oh yeah, me and my dad are best friends, like I swear like I really don't talk to a lot of people, I'm solo. I'm solo, I'm to myself. I just you know, I'm really close to my family, though. I'm really close to my family and I'm grateful that I have that relationship with my dad and my mom just if I...I'd rather go out with my mom than my friends. Like I love my mom and dad. They are really just you know, I don't know (laughs) I'm gonna get emotional! But yeah, that's, I mean. I really appreciate my parents a lot. I wouldn't be where I'm at right now. (cries) Sorry.

AH: Your dad must be really proud of you! I mean it must be a beautiful thing for him to see everything that you've accomplished.

SJ: I'm sorry.

AH: No, take your time!

SJ: I get so emotional (laughs).

AH: That's what happens when you love your mom and dad. That's alright! Take your time.

03:31

SJ: (laughs) Oh gosh. Yeah. Okay. (laughs) Sorry!

AH: That's alright!

SJ: I'm sensitive, I guess.

AH: They must be very proud of you, huh?

SJ: Yeah, my dad is proud of me. I mean I've come a long way and I've always been a really hard worker. Not to talk about myself or you know, but I'm...I work a lot. I don't have a social life anymore because I don't do anything but work. And hopefully when I get somebody to help me out more here then I will go back to what my goal is, like I said earlier.

AH: You shouldn't say that you don't have a social life. You just have a really interesting, unusual social life every day.

SJ: Well yeah, I see so much things and just hearing everybody's stories and stuff really makes it interesting, you know? I try to lead these people in the right way, but you know, some of them obviously don't listen. But some of them actually listen to me and come back and tell me, "Hey Sali, I stopped doing that." Because I feel like I'm some of these people's therapists here, I swear, I feel like a therapist. Like 80% of the time here, you know? And doing that internship really helped me, like I said earlier, in the prisons and seeing those different...they're just humans just like us, you know, that made mistakes. But yeah, I feel like a therapist here. I feel like I need one myself! (laughs)

05:05

AH: (laughs) Yeah. Never a bad idea! Well, it's been a delight talking to you. Before I turn the microphone off, any last words of wisdom you want to share with me?

SJ: Just be grateful for what you have because a lot of people don't have it what you have sometimes, you know? That's all.

AH: Um...

EH: Can I ask a question?

AH: Yeah, yeah, I'm sorry. Please! Yeah.

EH: So, are you plugged into a community of other immigrants, Palestinians, Arabic speakers here?

SJ: There's not a lot of Palestinians here. I think there are some Palestinian families in Huntington, but there's a lot of Syrians and I really, like I said, I don't talk to a lot of people, like I'm just to myself. I used to be in Dallas, there was such a huge Palestinian population, like it was so many Palestinians there. Like I felt like I was back home (laughs). Here it's not much, it's Syrians and they're always usually busy, you know. But no, in Dallas, I would usually go out and go with, because there was nothing but Palestinians there. But I don't know, I mean here I'm just always so busy, I could probably if I wanted to look around, find some, I probably would, you know, but I really don't have time. Like between my family and work, I don't have time.

06:51

EH: You kind of touched on this, but do you think, or how do you think your work here might help you be a better immigration lawyer?

SJ: Well, I mean I don't get a lot of immigrants in here, but I know there is a lot of immigration, like immigrants in West Virginia. 'Cause I see like Hispanics, I see Arabs. There's a lot of Syrian refugees that come, and I mean I don't think, I don't know if they get like a passport, or they get like citizenship? I don't know for sure. They probably get like a green card, but they probably don't get like a passport and they probably need help with that. Or like these Hispanics, there's, I've seen a lot of Hispanics here and I hear people speaking other languages that, I mean, they obviously are not gonna tell you, "Hey I don't have any citizenship" unless you are a lawyer, that they need you, you know. Obviously they're not gonna tell you, "Hey, I don't have...I'm not here legally," unless they need a lawyer. So, you know.

EH: But it seems like, I don't know what the lawyer equivalent is of a bedside manner, you know, like a doctor has a good bedside manner to talk to people, but it seems like you've cultivated that and that could help you as a lawyer.

SJ: Oh yeah, yeah. I know, like I said, I feel like a therapist, so, some of these people. I just feel like a lot of people feel comfortable telling me their problems because I'm willing to listen. I'm willing to give them my advice and I'm very blunt. Like I'll tell 'em right away, that's wrong and you should not do that! And that's why a lot of people like me here is because I'll tell 'em hey, I don't want to sugar coat it or anything. I'll just tell 'em straight away, that's wrong and you should not be doing that. And that's why a lot of people, and that's why I want to be a lawyer, 'cause I'll be like, no that's wrong! I don't want to be with somebody for doing something wrong. No I hate that, so...

08:51

END OF TAPE  
END OF INTERVIEW