



Ali Momani

Community Butcher

Lowell, Arkansas

Location: Lowell, Arkansas
Date: April 8, 2019
Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson
Transcription: Technitype Transcripts
Length: Thirty-two minutes
Project: South Asian Arkansas

Annemarie Anderson: Today is April 8th, 2019. I am in Lowell, Arkansas, with Mr. Ali Momani, and we are at his butcher shop, Community Butcher, where he sells halal meat.

Would you go ahead and introduce yourself for the recorder? Tell us your name and your birth date.

[0:00:19.4]

Ali Momani: Yes, my name is Ali Momani, and my birth date is 04/06/1971.

[0:00:25.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Thanks! And could you tell us where you grew up?

[0:00:29.4]

Ali Momani: I grew up in Jordan.

[0:00:31.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Could you talk a little bit about what it was like to live there?

[0:00:35.5]

Ali Momani: Similar to here, the life, the weather. We have peace, good school, good people there.

[0:00:44.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And what did your parents do for a living?

[0:00:47.2]

Ali Momani: My father was in the army, and my mom, she stay home.

[0:00:50.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, great. So did you have any kind of—any connection to butchers growing up?

[0:00:57.0]

Ali Momani: No.

[0:00:57.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. All right, cool! Well, tell me a little bit about some of your most fond memories of food growing up. What were some of the things that you ate that—

[0:01:08.0]

Ali Momani: Actually, I'm a chef. I studied a chef to be. I went to school to be a chef.

[0:01:10.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay! Cool! So, well, tell me a little bit about that. What made you decide to become a chef?

[0:01:17.6]

Ali Momani: Nothing. Just like to cook food. I went to school in Jordan to be a chef, and I came—I have studied for like four years.

[0:01:28.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay.

[0:01:28.9]

Ali Momani: And, yeah, I worked at the hotels, [unclear] Hotel, and I came here to the U.S.

[0:01:33.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. So what year did you—and what place did you study to be a chef in Jordan?

[0:01:39.2]

Ali Momani: Amman, the capital.

[0:01:41.3]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, cool. And what was it like to work in hotels in Amman as a chef?

[0:01:45.8]

Ali Momani: It's good. It's good money, good—it's good, good position to be a chef there.

[0:01:52.5]

Annemarie Anderson: What sort of things did you cook?

[0:01:54.3]

Ali Momani: Oh, like Middle Eastern food, different, it's not like the American food. It's different, very different, like Maqluba, Upside Down, Kabsa, Mansaf, all that. So all that, you know, with the chicken or beef, I mean chicken or lamb or goat. Actually, lamb was likely there. Yeah, that's it.

[0:02:16.9]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So when did you come to the United States?

[0:02:21.9]

Ali Momani: I came 1995.

[0:02:23.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. And where did you come to?

[0:02:26.3]

Ali Momani: Dallas.

[0:02:26.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Dallas. Okay. And what was your first impression of Dallas?

[0:02:31.6]

Ali Momani: It's beautiful. Beautiful city. Yeah, I love it there, and it's good, clean, big, big city, people nice. Everything was good at that time.

[0:02:41.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's good. And so you—did you come to be a chef there?

[0:02:45.5]

Ali Momani: No, I came just for to visit, to tourist, and I stay here. I was running a restaurant in Dallas, actually, and, yeah, before I move here.

[0:02:56.0]

Annemarie Anderson: What was your restaurant called?

[0:02:57.0]

Ali Momani: I was work for a company like Denny's. I was a manager there. IHOP, the [unclear], different kind of restaurant, and also there was Middle Eastern food, they called [unclear], I used to manage that restaurant and cook in it.

[0:03:15.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, cool.

[0:03:15.2]

Ali Momani: That's in Dallas, probably fourteen, fifteen years ago. [Laughter]

[0:03:19.0]

Annemarie Anderson: So how long did you stay in Dallas?

[0:03:21.3]

Ali Momani: Ten years.

[0:03:21.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. So what was it like—Dallas is a really big place, and I guess—well, my question would be, when did you make that transition from being somebody who works in restaurants and who cooks to being a butcher?

[0:03:39.4]

Ali Momani: Oh, we move here to Arkansas because my wife, she get a job at Walmart—

[0:03:44.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay.

[0:03:44.8]

Ali Momani: —and we have to move here. So we move here 2004, we stay for like three years, four years, and we move to Miami for five years, and we come back here. So I became a butcher because every time we need to go buy meat, we had to go to Dallas to get like halal meat, you know. We are Muslim, we have to have halal meat, cannot get any kind of meat. And we had to drive all the way to Dallas or Tulsa or Kansas City to pick up fresh meat, so that's why we came up with the idea to just open my own shop and serve the community here and make sure it's halal 100 percent and is fresh meat, not frozen or not—you know, just give it fresh the whole time.

[0:04:28.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah, definitely. Could you tell me a little bit about the process of like learning how to become a butcher?

[0:04:34.7]

Ali Momani: I learned from school and also I got some ideas from the Internet.

[0:04:40.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, cool!

[0:04:40.3]

Ali Momani: YouTubes, yes.

[0:04:42.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great!

[0:04:42.7]

Ali Momani: I got some ideas, but I have ideas. I'm a chef, so I know how to use a knife and how to cut the meat and everything, but for the people here, they have different cuts of meat. I have to go look at the YouTube to see how to cut it, you know.

[0:04:59.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That makes sense. So when did you open Community Butcher?

[0:05:03.2]

Ali Momani: I open last year in May, May 1st.

[0:05:07.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. And so you guys, did y'all move back to Bentonville in that—or Northwest Arkansas in that time period?

[0:05:13.8]

Ali Momani: Yes, we move. We came back in 2015 to Arkansas, so take me about four or five months to get set up the store and I open after that, yeah.

[0:05:24.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Well, could you talk a little bit about that process? I mean, it's kind of a big process to open up your own business.

[0:05:31.5]

Ali Momani: Yes. We had to go get the animals from the auction, have to find the goat and lamb from auction, and I keep it on the farm. We have farm in Centerton. And every time what I need, I see what I need for the week, I take it to the meat processing in Winslow, in Arkansas, so that's what they process the meat there, and I tell like what I need every week, see how much I need, or a month, and I'll take it there. We take to them live, and they will slice it there and I bring it back to my store.

[0:06:03.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. So are you present at the slaughterhouse?

[0:06:06.9]

Ali Momani: No.

[0:06:08.1]

Annemarie Anderson: No. Could you tell me a little bit about—so you own your own farm too?

[0:06:12.6]

Ali Momani: Yes. So the meat processing, they have to go by the Islamic way, so they have to see all the rules, and there's a guy from the USDA. They cannot do anything without him, and he has to be in the top. Anytime they want to kill, he has to be there. Even if they kill one chicken, he has to be there. They cannot do anything without him. So the guy, he really knows about Islam and he knows, you know, what need to be done before you kill it, and he will go the Islamic way. He's allowed to be saying the prayer on the animal before they kill it.

[0:06:44.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Could you talk about that process from start to beginning? Could you kind of describe it again for the recorder?

[0:06:51.4]

Ali Momani: Yes. Like the week, see how much I need to take, goat or lamb, to the meat processing, I go pick up my farm, I see what I need, I take it in my truck, I drop it off at the meat processing. Like if I drop it today, I have to make an appointment with them, you know, to know when I'm coming. So when I take it there, they will get it from my truck and they will slide it there, and they keep it there for twenty-fours, and they check the animals, make sure the animal is not sick, nothing wrong with the animals. I think after they kill it, they check the meat, see that the meat is good. If it's not, they will keep it, they will destroy it. If it's good, they'll give it to me. So everything is go by the

USDA, so they have to get approval and have to be stamped by the USDA. I cannot sell anything here without that stamp from the USDA.

[0:07:37.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. So after you get those kind of, I guess, carcasses, how do you—do you typically butcher to order?

[0:07:45.6]

Ali Momani: Yes. Like I bring it here, the whole goat, and the people that came, said, “I want one pound of leg,” or, “I want one pound of shoulder,” lamb chops, goat chops, “I want ribs,” so we do it by the order, what they ask for, so we cut it in front of them. We do everything fresh in front of them.

[0:08:02.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great.

[0:08:03.5]

Ali Momani: Yeah. And so like they have different cut, they have different order for them, so we have to do everything—I mean, sometimes even if you cut it and you have it like there, they will not buy it. They have like fresh cut, so you have to cut it in front of them. So you have to wait.

[0:08:14.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Could you talk a little bit about the relationships you've developed over the year that you've been open with people in the community?

[0:08:24.4]

Ali Momani: Yeah. I mean, I have a lot of customer, a lot of people from—even non-Muslim, I have like probably 90 percent of my customer they're non-Muslim, they're from India, and I have some Americans, some other cultures, people from Iran, from Arab. So everybody who come here, I have made a lot of friends, and even I have some people from Joplin, Fort Smith, they will come to buy halal meat from here, yeah. So we have a lot of— and this one year, my business has grown up probably like double times when I was open. It's getting bigger and bigger. And everybody like the meat. We always keep the quality for the meat. We always get like fresh meat, small animals, we get the young animals, not the older ones, so they need to be soft and taste good when you cook it, and its not going to take a long time to be cooked. So you have to keep the quality of the meat for them too.

[0:09:22.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Could you talk a little bit about—and I saw you earlier today at Pandiya's. Could you talk a little bit about the relationships you developed with some of the groceries and also—

[0:09:22.9]

Ali Momani: The restaurant?

[0:09:37.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Restaurants, yeah.

[0:09:38.1]

Ali Momani: I provide them with the goat, because that's what they use. They use the goat meat for the restaurant and community stores. So they order every week, but they have lots of different orders. Sometimes it's keema or sometimes it's goat chops. So I will go like every Monday, see what they need, and I prepare the order for them from today from tomorrow until Thursday I'll deliver the meat for them. Like I said, they have different amounts how much they need per week, what kind of meat they need, what kind of cut, so we have to go collect these orders on Monday and have it ready for them by Thursday.

And the grocery store, I have two grocery store, By the whole animal, the whole carcass. So, yeah, and the old machine there, they would cut it, but it's halal. I mean, and it's fresh. They get it fresh the whole time.

[0:10:33.5]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:10:34.9]

Ali Momani: So, before, they used to, even the grocery store, they used to go to Dallas or Kansas to pick up their meat. From here to Dallas, about six hours' drive, and

sometimes the summer, you know, it's going to be bad, the heat, and you don't how long be having the meat there, you don't know when they killed the meat, so sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. So, I mean, now that's what we do, try to give like everybody fresh meat.

[0:11:00.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. Could you talk a little bit about—I guess in more detail. So you mentioned you use a meatpacking place in Winslow? Could you tell me what their names are and then how you kind of found them and developed that relationship?

[0:11:15.1]

Ali Momani: It's AR, they called meat processing AR, and I found them in the Facebook, I mean Googles. So I was looking for someplace where they can sell the meat, and every time they have to be USDA. I mean, you cannot—anyplace here, that's the only one they have USDA. And I went and talked to them, and I've been doing business with them since I started, you know, been like a year now. And we have a good relationship with them. They're very nice people. They do whatever I ask them to do. Yeah, they're good. They're very good people.

[0:11:51.3]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:11:51.2]

Ali Momani: Yeah. And like when I said, you know, the USDA guy, so he will make sure it's halal and make sure they say the prayer in it and make sure they kill it the right way, and like I said, he has to be there every time they want to kill anything halal. He has to be there.

[0:12:08.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. Could you talk a little bit about your day-to-day kind of schedule here at the shop and what you do?

[Phone Rings. End of Track 1]

[Begin Track 2]

[0:12:23.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about the day-to-day operations of your butcher shop?

[0:12:29.7]

Ali Momani: Yes, we have fresh meat every Tuesday and Friday, so like today I drop the goat, Monday. I drop the goat to the meat processing. I'll go pick it up tomorrow. I do my orders. I have until Thursday to finish the order, deliver the order to the restaurant. On Friday and Wednesday, I drop the goat for the week, for the weekend, for the shop here, and I'll go pick up and drop it off on Wednesday morning, go pick it up on Friday

morning, and just if I have some orders to have ready for them, I made really an order for them and cut it the way they want it. They'll be able to come pick it up most of the time, like probably 90 percent of the time, the customer, they will call for the order before, and so I'll tell them when it's ready, and they come pick it up. So I work from Tuesday until Sunday, and we open from 12:00 until 8 o'clock PM, except Sunday we are open from 10:00 to 5:00. That's BC—so I'm the only one working here, so that's what keep me busy the whole time.

[0:13:39.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah!

[0:13:39.0]

Ali Momani: Yeah. That's what it's about.

[0:13:41.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. So tell me a little bit about—we kind of talked about this. Well, tell me a little bit about—I think this is something that I'm interested in. What—because I've talked mostly to people who are Indian, and could you talk a little bit about the community here, the Muslim community here in Northwest Arkansas, and what you provide for them?

[0:14:10.4]

Ali Momani: For the community and the Muslim community, we don't have that much people here, probably two, three hundred people, but we provide them with—we have a mosque in Bentonville. We go there. And every time, you know, we have—like next month we have the month of Ramadan, that special month for the Muslim. They are to be fasting the whole day. So people that [unclear] with the meat, halal meat, they come pick it up.

And also we have another holiday they call Qurbani, like when they have to slide a goat, so I'll provide them with that service too. Last year I provided for the service, so they didn't have to go look for a place to slide it. They didn't have to look for the goats. I have the goat, I have the farm, I have the butcher ready for them. So they just go to my farm, they do everything, they do the prayer there, they do all everything. So I save them a lot of time, I save them a little bit of money, you know, and, yeah, make it easy on them.

But before I open my shop, before I provide this service to them, they used to go to the farms and sometimes take them like sixteen, seventeen hours to finish this Qurbani, what they're doing. Last year, I think I be done by 2 o'clock. Everybody was like have their meat, have everything done. Yeah, it was like very fast to them. It was like happy with the service I provided to them.

[0:15:34.7]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet.

[0:15:35.8]

Ali Momani: Yeah, because I have the goat there, so just go pick up the goat and just [unclear]. We just right there people have two butchers, they slide it there and cut it and give it to them. Probably take, the whole thing probably take them like twenty to thirty minutes. So everybody just, you know, was happy. Before, they tell me it takes them like three, four hours just to do one animals, because, you know, after we slide it, you have to skin it, you have to clean everything inside, so that takes a lot of time, and sometimes you have to hang it up. There is no place to hang it. You have to go under the tree. It's going to be very difficult for them to clean it, skin it and clean it, you know, cut the meat too. When the meat will be hard, it will be hard to cut for them, because they don't have the right knife, don't have the right equipment to do that.

[0:16:23.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So could you describe for us your farm, what you have? Could you talk about like what it looks like and your animals?

[0:16:34.5]

Ali Momani: Yeah, just we have—my farm is in Centerton, and I rent it from somebody, so they have a family there that'll take care of the animals. They have everything. They have cow, we have horses, we have chicken, we have the goat, the lamb, and also they have different animals, all kind of animals they have there. And the people, you know, this is my friend, he's an American, him and his wife, they just retired and they just take care of the [unclear] there, the farm.

[0:17:05.2]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. What's your friend's name?

[0:17:06.1]

Ali Momani: What's his name?

[0:17:08.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Mm-hmm.

[0:17:08.8]

Ali Momani: Dale.

[0:17:11.8]

Annemarie Anderson: D-a-l-e?

[0:17:13.2]

Ali Momani: Mm-hmm.

[0:17:13.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Great! And what's his last name?

[0:17:15.9]

Ali Momani: I have no idea. [Laughter]

[0:17:15.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay, that's okay. How'd you find them?

[0:17:19.6]

Ali Momani: I was looking for goat on Craigslist, and I call him and I found out he's doing this for a living, so he go to the auction, he buy it, and he sell it to the people. So now after that, he started, we just worked together, so he just go to the auction, he will pick up the animals, because he has experience and he knows what he gets, so he just go to the auction every time. Actually, I just sent him. He will go pick it up and take it to his farm.

[0:17:44.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Oh, that's great!

[0:17:46.0]

Ali Momani: Yeah, so help a lot, yeah.

[0:17:46.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. So he gets the goats for you from auction?

[0:17:50.7]

Ali Momani: We buy the goat from the auction, yes.

[0:17:53.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Cool.

[0:17:52.4]

Ali Momani: Auction and farmers. We have a lot of famers too. We know they have a lot of animals, and I have farmers in Oklahoma and Joplin, Missouri, and Fort Smith, so I have a bunch. Every time they will call me, “We have some goats, some lamb.” I just go pick it up.

[0:18:09.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That’s great. So could you talk a little bit about—do you know some of those farmers? Could you talk a little bit about them?

[0:18:17.2]

Ali Momani: No, I just know everybody, you know, from Craigslist. I call them. I deal with them one time. After that, we became friends. Every time they have something, they just call me. I go pick it up. So, you know, sometimes I don’t know where they get it from, but, you know, everybody—sometimes like hobby to them, sometimes like a business to them. So, yeah, so every time they have something good, they will call me. I will go pick it up. I would say I meet them through Craigslist or some friend, he know them, he will give me the number, I will call them and I will go and talk. Yeah. So I have a lot of friend and farmers, you know. Every time when I need something, I just call

them. If they have it or they can get it for me somewhere else, they'll get it. I'll go pick it up.

[0:18:58.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:18:58.9]

Ali Momani: Especially in the winter, it's hard to get because the auction is once a month, and, you know, cannot buy too much because they get sick, you lose them, so that's why the winter I was depending on the farmers. So like I have black [unclear], all the time, they tell me I have this week three, four, I have this week two, I have one, so that's what I was doing through the winter, because winter, it's very hard to see. This is my first year, too, my first year experience. I never did this before, so, yeah, I have to learn everything. I mean, the winter was hard to learn.

[0:19:35.9]

Annemarie Anderson: It sounds like it would be really complicated.

[0:19:37.7]

Ali Momani: Yes. I mean, you know, for next year, I think it'll make it easier because like I said, this is my first year in the business and I learn every day. Every day, is something new. And this winter [unclear] because I don't know the auction is going to be

once a month, and I don't know if the price is going to be high, too, because they're not **whole a lot**, you know. When they're **whole alot**, the price will go up.

[0:19:59.5]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. What were the most important things that you've learned this winter?

[0:20:04.5]

Ali Momani: You have to keep in stock, yeah, because that's the hard part, to keep animals in stock. And like what I said, if you buy too much and they get cold, they get sick, it's easy to get sick and they pass it to each other, and you lose a lot. So that's another thing, too, so you have to have like separate two rooms to keep the sick one and to keep the good one, not mix them up together.

[0:20:32.0]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely.

[0:20:33.3]

Ali Momani: Yes, so we have to keep them apart from each other.

[0:20:35.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Could you talk a little bit about your—like, well, tell me, I guess, more specifically, to get some specifics, how many animals do you typically have to keep at one time to fulfill all the orders?

[0:20:56.0]

Ali Momani: So it depends. Like if you go to auction, they have like cheap, like the price, sometimes I get like thirty, forty, fifty. So depends on the price. Sometimes it go so high, I cannot get like—probably get ten or five. Well, what I need, I have to get what I need. If they're expensive, but if it is not, I will get more, like just to keep it for the future. But like what I said, you know, the winter will be high price. Really, you just get what you need. So I have to know. I figure out what I need for the week, and I will get for the whole month, from the auction. But if I need more, like what I said, I get some farmers, I'll call them or they call me. I'll just go pick up.

[0:21:38.4]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. And how many pounds of meat do you typically sell in a week?

[0:21:43.1]

Ali Momani: It depends. Sometimes we get busy week, sometimes we get slow week, but around 400, 500 pounds.

[0:21:51.6]

Annemarie Anderson: That's pretty good for one person.

[0:21:52.9]

Ali Momani: Yes.

[0:21:54.2]

Annemarie Anderson: Yes, definitely.

[0:21:55.2]

Ali Momani: So that's with the restaurant and everything. But it was good.

[0:21:59.4]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. Could you talk a little bit about—we kind of talked about this, and you kind of mentioned this a little bit, but I kind of want to expound upon it and make it bigger. It seems to be that there are immigrant communities—there are lots of immigrant communities, there's lots of really beautiful diversity in Northwest Arkansas. And I find it interesting that these immigrant people mix, because their food, the food that they grew up with was familiar to them is similar, so like there are Latino people and Latino markets, and sometimes Indian people go and buy spices at or Indian people buy halal goat from you because they know that they can have a reliable source of meat and they don't have to go to Dallas. Could you talk a little bit about the different people who shop here? You kind of already mentioned that, but is there anybody who kind of sticks out in your mind, any customer?

[0:23:01.2]

Ali Momani: I have a regular customer that came to get like meat every week, so like every week they will come get the meat from here. And like what I said, you know, most of the people from India, because the wife, she stay home and she will cook home, so they not go eat at restaurant or nothing, so they just come like every week and they get like, say, ten-pound goat, five chicken. So they take the meat for the whole week because they eat at home. That's what they do all the time. They don't go to restaurant. Maybe they go to the restaurant like once a week or two times a week, but not like us, you know. We're working, and my wife, she's working, so most the time we eat outside and I cook here.

So there's halal Indian grocery store in Bentonville, they have like four or five, but they just come get the meat from here and they get the groceries from there, so I don't have anything what they need. I have just different spices here, that's all. But the main thing in mine, I'm focusing on meat, the halal meat and the fresh meat. I'm not focusing about the groceries or nothing else. So that's what I said, a lot of people, they came every week, they get the meat from me from here, and they get for the whole week. Sometimes they get for the neighbors, you know. "I'm going to get meat." The neighbors, they will get for them too. So that's, yeah, I think that's the question? [Laughter]

[0:24:21.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah! Could you talk a little bit about, too, about some of the products that you sell? I see on your wall you have a lot of different Middle Eastern things.

[0:24:31.5]

Ali Momani: Yeah, Middle Eastern stuff, like hummus, freekeh. This is like the way they cook back home. So like I said, when we don't have a lot of people from the Middle East here, we have like probably six, seven, eight families, so that's what the most stuff they use. When they go to Dallas, that's what they get, and also get the bread, Arabic bread. So that's where we get—but the Indian, they use different spices, different ingredient, everything, so it's different. So that's only for the Middle Eastern people, and like I said, we don't have a lot of them. Just, we have a little bit here. So that's most I think what we use back home.

[0:25:13.0]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great. So it's a smaller community?

[0:25:16.6]

Ali Momani: Yes. We don't have a lot people here. I'm Arabic from Jordan, so we don't have Arab people here. So even in the mosque, probably we have, like I said, probably seven, eight families, Arab people. Most is from India and Pakistan. It's not a big city for Arab people here. I mean, if you go to Dallas, see a lot of them. Here, because everybody

just came to work for Walmart, you know, that's what they do, just work at Walmart and not a lot of them here.

[0:25:16.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Do you ever kind of miss the company of fellow Arabic people? Is it difficult?

[0:25:52.9]

Ali Momani: No, I mean, doesn't matter to me. Like I said, I used to work in restaurants, I managed a restaurant, so really this is—you work for your own business, you know, just you be free. You do whatever you want, whatever you want. You be your own boss of yourself, you know. But you have to take care of the business at the end of the day. You have to make sure everything is good.

I have a son, he's ten years old, so we have to go pick him up from school, take him to school, so I have nobody to—my wife, she's at work at Walmart. So the kind of life here, we like it. It's quiet, not too much crimes. My wife, she like it here. My son, he like it here. So we like it here. We love it. It's quiet, very quiet, no big crimes. Like I said, we used to live in Miami, and Miami is a different world.

[0:26:40.9]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet.

[0:26:41.6]

Ali Momani: Yeah, it is.

[0:26:41.8]

Annemarie Anderson: Did you work in the restaurant industry in Miami too?

[0:26:44.3]

Ali Momani: I do. I was working for [unclear] business. I was working in the food business, was working the wholesale business, like flea market. I was selling stuff at the flea market in Miami.

[0:26:59.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay.

[0:27:01.6]

Ali Momani: But here, to the food business, you know, just take a break. [Laughter]

[0:27:05.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah.

[0:27:06.9]

Ali Momani: So I like it here, so it's good. Maybe the future I'll open my own restaurant here again, so we'll see how it's going to go. If I got some more help, you know. Hard to find help here.

[0:27:17.1]

Annemarie Anderson: I bet. If you opened a restaurant, what kind of a restaurant would it be?

[0:27:20.7]

Ali Momani: It's going to be Arabic restaurant, Middle Eastern food, yeah. You know, we have halal, falafel, hummus, shawarma, so nobody have it here. No, any restaurant has like this here. I mean, they have one in Bentonville, but it is not like. But, yeah, like we do kebabs, shish [unclear]. Yeah, it'll be like Middle Eastern style, yeah. I think it will work here, but like I said, if I had more people, because it's going to be a lot of work. And I need a lot of help, because the way you cook the food, prepare the food, it take time and it need people know what they're doing. So, really, if you mess up anything, they will have to throw everything away. So it's hard to cook our food it's not like the American food, just throw everything on the grill and put on the plate. No. [Laughter]

[0:28:15.0]

Annemarie Anderson: It's a little more process to it.

[0:28:16.2]

Ali Momani: Yeah. I mean, you know, sometimes you're going to cook, take you like probably two hours to prepare the one dish, so if you do for your family, take about two hours, hour and a half to prepare the fish to be done from start to finish, take about an

hour and a half to two hours. Yeah, like I said, it's a lot of work, but its delicious, so everybody like it. [Laughter]

[0:28:39.1]

Annemarie Anderson: Yeah. Going back to, I think, some of these things that we see here, are there ever any, I guess, requests that people ask you to do?

[0:28:50.6]

Ali Momani: Yes, request the semonlina. That's where they make the sweet. And freekeh, they eat with the white rice. It's like whole wheat, wheat with rice. And also grape leaves, you know the stuffing with the rice and meat. Yeah, the people, they use this a lot. You know, because the hummus, they use hummus part of the time, everything in the morning, and also the falafel, this is easy to make, the falafel too. So, yeah, a lot of people use this, people we know. Even the Pakistani and Indian, they will use the falafel and the hummus, they'll use it, too, because it's healthy. A lot of people who go on a diet will tell them take this because it's [unclear] and it's healthy. Yeah, so.

[0:29:46.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. Could you tell me a little bit about—I mean, I think you kind of talked about this, but I want you to reflect. What do you think that you, over this year that you've been open, that you provide for Northwest Arkansas that wasn't there before?

[0:30:06.8]

Ali Momani: The halal, fresh halal meat, because nobody has lamb or goat here before, so a lot of people go to Sam's to buy a frozen lamb or goat, so provide them with the fresh meat, like they get it every week, two times a week. Before, they don't. So I think that's the best thing for them. And like what I said, have a lot of customer from different culture, different religion, so I have a lot of American, Mexican or— so everybody, you know, they will come to try the goat or the lamb. A lot of people said they never had it before, but when they try it, they will come back, they will come back for it, especially the lamb chops. When they do the lamb chops, they grill it, it's good, they come back for it.

[0:30:50.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Definitely. Well, let's see. What do you think— I mean, you've already talked about like you want to kind of expand and open a restaurant, but what do you want for the future of this business?

[0:31:06.0]

Ali Momani: I'd like to be like a little bit bigger, you know. Now try adding the beef. I'm getting—before I used to not have beef. Now I'm butchering the beef to sell the kind of steak like T-bone, sirloin, filet mignon. And because all the people ask for it and they want it halal, so that's why I'm selling the cow, to slide the cow, and I'm start sell it here. So we'll see how it's going to go. I'm start to sell this like two weeks ago.

[0:31:34.8]

Annemarie Anderson: That's good.

[0:31:35.3]

Ali Momani: I already sold the first cow, I'm doing the second one this week, because like what I said, a lot of people, they like beef and they like, you know, the cut steak, but they like to be halal, you know, because we have the Muslim people. And that's what I provide to them right now, the beef, even the fresh beef, too.

[0:31:55.1]

Annemarie Anderson: That's great.

[0:31:55.4]

Ali Momani: Yeah, see how it's going to go right now. [Laughter]

[0:31:59.9]

Annemarie Anderson: Good luck.

[0:32:00.7]

Ali Momani: Thank you.

[0:32:02.6]

Annemarie Anderson: Is there anything that we kind of hadn't talked about that you'd like to talk about?

[0:32:06.9]

Ali Momani: Nothing.

[0:32:08.7]

Annemarie Anderson: Okay. Well, thank you so much.

[0:32:10.6]

Ali Momani: Thanks so much.

[0:32:10.7]

Annemarie Anderson: That's for talking to me.

[0:32:11.5]

Ali Momani: Thank you.

[End of interview]