**Interview with Marie Assaad**

**2014**

**TAPE 1**

**Nicola Pratt:** Can I ask where and when you were born?

**Marie Assaad:** Yes. I was born in Cairo in ... in the old family's house in Faggarah, which used to be the aristocratic area, which is now no more ... it's even the lower middle class area. But we were opposite the big house of Butrus Basha Ghali who was the prime minister of Egypt , so it just (??). And I was born the fourth girl in 1932. So, the thing is, I'm the only surviving member of the family now. Because my brother even died more than a year ago. But my eldest sister and ... so... have really... and I have really... I mean all of them have died at a much younger age than I am. So this is... I was considered the unlucky one because I was the fourth girl and also because I was born the year my grandfather, who was the idol of my mother's grandmother, had died. So this ... I think by hind sight I would analyze I feel more pressure so that's why I rebelled against any form of pressure all my life. I was always very upset about being completely oppressed from them (??) and I always felt there is something liberating power in life that we have to work for. And that's why in anything that dealt with this issue attracted me from the moment. The other thing.. also because of the fact that I was the fourth girl, and is to be seen and not to be heard, I learned how to listen well. And these would begin two very big assets in my life from my work. Of course I was also privileged because it was kind of a liberating process. My elder sister got married at the early age of 17 and never went to university. My second sister went to... diploma school and married ... met her husband. It was a big drama that the husband was not chosen for her but she met her husband. My third sister also went to the American University in Cairo and then also worked with the Americans and married an American. So by the time I came I experienced this liberation. It was a very big course of liberation where my sisters were very lucky to find people from either from the family or society who were helping them to be liberated. So I found it resonating. And I was the one that was able as a result, not only to go to university and work and all this, but also to accept a job abroad. So that was the process and I .. always ... this always reminds me that we as families we cannot compare us... all the girls are liberated. It's a process. And usually the older people pay the price for this. I discovered this when I had to deal with female gentile mutilation. Because the women would say Yes, I have been circumcised but my younger sister has not been. this was always the kind of thing that people don't realize it. In many families this liberation process takes place without anybody's help. Just the fact that the older person get's exposed to something and then somebody... cumulative process. So, to tell you this, I joined all the extracurricular activities in the school because I liked to do things for people and (??) and have fun. I enjoyed my lessons but I enjoyed going on trips, I enjoyed playing games. I enjoyed class discussions, I enjoyed the international club to discuss international issues. These are all the activities. These all prepare. Ok. I ... on this background I think, why I was picked up or I was interested in those topics. because I was ready for this. I was sensitive to what people need. And this is why I worked after that. I worked twice engineer. Once at the beginning of my career 1952 with the worldwide WCA and ... this is when I started. and then in... and then I was asked to be the first woman to serve as deputy general secretary in the world council of churches in 1980. So, It's... yes... forget this. So, but in between, this was all the process of liberation. And.. this ... being exposed to international made me very much sensitive to women's issues. Made me very sensitive to even the issue of female gentile mutilation because I thought that it was the fate of every Egyptian girl to be circumcised. To be tormented. And then in 1952, when I joined the Word wide WCA they asked me to attend a closed session of the status women's commission which had just been formed in the United Nations. and they discussed ... they said we're discussing... this was Western women, a horrendous custom of mutilating girls because of their ... and getting rid of what they called extra. and it was so condemned it was to me an eye opener. I couldn't believe that this was something that we took for granted and all this so I started reading about it. and when I came back home, I started telling my friends about that and they'd say it doesn't exist anymore. The educated people either they were spared this custom and so they didn't know anything about it and they were not interested. they talked about illiteracy, they talked about early marriage, they talked about all other subjects but not about mutilating girls. and then I said, let me read about it. I started reading about it. And then I said let me ask the women. And I was so shocked that all the women that serve us in any way, not highly educated but even the (??) classes said of course, I have been circumcised and my daughter is circumcised and it's natural. And it took me quite... accumulated so much information ... it took me quite a while to confess to my colleagues and others to say this is an important subject. You cannot talk about illiteracy and cut the bud of every girl. Then in 1978, a friend of mine was working with UNICEF and the UNICEF was asked by the world health organization to find somebody to write a paper about practice of female ... they called it female circumcision then... in the different areas. And she said, you spoke so much about it and we made fun of you. Alright, write a paper. By sheer chance I had collected a lot of information and I was with working with a research center at the American University in Cairo so they asked me to go to a (??)... to go to the (??) and offer them a scholarship for somebody from Egypt to study on population and family planning, because we were working on that in our research. So they tell me, look why don't you go. this is a good idea, you're working on family planning, go to this (??) I said that's wonderful. I did and I got the opportunity to look at all the literature review that ever was written on this subject. which I never looked at here. Then I came back with a suitcase full of notes on female circumcision and how it was practiced and most of the ... what was written was written about women in Sudan and (??) Nothing about what is written here. But because there was hardly anything. very little except you know Nawal al-Sa'dawi, who still continues to be the feminist, she was (??) to tell about it, she was a doctor, and she dared speak about it and people condemned her for that. But I came back, nobody was interested and I had to do ... to finish my paper on family planning, so I put everything in a suitcase and forget all about it. then this friend of mine from UNICEF said Marie, (??) has asked UNICEF for somebody to write a paper on this and you are... this is your chance. You said you wanted to write something about it. Here is your chance. And the meeting will be in Sudan in February 1979. In the middle of all other responsibilities and work, I did this whole study. With the family planning center about the practice and a historical study and I had a colleague who was from the AL-Azhar university, so he gave me the views of the study on what Islam says about it and I'd tell him about what the traditions have said about it. We exchanged information. And I was able to write a paper. That created a sensation. That's how I first got to be known. And I was quoted in different magazines and this is how it first ... I realized that this is how.. and now I became miss FGM. and that's it. Ok. we did talk about it and people were condemning us and we had all kinds of things. But, comes... the international conference on population and development in 1994, and... there was a big... because the first day of the conference it was CN I think.. that showed ... dared to show a girl being circumcised. and shouting that this was cruel. and the media picked it up and it was a big scandal. The people that were ... believe me ... said we have to do something about it. All the activities.. and over night they said, you are the only one who knew about it we have to have a group and you have to be responsible for doing it. So, to make a long story short, we formed a task force to work on this and we had wonderful women activists who never were interested in this. They were interested in human rights. They were interested in ... corruption, interested in abuse of women, all this, but never in this subject. But when they got interested they became very productive. and we had ... we worked five years. Four years with a research center for that ... dealing with it legally, dealing with the NGOs, (??) groups and all this. and it really ... after five years, I realized, it is not just building an empire, because I was... the funding agency wanted to give us money and I told them I'm not building an empire. It's a movement and it has to be of the people. and so the NGOs that had been attending some of them were very active, started to pick it up and it became in every village (??) there was a group of people who said no. and that's what wanted to happen. and we realized in our world it's not a medical issue. It's a social culture issue. and so we shifted our (??) completely. and by listening to the women. and... because before we used to bring religious leaders and a doctor to talk about the bad effects of this and that and we were not credible. but when we listened to the women and got their messages and answered them according to this it became much more effective. And until now, our aim was to make sure that it is not an issue that all the country... we are fighting the whole country that says yes to it. And the media was shy about it. but that we have to make sure that the country was saying no to it. and this is what's happening now. they shifted through many stages. and when we felt that we were doing it away from the government and all NGOs it did not work and the ministries were not working with us neither the ministry of health, they attended and they said this is wonderful. You have the courage to do it. but they never took (??) but we were very lucky to reach the national council of childhood and motherhood. that was headed by Mrs. Suzan Mubarak, it's true, but the general secretary is still a very active person until now. And ... at the beginning she told me, I don't believe it, I don't want any party that has not (??) which she got obviously like wildfire. and now it became... I'm not worried about it anymore. we still have many people for circumcision and we still have setbacks that some of the Islamic groups say it's an Islamic practice. We still have the patriarchal issues of women that have to please the male and so on, but in every area there is people who have the courage of the villages or the small a reas... who say not over my dead body will I allow my daughter or anybody... and that was what we wanted. And also the media no more said for FGM but ... and so it's going on. I'm telling you this because I think this is how we build our reputation. We... and I think the most important thing is building cooperation and listening to people. and that's what happened. So when I left... I left all this in the hands of the people before. and when I was away in Geneva I was doing something very different but it was always, as a woman, they wanted me to be involved in all issues of women. And so... there I've learned that listening to the people and having women define themselves and not men define them, and having the different (??) about women and all this, this also was part of this process. It was not FGM as such but how women define themselves and how men define them. And how the different religions define women, and ... what ... this all goes to parenting. The patriarchal values that are still with us until now. and it's not only in Africa or Asia or the Middle East. But also in Europe. So this is how we made a global l view and this is how it goes on. and so when I came back in 1986 and I said no more jobs and no more research, I'm going to be just a volunteer and see what issues would attract me, then this is when the association for the protection of the environment was formed in Muqqattam and they involved me in this so I did it. I followed the same principals there, I just really formed groups that needed to express themselves. and this is what's happening. I got to be known about these two subjects like I said but there are so many people now that know and I am very happy that I've never left a place where I said no body is going to pick it up. Always someone to pick it up and it's being picked up and the issues are still there. So that's it.

**NP:** Could I ask you, could I go back first and ask you about when you were younger and you said you were involved in lots of extracurricular activities. Was this through your school or through the church or... and what sort of activities were there? Was it normal at that time for girls to be involved in..

**MA:** No I was always (??) volunteers. Doing volunteer activities. It was never with the church. I was there... until now I never became a church worker. Even when the world council of churches asked me to serve with them, I said I don't ... I cannot represent the church because I've never been in church work. But I've been in NGOs. volunteer in NGOs. And always my activities were volunteer in this, the church was not yet active in these things but when I came back from Geneva, I was asked to help the church to develop its ... development program. And work with groups and this is... so it's on the contrary. It's my community education and this is what helped me to serve the church and not the church helped me to (??).

**NP:** What sort of NGOs were there at that time?

**MA:** The first one when I was brought up and that was the YWCA. Young Women's Christian Association. Because they used to have leadership developed in the schools and as a little girl I was what they call (??) so I learned about YWCA, I learned how to develop groups, I learned how to... organize programs. I learned how to organize trips. how to listen to people. All this in school when... so that it. And then after that, there was so many organizations that I asked me for help here and there. So its... and then.. but the most significant thing was the YWCA in my life. where I learned a lot. And it exposed me to a lot of (??) on the global level. Or the Association that was formed in Al-Muqqattam that was a lesson for me how to work with oppressed classes like (??) and to listen to them and to women oppression and until now I say that was a big ... most important learning experience for me. And I've learned one thing from them. not to define them and tell them do this and do that. but to listen to them and make them do just... provide support. That was a very important lesson for me to learn.

**NP:** Were you unusual? Again, this period of when you were younger, was it unusual at that time for young women to be involved in public work?

**MA:** Yes, yes. It was unusual. No.. women... we did not call it public work. We... even when we think of active women like Huda Sh'arawi and all... they were not really political. They were all volunteering to do something. For other people, for women, for poor women, for service... That was the expression of our participation in society. And from there we realized that public work is very important. we realized the impact of our work. We can't all just talk to each other but talk to the policy makers and so on. Through the process. But we were really... our entry point was always an informal group of people getting together either in school or at universities or any organization, voluntary organization.

**NP:** And, were you aware of people like Huda Sha'rawi when ...

**MA:** Well, we read about Huda Sha'rawi. We knew about ... I mean her daughter ... her granddaughter from Muhammad Sha'rawi's son was with us at the American College and she just died recently actually. And this daughter, Laila Sha'rawi, her daughter is still a young friend of mine. I even have pictures of her she teaches in the American University ... it continues. When you move in this area you must read about all those pioneer women... that's why I'm telling you about women and (??) because we have all this ... because... but I was always interested to know that they did not start by public work at all. but public by really volunteering in service for the poor for (??)

**NP:** When you were growing up, when you were at school, were you aware of the political situation in Egypt? Were you ever... involved in any political activities?

**MA:** No, in school we never anything that will evolve .. it was never called political activity. But we were involved in the sense that .. in school... the way the schools were... although it .. for instance we went to the American College for girls or the American University. and both of them were started by American missionaries. But we were most (??) Christians and there was never a division between us... we grew together until now We still have the same relationship. Of course we're always very much interested in the fate of the poor. we always had to go visit places and orphanages ... to how to do your service .. I remember in American college when I was still a teenager, We had a long summer holiday but I volunteered for at least a month or two to give literacy seeking classes to the street children around the area. and it was very funny because I was always small in size and I (??) boys like this. (??) I said, you hold the stick for them so we had... but we were taught how to take care of our neighbor and to serve them. And to see how we can help them. And I was always very interested in the fact that it was not only by giving them food and giving them more charity. it was always give them something to be used. And literacy was very important. Although illiteracy is still very high in Egypt but we work and (??) time.

**NP:** Do you remember the 1952 revolution?

**MA:** Oh yes, oh yes. Actually when it took place I was in Geneva in 1952. But I remember very well. and the whole story and... yeah... and.. and the developments. It was very interesting when I compare 1952 with now. In 1952 it was ... initiated by very small group of officers in the army. and everybody (??) because they just needed change and... The 70... what is it? 1975 revolution? NO, no, when is ours?

**NP:** 2011? Oh the 25th of January?

**MA:** Yeah, yeah, the 25th of January revolution it was just completely initiated by the people themselves. And the difference is that in the 1952 revolution people were afraid. They were obeying out of fear. Out of.. if you don't you're in trouble.. we heard about people being killed and this and that and it was completely police. ON 25th, even if there was many who suffered and all that, the fear was gone. So, I see a big difference between the two. (??) In 1952.. you remember I was born in 1932 so in 1952 I was a grown up. I was in Geneva working.

**NP:** And, if I've remembered correctly, it was from being in Geneva that you first became exposed to the issue of Female circumcision. Is that right?

**MA:** Yes. I was being exposed to the meeting, the United Nations commission on Women. To this specialty so, it was a big eye opener for me. It was a big shock in my life. And they always tell you that shock therapy is the best. yeah.

**NP:** When you returned to Egypt did you... you wanted to...

**MA:** To do something.

**NP:** to do something was there...

**MA:** but it took me all these years. Collecting information. Doing studies and all this from 1952 to 1978.

**NP:** Why did it take so long?

**MA:** Because people didn't believe what I was doing. And I was not going to be.. raise the flag and say come on I wanted to build a coalition. from the very beginning I never thought I will do it alone. So I was collecting more information until the occasion came, yeah

**NP:** And then when you created the coalition, was it ... did you face any hostility from the government or other organization an society?

**MA:** Oh yes, oh yes, as I and the doctors who announced. there was a case they arrest me and I was given a warrant and hold... no, no, we faced all these. But the difference is I didn't do it as an individual. When you don't do it as an individual and you are a coalition they cannot punish you. but if you were alone and become a hero... I was never a hero. so it's always we are with group and listening to each other and meeting regularly and never discouraged. and... at the beginning we didn't have any money but we just met... I ... we used to meet in our homes and so on.

**NP:** How important was the IPCD ... international ...sorry, ICPD.. international Conference on Population and development?

**MA:** It.. actually the most important thing for me was the fact that the government wanted this conference very much to take place and ... the women of the world d who did not want to come here because they felt that... it's a very conservative country and against gays and all this and does not allow the people to speak and so on. But then the ministry of social affairs came and told us... told some of us ... the person of who was chosen to be the chairperson of that committee still living, Aza Hussein. That's why I'm asking you if you met her or not. They said if the conference will succeed or will happen or if not you will be (??) we want you as NGOs to get together and do something so we got together. She elected 12 of us who are active in different NGOs. and we were, the committee for that conference. And each one took a side. So... I was very interested .. I took.. my job was to encourage youths ... because we said we know people always talk about countries and they do this but we need really to have people who are friends of the forum. who.. the people who come not only wan to attend meeting but we want to know the country and all this. so we recruited young people and then.. and actually the reputation of those young people that we recruited from all the universities from everywhere and trained hem to be friends of the forum,

FF became very important thing so much that when there was a meeting in China, after that for women's meeting, they all asked them about how did you form the friends of the forum. and when there was a meeting in Geneva... I did the preparation for this, and I couldn't go because I was interviewing youth here, and my other colleagues from the committee went, and Naseem told me the most important part that convinced them that they will be safe and nobody will molest them and all this is the fact that we have young people at the hotels and everywhere accompanying them and taking care of them and all that. And to me that was wonderful because also formed the coalition. I got the young people representatives from different groups and with guys and girls to have some ... and university students and youth groups and so on. and we used to meet regularly. And... this made a lot of difference. Also, building coalitions.

**NP:** Who were you building coalitions with? What sorts of organizations?

**MA:** A big coalition ... people interested in the same issues. I always build a coalition of people (??) around an issue. We are kindred minds and we argue we discuss we're different but we're willing to listen to each other and respect each other and we have the same values of the human (??) So.. we built the coalition for the confrere was very important so that people from different groups were working for different issues and this is what helped move on. It's not: where is my Marie Basil or Marie Assaad, no. we're are the friends of the forum people. Like for instance they say: I am the friends of the forum. and you will find many people saying that .. and you're not owning issue, when you're building a coalition we all own the issue. We all promote the issue. but you don't own it yourself. and that's for me was the most important experience I've had, which I really appreciate until now. That.. because everything I have done ahs built (??) because of that. and that's why people say ... I say: why do you come and ask me? There are so many people who can answer. when you have very important women like Raja Umran and all these. I'm a member of the task force. and whenever she puts her CV anywhere in the world she gets (??) I'm a member of the (??) Task force. and she gives credit to them.. the same thing the women who formed Al-Diwna bookshop. they were members of the task force. and they signal that this is where they learned or ...

TAPE 2

**MARIE ASSAAD:** the course, no, we learnt from each other, because Aida is well experienced professor in psychology and all, but she said as a member of the task force of the women work, you really… you have very deep experience with each other and respected each other and listen to each other, this is part of the building a college, having this common interest a common issue, and learning how to listen to each other and respect each other. And I always say to people “it’s no use if you don’t build a ?? “.

I dream of building a coalition around the around the position of the president and not have one president, that’s my philosophy at work.

**NICOLE PRATT:** And do you think the government responded adequately to the pressure placed by the task force?

**MA:** responding adequately is very different, the government was forced to respond, I will just give you an example

Where the minister of health was giving lip service to… women and adolescents and he said he had allowed a committee after the film and the pressure of everybody and they had a commission of people to say that the girls will be examined and if necessary they will be circumcised. So we give the ?? , and when people told us “what do you think of the minister of health?” I said “doesn’t he go and visit you in New York or visit you in Geneva, ask him what he’s doing there”. So we built a coalition with women across the world to help us to tell our officials what should be done, and that helped a lot.

Because we said we are respecting our minister, because he is our minister and we must be polite with our minister, but we push the others asking the question, that’s all.

Women were very shy members in NGO in Upper Egypt or somewhere, and we would go and speak about reproductive health, and men who say “what about female circumcision? Isn’t it part of the reproductive health? It’s not considered part of the reproductive health?” childhood and the nurse and delivery and family planning but not circumcision. So we forced the issue on the agenda of different ministers this way. And as a result we had some people who formed a directory how to train doctors to include this as part of the reproductive health, whenever took it as an issue alone, I thought it’s a part of women and the care of women and children and all… or children and reproductive health.

It is a realistic approach but important, we don’t divide the human being, so you don’t divide the issues such that.

**NP:** How did you make the shift then to working on FGN to then working with Zabbaleen?

**MA:** you see… FGN by the time I came back, many people had taken over FGN and I wasn’t the first but I’ve learnt a lot working with FGN. And when they asked me about Zabbaleen it wasn’t a problem for me because the skills and if developed working on FGN which is a taboo issue, was exactly working with them. I started working on women and children, because when I went… and I am very social, I went and spent a long time just visiting from one home to the other, so I noticed from the observation that there was crucial group that is oppressed and nobody speaks about it, and nobody had any program for them until ?? Child birth and so on but not really empowering women and protecting the children. A strategy that… and I just spent three years walking, there was one person who was there… non who serve the public have visited the homes to protect the children for disease and so on, we talked to each other, so twice a week or three times a week I will go and make the tours on different houses. So they… because they learnt to love her so much because she was giving them service, then they accepted me, and so they were really speaking to me about their problems and so on, and then I found that by listening to them and taking from them their problems was much more effective than for me coming and telling ?? No, they were ??? , and I was helping them to see that I am just assisting you to do this. The most effective thing I’ve done that if find excellent is that when I used to visit them I told them “look, I want to hear you because you raise such lovely children on the most worst environment, among garbage and flies and everything

And we have succeeded so much, tell me how you managed?” so they started talking about their problems and the flies and how they need doctors and how much the spend money on doctors and how many children have died from that. You know when you listen to people and you bring them to the sense that they are the best doctors and the best people who know about them… not coming because I have the need to teach them, but listening to them makes a difference. And to me this is the most important skill I have developed which I appreciate until now.

**NP:** were you shocked by the situation… which visibly they are living or were you already aware of the conditions?

MH: I’ve heard a lot… if you know how to praise the poor and if you read about them you are never shocked, you are aware of it and you very much challenged and you must also be very humble and remember that you do what you can but you are not almighty, you ?? . On the contrary, we learn to be very very humble in our actions, we think until now, I mean I have no illusion that we live under… I always speak about when they speak out that women do listen you know. Women… the 1% are privileged in the world, what about the rest of the world who don’t have the opportunity and are struggling to make ends meet and so. So you become very sensitive to the needs of people and you become sensitive to the fact that you don’t define people but you respect them and listen to them.

**NP:** were you able to build the coalition of people in the same ways you did with FGN around the Zabbaleen or in previous conditions of the Zabbaleen?

**MA:** Yes, yes, for instance I… in fact, as soon as I went I said we really… all the organizations that are working there have to be very much in sync with women and children because it’s the crucial thing to most neglected people obviously.

So I said “let me form a committee of all these groups and together we will listen to each other”. The first day of course, there was a person working with OXFAM but was working with other organizations so she came to the meeting and said “who are you to call us?”. So I realized that I can’t call anyone outside the domain of my organization, so we started our organization and we told many others we are doing this and meeting once a month. They came out of interest, so the people who were formal like her we say “you can choose if you don’t want to come”, but the doctor of the health center that was… made by Suzan Mubarak in the none of the… other associations that were serving in public service and all this were… all these people who really had real genuine need to know about each other were key. And so, you don’t fight for “who are you?” and something, its okay. And we said we will start because this is a meet and so we open our home, and I worked very well because they felt that this is a real platform for them to learn to do this. I am very happy with the fact that… we struggle very hard, people make fun of me when we said we must solve the problem of garbage except when you ask people not to separate… to sort the garbage at different categories but to separate it into two categories. And that was… I started on this in 1991 and we had excellent experience in all this, but they said that unless the government is interested and enlisting the local… governorates are interested in this. And we spend… then I said “let’s see how other people take it all”. Now, are ministers of environment that we did settle in 1991, how many years later now? It’s more than this.

**NP:** twenty years

**MA:** Yes, everywhere we have to have… and she is not an experiment garbage separation at source. You know, in our groups you always say that it was your money but we developed an issue, but if anybody wants to pick it up I never said “I possess it, you have to take that mission”. No, and even if she doesn’t mention it I am very appreciating to the fact that she mentions me, but she doesn’t have to. Excuse me. I am telling you my philosophy in life.

**NP:** Ok

**MA:** And that is very important, and how this in the beginning you built coalitions when you spend when you study the people, the people work with you are those who promotes you, the people who seriously… and this is how they keep bringing people, you know, you touch me because this encouragement of this and that and that. And that is the most important thing, that you make the people feel that they are co- workers with you and not just your students or… and this is something I had when I taught ?? .

So, it’s an attitude of life and it’s very much needed, I always say “people, the only way to solve the problems of the world is to build coalitions about the issues of common interest”.

And when you do something you care for, you continue with it. So that’s what… it’s all I have to say to you.

**NP:** did… you said you were teaching as well, you said you taught?

**MA:** Yes, I taught, that’s a rather funny story because when I finished with the American university, my sisters had finished with the American university and entered work in mixed places, like for instance, my sister who worked in the… worked… who was studding social work and she t her husband there, my mother was very upset because she did not… she wanted to be the one to choose for her, and my sister who… finished university and went to work with the office of war information and American… she met her American husband there. So, she said… my mother had enough that I should not do the same thing when I finish. So, the year I graduated from the university I was in Alexandria on the sea shore, she went to meet our headmistress Doctor Helen Martin, she was a wonderful woman initially but very devoted to her students, we were all like her own children.

And she told her "I want you to do me something, I don’t want my daughter to go work anywhere else, I want her to be a teacher at your school". Of course Doctor Helen Martin was delighted, so she went ahead and gave me classes and announced… I was in Alexandria; she never asked my opinion or anything. So,… I got an express letter "what are you doing? The teachers say your name was announced and you are teaching". I said "I never wanted to teach" anyhow, after this I had to go and to explain my situation, I said "ok, I will not work full time because I am getting my other BA in education in evening course. So I will work part time this and I will do that while working. So, this is how I taught.

You know, it's amazing how you… get caught in certain situations but I say that despite of that, I did what I wanted which is wonderful.

**NP:** And did your mother choose your husband?

**MA:** No, No, but you see ?? . it’s a very funny story truth to be told, No, No, I did choose my husband but I was forced to accept the husband that I… I was not thinking of marriage at all then he pursued me, he started it.

**NP:** that's very romantic. When you went to Geneva, that was after you got married or before?

**MA:** I was the first time in Geneva before I got married, because I got married in 1955, so I was in Geneva in 1952 and 1953 but at the same time I went to Geneva, I was married and I had lost my husband, because he died in 1974 and…

**NP:** So

**MA:** So, that's it.

**NP:** was it difficult to be somebody having a career whilst having young children?

**MA:** No, because I from the very beginning I was very clear, I mean it's difficult when you are told too many things, but it was very early for me that i… had started working and I was also a teenager when I got married, so I set my top priority is to have children and it was very clear to me I will have three children, and I wanted girls and I had two boys, But never mind, but then I said the first two years I will work as a volunteer and not work in an official job, but when they started going to school I went back to the American university and took my MA because there were no MA offers here, and then I worked at the ?? as a result, but they were in school and in the university, but one thing that was good in our time, I don't know if it's a luxury anymore, that we were able to combine between our marriage life and our children and our work. And it was kind of ?? , when I worked at the American social studies center in the beginning I worked part time because I wanted to give a chance to my children, but then my director who was also a friend said "you are producing as much as people working full time, it's your fault" so it was a kind of flextime they do because the amount of work you produce and not office attendance, you know office attendance is for those at administration and such and doing programs and research on way to the field, and on this it's not… so it worked this way. No, actually there was sort of accommodation for us in the beginning, because it was new for women to work. Now it's very different because women they do jobs very demanding and the traffic is very demanding and everything, and the children and husbands are demanding. I did have that, I was very lucky.

**NP:** have you lived in this apartment…

**MA:** This is where I got married, this is the… this was an old apartment if my husband, and it was redone twice, once before I got married and the second time after my husband died and everybody left it. So I was very lucky, this building was built in 1934 and my husband was one of the first tenants, so we are still there.

**NP:** When you look out of the window, has Cairo changed a lot?

**MA:** absolutely, absolutely, Cairo was much more beautiful and much more human because the pressure of population and the traffic, the traffic is horrendous, especially Garden city, it's called Garden city because the British filled it all with gardens and villas, now look at the high rise and the… streets are not respecting the pedestrians, no, no, Cairo has become inhuman, but you see it was at the cost of the people you know. Before the poor stayed in their villages were poor but now they know how to migrate to the cities and learned to merge in the cities, so. It's… I always say as long as we are planting not for the benefit of the poor but for the benefit of the rich, we will have problems.

And I hope we learn from the 25th of January and the 30th of June, people will learn that unless you do something for the poor people… and I read wonderful articles about having transparency that is starting with squatter areas and infrastructure, and they are serious about it, that to me please me very much. But you see, the two things that pleases me now when I read about it is fixing the squatter areas that people here built their life on and all this, and give them the infrastructure, the water sanitation and so on and housing, but on other hand, stop the flow of the people of villages of Upper Egypt that they don't have to come and leave their land, and this is exactly… you know, they said that ABD EL NASER helped the poor, there is no doubt, because when he made land reform he divided the lands, so nobody was rich, the rich people used to spend on the poor peasants, didn't come rich because he took the land from the rich people, but the poor people you know with two feddan or five feddan would not cope with so many children. So the first two children stay in the land and the rest come to the cities. People need to realize that land reform was not well studied. So, I always measure any changes in any countries how much they are in favor of the poor. To me, I don't bring my bias along.

**NP:** How does this affect yourself? Do you ever consider as well have changes effects too?

**MA:** No, because actually you know we never been very rich, my husband stayed in this building all along, and we rent, we had a controlled rent, I pay for the expenses of the rent, the official rent, it's less than half what I pay for upkeep of this building, we decided to do that, but apart from the rent which is controlled, anybody can do it, and his company should be responsible for it, they don’t know anything about it, but for cleanliness and maintenance and the… we pay much more. And I feel terrible but I don't have the courage to leave and give it to somebody else, like Jesus said, I brought such thing.

But when I go to Mokkattam… the new apartments they are building now which are terrible, they pay rent much more than I do, even with the ?? . It's awful. Because controlled rent… the concept of controlled rent and subsidies and all of this, and now we are paying the price for it now. And you see he was a person for the poor and all his policies are all political. From radical point of view its nuts, he impoverished the rich but he got the poor rich. And the land you know the high land and the silt of the Nile and the subdivision of the land in such a way, we have lost a lot and the increase in population, people just built on arable land. The other day we went to Andrea, she got place outside, I was shocked about that, high-rise buildings on the best arable land we had, that's it. The challenges are there, but you know I've learned to be very humble and say "I do what I can, because I' am not God almighty" and everyday what God allows me to do I will do, I am not a heroine.

**NP:** Did you go down during the 25th of January revolution?

**MA:** I… many of the young people I knew went down, I was watching, and is said "if I was thirty years younger I would have gone" but I could not, my back is very bad so that doesn't allow me to do lots of things and it's physically this way.

I was encouraging all the young people.

**NP:** Do you see any… do you see a difference between your generation and the younger generation?

**MA:** Yes, the younger generation is not going for volunteer work as we did, they either having a career or they are having… they are activists, real activists in the field of civic education, very much so.

And then of course there are much more concerns as well. We see that our generation was challenged by the situation today and they are much more humble to what we can do or will do not big things. It's ?? .

**NP:** What is the best memory you have from your public life?

**MA:** The best memories I have is… actually many kindred minds and doing something together and enjoying the results, so this happened with FGN a lot, with the American college a lot, with the American university a lot, in the EPA you know, because when you meet kindred minds and you know how to enjoy things together and see the joy in people lives or taking care of children responding to you or take care of girls and so on, these are my best memories for that.

And we ?? also that we want different ?? run together as a family.

**NP:** Do you have any hopes for the future? Do you have any hopes for the future?

**MA:** I'm full of hope for the future but not in my life time. There are many wonderful things happening. And I know it will take time for the small things to flower but there is good life and so many things and I am hoping the people will learn that… revision being used as a tool is the most dangerous tool on earth. And this thing young people are realizing and that will be much more humanity and much more cooperation, because religion can be very divisive. But I know there is so many… I mean, I read and there are so many positive things that are said and done but people don't pick them and the media is very bad, they pick the things that are destructive much more, but I am full of hope but not in my life time, I mean, people even younger than me. It took France thirty years after the revolution to settle down you know, a revolution that really bring change take a long time but the idea of never give up are good. And don't build resentment, I mean I discourage people who are respectful of dividing the people, or having the families divided among their selves, this is… we always strive to be different. I like them… Mandela, and some people are really preaching it ????? .

But the difference is "can you do that automatically?" no, people who have committed crimes have to be accountable for it. So that's the difference, excuse me.

There is so many people, I can't imagine how much they make me feel, my goodness, I had today a woman who used to do massage for me but I befriended her and I have forgotten completely that her daughter was getting married

She comes to me with foods for me and says "I will do anything for you" I told her "but why? I am enjoying this…" I don't know much of her, she is grateful after so many years, her daughter is very well married and has three children and so on, and she comes to visit me, she comes from the end of the world to visit me, and to remember all these things which I forgot completely. Because you can love people and help them in their time of need and they don't forget. And to me this is the most important thing. I feel I have been very privileged to have had that in my life, I am very grateful, I don't want anything else. It was I who ?? told you about me.

**NP:** Yes, that's right

**MA:** that's interesting, I like Aida very much but she doesn't get in touch with me, she put on a lot of weight, didn't she?

I haven't seen her for years

**NP:** Yes