

# Interview with Souad Jarrar

## 2013

### TAPE 1

**Nicola Pratt:** Ready?

**Souad Jarrar:** Ready.

**NP:** Can I begin by asking when and where you were born?

**SJ:** I was born in Saudi Arabia, when? It is too important for you?

**NP:** Approximately.

**SJ:** 1960.

**NP:** Okay. did you grow up in Saudi Arabia?

**SJ:** Yes, and I went there to school, I finished my high school in Saudi Arabia then I moved to Lebanon, I went to AUB, I graduated in agriculture, and then my masters degree info technology and [inaudible: 00:24] so I have a scientific base lets say, then I went to Jordan, I didn't work in my field unfortunately because I didn't find a job at that time in that field, so I taught in a school sciences and math, then I worked in another school as a PR woman, then I met this lovely guy, Sameer, who brought me back to Lebanon, and I consider myself very happy to come back here, because you know, Lebanon for me is a home, because my best years were at the university, where all my personality has changed, and formed, that's why I do feel string belonging to Lebanon, we had this identity crisis you know, really, because when we were in Saudi, having the nationality having great time and great friends but still, you don't feel you belong to that place, and in Jordan it was the same, though most of the population there are Palestinian and I had so many friends, but still I didn't have any memory. You know, and this what connects you with a place, when you have memories, I mean, I used to see the difference between, me and any of my friends who were born and brought up in Jordan, even when we go for a walk, they will tell you, this is my first school, this is where we used to live ten years ago, and I don't know what, I didn't have any of this. For Beirut it was completely different, because when I came to Lebanon it was in 1978 okay, and the PLO was here, so the whole atmosphere was really different, I mean, it was very emotional and very important for me because I was very proud with my identity as a Palestinian, and actually maybe this is the first time, I really enjoy being a Palestinian, it was in this country, that's why I was very active at the university. We used to do so many things on voluntary basis, I used to go to the camps help kids, help women, teach, we used to go of course into demonstration, the political situation was completely different, we felt at that time that we are part of whatever was going on, its completely different from those days, I don't know if this only has to do with the age or the whole

circumstances have been changed. 30 years ago we felt that we were part of whatever was going on, and maybe we were younger and maybe we can make a change, maybe, but we were extremely active. After graduation I went to Jordan, in Jordan I did some voluntary work but not on regular basis, I used to go to some of the camps like in Baqaa, distribute some meats on some occasions or cloths and so on. Then when I came back to Beirut I volunteered with an NGO, the Palestinian NGO called "Inaash", the main... the main aims for Inaash is to revive and reserve the Palestinian embroidery and we used to have three kindergartens in three different camps, so my concentration at those kindergartens because they were really miserable conditions, I used to call them prisons those kindergarten. So, we tried our best to fund raise and renovate those kindergartens, I worked with the teachers with teachers in the camps and so on, then we were having like all other NGOs of course, problems in marketing out embroidery and I decided that maybe its good if I go into... it I studied fashion, by the way, I studied fine arts at ALU. I do participate with the [inaudible: 06:52]... exhibition that they crry every year. Few years ago I decided to join a fashion design school in order to be able to put our embroidery in a more ready to wear modern designs, this was to get more exposure, this was a great experience and I learned a lot. And then after I finished, no I didn't finish, I spent 3 years there, and for me it was fashion for a cause it was not fashion for fashion, I didn't want to be a fashion designer or anything, I wanted to apply our traditional embroidery into modern cloths, and this is what brought me there to the fashion course. And then a friend of mine she had an event, she asked me if I can execute table cloths for that event, I started putting the designs, I put five different designs with the colors that suit the theme of the wedding, and [inaudible: 08:36]... they finished 50 pieces in one month, so from that on, I decided why not to involve them in the design themselves to give them a chance to reveal their talents and capabilities in their own artistic [inaudible: 09:02]... so we started talking about the history of our embroidery, the origin of each motif... why it was called this and not that and so on. And this was extremely important for me because this was a good inspiration for them, to know how the Palestinian women when they were in Palestine got inspired and got to those, and came up with those motifs, of course those women were inspired by the nature around them, by the political situation, by the tiles by nature by their daily routine, and this is extremely obvious when you see the names of those motifs, I mean for example, one of them is called, "Balat El Haram", the tiles, I thought that maybe those women when they were playing in the Haram, they saw the tiles and they got inspired and translated the inspiration in their artistic language which is embroidery, or another one that is called "Asa El Ajouz", okay, and if you look at it, yes, it resembles a lot the cane of the old man, will be carrying it, others from nature like crab or frogs in the pond, definitely, they have seen these things or Jerusalem mountains, other motifs were inspired from their daily routine like 4 eggs in a pan, I like this a lot, 4 eggs in a pan, apparently she was frying some eggs and then it clicked, 4 eggs in a pan, other definitely have political connotation, like the tent of the Basha, maybe they saw a tent there for the Basha there, visiting Palestine, this was extremely important for me and for them to know the history and the origin of each motif and the name, the area, because we have 7 or more major regions and each region has its own motifs and colors and combination also of motifs, and this is how they used to know the lady, the area of

the lady, the origin, or even her social status or economical status, it was all in her dress, for example a dress that is fully embroidered and or a dress that has a metallic thread okay which is more expensive than the ordinary one, this will reflect a lady from a higher economical background, okay. And also it does reveal her social status, for example, you see a woman wearing a black dress [inaudible: 13:10]... okay, and only blue, that means that she is a widow. And you see dress that has colorful embroidery on the top part, this means that she got married again, that means she will cut her dress and put the colorful embroidery in the cut, and leave the blue one down. So all those things are really important to know, and the most important thing for me when I read about the history of embroidery, the course I took. That the Palestinian women they were very proud of their artistic language and it definitely developed with time, I am sure that each generation has added a little bit on it, keeping the heritage but keeping a little bit on it, but they were doing it with pride, it used to give them satisfaction, it used to give them sense of dignity okay, and also it was a social...I mean, they stay together and they talk about maybe their homes, their husbands, the political situation while they are broidering okay. This joy, this joy has been lost after the 48 and the 67 wars in Palestine, because so many people they had to leave their homes and they were distributed in towns or other camps, so and there were so many NGOs that were working on the camps and they sponsor the broiderery centers okay. Not only to preserve heritage but also to provide income for the embroiderers. That's why I... in most of the cases those ladies were copying a set of designs okay, with the same combination of colors, that were given to them, now, I mean to take this artistic language into just as a mean or a way for income is really sad, because it has to do, embroidery has to do with our dignity, it is associated with our identity, so its extremely important to feel proud of it, and to do it with joy, and you cant reach that step unless you are importing something, unless you feel like yes, you are the creator, or you are a part of this creation process, and this is what I did with those ladies, okay. I started after of course we speak about history and motifs and so on, I used to ask them, okay, fine we have these motifs, how can we play with it? Maybe repeat it sometimes, like in the Islamic arts [inaudible: 17:05]... or deconstruct it and construct it again or add something on it and so on. So the creative process started, and the results were really, really amazing, because they put their heart into it, because they were thinking and they were discussing you know, things among each other. It did have very good results I would say, not only in the, in terms of income but also in confidence, joy, pride, self fulfillment and now they are not copying somebodies design but they are creating their own, one of the things that I was really astonished to know, that non of them had ever did a peace for themselves, where during the projects some of them had table cloths in their homes, so they added some of their designs on that table cloth, another one she said, okay, yes, it is a great idea. When you see women say when you finish a jacket or... oh my god, why didn't we think of doing that before? Now, maybe they will start doing it. So this was extremely important for them and I noticed it did change their relationships and their status in the camp, she would come and tell you, my mother in law said that I am really an artist. I mean this is really a good thing to be. Or my husband said that I should use this motif more than that, like suggested to use these combinations of colors and so on. And some of them told me that now, when we look around us we see design, when they look at

the tiles on the floor or carpets, or chairs okay, now they started to seeing designs and few of them had the courage to translate what they saw okay, in designs [inaudible: 19:56]... which is really a step. Also, some of the young generation okay, their daughters were against learning anything in embroidery, because they used to look at it as a hard thing to do and tiring, tiresome, it doesn't pay back enough for them to go into that, now, plus of course all the changes we see that people into IT and those young girls are using the computer and other things, and they want to have a better education, I understand all of that of course. But out of this project, because they see something other than just copying embroidery, no it had to do with design with color, with forms, so they were encouraged that yes, they would like to get on board, and this is extremely important for us, because you don't want this thing to be gone, you want it carried from one generation to another as it used to be, I found out that the relationship among the women has changed although they were living in the same camp, but many did not know each other before, though they had the same skills, I feel extremely, extremely happy when I see them discussing certain motifs or helping each other or giving opinion, yes, you can do this, you can do that.

So it did bring them together okay, plus we did activities with them, like taking them out for lunch, this you know brought them together more, you know if one would get sick, the whole group would go visit her, it created this nice atmosphere, I forgot to say something in the family, which I really, really like, even the boys, the boys they got interested, and two of them asked their moms, please teach us how to embroider, for me this was Wow! Usually they help, some of them help their mum with separating the thread, we call it, when you take the threads of the Kamba when you remove it okay, one by one, it is really a hard work. Their sons they used to help them doing that which is great. What else, I talked about the income, the relationship with the family, the relationship among each other, yeah, one of the girls okay, she decided now to study interior design to continue her studying into interior design because she thinks that you know this will empower her more and more and she joined a college in the South, I mean all of those things I find them extremely positive and they do effect their life in the future. Now, I hope I can, we can continue together because I am sure if we were able to sustain good quality with new designs and new fabrics we can you know make more production, we can go into more production and sustain dignified income for those ladies, and go on with this project. I consider it as a learning process but I hope it will not stop, especially that my dream would be for those ladies to be able to inspire from their surroundings like the Palestinian women before 48 were able to do that, you know. Because I feel like this is a continuation of Palestinian history, I mean we had this marvelous traditional part that the women expressed in Palestine, okay., but after 48 and 67, we lived in diaspora, and that means that our inspiration will be different, the atmosphere in the camp is completely different than before, so I hope that one day in order to continue the history of the Palestinian people by documenting the atmosphere in the camps using their visual artistic languages which is the embroidery, maybe they will be inspired from the wars the broken streets around them, the Zinco that they have as a roof on top of their homes. I really don't know, I am sure, I am sure that one day they would reach that step and this will continue the cycle of the Palestinian people. That's it, any more questions?

**NP:** Can I start... let me go back again... and just ask few more questions, how was it that you were born in Saudi Arabia, what was your father doing?

**SJ:** My father he was working there, they left Palestine, actually my father left Palestine and went to Riyadh and my mum she left to Kuwait, when she was not even 18, she finished her high school and then she moved to Kuwait in order to teach, that was the case before, and my dad he went to Riyadh you know, to work there and to find better opportunities, and then they got married and my mom moved to Riyadh, and he started to work in a Bank, he was working in a bank when he started, and then with time, he went into free trading, both of my parents they studied after they got married, I mean I consider this generation, the generation of my parents is really incredible generation, because they took care of their parents, or their families, so there is one generation, they took care of them selves that's the second generation, and they took care of us a third generation, and now till now they are taking care of their grandsons, the 4<sup>th</sup> generation, they really struggled and they... maybe... definitely, definitely, I mean, what they passed through was great inspiration for us. They struggled really, really hard, for **[inaudible: 28:30]**... both of them they were working, they were taking care of us, and they were studying. I mean, they got their BAs during that time, so I really respect this generation, they did a lot, they did.

**NP:** Why did you come to Lebanon to go to university?

**NJ:** Why did I come to Lebanon? It was my parents choice actually, we used to come to Lebanon on vacations, but to tell you the truth, I didn't think that coming to Lebanon would change my life, not at all, and I was not enthusiastic about it because most of my friends they went to the States or Germany or Switzerland or to England... so, my dad he insisted that, he said that, I want you in a country that is next to me, you are my only daughter, I have three other brothers, so he said you cant live in the states because then I have to fly 15, 14 hours to see you, its better if you go to university next by. So, I was left with three choices, Syria, Jordan or Lebanon, of course I preferred Lebanon, its more Liberal and I applied to AUB and was accepted **[inaudible: 30:25]**... at the beginning I was not that happy to tell you the truth, because you know, I wanted to be with my friends and they were **[inaudible: 30:36]**... now when I look back at it, I say, thanks god this is what happened, because living in it and going to... you know, all the experiences in here changed me.

**NP:** When you came to university, when you started university, was there still civil war?

**SJ:** Very good question you know...

TAPE 2

**SJ:** ... my dad's friends, they used to ask him, how did you put your daughter in Lebanon? As if you are putting your daughter in the fire. They used to tell him you are putting her in fire. And he used to go, no, it's okay, she will learn from it and so on. Yeah, it was, it was, but maybe it was the end of the civil war. Okay, now the two parts of Beirut, the eastern and the western, this is true and we used to live only in the western, I mean, your area of living and moving was only one Km, okay, it's the university and the areas surrounding it, at that time, we were not able to go to Ashrafieh, or Junieh or any of those places, but because maybe, being involved in politics and social works and volunteering, that compensated for all of them.

**NP:** would you say when you got to university at AUB, was this the first time that you exposed to Palestinian political life?

**SJ:** Yes, yeah, this is for sure. Now, in Riyadh, I was younger and at the same time you don't have the chance to be exposed to any political movement or social work, the only thing that I remember is that after 67, after Abdel Nasser lost the war with Israel, I can't forget these days because they were extremely emotional, they were extremely sad, I was really affected by the emotions of my parents you know, everybody was crying at home, this is the first time I see my dad crying in my life, when Abdel Nasser passed away, when Abdel Nasser lost the war. And I remember that my parents they used to collect cloths and you know cloths to send to Egypt, so this stayed in my mind, and this is the only thing that I remember, and of course the house, we were brought up in a house that they always talk about Palestine and they always talk about grandparents and their childhood and their memories, my dad and my mum were neighbors, so they had a lot in common between us. And we used to hear about it, and we were supposed to excel in school because as Palestinians this is the only weapon you have in your hand, because your learning experience, because your certificate will pave the road for you to live in a decent way, we were brought up with this around us. And then when I came to Lebanon it was a completely different atmosphere, it was more open more free, as I told you the PLO and all the other Palestinian parties were extremely active and also the Lebanese **[inaudible: 04:16]**... movement was very active at that time, and then this is how it started.

**NP:** were you a part of any particular political group?

**SJ:** at one point yes, at one point yes, I was. But most of the work that we were doing was more a social kind of work. But of course I was affected intellectually by one group more than the other.

**NP:** When you went and sorry, when you went to the camps, what did you think?

**SJ:** I remember the first time I went to Shatila, it was a shock, I was very young, and I couldn't imagine that people were living in such miserable conditions, it was really, really shocking, I stayed more than **[inaudible: 05:34]**... without being able to go out or to eat properly, it really did, I mean it did hit me, I was not expecting this at all. To go to the camps and to see people, ten individuals living in an extremely small house

with no proper lighting no ventilation, [inaudible: 06:12]... of the camp were very bad, so for me this was one of the most miserable days I can remember, and then the way the people receive you they make you more relaxed okay, because then you see that still under those harsh condition they are living and they have the will to continue and they are ordinary people and they have their good moments and their bad moments where she will talk to you about her husband and her son as if she is part of, as if she doesn't see this misery, I don't know how to explain it really, as if it is natural and normal all around, with time, that's it I got used to it, even now when I see myself going to the camp, sometimes I have to detach you know myself, and then see, no, it is miserable, otherwise, I am becoming like them and getting used to it, okay and I can see this when I take a friend of mine or a visitor in the country to the camp, where I have to remember that it is really miserable when I hear their comments, when you go there often, it becomes the normal I think. It was tough at the beginning to digest whatever you are seeing, but then with time, it got better and maybe because I mean, I was doing the voluntary work so I was working with them and so on, and that's it, it became normal.

**NP:** did you ever feel guilty as a Palestinian, that your life is much better than the life of the people in the camp?

**SJ:** this is for sure, and I always say that there is no justice, this is for sure, yeah, I used to feel that, and so many times, but then, I don't know how, life will continue, sometimes I used to feel like living two different lives, really, imagine coming to the camp and commandeering a whole day, and at night you have a party for a friend of yours, where you find yourself in a completely different atmosphere. At the beginning it used to disturb me a lot, but in time... its amazing how we are able to adjust, of course, and especially when I used to go there, and you know, discuss a certain problem with one of the ladies or one of the kids, for example, one day a kid has to operate and they didn't have enough money to do that and it wasn't that much, okay, but still they couldn't afford it, and the mother and the rest o the brothers, they went crying and it was really sad, and he, I remember that he needed a certain kind of operation, so when I came back I told the group, some of my friends, and we did some fund raising for them, but of course, yeah, you always feel the contradiction and it is really tiresome, at the beginning it is very, very tiresome. And then the [inaudible: 10:52]... your mind will function how can I help instead of growing into the harsh feeling of it. This is I mean, this what balance it I guess, and I still do feel the same till now, so many times I still feel the same, yeah.

**NP:** what sort of activities, volunteer activities that you do in the camp, what sort of things?

**SJ:** Mostly, mostly, we were teaching small kids okay, when they come back, tutoring, when they come back from school, we used to help them in their homework, and read stories for them, I used to dance very well, so I used to teach some of the girls dancing and they used to teach me Dabkeh, I dint know Dabkeh, how to perform Dabkeh, so they taught me Dabkeh and I taught them Egyptian dancing, yeah. This kind of work, or used to doing some humanitarian aide, like food,

blankets, clothes and distribute them in the camp, This kind of work. Few times we did renovate some homes for needy people, what else? There was an old man I forgot his name right now, I used to enjoy sitting and talking to him because all what he knows is the history of Palestine and he used to talk a lot about his family, he was a refugee from Jaffa and he used to tell us all about Jaffa and his childhood and family and their palace as he used to call it, their lands, you know, their daily life and how it used to be extremely nice, and they were very happy in contrast to what they are living now in here, he used to insist, and yes, he used to have the key to his house, he showed it to me to... I remember him saying that whatever happens keep in mind that one day we should all go back there one day, always, always, keep it in mind and work for it, now I am an old man and I cant do this and I cant do that, but he had hope in us, I am glad that he died before he saw this misery that went on.

**NP:** you were saying earlier that in the time that you were at AUB, there was a feeling that you... everybody... felt like making change, and what sort of change did you want to make?

**SJ:** everybody, well, we did believe that one day we will go to Palestine, at that time we did have [inaudible: 15:14]... and that's why, we were extremely supportive to [inaudible: 15:22]... rights, we were participating in demonstrations, we were trying to help change the lives of the people in the camps, but the belief itself was extremely strong, of course I was not that... like I mean so many men, of our friends they used to fight in the south, okay. They were not only students they were fighters too, yes, we did believe that it would not take long before we are back, that's what we believed at that time. I don't know when I look back a it, oh my god, I mean... I don't know on whom or what we were counting, I really don't know. So, but that's what kept us smart, because we saw there was hope.

**NP:** Do you mean that you've lost hope now?

**SJ:** Now, I cant see this light at the end of the tunnel, I don't know, maybe what I am sure of that nothing will materialize in my days or in my kids days, this is for sure, now, I don't know if any other thing will happen in the future, but definitely I will not be alive when it happens, I mean after all the changes that you saw, we are now, we are asking for 20 percent of our historical land, and its impossible to get. You have nothing to count on, nothing... yeah. I don't have any hope. Maybe after 100, 200 years things will change, but giving the surroundings, its extremely difficult. Even in Palestine, if you have this 20 percent of your historical land now, we have two states in Palestine, few years ago, this was not even a dream, not even, you would never imagine that something like this would happen.

**NP:** so why do you think its important to keep, why is it important to keep being active and working for Palestine and the Palestinian cause? Did you ever feel like, its useless?

**SJ:** No, I mean I cant see the contradiction between both of them., I mean, till now, you have people in Palestine in the West Bank or Gaza, and it will stay there even if



the... in Jaffa and Akka and everywhere, yeah, and it will continue maybe like that... sorry. But I don't have, I don't have any hope that one day, we will return and go back there and have our home state now, for the time being, from regions and all the things around us. As I told you maybe after 200 years or something, but I strongly believe that even if this is impossible right now, this doesn't mean that you stop working, and you stop helping, we should do our best because these people who are living in Lebanon, I mean refugees, they need a lot of help and a lot of support. To have [inaudible: 20:30]... and that's why, I think we should continue helping each other, but I don't have this dream, this is what I meant, that one day we will be back or we will have our own state and I don't know what... at least I will not be alive during that, but this doesn't mean that life will stop, no. I did find my [inaudible: 21:09]... where I can have... when you look at it, even if I was wrong, and after 20 or 30 years or whatever things have changed, my goodness, America has [inaudible: 21:27]... and people went back home okay, at least, maybe they will be prepared for that, I don't know. I always think that we should continue working on the Palestinian human being whether he stayed in the diaspora or he or she will go back home, if they stay in the diaspora, then why not to create channels for them to improve their life, and their staying, the conditions of their staying, that's extremely important, and if they go back okay, what kind of a Palestinian human being do you want? If we are, if we don't work hard for ourselves.

**NP:** you said you were here during the 1982 invasion, what was that like?

**SJ:** I was in Beqaa, because in AUB, third year, agriculture we stay in Beqaa, through AUB and the war broke out and we had to go back to Beirut, it was horrible, it was a terrifying experience because... Beirut was bombarded day and night, and you hear it and you live it and you feel it okay, but maybe also being young we didn't have this fear, we didn't have this, fear, yeah, enough fear maybe and that's what kept us going out from home and trying to help people in different areas, yeah, we didn't have that fear, I mean, now if I think about it, oh my god, we were really courageous, not to care about the bombardment and or anything and just move from one place to another, because we feel, yes, it's your duty and this is the time that you can help and so on. It was a very, very tough experience, and when we had to leave before they closed all the roads, we had to take a certain road to Syria, my dad was there, my mum was with us, but my dad, he was waiting for us in Syria. And when we went out, we broke really in tears at that time because, as if you were betraying Beirut okay, [inaudible: 25:14]... then I went to Jordan, and I stayed there you know [inaudible: 25:24]... really paralyzed, doing nothing. Except just following the news and so on, but the worst day was Shatila and Sabra massacre, I couldn't stop crying, I didn't believe it, I didn't believe that one day we would face something like this, I couldn't believe that human beings can do this to each other. Irrespective of amount of hatred you have inside you, I didn't believe that you can kill [inaudible: 26:10]... weather they are fighters, women, kids, military, just bring them out of the camp... what can I say? I mean, it was really...

**NP:** How long did you stay in Jordan?

SJ: [inaudible: 26:40]... four months maybe, we came back again, and I insisted to come back, at that time I had the chance to go and continue my education outside [inaudible: 27:04]... and it was really a shock to see what happened in Beirut, and the level of destruction, destruction, destruction. It was [inaudible: 27:44]... and the people, when I went to the camps, it was awful, it was awful. The people, I mean you feel, especially because the NGOs they moved to Tunisia, and the people were really, they were really down especially in the camps, okay, and wherever you go you hear them talking about lost lives during that war and the difficulty [inaudible: 28:32]... especially in Sabra and Shatila, every time you go, even in these little wars okay, they are taking your hand, in order to show you what happened to their people. Every time you go there, this was the issue, and this was the whole [inaudible: 29:07]... it was really shocking... and it will continue this way, it will continue to be the same.. [Inaudible 29:21]... because you had to deal with kids who were with the women that are already devastated, and its contagious to see people like that, you will feel the same, but again, couple of months [inaudible: 29:82]... in 2000, this is just so you see how it is when we are young and have no responsibilities, like having a family and kids, till now I cant forgive myself for not going to the South in 2000. I was seeing everything on TV, when the Israeli withdrew and the people in the south were celebrating their victory, all what I remember in laying down in the couch and [inaudible: 30:55]... my kids were 4 and 3 years old, and I think they hated TV...

### TAPE 3

SJ: ...because they saw their mum laying down on the couch and looking at the TV, of course, I was extremely happy of the things that went on, but at the same time I was extremely sad because I know that it will never ever, live those moments, so... I was sharing this happiness with the Lebanese people they sacrificed a lot and they really deserve it but at the same time, extremely sad because I don't think we will ever see these moments, at least during my lifetime. In 2006, yeah in 2006, no in 2002, when Israeli surrendered from [inaudible: 01:17]... and Abu Ammar, I really went [inaudible: 01:20]... I was also attached to the TV all the time and I was extremely nervous, that's why I think, another thing why my kids hated the news, and maybe they hated being partly Palestinian, you know, mostly because they were extremely young, and they used to tell me they don't want to be Palestinian, and have anything to do with Palestine because every time they see it on the news, it is a catastrophe and every time we hear Palestine on the news we see crying you know... I didn't realize by the way that it affected them like that. So, I decided to go to Jordan and stay at my parents house for about ten days and then I came back, in 2006, I stayed in [inaudible: 02:29]... because my little one couldn't bear it, he was going hysterical, so my husband and my parents forced me to go to Egypt, so I got tickets and left to Jordan and stayed. When I came back I went with few friends to the south and we visited the villages there, and the towns that were bombarded there, and I went back and worked in the camps, I was volunteering with [inaudible: 03:15]... at the time. So the experiences that I lived in university were completely different you know, from what I lived after marriage, because the minute you have kids, it's a completely different story, I will try to think of something.

**NP:** Okay,

**SJ:** Now, maybe because there are other important things that are going on, so you don't have the time to go back to the memory and to talk about things, I don't know, because everyday now you have a new event and a new thing happening, so we are just discussing the things the things that are taking place on daily basis, we are not talking about the past, and this is one thing I think we did a mistake, maybe we should have rolled down our diaries you know, actually I started and then I stopped, during the 82 I started to write everything, everyday what was going on, and I used to write about the situation of the country, the people, not only the politics that you hear on TV and then I stopped. But this was, this could have been a good thing to keep and to continue doing, my aunt in Palestine did this and really encouraging her to write a book about it, or to do something about it, because she kept all her diaries you know, when they surrounded Jenin, and when they bombarded the camp there, she wrote her daily diaries and I told her that its extremely important because you are reflecting, I mean she is reflecting the daily lives of the humans, its not only the news that you see on TV or you read in the newspaper. Its about the people and how they live it, and what did they face at that time, maybe one day she would do it, I don't know. This is a woman you should meet by the way when you go to Jordan.

**NP:** Yeah, definitely. Was it difficult being Palestinian after 1982?

**SJ:** it is difficult to be what?

**NP:** to be a Palestinian in Lebanon after 1982?

**SJ:** 1982, you mean?

**NP:** afterwards?

**SJ:** definitely, definitely, I mean, yes of course, because in Lebanon the Palestinians have no rights basically, now, maybe things are changing a bit slowly, but still and there is no, the most difficult thing is you don't have a back bone in Lebanon, before it was the PLO, okay. Now, I mean, you don't have a reference point, you see. What is your reference point? UNRWA? Or Political parties? Or Palestinian political parties? Or NGOs? Or the Lebanese government? There is no reference point and that is what makes it harder, One Cappuccino for the madam. I told you that they lost their back bone that's how I read it, and aside from living in miserable conditions in the camps, there is no infrastructure, and for example the camps in the south they are surrounded by the Lebanese army okay, until now, if you want to fix a bathroom you need a permission. If you want to introduce any building material you have to get a permission from the... so, its really, really, its extremely hard, and take the basic thing, the shelter, okay, sometimes I go inside their homes and I say to my self, oh my god, how can they live in such a condition? Its inhuman, its simple, its inhuman, then education, there is UNRWA okay, and even if they were lucky to get to graduate from high school, what is next? They can't afford going to universities, and that's why there are so many kids that drop out of school, I mean maybe 69

percent of Palestinian kids join first grade, okay, and then only 20 percent of them they continue their university education, okay, its amazing, amazing, one time you were extremely [inaudible: 10:01]... once upon a time, that the percentage of the educated Palestinian people were among the highest, is the highest amongst the Arab countries, and now, when you look at it, I think we are down the scale that's for sure, and you know, its extremely hard... hurt when you meet those young people in the camps and they have no hope whatsoever, that's why they prefer to drop from school when they are in grade ten because if they know if they cant continue their education, they will say okay, fine, why should we be bothered? Why should we put the effort? I am not going to do this for them... they will end up working any kind of work in building, or electricity or you know any of those jobs, even in the camp, you can see lots of them, lots of those youth sitting on the street, and just doing nothing, now this is very dangerous, because they can be intimidated easily okay, by any group who can provide money. And that's why its very, very dangerous, extremely dangerous to stay like that because you never know when these hidden explosives will explode, you will never know. This is concerning education. Health, okay, they have the UNRWA and the services in health services in UNRWA they can't cover all of those people. And so many of them they just loose their lives or their health situation deteriorates just because they didn't have the proper care, health care. I am not saying that, the NGOs are not trying their best to work, I mean we have a very, very active civil society, this is for sure, but still, it is not enough, when it comes to work it is worse, because they can't allow to work in something like 72 or 70 jobs, and this is another problem, who have the guts to finish universities, what is next? Having the Palestinian passport, they cant go and... its very difficult to go work in other Arabic countries, some off them try to go to abroad, okay, to Europe illegally and they have to pay so much money to be able to get away with that, and if they stay here, with their degrees its very hard for them to find jobs, so they will end up again, on the streets. It is extremely difficult, now, the situation is becoming much worst after the Syrian, after the conditions now in Syria, you have so many Palestinians who moved to Lebanon, and many of them are staying in the camps and the camps are already crowded and now its more and more crowded, you don't have enough electricity or water or anything, and many of the Syrian refugees they had to take their jobs too, because they are less paid, for example, the Syrians are used to work in the fields, or in building, to build things, now the Syrian their places, because they less paid and much easier to deal with, so now it becoming even worse. Now, the camps in Beirut also they lost their Palestinian identity if you want, like [inaudible: 15:43]... and Shatila, and now it is mixed because so many people moved to those camps because its open and not surrounded by military forces, and at the same time its much cheaper to live there, so now, when I go to those camps, I don't feel it's a Palestinian camp anymore, you have Syrian underprivileged Lebanese, people from Palestine, Sudan, from everywhere okay, so... and that's why, the rate of crime increased so many youth there are living on drugs, we didn't hear of this before, from 10 years and n, you started hearing about those issues, yeah. It's becoming harder. Its more difficult for NGOs to sustain themselves, because most of the donation re going to for example, to Palestine, after each thing tat happens there, for example, after bombarded Gaza, people, so many events were transferred to the people in Palestine, now you have Syrian refugees, most of the donations are

to support Syrian refugees, I mean, really anything that happened in the area will affect the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon directly, directly, so now its becoming even harder... harder and harder. Yeah, am I answering your question? Really?

**NP:** yeah, yeah, how did you begin working with Inaash?

**SJ:** a group of friends they were planning to pay a project with Inaash, and I was a new comer to Lebanon, I had just came, and they contacted me, they said we are having an NGO for [inaudible: 18:40]... okay, and they wanted to reach, to have professional Palestinian people from different parts of the Arab world, they established this NGO and they wanted to call it Inaash, so they contacted me okay, and this is how I started with Inaash, and this reach stopped as an NGO, I don't recall what exactly happened with them, and I continued my work with Inaash, it was my second home, Inaash, I really, really felt involved in it. It was a very good experience for me, so...

**NP:** was that your first time to work in an NGO?

**SJ:** in Beirut yes, when I came back after marriage and everything, it was my first and only experience because I continued to work with them, especially that I was doing things that I really believe in, like this early childhood education, is extremely important, and it was... I always think that those 5 years from any child's life, will really affect them in the future, that's why I believe in the cause, but as I told you I was really shocked when I saw the kindergartens themselves, because as I told you before they were like prisons, even the doors they were made out of iron, like in jail. The windows were extremely small with iron bars, no ventilation, no lighting and everything, so after we did this fundraising we were able to renovate them. I wish you have enough time to visit, okay. We, now we have big huge classrooms with nice paintings on the walls and we have proper furniture for the kids, toys, educational toys for them to play with, so, I mean, now yes, I can call it a healthy atmosphere for a child to live in, okay. With light and ventilation, everything surrounding them is completely different, and so many kids when they go to these kindergartens they don't want to leave to their homes, because maybe, at least some of them I know for sure, that their... the area of their home as big as one of the classrooms, so its an outlet, and I work with the teachers and the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, and so on. It was a very fruitful experience, and especially the one in Balbak, we have kindergarten in Balbak, it was 600 hundred meters square and as we renovated it now, it is more than 1000 square meters now. We have completely extra floor with very nice classrooms, a big library, its really nice and it is the most important kindergarten there in Balbak. So, we used to have also volunteers from universities and school, that they will come to the camp and volunteer, they will teach the kids, tutoring again, or read stories or do some art work, in the kindergarten to us... the kindergarten in the morning, but we had many activities for the youth in the afternoon, so it was a great experience, unfortunately, the kindergarten in Balbak is still running, the one in Mar Elias is closed, and the one in Buj El Barajneh, they wanted to close it, but the teachers decided that they will

keep it on, they bought it basically from Inaash, and they keep it for themselves, and they have too many Syrian refugees, kids, in that school, so...

**NP:** So, Inaash wanted to close the school because there was lack of money?

**SJ:** Exactly, they are facing a little difficulties and they can't go on with this budget so, I was very happy to see the teachers taking the step, they put their "compensation", how do you say it in English? As you go out of their work, they give you money.

**NP:** Ah, pension.

**SJ:** pension, exactly, they used their pension to keep the school, and now I am also involved in that, to help them raise money in order to continue to work. I mean yeah, it can't be closed, we need this service and the ladies they need to work, and I am supporting them to yeah... it was a great step, really, a courageous step to use their pensions... in order to keep it. I mean, amazing, I don't know, I feel that this is their destiny of those Palestinian people, is continuous struggle, continuous struggle, yeah. Did we cover all?

**NP:** I just want to ask about how you got interested in embroidery? Is that something you always were interested in?

**SJ:** yes, I was, I was always interested in embroidery and I always appreciated, I do appreciate all kinds of handy work, whether it's embroidery, ceramics, painting, whatever, but especially embroidery, I am really into that and not only Palestinian embroidery, but any kind of embroidery, like the Indian embroidery, the Chinese embroidery, I really love it. It is an art for itself, now, as for the Palestinian embroidery, it's my passion, it's my passion, and I always like to put on Palestinian embroidery dresses and so on, but at the same time, when you think about it, usually, we put on our traditional Palestinian dress in certain occasions okay, certain festivals or certain national occasions, and so on, and that's why I always had this idea or dream, okay, why don't we apply it on something more so that we can use it any day of the week? Now, in Inaash, as I told you, for a long time in Inaash, I was concentrating on kindergartens and then I went into this idea into studying fashion and so on. Now, I feel that yes, I found myself if you want, with my art degree and the passion for embroidery and this important project, so I feel these parts of the puzzle are getting connected. Okay. I mean at this age, I started knowing what I want to do for the rest of my life. I found my purpose in life, let's put it that way. This is Palestinian, ah.

**NP:** this was a present from Widad?

**SJ:** really? Okay, okay, interesting, okay.

**NP:** is there anything that I didn't ask you that you want to tell me?

**SJ:** I think we covered it all. This is how I feel. If you, after you write your article, if you feel that something is missing or you want to add anything more, just let me know. Okay, I was really not expecting you to pick me up, I thought that you wanted older people that have longer experience and that are more involved in the past and they can give you a different kind of input, you amazed me, when you said yes I am a candidate for your project but I'm glad because it's a new experience, it's a new experience yeah.

**NP:** I think you got lots of experience, your story range is...

**SJ:** No, this experience is really new, because it didn't happen before you know, or at least for not a long time, let me say that for a long time, because before the NGOs, they used of course to teach the girl how to embroider, and then it went from one generation to another, Inaash, they started in 69, so they did teach some... they did teach quiet a good number of women how to embroider, I don't know how to embroider, so I couldn't be...

TAPE 4

**SJ:** ... in that manner, they did have to learn a lot about embroidery, but I helped in design, and the combination of colors, and so on... so yeah, it's a new experience, and I am sure that it will take us somewhere, someday, I don't know when and how... look at this article, its nice..

**NP:** Yes, I will definitely.

**SJ:** and you should show Imad my picture, I look really nice I this picture.

**NP:** you look nice all the time, I think.

**SJ:** No, no, in this picture in particular he was a good photographer. And also he took this picture fro my dining room, those things are on top of each other on the table, I don't have a house now, this house have turned into a storage, really, really, its miserable, because everywhere you go, if you come to my house, I am really, I am not inviting anybody to my home, because it's a shame its not a home anymore, it's a storage plus a working area, and closets, things are all over the place, unbelievable, but its inspiring, when I see such nice pictures, but if you need anything more just let me know. I will write you.

**NP:** thank you!

**SJ:** I am sure it's a completely different experience, from the things that you have written about, right?

**NP:** well...