



Izzat Freitekh
La Shish Kabob
Charlotte, North Carolina

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[*START INTERVIEW*]

Keia Mastrianni: It is Wednesday, April 12th, 2017. My name is Keia Mastrianni. I'm recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance, Charlotte, North Carolina, Central Avenue Corridor Project. I am at La Shish Kabob, and it is 3:04 in the afternoon. Will you tell me your name and where we're at?

[00:00:22]

Izzat Freitekh: My name is Izzat. I'm from Jerusalem originally. I live in Charlotte like ten years, and I have a business like eight years now in Charlotte.

[00:00:34]

Keia Mastrianni: What is that business?

[00:00:36]

Izzat Freitekh: This restaurant, Mediterranean food. The name of the restaurant, La Shish Kabob.

[00:00:41]

Keia Mastrianni: And you've owned it for eight years.

[00:00:42]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes.

[00:00:43]

Keia Mastrianni: Okay. Tell me, so what brought you to Charlotte?

[00:00:49]

Izzat Freitekh: My son here, he came to the UNCC, the university, and, you know, not easy to live in Jerusalem in this time, you know, war problem every day, and I have a big family. And he told me that Charlotte is quiet, nice. Because we don't know U.S. before, came first time here. He don't know how it's coming. You see it on the TV like action, you know. This Charlotte something area, quiet, nice, cute. We came here, then beginning the life, is coming like the same day be like a forty-three years, August 13th, 2008, and we came the same day here and the beginning of our life from the beginning.

[00:01:43]

Keia Mastrianni: Wow. Tell me how that was. Was it like starting a brand-new life? Everything was different?

[00:01:51]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, everything different, language, the weather, the people, everything, everything. Everything change. The school, the doctors, the dentists, all of this. Big family, seven daughter and one son I have.

[00:02:08]

Keia Mastrianni: All of them came with you?

[00:02:09]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes.

[00:02:10]

Keia Mastrianni: Oh, my goodness.

[00:02:10]

Izzat Freitekh: No, my son before, but I am with my seven daughter and my wife, we coming in one time, yeah.

[00:02:14]

Keia Mastrianni: Wow. That is a big adventure.

[00:02:18]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yes, change. Everything change.

[00:02:20]

Keia Mastrianni: Big change.

[00:02:21]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yes, yes.

[00:02:22]

Keia Mastrianni: And you have eight children.

[00:02:24]

Izzat Freitekh: I have seven daughter and one son, yes.

[00:02:27]

Keia Mastrianni: How do you have hair on your head still? [*Laughter*]

[00:02:29]

Izzat Freitekh: I like it. I like it, nice. Is good, is very nice. Thanks God, it's not easy. The girl here also not easy. It's coming different. Everything is different. In our country, there's no boyfriend, nothing like this. Here everything is *cool*. That's the big problem I have. All of them, no, that is something stopped. And first one, she married. The bigger one, she married and she have girl now. And the second one, my son Tariq he live in L.A., he work there, he's director, from here from university from Charlotte, and he director now is famous one in L.A. The bigger one, my daughter, she marry and she have one daughter, one girl, Dania, and Razan, she married and she have two boy. And Haya, she's now a broker. She has license for broker, is good in Charlotte. And Yasmin now in university, Malek in high school, Fulla in middle school, and Alma in elementary school.

[00:03:53]

Keia Mastrianni: Oh, my goodness. So what is the age range? How old is the youngest?

[00:03:58]

Izzat Freitekh: Alma now in June 2, she be like nine. And Dania, the biggest one, in October 1, she be thirty-one.

[00:04:10]

Keia Mastrianni: Wow.

[00:04:12]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes.

[00:04:12]

Keia Mastrianni: That is amazing. So tell me, what did you do when you lived in Jerusalem? Did you have a different career?

[00:04:19]

Izzat Freitekh: No, same. Restaurant. I am in this work from 1985.

[00:04:23]

Keia Mastrianni: Okay. Did your family have restaurants?

[00:04:25]

Izzat Freitekh: No. My father, no. My father is a rich man in Jerusalem, have auto business. We are from original, from the Jerusalem, from inside Old City in Jerusalem, and my father, my grandfather, my grand-grandfather, gave me all the—made in Jerusalem, made in Jerusalem. *[Laughs]* Yes. You know, it's not easy there. It's very *[inaudible]*. The people is nice, and there's no problem between Jewish, Christian, Muslim. The problem not like this there. The problem coming from the government, that we left, left everything.

[00:05:08]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure. So it's more political than it is the religious divisions?

[00:05:14]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. The problem, religion, I born in Jerusalem, Old City. I go to the school, the church school, the college *[inaudible]*. My wife also the Rosary Sisters School. It's all the church, big church in Jerusalem. But there's nothing. We don't think in that. No Jewish. The problem about the land, not about—the people is nice. But the government need this, this *[inaudible]*, and we feel this our land.

[00:05:47]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure.

[00:05:48]

Izzat Freitekh: And somebody coming to take our land from us. That's all. That's the right. But this now different, this coming of blood, and a lot of people is [*inaudible*] about that, but this time Jerusalem, not easy to live in Jerusalem. It's big prison. My mom there and my sister there and my brother, I call them every day. It's a big prison. Jerusalem is a big prison for the people there. But, thanks God I am here, we are happy. I let my mom coming two, three time in this nine years. She's old now, she can't coming, and that's the life.

[00:06:29]

Keia Mastrianni: Did you experience violence when you were back in Jerusalem? Did you have to deal with any of that kind of scary stuff?

[00:06:38]

Izzat Freitekh: No.

[00:06:38]

Keia Mastrianni: But it just—the tensions were there.

[00:06:40]

Izzat Freitekh: The tension, the tension, no, no. When you have seven daughters, you need to be afraid about that, Jerusalem, U.S., everywhere. But there's steps between here and Jerusalem. Here, we are afraid about them from different things, but there is a lot, a

lot, a lot of problem. But we came here and we are live here now from days one here. We are in Charlotte. We don't left Charlotte. And we are happy, and we don't go home back to our Jerusalem because is not easy to go back, expensive tickets, and then, you know, big family. But thanks God we are good.

[00:07:21]

Keia Mastrianni: And how did your son find Charlotte? How did he decide to come to school here?

[00:07:26]

Izzat Freitekh: From his cousin. He's coming from one to one, and that's the life, from one to one, from one to one. You know me maybe from somebody else. That's the life. From his cousin, he be here and he coming here. He be in Sydney. I sent him to Sydney, and he take his—he go like four years in Sydney to university. Then he come here because he like director. He go something else. I don't know in English, don't know the name, but something like for medical something, big also. Four years in Sydney, I pay for him like a lot of money for every year, but he didn't like this. He coming to Charlotte and he take what he need, and he make it, and he's good now. He's famous guy.

[00:08:17]

Keia Mastrianni: Wow. You must be proud.

[00:08:19]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah. Yeah, thanks God. Here's the picture. I'll let you see the picture for him. He's very, very famous guy.

[00:08:25]

Keia Mastrianni: Now I know why you're always on the phone, because you have eight, nine people you have to talk to here.

[00:08:31]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, and Mom also. [*Laughter*]

[00:08:34]

Keia Mastrianni: So tell me how you got into the restaurant business, if you've been in it since '85.

[00:08:40]

Izzat Freitekh: I love the food. I love to work in food. Here is my son. It's my son, and this is the famous one in U.S. I don't know his name. It's Eric something, Sungerman [*phonetic*]. Yeah, here is my son, and here's the people. He's in L.A. now.

[00:09:01]

Keia Mastrianni: Very cool.

[00:09:03]

Izzat Freitekh: The business coming like this. In 1985, I beginning. You know, we have like cinemas in Jerusalem. Inside the cinema, there's cafeteria. I've been in the cafeteria from the beginning. I'm small, I work in the cafeteria. When they closed all the cinemas, it was becoming bad in Jerusalem, is nothing, 1985, all the cinemas in Jerusalem and the West Bank close. I beginning my life from this point. I change. I take one place, small place outside [*inaudible*] from my father. Then I beginning my work. I bring all the stuff, the ice cream, the Coke, the sandwiches, the small one, I put it outside, I sell it. Then beginning the steps how it's coming. Then I learned this. I take like training how's to cook. Then I go from this point, from 1985, I begin.

[00:09:59]

Keia Mastrianni: So you got into culinary. You went to culinary school and took classes on how to cook?

[00:10:03]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yes, yes.

[00:10:04]

Keia Mastrianni: In Jerusalem?

[00:10:05]

Izzat Freitekh: In Jerusalem, yeah, Notre Dame.

[00:10:06]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. Now, so your love for food didn't really—it didn't stem from family; it just you kind of got into it as a young boy?

[00:10:14]

Izzat Freitekh: No, it's mine. My father is different work. My brother, different work. Only me. And my son now different too.

[00:10:19]

Keia Mastrianni: So what is it about food that attracted you?

[00:10:22]

Izzat Freitekh: Oh, I don't—the food is—you know, I like the food. Before I be fat. *[Laughs]* I like to eat to grill, to cook. I like. This beginning from the point that I like, because my mom also not Palestinian, my mom from Beirut, and she cook good. She cook good. And I learn from her something, and also I learn from her a lot of things, the taste. The taste is very good. When you learn—when you have the taste, the nice taste, you can go and your food like regular.

[00:11:06]

Keia Mastrianni: And what were some of the things that she made that you learned a lot from her?

[00:11:12]

Izzat Freitekh: Like tabbouleh, hummus, the famous one, the famous, the tabbouleh, the hummus, the cook the rice, how to cook the rice, how to cook the baba ganoush, the falafel, because my mom, she's Lebanese, originally Lebanese. And the kabob, the Mediterranean food, you know.

[00:11:31]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure.

[00:11:32]

Izzat Freitekh: The food in the Middle East, there is three places, coming from Turkish, the best, then go to Lebanon, Syria, and Jerusalem, then go to Jordan, Iraq, and then Egypt and this, but the best food in this three, four places. And beginning from there, you know, I know the taste and I know how to make the taste good. That would be here like everybody coming, I see the food and taste, the taste is good, thanks God. We make good. But hard work. This food, this kind of food, you need hard work, a lot of work.

[00:12:05]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah, because it's all prepared from scratch every day.

[00:12:09]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, and fresh.

[00:12:10]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. So, yeah, in Jerusalem, though, there's a lot of mixture of foods, like there's Palestinian food and Israeli food, and there's a few cultures involved there, yeah?

[00:12:29]

Izzat Freitekh: Uh-huh.

[00:12:30]

Keia Mastrianni: So tell me what—how it was to open a business here. Did you—yeah, how was that to get started here in Charlotte?

[00:12:42]

Izzat Freitekh: Here in Charlotte, I go to Eastland Mall. It's coming in the end. There's one Chinese guy, he need to sell his restaurant when I'm coming in 2008. I buy it from him in the food court, but I don't go in the same food. I go to the fry. Before this is coming, nobody know me, nobody know my name, and it's not easy to go in with the people, let them taste, and more also to our food. That I go in fry food, the chicken, the wings, something like this. Then they close and shut down. Then I sit at home like one year, more than one year.

[00:13:19]

Keia Mastrianni: Going crazy?

[00:13:20]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah. No, yeah, it's very crazy. It's not easy. And this time I look for place to help me to see how can—I found this place, and then I go over this step by step and everybody know me now. Not everybody, but, yeah, we make good. But not easy, you know. This area, in the beginning I have a lot of problem, broken—

[00:13:52]

Keia Mastrianni: With permits and—

[00:13:53]

Izzat Freitekh: Not permit, no, no. The permit, the license, this, I make it step by step, and I learn step. I go two, three times training for language, for also to take the certificate, how is to make this. This different, here different than Jerusalem. How to put it in the freezer, how to take it from freezer, how to heat it, this is a lot of rules here.

[00:14:14]

Keia Mastrianni: A lot of rules.

[00:14:16]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, not easy, but it's good. It's good. It's safety for me and for my customers. Yeah, it's good. I'm happy for that. I learned that, and I make it like 99, my score now is good. I beginning in '87 [1987], and I take 100 like three, four years, because our food need to be clean, everything, everything. Then's

coming, like I found this place. Then I go step by step. Last year I expanding because I need more space, so thought family coming, need to eat, there is no space. But we expanding, but we don't make money. It's not nothing different, not anything different for one place or two place. But, thanks God, and this time is good. We look for the future.

[00:15:08]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure. And what do you see for La Shish Kabob in the future? What would you like to see?

[00:15:15]

Izzat Freitekh: Well, I need to make a franchise, franchise like this, because I have the recipe, I have something special, but this coming steps, you know, a lot of steps. But I try. I try. I let some—because Charlotte's coming bigger and North Carolina is big place, big state, and we need—I mean, there is no fresh eyes for Mediterranean in North Carolina. I hope that I can make it in the future. That's what I need to be.

[00:15:49]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure. And when you first started this, were you doing all the cooking?

[00:15:54]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, me and my wife in the beginning, and there is one lady now work with me, and her husband work with me from the beginning. And the beginning, me and my wife and my daughters and this two guys, this my beginning.

[00:16:11]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure.

[00:16:12]

Izzat Freitekh: Then she learn everything, this lady. I let her learn from my wife and from me, and we go on this, and now she—everything, we need to taste it every day because the spice, it change from time to time. The spice not from here; the spice is coming from overseas. Not every time bring the same spices.

[00:16:34]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure.

[00:16:35]

Izzat Freitekh: That's what you need to taste all the food every time.

[00:16:38]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:16:39]

Izzat Freitekh: But now we are good. We are just like a big family. Now is good, this hire working, then you're working, and half of them is work is good. But for my daughters, small daughters, we need a lot of time. I have a lot of hours I make a day, like twelve or fourteen hours a day I work. But that the life.

[00:17:01]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:17:03]

Izzat Freitekh: That's the life. You don't work, you don't have money, is not good for you and for your family.

[00:17:07]

Keia Mastrianni: Right, and, I mean, and you have a large family to support.

[00:17:10]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:17:11]

Keia Mastrianni: And so your wife is a good cook too. She's incredible.

[00:17:15]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yes, yes, she is. My mom, she let her learn everything when—yeah. In all our life with the family, you know, we live like—I married in 1985. To 2008, like before we came here, our life is together with her family, with my family, and she learn everything. This our food. Who live in Jerusalem know this food, and we try to make the best, but sometimes somebody like it, somebody don't like it. But she's good. She's good, yeah.

[00:17:50]

Keia Mastrianni: Did she learn from your mom? You mom taught her?

[00:17:52]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, my mom, yes, yes.

[00:17:53]

Keia Mastrianni: [*Laughs*] Tell me about the food. Tell me what—just describe a little bit of the things that you serve here and the—

[00:18:03]

Izzat Freitekh: Here's the famous things here, the hummus, it's coming from chickpeas. You put the chickpeas like twelve hours in the water, then you make it like four or five hours in the oven, then we mix it with tahina [tahini] and garlic. The hummus is all the people—most the people know what's hummus. This is the famous one, like appetizer.

And the second one, the big meal, the lamb. Here nobody sell lamb, not a lot of the restaurant; all of them chicken or beef. The lamb shank is famous. We sell lamb and the kabob, chicken, beef, lamb. But there is a lot of people like veggie, like hummus, falafel, tabbouleh, that's the famous thing, the veggie combo. All of them mixed together, one of them, veggie combo. Veggie combo like five things, and [unclear] five things, the two.

But, you know, this restaurant, you need like Charlotte—I don't want to be quiet, but not like California or New York or this big places. It's kind of like busy. Like this place need to be busy twenty-four hours. But here, we are good. We don't make out, we don't make money, because what we make, we spend. What we make, we spend. That the life. But, thanks God we pay our bill, everything is good, that's what we need.

[00:19:25]

Keia Mastrianni: Right.

[00:19:27]

Izzat Freitekh: No need more. No need. If I need more, I go another state.

[00:19:31]

Keia Mastrianni: When you came over here, I mean, I know you had your family with you, but did you find a community of people also from Jerusalem or—

[00:19:39]

Izzat Freitekh: I found some guy, his name Mr. Tim Milton [phonetic]. He's the owner of my home now, because I'm renting now. I don't have home. This guy, he didn't know us, but I told him "I'm from Jerusalem and I have seven daughters and my son and I need house to live." We need house to—you need to check credit, you need your Social, you need—this guy, he give me the key in minute. "Take the key. We talk later." And he left me. And her wife, she help me in the school for my daughters. Nobody, only this two guy from the beginning: Mr. Tim Milton and Mrs. Shelby.

[00:20:32]

Keia Mastrianni: And just they just wanted to help, and that was it?

[00:20:36]

Izzat Freitekh: No, that's it. We find him in website that he have house. We go to rent the house, me and my son. We told him, "Mr. Tim, we are here, new. We come in yesterday. We don't have anything. We need house. I have big family that come from Jerusalem."

He tell me—a minute. He didn't take for him like ten seconds to think. "Here's the key." Made the contract end of the month. "Take your time now. See what you can do, and beginning from this point." That's it.

[00:21:14]

Keia Mastrianni: What a blessing.

[00:21:16]

Izzat Freitekh: That's it. No check score, no credit score, no deposit, no money, nothing.

[00:21:23]

Keia Mastrianni: Wow.

[00:21:24]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah.

[00:21:24]

Keia Mastrianni: That is incredible.

[00:21:26]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah.

[00:21:27]

Keia Mastrianni: [*Laughs*] Yeah, and—

[00:21:29]

Izzat Freitekh: It's nothing now like this. If you go to take apartment, you need a lot of paper to take that apartment.

[00:21:33]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure.

[00:21:34]

Izzat Freitekh: He give me the house, *his* house.

[00:21:36]

Keia Mastrianni: That's crazy.

[00:21:37]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah.

[00:21:39]

Keia Mastrianni: And did you know English before you got here?

[00:21:41]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes.

[00:21:41]

Keia Mastrianni: You did?

[00:21:41]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes.

[00:21:42]

Keia Mastrianni: Okay.

[00:21:42]

Izzat Freitekh: It's me and my wife and daughters, everybody, yeah.

[00:21:44]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah, yeah, okay. You know, I'm really struck by—I mean, the decision to come over here is a big one, but with such a big family it's—

[00:21:53]

Izzat Freitekh: It's not easy, but you need to make your decision. All make it or not make it. There's nothing to think about. Or you be safe for you and your family, or you go all your life in this problem and you don't know what happen in the future. I made the decision and they come here.

[00:22:14]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah, but what a—I mean, what a big decision and then, you know, the experience, it is not easy to come in and [*inaudible*] culture.

[00:22:22]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah, but what can I do? There is nothing to make.

[00:22:25]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:22:26]

Izzat Freitekh: There is nothing to me. When I came here, I only have like two—forty days, yeah.

[00:22:32]

Keia Mastrianni: And so have you found a home in Charlotte? Do you feel like this is your home now, like—

[00:22:39]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, I am in the same home till now, Mr. Tim. I don't buy a home. I can't buy home. You know, you need down payment, you need lot of problem. I don't have home to now. I rent, I pay rent 'til now. Nine years and rent. Thanks God is good. If you have money to pay the rent, it's very good.

[00:23:02]

Keia Mastrianni: Amen. *[Laughs]* So but do you feel like the city has embraced you?

[00:23:08]

Izzat Freitekh: I feel like my country, I feel that I born here, I feel the neighbors is nice people. I feel that everybody smile. There's no problem. I feel very like—in the school,

I'm happy with the girls. You don't feel like coming here; you feel like you are live here, you are born, because a lot of people—I see all the world here.

[00:23:30]

Keia Mastrianni: Isn't that crazy?

[00:23:32]

Izzat Freitekh: Mm-hmm, it's crazy. Yes, it's crazy.

[00:23:34]

Keia Mastrianni: Right here. It's a beautiful thing.

[00:23:36]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, it's very nice. I see the people, I don't think I see it in my life, yeah, Korean, Asian, Indian, Pakistanian, Afghanistan, Eritrea, South Africa, Egyptian people, Sudan people, Gulf people, Iranian people, oh, oh—

[00:23:56]

Keia Mastrianni: In Charlotte?

[00:23:57]

Izzat Freitekh: In Charlotte, yes. Turkish people, Chinese people, Japanese people. The Latino is different now; the San Salvador, the Mexico, the Guatemala. [*Laughter*]

[00:24:16]

Keia Mastrianni: It's incredible.

[00:24:18]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, all the people here.

[00:24:19]

Keia Mastrianni: And what about your people? Now that you've opened this place, do you find people who are from—

[00:24:25]

Izzat Freitekh: It's coming, people. There's not a lot of people from Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, there is now nobody here from Jerusalem. But Palestinian, yeah, but not from Jerusalem. Palestinian, you know, there's a big difference for Palestinian. Palestinian in 1948 is happen the war, there's a lot of people going outside country. And there's another war 1967, that other people also left Jerusalem and go. And there is the Palestinian inside Jerusalem, and there's Palestinian in the West Bank, and there's Palestinian in Gaza. Different, different culture, different people, they are.

In Jerusalem, no, I don't see anyone from Jerusalem here. But from like Palestinian from Kuwait I see, Palestinian from Syria I see, Palestinian from Jordan I see, Palestinian from Lebanon I see, Palestinian from West Bank I don't see. And from West Bank, no, I don't see. But there is a lot of Palestinian, but, you know, different culture. Coming the Palestinians from different culture but is good.

[00:25:22]

Keia Mastrianni: What is your specific culture like?

[00:25:24]

Izzat Freitekh: It's different. Jerusalem different, different for everything. The people different, the language different, the food different. Not the language like English, no, Arabic, but different. When you talk, you know you are from Jerusalem.

[00:25:41]

Keia Mastrianni: The accent.

[00:25:42]

Izzat Freitekh: The accent, yes.

[00:25:42]

Keia Mastrianni: Mm-hmm, yeah. But when people come in here, they are tasting a piece of Jerusalem, yeah?

[00:25:50]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, you feel that you are in Jerusalem, like my restaurant in Jerusalem.

[00:25:53]

Keia Mastrianni: Mm-hmm.

[00:25:55]

Izzat Freitekh: Same, same taste, same food, same everything.

[00:25:58]

Keia Mastrianni: And is it—does it amaze you to see all the different people from other countries come in here and eat?

[00:26:04]

Izzat Freitekh: At the beginning. That's what I take money from them. If you see the money, I take from everyone. Like from Saudi Arabia, I take from him. If you have money from your country, yes, give me. This is beginning, like this. Now the people take our money, take our Turkish money, our Indian money. I put the name, and I put it. But this, I don't know, some people, you can see it's a new life. I don't know that I'd see these people, you know?

[00:26:31]

Keia Mastrianni: I know. *[Laughter]*

[00:26:32]

Izzat Freitekh: Also in Jerusalem, have a lot of tourists coming from Europe, from U.S., but here different, different, different, different.

[00:26:42]

Keia Mastrianni: Do you take pride in being able to serve this food here and to have this business?

[00:26:47]

Izzat Freitekh: We only go step by step by here. We don't go in this big menu. We like to see what the people like. That's coming student, beginning with the student, the student like all of them from the Gulf, so make the food like Gulf food, because I know how is the Gulf food coming, the rice and the chicken and the—that's the beginning. Now I make everything, the Gulf, everything you see in the buffet and you see there. But not easy. There is days, days, a lot of days I lose, and a lot of days I don't make money. And a lot of days I make. We put this to this, we make, and we coming like [*inaudible*]. But I'm happy also expending, I'm happy to expending, because I look for the future, maybe I make something good.

[00:27:36]

Keia Mastrianni: Sure. So you've added the side dining room.

[00:27:40]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yes, yes, and the—

[00:27:41]

Keia Mastrianni: And this, this area.

[00:27:43]

Izzat Freitekh: This area is where we all sit here. Before, it's a small place.

[00:27:45]

Keia Mastrianni: Will you have special events or have like people—

[00:27:50]

Izzat Freitekh: There is a lot of special event happen, but not in this time, coming in like Ramadan, like another two month, with the fasting beginning. That's every night we have, so, yeah, every night we have food and we have people, and we have event, you know, that's Ramadan, because all the days fasting and then the days everybody come and eat.

[00:28:10]

Keia Mastrianni: And they come here to celebrate?

[00:28:11]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yes, yes.

[00:28:12]

Keia Mastrianni: Well, that's nice.

[00:28:13]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, it's very nice, yeah.

[00:28:14]

Keia Mastrianni: There's not many restaurants that probably are feeding people after the fast like that.

[00:28:18]

Izzat Freitekh: No, all of them come in regular, but we are here. Now everybody know that Ramadan is like a lot of people coming and everybody eat and there's a lot of food, kind of food, and lot of dessert and juice. You know, that's what we famous now in this.

[00:28:37]

Keia Mastrianni: That's special.

[00:28:38]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, that's special, Ramadan. Now, there is nothing, maybe nobody make it here in Charlotte.

[00:28:42]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:28:42]

Izzat Freitekh: I don't hear that somebody make it, but I make it. There's lot of people come in, happy, everything, fruit, this one coming like time to eat, all the kind of food is fresh, the fruit, the dessert, like kunafa, harissa, baklava, all of this.

[00:29:01]

Keia Mastrianni: Yum. Yum. Are you making the desserts as well or—

[00:29:07]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, there is cousin—my wife, her father, my wife is a big place for the dessert in Jerusalem, and her cousin here is like a professor in one of the university in one of the state. I don't know. I don't remember the state. And he came here and he let me learn how to make all the dessert. He's a professor of something. He's like big guy, and I don't know what—a doctor. But he know about dessert, he coming here, and he's very nice guy, and he let me learn how is the dessert make here in U.S. because different Jerusalem. And we make it. No, we make everything.

[00:29:53]

Keia Mastrianni: That’s very neat.

[00:29:54]

Izzat Freitekh: We learn. Yeah. And there is something to learn, I go to learn, no problem. I don’t care about the age. I learn. Told me, “Go learn,” I go learn. Told me, “Make something,” I make it. It’s easy for me. I try to make everything, but if I need to learn, no problem.

[00:30:11]

Keia Mastrianni: You’re very easygoing.

[00:30:13]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, we need it. We need it. *[Laughs]*

[00:30:16]

Keia Mastrianni: For somebody to just say, “Okay, this is what it is. We make the decision and we go, and we do what we have to do.”

[00:30:21]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, but if there’s something to learn—because when I go to CPCC [Central Piedmont Community College] here to go and more English, you know, I know English, but I don’t—there’s no conversation for me. There’s people from jail, there’s

people maybe seventy years, [*inaudible*] people, small, all the people, is nobody [*inaudible*]. If there is something to learn, I go learn. No problem.

[00:30:43]

Keia Mastrianni: That is good.

[00:30:45]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah.

[00:30:46]

Keia Mastrianni: So what brings you the greatest joy?

[00:30:49]

Izzat Freitekh: Like what?

[00:30:52]

Keia Mastrianni: Just being here, setting up this big business, what makes you happy?

[00:30:58]

Izzat Freitekh: Here?

[00:30:59]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:31:00]

Izzat Freitekh: That I work.

[00:31:00]

Keia Mastrianni: Just that you work?

[00:31:02]

Izzat Freitekh: I work. I have food for my daughters. I don't told anybody give me something. Thanks God that's the best things I have it, that I don't let my daughters or my son or my wife told somebody, "Please give me water." No, thanks God. We work, we make, we good.

[00:31:24]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. So just that you can provide for your family and give them everything they need.

[00:31:29]

Izzat Freitekh: For me and my family also, you know. But my family, because this girls, we need to take care of all time, we need—you know, the girls, we change everything.

[00:31:38]

Keia Mastrianni: The girls. *[Laughs]* So many girls.

[00:31:41]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, right. It's not *[inaudible]* that's what I work, hard work, not easy for me, but I let them be happy.

[00:31:49]

Keia Mastrianni: Do you feel like having come to the United States has given your children more opportunities?

[00:31:56]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's good.

[00:31:57]

Keia Mastrianni: It's been good?

[00:31:58]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes. This U.S., meaning U.S., nobody can talk about, is the best customer service in the world, U.S., and also the church is be nice. In the Easter, I go with my daughters and my wife to one of the church here. Food, free hot dogs, cheeseburgers, fries. Look. It's nothing but it's good. There's lot of people need this food.

My daughter, she have it in the website that we have something for eggs, this Alma. She told me, "Dad, please." I don't know the church, but when I go, I see church, I like it because I like the people there. They make everything open, juice, water, burger,

hot dogs, everything, and I see people eat, is happy. That make me happy. And we go there to play. I think that like, you know, like Easter, like when I go there, I see a lot people, nice people, everything free. I see something good. This is the first time in Charlotte, I see something like this, which is very nice. I like it.

[00:33:10]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. Well, that's neat that you're open to that, just to meeting community through [*inaudible*].

[00:33:16]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, yeah, that's what I try to make it here in the mosque every Thursday for long time, but I make the fasting every Thursday. I bring like the food that I have. I send them to the mosque. And I have also another church, I work with church here is for Egyptian people here in—not Albemarle Road. I don't know the name, but here, like ten minutes from here. Also I send them food Sunday, every Sunday. Nice people here, nice people here. There is poor people here. There's poor people here. We try. When you try to help, God help you. When you help the people, God help you. That's my life. If I have something to help, God give me more. Thanks God.

[00:34:01]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. Yeah, it's amazing. I mean, when you came here, you received help, and now you're just giving back where you can, across churches and mosques and—

[00:34:13]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, I know.

[00:34:14]

Keia Mastrianni: What a beautiful thing.

[00:34:15]

Izzat Freitekh: Look at the Knesset here, the Jewish Knesset, ask me about food, about this difference, because this need somebody to—different.

[00:34:24]

Keia Mastrianni: Kosher?

[00:34:26]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, koshering, is different. But ask me about food, it's easy for me to help in that. It's no problem. I don't care the religion. How you talk with me, that's your religion. You talk with me nice, that's your religion. You talk me bad, that's your religion. I don't care the color. How you talk with me, how you go with me, that's you. I go like this. I thanks God. Nobody asks me for, and here nobody is—the accent, when you told me somebody from where you are, okay, from Jerusalem, that's it. I don't talk Palestine, because nobody know Palestine. It's Israel. But Jerusalem, everybody know it.

[00:35:07]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:35:08]

Izzat Freitekh: But is good. We make it.

[00:35:11]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. And you seem to have strong faith and—

[00:35:13]

Izzat Freitekh: You need that.

[00:35:17]

Keia Mastrianni: —and strong family. [*Laughs*]

[00:35:17]

Izzat Freitekh: We need it. We need it.

[00:35:20]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. And tell me about your customers. Have you made friends through these customers [*inaudible*]?

[00:35:26]

Izzat Freitekh: It's like a lot of friends. We have a lot of friends. Here is the people, believe me, is nice people, and people need—what the customer need? Need to be smile in his face and give him good food and don't take a lot of money. That's it. If he like the food, he come back. If he didn't like the food, he didn't come back.

[00:35:51]

Keia Mastrianni: Your philosophies are so simple.

[00:35:55]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah. If he like it—

[00:35:56]

Keia Mastrianni: Makes sense.

[00:35:57]

Izzat Freitekh: —he come back. Your money in your pocket, yes? You come to me, if you like my food, you come back one time a week. If you don't like it, I didn't—it's food. You can't told me this nice and this good and you don't like it. If you like it, I see you another time. You don't like it, I don't see you.

[00:36:19]

Keia Mastrianni: Simple. But you make delicious food, and so people come back most of the time.

[00:36:25]

Izzat Freitekh: I make the original. That's the taste. That's the taste of the food. When you go to Jerusalem, you taste same taste. That the taste of our food. There's a lot of people like it and there's lot of people don't like it.

[00:36:40]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:36:41]

Izzat Freitekh: But I put American also food. I put the Philly steak, I put the burger, I put the wings. I don't have the Jerusalem just food. The Philly steak, the Philly chicken, the Philly lamb, I don't have it in Jerusalem, but I put it here because I need it. I need all the people coming, and I don't told them, "No, you are American, you don't like [inaudible]." No, I need all the people. I need the world.

[00:37:03]

Keia Mastrianni: That's right.

[00:37:04]

Izzat Freitekh: Who need to buy \$5, like he need to buy \$500, I don't care. That's good.

[00:37:10]

Keia Mastrianni: You know, and mention that you probably won't go back to Jerusalem, but do you feel like, you know, cooking the food that you do kind of keeps a connection between you and Jerusalem?

[00:37:24]

Izzat Freitekh: The connection, we have it every night. It's Jerusalem. It's the Holy Land. Nobody can forget Jerusalem. I am famous in Jerusalem, you know. If you don't see, I let you see now. I am the one of the famous in Jerusalem in the Facebook. Let me see now. I think it's 100 "like" and 747 "comment."

[00:37:55]

Keia Mastrianni: Oh, my goodness.

[00:37:57]

Izzat Freitekh: Yes, yeah, this and this also. There's like 4,500 "like," 2,000—

[00:38:04]

Keia Mastrianni: How are you so famous? [*Laughs*]

[00:38:05]

Izzat Freitekh: I told you, I have big restaurant Jerusalem.

[00:38:08]

Keia Mastrianni: Your restaurant in Jerusalem?

[00:38:10]

Izzat Freitekh: Jerusalem, yeah, the beginning.

[00:38:11]

Keia Mastrianni: And it's called the same place?

[00:38:12]

Izzat Freitekh: No. Abu el Ezz. My name.

[00:38:15]

Keia Mastrianni: It's your name.

[00:38:15]

Izzat Freitekh: Under my name.

[00:38:16]

Keia Mastrianni: What is the name?

[00:38:18]

Izzat Freitekh: Abu El Ezz Sandwiches, yeah. I told you I beginning in the sandwiches.

[00:38:23]

Keia Mastrianni: Yes. But I didn't know that restaurant is still there.

[00:38:26]

Izzat Freitekh: It's still there, but I rent it. But the name is there, Abu El Ezz Sandwiches.

[00:38:31]

Keia Mastrianni: And that started in 19—

[00:38:34]

Izzat Freitekh: Eighty-five, yes.

[00:38:34]

Keia Mastrianni: Eighty-five. And it's famous?

[00:38:36]

Izzat Freitekh: You saw. Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[00:38:39]

Keia Mastrianni: That's crazy.

[00:38:40]

Izzat Freitekh: All Jerusalem know me. I told you, I am the original. I am made in Jerusalem.

[00:38:45]

Keia Mastrianni: Yes. [*Laughs*]

[00:38:47]

Izzat Freitekh: You see this is also. Look at this. Any picture I put at 4,000 "like," 15,000 "comment," there's 3,600 "like," 1,400 "comment."

[00:38:59]

Keia Mastrianni: That's crazy. [*Laughs*]

[00:39:00]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah.

[00:39:01]

Keia Mastrianni: [*Laughs*] I love it. That's a beautiful thing. So, yeah, so, you know, I guess leaving that behind but bringing that here, I just see, I guess, you know,

maintaining that connection between your culture, and is it special to you to be able to share your culture with other people through food?

[00:39:27]

Izzat Freitekh: The food, look the food coming like this, if the meat fresh and the spices is good, not hot, you can eat. There's a lot hot and spicy I don't—we don't eat hot food, not like Indian or Pakistanis. It's different. There's lot of people like it because you can—the favorite is nice, you know, but I like the customer not coming every day. I like him to go to other place, to change, to be when he come back to my restaurant, let him be happy when he taste the food. When customer coming for you every day, every day, every day, you can't make for him every day different. I have menu. I can't change the menu, you know. Maybe seven, eight, ten times, finish the menu. That's what I let the people, "Go taste here, go taste."

I go to all of the restaurant to taste, to learn, also to learn. But it's easy. I mean, I hope that a lot of people like it, but you need to experiment for them, special the American people. The American people look for the name. There is franchise, he go inside and he eat regular. There's no franchise, he think 100 times before he go, because he spend his money. I'm with him. I'm with him. He need to pay money. He didn't taste the food, the food before. He hear about the food, but he didn't taste. That we need to explain more, more.

We need to work about this more, more than we have, to let everybody know that's the healthy food. Everything is halal and everything is hand-cut and everything is coming fresh. You can't go in frozen food. Frozen food, you can't make the frozen

food, no. And the vegetable is fresh. This vegetable, we clean it like you clean your clothes. The parsley, we clean it like three, four, five hours, to be the tabbouleh. The eggplant, we clean it and we fry it and we put it in the grill. And there's a lot of things to make. The fruit, the vegetable, a lot of work. The meat, a lot of work to clean it, to spice it, to keep it in the fridge like two, three days, the freezer. We buy it fresh, then we make it freezer. We frozen this food for one day to make everything is good inside, then we sell it, yeah. I mean, we need to explain for the people a lot, a lot of things, to let him go and now let the American people—you know, somebody trust what I told, "Take this. Trust me." He take it and be happy, because I feel that I know what like. But, you know, you need time, time, the time. The time is play for that. You need time. You need to be money in your pocket to be standing your legs.

[00:42:40]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah. So what are the biggest things that you've learned since kind of moving here and starting a new life? What has all of that taught you?

[00:42:51]

Izzat Freitekh: That you need to learn every day. Every day to be to study. Your work and other work, need to study. You need to be in U.S., you need to do that every day, every day, nonstop, nonstop. One day stop, you go back one week. Nonstop.

[00:43:10]

Keia Mastrianni: That's interesting. Yeah, yeah. And you've met people who've been kind?

[00:43:15]

Izzat Freitekh: You can't stop.

[00:43:18]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah.

[00:43:19]

Izzat Freitekh: I here now seven years. I close one day.

[00:43:21]

Keia Mastrianni: That's it. Wow.

[00:43:25]

Izzat Freitekh: It's coming to snow and nobody can go from my restaurant. One day.

[00:43:28]

Keia Mastrianni: One day. Wow. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you would like to say that you haven't said or that you want people to know about La Shish Kabob?

[00:43:39]

Izzat Freitekh: No, everything's—if you need to talk like 100 years, if you don't make something, let the people taste the food, special food, taste and like, I told you my food is the best I have. If you don't like it, you know, if you don't taste—sometimes you don't taste it, don't like it, that's it, finished. [*Laughter*] We need to let the people coming to try. This help me. This also need to told you about, this company—not company, this Taste of the World.

[00:44:21]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah, the global tour.

[00:44:23]

Izzat Freitekh: Every year she help me. Every year from days one till now, the Taste of the World coming, bring people, taste this food, eat this food, and pay. Not pay a lot of money, but pay. Yeah. It's very good, every year. Taste of the world, come and bring her people. The beginning I go, sixteen people, then thirty-two. Now this year I take sixty-four, and the next year—this year, 2000 (sic), I take 128, yeah, because I need a lot of people coming taste. This food is healthy food. If you don't like it, maybe we change for you something. We make for you something for you, you like it. But this healthy food.

[00:45:06]

Keia Mastrianni: Yeah, yeah.

[00:45:08]

Izzat Freitekh: That's what I need. But this Taste of the World is nice people.

[00:45:12]

Keia Mastrianni: Cool.

[00:45:13]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, its help.

[00:45:14]

Keia Mastrianni: Good organization.

[00:45:15]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah, I know. I mean, it's very nice when you give your life and other people coming and talk about you, and he pay also for you money for this food. What do you need more?

[00:45:23]

Keia Mastrianni: Right.

[00:45:25]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah.

[00:45:26]

Keia Mastrianni: And it creates more customers.

[00:45:27]

Izzat Freitekh: Yeah. It's not a lot of—this is good. The idea is good, the idea to help. If you help him, it's good. If you don't help him, but you have the idea, it's very good.

[00:45:37]

Keia Mastrianni: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Wonderful. Well, I thank you for your time, for your interview. And we will record thirty seconds of silence. Thank you so much.

[End of interview]