



**Playback Your Story asks the community around Gallaudet University to reflect on and unite through their connections to community, narrative, and place. Sponsored by Van Alen Institute and the DC Office of Planning, John Johnson conducted interviews throughout the community. The interviews culminated in a final performance by John Johnson's theater troop, Playback Theatre on the Gallaudet Campus in 2016. The initiative weaves together the stories of locals, inspiring us to cross the street, interact with one another, and understand the roots of our community.**

John Johnson: Today we have with us ...

Nijma Esad: Nijma Esad

John Johnson: Nijma Esad. Where did we just bump into one another?

Nijma Esad: Far East Taco Grille on Florida Avenue across from Gallaudet University.

John Johnson: Okay, and where do you live?

Nijma Esad: I'm a Trinidad resident. I live on Montello Avenue.

John Johnson: How long have you lived on Montello Avenue?

Nijma Esad: Since I moved to DC, which has been eight years.

John Johnson: What has that eight years been like?

Nijma Esad: Well, I'm from Chicago, so I can definitely say that living in a mixed community is new, because Chicago is very segregated. I'm from the South Side, so if I stayed in my community, I could definitely go days, weeks, without seeing people who weren't African-American, unless they were store owners.

John Johnson: What are some of the highlights or the beauty of your community?

Nijma Esad: When I first moved here, H Street wasn't what H Street is now, but H Street has always been a place that you can go walk to and get a meal, get a drink. I do miss the swap meet or the flea market—whatever it was called—the Florida Avenue flea market. I don't go to Union Market as much, because there's nothing there

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that I'm really interested in, but I still like the community. I definitely love that Planet Fitness is there. I can ride my bike and exercise, so it's becoming more of a walking community to do all of the things that I need to do.

John Johnson: Okay, and what things did you get from the market when it was around?

Nijma Esad: Shoot—That was the best place to go get a charger, because cell phone chargers, they break. That was the best place to go get some t-shirts, some cultural t-shirts, even some records, some CDs. I'm an implant, so Go-Go music is new to me, but it was easy to go up there and just get some Go-Go music to kind of acclimate myself to what it was.

John Johnson: What are the highlights of living in these communities, like the cultural aspect of it?

Nijma Esad: Now, that right there...In the terms that I look at culture, DC doesn't have it as much as Chicago, and maybe because Chicago is so segregated, we were forced to bring this cultural piece out. In Chicago we have an African festival, we have a reggae festival, we have a Caribbean festival. We have all of these festivals that are important to me and they're free, and here it seems like everything has a cost associated to it. In Chicago, you'd have to pay for the museum, but the culture is free in Chicago, and it seems like it's not free here.

John Johnson: What is your interaction with the university?

Nijma Esad: I haven't had much contact with Gallaudet University to the extent that I have neighbors, right? But our communication...I know how to spell my name. I know how to nod and say hello, but I don't have much communication or interaction with the university.

John Johnson: You mentioned some things with Union Market as well as Ivy City. What things can take place to actually bridge those things? Could you learn ASL?

Nijma Esad: Oh, that's definitely something that I would like to do, and I know that at the public library, they offer free classes. Gallaudet is across the street. I don't know if they offer free classes or if they're paid.

John Johnson: Cool. Thank you. Let's go eat tacos.

Nijma Esad: Yes.

\*This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity