

Sarah Arensman  
Cross-Cultural Interview # 2

Maysa was my language helper for our two-days of language acquisition practice. She also works for Ascension Church in their baby nurse on Sundays. Maysa is originally from Egypt and has been in the U.S. for 15 years. She came here with her husband shortly after they were married. He, however, has been in the U.S. for 18 years. Their marriage was arranged for them through their sisters. Maysa did not date him or have much time to get to know him since he was in the U.S. before their marriage. She is now divorcing him but does not seem upset by it. She says that is just how these things go, but asserts that it is not a good practice to have arranged marriages the way hers was. She remembers the first few years in America as being very lonely and talks about missing her family terribly. She told me it is hard to be here without any of her family.

Maysa has two children, a boy and a girl, aged 13 and 15. She talks of them constantly and tells me they are her life. She works at Macy's in the ladies' department helping customers try on and select clothing. She also gets paid by Ascension to take care of infants during the Sunday service. Maysa is not a Christian. She told me that a way to tell if someone in Egypt is religious is by how they dress, totally covered and veiled for a woman. For a man, you can tell by whether or not they will shake hands with a woman. But, she says, Egypt has become modern and so most people are not very religious anymore. She told me that all religions are basically the same and that she thought it was fine for people to believe in whatever system they want. She does not consider herself to be religious – but it is interesting that many of the customary greetings and polite conversation in Arabic is filled with references to Allah. She said that you do not have to follow Allah to say those things, but that they are just said as a custom.

Maysa believes that the Arabic culture is very friendly and outgoing compared to American culture. She says that Arabs are very family oriented and hospitable but that it is hard to get to know Americans well. She herself is extremely friendly, easy to talk to and enthusiastic about helping me with language.