

# Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community

## Interview with Amil Yasin

December 18, 2005

Interviewer Miguel Giner

*Miguel: Can you tell me what your name is?*

Amil: Amil \_\_\_\_\_ Yasin.

*Miguel: And what is your place of birth?*

Amil: I was born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

*Miguel: Kuala Lumpur?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: That is the capitol, right?*

Amil: Yes, that is the capitol of Malaysia.

*Miguel: And what is your race or ethnicity?*

Amil: I'm basically a Malay.

*Miguel: How many brothers and sisters do you have, and what are their ages?*

Amil: I have two sisters and one brother. The eldest one is basically 25 this year. My brother is about 20-years-old. My younger sister is 17.

*Miguel: Are your parents still alive?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: Where do they live?*

Amil: They live in Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur, as well.

*Miguel: Who among your family continues to live in your native country?*

Amil: Everyone.

*Miguel: All of them?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: So you are the only one in the United States?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: While living in your native country, what was your occupation? Did you work?*

Amil: No, I was basically a student. Then I came straight here and got a job over here.

*Miguel: What language did you speak at home when you were little?*

Amil: Both Malay and English.

*Miguel: Malay and English. So you never really worked in Malaysia? You were a student.*

Liberal Memorial Library received an \$8,000 Kansas Humanities Grant to record the immigration stories of immigrants to Southwest Kansas. The Grant titled "Crossroads of Commerce, Culture, and Community" will record and preserve the stories of 40 individuals and/or families who immigrated to Southwest Kansas from a foreign country.

The grant dollars from the Kansas Humanities Council allowed the library to record the interviews with both video and audio equipment and disseminate the information obtained during the interviews through our website and DVD recordings. Preserving the stories of immigrants to Southwest Kansas is important for many reasons, and if we do not begin to record them soon, the stories will be lost as families move on or individuals pass away.

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: Can you tell me about your living conditions in your native country before you came? What was your life like?*

Amil: Awesome. I am a city boy basically. I was born in the city, so we pretty much have everything over there, public transportation, night life. Name it, whatever, you can get it there.

*Miguel: What does your family do? What did your father do?*

Amil: My dad has got a \_\_\_\_\_ right now, and my mom working in a \_\_\_\_\_. They both work nine to five.

*Miguel: What type of company?*

Amil: My dad is running a company that does maintenance on radars. My mom is basically a bank worker.

*Miguel: What is your religion?*

Amil: I'm a Muslim.

*Miguel: While living in your native country, were you ever subjected to harassment, or physical, or mental abuse, or imprisonment, or torture by the authorities?*

Amil: No, no.

*Miguel: Can you tell me, what is your background, your education?*

Amil: I got a Bachelor's Degree in Engineering, Major in Mechanical. I graduated in 2003.

*Miguel: How did you first learn about America?*

Amil: I used to watch it on TV and got channels from the US, and I was pretty much exposed to the US since I was young.

*Miguel: What led you to move to Southwest Kansas?*

Amil: Well, I was basically hired by my company in Malaysia, and they transferred me here to work in the US as a field engineer in the oilfield. That is how I got to Southwest Kansas basically.

*Miguel: When was that? When did you come to Kansas?*

Amil: I got here February '04.

*Miguel: Can you describe your immigration trip? What can you tell me about that trip when you first came to the United States? What can you tell me about that trip?*

Amil: Before I got here, I applied for a visa, and I took me nine months to get a visa, and after that it was smooth sailing all the way from Malaysia to LA. I got stuck in LA for about four hours \_\_\_\_\_. After that they sent me to Houston for orientation for the company, and after that I came here to Southwest Kansas.

*Miguel: Basically the company recruited you while you still lived in Malaysia? You were still living there when they recruited you?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: What can you tell me about housing? How did you first find housing in this country?*

Amil: Actually I asked around in the office. They told me about a couple of landlords around, and I called them up. That's how I got some places.

*Miguel: What have been some of the most difficult adjustments that you had to make living in American society?*

Amil: I would say the weather and the food, the food itself. I am used to the food, but I don't like it as in

eating it every day, like eating steak every day. I'm not used to it, but I don't mind it, steak.

*Miguel: Anything else about your experience with the Immigration authorities? Anything else you want to tell me about that?*

Amil: Well, as far as I'm concerned about my experience, I've never had any hostile treatment by the Immigration authorities. They have always helped me out apart from the waiting. Other than that, nothing hostile.

*Miguel: The company recruited you, and then you had to wait for the work visa? Is that how it happened?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: What has been your experience with the police and law enforcement agencies in this country?*

Amil: I've never gotten pulled over by any police or law enforcement so far. So I can't really tell much on that one. Most of the experience in terms of law enforcement would be at the airport and, like I said, nothing hostile so far.

*Miguel: Can you describe any situations of racism? Have you ever experienced racism from the Americans towards your?*

Amil: Well, racism. Sometimes I do feel there is a difference between, they try to differentiate me with the Americans themselves, and as far as I am concerned, I have not been in a situation where it actually aggravates me or makes me feel like I am an alien. This is involving something that happens everywhere in the world.

*Miguel: During the time that you have been in America, have you had an opportunity to go back to your native country?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: How often?*

Amil: I go back at least two or three times a year.

*Miguel: Do you maintain contact with people in your native country?*

Amil: Yes, I do.

*Miguel: In what way?*

Amil: I call them up and I chat with them online sometimes. I drop them an email every now and then.

*Miguel: Do you send money back to your native country?*

Amil: Yes, I do. Every now and then I will send money back home.

*Miguel: Do you think that at some point in the future you will return to your native country?*

Amil: Yes, of course.

*Miguel: Why is that?*

Amil: I don't see myself staying in the US and having family over here. That is not something I want to do. I still want to go back home one day and live over there.

*Miguel: We are going to talk about expectations and reality. Amil, when you first came to the United States, what were your ideals and your dreams when you first came? What were your dreams?*

Amil: In being in the US?

*Miguel: Yes.*

Amil: Becoming rich, I guess. Well, no, yeah, either way, it is true. My dream was basically to have a better financial security and financially stable and sense I can afford to buy things I want. Not just that I cannot afford to buy things I want \_\_\_\_\_, it is that it is taking me longer to be able to buy something that I want over there compared to over here.

Miguel: *What do you like and dislike about American society?*

Amil: What I like is that they have better civic mindedness compared to Malaysia.

Miguel: *What do you mean by that?*

Amil: Like for example, if you drive a car and someone gives you a honk. Most of the time over here it is to say "thank you." Like, in Malaysia, no, if they give you a honk, it is basically that you are being hostile.

Miguel: *They are insulting you for something.*

Amil: Yes, and over here people are just more, like, say for example if you ride public transportation over here, you don't have it in Southwest Kansas, but in the US itself, in some places you have public transportation. Say, if there is an old lady standing up a young guy has to stand up just to give way to the that lady to sit down, but you don't have to in Malaysia, not very much.

Miguel: *In what way is America similar or different from your native country?*

Amil: Similar, I guess I would say the government itself in some sense. We both apply the democratic government. Different, probably the culture.

Miguel: *Do you feel more secure or less secure in this country?*

Amil: Compared to Malaysia?

Miguel: *Yes.*

Amil: Obviously I feel more secure at home in Malaysia than over here.

Miguel: *Why is that?*

Amil: Because over here I am just a...I stand alone, I've got no one to give me support in some sense if I need it, and over there, I've got everyone over there, and I can talk to anyone I want. And I know Malaysia itself. And like here, I would be like, "Huh, where do I go? What do I do?"

Miguel: *Do you think the quality of your life has improved since you came to this country?*

Amil: Financially I would say yes. Socially, no. In terms of financial stability, yes, I do earn more money over here compared to Malaysia. In fact, over here I make at least five to seven times more than if I were to work in Malaysia. Socially, being in Southwest Kansas, I would say no. There is nothing to do, and the only thing that you have over here at night is just bars and pubs and clubs. There are not much 24 hour restaurants around compared to Malaysia where you find food anytime you want. That is basically it I guess.

Miguel: *What is the population in Kuala Lumpur?*

Amil: In Kuala Lumpur, I'm not sure, I think it is about 17 million. I think so.

Miguel: *If you had the opportunity to talk to someone from your native country who was planning to immigrate to American, what advice would you give them? What would you tell them?*

Amil: Are you sure? No, I would say you got to prepare yourself. Let's say, if he or she is coming alone, then you have to prepare yourself spiritually, mentally, and know what you want and make sure that you know what you are doing if you come here. I mean, if you go to big cities, that is probably not much of a problem, but you are coming to a small town or a small suburb in the US, then, yes, you have to consider that I would say and make sure that you are doing the right decision.

Miguel: *If the President of the United States invited you to serve on an immigration committee, what*

*suggestions would you give to the President to improve the immigration experience?*

Amil: I would tell the President to actually reduce the tax enforced to foreigners. Instead having us following the US people, we probably have our own tax bracket, and hopefully it is lesser and not more.

*Miguel: At this point you are taxed at the same rate as anybody else?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: And you think there should be a different tax bracket for foreigners?*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: Why is that?*

Amil: Honestly I think I am doing a favor working here. If not, they won't bring me here, or there won't be any foreigner over here in the US. Just like now, I think there is a deficit in professional workers over here, and we are actually doing a favor to them working, so at least give us a few percent less and not the same as other Americans.

*Miguel: We are going to talk about national identity. Do you see yourself as an American or Malaysian or both?*

Amil: I see myself as a Malaysian one hundred percent.

*Miguel: Do you think it is important to maintain your national identity?*

Amil: Yes, sir.

*Miguel: Why is that? Why yes?*

Amil: I was born in Malaysia and I was told since I was young that being a Malaysian is a privilege and was not something that you wanted to mess with, and I've met people, I've met some religions that nation's citizenship revoked because they came to the US. In Malaysia itself the government doesn't allow us to have to have dual citizenship, you either be a Malaysian or something else.

*Miguel: In what ways have you attempted to maintain that national identity since you have been here in Kansas? How do you maintain your national identity here?*

Amil: As a Malaysian, you mean?

*Miguel: Yes.*

Amil: It is the religion identity itself, it is not something that you have to maintain. It is not something hard to do. Basically as long as you don't have a citizenship of another country then you are following, you are still a Malaysian.

*Miguel: As an immigrant living in the United States, what are your greatest challenges now? What do you see as your challenges?*

Amil: I would say right now trying to survive the load over here of never being away from my family and \_\_\_\_\_ and sent me to another country. I would say that is probably a challenge for me right now.

*Miguel: Do you think American education and society in general should foster bilingualism?*

Amil: Yes, sir.

*Miguel: Can you explain?*

Amil: Well, I would say, one thing about being bilingual, it enables you to communicate with foreigners easily. I'm not saying that being bilingual, as in having them to know only, say for example English and Spanish. We are diversified, like certain parts of the US have to understand English and Spanish and then certain parts of the US probably have to learn English and French so that you have a diverse culture or people with multilingual ability.

*Miguel: Actually the right word should be multilingualism rather than bilingualism because bilingualism is limited to just two languages when it could be more diverse.*

Amil: Yes.

*Miguel: Do you think American law enforcement agencies should end the practice of racial profiling?*

Amil: Yes, sir.

*Miguel: Why is that?*

Amil: I think people should be treated the same and basically everyone has their own right, and it is not because I'm an Asian and I should be racial profiled, but what if they were to come to Malaysia? We don't do that in Malaysia. We don't racial profile anyone.

*Miguel: In what ways could American society improve its treatment of immigrants? How can that be improved?*

Amil: I'm not sure I can answer that. In what ways you can improve...

*Miguel: American society could improve its treatment of immigrants. How can immigrants be treated better?*

Amil: I guess one way the government could do is expose people around here with the culture of people, of foreign people. For example, if you have a Japanese and an American, then when they talk the Japanese would not look eye to eye. In American culture it is basically rude for you not to look at the eye, but for the Japanese it is basically rude if you were to look at the eye. If the Americans would know that the Japanese culture is like that then they understand that, "Okay, he's actually not being rude." So part of it is exposing people over here in the US with the culture everywhere else in the world. Then they should understand foreigners easily, and all this racial profiling would not happen, I would say.

*Miguel: Do you think American society is becoming more hospitable or less hospitable to immigrants?*

Amil: Honestly after all this 9/11 terrorism stuff, I would not say they are becoming hostile, but I would say inhospitable is probably the word for it, and I don't blame them. I don't blame them. It is probably going to be the same thing if it actually happens in Malaysia, I think. I think that is just something normal, just a reaction.

*Miguel: Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience as an immigrant to Kansas? Anything else you would like to add?*

Amil: That'd be it.