

I'm Martin Manna, I'm the president, of the *Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce*. Proud father of four beautiful children, married to Tamara and a change agent here in the City of Detroit. My parents were born in small villages in Northern Iraq, which is present day in and around Mosul. That area, unfortunately, was recently taken over by ISIS. All of those villages were cleared. Many people have faced a persecution. So my family eventually fled to Iraq. And like many other Chaldeans, made the journey to Detroit in search of better religious and economic freedom.

Growing up trying to better understand my identity. Like many other children, we were I was confused. The family was confused about what it meant to be a Chaldean. We knew we were from the Middle East, yet primary language wasn't just Arabic. Why did we speak a different language? Why was our religion different than most people coming from the Middle East? And it came as quite a shock that people didn't like us for who we were. I think that was my first real experience of understanding that people don't always accept other people's differences or other people's skin color or other people's background or history or religion. It got me more interested in learning about what a Chaldean is. And the Chaldean community in metro Detroit, today is about 160,000 strong. It's the largest Chaldean community outside of Iraq. It's a growing community. So I was part of a small group of individuals that helped form the *Chaldean Chamber of Commerce* to help people understand the history of the Chaldeans, the contributions they're making to the City of Detroit. Not only did people not understand Chaldeans, but Chaldean grocers were always just hiring, maybe from within their own community and people didn't understand why. They weren't really heavily involved in the neighborhoods like they should have been. And so collectively, with the help of leadership from other communities, we formed some alliances. And I think the relationships have gotten much better.

You know, when you talk about Detroit, you know, you always root for Detroit. To me, we think of Detroit as the underdog, the comeback city. But Detroit has given us so much. It's a phenomenal city, so many wonderful childhood memories. That's had enormous challenges, but we've learned from them... right. It's given us opportunity. It's given us a sense of freedom, economic and religious, and it's allowed us to maintain our sense of family. You know, when you talk about the Chaldean community, it's the three F's, faith, family, food. And this community has also given us a lot of friendship as well.