Nadine Jawad:
Basic universal healthcare. Okay? Yes, we know that and many papers and academia and many books have been written about that, but that's not novel and it's not new. We need actually revolutionary thinkers and leaders to know how to engage with people from all demographics and all different political views to get on board that we're all behind the idea that people should live dignified lives.
Hi, I am Nadine Jawad and I'm a member of the 2020 Knight-Hennessy Cohort. I'm a 4th-year medical student graduating this year, and actually just recently matched. I imagine a world where healthcare is accessible to all and all humans have dignity and high quality of life.

Taylor Goss:
Welcome to the Imagine a World Podcast from Knight-Hennessy Scholars. We're here to give you a glimpse into the Knight-Hennessy Scholar community of graduate students, spanning all seven Stanford schools. Including business, education, engineering, humanities, law, medicine, and sustainability. In each episode, we talk with scholars about the world they imagine and what they are doing to bring it to life.

Willie Thompson:
Today you'll be hearing from Nadine Jawad, a fourth-year student at the Stanford School of Medicine. During our conversation, you'll hear about Nadine’s upbringing in a large Michigan-based family, majoring in public policy as a pre-med student, grappling with cynicism, writing with a purpose, and so much more.
Hey, what’s up you all? Welcome to another episode of the Imagine a World Podcast. I am your co-host, Willie Thompson, a member of the 2022 Cohort at the business school, going to be at the Ed school next year. I’m joined by my phenomenal co-host, as always, Taylor Goss.

Taylor Goss:
That's me.

Willie Thompson:
That's him. Music technology all day.

Taylor Goss:

Willie Thompson:
There it is. And we have the distinct pleasure, the honor, actually-

Taylor Goss:
Sincerely.

Willie Thompson:
Sincere honor of having Nadine Jawad on the pod. Nadine, how are you doing today?

Nadine Jawad:
I am well. Just on the end of the med school vibe, so just a bit tired. But first day, or I guess second day of Ramadan now, so my spirits are much better than they were before this week.

Willie Thompson:
And you mentioned in your introduction that you matched, which is a huge deal, right?

Nadine Jawad:
It is a huge deal. I'm going to be a doctor.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, she's going to be a doctor.

Willie Thompson:
She's going to be a doctor.

Taylor Goss:
Dr. Jawad.

Willie Thompson:
Dr. Jawad.

Nadine Jawad:
That is so weird. Somebody texted me yesterday, "Hi, Dr. Jawad," and I was like, wait, what? It's happening.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, we really should refer to her by her rightful title.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah do that please.

Willie Thompson:
Yes we should, yeah.

Taylor Goss:
Dr. Jawad.

Nadine Jawad:
I'm definitely going to be the kind of doctor where I'm like, "Please just call me Nadine, but-"

Willie Thompson:
Oh, you got to own it.
Taylor Goss:
You're a doctor.

Willie Thompson:
You earned it.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, you earned it.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, it's true. But also I have a lot of feelings about, I don't know, this could be a specifically maybe a cultural thing, but I don't think that it is. But I think there's too much prestige associated with becoming a physician. I think that doctors sometimes there's unfair power dynamics and for example, why do we have to wear a white coat? I don't know. I've never worn mine, I don't care. So yeah. But anyways, thank you. I am newly almost Dr. Jawad.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, of course.

Taylor Goss:
That's so exciting.

Willie Thompson:
It is super exciting. We're proud of you.

Nadine Jawad:
Thank you.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
I have a couple of just medical questions.

Nadine Jawad:
Please.

Willie Thompson:
Well, not for me personally, but about the Francis-
Willie Thompson:
Yeah.

Nadine Jawad:
I cannot give you any medical advice.

Taylor Goss:
We need to use your time now before we have to pay you later.

Nadine Jawad:
Yes, okay maybe then-

Willie Thompson:
Or for my insurance to pay-

Taylor Goss:
There you go.

Willie Thompson:
... depending on where you're in the States. But can you only get white coats? Because I'm thinking about, we had Johnny Powell on earlier and we were talking about scrubs and how you can get different color of scrubs and different types of scrubs. But it sounds like you can't wear like a black coat or brown coat.

Nadine Jawad:
No. So there are different types of white coats though. So you have a short coat or a long coat. And long coats are for people who finish medical school and are practicing physicians. But at Stanford, everyone wears a long coat because they don't want to differentiate between... We're all part of the care team, so we should all have-

Willie Thompson:
Interesting.

Nadine Jawad:
... the long white coat. I personally just don't care about this stuff. I would rather have the short coat because it's more convenient and cuter.

Taylor Goss:
If you had your way, what would be the conventional doctor dress?

Nadine Jawad:
I get that you want to have a symbol that indicates to somebody in the hospital that you are the physician.
Taylor Goss:
Sure.

Nadine Jawad:
But I just wear normal clothes. If I'm in clinic, I wear normal clothes, and if I'm in the hospital, I wear scrubs. But anyone can wear scrubs. I don't know. I just don't care about these things.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. Do you think you've noticed a difference with patients with the way they regard you whenever you're not wearing the uniform as it were?

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah. Honestly, that's definitely a good point. I think that I notice a difference, not just when I'm wearing a white coat or not, which I never usually do. But also I think to see somebody who's visibly Muslim, and I'm going to paint a picture for the listeners. So I'm wearing full scrubs and the hijab and a mask, and so really the only thing visible to my patient is my eyes. And it's just really interesting because I often get mistaken for someone working in the hospital, or a nurse and never really thought to be a medical student. And I see this often happen with other women of color as well, especially and women in general. But that doesn't really bother me.

If a patient is asking me a question and they get the answer and they feel happy with the answer, I don't need someone to know that I'm the doctor. Like it's completely fine. But yeah, there is a difference. And I don't know if it has to do with the uniform or just the demographic of what, who, and what I am. But I think, yeah, those dynamics definitely manifest. They just don't personally plague my heart.

Willie Thompson:
Well, I feel like there's so many things we could talk about and that we will talk about even this theme that we've had in the past couple of episodes about health and healthcare and health spans, as we're learning from Courtney before. But before we talk about the world you imagine, I would love to talk about the world you were born into and have experienced thus far. So Nadine, where are you from and what was your journey here?

Nadine Jawad:
I'm from Dearborn. Dearborn Heights, Michigan. It's the same community, just a mile apart. Was born in Dearborn, Michigan to a Lebanese family. My father was born in Lebanon, my mother is first generation Lebanese American. And I always like to make the joke, if I could describe Dearborn or my life in Dearborn, is that I didn't really know that I was a minority until college. So yeah, it's an interesting place because while extremely segregated, even between Arabs, I mostly grew up around Arab Muslim people. And in high school I was the class president and the captain of the soccer team. And nowhere at any point did it ever occur to me that this wouldn't be a normal experience because I wore the hijab or because I was Muslim or Arab.

And so the place I grew up in is that. It's a very diverse, very complicated Arab community, and it has the highest concentration of Arabs per capita.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, wow.
Nadine Jawad:
So that's just the thing that I like to tell people. And for me personally, I grew up within one mile of all of
my aunts and uncles and over 60 cousins. The other thing I love to always point out is, for example,
when I was in high school on the soccer team, half of the starting lineup was my cousins. So-

Willie Thompson:
Wow.

Nadine Jawad:
... just a huge family from a really huge and great and complex community. And that's where I'm from.

Willie Thompson:
What I'm attuned in from what you're discussing is that you went to an environment where that was not
the norm and you had to sort of grapple with that. So can you talk about the contours and complications
you've experienced being in a community that's, from the outside perspective predominantly in-group,
to a situation where you're clearly standing out in ways that you didn't know you would?

Nadine Jawad:
So that's a really good question. And actually, I was reflecting on this a lot lately because I'm writing a
piece for the Stanford Magazine about my life. So coming soon.

Willie Thompson:
When does that drop?

Nadine Jawad:
I don't know when it's going to drop but I think maybe next month. Yeah, so be on the lookout. But the
thing that is super interesting is this is easy to do when you leave a community. So when you're in it,
you're not really analyzing what it's like to be out of it. And then you exit it and you realize like, wait,
there's this whole other world in life that I was not privy to in my upbringing. And so I think the first
layer of complexity is more of a systemic or a larger macro level complexity. Because I didn't know, for
example, that it was abnormal for people to meet ICE officers. Or that it was abnormal to-

Taylor Goss:
Oh I see-

Nadine Jawad:
... not have a friend's house be raided by the FBI or something. The surveillance of our community is so
pervasive both at the federal level and on the local level that I just didn't know that these stress factors
were impacting people's lives. And eventually I would think about how that impact people's health, until
I was in college. And I remember I had this really bizarre interaction my first semester in a economics
class at Michigan. I moved to Ann Arbor when I was 17, and my friend in my economics class was saying
all the newspapers that she had read at dinnertime with her family. And honestly for me, the New York
Times is not it for me, but at the time, it seemed like everyone at Michigan read the New York Times. I
don't even know what half of the...like the Economist was.
And so I bring this up because it wasn't until I went to Michigan that I realized that yes, this way of living, the good and the bad is ubiquitous around me and Dearborn. But there's actually most people are not experiencing a lot of the things that I was experiencing as a kid. It really came for me I remember vividly and really what were people reading and what were they talking about and what were they interested in? And we can have a whole conversation about how that propelled my education-based non-profit in undergrad. But to answer the actual question, yeah, this imposter syndrome started to creep in where I'm like, "Why does everyone know this columnist for ex-Journal?" And that's when it really hit me.

But the moment it really hit me was at the end of my first year of undergrad. I decided to run in the student government election. And I wasn't privy to campus politics at the time, so I didn't know that Arabs don't typically get elected. I didn't know how much discrimination was pervasive on our campus because I had always had very positive experiences. And I was campaigning outside of a campus restaurant and handed somebody my flyer and he took it and he threw it on the floor and he said, "I would never vote for a Palestinian." And he swiped his foot across it.

And also, I'm not Palestinian, but this was the first time where I was like, whoa, that was really crazy. Because obviously I know that discrimination exists and I had experienced it mostly only in athletics as a kid. Because I would travel to outside cities and wear the hijab people would say, I'm a terrorist or whatever X thing. But when I got to campus in my student government election when I was interacting with so many out groups, and you're not siloed. To get elected, you have to speak to people from all backgrounds. That's when it really hit me. I was like, whoa, identity is such a big thing in America and in campus politics. And that's when I noticed it.

Willie Thompson:
That resonates with me though. I think going to college and there's almost this tacit knowledge that exists.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, what's the canon?

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, like the canon that people are familiar with. Yeah, that's a good way to put it because hearing Kay and Lydia talk about canon and what's in a canon. And that's a really good way of thinking about-

Taylor Goss:
What's the accepted thought.

Willie Thompson:
Exactly. Yeah. And I feel like I felt that in college. Because I also did not know what the Economist was until I got to college and I foolishly tried to read The Economist the full thing in a week. I'm like, "Oh, you just read this like a book. Why can't I finish The Economist?" And they were like, "Oh, it's because it's not meant to be read like a book." I was like, "Well, thank you. I didn't know that. I didn't know I had optionality in my reading selection." But that's a really profound reflection there. So going to Michigan, go U Mich, go blue. You guys are national championship. National champions.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, we are. Michigan is the best school, by the way. Just shout up, but-
Taylor Goss:
No comment.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, no comment. No comment. I'll let you and Emily enjoy this for now. Can you tell us more about what happened as a result of that election? And then what led you to then choose public policy as a major? And how did that set you on a path to getting to Stanford?

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah. Okay. A lot to unpack so if I'm going too much, just tell me to stop, but-

Taylor Goss:
Never.

Nadine Jawad:
... I guess the gist of it is I lost the election by 38 votes or something-

Willie Thompson:
38 Votes.

Nadine Jawad:
... or something very minimal.

Willie Thompson:
Oh wow.

Taylor Goss:
Wow.

Nadine Jawad:
Like 58, 30. It was something a small amount.

Taylor Goss:
And did it get sent to the Supreme Court?

Nadine Jawad:
Did not. Did not. I'm not that important. No, no. Nobody was rooting for me that hard. So that happened, that was the end of first year. The next year Trump got elected and I was still very upset with campus climate and the whole political world. And I was realizing that I was trying to study biology or neuroscience to become a physician. And I can remember the exact day of talking on the phone with my brother, he's a few years older. He had studied economics at Michigan and he said, "Why do you need to be basic? You're not basic. You don't need to study biology to become a doctor. You can study anything. Have you heard of the Ford School?" And I was like, yeah, I'd heard about it, but I really didn't
think about it, nor did I feel like I met any of the qualifications. Like yeah, I did student government, but I'm like, what can I give to a public policy program?

But I read the application and I applied. And they thought I had something to offer and I was the only pre-med in my program and they accepted me. And it was a life-changing opportunity. And there's so many things that I had in undergrad that I'm so grateful for. Just incredible mentors, incredible professors. But I'll give a specific thing that happened one time in my economics class. My professor was one of Obama's chief advisors in Econ, and she's a very, very prominent economist. And she wrote a key for the exam and had to rewrite the key to accommodate my answer because my arguments for whatever the economics concepts was in conjunction with my understanding of vaccine policy, in the context of public health, changed her mind about what could be a possibility for the answer.

And so she rewrote the key and I set the curve. And that was crazy because I was like, I'm not proficient in economics. I had taken one econ class before becoming a public policy student. But then to have somebody be like, no, you think about problems in such a different way and I'm going to revise this. That was so amazing and a big teaching lesson for me. The whole entire experience of studying public policy made me really think about healthcare in a more interdisciplinary way. And then again, just by way of luck, incredible mentors who were like, I think you should apply for the Truman Scholarship. Never knew what that was. Okay I applied, and then I won. And I was like, wow, this changed my life. And then mentors at Michigan and through Truman were like, "I think you should apply to be a Rhodes Scholar."

And I'm like, literally, I do not want to live in the UK. I didn't even understand the prestige of it, anything like that. I was just like, I want to take a gap year and then I'm going to become a gynecologist and I don't care, and blah, blah, blah. And my whole focus because of my upbringing was just to become a physician. And there's nothing wrong with just becoming a physician-

Willie Thompson:
Sure. Sure.

Nadine Jawad:
But I just didn't know that there were all these things that I could do. But by way of public policy, everything in my life changed. And then that's kind of my pathway to now come to Stanford. There was a point in time where I considered not doing medicine. I worked in D.C. at Amnesty International for a summer internship, and that was the summer I decided that I was going to apply to medical school. Because I felt that people in policy lack a lot of one-on-one experience. And unfortunately people in medicine sometimes just don't have the bandwidth to think about the broader experience. And so that internship really was the moment I was like, maybe I'll suck at both and I'll never be good at either, but I think I want to bring these things together. And so I applied to med school and now I'm here graduating.

Taylor Goss:
So you talked about your family being an influence on your decision to become a physician. What was that influence? And how did that ultimately play a role in your career?

Nadine Jawad:
I actually don't have the textbook era upbringing of being like, you have to be a doctor or you're unsuccessful.

Taylor Goss:
Sure.

Nadine Jawad:
That happens a lot, and I know a lot of miserable physicians because of that. I was actually quite the opposite. My parents actually gave me a lot of freedom to do whatever I wanted academically. And I did get prodded a lot by my community broadly to be like, "Oh, you’re the valedictorian of the high school, therefore you will become a doctor." Yeah, there was that expectation. But I think my reasoning for becoming a physician is actually thanks to my dad in many ways. So the first thing is I used to want to be a cardiothoracic surgeon. If anyone knows me now, I absolutely hate the OR. I don't even working in a hospital, I'm not going to. So I don't know where I got this idea. I think from Grey's Anatomy, probably.

Willie Thompson:
Right. Many such cases.

Nadine Jawad:
I remember telling my dad, "I want to become a cardiothoracic surgeon, but I don't want to be 40 and start my career." And my dad said, you can be 40 and a cardiothoracic surgeon or you could be 40 and wondering if you want to be a cardiothoracic surgeon. So just become a surgeon." That kind of made me think about timelines differently than what’s traditional, I think for people in my background. And then I think the second piece came actually later when I was working on the divestment resolution for BDS at my institution. And when I was working on that, me and my dad had a lot of difficult conversations because he was very against me speaking up so critically about Israeli politics. Because he felt that you’re a scientist, you’re becoming a doctor, you should just focus on that and be more careful about what you’re saying.

And at no point did I ever feel like I offended anyone with my language. But the main reason why this was a pivotal change was my father said something very specific to me. He’s extremely jaded with institutions coming from conflict himself. And so he thought you should become a physician. Like when I would grapple with these questions, he would say, "Becoming a physician is such a wonderful thing because it doesn’t matter the politics, you actually just learn a service where you can wake up every day and help somebody. And politics is so much larger and a lot of people think that they’re going to change the system, but most people actually never do."

And this is a very negative opinion, but I see where it comes from based off his history. And so for me, I internalized that and that's kind of how I... I only revisited that conversation many years later. But that was kind of the impetus for why I was like, oh, actually I think I should become a physician. So that's a long answer to how my community impacted me. But that's really how my mindset around becoming a physician kind of manifested.

Willie Thompson:
Good answer.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. So then you're in undergrad, you're engaging in student government. You switch your major to public policy and you go forward with that. You're working within institutions at this point. What was the thought change, the motivation change for you to feel like it was worth your time to work within institutions toward change? And maybe talk about your nonprofit in the context of that.
Willie Thompson:
Books are Benefit.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, shout out Books are Benefit, the first so many iterations. So I will say that every institution I've been a part of, I go in extremely optimistic and I feel that I can change things or make them not maybe change the whole thing but make them slightly better. And then I end up after doing the work, becoming a bit cynical and then exiting and trying to go do other work. And this has been the constant theme for me. It’s in politics, it’s in education policy, it’s in healthcare. So I’ll give an example to answer through my nonprofit. I went in with this understanding of I really don't know any of the books that my classmates are talking about. There's probably a bunch of kids in Dearborn who feel the same way. Let's start a book club and talk about it.

And then so many iterations happen, and that could be its own episode in and of itself. But I think what I learned through working in very low-income settings and education, where some kids don't have access to very, very basic things, like a good textbook to study their basic math. I realized that or I questioned, are nonprofits putting a bandaid on government problems? So why is it that a kid in Detroit or a kid in Dearborn doesn’t have access to a basic thing that a kid in Bloomfield or in Lavonia, Michigan has access to? And this made me really jaded, because I felt like you're putting a bandaid on a much bigger problem.

And I felt the same way in politics. I’d worked for these campaigns and I really cared. I knocked so many doors for so many politicians in Michigan and made so many phone calls and sent so many texts, and put my name on things because I really believe that they can make a change whether it was in Congress or becoming governor. And then you see what's happening today in the world and you wonder why am I even investing in electoral politics when you can elect the people that you think would be right and just, and they don't actually end up being right and just?

But I guess my conclusion though, and to answer the question about you've worked within them, I still think that we owe it to try. I think it's okay to enter and exit. I don't think you need to make it a lifelong struggle to always feel like you need to solve every problem in every institution that you're a part of. But if you're present somewhere and you have a skillset or a mindset or a thought that you think that can do something and make something marginally better for others, do it. And this is why I loved student government. At Michigan. David Schaeffer is the student body president when I was at Michigan and also a law student here. He's one of my best friends.

Willie Thompson:
Okay. Oh amazing.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, he really believed that. And I feel like when we did student government together, it's like you have hundreds of thousands of dollars to do something. Buy calculators for students who can't afford them for their math classes. Help people get suits for their interviews. Pay for preparations for low-income or first gen students to do certain interview preparation stuff. And so I do feel like we made an impact. And I feel like in all of the things that I've been a part of, there was some impact. And so that's why I continue to try to make institutions better, even though I'm cynical.

Willie Thompson:
I love that. And we'll get to your Imagine the world statement in a second. Because I do think even having heard you describe some of this so far, it's very evident how all of your life influences are culminating in the statement you made at the beginning of the pod. And I just personally would love to hear your thoughts on how do you temper cynicism? I think that's something that is extremely easy, it's almost... I'll never forget our cohort retreat, our 2022 cohort retreat in Asilomar, and we were talking about the community guidelines that we wanted to have as a scholar.

And so Serena mentions this wonderful norm of removing cynicism from how we engage to one another. Because the way the world works, cynicism is sort of the thing that helps prove that you can provide value to the world by poking holes in the things and sort of being cynical about them. And I found that very profound and very comforting to be in a space where cynicism doesn't need to be the default. Or cynicism doesn't need to be the center, I guess is what I'm getting at. So I'm wondering for you, how do you temper cynicism? Especially when you couple with experience that almost forces you to become more cynical because of what you see?

Nadine Jawad:
So you're asking me this at a time where maybe I'm my most cynical about engaging, for example, in political institutions after watching for the last five months, many, many children, women, innocent civilians dying in Gaza. And when I say that I'm nothing compared to what other people are experiencing, but what I know is that if this has made me this sad, I can't even imagine the sadness that people living near there or have family there are experiencing it. My family's in Lebanon, so they're also experiencing their own stuff. And I bring this up because even though I'm really sad, and even though I almost literally gave up on any idea that there would be something better. For me, and this might not be a popular answer, but I believe because I'm a Muslim and because I have a larger kind of divine role that I think is played in all of these human day-to-day things.

I realized that I combat my cynicism or I combat my desire to basically be complacent or not do anything with recognizing that the only thing I can control is every single day I show up to do something small. And I see that and the impact that I have with my peers and the people around me. And the work that I do here and internationally in Palestine and in Lebanon. The way I think about it is that if every person shows up when they can to their capabilities in some way, in a positive way, I do think we can make the world a little bit better. And it's hard to say that when you see... And it's not just in Gaza all over the world, people like in Sudan and many other places are experiencing horrible things. But I think again, for me, I recognize that life is temporary and it's just something that we're all going to live in. And I want to wake up every day believing that there are good people around me and I need to show up for them and for myself. And so that's just what has worked for me in these times.

But like I said, I understand that religion is not for everyone and it's not the framework, but I don't know, I just believe there's a higher power. And I think that people who are oppressed in the world, it will transcend to a world where they're no longer oppressed. And really this life is like a test more for the people who are perpetrating the injustice. And I want to be on the side of things where I'm not perpetrating injustice, and so I just try every day to do my best.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, beautifully said. I think that something that's implicit in your answer is the fact that cynicism will exist regardless of whether we want it to or not. And often being able to recognize, name, and confront something like cynicism, and even understand when it's warranted in some cases is important. But having the strength to move through it, and to take that feeling and redirect it towards something positive for people around you, I think is really incredible.
Nadine Jawad:
Thank you.

Taylor Goss:
So I appreciate that you make that choice, and I really do see you make that choice in this community constantly.

Nadine Jawad:
Thank you. I appreciate that. But honestly, I think you just sparked a thought, which is to say that I think sometimes things in the world are so bad that cynicism is needed. Because cynicism is almost a point of reflection for us to think about what could we be doing better? And I don't necessarily think that we all know the answers to what we can be doing better, but perhaps in the moment when we're like, "Hey, this is horrible, I'm tapping out," it comes and allows us to come back with an answer or a better solution for what we could be doing. So for me right now, I always thought that electing more diverse politicians was going to be the solution to making the world more just. And then you elect politicians who are "more diverse" and they actually end up being worse than the options that you had before. And I'm not thinking about anyone in particular. And there are examples, for example, for me like Rashida Tlaib is my Congresswoman. I love that woman. She really is a great spokesperson and I think she represents her constituents well. But I bring this up to say that maybe in the past I had thought that being the student body vice president or running for Congress, or being the change that you "wish to see in the world" is the way in politics. And then you get to a point where you just can't fathom or stomach anything that's happening. And you exit that space and you think, okay, well how can I show up differently? And that actually did happen for me before I came to medical school.

I wrote a report on how Raqqa, Syria was bombed during a lot of what was happening in Syria. Who was bombing who? People hardly ever know. And the Amnesty report actually showed that the bomb that bombed a civilian home was a US bomb. And they have pictures that literally say like US nine point, whatever the thing is. And our report shows this, and we wrote a letter to Congress discussing how it killed some civilians. And in that moment I was like, I just hate it here. I hate politics. I hate D.C. I need to leave. I need to figure out how I'm going to help people in a way that's just more one-on-one. Because honestly, even after writing that letter, they still continued to drop bombs on civilians in Syria from all factions. It wasn't just the US.

That's why I became a doctor. I was like, okay, there will always be bombs, there will always be war. Okay, time for me to figure out how I'm going to deal with the consequences of that instead of trying to prevent it in the first place. And so I bring that up to say that I agree, cynicism is a reflection point and I think it's needed and warranted. And I don't blame people who are so cynical that they choose to tap out of things.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah, absolutely. And there's almost a distinction I'm hearing of cynicism as a rear view mirror as opposed to cynicism as a binocular or as binoculars, I feel like. Because I agree, I think there's value in being able to reflect and think back to what could have been better. And sometimes I struggle with the tension of people who by default, when are presented with new ideas or presented with a new thing, immediately use that as the frame or the center I guess, of how they're engaging with the idea. But it's definitely a worthwhile thing to think about the role of cynicism and how it should be used and could be used to make us better.
I want to maybe use that as a transition a little bit. Because something I'm not cynical about is your Imagine a World statement. And I think that there's... I'm telling you all, if you all read anything from Nadine on her Insta, and on her LinkedIn, she lives by the words of her Imagine a world statement, especially when it comes to the importance of accessible healthcare and the fact that people should have dignity and quality of life. I'm actually just going to shout out her video on YouTube right now titled Collective Grief, A Cup of Chai and Blood Pressure Medication. It's a very riveting story. I'm not going to go into the details because folks should watch the video and engage there but-

Taylor Goss:
Which we'll include in our show notes.

Willie Thompson:
We will include in our show notes. Tell us more about this Imagine a World statement and how you think about the world today in terms of access to healthcare and dignity and high quality of life? And what you think needs to happen for us to get closer to a world that you envision in that way?

Nadine Jawad:
I think that the world is doing a horrible job at ensuring basic universal human rights. Health is widely and globally accepted, a universal point of something that everyone should have. But then you have people in conflict delivering babies without anesthesia if they're doing a C-section. And you have children in countries all over the world not getting basic access to immunization. And I think that it's horrible because we have enough resources on our planet to ensure that people have food, that people have housing, and that people have healthcare. And we do a horrible job at actually doing that.

I mean, on Mondays, I work at a unhoused clinic providing primary care to people who don't have a home. And I'm like, why does this exist in Palo, Alto, California? Why are we allowing a world where this is acceptable? And there's so many root evils to that, chiefly one of them being selfishness and a lot of it being capitalism. But I think we're doing a horrible job and how do we get to where we need to go?

Well, I think the first thing is there's always the political line, "We need basic universal healthcare." Okay, yes, we know that and many papers and academia and many books have been written about that, but that's not novel and it's not new. We need actually revolutionary thinkers and leaders to know how to engage with people from all demographics and all different political views to get on board that we're all behind the idea that people should live dignified lives. And to be honest, there is a fragment or a section of the world that believes that no, you have to earn your right to a house. You have to earn your right to healthcare.

And that's especially pertinent in US politics for people who don't believe on the like "socialist agenda." But I think for the most part, even the richest 1% in the US, a lot of people do agree with the basic standard of living, and we just haven't had radical enough thinkers or leaders being able to bring people together to actually come up with these solutions.

I wrote this in my essay, and I don't know if I cut it, but I'm going to say it here, the Stanford Magazine essay. But the solutions are actually quite easy. People need basic primary care. It's really not that difficult. But why don't we pay primary care doctors a good salary? Why do we have such a fragmented healthcare institution when it comes to health insurance? Why don't people know how to access their primary care? Why don't we teach people this in high school in their health education courses? What is my health and how do I access my physician?
There are so many things that we could be doing to make basic primary care more accessible, and I promise you that the ratio of it being one-to-one that if you give better primary care, people will have more dignified and better lives. You can catch early depression through screenings. You can catch addiction early through screenings. And then addiction and depression are primary risk factors for people being unhoused. So if you could find out these things early and think about the protective ways to help society, then we’d prevent thousands of people from living on the street in the Tenderloin.

And so yeah, I think we’re doing a bad job, but I think that we can do... And I will hopefully be one person that is working towards doing a better job. And I think unfortunately because of the way that corporate society works and greediness in our world has manifested, I don't know that in my lifetime I'll ever see universal healthcare for all. But I think that's the world that I imagine, and that's how I want to spend my career.

Taylor Goss:
Of course, there's the systematic barriers to this world that you imagine. You also briefly touched on the necessity of radical voices, I think is the way that you put it. And I know that a focus in your academic experience has been narrative medicine and medical humanities - that seems to be connected with the notion of a radical voice or an inspirational voice. How does journalism, narrative medicine, how does that play a role in your career and the way that you see of building a vision?

Nadine Jawad:
So there's a author or a scholar, his name is Ilan Pappé. He writes a lot about Palestine, but a lot about conflicts in the Middle East. And in his book "On Palestine", he actually documents a section where he talks about why we need to write. And in that section, I actually had writer's block, I'm not exaggerating, for two years. From May, 2021 with the siege on Gaza until two years later, I couldn't write or publish anything. I just stopped. And then I read this section when I was actually on the bus, in the Knight-Hennessy trip in Chile. And I read it and he talked about how our stories and the stories that we share of others are actually a documented history that maybe might not push the needle forward today. But the historical record definitely plays an impact in the future. So for me, I think that is why the role that writing plays. It tells people's stories. It opens people's minds.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. How do you see that playing a role in your career going forward? Do you want to write more? Do you want to engage more in mediums of art or things like that?

Nadine Jawad:
Okay, this is a tangent, but it's relevant, so I'm going to share it.

Taylor Goss:
Go for it.

Willie Thompson:
I love tangents.

Nadine Jawad:
I was having existential questioning about my career a year and a half ago when I failed step one. And when I did that, I had a meeting with John and I told him, "Well, I failed step one because I don't care about what I'm studying." I can't get myself up to study because I don't know that what I'm doing is actually helping, and I don't know if this is what I'm passionate about."

Willie Thompson:
Quick question.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
What's step one?

Nadine Jawad:
Oh, yeah. So step one is the board's exams in medical school, they're step one, step two, step three. And you need all three to become a licensed physician. And these scores and these exams determine where you'll go for residency.

Willie Thompson:
Got you.

Nadine Jawad:
And of course, I'm extremely protected as a Rhodes Scholar and a Knight-Hennessy Scholar. Who's ever going to be like, "You're dumb. You failed step one." I understand my privileges in this discussion, and I don't think anyone who fails in an exam is dumb or not worthy. But that's the way the system kind of labels... How'd you fail step one? Is the question people always get. And I'm like, well, I failed it, so that's what happened.

Willie Thompson:
Right, right, right.

Nadine Jawad:
So anyways, I met with John-

Taylor Goss:
John Hennessy, correct?

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, John Hennessy, sorry. Met with him and told him, and this pertains to my writing. I said, "Sometimes I wonder if I keep getting picked for things because I'm good at talking and not actually because I'm doing anything." And I delineate the difference between a workhorse and a show horse. And I'm like a lot of Rhodes Scholars and a lot of people in our elite networks are absolutely just show horses. Because you're a Rhodes Scholar, you get a book deal. Or because you are a Knight-Hennessy
Scholar, you get into certain elite privileged scholarships or other fellowships because people are like, "Oh, you're the best of the best at Stanford."

And I'm like, what? Am I? No. And it could have been anybody else, and why is it me? And I had a lot of guilt and imposter syndrome around this. And so I meet with John and I tell him, "I feel like a show horse." And he's like, "Bro, what?" Like, no, no, I'm just kidding. He was just like-

Willie Thompson:
I can totally hear him say that.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah. He didn't say that. But he was just like, "No, this is like, you are doing so much and here's all the things you're doing." And we talked about it, and I could still be doing more. It's not like anything... But I bring this up to say that I only want to write if it's of consequence. So I don't want to write just to say that, oh, look... I swear this is a story that I'm sharing not to brag. But the first time I ever wrote an editorial, it got published in the largest medical journal in the world. And I was like, whoa. And then the Elle Wood's quote "It's hard?", when she gets into Harvard. I was literally having a moment there because I was like, this is a really, really important paper. It was about Lebanon and refugees and vaccine policies.

But I was like, why did I get accepted? I'm not an expert on this. It was just like, let me try. And then it worked out. And I'm bringing this up to say that that was of consequence, and I'm proud and I'm happy that it was published. I don't know if academic journals are the place where I should be writing, because who has access to that? And is it actually changing anything? I don't know. But bringing it back to Ilan Pappé, writing does have an impact on the future of the world and the current state of the world. And I want to figure out how I can write, not because I'm a Rhodes Scholar who can get a book deal, but because I want to write something that actually has an impact on people and on minds. So yeah, I don't know what the answer is, I don't know so-

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. I mean, to me that means that you're looking for the opportunity that will be the most right for you and the most right for the world that you want to introduce your thoughts into. I can't... Wow, your thoughtfulness-

Nadine Jawad:
Thank you.

Taylor Goss:
... and your acknowledgement and understanding of your own privilege in that way is really striking to me. And I think it's something that I think it's important for all of us in this community to consider when undertaking any kind of platform. So yeah, thank you for speaking on that.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah. And I would just say, yeah, two things that come to mind from the reflection. And one is it is reality, right, that the proximity to these positions and institutions of privilege sort of breeds this heuristic of substance, right? People sort of see Truman's Rhodes, Knight-Hennessy, and then it's very easy to use it as a heuristic for being like, oh yeah, personal substance. They know how to do things in
an effective way. And it basically calls into question this, or reminds me rather of this quote from the 6th president of Morehouse College, Benjamin Lashamaze, who used to fairly often quote it in Morehouse for a bunch of different things.

But one thing he used to always tell students was, "It's not failure but low aim that is sin." And I think that for folks who are part of these communities who say they want to contribute to the world in a positive way, it's important to have high aims and to aim high and to be able to think about even if I don't get to where I'd like to be, the idea of striving towards something that's greater than me or something that I could accomplish on my own is worthwhile. So it's a really powerful notion that you've left with us today.

Nadine Jawad:
I actually have something to respond to that, which is who made Stanford or Harvard students the experts on designing nonprofits or solving the world's problems? When I went to Michigan and I built my nonprofit, many iterations, I co-built it. It wasn't just me, people were helping. But it was an organization that I put my soul into. And I realized that there were people who never went to college and were running nonprofits in my hometown that were doing a much better job at running a nonprofit than me. And I guess what university does bring to you and what these opportunities and these privileges provide is we do have a unique perspective because we have access to people from all sorts of backgrounds that a lot of people in my hometown just simply do not have.

So I think the ideas, yes, you have a more different life experience by interacting with different ideas. But I guess for me, I just constantly am reflecting on like, look, why do I have an opinion on this? Who am I to say? And I think that a lot of us would be served better if we actually questioned ourselves because I do think there is that heuristic. And I think that there's a self-fulfilling prophecy that you see, even if you just tell a first grader that they're smart, they start performing better on exams. So yeah, there's a lot to say about that. But yeah, I tried to be intentional about it.

Taylor Goss:
Nadine, something that I see you do very frequently in the Knight-Hennessy community is both express yourself really thoughtfully and kindly within the community. And also extend your reach beyond this Knight-Hennessy community for activism and fundraising and awareness raising for issues in Lebanon and Gaza and issues all over the world. Do you think of yourself as an activist? And is that part of your identity? When pursuing and raising awareness for the pursuit of social good in the world, how do you balance reckoning with atrocity and seeking joy and fulfillment in your own life?

Nadine Jawad:
Okay, so I want to start by first addressing the question about do I identify as an activist? I absolutely and wholeheartedly believe that I am. Essence of being an activist means that you support activism and you are challenging institutions and thinking about things in a very new and novel way. And pushing the needle far beyond where it would've been pushed without you pushing for that. But am I going to say that I'm the most radical activist, or that I am a leader in the activist community? I actually would not say that. I think there are much more progressive and more radical people than me. And that's why I'm not a leader of any activist space. I actually learn and I become better because of the activists that I'm around, and I try to identify and uphold the idea. But I think the work that I do, it aligns with activism, but I actually really think that my chief identity is being a Muslim.

And this identity is so important to who I am. And in the purest sense, you trace the history of Islam and the leaders that we look up to, both men and women, you will see activism in its purest form. You see
people who are like, wait, why don't people have food? We need to stop and create a society where we're all giving a portion of our money to stop hunger. And this to me is activism in the purest sense. And so I guess I respect organizers so much. And while I'm not an organizer myself, I feel connected to that community, and I think it drives a lot of my social understanding in this world. But I don't know that that's the chief identity that drives me to act on things. I really think my religion is the chief reason.

So I guess to bring the point of joy and how do I balance it with atrocities? Well, one, I can't say that I am doing that perfectly. I feel so guilty when I am doing whatever, like spending $80 on a steak at Aria Steakhouse in Palo Alto, knowing that $80 can provide for a whole family for an entire month to eat. And there are people because of sanctions and blockades all over the world, like in Iran and Syria and other places who we can't give the $80 even if we wanted to because they're sanctions on them. And so I'm never rid of the guilt, but I think guilt is a necessary human emotion to understand and be grateful for my joy. And I think in general, I am a joyful person and I experience joy every day. And I think that's because I am an optimist.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah.

Nadine Jawad:
And it's so beautiful. And I think in general, my friends always say, my tagline is I see life as a movie. It's because I do have these rose colored glasses where I try to view everything in a very beautiful and positive way. And in most cases, when it comes to the world, I'm not able to put on that lens. I see it for what it is. But I again, go back to the things that we talked about previously, which I just try to get up and do my little part and do my best. And it allows me to rid myself of some of that guilt.

And this ties to my faith because Islamically we're allowed to experience joy. And joy and grief are emotions that go together. And experiencing joy is actually in some ways an act of worship. Because of my faith and because I think that in Islam joy and grief go together. I think grief is a feeling I experience a lot. And I think I equally, if not more experience, the feeling of joy. And I think that's within my right as a human being.

Willie Thompson:
Wow. Fantastic. Honestly, Nadine, let's just keep the pie going for another couple hours.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah, honestly. There's genuinely, you should see our research document. There is so much to get to and talk about because you live such a rich and full life and one that is so giving to your communities. So I wish we could get to everything-

Willie Thompson:
But we can't. And as we come on the close, we're going to get to three questions that most folks are used to asking towards this part of the conversation. And the first, actually, you mentioned this
conversation with John, so that's a clear example of how someone in Knight-Hennessy has supported you or helped you just even think through some of the things that you've been experiencing since being at Stanford. Do you have any other reflections on how KH has supported or helped you in your personal or professional endeavors?

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah. I think we can all probably articulate quite easily what a very well-resourced scholarship can do for your professional endeavors. So I’m going to focus on my personal.

Willie Thompson:
Sure.

Nadine Jawad:
And I think that I came here in the pandemic, and I moved to California knowing nobody except one person from my hometown. And this community of people literally lit up my world in a way that I can't even explain. And to be quite honest, I am one of the most privileged people in America academically, having come from almost all of the elite scholarships and experiencing them and what those communities look like. And all of them have brought such beautiful experiences. But the friendships that I've made here transcend anything I've ever experienced. Best friends, people like you're crying and then you have a scholar show up with hair masks and books. You are having a good day. You see people outside your window with flowers. Every event that you have, you see people come and be there for you. And you fail something and people make you and remind you that you're smart. And you succeed, and they remind you that you're smart. And it's just like all these great people and this experience has changed my life. I literally would not have finished medical school without Knight Hennessy, in my opinion. Because I can't just be around people in medicine. It doesn't fulfill me and I don't like it. And just having this interdisciplinary cohort of people who go so out of their way to talk about religion, and soccer, and sports, and current events and just all this stuff that we're just talking about on a typical day here in Denning House, I'm incredibly, incredibly grateful for it. And that's why I go out of my way to try and make sure that this community is okay. I hope I've added more good than bad to it because I haven't always been perfect.

Willie Thompson:
Oh, come on. So much good. Just for context of folks who are listening. Nadine and I were in a group of fellow scholars for a dialogue on, I call it like relationship repair. And how do you find common ground. And Nadine, the tenderness and the care she showed in our group is not something that only I'd heard of but I experienced firsthand. So it's emblematic of who she is as a person. So I feel that, and I felt that as someone who even came here two years after you started.

Nadine Jawad:
Thank you, I appreciate that.

Taylor Goss:
Continuing on with some of our ending questions, something that every Knight-Hennessy Scholar does is fill out the section where we’re asked to provide eight improbable facts about ourselves. I know that
Willie and I have both stated before it is one of the most thought of time-consuming parts of the application. What was that like for you? And would you mind sharing one or two?

Nadine Jawad:
This has been definitely increased since this time. But in my application, I said in the last two years I've prayed in 23 different mosques spanning six countries, including the great Mosque of Xi'an, which is closed off to tourists. And I bring that up because I love to meet Muslims of all backgrounds. It's very interesting to go to mosques from all different architectures and historical periods. And so that was just something that was really beautiful to me that I was experiencing.

Willie Thompson:
So you've been to 23 mosques. It sounds like the number has increased since you've written that statement. So how many have you gone to now in total? And then, is there one you want to go to that's on your list? And if so, which one is it?

Nadine Jawad:
Great question. I love teaching and talking about Islam because I think there's a lot of just people don't know on campus, and there are not that many Muslims in the grad programs here. But I think the first thing is the numbers increased. I don't have a number, but I do want to share two mosques this year or at Stanford over the years that have meant a lot to me. So there's a mosque on Martin Luther King Jr. Way in Oakland. It's called Lighthouse Mosque. And it's a predominantly African-American mosque, and I've been going there for four years. And I specify this specific identity because I grew up amongst mostly Arab Muslims. And to experience religion in such a different way with people who are not coming, for example, from immigrant backgrounds, but are sharing my faith in a much different way has been the most remarkable experience.

Last week, the Imam literally gave a Friday prayer sermon about white supremacy and how white supremacy has permeated in the way that we learn Islamic ideology. It was crazy. I was like, I wish I could teleport this man to wherever I go next. So that's been great. And the only mosque I ever truly dreamed to go to was the Prophet's Mosque in Saudi Arabia. And this past winter break, Selma and I actually made the pilgrimage to Umrah, and we got to go to Mecca and Medina, which are the two holiest cities in Islam. And so the mosque that I really wanted to go to, I actually got to do that this year. Thanks in with Selma. So that was a really great experience. Yeah.

Willie Thompson:
Nice. That's amazing.

Taylor Goss:
And in closing, would you have any advice or thoughts for people who are thinking about applying to Knight-Hennessy program?

Nadine Jawad:
Oh, for applicants, wow, okay. I guess my piece of advice, and I give this for all scholarships, so maybe this isn't unique enough to Knight-Hennessy. But when I wrote my Knight-Hennessy application, when I finished writing the essay, I was like, mic drop. That was the best essay I ever wrote.
Taylor Goss:
Wow, okay.

Nadine Jawad:
Because yeah, I never think about what I have to write to win. I use scholarship and fellowship applications as a means to understand myself.

Willie Thompson:
Yes, yes.

Nadine Jawad:
So when you're writing these scholarship applications, actually like quick anecdote, when I wrote the Truman on the first round, I actually didn't get picked. And then they said, "Just kidding," and they brought me back, which was crazy. But when I wrote the application, I was like, okay, this is the first time I'm interrogating like why am I becoming a doctor? And what kind of doctor do I want to be? And where do I want to go and what city do I want? I don't know. I never thought about this stuff. I just was pre-med my whole life.

So when you're thinking about Knight-Hennessy, I think we have such a beautiful application process. And I could imagine if you're writing an application and you put so much thought into it and then you don't get it, I had it for that brief moment with the Truman, and I know that's so privileged. But I still benefited so much. And when I didn't get the news that I wanted for that experience or for other experiences, I realized that I had grown so much just through trying. And so I think everyone should throw their hat in the ring. And I think everyone should try to use this as a reflective space to grow. And I think it's a really beautiful application and good luck to everyone. It's a life-changing experience.

Willie Thompson:
Yeah. I mean, it's life-changing experience regardless of the acceptance, right? I mean, it sounds like what you're saying, right? Or regardless of the decision. I think that's something we've heard. At least I've definitely, I've heard and try to tell people about the fellowships. The well-designed self-life reflection questions for you to say, what do I want to do about life? And how does the scholarship help? But you never know what kind of clarity that I provide for you in the interim.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah. I guess I'm going to leave that with a quote. My mentor from Michigan told me that you can't ever lose a scholarship, you can only win one. And so that's a really good point, because you're still going to do the work you want without this. And then if you win it, great. But if you don't, I mean, that's fine you're still going to do the work. And so you have nothing to lose by just reflecting and trying to fill out the application as honestly as possible. Yeah.

Taylor Goss:
That's great advice.

Willie Thompson:
That's fantastic advice.
Taylor Goss:
And I'm so glad that you lived by that advice and came here. I just got to say, as we leave listeners here, I've really been looking forward to this episode, spending some time with you. Because I always feel so appreciated and so cared for by you. We've had some fun experiences. I'll tell an anecdote as briefly as I can. We were both on the Knight-Hennessy Chile study abroad trip that you mentioned briefly earlier. And we experienced an unexpected layover for one day in Santiago, Chile. And we got off, left the airport with our big bags, flying down to Patagonia, and spent the day traveling across the city. And it was so lovely to spend that time with you.

And in particular, one experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life. This is one of the most memorable days I spent in my life with you and with our fellow scholar Faizal. It was Friday and the three of us went to the largest mosque in Santiago. And I had never been to a mosque before, and I had never participated in Islamic faith service. And the two of you were so welcoming to me and really made that an incredibly meditative and mindful experience for me. I'll never forget it.

And I really think that you bring that energy into whatever space that I've seen you operate in. Whether it's one-on-one, or whether it's the way that you regard the Knight-Hennessy community. Even people who that I know have diametrically opposed opinions to you. And I'm so grateful that we have you in this community, and that I've gotten to meet you and that had that lovely day with you.

Nadine Jawad:
Oh to hear that, I'm about to cry.

Taylor Goss:
I know. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Nadine Jawad:
That was one of my best days too.

Taylor Goss:
Yeah. But yeah, thank you for being on this podcast with us. It has been such a pleasure to hear, and I'm so glad that people listening love to hear your story. But yeah, we just really appreciate you.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, of course.

Willie Thompson:
It's been a privilege and an honor, and yeah, it'll be good to see the community participate in Iftar soon. They're really great, and it's a really good time to engage with another community that's a part of the broader community that we live in. And actually, before we end, you said you matched. Also where are you going to be? We really buried the lead.

Nadine Jawad:
Okay. This came out of nowhere. I wasn't planning to be there, but here we are, homegrown. I'm going back to Detroit for a year. I'll be at Henry Ford Hospital doing a transitional year. It's a very much a community-focused program. My long-term goal is to become a preventive medicine doctor. But
preventive medicine, we don't match until intern year. So yeah, I'll be in Detroit. And actually, I'll be organizing a trip for scholars to come to Dearborn, so I hope, yeah, it'll be great. And I hope both of you'll come join us and learn more about my community.

Willie Thompson:
That'll be fun. From the Ford School of Policy to the Ford Hospital.

Nadine Jawad:
Yeah, exactly.

Willie Thompson:
It's a full circle moment. Well, Nadine, thank you so much. We're so privileged and blessed to have had spent this time with you, and yeah, we're so grateful for it. So thank you so much.

Nadine Jawad:
Thank you. Thank you.

Taylor Goss:
Thank you for joining us for this episode of Imagine a World where we hear from inspiring members of the KHS community who are making significant contributions in their respective fields, challenging the status quo, and pushing the boundaries of what is possible as they imagine the world they want to see.

Willie Thompson:
This podcast is sponsored by Knight-Hennessy Scholars at Stanford University. A multidisciplinary, multicultural graduate fellowship program providing scholars with financial support to pursue graduate studies at Stanford. While helping equip them to be visionary, courageous, and collaborative leaders who address complex challenges facing the world. Follow us on social media at Knight Hennessy, and visit our website at kh.stanford.edu to learn more about the program and our community.