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Interviewer: *MaryAnne Beatty*

Transcriber: *Meia Cacho*

Abstract: *Sameera "Seema" Nawaz is originally from Pakistan. She moved to Alexandria with her family in 1983. An active member and former president of TWIG, she shares her experiences on being a TWIG and the committees and projects she has worked on. Seema discusses the role TWIG can play in the community, especially during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. She talks about meeting fellow TWIG members in other countries and the special connections she formed by being a TWIG.*

Also present at the interview was Janet Hawkins.

This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.

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Introductions	
MaryAnne Beatty:	<p>Okay. Well, thank you. My name is MaryAnne Beatty, and I'm a member of Twig. And I'm pleased to be able to interview Seema Nawaz, who is a Twig member and who has had just the most fascinating life and experience. And we want to hear all about it. I was reading a little bit about your background information. And we're both from military families, so I know what that's like, to move around and be part of a military family, but before we start talking about Twig, I'd like for you to tell us about—a little bit about your life and your experiences, and how you ended up in the Northern Virginia, Washington, DC area.</p>
Seema Nawaz:	<p>Thank you, MaryAnne. And thank you to both Janet and you for inviting me to participate in this conversation. My full name is Sameera Nawaz but I go by Seema. That's how my community knows me and that's how I introduce myself, it's short for Sameera. I grew up in Pakistan. And the reason why I came to the Washington area was my husband joined the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, in January of 1975. We were engaged at that time. He went back and we got married in Pakistan in October '75.</p> <p>We used to live in Falls Church. But in 1983, we moved to the Alexandria area because we had a family, and my girls started school at St. Agnes. This was much closer. I could get them in a carpool easily, and that's why we have been living here for the last thirty-seven years now. We have three girls and two of them live in the New York area, and one lives close to us in Virginia.</p>
Being Introduced to Twig	
MB:	<p>And when you moved into Alexandria, is that when you became involved in Twig, and how did that come about?</p>
Seema Nawaz:	<p>You know, I moved here in '83, and I had a young family at that time. I don't know if you know St. Agnes. It's a small school, kindergarten through high school. Now, it's St. Stephen's and St. Agnes, but it used to be an all-girls school. Immediately, I got involved with educational institutions and orphanages in Pakistan because when we first came, I didn't think we were here for a long-term stay. It was always like maybe five years, ten years, and then, you know, we'd go back to Pakistan. So, I always had that in the back of my mind, but I was very much involved with the girls' school. And since I had three at one time, my eldest was in upper school, my middle child was in the middle school, and the youngest had started lower school, so I was always volunteering. And I</p>

	<p>wanted to do that because I wanted to know the education system here because I hadn't attended school in the States. So I wanted to see what my girls were going through, and I would be a room mother for one year or whatever.</p> <p>So I got to know a lot of people. And these women were members of the Twig, so they used to invite me to join As I had a young family, I would always say, "Oh, I don't have the time," but in 1994, Stevie Gillespie, who was the president at that time, we were watching our girls play on the field. My girls were all athletes and so was hers, [and she] said, "Why don't you join the Twig?" And I said, "Oh, I just don't have the time." She said, "No, no, no, there's a membership meeting, membership coffee coming up, so I'm going to send you the invite." And I agreed. It was at Joan Fletcher's house. She was a past president. And I saw many of my friends and people I knew from the school. So, I thought, "Well, it's a safe environment. You know, I know people. And they're doing something for the community, with the hospital." By that time, it had been maybe sixteen or seventeen years since we had been in Alexandria, and I really wanted to get involved. So that's when I joined the Twig, in 1994. It's been twenty-six years now.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Wow!</p>
<p>Seema Nawaz:</p>	<p>But I've been participating for twenty-two because, in between, we went to live in Vienna, Austria. So I resigned from the Twig and then went back.</p>
<p>Committees and Groups</p>	
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Oh, well, that's wonderful. So what groups and committees have you been involved with since you've been a member of the Twig?</p>
<p>Seema Nawaz:</p>	<p>Oh, with the Twig, let's see, it's been a while. I think I started with the Stock, then was Thrift Shop Chair maybe twice. I represented the Twig on the Antiques in Alexandria [Charity Show] Board for a few years. I was on the Membership Committee, the Homes Tour Committee, the Nominating Committee, served on the Audit Committee also maybe three times, then had the honor of serving as the president in 2009-2010. And right now, I'm part of the Ad Hoc programs committee, you know, during the [COVID-19] pandemic. It's a new committee just for this year. I don't know if will continue or not, but that's what I've been doing. Oh, I was a scheduler also.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>Oh, wow. Well, I think that you and your committee have done a fantastic job this year of bringing everyone together and keeping us together when we can't be together.</p>

Seema Nawaz:	Oh, thank you.
Building Friendships in Twig	
MB:	I think that's just been really special. And so speaking of special, do you have special friends or connections that you've made throughout the years as a part of Twig?
Seema Nawaz:	Absolutely, absolutely. You know, there's genuine camaraderie in this organization. And I've met very compassionate, kind women with a great sense of humor in this organization that otherwise I would not have met. We've had long-lasting friendships, not just with me but with our spouses also. So, we meet together many times during the year just as friends. I'm very grateful for that, especially the ones that make me laugh.
Memorable Twig Projects	
MB:	Well, I think you probably make a lot of people laugh and feel special because you're very warm, very warm. What are some of the special projects or things, or memorable projects that you've worked on or something that sticks out?
Seema Nawaz:	I've always enjoyed all the committees that I've been on during these past years. and my belief is that, when you volunteer, you should always work on the committee or the task that the chairperson or the organization needs at that time. So, I've always offered myself to the incoming president. When it's time to fill out the committee assignments, I always call in and say, "Well, wherever you need me, I'll be happy to serve on that committee." And I remember once when Starlet was the president, and I got a call, and this is after I just came back from Vienna, and she called to say, "Oh, Seema," you know how warm Starlet is when she first starts the conversation. She said, "Oh, Seema, I have something to ask you." And I said, "Yes, Starlet?" And she said, "Oh," and she gave a long spiel, and she said, "I want you to be the chair for the Thrift Shop." And I said, "Oh! The Thrift Shop?" And she says, "Yes." And I said, "Oh, okay." And there was dead silence at the other end for a second or two. And then she says, "Really?" I said, "Sure, Scarlet, that's what you asked me." She said, "Oh, yeah! Oh, thank you!" [laughter]
MB:	That's funny.
Seema Nawaz:	So, yeah, I've always enjoyed the committees. I thoroughly enjoyed being on the Antiques in Alexandria Committee. It was rewarding to see how much passion those people had for what they were

	<p>doing. And I'm also interested in antiques, and I learned a lot from all that. It was a good venture for the Twig because we were part of three beneficiaries that the money went to from the antiques show. One was the Lyceum, the Alexandria Association, and the Twig. So we were all three beneficiaries of the show. The other one that I really enjoyed was a new venture. It was a big risk that we took and I think it happened in 2006 or '07 under the leadership of Janet Hawkins. The space right next to the Thrift Shop and its address is 106 ½ North Columbus Street, that became available for rent. It's a narrow space like an alley but very long. It goes all the way to the full length of the Thrift Shop going backwards.</p> <p>We had the opportunity to rent it. I think we did it for six months just to see how the extra space would benefit us. And we set it up like a showroom. We even took small furniture, you know, like chairs and tables, and mirrors. And we set it up like that. I think Janet had formed a small group of maybe four people, and I was part of that. And we really worked hard. I remember sewing curtains for a dressing area. Our husbands also got involved just sprucing the place up. Thoroughly enjoyed that project. Too.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>That's nice.</p>
<p>Seema Nawaz:</p>	<p>And I, we made money on that but unfortunately, I wish we could have bought that part also and joined it with the Thrift Shop, but unfortunately, we were not able to do that.</p>
<p>Janet Hawkins:</p>	<p>I'm going to interrupt just real quickly. Seema co-chaired that committee with a woman named Julie Brasfield, who's also a past president, and they—we had no budget, just a very little bit of money and so they were contacting [people] through shop stores that were closing and, you know, foraging for different kinds of things to put it together. And it was a lovely space. If we had that opportunity now, we probably could afford to do it. At that time, it was a huge risk. We were still short on volunteers and trying to manage the shop at the same time. So anyway, but it was a really interesting exercise in stretching us to think a different way about how we were selling our materials. And the only other thing I'll say then we need to get back to [that what] Seema did was create the Special Sales Committee, which Julie and Seema also worked on where we started figuring out that we could make some more money with some of our special designer and other kinds of items that we'd been selling in the shop.</p>
<p>Twig's Contributions to the Hospital</p>	
<p>MB:</p>	<p>That's nice. So just to switch gears just a little bit, what do you</p>

	think some of the most important contributions that the Twig has made to the hospital?
Seema Nawaz:	<p>You know, we are always working closely with the hospital and making sure that all their urgent needs are met, but I think in 2010, Twig was able to make the largest pledge of a million dollars to the hospital. That had never been done before. And it was through the teamwork of the whole organization. The pledge was approved unanimously. And I think it was the first time that a charity organization in Alexandria had pledged this amount to the hospital. There had been some private pledges, maybe two, but those were private pledges to the hospital for a million dollars. So that was a huge thing for the Twig. I was very grateful for that.</p> <p>And then now, as we are going through the pandemic, Twig made a \$100,000 contribution towards the COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness Fund. The release of the fund was accelerated. We didn't wait till June [2020] when we normally give the amount to the hospital because that happened to be the immediate need. That was good, you know. I was very grateful and pleased that when we gave the \$100,000, there was an anonymous donor who matched the amount. So, it became \$200,000 for the hospital, but the Twig initiated that.</p>
MB:	That's nice.
Seema Nawaz:	So, I can see the big amounts and the big contributions. Otherwise, you know, with voluntary time also, the Twig has given that to the hospital when we used to work at the hospital, volunteer at the hospital.
MB:	I wasn't aware of that. What kind of volunteering then was that?
Volunteer Work at the Hospital	
Seema Nawaz:	<p>Oh, very interesting. When I joined, at that time, the "Actives" used to work, I think, two days. I think it was two full days, but part of that, you could work half a shift, half a day at the hospital. And they would train you. It wasn't something that needed lots of training. For instance, I used to work in the NICU [neonatal intensive care unit]. I wasn't allowed to touch the babies or go near the babies, but we would go and stock the shelves. And we would go and make those little splints or things like that for the babies. That took away part of the nurses' work that they would have to do. Get the paperwork ready. So, the folder was ready as soon as the child was brought in. They would immediately pull out the folder, and everything would be there for them to fill out.</p>

MB:	Oh, that's nice. That's nice.
Seema Nawaz:	We did that for a while and then I think they stopped, maybe some legal issues or whatever. And then we moved back to the Thrift Shop.
MB:	That's special. I didn't know that.
Seema Nawaz:	Yes.
Supporting Twig and the Hospital	
MB:	So why did you continue to support Twig and the hospital?
Seema Nawaz:	<p>Oh, well, the Twig because, you know, ultimately, it's the hospital. The hospital is really trying hard and does take care of all the needs of the community. And it's trying to provide the best healthcare that is possible to the community. Besides that, it also takes care of the under-insured and the uninsured people to whom healthcare is not available. They work in collaboration with the local organizations to provide support and guidance to such families who need that, especially childcare, pediatrics, people who are homebound. They get a lot of help from the hospital, financial, transportation and meals are delivered. So, it's really taking care of the community in a way that we are not aware of.</p> <p>I became more aware of all this. It is because of the Twig that I got involved with the hospital. After I completed my tenure as the president and all presidents do that, we serve on the hospital foundation board. We represent the Twig on the hospital foundation board for one year. And I did that. In that period you really become aware of the working of the hospital at close quarters. And you see how selflessly they all work and how many hours they put in. And then I think for me, it was a motivation to do more, for the Twig because it would ultimately go to the hospital. The hospital will benefit obviously. I also serve on the Quality Committee for the hospital as part of the community. I represent the community.</p> <p>So, you really get close to the working of the hospital. And when you realize that it's a lot more than you know, it's not just going to the ER [Emergency Room] to get treatment. There's a lot that goes behind the scenes. And now, since it's under the Inova Health System, the Inova System has these programs that are being extended to the community. There's even in place a program for Loudoun and Fairfax, and Alexandria community also, where elementary school children are provided lunches through the Inova System. Yes. So, there's much that goes on. I fully support and I feel there's more need. There's more that needs to be done.</p>

Moving Forward with Twig	
MB:	That’s nice. So, for the goals of Twig moving forward, what do you think they should be? Should we just keep moving forward like we’ve been doing, or should we do things a little differently?
Seema Nawaz:	<p>I think so, especially now with the pandemic, that makes you think that the people who are in a disadvantaged position get hit the hardest. And this issue hasn’t been resolved, right? The hospital is doing a lot. The Twig is doing a lot and working with the hospital, but it hasn’t been resolved. And now, there’s going to be more demand. So, moving forward, short term and long term, I think Twig needs to focus on how it’s going to generate the funding that it used to before COVID, right, because we don’t know. We are assuming that “Oh, by next year, we’ll have the Homes Tour again.” We’re not sure. It may take about at least ten years for the economy to come back, right?</p> <p>So, we need to focus more on our immediate goals also. And that means that for the Homes tour, we need to concentrate and make an effort to get all the people who were generous to us to get them back at the same levels at which they participated. Sometimes, it gets dropped. It needs a lot of work, but if we do the work now and be prepared of what we’re going to do next year, I think we’ll see the rewards. And also, for the community, we need to start a dialogue with the hospital because we are community-based, right? We need to have programs for people who are uninsured, under-insured, or don’t qualify for Medicaid.</p> <p>The opportunities are there for them to have the preventive care rather than crowd the hospitals when they are sick and then they go and then they have to go through the care and all that. They need to have access to preventive care where they are kept safe and don’t have to go to the hospital. I think we need to be more involved in the community in that sense. And for that, we need a dialogue with the hospital.</p>
MB:	Interesting. Well, I’m not—I don’t think I have any other questions. Janet, can you think of any?
Twig and the Community	
JH:	I have. I have two things. So, Seema, I’m trying to remember if you were a Shop chair when we administered some of the flu shot clinics. Wasn’t that—that’s sort of what we talked about—you’re talking about, right?
Seema Nawaz:	Yes, yes. Absolutely. We always do that on a small scale, right?

	<p>We did that, and then one time, again, we did some mammographies. We did the shots and the mammographies for the women also. But I think we need to get more involved in these types of projects, obviously, through the hospital because they have these projects. They have them in place, but maybe Twig needs to have a dialogue and focus our goals towards that. I mean, that's my thinking, Especially going through this pandemic right now. I see all the people who are badly hit and how much need there is. I see how many people have lost their jobs, and they have no place to go, even to feed their families.</p> <p>A neighbor was telling me, she's involved with a church group. And she was saying previously during normal times, they used to feed about 150, at the most 200. She says now every weekend, 500 to 600 people show up. And sometimes, people are just embarrassed to be there because they are people who had jobs. They were happy with what they had, and they were supportive of their families. And they could do that. But now, they are not in a position to do that. So immediately, what comes to my mind is the healthcare, that if they're healthy, if families are healthy, the children are healthy. And maybe they'll be in a better position to take care of themselves during these times.</p>
<p>Being a Foundation Board Member</p>	
<p>JH:</p>	<p>I don't disagree with that. So, you were very modest. You mentioned you were on the Quality Control Committee at the hospital, but you've also been on the foundation board for a while now. Can you talk about when that happened and what you've been doing as a foundation board member?</p>
<p>Seema Nawaz:</p>	<p>Oh, you know, like I mentioned, and you also know that Janet, we served on the hospital foundation board representing the Twig after completing the president's tenure with the Twig. So, I did that. When it was time for me to leave, Joe Viar, the chairman of the foundation board, said, "Oh, Seema, I want you to stay on the board." And I said, "My term is done, so now you have the other person." And we laughed about it, and I came back, but every time, when we would meet, especially at the Cancer Walk. Remember the Cancer Walk we used to have? Joe Viar would always attend. And we would meet him. And he'd say "Seema, I want you on the board." So one time, I said, "Well, why don't you invite me?" [laughter]</p> <p>I said, "What do I have to do to get on the board?" "Oh, we'll invite you." I said, "Then invite me. Every time I see you, you want me</p>

	<p>on the board.” So, he says, “Yes, yes. I’ll do that.” So that’s how it happened. Maybe it took him another year or whatever because the Nominating Committee had to approve. So, then they invited me and I said, “Sure, I’ll come on the board.” It’s a working board. It works hard to raise money, mainly, it’s a fundraising board. It tries to raise funds for the hospital, the campaigns that they go into, you know, small or whatever. You, [Janet] also happen to be on the board.</p>
<p>The Women's Tower</p>	
JH:	<p>Well, yeah, but you’ve been on the board a lot longer than I have. And that’s what I was asking. So you started, didn’t you start with the fundraising for the Women’s Tower?</p>
Seema Nawaz:	<p>Yes.</p>
JH:	<p>Could you talk just a few minutes about that?</p>
Seema Nawaz:	<p>I was on the committee for the Women’s Tower. This was really upgrading that section. They wanted all the services for the women under one roof, so they put in new elevators and all that. It was a big thing that now, especially for the expectant mothers, when they would go up. Previously, they were all with the regular, patients. You would have the woman who’s right about to deliver also in a wheelchair with them. So, the big thing was that now we have a separate elevator for the expectant mothers. [laughter] They have the whole elevator to themselves. Yeah, that was—and then with the Twig, Unit 28. That was also a big thing for the Twig, right, Janet?</p>
JH:	<p>Well, originally, the Twig Pavilion, I think that was our first pledge with, the big pledge was when Starlet was president.</p>
Seema Nawaz:	<p>Yes.</p>
JH:	<p>And it was actually on the fourth level of the hospital, in the high-rise part of the hospital. And then I think Chris Candio was the president. The idea was to try to centralize women’s functions, which is what Seema was talking about. So it was kind of—we had just paid off the pledge, and then they said they wanted to move the Pavilion over to the other part of the hospital.</p>
Seema Nawaz:	<p>Yes.</p>
JH:	<p>So, it was sort of like, “What’s going on here?” but anyway, I think it’s a better service for women. Since we are a women’s group, it’s nice that we can support that.</p>

Meeting Twig Members in Other Countries	
<p>Seema Nawaz:</p>	<p>Absolutely, absolutely. And, you know, I was saying, I did resign from the Twig at the time when I went to Austria. But every time I would come back to Alexandria because I had two daughters who were in college in the states at that time. Only the youngest was with us. I would make many trips during the year to come and see them. And every time I would come, I would obviously go to the Thrift Shop just to see who else is there. So, one time, I took many books and it was the Seaport Savories cookbook, because Christmas was about to happen. And I thought I'll give these out as gifts in Vienna, to my friends there. I was a member of the Women's Guild there. That is also a charitable organization at the United Nations.</p> <p>They raise funds and then the money goes to a charity in Austria and then in some other country that the membership picks. So I immediately became a member because I was missing Twig. I needed to do something there. So many international people were there, so I thought I'll give my Twig book to them. I was at a party, and I met someone from the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency.] Her name was Catherine Monzel, and we started talking. I mentioned that I had just left the Twig. And she said, "Oh! I was a Twig." [laughter] Catherine Monzel still lives in Austria, and she retired as director of personnel. So, I gave her some books. The next time I came, she said, "Bring me more books because I'm also in it." Her name was also listed in the big directory at the back of the book.</p> <p>And I saw it, and I said, "Catherine Monzel is there." Before that, when my husband first joined the International Atomic Energy Agency, one day I was invited to meet other members in his division. A lady walks up and I think she was a section chief in Shuja's department, introduced herself as Cindy Coolbaugh. She said, "Oh, I used to be an Alexandrian." So, we started talking. The moment the word Twig came out from my mouth, she said, "Ah! I was a Twig." And the late Cindy Coolbaugh [she passed away a few years ago.] So made sure I never lost my touch with the Twig. They're all over the country. All over the world, I would say.</p>
<p>MB:</p>	<p>That's special.</p>
<p>Seema Nawaz:</p>	<p>It was really exciting. It's very special, yes. You were talking about friendships. And immediately, I became friends with these women because of the Twig.</p>

MB:	That's nice. Yeah. Well, I think this has been wonderful.
JH:	Yeah, I'm going to cut us off.
MB:	Okay. Yeah, right. And then —