

Guest: Abdirizak Abdi

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Interviewer: Brian Campbell

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BC: Well, thanks again and welcome to the MidAmericana podcast. Why don't you introduce yourself? Share your name and just a little bit about you.

A: My name's Abdirizak Abdi I am now the principal at Humboldt High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. I've lived in Minnesota for about 13 years now. And most of that I have lived in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I almost call it my hometown. And I really appreciate the opportunity for this. Thank you, Brian.

BC: Yeah. Thank you. So I want to go back to your life. You're originally from Somalia, yeah?

A: Yes.

BC: And what do you remember about your childhood in Somalia?

A: Not a lot. So I was about 6 years when we actually moved out, technically not moved out but when the civil war broke out and everyone was trying to fight for their lives I came to camp at refugee camps so as a 6 year old I don't remember a lot. Don't have any stories that people tell about how all that went and how people were really forced out of their homes, the place that they loved where they spent their life and enjoyed the most. And so that was one of the most difficult memories of a lot of people. Because there is not really anything bigger than losing everything you have in one day and just have been forced to start a new life in somewhere that was less comfortable that you may have had. Those few years that we spent in refugee camps then we moved to the capital city of Nairobi just back in and in terms of Somalia it's been that way since close to 30 years now if not 30 years since the civil war and it there had been transitional governments and I don't know what the government is right now. During the civil war it is one of those memories that people will not talk about. And so, I was lucky because my brother kind of went to Nairobi, Kenya, trying to survive and be the breadwinner for the family. I eventually got to the US and then sponsored us to come here.

BC: So, I just want to go back to those memories of Somalia. You say you don't have many of your own memories but it's been important for other people to share stories with you. I mean what kind of stories do people talk about? You say there are certain things they don't talk about but are there happy memories that people pass along to you and others who don't remember firsthand?

A: There are a lot of things and I have those conversations with my colleagues and friends now where we talk about what is it like to be forced out of your home and forced out of the place

you called home. And I think for a lot of people they think that you just left on your own accord and that you wanted a better life but that is not what it is in a civil war. Normally there's violence there's so much that is happening not just in terms of losing your home but people being killed and many lives have been lost. There's just so much of in terms of violence that really got to that point where people could not stay at their homes and were first to leave to really fight for their lives and for safety and get to a place where they can at least feel safe and have food at the table. And so, there was just a lot of when you talk to people of losing family members. Fathers, mothers, close friends. And just, in a day they are killed right in front of you sometimes when you're a child. It's really not good memories but the memories that really had destroyed the loved ones were taken away for most people.

BC: Yeah so you are saying that even the good memories in Somalia are hard to keep alive in your community and your family.

A: Yep.

BC: Wow. I mean do you know that there are in your family that experienced that violence directly or people that had lost their lives?

A: Yep. I've had relatives that have been killed, people that have been family close friends that also have experienced that violence. So it's like you wake up in the day and everything has ended that you had. And if you stay alive and survive that day to make it to a place where you can stay alive, you're fine. And so at that moment when that happens it's like you don't even think of sometimes the people that are living in your own household because you're survival mode is just "how do I get out of here now?" and families have gone in a different way and had never been able to get reunited. It's just a lot of that and that memory and I think it's just not one that's really memorable.

BC: Was there a day where your parents said you were leaving? Do you remember kind of what that moment of departure was?

A: The thing is I don't remember anything at that point when I was 6 years old.

BC: Yeah, yeah.

A: But, I was told the story of how we told the story of how we got to the refugee camps and I'm glad those memories did not stay that I'm not traumatized as a child and I think that's a gift from God that did not happen. There are people that have those memories and would have tears when they talk about it.

BC: Yeah. So you do remember arriving in Kenya or arriving in those camps for years?

A: I remember most of my memories started when we moved to the capital city in Kenya. So I remember a lot about Kenya and living there. My dad ended up in Ethiopia which is another neighboring country to Somalia because some people were not staying together. So I haven't spent much time with my dad. Kind of grew up under the realm of my brothers. And not having that father bond not a part of my life, I think it would have been amazing or great. I remember a lot about just growing up in Kenya in general. I did go back to the refugee camps once in a while cause I had some close friends that lived there. So, the living circumstances in refugee camps were better than running free for your life and safety, we had limited resources in terms of food and shelter. We had limited resources in terms of I mean education. In Kenya, I think around 2003 I think it was actually when they made primary education free and prior to that you had to pay for even to go to preschool or kindergarten. And so, that really made it challenging for anyone that did not have the capacity to pay for school. To even get any education.

BC: So for people who have never lived or been to a refugee camp, describe that for me. What does a refugee camp look like, sound like, you know what are some of the sights, sounds, and smells that you can remember from living there or visiting.

A: Well it's just a bunch of tents. I'll just use tents because I think that's what people would mostly understand. It's like not a tent but let's just use tents set up by most of the times the international organizations. The UN and etc. etc. And at least you have a space to live in. It's not like you have your own room. Like where you live in a house and have your own room to live in. And in a lot of circumstances everyone would have a little corner that they sleep. And a family. And just think of a family of 7, a family of 10. And what that really looks like. In Terms of roads there are no roads there's no infrastructure it might be just one road that leads to coming and going as far as resources and being connected to the cities nearby. But other than that it's just a place that is set up for a temporary shelter for people to live until they are able to get to somewhere they can restart their life because they lost everything they had. And that's what a lot of people don't understand. Well why do you stay at the refugee camps? Well it's not really a place you can call home. It's dusty, you walk around in the air will be blowing out of your... just the dust coming out into your eyes no control over it. But there's also good things living under those circumstances that unstructured time in life even though you don't know where your future is or where you are going in a moment. But there is also just like I want to live in that moment right now because it's that free space. Open space.

BC: So you remember that feeling as a kid, the sense of freedom at the camp.

A: Like right now, not a specific memory but going back and back and back.

BC: There's little opportunity there for school for work for any kind of future beyond that immediate time.

A: we have this is what you have until you have a life. So technically it's like you're in transition. Of like putting a hold on your future like another way of survival in terms of living circumstances like food you get just a card you get certain things in terms of food. And that's donated. So it's not like you have a normal life. That you are working, that you are earning a paycheck you're earning money. You're just living under circumstances of you have nothing and we'll make sure you'll survive to have a life.

BC: Now do most people stay in that temporary way or are lots of people wind up there for a long time?

A: There are people that, well most of the people actually left during that time. And we were able to go around the world in here, the US, in Canada, and other countries that have sponsored them to restart their life. But there are people that are still there. Do not personally know them but I think you'll find those that did not make it.

BC: And how did your family wind up moving to Nairobi?

A: So my brother was kind of the key to that. My older brother started working and he's always been very active even at a young age. And just he was very sort of entrepreneurial, not the type of entrepreneurial here but just trying to make a living and survival. So he was the key to that, us moving to Nairobi. And then he was also the key for us to go to the United States cause he sponsored us.

BC: Yeah so tell me what's your brother's name?

A: Jafar.

BC: Jafar. Tell me a little about him. How was he able to move not just to Nairobi but I mean you told me he moved to South Africa and the US...

A: So when everything else is gone that you have when you're a refugee and you're trying to, you don't know where you'll end up you don't know what you'll become. You don't know what country you'll end up living in and call home. And just in that matter, I want to make sure that I would provide a comfortable life and get them to a safe place that has opportunities for education, have opportunities where I come from. We are more of a collective culture. We think of the good of the family other than just me. And so that's really what my brother was doing. So he stayed in Nairobi. He came all the way to South Africa and lived there for a while. It wasn't safe anymore. Still supported our family and he ended up coming here to the United States as an asylum. And travelled all the way through Latin American countries and go here

and he sponsored us and said you know my family is there and I want to bring them here. So we went through the process and through that organizations that sponsored us to come to the United States. We came here as refugees and he came here actually as asylum.

BC: So he came here literally through the border seeking asylum.

A: Yep.

BC: And is that how he wound up in San Diego? Is that right?

A: Yep, yep.

BC: Do you think that's pretty common for refugees?

A: I think it used to be common, yeah.

BC: Yeah, wow. So, you were in contact with him during those years as he made that journey?

A: Yeah we were.

BC: And was that maybe your hope all along?

A: Yes, that he would make it to the US. And that would have been the best thing that could happen to our family and it was. Because I would have never had the opportunity to have what I have now.

BC: but you spent most of your childhood in Nairobi. What was that like as a Somali refugee trying to make a life there and school and those sort of things.

A: I would say both challenging and rewarding for one. The fact that I had my brother's support and even having that opportunity of living there was great but it was also challenging because it's hard especially when you're not from there. I mean in terms of culture East Africa, Somalia has borders with Kenya we kind of relate in terms of understanding different cultures around us in that moment but then if you're not a Kenyan born citizen its really difficult. So you have to find the ways that you can really survive in terms because they will tell you to go back to the refugee camps. You technically, everytime you're bothered they would ask for your identification card, you're not supposed to be here. So it really has been both challenging and rewarding but as a child I had spent a great time going to school. And that was really awesome. The official language of Kenya is English so that's where I learned English as my second language. And that was really awesome that really helped me when I came here to the United States.

BC: And you really embraced school it sounds like, you work as an educator now. Was school something like you said was a struggle to pay and have access to school?

A: Absolutely, it's only when you cannot get the opportunity what really the value of it is and what you don't have in that moment and that's how school has been really for me. Infact, I mean growing up I didn't see myself working in education. That was not something that I wanted to do when I grew up. Then again, you know, some of the things that lead to that is after I started school here, college here, and really I started working at the schools and that opportunity of just certain students first hand had made me realize my passion and who I was in terms of working with kids and working with people. Very people oriented. My original thought was actually going to the corporate world and that's what I wanted to do because I saw myself as an entrepreneur and I wanted to get that opportunity. Interestingly enough, that even after I graduated with my undergraduate degree at St. Cloud University then I started to go into my MBA and then I have had some of my mentors who said to me, you don't belong to that world because it didn't seem like corporate would be a place for you. And they were right. It was not. Because I worked at the schools with them. So, yeah that's when I decided I wanted to go back and do my masters in education and leadership and administration and then I went back and I got my special degree to be a principal at a highschool. Nad did my superintendent's as well. By the way we got good news from St. Cloud State last week I got a certificate, it's interesting that you brought up that aspect of my life, so I remember walking around at St. Cloud State University and just like walking into that hallway in that administration building at St. Cloud State at a time when I was thinking about if i wanted to go to university or not and walking the hallway and just looking at the- you and I were talking about the Changing Midwest, and I just remembered that I was having that conversation and I was looking at the hallway and I remember looking at those pictures on the walls and really and I hesitated whether I wanted to go to school or not. Interestingly, I got our certificate from St. Cloud this week that I was recognized as one of their notable alumni and my picture will be displayed in that same hall.

BC: Wow. Were there pictures when you visited, did you see pictures of anyone that looked like you at St. Cloud State?

A: Nope. Nope. Not at that time. Yeah and that's it was just an interesting aspect of after i got it just thinking back in that moment and just sure if I wanted to even go to university yet. But then just thinking about it back and I actually finished my graduate school 6 graduate credits went on my GPA. I was one of those people that never worked hard and it was just easy for me. But just even thinking about getting that recognition and having my picture displayed for other people that might look at me to see that just shows you how much the midwest has changed.

BC: yeah well congratulations, that's a great honor.

A: Thank you.

BC: So I mean going back to when you first moved here you said that for years you kind of had this hope that your brother would make it to the US and that your family would be able to move. What would you imagine that the US would be like? I mean what was your vision of that life that was possible here in the US?

A: That's interesting that you ask. So, it's I think the phenomenal idea of America. For a lot of people around the world, not just refugees living in a camp. Is you know that America is the greatest nation on earth. And just that honor of been an American, having those opportunities to go there was something that was really great and valuable. And I remember you know people talking about it and I think the way it was viewed, at least at that time, was if I go there then it's just the end of survival. That you're going to have a good life, Gonna get a good job. Everything that American means is that everyone has and had their own definition of what it looks like. And so it's like you go there and I mean everything is set up for you, you're covered. If you become an American like that's it. That was kind of the view and that's the view that I had when I was coming here.

Interestingly, we arrived in San Diego, California and I remember the first month because you wait for just the paperwork when you come to this country as a refugee, at least for a month just like getting all your paperwork done. And I remember getting there and most of the people, brother and some other people that lived in that same building. They would all go to work in the morning and it was just us, the newcomers and stay home and watch shows. And I remember watching one of the first shows I've watched. It was Jerry Springer, so that was my first glance. And so I watched it and I was almost addicted because we didn't have anything else to do. We were waiting for our paperwork. And so just seeing that as my interaction with America and what it looked like, that kinda stuck with me through the years and that's how I viewed white people for a long time. Until I became an educator and I started examining my own epistemology and biases and had to go back and say oh that's where I got that from it's interesting that all of those things that we see every day give us a narrative of other people and who they are. Even though we don't make an effort to know them. So when I'm joking with my wife's friends I always tell them, hey I have always looked at you guys with Jerry Springer broadcasted so don't start with me. And I also say I know where you're coming from so just that acknowledgement of the things that we see and mostly now with social media it's been so powerful it's something really we have to stop, pause and examine ourselves and understand the other people around us it was just kind of interesting when I got here. Now to answer your question, I thought coming to America that was it. But then I didn't know that I had to work for everything to get to where I am. And I'm glad I did.

BC: Wow. That's a great story, I can imagine you and your family sitting around the tv and trying to understand this place that you had this vision in your mind and now you're seeing it jerry springer and it sounds like it did not align with that dream you had imagined.

A: If you think about it now a lot of people don't know. You I hear people say oh go back to your country even after you're living here for 14 years and just even the idea they have about someone who is a refugee thinking that they came to this country to take the things that they had. Other than just what the reality is of someone that had no other option or any other alternative but coming here. And have been a law abiding citizen but you know we still have that view of what a refugee person is. It's someone who came to this country as a refugee.

BC: Yeah I mean what is that stereotype that you've heard from other people what do they imagine Somalia is or what a refugee is?

A: I get all kinds of things. I remember back then, I lived in St. Cloud. You know it's a good place to live, I cherished my life there but there's also the side of St. Cloud that shows up in the New York Times sometimes. And the kind of place where that raises him as real. That really if you're a person of color that it makes it hard to live and survive. That's how it is but it's not. There are just parts of that and that's just the majority of people that live in St. Cloud are great people and have had the opportunity to get to know them but there are a few that are still stuck with the old ideology of it's just us. It's not even, it goes beyond the color lines and the color scheme. It goes beyond that and so there's I think more people from Germany and you know other parts of Europe that the few I'm talking about that view their less human counterparts are less white then they are because we have conversations. But the majority of humans there are great and oftentimes it's comments and people making comments and telling people to go back to your country. And I would hear... so one time I remember and this was actually someone that i had as not a close friend but a friend asked me this was during the time when that movie the Captain came about. The Pirates in Somalia, I don't know if you ever watched. And that movie and she came to me and said so Abdi I asked you those pirates the one that were actually kind of doing all the stuff in the indian ocean and they were making a lot of money on those cruise ships that would cross through that area. So she came down and she said so I have a question for you. And I said what is it? And she said, so do you think those guys would be able to come here to the US? Are they going to hurt us? I'm like no. There is no way. This is two different continents and they're not as powerful as you think they are because again movies, Hollywood, it's all those narratives that we learn or the norms in terms of social norms that we hear and see shape what we are. Yeah there's this still that fear of oh I'm afraid of you because who you look like or who you are. Even sometimes in a good way that people will comment.

So I remember one time, my first year history college class the teacher was kind of around late 70s. And so good guy I loved. I loved the way he taught because that's how I started. It's some

of those interesting things as an educator as a principal I always have to think about thinking about my students who are different than me. And I remember it was me and another Somalia student in class the rest of them were white students and his teaching style was you're on your own. You read the book and I'm going to test you about 40 questions and essay questions. And you answer them. And I remember the average grade of the class was I think D. But myself and other students in class were even answering extra questions because we would read the whole book and answer everything and then will take the exam and that's how we were taught back in Africa. And then one day he got mad and he stood up and he was trying to say something nice. I think about what he was trying to say. It was a kind of conscious leader realizing what I see here. He said there is no way that these two guys are getting A pluses and you guys are getting a D. Do you know where they come from? He said. And the students just looked at themselves and then of course this was just encouraging us and saying good things about us and then he said these people came all the way from a place called Somalia. A continent that is far away from here and you're telling me that you grew up here and you learned US history since grade school and no one else is trying harder than these two guys are trying. I don't buy that. And so he was just angry about the fact that we were actually doing a great job. But he didn't realize that his teaching style only really responded to us. That's how we learned. And that's how I tried to tell my educator friends it's not about the things that we look at it's not about how far you have travelled to get there it's not about the color of your skin it's not about you knowing how you were raised, all that. It's about how well you know who your students are and you try, are you willing to respond and to learn and develop their relationship besides even start teaching these kids. So just kind of an interesting phenomenon.

BC: So tell me how you wound up on St. Cloud from, you came into San Diego but what did you do there?

A: I've had some friends in Minnesota and so I ended up coming here to Minnesota, first in Minneapolis and I started working actually at the airport back then when Northwest Airlines were still alive. Before I think Delta bought them. I am working for a small company that served Northwest Airlines at the airport, at the terminal. And I remember my first winter in Minnesota in 2006. I still considered one of the coldest winters I have ever seen. And I became a water truck driver. A small truck that serves the aircrafts. So I would have a schedule and specific gates and a terminal that I'll be working at and so all of those aircrafts that'd come to those gates I'd put the water that would be used you know goes back on a trip. So that was my first job in America. And I remember in terms of how cold it was when I put the pipe and pump the water into the aircraft and when I was done and take that pipe out of the aircraft, that little water that would fall down on the ground sometimes they would freeze before they reached the ground. That was the coldest experience of my entire life. And I was just saying to myself I don't think I want to live in this place I think I just want to go back. I'm glad I did not go back

and so really interestingly after working there for close to a year I realized that my mother would always say to me if you ever want to go for the moon and reach for the stars get an education. So just thinking about what my mother said and what I wanted to do when I was a teenager I was hungry for money. I was just hungry for the paycheck that was really good. You go to work and sometimes you work over time and you see that money and you think I really don't want to give up this. But I'm glad I did give up and I finally connected with someone who lived in St. Cloud and just talked about going to school, a friend of mine. And that's how I ended up in St. Cloud. So I came to visit him in St. Cloud and then I never went back.

BC: So your mother she said get an education.

A: If you want to reach the moon she said always get an education. So my mom was a woman that really lived in education even though she never got the chance to go and get an education for herself. She always viewed it as something that could open the doors of opportunity for you. And she always talked about it. I think one thing that really kind of always, she made a comparison was that my older brother didn't have the opportunity to do that so he was just like supporting the family and being the breadwinner for the family. I think she wanted the younger ones to not go through that route to not give up the need to get an education. I'm glad I started coming back to me and that's how I ended up in St. Cloud. I started at the college first and then I ended up at the university. It was great, I enjoyed my time going to school. Still love school and I'm a learner and I can sit any day and just listen to anything that anyone is trying to tell me and I keep an open mindedness.

BC: And am I correct that your father was an educator as well?

A: Yeah my father was a teacher actually. He taught memorization of the Qur'an and these long studies and those sort of things. It's not that he went to school for it, just a very traditional background that you learn something and you teach people but it's not like you go to teacher training and learn that and become a teacher that's just the requirement here. So for a long time that's what he did for all his life was just teaching people and he was a good and memorable man. He would always say everyone is your friend until they are not. And so treat everyone with respect and so he was a very humble human being. Just the few moments that I've seen him because you know I have not spent a lot of time with him but he was just a man of service. And I think also that took from him and as a leader try to just be first human because that's I think the one thing we forget especially now that people are going under very difficult circumstances and so yeah.

BC: And was Islam a big part of what helped your family make it through all of these challenges?

A: Yes. Absolutely yeah. Both my mom and my dad were very good Muslims and they have always loved and have always taught us the first thing of being a Muslim is just good character and how you treat other people even those that are different than you. Those that you disagree with and they just lived into that realness just making sure that you're really not looking at people in a different way even when the opportunity allows you to. Not having pride at all and just being humble no matter what circumstances that you live in you don't know those circumstances will be real and it just reminds me of even thinking back I mean the circumstances for some people and some relatives that have lived in the refugee camps. I just kept that in the back of my head. You know when I see someone on the street who may have lost their job and was a homeless person, I cannot stand it. I always stop my car and think about that being me. So they really installed that in us and that was just living in that just being good Muslims not just what has been practiced by social media in terms of what a Muslim person is.

BC: Do you have particular teaching from the Qur'an that is important to you?

A: Yeah there's a verse that really talks about all of us being humans and that whoever has taken the life of a human has taken the life of all. And whoever saves one life of a human saves all lives. And the reason it talks about another verse, it talks about that we are all made in terms of culture and terms of religion and in terms of who we are and who we associate with. Just in the matter of recognizing our differences. But it's not so that we are different so that we fight with each other so we look at each other in a bad way. So those are the two versus that I always think about because again in the world where we live in the world today where there is so much division and uncertainty it's just hard figuring out to see the good in other people that are different than you.

BC: Well and as you say that sense of being connected and our lives being linked and caring so deeply that's so different than what is often the stereotype of what a Muslim is in the US.

A: Yeah. So St Cloud, during my time in St. cloud- have we talked about that?

BC: No we were just getting there I guess?

A: Okay

BC: Yeah so go ahead, tell me about your time in St. Cloud.

A: So my time in St. Cloud was really amazing. I had the opportunity to meet a lot of people to get to know people. The interesting thing is that I have made friends of all kinds of walks of life so different. Some were born here in St. Cloud, some born like coming from different parts of the world. The interesting thing is that some of those people that I had met in St. Cloud have now become more than friends but have become brothers and sisters. Someone that I call

sister is (Vic Strutter?) and she's white but I consider her as my sister and she'll always call me brother and I'll always call her sister. And just how much I have learned from those people and how much we have learned from each other was just amazing. I've had good mentors that really helped me through the journey of becoming an education leader. Willie Jett who is now the superintendent in St. Cloud, African-American, great man learned a lot from him. So just thinking about those people that really shaped who I am in terms of leading a school right now, all of that that has happened in St. Cloud. Adam Holme was one of my favorite principals when I was Assistant principals in St. Cloud. Al Johnson, African-American, just thinking about those people and how it's amazing that people that you have never had the opportunity to even consider that you would even know that became brothers and sisters and friends. And so there's just that part of St. Cloud that I always view and that people don't see. That a Muslim young man that came to this country as a refugee would really cherish and live a good life in a place in a place that they call it "white cloud". Just to show you that there's always two sides to the story, not just one. There are parts of St. Cloud, those few people that really make those comments, those ugly things that should not be. But there is just this other part of St. Cloud that is just great and awesome. And we try to generalize the louder voice that is based on what we hear.

BC: Well and it sounds like if the University is hanging a portrait of you on the wall that there are other students like you. I mean the community is changing not just the school but that the city of St. Cloud and that area, like lots of the Midwest, is becoming more diverse. And lots of people are seeing that more and more and are having to adapt.

A: Absolutely yeah when I moved to St. Cloud, even right now even when I go back now, I moved I live in Apple Valley now, Minnesota, and I work in St. Paul. But even now when I go back it's still changing. There are people that I did not recognize. The majority of the people back then. We're not realizing how communities are changing but they really are changing. And I think it's something that would be great because there's more diversity there is more for us to learn from each other and help each other.

So I worked for the schools for almost all of the time I lived in St. Cloud at least the last 10 and I kind of worked my way up until I became the assistant principal at the high school level and I stayed there for a couple years before transitioning to Mound View, which was kind of not far from where I work right now. So 2019 was my last year at Apollo high school as an assistant principal and it's interesting because I have a very imaginative and intuitive mind and I think about all of those things in terms of change. And how just not the Midwest but even America is changing both for good and for things that are not good.

And I told you this before; so 2019 August 20th was the anniversary, 50 years of when we first landed the first man on the moon. So Apollo high school where I was assistant principal, was

named after Apollo 11. So there was a capsule that was outside Apollo highschool that was donated by NASA back then. The symbol that exists and I was just thinking about the changing communities around me and kind of the things that were happening around time now to even more in terms of more divisions and more uncertainty, mistrust among us, as Americans.

So one thing that really was interesting was that specific day it was my last year at Apollo. I walked outside and I was just thinking about that specific day in terms of America the day we landed the first man on the moon as the first country in the world. And how much united we were just that specific day. And my imaginative mind travelled back all of those years, 50 years, and I was thinking because I just wanted to give you the idea of having a conversation with America itself. And so I was thinking about how divided we are as a society in America and how united we were that day that we landed the man on the moon. And I had a conversation with that America, 50 years ago. And interestingly in my imaginative mind I was talking to America and it was responding to me in my imaginative mind. In terms of what I have imagined America to be. As someone that cares, someone that really loves, and really cherishes starting a life and making a life here in the United States as a citizen.

So with that concern I'm walking right in front of Apollo and I ask America, so who are you? And I'm talking to that America that landed on the moon that day.

August 20, 2019, Abdi, as he walked in front of Apollo, a school named after Apollo 11, he asked America, who are you?

America responded, it is an irony that you asked, because most people have forgotten who I was to become.

America continued:

I was to be the guesthouse, welcoming everyone for whom they would become.

I was to be that night-bloomer flower, beautiful, bright, unnoticed in the darkness of night.

I was to be that glory flower which unravels into full bloom vivid for the dreamer to see from far away.

I was to be the dream of the young, the old, men and women from every corner of the globe.

I am the same America that landed first man to the moon 50 years ago today, but who are you?

Abdi responded, my journey is similar to men, women and children who've travelled million miles seeking for you.

He continued:

I am a young man who came to this country as a refugee seeking for a better life

I am an immigrant son whose father never had a chance to go to college and earn a degree
 I am a hopeful member of society who is encouraged by the faith of a courageous and
 humble mother

The son of a mother who never went to school yet reminded me that education was the
 road to success.

I am a simple human seeking for your dream to cherish, but what happened to you?

America responded, what an irony of time to live, it is human greed that happened to me, but I
 am glad you asked.

America continued:

My dream was to be the light, shining bright in the imagination of boys and girls playing in
 the dust of camps

My dream never changed, since the Apollo 11, but it's human greed wanting to alter that
 dream.

My dream will not live without the origin idea of the American dream, providing the best to
 all.

My dream will not survive the narrow-minded idea that it is for certain people as it will
 narrow the dream

My dream is the same dream that made Donald J Trump the president, despite many won't
 accept the reality.

Abdi interjected, America, don't think that you need to polish your heart to appear like a mirror
 in the world.

He continued:

America, if you tell unborn child the glory and the beauty of the world, they won't
 understand its majesty.

America, I often get discouraged by the crisis appearing every moment on the television and
 in the news

America, you whisper into my heart, stop pondering over the strangeness of world and
 speak your truth.

America, you say don't be discouraged by the fear, uncertainty, struggle, divisions and
 distrust among you

America, you ask me to go ahead and share the story and bond we commonly share, but I
 am asking how?

America responded: Go tell the world I am that diamond hidden in the dust, and you are that
 bright light shrouded in the darkness.

America continued:

I am you and you are me, but even diamond is worthless if it still hidden in the dust
 I am impatient of the circumstances as it will continue to divide amongst you more.
 I am here to assure you that good times are still ahead, as bad times don't last forever
 I am here to tell you don't let the fear of losing push you down and lose hope
 I am here to let you know that the conditions are brought to test you to reach to your
 new heights.

Abdi interjected again, America, but I am scared and keep holding myself down waiting things to happen naturally.

He continued:

I keep hoping someone else will act, but I remind myself that we all have a responsibility.

I keep reminding myself that what brings a joy to the heart of all Americans brings success to mine.

I keep reminding myself about the endless hope for our country and wish for a bright future

I keep reminding myself that the success of all Americans brings hope and prosperity into my heart.

I keep hoping that change will come and bring hope, prosperity, harmony, unity and endless joy.

America responded: It is your fear of not seeking beyond, and you have to take action and share your perspective.

America continued:

You are the American dream and Donald J Trump is now your president.

You are optimism, harmony and prosperity will bring you joy

Abdi, thanked America and concluded:

America the great, promise me that you will remain to be that eagle that never stops,
 America, I hope you bring joy to all and not just to some, no matter where they come from

And that was the end.

BC: That's amazing!

A: It is, yeah. It's-- and then I never shared it! I wrote it and I have many of those things that I've written that I just write them and and but I don't share it. And because again, publicity is something that I, is not part of my, DNA. I just want to be that simple person that kind of helps

the people that are around him, but again just that responsibility of us that we have voice and that we must share. I remember one time, it was actually one of those times that we celebrate for a holiday and I wrote a letter to President Trump, but I never sent it to him.

BC: You wrote a letter to President Trump?

A: I did.

BC: Like on a, on what holiday?

A: That was when he first, yeah it was the early days. Yeah. I wrote a letter to him and it was really interesting. But I never shared it, it was one of those things.

BC: What did you write?

A: So I write a lot of things but I never get it out there. Yeah, it was, it was kind of interesting. So it was actually a day that was kind of, so Ede, Ede is one of the two holidays that we celebrate as Muslims. And so, it one of those days and you know, I went and kind of celebrated and then I came back and I was in a good mood. And I sat on Bakani and I was just like thinking and all of a sudden it just crossed my mind because then it was just like when, yes we had divisions, but it didn't get as angry as it is, and I'm not into politics. So I never wanted to be involved my name, the author, me saying about anything because it's just an easy way, easy for your name to get out there. So, yeah I wrote and I remember just talking about you know the hour because if you are a leader, your words, your words, it's like, your words are like a sword with two sides. One with the good and one with the bad and so you can really make a difference by your words as a leader. And so I was just like an encouragement, it was just a hopeful message, I don't know if I still have it, but. Yeah, it was just kind of interesting, and that was when he was first elected. It was kind of new, so. But it was interesting. Again, it was just me, my perspective as a young man who came to this country.

BC: Yeah.

A: And just, talking to the leader of the world.

BC: Yeah. So you just finished celebrating the end of Ramadan, and you thought

A: No it was the other one. So one is Ramadan.

BC: Okay.

A: One is the Ramandan and then there is Eid.

BC: Right.

A: Another bigger one which is when people go to the pilgrimage. And so, it's kind of interesting, it was kind of interesting and I have no idea where it actually even came from, but it was just like something that was really interesting. But again,

BC: Well it,

A: Yeah I've never shared it.

BC: Well it sounds like you know from what you shared from August 20th, you had this vision that you, you do feel a certain sense of call to speak your truth.

A: Yes.

BC: That maybe that doesn't come easy for you, but that you do have a lot to say and you see in the world around you that there's truths that you need to speak right now.

A: Yeah! Yeah, no and it is, but it's just like people can take your words out of context too. So I'm also careful of what I say because I just want to live in my normal life. And I want to worry about my students and my staff and the people that I interact with every single day who need me the most. And my biggest obligation is them and so I don't want to be overtaken but then like you said again, I have that intuitive mind of just thinking about that because I remember now, now it's coming back to me. I think it was 2018 or somewhere, I think I was actually not the first the first time, I think somewhere there and I remember it was just a great day of important celebration, joy, and love for us. And you know as people celebrated normally wear traditional clothes and share their clothes. Share the dishes for that day I was just like I felt like you know I have, I'm going to give my wisdom and hope for our country and who would it be the best to send it to? Well, the president because he technically was the president. And so, yeah, it was just like, because what's really happening is that oftentimes we tend to pay attention to the noises and the loudness of you know, the two sides. All the way out, right? And that you know just that balance in times of, we are Americans, we are humans. We are the same people and it's okay to have those disagreements, but the place that we are right now is not okay. It's not okay in terms of how we feel about each other. And that we should really try

to find that balance that might be to be unattractive because that darkness would really blind us to see the light ahead of us as a nation. And it was just, it was just like those moments that I was just reminded that you know you have to be thinking about what wind has really brought us here as a nation, as Americans. And it's just that whisper of my heart that just said, do get discouraged. You have to be able to say what you need to say, and I just sat down and write and write but then I, like I said, I never shared it.

BC: It's really striking to me that you, you've had that urge to speak truth in the midst of this celebration where you were

A: Yeah.

BC: Wearing traditional clothes

A: Yeah.

BC: And eating Somali food and you know, being able to really celebrate those roots and to be able to celebrate that as an American

A: Yeah.

BC: And as a group of Americans that, that that is America, it's not just about assimilating and you know, kind of holding back that truth but it is about being proud of, of all the different cultures that are America.

A: Yes. And so, yeah. And I want to make sure that I am celebrating but everyone else even those that disagree with me the most can also celebrate. But there's just this fear and uncertainty and just struggles and divisions among us. And I wonder, I always have a vision of that we can change that and prevail to bring hope, prosperity, harmony, and endless joy to our communities no matter where you live or what Zip code because I believe that crisis just you know lasts a period of time and then not forever and we have to be able to envision and see the light ahead of us, but right now, none of us is doing okay in terms of where we are and what's happening to some of our communities just because of what they are associating who they are. And just the words that we use what we say to each other you know the struggles, the killings, there is just so much fear that exists and that's not what I see when I see America. That we can change that, but only if the people that oftentimes do not speak that includes me, can speak their truth and so that it kind of what overtakes me when I'm doing these things and writing these things.

BC: Well yeah, but I can imagine that that feels very risky you know

A: Yeah

BC: To speak up and to speak when you know that same president was just in Minnesota just a few weeks ago saying you know

A: Yes. The things that he was saying, yeah.

BC: You know, saying that the whole state is destined to be a refugee camp if we continue to you know welcome people, people like you.

A: Yeah. Yeah so how do you see that huh? How do you respond when your own president comes here and says that. But then again, that's not who you are. That's not what you believe. That's not why you're here. It's just, it's just because just an ordinary person was saying that, it's different. A president's word is like a sword. And it cuts whatever it cuts. And so I think it's just the matter of learning from each other. I think having that opportunity doesn't matter whether you're a president or have a different title, but I think there's just a fear amongst us and that really creates and the more that we're not willing to learn who we are from each other and praise our differences, and just I think the more this would continue.

BC: So, I'm curious, I mean, as someone who moved here as a teenager, I mean what was it like you know understanding kind of the racial history and differences in the United States, I mean, when did you come to you know think of yourself through some of those lens of you know race in America?

A: It's interesting because I think I've said this before to someone else because I have looked at myself as someone different even though I lived in Kenya, I was not a Kenyan and despite maybe the challenges that exist, I never looked at myself, there was nothing that would implicate that I was different. Even when I was around people that might have a lighter skin or darker skin, even when I was around in a small places, in small towns where you know its, I'm just passing by, and so I only realized that you know privilege is everywhere, and so the have and the have not in terms of socioeconomic, that exists in terms where you live, your Zip code and all that. The idea that my success would be determined by the color of my skin did not run in my head until I get to America. In another way, I did not know I was black until I get to this country. Even though I am, but I have never thought through it until I came to America and

there's just so emphasis poured into that which is really sad.

BC: And you said that, you know, many of your important mentors at St. Cloud were African Americans who I'm guessing helped you navigate some of that you know understand that landscape in the U.S.

A: Absolutely, and it's interesting because and I remember even St. Cloud when, you know those other days that I lived there they there's just this phenomena even and micro-aggressions around that even myself as someone who came to this country as a refugee that is still in terms of race, we are considered, as you know, as still black African American. Right? But even with that, the micro-aggressions of one is better than the other and just dependent under that circumstance and that moment that the system says oh, you in that same class I remember those old days and again, we have to be cautious of really putting those things into our heads because you hear oh, you guys, you work hard. You know, you go to work. And so don't be like, you know, the African Americans! And not, you know, from the South culture. And just creating that tension of the guy actually who is a school counselor somewhere but he also has a, he owns a barber shop right downtown. And those holidays, and I remember us trying to work you know just creating that community of it doesn't matter, this is just the system that creates that microaggressions that divides two people that look like each other, now we have passed the skin, you know, division of saying you're different. But now you're saying you're the same, but it's still you're different and I think the way that the system is set up is just to create more divisions and not to really unite who we are as people and it's not just African Americans, its also you know, my white colleagues and my white friends who have taken me in their wings and have helped me in terms of knowing all of this and becoming a really a cautious leader, who really examines the things that he hears and not just forming one general idea about any sort of people no matter what they are or where they come from.

BC: So I mean this summer, obviously the eyes of the world were really focused on the Twin Cities as that community and communities around the world protested the murder of George Floyd. I mean, what was that like for you I wonder.

A: It's probably what I've seen on that day when I was writing to America when I was talking to America and having a conversation with America. It's what envisioned was coming its where I envisioned that we are going to. Because if we continue where we are right now in terms of just more divisions and more not being honest with each other and and just not really willing to work on the system that really has for so many years you know, disproportionately just disadvantaged some and not the others the system that has not worked you know for all, if we continue on that route I think it's been a, it's been a very difficult summer. It's been a just

thinking that you know, many soldiers even just despite being an American, Minnesota means a lot to me and this is you know where I have cherished all my life. This is what I know. And as a person now and this is what really is important to me and seeing Minneapolis really with everything that was taking place and just it was sad. It was really moments of fear and what do you do that because you're powerless in terms of everything that's happening and I think it's a moment that calls us to really recognize the stories that are happening around us and just be mindful of those that we have under our leadership those that we interact with, our families, and have real conversations about these things because it's real. And it's happening. And it's sad. And it should not be that way. Because America can be better. Minnesota can be better and no one should lose their life no matter what.

BC: So where you part of some of those protests, or I mean how were you personally connected to any of that this summer?

A: Well we were in a you know, we were, we have another bigger thing right now that's called covid. And it really limits especially when we work with others in that really limits our movement around what we do and how we contribute. But so I haven't been a big part of that in terms of purchase, but it's just a sad moment in our history, it was just how could this also be happening in the greatest nation on Earth that we have all of these things going on and so the young people that are looking at that, my students looking at that in terms of who they are in relation to what's happening around them. That really breaks my heart because the school that I work at is very diverse has a diverse populations and I want my students to be able to see themselves in a not just the violence around them, not in just the way that might be viewed because of who they are, but just being able to, that they can get out there and work hard, and just play by the rules to just have that you know opportunity to you know be able to pursue their dreams.

BC: Yeah. So I mean what do you think it means for those students to see somebody like you as a school principal?

A: I couldn't think better than a student, a former student at, when I worked at Ironville, one wrote something and said, he said, that when we speak our truth as you know the younger generation, and just say what we need to say in terms of how we feel, everything that's happening around us. Adults don't listen and even if you listen, you still interpret with your own perspective and I think that is some of the dangerous things that are happening is that we hear things and we interpret with our own lens rather than the lens of those that are saying it. And so, he was just expressing his anger and how sad it is to see the things that are happening and maybe some of the things that people would say to them in the streets and as just yeah, it's just

very very very difficult time to live and I think we have an obligation as leaders to make sure that we are creating communities of love, harmony, and peace that we are really advocating for those that do not have the advantage that creates access and opportunity. The ones that need the most.

BC: So were there, are there things that you're doing in your school now that, now that you're principal for the first time.

A: We're distanced learning right now so, we haven't been back yet to our building.

BC: Yeah.

A: But we have been having conversations around that as you know in our district in terms of how we create that even in distanced learning and just making sure that we create these spaces so that people can have voices. Students can have voices.

BC: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I wonder you know there's been a lot of conversation nationally about how, how in during this pandemic, how educational access you know is reflecting all these disparities that you know students of color, I'm sure you know, students who are from refugee backgrounds, it must be incredibly difficult for them to have the same access to education. I mean, what do you see in your school and in your context.

A: You know, it's, it's a reality around not just my school, but I think that other, I mean if you are an educator out there kudos to you for all of the hard work that you're doing because it's not easy or. This pandemic has really created challenges and definitely would increase gaps in terms of where students would be. We are on hold in a lot of things in our lives. Not just school, but I think it's after, we might not realize it now because, right, you know it's a, I mean Minnesota state is not, we don't know about the tests yet, last year they were canceled in terms of data and measuring data and what that would look like for each school and I don't know whether they're going to have them because covid is still as real and I think that numbers are going up right now, but it would interesting to see what it looks like, what I can say is that the challenges of the pandemic are real and I don't know how much support really is out there in terms of, our institutions that have powers. But it's just a time where we're definitely going to see more gaps and more challenge for those that are disenfranchised the most.

BC: I'm curious, I mean just for you personally, you know what you've been able to do to kind of get through the pandemic, what have you, how has your life changed, what have you learned from that?

A: I think it's really been an amazing thing for me to just making sure that because a lot of times when especially when you're in a position of leadership you think of others and you have to really take care and make sure that you know those that are under, you're always thinking of them and that's how it should be, but it's amazing how I have been able to at least when I get an opportunity at least afterward, just keeping my routine of writing. I like writing. And that has really kept me going, but it's been really difficult because everything on one day you know we went into a lockdown and we were at home and it's just like something that we have never experienced before and it was real. And that's the one thing that I, when I think about is, if we are not thinking about each other right now. If we are not supporting each other now, if we are divided now, when would we ever be going to see each other as Americans? If we cannot do something about the disparities and the issues that exist because of the system that might have been built not for everyone, when are we ever going to see what that really looks like? And when are ever going to have empathy and sympathy for each other if we are, if covid did not teach because it's real. And it's happening to all of us across all Zip codes and across the nation. And we have, you know, what a crazy time of our lives that we live you know, in this ups and downs and going through us as we progress and try to find solutions. But it's definitely going to that they're going to be more up and downs because of covid. And we're going to have more challenges because of covid. And covid is real. And I think covid should teach us a lesson that we should see each other as brothers and sisters. Should visit our neighbors and make sure that we know how, the people that we work with and around us are doing, no matter what party they associate with or where they have come from. (Brian?), being your neighbor.

BC: Yeah. Well I wonder if we can take a few minutes to just maybe talk more specifically about the Midwest.

A: Okay!

BC: I wonder if you can think of any you know kind of funny stories of things that you think of as kind of characteristic of the Midwest. Things that you notice and laugh about with your friends, whether it's other Somaliss or white friends.

A: Yeah. It's interesting that you said that we always joke around. I always joke around with my white colleagues and friends about that in terms of the Midwest that it took me a while to really understand them. The kind of that niceness in the Midwest.

BC: Yeah.

A: And I kind of, it was kind of hard to adapt that because you know I want to speak my truth, I want to say it as it is. And so, it's just a matter of like but there's also the other side of my culture that relates to that being nice in terms of like coming from a collective culture, you are always nice to people, you are always thinking the big picture and you always think about the kind of the that we are in this together and all of that and so oftentimes I will like if we ever go to a restaurant, like, like, the kind of the culture in here is that oh you take care of yourself, I take care of myself, we're a very individualistic. I come from a collective culture as so I wonder you know if we eat food and have a coffee I want to pay for it, because that is how we grew up right? And I remember you know how offensive that was to some people when you know I first came here because I it was out of my conscious mind, I'll just do it. And they were like, you're not. I am okay, I have, I can take care of myself. I'm like, chill down, it's not like that you know, just, it makes me feel better so it's not like I'm not doing it out of disrespect, I'm doing it out of respect kind of the eye contact is another one that I've always struggled because you know in, where I come from, you fear targeted to someone, especially someone that's older, someone that's you know, older than you. Out of respect, you look down. But now you have to really, you know, pay attention and now I have to give you that eye contact to show that you know, I'm hearing you right?! And so I've always also struggled with that and it just you know, how people get offended and it's just, it's just amazing in terms of even navigating so when you work at the schools for you know the last 11 years, you also see, you know all these things, you know that you come across and just wonder in terms of how different like the culture is and how hard it is for people to kind of learn from each other and assimilate. And so one time I remember, I remember one time because it's hard to remember it. So one time I remember I was going to, someone invited me to a meeting and it was Ramadan and I was fasting and this place they had made like the best food ever right? This person knew it was Ramadan, but he completely like I don't if he forgot, so I walk in, and I'm walking in to this table and you know there's just this nice food. And I'm there in the meeting and you know I just said, oh I'm okay, I cannot eat it, and so when we got up I'm like you have tortured me today right? Because yeah he did this and he's like I'm so sorry. So there's just this, all of this different things in terms of the cultural pieces that really happens that you trying to do something good with respect but then on the other hand it can be viewed as a disrespect of the other. And so, it's an interesting place, the Midwest. I love it still even trying to figure all about you know just that being nice and just not making people uncomfortable, because it's hard. I think it's growing on me now and that's probably why I haven't shared some of the things that I've shared with you. And with that, because yeah, you adapt and you assimilate into the system but, yeah definitely the Midwest is changing and I think that's really something that's really interesting.

BC: Do you have any kind of particular Minnesota or Midwest foods that you, that you really like or really don't like?

A: When it comes to food, I kind of eat everything.

BC: Yeah.

A: Like, but what was it? There's something-- I can't even remember the name. One time I went to a, yeah I went, I was invited to kind of a get together from work and I still even don't remember what the name was. But someone asked to try something, it was kind of made out of potatoes and some other stuff that mixed I don't know exactly remember what the name was but

BC: Yeah.

A: Yeah and I like ate it and it was a nightmare, I didn't tell so. One of the things about the culture that I grew up is that if someone invites you are if someone offers you something, even if you don't like it, you try to make sure that you don't make that other feel bad. In the Midwest, if you don't want something you say, oh, I don't eat this. Right? And so I tried to eat it and I like literally because I think just because of what was in my mind and in my brain I had to vomit after I had left the party and I had to vomit and just like for two days I was sick as a result of it. And I never told that friend.

BC: Tough. That's awful.

A: So yeah.

BC: Well and I mean one thing that I was curious when you were talking about working at the airport and you were telling me about your first winter in Minnesota, is that something that that you and other, other immigrants, other refugees, do people share those kind of stories of you know that first Minnesota winter is that something people have you know conversation about often?

A: No, not at all.

BC: No?

A: But I think it would be really an awesome thing to do, to hear what the first winter looks like. But no, I have not heard people just talking specifically about their first winter. It just came to

me because I was just going through my you know memories and just connecting the dots and remembering my first winter because yeah, it's, it's amazing.

BC: Yeah.

A: People want to run away especially then. The one thing that I've struggled in my early days in my early years living in Minnesota, I can never really exactly know how much clothing do I need for that specific weather. And so I would always, and to dress for winter and all of a sudden especially when I, you know, have to go and supervise football games and that kind of stuff and I'd be coming home like freezing so yeah it's, I do love the two seasons right now. It's really awesome, I would never change it. People always would say, you know you came from San Diego California, that's the best place to live! Why did you come to Minnesota. And then from Minneapolis I moved back to St. Cloud and my friends would call me the backward guy, like move from a small city to a big city, you're just going backward. So.

BC: Like you're supposed to wind up in San Diego and not St. Cloud.

A: Yep, I wouldn't change really I love the I just wish that the winter was a shorter period than what it is right now. But I love the two seasons and it's really amazing.

BC: Yeah. So do you ever try anything like, ice hockey or ice fishing?

A: One time I was actually having a conversation with a friend of mine, not a friend of mine it actually was my colleague because I told her, so when I was living in St. Cloud, I you know, had to try all of those things, I'm very, when it comes to activities, I'm very outgoing. I try whatever that comes around. So I actually did ice skating up in Duluth a few times and so I was telling a friend of mine who is from the Midwest, born in the Midwest, and I said, you, I actually so we were talking about it and I said I actually do ice skating, I've done it before if you guys want to do it, we can do it! And she looked at me and she said, are you serious? And I said, what do you mean serious? And she was like, I never thought that black people do that. She surprised the fact that I actually did ice skating. So yeah, I tried, yeah I learned a lot in the Midwest that I did ice skating, ice fishing once, I went with my friend. I do like the water, I started doing some you know hiking and actually rock climbing, mostly indoor. So I do enjoy a lot both the winter and the summer. I did snowmobile and that was really awesome too.

BC: Wow.

A: So yeah, I, yeah I push my friends to learn about me and they push me to learn about all the different things that you know, some are weird in the Midwest. And you wouldn't know what it means, but, yeah. It's kind of interesting.

BC: Yeah! That's great. Well I know, I think I told you, part of why we started this podcast and this other colleague, you know neither of us is from here either.

A: Oh yeah?

BC: And so, yeah so sometimes things like, you know ice fishing or wearing the right clothes or figuring out how to dress right to run outside in the winter is hard for me too.

A: Yep. Yep I-- One time I went to, I actually didn't go after he explained to me because a friend of mine wanted to take me to hunting. And so I did all the courses and stuff and then I ready and I said so what time are we leaving? And he said oh we have to leave like 3 am. And I'm like, what? 3 am. And he said don't take a shower, right? And I said, what do you mean don't take a shower? Don't be, that's kind of hard, so you kind of explain the whole process and showed me the picture of him doing all of that and so after hearing like what I have to go through to do hunting, I said no, I never want. So that's the one thing that I've never have done to do. But I would love to do it. But everything else, I tried.

BC: Yeah. And Abdi, what do you think are there things you'd like to share about the Somali community in the Midwest? I mean there's like, there's such a remarkable number of people in the Twin Cities now and yeah, I'm that that's something people don't always know or understand. I mean anything else you want to add about.

A: Yeah, I think you know, there at least in the state of Minnesota, Somaliss have you know, we have a large number of Somaliss in the states and right now I think I almost everywhere in, in terms of institutions, you will find Somalis and one thing that really is one thing that people, we're very entrepreneurial and alot have started businesses in Minnesota and it's just interesting how you know some people have been very successful even though they came to this country as refugees. With very, we were not afraid of really starting something from scratch and I think for now, you know when people first started coming to Minnesota you know in early, in the 90s, the first Somalis and now it's different because right now we're very collective community like you are, might be walking in the street and then all of a sudden someone would see you driving and they'll pick you up right? That won't happen in other cultures because you'll not just like give a ride to a stranger. But that's how kind of how we grew up right? We help each other under whatever circumstances you go somewhere and we

see a Somali person and you're like, if whatever you need, that even though they may have never met you in your life, they would take care of you just because and even the other people and so we're very generous there are other things that I would say is that I think just that culture shock of that you know the things that are here are different than you know how people have grown up in terms of like the eye contact we talked about you know the sometimes the time I don't remember, you always give me the African time . We have meetings and I'll be like, just so you know I'll be late, you know because there's always that understanding of its okay, but then there's that also you in the Midwest thing if you're late its looked like as a disrespect right? And that I have to really adapt, especially in my profession right? So, so there's just like, I think there's more and more of integration now in terms of not just the Somalis, but the Eastern Africa community that live in Minnesota and I think there's more understanding of kind of the Midwest people really understanding who the Somalis are in terms of culture just being collective and all of the different things like and so, I think eventually, I think we like right now, we have people in politics and people in other institutions and so there's more awareness and acknowledgement of both sides but just like the loud voice, like one of the things that young people when they come here struggle is especially if you come from a place like the refugee camps, you get used to that open air space where no one controls your voice. Here like in school, you're like, make sure your voice is low right? There's just that expectation of low voice depending on where you are in that moment and you might just be having fun and talking and having a conversation and it looks like we're fighting but we're not right? So, just some of those interesting things.

BC: Well yeah, I will, I really enjoyed this, thank you so much for sharing so much of your story and your imagination and vision for American and the Midwest. I will, I will cut all of this down into a little bit shorter version and--

A: Okay.

BC: Yeah if you think of things that you want to add or things that you know any additional comments, you know, reach out to me and yeah, but I really especially as you say in the midst of covid, that its so nice to be able to talk with somebody and in this way and share stories and.

A: Yep.

BC: And so, I really appreciate it. And yeah, maybe someday when we're passed all this we can.

A: Yeah, no I. Are you going to share that with me or do I look it on the website?

BC: Yeah, I'll, I can do both and we I think this episode won't be scheduled to come out until maybe December even so?

A: Oh, okay!

BC: Yeah so, it may be a little while, we have the first episodes of this season are just coming out. So there was one that came out last week.

A: Okay.

BC: Whose a woman named Kao Kalia Yang? She's a Hmong refugee in St. Paul actually.

A: Oh! Okay.

BC: And a writer and so yeah I can send you the link to that and that'll be where your episode will go on that same website.

A: Oh! That would be awesome if you could do that. Yeah

BC: Yeah, and then I mean and once we get closer to time if you have ideas of you know people you'd want to share it with, whether it's you know, you know co-workers or schools or the Somali community, yeah I actually have a class. There's a marketing class at the college and one of their assignments is to try to imagine how they would you know be entrepreneurial and you know share this story in the right, the right places, the right audiences so.

A: Oh.

BC: But if you have, if you have ideas, yeah, we can talk about that.

A: No, absolutely! Yeah let's talk. What I would say is I think to conclude is I think we are at a time in our lives where no one knows what's next. There's just so many of us that have to navigate many unknowns and challenges in this pandemic. And think it's good to say to ourselves that good times, this time will not last, and that good times are still ahead. So do not lose the fear, do not lose the sight, you know of the path that is ahead of us and push yourself down. Because I know many of us are really scared of the next chapter of experiences, but we should not be because I think we can come together no matter who we are or what we believe or where we come from, if we unite, understand each other, be willing to know the perspective

of the other, examine our epistemology and our biases. I think we can become brothers and sisters and we can leave the world like we're dead. So thank you!

BC: Thank you! Alright! Take care, I'll be in touch!

A: Alright! Thank you! Have a good day!

BC: Alright. Thank you! Bye.