

Title: Noun Abdelaziz

Narrator: Noun Abdelaziz

Interviewers: Paul Holbel

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Transcript:

Paul: My name is Paul Holbel, today is May the 13th 2019 and I'm here at the Refugee Health Center to interview Noun, for the race and oral history project. Would you like to state your name, date and place of birth?

Noun: Yes, my name is Noun Abdelaziz I was born in June 22nd 2000 and I was born in Sudan, which is located in Africa but I grew up in Egypt because I moved from Sudan when I was three and then I came to America when I was 10.

PH: Ok, sounds good. I guess can you elaborate a little more on your childhood and family growing up?

NA: Yes, alright so I was born in Sudan, like I said before, when I was three I moved to Egypt because the economy really wasn't doing so well in Sudan and so my family decided to move to Egypt and then the UN kind of finds whatever countries are open for refugee people, and at the time there wasn't a lot just because the conflicts of Sudan wasn't as emphasized, so they only pick a certain group of people who were struggling the most to get them out. And so, we waited a few years, like 7-8 years I believe and then after that I was moved with my family to San Diego California, I came here in 2009 and I was 10 years old. I think September of 2009, so I already turned 10 by then and I haven't been back ever since, but my family has, my mom and dad they travel quite a bit. But I hope to go back.

PH: Any particular reason you haven't gone back.

NA: School. School is a big one. And work so I can't really fit that in there. And only a certain amount of people can go because we're a large family so if my mom were to go my dad would stay and if my dad were to go my mom would stay because I have younger siblings and they kind of need to be taken care of.

PH: How many younger siblings?

NA: I have 8 so like. Because my parents we're loving, so we're a huge family.

PH: That's a big family, it's hard to travel with that many people.

NA: Yeah it is, a lot of money.

PH: Are you the oldest, youngest?

NA: I'm the third child.

PH: Third child, ok nice. Would you say, coming from Sudan, has culture or religion shaped your view of the world at all, or what impact has it had?

NA: I think more than anything it had a positive impact, because as you know the more interaction you have with other people. The more open minded you become as a person. So I think kind of being able to experience that at a young age, having to meet a lot of people, being in Egypt you meet all types of people, who are Egyptians and some Moroccans, and some Sudanese, and so being in different religious settings, cultural backgrounds and all that kind of shapes your mindset to be open minded and so I think it wasn't as big of culture shock as when I moved to City heights, because you know, City heights is very diverse. And a lot of people might be shook because they think, woah you don't look like me and that whole culture shock. And I didn't have that because I grew up with a lot of diverse groups, so I think it had a positive impact more than anything.

4:00

PH: What are some struggles you had to face first coming to San Diego?

NA: I think language barrier is a big one. And you know I didn't have a culture shock in a way where I was looking like people like, oh you look different than me, but it was just like adjusting the smallest thing like, back in Egypt in school we would have school from Monday to Thursday there would be no school on Fridays Saturday or Sundays and so I came here and I was like, why is there school on Friday? So it's just like those little things didn't add up and like the school system was kind of different back in Egypt you learn like three languages at once. Where here, yeah in 5th grade. You were taught like French English and Arabic. Which helps me now because I know a little bit of everything and coming here its like I only know English and you have to learn Spanish. In high school you have to try and cram that in to get into college. Just the little things that acted as a barrier like language and just getting adjusted with your family. Not knowing things around and that's from my perspective but I'm sure it's harder for my parent because they have these kids in their arms and they're like, ok this is a new country I don't know how to drive, I don't know how to get a driver license you know I don't even know where to go to pay rent.

PH: Did your parents know English?

NA: Not at all

PH: So as one of the oldest sibling did you kind of..

NA: Yeah, I maneuvered... yeah basically, I guess I was good at English, more than my other siblings and have less of an accent than others in my house. So it was my responsibility to figure out every single form that ever entered the house. It was really intimidating. My dad said so were here, you have about 5 weeks to learn English because you have till fill out all these forms.

PH: That's Fun... I still don't like doing that.

NA: Yeah, I'm still doing it though.

PH: Are there any other struggles, I know you work a lot with other children, are there any struggles you see these children facing that kids who grew up in America, there just not aware of it. You kind of already covered on it.

NA: But I think one things that I need to emphasize on is building yourself from the ground up. Because when you come here your literally clueless. Your thrown into this new country and new language and it's like how do I communicate how do I get by, I don't even know how to approach people. So just building yourself from the ground up and the whole struggle with children going to school and kind of feeling excluded and some refugee families came at a time where it was very sensitive to be Muslim, or how it's always been sensitive to be black. Just having that as your identity is a barrier to a lot of things especially in the United States so I think wearing your identity and trying to hold onto that and still trying to maintain connection to yourself and raising yourself from the ground up

PH: When did you decide you wanted to work with kids in this way, in the way that you do now?

NA: Kids or Youth?

PH: Youth.

NA: Youth, we do not say kids in this office

PH: Why is that?

8:20

NA: Because Youth is more empowering and creates more a sense of a power dynamic. Because if you say kids your belittling someone's mentality. Your giving them, a like "your only a kid" type of thing. If you're a youth your capable of many things I have a feeling maturity is a mentality more than it is a physical thing. So calling them a youth created a balanced power dynamic.

PH: Ok I'll watch out for that.

NA: Working with Youth... Can you repeat the question?

PH: Yes so, what motivated you to work with youth or when did you decide that this is what you want to do?

NA: I think more than working with youth I started off as a youth so first in high school I didn't know what the heck I wanted to do, 9th grade and then 10th grade passed by and jumped from Journalism to photography to video production to this and then my parents were like, nothing arts. Especially if your like a refugee kid, 1st generation. No Arts. You have to go stem. And so I struggled with finding what I wanted and when I ran into the UCSD Youth Advisory Council I started off as a youth myself and kind of the work we've been doing in the community kind of inspired me, it really... because I didn't take myself seriously because I was called a kid I didn't know anything I was belittled. My mentality... I knew I was capable of many thing, I had a lot of potential to reach a lot of my goals I wanted to reach but again I was belittled for one the identity I held and for being a kid. Joining the Youth Advisory Council and the minute that power dynamic shifted my perspective shifted as well because when your held at a certain standard you naturally kind of manifest yourself into that and so I think being an environment where you're constantly inspired and kind of inspired to become a better version of yourself whether you, you know better your community or whatever kind of inspires you to see what potential in other things like that so you so I guess my my environment inspired me when I joined the Youth Advisory Council to focus on Youth Advocacy

PH: Okay, so it sounds like you joined three years ago, second year of high school.

NA: Well like the end of...so like around summer, around 3 years.

PH: How has the work you've been doing for them changed over the last three years and how have you seen yourself grow?

11:40

NA: The work itself I feel like every year we do something new but like the theme stays consistent which we focus on like food equity and kind of advocate, advocacy and food equity policies that are focused on trying to improve your communities and whatever we're going to pay for it and I so the kinds of base of the Youth Advisory Council didn't change but every year we trying to change up what we do so we can make more change I guess so over the years like one year we went to a Childhood Obesity conference because I ran a panel there so that's one thing I did and I gave a speech there, and talk about... I ran the panel introducing the panelists dr. Ramon who works here and we were talking about the importance of healthy food lunches at schools and how that's important for students and stuff like that and then like one year like we went to Borrego Spring for a retreat to kind of create team bonding and then I went to the apha and I'm so every year it was different and so having those different opportunities is really enlightening because every confidence that I go into I come out with new perspective and every work that I do in come out more humbled I'm just like it give me hope, it really does In the sense of ok the world might be falling apart but small changes are still changes.

PH: You've definitely seen individual impacts in kids is there any... or I guess first can you give me a brief overview about what the youth advisory committee does?

NA: So the Youth Advisory Council is a youth lead council that created, targeted for youth to kind of advocate for policies and things out their communities and everything that we do is youth lead there is adults in the room but the power Dynamic kind of makes it that you all have an equal voice within the room so the Youth Advisory Council for the past years kind of focus on improving the community through advocacy and food, food equity maintaining clean grounds in our neighborhood advocating higher power positions at policy so how can I involve youth in policy work and also research lead work so right now we're doing something called YPAR youth participatory action research and so we're doing research that lead by youth for the youth by the youth to kind of advocate for problems that we are seeing in our communities that need to be solved so we actually have the whole process where we came together we have meetings twice a month in like a conference room upstairs and we laid out every problem that we wanted to solve and we picked out the ones that were kind of reoccurring and then we kind of break that down even more and then we found that get so how can we connect that to something that happening in our community today or something that we can actually change because yes we would want to move all the fast food restaurants out of here but there's a big corporation that we can't really touch so what can we use kind of trigger to make people not go there in order for those corporations to kind of go on their own? And decrease the kind of food in our neighborhoods, again main focus food equity. so right now we're doing research on the farmer markets and were trying to see how many families involvement is not as much as expected how can we change our farmers market to better it so people and families would be more involved in accessing fresh foods and vegetables so they would decrease their visits to fast foods restaurant and stuff like that or how can we improve anything at all to make it more available to families.

16:30

PH: That was good amount, it definitely helps, the more clarification the better Is there any moment over the last year that you've been working here that you've been particularly proud of? Just one thing that stood out that impacted you the most

NA: it would definitely be the testimony for SBA 138, So SBA 138 is a bill that became a law in California last year we basically destigmatize getting free or reduced lunches for students in school so many times a barrier to accessing food in school was student were afraid of the stigma behind filling out an application and looking poor in front of other peers, and so that end up not filling out the application and end up not getting food, which affects there health overall so a lot of the schools now you just go through it with check your back ground and your family income and see how much they make and kinda process that and automatically enroll you so you are automatically enrolled through the bill and so the application has helped a lot of sense of days I think half a million students in California that get free or reduced lunches without the stigma of application and I think it makes me really proud because every event that I was like attended like last week I flew to Sacramento for advocacy for different bills you know just gaining knowledge of what's going on in the policy world and one of the lunch event that I intend to I got like a little shout-out from like that the host over there and it made me feel really warm because she was like 'because of you this many students are this and that' you know numbers are one thing and then when it comes to real life you feel good about you changed someone's life so that's one thing that I feel really good about it's a project

PH: yeah that's what I was looking for, when you first started did you have any sort of mentor or had you first heard about YAC?

19:18

YA: There's like a whole transition, I started of with the Nile sisters nonprofit, and I started off when I was in like 8th grade and I was a volunteer there I don't know I feel like all this work just came to me naturally like my mom knew like Hey we're looking for volunteers since I just started volunteering around and then one thing led to another so that after the Nile sisters thing finished you're like hey there's a united women of east Africa if you want to join like I feel like the good thing about city heights is it so well-connected that you can get one place to another without a problem. Cause everyone knows each other so I went from Nile sisters to United women of East Africa to here today to the Youth Advisory Council, so I don't have any Mentor but I kind of built and shaped my perspective around my work.

PH: Okay yeah it definitely helps that they're all connected it sounds like they're all connected also to the refugee Health Center

[small aside about what's on the syllabus]

NA: We call it the center for community health

PH: oh, really okay that's what it was on the syllabus for the classes, it was Refugee Health Center, not center for community Health I'll have to talk to my professor about that

NA: its degrading it really is, it makes it seem like only refugees are seeking help when we're trying to broaden health inequity within every Community not just for refugee communities. I mean this is a very populated community with refugees but when give such strong terminology

to a center, it kind of gives it stigma, you know what I mean, stigma is formed when wrong terms are given.

PH: So is there anyways community members can get involved in this organization or just help support you or weekly events

NA: I feel like the good thing about this Center is run by the community for the community and is already involved enough

PH: For people who haven't heard yet.

NA: One way you can help is you can look at it from a different perspective when you are coming in to community don't come in with predisposed notions of what we are simply coming in with an open mind to learn I feel like especially if you don't come from a very diverse place and you're coming into a diverse place you should come with open mind of who you are approaching – So to be helpful just have some cultural humility within that you will gain knowledge of what we need and what we don't need so if you really are interested in helping a group of people I think it shows more of towards your attitude then what you already think we need

23:22

PH: I guess if you're not already part of a community if you don't live in a community but you see that they need help and you want to help more you don't really know the needs of the community

NA: you say that you are not from the community but you already say that they need help , and already hold a notion of what they need help of, so coming in and say oh you need help with this but we never asked for help, you think we need help with this so instead of that just interact with us in a way... interact with the community in a way where we are able to ... so there are meeting, daily meetings on Fridays there are many programs in City Heights all you have to do is go in there and ask question, instead of coming in like oh I need help so I don't know what you mean like how does oh I already created my definition of help for you or like because there's a many programs exist within City Heights has an all you really have to do is go in with an open mind. I mean there is this huge center I mean anyone can walk into this building and go to the fifth floor and come in here like, hey I'm here, I mean you would approach any Community or organization or program is in the way you would a normal office, you can email them I think part of from my perspective I feel like what you can do to help a community that advocating is to be an ally more than anything be another person for them instead of against them because if were advocating for something it means were being held back from something so you don't want to be another barrier for someone's life

PH: I guess so quick transition have you ever had to deal with censorship throughout you work I don't know say though police force or other anyone trying to silence you or your organization?

NA: I feel like it's not really for me personality I'm going to speak for myself I'm sure everybody experiences something different, but speaking for myself, the short answer no but I feel like in every organization there is a learning process and especially for you know an organization created by someone who's not from the community sometimes they might not know and come with predisposed notions of a community need instead of asking them in the first place so I feel like it's not really an external source that's like completely silencing or a barrier, I mean

sometimes it can even come from the program or community, from the inside of the organization they might have conflicting barriers and confusion providing service for the residents so that comes with communication enable to send out the message the right way, deliver your services in a way that is approachable and acceptable by the resident so it's not like a silencing from external sources, more like internally.

27:15

PH: And it sounds like you want to keep doing this work for a while so where do you see yourself in 10 years what changes do you hope to be brought about?

NA: Your wrong I do not see myself doing this I just do this make change for the time being until I am able to gain my own set of power I guess and do my own work, how many years again?

PH: Next 10 to 5 years what kind of work do you see yourself doing

NA: I will not be in the United states in 5 to 10 years, I'm going to be in Dubai, so right now, ill just give you a brief explanation so it makes sense. So, I'm majoring in international business with an emphasis on [?] and all this advocacy work I'm doing right now is it build my perspective when I do go to third world countries or back home, Sudan, where I can build infrastructure for Youth and programs that will help you lead work within their communities because Sudan right now is having a huge Uprising and it's like I believe that 89% of the country are youth who are between the ages 18 to 25 and so it's predominantly youth and so once you create power for youth to kind of change their country it becomes a better country because right now its being ruled by older people who don't know anything and so 5-10 years I hope to graduate with Bachelor or masters from USC then go and work in Dubai for this company called TACU. TACU means energy in Arabic and I hope to have built my status in the company and kind of utilize what they have and create great infrastructure and country that requires infrastructure and create resources for youth, I guess. But it will not be here.

PH: Okay why do you decide that I guess?

NA: The only thing that's driving me to continue this little journey is whoever I left behind home its more of like a nostalgic thing, you know I left my home in in trouble so I want to go back and fix it, and if I had the opportunity to escape it I want other people to escape it I feel like many times people feel trapped once they come to the United States they feel the need to stay here forever. You know there's a lot of work that needs to be done here but there's more out there and I can't stay here because there is enough people working to improve this country but not enough for mine.

PH: Is there any point I might have missed that you wanted to bring up?

NA: Uhm, no.

PH: Do you work with your siblings at all at this organization or do they have similar plans as you?

31:00

NA: My brother, whose in high school, he's 16 I believe, he also wants to be part of the Youth Advisory Council and I'm kind of considered an intern at this point and I'm no longer part the

Youth Activities but I'm more like an example. So my brother watches me I guess, I think he wants to go to MIT or Stanford for computer programming he's very smart.

PH: Little bit of a transition but is there any person you really admire, not someone you've necessarily met because someone's work who's inspired you?

NA: That answer changes depending on when you asked me or how you asked me, I feel like I give you a different answer if it was a different day but right now I think Audrey Hepburn.

PH: Audrey Hepburn, why's that?

NA: Her persona, and just the way she holds herself is very beautiful and the amount of the work she has done she utilized her privilege in the right manner and that kind of what I strive to be, find peace within myself but also create peace outside myself and her ability to grasp so many languages at once and travel and kind of create change we just hold the same mentality and goals in life.

PH: If there is any piece of advice you could give your past self or youth today what would it be?

NA: Rule number one never fold on yourself, do you know what that means?

PH: yeah, that pretty good I like that... Well if there is nothing else you want to elaborate on...

NA: I mean I can expand on my advice, would you like me to?

PH: If you have more advice to be happy to hear it

NA: Don't fold on yourself for one because there is a huge chance that everyone is going against you and count yourself first. Two, have a good support system. Three, always build as you go you resume doesn't grow overnight so as you go like I did when I started 8th grade you kind of developed I got jobs but I also make sure that they build upon my resume, if you're privileged enough to provide for yourself financially and build your resume do it. So never fold on yourself, have a good support system and build as you go.

PH: Well that sounds like a pretty good place to end it, that was a pretty beautiful closing statement, well I guess that concludes our interview. Thank you for your time.

NA: Thank you for having me.