

**Race and Oral History Project, University of California, San Diego**

Narrator: Asiyah Ali

Interviewer: Julianne Woo

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**Julianne Woo:** Hello I am Julianne Woo. Today is May 12, 2019, I'm here at the United Women of East Africa Community and Cultural Center and I'm here with Asiyah Ali and she is going to talk about her experience of living as a Somali-American. How are you today on this Sunday?

**Asiyah Ali:** I'm good. My name is Asiyah and I'm 10 years old and, yeah. I'm here to be interviewed with Miss Julianne [Laughter].

**JW:** Okay so, Asiyah, how many siblings do you have?

**AA:** I have four. I have two...I have two older siblings and two younger, three brothers and one sister.

**JW:** Just speak a bit louder.

**AA:** Okay.

**JW:** So, do you get along more with your sisters or your brothers? How is your relationship with your siblings?

**AA:** I get along with my older...my eldest brother and my youngest brother the most but I fight a lot with my siblings that are closer in age with me. Maybe it's because of age, who knows.

**JW:** And so because you're closest to your older brother, I assume he teaches you a lot of things, but what are some things that you might want to teach your older brother or just all your other siblings?

**AA:** I want to teach my like, younger siblings, especially because they are young, how to be like left-handed because like, I know everyone has something special about them. Well like, why do you just want one thing? Like don't you want multiple things? Because you're young, I would want to teach them.

**JW:** So you want to help them reach like, their full potential?

AA: Mhm.

JW: Okay cool. And so we are currently celebrating Ramadan, what are your favorite parts?

AA: My favorite part is when we break our fast because it's like, such a relief. And that, like, it goes to show how...people who are less fortunate than us, how they feel and to always be grateful no matter what. For example, you want to sit in the front seat of a car and your sibling is sitting in the front, you should still be grateful you're in a car because some can't afford a car. They should be grateful because some people can't even walk. And they should be grateful because some people can't even talk. There's always somebody that needs more than you, but they have less.

JW: And so how has your view of Ramadan changed since you were younger and now you're a lot older...how has that changed?

AA: It shows me that I should be more grateful, that I have food, I have family, I am an amazing mother and father. I have opportunities to go to school because at school we are learning about people who are less fortunate than us. And there's more than 150 million kids that would want to trade places with anybody that gets a good education. And like, my teacher said when you go to school and get an education, you have more choices in jobs and you can earn more money. And when you start a family, they can go to school. So it's just like a cycle of life. And how to get out of the...well, you don't have to be poor anymore. So that goes to show that amazing things that you should be grateful for.

JW: We talked about your family, so what would you say is the best part of your family?

AA: Ooh. My parents...my parents, they have really good education and they have really good businesses. Like my mom, she runs the United Women of East Africa. And my dad, he's an electric engineer and he works for Qualcomm and I'm really grateful. And one day I, if I ever start a family, I want my family to be as successful as my parents so I look up to my parents a lot.

JW: So what is something that you feel like your parents teach you that you think you will pass to your own children?

AA: Probably that they should be grateful and to put others before them. And when they have kids, they have to put their kids before them and they should teach that to their kids. So they could feel great, and feel grateful for their opportunities.

JW: I guess moving on to the subject of school, what is your favorite subject in school?

AA: My favorite subject in school is science and social studies because in science we learn about electricity and magnets and that and bacteria and stuff, so we can learn to stop getting sick. And with the electricity, we learn how the lightbulb was made and stuff. And I think it's really cool that our education gets higher and higher, when we get more in the future. If you ever have kids, you can learn something from them that you didn't learn as a kid. And I love social studies

because we're learning about California and the history, and I didn't know most of these things. And I'm really proud because I can get good grades. Like, I got one of the highest grades in my class for social studies because I did some extra credit and stuff and a lot of people got the same grade too and I think it's because we learned a lot of things that we didn't know and we paid attention in class so I think that more education is better.

JW: So, when you get older and you go to middle school and high school and college, what is something that you want to learn?

AA: I want to learn physics I think because I want to see how things move and stuff. And I want to learn about the human body too. The thing I want to learn about most is politics because I want to be a Supreme Court [Justice]. The reason why is because in the third grade I learned that presidents just can't decide the laws like snap! [snaps] There's a process. For example, let's say that the president, for some weird reason, wants everyone to wear green on Wednesdays, like green hat, green pants, green shirt, green shoes. And it gets sent to Congress, and Congress could approve or they could say, "Oh, but I want it to be Wednesdays *and* Tuesdays." So they could send it back and the president could write that. They send it to Congress, Congress approves, and it goes to the Supreme Court. And then, the Supreme Court is the highest court and they could decide a lot of things. And they could only take a couple of dozen of cases per year. And I just want everyone to live happily and comfortably and if I ever become a Supreme Court, I would want that we pay more attention to the less fortunate. I would try, if I could, try to make everyone have a home or somewhere to live, if that would be possible, but there's some people that unfortunately are not the best. And they don't care, they're very selfish. But I just want everyone to be happy in life, that's all I really want.

JW: We've never had a Muslim Supreme Court Judge, as you probably know. So if you become our first, what do you think that means to you and what do you think that means to your Muslim community and having Somali heritage?

AA: I'd be really proud, but I would never want to brag about it because, again, I don't want to be selfish. But I'd be really happy and I'm sure my family and everybody would be really happy. I don't know. If anyone would be mad, I'd say that if you're mad right now, you'll be happy in the future.

JW: And I think young girls and boys who are Muslim, American, or who are Somali-American, can see you, they can be like, "Oh, I can also be a Supreme Court Justice," and it can inspire a lot of people. And yeah, you're getting there. [both laugh]

JW: Let's talk more about school. So what are the different groups at school? If there are groups.

AA: Well, in my grade, there are a few different groups. There's a group of boys that play a game called Infection and get in trouble every time because they're not supposed to run on the blacktop. And so, I have some other groups of friends. Some of my friends, we like to pick up trash because we want our school to be cleaner. And we get recognized for it, we get tickets and get to be in the raffle. And I have my other friends that love animals and stuff. And I have another group of my friends, they have these keychain bunnies that they love. I had one but I lost

it, but my friend said she'd give me another one. And then I hope that if I save enough money, I could get a bunch. And they homeschool their bunnies, and I think that's really fun. And something that they pretend that they're bunnies and they give them really cool names. Like one of my friends, her bunny's name is Switch. And I think that's so funny.

JW: Very cute. So, what do you like to do with your friends?

AA: Well, I like to play Roblox with them. Roblox is my favorite game. I play with two of my friends. One of my friends her name is Isabelle and she's really nice and really sweet. And my other friend Sadie, she's a lot like me. We like to get messy and crazy, and yeah. My other friend, Mayan, I've known her from pretty much the beginning. And I always tease her that in kindergarten when we first met, she was really mean to me and cause kept say "hi" and stuff, but she wouldn't listen. I keep teasing her about that. And then yeah.

JW: Okay. I would assume that some friends are not from the same culture as you?

AA: Hm, no. Most of my friends are mixed. Like a lot of my friends, their parents are immigrants. [Portion Redacted for Privacy] So I think it's really cool that we're not all from the same place so we could learn different things from them. Like some people are Mexican, some people are from Brazil, some people are from Canada. Like you never know who you're going to meet and where they're from.

JW: What have you learned from your friend's cultures and heritage?

AA: I learned that some of my friends, they're from different places. Like I didn't know, I thought... like my friends, their parents aren't immigrants so if they're white, they're white, their parents are from the United States. My other friends that are black, their parents are from the United States and the thing that happened with slavery. But I learned that's not all true so I thought that I was really ignorant to know that now. Now that I've learned it, I think that I can know more and feel better that I can know more than I used to know.

JW: Do you guys ever talk about your different cultures, or the holidays that you guys observe or?

AA: I only talk about it when they ask me for something. Like if they say, "Hey do you want this?" and I'm like, "No thank you, I'm fasting." And they're like, "What's that?" and I'm like, "Oh it's Ramadan, and then like you have to fast." Well, you don't have to fast but like, there's six different reasons why you don't have to fast. One: if you're pregnant. Two: if you're young. Three: if you're old, like really old, if you're like 80 or something. Five, I mean four: if you're traveling. Six: if you're crazy. And six: if you're traveling. So those are the reasons that you don't have to fast.

JW: Once you finish your homework, what do you like to do? I know you mentioned you like to play Roblox.

AA: Mhm. I like to play Roblox. Or if I don't feel like playing Roblox, I call my friends on my mom's phone and then I like talk to them about Youtubers and stuff. Like, the fourth grade thing.

AA: I also like to bake.

JW: Yeah, why don't you tell me about that.

AA: I love, I bake banana bread. And I was supposed, I was supposed to do that yesterday but I fell asleep and I was tired. And I also like to make cake. One time I made cookies and they weren't...they were good, but they were a little hard so... they didn't look like how they were supposed to look but the more I bake it, I'll get better.

JW: Do you have a favorite Somali food?

AA: I actually love sambusas, like there's different types but I only like the chicken one because I don't really...cause there's like potatoes. And I don't really like potatoes, I only like French Fries and potato chips. And there's cream cheese but I don't like cream cheese. And, they're really easy to make, too. So, it's like, you cut a shape of tortilla and you make it...you fold it into a cone. You take some paste which is water and flour and you stick it and you put whatever you want to put in there and then you close the top and you put more of the paste. So, if you want it to be hot, but you want to eat it later, you can put it in the freezer and then take it out and fry it. Or if you just want to eat it right now, you can fry it and then eat it.

JW: Okay, and where did you learn these recipes?

AA: I learned it from my mom. I always watch her and I always ask, "Can I do it? Can I do it?" And my mom is like, "Just in a few years, so just wait." And I also learned it from Girl Scouts, so that was really fun.

JW: Do you cook with your siblings?

AA: Hm, none of my siblings actually like to cook. But I only cook with my mom and sometimes my siblings ask me to make things for them, but I think that it's good that I know how to bake so I can show them and teach them but sometimes they don't want to so I just cook with my mom.

JW: What is something that you do want to learn how to cook?

AA: Pizza. Or maybe...oh this is hard. Cookies, again, because I want to be a chef. I want to be like a chef when I grow up, but like, not for full-time. So like, a few years.

JW: What kind of music do you like to listen to? <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is a popular perception that music is generally not allowed in Islam. However, because I have heard Asiyah make references to some pop culture artists, I wanted to inquire about it.

AA: Well, I don't really listen to music cause in Islam, you're not really supposed to listen to music. But I like to listen masjids, they're like Islamic songs and my favorite one is "Give Thanks to Allah" and it's basically saying to thank God for everything that he gave you, so I really like that one.

JW: Okay [both laugh]. Who is someone other than a family member that you really admire?

AA: Oh, this is hard.

JW: It can be multiple people if you can't think of just one.

AA: Probably...cause I want somebody that could like teach...Oh! Probably Michelle Obama because she's not just a singer, or an actress or something. Like, there's nothing that you can really learn from an actress or a singer unless it has to do with that career. But Michelle Obama, I could ask her a lot of things. Like how is it like having daughters that are both grown, how is it like being the first lady, how is it like being a celebrity. And if I ever get to meet her, I would be so happy. And I would just be screaming and I would ask her for her phone number to call her.

JW: So, you mentioned before that you take care of your grandmother when you're at home, what is that like?<sup>2</sup>

AA: So, on occasions like when my mom has to go somewhere. So normally it's my mom and my aunt that take care of her, but when they're both at work we...my cousin, she comes over and takes care of her when I'm at school and stuff. But when my mom and my aunt come home, either one of them takes care of my grandma. But when they're not here, and I'm at home and I have nothing to do, they ask if I can watch my grandma. And it's really simple, like listen to her. If she needs something, I go to her. And I help her with her food and stuff. And I remember back in the day when she used to take care of me, and she used to make me food, she'd make me popcorn sometimes and I'm really grateful for that experience. So now that she's getting old, I want to take care of her, and I want her to be happy because I was very happy when she took care of me.

JW: What do you think is something important that you can learn from your grandmother?

AA: Culture. She doesn't really know that much English, so I have to speak to her in Somali. I'm not the best at Somali, so I don't want to grow up like I know nothing about my culture. I mean, I am born in the United States but my parents are both immigrants and refugees. If I can't learn from them, I can always learn from my grandma because she has been living there for many...for plenty of years that I can ask her a bunch of things. And it's like bonding and I love her with all my heart and I would never...and she's just the best [Asiyah began to tear up talking about her grandmother in the last few lines].

JW: What are stories, because you were born in America, what are some stories that you hear about Somalia or about Africa?

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<sup>2</sup> Before the interview, Asiyah and Mrs. Abdi were telling me how Asiyah takes care of her grandmother. Mrs. Abdi was saying how loving and caring Asiyah was, and I wanted to hear her talk about it more.

AA: Well, I learned in Black History Month in February that we learned about a lot of things. Last year in third grade, we learned about Malcolm X, Sojourner Truth, and Thurgood Marshall, and we also learned about George Washington...Harvard? I think that's what his name...

JW: Carver

AA: Yeah, Carver [both laugh]. I really like the Sojourner Truth and Malcolm X, and Thurgood Marshall. I like Thurgood Marshall because he was the first, I think...I believe first African American Supreme Court, and that's what started me thinking that oh my god maybe I should be that too. Like I could be the first Muslim American Somali judge maybe, just one day. And I like Sojourner Truth because she was strong, she never gave up. I remember one time my teacher said that she actually sued someone that was white because they tried to sell one of her kids to somebody else in a totally different state. She actually sued two people, and she walked around preaching and preaching and she never gave up. I like Malcolm X because he had a voice, and he wanted people to hear him. But one part that was kind of scary was that he was like, "We don't need white people, they're nothing to us." And I'm like, that kind of hurt because you don't want someone to say that to you but if you say that to them, just think about how they feel. Like you should always put others before you and always think before you speak. My teacher, he had this poster and it said "Think Before You Speak." And each letter stood for something so like T: is it true? H: is it helpful? I: is it important? N: is it necessary? And K: is it kind? And that make's so much sense. I think that was really important, and everybody should think like that. It doesn't matter who it is, it could be like Donald Trump, it could be Obama, it could be me, it could be my mom, it could be anybody. But you always have to think about others before yourself sometimes.

JW: What are the differences, or maybe similarities, do you see between your Somali culture your Muslim culture and your American culture?

AA: Well, most of the people in my class...since I go to school a lot, I always look at people in my class because sometimes I like being the only person that's Muslim because I can feel special that nobody could say, "Oh, that's wrong." [Portion Redacted for Privacy] Sometimes I feel included in things and sometimes I feel left out, but that's just the way how I feel sometimes. But like, at school, there's this really funny time last year so when we're learning about Ramadan People thought that you don't eat for thirty days and then they're like, "You're gonna die if you don't eat for thirty days." And I'm like, "No, that's not how it happens. Like you eat breakfast at four or three in the morning. Then you go back to sleep. It's basically that you don't eat when the sun is out. You could eat when it's dark." And they're like "Oh, that makes sense." Like you would die if you didn't eat in thirty days. And I'm like of course, why would God want to do that to us.

JW: So the kids in your class, were they very responsive to what you were saying because you were teaching them how it really is?

AA: Yeah. And they had a lot of questions that sometimes I didn't really know how to answer. Like, "do you brush your teeth? How do you brush your teeth?" and I never thought about that.

Like I brush my teeth but I forget because I haven't really fasted until this year<sup>3</sup> so I'm like, "I don't know, like this is a really hard question. I feel so embarrassed." Like I can't ask anybody, like I'm alone. The other girl I was talking about, she was in the other class back then so I was like "oh my god I'm alone." And the teacher was like, "Of course you brush your teeth. Because he knew some of it because his wife used to be Muslim." And I'm like, "Thank goodness, I'm saved." So, yeah. They weren't rude and they weren't like that arrogant and I was really happy that they didn't say anything mean cause that could've really hurt. Like I never say anything bad about them, so if they said anything bad about me I'm just gonna tell them, "You can't say that because you hardly know about my religion. And if you're going to say things like that you should at least learn." And I actually learned from school, I learned about Christianity and Judaism, and I don't feel that ignorant anymore that I didn't know.

JW: From the time that I've known you, you're super funny. And I hear sometimes you make jokes about Donald Trump. And so I probably figured that you've heard some of the things he's said about Muslim people, and people of color, and different communities, and minorities and immigrants. How does that make you feel?

AA: It makes me feel, just a teensy bit sad. But again, he's Donald Trump, so no one really cares and like. If the immigrants want to come, people rebel, and people... I know that I can trust most of adults that actually think that Donald Trump may be doing something wrong sometimes. But he's still human and I can't hate him, but sometimes I wish that he could accept everybody the way they are. I mean, it doesn't have to be Muslim, it can be Jewish, Buddhism. But I just think that if he was willing to learn more about it... like, he can still learn about it now... he's not dead or anything, he could probably still learn. And it's always good to learn so the more you know, the less ignorant you are, as I said.

JW: If you could change the world, what would you do?

AA: I would change... I would change that every time I snap... it pauses and I could change everything. Like, if I would pause time and then like make everybody happy, I would say stuff... or if people were in a fight and say "Oh my god, this person talks about you, they admire you" so they could be friends again. That's all I want in the world, happiness to be spread everywhere. And like, I don't want people to make fun of other people because that's how bullying spreads. Somebody makes fun of you and you make fun of someone else, like that's how bullies spread. And I think that if there was more happiness, in the world then it would be prevented.

JW: Is there anything else you would like to say or add?

AA: I would like to say sometimes you have to... be the rainbow in someone's rain. If they're really sad, you have to bring them up. And if someone feels sad, just tell them that we need you to shine in the dark. Like they probably do amazing stuff for you. And even if they don't, just try to become their friend, it only takes one person. You should always choose kind instead of being

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<sup>3</sup> Clarification: This is the first year Asiyah has fasted . She didn't know how to answer the classmate's question because she had not fasted the previous year.



right and it may not make you feel better, but it can make the other person feel better. That's what I think is the most important in this world, is happiness to spread everywhere.

JW: And is that it? Okay. And that concludes the interview.