

## **Shamseldin Abdelaziz Oral History Transcript**

**Anthony Jensen**

**UC San Diego**

**Date: 5/15/2020**

**Location: Zoom Video Meeting**

**Start: 0:00 End: 33:25**

**Race & Oral History Project**

**Anthony Jensen (Interviewer)**

Okay, you can go ahead and read and then we can get started.

**Shamseldin (Shams) Abdelaziz (Interviewee)**

Alright, I the interviewee Shamseldin Abdelaziz hereby transfer to the University the rights to publish, duplicate or otherwise to use the recording(s) and transcribed interview(s), and any photographs and/or video taped footage taken during the interview. This includes publication rights and credit that electronic form, such as on the internet, the right to rebroadcast the interview or portions thereof and permission to transfer the interview to future media.

**Anthony**

Awesome. Thank you. Alright, so first I know we did this already before, like the section but we have to redo it again. But so the first section is going to be a little bit about your background and your family's background. So to start off, could you just introduce yourself and list where you were born, where you grew up and what high school you currently attend and your your grade in school?

**Shams**

My name is Shamseldin Abdelaziz , and I currently go to Hoover High School. I am a graduating senior. I was born in Sudan, and I grew up in Egypt.

**Anthony**

All right, cool. Awesome. So you said you're born in Sudan, and then you grew up in Egypt. So could you explain like the process of being born there and then like how old you were and you move to Egypt, and just your experience in all of moving from place to place.

**Shams**

I was born in Sudan. And then when I was one years old, my family was to Cairo, Egypt. And then I lived there for like seven years, I grew up there and most of my childhood was on the experience. Muslim country, it was like really fun growing up with people who are like the same religion as me. And like, we had a lot of things in common. And it was also like, enjoyable to to

like experience a different culture than my own, you know, Egyptian culture, and like their foods, their traditions, all these types of things, and just like having that Sudanese culture, and Egyptian culture, like, it would influence me later on in my life, because I would be like, a lot more knowledgeable than kids that are my age.

**Anthony**

Definitely. So what would you say? like growing up in the United States? Have you been able to have like a like the Sudanese culture or the Egyptian culture like in your life still, like while you're in the United States, or has it been difficult?

**Shams**

Oh, no, definitely. I've had it

cuz in San Diego, already Like, the city especially, it's really diverse and like there's so many cultures that are that have already been like, established here. Like there's different Arab stores, Somalian stores and just like, they made sure that the culture and their traditions are alive and are here. So it's like, it's really easy, especially like, a store down the street where my mother goes shopping. She brings us like most of our traditional foods that she makes at home, so it really hasn't, hasn't been that difficult.

**Anthony**

Awesome. That's good to hear. So, um, have you just talked a little bit about your name? Is that a culturally significant name? Or is it like a family name?

**Shams**

So my name is actually a religious name so Shamseldin, so Shams means sun, like the sun in the solar system, sun. And then din means like religion, faith. So the two are brought together. It's like sun of religion or faith. So it's like I think it has something to do with like illuminating the religion or like the faith, like lighting it up.

**Anthony**

Awesome. So and do you have any siblings that are currently with you in the United States?

**Shams**

Yeah, my whole family's here. My, my close family. They're all here. I have 8 siblings. One of them lives in Sacramento, because he went to UC Davis there. And then after he graduated he decided to stay up there. Because that's where he found work.

**Anthony**

Cool. So did all of you like all of your family, did you guys all come at the same time to the United States or was it spread out?

**Shams**

We came all at the same time.

**Anthony**

And what was that experience like for you? Like how, how did you get from Egypt to the United States like what was the like, the process or the reasoning behind that?

**Shams**

So the whole purpose My family moved to Egypt in the first place was for us to apply for resettlement to the United embassy. So we stayed there, we applied for resettlement and like my family, my mother would take us and my siblings, like almost each week, to the department in Egypt and like when we would just plead our case every week and like, rehearse, because we found that while we were standing that the families who were actively participating and advocating for themselves were more likely to get sent to another country like Canada or Australia or even the United States. So we waited. We frequently visited the department, and then eventually, we got resettled to California.

**Anthony**

All right, cool, awesome. So what would you say is your favorite childhood memories growing up in Egypt?

**Shams**

Oh, my favorite childhood memory would probably be during Eid, an Islamic holiday. And then just like growing up with the kids, and being able to like play with fireworks and different things like that, and just like going on the rooftop building our own kites and like flying them. We just had a whole bunch of fun

**Anthony**

That sounds awesome. Do you, still are you able to do any of that in United States or no?

**Shams**

Not really. Yeah. See like the fireworks you need like a license? Or get it approved somehow? I don't know.

**Anthony**

Yeah, yeah. No, I wish we could use fireworks here too. Yeah. So any special foods that you remember from your childhood and like, do you currently still make those foods in your household today?

**Shams**

Yeah. One food is Lamia, which is Like this, like a stew that's made from this green plant. And then there's another one called fum which is like beans. Mix with cheese and like herbs and then there's also like it's just like most of the traditional foods are like curry or like soup and it's just like plant based and then mix it. You always start with like grilling some onions and then later on you add meat and then you add like different types of different types of veggies. And that kind of determines how the taste of the dish is going to be

**Anthony**

Got it. so I know you told me this before but you're able to make some of those dishes yourself?

**Shams**

Yeah I actually can.

**Anthony**

Awesome. So do you do a lot of cooking around the house or \still mostly your mom?

**Shams**

It's mostly my mom but then every once in a while I tell my mom, let me handle it for today and she lets me take over.

**Anthony**

Awesome. That's good to hear. My mom would never let me take over bro. So I kind of off that topic. What is your favorite subject In school and what are some of your favorite hobbies outside of school?

**Shams**

My favorite subject will probably be like, history. I Remember, in middle school, it was just like, really fun like, being able to like learn about different cultures like Mesopotamia, Egypt, different cultures, like they're like ancient civilizations, and like, being able to say that, oh, I grew up in Egypt, and like some of the things I saw in the textbook I saw in real life, it was like really cool, and I really connected with that. And then outside of school, my favorite hobbies will probably be like, I watch a lot of anime. And like, I read, I read a lot, but then I don't read like anything. I read like specific things. I find it interesting. Like, if it's just like reading anything, I kind of struggle with that. But then, if I try to do that, I'm really interested in I could read it all

day.

**Anthony**

Yeah, definitely. So what's your favorite anime then?

**Shams**

I don't want to be generic but I would have to say dragon ball z or hunter x hunter

**Anthony**

Awesome. Yeah, I was on that Dragonball Z too growing up. So, before we move on to the next section, just please let me know how, how long you were involved. You've been involved in Yac and how you came to be involved in yac. I know you said that your sister was involved. But were there any other reasons why you decided to join?

**Shams**

I've been in YAC I believe, two years now. And I got involved. Yeah, my sister. One day I went to one of her meetings. At home, she mentioned some of the stuff that they were doing in the YAC. And then I just went to one of her meetings one day, and then I kind of just once I arrived, and I really fit in. I like the space because it allowed me to like share my views. And everyone in there was just like, so supportive and like, the conversations were just like, really powerful, you know?

**Anthony**

Yeah, definitely.

**Shams**

The things we did didn't just stop with conversations. Lizzy really taught us things that we can do to help us implement our ideas so it was really active to try to help our community

**Anthony**

Definitely you guys are definitely a special group of young people. So it's awesome that you're a part of that. So moving on to the next section, basically going to be a little bit more about your community. So, um, when you hear City Heights, what's the first thing that comes to your mind? And then like, what do you think of

**Shams**

When I think of city heights I really think of like how the people who are in this community like they made it their own, because I see so much diversity in city heights. And like, I see all the all the ways that like, if it was like a different race than living here, I like think about all the ways

that you might have been different compared to like, who's living here right now because right now Like a mixture of races is living here like, it's like a small image of what everyone wants the world to be like, because everyone always talks about how they want, like everyone to coexist peacefully. And city heights is my example of that. You know? It's not perfect but we Definitely like are getting to the point where like, oh, everyone's coexisting peacefully.

**Anthony**

Definitely, yeah, city heights for me. I didn't grow up there. But I grew up in the La Mesa area, but it's pretty close. And definitely I think City Heights has the best. It's the best place to go if you want food in San Diego because you can get any type of food that you want there from any different culture. So I definitely think that that's an awesome part about it.

**Shams**

Definitely

**Anthony**

Okay, so, I mean, you kind of answered this question already. And the answer you just gave me but what's your favorite part of living in your community

**Shams**

Hmm, My favorite part, I'd say the food, I really liked the food. And then just like the sights that like everywhere like you walk out in the street, there's like, different buildings, different food places, like I just like that when being able to see different types of people, like nowhere else in the world you can really like find that type of unity, that unity, like communities coexisting like that. You cant find it on a lot of other places in the world, you know, seeing Asian people, African people, white people, everybody just like living together because like in other countries it's like, you go to one place like it's all one race. Yeah, everyone is one race, but here it's like so many different people and I really like to enjoy that. So it gives it a flavor.

**Anthony**

Yeah, definitely man. Um, so I kind of wanted to ask you this question. Um, so you are, you're Sudanese correct.

**Shams**

Yeah.

**Anthony**

So okay, so how would you say like, I guess the like being African is different than like, I guess being an African American, like, do you see like a kind of like a, like a, like a divide, I guess? Or

do you feel that you guys are all like, I don't know, I don't want to say this in the wrong way. But I do feel that you guys don't get the same like. Like, do you guys feel the same struggles? I guess? Do you know what I'm trying to say?

**Shams**

Yeah, yeah, yeah I know what you're trying to say. Um, my experience personally is just like, coming to America. I feel like people who were black people were born in this country. Like, they kind of treated African people differently. I know. They kind of like looked down on them just in my experience. Yeah, like going to school like there was a lot of bullying. Like, I feel like a lot of it just like originates from self hate and like racism like because they kind of hating, hating their own like people, you know, because they're not sure about like their origins. And it's like it's not everybody because like I've seen really like people who appreciate their lineage like where they come from, even though they weren't born in Africa, they understand that that's their own land. But like for the most part, I've seen a lot of bad treatment towards just like African people from, from black from people who are born in this country, black people who were born in this country.

**Anthony**

Got it. So, how would you feel or how do you think that your country is represented in the media and how do you feel about these representations?

**Shams**

For the most part, Sudan, I feel like it's really like a trade with like, a country that's constantly like going through war. I know that we've had a lot of bad leaders. And like, whenever we're on the news, it's mostly about something negative, or like a war, like, oh, help this country, like, give them money you like, it's really a negative image. So I just want to, I want to change that because just based off personal experience, and like the people I know in Sudan, even relatives that I know, like Sudanese people, like they have a lot of like culture that they want to share with the world. They're really kind people. And they're very educated. You know, I know so many educated Sudanese people and like, they're really like, woke. Especially about the news like, global news, things that are happening around the world. Like, if you talk to a Sudanese parent, especially a dad, they're always like, informed about the most contemporary issues and like, they always share with you like their ideology and how they think that you should they should foster a problem. So they are really informed people and they're really intelligent. And I don't think that that is being portrayed in the media.

**Anthony**

Definitely. So living in city heights have you felt that there's been any challenges living there? And if there were any challenges, how have you overcome those challenges?

**Shams**

I'd say. Some of my biggest challenges like recently would be like trying to find a job that's like, nearby for some reason, like, a lot of the stores, like big franchises like McDonald's or like subway, stuff like that. They don't hire a lot of people who like live in the community because I know a lot of people like to apply for jobs even myself. I applied for jobs, at the stores that are around here and like they don't usually get back to you. It's like really hard to find a job in These places, but I don't understand why that is because if you're gonna be in the community, you should employ the people who live in the community, you know, so it's like a cycle. But then the money's not really staying in the community. And I feel like we need to have less of those like stores like McDonald's or like subway. And like have more of our own, like ethnic stores, restaurants, where we can like eat our own peoples food you feel me?

**Anthony**

yeah, gotcha. So what would you want people to know like, if you could say one thing, or say like someone grew up in like in the East Coast, and you could like to describe your community? Or like you want them to know one thing about it like what would you want them to know?

**Shams**

I'd say, there's power in community that's, that's the one thing I really emphasize there's power in community because I know that a lot of the people who came when they initially came here, I know they didn't have all the stuff that's here right now. So I know that they've been working for it. Like they really like work to get it all here, especially like the Somali community like, all the scores that they have, all the, like, they own, like, they have places that they own. Like, that's, that's really huge. You know, if you start owning your community, that's a huge move towards like becoming stronger as a race as people. So I feel like that's one thing that people need to know. Like, there's our community. Like, that's one of the projects that we're working on in the YAC right now, community unity, and I feel like one of the goals is that we can come together and we can like start buying the stuff in our community, so we're not paying rent to someone who doesn't even live in the community like Some rich person that lives outside the community.

**Anthony**

For sure, kind of like like a nipsey hussle type thing?

**Shams**

Definitely

**Anthony**

So, the next next section is going to be about, like the Coronavirus pandemic and how it's



affecting you and your family and stuff like that. So, first question is, How is COVID affected you and your family as of now?

**Shams**

Well, it really sucks like not being able to, like, experience my graduation. And like, the fun things like prom, senior night, and stuff like that. But besides that, I really feel bad for the people who are like struggling right now. Because me personally like, I'm not working anymore because I used to work for the county but then my job is like it's it's been put on hold for now because Coronavirus so I'm currently not employed and then my mom is still working but then it's like a risk every time she goes out she she goes to work you know you never know what is out there you know like there might be someone who has Coronavirus and she might come in contact with them and like it really all it takes is like one person to catch and then the whole the whole household is like put at risk.

**Anthony**

Yeah, definitely.

**Shams**

And then for my family I know back home and Sudan they even like close some like workplaces for my for my uncle's like who who's a mechanic like they closed some of the workplaces so they can't even like go to work and so like recently when they opened it but it just really like sucks. You know, the whole time. Especially one like this is the time that I'm supposed to be enjoying the most like the final months of my senior year. Like it's just like stuff being stuck in these four walls you know, kind of like go into the room go into the kitchen grabbing a snack and going back to the room you know like it's kind of really hard to like stay productive during this time. Yeah cuz like you're so used to like having a schedule so then now that you don't have anything it's kind of hard to be productive.

**Anthony**

Yeah for sure, bro it's definitely hard. I'm definitely sorry that you don't get to experience things like the rest of your senior high school like for me that was a special time. I mean like I'm supposed to be graduating this year at UCSD and like our graduations canceled and so I definitely feel you on that but like So you mentioned your job at the county Would you mind like sharing anything about that? Like what you did and that kind of stuff?

Yeah. So my job is called SD Nights which stands for safe destinations slash San Diego Nights. And what we do basically is we we host events like We, as the Unites, hire kids between the ages, like, as soon as you can start working they hire any kid, like as soon as they can start working, which is I believe, like around 15 or 16, something like that. They hire the kids, they

put them in leadership positions then they make them a part of lead squad. We're like, kids like myself, we set up events and facilitate them. And then we welcome kids between the ages of 10 and 18. So that they have a safe place to just like stay during like critical hours of the day. You know, like, for example, like, around nighttime or like late afternoon or like, people, kids are more susceptible to being influenced by like negative, negative things, for example, like street gangs, stuff like that, you know, if they're out in the street, they have, they're more likely to get influenced by things like that. So we just like make that environment a safe environment where they can like hang and get To eat for free and play for free.

**Anthony**

Awesome, dude. That's awesome that you do that.

**Shams**

Yeah.

**Anthony**

So last question on COVID, bow have you seen it have an impact on your community and city heights?

Shams

Just really like it's taken away from me. \*doorbell rings\* Give me a second.

**Anthony**

Ok.

**Shams**

Sorry

**Anthony**

No, no worries.

**Shams**

Can you repeat the question? Nevermind I remember, So, I'd say one of the biggest ways that it affected my community is that I know that we have a lot of undocumented people in my community. And I feel like they, they're probably like some of the people who are struggling the most right now. Especially like, people always seem like those people like the palateros, like ice cream trucks. There's people who like sold food out of their cars, like people like that. I know right now that like I don't see them anymore. So I feel like they're having like some of the hardest time to survive. I know, like, people who are out of a job, I don't know, like, how, how

they're finding aid right now. .

**Anthony**

Yeah, definitely. That's definitely a way that communities are being affected is with the undocumented people and like the government not supporting them in any way and stuff like that. So Alright, so the last section is going to be about just about your future and I guess what you want to do in the next few years, so, Could you just tell me about your future goals and where do you want to be in life, let's say a year from now or two years from now.

**Shams**

So, I hopefully want to either thinking about majoring either in business or engineering or like, just like double major and one of my goals is just like Right now I have like, I got a full scholarship, a full ride scholarship. And right now one of my goals is that the rest of the money that I'm able to acquire throughout my college journey, I like save it so that I can one day, start a business. Because my goal is going to start my own company that manufactures and sells like eco friendly technology to like all parts of the world. So I really want to focus on helping like third world countries, and like providing like different technologies that they need, for example, like technology to help with clean water, like filtration, stuff like that, like really things that make life easier for like people who live in third world countries. And I know that, especially some of the biggest problems in the world right now is that countries are getting like, getting taken advantage of because they have so many resources. But then the people who take the resources are not like they don't compensate for the resources fairly so like they take whatever, like oil or whatever the country has but they don't give them back, what they deserve for that oil or whatever resource it is. So I feel like I would work with countries like that. And I would either like get back different resources for them if they can't, can't like pay with money, or like just find ways to like make my earnings while still helping them. So like, it's like a growing company. But the bottom line is that I definitely want to like third world countries.

**Anthony**

Awesome. That's, that's a very, that's a very special thing to do. Awesome. So where like, as far as like a college like where do you plan on going next year?

**Shams**

Right now, UCSD but I'm waiting on a waitlist decision from UC Berkeley. So I want to See how that goes. And then I'll go from there.

**Anthony**

Awesome. Well, I can. I'm a UCSD student I recommend it. So you can stay in San Diego, but I know Berkeley's a special place too. So I know you'll do great wherever you go.

**Shams**

Thanks.

**Anthony**

So like where do you uh do you plan on? So say you do go to Berkeley? Like, would you want to come back to City Heights or stay there, or would you want to like live somewhere else?

**Shams**

For me, like one of my passions is just like really traveling. I feel like my life I want to be like a nomadic type person. Like, I don't really want to stay in one place unless I really have to because my whole life I never really stayed in one place for more than like 10 years. So like, I really don't want to stay anywhere for more than like, five years max. So if I had the capability like financially and everything was set for me, I would be traveling to like all corners of the world, and that's what I plan to do. I got a plan to study abroad and then after college, hopefully like I can just keep traveling and like work while traveling. That's one of my passions, like I really want to do that.

**Anthony**

Awesome. So if you could go to, to a place in the United States and one place out of the United States for those two places

**Shams**

Just to visit, I'd say maybe like the Grand Canyon and I'm actually not sure right now. Because really, a lot of places I want to travel are really outside of the United States. Like if you ask me anywhere else besides the United States. If you asked me anywhere else outside of the United States I could give you a Pretty decent list.

**Anthony**

No, no, no, I asked one place in the United States and then one place out of the United States.

**Shams**

Oh Okay, so a lot of places. I mean, me and my mom want to go to Rome together. Like ever since I was a kid, she's always been telling me. Like, once you get rich, we need take you to Rome. So like, that's the trip that we have planned. And then one of the persons I really want to visit would be Dubai. I know like, I watch a lot of YouTube videos about it. And like, it's so beautiful, you know, like, how dense The city is. And then also like, how they have different parts of the city where like they maintain the culture that they have, like the city has before. All the technology came in and like, it's just really beautiful. And I want to see it with my own eyes.

**Anthony**

Definitely. Alright, man. So the last question I have for you, um, it's not necessarily about your future, but I remember I got to ask it to you last time We talked I thought you gave like an amazing answer. So I kind of want you to be able to get this answer again on record. So, like, What does being a big brother mean to you? Because I know you have younger siblings. Like, what does that responsibility like, for you? And, like, what do you hope To show them?

**Shams**

So, as a big brother, like, I noticed that my siblings are always watching me everything I do. And I know that a really big part of being a leader is just like, being more than just some words, you know, like, you got to lead by example. I feel like whatever I do, especially like when I'm around my siblings, I always have to, like, pay attention to what I do, what I say, how I act, because like, they really like they're impressionable. At this age, and like, they carry on those habits, or like whatever they see me doing like the they take that and like, they implement it in their life. So I got to be careful. about what I do, because I want them to be good people when they grow up, so I have to set that example myself.

**Anthony**

Awesome. And just give your age the ages of your younger siblings.

**Shams**

Um, so my youngest brother, he's one years old, and then my mother gave birth to twins. They're four years old right now. I have a seven year old sister and a 11 year old sister.

**Anthony**

Dang, man, you got a you got a full house? Yeah, I got a. Let's see. I have four younger siblings and then one one older. So I mean, like, we're all like, packed, packed together, but I wouldn't trade that for the world. I always say like, like being with my siblings, and like, all at the same time. Like there's nothing better than that, like, so many memories. I would never trade for anything so

**Shams**

Yeah, definitely.

**Anthony**

Well, that's all the questions I have for you. If you just want to, I guess maybe say Like anything that you didn't you felt like you didn't get to get off your chest, anything we want people to know about you or about your community. Or are you good?

**Shams**

Yeah, I'm good, that's all.

**Anthony**

All right, well, thank you so much, bro. Like you're just you're a special young man like I'm, I'm glad I had the honor of interviewing you and getting to know you. And I have no doubt like all the amazing things you'll do in the future.

**Shams**

Thanks. I Appreciate it.