

The True American

The Life of Mohamud Osman



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*Mohamud's Homeland
of Somalia*

Imagine a small boy living among 1,000 villagers on the east coast of Africa. On the horizon stick houses sprinkle the land. Children play among the houses including one special boy named Mohamud Osman.

As a young boy he grew up in a village called Bardheere, Somalia. In Somalia, hills, mountains, and trees stand rooted to the earth. Rain falls throughout spring, summer, and winter. Showers cool the scorching summer days. Mohamud said, “You could pour water on your head and by the time you got to the other end of the village the water would be gone.”



The Osman’s property was approximately 600 square feet. The property included a small house for his 13 family members and an area for farming. Born on approximately February 19, 1985 (His birthday was changed with the immigration officers. Actual date of birth is not recorded so he doesn’t know his actual birthdate), Mohamud is in the middle of his 5 sisters and 6 brothers. His family grew food to eat and sell and raised animals. The main foods they ate were pasta, rice, collard greens and

'hugali', which is grits with okra. They cooked outside and got water from the river or a well. His house looked like a large upside down hollow coconut! Everyone slept on raised blocks because



A house similar to Mohamud's house

if cobras or pythons got in the house, you had a better chance of them slithering by you than on you. If you had to go to the bathroom you would have to go outside and bury it. Water for showers came directly from the filthy river. There was no electricity in Bardherere.

A normal day in Somalia mostly meant running and going to a religious school to learn Arabic. His family's religion is Islam. This religion keeps him from touching pigs or dogs, so they were not allowed to eat pork. Mohamud's family observed Ramadan.

Ramadan is a celebration that celebrates the poor who don't have food. Ramadan last 1 month and during that long month you only eat food at night. If you were caught eating during the day you would have been killed because you are disrespecting the poor. At the end of the month you celebrate with Eid where you eat a lot of food. Ramadan, in 2015, starts on the 17th or 18th of July. In Africa, Ramadan is sort of like fasting but it celebrates people who don't have food. The whole village would celebrate Ramadan at one time not individually. This is mostly only celebrated in Africa but you can celebrate here.

One of the things he loved to do and still does is to play soccer. In Somalia he ran barefoot with no equipment and the ball was made of softened plastic that was formed in the shape of a ball. He also loved to run and race.

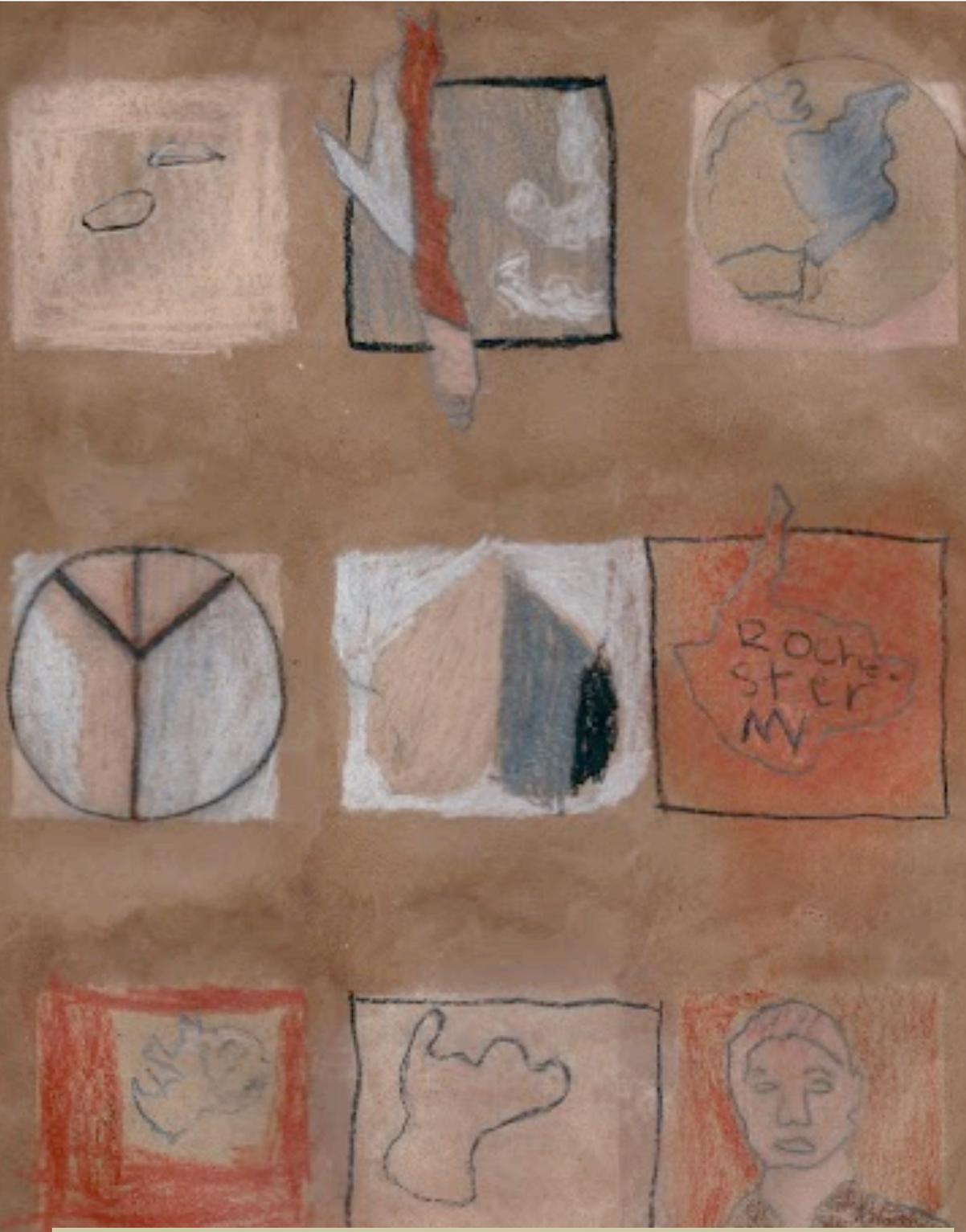
When Mohamud was 9 or 10, the Civil War in Somalia started to get out of hand. It was not safe and his family decided to move to Kenya as illegal refugees. In Somalia, Mohamud didn't know that America existed and he only knew Africa.



Mohamud remembers Kenya as being cleaner and grassier than Somalia. The refugee camps he lived in were much different than the village he came from. In Kenya he started to learn another language - one that he would need soon - English. Mohamud spoke quite a few languages. He spoke Somalian, Maay Maay (which doesn't have writing it is just spoken), Arabic and Swahili.

Occasionally he would help his mother in her shop. He continued to play soccer and run. For the next 5 years his life went on moving to 3 different refugee camps. He missed his friends.

When his parents told him that they were going to America he was okay with that, but he didn't really have a choice to stay. They took a 3-hour drive to Nairobi for the airplane. By now he was about 15 years old and hoped for a better future.



*Mohamud's Journey
to America*

Can you imagine having to walk for 3 weeks? While on this journey, a ten-year-old boy cowers between his parents petrified of the “laughing” sound of the hyenas. But the laughing isn’t funny. The shrieks of the predator mean it is calling for more hyenas to catch the prey. This is just the beginning of Mohamud’s experience on his way to America.

Mohamud’s family, along with 3 other families from different towns, decided to leave Somalia with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The four families were squished on a truck that



This is similar to the kind of truck Mohamud and his family rode in.

took them ½ way to the border of Somalia and Kenya. They had to get off and sneak in because Kenya was not accepting refugees. The illegal refugees had no paperwork and had to avoid the border patrol who travelled back in forth between Kenya and Somalia looking for illegal refugees. The border patrol were very mean people. They would beat you

and take you to the office if they found you. This is why Mohamud's family had to hide behind trees during the day and walk through the night.

On the journey Mohamud did not have a lot of food. Onions and giraffe meat filled his stomach. They prowled the area hunting for giraffe that would last them for a couple of days. Some people were left behind because they were weak from hunger. "I remember an old lady with two boys and she could not move. The boys moved her to the side of the road so border patrol would find her and help her," said Mohamud. Hardly any water could be found. If they found water they would have to boil it because it was so dirty.

After taking a long courageous adventure to Kenya he went to 3 refugee camps before establishing refugee status. First he went to Noa for a short time. Then he went to Dadaab before



Kukuma Refugee Camp

ending up in Kakuma. While he was in Kakuma he went to a private school to learn English.

At some point in time while in Kenya his family learned about America. They decided to come to America for a better life, education, freedom of religion, and peace. So, what they did was look for a sponsor who would help his family get to America. Working through an international organization for immigration, the sponsor bought tickets and arranged transportation and housing. While on the 10-hour flight, 15/16 year-old Mohamud did not eat anything but snacks. According to their religion his family does not eat pork and they thought that all the meals had pork in them! While on the plane he was afraid of the unknown. He was afraid of not knowing where to go or what it would be like. When he got off in New York City he saw someone with a sign with his name on it and he felt relieved. At first in New York City he was really scared in the car. He didn't know that the drivers were following the yellow lines on the road. There were no trees for barriers and he thought someone was going to hit them!

His sponsor brought him to Rochester and gave him a tour of his house. Mohamud was amazed by the tall buildings, lights, and size of his new house. Once they were settled and found jobs, they paid the sponsor back in payments for the plane tickets.

Mohamud's hard journey all ended in a peaceful manner. He hoped for freedom and that's what he got. He will not go back to Somalia because of the civil war, but he would like to visit Kenya someday.



*Mohamud's New Life
in America*

When Mohamud first got to America he was amazed at how different everything was. His first thought was how it was so much brighter, louder, and bigger than Somalia and Kenya.

Before coming to America, Mohamud had lived in a small house with 12 other people. When he got to America, he started living with his family in a normal sized American house. There were flushing toilets, running water, and electricity! It took some getting used to it. In fact, one time after taking a shower, Mohamud's mother left her clothes very close to a light bulb on the ceiling. Suddenly, the smoke alarm went off. They got out of the house and called 911. It turned out that the clothes on had burned on the ceiling light. Luckily, everything was fine.

In Islam, you live with your parents until you get married. Now, at the age of 28, Mohamud doesn't live with his parents anymore (and he's sure his mom is more careful around light bulbs) because he got married. A few years ago in America, Mohamud met a woman named Khadro. According to his culture a man has to ask a woman's father for his blessing in marriage. Khadro's dad was the



Mohamud and Khadro

only one in her family still left in Kenya, so he had to call him on the telephone to get his blessing. Now Mohamud and his wife live in Henrietta with their son Zakariye. Khadro is 27 years old and goes to school. Zakariye will turn two in April.



*Zakariye
(Mohamud's son)*

Many things are different about life in America. In Africa, people had to get all water from outside. Here, people have running water. Back in Somalia/Kenya, there was no electricity. Now electricity is everywhere.

Transportation is also different. In his homeland you walked everywhere. Here you drive everywhere. There is also a lot of new technology. Mohamud had never seen a phone or an iPhone or even a computer before.



*Zakariye
playing soccer*

Since then he has gotten used to it and uses his iPhone regularly. Another huge change has been the

shopping. In America, Mohamud goes shopping and is able to look around. He loves the diversity of shopping options. He can get anything he wants and return it for a refund!

Another huge change was freedom of religion. In Somalia, at midday you had to go worship at the mosque. At this time all shops would close

and in the village everything would shut down. If you were seen outside you would be killed--not by a government but by terrorist groups. In America you are free to practice, or not practice, whatever religion in which you believe.

Shopping was very different in Somalia. In the shop, there would be a counter with a shopkeeper standing behind it. The customer would ask the shopkeeper for the desired goods and the shopkeeper would get the goods and sell them. The customer would have no choice because there would be no variety available, and he or she would not be able to return

After arriving in the United States, Mohamud went to Jefferson High School for a year. It was difficult to fit in and there were a lot of fights, so he moved to West Irondequoit with his sponsor. He graduated from high school and now goes to Monroe Community College (MCC).

Mohamud has also had many jobs. His first job in high school was working at a corner store in West Irondequoit. In another job, he was licensed to be a truck driver but he missed too many soccer games with friends so he quit. Because



*Anthony Jordan
Health Center*

Mohamud had already learned English in Kenya, he later got a job as a translator for the Catholic Family Center (CFC). Now he works at Anthony

Jordan Health Center as a translator and makes appointments for new Somalian immigrants. His boss's name is Sharon, and he works on Lake Avenue.

In order to become a legal refugee in the United States, you need an I-94 form, which lets you stay for one year, and then you can apply for the green card, which allows you to stay for five years. After 5 years of being here, Mohamud was able to and wanted to become a citizen. He wanted citizenship because he is planning on staying here for the rest of his life and he wants to vote. For the citizenship application, there's a lot of paperwork to fill out. Then comes the test! The United States gives applicants a book to study with facts on American history. They are then given a test with 10 random questions out of 100 about things you read in the book. You have 3 tries to get at least 6 right. If you fail the test 3 times, you have to start everything over again. And fill out the paperwork...again. Mohamud passed the test the first time and only missed a single question--one about Susan B. Anthony!

Mohamud was the first one in his family to get his driver's license. Driving was easy for him to learn, but he's always scared that other people

are going to crash into him. When he first got his license he was excited to drive his family everywhere and translate for them because they did not know English yet.

Today Mohamud's siblings that are still living with his parents are between 4 and 21 years old. One of them also goes to MCC. Another goes to School #15 and the rest are in high school. Now all the adults in his family know how to drive, and his siblings have learned how to speak English. In fact, they are losing their native language, since they only sometimes speak Somalian at home.

Nowadays he lives to play soccer and travel. He drives to Nebraska, Vermont, and Ohio to visit friends and play in soccer tournaments. He plays with a lot of his friends, including his best friend Abdullah Cidow, whom he met in America. He plays on several different teams because he has the ability to get along with all different kinds of people.

Mohamud's jersey numbers are 2 and 11 depending on what team he is playing for. Soccer is his favorite thing to do. He even coaches soccer! His least favorite thing is snow—snow, cold, and winter!!!



One of Mohamud's soccer teams

Although he has started a new life, not everything is different. Mohamud still eats much of the same food: okra, grits, and goat meat. He also eats canned food and he loves pizza. He still celebrates the holiday Ramadan and practices Islam. Just as he did in Somalia/Kenya, he still plays soccer 4-5 times a week.

Mohamud would have loved to stay in his homeland of Somalia if all problems there were fixed. Because they weren't, Mohamud went to Kenya and eventually came here for freedom. He does not want to go back to Somalia because if you are from America you would be considered rich and there is a good chance you will be kidnapped. In addition, the same civil war that was going on when he left is still going on, so it is still unsafe. He would, however, probably go back to Kenya sometime if he has the chance.

Mohamud does not regret coming to America. In fact, he says, "After earning my citizenship, I feel like a true American." And that's exactly what he is—a true American.



We dedicate this story to our amazing friend, Mohamud Osman. He taught us to have courage even when things are hard. We'd also like to dedicate it to our awesome teachers and the irreplaceable Mrs. O'Malley who helped us and gave us information to be better writers!

Thanks!

Denim, Hannah, & Harrison