

**“Our lives are influenced by sacrifices, our sacrifices impact others.”**

**– Hawo Sadik**

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Her name is Hawo Hussein Sadik Mabruk Enow Shangalow. Each name is taken from the generation of a father, carrying the names of Hawo’s ancestors. This constant reminder of her roots tethers Hawo to the endless sacrifices her parents have made and to their experiences outside of America. These sentiments combine to allow her to maintain an optimistic perspective in times of alienation or struggle. This positive outlook has enabled Hawo to inspire her younger siblings and other Somali Bantu girls in her community.



Hawo’s home-life has taught her that love is care. Her parents' lives revolve around their children and this can be seen in their decision to uproot themselves from their home country of Somalia, all to create a better life in America. Her parents never saw themselves fleeing as they were so integrated into the vibrant and sunny life found in their community. Hawo’s parents cherished everything about their community, the first time they crossed paths was even in a local supermarket.

“My mom was working in a market and my dad was a translator and tradesmen, so he was able to travel to different countries around Africa. When he [Hawo’s father, Hussein,] was finally on his way home, in Somalia, he stopped at the market.” Hawo begins to chuckle, “and I guess he was mesmerized or whatever.” Hawo concludes that after seeing and learning about Hawo’s mother, Owliya, her father immediately met Owliya’s parents, and he spared no time in making the first move. After learning how much her parents approved of Hussein, Owliya made a decision. Hawo believes the story ends with her mom telling her grandmother, “You know what mom, I’m gonna do this just for you, just to make you happy,” and so Hawo’s mom agreed to get to know her father and decidedly fell in love. Hawo inherited the same filial piety and devotion towards family that her mother possesses.

This attachment to family made it incredibly difficult for Hawo’s mom to uproot herself from Somalia and leave the sanctuary that her family offered, but ultimately she and Hawo’s father decided it was the best decision for their own brewing family. Corruption and violence knocked on every village doorstep and swept Hawo and her family to a refugee camp in Kenya. At two years old, Hawo’s family was resettled in Columbia, South Carolina in the United States. Ten years later, her family finally moved to Buffalo with the help of her family’s sponsor.

A sponsor, Hawo explains, is a person from the destination country that is entrusted to teach, “new customs to the refugee family and help them to assimilate into life within a brand new country. They assist refugee families in learning the local language and in looking for a job.” If a refugee’s sponsor isn’t already a relative, often they become as close as family and a lifelong relationship is established.

As the eldest daughter and an English speaker for her parents, Hawo was forced to grow up fast. This meant babysitting, filling out paperwork, making appointments, and filling the gaps where her parents couldn’t in a western country; but after sacrificing her own childhood so that her younger siblings and parents could be more at ease, she remains grateful. Hawo exclaims, “I’m trying my best to make my parents proud and make them feel like it was worth it -- to leave their homeland.” From Hawo’s perspective it was worth it to leave Somalia behind, although she acknowledges that, at such a young age, there wasn’t much to leave behind.

Coming to a new country as an adult, as Hawo’s parents did, can definitely take a toll on one’s pride. Hawo recounts learning the basics of daily American life like the language and customs, while her parents took much longer to grasp these concepts. She imagines how this shift in power dynamic between child and parent hurt a mother or father’s pride. Hawo “would have to step-up and translate when...in a supermarket or when in a parent-teacher conference or anything of that nature,” because her parents were not at the level of understanding yet. Hawo infers, “this



is something a lot of immigrant children can relate to.” Hawo, and many other child immigrants, possess the self-reliance of an adult. While learning to be more responsible “has prepared us (child-immigrants) to be adults, at the same time it has stripped us of our childhood.”

Hawo advises other child-immigrants and first-generations “to think about the bigger picture.” Additionally she suggests, “maintaining an optimistic view about life” because “it will help you to remain sane.”

Hawo yearns to visit Somalia some day to reconnect with her home country and the identity that comes with it. However, that may be challenging. Somalians have tried to visit or go back, but because of the war and the immense corruption, many are prevented. This reality greatly influences Hawo’s goal to return to her homeland, open up a clinic, distribute clean water, and provide humanitarian aid. Hawo believes that “Somalia needs to heal,” and so she hopes she can bring her goal to fruition, specifically in getting more accessible clean water to Somalians because, as Hawo puts it, “clean water is a vital part of living.”

Many of Hawo's long-term goals lead back to uplifting her family in America and her people back in Somalia. This comes from Hawo's incisive recognition of her parents' difficult and ongoing journey. She still ponders what her life might look like if her parents stayed in Somalia; in the end, she's grateful they didn't. Hawo is reflective when saying, "I am very appreciative that my parents left their country, a place they're used to, just for the sake of their children and their futures. I am very, very, very humbled by that."

"Your parents made a sacrifice by bringing you to a country that they are foreign to, this is a new change for them too. Be patient with your parents, even if you think they're being unfair. They always have your best interests at heart, they only want what's good for you." Hawo's maturity can be heard with her every word. Hawo is aware that although her parents left an "oppressive country," it's still important to be "forgiving and understanding because they are in a country now that is still oppressive," just in different ways.

"There are a lot of social issues that still haven't been tackled here in America, so even though you're supposed to have a better life here that's not necessarily what's gonna happen. That's just what life in America is." Even after understanding the unjust nature of American society, Hawo believes eventually America will become more equitable in her lifetime, but "in order for that to happen we need to be more understanding of one another, so even as immigrants who get a lot of hate...try to be optimistic to then help others coming after." Hawo takes on the burden of being an immigrant in America and strives to create equality by understanding and helping others, so that eventually society will become more accepting to new immigrants and refugees looking for homes.

Having reached this middle ground of what it means to be an immigrant and what it means to be an American, Hawo offers a unique take on what America encompasses. Hawo admits that "America is the land of opportunity, but there's a hidden message in there -- the fine print that no one reads," stating that one must make up a certain demographic "to be eligible for opportunity." While Hawo agrees that it's possible for people to become successful in America, some groups of people do have to work much harder. "America is a country of 'can' not 'will'," Hawo succinctly concludes.

Being a Somali Bantu muslimah immigrant has never felt limiting to Hawo, as long as she remembers the sacrifices of her parents and how she will honor these sacrifices. This can render into a heaping amount of pressure to succeed, but Hawo takes this in stride. From her eyes to her voice, Hawo exudes self-confidence.

This belief in herself can be seen in the goals Hawo has set for herself. Hawo will be attending Cornell University in the fall of 2020 as a Chemistry major, as she plans to pursue

pharmacology. This summer she spent her days taking chemistry classes through her university, and after struggling in the first few weeks she finally received an A on her last test. On top of summer classes Hawo has been working at her local grocery store, doing henna designs for small tips, and memorizing the Quran. Hawo is incredibly passionate about the things that matter to her and she has big dreams. Sometimes she considers that one day she might have a family of her own, but doesn't ever intend to give up her career. "Women are capable of doing both," and so she hopes her parents can begin to see how strong of a daughter they raised.