Mustafa Jumale: Immigrant Stories

My family fled Somali in the early 1990’s because of civil war. When I was born, little did I know, that I would spend only a year in Somalia. My father was a driver for the United States embassy. He was dedicated to his work. ‘Til this day he holds on to his Somali driver’s license. My mother had eleven children, seven boys and four girls. Growing up in the United States, my parents shared very few stories of life in Somalia. I guess it is hard to relive those memories, knowing that they may never live in a peaceful Somalia again. This left me with a lot of questions and few answers. Until I was in the fourth grade, I did not think that we were different from anyone else. I viewed myself as an American. I didn’t ask why we were living in Mankato, Minnesota. The following year, my family moved to Eden Prairie, MN to a Somali neighborhood. I realized that year that we were different. I wanted to understand why we were here in the US. I wanted to understand how life was in Somalia.

Life in the United States was wonderful for my family. My father got a job as a security guard and later as a community worker before he retired. My mother owns a successful Somali business in south Minneapolis. My siblings graduated high school and created families of their own. Life was good, but for me it was not home. Perhaps it is the discrimination I experienced in the United States. Perhaps it is the fact that my family struggled financially as new immigrants. Maybe just simply it was the fact that I am Somali and in the United States that keeps me from calling myself an American. Perhaps by calling myself American, I accept the fact that I may never call Somalia home.

These questions are hard for me to understand as I am continuing to negotiate my identity as a Somali in exile. These personal questions and wanting to know more about my country has guided my life. I am on quest to find out these answers and to study the memories of other Somalis. So as I still search for these answers, I call myself Somali. Maybe one day I may add American to the end of that.