

IMPRINT



**NARRATIVES ON THE
FIRST-GENERATION
COLLEGE EXPERIENCE**

**2021
FOURTH EDITION**

SEATTLE UNIVERSITY

Contents

3	About IMPRINT & The Outreach Center
5	Editor's Note
7	What Is My Story? Yasmine Bupe
19	I Am Still The First Bianca Galam
25	Of Ash & Men Kali G
29	I am here, sittin, perched, Kali G
35	It's Worth Quitting Caleb Ohryn
40	They Call It Refugee Camp But I Call It Home Afrikaan Osman
50	About The Contributors
52	Acknowledgements

About IMPRINT

IMPRINT: Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience is a compilation of creative writing and scholarly work from Seattle University's (SU) first-generation college community. SU students, staff, faculty, and alumni who identify as first-gen are welcome to contribute. IMPRINT is published annually and released in the Spring Quarter. A committee of first-gen staff, faculty, and students mentor our selected contributors through the creative process.

IMPRINT is rooted in 3 values:

- ◆ *Visibility:* Increase visibility of SU's First-Generation College community.
- ◆ *Scholarship:* Helping SU's first-generation college community to own their identity as scholars by providing an opportunity for someone to experience a supportive writing process and publish a piece of work.
- ◆ *Mentorship:* Provide contributors with the opportunity to cultivate mentoring relationships through the writing process.

To learn more or submit for the next edition, please visit tinyurl.com/imprintSU.

IMPRINT is sponsored by The Outreach Center at SU.

About The Outreach Center

The Outreach Center is a community and resource space for members of the Seattle University community who identify with the first-generation college student experience and the military-connected experience.

We acknowledge and affirm our community's multiple intersecting identities, including low-income, international, undocumented and DACA, and graduate students.

At Seattle University, we define first-generation college students as students whose parents or guardians have not completed a U.S. bachelor's degree. Some first-generation college students may have siblings who have completed a bachelor's degree.

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Editor's Note

*"Revolutions are made out of love
for people and for place."*

– Grace Lee Boggs

I believe writing is a form of revolution. Each year, students, staff, faculty, and alumni tell me how Imprint helped them create a deeper, more meaningful connection to their first-gen identity. They tell me Imprint showed them how to reframe my first-gen experiences as strengths, gifts, and talents. First-gen is so nuanced that some have even discovered they are first-gen as they read Imprint.

Imprint pieces span the spectrum of first-gen experiences. This edition is no different. While each story is unique to the author, there are always common threads that weave us together. I am inspired by this year's stories of gratitude, persistence, and contentment.

With every Imprint compilation, we build and affirm the narrative about how what we love moves us to be creators of change. I am proud to be a first-gen graduate built by the love of my community and the places I've been.

In a year where people felt socially distant, some found it challenging to be motivated and willing to be vulnerable at the risk of not being seen or received.

I am grateful to our contributors who took the chance to reflect on, grapple with, and share their first-gen experiences. This edition of Imprint is a manifestation of the people who felt it necessary to be vulnerable now more than ever.

Thank you to the Imprint Committee who supported our contributors this year. You made sure that we closed the distance with every affirmation and edit.

I hope you find a connection to our community as you engage with their stories. Perhaps next year, we'll see you here—in print.

Gretchenrae Campera, M.Ed.
Division of Student Development

What Is My Story?

Yasmine Bupe

That is me, sitting in front of my computer,
My family photo albums on my left side,
My books and class notes behind my computer,
My water and coffee bottle on my right side,
I am trying to reflect on my story.
And I'm asking myself,
Who are you? And what is your story?
Why are you proud to call yourself a
first-generation college student?

I'm Bupe, which means in the Bemba language by adding its last part Bwa kwa Lesa, a gift from God. And my parents added to my name wa Manikunda, which means in the same language, of Manikunda. I'm a woman of color from Africa, a daughter, a sister, a friend, and a student to many professors. I'm an international transfer student, and I'm a first-generation college student.

I was born and raised in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo Kinshasa), a country full of

rich natural resources and culture, and rich stories. And my story is one of them. I was born in a big family, where sharing the same blood isn't what brings us together, but destiny does. Just like the famous African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," I was raised by a giant village, which set the foundation of who I am. I'm sure you are wondering how? I am getting there.

Growing up, I went to many primary schools, because my parents moved around a lot, which meant I had to change schools. Then I went to two boarding schools, Balou and Lycée Sacré-Coeur, for my secondary and high school. I graduated high school with a diploma in business administration. I'm sure you are wondering, how come? That's because, in my country, students have to choose their major in high school.

Knowing who I was or what I was capable of was pretty much hard for me to understand growing up, as the only thing I knew was to have good grades and to be among the top five students in my class. However, this changed during my last year of high school before the "Exetat" in 2013-2014. My all-girls high school, Lycée sacré-Coeur, wanted to elect a student body president. So senior students from the two majors, business administration and literature, were expected to apply for this position because my high school only had two majors. Applying for that position didn't even cross my mind because I was still pretty new in the school, and I'd assumed that that position suited well for those who did more than two years there.

I remember sitting at my desk; some of my classmates came up to me and asked me to be the

presidential candidate for our major. I was so surprised, and I refused their request right away because I was new; I didn't feel capable, and I wasn't popular either. However, this didn't discourage them from submitting my name for the candidacy. They did so without me knowing. The next day, they came back with my older sister, who encouraged and motivated me to "go for it" by telling other students; she attached posters with my name on them on different school walls. I felt very anxious but deep down, I heard a voice telling me, "You can do it, Jasmine. Besides, your people will support you." I didn't have a choice anymore. I was "in" the game. The next thing I knew was that with the support and help of my classmates, my boarding school's sisters and staff, my professors, and my family, I won the election.

After I won, I was expected to write and give a speech. However, I didn't know how to do it. I went home on the weekend so my dad could help me write my speech. He interviewed me and jotted down my ideas in his notebook, and we composed a speech out of it. He prepped me over the weekend; he recorded me as I read my speech over and over so that I could see and listen to myself and fix any errors. I finally gave my speech, and my work as the student body president started. From this experience onward, my need and motivation for learning how to speak in public and for leading and serving my people grew.

Two years later, I graduated and was ready to start college. But where? Morocco was my destination.

I arrived in Morocco in the midst of 2014 with my older sister, Dahlia. However, we couldn't live together

because my school was in Casablanca and her school was in Rabat. So we could only meet on the weekends. I began college with a major in business administration and management. Things were new and different. Morocco was a new and beautiful country for me. The good thing about studying there was that students are taught in French so I didn't have to learn a new language like Arabic because French was widely spoken in the country. Even though everything seemed good in Morocco, I wasn't feeling well. I was experiencing all the different symptoms of "culture shock" like many new foreigners do. I was feeling extremely lonely, stressed, and anxious. I was not happy and motivated at all. I only cared about studying because I could find my comfort at least there.

At first, I thought that it was only culture shock and that this phase would pass, but it didn't. I didn't feel like I belonged in Morocco, and I couldn't envision myself living or studying there. The feeling was so extreme that it started to affect my health. The only solution my sister and I could think of was for me to go back home. I remember that my family wasn't happy at all, with the exception of my sister because she was there with me and saw how sick I was and how I was struggling. My sister respected my decision. She wanted to fight for me like always. I felt like I failed myself and my people. I was ashamed of myself and could see the disappointment in my people's eyes. I felt like I wasn't capable of doing anything. I felt like my life was over. Remembering and writing about this particular experience only brought tears to my face. How can a person, who was always motivated to do things and ready to face and fight for everything, fail and give up everything just like that

without considering the amount of money her dad spent already? Was she even fighting? While people around me thought that I wasn't capable and that I was not smart, I knew deep down that I didn't give up. I was fighting even more this time.

I had been back home for a year and it wasn't easy because I was depressed. But I tried to do my best to move on and continue fighting against all the odds. I started to learn some English at the Congo American Language Institute (CALI) because I was bored and traveling around. During this time, I also went to Israel for my medical care. It was a trip that changed my life forever because I found the hope and courage that I'd lost. When I came back from Israel, my dad asked me to get ready because I was going to the United States to study. How can a person who always failed in her English course back in secondary and high school go to study and live in a country where everything is in English? How can a person, who didn't feel well in Morocco, in her neighboring country, live in a country that is far far away from her country? Besides, her parents have never been there, so how is she going to make it?

In December 2015, I was on my flight to the United States. Seattle was my destination city, after many stops. I remember a stranger, who is like a father now, came to pick me up and drove me to my new home in Bellevue. From there on, I started my new life in the U.S. around good strangers who became my friends, family, and role models.

I started college as an ESL student. From that point on, I felt the struggle that many foreigners face, the struggle of starting a new life from scratch. I experienced culture shock and faced many challenges and difficulties in my personal life, my

academic journey, and learning a new language. I sometimes felt annoyed hearing people speak in English all the time because I just wanted to see or hear something familiar (possibly from my own country) to feel good. I remember asking myself: am I even going to speak or write in English? How can someone who speaks three languages find a place to learn yet another new language in her brain? I'm sure those who speak English as a second language can understand my struggle. Being able to understand someone and express myself to people was so hard. I thought everything I said was a disaster. But how did I finally learn English? Well, I'm still trying to figure that out, as I'm still learning, and the only thing that I have in my mind toward that goal is discipline, which includes courage, practice, and giving myself a break.

A quarter before the end of my ESL classes, I felt like I wasn't the same person as before. Oh yes, living in a new country and far away from my family changed me. When I came to the U.S., I wanted to study business administration but I just wanted to study something new and different. I tried to talk to my parents about what I was feeling but they couldn't help because things were different for me here in the U.S. These are often the struggles of many first-generation international students here. Because you are the first in your family to study here, you have to figure out almost everything yourself since your parents don't share that experience. But no matter what, other people always come and help, as was the case for me.

During my last quarter as an ESL student, two or three of my English teachers from Bellevue College (BC) told me that I would be good at communication

studies because of my personality. How could communication studies popup into the minds of three different people? As a good student, I researched and decided to take an intro to communication studies class during my first quarter to see if I would feel that adrenaline rush inside of me. Oh wow! I fell in love with it, even if it wasn't easy. I fell in love with all of the different intercultural and interpersonal skills that I learned; they really helped me understand human beings even more and the world in general. I think communication runs this world.

My freshman year wasn't easy as I wasn't just studying with international students but with domestic students too. Just the idea of being in the same classes as them made me really nervous. It was hard for me to participate in my classes or defend my classmates' opinions verbally. I felt like my thoughts did not matter or were not worthy of sharing. In moments when I wanted to share my thoughts, anxiety would take over. I felt like my entire body was sweating, and I turned cold. Was it normal? Maybe yes. Maybe not. But I felt more embarrassed and bad about myself, especially when I heard the response I had in my head being answered by someone else in my class. It was tough.

At first, I thought that I was the only one to feel such negative things but I wasn't because many of my fellow, first-generation international students felt like that. Nobody tells them how your struggles are going to be or what will happen. So what should those students do to feel comfortable? They must give themselves time and try to encourage themselves to speak up and ask their professors for help with tips on class participation activities like group work.

As I began taking my credit classes at BC, I

started to feel more alive unlike what I'd felt back in Morocco. I felt more happy and busy at the same time. I was an active college student with a busy schedule: a healthy mix of school, work, and extracurricular activities like volunteering and attending students of color leadership conference in Yakima where I learned how to recognize and value my identity as a student of color and become a social agent of change. While studying at BC, I also got my first job which really helped me improve my English and go beyond my potential. And, of course, the beauty and pride in receiving my first paycheck. My own money from my own effort. Amazing and hard.

In the fall of 2018, a quarter before my graduation, I was researching universities, and I found out about Seattle U from my friends who were studying there already. I remember that I went to visit the campus to get some information. It was love at first sight: my dream became a reality. I liked the modern infrastructure, the small classes (which means less pressure), their communication and media studies program, the scholarship opportunities, their attention toward students and their well-being, and the different restaurants that surrounded the university. I felt at home and less anxious about everything. The more I walked around, the more I felt like I was home. When I called my dad, I told him that I want to study at Seattle U, and I would only apply to this university. It was too risky, but it worked for me. Lucky me!

In the winter of 2019, I graduated with an A.A. from BC and got accepted at Seattle U. I was ready to start in the spring quarter. But the worst of all problems began: financial problems back home. I remember that my friends, with whom I had applied to Seattle U., had already received their tuition money

except for me. I was stressed, and I began to ask myself, "Why me, why now, and did I do anything wrong to start my bachelor's at Seattle U?"

When I sent my dad the list of four best universities, he told me to pick one (my best), and that was Seattle U, the most expensive of them all. He told me to do my best to be a student there. When I got in, he was the happiest person, and he encouraged me to keep pushing forward even though I felt guilty and told my dad that I'd look for a more affordable school. But my dad instead sent me a picture of him eating in the dining room with a text that read:

What do you see in this picture? Of course, yes, it's me eating. Have you ever seen a human body starving for food or water to stop feeling hungry? I'm sure not. No matter what, they have to eat and drink because if they stop due to the financial crisis, they will get sick and die. Now how can I tell my own daughter not to eat or drink what her body is starving for? I'm talking about your education here. Please put a smile on your face and stop stressing about things that you cannot control. Instead of you crying like a baby, pray and hope for the best because you will study there. I will never prevent you from living your own dream. Fight for it.

Yours,
Papa

Remembering this message and writing it down here can only bring tears to my face. Why did my dad not give up and encouraged me to chase my dreams instead? Pure love and sacrifices! I'd say.

In the spring of 2019, my financial situation became under control; thanks to God, I started my adventure at Seattle U. My first quarter was very challenging, mostly in my UCOR classes. There weren't many international students in my classes so I was pretty much the only one. Much like Bellevue College, I found it challenging to connect with my peers and participate in class because I felt like everyone else was better than me. Besides, many of my peers knew and understood the teaching style of professors at Seattle U, and many of my peers knew each other because they either started their freshman year together or met via sports and other clubs. I'm sure international students feel me here. Everything was just extra so I had to study way harder than before. Sometimes I would feel so stressed that I would cry and pray in my study room. However, this changed with time as the dust settled, and I made new friends at Seattle U, through different events organized by my department and Black Student Union.

Seattle U taught me to love what was hard to do and achieve. I knew that the stress I was feeling was because I wanted to learn and be good. The teaching style was different every quarter. And I'm very grateful that I was part of the Department of Communication. Thanks to our incredible Administrative Assistant, Verna, who is always the first to welcome us and ready to help. I'm also grateful to all of my communication professors. Thanks for always giving us— your students—a voice to speak and an example to follow. As I write this, it already feels like I'm graduating. I will miss this place that has become my home forever.

This quarter, winter of 2021, will be my last quarter at Seattle U, although I haven't really thought

about the sadness or joy of leaving yet because I'm so busy and stressed about my life after graduation: maybe grad school in one year, finding a new job, a new me again, and hopefully seeing my family after being away from them for years. I'm feeling excited and emotional already. Of course, I'm scared too.

Remember the African proverb I mentioned before? "It takes a village to raise a child." So with everything that I've learned and gone through, why not be thankful to the village who raised me?

First, I owe everything to Jesus, my savior. Only tears can express what I'm feeling for all that He did for me. It's because of Him that I am who I am today and will be tomorrow. He was there during my ups and downs, and He will always be there. He took care of me like He had promised to my parents by giving me strength, faith, hope, and a chance to be the salt and taste of this world.

Second, I'm grateful to my friends, my colleagues, and my family, especially my parents who sacrificed a lot for my education in the U.S. *Je n'oublierai jamais vos sacrifices et vos prières qui ont fait de moi celle que je suis. Je promet de vous les rendre en faisant de même et plus pour les générations futurs* (I will never forget your sacrifices and prayers that made me who I am. I promise to return them to you by doing the same and more for future generations.).

Additionally, a message to all the first-generation students: I know it's challenging to be the first but it is equally rewarding to be the number one example for the next generation and to make it. Find your mentors because you will need their help, and be a mentor too for many others tomorrow. Failing is good because you learn and grow. Your family or community may not understand

your pressures or frustrations but do make time to understand yourself and give yourself some break. Breathe and find other first-generation college students for advice and help. Believe in yourself because you are a fighter and a champion. Look who I became (and will become) after all those ups and downs? One day, I will look back with pride because I worked hard towards my dream (working at the U.N.) with all my heart. Plus, I helped paint an amazing art for our future generation, one they can always look back at, embrace, and relate to.

So to my dear first-generation students,
how about you paint a new art piece for yourself?

Too early or too late?

Nope.

It's time to start inspiring!
You are the author of your story!

I Am Still The First
Bianca Galam

I was the first
To visit a financial aid office
To wonder why a required course was only offered
 once every two years
To avoid talking to my faculty advisors
While watching my classmates raise their hands
Approach professors with questions
Seek guidance from administrators
With ease
While I sat quietly thinking about how I could get
 myself to do the same

They were the first
To immigrate to America
Paving the way for me
To succeed in a society that was not made for us
People of color
Asians
Fillipino-Americans
Learning different languages and new ways of
communicating
Learning a new way of life
To create a different life for me

I was the first
To be an unpaid intern multiple times in life
To then tell my parents that my salary for my first
full-time job
Was higher than the salary of my father's
Leaving me to wonder how the system
Could possibly allow me, a twenty-two-year-old,
to receive annual salary of \$35,000
As my fifty-one-year-old father with almost triple the
amount of work experience
Received less

They are the first
To see their only child choose to live over 2,000 miles
away
Experience things they could not relate to
View the world in ways they did not understand
Question traditions and familiar ways of living
Because the opportunities offered to a college
graduate
Are not offered to everyone else

I am the first
To own the first-generation college student identity
Only after learning the term as a twenty-seven
year-old
Six years after the first time I graduated from college
To choose to take out even more student loans for
graduate school
Because that's what I had to do to support myself
My dreams
Their dreams

I am the first
To understand that professional spaces
Do not always allow me to show up as my
 authentic self
A woman of color
An islander
A Filipina-American
A first-generation college graduate with two degrees
Who was told that the person in this new role
Should have the characteristics of a white
 cisgender male
And accepting the job because my first-generation
 identity
Made me think it was the only option
The best option
Sacrificing my peace, my wholeness
To prove that I belong

They are the first
To remind me to not shrink myself
To not assimilate to society's expectations of what a
person of color should be
Like they had to
Challenging me to break the mold
To persist
For myself
For those who come after me
For those who came before me

I am the first
To continue navigating systems and policies that
don't allow us
To succeed
To shine
To remind myself that I have already succeeded
Because of my identities
Because of who I am
Because I was the first in my family to learn and
navigate systems that weren't made
For me
For my family
For our community

I was the first
I am the first
I am still the first

Of Ash & Men

Kali G

Hmm... I don't know what to start with
maybe things thought to be myth
like how I felt power-less
with how he made me pant-less
Or maybe it's the feeling of numbness
as a result of his roughness...

Perhaps it was a nightmare, a scary dream,
for someone who ended up playing for the wrong,
team,
Disgust, denial, disinterest,
in being myself
in living my truth
Numerous naked nights sans sufficient sleep
my
unforgiving youth,
Unwanted invasions in my mind from
psychological damage,
Something to add to my pathological baggage
In a constant state of self-blame,
I can't shake the embarrassment,
the shame.
Anything simple has become a challenge, and,
my ability to be intimate is now long ranged,
and,

I still don't know what to start with
 know what to start with
 start with
 with,
With how, I create rungs on my ladder to climb
 out of my pit of depression,
 with how, I actively choose to reach for
 my ascension,
 with how, I embody intimacy w/ my
 partners, my,
 sexual expression,
 with how, I arm myself
 everyday with bullets
 that have the names of
 my dearest Friends

There's depression,
pressing down on me constantly,
making me approach every situation cautiously, Then,
we have ptsd, a friend of mine for over a decade,
forcing me to perform charade after charade
Don't forget fatigue, the kind of tired that lingers,
almost making it feel ok to pull the trigger, BFF,
numbness, never needy, always aware,
sometimes sorry,
invariably intoxicating, The twins,
anger & sadness, that lead to madness; their cousins,
insomnia & social anxiety that at times
feels frightening,
Family friend body shame, that is to blame for
my feelings of
inadequacy that go untamed, Long lost friend,
who is never
lost,
internalized
trans-misogyny
perpetually
perpetuating
my
repression
into
perpetuity

They all fall down

All fall down
fall down
But,

When I miss & their flames awaken,
lick at my heels, threaten to break-in,
turn me to ash, a life forsaken,
I will rise like the phoenyx,
Don't get that mistaken.

I am here, sittin, perched,
Kali G

I am here,
sittin, perched,
mindin my black bidness.
My black senses a tremblin,
a warnin of a war stings
wary nerves
Damaged...

Damaged, waitin
for hope, nerves in
pain - as they look - at
a world, in pain - as they look
- graspin scattered ash
of a world, razed.
Growin.

Growin
dissentin op-
inions openin like
onions, each layer peelin back melancholic
flavors doin yo
eyes, favors.

Favors
of clearin the
debris under the eye, a
necessary medicine required
to see, that wary
nerves might
have hope.

Havin
hope takes
power, another
dimension crossin into reality
- a divine retention -
an energy. Black
Sea.

Black Sea of
Ancestry guides
the tip of my pen
words gaspin, air no longer
waitin to be, heard.
Or rather now,
we fearless.

Fearless.
Never afraid,
of drownin among them -
those that lack the skin i am
in - out here breathin for
free, it's the asthma,
for me.

For me, I
still carry an
inhaler, to breathe. A,
forgotten nighttime practice,
a, blind Meditation.
Placebo pill.
Ration.

Ration:
empty in its,
passin from, hand to hand,
never findin, an open mouth,
too busy tryin, to choose,
who must be,
worthy.

Worthy
of a body of a
mind - all its own - only
worried about its contents.
Time, bittersweet, for-
gives, most trans-
gressions, return.

Return
like OCD
managin pts - with
out the "d" - considerin my
mistakes are never
out of order.
Chaos.

Chaos:
a new normal,
methodizes the self,
to be made, and unmade,
again, and again, findin
more of the hidden,
spirit.

Spirit so
full of fight,
not wantin to waste
time, upliftin souls of others
before understandin;
self-care's always
soul food.

Soul food.
What is soul food,
to a soul, who thinks
he is already full; all too
ready to pass the plate
along to the next
mouth, waitin.

Waitin,
life sustainin
sustenance always
at arms length, never feedin
one's self, forgettin that
hunger, was once
dinner, for one.

For one
turnin into two
- a thought so foreign -
like finally drinkin water
when all you knew was
thirst; survival
in a drought.

A drought
drainin oceans,
collateral damage
when the world is on fire,
burnin with the power
of a much too
excited fuse.

Damage
stings wary
nerves, a warnin of a war
my black senses a trembling
mindin my black bidness
sittin, perched,
I am here.

It's Worth Quitting

Caleb Ohryn

Introduction: I am a quitter, I pride myself on quitting. I have never stuck with an extracurricular activity for more than a few years. Trying things can be scary and quitting them can often be even scarier. Below is a list of all my extracurricular activities and why I quit them.

Soccer (Age 4): Teaching preschoolers to play soccer cannot be easy – we played indoors in what I remember to be a large gymnasium. It was never fully lit up and a few of the lights were always flickering. The team assignments were messy, and it was clear that none of the children even knew which team they were on. There was one component of soccer I enjoyed above all else: having possession of the ball. Very quickly, I discovered a strategy to maximize my fun. Every time I got the ball, I would kick it into the corner of the room and box it in with my feet. While I was having fun, the other kids, trying to kick the ball, would bruise my shins and ankles, but I didn't care. As much fun as I had playing soccer by not allowing anyone to score, something felt off every time the coach reexplained what he thought the point of the game was.

Taekwondo (Age 6-9): For most of my childhood, my

mother was a single parent, and this meant she rarely had any free time. My sister and I both expressed interest in Taekwondo and my mom was ecstatic to make it happen. Taekwondo wore us both out and there was a “dojo” just down the street from our house that hosted classes every day, giving my mom the ample breaks that she deserved. The whole place smelt like sweat and feet, the old wooden floors were warped from the years of people stomping and jumping, and for the amount of Korean flags on the wall, you would have expected to see a few more people who weren't white. It was in Taekwondo that my distaste for authority figures became clear, I made it all the way to a purple belt before deciding I didn't like being told what to do all the time.

Trumpet (Age 9): Every parent eventually tries to either make their kid learn to play an instrument or learn a new language. As our interest in Taekwondo faded, my mother found us a new activity for us both to enjoy. She signed us up for an after-school music program. My sister tried to learn the flute, and I tried to learn the trumpet. The trumpet was not my first choice. I wanted to learn the saxophone, but renting a trumpet was significantly cheaper, so my mom promised that if I stayed committed to playing the trumpet long enough, we could reconsider the saxophone as an option. We would meet up a couple times a week and each time we'd be given different things to practice for the days in-between our lessons. I didn't enjoy playing the trumpet because it only had three buttons, unlike the saxophone which had over 20. I didn't value practicing something I didn't have fun doing, and I didn't have fun because I rarely

practiced. On the occasion that I did practice, I imagine my family didn't enjoy having to hear it.

Lacrosse (Age 10-11): Fifth grade is a hard time to be a kid, with puberty sneaking into my life, I had a lot going on and it was easy to be anxious about unnecessary things. One thing I was anxious about was that all my friends were playing lacrosse without me, and the solution to this anxiety felt simple. We practiced at my neighborhood high school, and my friend's dad was our coach, but those anxious thoughts didn't go away after joining the team. The anxiety ended up not being my least favorite part of lacrosse — in the multiple years I played, I only scored once. Lacrosse wasn't my sport, and even when practicing multiple times a week, I wasn't showing much improvement. I didn't have fun playing a game I wasn't good at.

Rock Climbing (Age 12-13): Middle school made fifth grade feel easy. Our core classes were mixed between sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, everyone was starting to use social media, and we had middle school dances every few months. My confidence was both the highest and lowest it has ever been. After my stepdad cheated on my mom, I took middle school especially hard. I didn't know how to express the emotions I had in a healthy way, so I took pent them up and took them out on my classmates around me. I didn't know how to deal with my emotions, but what I did know was that I didn't want help from anyone. My mom and my teachers decided that it was a good idea for me to find an extracurricular activity I could use as an outlet to express myself. I chose rock climbing, it was a blast. As I started to

climb more, I joined a youth climbing club, which was perfect because previously I had always climbed alone. Everyone at in the youth group was so nice, they offered me all the advice and help that I needed, but I didn't want help.

Cross Country/Track (Age 16): I felt self-conscious about my body and the girl I liked ran cross country, it was a win-win. Until that crush faded and with it so did my motivation to run.

Speech and Debate (Age 18): I love to argue, and because of that, I have been told my whole life by others to join some sort of debate team. It made sense, but I don't like being told what to do, so every time someone told me to join, that was one more reason I used to avoid joining. A few weeks before arriving to my first quarter at college, I got an email advertising the school's speech and debate team. I like to think I made the decision to join by myself, but I know that's not true. I responded to the email saying I was excited to join. As it turns out debate takes all the fun out of arguing, I didn't join debate to be right, but apparently, you're supposed to "form valid arguments and not antagonize the other teams."

Conclusion: I have learned more from quitting than I have from just trying. Too often people equate the value of trying new things with finding something you thoroughly enjoy or excel in, but when trying to find what you connect with, inevitably you will find things that you don't. Learning how to quit is just as important as learning how to try. There's no point in spending your whole life trying to love an activity that isn't for you. Quitting shouldn't come from discontentment

with the activity, but rather it should come from contentment without it. Your worth isn't what you've stuck with, it's your willingness to find something worth sticking with.

They Call It Refugee Camp But I Call It Home

Afrikaan Osman

Disclaimer: As the first person in my family to finish high school or earn a degree, I could not have imagined that I would have the chance to attend Seattle University. Before coming to the U.S., I didn't know what first-gen meant, and I first learned about it when I was in college.

I was born in Somalia, a country in the Horn of Africa, with the longest and most beautiful coastline. However, most of its resources and life go to waste due to government instability. My country is torn apart by a ravaging and ongoing civil war that began in 1991. People die due to war casualties, suicide bombs, hunger, diarrhea, malnutrition, and the poison from the artilleries of Somalia's military arms that victimizes innocent civilians. The war has claimed the lives of millions of Somalis, including my mother's ex-husband, who was shot 47 times due to clan rivalries. My mother, traumatized by this, left her home, business, and belongings, taking only my older half-brother and \$300, which she paid to board a ship carrying thousands of other Somalis who were fleeing the war to Mombasa, Kenya.

On arrival in Mombasa, the ship was denied entry for 17 days. The passengers and the crew ran out of food and water. The ship later caught fire, killing many older people and children, while others got sick and weak. Finally, the U.N. envoy paid money to the

Kenyan government to let the refugees rent farmland on which they settled. A few years later, my parents met at the camp and had my older brother. In 1997, when the number of refugees grew, the Kenyan government announced the closure of the camp and moved the refugees to a more remote location because "they were a burden to society."

Many Somali refugees, including my parents, went back to Somalia in hopes that the war had subsided. They arrived in Mogadishu in January 1997. Everything seemed calm due to Ramadan. Warlords had "agreements" that during the month of fasting, there should be no violence. Despite this, a full-blown war erupted out of nowhere between two different tribes in Mogadishu. People were tortured and terrorized. I was born in Mogadishu in March 1997, a few weeks after the peaceful era had ended. My mother and father had divorced, and my mother was all alone with three kids to feed. Determined to find us a safe place to live, she walked for two days to a city called Baidoba in Somalia lugging a donkey cart under which we (her kids) were hidden. She then arrived in Kenya and was among the first convoys to be relocated to a new camp in the northwestern part near the border of South Sudan called Kakuma Refugee Camp. I was only three months old then.

Although the U.N. calls refugee camps a "temporary settlement" for refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs), I lived 19 years of my life in a camp, long enough for it to become a permanent settlement. As a child, I understood that we didn't live normal lives like the other children. Most of the memories I have living in the camp are happy ones like me playing in the mud after a long-awaited rain to cool the 420C hot weather that we experienced

year-round in the camp. We built small mud houses, ran barefoot to slide in the mud, which would get all over our bodies, and created more work for our parents to clean us. I also remember playing with and carefully observing underground creatures and watching my favorite childhood show, Teletubbies, in black and white.

To earn some money and to survive, my mother would cook and sell food to other refugees and local people. I was my mother's favorite child (or at least I think I was!). She wanted me to become a "Sheikh" (a Muslim religious priest) so she took me to an Islamic teaching school called "Dugsi" that taught me how to recite the Qur'an in Arabic. My teachers were harsh. They could hang students from trees and whip them if they didn't recite the Qur'an well. I remember asking my teacher once, who was a young but scary-looking man, "Where is God, and what does God look like?" The result? Several whips! I shared this incident with my mother, and she decided to homeschool me and my siblings about religion.

My mother homeschooled us until I was about eight years old. This meant less trouble and more safety. It also meant that she didn't have to give us money for food because we could eat at home. During this time, I built a close relationship with my mother and also learned about the role of women in society, especially in the camps, since men usually remained in war-torn zones for pride and at times, to fight or die in the war. I also witnessed how violent and abusive fathers were towards their wives and children in my neighborhood such that I didn't appreciate having a father around. In some cases, they weren't even present as in the case of my mother who remarried and gave birth to my three younger siblings

but my stepfather left and didn't come back for 14 years. My mother was again put in a place where she had to raise all of us on her own.

At a very young age, I became an expert in reciting the Qur'an. I knew all 114 chapters (6,346 verses) by heart. By the time I turned nine, I was already leading prayer sermons and prayer calls. I also had a key to the mosque because I cleaned and slept there at night. I would often go on three-day religious retreats, "Tableek," to the nearby campsites to preach to people about Islam. My mother did her best to keep us all out of camp trouble, including but not limited to violence, drugs, and unwanted pregnancies. Though I was young, she trusted the mosque leaders I spent time with. She shouldn't have.

In 2007, I went on a three-day retreat with other 11-year-olds, an event that has helped shape me into who I am today. The leaders taught us about paradise and the rewards it came with, and the eternal life after death in a wonderful place called "Firdous," one of the seven paradises, as outlined in the Qur'an. On our final day of the retreat, we learned about the need for young people to fight and die in the name of Allah. The next thing I knew, I was manipulated into joining a terrorist and rebel group fighting a "holy war." We were scheduled to leave that evening without our parents' knowledge. I was ready to go but got sick with malaria and instead went home to my mother. The next day, we heard that the other children, who had participated in that retreat with me, had been sent as child soldiers to Somalia by those religious leaders. I was fortunate. My mother's love and a mosquito bite saved me.

Going to school became my only hope to escape violence in the camp and to receive an

education no matter how (overly) crowded the classrooms were or how dilapidated the structures were. In school, I was exposed to different ideas. I learned subjects like Mathematics, English, and Christianity. Though I was bullied a lot in school because I wasn't good at sports, I fell in love with reading books. There were no libraries at the school or in the camp, and my mother couldn't afford books so I bought lots of nuts instead to read little pieces of newspaper they were wrapped in. I was fortunate to be a part of the 3% of students who could graduate with high scores and go to high school, where I learned about European history and memorized names like Vasco da Gama, who was among the first missionaries to explore Africa. Looking back, I wish I had learned an analysis of why they came and how they impacted our history – my history.

As refugees, we weren't allowed to (legally) work in the Kenyan employment sector because we were seen and labeled as terrorists, a burden to the community. Thus, I did not have college to look forward to. I wanted a higher education and a job to earn an income, but those opportunities were not within reach. The gap between the refugees and the host community was wide such that when I worked for a nonprofit hospital that hired refugees in the host community, I was paid 4,000 KSH (Kenyan Shilling) which is about \$40 while my coworker in the same position, a citizen, earned 90,000 KSH equivalent to \$900.

In the camp, I lived among people from more than 28 countries in Africa who spoke different languages and had different beliefs and cultures. I strived to fit in with these communities, and as a result, I gained a deeper respect for different world

viewpoints. I created the Kakuma Youth Leaders program, a youth-built and youth-run organization that focuses on youth engagement and sports for self-improvement. Without any budget, my colleagues and I organized sports events and motivated youth to find their self-worth and their voice. We then documented their voices through social media platforms and created a Facebook page called "Youth Voices in Kakuma." I also began to volunteer for humanitarian agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in doing both administrative and outreach work.

A year later, I was selected by my camp to serve as a youth leader representative for 150,000 youth and children in refugee camps in Kenya. In June 2016, I was selected to participate in the Global Refugee Youth Consultation in Geneva, Switzerland to advocate and to create core policies for refugee youth. In the same year, the Kenyan government announced the closure of our camp so I created an online campaign called "They call it refugee camp but I call it home" to create awareness on how some programs needed to be better designed to help rather than repatriate the refugees.

After a 25-year-long wait in the camp, my family was finally sponsored to relocate to the U.S. as refugees in July 2016. We first settled in St. Louis, MO, amid a BLM movement, anti-Trump campaigns, and women's rights marches. I became curious and inspired to learn more about the history of Black people in America. Through these movements, I learned more about myself because, in Kenya, most of my identity was shaped by the colonial influences of Europeans and Arabs. I started reading books by Black and brown authors, and I began to reflect a lot

on the similarities between my life as a refugee in Africa and then as a Black man in America.

In St. Louis, MO, amidst the BLM protests, for a second, I forgot that I was in America. I thought the resettlement agency tricked us into going to another African country where so many Black people were protesting all at once. Unlike my experience living in St. Louis, in Africa, I witnessed constant police brutality and no one was allowed to protest. I was reminded of the 13-year-old me who was slapped into unconsciousness by a Kenyan policeman, who also took away my money that I had intended to spend on school supplies. I was happy to have come here, to what seemed like the Blackest city in the United States. At the same time, I was sad to learn about the social, political, and economic inequalities in my neighborhood in St. Louis—in America.

I was first reminded I was Black when my brother and I got lost while touring our new neighborhood two days after we arrived in the U.S. We got lost and we asked a young, white lady the directions to Minnesota Avenue; that's where we lived. She quickly fled. I wasn't sure what scared her then. Was it my "broken English?" Maybe it was about my race. My brother and I were once again seen as threats much like how Somali refugees are viewed in Kenya.

My family and I had high hopes of coming to the "United" States. Instead, we experienced a country that was "divided" with every group hating the other. I was caught amidst many intersectional identities: Black, Muslim, refugee/immigrant, and low-income. In 2017, Trump had passed several executive orders that banned Muslims and refugees from coming to the U.S., especially Black and brown people, due to which, my brother, who still lives in the

camp, could not join us. My family was mentally and emotionally exhausted because every day we lived in fear that we may be sent back to our country and/or attacked and killed by Trump supporters at any time.

Through sponsorship from a family friend, we moved from St. Louis to Seattle into a one-bedroom unit that accommodated all six of us. We didn't have any privacy and needed a bigger space. So my brother and I moved into a family-owned van during Seattle's coldest winters while risking attacks by thieves and the police. I was the only one in my family who could speak English at the time so I helped everyone in my family fill out different forms, answer emails, and translate school and doctors' appointments. I also applied for several jobs on their behalf. I was lucky enough to start my first job working at Walmart and was beyond excited to finally start college in 2017. Working full time, taking full-time classes at Seattle Central College, and caring for my younger siblings did overwhelm me.

In college, I was shocked to find out that I was the only male in my ESL class because my perspectives and my worldview were partially shaped by the patriarchal culture I was raised in where women weren't allowed to lead and do what men do. In my 7th grade at the camp, there were 350 students of which only 10 were girls. I later understood that the girls were kept from school to do household chores while the boys went to school. Coming to the U.S. greatly changed my perspective in how I see women now: my doctor, counselor, mentors, friends, and most of my professors are women.

The first six months in college were very tough because I commuted three hours to and from school every day. I only slept for about four hours every night

because of work and assignments and began to use my commute time to listen to audiobooks. I currently listen to about two books a week and that has greatly helped me become a better person.

At Seattle Central College, I ran for student body president to help make certain services more accessible to working students like myself. I ran for a second term and created legacy projects like establishing longer operational hours for the gym and creating spaces and programs for non-traditional students like myself. I led a team of 47 student workers from all over the world and eight student boards tasked with different responsibilities. I also led over 70 student groups and organizations, and we organized over 100 campus events. Additionally, I managed an annual budget allocation of \$1.9 million, through which I learned how to manage finances.

The image of economic depression and the students' lack of information about refugees encouraged me to create the Refugee and Immigrant Student Organization (RISO) and the "Refugee: Walk in my Shoes" campaign in which over 600 students participated. In 2018, I founded tech4REFUGEES, an organization that encourages young refugees and immigrants to be part of the STEM fields, and started a computer crash course for older immigrants and refugees. In the summer of 2018, I developed a curriculum for 40 middle and high-school students and tutored them in Math, English, and coding.

Finally, in 2020, I graduated from Seattle Central College. I then chose to transfer to a university to complete my undergraduate education. I chose to attend Seattle University for several reasons, including the strong sense of community and the distance from

my house. I also got accepted into the Alfie Scholars Program where I've benefitted from the scholarships, personal development, and academic enrichment programs. Through the Program, I've helped create The COVID-19 Civility Pledge Campaign, where I am currently working with youth-affinity groups to create awareness on virus prevention and misconceptions surrounding vaccines.

I'm currently pursuing a major in computer science and a minor in business at Seattle University. I have gone from owning my first computer in 2016 to become a computer scientist in less than five years. Upon graduation, my short-term goal is to attend an MBA program at Seattle University and my long-term goal is to continue working for my organization, tech4REFUGEES, to help change the lives of fellow refugees, immigrants, and the community at large through technology and advocacy.

My advice to other first-gens in high school, college, or university who want to attend a four-year institution is to persist, be patient, and unlearn hurrying. One step at a time for a change. I would also encourage you to take leadership roles, start projects, and join groups to create a community for yourself. There is nothing you aren't enough to do. You are enough and if I can do it, you can too. Finally, be humble, be present, enjoy every moment with students, and explore and learn from the diverse student body in your college and university.

My name is Afrikaan once a refugee and now living my wildest dream of getting a higher education.

About the Contributors

Yasmine Bupe is a communication and media studies major specializing in communication studies and minoring in international studies. She is a happy and proud citizen of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo Kinshasa) where she was born and raised. She has many identities: a first-generation student of color, among many others that she loves dearly and mentions in her piece. Her life experiences encouraged her to dedicate herself to developing and empowering her voice and those of others. So, she decided to create a podcast called "IS and Proud" which talks about Seattle U's international students' stories and the different challenges they experience while studying and living in the U.S. You can tune in on Spotify, Anchor, or Google Play to give it a listen! Jasmine hopes to honor and give back to her community and future generations.

Bianca Galam is a first-generation Filipina-American, born and raised on the island of Maui, Hawai'i. As an educator, she is dedicated to supporting college students and alumni in their holistic learning and development. Bianca is also a Barre3 fitness instructor who strives to create spaces and moments for folx to move mindfully, feel at home in their bodies, and celebrate their inherent strength. Bianca received her B.A. in Business Administration from Saint Martin's University and M.Ed. in Student Development Administration from Seattle University.

Kali G is currently a Student Success Coach with City Year at her alma mater Chief Sealth. Working with her partner teacher who was also her eighth grade teacher, she continues to support students during virtual instruction. Art has been and will always be a part of the way in which she understands the world which continues to be interrogated through poetry and fiction in a chapbook and novel that will be published, eventually.

Caleb Ohryn is from Portland, Oregon and is 19 years old. Caleb has one older sister. Caleb grew up in a single parent household. Caleb has curly hair. Caleb is not super good at being told what to do, Caleb often finds himself arguing just for the sake of arguing, and he like anticlimactic stories.

Afrikaan Osman was born in Somalia during a civil war that forced his family to seek refuge in neighboring Kenya. He grew up in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya. In Kenya, Afrikaan worked and advocated for the rights of his fellow refugees. In 2016, he was elected the Refugee Youth & Children Representative. In 2017, heregistered at Seattle Central College (SCC) and graduated with two A.A.'s in 2020. In addition to being the Valedictorian honoree at SCC, he served as the student body president for two terms. Now at SU, he is currently a junior studying computer science and business. Afrikaan continues to champion his advocacy work in King County as founder of tech4REFUGEES, an organization that aims to spark young refugees to pursue STEM fields. Afrikaan hopes to pay tribute to his mother who ignited his passion to pursue education.

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