

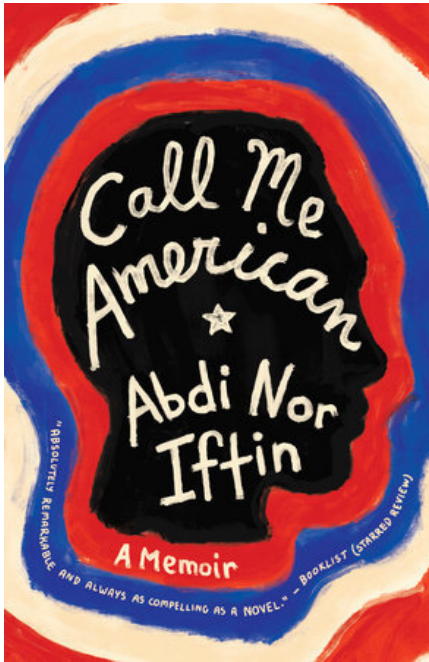


ShelterBox

BOOK CLUB NORTH AMERICA

Call Me American

Abdi Nor Iftin



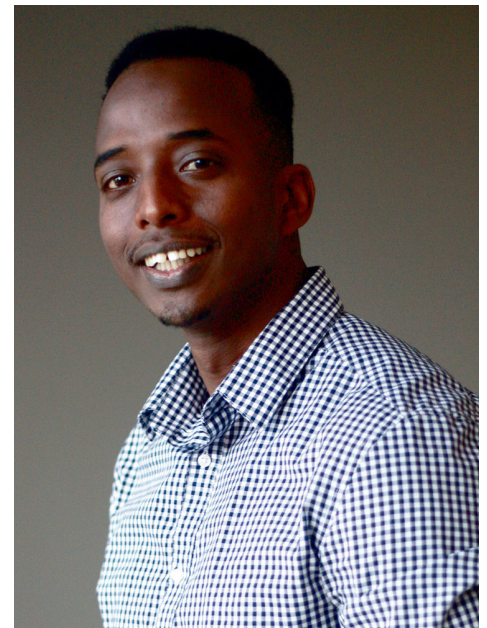
Abdi Nor Iftin first fell in love with America from afar. As a child, he learned English by listening to American pop and watching action films starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. When U.S. marines landed in Mogadishu to take on the warlords, Abdi cheered the arrival of these Americans, who seemed as heroic as those of the movies.

When al-Shabaab rose to power in 2006, it became dangerous to celebrate Western culture. Desperate to make a living, Abdi used his language skills to post secret dispatches, which found an audience of worldwide listeners.

In an amazing stroke of luck, Abdi won entrance to the U.S. in the annual visa lottery, though his route to America did not come easily.

About the Author: Abdi Nor Iftin

As a child in war-torn Mogadishu, Abdi Nor Iftin learned English by watching action movies. When U.S. Marines landed to take on the warlords, Abdi cheered the arrival of these real-life American action heroes. Sporting hip-hop clothes and dance moves, he became known as “Abdi American.” But when radical Islamists took control in 2006, it became dangerous to celebrate Western culture. Instead, Abdi risked his life posting secret dispatches to NPR. As life in Somalia grew more dangerous, he fled to Kenya. In an amazing stroke of luck, he won entrance to the U.S. in the annual visa lottery, though his route to America—ending in a harrowing sequence of events that nearly stranded him in Nairobi—did not come easily. Now he is a proud resident of Maine and is US citizen. Abdi’s naturalization ceremony took place in Portland, Maine January 17th 2020.





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Meet Esther



Esther, Cameroon 2019

40-year-old Esther, from a village in the Lake Chad area of Nigeria, sadly lost her husband when Boko Haram militants violently attacked. “The last thing I remember was that I found myself with people who were also running. Then we reached Cameroon.” Esther and her family arrived Minawao camp safely but were faced with extremely difficult conditions. “We had to live with hundreds or thousands of people, all in the same place for months. It was just unbelievable... I did not know if I would survive, but we had no choice.”

Months later, her family relocated to a tent and was given some essential aid items. “When we received the shelter and the extra items our life changed considerably. We could live as a family and had basic items for our daily life”. However, Esther still struggled to find enough food for her family. “I then decided to do something to avoid this from happening again in the future.”

In her previous life in Nigeria, Esther was a farmer. “I didn’t have any money to start growing so I started fetching wood I could sell until I got enough money [to rent a farming plot].” After every harvest, Esther divides her crops into two, for family and for sale. “I use the money I make to take care of the children, their clothing and treatment when they are sick. Next year I want them to start school,” explained Esther. “I am happy growing plants here it helps my family and we are not as dependant as we used to be.”

ShelterBox in Conflict Zones

ShelterBox has responded to displacement due to conflict many times in the past, from responses in Iraq and Chad. We are currently deployed to camps in Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Ethiopia addressing shelter needs of refugees. Upon arriving to displacement camps, families often stay in large collective centers or have no shelter until private family tents can be provided, if they can be provided. ShelterBox sees a future with no family left without shelter after conflict and will continue to work to reach even more families who have been displaced.



Yi Shun's Discussion Questions

1. Iftin's life is influenced by several American imports: basketball, movies, and Marines. What other foreign influences make themselves apparent in the book? What effect did they have on Iftin and his family?

2. Stories make repeated appearances over the course of Iftin's memoir. How does Iftin incorporate them into the narrative? What effect do you think they had on him as a boy, a young man, and now, as an adult?

3. Iftin's mother, female family members, and other women play a huge role in his upbringing and his view of the world, and yet, the argument can be made that Somalia is a patriarchal society. Discuss the women we meet over the course of the narrative, and the ways they influenced Iftin.

4. The Muslim religion appears as a primary "character" in this book. How does its presence influence Iftin? If you were to write a memoir, would religion play a large role in your book? Why or why not?

5. For a long time, Iftin believes that American movie characters are real. Do you remember a time when you first realized something you thought was real, wasn't? What effect did this have on you? What effect do you think it had on Iftin?

6. Where were you when Iftin landed in Boston? What do you remember of that weekend? What does it mean to you, to know that he was taking such a big step that weekend?



Yi Shun Lai

Yi Shun is one of ShelterBox's Response Team members and a dedicated volunteer. She is also a writer and editor and has been for the entirety of her professional life. She is a co-owner and editor of the Tahoma Literary Review and the author of *Not a Self-Help Book: The Misadventures of Marty Wu* (Shade Mountain Press, 2016). She writes, teaches, and speaks regularly on communication across the board, from business to literature.