

Winnie Kibe

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SPEAKERS

Winnie Kibe, Rimsha Syed



Rimsha Syed 00:02

Hi, this is Rimsha Syed. The date is February 28th, 2021 and I'm here interviewing Winnie Kibe for the Texas Freeze oral history project. So without further ado, Winnie, would you like to introduce yourself?



Winnie Kibe 00:19

Yeah, my name is Winnie Kibe. I am from Kenya, but I grew up in Colorado, specifically Aurora, which is a suburb of Denver. I've been in Texas for about, I think, it's five years now, which is crazy to think [laughs]. I lived in Austin for about four of those years, three when I went to UT Austin, and one up here in the DFW area. So that's where I've been since the pandemic hit. I moved back in with my parents. I am 22, I'm turning 23 May and I am Christian.



Winnie Kibe 00:57

I have been working in a criminal law defense firm for the past year. I'm going to go to law school in August, which is crazy to think that all this is finally coming together. I will be pursuing my JD at Boston College. I actually wanted to start doing law because of just my past experience with racism, with growing up as an immigrant, and also wanting to help communities of color. I've tried various avenues to try and help communities of color, but I think the most effective way would be by pursuing a juris doctorate, at least for me,

because I do want to make institutional changes, which do require some legislative components. I'm currently living with my parents, which has been a hard transition. I'm used to living by myself for the past four, five years. Moving back home was not easy, but I moved up here in order to save money for graduate school and also just to have kind of a safe place to be during the pandemic, which has been a whole story on its own.



Rimsha Syed 02:16

Wow, yeah. Thank you so much for sharing all of that with me. I want to actually jump back in time a little bit and ask if you could describe where you grew up? I know that you mentioned that you're originally from Kenya, so I'm wondering how long you were there and what that was like, if you have any memories of that time in your life, and then, why your family decided to move elsewhere?



Winnie Kibe 02:47

I'm from Kenya, but I was only there for five years, so I don't have many memories of growing up in Kenya. Most of my memories are of Colorado. My parents decided to move to America just because they didn't have a lot of resources in Kenya. My dad was college educated, even in Africa, but he wasn't able to work in the field that he wanted to. He ended up working as a partner in his brother's construction business, but my mom was not educated and was unemployed for the most part. So they decided to come to the US to make sure that my siblings and I had better opportunities or access to better opportunities than they did. Especially my mom because she always felt bad that she was unable to go to school and a large portion of that was because she grew up in a single parent home. Her father died when she was four years old. In order to make ends meet, her mom was always working and was unable to afford education for her and her two siblings. Her mom decided to send, I guess, the brightest to school and my mom was not a part of that, so she always wanted to make sure that her children had access to education, whether, you know, their grades reflected their intelligence or not.



Rimsha Syed 04:06

Right, right. Thanks for sharing. And so, what was the process like of you moving then from Colorado to Denton? And how old were you during that time?



Winnie Kibe 04:18

Yeah so, my parents decided to move to Texas because my dad got a better job

opportunity in the North Texas area. At first, my dad was the first one to move and that was in March 2016. He moved first because he got the job [and] he lived with a family friend in Plano, which is about 45 minutes away from Denton. But that's because he got a job in Plano. My mom and my siblings and I moved in the summer and a large portion of that was due to the fact that my siblings were still in school and I was still in school.

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Winnie Kibe 04:55

My first year of college, I was at a private liberal arts school in Iowa. My mom wanted to make sure that we all finished our semesters before we moved to Texas, just to keep our education kind of uniform and not disrupted. I had wanted to leave Iowa for a while. I wanted to move back to Colorado and go to CU Boulder, but my parents decided that it would be best for me to move with them to Texas. They thought that moving with them would give me more stability, I guess. I didn't quite understand that, but I decided to apply to two schools, UT Austin and Texas A&M. After doing a little bit more research, I found Texas A&M not to be my style. I was not going to move from one small town to another small town, that seemed kind of counterproductive because the whole purpose of me moving was because I felt like I stuck out in Iowa - there wasn't much diversity.

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Winnie Kibe 05:53

There is a lot of microaggressions, a lot of racism, that was also like in your face, which is something I've never seen before. I didn't want to put myself in an environment that would mimic that kind of culture, so I decided to move to Austin and go to the University of Texas at Austin. I thought that it would be more diverse because it has, you know, a lot of people that come from everywhere to work there, and to go to school there, and it's also the middle of the city, which I liked that idea. It seemed like there would be a lot more different types of thought, different types of people, which is something I was really looking for.



Rimsha Syed 06:35

That sounds like an important thing you were craving when you were making that decision to move. So earlier, you mentioned that you went to a private liberal arts school in Iowa. And personally, I've gone to public school my whole life, so I'm just a little bit curious if you can talk more to your experience of what going to a private liberal arts school was like for you?

W

Winnie Kibe 07:01

Yeah, for sure. Well, I guess I'll start with my first day there. The first day on campus, my parents had just decided to leave to drive back to Denver, and I was approached by an older White woman, who asked me what sport I played. Now mind you, I'm five foot one, average build, I don't look athletic whatsoever, so I was kind of in shock because I didn't know what to say. And I didn't realize at first what she was insinuating, but when I sat back and thought about our interaction, I guess she thought that the only reason a Black woman would be in the middle of Iowa and go to the school was because she was on an athletic scholarship of some sort. That was the culture that I was engulfed in.

W

Winnie Kibe 07:50

I was one of two women in my entire political science department at the school. [In] most of my classes, I was the only person of color, let alone the only Black woman in a sea of White men studying political science. I'd always wanted to study political science because I wanted to be a leader. And at the time, I thought the best way to be a leader was to be in politics and to do governmental things. It was really disheartening when your ideas were consistently shut down, your viewpoints unsupported, and when you kind of were drowned out by a sea of opposing voices. I didn't quite enjoy going to a private school in a small town in Iowa because it was really hard to be a person of color. It was hard to exist, let alone study and excel. So yeah, it was very difficult.



Rimsha Syed 08:51

Yeah. I'm really sorry you had that experience with that White woman. That sounds truly awful. Do you feel that you found that sort of diversity and a better environment that you were craving when you did make it to Austin?

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Winnie Kibe 09:11

Okay, oh my gosh, that is a fun question because I don't think I knew what I was getting myself into [laughs]. I knew that the South was racist because of its past and its ties to the confederacy. And I knew that some of that lingered even to this day, but I didn't know how bad it was or that it would be perpetuated by my peers and not by the generations that came before us. I thought, you know, racist mind thoughts were something that older folks carried and that's because of the culture and the time that they grew up. I didn't think that people around our age, who were educated and who lived in a globalized world, in a world where we were able to see all these different cultures, these different experiences, would hold the same values. That's something that really surprised me.

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Winnie Kibe 10:04

When I moved to Austin, another thing that was really off-putting about the city of Austin is that although Texas boasts of its diversity and Austin as the capital, it's one of the fastest growing cities with their population of people of color, especially Black people, declining at rapid rates that you don't see anywhere else. And that's due to the gentrification of the city and of spaces where people of color usually reside, being quickly bought out, or property taxes skyrocketing to the point where these individuals are unable to afford to live in places where their families have lived for years. That was something else that was going on in the background, let alone what was happening on campus. Unfortunately, for me, I transferred to the University of Texas during the height of the Trump campaign, so it was fall of 2016.

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Winnie Kibe 10:56

I still remember one of the most interesting events I was ever a part of - that was the affirmative action bake sale. It was actually put on by one of my classmates. He was the president of young conservatives of Texas, I believe, UT Austin chapter. They put on this bake sale where alleged baked goods were sold to students at varying rates, depending on their race and their gender. For example, White men and women would be buying a baked good for \$1.50, but African American men and women would be buying a baked good for 50 cents. And they claim this is the way that affirmative action worked in our society, granting privilege, undue privilege, to peoples of color in allowing them to, I guess, get the same things that other people have to work harder for, which was completely wrong and just so disturbing.

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Winnie Kibe 11:56

I also saw a lot of things that I didn't expect to see. There were many confederate statues on campus when I first started at UT and they were all taken down. It was actually kind of crazy, in the middle of the night, they just disappeared. And that was a move by the president of the University at the time, Gregory Fenves. It resulted in this uproar of just anger and I didn't understand how people can be so angry at the symbols of hate. It's just racism that were being taken away to kind of make others feel comfortable in the space that they deserve to be in. So it's kind of like I went from racism in Iowa to pure just racist in Texas. Especially Austin, for a city that boasts of its liberal-ness and its commitment to diversity, it's not the experience of a Black woman, specifically myself. It's not what they say it is. It's actually very far from the truth.



Rimsha Syed 13:01

Yeah, I totally agree with everything you just said. As you know, you and I met in an Arabic class at UT, where I also graduated from, so I'm very familiar with the racist bake sale as well as many other terrible things that people of color went through and continue to go through at the University of Texas at Austin. I wanted to ask, what sort of things do you do to take care of your mental health in a climate that's not always conducive to a positive environment? And do you feel like you sought out groups or organizations on campus that maybe did foster a healthier environment in that regard?



Winnie Kibe 13:49

This is actually a really good question and I'm so glad you brought it up. The key to that answer, I believe, is community. As you said, it's the people that you choose to surround yourself with that essentially lift you up when everything else seems to be falling apart - when you don't get the support you need from administration, from faculty, from staff, or even just from the environment that you're in. It's definitely the people that you choose that become your safe guard and I'm so glad one of those people is you.



Winnie Kibe 14:23

Another great space is the Multicultural Engagement Center. I believe you introduced me to that as well. It's a great place for people of color to kind of just group to engage in difficult conversations about what's going on to our communities on campus, and in the state, and in the country as a whole, and even internationally. It forces us to have difficult conversations about how a lot of the things we go through not only meet up on different levels, so the intersectionality of our issues, but also how we can play a part in resolving these problems. And I think a large portion of that is educating ourselves on what we can do. [There] are the different forms of activism, what activism is, and allowing ourselves to have the space to be able to engage these difficult topics. Nothing gets done if you don't understand what's happening and how to resolve it, and if you don't give yourself the space to process it and determine that this just isn't right, and we don't have to stand for that.



Rimsha Syed 14:24

Me too [laughs].

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Winnie Kibe 15:33

I'm really grateful of the Multicultural Engagement Center. I'm grateful of the organization that I was a part of within that center, which was Students for Equity and Diversity. I learned so much through their leadership program and beyond that, by just being an officer. I was logistics officer, so I was the wedding planner of the group. I worked to put together a bunch of events, make sure that logistically, everything would come together all right, that we had food, we had guest speakers, panelists and such. And I loved my job, I loved being able to see the smiles that the students of color would have when they would leave. I'd love to see the difficult conversations that we would have in that space. And I would love to see all the growth that would happen because we don't understand that our power is in knowing how to liberate ourselves and others and also just being aware of how similar our experiences are. I am really grateful for that space.



Rimsha Syed 16:38

Yeah, community is definitely very important and I'm really glad that you played such an important part in the Students for Equity and Diversity organization. I personally don't know how I would have made it through those four years of undergrad without my friends and, of course, being part of those progressive orgs that you just mentioned.



Rimsha Syed 17:00

I want to transition a little bit and talk about what you've been up to since graduation. And we did graduate in the same year, 2019, which was well before the pandemic hit. I kind of want to know what you've been up to since before the pandemic and then when the pandemic started.

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Winnie Kibe 17:24

It's been a crazy two years, which I can't believe it's been two years, we're getting old [laughs]. After I graduated, I started a one year fellowship with UT Austin. It was a development fellowship, which development is just fundraising in higher ed, and it was not for me. I spent a year raising money for the University of Texas at Austin. At first, I thought it would be a great opportunity. I gained a lot from being in that space. Although it was difficult, I feel like I learned a lot, I grew a lot, I was able to gain a lot of opportunities that I might not have gotten at other institutions. So I wanted to pay that forward. And I thought that the best way to do that at the time was to work in development. Plus, it was a great opportunity, great benefits, and the pay was nice. I would travel all over the state of Texas, meeting with various alumni, and racking up funding for all sorts of different programs -

because I worked out of the annual giving office, I didn't have to raise money for a particular school at UT, I could raise money for any school. I would raise money for business, for natural sciences, engineering, liberal arts, all sorts of things, and also special programming, such as summer programs for high school students and such.

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Winnie Kibe 18:43

Unfortunately, the job started to wear me down. There's not a lot of people that look like me in the development office, so it was very difficult meeting with older, wealthier alumni, who come from generations where these racist beliefs kind of can just be said outright. I wasn't used to that, you know. I'd seen protests and I'd seen microaggressions and I'd seen individuals do some interesting things on campus, but I never had someone sit across from me and tell me that UT Austin discriminates against White men, which was a very interesting conversation that I did have with an alumni. Other conversations I had where the Board of Regents granted a certain amount to be put into an endowed scholarships to help lower income individuals go to UT Austin without having to pay tuition and a lot of the alumni were actually upset about that - something that was very disheartening.

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Winnie Kibe 19:46

You would think that if you had to work hard to go to school, you'd want somebody else not to have to do that, so that they can focus all their attention on studying and being the best that they can be. Unfortunately, that's not what a lot of the alumni that I encountered thought. They would have rather had individuals work hard like they did and struggle and not be able to have the best possible academics in order to kind of earn their degree, in some way, is what they thought. I completely disagree with that train of thought. And because of this, these constant ideas that I had to engage with, that I didn't agree with, that also were hurtful and offensive, not just to me, but to a lot of the individuals that I work with, I started to suffer from burnout.

W

Winnie Kibe 20:34

I decided that that was not the path for me. I wanted to advocate for others. And I thought raising money was a great way to advocate for others, especially young people, who are pursuing an education, but it didn't turn out to be what I thought it would be. After that, I actually just quit my job on a whim in June and I decided to move back home. It was the height of the pandemic, things were getting crazy in Austin, my lease was almost up, and I decided I needed a change because I couldn't do another year of the job that I was doing. I moved back with my parents, up here in the DFW area and I decided to start studying for the law school admissions exam.



Winnie Kibe 21:19

After living through Trump's America and seeing how inefficient and ineffective our government was, I wanted to believe that maybe I could be a part of those that were actually working for the people, working to make things more efficient, and working to roll out legislation that would actually benefit people. I decided that maybe my form of acts of activism would be to pursue a legal degree in a legal career, where I can help individuals that way because raising money wasn't working out. I studied for the LSAT, I took the LSAT once in June, no July, and then again in October, to try and raise my score. And then I applied to various law schools. I got a new job in August after months of applying. Now, I work at a criminal defense firm in Colleyville, which is not too far from Denton, and I have been accepted into multiple schools now. I am looking to commit to Boston College, I think it'd be the right place for me. I'm super excited to be moving out East. I'm hoping a new city, a larger city, and a lot more people will just add to all the different reasons why I want to go into this work. I plan to pursue a career in public interest. I want to fight for the people, especially those who can't afford legal counsel, majority of which happen to be Black and Brown people. I hope to make a difference in these communities and work to give them access to opportunities that they wouldn't have had if they didn't have someone fighting for them.



Rimsha Syed 23:07

Yeah, that's a great vision and I wish you the best of luck in Boston.



Winnie Kibe 23:13

Thank you.



Rimsha Syed 23:15

I want to transition a little bit. So as you know, Texas went through a polar vortex earlier this month, during which many cities saw inches of snow for the first time in history, actually. I wanted to ask what was that time like for you and your community over in the Denton area?



Winnie Kibe 23:40

I grew up in Colorado, so I'm not a stranger to snow or to ice. But when I tell you I have never encountered anything like this. I'm so serious. This was about as close to a nightmare as you can get when it comes to winter weather. It started snowing on Sunday.

It started snowing that Sunday, I can't remember the specific date, but we had about four or five inches of snow. It seemed like it was going to be fine. It was cold, but I wasn't too worried about it. Sunday night, we lost power and we did not have power until Friday morning. It was horrible. The temperature in our home dropped to well below 50 degrees. We had water, but it was a concern because we kept on hearing of individuals losing access to water or having pipe bursts, so we would leave our water dripping all the time.

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Winnie Kibe 24:40

There was no way to heat ourselves up. We barely use our gas fireplace, so when we did decide to turn it on, our carbon monoxide detector went off. We couldn't use that anymore because we were at risk of falling ill or just dying from carbon monoxide poisoning. There was no food in any of the stores. My dad and I would take incremental trips to grocery stores to see if we can get canned goods or stuff that doesn't need to be cooked because obviously, we don't have power, so we couldn't cook. There was nothing. All the sandwich meat was taken all the bread was taken. It was a nightmare.

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Winnie Kibe 25:21

I remember one day, I believe it was Wednesday, we woke up and I started crying because I felt like it was never going to end. I was in layers - two pairs of pants, two long sleeve shirts, a jacket, socks, a hat. I was wearing a mask because the air was so cold in our house like my nose was starting to hurt because of the air. I've never encountered anything like that. And we also have pets, so we have seven chickens and a dog. My dog, Chewy, was so cold. He was wearing socks, boots and his long pajamas to try and keep him warm. We had to put blankets on the chicken coop. We nailed them to all the sides because they just have netting on the sides of the chicken coop, so that the chickens can be able to see and it never really gets that cold, so we never really need to cover them. But we had to put blankets all over the sides of the chicken coop to keep it as insulated as possible. They had a heating lamp in there that we had installed. We kept it on all the time, but whenever the power started rotating - so it would be on for 40 minutes and off for an hour - the chickens would get the lamp on for 40 minutes, but then for an hour, they wouldn't have any heat. When I tell you, we'd have to change the water every 30 minutes because it would freeze, so they can drink water from their water bowl, that's how cold it was. I know they were very cold and I felt so bad for them, but there wasn't much we could do. We couldn't open the garage to let them in because there was no power. It was a nightmare. I have no words to say what the state of Texas went through that week. It's so unfortunate.



Rimsha Syed 27:11

Right? Yeah, it was a pretty awful time. I know that thousands of families are still recovering and will probably spend the next few weeks if not months if not years continuing to recover from damages and everything else that went on. I wanted to ask, were you and your dad worried about driving through the snow given that we didn't have anything like snow plows here in Texas the way that maybe you and your family were used to having back when you lived in Colorado?

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Winnie Kibe 27:46

Yeah, for sure. I actually forgot to talk about that. There's just so much that happened that week, it's hard to remember it all, but we were horrified. I learned that the entire state of Texas has 37 snowplows. That's ridiculous. There was people with snowplows coming from Minnesota to come and help clear out the streets in Texas, which unfortunately wasn't enough. And when they did get here, there was no gasoline for whatever reason, the gas pumps had run out of gas. It was just this cyclical effect where people would come to try and help but then they couldn't get the energy necessary to power their vehicles to help.

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Winnie Kibe 28:24

The roads were horrible. It started off bad that weekend because there was an over 130 car crash in Fort Worth because of the ice. And then it just digressed to the roads were just not cleaned. They didn't have enough plows, they didn't have enough salt to put on the roads to try and help with the ice. It was actually really scary when my dad and I were driving out to try and get groceries. He had his four wheel on in his SUV to try and help, but the roads were really bad. We'd have to drive at 15 to 20 miles an hour just to try and be safe. Unfortunately, Texas residents aren't used to that kind of weather, so they're not equipped to drive in it.

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Winnie Kibe 29:05

We saw a lot of cars on the side of the road that looked like they had spun out. There were a lot of individuals who were unable to control their cars on the road while we were driving, so it became dangerous for us - not because of my dad's inexperience in the snow because he's a very great driver in the snow, but because other people weren't used to that type of weather, or being able to drive in those conditions, or didn't have the cars who are well equipped to do such. It was actually really scary. We came to an intersection when we were trying to pull into Kroger and when my dad tried to stop his car, it wouldn't stop, so it just kept on going and going and going, it would slide, oh god, it was horrible.

Luckily, there wasn't anybody there, so all we did was hit the curb and then we were able to pull into the parking lot, but it was treacherous.



Rimsha Syed 29:56

That sounds really terrifying. I remember just choosing not to leave my house or drive at any point because I've lived in Texas my whole life and definitely had no experience driving in the snow. I was not ready to leave my house.



Rimsha Syed 30:13

Another thing I wanted to talk about is the boil water notice. So in Austin, we had a boil water notice for a couple of days, but no running water. I actually ended up walking to my nearest gas station, which was also very slippery, to get some crates of water, which cost me around \$50, which is pretty ridiculous. I also remember having to go down my very icy staircase to bring up buckets of ice to boil and use that to fill my toilet tank, so that it would actually flush. And then [i'd] use some of that other water to maybe water my plants or wash some dishes because I didn't want to burn through that bottled water I had bought because I had no idea how long the boil water notice would last or when we would get our running water back. Do you have any similar experience related to like a shortage of water in your house?



Winnie Kibe 31:20

Yes, so we didn't lose water, but we were under a boil water notice for about four days. It was getting dicey because, as I said, the stores didn't really have anything. So what me and my mom did on Wednesday morning is we went and we collected all the snow that wasn't walked on and we put it in pots. Every single pot that we had in our house was filled with snow. We got one of these big bottles of water that we just had an empty big bottle of water in the garage, and we started filling it up with any of the boiled snow that we had. That's what we were using to give the chickens water and to wash our hands, and if you needed to brush your teeth, and if you needed to wash any dishes. We would try and boil the water in the sink too, but anytime we boiled the sink water, it left like mineral residue at the bottom of the pot. It was really weird, so I'm not quite sure what was in that water. It scared me and my parents, so we decided maybe that wasn't the best to use for consumption. We'd use that if you needed to quickly wash your hands.



Winnie Kibe 32:27

We saw that the snow water was running out. It was turning into a situation that you wouldn't imagine would be happening in the United States quote unquote, you know. It was hard and we would try and conserve water. I'm not gonna lie to you, I didn't shower for about five days and that was also hard, but you got to do what you got to do. Laundry was piling up. We couldn't do laundry, but that was like the least of our worries. There was a point in time where brushing your teeth was like a nightmare because you had to try and use as little water as possible. One day, I actually tried to wash my face with a water bottle and thought I was gonna drown because the water started going in my nose [laughs]. I never thought it would come to that. When we were boiling snow water, it was pretty bad.



Rimsha Syed 33:26

Yeah. So what did you and your family do during the nights when you didn't have power for about a week?



Winnie Kibe 33:34

Yeah. It got real cozy up in here. We had to get into one room and share the bed because we needed to be warm.



Rimsha Syed 33:44

Right. I spent the majority of that time just sleeping, hoping that things would be better when I woke up, but what did you do to really pass the time?



Winnie Kibe 33:57

Honestly, I would try and read, but my mom didn't want me to use the flashlight up. After that, I would just sit around. It was just a waiting game. There wasn't much I could do. I would just sit around, especially in the evenings because after 5pm, it started to get dark. And all we had were candles and some flashlights and my mom didn't want us to use the flashlights up because what if we had an emergency and we needed to go outside, obviously, it would be really difficult to see outside with a candle. All we had in the house was just all the candles, which by the way, made our house smell horrible. My mom has this like obsession with Bath and Bodyworks candles [laughs]. We lit all of them [and] the smell in our house is still lingering. I don't even know what smell this is, but it's just a combination of every single candle we had.



Rimsha Syed 34:47

Yeah, yeah. I remember being afraid to use my phone because I didn't want the battery to run out in case there was an emergency and I needed to contact somebody. That was a struggle, I feel, not staying connected with my friends and family.



Winnie Kibe 35:05

Yeah, for sure. I don't know if you experienced this, but I think cell phone networks were cutting off service when your power was down. At least that was the experience up here in North Texas because my phone was unable to make calls whenever our power went out. But when the power was on, I could make calls and send text messages. It was really weird and this isn't just in my house, it was something I've heard from my co-workers and also from my boss that their phones were unable to make calls. So I didn't understand what you were supposed to do in an emergency if the cell phone service was also being cut off, which was really bizarre.



Rimsha Syed 35:44

So what do you think went wrong with the infrastructure and grid system that we have here in Texas?



Winnie Kibe 35:52

Well, we can start with root problem. Texas is the only state on its own electric grid. They do that in order to avoid all that comes with federal regulations. That's the root problem. What happens up north when a state was concerned with losing power is other states are able to channel some of their energy to that state, which is what other states were offering to do to Texas. Unfortunately, due to the fact that Texas is on its own grid, they couldn't give Texas any power because that requires a whole entire setup. There was no way for Texas to get power from anywhere else.



Winnie Kibe 36:31

Also ERCOT, the company that runs all the energy in Texas, they advised all the cities to equip their power centers and their facilities with winter preventative measures, but it wasn't required, it was only recommended. And because Texas doesn't usually have harsh winters, they didn't do it. It's also a lot of money. In order to save money, they didn't do it. Our facilities are not equipped to be able to provide power in extreme temperatures. And finally, Texas homes aren't built to be well insulated, so they're unable to keep heat inside,

which is why a lot of people's houses were dropping to extreme temperatures, like 25 20 degrees.

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Winnie Kibe 37:18

Obviously, that'll cause your pipes to explode because that's below freezing. And water plants were unable to have power during this timeframe, so they were unable to filter and make sure that the water was clean. Therefore, people were unable to drink water and they had the water boil notices. So it was like this whole kind of domino effect starting from being on our own grid that kind of just trickled down to every single system, not just power wise, but also water wise, and then insulation wise, resulting to burst pipes and just a bunch of stuff. It was horrible.



Rimsha Syed 37:52

Yeah. I personally feel like it took President Biden way too long to finally declare this a national emergency and have FEMA come out with water and resources.

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Winnie Kibe 38:06

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. They should have been there the moment we lost power. They should have been there the moment we didn't have water. But instead, they waited until the power was back for wherever it was available and water was back for most people for them to react, which is just another example of the inefficiency of our government.



Rimsha Syed 38:28

Yeah, I feel like the majority of Texans were really relying on community resources and mutual aid groups to do all of the work that our government should have been doing for us.

W

Winnie Kibe 38:40

Which honestly is not surprising. It's what's been going on for the past year as well. During the pandemic when the government has been unable to provide economic and also just health care support to individuals. Communities have really been the ones grouping together to help each other.



Rimsha Syed 38:57

I couldn't agree more. I hope that Texas doesn't get hit with another snowstorm ever. But if it does, do you have any recommendations for Texans moving forward from this?



Winnie Kibe 39:11

Yeah, so I also hope that Texas doesn't get hit with another winter storm, but because of climate change, that's unlikely. I believe this will be something that will become more common than it should. My recommendation would be to invest money in upgrading our electrical systems to make sure that this doesn't happen again - winterizing our electrical systems and also rejoining the federal power grid. That way, if something like this ever happens again, we can get energy from neighboring states such as New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado [and] Arkansas to be able to support ourselves. I would also recommend that Texas starts requiring homes to be built with insulation, insulation that's able to withstand extreme temperatures. That way, even if we do lose power, in whatever case, we're able to stay warm inside our own houses. And finally, I would recommend that Texas starts adding some sort of driving course in preparation to get your license that deals with driving in extreme weather conditions such as snow and ice.



Winnie Kibe 40:19

Because though, it doesn't snow often in the DFW area, it does ice every single winter. And people aren't required to learn how to drive in that, which to me is kind of counterintuitive. Why would you give someone a license when they're unable to drive in conditions for a couple months of the year, you know? Those would be my recommendations. Finally, I just encourage the people to kind of take a look at what's been going on not just with this ice storm, but with the pandemic, and start critically analyzing where their help is coming from and start looking at what resources have been there for them and which ones haven't. Because I feel like it's pretty obvious who's been there for us and who hasn't been there for us. I don't think the government is a source that we can rely on anymore. It never has been, but it's just become very evident within the past year, year and a half.



Winnie Kibe 41:08

I would encourage individuals to look at that and start working together to kind of tackle the inefficiency of our government systems and our leaders and hold them accountable. Because while we were struggling here in Texas, one of our leaders was in Cancun. It's the truth, you know? He unfortunately, Ted Cruz, decided to blame it on his children, which

made it a whole lot worse. Take responsibility for your actions as an adult. There's no way your 10 and 12 year old kids bought a plane ticket to Mexico, booked a hotel, and forced you to take them. You played a part in that, you left your constituents when they needed you the most, you showed your privilege as a leader, being able to use state resources to be able to escort you to the airport. Then escaping a situation that literally hundreds of people died in for the betterment of your own family instead of doing your job as a civic leader, as an agent of the state and agent of the people. So I just encourage everyone to take a look at who's been there and who hasn't because it's very evident who's taking care of us and who's not.



Rimsha Syed 42:29

Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I would have hoped that our elected leaders could have at least informed us about what was to come at the very least, but that did not happen. So we were kind of just thrown into a situation that literally no one knew how to navigate whatsoever.



Rimsha Syed 42:52

I do want to take note of the time and make sure we're not running too late today. But before we close things out, I wanted to ask if there was anything else, either about yourself or the winter storm, that you'd like to mention? Any closing thoughts that you might have?



Winnie Kibe 43:11

I guess my last thought on the winter storm is that the power outages and the water outages definitely disproportionately affected peoples of color. I just want to make sure I touch on that because it wasn't an equal distribution of power outages or an equal distribution of water boil notices and such. There was definitely communities that were hit harder than others and those communities were targeted due to race and socioeconomic status and I just wanted to touch on that. It's sad because communities that are already struggling the most due to a global pandemic, due to the economic hardships that have come as a result of the pandemic, had to encounter this difficult winter storm that wrecked havoc on their lives, their households, and their properties due to the inefficiency and ill preparedness of our government and our state. That now, they're stuck in worse financial and health situations moving forward that could potentially affect them not just for a couple months, but years.

W

Winnie Kibe 44:26

The damage that's been done to all the properties that were really hard hit, the pipes that were burst, the electric bills that are going out, these are serious things. These are things that are going to ruin some people's lives. It's so unfortunate because our government doesn't have a plan on how they're going to assist these people moving forward. And finally, I'd encourage people who have been impacted by the storm to look into the resources that FEMA has. I know that they are covering some portion of repairs to homes and businesses. I would also encourage them to look into getting on fixed electric plans, more energy plans. A fixed plan basically means that you pay the same rate all the time, no matter what. A lot of people are on varying rate plans, unknowingly. So your energy bill is adjusted according to what's going on around you, also in addition to how much you use. Try and get on a fixed rate plan if you can get on that, so that moving forward, you can protect yourself and your household.



Rimsha Syed 45:37

Yeah, thank you for that advice, Winnie. I'm really glad that you mentioned it. It's really important to take note of which communities were affected most throughout all of this. Thank you so much for taking the time to be part of this project. It was really lovely speaking with you today. I'm gonna go ahead and stop the recording now.

W

Winnie Kibe 46:00

Okay. Thank you so much.