

Sola Akinola

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SPEAKERS

Sola Akinola, Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz

- V** Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:04
Today is August 4, 2022. My name is Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz, and I am an oral history fellow with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life working on the Gone to Texas oral history project. I'm in Oakcliff, Dallas, Texas interviewing Sola Akinola. Sola, can you introduce yourself, share your pronouns, and share where you are located today?
- S** Sola Akinola 00:25
Sure, yeah. So yeah, my name is Sola Akinola. I'm living in Grand Prairie currently. My pronouns are he and him. Yeah, that is me.
- V** Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:43
Thank you. Where were you born Sola?
- S** Sola Akinola 00:47
I was born in Arlington, Texas. Arlington Memorial Hospital, I believe.
- V** Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:56
And where were your parents born?
- S** Sola Akinola 00:59
They were born in Nigeria. I don't know, I don't remember where exactly, but it's in Nigeria I know for sure. Near Lagos, I believe.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:13
When did your parents come to the US?

S Sola Akinola 01:19
Sometime in the early 80s. I don't know the exact year, but it was early 80s sometime.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:29
Did they come to Texas first whenever they first came to the US, or did they make a stop anywhere else?

S Sola Akinola 01:39
No, it was just Texas. They came here straight to Texas.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:49
And how and where did your parents meet?

S Sola Akinola 01:53
Ah, gosh, they met - I believe it was a boarding school. I don't remember where though. Cause I know my dad was - so he was born in Nigeria, but he was raised in the UK. But I believe my mom had a different experience, but I don't know for sure. But I do know I believe it was at a boarding school at some point that they met.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 02:32
And how old were they?

S Sola Akinola 02:34
How old were they?

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 02:37
How old were they?

S Sola Akinola 02:37
Yeah sorry. They were - I don't remember the exact age. This was elementary school age. Like eight or something.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 02:59
That's neat. So do you know why your parents chose Texas? Was it that they had community here already? Or some kind of connection or family member here?

S Sola Akinola 03:11
I'm not entirely sure why they specifically chose Texas, cause I don't believe they had any family or community here. Because I know my - let me think. One of my uncles and aunts, I believe they were in New Jersey. Was it New Jersey? Somewhere out there. They were not here in Texas. I know that for sure. But they didn't have any community here at the time. So I don't know why they specifically chose here.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 03:56
How has immigration affected your upbringing?

S Sola Akinola 04:02
Oh boy, looking back at it now, I felt very isolated just from everyone and everything. Both from my parents and from the classmates, schoolmates that I grew up with. Because my parents for the longest time up until fairly recently, they never really shared a whole lot about where they came from. So I grew up knowing very, very little about them. Even now, over twenty years later, I'm only now starting to learn more about them. So from that end, I just didn't know much about them, and as a result I didn't really feel anything sort of connection to my culture, my country of origin, my parents and my family even. I didn't feel that sort of connection to them.

S Sola Akinola 05:11
And then on the other end, as far as like being an American, I didn't feel too connected with that either for a multitude of reasons. Not the least of which being the myriad of microaggressions that I - either microaggressions or just flat out racism that I was exposed to on a sadly regular basis. So it's just growing up, it's made me feel just kind of alone. I could never really connect with anyone or anything. I didn't really understand the world around me. I didn't understand the people around me. Because nobody told me anything, or nobody wanted to tell me anything. No one wanted to be around me. And so it was just very isolating and very, very confusing I think.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 06:27

Thank you for that. Can you share what a typical day looked for you whenever you are growing up Sola?

S

Sola Akinola 06:36

Yeah. So that's changed a lot over the years. I kind of see it as different eras, basically. So we moved to this current location Grand Prairie, because when I was born, we lived in Arlington. And I think we moved to Grand Prairie when I was turning four. Yeah. Spring of 1997. So I don't really remember anything before that. Most of my memories growing up was living here in Grand Prairie. So I remember I went to daycare. I remember that, and then I would come home. And there wasn't really a whole lot going on at that point. Because I remember my brothers were in school, and I don't know, we didn't talk too much at the time I don't think. There was a lot of - either they were out and then I was here, or I was gone and they were here. So there wasn't a lot of interaction there for a while.

S

Sola Akinola 08:09

And then I started school or kindergarten more specifically. And that was when I started interacting with my brothers a bit more. Trying to think. I had afternoon kindergarten, so I remember I would wake up often with my twin brother, and then we would just watch cartoons in the morning, and then we would just go to school. Our mom would drop us off. So that was kindergarten. And then I remember first through fourth grade was when my mom started her childcare business. But that started at home. So we would have children I think just from around the neighborhood, just locally, they'd come and hang out at our house.

S

Sola Akinola 09:04

And I remember that was, to go back to a previous question with how immigration affected my life, that was - it affected me in that sense, because I remember some of the kids didn't particularly like my mom, because she was a very strict person, very strict parent. Both my parents were. I often didn't get along with the kids either for various reasons. It was more of that isolation, that not being able to connect with anyone. So that was something that I had to deal with pretty regularly for those few years up until when I was nine, when my mom finally got her own building. So she moved the daycare over to that building.

S

Sola Akinola 10:10

And so from that point, it was a pretty quiet but sheltered life. My parents were strict, so we weren't really allowed to do much during the school year. We'd go to church not even every Sunday. We were pretty sporadic about that. There was some years where we'd go regularly, other years where we wouldn't. But that was a thing that we did. I remember, yeah, just like I was saying, our parents were pretty strict. We couldn't really go out of the house much. We

couldn't invite people over that much. It was just school then home, school then home. And that got pretty tiring. But that was something I just had to grow up with. Not very interesting, but yeah.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 11:17

Thank you Sola. I understand. My mom was a teacher too, and so it does put you in some odd circumstances with peers. So you mentioned that your mom ran a daycare. What did your dad do?

S Sola Akinola 11:34

So he worked for Conway as part of the logistics team. He worked a lot with computers, I know that, and a lot of just electronics in general. He, oh gosh, I remember. He was gone for work. He would leave super early in the morning, seven, before seven, and then he wouldn't get back until almost eight at night. He's already a pretty emotionally distant person as is, but the fact that I barely got to see him, or at least early on, that certainly didn't help matters. I know his schedule changed a fair bit as the years went by. It was a lot more generous. He would leave a bit later in the morning and then come back earlier in the day, so he wasn't gone for twelve plus hours. But yeah, that was definitely a thing that I guess he did for a good few years after we moved here to Grand Prairie.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 13:05

Thank you Sola. That's interesting. I hadn't really heard about this before. But I'm noticing a little bit of a knocking noise every once in a while. Just so you could be mindful of it. I'm not really sure what it is. It might be that, whatever that was.

S Sola Akinola 13:22

Yeah, it's this bed frame. Sorry about that.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 13:27

That's okay.

S Sola Akinola 13:28

I'll try to move so that it's not - that's better.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 13:35

Okay, great. So you said that you have a twin. How many brothers and/or sisters do you have,

and is there anything special that you remember or would like to share about them?

S

Sola Akinola 13:50

So I have three brothers. I'm the youngest of four, two older brothers and an older twin brother. Anything special? I mean, there's a good few things that come to mind. But one thing that I really like about our relationship is that we have a lot - and I mean a lot - of inside jokes and references that we've just continued for years. And I mean over two decades at this point. We still just reference it to each other, and it's just funny how we still remember it now. We still keep the joke going for over twenty years now. So there's that. I know my oldest brother was, albeit indirectly, responsible for the reason why I'm a musician today. The reason why I play all the instruments that I play and the reason why I do what I do as a musician is indirectly because of him.

S

Sola Akinola 15:07

And as well I know - so another thing that I cherish about my siblings that we all at some point used to draw comic books. And this goes back to the whole inside joke thing. We used to draw comic books. It started with my oldest brother, then I saw him doing it, and I thought that was so cool, and so I started doing it, and then my twin brothers started doing it too. And then my second oldest brother got in on the action a little bit. My oldest brother stopped after a while. Me and my twin brother, we kept going for a good while, for a good few years. And it's just something that he and I, my twin brother and I, that we still talk about every so often. We talk about our characters, and what they do, and who they are, and whatnot.

S

Sola Akinola 16:15

And it's just interesting to think about how over the years these characters in this world that we all that we built for ourselves, just how they relate to each other, how they've changed, how they developed. We all created this world, each of our worlds, we all created our own worlds, and they've linked with each other. And they've changed, and all these characters have changed and developed over time. So I really, really love how we created this thing for ourselves, and how even though we don't necessarily draw the comics anymore, the characters are still very much alive. The world is still very much alive. The story, it's all still there in our hearts and minds as generic as that sounds. But it's so true. It's still there. It's still very much alive, and we've still you still kept it going strong even after - how long has it been? Twenty years, twenty plus years? At least twenty years. So that's something I really, really cherish and appreciate.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 17:29

That's beautiful. Your family are so creative. Let me see. So where did you go to school and elementary, middle, high school, and did you happen to have a favorite subject or a favorite teacher?

S

Sola Akinola 17:48

Yeah, so I went to elementary school at West Elementary, literally just around the corner from where I live. I can see from my bedroom window. My favorite subject, at least in elementary school, is probably science. It varied just throughout grade school in general. My favorite subject, it varied. So I liked science a lot. I think I also, once I got into orchestra, that definitely was my favorite. PE was - I had sort of a love-hate relationship with it. When it was fun, it was fun, and when it wasn't, it definitely wasn't. So that was West. Junior high, boy I hated junior high. But the saving grace for junior high was orchestra again. I really loved orchestra. I loved my teacher Mr. Sunder. Easily one of the best teachers I've had in all my years of going to school, college included. He was just, I don't know, he was a really chill, really nice guy. Had a wonderful sense of humor. I just really, really loved him.

S

Sola Akinola 19:18

So yeah right, middle school. I went to Barnett Junior High, so that was that. High school I went to James Bowie High School. Favorite subject, let me think. French, I loved French class. Again, I loved orchestra. I loved tennis. Is that everything? Pretty sure that's all the classes I really loved that stood out to me at least. Yeah, yeah, those were my favorite. Favorite teacher actually in high school. I loved my English teacher Mrs. Monajami freshman year. My French teacher junior year - did I have her sophomore year? I think I had her sophomore year. Madame Comeaux-Scott I think her name was, because she got married at some point, so she changed her name. Let me think, who else? That's all that comes to mind. Most of my teachers are pretty good. Oh yeah, my English teacher junior year Mr. Wood was also good. But yeah, most of my teachers were good in high school. They were all pretty good, but those were the standouts, I would say. Yeah.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 20:42

I'm glad that you had multiple favorites. So where did you go to college, and what did you study while you were there?

S

Sola Akinola 20:51

So I went to the University of North Texas. Initially for my first two years, I studied music. I wanted to be a music major. I wound up not really liking it for a couple of reasons, so I switched my major to linguistics with a minor in Japanese, and that's what I got my bachelor's in.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 21:31

And I know that you speak Japanese, are there any other languages that you speak, and are any of them associated with your parents origin?

S

Sola Akinola 21:44

So I speak, or at least I spoke French. It's sort of fallen off a fair bit since high school, but I've

retained a surprising amount of it, considering it's been over a decade at this point. And actually, on that note, I think there's a good number of French speakers in Nigeria, and my parents actually know a little bit themselves. Of course, it's not their native language, but it is something that they are a bit familiar with. I've been trying to learn Yoruba, which is language that is actually associated with where I come from, where my parents come from. Many attempts were made, I still haven't gotten around to it. Because I've asked my parents a few times if they could teach me, and they just didn't. And they have their reasons. They've mentioned why. But I've tried to learn it from them, and then I've tried to look up things online, and I did find one thing. I found I think this language partner exchange program with Yoruba speakers, so I look more into that. But yeah, currently, I don't actually know any Yoruba except for maybe a few phrases and words. I know a decent amount of French, and I know conversational Japanese.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 23:26

How did you learn Japanese?

S

Sola Akinola 23:32

I learned it at UNT, University of North Texas. I learned it just by taking classes. And since I've left, I've mostly been trying to self-study, largely by watching - well aside from anime, I watch a fair bit of that. But even aside from that, I've watched a lot of content creators and streamers online who speak Japanese. So I just I watch their videos, I watch their streams, and I take notes on things that I've learned from watching them and I just try to keep all that in mind.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 24:23

Earlier you mentioned that your parents had their reasons for not wanting to teach you Yoruba. Do you feel comfortable sharing those reasons? And you don't have to if you wouldn't like to.

S

Sola Akinola 24:34

Yeah, yeah. I mean basically, they - and I think this is probably just the reason why they were so hush-hush in general about their history before coming here. The reason they cited was that they just wanted, I guess, life for us, for their children, for me and my brothers to be easier. And they didn't want us to struggle as immigrants. I guess they just wanted us to be a bit more Americanized so that we can fit in more with people around us, so that we don't have to struggle the way they did when they first came here. So yeah.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 25:35

I understand. Whenever you were growing up, did you do or participate in any community events or organizations, or did your parents?

S

Sola Akinola 25:46

I don't believe I did, at least not as far as I can remember. There was that church. Well, no - well yeah, okay. Sure. There was a church camp that we did a couple of times over - I think this was when I was in high school - that we hosted here at our house. But other than that, I don't think I've done anything. My parents, on the other hand, as well as my uncles and aunts, they started their own organization. I believe it's called the Ekimogun Association. I don't know what it's about. Exactly. I don't know what they do. I do know at one point, they gave a scholarship to one of - one of the members, one of their sons was going to college, and they gave him a scholarship to go. I think he went to Baylor. But other than that, yeah, I don't really know what they do.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 27:23

In that you mentioned that it was related to church activities, do you have a certain denomination of church that you attended, and can talk more about the importance of that religious experience to you as a child and now?

S

Sola Akinola 27:46

Yeah, as far as denominations are concerned, I think we were nondenominational. I don't think there was one specific denomination that we adhered to. But I do know that the churches that we went to were primarily for other Africans. Not just Nigerians, just African immigrants in general. But those are the churches that we went to growing up, and I remember, I guess it helped me, at least a little bit, make some sense of the world. Because as I mentioned earlier not knowing anything about myself or about anyone else, that felt pretty isolating, but I at least had that sort of faith. And that helped sort of give me some comfort as well as some sort of insight as to how the world works around me, how people operate around me.

S

Sola Akinola 29:05

And I guess growing up, like now - I mean, faith is something that my faith is something that I've held onto, but it's just something that's more of a personal thing now, I guess. I'm not terribly open about it, just because I've grown very, very distrusting of other Christians over the years. So it's something that I hold onto myself that it brings me comfort. And really that's just it. It just helps me, it gives me something to hold onto when I'm confused or scared or anxious. But that's about it. Yeah. [pause] I think you're muted.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 30:20

Thank you Sola. You said that the church that you attended wasn't just for people of Nigerian descent, but just Africans in general. Did you find any comfort or do you have any stories you could share about your peers who also had African parents? Because I could imagine that might be a nice thing to have peers who were going through similar experiences.

S

Sola Akinola 30:47

Let's see, I don't think I met anyone at that church who had peers who were of African descent. There were two people that I remember meeting pretty early on in my childhood. One, we went to pre-preschool. We were best friends, and his parents and my parents, they were also pretty close. They were friends with each other, and then his son, or their son - so his name is Kunle. So Kunle, me, and my twin brother, we were all just best friends. I remember we even had our own handshake. I can't remember how it goes anymore. But I remember we had that for us. And he was a really good friend of mine. But I remember after that, we didn't see each other again until late-ish high school. We wound up going to the same high school together, which was cool. I think at one point I had found out that we went to the same middle school, but I never saw him. But yeah, we went to the high school together, and we had a class together, and yeah, that was our first reunion in I think over ten years at that point, and that was really sweet.

S

Sola Akinola 32:25

And then to take it a step further, in college, his sister and I were in the same dorm hall. He had a older sister, and her name was Sola. So that was, wow, that was pretty crazy just how all that worked out. So yeah, that was pretty cool. I haven't spoken to her in a while though. But yeah, that's one person that I met who had a pretty similar experience as I did. Now, I remember another kid that I met in first grade. What was his name? Dapo, I think. So we were friends. But he was sort of one of the popular kids, which I guess is a thing even as early as first grade, but whatever. He was one of the popular kids, so as such, there were points where me being the weirdo unpopular kid that no one cares about, sometimes he was sort of distant. He would distance himself for me, because he just doesn't want to be seen hanging around with me.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 33:54

I think meeting your childhood friend's sister who also had the name Sola is really interesting. Could you talk more about your name, and also, is it common? So that way people understand why it was amazing that you met someone else who also had that name.

S

Sola Akinola 33:54

But we were friends except when we weren't. So that was just interesting how just despite -that contrast. He too was I think a first generation or second generation, I forget the term, but his parents were immigrants from Nigeria. So it's just that contrast of experiences where he's one of the popular kids, and I am on the other end of that spectrum. Yeah, that's pretty funny to think about now, but I haven't I haven't seen him since first grade. I think he wound up going to the same school, the same high school that my cousins went to, so it was interesting to hear from him in that regard. But yeah, those are, I think, some of the other kids that I've met whose experiences were similar to mine.

S

Sola Akinola 35:34

Yeah, so Sola, or at least my name Sola, is short. It's short for Olufeyisola which itself is a phrase

that means "God gave this to us as wealth." So that was sort of the naming convention that my parents went with. So me and my second oldest brother both have a name that pretty much mean the same thing. "God gave this to us as wealth." Whereas my twin brother and my oldest brother - so my twin brother's name is Sayo and that means "joy," and his full name is Olufeyisayo which means "God gave this to us as joy." And my oldest brother, his name is Ayotola which I believe means something similar to that. I don't remember. I know ayo means "joy." So yeah, basically, point being, that was our naming convention, wealth and joy. Oh Sola, I didn't even say, Sola means "wealth." So wealth and joy is basically what all four of us are named after.

S

Sola Akinola 36:55

As far as being here in America is concerned, Sola is definitely, definitely not a common name. From what I understand, it is a fairly common name in Yoruban culture. It's not like John or anything, it's more like a, I don't know, like a Steven or something. It's not top tier common, but it's not far from it either. So it's crazy to me that not only did I run into someone pretty strongly associated with my young childhood, but it's just someone that I hadn't seen, because I only ever saw her I think just in pre-k and that was it. Running into her in college was just pretty crazy, because I just never would have - basically at that point I forgot she even existed. So running into her and living in the same dorm hall no less was pretty pretty crazy for me. It was mind blowing. But I was happy. We were pretty good friends, and I think she graduated at some point, and we haven't spoken a whole lot since. But yeah, it was a good time just getting see here and reconnect there.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 37:10

While you were in college and now in your adulthood, could you share any organizations that you were a part of in college or now?

S

Sola Akinola 38:55

Give me just a second. [background noise] Supposed to stay muted, I am so sorry.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 39:39

It's okay Sola. So the question was, did you participate in any community events or organizations in college, and are you still participating in those organizations or any new ones in your adulthood now?

S

Sola Akinola 39:56

Let me think. So I remember being a part of a couple of Christian organizations. There was Student Connect, there was FOCUS [Fellowship of Christians in Universities & Schools], and then there was Mars Hill. There were those. And aside from that, I mixed and mingled with a lot of other ones. There were some video game ones, video game-based one. There was an anime

based one. There was a Japanese culture-based one. That was it. I'm not really a part of any of those nowadays, but that's what I did during my college years. And I guess, technically - so I'm a part of an orchestra, the Mansfield Philharmonic Orchestra, which I did join during my college years, specifically grad school. And that's the only one that I'm still a part of even today. In fact, our rehearsals will be starting back up pretty soon in September. I don't remember when our concert is though, but it's either late September, early October, something like that. So that'll be that. Yeah, that's pretty much it. I'm just a part of that orchestra, not really any part of any other organization.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 41:07

What historic events have had an impact on your life and how, if any?

S

Sola Akinola 41:52

I'm so I am - this is something I think about from time to time, and it's so weird. I don't know if it's because I'm just straight up lucky, or if it's just the result of just me always - I don't get out much, but I haven't really been directly impacted by any historical event. Even COVID, the worst thing that's happened to me there is that I got laid off. And even with that, the crazy thing about that, right, is that I got the job right before the shutdown. So I was working from home for just that whole time, and things are going pretty well until they weren't, I guess. Then I got laid off. That's really it. I've not really been impacted by anything just my whole life as far as historical events are concerned. Even climate change the way it is hasn't really changed much about my life, except for the fact that I hate getting into my car because it's so hot. But yeah, no, I haven't really been significantly affected by any sort of historical event yet.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 43:41

You mentioned your work life. So what do you do for work now?

S

Sola Akinola 43:46

So I teach. I'm a private lessons teacher. So I teach violin, viola, and cello. I've been doing that. I think I started doing that November 2020, the same year of COVID of all years, which again, it's just weird how even COVID hasn't really stopped me much. But anyway, so I teach at a music studio. I teach students of all ages. The youngest student I've ever had was three. The oldest, I don't know how old she was, I think she was at least sixty. So I teach anyone who's willing to learn pretty much. And aside from that, I've recently started doing private gigs. So I'll play for weddings or birthday parties or even church services. Anyone who's willing to have a musician play music for any amount of time. So I do that, I've been doing that on the side. So yeah, that's about what I do currently.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 44:58

That sounds like a lot of fun. Let me see. So what goals do you have for yourself in life Sola?

S

Sola Akinola 45:12

Yeah, this is something that I've mentioned once before. Well, not necessarily to anyone in particular, this is something I've thought about, I guess I should say. So for the longest time, my goal was to go back to Japan and become fluent in Japanese, with my end goal of joining the localization/translation team of Nintendo. So either work for Nintendo here, Nintendo of America, or Nintendo of Japan. But just certain events, especially this year. Because I worked at Texas Instruments earlier this year, and then I lost that job. And just my experience with that job, working that job and then losing it made me realize that maybe working for Nintendo probably isn't my thing. Corporate life just isn't really my thing. Because I think I work best, I'm my best self when I can do something that I love, and on my own terms. I guess it seems pretty obvious now in hindsight, that's kind of a no-brainer. I feel like that could apply to pretty much anyone. But it took me so long to realize that.

S

Sola Akinola 46:57

But all that being said, I'm not entirely sure what my end goal is at the moment, since I've gone back to the drawing board, so to speak. Because after losing that job back in February, I believe, that Texas Instruments job, music has since then slowly been making its way back into the forefront of my life. Because after I dropped it as a major at UNT, it was largely on the backburner. It was just something I did on the side as a hobby. But it's been slowly taking over my life again. So right now, I've been focusing on keeping that momentum going. I want to continue what my younger late teens, early twenties self started, and I want to finish these music projects that I had shelved for years. I want to continue teaching people music, teaching people how to play music. And I just want to continue sharing my love for music with everyone. And I think just continuing on that momentum, I'll have a much clearer goal of what I ultimately want, if it's not that specifically.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 48:38

That sounds like a great goal to have. Can you share about a moment in which you experienced discrimination, and how did it impact you, and any actions that you might have taken in response to it?

S

Sola Akinola 48:56

Oh sorry. Could you repeat that?

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 48:59

Yeah, sorry. The mailman came by.

S

Sola Akinola 49:04

Give me a second. [pause] Okay, sorry. Interruptions. Go ahead.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 49:19

Okay. Could you share about a moment in which you experienced discrimination, and how did it impact you, and any actions that you have taken in response to it?

S

Sola Akinola 49:34

Yeah, so I think so. First thing that came to mind is sort of a minor thing that I had forgotten about for the longest time up until a few months ago. When I was in kindergarten - so you know how people in America spelled mom as m-o-m, and then people I think most everyone outside the US, they spell it m-u-m? Well, so I spelled that as the latter, m-u-m. And so when I was in kindergarten, I remember my classmates giving me such a hard time about that. I basically changed the way I spelled it. I just assimilated myself into that spelling. So I had spelled it as m-o-m. And then I remember just a few months ago, I just recently randomly remembered that, and I was like, "Huh, that's not right." So I started spelling it as m-u-m. I'm even trying to make a concerted effort to regain that part of me. So yeah, so there's that. It's a small thing, but it's something that I think was worth mentioning.

S

Sola Akinola 51:07

But I remember some other things. I remember this one specific moment that came that comes to mind. So when I was in high school, it was during lunch or lunch period. So it was me, my twin brother, and two friends. We went to a Kroger that was just down the street from our school. So for context here, right, me and my twin brother are the only obviously Black kids among the four of us. We have one other friend who is Black, but he's extremely light-skinned, so it's not immediately obvious that he's Black or African-American, but he is. And then the other friend is Latino. So just keep that in mind. So we go to Kroger, and there's this rule at our school that you can't bring off-campus food on the campus. So I think we were joking about as long as we put it in our pocket, no one will notice, right? And so I wasn't around them at the time. At some point when we were in Kroger, we had gotten separated. So I was on my own and my twin brother and my two friends were elsewhere, right? So I was doing my thing, they were doing their thing. And I think what they were doing at the time, was seeing what they can fit in their pocket, which made it look like they were stealing, but they weren't. So we we left the store. I don't think we bought anything ultimately, but we left the store.

S

Sola Akinola 53:12

And then we were stopped by two police officers. And they decided that they were only going to check me and my twin brother. They didn't even bother checking my other two friends. They only questioned us. They had no reason to question me. I didn't even do anything. It would have made some sense if they just questioned my twin brother, because I think he was the one who was trying to fit stuff in his pocket, but even that wouldn't have made a whole lot of sense. But the fact that they only questioned the two obviously Black kids was, yeah, pretty on the nose there. But that's something that I remember. The thing about that is that I didn't realize

what had happened at the time. I didn't realize what was going on until many years later when I looked back on it. But yeah, that's that's something that comes to mind. And then just aside from that, I remember just some jokes that people would make, some remarks that people would make. Yeah, just jokes and remarks about the color of my skin and my culture and things like that.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 54:44

Thank you for for sharing Sola. I really appreciate it. I know it's some important to document but terrible that it even happened. So considering all of that, have you your views about living in the United States changed over time? And if they have, how would you describe that change?

S

Sola Akinola 55:07

Yeah. Sorry, give me just one second, my mom is calling me. [pause] Okay, there shouldn't be any more distractions. I'm so sorry.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 55:58

Okay, so the question was have your views about living in the United States changed over time, and if they have changed, how so?

S

Sola Akinola 56:13

They most certainly have. Again, alluding to an earlier question, me being isolated from everyone and everything, I didn't really understand the world around me. But I was often, just from the media that I consumed, from my classmates, privileged classmates and teachers alike, I had it hammered into my brain that America is the best country ever and yada, yada, yada, no racism, blah, blah, blah, land of opportunity, all that good stuff, right. And so that's what I believed. Even if I tried to question otherwise, I was called out for it. So yeah, that's what I was - I just accepted that as the truth for the longest time. It wasn't when I finally left for college when over the years, finally getting out of that bubble, finally not being sheltered, I came to realize that, oh boy, that is so not true. Or at least that's what I've come to believe. Just everything that I had learned about living here, everything I learned about the US, or at least was taught was so, so wrong, so outdated.

S

Sola Akinola 57:53

I don't know. It's made me pretty frustrated. I don't know, there's so many things about my childhood that I just look back on, and I just get really upset. And that's one of the things that makes me really upset, and it makes me not look back at my childhood very fondly. It's that sort of living this lie for so long, just realizing that there's all these issues going on, all these issues that I personally experienced. For example, with the profiling that I had mentioned earlier with going to Kroger. I didn't even realize what had been going on as I mentioned

because I was taught that racism is over, blah, blah, blah, that's not a thing anymore. And so whenever I experienced that, it wasn't obvious to me what was actually happening up until years later.

S

Sola Akinola 59:08

And so just experiencing things like that and other remarks and jokes and just other experiences that at the time weren't immediately obvious to me what they actually were, and then looking back at it now, it's just really, really made me upset with my experience living here. Because it's one thing to have to experience that on its own, but the fact that I was so blissfully unaware of the implications of all of that, it's just very, very frustrating to look back on, that I was going through so much, and I just accepted it as this is just a fault of my own, instead of the fault of the culture, the society that I live in. It's fueled my low self-esteem, my self-hatred, and all that stuff. I've worked so hard, and I've come so far to unlearn all of these things and to unlearn all this self-hatred and all that, but it's just frustrating that this was a problem for so long, and it's hurt me for so long, and I was so unaware of it.

S

Sola Akinola 1:00:41

But yeah, made me a lot more cautious about the media I consume and the people that I hang out with, the people that I meet. And I don't want to say it's made me - 'cause for a time, it definitely made me a lot more cynical. But I've been working past that, too. But yeah, it's been a rude awakening, to sum it up. Just leaving home and being in college, it's helped me realize a lot of things. So yeah, I think that's where I am right now.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:01:34

That's a lot to realize Sola. Yeah, a lot to metabolize and process, but thank you for your responses, very thoughtful. So this will be the last question of the interview. So you know this is a recording that others will hopefully go back to in the future as a reference. So knowing that, would you like people to know anything else about you? Or is there any message that you would like to be remembered by?

S

Sola Akinola 1:02:09

I don't really know. Well, I mean, it's important to me, I think, I don't know what importance it will be to anyone else. But I think it might inform some of the answers that I've given in this interview, but I am both autistic and I have ADHD. And as someone who's experienced both, well, as someone who is both, who is this neurodivergent, it's made it that much more difficult as the son of an immigrant to fit in. I think that that right there was just yet another layer that I had to work through to understand myself and understand the people and the world around me. And just the discrimination and racism that I experienced growing up, it was yet another thing that I didn't realize about myself until pretty recently, actually. So it's another thing that took me many years to finally realize about myself and about my experiences growing up.

S

Sola Akinola 1:03:41

So it's just made me realize that I definitely lived a pretty - what's the word? Not cultured, privileged, there we go - a very privileged life growing up. I won't deny that. I definitely won't. But even though, I had a lot of privileges growing up, it still wasn't easy. Because again, I was a son of an immigrant, my parents were pretty distant from me, so I didn't really have that sort of emotional connection to them, nor did I really understand much about them or about myself, and I struggled being that outsider, as far as culture is concerned, and then just being an outsider as far as being a neurodivergent is concerned.

S

Sola Akinola 1:04:43

So just something, I guess, that I'm working on now is just still learning more about myself because that's what my journey has been for these past couple of years: learning more about how my life as an immigrant has informed a lot of my decisions and a lot of my upbringing, as well as how my life as a neurodivergent has affected me and how it will continue to affect me, as well as what I can do to live with it, to continue working with it, as opposed to against it. Basically, I've just been coming to accept myself for who I am after being confused and rejecting myself. And that's the journey I'm on right now, and that's where I am in that just learning more about myself and accepting myself and coming to terms with all of it.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:05:53

Thank you so much Sola. I really enjoyed this time with you. And yeah, I love that you were able to participate in this project. I really do appreciate it.

S

Sola Akinola 1:06:05

Thank you for having me.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:06:06

Yeah, of course. Well, I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording now.