

## FABRICE YOBOUA

Hello, my name is Fabrice Yoboua. My father is from the Ivory Coast and my mother is from Haiti. I've lived almost my entire life in Toronto.

### A CHILD OF IMMIGRANTS

My parents immigrated to Canada to study. My mother studied Education while my father went into Engineering. This is an immigration story in which the people were a bit more fortunate than most other immigrants. We know that some people come here as refugees. We were quite blessed.

Growing up with immigrant parents was quite an experience. Most people speak of a generational gap. When you have immigrant parents, there is also a cultural gap. There was a lot of trial and error on their part because they were learning the culture at the same time as I was. Because they already had a certain understanding of how culture is supposed to work, sometimes there were hurdles. So, growing up in Toronto, in my family, well, let me give you an example. My parents had a very specific idea of what a student was. We were sent to a Catholic school so we had to wear a uniform. My father would insist that when we went to school we had to wear our sweater tucked into our pants and the necktie had to be properly tied. For him, this was a mark of pride. We had plenty of discussions at home, trying to convince him that this was not how the uniform was actually worn. And that yes, we could go to school to school in civilian clothes, change there and even take off the sweater without it being the end of the world. For my father, how you present yourself is very important. We would often have heated discussions on how long our hair was, if our beards were too long, if our clothes were not tucked in properly, because that was the way he was raised. So the way we would dress at home, wearing pants that were a bit loose, or even walking around in a more relaxed manner, would become sources of tension and the subject of family discussions.

### ON RACISM

In high school, specifically, there were a lot of occasions for discrimination. I was a student who did well in school. I think everyone has heard people make comments like... if you do well in school, you are not really Black. I heard a lot of these types of comments, from several people. From my friends who were Black, but also friends who were not Black. That was very hard for me and because it was stereotyping, it was very difficult to deal with.

I remember the first time someone hurled a racial insult at me. He told me: "Yes you, you're as black as poop." I remember that moment, and I remember that the teachers at school reacted appropriately. However, I remember that it was the first time that it stayed with me. I also remember that it took me a really long time. I remember feeling I had really been attacked, really set apart. This is something that takes a really long time

to regain confidence and forget the fact that you don't... A racist attack is something that sets you apart from the group. It took me a really long time to get back in the group, because I had been singled out of the group and that had hurt me a lot.

#### IDENTITY AND CULTURE

For myself, I often define my identity based on my circumstances. For example, if I am with a group of Quebeckers, I will define myself as being a Franco-Ontarian. If I am with Anglophone friends, I may define myself as a Francophone or maybe a Franco-Ontarian. It varies a lot.

The way we celebrate culture at home is through gatherings. When I was very, very young, my relatives lived far away. We were living in Toronto at the time. I had relatives in Montreal and in other parts. We would get together during family holidays, Christmas and Easter, and we would have really big meals. People would come, we would eat and we would listen to stories. Stories about how things were in the country, stories about the challenges of integrating. As the stories were being told, meals would be being prepared: attiéké or alloco with sardines, my mother's rice and peas.

#### ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

If I was young, and from a family where I think my parents cannot understand because they are not from here... Find someone you can talk to, because it is very important to be able to find resources. One of the things that will happen is that, when you keep everything bottled up inside, you will miss out on opportunities. So find someone you can confide in, someone you can go to, someone you can talk to. Also someone who can act as a mentor to you. Someone who has gone through it, who can tell you: "OK, this is what you do here. At this age, you need to get a job because later, if you want to become a doctor or lawyer, they will want to look at your résumé." This might be something that your immigrant parents might not know, someone who might be able to help you not miss out on opportunities and someone who can help you share your experiences.

#### FIN DE LA VIDÉO

*Fabrice recently completed his Master's degree in biochemistry at the University of Montreal and now teaches science to youth from disadvantaged communities through the 80, ruelle de l'Avenir initiative.*