

Sajjad Jaffery

[Start of recorded material]

[01:00:03:23] My name is Sajjad Jaffery. I was born in Toronto, Ontario. My parents moved to Canada in 1989 from Karachi, Pakistan.

In the beginning

[01:00:18:02] Both my parents were born in Karachi and obviously living in such a large city and such a diverse city, they had to grow up with a lot of economic and political tension. The reason that both my parents had come here was due to the fact that they already had family settled here. My father decided that he wanted a better life for himself and for his family.

[01:00:37:05] My father and mother were people who were both very large believers in education and on expression and on honest and humble work. So they felt that Canada was definitely a place to start that and start a great family for that.

Adaptation

[01:00:53:16] I don't feel that my parents had large difficulties due to the fact that they were both educated at the time, they were both well spoken with English and were literate. I think that probably some of the major concerns that they had were definitely adapting to a new society, a new culture and definitely raising a family in an every-changing country.

[01:01:12:22] My father had always kind of dreamt of becoming an architect but it never worked out for him in the favour that he wanted it to. But I think one thing that I've learned from my father and one thing that he stands by is diversity of education. So although my dad come from a totally different background, he was fine with wherever he worked. Working in places such as 7-11, Rogers Video, and today I'm happy to say that my dad is a highly professional man in Scotiabank.

Enacting Change

[01:01:42:11] A lot of the time when I'm doing things, when I'm reflecting on some of the stories that I hear, I want to give back to my community. It wasn't until high school where I really started to think about what I wanted to be passionate about. And what I was passionate about was connecting people and helping people who couldn't help themselves.

[01:02:05:02] So in grade ten, I had the opportunity to start my own non-profit organization by the name of the Dunbarton Peace Project. My mandate was to help

people through small changes, in the end, to create bigger changes. We did that through micro financing, through building classrooms and bathrooms in different schools all across the world, from Pakistan to small villages in Ghana, to areas in Palestine, to areas in Israel.

[01:02:32:15] There was no limit to where we could go. There was really none of that. I was also really involved in my environmental council and very involved in my school community. It's something that I really enjoy doing.

A child of immigrants

[01:02:49:05] There are definitely a lot of stories looking back into my more extended family. My grandmother is a big inspiration for a lot of the work that I do today and the passions I have. My maternal grandmother was actually the second female flight surgeon in all of the world, the first in Asia. Despite the fact that Pakistan is an Islamic country where women weren't given the most opportunities, she was still able to avail of what there was for her and become very education and very passionate about what she did.

[01:03:23:02] I've seen my grandmother actually with my own eyes treat people on the streets of Pakistan where people are very impoverished and very unhealthy. Seeing those types of things from my family directly and from my heritage is definitely, again, a great factor of who I am today.

[01:03:39:20] Everyone has to have some uniqueness in them and I think that a lot of people mistake that difference and uniqueness as a negative thing. I feel that culture adds a uniqueness and culture as a positive thing. Being a child of an immigrant, it allows me to share stories that my parents have told me, share language, share religion, and show my society and my community that I am different and I come from a very diverse and rich background.

Defining identity

[01:04:09:18] I feel that Canada is a place where culture and differences all come together and create bonds and create unity. The way I celebrate my culture, since I am my own unique individual, I feel it has a large part to do with the way I walk out, the way that I'm passionate about different things. So I think that it's less about celebrating it, but rather more about who I am.

On giving back

[01:04:36:14] I feel as though my biggest resource growing up was the community that I was surrounded by. Being an able body, being someone who is somewhat educated today, I owe a lot to my community. And through that, I feel that giving back not only

to my local community, but also to my international community speaks a lot. Because empowering people is the only way we'll progress.

[01:04:57:14] It's obviously very enlightening, inspiring and uplifting to hear different people's stories. I know that a lot of the things that I did was from listening to people's stories, but it may never be the case that everyone has a family that supports them the way that I did. If I'm able to be that support for some people, then it's definitely a plus.
[01:05:16:11]

[End of recorded material]

Sajjad is studying cell and molecular biology at the University of Toronto Scarborough. He was recently awarded the TD Canada Trust Scholarship for Community Leadership.