I like to think that my parents were star-crossed lovers. They weren’t meant to meet or even start a family together, but they did it against all odds. My father was born in Somalia, and he struggled greatly growing up. His entire family was executed in front of him and he was forced to flee his home. My mother was born in Kenya but was raised in Tanzania. She didn’t face much hardship, she grew up in a wealthy family with six older brothers. Because my father didn’t meet any of the expectations my mother's family had, my mother left her family. He was poor, uneducated and didn't have the right reputation. She would rather be poor with someone she loved, than be rich and lonely or married to someone she abhorred. Her family would have set her up with a wealthy man, from the same tribe, that came from a well off background and she would have lived the rest of her life lavishly and lonely. They met young and fell quickly in love and would later have four kids together.

I was born on a rainy day in Nairobi, Kenya. My dad has always called me his little angel. When I was a newborn, I had a really bad case of jaundice, which almost killed me. He told me that he would stay with me for as long as he was allowed, telling me that it was okay if I let go. If it was my time to die, if Allah wanted me with him, I could leave. They would be fine without me, at least they got to meet me. I eventually got better and was able to go home, but I wasn’t the same afterwards. Both my parents can say that after that near-death experience I was different, something was off. Before my illness, was a very loud baby, always crying, always seeking attention. But afterwards, I was quiet, rarely cried and just stared at everyone. Observing the world. They shook it off, thinking that it was normal and continued with life. Though in the back of their minds, they thought that this was a bad omen. The first of many that would convince them to pack their lives and immigrate to an entirely new country, knowing nothing of the people or place. They had another girl when I was two years old, not long after she was born we came to America.

Coming to America was a whole new experience to me. I didn’t want to come here, I was perfectly content with staying in my home. My parents actually tricked me and told me that we would only be gone for a week, that it was a small vacation. Me being the naive child I was, agreed and followed their lead. Looking back on it now, I know that they made the right choice. If we had stayed in my life would be completely different from how it is now. I would probably be married off right now, maybe with a kid or two. Living a life I would hate and thinking about the what if’s. I know for a fact that I wouldn’t have continued my education past middle school. I would be forced to leave school and work to help support my family.

I’ve lost a considerable amount of things, but gained plenty more. I lost my culture, language, family and identity. Because my family was learning English, that’s all we spoke in the house, I was still learning my language so this overload of a new one caused me to lose my native tongue. I came here at such a young age, I was still learning my own dialect, I slowly lost my dialect. I can no longer speak to family members or communicate with them because I no longer know the language. This caused me to question who I was as a person. I was an African that could no longer speak her native tongue. Language is a part of your identity, it’s a part of who you are as a person. How you communicate with others makes up a big part of you as a person.

Not knowing who I was as a person takes a toll on you. I was always questioning what my purpose in life was, and because of this I would question everything. Little things that wouldn’t matter, such as if I was too awkward? did people want me around? am I not wearing something appropriate? is something wrong with me? I would especially question myself in social settings. This would continue to get worse as I got older and would deter me from going to social events or hangouts. I thought that these types of thoughts were normal, that everyone had them. Though everyone had them, the feeling of panic I had in large groups or crowds weren’t necessarily normal. I later learned that I had social anxiety and that was an explanation of the panic attacks I would get. My entire seventh grade summer, I would have anxiety attacks and panic causing me to have a panic attack, I thought that I was dying until I learned this.

Looking back on my life I have realized that I have lost and gained many things. I lost my culture, language and sense of self, but I gained a new culture, a new language and learned so much more about myself as a person. If none of these events were to have happened to me, my life would be completely different. If I didn’t reach the brink of death, my family may have never wanted to move to America and with that I wouldn’t have the opportunities I have today. Coming to America, I have the opportunity to learn about the world and many cultures. I have learned what I am and not capable of, I learn something new every day. So although I lost my family, I gained a new one. Some may not be of blood relation but I am loved the same. I will constantly be searching for who I am and my purpose in life, but isn’t that the great adventure of life. Learning and experiencing amazing things, in search of yourself. I will lose and find myself multiple times in my life, but I know that no matter where I am, I will always be found by the ones who truly love me.