

# GROWING UP

# SOMALI IN

## AUSTRALIA by Samira Osman 10D

### A spin-off story to Alice Pung's *Growing up Asian in Australia*

Growing up Somali in Australia was never something that made me feel out of place. Until my first year at school at Heidelberg Primary, which you probably think is the typical place for a Somali to go to and it was. The school was inundated with cousins, distant relatives, family friends and others from the nearby community. It was the ideal school to be at and ultimately at the time, seemed like my home away from home.

Until my second day of school I had never considered myself to be different from anyone else. However on this day, two days into my school life, I remember being assigned to groups in order to color a large-scale image. The purpose of the task seemed to be teaching prep students all about cooperation and working in large groups. So there we were, completing the colored image of a cartoon until only his face remained. One of the girls in our group asked me to pass her the skin colored pencil but little did I know what she meant by this. Naively, I passed to her a darker shade of brown and until this day, have never forgotten the looks on my classmates' faces. Giggling ensued and I was told rather contemptuously that she meant "not that colour, the real skin color!"

Growing up in a Somali household rich with culture, three key aspects seem to stand out: your *Qaabil* (tribe), your proficiency in the Somali language and more importantly, your ability to make a good cup of *Shah* (tea).

Around the world, tea is important beverage. It's what we use to welcome our guests with, what we offer anyone who comes to our home. However, the women of Somali take it very seriously: to them, a good cup of tea is the way to any man's heart. In Somalia, the *Hooya's* (mothers) would discuss how their *Faduma* could handle fifty quality pots of *shah* (tea) with ease, which she would then serve to all her friends, her mother's friends, her father's friends and the rest of her *Qaabil*.

Your *Qaabil* in Somalia has to be one of your most redeeming qualities. Naturally, you take the *Qaabil* of your father and if you know how to recite back the fifty or more of your middle names, eventually you will find the one by which your tribe was named after. Say you were lost in your village back in Somalia and needed to find your way back home, you'd just have to say all these middle names and someone would lead you straight to your grandparents' house, while telling you that they too share a few of your grandfather's names which consequently makes them your cousin (this was the case in every conversation I've had in my time there). However, being born in Australia meant that I had no clue what my *Qaabil* truly was. This dismayed my grandmother greatly as she feared that if this was the case, I'd one day accidentally end up marrying a man from an 'enemy' tribe and life would be over as we now know it.

Language is another barrier. Speaking English every day takes a toll on the way you speak the Somali language, which requires a completely different tone of speech. You never really feel like the typical Westerner until you're stuck in Somalia, trying to communicate with your foreign accent and everything just comes out sounding like English. The term "Dhaqan Celis" is one that refers to a Somali, who has lost their way, consumed by Western culture and in need a return to their roots. If you haven't heard it before, then you haven't surrounded yourself by hardcore Somali enthusiasts.