

Abdiaziz Bio

Abdiaziz Guled, born into the nomadic life in Somalia, East Africa, doesn't know his birthday or how old he really is. As a part of a family which herded camels, cows, and goats, he was assigned the task of keeping an eye on the goats. "I would look to the horizon and think, that's the end of the earth", he remembers. Orphaned at a very early age, he was taken in by his policeman oldest brother, and was given the opportunity to go to school. His primary grades were taught by Italian nuns, and the former goat boy learned to read and write in Italian before becoming literate in his own language. Because his brother was moved around the country from region to region, Abdi learned to make friends easily, also learning many different dialects along the way.

At one point he lived near a sports center, and played the part of ball boy, just happy to be among all the various games being played. He was discovered by a coach to be very good at basketball, and asked to join the local team. Eventually he became a member of the National Team, traveling to other countries to represent Somalia. During a summer clinic in Mogadishu, the capitol city, a coach from Southern Oregon State College invited Abdi to come to Ashland to play for the college team. After a couple of years he accepted the invitation and graduated with a degree in business.

Somalia's civil war broke out while Abdi was in America. This made returning to his country extremely dangerous. Instead of doing accounting (he said he couldn't count people's money) he decided to try counting kids (the human kind) by working in the Ashland School District with at risk youth. He also married at this time and became a US citizen. In 1996, Abdi and his wife Mary sold everything they owned (except their 1985 VW van) and took an around the world trip on a sabbatical leave from Mary's job. They went to 23 countries and kept a page on the internet--Abdi and Mary's Hakuna Matata Adventure--for students all over the globe to follow like a geography lesson. They visited schools in Portugal, Kenya, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Yemen and many other countries, telling students about the US and their travels. They also connected classrooms in these countries to some near their home in Oregon.

Abdiaziz is now a Student Advocate at Ashland Middle School. He listens to kids, and helps them through the rough spots of their lives. He also is head coach for the Ashland High School Boys Soccer team, coaches boys and girls basketball and track at the middle school, and visits classrooms all over the district, telling about growing up in Africa. He is a fantastic storyteller, born into the oral tradition where no telephones, TVs or radios existed. His talks are peppered with stories of African lions, monkeys, elephants--much to the delight of his listeners, young and old. Because of these stories, he is know by practically every child in his town of Ashland.