

# Amira Kherrallah

## Central African Republic



**Interviewer:** Would you start by briefly introducing yourself?

**Amira:** My name is Amira. I'm from the Central African Republic. But I came from Chad. I've been there for five years before coming here.

**Interviewer:** What is your country of origin? And what does it mean to you?

**Amira:** It means everything for me because I was born and raised there. It's where I belong. And sometimes I really miss my country because you know, I came here alone as a refugee and I am separated from my parents. I have nobody, but when I think about my country I feel very proud. I have this feeling of belonging, I don't know how to explain that. But I love my country. And I love everything about my country.

**Interviewer:** When did you move to the United States?

**Amira:** Four years ago, in 2019.

**Interviewer:** Who helped you come to the United States?

**Amira:** The IRC, International Rescue Committee. It's the resettlement agency. When you're a refugee you go through this process of resettlement, so they help us come here and finding apartments and to help us adapt ourselves and start this new life here.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever live in a refugee camp?

**Amira:** No. In Chad, we have two kinds of refugees, you have the internal refugees, and you have the external refugees. So the internal ones are living in the camp, but the external ones are those who decided to rent a house or have a job outside of the camp. So I was one of those external refugees.

**Interviewer:** What is the 'American Dream' to you?

**Amira:** I started a nonprofit last year, and my dream is to work on this nonprofit and make it bigger so that I can bring it back to my country. The United States is the land of the fortunate, and when I came here I had a dream to build something, you know, unique, something different, and something that can impact people. This is kind of what I'm doing for the nonprofit trying to impact people and also help. The nonprofit is about women's health. So trying to help my community to get the resources they need, and also encourage them to take advantage of the important is here.

**Interviewer:** What's the nonprofit called?

**Amira:** Prevent Her.

**Interviewer:** I wanted to ask you what your first year in Chad versus your first year in the U.S. was like?

**Amira:** It was not similar. I felt alone because I went to Chad alone without my parents. But here, it was different because I grew up a lot so when I went to Chad I was 17 years old, so I was alone without my parents and I was very lost. I didn't know what to do, where to go, and this kind of stuff. It was really hard for me compared to coming here. The first day, it was kind of different also, because it's a big country and we still need to, you know, to adapt and this kind of stuff. I was really excited about coming here because, you know, I had a dream. But when I went to Chad, it was a different situation because I was fleeing. I had a war in my country and I just felt it because of the war and I wanted to be safe. But coming here was a long process, I knew that I would come here and I knew that I would have a better life here. So it was kind of different.

**Interviewer:** What's the story behind your name?

**Amira:** There is not a particular story. 'Amira' means 'Princess,' and I'm the only child of my parents. My mom had a very hard time getting a child. So when I came to life, my dad was like, 'This is my only child. She's my princess.'

**Interviewer:** What objects tell the story of your life?

**Amira:** This question is kind of hard to say. I would just give a word, I will say 'Serve.' I'm a very ambitious person, and I like to serve. I dedicate my life to serve my community, and the people around me.

**Interviewer:** How are your parents different and alike?

**Amira:** Everybody's unique, though, everybody has a personality. I feel like I'm more like my mom. I don't look like her at all. I don't look like my dad at all- I'm very different. The value that she gave me so I feel like I'm more like my mom, not physically but you know, with my education, my way of thinking.

**Interviewer:** What is something you will tell people about your culture that you feel really proud of?

**Amira:** The community sense. The fact to be together, we like to be together, we like to celebrate, we like to feel this happiness of being in the community.

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes for your community?

**Amira:** I really want my community to realize that we have a lot of resources here in the United States and Utah, and I want them to take advantage of those resources.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me about your spiritual beliefs?

**Amira:** So my name is Arabic, but I'm Christian. This is kind of confusing to people. But my dad was Muslim and my mom was Christian. So I believe in God, I put God first in whatever I do. Even my life, I think, is a mission from God and He is using me to serve. There is a saying 'Blessed to be a blessing.' So I feel like even coming here, it's true, I went through the refugees

things and stuff, I lost my parents and stuff. But I feel like God has a mission for me in my life. And I believe in God, I strongly believe in God and I put God in whatever I do. And I hope that God will use me to impact my community.

**Interviewer:** So your mom is Christian and your dad is Muslim. Why did you choose Christianity?

**Amira:** It's a matter of belief. Usually when your parents have a religion you just follow your parents. But, for me in my case, I decided because I believe in it and I feel like I have more relationship with God being Christian than trying Muslim or something. It's a personal decision and a personal choice because I feel more connection spiritually with the Christian side.

**Interviewer:** Being a refugee and being in the camp we always have these ideas about how America is like and the stuff there. When you came to the United States, did you feel like America was everything you ever hoped for? Or did you feel like it was different to the way it was presented to you?

**Amira:** Always there is reality and there is expectations. I was educated so that I made some researches on meals and stuff so I know that. But we still have expectations like, 'Oh when I will come here I will get my dream job' or 'When I come here I will do this, I'll do that.' But I still got my dream job in Oregon, I got what I wanted, but I feel like sometimes when you're there you don't know what it is in America and sometimes you have some expectations and it's sometimes not the reality. When you come here you have to work hard. In my country, for example, we don't stand to work we sit down but when you come here you have to stand. When you come here they don't give you a lot of details, they just tell you about America and everybody knows that the United States is the country of dreams. You have to know that when you come here you have to work hard to realize this dream.

**Interviewer:** What was your favorite school subject?

**Amira:** English, but also biology because I wanted to become a doctor. I was very curious to know my body. That's also why I believe in God because our bodies are very exceptional. So I was like, 'Okay, why do I have blood here? Why here hurts me?' I wanted to understand my body because my mom had breast cancer and she already passed away. But growing up with that I was like trying to understand why she had breast cancer and if I can help her and become a doctor or something like that, so I loved biology.

**Interviewer:** Are you still in contact with your father?

**Amira:** Yes, we have WhatsApp so we talk all the time.

**Interviewer:** What do you talk about?

**Amira:** Being here alone I sometimes feel very alone. Keeping in touch with my parents I feel a little bit better and so we talk about everything; 'How is your work? How do you feel? etc' I

hope one day to become an American so that I can bring my dad here so that we can no longer talk through the phone, just in person.

**Interviewer:** What are you grateful for about America?

**Amira:** Living here is an opportunity that everybody doesn't have. I'm grateful for this opportunity America has given to people like me, like refugees, to come here and to start a new life and to have the comfort and also, have better education, have a job, and have an opportunity to start businesses or nonprofits, so I'm grateful for that.

**Interviewer:** What advice would you give your younger self?

**Amira:** Be mature. I was the only child of my parents, I got everything that I wanted, I was not ready to become a refugee. I will tell my younger self to be more courageous, accept challenges. When you go through difficulties it's meant to make you stronger not to make you weak.

**Interviewer:** What traditions have been passed down in your family?

**Amira:** We do have some cultural celebrations in my country. So we gather, we dance, we eat.

**Interviewer:** When you first came to America, did you ever feel unwelcomed? Or I know you mentioned that it was hard for you because you didn't have anyone, like your parents, with you. Did you ever feel unwelcomed? How were the people?

**Amira:** No, I felt very welcomed. Even at the airport, because we get like caseworkers who welcomed us at the airport. They did everything so that we feel at home. And I like very much this part. Of course, we don't have our family here. You know, you love your family. Except for that part, I think I felt very welcomed. People are very kind. People are smiling to you. And when you need help, they don't hesitate to help you. You have resources. If you need something, there is always somebody who offers help to make you feel welcome.

**Interviewer:** Are you a student?

**Amira:** Yes, but I'm not studying medicine. I had a bachelor's degree in telecommunication when I was in Chad. And when I came here, I tried to go back to school, but I'm working on that. I'm just taking some classes; leadership classes, web design classes, and I also have a job so it's not easy trying to do both at the same time.

**Interviewer:** What languages do you speak?

**Amira:** I speak French, Arabic, Sangha, which is from my country, and English.