

## **Sr. Hibo Farah**

Interviewed by Br. Usman Mohammed

*Hibo Farah is the 2010 recipient of the Tallman Foundation scholarship award. The scholarship is worth \$20,000 over four years. Her story is one of courage, hard work, dedication to excellence and an inspiration to many new immigrant youth residing in the inner city. She is from a single parent household and through inspirational support from her mom and role model, she rose above many obstacles to pursue her dreams and make them a reality. Her commitment to social activism and promoting positive change in society at such an early age played a crucial part in winning the award.*

The following is an excerpt of our interview with Hibo Farah:

### **Q. What is your background and when did you move to Canada?**

A. I was born in Tanzania, my mother is from Somalia and my father is Kenyan. We lived in Arusha until my family moved to Canada in 1993. I was two years old when my family moved here.

### **Q. Where do you attend school and what is your major?**

A. I am currently in grade 12 at Sisler High school. I will be attending St. Boniface University when I graduate and will major in Chemistry. I want to eventually become a medical doctor in the future.

### **Q. How did you become eligible for the award?**

A. I found out about the Tallman Foundation while volunteering with 10,000 steps. I also participate in the Student's council and I am the current Student President at Sisler High School. These activities afforded me the opportunity to work closely with school administration where I met the right people that guided me towards this goal. I really think that in addition to meeting the general requirements for the award, it is also important to know the right people to help prepare you adequately.

### **Q. What was your motivation?**

A. I have always wanted to be involved and be active in volunteering and promoting positive change wherever I am. I was also inspired by the Barrack Obama's Democratic Party nomination and eventual victory in the United States Presidential election in 2008. It strengthened my faith in the fact that with a lot of hard work anything is possible.

### **Q. Now that you won the scholarship, what challenges do you anticipate?**

A. I think a major challenge will be improving my French, as I will be attending a French University and taking all of my courses in French. Another challenge will also be going through my undergraduate studies without the company and support of my friends who will be attending University elsewhere. I think the biggest challenge of all will be the pressure to succeed and do well.

### **Q. Who are some of your role models?**

A. My main role model will be my mom. As a single mom she stayed determined and persevered in the face of adversity. Her courage inspires me. She always encouraged me to work hard, keep my head up and never give up even when things don't appear to be working out. My other role models outside my family are Barrack Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Stephen Hawking, the Einstein of our time.

**Q. What is your message to new immigrant youth?**

A. My main message to new immigrant youth will be to not lose their integrity. If you have a bit of belief and morals in your family, don't let them fade away because of peer pressure. Keep strong and be yourself. I think that new immigrant youth have a lot to be proud of and should not forget many of the strengths and moral standards they bring with them. Drawing on these strengths will make it hard for them to be easily manipulated and give them the independence to resist the pressure of trying to fit into mainstream culture in a way that causes them to lose their true identity.

**Q. What about your message to the youth in general?**

A. My message to the youth in general is to not back away from opportunity. They should be active and volunteer in various places so they can hone their social skills and develop their character. They should strive to take advantage of these opportunities even if they are intimidated or afraid.

**Q. There is a general perception that the North End is rough and not a good place to nurture solid potential. What is your perspective on the North End?**

A. Truthfully, I don't see the North End as negative. I believe that challenges make you stronger. I believe that a lack of opportunity is a bigger challenge in the area. This is often because of an information gap. Many of the youth in the area don't have access to vital information on places and resources they can take advantage of. This is particularly true with new immigrant families. For example, many new immigrant youth are not aware of places like the NEEDS centre, that offer volunteer opportunities, after school programs, career counseling and employment services.

**Q. What about schools in the area?**

A. Contrary to opinions that the North End lacks good schools, there are actually a number of very good schools in the area, like Sisler, Calvin High and Saint John's. These schools are serious about discipline and expectations are high. They are actually better than a number of schools in more affluent neighborhoods that lack discipline and lower expectations for their students.

**Q. But what about concerns that schools in the area do not have the resources to be able to offer higher standards and good quality education?**

A. I think the focus on resources and the assumption that schools in wealthier neighborhoods are better can be misleading. Many new immigrant families put their children in these schools thinking they are better. However, some of these schools in better neighborhoods have lax protocols as teachers are afraid of disciplining the kids. ***(For example, immigrant families in the area prefer to send their kids to schools like Maples Collegiate. However, the school is not as serious about discipline and enforcing higher standards in comparison to schools like Sisler, Calvin High and St. John's in the North End)***. I really think that new immigrant families should put their kids in schools where higher standards of discipline and expectation are higher and seriously enforced.

**Q. How do you feel about the Muslim community here in Winnipeg, in terms of activities and ways they have reached out to you?**

A. I do not feel that the Muslim community has reached out to me. I find that our community is ethnocentric with people preferring to cluster around their respective ethnic groups, rather than mixing and opening up as promoted in the idea of being one Ummah. I feel it is hypocritical to be this way, and that is why many of us feel that we are being pushed away because people are so judgmental and not very welcoming of those outside their subgroups. I also

think that the Friday sermons are not regularly geared towards addressing many of the current problems we face in the community.

**Q. In what ways do you think our community can be better in reaching out to new immigrant youth?**

*A. I think our community can be better if we find ways to break away from ethnic enclaves, open up and learn to talk to other people. Building ethnic enclaves will literally close you up to opportunities outside of that group. Also, our community should post volunteer opportunities outside the masjid. For instance, other religious communities post volunteer opportunities on their bulletin boards, in places like the Health Sciences Centre and encourage their youth to participate in programs and opportunities outside their community. I believe we should learn from them and not stay in our own little hub.*