

Transcript

Episode Title: “Taking a Sabbatical to Volunteer in Tanzania” with Safiya Robinson

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SAFIYA [00:00:00] They couldn't understand a Black person, specifically a Black person that in their mind looked so Tanzanian. And because they kept telling me all my features were so Tanzanian, like my nose and my cheekbones and... Like they're very specific. And they told me exactly which tribe I came from, and they showed me pictures. And I learned that there was this thing, especially in the largest cities like Dar es Salaam, that there were some younger people who were trying to pretend to be English. And so they would speak English and they wouldn't speak Swahili. And that was very frowned upon by the older generation. So they were wondering, was it one of those young people who didn't want to speak Swahili and I had a hard time just explaining to them I genuinely don't speak Swahili like that. I'm not African.

CHRISTINE [00:00:50] Hey, everyone, welcome to *Flourish In The Foreign*, the podcast that elevates and affirms the voices and stories of Black women living and thriving abroad. This podcast centers Black women, and also explores living abroad as a pathway to wellness. And wellness in all of its many forms, financial, professional, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Welcome to the show. And welcome back. If you are returning, thank you so much. I am Christine Job, the host of *Flourish In The Foreign* and also a Black American expat living and thriving in Spain. I am not only the host, but also the creator, the producer, and just generally be everythinger of this here podcast. And as you may know, this podcast truly is a labor of love. But, you know, labor nonetheless. And that is why I'm asking you all to please support this here podcast. Now, there are five ways for you to support *Flourish In The Foreign*. The first way is to become a Patreon supporter of *Flourish In The Foreign*, go to www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. The second way for you to support this podcast is by Cash App. You can Cash App the podcast at \$flourishforeign and Cash App truly is like a tip jar. So if you're listening to an episode that really moves you, that really inspires or just helps you out, you can go ahead and slide the podcast a couple of bucks via Cash App. And it's also a really great way to contribute to the podcast if you're not ready to make an ongoing monthly commitment. So you can go ahead and Cash App the podcast at \$flourishforeign. And the third way you can support *Flourish In The Foreign* is by placing an ad within this podcast or sponsoring an entire episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*. If you have an organization or a business that's in alignment with this podcast, and you will love to get in front of an incredible audience of ambitious, educated, and internationally-minded women, go ahead to flourish in the forum's website, www.flourishintheforeign.com/contact and drop me a line I will send you over the rate sheet and we can go from there. The fourth way you can support *Flourish In The Foreign* is of course, sharing the podcast with the people that you love and the people that you know. Share the podcast with your audience. It is so important, and I always say it and I'm going to keep on saying it. Your personal recommendation, your seal of approval, your “This is what

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CHRISTINE [00:06:18] This next story features Safiya. And her story, I think is so very interesting. I mean, she has literally traveled around the world and has found her way back home. I think there's a lot to learn from her story. But I'm gonna let her tell you all about it.

SAFIYA [00:06:45] My name is Safiya Robinson. I am 42 and I'm in Barbados. My hometown is Christchurch in Barbados. I was born in Curaçao, then I was in Barbados probably within months after that. And then about a year after that, we moved to Canada. And I was in Canada until I was 4 or 5, and then I moved back to Barbados. And then when I was 19, I moved to the UK. Growing up, I had a lot of family that lived abroad. So in the 60s, there was a big migration out of the Caribbean. And people went to the US, they went to Canada, they went to the UK. And so my dad was one of those people, he went to Canada with his brother. Not at the same time. His sisters, one went to England, one went to the US. So I always had cousins who lived overseas. I have a big family in the US. I have family in Holland. So just growing up, I have family all over the place. And so I kind of just assumed at some point I would, I would go overseas to either study or live. I didn't know where or when, I just kind of assumed that that was what was gonna happen. At some point.

CHRISTINE [00:07:59] I asked Safiya to tell me what was her experience like studying in England.

SAFIYA [00:08:05] I studied in England, and I studied dentistry. And I have to tell that story because it's hilarious. When I was growing up here, I love to read. I've always loved reading. And I grew up reading like, US audience may never have heard of this author, but her name is

Enid Blyton. And she writes lots of children's books and teenage books are... Because this was back in the 40s. Let's be clear, this was decades ago. And she wrote about this series about girls in an English boarding school. And so they're all in the British countryside. And they're eating all these British stuff. And I just imagined, "I'm going to do that one of these days." And just for context, they call Barbados 'little England.' So because we were would have been a colony until the 60s. We were very similar in terms of our cultures and everything to the UK. It was a big, like imagination for me to think about living in the UK and being in the middle of the English countryside. That's how I that's one of the factors that heavily influenced me going to the UK to study. In our fourth year, we had a gap period between one semester and the other, and I went to France to do French. I was in the middle, like right smack dab in the middle of France in the tiniest little village. I was with a church camp. And it was amazing. The kids were hilarious. I've been studying French since I was 11 at school right the way up until I was 16, 17. And I feel like I learned more in those few couple of months. Being there going to the market, going to the shops, talking to local people who are French that I had to learn and like the six years I've studied at school and that was just fun. I was my friends from church and it was good.

CHRISTINE [00:09:57] After Sophia graduated from university, her and her best friend went on an amazing post-graduation trip.

SAFIYA [00:10:06] As soon as I finished university, my best friend who studied in the US, she and I got on the train and we went interrailing all through Europe. That was fun. Europe, obviously, this is back then because it's it's obviously expanded a lot. This was back in the 90s, late 90s, early 2000s. Obviously, the EU has changed a lot since then. But at the time, majority of what would have been considered in that area was Western Europe and England was not included. So you fly over to somewhere there. And you have a ticket. And basically it this ticket allows you to travel anywhere throughout Western Europe on the train. You buy one ticket and you use it, it lasts about 6 weeks, or it did at the time, 4 weeks or 6 weeks, depending on which one you buy. And then you can just get on a train. We just went... We decided we wanted to go to Egypt first. We spent a couple of days in Cairo, see the pyramids, that type of thing. And then from there, we flew up to Greece. And then we started in Greece. And we just took the train, we went through Greece. We went from the south of Italy right up to the north of Italy. We went to Barcelona, in Spain. We went to Portugal. We went to Germany, France. We then went to the Czech Republic. We did all kinds of exciting stuff. We just got on the trains and went all around and then I returned to England for a year to work. And they definitely turn to Barbados because my dad was really ill. And I came back here after I finished working that year in England. He actually passed away a few months after that. I stayed here for another probably 18, 19 months or so. And then I moved back to England to take a different type of job, which was still dentistry, but it was in the community.

CHRISTINE [00:11:54] Sophia and her best friend went on another trip and this time around the world. I asked Sophia to tell me all about it.

SAFIYA [00:12:05] I need to introduce you to my best friend. Her name is Rennie. She lives in New Jersey. She is going to be listening to this episode, I bet she's gonna be really annoyed that I've just outed her, but she's my best friend. She and I always wanted to travel everywhere. She's the one that came interrailing with me. The very first time I went to Europe, I spent a weekend in Paris, she was with me there. We've gone everywhere. And we decided we wanted to take a trip around the world. It's easier to travel to the UK, they had this round the world package and it was just like you buy a ticket, it has so many stops on it. You pick the stops. It was a lot cheaper than trying to buy individual flights. It was actually cheaper for us to buy in the UK and for her to buy a ticket to London and fly over there to meet me. And off we went. I've been working in the UK by that point probably for about maybe three or four years. And we decided we were going to do it, and then just kind of saved up for it. And we did it. And it was just fun. We went to Thailand, we flew into Singapore. We went to the north of Australia, Darwin flew down through Australia, it was pretty massive. Flew down through Australia. We stopped in Alice Springs we visited through Uluru. We then flew even further south, we did Melbourne. we did Sydney. We even spent a week in New Zealand, which can I just say is the most naturally beautiful place I've ever been at that point in time. It was just amazing. We had a week in New Zealand. We hired a car, drove around like the whole of South Island. And then we then flew back in time I like to call it, over the international date line. We flew back in time, went to San Francisco. I've never been to the west coast of the US before that was really fun. We were in San Francisco for a bit. And then we eventually flew back to New York, which is where she was at the time. And I then flew back to London. That was our trip. And we did it in about 2830 days. I had about five weeks off from work and she didn't have as much time off from work. So the last bit of time we were in New York, she was working, but it was too short. And it was a lot of fun. She and I kind of we kind of... We used to do this. Even though we went interrailing it was like two or three days in a place. And then finally we wanted to see as much as possible. And the only way to do that, if you don't have a lot of time is to just keep moving. That's what we used to do. For years when we traveled we just used to keep moving. Just keep moving. Keep going next place.

CHRISTINE [00:14:37] I asked Safiya to share some of the most memorable moments of her trip around the world.

SAFIYA [00:14:43] There were a lot of funny moments. One thing I will say and only because what happened then is important to me now, I started... The very first trip I took which was not with her, this is when I was a student. I went to Eastern Europe and I remember going and having a lot of fun. And then not remembering much of it. And so every trip she and I took since then we would take really good notes. And that's how I started travel writing, actually. I remember it so well because I literally chronicled the whole thing. To anybody who travels anywhere, if you're not gonna remember it, write it down. Like, that's the one big piece of advice I would give anybody, you think you're gonna remember, you're not, just write it down. Loads of interesting things happen. We got upgraded to first class on Cathay Pacific, which is like a really

fancy airline already. And we don't even know what happened. We were walking into the airport, and we were having a conversation about whether it's worth spending your money on accommodation, or first class, because first class is so expensive. And we were young, working, we didn't have a whole heap of money to spend, we were just on a budget. And then we got to the airport, and they upgraded us to business class. And we're like, well, we got champagne, and we were like, in our jeans and T-shirt and slippers. And it was, it was just such a weird contrast to all of these business people, all dressed up in their finery. And here you are in our jeans and T-shirts drinking orange juice out of a champagne glass. I'm trying not to laugh too loudly. That was hilarious. And Australia. Australia was, I don't know what to say about it. It was an interesting place. When we arrived in the north, they have quite a big indigenous population there. And it was kind of upsetting to me to see the contrast between the indigenous population and the white Australian population. That was that was difficult for me. And I am obviously not an Indigenous Australian. But it was very upsetting. It was a really, really upsetting to me. And it's something I've never forgotten about going there. Even though I've been back. And I've had good times, both times, I've always remember that and it just really bothered me a lot. New Zealand. Like I said, it was just beautiful. It's just like you're standing on a beach. Looking at a glacier. It was just my mind was just blown away by the share natural beauty in New Zealand, they could not believe it. And that I would go back there tomorrow, if somebody handed me a ticket. I have, honestly, most of almost all of my travel experiences, I would say have been positive, I can't think of any negative experiences. And the one negative experience I had was, it wasn't even that bad. I'm looking back on it now it seems pretty funny. Although it was quite scary at the time. I got thrown out of a train on the German border... a long, boring story. But my friend went to Czech Republic. And that was it was just a period of time. And they had changed a visa regulation like maybe a couple of months before. And I had gone to Czech Republic before and I never had a problem. And this time around when they got there, there was a bunch of us that got thrown off the train and had to spend the night in the train station. And this was before cell phones, before Google, before like sat-nav, before... Not even before people had cell phones. There was no social media. Just even getting hold of my friend and sort of telling her where I was and where to meet me. That was interesting. But it was only a couple of days. And it was... It turned out fine. And it wasn't my Blackness that was the problem. Because there was a bunch of us that got thrown off the train. And that was the only Black person, all the rest were very white. Some of them were Canadian. Some of them were from other countries and they had just changed their visa regulations. And the only place I think I felt probably intimidated is when we went to Egypt. As two women traveling alone. I wasn't comfortable. My friend that I traveled with, she had a friend from work who was there, he picked us up one day and took us driving around. Introduced us to a taxi driver and they drove us around. And beyond that, being single women alone in Cairo in Egypt. I didn't feel comfortable. And they have a very good friend who's Egyptian and she was like, she wouldn't either and she's Egyptian. And she would always recommend, go with a man. That was probably the one place that I would say I felt uncomfortable as a woman, not necessarily being Black, but as a woman alone or with another woman. I didn't feel comfortable. Beyond that, I... We had a blast. I can't say anything other than that. We had a really good time. But I generally speaking all my travel experiences have been amazing. I can't complain.

CHRISTINE [00:19:25] I asked Safiya what her experience being a Black woman in England.

SAFIYA [00:19:30] It was kind of eye opening for me. I, obviously growing up in Barbados, I don't wanna say everybody's Black, but like the population is 90 something percent Black. About the familiarity for me, I'd never lived anywhere as an adult, that I was, say, in the minority. And even though there is a Black population in the UK, a lot of it is concentrated in the bigger cities or at least it was at the time. In London or anything like that. London, Birmingham, Manchester, even Leicester, to a certain extent has bigger populations of minorities. I was in Bristol, and it still has a fairly large population. But I was in the university town side of it, and I was actually kind of in the minority. And like in my class, our dental class had 60, I was the only Black person. There were some girls, a couple of guys that were Arabic. We're still really good friends. There was a quite a big Indian population. And then there was a white population and a few people that were mixed. And I was in the minority from that perspective. And I think what struck me was I did meet a lot of overseas students. Like I was in the Afro-Caribbean society, I have a part-time job so I worked in the supermarket. And I met a lot of like, Black international students. They came over from the Caribbean, or they would have come over from parts of Africa. I didn't meet a lot of local, like Blacks that are from the UK who were at that university. Might have been different if I had been in London or somewhere. But where I was, there wasn't a huge population there. To me, it was just a lot of observation. And I'm a writer and an observer, I just observed and kind of like took it in like, "This is interesting." Why is there such a disparity, with at least where I was, and in the course that I was doing, and then even in my Halls of Residence? Why were there not that many Black British students? Given that at the time, there were no tuition fees, they were grants, there was a lot of more of an access to tertiary education. It was just an observation for me to see that difference in the international students versus the local Black British students.

CHRISTINE [00:21:47] So Safiya had the opportunity to live and work in Tanzania. And I asked her to tell me all about that experience.

SAFIYA [00:21:56] At the time, I was living in England. And I've been there for a while. Ups and downs in the sense that a really close friend of mine had actually passed away. Maybe a few years after I moved in. He was a friend from University. He was one of my housemates when I was at university, we were really good friends. And it was just really sobering for me when it happens, because we were like 29, 30. And you just kind of don't expect that, I mean... I've lost people before. I'd lost both my parents by that point, but like, to lose somebody in my age category was just so sobering. And I kind of, I just felt kind of lost. And whenever I felt like I needed grounding, I always tend to look to see what I can do for somebody (inaudible) something like all this stuff. And I really wanted to do some voluntary work. I've always done volunteer work. And I've done a lot when I was in the UK. But I wanted to do some outside of the UK. Because I was just feeling like, I want to do something that feels like actually helping

somebody and not just showy or whatever. I was looking for different charities and they actually found a dental charity that was operating in Tanzania and I became really good friends with the couple who ran it. And the charity has a few different things that they do. One thing they did was they opened a clinic in the north of the country in Mwanza. And that clinic is for local Tanzanians. But it was also for... There's a big community of international workers down there. A lot of them had this, we had health insurance. So what they did was they opened the clinic there, where they had local dentists come in from either England or Australia, the US. And for the people who were there who were English speaking, it was nice to have an English speaking dentist. And they would pay what they would normally pay in the US or wherever. And that money then funded the charity, and the charity was about training doctors and nurses and rural parts of Tanzania that didn't have any access to dentists. Training with doctors and the nurses to carry out basic dentistry, we would go and do training. There was a whole... Like there's loads of things that we did. And I just enjoyed their work because it's really sustainable for local Tanzanians. It doesn't just rely on people coming in. Their eventual plan was to hand it over to the locals. And they did eventually, they did. They've left Tanzania, now they're back in the UK. And they want to hand it over and they did. And I'm just really pleased that they had a vision of doing work somewhere and making it very sustainable and handing over at the end in a way that was really long-lasting. As opposed to just coming in, doing a bunch of stuff, and then leaving, which I've seen a lot of organizations do. So I wanted to work with them. And I took some time off from work and I did it. It was just an amazing experience. It just reminded me so much of Barbados. In terms of the landscape, I visited Zanzibar, and the beaches are my new target. So it just made me it kind of actually made me a bit homesick. I apparently I look Tanzanian, I've had people stopping me on the street and asking me which tribe I was from. I will say that all of the British and Europeans that I met in Tanzania worldwide, I was the only Black volunteer worker. And apparently, you don't really see Black volunteer workers in these organizations. And so there were a few challenges that I had, that I think I couldn't even explain it to the host... The family that was hosting me, which is a white British family. Like I had a few challenges, I was trying to explain it to them. And I don't think they could even understand it, because obviously, they didn't get... Have those challenges. And I think from the Tanzanian because obviously most of Tanzanians I met were Black Tanzanians. And they couldn't understand a Black person, specifically a Black person that they, in their mind, looked Tanzanian. Because they kept telling me, "Oh my features were Tanzanian," like my nose and my cheekbones, and... Like, they're very specific. And they told me exactly what's tribe I came from and all these... They showed me pictures. And it's shocking how similar the resemblance was. And their mind, they couldn't understand a person who looked like them who didn't speak Swahili and who wasn't Tanzanian. But when I tried to explain to them where Barbados was, they had no clue. Like they really had no clue. They were so happy to think that there was another country that was full of Black people, because in their mind, Africa was the only place in the world that was full of Black people, and everywhere was white people. They were so happy to think like, "Oh, there's whole country full of Black people somewhere else. That's amazing." But they couldn't get their head around me not being Tanzanian. I'm not having that connection to Africa, even though I would have originated there generations ago. And I learned that there was this thing, especially in the largest cities like Dar es Salaam, that there was some younger people who were trying to pretend to be English. And so they would speak English, and they

wouldn't speak Swahili. And that was a big, like, it was very frowned upon by the older generation. They were wondering, was I one of those young people who didn't want to speak Swahili? And I had a hard time just explaining to them like, I genuinely don't speak Swahili like that. I'm not African. My saving grace was a guy that I met who had moved there from Uganda. And he didn't speak Swahili, either. His first language was English. And he came over as an English teacher. And he has to teach himself Swahili. And he had that experience as well. Because people saw him and they couldn't understand why he couldn't speak Swahili. And he was my saving grace. He took me under his wing. He taught me a lot of the Swahili I know. He would take me to the market. He taught me how to barter for my vegetables. And he was just a really good friend who understood the challenges that I was having. Because I found, like I said, the white European friends and the family that I was staying with who I'm really good friends with up to this day. I think they just couldn't understand that issue at all.

CHRISTINE [00:28:17] I asked Safiya, if whether the politics of Tanzania or England respectively, had affected her while she was living in either country.

SAFIYA [00:28:29] Well, it didn't really affect me in Tanzania. It was fine. In terms of the UK, the period of time during which I lived in the UK. They opened up the EU quite significantly. The new country started coming into the EU that hadn't previously been there. When I first lived there as a student, the EU was mostly Western Europe and (inaudible) was there came Poland, and there are some other more Eastern Bloc countries that entered the EU. And because this is my perception, I will say, but because the UK has a very open welfare system, and opportunities to work and that type of thing, and obviously is English, lots of different factors. There was quite an influx of people from Europe, particularly Eastern Europe, into the UK. I was working there all that time. And it's caused a lot of problems. I will say it caused a lot of problems. And one of the big hot topics to discuss at the time was immigration. Immigration was a huge, huge topic. And people were calling for England to leave the EU, which they ultimately did a few months ago. And that type of thing, and they were really trying to get a handle on the perceived problem of immigration. But the problem was, they could not really stop people from the EU from moving to England because they were part of the EU as well. What I found they did was, they became a lot stricter on non-European immigrants. All of the time that I was there, the regulations kept changing, they kept changing, they kept changing. When I eventually was going to leave, like I couldn't change jobs, I'd applied for other jobs, I applied for a job. They said that they wanted to offer it to me, but I applied to do it on Tuesday, they didn't have any space on Tuesday, they had it on Wednesday, that would have required a whole different work permit, and they wouldn't even apply for it. And that was it. So there were times when those changes in regulations affected me personally, because I was not British. And if it had been 10 years previous, the amount of time that I spent in the UK, I would have been able to apply for British citizenship. By the time I was there, this time around, they changed those requirements, they change those laws, I couldn't do it. I never did in the end. Like I got like permanent residence, but obviously, because I lived outside of the UK for so long and gave that up. But they just kept changing. And they were doing it in a way I think politically, to be shown to be doing something because people

were so up in arms about immigration, and they couldn't do anything about the people were coming over from Europe. That was probably the biggest influence politically on me. While I was there, I because I was working in the public health care system. When I started there, and this was actually one of the reasons that I left. When I started working there, the community care, community dental care that we were doing used to do that into a lot of schools, we get a lot of school screenings, you would go to the special needs schools, there was a lot of stuff that we did. As politics and governments changed there was more of a call to give dental access to everybody, basically people who might be able-bodied. Because we saw in the community, we tend to see more special needs patients, we tend to see children that were in care, or we tend to just see children that were unable to access or maybe at disadvantage of accessing services elsewhere. We used to have cases referred. As a government changed and things changed, they look to increase access. But what actually happened was it actually decreased the treatments that we were doing. More people could come and be seen but there was less that we could actually do for them. And eventually, I left because I was like, "I don't want to be working somewhere and all they can be doing is taking out teeth." That's not interesting to me. That's not why I did this job. There have been a lot of changes over the years in terms of even with the health service, how people are paid, how they're allowed to move to the system, all kinds of changes that would have affected me because I worked in the health care service. And eventually it reached a combination of the work, the immigration, the everything. I decided, you know what, if I'm not going to be able to do what I came here to do, I'm going home. And I came back to Barbados.

CHRISTINE [00:32:58] The Windrush scandal was and is still a scandal happening in the UK. In which people of mostly Caribbean heritage, who emigrated to the UK, were then decades later wrongly detained, denied legal rights, threatened with deportation, and actually deported from the UK. Basically, seen as non British citizens. And now these people moved in the 1960s to help build the UK, the infrastructure, the health service, and the majority of these people came from ex-British colonies. And so it was seen definitely as a slap to the face. And so I asked Safiya, as a woman from Barbados, with family that immigrated in the 60s to the UK, how she felt about the Windrush scandal.

SAFIYA [00:34:03] Of course, I would have told you that when I lived in the UK, it was around the time that there was a big concern with immigration. And this... The whole Windrush scandal happened after that. I should say that it happened to me, not even after that, but in the midst of all of that, the Windrush thing occurred. And that same Windrush scandal was related to the same migration that I talked about with my parents and my aunts and everybody who would have gone over to the UK, like in the 60s. I was disappointed, because I feel like, I mean, I'm sorry, I should say the whole of the UK was built on their colonies. A lot of their wealth was built on their colonies. Now you give your colonies quote, unquote, independence. I say, quote, unquote, but I won't go into that right now. And you are offering these opportunities, but it's almost like, to me it's almost like a very conditional thing that you want people to come and build your transportation system, you want to come and build your healthcare service, but you don't

feel if you have any responsibility towards them. The whole thing just upset me. But it also showed me, like, despite everything, despite how things are in the world, because I think the whole very colonization system left and legacy on Black people that can be taken one way or the other. But I feel like it's time for us to build our own legacy and look after each other because I feel like, and this is throughout the world, not just in one place or another. Because I feel like, it is clear that nobody else is going to look after you, you have to look after yourself. And to me, it just made it even more important for me to feel like I want especially young people to start to build things for themselves. And I don't think that there's enough of that message out there. And like, it makes me want to shout it from the rooftops like "We have to look after you. We have to build our own businesses." I feel like there's not enough Black business being built and supported by other Black people. Like we have to look after ourselves. Because otherwise, we are at the mercy of the systems which we did not make, which were made for the people who made them.

CHRISTINE [00:36:20] I asked Safiya to compare and contrast the healthcare systems of Barbados, the UK, and Tanzania.

SAFIYA [00:36:29] I should warn anybody who's listening. I'm actually a healthcare nerd. I studied public health. I was super a healthcare nerd. I will try to not geek out about it. But here in Barbados, we have a mixed system. We do have a lot of public health care. We have a public hospital, and that's the main hospital here. We have public health clinics, which are all over the island. And then we have private healthcare as well. So we have public-private, like I said, public is for anybody, anybody who gets sick call the number, they'll take you to the main hospital. And yes, there's a private hospital. But even if you go to the private hospital, and there are times when they will transfer you over to the main public hospital because that's the best equipped out of the two, or has more equipment than the two hospitals in terms of medical health. In terms of dental health, they are dental clinics within the clinics, the community health clinics it's mostly for children. And they're very limited treatment to adults. They're adults for the most part, they have to get their dental care within private health care system. And then there are some private dental clinics all over the island. That's how it works here. It's mixed public-private. The UK, it's a mix of like I said, our systems a lot of our systems are roughly based on the British system for many, many years. The UK is mixed. They have a very big National Health Service, NHS. And they cover a lot of their public hospitals. When they went there, I worked in one of the community centers and they have private like, clinic like, dental clinics. They have public and private dental clinics or dentists that do public and private dentistry. And then they have private, they have like health insurance covered, hospitals, there's one there called Bupa, they have big hospitals that are just for the people who have their insurance. And they have like health insurance. But dentist, you can actually buy a dental policy that will cover certain things, or you can just pay for it outright. But its a big mixed bag of private and public. Tanzania, Tanzania, I believe is a mix of public and private. In the bigger cities, there's better access. When I went there to work. And I can speak mostly for dental, when I went there to work. They had something like one dentist to every 500,000 people. That was the

ratio that they had. And 90% of those dentists were in the main cities. What was happening was the people that live rurally, and they had quite a big rural population, they would some of them would have to walk for five, six days to get to the dentist. Like they were really cut off from that. But each... A lot of rural villages had a small health clinic and they would have either a doctor or health care worker, a nursing something like that. This is... They would have the schools and that would be public. Public health. And they would take care of their immediate medical needs. And the places that didn't have that for whatever reason. They have their own traditional medicine people who would do their traditional medicine. And in terms of dentistry, the access out in those rural areas was bad. And there are people you would... You could die from a dental infection. But they said there are people who would have to get on a bicycle and ride for five days to get to the dentist. And the whole aim of the program was to increase access to the areas that didn't have any. But sustainable access, that was why they would train the doctors and they would give them a dental kit by the end of it. They could carry out basic extractions or whatever, and then have a referral system for people who were outside of that scope.

CHRISTINE [00:40:24] Seeing as Sophia is a dentist, I have to ask her, why is dentistry usually a separate cause from general health care? Right? Like why is dental health insurance usually a separate or add-on cost to general health insurance? This is something that's always bothered me. And since she's a dentist, I took the opportunity to ask her.

SAFIYA [00:40:50] Because dentistry is a very high-cost service. This is something that I've had conversations with a lot of people over the year. If you want to set up a medical clinic, unless you are providing specialists like diagnosis if your... Oncology or something like that, as a general medical practitioner, like you as a doctor are the biggest resource in the office, your doctor, your staff, your nurse. To set up a basic dental office is hundreds of thousands of dollars. All of the equipment is expensive. It all needs maintaining. Over the years, a lot of things have become disposable. Recently, we were doing some calculations here, and it's like, to run a dental office it can cost upwards of \$60, \$100 just for somebody to walk through your door. Because of all the equipment that you have to maintain. They're all, obviously, all your X-ray machines, all of your drills, and your hand pieces, and your impression material, all of the materials that are there. The chair like the chair is ridiculously expensive. Everything requires maintenance. Everything has a cost. A lot of things, like I said are disposable. And right now we're in the midst of the Coronavirus as a lot more personal protective equipment to wear. And a lot of the companies that make those things, because it's economics, you need more they put up the prices. But it's expensive to actually... and dentists at a very high risk for disease, transmittable diseases. Dentists, hygienists and dental nurses, they do a lot of protection, a lot of disinfection, that's just pretty standard for a dental office. And there are a lot of costs there. And for a lot of places, the cost of running a dental office, you need to have the money has to come from somewhere. Even in the UK where you can go to the public NHS doctor for free. If you went to the NHS dentist, there was a charge, it was a minimal charge. And if you are a child or if you fell into certain brackets in society, you could claim an exemption. But other than that,

they were charges they had to charge because there was no other way to keep the system going because it was expensive.

CHRISTINE [00:43:09] I asked Sophia what was her journey into writing.

SAFIYA [00:43:12] Writing, as I always have, I've always wanted to be a writer. But for me writing and traveling have always been one or they were up until I started this blog. As I told you when I was younger, I loved writing. Funnily, I loved reading and like I said reading was the thing that was my travel and I was a child and then when I was a teenager. because we didn't really go anywhere I after my mom passed away, we didn't really do a lot of traveling, it was a little bit difficult. For me, my trips were in the pages of these books. Reading was my traveling files, like I traveled to Narnia and I travel to the British boarding schools and to outer space. And everywhere, everywhere I traveled, I traveled through the pages of these books. And they were obviously mostly fiction and it was just... I loved reading, I still love reading now to this day, reading is still the thing that transports me. And I always wanted to write and I always wanted to write a novel. I always imagine writing this big, exciting, juicy, long novel that was just twists and turns and all these things. And I always thought I was going to write that. And I tried several times and I didn't. But in between there, I would write other things. I've always loved the written word. I write poetry, I write anything. When I started to travel, as I said, what happened was I realized how quickly I forgot things. And I started writing these long epic emails to my sister is my friend back in Barbados, my friend who was in the US with, and they would just write about my trips. And it gave me a love for writing about real life. Like I've always loved reading fiction, but that gave me a love for like real life writing, which I never thought they would like. And that is how I kind of got into thinking about starting travel writing, and starting to blog, that type of thing. At the time, it was just personal. It was just for my friends and my family and my emails, it was never for real people other (inaudible), like it was never for public consumption. When I was about to turn 40, I finally decided to start this blog and... It was supposed to be 39 lessons I learned before I turned 40. Now I should say I'm 42, about to turn 43, I still write life lessons. I've been it doing all that time. And going through the process of writing the blog, I decided to try again to write a book. I tried several times hadn't happened. But going through that blogging process gives you the confidence to write a book. So I did, I published it on Amazon. And then I wrote a novel that's on my website. And I just realized how much I love writing, how much I love exploring ideas and people through writing and places, right, if there's a couple ideas, just through the written word. And connecting, like you can connect so much as people through your writing. What would happen is people would say to me, like, "Oh, my gosh, you're so brave, I could never, I could never write a blog and put it out there." And a combination of my background of my traveling, my reading, my writing, all of the things that I learned, I got this real sense that people need to tell the stories of the places that they are, the need to tell their own stories. Tell the stories of their communities, like people continue to do that. Otherwise, in 100 years' time, what's left is going to be the story tools from one person's perspective. And that might be an academic person who was at university and their only job was to write a history book. And I know some of those people, and they're great people, but they have one lens of the world. And I just thought, I need to feel like I honestly feel like we, and I say we I mean we as

women, we as Black women, yes, Caribbean, or American, or whoever, we need to tell our stories. Otherwise, no one's gonna know. Right. And that's why I love this podcast, I love the idea of telling the stories that people might not otherwise care or know, because I think about the impact that the stories that I read had on me. And I feel like, we need more people to have that impact. And that is what made me decide to help people to write but I love coaching people around not just writing but like getting visible. For me. A big part of getting visible was writing, was blogging was the book. But it was modeling, it was some of the organizations that I'd worked with, it was a traveling that I've done, and just the power of having good people visible. I want good people to write their story and get visible. That's like one of my mission in life.

CHRISTINE [00:47:54] I asked Sofia for some advice for people who may be interested in starting a writing career, or at least interested in starting a blog.

SAFIYA [00:48:04] I would advise them to write, start writing. For me when I started writing, I wasn't I wasn't even publishing, I was emailing people. But the key is to start writing and to start, start developing your voice and figuring out your own writing style. There's a... I'm gonna call it a misconception. There's a misconception out there that writing and writing a blog looks a certain way, which is exactly the reason why I feel like we all need to be writing our own stories, because there's too much out there of this, "This is the one way to do it. This is the one way to do it." I would say write, figure out how you write best. Figure out what you enjoy writing about. The only way I figured out why I enjoyed writing about was actually writing, it never occurred to me that I would write non fiction. Like, it's never even occurred to me, I always thought I was going to be writing about dragons and elves and all those things. They never occurred to me that I was going to be writing about South Africa and Tanzania and places that I went, I honestly thought it would be writing about fictional characters. I learned that through writing. So my thing is always to start writing. If you have 5 ideas, if you have 10 ideas, write about all of them. You might discover you might like a topic but you don't want to write about it. And the only way to find out is to actually try. I'm all about the doing. I'm all about getting in there. I always say right, like nobody's looking over your shoulder because probably nobody is, and if they are you have a different problem. Just start writing and see what catches your excitement. See what really, like you're writing about it and you're like, "Ooh, I like that." Go in that direction. Follow your curiosity just right. See where it takes you. And it may take you in a million different directions and that's okay too. If you're somebody who enjoys writing about things that people want to read about, there is a lot of opportunity in both monetizing your blogs, but also designing programs around that. This goes into what might be called content marketing. if you Googled it, you might want to Google content marketing. And it's basically using your content to build a form of income. And it could be a podcast, it could be a blog, it could be your YouTube channel. It doesn't need to be the written word. But it needs to be a way of connecting with your audience, finding out what they're interested in, what they want to hear more about, what they want to learn more about, and then kind of catering to that need, and then finding somebody to pay you. That somebody might be an advertiser, but it might be another company who has those products. Or it might be the very reader themselves, who want to learn more from you, who want to maybe sponsor you

on Patreon, or buy your product, buy your course, or program or whatever. It's like, find that thing you want to write about and figure out how to connect with your audience through it. Is it going to be a blog, but is it going to be a podcast? Or is it going to be a YouTube channel? And then make sure you can connect with that audience. And there's a lot of tech, boring tech stuff that goes into that SEO and all that boring stuff. Learn about it, so you can have a wider reach with your work. And then through that reach, you will then be able to monetize it, I guess, either through an external person, an advertiser, or through the very people that you've reached out to who wants to learn more from you.

CHRISTINE [00:51:43] Safiya is a published author. And I asked her to tell us a little bit more about her books.

SAFIYA [00:51:49] There were a nonfiction book, and it's called *Everything is a Thing, My Journey To Living a Truly Authentic Life*. And it was based on my life lessons. And what that book is about how finding your values, how I found my values, how I live more from that perspective, and how it made my relationships better. One, that's the first book I wrote and self-published. The second one I did write and I did distribute, so I guess it's published, but it's not on Amazon. It's available on my website, and it's called *Lessons and Love*. And despite being somebody who hasn't done much dating, or has been single for most of the time, I'm totally fascinated by the idea of love. Like chess, totally fascinated by it. And I wrote this book called *Lessons in Love*. And it was basically about a girl whose best friend got married, moved halfway around the world, then this girl's kind of like building her own life, and her own relationships, and it's told through her emails and her letters between her and her best friend and other people. Because all the years that I was living in England, and my best friend was living in New York, our whole life was told through emails, I wanted to kind of recreate that experience. That is actually what that book, it's about, *Lessons of Love*. And I did write a book, which I have not published, and it is about well-being actually, it is really about wellness for dentists. Because Dentists have a really high incidence of poor mental health, depression. And having had some of those issues myself, I wanted to talk about what worked for me and I wrote about well-being. And it is about those 12 aspects of your life, which are not just career but like physical wellness, education, creativity, diet, relationships, spirituality, finances, like all of the areas that feed into your life, and just ideas and tips to kind of manage those things that you can bring that idea back up into better how I asked.

CHRISTINE [00:53:47] Safiya, what is her definition of wellness, and how had living abroad influenced that definition of wellness?

SAFIYA [00:53:57] My personal definition of wellness is really about in order to be fully well, you do have to have physical wellness, you have to have good mental health. You want to have good relationships, you want to have good finances and good financial management, a career, creativity, education... There's so many things I think that feed into wellness. The thing that I think is the biggest piece of it is that the thing is that you pay the least amount of attention to,

there's a risk of that thing holding everything else back. But I always call it the rate-limiting set, which is a nerdy thing that I learned in chemistry. But it's like, that thing that you pay the least amount of attention to is the thing I think that can limit your wellness. If you pay a lot of attention to your financial wellness, and you're not getting any sleep, then you're not fully going to be well. If you're paying a lot of attention to your exercise, physical eating wellness, but you know, have a career that's exhausting you, or a relationship ship that is really not good for your mental health, you're never going to be fully Well. To me, the key is to find the thing where you're putting in the least amount of energy, and try to support that thing the most. And it could be your mental health. If you're focusing on everything else, and you're ignoring your mental health, take some time to focus on that, and, and try to bring all areas of your life into being well.

CHRISTINE [00:55:26] Thank you so much, Sophia, for sharing your wonderful story. And although we did disagree on whether Trinidad Carnival or Crop Over in Barbados, which one was the better event... which I'm still holding on Trinidad, we had an amazing, amazing discussion. So thank you so much, Safiya. And if you want to stay connected to Safiya, you can.

SAFIYA [00:55:53] My blog, and my website right now is www.39andcounting.com and it's digits, three, nine and counting, dot com. If you have eyes and you love to read, come read. If you are thinking about writing, just come and join me I love to write about writing. And I love helping people to get their voice out there as a writer. And also because I love podcasting, started recording some of my blog posts. If you want something to listen to while you're cooking, come on down to the website and find some stuff. I'm on Facebook, you can find my official Safiya Robinson, author coach page, if you'd like me over there. I'm on Instagram at [@SafiyaRobinson76](https://www.instagram.com/SafiyaRobinson76). So and I have a podcast that only has one season so far. And it's called *Big Lessons From A Small Island*. And you can hear some of my posts there as well.

CHRISTINE [00:56:47] Thank you so much for listening to the podcast this week. I really hope you enjoyed this week's episode. Definitely make sure you are following the podcast via Instagram because that is where I post a lot of the announcements that happened for the podcast. It's where I go live by myself or with guests. And I will be going live this Thursday and on Sunday. This Thursday, I'm going to be talking about how to get a job abroad. We're going to be talking about whatever questions you have about, either starting a business abroad, or how to land a job abroad. I think I'm going to do it as a series. So definitely stop by Instagram. And let's chat. Let's have a discussion. Bring your questions. I mean, if you have something to say maybe you'll go live with me. Who knows? Definitely make sure you are following *Flourish In The Foreign* on Instagram [@FlourishForeign](https://www.instagram.com/FlourishForeign). And if you are ready to take your skills and your expertise abroad, if you want to leverage your talents and your expertise into a viable and sustainable online business so that you can pursue a thriving life abroad. Get at me, get at me. I have my signature 12-week sprint that is open right now but I will be closing it at the end of the month or sooner depending. So if you're ready, if you want to start the new year, not just with a wish and hope and new year new me kind of stuff. If you actually want to start the new year with a game plan and with a business and really be out, definitely hit me up check out my website at

www.ChristineJob.com. And if you are thinking about starting a podcast, maybe you've already started one and you're feeling like what do I do? What is there all to do? Because it's overwhelming. I highly recommend you check out the WOC Insiders Podcaster Membership Program. I am a member of this membership. And let me tell you, they have so many amazing resources to help you get started to help you monetize your podcast for you to increase the reach of your podcast. So if you're interested in really taking your podcasting seriously, I definitely recommend joining the WOC Insiders Podcasters Membership. Please use the link on the *Flourish In The Foreign* website or any of the bios across all of our social media channels. It is an affiliate link but it's at no extra cost to you and it's just another way to support this here podcast. Thank you again to Zachary Higgs who produced the music of this podcast. If you are looking to have music created for your podcast or your next project, definitely hit him up. I'll leave all of his information in the show notes. All right. That is it for this week. Have a fantastic week, no matter what. All right, y'all. Take care of yourselves every single day and every single week, but especially this week, take care of yourself. Always. Well, we will get through no matter what. All right. All right. See you next week.

CHRISTINE [01:00:37] On the next episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*:

NEXT EPISODE SPEAKER [01:00:41] There was this really funny YouTube series years ago, that detailed (inaudible) and diaspora moving back to Ghana, and I will never forget them going house hunting. And this house is \$4,000 a month. And they were like, "What?" I think they had moved from New York City or something. And so they were expecting, "Oh, it's gonna be cheap. If I go back to the continent." Like no, this, this place is \$4000 a month and they're like, "But the power is not gonna be reliable?" And they're like, "No. So if you want it, it's that." And so I think also have to recognize that this is a very wealthy continent, wealthy in the people, wealthy in the resources and the intelligence and the brilliance of the people that inhabit the continent. And so if you want to be a part of that, you're most welcome. We welcome you.