

“AMERICAN DREAM IN
EAST NEW YORK”

TRANSCRIPT

ORAL HISTORY
CURRICULUM

FOR LESSON

*Migration
Stories*NARRATOR **Kobir Chowdhury**

CHOWDHURY My name is Kobir Ahmed Chowdhury. I was born in Bangladesh, it's a very small village called Porchok, and then it's Sylhet, Bangladesh. And right after high school, I had a wonderful opportunity, or I was one of the lucky ones to be selected on a visa program, through a lottery system, and that's what brought me here to the United States.

STRONG When you did come to Brooklyn, what was that transition like for you?

CHOWDHURY Oh, it was, I had no family here, and my uncle knew somebody who, who lived here, so that was like our, our you know, only thing to grab, and he was very kind to, to allow me to come to his house. When I called from England, Heathrow Airport, he was not home, somebody else picked up the phone, so that guy later on, even today, appreciate how he comforted me and he said look, come it's okay, we'll come to the airport, pick you up. And yeah, they were very cordial, nice, many people live together obviously and first few months, I couldn't complete a whole letter, because I would tear down and you know it's just, it's just so, so far, so different, you know so much that I didn't know about, you know? So it was a struggle but you know at times like this, you would pray more, you would appreciate what you had and look forward to what you were going to make out of yourself and how you're going to make yourself better, and those are the things that would comfort you. Yeah it was, it was not easy, not easy.

STRONG Tell me about some of the things you learned to do to take care of yourself and build a life.

RUN TIME **6:06**

CHOWDHURY Well, I had no skill, just from high school and you know, you also have to worry about paying the rent. End of the month, you know people are nice but they cannot afford to, to support you financially, so with no skills, I would — and a lot of people were not working at that time, you know not working, not having a job for three months, six months, was very normal. So, after a week or so, one of the roommates said you could come with me to start looking for jobs, and so I did go with him, but I met him in the train station, I didn't dress properly, so he kind of yelled at me, he said, “Hey, you know, that's not how you guys —” only if I knew. So I came home, changed my shoes and something else, went with him. We went around just looking for a job. He would say that but we wouldn't land on anything. Then he said okay, we'll have a cup of coffee or something, let's go to this mall, they have a nice food court on the seventh floor. Right as we got in, there was a little water fountain with a little stage there, it was Christmastime. So I came in September, Christmas decoration and festivity was very, very big at that time I remember, so there was some kind of dancing performance on that stage. In the wintertime, they'll close the stage and make it into you know, a performing place. It was amazing and colorful and you know very nice, and so we walked on each floor, we went to the seventh floor.

So, the store we were buying coffee from, he said we were looking for a job, and who became my boss, he said who? He said, “Both of us.” But he, he picked on me and he said look, you can come around, back to the corridor and I want to talk to you for a minute. So I did go and I was so nervous, I was so nervous he, I thought he would first ask me my name, that's what my natural thinking, so I said — I was prepared to tell him my name but he said, “How are you?” I said, “My name is Kobir Ahmed Chowdhury.” [laughter] Just this, — and he goes, he

said you know, “You’ll be fine, don’t worry, I’m not —” then he said if I could come couple hours, you know from eleven to I think three or something, just to deliver food within the mall for different floors, or maybe sometimes outside.

I worked I think 15 hours, three hours a day, just for deliveries and stuff, and he put a lot of singles, one dollar bills, and maybe a five and a twenty on the top, so it felt like a lot of money, and he knew he wanted to make me feel good. So he gave me a lot of money, I thought it was a lot of money I grabbed, that I was — I told him thank you, I came home. I didn’t count it over there, came home, I counted the money and it was \$60, and I realized, how much does a ticket cost to go back home, because \$60 times whatever, you know, I think it was five, six hundred dollars or something, and my feet would hurt. Delivery, you know it’s a struggle. So I really broke down, I said how long will it take or how much do I have to make, to make enough money to go and see my family again, you know? But you know, things got over and you know, I started making — I made good money.

Six months later, I became a manager of that store.

BIO Kobir Chowdhury was born in 1974 in Bangladesh’s Sylhet district. He immigrated to the United States in 1991 and settled in East New York. He worked in real estate and banking after arriving in New York. He also attended Masjid Al-Aman in East New York and began to take on leadership roles in the mosque in the 2010s, including serving as an advisor to the executive committee and as the president of the mosque’s board.

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