

## ABDULLAHI ALI

So, this happened around... I want to say, August of 2013 – either at the end of August or the beginning of September.

I had just moved to China, to go to school there, and I was like feeling very confused and like, conflicted and, y'know, like culture shock is a *real* thing. There's a huge language barrier, and there were a lot of things that were kinda like, y'know, stressing me out and like upping my anxiety.

And this one morning, my sister comes to me and she's like, "Yo, y'know, you haven't left the house, you been feeling kinda down, looking kinda down, like, do you wanna go shopping?" and I was like, "You bet!"

So we go, and we go to something called a pedestrian street, kinda like an outlet mall, but it was like *huge*, like I'm talking, at least, four or five blocks just going down up to like five stories, just like sometimes *circular*, sometimes *straight*, just like an endless amount of stores and restaurants and just a huge, like, infrastructure, just like, you can have a good time and like spend bare money.

And so, we're shopping, we go, we eat and she's like, "Yo, I got a surprise for you" and I was like, "Aight, bet" y'know what I mean? Like, "What'd you buy me?" And she was like "Nah, follow me" and I was like, "Aight, cool."

We go, and we come to an alleyway, and like, there's a *huge*, like, banister that says "ANIME ALLEYWAY". And like, I grew up watching Anime. I watched Anime at like thirteen — I think — or twelve. I'm eighteen at this point, and like, I have merch and stuff, and like Anime, Manga, like one of the few constants in my life that like, even to this day, I still watch, read, reread, like. I love it. I love it!

I was really into the culture for a bit but like, growing up in Canada, it was like, always hard to come by, like, trinkets and like, cool Anime cosplay things that like, y'know, like, all these things that you could buy from the anime. It's like, super hard to come by. So like, I'm standing there in the front of the alleyway and it's like, long. It's like literally, like, shops and shops and shops and shops.

Living abroad, my parents would send me money every month for like my living, food, y'know I mean, whatever. So like, I'm just picking up that money — so it probably was in September. So we'd just picked up that money, and I'm standing there, just looking at like, at least like, fifty, sixty stores of just pure anime stuff, like, there were swords poking out the door, there's robes hung here and like, there's hats here, there's trinkets here, and with a pocket full of money, I'm just happy.

Like, anytime I want a reference, like a point of *pure* joy and happiness in my life, I literally think about like, eighteen-year-old me, my first or second week in China, I don't know anything, I don't know anyone, I can't speak the language, and I'm just standing in the Anime Alleyway literally feeling at home.

I was like, "I know that, that's Ichigo's sword" y'know what I mean? Like, "That's Zoro's sword, that's that Katsuki jacket that, y'know like the One Piece poster, that's Chopre's hat!" and like, all these things and I'm just like — my sister's like — "Yo," y'know, like "It's Anime Alley, y'know?"

And I was like, "Yo, listen, you don't have to like leave, or, I don't know if you wanna stay here cause i'mma be here for a while", like, "I'm going into *every* single store." She's like "Yea, I'm going with my friends, whatever, just call me when you're done." And like, I must've spent, like, half my monthly money and I got like, four or five hours just buying *bare* stuff. Things I have till this day.

And yeah. It was like, it was such a beautiful moment for me cause it was like, going from being, like, feeling completely foreign and completely lost and like, me not really knowing anything or anyone or how society works there, to like find me at the small of the — well it wasn't small, but like, it was like, in the grand scheme of things, it was like a little alleyway that literally made me feel at home like, y'know what I mean?.

Even some of the vendors, I don't speak the language but like, y'know, you do like little actions and whatnot and like, y'know, hand gestures like 'ah yeah yeah' I'm like, 'yeah, that, that!'. Da da da, this, that, showing them pictures of like other characters and yeah.

Like it was just, um, it was really a comforting and a beautiful moment and it's a moment on top of that, like it doesn't matter where you go in the world y'know?

Like, you can always potentially find, y'know, a piece of home, you can find a piece of yourself anywhere in the world, y'know? If you look hard enough and you open up to it.