



Circumstances changed, however, as the aftermath from the conflict in Ethiopia continued to simmer, exacerbated by the effects of widespread drought and famine. Helina and her mother and sister were able to extend their stay in the US. Due to a variety of complications, her father was unable to join his family, a separation that wound up lasting nine years.

"We talked on the phone and eventually were able to e-mail him, but we didn't see him for a very long time," said Helina.

Her father absent, Helina took a large measure of inspiration from her mother, Salelesh, who often had to confront prejudice as a single African mother with two daughters and a distinctive accent.

"It always got me so angry to see people disrespect my mother," said Helina. "But she always taught me to how to deal with it - and not to let it bother me.

"When you don't have the traditional nuclear family like everyone else, it starts to have an effect on you as you internalize some of it."

For this and other reasons, Helina said, she had a hard time adapting to some aspects of life in the US.

"My mother and sister were the only people who understood our situation," she said. "So we were very close."

Eventually Salelesh completed her doctorate and was able to work in the public health field for the state of Maryland. In