



**COLLEGE MAJOR**  
Political science

**ANOTHER FAVORITE FALLS**

Rangleley's Smalls Falls. "I love the way that you can see the water flowing in from above and beyond the trees.

If you're standing at the bottom, it's like it's falling from the sky."

**NATURAL WONDER**

"In winter, I love snowshoeing across the Royal River when it freezes over. Just the idea of being able to walk on a river is really crazy to me. I couldn't believe that I could do that."

## Abdi Nor Iftin

### BIG FALLS PRESERVE, NEW GLOUCESTER

**N**early every summer morning, before most alarm clocks sound, Abdi Nor Iftin heads out to sneak in a hike along the rolling trails of New Gloucester's Big Falls Preserve. He finds refuge there, away from traffic noise, amid the 40-acre parcel of beeches, hemlocks, and pines, with its whispering falls on Meadow Brook.

"Being surrounded by the trees, birds, and water gives me this sense of safety," he says.

That safety feels nothing short of miraculous to Iftin, who spent most of his life in war-torn Somalia, contending with violence, homelessness, hunger, and poverty, an experience he recounted in his affecting 2018 memoir, *Call Me American*. He ultimately won a green-card lottery and immigrated to Maine in 2014, with the help of a Yarmouth family who took him in after hearing his story on the BBC.

This summer, Iftin published a new adaptation of his book, geared toward teens and young adults. He wants to help young readers grasp the human side of the refugee experience, he says, particularly in light of the national conversation about systemic racial injustice, sparked by the killing of George

Floyd by a white police officer this spring.

"Kids need to learn about immigration, asylum, and refugees in ways other than what they see on the news or portrayed in Hollywood," says Iftin, now a U.S. citizen, still living in Yarmouth and finishing his bachelor's degree at Boston College. "They're so eager to learn. The best thing I can do is help them understand our stories before they grow up and become members of society."

He also hopes to show young people that, like him, they can defy seemingly impossible odds.

"The first 25 years of my life were about survival, safety, and security," he says. "I was angry and starving, but I had a dream, and I didn't give up. It was brutal, but I am resilient, and here I am."

Coming from the deserts of Somalia, Iftin revels in Maine's varied terrain and extreme seasons, and he hikes at every opportunity.

"Maine is such a combination of crazy things," he says. "Right now it's green, grassy, and beautiful, and in a few months, snow will cover everything. Then, a short walk from my house, there's a sand dune, which I never expected to see in Maine. The nature in this state is therapy and a reminder of the beautiful planet that we have." — JENNIFER VAN ALLEN