

## The Peale, Baltimore

*Out of the Blocks* Storytelling Series

Recorded by Aaron Henkin; Photographs and Music by Wendel Patrick

Produced for the *Out of the Blocks* website, created by the Peale, <https://ootb.thepeale.org/>

*Out of the Blocks* is supported by PRX and produced with grant funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cohen Opportunity Fund, The Hoffberger Foundation, Patricia and Mark Joseph, The Shelter Foundation, The Kenneth S Battye Charitable Trust, The Sana and Andy Brooks Family Fund, The Muse Web Foundation, and the William G. Baker, Jr. Memorial Fund, creator of the Baker Artist Portfolios



Speaker 1:

You've been robbed how many times?

Hamza:

Seven. Come and open the door, take all the cigarettes, take all the money, take all... Seven times.

Speaker 3:

[Inaudible 00:00:18].

Hamza:

What's up, man?

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Speaker 3:

Do you have any Claritin? Give me one medicine.

Hamza:

My name Hamza [inaudible 00:00:23] with Saratoga. Saratoga Grocery Store, LLC.

Speaker 3:

[foreign language 00:00:30]?

Hamza:

I'm from Yemen, it's Arabic country. I come in here two and a half years. We can't go back in my country. No house, no nothing, everything done.

Speaker 3:

[inaudible 00:00:49].

Speaker 1:

Tell me how many hours a day, how many days a week, you're in this shop?

Hamza:

Every day, 7:00, 8:00 in the morning. Sometimes 2:00, sometimes 3:00 in the night. I live upstairs of the store. Finish work, go upstairs. Finish work, go upstairs. But one room, all the small room, no shower. I go take shower sometime my friends sometimes.

Speaker 1:

What does it do to your mind, to always just be here?

Hamza:

Like a brother, sometimes you say [inaudible 00:01:34]. Not for me, what I want. I don't want nothing, nothing else.

William Donovan:

When he first came, I wrote the alphabet down, try to decipher his alphabet from the English alphabet, try to teach him how to add and subtract the way we do, different stuff like that. My name's William,

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William Donovan. We're around the same age and just hang, talk to him, because he's the only person that really works here. It's his business, and it's all his money, he has to pay all the bills. If you're sitting in your business all day you need somebody to talk to. You know what I mean? You want to get something to eat, you can't leave your business. Or if you do want to leave and go out and get some fresh air, you need somebody that you can trust that's not going to steal from you. Stuff like that.

When you first came and you were sending money to your father and your mother, you sent me \$1,500, \$2,000. Sometimes you send me to the store, and you seem happy when I bring you the receipt back. You happy you're sending money to your family. It's good.

Hamza:

Sometimes you owe somebody money. When you open a business, you take money for everybody this way, this way, this way. When you give him his money back, of course he's going to be happy because you make business.

Speaker 1:

So I wonder, William, if there's a question that you always wanted to ask Hamza that you haven't had a chance to ask him.

William Donovan:

Yeah, it's a lot. Let me see. Main thing I would like to ask him would be, is he happy with his life?

Speaker 1:

Don't ask me, ask him.

William Donovan:

Are you happy here in Baltimore, working in your store?

Hamza:

One day I'm going to leave all this headache. All this headache, I'm going to leave it one day. I'm going to leave it one day. I'm going to find a good life.

Speaker 3:

Let me have two.

Hamza:

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[inaudible 00:03:42].