

# AD 10 Mac and Blair

**Claire Clotney:** Hi, my name is Claire Clotney, and welcome back to another episode of American Dreamers, which is brought to you in partnership with Aurra Studios as part of their original content. Now I'm a parent. Some of you may not know that I am the mother to a super amazing child. And together we have traveled to many incredible destinations around the world.

Travel with children though requires some serious organization skills. Relocating with children, now this requires meticulous planning. On this episode of American Dreamers, my guests, Mac and Blair Billing, the heads of the 9BFM family relocated from the US with not just one, not two. Not three but four children, a whole family of six who moved during the pandemic.

Hi Mac. Hi Blair. How are you?

**Blair Billing:** Hi

**Mac Billing:** We're good. We're good.

**Claire Clotney:** You look really calm and relaxed and chilled. And I can't wait to understand how you navigated from the US to the UK during a pandemic. It's a lot, right?

**Mac Billing:** It was a lot. It took, it took a lot of effort for us to get going. When we tried to do it, the place where you do the biometrics, where your visas, they were all closed because it was COVID lockdowns in the US and the UK.

We ended up having to drive a 12,000 uh it's actually about 2,400 miles total. We had to drive around trip 1200 miles to get to a site where we could get, uh, biometrics done to get our visas. And then we had to drive another couple of hundred miles to get to another site to finish the family because they could only do three and three.

And they went drove about 1500 miles back to get back to the Washington DC area where we left from. We did that over like a three or four day period, because that was the requirement we had to get our visas done and we had no other options.

**Claire Clotney:** Determination, determination. That's all I can think. So Washington, DC, what was life like there for you and your family?

**Blair Billing:** Um, DC, was very fast paced. Um, we both had very busy, hectic work schedules. I actually was working in Virginia, so I drove from our home in Southern Maryland, where we live was about 30 miles outside of DC. So I drove past DC to Virginia and then kind of actually way out in Virginia to go to work. Mac was in DC.

Our days were really long and you just got used to it. And if that's how we want it to live, that's what it was.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. It was a, it was, um, 110 miles. Daily round trip for Blair to drive to her job. We were in DC. I got there in 04'. I think like you arrived in like, 05'. Yeah. I hope professional career was, was in the Washington DC area.

We bought a home, we had a farm on a ranch down south of the city. When you know, we really think about it. It was, it wasn't really a move cause we sold our property 16 acre farm. We sold all that cause we were so committed to, uh, to making the move.

**Claire Clotney:** I'm sat here and I'm shaking my head. I'm thinking, oh my goodness.

Not even in a horrible way. This is British humor. What is wrong with these people? Why would you give up? I mean, I don't know how I feel about the drive, the commute, but it sounds like you were living decent lives.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. We both felt as though we easily could've stayed where we were and been very happy work was not bad, but we looked around and we, for me, especially, I started to talk to Blair and I was like, Hey, you know, the city is great,

but I don't want to live my whole life here. There's more to the world that I would love to see more things that I would love to experience. So that, that fall started to formulate at night. We'd like to walk. So we lived down the drive. I drive ways about half a mile long. So we'd walk at night up and down the driveway talking, and that's kind of one of our things we would talk.

And we'd just say, Hey. Let's go somewhere else.

**Claire Clotney:** Okay. Think back to when your children weren't even born, they might not even be in a dream when you were a new couple. I'm not sure how long you've been together, but I'm guessing a little while. It's the life that you're living now, what you had in mind or planned?

**Blair Billing:** No, no. It's one thing when you're. Uh, college student and you're sitting around like, oh, I want four kids. Yeah. Okay. You can say you want four kids, but picturing like where are you going to live or how you're going to live? I hadn't envisioned any of that part yet. And our lives from when we were dating and first married to how it is right now.

It's very, very different. When we were first dating, we lived in Arlington in a apartment style town. And, you know, it was very cute, very close to the city. And then we proceeded to pack up and move 30 miles out to a farm that was the closest to Chipotle was like 30 minutes away.

**Claire Clotney:** I love the way that Chipotle is the landmark.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. We went really rural and, and, you know, also as far as living overseas, when we were this early dating couple period, we saw an opportunity for a position in Germany and we scoffed at it. It was like, absolutely not. We'll never do that if we weren't in the right space and the frame of mind to even think of living overseas for

**Blair Billing:** extended, that was before we had done any travel individually or together.

And it was just like, ah, I don't want to do that. I think I like it here. Yeah,

**Mac Billing:** we just, we weren't ready at that time to make that kind of a move. And it wasn't, it just wasn't a thought. So when you say from where we were to where we are now, it is, it is complete 180 that transition and a change. It was not a fly by night decision.

It wasn't just quick. This is a gradual, we've been married for a decade now. So this is been a gradual transition to, to where we were.

**Blair Billing:** And many, many conversations to get to this point conversations. So

**Claire Clotney:** how old are your children?

**Blair Billing:** Our oldest is two. So right now, it sounds perfect. Um, we have a 10, 8, 6, and a four year old.

Oh yeah.

**Claire Clotney:** That's a lot they're of the age though, of having their own dreams, I guess. And not quite, oh, what do you want to be when you grow up? But I think children of today see a lot more than what we saw when we were growing up the conversations you were having together as a couple about where you would live.

Did you in food, the children and those conversations. We did not. No,

**Blair Billing:** not initially. Yeah, no. When we got closer to it becoming more of a reality, we kind of did try to prepare the kids and talk to them some about it, ask them what their thoughts were. And that was more so to like, get them to talk about it with each other, like our oldest to, um, as a girl and a boy.

And she was very much like, no, I don't want to go. And I'm like, I promise you'll like it just go with it. And our son was like, let's go I'm there.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. So yeah,

**Blair Billing:** absolutely.

**Claire Clotney:** Absolutely. Did you both have that feeling of, yeah, let's go though. Yourselves before you told the children or were, was one of you a little bit more like, I don't know.

We were moving away from family and friends

**Mac Billing:** and no. Actually over the years, we've had some really good friends that lived there at one of my high school, best friends that lived in the DC area. They now live in Texas. They left a few years before. So most of our close friends had already left. Blair's best friend from college has not lived in the states.

Well over a decade, she's little to Japan, Lau China, China, they're now in Zambia, but there was no hesitation between us about whether we should go. There was not any hesitation. The only hesitation really was whether we should sell our property or not. And ultimately we made the decision to go ahead and do that.

But as far as going. W when we made that decision that we wanted to do it, we were completely committed to

**Claire Clotney:** setting your property. Does feel like a huge right. Final nail in the coffin. No. Going back to your lovely farm at all, and you're comfortable. Yeah.

**Mac Billing:** Yes. The thing was, we talked to people who lived outside of the country before, and some of them had kept homes, summit had not, and we'd heard great stories about it.

Oh, we can rent the place out. We heard horror stories about it. People would trash your place, but for us, ultimately, we said, you know what we wanted to do. And we want it to be committed to it. And we knew that if we kept a property back in the states, we'd always be always thinking about that. And we wanted to be committed to it.

Want it to be able to fully experience where we are and kind of live in the moment.

**Blair Billing:** Yeah. It, it became more of a reality. Once we, right before we left, we had to sell a vehicle. I was, I was nervous. It wasn't even my vehicle. And I was like, are you sure about this? Are you okay with this? Do you feel okay?

You gonna be mad? And you're like, it's fine. It's not a big deal. We'll do it again.

**Mac Billing:** I'm on a lot of vehicles. I can always buy another one.

**Claire Clotney:** I understand that. So what was it like leaving a community behind? I know you say you're close friends and you'd moved far away, but actually you still have a community of people around you, especially when you have.

You know those relationships at that age, you know, seems like life and dev. It seems like, you know, they're going to be best friends forever. And not only that you acquire friends for your children's friends, parents,

**Mac Billing:** the, the thing about our kids, we have to pry that information about out of them about who their childhood friends are, because honestly, and from what we've observed, They're best friends are each other.

We have four children, they have their own rooms and they all sleep in the same room together. Typically I wake up at night in the morning and I have to hunt

them down because he switched rooms and each night they might be in my daughter's room. All right. There may be in the little boys room or they just, but they, they all for sleep together in the same room.

So as long as they're not separated from each other, they seem to do really well.

**Claire Clotney:** Yeah. I can relate to that feeling. Um, I grew up with two sisters and an older brother and, you know, I say that they're my God-given best friends. We shared the same womb and room going up. So I understand. But considering each of your children's needs, the U S presents opportunities for sports and sports scholarships and, you know, arts and other places, you know, they might have a bit of a leverage in certain career spaces.

What was your thinking about what's going to be best for each child?

**Blair Billing:** There was more. W, how did we want to continue the development for each child? From everything that we had heard about the UK school system, we heard that it would be good for the lower grades. And so that's where most of our kids are at right now.

So it's a great opportunity to take that right now and see like, how is that fairing for our children? And right now, It's doing wonderful. I tell my husband all the time. I don't understand because we put them in this school and they have to go through a transitionary time where they stay at school for about two to three hours a day.

And then they come home. Well, the first week of doing that, he was already coming home telling us sounds like. I don't understand you mean phonics?

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. That's a reference to our youngest who, if he was back in the states actually still would not be in school. He's in reception this year and saw the youngest is doing really well.

Really? They've all been doing well. We were not completely satisfied with the school system that they were in back in the states and we recognize. We want an opportunity to change up that system. Cause they only get one go round at that early education. Right? You'd need that solid foundation if you miss it, they're kind of always behind.

And so we were not committed to that school system. We were actually looking for a change. So when we had this opportunity and looking at what we've heard, everything we experienced up to this point now about the British schools. We

didn't feel as though there will be a drop-off in capabilities and education and they would get the opportunity to pick up a, a, a very British accent.

That's what we were hoping

**Claire Clotney:** for. Yeah. That's nice. My thoughts has picked up the American accent from YouTube. She's got better American accent than myself. She's, she's currently in the UK, and I understand that the elementary or primary education is really, really great. And it seems that the primary education.

Works great in the UK. And then you get to high school in the U S and university, and then you've got the same compliment in terms of great opportunities and broadening the scope for learning and, you know, just try new things. So it's interesting in that parallel, how did you balance. Your children's needs with your personal passions and desires for relocation, because it seemed as if, as a parent you're often required to sacrifice and give up on all your dreams for your children.

How did that play out with the relocation?

**Blair Billing:** It ended up being a bunch of charts. It was the worst. So he has his things that make him happy. So that means that whenever we move somewhere, he wants space and. We have to make sure that we have that. And then I want to make sure that the kids are in a good school system and that we still have access to extracurricular activities.

And will we get to do different things with the kids and have just be naturally situated for stuff like that?

**Mac Billing:** Our kids won't swim. We've been trying to get them back into swim. Now, Karen. Yeah, capabilities that they were going to do TaeKwonDo they're there don't have Quito here. So we kind of got them rolled into the same kind of similar routines that they were doing back in the.

To keep it balanced for them. Really the thought process also is this is as much for us as it is for them. We really wanted to do this for us because I do believe a lot of adults, they do have children and they hit that, that, that middle age point to where there may be, I don't know, 35, 45, somewhere in there, a little older, a little younger than that.

But what does matter is that turn off their own ambitions and dreams and desires and just start living solely and wholly for the children, which is a

wonderful, wonderful thing. But I think it's even better. If you could blend the aspirations and desires of what you think you want to do with the needs for your children.

And we have kind of, we've tried to try to do both and we are getting a lot out of this, but what our children are getting out of it is exposed to. And that was one of the key tenants for me was that, you know, looking around, I love the American system. I grew up in it, of course, but also recognize that there are other systems of success around the world.

And if we could get our children exposed to some of the other cultures and experiences, they can recognize and realize that they have more opportunities than just what's available in one specific location. So this year we've been to Scotland, we've been to Portugal. We went back to the states. We have a whole itinerary plan Lara, and I have done some travel COVID of course has been a hindrance.

So we've had to of course, uh, do a lot of testing and then we've get tested for them as well and, you know, vaccines and all that. If that's our, but it's just really was something that we want to do to give them an opportunity to, to Excel by exposing them to different cultures. And I think that's going to play a great role in their development as individuals.

**Claire Clotey:** Traveling with children is not easy. I said it right at the beginning. I am like the bag lady when I get on a plane with my door. So now she's old enough. I just stuff her a bag with it that you want your goods, you carry them. But there are certain things that she absolutely loves. And I take on the plane to keep it quiet at the moment.

Um, she loves the. Chocolate covered pretzels from the UK and she loves jammy Dodgers. And she's got her favorite crisps that you call chips. And I know you've done the Lay's versus walkers chips versus crisps thing on your YouTube channel, which is quite interesting. I'm going to push you for that in a moment, but what did you have to pay?

In each child's case, in your cases for your, your suitcases, for yourself, that was American that, you know, you just needed here in the UK with you,

**Blair Billing:** the granola bars.

**Mac Billing:** Granola bars. We actually get them shipped over



is a Quaker is a Quaker. There's a specific Quaker oat granola bar that just does not exist here. Those we actually get shipped in. Yes. That is the. The only thing, but for packing for the kids, they have their laptops, they carry their own backpacks and we pack the little snack bags and it's, so it's actually kind of cute because they get on a plane.

And once we get up at altitude, they pull out the tablets and when they get hungry, they get their own snacks. And I have nothing for them in my bag and they have nothing for me and their bags and it is completely separate, you know, soften those granola bars. I can't think of anything because I just feel like, especially here living in a UK, I hope no one takes offense, but it's kind of like the U S light in some ways, because the cultures are so similar as far as like what's available, the brand names are different, of course, but there isn't really a drop-off and capability there.

Isn't a drop off in produce. Isn't a drop-off in good. It is kind of like a one to one, uh, transition for us. That's been our experience and, you know, I haven't had any issues with them.

**Claire Clotney:** Well, I don't know about that. Portion. Sizes are different. You know, what you get in your walkers, Chris is quite different to what you get in your lays Chris packet.

But I have to say you, you were both on decided about that. I'm telling you walkers is better.

**Mac Billing:** I have definitely transitioned. I prefer, I think in that. I think I came up on the side of walkers and I think Blair was more lazy, but I liked it. I liked the smoother, softer flavors of the walkers chips, a little softer.

I won't disagree with your walkers. Pretty good.

**Claire Clotney:** Yeah. You, your children have good tastes. They like fish and chips.

What meal do you miss from America though?

**Mac Billing:** I would say for me, Mexican Tex mix. Yeah, it just doesn't of course not authentically exist here, but there's some flavors there that, you know, I'm from the south. So around Arkansas, Texas Southern region there, they can do some things. There's some barbecue flavors.

That a hard to replicate here. And then I guess some of those Southern comfort foods is what I'm talking about. American Southern comfort foods.

**Blair Billing:** I need to figure out where collard greens are here. Somebody sent me a Tik TOK of Thanksgiving and it was a hot of collard greens. And I was just like, nah, I have to go figure out where to get those, because

**Claire Clotney:** I don't know.

So many similarities, but so many slight differences because you know, I've, I've visited the south for a Thanksgiving and collard greens, mustard, greens. I don't know what that is in the UK, but equally now I'm here. I love Pak Choi, you know, frying up a Chinese dish, for example. And I can't find patchouli here.

I don't know what it's called. And I also was looking for what I call sugar snap peas almost. And over here, they're called snow peas. Yes. How has the UK different from your expectations?

**Mac Billing:** You know, first thing just right out there is I have been surprised by the amount of metal melanated people that we have seen here in the UK.

It has shocked me. I had no idea. I was, I knew that there was a community in London, but we have been into a lot of places all over Scotland and all across. And we love to go to the castles and hunt out those obscure locations. And lo and behold, every single place we've been there are melanated people everywhere.

And I said, wow, I just had no idea. I just didn't know because I just don't see. I didn't see it picked it. I didn't look for it either, but I just, that has, that is one thing that's really shocked. In a good way. That is not

**Blair Billing:** negative. I guess some still like a little surprised by the weather tonight. We were driving.

When we left, it was clear when we were leaving the store, it was foggy and British fog is, is. We have fog in the mornings, in the states, it is gone in like an hour and it's really, really low and it's not hard to drive through here. I'm like, I think you're going too fast. I really need you to slow down a little bit more.

I can't, I can't see anything.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. We had to get our cars. We did bring over two vehicles and we had to get them modified to meet a UK specs. And of course they added the fall. And I didn't understand it. And like we have fog lights, we have them, but they're American fog lights on the front. It's entirely different, but you really now understand now the fog is so much more dense than anything we've experienced in the U S and it can come up in the middle of the day, 1:00 PM.

And it's just, it gets foggy and can stay foggy for the rest of the afternoon. Yeah. That's not something I'm familiar with. That was also a bit surprising.

**Claire Clotney:** Well, you're saying that very pleasantly. I love the UK born and raised. Hey, what can I say, bots? The web, the wherever used to jar me so much. Now I'm in the desert.

I'm just quite happy. I know what I'm going to get. You know, have you had any interest in experiences that have made you feel really black and American and not? Whoa, we are really not from here. And when you're out in the community, I don't know.

**Mac Billing:** I, I don't, I don't know, I guess, because I always feel that way.

So you mentioned we have a YouTube channel. I did a video where, where 'cause we, we, we start a YouTube channel. We actually really, I had to China for a long time, and we really started while we were here in the UK and started posting up and I would refer to myself as African-American and black and things of this on, we had a lot of people in the comments saying British people in the comments.

Well, you don't have to refer to yourself that way here. You know, you don't have to distinguish in that manner. And so it caused me to, just to think about it because in America, you never forget that you're black. It never is not an ever-present thought is always there in the back of your head. And sometimes not just in the back of your head where you're always cognizant.

Of it and aware of it, it was different. And it caused me to think like, well, what is it like to live someplace where that's not the first thing. I'm not saying that it's not an important thing, but where it's not the first thing that comes to people mind. And that is, uh, a unique thought in and of itself.

But I can't think of a specific time here where I have. Yeah,

**Blair Billing:** not necessarily black, but definitely not in America. And I was probably our first bonfire night and we didn't realize what was going on. You know, we, we still go for walks and we're going for walks and they're like, oh, look, there's fireworks over there.

It was fireworks over there. And it's just, we didn't know that it was a whole holiday going on. It was just completely oblivious.

**Claire Clotney:** I've had conversations with other people on this podcast series and you know, we've spoken about the fact that in America, racial politics are playing. Every day, every time you turn on the TV, it is very black and white news, but at the same time, the UK main may or not be burying the conversation and pretending that it's not a thing, oh, I don't see color.

And in saying that isn't that problematic.

**Mac Billing:** So going back to the comment section, and I was talking about the video idea, I've talked about being African-American and I had a couple of black Brits come into that discussion and it said, Hey, don't be food. It is still a relevant issue here. And I want to tell you what they told me.

They said, you can be black and you can be British and you could be black, British, but you can never be English. And when I heard that. Oh, I see. So it's here. It's still exists. And you still run into that. It's just different, not as in your face, as some with what you would experience in the U S that's kind of been my take on it, uh, up to this point, you

**Claire Clotney:** said that.

You had discussed with other black immigrant families who were living in other places. I wonder wherever you've met any other black American expat families, because I have never, I've met lots of Australian, South Africa, white south Africans, or, you know, Europeans, you're the first African-American ex-pat family that I've ever.

**Blair Billing:** I, I had a friend in college. She was a friend that you had to be careful what book you picked up in her dorm room, because more than likely it wasn't going to be in English. So she would have like a Spanish book or a tagalo book or a French book all sitting on the same shelf. And you just thought it was like little red riding hood.

Well, it was a little red riding hood. It was just into gala and she eventually, you know, after college, She got married and part of his job was to travel and he has several different assignments overseas. And then when she decided to start working again, she got a job that has her traveling now and has them living outside of the us.

But that was the first time listening to someone talk about. I want to live outside the U S when I'm an adult, like this is, we were college students and I'm like, well, why do you want to do that? And she's like, oh, well, I was an exchange student to Japan when I was little and I just liked overseas. And I, I still want to do that.

So she was. First person I can think of it, like really expose me to the whole, yeah, you can go live over here or you can live anywhere throughout

**Mac Billing:** our professional career. We've been to multiple countries now, Blair and I took a wonderful vacation in 2019 where my sister had exchange students from Thailand.

So we went to Thailand to, to visit with her and her family. And then Blair and I left and we went to Singapore and we had a wonderful time in Singapore. And if you've never been on that side of the globe, I would highly encourage you to get up to that side of the globe as well. Cause it just, you realize how insignificant your global effect of your culture is.

You know, you're talking about hundreds of millions of people who exist in a world in a culture that is completely removed from your own. And they're living just fine and it just opens your eyes up to what there's definitely more than one way to survive. And it's definitely more than one way to live.

And that kind of has been an expansion for us, but you're right. When you think about it, we don't personally, aside from players, Uh, we know a couple of, I think, uh, black families not really closely connected to them that are living overseas. The rest of them, I guess, would just be YouTube. Here's who we see.

And we follow a lot of their channels and, and a lot of their experiences as they, you know, they kind of inspire us in some ways too, to kind of do what we're doing is. I wish there was more, I wish that more people understood that this is something that they could do. You don't have to take as big a leap as we did, but you can definitely still do it.

You know, you, you're going to be separated from family. You're going to be outside of the culture that, you know, And there is some uncomfortableness that comes with

**Blair Billing:** that, but now is a great time to do it. Like we've never had the access to technology to keep us connected. We never had before, like FaceTime or Skype or Facebook messenger to keep us all connected and to still see each other on a daily or however frequently you want to see or talk to your loved ones.

So I think people should really look into. Living overseas or doing a vacation overseas is very eye-opening and, um, a really nice experience. I know Mac Arthur mentioned, uh, we went to Thailand and Singapore and that was really awesome. What was our first trip out of the country together was actually to believe.

We were really excited to do that. By that time we have been married for a couple of years and we finally got a chance to go on our, I guess, honeymoon, but we won't call it a honeymoon because that was way past that stage of a marriage. And it was a great week. Unfortunately, everything is being compared to beliefs and it should not, we shouldn't do.

What

**Claire Clotney:** was it about

**Blair Billing:** belief? Well, why don't you saw people that looked like you? It was awesome. And then they also spoke all like three languages and you're like, yo, I'll speak three languages. And they're like, yeah. All of us.

**Mac Billing:** So yeah, it was a, I don't want to mispronounce the name of the people. Uh, the Gallup.

and I'm probably saying it wrong, but there's a group of people there who have African descent. So we, we actually talk with them a lot. The town that we stayed in balloons was really was a really great, so beautiful tropical central American country. But the people were really wonderful and of course they speak English there.

And so there was no problems with us with being able to communicate, but they all were bilingual could speak two and three languages, you know, going back to what Blair mentioned about technology. So I was up last night to 4:00 AM,

four 30 in the morning, my high school. Uh, in Arkansas, they were playing football game for the state championship.

Yeah. That connectivity. And to be able to connect to individuals, I was watching a game at the same time. I was on a live stream where my mother and my brother and my sister is superintendent of that school district. So she was. So even though I'm here in England, I still feel very much connected to what was going on.

So you can kind of overcome with, with technology, overcome solo, some of those differences, as far as being separated, physically, even this conversation that we're having now, you know, we're in England, you're, you're in a U S so you can, you can overcome those things. If moving out of the country is a bit too much in depth.

Get a passport and go visit some places and see the world and experience some things that are different. It will change your, your viewpoints and it will definitely change your perspectives.

**Claire Clotney:** I'm really excited that my daughter has had the opportunity to travel to so many different places. I call it a gift that my mother gave to us as her children and a gift that I'm glad.

I've been able to give to my daughter. I wanted to be a real global citizen at the same time though. I want her to have a really strong sense of self identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, you know, understand that she's got Ghanaian, Nigeria, German, Swiss, English, heritage, you know, for your children being in the UK.

How do you give them that strong sense of whether. African-American identity, African identity, black identity. What is it that you call it that you want them to hold onto and feel proud of being part of,

**Mac Billing:** uh, our children look a lot like us, we are dark brown. Um, so it w it goes with them every everywhere they go every day is going to sound maybe a little crazy, but I spend time.

Going through YouTube and listening to a lot of, I call it the history of black music, because so much of our culture is in our music. And I'm like, well, you need to know who Lionel Richie is. Uh, we're going to go through a Michael Jackson phase. Um, then we're going to work our way up through the, up through the decades.

We're going to go all the way to the blues. Johnny Taylor, we're going to go up through gospel were coming up all the way through to, to Nicki Minaj and in all of the modern. Rappers. And I'm like, well, you're going to be connected to the culture. You're going to have to know the culture. You don't have to know all the dances, but you need to know, you need to know the culture because this is who you are.

And this is, this is your culture. And so there are some aspects of black culture that was like, oh, I wish we could change this. Oh, I wish we wouldn't do so much. But I don't deny it. You know, we watched a breakfast club, our

**Blair Billing:** son, I think it was last year, he came up and he, I dunno what I was asking him. And he was like, mommy, can you play that song again?

I was like, what song? And he started singing. Grains beans, potatoes. And I was like, seriously, that's what you want to hear right now. And,

**Mac Billing:** but yeah, so we throw the music is one way we do it. We do it through the music. The other thing is I say, I'm thinking in my head, like, okay, at some point you went back in the states and you're going to have to fit in with the culture and to fit in with the culture you had to be cognizant aware of the music.

You also have to know how to play this. Of basketball. So I have them out there with a basketball and a hands. I played high school basketball. I'm like, you're going to know how to play basketball. Cause I'm not going to have sons are going to get embarrassed because they can't step on a basketball court and you don't have to be LeBron James, you don't have to be phenomenal, but you need to know the basics.

I try to find those, those cultural points and the things that I, that I'm aware. And then of course also the black church experience, you know, I was a, a church musician for, for many years before we moved over here. And we haven't been able to do as much because a lot of restrictions and things that I saw just knowing those points of black culture, which is going to be in the music is going to be, and the is going to be in the language is going to be in the church and trying to make sure that they have that grounded in who they are.

Also, I mentioned that we sold our home. The focal point for our children is actually in Arkansas because Beau and Blair and I've had to travel for work. We dropped our kids off there with my parents and they've kept them for up to six



months at a time. And that is the point, the place, like if there's a place that they have to go back to that they call home.

We've set that as like, that's your home point? That is the whole point for you. And that's where my sister is my brothers, my nieces and nephews, all everyone is there. So that's home points for them. And that's another way that we try to make sure that they stayed, stay connected to the, the American and in that black culture.

Cause that's, that's those ground points.

**Claire Clotney:** It's like grandma's house, but the matriarch of most black homes, not to dismiss a tool, the role of the black father, which is very important, but everyone knows what you mean when you say grandma's house. Right, right,

**Mac Billing:** right. And so we, we make sure that they are. I'm fully aware of that.

**Claire Clotney:** I'm excited for your children and I'm really excited for you as a family. What do you think that the UK, other than family won't give your children that they'll need to go back to America for

**Blair Billing:** America because still very much, or the U S is still very much a melting pot. And I definitely appreciate a lot of the intercultural experiences that I had in college.

And there's no other way to like, describe it, like for us when we talk about, oh, we're going to DC, we're going to eat. That's all we're going to do is we want to go eat. And as it's every kind of restaurant that you could ever, never think of, I want to go to the Ethiopian place. I want to go to this Indian place over here.

And personally, I think that the us has just the inner cultural diversity that can't be matched really. Like I've, I've met so many people from so many different places, all in the U S so

**Mac Billing:** I would actually take it from a different perspective. So I still feel as though in a many ways. The United States is one of the best places to be.

If you're a black person is, and as a, as a black American, we have so many clear examples now of black success in America. You know, you can feel,

however you want to feel about Kanye west. He's worth \$6.6 billion, Jay Z and Beyonce, but it's not just them. There are others in almost every single industry.

Across all parts of American society where black people have been able to rise to the various highest levels to include the president of the United States. So I feel as though that is something that is available and open to them in America as well, that they can go there and they can, America is still very much, oh, pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of country to where you can.

Make it, as far as you put yourself into it to make, if you, if you try really hard, you put everything you have into it, you can reach the highest levels of success. And that is something that I feel as though can still, you know, America has an opportunity that I think still surpasses many other nations, but that ability to give you that, you know, experience,

**Claire Clotney:** we did touch on the fact that we weren't going to go into the detail of your work, because that was too complex.

But people are probably wondering what industry you work.

**Mac Billing:** I work in it, managing a team that develops well capabilities and applications and things of that

**Blair Billing:** sort. I work in security management. So I do like a billion access badge access that sort of.

**Claire Clotney:** I guess my final question is, will you become a better America?

Are you there in the UK to stay

**Mac Billing:** We're on a work visa?

We're we're on a work visa. You know, that is actually something that we, we talk about a lot. That is our conversation that, that Blair and I constantly have conversations about this now, where do we want to go? If we were to leave here, where do we go next? We don't have a point back in a state so we can pinpoint and say, you know what?

We want to move to Charlotte, North Carolina. That's we want to go, want to go to Columbia, want to go to Dane, wherever we don't have a specific place in the states. And, but we don't have a place in the world anywhere right now that we

could say that we really, really just want to be, you know, beyond where we are right now.

It is difficult for me in many ways, too. Think about coming back because I know how long we've roughly would be here. The plan is definitely for several more years, which means that I would be returning. If we go back to the states from this point, from that point, we will be returning with black teenage sons into American culture.

And that's a scary thought for me in many ways. That is a scary thought.

**Claire Clotney:** It just when they're teenagers though, or do you feel that that fret very much still exists for an established Black American man?

I think

**Blair Billing:** personally that it still exists for my husband. It exists for all of my children. And it's something that we're, we're still trying to strive to have that conversation.

We want them to enjoy their childhood and to be a child. Yeah.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah, they're just some hard realities. You know, I made the comment. You say that you, if you hear some contradictions, like you just said, America is this place where you could succeed.

**Claire Clotney:** Yeah. I was going to call you out. They going to get there.

**Mac Billing:** Yeah. You can succeed above and beyond, but then there's also, if you can make it through the gauntlet, you can succeed above and beyond.

There is some hard realities that have been brought to light over the last Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Mike Brown, and Philando Castille. And, you know, I could just keep going. Right. And so there's some hard realities about America. There is definitely work to be done from a cultural side for developing like American culture needs to transition.

It needs to change. It needs to evolve. It needs to become a bit more inclusive. So I'm not saying it's great. I know that there's more work to be done. I see it at the teenage phase. I see it as being affecting, you know, my daughter as well. You know, she's not excluded from this, but I was just thinking about it from the standpoint of, I know the challenge for all of our children and black

children, definitely for my young black sons as well that I would be taken back into America.

And at teenage phase into those early twenties. And if you look at the, you know, some of those bad things that happen, it has happened. Look at the ages. I don't want to get too much into this, but you know, it is a known procession in it. I did in America, that our children are viewed as older than they really are.

Your child could be 14, but to the majority that's looking at your child is 14, they see a grown man., Tamir rice, they see a grown man with a gun. I think he was, yeah. I don't want to get into eight. I think it was 12. So that concerns me. It is a dichotomy there. It is really hard to, to reconcile these, these, these two thoughts of America.

Great. And then also America not so great. It's it is. And it pulls us. I mean, it pulls me to try to resolve that in my head. And at this point I can tell you, honestly, I don't have a solution if I did, you know, maybe I'd be famous. I could help other people, but I don't have a solution. To how do we reconcile this?

I don't have a reconciliation that may explain why we're currently not in the United States

**Claire Clotney:** Tell people where they can find out more about your family, your travels, your journey, or experiences. Your videos are so educational. If you want to learn about life in the UK from driving around roundabouts to nature, you guys are doing it all.

Share your social media handles.

**Mac Billing:** If you really want to find out where we are, it's 9B4M, the family, we have a YouTube channel under that same name, uh, Instagram. Also now without the numbers, it's all letters, 9B4M, the family, that's where you can find us, we have a web page with the same title, we're still developing the web page to get up and running.

But if you want to know why we have so many social media, because we really just want people to see us doing what we're doing and understand that it's something that they could do as well.

**Blair Billing:** I prefer that Instagram account the most, um, because that shows a little bit of life in Maryland and what it was like for us.

And it was beginning travel stories of, Hey, I went here. Oh look, we went and did this, and then there's a chicken

**Mac Billing:** 9B4M the family, Instagram and a YouTube. And they got a webpage is up and operating as well. So yeah, that's where you can find this.

**Claire Clotley:** Well, thank you for all you're doing both Mac and Blair and I wish you and your family the very best.

And let's stay in touch.

**Mac Billing:** Okay,

thank you.

**Claire Clotley:** Mac and Blair Billing, the heads of the 9B4M family have shared how and why they pursued their desire to relocate and live out their dreams as individuals at the same time, balancing the need to make decisions that are in the best interests of their children. I appreciate their deep reflection on what the US offers their family.

Whilst they respect other parents who put their dreams on hold for their children. I admire them for choosing to live out their dreams for their children to see and be a part of their ongoing commitment to keeping in touch with family in the US whilst fully immersing themselves in the adventure of living abroad will undoubtedly give their children a solid foundation, even in their transient state of living.

To share your experiences of being Black in the UK versus USA. Email us directly at [americandreamerspodcasts@gmail.com](mailto:americandreamerspodcasts@gmail.com) and please rate and review American Dreamers on Apple Podcasts. It's the best way for people to find this podcast. Special thanks to Aurra Studios, our production team and AP Brianna Jovahn and editor, David Devereaux. Stay in touch with me on the socials at Claire Clotley.