



OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



INTERNATIONAL
VOICES **A**t Black Hawk College

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at Black Hawk College




Black Hawk College
www.bhc.edu

Fall 2015

English as a Second Language Program

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These articles were written by the students in the ESL Advanced Writing classes. We would like to thank Janet Francisco and Lisa Miotto for assisting with the editing and revising process, and a special thanks goes to Sheryl Gragg, support staff for the Humanities, Languages, and Journalism department, for her time, effort, and energy in editing and formatting this newsletter. Her creativity and patience are much appreciated. Additionally, we want to express our gratitude to Mike Winter, who took the individual and group photos, and Kris Meyer, who designed the cover. Thanks to all.

Nina De Bisschop and Lisa Torres

ANTA FALL DIAGNE



My name is **Anta Fall Diagne**. I am from Senegal, which is a small country located in West Africa. I came to the U.S. in 2013 to join my husband. I live in the USA with my husband and my little daughter, who is twenty months old. I work as an auditor in an export packaging company (XPAC). I got a pharmacy degree at the University Cheick Anta Diop of Dakar (UCAD). I am taking ESL classes to improve my English, which is not my native language. After finishing my ESL classes and having a good fluency in English, my goal is to take pharmacy courses and become a pharmacist in the U.S. since it was my profession in my country.

College Degree System in Senegal versus in the United States

The most important and honorable richness that will always remain a benefit to people is knowledge. Many people think that having money is richness, but it is not because money may disappear. There are many ways of getting knowledge: knowledge received from parental education, knowledge obtained from life experience, knowledge gained from schools, etc... However, the universal one is the knowledge received from academic schools. Even though courses and majors may seem the same throughout the world, educational methods and systems are different from one country to another. For example, in two countries, Senegal, my native country, and the United States, the college education systems are different. The differences are mostly noticed in the cost of a college degree, the method of instruction, and the quality of education.

First of all, attending college in the U.S. is one of the biggest problems that American students are confronted with after graduating from high schools because of the expensive cost of tuition. Even though the American government offers some public services such as grants and financial aid, many American students quit school after high school because of the lack of money. Conversely, in Senegal, colleges and universities are part of the public service, so they are free and managed by the government. As a result, any Senegalese citizen who has graduated from high school, which requires passing a national exam in Senegal, has the right to register for a university for free. Students may take four years or six years of class and will only have to pay the annual fee, which is about ten or fifteen dollars per year. Furthermore, college students in Senegal also benefit from a monthly allowance for their needs on the campus. You may see many adolescents seeking a high school diploma just to have the comfort that many of them don't have at their homes. They may benefit more on the campus of the university. Plus, while many American college students are struggling to pay school loans for 10 or 15 years, Senegalese students are not confronted with loan problems. Since the school is free, it is rare to see people paying for school there unless it is a private university.

Secondly, even though majors and classes taken in the U.S. and in Senegal might be academically equal, the systems of instruction differ. In Senegal, college and universities offer programs including both undergraduate and graduate, or professional classes. Whatever the

major that students may take, classes are taken separately. For example, a student willing to have a major in medicine can't take a biology class one year and take another one in the next year; the student will need to take all of the classes required for the year, which may be equal to 7 to 13 classes a year. Conversely, in the U.S., except in some rare institutions that offer both, many schools offer basic classes and professional classes separately. Furthermore, in the U.S., colleges often offer undergraduate degrees while the universities offer the professional degrees. Contrarily, in Senegal, there are no differences between colleges and universities. In addition, the calendar of the college program in the U.S. is also different from the calendar of Senegalese college programs. In Senegal, the college year begins in November and ends in July, with only two evaluation exams in between: a midterm exam, which is often in March, and a final, which is in July. Besides the two exams during the year, a makeup exam is offered in October to give a second chance to the students who failed the first exam. In contrast, in the U.S., the college year is divided into three semesters: fall, which is between August and December, spring which is between January and May, and summer, which is an intense class between June and August. Each semester often contains two exams: a midterm exam and a final exam. In Senegal, any homework done outside of the class is not counted toward the student's grade, unlike in the US, where homework done at home is part of the student's grade.

Thirdly, even though the quality of education offered in both countries, Senegal and the U.S. is theoretically and academically similar, there are differences in the areas of experimentation and practice. Indeed, in the area of experimentation and practice, the students who graduate from the universities and colleges in the U.S. might be better off than students who graduate from the universities and colleges in Senegal. As an undeveloped country, some failures of the quality of the college education may be due to the lack of performance, materials, and laboratories. In addition, in the area of scientific majors in Senegal, students miss out on a great deal of scientific experimentation that should be done during their schooling because of the lack of products and tools. Another fact that affects the quality of college education in Senegal is the insufficient number of offices and companies for students' internships; you may sometimes see a student graduate with a bachelor's or a master's in his major without taking any internships or training in his major. Contrarily, in the U.S., there many companies and offices where college students may take internships and training. Also, in the U.S., instructors focus more on practice and experimentation than on theories, compared to Senegal where theories are dominant.

In summary, even though they have some similarities in the areas of majors and courses offered, the college education system in the U.S. is different from the college education in Senegal. The accessibility, the courses schedule, and the application of skills are the major points of differences between the U.S. and Senegal in the college education. The expensive costs of college tuition in the USA may be considered the biggest barrier to getting college degrees in the U.S. compared to Senegal where college degrees are free. However, new policies for free college degrees in the U.S. would be a good idea that would help the U.S. in world competition. Even though Senegal theoretically offers great courses and majors, the U.S. may be better in skills due to more access to tools and equipment. Nevertheless, Senegal retains imminent professors who offer courses in Senegal and throughout the world, and it remains one of the best countries in West Africa in the area of academic education. Education is one aspect of development that every country must promote to have a stake in the world. Indeed, the better a country is constituted of educated population, the more that country is developed, organized, and prosperous.

BARENGAYABO NDUWIMANA

My name is **Barengayabo Nduwimana**, and I was born in Congo. However, I grew up much farther away in Tanzania with my parents, four brothers and three sisters. I came to the United States in 2008 with most of my family, but my oldest sister is the only one who decided to stay in Tanzania. I'm 21 years old, and I speak three languages: Kirundi, Swahili, and English. I graduated from Rock Island High School and started attending Black Hawk College in 2013. My dream is to become a nurse, so I'm hoping to finish the ESL program and start to take my major classes. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my friends and family by playing games, telling stories and doing other things that we love. I love watching any kind of movie and helping my parents with chores around the house.



Special Holidays in Tanzania

Tanzania is a beautiful country in East Africa, bordering the Indian Ocean. It is the largest of the East African nations. The northeast of Tanzania is a mountainous region that includes Mount Kilimanjaro, which is the highest point in Africa. Tanzania was formed in 1964 by the union of the republics of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Tanzanian people love to celebrate their own unique holiday traditions. There is no shortage of exciting holidays, in which everyone takes real pride. Tanzanians respect each other's religious differences and enjoy several important celebrations, including Eid-ul-Fitr, Christmas Day, and Nane Nane (Farmer's Day).

"Happy Eid-ul-Fitr" is a blessing used by most Tanzanian Muslims. Eid-ul-Fitr is the special holiday of Tanzanian Muslims, which is usually celebrated on a Friday, and celebrates the fast breaking at the end of the holy month of Ramadhan. Muslims avoid eating and drinking between morning and evening for a month. On the first day of Eid, they begin their day at the mosque wearing new clothes to worship Allah, which means God in Arabic. A special Eid-ul-Fitr ceremony is carried out in an open area under the sky, where the worshipers bend forward on their prayer mats, press their heads against the ground, and raise their hands high to worship their God. They start to greet everyone saying "Eid Mubarak", which means happiness to everyone. They also pay "Zakat al Fitr", which is the offering for the Ramadan month. "Zakat al Fitr" is given to the church to start the Eid prayer. Zakat al fitr can be in the form of money, food, etc., and will be given to poor people. Everyone prays to God asking for God's forgiveness,

mercy, peace, and blessings for all people around the world. On the second day of Eid, families visit their friends and loved ones and exchange gifts and sweets. Women decorate their homes, clean their houses, dress themselves beautifully, and apply henna on their hands; meanwhile, men wear white clothes. Women prepare special dishes, especially "Saiwiyani", which is a famous dish during Eid. Children enjoy the most, as they get gifts and love from all the relatives.

In addition, Christmas is a magical time of the year for Christian people in my country. When the day of Christmas comes, all Christian people start to prepare in the morning by dressing in special traditional clothes. After they are done preparing, they go to a Christmas morning church service with families and friends to remember the birth of Jesus. After they attend church, they go back home, where they prepare a beautiful place for family members and friends. They come together and start to eat special dishes and have a good time dancing, drinking, playing games, and telling stories of Jesus. In the village where I lived, Christian people don't give their children gifts, as they do in the U.S. or other countries because they are too poor to be able to afford presents for their kids, and there aren't many toy stores in my country. The only gift that they afforded to give their children on Christmas Day was new clothing. Therefore, most kids like to walk around on Christmas Day showing off their new fashionable clothing. It is a big deal for Christian people to have new clothing since it may be the only one set of new clothes they get during the year.

Finally, Tanzania is the country of farmers and city workers, who work in government offices and other businesses. To honor these groups, they have a special day, which is Nane Nane (Farmer's Day). Nane Nane means "Eight-Eight" in English. It is a public holiday in my country that is held every year on the eighth day of the eighth month. It is an event that recognizes the hard work and contributions by farmers to the Tanzania economy. On Farmer's Day, numerous farmers and producers gather at an agricultural fair to bring attention to their products and meet with other farmers. After they finish conducting their business, they start to celebrate a big closing party in the evening. They spend time together and have a good time by sharing special food including stewed chicken, green bananas, sweet potatoes, African donuts, and a vegetable called mchicha (kind of spinach). They also eat a nice portion of nyama choma, which means roasted meat because it is a traditional dish of the Maasai and Chagga tribes in the north of Tanzania. They have fun dancing with family and friends. They are delighted with Farmer's Day, as it is a good setting for them to interact with other business people.

To conclude, these special traditional holidays are still celebrated in my country, and people enjoy and have fun with family members by sharing their love and kindness. Eid-ul-Fitr, Nane Nane (Farmer's Day), and Christmas Day are now some of the most important holidays in Tanzanian peoples' lives. Even though Muslims and Christian people don't have the same holidays, they expect each other to respect their traditions and their holidays.

BAYOUMNINA BISSAKA



My name is **Bayoumnina Bissaka**. I was born and raised in Togo, a country located in West Africa. I've been living here since February of 2012. I live by myself, but I do have a brother who's a National Guard Army reservist. He lives in Kansas City, Missouri. All of my other family members live in Togo. I work at the Joslin Plant, also known as Tyson, a factory located in Hillside, Illinois. In 2013, I started the ESL program at BHC. My future goal is to finish the ESL program and see what will come next. I'm planning to get at least an associate's or bachelor's degree, which will enable me to get a better job. My hobbies are reading, surfing the net, watching movies and TV shows, and listening to music.

Evala Festival in Togo

Have you ever heard about voodoo ceremonies in Togo? Have you ever heard about an ethnic group in Africa that can dance in a burning fire? African countries have diverse cultures, but many of them are similar with different meanings. Togo is a society with many ethnic tribal groups, and the variety of festivals celebrated throughout the year in different parts of the country reflects this diverse mix of African traditions. One of these festivals is called Evala, a traditional rite that young men among the Kabye ethnic group undergo in order to become men. Indeed, this festival has a traditional ceremony, a tournament or competition, and enjoyment.

"Evalu", in the Kabye language means a "wrestler" or a strong man, and "evala" is the plural form of "evalu" meaning wrestlers. Evala is a traditional ceremony for the Kabye ethnic group of Kara in the Northern part of Togo. Each year, this ceremony is held in this particular part of the country during the last two weeks of July. It is a kind of traditional fight aimed at bringing the opponent down. Prior to this ceremony, young men are separated from their families for a couple of days in order to be trained psychologically and physically. This involves activities such as climbing trees and mountains and wrestling. The objective is to prepare these young men for adult life. Therefore,



those who do not complete are not initiated into adulthood. In the Kabye area, a young man who fails the initiation will be punished by the wise men, his parents, and the entire society, by being excluded from his community. The dates of the ceremonies are decided after a consultation with the oracle and the authorization given by the great fetish priest called "Tchodjo". After the festival, the traditional priests visit all of the sacred places to thank the ancestors for allowing the ceremony.

Evala is a tournament in which many villages around Kara compete with each other. For example, the village of Lama will compete against the one of Tchitchao the village of Yade will compete against the village of Bowu; the Piya will compete against the Yaka, etc. The wrestlers usually wear sport shorts without shirts. Each village wears a different color. Each team is made up of 5 young men from ages 18 to 20, fighting against five others. Rules are not really clear, but when the time is up, each fight ends either with one competitor winning or with a draw.

There is no final ranking; the only thing that remains is the brave behavior of the wrestlers. The community's wise men are the ones who make sure the rules are respected; they supervise and arbitrate the tournament. Although losing at Evala doesn't disqualify one from initiation, losing can bring embarrassment to one's family, friends, and village. Therefore, all of these young men take it seriously in order to avoid defeat. Consequently, like any other sport or competition, there is always a winner and a loser, but one should have in mind that it is still a ceremony.



Finally, Evala is a time of fun and enjoyment. During Evala, like any other festival, the mood that prevails is joy and happiness. In the Evala festival, many people travel from all over the country to participate in this festival. The myth that's behind this festival attracts many tourists who are curious to see it for themselves. The fun part of this festival is that you might encounter many groups of women and men who sing and dance to support their village or their team. The songs they sing are inspired by the moment of the fight and when it looks like a clash between them. All of this is nice to hear. After the fights, people sing and dance from village to village, eating and drinking the local beer. Moreover, there are many other activities such as big concerts, where many artists of the area and all over the country give a show. There are many clubs that work really well during this festival. Hotels are overcrowded with visitors and storekeepers, and they seize the opportunity to realize good business. There are also numerous places of interest such as the zoo, the national museum, the Tamberma castle, etc. They are visited by curious people.

In conclusion, Evala festival is one of the most watched festivals in Togo. It is always broadcasted on live TV on the national TV and other TV stations. This festival or ceremony always ends with another one called "Akpema" a female imitation of evala, a ceremony which glorifies mature young ladies ready to get into the motherhood. This ceremony enables the evala to look for their future wives through this rite. All these ceremonies combined make the festival more exciting. Whenever you get a chance to visit Togo, in the month of July, seize the opportunity to see how joyful, how competitive, and how lively this festival is. I bet you'll never regret attending to such a festival.



CHRISTY SUI

My name is **Christy Sui**, and I am twenty two years old. I am from Burma. My native town is Chin. I came to the United States in 2010, and I am residing here with my older brother, uncle and aunt. The rest of my family still lives in Burma. However, I would like to get my citizenship and eventually have the rest of my family come to the United States. I graduated from Rock Island High School in 2013 and have been attending Black Hawk College since August of the same year. I like Black Hawk College because my advisors and instructors are very helpful. Most importantly, the ESL Program has allowed me to practice and understand the English language much better. When I lived in my country, I planned on being a social worker to help children and families. But when I finally moved to the United States, I decided I wanted to be a nurse and a minister. I want to be a student at Bible College in the future; I believe this will give me a greater opportunity to help people. Also I want to assist those with medical needs, I want to teach the word of God to people.



The Happiest Day of My Life

My family was not well to do, but I was happy to be loved by my parents, brothers and sisters. In fact, before I came to the United States, my life was very terrible because my parents had bad luck, and they both went to the hospital for a month. When my parents were in the hospital, I was working in a government camp. One day, I couldn't work very hard, and I took some rest in a shanty. A man came and slapped me on my face and told me to go back to work. I cried very loudly and ran home. Two days later, I was threatened by the government police, and I couldn't imagine continuing to live in our house, and I decided to leave my family. I was upset that our separation occurred unexpectedly in Burma when I was 13 years old.



I ran by myself to Malaysia, which the Burmese called the second country. While in Malaysia, I worked in a factory for one year and then worked in a restaurant for two years. Although my parents wanted me to return home, I told them that if I did, I would spend my life in jail. So I continued to survive by myself. However, I found out about an opportunity to go to a third country: the United States. When I was 15, I came to this area through the help of World Relief. The day I realized that I would reach my three goals was the happiest day of my life. My goals were to live in the U.S., to get a good education, and to have a best friend.

First of all, my reason for living in the U.S. was to get a new life. On February 22, 2010, I arrived in the United States. At first, I was so sad because I came alone and lived in the U.S. without family. Moreover, I could do nothing because I didn't understand and couldn't speak English. Also, I couldn't go anywhere because of the weather and being without a car. I didn't know how to ride the city bus. But now, I am happy to live in the U.S. because I understand how important it is to live in the U.S., and how my life is changing. Also, I had never imagined coming to the United States in my life, but now I am in the U.S., and I can live a better life even without a job because the government helps me a lot. In addition, Thursday, September 24, 2015 was the happiest day for me because I passed the U.S. Citizenship test and got a driver's license. On October 16, I will be a U.S. citizen.

Second, I am happy to get a good education in the U.S. For instance, I never thought I could have a high school diploma because I couldn't go to school in my home country. In Burma, my parents were very poor, and they had no education. They didn't know how important education was, and they couldn't support a higher level education. I received a high school diploma from Rock Island High School on May 25, 2013. It was the first wonderful day for me. I was excited about finishing high school because I knew that I could have the opportunity to go to college, and I continued my education Black Hawk College. It was amazing for me because I could learn more English. Also, I never spoke English when I was in my home country, but I can do it now. Furthermore, I was so glad that I have had an opportunity like no one else in my family. It was most pleasing time in my life.



Finally, after I went to Rock Island High School, I met a friend named Maggie, and she was so nice to me. We became the best friends. Later, I met many friends from different countries and different cultures in high school. I learned about their cultures and behavior. After I graduated high school, I continued in the ESL program at Black Hawk College. I met a lot more new friends at Black Hawk College than in high school, and I also have many good instructors in college. After I finish the ESL program, I have decided to continue in the nursing program. Even more, after finishing the nursing degree, I have decided to live together with my family again. Now, my parents are still living in Myanmar, and I hope they will be excited to come to the U.S. However, I used to call my mom, and every time I heard her crying on the end of the phone. I told my mom when I finish the nursing degree, I will call the whole family to come to the United States and live together here. In addition, having this opportunity to attend BHC is the greatest opportunity of my life.

In conclusion, I was able to find my way through what could be considered a "third country." I'm so glad to be here, to have a good education, and to have a best friend. I'm lucky to have the best teachers and to live a better life. Also, I have never had happiness before like I have in the United States now. Living in the United States, getting a good education, and having many friends are indeed the happiest days of my life.

Cristiane Carlesso



My name is **Cristiane Carlesso**. I'm 31 years old, and I come from the southern part of Brazil. I'm married, and I have a son, who was born here. I've been living in the US since May 2014 because my husband has been on a work assignment here for two years. I'm a physical therapist, and I used to work in a health clinic with other professionals in my hometown. I plan to return to my job after our time ends here. My first goal is to finish the ESL Program. I want to teach English to my son and encourage him to study in the U.S. in the future. My second goal is to have an opportunity to take a course in my field and have some professional experience here. For these two reasons, I have chosen BHC to improve my English skills. I'm so glad to have the chance to learn about different cultures and values among the people I have met here.

Cultural Differences When Having a Child in the US vs. Brazil

What is one of the most important moments in life? Having a baby is certainly a significant happening for any family around the world because it brings life, renewal, and hope. However, the viewpoints toward this situation can vary among cultures. In the United States and Brazil, there are some differences in the prenatal care, the childbirth, and the role of the father when having a baby.

First of all, the time prior to the birth is extremely important for all parents-to-be. This is true in the USA and in Brazil, but with a few differences. In the USA, obstetricians tend to work as a group, and the new mothers are encouraged to visit various doctors within the group at appointments. The reason for this is that the due date is only approximate, so labor and delivery at the hospital are supposed to be with the obstetrician working there at that time. Having a doctor who is familiar makes mothers less anxious. In contrast, expectant mothers in Brazil prefer to visit the same obstetrician throughout the pregnancy, and they also expect to have this doctor during childbirth. Since they develop a close relationship, women feel very insecure if something unsuspected happens and they have to have their babies with another doctor.



Secondly, childbirth choices differ between the USA and Brazil. The American preference is natural birth while cesarean is an option encouraged only in special cases. New parents are also well-informed through prenatal classes where they learn about the natural pain attached to the labor and some relief techniques, like massage, meditation, or walking. Different from the USA, Brazil has a high number of cesareans over natural birth. Brazilian obstetricians prefer to schedule all labor and deliveries in order to see each mother through to the birth of her baby. It

is important to understand that there is a culture of “no pain” in Brazil, so women are generally scared of natural childbirth and emotionally dependent on their doctor. Additionally, Brazilians rarely participate in prenatal classes that clarify many aspects about labor and birth.



Thirdly, the father's participation during prenatal time is similar between Americans and Brazilians, but they are unlike each other during the childbirth itself. In the USA, fathers support their wives in labor, giving them massages during the contractions. They also participate actively in the delivery. For example, men encourage their spouses to push, and they hold their babies when they come out into the world, or they can cut the umbilical cord when the doctor gives the permission. By comparison, fathers in Brazil are generally not involved in the delivery since most are done through cesarean. They can be at the wife's bedside with the view of the birth blocked by a partition if the doctor allows it, but men commonly stay in the waiting room like for any other kind of surgery. When the medical procedure is done and the baby is in the mother's arms, the father is invited to share this moment as a family.

It is true that the perspective of having a baby are different comparing the USA and Brazil. Americans are not dependent on one exclusive doctor during prenatal care like Brazilians are; Brazilians also prefer natural birth over cesarean; and fathers in the USA are often permitted to participate during childbirth. There is no right or wrong, but these contrasts reflect the cultures and beliefs in each country. In spite of the differences, having a child is a special moment everywhere.



FAOUSSATOU ABOUDOU

My name is **Faoussatou Aboudou**, and I'm from Togo, West Africa. At 37 years old, I'm a mother of two children, one girl, who is eight years old, and one boy, seven years old. I have five siblings, four sisters and one brother. On August 2005, I moved to the United States after receiving my master's Degree in Accounting. I'm taking ESL classes in order to improve my English and continue my education. I dream of becoming an accountant, and I hope that I will achieve my goal.



Traditional Muslim Wedding

Every religion has its rules. In all Islamic countries, marriage is viewed as a religious obligation, a contract between the couple and Allah. The traditional Muslim wedding differs depending on culture, and weddings are not held at the mosque but at the bride's family's house. Before the celebration of the wedding, some steps are required. There are three steps of a traditional Muslim wedding: the engagement, the fulfillment of the dowry, and the wedding feast.

The first step is the engagement. This is a period in which the groom and his family ask for the hand of the bride. The engagement in Islam is a promise of marriage. The man chooses the lady that he really wants to marry and talks to his family about it; after that, the man and his parents make an appointment with the other family in order to ask for the hand of the lady. After the lady and her family accept, both, man woman, decide to get married at a convenient time. During this period, both families try to get to know each other. In addition, the couple is not allowed to be alone with each other because they are not married, and it is not allowed for them to have an intimate relationship. For example, the man can visit the lady in her house at any time in the presence of her parents; he can take her out, but both, man and woman have to be conscientious.

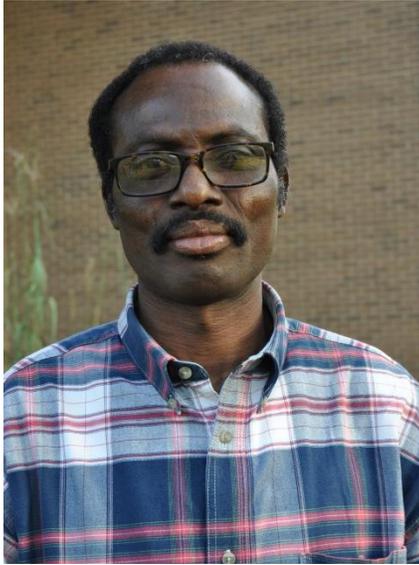
The second step is the fulfillment of the dowry, a gift from the man's family to the woman's family. The elements of the dowry are different in every culture. For example, in my culture, the bride's family specifies all things included in the dowry. The most essential are money, African clothing, shoes, gold jewelry, bags, suitcases, honey etc. Next, the wedding agreement, nikah, is the official and legal marriage. The nikah is usually directed by an official religious authority, an imam, or another authorized person. It requires the presence of at least two witnesses who sign and attest that they were present for the nikah, the offer of marriage by the man. The imam also signs the document, but this doesn't affect the validity of the marriage. After the acceptance of the lady, the signing of the document, and the exchange of the dowry, the man and woman are considered married in Islam and can live together as husband and wife.

The final step is the wedding feast, called wolimah, for which the groom and his family invite their relatives and friends as well as the bride's family and friends. It is a formal announcement of the formation of this new family. The celebration of the wedding is different in

every culture. For instance, in my culture, the festival has two parts. On the first night, the bride, along with the women on both sides of the family, applies henna designs on her hands and feet. The women also sing and express their happiness. On the main wedding day, the bride wears white lace and beautiful gold jewelry; with all the gold she wears that day, she looks like a queen. She can wear many other outfits if she wants during the celebration. At the same time, the groom also wears a fabric similar to the bride's clothes. There is plenty of delicious food. Also, the music is very loud. When the bride and other unmarried ladies dance, other people give them money, and sometimes, people put the money on their forehead. After the night of the wolimah, the couple can have an intimate relationship and live like husband and wife.

To sum up, the acceptance of the woman, the gifts from the man's family to the woman's family, the marriage contract, and the celebration of the wedding are the steps of a traditional Muslim marriage. In some Islamic countries, there are some other customs, but these are the most common Muslim tradition for marriages. I hope that the Muslim traditional wedding will become even more elaborate down the road.

FRANCIS MORRIS AMUZU



My name is **Francis Morris Amuzu**. I am from Ghana, a country on the coast of Africa. I'm married, and I have three sons, one daughter, and one step daughter. I came to the United States of America three years ago. I am living in Moline, in Spring Brook Courts, without the rest of my family. In 1979, I graduated with a college diploma in automobile engineering from Bishop Bearden College in Ghana. Then, I went to the City and Guilds of London and got a certificate in automobile engineering. I'm attending Black Hawk College here in Moline. I am planning to become a mechanical engineer. My first goal is to finish the ESL program, which I feel is the first step to achieve success in education. I hope to reach my goal in the U.S. It's the land of golden opportunities to work, study, and become who I want to be in the future.

Naming Ceremony in Ghana

What is a naming ceremony? A naming ceremony is the event at which an infant, a youth, or an adult is given a name or names. There are many ceremonies around the world, and according to David. S. Slawson, who is an anthropologist, "Names are important key to what a society values. Anthropologists recognize naming as one of the chief methods for imposing order of perception".

First of all, the naming ceremony is done for the child to be recognized in society. We have names like Kpodziemo, Abadinto, Dzinto, Vihedego, and Sunna in our dialect. Kpodziemo is the name given to the naming ceremony in the Ghanaian society. It is called the naming ceremony because it is the first day the child is given a name, and it is called an outdoor ceremony because it's the first time the child is taken out of doors.

Secondly, in Ghana, we have over two hundred fifty different ethnic groups, with different names for outdoor ceremonies. Abadito is the naming ceremony for those from the Akan tribe and culture. More often, the naming ceremony takes place on the eighth day, depending on the health of the mother and the child. During this time, the baby is regarded as a complete stranger or visitor. Such a child is known among the Akan as Ohoho, for the Ewe, it is known as Amedzro; to the Dagaris, it is known as Saando for a boy and Saampaga for a girl. The day for naming the child differs from community to community. For Akan it takes place on the eighth day; for the northern and the upper regions, it happens on the third and fourth day for the boys and girls respectively. The choice of names and the method involved differs within ethnic groups. For example, Akosua and Akwesi are used for a girl and a boy respectively, who are born on Sunday. These are the days of the week males and females are named. English: Sunday, Ghanaian: kwasiada, male and female name: Akwesi-Akosua, Monday-Dwoada-

Kwadwo/Adjoa, Tuesday-Benada-Kwabena/Abenaa, Wednesday-Wukuada-Kwaku/Akua, Thursday-Yawada- Yao/Yaa, Friday-Efiada-Kofi/Afua, Saturday-Memeneda-Kwame/Ama.

Finally, the Gas, those from the greater Accra region, call their naming ceremony Kpodziemo. Early in the morning, two elderly women from their father's house are sent and bring the child from the mother's; one is chosen to perform the rites. If it is a male child, the person chosen would be a man or woman. They must be of good character so that the child will have the same character when he or she grows up. The elder pours libations, which are called corn wine, gin and schnapps. Corn wine is used for the first libation. The drink is provided by the mother's family. The second libation, which is gin or schnapps, is provided by the father's family. After the libation, the child is brought out and stripped naked. The child is then put on the ground. A calabash of water is thrown on the roof top so that it flows on the child while on the ground. A calabash is a large tropical fruit, which has thick hard skin; the child is given some wine to taste. A final libation, which is known as the outdoor prayer is poured. This libation is offered to ask for the blessing of the child's family and prayers for the child to be obedient, truthful and respectful. The child is then announced to the gathering and the corn wine is served. Then, the gifts are presented to the child, and a special feast is thrown for all of the people to eat.

I have witnessed many naming ceremonies one of which was unforgettable; it was the naming ceremony of my younger sister. That morning, there was a pregnant woman, who was a neighbor. After the child's name was announced, she was happy that she went into labor and gave birth to a baby boy that same day. The boy then was given the same name as my younger sister's baby.

The naming ceremony is a memorable ceremony to each family. It is one of the most important ceremonies in most tribes, for it is the day the child will be given a name for the first time, and presented to his family, neighbors, friends and world.

GEORGE KWAME NKUTIAH

My name **George Kwame Nkutiah**. I was born in Ghana in West Africa in 1981. My wife, my mother, and all of my five siblings are currently living in Ghana. I came to America in 2012. I was enlisted in the US Army in 2013. My major goal is to start an officer's course in the Army after my degree program.



Funeral Celebrations in Ghana, West Africa

A worrisome phenomenon is creeping into the Ghanaian society these days: the way funerals are becoming competitive festivals where wealth is lavishly displayed, leaving huge debts burdening the bereaved families. The word funeral, as defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is an observance held for a dead person usually before burial or cremation. Wailing, agonizing, mourning, and heartbreak are usually associated with this ceremony. However, funerals in Ghana are not only an occasion to mourn: They are also an opportunity to celebrate the life of the dearly departed through excessive publicity, extravagant expenditures, and the organization of huge parties for the guests.

In the first place, there is a public notice of the death of a loved one; this depends on the financial status of the bereaved families and how friendly the person was when he/she lived. Funeral publicity in Ghana comes in several forms, such as electronic media, newspapers, billboards, and social networks. The public is well informed about the death: they learn when and where the funeral will be held and who the person was when he lived through the publication. The public takes all these into account to judge the standard of the funeral. Friends and loved ones make decisions based on the publicity about how much they will contribute to the success of the funeral. The fact remains that the more a family spends on the publicity, the more they get to spend on the funeral.

Furthermore, funerals in Ghana are seen as chances to display family wealth to the public. It is always common for families to go into huge debt to finance expensive funerals. Ghanaians may spend as much money on funerals as on weddings, sometimes even more. A funeral planner in Ghana interviewed by CNN's "On the Road series" on March 11, 2014, was asked about how much an average funeral would cost. "An average funeral should cost between \$17,000-\$20,000" (Kwaku, a funeral planner in Ghana). That includes the obligatory giant, colorful billboards that announce funeral arrangements, which may cost from \$600 to \$2,500 and are placed at strategic spots for everybody to see. The extravagance also extends to the caskets. Coffins have become a statement in Ghana. They may have fanciful shapes that represent the dead's profession. Thus, a fisherman may have a coffin shaped like a fish, and shoemaker may have one shaped like a shoe. There are also caskets shaped like Coca-Cola bottles and airplanes. Ghanaians revere the dead so much that funerals are at the heart of Ghanaian social life. Lavish spending on funerals has invited criticism from political and religious leaders. A member of legislature, Alban Bagbin, once said in legislative proceedings that

Ghanaians are investing in the death rather than in the living. Charles Palmer- Buckle, the Archbishop of Accra (the capital City of Ghana), during the burial service of the late John Evans Atta Mills (the former president of Ghana) on August 11, 2012, said that the surest way to remember the dead is not through the type of coffins used to bury them nor the type of clothes worn during their funerals. We remember them by doing something positive in the name of the dead, which would benefit the living.

Finally, the bereaved families have to provide food, drinks, music, and dance for their guests. Most funerals are held on the weekends, most frequently on Saturdays. Mourners, who usually dress in black or black and red traditional funeral clothing, may travel to other towns or villages, and in turn, they expect the bereaved families to provide food, drinks, music and dance. Parties are usually held after burial services, either at the family house or at public places. There will be special tables set aside where people will make financial donations to the family to help defray the cost of the funeral. Funeral rites in Ghana, like in any other part of the world, involve some official crying by mourners, as well as some praying. But the rest of the funeral ritual is purely party time. Ghanaians show their last respects to a dead person through organizing big parties for the mourners to dance and to have a good time. They believe the dancing and the celebration will make the dead person happy.

While most people in Ghana celebrate funerals lavishly by fancy publicity, profusion expenditures, and organization of enormous receptions, they must also remember that whatever they spend on heightening the burial of a deceased person cannot revive him. Indeed, the time has come for the good people of Ghana to reduce funeral expenses and leave enough money for the orphans, widows, and widowers and pay more attention to healthy living instead of spending all of their resources on expensive funerals. "Ghanaian do not play with their style (swag), style is a major part of life in Ghana, so much that we like to take it to the grave." Said by Kwaku, a funeral planner in Ghana, when I contacted him on phone during this writing on the September 20, 2015.

HEI ROH HTOO



My name is **Hei Roh Htoo**. I am from Burma. I had been a refugee in Thailand for twenty-four years before I resettled in the United States of America. I am married, and I have two children. My family and I came to the United States 7 years ago. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College here in Moline to improve my English. I hope to pass all classes and fulfill my dreams.

My Struggle for Education in Thailand

When I was seven years old, my father became a soldier. He went to the training camp, and he didn't come home for a year, so my mother was the one who took care of the family. Living in Thailand in 1997, we couldn't go out without side permission. Indeed, we were refugees, so we had to stay inside the camp. Every day, we stayed home and did our household chores. I didn't feel happy with my life. Thus, I decided to go to school. I started Kindergarten at the age of seven. I thought that it was too late, but my mom told me education never gets old. Also, she said, "Education is very important to everybody. If we have education, we don't need to worry about anything. We will get a better job, and we will have a beautiful life in the future."

The first day of school was really hard. I didn't know how to write one word, even in my Karen language. Every time I held my pencil, it rolled over. It made me frustrated. A few minutes later, my teacher told me, "Hei Roh, someone was looking at you." I turned my head and saw my mom standing at the corner, smiling. Her face looked very happy. She came straight over to me and asked if everything was all right. She gave me a hug, and she left my class. I learned many things during my childhood about how to manage my education.

Next, my education fulfilled my dream a little more when I transferred to high school. I spent six years at the Eden Valley Academy. That school was a little different than my elementary school because the Eden Valley Academy wasn't a public school. It was a missionary Bible School. Sometimes, I had English teachers who came from India. They worked really hard to make the Karen students' lives better. Also, they held prayer week before Christmas. I tried my best when I worked with them. They were fabulous. They used their precious time and energy without obtaining salary. They touched my heart a lot.

Finally, in the rainy season, the education situation wasn't good. It was muddy everywhere. When the sun came down, mosquitoes were flying. At night, I hung my mosquito net to protect my skin. In the morning, I woke up and carried water to help my mother before I went to school. I walked from home to school on foot. It used to take me 45 minutes to get there. I was sweating when I got there, but I still went to school!

In conclusion, even though I had struggles in my childhood, I learned many things: how it was really hard to manage my education, how education fulfilled my dreams when I transferred to high school, and how education was so important to me. For this reason, I am trying really hard to fulfill my dreams because I have been through many things. Also, I will always remember what my mom said, "Education never gets old."

JANEILLE CHIN

My name is **Janeille Chin**; I am 23 years of age. I am from the beautiful island Jamaica. I migrated to the United States of America in June 2015, and I am living with my family in Rock Island, Illinois. I came to America leaving behind my parents and two younger brothers. In my home country, I attended St Jago High School. I am currently attending Black Hawk Community College where I intend to pursue an Associate of Science Degree in Computer Science. I came to the USA hoping for a better future for my family and me. My ultimate goal in life is to be successful at whatever I decide to do in the future. It is my dream to take care of my family, and I will achieve that by working hard at everything life throws at me. I believe that hard work brings success.



Reggae and Dancehall Music in Jamaica

Jamaica is the third largest country in the Caribbean. It is located in the northern Caribbean, with a current population of approximately 2.7 million people. Jamaica is popularly known for its music. It is home to vibrant, energetic, outgoing people who keep the music alive. Music is an important aspect of Jamaica's culture. In Jamaica, music has changed from ska, mento, and rock steady to reggae and dancehall. Reggae and dancehall music both originated in the 60's and 70's and have influenced many types of music genres around the world. Jamaica is branded as the birthplace of reggae and dancehall music, which continue to evolve nonstop.

Dancehall is a versatile genre; it is characterized by fast rhythms. Dancehall music is about attitude; it is unique and very energetic. In dancehall, dancing plays a major role. Dance moves are usually created by Jamaicans during street dances such as Weddy Weddy Wednesdays. At a street dance or party, all genres of music are played, and the party will sometimes go on until late at night or early in the morning as patrons want to hear the latest and hottest reggae and dancehall music before they leave. Some songs are about "wining", the rolling of the hips in a circular motion. Some people would say dancehall is a very "crude" music type because a song may contain sexual or violent content. In my opinion, I would say there are both positive and negative messages. A song may carry decent and uplifting messages while other songs may not be undesirable for some people to listen to.

Reggae music carries messages of love, unity and peace. It is inspired by African music; however, it has expanded significantly and continues to develop. Reggae music is for people of different social classes and cultures. It is much slower than dancehall as mentioned before, and the rhythm is created by the beating of the heart, a slow pace rhythm. Reggae is music of the world. Reggae music can be found everywhere, on the streets, in vehicles, in public places, at work and in homes. When reggae music is played, images of the legend, Bob Marley, come to mind. Bob Marley was a Jamaican reggae artist, song writer and musician who achieved a lot.

Bob Marley was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2001. Bob Marley died in May, 1981. Reggae music is still enjoyed by people from many different countries.

There are many other popular artists who have significantly contributed to reggae and dancehall music, such as Beenie Man, Bounty Killer, Vybz Kartel, Shaggy, Sean Paul, Buju Banton, and many others. There are also events held in Jamaica which attract major international attention, for instance, Reggae Sumfest, is the largest reggae event in the world and usually attracts thousands of people. Many people from all over the world travel annually just to attend events like this.

Reggae is great! Bob Marley would say, "One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain". Jamaican culture is filled with fascinating stories that are just waiting to be told, a culture that is unique in its own way, a dynamic culture, with many aspects and traditions, a paradise, where the people are warm and welcoming.

JULISSA BADILLO



My name is **Julissa Badillo**. I am from Mexico City, and my native language is Spanish. My parents live in Mexico, and I have two older sisters and a younger sister. They are all married. I moved to the USA seven years ago when I got married. I don't have children yet. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from the University of Mexico UNAM. I have been living in Moline, IL, and I have been studying the ESL program since then. My goal is to pass the TOEFL test to enroll in a U.S. university and to complete a Master's Degree in Law.

Kids and the Use of Technology

From the moment babies are born, parents take pictures of every moment of their life. Immediately, these pictures are shared with family and friends via email or social networks. From birth, technology will be present in the life of the children, but the technology may cause some effects on the children's health, like obesity, addiction, and loss of sleep. However, the use of the technology has a positive effect on their education.

One of the effects on kids' health is obesity. Many children spend a lot of time in front of electronics, watching TV, texting with a mobile, using online media, listening to music, and playing video games. The boys especially, tend to eat more when they're playing video games; therefore, they burn fewer calories. There is a clear connection between watching TV and obesity. Children with obesity have a high risk to get cholesterol, diabetes and high blood pressure. If the parents take their children outside, they can do exercises like running, jumping and playing. Also, the use and abuse of electronics are causing addiction in the kids. Their behavior is changing. They lose contact with the reality of their social, emotional, and family life. They don't know how to interact with other children. For example, some children do not know how to play the traditional toys like dolls, cars, or board games; they prefer playing with electronics games. Emotionally, the heavy use of electronic media can have significant negative effects on children's behavior. Those who watch a lot of simulated violence, common in many popular video games, can become immune to it, and the children are more inclined to act violently. In their family life, a clear example is during dinner, and when parents or grandparents pick them up at school, there is not conversation anymore because the boys and girls are using their devices, and they like to have more of their communication through electronic media, and less of it face to face. Another effect on kids' health is the loss of sleep. Children who spend too much time playing video games using tablets, or chatting on cellphones until midnight, lose track of time and have significantly more difficulty falling asleep.

However, technology has a positive effect on education. Children's education has changed a lot with the use of tools in the classroom like whiteboards, smartphones, social networks, internet, and digital books. The use of technological devices in education, is a great way to engage students because it attracts them. Mobile devices and computers provide students a fun

learning environment. As we know, different students have different learning styles, and technology helps them learn in the way they're comfortable with many games, storytelling apps, and online tools. Also, these tools provide a lot of information. For example, with a simple computer or cellphone, children can connect with schools, libraries, exhibitions, and museums around the world with a single "click" of the mouse. Also, it offers independence, develops students' social skills, research skills and communication skills.

In conclusion, we cannot go against the tendency; this is the reality. The new technologies are available to our children, and parents need to be aware of how much time their child spends playing with video games, tablets, or computers. This could affect the children's behavior physically and mentally. However, technology in children's education can be seen as a benefit. Parents need to make the decision of choosing educational games, choosing the time and place to play or to study with the new technologies.

KOMITSE GBOHLA

My name is Komitse Gbohla, and I come from a little country in West Africa called Togo. I have five siblings, and my family is living in Africa. I have been in the USA since last year. I like African food, African music, Jamaican music (reggae and dancehall), and rap music. I like good music in general. I like meeting new friends, talking to nice people, and I also like reading and jogging when I have time. After my writing class, I plan to study history and political science.



Togolese Culture

In Togo, we have many aspects of culture due to the different ethnic groups and tribes. The meeting of people and tribes through commercial exchanges has also influenced our culture and traditions. In general, we have some common cultural aspects concerning clothing and dances, which are some ways to express ourselves, promote our culture, and display our identity.

First of all, Western clothing is generally worn at home (jeans and t-shirts) and especially at work (trousers, shirts, and suits) even though we can also notice some African clothing at work, but it is not necessarily the traditional clothing. Traditional clothing is usually only worn for weddings and some traditional ceremonies like funerals and enthronization. A big loin cloth, called Kente, is put over the left shoulder, and it covers the whole body from the chest to the feet. This Kente has a lot of significance depending on how it was made with its different colors. The social rank, for example, is determined according to the Kente somebody put on. The Kente is made on a traditional loom. Its manufacturing consists of weaving cotton or silk wire. It is generally made with thread of different colors. Each color has a particular meaning. The black for maturity and spiritual energy; blue for peace, harmony, and love; green for vegetation, harvest, growth, and spiritual renewal; brown for Mother Earth; purple for womanhood; silver for serenity, purity, and joy; white for purification, and sanctification; gold for royalty, high status, glory, and spiritual purity; yellow for precocity, health, and fertility. For this reason, royal Kente are made mainly with gold and yellow wires. The weaving produces long strips that are eventually sewn to get the final loincloth. Although it is widespread today, it is a sacred loincloth worn on special occasions. You can also see a typical shirt called "Batakali", which is used for ordinary events as well as special events.

Second, Western dances are usually appreciated by younger people, but we also have traditional dances for special ceremonies, such as funerals, weddings or the enthronization of a chief or the head of a village. Dances are a way to express our feelings and to communicate generally. We have Akpesse and Agbadja, which are folkloric, rejoicing dances executed during weddings and after funerals or special events. The dance of warriors is the dance of hunters called Assafo, which are the guardians of the royal throne. This dance is to express their power and their bravery. They are the army of the royal throne. The Assafo dance is executed during an enthronization or the funeral of an ancient.

In conclusion my culture has wonderful clothing and dances. I can say that my culture is rich and valuable, and I appreciate it for its originality.

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KOMIVI K NEKOU



My name is **Komivi K Nekou**. I am from Togo, a little country in West Africa. I have been in the United States of America since September of 2014. Initially, I had been in Frederick, Maryland, before I moved to East Moline, where I started my first job. I have two siblings, whom I miss a lot because they live in my home country far from me. I attended university in Togo, and I graduated with a master's degree in Sociology. My future goal is to finish the ESL Program and then study to become a behavior analyst.

Miss Togo

What does the word “Miss” mean to people? Every country has its own culture, customs, and traditions. In Togo, like other countries in Africa and around the world, there are many kinds of celebrations during the year. From the north to the south, from the east to the west, the Togolese are different in terms of culture, customs, and traditional feasts. However, one important event that gathers everyone together in the entire country is the Miss Togo Election. Being Miss Togo is like winning a jackpot, but it requires many qualifications such as beauty and educational background. The origin, the election, and the duties are some points to learn about the event.

First of all, the beginning of the Miss Togo pageant comes from Mr. Gaspard Baka, manager and contractor in 1990, when he met Genevieve de Fontenay, President of the Committee for Miss France, in Paris. He noticed that Togolese ladies were absent from competitions such as Miss ECOWAS (Economic Community of West Africa), Miss World, or Miss Universe. After that, Miss Togo was initiated to elect the ambassadors of art and fashion. The first edition was opened in January of 1995, and a thousand girls applied all over the country. To be a candidate, the girls must be Togolese citizens, be between 18 and 23 years old, be a minimum 5 feet 5 inches, and be able to express themselves properly in French. They must also be single without any commitment or marriage.

Secondly, the election of Miss Togo is a time of discovering the different cultures of our country. Initially, the committee of Miss Togo selects girls in each region of the country. To give the opportunity for every culture to be represented in the competition, the committee organizes Miss Campus, Miss High School, and Miss Regional for the six regions that Togo consists of; after that, they retain 20 ladies who run for the crown. Usually, the national election of Miss Togo takes place on the last Saturday of August. Each candidate has to show her traditional dance that illustrates her culture and custom. The first appearance at the podium is in a swimsuit, and then the jury selects 12 for the second step. Then, the ladies have to choose a paper on which there is a question and answer it correctly without mistake or hesitation. This explains the reason why not only having a beautiful face or body can make a lady Miss Togo.

Finally, being Miss Togo requires some duties. The Miss has to be present at Miss ECOWAS and represent the country in some international competitions. Most importantly are her social activities in the country. The Miss has the opportunity to do a project which is granted by the sponsors. The latest final in the Miss Togo 2015 election was held Saturday, August 29, at the convention center of Lomé. At the end of the evening, the crown of Miss Togo 2015 returned to Miss Gaëlle Akou Yayra Adzoh. She is a 22 year old student in accounting at the Catholic University of West Africa in Lome. Miss Gaëlle, Akou Yayra Adzoh, therefore, succeeded Miss Tatiana Mariama Camara for her 12-month term and will work with poor women and encourage entrepreneurship as her social activity.

In conclusion, Miss Togo is the occasion where people all over the country and the world learn more about the culture in Togo through these talents and demonstrations. No one is perfect; however, the committee for Miss Togo does its best to win Miss Universe, and hopefully that will be an honor for the entire continent like in September of 1998, when Miss Togo won 3rd place at the Miss World in the Tokyo competition in Japan.

LAURA PEREZ

My name is **Laura Perez**, I am married, and I have four kids. I have three girls and one boy. I am from Mexico. I have lived in Chicago, Wisconsin, and Ohio. But, now I have been living in Moline, Illinois, since 2003. My goal is to finish the ESL program and one day become a nurse. My oldest daughter is in college, two are in high school, and my son is in middle school. Since my kids are old enough to stay at school all day, now I am able to go back to school. I think it is never too late to fulfill your dreams. Good luck to all of you.



Exchange of Cultures

Have you ever been in a place where you were able to hear people speaking many languages at the same time? Well, I have. The place is called Black Hawk College in Moline, IL. Many years ago, Sauk and Fox Native Americans were the only ones living here. Now, many people from around the world call this place home. This place has been wonderful to explore for many different reasons.

One of the benefits is that when I start talking to my classmate, I learn a lot about different countries and how people live there. Sometimes, they tell me very sad stories and they take me there without been there in person. For example, one of my classmate was telling the story about her and her family. She said that her life changed a lot since that time. They had to move to a safe place because the place where she was living was in war. Every day I hear on the news about war in other countries, so people have to flee from their own hometown to a safe place and find shelter as refuge. Sometimes, they have to live there for a long time until the help from other countries arrives. Listening to her story, I realized how blessed we are to live in America, and how hard it is to live in other countries. Here in America, we have freedom thank God and the people (soldiers and others) who serve this country.

Moreover, I am able to make new friends from around the world and discover the differences and similarities between our cultures. I like to talk to others and see some pictures of their country. Sometimes we search on Google and discover a lot of beautiful places. For example, I know a girl from South Korea. One day I cooked something at home, which was very spicy. I thought she wouldn't like it, but when she tried it, she liked it. She told me that in her country the hot and spicy food is common. I was very surprised, when I found how similar our cultures were even though our countries are far away from each other. Also, I have a friend from Brazil, her name is Chris and her language is Portuguese. One day she told me that in Brazil the winter is not as cold as is here. She said that during fall and winter, she is still able to go to the beach and enjoy the weather. Another day, I started talking to her in Spanish and she

started talking to me in Portuguese and we understood some words, but not all conversation. Even though, our languages sounds very similar, there are a lot of differences. I don't know if one day I will have the opportunity to go at least to one of my friends' countries, but at least now, I have an idea how life is in other countries without experiencing it in person.

Another benefit of having classmates from different countries is to learn a few words in their language. For example, one day I heard a student speaking another language, and I didn't know what language it was, so I had to ask the student where she was from. And she told me she was from Togo, Africa. She told me that French was one of the language she could speak and I asked her if she could teach me a few words in French. She said yes. Now I know how to say good morning, how are you? Also, another example is when I started talking in English to my other friend, her name is Isabel, and she told me she was from Equatorial Guinea, Africa. Later, I heard her speaking Spanish with her brother. Then she told me that small portion of Africa, Spanish is the official language. I was so confused that day, and I didn't believe her. So I have to admit, I went to my house and searched it on the Internet. I found out that it was true. The people from that small portion of Africa speak Spanish. I had never heard of it, and I didn't know that city existed.

Learning about other ways of living and listening to the stories of the people from those countries will take you to those places without being there in person. These experiences make me realize how hard life is in some places, and definitely I will see life differently.

NEELIMA DHARANIKOTA



My name is **Neelima Dharanikota**, and I'm from India. I graduated with a Master's in Botany in my country, and I worked as a plant science lecturer for three years. I am married, and I have a son. We came to the United States in 2010 as my husband got an opportunity to work here. This is my second year at Black Hawk College. After finishing ESL classes, I want to do nursing. I am also taking phlebotomy classes and hoping for a good career in the medical field. I believe America is a land of opportunities for the people who strive for their dreams.

The Science behind the Tradition

India is regarded as the oldest living civilization on Earth by many historians. Indian culture is Hindu dominated and typically complex and divergent in nature. The customs and practices of this age-old culture seem so rare and are often confusing, but behind these confusions, there are amazing scientific foundations, which are very ancient and wonderfully formulated for the benefits of the civilization. The significance of Indian culture and customs lies in the scientific processes, which focus on human well-being.

Indian customs are part of everyday life and have mostly been part of the way of life of Indians for a long time. Indian customs have scientific benefits behind regular life tasks like greeting people, getting dressed, wearing ornaments, and worshiping. For example, Indians greet each other by joining their hands, which is known as "Namaskar". In fact, pressure points for our eyes, ears and brain are located in finger tips. Joining both hands will bring all pressure points located in finger tips of palms together. Pressing these points will help to remember the person for a long time, and there won't be any germs transfer because there is no contact.

Also, sleeping with the head facing north is considered evil in the Indian culture, but scientifically, when we sleep facing north; Earth's magnetic field aligns asymmetrically with our body's magnetic field, which makes our heart work harder to cope with the asymmetry. If we sleep in this position, iron from the whole body starts to gather in the brain, which can cause headaches, Alzheimer's disease, cognitive decline, Parkinson's disease, and brain degeneration.

When we consider the use of spices like turmeric, it is considered holy in India. It may sound strange, but they use it in their food, apply it to their face, apply it to their door frame, and use it for devotional purposes. It's scientifically proven that turmeric is antibiotic in nature and inhibits liver damage (proven experimentally at the Medical University Graz in Austria). According to the American Chemical Society, turmeric contains a wide range of antioxidant, antiviral, antibacterial, anti-fungal, anti-carcinogenic, anti-mutagenic and anti-inflammatory properties. It is also loaded with many healthy nutrients, such as protein, dietary fiber, niacin, Vitamin C, Vitamin E, Vitamin K, sodium, potassium, calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, and zinc.

Indians have worshiped the tulsi plant for thousands of years. It is considered as a sacred plant, and it is present in every Hindu family, in front or inside of their house. Recent studies have shown that the tulsi plant releases ozone (O₃) along with oxygen (O₂), which is essential for ecological balance. Tulsi acts as an herb in the treatment of respiratory system disorders. Swallowing 12 leaves of tulsi twice a day prevents stress, purifies the blood and helps prevent several common ailments. Tulsi is used in making the "Theertam" (holy water offered to drink) used in temples, which is proved to be a very good blood purifier. Sitting on the floor while eating is an Indian tradition; however, sitting on the floor crossing legs is "Sukhasana" in yoga and helps to activate digestive enzymes.

Besides their beauty, Indian ornaments also have their scientific benefits. Indian women and men put "Tilak" (a round red dot) in-between their eyebrows on their forehead, which is very important practice in Hindu tradition. Indeed, that point is a major nerve junction in the human body. Pressing on this point activates nerves that link to the memory and help in improving concentration. Married Indian women have a tradition of wearing toe rings. Wearing toe rings is not just a custom of married women, but there is a scientific cause behind it. Normally, toe rings are worn on the second toe. A particular nerve from the second toe connects to the uterus and passes to the heart. Wearing a ring on this toe strengthens the uterus. It will keep it healthy by regulating the blood flow to it, and the menstrual cycle will be regularized. As silver is a good conductor, it also absorbs polar energies from the earth and passes them to the body. Applying mehendi on the palms and feet of a bride and bridegroom is another Indian custom. In fact, mehendi is a powerful medicinal herb. An Indian wedding is a five-day celebration, which can cause stress. The application of mehendi can prevent too much stress because it cools the body and keeps the nerves from becoming tense. This is the reason why mehendi is applied on the hands and feet, which house nerve endings in the body.

These old Indian traditions are often considered as superstitious, but with advancements in science, now it is evident that these traditions are based on scientific knowledge and passed from generation to generation as cultural practices. Even though many common people don't know the actual uses of them, they have been following them faithfully for years. To sum up, these old customs, rituals and traditions of India were once introduced by ancient Rishis, who knew their scientific roots, and were practiced for the well-being of the people as part of their culture.

NTIRAMPEBA JORJETE

Hi my name is **Ntirampeba Jorjete**. I am 20 years old, and I am from East Africa (Tanzania). I was born in Congo, but I grew up in Tanzania. Right now, I live in Rock Island, IL. I have both my mom and dad here with me, and I have four brothers and five sisters. Two of my brothers and one sister are back in Africa, and they're all married.



Trip to Meet My Grandparents

Have you ever visited family members you had never met before? When I was 12 years old, I visited my grandparents for the first time in my life. It was great, but the trip took very long. Even though the trip was long, I wasn't that tired because my goal was to see my grandparents.

My parents, my little brother, and I first traveled by bus for four hours from Mtabila to Kigoma to my aunt's house where we spent two and a half weeks. I knew about this trip for about three weeks. I prepared myself by getting things ready all those three weeks because I was very excited to hear that I was going to travel. I couldn't wait. My little brother and I were so excited to see my aunt and her six children because we had never met them before. At first, they didn't realize who we were, until my aunt told them. On the next day, I played with my cousins like they were my long-time friends. We got to know each other's names, and we were happy to get to know each other. After two weeks, we continued our trip. We took off from Kigoma, Tanzania, to Congo where my grandparents lived. We had to take a boat because there is a river called (Tanganyika) between Congo and Tanzania. I got sick because it was my first time traveling on a boat. It took us the whole night to reach to our destination.

When we reached our destination, my mom sat me somewhere under a tree to wait for her. When I asked her why, she said that she was going to see if her parents still lived in the same house she left them from. She was gone for 30 minutes. I was still waiting when I saw two people behind me, one was my grandpa and the other one was my cousin. I didn't know them, but they knew who I was because my mom had already told them about me. My grandpa was in a hurry. He only gave me a hug and left. My cousin took my bag, and he told me to follow him. I felt like I was being kidnapped until I saw my mom. When my grandma saw me walking toward her compound, she came and gave me a big hug, and she said, "This is my granddaughter!" She gave us food, drink, and fruits. I enjoyed it. The next day, my mom, grandparents, cousins and I went shopping. I was really happy to meet Congolese people. The month we spend there was very great because I met new friends, and learned new games. I even went swimming in a river called Kalamabenge and my grandma taught me how to swim. The happiest part of the visit was the stories my grandmother told me. She told me great stories.

Afterwards, we went back home. When we got home, after two weeks, we started the process of coming to the United States. It was not happy that we are coming to the U.S. because I would not see my grandparents again. While we were in the process of coming to the U.S. we heard the bad news that my grandmother had died, I cried so loud because I had just come from visiting her and then she passed away. On the other hand, I was happy that I had the chance to meet her before she died.

PLEH HTOO



My name is **Pleh Htoo**. I come from Thailand, the Mae La Refugee Camp. However, I am not Thai. I am Karen. I was born on April 19, 1993. I have six siblings. I am the second youngest in my family. I have four sisters and one younger brother. My hobbies are watching movies, fishing, playing volleyball, and listening to music. I have been in the United States for 7 years. I finished my senior year at Rock Island High School in 2012. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College because I want to fulfill my dreams. I am dreaming of becoming an office specialist.

Karen Traditional Clothing

Do you have a traditional costume? When do you wear your traditional clothes? Every culture has its own traditional clothing. Karen people also have it. We always wear them when we celebrate our national holidays, special occasions, or to church or monastery. Karen traditional clothing is very unique because before we turn the fabric into clothing, we use cotton to make it into thread. Plus, the Karen clothing has meaning. Sometimes you might see Karen people who do not wear the same clothing. There are three labels that show the different ages of people, and they wear different clothes such as the Karen blouse with a sarong, the traditional dress, and a men's shirt with a men's sarong.



Firstly, once they are married, people have to wear a Karen blouse with a sarong. Then people recognize that they are not single anymore. For example, the day when they celebrate their marriage, married women wear blouses and skirts or sarongs, and men wear Karen blouses and sarongs. All of their clothes are made with beautiful bright flowers. Also, they wear different colors like red, black, and yellow.



Secondly, when they are young, they are not ready to be married, so they have to wear a long dress. Also, they wear different types of colors such as red, blue, white, and black. Most young girls pick white dresses because they look bright and pure. Sometimes, they wear long scarves wrapped around their heads. In the past, people used to wear ordinary fabric, and the clothes didn't look so good. Now, all of the clothes are made with cotton fabric, so they look beautiful.

Finally, Karen men prefer to wear short shirts and men's sarongs with many different patterns that indicate marital status. For instance, if a Karen

man wears a red sarong and a white shirt, it sends a message to others that he is married. Single Karen men usually wear red shirts and other colors (not red) for a sarong. Wearing Karen traditional clothing does not require a lot of skills, and it doesn't take too much time to wrap a men's sarong. It is not as difficult as tying a necktie. In the past, most of the men wore a men's sarong, but nowadays, Karen youth are wearing pants made of Karen traditional clothing materials. All of these clothing pieces are Karen traditional costumes designed for Karen men.

In conclusion, Karen traditional clothing labels peoples. It tells who we are and where we come from. Karen traditional clothing not only expresses our age, but it also shows marital status. These clothes are gifts from our great grandmothers and grandfathers. Indeed, I never forget to wear my traditional clothes. Wherever I go, I always carry my clothes with me because I think my clothes are more beautiful than other traditional clothes.



RAMADAN KARANEZI

My name is **Ramadan Karanezi**. I am from Kosovo, a small and beautiful country located in southeast Europe. I am married, and I have two kids. My family and I have been living in the United States for four years. Winning the green card and moving to the USA was the biggest change in my life. I graduated from medical school in my home country, so my objective remains in the medical field. However, I know that I have a lot to do in order to work in my profession to have the life I want. The United States is providing me the opportunities to grow and develop, both in my personal and professional life. My philosophy of life is to be thankful for everything I have, so I have a strong sense of purpose in everything I do. In my spare time, I like to spend time with my family. I usually play basketball or tennis with my kids. I think that the ESL classes at Black Hawk College will help me advance my career.



Doku-Fest in Kosovo

Doku-Fest is an International Documentary and Short Film Festival held in Prizren, Kosovo, my home country. This festival is held every year in the month of August, attracting lots of people along the way. Before the war in Kosovo, Prizren used to be the city of culture, and the cinema of the city was the reference point for many tourists and young artists, but due to the war, it stopped. Doku-Fest was created by a group of friends wanting to bring back the tradition of documentaries and short films to Prizren. Doku-Fest, now an annual event to go and watch documentaries and short films, has gained attention worldwide. But what makes Doku-Fest so important and rich is that it is comprehensive in many aspects, such as screenings and selections of best documentary, workshop-debates, and finally, lots of fun and cultural activities. It's a very good model of how a film festival turns into a full stage with communication and entertainment activities.

First of all, during the time of Doku-Fest, people come from all over the world to see the documentaries and short films. Directors and all other filmmakers want their documentaries and short films shown. During August, when Doku-Fest is going on, people compete to get some good viewing spots for the documentaries and short films, which are held at the Castle Cinema and the River Cinema during the evening. Both the Castle and the River Cinemas are outside,

so the viewer has much more freedom when watching the films. The Castle Cinema is on top of a castle in Prizren, while the River Cinema is on top of a river in Prizren.

What happens during Doku-Fest? Doku-Fest is a time when businesses in Prizen start getting more work and people start coming in. Also, the hotels and apartments are all filled up at the time because of the tourists coming in. Doku-fest is a huge event every year, and it attracts a lot of tourists, and this contributes a lot to the city's budget. For most people, Doku-Fest is not just to watch the films, but also to meet new people and create some new experiences at the same time.

Last, but not least, what activities are going on during Doku-Fest? There are a lot of activities that go on during Doku-Fest. During Doku-Fest, the city of Prizren is lively all night long, so it's no wonder there are many activities to do. You can go to music concerts or maybe even participate in the activities that Doku-Fest itself has created for you. Most game places are open during Doku-Fest, so you could go to an arcade, or you could maybe even go hiking all the way to the castle, for the Castle Cinema. No matter where you go in Prizren, there will always be at least some activities or things to do at the time of Doku-Fest.

In conclusion, Doku-Fest is a time to hang out with family or friends and have a good time and experience watching films outside. No matter what you do in Doku-Fest, there will always be something that you will like about it. Every year Doku-fest comes with a new look, as competitive in terms of movies that appear, but also in terms of cultural entertainment for the fans who love the movies and the nightlife.

REGINE NADEGE EKOH



My name is **Regine Nadege Ekoh**, and I am a 28-year-old Cameroonian lady. I am the oldest child and have four brothers and two sisters, who live in Cameroon, my home country in Central Africa. I have been in the United States since last year. Before coming here, I attended a college where I got my teaching diploma and my bachelor's degree. I taught for two years in high school, and I hope after completing my master's and/or my PhD, I will teach again and enjoy life like in the past. Life is more challenging in a new country. Traveling and history are my hobbies.

Ethnic Groups and Languages in Cameroon

Usually called "miniature Africa," Cameroon is a central African country located on the Gulf of Guinea and bordered by Nigeria, Chad, Central Africa Republic, Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. The country has an average population of 22 million. In 1884, Germany signed a protectorate with the local chief over the current Cameroon. Since then, a new language was introduced to the land and used in official documents. After World War I, the country was mandated by the League of Nations through the United Kingdom and France. In 1945, when World War II ended, the United Kingdom and France ran it as a trusted territory, supervised by the United Nations. As a result of this double presence, we ended up with two official languages: English and French. Eight of ten regions speak French and two English. Besides that, there are around 280 ethnic groups and languages in Cameroon.

To understand the ethnic and linguistic diversity of this country, it is advisable to check back in the migration process of this population. All the languages families seen in sub-Saharan Africa are present in Cameroon. They are Bantu, Semi-Bantu, Sudano, Sahelian, and pygmy languages. These groups are mostly settled in specific geographic zones. Due to the geographical location of the country near the center of the African continent, all ethnic groups settled there during their migration process. In fact, the physical geography of the country where all climates, landforms, and the proximity to the Atlantic Ocean motivated people from abroad to live there. For instance, Pygmies were the first to settle in the forest part of the country because it is their natural environment and they could find the necessities for their survival. For the same purpose, they were followed by some Bantou groups. The last group to settle in Cameroon was the Fulani and they belong to the Sahelian group. They brought their language, Fulani, and imposed it on the previous inhabitants as a common language. Each ethnic group has multiple dialects. To illustrate, the Bantou formed a set of more than eighty dialects. That is why today, in the same area, there is such a plethora of languages.

Therefore, the linguistic diversity has influenced the family life in several ways. In the past, both parents spoke the same language because marriage within ethnic groups was promoted. Consequently, children spoke two languages: one ethnic language and English or French

depending on the family's geographical location. Today, due to the development within the country, marriage between ethnic groups is common. This situation has led to trilingual or quatro-lingual families. Some parents have chosen not to teach the local dialect to their children. Instead, they focus only on English and French. This new generation is the product of intellectual and bi-ethnic parents. The new generation has lost its identity. To clarify, these children don't know to speak any dialect; consequently, they have lost their culture.

The other crucial spheres where the linguistic diversity interferes are school and public life. The school system requires English and French in all schools and universities. Some schools are mono-linguistic, which means courses are taught either in English or French. In this case, the other official language is taught as a second language and is compulsory. However, most schools offer a bilingual system. Henceforth, courses are taught in both English and French. Universities are also either francophone, Anglophone or bilingual. For instance, in a bilingual university, students must have high skills in both languages because each professor has the choice of a language in which he or she will teach. In public life, everyone is free to speak the language in which he or she feels comfortable. The promotion of bilingualism is the priority of the government. As a result, all across the country, signs, information, official documents, news, etc. are written, spoken, and read both in English and French.

On balance, Cameroon is a country that hosts ethnics groups with a linguistic diversity. This melting pot of cultures, tribes, and languages has influenced our lives resulting in a cultural syncretism. Today, being a Cameroonian means being mixed and unique.

ROSEMARIE WILLIAM

My name is **Rosemarie William**, and I'm 21 years old. I was born in Myanmar, and I grew up there. I have been living in the U.S. with my family since May 2014. Now, I live in Rock Island with my family, and I'm taking ESL courses at Black Hawk College because English is my second language. I haven't decided yet on my future job because I have a lot of choices in the U.S. I want to be a teacher, a nurse, or an interpreter. I have already decided to finish advanced ESL classes. I'm planning to go to a university, and I will try my best to finish my education, no matter how hard it is for me.



Human Trafficking in Myanmar

Human trafficking is the trade of humans or *skin trade*. This trade has spread all around the world, and this is an illegal trade. China, Thailand, Vietnam, and India have this kind of problem, and their governments can't stop the trade. People who have been sold are innocent about why they have been sold, but some agree on the purpose. My country, Myanmar, has been facing human trafficking for a long time. There are three reasons for this: the agreement by parents, the persuasion by traffickers, and the scarcity of work due to the government's economy.

Some of the poverty-stricken parents agree and sell some of their children because they can't afford food for their families, so they do what they know and try human trafficking. For example, in 2012, in Malaysia, one of my daddy's friends had a baby, and his wife had to go to the hospital to give birth. When he went to pay the bill, the hospital cost was so expensive, and he couldn't pay for the baby. A few days later, he decided to sell his baby to his Chinese boss for RM 7,000(\$ 2,350), and his boss sold the baby to a rich couple who couldn't have a baby. Thus, the baby was sold by his father. When our church found out about that, our pastor took back the baby, and he gave the money to the rich couple in exchange.

Next, after the agreement of the parents, there are some people who help or persuade parents to sell babies. There are a lot of traffickers, and they buy and sell human life. In a YouTube video from August of 2011, the Irrawaddy Publishing Group interviewed a girl, Thida. She told them that when she was thirteen, she used to sell vegetables at a market every day because of her family's daily difficulties. One day, one woman came and talked to her, and she persuaded her to work in Kaw Thauang, which was in nearby Thailand, at a restaurant. Wanting more money for her family, the girl believed her and followed her; however, she was sold by that woman to Ranong, which was in Thailand. When the Irrawaddy Publishing Group interviewed Thida, she told them about how she was sold, how she became a sex worker, and how her life changed in Thailand. Traffickers never give up on their target person, and they continue trying to persuade that person until he or she changes his or her mind. As a result, a lot of girls' lives are damaged forever because of traffickers' persuasion.

The agreement and persuasion wouldn't happen if my country's economy were better than other countries. The scarcity of labor is one of Myanmar's main problems, and many people want to work and make more money to support their families; therefore, they contact brokers and go to other countries. Brokers take their money and sell them to illegal fishing boats, industries, etc. My friend's uncle faced that problem. He wanted to work in Malaysia, but the broker sold him to an illegal fishing boat for Baht 14,000 (\$391.93) in Indonesia; he had been working there for eight years. When the boat came back ocean side, he ran to Malaysia and met his family. Thus, some people depart to other countries to get better jobs, but they end up being sold by brokers or traffickers to elsewhere. That kind of skin trade has been happening for a long time because of the scarcity of labor in my country.

In conclusion, around the world, a lot of sex trafficking victims are women and children. Everybody has ability, and he or she can be a great president, governor, teacher, father, mother, etc.; therefore, selling the person to others means to destroy the person's life. My country, Myanmar, has been facing human trafficking for a long time; this is due to parental agreement, persuasion by traffickers, and the economy hardship. We can't price lives. Buying and selling human life is illegal, so human trafficking or skin trade should never exist in Myanmar or around the world.

SADIKOU OURO SAMA



My name is **Sadikou Ouro Sama**, but you can call me Sadik. I am 26 years old, and I come from Togo. When I finished my high school, I started studying English Literature at the University of Lome, but I could not finish because I had to move to the USA in 2014. I am taking ESL classes not only because I love English, but also because I want to pursue my studies in psychology. Personally, I am a funny person because I love jokes and funny stories. My dream is to be helpful to everybody one day. I am happy to be in the USA, and I hope I will achieve my goals.

My Cultural Dance in the North of Togo

Though my country Togo is one of the smallest countries in Africa. Togo is not poor in cultural diversities, dances, and traditions. Each area, town, or city has its own traditional, cultural dance celebrated every year to thank gods. I am Kotokoli, an ethnic group in the North of Togo, from Sokode. We have our cultural dance named the Gadao Adossa and Kosso, which is celebrated to thank the ancestors for the abundant harvest. Gadao Adossa and Kosso is the main Kotokoli festival dance. It consists of three days of festivities, from Friday to Sunday. This particular event is important to the community because Adossa is the dance of the knives danced by men, and the Kosso is the dance for the women.

First of all, this unique occasion gathers the most important people of the area, like politicians and people who live abroad. Everyone comes to celebrate, to enjoy, and to feel the moment. The first day, early in the morning, all of the children of Sokode leave their homes to go clean everything and make sure the whole city is ready for the occasion. Then, since all of the people are Muslims, a great Djouma prayer is done in the big mosque. Then, every dancer will meet in the spiritual chief's house to prepare for the next day. The spiritual chief is the only one who prepares them, nobody knows how or why.

The next day is the day of celebrations, the day which everybody is waiting for. The town is clean, and the dancers are ready and well prepared. Everything begins that morning at the stadium of Gadao in Sokode. Everybody goes there. Some go to watch, and others go to present. Before they start, there is a great speech of welcome and of happiness from the great chief and other important guests. All the invited regions present their dances until midday, and after that, everybody goes back home to prepare for the Adossa later. At 3 pm, it is the time of the Adossa. The Tchapkide is the chief of the group. He is always the first to appear in his traditional clothes, wearing all red from head to toe. Then, followed by the drummers and the other dancers, they will go and call the spiritual chief to start the Adossa steps. It is neither the time for war nor the time for jokes though every dancer has his sharpened knife in his hand. It is the time to enjoy the moment, for men and boys, old and young, to grab their knives. They cut themselves with their knives but nobody bleeds. They cut their tongues, bellies, backs, throats, arms, and every other parts of their bodies without bleeding. Their bodies remain the same, no

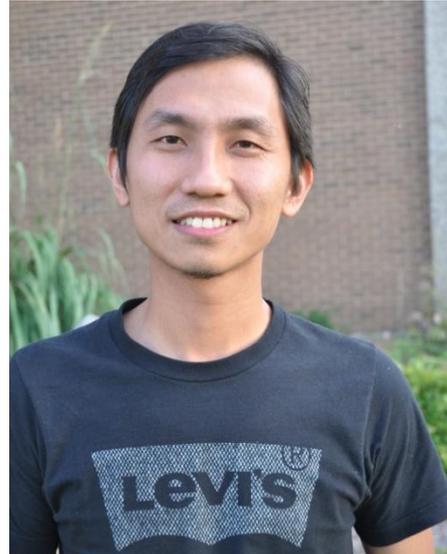
matter how hard they try to cut themselves. Tradition, culture or customs, nobody knows how they do. The dancers can tell the mystery. Some are born incapable of being wounded, hurt or damaged, but some bathe themselves with magic products. With all of these sharpened knives, nobody gets hurt. Then, everything ends with a horse parade. Proud of their heroes, everybody goes home happy.

Finally, on the last day, it is the day for the women to show their dance, which is the Kosso. Women come wearing their best and finest outfits. They dance to show their support for the courage of the men. The women wait until everybody has arrived. The women dance in a row or in a circle, and the drummers always follow them. Only one woman sings for the group and the others answer. They dance and they go and greet all of the important personalities.

In conclusion, the Adossa Gadao and Kosso is one of the most respected dances in my country. All around the country, people come to watch and learn. Nobody knows exactly how they do it; the mystery makes the dance more interesting. I had the opportunity to dance it once. I have seen the joy, the excitement, and the pride of the people dancing it. Every tourist must at least visit just to watch, to learn, and to appreciate the mystery and the faith that my homeland people have in their culture.

ZAU TU

My name is **Zau Tu**, and I am 27 years old. I am from Myanmar, which is located in Southeast Asia. I have been here for 2 years and 5 months. I don't have any family members here. I left them because my life was in danger. My hobbies are watching movies, listening to music, and playing soccer and the guitar. I am taking ESL classes at Black Hawk College in order to improve my English. My first goal is to finish ESL classes, and my second goal is to finish my bachelor's degree. I have two options to choose after ESL classes: one is to go to the Bible College, and the other one is to work on my bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. I hope that one day I will be able to execute my plan in order to have a better future.



Water Festival in Myanmar

It seems that every country has its very special, cultural and traditional religious or ritual days and festivals, and people celebrate these events in very different ways. Additionally, people portray their cultural and traditional festivals that are beautiful, respected, and treasured; they accept that their respective festivals are inheritances that descend from their forefathers, which is a huge responsibility to carry on from generation to generation. Some people have passion to celebrate fairs through their beliefs and the teachings of their gods; therefore, there are many religious ceremonies around the world. Indeed, one of these is the Water Festival of Myanmar.

There are many cultural ceremonies and events in Myanmar, but the Water Festival (*Thingyan in the Burmese language*) is the most popular and honored that is held nationwide; the Water Festival is called the Myanmar New Year. The festival celebration falls annually in mid-April (on the *Burmese calendar 'Tagu's' month*), and at the end of the school holiday, and it lasts for five days, so all of the people are able to enjoy celebrating the Thingyan. Some companies and private organizers have to apply for permission from the ministry to set the stage (the water spraying station), which is the place that people play with water and music performances are given on the street, which are sponsored by rich families, businessmen, and celebrities. The participants use silver cups, devices, and water tubes with handles for dousing or throwing; the revelers use pickup trucks, open-roof Jeeps, motorbikes, and various vehicles. Nowadays, many foreigners are there during the period of celebration in Myanmar, especially in Rangoon and Mandalay's cities, which are the largest cities, because they love to join and hang out, and they want to get new experiences.

The Water Festival is related to Buddhism; hence, it is a very fashionable celebration in Myanmar because the majority are Buddhists. They believe that throwing and dousing water on each other is washing away their sins in order to enter into a brand New Year. The believers of Buddha are very devoted people, and they follow or observe the teachings of Buddha. Moreover, some Buddhists, particularly aging people, go to the temple for meditation and

recitation in the time of celebration. Some accomplish good merit activities: they provide free food to the public and deliver it to the neighborhoods; they give food to the monks, and they sterilize the monastery. Mont-lone-yepaw (*in Burmese*), which is made of glutinous rice and palm sugar, and mont-let-sung or Shwe Yin Aye (*in Burmese*), which is made of glutinous rice, palm sugar syrup, bread, and homemade colorful jelly, are very famous during the festival. On New Year's Day, people go to their parents' houses with gifts such as money, food, and clothes to show respect, ask for blessings, and give thanks.

The musical entertainment also takes place and is one of the main keys of the celebration of the Water Festival. Ladies are on the stage wearing different colors of Myanmar traditional dress, performing conventional dances, which are very peaceful, and showing the beauty of the wonderful dance. There is Myanmar classical music and song performances, which are very dissimilar to western music. There are many music concerts not only in the day but also at night; there are many kinds of music performances available for the crowds because the stage presents them differently. Big companies appoint the music bands, vocalists, and DJ performers nationwide.

Finally, the Water Festival (Thingyan) is a well-recognized ceremony in Myanmar, and it gives people enjoyment, freshness, and strength; indeed, it is the teaching of Buddha for Buddhists. Even though it is associated with Buddhism, all of the people of Myanmar, including those of other religions, celebrate it because it is a national, cultural festival, which is celebrated once a year. Many types of music, songs, and dances are conducted during that period. Therefore, the Water Festival occupies all Myanmar, and it is in people's hearts, and it will always be there.

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY

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