



# INTERNATIONAL VOICES at Black Hawk College



OUR SIDE OF THE STORY





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Thanks to all.

Nina De Bisschop

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# RASEDA BE

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My name is **Raseda Be**. I was born in Thailand in a refugee camp, and I grew up in the camp. I was in 11th grade before I came to the United States. I had to wear a uniform when I went to school. I used to wash clothes with my friends in the river, and I used to go to the forest with my dad and uncle. I used to carry water twice a day when I lived in Thailand. Also, I used to help my parents in the garden when I didn't have school. I came to United States in 2014. I have seen many different things in the U.S. I studied in high school for two years. After that, I started ESL classes at BHC.

## Life in Mae La Camp

Many ethnic groups became refugees in Thailand because of the civil war in Burma. Many people left their villages to escape the war, abuse and killings by the Burmese army. There are nine refugee camps in Thailand. Mae La refugee camp is the largest of all camps in Thailand. My parents moved to Mae La camp because of the war in their village. They lived in the camp for 20 years. All my siblings and I were born and grew up there. The camp was safe and enjoyable, but there were no jobs.

First, living in Mae La Camp, we felt safe and at home. When we lived in the camp, we didn't have to worry about the war. We could sleep peacefully at night. For instance, my parents had told me that when they lived in their village, they had to sleep in the forest because the Burmese soldiers were coming to the village at night, so they were afraid to sleep at home. Also, they were killing babies, older people, and men. They also always had to worry about the women because the women suffered sexual violence and abuse. Another reason we felt safe was we didn't have to be afraid when we went to the forest. We planted vegetables and fruits, and we raised cows, chickens, and goats in the garden, and nobody could take them away from us. For example, in my parents' village, they were planting vegetables and raising animals, but the military would take their pigs, cows, goats, etc. away from them. In addition, we didn't have to worry about food in the camp because we received rice, oil, beans, etc. from the UN (United Nations) every month. Also, the UN donated books, pens, pencils and backpacks for our school.

Second, living in the refugee camp was enjoyable for me. When I lived in the refugee camp, people were very happy. Even though it was difficult to live there, people were thankful to have a safe place and were happy to support each other in a difficult situation. It was very nice to live somewhere where people were always helping each other. Also, they shared whatever they had, but they didn't expect anything back. Another reason they were happy was because they spent time with their friends. For example, people did chores, such as gathering wood from the forest, together with their friends and neighbors. They went to the river to wash clothes and swim. Every afternoon, they went together to get water, and then later they cooked for their families. After they were done with their chores in the





evening, they hung out with friends and played hide and seek or took walks. When I lived in the camp, my house was bigger than some of the others and had a TV, so my neighbors watched movies at my home.

However, refugees had problems finding jobs. There were no paying jobs in the camp, but some adults found work outside the camp. One example was picking corn by hand and putting it in bags. Then they had to carry the 25 kg (55 lb.) bags to the trucks. Even that job was seasonal, and it was dangerous because it was not legal. Also, many people also had gardens outside of the camp, so they could grow some of their own food. The UN provided food, but they didn't give us money. Some people in the camp had a little more money because they sold the vegetables from their gardens, so they could hire someone to wash their clothes, and people who needed money washed clothes for others to get money. Because they didn't have enough jobs, they couldn't afford for their children to go to school, so many children had no education. Then they tried to find a job outside of the camp, but they were not really allowed to go out, so they were arrested by the police and sent to the Thai and Burmese border or taken to jail. In addition, they needed a ticket if they wanted to go out of the camp. It cost 150 baht to get a ticket, and most people couldn't afford it. These were the main problems for the refugees.

The refugee camp was safe and enjoyable, but there were no jobs there. The refugees wanted to move to third countries (first country: home country; second country: refugee camp country) because they wanted their kids to have an education and have a place to work. I have been in the US for four years. I like to live in the US because I have improved my education. I also have a better life in the US. I always miss my friends and relatives in the refugee camp, but I don't want to live in such a difficult situation again.



### Ramadan

Ramadan is an important month for Muslim people. Ramadan is the holy month in Islam. It is the ninth month in the Muslim lunar calendar. Muslims fast for 30 days. They fast from sunrise to sunset. All family members gather for Iftar time, which is the time of breaking the fast. This month is considered a charity month; people help others in need, and they give them money, food or what they need. Usually, many families gather together to eat Iftar and pray. After that, they read the Quran, the Muslims' holy book. The reason for fasting is to understand how other hungry people feel if they don't eat. That can encourage them to help and give to others. During the last Ramadan, I visited my aunt's family in Indiana. After we finished praying, we didn't sleep the entire night, and we spent time with family, friends and neighbours. Every country has different traditions for Ramadan. Some choose to break the fast publicly by putting the food in the street at Iftar time, so anybody can share the food even if they are not fasting; others choose to eat inside their homes.

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# MAZAMA-ESSO BIDEMA

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My name is **Mazama-Esso Bidema**. I was born on December 31, 1989 in Sakalaoude, Togo. Being the last of six kids in my family, I lost my father when I was only one year old. My mommy alone would take care of me. She raised me under difficult conditions because nobody was there to help. She sent me to school, and I got a bachelor's degree. I came to the United States in June, 2017. I now work at Tyson. I have decided to further my studies and get a higher degree in order to find a good job in the future. My daily work at Tyson is tiresome, but I am determined to achieve my goal. The Christian that I am, I believe that God will help me to overcome my problems.



## Agriculture in Togo

Togo is a small country located in West Africa. It is bordered in the north by Burkina Faso, in the south by the Atlantic Ocean, in the east by Benin, and in the west by Ghana. In the domain of agriculture, people grow many products. Among which are corn, cultivated almost all over the country and mostly in the south; yams, cultivated mostly in Bassar (a district situated in the northwest of the country); coffee and cocoa, cultivated only in the southwest; and beans and millet, cultivated in the center and north of Togo. Due to many factors, agriculture in Togo has a lot of problems that hamper its development. According to research by the government of Togo, more than 75% of the population are farmers. Yet, the same survey shows that 80% of the population are extremely poor: living under the threshold of poverty and eating hardly once or twice a day (source: Télévision Togolaise). How can we explain this paradox that many people are farmers, but are still starving?

In Togo, we come across many problems that explain this situation. First, the soil is very poor. There is no way they can reap anything if they don't use fertilizers. Fertilizers in Togo are expensive; only few farmers can afford them. This situation does not enable farmers to reap enough. For some crops, apart from using fertilizers, they also need to use insecticides to spray and kill worms that destroy crops. That is why, despite the large surfaces they cultivate, they still have low yields. Many times, fertilizers are not even available. They are not manufactured in Togo; rather they are imported, and when the time comes to use them they are nowhere to be found. They come in when it is too late to use fertilizers. Eventually, farmers reap less than expected. Sometimes, fertilizers and pesticides are there, but farmers use them wrongly because many cannot read the instructions written on them.

Second, there are no machines. Everything is done by human force using outdated tools, such as hoes and machetes. Farmers use their own strength with rudimentary tools; thus, it is not possible to cultivate large surfaces like here in the United States, for example. In Africa, especially Togo, some people use animal coupling to cultivate large surfaces, but it is still insufficient because this method is outdated as well. Modern equipment needed are tractors, threshers, seeders, etc.

Third, there is a scarcity of rainfall. In Togo, we have two seasons: a rainy season and a dry season. The rainy season goes from April to October; the dry season goes from October to March. For a long time now, the rain has not been falling at the expected time. It is due to general climate warming and human activities such as destruction

of forests. In Togo, people cut trees to make charcoal. By doing so, rain falls rarely, and droughts often devastate all the farms. Farmers are disappointed and hopeless because a food shortage is inevitable. Some other times, heavy rains can fall causing floods and devastating crops. This phenomenon was observed between 2007- 2010.

To sum up, there are many problems in the domain of agriculture. This is why, in spite of the great number of farmers, many are still starving. In this case the government needs to help farmers to become autonomous. The government must provide fertilizers and pesticides to whoever wants to buy them. The government must send experts to help farmers increase their yield. Almost 100% of farmers in Togo are illiterate; therefore, they cannot develop new strategies to increase their yield. The population and the government must fight against the effects of climate warming by planting trees everywhere. The government must find an appropriate place for monkeys and elephants because they also destroy crops. If these suggestions are taken into account, surely agriculture will be improved.

### **A Special Holiday of the Kabye Culture in Togo**

In July of every year, there is a traditional initiation of young men which gathers all Kabye people of the country and those who are abroad. In Kabye culture, a man is supposed to protect his community in case there is an attack. For that reason, by the age of eighteen, a young man must be initiated in how to fight without a weapon. To do this, young men from different villages wrestle to determine the winner. This initiation is called Evala. It is held in a public place (usually in a stadium) in the presence of authorities, including the president. The young men from two villages get in the stadium and wrestle two by two. The one who takes down his opponent wins, and the village with the most takedowns is the winner. The young men do this for three years. After three years, the young men are accepted in the community as adults. It is a very exciting ceremony that many people like.





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# GONG CHEN

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Hi, everybody. I'm **Gong Chen**. I come from China, and I was born in Xiaoyi. It is a small town, but many people live there so the streets are always bustling. I am 20 years old this year. I went to primary school, junior high school, and high school in China. I have a big family. Some of them are living in Xiaoyi, China, and some of them are living in the United States. My family members in the United States are not living in the same city, but we meet each other every year. I hope I can finish my college as soon as possible and find a good job in the future. My dream is to travel around the world.

## Spring Festival

Spring Festival, also called Chinese New Year, is the most important and the biggest festival in China. Spring Festival is the first traditional festival in the year, and it has a history of more than four thousand years. Spring Festival has become an indispensable symbol of Chinese culture after years of custom accumulation. Celebrating the Spring Festival has become an important thing for people to do every year. You can feel the uniqueness of the Spring Festival in the preparation, the traditional ways of celebrating, and the customs.

First of all, preparation for the Spring Festival is unique in China. Because the Spring Festival is very important for Chinese people, people usually begin to prepare for the Spring Festival half a month in advance. The first thing to do is to go home. Spring Festival is a holiday for which people should be reunited with the whole family in their hometown, so no matter where they are, people will find a way to get back to their hometown. Then, a unique phenomenon happens in China: Spring Festival travel rush. During the half month before the Spring Festival, there are millions of people traveling. The consequence of so many people traveling at the same time is the traffic in China will start to get very busy whether it is airplanes, trains, or highways. At that time, you may not be able to buy any train tickets and airplane tickets, and you may also get stuck on a highway for hours and not be able to move. After people go back to their hometown, they will start to prepare other things. Cleaning their house is one of the most important preparations, so people will take it seriously. We always clean the house to make it clean and tidy, but during the Spring Festival, cleaning is not as simple. You must make the house look like new, so it takes a lot of time and people to do this. When I was a child, most of my family members used to join in this cleaning work, and it took the whole morning and half of the afternoon to finish the work. When we saw the house looking like new, everyone was happy. The other important preparation for the Spring Festival is shopping for the Spring Festival. People always buy lots of stuff during the Spring Festival. Firstly, they will buy lots of nuts and candy for entertaining guests. Then, they will buy lots of vegetables and meat because stores will close before the Spring Festival. Finally, people will buy new clothes and shoes because this is a traditional custom that people should wear new clothes during the Spring Festival in China.

Second, people have unique ways to celebrate the Spring Festival. Setting off firecrackers is one of the most common ways of celebrating. For a few days before the Spring Festival, you can start to hear the firecrackers anytime. I remember when I was young, I liked to set off firecrackers, and I used to spend all afternoon setting off firecrackers with my friends. It is very important to set off firecrackers on the first day of the year because people think it will bring good luck. Staying up late or not sleeping on New Year's Eve is another traditional way to



celebrate. Many families stay up late, and some people don't sleep on New Year's Eve. People will play card games and chat with their family. The other way is watching the Spring Festival Gala. Since 1983, China Central Television has prepared a program for the Spring Festival every year, and it is named the Spring Festival Gala. The show lasts for half an hour. The Spring Festival Gala always has many different and interesting shows; for example, it usually starts with a large musical performance. Then, it will have some short sketches and magic performances. People are usually attracted by these short sketches and magic performances, and they usually laugh and feel surprised when they watch them. After the most interesting part finishes, the Spring Festival Gala ends in a classic farewell song.

Third, there are some unique traditional customs of the Spring Festival. First, people will go to their friends' and neighbors' houses to pay a New Year visit. Paying New Year visits has a long history in China, and it is an important activity during the Spring Festival. People usually go to their friends' and neighbors' houses with some gifts, and they will never go to another's house empty-handed because that is disrespectful. Another traditional custom is very popular with children because children can get lucky money from adults. The lucky money has a good meaning, people think it can bring health and safety to children, so they offer a blessing to the children through the lucky money. The other traditional custom is putting up New Year scrolls. New Year scrolls are an indispensable thing for the Spring Festival, and every family will stick them on the door. People will write some good words before they put them up, and those words are the wishes of the people.

In conclusion, the preparations, celebrations, and traditional customs make the Spring Festival unique. I like this festival very much, and I think almost all Chinese people like it, too. If you have time, I recommend you experience the Spring Festival. It will be an interesting and unforgettable experience.



### Spring Festival Couplet

The Spring Festival couplet is one of the unique items in my culture. During the Spring Festival, every family will stick the Spring Festival couplet on the door, and they will keep it sticking on the door for the whole year until the next Spring Festival. The Spring Festival couplet is the most important sign for the Spring Festival. When people stick it on the door, it means the Spring Festival and new year is coming. From the picture, you can see the Spring Festival couplet is made up of three pieces of paper. Two of them are long, and the other one is short. People usually use the red paper to make the Spring Festival couplets because the red color represents good luck, so when they have a pleasant occasion, like a wedding, people will decorate items with red. Then, people usually write some Chinese verses with gold or black color on the red paper. Those verses contain the expectations of people, so people stick the Spring Festival couplet on the door hoping it will bring luck and happiness in their house.



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# ADJOUME DAGALOU

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My name is **Adjoume Dagalou**. I'm from Togo, Africa. I have been in the USA since 2014. I live in Moline with my husband and my two sons. My parents and siblings live in Togo. I work as a CNA in a nursing home, and my dream is to be a nurse in the next five years. I like cooking and spending time with my family. I cook almost every day for my family. Learning English is interesting. It prepares me for my academic classes. I like all my English teachers; they are wonderful.

## Tingban-pab, the Harvest Festival

It is good to be thankful for everything we have. Many cultures like to thank God for their gathered crops every year. In Togo, there are more than ten harvest festivals each year. One of these festivals is Tingban-pab. Tingban-pab is celebrated every year in a different town of the Savanes region; it gathers all natives of the region, and the folkloric dances of the region are performed during the festival.

First of all, Tingban-pab is celebrated every year in a different town of the Savanes region. Tingban-pab is the traditional harvest festival of the Moba culture in the Savanes region. It is celebrated after a great harvest on the second Saturday in December of each year. It is an occasion of giving thanks to God for a good harvest. This festival rotates amongst the main towns of the region. It is organized following a specific order, which goes Dapaong, the official town of the region, Tandjoare, Kpendjal and Cinkasse. For example, Tingban-pab was celebrated in Dapaong in December 2016. In December 2017, it was celebrated in Tandjoare, and then it will follow the same order for all four cities of the region.

Secondly, Tingban-pab gathers all natives of the Savanes region at the same place for the festival. Even though it is not celebrated in the same place each year, all natives move to the place designated for the festival when the date comes. For instance if the festival will take place in Dapaong, people from Tandjoare, Kpendjal, and Cinkasse will go to Dapaong for this special day. Natives who live outside the region also come back home if they have the possibility to attend the festival. This even applies to natives who are now officials in the government. For example, Mrs. Kolani, a Togolese government official, lives in Lome, the capital of Togo, but she goes back to Dapaong for the Tingban-pab festival each year.

Finally, different folkloric dances of the Savanes region are performed during the Tingban-pab festival. The festival is accompanied by traditional dances which are the cultural wealth of the four communities of Savanes. Therefore, Talkoutik, the most popular folkloric dance of the region is performed first; then comes Bontana of Korbongou, and finally the warrior's dance of Worgou. These dances, so rich in sound with different equipment, such as drums, cymbals, and flutes, delight the public. The Talkoutik dance is performed by members of the Tandjoare community, who are dressed in garments made with cowries that boost the sound of the music. The Bontana dance is performed by the Kpendjal's community, also dressed in their special garments, and the final dance called "Warrior's Dance" is performed by elderly people in large traditional dresses with war equipment on their back representing the people who fought in different wars.

In conclusion, Tingban-pab is a wonderful harvest festival in Dapaong that is celebrated each year in the Savanes region following an order of rotation. All natives of the region meet in one place for the festival, and the marvelous folkloric dances of the region are performed to make the festival come alive. This is an amazing festival that attracts many tourists each year to the region.



This poem has been told since the childhood of my parents until now, and every child in my culture has said it. It is dedicated to our mothers for their courage and hard work. This poem was written by Camara Laye. In this poem, the word 'mother' means "all mothers" and the word 'son' means "all children, girl or boy".

O ma mere, femme noire, femme Africaine,  
o toi ma mere, je pense a toi.

O Daman, o ma mere, toi qui me portas sur dos,  
toi qui m'allaitas, toi qui gouvernas mes premiers  
pas,  
toi qui la premiere m'ouvris les yeux aux  
prodiges de la terre,  
je pense a toi.

Femme des champs, femme des rivières, femme  
du grand fleuve,  
o toi ma mere, je pense a toi.

O toi Daman, o ma mere, toi qui essuyas mes  
larmes,  
toi qui rejouissais mon coeur, toi qui patiemment  
supportais mes caprices,  
comme j'aimerais encore etre pres de toi, etre  
enfant pres de toi!  
Femme simple, femme de la resignation, o toi  
ma mere je pense a toi.

O Daman, Daman de la grande famille des  
forgerons,  
ma pensee toujours se tourne vers toi, la tienne a  
chaque pas m'accompagne.  
O Daman, ma mere, comme j'aimerais encore  
etre dans ta chaleur,  
etre enfant pres de toi.

Femme noire, femme Africaine, o toi ma mere,  
merci;  
merci pour tout ce que tu fis pour moi, ton fils si  
loin, si pres de toi!

To my mother, black woman, African woman,  
o mother, I think of you.

O Daman, o mother, who carried me on your  
back,  
who nursed me, who governed my first steps,  
who opened my eyes to the beauties of the  
world,  
I think of you.

Woman of the fields, woman of the rivers,  
woman of the great river,  
o mother, I think of you.

O Daman, o mother, who wiped my tears,  
who cheered up my heart, who patiently dealt  
with my caprices,  
how I would love to still be near you.  
Simple woman, woman of resignation, o mother,  
I think of you.

O Daman, Daman of the great family of  
blacksmiths,  
my thoughts are always toward you, yours  
accompany me with every step.  
O Daman, my mother, how I would love to still  
feel your warmth,  
to be your child that is close to you.

Black woman, African woman, o mother, thank  
you;  
thank you for all that you have done for me, your  
son,  
so far away yet so close to you!





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# ANAI EKALINO

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My name is **Anai Ekalino**. I am originally from South Sudan, which is a new country that has split from the Sudan five years ago. I am the oldest of six siblings. I am 31 years of age, and I try to embrace every day. I was named Anai after my great grandmother because my father wanted to honor her for the fact she raised my father. Also, my great grandmother, Anai left a legacy in our family, and every first born child is named after her. For example, my brother and my uncle who is my father's brother are named Anai. I have lived in the United States for 14 years. It has been a great experience. I admire living here because of the opportunities available if a person is willing to work for them. I am glad to have the chance to be at Black Hawk College and focus on my future. I am going to school to major in finance and minor in accounting. I am hoping to open my own business in the future. I have worked for a bank before, and it attracted me to the field. As I mentioned earlier, I am pleased to start on a new path and hope to be a great example to my siblings.



## The Values of the Dinka

Africa is rich with so many cultures. Many cultures tend to value and attempt to preserve their culture. One of the cultures that takes their values to heart is my

culture: Dinka. The Dinka people are part of the Nilotic group in South Sudan. The word Nilotic refers to groups who are close to the Nile in Africa. Youth transition, nature, and respect represent important values in the Dinka community.

First of all, the youth transition period is very essential. At the age of 12, the teenagers are required to move out of the house. They are considered youths who must all live in one group home. The purpose of living all together is to learn about the culture. They are to live there until they are able to live on their own and get married. At times, the government recruits them to the military at the age of 18. Similar to many other cultures, my culture has symbols which represent it. During the transition time, an elder would mark the foreheads of the young people. It is three lines, which cross each other and extend from the top eyebrow to the mid forehead. In addition, a Dinka person must have four bottom teeth taken out, especially in the transition period. My father told me it was the most painful experience because there were no pain killers used. It is part of the cultural tradition and must be done in order to differ from other cultures. Although the transition period has painful times, it is considered worth it to uplift the reputation of the house and the tradition, and it shows the pride of the Dinkan culture.

Secondly, the Dinka people are very passionate about nature. The name Dinka comes from the word Deng. Deng in the Dinka language means rain, and it is also a very common name for men. One of my siblings has the name Deng.





The climate in South Sudan is mainly rainy, so the grass is always green. A lot of Dinka families own cows and farms. The community loves to fish in the Nile when there isn't heavy rain. Fishing and caring for cattle are bonding moments in free times. Kids are usually taught about farming at an early age. The terms for different cows are one of the first things they are taught. For instance, the black and white cow is one of the most expensive because it's rare, so it's called Ajoh. Besides the name Deng for men, Ajoh is a common name for women. Moreover, most Dinka names come from nature, something the community values.

Thirdly, the culture values the respect for one another at all times. When a person comes to visit a Dinka home, they are welcomed. It is important to give water first and then offer warm milk. Regardless of where a meeting occurs, we have to show respect toward each other. During meals, the eldest in the family is the first to help themselves. Children are also shown respect, by allowing them to be free and speak on concerns. Kids and adults are honored should a person accomplish great things in the community.

In conclusion, the Dinka culture is starting to become more known at this time, which makes me proud. I believe it is becoming known because of how the community is representing it. Values such as youth transition, appreciation of nature, and mutual respect are among its highlights.

### **Malokia**

One popular Sudanese dish is malokia, which is a leaf. It is one of the main dishes in our country. Everyone thinks they are special if someone makes it for them. It's a very easy task to cook it.

Ingredients: Chopped onion, Beef (cubed), Malokia.



Fry the onions first, then add the beef and molokia. Add water and let it cook for about one hour. Some people like to add tomato sauce, but it depends if a person likes it. After it's cooked, a person should stir it so it will be smooth.



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# JULY GAY

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My name is **July Gay**. I come from a Thailand refugee camp. I am 20 years old. I love to play volleyball, watch movies, and spend time with my family. This is my third year at Black Hawk College. Before I attended college, I went to Rock Island High School. I live with my parents, and I have two brothers. One is in high school, and the other one is in middle school. In my house, my mom is the only one working. My dad can't work because he has a disability. I hope to pass all my classes in college. My dream is to become a medical assistant and help others.

## My School in Thailand

When I lived in Thailand, I went to Seventh Day Adventist School (SDA). My school was a religious school, which is why my parents sent me there. I started to go to that school when I was six years old. I was there from kindergarten to third grade. After third grade, I came to the U.S. What I remember most about my school in Thailand are the school rules, classes, uniforms, and teachers.

Firstly, we had many rules in my school. Every student had to be at school before school started. If you were late, you would get in trouble or get hit by the teacher. Every morning, we had to go line up at the school playground to sing the anthem. When we sang the anthem, we couldn't move or talk. We had to stand up tall. Afterwards, we worshipped a little bit before the classes started. Each morning, one of the teachers gave a prayer. We listened to the teacher say the prayer, then we went back to our own class and started the class. In addition, before we went back home at 3:00 p.m., we had to sing the school end song; then we could go back home. At the end of the school year, foreigners who were supporting the school came to our school to give us toys and food. We were really happy because we didn't have money to buy those things. Some students from other schools were jealous of us because we got gifts, and they didn't.

Secondly, some of the classes in my school were hard, and some of them were easy. I had eight classes: Bible, Karen, English, Math, Health, Science, Burmese and Geography. School started at 9:00 a.m., and we had a break at 12:00. During the break, some of the students went back home to eat, and some of them went to buy food near the school. After the break, class started again at 1:00 and then ended at 3:00. In my school, each class had a special group to clean the school. Every week, in the morning, at 5 or 5:30 a.m. when the sun had not risen, each group had to go clean the school. In addition, we had to pass all the classes to go to the next grade. Even if you failed only one class, you couldn't go to the next grade. To pass the class, you needed to have 50% on your grade. The night before the final test, you would hear students memorize for their test and study very hard. I used to see some people who studied really hard, passed all the classes except one, and still failed. They got really sad because they had to retake the same class, and other people judged them, and they quit school.

Thirdly, we had to wear school uniforms. The color of the uniform was white and red because those were our school colors. We had to wear our school uniform for four days. On Wednesdays, we had to wear a Karen dress or Karen shirt. For the uniform, girls had to wear a white shirt and skirt, and boys had to wear a white shirt and pants. Every student had to wear a red scarf around their neck. If girls wore pants, they would get in trouble. I remember when I was in 2nd grade, I went to school wearing pants because I didn't like to wear skirts, and on that day I also couldn't find my skirt. When I got to school, after they finished the morning worship, I got hit by the principal, but it was not only me who got hit. It was also people who didn't wear their uniform or didn't follow the

rules. On weekdays, every morning, you would see students wear their uniforms to go to school, and it looked beautiful. Their uniform colors would look different because each school had a different uniform color.

In addition, teachers had a lot of power. They could hit students wherever they wanted. You had to respect them like your parents. Some of the teachers hit you worse than your parents hit you. You had to follow what they told you to do. For instance, if you failed a test or made trouble, some of the teachers gave you a whiteboard, and you had to write, “Don’t copy me because I’m a bad student.” Then you had to put it around your neck, and you had to run around the school, and every class could see you and laugh at you. Some of the teachers gave us a big paragraph, and they gave us two or three days to memorize it. After that, you had to go recite it to them, and if you couldn’t remember and got it wrong, you would get hit. Sometimes, they hit you on the leg, butt, hand, fingers, and sometimes they shot your lip with a rubber band. I didn’t usually get hit, but every time I did, I felt scared. However, some of the teachers were nice. They didn’t hit their students, and they understood their students very well.

To summarize, in my school we had too many rules, seven classes, school uniforms and different kinds of teachers. I didn’t really like to go there because none of my close friends that I played with went to that school. Hopefully, someday I can go visit my school and meet my old teachers that I haven’t seen for so long.



### **The Rabbits and the Tiger**

Once upon a time, there was a group of rabbits in the forest. A tiger saw them and planned to eat them. But the rabbits were always together, and whenever they raised their ears, it looked like sharp pieces of wood, and the tiger was afraid to eat them. But one day, the tiger came to the group of rabbits and said, “If you guys stay together all the time, it will be hard for you guys to become leaders and support each other.” And the tiger suggested the group of rabbits separate and go to different places. When the rabbits heard that, they agreed with the tiger. So the group of rabbits separated from each other, and the tiger ate all of them one by one. The moral of the story is if we stay together, our enemies will fear us. But if we separate, it is a chance for our enemies to kill us one by one because they know we are weak when not standing together as one.

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# OLGA IGLESIAS COSTAL

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My name is **Olga Iglesias Costal**. I am from Spain, even though I was born in Mexico City, Mexico, and I lived many years in Caracas, Venezuela. I also have an older brother who was born in Switzerland. As you can see, my parents love to travel around the world. I am 37 years old. I have a technical degree in tourism. I have been living in the United States for a year because my husband was transferred from John Deere Spain to the United States branch for two years. I realized that I need to make the most of my time here to improve my English. Thus, when I go back to Spain, I will have the advantage of having learned another language and I will increase my options to find a good job. I have a lot of friends that I really miss and for that reason, sometimes I feel homesick.



## What Most People Think About Spain

Have you ever been to Spain? I am from Spain, and I can tell you three facts about the Spanish culture: we always greet with two kisses, we use olive oil in all our dishes, and we are very noisy; but I should clarify some other points that foreign people think they know about Spain. Let's talk about soccer, bulls and naps.

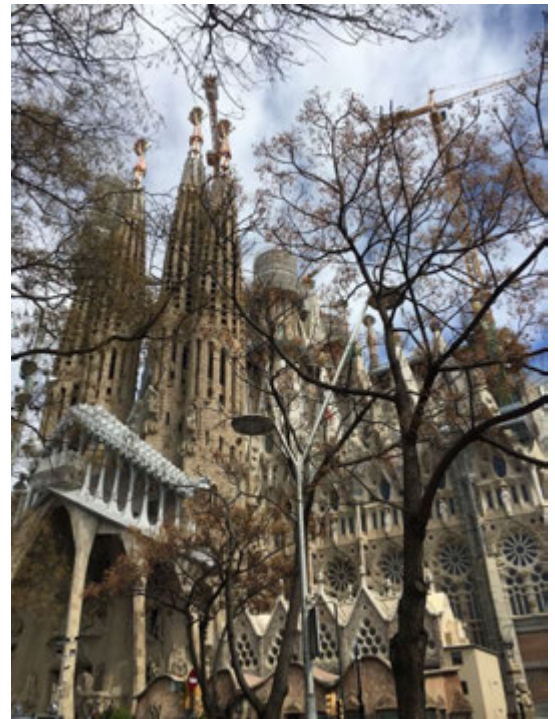
First, soccer is the main sport in Spain. Players from around the world dream of one day having the opportunity to play there, but soccer is not the only sport that the Spanish are good at. We have Rafael Nadal, who has won several tennis championships; Pau Gasol, who is a six-time NBA All-Star, four-time All-NBA selection, and has won two NBA championships; Miguel Indurain, who has won seven bicycle Grand Tours; Fernando Alonso, who is a two-time Formula One Champion; and Carlos Sainz, who has just won the 2018 Paris Dakar. As you can see, Spaniards are interested in a lot of sports besides soccer.

Secondly, in the old days bullfighting was very popular among Spanish people, but nowadays this sentiment has changed because of cruelty. In fact, most of the people who usually go to the bullfights and to the Sanfermines to run with the bulls (both famous around the world due to the novel *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway) are tourists. Most of the bullfighting arenas have been turned into shopping malls or event venues because of a lack of audience. It is a polemical topic in Spain since most Spaniards think that this kind of activity is cruel, violent, and should be totally banned by law. On the other hand, there are some Spanish people who still think that bullfighting is an art and that it is a part of the Spanish culture and Spanish history.

Finally, too many foreign people relate Spanish life with taking naps. Yes, a lot of people in Spain take naps, but this is because most of the businesses close at two in the afternoon and open again from five to nine. Therefore, they have time to go home, have lunch with their family, and take a short nap before going back to work. This is also the reason why we have late dinners and go to bed very late. Nowadays, this schedule is not very common, especially in big cities like Madrid and Barcelona, but it is still a practice in small cities and towns.

All in all, Spain is a country that welcomes millions of tourists per year, and most of them visit Spain with these stereotypes in their head. Therefore, they spend most of their time in the country visiting and doing activities related to: soccer, bulls, and thinking that all Spanish people sleep after lunch. Instead, they should use some of their vacation time to do other activities. For instance, they can go out for delicious tapas, visit wine cellars, take medieval castle tours, watch a flamenco show, visit famous museums, and so on. Spain is a great country with a lot of things to offer apart from soccer, bulls, and naps; because as the motto says, "Spain is different."





### The Spanish Omelet

I would like to talk about one of my favorite Spanish dishes because it is easy to prepare, and at the same time it is delicious. The Spanish omelet or tortilla española is a simple recipe that everyone can enjoy hot or cold, as a starter, main dish or as tapas at a picnic. It is made with eggs and potatoes. Some add onion or some more ingredients such as chorizo, tuna or vegetables. My favorite is the Spanish omelet with onion. The ingredients for this recipe are: 3 potatoes, 1 onion, salt and olive oil. The process is almost as easy as the list of ingredients; you should peel the potatoes and cut them into small slices, and do the same with the onions. In a medium bowl, mix the potatoes, onions, and add salt. Heat the olive oil in a non-stick frying pan. Then fry the potatoes and onions on low heat and cover them with a lid for five minutes to let them soften. Turn up the heat for another five minutes until the potatoes are golden brown. Meanwhile, break the eggs into a medium bowl and whisk vigorously until frothy. Add the potatoes and onions to the eggs and mix until fully integrated and continue cooking in the same non-stick frying pan for six minutes. Then you should turn over the contents, using the lid to steady the omelet, and repeat the cooking process for six more minutes. And that is all...enjoy your meal!



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# HEIDI KUO

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I am **Chian Yu Kuo**, but you can call me **Heidi**. I was born and grew up in Taiwan, a province of China, where the official language is Mandarin. Thus I am a Chinese native speaker and familiar with Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese characters. I graduated from National Taiwan Normal University. I'm a high school teacher in my country; therefore, I want to become a teacher again in the future. If you are interested in learning Chinese, I hope I can assist you to achieve your goals. I settled in the United States in 2015 with my husband because of his job. I have lived in Los Angeles and San Diego for one year. I hope I can visit the other major cities of the US during my lifetime. In the end, I appreciate that God gave me the chance to come to the US. It changed my life a lot because it broadened my horizons.

## Taiwan's Education System

The education systems in various countries may be extremely different; Taiwan's education system is no exception. Taiwan's education system is free from elementary school to high school. Taiwan's education system is famous for producing high scores, especially in mathematics. However, it has been criticized for putting too much pressure on students. The following problems exist in the education system in Taiwan. Students spend too much time studying, students have too much pressure for learning, and the system has a negative impact on students' health.

First of all, Taiwan's students spend too much time studying. The pupils of Taiwan arrive to school at 7:30 am and leave school at 4:30 pm. However, most schools have after-school tutoring, which goes from 4:30 to 6:00 pm. As a result, most students leave school around 6:00 in the evening. In addition, many students will go to cram schools directly after school; they eat meals, write assignments, and review in a cram school. The usual time to leave cram schools is 9:00 or 9:30 pm; therefore, many students arrive home around 10:00 pm or even 11:00 pm. All in all, study time in one day often goes from 7:30 am to 11:00 pm. Most students spend so much time studying because their parents work long hours and have no time to take care of and stay with their children. Therefore, parents arrange a lot of study time for their children.

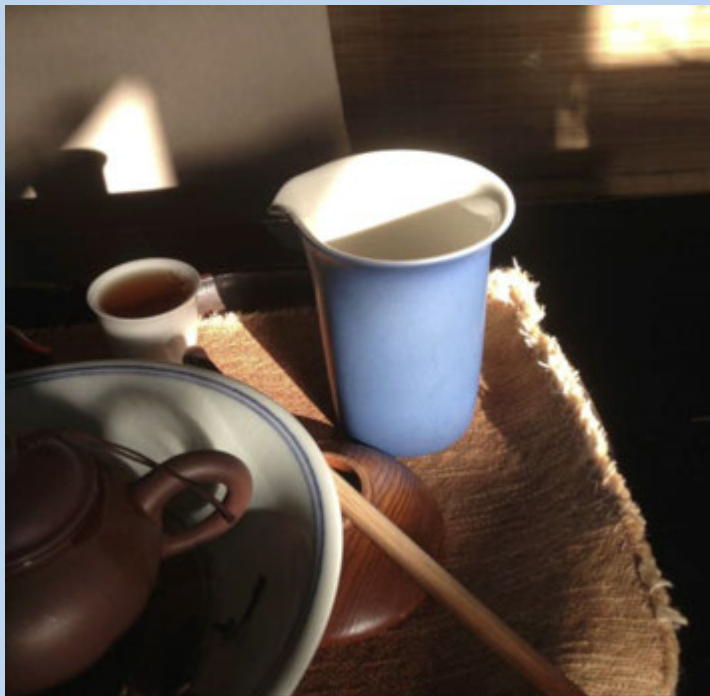
Secondly, the students have too much pressure for learning. Taiwanese parents like to compare the achievements or accomplishments of their kids with other children. I remember when I was young, every time when I finished a test, the school issued a transcript that included the grades of my classmates. That means everyone will know your scores and try to compete against one another. The worst part was the transcript had rankings. Most Taiwanese parents got furious when they received transcripts and found their children got lower scores than others. This has created a lot of pressure on students. In order to perform well, so many students use rote learning to remember information. This kind of memorization makes the students unhappy about learning and is unhealthy for their growing body. Research has shown that if kids learn things reluctantly, the information is stored in their short-term memory, and the kids will forget it as soon as the examination is over.

The third problem is that the system has a negative impact on students' health. Long study hours don't allow students to get enough sleep and exercise. Many studies have shown that insufficient sleep and a lack of exercise can affect the students' physiological growth. In addition, the pressure from parents and the society makes the students have a psychological shadow. Whether mental or physical, it will affect the health of students. The impact of this situation is that Taiwanese students are generally not tall, and most students are near-sighted.

Taiwan's education system needs to improve. Teachers need to take the lead to change their old concepts to help their students to create a perfect learning environment, which lets students learn happily and without pressure. I hope Taiwan's government can squarely face the education problem. I believe changing this will take time, and the teachers may not be willing to change and get out of their comfort zone for this challenge, but I think this is the right thing to do. I hope Taiwan's board of education can pay attention to this issue and help the students of the future.

### **Chinese Tea Ceremony**

The Chinese tea ceremony began in the Tang Dynasty; the founder is Lu Yu who wrote the first book about tea in the world. Based on ancient records, the Chinese tea ceremony is not only about drinking tea; the most important part is people can cultivate their mind through the preparation and presentation of the tea. However, the formal Chinese tea ceremony requires not only tea sets, but also that tea drinkers spend time tasting the tea. In the past, literati preferred tea over wine, and now most Chinese people drink tea very often. Some older people are accustomed to drinking tea every day. However, as times have changed, tea has become a common canned drink, different from the self-cultivation and slow tasting of the tea in the past. Although the changes in times have affected the Chinese tea ceremony, Chinese people will never forget the essence of the ceremony. Some historic restaurants still provide tea sets and places for those who want to revisit the Chinese tea ceremony.





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# Eh Kyar

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My name is **Eh Thaw Kyar**, and I'm from Thailand. I was born on the Thailand border, but I grew up in a Thai refugee camp (Mae La Camp), and I'm a Karen national. I have two sisters, and I live with my parents and one of my sisters. My older sister lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My career goal is to join the U.S Army. I have been living in the United States since 2010, and I have been studying at Black Hawk College for two years. When I graduate from Black Hawk College, I will be able to help our people in the refugee camp.

## My Family's Struggle for a Better Life

Many people in the world don't know that Karen people used to live in Burma. The reason why most Karen people live in different parts of the world is because the Karen had to face many problems in Burma, which is now known as Myanmar. People

around the world often don't know about the Karen people because the Burmese military took over the Karen motherland, called "Kaw Thoo Lei." In the Karen state, Karen people fought against the Burmese government because the government didn't want to free the Karen state and wanted to cleanse all ethnic groups, especially the Karen nationality. The Burmese soldiers killed many Karen people in Burma, and the Karen people fled to a second country (Thailand) and then to third countries (America, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Norway, England, and other countries) to live a better life. My family had a hard time because we had to move from one place to another. There are three reasons that my family left Burma and eventually Thailand: civil war, education, and a better life in a third country.

First of all, because of civil war, my parents moved to Thailand. My parents were born and grew up in Karen state, Burma (Myanmar). My parents were farmers, living in a small mountain village, raising animals and growing rice and vegetables. When my parents were young, they faced civil war because the Burmese soldiers came to their village and killed many people, raped the women, and burned down the village. Furthermore, my parents and their friends had a hard time. They didn't have homes to live in. They escaped war and lived in the forest in fear of the oppressive Burmese military. People who lived in the villages had to be careful because they didn't know when Burmese soldiers would come. However, years later, my parents and other Karen people found a better place to live. From Burma, they waded across a river to Thailand, and they made a new life in a second country, in a village on the Thai border. Later on, my sisters and I were born on the Thai border. Later, when I was four years old, my parents moved to a Thai refugee camp (Mae La Camp).

There were nice refugee camps in Thailand. The Karen people lived in the Mae





La Refugee Camp, which was the largest camp. We got federal aid from the UN (United Nations): rice, oil, yellow beans, chili, and fish paste. However, life in Mae La camp was very difficult because there were no job opportunities, and education was very expensive. My mom had to go to work in Bangkok. It took a full day on the bus to get there. We had to stay with my dad, and we didn't see my mom for six years. My mom did this, so she could afford to send us to school. In the refugee camp, many people worked on the farms and planted vegetables, but they still didn't have enough money to send their children to school. Many people decided to go to the third country to live a better life. In the refugee camp, we didn't need to have a passport to a third country. The UN interviewed us, and we didn't need to pay anything to go to the third country. My dad didn't want to move to the US because his heart was still in his home village in Karen, but all my childhood friends were going to the US, and they contacted us. Moreover, my family had been living in the refugee camp for more than 10 years, and my dad finally decided to go to the US because he thought that there would be a better education for us, we would have a better life in the future, and we would be living in a peaceful country, but the deciding factor for moving to the US was our education.

Finally, my family started to have a better life in a third country. In 2010, my family came to the United States of America. When we arrived at the airport, we didn't need to worry about anything. Before we came, people who worked with the UN gave us a paper that had English translated to Karen and pictures for us to use if we got lost in the airport and needed something. For example, when we needed some help, we showed the paper. If we got lost in an airport, we didn't need to worry. When we first arrived in the US, it was difficult for us to speak and read English. Moreover, we didn't know how to shop for food or cook American food, and we didn't like to eat American food very much. The American food tasted bad to us because it was our first time eating it. We didn't have our own food to eat and didn't have friends that spoke the same language. We didn't know how to use money and didn't know how to go buy food in the store. After we had been in the US for one week, some Karen people came to visit us, and we were happy to meet new Karen friends. We were happy talking with them, and they taught us about American culture and what we should do to adjust better. By the time we had lived in America for only one year, my family started to love living in the US because we didn't have to be afraid of any soldiers or hear the sound of guns.

In conclusion, life in Burma was dangerous, living in a refugee camp in Thailand gave us a sense of community but no future, and now life in the US gives us opportunities for education, a peaceful life, and better jobs. In Burma, my family had to face the problems of civil war, lack of education, and poor working conditions. Life was hard, moving from place to place and starting over again in a new country. Without the UN, many refugees wouldn't be able to survive or get opportunities to come to other countries to seek a better life. Now, after seven years, my family loves eating American food, and we have a better life with more education and better jobs in our third country.



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# JUDITH MARISCAL

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My name is **Judith Mariscal**, and I am from Mexico City. I am 37 years old. I studied marketing in my country. When I was 26 years old, I got married to the best man, Pedro Lua. At that time, I worked in Gillette, and he was the physical trainer for the Mexican Tennis Federation. We saved our money for five years to open our own business. On one special day, on our anniversary, we went to dinner in a wonderful restaurant, and during the dinner we talked about what kind of business we wanted. He said, "a restaurant like this," and I said, "yes." One month later we opened our restaurant called D' Lua. We worked so hard for five more years until God sent us an angel, our son Mateo. We worried about the delinquency and the terrible, dangerous situation in Mexico. We thought about another place to live safely and happily with our son. In 2016, we baptized our son. At this party, we met the owner of the Old Mexico Restaurant in Rock Island, Illinois. She was the aunt of our cousin, and she was on vacation in Mexico. We shared our situation with the cousin's aunt, and she realized that we were good people. She trusted us and sold us the restaurant in 2017. Now we are here in Rock Island. All of our family is in Mexico, but we are so happy here. The people that we have met are so friendly; it feels like our own family.



## My Dream of Being an Escaramuza

When I was a child, I loved to go to the rodeos to see the Escaramuza show, and I was the only one in my family who liked this kind of show. Then one day, after already being married, I told my husband, "I have a dream. I want to be an Escaramuza," and he answered me, "It's never too late." After a couple of months, on my birthday, my husband gave me a horse. To me, this was a huge surprise, and it was a beautiful horse. This

was the first step in realizing one of my dreams. But what does it mean to be an Escaramuza?

Escaramuza is an official Mexican sport registered in the National Charrería Commission. Escaramuza is the name of the team and also of the members of the team, the eight female rodeo riders and eight horses doing choreographed evolutions on horseback with Mexican music during the presentation. There are regulations for every routine, for dressing, and for the riders' and horses' equipment. The team has only eight minutes of a Mexican song to do the twelve continuous exercises at full gallop and with precision. The whole team has to be dressed perfectly identical with a traditional Mexican dress, Charro hat, belt, undershorts, shawl, hair bow, ornaments and boots. The equipment includes spurs, riding crop, sidesaddle, boots and rein. Every presentation and each team are scored in order to go to the National Charro Championships. The qualification to go to the national championship begins with the state championship. The team that wins in the state continues in the regional championship, where six more states compete. Finally, sixteen teams are selected to compete at the national level. I can proudly share that my team and I arrived at the National Championship.

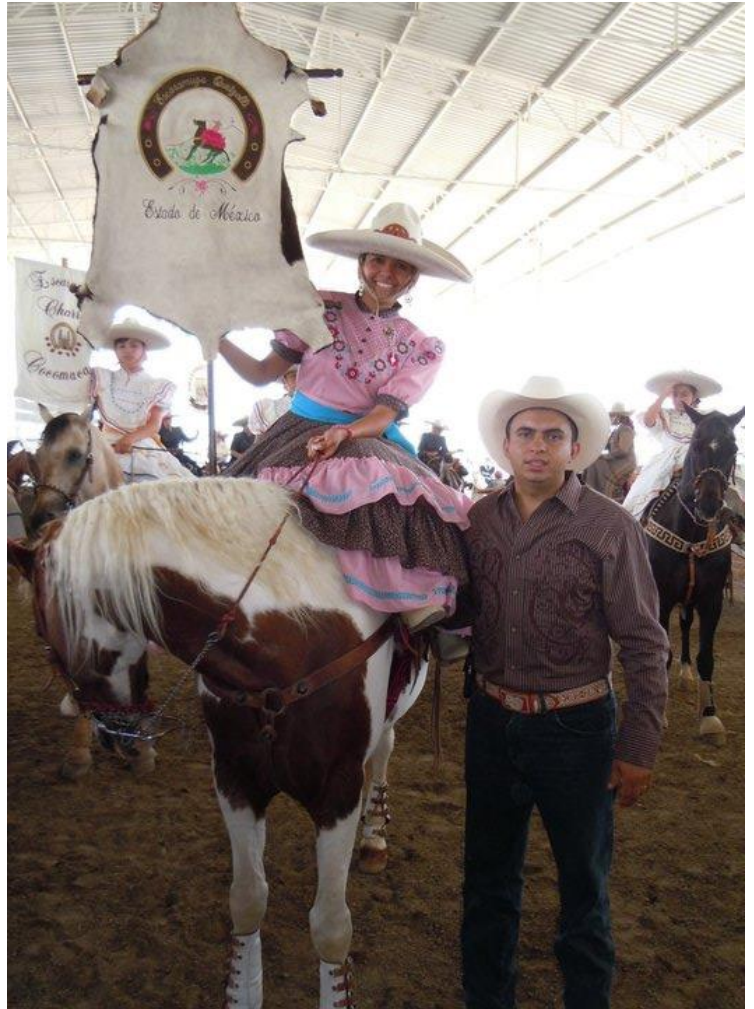
Knowing the above, you may wonder why this was one of my dreams. When you are in a rodeo watching this kind of sport, you can feel the velocity with the dust that the horses raise in the first entrance to the rodeo. In the rodeo, you can see all the colors and shapes in the embroidered colors in each dress, but when the music starts, you can feel goosebumps because this is the moment when the presentation begins. It is like ballet because the horses move in cadence with each other, and they look like they are dancing. Although it all looks very nice, the performance is very dangerous. In each exercise, the precision of the movements is really important because there are turns and crossings that put the rider's life at risk. Teamwork starts with the rider and the horse. My horse's name was Cherokee, and every time I called his name, he knew we would start the routine, and he felt the adrenaline in my body along

with his. From the minute that the jury allowed us to warm up before the presentation, I felt hot flashes, and my heart seemed to be beating a thousand times a minute, but when leaving at full gallop, it was as if the air would focus my attention on every detail that the judges would look for.

To me, every eight minutes was filled with power, joy, enthusiasm, adrenaline and passion for riding. Today, I thank God for being born in Mexico, because this is the country that first showed me my dream; and the only place to practice this sport. If you love horses and teamwork, are disciplined, and like the risk, go to Mexico where you can be an Escaramuza.

### **Our Mole Sauce**

There is a special sauce in Mexico called mole. Mole comes from a Nahuatl word “molli”, which means sauce. There are a lot of varieties of mole. It can be black, sweet, green, nutty, red, brown or bitter, but my favorite is the black mole. I will explain how to cook this kind of mole. There are three basic steps to cooking mole. First, you have to roast almost 20 ingredients: dried fruit, chili pepper, nuts, spices, day-old bread, almonds, peanuts, onions, cinnamon, tomatoes, cumin, cloves, anis and tomatoes. Second, blend all roasted ingredients with chocolate, onion, garlic and cilantro. Finally, in a large pot, fry the whole mixture with oil and add chicken soup until you have the desired liquid consistency. The mole is served with cooked chicken and red rice. Because the process of cooking mole is so hard, it is customary to cook it only for important parties. When it comes to eating the best mole, I recommend traveling to Puebla because is the best place in Mexico to eat mole. Puebla was the first place where mole was cooked.





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# TITI MUSHIMATA

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Hey, everyone. My name is **Titi Mushimata**. I come from Congo D. R. C. My city is Lubumbashi. I am the seventh one in my family. I have six brothers and three sisters. I lost my one sister, the one who came after me, in 2016, and I lost my parents when I was six years old. My life wasn't easy, and I needed to get someone to support me for my college education. My brother, the first one in our family, was working. He was taking good care of us, paying for our education and everything we needed. I did not finish my education, but got married, and my life started to change for the better. In conclusion, do not give up in life, because you don't know what tomorrow is going to be.

## My Journey in South Africa

I was born in Congo D.R.C., and I got married in my native country. Around that time, there were a lot of problems beginning to surface in Congo. People were getting killed, so my husband and two kids at the time decided to ask for refuge in South Africa because we felt that it would be safer. My journey in South Africa consisted of the adjustment to the different country, having to deal with pregnancy, and my file to the United Nations being opened.

First of all, when I arrived in South Africa, many things were different, and I was forced to adjust. The life in South Africa felt safer than in Congo, but it was still really difficult. I had to work a lot for us to survive. My husband didn't have a job at the time, either. Along with that, there wasn't any initial help by the government. As soon as we arrived, we had to fend for ourselves. We had to work in order to not live in poverty, and the work was brutal and difficult. It was also a challenge learning the language. Congo is mostly French speaking, so we had to learn English, which was spoken abundantly in South Africa. It was hard for my entire family, but we survived it.

Secondly, I got pregnant in South Africa. I had a third child in South Africa, and this was by far the most difficult time in South Africa. Prior to this child, going to the hospital was free. I never had any issues with the hospital until my third pregnancy. When I started to have contractions, and I reached the hospital, they refused to help me because I had to pay in advance, and we didn't have the money to pay for the delivery of the baby. The hospital workers were ruthless, and they didn't care about my situation. They ended up chasing me out of the hospital, completely ignorant to my current state. The baby was literally about to come out, and I had to push the baby out in the street. I had no other choice. Fortunately, some paramedics showed up, and they asked me why I wasn't in the hospital, and I told them that I didn't have enough money to pay for the delivery. So they helped me get the baby out, and after that, the hospital finally took me in. After helping me, they told me that I wouldn't be able to leave until I paid. It was cruel and just really wrong. This made it incredibly hard for me and my family.

Finally, I had a file opened with the United Nations. Journalists arrived at my house to document everything that had happened. My story was put in the newspaper. The UN heard about my situation with my pregnancy, and they contacted me to talk about how to help us with our situation. They told me to come to their office to talk about everything. They wanted to send me to another country because South Africa didn't welcome us. They said they would send us to a third country, a place where we would be safe. This led to the governor of South Africa contacting me to apologize for the whole situation. All the nurses that had removed me from the hospital were eventually fired.

I don't regret any of the things that happened in my life because it led to where I am today. Everything that happened concluded with me arriving in America, where I live a happy life. I felt like I was finally at home. My initial time in America was a lot better than in South Africa. No matter how bad your situation is, you always have to have hope. Hope kept me going through my hardships and it never failed me. My journey in South Africa ended with me immigrating to the United States. God bless America. My journey in South Africa consisted of the adjustment to the different country, having to deal with a hard pregnancy, and having my file opened in the United Nations.

What a delightful atmosphere there is in my city in Congo D.R.C., in which everybody lives like one family. What a friendship we had between us as we were just little peers. There is no difference between family members, someone from the locality, or even a stranger. You are always welcome in a house that you enter. We share everything we have, with pleasure, and without regret. As peers, we eat in our friend's house as in our own. Our parents love each one of us like their own children, and if you are a stranger and see us in a house you can't know who is really from the family and who is not. At harvest time, all the farmers bring a part of their crops and share it with everyone. It is a day of fellowship on which all the people of the city gather and socialize. The day before that day, all people gather in a public place where they tell stories about the ancestors.

Life in that beautiful city is very wonderful. With its verdant landscape, delicious fruits, humid climate, and good social atmosphere, this city is very coveted for dwelling. Every single day, life is amazing. As a native of that beautiful city, I can never forget the wonderful life we had in that city. When I think back and remember that city, I feel very homesick for it.



### La Rumba

A cultural aspect of my country is the Rumba dance, also referred to as "La Rumba." Rumba was one of the most popular songs and dances in my home country. It consists of a mixture of jazz and soukoss, another type of dance in my country, which involves moving your belly around with a cloth tied to it. Every event was celebrated with the Rumba. It was really popular, and it was everywhere. You could find the song at baby showers, weddings, graduations and at various parties. It was almost shameful if you had never heard the song before at that time. It was displayed on national television. The song itself was used to express joy or celebration. The dance that is associated with the song was performed by the musicians; that's how it got really famous. The song is in Lingala, which is one of my national languages. We had popular musicians, such as Koffi Olomide, who was one of the most popular musicians. Fally Ipupa was also one of the biggest artists from my country. Many of the countries in Africa know about these two artists. They made our country proud. The Rumba dance was created by Koffi Olomide, and the dance was a big part of my country's history.



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# TETEKPOE N'KONOU

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I am **Tetekpoe N'konou**. I was born on a cool and sunny day in June 1986, in a small city near the sea. It is Lome, the capital city of a small Western French-speaking country named Togo. I have a large lovely family, which includes four brothers and three sisters. We understand one another although our mother and father passed away in our childhood. I attended primary school and high school in Togo. I started studying public law at the University of Lome in 2011. Fortunately, I won the lottery visa in 2014, and I went abroad in 2016. Actually, I live in Moline, and I earn my life by working at Tyson, and I study at Black Hawk College as a part-time student. I have friends, and we help one another in tough times. Friends, in fact, are part of my life. I dislike hatred, but I have a great respect for peace, so my ambition is to study international relations and become an effective peace maker in the world down the road.



## Hospitals in Togo

Togo, a small French country in West Africa, is bordered in the west by Ghana, in the east by Benin, in the north by Burkina Faso, and in the south by the Gulf of Guinea. The country has struggled for years and years to get rid of its political unrest without success, and more than 50% of its population lives under the poverty line. The health care system is not well organized, so a large number of people do not have access to health care. Nowadays, hospitals in Togo are still having many problems, such as a lack of medical equipment, a lack of medical staff, and the problem of having to pay in advance, or risk dying.

Togo has one of the worst health care systems in West Africa. First, there are very few hospitals across the whole country, and this problem gets worse when it comes to small villages in the country. Most remote areas, for instance, do not even have a single hospital, and when people get sick in these areas, they have to travel across a considerable distance before getting health care. Then, in addition to the lack of hospitals, the ones that exist do not have the required medical tools to treat people. Our hospitals lack many basic health care items. Most hospitals do not have X-rays or medical monitors that allow medical staff to evaluate a patient's health. Sylvanus Olympio, the biggest public hospital in Lome, the capital city of Togo, does not have a single scanner that works properly. Its emergency rooms do not have first-aid equipment, and there are not enough beds for patients. The equipment is outdated and does not work properly. For example, Bojona George, my high school classmate's father, died of an unknown disease in 2012, in Sylvanus Olympio hospital because the scanner did not work and did not detect the cause of his sickness. Knowing that the hospitals are not well equipped, rich people and members of the government go abroad for health care when they fall sick. Our late president Gnassingbe Eyadema died on his plane while he was being taken to a hospital in France.

Not only do hospitals in Togo have problems with equipment, but they also have problems with medical staff. In Togo, we have a shortage of health care staff. Togo has few doctors across the country, and this meaningless number of doctors is not well paid, so they work in various hospitals in order to increase their income. People hardly have the opportunity to see doctors for their problems. I lived in Togo for more than thirty years, but I never met with a doctor when I went to hospitals. In 2014, for example, the greatest gynecologist of Sylvanus Olympio had a heart attack, and he was taken to the hospital where he worked to be treated. Unfortunately, the only qualified doctor who could help him was far from the city, so the gynecologist passed away while the doctor was on his way to the hospital to rescue him. In February 2015, a friend of mine named Zonka died after poison exposure.



He was taken to the hospital Chu Campus, and they paid the amount required, but he was then told that they could not take care of him immediately because the attending physician on duty was in charge of 65 patients.

It is also crucial to point out the requirement in order to be treated in our hospitals. There is nothing worse than watching a human being die without helping him. In Togo's hospitals, no matter what it is, people have to pay before their consultation and treatment, but no one knows when he might get sick or if he can save the necessary amount of money to cure an unpredicted disease. The rule is "Pay or die," or "If you die, you die." In December 2017, Adjowa, a twenty-two-year-old college student from our neighborhood, died after having abdominal pain. In fact, she got to the nearest hospital when she felt the pain, and she was able to pay for her consultation fees, but she was unable to afford the medical testing, so the nurses refused to care for her under any circumstances if she did not pay the required amount. Even though the patient was moaning, they did not pay attention to her. Despite her mother's crying and begging to save her daughter, the nurses just turned their back on them. Three hours later, the young Adjowa died of a minor sickness, which could have easily been cured.

In brief, my country's hospitals have many troubles due to their lack of medical equipment and medical staff, and due to the pay or die rule. Hospitals are there to help people in need. The population is the root of every nation; therefore, there would be no nation without the population. This population is supposed to be the leaders of tomorrow, but they are dying. I think our government must show awareness of the situation by investing more and more money in the health care system in order to provide better health care to the whole nation.

### Stone Holiday

Each country in this world has traditional holidays and various ways to celebrate them. In Togo, my home country, we have a special holiday, which is celebrated each year on the third Thursday of September. The holiday is called Stone Holiday; on this day, people gather in a special place and direct themselves to a forest looking for the stone of the year. We wear strange clothes and make noise when we are looking for the stone, and we say a lot of prayers in order to get a good stone. We start looking for the stone on Thursday with traditional songs, and we often find it on Friday. When we get home with the stone that we found, we kill different kinds of animals to celebrate and thank God for our fate. The stone that we find will determine what will happen during the next year. We have four types of stones: blue, white, green and red. The blue stone symbolizes joy. If we get a blue stone, people will live joyfully during the following year. The white one means peace. If we have a white stone, we will have enough rain. If we have enough rain, it will ease the task for farmers to have productive crops and to feed the population, so there will be no hungry mouths to feed. If we get a green stone, we will get too much rain, so the farmers cannot have good crops. It will have a negative impact on the population due to high prices, inflation and hunger. The red stone symbolizes danger. If we get a red stone, we have a lot of road accidents and droughts. In September of last year, my country found a blue stone, so this year will be prosperous and joyful for the whole nation.





My name is **Ma Oo**. I will be 24 this coming July. I have one brother and a sister; I am the middle child. I'm from Mae La Camp (Beh Klow), Thailand. My career goal is nursing. I have been living in the United States for seven and a half years. I arrived in Erie, Pennsylvania on June 3, 2010. I finished high school at a charter school in 2014. After that, I moved to the Quad Cities. In 2015, I married and had a son. I still live with my parents after marriage. Because of my parents' and husband's support and courage, I was able to continue going to school. When my son was about 8 months, I started to take ESL classes at Black Hawk College. I hope I'll make my family proud one day. My dream is to become a nurse and help others.

## My Childhood

Time flies so fast, but some memories never fade away. As a child, I always had a good time with no worrying. Thinking about those fun memories from my childhood brings me happiness. There are some fun memories from my childhood that I will always keep: spending time with friends, having fun at school, and playing games.

The first memory from my childhood is spending time with my friends. I was often playing with my friends in the rain. Every time when it rained, my friends and I put plastic bags on our heads and showered in the rain. Full of giggles, we slid down the slippery hill, and we all got dirty, but it was fun. On the weekends, I used to pick vegetables in the forest with my friends. During the rainy season, we went to the forest to get bamboo shoots. With a very strong and sharp knife, I enjoyed digging up the bamboo shoots from underground. Sitting by the river and listening to the sound of the water, I washed all the bamboo shoots that I had gotten while I played with my friends. Moreover, in the summer, I went to pick "paw paw wah" (a white flower). Paw paw wah would grow only after wildfires. From the solid ground, I had to dig it out with all my strength, but I always enjoyed digging them out.

The second memory from my childhood is having fun at school. Once a year, in the early morning, we gathered together at school in order to go on a picnic trip. We had packed food and extra clothing. We walked up a mountain one by one in the dark with our noisy voices. When we arrived at the picnic place, we played games, swam, took a lot of pictures, and ate together in happiness. Another fun thing was having school Christmas. At Christmas, each class exchanged gifts. As I was little, I was always waiting for the best gift, and all I hoped was that the teacher would have to exchange with me because the teacher's gift was the best for me. When teacher called out my name to get a gift, I was nervous and happy at the same time. Additionally, having the end of school ceremony was fun. At the school ceremony, full of worry and excitement, I was looking forward to



checking for my name on the list of those who passed their final exam. I usually started looking for my name from the bottom because it made me worried and excited at the same time. At the ceremony, the people who got first, second, and third place were extremely happy. Full of loud music, there were performances, songs, and the gifts went to people who got first, second, and third place. After that, everyone was eating happily.

Lastly, there are a few games that I used to play when I was little. When I was little, I used to blow rubber bands with my friends. In order to blow the rubber, we did rock, paper, scissors, and the winner got to go first. We drew a line on the ground. We put all the rubber bands in our palms and threw them into the air and on the ground below the line and blew all the rubber bands to pass the line. If we threw above or on the line, we were out. Blowing on the rubber was enjoyable because sometimes people got dust stuck above their mouth looking like a mustache, and we would laugh at each other. We played with rubber bands in another way, too. We tied all the rubber bands together and kicked it. If anyone could untie it, they got all the rubber. Another thing that I used to play with was a clay ball, which we made ourselves. We lined up the clay balls in groups of three balls in a triangle shape, and then from afar, we threw another ball into it. For example, if it hit one in the middle, we got half of the balls, and if it hit the first row, we got all of them. Furthermore, I also played with little rubber toys. To play, we drew a line on the ground, and we had to stay back as we threw the rubber toy. It had to be between the lines or near the line. I always hoped to go first because I wanted to win. Additionally, playing jump rope games was enjoyable. The rubber rope was pulled by two people. We had to jump over the rope, which we couldn't touch, and our teeth couldn't show. If our teeth showed, we had to hold the rope in someone else's place. The levels went from the leg to the wrist. Once the rope went above the wrists, we could touch it, but our teeth still couldn't show. Therefore, people who pulled the rope often made us laughed in order for our teeth to show. Competing with friends was fun. I liked to play all these games because I was enthusiastic and nervous at the same time.

In summary, my childhood life was mostly fun because I got to spend time with friends, have fun at school, and play different games. Every time I think about those memories from my childhood, I always feel satisfied and smile. Hopefully, I can teach my son how to play those fun games one day.

### Karen Don Dance

For the traditional Karen don dance, women and men dance as a team. It takes about 25 minutes, and it is supposed to be 16 men and 16 women dancers, but they can divide in half, which includes 8 men and 8 women with extra people who will sing. They dance in beautiful costumes. The men and women wear different colors. Typically, all men wear blue, and all women wear red. It takes at least four months to practice dancing and singing 12 chores of songs before dancing during the Karen New Year event. Then, the dance instructor will choose who will dance and who will have to sing. The instruments included are Karen drum, flute, buffalo horn, etc. While they are dancing, they have to jump and shout along to the beat of drum. People usually dance and compete during Karen New Year, Karen Wrist Tying Ceremony, and Karen Revolution Day. There is a judge who will decide whose team dances the best and be in first place. The teams that get first, second, or third place get a gift.





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# BIBI I SHA

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My name is **Bibi I Sha**. I am 23 years old. I have two sisters and one brother. I am the oldest daughter in my family. I am single and live with my parents, sisters and brother. I came from a Thai refugee camp called Mae La refugee camp. My family came to the United States on March 27, 2014. We have been living in the Quad Cities for almost four years. I graduated from Rock Island High School in 2016. After I graduated, I started the ESL program at Black Hawk College. I have been studying at Black Hawk College for two years. My parents also help me to study at BHC. My career is business accounting. I want to have a good job in the future because I want to help my family.

## My Family's First Month in the U.S.

My family wasn't happy when we first came to the U.S. We wanted to reunite with our family in the U.S. We thought if we came to America, we would be able to live with our relatives, and we would be very happy. After we came to the Quad Cities, we only saw my uncle's family since my other relatives were in Fort Wayne, Indiana. When my family came to the U.S, we had many problems with communication in English, transportation and food.

First, my family had problems with the English language when we came to the Quad Cities. We needed a translator to go to hospitals because we couldn't speak English, and we didn't understand what the doctors and nurses told us. Then, I felt very confused about what they were saying. Sometimes, my aunt and cousins helped us to go to appointments. On the weekends, my uncle and aunt took my family to food stores. When we went to stores, we couldn't find the foods that we used to eat. Also, we didn't know how to ask for the price and names of items, so they took us to Asian stores, where we found them. After two weeks, my second sister and I started to study at Rock Island High School. We didn't know how to get to the classes, and we didn't understand our daily schedule. Then, some of the Karen students who had been here longer, helped us find the classes. We also had problems with our homework assignments, quizzes, and tests. So, the teachers told the same students who helped us find the classes to explain how to do the homework.

Second, my family had problems with transportation in the U.S. We didn't know how to take the bus when we first came to America. One day, my dad went to school. When he came back home, he forgot to ring the bell in the bus. When he saw the downtown parks, he remembered it was very far from our house, so he got out of the bus and walked home. It took him one hour until he was able to find the way home. Another day, my mom took my siblings to school. While she walked, she fell in the snow and hurt her legs. When she came back home, she put some medicine on her legs, and she felt very hurt and angry. I also still remember the day that I walked home in the winter. My cousin came to pick my sister and me up in the morning. We forgot to tell her that we had to stay at school after classes. So, after school, she thought we had already gone back home, so she left. When my sister and I went to the parking lot, we couldn't find her car. Then, we had to walk through the snow, and it was very cold. When we lived in our country, we didn't have this kind of weather. It took us 30 minutes to get home. When we got home, my sister was very cold, so she went to sleep on the heater. I took three or four blankets and went to sleep in my bedroom. After two weeks, my parents bought bicycles for my youngest sister and brother. When they got bicycles, they visited my uncle's family and their friends. Sometimes, my dad rode the bicycle and visited his friends' homes.

Third, my family had problems with food when we came to the U.S. We weren't used to eating fast food when we lived in our country. Then, my cousins bought pizza and hamburgers for us, but we didn't eat them because we had never seen nor eaten these foods before. When my sister and I went to school, we didn't eat the food in the cafeteria, and we brought some food from our home. When we first moved to our house, we saw food that World Relief had bought for us, but nobody ate it because we didn't like it. Also, we weren't used to having milk or coffee in the morning. We only used to drink tea when we lived in our country. When we went to my uncle's house, they always drank coffee and milk. We didn't like American snacks either. When we came here, we found very sweet and salty snacks. When we went to stores, we saw many kinds of potato chips. We thought it was the same snacks like in our country, so we bought them. After we ate them, we realized they were very different. During my family's first month in the U.S, we had many problems with the English language, transportation and food. We weren't happy when we first came to the Quad Cities. Also, it was very difficult to learn how to live this new life in this new country. Now, my family has been living in the Quad Cities for four years. So, we have more friends and are much happier than when we first came here. Finally, we don't have many problems because we can speak English. We also have our own cars, so we can go to stores and visit our friends by ourselves. Now, I like some of the American food and drinks, but I still eat mostly Asian food at home.



## Muslim Traditional Clothing in Thailand

I believe that every culture has its own traditional clothing, and our traditional clothing is a very important thing for us. The traditional clothing for Muslim people in Thailand has many different styles and is very colorful. Older women in Thailand usually wear long black dresses in very old styles, but middle-aged women like to wear new styles and very light colors. They always buy new dresses when they have a celebration and for going to mosques. We see many women wear a variety of designs and colors every single day. In my country, women's dresses are more expensive than men's clothing. In addition, many ladies compare their dresses to each other at festivals.

When I lived in Thailand, I saw some people wear traditional clothing every day, but many people didn't. Also, women wear hijab every time they go somewhere, like to someone's house or stores. Young boys don't usually wear traditional clothing or hats. They only use it for prayer and celebrations. For example, my family doesn't usually wear our traditional clothing. We only wear it when we go to visit our relatives, for celebrations and prayer time. Therefore, we still keep and buy new traditional dresses when we see new designs.

We wear everyday clothing when we go to school and stay at home, so some people in the Quad Cities think we aren't Muslim because we don't wear our traditional clothing. However, I wore my traditional clothing when I went to a mosque opening celebration in Fort Wayne, Indiana. On that day, I saw a lot of women, men, and children in traditional clothing. I took pictures with my relatives, and I had a lot of fun there. I think culture is a really important part of people's lives.



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# MEHEIANA YODO

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I am **Meheiana Yodo**, and I come from Togo, a small country located in West Africa. I was born on May 12, 1979 in Sokode, Togo, to a poor family. I went to elementary, middle and high school in a Muslim city. My father was a cook and polygamous, and he moved very often, so I could see him only one time a year. My mother was a local beverage saleswoman, and she was everything for me, my two sisters and my little brother. After her death, I started to take care of myself, my two sisters and my little brother. In high school, I stopped studying because no one was able to support us. Then I decided to go to Lome, the capital of Togo, to work to survive and help my sisters and brother. I combined the job and my studies until I got my bachelors in Logistics and two years of training in law at the University of Lome. After that, I got married and I had my first daughter on April 8, 2011. In 2014, I won the lottery visa for the USA and on February 6, 2015, I moved to the United States with my family. I started ESL at Black Hawk College in 2016, and now I am taking the Advanced Writing class. Also, I work at Tyson, and I now have three children, two pretty girls and one nice boy. My dream is to finish my studies in Logistics, have a good job, take care of my family and help my sisters, brother and everybody else that needs help.



## The People of the Kabye Tribe

Between the 16th and 17th century, the African continent experienced tribal wars. Fleeing this, a group of people left from Central Africa to West Africa. Going through the current Sudan, Chad, Nigeria, and Benin, they found refuge in northern Togo. That group of people is the Kabye tribe, or, “People of Kozah”, the mountainous warrior farmers of Togo with a diversity of ceremonies and dances. The aspects that make this tribe beautiful is their area, their cultural and ancestral values, and their religious beliefs.

First, the wonderful area of the Kozah, or Kabye, tribe is distinguished by physical elements, such as the landforms, vegetation and houses. These elements describe the specificity of the warrior farmers who live there. The home of the Kabye tribe is a mountainous region, so the land is constituted of several massive mountains, plains, hills, and uplands. This kind of landform makes agriculture difficult, but the people of Kozah have easily overcome these obstacles because they live only off agriculture and livestock. Next, the vegetation of that area is made up of big, wonderful trees. Among the vegetation, there are many attractions, such as wrestling arenas, dance areas, and sacred places, which all serve specific purposes. In the year, there are two seasons: six months of rain and six months of dry season. During the rainy season, we can see the beautiful mountains, plains, hills and uplands covered by the greenery of trees and some houses, but in the dry season, everything is clear, so we can see all the houses, the mountains, hills, plains and uplands because all trees have lost their leaves. Moreover, the houses



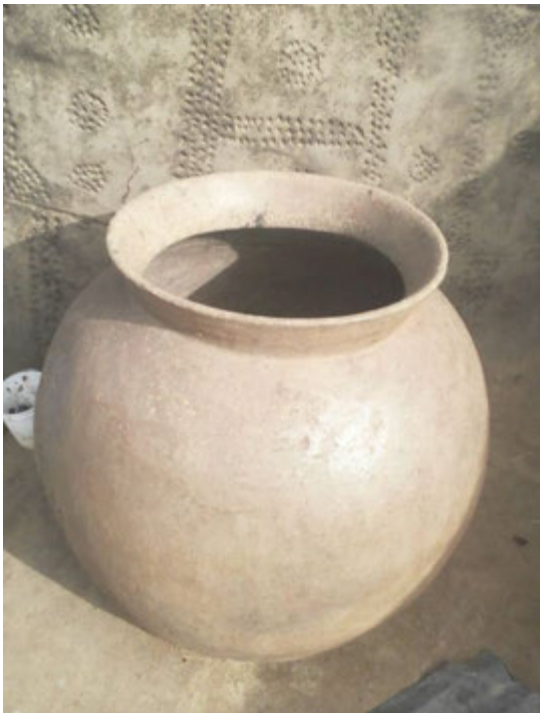


of the Kabye tribe are built with clay. The roofs are covered by straw, and the shapes are round, rectangular or square according to the preference of the person.

Second, the values of the Kabye tribe are found in their ways to practice agriculture, ceremonies, and dances. Agriculture in Kozah is practiced on stony or rocky soil, and the people use a technique called “terrace agriculture”. This technique is to grow on sloping land on a stepped surface supported by stone walls. This practice of agriculture was transmitted by their ancestors, and it has been practiced from generation to generation. Also, the ceremonies or traditional rites of the Kabye tribe, such as Evala, Akpema, and Kondona, are a passage from childhood to adult status. For example, Evala is an initiation during which a young boy is prepared to become an adult in a traditional wrestling match. Akpema is another initiation, which prepares a young girl to become an adult in a series of ceremonies. Kondona is another initiation, which prepares an adult man to become a wise man. Then, those initiations determine the social rank of men and women in the Kabye society. Next, the traditional dances are another value of the Kabye tribe. Some of their traditional dances are Kamou, Soh, Tchimou, and Habie. For example, Kamou is a dance that is done during holidays or parties. Soh is danced when an old person dies. Tchimou is danced during traditional weddings. Habie is another dance that is performed every five years by people who have magic powers. All those values give the people of the Kabye tribe the beliefs that are unique.

Finally, the beliefs of the Kabye tribe people have their foundation in the gods, and they are animist. Therefore, some mountains, uplands, forests, and rivers are considered forms taken by the divinities. For Kabye people, the dead are not dead, and they are everywhere. The ancestors or dead are the protectors for the people who are alive. Sacrifices are made to trees, mountains and rivers as divinities. Also, every house or family has its own gods or divinities, and they arrange some places where people can adore them. These sacred places are called “Egolmye”. Next, each of these divinities or gods has influence on a specific area, such as rain, harvests, wind, hunting, war, human fertility, and diseases. In addition, these divinities are considered to have the ability to be intermediaries between humans and the Almighty God called “Eso”.

In conclusion, every tribe of people has its own characteristics that make it unique in the world. The people of the Kabye tribe have their landscape, traditional and ancestral values, and their religious beliefs. These qualities have made that tribe of people an extraordinary group of people in the world because lots of tourists like to visit this tribe. In fact, every tribe or society has to take care of its cultural and ancestral heritage to preserve it for their future generations.



*This piece is used by the Kabye tribe to store the local drink, called 'Tchoukoutou'.*



*This piece is used by the Kabye tribe for water and the local drink, 'Tchoukoutou'. They use it especially to welcome guests.*







# OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



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