



INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

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OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



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**These essays and cultural pieces were written by the students in the ESL
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designing the cover.**

Nina De Bisschop

Associate Professor, ESL

Oladele Akignele



My name is Oladele Vincent Akignele. I like being called Ola, which means wealth. I was born and raised in Benin, a West African country bordered by Nigeria in the east and Togo in the west. I went to Pobe High School, where I got my high school diploma in 2012. I attended Abomey-Calavi University, the biggest university in Benin, where I studied English and got my B.A. in Applied English Linguistics. Two years later, I started teaching English as a Second Language at Ikpilte High School. I taught there for 1 year and 5 months before traveling to the United States in May 2019. Four months after I got to the USA, I started ESL classes to improve my English before starting academic classes. My plan is to study business because I would like to become a famous international businessman. It was the reason why I chose to learn English because, for me, an international businessman has to speak at least two international languages to be able to discuss with his international partners and customers. I am working hard day and night to reach my goals and realize my dreams because only hard work makes people famous.

Ethnic Groups in Benin

Benin is one of the former French colonies. It is a West African country located on the Gulf of Guinea between Nigeria and Togo. Independent since 1960, its population is composed of a mosaic of peoples. This population is made up of different ethnic groups with varied cultures. The most powerful ethnic groups are the Adja-fon, the Yoruba-Nagot, the Bariba and the Fulani. They came from different backgrounds for different reasons to settle down and form the country. Their different origins explain a set of cultural norms and customs whose rich diversity deserves to be presented. The purpose of this work is to discover the different ethnic groups of the populations of Benin.

The current republic of Benin has a rich and varied cultural history, which draws its liveliness from the plurality of peoples that make up the country. Indeed, the Adja-Fon are the first ethnic group of Benin. Spread out over the whole territory, especially in the South and West, the Adja-Fons are the largest ethnic group. They were the first to settle down in the country and establish the Kingdom of Dahomey. Even the former name of the country was “Dahomey Republic.” Adja-Fon people are known all over the world for their Voodoo. A national day has been decreed for the celebration of Voodoo in Benin. It is celebrated every January 10. Many languages are spoken by this ethnic group such as Fon, which is the first local language of the country after French, the official language, Adja, Mina and other dialects of Fon, like Goun and Torri. Their main activities are trade and fishing because they are close to the Atlantic Ocean and other lagoons.

The Yoruba-Nagot are the second largest ethnic group in Benin. They can be found in the south-east and the center of the country close to Nigeria. They share the same culture as the Yoruba of Nigeria. According to the history, they came from Nigeria and established the Kingdom of Ketou in Plateau State before spreading to other states like Oueme and Collines. They are known for their festivals, especially

“The New Yam Festival” in Savalou, “Ologuodogbo” in Ketou and “Egoungoun” in Sakete, Pobe and Porto-Novo. Yoruba-Nagot people speak many languages: Nagot and Holli in Plateau State, Yoruba and Goun in Oueme State, and Dasha, Chabe and Nagot in Colline State. Their main activities are agriculture and trade.

In Benin, the Bariba are the third largest ethnic group. They came from Nigeria and settled down in the north of the country. They are people of the Kingdom of Nikki, which was founded by Wassangari people. They are well-known in the country for their culture, especially “The Gaani Festival,” which is the festival of victory and joy. It is a traditional festival during which Bariba people demonstrate their culture, especially horseback riding and dancing. People come from different parts of the world to attend the festival. They speak many languages such as Bariba and Ditamari or Somba. Their main activities are agriculture, trade, and breeding.

The fourth largest ethnic group in Benin are the Fulani. They are located in the northern part of the country, especially in the states of Borgou and Alibori. They are well-known for their activity, which is breeding. It is their main activity. Some also do farming. They are nomadic people and cattle breeders. For Fulani people, cattle are important and should be considered as part of the family. During the dry season, they bring their cows to pastures and trade milk for food or manufactured products. They speak Fulfulde.

To sum up, the Beninese population is made up of many ethnic groups that came from different backgrounds either to flee from wars or for economic reasons and formed the country. This varied range of ethnic groups is the basis of different cultures and customs presented in the country. However, despite the different backgrounds of the Beninese, they live in perfect harmony and work together for the development of the country.

Positioning of the Gobi Hat in the Yoruba Community

Wearing a hat called Gobi with a specific outfit, especially Agbada, is common in the Yoruba community. The way people adjust this hat depends on their status, and this positioning has different meanings. When the gobi is on the right side, it means that you are a married man who still has space at home to welcome new women. When your gobi is leaning to the left side, it means that you are a married man who has no room at home to welcome new women. When your gobi is oriented forward, it means that you are a man who likes to have fun, but all women who approach you should expect nothing. However, there are other meanings that people tend to give to the positioning of this hat, but these are the most common ones.



Sushila Bhattarai



My name is Sushila Bhattarai. I am 25 years old, and I am married. I am from Nepal, which is a very small country where there is a lack of opportunities. I was born as the middle child in my family. There are six members in my family: my dad, mom, two sisters, and one brother. I finished high school in Nepal. After graduating from high school, I went to college for two years for an associate degree. After that, I enrolled in a 4-year bachelor's degree program in accounting; I only finished two years because I got married. In Nepal, I was a teacher, but my dream is to become a nurse or a CEO. On April 26, 2017, I came to the United States with my husband. I started studying English at Black Hawk College. Studying and working together is hard for me because I work at Walmart as a cashier. Then I have lots of homework to do. Sometimes, I couldn't finish my homework because I am also a housewife. I have faced a lot of ups and downs in life, but I haven't given up. I am still learning English, and this is my last semester for ESL. I hope I will pass these classes with good grades and successfully reach my goal in the future.

Struggle to Manage My Time

After I married an American citizen, I left Nepal to join him in the U.S. in 2017. Living with a new family was not easy, especially since I was newly married. At first, we lived with my mother-in-law in Silvis. In addition to my mother-in-law, my husband's brother and his wife also lived there. That meant I had to adjust to living in a new country as well as living with three new family members. Coming to a new country and taking three college classes in one semester was very hard. Also, working and having a busy life made managing my time to study impossible. I learned from my experience because I had to suffer the first time when I took three classes without any idea about college classes in America. There are three things that really made me struggle when I tried taking those three classes: the new language, a new job, and a new marriage.

First, language is a big problem for me because I learned only a little bit of English in my country. On April 26, 2017, I came to America. Three months after I arrived here. I decided to take some classes, so I went to Black Hawk College with my husband to join classes. I had a conversation with the ESL Coordinator Janet Francisco, and Janet and my husband said three classes would be very hard for me. Also, my husband told me that English is hard because it is our second language, but I did not listen to them, and I enrolled in three classes. I thought it would be easy for me, and I would finish very soon. However, when class started, I had to go to school four days a week. I could not understand my assignments, I did not understand what the teachers were saying, and I did not know how to do anything on the computer. It did not work out for me, and I had to drop those classes.

Second, when I first came to the United States, I did not have a job. I stayed home for three months without a job. I applied for a job at Walmart, and after a few weeks, they called me. This was at the same time, I signed up for three classes, too. I got the job at Walmart, and I started working second shift. It was very difficult to manage my time for studying. Working all day and dealing with customers made me tired when I got home, so I did not focus on my studies. That is why I could not finish my

homework, did not study, and failed my tests. When I did not do my homework on time and I received zeros, I cried all night. Sometimes my husband helped me, but he was also working, so he felt tired too. I prayed to god to please help me.

Third, my new married life also affected my studying. Being a typical Asian housewife was very tough because we have to clean, cook, wash dishes and do the laundry by ourselves. I lived with a joined family for the first time when I joined my husband in America, but nobody helped me. According to Asian rules, we have to take care of our in-laws, so I had to take care of my mother-in-law and other family members. I was so busy all day that I did not have time study. When I had time, I was so tired that I could not concentrate on studying. Now, I am taking two classes, and I understand my assignments because I have already taken some classes. I work 40 hours a week, but I have two days off each week. I work from 5 a.m. to 2 p.m. After two o'clock, I am free, and I can do my homework when I get home. If I am confused about something, I have time to come to BHC and see the tutors and ask them for help. Now, my husband and I live in an apartment. With just two people, there is less housework, and my husband has started helping with cleaning and cooking.

In conclusion, making the wrong decision made my life very difficult. A new language, a new job, and being newly married were the main factors that made me struggle for a whole semester. The result of my struggle was dropping classes and not finishing as early as planned. Now, I learned when I am starting to do something, I will think very carefully, search about what I am doing and listen to the advisor. Then, I will make the right decision for me.

Tihar

Nepal has various cultures, religions, and festivals. The Hindu religion is the most highly respected religion in Nepal. They celebrate many festivals, but the most important are Teej, Dashain, and Tihar. Tihar, which is my favorite, is the second biggest festival in Nepal. Tihar is also known as Deepawali or lighting festival. Nepalese celebrate five days of this festival. Tihar starts with kaag (crow) puja, kurkur (dog) puja, cow puja, Goddess Laxmi puja and ends with bhai (brothers) tika. When Tihar starts, people clean their house and decorate with Rangoli, Diyas and lighting. The first day, people celebrate Crow Tihar because they believe the crow is the symbol of Yamraja, who is the god of death. That day, they worship the crow and pray that crows will come to their house bring good luck. On the second day, they celebrate Dog Tihar because dogs protect us. Nepalese put out food for them. Cows are the symbol of the goddess Laxmi, so on the third day people worship cows. Also, they believe if they feed cows properly, the Goddess Laxmi is happy, and she gives us blessings and wealth. The fourth day is a Laxmi puja. On this day, people make Rangoli to welcome the Goddess Laxmi. Laxmi is also known to give money or possessions. At night, people worship her with flowers, sindoor (a red powder or vermilion) and sweets. People light Diyas (lamps or small bowls made of mud) and hang electrical lights inside and outside of their houses all night. They make different kinds of food. The last day is Bhai tika. Bhai tika is known as Brother's Day. On this day, sisters wake up early and wear nice dresses. Also, brothers wear nice suits and sit on mattresses on the floor. In addition, the sister puts seven different colors on the brother's forehead and puts phoolmala (garlands) around his neck. She feeds him his favorite food, and she gives him blessings and gifts. Afterwards, the brother does the same things for his sister. On this day, the sister prays to Yamraja and asks him to give a long life to her brother.



Delia Castellanos



My name is Delia Castellanos. I am 39 years old. I am married, and I have three kids. I am from San Jose de Gracia Jalisco, Mexico. I am the seventh child of a family of ten children. My hometown is a small town. It is very peaceful and picturesque, but there is no opportunity for higher education, so any dream to be a teacher disappeared. When I arrived in the United States in 2004, I started studying English, but I had to stop because I started raising a family. Two years ago, when my kids were old enough, I came back to school to finish what I had begun. Sometimes I think that I am too old to continuing studying, but I think it is never too late to reach a goal. It is more difficult now because I have my family, work and study at the same time, but my decision makes me keep going to reach my goal.

Life with Two Nationalities

It is a difficult decision when people migrate to another country, and they decide to grow their family in a different country that is not their native country. My life is one example. I met my husband in 2003. After we got married in 2004, we decided to migrate to the USA to have a better life. In 2007, my first son was born in Bettendorf, Iowa. Afterwards, my other two children were born in Bettendorf, Iowa as well. It was at that time that I understood how important it is that our children learn about their roots. The most important thing that parents are in charge of is their kids, so parents need to teach their children about their roots. That decision can be very hard because society and schools play an important role in our kids' lives. Children are learning about language, culture and a lifestyle that is different from ours. That is why we as parents need to teach them their own culture.

One of the most important decisions that parents need to make is about language. What language are they going to teach them? Are they going to teach them their native language or the language of the new country? In my own opinion and experience, parents should teach their children their native language first before they learn the second language. My experience is with my three kids. When my first child was born, at home we only spoke Spanish. That also happened with my second child. When they started school at the age of three years, they were already fluent in Spanish, and they started speaking English at home. My two boys are fluent in both languages, Spanish and English, but my youngest kid, who is a girl, has difficulties with my native language. She only wants to speak English because when she was a baby at home she listened to a lot of English. Then she entered school at the age of three, and she learned the English language. My husband does not speak English well, so sometimes he has difficulties understanding her, so my daughter gets upset for that reason. The other difficulty is that she does not speak Spanish, so it is hard for her to try to communicate with my family in Mexico.

Second, the decision about culture is one of the hard decisions that parents have to make. Which culture should we teach? For example, in my own experience, it was difficult to decide how to introduce some celebrations that do not exist in our own country, such as Halloween, St. Patrick's Day, etc. Then we also had to decide how to teach our kids our own holidays? With my kids, I needed to explain to them about the difference between Halloween and the Day of the Dead. On the Day of the Dead, we celebrate our family members who have died. It is more of a remembrance than a celebration. It is hard for us as parents to decide how and when to do it. We decided to celebrate both holidays. For example, Christmas is similar here and in my country in many ways, so we celebrate like Americans do, but we include our tradition through things like posadas, piñatas, etc. On the other hand, we decided to introduce the Fourth of July to our children, but we do not celebrate the Independence of Mexico in the same way.

Finally, there is the lifestyle. For example, in Mexico kids are more free to walk on the streets alone at a young age. Kids are walking to school, stores or pharmacies. In this country, things are different. In the USA, adults are more protective of their kids. That was something that I liked. I liked it because in my country kids are more exposed to danger when they are by themselves on the streets, but I also think that it makes kids more dependent on parents. The other example is that kids are using a lot of electronics. Sometimes, the busy life in this country makes parents look for an easy way to keep their kids entertained. This is what is happening in my family: my children are more dependent on electronics, and they do not want to go play outside, or find any other ways of entertainment.

The conclusion is that parents that immigrate to a different country have to make the difficult decision which language to teach their children, how to introduce their native culture as well as the new culture, and which lifestyle they want for their children. Migrating to another country is a hard decision, but sometimes it is necessary. It makes us reflect on the difficult situation that migrants go through.

Ballet Folklórico

The Ballet Folklórico is a piece of art that is a unique item from my country. Ballet Folklórico is a group of people dancing and representing the typical music of Mexico. Every state has its own songs that identify it. The songs can talk about what makes that state special to our country. For example, the state where I was born in Mexico is Jalisco. Jalisco has many songs that represent it, but among its most famous songs are “El Son de la Negra” and “La Madrugada.” Most of the songs talk about the richness of our land, how the gentlemen try to conquer the love of a beautiful lady, and the courage of our men and women. The Ballet Folklórico makes us feel very proud of our roots. The big dresses that the beautiful ladies wear when they are dancing and the good looks of the gentlemen wearing their traditional suits give us goosebumps, and it makes us remember our tradition in any part of the world that we are. The Ballet Folklórico is a unique item of my country Mexico; it has been representing us very well around the world.



Akouyo Gbomagnui



My name is Akouyo Sela Gbomagnui, and I am from Togo. I was born on August 12, and I am a twin. I was raised in a polygamous family. I have five siblings from my mother's side including my twin sister, and five from my dad's side. All my siblings have their own families. I studied science, and I earned my bachelor's degree in my country in 2008. Later, I went to a university where I studied sociology. I moved to the U.S. in 2016, and I started ESL classes in 2018. I love gospel music. I dream to travel to big cities in this country and to Canada.

The Adjifo Ceremony for Girls in Adangbe

My country, Togo, is located in West Africa. Adangbe is a village in the Zio prefecture in southern Togo. Almost all Togolese communities have their own culture and different ceremonies. With that, all the girls from the Adangbe community go through the Adjifo ceremony before marriage. During the ceremony, certain rules must be followed by the girls, their parents and the women who will carry out the ritual for the girls.

First, the girls' parents must go to the village chief to tell him of the news that their daughters are going to go through this ceremony. Once the message has been passed on, the "Tassinon," those who lead the ceremony, consult with each other to fix the date on which these girls are to go to the convent. As these are rituals, they consult with the deities to see if they approve the date they have chosen. Several families participate, so for the proper conduct of the ceremony it is necessary that the girls' families must like each other. There should not have been any past conflict between those families. Even if some of them are in conflict, there must be a reconciliation process before they go through the ceremony together. The girls concerned are informed three days before the rituals. After that, these girls accompanied by their parents, go to the place of the ceremony and are put in the hands of the Tassinon. They live in the convent for three months. Each family must provide food for their daughters three times a day. Towards the end of those three months in the convent, these girls undergo a rite, which consists of giving them three scars on the left forearm and one on their left cheek. After these scars, the Tassinon consult the deities for the release date.

Secondly, parents, friends and close families are informed of their daughters' exit from the convent. It is total joy for the "Adjifossi," their friends and their families. At that time, each family brings out precious loincloths and precious pearls. The Tassinons dress the girls with loincloths and pearls to

cover their private parts. After making the girls beautiful, the Tassinons send a message to the parents and the public that they are going to bring the Adjifossi. The men put the girls on their shoulders before arriving in the public place where the population has gathered for dancing and singing. It is a time of rejoicing, so the families kill animals to cook and receive the guests. Everyone is joyful. After the party, the Adjifossi go from house to house, village to village and town to town to dance for two weeks for all the people who supported them during the three months spent in the convent. It is the end of the rituals, and the girls get rid of the clothes used during the ceremony and retrieve their usual clothes.

To conclude, the whole process that these girls go through makes them prepares them for entering a marriage. In the past, only girls who were a certain age to get married could participate in the ritual, but things have changed, and now even girls of five years old can do it. It is important for every family to have a virgin girl for the ritual because it is the rule of the ritual. Parents who have virgin daughters are very proud of the and say that they gave them a good education. Nowadays, there is a lot of improvement compared to ancient times, and families can even have the ceremony for their daughters without the scars on the forearm and the left cheek by paying a fee concerning the scars.

Sodabi, a Local Beverage in My Country

Sodabi is a local drink made from fermented palm wine in southern Togo. The palm wine has a white color, but after preparation, it comes out crystal clear like water from the pipe connected to the barrel; only its smell and flavor differentiates it from water. It is a drink that the ancestors used to make for their different ceremonies, but it has become an aperitif for many people.

Hamida Jali



My name is Hamida Jali. I was raised in a small town in Sudan called Kuttum. I was born on March 28. I come from a polygamous family where I have 20 siblings. I had a great father, who just passed away in January. I have been living in the USA since 2008. I got my high school diploma in Sudan, and I studied accounting at Juba University in Sudan. I am a mother of four sweet children, two girls and two boys. The girls' name are Nawfa, nine years old, and Norma, four years old. My boys' names are Ahmed, seven years old, and Taha, two years old. My career goals is to be a preschool teacher. I like to spend time with kids, listen to them, and teach them new things. My dream is to help people in Darfur in the West of Sudan. Those people have a very bad situation because of the war. Meanwhile, I also want to open my own preschool. I would like it to be very special and have several languages. All this will be after I finish my degree as a teacher. I hope my dream comes true, and I reach my goal.

How the War in Darfur Affected the Lives of People

For many years before 2003, there had been conflicts in the North African country of Sudan between the Arabs from the north and the “Africans” from the more southern parts of the country. The Arabs did not want to be associated with the people of the darker complexion and wanted to rid all of Sudan of these people. They took severe actions that led up to the war and genocide in Darfur in 2003. Like most wars, this one in Darfur brought along many troubles and had effects on the people and the country. The war in Darfur left many people without homes or land, it brought forth health issues to the people of Darfur and caused major environmental pollution and destruction to nature.

As cities and towns in Darfur became war fields and fighting piled up, a lot of destruction was caused not only to the people but also to buildings and long-loved structures. For example, homes, stores, and government buildings have been demolished. Homes got burned to the ground. People were left homeless, and many died as a result of not having a home.

The lands that farmers used to grow their crops and make a living were ruined. They had no or low sources of food. Although it seemed like people had their homes taken away from them, that was not always the case. Many people had to up and leave for the safety of themselves and their loved ones. They had to pack everything up and flee a place they had only known as home.

Unfortunately, homes and land were not the only losses caused by the war in Darfur. Many people also lost their good health. Malaria, diarrhea, and respiratory infections are just a few of the diseases and health issues that came with the war. Lack of food also caused high rates of malnutrition. All these issues caused deaths, which may have been prevented with some medical assistance. Doctors in Darfur were called to fight, and many ended up dying. Doctors and physicians from the capital of Sudan were ordered not to go and provide any type of medical aid to the people of Darfur, which also meant

they also could not provide the proper food rations to the people in need in Darfur. Other countries noticed what was happening and came to the aid of the people. International organizations came and brought along food, medical assistance, shelter, and mental stability to Darfur.

While trying to solve the health issues, the people of Sudan also had to try to solve environmental issues that came along with the war. The land of Darfur is mostly a desert with a low amount of resources such as gold, silver, and gasoline that are not always accessible, and there are low amounts of rainfall. This makes Darfur sensitive to environmental destruction. All the fighting during the war left behind gas from ammunition that polluted the air. The fire weapons and bombs caused fires and destroyed natural resources for companies that mined gold and silver and extracted gasoline. The very few fields of green in Darfur turned into more desert, and trees and plant lives were destroyed.

Today Darfur and Sudan as a whole are still suffering from the horrible damages caused by this war and genocide. There is still conflict between the Arabs and “Africans,” but many people have grown to realize that the difference is not there. This entire conflict was put into the minds of the Arabic Sudanese people from the North by the leaders of Sudan at the time, especially the president at the time, Omar Bashir. Sudan is getting better and better every day as it continues to recover from this terrible tragedy that struck them in 2003.

Asida is a really common dish in the past and modern day in Darfur, Sudan. Asida is a traditional food that is usually served for big occasions, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. Asida comes with molah and has a high nutritional value, as it is rich in vitamins, which makes it a complete meal. Asida requires a special flour to make it. The flour is added to boiling water on the stove and mixed. Molah takes a lot of time to cook, and there are many kinds of molahs with different ingredients: first molah tagalia, consists of oil, onion, dry or fresh meat, tomato sauce, dry okra, cumin, black pepper, and garlic. Second, molah rob or neaimia consists of the same ingredients as molah tagalia, but we add yogurt and peanut butter. These two kinds of molah are popular, but we have many others. People eat it with their hands, and they always sit on the floor to enjoy that delicious food, and there are special dishes to serve it. In conclusion, I really like this common dish that is served in my hometown on special plates.

Julienne Niyokwizigir



My name is Julienne Niyokwizigira. I am 19 years old. I was born and raised in Mtabila, Tanzania, until I was five. Then I moved to the United States in 2008. Before I moved to Rock Island, I was living in Boise, Idaho, where I first learned how to speak English. It was hard to learn English at first, but within a few months, I learned more. My family then chose to move to Rock Island one year later. I am the second oldest in my family. I live with both of my parents, and I have six sisters and two brothers. My goal in the future is to become an ESL teacher. It is a goal that I want to accomplish in the future once I am done with college. I would describe my personality as a funny, loving, honest and someone who loves to help those in need. I love working out a lot at home to keep my body in shape, especially when I am not doing anything on the day.

Christmas Day in Mtabila

Do you know how Africans celebrate their Christmas parties? Christmas Day was extra special to me and my family when we lived in Mtabila. I experienced how my family celebrates Christmas, and it was totally different than here in America. When I was young, I used to be so excited when it came to Christmas because there was so much food to eat and to try, and I loved it. I sometimes wish we still celebrated Christmas as we did in Africa, but now we celebrate it differently. For example, we go to church on Christmas day and listen to the word of God and sing Christmas songs. In Africa, the three most important parts of our Christmas Day were that we gathered around as a family, we ate special food, and we called our families that lived in America to send us money.

First, we gathered around as a large family. My aunts, uncles, and cousins were part of the party. When it was Christmas time in my country, everybody would be excited because it was the only day we gathered around as a big family and ate together. Each family had to bring what they had, whether it was good or bad. For example, if it was a different dish, and you did not like it, you would still have to bring it for the other families that were there to taste it. While we were eating, each person would tell a story about anything to keep us from being bored since there was not any music to listen to. Your story had to be funny; otherwise, you would be skipped, and they would come back to you later. There were stories about how the men married their wives, how they were chased by a tiger while getting apples from a tree, and how they were fighting with their neighbors. My father had the funniest story. It was about how he met mom when they were younger and how my mom was trying so hard to be with my dad after all my dad was doing for her.

Also, the only time we ate special food was on Christmas Day. For instance rice, meat, and chicken were the main food a lot of us loved, but we could not afford to eat it every day because most of

the people were poor, so it was extra special. Anybody was welcome on the special day. Whether you had food or not, you were still welcome to join us. A lot of the families were really generous to share with others that could not afford to bring food, so it was amazing to see each and every one smile for the first time.

In addition, we called our relatives who lived in America to send us money. When it came to Christmas Day, my parents would call their relatives before Christmas to send us money to be able to eat well on the day. For example, it was extremely hard to get money from our relatives who lived in America because they would give so many excuses that did not make sense to us. Since now, I live here in the U.S., it makes more sense because now I know if you want something, you have to work for it whether it is little or big. It is easier for our family now to celebrate Christmas on our own without having to beg for anybody's money. A lot of the families would cry and beg for their family to send money or otherwise they wouldn't eat on that day. That is how difficult it was back in Africa. Even though it was not Christmas yet, my parents would call them early so they could send the money faster, but it was not easy at all. Sometimes our relatives were the easiest people to go to if we needed anything, but when it came to asking for money for Christmas Day, it was the hardest thing ever.

Christmas Day was a day we were all happy to share and to communicate with each other. Not everyone in Mtabila was able to gather around as a big family because some of them did not have a family back in America to send them money to eat on the day so that they would be able to come together. I am glad to have done all that with my family in Africa. Even though it was not easy celebrating Christmas with everyone because of how poor we were; at the same time, I am grateful.

Mandazi (African Donuts)

I would like to explain how to make mandazi bread, an African bread that I make often at home. First, you gather your ingredients. You will need 4 cups of flour, 1 cup of sugar, a quarter of a cup of oil, 3 eggs, 1 cup of milk, and a packet of yeast. You combine the ingredients in a large bowl. Then you mix it all until it all comes together. Put it in the empty oven for 30 minutes. You get the dough out of the bowl and put it on the counter. Heat a cut of oil on the stove. Roll the dough on the counter until it is a long log. Take each section roll it on the counter with your hands, flatten it out, and put it in the oil. When it is brown on each side, you drain it on paper towels. Then eat them while they are warm.



Pamela Lawson Eklu Koku



My name is Pamela Lawson, and I am from Togo. I was born on July 29 in Lome. I have three siblings, and I am the only girl. I graduated from high school in 2011. A year later, I attended the University of Lome, where I earned my bachelor's degree in law. After my studies, I worked for two years in a law firm. In August 2018, I joined my husband here in the United States, and I started to attend Black Hawk College a year later. This is my third ESL class; hopefully, I will finish next semester. I love reading and listening to music; those are my favorite hobbies. My goal is to end up with my associate's degree here and to continue my studies at a four-year college where I can get my bachelor's degree. I know it is a long road, but I will not give up on it. I will do my best to fulfill my dreams.

Second Chance in America

The United States is the dream country for many immigrants because they are sure that there will be an opportunity available for them. In my own experience, when I was in my country, I had lost hope of continuing my studies, and this happened to many immigrants. The condition in which I was living was a little difficult. I was working, but my salary was not enough to take care of myself and to pay tuition and fees at the same time. However, here in America, attending school is an option for everyone; you just have to want to do it. Since I came here, my views on things have changed. I have decided to achieve a goal. Indeed, living in America has offered me the opportunity to start a new life, the opportunity to study, and the opportunity to have a good career.

First, starting a new life in America can mean to reinvent yourself and to have a family. As I said earlier, my vision has changed, for I have a new perspective and a target that I must meet. Therefore, this new perspective will give me the "New Me", which means reinventing myself and fulfilling my goals. For instance, when I was in my country, I put the dream to continue my studies out of my mind because I lacked support, and I could not handle it alone, but my arrival in this country has changed my views; the dreams that were dead in me because of the lack of money have become reality. I have now started school again, and I also have a family, who helps and pushes me to succeed. I also realize that it is important to have a family because it would be in vain to have a new life and be alone.

The second thing is the opportunity to study. We all know that in our home countries when someone has a family to feed, it is very hard for that person to think about studies. For example, if you are a girl and you get pregnant, you will be affected by what people will say about you. They will judge you as if it was a sin. However, here in the U.S., even if you are parent, you can still go to school. Whether you are old or young, the schools' doors are open to you; you just must choose a field that pleases you.

One more thing is that no one here is too old to learn new things. We are conscious that education is very expensive in the U.S., but once you are working, you can pay your tuition and fees. There is even a financial aid for those who qualify.

Thirdly, after studying, career opportunities are open to you. Each person that has a diploma will likely have a good career. On the contrary, in our hometowns, even if you got a diploma, you will still be unemployed unless you know someone who will recommend you to the director or the head of a firm. Then if you are lucky, they will accept you; otherwise, you will end up selling in the market or driving a motorcycle taxi. Meanwhile in America, if you are a graduate with a good GPA, you will probably find a good job. One other point is about the retirement; if you worked a long time in a company, they will give you a pension.

Overall, the second chance in America is not just offered to immigrants; it even applies to those Americans who have failed in their youth: they also have this opportunity to start over and then to accomplish something they always wanted.

Ablo Recipe

Ablo is one of the popular dishes cooked in Togo. It is commonly prepared during celebrations or events, such as marriages, birthdays or funerals. The ablo preparation requires several steps, which include having some ingredients; those are rice and corn flour, a little bit of sugar and salt, maizena, yeast, an aluminum or plastic mold or banana tree leaves. For the preparation, once the pot is on the stove, you add water and let it boil for a minute. After boiling, you pour the corn flour, and then you stir it until it becomes smooth. Then, you take the pot with the corn off the stove so that it can become cold. Then you add the rice flour, the yeast, the maizena, salt and sugar, and you mix them together. After the mixture becomes pasty, you put it in a hot place for one hour so that it rises. An hour later, you put the paste in a mold whether it is plastic or aluminum. Once again, you put the pot with water on the stove, but this time you also put the colander over the pot. Then you fill the colander with the molds, and the steam will cook it; some minutes later, the ablo is done. Most of the time, Ablo is accompanied with tomato sauce, pepper, and with fried fish.

Nathan Mukonkole Kadimisha



My name is Nathan Mukonkole, I was born in May of 2000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I studied at Saint Andre School and ITIL School in my home country. I got my diploma in 2018 in general electricity. I am an interpreter for the deaf in my home country, and I took some training in American Sign Language (ASL). I speak French and Swahili fluently and some English. After high school, I worked for a year in a company as a fire watcher. In my family, we are only two children, my big sister Eunice and myself. My father's name is Urbain Mukonkole, and he is an entrepreneur; my mother's name is Yvette Sango, and she is a nurse. I came to the United States at the beginning of the year with the purpose of studying, and that is what I am doing. Being in the U.S. for any purpose was one of my dreams, and now I am living that dream. I am kind of timid among a group of persons that I have never met although timidity does not characterize me. I am planning to do all of my studies here in the U.S., meaning undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate. Right now, I am doing advanced English at Black Hawk College and expect that I become used to English as an international student from a French-speaking country.

My Plans After My Studies

My name is Nathan; I am from a modest family made up of two children, my big sister Eunice, and I. I was born in Congo and grew up there. My parents have been working hard for us and made an effort to send me to the United States where I currently am for my studies. I have only one friend, Francis. I have different ambitions in my life that I want to fulfill. Here are some of my plans after my studies: make money, help my family, and create jobs in my home country because since my youth, to be useful to myself, to my family and to my country were my passions.

To begin with, everyone in the world who studies does so in order to have a better life in the future. Although we study to be cultivated, to have deep knowledge of a trade, or for so many other reasons, the final goal is to have a well-paying job. It is in this perspective that I want to start working hard right after my studies in order to have a better life, which is to say to earn money, as the bible says, "It is by the sweat of your brow that you will eat." Also, earning money will make me useful to everyone, and it will help me to survive. Thus, I can deduce that those who have the capacity to work but do not want to work neither want to eat.

Furthermore, coming to the rescue of my family is one of the most important factors to consider. All of us will eventually grow old one day, and we will no longer be able to work. My parents devoted themselves and invested in my sister and in myself to send us to good schools and universities, and as a sign of gratitude, I must in turn come to their rescue. As an illustration, one of my friends had the opportunity to be sent to study in England by his parents, and after his studies, he bought a big house for his parents and gave them a colossal amount of money. Therefore, helping the family is the responsibility of every responsible and appreciative child. Aside from helping the parents, everyone knows the family is big because there are uncles, aunts, friends, and so many other loved ones who will sometimes need help

in certain cases. Not everyone can be rich in a family, but some are there for the others. So every conscientious human being has to know that helping his family, his friends, and his acquaintances is a duty and a responsibility.

Also, the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is my home country, is one of the richest and at the same time the poorest country in the world. It is rich because it contains the rarest, most sought-after and coveted mineral resources worldwide. On the other hand, the unemployment rate is very considerable and needs to be reduced because the lack of jobs and the juvenile delinquency is very bitter. This is where my third plan comes in after my studies, which is to create jobs to lower the unemployment rate. The question is how to get there? I have how seen many native and foreign investors alike who have gone about creating jobs. For example, Tenke Fungurume Mining, TFM, which is one of the big mining companies, has been able to create job opportunities for all categories of people, which means literate people, illiterate people, the old and the young, by methods of subcontracting. It is this example that inspired me to make myself useful to my country by creating my own business related to the natural resources mentioned previously. I would like to create a company that will be exploiting those resources; that is to say to earn money for my personal needs and to decrease the unemployment rate as well.

To sum up, my plans after my studies are to work hard in order to come to the aid of my parents, my family, my friends and finally to decrease the unemployment rate in my native country. I want to do so by creating a business so that I can first be useful to myself and then to my family and my parents, and finally to my homeland.

Black Woman, African Woman
(English translation of a poem by Camara Laye)

Black woman, African woman,
To you my mother I think of you...
O Dâman, O my mother,
you who carried me on your back, you who were breastfeeding me,
You who guided my first steps,
You who first opened my eyes to the wonders of the earth,
Thinking of you...

Woman of the fields, woman of the rivers,
Woman of the great river,
To you, my mother, I think of you...
O you Dâman, O my mother,
You who wiped my tears,
You who rejoiced in my heart, you who patiently endured my whims,
As I would still like to be close to you,
Being a child near you!

Simple woman, woman of resignation,
To you my mother, I think of you...
O Dâman,
Dâman of the great blacksmith family,
my thoughts always turn to you,
With every step, they accompany me,
Dâman, my mother,
As I would still like to be in your heat,
Being a child near you...

Black woman, African woman,
To you my mother, thank you;
Thank you for everything you did for me, your son,
So far, so close to you!

Mumu Nay



My name is Mumu Nay. I was born in a Karen refugee camp, in Thailand in 1987. The camp is called Mae La Camp. I have a sister and a brother. Before I came to the United States, I lived my whole life in Mae La Camp. I went to elementary school, junior high school, and high school there. I graduated from high school in 2005. After I graduated high school, I worked for the Burmese Women Organization for two years. I got married in 2007. My husband and I applied for resettlement to the United States after we got married. In 2009, we got approved by the Department of Homeland Security. I came to the United State in September 2009. I have been living in the United States for 11 years. After I came to the United States, I had my first son in 2011. I had my second son in 2014. When I got to the United States, I worked for Xpac for a year, and I enrolled in ESL classes. I stopped a few times when I gave birth to my sons. Then I enrolled in Academic ESL at Black Hawk College in fall 2016. Hopefully, I am going to finish my academic ESL classes this year. Even after I finish the ESL classes, I will continue to study more English. My dream is to become a teacher and help others.

Karen Refugees in Thailand

There are several reasons people become refugees: due to natural disasters, wars, and religious or ethnic conflicts. Myanmar has the longest civil war in history. In Myanmar, states are divided by the different ethnicities, which is different from the United States. Each state in Myanmar has a different ethnicity. For example, Karen State has roughly 95 percent Karen people. Each state is governed by the ethnicity leader. The Burmese military government wants to control everything, so they have invaded every state. When the Burmese military government invaded Karen State, they killed Karen people, raped women and burnt their houses and their food. For example, they burnt the paddy fields and food storages. There was no safe place for Karen people to live in Myanmar, so they fled to Thailand. The Karen people have been in Thailand as refugees since 1984. The situation in all the refugee camps in Thailand is similar in terms of food, education and jobs.

First of all, food in the refugee camp is provided by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The main foods provided to the refugees are rice, salt, cooking oil, split yellow peas, and fish paste. Sometimes, they replace split yellow peas with sardines. There are no vegetables or meat provided. Refugees need to find these on their own if they want to eat vegetables and meat. The food is provided every month, and there is a limited amount for each person. It does not matter what age and size; everybody gets the same amount of food. If you are a heavy eater, the food they provide to you might not be enough, but if you have small children, you may have extra food since children consume less food than adults. Everybody gets two meals a day, breakfast and dinner. There is no lunch for refugees because there is not enough food if you eat lunch. I was so skinny when I lived in the refugee camp because I did not have enough food to eat.

Secondly, beside the food, there is a free education system for children provided by ZOA. The education goes from preschool to high school. The schools were built with wood or bamboo without floors. Tables and chairs were just put on the ground. In some of the refugee camps, the Thai authorities do not allow a high school in the camp. In 1999, the Thai authorities in Nupo Refugee Camp did not allow a high school because they did not want Karen people to get an education. The Nupo Refugee Camp is where my husband came from. After high school, there is no college or university, but there are some vocational programs, such as TPC (Teacher Preparation Course), FSP (Further Special Program) and SEP (Special English Program). Those programs are very limited. There are only forty students accepted in each program. To be able to participate, you must take an entrance exam. You must pass the entrance exam to study in the program.

Finally, if you graduate from TPC, you can be a teacher in the camp. You will receive 500 Baht per month as your salary. If you exchange 500 Baht for the US Dollars, it is equal to \$15 dollars per month. Besides being a teacher, you can be a nurse or social worker; there are no other jobs for Karen refugees in Thailand, so people in the refugee camps stay home, visit each other, and play soccer all day. There are no telephones, electricity, or internet. Life in the refugee camps is very boring. After I graduated from high school, I joined the Burmese Women's Organization to do community work. The organization focuses on promoting Burmese women's rights. Refugees are not allowed to travel outside of the camp. Thai authorities guard the camp 24 hours a day, 7 days week. If a refugee sneaks out of the camp to find work and is captured by the Thai authorities, he or she will be punished by doing community service, or he/she might be deported to Burma. My father was deported to Burma one time for looking for a job outside of the camp. Some of refugees who were captured by the Thai authorities were physically punished, for example, by being beaten with a bamboo stick.

In conclusion, food, education and jobs in the Karen refugee camps are terrible. There is no opportunity for Karen refugees to improve their life. Everybody should have the right to be educated and improve themselves even if they are refugees. In 2007, the United States, Canada, Australia, Norway and Sweden were the countries that allowed resettlement for Karen refugees to their countries. I hope this opportunity will continue for the refugees who still live in the many refugee camps around the world so that they have a chance to relocate in a third country.



Water Festival

The water festival is the celebration of New Year in Burma. It is also known as Buddhist New Year. The festival is usually celebrated the second week of April every year. Most people go back to their hometown to meet their elders. The festival is about family gathering. If a family lives far from each other, they come back to their towns and cities to meet with their family and friends. For example, a lot of young people go to the towns and cities to look for jobs and then end up working in the cities, but they will come home for the Water Festival to pay respect to their parents and grandparents. In addition, the most obvious part of celebrating the water festival is throwing water on others. On a hot day in April, it feels good to get your body wet. Also, the children use squirt guns to play with each other. Moreover, people have bowls of beige colored talcum powder and mix it with water. They apply it to their face and the bodies of random passersby as a blessing for the new year. The water is a symbol of washing away all of the bad luck, and people refer to the water as holy water, so good luck will enter in the present year.



No Niang



My name is No N Niang (Hanna), a refugee from Myanmar, and I am going on to be twenty years old. I lived in Malaysia for almost six years, and I have been in the United States for four years. I have the most wonderful and adorable two younger brothers and parents. My father went to Malaysia when I was five years old, and my mother and youngest brother went to Malaysia when I was nine. By the grace of God, we were united again when I was eleven. In the same way, we were apart again when I was thirteen years old because my parents send us to a school called Shelter Community School One in another state in Malaysia. That school is where I learned how to write and speak English. I hope someday I will visit Myanmar and Malaysia to pay my respect to my grandparents and my teachers. Now I have been staying together with my family since 2016. I always dream of making a difference for others.

My Life

My name is No N Niang, and I was born in Myanmar. I came to the United States of America as a refugee with my family about four years ago. As of now, I mainly grew up in three different countries. There is Tui Khal (Myanmar), where I was born, where we were undifferentiated, looked the same, spoke the same, dressed the same, and ate the same. There is Subang (Malaysia), where I found myself, where we were indistinguishable, looked alike, spoke differently, dressed alike and ate similarly. There is Moline (USA), where I started to notice I am different, where we are disparate, look extremely different, speak very differently, dress super differently and eat really differently. There are five of us in the family: My brothers and I love to play soccer (football), which we get from our father, and our father gets it from his father; our grandfather. I love art; I am the only one in my family who loves or likes to draw. God gave me such a great offering by giving me such delightful and enjoyable parents, and making me an older sister to my brothers. In 2005, my father went to Malaysia. I thought he would be back soon after; unfortunately, he never did return; instead of him coming back to Myanmar, we went to Malaysia. Until now, he has not gone back to Myanmar for more than thirteen years.

We went to Malaysia to wait to go to the third country. Our ancestors used to say the U.S. is where milk and honey flow. We were waiting to go to the third country so that we can have a brighter future and not an easy life but a better life. Since we were staying in another country, life was never easy. The Malaysian law does not recognize nor acknowledge us. Therefore, we were unable to study locally as we did not possess the necessary papers for it. The police in Malaysia are corrupt, so if we do not have any kind of protection, they can do whatever they want to and deport us. If they ask you for money, you have to give it to them; otherwise, they can send you to jail or deport you. No one wants to go to jail nor be deported because they have a family that needs their support. By the grace of God, my family and I got a UN card. We had UN cards, so we were protected by the United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR). Still that did not mean we were free from the police nor could we do what the citizens can. Not all refugees have a chance to go to the third country or have a UN card. Most importantly, not all refugees were under the protection of the UNHCR although they wanted to be. I lived in Malaysia for five years. We were refugees; therefore, we could not attend the public school. So, for three years my brothers and I went to a refugee school called Shelter Community School One. The teachers were so supportive and understanding. Most of all, they were not paid to teach us; they taught us with love and caring. As a result, I learned how to read and write in English from that school.

In 2016, in early February, my father received a call from the office of UNHCR that we will be going to the third country, the U.S. On that day, my brother and I went to one of our history teachers' houses to visit. When we got back home, our father told us the news. During that time, I was shocked. Above all, I was not sure if it was good news or bad news, but one thing that was for sure was that my family was delighted because that was what we had been waiting for. However, I was miserable, and I did not know how I felt. In fact, I asked myself, "Do I have to leave the people that I love behind again? I left my family once before, and here I have to do it again." I was so sad that I did not have a chance to say goodbye to most of my friends. On that day, one of my teachers, who was my favorite teacher, came to say goodbye to us before we left. I loved her so much, and I will always love her. When I was with her, I had fun and joy, like I used to with my grandfather. She replaced some of the emptiness of my heart. I am so happy that I had a chance to know her and have her in my life. She has a special place in my heart, which nobody can take away. I think what helps us "move on" is to think about what a wonderful person our loved one was, and at first, all the memories we have, even the happier ones, are going to be painful and very hard. Eventually, time goes by, and life keeps moving on, and suddenly all those memories will bring a smile to our faces one day.

When I got to the US, I struggled with many things. I tried to have fun in school, but I did not until now. I tried my best to fit in with this new culture, this new world. One of the things I struggle with until now is my name. I never had problems with my name before, but after I got to the U.S., I started having problems with my name. As soon as I tell my name, some people mock my name and react differently. After they hear my first name, there are follow up questions that come along with it, which I do not like to answer and do not like to hear. I am always delighted to tell the meaning of my name. Sometimes, they would say "No! Who gave the name no?" I try to put a smile on my face so that I can escape from it. They might think it does not matter, but it is extremely painful. Never in my life had I thought my name would affect me badly and that it would be uncanny to tell my name to others. I am very happy with my name, but there are times that I wish I could change my name.

I always wondered why my parents wanted to go to the U.S. They did not know how to speak English, we did not know how the U.S. system works, we had no idea what the U.S. was like, and we had no idea how we would live here. The answer to that is simple: They wanted us to have a better education and someday be able to help people who need it. We know life is not easy, but we have to try our best. My parents do not know how to speak English, but they know God is always by their side. They always tell us that it is not easy not knowing English, and people talk to you like a dumb person. We all know life sometimes does not go as we expect and how we want it to be. We might look different, and we might dress differently, but at the end we are all human. In life, sometimes we go up and down, left and right. Life is full of happiness and tears.

Ve Leh Pung

In my culture, there's a custom called Ve leh Pung. Every Zo family has their own Ve leh Pung min (name), and they have the same meaning. There are many different types of Ve leh Pung names. To understand, it is like a family name, but we Zo people do not use it in our names, and people who you have no idea about can have the same Pung. Each family has their own Pung names, and the household would take the father's Pung name. This Pung name will never change unless you are a woman because if a woman gets married, they will take their husband's Pung name. Also, not only does your family have the same Pung, there can be people who have the same name and you have never met them in your life, but we are considered family no matter what. If we want to know about our family line, we sometimes can find it from our Pung names. Our Pung can tell who we are and from whom our family line started.

Komla Jules Noussole



My name is Komla Jules Noussole. I was born on February 15 in Togo, a country in West Africa. I grew up in Lomé, the capital of Togo. I am the third child of a family of four children. I have two brothers and one sister. I lost my dad in 2006 when I was in secondary school. My mum was the only one who raised us until now. After graduating from high school, I studied German at the University of Lomé because I love languages. After my studies, I taught German for one year before moving to the United States. I moved to the United States on October 1, 2019. My goal is to become a lawyer and an interpreter, the reason why I started ESL class at Black Hawk this semester to improve my English and then to start taking law classes.

Switching from One Educational System to a Different One

Have you ever thought about studying in another country? Have you ever thought about how different it can be? Educational systems differ from one country to another, and every country has its own educational system. Some African countries inherited their educational system from their colonizers. For example, my homeland Togo inherited its educational system from the French, and switching from that system to the American one is a great challenge for me. The main differences I encounter are the school system, the number of students in the classes and the use of technology.

The first difference is the school system. I studied in a system where we have four levels: primary school, secondary school, high school and university, but in the United States, I remark that college is a little bit different from university. In Togo, we talk about subjects, and you can have up to fourteen subjects in one semester, but here in the United States, we talk about classes, and it is very difficult to take more than four classes per semester. In the USA, the teachers give a lot of homework, which influences the general grade of the semester, but in Togo, they give little homework, and it does not influence the general grade. It was very difficult for me to understand all these things on my first day. When the teacher was talking about how we will proceed during this semester, everything sounded very strange to me, and I could not catch it all. It took longer for me to understand the new system.

Second, we have the number of students in the classes, which is very impressive. Here in the USA, you usually do not find more than thirty students in one class, but in Togo, we were more than 100 in one class in public high schools, and it is worse in the universities, where you can find more than 2,000 students in one hall. This does not help students to learn and understand the courses, but, in the USA, the number of students in one class helps with the interaction between the teachers and the students; the

students can ask questions to understand the course more. For me, it is so helpful because it permits communication with the teacher. This allows me to know my classmates and to be active in class.

Finally, the use of technology in the American educational system is a great challenge to me because in Togo, we just use computers to do some research and to type some assignments. In the USA, we have online classes to follow and a lot of homework to do online; we even submit some assignments online. This is the greatest difference I am trying to adapt myself to. It was difficult for me in the beginning, but now, I have mastered almost everything concerning the online class, and I hope to master it all very soon. I am also learning how to use Microsoft Office in order to type my essays very well.

To conclude, it is a great challenge to switch from one educational system to a new one. Especially in my case, you must adapt to the school system, the number of students in the classes and the use of technology; it is difficult, and it takes a lot of time. The whole world has to start thinking about a common educational system.

“La Colombe de la Paix”

One of the historical and cultural places of Togo is “La colombe de la paix,” in English as “The dove of peace.” It is a giant monument located at a strategic crossroads in Lomé, the capital of Togo. The monument is approximately at the center of Lomé connecting four main roads: the road leading to the airport, the road leading to the university, the road leading to the big market and the coastline and the road leading to the Army Camp. Everybody living in the capital Lomé must use one of these roads at least once a week, and most tourists will pass through it while entering the country. “La colombe de la paix” symbolizes peace and represents a lot for the Togolese. That place is used for many activities such as musical concerts and meetings. At the end of every year, the place and the roads are decorated, and, on every December 31, a big concert is organized for all the musicians to celebrate the New Year. It attracts tourists every year.

Gaby Palma



I am Gaby Palma. I am 22 years old, and I am from La Ceiba, Honduras. My first language is Spanish, and I am very proud to be Latina. I have two brothers, and I live with my mother who is an awesome person because she would do anything for me and my brothers, no matter how old we are. My mother and my brothers are my everything. I moved to the United States in 2015, which was a big change for me because I did not speak any English, and it was very hard for me to ask or answer any questions. It was a big change because at first I got a little depressed and did not know what I was going to do with my life. I honestly thought I was never going to be able to understand or learn any English, so that used to make me feel even more upset, but over the years, I started learning more and more and found out that I could even go to school, which was a good change and opportunity for me because I have always liked school even though it is hard sometimes. One of my biggest goals is to have a decent job doing something I really like and enjoy doing, so I am currently going to school for Medical Assisting, so one day I can work in a clinic or hospital. I am very thankful for the help Black Hawk College has offered me.

Tourism in Honduras

Honduras is a country located in Central America. There is a lot of tourism in Honduras, a lot of beautiful things to see and places to go, for example, its beaches. A lot of people from other countries like to visit Honduras, especially people from the United States, because they say they like to visit its beaches and the Copan Ruinas.

The three places that have the most beautiful beaches in Honduras are Roatan, Guanaja and Utila. Their beaches are beautiful, but Roatan is the most well-known. Roatan is an island in Honduras. It is about 65 kilometers (40 miles), and it is actually located right between two other islands, Utila and Guanaja, but Roatan is the largest one of the three islands. Even though Spanish is the main language in Honduras, in Roatan, they speak English, too. A lot of people that go to Roatan usually stay in the areas called West Bay or Coxen Hole.

Another place that people love to visit in Honduras are the Copan Ruinas. They are located in the Copan Department of western Honduras close to the border to Guatemala. What people usually do when they visit Copan Ruinas is to take horseback rides to nearby towns because that way they can see the area and also visit the Los Sapos Ruins, another very well-known place.

In conclusion, there are a lot of things to do when you visit Honduras. Honduras has a lot of natural things to do like play with butterflies in the Butterfly Museum, so everyone will find something to enjoy.

Van Biak Par



My name is Van Biak Par, and I am from Chin State, Myanmar. I was born in Surngen Village in Chin State. I have one brother and one sister, and I live with my family. When I was young, we had to move lots of places because of war. When I was three years old, we moved to Kalaymyo, Burma Stae. We lived in that state for eight years. Eleven years later, we moved to Malaysia, and we lived there for five years. In 2016, we arrived in the United States. We have been living here for four years. I never thought that we would be moving to so many places in my life. Now, I feel very safe, and I do not think we will move again.

Chin National Day

Chin culture is unique in Myanmar. Chin was formerly a part of Burma, but the Chin people are not Burmese. Chin National Day is a celebration of our culture. It is similar to the U.S. Independence Day on July 4 but without fireworks. Chin National Day is important to Chin people wherever they live, and it is celebrated in different ways in Chin and the U.S.

Chin National Day is very important for Chin people. On January 27, 1947, six Chin leaders attended the Burma Constitutional Assembly meeting to declare Chin independence, and these six leaders represented six cities: Kanpalet, Tedim, Hakha, Falam, Paletwua and Matupi. On October 9, 1950, Chin leaders had a Chin Affairs Council meeting, and they thought there should be a national day. Even though they first discussed having a national day in 1950, they announced that Chin National Day officially began on February 20, 1948, one year after Chin got its independence in 1947.

In Chin, the celebration lasts three full days, and crowds of people attend all three days. The leaders make speeches about the history of Chin. The soccer stadiums are full of people who listen to the Chin story. There are two stages on opposite sides of the soccer field. On one side, they do concerts, and on the other side, speakers from major Chin cities such as Kanpalet, Tedim, Hakha, Falam, Paletwua and Matupi talk about the importance of Chin independence. On the other hand, in the U.S., the Chin celebration lasts only one day. The local leader of the Quad Cities Chin community makes a speech, and the pastor preaches from the Bible. It is often held in school gyms or auditoriums.

On Chin National Day, we have many different activities. In Chin state, they have concerts, and Chin people sing different religious songs, traditional songs and love songs. They have many performances like a bamboo dance and other cultural dances. In the middle of the soccer field, one lady is chosen to toss chickens and money into the air. The people in the audience run onto the field to grab the

money and chickens. The lucky people either have money to spend or a chicken for roasting later. There is special Chin-style wrestling, and the general audience can participate in pillow fights. For the pillow fights, a strong track hurdle is placed in the middle of the field. One man starts by sitting on the hurdle holding a pillow. Another man challenges him to fight and climbs up on the hurdle with a pillow. After both men are facing each other, a referee blows a whistle, and the men start swinging the pillows. The winner knocks the other man off. Then, almost immediately, another man from the audience challenges the winner to the next fight. It often takes an hour with a long line of challengers before the pillow fight is over. A lot of people make different Chin food and sell it on National Day. In Chin, Chin National Day is celebrated by many people who wear traditional clothing. In the U.S., we also have Chin wrestling and pillow fights. Young people have a fashion show and model our traditional clothing, and they wear different colors and styles to represent each city of Chin State.

Chin National Day is very important for Chin people. We celebrate every year even though we no longer live in Chin State. We show other people that Chin culture is also unique in Myanmar. We show how much we respect our native country. I want you all to come to our Chin National Day and enjoy our Chin celebration.

Chin traditional clothing and jewelry are unique and easy to identify. Our dresses are colorful, and they are very expensive. A complete traditional outfit with jewelry can cost as much as \$10,000. Therefore, these outfits are handed down from generation to generation. The wife of one of our Chin members wore a dress that was over a hundred years old on our last Chin National Day. Most Chin normally wear red and black, but flowers are mixed colors. Chin traditional clothing is handmade and made with different styles. We also have many different kinds of jewelry. There are coin earrings, coin rings, coin necklaces, silver belts and buckles, wide belts made out of narrow gold bands, bangels, and bracelets. We wear traditional clothing only on special holidays: Chin National Day, Christmas, New Year, and family weddings.



Abdoul Sanfo



My name is Abdoul Kader Sanfo. I am 21 years old, and I am from Burkina Faso, a small country in West Africa. I was born in a family that is composed of four members: my father, my mother, my sister and me. I graduated from Marien N'Gouabi High School in 2016 in Ouagadougou, which is the capital of Burkina Faso. I was raised by my beautiful mother for almost 18 years before I moved to the United States. Most of those years, my father traveled back and forth between my country and the United States. When I was younger, my dreams were always to become either a soccer player or a doctor. After I graduated from high school, I gave up on my career of being a soccer player to concentrate on my studies to become a doctor. It is with this prospect that I carry on my studies as a student at Black Hawk College. I am looking forward to going to the University of Iowa after I get my Associate in Arts degree.

My Life as an Immigrant

The United States of America is a land of opportunities and ambitions. Around the world, many people are dreaming about living in the U.S., and I was one of them. Coming to the U.S. has always been my dream because I could carry on my education and also experience the U.S. culture and other cultures. The U.S. is a country where a variety of people live and also preserve their cultures. I was glad to know that my wish would be a reality when my father told me that I would be immigrating to the US. In my life as an immigrant, I have had to adapt to the cold weather, student life, and food in the U.S.

My country, Burkina Faso, is located in West Africa, where the temperature is always above 45 Celsius, which is 102 Fahrenheit. We pretty much have sun on every single day of the year. Since I moved to the U.S. in 2017, I have faced many types of weather that I could not imagine people were living in. I am mostly alluding to the wintertime. It is really hard for people who come from the warmer parts of the world to adapt to this specific weather. I used to layer more than three outfits to keep my body warm when I first arrived here. For example, last winter, this area had very unusual weather because the temperature went down to approximately negative twenty-three degrees. Personally, at that time, I was at home with my heater set at ninety degrees, and also, I didn't go anywhere because my body could not handle it at all. The only weather that I really like here is summer. Summer does not seem that hot for me, but it is warm enough to feel a little bit like home.

On the contrary, I have my experience studying as a college student in the U.S. I used to be a student in my country, Burkina Faso, but it was something different than I am experiencing now. At the time, I was a student in my country, my principal job was to study and nothing else. Here in the U.S., I am still a student, but I have to work to pay for my phone, gas for my car and clothes. I started noticing the struggle that U.S. students are going through including me. I had to find a way to go to school and

work at the same time. At the beginning of this process, it was very hard because I got tired; it was exhausting because I was not used to it. Nowadays, I am learning more about working while studying from other students who are doing the same thing, so they have helped me to adjust my work schedule and my academic schedule to a perfect harmony. Furthermore, I am still at school, and I am working hard to finish my Associate in Science degree so that I can attend a four-year university and prepare for medical school.

Finally, there are some foods in the United States that are not made for me. I personally like tasting foods from the rest of the world. If you immigrate to a country, you should at least try the food that most people in the area appreciate. In 2018, when I had been in the U.S. for a few months, I went to a restaurant, and I asked for a special typical American food, and they gave me mashed potatoes, but they did not taste as good as I had expected. Actually, I did not like them at all. Later, an American explained that the local restaurant had probably used instant mashed potatoes instead of the real thing. Most of the time, I prefer to cook my own food at home. That way, I do not have to deal with food that I have not tried and might not like. Also, I don't eat spicy food, so I kind of abstract myself from eating at places where mainly spicy food is on the menu. After my experience with the mashed potatoes, I am hesitant to ask for typical American foods. Perhaps, I just fell in the wrong place to savor my first American meal.

To conclude, I often think about my adaption, my student life and the taste of my first American meal. I like being here the United States because I have had experiences that I could have never experienced in another country. Living as an immigrant may be a little hard for some people, but as long you have the motivation and the determination, I think everything will be alright. I am personally having the best time because I noticed that I have become another person, and I am also experiencing that some people would like do the same thing. I will never forget about the day my life as an immigrant began.

The “Benga”

The “benga” is from my language “mossi,” which means beans. The food is known as the most commonly consumed food in Burkina Faso. In general, beans are known as a complete food in the food system. My country, Burkina Faso, is one of the poorest countries in the world, so it is really hard for people to have a good and full meal. To balance this insufficiency, people had to turn to things that they could find locally, so beans were meeting their criteria. In addition, we have the affordability of beans, and we also cultivate beans a lot in my country. Cooking “benga” is very simple. What we need is a bag of beans, rice, which is also one of our favorite foods, onion, tomato sauce and chicken soup to make it taste good. First, you need boiling water in a pot in which you pour your beans and wait until the beans are almost cooked, so you can add the rice with potassium. While the beans and the rice are boiling, you should take another pot in which you will have to cook the soup. Second, with your onions, tomato and any seasoning you want to add, you need to fry them and make a soup. I personally add fish to it, but some people add meat instead of fish. Everything depends on your taste and what you can afford. After these steps, your benga is ready to be served. In general, we eat benga as a family. I mean that usually if benga is served, there are at least three people together who will share this benediction.

Tresor Seba



My name is Tresor. I am 21, and all of my brothers and sisters were born in a small village called Mulenge in DRC (Central Africa). In 1996, we moved to a small city called Bukavu, and I was born there. I grew up in a big family with five sisters and two brothers. I live with my brother and three sisters, and the others live in Canada. So, in 2004 my family and I moved to a small country called Burundi (East Africa). I studied in primary and secondary school there. In high school, I focused on biology and chemistry, and I graduated in 2018. When I have free time, I like to play soccer and basketball. Now I am planning to study industrial engineering when I finish ESL classes.

DRC: Rich and Poor

Can you imagine how a country can be rich and poor at the same time? Congo-Kinshasa, which is located in central Africa, is the fourth biggest country in Africa. Congo-Kinshasa, which is also known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is also the most populous country in Africa. The capital is Kinshasa. The minerals in DRC are rare and in great demand everywhere in the world. The things that make my country rich are its resources, and the things that make my country poor are unemployment and war.

Firstly, Congo is a country that has many natural resources, such as, copper, gold, diamond, cobalt, uranium, ore and oil. That makes it the richest country in the world. It is made up of several large mining cities like Lubumbashi, which is the city with the greatest quantity of copper. Kolwezi is another city with different kinds of minerals, such as uranium and radium. In every province in DRC, we can find at least one or two different minerals. For example, Katanga is the biggest province that has mining companies in DRC because we can find many kinds of minerals like cobalt, copper, uranium, manganese, gold, etc. Even though DRC has many resources, they do not know how to exploit them, and there are some people who use that for their personal interest. Therefore, the government has to learn how to exploit all the resources that they have in their possession.

Secondly, even though my country is full of resources and natural wealth, it is one of the poorest countries in the world. Many people do not have a job, and that creates many problems like poverty and malnutrition. Many people in DRC live miserable lives. For example, in South Kivu, the province that I come from, some people do not even have a place to live and are homeless. The majority of people earn three hundred dollars or less a year. Therefore, the lack of employment causes malnutrition; many people die because they do not eat well. That is why DRC is the fifth poorest country.

Thirdly, the problem that leads to poverty in my country is the war. In the provinces where we can find the minerals, there is also a war, for example, in South Kivu, Lubumbashi, and Maniema. From 1998 until today, there has been a war in DRC. Many Congolese have become refugees in other countries because of the war that never ends. I experienced war in 2004 before we moved to Burundi with my family; that was terrible, and I cannot forget it because I was a kid. My parents tell me that they experienced five wars. In the war of 2004, my friend lost his mom and his sister. The war has caused many problems in DRC, and many families lost people and many children lost their parents. People are so tired because of the war that never ends, and they are still afraid to return to DRC because of insecurity.

In conclusion, the resources that make my country rich are the cause of everything that makes my county poor. Everyone wants to be the owner of that wealth in DRC. The only resolution is to maintain security and to punish every person who tries to use the resources for his own benefit. I think that will help and DRC can become a developed country in the world.

“Gukwa” is a traditional ceremony that was passed down from our ancestors centuries ago. This ceremony is for paying the dowry. The grooms give cows to the bride's parents as the bride price. However, because of modernization in the 21st century, grooms now pay in cash. Cows have great value in the Banyamulenge culture. Since the Olden days, the more cows you had, the wealthier you were. Not only were you respected, but everyone from your clan had a good name as well. In our culture, the groom does not actually go ask for the bride himself. It is considered untraditional and disrespectful. Instead, the elders of his clan or family pay the bride's parents a visit and asks for their daughter's hand in marriage. If the bride's family agrees, then they come to an agreement of how many cows to give in exchange for the bride. The bride's family cannot ask for more cows than they have. Before the groom's family comes to ask for a hand in marriage, the bride's family already has all the information concerning the wealth that the groom's family possesses. If they have more cows, they have to give more cows to the bride's family. For instance, if the groom's family has fifty cows in their possession, they usually give twelve or fifteen cows to the bride's family. It depends on how their agreement was. In fact, the agreement of cows in Banyamulenge culture is another ceremony called “Gukoshanya”. After this meeting at the bride's home, their elders return to the groom and deliver the news. The date of the “Gukwa” ceremony is then released. During that wait, much preparation of the ceremony takes place. The bride must take good care of herself in ways such as not doing too much housework, resting a lot, and keeping herself neat and clean for her husband-to-be. The bride's family makes sure she is in good condition before giving her away, and they have to be prepared to receive the groom's family. When the groom's family arrives, they do not take the bride at the same time. They discuss everything that they had agreed about, and they tell all the guests that they have concluded everything, including the “Gukoshanya,” the agreement of cows. After that, the groom meets with the bride, but before the bride comes out she stays with her brother, and the groom has to give money to the brother to meet the bride. The groom's family sets the date of the marriage. In conclusion, the “Gukwa” ceremony in Banyamulenge culture is prepared only by the bride's family, and the marriage ceremony is prepared only by the groom's family. When they finish the ceremony of the “Gukwa,” the bride stays with her family until the day of the marriage.

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



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