



INTERNATIONAL VOICES at Black Hawk College

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



FALL 2022

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Nina De Bisschop

Afiwa Ameyapo (Colette)



My name is Colette. I was born on October 10 in Togo, and I am Togolese. I got my high school diploma in 2015. I started university in 2016. I studied management accounting for 2 years at the University of Lomé, Togo. I am the last born, and I have four siblings, two sisters and two brothers. I came to the United States in May, 2019, and I started taking ESL classes at Black Hawk Outreach in that same year, but I started at Black Hawk College in 2021. I have been working at Tyson for three years. I like watching TV and listening to music for entertainment. I like taking walks to enjoy the weather and feel nature.

Traditional Wedding in Togo

The traditional wedding ceremony in Togo varies between ethnic groups. Traditional weddings are done to honor the bride and her parents since it is something cultural that our ancestors have always done. From generation to generation, we have maintained this value for our culture. In the Maritime region, more precisely in the prefecture of Yoto, the traditional wedding takes place in the following steps: first step and the wedding celebration.

First, the presentation of the man and his family to the lady's family is so important, and it is called the First Step. Usually, that is done earlier in the morning. The man and his parents have to knock on the lady's parents' door early in the morning because it symbolizes the respect they have for their future in-laws. But in some cases, it depends on the travel distance, so it will be tolerated if they are not there early. After they are welcomed, they will be asked about their reason for visiting. It is to the man's father to respond, and the answer is always in the form of a parable; for example, "Well, we found a ripe fruit on your tree that we want to pick; that's the reason for our visit." The lady's father pretends not to understand and asks for clarification. This is the moment when the man's father has to reply, "My son here told me that he is interested in your girl (named X), so please that's why we are here for your permission to allow us to marry her." Next, the father calls his girl and asks her if she knows this man. She shouldn't say yes but should say, "He told me that he wants to marry me, but I told him to come to see and ask you before." She will be asked again if she likes and loves the guy. If she says yes, then the list of the dowry will be given to the man by the lady's father. The man can right away decide on the date for the delivery of the dowry, or if not, they can go and think about it and will let the lady's family know that they will arrive this or that day for the dowry ceremony.

Secondly, on the dowry day, the man, his parents, siblings, uncles, and aunts have to be present to meet the lady, her parents, siblings, uncles and aunts and get to know the man's family, and this makes the ceremony more interesting. On that day, the presentation of the bride to his man is kind of funny. First, the lady's aunt brings a lady covered in a loincloth on her head in front of the man; she will take the loincloth off and will ask the guy if it is this lady he is looking for? He will probably say, "No." She will do the same thing for one more lady, and he will say no. The third or fourth time, it depends, she will have to bring the

bride herself in front of him, and he will happily say, “Yes, she is.” Both families will clap and shout loudly with joy. After that, the lady’s father will ask her if she accepts the presents such as wine, alcohol, jewelry for the lady, dresses, loincloths, and shoes that the man brought to him. He also asks again if she really wants to marry this man. She will answer, “yes,” and her hand will be given to the man by her father. Everybody is full of joy with cheers. Afterwards, the elders do the prayer of union to unite the couple without forgetting to pay homage to the ancestors. Now, it is party time, and everybody eats, drinks, and dances. After all is done, the lady can go with her husband that same day or can stay with her parents and go to her husband another day; it depends on how they both decide.

In conclusion, the traditional wedding is so important for the respect of both families, and it gives the opportunity to the members of both families to meet and know each other and to celebrate this union happily. It is always an unforgettable day for the couple.



The Story of the Turtle and the Birds

Why does a turtle have tiles on its back?

One day, a turtle and some birds decided to go to a big party that would take place in heaven. All birds could fly because they have wings, but the turtle doesn't. Therefore, the birds decided to each lend one a wing to the turtle so that it can fly to the party with them because they didn't want to leave it alone on earth on the condition that it would give them back their wings when they came back to earth. On their way to the party, they decided to change their names. Each bird took a name it liked, for example, Dove, Eagle, Pigeon, ..., and the turtle said, "I will be called **You all.**" The birds had no idea. They just said okay. Arriving at the entry, they presented themselves and joined the party. They were dancing when a waitress called them and served them food on one plate. One of the birds asked "Whose food is this?" And the waitress answered, "It is for you all." And the turtle shouted, "Oh! It's mine!" so they gave it to the turtle hoping that the waitress would bring them theirs later. They waited until the turtle finished the food, but the waitress didn't bring any food for the birds. Therefore, the birds approached the waitress and told her that they had been there for a long time, but they still didn't have their food, and the waitress replied, "I told you that the food was for all of you." Therefore, the birds got angry and by force took their wings back from the turtle and told it to come back to earth on its own. It started crying and begged them to at least tell its wife when they will arrive to cover the floor with cushions so that it can bounce on that. On earth, the birds, wanting revenge, told the wife that her husband told them to tell her to cover the floor with a lot of pebbles and rocks, which was exactly what the wife did. Some minutes later, the turtle came down and fell on those pebbles and rocks, and he got his shell broken into tiles. So that 's why the turtle has tiles on his shell.

Jeremie Anga



My name is Jeremie Anga, and I am a student at Black Hawk College in ESL and cyber security. I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a big country in central Africa, where I was born on August 18, 1997. I am living in the United States of America as a lawful permanent resident, in Moline, Illinois, a beautiful city with a diversity of cultures and one of the Quad Cities. All my family members, my father, mother, two sisters and two brothers, live in my country, so I am the only one here. I am Christian, single, and I have no kids. One of my main interests is to see people happy around me, so I never hesitate to do something to bring happiness where I am. I like thinking and wondering about how to be helpful to the world. That helps me work on problems I see around the world and look for something better. I dream to have a life in which I will influence

people the way I am influenced today by other successful people.

African Immigrants' Plans and Changes

The United States is a dreamland for many people around the world, especially for Africans like me. If you ask most Africans where they want to travel and stay, they will answer "the United States of America." It's not because Africa is bad; it's just because what they see on television and social media seems to be better than what they have. When they find a way to come here, they make a thousand plans that they want to achieve when they get here. Unfortunately, few of their plans are really realized because of different circumstances. As an immigrant, I also faced this; some of my plans were reevaluated and placed on a to-do list for the future. Those changes are caused by many factors including the misinformation about life in the United States and the responsibilities left in their home country.

It all starts with stories and testimonies about the United States from friends or the media. What Africans hear about America is that life is easier than anywhere else. On television, they see big cities like New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Their friends and other immigrants here show and tell them that it's better to live in the United States than where they are. Those friends show them all the good things about the U.S. and how somebody can easily have the life he wants in a short time. Africans are told that finding a job in the U.S. is so easy because companies always hire people, car prices are cheaper, food and groceries cost nothing and that there are some restaurants where you can eat for free. The biggest illusion is about salaries. Personally, a friend told me that I could make at least one thousand dollars a week doing a job that doesn't require a college or university degree or any experience. With this information, Africans plan a lot of things, a dream life. We also have those who plan to pursue their studies in order to get a college or university degree. A thousand plans are made according to this misinformation.

On the other hand, we have the real life here in the United States. After African people arrive in the U.S., they figure out that life is not exactly how they were told. The first job I did once here was not what I had expected. And my first day was the longest day of my life. I was on a production line, and my task was to remove the skin from hundreds of pigs. I had never done that kind of job before. When I got home, I was dead. I had pain everywhere in my body. I could not quit the job because I did not have enough knowledge in English to get another job. Also, I was not paid a thousand dollars a week as they were saying. In addition, there are several unavoidable expenses people must pay; this includes rent, utilities, phone bills, clothes, food, groceries, etc. Immigrants who

planned to study find that it costs a lot of money to go to college or university. If they are able to have financial aid, there is still a problem to face: time. Being a student in the U.S. requires a lot of time and energy, so it's challenging to work full-time and be a student. As a result, there is a dilemma. On the one hand, they have a job and bills; on the other hand, they have classes. The real life in the United States often is not what people hear about.

Finally, African immigrants face their responsibilities and duties from their family in their home country. Most of the time, we travel in order to find a better life for us and our family. Therefore, once here, everything immigrants do is to always think about those left in the home country. This fact weighs on their shoulders, and most of the time, it affects all decisions they make here. For example, those who decide to go to school finally drop out because going to school means less time working and more time in school, so their dependents are automatically affected because they will not have enough money to care for them. In African culture, if you are blessed, you must bless others, and living in the United States is considered a blessing.

To sum up, African immigrants' life in the United States is influenced by many factors, and plans they make before traveling here change because of what they are told about the U.S., which is often different from the reality here, and because of their responsibilities and duties left in Africa. Those facts and changes are one the reasons it takes a long time for immigrants from Africa to build a stable life in the United States.



The Rumba Congolaise

The *Rumba Congolaise* is a very popular dance in Central Africa. It's from the Democratic Republic of Congo. It's a special dance because it is often performed on important occasions, such as wedding evenings, but also because it is danced by respectful people, a couple, usually a man and a woman. It looks like salsa but has very remarkable differences. Two partners are standing parallel, side by side. The right hand of one is placed on the left shoulder of the other, and the left hand of the first is placed on the hand of the other on the right side and vice versa. The goal is to move in the same rhythm of dance steps, as in the *Zouk*. In fact, it is the music that defines this dance because it strongly resembles other dances in the world. The DRC has lost a lot of things in its musical culture with the advent of cultural mixing; however, the *Rumba* still remains.

Aur Areepan (Nadia)



Nadia is my name. I am 17 years old. I was born in Korat, Thailand. In 2022, I graduated from high school in Thailand. Now, I am studying ESL at Black Hawk College. My goal is to be a nurse because I love to take care of others and want to gain knowledge to take care of my family. Not only me, but also my parents want me to have a good career in the future. I love spending my free time reading novels and watching Korean series. Moreover, I also like exercising and playing musical instruments. When I was in middle school, I had the opportunity to compete in Taekwondo. And at the age of eight, I started learning violin, and I have had an interest in music since then. As I am so interested in many subjects, deciding on my future career is difficult for me.



Cha Yen (Thai Iced Tea)

Cha yen is a creamy, refreshing beverage that pairs well with a hot, tropical afternoon. Although this beverage is popular in Thai restaurants all around the globe, it is most common in Thailand. *Cha yen* is a drink served over ice and made with brewed black tea and spices like vanilla, cinnamon, cardamom, and star anise. Thai iced tea's bright, signature color comes from food coloring added to black tea in the Thai tea mix. The brewed tea has a dark crimson color on its own. Thai tea can vary in sugar, type of milk, and type of citrus. The recipe below is straightforward to make and tastes exactly like what you can get in Thai restaurants.

- 2 tablespoons of loose-leaf black tea
- 1 pod of star anise
- 2 pods of cardamom
- 1 cup of water
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- 1 tablespoon of sweetened condensed milk
- 2 teaspoons of evaporated milk
- 1 cup of crushed ice

Preparation: Pour the water into a vessel and bring it to a boil on the stovetop. Next, add the black tea, star anise, and cardamom to the pot of boiling water to steep for five minutes. After that, strain the tea. Then stir in the sugar and sweetened condensed milk until both are completely dissolved. Fill a glass completely with ice and pour the tea over the ice. Lastly, generously drizzle evaporated milk over the top and take in the divine cascade. Give it a stir before you enjoy!

Cedric Asige



I am Cedric Asige from Togo, and I'm 22 years old. I live in Moline, Illinois. I came to America just eight months ago, and I live with my parents and a sister. My main purpose for coming here is to develop myself to become someone great in the future. I really don't have many friends around me, but I'm coping. Actually, I have had this vision of becoming a bank manager, but I suddenly decided I want to be an accountant. To talk about my leisure activities, I like to play basketball and watch movies. One of my strengths is that I like to learn more from people who can impact me with knowledge. I'm a student in Black Hawk College, and I hope to further my education at a university. There are so many things I don't like, but the most important one to me is telling lies because I like to be honest, and honesty prevents conflicts sometimes.

The Marketplace in Togo

The name of one of the biggest markets in my country, Togo, is *Asiganmé*, which means "big market." It has great influence and effects on people both positive and negative. When you go there for the first time, everything will be so strange to you because the behaviors of everyone are not expected. In this market, everyone has his or her own strategy of selling and buying. The ways or different conducts of everyone make the whole place very busy as well.

To start with, the different types of products for sale make the people very unique. There are sellers of food ingredients such as spices, tubers, corn, and animal products (meat and fish). You could also find electric gadgets like televisions, electric appliances, music players and many other things. Because the market is a very big place for business, people get hungry and tired sometimes, so there are even restaurants where one can eat. Other regular products anyone could think of are not left out. Also, there is a specific place in this market where currencies are exchanged. For example, a Ghanaian can exchange his or her currency to the currency of the Togolese. This allows for easy purchase of goods in the market.

The behavior of the sellers changes day by day. They always want to convince buyers to be attracted to their products. They begin to shout at the top of their voices advertising their goods. They believe that will catch the attention of the people. Most times, this strategy works well, but other times, it is even boring to stand and call a buyer to see what they are selling. Unfortunately, there are days sellers come to the market and do not sell enough till night falls. At the end of the day, they feel disappointed. For some lucky ones, rich business partners from other countries come to buy tracks of goods from their wholesalers for various places.

Unfortunately, there are unexpected bad activities in *Asiganmé*, and stealing is one of them. Individuals who do not have good intentions always want to do bad things. Because the market is huge, ten to fifteen thieves could be arrested within twelve hours. Thank God for the new police station that has been built. Now, the number of theft cases has decreased. In addition, fire outbreaks happen once in a while due to the bad connection of the electric wires. A lot of people go to their houses in the evening and find their stores burnt down the next morning. This has devastated so

many sellers in the past few years.

To conclude, *Asiganmé* is a very profitable and interesting market, but it has its disadvantages as well. The best products you can imagine are all there, different currency exchange is available, and they also have the best approach to welcome customers. I hope the government does something about the unexpected activities such as thefts and fire outbreaks for the safety of everyone in the market.



Recipe for *Akume* and Fresh Fish Soup

In Togo, we have so many dishes that we prepare, and people from other countries love eating them. but I will talk about a special dish that I really love so much and how to prepare it.

The name of this dish is *Akume* and fresh fish soup. To start with, you need to go to the market and get all the ingredients to prepare this food. You need corn flour, tomatoes, fresh tilapia, seasoning spices, onions and most importantly there is a vegetable that we add; it's called okra also known as "ladies finger." The okra will make the soup very slippery, which allows the food to be swallowed very easily.

According to our cooking rules, we prepare the soup before the *Akume*. First, we blend the tomatoes, onions, ginger, garlic, and the pepper. Slice the fish into pieces and cook them separately by adding garlic, onion, and seasoning to make them taste delicious. After that, we start the stove, and we pour the blended tomatoes into a pot. We cook for a few minutes, and we mix everything together with the cooked fish or tilapia. We wait for 10 to 15 minutes for it to be well cooked. Now we can prepare the *Akume*. We mix a cup of corn flour with water and leave it on the stove for 2 to 3 minutes. After that, we stir it very well, and we add more corn flour to make it sticky and soft for better consumption. We continue to stir until it's well cooked. We know if it's ready to be served by touching it in the pot, and we turn it onto a plate for it to be served with the fresh fish soup.

Pelagie Dapah



Hi my name is Pelagie Dapah. I'm from Togo, Africa. I'm 18 years old, I go to BHC, and my career goal is to learn more about English and how to be an actress. I have a family that lives here in Illinois, my three brothers, one sister, and my parents. My dream is to write stories and act in movies and shows one day. I really hope to become who I want to be one day and make my parents and the rest of my family members that are still in Africa proud.

Transportation in my Country

Transportation can be difficult in some countries. Even though the US is all good with transportation, a lot of people are suffering about it in other countries, and I will talk about it in my country.

First, it is hard to transfer from one place to another. We pay to get a ride to somewhere that we need to get to. Some people can't afford it, so they walk for miles. Only about 50 percent of people can afford their own vehicles because we don't earn a good amount of money when we work.

Second, some students ride their bike to school, and even some adults ride their bikes to work. There are just few busses for rich kids whose parents can afford the bills for school transportation. Some students even cry for the bus drivers to come get them with the bus as well.

Lastly, we've got so many taxis, which are like an Uber for us, but the difference is that we have taxis everywhere, and we always pay in cash. Some people do work as a taxi driver because they earn more money than when working in other jobs. Taxi drivers are always anywhere. You can find them in markets, and they ask you if you need a ride somewhere. There are trains, but it would be expensive to take the train to somewhere you want to get.

In my opinion, in my country, they have to pay people more money for working hard, so they can afford something to ride when going somewhere, and we shouldn't trust taxi drivers because if they are in need of money, some of them would steal money from people or do worse.



Cultural Clothing in My Country

In my country, Togo in Africa, we wear a type of hat, which is similar to a bonnet. We wear them when we get our hair done or when we don't want to leave our hair hanging out. There are different types of colors of these bonnets. We make them ourselves, and you can only make them if you know how to knit. People who can actually knit are the only ones who sell these in Africa. We usually wear these bonnets when we go to shower so they keep our hair from falling out. They are not really expensive in Africa. You can get one for five dollars or less. Only old people knit these in my country because other young people don't have time to do it. It can take you ten to twenty four hours to knit them, so some young adults ask the old people to knit them for them, and they pay them for doing it. They sell these in Africa because it is very hot there and people don't like leaving their hair out. It itches when we leave our hair out because of the hot sun. They look cute on people because they are made out of different colors. Of course, there are black ones too, but people like the color ones more than the black ones. I like the black one because it looks natural, and black matches my hair color. These bonnets are popular in Africa. Almost every African knows what they are when they see them. We have different names for them because we speak different languages in Africa. In my language, Ewe, we call them *coucou*, known as hat.

I also want to talk about something we call *djonou* in our Ewe language. *Djonou* is something like a string made out of beautiful small items. They look cute on any woman, and it's just for beauty, which means only girls wear them. We wear them because they look cute on us, and our African men like them. We can wear more than one on our waist. It's only meant for waists. It can show off your shirt or it could be on your skin without showing off. Some people don't like to show it; they would rather keep it so it won't show. I like wearing it, and it doesn't matter to me if it shows or not. *Djonou* is something we can all make. It is very easy. If you learn how to do it, you can do it easily. I loved making them when I was in Africa, and you can also mix them differently with any other colors. This item can be found in Africa or online in the US, because people from Africa noticed that people in America here like this item too, so they started selling them, but it is actually an African thing.

Iletou Christelle Etekor



I am Iletou Christelle Etekor, and I came from a beautiful country named Togo. I grew up as the eldest daughter of a family of four, two girls and two boys. I grew up with both parents and lost my dad ten years ago. I had a very happy childhood. I reflect a varied personality including ambition, generosity, motivation and pleasant calmness. I am a Christian and love reading the Bible. I am married with two daughters, Maeva and Malvina. I am a full-time student, motivated by my love for learning and to become a successful woman in today's society. I got a master's degree in business management in my country and was working in one of the banks as a business manager. I came to the USA seven months ago with my family, and I would love to continue in business administration and obtain my master's degree here also. I have kept a keen interest in journalism and enjoy reading, dancing, travelling and poetry, and most importantly spending time with my loved ones.

Widowhood Practices in Togo

In Africa, and in Togo, people have a strong preservation of ancestral beliefs. African culture turns around mystical interpretation of the relationship between the visible and invisible worlds. In African thoughts, "death is not the final destination of a person." Male dominance and patriarchy influence the practices of widowhood, and because women have an inferior status in our society, they are excluded from the decision-making when their husbands die. The widowhood practice is a very important example and a time when the widow is more humiliated than the widower. Consequently, in this widowhood practice there are differences in the rites and even the mourning period for the widows and the widowers. This difference also shows in the family's decision about the new life of the widows and the widowers.

One of the most important differences in the widowhood practice is the grieving period. When we take widowers in my culture, it's common for the grief process to take six months or a year. The widowers must wear only black or blue color clothing through the grieving period. They must take their rings off immediately after the death of their wives. They don't have to shave their heads. Grieving and the process of moving on is something the widowers can choose to do in as little as two weeks if he wants to because the normal period is six to twelve months, but sometimes he chooses to do it much shorter. The widower can remarry right after his grieving period because the tradition allows him to do so, to avoid denial and to face the pain. The widowers are also allowed to not take part in the funerals of their wives.

At the same time, the widow whose husband has died is immediately put in a dark room inside the family's house. The widow must not open her mouth under any circumstance until her late husband is buried. She wears a black dress and is only allowed to wash in the evenings when everyone is asleep. She must shave her head and must cover her head with one of her late husband's pieces of clothing. The grieving period depends on the status of the late husband varying between three to five years before the end of widowhood. If the deceased is rich or is an authority in the community, the grieving period is much longer than if it is just a common person. The widow must keep her ring until her in-laws allow her to remarry.

The second important difference are the rites of the widows and the widowers. The widow-

hood rites in the widowers' cases harbor practices that involve him proving his innocence. For example, he must sit on the sacred leaves the day following the death of his wife for three hours, and if an ant bites him, he will be found guilty of the death of his late wife. If he is not guilty, the widower then chooses the date of the funeral and can withdraw for the organization. He must be present at the morgue and can choose to be present or not for the rest of the ceremony. As soon as the burial takes place, he will thus be able to be without his black or blue clothing and continue his widowhood for the period he has chosen.

For the widow, in our culture the rites start the same day the husband is no more. She is forbidden to eat from the same dish as her children and family members for a considerable number of weeks because she is considered ritually unclean. She will only leave her room the day of the funeral to go to the morgue to prove that she was faithful to her late husband and knew no other man except him during their marriage. The widow, for the first time since the death of her husband, will ask him to help her become widowed, to protect their children, and to give her the strength to remain faithful for the next three or five years. Only then will the deceased be bathed, and the remains of that bath water used to wash the husband's corpse will be given to the widow to drink. She must drink this water to prove her innocence and has to declare all the material possessions of the deceased. If she refuses, she will be banished and will be held responsible for the death of her husband. Similar to this, in some families, when a man dies, the woman is accused of killing him by the man's family, and the act of the widow walking across the corpse as it lays on the floor can show that she has not killed the husband. At that moment, everyone may see her as a witch and call her bad names.

The third part is the mourning period and the family decision. The widower has to stay in his mourning dress just for a period of his own choice. He can go after all his duties. The family of the late wife will bring him one lady from the family to help him with the children. When he is ready to remarry, the lady will go back to her family. No further restriction is made for the widower.

However, the widow, after the burial, is isolated and restricted from going to any market. If she needs anything, she has to look for someone to do that for her. She cannot attend meetings, dedications, and marriage ceremonies, for example, because she is considered unfit for public appearance. If she must go to church, she leaves to go back to her home as soon as the service is over. The widow must not wake up or be seen outside early in the morning, in order not to bring bad luck to people. She must continue to wear the mourning clothes for one year and can duplicate the mourning dress for the second year because according to the beliefs, the widow has to maintain one odor in staying in the same clothing for one year so that the deceased will not disturb her. Most of the time, the in-laws will take the decision to dispossess the widow of her husband's properties, and, as an excuse, will take her period of mourning. The widow must in no case desire a man during her widowhood and may not remarry before the three or five years have passed.

In conclusion, according to our beliefs, and how women especially in African countries are considered to be weak, they are exposed and treated badly in the widowhood period. In the rites, and even during the entire mourning period, the widows are subjected to inhumane treatment. The family always decides for the new life of the widow, but the widower is left to decide for himself, and that is not a good thing to do. Though it is good for every human being to value his customs and practices, it will be important to focus on positive things. Our women are traumatized for life. The scars left by the horrible pains from the loss of your loved one are accentuated by these practices. These rites don't honor women. Most of them come out of their widowhood broken and very wounded. I believe that now because of education and Christianity, most of these culture practices will change.



Cereal Fonio Recipe

I come from the plateau region, and my country is Togo. We really like to eat Fonio, a very popular cereal. I am going to tell you how to cook and eat it. We have many ways to cook it, and I choose to cook it the same way my mother showed me.

List of ingredients:

2 cups of Fonio

One medium smoked fish

One big chopped onion

Garlic

A tea glass of melted shea butter

Two big fresh tomatoes

Two tsp of concentrated tomato

One African eggplant

One red pepper

A few celery leaves

Salt and black pepper

Preparation: In a pot, heat one and a half liters of water. Add the shredded and cleaned smoked fish, the crushed fresh tomato, the concentrated tomato (paste), the dried onion, the chopped big onion, the celery, salt, black pepper and the eggplant. After that, you cover the pot and cook everything for 20 to 25 minutes. When the vegetables are cooked, remove them and set them aside. Then you wash the fonio, drain and dry it in the microwave. You must brown the fonio lightly in an empty pot. You check the seasoning and, if necessary, add lukewarm water to it and let it boil a little more. You now add the golden fonio little by little, stirring as you go. Cook it over low heat until the water evaporates completely. You check the salt, and if it's okay, you can now serve it hot drizzled with hot shea butter. You can garnish with eggplant and the red pepper, or even with cabbage. This food is my favorite. Please, try it at home; you won't regret it.

Essi Sylvia Gbedjangni



My name is Essi Sylvia Gbedjangni. I have lived in the US for almost 5 years. I was born in Lomé, Togo. I received my high school diploma in Togo. Now, I'm studying at Black Hawk College. I want to become a nurse, so this is the reason that I am still taking classes at Black Hawk College. I have one big brother and two younger sisters. I'm married, and I have one beautiful daughter. I always hoped to create an NGO to be able to help widows, orphans, and those in need. My dream is to be in partnership with those who live here in the USA and can help me to support these people. I will be very happy if I reach my dream.

Traditional Weddings in the Ewe Ethnic Group

The Ewe ethnic group is found in Togo. In Ewe custom, it is very important to have the traditional marriage for a girl because this is a sign of respect and honor in the family. The traditional wedding is done in two stages: the *Kokoko* and the official ceremony.

Before the *Kokoko*, the girl presents her lover to her parents; then he will come back with his parents to take the list of things to provide for the dowry and also to choose a date for the *Kokoko* ceremony. The groom's father will inform the elders of the family about the day of the ceremony. For this, there is not much to do because it is just a presentation of the family. The day of the ceremony, the groom and his family come at 4 a.m. to knock on the door of the bride's family. That day, the groom's father will tell his in-laws that they found a beautiful flower in his house.

The next event is when the groom and the bride prepare for the official ceremony. The



groom will give money to his aunts to buy some of the things that are on the list: Bible, necklaces sheets, loincloths, shoes, earrings, bags, candies, and he will take care of buying the drinks like whiskey, and *sodabi* (local wine). The day of the traditional ceremony is the big day when the two families and friends will celebrate the wedding. That day, everyone is excited and happy. The bride's family will ask the groom and his family to show them the list of what they

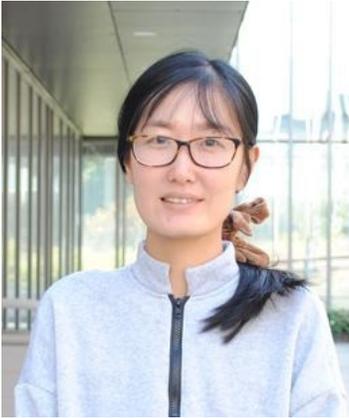
have to give. Then they ask one of the aunts of the bride to verify if what they brought is correct. After that, they ask that aunt to bring the bride. The first and second girl they bring will not be the bride. They cover the faces of the girls with a loincloth before bringing them just to see if the groom can recognize the bride. The third will be the bride. If the groom recognizes her, the bride's father will ask her in front of everybody if he can take what the groom brought. If she says yes, he will ask the groom to put the ring on the bride's finger. After that, the elders give advice, and there will be a small party where people will eat and dance.

In case the bride got pregnant before the official ceremony day, the groom's parents must come and apologize to the bride's parents saying their son has spoiled something in their house and that they have come to apologize for it. In this case, the price of the dowry will no longer be the same because the groom has offended the bride's family. The bride's parents will recommend for whiskey and wine to be added for the list of the official ceremony.



In conclusion, traditional weddings are very important for people of the Ewe ethnic group. This gives respect and honor to the bride's family, which is why all parents want their daughters to be married in this way.

Youngju Kim



My name is Youngju Kim. I'm from South Korea. I was born in Wonju, South Korea, but my family moved close to Seoul when I was in high school. I grew up in a middle-class family. When I was in school, I had an aptitude for Japanese and English. I got awards for English, and I got to experience Japanese culture as an exchange student for seven days. When I was 15, I earned my JLPT certificate while I was in high school. At the time, I wanted to be a Japanese diplomat or a Japanese interpreter. When I was in my senior year of high school, I applied to three universities, and I was accepted by all three, and they even offered me scholarships. But I dropped out of the college. I wanted to go to because I met my ex-husband who was in the US military in Korea. We got married in 2010, and I migrated to Kentucky in 2011 for the first time and moved back to Korea again later. Since we were a military family, we relocated a lot domestically and internationally. In 2013, my son was born on the US military base in Korea. In 2016, I got divorced, and I was a single mother for a while. I worked at a retail store and in the education field. In 2018, when I traveled to South Korea for a visit, I met my fiancé. My motivation to go back to college was for my family's better future, and I wanted to feel personal fulfillment. Currently, I'm chasing my dream of being a nurse. I'm naturally compassionate and love helping others. I don't think the nursing program will be easy, but I will try my best to achieve my goals and keep chasing my dreams.

Education In Korea

Korea is one of the most educated countries. We take education very seriously. I remember I used to stay at my high school until 10 p.m. If I went home earlier, I got in trouble at the school, which meant that I had to clean the classroom every day for a week. I didn't realize until I moved to America how highly Korea values education. There are many differences between Korea and America, but there are three main differences in terms of education in Korea and America: the school system, the afterschool system, and pressure and expectations from the school and parents.

First, Korea has a variety of schools. There is really no difference between public schools and private schools. The students from both public and private schools wear uniforms, and the students from both schools receive a good quality of education in both private and public schools. However, there are specialized schools for students such as foreign language schools, science schools, art schools, and international schools. On the contrary, America tends to have only private and public schools. They don't have a lot of different programs for compulsory education. A lot of Americans believe that private schools are better than public schools. Private schools are not as specialized as in Korea, but they are very often religious, for example, Catholic schools and Christian schools. Most of the private schools make the students read the Bible. Usually, Americans don't wear uniforms in public schools. In most private schools, it's required.

Second, America's afterschool system is very different than Korea's. In Korean schools, they teach you to be competitive with others at an early age. A lot of parents send their children to afterschool programs, and these programs are very challenging. They usually consist of math, science, Korean, and English. Parents don't mind spending money on education. Additionally, there are piano and art afterschool programs that children can take advantage of. Also, Korean schools offer

some afterschool programs that students can take twice a week such as foreign languages. On the contrary, there aren't many afterschool programs available in America. They have YMCA programs, but it's more like daycare and only helps the students with homework. YMCA staff usually come to school to watch children until their parents come to get them after they get off from work.

Third, the pressure and expectations from schools and parents are different in Korea than in America. Once you become a high school student in Korea, the school wants you to stay at the school until 10 p.m. to study the materials for your classes on your own. Korea's high school goals are for students to get accepted by good colleges in Seoul. A lot of students usually bring lunch and dinner, or the schools offer lunch and dinner. Koreans take university entrance tests very seriously. The exam dates will even be announced on the news. Since the schools' goals are extreme, parents' pressure on students is extreme as well. Some parents send their children to England or America to improve their English during school breaks. They expect their children to perform well academically and hire private tutors. On the other hand, American schools respect students' decisions, and parents usually respect what their children want to do, and they don't pressure their children. They just support what they want to do.

In conclusion, these examples show that Korea and America have differences in education. Korea has more specialized schools than America does, and you can still receive a good quality of education in both private and public schools, unlike in America. Also, Korea has more advanced afterschool programs than America does. Lastly, expectations from schools and parent pressure is vastly different than in America, and it can affect children in different ways. Perhaps balancing pressure and expectations from school and parents with freedom for students to make some choices would create an ideal education system because both Korean and American systems have good points.

Subak Hwache

There are many traditional Korean seasonal desserts, but I want to focus on *Subak Hwache* (watermelon punch). A lot of Koreans enjoy this dessert during the summer. Koreans make it with



a seedless watermelon and add other fruits. There are many options for it, and there are no specific recipes or rules for making it. It really depends on your preference, but I can confidently say that Koreans usually have their own family recipes, and I will share my family's recipe here. The ingredients you will need for 3 servings are: three cups of chopped watermelon, 1 cup of sliced peaches, 5 cups of milk, two cups of sprite, and 3 spoons of sugar. You will also need a big bowl. You can mix it all together and pour it into a small bowl later. Some people add ice cubes, and some people don't. Again, it's your preference. After you mix it all together in a

big bowl, you will need to pour it into a small bowl to serve, and then it will be ready to serve. It is really a simple recipe that anyone can make. You can find these ingredients in your local grocery store. You don't need to travel to an Asian market to obtain them.



Joyce Koudjodji



My name is Joyce, and I'm 19 years old. I was born in Lomé, the capital of Togo. We moved to the United States in 2012. My parents work at Tyson. I have two siblings, a sister and a brother. They are younger than me. I graduated from United Township High School, and my next plan is to go to college. As of right now, I'm a freshman at Black Hawk, and I am majoring in architecture because I love to draw and make things from scratch. My dream is to travel and see and learn new things about architecture. An interesting thing about me is I love to dance and make people laugh because it brings me joy.

Coming To America

Ever since I was born in my country Togo, West Africa, I didn't know where my father was. I didn't even ask where he was, but when I found out he was in America, I always wondered how it would be and what it would look like there.

When I first came to America, my sister and I were young. I was nine years old, and she was seven years old. I didn't know anything about America and was really excited when I heard we were moving there. It was our first time going on a plane, and it was terrifying for me. I used to think that my ears were going to pop because of the gravity when the plane took off. This made my ears feel big and puffy. The food they served on the plane was not my usual appetite because I saw it as American food. Some things were very new to me, and I didn't want to risk the chance of eating something that I didn't know. The only thing that looked okay for me to eat was the bread and butter. I thought it looked familiar, so I ate that instead. The food they served was nasty to me and my sister, and even my mom didn't like it. When we landed, everything was different, the buildings, food, houses, and schools. Indeed, everything was new to me, my sister and my mom. On the other hand, my dad had been in America for many years before us, and he spoke English. However, we didn't know how to speak English, and it was hard to communicate with people. Because I was never a very talkative person, not being able to speak English didn't bother me as much. However, my sister is totally the opposite. She likes to talk and was the first one hyped to learn English. I knew I had to learn it either way because it was the new language in the country that I moved to, and I knew it wasn't going to be easy.

Second, the first time I saw a school bus, I was amazed by how big it was with the



children inside because I had never seen such a thing. I wanted to go on the bus, too, so I asked my dad if I could go, and he said "Yes, you'll be going soon." I was happy but nervous because it was my first time stepping into an American school. When I first went to school there were a lot of students of different races. I was in fourth grade in my country but got placed in third grade when I started. I was so happy; however, at the same time, I was shy and nervous that day. At the end of the day, it went well because one of the teachers asked one of the students to show me around or accompany me so I didn't feel left out. It was a boy, and when

we went outside, and he asked me if I wanted to play, I said no. So he went back to playing. We were all outside for recess and that was a really new experience.

Finally, that day I thought I was going to be the only one that didn't know English, but I was wrong because I found someone that spoke the same language as me. I was so happy and excited that she was my first friend. The more I hung out with her, the more other people I met, and I got a little more talkative. I was still a shy person but not like before. That first day of school changed everything for me. All the friends I made in third grade were by my side all those years.

We went to all the same schools all these years till now, and we are still together. I feel like they've helped me a lot to feel comfortable and accept this new place I had to make my home.



School In Togo

In Togolese schools, many things are the same as in other countries, like coming to class, going to our seat, doing some warm-up work, or going to breakfast. Many other countries have school uniforms, and Togo does, too. The colors come in light green or blue. The design is like small square shapes, and girls wear dresses while the boys wear shorts and shirts. But not all of it is the same in Togolese schools. For example, a United States student will go to the cafeteria and get in a line and get some food on a tray. Then go to the chair and put the tray on the table and eat. After they are done, they get up and throw the trash away or leave it on the table so the workers can clean it up. Then they go to class and say a pledge. But in Togo, you will have to come to school on time because we have a bell, too. And when you want to eat breakfast, you'll have to eat it quickly because when the bell rings, you have to be in a line outside in the middle of the school for the pledge. If you're late, the teacher will know no matter what because they walk around to see if someone is missing in the line. If they find out, they will hit you with a stick. The sticks are not what you'll find on the ground somewhere. It is a weird stick that you can't find here in the United States. In class, when you talk or play around while the teacher is talking or teaching, they will lay you on a student desk (The desk is long enough for two students to share it) and hit you on the back all the way to the leg. Even if the teacher is not in the class, they will hear you because the class does not have a door, so it is easy for them to hear the students if they are talking and playing around in class. For PE, we don't have a big gym. We go outside after changing into our PE clothes. We go out in a line and march to a place where we do the activities, like soccer. In our school, we only played soccer because that is the most famous sport in Togo, so all Togolese schools mostly play soccer.

Samah Mohammed



My name is Samah Mohammed. I'm 30 years old from Gezira state, Sudan. I came from a big family with three sisters and three brothers, and I'm the oldest daughter in the family. I have two beautiful daughters, whom I adore. They make me go on in my life and drive me to achieve my career goal and obtain a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. My dream is to raise my kids to be proud of them and to make the world a better place.

Education System in Sudan

Education is the most important thing; the governments should work to develop it and keep it up to date. Before, it wasn't easy for the individual to get a chance to get an education, but now, thanks to the abundance we live in, it is not that difficult to be educated and improve yourself and get a prestigious job. Higher education systems differ from one country to another when it comes to the costs, numbers of universities and the educational materials, and Sudan is not an exception from the other countries.

First of all, the number of the universities and educational institutions is too small considering the size of the population, and the people there are really suffering to get a seat at one of the universities. Some states have no university at all, so the students have to travel long distances to get to the state that has a university, and of course it takes a lot of money. Travelling costs are the biggest problem for the students from those states keeping in mind that working while studying is not an option because of a lack of job opportunities.

Secondly, the educational materials are very poor in Sudan, and the scientific labs lack a lot. Scientific references are poor too and a little outdated in regards to the technological revolution we have witnessed. I remember that we had to finish one course without doing the experiments that were required before the final exam. Because of the lack of the substances, we couldn't complete the experiments despite efforts to obtain these materials. The conditions are really tough for professors, so large numbers of them have immigrated to different countries so that they can practice what they know in a perfect environment, and I don't blame them. The lack of educational materials is an obstacle to many students who dream of making a difference in their societies.

Finally, higher education costs and fees are lower in Sudan compared to other countries in the world, and it is almost nothing. Higher education is funded by the government, and the cost to students isn't enough to demand a good education, and that's why the educational system is not perfect. I think it would be better if the government found better plans to support education and to

oblige businesses and companies to contribute to it.

The bright side in higher education in Sudan is that the fees are insignificant, but the poor teaching materials make it very difficult for the students to keep pace with the educational development that is happening nowadays.

Sharboot

Sharboot is a Sudanese drink prepared especially on the *Eid Aladha* holiday for Muslims. The preparations start three days early before *Aladha* day when Sudanese women wash the dates with water and let them dry for some time. After that, they boil the water and add some spices like ginger and cinnamon to give it some flavor. Adding the dates to the hot water is the most important process, and then they give it some time to cool down. After that, they transfer the mixture to a sealable container and close it tightly for one day. The next day, the drink is going to be ready to be opened, filtered and poured into another container to be put into the fridge until the *Eid* day. The whole process takes around one to three days maximum. *Sharboot* is served on *Eid* day with the morning meal.



Reponse Muhoza



My name is Reponse Muhoza. I was born in Congo (DRC), in a place called Minembwe. I'm 18 years old and attending Blackhawk College at the moment, but I also want to transfer to another college after I graduate here. My career goal is to study aviation. I want to be a commercial pilot as my future job. I have seven brothers, one sister, same parent and I'm the youngest in my family, I'm not married but three of my brothers are and my sister. Our hopes and dreams is to get an education and have a better life here in United States. I like this place, but I would also want to visit Europe and other countries which is why I want to fly planes and travel around the world.

Burundi and United States Health Care

Just like many of the people in this class who were not born in the United States, I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We moved when I was only three or four years old. We moved to East Africa, to a country called Burundi, where I stayed until I was 15 years old. We came to the United States in 2019, and we have lived here ever since. I'm going to be talking about the difference between health care in Burundi and the United States.

First, Burundian health care is underdeveloped. It is really poor. They have emergency services, but when you call for help, it depends on where you live. For people who don't live in a city, it takes about two to three hours for the ambulance to get to them. Hospitals are supposed to give people hope to live by treating them, but in Burundi, hospitals open late and close early, and they only have one or two doctors at night for the whole hospital. It's not like this in the whole country, but it's really hard for people to get the treatment they need. It usually takes about five to six hours for people to get treated; a lot of people die on the way to the hospital because they don't have transportation. In addition, people wait hours and hours to see the doctor, and when the doctor meets them, he/she gives them one or two ibuprofen.

American health care is advanced. When people get sick, they make an appointment so that way they don't need to wait too long. All the documents are saved for you on the computer with your name. The emergency room is open 24/7 for people to get treatment. They take care of you with everything they have. In addition, when you call 911, the ambulance gets to you in less than fifteen minutes. The technology and how fast they respond here is amazing. It's faster than I could ever imagine. I'm sure if Burundi had the same technology, people wouldn't be dying the way it was when I was there.

Second, there is the cost of the hospital. In Burundi, insurance is really expensive, and there are so many types. However, some are cheaper than others, so you need to have a job in order to get a better one. The treatment costs a lot of money; it costs about 30,000 to 40,000 Franc. All I know is a lot of people die. Some lose their houses and farms and become homeless because of so many hospital bills.

Hospital costs in the U.S. are expensive, but most people have insurance that covers almost everything, and you don't need to pay right away. They treat you first, and you pay later. I know

some people become homeless in the U.S., but it is not the same.

I just hope one day I will return and help those who have issues with transportation, help to add more ambulances, and help build more advanced hospitals for the people of Burundi because that's one of the problems they have.



Abahebera, Traditional Dance and Music

The dance is called *abahebera*. I love to watch them perform. Whenever there was a big event, I used to go see them dance using drums and sticks. It's amazing how they do it. The dance is very popular in the east African country Burundi. They wear the same outfits with the Burundi flag all over as those are the traditional clothes. They usually go where the president is going to visit or any of the leaders in the government. Not everyone can do it. You need to practice for a really long time and be physically strong. My plan when I was in Africa was to be able to play it. However, anyone can dance it. But mostly it's women who dance and men who play the drums. They have a unique way to dance, but it's not like playing the drums. I miss them. When I go visit, I will make sure I see them again.

Chantal Nabageni



My name is Chantal Nabageni. I am originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I am married, and I have a three-year-old daughter, and I have seven siblings. I grew up in the East African countries, where I learned French, Swahili, Kirundi, and Kinyarwanda. My family and I resettled to the United States after living in Burundi for 13 years. I am currently employed at World Relief Quad Cities, an organization that assists immigrants and refugees. Since I was 8, my dream was to become a lawyer, and this was driven by growing up in a community plagued by many issues and injustices. My desire has always been to help others, especially those who were not able to help or defend themselves. My personal goal is to continue my education in college and gain skills, particularly in English. Studying at Black Hawk College will help me advance toward my leadership goal.

My Journey and Resettlement Experience in the USA

In general, most immigrants/ refugees immigrate to the United State of America for many different reasons like social, economic, political, religious and due to their fear of returning home. There are different categories of immigrants, such as naturalized citizens, permanent residents, refugees/asylees, and unauthorized people. There is not a single immigration story that fits every case; each and every one has a unique experience. My journey and experience include: the resettlement process, the selection, and the challenges.

I resettled to the USA in December 2018, after spending thirteen years in Burundi as a refugee. Burundi is a small and beautiful country, which is located in the East African area, close to Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. I am originally from DRC. In 2018, Burundi hosted more than 65,000 Refugees. When I got my high school diploma in 2012, the resettlement program began in the city of Bujumbura where my family and I were living. Everyone was talking about going to the USA, waiting to be selected for the resettlement program, but not everyone was eligible for resettlement. The requirements were clear; priorities were refugees who had been in the camp for a long time. The refugees in the camp were 59% of the population and urbans were 41%.



The chances for resettlement was very minimal, which led to high competition, rivalry, fights, hatred, and killings (through poison or witchcraft), especially in the refugee camps. At the beginning of 2014, my family and I got selected for the program of resettlement. It was an answer to a prayer we had been saying for so many years. We expected the process to take a few months after

the selection, but it didn't. The process took four years. Imagine what you could have accomplished in four years. Some of the refugees with whom we began the process dropped out of school, believing that they would be in America soon. Others took loans with the intention of paying them off in a few months but ended up in prison because they couldn't pay them back, and it was impossible to back their loans. For me, while waiting to come to the USA, many things happened. I got a scholarship from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative known as DAFI program, which gives refugees the opportunity to earn an undergraduate degree in the country of asylum. I remember many refugees, especially those who were in the camp, got the same opportunities but could not take advantage of it because they were asked to choose between pursuing their education or staying in the resettlement process. Most of them chose the resettlement; however, they are still waiting to come to the USA since that time. After I graduated, I met my husband, who was not a participant in the resettlement program. I married him, and after a few months of marriage, I received my visa to come to America.

The adventure began when I received my visa. It was exciting news to celebrate, but I was unable to do so because my husband was not eligible. I had only two choices: leave with my family or stay with my husband. As you are aware, refugees leave their country, and make hard decisions not because they want to, but because they have no other favorable option. At that time, as a refugee I was already going through some difficult times, such as financial difficulties and insecurity, So I decided to leave for a better future life. Before I came to the USA with high expectations of life, I contemplated the ideas of what I see in movies. In the movies, for instance, they don't reveal what happens behind the scenes; instead, we just see lovely houses, comfortable lives, people hanging around, and good places where everything is ideal. I didn't really know what life would look like in America until I arrived.



I came to the USA with a large loan for my airplane ticket, I faced the language barrier, new systems for transportation, schools, hospitals, technology, and so on. One day, I took a bus and went to the hospital to schedule a dental appointment; when I arrived, they gave me a number to call for scheduling. I was shocked; I could not understand why they could not just put me on the schedule list. So I returned back home and found someone to make a call for me because it was hard to communicate over the phone. Within less than six months, I had to work, pay my bills, support my husband and family left in Africa, and become self-sufficient. My first and second year were really hard. I could not find an easy job because I could not communicate in English, and I did not know how to drive. The only option I had was to get a job which did not require me to communicate or to drive. That kind of job is always hard, so I had to do what other people who could give me a ride were doing, which result-

ed in following their shift and schedule. For example, if they planned on leaving earlier or later for work, I had to do the same. I wanted to learn English during my first year, but I could not combine work and school at that time because I was working the night shift. So attending the morning class after spending eight hours working was hard. I needed to rest for my selfcare.

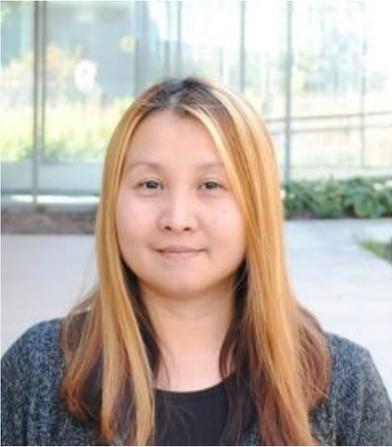
To conclude, my journey and resettlement experience was a hard, long road; however, I gained courage, strength and confidence in every situation that I faced. I always remember this quote, “A problem is a chance for you to do your best.” The challenge I had helped me to discover the talent I did not know I had before and showed me what a strong woman I was. I have been in the USA for almost four years, and I am still adjusting to the American culture and system; however, good things have happened to me; I am comfortable, self-sufficient, enrolled in school, have the ability to make my own decisions, and enjoy my new job.



The Value of the Cow in Banyamulenge Culture (DRC)

The cow (*Inka*) is not an animal like other animals in Banyamulenge culture. History shows that the cow is one of the most sacred things in their culture and considered as something that comes after a man. The cow symbolizes their culture, and was their main source of income, family heritage and serves as a dowry until today. The dowry could not be paid in any other form than cows. In Banyamulenge culture, they have a specific way they talk about the cows and treat them with great respect. For example, every cow has a proper given name and everyone, whether young or old, has to take care of it. In their culture, they even have special songs to praise the cow. Because of the value given to it, they said, “Those who owned cows did not get sick, did not get hungry for years, and did not lack servants and friends.” A long time ago, the community lived on milk and meat only, but when they started to travel and meet other cultures, they started to eat other food. Besides its milk, meat, and butter, which served as the community main dishes, its horns, skin, urine and waste was used to build the house and used as fertilizer.

Grace Say



My name is Grace, and I am thirty-four years old. I was born in Thailand, but my original background is from Myanmar. Because of the civil war crisis in Myanmar, my parents had to immigrate to Thailand. I was born in a Thailand refugee camp and lived in there for twenty years with my parents and two siblings. Living in the refugee camp was not easy. We were faced with life threatening situations and had no opportunity to study. I found a way to come to the United States to have better opportunities. Since I came to the US, I worked two jobs to support myself and my family. I faced the language barrier and struggle for living. I did not have a chance to come to school and study for many years. So to gain more opportunity, I made a decision to enroll in ESL classes at Black Hawk College. I have been studying ESL for three years. After I complete my ESL classes, I have a goal to study business management in the future. I am so glad to come to Black Hawk and study.

The Challenging Life of Immigrants in the U.S.

Many immigrants come to the USA for a better life and better opportunities. I came to the United States with the hope that I would create a better life, but I had never expected the challenges of living in the U.S. Since I am an immigrant, it is essential to learn how to adapt myself to a new environment and new culture. As an immigrant, there are many different problems and difficulties for me to go through to become successful. I have encountered mainly three barriers: language, culture and lifestyle.

One of the most obvious challenges is learning a new language. I know that the most important thing to learn is the English language while I live in the U.S. I knew that attending an ESL program will help me to overcome the language problem, but I didn't have enough time to take ESL classes for the past several years because I had to work two jobs to support my family back in my country. I tried to adjust my time to take ESL classes, so I have been taking ESL classes since 2020. The ESL program has helped me learn how to read, write and speak in English. I also struggled to communicate with people; for me, speaking only a little English made communicating difficult and caused me to misunderstand people. For example, several years ago, I went to a doctor's appointment and got a nasal spray prescription from the doctor to use twice a day. The symptoms didn't improve after taking it for a few days because I was supposed to spray it in my nose instead of taking it orally. I misunderstood the information that the doctor explained to me. I also struggled understanding the American accent because the pronunciation is totally different in my language. I am always nervous and embarrassed talking in front of people because I have a strong accent and sound incomprehensible to people.

In addition, another problem for immigrants is the cultural barrier. When I first arrived in the U.S., I learned that we are living in a rich and diverse culture in America. I know that Americans live in pursuit of their own happiness and respect other people's cultures. I believe that some values of American culture have influenced my life. For instance, in the U.S., when people are in line, they don't skip the line. If you skip the line, you are rude to others. In my country, people always skip the line when they are in a hurry and don't want to wait a long time. Moreover, people in the U.S. mostly respect the time; people are punctual to their appointments. Therefore, I try to be on time whenever I have an appointment. I have adapted to foods that I didn't like to eat before. For example,

pizza was not my favorite food, but I now like eating it frequently. Not only have I adopted a new culture, but I am also keeping my own culture. To keep my culture, I always wear traditional clothing when I go to church and speak my native language at home to help me not to forget my own culture. Adapting to a new culture is difficult, but over time I have gotten used to it.

Finally, lifestyle is another problem that I had to face in the U.S. Since I moved to the U.S., my lifestyle has changed a lot. I had to learn about the new environment that I live in. For example, when I first arrived in the U.S., I had to use the stove to cook. I was very afraid to use the stove because I was worried that the kitchen could catch on fire and burn down the entire apartment. I also had a hard time to get familiar with commuting in the city because the bus and subway systems were very complicated, and every transportation system was new to me. Finding a new job was very difficult for me who had just resettled in the U.S. I had to learn how to read and write basic English for six months to find my first job in the U.S. I also have responsibility for my housing expenses and pay monthly bills on time. If I pay the bill after the due date, I will get charged for a late fees. For instance, when I moved out of my previous apartment, I forgot to pay the last payment of the electric bill for a year, so the last payment came to a high amount with the interest. I didn't make the last payment because I didn't know that I had to call the electricity company whenever I moved out and into a new apartment. Therefore, I learned a lesson, and I now try to submit all payments on time.

To sum up, the challenging life of immigrants in the U.S may have seemed very difficult and discouraging for me at first, but everything is possible for me, and I try hard to continue to live a better life. As an immigrant, although I was confronted with problems such as language, culture and lifestyle in the U.S, I have turned the challenges into great opportunities, and I have overcome the problems. Specifically, today I am able to communicate easily with people, I have adapted the values of American culture, and my demanding lifestyle has changed into a fantastic lifestyle. I am grateful for my current life in the United States.



Karen Wrist Tying Ceremony



I'd like to share about the Karen wrist tying ceremony. Karen is an ethnic group in Myanmar and Thailand. The Karen wrist tying ceremony is held in August every year. In August, all Karen people gather wherever they live and celebrate the wrist tying ceremony. The ceremony is sponsored by the elderly people in the community. People who go to the ceremony have to wear the full traditional costume. The elderly use white thread and tie it around the wrists of young people and children. The elderly call upon the spirits of young people and children to come back and stay together with their parents and live free of fear and safe from harm and evil spirits. They put seven items in the hands of the children and young people and pray for them. The seven items have to be ready in the basket before the ceremony. The seven items are threads, rice balls, triangle sticky rice, boiled plantains, flower branches, sugarcane and a cup of cold water. The seven items represent peace of mind, protection, solidarity, loyalty, the ability to settle and grow, unity and good morals.

Ayaovi Vicentia Tina Soglo



My name is Ayaovi Vicentia Tina Soglo, and I'm 18 years old. I was born in Lomé, Togo. I moved to the United States in 2016, and I live with my father. I have seven siblings, and I'm the oldest child. I graduated from Moline Senior High School, and I'm a freshman at Black Hawk College and I will major in nursing. My dream is to travel around the world. An interesting thing about me is I love singing and being a comedian.

Speaking Two Languages

Back In Africa, I didn't have to worry about learning English until I came to the United States.

First, back in Togo we have Ewe, the traditional language and French, which we speak at school and sometimes at home, but we speak mostly Ewe at home. That is how I pretty much lived my life.

When I learned that I was coming to the United States, I did not worry about coming here. I was so happy, nervous, and sad at the same time. But once I got here, things got a little bit hard. I started sixth grade, and in my head, I thought they did not have any other Africans and that I would be the only African kid in the class, but to my surprise I saw other African kids in the school, and I was so happy that I could be in the same class with them.

From there, I started learning English. I will say that being the new kid in a different school and not knowing anyone was the hardest part of the experience that I had to go through, but in the end, I got used to all the things.

In conclusion, I will say that learning another language is helpful in so many ways, and I enjoyed learning English and am proud of how I can communicate now.



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