

# OUR SIDE OF THE STORY

## INTERNATIONAL VOICES at Black Hawk College

Fall 2012 • English as a Second language Program



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**Romain Edoth-Tossa** is my name, and I am



originally from Togo, West Africa. I have been in the United States since 2000. Before coming to Moline, I lived in New York and Minnesota. I can speak Mina, French, and English. I like meditation and science, especially computer science, and my dream is to be a specialist in this field. I enjoy my free time by watching TV, reading and listening to music.

I also like soccer and ping-pong. Life is beautiful, so let's work for the beauty of everything.

## My Wishes for Africa

When I consider the world and its evolution, I wonder where Africa is in the world. I remember in the sixties, a French scholar declared that, "Africa has started badly." Some Africans didn't agree with him, and today I would say that Africa didn't even start because if it did, we would find it somewhere, and we would hear its voice among other powerful voices when it comes to decide the way history will be written in the contemporary world, precisely after the independence of most African countries in the sixties. I declare that someone who leaves a place must forcibly be found in another place; otherwise, he is lost. In today's world, many important decisions are made without consulting African countries, for they dwell underdeveloped countries with diseases, famine, civil wars, etc. But I have hope, and these are my wishes for Africa in economic, political, education, and even military domains in pursuit of Africa's unity. My thought are very personal, and they are not exhaustive.



Above all, the whole world, without any doubt, agrees that Africa is an immensely rich continent with the oil of Algeria, Angola, Gabon, Ghana, Libya, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo; the gold and diamonds of

Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa; the cacao and coffee of Ivory Coast; the phosphate of Morocco and Togo; and many other raw materials dispersed in different parts of the continent. But the exploitation of this richness and the inequitable distribution of the revenue become a source of war all over the continent. We have the example of the Liberian Civil War in the nineties, and we have to consider the permanent war situation between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The conflict between those two countries is essentially linked to the lack of land. Indeed, it would be difficult to a vast and rich country like the Democratic Republic of Congo to live peacefully beside a small and poor country like Rwanda where 8.5 millions of people live with 395 inhabitants per square kilometer, and where Hutus and Tutsis frequently kill each other. Africa must unite to avoid the land problems and this kind of war between communities and between countries because once we are united, everyone can live where he or she wants. Of course before colonization, there were wars between some African kingdoms and empires, but the conference of Berlin in 1884-1885 divided the continent like a cake, and people and nations were dispersed in different countries limited by artificial frontiers.

Africa must unite so that from Casablanca to Johannesburg, from Dakar to Addis-Ababa, and from Cairo to Lagos, African people can move around freely for their economic activities.

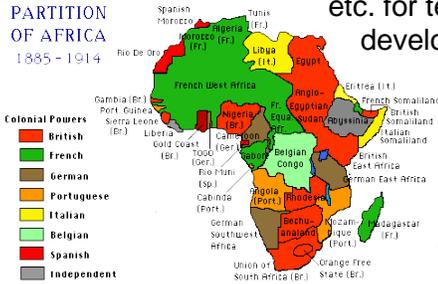
The economic activities would be flourishing in a united Africa. For this, Africa should create 5 economical regions which would be headed by the leader states like:

- Angola and South Africa
- Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon
- Ivory Coast and Nigeria
- Algeria and Morocco
- Egypt and Libya.

With those economic regions, Africa could modernize the agricultural activities through the mechanization and the use of chemicals. Industrialization of Africa is necessary, and it must be encouraged in order to transform the

numerous African raw materials and send the final products to Europe, Canada, China, Japan, Russia, U.S.A., etc., and the profit could be used to improve transportation, to build schools and hospitals, and to develop tourism. Henceforth, Africa must exchange oil, gold, diamonds, wood,

**PARTITION OF AFRICA**  
1885 - 1914



etc. for technology from developed countries such as France, Germany, Japan, and the U.S.A., and avoid receiving money, which is

often a source of corruption in developing countries. Recently, Radio France International accused countries like Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Malagasy Republic, and Equatorial Guinea of corruption. It would be better if developed countries sent their technology instead of money to Africa. The important financial dependence on foreign countries leads them to incessantly interfere with African politics.

Even though Africa must cooperate with developed countries, this cooperation has to be sincere and profitable to both partners. In many cases, the assistance from developed countries is rather based on their unilateral interests; therefore, the developed countries always want to put their servants at the head of African states. So the elections are fraudulent and followed by a lot of disorder in many African countries. It's necessary that confidence be established among Africans and among their political parties. Moreover, they have to respect themselves and each other in order to be worthily treated by their partners. Until now, it is not acceptable that the African continent doesn't even have a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council even though many Africans are well-educated and can lead important international organizations.

Education is an important problem in Africa. The basic education must be encouraged and be free for primary schools, and African languages must be taught. Literacy must be introduced in the villages, and professional education must be given a priority. It would be necessary for African students to acquire knowledge or gain experiences of high level studies in Asia, Europe, and the U.S.A.

Security of the continent is also very important; therefore, Africa must have a strong army to protect its land and its inhabitants. Today, the African armies are used in the civil wars, and they kill their own populations; they protect the government and repress the oppositions; also, the armaments are obsolete. Even though we don't necessarily need a nuclear weapon, we need sophisticated weapons to compel any aggression from land, sea, and air.

In conclusion, in spite of its enormous potential, Africa is far from being a peaceful and developed continent. Human history has always shown that there is strength in unity. Consequently, a united Africa would be strong, respected, and it would play a role in the modern world. This unity is necessary for the development of its economy, its politics, its education, and its armies. In this perpetually changing world, a delay in those different domains could be serious and dangerous to the whole continent; the history of civilizations, kingdoms, and empires has provided proof.



My name is **Sandra Jaramillo**. I was born in Valle de Santiago, Guanajuato, Mexico.



I'm 22 years old, and I have been here with my family for seven years. I have three brothers and one sister. I live in Rock Island with my family. I'm currently taking classes at Black Hawk College. I haven't decided my major yet, but I would like to work with computers. I like go to the church and hang out with my

friends. I like to listen to the music and play the guitar.

**MEXICAN FAITH: MY FAITH**

My religion is the same as most Mexicans': Catholic. The Catholic religion came to Mexico along with the Spanish. The priests who evangelized around Mexico are Fray Martin de Valencia, Fray Pedro de Gante, Fray Toribio de Benavente, and Fray Juan de Zumarraga. Some people accepted the religion, but others did not because they had their own beliefs. But to this day, the Catholic religion is special to



most Mexicans and very special to me personally.

Religion is very important in the lives of most Mexicans. We go to the church every Sunday. If we get married, we cannot divorce because it is against the religion. Mexican families baptize their children. The children make their communion and confirmation; we follow the rules of the religion and the word of God. In addition, the Virgin of Guadalupe is worshiped by all Mexicans. She is our mother, and she loves us even though we killed her son,



Jesus, because we are sinners. On December 9, 1531, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, who was an Indian. The Virgin of

Guadalupe spoke to him in his own language, Nahuatl, the local language of the Indians, and she asked for a church to be built on the Tepejac hill in her honor. Juan Diego told the Archbishop, Fray Juan Zumarraga, but the Fray Juan did not believe him. Fray Juan told Juan Diego that the Virgin of Guadalupe had to give him evidence or a miracle to prove her identity. On December 12, 1531, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared again to Juan Diego, and he told her that Fray Juan did not believe him. The Virgin of Guadalupe told him to pick flowers from the top of Tepejac hill. Although in December it was very late to

grow plants, Juan Diego found roses of Castilian, a very rare type of rose in Mexico. Juan Diego picked up the roses and put them in his cloak and the Virgin arranged the roses in his cloak. So Juan Diego went back to Fray Juan and opened the cloak in front of him and the roses fell to the floor. The



image of the Virgin of Guadalupe miraculously was imprinted on the fabric. Based on this miracle more than three thousand Indians converted to Catholicism. That is why religion is very important in my country because it was a delightful pleasure that the mother of Jesus chose to appear in Mexico. For centuries, this real story has been told. I said, "real" because the cloak with the Virgin's image is still in Mexico in La Basilica in Mexico City. However, for me my religion is more than a tradition because I live my religion very seriously.

Since I was a child, I believed in God, thanks to my mom, who influenced me to believe, but religion was not very important for me. I believe in God because I know that He created me for love, and He loves me the way I am. Religion became important in my life when I started to go to a group in the church called Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Moline. My friend, Carlos, invited me to this group, but I did not go because I did not care and I did not have the time to go. After one year, I met



Luis, who is my boyfriend. He also goes to this group. However, I decided to go with my boyfriend. My surprise was that I found the missing part: I needed God, who filled my emptiness. Before I met Him, I felt emptiness in my heart even though I had everything I wanted such as clothes, shoes, and money. However, I always asked myself why it was not enough. During that time I was in depression, and I was about to kill myself because I felt miserable, not loved and alone. Nothing had meaning to me, but God was there for me. Even though I could not see him, He was there. God saved my life by speaking to me through one person. These words reached into my heart. The words were "I love you." God saved my life. Many people feel this emptiness even though we have everything we want.

God continues to change my life to value all I have. I am a Mexican, who loves her religion with all of it is traditions. Finally, I am a daughter of God, and I'm here for a mission: to serve God and others and thank Him for His love and everything I have. I am still going to this group; I encourage everyone to get closer to God because He really changes lives. Just give Him a chance. Nothing fills us, just God.



My name is **Roger Yao Doke**. I'm from Togo. I have done my studies from primary school up to university in Togo. I am married, and I have two kids. I was an accountant in a big hospital in Lome, Togo, for eight years before coming to the USA. I realized my dream by coming to the USA and pursue my studies since I like to continue my studies in English and speak the English language fluently. I have been living in the USA since April 23, 2011. I hope to become a public accountant or work with an international organization since I am bilingual. My hobbies are: listening to gospel music, watching TV, and going for strolls.



### Loss of Values in Togo

Togo, one of the countries that are culturally rich in West Africa, has started losing its values by the contact it makes with other cultures, and especially through the colonization during which French people brought and imposed their language because they were looking for a common mean of communication among several traditional Togolese languages. Through this contact, my home country Togo has lost its values in many ways such as in language, in clothing, and in music. These losses of values continue to grow and affect the whole country since French people built their schools everywhere in the country and educated Togolese in French at a young age.



Togo is a country of linguistic diversity; the country has forty-eight languages spoken by the different ethnic groups. Through colonization, the French language has been imposed upon the Togolese at the detriment of the native languages. Therefore, the French language is taught at a young age in schools. For example, even in nursery school, teachers start teaching the French language. For this reason, the Togolese can neither speak nor write their native languages well. Furthermore, some children from well educated families where the French language is the only means of communication

are not able to utter a single word in their native language. For example, I can't speak my native language, Ewe, with the real accent like the people who live in my village. I speak my native language by mixing it with French words and a French accent. French influences my accent strongly in my native language. My home country put aside its valuable native languages and adopted French, the language of the colonist as its first language. Today, French is used everywhere in my country and serves as a common means of communication between different ethnic groups. Another place where the native languages lose their value is the workplace. Most of the workplaces are composed of people from different ethnic groups who are well educated. They have the language of Molière at their tongues, and they speak this language to communicate with each other since they would not understand each other in their different native languages. Therefore, in the workplaces you will hardly hear native languages spoken by the Togolese. The native languages of my home country lost their value through this practice of the French language.

Language is not the only area in which my home country loses its values but also in the way they dress. French people came to Togo with their own style of clothing. The French imposed their way of dressing at the work place where the workers must wear uniforms, suits or coats while working. For instance, soldiers, bank clerks, and students must wear uniforms. From there, this style of dress spread quickly to the Togolese markets with very low prices, and the population was very interested in these kinds of clothes, so they put aside their valuable traditional style of clothing. The traditional clothes are completely forgotten while the Europeans make a profit on their style of clothing. Through this event, the valuable Togolese traditional styles of clothing are lost. To illustrate, today, young men and teenagers don't know how to wear traditional Togolese clothes. They don't know how to put "a man big cloth" on their shoulder. For example, one day, I went to the traditional festival in my home town,

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and I was given this big cloth to wear. Truly, it was a big problem for me because I didn't know how to wear this cloth. I came from Lome, the capital of Togo, and I didn't know anything about this style of clothing since we didn't learn anything like this at school. I was completely frustrated. For instance, in some countries like Ghana, they install this valuable culture in their schools, so they teach students from the young age how to wear their traditional clothes, but in Togo, there is nothing like this in our schools. French programs take their places, which is very bad. Also, Togolese journalists who must be a good example by wearing traditional Togolese clothes to show the value of our clothes on TV are always in a tie and coat like European journalists. These Togolese journalists are not promoting the value of Togolese clothing. Therefore, through colonization, and the Togolese attitude and behavior, these valuable and nice traditional styles of clothing that our forefathers left for us are completely lost in the Togolese culture.

Another area where Togolese values are lost is music and dance. Togolese traditional music and dance are abandoned due to the profit of European music and dance. The valuable music and dance which need to be



developed are thrown away. Through this, Togolese only copy the music and dance of other countries, especially European countries. In the old days, the music that our grandfathers composed was very rich with many lessons because their music was based on our

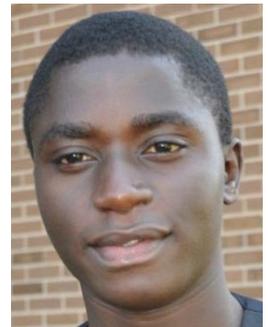
tradition. This gave the music its value; however, nowadays, they copy European music, so the music does not have the necessary values because the lessons in the music are not based on the realities of Togo. The real value of Togolese music is lost through these copies of music. For example, traditional Togolese music, such as agbesse, borbobor, akpalu, gadjo, agbadja, disappeared in Togolese culture and was replaced by rap music, funky music, and zook love music, which are all European styles of music and dance. Another behavior that causes the loss of value of Togolese music is

that the Togolese media such as radios and televisions like to play too much foreign music. By doing this, the population is interested in foreign music to the detriment of our traditional music and dance. Togolese music and dance has lost its value because they don't teach this kind of music and dance in the schools in Togo. Since we know that school is a gateway of knowledge, the new generation has no knowledge about the traditional music and dance. Through this practice, the country has lost its values in music and dance.

In conclusion, through colonization, attitude, and the behavior of the Togolese, Togo has lost its linguistic, clothing, and musical values. Keeping these values alive could help Togo to become a good melting pot in which traditional values and European values could live together for the development and betterment of the country.

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My name is **Bukuru Jackson**. I was born in a small town called Nyanza-Lac, which is in the region of Makamba, Burundi located in East Africa. There are nine people in my family: my parents, my three sisters and four brothers, including myself. After I was born, the war started in my country, so we had to flee the country. We went to reside in



Tanzania, where I spent most of my life. Fortunately, in 2007, the U.S. government agreed to help refugees whose lands were taken by rebels during the war by giving them resettlement in the United States. In June of 2008, I arrived here in the U.S. I enjoy living in the U.S. because there are a lot of opportunities here for everybody. My plan for the future is to become a businessman and to become a preacher.

## Challenges Faced by Burundians in Their Everyday Lives

Burundi has experienced many economic issues and has been in a war for a long time. In 1993, many Burundians fled the country and settled in neighboring countries such as Tanzania and Congo, due to ethnical conflicts, which led to the death of the first Hutu president, Ndadaye Melchior. The war in my country,

Burundi, damaged a lot of things including people's lives, properties, and the environment. It became one of Africa's poorest countries after the war. Today, life in Burundi is very tough because of its poverty. In their everyday lives, people in Burundi have to deal with three problems, which are economic, health and political challenges.

The first problem in everyday life in



Burundi is economic challenges. The Burundian economy is so bad that many people starve. Many of the people still living there eat once a day; they eat only dinner because they

don't have money to buy food. They don't have money because many of them are unemployed, even those who have finished their education. For example, I have a cousin who graduated with a judicial degree from the University of Bujumbura, a major city in Burundi, but he couldn't find a job anywhere in the country. He is in a very difficult situation today because he doesn't have a job. He does not have money to buy food, clothes and other necessities of life such as shelter. Many teachers are being laid off because of the worsening economy. A lot of students can't continue their education after getting out of high school because they can't afford to pay for college or university. Another example of the difficulty of life in Burundi is my friend whose family lives in a grass house because they don't have enough money to buy or build a brick house like other Burundians. Not only does this family live in such a house, but many other Burundians do, too. Sometimes, these houses made of grass are burned down by wildfires during the summer, or they are burned down when people are cooking in the house. Burundians' everyday lives need financial support. They need enough food to eat in order to live. Moreover, they need shelter and clothing so they can live like human beings, not like animals.

The other trial of everyday life in Burundi is health problems. Mainly caused by the war, a lot of Burundians currently have health problems, such as



heart disease and disabilities. They are not able to do certain activities like play sports, attend school or work, in order to support their families. It is not possible for them to do these activities because some of them have lost their legs or arms or both during the war and others have become blind after the war because of the lack of nutritious food. Life in Burundi is hard for others because they have infectious diseases, which prevent them from working or doing other activities. Those diseases are rabies, yellow fever, a viral infection that it spread by mosquitoes, and HIV. A lot of Burundians and foreigners residing in Burundi are suffering from these diseases, and many of them are dying because of the lack of medical facilities and poverty. Health problems which cannot be solved are big challenges to Burundians.



The last tribulation of life in Burundi is political challenges. Political issues have been the main causes for thousands of Burundians to immigrate to foreign countries. Burundi has two major political parties, which are FRODEBU (Democratic) and UPRONA. These two groups oppose and hate each other, due to the death of the first Hutu president and Democratic leader, Ndadaye Melchior, who was killed by the other party, which started the war. Burundians and other foreigners living there do not feel safe because politicians keep arguing among themselves every day. The reason for their arguments is the assassination of the first Democratic president. Due do this, one party doesn't want another party to rule the country. They keep arguing over power. Burundians and foreigners living there fear that there will be another war in Burundi, since politicians do not want to settle their arguments. Every day, Burundians who fled to other countries during the civil war listen to news in order to find out what is going on between the parties. The lack of understanding between politicians makes people who fled to foreign countries, including myself, fearful of returning home.

In conclusion, everyday life in Burundi is difficult because Burundians face many challenges such as economic issues, health problems, and political issues. In my opinion, the

Burundian government should ask for international support in order to save the lives of thousands of Burundians who are starving and dying because of poverty.



Moreover, the leaders of other countries need to understand that we, Burundians, love our native country, but we don't feel like going back there because the political parties keep fighting over power.

Instead, they need to settle their arguments and allow us to return to a peaceful country.



It is a pleasure for me to tell you who I am. My name is **Sofiatou Gbadamassi-Gloh**, and I am twenty-four years old. I was born and grew up in Gabon, and I am the first born in my family. I moved to Togo, my country of origin, to continue my studies after getting my high school diploma in Gabon. In 2011, I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Financial Accounting. My family is very important to me. I have three siblings, two brothers, Ramzy and Zacharie, and one sister, Rodiatou. I came to the United States to improve my education. When I was a teenager, I used to be my mother's cashier at her restaurant, and this inspired me to major in accounting. My mother is a business woman; my father is an architecture instructor at the college level. In my free time, I like playing piano, cooking and listening to gospel music, and my wishes are to work for a company and to speak English fluently.



## Welcome to Togo's World of Art

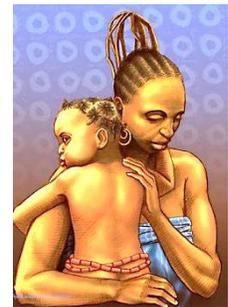
Do you know that the appreciation of nature through a work of art can be regarded as one of the greatest pastimes? Each country values its culture differently through music, tourism, art, festivals, painting etc. In my country Togo, a small nation in West Africa, we value our culture through the work of art. Togo's



culture is represented in the variety of artworks, and art has allowed Togo to organize fairs which bring a

positive profitability to the communities.

In West Africa, Togo offers a variety of its art products which contribute to its economy. Paintings, bracelets, handicrafts, statuettes, batik, engravings, ceramics, baskets, clay pots, and decorated potteries are various Togolese works of art. The variety and the quality of the sculptures or paintings are also astonishing, and most of them carry a specific meaning. For example, a picture of a mother with her child may represent mothers who are *as gentle as sunlight on an April morning since they take care of children with love*. In addition, artists make key rings in the form of Togo, statuettes in the form of animals or people, and necklaces and bracelets made from pearls in order to embellish a woman's body. Sometimes, people ask themselves which materials artists use to make some beautiful sculptures. For the manufacturing of their works of art, the artists usually use ebony wood, mahogany wood, bamboo, and plastic to manufacture them. Besides, some women weave textiles with the bright colors which represent the traditional African life in the village and the Togolese history. Therefore, African women use these bright colored textiles to create their clothing; the designers, the model makers, and the dressmakers continue to make clothing a piece of artwork that is an ornament of beauty and wealth. People can find these various works of art in the galleries, museums and in artisanal stores in Togo.



Next, art has an importance in the Togolese culture. Every two years, Togo organizes an international fair, and this fair consists of presenting the artisanal products made in Togo. Thousands of people from Asia, Europe, and Africa come just to admire or buy these works of art. The fair seems to be as big as a football field. People spend their time to admire and to appreciate the necklaces and bracelets in unique multicolored pearls, small kitchen utensil, crowned statuettes and other artworks. In addition, Togo offers visitors many objects of this traditional craft. The goal of the international fair is to have an exposition of the work of the major artists from all of the countries of West Africa. Togo organizes a fair in order to

show its cultural values, to discover the potential of other cultures, and to attract many tourists. Before any exposure, a multitude of ethnic groups from Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, and Niger made these artistic pieces. Additionally, I created my own small experiment with the world of art in December 2011. I was part of a group of students who participated in this fair, and we sold artisanal products, such as key rings, beautiful vases of flowers, women and men's shoes made of leather, and clothing made with textiles. For that, we had sought suppliers in the area, and then we made a work contract with three suppliers in order to sell their goods. It was really beautiful to see this artwork exhibition that expresses the values of the Togolese culture.



As a final point, art carried out in Togo has some positive effects because this sector of art is generating employment and profit in Togo. Even though having a job in Togo is difficult, people seize this opportunity to be creative themselves. The abundance of raw materials helps many

artisans to make many crafts and sculptures. Several artisans work alone or in a group at the art center, or they open their own businesses where they produce a variety of artisan souvenirs. Most of the artisans sell their works of art to the tourists; they make a profit from this. Moreover, exposition in an artisanal fair usually brings earnings. My experience with seven students who participated in this art exhibition in 2011 is unforgettable. We sold lots of works of art; as a result, when the fair was finished, we had made a ten percent profit. We felt like successful entrepreneurs, and we were happy because we made money through the sale of a variety of artwork. Also, the three suppliers were glad because we were able to sell their goods. As rewards, each supplier offered us some gifts and paid us for the service.



In conclusion, Togolese art is making a big change in the Togolese economy. Togo offers many works of art to admire, to keep as souvenirs and to help decorate a home. Art is very important because it generates many jobs and profits. Some Togolese artists teach themselves and don't learn from any art courses

while others learn from other artists. They perfect their works of art with more practice and belief in their natural gifts and talents. Art is so special to me because it makes me proud of my country.



My name is Akou Eklou, and I am from Togo, West Africa. I am twenty-five years old. I have one older sister and three younger sisters. I have been living in the U.S. with my family for three years. I am single with no children; I work at Farmland Foods, and I study at Black Hawk College in Moline. I speak three languages: Ewe, French and English. My dream is to become a nurse, so I can take care of all people. My hobbies are singing, dancing, shopping and spending time with my family.



### **Funerals in Ewe Society: How Expensive Are They?**

No one wants to talk about death and funerals. Unfortunately, death is a fact of life and there simply is no way to avoid it. For indeed, there is a time to be born and a time to die. When someone dies, we hold a funeral, but the cost and the details involved in a funeral can be very expensive, and every culture throughout history has marked death with a ritual or ceremony. In the same fashion, funerals, traditionally, are extravagant in my village, which is part of Ewe society because they include a multitude of events.

I still remember the proceedings of the ceremonies of my dear beloved uncle, Akapko Kossi, in 1997. May his soul rest in peace. After eight months of sickness, my uncle died. Although our family members endured a lot of expenses for his diagnosis and treatments, as well as for his doctor, nurse, and herbalist, no one was able to save his life. The last place, where he was hospitalized before he died was the hospital of Tokoin. On this morning, he woke up and asked to talk to my mother, his little sister. The last phrase that he said to her was, "Please, take care of my only son, Emile, for me." Then he passed way, and my mother shook his body, but he would never say another word again. Everyone in our family was waiting for his healing, but instead, we were obliged to

accept the reality that we couldn't avoid his death.

My uncle's death was a very tragic event and shockingly sad news that left my family heartbroken. As other deaths in my family, our family respected all the steps of an Ewe society funeral. When my uncle passed away, all



the family members were concerned with informing each other about this tragic event. Then all the family members met to plan his funeral, which included a lot of details. As the family members were planning the funeral program, the body of my uncle was at the mortuary. The funeral ceremonies usually take place over a single weekend just after a death or after several weeks to allow family members or relatives who live far away from our village to prepare and accommodate work. Similarly, my uncle's funeral ceremonies took place two months after his death, so his body was at the mortuary all this time. In my village, the funerals take three days, usually Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and include six big steps with two special events which are the wake keeping and the burial day.

The six big steps of Ewe society's funeral are:

- Nudogbe, which means the wake keeping day
- Amedigbe, which is the burial of the body, previously preserved in the mortuary or traditionally with herbs
- Ndinamegbe, which means the main mourners, one day after the burial has taken place
- Yofogbe is the day, where lineage rituals are performed and gifts are offered to the family of the deceased, especially to help with the costs associated with the funeral.
- Akontawogbe, which means three day after yofogbe, donations are estimated.
- Xomefewogbe: the final cost of the funeral is established.

Funeral donations are a main focus in the proceedings of the ceremonies due to the high cost of our society's funeral. Costs include the coffin, the burial clothes, public dances, food and alcohol, and also guest accommodations.

Although the six steps are included in our Ewe society, the wake and the burial day are the most important events in our funeral.

The wake keeping day is one of the most popular events in each culture's funeral, and it is seriously planned in the Ewe society. On the wake keeping day of my uncle's funeral, everything was very well-planned. It started on Friday night at 10 pm. It took place under a big shed that the young people of the village had helped the family members build for the funeral. The family had to borrow a lot of chairs for the event. All the people of the village and the guests were seated under the shed like crowds waiting for a race competition. Then the man of God, who was invited, celebrated the mass for the repose for his soul, and one of the family members presented a summary of my uncle's life as it usually happens at our funerals. At the end of the mass, different types of dancing, such as Bobobo, Agbadza, and Akpe, took place under the shed, and people were free to watch any of the groups. The music was very loud, inspiring and provoking. I was inspired too; I danced although I was crying. The members of the musical groups were very dynamic, and the music was lively. They were dancing beautifully and gracefully. The dancers were energetic, enthusiastic and radiant. At midnight, the family members came from the mortuary with the dead body. In the mortuary, they took the time to wash the dead body and put him in his burial clothes. When they arrived with the dead body nicely prepared, the family members extinguished the light, so people knew that they had arrived. People cried and shouted everywhere. Next, they put the dead body in a room that was prepared for his last viewing. Family members went to see the body, and everyone else had the right to see him too. While people went to see him, people were dancing. The family members had to bring different kinds of foods and alcohol to last whole the night. The different kinds of food that we usually cook are rice, akoume, fufu, and zogbon. Zogbon is a kind of porridge that was shared at the wake day.

The burial day is the most important day in our society. The wake continued until the morning of the burial day, which was Saturday. In the morning, our family brought the guests and people who stayed at the wake until the morning zogbon under the shed. At 9 a.m.,

people had to go to the burial mass. During this day, family members wear a uniform of African clothes; they are usually black in color. Women wear a skirt and T-shirt, and men wear pants and a T-shirt, too. Also, it is an opportunity for



people to show others the importance of their African clothes. People who do not wear African clothes are frowned upon. The people at my

uncle's funeral were elegant with their clothes; especially the women, who looked as beautiful as the sunlight. At this mass, they brought the dead body in a coffin. At the end of the mass, all family members stayed around the family for their last ceremonies, and they closed the coffin. Then four men carried the coffin on their head, and they were in the front of the audience with the family members headed for the cemetery. They snake walked to the cemetery, and people cried, sang, and especially my uncle's own son, Emile, cried as if it was raining outside. Their faces looked like dark clouds. At the cemetery, people took their place around the burial site dug by the young people of the village. The man of God pronounced his last phrases, and the coffin was buried. Then, people come back from the funeral, and the ceremonies continued.

In my village, funerals are one of the most likely places to see colorful performances of dance, which still continue after the burial. Usually, lively and spectacular performances follow the life of an honorable and involved member of the community such as the chief of our village or a rich person.

On Sunday, a mass of thanksgiving takes place. Family members celebrate by giving thanks to all the people, especially the guests. After the mass, people can leave the funeral place and return home.



After all the proceedings of my uncle's funeral, my parents came back from our village; we suffered the next month because they used all their money for the funeral. When my mother presented the final cost of the funeral to me, I

could see how much it was, and how difficult it was to plan the funeral. To sum up, when someone dies, the family members don't just cry for his or her death, but for the expenses of the funeral as well.

In conclusion, my uncle's funeral followed each step of Ewe ceremonies, and the ceremonies were very expensive, but it was the saddest day I have ever had because I was close to him during his life, so my father gave me the chance to follow them to the village and to participate in each event. I was most sad during the wake and burial day. During the wake and the burial day when I saw his body on the bed, that upset me the most. It made me cry a lot when the coffin was finally closed. I still remember this sad day when I hear of someone's death.



I am **Dodji E. Mawougbe** from Togo, West Africa. I'm



27 years old, and I have been in the US for four years. I speak four languages: French, English, Ewe and German. I am a student at Black Hawk College and employed at Tyson. I have four sisters and five brothers. They all live in Africa with my parents. In my free time, I watch TV, movies, and soccer games. My dream is to

be a radiologist one day.

### Togo – a Peaceful Country: Why Are So Many People Leaving?

Togo, my homeland, is a small country in West Africa, bordered by Ghana to the west, Benin to the east, Burkina Faso to the north, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. It has not had any war troubles since the country has been independent, and it looks like any peaceful country in the world, where many people immigrate every day. Among these people who move to Togo, we can count Ghanaians, Nigerians, Burkinabe, Chinese, French, and others who enjoy their life in Togo. In contrast to the past, the country now has its freedom, and people can stand up these days in order to express their desires, opinions, and talk about what is going badly in the country.

During the time of our famous President Eyadema Gnassingbe, people could not say anything negative about his governance, but

these days with his son Faure Gnassingbe, who took his place after his death on February, 5 2005, Togolese, even foreign people have this freedom, which gives them the voice of democracy. Political parties now have the authority to manifest their movement in the country from north to south, and many people who lived in exile because of the political issues are back in their homeland. Gilchrist Olympio



and Koffi Gnagnam, who are both politicians, are great examples to illustrate this fact. In the past, they were not able to live in the country because the president was afraid that they would organize a

putsch against him; therefore, they were persecuted.

People may ask why there are so many Togolese immigrants in different parts of the world even though the country is peaceful. To clarify a misconception that many people have, I will say that not all Togolese who are living in the different countries of Europe and in the US are refugees. Only a small percentage of people left the country because of political issues. In contrast to other countries, like Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Somalia, Congo, whose people left because of civil war, the main reason why Togolese have moved to European countries and the US are economic conditions, especially the lack of jobs, and problems in the education area. For example, many Togolese who are living in the US now are coming here with a program that the American government created to help them. This program is called "Visa Lottery." And before getting this visa, a person must prove that he has a high school diploma or other certificates required by the US government. This lottery is held every single year, and over 825 people win in Togo alone. That is why in different U.S cities such as Moline, Atlanta and New York, you will see lots of Togolese. Not only do they have their diploma, but they also like to further their education and obtain more degrees when they come to new places. This is a particular observation now in Moline, where plenty of Togolese immigrants are taking as many



classes as they can at Black Hawk College. These people are often going to school while working full-time jobs in local factories because they hope to get better jobs in fields like accounting, human resources, and information technology in the future. There are many Togolese people in the area who have been able to obtain great positions at John Deere, Alcoa, or local banks after years of hard work.

The reason that Togolese people have chosen to come to the USA, and the Quad cities in particular, is simple. The first Togolese immigrants who came to the Quad Cities let others know that it is a wonderful place to live, and getting jobs is much easier than in other places, like Chicago and New York. So if someone comes here, and he realizes that the place is great, he will bring his friends. For this reason, there are more and more of us here and Americans often guess that we are refugees, like ours peers from other countries. One important reason



that brought people here is the education that is available here. Even though the ESL program is a bit long and intensive at Black Hawk College, it provides a helpful service to immigrants. It helps us to perfect our communication and writing skills through different classes.

All in all, Togo is a peaceful country, and democracy is on its way. I invite all people who plan to visit Africa to visit my homeland, Togo. Even though not everything is in place yet due to some rebuilding, I encourage all of you who would like to visit Africa to choose Togo because I have the conviction that down the road, the country is going to look great.



My name is **Puspa Gajmer** and I came all the way from the " Land of Thunder Dragon," Bhutan. I arrived in the United States on September, 28, 2011 carrying piles of dreams. I always keep my motherland, Bhutan, in my heart. I am 27 years old. I usually believe that parents are like God whom we have to serve and respect to the best in life. My father passed away in 1993. Now I have two mothers, and I take care of them so much. I got my Bachelor Degree in Arts, and studied western classical music in guitar many years in Nepal. My dream is to be a Bhutanese classical guitarist, composer and music arranger in the future. In my leisure time, I compose songs, read books, and play musical pieces. I hope life will be better here.



## My Childhood Memories of my Motherland, Bhutan

I was seven years old when I had to leave my motherland. In 1989, a civil war started in Bhutan between local people and the government regarding human rights and social equality in the country. So, my family and I were compelled to leave my motherland because of the government harassment to the ethnic Nepali minority and civil war in Bhutan. As I moved to Nepal in 1992, I lived there in exile as a refugee for twenty years in clusters of thatch huts, which were made out of bamboo. Finally, I made a journey to the U.S on Sept. 28, 2011. Although my motherland is far away from me, I miss my motherland very much, and I still have my clear memories of my home country, Bhutan.



My bygone days of Bhutan are the days of my village and remarkable experiences. As I imagine the moments back to my childhood, I usually recall the beautiful and enigmatic scenic beauty of my village in Bhutan. Although I was small, the moments I spent playing under the big trees and on a sleepy hill always come in my mind. The moments I spent playing ball on a beautiful ground of my area are still fresh and printed in my hearts as a remarkable memory. The Bhutanese community in my village was very good to help each other in case of need. The system in my village was very nice where each one of the village people used to give a

hand and encourage one another and support each one of the people very nicely. People were friendly, sociable and kind-hearted.

The snow-peak mountain near my house still wanders in my mind and feels as if I am still in my backyard playing with my neighbor friends . The stream behind my house was the main place where I used to visit to quench my thirst of happiness, and I used to swim there, especially in the summer season. The most memorable quality of my village was the people's unity to carry out any type of work. For instance, if there was a problem in a neighbor, the next neighbor used to help. There used to be financial support in the funeral ceremony. Therefore, the remarkable activities are still striking my mind of the past moments of my motherland.



The markets of my motherland still paint a beautiful picture in my memory. In the U.S, as I go to K-mart and Wal-Mart, however, I feel I am lost in a mighty horizon of sorrows and feel very sad. But, I feel joy when I think about the shopkeepers sitting on the side of the market in Bhutan asking consumers what were they looking for and trying to buy are still in my memories. I still remember those days when my mother gave me some money to go the market. We went on Sunday with my brother playing hide and seek in the bushes by the side of the road as we were going to the market. Beside this, I usually remember those days of my motherland when my mother gifted me with sweets which pleased me for whole day. So, I am proud of my Bhutanese markets which are extraordinary.



Another recollection of my childhood is the day I started going to the primary school for the first time with my brother. My brother was in Level Three, whereas I was placed in Two. The classmates were very friendly and helped me in finding and in doing any sort of difficult tasks from classwork to homework. Although every Bhutanese mate was good, one of my friends named Dorjee Tshering

of the Drukpa family was very clever and honest with me. We used to play together most of the time. The necklace that he gave me is still in my box, which reflects the intimacy between us of



those bygone days. Although our past is easy to forget, he remains as a memory in my heart ever.

By the time I was about to celebrate my eighth

birthday party, the world's most peaceful small nation was suddenly plunged into revulsion and horror where there were the discrimination and the violence between Lhotshampa and government in regard to religion, caste and creeds, human rights, etc. Innocent Nepalese were killed, arrested and sentenced to death. Every moment we spent at home, was very frightening and terrifying to each one of us. We couldn't live safely and comfortably. On August 12, 1990, there was a very sorrowful and remarkable night for us. That night at around ten o' clock, a gang of armies came to my house and asked my mother if our father was at home to be arrested. When she just replied, "no", my mother was knocked down and kicked on her head. The soldiers

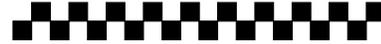
warned us that they would kidnap my sister, but luckily both of my father and sister had left for my uncle's house



that evening to escape from the army. So, the next day, as soon as my dad and sister stopped by, we decided to protect our critical lives from those tyrannical rules and norms of the country in the night. Having left all that property, land, assets and a beautiful house, the time had come to end our beautiful life of my motherland and live somewhere far from its lap forever. Presently, the images of my country arise in my mind like hallucinations.

My motherland, Bhutan, used to be the safest place to live in, and to enjoy where one could walk around the street at any time from morning to mid-night. People honored their behaviors, shared their feelings and respected each other in many ways. I love and keep my special memory of my motherland in my heart so much. I pray that one day I will return to my

country and experience fresh native air because it's a giver of happiness even at the end of my life.



My name is **Afi Sena Degboe**, and Togo is my home



country. I was born on March 7, 1976 in a family of 7 children. I came to America in 2001 at the age of 25, with a permanent resident visa, and I became an American citizen in 2008. I'm married and have three children. I'm currently a Licensed Practical Nurse, but I'm continuing my

education to become a Registered Nurse and possibly get my bachelor degree one day.

### Free to be Me!

Is the American dream the pursuit of happiness or the chase after big money, fancy cars, or big houses? James Truslow Adams, in his book, The Epic of America, which was written in 1931 states that the American dream is "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement." Everybody can define his own American dream, but my American dream is coming true as I succeed through hard work, I now have the potential to lead a happy life, and to have the freedom to be myself.

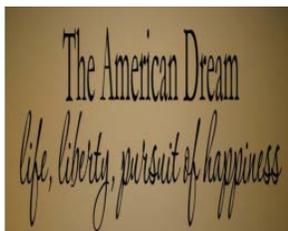


First of all, my American dream is becoming reality because of hard work. I wake up every day and work hard to pursue my passion of helping others through education. First, I have always wanted to be a nurse, but I did not have the opportunity to reach that goal in my country, Togo. When I moved to the USA, I was determined to pursue my dream by going back to school. Although there were challenges along the way such as having to learn a second language, English, today I have a Licensed Practical Nursing degree. Not only am I continuing my education in order to get my associate degree in nursing, but I am also

studying to get my bachelor's degree. I know this dream will come true one day. In addition, I'm pursuing my American dream by helping others. For example, since I came to America, I have become the one whom everyone in my family is looking up to, especially my younger siblings. Before I left Togo, one of my younger brothers had his high school diploma and wanted to study engineering, but my dad was not able to pay for his tuition, so he chose another major at the university. When I came to the USA, he counted on me to help him achieve his goal. As soon as I got a job, I started saving. I had enough money to pay for his engineering tuition. Today, I'm glad to say that my brother finished school, graduated with a bachelor's degree in engineering, and is working for a very distinguished company in Togo. He is also taking his turn to help our other siblings reach their goals. Not only is my American dream to pursue my education, but it is also to help my brother accomplish his dream.

Secondly, my American dream has become real, for I'm leading a happy life by doing what I love for a living and by having a family of my own. One of the things that make me happy is helping and caring for people who really need it no matter their age, or their health condition. That is why I became a nurse. For instance, when I was fifteen years old, I helped my mother take care of my grandmother who had a stroke and became paralyzed on one side. I enjoyed feeding her, bathing her, and reading to her. That was how I got the inspiration to become a nurse, so when I moved to America, I pursued that passion. I love my profession. Another dream I had when coming to America was to have a family of my own, and that dream came true when I met my husband here in America. We fell in love, got married and now we have three beautiful children. Although we don't own a business, a big house, or fancy cars, we are grateful for having each other. My American dream is coming true because I'm living a full and joyful life by doing what I love and by having a beautiful and loving family.

Finally, I'm living my American dream because I'm able to be myself since America is the land of freedom. First of all, in America,



people can live the life they want rather than the one someone forces upon them. This is true for many immigrants because many of them fled from extremely difficult circumstances such as war, hunger, persecution in their native countries. For instance, in my country, Togo, we have a dictatorship system that persecutes anyone who speaks up against the government corruption and election fraud because we had a President who won every election from 1967 to 2005; then, his son took over the presidency after the father passed away, so there is no political freedom in Togo. However, in America, there is freedom of speech, and there is no fear for expressing political views.

Secondly, being true to myself and who I am is another way my American dreams is coming true. For example, I'm not afraid to expose my true character, and I don't have to pretend to be something that I'm not. For me, the American dream disregards discrimination based on a person's race, religion, gender and nationality, which enabled me to achieve specific goals.



Coming to America allowed me to have freedom of speech, stay true to what I believe in, make my own decisions, my own mistakes. This enabled me to become a better person.

To conclude, my American dream is becoming a reality because of the steps I have conquered so far such as succeeding through hard work, having the potential for a happy life, and having the freedom of being myself. I'm studying to become an RN. I'm happy and living the life I always wanted. It doesn't matter if a person is born here or came to America; everyone has his own version of the American dream.



My name is **Dovi Martina Ahligo**. I am from Togo, a small country between Ghana and Benin in West Africa.



Togo is a francophone country, and English is my third language. I have been in the U.S since 2008. I have three brothers and two wonderful sisters. In my free time, I watch movies, read, or listen to music. I studied biology in Togo before I moved to the U.S. My goal is

to stay in the same field and complete my study at Black Hawk College to become a nurse.

## The End of My Illusions about the U.S.A.

The United States of America is a huge country according to its population and the economy. It is a super power in many different areas. I learned a lot about the U.S.A. in my country, which gave me some stereotypes about American life and people's behavior in jobs, culture, and society. I thought that life would be easier, and I was going to live in heaven once I come to this country. Are my stereotypes still the same now that I live in the U.S.A.?

The important thing that makes a country stable is job opportunities. I heard a lot about the U.S. economy when I was in high school in my country. The U.S.A. has a lot of job opportunities. This means that business is good; people are finding jobs when they want to work, and the average unemployment rate is low. Whoever really wants to work in the U.S. usually finds a job. With all this information in my mind, I thought that I would find a job as soon I applied

for it. However, there is a difference between the job offers if the applicant is an immigrant. The barrier is the language and the accent. The easy way is to find a job where one does not need communication skills, but the ability to do physical jobs. For example, people can't imagine how



many times I applied for jobs but didn't receive a single call. First, I woke up early for the applications, and I was nervous every day. Next, there were a lot of applicants looking for the same job. They have a certain number of

applications. If they want 20 people, they will distribute the 20 applications according to the first twenty people who are registered. For the first time, my number was 22, and I decided to go back home. The second time, I was on the site at 4:30 in the morning. I had to fill in the application really fast because there were several applicants for the same position. I was lucky that day, and they received my application. Unfortunately, I didn't receive any calls from them. After an explanation, I had to redo another application because the first one was over one month old, so I went through the same scenario and finally got hired. My job was not easy at all. The first day of my training on the job, I didn't get to eat during my break, and I threw my food in the garbage because I didn't feel hungry. I wished it was just a dream, but it was the pure reality.

Another area of my stereotype was American society. I knew that Americans are devoted to the idea of individualism. They adopt a nuclear family and plan everything according to the size of the family. There were still a few things I found surprising when I moved here. For example, a stranger has to give people notice ahead of time before visiting them. It is hard to imagine that people who live in the same building don't even know each other. For example, I have never seen the people who live right across from me in the same building. Moreover, I learned that "time is money" for Americans. Everything Americans do is in relation to the time, or the schedule for the day might be rearranged. There is a clock everywhere, in the kitchen, bathroom, living room, bedroom, and garage to show the importance of the time. Everybody is like a robot revolving around the time. Before I came to the U.S., I saw a lot of American movies. These movies portrayed Americans who would barely walk but instead, they were always in a hurry, and they would even run. I asked myself the reason why Americans were always in such a hurry. Now, there is no doubt because I am in the same situation. I am often in a hurry because I have a full schedule. I wake up early at 5:00 am to take care of the family, and I am always in a hurry to come to school on time.



After class, I am still in a hurry to go back home because I have to get ready for work in 45 minutes. I watch the time frequently to make sure that I am accomplishing tasks in the appropriate time. I originally thought I would be free, go outside for fun, and travel a lot to visit a lot of famous places. Of course, I am free, but I am stuck with my school responsibilities, and I am barely able to go out for fun.

Finally, I was impressed by American society when I learned that Americans live longer and have a good record of longevity. So, I



thought that I was going to meet a lot of elders. On the contrary, I saw mainly young and dynamic

people in this country. It is not common to see elders in public places. Does this mean that this country doesn't have elders? Americans are organized, and elderly people stay in their houses, hospitals, assisted living centers or nursing homes. They do not go outside.

In addition, the society is well-educated, and women can afford whatever men can afford. They have the opportunity to go back to school and change their lives. For example, I was shocked when I heard that America has a lot of older people who are still going to school. My first question was, "What are they studying all that long?" In my country, students have to complete their courses in a certain amount of time. Once they quit, it is difficult for them to go back because their peers have finished their degrees. Now, I am the typical type of student in the U.S. because here I am still going to school and don't even know when I will be done. In this country, there is opportunity for young and old people to achieve their goals if they have determination.

In short, America is a great country where there is opportunity for anyone. The important thing is to know what to do with that opportunity and how to focus on it. My stereotypes about this country have changed now that I live here. I see a big change between my original thoughts and the reality of the U.S. in business, culture and social situations. Maybe there is more to

discover in the future. I noticed that I shouldn't have judged the American lifestyle when I did not know the reasons behind certain behaviors.



My name is ***Thein Say In Htoo***. My parents are originally from Burma, but I was born in Thailand, Sho Klo refugee camp. I am from Karen nation, and I don't speak Burmese at all. I don't want people to know that I am Burmese. I started learning Burmese when I was a child, but I've never spoke Burmese. I have never been in Burma in my life. I spend my whole life in Thailand refugee camp. I was 14 years old when I came to United States. Piano is my favorite instruments, and I play the piano in church every week. I graduated from Rock Island High School. My dream is to become a nurse or a school teacher because I want to help my people back in poor countries like Burma.



### **Keeping My Karen Culture**

Life as an immigrant is hard. When people "force" themselves into other countries as immigrants, it is very challenging for them to get comfortable in the new place. My family and I are adjusting to the conflicts between the America culture and Karen culture in three aspects: greetings, eating habits, and dressing.

First of all, greeting in my culture is very important because we show our respect to others. For example, if we see older people we should say, good morning or good evening. In American culture, we greet each other by saying "hello" to others, but it does not mean anything to us; it is just a word we say every day. Furthermore, in my culture, we do not call elderly people or younger people by their name; if we call them by their names, it sounds like we disrespect them. For example, if I see someone five years older than me, I call him or her by brother or sister. I should not call him by his names because it is the way that I show my respect to him. If we use older people's name, we do not respect them at all. In American culture, we call people by their names, and it does not matter if they are older or



younger. America people call their loved ones by their names. For example, in high school, we do not use the teacher's name only. We should call them Mrs. Mr. or Miss and their name. During my first days in America school, I felt very strange because students called the teacher by their names. I felt scared if I called them by their name, I did not want my teacher to think that I did not respect him or her.

In addition, American culture is very strange for my family and me because some American people do not welcome guests in their home. In my culture, guests are so valued that if we find someone on the streets that speaks our



language and he or she has lost the way to get home, we normally

greet him and offer him rest in our homes. We always welcome guests in our house; even we do not know them. To welcome guest at our house is very important to our culture and tradition.

Secondly, not only is greeting a big issue, but also eating habits. In my culture, we do not have different meals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In America, people eat different food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. For example, we eat bread, toast, and pancakes, coffee, juice, and milk for our breakfast. We eat hamburgers, sandwiches or pizza for our lunch. Sometimes we eat chicken fries, or fried rice for our dinner. To illustrate, in my culture, we eat rice, noodles, bamboo shoots, banana flowers, younger papaya, fish, and other kinds of vegetables. These foods are our meal for everyday life. We do not usually eat meat because meats are very expensive, and we do not have enough money to buy the meat. The vegetables are very easy to find on the mountains. Some people plant their own, so it not really expensive. My mother always cooks rice for every meal; we do not care if we have the same meal for a day. Rice is our top meal in my culture. I had never seen fast food before until I came to America. In America, people usually eat fast food, so they do not



have to cook for every meal. They just order the food at the restaurant, and it really easy way for them.

Finally, beside greetings and eating habits, dressing properly is the most important to Karen culture. People always look at what kind of clothing a person is wearing. For example, I never wore short pants or short skirts when I was in Thailand. If someone wears very short clothing showing his or her body, people talk about him, and think that, he or she is not a good person. In Karen schools, the girls should not wear pants. We had to wear our uniform: for girls, a white shirt and blue skirt; for guys white shirts and blue pants. Also, we had to wear a skirt all the time. If someone wore pants in the school either short or long, they were not respecting the school rules. If a student violates the dress code, he or she might clean the whole school by themselves or get detention after school. The American dress code is totally different. People do not care what kind of clothes other person wears. In public schools, we do not have to wear uniform, so students can wear whatever they what to wear.



In conclusion, greeting, eating habits, and dressing properly are very important to Karen culture. I have noticed the difference here in America. My family and I have had a hard time facing them. Although I live in the US, I am really proud of my native culture. I have very strong cultural values, and I will try to keep them for the rest of my life.



My name is **Akossiwa Fiaboe**. I am married to Kofi Afiademanyo, and I have three kids' one boy Jerry and two girls Blessing and Victoria. I am from Togo, West Africa, and I have four sisters and three brothers. I speak French, English, and Ewe. I got my high school diploma and studied geography for four years, so I am a bachelor's degree holder. I came to America in November 2007. I am a student and worker, and my goals are to become a nurse or a



medical doctor one day. I like to go to church, sing, and praise the Lord through the Gospel.

## No Heaven

Why did I move to America? I was in a good situation before deciding to travel to America. America is a place where many people want to go because they think it is a wonderful place, and it is like heaven for most people. Schools, books, TV shows, and movies showed me America as a nice place where everybody can could and have peace and money. I started dreaming about America when I was in the high



school, but my coming to America showed me the reality. My journey to America was a huge and painful decision for me, but I made it because I thought I would become prosperous, so I left my family, my business, and my house to move here.

First, I had to leave my parents. In May 2006, I received a letter, which informed me that I had won the America Visa Lottery. When we win, it is easy to have a visa to come to America and stay with no legal problems because as soon as we reach here, we receive the permanent resident visa for ten years, and we can become citizens after five years. So, I started all the preparations to be approved in the interview. In June 2007, I went to the US embassy in my country for the interview; the ambassador asked me why I wanted to move to America, also she asked me about my school. She asked me to explain my research about "Women`s Participation in Development," which was my thesis from the university. I passed the interview, and I got the visa for America, so I had to leave my country with my children. My father and mother are still alive; I have four sisters and three brothers, so my decision to travel was problematic for everybody in the family. I had never left my parents before. Though I am married, we could see each other whenever we wanted, and my father always visited me. However, I thought coming to America would change my situation, and I would become prosperous, so I ensured them that everything would be fine here, and I would support them. I remember my mother crying and

saying that she might not see me again; she did not want to accompany me to the airport. With a sad heart, I left my parents. My son, Jerry, was three years old, and he was so excited to take the plane. He told everybody that we were traveling to America, but his sister, Blessing, was just a one-year-old baby who did not know anything. My husband was confused because he was afraid to leave his job and his mother, who was old. However, later he was happy because he was sure his children would have a good education in America.



After surviving the painful departure, our family started a new phase of our lives. All four of us came to America: my husband, Kofi and my two children, Jerry and Blessing. Most of the time, people with no job, students and some people with low-income jobs in my country move to America to have a better life, but this was not our case because we were not in need, we just wanted more than what we had. My husband, Kofi, is an electronic engineer; he was working for an international company as a maintenance supervisor. He worked on a machine called scanner, and he was the person in charge of maintaining it. He had to teach some employees how to repair or fix it. So, the company sent him to many countries to install the scanner. He had a good income, which was enough to support the family and to take care of his mother. We were living in a good situation, but still we wanted better than that. After finishing my education, I didn` t get a job, so I opened my own dry cleaning company, which I was managing myself with the help of some employees before the lottery visa came. We were positive about our decision to leave; I wanted to continue my education and my husband, too. We also wanted to stay together because my husband travelled all the time, and we missed each other. We wanted our children to have a good education and good health. We thought we would have a job with good income. We thought we would have more than what we had, so we could reach all of our goals.

When we were preparing to come, some people tried to discourage us from this journey, but we didn` t listen to them because we thought

with all our degrees and work experience, we would be able to find a better job, continue our education, and assure the future of our children in the US. People advised my husband not to resign from his job and to ask for a leave without pay instead, but this was not possible. He had no choice; he resigned. He came first in



October, stayed with a friend to look for apartment. He came to find a place for me because our friends and relatives did not want us to live with them; they said life was difficult here, and they did not want more charges. His best friend, who was in Atlanta, Georgia, told him he could stay only two weeks with him to find an apartment, but to have an



apartment he needed income here in America, so he had to pay six months advance for the rent. When he got the apartment, we joined him after two weeks, and we had to buy all the furnishings. We spent a lot of money. We did not get a job easily as we thought before. My husband went back to Africa, and I had to take care of everything here by myself. It took six months before I could find a restaurant job. While I was not working, my husband had to send me money from Africa. But we thought people would help us like we help each other in Africa. We would not need money from Africa if this place was a really good place. I had to pay the babysitter before going out to look for a job; I was not driving yet, but our friends refused to take us to places. They told us to buy our own car, so we bought a car with money brought from Africa, not money earned here. I did not know the town, so I needed to bring my children to a hospital, go shopping, but nobody wanted to show me anything. My life here without help from anybody made my husband sad, and he finally resigned his job to come here. After one month, he found a security officer job, but he was fired after seven months of work. Since then he hasn't been able to find a job. We started suffering and thinking about what people had told us about America, and we started regretting our journey. Till now, nothing is going well and

our life is so miserable. We have discovered now that America is not heaven for us and for many people, but it is too late to go back to Africa because we spent all our savings, and we don't have any money. We sold our home and our precious belongings to survive here in America. We have to bear the new life, and we hope life will change in time. Our journey to America was the worst decision we have ever made in our life. We should have accepted people's advice before coming, but we didn't. I will never forget that America is not heaven, but a place where we have to struggle a lot before finding ourselves. Unemployed people or students are welcome here because they can start their life, but people who are already settled in their home countries, shouldn't come to America because it is waste of time and money.



My name is **Niyogushima Zena**. I was born in a refugee camp in Tanzania, but I am considered a Burundian. I grew up in a refugee camp where both my parents raised me and my other six siblings. However, I am the oldest of seven children. I have been living in the United States for five years. In the year of 2011, I graduated from Central High School in Memphis, Tennessee.



Also, I recently transferred from Southwest Tennessee Community College to Black Hawk College where I am attending the ESL program. At Black Hawk, I want to graduate from the ESL Program and start my academic classes. My goals are to work hard over here at Black Hawk and achieve my pre-medicine certificate. I am willing to transfer to a four-year University after Black Hawk. In the future, I want to become a medical doctor.

### Adjusting My Cultural Heritage

There are many aspects of an immigrants' life that he or she has to adjust when living in a new country; however, some aspects of cultural adjustment take a life time. Among these aspects, social and school behaviors were the ones that I had the most difficult time adjusting to.

Social behaviors toward people were one of the aspects that I had to adjust to when I got to the United States. First, greeting people was one of the challenges that I faced and had

difficulties with. At first, I did not know that most people are called by their surname because in my country, people are called by their first names. I had to practice how to call people by their last names. Everyone in the U.S. is called by



their surname to be shown respect, so they are called “Mr., Mrs., and Miss.” Secondly, friendship was another problem that I had, and it was very hard for me to make friends with the people around me. I had to learn how people in the U.S. build their friendships. In the refugee camp where I grew up, it was not hard for me to build friendship with others due to the fact that it was a place where I had been living all of my life. Therefore, it was very simple for me to know a person well. For example, all of my friends lived near my apartment, and we visited each other almost every day; therefore, I knew more about their families and their character traits, which strengthened our friendship. However, according to my observation, in the U.S, people keep their friendship restricted to work places, clubs, fitness centers, schools. When somebody new arrives, it is not easy to be included. On the other hand, in my country, most people know each other in social settings. For instance, there were some meetings that were held in the refugee camp once a month. All the people that attended the meetings built friendships through that process. In the U.S, there are few reunions, but in my country, we have many. For example, in my country, there is a gathering and

celebration when a family receives a new born. Families get together and celebrate, and then the mother is given permission to carry the baby on her back which is called



“Guhekereza.” When celebrating, grandparents are chosen to bless the child. Also, there is another celebration called “Gusengesha Umwana,” that means “a child is dedicated in front of the church,” which is done when a child

is about two months old. After the dedication, the church, the family, and the friends are invited to celebrate for the child. Also, neighbors are invited to come and collaborate with the family. However, this is done mostly by Christians. Since I moved to the U.S., I have only attended one of these celebrations, and it was very different from how it was celebrated back in my country. These social behaviors are still difficult for me to face.

Secondly, school behavior was the other aspect that was hard for me to follow because it was very different from where I come from. In my country, students stay all day in school, but they are not assigned lots of homework like in the U.S. For example, when I got here, the very first day I went to class, the instructor gave the students lots of homework. When I got home, I was so stressed out because I did not know what to do. Also, it was very hard for me to get used to the teaching system because in the classrooms, professors did not go into detail explaining the material, but they assigned harder homework, which was to be done at home.



Consequently, I was always up late trying to finish my work. Additionally, in the United States, there are some strict rules about plagiarism that were hard for me to understand. When I left my country, I had not yet been taught about plagiarism, so it was not easy for me to follow the rules. For instance, sometimes instructors gave the class some research work to do at home. Most of the time, I used sentences from the sources instead of using my own because I did not know how to paraphrase. Also, in my country, students are taught to respect their teachers the same as they respect their parents. Therefore, it is not very easy for students to complain about their grades. Over here, when a student fails a test, for example, he or she can ask the professor for a make-up, but in my country, make-up exams are not allowed. If a student fails the test, he must repeat the whole school year and do all the subjects over again. Lastly, in my country, it was mandatory to wear uniforms in all schools. In the Quad Cities, students do not wear uniforms in public schools

at all. To summarize, school behavior was difficult for me to learn.

Social and school behaviors were two aspects of American culture that I had to work hard to adjust to. I had to learn ways to establish friendship through meetings and calling people by their surname. Also, I learned to follow the strict rules about plagiarism, and I learned to talk to my teachers in an effective way. Finally, I learned to enjoy attending school with no dress code. Family reunion is the only aspect that I am still working to adjust to because most of my family members do not live with me here in the United States.



My name is **Gay Ka Paw**, and I am from Burma (Myanmar). I left Burma in 1999 because of the ongoing civil war. Then I moved to Thailand, and I lived there for almost ten years. In 2008, I moved to the US with the help of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and the government of the United States. Now, I have been living in the city of Rock Island for four years. Therefore, I have a better life, and I am still taking ESL classes at Black Hawk College. I am looking forward to help my community as much as I can as a translator.



### My Experience with ESL Classes

May I tell a story? Once upon a time in Burma, there was an uneducated son of a millionaire, and he was the only son. When he was a child, his parents didn't let him go to school and play outside with other kids because they worried that other kids would hurt their son. Because they loved him so much, they didn't ask him to do anything; instead, they did everything for him. As he grew up, he didn't have any knowledge or education, so he didn't have any skills to support himself. After his parents died, he owned a lot of material possessions. However, as he was an uneducated person, everyone in his town could lie to him easily, so all his possessions were gone a few years later. After that, he didn't have any food to eat, so he began to wander to beg,

but everyone ignored him. In short, he wandered everywhere, died in the forest, and became food for the vultures. Even though he was very rich, his life ended so badly.

This story was told to me by my grandfather because he wanted to encourage me to go to school, and he didn't want me to be a person who has a lack of knowledge and education and end up as badly as the



uneducated son of the millionaire. I realized that even though some people are rich, they will lose all their wealth one day if they don't have any knowledge, skills, and education either from school or outside. Therefore, I went to school in the refugee camp I lived in in Thailand until I graduated from high school. Even though I had graduated high school, I didn't have a solid foundation of English. When I moved to the US in 2008, English was my biggest challenge, so I had to take ESL classes at Black Hawk College because English is not my first language. English is used nationwide in the US, so I have to learn it in order to be able to communicate with English speakers. Now, I have been taking ESL classes for four years, and during my last semester, I am taking three ESL classes. To get here, I have been through many experiences and met many people.

I began my first ESL class at Black Hawk College in Rock Island one month after arriving in the US. At that time, I worked in the morning, so I had to take evening class. Working eight hours for my company, I was already tired, but every evening after I came back from work, I rode my bicycle to come to school in order to learn English. It was summer time, so I could ride my bicycle every evening, and it took me thirty minutes to get to my class. In my class,



there were many people from other countries, and they also had the same problem as me, so I wasn't bored; instead, we had fun, and we learned from each other. As a beginner, I thought English was very easy at that time, and also there wasn't too much homework. A few months later, it seemed like time was going fast because I would have a

break soon, and I continued my ESL class here until break.

After a short break, I wanted to continue my ESL, and I came back to the same school in Rock Island; however, I had to take a placement test. Then the result was that I was qualified to move to level 5, so I had to go to IETC center in Moline. It was quite far from my apartment, but I had a friend that gave me a ride every day. Therefore, I didn't need to ride my bicycle. Again, I met many different faces from different countries: some were from Africa, some were from Middle East, and some were from Mexico. They were very friendly, and sometimes they even taught me their languages. It was funny because I came to ESL class, and I was supposed to learn English, but I learned a few words of other languages, too. Taking ESL here, I had the opportunity to use a computer and the Internet every day before class, and I was very excited about that because I had never used them in my country. At this level, I didn't have much homework; instead, I often had tests. I was in level 5 for two semesters because my friend decided not to move to level 6 at the main campus. Because I didn't



have a car, and I didn't know where the main campus was, I had to stay with him until the spring semester ended.

Time was going so quickly because it was time to start a new experience at the main campus in Moline. Transferring to level 6, I learned many new things. For example, when I was in level 5, I didn't have to take separate subjects as I did here. For level 6, there are 4 main English subjects: writing, reading, grammar, and listening/speaking. My first subject was writing, and I took it in the evening because I was a full-time employee who was working in the morning. Before the first day of my class, I had an orientation to find my classroom, the ESL office, the library, etc. On that day, I remember my friend and I wanted to take the elevator, and we rode up and down four times because we didn't know where to go. Later, we met somebody and asked for help. Then during the orientation, we were able to go and find our classroom. In writing class, I learned how to write correctly and how to organize my writing. I thought to myself what I

had learned so far, and I was so lost because I was sleepy in class all the time. I had a nice teacher, who always told me, "Wake up, Gay Ka," and her smile was always shining in class. In this class, I had homework assignments every day, and I had enough time to do my homework because I had a class every Monday and Tuesday. After class, I arrived home at 9 pm, and I was ready to sleep. Then in the morning at 4 o'clock, I had to wake up to go to work riding my bicycle for thirty minutes. After I finished working, I arrived home at 3 o'clock. Then I cleaned up and had dinner. A few minutes later, I started doing my homework until 8 o'clock if I had class on that day. In this class, there were also many international students who were continuing their education as I was here. As English is not our first language, we kept striving to learn it in ESL class even though we were tired from work, and we had to spend our free time in the evening.



Finally, after going through the ESL program step by step while working full-time, I am now a full-time student this semester because I lost my job last year, and my former company helps me to continue my education here, and it is also my final semester to finish my ESL class. As a full-time student, I have quite a lot of homework that I never turn in on time. It is not just because it is too much homework, but it is because I can't manage my time well. After taking ESL classes, I think my English skills have improved over time. In addition, it is not my dream to learn English only, but I also have a dream that one day I can work to help my community. While living in the US, I have adapted to lots of new experiences that every new arrival from other parts of the world has.

In conclusion, to reach my goals, I have to take every single step, starting with ESL classes, to overcome my big challenge, the language barrier. In all of my ESL classes, I have learned many things, such as writing, reading, and speaking and listening in English, but I also learned a lot about the cultures of my classmates. Therefore, no one can lie to me



easily. Because of my grandfather's story, I have strong courage to learn to reach my goals. Today, I am not left behind in this century because of my grandfather's encouragement. Meanwhile, BHC has given me so much knowledge that one day I can use in my career, so I would like to thank BHC by writing a short poem here.

**My Black Hawk**

Located in the Lincoln's land  
 For everyone you glad to stand  
 Education for immigrants  
 ESL is your projects

Taking ESL since 2008  
 Improving my English  
 ESL is diversity  
 Learning with equality

Supposed to learn English  
 Also learned another language  
 Bonjour, Hola, Komasta  
 Learning from my friend Sandra

Expecting A or B  
 C master I'm glad to be  
 'Cause lazy to do my homework  
 Satisfied with my result

Being in love with my Black Hawk  
 Nicknamed my son little Hawk  
 For my son and my gorgeous wife  
 Helpful daycare you provide

Black Hawk College I love you  
 Never forget to thank you  
 For community and refugee  
 Number one you proud to be



My name is **Blandine Eklou**. I come from West Africa, Togo, and I was born in the capital of the country, Lome. I have been living in the United States for ten years with my husband. I have studied English at Black Hawk College as my second language for a while. I have learned English to reach my goals. My first dream is to become a nurse because I like to help other people, so I'll study hard until I reach my goal. Also, I love to have my own



business which would make me travel. If my English is better, I can use it everywhere in the world. All my relatives live in my country, and I miss them. I love reading, swimming, doing volunteer work, watching TV.

**The Loss of a Dream**

Why do people consider that living in another country is better? Living in a place like the U.S. was my dream because of a documentary I watched and pictures I used to see. My wishes came true in 2001, and I strongly believed that by coming to United States, I would become prosperous quickly. I would have the same style of life, and I would live without any stress.

First of all, when I was preparing to come to the U.S.A., I thought there would be an easy way to get prosperous quickly. According to what I watched on TV and heard from other people who had lived here, it was the reality. Therefore, I promised too many members of my family and to some close friends in need that I would take care of them as soon as I got into the U.S.A., and I had a job. But when facing the reality of living in the U.S.A., I found out surprisingly that the way people lived in developed



countries was similar to the way people live in undeveloped countries. To summarize, I figured out that in both types of countries, people face struggle, so there is not one better than the other. As a result, the U.S.A. turned out not to be the paradise I imagined. To demonstrate this, the first day of my landing in Chicago airport, a cab took me to the bus station from where I would be travelling to Moline. The cab driver dropped my suitcases on the ground. Before I got my suitcases to carry them to the terminal, a man came over, and surprisingly carried my suitcases to the bus station. I thanked him by handing him five dollars. I could not imagine how happy he was because he said thanks to me many times and went away. I could not believe that there were also people in need in this country. Apart from this experience, another one contributed to my disillusion about finding a job in order to survive; it was an ordeal. I spent

almost three months in my cousin's house without looking for any job. My cousin told me to wait until a period of time when a job opportunity would open in the company where he was working. However, I just became a baby sitter for his child. During all that period of time, many friends and family members from my country were upset with me because I was not sending money or not calling them. Then, I finally decided to get a job by applying to another company. When I started working, I began to realize that the American dream depended on me, and nobody else could do anything for me but myself.

Secondly, I thought that we would have the same style of life in the same way we understood family life in my country, which seems to be different from the Americans idea.

We understand family consisting of many members from the children to grandparents, great grand parents, cousins, nephews, aunts, and uncles. Therefore, in our family reunions, there are a lot of people who get together, even with some family friends. I miss my family when I remember them. But here in the



U.S, the family definition is strict, too. Most Americans families I visited consist of a father, a mother and children, and sometimes include pets. In some rare occasions when Americans families get together in some particular events like Christmas, Thanksgiving, I could see, apart from father, mother and children, some other relatives who leave right after the reunion, back to their homes, a long-distance away. Moreover, to respect my American friends' tradition, I send them birthdays or anniversary cards. Sometimes we talk on the phone, but we do not visit each other as I need because it is not part of their culture. In my country, a person can pay a visit to loved ones

without calling them in advance, but in the U.S.A., they make a plan. In addition, another aspect of American culture I had to



adjust to was about the elderly. In my culture, the elderly are taken care by family members or friends until their last day of life. But in the

U.S.A., I began to understand that many families are separated by long distances for job reasons, and they do not have time to take care of their elderly. When I was growing up, my culture engrained in me to take care of the elderly, so that they could not live alone, and isolated until their passing away without any help. However, to alleviate my concerns, I learned the good news that in U.S.A. there are many nursing homes to take care of the elderly when they are not close to their loved ones.

Lastly, coming to the United States, I thought I would live without any stress anymore because I thought everything would be easy. As human beings, we always have illusions about finding a perfect and quiet place to live in without any stress or depression. However, I have found myself in a stressful situation since the beginning. I have faced the language barrier for communication. I was so embarrassed to go out because I could not understand and speak English. Then, I got so pleased to take ESL classes, and today I can do most things by myself even though my English is not totally perfect.

In conclusion, after I learned more about all the situations, I have understood that it doesn't matter which country we live in, the stress is different, but it exists in both countries.



I am **Koffi Tchekpassi**, a single gentleman originally from the north of Togo. In terms of family size in Togo, I am from a small family and have four siblings, two older sisters and two younger brothers. All my family members live in Togo. After graduating from high school in 2005, I taught mathematics in a private secondary school for one year. After teaching for one year, I enrolled at the University of Lome where I was studying agricultural engineering when I got the opportunity to come to the USA. I moved to the United States in June 2010. I live in Milan and enjoy yanking people's chains.



### My First Job in the USA

Many people in other countries have dreamed about the powerful country which is the USA. When I watched shows about the USA in my country, I thought it was like heaven, but as

a saying states,” Do not judge the book by its cover.” I discovered the realities of the USA when I started my first job as a night stocker at a Hy-Vee store in Davenport, Iowa. This job was not what I had envisioned for myself in this new “land of opportunity.”

In fact, it all began when I was a student at the University in Togo and got the opportunity to move to the USA in June 2010. I first lived in Chicago before I moved to Moline in September of the same year. Looking for a job, I applied to a variety of companies and stores; fortunately, the Hy-Vee located on West Locust Street in



Davenport, Iowa called me for an interview. From that moment on, my stress began because I did not know anything about

the job interview process, even in my home country. I had a hard time during the interview because there was no interpreter, so I had to defend myself with my poor English. One week after the interview, the human resources manager called me for a drug test; two days later, he called me and told me that he found something for me, and my job title was night stocker.

The day before I started the job, I was very nervous for many reasons. First, it was my first job, so it was my first experience in the workplace in the U.S. In addition, I was clueless about what my job was, and how I was going to do it because nobody from my community worked there, so there was nobody to give me some ideas about the job before I started it. Then, my first day of work arrived. I was supposed to start at 9: 00 pm, but I was in the store much earlier, at 6: 20 pm. At 8: 55 pm, somebody came to me and asked me, “Are you, Koffi ?” Then I said, “Yes.” He said to me, “Well, I am David, and I am your boss; our job is to pick up goods in the stockroom and then categorize them in the store.” I said, “Ok. “ He took me to the stockroom where my co-workers were waiting, and from there, we started pulling pallettes of goods with hand jacks to the store. It was very hard for me because I did not have any training before I started doing it. That night, I hurt one customer with my hand jack because I was unfamiliar with the tools. However, no harm

was done. In addition, I had no idea about the store’s areas, so I had to ask for help all the time in order to find where things belonged. To help myself, I wrote down some areas with their goods on a piece of paper so that I could study it at home. Another difficulty was the origin of my co-workers. In fact, I was so embarrassed; there were no other Africans in that store, and all my co-workers were white people. Therefore, during the break times, I used to sit alone in the corner even though my co-workers tried to be nice to me. Because of this loneliness at that time, I was thinking all the time about a lot of friends that I left in my home country.

In addition to the stress and the hard experience I had during work, the transportation was the biggest problem I faced. In fact, at that time, I did not have a car, and there was no one to give me ride, so I had to ride the bus. My shift was from 9:00 PM to 6:00 AM, but I left home at 5:30 PM to go to work. The problem was that the last run of Davenport’s Bus 3, which was running to the HY- VEE, was at 6:05 PM, and I lived in Milan; therefore, I had to leave my house early in order to get the last bus to Davenport. At 6:20 PM, I was already at Hy-Vee and sat down in the break area. I wasted 2 hours and 40 minutes doing nothing in the store; however, I needed more

time to sleep because I got only three hours of sleep a night. I came back home from work, took a



bath and then went to school. I always went to bed around 1: 15 PM and got up at 4:30 to get ready and wait for the bus at 5: 30 PM. At Hy-Vee, they scheduled employees for any day of the week, so sometimes I worked during the weekend and guess what? On Saturdays after work, I had to wait from 6:00 AM till 8:30 AM to take the bus. The worst was on Sundays. After work, there were no busses on Sundays in Davenport, so I had to walk about five miles from the Hy-Vee to downtown Rock Island to ride the bus. It was so hard for me because all these things were happening in the winter. I remember on Thanksgiving Day 2010, there were no busses at all, so I walked in the cold weather about eight miles from work to my home, and the temperature on that day was 21

degrees. I was very frustrated at that time, but I did not have a choice; I had to deal with it. The only chance I had was that there were my three co-workers: Nancy from Silvis and Joe and Bob from Davenport who helped me sometimes by giving me ride, but unfortunately most of the time our schedules were different.

To conclude, my first job was not a piece



of cake for me, but it was a suffering. I was able to deal with these difficulties because of the education I received from my parents, and I

always remembered a sentence that my father told to me all the time: "Be brave all the time, my son, and remember that the beauty of a man is his work." All of my work sufferings ended when I found a new job at X-PAC. It is a packaging company, which is located in Milan. In fact, X-PAC is about one mile from my house, and there are buses all the time. Therefore, I arrive at work only five minutes before my shift starts.



My name is **Anita Adjoa Aubyn**. I come from Ghana, West Africa. I belong to a family of five which includes my dad, my mum, my two siblings, and I. my whole family is back home in my home country, and I am the only one here. I have other family members from my extended family here in the states, but they are all in different states. I am currently working and going to school, and I am hoping to be done with my schooling in the next four years though I know it is going to be a very tough journey. Fortunately for me, English is not something new to me since I come from an English-speaking country where English is spoken, and taught at school, but the only problem I have is the American accent since I happened to study the British English, which is a little different from the American English in terms of style of writing, spelling of words, and pronunciation. I am working very hard towards my dreams and aspirations of becoming a registered nurse someday. I chose the nursing career because I love to take care of people, and my late aunt Florence who was also a nurse, is



my role model. I started Black Hawk College this fall, and I think everything is going well with me. I would like to thank God, my aunt Amevi also a student at Black Hawk College, the tutors, and all the students at Black Hawk College for their support, for being friendly, and helpful to me in achieving my career goals.

## Racism: The Ugly Reality

Racism, does it still exist in the United States? This is the question a lot of people ask when you tell them about racism in the United States. When I was back home in Ghana, West Africa, I remember my friends and other family members who live in the United States



Kawana Jasper, left, and her mother Sharon Jasper talk to a man before the New Orleans City Council holds a meeting about tearing down public housing buildings in New Orleans, Thursday, Dec. 20, 2007. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

complaining about racism, and how embarrassing and sad it could be when they called home, but I never believed what they said because racism doesn't really exist in Africa since we

see ourselves as one big family. I never believed racism still existed in this modern world until I moved to the United States. That was when I had the answer to the question above. Yes, racism does really exist here in the United States even though the government is trying so hard to eliminate it. Racism in the United States exists in schools, public transport, shopping centers, work, hospitals, apartments, employment, entertainment centers, real estate, and even in churches. Racism is very embarrassing, disappointing, heartbreaking, surprising, and unexpected.

First, racism causes embarrassment to people. Everyone wants to have his or her own freedom, and people always want to be very happy wherever they find themselves. Life can be so miserable when one is ignored and treated badly. For example, when I boarded the plane from Ghana to Atlanta, I knew there would be different interpreters who would help people who did not understand a



language at the immigration service, but when I got to the Atlanta airport, though there were interpreters, the immigration service personnel did not willingly help people who could not speak

English. They would ask them to wait while they served other people who could speak English instead of bringing in an interpreter to help. Though I could speak, read and write English, I was not used to the American accent, so I could hardly understand the immigration officer when he spoke, so he just asked me to step aside for the other people who could speak English to be served. I stood there for almost two hours, and I was the last person to be served. I felt very embarrassed since we Africans are not used to giving this kind of treatment to foreigners who come to our country. We, Africans, treat people equally whether they are black or white. We even give foreigners the best treatment since we believe guests must be very well-treated.

Secondly, racism can be so disappointing. In the United States, the Whites are treated with extra care and respect while the Blacks and other immigrants are not. Blacks are not given equal treatment under the law. When a White person violates a traffic regulation, he is ignored but when a Black or other immigrant does it, he is jailed. For example, when my uncle was



driving from Posen to downtown Chicago, he was stopped at a light with other cars. After waiting for ten to fifteen minutes, all the cars decided to go. My uncle did the same, but he realized he was being followed by the

police. He stopped the car, and the police came over to give him a ticket for violating the traffic regulations. When my uncle asked about the other people, all Whites, the police claimed they never saw them, which was a lie. My uncle got so angry and was very disappointed because they deprived him of his right because he is Black. Racism can be so disappointing when one is not treated fairly.

Thirdly, racism can be heartbreaking and may cause people to misbehave if care is not taken or if people do not control themselves. Sometimes at the restaurant or at other services like shopping centers, hospitals, the Whites are warmly welcomed, and treated with respect and care while the Blacks and other immigrants are not but rather ignored though we all (Black or White) are going to pay for whatever service is provided to us. The saddest part is that the Whites still see the Blacks as slaves. If slavery does not exist anymore, why are we asked

about our race when filing paperwork? This is an indirect way of being racist. At the various work places in United States, the Blacks and other immigrants do most of the hard jobs. Racism at the work place is very common though most organizations announce in their policy that there shouldn't be racism and discrimination in their place of work. For example, at work, it is so heartbreaking when Black people working at the same job with the Whites and the Whites are released from work or forced to change jobs when they complain. Always, the Africans and the Blacks are ignored even though they do the hardest jobs. Racism can be heartbreaking when some people such as the Whites and other immigrants are given better treatment from the Blacks.

Also, racism can be unexpected when your fellow immigrants treat you badly just because you are



African. Ever since I moved to the United States, the most racist people are the other immigrants (other than Africans and Asians.) They are not receptive to Africans because they think we get our documents and citizenship easily. They get up and move to another seat in the bus if we, Africans, sit next to them. They ignore us when we smile at them. They always seem unfriendly and very hostile. When I meet other immigrants in the bus, at school or at shopping centers, they refuse to smile back at me.

Finally, racism can be so disappointing when fellow Blacks look down upon Africans or treat them badly because they see themselves as African-Americans, forgetting their African background. The Black Americans always distinguish themselves from the Africans



because they think they are different in terms of their accent and color. They treat Africans badly, which is not fair. A

friend was once complaining about how a Black American told her she is black, and that my

friend could never be a Black-American since African-Americans have brighter skin colors than Africans. She was so downhearted and disappointed her fellow Blacks could treat her so.

In conclusion, racism can be very embarrassing, surprising, heartbreaking, unexpected, and disappointing, and I think it is about time we all (Black or White) see ourselves as one since we were all created by God. We all have flesh and blood flowing through our veins. The only differences are the skin color and the language. We cannot question, God, our creator. In my opinion, I think we should all live as one happy people in a racism-free world.



My name is **Bayubahe Sikora**. My parents were born



in Burundi which makes me Burundian, but I was born in Tanzania. I have six siblings, three sisters and three brothers, and I am the second eldest child in the family. I am currently living with my mom, my dad, and my brothers and sisters. I lived in Tanzania almost my whole life. In June 2007, when I was 13 years old, my family and I moved to the

United States of America. I lived in Chicago for one year and a month where I spent my ninth grade year. In August 2008, my family and I moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where we lived for four years and four months. I graduated from Memphis Central High School, and I attended Southwest Tennessee Community College as a freshman in Memphis as well. This year 2012, my family and I moved to here Rock Island, Illinois, where I am now attending Black Hawk College. Ever since I was a child, my dream was to become a doctor and help others. When I got here, I have kept my dream of becoming a doctor. I have decided to go into the field of Pre-med after completing the ESL program. I also planned to transfer to a four-year university after I receive my associate degree in science here at Black Hawk. I also want to become a pediatrician, so I will be able to go abroad and help people with their needs.

## New Language and New Experiences

In June of 2007, my family and I came to the United States. I was thirteen years old. It was very shocking to leave my old friends and my family members. However, it was also

exciting because I was coming to a safe place. My family and I moved to the United States because of freedom of speech, education, and a better life. When I got here, I was surrounded by very nice cars, buildings, colors of people, trains and etc. I also faced some challenging situations like adjusting to the new food. Besides my concerns, I experienced some funny and interesting situations because of my lack of English, my needs to adjust to the new culture, and my need to make new friends.



First, the lack of English was obviously a big issue. When I was in Africa, I used to speak Kirundi, Swahili, and French; they were not and are not associated to English at all, but to French. I had to wait for three months before I started school. The first day I went to school, I felt lost and lonely. For example, English is not directly connected to many other languages and it was grammatically unlike my other languages. When I was in the school, I did not speak English, so my math teacher said “ooh yeah!” sounding like “no” in my native language; then I was so confused. After that, I found a friend, who spoke Swahili. I was very happy because I thought that I would be with her in all of my classes. However, she was not in another classroom. I asked my teacher by saying, “s’il vous plaît enseignant, je peux aller aux toilettes?” Which means: Please teacher, may I go to the bathroom? The teacher did not understand what I was saying, and she just stood watching me. Even though she did not say anything, I had to use bathroom, I just left. When I returned to the classroom, everybody was looking at me. In another embarrassing



example, one day my family and I went to church, and the person who was leading the church service program said, “It is time to welcome

visitors,” but my family and I did not stand up because we did not understand English, and we did not know what he was saying. Because we did not understand the suggestion of the pastor, we saw the whole church pointing at us; still, we

did not know what they wanted us to do, so a man came and told us to stand up by gestures, and we stood up. We thanked the man who helped us that day.

Secondly, I had difficulty adapting to the new culture mainly considering clothing, eating habits, and treating people. For example, in my culture, women are not allowed to wear pants, but when my family and I got here in the United States, I had to wear pants due to the weather and the school dress code. When I noticed the differences, I felt both happy and embarrassed. I used to wear shirts or pants only during gym class, but not at home. In addition, I had to adjust my eating habits. I have added many different kinds of food such as spaghetti, pizza, lasagna, and ravioli to my diet. The first day at school, the lunch lady gave me pizza, and I did not enjoy it, but I have become accustomed to it. I also had a problem treating people. For instance, in my culture, young children give respect to the elderly people. To clarify, people greet elderly by saying "Shikamoo," this is a Swahili greeting of respect for older persons in daily passing, They respond "Marahaba," which means, "I thankfully accept your respect." Also, teachers receive more respect from the students, who cannot talk back to their teachers. In my American high school, a boy named Sam used to talk back to the teacher. I noticed this in American schools, and it seemed to be acceptable in my school. But in my country, if he had done that, he would have been expelled.

Lastly, I also had a problem with making new friends. Since I did not speak English, it was very hard for me to talk to people. Making friends was very complex because of language barriers. Because of that, I had to learn English. The more I learned English, the more confident I



became. I attended many ESL programs and the refugee agency provided my family and me with a tutor. I also had to read books and to spend many hours in the library. To clarify, during that time, I was very shy and scared of insulting anyone I spoke to. Because of this, I was fearful of speaking to Americans. Today, it is easy for me to make friends because I have

learned a lot about speaking the English language. About six months after I came to the United States, I was able to hold a conversation with an American.

To conclude, I had several funny and challenging new experiences when I first came to the U.S. because of my lack of English. However, learning English has helped me to meet my need to adjust to a new culture and to make new friends.



My name is **Niphaphorn Loughead**, and I am originally from

Thailand, the "Land of Smiles." I am 30 years old, and I have been married since 2008, the same year I moved to United States. I am so glad that I am taking ESL classes at BHC because I have learned many things about English on this campus. My career goal is in the medical field, and I hope one day I will become an RN as I dream of reaching the stars. People have dreams and hopes, and I have the chance to live in the land of opportunities, so I will continue to reach for the stars



## Experience of a New U.S. Citizen

I PASSED THE TEST! October 1, 2012 was the day that I became a U.S. citizen. Becoming a U.S. citizen was important to me because I would like to live in the United States without worrying when the Green Card fee or the fee to apply for U.S. citizenship will increase next. Since I found out that the Department of Homeland Security allows permanent residents to become U.S. citizens, I decided to take advantage of this after I fulfilled the requirements.

Applying for U.S. citizenship is not an easy process, but I think it is worthwhile. I followed these three steps when I applied for US



citizenship: I read about other people's experiences to get more information, got all the requested documents ready, and followed the instructions step by step after sending in my documents.

My first experience was searching on the Internet. I had been doing this since I was in Thailand because I was curious to learn more about visas and what I would have to do after getting married to my fiancé, who is a US citizen. I went on the USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service) website to look for the cost and the documents they need in the case of marriage to a US citizen. At the same time, I joined a website, which is called

*Unclesamgirls.com* to help me get more information, and I used this website to help me process my Fiancé Visa or K-1 Visa. I read a lot about other people's experiences and how they processed their own documents and where all the paperwork came from before sending it to



USCIS to apply to become a U.S. citizen. For example, while searching on the Internet, I found out that I have to be married for three

years after my first Green Card was issued to have the right to apply for naturalization. I also found out that I have to study for a test that includes civics and American history.

April 1, 2012 was that date when I had been married for three years, and I could have applied for my N-400, three months before that, which means I could have applied on January 1. At that time, I still was not sure if I really wanted to do it right then because I was going to school, and I did not want to interrupt my school schedule. I started to apply on May 24, 2012. At that time, I had several documents to collect and other things to gather. The documents I had to include in this application were the N-400 application form, a copy of the front and back of my Green Card, my marriage license, documents of proof that my husband and I live together, such as mortgage, credit card bills, personal loans, utility bills, etc., the past three years of income tax (IRS) returns, a check for \$680.00 for the application fee, two photographs of myself, and evidence that my husband has been a U.S. citizen for last three years. There were a lot of documents I needed, but it would

be the last time to deal with it, and the documents had to be copied and sent to USCIS. I kept all my original paperwork because on the interview day, I had to bring all these papers to show to the officer.

For the next step of the process, I had to be very patient and follow the instructions carefully. I received my first notice letter on June 1, 2012, and it gave the details for the place and date for me to do my finger prints. My finger prints were taken at the USCIS office in Naperville, Illinois, and the date was June 20, 2012. After taking my finger prints, the officer handed me a book and a CD to study for the test. The book had one hundred questions to study, but in the real interview, the officer would pick only ten questions to ask. I studied for the test for about a month. After two months, I received my second notice letter that gave me that place and date for the interview. October 1, 2012 was my interview, and it happened in Chicago. I was more nervous than ever because I worried about not having studied enough for the test even though I knew many people said how easy the test was. I knew in my heart that I had to pass the test on that day. I told myself if I missed one question, there would still be nine more questions. I kept looking at the door and waited for the buzzer in my hand to vibrate because I was afraid that I missed my name when the officer called it. The buzzer scared me when it vibrated and my name was called. The interview was simple; the officer asked me questions that were in the book I had been studying, and the test included reading and writing basic English. The officer asked me seven questions because I missed one answer, and he

asked me to read out loud to him.

The question I had to read out loud



was, "Who is on the dollar bill?" After I read that question to him, he read the answer to me and asked me to write it on the paper, and the answer was "Washington is on the dollar bill." I just felt like a mountain had been lifted off my chest when the officer told me that I passed that test. He also said that the oath ceremony would be hold in Rock Island, and I would get a letter

from USCIS. I was so excited and nervous at the same time still, and I left the room to meet my husband.

My husband: Did you pass?

I: Yes!

My husband: What did he ask you?

I: I don't know, but I know I passed.

My husband: See! Piece of cake and no mess.

My husband was so happy for me that I passed the test, and he kept saying that he knew I would pass.

Now all these experiences are still in my mind because I am still wondering what the officer had asked me, but I know for sure that I passed the test and will become a U.S. citizen. I have to wait for three or four weeks to receive the invitation to the oath ceremony. I would like to suggest to all permanent residents who would like to become a U.S. citizen to apply and go through the whole process. It will benefit you if you would like to live here longer or forever.



My name is **Dossi Carine Astrid Djiman**. I am from Benin, which located in West Africa. I was born in Benin and grew up with my family. I have one brother, one younger sister, and one younger brother. I am licensed in agronomy (expert in the production of all food, both animal and plant). I have been in U.S.A. since December 2011, after my graduation to improve my English skills, and to continue my study in agronomy. I live alone here; all my family lives in Benin. I don't work, and I am a full-time student. My dream is to get my doctorate degree in agronomy, and after my graduation get a work at FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). I speak Fon, French, Ewe, and English. My hobbies are listening to music, going shopping, and watching TV.



## Discrimination of Blacks from Africa in America

According to World English Dictionary, "Discrimination is the treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit: partiality or prejudice." However, I didn't

think that I would find discrimination in the U.S. When I watched American movies in my country, I used to see Blacks and Whites together, and they seemed to be in harmony. In addition, the fact that America has a Black president also contributed to my idea that Blacks and Whites lived perfectly together. When I got my visa to the U.S, I couldn't imagine that I would be the victim of discrimination or that the Blacks from Africa, in general, were victims of discrimination every day either from Whites or from Blacks.

First, it surprised me that the White Americans discriminated against the Africans. When the Whites come into African countries, the Whites are treated equality, and sometimes they have more privileges because the Africans say that the Whites, the guests, need to feel at home. But it is not the case when the Africans come to the White home; the difference is sharp and clear. The manner the Whites are treated is very different from the manner in which the Africans are treated. The Blacks, the African immigrants, have fewer chances than those Whites. For example, Africans are given very hard work. They also receive very low pay for this hard work. It is very rare to find an African who works and earns the same as a White. Also, the bosses and coworkers create trouble against Blacks so that the Blacks are fired. Even if Blacks and Americans have the same work, Blacks work quality is monitored more carefully than the American work quality. When the African has a health problem at work, the way he is treated, is different from that of an American. In addition, when Blacks go to buy in the mall, for example, the way in which the cashier speaks and smiles at Africans is not the same as with the Whites. The cashier speaks



and smiles naturally, when it is the White person, but when it is the African's turn, the cashier speaks with him by telling how

much he has to pay for; that's all. The discrimination is also at the school. For example, American children consider the African children as wild animals they must flee. For the American children, the African children are not like them. White children think that they have more rights than Africans, and this is true because wherever you have an African and a White, the White is considered more than the African. The White has more opportunities than the African.

When I asked Americans to explain this discrimination, almost all of them say that this is their country, and the African needs to adjust. Other Americans say that it is because the Africans are different from them; they don't have the same education and the same culture. It is also because for some of them have a bad idea about black. The stories about the black dog and cat show this prejudice.

What hurts even more is when American Blacks discriminate against the Africans. One day I took the bus, which was driven by a Black-American. The bus made a stop and there was a Togolese who came to get on the bus. She was running to catch the bus, but the bus driver went



even though the Togolese was beckoning with her hand. When we came to another bus station a little later, there was

an American who was a longer distance from the bus, but the driver waited until she entered the bus. She left the person with whom she shared the skin color, and she waited for the person that did not have the same skin color. When I asked the Blacks about this discrimination, many have replied that it was not true. When I told them the story of the bus, they explained this discrimination. It was because the Africans were part of slavery past, and they didn't have to fight for freedom. The Black-Americans were sold by Africans, our ancestors, to the Whites. Now the Black-Americans have difficulty trusting other Africans. I thought that this was past history, but this hatred has passed to another generation.

To conclude, for all who will read this article, if you know people who discriminate, convince them to know the person before judging. For me, we are all equal; the past is the

past we must forgive our ancestors and create our own new history of equality.



My name is **Man Bhattarai**, and I am from Bhutan. Bhutan is a small country situated between India and China. I grew up in a small town in Bhutan called Kharbandi, but I spent most of my life in Nepal along with my family. My education began in Nepal, and I completed the 12th grade there. After that, I went to India for three years to continue my education and get a bachelor's degree. I completed my degree in 2004. Now, I am in USA as a refugee, and I am studying at Black Hawk College. I came to the USA on May 12th 2009, and a week later, I joined Black Hawk College. I would like to be a physical therapy assistant, and I am taking some course for that.



## My Role in My Community

According to the famous philosopher Aristotle, man cannot live without society and, "He who is unable to live in society [...] must be either a beast or a god." The communities we live in are important parts of our life that directly impact our world view. We all try to promote concepts of help and safety in our communities. The community that I belong to is rather small.

There is a total of 180 members in our community. My community is the Bhutanese community in the Quad Cities. All the members of my community are from Bhutan. Bhutan is a small country situated between two big countries, India and China. The country is ruled by a king,



Gijmey Singey Wangchuck. He is also known as a dictator king. He expelled all his citizens in 1992 and sent them to Nepal as refugees.

The Bhutanese people of my community have been settling in the Quad City area around Rock Island and Moline for the past two to three years. Most of us left our country because of the dictatorship of the king. We were expelled from the country in 1992, and since then, we lived in Nepal for around 15-20 years in a camp before

moving to different parts of the world. Fortunately, a very small number of around 180-220 people came to live in this area in Rock Island and Moline. There are more than 60,000 people from Bhutan in the different parts of the



United States. We came here through the agency called World Relief. This agency processed us from Nepal and

brought us here. After they brought us here, we sought help from different agencies and organizations in the area. Now, we are working hard to integrate our community into this place. I help my community people in their various activities, such as their medical appointments, and I also take them to church and temple every Saturday and Sunday. In addition, I also help the children in my community by teaching them our native language and giving them transportation after the language class.

Most of the people in my community are uneducated, and they only speak their own language, Nepali. Very few people are educated. The Quad City area is totally new for us. We formed this community to help those people in their daily life, such as taking them to ESL classes and teaching them about this place, like the



rules and laws, and being on time for appointments. My days are always busy. Beside my full-time classes, I work late for my community. Our community hopes to enlarge and strengthen the co-operation among its members and other local communities in the economic and educational fields. We target the promotion of self-help activities for Bhutanese residing in this area and provide opportunities for the community, such as social, educational, and cultural activities.

As a member of the Bhutanese community, I have lots of responsibilities, and I try to educate myself about the different cultures and religions within the community. This way, I can discover how to serve the needs of my community. Apart from this, culture, language, education, and social issues are highly eminent in the Bhutanese community. Culture is an

important factor of our community. Our culture has taught me how to respect others, how to behave in front of others, how to perform my duties. Bhutanese culture includes various religious activities like performing "Pooja," a Hindu religious ritual and many other activities.



As a member of my community, I must be aware of the needs of my neighbors and try to meet those needs. I currently volunteer my time at churches and temple to teach small children our languages and culture. Volunteering gives me a chance to focus less on myself and give my time and energy to others in need.



My name is **Amevi Mawulawoe Avoughlah**. I come

from a small village called Noepe in Togo, Africa. I have eight sisters and four brothers. I have been in the USA since April, 2009. I live in Moline, and I'm the mother of a boy whose name is Harry Mawu tiam. Before I came to the US, I was a second secretary-general of UDS-Togo (Union of Democratic Party), a secretary of a non-profit organization, and president of a women's group in my church. I like to interact with people. My first dream was to be a journalist, but as I grew up, I always thought about what I could do in order to help the people in my county better than as a journalist. Then, I realized my village needs a nurse because of what I saw from my parents, a nurse and a doctor. I want to become a nurse so that I can help others. My hobbies are: reading the Bible, shopping, listening to gospel music, and traveling. I am so thankful to be in this country of opportunities, and I hope that one day I will deliver the dream I carry like a pregnancy.



### **African Treasures Organization: My Part in the Fight against Poverty**

Helping the poor and needy people in my life and in my neighborhood and putting a smile on their faces has been my joy since my childhood. My mother told me how I made anybody I met happy at only two years of age. I

never left the sight of anyone I knew was sad; I would stay with the person to console him or her until I was certain that the person was okay before I left him or her. My mother is a nurse, and my father is a doctor. As a little girl, I used to go to their clinic to the labor and delivery room



(this is permitted in my country) to console women who were in painful labor with words such as, "Oh sorry, you will be ok soon." Compassion for those who suffer was my passion, and I had a strong vision of

helping the poor and the needy in the future. It was this vision that brought me to the city, Kovie, in 2003 to join an association that, at the time, didn't have a name yet. Later, it was named the African Treasures Association (ATA); a non-profit organization founded in Tsevie, Togo, West Africa. Now I am the general secretary of the US branch of the African Treasures Association.

Togo is one of the poorest countries of sub-Saharan Africa. Its people struggle in the midst of poverty, unemployment and diseases to make ends meet. ATA was founded to address some of the social problems of the rural communities of the District of Zio and Ave specifically. The founder of ATA is Mr. Ayayi Patatu, a middle school teacher whose passion for the poor, especially the students we met with every day, led him to dream about and to found an organization to address the socio-economic needs of the rural folks. I met him in 2003 when I was his student and the middle school student president. I was the person who explained the students' needs to the teachers during meetings.

One day during a conversation with him, he explained the objectives of ATA to me. I fell in love with the organization and its mission of empowering the rural students and adults to emancipate themselves from poverty and the social problems of the system.

Our mission is to promote the emancipation of women, men, and girls and work for the protection of children. The general objectives of the African Treasures Association are to encourage training of cooperatives and groups in agriculture, health, and commercial and human development. Occasionally, our

mission and projects will be published in the national daily newspaper, the *Togo Press*. By the virtue of the Diversity Green Card Lottery, some of the members of ATA, including the president and me, are now in the USA. Consequently, we have formed the US branch of ATA, and we registered ATA as a 501(c)3 non-profit Organization in the US with the same mission of helping people back at home in Togo.

Our own funds are used to support programs aimed at emancipating the most vulnerable of the Zio-Ave district areas. Also, we support petty traders with microcredits with 0% interest. This money is paid back to our coffers to be used for other projects. Currently, our funds are being used for the fight against HIV, STDs and other endemic diseases. Our members in Togo ride used bikes that were bought here in the US from the Goodwill stores in Rock Island and Moline and sent to them. With these bikes, they can reach the people in the villages around. Also, I buy used clothes and clothes that are on sale as well as stationery and shoes from those same Goodwill stores (Tuesday Quarter Day). Then, I buy candy, toothpaste, toothbrushes, medicine, books and note books at the Dollar Tree, Dollar General, and Wal-Mart and ship them in big boxes to Togo. I am the one in charge of this project. This summer, I went to Togo myself to see my family, but I used some of my time to distribute the items shipped to the poor people.

The smiles on their faces gave me a lot of satisfaction and fulfillment. My dreams are being fulfilled. I find a lot of satisfaction in helping the poor and the disadvantaged by improving their living conditions, among other things. For example, this summer while in Togo, some friends and I helped a boy who got a urinary tract infection from swimming in a polluted river and was urinating blood.

He had no insurance or money to go to the hospital for treatment. So our organization took him to the hospital and paid all his bills. He is cured of this disease now, but he is just one out of the many who are suffering from the same sickness. My thanks go



to those friends in the organization who donated to the ATA. With their help we were able to help a boy and save a life. Many more lives need to be saved and more funds are needed.

My visit to Togo this summer and what we were able to do have given me a lot of reasons to continue. We should not give up on our mission of improving the life of the disadvantaged. Jesus said, "The poor will be with us every time, so everything you do to one



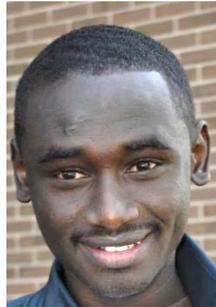
of these you do to me because you can't see me but you see the poor". So why can't we save a dollar to save the life of someone far away in Togo or

somewhere else in the world?

The mission of ATA continues. We are empowered to lay down our lives for the needy by identifying the needs and setting up remedial and developmental projects to alleviate them. We still have a lot of work to do. How many kids need milk to drink in Africa and yet can't find a spoonful? Now think about how many cartons of milk you pour out in your sink every week. How many kids go to bed in Africa without food and yet how much food do you keep in the fridge for weeks and throw away unused? When do we stop the waste and save some money to help someone in need? We are organizing a campaign to raise awareness of HIV AIDS. Let us all join the fight with the African Treasures Association to save and change lives in Togo.



My name is **Moussa Issa**, and I am from Dar al slam, Sudan, East Africa. That is where I went to middle and high school, and in 2009, I graduated from Al Akarima High School. Right after my graduation, I came to the U.S.A chasing my dream, which is to study computer information systems. I speak three languages so far: Zaghawa, Arabic, and English. Also, I am a sports lover and my favorite sports are basketball and soccer.



## Imelda Crinklaw ESL Career Resource

Have you ever needed somebody to help you with your career choice? Have you chosen a major or a career that you did not like? My cousin Mohamed, for example, studied business management for two years. After he graduated and got a job, he did not like it, so he went back to school. Right now he is so happy in his new major, which he just started last semester after getting help from a career resource coordinator. So for that reason, I would like to introduce you to Ms. Imelda Crinklaw, the career



resource coordinator (CRC) for the ESL Program at BHC, who can help you with any of these problems.

Who is Imelda? Imelda was a career adviser at BHC for 15 years. She has been the English as a Second Language (ESL) career resource coordinator for over six years. Ms. Crinklaw is originally from Mexico City, Mexico. She moved to the United States at the age of 17 with her American husband. She went to middle and senior high school in Mexico before she came to the U.S. Then she got her bachelor's and master's degrees from Western Illinois University. She worked in more than one field. In fact, between 1997 and 2001 she worked as career advisor, academic advisor, and a cross-cultural assistance director.



After I interviewed her, I understood that she has been very helpful to many students, and she is always extremely friendly. First, she helps the students find more information about careers and the wages that the students are going to earn after finishing the program that she helps them with. Basically, her job is to guide the students to careers that they want to have in the future, and she always tries to tell them not to waste time in a career that they don't like. She is there to help the students find information about the job duties, salary range, future outlook, financial aid, and help them to register for classes. In fact, she gave me an example of a student who spent one year in a program that he

did not like. Then he came to her, and she helped him find the career that he was looking for all that time. He was very excited about his new career choice. Also, I was able to interview



one of the students she helped; his name is Prophet Saint Fleur. He said he graduated

from university when he was in Haiti, but when he came here, he did not know what to do or where to start. So he came to BHC looking for help, and then he found Imelda. She did research for him and told him everything that he needed to do. He said he was so glad he asked her for help before taking any action. In addition, she is extremely friendly, and she gives you all her attention as soon as you walk in her office. For example, whenever I need help, I just walk in her office without an appointment, and she never told me to make an appointment before coming in. When you walk into her office, she welcomes you with a big smile; she leaves her work behind to help you and talks to you in a friendly way to make you feel welcome in her office. She is always ready to answer any questions that you have.

In short, if you want to choose a career and you do not know what it will be, or you don't know who you should ask, don't worry; Imelda is always there waiting for you to help you with any questions that you have. She is very helpful and friendly. My fellow students, I suggest you to go and see her for any questions that you have about your career.



My name is **Joceline Wilson** and I am from Togo. I am 18yrs old, and I just graduated from United Township High School. I am pursuing my career in the health field business. I came to the United States with my parents, my twin brother, and my little sister. My future hopes and dreams are to receive my RN degree in Nursing, or to receive a degree in Neonatal Nursing.



## Some Effects of Dictatorship

What is dictatorship? Dictatorship is the idea of one government taking control of all power without the people's consent. Even though we live in a globalized world, in which the democracy is widely spread, dictatorship is still a reality in many countries. There are three main effects of dictatorship: they are corruption, no democracy, and death of citizens.



The first effect of dictatorship is corruption. It is a system in which the president and his followers can do whatever they please without any consequences. The abuses his power. Our late president Nyassimgke Eyademan of Togo was a cruel president. He did everything he wanted without any consequences. For example, he could take a person's wife without any regard of the person's feelings, and if anybody tried to question him or tried to advise him to be better, the person ended up disappearing and never being heard from again. Another example is his running for reelection. He cheated and killed his opponents that ran against him. He elected himself and if anybody tried to run against him, the person ended up dying. Anybody that tried to run against him died or citizens that supported another party tended to get beaten up, hurt, or even killed. An example of that would be being on the presidential seat for more than thirty years. The people of the country did not receive any benefits from their hard work such as health care benefits, and educations, and etc.

Secondly, not only corruption but lack of democracy is another effect of dictatorship. People have no freedom of speech. For

example, the citizens of Togo don't have a say in anything the president does. All they have to do was to obey the rules and to follow all his demands. The president can kill and murder hundreds of people without any consequences. There is more violence. For example, the people of Togo will try to over throw the president. In doing so, riots begin and people start fighting and hurting one another. Another example, I remembered the day that I was sitting on the side walk with my mother when a group of gang cars drove by and started whipping everyone on the street. I got whipped on my thigh with a poisonous whip without my knowing it was



poisoned. Later, it started to hurt, and it grew into a big wound. Luckily, I went to the doctors on time and I was written a prescription pill to heal the wound. Finally, there is no justice (the government is above the law), for example in America, it is different. In conclusion, no democracy can lead to uneven ruling.

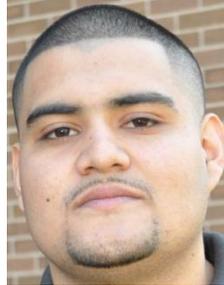
Finally, dictatorship not only brings corruption and no democracy, but also lots of deaths. Civil war is an example. People tried to fight death of citizens. Many people died during the reign of President Nyassimgke Eyadema. There was a law if anybody talked bad about the president and his idea of total dictatorship, the person would be turned in to the police and thrown to jail. During his presidency, my country had a big civil war going on. That was the time when people could win something called "lotto visa" which is a free acceptance to come to the U.S. for a fresh start and a better life away from violence and fear. That was how my family came about to the U.S.



In conclusion, these are the three main effect of dictatorship that often results in corruption, no democracy, and death of citizens.



My name is **Julian Quintana**, and I am 21 years old.



I am originally from Mexico, but I came to the U.S. to start a career as a computer programmer. One thing that I like to do is to write, record and produce music. I am really into that kind of world, but I do not forget about my career because I need to have a plan b for the future. I am the oldest in my family, and I always give good advice to my siblings.

## The Real Pit Bull

There are many stories about the creation of pit bulls, and not one is similar to another. The original bulldog, which was used for boar



hunting, looks so similar to the pit bulls nowadays because bulldogs are their ancestors. They were given the name bulldog because when the horrible sport of bull baiting became popular, they were the dog best suited for this purpose. (Bull bating was a sport in which dogs fought with

bull.) Later in 1835, the original bulldogs were outlawed in England because people started dogfighting, and that is how bulldogs started to get the bad reputation that they have nowadays. Many people do not realize that every dog breed has specific characteristics and is, therefore, used for a different purpose. For example, the English setter is used for hunting, and the German shepherd is used as a police dog. Because bulldogs were bred for fighting, people still have negative thoughts about pit bulls. I have a positive idea, and the experts explain in a different way why pit bulls are good dogs and not necessarily dangerous.

### *What People Think about Pit Bulls*

People think that Pit Bulls are the most dangerous dog and that they do not deserve to be a pet for a family. I have heard many stories about pit bulls. Some people say that they look dangerous because of their appearance, and others say that they have seen or experienced a pit bull attack. For these reasons, thirteen states in the U.S. have state-level laws prohibiting local counties to own and breed pit bulls. All this is true, unfortunately, but it is not the dog's fault if the owners trained them to be aggressive.

*What I Think about Pit Bulls*

To me, pit bulls are the best dogs that you can have because they have so many skills. I used to have two pit bulls, and I know this from experience. I raised my pit bulls by myself, and they reacted in a very good way and were not a dangerous at all. Pit bulls are smart in a different ways than the rest of the dog breeds. They are going to learn and do everything that you teach them, so that is why if you taught them to be aggressive, they are going to be aggressive. For example, I taught my pit bulls to always be on my right side, and that is where they always were. It is the

same with a child; if you teach your child to be bad, once they grow up that is how they are going to be. However, people can always change, but dogs cannot.



They are always going to protect their owner, no matter what. Not only do they protect their owner, but they also protect the family because they are loyal with every person that treats them with love. For example, my pit bulls never left my side when I was with them, not even when people tried to distract them. My pit bulls never reacted in an aggressive way not even when other dogs barked or tried to get their attention.

*What Experts Said about Pit Bulls*

According to the book, *Experience with Pit Bulls*, "Despite the fierce prey drive hardwired into the original pit bulls, they always made



excellent companions for humans." They have a fighting ancestry, but the pit bulls of this era are different. Experts confirm this because in the past

when they were trying to breed a different pit bull, they killed the dogs that showed aggression toward humans, even in the middle of a fight. The experts also confirm that, "From this selective breeding came a dog that possessed a fierce prey drive, but was exceptionally people friendly," and that, "The Irish version of the pit

was actually known as the 'Old Family Dog,' because it was considered the perfect family pet, known to be especially good with children."

In conclusion, pit bulls are not dangerous. I know that they have a bad reputation, but that is because of the dog owners who trained their pit bulls to be aggressive, abused them physically, and used them in dog fights. Why not give these dogs an opportunity to be a pet now that we know that they can be a perfect family pet. A pit bull can be a good dog for everyone, but they need to be treated with love, so they can show love to every person and every animal in the world.



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*Nina De Bisschop and Janet Francisco, ESL Instructors*