

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY

INTERNATIONAL VOICES At Black Hawk College



Black
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English as a Second language Program

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Nina De Bisschop, ESL Instructor

AYAWA AMOUZOU



I'm Ayawa Amouzou. I'm 30 years old, and I'm from Togo. I'm married, and I have two children. I'm a student at Black Hawk College, and I'm pursuing a career in nursing. I hope to finish the ESL program at the end of this year so that I can start taking classes in my major subject. My dream is to finish my studies and have a good job which will allow me to take good care of my family.

Immigrant Couples in the USA

Immigrant couples were living in their home country according to their culture and the realities of their country because they got used to it; once they enter the USA, they experience another life different from the one they were living before. This new lifestyle takes them through stressful times and can lead to divorce; however, some couples live happily despite all these problems.

First of all, some couples experience stressful times after arriving in the USA. Couples often have to stay with someone for one to three months or even longer, depending on their situation. That moment is a difficult time for the couples because they don't have the privacy they were used to; most of them have to share the room with someone else.



They have to eat everything presented to them, and they can't make any decision without asking the person who lodges them. According to one of my friends and her husband, their first weeks here was tough because they had to live with the cousin of the husband; the aunt (the mother of the cousin) was rude in speaking and sharing food with them, but they stayed in that situation until they got a job.

Also, other couples coming to the USA go through other situations which lead them to divorce. When the couples start working, they experience fatigue because they were not used to the hard work in the factories. In addition, they have to work in shifts, so, if they work in different shifts, they don't have enough

time to spend together. That situation reduces the mutual affection of some couples who are nervous around each other and argue about little things. If the arguments continue all the time, they often get a divorce.

On the contrary, some immigrant couples are living here happily although they faced the same situations, for their financial condition has improved since they left their home country. For instance, there are couples in the USA who adapted to the hard conditions quickly. They go to work and





come back late; in place of being mad at each other, they share their difficulties and support each other. For my husband and me, at the beginning it was difficult, but now, when we have a little time we go for a walk or shopping, and every Sunday we go to church to pray and listen to the word of God. It is helping us to stay strong, no matter what.

In conclusion, it takes a long time for the newcomer couples to become familiar with American life. This is why some immigrant couples feel the stress, and others even ask for a divorce; however, some couples notice the amelioration of their condition, so they are trying to find the means to stay strong, no matter what is happening.

Okra Sauce

Okra Sauce is the most common dish in Togo. It is made with okra, smoked fish with shrimp, or smoked fish with crabs, peppers, salt, palm oil, and spices. This dish is very often served in Togolese households with another dish called Akume (made with corn starch). Okra sauce with Akume can be eaten at lunch or at dinner.



BASSAM ZAKARIA

Bassam is the name I was given by my parents on May 19, 1992. I was born in Baghdad, Iraq, and moved to Damascus, Syria at the age of 12. In 2010, I moved to the U.S. and went to high school here for two years. In addition, to improve my English and help me with my future major, I'm taking the ESL Program. Because music is my life, I write and sing many rap songs. Improving my English, getting a good career, and continuing to rap: those are my hopes for the future.



Why Give Up?

I'm sure you have had a particularly challenging time in your life. Nowadays, making decisions is not easy. Moving to the U.S. was one of the hardest decisions I had to make. Moving to Syria to live there for four and a half years was the best option to escape the war in Iraq, but due to the bad situation in Syria and the lack of work and education, moving to America to continue my education was a great opportunity. I had to leave my family, friends, and

childhood behind to have a better life. Then I had to face a new life, culture, and language when I moved to the U.S. in 2010. The new circumstances that I had to face were the new language and high school life, but I found different ways, including rap, to help me adjust.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was how to learn English. Basic British English was all I had learned. Even though English was my favorite language, and I learned many words when I was a kid, I never thought I would have to use it to communicate with others. In fact, the basic English I learned was not going to be enough in my everyday life in the U.S. Not understanding what people were saying was a strange feeling, not unlike a new born baby who doesn't understand a word his parents say. I asked myself, "Why don't we just have one language in the world?"

Moreover, finding a good and fast way to learn English was not easy at the beginning, but giving up was not one of my options. Finally, I found the first step through a song I liked but didn't really understand. After doing some quick research, I found the song, played it with the lyrics, translated each word that was new to me, and this was a fast and easy way to learn many vocabulary words. However, listening to songs with the lyrics was not enough, so movies were my second step. Watching my favorite movies every day was a great way to learn English. Repeating the same part three times in a row, listening to the way the actors talk, and repeating it out loud was the strategy I used to adjust to the American accent. In addition, listening and using English more than my native language was a good, easy, and fast way to learn it.

Another challenge was adjusting in high school. Excitement was what I felt when I first started going, but a little depression soon came along when I found out that I didn't know a thing



about high school in the U.S. I had to face it; dropping out was on my mind all the time. "How am I going to understand the teacher and the students?" was the question that I didn't find an answer to at that time. My first year started with no friends and a lack of English I had at that time. In order for me to make friends, I had to focus on learning English. Meeting new students every day but not understanding what they were saying was not fun at all. One of the new friends I met in P.E. class used to talk to me the whole class period. I remember she said, "I know you don't understand everything I'm saying, but just listening to me will help you to understand the way we talk."

Moreover, I spent my summer break after I finished my first year on learning English. I spent half of the day just learning new vocabulary and how to use it in complete sentences. I was so ready for the second and last year of high school, wondering if the time I spent on learning English was going to be enough. Teachers and students were shocked; even I couldn't believe I was able to understand what everyone around me was saying. Also, I was finally able to communicate with students, and they were wondering if I had been lying about not speaking English the first time they met me. In addition, I joined clubs in order to continue using the language as much as I could and to make friends.



Finally, working with others on music and meeting new people was the best way to adjust to the new life and to improve my language through conversations at the same time. The guitar is my favorite instrument, but playing at home by myself was boring. "Why do you have a guitar in class?" I asked Mr. Duster, my geography teacher. "I give lessons after class," said, Mr. Duster. Bringing my guitar for every lesson, meeting new people, and playing the guitar were a good start for me to continue playing music.

Since Rock Island High School has students from all over the world, the staff decided to do Diversity Assembly and a cultural dance for each ethnic group. Since I was the only guy from Iraq, it was impossible for me to dance by myself. I told my English teacher I could do a rap song in my language; he thought it was a good idea. Working on the music, the lyrics, and practicing was not easy. One day, while I was taking my guitar lesson with Mr. Duster, I told him about the show, and he said, "I used to rap when I was your age." An idea came to my mind.



Since I was rapping in my language, no one would understand what I was saying, but Mr. Duster could do a part in English on the same subject. I asked him to rap with me. "Let's do it," he said. After many days of practicing, the day came, and we were ready. Standing in front of all the students was kind of scary, but somewhere deep inside me I was so happy to show my talent. It was a real challenge to do, but it was a good chance for me to adjust to high school life. After my performance, many students told me about how well I did. Of course, I felt very happy and proud.

In conclusion, all challenges have had a good impact on my life, and I will always remember to face challenges with confidence. Even though I encountered many obstacles, such as having no friends and dealing with a language barrier, I never gave up. Joining clubs and playing music with others were very helpful to improve my English and make friends. Till today I'm still doing the same thing to learn more English and make more friends. In addition, not giving up in high school has given me a lot of opportunities in my life. I always say, "Giving up is not an option."

One of the Ancient Wonders of the World: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, were built approximately 2500 years ago in 600 BC. The gardens were built for King Nebakanezer II. Nebakanezer's wife, Amytis, missed her hometown when she moved to Babylon. Babylon was very flat and dry with very little rain and, therefore, had very little greenery. Her hometown was very mountainous, so Nebakanezer had the gardens built for her so it would resemble where she used to live. The gardens were huge, over 300 feet tall and contained many types of trees, flowers, lawns, plants, fountains, pools, miniature what?, fruit, animals, and waterfalls, which were said to have been from places all over the world. It is called the Hanging Gardens because the gardens were built high above the ground on multi-level stone terraces. The plants weren't rooted in the earth like a traditional garden. The Hanging Gardens were known to be in Mesopotamia, near what is now Baghdad, Iraq. It was located by the Euphrates River. It had every kind of plant available in the kingdom. Not only were the plants and flowers amazing, but also the technology used to water them. The different levels of the garden were very high up, and since it barely ever rained in Babylon,, the Babylonians created a water pump that transported water from the Euphrates River up to the Hanging Gardens. They created the pump by attaching buckets to a chain. The chain was connected to two big wheels at the top and bottom. These would allow the chain to come back up after it went to the bottom to retrieve the water. Slaves powered the chain by pulling it so that it would continue to move. As the chain moved, the buckets would go into the river and fill with water. They tipped over at the top of the pump so that the high gardens could be reached and irrigated. The water traveled down channels so that all of the plants could be watered. Hence, the grass was permanently green and the leaves of trees grew firmly attached to supple branches. Unfortunately, the Hanging Gardens were destroyed by earthquakes around 200 B.C.



HTOOKA PAW



My name is **Htooka Paw**. I was born in Burma in 1992, and in 1999, I moved to Thailand because of the civil war in Burma. In 2008, I moved to the US with the help and support of UNHCR. Now, I have been living in the city of Rock Island for almost six years, and I have a better life now. I studied ESL at Rock Island High School, and I am still taking ESL at Black Hawk College. I am looking forward to helping my community, and my career goal is to become an environmental scientist or a social worker.

My Trip to Costa Rica

Traveling to Costa Rica was an amazing experience, and I learned many new things. When I was a child in Burma, I never thought I would travel overseas to countries like Thailand, America and Costa Rica. Costa Rica is a beautiful country located between North and South America. The most important things that I learned about on my trip are the agriculture, the environment, and the people's lives in Costa Rica. It was a fun trip because I was able to gather new experiences, travel to new places, learn more about planting, save animals, and meet Costa Rican people.

Firstly, the purpose of the trip was to learn about the environment of Costa Rica. Before I traveled to Costa Rica, I had learned how to save the environment by recycling waste, cleaning up the river, planting trees, and doing a lot of volunteer work in the Quad Cities. I got to go on this trip because my teacher introduced this trip to us. She showed us how people save the environment there and how can we save the environment in the USA. I saw many interesting activities, and I wanted to go. However, this trip cost lots of money, and I got the opportunity to travel because I

got to pay it off in monthly payments, and I got some support from my teacher and my parents. Also, I do volunteer work at QCCA, and they supported me as well. I am thankful to all of my friends, family, and my teacher who supported me.

When I lived in Burma, I never traveled on an airplane, and when we moved to Thailand, we traveled only by car. However, this was my second time traveling on an airplane to Costa Rica. This time, I was very excited because I wasn't afraid of the airplane. I was excited to travel with the Environmental Action Club of eleven high school students,

and I was excited to learn about the environment in Costa Rica. I traveled to many beautiful

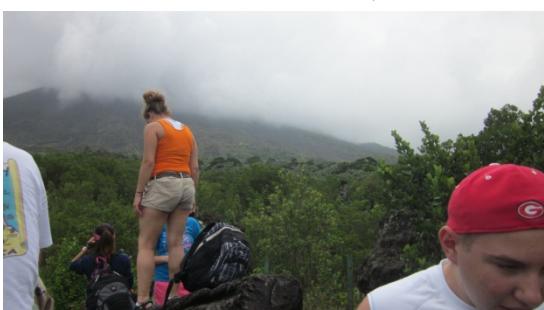


places in Costa Rica. The places I visited were Francisco's Lodge, a turtle station, the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, the home of the Bri Bri tribe, and the Goddess Garden. These places were all environmentally friendly. The weather in Costa Rica is as hot as my country, Burma, and the landscape includes mountains, volcanoes, national forests, and farms, which is very similar to my country. I loved it so much because it reminded me of the climate and the landscape of my home country.

In addition, the agriculture of Costa Rica is similar to my country. When I visited Costa Rica, I learned how to plant, and I planted sugarcane and trees. When we planted sugarcane, it was easy for me because I had experience from my country. In fact, Costa Rican people plant sugarcane the same way people in my country do. They use fertilizer and natural compost. We planted sugarcane row by row, and we added the compost and covered it with dirt. We also planted trees the same way. Costa Rican people dug into the ground and put in the tree before covering it with dirt. We didn't do much, but we tried to help save the natural environment. Trees clean the air, and they take out pollutants; therefore, we can breathe cleaner air.

Moreover, we tried to save the animals there. We saved the turtles that had just hatched, and we released them into the ocean. We did this project to protect the turtle's eggs and save the little ones. When I touched them, they felt soft and easy to break. Therefore, we protected them from other humans and animals who love to eat their eggs. We protected them from raccoons, birds, monkeys, crabs and snakes. On the first night, we did a turtle patrol, and I saw a big ocean turtle called "leatherback." This turtle was very huge, and she laid a thousand eggs by that night. I was amazed because I had never seen a big sea turtle like this before.

Also, people's lives in Costa Rica are different in many ways, too. The students went to school in the morning and came back at 5:00 pm. They had several subjects in school. The difference was the time they go to school, and I noticed that they study really hard in this long turn hours. I saw many farmers who were working in the fields. They planted banana trees, pineapple trees, papaya trees and others. The fruit there tasted very fresh and sweet. Many workers were working and living on the farms, too. They had a house on the farm, like in my country. In my country, we called it a tent, but it was made of bamboo with grass on the roof. In Costa Rica, it was a little different because the roofs of their houses have wood, and their houses are made of wood, too.



When I visited the Bri Bri tribe, I saw the native people of Costa Rica. They lived in very basic houses, and they are very poor. They didn't have any electricity, and their houses were made with bamboo and different grasses. The weather there was fresh, and the air was clean. The river was cold and clean, and the birds were singing melodious sounds. I felt very delighted to see the nature, the mountains, and the green plants. When I visited, I played soccer with the Costa Rican, and we

shared our traditional natural remedies. They showed me their natural remedies, and I showed them some of my remedies as well. Their remedies are bitter tree leaves and some natural roots. They use them to treat diarrhea and diabetes. These natural remedies were very interesting to me because, in my culture, we use the same things.

To conclude, you should visit Costa Rica if you want to learn about a different culture, weather, food, people's lives, and the environment. It is also interesting to look at the differences

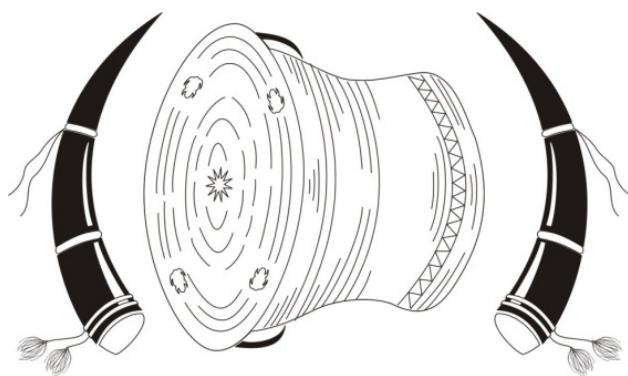


between Costa Rica and the US. You may want to learn about the animals and learn how to save the environment. Well, I really loved this trip because I learned many things, I was able to travel, I had a great experience, I had the opportunity to save the animals, and I met Costa Rican people.

Unique Items from My Country:

The Karen Traditional Bronze Drum and the Buffalo Horn (Klow and Kwe)

The bronze drum and the buffalo horn are cultural pieces from Burma (Myanmar) and represent the Karen ethnic group. They are also instruments that are important for the Karen people. First of all, the Karen bronze drum represents peace to the Karen people. In the drum, there are three art pieces, for example, a frog, an elephant, and a sun. The frog shows that when Karen people have a peaceful life, they stay in the same place, and when the frog is moving, it shows that Karen people have to carry their children and move away from difficulty. Next, the elephant represents something bad that happened, and the people have to move leave their land. The sun means that the Karen people shine bright like the sun. They never stop moving, and they will try their best like the sun. The Karen drum is made of gold, silver and copper while the Karen buffalo horn is made with real buffalo horn or even elephant horn. These important instruments are used during celebrations, meetings, ceremonies, and even during war. In the past, the Karen people played the drum when they had a dance, a meeting or other important things coming up because they didn't have any technology to call each other, so they used the drums to call their family to gather. To conclude, the klow and kwe are important to my Karen people's life because they represent the Karen people from Burma, the meaning of our art and crafts.



KAINGZE OO

My name is **Kaingze Oo**, and I am 21 years old. I am from Myanmar (Burma), but I am not Burmese; I am Karen.

Karen is one of the ethnic groups that has been living in Myanmar, and I am very proud to be Karen because I love my people and my culture. However, I came to the US in 2008, and I have been living in the U.S for five and a half years. I lived in Chicago for four years before I moved to Rock Island.

Moreover, I am studying ESL at BHC right now, and I will be finishing my ESL classes next year. My major is nursing, and I want to be a nurse because I love helping people. In addition, I also want to go back to my country and help the Karen people.



My Childhood Experiences

Everybody has his or her own childhood experiences. Some people experienced a difficult childhood, and other people experienced a good childhood. Personally, I look back at my childhood experiences with more sad memories than happy memories.

First, I remember that I grew up in different camps, but I don't have any memories about the country where I was born. My parents told me that when I was around one or two years old, they had to leave Burma because of political and economic problems in the country. Therefore, they moved to a camp in Thailand and became refugees because they didn't have a place to go and no food to eat.



My first memories are from when I was five years old. I remembered a little bit about the first camp where my parents settled down. It was a small camp, and only Karen refugees lived there. I remember my parents worked really hard in order to send my siblings and me to school. We lived there for about six years, and then we moved to another camp because Burmese soldiers came and burned down our camp many times. We couldn't stay there, so we moved out to Umphium camp because it was safer.

After that, I lived in Umphium camp in Thailand for about ten years, and I have so many memories from when I was there. I grew up in the camp without electricity, and it was hard for me, my parents, and everyone who lived in the camp. At that time, I walked to school every day, and it took twenty minutes to get to school. When I studied at night, I used candles to give me light. Sometimes, when I fell asleep, my hair got burnt by the candles, but I got used to that because this was how our everyday life was in the camp. While I was at school, my parents were working on a farm all day in order to support my sister, brothers, and me. On the

weekends, I helped my parents on the farm. I helped them plant the seeds, cut the grass, and water the plants. If I had time, I went to hang out with my friend in the forest, and we played hide and seek. However, I didn't have toys to play with because my parents couldn't afford to buy any for me. My house was made of bamboo and other wood, and there was space for five or six people to live in my house. I lived with my parents, one sister, and two brothers, and we had enough space for all of us. When I was living in the camp, it was like living in jail because we couldn't leave the camp since we didn't have Thai ID cards and passports. If you wanted to leave the camp, you had to pay a lot of money to the guards.

Nevertheless, I know living in the camp gave me a hard life, but I was also happy because I had a family who supported me, and I had a friend who was always by my side. For example, my parents bought me school uniforms, books, and paid for my school fees. If they had time, they took me to the forest and played with me. In addition, I had a friend who lived nearby my house, and we grew up together before we moved to Umphium camp. Every morning, we walked to school together, and we walked back together after school was over. On the weekends, we played at each other's houses, and we would hang out in the garden. When I had

a hard time in school, she always came to my house and helped me do homework that I had problems with, and we studied together. We lived like this in the camps for over fifteen years, and I was happy that I made it through even though I had a hard time going through each year.

My life changed drastically when I moved to the U.S., and I have a much better life now. I live in a better house because I have a more comfortable bed than I ever did before, and I have a light in my room, so I don't have to use candles like I used to do when I was in the camp. I am able to go to a better school in the US because American schools have much better education than the schools in the camps in Thailand, and the schools have many interesting subjects

that I like to study. You also have freedom, and you have the opportunity to do what you want; no one can force you to do anything. I would like to stay here my whole life and get my citizenship, but I will never forget who I am and where I came from.

To sum up, I experienced many difficult situations when I was a child. I have lived in and moved out of different camps, and I know how it feels living in a camp as a refugee, instead of in your own country. Someday, I would like to go back to my country and help my people.



Mohinga

There are many traditional dishes in my culture, but the most common one is Mohinga. To make Mohinga, you need to make a broth by adding catfish, lemongrass, garlic, turmeric and water to a large saucepan or stockpot. Bring it to a boil over high heat and skim any impurities that rise to the surface. Reduce heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain the broth; then remove the fish meat from the bones. Set aside and reserve the broth. Meanwhile, to make the paste, with a mortar and pestle, pound the lemongrass, chilies, red shallots, garlic and ginger into a nice paste. Set aside. Heat the peanut oil in a saucepan over low-medium heat and add the turmeric. Next, add the chili paste. Add the red onion, lemongrass, ginger and garlic. Cook for 5-6 minutes. Add the flaked fish and coat in the paste. Sauté over low-medium heat for 20 minutes. Add the shrimp paste and paprika. Continue to cook, over low heat, for a further 5 minutes to infuse flavors. Return the broth to the stockpot and place over medium heat. Add the crushed chickpeas, rice powder, fish sauce and flaked fish mixture. Season with salt and black pepper. Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes. Add the red shallots and boiled egg. Add the banana trunk. Divide the vermicelli noodles among 4 bowls. Pour the broth over the noodles and garnish with coriander, snake beans and chili flakes. This dish is considered one of the national dishes in Burma. This traditional dish is often served at breakfast but also sold throughout the day in restaurants, tea houses, and by street vendors.

Ingredients

½ cup peanut oil	1 tsp turmeric powder
½ red onion	2 cm piece of ginger
2 cloves garlic	2 tsp shrimp paste
1 tsp sweet paprika	85 g toasted rice powder
4 tbsp fish sauce	2 red Asian shallots, peeled
2 hardboiled eggs, sliced	600 g cooked vermicelli noodles
4 sprigs of coriander, to garnish	4 snake beans, finely sliced
pinch of dried chili flakes	3 tbsp cooked, crushed chickpeas
1 stalk lemongrass, white part only	100 g boiled banana trunk (alternatively, use banana blossom)



KHARKA GIRI



My name is **Sanju (Kharka) Giri**. Originally, I am from Bhutan. In 1994, my parents had to leave the country because of the political pressure from the government. Then, I lived in Nepal until April 14th, 2012, and then I came to the US with my family. I spent much of my childhood in Nepal as a refugee. I completed my bachelor's degree in humanities from Tribhuvan University in Nepal. After that, I worked as a volunteer teacher in the refugee camp for two years. Presently, I live in Rock Island, Illinois with my family. My career goal is to complete the nursing courses and become a responsible nurse. Through this profession, I want to serve my community. I always dream of visiting my home country once again in my life. I hope my dream will come true one day.

The Misery of Child Brides in Nepal

In Nepal, there are some socially established evil practices performed in the name of tradition and culture. Particularly, early marriage is one of the wicked practices that exploit young girls in many ways. The people who live in rural areas of Nepal still perform early marriages of their daughters. They believe that their souls will rest in heaven if they marry their daughters before their menstruation cycle begins. Some consequences of early marriage in Nepal are poor health conditions, low literacy rates, and domestic violence.

First of all, early marriage has negative effects on the health of these young girls. In Nepal, many girls are married between the ages of six and eighteen. Mostly, the grooms are above the age of twenty-five. Young girls' reproductive organs are not fully developed for sexual intercourse and they are not aware of sex education and sexually transmitted diseases. Indeed, some girls suffer from HIV/AIDS since their matured husbands often have multiple sex partners. These little girls become pregnant when they are physically not capable of giving birth to their babies. Since they are premature, there are high rates of maternal and infant mortality. No doubt, these girls suffer from fistula, heavy bleeding, anemia, cervical cancer, and miscarriage. Moreover, child brides are discriminated against badly if they do not bring a sufficient dowry into her marriage. Groom's family expects enough wealth like furniture, jewelry, televisions, cars, and motor-cycles from the bride's family. A girl is not allowed to have delicious food unless she serves her



husband and his family members first. Even while she is pregnant, she usually has to eat left-over food after serving her family. In this way, her health gets very poor.

Similarly, the second consequence of early marriage in Nepal is a low literacy rate. There are many girls who get married at an early age and are deprived of educational facilities. In Nepalese culture, girls are mostly confined inside the four walls of their in-laws houses after they get married. They are subjected to social criticism if they try to rejoin the schools. Many girls drop out from the schools due to early marriage. Furthermore, girls stop going school because of early pregnancy; therefore, the literacy rate in the country is low since half of the Nepalese population is comprised of women. In fact, early marriage causes Nepalese girls to be socially and educationally backward in the Nepalese society. They are suppressed and dominated by males if they are illiterate because they fully depend on them.



Finally, another consequence of early marriage in Nepal is domestic violence which is a serious problem faced by Nepalese girls. A very young bride, who could be playing with her dolls, has to do all the house work in her husband's house. If she denies being a submissive wife, she may experience physical torture by her husband, mother in-law and sister in-law. For instance, my cousin got married to a Nepalese man at an early age. Once she said that her mother in-law beat her badly with spatula when she over cooked the rice and spoiled the meal of the day. A married girl is not permitted to go out of the house for any celebration or entertainment because her husband and his family think that she could elope with another man.



Consequently, she is left isolated from her friends, family and relatives. During an important stage of her psychological development, she has to encounter emotional and sexual abuse from her husband who is older and stronger than she. These lead her to post-traumatic stress, feelings of anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder.

Ultimately, early marriage has rigorously affected the overall development of Nepalese girls. Poor and uneducated parents, living in the country, still try to arrange early marriages of their daughters, but the people living in the urban areas of Nepal are mostly aware of its consequences and have stopped following such practice. Also, the Nepalese government and many other national and international organizations are launching various awareness programs to avoid child marriage. A country cannot become civilized, prosperous, and peaceful unless women are literate, healthy, and emancipated from domestic abuse. Hence, it is the responsibility of every parent to think about the basic rights of their daughters and stop arranging their early marriages in order to free society from social evils.

Poem: In My Dream

It was at the dawn
I saw millions of dew drops
glimmering on the lawn
which seemed all sacred and
full of eternal charm

Soon the merry breeze
softly kissed their shiny faces
and the gentle rays
seized their brightness

An old man in a white gown
smiled at me and said,
"Wake up to wear a crown,
opportunities are dewdrops
certain to fade down"

This is the first time that I wrote a poem in English. I have been writing poems in my language since I was sixteen. I love writing poems because it provides me a medium through which I can express my feelings and emotions. Now, it has become a part of my life. I don't remember who inspired me, but when I wrote my first poem in high school, my teacher inspired me to keep on writing. I can say that poetry has become my best friend because I can share my happiness and sorrows with it.

KODJO EGLA

My name is **Kodjo Egla**. I am from Togo, and I have been living in the United States for three years. I am twenty three years old, and I am an ESL student at Black Hawk College. Being a foreign student in the United States, my goal is to become an airplane engineer seven years from now. Moreover, I am lucky to have my family living with me in the United States. I have a big family, which includes my two little brothers, my father, my mother, and me. To sum up, I am really thankful to be in the United States with my family.



The World is Getting Smaller

What would the world be without technology? There have been significant advances in the field of technology over the past few decades. Technology lets people improve the way they live so that people can focus on the really important things in life, like keeping in touch with long-distance family and friends. Technology has developed so quickly and changed our lives so drastically, and the world seems to be getting smaller due to these developments. Developments have allowed people to efficiently communicate, conduct business, and provide transportation.

First of all, technology has greatly improved throughout the world in a short period of time. Any form of technology can be used in any country. For example, many people now have access to personal computers and cell phones. Recently, during student protests in the capital of Togo, the police beat students. With the help of cell phones and social media, protestors were able to instantly record the events and post the videos and images on YouTube and Facebook and uncover the violence that the government was denying. Not only did the video gain local news coverage, it also went international. I was able to watch the video while I was here in America.

Nowadays, people are using technology to do video conferences and communicate with their friends and family. For example, I use

Skype every Saturday to communicate with my uncle in Togo. Also, I can talk to the rest of my family who does not have Skype through cell phones. In Togo, although people have cell phones, they still write letters, and it takes at least a week to get to the destination, depending on the distance. Before technology, people sent mail by horse; however, it did not take two days, it took weeks and months. Today, one click of a button will allow one to see any person.

Second, businesses have opened the world up in



connections. If one has a question about his or her computer, a service operator across the ocean in India may be the person who helps. For example, the phone company that I use to call Africa is in India, and I can tell the difference just by listening to the person's accent. We can pretty much assume that lots of jobs are now sent to India, China, and other countries. For example, the factory where my mother used to work at was moved to India because the cost for the employer will be much lower there than in the United States.

Finally, technology in my country is working better for some Togolese in transportation. For



example, before I got to the United States, I had to walk 20 miles with my baggage in a trailer, which was pulled by a horse to get to the airport. Now, I talk to my friends, and they tell me how everyone has a family car, and they drive it all the time. This allows them more time to get where they need to go. They do not have to worry about walking under the sun anymore because they drive cars around. They also told me how the government is going to set up public transportation throughout much of Togo. Without technology, we would not

be able to ship buses to Togo.

In conclusion, I think there is no doubt that we are very much connected to the world.

Technology has always been a very important part of our daily lives because it helps people get places faster, helps them do things faster, and it helps them do business faster. Throughout the passing years, technology has changed us and brought us to the point where we cannot survive without it.

Togolese Musical Instruments

Played by the smoothest, gentlest movement of the hand,
the instrument represents my country, Togo.

When I hear the sound of its music,
most of the time, it reminds me of a rose abandoned on a beautiful spring evening.

Played from time to time by Togolese from generation to generation,
it has an important value to those who have ever come across it.

Dig and search for any possibility in your power, dear Togolese
and preserve the value of our culture for our future generation.

The instrument is played during the traditional events, like birthdays, Independence Day, and any traditional day. For one, the instrument is played with both hands. One hand holds one of the instruments and shakes it while the second hand is moving back and forth with the other instrument in order to make perfect rhythms. However, the instrument is only played by professionals who know how to manage the rhythms of the sound that goes with the dance. For example, my grandpa is a leader who teaches young people how to play the instrument. Finally, people compete with each other by dancing, and the leader chooses the best one who is supposed to replace him when he retires. Most importantly, the instrument's music tells people what kind of traditional event is going on and gathers people around.



KODJO KUWUAMENU



Born on June 11th, 1979 in a small country called Togo, located in West Africa, I, **Kodjo Kuwuamenu**, son of Kossi Kuwuamenu and Gbolo Afiwa, went to high school at the Lycee de Tsevie, where I graduated in 2003. From 2004 to 2007, I studied nursing at ENAM, and I became a registered nurse. From 2007 till 2008, I worked as a manager at a nursing center in a small town called Enfoin in Togo. From October 2008 to July 2009, I worked as a registered nurse at the Hospital of Assahou, which is a small town in Togo. In August 2009, I moved to the U.S.A. One month later, I became a Tyson employee, and I have been working there since then. Since 2011, I've been studying English at BHC and now, I'm taking Writing II class.

American Gestures That Could Be Offensive in My Country

After four years in the U.S.A., I went back to visit my family in my home country, Togo. During the six weeks that I spent over there, I served people with my left hand, and I got insulted two times because I have adopted some of the American gestures that are considered offensive in Togo. I noticed that I offended people with my gestures. I was reminded that culture differs from country to country, and each country has its unspoken laws; if you break these laws, people will get angry with you. I noticed that several gestures which are common here in the US could be offensive in my native country, Togo.

First, giving someone something using the left hand could result in conflict. American people don't care if you use left hand to serve them, but in Togo, this is not allowed. The left hand is the hand of the devil, the hand of bad luck, and it symbolizes a curse in my culture; therefore, using the left hand to serve somebody is like trying to curse him or her. I remember the day I was riding in a taxi in my country, and the driver stopped to argue because a foreigner had paid him using his left hand. The driver called him a devil and said, "I wouldn't have given you a ride if I knew you have a bad spirit and want to curse me." Although the man was a foreigner, the driver was still so mad at him just because he assumed using the left hand has the same interpretation everywhere. Also, when somebody is giving you something, you shouldn't use the left hand to receive it; if you do, he will be mad at you. Using of the left hand to serve or receive something is like a boundary in my country.



Second, greeting elderly people or your boss at work by looking them in the face or calling them by their first name is sign of impoliteness in my culture. In my culture, older people



demand more respect, so we don't look at their face while we are talking to them. I learned this from my parents and teachers who always told me not to make eye contact with old people because it's disrespectful. Even when we greet our teacher at school, we don't look them in the face, just because we are trying to be polite and respect them. This is why when you see people from Togo greeting their bosses, teachers or elders, most of them always have their face down, and their eyes are looking at the ground; this leads to confusion in the US, where people expect eye contact. Also, American people often call their fathers, teachers, bosses, or an elder by their first name, but in my culture, we don't do this; if you do, people

will tell you that you have bad behavior and disrespected them, and they may insult you and your parents for not raising you well. However, I was surprised to find that teachers in the US don't like it when I call them "teacher". Many Togolese students address their teachers as "teacher" here in the US, which can also lead to misunderstandings.

Finally, there are some interjections like "hey" and "you" that are used to call people here in the US and that may lead to a misunderstanding in my country. Togolese do not like to be called "hey" or "you" because they think if you call them like that, you disrespect them, and they will be very mad at whoever called them. They get their feelings hurt quickly, especially in case someone calls his boss or an elder using these interjections. For example, when I first came to the U.S.A., I used to get mad at people for calling me "Hey." I even yelled at my niece to stop calling me "Hey." Just last week, my friend Essofa told me that he got mad at his boss at work for calling him "Hey." Calling someone by using these words is a synonym for a lack of respect; therefore, Togolese people may be mad at you or have a bad reaction toward you if you do call them like that.



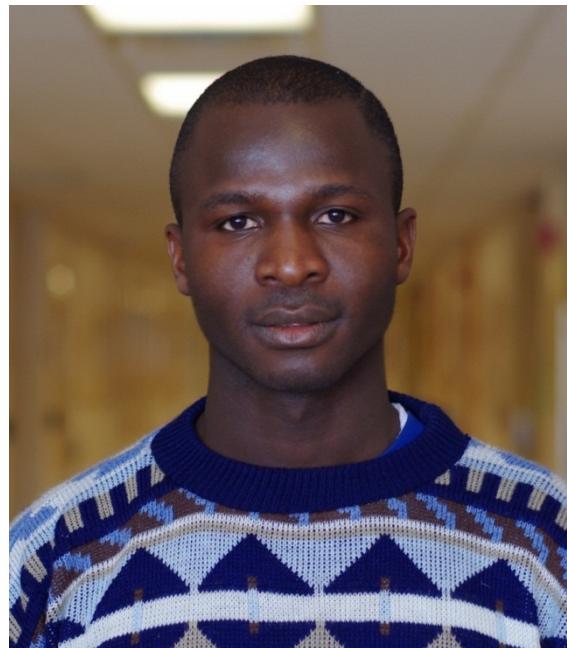
Every country has its culture. Each country has its beliefs and opinions, which are different from others and which can be misunderstood in other countries. Some gestures like using the left hand to serve people and greeting elders by looking them in the face can be a source of conflict in my country. Still, Togolese don't like to be called by "hey" or "you". After living in the US for four years, I have adopted some of these gestures that are not acceptable in my culture, and I'm now more aware of these differences.

A Special Holiday in My Culture: Ayiza

A special holiday in my culture is Ayiza, which literally means the feast of the beans. This feast was established in memory of the installation of the prefecture of Zio after the Ewe people had escaped the dictatorship and abuse of King Agokoli. The festival has always been held in Tsevie in the month of August and on a Saturday. The festival lasts the whole week and ends on the following Saturday. During this week of traditional celebration, the Togolese participate in a lot of activities, such as moonlight tales, theater showings of their suffering under King Agokoli, and soccer games. On Friday, the tribal chief, the King and his chiefs enter the sacred forest to make sacrifices and prayers. On Saturday, everyone gathers in a public place for the final ceremony. The chief of ceremonies, the king and his chiefs do the honor to plant and to harvest the beans they will prepare, share, and eat. After that, they proceed by performing different dances. The Hunter's Dance ends the ceremony; then, everyone goes home and cooks a bean dish, called "Abobo". The festival continues with parties at the bars and homes till midnight.

KOKUTSE ADANBOUNOU

My name is **Kokutse Anani Adanbounou**, and I was born on February 18, 1987 in Lome, Togo. I belong to a big family, but I am the fourth, the penultimate, of my mother. Studying accounting at University of Lome in my home country, I got the opportunity to come to the U.S., my dream country, in May 2012. I will be marring very soon. I am working full-time and taking ESL at Black Hawk College to prepare my academic classes. Finally, I have decided on information technology as a career since I like it and have a strong desire to create something useful in that area. I am a Catholic Christian, and I like gospel and reggae music because reggae musicians tell the truth without being afraid of anybody. I like "agbadza," a traditional music and dance from my home country, too. I hope that love for others is the most powerful weapon, which can bring peace in the entire world.



Togo's Human Capital Flight

Human capital flight refers to the phenomenon of a country losing its elite to foreign countries. There is a large number of Togolese students with a strong educational background who immigrate to the Quad Cities for job purposes. Thus, we should think carefully about the causes, effects and solutions of this phenomenon.

For one, Togolese leave their country in order to further their education. Togolese students who received their master's degree and want to get their doctoral degree are obliged to continue their studies abroad, especially in Europe and America. For

example, I had a grammar school teacher, Mr. Apoli, who immigrated to France to prepare his doctoral degree in economics. Because our universities do not offer all the degrees in the world, especially newer degrees related to technology, many students decide to emigrate in order to realize their dreams. Likewise, Landry, a friend I studied with at Lome University in 2008, is now studying information technology in Belgium since no university in Togo offers this degree.

Togolese do not leave only for educational reasons, but they also leave to escape poverty. Every single year,



hundreds of Togolese emigrate to get jobs. Among these people, students and recent graduates are unfortunately the target because life is very hard for them. My case is a proof as well since I had one semester left to get my license in accounting, but I left the country to escape poverty. In fact, many students who get their professional license or master's degree experience unemployment. They cannot find jobs related to their degrees because the few companies we have are full of their seniors in education or use nepotism in their hiring process by favoring relatives, siblings or friends, who may not have the appropriate skills for the job. Meanwhile, some students have their family and children to feed, so there is only one thought: leaving the country if possible.

Therefore, Togo faces some negative consequences, such as a lack of eminent people in



the home country. For example, the Universities of Lome and Kara, the two public universities in Togo, lack eminent professors; hence, a need for professors made some of them travelling professors. They teach at both universities: Lome in the southern part of Togo and Kara in the northern part of the country. They alternate their absences along the weeks or months while teaching at both universities, and they also teach in other schools named BTS, which are private schools or universities. As a result, the students of the public universities are affected negatively.

Education is a serious problem in Togo.

Another effect is the lack of doctors. Many of these students who emigrated became great doctors. They emigrated to attend better medical schools abroad, but they did not come back to their home country, where health care professionals are really needed. As a result, hospitals are suffering, and people still die unexpectedly despite today's medical progress. Also, rich people take their ailing relatives abroad for treatment. Just as the population wishes, some of these emigrant doctors really want to come back and invest in the country, but they cannot come back because of the political instability and the fact that the government is not ready to pay them salaries that are commensurate with their skills and experience. Therefore, they become citizens in the foreign countries; thus, Togo has lost many eminent doctors, and so the whole country is affected.

There is no problem without a solution, so these are my suggestions to build a new, bright country. First, I would submit to the government this proposal: support students by offering them a better framework of study because most of the emigrant students, including myself, have important skills, which would profit the country; next, encourage educated immigrants by offering well-paying jobs and room for creativity. Once this is done, the mind revolution should be the basic development: many minds for a strong and a prosperous country. Next, job opportunities should be a priority to reduce this phenomenon. Subsequently, the government might encourage immigrants to invest in their home country while fighting for a democratic system.

In conclusion, many Togolese continue to emigrate due to the educational situation and poverty. Unfortunately, the emigration affects Togo in the educational and health sectors. Consequently, it gets more and more difficult for the country to develop further when the individuals with the knowledge and skills to do so leave the country. We should remember that nobody could build our country for us, and the government might improve its leadership system in order to handle this matter.



Agbadza, a Traditional Dance of the Ewe

The Ewe people, an ethnic group in the southern part of Togo, perform a special dance named Agbadza, which is combined with drums and songs. To start with, the word Agbadza comes from two Ewe words: "agbe", meaning "life" and "edza", meaning "clean". People used to understand Agbadza as "agbea edza" or "agbea egadza", which means "life is new" or "life is renewed" because Ewe people believed that they renewed their lives through these Agbadza dance, so they danced to experience this thought. In fact, they dance mostly with their back bone. However, today, Agbadza dance is performed at Ewe parties and funerals, and people are very happy when they hear the drum, sing and dance since the dance is harmonized with drums and songs. The drums' sounds and the songs indicate the steps of the dance and give the signal when people might start dancing with more motion. Additionally, men and women, old and young people dance together equally. In short, Agbadza is an interesting music that includes drums, singing and dancing, and I really like it.



KOSSI EGLA



My name is **Kossi Egla**, and I'm from Togo, a small country located in West Africa. I am 22 years old, and I have been living in the United States since March 2011. I have four brothers and one little sister. Right now, I'm a student at Black Hawk College. I'm planning to become an electromechanical and computer engineer in the near future. I have always dreamed of becoming an engineer and being part of NASA. Also, I hope to create a company, which will make a change in the economy of my country.

Illegal Drugs Experienced by Immigrants in America

The world, in which we are living, is full of experiences. People gain experiences through numerous different situations. Some acquire new types of experiences while they move from their home countries to other countries. Some immigrants experience illegal drugs for the first time when moving to the USA. What exactly pushes them to this kind of experience? What are the negative consequences of drugs, and what are some solutions to resolve these problems?

First, most of immigrants, especially from my country, Togo, are not exposed to drugs in their home country. The lack of money and the poverty in my country don't allow adolescents to use illegal drugs. Also, there is no education on drugs in my country, so children don't have any ideas about those products and their effects. Therefore, most immigrants from my country don't have any experience with illegal drugs before coming to the United States. When I came to the USA, marijuana and cocaine were totally new to me. My first exposure was with my American friends during a party in the summer. Almost everybody at the party was smoking marijuana and using cocaine. Feeling weird and different, I wasn't sure how to react in that situation.

In fact, there are many reasons which push immigrants to try drugs. Thinking about my own experience, I was homesick when I came to the US. I was depressed about the weather and the working conditions. In addition, I felt lonely. I spent almost all my weekends at home on my computer. Then, I tried to fit in to my new environment by making friends. Most of the friends I made were Americans, and some of them used drugs. One of my co-workers, who became a friend of mine later, advised me to try some marijuana. He told me that marijuana will probably help me overcome my problems.



Immigrants often have to deal with a difficult situation, including hard factory jobs, language problems, school, etc., and some think that drugs will help them relieve some of the stress.

Finally, the consequences of using drugs are terrible. As many Americans, immigrants also often become addicted to drugs. Some cannot live without smoking marijuana or cocaine. One of my Togolese friends told me that he always feels good after smoking marijuana and using cocaine. An immigrant's situation may get much worse when facing legal troubles and health problems on top of the problems they already had to deal with.

As many diseases have a cure and places to heal them, people addicted to drugs also have numerous centers to help them overcome their addiction. Rehabilitation centers and support groups have programs to help cope with drug addiction problems, but immigrants are not always aware of the resources that are available to them. However, friends and family are usually supportive and able to help a drug addict.

In conclusion, feeling lonely and homesick and looking for new friendships could lead an immigrant to become a drugs consumer, and the consequences can be terrible. However, here in the USA, our new home, there are many good people around us. We just have to make sure that we are spending time with the good ones, so we can avoid problems and live joyfully in this gorgeous country.



Dehaa and Tchoucouthou

Dehaa and Tchoucouthou are traditional drinks from my country Togo. They are very special beverages in my culture. Dehaa is made from palm trees. After the palm tree has been cut down for many days, people make a little hole in the middle of the palm tree to collect a white juicy drink from the palm tree. Dehaa is served especially during traditional festivals, like the yam and harvest festival. Also, Dehaa is more popular in the South than the North of Togo, and it is often served in a gourd. Tchoucouthou is another beverage in my country. It is made from millets, a small cereal grain grown in the north of my country. Tchoucouthou has its origin in the north of Togo, where it is very popular. We can also find tchoucouthou in the south of my country because the capital is there. Tchoucouthou is served at any time in my country. Numerous people who are living in villages enjoy drinking tchoucouthou on Christmas and New Year's. Tchoucouthou is often served in a calabash, a bottle gourd.



Dehaa



Tchoucouthou

MERYEM DINIA

My name is **Meryem Dinia**, and I'm from Morocco. I was born and raised in the capital, Rabat, and I had never been out of my home country before; therefore, living in the United States was quite a challenge for me. I'm 23, and I'm the youngest with two older brothers. I studied computer science and specialized in computer networking, and I got my diploma as a specialized technician in 2009. I wanted to study further, but my family couldn't afford it. I hope my dream will come true in the United States, where I can work to earn money for my degree and study.



Is American Culture Hard to Adjust to?

In 2012, I got married to my husband Mohamed in Morocco. He had been living in the United States since 2004, and had worked at Tyson Food Company for 7 years, so I had to move to Moline in January 2013. The year 2013 was the worst year of my life. I realized that

year that the most terrible feeling I have ever had is homesickness. I had never been away from my family for more than a couple of days, so living here, in Moline, was very hard for me. I was depressed and couldn't get out of my bed. I had anemia for the first time in my life because I wasn't eating. My husband said that I would have to keep myself busy, and he suggested that I should not stay at home all day, and that I should go to college. He was right,

but, at first, I couldn't step out of my house alone because the street was really empty, and I literally had a phobia of going out. I always had that feeling that everybody was looking at me at the store because I looked different. During this time, I remembered all the Americans that I met in Morocco, and I said to myself: "I wish I could feel at home just the way they did in Morocco".

Cross Cultural Learning (CCCL) is the center that runs all of the Study Abroad programs for the School of International Training in Morocco. The center was located in the *medina*-the old part of the city of Rabat, and is a ten minute walk away from my house. My family was a homestay family for the American students who came to Morocco for the School of International Training's (SIT) Intensive Arabic & Moroccan Culture Program since 2007. During this long time, I had the



opportunity to closely observe the American culture. I shared my room with some of the American students. We would watch movies together, work out together, or go shopping. I could tell that they were able to blend into Moroccan culture because they could walk to school and travel alone. One of the American students, Laila Ameri, said, "My two months in Morocco were certainly two of the best months of my life." Thus, I asked myself why can't I adjust easily to the American culture? Is it because of my personality, or because of the American culture?

American culture is definitely very different from Moroccan culture. Moroccans have a rootedness to their culture and family, and that's probably why it was hard for me to live far away from my family. My house in Morocco is a 100 year-old house, and it's big enough to fit four families: my two uncles' families, my father's family, and my unmarried aunt. In total, fourteen people were living in the house. Here in Moline, I live with just my husband in a small apartment. When my husband goes to work, I turn on the TV and turn it on loud because I'm not used to being alone in my house, and I can't stand this quiet.

When I asked some of the American students who lived with me in Morocco how they adjusted to the Moroccan family, they said that they had the same problem, which is homesickness and culture shock, but they immediately felt better once they moved into my home. Mely Jacobson, an American student, said, "The big difference for me was having your family. I especially appreciated that I could ask you questions about things I didn't understand in Moroccan culture." "The most important factor in my adjustment was definitely my home stay family," said Laila Ameri.

Family means safety, love, care, and warmth. Having this ambiance, the American students felt that the home stay family was their second family, and that helps tremendously in adjusting to the new culture. We also had pets: a cat, birds, and pigeons. Laila Ameri said, "I had been missing my cat at home so much, so having that reminder of home helped tremendously."

My mother is a kind and a patient person. "My home stay mother would get up every morning and make me breakfast," Laila Ameri said. She would help the students with anything, like teaching them how to bargain, where to shop, and how to use some Arabic words. "Your mother helped me a lot too – she was always so patient and didn't mind reminding me of the word for 'raisin' twenty times!" Skye Anderson, one of the American students, said. Spending most of my time alone while my husband was at work made it harder for me to adjust.



In addition, Moroccans walk everywhere; to school, to the grocery store, etc. In Moline; however, people do not walk and use their car to go anywhere. Laila Ameri said, "I have noticed that I have an easier time adjusting to a place when I am able to walk places." It was hard to adjust to the lifestyle in the US because I'm used to walking. The first time I decided to go for a walk, I was the only one on the street. I was uncomfortable and couldn't continue walking because I felt that people in cars may make assumptions about why I am walking somewhere, so I immediately came back home.

Everyone experiences culture shock when moving to another country; it's just a matter of preparing for it. I also think that reading about the culture beforehand may help avoiding culture shock or at least keeping it to a minimum. Moreover, the fact of living temporarily in a foreign country would make it easier to deal with annoyances because you know you are not going to be there forever. In my case, I'm not sure if I will return to Morocco soon. I thought that I was

familiar with the American culture, but I'm not even close, so I still have to adjust to the new sights and sounds around me. I started going to Black Hawk College in August of 2013, and I learned many things about the American culture, which has helped me a lot to understand Americans and get rid of my fears. I feel comfortable most of the time but still miss my family. However, I'm still not used to driving all the time, and I miss walking around and contemplating the beautiful monuments of Morocco.

Moroccan Tea Recipe

Moroccan tea is one of the main staples in Moroccan meals. It's basically prepared with green tea and fresh mint, but some people add more herbs, such as absinthium or wormwood, to have a beautiful aroma. To prepare Moroccan tea, we use the Moroccan teapot called *elberrad*.

To prepare Moroccan tea with mint, you will need the following *ingredients* for a small teapot:

- 1 tablespoon green tea leaves
- 1 or 2 small sprigs of fresh mint
- 1/4 cup sugar (you may adjust sugar to your personal taste)

Preparation:

- Bring some water to a boil.
- Add green tea leaves to a teapot, and rinse them with some boiled water. Next, discard the water.
- Fill the teapot with the boiled water and put the teapot on medium heat.
- Once tea comes to a boil, turn off the stove and add mint and sugar.
- Stir the tea gently and pour into small tea glasses and serve.



MOHANNAD ABU MARAR



My name is **Mohannad**. I'm from Jordan. I'm 19 years old. My family consists of six people: my father, my mother, one sister, and two brothers. I'm the youngest one. I live in Moline with my brother. He studies at Black Hawk College, too. I came to the U.S to follow my dream and to study. I want to be a car designer and that has been my dream since I was a kid.

Car Design

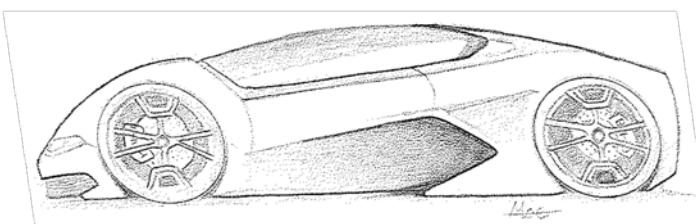
Cars have become one of the most important things in our daily life, but unfortunately, most people use their car every day, and they don't think about how much hard work it took the designers and the engineers to create it. For each car that we see in the street every day, lots of engineers and designers worked hard to make it safe, fast, and beautiful. The car designer has to be talented in drawing, but that is not all. The car designer has to be creative, and he/she has to focus on creating new ideas.

Since I was seven years old, my dream has been to become a car designer. I love cars, and I adore their shapes and colors. I first started drawing cars when I was seven years old. One day, I saw a car magazine, and I found some car sketches inside. I tried to draw my own sketches, and it seemed that I was good at it from the first time. Since that day, I have loved to draw cars. I originally received my talent from my mother because she was a great drawer, but I didn't go to any drawing school to learn how to draw. Instead, I learned how to draw on my own. I remember when I was in school; I used to draw cars, instead of listening to the teacher. All the kids in my class used to watch me while I was drawing. I felt happy and proud of myself. I was wondering if someday I would work for one of the big car companies.

Till now, I still enjoy drawing cars, and I still want to make my dream come true. I like to draw all kinds of cars, especially sports cars. It's easy to draw a car, but it's hard to create a new concept. New concepts take a long time to create. When the designer makes a new concept of a car that means he is creating a new car generation. The designer has to take care of lots of things in the car, like the aerodynamics, the safety, and the shape. The aerodynamics of the



sports cars are very important because if they're not perfect, the car won't be fast, or it might be dangerous when it turns, so aerodynamics affect safety, too. Moreover, if the aerodynamics are bad in the car, it is going to increase the gas usage because the air is going to push the car back, and



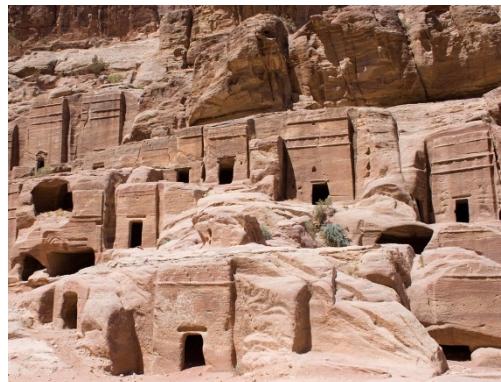
that makes the engine work harder. The weight is also very important. It improves the acceleration, so if the car is lighter, it will be faster. That's why sports cars are made of carbon fiber. The designer also has to take care of the lights to allow the driver to see the road. Moreover, it has to look good; otherwise, nobody is going to buy the car due to its ugly look. Everyone wants his\her car to look beautiful.

I still enjoy looking at car magazines. I love Lamborghini's and Ferrari's designs because they have an aggressive look. Also, the aerodynamics is perfect, and for sure, they are super-fast cars. I like the Rolls Royce as well because of its interior design. The interior design is very important. Nobody wants his\her car to be basic inside. Everybody wants his\her car to be full of technology and options, like a big screen, a lot of buttons, premium sound, and comfortable leather seats. That is very important to me, too.

In conclusion, I'm following my dream to be a car designer. It's the job that I have always wanted. Now, I'm studying in the ESL program, and then I'm going to get an associate degree from Black Hawk College. After two years, I will transfer to a good university to pursue a bachelor degree in industrial design to become a car designer. I would like to find a good job as a car designer. Car design is important in our lives, and it affects our safety too, so someone has to take care of it. Someday, I will be a car designer, and you are going to remember me when I design and put my name on your car.

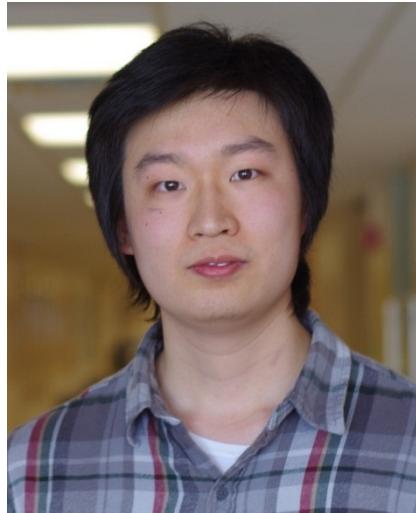


Petra is a wonderful city, and it's one of the seven new wonders of the world. It's a whole city inside a mountain made of big, pink rocks. The word petra means "rock" in Greek. First of all, it's one of the seven wonders because it's a great big city made of a unique pink rock. It's inside a big mountain. The Nabataeans built it there to protect them during the wars. There is only one way to reach it, which is the "siq," a very narrow, long path inside that mountain. That's why some people call it "the Lost City." Also, it has a magnificent water system. The clean water enters from one side, and the dirty water goes out from the other side by gravity. The Nabataeans built the city in 1200 BC. Scientists say that the Nabataeans were big strong people because they found that the houses and the doors are particularly big, and to build some houses inside a mountain is not an easy job. The Nabataeans were also very smart because they built that complicated water system, which is moved by gravity, around the city. Finally, Petra represents my home country, Jordan, because the Nabataeans built it, and they are the ancient Jordanians. It tells us how old Jordan is, and Jordanians are proud of it because it's one of the seven wonders of the world. It brings people from around the world, and the government takes care of it to keep it beautiful.



PENG CHEN

My name is **Peng Chen**, and I am from China. I was born in the northern Chinese city called Tianjin. I was a high school student before I came to America, and now I am living here with my parents. I like to play basketball, and I am really interested in technology. I pay lots of attention to new technology, such as new computer hardware, smartphones, and cameras. Therefore, I want to focus on computer science in the future.



Don't Just Point and Shoot: the Beauty of Light and Shadow

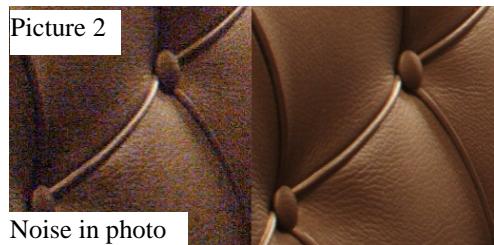
Everyone knows how to take a picture, right? All of us can take out our cameras or cell phones and press the shutter. Boom, a photo appears on the screen. However, the real answer is "No" because we didn't take the picture by ourselves. The camera did 99% of the work for us, and the only thing we did was just press the shutter. Modern technology brought us easier lives, but they also took away lots of the fun that we can have. Most people just use their cameras in auto mode, so they are limited by the program and don't know what their cameras are really capable of.

Believe me, most people have a desire to shoot pictures. The only thing they need is a spark to light it up. The match that lit up my interest in photography was a trip to San Diego. One of my cousins is living there, and he taught me how to shoot, and he also taught me many tricks about photography. I was amazed by photography because in the same conditions you can create so many different images by simply adjusting your camera.



First, if you want to explore the potential of your camera, you need to understand the meaning of the shooting modes. Most cameras have mode dials, and you can change the modes by turning the dial. The auto mode is just like its name; the camera will do most of the work for you, but you can't adjust anything, which means you can't do anything creative. P mode stands for Program mode, and you can adjust one option. Then, the camera will calculate the other data for you. P mode is the best mode for beginners, and you can achieve many effects by using this mode. The third one is the M mode, which is manual mode. In this mode, everything is fully adjustable. The last one that we are going to use is B mode, bulb mode, and this mode is for very long exposure time or fireworks shooting.

Now, you have a general understanding of the camera modes, so what's next? There are three main



elements that control the exposure. They are shutter speed, aperture, and ISO sensitivity.

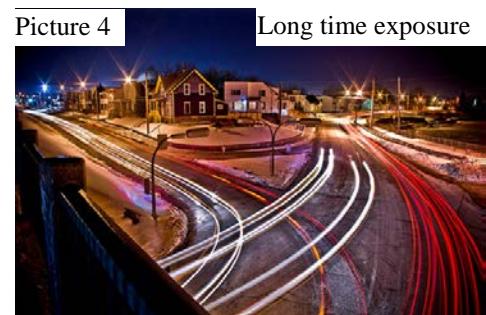


Shutter speed is used to adjust the exposure time, and the longer the exposure time is, the brighter the photos are. Apertures are used to adjust the amount of light that enters the camera, so the wider the apertures are, the brighter the pictures are. All these adjustable options are used to change the exposure, but they also have other functions, and those functions are the fun factors that make your pictures creative. Those are the things that you can adjust in P, B and M mode.

Then, what can we do with all these newly discovered camera functions? Bokeh is a blur effect in the area that is out of focus, and every photographer loves this effect. Bokeh can highlight the theme of a picture. Wider apertures, longer focal length and deeper background can help you create blurrier bokeh. It is always used in portraits or small object shooting because when you shoot portraits, you don't want the background to distract the picture (**see picture 1**). The newsletter's portraits that I took are a good example of it.

Next, adjusting shutter speed may create surprising effects. First, in low light conditions, you can extend the exposure time to avoid noise (**see picture 2**), which is the result of high ISO sensitivity. All you need is a tripod, and you can expose as long as you want without worrying about the blurry pictures. For instance, if you want to take a picture of a waterfall, you can turn to P mode and set the shutter speed to four seconds and let the camera do the rest of the work, so you can get that silky waterfall effect (**see picture 3**). You may fail the first time, but after several tries, you will find a good exposure time. You can also use long exposure and small apertures to create astral round the light (**see picture 4**). First, we need to use manual mode, and set the aperture smaller than f10 (the bigger the numbers are the smaller the aperture is) and make sure you shutter speed is longer than two seconds. Then let the camera calculate the shutter speed for you.

The tricks that I mentioned don't require a very expensive camera because most cameras have those functions. All you need is to explore them and unleash the power of your camera. Soon, you will find out that there are many more tricks than I mentioned, and you might be able to use more than one effect in a photo. You will experience the pleasure of playing with light by the touch of your fingertips.



Chinese New Year

Chinese New Year is a grand Chinese festival, and the biggest celebration of the year. Every Chinese treats the Chinese New Year seriously. During Chinese New Year, everyone wears their new clothes because new clothes symbolize a new beginning. The Elderly carefully prepare some money in envelopes and give them to their offspring to celebrate their growth. Every member of the family will go to their parents' house, and the whole family will get together to have a sumptuous dinner. The most exciting event of Chinese New Year is the fireworks. The atmosphere of New Year's is lit up by fireworks. Billions of fireworks and firecrackers are ignited at 12 a.m., and the scene is truly humbling. The celebration lasts for fifteen days, and almost everyone can get seven days off. During those fifteen days, China is immersed in an atmosphere of joy.

SANVI PANOU



My name is **Sanvi Panou**, and I am from Togo, one of the smallest countries in West Africa. I am 29 years old, and I am the youngest of my family. I have one brother and one sister who live with my mother in Togo. In May 2012, I moved to the U.S. with my wife, and I have been living in Moline since then. After getting my bachelor degree in biology, I taught biology at a high school for four years before moving to the US. My goal is to, one day, become a physician assistant.

Coastal Erosion in Togo: Causes and Consequences

Togo, one the smallest countries located in West Africa, is bordered by the Republic of Benin to the east, Burkina Faso to the north, Ghana to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south.

Togo covers an area of approximately 22,000 square miles and has only 32 miles of coastline, which is sandy. However, for several years, Togo, as most of the coastal countries of the West Africa, has been facing the phenomenon of coastal erosion. According to the British Geological Survey, “Coastal erosion is the removal of material from the coast by wave action, tidal currents and/or the activities of man, typically causing a landward retreat of the coastline.” In Togo, coastal erosion has several causes and a serious negative impact on the environment, the population, and the economic activities.

Coastal erosion in Togo has two different types of causes: natural causes and human causes. The first natural cause of coastal erosion is global warming, which has led to the elevation of the ocean levels and increased coastal erosion. In addition, the ocean level is higher than the ground level in Togo which facilitates the advance of the ocean on the mainland.



Although there are many natural causes of coastal erosion, most of the causes of coastal erosion affecting coastal communities are due to human intervention in the transport processes along the coastlines. First, normally, the waves take sand from the coast and deposit it on beaches further to the east. However, with the construction of the Port of Lome in the littoral zone, the



waves dragged lots of sand from the beaches located in the downstream of the main jetties of the port. As a result, this phenomenon has increased the erosion of the coast in these regions. In addition, dredging activities and the extraction of sand for construction amplified the phenomenon of erosion in Togo. Because of the scarcity of fish in the sea, most fishermen have begun extracting sand from the sea. Then, they sell the sand in order to have money to take care of their families, and this practice increases the effect of the coastal erosion in my country.



Coastal erosion has many disastrous effects on the local communities and economic activities. According to the Department of the Management of the Environment of the University of Lome, "Between 1985 and 2000, the Togolese coast has receded at an average rate of 10 meters per year." First of all, in some villages, life has changed dramatically since the intensification of the erosion. Many villages were moved because the sea had engulfed their land in only a few years. However, the displacement of the population creates a significant problem of relocation and resettlement. For example, before 1995, there were more than 64 coastal fishing villages in Togo, but now there are less than 20 coastal fishing villages. My friend



Akouete, who is from Porto Seguro, a small coastal village in Togo, told me, "When I was young, I used to walk about 100 meters from my house to go to the beach, but now the sea has destroyed my house, many coconut trees, the primary school and even the cemetery of the village." In addition, coastal erosion causes the destruction of roads, and buildings, leading to an economic crisis in some villages. For example, one of my uncles told me that the ocean has already destroyed two roads, and the third road is currently being destroyed by the ocean. With economic

problems, many young people leave their villages to work in the cities. Moreover, coastal erosion also has an impact on the environment through the destruction of many mangroves, coconut trees, and tourism zones.

For several years, the government and some private organizations have struggled to reduce coastal erosion. For this reason, many jetties, along with a breakwater, were placed along the coast to stop the evolution of the erosion. When I was preparing my master's degree in environmental management at the university, together with some of my classmates and our teacher, I did some research to find solutions to reduce the effect of the erosion on the environment. Some of the solutions that we proposed to the government were an interdiction of the extraction of sand from the beaches, financial assistance for the fishermen, and building other breakwaters. However, coastal erosion is still one of the most crucial problems that my country, Togo, is facing.



Traditional Wedding in Togo

In Togo, my home country, the traditional wedding is a very special thing in the life of every young woman. During this wedding ceremony, the groom gives the dowry to the family of the young bride. In our culture, the dowry consists of money, goods, and talents given by the bridegroom to the family of the bride. For this reason, one month before the ceremony, the groom receives from his bride's family a list of the items of the dowry, including things such as traditional clothes, rings, shoes, whiskies, suit cases, necklaces, money, and handbags. First, the wedding begins early in the morning with the arrival of the groom's family in the house of the bride. Then, both families sit face to face, and the ceremony starts with the greeting and the presentation of each family member. After a few cordial exchanges, the family of the groom shows the dowry requested by the family of the bride, and the aunts of the bride check if the groom bought all items requested. After that, the aunt or the sister of the groom puts the ring on the finger of the bride if the groom is not present because the groom is not obliged to be present at the ceremony. Finally, the family of the bride hosts a party for all the guests, and both families eat, drink, and dance together to celebrate the union of their children. The traditional wedding is still one of the most important events in the life of every young man and woman. Even though the dowry is very expensive for the groom, every groom is obliged to honor his bride and his family.



Togo



VEACESLAV MOROZ

My name is **Slav Moroz**. I am 34. I was born in a beautiful, central European country called Moldova. It is situated between Romania and Ukraine. My favorite sport is body building. I started to practice at the age of 18. I like to travel, so I hope my future job will involve some traveling. My plan for next two years is to continue my education. Also, I hope to find a way to join the U.S. Army. In this way, I hope to use some of my foreign language skills.



Russian Ways: Military Presence in the Republic of Moldova and other Former Soviet Countries

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia claimed to be the legal successor to the Soviet Union in the international arena, despite the loss of its "superpower" status.

Contemporary Russia was formed under very unusual circumstances: a result of a revolution

which involved a 180 degree turn in terms of policy and ideology and also a drastic reduction of economic strength, military potential and territory.

Moreover, most of analysts recognized that Russia was a country in rapid decline as an economy, a coherent state and an international player. Since 1991, the Russian economy has declined faster and longer than any previous major power in world history. With economic decline had come weakness. The Russian government struggled to

provide the most elementary public goods, such as a single currency, a common market, public security, welfare and elementary education. This internal weakness destroyed Russia's international influence, turning the once proud actor into a mere observer with mostly symbolic roles to play. All these sad facts mixed with bizarre nostalgia created an image of a little extremist and expansionist international actor.

Despite all said, other nations treated Russia with great delicacy. This is because of the one, and sometimes the only argument that Russia had in its pocket: Russia's nuclear military potential. Even now that Russia has stabilized its economy and can



compete with any major economical neighbor, the maintenance of its nuclear superpower status is a number one strategical priority. That is why, every time a major geopolitical decision is made, Russia is one of those to be consulted. Being aware of this fact, Russia has a tendency

to break from reality sometimes. Proof of this fact is that Russia, in one way or another, but always from a position of a greater power, is present and has disagreements with all neighbors, in particular the former Soviet republics. Being one of the smallest republics in the Soviet Union, the contemporary, already independent, Republic of Moldova is not an exception.

Because of the illegal Russian military presence on Moldovan territory, there is a long lasting territorial dispute called: "conflict over



"Transnistria", in which one of the conflict parties - Transnistria - seeks independence from the rest of Moldova while the other side - Moldova - aims to restore its full sovereignty and territorial integrity. For more than two decades, the situation has been stagnant. Many meetings were organized, a lot of countries offered themselves as mediators in this conflict, and even a few treaties were signed, but nothing happened. Moldova still has an illegal, unrecognized autonomous state in its territory. Because of Russian support, including military support, Transnistria has developed into a de facto state of its own without international recognition and heavily dependent on Russian money.

Unfortunately, Moldova is not the only case. The so-called "frozen conflicts" are the toughest challenges to the Black Sea regional security, as well as to the national interests of several post-Soviet states. They include: the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. These conflicts vary in scope, history, and management options, but are structurally similar and all, with no exception, have a Russian element present.

In the conclusion, I wanted to reemphasize some of the points I mentioned, but I encountered an unprecedented coincidence. Since I started to write this article, an event took place in which Russia confirmed its above-mentioned "evil" status. I am referring to the events in the Ukraine and the latest forced annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation. As a result of a military intervention and a so-called "referendum" that took place on March 16, 2014, a considerable territory of a sovereign state was kidnapped overnight by ex-Mother Russia. So, unfortunately, nothing has changed, and Russia was, and I think will remain, a clumsy bear that everyone is avoiding.





Moldovan Carpets

Moldovan handmade carpets have traditionally played an important role in the family life, especially during ceremonies like weddings, for example. They were used on walls inside houses, placed on beds, and, of course, on the floor. Usually, they were passed from one generation to the next and rarely sold.

Traditional carpets are one of the ways to express the Moldovan understanding of beauty, which was gathered over generations. In the past, they also served as an important indicator of people's social status. They have attracted the attention of art and ethnographic researchers, but this is not a new phenomenon. Moldovan carpets were exhibited at an international exhibition in Paris in 1867, and then in Krakow, Vienna, and Geneva in different years. After the 1880s, carpets made in Moldova were presented in a series of exhibitions in important trade centers of Russia, like Harcov (1887), Nijniy-Novgorod (1896), Petersburg (1902, 1913).



YOUNES NOUHILI



My name is Younes Nouhili. I am from Casablanca, the biggest city in Morocco, North Africa. I am 41 years old. I have three brothers, three sisters, and I am the youngest one of my siblings. In fact, two of them live in the USA, too. I joined my wife in the USA in 2011. Since then, we have lived in East Moline. I work full-time at Tyson Food Company, and my hobbies are playing soccer, American pool, and watching movies. I am planning to get my degree in computer science.

Does the American Dream Still Exist?

Regardless of the definition that people give to “the American Dream”, from coming to the new world with the opportunity to purchase low-cost land and becoming farmer, to those who are looking for celebrity and fame, there are many points of commonality: liberty, opportunities, and the pursuit of happiness, so people from all over the world are coming to America to look for that dream, and my question is: Does the American dream still exist?

The American dream is definitely an illusion that Americans use to strive for a better life. “For many of them, the American dream got lost between medical bills, the unaffordability of the children’s college, and the hard work to keep their houses.” This was the answer from my friend Essam from Sudan, who has spent thirty years in the USA and has two teenagers, fourteen and fifteen years old. The answer of David, my native coworker, wasn’t different, explaining that he lives from paycheck to paycheck with no guarantee that he will be able to keep his home after his wife was laid off from her job.



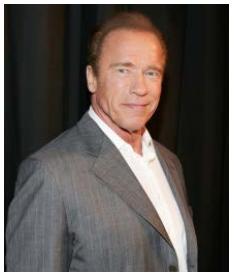
People are now complaining that the chance to catch that dream has become low enough to make them give up looking for it. I agree with that opinion, but we need to consider that the population of the United States has grown, which is why the competitiveness between young people to get good jobs or reach their goals has increased.



However, from the perspective of liberty, the land of Uncle Sam has been the perfect place where people can live with maximum degrees of freedom and equality. I think that the American society has succeeded in breaking down all kinds of religious barriers that many people, especially young people, suffered from in their native countries. In my opinion, the most important thing that has always applied to the American dream since Columbus discovered the new land is the freedom of religion. Now, we witness a diversity of religions and beliefs that Americans live. For example, one can drive along Kennedy Drive in Moline, Illinois to see the religious diversity that this country has. On that street, you can find churches that represent all

of Christianity and the Islamic Center mosque, within a distance of less than a quarter mile. It is true that after September Eleventh, Muslims have suffered many kinds of annoyance and harassment, but the fact that the American law still protects minorities proves that it is one important part of the American dream that still exists.

Another important part of the American dream is the chance to seize opportunities in the United States. We have seen many people who came from the ground and became rich superstars. There are countless examples. Arnold Schwarzenegger is a perfect example of an unknown person from a small European village, who became one of the most popular bodybuilders, one of the highest paid actors, and even the governor of the state of California. I recently watched the 2014 Oscars, and I was impressed by the performance of Lupita Nyong'o, the African girl who received the Oscar for her role in *12 Years a Slave*, and who is now on the covers of all the famous magazines in the world. At the end of her speech at the Oscar ceremony, she encouraged immigrant kids not to give up on their dreams but work hard for them, saying, "No matter where you are from, your dream is valid." Also, I saw the movie *Captain Phillips*, and I was amazed by the performance of the young Somalian, Barkhad Abdi, who was nominated for best supporting actor at the Oscars and the Golden Globes, which makes anyone feel that the American dream still exists.



My last point about the American dream is the pursuit of happiness. When people feel free and have opportunities, they build hope. That hope can lead to happiness. Regardless of the stress and the anger that Americans face in their daily live, the possibilities that this country offers will always keep the American dream alive.

Once in Morocco, you will notice that the most often consumed drink is mint tea. Offering tea is a welcoming gesture in the hospitality and culture of Morocco. Moreover, mint tea is the official drink during Moroccan ceremonies, which makes "berrad," the Moroccan tea pot, the most important piece in each single Moroccan home. The Moroccan tea pot varies in size. A small one holds about six glasses of tea while a large one holds approximately 12 glasses. It varies in shape too, depending on the skills of the crafter. Still the unique traditional design is not comparable to any other item in the world because of its curved long spout, which makes pouring tea in tiny glasses relatively easy. The berrad is a piece of art that Moroccans are proud to use daily.

