



INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

Fall 2018



OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



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Thanks to all.

Nina De Bisschop

DETONDJI LOIC ADJAHOUNGBETA



My name is **Loic**. I am 19 years old. I from Benin in West Africa. I have three brothers and one sister. I have been living here since last year. My career goal is to be a doctor or pharmacist. I like to watch movies, cartoons and anime. I like to listen to music. I hope to be successful in school and in everything I do. I dream about traveling around the world.

Animist Holidays in Benin

Benin, my country, is in West Africa. It got its independence in August 1960. Since 1960, its culture has evolved slowly. The Beninese celebrate twelve national holidays, which are a mix of animist, Muslim, Christian and secular holidays. The two animist holidays are Voodoo Day and Yam Day, and they are celebrated by every Beninese.

First, Voodoo Day is celebrated on January 10 every year in Benin. It is a day dedicated to the animist gods we pray to. Our fifteenth president, Mathieu Kerekou, decided to dedicate January 10 to the gods and voodoo because the animists wanted a reason to promote their beliefs. Their beliefs were forgotten at the expense of other beliefs. During the day, we have a parade for “egou”, which is a ghost who is put in special clothes, special events in sacred places, folkloric dances, and special prayers for the country’s emergence. We have special food for the voodoo including brown wo (pate), abobo (beans), abocoun (red beans), atacoun (local fruits), etc. Each animist group has its own special clothes, but all of them wear a pagne with a special design made for the day. For the public festivities, each belief has its own celebration. For example, the ones who believe in mamiwata (mermaid) spend all day at the beach where they have a party and pray.

Second, Yam Day is celebrated on August 15 every year. It is a day to celebrate the picking of the yams. It is to say thank you for the harvest. It is like Thanksgiving in that it is a celebration that reunites the whole family. Beninese spend the day with their extended families (brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, aunts, and sometimes friends), enjoying a good meal, dancing, singing and having fun. The main dish of the day is agoun or fufu which is a paste made by crushing boiled yams with a pestle. It is a job for men and strong women. It can also be made by putting fufu flour in boiling water. Everybody enjoys it together.



In conclusion, some of the animist holidays that are celebrated each year in Benin are Voodoo Day and Yam Day. They are holidays that are celebrated in families, with special events, special food, etc. These holidays help define Beninese culture.

Wo or la Pate

A great variety of foods exists in Benin from south to north. The staple food is la pate or wo, which is one of the main dishes in my country. It can be made with corn, millet, cassava, or sorghum flour. The one made with corn flour is served for lunch or dinner, and the other one is served for special occasions like birthday parties, baptisms, etc. It is a food with a large amount of carbohydrates that is also served after a hard day of work. It is very easy to cook.



Ingredients: corn flour, water

Put the water in a pot and leave it until it is boiling. During this time, you mix the corn flour with some water. When the water is boiling, add the mixture and mix it with the boiling water. You will have a new mixture. After 10 minutes, with a spatula, you add the corn flour and mix everything together to obtain a paste. The accompanying sauces are cooked for a long time and seasoned with onions, tomatoes, garlic, and peppers. Sauces may be based on vegetables or pounded leaves, or tomato sauce, and may include fish, meat, etc. La pate is dipped into the sauce, and it is eaten with the hands.



KOFFI AMENOU

I am **Koffi**, and I am from Togo (West Africa). I am 27 years old. I have two sisters and three brothers. I am Catholic. I got my high-school diploma in 2011, and I went to the University of Lome where I studied biology and physiology. I used to be a teacher when I was in Togo. My dream is to be a doctor or pharmacist, and I will strive to accomplish one of these goals.



The Problem of the Democracy and the Underdevelopment in Togo

The problem of the democracy and the underdevelopment in Africa, especially in Togo, has become serious. The origin of this problem has to be found. Many are the causes, but there are more external than internal factors.

The lack of democracy and the underdevelopment of Togo depend in part on the Togolese themselves. First of all, Togo has leaders who are dictators. The presidents and the government look for their own profit without thinking about their population. It is not fair to have one president for more than fifteen years, but Gnassingbe Eyadema was president from 1967 until he died in 2005. Even after his death, his son was able to take the reins with the help of the army. Thus, one family has been governing the country for more than fifty years.

Another internal problem is the repression of the population who wants to fight against the violation of human rights. This has created fear inside the population, so most leaders who want to fight against the government flee to other countries. For example, in 2005, more than 500 people fled to Ghana and Benin. Corruption is one of the greatest problems. The resources of the country are not shared equitably among the population. Jobs are given by affinity, and the justice system favors powerful people. For example, in 2002, Agboyibo, a leader of the opposition, was put in jail unfairly. The trial was against Agboyibo and the prime minister, and although all the lawyers confirmed that Agboyibo was right, the judge sent him to jail for more than six months.

In addition to the internal causes, the other problem is the pressure of developing countries based on the weakness of Togo. This is very important to notice. Although Togo is independent, the colonist, France, still puts pressure on Togo's leaders. Togo's presidents are supported by France, who plays an important role in the presidential election, so Togo's presidents have to honor France. All this happened because the developing countries are looking for commodity. It is hard for an African president to make a decision against the will of the more powerful European countries. For example, in 1963, Sylvanus Olympio, the first democratic president of

Togo, was assassinated because he had made a plan (which was not in favor of France) to change Togo's currency (FCFA), which is controlled by France. More recently the Togolese presidents have been honoring France, so although the population is suffering and some are getting killed, there is never any real pressure on the president.

In conclusion, corruption is the greatest problem in Togo. Neither the European countries nor the Togolese government tell the truth to the Togolese. We cannot understand why France goes to other countries like Ivory Coast to help them and even captured their president, but they have never helped the Togolese with their problems. As Togolese, we have to think more.

Sodabi

Sodabi is a kind of local beverage in Ewe culture in Togo. It is an alcohol made with palm wine. It is a very important beverage in Ewe culture. Although many other people also use it in Togo nowadays, it originated from Ewe culture, and it is used in every ceremony. For example, nobody can celebrate a traditional wedding without including Sodabi as a beverage; for funerals, Sodabi is required; to pray to the ancestors, Sodabi is required. Sodabi is used the most by the traditional religion. It is a historical beverage because in 1990, the president of Togo tried to abolish it, but the Ewe fought to safeguard it, and they are proud of it. In conclusion, Sodabi is a very important beverage in Ewe culture, but it is important to notice that it is dangerous because it intoxicates easily.

ROUKEIATOU BOURAIMA OUROU



I was born on December 09, 1984 in Kara, which is located in the north of Togo. In my country, I earned my high school diploma. My parents live in Lomé, and I have two siblings. Today, I live in the United States, and I have been here with my husband and my children since December 2012. I am married, I have four children, and I am taking classes in the ESL program. I will be taking nursing classes after I graduate from ESL. I hope I will become a nurse midwife. In addition, I have been working at Tyson for five years. I hope I can visit Disneyland one day before going back home.

Traditional Marriage in Tem Culture

A marriage is an alliance between two different people. In African societies, this relationship is taken seriously by parents because it creates a strong union between a bride's and groom's family. In my country, Togo, traditional marriage follows many steps including parents' introductions, family arrangement, and dowry.

In a traditional marriage in Togo, when a boy and a girl are romantically involved with each other, they have to inform their parents. The first time they meet and date, the groom must visit the bride's house, so she can present him to her parents and tell them his name and the name of the family he comes from. Then, the next visit will be with the groom's family, and he does the same. After this step, they visit their aunts', uncles', and grandparents' houses if they are alive. Some aunts and uncles ask a lot of questions to the groom. For example, the family may ask the groom about his family, so they can check whether the family has a good reputation or not, or they can ask if he's working or studying because in this way, the family can know if the groom will be able to provide for his wife.



Once they finish the introductions, the groom's family makes arrangements to meet the bride's family for the agreement. This is called the "knocking-on-the-door step" during which the groom's parents choose aunts to visit the bride's family with twelve or more cola nuts. Then the bride's family takes those cola nuts and shares them with the uncles, aunts, and grandparents. This is like announcing to them that their niece is now engaged to a man. The groom's family follows one more step and brings a bowl of cola nuts, and some families add an amount of money. At this time, the bride's family shares the cola nuts with all family members to inform them that their sister, niece, cousin or grandchild is formally engaged (the first one is



only for parents, uncles, aunts and grandparents, and the second is distributed to all members of the family even young brothers).

Afterwards, the groom's family sends a suitcase with four different qualities of loincloth, four pairs of shoes, four head wraps, four veils, jewelry and an amount of money. At this time, adding money to the suitcase is an obligation for the groom's family, and the amount varies from two hundred dollars up. Also, at this time, both families make arrangements to prepare the wedding day. The wedding takes two to three days; it depends on each family. On the first day, which is a Friday for some families and a Saturday for others, the bride is covered with a big veil by a special lady who is called "Taba", and then the women sing for a couple of hours. At the same time, another woman puts henna on her feet and hands. The next day, the celebration starts in the morning at the mosque with a prayer; after the prayer, families share food and drinks. In the afternoon, she is presented in public, and then they sing and give her money. The final step is to take her to her husband's house in a special car and other members take the bus to give her support or to accompany her.

To conclude, traditional marriage in Tem culture in Togo follows many steps before the wedding, which is celebrated in both families. Now, the spouse and the wife share their feelings and live together as a family. Men in Togo have to invest a lot in order to get engaged, but it is the best solution to be united and to live together.



The Adossa-Gadawou Festival

One of the biggest celebrations in Tem culture is Adossa-Gadawou-Kosso. This celebration assembles many native people living in different cities. On the day of the Adossa-Gadawou festival, people wear their traditional clothes. Men wear traditional pants and a big shirt all made by hand, and some men ride their horse, and others carry knives. In addition, women wear one traditional loincloth with a white shirt, and the second loincloth is used to wrap their heads; they have special red or white jewelry. Adossa in particular is a festival of knives in which people cut their stomach with knives. Kosso is a dance in which women move with their loincloth. During the Kosso dance, women make a round and dance behind each other.

KERLY BACKES DAL FORNO

My name is **Kerly Backes Dal Forno**, and I am from the south of Brazil, a state called Rio Grande do Sul. My hometown is close to Argentina, and its name is Tres de Maio. At this time, 25.000 people are living there. I am married, and we have only one son called Matheus. He is seven years old and started second grade this year. Before I came to the United States, I had been teaching history in a middle school for almost twelve years. I have been studying at Black Hawk College for almost two years, and my goal is to improve my English, especially, my ability to communicate and understand Americans. We are here temporarily, and next year, during the summer, my family and I will return to Brazil permanently. Being here in the United States has been a great experience. I have never lived in any other country before. I learned a lot about different cultures, countries and languages. Personally, I was able to try many things, and I think I changed a lot, and I am so happy that I was able to have this experience in my life.



Brazil: A Mixed Culture

During almost four hundred years of colonization, Brazil received millions of immigrants from all around the world. They brought different aspects of their culture and contributed to the large diversity over there. While different groups of indigenous people occupied the land for many generations, Portugal started its colonization, looking for new lands, in the mid-16th century. Portugal also brought thousands of Africans as slaves to Brazil. Therefore, all these ethnic groups have influenced many areas of Brazilian culture, particularly the cuisine, art, and language.

First of all, looking for good opportunities to make money, Portugal discovered Brazil's existence in 1500. On this land, different cultures of indigenous people had lived for generations when the Portuguese arrived. In the first 30 years, Portugal was only interested in getting Brazil wood, which had a good value in Europe. The indigenous helped them not only to extract the wood, but also to survive in the forest and get food. The indigenous population had always taken advantage of what nature offers, such as roots, leaves, palm fruits, and hunting meal. However, one of the most important contributions to our cuisine was cassava flour. This heritage was incorporated in our kitchens, and, today, it is used to prepare different types of bread, cake, soup, and other dishes.

After that, Portugal decided to bring people to live in Brazil because they did not want to lose this land to opponents. Many villages were built along the coast to receive all those adventures. Sugar cane was a good business in Europe, and our country had many acres to produce it. Therefore, at that time, Portugal started to bring

Africans, as slaves to Brazil. This population, who originated from different parts of Africa, came to Brazil to work with sugar cane, in gold mines, and, also on coffee farms. The African population, who was brought to Brazil for around four centuries, was the most significant support for all work developed there, and, as a result, we can find their influence. Trying to survive the slave work, Africans developed a type of fight, called capoeira. This type of fight was mixed with African rhythms and songs in order to practice it in a hidden way. “Accompanied by music, capoeira dancers gracefully use arm and leg motions designed to barely miss the opponent. Well-aimed high kicks skim over the head of the other fighter” (“African Brazilians” 19).



The most significant immigrant heritage in Brazil, in fact, came from Portugal since the beginning. Our official language, Portuguese, is spoken by the whole population. However, the vocabulary is somewhat different from the language spoken in Portugal. This difference comes from the connection with the indigenous people and, of course, the Africans. For example, words like *abacaxi* (pineapple), *mandioca* (cassava) and *catapora* (chickenpox) are indigenous words introduced into the formal vocabulary. Similarly, words such as *caçula* (the youngest children), *cochilar* (take a nap) and *caxumba* (mumps) were adopted from African idioms. The list of these common words is gigantic, but plenty of other expressions were also adopted from other cultures.

The history of Brazil continued through the following centuries. Other people from other countries also came to Brazil. Italians and Germans, who were running away from persecution, poverty and war, settled in the south and southeast in the 19th century. Encouraged by the Portuguese government, these immigrants occupied idle lands and developed their own culture. Their influence can be found in the architecture of these locations and into the local economy. Small agricultural farms, pig farms, breweries, wineries, regional parties, folklore, and education are examples of this influence. Another important point is that Portugal replaced the slave labor of the African immigrants with the salary work of the Europeans. In other words, especially the emancipated African slaves were affected by unemployment.

Finally, the cultural diversity of Brazil is a consequence of the occupation of its land. The people who participated in the occupation left their marks, and those small pieces of heritage built this country called Brazil, which has a wonderful diversity of taste, language, and food. However, the fundamental cultural heritage came from Portugal, which was responsible for the initial formation of the Brazilian culture.



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Chimarrão

Chimarrão is a drink, which is found especially in the south of Brazil. This drink is a typical tea made with leaves from the *ilex paraguariensis* tree and served with hot water. This tea is a symbol of hospitality, and when we receive guests at home, we prepare this drink to share. The origin of this tea is connected with our colonization. Indigenous people drank this tea during their rituals, and immigrants incorporated this habit because of its taste, the comfort it provides during the winter, and its digestive properties. To prepare chimarrão, we need specific objects: one traditional cuia, a container called porongo, which is made from a fruit called *legionaria vulgaris*, yerba mate (tea), one bombilla, which is a spoon straw, warm water, and one small plate. The process to prepare chimarrão is simple: First, heat the water to 160° F. Second, fill the cuia two thirds of the way with yerba. Third, cover the cuia with a plate, flip it upside down, shake it a little bit, and then hold it at a 45° angle leaving a space for the water. Fourth, put the hot water into the space and gently set the silverware straw into the cuia and drink the tea. It is important to mention that there are some rules to drink chimarrão. This drink is passed from hand to hand in a big circle of people. Each one must drink all of the tea inside the cuia. We share the same container and straw, and when you do not want to drink it anymore, just say thank you when you pass the cuia. Although this drink is a little bitter, it is a symbol of friendship in my state.



NDIKUMANA HELENA



Hello! My name is **Ndikumana Helena**, and I was born in Kigoma, Tanzania. I am 18 years old. I am the oldest in my family. I have one brother and six sisters, and there is another baby on the way, which will make eight in total. I have wanted to visit South Korea ever since I was a sophomore in high school. South Korea is a country that has attracted me, especially the food (street food), my favorite band and many other things. I am really proud of myself that I have finished high school with a 3.2 GPA because I really tried my best to earn it. I will do everything I can to get good grades in college. I am planning to study law enforcement once I am done with my ESL classes. I will attend Black Hawk College for at least two years, and then I will transfer to a four-year university. I want to become a police officer because I want to help stop domestic violence, murder, child abuse, and more. When I think of my home country, I start feeling sad because there is a war between two ethnic groups in Tanzania. Innocent people are dying for something they did not do or something they do not know about. Even though the fighting in Tanzania does not relate to becoming a police officer, I just want to help innocent people from getting killed. These reasons are why I want to study law enforcement, and I hope nothing stops me from that goal. Many people say it's not an easy major or career since I was not born in the USA, but I say it's okay; I will challenge myself and see where I am going to get because I've been wanting to become a police officer for so many reasons. I would like to become the first African police woman in Rock Island.

My Everyday Life in Tanzania

Tanzania is the country where I was born and raised through hardships. The life I was living in Tanzania with my family was very hard because every day we struggled to get by. My parents were born and raised in Congo. A few years later, they moved to Tanzania because of the war that was happening in Congo. I lived in Tanzania for eight years until we were chosen to come to the U.S.A. The place I was living, the food and the education were things that affected me when growing up.

First, food was a huge problem. Many times, a day would go by without us kids eating anything because my parents were not around much to feed us. They worked far from home. My dad would travel far away to get some food, so we would not starve. He would bring us some mangoes and sugarcane. We had a garden beside my house where we planted vegetables, such as tomatoes, corn, and beans. There was a program by a group of people from different cities, and they would give out free food to us and other families that were in need of food, and it was a monthly thing.

Second, I lived in a house that had two bedrooms, and it was made of bricks. It was a house that was very strong on the sides, but the rooftop was a problem because whenever it rained the water would go through one of the open holes in my room, and my dad would have to wake up in the middle of the night to fix it because it often rained in the night. We lived by a water well where we fetched water every morning and evening. We cooked everything on a wooden fire, and everything we cooked was eaten the same day it was cooked because we did not have anywhere to store the leftovers, and if we kept them for the next day, they would go bad and start smelling. We did not have a bathroom, kitchen, and showers in the house. In the night, it was harder for us to use the

bathroom because it was outside, and we had to use a torch because there were no lights in the bathroom. We had to shower early before it got dark because we would not be able to see at night. Even the kitchen was outside, so we had to cook early. It was really hard for me because there was a time I had to prepare dinner for my sisters when my parents were not around, and it was at night when I had to use a torch to see what I was doing. However, we did not have any problems with clothing because we had plenty of new clothes to wear because people from America would donate clothes to needy families.

Lastly, when I started my second grade year in Tanzania, it was very hard to get even a pencil and a notebook, but my parents always found a way to get the supplies I needed for at least a semester. It was very cold in the morning, and in the afternoon it would start getting hot. I had to walk to school every single day with other kids my age because there were no school buses that would take us to school, and the school was very far. I had morning and evening classes. During my break, I would go home to eat because we did not have any cafeterias where we would eat or buy lunch. After eating and doing any chores my mom told me to do, I would go to my evening class. The reason why I had an evening class was to get extra help with my studies from different teachers because I was falling behind. It was not on the same school grounds; it was in a different place, like a church school. There was no recess, but we had breaks in each class session to either go get some water, go to the bathroom, or talk with our classmates. There were a lot more students in the afternoon class than in the morning class. We were all eight years old and in the same grade and class.

In conclusion, the food, my environment, and my education played important roles in my everyday life in Tanzania. Trying to survive every single day on a small portion meal was something I had never dreamed of. Once I moved to the U.S.A., everything changed. I had everything I needed in the house. We did not have to struggle any longer.



How to Make Fufu

Have you ever tried this popular dish of Africa? It is a very popular dish that goes with so many side dishes. Most of the African countries cook their fufu differently, and they have their own side dishes that go with it; you can cook it either very hard or soft. There are also many types of fufu flour such as cassava flour, cornmeal flour, plantain flour, and more.

Fufu is a dish that you can cook in a short amount of time. For example, when you do not have time to cook something special, you just boil some water in a pot and then get some overnight side dishes that you can eat with the fufu because fufu is not eaten by itself. It needs something to go with it to get a better taste. Fufu is eaten anytime of the day, in the morning, afternoon, or evening. It does not have to be a special day for it to be eaten. First, you need to boil water in a pot. The size of the pot depends on how much you are making. Second, once the water is thoroughly boiling, add the fufu flour into the pot. After that, start stirring or mixing it with a wooden spoon until it sticks together. Once it sticks together, put it on a plate and get ready to serve the fufu with different side dishes and eat it with a very happy face. Fufu is eaten with the fingers because it tastes way better this way. Of course, it is your choice if you want to eat it with a fork if you are uncomfortable using your fingers, but, in an African home, using your fingers is a must because you will get scolded if you use a fork because that is not how you were raised eating your country's traditional dish.

JAMI HESSELL

Hello, I am **Jami Hessel**. I am from Okinawa, Japan, and I was born and raised in Okinawa. I am 19 and will be turning 20 this year. I moved to America last year. I have three siblings: one Japanese sister, one Japanese brother and one American brother. My Japanese siblings live in Okinawa, and my American brother lives in NY. Now, I am living with my grandmother, who is my father's mother. My closest family members are in Okinawa. After I finish the ESL program, I will continue going to Black Hawk to study business. After I finish my two-year degree at Black Hawk, I will transfer to a four-year university. I know it will be so difficult for me to get good grades in regular classes, but I will do my best.



Obon Festival

Obon is an annual Buddhist event, which is celebrated for three days to welcome the spirits of everyone's own ancestors. This holiday is common in Japan; however, Okinawa celebrates this holiday differently from all the other prefectures in Japan, so most of the people from other prefectures think our Obon is unique. Because we worship our ancestors, this is one of the most important events of the year in Okinawa.

The first day is "Unkei", which means welcoming day. All the family gathers in the house that has a Buddhist altar; most of the time, we gather at our grandparents' house. Many people have an altar at home, and it stays out all year long. During the day, we prepare flowers, green tea, water, chopsticks, food, sake and more so that we can offer it to the ancestors. In the evening, after most of the family has arrived, we start the ceremony to welcome the ancestors. After we pray, we eat. Usually, we eat a traditional Okinawan rice dish, called "Unkei-Jyusi", which is cooked with many ingredients, and this is my favorite dish. We also offer this dish to the ancestors.

The second day is the day we let the spirits stay and entertain. We call this day "Nakabi", which means the middle day. Most of the people visit their relatives' houses that have Buddhist altars to greet the spirits and pray for them. We usually bring some gifts, such as juice, canned fruit, snacks and jelly when we visit their houses. When we do not have time to visit, or when they live too far away, we send them. On the other hand, the houses that have Buddhist altars have to welcome their relatives, and most of them prepare food to welcome them. That is why, most of the time, the people who are visiting their relatives have to eat a lot of food because each house provides food. At nighttime, many people go see the Eisa dance, which is a traditional Okinawan dance, on the streets. We can also see Eisa dances on the first and last day of Obon, but most people go out and see it on the middle day. Some families gather again and have a dinner together.

"Ukui" is the last day of the event, and it means leaving day. On this day, we never go near the ocean because we think our ancestors will take us to their home with them. We gather again to say good-bye to our ancestors and eat dinner. We prepare a lot of food, such as tempura (deep fried food), sushi, beans, and more. Many people make

all the dishes by themselves, but some people buy food that is already made. Also, you can hear the sound of drums from outside, so it feels like we are having a big party. After we eat, we start the ceremony to see off our ancestors. At this time, we offer food, drinks and money. Instead of using actual money, we use a paper that we consider as money for another world, and we call it “Uchikabi”. We open the window and burn the money so that the smoke will go outside with the ancestors. After we burn the money, we pray for them. We thank and appreciate our ancestors for visiting us.

This holiday, Obon, is really important for Okinawans. We believe our ancestors are watching us and protecting us every day. When you go to Okinawa during Obon season, you will see how people are busy going around many places for this holiday. I really love this holiday because I feel like it bonds the family. I think this is one of the reasons why Okinawans take this holiday so seriously.

Eisa, Traditional Dance of Okinawa

In Japan, each city has its own traditional dance. Eisa is one of the traditional dances in Okinawa. Usually, the women dance without using instruments, but the men use Japanese drums (taiko) to make the sounds. During Obon, you can see Eisa dancing all over the streets. The dance starts in the evening and lasts until midnight. We dance it during Obon season to welcome and entertain the spirits of our ancestors. Also, we can see Eisa at the festivals we have during the summer and at school festivals. That is why most Okinawans have experience dancing it at least two times in their lives.



JAELE NKUSU



My name is **Jaele Nkusu**. My friends and the people that cannot pronounce my name call me Jaii. I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Kinshasa, but I was raised in the USA. My family and I came here for the most part for a better education. The hardest part was the fact that I had to start over, and anybody that immigrated from one place to another knows exactly what that feels like, the feeling of being new to everything and having to allow yourself to get used to a whole new way of life. I remember my very first day of school like it was yesterday. It was in Indianapolis. It was neither a bad experience nor a good one, and I would not change it in any way. I just wish I knew what I know now.

The Challenges I Faced When I Migrated to the United States

Do you remember the very first trip you ever took? I came to America from Africa at a young age when I was young enough to possess a high-level of innocence and old enough to process the differences in a different country. When I first came to America, the only things on my mind were food, the fear of being in an unknown place, and the frustrations of wanting to know things that others had no problems with.

When it comes to American foods, it's very different from what I was used to back in my country, from the way the food is prepared and portioned to how it tastes. I found it very mesmerizing how a person can experience all the rich cuisines the world has to offer in one place. I remember how surprised I was when I first tasted American food on the airplane. For example, there was a plate filled with chicken, peas, and carrots and on the side a bottle of milk or water. It was amazingly interesting how the people made the food look on plates, very beautifully organized. The tastes were a little weird but good. Before that, I never knew there were such things as food portions with different sizes and that, when asking for a meal, you could ask for the size you want, and I was surprised that I could get a large meal for a cheap price. In addition to that, when we first entered our house, there was a big basket of chicken legs, a bowl of mashed potatoes, and drinks. At the time, I did not understand why this combination was so perfect together. All I knew at that moment was that I loved American food.

It was not so much the fear of being in America that kept me up at night. It was not knowing where to start because it is hard having to start from scratch in a new location and feeling rejected due to not knowing the language spoken around you. If I remember correctly, the only time I ever experienced real fear was when I was in 4th grade. It was like any other day, but my family was not going to come to pick me up from school, so I had to find my way back home. I knew I had to ride one of the orange school buses, but for some odd reason, I could not pinpoint which one. Of course, I also knew that all I needed to do was to ask for directions; however, me being unfortunate and not knowing the language spoken, I had no clue what to say or how to say it. Eventually, I found someone that was able to help me out through pictures and gestures. As it turned out, all I had to do was look up my name on the list of students riding the buses. If that experience taught me anything, it is that sometimes the answers are right under your nose, and you just have to look.

Being frustrated about the simplest things that an average person in America can do with their eyes closed was and still is one of my main issues because I simply cannot do that. For example, it starts with the way the

school system works. I was never able to understand the whole concept of how the American kids could misbehave and mistreat their teachers, yet all they got as a punishment was a "timeout." While in Africa, if a student was acting like a fool, hitting the student would be the teachers' first choice. The other thing that frustrated me a lot, and I must confess still does, is the English subject. I remember when I was in elementary school, we had story time, and I could not understand what was going on or what I was supposed to be doing. English was and still is really confusing and hard. I never imagined English could be even harder than that until I started my high school year and had to write paragraph after paragraph.

All things considered, if I could change anything about my very first time in America, I would not change a thing because, through all the struggles, I learned a few things, too. For example, if you have to learn a new language, make sure you first learn the basic words like "help me" or "direct me to this location, please." If you must try new things, start with the food, and it is completely okay to be frustrated because it is guaranteed to push you past your limitations.

Dance Roles of Men and Women

For as long as I can remember, I have watched the people around me participate in the most beautiful and amazing traditional dances. At a young age, I knew the sounds that indicated that the place was most likely to have dancers dancing to the beautiful music. I remember there was a day when I asked my mother about the meaning behind the dancing and the music. Her response was that "when males are dancing, it means that they are the chosen ones, most likely next in line for royalty." They made the strangest movements that I never quite understood until now. When a male was chosen it meant one of two things: becoming a king or going to fight in a war, and so, while they danced, they would make a fighting movement, which meant they were ready for whatever that meant for each individual. Being a kid, I figured it must mean the same thing for the women that danced, but I was wrong, for when a woman dances, it indicates that she is going to her married home, or she is showing her beauty, kindness, and goodness through dancing, symbolizing the Ankole cattle that's believed to be the most beautiful cow in the wildness of Rwanda. I couldn't wait to become one of those beautiful ladies that danced, and so on my 14th birthday, I knew the only way to make it remarkable was if I joined my sisters and brothers while they danced celebrating me. From then on, whenever my family is celebrating a festival, I know I am going to be a part of it, a part of something that reminds me of who I am. My mother always says, "You should never allow yourself to forget who you are because you'll lose your way." I am not planning to lose that part of me that puts me to sleep at night.



This was taken after the celebration of a newborn baby girl.

COMLAN BLAISE KINTO



I was born on March 3, 1992 in Lomé, Togo to Mr. Kouassi Kinto and Mrs. Ablavi Messanh. My name is **Comlan Blaise Kinto**, but the first name that my mother gave me was Mawuena, which means God-given in my native language, Ewe. I was born in a middle class family. I am the youngest child with three siblings, one girl and two boys from my mother. I have nine more siblings from two more wives of my father. My father and my mother have been married for 45 years. My mother is my biggest hope and inspiration to become what I want to be. My childhood was a good experience because I learned life lessons from other people's experiences and my own. I finished my high school in 2013 at Sainte Catherine School, and graduated as a computer technician in 2015 with a certificate from HTC in Avepozo, Togo. With the help of my two brothers, I participated in the U.S. Diversity Visa Lottery, and it permitted me to come to the United States. I am living here with my brother. I experienced severe back pain through my first eight months in the United States. I am working at Black Hawk College as a mail carrier, but I want to become an IT manager and hopefully a business owner one day. I will be what I was meant to be because I have faith in God.

Poverty Has Affected Togo in Different Ways

It really can lead people to death. Poverty is one of the most common problems, which can lead people to depression, mental illness, social injustice, and even death. Just as poverty has been affecting many countries in different places around the world, it has been one of the most common issues in my lovely country, Togo. In different ways, poverty has affected Togo, a small country in West Africa. Gradual devaluation of education, lack of money transactions, and corruption are the three major ways, in which poverty has affected Togo.

Education is very important in Togo, but it is not valued currently as it was 20 years ago. Going to school is one of the most ambitious goals for Togolese, but the conditions, in which teachers teach students, are unsatisfactory. Most of the public school teachers sometimes do not receive their salary. Since 2010, public school teachers have been protesting for their salary and demanding a raise. Each year, public school classes are canceled because teachers go on strike for weeks or months. When teachers go on strike, students sometimes decide to march and protest. Sometimes, this interferes with the national exam date because the schedule of the school year is not respected. For example, the date of the 2018 national baccalaureate was in June, but due to the strike and marches in Togo, the students were tested for their baccalaureate in August. Furthermore, the University of Togo has been a place of struggle. My country has two public universities, which are the University of Kara in the north and the University of Lomé in the south. The government of Togo is supposed to give financial assistance to any public university student in Togo, just as other African countries such as Benin and Burkina-Faso do. The students receive this financial assistance every three months, and it supports them in their financial needs. Each year, university students protest to claim this three-monthly premium.

One of the common issues that poverty has caused is societal problems. Poverty forces people to accept lower wages. For example, to find any way to support themselves and attain their goals, some young girls have desperately given their bodies to men in exchange for payment. In some work places, a girl is sometimes asked to

sleep with the manager in order to keep her position, or she is fired. In some areas of my country, people have been living in sadness because poor people are getting poorer, and rich people are getting richer. Employment has become very difficult because of the low wages. For example, people work very hard, but they get small pay at the end of the month. Similarly, some employees, such as nurses and doctors in public hospitals, do not receive their pay sometimes. Subsequently, some doctors have created clinics in their houses. Since they work hard but do not receive their salary, they, sometimes, schedule appointments with their patients to meet with them in their own clinics at home. They often take some of the medicines that they use from the public hospitals. Moreover, sales people have been suffering a lot because they have not been able to sell their products. For example, debts have increased for salespeople because they borrow money to do business, but people are not buying their products. Because consumers do not have money, they, sometimes, ask to buy products on credit. Some business owners are in debt because their customers do not have money to pay them. Equally important, a lack of money has affected families. Money has been the issue of serious and dramatic discussions between couples. Some couples fall apart just because the man is not able to support his wife the way a rich man would.

Gradual devaluation of education and the lack of money transactions are not the only areas which poverty has affected in my country. Many groups of people have been forced to become corrupt because of the lack of money. The political parties are corrupt. For example, there are betrayals and lies among political members. In addition, generally, everyone everywhere has to respect the laws, regardless of his/her wealth. However, it is different in Togo. For example, when a poor person violates a law, he/she is severely punished. On the contrary, when the president or any member of the government violates the law, nobody does anything. From 2005 to 2018, hundreds of Togolese were killed for protesting to claim human rights, and nobody has been held responsible for that. Another important fact is that the market places have been functioning based on variable prices. For example, some items are priced based on the class of a person who wants to buy them. To illustrate, suppose that I have my own boutique with my items. I will not have prices on my items. If a poor man comes to buy an item, I can sell it to him at a normal price, but if a rich man comes to buy, I will decide to sell it to him at a higher value. Furthermore, rich people are influencing the country. For example, in service places, people tip the workers in order to be served first and faster. As a matter of fact, if a case concerns a rich person and a poor person, the rich one is often favored.

In conclusion, poverty has affected my country in schools, money transactions, and corruption. Poverty has provoked negative effects in my country despite the fact that my country has the important resources to become a well-developed nation. The problem of my country's crisis may be due to the patrimonial and mal-governance of the same family for over 50 years. However, as nobody knows what the future will bring, my country may be able to prosper if we have a new president.



To my mother and every mother,
All I can say is, "Thank you",
All I can do is "Make you proud",
She who gave me the chance and life to come into this world,
While I have seen many others taking this chance from other innocents,
I love you, my wonderful Mother,
She who has no fear of telling me whether I am wrong or right,
She who never gives up on me because I am wrong or right,
She who never gives up on me because I am masculine or feminine,
She who never abandons me because I am ugly or bad,
I love you my goddess
She who gave me everything in her power to see me succeed,
She who took care of me when I was little,
She who sang every song in this world every time I cried,
She who consoled me and made my tears into smiles,
She who knows and feels my pain whenever I am in pain,
I love my unforgettable mother,
She who inch by inch taught me to sit by having my back,
She who taught me to crawl by crawling with me,
She who taught me to stand up by holding my arms,
She who taught me to make steps inch by inch with joy and excitement,
She who taught me to say word by word and I ended up saying every word,
She who spoke with me but never knew anything I said,
She who could not eat when I could not,
She who could not sleep when I could not,
She the one who gave up everything for me
I can never abandon you as you never did to me
Merciful mother,
I can never thank you enough because money can never buy all you did,
She who promised to never give up on me, even if the world did,
But all I can do is to make you proud!



EVA VAN SUI MAWI



Hi! My name is **Eva Van Sui Mawi**, and I was born on December 29, 2000 in Falam, Myanmar. I have three sisters and one brother. We used to play together all the time. I am the youngest in my family. We had had a big house in Chin State. We moved to Malaysia in 2009. At that time, I was only nine years old. After that, we lived in Malaysia for about six years. In 2014, in the month of July, we came to the United States. On September 1, I started my freshman year at Moline High School, and I graduated in May 2018. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College to fulfill my dreams. My dream job is to be a pharmacist and work at CVS. I am hoping to visit South Korea when I finish with my education.

My Hardships as a Freshman

When I was little, I never thought that I would be living in the United States. I also never dreamed to leave my country, but many things can happen in our life beyond our assumption. When I was nine years old, my family moved to Malaysia because of the conflict in Myanmar. During those years, many things happened in our life. It was not easy to live in Malaysia. We could not go outside whenever we wanted because it was too dangerous for us. When we were outside, we always needed to be careful because there were a lot of thieves who tried to steal our purses and phones. I went to a Chin school to study Chin and English. In 2014, in the month of July, we came to the United States. On September 1, I started my freshman year at Moline High School. During my freshman year, I had many difficulties at school because of the language, the isolation, and the new material.

First, everything is hard when you do not know the language. At that time, I only knew a few English words. The worst part was that I did not understand anything when people were talking to me. I was always scared to go to all of my classes because I did not know enough English to talk to people. If someone talked to me, I just nodded and smiled at them because I did not know what they were saying. I eventually learned English in an ESL class and by listening to teachers and others talking. It took me about two years to start understanding people.

Secondly, I felt isolated because there was no one who spoke my language at that time. I was scared to talk to people because I did not know their language. I did not have any friends because I was so scared to approach anyone. At lunch, I did not even know how to say the names of the food. I just pointed to the food with my finger and went to sit by myself. I tried to do everything by myself because there was no one to help me. Sometimes, I was almost crying in class if I did not know how to



do my work. Everything was new for me. It was like I started a new life. There was one girl who talked to me in my gym class. She was a really sweet and kind girl. I had more confidence to talk to people because of her, and I also made new friends through her. After that, I did not have any problems making friends anymore.

Lastly, there were many new materials, which I had never used before. For example, I did not even know how to use the locker because we never used those locks in my country. Again, I did not have any friends to ask for help, but one girl was really sweet and taught me how to use the lock. When we needed to do something with materials in class, I just waited for my classmates to do it first because I did not know how. After I saw what my classmates did, I tried to do it by myself. The good thing was that once I see a teacher demonstrate something, I can usually do it by myself. I am also a fast learner, but I was always glad to have some classmates who were really nice and helped me out with everything.

My freshman year was the hardest part of my life, and it was like a nightmare for me. I do not want to relive it again. As time goes by, I got better with my English, and I made friends. I started to have confidence and tried new things. Even though it was hard at first, in the end, I achieved many things. I actually performed at the “Share Joy” Talent Show three times, and I started to work hard and get good grades. Finally, my hard work paid off when I got four recognitions. Also, I am a member of the National Honor Society and got a certificate and scholarship on April 19. My senior year was the best year of my school life because I had many friends, was confident in myself, and knew that, if I tried, I could do anything. I graduated high school in May. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College to fulfill my dreams. That is why everyone should try his or her best even though it is hard, but in the end, you will find happiness. So, never give up and do your best in everything you do.

Tribal Drum (Khuang)

Many years ago, Chin people used tribal drums for music because there were no pianos, guitars or other instruments at that time. Chin people always go to church on Sunday to worship God. When they did not have any instruments to play, they used tribal drums. The tribal drum is made of leather, and it is made by hand. We call the tribal drum khuang. In the past, everybody used a tribal drum in church to sing. One man played the drum at church, and everyone was singing. Whenever we changed the song, the drummer also needed to change how he played because every song has a different beat. It is not easy to play the drum at church because we need to use our strength, and we sing six or seven songs at a time. However, in the 21st century, we do not use tribal drums anymore in Chin state because there are many instruments to play. Now, they use pianos and other instruments at church.



KONDO CLAUDE N'SOUGLO



My name is **Kondo Claude N'souglo**. I was born in Togo, West Africa on December 7th. I was raised by both of my parents. I have seven siblings: three girls and four boys. I am the oldest of my siblings. I grew up in Togo, and I started school when I was five. My first school was our primary school, and I went to school with my father every morning since my father was a teacher. In high school, since I like science, especially biology, I decided to focus more on science. I graduated from high school in 2014. After my graduation, I should have started at the University of Lome, but because of the problems at the institution, my father decided to register me in a private university so that I can get a degree and get a job very quickly. I was registered for a construction career with a focus on infrastructure. In the year 2014, after starting on campus, I won the Diversity Visa lottery for the United States. I came to the United States in 2016. I found a job to survive in the beginning in 2017. I have been taking ESL classes for a year. I really learn interesting things while learning English. After ESL, I will start my major in the healthcare field. I hope to become a great doctor in the future. My first dream is to become a doctor, go back to my country, and help people with their health.

A Special Holiday Celebration in my Country

In every country, there are some holidays that people celebrate to enjoy themselves, and they get a chance to share what they have and maybe show their talents. Since 1960, after the independence of Togo, citizens, in every part of the nation, celebrate their holidays on different days of the year. In my community, there is a celebration called Hogbezan every year on August 25th. During this celebration, there are many interesting things that people do such as dance, wear traditional clothes, and do magic.

First of all, in my community, people celebrate the traditional holiday called Hogbezan, for which everybody meets in one specific place. At that time, they show to each other their different dances. For example, in my village, people perform different dances, such as Agbadza, Bobobo, etc. All these dances are like a competition, and the crowd has to choose one best dancers. Most of the time, the same dance is chosen by everybody, and it is the Gadzo dance from the village next to my village. For this dance, they have two to three people play a gong, and others just clap their hands in one rhythm so that it sounds great. To that rhythm, the dancers move skillfully to make the spectators feel happy. Now, to dance, they have five people aligned, and they dance together first and then separately. In their dances, they portray their ancestors as powerful hunters, and they have guns in their hands to show this. This holiday does not revolve only around dances.

Second, showing each other one's tradition is very important at the time of Hogbezan. There are many traditional items that people show to each other. For example, in my village, people show off their traditional clothes. We do have different ways of dressing depending on our heritage. For example, in my village, people use palm leaves to dress traditionally for a particular situation. For example, for hunting, people use the palm leaves to wrap their feet separately and keep some leaves in their mouths that show that they are hunting a big animal. Also, some people dress in a traditional way called Zamgbeto, which is the name of the god that protects the community at night in order to chase away bad spirits. Apart from the dance and the traditional clothing, we have another part of the celebration.

During this celebration, people do some magic to show everybody what they are able to do. In my village, some people use a can and put a very big object in the small can, which is impossible for other people. Also, some people use the help of the god of the night, who is called Zamgbeto, to cook very fast. What they do is put the chicken, for example, in front of the god and in about three minutes, the food is ready. It is very extraordinary to do these types of things. After all that, people sit together, eat and drink before everybody goes back home.

In conclusion, Hogbezan is the celebration that gathers all brothers and sisters from all over my community to enjoy themselves by showing to each other their dances, their traditional clothes and their abilities to do magic. People have been celebrating this holiday for almost 54 years. This celebration helps people to get to know each other too. It is a very valuable celebration.

Lokpo: Traditional Ewe Loincloth

Lokpo is a kind of traditional clothing in my country, Togo. We can find Lokpo in most communities. Lokpo is composed of multiple colors and has a very nice look. It is made of cotton with a traditional machine. In the Ewe community, Lokpo is a very traditional way to dress. In the past, not everybody could wear it because it was very expensive and tied to tradition. I remember my mother told me that my grandpa, who is her father and the former ruler of my village, used to wear Lokpo for certain occasions. He wore Lokpo during traditional celebrations or other special events. He looked great and respectable. Lokpo is very easy to wear. Nowadays, because everybody can afford Lokpo, we can see it on most people. Even ladies wear Lokpo in different designs.

MU POE

I was born in 1994 in a village in Burma, a very poor place, but I grew up in a Thai refugee camp called Mae La Camp. I have five siblings, but only three siblings are from my biological father, and I am the youngest. After my father died, my mother remarried. When I was a child, things were difficult in my family, and I moved to Mae La Camp in 2004 without my parents, but I had my brothers. When I lived in Thailand, I could not contact my mother, but she visited me in 2011 before I moved to the U.S. After I arrived in the US, I first lived in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I started going to school in 9th grade, and I had a hard time speaking English. I moved to Rock Island in February 2014, and I got married when I was in 12th grade. I had a kid before I graduated from high school. I started studying in the ESL program at Black Hawk College in fall 2016. In the future, I want to be a nurse.



The Journey of my Life

Moving from one place to another is a familiar experience in my life. Also, living with different people is a good experience. These people may have been good or bad, but they have become part of my life lessons. I learned something new when I lived in different countries, and I learned something new when I lived with different generations. It is difficult growing up without parents, but I am blessed to have some people on my side. Since I was a child, I have moved around a lot.

The first place was Burma. I was born there, and I lived there with my parents and siblings for ten years. I have three siblings from my biological father and two siblings from my stepfather. Because of my family situation, my two older brothers went to Thailand to stay with my grandparents. I am the youngest child of my biological father, but I was treated like an adult. My stepfather was an alcoholic, and he was not helpful in my family. My mother told me that I had to be a big girl for my siblings, for I had to be on her side, and she wanted me to be a farmer when I grew up. In our daily life, we raised animals, such as chickens and pigs for meat, and we also grew vegetables and rice for food. When I was little, my mother was proud of me because I was a good listener, and I was a dependable person that my mother could rely on. For instance, I helped my mother with chores like cooking, cleaning, and taking care of my two younger siblings when she was sick. I did not have much time to play like other kids. Furthermore, I was bullied by other kids because I did not have a father, and my stepfather was an alcoholic. However, I never told my parents or anybody else that I was bullied.

The next place was Thailand. In 2004, I moved to Mae La Refugee Camp in Thailand. I grew up there, and I was raised by my grandparents. At that time, I joined my brothers, but my oldest brother did not live with my grandparents. He lived in a dorm. I was ten years old when I moved to Mae La camp, and even though I was young, my heart was old enough to distinguish good things from bad things. My grandparents were also proud of me because I could do chores. My grandparents sent my older brother and me to school, and I attended school there from 2nd to 8th grade. My grandmother worked as a housekeeper in the hospital of the Mae La Camp, and I helped her with it. I had lived with my grandparents for four years, but in 2008, my grandparents' family moved to the U.S. My brother and I were left, but we could take care of ourselves because people received food every month in the camp. I earned a little money by selling the extra food that we did not eat. Sometimes, one of my grandparents' sons, my uncle from America, sent us some money, so we could afford to pay our school fees and other things. The

last time I saw my mother's face was when she visited us before going to America. I lived in Mae La for seven years.

The last place was the United States. I arrived in Milwaukee with my older brother in June 2011 when I was 17 years old. I started 9th grade in September 2011 in America. I had a hard time speaking English. When I arrived in America, my life was more miserable. My grandparents' son, who had sent money to us when we lived in Thailand, made my brother and me live with his family. My brother and I never thought he would be so evil to us. Luckily, his wife and children were nice to us. Since we moved in with his family, I felt like we were his slaves who had to pay back our debts. He forced my brother to drink. If my brother did not drink, my uncle got angry at him. Moreover, he did not allow me to make friends, and he did not want my brother and me to see his parents, my grandparents. At that time, I lost interest in education. In the morning, I woke up at 5:30 to prepare breakfast for his kids, wake them up and drop them off at school, and I went to wait for my school bus to go to school. Every day after school, I had to arrive home on time. When I came home late from school, he looked at me with a serious face. I did not have the opportunity to stay after school to learn more English. In 10th grade, I was 18, and I decided to work instead of going to school; he said if I left school, I could not work at other places but had to be a housekeeper in his house. We lived with him for three and a half years. Finally, we found a way to escape when I was a junior. To escape the miserable life in the house, I dated a stranger on social media for a month, and then I married him. Luckily, I was loved. I moved in with him in Rock Island in February 2014; I finished at Rock Island High School in June 2015. My daughter was born on the last day of the first semester in my senior year. After giving birth, I was encouraged by my husband's aunt to finish school, and she babysat my daughter when I went to school. Actually, she wanted me to get a high school diploma. I have been attending the ESL program since fall 2016, and I will be finishing the ESL program this spring. After graduating the ESL program, I will continue to go to Black Hawk College to study in the nursing program.

To sum up, I do not want to blame people who gave me a hard time, but I will keep them as free lessons. I appreciate the people who are on my side to motivate me to continue my education. Additionally, I cannot thank them enough for what they have done for me. I experienced life in Burma, Thailand and America. I hope I can have my family reunite in the future.

The Karen Wrist Tying Ceremony

Every year, the Karen Wrist Tying Ceremony is celebrated in August. It is a significant event that reunites Karen people in the same place. We assemble certain materials including a glass of water, thread, rice balls, sticky rice triangles, boiled bananas, sugarcane and flowers on a tray. The older people, such as our parents and grandparents, will put one rice ball, one sticky rice triangle, one piece of sugarcane, one piece of boiled banana and a flower in the younger people's palm, and they will wet the thread with the water and tie the young people's wrists. After the wrist tying is done, the youths have to eat the food in their palms. Grandparents and young people sit across each other, and the grandparents will pray and bless the youths while they are tying their wrists. This is how people usually pray: "pru k la, pru k la, pru k la; come back, live with your family, don't be afraid, don't flee into the forest and other places", for the person's spirit will come back. Also, there is Karen Doe Dance during the wrist tying ceremony, and we eat different kinds of Karen food. For the Karen Wrist Tying Ceremony, we all wear Karen shirts.



ELIZABETH SANCHEZ



Mexico's Holidays

Mexico has a lot of holidays; Mexicans celebrate similar holidays as in the United States. Mexico celebrates Easter, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas and New Year's, but there are some holidays in Mexico that are not common in the U.S., like Children's Day, El Grito de Dolores and Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Children's Day is known as (El Dia Del Niño). It is celebrated on April 30th each year. On this day, children celebrate at school and at home with their parents. Schools have special events for the children. The children take part in activities like face painting, games and plays. The teachers get creative and make (bolos) for the children.

Bolos are bags or cardboard boxes full of different Mexican candies. Each child receives a bolo to take home. On Children's Day, parents spent time with their children at home, or they take them to the park or to the pool to have fun.

Mexico's Independence Day celebrates the day of the cry of Dolores (El Grito de Dolores) on September 15 and the day Miguel Hidalgo is believed to have made the cry of Independence (El Grito de la Independencia) in the town of Dolores on September 16, 1810. El Grito de Dolores was a call to arms to motivate people to fight against the Spanish regime. Hidalgo's army fought against the Spanish soldiers in the fight of Independence. El Grito de Dolores and El Grito de la Independencia are both part of the same holiday, but El Grito de Dolores is celebrated on September 15, one day before El Grito de Independencia on September 16. On these days, Mexicans get together to celebrate with Mexican food and with Mexican music. On September 16 the Day of Independence is celebrated similar to America's Independence Day. Mexicans celebrate with fireworks and food, and the people dress up in the colors of the flag.

My name is **Elizabeth Sanchez**. I am seventeen years old, and I was born in Toledo, Ohio, but I am from a small town called San Jose De Gracia in Mexico, two hours away from Guadalajara City. I have four half-sisters from my dad's side. I am the only child from my mom. When I was born, I left from Toledo to go to Mexico where I stayed for a few years. At the age of four, I left Mexico to go to Toledo where I started kindergarten, and I stayed there for one year. When I was five years old, I went back to Mexico where I finished elementary school and started middle school. In December of 2012, at the age of twelve, I moved to Moline, Illinois. I did not know English because I had started to speak more Spanish in Mexico, and that made me forget my English. I completed half of seventh grade at John Deere Middle School, and it was very hard for me because I did not know what people were saying, and I felt so scared. Now my English is getting better, and I am very proud of myself for getting this far. After I finished middle school, I went to Moline High school. I took nursing classes at United Township High school, and I graduated as a nursing assistant. On May 26 of 2018, I graduated from Moline High School, and now I am going to Black Hawk College. On December 24th of 2018, I will have been living in Moline for six years. I live with my mom. My dad is in Mexico because he cannot come to the United States. I have to go and visit him in Mexico. I have two goals. One of my goals is to graduate from college, and my second goal is to be a nurse one day. I want to make my mom very proud.

The day of the virgin of Guadalupe is a Catholic festival that is celebrated on December 12. It is believed that a man named Juan Diego encountered the Virgin Mary twice in Mexico City on December 9 and on December 12 in 1531. According to the legend, when Juan Diego saw the Virgin Mary for the first time, Mary told Juan to ask the bishop to build a church on Tepeyac Hill. However, the bishop needed proof, so Juan asked for a miracle. Juan returned to the hill to see roses in a spot where there were previously cacti. When Juan Diego returned, he showed the roses to the bishop and also revealed an image of the Lady of Guadalupe on his cloak. The bishop believed in the miracle and built a church. Mexicans celebrate this day with food and music. On this day, Mexicans like to give thanks and ask for a miracle from the Virgin Mary at church.

In conclusion, Mexico celebrates holidays that are very important to Mexicans like Children's Day for the kids, teachers and parents, Independence Day to celebrate El Grito de Dolores, and the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe to celebrate when Mary appeared. In the U.S., Mexicans also celebrate these days. It makes me happy because Mexicans are continuing to celebrate these holidays even in a different country, and that makes me feel like I am at home.

Traditional Dish

Pozole is a traditional soup from Mexico. There are three different kinds of pozole: there is pozole blanco (white pozole), pozole verde (green pozole), and pozole rojo (red pozole). Each kind of pozole can look similar but has different ingredients. The ingredients are what makes the pozole change its color and its taste, but the traditional one is the red pozole. Pozole is a hot dish; it is made from hominy, meat like chicken or pork, chili peppers and seasonings. On top of that, the pozole can have chopped onions, lettuce, sliced radishes, avocado, or salsa, and you can eat it with tostadas. Tostada is a flat fried tortilla, and tostada is a Spanish word that means toasted. Pozole is a special dish because it is served as a celebratory dish. Pozole is served on common occasions like on September 16, Mexico's Independence Day, birthdays, Christmas and New Year's Day. However, pozole does not have to be served on special occasions; it can be served on any other days.



WILSON N. VINCENT

My name is **Wilson N. Vincent**. I am originally from Burundi, and I was raised in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I have three brothers and three sisters, all of them are living in Burundi. I have been living in the United States for ten years. I have been married for nine years, and I have three boys. I love watching soccer, going to church, and traveling, and one of my life goals is to travel to nearly all countries of the world by the time I am 65 years old. I live in Moline, and I am an ESL student at Black Hawk College.



My Life in Muyovozi Refugee Camp

I never knew about the difficult life of a fugitive, but when civil war came to my country, I fled to neighboring Tanzania. Tanzania asked for help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees because of the large number of refugees in that country. Many of those refugees lived in Muyovozi Refugee Camp. Despite the 35,000 refugees that lived there, it was smaller than the neighboring camps, Mtabila I and Mtabila II, which were next to it. The UNHCR is the program that helped the refugees in that camp. My life in the refugee camp was difficult regarding the food, housing, and education.

First of all, I experienced difficult times eating food that I had not eaten before. Actually, the UNHCR gave out a weekly portion of cereal grains and vegetables. We cooked yellow corn as it was or ate fufu made with yellow corn. The UNHCR donated cooking oil as well as corn oil and OKI vegetable oil to refugees to cook pinto beans, lentils, and white and green peas. I remember between 1999 and 2002, the UNHCR gave us beans, which took between 8 and 10 hours to cook. During that time, we did not eat lunch, and we spent ten hours walking around looking for firewood. From that day on, I lived there in bad conditions, and I learned how to eat cooked yellow corn and beans. Oftentimes, I got sick and presented the symptoms of stomachache, nausea, abdominal bloating, etc. After getting medicine, I got better.

Secondly, as refugees, we did not live and sleep in the beautiful houses as we do now. The UNHCR gave away tents to refugees. My first house in the camp was a tent house, which was a fly tent tied around tree trunks with straps of ropes tied to the ground. In the summer, we put grass on top of the tent to protect ourselves from the heat. After one year, I learned how to make bricks and build houses. I also learned how to build a house using straight medium sized tree trunks with wet soil. Because of the rain in that location, houses would not last long; we renewed them every 3 or 4 years. When a tent became old, people had problems, especially in the spring. For example, I remember in the spring of 2000, the tent I had was old, so I did not sleep in it because it leaked too much. I stayed up

all night standing in one place. The next morning, I got large bags from my friends, and I hung them under the holes in the tent where the water was coming from. That night has remained an unforgettable experience in my life.

Finally, the education system was not easy for me. I started a small business: selling peanuts, mangoes, and sugar cane. I sold them in the streets of the camp. My small business helped me pay for school fees for four years before I finished my secondary school. I had attended secondary school at Lycee de l'Esperance in Muyovozi Refugee Camp before I went to another school. Before I transferred to nursing School, I built fences in the villages to pay for the school fees. It was a private school, and every student had to pay money to attend. In 2003, I was able to transfer to Muyovozi Nursing School. In 2006, I graduated and became a nurse. I used to administer medicine to patients in the female ward at Mtabila I refugee camp. I lived in Muyovozi Refugee Camp, but I worked in Mtabila I. I was happy to help people get healthy; it had been my goal since I was young. Then my life changed a little bit after getting a job because I did not go back to selling anything or building houses again. I worked in the camp hospital until I came to the U.S.

In summary, my life in the refugee camp was complicated in terms of the food, housing, and education. Due to the problems, I had in the camp, I can explain to people what life is like in a refugee camp. I will have been telling this story to many people for many years by the time I retire. Nonetheless, my life in the U.S. is now much better than the life I lived in the refugee camp. I like the U.S. because here I have good food, a nice house, and I get financial aid to pay for my studies.



Celebrating Christmas in Burundi

In my hometown in Burundi, Christmas Day is a special day, for which people invite their families, friends, and neighbors to celebrate together. Burundians celebrate it in three great ways in terms of wearing new clothes, eating special food, and drinking special beverages and traditional beer. Firstly, Burundians wear new clothes. Women and girls wear “kitenge”, “umutamana”, and blouses. Men and boys wear suits and shirts. They also wear new shoes. Secondly, Burundians eat special food. They cook beef, chicken, sheep, goat, duck, and lamb and eat them. Thirdly, Burundians drink different beverages. They enjoy drinking “urwarwa”, a traditional banana beer, and Primus beer, Amstel beer, and different sodas. You can see eight to ten people drink banana beer at the same time; they use straws and big bowls, and they drink together. For Christians, these events happen after celebrating Christmas Day in church. In summary, Burundians celebrate Christmas Day in three great ways in terms of wearing new clothes, eating food, and drinking special beverages and traditional beer.

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



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