



INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

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OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



These articles were written by the students in the ESL Advanced Writing class.

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Nina De Bisschop

Associate Professor, ESL

Table of Contents

Irene Aithang	
Growing up in Different Countries	4
Afi Amedoha	
My Hometown Lome	6
Komivi Baite	
The Traditional Marriage	8
Hafssa Bayane	
Moroccan South Sahara	10
Kotsikpa Dandonougbo	
How Colonization Has Affected My Country, Togo	12
Kuegah Dede	
A Typical Sunday in Lome	14
Mpawenayo Divera	
My First Surgery Experience.....	16
Habiba Ettalbi	
Traditional Moroccan Pottery in Safi	18
Sara Fnu	
My Difficult Life in the United States	20

Florence Gbezan	
Finding a Job in Togo	22
Atawakouna Ivette Kpeglo Epse Koffison	
The Traditional Marriage in Ewe Culture	24
Zawadi Leeya	
The Differences between My Life Here and in My Country	26
Ngun Lian	
My Hometown	28
Mawussi Mensah Amavi	
The Akpema Ceremony for the Girls in Kara	30
Yejella Neeharika	
My Hometown in India	32
Dodzi Sessi	
My Everyday Life as a New Immigrant	34
Kodjogan Zouglo	
The Agriculture in Togo	36

Irene Aithang



My name is Irene Tialhnemsung Aithang, and I was born in Burma. I grew up in a small town called Vantlang, which is in Chin state. I arrived in the US at the age of 11, and it was very hard for my family and me. Everything was new to us. I started school before summer break, and I did not get the chance to learn English for a while. My family and I took the bus when we needed to go to the grocery store because we did not have a car at that time. We walked to friends' houses even in winter. I did not go out much because it was hard for me to make friends, and I did not speak English. When I finally learned how to read and speak, it was a lot easier to make friends. At that time, I did not think that I would be going to college. After ten years, I am currently attending Black Hawk College. I want to become a nurse, and I know it is going to be hard, but I will try my very best. If everything goes well with my classes, I hope to visit Burma this coming Christmas with my brother.

Growing up in Different Countries

I never expected that I would be growing up in different countries. My parents never told us about moving, but somehow, we ended up packing our things. We left our home country, friends and family. Moving from one place to another allowed me to experience many new aspects of life.

To begin with, my life in Burma was joyless. We were happy as a family, but our life was hard because of finances. In 2005, my dad went to Malaysia to work so he could take care of us and provide a better life for us. My dad came back to Burma because he did not want to go to the US without us. He then found out that he could apply for us as well, but in order to do that, my mom had to go to Malaysia, too. My older brother, Phun Peng, went to school in Hakha, the capital city of Chin state, my younger brother was only two years old when my mom left for Malaysia, and I was eight years old at that time. After my mom left, my aunt stayed with us for almost two years. It was hard for my two younger brothers and me because my parents were not with us and neither was my brother. I had to take them to Sunday school and to parent teacher conferences because my aunt was always busy. After two years, my brothers and I finally went to Malaysia to join our parents.

Additionally, living in Malaysia was hard. We could not go out without our IDs because the police would arrest us. If we were arrested, they would send us to a big prison, and it would cost a lot for us to get out. We would always stay inside and even though we stayed inside, it was still dangerous for us. One night, my brother Phun Peng was sleeping in the living room and was arrested in the middle of the night. While my brother was in prison, my two younger brothers and I had to stay home every day while my parents went to work. Weeks later, my dad tried to get my brother out of the prison, but we did not have enough money at that time, so one of my dad's friend got him out for us. I did not go to school because the school was too far away from where I lived. I stayed home with my two younger brothers

every day. Living in Malaysia was very hard for us because we could not go out as we wanted to. We were always afraid that we might be arrested.

Lastly, we were very anxious when coming to the US. We arrived in the US on April 16, 2009. When we first got here, my dad was the only one that knew a little bit of English, and he was the one that did all of the talking. We thought it was going to be easier than in Malaysia, but, in the beginning, the only difference was freedom. There was a Burmese interpreter, and luckily, my dad knows Burmese. My family and I had to take the city bus just to go to Walmart or church. We learned where to wait and where to get off. We also had to walk to Walgreens, which took us more than 20 minutes. Months later, my parents started new jobs, and we had to go to school. We were so nervous because everything was new for us. School was especially difficult because we did not know what the teachers were saying and did not understand the homework that we had. As time went by, we made new friends, and we became comfortable living here.

Therefore, growing up in different countries is not easy. As my family and I moved, we learned new things from each country. We had to relearn everything, and it was very difficult for us. Sometimes, I wonder how I overcame all of these difficulties and how I went to school without knowing what the teachers were saying. Now that I understand English, and I want to help out my family and friends that don't speak English.

Afi Amedoha



My name is Afi (Jane) Amedoha. I come from Togo, a small country in West Africa. I was born on August 2 and was raised in Lomé, the capital of Togo. I come from a polygamous family where I have four siblings from my mother's side and seven other siblings from my dad's side. I graduated from high school in 2009 and went to the University of Lomé (UL) where I studied biology. I came to the US in 2016 and started ESL classes in 2017. Now, I am working as a Certified Nursing Assistant in a nursing home. Once I finish with the ESL program, I will continue my studies in the health care field. I know it is going to be very hard because it is a very complex area, but I will make it. I like to read, listen to music and watch movies.

My Hometown Lomé

Lomé is the capital of Togo, a small country in West Africa. It is also the largest city of the country. Lomé is a beautiful city, and it is where I was born and raised. I still have nostalgia when I think about my little town Lomé because I had a good and bad time there before moving to the US. Its history, tourism and education make it an exceptional city.

Lomé was founded by Ewe people in 1880 and became the capital under the colonization of Germany on March 6, 1897. It was a place of international trade for West Africa because of its location on the Atlantic Ocean., The access to deep water makes the shipment of cargo easier; therefore, most of the countries in West Africa come to ship their cargo containers from there. After World War I, Lomé became the capital of French Togo because Togo was divided between Germany and France in 1919. Nowadays, Lomé has a population of around 2 million people from different origins.

Lomé is also known for its markets, Independence Square, and beach, which make it a tourist site for foreign people. The big market of Lomé (Asigame), an outdoor market, is a place where everything is sold. It is known as the best place to find a quality loincloth (for example, super wax, wax hollandaise and many other kinds of loincloth), so many foreign people come to buy their loincloth in Asigame. In addition to that, we can find other fabrics, jewelry, fruits, vegetables and many other kinds of things. Also, inside of the market, there is an art gallery where you can find art objects. Many foreigners come there to buy souvenirs. Beside the big market, there is also the voodoo fetish market where ritual items are sold, for example bodies of dead animals like monkeys, leopards, birds, crocodiles, etc., talismans, and



many other things related to voodoo. This market is known as the biggest fetish market in the world. The architecture of the Independence Monument also attracts people. This monument is a symbol of freedom for the Togolese, and it was built when Togo was freed from French colonization and became independent on April 27, 1960. In addition to that, Lomé has a beautiful beach with fine sands and a golden color and coconut trees all along the coast. People usually come there to play games, to drink, and make sculptures out of sand. It is a good place to relax and to have fun.



Education is very important for the people of Lomé. Every parent sends his and her children to school to have a good education for a better future. For this reason, the public primary and secondary schools from six years old until graduation are free. In addition to that, we have the University of Lomé where most of the students go after they graduate from high school. Since Lomé is an international city, we also have international institutes like the American International School, the British School of Lomé, and French schools. Each of them has its own curriculum. It helps foreigners to feel like they are in their own country because those institutes offer the same thing as the home countries.



In conclusion, Lomé is a beautiful city, and its history, tourism and education make it stand out among the other cities of Togo. Although it is a small city, people who live there enjoy their life very much, even foreign people; therefore, I still miss the life over there.

Palm Wine of Togo (Deha)

Deha is a local beverage made in the south villages of Togo. It is a special beverage of the Ewe people. It is made from palm and has a white color. Usually, the manufacturers cut the palm trees that are old and no longer produce palm nuts. Once the palm tree is on the ground, after a few days, they dig a hole and start a fire inside of its trunk, which causes the plant to ooze all the sap inside it. It is collected in a bottle previously placed under the trunk. The farmers come to get the sap out of the trunk the next day. It is a sweet alcoholic beverage, but it ferments very quickly and becomes very strong. For this reason, it is best to drink it on the same day it was produced. It is a local wine, which can be served anytime or during the holidays and traditional festivals. What I like the most is that it is a natural drink without any other transformation and it tastes very good.



Komivi Baite



I am Komivi Baite. I was born in Togo in 1983. After I finished middle school in my native village, I continued high school at Lycee of Kpodzi, where I received my high school diploma four years later. I attended the University of Lomé and received my bachelor's in philosophy. After my studies, I taught for three years before winning the immigrant visa and coming to the US in March 2012. Here in America, I had my first job at Tyson for 2.5 years and then switched to HON Allsteel, where I worked for two years. Now, I am working at John Deere on the assembly line and keep taking ESL classes. Today, I am planning to finish my ESL classes to improve my English before taking academic classes. I would like to work in an office after my studies. Office jobs are safe, but in the factories, you can be affected by injuries and some illnesses, which is why I do not want to give up on school. I should reach my goal because America is a country of opportunities.

The Traditional Marriage

The Traditional marriage is a kind of wedding celebrated in traditional societies different from industrialized countries. This marriage has different steps including the first meeting with the lady's family, the preparation of the celebration, and the celebration of the marriage.

First, the groom's parents invite the future wife's family to meet them and discuss about the celebration of the wedding. The meeting time often happens in the morning in presence of the uncles, aunts, and the parents of the future bride. At this time, they decide on the day of the celebration, and the lady's family gives a list that contains the dowry to the groom's family. At the end of the discussion after their mutual agreement, they drink the alcohol brought by the groom's family.

Second, after leaving the meeting, both families inform the future couple about their decision made at the meeting and the day of the marriage. Thereafter, the groom gives money to his parents to buy the dowry recommended by the lady's family. For example, they buy alcoholic drinks and sodas (Coke, Fanta, and Pepsi), traditional clothes and food including yams, corn, rice, chickens and goats to cook different kinds of food, like *ablo*, *foufou*, *kom* and rice on the celebration day.

Finally, on a Sunday, the whole family of both meet together in the lady's parents' house and start the ceremony; that day, they animate the celebration with traditional and foreign music, and they sometimes invite a choir. During the ceremony, the spouse's family checks the dowry to see if everything has been bought, and the bride arrives at the ceremony with her aunts while people are playing music. Before ending the ceremony, they eat, drink and dance; the groom is sometimes represented by someone from his family because he is not obliged to participate in the ceremony.

To conclude, the traditional wedding is a kind of marriage that is very respected in my culture and consists of some steps different from weddings in other cultures like Europe, Asia and America. In my culture, this celebration is important because everybody who would like to celebrate a church or courthouse wedding should have a traditional wedding first.

The Cascade of Kpime

The cascade of Kpime is a tourist place that welcomes people from different countries around the world. This place is located northeast of my native area Kpime Seva. It is always busy every year between June and September (rainy season). During this time, many tourists visit the cascade where people play drums and organize different activities like the sale of fruits and traditional products. After visiting the different parts of the location, the foreigners take showers under the water falling down from the mountain. Near the cascade, tourists find a pilgrimage site where Catholics have a celebration in November of each year.

Hafssa Bayane



My name is Hafssa. I am 27 years old. I was born in Morocco, specifically in a city in the south called Guelmim. I have one sister. She is the oldest, and I have three brothers. My mom is a housewife. She takes care of the house and cooks for us when we are at school, but my dad is a nurse, who works as a laboratory technician. That is why I want to be a nurse like my dad. I grew up around needles, medication and medical terminology. Furthermore, I like to help people and relieve their pain. Back in my hometown, Guelmim, where I spent most of my life, I went to university for two years, and I got a diploma as a computer technician in 2012. I love my small town where I had a lot of happy memories.

Moroccan South Sahara

I am a desert girl. I was born in a city called Guelmim where I spent all my childhood and received my education. On some maps, you will see that Moroccan South Sahara is split because of a political conflict between Morocco and the Polisario Front, but it is under sovereignty of Morocco now. However, this part of Morocco is very different from the North because of the history, the customs and traditions of marriage and divorce, and family values.

In 1912, Morocco, Spain and France signed a reign of protection, which led the king of Morocco to lose his control of his territory to France and Spain, so Morocco became one of their colonies. The North and South was under Spanish control, and the middle was under French colonial control. After a lot of revolts, the colonial rule of the North and the middle ended when King Mohammed V came back from his exile, but the South Sahara was still controlled by Spain. After the king died, his son Hassan II took over and announced to prepare for the Green March, which was on November 6, 1975. It was the greatest march the world had seen to demand our independence from Spanish colonialism. On November 5, King Hassan II gave a speech for his 350,000 Moroccan supporters, who were waiting for a sign. The march started on November 6 without guns. Only Moroccan flags and the Quran were in the volunteers' hands when they started moving to Sakiya Lhmra. On November 9, the king gave another speech to announce that the march was successful, so all the volunteers should go back to their cities. On September 14, Morocco, Spain and Mauritania signed an agreement that Morocco had its South Sahara back without bloodshed.

The customs and traditions in Western Sahara are different from the customs in other parts of Morocco. People who live in South Morocco like full-figured women, not skinny ones, because they look more beautiful when they wear their fancy "Mlhfa", which is the traditional dress; furthermore, marriage

is really expensive. The man is responsible for all expenses; for example, he should buy gifts for his bride and her parents and give her a dowry. Gold and camels are considered as a gift too because desert people used to live in tents, and they used to have a lot of camels as a source of income. The bride stays in one room for almost a month before the wedding, eating and taking care of her skin and body by using traditional masks. The day of the wedding, the groom goes to the bride's house with all his family, friends and the cars that contain all the gifts. On that day, no one can see the bride's face. She stays in a separate room covering her face. When the party starts, the groom's sister stands up and starts showing people the gifts from the clothes to the gold to show off their generosity. The South Sahara people have their own music and instrument called "Lkdra". They play music after all the people eat, and they get in a circle and start singing and dancing. After the day of the wedding, the bride's family makes breakfast and takes it to the couple's house, and that is the day when the bride can show her face to the people and her girlfriends, who are invited for a special party called "girls party". In addition, if a woman divorces, she has a divorce party where she invites all her friends and other men to know that she is not married anymore.

Family values are so important to South Sahara's population. It starts with old people, whom you should respect. Even if they are not from your family, you have to listen to them and not argue. Furthermore, all of South Sahara's population likes camel meat and tea, which should be made on the coals. Sometimes, it takes three hours to brew, but it has a social purpose. Family and friends can sit and discuss the family issues and the ones of the tribe. You should drink only three cups of tea; it is a tradition. Also, men have a lot of respect for women since they are responsible for the whole family; the other thing is that a man can have more than one wife, and they can all live together without any problems with a strong relationship between the brothers and sisters even though they have different mothers but the same dad.

To conclude, I lived in this area for 23 years. The Moroccan government has done a lot in this part of our country by building schools and improving infrastructure and hospitals, since it used to be only a desert where people lived in tents with their camels, but they still need to provide more work opportunities to young people. Finally, we are not giving up our land because the conflict between Morocco and Polisario Front is still standing, and it has been known as the longest regional conflict.

Aid al-Fitr

Aid al-Fitr is a Muslim holiday. It is after Ramadan where we fast from sunset to sunrise and learn patience, compassion for poor people, and a lot of health benefits. In the morning of the holiday, people wear their new beautiful clothes, which is often a dress called "Jlaba" for women and men. We all go to pray and listen to the Imam's speech. After that, people eat their special breakfast, which consists of homemade cookies, special bread, tea or coffee, and other things, and people start visiting each other and congratulating everyone. Kids get new cloths and money from family members and people, so they can go buy candy and feel happy. For dinner, we usually cook couscous. It is a special dish for when the family gathers, and we eat it at my grandparents' house. In the evening, families visit each other, and people go outside for a walk and eat dinner.



Kotsikpa Dandonougbo



My name is Kotsikpa Kossi, and I was born in Togo, which is a country located in West Africa. I grew up in a family of five brothers and two sisters. In Togo, I spent many years studying. I got my high school diploma with a focus in accounting in 2005. The next year, I started taking college classes in the same field. I had not been doing it for a long time when I found a job in a company called SIMPARA. My role was to maintain their accounting. I worked there for five years. In Togo, when I had a free time, I liked playing soccer and hanging out with my friends. I moved to the USA in 2013. I live in Moline, and I have been working full time at Tyson since 2014. In addition to my job, I am a part-time student in Advanced Writing and Advanced Reading at Black Hawk College. By the time December arrives, I will have already taken seven classes. My goal is to master English, which is my 4th language after French, Ewe, and Ana. After finishing ESL, my goal is to continue my education in computer science or accounting in order to have my associate degree, which will allow me to find a better job.

How Colonization Has Affected my Country Togo

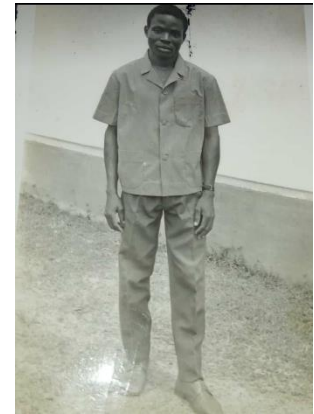
Located in West Africa and bordered in the north by Burkina Faso, in the south by the Atlantic Ocean, in the east by Benin, and in the west by Ghana, my country is called Togo. Togo is recognizable by its flag that consists of a white star in a red square, two green and two yellow rectangles. But before obtaining this flag, which was the fruit of the independence declared on April 27, 1960, Togo was colonized by France. If you compare Togo before and after the colonization, there is a large difference between the two of them. Therefore, the French colonization has affected Togo in many ways. The three areas that have been touched are education, infrastructure, and culture.

Togo is a country where many languages are spoken, and the learning of new language passes through education. Education is the first area touched by French colonization. In Togo, almost each city has its own dialect; however, there is one language that is spoken by everybody in the territory of Togo. This language is the official language. It is French and is taught at school. This language arrived in Togo because of the colonization. French is taught at school, and it is spoken at work, and in the public area. Up to the dialects, they are taught by the parents at home. They are spoken at home and outside by people who know that they come from the same place. Another point touched by colonization is the school. Through colonization, the schools have changed. People have started to attend school in order to learn French and acquire knowledge that can help them to have a better future. Since then, school has become the principal place to become successful person. Those who do not go to school are considered as failure. In Togo, the learning methods is the same like in France, and it is the LMD (License Master Doctorate). The LMD consists of having an average grade in all the classes that are required before obtaining your diploma; otherwise, students are compelled to take the class again. This was not the case before the colonization. The teachers are trained based on French education in a special center after recruitment.

The second area affected by the colonization is the infrastructure. During the colonization, the beauty of Togo has changed. Togolese could notice the improvement of the infrastructure. The roads have become larger and well built like the principal road which is an interstate, and the secondary road which connects many cities. Also, the rail way system for train has been established for the transport of heavy and special article. The access to imported products is possible through the boats and the planes. All these improvements have revolutionized transportation, and it is beneficial for the economy of Togo. In addition, the new houses are built with cement, and the top of which are covered with modern building materials. The new methods of communication like phones, and computer were also brought by the colonization. Consequently, these changes have made the life easier for people.

The last area touched by French colonization is the culture. The colonization has brought companies named ODEF (the company that produces cutting board used for furniture), OIC (the company that raises and sells chickens), SOTOCO (the company that produces cotton), AMINA (the company that produces strand of hair), and so on in Togo. As a result, they have created jobs and changed the financial situation of Togolese. Because the workers of Togo have money to afford lots of things, they have started to like French's style and have begun to buy their clothes. By doing this, they have copied the ways of dressing of the colonizers. The nice long sleeve clothes, pants, and suits have taken the place of baggy. Also, the lifestyles of citizen of Togo have improved since they have access to modern medicine. Furthermore, the taste and the smell of the food are not the same because they have started using spices coming from France. In addition, the way of cooking has become better because of the new kitchen appliances at their disposal.

In brief, Togo which has been an independent country since April 27th,1960 was colonized by the French before being independent. This colonization has affected Togo in different areas that are education, infrastructure, and culture. In fact, there are lots of differences between the pre-colonization and the post-colonization. However, one question remains posed: how Togo would be without colonization?



The Traditional Celebration of Notse

Notse is a small city, which is located in the south of Togo. This city has a traditional celebration called Agbogbozan, which means “the party of the wall.” Agbogbozan is so important to the people of Notse because of its history, organization, and celebration. Firstly, as other traditional celebrations, Agbogbozan has its own story. According to the history, Agbogbozan is celebrated in order to thank the wall that saved the ancestors of Notse when the colonizers wanted to kill them during a time of war. They found refuge behind the wall, and the colonizers did not find them. As a result, they decided to have a special day for this wall. Secondly, this party is celebrated on the first Saturday of September. One week before, the soldiers of the king, “Alaga,” go out and kill all the animals that are outside, and the blood is used for the ceremonies. The men prepare the community place where the party will take place. The women arrange the house and go to the market to shop. Thirdly, when the day itself comes, everybody goes to the community place where the celebration is held. It starts with the welcome speech of the king, followed by the demonstration of the traditional dance of each area. Afterwards, people go home where they cook, eat, drink, and dance. Many activities like soccer, handball, and so on follow in the afternoon. In conclusion, Agbogbozan is a traditional celebration in Notse; in addition, it is well organized and celebrated by all people of Notse on the first Saturday of September.

Kuegah Dede



My name is Dede A. Kuegah. I like “Ahoefa” because it means “peace” in my language, and it means a lot to me. I was born on December 10, and I am from Togo (Aneho). Aneho is a small beautiful city located in the south of the country, and it is surrounded by the sea and lakes. I have three siblings, and I am the only girl among them. Our eldest is an accountant, and the second is a lawyer. They already have their own families. The last one is a computer scientist. I earned my bachelor’s degree in accounting in my country, and I worked for a year before I moved here with my husband. I have been studying at Black Hawk College for almost two years. This semester, I will finish my ESL classes. I love business, and I hope to fulfill all my dreams. I dream to visit places like Paris, Miami, etc.

The Typical Sunday in Lomé

Lomé is the capital city of Togo; therefore, there are a lot of activities in Lomé every day. In the lines to come, I will be talking about a typical Sunday in Lomé. Sundays in Lomé are very special because it is the end of the weekend and most people plan their events and festivities, such as wedding, sport activities, parties.

The activities in a typical Sunday is divided into three periods. On a typical Sunday morning in Lomé, you will see a lot of people moving around, especially Christians who are going to worship. Hence, the streets are full because of the massive use of transportation in every direction especially between 9:30 and 10 a.m. because most church services are scheduled to start at that time. Also, you can see food sellers following the same motion to go sell their goods at the gates of churches. You can observe those movements slowing down for a few hours, but around 1:30-2 p.m. the same thing will begin again in the opposite directions.

Some people plan their wedding ceremony on Sunday; in this case, you can see decorated motorcades. Usually, when you see a motorcade decorated in pink, it means it is for the bride meanwhile if it is blue, it identifies the motorcade of the bridegroom. Moreover, you will see people jumping on their motorcycles and others on public transportations to follow the motorcade in order to attend the wedding.

In the middle of the day on Sundays around 3p.m., there are a lot of sports activities like basketball tournaments between districts opposing each other. The same thing applies to volleyball and tennis. These activities attract the young people. The main sports activity in Lomé on Sunday is the soccer game. When there is a big game, you can see crowds of people moving toward the stadium of Kegue, the biggest stadium of Lomé, or the Omnisports Stadium of Lomé. The affluence toward these centers is more observable when it is the national team playing because people want to go meet their fans. Business people also use this opportunity to sell flags more expensively than the normal.

At the end of the day during the evening time, there are also lot of activities going on. You can see some people going to the musical concerts usually at the *Palais des Congress* while others go to parties, to theaters, or gather in public places to hang out with friends. Some people dance where music is being played in bars or restaurants that are only opened in the evening. In those places, you do not have to spend a lot of money to enjoy yourself.

To sum up, Lomé is the city I like to spend my Sundays because there are so many activities to choose from to have fun. This helps me to get rid of the stress accumulated during the workweek, and it also gives me the opportunity to meet friends outside of work. Most of the time, Sundays in Lomé have events and festivities. I wish everybody could taste the happiness of this day in that city.

Beads

It is our culture that sets us apart from the rest of the world, and every culture has its own particularities. For some countries of West Africa, beads are so important, and they cherish them so much. There are different categories of beads: some are made of clay or plastic and others of gold or silver. There some special beads our ancestors used, and we may inherit them because they are so expensive. All those different beads are used in our traditional marriage, and sometimes to show the wealth of the family, our love for the tradition, or our beauty. It looks so beautiful if you know how to wear pearls with your clothes, and our elders like to wear them with our traditional clothes.

Mpawenayo Divera



Hello, everyone, my name is Mpawenayo Divera, but I love to be called Divera or Vera. I am from East Africa; I was born on November 23, 1999 in Tanzania. I am 19 years old at this moment, I am about to turn 20 in few months, which I am very happy about. My goal is to become a traveling nurse so that I can help people around the world who have no way of being healed. I have been living in America for ten years now. I came to America with my whole family. I live with my mom and two brothers, one is big, the other one is small, and I am the only girl in our family. We love living here in America, but I do wish to go back to visit my country and family members like my aunts, uncles, and cousins who are still there. This might be funny, but my hopes are to pass or test out of ESL so that I can start taking my career classes and get a different job. After school, I go to work, and I work at Hardee's, but I kind of do not like the job.

My First Surgery Experience

Back in Africa, I had to go with my aunt, my mom and some other older ladies to the farm to watch my aunt's youngest child, Fabrice. I was six years old at the time. On our way back home, I was injured, so I ended up needing surgery. My first heel surgery was difficult and painful. It affected me in so many ways. I had a hard time facing the process of how it started, going through the surgery, and even recovering from the surgery.

First of all, I still don't know what bit me or if I stepped on something that might have caused my heel to hurt, but on our way back home from the farm I started to feel pain in my left heel. As the days passed by, the pain in my heel got worse and worse. It got to the point where I could not walk on my feet or stand on them; it was really hard for me to move. The way I walked was by crawling or just taking eight steps and stopping, and this all started the day after taking care of my nephew. Whenever my heel hurt, I cried, and I was not able to eat at all unless my mom or aunt were there to feed me and keep me calm.

Secondly, the surgery process took a long time, and I was in the hospital for three days. My mom was allowed inside during the surgery because I remember the doctors asking her if she was staying or not. I also think I took some medication before the surgery because I did not feel anything during the process.

Thirdly, it was also hard recovering from the surgery because the pain was very strong. The doctors had a hard time working with me. When it was time to change the cast, I could not stay still, so even people from outside had to come to help keep me still. I do not know if this is how it goes, but changing the cast hurt so badly to the point where I was trying to run away. I also still had a hard time walking again even throughout the recovery.

To conclude, my first surgery went as bad as I thought. I hated the way it started, the surgery, and recovering from it. Even now, I still do not know what happened to my heel, but I think it just came on its own. I have never had any other surgeries since then, but I almost had another one on my belly button because it was big when I got to America, but I said, “No, it will go away on its own,” which it did. I never want to have another surgery ever again in my life after experience my heel surgery.

Plantain Recipe

Plantain is one of my favorite dishes. Plantain is cooked everywhere and is served at weddings, parties, and home. Another name for plantains is green bananas. I love the way I cook plantains the most. When someone else cooks it, I can still eat it, but it is not as good as my own cooking. I am not trying to be mean or anything, but most of the time it is hard for me to even eat African food if I did not make it. There are so many ways that plantains can be made or cooked; some people fry them, others peel the skin off, and others keep the skin on. When I cook plantains, I leave the skin on. First, get a big pan, put the plantain in, and add any temperature of water, but I usually use hot water. Second, put the pan on the stove and let the water boil. Once the green bananas turn black, press on it to see if it is ready. If it is soft when you press it, then it is ready. Third, take them off the stove and put them in the sink. Then peel the skin off and put them back in the pan. Fourth, add a little water into the pan then put it back on the stove and add salt. While it is cooking, cut the tomatoes and onion; then get a small pan. I also microwave the tomatoes after cutting them. In the small pan, put oil into it, and once it boils, put the onions in and let it cook. Add one can of tomato sauce first, and after one minute, add the cut tomatoes and mix it. Fifth, put the tomato soup you made into the big pan with the plantains and let them cook together for about 4 to 5 minutes. After taking them off, they are ready to be served. Even though this is my favorite food, we do not eat it every day. We eat it once or twice a year, but I wish we ate it every day. Even back home we did not eat them a lot, maybe like once every two months in the summer time.

Habiba Ettalbi

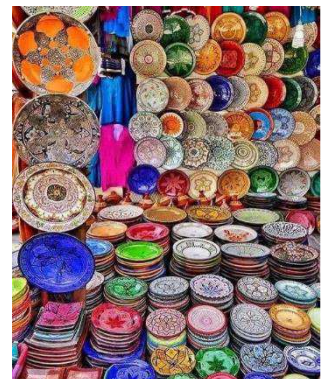


My name is Habiba, and I am from Morocco. I have been living in the USA since 2012. I got my high school diploma in Morocco, and I studied business management for two years in college in Morocco. Today, I am an ESL student at Black Hawk College, and I am looking to improve my English. I am a mother of two daughters: Taqwa, five years old, and Tawba, four years old. My oldest started kindergarten this year, and she is so happy about the school. In addition, she likes to read stories every night before bed. My youngest is in preschool, and she likes to draw and color a lot. I have many dreams and goals; one of them is to be a successful person in life and a good example for my daughters. In addition, I want to create an organization to help people in need, specifically in Africa. Moreover, I want to help women in difficult situations, women who cannot provide a living for their families. Meanwhile, I also want to help children in difficult situations to attend school as a normal right for every citizen.

Traditional Moroccan Pottery in Safi

Morocco is a country located in the northwest of Africa. As you travel across Morocco, you will discover a land of natural beauty and of rich cultural heritage, a heritage that has been living in Morocco for centuries. One of the most integral parts of cultural heritage in Morocco is pottery. Pottery is a very old technique in Morocco used to make plates, bowls, dishes, vases, and the tagine. I grew up in a small city called Safi, and it is considered the capital of Moroccan pottery. Also, the ancient streets in Safi show that pottery is at the heart of the city. Moreover, the pottery in Safi is created in many steps, plays an economic role in the city, and is a symbol of the city.

The pottery in Safi is an old art made by hand from the extraction of the clay to the final product. However, there are many steps to turn the clay into a valuable product. As a first step, the potters bring the clay from a mine to the workshop, and they leave it in the sun for one week for it to better absorb water when breaking it. In the second step, they immerse the clay into traditional tanks of water, and they leave it out to dry in the sun for three days. Once the clay is dried, they mix it by hand in order to get a soft dough. Finally, the potters model the clay to whatever shape their imagination invents. When the time for firing comes, most potters use the traditional wood-firing kilns because they cannot afford to use gas ovens.

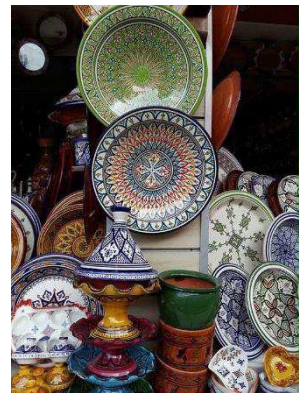
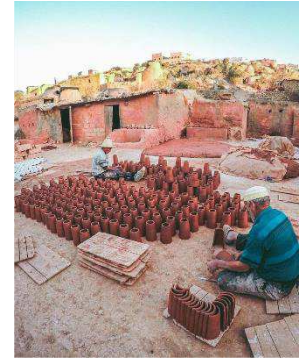


Safi is a small city that suffers from a lack of job opportunities. Pottery has played a big economic role in the city for many years. Selling the pottery is a source of living for most families in the old town of the city. Also, some people work at the clay mines while others transfer the clay by trucks to the workshops. In addition, most of the men in the ancient city are craftsmen

who own small workshops where they work and teach new learners the skill of the craft. Moreover, there are public pottery courses to reintegrate students who have dropped out of school because they had to work, so they get the chance to study a craft and work in painting the crockery. Nevertheless, Safi is the center of Morocco's pottery, and there is national and international trade for the local industry of the city.

The pottery in Safi is a treasure and a symbol of the city, for many years, the city has protected this art from extinction and has kept it alive from one generation to another, which has made it a symbol of the city. The pottery in Safi differs from the pottery in other parts of the country in its unique, fine designs that were influenced by Islamic art. Also, it differs in its combination of modern multicolored designs and traditional patterns. The pottery uses the colors blue and white, which are the same as the colors of the old houses in the ancient city, and the colors green and black, which are the same as the colors of the green nature that surrounds the city. Moreover, the population of the city uses the pottery to decorate their houses on the inside and outside, so when you are walking in the streets of Safi, you will encounter the symbol of the city everywhere.

Pottery is a treasure that Moroccan craftsmen have passed from one generation to another. Also, the pottery has lived in Safi for centuries and is still the heart of the city today. Therefore, the pottery in Safi is more than an art; it is a symbol of the city, which plays an economic role and passes through different steps.



Moroccan Tajin

Morocco has one of the world's most diverse cuisines. Also, Moroccan cooking depends on spices and intriguing flavor combinations that make it unique. One of the most famous and classic dishes in Morocco is tajin. The tajin is a slow-cooked stew made in an earthenware dish known by the same name. The tajin is typically made with inexpensive cuts of meat that become tender with slow cooking, and it's flavored with vegetables, olives, and spices. The first step of making a tajin is to place a layer of sliced onions on the base of the tajin in order to prevent meat and vegetables from sticking to the bottom and burning. The second step is to set the meat or poultry in the center of the tajin to save space to add more vegetables. After setting the meat in the middle of the tajin, it's time to add the magic touch of spices. In a small bowl, add one tsp of pepper, ginger, turmeric, paprika, saffron, garlic, salt, and ¼ cup of olive oil. Then distribute some of the spice mixture over the meat and onions. The next step is arranging the vegetables, potatoes, carrot, zucchini, or any other vegetables. After peeling, washing, and cutting the vegetables into thick strips, it is time to arrange the vegetables by trying to stand them upright around the meat or poultry, and to use the rest of the spice mixture to season the vegetables. Finally, to give a lovely presentation to the Tajin, add stripes of colorful peppers, slices of lemon and tomato, green olives, and one tsp of chopped parsley. In addition, before placing the tajin on the stove, add 2 cups of water into the tajin. Then place the tajin over low to a medium heat for one to two hours while checking the level of the cooking liquids every 30 minutes.

Sara Fnu



My name is Sara, and I am from Myanmar. I live with my family; I have two sisters and one brother. I came to the United States in March 2016. I had many difficult times in the first year of my life in the United States because I did not speak English. I started to study English at the Black Hawk College Outreach Center for a few months. After that, I studied at Joliet Job Corps where I got my high school diploma and completed an Office Administration training. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College to get my two-year degree in accounting. Indeed, I love the Mentor & Mentee Program at BHC because I have met many people from different countries and learned about their cultures. Overall, I have a good life in the United States because education has changed my life, and I am thankful to all my teachers, friends and family.

My Difficult Life in the United States

Did you ever imagine living in another country when you were young? I never ever imagined that I would be living in the U.S. when I was a child. In Burma, education was very expensive; two years of high school were approximately six thousand American dollars. This makes it very hard for a regular family to afford education. My parents moved to Malaysia to make more money for me and my three other siblings. Before we came to the United States, my parents had to leave us with our grandparents. When my parents got approval to move to the United States, it was extremely exciting because we were moving somewhere new where we would have new experiences. In 2016, in the month of April, we arrived in the U.S, and during my first year, I had many difficulties with school, language and food.

First, I was very excited to go to high school, but that did not happen. When I got here, I was over eighteen, so I could not go to high school. At that time, I did not know which school I should go to or where should I start. I asked some of my friends, and they suggested the Black Hawk College Outreach Center. I went there for six months, and I studied ESL. After that, I heard about Joliet Job Corps, which is an adult job-training program in Joliet, Illinois. I decided to study there to get my high school diploma and office administration training. Two years later, I completed that program, but I decided right away that I wanted to get a college degree, so I continued at Black Hawk College.

Second, language was the most challenging problem that I had to face during my first year. At that time, I rarely spoke in class, with friends, or with teachers, only if necessary, and I was so shy and scared to speak to people because my weakness was English. Even when someone talked to me, I just smiled at them without any words. Also, my siblings and I had to go to many appointments when we got here. My English was not good enough to communicate with my caseworker, office assistants and doctors. When we had an appointment, I had to ask someone to translate for us. The worst part was that since I am the oldest daughter, I also needed to take care of my younger siblings. If they had

appointments, I had to translate for them even though my English was not enough to communicate for myself.

Third, the food became my most memorable experience. Burma's cuisine is hot and spicy; in contrast, American cuisine is sweet. I remember I was very excited to taste American foods, but I totally did not like them at first. At Joliet Job Corps, the program includes free food for all students in the dorms. I lived in a dorm and ate American foods. Most of the time, I skipped either lunch or dinner or sometimes both because I was not used to eating American foods, and I did not like the taste of the foods, so I usually just ate instant noodles. Those noodles were my lifesaver because I would have stayed hungry without them. Also, when I was going out with friends, I did not know the names of food, so I just pointed at what I wanted. Even though I tried to finish what I ordered, I usually had a lot left over.

In the U.S., the first year of my life was the hardest part; however, I have gathered many experiences from those difficulties. As time goes on, I have been improving my language, and I have gotten used to American food. Now, I am attending Black Hawk College to achieve my dream. After completing ESL, I will take a business program because I want to have my own business in the future. At Black Hawk College, the Mentor & Mentee program has helped me to get new friends and have a chance to talk with native and nonnative speakers.

Bamboo Dance

In Chin State in Myanmar, the bamboo dance plays an important role because the dance is performed at some celebrations, such as Chin National Day, Chin Harvest Festival, wedding ceremonies, and so on. In order to perform the bamboo dance, there should be twelve or more people, and the number of men and women should be equal. The men are sitting on the floor, holding the bamboo, facing each other and clapping the bamboo sticks to the sound of the rhythm. Women are dancing between the bamboo sticks, and they have to move by stepping in and out from a pair of bamboo sticks. The dancing style and the bamboo clapping beats may depend on the song, and there are many kinds of bamboo dancing styles. The bamboo dance is the most popular dance in Chin culture.



Florence Gbezan



Hello, my name is Florence. I was born and raised in Togo, and I am 23 years old. I am the only girl in my family, but I have two brothers, the youngest one lives here, and my big brother still lives in Togo. I have been living in the United State since 2014, and I used to live in Washington D.C. before I moved back to Moline. I got my GED diploma in 2017 at the Black Hawk College Outreach Center. I love watching a lot of TV episodes, which helps me understand English better. My career goals is to be a nurse, and I know it is a long way, but I intend to work hard to achieve it. My biggest dream is to travel around the world to experience something different and leave with new knowledge. I hope to accomplish my goals.

Finding a Job in Togo

Finding a job after graduating from university is a part of everyone's dream, especially in underdeveloped or developing countries. However, it is sad to see that Togo is one of the countries where the world of employment is reserved for only a few selected. This problem has become recurrent throughout the territory, resulting in many socio-political problems, lack of employment and questions about how to find a solution.

As an underdeveloped country, Togo ranks among the countries where the unemployment rate is very high, resulting in many socio-political problems. It is easy for a person from a wealthy family to find a job quickly compared to someone from a poor family despite the efforts they make. Thanks to the political party in power, there are certain groups, for whom the possibility of having a job is much easier. Therefore, individuals who do not belong to the leading political party or are not from the same ethnic group will have trouble getting employed. However, it must also be said that there are some people who come from the same ethnicity as the ones in power but have difficulty finding work because they are not from a good family. It is highly possible to get job just knowing someone in a good or high position, for example, a director of a company or a political personality. I have two friends back home who are intelligent. They have had their bachelor's degree since 2010, yet they are still at home and still looking for a job.

Due to the lack of employment, it is difficult for young graduates, who are becoming more and more numerous, to enter the labor market. There are not enough companies. The government officials, instead of creating jobs, take the wealth of the country for their own good. They help their own families or children to go further but do not worry about the citizens of the country. Also, there are many positions

held by elderly people who are already old enough to retire but do not want to leave their place for the new graduates. Even the smallest companies we have usually ask an applicant for experience, which most young people do not have because in school it is basically just the theory we learn. In the year 2016, the late president initiated a program of entrepreneurship that could help young people to get a job, but there were few whose projects were chosen. That is why most young graduates stay at home and do not do anything, and most people prefer to leave the country to find an opportunity somewhere else.

To overcome this problem, the government must first adapt our education to the realities of our society. They also have to create jobs linked to the situation of the country instead of copying the Westerners. In school, they need to teach students more self-entrepreneurship, and they need to improve their training. They need to create training related to entrepreneurship, which will help young graduates to create something for themselves when they are done with school. The government should create new jobs or programs, ones that can allow young graduates wishing to engage voluntarily for a given time to work in return for a small payment, or to insert qualified graduates into the labor market without any distinction whatsoever. Instead of training young people to be creative and enterprising, they are trained to beg for jobs and to be totally useless to our society.

To summarize, in Togo, young graduates are suffering to find a job that will help them to take care of themselves or their families due to the lack of employment and some political reasons. I hope, in the future, there will be more chances to improve that situation that can help the future graduates.

Festival of Agbamevo

This festival is celebrated by the “Agotime,” who are located in two countries, namely Togo and Ghana. As long as I remember, my dad told me our ancestors were weavers. They made these loincloths with their bare hands from cotton, which they cultivated and made the strings themselves in a traditional way. They made different variants that were exclusively intended for the local trade. Even though at this time there were no cars or any sort of transportation, they walked from their city to another city to sell the loincloths. With globalization and this new generation, they have dedicated the month of September to remember the history. Togolese and Ghanaians gather wearing these “Agbamevo” loincloths. These loincloths were usually worn by traditional leaders and chiefs, but because of the beauty of them and the industrialization, it is common to see many on the market. Nowadays, they make these loincloths with machines, which means that they are poor in quality compared to the original made by our ancestors. The beauty of “Agbamevo” and its production process are always the pride of the people of “Agotime”.

Atawakouna Ivette Kpeglo Epse Koffison



My name is Atawakouma Ivette Kpeglo Epse Koffison, and I am 28 years old. I came from Togo, a country that is situated in West Africa. I was born in Tohou, a small village in Togo. I have two little brothers and one sister. I am married, and I have two beautiful girls. I completed four years of college and studied law after getting my high school diploma. I used to work as a midwife aid and facilitator of a project in my country. My life goal is to become a registered nurse and to be a good example for my children. For now, I am a certified nurse assistant, and I am a current student at Black Hawk College. I like to sing, dance, travel, and watch movies.

My Traditional Marriage in Ewe Culture

Growing up, young men and women start to build a relationship, which later leads them into marriage. Parents are serious about marriage because it is an important decision, not only in the spiritual view but also in the physical and moral view. Because it engages two people for their entire life, traditional marriage in Ewe culture requires three steps, which I had to follow before my marriage. The three steps are door knocking, family introducing, and dowry.

After the decision to get married was made by my husband and me, our family got involved. When the family of my husband visited my family for the first time, we called this first step “honfoha,” which means knocking on the door. On that day, the family of my husband came and expressed the desire of their son to marry me. My family responded to them by saying that their message was heard, but they needed some time to think and to talk with me before they said anything. At that point, the first meeting was at its end, but my husband’s family had not come empty-handed. They had to bring some drinks, and those drinks would not be returned even if a marriage were not to be celebrated after. Before the date of the second step, my family made some investigations to find out about the reputation of my husband’s family. Those investigations were to see if my husband’s family takes care of their wives, if they are respectful to other people or families, and if the two families have had some issues in the past regarding land for example.

After the investigations, the date of the second step was chosen. My husband’s family returned for the second step; this is called “Ape nya ha,” which means knowing the house. Even though they had already come the first time, my husband’s family could not be welcomed to continue the steps yet, so the second step is to show that they are now welcome to the family and that they are in the right place. On that day, my husband’s family returned to my family, and the main purpose was to get to know each other

in the family and to receive the list of things that are required before I could become his wife as required by traditional laws. Food and drinks were shared, and the date of the traditional wedding was chosen.

The third step, which is the last and the most important date, is called “Tabiabia,” which means bringing back a wife. On that day, our two families were sitting together and the items that were a requirement for my marriage were verified. There was, for example, a suitcase containing loincloths, pairs of shoes, head wraps, jewelry, an amount of money that was chosen by my family, and a stool. Everything on the dowry list has a meaning. For example, the stool means that I have a place to sit in the household. In other words, I am welcome in the family. That is why they must buy a stool. Next, if the list is complete, the wedding will continue; otherwise, they would have to go back and complete the list before they proceed with the wedding. It was on that day that my family recognized my husband according to the tradition even though he had already visited them in the past. My husband added a wedding ring, which he put on my finger later that day. Putting the ring on my finger showed that I am not available for another man. After that, gifts were given to the new couple. Family members started to give advice to the new couple to help them to build a better household. Food and drinks were shared, and gifts were given to us.



To conclude, my traditional marriage in Ewe culture in Togo had three steps, which were knocking on the door, family introduction, and dowry. From that day, we started our new life together. Even though the traditional marriage was expensive for my husband, he was excited, glad, and happy to honor me, and to show his love toward me.

Riz Cantonee

We have a variety of foods in Togo, but riz cantonee is one of the dishes that is prepared only for certain events. Marriage, anniversary, birthday party, and naming ceremony are the events for which people can prepared riz cantonee. We have different kinds of riz cantonee. Some are cooked with soy sauce and some with another base. You can use any kinds of meat you want. The dish is made with some main ingredients, which are rice, pasta, green beans, carrots, soy sauce, meat, garlic, and green peppers. To cook riz cantonee, season the meat of your choice, cook it, and fry it. After that, break the pasta into small pieces and fry it. In a new pan, pour some oil and then add garlic, onion, and ginger. Mix it all together and after two minutes, pour the rest of the sauce that remains after cooking the meat. Let it boil for five minutes; then pour the rice into the mixture. After that, let it boil for five minutes and then add the fried pasta and meat. You can now add the soy sauce and mix it all together. After another five minutes, check to see if the rice and the pasta are well cooked. If not, you can add water to the mixture to let the rice and the pasta cook more. The dish can be served and can be eaten with chopped green peppers with salt.

Zawadi Leeya



My name is Leeya. I was born In Tanzania. I grew up in Ngala; I started going to school when I was little. I lived in Ngala for nine years and after those years, I moved to a refugee camp called Mtabila. I was attending middle school in Mtabila Camp before I moved to another camp. When I was in Nyarugusu camp, I used to go to high school, and I used to play a lot with my friends, but I do not do that anymore because my life has changed. My family and I used to spend time together a lot, but since we moved to the U.S.A, we do not have time to do that because we have a busy life here. I thought life in the United States would be easy, but I found out it is not easy. I remember when I was in Africa, I used to go to school and do my homework only. I did not have to worry about going to work. I am attending the ESL program these days, and I work at Custom Pack. I have been in this program for almost three years. My goal is to work as a nurse in a big hospital somewhere. I will also be having fun with my new family. To finish, I would like to say that even though I have busy life these days, I hope my life will change by the time I finish my school.

The Differences between My Life Here and in my Country

Have you ever experienced the hardship of living in a refugee camp? I was born in a refugee camp called Ngara, which is located in the central part of Tanzania. Being born and raised in that place was the worst experience I have ever encountered. My life changed when I first I got here to the United States. It was not easy to get used to living in this country during my first and second year here due to the language barrier. When I moved to the USA, I had to make many adjustments like other people who got here before me. Since I arrived in the USA, my life has changed in terms of finance, health care, and communication.

The first thing that brought changes into my life when I moved from Africa to the United States was electricity. When I was in Africa, I had a difficult time to cook. In my kitchen, I did not have an electric stove. I used three stones and firewood instead of an electric stove to cook food; I had to go far from my house to find firewood, so I could cook. Since I moved to the USA, I do not have to worry about going far from my house to find firewood anymore because I have an electric stove. I used to have problems during nighttime when I was still in the refugee camp. When I was in Africa, I had to use oil lamps. Sometimes, it was hard for me when I did not have oil to put in my lamp; at that time, I had to use firewood so I could see where I was going in the house.

In addition, I also experienced big changes in healthcare soon after I arrived in the USA. In the refugee camps, healthcare was so horrible. It was not easy to get the medications in the camp; for this reason, people suffering from serious illnesses had to be transported to a very far away hospital. Here, it

is easier for us to get medical tests in the hospital. My father had a tumor in his shoulder, and the doctor ordered an MRI for him before the surgery. There was not an MRI in the camp. Once, when my big brother needed an X-ray in the camp, he did not get it because it was too expensive. Making appointments in the USA when we need to see a doctor is a big change. In the camp, I just walked to the clinic, sat down, and waited until a nurse asked what was wrong. Now, I have to call a doctor's office and make an appointment for a definite time, and I have to keep that appointment because if I am late, I have to reschedule for a new time.

My life has also changed in terms of transportation. When I was living in the camp in Africa, the transportation was not easy, but here it is easy for me. If I wanted to go somewhere, such as to school, the market, the hospital, or other places, I used to walk; I got tired of walking every day. I had to walk five miles to school and three miles to go to the market. Now, it is different. In Africa, I did not have a car, but now I drive my car. My life has completely changed in terms of going from one place to another; it is so much easier now. I do not have to walk everywhere. I walk sometimes if I want. I can take a bus if I do not want to drive. All of that are the big changes about transportation.

In conclusion, many things have changed in my life since I came to the USA. Electricity, healthcare and transportation have changed my life. My life is much better because of those changes. When I think about how my life used to be in the refugee camp, I realize how lucky I am to have these important changes in my life.

Christmas Celebration in Burundi

In Burundi, Christmas is a special holiday for those who celebrate it, especially Christians. Many people invite their friends, neighbors, and families so that they can celebrate together. To celebrate Christmas, people put on traditional clothes and enjoy traditional food and drink. Some people celebrate it at churches and others at home. On Christmas Day, people usually put on new and nice clothes. For the man, they put on suits and ties, and the women put on imikenyero and ibitenge. On Christmas day, people usually cook green bananas, beans, and beef. For drinks, they drink different sodas, juices and different kinds of beer.



Ngun Lian



My name is Ngun Lian. Some of my friends call me by my nickname, Sam. I am from Chin State, Myanmar, and I was born and raised in Chin State. I am 22 years old and will be turning 23 soon. I moved to the United States four years ago. I have been studying at Black Hawk College for almost a year, and my goal is to improve my English and have a better job. I have four sisters, and one of my sisters also goes to Black Hawk College. Now, I am living with my parents. I used to work in Muscatine, Iowa as a CNC machine operator. After I finish the ESL program, one of my biggest goals is to become a technician. I know it will be so difficult for me to become a technician, but I will do my best and try hard to fulfill my goals.

My Hometown

My lovely hometown Falam is in Chin State, Myanmar, which is located in the west of Myanmar. I loved living there because the environment was so comfortable and always made me happy. I love everything about my hometown where I was born and grew up for 14 years. There are three things that people talk about most in my hometown: the environment, the food, and the hardships.

First, there are a lot of rivers and mountains near my hometown. The closest river is called “Sih-hrual.” It is located in a small town called “Lailun.” The river is so clean that we never used a filter before we consumed it. Some people used it as a swimming pool because it was safe to swim around in the river. There is also a famous lake called “Rih;” it is so famous in Myanmar because it has a heart-shaped outline. It is about one mile in length, half-a-mile in width and about 60 feet in depth. It is so beautiful to look around the lake, but most people do not dare to swim in the lake because the villagers say that a ghost haunts it. The highest mountain near my hometown is called “Zinghmuh Tlang;” it is located in “Tlangzar.” Most people like to climb the mountain very much because they can see the whole town from the top of the mountain. There is also a huge cross on the top of the mountain; the villagers say that the cross identifies them as Christians.

Second, food plays an important role in my hometown because most people in my hometown plant corn; it is the only way to support the family. However, we could not grow other foods, as we wanted to because there was not enough rainfall in summer. Mostly, we ate corn and white rice with spicy curries. We also use corn as soup, which is called “Sabuti;” which is very famous in my hometown. For example, we serve it on Chin National Day or other holidays.

Lastly, there were a lot of hardships that we faced in my hometown. Most importantly, we suffered from erratic rainfall, landslides and floods. We suffered erratic rainfall and landslides around

October. When I was around 10, a lot of houses (including my house) were destroyed by rainfall, and we could not do anything about it because the rain was too heavy, and we were scared to go out. By the time the rain stopped, the water had covered all the roads. Until today, most people in my hometown have been facing a lot of hardships. Almost every single year, we suffer from erratic rainfall and landslides, and it is so sad that most people do not get any help from the government because Myanmar is a dictatorship. Therefore, most people rebuild the houses by themselves, and it takes almost three years to get new houses.

My hometown is an important part of my life because, no matter what city I call home in the future, I will only have one hometown. It is comforting to know that my hometown is such a special city to me.

Ruakhua-tlak, Traditional Dance of Chin

In Chin State, each city has its own traditional dance. Ruakhua-tlak is one of the most eye-catching traditional dances in Chin State. Mostly, both men and women dance without using instruments, but they clap the bamboo sticks to make the sound. It is so dangerous to perform this dance because you have to lift your feet and dance between bamboo sticks, which are clapped by the bamboo holders. This dance is so difficult that most people in Chin State do not know how to dance it. Mostly, we perform this dance on Chin National Day, which is celebrated in February.



Mawussi Mensah Amavi



I was born on May 5 in Kara, one of the cities in Togo. I have two sisters. I started school in Lomé, and I was able to get my certificate after five years of study instead of six years. I was studying in secondary school when my father passed away. I lived with my aunt until I got my high school diploma. When I arrived in the U.S., I started working at Tyson after one month. I am studying English at BHC because my future is very important for me, and I am working hard for it. Very soon, I will finish my ESL program, and I will be studying in the nursing program. I am sure that I will have my associate degree in 2024 and will work in a hospital before continuing with my bachelor's degree.

The Akpema Ceremony for the Girls in Kara

Togo is a small country in West Africa. It is located between Ghana and Benin. The population is made up of about 30 ethnic groups. The Kabye are one of the northern groups of people located in the Kara region. The Kabye have some traditional festivals, such as Akpema, which is an initiation rite in Kabye country, which marks the transition from girl to woman. This rite is practiced in the north of Togo in the Kara region. It is done once a year for girls who are at the age of eighteen. Akpema consists of the rite, the market visit, and the marriage.

First, this rite is preceded by a procession of naked girls whose loins are wrapped in pearl strands. The parents and the tribal priest watch as they walk to the sacred forest where, individually, the girls sit on a sacred stone. If the girl is not a virgin, blood will flow from her genitals, or she will be stung by bees. Today, this custom is still practiced, but girls do not have to sit on the stone unless they want to prove their virginity, in which case they are asked to sit on the sacred stone to make the family proud. After the ceremony, all the “akpenous,” the young initiates, are assembled in a place under a tree where the traditional priests perform a ritual and release them to return home. Along the way, the initiates of previous years and the parents sing to praise the virginity of their initiates, and they dance with batons in their hands.

Second, they go to the market. The day after the ceremony, the initiates can go to the market, wearing a white slip and bra. Over the slip, they wear pearl strands and start to dance the “chimou” dance from home to market, which marks the end of the ceremony. In fact, “chimou” is a popular dance in Kabye country. It is played as a sign of recognition of the parents towards their daughter for having kept her virginity until the ceremony. During their dance, the girls receive gifts from the merchants, who are very happy for them.

In addition, before the ceremony of Akpema, the girl is already promised to a man, so just after the ceremony, the girl returns to the home of her fiancé where they try to force her to eat, but she must refuse for at least two days to show to her parents-in-law that she can resist hunger. On the third day, if she agrees to eat, they know that the girl is theirs, and the new family will start to celebrate by dancing. Then, the fiancé organizes a dance at the girl's home where he, the parents, and his friends offer drinks, loincloths, and agricultural products to the girl's parents.

To conclude, Akpema is a ceremony that is done to show that the girl has become a woman and that she can carry the high and heavy responsibilities of the home. She must show that she will be worthy of everything. Today, they continue to hold the ceremony but in different ways because many prefer to do it at the church to show that even though they care about their tradition, they know that is God over everything.

Tchoutoukou

Tchoutoukou, commonly called tchouk, is a kind of local beverage in Kabye culture. It is a drink made with sorghum that is served in a calabash. The ancestors used it during their prayers to fetishes. Although this drink is destined for rites, today it has become a source of income for many people.



Yejella Neeharika



First of all, my name is Neeharika, and I have been living in Moline since 2013. My home country is India, and I was born on April 3, 1991 in Visakhapatnam, India. I have one sister, and I got married in 2012. My husband has been working for John Deere since 2008. I also have a 4-year-old baby girl, and I completed my high school education in India. Recently, my family and I moved to a new house. I am going to ESL classes at Black Hawk College, and I want to work in a hospital as a physical therapist assistant, so I need to complete the prerequisites and PTA courses to work in a hospital. Finally, I hope that I will fulfill my dream by becoming a physical therapist assistant in my future, and my family is helping me to achieve my goal in the future.

My Hometown in India

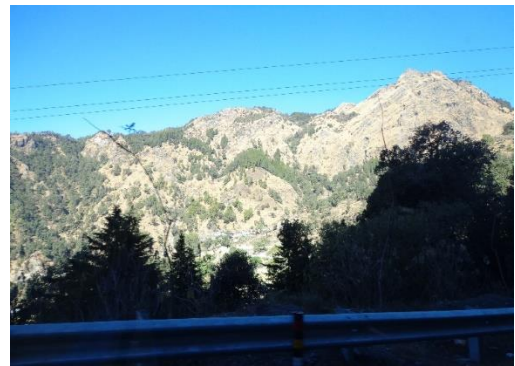
My hometown is a city, which is famous for its beautiful sceneries, and it is situated in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. Visakhapatnam is a city, which is recognized as the top tourist place in Andhra Pradesh. It is also a port city, which has harbor, and it also has sea transportation facilities, and most of the ship transportation is from Visakhapatnam to Andaman and Nicobar Islands and to Goa.

There are two famous beaches in the city, which fill with bigger and bigger crowds every day. First, the people and tourists in Visakhapatnam like to spend most of their time at beaches. Visakhapatnam is the only city with a seashore among all the cities in Andhra Pradesh. When I was young, I used to go to Rushikonda beach with my parents every day after school. I used to see large numbers of people there in the evenings. In my opinion, Rushikonda beach is widely known for its golden sands and slow waves from the Bay of Bengal, and I used to enjoy watching people do water sports like swimming, water skiing, and wind surfing. While watching these, I used to think that I would also like be part of it, but I did not know how to swim. I feel it is the perfect place for adventure lovers who enjoy activities on the water. Ramakrishna beach is the other popular tourist attraction in Visakhapatnam. When I was young, my school made a trip to Ramakrishna beach. I saw a submarine museum, which was located towards the north end of Ramakrishna beach, and there was also a flight museum, which was situated one mile from the seashore. I enjoyed the trip with my friends a lot, and I observed that a lot of people were at this beach to visit the aquarium.

Secondly, the parks in Visakhapatnam are more attractive, and they are filled mostly with children. There are two famous parks in the Visakhapatnam. One of the famous parks in Visakhapatnam is Sivaji Park, which is famous for its playgrounds and water fountains. In my childhood, I used to spend most of my time with my friends at Sivaji Park by playing on merry-go-rounds and swing sets every day

after coming back from school. I used to feel joyful while playing with my friends, and I also used to like the water fountains, which dance according to the music played. This was the main attraction in the park. The other famous park is Tanneti Park, which is located near my house and besides the beach, so I also used to spend my time with my parents and friends there in the evenings because it is a park full of greenery, and it is very clean and crowded. We can also get many types of street foods over there like chat, bhaji and, panni puri; whenever I went to that park with my friends, I used to enjoy the tasty smells, so I used to buy and eat street food, which tasted very delicious to me and my friends.

Thirdly, many people in Visakhapatnam visit hill stations in May because all the schools and colleges will have holidays to relax in the hot summer. There are two famous hill stations in Visakhapatnam. Araku Valley is one of the best hill stations in Visakhapatnam. Two years ago, my parents and I went to Araku Valley by train, and the train journey was wonderful because it passed through 37 tunnels, so one can enjoy the journey a lot. After reaching Araku, my parents and I visited the Borra caves. These caves were formed naturally with different stunning shapes, and they were beautifully lit up in different colors. Araku is also famous for coffee and masala plantations. The smell of coffee leaves spread through the entire valley, and as I am fond of coffee, it rejuvenated my senses. This was such a different experience that I had never had in my life. The other hill station is Lambasingi Hill Station, which is famous for snowfall in the winter, and it is situated about 100km from Visakhapatnam. When I was young, I visited this place with my friends. There, I saw the cool wind blow from the forests and valleys of Chintapalli making Lambasingi Hill look cool and foggy. It was an amazing experience for me that cannot be explained in words. I would recommend interested people to visit this place in December and January because the snowfall and beautiful cool winds blowing will only be seen in these two months.



Finally, beaches, parks and hill stations are the main attractions in Visakhapatnam that people and tourists always enjoy during their summer holidays. They visit to relax and to make wonderful memories while enjoying the beautiful views of these different places.

Chicken Biryani

This is the most popular authentic dish that is served in all Indian weddings, parties, and special occasions. This dish is made with a lot of spices to get a good taste, and every person will like this dish if they love spiciness. I cooked this dish last Sunday for my family. The ingredients required for this dish are 1) Basmati rice 2) chicken 3) ginger garlic paste 4) masala spices like cinnamon, cloves, and bay leaves and some vegetables.

First, we have to cut two carrots, onions, and green chilies into small pieces. Next, we have to fry all these in a nonstick pan in oil. Then, we have to boil some chicken pieces in a small pan while adding some salt and chili powder after boiling. We have to combine the washed rice, ginger garlic paste and boiled chicken in a frying pan, and we have to mix it well. After completing this task, we have to place everything in an electric cooker and add some water, masala spices and salt to it. When it is done, we can serve and eat it.

Dodzi Sessi



Hello, my name is Dodzi, and I am from Togo. I was born and raised in Togo, but for some reasons, I moved to the United States in March 2018. Everything was new to me, especially the language, and I felt stupid every time I talked to people, and they could not understand me or when they talked to me but I could not understand them. The most important thing for me is to enjoy myself. In fact, I spend my time listening to music, dancing and hanging out with friends. This is the best way for me to deal with my new life in the United States. I dream to become a filmmaker and travel around the world.

My Everyday Life as a New Immigrant

Each country has its own culture. However, when you move to another country, you must learn new things from this country. When I came to the United States, I had to face and deal with my new life, something that has not been easy to do; this is a big everyday challenge. The language, the lifestyle and the stress are three things that I am working on every day.

Born in a francophone country, my first language is French. I had never spoken English before, so when I came to the United States, English was the first thing that I had to learn. I had the chance to start school a month later after I moved to the United States so that I could improve my English quickly, but it is not as easy as I thought. There are so many things to learn that sometimes I feel confused and lost. First, I have to work on my accent. I have been speaking French since I was born, and it influences my accent when I speak English. Since it is hard for people to understand me, they often ask me to repeat what I said. The second thing is the English vocabulary. There are some words with the same spelling that we have in French, but they mean something different in English. This makes English difficult for me. The word “addition” means the bill at a restaurant in French, but in English it just means addition (in math for example). The last thing that makes English difficult for me is informal English. As a learner of English, I copy and memorize anything I hear and pay attention to people’s ways of speaking English, but most Americans use informal English, and it is hard to make the difference between formal and informal English.

American culture is very different from mine. People's behavior, the clothing, and the food are all new to me. Firstly, people's behavior in the United States does not look like what I used to see. I remember in my first months in the United States, I could not understand why people like solitude. In America, everybody does his or her own thing without talking to others. In contrast, in my country, we

are always with family and friends because we like to do a lot of things together. Secondly, I have to adapt to the clothing, especially in the winter. We do not have snow in Africa, so coming here and starting to wear heavy clothes with snow boots made me feel uncomfortable. I need to be familiar with each season's clothes and know what needs to be worn when. Thirdly, foods are the strangest things I have been seeing in the United States. There are so many foods that I do not know anything about. I was able to find an African store, where I can find everything I need, but I tend to eat the same foods again and again because I cannot eat all of the American food. A few months ago, I decided to learn to eat American foods so that I can have more of a variety of food for my lunch. For example, I tried hot dogs, bologna sausage, tacos, and more. I liked most of these foods, and I am excited to try more new foods.

Even though I try to be happy anytime, my heart tells me that I am not happy. I am stressed every day by my workplace, tiredness, and solitude. I am an employee in a factory, a job that I do not like, but I have to do it until I find a new job. Feeling that I am not in the place I want to be makes me nervous, and I cannot stop thinking about how to make my life better. As a full-time worker and student, I am so tired that I cannot even smile. I sleep three hours every day, sometimes two hours because I spend ten hours at work and after that, I have to go to school, do my homework and take care of myself. The last thing that makes me stressed is the solitude. I moved to the United States leaving my whole family behind. I miss them, and I feel lonely. Immigrating to another country and doing everything by yourself is not easy.

To conclude, learning English is my daily challenge, but I also have to learn about American culture and deal with stress. However, I love America, and I am determined to do everything to adapt to my new life.

Adossa Gadao

Adossa Gadao is one of the famous traditional holidays in Togo. It is celebrated in Sokode, a main town of the central region in Togo. There are two different festivals, Adossa and Gadao, that are combined and celebrated together. Adossa is the knife festival, or "fete des couteaux" in French, and Gadao is celebrated to thank the gods for everything they have been giving during the year, such as food, health, peace, etc. Every year Adossa Gadao is celebrated for three days, during which young men show their strength by cutting their bodies with knives without having causing injury. As part of this festival, there are many other practices, supernatural things that are interesting to watch.

Kodjogan Zouglo



My name is Kodjogan. I was born and raised in Lomé, Togo. I am the oldest child of my family. I have two sisters and three brothers. Mr Kodjovi and Mrs Abla are my parents. All my family lives in Togo. I graduated from high school in my country. I came to the United States thanks to the U.S Diversity Visa Lottery. I have been here since December 2016. I have been working at Tyson for more than two years. I started the ESL program in spring 2017. I live in East Moline. My goal is to study accounting and become an accountant. My dream is to build a worthy hospital in my village because people really need it.

The Agriculture of Togo

Togo is located in West Africa. It has been independent since 1960. Togo is subdivided into five economic regions. Togolese agriculture is greatly diversified in agricultural products, and the sector employs 70 percent of the active population. Togolese agriculture is based upon food crops and cash crops, but it has encountered some problems.

First, the production of food crops is diverse. This production is mostly used domestically. Maize is the main food of Togolese. It grows abundantly in the south of the country. The maize type called “Agoe bli” in our native language is grown most, and it develops growth after two months. It is found all over the country. After the harvest, farmers transport the maize to their homes; then they build a granary to keep the maize for up to six months, the time to pass the next rainy season. Yams are an important food, which is eaten often by everyone in Togo. It is cultivated throughout the territory, but the Bassar region is the largest producer. Yams need a long, warm growing season. They will take approximately 3.5 months to mature, and they do not like cold temperatures. Also, the production of millet is based in the north of Togo. Millet grows to maturity within 60 to 70 days. This production is intended for the consumption of the family and eventually sold in part to provide for the needs of the family.

Second, Togo produces cash crops. Togo is a small producer of coffee and cocoa in the world. This production is located in the Plateaux region. The production is dominated by smallholders, who produce both coffee and cocoa. Farmers typically grow an average of around two acres. Through “OPAT: Office des Produits Agricoles du Togo,” the government buys coffee and cocoa from the producers. The government sets the purchase price according to world prices. The government is responsible for selling the products outside. In addition, Togo is a producer of cotton. Cotton is produced from north to south in the country. Many farmers like to grow cotton because the sale of cotton provides them money.

Therefore, some farmers prefer to grow cotton instead of food crops. Through “ANSAT: Agence Nationale de la Securite Alimentaire du Togo,” the government buys cotton, and then sells it outside. A lot of Togolese work in agriculture in Togo, which means agriculture is the main source of income for a large part of the population.

Finally, Togolese agriculture has encountered some problems. The crops are cultivated on poor soil. The same land is cultivated for several years making the soil poor. They also burn the area to clear the land for farming, which causes poor soil. Lack of mechanization is still a big deal for Togolese agriculture. Farmers cannot cultivate large fields because the work is still done by hand. They continue to use hoes, machetes and axes. Therefore, many people work, but the result is insufficient. Agriculture also faces irrigation difficulties. The farmers do not have irrigation systems to water the fields. As a result, farmers are waiting for rainwater. If the rain amount is not sufficient, the crops will be bad.

There can be no doubt that using a large part of the active population, Togolese agriculture remains rudimentary. This precariousness comes from many problems that agriculture faces in Togo. Togolese agriculture is founded on food crops and cash crops, but the problems prevent its development. Now, the government is trying to finance agricultural projects, and I hope that Togolese agriculture will have a better tomorrow.

Tchoukoutou

Tchoukoutou is a traditional beverage originally prepared in the north of Togo. It is highly valued in the north of the country. This drink is made from millet. Although widespread throughout the country, it is still used for specific events. For example, no engagement or wedding ceremony can be celebrated without including tchoukoutou. Also, it is required for funerals to pray for the dead and for happy events as a drink. It has a pleasant taste. Today women prepare it and have made it a trade, so it is easy to find. It is better to drink it moderately so as not to get drunk.



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