



INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

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OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



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

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Nina De Bisschop and Lisa Torres

Fadumo Abdi



My name is Fadumo Abdi. I am from Somalia. I was born in Dadaab, Kenya in 1999. I have one brother and three sisters. I came to the U.S. at the end of 2010, and I started school right away at Glenview Middle School. For high school, I went to United Township. I am a student of ESL because I want to improve my English. In my future, I want to be a nurse, and I am trying to achieve that goal no matter how long it takes. My favorite sport is soccer, and I am a fan of Manchester United. I love communicating with everyone, no matter who you are. I also like to read books sometimes when I am free.

After the War Broke out in Somalia

Unfortunately, my family was living in Somalia when a civil war broke out. My parents had to run for their lives. Due to this heartbreaking war, many people escaped to Kenya. The Kenyan government opened the doors for the suffering people and welcomed them with open arms. My family and I lived in a UN refugee camp for almost 11 years. Indeed, there are people who are still living in that refugee camp. Life in a refugee camp can be harsh, especially for a big family because we had to share one room for the entire family. On the other hand, life in a refugee camp can be a positive experience because it provides safety, shelter, and supportive friendships.

First of all, living in a refugee camp was safe and secure because the whole village was surrounded by the military. Every block had its own security guard, which was important because people suffered so much, and everyone was hungry for peace. The UN started to bring food for the people, and the people had to get in lines to get their daily meals. The Kenyan government and the UN started to build hospitals and clinics. Previously, some children had been dying due to a lack of medical care, but the UN sent doctors and nurses to save the children. The UN gave everyone a medical card, and people were thankful for the needed medical care.

Because many parents lost their children while escaping from the civil war, the refugee camp was a good place to settle. Thousands of people were hopeless and suffered a lot because of the civil war, and they wanted to get their lives back to as normal as possible. After the people escaped from their countries, they had nowhere to sleep. Two to three families had to share a tent together, and it was difficult for families to sleep in those conditions. After the people had suffered a lot, living so closely together, the

UN solved this problem by sending help for the people. The UN helped to give shelter to the people who had nowhere to sleep. The UN was also supporting the people to restore their lives again.

Finally, the people were supporting each other because everyone went through the same problems. They understood the conditions that they were in, and their only choice was to support each other, no matter what. Everyone reached out to the new members so they could feel comfortable and told them what they needed to do. The refugee camp became a home; everyone tolerated it.

To conclude, living in a refugee camp can be harsh. The people there have suffered a lot and have seen so many things, but they accept the conditions that they are now in because the camp provides safety, shelter, and supportive friendships. The refugee camp becomes home to the people because they settle in and experience the negative and the positive things of living in a refugee camp, just like living anywhere else.

Somali Tea

Somalis are obsessed with shaah (tea). They love drinking tea. They especially love drinking the black tea. Many people drink shaah in the morning; some drink it in the afternoon, especially the elders. No Somali will go out without drinking shaah in the morning. If you visit a Somali house, they will welcome you with a cup of tea, and some cookies that go with the tea. Some people believe that if they drink tea, it will make them stay awake to focus on their daily duties. Some people prefer to make their own tea at home, so they can use any spicy tea they would like. Here is how Somalis make tea at home. First, they need to get a coffee pot. Then they pour two cups of water, two cups of milk, and add cloves, ground ginger and cardamom. Some people add other ingredients, such as black pepper, but some prefer to use just two cups of water, two cups of milk, sugar, cloves, ground ginger, and cardamom.

Gerald Acabá-Serrano



My name is Gerald A. Acabá-Serrano. I am from Camuy, Puerto Rico. I was born on February 24, 2000 in Puerto Rico. I spent all my childhood on my beautiful island. I come from a family of five members; I have two younger sisters named Valeria and Karina. I attended many different schools: my first years I spent in a public school near my home. Then I moved to a specialized school for baseball as my talent was growing over time. Thanks to those schools, I am here writing this message because with the help of many people, I got a scholarship, and I am here at Black Hawk College playing baseball and doing something for my life. I am a person who has many dreams and many goals to fulfill. One of my dreams is to become a professional baseball player and be recognized worldwide. I am a fan of sports, and I love everything related. I consider myself a fair and honest human being since from childhood my parents taught me many values. I will always be grateful to God and my parents for teaching me and helping me become who I am today.

A Ball that Changes Lives

For many people, baseball is just a normal sport, but for others it is much more than that. Baseball is a sport that can help you achieve many things in life. How is it possible that a simple game can change the lives of many people? Academic opportunities, money, and fame are just three things that baseball can change in your life and can have a big impact on a person.

Who does not dream of becoming a professional one day? What would you think if I told you that you can get a scholarship to study what you want and become someone? A simple sport like baseball can save you money for school. For example, because I study here at Black Hawk College and play baseball for the college, I do not have to pay anything. The life of a person can change with a scholarship offer thanks to baseball as it happened to me. I left my country and my family for a dream and an opportunity that I got through the sport of baseball. That is why I always say that sports and education go hand in hand since both change lives. At my side, many friends remained without a scholarship or opportunities, but hard work and the desire to be someone helped me to get this great opportunity. A scholarship can make a big change in the life of any person, and I know a lot of people that have a professional job and have nice lives thanks to baseball because they received a good scholarship.

Every man on the planet thinks about getting a job with which he can support a family and do well economically. What if I told you that baseball has helped thousands of people make a good living, thanks to a talent that many have worked on with much effort. The MLB athletes earn millions of dollars just for playing baseball, and thanks to that, they have a job playing baseball, and it has changed their lives completely. For example, I have a coach who used to play professional baseball, and he always tells me that baseball is a good career, and there is a lot of money that I can earn by playing baseball. That is why I know that all this is real, and that a simple sport like baseball can change lives.

Many dream of being famous and being someone in life. Many people who never thought to be recognized are now globally recognized thanks to baseball and the opportunities that this beautiful sport offers to the people who practice it. From ads to magazines, baseball is and will remain a worldwide sensation. Fame changes the life of any person and gives them the honor of being an example for many people who see them as someone to follow. Their behavior can make them someone who helps the world with good actions and all that with a simple sport, baseball. For example, Javier Baez is a recognized superstar around the world, and he can be a good example for the society. My model to follow is someone who regardless of fame is humble, and it is Carlos Beltrán. He is a tremendous human being and the desire to be someone in life takes him to be one of the greatest candidates for the Hall of Fame.

In conclusion, the opportunities for scholarships, money and fame are among the things that baseball offers you, and baseball helps to change the lives of young people who have the dream to improve their lives. For example, I am a young man who will follow his dreams since the sport of baseball has changed my life completely, and I know that over time I will see the other results with God's favor.

Gloria (Sandra) Adedze



My name is Sandra Adedze. I am twenty years old, and I am from a small country in Africa named Togo. I grew up in the city called Lome. I live here with my parents and my four brothers. One of my dreams is that I want to become a manager in a big company or enterprise. My hope is that I will become one of the most famous women in the world. I want to help people in need and the homeless to realize their dreams, and personally nothing is more important to me than seeing people happy. Another thing about me is that I like to help everyone. I like being on vacation a lot and visiting other countries. Moreover, I like adventure because I like to discover new things and admire the nature.

My Life in Togo

When I lived in Togo, I lived with my uncle and my aunt. My uncle was a scrap dealer, and my aunt was a hairdresser. I was twelve years old, and I lived with them because my parents were living in the USA with my four brothers. They wanted us to be together, but there were problems with my papers; thus, they had to leave without me. When my uncle decided to be my guardian, I did not know my life would be like hell. They were really mean to me in many ways when it came to my education, my friendships, and my free time.

First, they were mean about my education. I went to a public school called Modern in Lome. My uncle always wanted me to read my books and learn new things. I was always supposed to be doing my homework. He warned me that I could not be on my phone while I was studying. But while doing homework, I had to ask some questions to my friends since I did not always know all the answers. But with my bad luck, when I was about to use my phone to ask something, my uncle was always right beside me, and he slapped me even though I tried to explain to him. The worst was that he never helped me do my homework. And everyday it was the same thing. He always accused me of ditching school, and to be sure, he had about five people that spied on me all the time, everywhere I went. What I did to prove him wrong was that I worked hard to pass all my exams, and I was always in the top three of my class when they gave the results, and I was proud of myself because there were more than a hundred students in the class.

Secondly, they were mean about my friendships. They never liked seeing me with friends, even girls. Moreover, if my uncle saw me with a boy, that day I would regret being friends with the boy. All of the time, they accused me wrongly, but I could not speak up because in my culture they say if the adults are talking, children do not talk. Every day, they blame me for things I did not know about. For example, one

afternoon, I asked my aunt permission to go to the house of my classmate, so that I could borrow some papers to review for our exam. When I came back, I saw my uncle sitting in our living room, and he grabbed a big stick. I was afraid, and he asked me where I was coming from. When I answered him, he said that I was lying and that he knew I came from my boyfriend's house. Suddenly, he started beating me with the stick. Even though I was saying I did not have a boyfriend, he did not want to believe me and continued to beat me until I became unconscious. In addition, on my birthday, my friend told me he wanted to give me gift, and I was so happy and waiting for the present. Then, my uncle sent me to buy something for him, and when I came back, I saw a gift in his hand. I thought that day would be the end of my life because of the way he was looking at me. I thought, "My god! I'm dead!" My uncle said, "Your boyfriend just brought you a birthday gift," and I told him, "He is not my boyfriend." As always, I was never right. My uncle said there was only one way to know if I was telling the truth. I was ready to prove him that I was telling the truth, but I was not expecting him to say that I had to return the gift, so I thought he was joking. In the middle of the night, he woke me up, and I led him to the boy's house, and I gave him back the gift. I was really ashamed of myself, and I was really mad because despite all he did not believe me.



Thirdly, they were mean about my free time. I never had free time, I had to do everything that had to be done around the house. Even if I finished everything, my aunt always found something that would keep me busy. Although they had children, I was the one doing everything. I could not take nap for thirty minutes; for example, one day I was really sick, so I decided to take a nap. Some minutes later, my aunt was back from work and saw me lying on the bed. Without asking why I was sleeping, she hit my back really hard. When I woke up, my head was spinning and hurting, but she didn't care. All she wanted was for me to wake up and come help her in the kitchen to cook.

Finally, my uncle and aunt were really mean to me about my education, my friendships, and my free time; however, where would I have lived when my parents were in the USA. I lived with them for seven years, and those years were the most horrible time in my life. When I came to the USA, I felt like I was alive again. Living with my family and chasing my dreams are the most important things for me. Based on experiences, I can tell there is a huge differences between our parents and our guardians. Although I went through all that, I keep smiling. Now that I have everything that I need to be who I want to be, I am not going to give up on my dreams. I am glad I went through all that because it made me who I am today.

Togo is a small country in West Africa. My country has many different kinds of clothes. First, the clothes are made from cotton, some from animal skin or feathers, some from trees, and some from loincloth called avo or brekeri in our language. Those are worn for special festivals and traditional occasions. Wearing those clothes shows respect according to our great grandparents. In addition, they make skirts, dresses, pants, hats, shorts, and many other things. Furthermore, the dresses and skirts are made for women. The pants and shorts are for men. Women wearing pants or shorts is inappropriate and disrespectful. Secondly, those clothes are matched with beads made in form of handmade necklaces and bracelets. Dressing in those clothes totally changes your appearance, and anywhere people go they are recognized as Africans. Finally, my country has different kinds of clothes, and they show the value of the country. If they continue like that, the new generation will keep it as their heritage.

Essi Agbalo



My name is Essi Agbaglo. I am from Togo, West Africa. I am from the village of Agbelouve in the county called Zio in the south part of the country. I am thirty-eight years old. I attended elementary school and junior high school in Agbelouve before moving to Tsevie, another city where I attended high school. I continued my career at the University of Lome, the capital of Togo to pursue my career in 2003 with the idea to become a flight attendant. After one year at the university, we won the Diversity Visa lottery. My husband and I moved to the United States. I have three daughters, Ivana, Gabriella, and Ariana. Unfortunately, based on the way I see my life in the USA, I have changed my mind from becoming a flight attendant. Now my future goal is to work for the government, especially in agriculture as a USDA worker because I don't want to miss my family that much. My other dream job is being a civil engineer. I hope I do not give up on school so I can build the career of my future.

Togo's Barriers to Development

Why does Togo have such rich land, but it is also one of the most unhappy countries in the world? Togo is a small country situated in West Africa, and it got its independence from France on April 27th 1960. Its first president was Sylvanus Olympio. However, Togo's barriers to development includes many factors, such as leadership, education, industrialization, and money.

First of all, the first president, Sylvanus Olympio, wanted the country to be a democratic country, and he wanted the country to develop by creating jobs, better education, and he wanted the country to have its own currency before he was assassinated by colonists in 1963. Later on, the French colonists chose their own leader, Dictator Gnassingbe Eyadema, who presided over the country from 1967 until the end of his life in 2005. Subsequently, his son, Faure Gnassingbe, took over power as another dictator. He has been the current president from 2005 to now. The Gnassingbe family is a corrupt family, who destroys people's lives and futures. This government has been torturing its population for decades, and many people have fled to find a better life outside of the country. Every time somebody new wants to create jobs, the president and his government always finds something to destroy that person: for example, the government imposes high taxes on that person or does background checks on that person's family to make sure the family has not revolted against them before. This halts the country's development. Therefore, this makes the people angry. In order to get jobs, people have to have family ties to the government or political party.

In addition, the education of Togo is in the most miserable condition in Africa. For example, Togo does not have many schools. Starting from elementary school, the little students walk a couple of miles to come to school every day. In particular, they walk through the rain and hot weather to come to school. Most classrooms are aluminum huts or grass huts, so if it rains, the students get wet. Although the people speak more than twenty-six dialects, the teaching language has to be French only. The teaching

methods are deplorable, too; for instance, teachers use black boards and chalk to teach the students. There are not any labs to do exercises or computers to practice on. The most devastating assignment is when we study other countries and their histories, but we do not study our own. From elementary school to high school and even at the universities, teachers do not have the technology to teach or to learn the use of computers. This is one of the obstacles to the country's developments because these conditions do not encourage the students to go forward in school.

Furthermore, Togo has different mineral resources, but there is not any way to access these mineral resources. Togo needs industry or manufacturing processes to access these materials. These processes would create many jobs in the country and prevent people from fleeing to other countries. Technology is not successful in my country. Evidently, in the twenty-first century, farmers are still using hoes and big knives to cultivate their farms, but in the United States, they use irrigation and convenient production methods for their farms; however, in Togo, the farmers have to pray for rain for better crops.

Finally, the money is another factor that is a barrier to Togo's development. The country does not have its own currency. Instead, France imposed the Franc CFR (French African Colonies money), which was created after War World II in 1945 by the French president DeGaulle. From that year to 1973, France had a contract with its colonies, including Togo. This stated that everything Togo did outside of the country for profit had to go back to the French government. In fact, since the dictator took over power, all the country's profits went to France. The current president, has negotiated and the donation of profits has been reduced to fifty percent to France. This is making the country poorer because the government does not have the money to pay its people. Togo does not ever have any exports to develop itself.

In summary, Togo is one of the unhappiest countries in the world, due to its dictatorship, education, manufacturing, and money. However, we could have our total independence and be a happy country if the French would stop interfering in our development, and that is why from last year, the population has been standing up and started fighting for its democracy.

My Hometown's Traditional Holiday

Back in my hometown Tsevie, in the county of Zio (called prefecture de ZIO), we have a traditional holiday called Ayizan, which means the bean holiday. It is celebrated every third Saturday in August. Every year, almost every Zio native comes to celebrate this holiday. This can be compared to Thanksgiving in the United States. The story behind this holiday is sad. Back in our ancestors' time, there was a king of the Ewe named Agokoli, who killed people and used their blood to build a wall because there was no rain and the season was very dry. So our ancestry escaped from this maniac toward the south part of Togo. Unfortunately, hunger caught them, but they had to think smart. Some of them carried beans. They planted these beans, and they had a smaller harvest than expected. When the next escapees arrived, they told them the harvest they had was small. This is the meaning of Tsevie (small harvest). They thought that this place could be their new home because they had some rain at that place. At the time of celebration, the wise men, the kings of the county, and the population come together in a public place. The wise grow the beans and harvest them at the same time on the same day. They do this in a mythological way. After the ceremony, people sing, dance and adults and young people show their talents. To sum up, Ayizan is one of my favorite traditional holidays. I always have nostalgia at the time of this holiday.

Thamer Alobaidi



My name is Thamer. I was born in Baghdad, Iraq. I studied in Baghdad and graduated from the college of law. I worked as a lawyer for many companies. In my country, we studied English from fifth grade to twelve grade, but in college, we took just one class legal terminology. I came to the United States in 2012. In my country, I worked with Americans. I have lots of American friends, and they are my best friends. We worked together. Since I came here, I have had different jobs. When I was in Chicago, I worked at O'Hare airport. Now, I work with Project Now as a program assistant. I like my job because I help a lot of people every day. After ESL I want to study to be a paralegal. I love legal field work. My favorite foods are Mexican and Indian food, I like burritos, chilaquiles, masala dosa, and biryani. In my free time, I go to the gym.

Education in Iraq

Do you know that Iraq has the oldest university in the world? It is called Almustansiria Madrasa, and it was built in 1227 in the Abbasi era. Indeed, Iraq has one of the oldest education systems in that area controlled by two ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Nowadays, education is free and public, and there are some private schools and colleges where students pay for their tuition.

Generally, schools are free and mandatory for the first six years at the primary level. There are two types of schools, public and private, in Iraq. The government controls both public and private schools. At age six, parents have to register their kids for primary school. Schools are divided into primary, intermediate, and high school categories. In primary school, students study for 6 years. They learn the basics like Arabic, English, mathematics, history, geography, social studies, and science. Students have to study for 12 years in order to graduate from high school. Intermediate and high school are six years of study, three years for each. After an intermediate school, students have the chance to go to a high school or a vocational school. Vocational schools help students to get a certificate in trades like welding, carpentry, and auto mechanic. High school starts in level 10 to 12, and students can choose to study either literary or scientific subjects. Thus, high school prepares students to go to college.

After high school, the final grade in the last level of high school will determine which college the students are going to attend. For example, when I was in high school, my final grade was 89 out of 100. At the time, the school of law would not accept grades less than 85; this qualified me to attend the school of law. If I had gotten a lower grade, I would not have been able to attend it.

There are two types of colleges in Iraq: public and private colleges. In the public colleges, the government pays all of the students' expenses like books, tuition, and rent, while in private colleges, students pay all of the expenses out of their own pockets. Usually, students go to private colleges if they do not get the required grade that qualifies them to attend public colleges. The time for college study is four years except for medical schools, which is six years. Every year has two semesters. Classes start at the beginning of October and end in June. There is just one mid-term break every year, and it is from December 25th to January 10th.

In conclusion, the education system in Iraq is public and free with some private schools and colleges, and I would like to quote Nelson Mandela who said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."



When we think about holidays, the first thing come to our mind is food, especially cookies. Iraq like many other countries has its own traditional family cookies that they make to celebrate Christmas and Eid. Although Iraq has many different ethnic and religious groups, they all make the same holiday cookie, which is klija. Family members gather together the day before Christmas or Eid to make klija cookies; usually, all family members participate in this ceremony even kids.

There are three simple steps to make these cookies, and the amount you want to make depends on how many people you want to serve. First, we need flour, yeast, cardamom, sugar, and salt, and we mix them together with one cup of melted butter and milk. The mixture will become the cookie dough. Second, we can use different kinds of fillings like dates, coconut, walnut, or sesame. Third, we roll out the dough in a thin layer and use any mold to shape the cookies; some people use their hands to shape the cookies into circles or half moons and fill them with dates or whatever filling they want and bake them at 400F for 20 minutes. Now we have a healthy and delicious cookie, and we serve it with tea to our guests.



Maria Alvarez



My name is Maria de Lourdes Alvarez, but everybody who knows me calls me "Lulu", and I really like it! I was born in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1968. This city is very colorful, and I love this city. My family moved to Mexico City in the same year I was born. My mom always took the time to talk to me a lot about the city where I was born. That is the reason why I love this beautiful city so much! In my house, we are six in total, three brothers and three sisters. I am the only one who finished high school. We were very poor at that time; my older siblings had to work since they were very young. I am so glad to have this kind of family because I have learned so much from them.

Conflict between the Oaxaca Union and the Government

I am the type of person who likes to have a good relationship with my friends and with all people. I grew up in Mexico City, but I was born in Oaxaca. The state of Oaxaca is known for its beautiful colors and delicious food. After I finished my technical school and got my certificate as a secretary, I moved to the city of Oaxaca to work in a public high school as a secretary. I started making friends there because it is something that I enjoy. While all of these are positive memories, Oaxaca is also known for the years-long conflict where public-school teachers fought with the government for their labor rights. This was a very important movement to me because I knew teachers always had to be improvising the ways to teach children, fight for better salaries and work toward democracy.

I was personally involved in this teachers' labor movement, but at that time, I did not have any precise knowledge of what exactly this fight meant. Inside of the school where I was working, the teachers were divided into two groups: one supported the movement intensely, and the other group did not support it that much. I was on the side of the first group. Both groups disagreed at the meetings. They had to discuss decisions and the way to participate in marches or strikes; I was introduced to this movement by the first group when they started talking to me about why they had been fighting for so long. I believed that I had to support them, but I think they brainwashed me to use me for their purposes, like spreading information to the opposition or finding information from the other group to give to them. The opposition group got mad after a while and saw me as weak, so they attacked me physically. Teachers who had been in this movement for many years knew how to play the game; they did not get in so deep in order to not get hurt, and the fight is still going on today. I do not want to say that the teachers are wrong; I am convinced that they had good reasons for their fight, like increasing salaries, getting better representation, better schools, and having more teaching supplies. However, at the same time, they

fought in a dirty way. I say this because of how these teachers did it inside of the school where I worked. I did not have to be involved in it, but I was.

By the time I realized the huge problem I was in, I had decided to run away and go back to Mexico City or to any other place. I felt disappointed with myself, and I just wanted to disappear from that place. Time was running out, and an opportunity arose. My youngest brother who had been living in the U.S. for a year asked me to immigrate to this country, and I accepted.

This bloody conflict changed the direction of my life. I felt so disappointed and discouraged that I left my family and friends, moved to the United States, and started all over again. I had to work harder than I was used to, and my baby son grew up without close family members. However, at the end of the day, I am so grateful to God and to this country. This experience helped me to feel more secure, and I am so happy to help others and trust in people again.

The Jarabe Tapatio

The Jarabe Tapatio is a very famous folk dance common in Guadalajara, which is located in northern Mexico. I would like to share some of the interesting history about the Jarabe Tapatio. It is a very old dance. In the beginning, it was considered provocative and inappropriate because it showed men trying to court women. The same dance today still shows men's interest in dancing to attract women, but now it is recognized for its exciting and vibrant performances. The music for the Jarabe Tapatio is played by mariachi bands with violins, trumpets, and guitars. The dancers wear traditional Mexican clothing. The girls' dresses are very bright and decorated with ribbons of different colors. The boys wear typical charro outfits, which consist of tight pants and short bolero jackets embroidered with bright metallic thread and decorated with shiny buttons and chains. The decorations also include traditional symbols of Mexico. In the pictures that I have added to my cultural paragraph, you can see my friend's daughter showing her dress and the way the hair is worn. Another friend's son is wearing the charro outfit, and you can also see the couple performing the dance. Children in Guadalajara learn the Jarabe Tapatio in grade school, and young people in the Quad Cities can also learn the Jarabe Tapatio at the Quad Cities Ballet Folklórico. You don't have to travel to Mexico to see this traditional cultural dance. I invite you to check the performance schedule of the Quad Cities Ballet Folklórico online at <http://www.theqcbf.com/> and then go to see this beautiful folk dance performed in person.



Kossi Ayikoue



My name is Kossi Ayikoue, and I was born on the 22nd of October 1989. I am from Togo. I am the first son of my parents, and I have two brothers, Oliver and Innocent, and a sister, Dzifa. I spent all of my adolescence in Lome, the capital of Togo where I grew up. I spent seven years in elementary school and four in high school. I started college in 2007 and after three years of hard study, I graduated and went to the university where I studied Spanish literature and the Hispano-American civilization. Before I went to the university after graduating from college, I worked at Amina-Togo, a firm where we processed women braids for three years. I quit school once again in 2014, and I worked at Espoir-Aluminium, an enterprise whose specialty is modern construction or architecture. I received a certificate as a technician in modern construction in early 2017 after I had managed many construction sites in my country successfully. I left Lome in July 2017 for the USA where I have started a new life. To be honest, I miss all of my family, all the people dear to me that I left in Togo. I find life in the US very different because I have met another culture and new friends. I am taking ESL classes to improve my speaking level and writing English. I am planning to go through engineering studies after ESL classes and create my own business later. I am also planning to go back to Togo in the next two years and get married to my fiancée, who is waiting for me. Together we are going to have two or three kids and live in our own house where our children will grow up. We will live in the USA and start our family. I hope I will have success in my business, and I want to help my family as much as I can, and I also want to help other people that need some help to develop and show their talent.

Traditional Guin Wedding in Togo

Wedding traditions are not the same in Togo. They differ according to the ethnicity. For example, to the Guin, the ethnicity of my father, marriage traditions are ancestral and particular. At the time of the Guin ancestors who settled in the south of Togo because they were persecuted by wars, marriage was a contract between two clans to join resources, become stronger, and protect their interests. However, since time has passed, the Guin wedding has become very complicated.

A Guin wedding can take time. The initial step is the dating process, during which the man presents the woman to his parents to let them know they are a couple. The man's parents ask information about the woman's family in order to judge if an eventual marriage could be possible. They do this to prevent discord because to Guin people not all the clan could marry due to historical conflicts. Another step is the engagement. This stage does not involve much, but the man still needs an approval from the father and the uncles. Then they can give a symbol, a ring or other thing, as an engagement or promise to marry. The final step is the one that involves the bride. It consists of announcing the engagement to the bride's family, especially to the father, because he is the one who can decide if the girl is ready to get

married or not. The dating process can be long, but it is very important for both families to get to know each other to prevent an eventual discord.

The introduction to the bride's family is also an important step of a Guin wedding. Two major points characterize this step. Firstly, there is the announcement to the parents of the bride: it is the desire to marry their daughter. This step is done by the man's family. During the meeting, the family asks for approval from the bride's father. Once the approval is granted, the dowry list is next. It is a list of goods that the bride's father must give to the family during the ceremony. The list is made by the aunts of the bride. It includes dresses, shoes, and jewelry. It also includes money. The introduction to the bride's family is very important for a Guin marriage. It permits the two sides to get to know each other and set a date for the dowry ceremony.

After the approval is given, the dowry list is sent to the family, and a date is set; then the dowry ceremony takes place. This step consists of three parts. Firstly, there is the official introduction of the husband to the bride's family in order to ask the bride to confirm if the man is the one she wants to marry. If she confirms, then her family can collect and check if the dowry list is respected, which is the second step. The third step is when benedictions are pronounced upon the couple. The couple is officially united and recognized by all the members of both families. The dowry is obligatory for a Guin wedding. It is very important because it is a symbol that the bride is given in marriage and doesn't belong to the family anymore.

The wedding celebrations may start as soon as the dowry process is completed. The celebration reunites families, friends, and guests. The couple gets prepared separately. They wear new clothes that are reserved especially for the occasion, and often, their clothes are made of the same material. Many dishes are served and everybody enjoys the day. The couple receives many gifts. After the celebration, the bride is taken to the husband's house by her aunts to start a family.

To sum up, marriage is one of the most important traditional ceremonies for Guin people. In Togo, there are as many wedding traditions as there are different ethnicities. However, the particularity of a Guin wedding is the long procedure that it follows, from the dating process to the wedding itself. To the Guin people in Togo, the traditional wedding has changed for generations, and the coming generations will probably experience something new as well.

One of the delicious cookies made in Togo is "souklezi". It is made of peanuts, sugar, and lemon, and its cooking process is not difficult at all. Drying the peanuts, dissolving sugar, and mixing all together are the main steps in the process. To make souklezi, we first need to clean 4 or 5 cups of peanuts with warm water so that we get rid of the bad nuts, and dry them in order to prevent them from getting stuck to one another. Second, we need to dissolve 5 or 6 cups of sugar in a pot at a high temperature. As the sugar is being dissolved, we must add one quarter cup of lemon juice to make it flavorful. The quantities need to be strictly respected. After dissolving the sugar, the next step will be pouring the peanuts in the dissolved sugar and mixing it all. After 10 to 15 minutes, our cookie is ready to be served. In Togo, "souklezi" can be served to guests at home or at parties. It is easy to cook, and it takes at least half an hour to be ready. Peanuts, sugar, and lemon are the main ingredients.



Mariam Diallo



My name is Mariam Diallo. I come from West Africa, most especially Guinea Conakry. I am 30 years old, and I am married, and I have two amazing children: A seven-year-old son and a five-year-old daughter. My wonderful mom lives in Guinea. She has four children. I have two sisters and one brother. I have been living in the United State since September of 2011. I got my citizenship in 2016. I went to school back home until I graduated from high school, but I did not finish university because I had to move to the U.S., but I now I have a better chance to finish college here. I have been studying ESL since I came to this country to be able to communicate better with citizens . First, I went to Black Hawk College's Outreach Center before I moved to the Black Hawk College main campus, and I went to Scott Community College for my CNA license. I worked at Tyson for one year, which was my first job. Also, I worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant for the last four years, which I enjoyed a lot because it helped me to improve my English skills. At this time, I am working at Kraft Food Company. I really hope to finish college to get a better job, and my biggest dream is to have my own business and help others have a better life. My dream is to be an LPN.

Fulani Wedding

Many people want to have a wedding when they meet someone they love and would want to spend their life with. Weddings differ from one country or culture to another. Indeed, Fulani weddings in Guinea include food preparation, religious procedures, a party, and a ceremony or reception after the wedding.

To start with, food preparation for a Fulani wedding in Guinea always starts in the afternoon of the day before the wedding. It ends the next morning. Food preparation happens in both households (the bride's and groom's). On the first day, there is no actual cooking done, only food prep like peeling vegetables, steaming corn flour, and making cow's milk from powdered milk. Making corn flour and cow's milk are forms of respect in both families. These are parts of the traditional meal that many people enjoy. Family and friends come from different countries to help. They stay either at the bride's or the groom's family's house. The next morning (the wedding day), people who spent the night get up as early as 4:00 a.m. to start cooking different kinds of dishes, and the rest of the people join when the sun rises. Food preparation happens in both households. This food preparation takes place independently, but it is usually similar in both houses. Around 7-8 a.m., breakfast is made for everyone. Breakfast usually consists of tea or coffee and bread or kankeliba. When the bride goes to sleep and wakes up, she does not do any work; everything is done for her. After breakfast, the bride and her bridesmaids go to a salon to get ready. They get their hair, nails, and makeup done, add henna, and put on outfits. Then, the groom and his friends meet them at the salon.

Second, the religious procedure is performed by men only. This ceremony takes place in the bride's house after the food preparation. The bride's family serves the special guests (the groom's family) when they arrive. After that, a conversation takes place between a representative from the bride's family and all of the men present. The groom's family asks the bride's family three times to help join their daughter to their son for a lawful marriage. The bride's family says "yes" three times. This is just a formality because that is the reason they have come; there has already been consent from both families before that day. Then, the groom's family presents a dowry gift to the bride like, "caw", or money, and money for members of the family. The money is going to be divided among the aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters. The representative from the bride's family informs everyone in the room of the gifts for the bride and the money. After this, two other people, usually those with great knowledge of the Quran, hold a handshake and say things to tie the knot. This conversation involves wording and language from the Quran.

Next, there is a party, which starts with the groom and groomsmen going to pick up the bride and the bridesmaids. They go to an officiant to sign the wedding certificate and exchange rings. They then go to the reception party to dance, collect gifts from friends, and cut the cake. Usually, they invite a singer, drummers, and comedians.

Finally, after the wedding ceremony, the bride is taken to her parents' house, where representatives (women only) come from the groom's family to perform the traditional wedding. The bride changes to regular clothes, and she sits in a chair. She performs "wuduh ablution", and then she is dressed in all white. When she gets up, her mom sits in her place. She is then taken to her new home (the groom's house), but usually the bride cries a lot, so they give her money to keep her calm. She is carried to the car first, and from the car, she is brought to the groom's house. When she arrives, they will sing to welcome her, and the groom's family is going to give money to the people who are singing and clapping. After that, they change her clothes to an outfit with money sewn in. The outfit consists of an umbrella with money around the edges, a headscarf with money, and a dress or shirt with money all around it. Sometimes, even her shoes will have money sewn in. They will then take the bride one final time to spend the night with her parents. When she returns to her husband's house the next day, she is given all of her gifts from both sides of the family. These include at least two to four suitcases with clothes, jewels, shoes, handbags, money, etc.



In conclusion, the Fulani wedding in Guinea involves many things, such as food preparation, a religious procedure, a party, and a traditional wedding after the ceremony. Fulani weddings are unique and amazing; it is a great feeling to witness a Fulani wedding. It is a wish for every young Fulani person to experience this moment in life.

One National dish of Guinea which many people enjoy eating for lunch is called “Hacco poute.” In English, the name of the dish means sweet potato leaves. The dish is very well known in West Africa. The way we cook the dish is very particular, and the preparation of sweet potato leaves requires a lot of time, like three to four hours, and many ingredients. There are two different ways to cook the dish, but I am going to explain one way how most people cook the dish. First, we clean the leaves with water. Then, we chop the leaves into very small pieces. After we are done with the chopping, we clean the leaves one last time, and then we put them into a pan and add water. Secondly, while the leaves are boiling, we cut the meat into small pieces and add it to the leaves. Then, we can add fresh fish and dried fish, and we mix the ingredients. Then, we add different kinds of vegetables like onions, green peppers, and hot peppers; then, we add some seasoning like a Maggi cube or Knorr chicken flavor. Furthermore, we add some salt when we finish adding all of these ingredients. We wait until they are well cooked. The final step is to grind okra in a blender and add it. We mix it with the leaves and add palm oil. Then, we stir often until everything is combined. To finish we taste the sauce to see if it is delicious, and we remove it from the heat. Then, we cook the rice in another pan. To serve, we put the rice on a plate. Then, we add the sweet potato leave sauce on top of the rice and enjoy it.



Esama Eltaib



My name is Esama. I was born in Sudan in 1972 in a small village named Elwali. I studied for fifteen years in Sudan. I had worked in a product company from 1996 to 1998 before I went to the United Arab Emirates in 1999. I had worked in the Abu Dhabi International Airport for five years before I came to the U.S.A. in 2004. I worked in South Dakota, Minnesota, and Virginia between 2004 and 2011. I moved to Illinois and got married in 2011. I worked for XPac for two years. Now, I have been working for the United States Postal Service as a mail carrier since 2013. I started studying at BHC in January 2017. My goal is to become an accountant, and I am striving to reach my goal. I have three kids, and we just had another baby at the end of March. Life in the U.S.A. is really hard because you have to do too many things at the same time.

My First Son's Birth

Can you imagine a life without kids? I cannot. In the Quran, Allah said, "Money and children adorn the life of people in the world." I was married once before I met my current wife, and that first marriage was childless. That changed when I married my wife, Maza. The happiest time in my life was when we had my first son: it included how we planned for the birth, the pregnancy, and the day of the birth itself.

First of all, I was working in Virginia before I moved to Illinois. I came to Illinois on July 21, 2011, to get married. My wife and I had an amazing wedding at the Ramada Hotel in Moline. After the wedding, I stayed in the Quad Cities for three days. Then I went back to Virginia to resign from my job there. I returned to Moline as a permanent resident on August 8, 2011. A couple of days later, my wife found out that she was pregnant. I felt then that I was the happiest man in the world, and we immediately began planning to have my mother come from Sudan to help with the baby. I had not seen my mother since 2009, and I was looking forward to presenting her with a grandchild from her oldest son. The following weeks were filled with shopping for a crib, clothing, and even diapers. We planned to be prepared for the arrival of our firstborn child.

About ten weeks before her due date, my wife's pregnancy became complex. The baby started losing water, and it was not gaining weight. The obstetrician sent my wife to see a specialist in Peoria. After they examined her, the doctors in Peoria kept her in the hospital there for a week. Then we returned to Moline, and the doctor here kept checking her weekly. It was a stressful time for both of us. My wife's doctor decided not to wait for the due date; he would deliver the baby two or three weeks earlier. I still remember that her due date was at the end of April.

It was April 5, 2012, a Thursday, when I went to O'Hare International Airport in Chicago to pick up my mother. On Friday, April 6, we went to the Illini Hospital in Silvis at seven o'clock in the morning. The doctor said, "We will deliver the baby today." The doctor told me that my mother and I could stay in the room with them if we wanted to, and we did. Finally, around 5 p.m., I heard my son crying, and my tears started running. My wife and I looked at each other and felt the deepest love we had ever known. Minutes later, the nurse placed my son in my arms. I felt that I owned the whole world and was holding it in my arms. Later that evening, I was overjoyed to receive a phone call from my father in Sudan. I was not only proud of my own son; I felt happy that my father was proud and happy for me.

In conclusion, one of the happiest moments in my life was the birth of my first son. This included the planning of the event, the pregnancy, and the actual day of the birth. It is not easy to live without kids if you would love to have them. I love taking responsibility for my family and doing my best to help them live better and more happily. My father taught me this, "The message for us is to take care or be responsible of our families, and then we will die in peace." I hope God will give children to those who want them, so they can experience the happiness that I have.

Unique Sudanese Coffee Making Traditions

Can you imagine the world without coffee? For me, I always start my day by having a cup of coffee. In Sudan, we have a unique way to make coffee. Every house in my village has special equipment to make coffee. This equipment consists of a mud or metal charcoal oven, a pan to roast the coffee beans, a grinder, a metal decanter for mixing the roasted coffee beans and spices, a coffee pot, and small coffee cups. The ingredients we use to make the coffee are these: green coffee beans, water, cardamom, ginger, and sugar. All of the family members gather together usually after breakfast, and the younger girls bring the coffee equipment. Then the mother starts making it. We love the smell of the coffee beans when they start to roast. We sing songs with the grinder while grinding the coffee beans. When we are having coffee, we always dress in our traditional clothes. We also serve coffee at events of both sadness and happiness. Making coffee the traditional way is a long process, so my wife only does it for me on my day off. My youngest daughter likes the smell of the coffee beans while my wife is roasting them. I brought all of the equipment for making coffee from Sudan. Wherever we live, we are supposed to stick with our unique Sudanese traditions, and I will stick with my coffee.



Ahmad Farraj



I am Ahmad from Jordan. I am 26 years old. My hometown is Amman, the capital of Jordan. I finished elementary school in Amman. Then, I moved with my family to Muscat, Oman. I lived in Oman for three years, and I finished high school there. After that, I went back to Jordan. I studied civil engineering at the University of Jordan, and I graduated in 2016. I worked in Jordan as a civil engineer for two years in a construction company. Then, I decided to come to the USA and continue my study. I am planning right now to finish the English class. After that I will apply for a master's degree in transportation engineering at one of the universities in the US.

Mansaf

There is a wide variety of techniques used in Jordanian cuisine. Jordan has many traditional foods, but the most famous one is mansaf. It is a traditional meal that is served for most occasions and contains rice, jameed (dried yogurt), and lamb. Moreover, mansaf comes with many traditional rituals, but the most important things are how we make it, how we eat it, and when we serve it.

First, mansaf requires a lot of work. To make mansaf, we need to wash the lamb meat and place it in the pot. Then we cook the meat with seasonings, salt, and pepper for 20 minutes until browned on all sides. After that, we add water to cover the meat, and we cook it for two hours. While the meat is cooking, we soak jameed (dried yogurt) in a large pot with water. Then we mix the water with the yogurt in a mixer. After that, we place the mixture in another pot and boil it over medium heat while constantly stirring the mixture with a wooden spoon until it reaches the desired consistency. After that, we add a little bit of the meat broth and the meat into the mixture, and we boil it together. Then we add mansaf seasoning and one spoon of ghee, which is a clarified butter made from the milk of a buffalo or cow. After all these steps, the mansaf will be ready to serve with rice and some nuts sprinkled on the rice.



Second, eating mansaf is one of the traditional customs in Jordan. After we put the mansaf on a big round plate, we place it on the table, and we stand around the table with all the other eaters. We eat mansaf with our right hand, and the other hand should be behind our back. To start, we put some jameed

sauce over the rice and lamb. Then we take a piece of lamb and mix it with the rice on the platter with our fingers. After we have a good amount in our hand, we shape it into a ball and drop it into our mouth in one bite, Our hand must not touch our mouth, and our head should be far from the plate. After that, we repeat these steps again and again until we are stuffed.

Third, we do mansaf for all the occasions in Jordan, for example, weddings, funerals, holidays and feasts. For instance, it is served on Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha, and especially on April 11, Jordan's Independence Day. It is not hard to find mansaf in Jordan. You might get invited to someone's home to try it. If not, all the restaurants in Jordan serve fantastic mansaf. Because of that, mansaf is considered the main dish in Jordan. In the past, mansaf was known to resolve conflicts between Jordanian tribes. Also, it is known that if you want to honor your guest, you do a mansaf. Bedouins in the Jordanian desert were the first who prepared mansaf. As the Bedouins move around a lot, they spread their recipes to other regions. Mansaf, in the beginning, was made with camel, bread, ghee or meat broth, rice and jameed, but now we use lamb meat.



In conclusion, mansaf comes with a lot of traditional rituals that make it the most famous dish in Jordan. You can find mansaf in all big cities in the USA, like Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. Also, almost all the Jordanian communities in the US do it in their homes. As a Jordanian, I advise you to try it because you will get a taste of the Jordanian culture.



Bedouins of Jordan

Bedouin is the name for people who live in the desert. Most Jordanians are of Bedouin origin, and they are known as Bedu. They do not have a certain place to live, so they move wherever the water and the food is. Their main source of living is through livestock farming. Therefore, all their dishes contain livestock meat. Bedouins live in black tents made of goat hair. The tents are also called "bet al-shaer". They build their tents, which are supported by five main columns and look rectangular, on hills not in valleys to avoid floods. Moreover, animals such as camels and horses are the main transportation for them. They usually wear lightweight and light-colored clothes, which protect them from the extreme heat in the desert. Bedouins are famous for their hospitality and generosity. They honor their guests by hosting them for three days without asking them any questions. Also, they sacrifice a camel for their guests. Moreover, Bedouins have their special celebrations that include music, poetry, and a special dance called Deheya. They use a traditional instrument called shabbaba, a long metal pipe with multiple holes.

Ayite Folly-Attoh



As the first-born with five brothers, I was born in Lome, Togo. I spent a quiet childhood, but my teenage years were very hard because I learned how to fight before having what I wanted. In my teenage years, I used to be an unruly boy sometimes, but I had an accident that changed my life, and I focused on my studies. I got my high school diploma in 2010. After that, I studied simultaneously English in an American school named "English Language Center" and Linguistics at the University of Lome. I graduated from the English Language Center but not from the university because I was demotivated. When I decided to drop out of the university, I became the manager of an Internet cafe. Six months later, I received training in cabling and disc jockeying and became a disc jockey, a job that I was doing before coming to the U.S. in 2017. I like to listen to music, watch movies, and play soccer.

Disc Jockeying in Togo and in the United States

We all have a kind of hobby or passion that we dedicate our time to. Often, people follow those passions to the point of making it a job. As a big fan of music, I used to be a disc jockey in my country. At first, I started to play music just for fun, but a friend of mine suggested that I make it my livelihood. After one year of training, and for six years, I was a disc jockey, playing music all around my country. What do you have to know about disc jockeying? How is practicing this profession different in the United States and Togo? Are there some similarities between the two countries though? Well, disc jockeying differs in the two countries in terms of occasions, the expectations of the audience, and the sound system equipment while it is similar in terms of animation.

The first difference is the occasions for which a DJ is required. A disc jockey, or DJ, is a person who plays music for an audience in a particular place. In Togo, people call on DJs for any kind of activity. He can be called for a birthday party, a wedding, a promotional event, a performance in a night club and even for the sound system in a mortuary. When I was in Togo, for example, I used to liven promotional animation for banks and stores doing promotions for their goods and products. I used to play and animate outside so that people would know what was going on inside. On the contrary, according to my own experience, DJs in the U.S. are required mostly in night clubs and for weddings. I went to many American birthday parties where there was no DJ, something that rarely happens in my country.

Another difference is the interest the audience has in the DJ. Since in the U.S. disc jockeying takes part mostly in night clubs, it is a little easier than in Togo. In fact, young people mostly go out just to have fun, and they are the only group of people who is a fan of the DJs' performances in this country. The elders are not really interested in their performances. Therefore, they generally agree with most of the songs the DJ plays and are not surprised by his mixing styles. On the other hand, in Togo, the audience judges every single song that is being played. The DJ has to make people dance and keep them in suspense; that is his only job at a party. For example, you will notice some "Oooh! Aaah!" as long as he is playing enticing music that they like, and you will see many people on the dance floor. On the contrary, when they do not agree, people will just refuse to dance and boo the DJ. Even if he has an extraordinary

mixing style, people will keep asking him to just make them dance; otherwise, they will leave the show. Personally, I liked those comments and feelings from the audience because it helped me know if I was doing a good job or not.

In addition to the circumstances of performing and the interest of the audience, the sound system equipment differs from one country to another. In Togo, there are many good DJs, but they lack equipment. You can see them using old decks, amplifiers, and mixing tables. The main reason is that the new ones are so expensive that they cannot afford them. I suffered many times from that in the past because I did not have much equipment. In fact, I had to rent the equipment from a person who used to take almost half of my earnings. Even though I loved my job, knowing that I could not afford my own equipment made me feel bad. I had started saving money to buy it when I got my visa to the U.S. On the other hand, in the U.S., DJs use the equipment of the new generation. While visiting some night clubs, I saw the latest equipment like new numeric mixing consoles, sound compressors, and quadruple readers. I was so impressed because the equipment seems to be simpler to get, and it makes the job easier.



The main similarity DJs in the two countries have is the animation in itself. In both countries, DJs are also “Masters of Ceremonies”. They can try to converse with the audience and liven the show by giving some information or directions from time to time. For example, in the U.S., at weddings, DJs also introduce the bride and groom, the bridesmaids, and the groomsmen. Togolese DJs on the other hand, animate more in night clubs and pubs than at weddings, where there usually is a committed Master of Ceremony.

All things considered, it is obvious that there are some differences in the practice of disc jockeying. Even though there are many differences in the two countries, disc jockeying remains an interesting job with a lot of fun in Togo as well as in the United States. With better equipment, Togolese disc jockeys will be able to accomplish great things. During the years that I did that job, I felt very comfortable because I was doing something that I loved. That job helped me achieve some goals in my life; I traveled all over my country and made money and acquaintances because of it. Now I am in the U.S. and will focus on my studies for a while, but as a fan of music, I’m planning to help on the verge DJs of my country by creating a training structure with qualified DJs who can help them progress. I can also restart doing the job if the passion becomes stronger than me.

Everybody has a specific cultural item. I am Guin, an ethnic group based in the southeast of Togo. In my culture, we have a tradition, which years after is still drawing crowds and arousing the curiosity of people who are not from our culture. That famous celebration is called “Epe Ekpe”. One part of the celebration of “Epe Ekpe” is one of the most anticipated moments in Togo: “The Taking of the Sacred Stone”. From what elders have told us about it, that celebration dates from the 17th century and marks the first day of the year for my people. That celebration always happens in early September. According to the story, the Guin people came from Elmina in current Ghana. Persecuted, they had to move to a quiet place. During their exodus, the priests promised to the divinities to be grateful if they give them that place. When they arrived in Glidji, in the current Togo, they had the revelation that it was the chosen place. To prove that, they were told that there was a sacred stone in the forest next to them. Since that time, every year, the priests go to that forest and pick the annual sacred stone. The stone has different colors, which predict the events that will happen in the year. Red, black, blue, green or white are some of them. The stone always delivers a message and the way the citizens must behave all year long. After the ceremony, the festivities start, and people share the typical couscous of the culture, which is called “Yaka Oquin”. That celebration is well-known in Africa and even abroad. It is so famous that people come from all around the world to take part in it.

Pape Gning



My name is Pape Latyr Gning, I am from Senegal, West Africa. I have nine siblings with the same mother and same father, which I think is cool. I am the youngest among four sisters and five brothers. I went to SEED Academy, a school based on education and sports sponsored by Nike. I started my NBA career when I was at Jacksonville College in 2013. I have been living in the Quad Cities with my brother for about five years now. I came to the US because I had a full scholarship to come and play college basketball in Texas. Now, I work at Jumers full time and go to school at Black Hawk College. I enjoy working out and playing basketball with my friends. Rice is my favorite food, and I can eat it all the time.

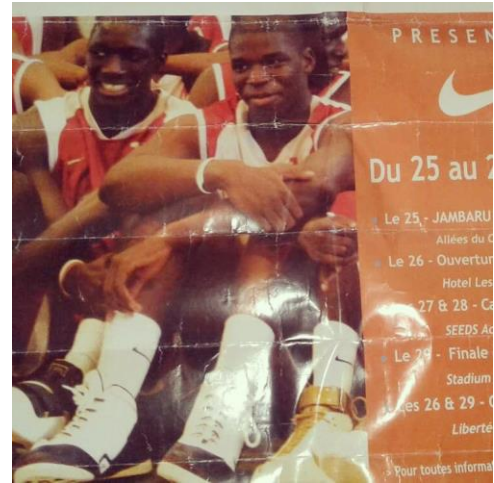
How I Fell in Love with Basketball

I started playing basketball because of my older brother. I played soccer first because it is the most practical and the most famous sport in my country, Senegal, West Africa. One of my brothers was a famous basketball player back then, and people really admired him for his talent. I wanted to be famous too, but not as a basketball player, as soccer player. I could not take basketball seriously because I thought it was a soft sport until I started going and watching my brother play. I was surprised when I saw lot of contact and how tough, hard and challenging it really was. My friends were not interested in playing basketball, so it was not easy for me to learn it unfortunately. I was kind of interested after watching my brother played that day, so I decided to give it a try. I asked my brother to take me to the coach so I could join the developing team. I had to hide the fact that I was going to join a basketball team to my friends; that is how embarrassing it was.

I fell in love on the first day I touched the ball. Since then, I started following my heart playing more basketball and less soccer. From then, I was seriously focused on playing basketball because I wanted to be as good as my brother. For the first time, I heard people saying, “Malick’s brother is getting better and is going to be a great basketball player.” I could not stand that because my brother’s name always came up, but not mine. I was in middle school at that time. One day, I heard about SEED Academy. Launched in 2002, the SEED Academy is the first basketball student-athlete academy in Africa. Up to 40 high potential student-athletes, boys and girls, live, train and work towards achieving their goal of attending American universities. Everything is financed by the academy, so once you make it, you will not have to worry about anything financially. I thought I was not that good until they recruited me. I had to sacrifice a lot of stuff because it is really far away from my home, about 3 hours away, and it seemed like the country to me to a city boy. I had to leave my family, friends and the city. It was a big

deal to me because all I wanted was to become good enough to make it to the USA. I guess I was good enough to make it because we were more than one hundred trying to get picked. The academy needed ten players, and fortunately I was among the ten players.

Once I made it there, I had to be a better student first because that is what they care about the most, more than a good athlete. I spent three years there. Those three years were full of pain, joy and achievements. I had to be a good basketball player to be part of the 20 and under national team. From there, I wanted more. I was thinking about coming to the USA to continue my dream, which was to attempt college and then make it to the NBA. We had some teammates who made it to the NBA, so why not me? The next big thing was to show my coaches that I was ready to go pursue my dreams to the next level. It was not easy at all because all my teammates were as good as I was, but as we all know, “When it’s time, it’s time.” I will never forget the day Brian Benjamin, the main guy who was in charge of what it takes to bring us here, called me to let me know that I finally had a full scholarship to go play college basketball in the US. I could not believe it! In my deep thought, without being arrogant at all, I thought, “I deserve it because of all the sacrifices and decisions I took...all those ups and downs I faced, all those challenges I went through with my teammates,” because we all wanted the same goals. So you have to be talented and a hard worker to stand out from the rest of your great teammates who were waiting for their moment to shine.



I made it to America in 2013. I was very excited about my new student athlete life. Unfortunately, something happened, and things did not work out as I planned due to some international athlete rules. I was hurt, and I had never been so discouraged as I was then. I did not know what to do because I was really new in this country, and my English was not that good. I could not go back to school for almost four years and could not work at all either. My life was a total struggle. I came here to study and play college basketball; then suddenly everything was gone. What a disaster! I did not quit. I kept asking for help left and right. I wanted to go back to school so badly. I went back and forth from my house to Black Hawk College to figure out what I had to do to fix my situation so that I could join the courses. That is how I met Janet, who really wished she could do something to help me so that I could start my classes.

The first thing I did when I got my situation fixed was to see Janet so I could register for school. Here I am trying to finish school knowing that I cannot make it to the NBA, but I have a lot of goals to achieve still. Never underestimate yourself. Only you can make it happen if you believe it. Always put education first; that is the key. I cannot wait to tell you about my next achievement.

Something really popular in my country Senegal, West Africa, is a strong green tea called “ataya”. It is a three cups ritual of serving and can take about three or four hours to make. People make ataya every day right after they are done eating, just by preference. In this case, it can be after breakfast, lunch or dinner, but in general, people’s favorite time to make it is right after lunch. At that time, they would have time to play cards or a long conversation. It is more like just hanging out with friends with their favorite snack (peanuts). The tea is really sweet, hot and strong and is poured back and forth into another glass to create a foam on the top and to mix the sugar. To make ataya, you are going need the green tea, sugar and lots of mint. The first serve is always the stronger, and it is called “leuweul”. It will get less strong as long as we keep making it. The second serving is called “deuxieme,” and the last one is called “troisieme.”



Adisa Iriskic



Hello, my name is Adisa, and originally, I am from Bosnia and Herzegovina. I studied nursing, and I was a registered nurse in Bosnia for two years before I moved to the USA. I moved to the United States in 2006 and worked as an au pair for an American family. In 2007, I met my husband who is also from Bosnia, and we got married in 2008, which resulted in another move to the Quad Cities. We have two kids, and we currently live in Moline. My goal is to study nursing and practice as one.

Life in Bosnia after the War

The Bosnian war started in 1992 and ended in 1995. After the Dayton contract was signed by all three presidents of the involved states, Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia, per Dayton, the war was over. Even though the war was stopped, Bosnia and its people had a long road of recovery in front of them. The economy and people's lifestyles were destroyed, and the country was divided inside.

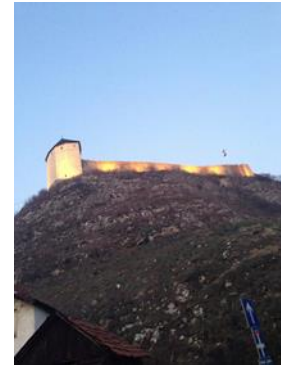
First of all, the Bosnian economy, like everything else, was completely destroyed. Factories were burned to the ground, which caused a high rate of unemployment. For instance, people who were physically able to work did not have a job because there were only few places that were open and running at that time. Since the whole country was in despair, and a few of factories that were not destroyed during the war were running but had very low production and very slow economic growth, it gave a little hope, but it was not nearly enough for economic recovery. Another issue that Bosnia had at that time was corruption, which was a big problem. Corruption was everywhere, and bribery became a normality; for example, if you went to the hospital, you could bribe nurses or doctors by giving them small gifts or a small amount of money to look after you better. Besides this, another issue that Bosnia was going through was the destruction of agriculture and livestock, which led to yet another problem: hunger. For instance, my grandfather, was a farmer all of his life, and he owned a huge farm, but when the war started, he was forced to leave everything behind, the farm, the animals, and all his personal possessions, and all of these things had been stolen or destroyed by the time he was able to go back.



Gradina

Furthermore, the lifestyle was destroyed. Most people went from having everything to having nothing, or just the bare minimum, which led to an issue with refugees. For instance, some people left the country and moved to different countries, but the majority of people stayed, and the ones that stayed would live in abandoned buildings like schools or hospitals that were halfway destroyed. Also, health care was very bad at that time in Bosnia because of the lack of medical supplies, medications, and functioning hospitals. In bigger cities, some of the hospitals were running and trying to help and cure people, but unfortunately in most cases the lack of medication and supplies just sped up the dying process, especially for the elderly and children. Poverty was another issue because of unemployment and many other factors that the country was dealing with; for example, people did not have any income, which is necessary for buying food, clothes or other supplies necessary for basic needs.

The most significant issue, even today, is that the country was divided into three different parts. Once a peaceful country with a multicultural population, the country was divided, and you have borders inside the borders. In other words, you have three entities inside one country: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic Srpska and District Brcko. For example, Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia, is in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the city where my parents live is about 100 kilometers from Sarajevo, and it is in the part of Bosnia that belongs to the Republic Srpska, which is also part of Bosnia. To clarify, Republica Srpska is a republic inside of Bosnia, and it is one of the three entities Bosnia got divided into. The next issue is the political system in Bosnia, which is very complicated; for instance, at one point Bosnia had three presidents that would rotate every four months or so, and they were picked from every district that Bosnia was divided into. Therefore, tension between nations was yet another problem at that time in Bosnia. Since the wounds were still fresh from the war, people had certain tensions among each other. During the war, a lot of people lost loved ones, especially in cities like Srebrenica where genocide took place, and some of the mass graves have not been discovered yet. People still grieve their losses, everybody in their own way, and try to move on even though it is very difficult to recover from something like this.



Old Town Tesanj

Anyhow, this was Bosnia back in 1995, which was 24 years ago. Since then, a lot of things have improved; the economy is much better, and the lifestyle is nicer, buildings have been rebuilt, schools and hospitals are up and running, the agriculture has recovered, and the country seems to be going in a good direction. Even though the country is still divided into three entities, people have learned to live together and be civil. Overall, Bosnia is a very small country that has been through a lot, got destroyed economically, socially and is divided in three parts, but it is building itself up all over again.

Tufahija (Bosnian Dessert)

A traditional Bosnian dessert is called tufahija, and it is made of walnut-stuffed apples, and it is served with Bosnian coffee or after a meal. Tufahija is a delicious and refreshing dessert that is very popular in Bosnia. Making this dessert is very easy, and it contains only few ingredients: apples, honey, walnuts, lemon juice, water, sugar and whipping cream.

The first thing to do is peel the apples and take out the apple core, put the apples in the water together with the sugar and lemon juice, and bring it to a boil. Then on medium heat, cook the apples for 20 minutes, just be careful not to overcook them. After 20 minutes take the apples out and let them cool off. Keep boiling the remaining water, sugar and lemon juice until you get syrup. In a separate bowl, combine the crushed walnuts, honey and whipping cream; stir well. By this point, the apples should be cool enough to start filling them up. Take the mixture that you prepared from the walnuts, honey and whipping cream and stuff the apples with it. After the stuffing is done, take some extra whipping cream and decorate the dessert. On a decorative plate, put couple of tablespoons of syrup and put the apple on top of it. Grab a fork and enjoy!



Kalthoum Kadfour



My name is Kalthoum. I am from Sudan. I was born and grew up in a small city called Almorda in the Umdurman region. I went to Hy Aldobat primary school. I studied at Umdurman High School for Girls, and then I went to Alahlia University in Umdurman. I traveled to Egypt where I applied as an asylum seeker. I worked in Egypt as an interpreter in an organization called RLAP (The Resettlement Legal Aid Project), which was working with UNHCR (The United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees). I have two boys and five daughters. I love big families because I grew up with six brothers and one sister. I have been in the U.S since October of 2015 where I changed my career to work in the health care field as a comfort companion where I guard fall or impulsive precaution patients, but I am going to work on the patient care team (PTCH) this year. My dream is to become a registered nurse. I hope to work in the same hospital with my oldest daughter who wants to become a pediatrician.

Sudan's Recent Revolution

Have you heard about Sudan's recent revolution? Tens of thousands of people have been protesting in Sudan. The Sudanese people are calling on the dictators to step down and leave office. People have been protesting for many reasons, initially for the rising prices of bread and other products, the devaluation of the currency of the economy, and the loss of dignity, justice, peace, and freedom.

President Abshir has been controlling the Sudanese nation for thirty years. During this regime, he has destroyed the agricultural sector, education, the economy, health, and construction. For all these reasons, people have made peaceful protests to change the regime.

At the end of 2018, the government started raising the prices of bread and other products, which led people to protest in the streets, calling the government leaders to step down and take the president to the International Criminal Court. Due to these reasons and humanities crimes in the civil wars in the west of Sudan, people have been blocked from access to the internet. In addition, there have been human rights violations committed against the demonstrators; for example, people have been killed and arrested for no reason, except asking about their rights of thought and freedoms. Many horrible things happened besides the killings committed against the demonstrators. They have been raped and tortured in detention. These violations do not distinguish between male or female, young or old. Also, they throw Molotov cocktails in the houses, which harm families.

When protestors marched to parliament in December, they were met with security forces, tear gas, and shots to try to block them from reaching parliament.

Indeed, more than 100 protesters have been killed by the government. The people still demand the fall of the regime; furthermore, there is no end to the number of protesters. Thus, the biggest challenge the president has ever faced is only continuing to grow. They need the president to take power in the country through a series of popular elections and make constitutional amendment that give every citizen his or her rights.

Sudanese Women's Dresses

This is Sudanese women's national costume. It distinguishes Sudanese women from other nationalities. We call it toob in our language, and it is part of Sudanese culture. In addition, it expresses Sudanese identity. It covers the whole woman's body from the head down to the feet. The woman can wear a shirt and a skirt; then, she can tie the side of the toob at her waist and wrap it around to her head and pull it under her chin to her shoulder. It can be made from cotton, polyester or another type of material. Girls are not allowed to wear it, only women can, especially after marriage. Furthermore, there is a connection between toob and decoration with Henna, which a sign of marriage, too.



Godonou Koutemon



My name is Koutemon, Godonou Michel Wenceslas. I am from Benin in West Africa. I was born in Adjohoun, my mother's village, where I grew up. I was born in a polygamous family. I have ten siblings alive: five girls and five boys. I got my high school diploma in 2006 from Adjohoun High School. I studied Chemistry Biology Geology (CBG), and I got a master's degree in hydrobiology in February, 2013, from the University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin. I passed the state test in July, 2014, and worked as a biology teacher since then. I left my job in March, 2016, and moved to the United States with the intention to pursue my studies and get my PhD, so I could work as a teacher in my country's universities. Once in the U.S., I realized that things are not like I thought. I started taking English as Second Language (ESL) classes at the Black Hawk College Outreach Center in level 3B in January, 2017. After two semesters, I was transferred to the Academic ESL Program at the Quad Cities Campus. After tremendous analyses, I chose to become a physician assistant or to pursue my study in hydrobiology especially in fish farming. I know that it is a big deal to me, but I will try my best to reach my goal.

Polygamy in Benin

The choice of the partner with whom you will spend your life is a challenge. Sometimes, it turns bad and leads to polygamy, a practice in which a man gets married to at least two women that is still practiced around the world particularly in my country, Benin. Many reasons lead people to engage in this practice, and it generates tremendous consequences.

As causes for polygamy in my country, we can cite tradition, labor, and fertility problems. Traditionally, there are certain ethnic groups in Benin that believe that having many wives is a synonym of wealth. What I mean is that it shows that you have enough money to support many wives and their children. So if you belong to these ethnic groups, and you decide to have only one wife, your parents will not be proud of you, and you do not have any respect in the community. Another reason that leads people to polygamy is labor. As Benin lacks in agricultural engineering, most of its farm work is based on labor, so farmers invest in labor. As a result, they believe that they need to have many children who will help them with farm work. Another point to consider as a cause of polygamy is the problem of fertility. As it is known in the world, the result of marriage is children. If you do not have at least one child in your life in my country, it is a big problem for you in your society. Due to that, after many years of marriage, if the couple is still not able to have a son, then the parents (on both sides) start asking questions. Advisors, the man's parents and friends, push the man to get married to another woman, or they push him to cheat on his wife. While cheating, if the other woman becomes pregnant, she is welcomed by the family-in-law.

The very first consequence that polygamy leads to is the lack of love in the relationships, which creates division between family members and makes the lives of the heirs harder. What I mean is how can a man treat his wives (at least two) exactly the same way? In fact, an uncle of mine has been trying to do so, but it does not work as well. For instance, he has two wives living in different villages (about six miles between the villages), and he is working as a teacher in the village of one of his wives. How many days

will he spend with the second wife? He stays with the second wife only on weekends, which is not fair. Another problem with polygamy in my country is the division. In fact, it is not easy to put the children of these many wives together. As siblings, the children who are supposed to have the same surname do not want to do things together; they do not want to share things. I mean the wives will never have the same amount of money, and so they cannot take care of their children the same way financially. Since mothers love their children more than anyone, they try to give their children the best they can, which creates jealousy between these children and the other children whose mother(s) cannot afford as much for them. The biggest problem with polygamy in my country is the inheritance. Of course, it is a custom in my country that after the death of the parents, their belongings go to their children. This idea brings plenty of problems in polygamous families. Children of all these sides do not have the same level of education or the same understanding of life. So depending on their best understanding of life, some want the whole inheritance for themselves, which is the source of big trouble and can lead to death between brothers. Sometimes, some irresponsible children decide to kill the other mother(s) or even their father only for the inheritance.

Polygamy is a very bad practice with tremendous consequences, which is still in practice in Benin, my country. It can happen easily due to the poor living conditions in this area, including agricultural system, the poverty, the level of education, and so on. I hope, someday, people show awareness of the consequences of this practice and reduce it as much as possible or even stop it.

Each country has its dishes, which make it different from others. Among special dishes we enjoy in Benin, we have “sankpiti,” my favorite one when I was studying at the university. It is made of beans and corn. It contains protein, so we do not need fish, eggs or meat. You can eat sankpiti at any time, so it can be served for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Do not worry about how to cook sankpiti because it is pretty easy. Pour water into a pot and cover it; wait until it boils; then pour your beans in. Wait again until your beans are cooked, and now you can add a desired amount of salt, garlic, onion, and hot pepper. With a spoon, mix it all together. Please do not add anything if your beans are not ready yet; otherwise, your beans will not cook. Now, it is time to add palm oil and corn flour; then you cover the mixture for a while. Finally, use the backside of a spatula to mix it all together vigorously.



Sourabh Lahoti



My name is Sourabh Lahoti. I was born and brought up in the central part of India in Indore, Madhya Pradesh. My parents are Vinod Lahoti and Kalpana Lahoti. I have one younger brother. I got married in 2007 to Rajeshree Lahoti, and we are blessed with two daughters: Shreshtha Lahoti and Darshi Lahoti. I earned a master's degree in computer science before I came to the USA in 2003. I have many hobbies like playing and watching different sports: cricket, soccer, and chess are a few of these. I also enjoy watching comedy movies and serials, and I like to cook occasionally.

Cricket Is Not Just a Sport; It's a Religion in India

Cricket is the most popular sport in India. It is like soccer in European countries. In 1800, cricket was invented in the southeast part of England, formerly known as Britain. Cricket started getting popular in England, and it eventually became the national sport. During the 1800s, India was ruled by the British. They brought this sport to India, and it was popular between the colonizing officers and wealthy Indian people. Rich Indian families used to send their children to England for higher education, which infused them with a passion for the game. After independence, the popularity of the sport trickled down to the grassroots of the country. Nowadays, cricket is practically a religion in India; we adore it, love it, and worship it.

In the 1983 Cricket World Cup, Team India was known as a young team with potential. They were not expected to last long in the tournament, but they surprised the world by winning it. Team India started building their success by winning different tournaments, which led to a greater popularity of the sport. The Indian cricket team has had many legendary players, and one of my favorites, Sachin Tendulkar, is called the God of Cricket. In India, people think and talk about cricket every day, all the time, while they are walking, eating, drinking, and working. The enthusiasm and the excitement for cricket is higher than anything else. For years, the national sport of India has been hockey, but kids are now getting influenced by the popularity of cricket; in fact, they grow up knowing cricket from birth. Cricket fans in India experience a passion, a shared craze, and an excitement that cannot be matched by any other sport.

There are two instances that show you my personal love for the sport. When I was in eighth grade, there was a cricket match between India and Pakistan. I had a final exam on that same day, but I

decided to write just enough answers to pass the test, and then I ran home to catch the match. Now, in my office, it is a known fact that I will take a vacation day to watch a cricket game. Cricket works as a stress reliever for most Indians as they can forget about their day-to-day worries by enjoying a game of cricket by playing it or watching it. This also helps our kids to learn the importance of teamwork that is crucial to play the game and succeed in life.

Nowadays, there are many cricket leagues that allow young Indian players to showcase and develop their talent. These leagues allow international players to play along with domestic players, so the level of the game is highly competitive; in fact, it helps Indian players improve and prepare to play for the national teams. The most famous leagues currently playing in India are the Indian Premier League (IPL), the Karnataka Premier League (KPL) and the Tamil Nadu Premier League (TNPL). Through such tournaments, domestic players also earn a decent amount of money. This has made cricket a viable career choice for kids, and parents are also supporting them due to the many opportunities the sport offers.

Today India has not only accepted this exciting leftover from colonial times, but cherishes it with a collective obsession that has turned cricket into a national religion. No matter what our form of worship is, all Indians sit glued to their screens on match days and pray to their gods for our team's success. We celebrate victories with songs, firecrackers, and colorful parades; and we mourn our losses with the reinforced determination to practice harder, play harder, and perform better.

“Bura Na Mano Holi Hai” is a common phrase heard when friends and family put colors on each other during the Holi festival celebration. It is an advance apology, saying to others “Don’t get mad, feel bad or mind;” it is Holi, a time when people throw water colors at each other. There are many festivals that Hindus celebrate, and one of my favorites is Holi. Holi is also known as the festival of colors. It is based on a traditional story about a demon king named “Hiranyakashyap,” who got a blessing from a god so that neither humans nor animals could kill him during the day or night. After getting this blessing from the god, he believed that he was immortal and asked people to pray to him instead of to the god. When his son Prahalad refused to worship him as he was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu, Hiranyakashyap created many strategies to kill his own son, but they all failed. Finally, he asked his sister to hold Prahalad and sit in the fire as she was blessed by god to never get harmed by fire, but that also failed. Then during the evening, Lord Vishnu suddenly appeared, half in human and half in animal form, and killed the demon king Hiranyakashyap. Based on that, people of the Hindu religion started celebrating the Holi festival every year. The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, and the celebration lasts for two days. The first day is “Holi Dhawan” when they burn a heap of sticks in the middle of the street from the evening until the morning of the next day. On the next day, fun, excitement and a lot of joy begins by playing colors with your friends and family. This festival is a sign of the end of winter and the start of summer in India. People play colors on the street while singing Holi songs and dancing to the music together with their family, friends, and neighbors. In the afternoon, people visit each other’s homes and playfully throw colors at each other. On this day, people enjoy delicious foods and sweets. After playing Holi all day, they take baths, put on new clothes, and go to meet their friends and neighbors.



Salamata Maiga



My name is Salamata Maiga. I was born on September 1978 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (West Africa). I am from a royal family, and I have two brothers and two sisters who are all married with children. Three of my siblings live in Burkina Faso, and one lives in France. Before coming to the USA in 2014, I received my bachelor's degree in Computer Science. I have worked for fifteen years from being a sales person to a supervisor in a church's TV station. My first goal was to become a nurse because I like to help people, and I cannot stand seeing somebody in pain, but at the same time, I cannot support seeing blood. Therefore, I changed my mind to study agriculture after ESL. I am married to a wonderful man who works full time and studies at the same time. I have two children for now. I am a Christian, and I like going to church to be with my brethren to praise and worship our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. I like listening to gospel music, watching Christian movies and preaches. When I am done with my studies and homework, I spend the rest of my time with my children playing some games or watching Emmanuel.TV or TBN or reading the Bible. My hope and dreams are to get a degree here in the US in whatever I study, work, and help whoever I can help to succeed here and in my home country Burkina Faso.

The Fulani People

Burkina Faso, also called country of integrity in West Africa, is a small parliamentary republic with more than twenty million people. Burkina Faso is a French speaking country that uses CFA franc as currency. It has more than sixty-five languages and ethnic groups, among which are the Fulani, my mother's ethnic group. The Fulani, also called Peulhs or Fulbe in Burkina Faso, are a nomadic ethnic group completely different from others with a different culture, language, and religion; they live especially in the northern part of Burkina Faso. The Fulani people are defined by two aspects: their origin and their way of life.

In Burkina Faso there is a proverb that says, "Tell me your ethnicity, and I will tell you what kind of person you are." For example, if you tell someone that you are Peulh, they will have a mindset about your character as not being trustworthy. The Fulani people are the second major ethnic group in Burkina Faso, but nobody can say where exactly they are from. The Fulani people are said to have originated from Macina in the Fouta Jalon, which is in central Guinea and from Upper Egypt. According to *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*, "Many Fulani traced their beginning to the Senegambia area where, as early as 1000 years ago, they adopted a pastoral livelihood and began moving around with their herds of cattle [...]. They were a pastoral group who were a mix of Arabic and local people, and they were always moving to escape drought because of their cattle and sheep" ("Fulani", p.222). The Fulani are nomadic cattle herders, who live everywhere in Africa, going from Sudan in the East to Senegal in the West,



traveling from one place to another and looking for food for their cattle. Their origin affected the way they dressed because they were descendants of the Arabic, and they lived in desert areas with their cattle. Their mode of clothing was mostly composed of long robes worn over pants and a long turban wrapped around their head, but today, even though they are still wearing the same clothes as before, their clothing has changed a lot because they clothe themselves like everybody. Because of the influence of Islam, the Fulani people adopted the Muslim religion as their own. The Fulani people's migration is also due to their desire to spread the Islamic religion they inherited from their Arabic origin throughout Africa. For example, for centuries the Fulani people had led a so-called "Islamic holy war" or "Jihad" in some West African countries because of their big powerful kingdoms totally devoted to Islam.

The way the Fulani live is totally different from other ethnic groups. At the beginning, people felt rejected because they could not associate themselves with the Fulani. The Fulani's lifestyle did not allow them to marry anyone from other ethnic groups because they were always moving from town to town; therefore, they could only marry their cousins and live among themselves. They used to live in tents, and they did not build houses because they were always moving according to the seasons, to seek food for their cattle and sheep. All family members lived together in the same place because family is vital to their social unity; they do everything together, including building their tents, doing a little farming when necessary, and raising children together. The younger ones worked for the elderly by pasturing the animals, cooking, and cleaning. They did not have office jobs because they did not go to school. In fact, when the colonizers came from Europe to the Fulani villages to take their children for school, they preferred to hide their own children, and they sent their slaves' children who became educated and ended up becoming the rulers of the country. Today, they have become more settled, and their devotion to animals rather than agriculture has led to problems with other ethnic groups because Fulani's animals often enter the farmers' fields and destroy their crops.



To conclude, the Fulani are an ethnic group totally different from other people, ranging from their origin to their lifestyle. Their origin is not clear, and people are still searching to find out where the Fulani are really from. Their lifestyle made other ethnic groups stay away from them for a long time, considering that they seemed too proud to be associated with anyone else. Today, the Fulani are getting married to other ethnic groups more and more even though there are still some exceptions. They are going to school because they have learned the necessity of education, and a lot of them are getting good jobs in offices leaving the herder's life behind them. From being only Muslim, there are now more and more Fulani Christians, and some even practice other religions. They did not change their nomadic lifestyle because they are still traveling around the region; however, it is not because of the animals anymore, but to get more education and knowledge. I know about the Fulani people because my mother is Fulani, and she is light-skinned with smooth and curly hair like the Arabic people. My mother used to tell me about her family's story, but it was my grandfather who told me everything about the Fulani people because he was a teacher. He told how he went to school by himself because his parents did not want him to be changed or transformed by the "Tubabu" (meaning white people), so he followed his friends from the other ethnic groups to go to school. He told me that, at that time, they were half-naked without shoes, and they had to walk miles to get to school, but because he had decided to succeed, he did not give up, even with all the difficulties. My grandfather was the one who gave me the



love for school and the desire to succeed, he used to tell me, “My Child, never give up on studying, and don’t do like your mother who refused to go to school because one day you will get the benefit of your efforts.”

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Burkina Faso is a small country in West Africa with sixty-five different cultures and languages. In my culture, there is a dish called degue, which is made with millet flour and yogurt. To prepare this dish, you mix the millet flour with water to make a paste, which you work with your fingers to make very small bullets. When you are done making the bullets, then you steam them until you smell the millet odor before removing it from the fire. In one saucepan, add butter to your degue bullets and mix it together well and set it aside. In another saucepan, mix together yogurt, sour cream, condensed milk, and sugar. After you finish your yogurt mixture, you add your degue bullets, mix, and put it in the fridge for about one hour or just add ice and enjoy. Normally, degue is served on a special traditional plate called calabash. In my culture, this dish is served as a welcome water to the guests and visitors. It is also given to a woman who just gave birth to help her produce enough milk for the newborn baby. If you visit a family, and you did not receive this meal, it means that you are not welcome. It is also a way to say to a groom that he is welcome in the family; therefore, the family will serve it to him in a calabash, and he has to finish half of it to show to his in-laws that he appreciates the food. To sum up, degue is always present in a Fulani’s house; no matter what time of the day or night, you will always find it. Degue is like their main dish even though it is not, so a Fulani cannot spend one day without having it.



Maria Martel



My name is Maria Martel. I am from Caracas, Venezuela. I am forty-seven years old. I am married, and I have only one daughter from my first marriage. My daughter's name is Astrid. She is twenty-eight years old, and she started law school in Iowa City last semester. We moved to the United States twenty-two years ago. I used to work at Trinity Hospital in Moline for ten years, and last October I decided to go back to school full time. Now, I have been studying at Black Hawk College for almost one year, and my goal is to improve my English and go into the Surgical Technologist Program. In addition, I would like to get a better job in the future. Being here in the United States has been a great experience and opportunity in my life. I have never lived in any other country before. I learned a lot about different cultures and languages.

Life As a Single Immigrant Mother

It is hard to be a single mother. It is even harder when you have moved to another country. Raising a child or children by yourself is a challenge; however, you can do it with sacrifices. I am from Venezuela, and I was a single mom when I moved to the United States with my daughter. Her name is Astrid, and she was six years old when we moved here. It was hard for us in the beginning because we did not know how to speak the language. As a single immigrant mom, taking care of my daughter, working, and learning a new language were the biggest challenges I had to face.

First of all, when I was in Venezuela, my mother, father, and other relatives used to help me raise my daughter. When I came to the United States, I did not have any relatives to help me with Astrid. It was especially difficult when my daughter was sick. I would call my mother for advice in Venezuela. I would also have to miss work when she was sick because I had no one to watch her, ultimately losing money from having to call off from work. Fortunately, there was a family in the Quad Cities that was looking for a Spanish-speaking babysitter because they wanted their children to learn Spanish. Someone from my daughter's school recommended me. They invited me to their home, and we bonded immediately using sign language. Eventually, they asked me and my daughter to move in with them. Even though they were very good to us, it was still hard for me to leave my daughter with them when I went to clean houses on the weekends. When I left the house, I used to cry on my way to work, wishing to have my real family here and not having to leave my daughter with strangers.



Secondly, being a single immigrant mom is not easy when you have to work. As a single mom, I provided the sole financial support for my daughter, so I soon needed to find a more stable job than cleaning houses. When my work permit was finally approved by immigration, I got a job in the cafeteria at the University of Iowa Hospital in Iowa City. This job gave me experience speaking English with Americans, and I learned vocabulary for health and nutrition. It was still difficult to manage getting my daughter to school, but my supervisor was willing to arrange my schedule, so I could spend time with my daughter. In order to support myself and my daughter, I had to hold three jobs: delivering newspapers, cleaning houses, and working in food and nutrition services at the hospital. I needed those three jobs because we did not have any financial or other type of monetary assistance, and I had to pay rent, food, and utilities. After eight years, my spoken English was fluent, and that helped me get a job at Trinity Hospital in Rock Island. I always had to adjust my work schedule because I had to drop Astrid off at school and pick her up every day. Then I tried to spend a little time with her between jobs. Having no one to help when you have a bad day or difficult time is also hard. A single parent has to take the time to be with their child to help them deal with their loneliness as well. We both really missed our family back in Venezuela.



Finally, the biggest struggle for both me and my daughter was learning English because Spanish is our first language. Not knowing any English caused big communication problems when we came to the U.S. Three months after our arrival, my daughter started kindergarten. To learn English, I started volunteering in her classroom. She also had an ESL teacher who came to her classroom every day for two hours and helped her to learn English. However, I still struggled at home to help my daughter with her schoolwork because I could not read or understand the assignments. It is not enough just to speak the language; reading and writing are also necessary. It was frustrating when I had to go to the supermarket, and I could not understand when some people were talking to me, and I did not know how to respond. In addition, when my daughter was sick, and I had to take her to the doctor, it was another issue for me to communicate with the doctor. My little girl was the translator for me. I was embarrassed, so I decided to learn more English by trying to learn from friends at work. I would also practice my English by reading books and studying. However, I also wanted my daughter to keep her first language, which is Spanish, at home. I used to talk to her in Spanish at home, but most of the time, she would respond in English. While I was struggling with the situation, I did not want her to lose her native language. It was hard for me because she wanted to speak only English.

In summary, being a single immigrant parent is not easy especially when you do not know the language, and you do not have any family members or anyone else around helping you with your child or children. As a single immigrant mother, taking care of my daughter, working, and learning a new language were challenges I had to face. However, it was worth it because today Astrid is an amazing daughter, a wonderful human being, and an excellent student. After she graduated from high school, she received the President's Scholarship at Augustana College where she maintained a 4.0 GPA and graduated with honors. Following that, she received a scholarship from the University of Illinois and earned her master's degree in social work. Today, she is attending the University of Iowa Law School where she has received a scholarship to become an immigration lawyer. I am so proud of my daughter and all the hard work she has done to get where she is today.



A special Dish in Venezuela

Arepas are the most delicious and popular dish in Venezuela. Arepas are made with family and friends, and they are eaten for breakfast and dinner. The preparation is easy to follow and make every day. Also, arepas are a common breakfast dish in my country, and most of the Venezuelan families eat that. First of all, to make arepas, you mix water and salt in a bowl; then you add white corn flour called Harina Pan and mix it by hand for at least five minutes. Next, you knead the dough until it is the shape of a hamburger patty. Arepas can be fried or baked. After cooking the arepas, you can fill the inside with cheese, ham, tuna or any kind of meat. They are famous in any local restaurant in Venezuela as well as in other countries such as Colombia, Peru, Honduras and other South American countries. In addition, I brought arepas to the United States too because I have done arepas for some of my friends from the U.S. who liked it. Since then, I have been cooking arepas for other occasions. For example, last year I made arepas with shredded beef for the International Food Competition at Black Hawk College and for birthday parties and other events. In conclusion, because arepas are good and popular in Venezuela, families are still eating it. Also, some American people like to eat arepas. I enjoy to cook arepas for my family and friends especially for my grandson, Dayton, who loves arepas with bacon and cheese.



Maria Perez-Aguilera



My name is Maria Perez. I was born in Guanajuato Mexico, and I am 51 years old. I have three kids. I like to go to school, and I am studying ESL at Black Hawk College. Learning English is important for all people, and here we have the opportunity to learn. My goals are to finish school soon and to study for CNA or to work with kids. My dream is to speak English fluently and to have another job. I would like to have a big house with a large yard and a lot of plants and someday go to my country and visit my brother. I like to read, write, listen to music, and I practice my English with my daughter. We begin speaking English and finish speaking Spanish.

Christmas in My Town

Christmas and the Christmas spirit make people feel happy. Christmas is a very happy time to share in my small town. It starts on December 16th with the traditional posadas. These consist of sharing food and giving out candy and cookies in a bag. This is called an “Aguinaldo”. This posada is done at a different house every day for a week. This is where the food and the Aguinaldo is given. After everyone has eaten, people break piñatas outside of the house and get more candy. People come from different places to celebrate and see their families.

The posadas begin in the afternoons at a certain time that the people are going to agree and get together. At the church, someone rings a bell to signal that it is time to go, and everyone gathers at the church to go to the chosen house. People go singing and praying until they reach the house where the first posada will be. There, they sing outside of the house and sing some traditional songs. Then the people are let into the house to eat. At that time, the aguinaldos are given out to everyone. Then they eat together. After all of that, people hang up a piñata and put on a blindfold on a child to break the piñata. That child tries to hit the piñata. If they cannot break it, someone else gets a turn until the piñata is broken. When someone finally breaks it, the candy falls out and everyone rushes to get some. This tradition continues for a week at a different house every day.

Second, the food is fantastic. There are delicious tamales, buñuelos and pozole on Christmas Eve. This is very important for my town. People start preparing the delicious food the day before. Tamales are made from corn. This procedure consists of cooking the corn first and then grinding it with a special machine to prepare the “masa.” The tamales are made with red salsa and pork meat, or green salsa with chicken. Pozole is made with either red or green salsa. Buñuelos are made with flour. They are made in a

way that is similar to tortillas, but the masa is stretchy. It is cooked in oil until its hard and then sweetened with “piloncillo,” which is a type of Mexican candy. We also add cinnamon.

Third, people in all houses have a baby Jesus set up on a nacimiento. The nacimiento is a recreation of Jesus’s birth with small statues of the baby Jesus, Virgin Mary and other small figures. There are some smells that are found in every nacimiento. These are tejocotes, guava, and orange smells. People from other towns arrive because a lot of them like to go around on those days, and everyone is welcome. People share the food that they prepare. Around midnight, fireworks start to be fired into the sky. This is for people to know that it is Christmas and that baby Jesus is arriving. In all the houses, people start to give out candy. A lot of people don’t sleep because they are outside running or walking from house to house getting candy. This is an amazing time for everyone. When people return to their homes around two or three in the morning, and they make fires to stay warm. They stay awake all night listening to music, talking and dancing. People from other towns like to go and say that they feel like part of my town. When the sun rises, everyone goes to sleep.

In conclusion, the posadas, the food and the celebrations of the baby Jesus are important parts of life in my town at Christmas. Sharing is very important, and my town is a place where other people like to come and celebrate together, and that is why everyone feels welcome in my town at Christmas.

There are two kinds of enchiladas. There are red and green enchiladas. The green enchiladas are made with chicken meat and mozzarella cheese. The red enchiladas are usually made with ground beef or chicken. They are also served with rice, lettuce and sour cream on top. Making the enchiladas is very simple. First, the tomatoes and the peppers are boiled together to make the salsa. Second, the tortilla is soaked in the salsa. Then, the tortilla with the salsa is put into a pan with hot oil. After this, you put the chicken and the mozzarella cheese on the tortilla and roll it up. The enchilada is put on a plate and into a microwave to heat the chicken and melt the cheese. Lastly, the enchilada is ready to eat when it is served on a plate with rice, lettuce, and sour cream. In conclusion, green and red enchiladas are one of the great Mexican dishes. They are also the favorites for my family.

Eyleen Polanchek



My name is Eyleen Polanchek. I am a hair and eyelash extension designer. I was born and raised in Peru, South America. I moved to the United States of America in 2005. I lived in Texas for over 10 years, but I love the Quad Cities. This is my first semester at BHC. I like almost everything under the sun or snow. I was raised moving around all over Peru, traveled overseas, and I did my share of road trips through America. I like painting. I am not good at it, but it is relaxing. I love reading!!! I do prefer a good hard cover book than my tablet though. I miss the Pacific Ocean, its waves and the sand, but the gorgeous pine views are breathtaking around here. My short-term goal is to finish the Business Program at BHC. My next step is to attend barbering and teaching school a cosmetology and barbering school that helps others make their dreams come true.

Peru Is Not Only a Cultural but also a Culinary Destination

All around the world, the demand for diverse, fun, healthy and mind-blowing cuisine has become a trend in the last ten years with people interested in trying different tastes, to some of them not imaginable. Peru is well known worldwide for the breathtaking Machu Picchu, and its ancient cultures, but in the last 15 years, Peru has become an icon that salutes history, fresh ingredients and a mixture of flavors.

Peru, located on the west coast of South America, has a rare topography that includes beautiful sandy beaches, incredible rocky mountains, and one of the deepest jungles in the world. People from all over the world visit Peru every day, some to admire the magnificent archeology, some to surf the longest wave in the world in Puerto Chicama, some to explore the unknown jungle, or some to simply admire the old churches draped wall to wall in real gold. There are many reasons to visit Peru, but most important of all is the heart Peruvians like to share not only with their own, but with foreigners. Peruvians have a complex mixed culture, but they have in common the love and respect for their food, which through the years, young chefs took the chance to improve, change, or just share with others to finally present it to the world, not just as part of them, but as a challenge to every expert on the subject.



The demand for Peruvian food increased exponentially everywhere, challenging home cooks and chefs to take risks and invest in new or bigger locations, which created a need for new infrastructure, like hotels, hostels, bed and breakfasts, adding an economic impact for the country. The development in this industry demands from investors not only to meet international standards, but to be able to compete with

big companies and famous names; as a result, small businesses are finding trademarks to make them unique and special.

The impact that globalization had on the service industry like restaurants is enormous. People can see live videos, or friends' pictures taken on the other side of the world, comment, repost, share recipes, like or dislike, and much more, even critique without tasting or being there. Peru makes sure the products and services not only comply with the law but also enchant people by how fresh and healthy they are. This goes for the fresh fish from the ocean, rivers and lakes, all the way to the over 1,200 different types of potatoes its mountains supply worldwide.



Peru is linked with historic events, archeological treasures, extraterrestrial written signs, cosmic energy, unexplained events, heavy earth gravity, but also with the creativity, investment and vision the Peruvian cuisine shares internationally. Nowadays, Peruvian cuisine is considered top of the notch, with demand not only by Peruvian residents in other countries or as their treat when visiting, but also by international chefs and brands that took the mixture of ingredients as an innovation to their own restaurants all around the world.

El Cajon Peruano

A “cajon” is a musical instrument from Peru, South America; it is part of the soul and culture of Peruvian folklore. A Cajon resembles a shoe box, one that you can sit on comfortably with a hole on the back for percussion; material, size and measurements are determined by the music produced; the musician’s hands will rhythmically create sounds by tapping the front side with knuckles and fingertips. There are several theories of how the “cajon” was created, but they all agree that African slaves were the ones who created and developed this amazing instrument in the 16th century. It is believed that by the end of the 19th century the standard sheet wood used to build it was replaced and improved, only to accomplish better music tones. The rhythm could not stay hidden anymore, and “Criollos” (Spaniards and Incas mix), plus Spaniards were “embruados” by the “cajon” tunes. Although it became part of Peruvian history in the 16th century, it was only appreciated and accepted later on. Nowadays, internationally a “cajon’s” rhythm can be found in diverse music styles from rap, pop, blues, funk and jazz. In Peru, Tondero, Peruvian Waltz and Zamacueca it is a beautiful spectacle you don’t want to miss! The “cajon” was brought to Peruvian culture, but it slowly became part of it by giving happiness, hope and love to their souls with every tap of the fingertips and knuckles.

Essi Samtou



I am Essi Selom Samtou, and I am from Togo, a small country located in West Africa. I was born in 1993 in Kpalime, one of the biggest cities of Togo. I lost my father early, but I still have my mother. I have one brother and two sisters. I have an associate degree in Law and in Human Resources Management. Before I moved to the United States in 2016 to join my husband, I had been working as a human resources manager at FECECAV, a financial institution for one year and a half. Actually, I am in the ESL program to study English in order to improve my communication and listening skills. My goal is to be a nurse, so I will take nursing classes after graduating from ESL. One of my favorite hobbies is to decorate.

Traditional Wedding in Ewe Culture

Marriage is the most important thing in every human being's life. In Ewe culture, marriage begins with a celebration called "ameta biabia" (traditional wedding), a symbol of the new unification of two families. The traditional wedding consists of three steps: vopopo, preparation time and the engagement.

First, the most crucial thing before everything is vopopo, which is the meeting between the two families. In fact, every family consists of at least five people and includes uncles, aunts, parents, brothers and sisters. The groom's family goes to see the bride's family to talk about the project of the marriage. After that, the bride's family sends for their daughter for some questions about the guest. Some examples of questions for the bride are, "Do you know these people? Where do you know them from? Do you know why they are here this morning?" If they accept the marriage proposal, the groom's family takes out some drinks like beer and juice to thank the bride's family. In fact, the beer represents the eventual bitterness and the juice represents the joy for the future couple. However, this part of the ceremony usually ends when the bride's family gives the groom's family the list of the items for the dowry, which consists of different types of drinks, traditional clothes (kente), jewelry, and salt. In fact, this list has already been made and will be the same for generations.

Second, the groom's family prepares for the next ceremony. In this step of preparation, the groom's family buys all the items piece by piece to avoid buying the wrong ones. This preparation usually takes at least six



months depending on the financial situation of the groom. Sometimes, and this is exceptional, the groom asks the bride to follow his family in the acquisition of the items, so she can choose whatever she wants. After all these errands, the groom's family returns to see the bride's family to choose the date of the big ceremony. Sometimes, if the bride's family does not have enough money to organize the ceremony to receive the guests, the latter delays the date and recalls the groom's family when ready.

Finally, the engagement also called "fiancailles" is the main ceremony. On that day, the groom does not need to be present. His family will bring all the items they bought to the bride's family's house. After some processes, the bride's family calls some girls who can be sisters, cousins or even friends including the "main girl" and presents them to the groom's family. If the latter identify the girl they want among them, they scream and say, "Yes, there she is!" At this moment of the ceremony, the groom's family brings out the items they bought and exchanges them for the girl. The sister of the groom then puts the engagement ring on the bride's finger. This is the beginning of a unification of two families and the birth of a new couple.



To conclude, traditional wedding in Ewe culture is a very important thing, so every family tries to do its best for its success by following the three important steps. In fact, this is actually a representation of my own traditional wedding. I went through all those steps, and it took one year to complete it. It was absolutely the happiest day of my life ever. Unfortunately, my husband was out of the country at this time, but overall we all felt happy and thankful.



Foufou is one of the most common foods in my culture (southern Togo). Foufou is usually made with yams. Now, how do you make a delicious foufou? First of all, you need fresh yams, which you must peel correctly and put over a flame until they are cooked. Second, you need a mortar to grind them until obtaining a paste. The foufou is then ready to eat. Foufou goes along with peanut sauce, fish sauce, beef sauce, or goat sauce. People often prefer to eat foufou for lunch, but some others want it for dinner. However, foufou is also made for special occasions like traditional weddings, funerals, and Christmas. Talking about Christmas, there is no wonderful, awesome, or amazing Christmas without foufou. Some people make it on Christmas Eve and others on Christmas Day. Foufou is an interesting and delicious meal, so in case anyone wants to taste it, let me know.



Akouvi Sodjinou



My name is Ina, and I was born in Togo, which is in West Africa. I have two brothers and three sisters. My father was a teacher, and my mum a housewife. I have been in the United States for eleven months. I am married, and my husband has been here since 2011. I started my first class in the United States this year, and it was not bad. I meet new people, and my teacher is very kind. I know it will not be an easy task for me as a housewife working and going to school at the same time, but I know with hard work and God's help I will be fine. I want to improve my English and be able to achieve my dreams in the future. When I was in Africa, I studied travel, tourism and ticketing. I hope I will continue in that and find a job for some airline such as Delta, United, American, etc. On the other hand, I want to have my own business, so I may also continue in business management to be able to run my company in the future. I am happy about this course because I am in class with different people from different countries and cultures.

The Tamberma People of Togo

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, the amazing Tamberma valley, is home to a unique collection of fortified villages with houses like small castles called "Tata Tamberma," which were built in the 17th century by people fleeing the slave trade in Benin, who also wanted to protect themselves from wild animals. The Tamberma are an ethnic group, which belongs to the Bammariba ethnic family. They live in the Nadoba area, which has many other villages in the North-Eastern part of Togo. Nadoba shares a border with Benin and is in the district of Keran (préfecture de la keran). The Tamberma speak Outamari, and they are unique when it comes to their lifestyle, architecture and trade.

First, the Tamberma's lifestyle is based on their traditional values, which are precious and were received from their ancestors. They have a real sense of family as they live together in the same house, cook and eat from a common plate. They have some special traditions. For example, when a young man reaches the age to get married, he should choose where to stay, so the tradition demands that he throws an arrow on the family land, and the point where the arrow will stick to the ground, that will become the chosen place where he will build his house. Primarily, the Tamberma are animists (traditional religion), but nowadays many are becoming Christians. They protect themselves and their homes with fetishes as part of their belief in the spiritual protection from their ancestors to whom they offer animal sacrifices, just like to their divinities. Moreover, their lifestyle is also marked by cultural events, which are very important, for they bring many people together to dance and share life events. For example, their major cultural event is called Tislif Lifuani Obudam, which is celebrated at the end of February or early March together with two other tribes, Lamba and Gangan. Also, Tislif Lifuani



Obudam is a Thanksgiving celebration to thank God for the good harvest and to present the offerings taken from their harvest. During that celebration, there are a lot of local drinks made of millet and other drinks. There is a possibility for visitors to taste different local foods. The cultural event opens with a thanksgiving prayer, and various cultural dances from the different ethnic groups; it is like a festival.

In addition, the Tamberma have the most beautiful architecture in the world. They do not adopt other styles of architecture because they value their originality. Their houses are built with wood, straw and clay. The houses are round and are called “tata.” In the tata, we have a reserved place for the fetish, the kitchen and a corner for the animals they are raising on the ground floor. Their bedroom is on the first floor. One can access the first floor with a wooden ladder. There is a hole from the first floor to the outside that allows the occupant to see anyone who enters the castle. The rooftop is considered as the dining room, the place where they dry the corn, rice, millet, etc. Furthermore, they have an attic on the roof where they keep their crops. Also, every tata has a giant fetish, which is designed with the portrait of a particular divinity, at the entrance. The giant fetish is said to ward off evil and bad spirits, so it receives periodic sacrifices.

Finally, the Tamberma have a special trade day also called a market day, which takes place every Wednesday of the week. They mostly live from agriculture and hunting. Their agricultural activities are not developed, but they manage to cater for their basic needs. Most of the villages have their own market day, but Wednesday is the common market day for the whole area. The markets are common places where people can easily meet. Not only are many things sold and bought in the market, but there is also a possibility to exchange goods for those who do not have money. People come from different places either walking, biking, or driving on that day to attend the market. Everybody has something to sell, buy, and exchange. For example, women come from Lomé, the capital of Togo, to buy charcoal, maize, chicken, sheep, and other goods they cannot get in their areas. On the other hand, those who do not have money bring what they have such as hens, fresh fish, or peanuts for exchange during the market day. For example, someone can bring rice to exchange for maize or for sweet potatoes, and many other goods according to the agreed measures. This transaction or system of exchange is how their ancestors used to trade and that remains a great value for the Tamberma people.

In conclusion, some people continue to keep the true African values as received from their fathers, and one can count the Tamberma people among those who do so. The Tamberma are special people who still value their originality and uniqueness. I visited their market and their castles (tata or koutamakou). I love them because they are themselves with regards to being original, and I expect every African to keep their originality and value their culture. I studied with some of them in our primary and secondary school, and I still have good memories. In addition, I got the chance to visit Nadoba where they have their market and visited Wartema, where I toured their castles. I would recommend any tourist visiting Togo to see that touristic site.



Fonio: a Special Dish

Certain dishes show our origin, so that is the case for fonio, which is a very special dish for Akposso. It is a cereal made of small seeds. Also, fonio is prepared as follows: Put the beans on the fire. When the beans are cooked, Fonio is added and cooked over low heat. Fonio is eaten with red oil and chili according to tradition. On the other hand, Akposso cannot have a wedding or funeral ceremony without preparing fonio. Besides, fonio is historically known, for it helped to feed Germans who were hiding from the French and British in the Plateau Forest during World War II. In conclusion, a true Akposso cannot do without fonio because it is part of us. Fonio's preparation and consumption is transmitted from generation to generation.



Essohouna Tagba



Married, a shift worker, and a student, I am from Togo. Togo is a small country in West Africa, which is known for its joy of life, which I have inherited. I come from a family of seven kids (five girls and two boys), and I am the third one. After my high school diploma in Kara my hometown, I studied French literature in college. After graduating in 2013, I worked as a radio speaker for three years before I moved to the United States on December 30, 2016. My dream job has always been to be a journalist, which is why, after my graduation, I went on to work in a radio station even though my field of study was not. After ESL classes, I do not know right now what my field of education will be, but one thing I know is that I would like to work in an international organization in Africa. For me, my country has invested money in my education so that one day I could help with its development; for that reason, it will be unfair to not give back what I have received. For now, I would like to graduate from the ESL program, and with the help of an advisor find a field of education that will fit my career goal. I have a strong believe that with hard work and determination I will make it.

The Three Men in My Life

Generally, a person's life is the result of the influence he or she received from the people around him or her. Besides that, all the experiences we go through, whether they are good or bad, build our character. Most of the time, our family members are those who, through their attitude, impact our lives the most. In my own case, I am the result of the education I received from my father, the great intellect of my brother, and the love of my husband.

Family is not just an important thing; it is the most important thing in the whole world, and in my case, my father is my family, for he is the one who raised me. He taught me the importance of education, religion, and hard work. Firstly, growing up, the only thing my father has ever wanted for me and my siblings has always been to have a good education. He used to say to my sister and me that education should be our first husband. According to him, a good education will give us a good job and with a good job we can choose the husband we want. For that reason, all my siblings and I graduated from college. From the first grade to college, my father has provided everything, and there was no excuse for anyone of us to fail. Secondly, for my father, no human can have an accomplished life without having a relationship with his creator, so my family used to attend mass three times a week, which made me a strong believer. Thirdly, because we were raised by our father only, my siblings and I learned from him the importance of hard



work. From a very young age, we had to do all the house chores ourselves, and we also had to have our homework done before our father came back from work.

Beside the great influence of my father, my brother has played a large role in me being who I am today. He is smart, kind, and very wise. Growing up, every kid has a hero, a person he or she looks up to. My brother was my hero. To begin, my brother is very smart and always had good grades. Because he always brought home good grades, every one of us tried to be like him. His smartness created a kind of competition among us at home. Whenever one of us had a bad grade, my brother always said, “This is not the grade you are supposed to have; remember that we have to make our father proud.” However, this kind of competition did not stop us from loving each other. My brother especially is a very kind person. He was always ready to help. When one of us did not understand something, we used to go to him seeking his help, and he was always willing to help. My brother was also the one we always went to when we needed advice for something because of his wisdom



The third person who impacted my life is my husband. His love, sacrifices, and forgiveness made me a better person. My husband and I met in high school and have been together since then. The most important thing that made me fall in love with him is the fact that he loves people. My husband is always willing to help. Sometimes, it upsets me because he always puts other people first. For example, my husband has a cousin to whom he is very close. This cousin of his always takes advantage of his kindness by asking him different services, and my husband never complains about it. That attitude of him is the reason why everybody loves him wherever he goes because he is caring and a very nice person. Due to his inclination to love everybody, he never hesitates to put other people’s interests before his. If my husband has only one dollar in his pocket, it would not be a big deal for him to give it to somebody who needs it as much as he does. My husband is also so forgiving that sometimes I wonder if he is human. For him, if somebody wants to live long, that person has to be forgiving, and that has helped me to be forgiving no matter what people do to me.



Finally, because of the education I received from my father, the great intellect of my brother, and the love of my husband, I am an accomplished and confident woman. My father, brother, and my husband made me who I am today through what I have learned from them. From my own experience, I can state that humans are truly the result of their experiences, and whoever you have around you will have an impact on who you are. Whoever wants to be a successful person should have good people around him or her.

Loincloth Made in Togo (Satta Bissao)

Loincloth called satta bissao in Kabye, a language spoken in the north of Togo, is the pride of Togolese. It was initially the principal fabric used for chiefs' clothes in Togo, my country. Loincloth is a fabric made with cotton. Usually made by women, they first make the wires, and afterwards they weave those wires with an artisanal weaving machine. Artisanal loincloth is initially white, for the cotton is white, but nowadays some of them are dyed. Satta bissao is a heavy loincloth, and it protects from the cold. Originally, men used it to wrap their whole body, and women to wrap from their waste to their feet. In the north of Togo, originally, it was not everybody who could use satta bBissao, It was only reserved for men and women age fifteen and above because it was expensive and also showed that the person who wears it is an authority. Unfortunately, nowadays everybody wears satta bissao, for they are made with modern machines and consequently are less expensive.

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