



# INTERNATIONAL VOICES

at Black Hawk College

## SPRING 2021

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



## **Table of Contents**

### **Ablavi Avowoto**

The Transportation System in Lomé, Togo .....2

### **Mensah Aziabou**

The Nana Benz of Togo.....4

### **Miguel Cortes**

The Sugar Industry in Mexico .....6

### **Akouvi Domedjoe**

Difficulties Integrating in the USA.....8

### **Essi Kevine Ruth Dussey**

Naming Practices in Ewe Culture.....11

### **Ruby Myint**

Life in Thailand.....13

### **Ngun Cer Shannon**

The Beautiful Land and Delicious Foods of Chin State.....15

### **Diego Verduzco Mendoza**

The USA in the Eyes of an Immigrant.....18

### **Naomi Zawadi**

Born with Two Nationalities.....20

**These essays and cultural pieces were written by the students in the ESL  
Advanced Writing class.**

**I would like to thank the Marketing Department for designing the cover.**

**Nina De Bisschop**

# Ablavi Avowoto



My name is Ablavi. I am from Togo (West Africa). I have been in the US since 2013. I am married, and I have three boys. I live in Moline with my husband and my children. In my country (Togo), I was a student; I received my high school diploma in 2010, and then I studied sociology at the University of Lomé for three years, but I didn't graduate before coming to the US. In 2019, I got my Phlebotomy Certificate at Black Hawk College, and in 2020, I got my PCA (Patient Care Assistant) Certificate, and CNA (Certified Nurse Assistant) at Black Hawk College. I am a phlebotomist and CNA, but now I am working as a CNA. My career goals is to become an LPN (License Practical Nurse). For that reason, I need to improve my English, and Black College is here to help us.

## The Transportation System in Lomé, Togo

The world has different types of transportation, and the transportation system varies from country to country. Lomé, the capital of Togo, has certain modes of transportation. Lomé is located in the southern part of Togo (West Africa) close to the Atlantic Ocean; it is the biggest city of Togo. People in Lomé carry out many activities like work, school, shopping, etc. These activities require the use of different types of transportation such as the shared taxi, the motorcycle taxi, the city bus and the bike. Each mode of transportation has some advantages and disadvantages.

First, the shared taxi is a taxi that is shared by many passengers who go to the same destination at the same time. The shared taxi is a mini taxi that usually provides transportation to any point within central Lomé. One taxi can take four to six passengers; it is a mini car, so it fills quickly. There is no schedule for the taxi; for that reason, you can catch it at any time; there are also a lot of taxis on the street or at the taxi station. However, some taxi drivers overload the vehicle by adding more passengers on the way, and you might not feel comfortable with this. They often stop; thus, it may take a while to get where you are going, and they sometimes wait for the taxi to be full, so you might have to wait around for other passengers. Hence, you need to be patient, vigilant, alert and confident when taking this mode of transportation.

Second, there are motorcycle taxis as used for transportation; they are commonly called *Zemidjan* or *Z*; there are a lot of motorcycle taxis around Lomé that provide transportation within the city. The *Z* drivers drive around the city looking for passengers. Some drivers work during the day while some work during the night. It usually takes only one person plus the driver, but sometimes, people overload them due to the lack of availability of real taxis. It is faster than the shared taxi because it takes only one person. There are no designated pick up or drop off areas; as a result, you can catch it anywhere you see one. In addition, you pay approximately the same as you would pay for a taxi. Nevertheless, when taking

a motorcycle taxi, you are exposed to some dangers; for example, you will get wet when it rains, you will sweat when it is hot, you will be cold when it is cold, and when bugs are out, you will wear or eat them. You will also get hit when things fly up from the tires.

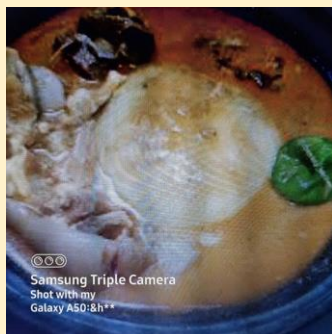
After that, we have city bus named *SOTRAL* (Society of Transportation in Lomé). They are around the town and have different routes. They are usually used as the easiest way to move around in Togo. The city bus is less expensive than the taxis; furthermore, traveling by bus is cheaper than owning or operating a personal car; taking the city bus saves money in fact. Nonetheless, city busses leave at a specific time, so you could miss it if you are late, and you have to wait until the next time; in brief, taking a city bus can include a long waiting time. There is less flexibility regarding detours and a higher chance for getting infected with diseases. Delays may cause problems at school or at work because many workers and some students take the city bus. The seats are also too small to be comfortable.

Finally, bicycles are used as another mode of transportation, and they are usually used by students because they are easy to afford. People who ride bikes often wear a helmet for their protection. On the other hand, using a bike as a mode of transportation is not safe if the person does not wear a helmet. Some people get hurt when an accident occurs.

In conclusion, using a mode of transportation depends on the capacity or the possibility that you have. Some have their own car or motorcycle, and they don't need the public transportation; the number of men who have their own transportation is higher than the number of women. Also, some elderly people don't rely on the Z because it is unsafe; they would rather take a taxi or city bus. In addition, most students walk to school, and some high school students ride a bike because the school bus is available only for the university and only in some areas. On average, half of the population uses public transportation.

### A Recipe for a Special Dish: Fufu and Peanut Butter Sauce

Fufu is a special dish for West African people, especially in Togo. It is usually eaten at lunch time. Fufu is made with pounded yam or cassava after the yam or the cassava is peeled and cooked with water. For the sauce, it is made with creamy peanut butter and cooked with water; after the peanut butter is cooked with water, you add tomato sauce, spices like onion, ginger, pepper, garlic, and salt and any kind of meat that you like, and then you let the sauce sit on the stove for a little while. When everything in the sauce is combined and fully cooked, you can serve it for dinner by putting the fufu on a plate and pouring the sauce over the top of it.



# Mensah Aziabou



My name is Mensah Kodjo Aziabou. I am the third boy, hence my first name Mensah. I'm from Togo. I was born on October 6, in Badou (Tomegbe). I grew up in Lomé, the capital of Togo. I am a Christian, and I worship in the Presbyterian Church. I received my confirmation and baptism in 1995. After graduating from high school, I continued my studies at the University of Lomé. I studied geography, more precisely agrarian, rural and urban geography. I also studied climatology because my goal was to become a climatologist and to work in weather stations. I was a history and geography teacher at the Protestant College in Lomé Agbalepedogan before coming to the United States. I am a married man; I have two boys (Anael and Raphael). I work at Tyson Food's Joslin plant. I would like to become an entrepreneur and create training centers to help the poor and widows so that they too can find work.

## The Nana Benz of Togo

The economic development of a country requires hard work on the part of both men and women. Therefore, some women called Nana Benz of Togo continue to work to further increase their participation in the economic field. They are famous Togolese business women, and they are very courageous to face all challenges. With this in mind, I want to share who they really are and what exactly they do.

First of all, why are they called Nana Benz? What you should know is that the first name *Nana* comes from the Ashanti language spoken in Ghana, and it means mother, and the second name *Benz* comes from the fact that these women like to drive Mercedes Benz cars. The Nana Benzes started their activity in the 1950s, but it was in the 1960s that their activity took on great scale and led to prosperity. During this time, many women wanted to contribute to the development of the country. For this reason, many of them no longer wanted to stay at home. They embarked on several activities such as loincloth trade.

Second, the Nana Benzes carry out several business adventures. Their first activity is the trade of loincloths. With this activity, they occupy a very important place in the Togolese economy. The type of loincloth they sell is wax. These fabrics are made in the Holland and England. What is amazing is that they have created special names for the fabrics they sell. For example, they have names like "The eye of my life" or "Your foot, my foot." Another example is "If you go out I go out." These fabrics sold by the Nana Benz are used to do a lot of things. For example, both women and men sew clothes with these fabrics. On the other hand, these fabrics are part of the dowry given to a woman before the wedding. They are also used for carrying children. Waxes and Hollanders are expensive fabrics, which are admired by many people. Another activity of the Nana Benz is investing in real estate. They are very intelligent. They

finance the construction of houses, villas, and hotels. They rent these houses. Sometimes, they sell some of these villas to build more. They also build stores or warehouses, which they rent to small merchants.

Third, the Nana Benz use different modes of transportation. It can be noted that they travel in expensive cars made by Mercedes Benz, Toyota, and Hyundai. The Nana Benz are much admired women because they are very respected. They have a lot of money. Other people want to become like them when they see them driving their luxury cars. For orders of their fabric, they travel by plane. Sometimes, their orders of fabric come in on airplanes or ships.

In conclusion, the Nana Benz are famous Togolese business women whose fundamental activity is the trade in Dutch wax loincloths. They carry out various activities. What should also be noted is the role they play in the home. They use the income from their business activities to cover household expenses and pay for their children's education. For example, they spend it on food and schooling for their children to go and study in universities abroad.

### **Preparation of the *Sodabi* Drink**

*Sodabi* is a local drink and widely used in my culture for various factors. First, let's describe how it is prepared. *Sodabi* is obtained from palm wine. We collect a lot of palm wine and pour it into a barrel. The poured palm wine should occupy 3/4 of the barrel, and then we let it cool. We equip the barrel with a pipe and a can. Then we close the barrel and make a fire at the bottom of the barrel. After a few hours, the cooling of the vapor turns into liquid in the can to make alcohol. This alcohol is *Sodabi*. This drink is served during ceremonies and during holidays. It is served in a respectful manner because this drink has a spiritual connotation.



# Miguel Cortes



Hello everyone, Let me introduce myself. My name is Miguel Angel Cortes. I am originally from Mexico. I was born in a small city name Tala in the state of Jalisco. I am the youngest of a family of seven. I started studying at the Echeverria Alvarez Elementary School. After that, I attended Manuel M Dieguez Middle School, and I finally finished high school at the Humanistic Center Fray Antonio Alcalde (Catholic Seminary) in Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco. Later, I started working at a sugar company named GAM and became part of the union, Section 25, which is incorporated into the National Union for the Sugar Manufacturing Industry in Mexico. I moved to the USA in 2011 when I was 23 years old. At first, it was difficult because the language is different, so it was hard for me to find a job or do other activities such as going to a restaurant and getting the right order. Soon after, I heard about ESL classes. I got enrolled and learned the basics. At the same time, I got my GED to get better opportunities and benefits. I got married and had two daughters. The oldest is five years old, and the youngest is four years old. It became a little harder to keep studying because I have a family to take care of and a full-time job. I currently work at John Deere Davenport Works assembling construction tractors and equipment. In the future, I would like to study in the higher level to get more opportunities within the company.

## The Sugar Industry in Mexico

There are different types of sugars in Mexico ranging from brown, granulated, and powdered to organic cane sugar. As you may know, sugar can be used in cooking recipes, in many processed foods, desserts, carbonated drinks and even liquor. Even though, for the most part, sugar that is used in excess is harmful if taken without moderation, its origin and process is unique; the overall result is to add a sweeter and tastier bite to what we eat. There are differences in the process of making each type of sugar, but today, I will focus on explaining the process of making organic cane sugar.

Sugar production is a long process. It varies in time from beginning to end, but it usually takes one to two days for the whole process. The origin of sugar is sweet cane, which is mainly grown out in the fields. Once the right canes are selected, late in the afternoon hours the selected canes are burned with fire. The following day, early in the morning four to five crews of men arrive at the fields and start cutting by hand the canes that were selected and burned the night before. After they have been cut by crews, they are stacked together and loaded onto large special sugar cane trucks by other workers. Truckers must wait in line to dump the canes at the mill.

Once the canes arrive at the mill, crews gather to start pulling the burnt canes from the trucks and then transfer them to large containers where the outer part (the peel) and the inner part of the cane are separated. Next, within the machine process, the canes are now peeled and transferred to another set of

containers, in which all the juice from the canes are pulled and the purification process of the juices starts to clarify the liquid in a different set of containers in another department for further process.

After the juice is purified, it goes through the process of condensation in another set of containers. Lastly, the juice becomes honey. Once the juice becomes honey, it will be transferred to the spin cycle, and it granulates into smaller particles; as a result, we get sugar on our table.

### *Pulque*

There are many beverages that are originally from Mexico, especially from the state where I am originally from, Jalisco. Tequila is one of the major cities in Jalisco and in Mexico that produces *pulque*, *tejuino*, and *tequila*. Today, I am going to talk only about the process of making *pulque*, which is an ancient beverage that originated roughly around 400 BC. Our ancestors called *pulque* the beverage of the gods. First of all, we need a maguey plant. Each plant of maguey needs to grow for about thirteen to fifteen years in order to use it and produce either *agua miel* or *pulque*. Once we have the right plant with the right age, then we have to start removing some parts around the maguey so that we can get to the heart of the plant. After we find the heart, we remove it and cover it and leave it to ferment for six months. After we have waited for six months, we come back and clean it with a special tool called *raspador*. Then once cleaned, we get to extract the *agua miel* with a special tool called *acucote*. Then we let it ferment for about one month to finally have the *pulque*. The whole production takes around three months for each plant.





# Akouvi Domedjoe



My name is Akouvi Domedjoe, but my relatives call me Anita. I was born on January 2, 1985. My father is a polygamist, so I have four siblings on my mother's side and thirteen siblings on my father's side. I came from Togo, which is a small country in West Africa, located between Benin and Ghana. I grew up in Lomé, the capital of Togo. Togolese speak French and a lot of dialects. I got my high school diploma in 2006. I had participated in a competition before entering the medical assistant school at the university of Lomé. After three years, I got the medical assistant diploma, which is a specific diploma from my country. Most of the time medical assistants work as doctors in small towns where there is a lack of doctors. I had worked in the hospital of Kpalime before I moved to the USA in November 2014 with my husband and our son. Now, I have three kids, and this my second semester in ESL. My goal is to improve my English and become a registered nurse.

## Difficulties Integrating in the USA

After getting my visa for the USA, I was so excited about moving to the country of opportunity. The first thing that I did was to quit my job because I thought that I could easily find something better in the USA and that I could make a lot of money. Furthermore, I was dreaming about my new life. I saw myself working in a big hospital. Unfortunately, a few weeks after my arrival, I realized that the reality was completely different. Things were not as easy as I thought, and I quickly noticed that the major problems all immigrants face when moving to a foreign country are integration problems. As an immigrant, I have struggled with the same problems, including the language barrier, the new American lifestyle, and a lack of information.

First of all, the language is essential to being a functioning part of a society, but the fact that I came from a French-speaking country complicated my situation. Therefore, I couldn't really communicate with people because I had a strong accent, and in the same way, the American accent was incomprehensible for me. For example, my first interview for a job was disastrous, for I wasn't able to answer all of the questions. Therefore, the interview ended; as a result, I didn't get the job. I had to stay at home for more than three months before finding a job, and it was really stressful for me. Even though I finally got a job, my inability to speak English well and to understand it was an issue for me in my workplace. For instance, I remember attending a safety meeting every morning in my first job, but I couldn't understand many



things. One day, my supervisor had designated me to speak about a safety topic, but I was so ashamed to speak because I knew that they wouldn't understand anything. In addition, most of the time, I had trouble following my supervisor's instructions, something that annoyed her very often. In brief, the language barrier had a big impact on my integration because I couldn't really communicate with people. I felt so lonely although I worked with many coworkers.

Another thing that made my integration difficult is the American lifestyle. It was really hard for me to adapt myself to this new life because everything seemed very different for me, especially American work life. For example, when I got my first job, I had to start at 4 a.m., so it meant that I had to wake up at 3 a.m. Monday through Saturday. At the beginning, it was hard to follow this work rhythm. Besides, I was taking ESL class, which is very important for me. I really struggled to manage my time between my work and school. In addition, I had small kids at home who needed all my energy and my attention. I felt so tired after coming back from work, and sometimes I neglected my children. After a few months of effort between my children, my work, and school, I got sick. Therefore, I abandoned the ESL class. Clearly, following American work life is very hard for all immigrants, but over time we get used to it.



Above all, the lack of information is one of the factors that make the integration difficult for immigrants. The fact that we were new in a foreign country and didn't have anybody who could give us the right information really complicated our situation. For instance, in my case, I really suffered when I tried to apply for work and prepare myself for the interview. In other words, I didn't know how to do the application online, so I had to ask people to do it for me all the time. It took me a long time to learn all these things. Also, while I was looking for a job, I didn't know that there are many recruitment centers, which could easily help people to get a job. Furthermore, before doing all the administrative procedures for integration correctly, we need to have all the right information. For example, when I was applying for my social security number, I forgot to put my spouse's name; consequently, today I am still using my maiden name. In brief, the lack of information about the administrative procedure, or how to find a better job, or how to manage your time between work and school, could be a handicap to the integration of immigrants.

In conclusion, living in and integrating into a foreign country may seem extremely difficult but not impossible. As an immigrant, I have encountered many problems such as the language barrier, the new American lifestyle and lack of information, but with courage, motivation and determination, I have overcome them one by one. Specifically, today I'm able to communicate easily with people, and I'm glad that now I can do everything by myself such as applying for a job or doing any kind of administrative procedure. In addition, I have found a way to manage my time between work, school, and my kids. Finally, I have a lot of goals, and I will do my best to realize them, especially to become a nurse.

### **Catfish Soup Recipe**

Togo, my country is divided into five major regions. People of the maritime region, especially those who live near the sea, really like fish. Also, one of their popular dishes is catfish sauce or soup. It's prepared for guests or just for lunch or dinner with family. To cook catfish sauce, we have to follow three or four steps with ingredients such as ginger, garlic, black pepper, anise seed, onion, tomato, green peeper, bay leaves, oil, okra, and some fish. First of all, we clean the fish with hot water and lemon in order to remove all the spots on the skin and kill all bacteria. After cleaning the fish well, we cut it into pieces. Secondly, we blend the spices, and put the mixture with a little bit of oil on the stove. After a few seconds, we add the mixed tomatoes and onions, and we stir it for five minutes. Then we add water with chopped onions, okra and green pepper. The third step is to let it boil for ten minutes and add the cut fish with some bay leaves. 25 minutes later, it's ready, and we can season it with salt and seasoning cube. This delicious catfish sauce is often served with rice.



# Essi Kevine Ruth Dussey



Hi my name is Essi, and I am from Togo, a country in West Africa. The city I lived in before coming to the United States is called Lomé. Lomé is a large city and is home to many serene beaches. I am 19 years old. I have two brothers and three sisters. My dream job is to become an accountant someday, and I work really hard to be successful in school. My favorite sport is tennis. I like to play tennis in summer. My hope is to pass all my classes this year and be independent someday.

## Naming Practice in Ewe Culture

In the Ewe culture in Togo, people name their child after the day of the week. In the following lines, I will try to explain the naming practices. Ewe naming practice is a tradition of giving a name to a child according to the day of its birth.

First, it is not required to name your child according to the day of their birth, but in my village, it is a tradition that should be followed. Each day has a name in the same way that each nickname has its own meaning. In my country, the last name comes before the given name. For example, in school, they can call you by the name by which you were baptized or by your middle name.

Secondly, we have names based on days of the week and on who came first. For example, if you were born on Monday and a boy arrived earlier, they will call him Kodjo, or if it is a girl, she will be called Adjo. If they are born twins, the two will have the same nickname but different meanings to know both. Also, sometimes a suffix is added at the end of some names for the ones born on a Wednesday. For example, if a child comes last, she will be named Akouvi, but if she came first, her nickname will be Akou; the same goes for the boys, but the names are different for boys and girls. Boys are named Kokou or Kokouvi. We have a ceremony that we hold whenever we welcome a baby home for the first time. It is a tradition that has been perpetuated by our ancestors. This ceremony will be practiced by the grandparents of the baby on the paternal side; after the ceremony, the child will be presented to the community.

Thirdly, people sometimes give their children church names from the Bible as nicknames. Some people believe that giving their child a church name is a memory of what the person did or experienced in the Bible. Parents encourage their children to follow in their footsteps. It is just a normal thing for parents or Christians to do.

Indeed, naming your child based on the day of the week is not something most countries do, but I think it is delightful.

### **Togo, Country of Origin**

The only place where my roots were born from my fetus.

The earth, welcoming me with open arms unconditionally to the outside world.

The verdict of my conscience frees me from loving my whole existence,

A country that expresses itself in the love and freedom of the other,

Incredible presentation but had the confidence to work together and build prosperity;

depends on the love and pride of ancestors.



# Ruby Myint



My name is Ruby Myint. I am 20 years old. I was born in a Karen refugee camp called Mae La, in a country named Thailand. I came to the United States when I was seven years old in 2007. I have one older brother and two younger sisters. I come from a very poor family and I know the struggle of not having food on the table. My parents received little education growing up, to make them proud, I am the first child in my family to attend college and I will make sure I will be the first to graduate from it. I went to Rock Island high school and got my diploma there. My goal is to become a nurse. I want to be able to cure and help others because staying healthy is very important. One of my favorite quotes is “you can do anything if you put your mind to it.” One day when I reach my goal, I want to go back and visit Thailand to help by donating money to the poor families. I want to inspire and share my stories to them.

## Life in Thailand

Thailand is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. The weather is perfect with no snow. It is always sunny and breezy. Everywhere you go, you see beautiful places and meet friendly people. Before my life began in Thailand, my parents came from Myanmar. One day they were driven away from their home along with thousands of others and ended up in a refugee camp called Mae La on the Thai side of the border. Years later, I was born in the camp. Life in the camp wasn't always easy. A lot of us don't have jobs, we always struggled for food, most of us couldn't go to school, and some would start working at an early age to help the family.

Although the refugee camp was the only safe place for us, it was also a difficult place to survive in. Thousands of Karen people ended up in the camp due to the Burmese military attack. The camp kept us safe, but it was also very restricted. We were not allowed to go outside of the camp, or the police would arrest us. Due to the lack of jobs, people would sell homemade food or snacks on the streets to make money, and some would gamble. When that was not enough, a family member would risk going outside the camp to go work for a rich person as a housekeeper/maid. Fortunately, some made it out and successfully came back without being arrested, but some didn't.

Moreover, surviving in a crowded camp was difficult. There would be food and water shortages. People would suffer from a lack of nutrition, and this would cause many people to become sick. Some people had it better than others because they were able to make more money while living in the camp. The camp itself was already poor, and homeless people without food or water would starve to death. Another reason people died from sickness was because there was no proper sanitation due to lack of water. Because the camp was overcrowded, people would get sick continuously, and it affected others quickly.

Last, school was a strict place for kids. They would punish them by whooping them with sticks or rulers if they did not listen. Sometimes kids got punished for not doing their homework or even not knowing the answer to the teacher's question. On the other hand, kids raised in a poor family usually didn't attend school. Kids would often cry seeing their friends go to school because they didn't have the chance to. The majority of children did not get to enjoy their childhood. They were expected to work like an adult to help provide for their families. Some would rather help their families than attend school knowing their family was struggling.

To summarize, everyone should have the opportunity to live freely and without worrying if they will have food for tomorrow. It's unfair that no matter how hard they tried, the refugees in the camp did not have the opportunity to better their lives. People in the camp have lived a miserable life. Kids should not have to worry about working; they should be focusing on their education instead.

### Karen New Year

The Karen New Year is a holiday celebrated by the Karen (Kayin) people. It is the most popular holiday for Karen. The date for this holiday varies because we use the lunar calendar, but it is usually celebrated around the end of December or the beginning of January. It focuses on the Karen people and their culture. The New Year celebration contains dances and lots of cultural food. The cultural dance is called *don*. It is performed by a group of boys and girls. They each wear the same cultural clothing in a variety of colors and a white band wrapped around their head. People usually focus on the dances and the clothes when they go to the Karen New Year. People from different places visit different states just to attend the event, so it is important that the dances are performed nicely and correctly. This holiday is celebrated by the Karen people in Myanmar, some parts of Thailand, and in the United States. For this event, we welcome everyone including people from other cultures. The more people we have, the more excitement and fun there is.



# Ngun (Ayoon) Cer Shannon



My name is Ngun Cer Shannon. I came to the United States from the country of Myanmar. I grew up in a small town called Than Tlang. It is located in Chin State. I am 36 years old. I am married to an American, and we have one daughter with another on the way. I am expecting her to be born at the end of June. I hope this pandemic will pass quickly, and we can enjoy life as normal like before. My dream is to become an entrepreneur in the future, and I want to open my own business. I love travelling, and I am hoping that soon I can travel to some of my favorite places. I am planning to earn an Associate's Degree in Business Management. I am sure it will take me awhile, but I hope that I will eventually reach my goal.

## **The Beautiful Land and Delicious Foods of Chin State**

Many people do not know about Chin State in Myanmar. They don't know what the country looks like or how the people are. Under British rule, Myanmar was known as Burma. This stayed that way until the military drove the British out of the country. This led to the country being renamed Myanmar, and it started the decades long military dictatorship rule. Throughout it all, the people of Myanmar and especially from my home state of Chin State have kept their traditions and culture intact.

One important aspect of the region are the geological features and location of the region. Chin State is part of the country of Myanmar. Chin State is located on the western side of the country, on the border with the country of India. The capital of Chin State is a city called Hakha. The land is up in the hills of Myanmar and as such the temperature is generally cooler than the majority of Myanmar. There are many huge and tall trees such as pine trees and willows. There are several big rivers and small streams that run through my state. Chin State is also not too far up the hills, so there is still some jungle on the eastern and southern edges of the region.



Another important aspect is the culture and religion of the people. Chin State is a poor state in our country; therefore, the people in Chin State are extremely hard-working and very sincere people. While they are all considered to be Chin people, there are several different dialects and groups of Chin people. Hakha Chin, which is what I am, is one of the groups. Other groups include Zo Chin and Falam Chin. These different groups have different dialects of language, which can make it a little difficult to understand when talking with each other. It is sort of like someone from America trying to talk to someone from Australia or England. The major religion of our region is Christianity, but the main religion of Myanmar is Buddhism. Chin people also have several superstitions that have come from their history. For example, if your palm itches, you should expect to get money. One of the most popular superstitions is that on the first day of the new year, it is especially important to keep in mind who is the first person to come into your home. If the person's name has a good meaning, then that means you will have good luck. On the other hand, if their name has a bad meaning, then that is bad luck for the year. The outfits that Chin people wear are mostly handmade and come in very bright colors. Most women make their clothes by hand using knitting, needle points, and weaving. Most women tend to have long dark hair that is said to represent dignity and modesty.



Last is the delicious food the people of the region enjoy eating. Almost all the food they eat is homegrown and organic. Most people grow their own fruits and vegetables, for example, tomatoes, lettuce, squash, and other varieties. They will also buy them from markets where others sell the food they grow. All their meats come from the animals that they raise. Many of the dishes their people eat are spicy in flavor. Normally, these dishes are enjoyed with rice. Usually, food is prepared with spices or with fish paste. Chin people use several different spices in their cooking, including Thai chilies and different kinds of curry. There is always soup served with the food. Some examples of the kinds of soup are vegetable, beef, pork, or chicken soup. It is also quite common to eat by using your hands.



In conclusion, there are many beautiful geological features of the land in Chin State. The weather is extremely good for the people and the environment. It is also good for the animals and plants. The people are very friendly, generous, and understanding. They are also very welcoming. The languages are similar, but, by having 135 dialects, it brings some complications in communication; however, we all believe in one religion, which I think is very impressive. Believing in superstitions also makes people take extra precautions sometimes. Chin cultural dresses are well-known by other ethnicities because they have incredibly unique and bright colors and stripes. They also have attached coins and silver on them. The food has amazing flavors and aromas. Since they are all organic, that means the people tend to be more healthy, strong, and have fewer diseases. I am inviting you all, my classmates and others who may read this article, to visit my country in the future. I can guarantee that you will have a wonderful experience and make incredible memories.

Mu Hyin Kha is a quite common dish in my country. We mainly serve this dish in the morning for breakfast, but there are some restaurants that sell it all day long. This dish is also served on special occasion or events. The dish is mainly a fish broth soup that contains yellow peas, onions, ginger, garlic, and banana stalks. A can of sardines or mackerel is also added to the fish broth. It is then seasoned to taste with salt and pepper. The soup is served over a bowl of noodles. Dry rice noodles are the most commonly used noodles. However, you can also substitute wheat noodles or any other kind of noodle you like. People also eat it with rice instead of noodles. You can then add hard boiled eggs, cilantro, lime, soy crackers, and soy sauce. These are the usual additions served with the soup. Some people add fried garlic and chili peppers to the soup. Everyone has their own ways to make it.



# Diego Verduzco Mendoza



My name is Diego Verduzco Mendoza. I was born on July 16, 2001 in Poncitlan, Jalisco Mexico. I have 3 siblings, 2 brothers and 1 sister. I grew up in Mexico until I was 16 years old. I studied middle school and part of my High school in Mexico. I moved to the United States in 2017. I got my first job when I was still 16 years old. I only studied two years in high school here in US. I graduated from UT high school in 2019 and I entered to Black hawk Collage the same year. My goal is to get a degree in accounting. I hope one day I will be able to open my own business. I am very hopeful that the opportunities that I have been given here in the US will make my life successful.

## The USA in the Eyes of an Immigrant

When an immigrant comes to the USA, they see the USA is different to their home countries. Three aspects stand out more than others: opportunities, culture, and social life.

First of all, immigrants see the opportunities in every aspect of life. Immigrants have greater opportunities to get a better job in the US than in their home countries. Most of the immigrants come to improve their working conditions, salaries, and job opportunities. They also have a bigger chance to open their own business. Younger and adult immigrants have the opportunity to study for free. If they want to study a career, they can get a scholarship to achieve their goals.

Second of all, the United States has different cultures and traditions. A great number of immigrants don't celebrate some of the US holidays such as Halloween, 4th of July, etc. This makes it a bit strange for the new immigrants, but it is not a bad thing because a great majority of immigrants start to celebrate the holidays. The United States is a place where many types of cultures are concentrated thanks to immigration. Perhaps for many immigrants, it is incredible to see an Asian, Black, or Latino person on the street. This is because for many of them in their countries it was very unusual to see a person who is not of the same race. When you hear another person speak a language that is not the same as yours, it is surprising. In many countries, it is rare to hear a person speak more than one language, but in the United States it is almost normal. The quality of life is much better than in the countries where the immigrants come from. This creates a space of tranquility for many immigrants because they have security, employment, and quality life.

Finally, the social life in the US is different to the social life in other countries. In the United States, there are many parties, and the more people go, the better the party, even if you do not know them, but in other countries, the parties are a little more private and for close friends. Americans often like to talk to strangers and interact with new people, but their sense of humor may be different from other people who come from different cultures. Sometimes, this can cause problems, or it can make both learn new jokes from other cultures.

In conclusion, an immigrant sees the United States differently than his native country, but even so, they try to adapt to their new home in the best possible way. Many people adopt new traditions or even share their traditions with American people. This means that the diversity continues to grow, so more cultures are accepted.

### **Mariachi Band**

The mariachi band is a genre of regional music in Mexico. It is originally from a region in western Mexico. Jalisco is where the Mariachi tradition was created. The mariachi is formed by a group of men (sometimes women) with various musical instruments. Some of the most famous mariachi singers are Pedro Infante, Jorge Negrete, and Juan Gabriel. People hire mariachis for parties like weddings, quinceaneras, and birthdays. Mariachis are an important part of Mexican culture, and it is considered a pride of our culture. The mariachi draws the attention of other countries to Mexico and our culture.

# Naomi Zawadi



My name is Naomi. I'm originally from Congo, but I was born in Zambia. I lived there for almost 14 years, and I learned almost all their languages, so I speak Swahili, English, Bemba, and I can also understand when somebody speaks French. I'm 20 years old. I have six sisters and two brothers. I'm married, and my hopes and dreams for this year are to pass all my classes and get a good scholarship for next semester. In my free time, I usually just watch TV and sit down with my phone. I don't like to read. The only thing that I read for fun are memes on the Internet. I like to cook sometimes, and my favorite things are shopping and going out with my friends. I used to play tennis. I played in high school for three years, but now I don't do any sports. I also sing at church in the choir, and I can braid hair.

## **Born with Two Nationalities**

Most people can count on their nationalities to be a constant in their complex identity, but not me. I was born with two nationalities. Even though I was born in Zambia, my parents are from Congo. They came to Zambia in the year 2000 when their life was in jeopardy. They ran away from bad government who were using soldiers to kill civilians. During that time, my parents had six children, and my mom was pregnant with me. But before the war in Congo, my dad used to work as a farmer, and my mom was a teacher. My dad owned a farm with 90 animals, which also helped them with cultivation and food at home. Once the war hit in Congo, they had to run away from the country they believed was their motherland, where they grew up, went to school, and even had a family. All of that was taken away by the stingy government. They walked for three days hoping to reach their destination where they could live in peace and that destination was Zambia which was the closest country to where they were in Congo.

Reaching Zambia, my mother gave birth to me. As a child, I thought maybe speaking two languages and being from two different countries would be fun or will make me feel kind of special, but it wasn't. My parents were forced to learn the foreign language to at least have peace and for the immigration to leave them alone. In Zambia, even though you were born there or lived there for more than ten years, but your parents are not Zambian by birth, you are still a foreigner. You cannot open a business, and you cannot go far in school past high school. Life continued until my parents decided to come to the US as refugees.

When we got to the US, our lives were a bit hard for us because we had to start new in everything. My dad decided that for me and my siblings who were older than 18 had to work, and those who are younger had to go to school. At the beginning, life was hard because we had to get used to the

American culture, and my little sister and I had to go to school. On my first day of school, I got lost in the school because I didn't know that the students were the ones to go and find the teacher's classroom. In Africa, the teacher is the one who comes to the classroom where the students stay all day. The teacher teaches and then leaves before the next teacher comes in and does the same thing, so I thought it was going to be the same. I just assumed it was going to be the same, and nobody told me of how the system worked.

In conclusion, living with two different nationalities has been one of the most challenging things in my life. It's because you have to make sure that you make yourself feel comfortable between two different countries that speak different languages while trying to adapt in two different worlds.

..

# OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



English as a Second Language Program

6600 34th Avenue • Moline, IL 61265

[www.bhc.edu](http://www.bhc.edu) • 309-796-5000