

# **Living in the United States as an African (Southern Sudanese) Person**

**By Kon Majok**

It's true that personal experiences of living in the United States of America cannot be duplicated from one person to another. However, living in the United States as an immigrant and or a black person may have common denominators experienced most Africans especially Sudanese. In my case, it was indeed a privilege and an honor to have been selected together with my family to come to the United States out of all the other countries that were accepting immigrants back in the late 90's while living in Cairo (Egypt). After arriving and living in America, much was revealed to me that the refugee orientation could not have disclose because it required first-hand experience. We ran into new bizarre weather, new food, new people of all kinds, new ways of doing school, and new way of doing church, and through all of that I grew through awesome and sometimes turbulent experiences that could not be duplicated by another.

Navigating everyday life while hiding from the extreme cold weather was something new and hard to manage for me. When I was in Africa, I loved getting up in the morning to study. However, this habit became difficult to maintain in America, because it was hard to stay worm and awake at 5:00 a.m to study and expand my English. Early morning studies were the time my brain accepted new vocabularies into my repertoire with ease. Walking to school,

playing outside, which we were accustomed to in Africa, and visiting neighbors became difficult of a task in the America.

Food was something that was new and exciting to try because it was so different and sometimes delicious; while other times just plain spooky for an African like me. In the U.S, living as an African taught me the vitality of holding on to one own identity, because everyone else was proud of their background, while professing priority to their American identity. I ran into many people of different backgrounds, and it showed how welcoming America was in meeting different refugees and people of other backgrounds especially in schools in Boston MA. School was awesome but having a different background and culture then what was dominant in school made school challenging. There were new languages for me, new people, and new curriculums to navigate. Luckily, students can eat in school and stay the whole day and night for school activities. It was hard to determine how academia was evaluated or highlighted since many students were preoccupied with sports, fashion, and extracurricular activities aside from studies. I came from a background where academic was what all students paid attention to. In America, new school activities became visible quickly that I had to pay attention to.

To add to all of these excitatory elements which can easily overstimulate any person experiencing them was what came during the weekends. Youth group, church, and choir was something new and demanding. From African catholic ways of doing church to now becoming a Lutheran was something unexpected but rich in all its avenues. We were invited as a family to be a part of a church that was very active (First Lutheran Church, Lynn, MA). We worshiped and spend countless hours talking as youth in a youth group (FLYP) about topics that were once

not matters discussed in public including teen issues, race, class, and ethnicity. We went to bible camps over the summer, served at soup kitchens, and help clean the church when it was overgrown with wheat and grass.

Weekend work eventually intervened and obstructed the usual day to day flow including dance parties, proms, and other family matters. Graduations, birthday celebrations, and weddings were added, and eventually college. College, which is usually navigated by the whole family in American for kids to attend successfully, was difficult for my family who was unable to offer much help with college let alone that they were hundreds of miles away from Concordia College being in Boston MA. Graduating school was a relive only to realize that landing a career is not an automatic occurrence contrary to popular believes in the African homes. Going on to live in the “real world”, proved challenging as school loans, rent, insurance payments demanded larger portions of the paycheck. This holds true for many Sudanese refugees. Most of us were oriented prior to coming to the United States in regard to the American dream, but attaining the basics of it, prove more elusive and challenging. Locating a functioning community to address these issues in the West is another challenge as well.

All in all, living in America is challenging and exciting, but it is something that cannot be duplicated from one person to another.