

## ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Ogechukwu Adiele



*Oge is an ESOL student originally from Nigeria. She has lived in the United States for almost 2½ years. She and her husband have three young children, two boys and a girl. Oge is currently working on prerequisite courses, and she plans to apply to the MCC Nursing Program. In this interview essay assignment, Oge writes about a memorable experience that reminds us that it really is a very small world.*

### Roses Hidden in Thorns

It was a good evening, and I was driving to the grocery store to do my shopping. Suddenly, I noticed an uneasiness in the movement of my car as the steering wheel was shaking. "GOSH!" I screamed. I had a flat tire. I was on a highway, so I managed to curb my car on the side of the road with my hazard lights on. I thought of calling my husband, and then I realized I forgot my phone at the house. I became helpless because I didn't know what to do at that point. I spent twenty minutes inside the car thinking of what to do, but no solution came to my mind. Cars were passing, but I didn't know how to stop someone for help. I prayed silently, and asked God to send me an angel that would help me out.

Still in my despair, I heard a voice that said "Hey, what is wrong with your car?"

I looked up, and saw a car parked behind mine. "I have a flat tire," I responded. Seeing an average height man offering to help me out was a big relief to me. In the process of trying to change the tire, he found out that I had no spare tire. I asked if I could use his cell

phone to call my husband. He handed the phone to me without hesitating and also offered to give me his own spare tire. I was amazed at the fact that such kind hearted people still exist in this world. He fixed my tire. I was so happy with his assistance that in addition to my appreciation of his kind gestures, I also requested his number knowing that my husband would be glad to say a thank you to him. This I told him, and the stranger smiled and walked back to his car.

Entering my house after my grocery shopping, I heard my husband's voice chatting with a friend in the sitting room. I headed to the kitchen to unpack all I bought from the grocery store. My husband called me to come and greet his visitor. I left what I was unpacking, and went to the living room. My husband began to introduce us, but he noticed the shock on my face and on his friend's face.

"He was the man I told you that helped me with my flat tire!" I exclaimed.

As my husband began to thank his friend for his kindness towards me, I thought, "What a small

world!" Of all the people that were passing on the highway, it was my husband's friend Nelson\* that stopped to help me, I thought. I shook my head in surprise, and I went back to the kitchen to prepare a good dinner.

Placing the dishes on the table, I asked my new friend when he came to the United States from Nigeria. He came to this country during the winter of 2000. The cold he felt on the day he arrived at the JFK International airport New York was alarming, and he wasn't wearing a thick winter jacket, so the cold really got into his skin. I became more inquisitive to know how he came here as I got my paper and pen to note some details he gave. I asked him if he won the American visa lottery, or if he came with a visiting visa, and then decided to stay. He sipped his drink then shook his head in objection and said it was his mother that brought him here being the only surviving son, and also because the way of living is better in the United States, his mother felt he should live here. I felt he was lucky and smiled.

I chewed the apple in my mouth

and continued, "Some of us had a tough time adjusting here when we came because we didn't know anybody. What was your experience like? I think you may have had a good story since your mother resided here," I added.

He dropped his fork in his plate; he sighed and folded his arms. He then answered with a strong voice filled with emotions. "I don't really like talking about what I went through when I came here because it reminds me of my mother's death," he said. At his last statement, he coughed a little as if he was choking. My husband gave him a glass of water to calm him down.

After a while, he narrated to us about his journey to the United States and the ordeals he went through. He began by telling us how his mother welcomed him at the airport, coupled with the delicious Nigerian food she prepared for him on his arrival. This, for the first time in his story lit a smile on his face as he said that he was very surprised to have had such a meal due to the fact that he thought it was impossible for one to find our native food in a foreign land.

He said that his precious mother was also planning a trip to Nigeria before he came, and as it worked out, she finally traveled for a two week visit to Nigeria three days after he arrived in the USA.

Little did he know that prior to her two week visit would be the last time he would ever see his mother again as she was confirmed dead a week after she arrived in Nigeria because of food poisoning. He poured wine in a glass and sipped a little and looked me straight in the eyes. In his eyes, you could see pain. Looking at his eyes, I dropped my pen and wondered about the pain he must have felt.

"I am sorry I have to put you through this pain again," I said. "How did you survive here since you were barely two weeks in this country before the death of your mother?" I asked. I noticed he was becoming uncomfortable.

All his plans and dreams were shattered because of his mother's death. Being new in the country, he did not understand the system of United States and how things were done here. Shortly after his mother's death, he was evacuated from his mother's apartment because her bills were overdue. "Where do I run to? Who do I talk to? Do I go back to Nigeria? How do I survive in this country without help? Different thoughts ran through my mind," he said. He found solace sleeping on the streets. He searched for a low paying job that could at least put food in his mouth and shelter him even if it was only a room in a motel. He finally got one, but the

job didn't last long because he had a problem communicating in English.

One fateful day, as he was wandering around on the street like a sheep without a shepherd, a car stopped and asked him to come in. Because of how frustrated he was, he entered the car. He didn't care whether they were kidnappers or armed bandits. The young man who graciously took him in his car introduced himself as Gabel from Kenya. Gabel asked him a couple of questions but instead of answers, Gabel noticed tears flowing down Nelson's cheek. Gabel, who was living with his younger brother, decided to take him under his wings, and help him succeed in the United States. He added, "In fact, Gabel was my Angel, and I owe him a lot." He smiled. Twelve years later, my new friend was now married with three kids.

The terrible loss of his mother, all the hardships he went through, and the rejections were all great thorns in his life, but later on, they were all blessings in disguise as beautiful roses hidden in the thorns later manifested. Now I knew the reason why he stopped to help me, I thought. Nelson's phone rang. That was his wife calling and he stood up to go. We showed appreciation once more for his kindness, and then my husband accompanied him to his car.

*\*Some names have been changed.*

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*ESOL Voices a collection of stories written by ESOL students at Monroe Community College. This semester, we are highlighting students from African countries. Look for a new story in the Tribune each month. We hope you will find these stories interesting and inspiring.*

*Katie Leite & Pamela Fornieri, ESOL Program, September 2014*

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