

AMERICAN WONDER!

I hail from the eastern part of Nigeria, the Igbo tribe. Going to the University, a feat neither of my parents had the opportunity to accomplish, was quite challenging. So you will agree with me that having my graduate studies in the United States is quite an amazing feat. Before setting out to the United States for my graduate studies, I had anticipated an adventurous experience. The fact that I will be traveling outside the shores of my country for the first time made me even more excited. No doubt, this was going to be a very significant 5-year span of my life. So far, it has been remarkable in every sense.

On arriving at the University of Delaware, I was stunned by its beauty and rich history. I was fascinated by the way the school integrates with its host community in such fashion that it appears the school flows naturally into the community. There were no boundaries or demarcations. The very fact that you could be on Main Street and be steps away from the campus shows how much emphasis the university places on the need to balance work and life. That was indeed a good first impression of my new home. Indeed, there was more to come as acclimatizing to my new environment turned out to be more than I had anticipated.

Before coming to America, I have always had the conviction that I possess a very good command of English language but to my own chagrin that doesn't seem to be the case. I could barely understand the immigration officers at JFK airport. In fact, I think they had more problems making sense of my spoken English. It was a bit embarrassing for me having to repeat my responds over and over again just to convey a simple meaning. I noticed with dismay the gradual decline in my desire to engage in conversations in a bid to cover up my recently discovered flaws in spoken English. Overtime, I made friends with some native speakers who

had the patience to filter my speech for clarity and meaning. Hanging out with them these passing years has really improved my ability to enunciate and comprehend words better. Also, I learned that it's more expedient to use American argots when communicating with Americans. For example, I almost ruined a friendship when I told a friend that his mum's booth was messy – referring to his mum's trunk, which actually looked untidy. But he thought I was referring to his mum's butt. Thank goodness I was able to remedy that situation. Now I just say trunk.

My first class in UD was quite remarkable, although filled with anxiety and anticipation, as I had no clue of what to expect. The classroom was obviously well selected to match the class size. This was contrary to my undergraduate experience in my home country. Everything seemed well organized and the faculty displayed in-depth knowledge and devotion to their profession. They showed up on time and if for some reasons were unable to make a class, we were informed before time and were kept busy with home works. The pace of the classes was quite fascinating as there was so much material to cover in every course. From weekly home works, to individual presentations every fortnight, to quizzes every month and midterms. It was indeed a marathon experience that drained the faculty themselves. As if the marathon learning experience and the language barrier was not challenging enough, winter came knocking cruelly.

Initially, I had eagerly anticipated the winter because I wanted to experience snowfall. Little did I know that such experience would come at the expense of five months of freezing temperatures. My so-called winter jackets and fur-coats were acquired with my prior notion of cold weather. Needless to say, they offered no real warmth against the cold. I had to master the art of layering and never to leave the house without a coat during months that are spelt with an 'R' (i.e. September to April). By the next winter, I was well prepared to withstand -35⁰F while on

vacation in Wyoming. Nevertheless, I still have a strong nostalgia for the all-year-round summer temperatures that wears the face of sub-Saharan Africa.

One other interesting experience was getting my taste buds receptive to the menu at American restaurants. American cuisines were far off from typical Nigerian or African food. For a while, I had to struggle with the food and my bowels would rumble after eating chili or bread smeared with sweet potatoes and cheese. Ordering at restaurants was really a big deal. My meals were always a surprise because most times I had no clue of what I ordered until it was served. I learned to stick with burgers because no matter how ingenious the caterer wants to be, I am sure to find bread and some meat inside. Having lived here for a while now, I can say that am pretty much comfortable eating a wide range of food.

Joining social and religious groups on campus have aided my transition into American culture. Through diverse activities that foster interaction and opportunity of meeting new people, I have been exposed to life in America. I had the opportunity of celebrating Thanksgiving and watching the super bowl with an American family - though I only understood touchdowns the whole time. I also served as a volunteer during the Pope's visit to Philadelphia and got involved in lots of other activities that aided my integration process. I am very much convinced that these experiences have broadened my views and thought process in so many ways and would positively influence my judgement in the future.