

Environment: I grew up in a small town called Teshie in the capital city of Ghana, West Africa. Many residents of Teshie, including my parents, came from various rural areas across the country in search of good jobs. This high level of migration resulted in the representation of several ethnic backgrounds in my community. Each ethnic group spoke a different language – a phenomenon that severely hindered our ability to communicate with one another. To overcome this challenge, each person learned to speak some, if not all, of the other languages that were represented in the community. As a result, the average person, regardless of age or origin, was capable of speaking at least two local languages. I learned to speak four local languages in addition to English and French, which I was taught in school. It wasn't until a few months ago that I began to think about how my outlook on life has been shaped by my experience as a child in Teshie. I came to realize that my community taught me to value the opinion of each person present even it achieving this meant learning a new language.

Family: I have an older brother named Julius. We didn't spend much time together as kids. He went to boarding school at a very young age in his academic career. I think my parents sent him there because they were struggling to give both of us sufficient attention while working very long hours at work. I was in boarding school by the time Julius graduated from his boarding school and came to spend a few months at home. We fought a lot during our childhood. I think part of the reason was that we were not accustomed to living together and another reason was that we were learning to be angry all the time because our father seemed angry all the time.

My mother is a very quiet person. Thinking back, I realize that most of our conversations involved asking her to request things from my father because I was too afraid to ask him or receiving advice from her about avoid my father's wrath. There were a few times when she gave me life advice. I cherished such moments. My favorite was when she told me, "Always tell the truth, even if it leads to losing your head."

Religion: I grew up in a Christian home. In the first ten years of my life, this meant my brother and I went to church every Sunday with my mother while my father stayed at home sleeping. My father never allowed my brother and I to stay at home with him. He would always give us money for our church offerings. It seemed that he believed in Christianity but didn't care to practice it. Perhaps he made us go with our mother because he knew it made her happy. Somewhere along the line, my father was invited to a different church by his boss. He probably went just to find favor with his boss. However, he fell in love with that church and made it a point to attend every Sunday. My mother, brother and I started attending this new church with my dad not necessarily because we didn't like our current church at the time, but mostly because in my family, everyone had just learned to do what my father wanted in order to avoid provoking his terrible temper. I did end up really liking our new church especially because I could see how it was transforming my father from the strict, angry, terrifying man who I was literally afraid of greeting every morning for fear of triggering his anger, to a man who laughed more, talked more, and cared more. Once my father started controlling his temper, I automatically started

controlling mine. Julius was not so successful at changing his temperament. As a result, my father and I have a very pleasant relationship now while he and Julius just tolerate each other most of the time.

Education: My kindergarten through third grade years were spent at a school named Love Preparatory School. I don't remember much from these years except that I always topped my class on our end-of-term exams. When I reached third grade, my principal attempted to convince my parents to let me skip fourth grade because I was too smart for my class. Oddly enough, the week my parents had that conversation with the principal was my last week at Love. My father was appalled by how easy it was for me to succeed at this school so he took me "school-hunting." Our hunting process involved me showing up to some of the best schools in the city and joining kids in my grade for their end-of-term exams. I don't know how my father convinced school officials to let me show up in classrooms like that but he did. If I did well on the exams at any of these schools, I was not allowed to attend there. This continued for a few weeks until I failed the exam at Queensland International School. As a matter of fact, I performed so poorly that the teachers at Queensland said they would only accept me if started third grade all over again. My father accepted that deal on my behalf and Queensland became my new academic home. Being an international school, Queensland was the first place where I started learning about the existence of a world outside of Ghana even though much of what we were taught revolved around the slave trade.

Despite the tough beginning at Q.I.S, I managed to rise to be among the highest achieving students in all my classes and gained admission to one of the best secondary schools in Ghana when I graduated.

Presbyterian Boys' Senior High School was an all-male boarding school. It was quite ironic that this school was ranked so high because the teachers did not really teach us much. If they weren't on strike demanding higher salaries, then they were away doing side businesses to earn more money. It was the poor quality of education at this school that made me and a few friends of mine start looking for a way out. One summer, a close friend of mine visited his mother in America and returned with several pleasant stories. I remember our conversation like it was yesterday. Every sentence was followed by, "it's a really nice place. It's really great. We need to school there. We need to find a way to get there" Julian had visited a few high schools while he was in America and the attention he received from the teachers and school officials blew him away. Heck! I was blown away by it too and I hadn't even experienced it myself.

About a year later, we had found a way to go to America. We had to convince our parents to part with over \$10,000 and to allow their seventeen-year-old children to go live in a foreign land for a full year. I am not sure which was harder for my family: spending the money, or letting me go so far away at that age. Either way, I'm glad they did both and allowed me to come to America as a foreign exchange student in Hanover, Pennsylvania.

I want to integrate the stories above and use them to create a clear image of how my childhood experiences shaped my identity before I came to America. I feel it is important that I make these stories more coherent before I delve into talking about how my identity has been affected by my experiences in America.