

Just tell me about yourself. What do you do, where are you from?

Ah, My name is Joel Kambaka, I'm from the Congo, I've been here, in Kirksville, in Missouri, Kirksville since 2015, July 2015.

And how did you find Kirksville?

So, I wouldn't be here, I wanted to be in Washington, D.C. I have a friend over there, a family, a friend of mine, but before coming, one of my brother's friends, who had been living here for 5 or 7 years or so, told my friend that here it's safe, they have a good college, or university here, it's safe for school, it's not very distractful, it's good, and it's safe. That's why I came here.

Did you come here with anybody else, or?

[shaking head] No.

So how did you come to the United States? Was it through the DV Lottery?

Oh yeah, so my brother used to work with American embassy in the Congo because he's kind of like human rights defender, so he used to work, he used to have some conference, some youth conference in the Congo, to try to mitigate youth, to tell them about their rights, what they have to get from the government, or if anything, what the government have to give them, because around the world, in different countries such as the United States, France, and some other countries in the world, the government provides lots of opportunities. School, especially school for youth, to promote the youth, because the youth is the strength of the country. So he used to do that. And usually, he used to come in the US every year to take part in the Youth Conference which takes part every year in Washington, D.C. So he has lots of friends, American friends, students. So he started working with them to find a way for me to come here as a student to study. So where, when, while we were in the process, where to go, what to do, which person to contact, make that happen, he told me about the DV lottery, and "Do you want to play?" And after that, I been called by the agency where I went to play the. The civil servant, he told me that I had been selected and the first thing I did after receiving that, I applied to ask to receive an appointment with the American embassy. Many months later, they sent me an email with the date of my interview, and all the things I have to do and to bring. All the documents that I have to bring. They sent me to the hospital because there are lots of hospital but they have specific hospital because those hospitals have kind of American doctors.

What do you mean [indistinguishable]?

So, what they do, before coming in the U.S., after winning the lottery, before coming here, there are things you have to do. The United States embassy always wants to make sure that you don't have any bad disease in your body that can affect American people or other people in the US. They have to make searches such as cancer, kind of lungs disease, HIV, and other bad diseases.

And they make sure, they have specific hospitals in the Congo and doctors, where they have, they send people. They don't send people to any doctors, so they have their doctors that they trust, they send people to those doctors. So when you go to doctor, you can set appointment, you go, you do all the stuff, they check your body, they check everything to see that you are perfect, you are healthy, you don't have anything bad, and after that, you not gonna take the result to the Embassy, the hospital will send them. If you, if you come to take it, they seal the envelope, if you try to open it, if the embassy find out you tried to open it, your case will be terminated. Yeah, so, you're not gonna take your interview, they just will cancel your case. And after that, if everything is okay, you pay your visa, and they give you a visa, and after that, it is your responsibility to pay for ticket, to know where you want to go, in which state you want to go.

How did you feel when you won the lottery?

When I won, I felt good, but you know, it was my first time. I heard of the lottery, but since I didn't have a tangible proof that it is really really real, I was kind of happy, but I was wondering if it is really really true.

But why did you want to leave the Congo and come to the US?

I wanted to leave the Congo to go, to leave the Congo because after my high school, I was planning to go into the bible college. But in the Congo, we don't have, we have only one bible college I think, or two. There's nothing good about it. They don't have qualified teachers, they don't have a good educational system, so it's not good. I was planning to go, especially in English speaking countries because I know most of pastors or people who have studied bible college in some English speaking countries, they have a very very good system. So I wanted to go, and that's it.

What are some of the biggest challenges that the Congolese face here in Kirksville and in Milan?

What do you mean?

The biggest challenges?

So the biggest challenge is language. That's the main point. Because, you know, most of Congolese people, they act wrong, they react very bad because most of them are in trouble, get in trouble because they don't understand things. Why? Because of the language. I will say the biggest challenge is the language. Because most of them don't speak the language because you can go somewhere and there is a piece of paper on the wall saying "This is what you have to do here. This is what you don't have to do." Since they don't speak the language, they don't understand anything they do wrong, and they get in trouble. Why? Because of the language. So I will say the biggest challenge is the language.

Do you like it here in Kirksville?

Ahhh, I like it. I like it kind of. I like it. It's safe. When I first came, I didn't really like it because all my plan was to go to school. I wanted to take advantage of all opportunities of school here in the US. When I first came, I was trying to make friends, because you know, to learn a language, one of the best ways to learn a language is to spend time with native speakers. As long as you spend more time with them, the more you are with them, the more you learn and the better you get. So I wanted to make some friends, but was very hard because some people don't like you because you are black, because you came from Africa, and they show you that we don't like you, that we are not even interested in helping you, and that hurts. But thanks to God, Jesus, my Savior, some good people, I met good people who love me the way I am, they help me a lot. Even now, if I'm able to speak this little English, it's up to those friends. And they are so dear to me.

So you have friends here, what were you doing since 2015, and what are you doing now?

So when I came in 2015, I started working in a factory because I knew I needed some money because I was a new person in the U.S. My own family was Jesus Christ. And where I was living was my brother's friend. So I didn't have anything. I wanted to, to kind of, to position myself, and I knew I needed a car, because school, you need a car, to pay the rent, some things like that, and I started working and saving some money for school. And then in 2017, in May, in May 26th, I stopped working. I started... to get focused on school, in school, so I just, right now I graduated from The Language Company, in Kirksville and I'm so happy. I just graduated. And right now, I applied to MS Community College, if everything goes well, thanks to God, I will start at MSCC in January for one or two years and then after that I will transfer my credit at the Bible College.

Well, congratulations.

Thank you.

And what do you want to do after bible college?

After bible college, I want to share the Gospel with people. The people around the world. To tell them about Jesus, what Jesus has done for them, what Jesus can do for them, what Jesus offers them, so that's what I really really want to do.

How is the United States different from the Congo?

The United States is really different from the Congo in many many aspects. First thing, in the US, I will say, no one is above the law. Even the president is under the law in some way. And the law is for everybody in some way. It's not for some people. If you meet a policeman in the US, if you were in trouble, if you see a policeman, you feel good, or you feel that you are safe. You are

safe because he's there to try to fix things, to try to take care of you, to protect you. Because in my country, the government isn't there for you. They're there for their own sake. They don't care about how people live, they don't care about the suffering of people, but here the government works for the people, because they know if something's wrong, they kick them out. They have been elected to help the people, to work for the sake of the people. But in my country, in the Congo, the government is full of corrupted people, the president himself, the prime minister [voice growing louder], everybody! They don't care suffering of the people, about people. And here, another thing, in the Congo, there are no school opportunities for the youth. Here in the US, if you do not have enough money to pay for school, the government can help you. because the government care about people, they want people to be educated. In the Congo, it's not like that. And here, when you go to school, you get the grade that you deserve. In the Congo, smart people ALWAYS fail. Why? Because they didn't want to pay the professor. Here, the teacher does his best to make the lesson understandable to students because if many people fail, the teacher will get in trouble. Maybe he's going to lose his job. Maybe he don't teach good, maybe, maybe lots of things. And the teachers, they love students, they want them to learn. But in the Congo, teachers want people to fail. Why? Because if you go to see him, "Why did I fail?" and you pay him, you gonna pass. And many people, if they graduate, they don't have nothing. People who have knowledge, they fail. Why? Because they didn't pay. And that is one of the things that is weakening the Congolese government or the country.

What are some things that you would like people from Kirksville to know about people from the Congo? What are some things you wish people could know?

Ah, I would say if there are thing that people from Kirksville to know about the Congolese is they need their help to get involved, kind of to know what is life, how things work, how do things work in the US because most of the Congolese people get in trouble because they don't know. I would like people in Kirksville to know that they need their help to know how things work.

What can people in Kirksville do?

What they should do kind of to help them, to explain things to them, if they are asking Congolese some words, and they don't know them, to try to communicate, to try to communicate, to help them try to understand what they need to understand. Kind of to help them, you know, you may meet someone who doesn't speak well English, but if you take the time to speak to him sometimes, that might help him to improve the language.

What are hopes for the Congolese community in the future?

One of my hopes for the Congolese community is to see lots of them at university and college. To see most of them go to school, to learn, to study, to know how to do things, how things work in the US, in order to live in peace. Because the United States is a country where there are lots of opportunities. But if you mislead yourself, you may not be able to take advantage, or to enjoy all those benefits. So my hope is to see them in school, to see them being able to speak English, to

be able to understand things, and to be able to take advantage of all the opportunities of school, especially school, education, here in the US.

You've talked about English a whole lot. What other languages do you speak?

I speak English, I speak French, I speak Lingala and Swahili, two African languages.

Can you demonstrate some Swahili and Lingala?

In French, we say, I wanna say "How are you?" In French we say, "Comment ca va, comment allez-vous?" In Swahili, we say, "Habari," or "Vipi," in Lingala we say, "Boni, ngigni."

Is it hard not to speak that here, do you miss it?

Not really, because I know I was born in the Congo, I did speak Lingala and Swahili almost my whole life. Here I need to go to school, so I know here I need to improve my English. I don't care about Swahili and Lingala because I know I can speak them, French I know I can speak, even if I spend maybe 10 years or 15 years in the US, I will still be able to speak those languages, I will never forget them. My main purpose is to improve, to get really really fluent in English.

Is there anything else that you want to say? to Kirksville, or to the US, or for anyone watching?

What I want to say is... I would say... I'd like people, if they meet some Congolese people, if they want to know things, to try to explain things to them to try to help them, to try to explain things for them, because there are many things, many opportunities in the US, but most of the Congolese don't know about these benefits. To try to explain to them, to try to make things really clear for them, to help them, to love them as they love everybody.

Two more questions. What was the biggest culture shock when you came to the US?

Can you explain?

Culture shock? Like when you came to the US, were you super surprised about anything? Or was it hard, adapting?

I will say I was... I was surprised, I was surprised to see... the way people to see the way most people act. You may not know him, he doesn't know who you are, but they are friendly. And even if he doesn't know who you are, if he sees you, he faces you, he kind of smiles. And that makes people feel good.

How do you think you can keep your own culture while still learning all about American culture?

I think I can keep my culture by trying to remember my country. Trying to remember it. Remember things of my country while trying to learn in your culture, uS culture.

Anything else?

Hmmm, no.