Walking Backward to Freedom
Celebrating the “Fête Des Haricots” in Togo, West Africa

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PRE-READING
Find the definitions of these words before you read:
pilgrims, animosity, resolve, harvest, prosper

This is a story about the migration of the Ewe (pronounced ay-way) people, my great grandma’s native people, a tribe that is as old as the human race. The story of their migration is the reason for one of the famous celebrations in my country Togo, West Africa.

This celebration is a national holiday that honors our ancestors. The celebration is called “Fête Des Haricots” (Festival of Beans). On this holiday in September, pilgrims give thanks for their escape from an evil king and for their harvest of beans.

Long ago, our ancestors lived under a king who was full of animosity. His name was Agorkorli. He was the ruler of Notsie, where the Ewe people lived. Agorkorli was a cruel and wicked king. He built a tall and thick clay wall to prevent his people from escaping. But the people wanted to escape, and they were firm about their decision. They made a plan to pour water beneath the wall. The water weakened the wall and opened a passageway through it. What a great idea!

The elders made a plan for the Ewe people to escape. They set a time to leave. With hot anger and calm resolve, they escaped through the passageway in the darkest hour of the night.

They started the journey by facing north yet walking south. They escaped walking backwards. Fantastic! Another great idea! When the king sent his guards to find them, their footsteps led back into the village.

When our ancestors departed from Notsie, they took with them some seeds of bean plants. On their journey, they came to a place where they planted the seeds. They waited there for the plants...
to grow and to be harvested. They named that place “Tsevie” (which means grow up or sprout out a little bit). After they harvested the beans, they journeyed to a land full of sand. They settled there and named it Keta, which means “On top of the sand.”

Keta is in the Ketu District of Ghana. The pilgrims dropped their belongings and said, “We have planted our feet on a higher ground. Can we think of any other place where life is better than ordinary home?”

In Keta they lived a quiet, peaceful life, and they prospered.

After the death of the unkind king, they decided to come back and settle in Tsevie. They chose August 8th as the day to commemorate their escape, and they named it Fête Des Haricots.

When I was in my country, this was a very important celebration to me. To celebrate Fête Des Haricots, I had to save money so that I could buy new shoes, jewelry, and a white dress. The celebration is important to me because it is part of who I am. I love it so much. We, the great grandchildren, dressed in white and welcomed strangers and introduced ourselves to each other. We killed cows and cooked beans because beans were the favorite food of the pilgrims. After the celebration everyone went home with uncooked beans.

I will never forget that the struggle of the Notsie people was hard and courageous. It makes me feel great and proud. Throughout the year, I never lack beans. The honoring of this history and these people is a very special celebration for me. I have missed it since I came to America!

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**Political Boundaries vs. Tribal Boundaries**

Between 1880 and 1913, the Europeans drew boundaries for 40 new states or colonies in Africa. These boundaries form the basis of current African nations. The country boundaries created by the Europeans often grouped together African peoples with very different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds.

— from <www.our-africa.org/history-war-and-politics> (site includes short videos and more)