

(A Fragrant Life of) Food, Poverty, and Immigration

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BEFORE YOU READ: What does *fragrant* mean? Give some examples of fragrant foods you eat or products you use. Use *fragrant* (adjective) and *fragrance* (noun) in sentences.

Growing Up on One Meal a Day

When I was 12 years old, my father died. It was 1982. I miss him. In July of 1989, I stopped studying, so that I could work to help my mom. We didn't have anything to eat. There was nothing on the table. I didn't have any shoes. I had almost no clothes. I used to eat one time a day, usually rice and beans. We used our fingers to eat. Sometimes, I ate a Senegalese soup called *canja*, which has rice and a lot of other things like pork and oysters.

On June 7, 1998, a war started in Guinea-Bissau. Any war is bad. I remember the fighting. People died in the street. This memory is in my mind all the time. Thank God, I didn't die, but my

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friends and family died. There were bombs. Nobody could help you, because everybody tried to go to a safe place, to save their own lives.

I worked for a pastor, who tried to help me move up in life. His name was Father José Enrique Marquéz. He was a good pastor. He sang. He wrote history books. He helped the community get food, and he ran a church choir for boys. He had a person working for him who showed me how to fix and paint houses and do plumbing and electricity. We used those skills to rebuild, to help the community, especially poor people. This work did not pay much.



New Foods in Dakar and Cape Verde

After the war was over, I went to Dakar, Senegal. Dakar is beautiful; I like Dakar. I had my first child there. That is where I tasted my first *thieboudienne*, a food they cook with different meats, like fish, and also yucca, carrots, and a type of radish.

Later, I traveled to Cape Verde to find work and have a better life. My job was in construction. In Cape Verde, I ate *cachupa*. There are two kinds of *cachupa*, "*cachupa rico*" (rich *cachupa*) and "*cachupa pobre*" (poor *cachupa*). The rich version has vegetables, pork, and beans. The poor version only has corn and some fried eggs. For flavor, they might add fried yuca.

Because I had work in Cape Verde, I was able to buy clothes. I usually wore blue and white, because those are the colors of my favorite soccer team in Portugal. I like that team because, when I was young, my father liked that team. We listened to the games on the radio together. Nobody back then had a television.

The first friends I made were at my job. They didn't speak my language, Guinea-Bissau Creole. It is different from Cape Verdean Creole, but we could still understand each other. I also met people at church. They were from Nigeria,

Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Ghana, Liberia, and Cape Verde.

French Fries and Fragrances in America

A lot of my friends said, “Oh, you are a good worker. Try to get a visa to go to America.” In September of 2001, I got a visa to go to the U.S. I moved to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and I started a new life by working for a trash-removal and recycling company.

The first food I tasted in America was pizza. It was very good! It’s an easy-going food, because you call the pizza shop, and it’s ready five minutes later. That was new for me. My friend from work took me to MacDonald’s one Sunday. He showed me French fries and chicken nuggets. He said, “Now you’re American!”

Everybody in Africa has a different smell. But Americans try to help you make a new life. They bought me deodorant, shampoo, and nice cologne. Now I use Bleu de Chanel, which I keep at work. But when I go to church, I use a cologne called Coach. All these fragrances were new to me.

In the morning, I worked on the garbage truck, and at night, I cleaned schools, offices, and houses. I did these jobs for eight years. Then I started working at a pallet company. I got married and became a permanent resident. Then, after two years, I had an interview for my Green Card. When I got my Green Card, I looked for a good job. Now I work at the Plastics Group of America. It’s a good job.

Many People Have Helped Me

I miss a lot of things from home: food, hugs, and more. I especially miss the best food from Dakar, *thieboudienne*. But in my long journey, a lot of people have helped me. I want to say thank you to the people who helped me in my ESL class at the Pawtucket Library. I don’t want to stop learning. I want to keep doing everything I can to move up in my life. For almost 20 years, people have tried to help me. They taught me: this is good, this is not good. Thank you for helping me again and again.



Trace Anselmo’s route. Find the approximate locations of Senegal, Cape Verde, and Rhode Island on this map.

AFTER YOU READ: Tell your life story using food or fragrances (or both) as the organizing principle. Use slideshow software to share your story. Add images and text.

Anselmo Taborda is from Guinea-Bissau. He is a tall man, a Black man. He is hard working, and he believes in God. He helps his friends at work, and his friends help him. He wants to learn more English and maybe get certified in computer systems. He is a student at the Institute for Labor Studies and Research (ILSR) at the Pawtucket Public Library in Rhode Island, and he is grateful to his teachers.

