

Kavamahanga Raphael Interview

Where were you born?

I was born near in Bujumburu, in Burundi.

What name were you born with?

Kavamahanga Raphael.

How old were you when you left your country?

I was 26 years old.

What was your occupation or line of work in Burundi?

My occupation was a teacher to teach new students in primary and secondary school.

What were your reasons for leaving Burundi?

My reason is a little bit longer. My first reason for living – there was a tribal war. Our government and the military make forces and one race killed by the government. It was in June 1972. I wanted to stay alive, so I left.

What country did you travel to America from and in what year?

Because I left my country, I went to Rwanda and it was as I told you before in 1972.

When you left, were you forced to leave anyone behind?

No I think not because I brought my whole family with me.

What type of transportation did you take on your journey?

We took two or three trips. We live in Kitale, Kenya and took a journey in the airplane. Everything was in the airplane from Kenya to the Netherlands. There we were in an airplane until New York. We slept over there; it was snowing. It was our first snow and it was cold! From New York we took the airplane into Dallas and finally we put our feet on Arizona's line where we stay until now.

I forgot something; the transportation was organized by IOM.

Why did you choose to come to the United States?

The reason is if you come from the country war you have to save your life and to live where I was, I need to be free. The United States is a country in freedom and I chose to live in this security and freedom.

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How did you finally end up in Arizona?

Because when we left Rwanda to here it was intended to come to Arizona. They told Arizona is a good place; it is warm, no snow, no cold. (Because I have high blood pressure I don't like the cold). It was planned to come here with my whole family.

How did you learn to speak English?

I knew a little of bit of English, I used it when I travel. But when I came here I realized that I needed to start. We had a teacher who came to our apartment. It was at Dunlap and 125 Avenue. The teacher covered some lessons with the whole group and the family. After two years you could speak English and do something. So I decide to spend our time to learn English. At six in the morning was leaving and I took a bus until Buckeye. We went to the east until, I think, 12 Street and Sales Center. I took one year and because I'm old it went slowly but I did greatest job because the teacher told me that I was the first. And after that I went to 7th Ave worked in document writing as a way to learn English.

What is your life like now that you live in the United States?

I was a teacher but here you can't teacher because here in the United States you are very, very lucky. You have everything to use at school, but in Africa we don't have much. You have a television; in Africa, in the Ministry there might be one or two computers. I never have used a computer.

What type of jobs, or work have you had since coming to the United States?

I have worked at an architect for two months. After I have worked at industrial industries. I worked as I was training in a store and we had many trainers. I think one came from California only for me. They teach us a little bit of English. We worked and trained about many things. After this, because we had work over there for no more than one year, and after I got a job as a security guard. Now I am working as a security guard at a zone of construction. Not in a store, but in a zone of construction. I am lucky to because when I was teaching we had the three R's : building, agriculture, and construction. And each teacher knows that the other teacher was doing. So when I am assisting I am interested to know what they do.

What is your favorite memory of Burundi?

I can tell you for America. My greatest favorite memory that I had is the greatest development in the US. They take the roof off the sky for everything! They bought this [his house], computers in offices, commons, industry, . . . everything. This is for America.

Here they use a computer, in Africa they use the brain and they write everything. Because I taught agriculture. It was the first step because before work in the office, must eat. Travel to the moon, you first have to eat. But there's not enough food. I dislike it because

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there's not enough food and they don't have enough way to get everything. Maybe in other things, but not this.

Do you want to stay in the United States? Why or why not?

Yes. Men and the women are able to everything. You work in the office, you are pilot, you are in the army, you are the teacher, you are everywhere. But in Africa the women don't have a good job you see.

You have the answer. I left my country to save my life. In a freedom country to be free you can sleep in your house and forget to close your house. But in Africa it is impossible. During the war many people died and don't find the food. The answer is I prefer to be where I am. Why? The reason is explained.