

New Roots Review

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Shoes I Have Never Walked In

by Fred Wilgenburg

I admit to that phrase sometimes when I am among refugee and immigrant friends. They seem to appreciate the honesty, and the interest in their life story. I may not be able to relate, but Jesus can as he was a refugee.

For Homary, already as a seven-year old, education was a crucial part of him becoming a Jesus-follower. Born into a Muslim family in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as a young boy, Homary started attending the government (public) school in his area, which had Christianity as its religious instruction. While his dad was not pleased that the school was in session during the Friday afternoon prayer time for Muslims, he allowed Homary to stay as he excelled there. Similarly, at first his dad did not allow him to attend Sunday School, to which some Christian friends invited him, but after Homary pleaded with him, he was allowed.

Homary's parents were not always Muslim. His dad identified as a Christian into his teenage years, but at a time of seeking direction during what were rebellious years, he became motivated by some young Muslim men who became his role models, along with the rules and guidelines of Islam. Homary's mom, as a teenager in DRC, became frustrated by what seemed to be a lack of change in the lives of Jesus-followers she knew, so she became Muslim.

During difficult years of civil war, in which many lives were lost, especially in the Swahili and Lingala-speaking areas of DRC, and further endangered by the fact that Homary's family was royalty, in 1993, he and his family became refugees to Zambia. In the refugee camp, he worked for a Finnish mission for orphans. Showing promise, the mission sent Homary to theology school to be a youth pastor. After leading a youth ministry, and being a treasurer for a church, he became a pastor there.

During this time, Homary met Queence, who eventually became his wife. Her parents were originally from DRC, before having to leave to Zambia as refugees. Queence was born in the refugee camp there. Homary and Queence married, and they soon had a son, Albert. Queence and Albert received an opportunity to come to the US, which they accepted, even though Homary could not come with. Five years later, Homary was able to join them, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Homary has always hungered for learning. Besides him speaking several languages, to provide a better living for his growing family, which now includes five children, while working at Smithfield Foods and wanting to be promoted to a supervisor role, Homary completed a Bachelor's degree, and is presently working toward a Master's degree. Queence has a similar drive. She has owned a beauty salon for many years, and together with Homary, they run a growing home health care business with some part-time employees. As this couple together builds up their financial capacity, their ultimate dream is to open a foundation to help underprivileged people in Homary's hometown in DRC, and in Zambia.

Something that makes Homary happiest is that over the years, nearly all of his family, who mostly were Muslim, have come to receive God, and to know Jesus as their Savior. For his mom, Homary found a Lutheran catechism in Luba, her tribal language, "mother tongue." Reading that, along with seeing her family as —> —>



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escape to at that time.

In Sudan for just six months, Badreddin climbed onto a truck for a 25-day trip across the deserts of Sudan, Chad, and Libya. His goal, like many Africans, was to get to Europe for a better life. It was in Libya that Badreddin, a speaker of the Oromo and Amharic languages, learned Arabic. He lived in Libya for over two years, often with little food to eat, and in danger, as many Libyans despised, and even threatened the lives of, African men like Badreddin. As the Arab Spring was occurring, during which there were pro-democracy protests across northern African and Mideast countries, the Red Cross directed Badreddin to go to neighboring Tunisia, which was safer than Libya.

While a friend boarded a raft to go to Europe, Badreddin chose to wait longer in Tunisia, and after one year, he was granted passage as a refugee to the US. While the friend lacked permission and proper papers, so that now, twelve years later, he still has a difficult time securing steady employment, with refugee status, Badreddin was able to receive his green card from the US in five months, which is a legal status allowing him to work and/or go to school. Badreddin first went to Phoenix for six months, which is where he met Biftu, a fellow Oromo Ethiopian. They moved to Sioux Falls in 2012, and soon got married. Coming from hot places, they enjoy the changes in seasons, and are happy to both work at Smithfield Foods, so their family, which now includes five children, has much opportunity for education and a solid future.

My blessed life as a child of God has always been in the US. I have not had to “walk in the shoes” of a refugee. Rather, I have been given much—loving families, good education, affluence, and a personal relationship with God. To that, Jesus said, “from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Luke 12:48). Those words are not a threat, just the natural expectation for receiving God’s transforming grace, and the opportunity for fulfillment as we help, love, and empower others, including so they also can receive that amazing, transforming grace.

(continued...)

vibrant Jesus-followers, were key to her return to the Christian faith at an old age.

In his 34 years, Badreddin’s life journey has had numerous stops. He is of the large Oromo tribe in Ethiopia. It has a history of seeking independence from Ethiopia, which has caused conflict with the government. As a teenager in 2009, after much intimidation by the Oromo Liberation Front to join their cause, Badreddin fled as a refugee to Sudan. Like many Oromo people, Badreddin is Muslim, so Sudan was the country to es-

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