



My name is Théophile. I'm from Cameroon, central Africa and the way that I was born, my mom and my dad were both fishing in the boat. This is where they meet each other. My mom told me, "I meet him fishing at 3 AM in the morning. He has his own boat and his own team" and when they went to catch a fish he showed her how.

They have the first four child, the four pass away. One die of malaria, one die because of the typhoid, other die by accident, and the ten-year-old die by poison. It was so much hurt to my mom and to my dad that they became happy when I first came in the world. I was the number fifth who came and I was born in the middle of the water in the boat in the sea.

Then my dad start to raise me and my mom they raise me. And when I was 6 years old, my sister came. We were living near the coast and my dad started engaging in politics, with the ruling party. But one day, he saw the other side and he became against the government.

Meantime I pass my high school diploma. It was a very very happy time in my life. I was with friends. We have passed and we will go to university, and we are celebrating, eating big plates of banana and plantain and catfish stew, very happy, when they come in the club and say "Your Mom is calling you. Your sister met accident."

I find my mom there, my dad, they crying. They say they couldn't find even the body of my sister. Hand over there. Head over there. One arm, it was gone completely. We found that a mile away. Because it was a big big crash. A car that carry 14 people and a truck. We start to put piece and piece together. My sister. We went to the market near there nearby, buy some stuff to wrap it inside, and go back and put in the mortuary. So my sister. Why this can happen I do not understand.

Then I went to the university of Yaounde. Like my dad, I became activist also because in Cameroon the people in power were only people from the South. Them from the South, they keep the money, the visa for the foreign country, grants to study abroad, and they don't qualify, they don't have the grades to qualify while us, we come from the high school with grades we qualify and only students from the South, the ethnic of the president, they get.

We organized the students. They call the student movement the Parliament. Then the government put some other group of students against us. They gave them munitions and automatic guns and all like that. It became very serious now. We didn't have nothing of weapon. Nothing. It was only the talk, talk. The opening of democracy in Cameroon. I was a leader. We were asking government you know to create more universities in other states. There was only one in all of Cameroon. Also give scholarships to those who have good grades and stop giving weapons to students to use against students. Of those three we won only one, open more universities.

But now they start chasing me. And then my dad is in jail. They say, "You were with us first, now you want to knock us down." They arrest him because his opinion was, "You have to share the power. You are president, you control the justice, you control the army, you control everything only in one person." They said, "Ah, we didn't know we had a snake inside the room." Well, that was the end of my dad. The end. He was in prison till he passed away. They found his body in the bush.

I became now a member of the political party and I was arrested. I went into jail and it was really bad. I was arrested 4 or 5 times. I saw the fire. I died and I came back. It was very very bad, very very bad, tough tough tough tough and I never see my dad. He never know that my mom pass away. He never know that I was in the jail. He never know that. He never know I was married. He never even know my first son. Never.

So, I went to an event. It was organized by the students and some recognize me as a former leader. They come to meet me, they surround me there, they give me their respect. They say, "You are the man! You are the man!" but there were two spies at that event. Then in the restaurant, suddenly the police came and surrounded us. When they came inside, they get only me. They pick me like that.

There was a priest, he became good friend to my dad. He start to make escape preparation. He learn when they are going to move the prisoners in a big truck. He make arrangement with the other prisoners. There were about 50 of us, and when I sit inside the truck, I sit at the end. Two people with the gun, there, at the other side. Then one tell me when the car going slow somewhere, you going to jump. I said that he was joking. When the car start to slow, he push me. I fall out and start to running the opposite side and the truck kept going. I hear the noise of the gun. Fo fo fo! Suddenly a car was stop by me. It was a friend. I didn't know that it was prearranged. I didn't know that. Nothing, nothing. It was maybe two weeks later they explain me how.

Then I have to hide in the village. The traditional healer do me the massage with the bones of the lion because I was like a baby just born. I was weak. I was crazy. I was completely lost in my life.

Then they want to get me out to the country to Holland. Embassy of Holland help many students. I talk to my mom. My mom said, "No, you are the only one that remain to us." My mom lost four child, then my sister also. People try to talk to her, "They're going to

kill him. They're going to kill him." But I say no. Then my mom she too pass away. She wanted to travel to village to see me but she is poisoned.

So I was hiding behind the church till I escape. If my mom and dad didn't pass away, I would never go.

The priest help me, feed me. He's like my second dad. I try to find him again but they say he is gone. But I will never forget him. He give me letter to a priest in California. How I get visa? Switch the photo in the passport. Even the day up to the flight, in the airport it was high high high high fear that they were going to get me.

I arrived in the airport in Pennsylvania. From there I have to meet someone there who was guiding me here to California. That person isn't there. Later, I find out he died, but the priest didn't know that. Lucky that I have a ticket from Pennsylvania to here. My ticket was LAX and I'm going to this other place and the taxi take all my hundred bucks. I have nothing. I don't speak English, not even "Hi." And I have letter to this priest but I don't even know where is the church.

But now, this city is the key for the rest of my life. I go to the library. At the church I met someone who speak French. Everything start now to go up for me. Everything take off. PTV help me from the bottom until right now.

But I don't like to go out. I keep stay in the home. It is in my body ever since I was hiding. It never go away on me.

You know. I try to get back again my body. I never get it back. Even my stomach. During the torture, they make me drink the hot water. It boil me completely inside here. Sometimes they would put us naked sometime and tie us like that. I lost my teeth here. And this, the torture, burn here. And knife also, all this is knife. They tie us in the chain, chain like that, and like that. We call that balançoire.

But I didn't want to tell that story anymore. I wanted to put it aside. I came here in the US to be in peace. My grandma say a proverb: "Quand tu vas à chier, faut jamais tourner à voir ce que tu as chié." When you go to the bathroom to have the BM, never turn to look what BM you did. BM? Is terminology of etiquette. When you go the bathroom have the poop. Never turn back to look what you poop. In life, you know, that it remains in the past.

For six years I petition immigration for my wife and my son. Six years, and also all the years of hiding, and she already have another life. My son, he want to stay with his Mom.

But I'm OK I'm fine I'm good. I trying to go to a normal life. In this country, I don't see another country in the world where to have opportunity, to have respect. I went to school and now I am about to graduate as engineer. But I think back to what happened to my family. It still hurt me sometime that I don't have mom, I don't have dad, I don't

have sister. I have also some small land from grave of my dad. How you call that? Sand? from his grave. When you die you become poussière, dust. I have poussière from his grave.

Mom gone, dad gone. Where I'm going now? Sometimes I ask myself why I'm still alive today. I don't understand that. Why? Why did people want to hurt me? Why they want to hurt my dad and my mom? and my sister and my four siblings. I don't understand. It's very very painful.

In my life I only wish good for everybody. I never want someone to fail. I want people to succeed in life. When someone do something great, I'm happy even if I don't know him.

Some time here when I'm watching the TV, I saw the violence, I have to turn the TV off, It gives me flashback. I don't know where I am. I'm still being chased by the military, with the gun behind me, put on me behind, in the crowd. They put the gun on me, here, like that.

They arrest me, beat me. "You will never do it again." I was a student, at the university, the first time. I don't know why I didn't stop. I kept going.

I try to make something that maybe the new generation have the benefits in my village. When I become US citizen maybe I can build a school there. Without them, I'd be dead, I'd be dead. I want to say thank you to all them.