



UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

Clarke
put down roots
in Abu Dhabi
with her family.

BYE, AMERICA

FROM JOSEPHINE BAKER TO NINA SIMONE, BLACK WOMEN HAVE BEEN LEAVING THE U.S. TO PURSUE UNMATCHABLE OPPORTUNITIES OVERSEAS. HERE, THREE WOMEN SHARE THEIR JOURNEY OF LIVING NEW LIVES IN FOREIGN LANDS
AS TOLD TO CHRISTEN A. JOHNSON

Tamara Thomas Clarke, 35

Atlanta to Abu Dhabi

In December 2012 I arrived in my new home, Abu Dhabi, with my 8-month-old son and four pieces of luggage. I couldn't believe I had just traveled to live somewhere I had never even visited. My husband, Walter, had secured a job teaching high school English abroad, a long-standing career goal for him. I was ready for the challenge and had an online accessories business, which was easy to maintain anywhere. Walter had moved in October to get acclimated. As Christmas approached, it was time for us to follow him.

Before relocating, I joined Facebook groups in which people who live overseas share information. Our parents knew this change could enrich our lives, but weren't so thrilled about us taking their grandson halfway around the world. The Middle East is often linked with religious fervor, so our decision promised a learning experience about other aspects of the region.

My first day here was surreal. We bought household basics and looked for a crib. I was timid and let my husband do all the talking. In the beginning, I felt as if everyone was watching me. One day my husband said, "They may be staring because there aren't many people here who look like you." I softened after that. One day I was shopping and a sales

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—TAMARA THOMAS CLARKE

associate asked, "May I touch your hair?" Tickled, I said, "Yes," giving her full access to my tresses. I turned around to find four Filipino associates smiling. They had many questions, so I ended up giving a ten-minute tutorial on locs. It was an exchange I will always remember.

In November 2014 we welcomed our younger son. Here, my prenatal health care mirrored what I had received in America with my first son, and some hospitals use American or British standards of care. My doctor was well trained and highly

recommended. It's awesome raising my children in a different land, because it breeds cultural understanding

and open-mindedness. I discontinued my e-commerce business and am now a stay-at-home mom, tech writer and theglobalgazette.com blogger.

The UAE is a Muslim country, but it practices religious tolerance. I'm Christian, so I'm not required to cover my head. There are formal places, like the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, that provide hooded abayas for ladies to wear when visiting. We attend a local church where our younger son was dedicated.

Returning to the States is a goal for our future, but we don't have a set date. As a mother of two Black boys, I want to return to a stronger, greater America. I'm hopeful that the citizens will continue working toward justice for all. ▶



Nicole Blake, 36

Newark, New Jersey, to London to Berlin

A Newark native, I didn't really appreciate the head nod or smile Black people give each other in passing until I moved abroad, because I would have been nodding all the time! Being a person of color in Europe is totally different. Once I was walking down the street in Berlin with some relatives who were visiting. We heard someone yell, "Hello!" It was a Black woman, and she was so excited to see other people of color. She crossed the street to greet us. My family still jokes about this.

In 2006 I was working as a government contractor in Washington, D.C., when I was offered a six-month temporary assignment in London. I took the opportunity and it extended to three years. Once the contract was up, I wasn't ready to leave Europe. I secured a position in Germany's private sector and moved to Berlin in 2009. At that point, my knowledge was limited to the Berlin Wall, Oktoberfest and the Holocaust.

When I announced my decision to stay in Europe, I'm sure my mom cried, just not in front of me. I miss my family and support system, but not enough to move back to the U.S.

While in London, I met and fell in love with a Danish man, the father of my 2-year-old daughter, Arianna. We were together on and off for five years. I was eight weeks pregnant when he decided our relationship wasn't working out. Despite his decision not to be in our lives, his family is supportive and his mother visits often. For a single mother, I find that Berlin is a parent's paradise: After giving birth, I was able to take 14 months of paid parental leave. Also, the government subsidizes my daughter's day care—so I pay less than \$80 a month—and gives every parent "child's money," about \$200 every month, until the child is 25 and meets certain requirements. I don't know what it's like to raise kids in the U.S., but my friends say I got the better deal.

However, I do worry about the lack of visibility of people of color. There are days when I am the only Black person my daughter sees. I refuse to let her ignore her Blackness, so I connect with families of diverse backgrounds. She has friends who

look like her and friends with moms who look like me.

I think it's important for Black Americans to experience the rest of the world. There are parts where our skin color is not a liability and where police are not above reproach. Seeing yourself beyond the context of America is eye-opening and I have changed so much. I hope to apply for permanent residency.

Living, thriving and raising my daughter in Berlin have taught me I can do anything. I didn't know anyone and couldn't speak the language early on, yet I am still here.

Michelle McKinney Hammond, 57

Chicago to Accra

July 1, 2011, the day I moved to Ghana, is forever etched in my memory. My Ghanaian father had passed away the year before. He left me a security company and a financial business in the capital city of Accra. At the time I was a best-selling author and speaker in America, but I had lost everything in the recession. I was traveling back and forth, trying to revive my own businesses as well as my father's. I had only exhaustion to show for it. Finally, in a prayerful heap, I asked God what I was supposed to do. His message was clear to me: "Move to Ghana." I didn't have all the details, but I was ready for the leap of faith.

My friends were sad to be losing the host of our get-togethers. The hardest part was all the packing. It was better for me to take my things than to furnish a house there. I remember the numbness settling over me as the shipping company removed all my worldly possessions. That's when it dawned on me that I was about to embark on a whole new adventure—getting my father's companies back on track, writing my books and traveling for speaking engagements. I realized I was here to stay when I learned about maintaining a home the Ghanaian way. All the things I took for granted in the States, like running water and electricity, took on a different meaning. I often had to go on treasure hunts for the simple things. When I visit America, I head to Costco and Sam's Club to stock up on paper towels, toilet tissue, cleaning materials, my favorite salad dressing and toiletries. Some items are available here, but the markup is so high that it's cheaper to ship them to myself.

I am deeply involved in church as well as in my businesses. My work is my play. I keep my circle small and miss my friends back home. When I visit, I send a calendar so everyone can pick a time to hang out.

In Ghana I'm making a difference in people's lives. American culture is in your face, while the culture here is much more subtle. Americans become jaded quickly, but Ghanaians are more open to new things. Being here is rewarding. I feel bad for missing my nieces' and nephews' milestones, but unless God wants me to return I will remain where I am.

