



Thanksgiving from an Immigrant's Point of View



From left to right: Ben's brother, Lomor; mother, Akiru, and sister, Asibitar.

I was born in a field to nomad parents in Kenya. My dad died when I was young. My mom still lives in a small village in a home with no electricity or running water. My brother is a shepherd. My sister cares for my mom and her own children. Today, I am studying for priesthood in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

How did I get to Cincinnati and begin studying for the priesthood? I had the opportunity to go to school here through the generosity of Ed Colina, a Cincinnati who started a foundation to provide education to poor children in Kenya.

I visited the U.S. first time in winter 2012. I came to convey in a physical way my sincere gratitude to the American sponsors and friends of the Ed Colina Foundation. They sponsored my graduate studies in Kenya and continue to support the educational and economic conditions of struggling Kenyans through the Foundation.

Through the generosity of the Ed Colina Foundation and other friends, I continued to visit the U.S. My most memorable visit was in November 2013. It was a Thanksgiving dinner when the Colinas, my host family, invited me and other guests to share in the great American tradition of roast turkey, cranberry sauce and pecan pie. I was so happy to be part of the family and the celebration. The warm home and the dinner of my host family reminded me of Mass where we come together in unity, mercy, and love. In the same way, at Thanksgiving we put aside our hatreds, our troubles, our differences and our problems and seek a retreat, if you will,

into all of the good things for which we are grateful—the things that made the country great. I saw, in particular, the dinner table as a place where we brought out the best in ourselves – to feed ourselves, to feed our neighbors, and where we shared our traits or virtues of generosity, dutifulness and compassion.

As an immigrant as well as a young person, I see many more opportunities and a better future for young people in this great country, than were many years ago. Even though there were fewer opportunities during the depression era of our grandparents, conditions improved and our parents worked very hard not only for our bright future but also for our wonderful country.

This Thanksgiving, I am giving thanks to our country's immigrant ancestors. We often forget what it took and what it still takes – to get here, and to make a success of our lives, as individuals and as a generation. I would like for every immigrant American to remember and be grateful for the work, the hardship, the endurance, the struggles with prejudice, the sheer will it took for their ancestors to build a nation as prosperous and full of opportunity as ours.

Just as immigrants who came here generations ago, those who come today bring hope and a desire to work giving a hybrid vigor to the nation's industries and institutions and adding their culture, gifts, and dreams to the American experience.

As I continue living, studying and adapting to American life, I can't tell you how I grateful I am for being here in the first place and for the many blessings I have received.

I see great opportunity and hope in this beautiful country of ours. As I look forward to becoming an American citizen in the future, I continue to work hard, not only to achieve the American dream, but also to be a role model and beacon of hope for many who, like generations before them, will come to this wonderful country and build their future here.

