

My name is Moussa Ba. I am from the country of Senegal.

I am now a citizen of the United States.

This school, The English Language School, has made a major contribution in my life. I truly thank God for this school, its faculty, and my fellow students.

I grew up in a farming village in Senegal. Senegal is the most western country in Africa. On the opposite side of Africa is Ethiopia. Senegal is a small country with beautiful beaches on the Atlantic Ocean. It has almost 13 million people and is a former French colony.

When I was a boy my family raised cattle and farmed, we bathed in the river, there was no electricity in our home, and our village did not have a school.

I spoke two African languages, Wolof and Fula – also known as Fulani. I also spoke French. Now I also speak English.

As a businessman I traveled over much of Africa and here in America. My cultural journey has taken me from West Africa to University City, Missouri. Here in University City, in this school, the most amazing things have happened to me.

Let me tell you that all immigrants that come from poor countries not knowing English can be frightened. There is much that you cannot do for yourself. I have done business, traded, bought and sold, and traveled and here in University City this is the first school I have ever attended.

I speak four languages and yet I could not read or write. That means that I was even more dependent on people to help me. I need to know the law, get a license, read a sign.

This school has given me a measure of independence that has opened my eyes.

The students at this school are from many countries. Some of the students, like myself, are unschooled when we begin. Some are highly educated as engineers and doctors. We all need to learn English and understand how to live in America. This school is amazing in that we learn from each other and we teacher each other.

The teachers I have had have all have had patience and understanding. There is much to learn. School is an important part of my week, but I must work and do business, too. Through the school I have had tutors who have helped me understand how to study to become a citizen and how to fill out tax forms.

This wonderful school is free. The school teaches its students to learn to speak English and to understand how to successfully live in America. I now know that education is a great gift.

Friendship is also a great gift. The teachers have become my friends. The people at this school care about you. If you are absent for a few days a teacher will call and care to know how you are doing. My teachers and tutors and their families have taught me.

You can see that I have taken a long and surprising journey over many miles and many years. Much that happens is by accident. But this school and the way its students learn and teach each other is not an accident.

I really have to thank God for letting me find my way to this school.

In all my travels and years this is my only school, the only school I have attended.

My current classroom teacher, Linda, and her husband have been my teachers. My current tutors Jack and Toni and Toni's husband have also been my teachers. I have to give them special thanks.

The Director of the school, Mr. Clay Ware, and the administration have provided me with an opportunity for which I wish to give great thanks.

My fellow students have also been my teachers. I am very proud to think that I have assisted in teaching them. I owe the large number of students with whom I have shared the gift of education my great thanks.

I certainly must thank God for letting me do all that I have done as a result of this school.

I have said that this is my first school.

This is also my first speech.

I thank you for listening to me.