

## An American-African

Written by Carol McCullar  
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Dumelang! ( I greet you) My name is Carol McCullar and I hail from South Africa. I have been living here in Minneapolis for the past 18 months. One thinks that the movies are sufficient to teach you all about the American way of life! Nothing can prepare you for what awaits you once you have undressed at the port of entry, had your blood drawn, finger prints taken, grandmother's first boyfriend's name and address noted and all the rest done. You walk through the little opening –at customs praying that you don't trigger any alarms because of the 12 stones you took from your mother's grave, securely pinned with a safety pin in your luggage. Once through- you smile! "I am an American!" you think to yourself!

Nothing prepared you for the long winter, nothing prepared you for the snow, nothing prepared you for the absence of street vendors, and nothing prepared you for the absence of hadedahs. You search for any kind of familiarity, a taxi, not a sophisticated Blue and White taxi, a township taxi with the driver's arm swinging outside the door. You look for commuters standing at strategic points making familiar signs indicating where they are traveling to. A finger pointing downwards – meaning local, a finger pointing upwards meaning Johannesburg, a cupped hand meaning Orange Farm, four finger meaning- Fourways! Taxi drivers stop only for the signs that apply to them!

Gradually you get to know that corn is nothing else but mealies, but you are disappointed! It is sweet corn! You ask for hard corn and you are told that that is not for human consumption that is used to feed cattle with! You want to turn into a cow and eat roasted mealies that hurt your jaws the next day!

Comfort food! That is what your mind tells you to do and you go in search of mixed masala. You recall a movie called Mixed Masala and you assume that Americans are therefore familiar with real mixed masala. You end up buying gun-powder! Everybody coughs and sneezes the minute you add the stuff to the pot- no one eats dinner that night. The comfort food turns into un-comfort-able food. Nothing can comfort you.

I ask myself: "What is wrong with me. Why am I so downcast?" Even 18 months later? I sit down and I write a letter to myself about my experiences here in Minneapolis and this is what I find.

I started writing my memoirs when I came to the USA and it made me realize what poverty really is.

I compared American poverty with South African poverty and realized that there is a huge difference! It cannot even be compared. Poor Americans would qualify as middle class in South Africa!

It pains me so deeply to see how Americans waste food. Every time I see food thrown away, I want to run and save it and send it home to people I know would be going to bed without a meal once again.

I drive through the allies and I see discarded goods, furniture, vacuum cleaners, Computers, containers, just ordinary empty buckets! And my heart bleeds! I know that someone back home needs the stuff- how can I get it to them? That empty paint bucket will serve as a water container for someone living in an informal settlement!

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- I look around for familiar things like drumming workshops and Diversity workshops and then I begin to doubt myself!

It seems as if drumming in South Africa and drumming here in the USA are two different things. Back home we used drumming workshops as part of team building exercises. Teaching people how to use African drums to build a team. Here people use them just for fun!

A Valuing Diversity Workshop raises awareness of differences and creates an environment in which differences are not only tolerated but valued and embraced. But the big thing was that we openly spoke about these things, in a safe environment.

I look for Diversity jobs on the Internet and the things I find do not match with the picture I hold in my head!

- Then I realize that it is not only those pictures that do not match- it is also the pictures I create. I say things to my American husband and he has totally distorted pictures of what I mean. I say to him: "I think there is something wrong with the geyser. It's not warming up." And for the rest of the evening he does not talk to me. I try and figure out why. Did I eat garlic? Has he lost interest in me? Finally we are alone and then he drops this bombshell. "How dare you tell me about the affair you are having with an old man?" I almost dropped dead! "What affair Darling?"

"The geyser that is not warming up to you any longer!" He barks at me!

I burst out laughing! Is that what this is all about. I take him by the hand and lead him down to the basement and show him the geyser. He looks at me in total disbelief.

"Baby, that's not a geyser. That's a water heater."

I don't know how long it is going to take me to be an African American- but right now- I am an American African- and that is a difficult thing to be.