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# Albert Mhangami: From Africa to America

April 2, 2013



by: John Moulton

Messiah freshman Albert Mhangami adds a special flair to the student body.

At first glance, he may seem like an average freshman from anywhere around the US. But anyone who knows Albert Mhangami knows this is certainly not the case.

It may be his accent that gives him away, or it could be his membership in Messiah's African Student Union. But whatever the case, friends of Albert Mhangami know that the place he calls "home" is a twenty-eight hour plane ride away. Mhangami is from Zimbabwe, a country located in Southern Africa.

Since coming to America to study at Messiah College, Mhangami has had to adapt to many cultural differences. In Zimbabwe, eye contact is a "sign of challenging someone else," and the crazy hugs people do here "violate personal space," he says. He is also confused by the ritual of creaking people for their birthdays and seeing others tickle people. "Even when that person says stop, they continue," he marvels. But topping all of these things is the "weirdest thing Americans do:" prank each other.

When it comes to weather, Mhangami has found the Grantham climate to be rather different than Zimbabwe's.

“I love looking at snow. It is beautiful, but when you touch it, it is so cold,” he said. Movies in Zimbabwe portray snow as “cotton balls falling from the sky. That is heavenly, but I was deceived,” he admits.

As if adjusting to a different climate isn't enough, the Zimbabwean has also had some new culinary experiences since his move to PA.

“American food makes you hungry. It is really weird. But I really like the yogurt covered cranberries. They are weirdly tasteful,” Mhangami says.

While staying with American relatives during Christmas break, Mhangami learned that “Americans have a consumer mentality.” He loves gifts but was “shocked by the amount of gifts” people give at Christmas. To illustrate this, he used an example.

“If I were to give you a gift such as a necklace [in Zimbabwe], you would remember it and would have it for the rest of your life. But, in America, people buy Playstation games that only last a short time until they are not wanted anymore.”

Although there are differences between Americans and Zimbabweans, Mhangami said that the most shocking thing for him is how similar we are. “The same things that make me laugh or upset me; others feel the same way here.”

The biggest transition Mhangami had to make when he came to America was learning to depend on God.

“When I was younger, I depended on my parents. In high school, I was finding that I depended on myself. But here, I'm finding I wasn't depending on me anymore. I'm depending on God for everything. Even the little things. It feels good, but it's scary at the same time.”

Mhangami is currently majoring in prelaw and politics, but he plans to switch to Criminal Justice. He says his choice of major is “heavily influenced by experiences from back home.” With little time to think about home, however, Mhangami's interests on campus include playing for the Messiah Field Hockey team, participating in Student Government Association, and even joining the Knitting Club.

“Right now, I feel like I have a purpose here at Messiah. I am dedicated with everything I am and feel like I can't go home yet.”