

## **Ebow Quansah**

Interviewed November 17, 2007  
by Holli Connell  
Midway Village Museum

## **Ebow Quansah**

Holli Connell: If you could state your first and last name.

Ebow Quansah: Okay my first name is Ebow and last name is Quansah.

HC: Sounds great.

EQ: Okay, Thank You.

HC: Okay. Are you married?

EQ: Yes I am married.

HC: Okay. Do you have any children?

EQ: I have two children, a 17-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old son.

HC: And what education do you have, an educational background?

EQ: I have been to Bible College and then also I have been to the Bradley University and I have a bachelors degree in Christian education, and a Masters degree in biblical and divinity studies.

HC: Was all your schooling done here in the United States?

EQ: No. I, I did some of my schooling in Ghana which is the country I'm from originally and then I did some of it here too in the US.

HC: Okay. How long have you been in the United States?

EQ: I've been in the United States on and off for, since 1976. I have gone back home and lived and worked back home and then came back to the US.

HC: Great. Where exactly are you from, place and country of origin?

EQ: I'm from, my hometown is called Salt Pond in the Southern, South central part of Ghana, Ghana is the name of country that I'm from.

HC: Okay. What did you do before you came to this country?

EQ: Before I came to this country I worked in a Christian bookstore in the capital city of my home country, Ghana. The name of the capital city is Accra and I worked in a bookstore.

HC: What was your life like then?

EQ: I, I was very active. I worked in the bookstore usually eight hours during the day Monday through Friday. And I've forgotten exactly but I think I worked about four hours on Saturdays also. And then in my free time I was part of a, of a youth organization and so that, those, those two activities kept me busy.

HC: What made you want to come to the United States?

EQ: I wanted to come to the US, the main reason I came to the US was to further my education. Or to get, I wanted to, the way it happened was I wanted to go to a school where I could get education in Bible, Bible education or Bible training to get a good understanding of the Bible and its teachings and eventually to be able to go back to my country, Ghana and teach over there.

HC: When did you decide to come?

EQ: It was in 1974 that I, actually it goes back a few years before that, probably 1972, 73. That was when I started thinking seriously about coming to the US to study but it was 1976 that I was able to come.

HC: How did you make the decision to come here? What led you to the decision to come here?

EQ: Okay. I happened to be at a conference in Switzerland in 1974 and I met, I met a man who happened to be the president of a Bible College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and he and I exchanged notes and I explained to him my interest in going to a Bible school, a Bible college and getting training in Bible, getting Bible education and he, he encouraged me and he said, in fact he put some information out about the school where he was the president and he encouraged me to apply when I went back to my home country.

HC: How did you get to Rockford?

EQ: That's a long story but I was living in North Chicago which is actually a suburb of Chicago and working for Motorola in cell phones, making cell phones and Motorola built a new facility in Harvard, Illinois which is about 45 minutes drive from Rockford, east of Rockford. And it got to the point where Motorola told us, the employees, I was working for Motorola in Libertyville, Illinois and they asked some of us, the employees working at the Libertyville facility, that they needed some employees who had had some experience working at Motorola to come and work at the facility in Harvard and I volunteered to come to Harvard.

HC: And how long ago was that?

EQ: That was in 19, that was in 1999. In June of, June of 1999.

HC: Had you ever been to this country before you came in 1976?

EQ: No, I had not.

HC: Okay. How long did it take you to make the arrangements to come here and what was involved in doing so?

EQ: It took me, it took me about a year to make the arrangements to come. I was actually offered, offered admission to the College in Grand Rapids Michigan in 1975. But at that time it did not work out for me to come to the US in 1975 and so I wrote to the president of the College and explained to him the situation I was facing and he agreed that I could come the following year in 1976 so it took, took about a year. And naturally, at that time I did not have enough money that I had saved on my own to come and train in the US and so within that year some friends helped me with the funds to be able to come to the US.

HC: Did, did you come here alone or with any friends or other members of your family?

EQ: I came here alone.

HC: What was the journey if you could describe it, how you traveled, who you left and met and as long or as brief as you'd like...

EQ: Okay. I came by plane, in other words I flew from the capital city which is Accra in Ghana to New York City, the John F. Kennedy International Airport. And when, I believe I stopped, I came on Alitalia flight on the airline Alitalia, which is actually an Italian airline. And so I came through Rome, we had a stop in Rome. I've forgotten for how many years, probably, I mean for how many hours, probably for about, maybe about six hours stopping in Rome. And then continuing to New York City to the John F. Kennedy International Airport. And what was helpful to me when I first came to the US was I had gotten to know some, I had made some American friends. They had come to work as missionaries in Ghana, some years before from 1972 to 1974 and I had gotten to know them and become friends with them and so I wrote to them, informed that I was coming to the US and it was my first time, I didn't know anybody and so I asked them if they could meet me at the airport and help me get to where I needed to go and they were very helpful. They came to meet me at the airport in New York.

HC: And did they bring it to school?

EQ: No what they did was one of my friends took me home. She lived in New Jersey and now I've forgotten the name of the city, New Jersey, not far from Philadelphia in Pennsylvania. So she took me home and I stayed with her and her parents for a few days, probably about three or four days before I flew from... and then she took me to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where I flew from the airport in Philadelphia to Grand Rapids, Michigan.

HC: And then at that point at the school, how did you then transition into the school?

EQ: I had, I had written to the school and told them the date on which I would be arriving in the US and the school had written to me and told me and given me information on when I arrived in the US what to do, they had given me phone numbers of people to contact. I, if I remember correctly it's been so many years I've forgotten all the details, but if I remember correctly the president of the College gave me his name and phone number and so when I arrived at the airport

in Grand Rapids, Michigan I called the president's house. It happened to be a Sunday and they happened to be at church but one of his children happened to be at home and took my call and she was the one who came to the airport to pick me up from the airport.

HC: Okay. Let's see. Did you know anyone here in this country before you came?

EQ: I, as I said before I had met and gotten to know some Americans when I was in Ghana, who had come to Ghana to live and work as missionaries and so I knew a few, about maybe three or four people that I knew they had become friends of mine before I came to the US.

HC: Did any members of your family come here before or after you did?

EQ: I had two cousins that had. My mother's oldest sister had two, two of his children had come to US years before me. One of them had gone to Canada to study in science and then after his studies he'd come to, he gotten a teaching position in a university in the US and so he was teaching in the US before. And then his younger brother had come to the US to join him. And so I have those two cousins.

HC: Any after you?

EQ: After me, no.

HC: Where did you stay when you first arrived in Rockford?

EQ: When I first arrived in Rockford, actually in Rockford what happened was because I was being transferred by Motorola, the company that I was working for in Libertyville, Illinois, they had agreed, the Company had agreed to contribute towards my family and I being able to get a house in Rockford. We happened to be, we happened to have a house in North Chicago where we were staying before and we sold that house to, in order to move to Rockford. And so the, what happened was we had enough equity in the house that we owned in North Chicago that it helped us to be able to purchase another house in Rockford. And also the company Motorola helped us.

HC: Nice.

EQ: Yes it really was.

HC: Let's see. How did you find a place in Rockford to live? Did you go through steps with realtors or a group of something like that...

EQ: Yes, we went through realtor. It happened that at the time Motorola asked me and other employees of the company to transfer to Harvard, Illinois, My wife and I had, were planning on moving from North Chicago and we had contacted a realtor to help us with that move or transition. And so when the company offer, made the offer for me to move to Rockford instead of moving elsewhere or leaving the company, the realtor who was helping us, he was

instrumental in finding another realtor in Rockford who was very helpful for us locating a house that we could buy.

HC: Right now is there anyone from your home country living in your immediate neighborhood?

EQ: In my immediate neighborhood, no.

HC: How about in your community?

EQ: In my community presently, no.

HC: Let's see. When you arrived in. . . when you got here to the United States in 1976 and then now you're here, and you moved to Rockford in when again?

EQ: June of 1999.

HC: Within that time, did you have a visa or did you become a citizen during that time?

EQ: I had a visa. What I had was, they called a student visa and so that's what I had until, until 19... I'm trying to remember now... 1986 when I got married and my wife happens to be a US citizen and then I was given what's called resident permit, or some people also refer to it as green card. Yes.

HC: Are you a citizen now?

EQ: I'm not a citizen but I'm a permanent resident.

HC: Permanent resident, okay, thank you. Where do you see yourself in five years?

EQ: This is 2007. In five years, what I'd like to do, right now I have a Masters degree and I'm interested in teaching at the college level. And I have been told by more than one source that it's better if you have a doctorate degree if you want to teach at the college level. So, from, in five years time what I'd like to do is get a doctorate degree to help me be able to get a teaching position at a college.

HC: When you first came to the United States how did you get around vehicle wise?

EQ: I got around by asking some friends for a ride and so that's how I got around.

HC: Did you ever drive a car? At what point did you drive a car?

EQ: I started learning to drive in Ghana, my home country. I believe it was in 1973 when I started learning to drive a car. And I started with a stick shift car, learning to drive stick shift and that was difficult. And so it took me a long time it took me many years before I finally was able to learn how to drive.

HC: And how about in Rockford? How do you get around for transportation here?

EQ: In Rockford currently, I used to have a car, own a car, but presently I don't. For about a year now I have not, I have not owned a car. And so during the summertime, spring and summertime I use a bicycle to get around. And, but then during the winter time I take the bus.

HC: When you first came to Rockford in 1999, was it comfortable, were you comfortable in town? Did you have, did it take very long to become comfortable in Rockford or not?

EQ: No actually, personally I, and I suspect my wife would probably say the same thing, that we, I think we both really liked Rockford and I believe the reason is that we were living in North Chicago where, and if you are familiar with Chicago and the housing, the way the houses are in the Chicago area, the houses are close together and also there's a lot of development going on, building and development going on most of the time. And so space is sort of cramped. And then we came to Rockford in, it was actually in May of 1999 that we first came to Rockford to look for housing and we found that Rockford is very spacious, in other words, there wasn't as much building activity going on and there was a lot of empty spaces in Rockford and that was very attractive to us, that was very refreshing for both my wife and I. And then also another thing we discovered that made Rockford attractive to us was we found out, how prices of houses, we found it very reasonable. And we were surprised because in the area where we were living in North Chicago area, like a three-bedroom house was selling for around \$120,000 and even that was a reasonable amount. And then we came to Rockford and found out that you could get a three-bedroom house here for about \$90,000, and so we thought it was, the prices in Rockford were very reasonable.

HC: Did you speak English upon arrival to the United States?

EQ: Yes I did.

HC: How did the knowledge of English affect you coming to a new country?

EQ: Actually my knowledge of English was very instrumental in my coming to the US because I had to take a test in order for part of the admission process for getting into the college that I was admitted to was that I will pass an English test. And it's called test of English as a foreign language. And so I had to take that test while I was in Ghana, and pass it with a good passing grade before, as part of my admission process.

HC: What language do people speak in your country that you're from?

EQ: Okay. English is the official language in Ghana, and that's because, the reason why it is that way is was we were colonized, Ghana was colonized by the British for many many years until 1957, just about 50 years ago when we obtained independence so we were granted independence from Britain. And so the schooling system was put in place during, or the education system was put in place, during the time of colonization by Britain and so English, English became the official language in Ghana and it is still that way today.

HC: Thank you. Did, when you came to United States, and specifically Rockford, did you and your family attend churches or temples or anything religious?

EQ: Yes we did. Because, before we moved to Rockford we were part of a church in North Chicago actually Waukegan. Waukegan and North Chicago are two cities that are, they are like Twin Cities and there was a church in Waukegan that we, my wife and I and the children we attended and so when we moved to Rockford we wanted to continue with that tradition.

HC: Are there other organizations that you belong to or work with here in the community?

EQ: Currently apart from church no, there's no other organization that I'm a part of, a member of.

HC: Are you active in politics or community action?

EQ: No I am not.

HC: How did it feel to come to the United States from a foreign country?

EQ: There are two parts to my answer to that. First it felt, when I first came to the US it felt, right away it struck me that I had come to a different culture from the one that I had grown up knowing and was comfortable with. So it took me awhile to, and what struck me was or what happened to me, what occurred to me was, it would take time for me to adjust to a new or different culture. So it, the impression right away was that this is a different place and a different culture, a different way of looking at life that I had come to and it would take me time for me to become familiar with the way things are done here.

HC: Did, how do people treat you when you arrived?

EQ: The reception that I got from people was good. My, in my, I was treated well.

HC: Did you ever feel unwelcomed by neighbors or employers or anybody in your community when you came to Rockford?

EQ: Rockford, no, I didn't feel that way even though I was, both my family and I were cautioned by some people to be careful. But no, we felt that people were welcoming to us.

HC: What did you think about this country before you came and have your ideas changed?

EQ: Yes certainly. Before I came to the US. . . OK, my experience, I had encountered as I said before, I had encountered and gotten to know some American friends, some Americans. And it happens that the Americans that I encountered mostly were Christians and who had come to live and work in Ghana as missionaries. And one, one of the things that was told to me on a number of occasions or said to me by those American friends was that America is a Christian nation. And so when I had the opportunity to come to the US, I came with, with the mindset or the outlook that, oh I'm going to a Christian nation and of course I had meanwhile, I had become a Christian and believed in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. And so when I was coming to the US I was very delighted and said to myself, I'm going to a Christian nation, from what I had been



told. So I expected to come here and see people living the way Christians are supposed to live and so I came with, with the mind that I wanted to come and see and learn from the way Christianity should be practiced and, and I have to say that I was in a number of ways I was disappointed when I got here and found out the truth for myself.

HC: Has your move here turned out like you thought?

EQ: To a large extent yes, it has. In other words, well, my main reason for coming to the US was to get higher education or to get training in Bible education. And I have been able to achieve that to a large extent and so my answer to that question is yes.

HC: What has been the best part?

EQ: The best part is, is coming to live in a different culture from the one that I grew up in, in learning. I have to say I have learned so much from living, from coming to and living in the US during the years that I have been in the US. I have to say my perspective on life has changed and one of the things that struck me when I came to the US was to find out the liberties that individuals have in the US, which of course is enshrined as I later I found out, enshrined in the Constitution, individual liberties. And so I felt to give people the freedom to be who they wanted to be and so that, that's one of the things I have cherished about American culture, or society.

HC: What's been the worst part?

EQ: Okay, the worst part has been being discriminated against because of my color, because I happen to be an African. So that's been the worst part of, encountering some people who did not like me because of my color, because of who I look like.

HC: What do you miss most about your former home?

EQ: When I first . . . probably, a number of things. . . but one of the, when I first came to the US, I felt, one of the things I felt so acutely was the, and later on as I realized it's a difference in cultural perspective and that is, in Ghana where I'm from our culture is basically community-based. In other words basically you look out for one another and also people are interested in who you are, and especially your family members, in your welfare. When I came to the US one of the things I found out right from the beginning was, here there are, here the emphasis is on the individual and basically living your life as an individual and minding your own business as some people might want to put it. Whereas in Ghana the culture I'm from, it's community-based and you find that there are other people who are interested in what's going on in your life and, not everyone, but some, who are genuinely interested in what can I do to help, help you especially if you are going through difficulty. And so when I came, first came to US I found those two views clashed and that's where I felt acutely, it was difficult for me to make close friends, become close friends with people because I found people were too busy living their own lives or doing the things they wanted to get done, that it was difficult to get the attention that I felt I needed so I felt lonesome, really lonesome for a long time.

HC: I never really thought about that, individualism. Cause we talk a lot about communities and stuff like that. Do you think you'll, excuse me, have you gone home to visit since you moved here?

EQ: Yes I have done that on two different occasions, in fact I...

HC: And... I'm sorry... well I'll just ask. What were your travels back for?

EQ: The first time I went back home to Ghana was after I had been in the US for about four years and I missed, I missed my home country terribly and I wanted to, and I missed my parents as well as my brothers and sisters who were all back in Ghana and so I wanted to go back home and touch base with them again and that was after four years I have been in the US. And that was the main reason why I went to Ghana. And then the second time was, that was in, the first time was in '79 or '80. '80 rather. Second time was '87, 7 years after that. And the second time I went to Ghana, I had gotten married in the US and my wife had not traveled outside the US before and she had never been in Ghana because she is a US citizen. And I wanted to take her with me to Ghana to visit for her to see what Ghana is like and for her to be my parents, my brothers and sisters, my relatives.

HC: I bet that was fascinating, for both of you.

EQ: Yes, yes it really was.

HC: I'm sorry, were you going to say something on the end, sorry, before I interrupted?

EQ: I was going to say that we, we actually ended up living and working in Ghana both my wife and I for a year and a half.

HC: Was that, at the time that you went to visit or did you go back?

EQ: We actually, for me it was actually going back and, and fortunately or thankfully my wife was willing to live, to live and work with me in Ghana for that period of time.

HC: That's amazing. If you have children, which I think you said you did, what do you want them to know about the culture of your homeland?

EQ: Everything. As much as possible I would like for them to know all there is to know about the culture of my homeland or my home country. Unfortunately my children, I have not been able to take my children to Ghana yet. I, it's something that I look forward to eventually being able to do, because I would really like for them to see my home country where I grew up and what it's like.

HC: You think he'll spend the rest of your life here in this country?

EQ: No, I do not believe so because, the reason, or the main reason is because I believe that I, I'm needed back in my home country, Ghana. Or there is so much that I can do in my home

country of Ghana that I look forward to eventually going back to Ghana, and living and working there.

HC: Really the last question we're at is, how do you feel about the current debate in this country about immigration?

EQ: I have heard quite a bit about it in the news, I have not given it as much thought, but when I came to the US in 1976 I was, I was and I still am, I was very grateful for the opportunity for me to be able to come to the US and especially to go to college here because I, I believe that the education that I did receive or have received from coming to the US and going to college here has been good education. And so I was very, and there were, in fact the school gave me, even though I had to work and pay some of the amount but, by and large I was given a scholarship, and so there were a lot of people here in the US who contributed to make that possible and I'm very very grateful for that. And so it's, it has been a positive experience.

HC: Great. That's it!