



Across Africa In A Month



Martha Ronke Ayorinde

In this first interview in our Across Africa Series, Martha Ronke Ayorinde, a Nigerian by origin but who now describes herself as Afro-Czech, talks about her life and times in the Czech Republic and how she is contributing to the economic development of the country.

Q: How old are you?

A: I am 43 years old

Q: When did you arrive in the Czech Republic and what brought you here?

A: I came here in 2000. The reason that brought me here was to stay with my mother, Her Excellency Julie Joke Ayorinde, who was then the Nigerian Ambassador to the Czech Republic. When her term ended as ambassador, I decided to stay here, on my own.

Q: How did you manage to adjust to your new environment without speaking the Czech language in the beginning, and what is one of your most unforgettable first impressions?

A: Without speaking the Czech language, it was very difficult for me in the beginning as everything was in Czech. But once I made up my mind to stay, I prepared myself to face the challenge and adapt quickly. One of the funniest and embarrassing moments still on my mind was when I started living here I did not know

much about Czech cuisine so it was difficult for me to shop and cook. In trying to find a way out, I came to like a particular Czech bread because the taste was similar to a bread that I liked back in Nigeria. Fortunately, close to our residence in Prague was a shop where I used to buy this bread.

One day I went to the shop and the bread was not at the usual place on the shelf. In Czech the bread is called babovka, but while enquiring from the shopkeeper, I mispronounced it and said I wanted babicka which in Czech means grandma. Of course he did not understand me until I went out to call the driver of my mother who was a Czech to come and explain what I wanted. In the end we all laughed over it but it was a good lesson and it is still on my mind to this day.

Q: What is your profession or occupation and are you working in your field of trade or studies or doing something different?

A: I am a trained beautician but I am now working as a hairdresser and a consultant for hair and make-up.

Q: Do you feel at home here in the Czech Republic and do you still have links with family and friends in your country of origin?

A: Please remember I arrived in my youthful years so I grew up partly here. Now I have a business here and have some peace and stability. My first child, a 3-year-old girl, was born here. Yes I feel at home here. I see the Czech Republic as my home and Nigeria as my home too. Yes I still have good contacts with my family and some friends back home in Nigeria.

Q: In what way through your work are you contributing to the socio-cultural and economic development of the Czech Republic and if possible your country of origin?

A: I have managed to set up this business, Mathas Inspiration and Hairdressing Saloon, and running it for more than 10 years now. The saloon gives me work and I also offer job opportunity and training to others. By paying taxes for myself and the business, and for the others who work for me, I am contributing to the economic development of this country. I provide employment opportunities to some Africans and that helps with their integration into the Czech society, and not only Africans because my accountant for example is a Czech. I guess this is something that most Africans living outside the continent for a long time have to deal, and come to terms, with.

I am also contributing to the enrichment of the multicultural environment with an ethnic business that caters for both Africans and Czechs and any other person who needs it. For example, I play a useful role in providing counselling and services to parents and children from bi-racial families as to which cosmetics are suitable for them. Yes, I also have a hairdressing saloon in Nigeria but that is very small compared to what I have in Prague.

Q: How do you see yourself - an African, Afro-Czech or a Czech?

A: Well my family and friends back home say that my mentality and way of doing things now have become like that of a Czech. My Czech friends with me here in many instances also see a real African in me. In that context, I can conveniently describe myself as an Afro-Czech.

Check Martha's work: www.marthasinspiration.cz

Contact her: info@marthasinspiration.cz