

Get to Know

Ibrahim Dabo

BY CARRIE JOHNSON

This month's *Hearing Life* feature provides an introduction to Ibrahim Dabo, a new member of the HLAA Board of Directors. I interviewed Ib virtually on Zoom. I hope you enjoy getting to know Ib as much as I have!

About Ib

Ibrahim Dabo's friends call him Ib (pronounced Eeb) or I-B. He was born in Sierra Leone, a country in West Africa, where he lived until he was a teenager. Ib was not born with hearing loss, but developed it as a young adult. He came to find HLAA through an online search. Ib is the newest member of the HLAA Board of Directors. Like most, he experienced a grieving period when he was diagnosed with hearing loss. Ib has a fascinating story to share, and his encouragement and positivity are infectious.

Ib Dabo grew up in a very loving family and community. He loved learning and going to school, which was encouraged by his family of educators and his extended family. Ib grew up wanting to learn as much as he could from older people, whom he naturally gravitated toward. "In my family, I did all I could to excel because I had all the support that I needed to excel," said Ib.

At the age of eight or nine, Ib discovered that he loved the news. "From a young age, I was particularly disturbed about the West Africa news I heard on the radio, or read in magazines. I learned about the war in Liberia, and how people were becoming refugees. I wanted to help," said Ib. It bothered Ib a lot that he was not in a position to help the refugees. Little did he know that at age 14, war would drive him out of his country. "I was a teenager when I learned teenagers had been abducted. Some of them were put on drugs and given guns to fight alongside the rebels. And so, when the rebels came to the capital city Freetown, where I was living, I was terrified. I wanted to grow up and be successful, so I can help people in need. Maybe the news I was hearing contributed to my desire to want to help people," said Ib.

"I was fearful for my life, my dreams and my future," said Ib. So, he and his older brother (and 600 others) boarded a boat for a journey across the Atlantic Ocean. "So, we were heading for Guinea, but that seven-hour journey turned into a five-day journey to The Gambia, after we were informed the Guinean authorities did not allow us to enter their borders. A lot happened on that boat that was so terrifying and at one point in time, I felt like this was it, this was the end." One of the boat's two engines stopped working. The communication system on the boat broke. The passengers ran out of water and food.

Thankfully, Ib did get off the boat. He lived the next seven years as a refugee in The Gambia, a country in West Africa. It was from there that Ib made his way to the United States.

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From West Africa to the United States

Ib settled in Maryland, where he met his wife in 2004 at Baltimore City Community College. He holds an associate degree in business administration from Baltimore City Community College, a bachelor's degree in management information systems from the University of Baltimore and a master's degree in applied information technology from Towson University. It was in 2013, while in graduate school in his 30s, that Ib was diagnosed with bilateral sensorineural hearing

Right: Ib Dabo, photo by Kara Hudson. Inset photo, left: Ib as a young man in Sierra Leone. Inset photo, right: Ib with his wife, daughter and son

“Hearing aids changed my life. To hear so many new and beautiful sounds, like on a beautiful sunny morning hearing the birds. It was amazing all the sounds I heard and it made a big difference.”





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loss through a hearing screening on campus. “I got to understand why I isolated myself from some people. Why I stayed away from a lot of social interaction. I got to understand why I was stressed out a lot, especially when I was in school. I remember some classes in undergrad, for example, I could not understand anything my professor was saying. I would only go in to take notes if there’s any notes on the board, and figure out what the homework is and I remember specifically turning to my friends and saying, ‘I don’t know why the Professor speaks like this,’” said Ib.

Hearing Loss Diagnosis

Ib was devastated when he received his hearing loss diagnosis. He went through a grieving period (2013-2020) after he was diagnosed and received his hearing aids. Not knowing many young people, or many in the Black community, with hearing loss, Ib felt a bit hopeless, and was searching for support.

“Hearing aids changed my life,” said Ib. “To hear so many new and beautiful sounds, like on a beautiful sunny morning hearing the birds. It was amazing all the sounds I heard and it made a big difference,” said Ib.

Ib is now a leader and advocate who works to support and guide others. His focus is on building relationships, especially with young people and those in marginalized communities, so they will know that they are not alone in their hearing loss journey. Ib’s advice to those first diagnosed with hearing loss is—“Get support and be easy on yourself.”

Finding HLAA

Ib found the HLAA community through a Google search. He immediately joined the HLAA Facebook Official Community and Support Group (www.facebook.com/groups/363776767846053/), and became a member of HLAA. He learned as much as he could about HLAA and attended the Virtual Convention in 2021.

Ib, his wife and their three children (including one brand new baby boy!) now live in Atlanta, Georgia, where Dabo is currently the director of enterprise business systems for the General Board of Global Ministries, the global mission agency of the United Methodist Church, which operates in at least 100 countries.

Through his work, Ib is finding ways to use technology to solve problems. “So, in my daily work when I’m dealing with systems, our organization has projects around the world. Our projects include global health,

Left: Ib in his home office. Right: Ib and his family

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agriculture and education. I focus on implementing the systems and thinking about the beneficiaries, people who are in need. So, how can we use the systems and technology in general to drive the work that we do to ultimately benefit the people who desperately need help?” said Ib.

Passion for Journalism

Ib also has a passion for journalism. Ib started writing professionally when he was a refugee in The Gambia, West Africa, at the age of 17. Even though he did not have any experience in journalism or training at the time, he just believed he could do it. The leading international soccer website at the time that appointed him Africa Lead Correspondent was SoccerAge. It was four years later that he started working as Africa Editor for Goal.com, which then became the leading global soccer website.

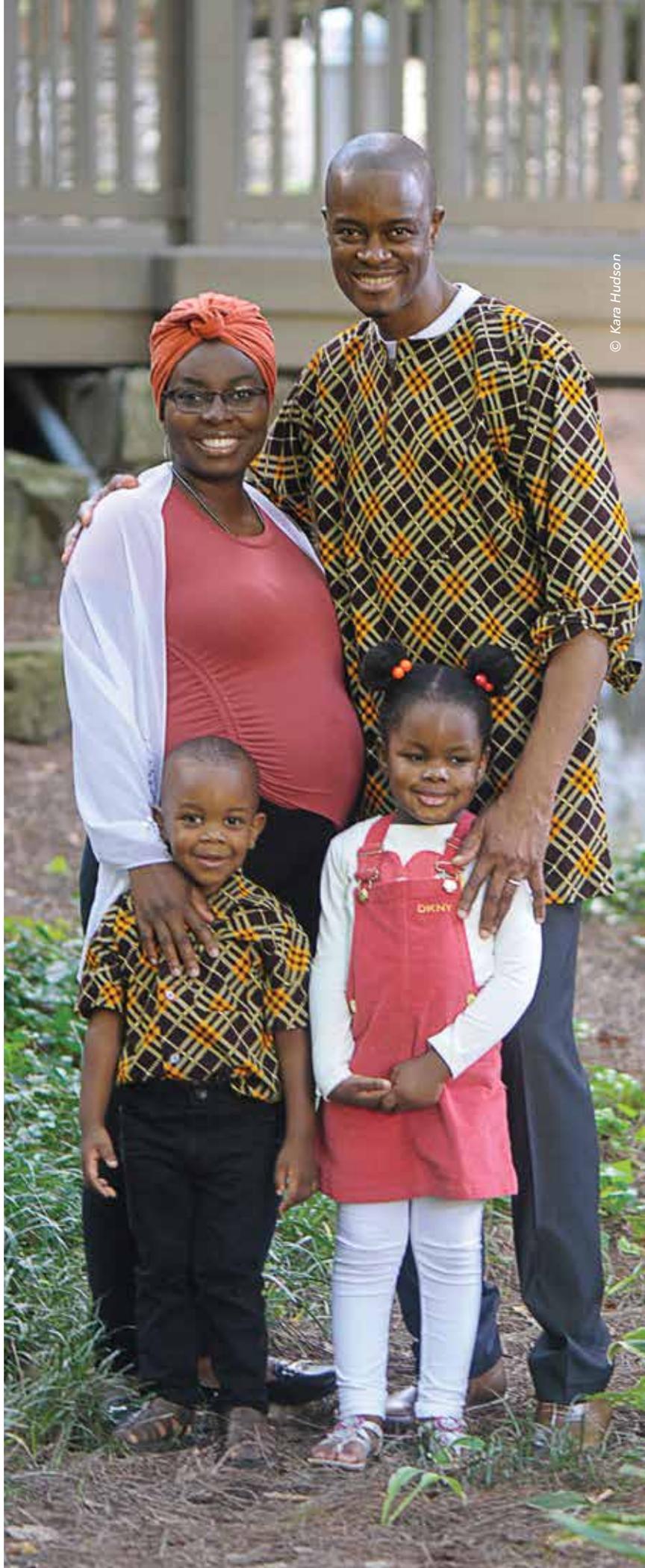
“As a teenager in The Gambia as a refugee, I wanted to share stories. My story is one of war and survival. I had family members who were killed brutally during the war. I wanted to raise awareness and the need for peace and love. But I also wanted to share stories of how soccer united refugees,” said Ib.

Mr. Dabo has written for several international publications and interviewed people from all walks of life. Ib loves writing and sharing stories, which he does through his blog. His writing since he came to the U.S. mainly covers nonprofit organizations.

“In 2021, when I made that decision that I’m going to get involved with the HLAA Board of Directors—that’s when I made the decision my goal was that I’m finally going to step out and stop hiding my hearing loss,” said Ib.

Ib says, “With faith, determination and hard work, you can do anything.” **HL**

Ib Dabo serves on the HLAA Board of Directors. To connect with Ib, email ibrahimdabo@gmail.com, or you can connect with him on social media, www.facebook.com/IbTalkOnline.



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Atlanta, Georgia
Born in Sierra Leone,
West Africa

Ibrahim Dabo

My hearing loss has allowed me to pursue my God-given purpose of inspiring people with my story through public speaking and advocacy.

My sage advice for someone newly-diagnosed with hearing loss is to find a support network that understands what you are going through and will support you so that you can thrive. The HLAA Facebook Official Community and Support Group (www.facebook.com/groups/363776767846053/) is a great space to connect and get such support.

When I grew up, I wanted to become a philanthropist.

The hardest thing I've ever done was public speaking.

My little-known talent is that I'm a self-trained artist.

Hobbies? I love listening to Christian praise and worship music and am very competitive at playing Scrabble.

Kids? I have two beautiful toddlers who are teaching me how to be patient and have fun at the same time. We are also blessed to have a bouncing baby boy who joined us in December, just in time for Christmas.”

Pets? I had a rooster as a pet in Sierra Leone. How we bonded surprised everyone.

I definitely am not a morning person.

Working nine to five (current and past jobs): At age 17, I worked as a journalist for the leading global soccer website at the time—SoccerAge—and four years later as Africa Editor for Goal.com, a leading global soccer website. Other companies I have worked for as an information technology leader include PRIME Research (a global public relations consulting company; now Cision Insights) and the General Board of Global Ministries (the global mission agency of the United Methodist Church).

Happiness is awesome when it comes from within regardless of our situation. If we solely search for happiness externally, we're likely to be disappointed.

My favorite season is the summer. It's a reason I was happy to move from Michigan to Georgia.

I am a Christian, husband and father.

I have a weakness for Cadbury Dairy Milk and Almond Joy Coconut Chocolates.

I have the uncanny ability to fix things.

I simply cannot live without my family.

My three favorite possessions are my cellphone, laptop and wallet.

If I ruled the world I would make it a happy place for children by supporting their education and basic needs so they can thrive and live a fulfilling life.

My long-term goal is to start a nonprofit organization.

My greatest accomplishment is becoming a journalist at age 17 when I was appointed Africa Correspondent for a large Internet media company without experience in journalism.

I want to be remembered as someone who inspired people globally to believe they can accomplish any goals they set for themselves by faith, hard work, perseverance and determination and fulfill their God-given purpose.