

## Shoana



It had been sixteen years. The then twenty something year old had not been home since a brutal civil war had struck the country in late 1989. The country had been badly battered. Buildings lay in ruins. Bullet holes lined the walls of many buildings. Poverty ruled the city streets. But Shoana Clarke Solomon saw something quite the contrary. “This country is so beautiful,” is all she could think of her native land, Liberia. Despite the evident devastation that country had suffered and the apparent struggles that still plagued it, the young Liberian was glad to be home.

In 1990, Solomon (then only a child) and her family had fled the country when civil war struck. The family (like so many others) was forced to take refuge in the United States (and other countries), leaving behind their lives in Liberia. Solomon recalls longing for Liberia (as she grew up the States). “We had everything we needed in Liberia. We lived in America because we had to.” So they adjusted to their new life.

In 2005, Liberia elected its first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Solomon received the opportunity to document the Presidential Inauguration in pictures. After that trip Solomon knew that she had to find her way back home.

In June of 2009, the move happened. She closed her photography studio, said goodbye to her parents, and left with her daughter and then husband. She was leaving so much behind to take a chance in a country that had been through so much since she last resided in it. But it was a risk she had to take. She had to go home.

Solomon’s first venture in Liberia was opening and operating a school at an orphanage. She ran the school for two and a half years after which it was turned over to the mother of the orphanage due to disagreement in operational decisions. Heartbroken, she stood at a crossroads; take the path that led to the familiarity of the States, or stay in Liberia and do more. She decided to stay. Since then Solomon has gone on to open and operate several successful businesses including a guesthouse, a photography studio, a hair salon, a marketing and interior design firm. Her latest venture is a creative arts center (which will launch on July 9, 2012). The center will provide classes in the visual and performing arts. Solomon plans to provide scholarships for low-income families.

For Solomon, achieving success in her home country is a dream come true. But this dream does not come without consequences. According to her, some locals are very excited that Liberians (who had to leave home for various reasons) are returning home with their skills and experiences. On the other hand, others believe that the “repats” are taking jobs away from them. Solomon says that this often leads to negative interactions. She recalls a particular incident at the passport office when an apparent “repat” politely asked an employee where the line was for ordering passports. The worker became extremely enraged with the woman. “You people think you are better than us because you came from America! You think you can just come and jump in front of the line!”

Solomon says she has had other experiences with people who share the same sentiment as the passport worker. However, she does not let that bother her. She is focused on making a difference in her country.

To learn more about Shoana and her work in Liberia, visit:

<http://theoceanhouseliberia.wordpress.com/>

<http://cicreativeartscenter.wordpress.com/>

[www.cachellehairandmakeup.wordpress.com](http://www.cachellehairandmakeup.wordpress.com)

To learn more about the Going Home Project, [click here](#).

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