

A LONG JOURNEY FROM RWANDA

A Teacher's Calling for Community

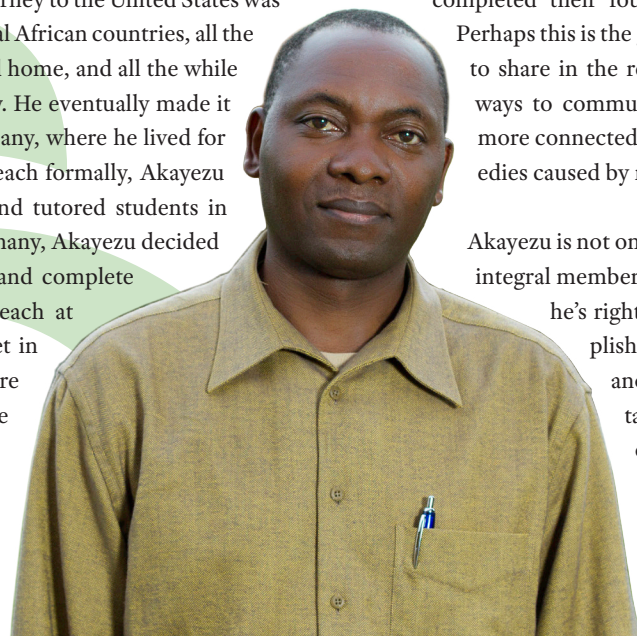
By Lori Tanner (W395) and Jessica Murphy (W364)

In the African country of Rwanda, in the year 1990, a civil war began. What initially appeared to be a small ripple in the grand scheme of world events would gain force with shocking and painful speed. The government was overthrown, and genocide ensued. Many of those who survived were forced to flee to makeshift refugee camps. African people, most from Rwanda but with different cultural backgrounds and even different languages and dialects, gathered in these temporary settlements, creating community in the few ways they could. One of these people was IU Southeast French instructor Napoleon Akayezu.

Having received an excellent education prior to the Rwandan conflict, Akayezu became a teacher in the patchwork schools that the suffering but determined refugees formed. Akayezu was gifted with knowledge of seven different languages: English, French, German, and four African languages, and he had studied at the National University of Rwanda. Perhaps seeing the devastating effects of cultural misunderstanding in his own country compelled Akayezu to share the gift of communication with his fellow refugees.

Akayezu says of his desire to teach, "It was a kind of giving back of what I had received." Like his fellow refugees, who created temporary schools and shared knowledge in the face of death and loss, Akayezu does not focus on what he has suffered. Instead, he acknowledges the happy childhood he had in Rwanda prior to the war, in a tight-knit family and community. He attributes his success to God, yet he does question why he lived when so many died. "Maybe I have a mission to accomplish," he says half-jokingly. Perhaps he does.

It seems as if Akayezu's arduous journey to the United States was guided. He travelled through several African countries, all the while a refugee from his childhood home, and all the while pushing towards where he is today. He eventually made it to South Africa, and then to Germany, where he lived for seven years. Although unable to teach formally, Akayezu made the most of his situation and tutored students in languages. During his time in Germany, Akayezu decided that he would come to America and complete his master's degree in order to teach at the college level. He wanted to get in contact with the American culture and allow his family to live the American dream.



Napoleon Akayezu

Akayezu eventually made his way to Louisville, which has a significant African refugee population with a rich cultural tradition. In Louisville, Akayezu seized whatever chance he could at obtaining work to support his family – and he did so diligently and cheerfully, with his mission still in mind. He worked in a factory, drove a truck, and cleaned streets, all while pursuing his graduate degree at the University of Louisville. With his feet firmly on the ground in the daily grind of working to build a stable life in America, Akayezu continued to dream of the day he could once again teach and share with different cultures, as he had done in the refugee camps, and as he had done in Germany.

Upon graduation from the University of Louisville, Akayezu applied for a position as a French professor at IU Southeast. In 2008, after years of setbacks and obstacles, Akayezu became a college professor.

Akayezu teaches French from 100-level classes all the way through French 250, the modern language classes required for many IU Southeast students. Akayezu brings his tradition of community into his class. His smile and quick wit soon has students talking openly with one another, gamely attempting to pronounce greetings and simple phrases in French. This rapid progress should not be surprising because Akayezu is demanding and has high expectations of his students. Yet he is forgiving of mistakes and always willing to answer questions, sometimes stammered out in painfully broken French.

On any given day in Akayezu's class, you may get to hear Algerian pop music, listen to stories of different cultures and how they communicate, play a traditional African drum, or learn about German pub etiquette. Akayezu punctuates the grind of conjugating verbs with the color of life, much as he did while traveling and toiling for years.

Akayezu also encourages his students to support one another, and many of them maintain friendships long after they have completed their four semesters of a foreign language. Perhaps this is the great gift that Akayezu felt compelled to share in the refugee camps. Allowing people new ways to communicate makes the world community more connected, and perhaps one day, will make tragedies caused by misunderstandings rare.

Akayezu is not only a creator of community but also an integral member of one, here at IU Southeast. Maybe he's right; maybe he has "a mission to accomplish." Maybe we all do, crossing one another's paths in these halls, giving and taking freely of knowledge. Perhaps we can learn quite a bit more than French from Napoleon Akayezu.

"A WORLD OF SHOCK AND ENTHRALLMENT"

A Teacher and Painter Lives His Dream

By Samantha Eiklor-Tate (W395) and Leigh Powers (W364)



Aaron Lubrick - *Dad's Boat*, 2010

Most children dream of what they want to be when they grow up; some aspire to explore the solar system as an astronaut, become a cowboy or a cowgirl and ride horseback in the Wild West, or live in a castle as a prince or princess. These dream jobs usually change into something the world deems practical or realistic. The lucky ones, though, grow up to realize they can make a living doing what makes them happy. Artist Aaron Lubrick, a former instructor at IU Southeast from fall 2009 through spring 2011, who is currently teaching at The Kentucky School of Art, is one of the lucky ones.

Lubrick has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Columbus College of Art & Design and a Master's of Fine Arts from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. For both degrees, he majored in painting. "I always drew pictures when I was a kid, but when I entered high school, I really started painting ambitiously." Around that age, Lubrick decided to live his life doing what he loved.

Lubrick's love for drawing and painting was important to him, but he also wanted to work around people. "I fell in love with drawing and painting when I was in high school. I realized I wanted to surround myself with these practices yet actually be able to make a living. I also very much enjoy the positive ambitions and energy that a college atmosphere can provide. Not to mention, I



Aaron Lubrick

am a pretty social person; being in the studio every day with no human interaction can make me crazy." So he took this ambition and taught Intro to Drawing, Intro to 2D Design, an art appreciation class, and a drawing and painting class at IU Southeast.

Because he wants his teaching to encourage his students, he both understands that art can be tricky (because artists have differing opinions of what they like or don't like) and keeps an open mind as to what his students try to express through their own art. Being influenced by many of his own teachers, he knows how the feedback and energy of a teacher can positively impact students. Edouard Vuillard is one of Lubrick's favorite artists, and he uses Vuillard's inspiration in his own career. "Vuillard's work is incredibly complex yet aesthetically simple and a little quirky to show all life's perfect imperfections. He keeps me realizing that there is no limit to what can be achieved on a two-dimensional surface," Lubrick states.

Besides being a professor, Aaron Lubrick is also an established painter, exhibiting his paintings in various shows a few times a year. His last show was in August of 2011 at the Nautilus Gallery in Louisville. He has a unique way of painting, as he is not one to sit down and plan every detail out. In a biography he wrote for the Web site of the City Art Gallery in Columbia, South Carolina, he stated, "I never want to know what the end result will be. Losing myself to a specific note of color, then reacting to its surrounding colors, places me in a world of shock and enthrallment."

In his current position at The Kentucky School of Art, Lubrick readily admits that leaving IU Southeast was "a hard decision, but the art school was off and running." Feeling he can now help build another school's art department allows him to continue to live his dream, but he still has fond memories of IU Southeast. "It is a wonderful learning community with an outstanding faculty that is consistently bettering itself. It has such a great infrastructure in that it allows students and faculty to focus on what's important: the student, learning, and careers. I enjoyed my time at IU Southeast and feel extremely lucky to have been a part of this educational community. It gave me the strength, experience, and confidence to be where I am today." "Strength, experience, and confidence," as well as professional success and a genuine love of painting: it's these qualities that allow Aaron Lubrick to serve as an inspiration to his students, who, like Lubrick, may someday be numbered among the lucky ones who are living their dreams.