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A Young Woman with a big mission

By Ed Goldman

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Braye Jombo plans to make several trips back to her home in Nigeria over the next five years. Her travel companion: everything she learned while earning her MBA here.

“I want to help empower women who own businesses in small villages,” she says, “and I want to get public education off (the government of) Nigeria’s back burner so that teachers can be inspired to come to work again and kids can be inspired to learn.”

Jombo, who’ll be 30 this fall, spent eight years in the U.S. Navy, seeing a good deal of the world. “We toured the Atlantic,” she says. “I saw London, France and Turkey. Then I was posted to Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, for five or six months. I still miss the people I served with.” By the time she left, she held the rank of petty officer (about the same as sergeant in the U.S. Army) and knew what she wanted to do with her life.

Armed with the 2008 version of the G.I. Bill, which provided more funds per unit to veterans heading off or back to college, she enrolled at Drexel University’s Sacramento campus (Drexel’s mother-ship campuses are in Philadelphia). She had already earned an undergraduate degree in business management while in the Navy. “Women in Nigerian villages depend too much on their husbands to support them,” Jombo says. “I want to consult with them, show them how to create or grow their own businesses so they don’t have to rely on their husbands to keep their jobs.”

Jombo is one of six siblings. Her father is an accountant and her mother has owned a beauty salon for 20 years. “They’re going to help me launch my NGO when I get back to Nigeria,” Jombo says, “but I also hope to find investors in the United States. Some of the major oil corporations are investing in small businesses overseas.” (NGOs, as I’m sure you know, are non-government organizations with social missions, such as nonprofits.)

To earn money, Jombo has been working in the voluntary services division of the Northern California Veterans Administration — where, ironically, she helps raise funds for veterans. She recently re-posted from Mare Island, in Vallejo, to the former Mather Air Force Base in Rancho Cordova, which is now a business park.

“My mom says when I get back to Nigeria I can work out of her garage to get my business going,” she says. Isn’t that how Hewlett and Packard got started?