

TRANSCRIPT

Episode Title: “Finding Healing Abroad in Thailand” with Halona Black

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CHRISTINE [00:00:46] Hey, everyone. Welcome back to *Flourish In The Foreign*, the podcast that elevates and affirms the voices and stories of Black women living and thriving abroad. I'm your host, Christine Job, a Black American woman, living and thriving here in Spain. *Flourish In The Foreign*, not only shares the stories of incredible Black women, just doing the damn thing around the world, but also explores living abroad as a pathway to wellness. And that means financial, mental, professional, physical, and spiritual wellness. Thank you so much for tuning in to this week. If this is your first time, hey. And if you've been rocking with the podcast for a while, thank you, thank you very much. As I said, I am the host of this podcast, but I'm also the creator, the editor, the social media manager, and the everythinger of this here podcast. And I'm looking to get some serious help for the podcast to keep it going for all of you. And that's why I'm asking for all of you to support this podcast. There are six ways for you to support *Flourish In The Foreign*. The first way is become a Patreon supporter of *Flourish In The Foreign*. Just go to www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. Shout out to Barry and Kaia becoming the latest Patreon supporters of *Flourish In The Foreign*. Thank you, thank you so so much. The second way to support the podcast is by Cash Apping in the podcast at \$flourishforeign. Cash App is basically like a tip jar. So if you're liking what you're hearing, be sure to tip the podcast via Cash App. And shout out to Olivia who Cash Apped the podcast this week. Thank you so much, Olivia. The third way to support *Flourish In The Foreign* is by purchasing an item off of the podcast's Amazon wishlist. The podcast has really been a labor of love and also a lean mean podcasting machine. And so it is time to upgrade some of the equipment that I use to podcast. And you can help upgrade the podcast equipment by purchasing an item off of our Amazon wishlist. You can find that via the website at www.flourishintheforeign.com/support. The fourth way to support the podcast is to be sure to share the podcast. Yes. While you're listening to this podcast right now go ahead and screenshot it tag *Flourish In The Foreign* at FlourishForeign and share it across your social media channel. The fifth way to support *Flourish In The Foreign* is by placing an ad or sponsoring an entire episode of the podcast. If you have a business or organization that's in alignment with the ethos of this podcast, go ahead and drop me a line at www.flourishintheforeign.com/contact, and I will send you the rate sheet for placing an ad or sponsoring an entire episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*. If you're looking to get your products or

services in front of an amazing audience of just incredible women who are internationally-minded, definitely shoot me an email and we can work some things out. The sixth way to support *Flourish In The Foreign* is of course, subscribe to the podcast and also follow the podcast across all social media channels at *FlourishForeign*, so be sure to be following the podcast on Twitter, on Instagram, and on YouTube. Be sure to rate the podcast five stars and leave a review. I always love reading your reviews and I'll be sharing one now. This week's review comes from circusfreak17 and says: Insightful for those who want to move abroad and relatable for those who have. The first two episodes provide insightful thoughts and ideas for those who are hoping to move abroad. If you are currently living abroad or have previously lived abroad, they have anecdotes that are relatable and make you realize you're not the only one with those thoughts. Can't wait for more to come. All right, thank you so much circusfreak17 for listening to the podcast, supporting the podcast, and of course, writing a review for the podcast. It means so much to me. All right, I just gave you all six ways to support *Flourish In The Foreign*, and I hope you have chosen at least one way to support the elevation and affirmation of Black women's voices and stories today. All right. On to the next episode.

CHRISTINE [00:06:31] This week's episode, we have Halona Black. Ultimately, her going abroad story is about healing. I think it's not just about physical healing, but like so many other women have been on the show, it's about a healing in all aspects of her life. But I'm gonna let her tell you all about it.

HALONA [00:06:56] So my name is Halona black. I currently live in Danang, Vietnam, and I'm 42 years old. So I did the Peace Corps when I was in my early 20s. And so I lived in Togo in West Africa for two years. And then I spent several years traveling and working around various countries in West Africa, doing international development work. My parents, they were never really travelers, but we did go on a few vacations. Just short family vacations. I remember one in particular where we went to Mexico. And it was a very touristy experience where we stayed in a small resort on a beach. But one of the things that stood out most in my mind was taking a bus through a small village. That was a very traditional village, you know, where people were living in very small, you know, humble homes. The tour bus operators told us that we weren't really allowed to sort of get off the bus and sort of explore around the area. We just sort of ride through. But I was very curious, I was probably about 12 years old at the time. So I was very curious about who these people were. And then as I got older, when I got into high school, I took French lessons. And my French teacher, she was so fascinating. I loved her so much. She was a French teacher during the regular school year, but during her summer she was spending traveling. And so when she came back to school, she would tell us about her travels. She went to Paris, or she would take a trip to Alaska to work on a fishing boat for the summer, or she went somewhere in like Ecuador. And all these really cool places that I kind of thought that I would always want to be able to see but didn't really know how I would get there. So I think I really more so, count her as an example, my probably, my first real example of someone who traveled and I said, "That might be something that I would want to do one day." I did my undergraduate study at Rutgers University. I graduated from the Newark campus in New Jersey. And I got a

degree in theater arts, in video production. And so when I went, my intention was to be able to learn how to do documentary filmmaking, and doing video editing, which is something that I really loved at the time. And when I graduated, I wound up getting a job working for CBS News. And so that was interesting. But while I was in college, I wanted to study abroad. My mother at the time, she had recently been diagnosed with breast cancer. And so it kind of made it difficult for me to be able to make the decision between staying home to be available for her, and making the choice to leave to go study abroad. It just felt like it was just so far. And then at the same time trying to find resources... Like how do you figure out how to pay for that sort of a thing? Because at the time, I was barely paying for the opportunity to be able to go to college. So trying to pack up and go abroad, and then your mother has cancer at the same time, was really a lot. And so, although I had gone to like different info sessions, I just didn't take advantage of any sort of study abroad opportunities. But at the same time, I don't think I looked as hard as I should have, looking back on it. I think if there was a person available that I felt comfortable speaking to, about how to be able to find that sort of an opportunity, given the hardships that I had at the time, I think I probably would have made the leap to do it. But it just didn't work out that way. But maybe almost two years after I graduated from college, I wound up going to an info session for the Peace Corps. I went one night, and it was the most fascinating thing I had ever heard. And they pay for it. So, I figured this would be the best way for me to be able to have an opportunity to go abroad while I'm still young. I was in my early 20s, had just left college, and so I figured it would be a great time for me to go. And it was. I went and I wound up applying. And it took about a year to go through the application process. But I eventually wound up in Togo, West Africa.

CHRISTINE [00:11:29] I was curious to know, what was the preparation like once joining the Peace Corps? Getting your country assignment? How did they prepare you to go abroad?

HALONA [00:11:40] When you become a Peace Corps volunteer, you have three months of training. And so they put you in a village with the group that you show up with. And they teach you the languages that you need to learn. The national language of Togo is French, and so I had to be able to improve my French. Now I know I took four years of French when I was in high school, and I think maybe I took another year of French when I was in college. But it's a very different thing from speaking to other American students in the United States, and actually having to use it in a totally different context where you have to learn how to use the language on a regular basis. So that's where I really learned how to use the French language. And then it's also complicated by the fact that, even though the national language is French, there's at least 50 plus other languages, local languages within the country of Togo. Because there's all different tribes and cultures that are... That live within the small country of Togo as well. So, most people in Togo speak their own mother tongue, and then they use French as, just sort of the national language to sort of use within government or school, and things like that. So I learned French. And then when I... Probably six to eight weeks into training, when you figure out where you're going to be placed, I also started to learn the language of Kotokoli. It's called Kotokoli, it starts with a k. And so I learned some of that language. And then you also learn

some of the agricultural techniques that you'll be using when you do your work within the village that you're placed in.

CHRISTINE [00:13:29] I asked her what was her family's reaction to her giving up her career in TV and deciding to go to Togo.

HALONA [00:13:39] My mother, bless her heart, she had a hard time with it. She didn't want me to go. She had a hard time seeing me going. At the time, she was still sick with cancer. She eventually passed on some years later. But she, yes, she had a very hard time with me packing up my life. And part of it was because she just wasn't, like she... She didn't understand or she wasn't sure how or why I would want to fit this in my life. She wanted me to be able to go and get a regular job. To sort of stay on the career path that I was on. Even though the career path that I was on, it didn't pay me a whole lot, but I did enjoy it. But it was a creative career path. So that was already a source of contention for me and my family. But yes, she had a really hard time with me choosing to go so far away to a place where no one knew me. I wasn't really sure if I can get any help anywhere. I didn't even speak the language to be able to ask for help. That was difficult for her. For my dad, he was a little bit more understanding, although he also had his fears as well. But he also understood that at that point, I was an adult and that I could be trusted to sort of make my own decisions about what would be good for my life.

CHRISTINE [00:15:01] I asked her to describe the day she left the United States, and landed in Togo.

HALONA [00:15:08] The day I left New Jersey, they had us fly to Washington, D.C. just to sort of get briefed on what we would expect when we fly over to Togo. But when I remember the day I left New Jersey, my mom drove me to the airport, and she was still angry with me. All the way up until the time they called for me to board the plane. And then she just cried and cried and cried. And then I cried, because you don't want to see your mother crying. And I remember just hugging her so tight at the airport, and just telling her that I was going to be fine, and she didn't have to worry about me. And she just cried and cried and cried. And then I sat down on the plane and I'm still crying. I cried all the way to Washington, D.C. because it just, it just broke my heart to see my mother cry like that. And I knew that it wasn't so much anger, it was just more that like she couldn't protect me. But for months after I had learned that I had gotten accepted to go into the Peace Corps, all she could express was anger about me going. And then I arrived in Washington, D.C., and I kind of met all these other new faces that I was going to be with. And eventually, these are people who kind of became family members for a while. And for many of them, I'm still friends with them to this day, 20 years later. I kind of felt, sort of, like this was just a brand new experience. For me, I was as far as traveling was concerned, I hadn't had near any of the sorts of experiences that a lot of the other mostly white Peace Corps volunteers had had before, as far as backpacking in Europe and going traveling to various countries as a birthday

gift. My parents had never done anything like that for me. Not that they wouldn't want to, but I just don't come from a family that has that kind of resources. So I felt very odd. And almost like I didn't kind of belong in the group. So it was a stretching moment for me to be able to learn how to get along with other people, and to learn that the world is a lot bigger than what I had previously thought it was. And then, I remember we got there, we got off the plane. And I remember they had opened up the plane, and we were hit with this like heat that I had never felt or experienced. It was this dry heat that I had never felt before. It was just dry and dusty. Then you see all these other Black people on the... Like I had never seen so many Black people in one place like this, probably in my entire life. And so that was a weird... That was a weird feeling for me. There was I think, there was two, maybe two other Black people who were there that were in my Peace Corps group with me. And so we had kind of connected a little bit. And we were just... We were excited to be in Africa. As Black people, we were excited to be in Africa. And just being able to get off the plane, and getting our bags and getting situated, and getting in the car to go to our hotel where we would be stationed for the least, I guess the next five to seven days, just to sort of get situated. We were in Lomé, Togo. And Lomé is located on a beach. So being able to see the beach as we go towards our hotel was really surreal. Because as a Black person in America, probably the only connections that you ever make to Africa is our history with slavery. And so, to be able to look at those waters and say, "Wow, is this where my ancestors come from?" And so that was... Just to be able to take all of that in at one time, was really, it was an interesting experience.

CHRISTINE [00:19:22] I wanted to know what the first year in Togo was like.

HALONA [00:19:26] It's tough. It's tough adjusting. When you first get to Peace Corps, you have your first... Before you actually become a full-fledged volunteer, you actually have your training period. And so everyone who came in my group, we all trained together for three months in a village. And we lived... We each were placed in a host family within this village and so most of them were very loving families who took very good care of us. And they were able to help us out with adjusting to things like, "What's it like to live in a place where there's no running water? Where the electricity cuts off several times a day, if not for days at a time? How do you get along with how to use a latrine instead of a flushing toilet? How do you bathe? How do you prepare food?" And all those sorts of things. And then, you know, they help you with language and culture. And one of the things that I learned is, that just because you learn how to speak French, that cultural context makes a big difference in how you learn a language. So West African French is very different from French from France, which of course, makes sense. But when you're a young person, you don't really get these things. So just learning how Togolese people express themselves was really fun, and how people express themselves across different ethnic groups was interesting to be able to witness. And to be able to learn different expressions. And to... As a Black person, to be able to see some of the expressions that people would use in Togo, could be traced to things that like my great grandmother used to say to me when I was little. So it was nice to be able to make those sorts of connections. After you complete the first three months, there's like a graduation ceremony. And then you get placed in a village. And so I

was placed in a very small village in central Togo. It was in a Muslim village by the name of Wassarabo. And this was the home of the Kotokoli people. And I was there for two years. And so in my first year, is just a big year of adjustment, of just learning how to be by yourself in this place where you have to negotiate everything on your own. You don't have the comfort of being in the group anymore. You're literally just sort of sent out there, into what feels like the middle of nowhere. And you're just out there, trying to figure out what work can I do on a regular basis? What makes sense? What am I interested in doing? What is... What is my village interested in working with me on? And so what I wound up doing... What the Peace Corps always suggests is that you spend the first 3 to 6 months just kind of learning, instead of just working. Just so that you can sort of get a feel for how things work in your village. And of course, when you go to places like this, they work a lot slower than perhaps we as Americans are used to in the United States. So they appreciate you coming in, and sitting down, and sharing food with people, or sitting underneath the mango tree in the middle of the afternoon or during a hot day. Just to share some mangoes and just sort of talk about who you are and what it is that you're doing. People are always curious as to who I am. And at the time, I had really long, thick locks in my hair. And so... Plus, I'm a lighter-skinned, Black person. And so they always wanted to ask if I was related to Bob Marley. That was a popular question. As a lighter-skinned black person, it was very interesting, because people were always sort of assumed that I was mixed. You know, sure, somewhere in my family there was mixing at some point. But both of my parents are considered to be Black people. And so they were very curious about what my parents looked like. And so I always had to carry around pictures of my parents to prove that both of my parents were Black. And then they don't like to be in the sun a lot, because they don't want their skin to be darker. And so, with me, of course I love the sun, and wanted to be as brown as I could possibly be. But as my skin would get darker, they would say, "Oh, Helona your skin... Your skin is ruined. You need to put on the whitening cream on your skin so you would be beautiful again." So that was always difficult to hear. But at the same time, you have to remember that that's a reflection of their own poor sense of self-esteem and the colorism that they go through. Which is the same as any other group of brown... Black and brown people that you would find anywhere in the world. I also had some issues with trying to be seen as a Black person. Because the further out that you go into villages, the less education people have. And so a lot of people don't know the history of slavery and how Black people got to other parts of the world. And so when I tell them that I'm American, they would say, "Well, you can't be an American because only white people come from America." So you'd have to explain that history. And then they would explain... Well, they knew that there was a point in history where people just sort of disappeared, but they just kind of thought that everybody died. They didn't really realize that there was a whole group of people that we connect to and we call ourselves descendants of those people who come from various African countries. And we've survived, we've been thrived. We thrive every day. And we're very proud of our cultures and where we come from. And for many of us, we want to be able to connect to those cultures again. So trying to be able to explain that to people was often difficult, and to see that sometimes they would shun you as a Black person, but then they would accept a lot of the other white volunteers, just because they were excited about being close to white people. And so it was just very interesting to be able to have that experience as a Black person. You could never really get close to a lot of the other white volunteers because they didn't really understand why certain interactions with people

would make you angry, or would make you upset, or sad. They just couldn't relate. And so as a Black person, you kind of felt like you were left on your own, to be able to sort of figure these things out. I'm glad that I got placed in a majority Muslim village, or at least that part of the central... From the central part of Togo all the way up towards the north is where most people are Muslims. Anything in the south of the country are usually people who are both Christian and... They're Christian, and they practice their own local religions like Voodoo and other things. And so my coordinator, I guess, my... The director of the Peace Corps, saw that I had a very introverted personality. And so the tribes of the south of Togo tend to be a lot more in your face, and very confrontational. Not in not in an unfriendly way. But just in a way that sort of made me feel uncomfortable. And I had a hard time trying to negotiate my way around that particular part of the culture. But before... I don't, I don't really know why, but most Muslim cultures tended to be a little bit more laid back, and so that works better for my personality. And so I liked being in that area of the country, it was really nice to be able to sort of be a witness to their rituals and their holidays, but also... They're Muslims, but they also hold on to a lot of their own traditional cultural beliefs as well. So they'll celebrate Muslim holidays. But then there will also be other traditional ceremonies. Like when they have babies and they have naming ceremonies, or to watch people do traditional dances. And then you get to participate in that is... I just feel really blessed to be able to have had that particular experience that I had with them.

CHRISTINE [00:28:50] Since the Peace Corps is a two-year program. I asked Halona to tell me what were some of the differences between her first year and our second year in Togo.

HALONA [00:29:02] So in your second year, you just feel a little bit more confident. You're still not really there as far as feeling like you 100% belong, But you're just a little bit more confident than you were your first year. I... As my time was winding down, I was really unsure about what I was going to do. When I had left, it was some months after 9/11. And so, although I hadn't paid attention to a lot of the news that was going on in the United States, I knew it wasn't really a good situation as far as jobs and things were concerned. So I really had no idea what I was going to be going home to. I just know that I felt like I had grown so much, and that Togo had just become so much a part of my life and it changed my life so much. I felt like I had done a lot of growing up. And I felt like I was a completely different person. And even still, in the back of my mind, I felt like I could... Whatever it is that I needed to do in order to make it back in the States, it couldn't be any harder than what I had experienced during the two years that I was in Togo. So I had left with a lot more confidence in who I was, in my ability to be able to survive. Because it's really difficult to be able to pack up your whole life and just be thrown into a village where you don't speak the language, you have no idea how the culture works. So I figured, if I could figure that out, then I could probably figure out anything else in life. Not that there weren't things that were difficult, but that sort of... Peace Corps really laid down the foundation for letting me know that you could really do anything as long as you're open and willing to try.

CHRISTINE [00:30:57] I asked what it had been like dating in Togo.

HALONA [00:31:02] I dated one guy who actually became my husband. I probably met him maybe six months into my being in my village. He wasn't from my village, he was from the town, maybe 30, 40 minutes or so outside of my village. And I dated him. And we wound up falling in love with each other. And we got married. And so it was interesting. He was always really fascinated by other Black people and the experiences of Black people in America. We're not together anymore, we wound up getting a divorce, probably eight years after we got married. But I appreciate the fact that I met him because I was able to learn more about his culture than if I had to just sort of figure it out on my own. So he sort of became like a cultural translator for me, if you will, during the two years that I was there in the country. I learned a lot about politics. I learned about the complication of religion, of being a Muslim, but also being able to follow certain traditional aspects of African religion as well. With just learning how people interact with each other between tribes. Yeah, it was very, very interesting. And his father had four wives, and probably others. But there were four main wives. And so, this was my first time learning about what it's like to be in a family of people with multiple wives. So it was just a period of a lot of firsts. Of a lot of expanding my mind on what is right. What does it mean to be to live right, or to live according to your culture. And trying to explain that to both sides of our families was very, very interesting.

CHRISTINE [00:32:58] I wanted to know more about Halona's experience in an intercultural relationship, and how living in Togo affected their relationship. And then how moving to the United States affected their relationship.

HALONA [00:33:15] When I ended Peace Corps, I went back to the United States, he joined me in Washington, D.C. about six months later. And immediately, it was a big cultural difference. Because as an African man who assumes... He was used to being in charge. And so since I was the one who was always the subordinate one, so to speak, culturally, he became the subordinate one, culturally, when he came to the United States. Because he didn't speak a lick of English. He needed to be able to learn English and go to school and get some sort of job training and all that other stuff, which is kind of difficult for an African man to be in. Basically, he didn't like it. He didn't like it. And so that caused a lot of tension between us. And I think that's eventually what led to us to be able to get a divorce. It was just too much for us to be able to navigate. I've met other couples, Black American women with other African men, they've been able to work out their differences, but we were not. That dynamic of him trying to learn how to navigate being an American, and learning what it means to be a Black person in the United States was difficult for him. And he didn't really like having to learn a lot of things through me. He was used to learning through other men because that's what they do in their culture. Women learn from women and men learn from men. And so that was hard for both of us.

CHRISTINE [00:34:55] Hey, everyone, I hope you're enjoying this episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*. And if you are, please be sure to take a screenshot, tag FlourishForeign, and share across your social media networks. It's really important to share these stories. Since you are enjoying this episode, be sure to support this podcast by becoming a Patreon supporter at www.patreon.com/flourishforeign, tipping the podcast via Cash App at \$flourishforeign, or

purchasing an item off of the podcast, Amazon wishlist which you can find at www.flourishintheforeign.com/support. All right, on to the rest of the show.

HALONA [00:35:53] Well, I've always wanted to live outside of the United States. When I came home from being in Togo for two years, I remember maybe a year later saying to a friend, "I can't hear God anymore," which at the time sort of seemed weird for me to be able to say, but when you live in a rural village where the food is very pure, and you're living a very clean existence. And then you get plopped back into the pollution of the United States, and listening to the news, and living in a place where people are very fearful. And you got to get put back into an environment where you're working in a cubicle and you don't get a lot of sun. I have fallen into a depression.

And so I remember saying to my friend that I really just can't hear God anymore. And I've always wanted to go back to live somewhere, not necessarily in Togo, but someplace else. I really wasn't sure where, but I knew that living in the United States was not where I was supposed to be. However, I also felt like there were other things that I needed to get from the United States. Like I wound up going to graduate school. I felt like I needed to do other things as far as job experience, and things like that were concerned. And so I did that for a good 15 years of... And also just sort of figuring out what my life would look like if I were to go overseas. I wanted to be able to be free. And I learned that I wanted to be free because eventually when my mother passed away from cancer, I was traveling back and forth between Washington D.C. and when she lived in New Jersey for a good six months while she was in hospice. And I just needed to be flexible. I didn't like the fact that I had to ask my employer for time off to be able to take care of my mother, if I had to leave an hour or two early to be able to go be with her. Because I felt like she was my mother and I owe that to her. But I didn't like the feeling of being tied to a job and having to ask everyone whether or not I should have the right to take care of my dying mother. So I was always looking for something that would give me the freedom to be able to move around as I wanted to. I just wasn't sure what that would look like yet. How I decided to be able to go abroad was really through personal illness. I've had issues with fibroids, also with adrenal fatigue. And I was dealing with a lot of weight gain. I had thyroid issues, and I tried to work within the United States medical system to be able to fix a lot of those things. But really, I was tired of being pointed in the direction of pills and surgery as the only way to go. So yes, I wound up getting a surgery to remove fibroids. But then six months after I had that surgery in 2009, the fibroids were coming back. So I had developed an interest in natural healing techniques. So this go-around, when I decided that I wanted to go back overseas, I also wanted to go someplace where I could probably find a greater connection to some sort of natural healing modality. And I wound up picking Thailand as my first place, not really realizing how many natural health resources I would find when I got there. I was just kind of hoping that I can go someplace and get like, acupuncture, or get exposed to better air, maybe get some rest and get access to good food again. And maybe my problems would sort of fix itself. I went to Thailand. Got there, and I might... Like my whole body just sort of collapsed. For the first six months that I was in Thailand, I really couldn't do a whole lot. I was glad to be there, I met a lot of people. But I couldn't really interact or go sightseeing and do all those exciting things that

people do when they first get overseas into a new country. Because I was just too sick to even move. And so I wound up connecting with an herbal healer in Thailand who put me on a protocol for six months that helped me out with my fibroids and restarted my whole body. So I wound up losing about 100 pounds during this process. I think I was there for a total of nine months. And then once I got to a place where I was feeling a lot better, I traveled to Vietnam for three months at that point. And then I'd also gone to Laos and Cambodia as well. And now I'm back in Vietnam for a living.

CHRISTINE [00:40:54] I asked what has been her experience living in Asia?

HALONA [00:40:58] Well, first of all, I love Asia. I did not think I would love it here as much as I did. I really fell in love with the Buddhist culture here. And I've learned how to meditate here. And just learning a lot about Buddhist thought and traveling to different temples. I love temples, I can hang out in temples all day. To be able to have easy access to nature that's really untouched. I really, I really love that aspect of living in this part of Southeast Asia. As far as my interactions with other Asian people, for the most part, most of them have been positive. People I meet a lot of people who are curious about who I am. When they realize for a lot... Especially in Vietnam, when they realize that I'm an American, when they see my Black face, they think I'm African. But like when you go to a hotel, and you give them your passport, and they'll say, "Oh, so you're an American, but you look African. I don't understand." So you have to explain that Black people live in America. So that's nice. But then there are also some times when you'll know that people are saying negative things about your skin color. And I don't really think anything about it. I think for me, I think I have thicker skin because of the experience that I had living in Africa around other Black people. And it was... They would say the same things about me as they would say here. And I just sort of chuck it off as an experience in colorism. And colorism affects not just Black people, but also Asian people as well. And so when they are saying things about my skin color, it's just something about that level of miseducation that most people of color around the world have about who they are, and where they come from. And so I don't look at it as like a racist incident or anything like that. I just look at it as, people are just ignorant. And if you weren't here to be able to show them or teach them something else, then it would be a problem. But thus far I love... I love living in this part of Asia so far.

CHRISTINE [00:43:20] Halona is a writer, and she has her own business. She is location-independent. And so I asked her to share some advice for all of you who's looking to become location independent, or perhaps even writers.

HALONA [00:43:37] I'm a freelance writer, and I do corporate blogging, as well as book ghostwriting for VIP clients. And so the inspiration for that came from while I was working in adult education. I had started doing things like blogging, I just needed a space to be able to talk about the work that I was doing in adult education, as well as being interested in sort of sharing

what I was doing so that I can be paid for teaching kids gigs, side gigs, consulting jobs and things like that. So this was me sort of putting my toe in the water, so to speak, to be able to find what my freedom would look like. And so I said, "Well, I can do some consulting work or teaching things on the side people can pay me for." And so I use blogging as a way to be able to explain to people what I did as an adult educator, but also to be able to connect with people who are higher up. That was really how my writing business really started. It was more so to be able to market my skills, more so than to be paid for the actual task of writing. So in that process, I learned a lot about things like search engine optimization, and just being able to find an audience and connect with them, so that I can build an audience around what it is that I was doing, and all sorts of things. And those are all things that I've been able to use even today, as I write blog posts for various corporations. I don't come from a family of entrepreneurs or people who did side gigs or anything like that. So I had to go through that learning process on my own, of learning that if you don't do the work, if you don't do your marketing work, you don't get paid. You don't have someone who's always standing over your shoulder telling you all the time what to do, how to do it, when certain things should be finished. It's up to me as the business owner to be able to create all of those boundaries for myself, so that I can have a business that is consistent and brings in cash on a regular basis that I can really count on. So I would say learn a marketable skill that people can pay you for. And to do that, while you still have a regular job well before you take the leap to go overseas.

CHRISTINE [00:46:11] I asked her to talk about her definition of wellness, and how living abroad had influenced her definition in her practice of wellness. And truly, how living abroad has transformed her life.

HALONA [00:46:30] Well, my definition of wellness has really been influenced by the healers that I worked with while I was in Thailand. So there were... It's an herbalist, as well as an energy healer that I work with while I was in Thailand. And both of these, they're two Black men that I met while I was there. Before coming to Thailand, I was very used to putting myself last, and I thought that living in a constant self-sacrifice mode was the way to be able to be successful, and it's not at all. And being here in Southeast Asia shows me all the time that the less that I do, and the more that I am focused on finding activities where I can get more benefit out of it. Rather than trying to do run around doing a bunch of stuff that kind of works, but doesn't. That's just way more beneficial to my life than anything else. So my wellness routine for myself, it looks a lot like getting a lot of sunshine. I always have access to excellent fresh food. I do 20 minutes of meditation in the morning, and then another 20 minutes of meditation before I go to sleep. I make sure that I take my work breaks. There are some times when I do have to work more, a little more than normal. But I do allow myself the space to be able to take breaks. And because I actually live in a place where my rent is only \$350 as opposed to paying \$1,000 where I was before living in Florida, it's just a lot easier for me to be able to take those breaks, because the cost of living here is so much cheaper. And then it's nice to be able to have access to the beach on a regular basis. So being in salt water a few times a week is very healing for the body.

CHRISTINE [00:48:26] I asked her to share some advice with all of you who may be thinking about making that leap abroad.

HALONA [00:48:34] Yeah, continue to listen to stories of people who are doing what it is that you want to do. Because there's a million ways to be able to go overseas, it's just a matter of connecting and making the plan that works best for who you are. And so, like years before I had even left to go to Thailand, I spent a lot of time listening to podcasts. Because I understand that fear of what you want to do, but you're not really sure that you will be met with what you want if you decide to bet on yourself. It's very hard for us to be able to bet on ourselves just because we don't know what's out here. But I'm living proof that if you go towards the thing that you want, you will never be disappointed. Not that you'll never have hard times, or there'll be days when you're you're wondering if this was the right decision for you to make, but it'll always work itself out. But you have to at least give it a try. Do you really want to go through life wondering what you could have created had you just decided to bet on yourself and just gave it a try. Just, even if you just did it for three months and you decided that you hated it. Your life will expand in so many ways that even if you decided to just go back home and get a job, you'll be coming back home a much different person. Which really, I think is what this whole life experience is about. It's about constantly challenging yourself and expanding yourself in ways that maybe you didn't think about before. So go ahead and give yourself that opportunity. You'll never know what it is that you're going to be able to find out about yourself and how learning about those things will help move you into the next part of your life journey.

CHRISTINE [00:50:24] Thank you so much, Halona, for sharing your story. And if you want to keep up with Halona via social media, you can.

HALONA [00:50:33] You can find me online. I'm on LinkedIn, for those who want to learn more about my work as a freelance writer. You can just look under my name Halona Black. Or you can find me on Instagram or Facebook. On Instagram, I'm at soulauthorjourney. And on Facebook at Halona Black. You can find me online at digitalwellpublisher.com.

CHRISTINE [00:51:03] Thank you all so much for listening to this week's episode of *Flourish In The Foreign*. If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to take a screenshot and tag at FlourishForeign and share it across your social media networks. Also, please be sure to support the podcast by becoming a Patreon supporter at www.patreon.com/flourishforeign. By tipping the podcast via Cash App at \$flourishforeign. Or purchasing an item off of our Amazon wishlist so that we can upgrade the production of the podcast. And you can find that at www.flourishintheforeign.com/support. Be sure to be following the podcast on Instagram at www.instagram.com/flourishforeign. That is where I go live either by myself or with past podcast guests, and we have really fun and interesting conversations. So if you have any questions or if you want to meet some of the past podcast guests, definitely be sure to tune in to Instagram. And also check out the YouTube channel for *Flourish In The Foreign*. I've uploaded a really

fascinating conversation that I've had with Tiffany Smith of *Abroad and Education* podcast, where we were discussing intergenerational mobility. And how that has affected Black people living abroad, and even thinking about why they want to go abroad. It's a fascinating conversation. So definitely check it out on the YouTube channel. And as most of you know, I am a business strategist. I help Black women and women of color, leverage their talents and their expertise into viable and sustainable online businesses that make them professionally fulfilled and financially abundant while they pursue thriving lives abroad. If you are ready to launch your own business, or scale your own business, to give you a firm foundation for your leap abroad, or help to make your time abroad a more thriving experience, let's chat. I have an amazing 12 weeks sprint program that I use to launch businesses and scale businesses for myself and for my clients. If you're interested in learning more about that, you can go to my website, www.christinejob.com. And you can also book in a free discovery call or we can chat more about it. Be sure to start off 2021 not with a wish and a hope, but with a plan and a business. And of course, thank you to Zachary Higgs who produced the music of this podcast. Zachary is just an incredible musician. So if you need some music for your latest project, be sure to hit him up. I'll leave all of his information in this episode's show notes. All right. That is it for this week. Thank you all so much for listening to *Flourish In The Foreign*. See you next week.