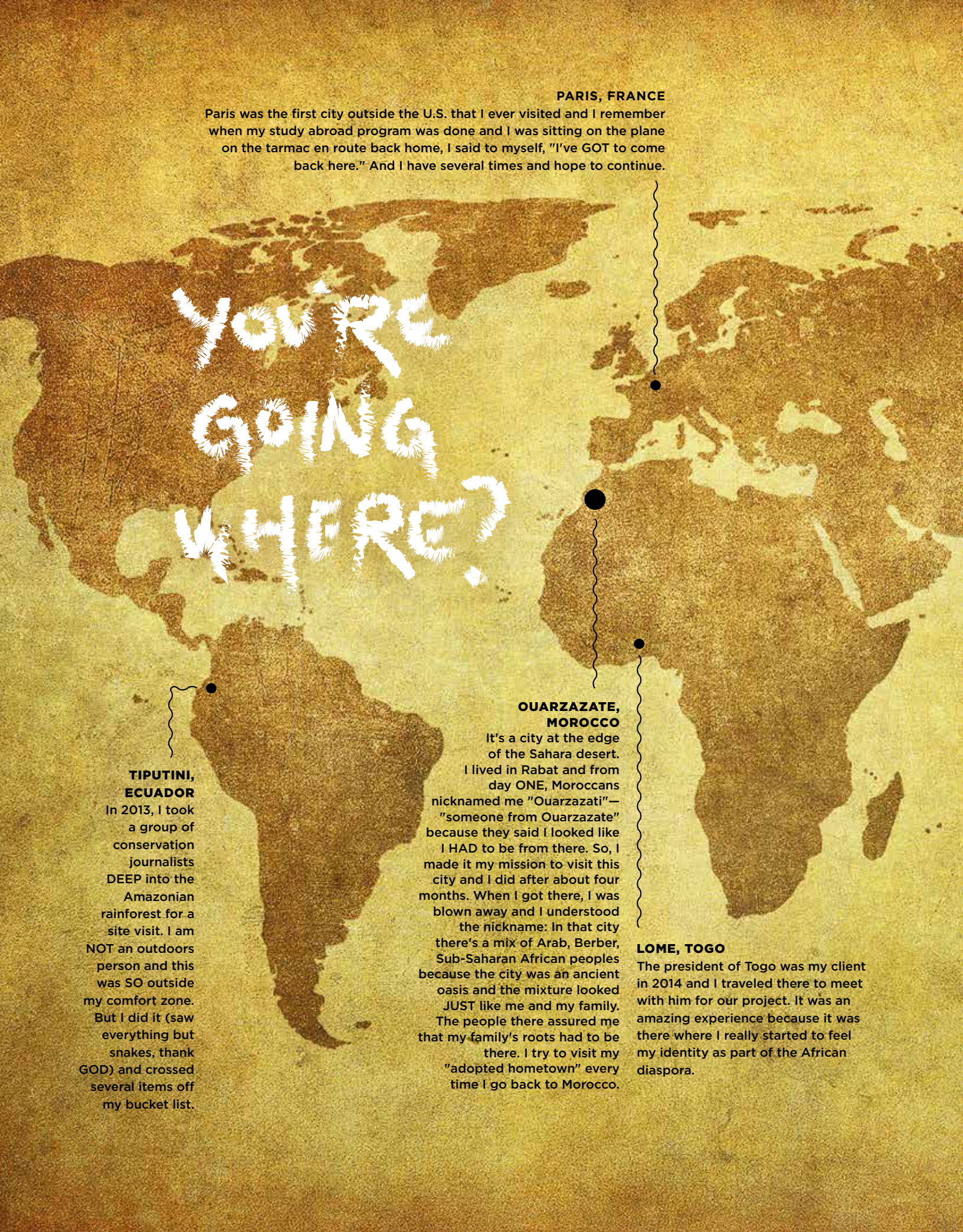
DUKE

MAGAZINE



IF YOU DARE



PARIS, FRANCE
Paris was the first city outside the U.S. that I ever visited and I remember when my study abroad program was done and I was sitting on the plane on the tarmac en route back home, I said to myself, "I've GOT to come back here." And I have several times and hope to continue.

TIPUTINI, ECUADOR
In 2013, I took a group of conservation journalists DEEP into the Amazonian rainforest for a site visit. I am NOT an outdoors person and this was SO outside my comfort zone. But I did it (saw everything but snakes, thank GOD) and crossed several items off my bucket list.

OUARZAZATE, MOROCCO
It's a city at the edge of the Sahara desert. I lived in Rabat and from day ONE, Moroccans nicknamed me "Ouarzazati"—"someone from Ouarzazate" because they said I looked like I HAD to be from there. So, I made it my mission to visit this city and I did after about four months. When I got there, I was blown away and I understood the nickname: In that city there's a mix of Arab, Berber, Sub-Saharan African peoples because the city was an ancient oasis and the mixture looked JUST like me and my family. The people there assured me that my family's roots had to be there. I try to visit my "adopted hometown" every time I go back to Morocco.

LOME, TOGO
The president of Togo was my client in 2014 and I traveled there to meet with him for our project. It was an amazing experience because it was there where I really started to feel my identity as part of the African diaspora.

BY CALVIN DARK

"You ought not go over there. Ain't no telling what could happen to you."

THAT'S HOW an aunt warned me when I decided to study abroad. The decision wasn't surprising because I had a lifelong fascination with foreign languages. But in Siler City, about fifty miles southwest of Durham, I had nearly exhausted the opportunities to use them. It was a shock to both my community and me that I found myself going, with an actual passport and airline ticket, over a big, real ocean.

"But do you even speak Paris?" a cousin asked that summer night after my freshman year before I left for France.

While I was excited to put my Parisian skills to the test, I was afraid. Durham was the biggest metropolis I'd semi-conquered. However, that fear was nothing compared to the fate that would befall me if I ignored the wisdom my parents had always made plain.



"If you get to the end of your life and you're not happy with it, you can't blame nobody but yourself."

I was raised by parents, family, and a community who were profiles in courage—like many black folk in North Carolina. Strong communities are such because that wealth of knowledge from facing fears is shared. But confronting my fear took me metaphorically and literally far away from any tool in our community's arsenal. Besides, with all the new and amazing options and opportunities I had in *this* country—a burgeoning Duke education among them—why was I drawn to faraway places I could quite easily avoid?

They thought I learned my lesson once I got safely back to campus from France. That was until my next study-abroad adventure, in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"Be careful over there!" my uncle hollered by phone across a hemisphere. "We saw everything happening on the news and wanted to make sure you're all right."

Apparently there had been an uptick in violence in Bosnia. I just listened, thanked him for the heads-up, and told him to let everybody know I asked about them.

It's so telling what I remember about my Duke senior year. I recall in vivid detail the Saturday night a good friend and fellow senior strongly encouraged me to apply for a Fulbright fellowship after my planned post-graduation opportunity evaporated. I don't remember how I got the news late that spring that I had been named a Fulbright Scholar to Morocco. I also don't remember any specific one of the associated waves of congratulations, though there were lots from friends, faculty, and family.

But I do remember that evening after the news' novelty subsided and preparations for Morocco began. I was coming out of an East Campus computer lab, where I had printed the final copy of my last assignment for graduation, when I got a phone call.

"Do you think we're going to just *let* you go? Are you crazy?" said my steadfast family Amen corner, though in that moment they sounded like a Greek chorus warning of tragedy.

My return to the U.S. after my Fulbright year in Morocco coincided with a large family cookout where I was eavesdropping and overheard a cousin ask my aunt where I was off to next.

"I don't exactly know, but I bet it'll be Morocco again, he *loves* it. Chile, do you know *Morocco*? It's just south of Spain in Africa and they speak Arabic and French. Calvin speaks both of those. You remember that beautiful dress I wore to the church banquet? It was a gift—handmade from Morocco...."

Now, I get excited when I "like" a cousin's Facebook post that he's studying abroad in Ethiopia or that she's doing a Spanish immersion program in Costa Rica. I'm awestruck by my life's purpose when I receive a text that someone in my community's embrace "is getting a passport for the first time & needs some travel advice."

When you're a part of a strong community, you don't really face fears alone—no matter how far away confronting them takes you. I unknowingly but thankfully took my family on my journey and made my own special contribution to our great shared wealth of knowledge. ■

Dark '01 resides in Washington, D.C., and is president of CD Global Strategies Group, a public-relations firm he founded.