

Born as Dembele Nonye. Know Now as Moussa

A Life of Resilience and Rhythm



Dembele Moussa hails from a traditional Bwa-Bwa Griot family of musicians and artisans originating from Burkina Faso and Mali — a lineage steeped in rhythm, storytelling, and craftsmanship. His family's music is not merely sound; it is history, spirit, and ancestral memory carried through generations.

From early childhood, Moussa was surrounded by the heartbeat of drums and the soulful hum of string instruments. Under the guidance of his father and other relatives, he learned not just how to make music, but how to breathe life into wood and skin — how to craft instruments that sing with the voice of his people. Over twenty-five years later, Moussa stands as a professional musician, educator, and master craftsman of West African instruments — a keeper of tradition and a messenger of resilience.



A Child Between Worlds

Moussa was born on September 21, 1982, in the small village of Ouarkuye, near Dédougou, Burkina Faso. His father was from the Dembele family of Burkina Faso, and his mother from the Keita family of Mali — two proud lineages bound by artistry and tradition.

But his birth came under difficult circumstances. His mother, only fourteen years old, had been promised in marriage to another man in Benena, Mali, since she was twelve. When she became pregnant, her family faced an unbearable choice — to honour the old promise or accept the new life growing inside her. Bound by ancestral vows, they chose tradition over love.

The child was hidden away, and his mother was sent to fulfil the marriage she had been pledged to. Forbidden to speak of her son, she carried her sorrow in silence. Three months later, the baby — little Moussa — was given to her relatives, the Keita family. A couple unable to have children took him in. In their home in Djibasso, near the Mali border, that is where he was given the new name: Moussa. So, he grew up with the name Moussa



The Truth Revealed

Life in Djibasso was not easy. His adoptive father was harsh, often punishing him severely. But hardship forged in Moussa an early strength — a quiet fire that would guide him all his life.

When he was around eleven, a woman he believed to be his “sister” often visited him from her husband’s village. She brought him gifts — small tokens of affection that made him feel seen and loved.

One day, when she asked about a shirt she had given him, he broke down and cried, telling her that his adoptive father had burned it and bitten him during a punishment. Overcome with emotion, she could no longer hold back the truth.

With tears in her eyes, she looked at him and said softly,

“The man you call your father is not your father. The woman here is not your mother. I am your mother.”

At first, Moussa refused to believe her. How could someone he called “sister” be his mother? But as she spoke — telling the painful story of his birth, her forced separation, and the father he had never met — something inside him began to stir. He learned that his real father was alive, living in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.

That day changed everything. The truth became both his burden and his light.



A Boy's Journey of Hope

At the age of twelve, driven by an unshakable longing, Moussa made a brave decision. With no map, no money, and no one to guide him, he hid beneath a bus and travelled from Djibasso to Bobo-Dioulasso, searching for the man whose name he barely knew.

The city was vast and bewildering. People spoke Dyula, a language foreign to his ears. The streets were loud and unfamiliar, and Moussa was just a boy—hungry, alone, and invisible.

One day, he heard the beat of drums echoing in the distance. The rhythm called to him, like something ancient awakening inside his chest. He followed the sound and stumbled upon a celebration for a newborn baby. There, amidst laughter and music, he heard people speaking Bwa-Bwa—his own language.

He approached them cautiously and spoke. To his amazement, they were relatives from his mother's family. They fed him and listened carefully to his story. Concerned for his safety and believing it was best for him, they sent him back to Djibasso.

But the fire in his heart did not fade.

Again and again, he tried to reach his father. Each journey ended in disappointment—but never in defeat.

In 1996, Moussa was fourteen years old.

His adoptive father, who was also his great-uncle, arranged a meeting with Moussa's biological father in Bobo Dioulasso. It was meant to be a significant day—the first time Moussa would meet the man whose blood ran through his veins.

When they finally met, Moussa was overwhelmed with joy. His heart raced with hope. He was convinced that this time, he would return home with his real father. At last, he believed, he would belong.

But hope can be fragile.

Before Moussa could take a step toward his new life, his adoptive father intervened.

There were "conditions."

He demanded financial compensation for the years Moussa had lived under his care—for food, clothing, medicine, expenses, and every other cost of raising him. Every year, he said, would be calculated. Every expense would be counted.

"I will return your son to you when you pay me," he stated firmly.

The words fell heavily into the space between them.

Moussa's real father stood silent for a long moment before answering.

"I do not have that amount of money."

A heavy silence followed.

"Then you shall not take him," the adoptive father replied.

Moussa felt his breathing quicken.

"Baba, I want to go with you," he pleaded.

His father knelt before him and gently held his face in both hands.

"I came because I love you," he said, his voice breaking. "But I cannot meet this demand."

For the first time, Moussa saw the truth in his father's eyes—not rejection, but helplessness.

As the sky turned a deep orange, the adoptive father grasped Moussa's arm and signalled that it was time to leave.

Moussa resisted slightly and looked back.

“Please... don’t leave me.”

His father stepped forward—then stopped. He had no money. No power. Only shame.

The bus engine started.

Dust rose into the evening air.

Their eyes remained locked until distance slowly erased his father from sight.

When they returned to the quiet village, everything appeared unchanged. The same houses. The same narrow paths. The same still night air.

But Moussa was no longer the same.

He walked more slowly, more heavily. Something inside him had shifted. He was no longer an innocent child. That day, he learned that love is not always enough when poverty stands in the way.

That night, he lay awake on a thin mat, staring at the ceiling in the darkness. His father’s words echoed in his mind:

“I came because I love you.”

A single tear rolled down his cheek.

It felt as though he had been given a price.

As though he had been weighed, measured, and returned.

And in the silence of that long night, a question began to grow inside him—

How much is a son worth?



Finding His Way to the Capital City

In 1999, when Moussa was seventeen, fate whispered again. He overheard his mother's relatives talking about a wedding to take place in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. It was the first time he had ever heard that city's name — and something inside told him to go.

He travelled there with nothing but hope. Ouagadougou was unlike anything he had ever seen — crowded, colourful, alive. But it was also cruel to those with nowhere to go. For two months, he lived on the streets, for a year, cold, yet determined to survive.

Then one day, while wandering through a busy market, he came across a tailor's shop. As he listened, he recognized voices and faces — relatives from his mother's side. During their conversation, a woman speaking Moore, a language unfamiliar to him, asked one of his uncles, "What is the boy's name? His uncle replied softly, "Moussa."

That single word stopped him cold. It was the first time he had ever heard his true name. In that moment, Nonye faded away. From then on, he called himself Moussa — the name his parents had given him at birth, the name he carried in his blood.



The Reunion

Moussa stayed in Ouagadougou, occasionally visiting his mother's relatives but choosing not to live with them. His heart still belonged to a dream — to find his father again.

Four years later. On April 28, 2000, at the age of eighteen, he was invited to a wedding — the same one he had once overheard about in the village. The air was filled with music, laughter, and life. Moussa danced freely, his heart light for the first time in years.

Then, through the crowd, a man approached him. Placing a hand on his shoulder, the man asked,

“What is your name?”

“My name is Moussa, he replied.

“Do you have another name?”

“Yes,” Moussa said. “My other name is Nonye.

The man paused, emotion trembling in his voice, and said quietly,
“I am your father.

The world seemed to stop. Moussa's heart pounded. Could it be true? Could this stranger be the man he had searched for all his life? After their first meeting, in Bobo Dioulasso, unsure and overwhelmed, he walked away.

But the man returned — this time reminding him of the day they met in Bobo Dioulasso with his adoptive father. He also retold the exact story Moussa's mother had shared with him in Djibasso. Every detail. Every memory.

Tears filled Moussa's eyes. The truth was undeniable.

After eighteen long years, he had finally found his father again.

The next morning, he moved in with him. Together they laughed, shared meals, and began to rebuild what life had once taken from them. His father taught him the sacred craft of instrument-making — a bond that would shape Moussa's destiny.



Loss and Renewal

Four months later, tragedy struck. On August 27, 2000, Moussa's mother passed away. The grief was unbearable. Despite his father's pleas to stay, Moussa returned to Djibasso and Benena to honour his mother's memory.

When he came back to Ouagadougou in January 2001, his father was gone — he had moved back to Bobo-Dioulasso. When Moussa finally found him again, his father, hurt by Moussa's disobedience, rejected him. Heartbroken, Moussa found himself once again living on the streets.

But this time, he refused to surrender to despair.

He began helping other street children — sharing whatever food he could find, working odd jobs, selling soap, yams, onions, and small goods to feed the kids around him. From 2001 to 2002, his kindness became his survival. His purpose grew stronger than his pain.



A Son's Return

In 2003, determined and hopeful, Moussa returned to Bobo-Dioulasso to see his father once more. This time, he came not as a lost boy, but as a man with a heart full of forgiveness.

He offered to help — to pay rent, to support his stepsisters' education, to rebuild their bond. Moved by his sincerity, his father finally accepted him back. Though their relationship was not always easy, love slowly replaced pain, and understanding took the place of distance.

Even after finding peace, Moussa never forgot the children who slept on the streets as he once had. He continued to share food with them and with schoolchildren, using his music and work to uplift others.

Moussa is the founder of **FASO DEME BAGAOU**, a program based in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, where he provides meals five days a week to 321 students at Bolomakote School five days a week.

By guaranteeing that every child begins the day with a healthy, nourishing meal, the initiative addresses immediate nutritional needs while simultaneously investing in long-term academic performance, physical development, and overall well-being.



Legacy of a Healer Through Music

Today, Dembele Moussa's life is more than a story — it is a song of survival, love, and forgiveness. From the silence of abandonment to the rhythm of drums, from the streets of Ouagadougou to the heart of West African music, Moussa transformed his suffering into strength.

Through his craftsmanship, he gives voice to tradition. Through his music, he gives hope. Through his compassion, he gives life.

His journey reminds us that even the deepest wounds can become the source of our greatest beauty — and that no distance, no loss, and no silence can stop the rhythm of a heart that was born to sing.

