

Southern Sudanese Community Center: Race & Oral History Project, UC San Diego

Narrator: OUMNIA KONATE

Interviewer: Millen Mengis

Date: May 20, 2021

Location: San Diego, California

Collection: Race and Oral History Course, Spring 2021

Length of interview: 00:15:28

MM: Hello, my name is Millen Mengis and today is May 20th, 2021 and I am currently an undergrad student at UC San Diego, and today I have the privilege of interviewing Oumnia through Zoom for the UCSD race and oral History project. Thank you so much for joining me today and I'm looking forward to our conversation. So first off, could you share with me your full name and briefly introduce yourself your age what grade you're in and what do you do on a day to day?

OK: Um, my name is Oumnia Konate and I'm 13 years old and my birthday is August 3rd, 2007 and I currently go to Lewis middle school and I'm an eighth grader there and I am African American. And what I do on a day-to-day basis is, go to school, every morning and come back from school, do homework, sit have some family time, and then have dinner, and then spend some 'me' time, and then go to sleep and do it all over again!

MM: Awesome, okay and where are you from and describe what your neighborhood is like.

OK: Okay, I am from Cote D'Ivoire and South- not, not South Sudan—*Sudan* and I am a little bit French, just a little bit. I live on University avenue and my neighborhood it's pretty quiet, most of the time, not all the time, but most of the time. It's pretty chill, nothing much happens around here, and yeah.

MM: Okay, and did you grow up on University? Or, where did you grow up?

OK: I grew up- I was born in San Jose, Santa Clara and I grew up there for three years and then I came to San Diego. Then my first- like me and my mom's first apartment was in Adams, Adams street. Then I went to school elementary school in Normal Heights Elementary and then moved on to Lewis and then moving on to Patrick Henry.

MM: Nice. Okay, and then I also wanted to ask if there's anything that you still have or that currently reminds you of your hometown? Like, just a person or any object, anything that reminds you of home that you currently have with you.

OK: Um I do, which is my mom because she's been there longer than me so she reminds me since like I was, I was still little so I don't remember as much things because I was only like a baby—like two or three, so she like kind of refreshes my memory of where I came from, all the stories and stuff we went to, and all the traveling we did.

MM: Nice okay, I love that. And um, going back to a little bit about your culture, what can you share with me about your culture?

OK: Um I am Shilluk, which is a tribe. It's like a tribe in Sudan. There's many tribes, but the tribe I'm from is Shilluk. Basically our tribe, we wear some scarves called lauer's where like half of it—not half of it, but like a hook is hooked onto your arm and your arm is through and then it's like a dress flowing but it's like a light piece of fabric, like a scarf but a *really* long scarf with details and yeah.

MM: And do you wear that on special occasions, or like is it an everyday wear?

OK: My mom wears it on special occasions like weddings. We also—since like I'm like Sudanese as well, we also wear something called a “thobe” which it's like, you wrap it around the head and it's like really colorful there's many, many varieties of it, you can choose whatever kind, you want to wear and that's like most of the time, people wear to weddings or partly to church and like just really special occasions, and parties and stuff.

MM: Nice, okay and um has your culture been reflected in your everyday life or has it impacted how you grew up?

OK: It hasn't been affected in my everyday life but it's been affected in my life, because we have like basically—I don't know what the language is called but, there's a language that we speak, and my mom speaks it to me I don't understand—I understand a little bit so she speaks it to me slowly, slowly. Then she speaks Arabic, I understand it really well and speaking a little bit, but not as much as she does because it's her first language and not mine. But, I understand that really well and yeah.

MM: Do you speak any other languages, besides English?

OK: I speak a little bit of Arabic and a little bit of my tribe language and I only know a couple words in Spanish and in French only little bit not as much but yeah.

MM: Okay, and what do you love the most about your culture like do you love the food, traditions, or music?

OK: I love the traditions and food because the food is so delicious! And it's like every time, especially if you were to go to a big gathering with a lot of people, you would find so many varieties of food! And you'll find your favorite cousins there,—[well not, yeah favorite cousins there] your favorite food, favorite dishes and everything. Then, like the traditions and the music is just amazing.

MM: What's your favorite dish?

OK: Um, this thing called sambuusa, where it's like you can stuff it with different things, you can stuff it with like *jebna* which is cheese—like goat cheese, and you can stuff it with meat, there's vegetables. There's a lot of things you can stuff it with. As long as it's good, going in my tummy! [laughter]

MM: And then going into a little bit about yourself, what do you like to do in your free time or for fun?

*At this point, we had a couple of brief interruptions. The interview was paused and the question was re-asked when resuming.

MM: What do you like to do in your free time or for fun?

OK: For fun, I like FaceTime me my best friend's name is Emily—

MM: Yeah, so what do you like to do in your free time or for fun?

OK: I like Face Timing my best friend and her name is Emily because she makes me happy and we've been knowing each other for almost three years now. And sometimes I like to hanging out with my little cousin and like just family, like sitting down, watching movies, laughing and do all that.

MM: Nice okay, and can you describe a little bit about your school life, like what's the best part or your least favorite? Do you have a favorite subject or something that you do after school for fun?

OK: My favorite subject is math because my math teacher— I had him in sixth grade, and now I have him in eighth grade and he's really funny because every time he's like, “Oh I'm your favorite teacher right?” He just makes real fun jokes and everything. And when I don't come to school and I come to school the next day so— today he did this as well—I have Ms. Jacobs, which is like an ALD class and then I had him yesterday, but I didn't go to his class. Their classes are like right by each other, so he said this to my teacher, Ms. Jacobs like, “Oh we're gonna have a problem, because Oumnia wants to go to your class and not my class!” [laughter]

And so yeah, and I really like that subject because it's really fun and it is easy, most of the time, not all the time.

MM: Nice okay, that's really interesting because most people don't like math but great you do.

OK: Yeah.

MM: Okay, and then who or what has a big influence on your life, like a family member or friend, and how and why?

OK: My mom, definitely and my best friend Emily because if I'm not with my mom I'm with her most of the time because we see each other in school, all the time. So, if it's not my mom, then it's my best friend, because she's my best friend and she helps me do some things I may not be able to talk to my mom with or like some things I just I don't feel comfortable talking to my mom too. But yeah, and if it's like something that is affecting me with family, then I will talk to my mom about it and she'll make me feel comfort because I'm her daughter and yeah.

MM: Okay and then I want to also ask you about your relationship with the Southern Sudanese Community Center. So, how did you learn about the Southern Sudanese Community Center and how did you get involved in it?

OK: It was actually a really long time ago, from when we move from San Jose to here. I was—or no, we came for a party I think. I don't fully remember, because it was a really long time ago, I was still really little, I think I was three years old. And that was my first time like going to that place before. And then since, I grew up knowing Chuol, and then my cousins and stuff they would go there, so that's how I would be more involved and stuff. So when I would stay at my cousin's house, they would go there for like field trips and stuff, then I would go with them, and that's how I got involved with it.

MM: Okay. And how has it helped you or what do you like or enjoy about the organization?

OK: I like it because like sometimes when I'm not familiar with homework I have somebody to ask or talk to about it, and get help.

MM: Okay, that's great. And then going back to like community, who or what would you say is your community and how would you describe that relationship? Like, where do you find a sense of like community or like, home?

OK: Um, I am not fully sure, but um basically, everybody that I talk to is most of the time family—aunts, uncles, and I've been knowing them for a really long time so their basically, family to me so like you're really comfortable doing everything around them, because their family, you've known them for a really long time and yeah.

MM: Lastly, I want to talk about COVID-19 and basically how has your life been affected by COVID so like school, your social life, or like family?

OK: My life has been affected by COVID and school because there's like a lot I realized. Who's like who your real friend is and who's like sort of your friend only because you see them everyday. COVID has taught me like some—not all people are going to be real with you, some people are just going to be fake with you. And then it affected my social life, because I didn't get to see a lot of my friends for a year and more. With family and cousins and stuff, you don't get to see them as often as you were before COVID because corona.

And like, it doesn't matter if your family, your sisters, anybody could get it. Even your mom, dad, anybody can get it so like that's why you try to like separate yourself from them as much as possible. You might see them once in a while, but it's not as much as before.

MM: Right, yes, and how do you like understand the pandemic or what's your view of it?

OK: Um, my view from it is just like a big virus going around, killing and hurting everybody because like anybody could get it, doesn't matter the age, it could be a newborn baby right away could get it. It doesn't matter what your age is or what your status is, you could get it— like even if it's a famous millionaire you could get it. It doesn't matter as long as you social distance as much as possible, which I know some people don't understand about that. So, some people just don't care about it and go and like party and everybody gets it, and then it spreads and spreads and spreads even more. Because, for example, if you go to a party and you get corona, you won't know you have it [corona] until like five days after, and you're still going around the city. So then other people are going to get it, and then its going to keep going and keep going until people learn how to social distance and not like, go out as much. It's okay to go out every once in a while, but just not everyday because even people with the vaccine, still the same thing— just because you're not going to be affected doesn't mean the others around you aren't.

MM: Yes, that's 100% valid and true. So, I also want to ask what helped you during the time of quarantine or if it was a hard time for you during the pandemic? What kind of helped you get through it?

OK: Um, I would say what helped me get through it was my friends and family. Like even though sometimes it would be really annoying because you see them everyday and like for longer periods of time. It would be really annoying sometimes but you would get through it, because at the end of the day, their family, their friends, so you would have to deal with it, whether you like it or not. [laughter]

MM: That's very true! Okay, and then I'm just going to close the interview now, so you have any final thoughts or anything that you want to share with me or, just like in general, anything that you'd like to share?

OK: Mmm, not really. [chuckles]

MM: Well, thank you so much well for taking the time to do this interview with me and yeah, I just really appreciate it.