

Transcripts

Interviewee: Akon Thon

Interviewer: Yuichiro Tanaka

Date: Friday, May 21st, 2021

Attendees: YT= Yuichiro Tanaka (interviewer) AT= Akon Thon (interviewee)

Yt = Hi, My name is Yuichiro Tanaka, I'm currently an undergraduate student at UC San Diego. Today I have the privilege to interview the Southern Sudanese community center for the Race and Oral History Project. Thank you so much for joining me today and I am looking forward to our conversation. To start off, could you share with me your full name?

AT: Akon Thon

YT: Nice to meet you.

AT: Nice to meet you.

YT: So how are you doing today?

AT: I'm very good too thank you.

YT: So could you give a brief introduction as to who you are? where you are from? And is there is anything that you miss about your home town?

AT: Yeah so my name is Akon, and I guess you can say I'm from San Diego because I migrated from a different country when I was around ten.

YT: Oh I see

AT: I've been here and I've been to college up North.

YT: Have you ever moved back to your hometown?

AT: I went back to visit in 2018.

YT: My next question was gonna be what is your upbringing but since you are from San Diego.

AT: Yeah

YT: So could you tell little more about your background of what you have been doing until now, and do you have any traditions in your family that came from your culture?

AT: Yeah the thing about my family is that In here we don't say that you are mixed because you just see the skin color and know it, but back home it's about a mixed tribe. So I'm Dinka, and I'm also Shrub. So those are two different tubes. They came together, and now when they ask me which tribe? I say Dinka because we go with our father's tribe.

YT: Oh I see so that when you introduce yourself, that is like that entry?

AT: Right, exactly, and explain your father's because we have that tradition of masculinity. So I'm from two tribes and I go with my father.

YT: Does the language differs depends on the tribe?

AT: Um the language does not depend on the tribes. But I introduce my father's tribes.

YT: Ok I see, so instead of explaining where you are physically from, you introduce tribes?

AT: Right.

YT: That's really cool.

AT: I can be born from my mother's tribe but I still introduce my father's.

YT: Ok, moving on to the more personal question. How would you describe yourself? Like your personality or what has influenced you the most?

AT: Um for myself, I graduated from Cal State University, which is up North. And my personality is easygoing, I like to talk to people.

YT: Is there anyone you got influenced by?

AT: Yeah, my mother. She is very hardworking and I hope to be like her someday.

YT: Oh I see, I'm kind of the opposite because I admire my dad haha.

YT: So since this interview is about knowing the Southern Sudanese community center, I like to know how did you start getting involved with the community? What was the first thing for you to get to know the community?

AT: So, as I said before, we have different tribes, so Chuol, our director wanted people from different tribes to get involved with each other, and that how we all got together.

YT: What's your understanding of the community? What is your main goal?

AT: Yeah, the main goal of the community is basically... there is a lot of people who need assistance when they moved, and now the pandemic hit. So now they are more in need, and we can help people with any language or anything.

YT: How would you describe our relationship with the community? What do you mainly do?

AT: I grew up with these people when I was ten, and now I'm in my twenties and I understand what they are going through, so if I can reach back to them and help.

YT: So what kind of programs do you have in your community?

AT: We have tutoring, even just coming into a hangout, giving out diapers for children and anything they need. We try to provide for anyone.

YT: so anyone can go there and find what they need help with.

AT: Right.

YT: So you did say something about COVID, but more specifically, how did COVID change your life?

AT: My life in Particular?

YT: Yeah, you can also share about someone you know in the community as well.

AT: Yeah, I have an uncle from back home, and because I was living in up North, ten hours from San Diego, he told me to come back home, and stay with the family. So now I'm back home now. Also with other families, we all try to stay together and help. Because most of the people I spoke to have lost their jobs, and it's very hard. That's why my job is good because I can talk to them give advice.

YT: Yeah. I'm doing this interview from Japan but I used to live in San Diego too, and when COVID hit, I moved back so I understand what people are going through.

AT: Yeah like you have to keep close with family to help.

YT: On the other hand, did you find anything enjoyable? For example, I spend more time drawing while being home.

AT: Well I went to school for criminal justice, and I wanted to be a police officer so if it's safe, I go ride along with the officer, to check neighborhoods and see what's going on.

YT: That is really cool.

AT: Yeah.

YT: It's interesting how this COVID is changing everyone's life, not just in negative ways but giving people more opportunities.

YT: Ok, That's pretty much all the main questions that I had for you but is there anything you like to share with me? Or any advisement of the community?

AT: Yeah for Southern Sudanese, first needs to go through Egypt right? And I waited one year or some people waited for about thirteen years just to come to America. So these families are the one we are trying to help, just to help they adjust. If you need food or close, we can provide it for you.

YT: So if they need any help

AT: We are here! Southern Sudanese Community Center is always here for you.

YT: Thank you so much, and that was a great interview with Southern Sudanese Community Center.

AT: Thank you.