



## The Lives of International Students, March 6, 2015

**Title**

“A Master's Student from Nigeria”

**Date**

March 6, 2015

**Location**

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

**Summary**

Okonkwo discusses his difficult childhood as the youngest of nine children growing up in Lagos, Nigeria. From there, he reflects on community life in Lagos, ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria, political instability in his home country, and his experience of being bullied in high school. Okonkwo next describes his move to Washington, D.C. to study at American University, his adjustment to life on the East Coast, and his chance encounter with a kind couple who provided him with assistance upon his arrival in the U.S. He then recounts his decision to pursue graduate studies at OSU, his switch from Pharmacy to Public Health, his study habits, his social circle, and his work outside of the classroom. He likewise details his involvement with student organizations, notes the very small African community at OSU, and shares certain aspects of American culture that interest him, including American football. As the interview nears its end, Okonkwo discusses the ways in which his perceptions of the U.S. have changed, and the difficulties that he has experienced upon learning of increasing strife in Nigeria. The session concludes with Okonkwo's thoughts on his future ambitions following OSU.

**Interviewee**

Chidi Okonkwo

**Interviewer**

Chris Petersen

**Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/international/>

## Transcript

**Chris Petersen:** Okay Chidi, if you would please introduce yourself with your name and today's date and our location.

**Chidi Okonkwo:** Hi, my name is Chidi Okonkwo and today's date is 6th March, 2015 and we're in the third floor of the library, Valley Library, OSU.

**CP:** So you are the third of our series of interviews talking about international students here at Oregon State, and so we'll talk a lot about your OSU experience, but I'd like to begin at the beginning; where were you born?

**CO:** I was born in Nigeria, west of Africa.

**CP:** Which city?

**CO:** Lagos.

**CP:** That's the capital city?

**CO:** It used to be the capital city but it got moved. Like the capital city right now is Abuja which is approximately a six hour drive from Lagos.

**CP:** Did you grow up in Lagos?

**CO:** I grew up in Lagos, yeah.

**CP:** What was your family background?

**CO:** What do you mean by family background?

**CP:** Your parents' occupations, and I understand you come from a large family.

**CO:** Yeah, I come from a large family. My dad was actually a businessman before he passed away but yeah, and my family, most of them are in business, like we would just sell the imports and sell stuff, so pretty much business family, business oriented family.

**CP:** And what do you mean when you say you had a large family?

**CO:** Large family, exact have nine siblings, so that's pretty much large for most people. And I'm the last of the kids, so it's really large family with so many cousins and step-brothers and step-sisters.

**CP:** So you're the youngest of ten children?

**CO:** Yes.

**CP:** What was that like?

**CO:** Well, I'm the youngest of nine.

**CP:** Nine.

**CO:** In total was nine. I mean growing up I didn't really have—I was the last but then all my brothers are all grown up so I was basically the last boy in the family, so it was fun growing up with my sisters, but then I would have growing up with like eight brothers, because all of them pretty much older than me. Yeah, but growing up in my family was fun. It was interesting. It was like a normal family.

**CP:** So you had a series of older brothers and then sisters and then you.

**CO:** Yeah. Older brothers, sisters, me. So when I was growing up all my brothers like all grown up and they didn't like doing small kid stuff.

**CP:** So you played with your sisters?

**CO:** I played with my sisters, but then I played with other guys, like around family friends or anyone in the area.

**CP:** What was your neighborhood like?

**CO:** It was pretty much safe. It was a safe neighborhood, it was located in Victoria Island which is like, I mean people think it's the posh area in Nigeria, but it's just like a normal Nigerian family. We were surrounded in my neighborhood with mostly schools around, so I'd get to see so many people going to school every day, so I could make friends with school kids.

**CP:** And what is Lagos like?

**CO:** Sorry?

**CP:** What is Lagos like? What was it like to grow up in?

**CO:** Growing up in Lagos is; the only comparison I could give in terms of growing up would be New York. It's like a pace, a very, very pacey environment; everyone is always on the go, people are just trying to get to work, people are trying to survive, so it's like, like how I would say back home is mostly the hustles, like hustles live in Lagos, so if you can't, if you're not able to hustle you probably won't be able to fit in Lagos, because if you like the quiet of life of living in Oregon, then Lagos is probably not for you. It's more like New York, very paced, there are too many people. The population is huge, too, compared to other places in Nigeria. And it's mixed, because in Nigeria we do like three major languages, which are Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, but you see everyone, Lagos is kind of a mixture of like every ethnic languages, like the Igbo people, the Yorubas, and then Hausas. So pretty much everyone speaks English as the official language.

**CP:** What language did you grow up speaking in the house?

**CO:** I grew up speaking English but then my mother tongue is Igbo, but I occasionally Igbo but I mostly speak English. Just because like it's easier to communicate with people because I have friends who are from different ethnic backgrounds, so it's way more easy to communicate with them.

**CP:** Can you tell me a little more about the different ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria?

[0:04:54]

**CO:** Different ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria, I've just said Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, even though they're in other tribes, but Igbo people are mostly individual in terms of Nigeria. Igbos mostly live in the—originate from the eastern part of Nigeria. Yorubas originate from the southern part of Nigeria and Hausas originate from the northern part of Nigeria. And then again, it's just like where you come from, actually most of the time nearby, because in the north you have Muslims, in the east you have most of the majority of them are Christians and very few Muslims there, and then in the south, which is where Lagos is located, it's like mostly a mixture of everything and so you have fifty percent Igbo, fifty percent Hausa, so it's just like a mixture of the whole ethnic group and mixture of religion also, so it's kind of interesting. You get to see everyone from a different, diverse background.

**CP:** Did religion play a role in your upbringing?

**CO:** It did. My parents were Christians, so it was definitely interesting growing up in a Christian family, then having friends who were from a different religion, even though we don't, I don't really necessarily kind of try to get into religious topic, but it's always something people try to, people always discuss. It's like a very heated topic back home, so I just try to stay away from it, but yeah, it's very interesting growing up from—growing up in a city where majority of them, like fifty percent are Christian and fifty percent are Muslim.

**CP:** What sorts of things did you like to do growing up?

**CO:** I had like the worst—not really worst, but I [unintelligible] growing up just because growing up my mom was diagnosed with cancer like barely when I was two. I wasn't even two, I was like one. So growing up I didn't really have time to—I didn't do what most kids did growing up. Then she died when I was ten, so I kind of had to grow up really, really fast. So it was—and I can't really remember playing with toys or riding bicycle like most kids. I figure I had to grow up fast just to be successful in life.

**CP:** Did you have to work?

**CO:** Yeah, I started working when I was eleven, twelve, but then I worked for my step-brothers, so it was mostly family business. But it was pretty interesting because then it just made me grow up compared to—I mean I wanted to be like other kids but it was hard though, sort of surviving.

**CP:** Yeah. What was school like for you?

**CO:** School, it was definitely an interesting, also, topic, because I went to a boarding school and it's usually at a [unintelligible] because when I went to high school I was always bullied and it was really—I went to high school in Nigeria but I didn't like school, but then my family was like all about school. I didn't like school because I was always getting bullied by other people, but I knew I needed education to be successful in life. So it was always my motivation. And it was, I think was the only thing I owe to my parents, who are not here, just told them that—even though they're not here, but just to survive, because I know they will be very proud of me, I think.

**CP:** You got bullied because you went to boarding school? Is that what you—?

**CO:** I mean not because I went to boarding school but because I was, I couldn't fit with other guy, I mean I didn't really fit it any category back in school. Also I was like the quiet kid, just trying to be on my own because I know with so many things going on back home and just trying to survive it was always me, so if people just look to confront I just try to make silly jokes, though it wasn't really funny, about me.

**CP:** What was the political situation like in Nigeria growing up?

**CO:** I'm basically the last person to talk about politics. I mean it was mostly democratic, come from like a democratic government but—

**CP:** Was it stable? Or...

**CO:** Depending on how you want to define stable it could—it wasn't, I mean I didn't really get into that but it wasn't really stable for me because stable can have different definitions, but then it was pretty much you had a president who had vice president who had everything and most everyone, but it was the government but it wasn't really providing or trying to make—it wasn't necessarily better one of the cities, because I mean growing up, days I didn't have light for days, which is like electricity, so I could go days without electricity. So just the basic amenities like the schools, back home even the government schools which are supposed to be free public schools are not free. So it was like most of all this stuff's like—so I know the governments are working very hard, but they're working very hard for the citizens, like you really—back home it's all about the individual. If you want to succeed you have to work on your own. You can never depend on the government.

[0:10:48]

**CP:** So it sounds like you did a—you were working a lot as a kid and just kind of keeping to yourself and staying within the family?

**CO:** Yep, I had to work a lot. My family, we were workaholics, I guess. Everyone is always trying, like we work a lot in my family. So once I'm back from school, the next few days I'm back to work, so it was mostly I didn't really have time to—I never had time to go on vacations, even though I went on a couple, but I was mostly working.

**CP:** So did you get to travel a little outside of Nigeria before you came to the United States? Or did you go to other countries in Africa?

**CO:** Oh I did, I did go to other countries in Africa and I did travel when I was back home, but I could count how many times I've traveled, compared to some of the other kids I played with who travel like almost every time. So it was definitely something that at that age I didn't understand why I had to work, but now I'm much mature enough to know it was just building me up for the future.

**CP:** For Nigerians that are able to go on vacation to a different country, what's a common destination?

**CO:** Mostly within London...

**CP:** Europe?

**CO:** Europe, yeah Europe. I mean not really Europe, because most of them, or every one back home just goes to London, here, or the US, so it's like these two countries. Anything outside of that you probably didn't go to vacation.

**CP:** What role did the internet play in your upbringing, if any?

**CO:** I didn't even know what internet was until I was, I think when I was in my last year of high school, which is I was almost fifteen and sixteen then, so I didn't really get to use the internet until at that age, so it didn't—but then when I started using the internet it was at the end; I was like already, I was about to go to undergrad, so it was mostly interesting. I didn't get to use it when I was a kid.

**CP:** So you finished high school and then what happened next?

**CO:** When I finished high school I went to—I moved to American University, which is in D.C., to do my undergrad.

**CP:** How old were you?

**CO:** I was seventeen.

**CP:** So you went straight from Nigeria to Washington D.C.?

**CO:** Yeah.

**CP:** That must have been something else.

**CO:** It was a different scenario. It was like a different change, because I mean moving without my family was very different, and then it was most of the time it was just lonely and most times I just, like adjusting was a big part of it, and I remember not doing too well in my first term, because I was trying to adjust, so everything, the culture, the how the system was, so it was a big change in my life.

**CP:** Before you went to the US, what was your perception of the United States, growing up in Nigeria?

**CO:** Like I said, I mean everything I knew about US was through the movies, but then movies, I don't really watch that much movies, even up to now. So it was mostly like the dreamland, like everyone in US succeeds, I mean that was like the only perception I had. It was like if you go there you can make a thing for yourself. I mean you just go there to be successful. So it was the only thing I had in mind about the United States, just because I didn't, I mean like I said, growing up I didn't really have the exposure to like internet, but then when I came here and saw it was different from what the Hollywood, like the movies try to make America look like.

**CP:** How did you get connected with American University?

**CO:** I had a couple friends who go to American University, so they were saying good thing about that. And then American University...yeah, it was through mostly through my friends, I had two or three people, two or three friends back home who were going to that school.

[0:15:19]

**CP:** Did you have a scholarship?

**CO:** I didn't have a scholarship.

**CP:** So you had to pay for it on your own.

**CO:** It was—I had to pay. It was expensive. But I mean I'm glad because my step-brother really helped me out.

**CP:** Well tell me about adjusting to life in Washington D.C.

**CO:** It was my first experience, when I moved or when I came out, I don't really have—it was winter time, so I really have to bring a jacket but, and it was freezing outside. And I didn't know my—because I came with a couple friends, there were three, but then I got delayed at the airport and then they all left me, so I had—I missed my connecting flight from Atlanta to Washington D.C., so when I got there I didn't really know anyone. I was all by myself and I met this couple who were almost, like one of them goes to Georgetown, the husband goes to Georgetown, and then she saw I was reading a booklet about American University, just trying to figure out like where do I go from the airport, and then she was like "oh hey, do you go to American University?" I was like "yeah, I'm just a new student, but I don't know my way."

So it was interesting, because I mean we struck up a relationship, and even though they didn't really know me they offered to drive me to American University, but when I got there the dorms weren't really open for international student, because I was like two or three days early, and they said I had to wait. So they offered to let me sleep in their house, even though they didn't know me. So that was like my first experience about the US.

**CP:** Wow.

**CO:** And it was definitely interesting. And then I still, up to today, I still appreciate everything they did for me, because even though they didn't know me they offered me that help, which is very, very helpful to me.

**CP:** Yeah, for sure. That's a great story.

**CO:** Yeah, thank you.

**CP:** So tell me about once you got settled in at American, being a college student in the United States.

**CO:** It took me over a year plus just to get everything settled, because I mean missing my family and trying to act, just like the education system and trying to make friends, and D.C. isn't really the best place, because everyone, it's more like an individualistic aspect of America, I mean that was what I was exposed to, like everyone is always about their education, good work, so everyone is always on their own. So it was definitely hard trying to—so I just basically hung out with the two friends I knew back home, so it was like—which was really good but then I wanted to make other friends and try to adjust with learning, studying, anything. But that was, that didn't really work out till like third or fourth year of my undergrad.

**CP:** What did you study?

**CO:** I studied biology, and I graduated with that.

**CP:** So do you have fond memories of that time, or some mixed memories?

**CO:** I love D.C., I love especially seeing the—we couldn't, like almost more than half we didn't have to go to school because of the snow. That was very, very interesting, because I didn't want to go to school. I mean I like school but I was just, I needed a break. It was almost like the seventh week and then school was very stressful. So the snow definitely helped out. And I do have a couple good stories about D.C. but not that much, because I didn't really have that many friends to hang out with.

**CP:** Did you get to explore the city much?

**CO:** Yeah, I did, I definitely did the nightlife, going to the museum, going to the White House just to see how—then I think the experience that I can never forget was when it was, I can't remember the date, it was the news about Osama Bin Laden being killed, like we all—oh, it was around twelve we had the news and everyone marched from the campus to the White House. It was very interesting, because even though we had—most people had finals, like final week for us, but people just left their book and everyone was marching and I loved the unity. It was very, very, it was very good experience that I can never forget.

[0:20:07]

**CP:** Well you finished up at American, and did you go directly from American to OSU?

**CO:** Yeah, I finished my degree May 2012 and I came here September 2012, yeah.

**CP:** So why travel across the country and come to Oregon State?

**CO:** Oregon State, that was the first thing everyone asked me. I wanted to go to pharmacy school, so I thought like maybe coming to Oregon State because I know that they have a good pharmacy school. I wanted to take couple classes as just to prepare me to go into pharmacy school, but then when I took one or two times I didn't really like the pharmacy aspect. That was actually my major. But I just wanted to come, I was mostly interested in like the pharmacy school. That was the only thing that brought me here. And then I had a friend from D.C. who was from California who was moving too; he was going to school in University of Oregon, so he definitely influenced me coming to Oregon.

**CP:** So what did you think of Oregon and of Corvallis and of OSU when you arrived?

**CO:** It was definitely like the smallest city I've ever lived in, because when I landed in Portland Airport I thought oh, okay, maybe my school will be couple minutes from here, but then it took me like two hours. I was like oh no. And then driving down to, like driving through the road of Portland to Corvallis, seeing the farming and everything, I was like oh no, what did I get myself into. But it was really good, I mean I like it. I've been living here for almost two years and I like the quiet life of Corvallis, like this small town. You get everywhere by walking, almost everything is accessible, so that was—it's one of the major things I like about Oregon compared to D.C. where almost everything is far. You have to drive, even though the Metro system is good in D.C. Oregon offers me that quiet life I can focus on my education more, compared to D.C.

**CP:** Had you arranged for to have a place to live before you got here?

**CO:** Yeah, I lived in the dorms, so it wasn't so much of a hassle for me.

**CP:** And how was that for you, living in the dorm?

**CO:** Dorm life in Oregon State was not the best. I mean just because I had to live in a temporary resident hall, which is Finley Hall, and I think it's made so many people just, even though it was the dorm, but we had to live within—it was temporary so we didn't get to meet so many people. It wasn't like the full dorm, so I didn't really have that atmosphere in Oregon, and then I moved out like after one term.

**CP:** Off campus?

**CO:** Yeah, I moved off campus after that, yeah.

**CP:** Well, you started out in Pharmacy, you mentioned, but you didn't like it so you switched to Public Health, is that correct?

**CO:** Yes, went to Public Health.

**CP:** And you're a graduate student in Public Health?

**CO:** Yeah, graduate school in Public Health.

**CP:** Tell me about sort of your academic progression in Public Health, how that's gone for you.

**CO:** It's been the best choice I've made. I mean I have good professors in Public Health that I really, really like, because they're encouragement and their dedication to the students is exceptional. So they have just always been there for the student, they've always encouraged the student, the learning experience is good. It's a small class; you get to participate, like everyone leading discussion. It's just been like one of the best experience of my education.

**CP:** How did you decide on Public Health?

**CO:** I always wanted to work in the health field either as a medical doctor, and because that's the aim to getting my dream, because I still want to be a medical doctor, is Public Health, because I'm always interested in the health aspect, like the health field, so that was definitely a no brainer for me.

**CP:** Tell me about studying. The international students I've talked to have talked about how much they have to study, and I assume you're studying a lot.

**CO:** Yeah, I do, I mean that was another thing I like about Corvallis, because it gives me more time to study. I don't really have to think about this act is coming to Corvallis that I have to go and see, or everything going on; it was just it's always about education, so I do, I mostly study every time at the library, so the library's really—it's open twenty-four hours Sunday through Friday, so it's always something, that's another aspect of OSU that I really like, because it gives me more time to study, even that if I don't have time during the day I can study at night.

[0:25:21]

**CP:** So you're here pretty late sometimes?

**CO:** Yeah, I do study pretty late. I actually like it, because most people go to bed and it's just you; you get to study and concentrate and get work done.

**CP:** How late is late?

**CO:** My first couple terms I studied up to 3, 2 pm. Sorry, to am, to 3 am, so that's pretty late to most people.

**CP:** I'm interested in knowing about making friends and finding a community here at OSU for you.

**CO:** When I moved to OSU, finding, making friends wasn't easy, because I had joined Bible study group so I usually just go, we meet weekly and just go over the Bible scriptures, so that was like they were mostly my friends, but then I'm very outgoing person so I basically just make friends to whoever I want to, I think can be friendly. So it wasn't really—people in Oregon are very friendly, so that why [unintelligible].

**CP:** So religion continues to be important to you, then?

**CO:** It, yeah, it's still the same important to me but I'm still, I'm just—because I mean that was the only way I could make friend beside—it was the easiest aspect of making friends in Oregon.

**CP:** Well you're very active on campus, I'll ask you first about your jobs. You've got two jobs, is that correct?

**CO:** Yeah. Working two jobs, I love the two jobs. I just wanted the experience and so they are provide different aspects that will be very helpful outside of Corvallis, so that was the major thing why I wanted to. At one of the two jobs I work for International Student Services, and I love working with international student, because I mean I could give them my experience and I can share my experience with them and sort of give them my approach, like how I've been trying and surviving. And especially I was—most international student who come—I have been volunteering as international student orientation leader, which is helping international students, so that really got me interested in looking for a job in the international. Then working in Student Health, it was the best choice for me because I get to do something I'm very interested in, which is working in health fields, so I think the both jobs just kind of work hand in hand for me.

**CP:** What kinds of things are you doing with Student Health?

**CO:** Student Health I work as a MARS outreach worker; so MARS stands for Male Advocate for Responsible Sexuality, so we kind of do one-on-one consultations with male student of OSU community and then we do an outreach program where we go to any of the fraternities or the dorms and just kind of talk to students about responsible sexual life and healthy relationship, which is definitely something I'm very interested in.

**CP:** From your job with the international students, one of the questions I'm asking people is what are some of the issues that international students seem to be talking about the most for their own lives here at OSU? What are these people telling you when you talk to them and counsel them about the problems they're having or concerns that they have?

**CO:** I think the most concern people really have is just trying to make friends. I mean because most times when you come to, even though the international student population is growing in OSU but then trying to make friends with people who are not from internat—people who are not from the US is mostly difficult for them, and then trying to adjust to life in America is also difficult, and access to healthcare, I think that was especially, I mean there's just so many—I mean most people I've spoken to they like living in the US, they really like the opportunity that's offered to them, but then these small things that really matter in life, like making friends who you can always connect with, is something that most people are struggling with, either because they have different cultural background or different approaches, so it's like how do we bridge the gap, that's mostly it.

[0:30:08]

**CP:** Have you had much contact with INTO students?

**CO:** Yeah, I have. I've met a couple of INTO students.

**CP:** What is your perception of that program?

**CO:** It's a good program, because I mean for some for them they are fortunate to be, to come to, like enter, they relate to OSU as an OSU student, so that's a good way. But then it teaches them, like most of them want to learn the English language, because most of them don't learn English, so that's a good thing that they get to learn English and to learn about the culture of America, which I would have if there were—I mean I don't know, but if that was the first thing that was offered to me, like come to the US even though I've been speaking English all my life, but then just trying to take in a couple terms or couple semesters to understand about American and trying to adjust to the educational system by just learning the language and learning the cultural aspect before moving there really, to the university, colleges, like the university classes, would have been very helpful for me. So I think the program is an awesome program.

**CP:** So there was a language barrier on some level for you when you first came to D.C.?

**CO:** Yeah, even though I spoke English I was still—but then just trying to understand people's culture, which I think INTO really is very good attempt of doing, but then the language barrier also, it was hard because most, like in terms of writing papers, I tend to write the way I have always been writing, but then I didn't get that exposure, because back home we used the British system of education, so the spellings are mostly different, and then moving here and trying to write that way wasn't really affective for me.

**CP:** What sort of involvement have you had with student organizations?

**CO:** I'm part of African Student Organization and I'm also part of the International Health Club, which is the Public Health international student. So it's been very interesting and a good experience for me. And I played rugby for a term.

**CP:** On the rugby team?

**CO:** Yeah, the rugby team.

**CP:** Oh wow, how was that?

**CO:** It was good, it was interesting, it was awesome, the practice was nice, but I just didn't have enough time to go to practice or just attend the camps, so I definitely had to think about prioritize my education compared to rugby, which I really still like but it was one thing.

**CP:** Had you played that growing up, or was it new to you?

**CO:** It was new; it wasn't really new to me because I used to play in American University rugby team, but then it was still fairly new to me, so I was very interested in learning more about it.

**CP:** Is there much of a Nigerian community on campus?

**CO:** I mean in terms of—there aren't much Africans on campus but the African Students Association, the last time we checked there were like thirty-six, thirty-six students from Africa, which is not very—

**CP:** Thirty-six students total for the whole campus?

**CO:** Yeah, I mean that was—I can't really remember, I'm mostly sure, but I know it wasn't—it was just it was a small number for like a large university like OSU. But then we still try, even though we're a very small group of people, we still try to organize event, like we organize the African Night event, which has been successful over the years, and where we get to showcase our African culture. But even without that we still try to get everyone involved in learning people's different culture.

**CP:** I'm interested in your perspective on the idea of African culture. I mean you're Nigerian and you are from an ethnic group within Nigeria, this is pretty specific. Americans tend to think of Africa as this one big place that's homogenous, but in fact that's not the case at all.

**CO:** Yeah, yeah that was, even doing the African night, that was what we tried to just kind of how do we tackle this myth that African is like a small—not like a small country but like Africa is different from, Africans are different in terms of their culture, the way they live their life or the way things work in Africa, because so many, like fifty-four, fifty-six cultures in Africa, which is way—so like everyone is not the same. But I mean I just tend to kind of go, like when people say "are you from Africa?" I mean I'm obviously from Africa but then I'm from Nigeria, but then people just kind of pool Africans in this umbrella, like everyone is, like if you're from Africa you have the same culture, you have the same, you eat the same food, you do the same thing, you do the same dance, but it's all different from country to country.

[0:35:32]

But then again, I guess it's just educating them, because most of them haven't had the chance to know more about Africa, so it's just educating them and letting them know Africans are different from each other, just like how Americans are different from each other. It's like the United State is different from Mexico even though they're all in Central—North America, sorry. Yeah.

**CP:** Have you found that people are interested in learning more once they meet you? Learning more about your background and your culture?

**CO:** I mean comparing the African Night event we had mostly LaSells filled up. I think people are pretty much open to learning about different cultures, just like having that avenue or having that resources provided to them, which I think the African Student Association is doing pretty well in trying to educate them, but people are very interesting in learning that.

**CP:** Well you were in D.C. for a little while, so I assume that you had a chance to acclimate to American food.

**CO:** Yeah.

**CP:** But I'm interested in knowing about food for you, and especially here. I mean there's probably not a whole lot of access to foods you grew up with.

**CO:** Yeah, it's definitely not a lot of access to food I grew up with, but then I don't really cook, so I'm not that picky about food. I love food, I mostly love Chinese food anyway, so either Chinese or Thai food, just because it's spicy, it just gives me that. And African food are mostly spicy, so I get to eat Chinese food or Thai food here, which is spicy. But then I do miss my African meals. I wish mostly were, I could have access to them.

**CP:** Yeah. Have you been able to get together with any other folks around here and make a meal at some point, or?

**CO:** We actually did have an event; it was last couple—last month. It was African Night where we made African food from different African countries. They were more from East Africa, from West Africa, from northern Africa, and it was very awesome, because I ate a lot of African food. But other than that, no.

**CP:** Are there any components of American popular culture that you've become interested in or fascinated with, like for example the different sports or holidays or anything like that that you hadn't known anything about?

**CO:** Oh yeah, Thanksgiving I didn't know anything until I moved to the US, which I do really like now. And football, I didn't know anything about football until I actually moved to Oregon. So that has actually gotten me interested in learning more about football and like what really goes on, because back home, even when I was in D.C., my school didn't have a team so we all played basketball and soccer, which I'm very familiar with soccer and basketball. But moving to D.C., my first game, my first game of football I didn't really understand what was going on. But after reffing for Dixon for intramural sport, I got, I reffed football, flag football.

**CP:** Oh really?

**CO:** Yeah, so I got more exposure, like more I know the rules, which is very helpful because it just helped me to know what's going on, and next time I went to a football game.

**CP:** You have to learn the rules to be the ref, right?

**CO:** Yep.

**CP:** Are there any places on campus or in town that have become special to you besides the library?

**CO:** Fred Meyer. Just because I mean I live very close to it, so every time I get mostly everything from there. But I mean other than the, I'm just trying to remember what. Dixon; I work out, like try to stay fit, so Dixon is, and that's very good with the stress from studying or being stressed, away from work and school. So that has been like a sanctuary.

**CP:** Have you been back to Nigeria since you came to D.C.?

**CO:** Yeah, I have went back a couple years for my sister's wedding, but other than that I haven't gone back in two, three years. No, two years, yeah.

**CP:** Do you get homesick at all?

**CO:** It's very difficult. I mean I do get homesick but I tend not to think about being homesick or just missing my family. I just tend to concentrate on what the main reason why I'm here, which is my education, because I mean I believe that's what everyone is trying to do, even my brothers and my sisters are all just trying to survive.

**CP:** Yeah. Well you mentioned that both of your parents have passed away, and so you're kind of on your own.

**CO:** Yeah, I mean I'm not really on my own, I do have my brothers and sisters, but then they all have their own issues to tackle, so I guess yeah, you could say I'm on my own, but then I still have support from my family members, which is really good.

[0:40:48]

**CP:** Are any of them in the United States?

**CO:** No, I'm the only one here.

**CP:** All in Nigeria?

**CO:** No, my sister lives in London with her husband, then I have one of my brothers in China. But the rest are in Nigeria.

**CP:** How has your perception of the US changed since you arrived in D.C. to now?

**CO:** Well first of all I'll just say how has my perception from the—compared from the different coasts of the US, like the west coast and the east coast, which is where D.C. is. It's like I feel people in Oregon are like way—and west coast especially—are way more friendly compared to—I'm not really going to say D.C. people are not friendly, just because I didn't meet, there are so many friendly people, but I believe people are more individualistic, like people are just more focused on surviving the day, so most of them didn't really have time, which is, I wouldn't blame them. Here in Oregon you get—I met a couple people who were very friendly, you get to hang out with them. It wasn't all about—it was more about building a community, whereas when I was in D.C. it wasn't. And that was, I used to think back home before I moved to US like everyone was all their own, just because seeing how, from the movies, like I didn't really get to see that many community buildings; it was all about trying to survive, being individualistic, being independent, and that was all I was seeing. But that is beginning to change now.

**CP:** How much more time do you have at OSU?

**CO:** This is my last term of taking classes, but then I have next term also, so I would say pretty much a couple months before I leave, unless if I get into the PhD program.

**CP:** So what are you trying to do at this point? Are you considering graduate school at OSU or somewhere else?

**CO:** Graduate school, I'm in grad school.

**CP:** Or I mean a PhD, doctoral program.

**CO:** Yeah, I'm considering; OSU is like one option for me, but then I'm also exploring the opportunities of going to different states and just seeing how that works, but I do like D.C., so—or sorry, I do like Oregon State, so if I get into Oregon State I will stay here.

**CP:** But you want to keep going to school somewhere in the US, is that—

**CO:** Yeah, I do want to go to school somewhere in the US or wherever. I'm just like wherever life takes me, so if I find myself back home, find myself here, good. I'm just like, I don't really think ahead, I guess. I just go with the flow.

**CP:** Are you going to stay in Public Health, or are you looking in a different area?

**CO:** I'm pretty much going to look in the medical aspect of the health field, so either going to a medical school or, yeah, I guess I'm still going to stay in Public Health if I get into the PhD program. But other than that I'll probably just take a couple years and see if I can get into med school.

**CP:** What has it been like for you to read the news about what's happened in Nigeria the last several months, and be so far away from it?

**CO:** It's been tough, it's been tough, but I don't really read that, because I mean when I read the news I just get to think about what's going on, like wanting to be there just to see my families are safe, so I tend to stay away from it. I don't—even though I read once in a while what's going on, but I don't really indulge myself into it, just because if I do that it's not only going to affect my education but it's going to affect my education but it's going to affect my every day-to-day living, so I tend to stay just knowing my family are safe and most of my friends and relatives are safe. I just pray for peace, that's what I do.

**CP:** Yeah, it sounds like you do everything you can to stay very focused.

**CO:** Yeah, education is the biggest, I mean my stepbrother always tells me like education is the only thing that can get you from this point to this point, so I'm always trying to survive, because I'm always trying to move ahead. Even though it shouldn't be the only thing about life, but I believe if you're aware, if you're knowledgeable about stuff, people won't really take you for granted.

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**CP:** So when you finish with school, with your PhD program or however, whatever the end of the school will be for you, do you intend to go back to Nigeria? Is that your goal?

**CO:** Oh, I definitely intend to go back to Nigeria, just because of the public health system. Back home we are all about the curative aspect of medicine, so if I end up with a PhD in public health I will want to go back and just try to see how we can add the preventative aspect of medicine also, is very important. So it's something I will want to go back, and just going to see I can help with like the health sector back home, or even though I'd want to work here and get experience in like five or six years, but I also definitely want to go back home someday.

**CP:** Yeah. Well Chidi, I want to thank you very much for this, it has been very interesting and I wish you the best of luck for the next few months and the years that come after.

**CO:** Thank you so much for having me.

[0:46:38]