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Oral History Interview with Fiona Gardner and Uche Nduka
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.048
Interview conducted by Charis Shafer at the narrators' home on June 5th, 2013 in Brooklyn, New York.

CHARIS SHAFER: So, this is Charis Shafer and I am here with Fiona Gardner and Uche Nduka, and this is an interview for the Brooklyn Historical Society. And Fiona, we've known each other for a while, but I do want to ask you a little bit about, maybe, your early life. And Uche, you too, about your early life, and if you want to start wherever you feel comfortable starting and launch into it --

FIONA GARDNER: Sure.

CHARIS SHAFER: -- and eventually we'll get to how you two met (laughs).

FIONA GARDNER: Um, all right, so what do you want to know about our -- want, uh, in terms of, like, our early life, like is there, like, some kind of format, I mean...

CHARIS SHAFER: Sure. So can you tell me where you born, and where you grew up?

FIONA GARDNER: Yes. I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1976 (laughs), um, and my parents, I guess, could say, like, just in terms of this project -- I know this project is about intercultural, right --

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

FIONA GARDNER: -- kind of experiences, so my parents were a couple that were intercultural, um, in terms of -- that my mother's family is Jewish, and my dad's family is very, like, old American, been in the United States since, like, before the United States were the United States. Um, and, were -- my father has, like, people who were involved in the Revolutionary War, and were constitution signers, like, on both sides of his family. Um, and both of them -- people in my father's family fought in the Civil War and fought in the Revolution on both sides of the family. Um, and they were all kind of northerners, so I have, like, a lot of roots on the east coast even though I grew up in the Midwest, and um, my mom comes from a family that basically came over around the turn of the century and were Romanian Jews. Um, although my grandfather on that side was also not Jewish. So there's a long history or intercultural, uh, things going on. My grandfather on that side of

the family was a musician and came -- his family all came from Germany, and he married my grandmother, who was a Romanian Jew. Um, but, all those people came over around the turn of the century, as opposed to, like, my father who had this very long, like, American kind of trajectory going on.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm. How do you remember hearing about that from your family?

FIONA GARDNER: Um, well, my -- actually, like, both my parents were always very -- like, would tell stories about their families. Storytelling was always a huge part of my, like, childhood, and everyone in my family is kind of a storyteller in their own way. And my grandparents -- also I grew up with grandparents that were around and lived a long time, other than my grandfather on my mother's side; my grandmother on that side of the family lived to be 96, and my dad's parents lived to be 91, both of them. So I sort of grew up with these grandparents that were around, that all liked to tell me stories about their lives and, like, their families and stuff. So I don't really remember a time when I didn't kind of have some, like, oral tradition of like -- was, you know, what my family's background was, basically.

CHARIS SHAFER: So where did you spend your early years?

FIONA GARDNER: Um, well, my very early years before I went to grade school, I spent in Wisconsin actually. And it was kind of, like, rural. My parents were, like, back-to-the-land-ers in the 1960s kind of thing going on, of like, you know, slightly communal living and um, I was born at home at my mo-- my mom's mother's place in Minnesota, actually. But, then shortly after that, we lived in this barn apartment that was above, like, you know, where the cows and the chickens were and everything, and my parents were definitely going through this sort of, like, hippie experimental, you know, period in the early '70s, and then -- and my dad was teaching at an incarceration facility for, um, boys that had committed crimes. And then my parents decided, well, once I was -- I guess, like, getting close to entering kindergarten, they decided that they had to move to a city, because they started worrying about what school systems were like, and what, like, the political viewpoints of the vast majority of people who were living around them had, and how this was not cultural things that they really felt comfortable with, and that brought them to move back to St. Paul, Minnesota, and both my parents had grown up in St. Paul.

So my grandmother on my mother's side had lived there, and my dad's parents lived there, and so that was, like, really what brought them sort of back to the Twin Cities.

CHARIS SHAFER: And they met in St. Paul?

FIONA GARDNER: Um, you know, I don't actually know 100% if they met in St. Paul. I know that they met at some kind of wild party, which was what my parents told -- always told me, and that my dad apparently saw my mother across the room, and he was eating popcorn in a bowl, and when he saw my mom, he was like eating popcorn and he picked up the popcorn, [00:05:00] and instead of putting the popcorn in his mouth, he went like this, and hit his head with the popcorn and, like, missed his mouth, so my mom was aware that he was, like, watching her when this happened. But I don't know if that was actually in Minnesota, or if this wild party was, like, somewhere in Wisconsin (laughs). But I do know that that's how my parents met. And my mother always claimed that she, like, fell for my dad because of his dog, because my dad had this like large black lab named Moonshine, who was alive when I was small as well, that my mom was, like, very fond of, and she claimed that she, you know, that that was the reason she decided to get into bed with my bed. Probably only a half truth, but you know.

CHARIS SHAFER: And Uche, can you tell me a little bit about your early life, and feel free to go back as far as you want to.

UCHE NDUKA: I'll try, as much as I remember. Um, I was born in, [date redacted for privacy], in a town called Umuahia in Eastern Nigeria. And um, my parents were both students when I was born, and my dad just finished his secondary school, my mom was, um, (inaudible) in school. So they briefly, you know, paused, so to say, and then after I was born, they went back to school, and I grew up with my two grandmothers. My two grandmothers, uh, brought me up, uh, but paternal and maternal. So I, right from childhood, my life was a bit, peripatetic because I was moving between my grandmother, my paternal grandmom to my maternal grandmom, you know, stay with them in, you know, um, from time to time, but like being shuffled between the two and I enjoyed it very much. So growing up, I saw my parents like, more like friends, you know, because they would just come back from school and we'd hang out and they'd give me too much attention. Then after a while they, you know, disappeared. And as a child, I was also

curious on how come they disappear; I don't see them for a while, and then they come back. So that was the tone, how do you say, of my childhood. But the other thing that's important to emphasize, you know, from my childhood is that, it was also under the shadow of the war. After I was born in '63, in 1967, the Nigerian Civil War broke out. You know, the people from different parts of Nigeria just started, sort of, um, you would have called it genocide against Igbos, and I am Igbo myself. My parents were both Igbos. And (inaudible) Igbos, we are attacked in (northern part of) country. You know, um, in those days. And so, the Igbos left almost every part of Nigeria, they were thrown to the enclave, which was an eastern part of Nigeria. An (inaudible) of men, 1967, would have probably gone Biafra for a while undeclared. So I was about two-and-a-half years old, between two-and-a-half and four years old, when Biafra was (inaudible). So all through that war that took place, you know, it took me to, I think it took two years, and then the war fought for three years. I was there along with my other, um, what I call, the other members of my generation. Lots of them in a (inaudible) of starvation, um, some died of just the violence of war, you know, and those sort of things. There wasn't much food. I remember actually, that there was always a sort of a makeshift, um, technique that my grandmothers used to be able to get all of us fed. And my uncles were always -- had the, you know, hide away, they tried hiding, so they wouldn't be conscripted into the war. Because it's (inaudible), the Biafran side of it was that every adult, they felt, should be at war. You know, in self-defense, because we had been attacked by these, um, Nigerians.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

UCHE NDUKA: And, um, yeah, that's colored in a good part of my childhood, you know, in terms of my sense of, um, the instability of life so to say. Um, my sense of, um, you know, just seeing violence early, and really seeing it in terms of, not just as a, as history, but seeing it -- because I remember my dad, at some point, carrying me on his shoulders and going to show me, just near the chapel, the village chapel, where a bomb just like broached through into the earth, and uprooted trees and so on. And some people were buried in this big hole, you know, it was poignant. Don't know why he did that, but I was very, you know, just a child. But I think he just thought, perhaps, if you just showed

me how life is, or (inaudible) doesn't fit, and I never forgot the experience of seeing that large home hit by a bomb, you know, from the enemy, so to say, those bombs were dropped through the planes, airplanes, uh, (inaudible) cars, I think, being flown mainly by Russian mercenaries, you know, [00:10:00] the Russians who did (inaudible) this bomb in Biafra in those days. And, um, after the war, then in 1970, um, (inaudible) that, I resumed school and I entered primary school where I studied and -- and one of the things I can (inaudible) mention, was I remember the even during the Biafran war going on, where this kindergarten, we had this kindergarten where they would send us to. And once we hear the plane, noise of plane you know, you know, um, from the sky, we all have to automatically dive under our desks, you know, we just dive -- that's what we were taught, you know, to do that. And then in those days, where we are not in school, we go to a valley there, this valley near a stream, with huge trees, where we just spend the whole hours. So that we'd be there until night, then we'll quietly come back to our main family houses, and of course the whole roofs were covered in palm fronds, so that (inaudible) planes looking out there will think "it's just a forest." So we don't see the, the roof, because the roof can attract bombing, "oh, that's where people are living, and then throw a bomb." Um, so we grew up almost like, "Well, we have to be careful, you know, you have to be cautious," you have to be, um -- but still, I also discovered another side of it - it was quite (inaudible) because, while this was happening, we ourselves -- we were (inaudible) we had sort of this makeshift army or make-believe army, we were forming our, you know, ourselves against invisible enemies, and you know, (inaudible), and really, really, you know, using some sort of casaba balls to throw at each other. You know, for me that was good form, you know, and we played football, too, you know, in spite of all that, we played around, we uh, we were kids in spite of the whole violence, is you know, I mean, there wasn't -- it's now, as an adult, you know, looking back, with hindsight I can say, "Oh," you know, "that was really a (inaudible) time." But for those, those years, I didn't think, I didn't feel the danger much. You know, emotionally. I just saw with the eyes of adults, because each time the planes, or the (inaudible) planes, or the bombers, you know, arrive in that, you know, region, my dad dashes around -- I was the only child, and dad is around looking for where I -- once he sees me, he just grabs me and

puts me on his shoulder and just dives -- the nearest tree or under the nearest, um, bush or bramble, or any of those things that would cover us. And for me, I found that actually hilarious, you know, I was always laughing, because I'm like, "Oh," got dad horsing around, and -- but he said, but looking at him, you know, I remember now that there's this fear in his eyes, because what's right to say this son, this child, and uh, protect me, you know, and then. So the other kids, too, every parent's rushing around, you know, trying to hide the kids from -- so they wouldn't come on that, on that um, bombing. You know, another kind of bomb. So these are actually two things, you know, I would say it for me -- you know, I remember where I grew up in eastern Nigeria. And, um, and maybe after the war, the military, of course, you know, were in power -- you know, they were in power. And that militarization of the psyche of my generation started, because at some point, you just think that the best thing to be is a general. Or -- um, because those were the heroes of society; that's what we saw as we were growing up. We never, we didn't really, you know, experience much of the democratic, uh, what would I call it? Processes. You know, in terms of voting and so on -- you know, for years, was always one military coup after the other, some general wakes up, kills the other one, then imposes a, what they call a, a, a... a "dawn to dusk" curfew. You know. And then gives this announcement, everybody should just stay indoors until everything quiets. And then after that, the general, you know, keeps on, um, ruling until somebody else comes out and bombs him out. Then that one takes over. So it was a sort of -- I would say, I had a very bad political education, you know, from my childhood on to my adolescence. Because it's now to my adolescence, to my adolescent, when I was a teenager. All through my teenage years, it was just a bunch of generals, you know, the (inaudible) who were in charge. You know, they controlled the contracts, they controlled employment, they control every damn thing, you know, political and um, even the press. I remember, as a teenager, remember (inaudible) where a journalist was flogged, you know, a military government gave order that the journalist, you know, um, should be flogged. Because he reported him in an unflattering manner, reported about his activities in a way that didn't praise him, that was depressing in us all. So to simply use the bottom [00:15:00] of a broken bottle, and um, you know, removed his head you know, (inaudible) the bottle and

then flogged him. And that kind of thing, you know, for a child growing up, I think it does something to you, you know, in terms of -- for me, in particular, what it instilled in me was a total disrespect for any kind of authority, you know, once I see it coming, I kick, you know, around, you know, even if it works against me, now, you simply have to see -- it's still something I'm working through, but these are what I would call part of those things that shaped me as a child, shaped my childhood, shaped my adolescence. And once I could think for myself, you know, particularly, I'm going to say from 18, 17, I started questioning the whole environment, everything Nigeria. What it is about the marriage laws, what it is about the schooling system, all that is about etiquette, and all that, because I simply discovered that laws of distance, people expect that once somebody else has more power than you, than you have really no right to assert yourself. So, if someone is older than you or (inaudible) he or she is smarter than you, is this nonsense really true? You know, intelligence doesn't really come through age. These are the kind of things, you know, I encountered as a child growing up, and which I kicked against, you know, in my late teens. And which I'm still kicking against (laughs).

CHARIS SHAFER: So Fiona, I think we got to, about seven or eight years old for you. Do you want to start from there and tell me -- you had moved, your family had moved to St. Paul?

FIONA GARDNER: Yeah, yeah, I grew up in the Twin Cities pretty much after that, um, and I would say, I mean, my father -- my father's a puppeteer, and that had a big impact in my life in terms of being, like, an artistic kind of person. And um, my mom is a children's librarian. Uh, so I spent a lot of like my teenage years being very focused on wanting to be an artist, and going to an arts high school and, um, I'm sort of someone that didn't fall very far from the tree, so to speak, so like, I was, I had parents who were very supportive of those things. Um, and I pretty much knew, like, at a pretty young age that I wanted to come out to the east coast and go to art school, and that I wanted to go to Rhode Island School of Design, which is what I ended up doing. Um, and I have two younger siblings; I have a brother, who's in the middle, and my sister, who's the youngest child, and I think that I fell, in a lot of ways, into being the, like, classic oldest child in that I was always this, like, kind of overachieving kid. And in a lot of ways, I was sort of al-- I feel like as

I've gotten older, I've gotten younger in a certain sense. Like, when I was a kid or when I was a teenager, I was very serious. I didn't really get into a lot of trouble, I didn't do, like, the classic sort of teenage rebellion things. I sort of spent all my time, like, working on my artwork and being a little adult in a certain kind of way, and really wanting to, like, please my parents and, like, my family, and not really having a rebellion so much. And it was a shock in some ways for my parents, when my younger siblings got to be teenagers and then showed them what classic teenagers do, because I hadn't properly prepared them for that. Um, so I'm trying to think, like, if there -- and also my family, um, was like fairly religious, too. Like, my -- I had a bat mitzvah and my parents, we like always celebrated Shabbat every week, and -- so I would say that the one way that -- I didn't really rebel against those things, necessarily, as a teenager, but I definitely started to, like, question their importance to me, um, just because I always saw, like, art as being the thing that I cared more about. And I think that I was, like, less interested in the whole religion thing, or questioned, like, how that was going to, like, work out in my life in a lot of ways. And then when I went to college, I really started, like, not doing those things that my family did. So maybe that was, like, the thing for me that was kind of like a form of rebellion in some ways. At least initially.

CHARIS SHAFER: And your father had taken on those practices?

FIONA GARDNER: Yeah. Like my dad converted to Judaism, even though he didn't come from a Jewish family. Although at this point, actually, my parents hadn't been, been together for many years, and my dad hasn't been a practicing Jew since my parents were together, but my dad also was somebody who very much came from that generation in the 1960s, where um, people were really looking for spirituality in other places, and he grew up in a family that, [00:20:00] um, sort of considered themselves Methodists but not in a very, like, serious kind of way. And my grandparents went to church, but it was really just about the fact that they felt like, "Oh, we should go to church because we have kids, and that's what we're supposed to do." And the minute that their children were sort of grown up and not in the house, they weren't going to church anymore, and they weren't celebrating things, and I think that my father was kind of a spiritual person who was, like, looking for something to, like, fill that, and so for a while, Judaism sort of

became that thing for my dad. Um, although, then when my parents split up, he wasn't doing that anymore. But it was the thing that my family, like, culturally, you know, had when I was growing up.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah. So you moved, then, from the Midwest to the east coast.

FIONA GARDNER: Yes. I -- and that happened when I went to college.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

FIONA GARDNER: So, I went -- got into Rhode Island School of Design, and I came to Providence, um, and pretty much when I got here, I kind of felt like, "Oh, this is where I'm supposed to be." Like, I felt, like, an immediate kind of identification with, um, east coast culture as opposed to where I grew up in the Midwest. I felt like, at least when I was growing up in Minnesota, Minnesota in a lot of ways felt very homogenous. Um, that has changed in a lot of ways. I think that, like now, if you were to go to the Twin Cities, you will see a lot of people from Somalia, for example, and um, like, just, you know, other places in general because there's been more movement. But when I was growing up, it was pretty much a state that was dominated by a lot of Scandinavian, um, immigration. So there was a lot of Swedes and Norwegians and Finnish people. And there was a Jewish community, but it was fairly small, and then there was a black American community, but it was fairly segregated from other things that were going on, there was not a lot of mixing between those people. And then, when I was in high school, there was a small minority group of Hmong people that immigrated to the Twin Cities based on the whole Vietnam War, and the fact that the United States, um, had used them as scouts during the Vietnam War, and so we had made an agreement that they could immigrate. And for some reason, a lot of them ended up coming to the Twin Cities. And I think it had to do with just, the Twin Cities involvement as a place that was fairly liberal, and had good policies in terms of immigration. But even so, if you looked at the cuisine in the ci-- in Minnesota, where I grew up, it was very like American, you know, when I was in high school, like, the first Thai restaurant came. You know, it was, it was very much like a Midwestern, incredibly kind of, like, white. Um, there was definitely a culture of, like, "Minnesota nice" that people like to talk about, which is just that everyone's kind of friendly to you and says "hello" on the street. But they're not

necessarily going to, like, become friends with you easily. And uh, and it was a culture where I think it was difficult to be an outsider. And even though both my parents actually grew up in the Twin Cities, and I was born in the Twin Cities, you know, there were very few years, actually, that we lived in Wisconsin. I mean, I pretty much lived there from the time I was, like, six on. Um, culturally, I always felt like my family didn't really quite fit in there. It was like, I have these kind of artistic, hippie sort of parents that were kind of like outspoken. I lived in this old Victorian house with my grandmother and my great aunt downstairs, so there was this like intergenerational thing that was also kind of unusual. And felt like more of the kind of culture that immigrants sort of have. Of like, living with, like, multiple generations in the same kind of house, and that was also very weird in the neighborhood that I grew up in. So I never really kind of felt like I fit in, you know, culturally in those ways. And also just, you know, people didn't really give their opinions very freely in that environment. It was kind of more like "keep things to yourself" kind of culture. Um, and then also, just physical things about Minnesota, like it's landlocked, you know, so and -- so when I came to the east coast, I just felt this kind of immediate identification with it being, like, on the coast, so I think any, you know, you immediately sort of feel like more of an open kind of environment when you're on a coast, whether it's the west coast or the east coast --

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

FIONA GARDNER: -- and also just, there being more of like an intellectually kind of rigorous culture in this part of the country, and people being more like, this, you know, "what you see is what you get." And um, and I don't -- Providence is a small place, where I went to college, so I didn't immediately feel the multicultural aspect of the east coast by living in Providence, [00:25:00] but um, from there, I ended up living in Boston and then moving to New York, and I just think that all of, like, my adult experiences on the east coast -- I was put into contact with so many different kinds of people, and felt more at home with a like more complex narrative than the environment I grew up with, which was more like, everybody's kind of the same on some level, you know.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

FIONA GARDNER: It was, like, all the places that I've lived, basically, as an adult on the east coast, it's more like, everybody has some kind of multi-layered kind of story, or like, people have come to these places because they maybe didn't fit in --

CHARIS SHAFER: Right.

FIONA GARDNER: -- wherever it was. So you get these populations of people, we're all looking for something else. And I think I felt, therefore, more at home among communities like that, as opposed to like, the place where I grew up, which was more like, you know, people went to the high school that their parents went to high school at, and they probably all went to the same churches, which my family didn't want to, and they like, went to some local college, and you know, then got married and had kids. Like, it was this trajectory that sort of everyone was on that I didn't really feel part of, so, you know.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, mm-hmm. Uche, I think we took you out to about 17 or 18. And you're still in eastern Nigeria at this point?

UCHE NDUKA: Yeah, yeah, I was still, I was still there. Actually, I think I entered university when I was 17 and-a-half, entered a campus, my first degree, English history. Um. But prior to that, of course, I was at a secondary school, which I, where I spent five years from -- we have talked -- sort of almost like a British syllabus, actually.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh really?

UCHE NDUKA: Yeah, you know. Neo-colonial in a way, because we have, make sure of -- Nigerian writers being taught to us, and then British writers also, you know, (inaudible) when we are being taught songs about "London bridge falling down" and snow, and in Christmas they are talking about white snow, and so, and then when you look around you, everybody's place is dust, you know. I mean, it was totally incongruous, you know, in the kind of things we are being taught. What are we going to do with London Bridge, you know, a child in Nigeria, in southern Nigeria. And um, but it's all part of, you know, the way you, you might -- I would say, we spend that time (inaudible), getting colonized, you know, so it took, it took some of us until the time we entered university to start questioning some of the things we were programmed in, and sort of conditioned, use the word, is that the word, being conditioned, you know, to being --

CHARIS SHAFER: Was the school itself English-run or was it just this legacy?

UCHE NDUKA: Nigerians! Oh yeah, Nigerians.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, OK.

UCHE NDUKA: You see, the thing with Nigerian history is that it's -- the British had colonized Nigeria. They're what you call, their own (inaudible), so they quietly got Nigerians indoctrinated, so that Nigerians now can indoctrinate each other, or indoctrinate their kids, so you don't need physical presence of the British in Nigeria for lots of things in Nigeria to become British. Of course, you know, from time to time we have some English man or woman pop up as some supervisor for schools or some civil servant, you know, (inaudible) our ministry, but somehow, the, the, the Nigerians growing up which I will say, my parents' generation, and even my grandfather -- my grandparents, for instance. Um, we have been taught that everything English is superb; you know, so everything English is what to aspire towards. And my two -- my paternal grandfather was an Anglican catechist, meaning sort of a priest, yes, he was a priest, an Anglican. So he (inaudible) as a priest; he taught, and he was a primary school teacher, and then was a catechist at the same time. So where about, you know, he's inspired to teach, he teaches normal mathematics, English, religious studies, and all that, and then, on, on, on, on Sundays he goes to church to help conduct services, you know, Sunday services. So we grew up -- that's you know, my grandfather. My other grandfather, my maternal grandfather himself, was a civil servant in the British sort of, um, civil service, but in Nigeria. You know, he had something to do with Burma. I can't remember whether he even went to fight for the British in Burma in the world wars. I must have seen him in military uniform that know that, and that story is not clear till today, you know, I didn't ask him questions. And, uh --

CHARIS SHAFER: You said Burma. In Burma?

UCHE NDUKA: Hm? In Burma, yeah. You know. And, but I would say I know more about my grandmothers, because I think my grandfathers died when I was just about a year old or something. They died, so I couldn't remember them, but the two grandmothers [00:3:00] were very, very, present figures as I was growing up. I

remember they were like really tough human beings, you know, a mixture of tenderness and toughness.

CHARIS SHAFER: What were their names?

UCHE NDUKA: Um. My paternal grandmom was called [Owayinye], translated in English, it means "twenty horses." Yeah. And uh, the English name is Agnes. Yes. And then my maternal grandmother is called [Oza]; Oza means "she reclines." Very poetic. And then, uh, English name is, um, remember now -- it's either Julie or Julia, can't quite remember which one it is now, yes. Jeanette.

CHARIS SHAFER: Jeanette.

UCHE NDUKA: Yes, Jeanette. [Oza Urakwe]. That's the full name. You know. And um, so I grew up, you know, with these people. And a bunch of them are fairly religious, you know, human beings. They, they lead the women at the churches -- English, you know, (inaudible) went to. They were like leaders, they were both just natural leaders. I remember (inaudible) when I was coming in to report to them about some crisis in their life, they, I'd (inaudible) in cases of, um, say, matrimonial cases or just interpersonal difficulties between people. So they were, they carried that role, you know, the family. And they held up the family practically, because the men died off, so to say. But they were alive, you know, they were alive through the war, all through the war, they were alive. My grandfathers have already left before the war had started. You know, in eastern, in eastern Nigeria, the whole of Nigeria, so to say. Really, Biafran-Nigerian War. So. From the war right down to primary school after that and my secondary school, where I studied, in which I know these things I mentioned. And after that, I went from -- at 17 and-a-half, I passed to go to university. University of Nigeria, and so -- where I studied literature and history, combined degree on this. And it was there that I discovered through literature the value of inquiry, of asking questions. And not just accepting whatever you are told by anyone. I was, I probably say this was one of the high points of my life, you know, and information of who I became as a writer. There I discovered writers, you know. Tolstoy and, um, people like, uh, Ibsen. You know, the Danish -- the Danish playwright. Um, people like -- I read Emerson, you know, I read Thoreau, you know, the Americans. Edgar Allen Poe. So, you know, it just went on.

Emily Dickinson, you know, Walt Whitman. I read my first bunch of American writers at university. And then, then, on the other side were Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, who just died, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Flora Nwapa, uh, Buchi Emecheta, these uh, women, so. And then what I call continental African writers, like Peter Abrahams, the (inaudible), South Africans, Mariama Ba from Senegal. So you went on, so I had, sort of, what I call a balanced education, you know. We read globally, like, liberal writers, like American writers, British writers, even some Spanish writers, you know, but they were all translated into English. And then African writers, contemporary African writers, so to say. And within that particular period was when I discovered what I would call activism, you know, because within this (inaudible), some of us started fighting against apartheid in South Africa. So we had groups that we (inaudible) dismantling South African apartheid system. And then we had groups whereby -- you know, we organized protests against anything we had -- like, say, increasing school fees, or, or people being prevented from going into, into um, moving around within the city. There were sort of, these rules that you just felt were totally useless, you know, for us. Or when we protested against some – a mercenary, so to say, or (mercenary) from the town coming to have their stalls you know, their stalls within the university campus. And we felt that officials from university took money from them and just got them in there. And when you say, you can't do that without telling us, so simply when they (inaudible) matched, down whatever it is that they put up. So of course we are punished, and they brought in the police, arrest all of us, shield us out of the hostels where we lived, [00:35:00] because we usually have these hostels where, you know, we lived. And there was also the -- what I was saying, I said, as part of my growing up, you know, when I discovered my love for music, you know. And my love for women, too. You know. They all came along with it, I mean, I think I spent most of my time chasing women, I was chasing girls, (inaudible) like that, because we all, you know, in our late teenage years, you know, in the early teenage years, yeah, dating, you know, you know, we dated a lot, you know, danced from one party to the other. Crashed the parties we weren't invited to, you know, and I had this motorbike that, you know, my dad bought for me, you know, which I just rode around the whole place. It's still a miracle that I never broke

my neck, you know, with the kind of speed, you know, which I (inaudible), you know, in those days. So university simply blew my mind, you know, lead me to question the laws of the assumptions, you know, the adults taught, that we have to, as, you know, adopt -- religion, for instance, political, uh, military dictatorship. Um, the philosophy of the society, you know. The laws that (inaudible) doctors, (inaudible), lawyers, and so on. But I discovered my love for literature in a way, we studied literature, I mean, and yeah, I faced a decision for that. Because for them, they felt, well, I was going to starve. You know, if just the literature, um, how you can feed yourself or feed your family, and those things, you know. So I felt, also, at that point, those need to be questioned. There's not a law that everybody has to be a doctor just because of (inaudible) -- so I would put it this way - I started questioning the materialistic business of laws of expectations, you know, on people like us, growing up in those days. And the, the role models we had, like I told you, were just a bunch of military generals. Some, um, very rich businessmen, mainly, you know, there was, you know, businesswomen, but mainly men. And it was a very patriarchal setup, you know, everything the men says, I will (inaudible) to do and so on. And some of us that our own mother, they didn't take it lightly. So we didn't like it, ourselves, you know, I think, at that point, we just started questioning the patriarchal bases of that environment. And it wasn't funny, because we really faced tough uphill tasks and opposition from the men, from our teachers, from our professors, from our parents, uncles and so on. Um, but and in music, too -- like, I mentioned music earlier on. Music is also one of those things I felt politicized me, because I just remember that at that point, or rather I experienced the power of art to cross borders, whether they're nationalistic, you know, whether they're political, whether they're tribalistic, any kind of barrier -- the power of art to go beyond different cultures. Because for instance, when I was reading Pasternak, you know, as an undergraduate, reading uh, Dostoevsky -- and so these are Russian writers, what have Russian writers, uh, culture got to do with the Nigerian culture? But still I identified fully, you know, with rebellious characters in those books -- in *Anna Karenina, Notes from the Underground*, and so on by Russian writers. And it's something -- when I, when I read, um, Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* -- that was also one of those books that, um, I liked very much. And Emerson's, what do

you call it, "The American Scholar," one of those essays he wrote about an American scholar. And um, um, Walt Whitman's essays, actually I got into more of his essays than, than the poems. And these are American cultural figures, so to say, but still, I just felt that connected to what they are saying in terms of what I found is true sounding about -- and then the music, too, you know, and then I got into rock and roll, which was very strange for that environment. You know, this, that environment's so fused with local music, too. You know, we have an abundance of musicians in Nigeria, and so on. And well, I started hearing Bob Dylan, started hearing the Beatles, uh, um, Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix. I've not stopped listening to them since then. So it's like, the music I was still listening, actually, (inaudible) today. Now they turn to so-called new, newer voices, you know, in that way. So two central things, you know, for me. Uh, grew in, um, through my teenage years, because, you know, like I said, my discovery for art, and its power. And then, the, [00:40:00] the, the, the need to ask questions. And then the third one, experiential. To know that the, life is not only about the brain, not only about talks. It's like the corporeal is important, too, you know, sensual, and all -- the sensuality, the experiential. This, so all these factors, I think, you know, combined to shape who I was becoming as an adult, you know, until I left the univers-- I left the university when I was 21 and-a-half. You know, and um, and still had authority issues, you know. I remembered physically fighting with a soldier, you know, and breaking his head with a bottle, a beer bottle. Um, just shortly after I came out of university. Because there, they were just being overbearing, you know, this soldier was being overbearing and (inaudible), and just harassing me for nothing. So I think I just reacted, I was very angry, you know, and ended up, ended up in this fight. Which, well, he got the worst of. Um, and I was punished actually, because um, usually at the university in Nigeria, you do a one year (inaudible) in service. You know, that's what they call it. So my sort of, instead of my (inaudible) for one year, they added three more months as punishment, because I had beat up one of the officials, and you know, wounded him and all that. And uh, then after that, I started working for the writers at the Association of Nigerian Artists. Somehow, I became the (inaudible) secretary, the British part of the, uh, um, Secretary (inaudible). And, you know, started what I would call my literary life, you know, my

writing, and uh, and since then it hasn't stopped, so, you know, from the doors that you know, what I would call the beginnings of what, um, what is the place, the kind of life I was going to, what presaged what I was going to do, you know? Your future. Well, damn, I (inaudible) knowing it at that point. Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm. What's that? Sounds good. Just taking a little pause. This one. And so we're back.

FIONA GARDNER: OK.

CHARIS SHAFER: Fiona, I think it's to you. And where we left you, you were in Providence.

FIONA GARDNER: Yes. Um, yeah, so I spent four years in Providence, with also a stint in England, actually, I did a semester in Nottingham, um, in which I realized I was truly American (laughs). I think that, like, living abroad -- because in my, like, teenage years, I always felt like an outside, I did not feel American, actually, at all. I was always sort of rebelling against everything, and I think that when I went to England and encountered lots of British people who told me how I didn't speak English and how I was, you know, not one of them, and how I was really outside there, I found a new, like, love for wanting to go back to the place that I came from, actually, a little bit. Um, so I did a semester there in England, and then I came back to Providence, and after I graduated, um, I was trying to figure out where I was going to live, um, or what I was going to do after that. And I went back to Minnesota for a summer and spent the summer with my father, and I knew I wanted to go back to the east coast and I didn't really want to end up back in the Midwest, um, but basically, I was a little bit freaked out about the idea of coming from New York City, even though I graduated in painting in undergrad, and my whole department, pretty much, all came directly to New York. But I think being a Midwesterner and having grown up in a fairly, like, a city that was, you know, a real city, but had more of a small town aspect to it. I found New York really overwhelming and so instead I went to Boston. But on some level, I think I always felt like I was going to end up in New York at some point in my life, and I was just, like, putting it off, sort of, for a while. Um, [00:45:00] so I went to Boston and I lived in an artist building in Boston that was an old warehouse and kind of this collective sort of community, and I quickly had a lot of shows and I ran an art program from special ed kids, and worked in a frame shop

and a bead store at one point, sort of had all these, like, odd jobs going on -- sort of my, like, young adult's experience. And within like three years of living in Boston, I kind of felt like I had outgrown the place on some level, and I applied to go to graduate school in New York, which was kind of like my way to, like, maybe come to New York City, but in a way that I had some kind of safety net involved. And I got into Columbia's graduate program in visual arts -- [car honking]

CHARIS SHAFER: That's annoying. Oh.

FIONA GARDNER: Um, so I got into Columbia's graduate program in visual arts, and I also had in that time made this transition from being someone who was a painter to being a photographer. Um, which I started in England, really, because I had this elective that I took outside of, like, my painting courses, and I kind of discovered photography in England that way. And then I was taking more and more photographs in my studio, and initially I thought that making paintings from the photographs was what I was really doing, until I discovered that these paintings actually were not that very interesting, and the photographs were more interesting. So, while I was still in Boston, I started taking these art classes at a school called the New England School for Photography, because I realized I needed to get some kind of technical understanding of things, because I was really very self-taught at that point. So when I applied to go to Columbia, I applied to go, actually, as a photographer as opposed to a painter, even though I had always been a painter. Um, and I got into Columbia, and I came to New York, and when I first moved to New York City, since I was going to Columbia, I lived up on 125th Street and Old Broadway, very near the campus, and in Boston, I had been living in this massive warehouse, you know, I had this like 2,000 square foot loft space -- um, top floor, like, view of the Boston Harbor, I could like -- it was an all artist building, I could leave my building, get on my bicycle, drive out to this, like, beach, that when it got, we'd all kind of, like, sleep on the beach at night. And it was all very kind of like bohemian, slightly like idyllic, when you're in your early 20s, and then, when I moved to New York to go to grad school, it was like I really moved into the stereotype of the small, horrible, like, New York apartment. Like, I literally had this apartment that was maybe, like, 500 square feet and was a two bedroom, and my bathroom was, like, so small that if you sat on the toilet,

your knees would like hit the door, and the bathtub wasn't even a full bathtub, it was like, my roommate and I would joke about how maybe the other side of the bathtub was on the other side of the wall, because it was a bathtub where there was half a bathtub that, like, fit into the wall, and you wondered if the other half was over on the other side. And it was also, at the same -- it was over a laundromat, and it was at the same level as the train, the 1-9 train, I mean now it's only the 1, but at the time it was the 1-9 train -- that would go down, you know, over 125th Street, and so basically, when the train would go, my entire apartment would kind of like vibrate. And it was very cheap, which was why I had this place; it cost like $1,000 for a two bedroom over near Columbia (laughs) and, which is basically why I got the apartment. It was like, through a friend of a friend kind of situation. But I remember, you know, driving in this, the U-Haul with this friend who, like, drove me, and my cat was like on my lap for most of the ride, causing all kinds of problems, and we got into, like, New York City, and I distinctly remember looking around at everything and moving into this apartment and just feeling, like, incredibly overwhelmed by New York, and thinking, like, how am I ever going to feel at home here, you know? Like, how am I even going to make this work? And you know, now I've been in New York City like longer than I've been anywhere else in my adult life. Like, over 10 years at this point, and I don't feel that way at all about New York. So it's just kind of like an interesting, like, you know, like every once in a while I think about that, like, juxtaposition, and where I also started out in New York City, as compared to, like, where I live now, and you know.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

FIONA GARDNER: So.

CHARIS SHAFER: Uche, how did you come to New York? What was your path?

UCHE NDUKA: Well, I would say it started from Lagos in Nigeria, and I worked, outside of university, I um [00:50:00] worked for a publishing outfit, worked for the writer's secretary, and then at the mo-- at the point I left Nigeria, I was just working as a freelance literary journalist. I was writing, um, literature for newspapers, and painting, visual art exhibitions, and so on. And just some raw essays, really, for different papers, and they didn't pay me, so I was a freelance journalist, probably, a writer when I left. But then at

some point, the Goethe Institut, which is a German cultural institute, um, contacted me and gave me this fellowship to go to Germany for two months and just, you know, out of the blues. So, you know, that actually marked the beginning of my journey out of Nigeria. This was in October 1994. So I left Nigeria, I think, October 25th, 1994, and then flew to Bremen in Germany, where I was stationed at a Goethe Institut there in Bremen, just learned a little bit of German, and then traveled around, do some cultural tripping around. So somehow that two months, there that was supposed to be about three months, just, somehow, expanded. That I now lived in Germany for about eight to nine years, yes, and then at some point, I was invited by a group to, um -- environmental group, in Europe, beautiful group, called "A Seed." They work on climate change, on -- uh, against bank frauds, and uh, what they are called? This official cloning of plants and so on. They're just really a beautiful group that -- very, very utopian and idealistic, but very committed to a vision of seeing a better future in the -- so they invited me to help them edit a book on climate change called *Cold Catches Fire*, and then I'm going to help them edit it, with another colleague of theirs, and the book is published. But (inaudible) returning to Bremen after this (inaudible) in Amsterdam is Holland, and I ended up living in Holland for three years in Amsterdam. And then moved back to Bremen again, where I continued teaching, because when I wasn't in Bremen, actually, um, as a sort of, um, a guest artist. I was invited by the university to come in and start teaching part time, so I taught African literature part time on and off for about seven years or eight years, also when I lived there. So I went back from Amsterdam, I (inaudible) returned to Bremen, and within I think a year and a half or two, um, I got this invitation from, from the States, because my parents had long left Nigeria and were already living here with my siblings in America. So my parents, and my siblings, my brothers (inaudible) they all wanted to become Americans, so to say. So it's then my dad applied for my own green card, and so on, so I got an invitation to -- in the American consulate in Frankfurt to come over to interview for it, and somehow I got past interview, so they gave me a visit to come to the States. So I arrived in the States in 2007, August 2007 was when I got here. And my parents happen to live in Brooklyn, in New York Avenue. So I lived there, and I stayed in my parents' apartment for about four months before I moved into, you know, a, with a

cousin -- we shared a flat, you know, on the same street, it was the same view actually. And that's like the beginning of my stay in Brooklyn, so it wasn't anything planned, actually, and I (inaudible) didn't actually know I was going to live in New York, because I thought I was simply going to come and hang around for, like, say, three months, because I didn't see my parents and my siblings for about, between 11 and 12 years. But I wanted to see them, and I missed them badly. We'd talk on the phone and all that, but it wasn't enough. So, but um, you know, coming here, I happened to have gone to the poetry project just for poetry readings and so on. I just, I met these very, very interesting poets who I, I um, I liked. You know, I liked very much. In terms of their commitment, in terms of their passion, in terms of their devotion into the art of poetry. And then I started thinking about, "Oh, why don't I just stay here for a while more?" Instead of just returning to Germany. Because all through these three months, I still have my return ticket to Germany. So, um, I stayed on. You know, one thing led to the other [00:55:00], I adapt, I tried to enter school here; I tried to get my Master's, so I did an MFA. What do you call it? Master's in Fine Arts in, um, creative writing at Long Island University, LIU, Brooklyn section of it. And I've been living here since then, you know, I've been living in Brooklyn all that time. So I studied here. And while I was living in Brooklyn, of course I was, I kept writing, you know. And my -- I'll call it, sort of, my connections continue deepening too. Because I'm meeting very, very interesting people. Not only writers now, but painters, musicians, you know, the artistic community of Brooklyn, you know? I find it very, very inspirational in a way. And also it's -- so I discovered naturally the historical, um, sheen of Brooklyn as a place in terms of artists who have lived here -- I didn't know Walt Whitman lived here, too! You know. And current authors like, um, Paul Auster -- you know, lives here too. And then some younger poets, you know, Rachel Levitsky. And um, yeah, so I kept meeting people, I kept meeting people -- I've (inaudible) met, uh, one of the prose writers, yeah, called uh Joshua Foust is one of the current writers I've met, you know, in this place. I met a poet called Lonely Christophe, very very interesting. You know. And somebody called (inaudible) Benjamin. You know, uh, many, many others. You know, in fact, in fact, there's like each, each season of my stay in Brooklyn, I keep meeting poetic people. Like I keep

meeting filmmakers, um, not just filmmakers, eh, composers, uh, people in experimental fields and also, what are, you know, some very, very interesting things. And of course, this is also (inaudible), but the way I met my partner, you know, the artist-photographer Fiona Gardner. And, as they say, the rest is history, so I'm still living here in Brooklyn; I'm very much here.

CHARIS SHAFER: Maybe uh, I'll turn to Fiona (laughs).

UCHE NDUKA: And of course, one of the most important thing to happen to both of us is that we've now got a daughter who is, uh, four months old. Sula, (inaudible), you know, so and we feel really energized by her presence, in (inaudible) energized, so I'll see if we've been given also a new lease on life, you know, by her arrival and I'm grateful for that. And I would say I'm grateful to Brooklyn for that turn of events. You know. In my life.

CHARIS SHAFER: Well, I think we're almost coming to a close, but Fiona, do you want to tell me how you two met?

FIONA GARDNER: Oh, sure. So Uche and I actually met on Facebook, which you know, is kind of a contemporary way, I guess, to meet. Um, but basically, my sister, who is a poet, and Uche somehow were in touch, I don't think either one of them really remembers how the conversation started, but in some way they were, you know, in touch on facebook and, like, wrote each other about things. And I have a friend, Derek [Emms] who lives in Brooklyn, who is an artist, and Derek and I went to graduate school together. And at one point, Derek started this magazine called *Binge*, and he was a bit overcommitted, so we only ended up doing a couple of issues, um, but, Uche was supposed to be the poet in the third issue that didn't happen, and my sister was editing all the poetry section, and I did all the photography for the magazine. And so Uche and I were initially kind of in touch about that, because I was supposed to get some pictures for him from the magazine. And then over the course of the next four years, really, we exchanged like maybe four or five emails over facebook that were all about, kind of, art-related things. And at some point, Uche asked me, "Well, did you find a publisher for that book you were," you know, "working on." And I was like, "Yes, in fact, I did!" You know, we had this conversation about it, and he was like, "Oh, we should really get

together for a drink." And then neither one of us did anything about it, so we didn't actually get up, meet up. And then I was at the Franklin Avenue subway stop in Brooklyn, um, talking to a friend of mine in front of the turnstiles, and we were having this moment of, like, sort of continuing the conversation and trying to say goodbye so we could both go in opposite directions on the train. And when we were standing there talking, I saw Uche come down the stairs in a big rush, down to, [01:00:00] in the subway stop to, like, get on the train. And I didn't say anything to him because he was, like, sort of in his own single-minded, uh, head, like rushing, clearly, to somewhere. And I almost didn't write him to say anything about it, but it was just one of those moments that was kind of, like, funny, because I've never seen him in the real world, but I recognized him from Facebook, you know. And so, then I emailed him on Facebook and I said, "Hey, I saw you on Saturday, rushing down the stairs at Franklin Avenue." And he was like, "Wow, I can't believe you recognized me!" And so that was when we made an actual plan and, you know, met up at this restaurant called Chavelas in, um, Crown Heights. And (laughs) neither one of us really thought it was a date at the time, we both were just kind of like, "Oh, well, I'm getting together with this person who I only know in the virtual worlds," and it was more like a, you know, sort of out of curiosity-like kind of thing. But of course in retrospect, it's also kind of funny to me, because my sister and I had made jokes for a long time about how Uche was this guy who only existed on Facebook, because we would ru-- encounter lots of other, like, people that we knew who were like friends with him on Facebook. And we would ask them, "Well, do you know Uche Nduka," and they would always say "No." But they were friends with him on Facebook, so we started having this idea that he was just, like, this like virtual dude. So when I finally met up with him, and then we ended up, like, getting together and now we have a daughter toget-- you know (laughs), so.

CHARIS SHAFER: I can personally attest that he is, in fact (laughs) corporal.

UCHE NDUKA: Not a ghost. (inaudible) You know, a human being, flesh and blood.

FIONA GARDNER: But, so we met each other in a rather roundabout kind of way.

CHARIS SHAFER: OK. Well we've gone on for quite a while now, and I think probably it's time to call it to a close unless you, either of you, have anything else you want to add to the interview.

FIONA GARDNER: Hm.

UCHE NDUKA: Well, um, the, only a little thing I have to add, so to say, a simple about, in terms of who I'm meeting, you know, being together as a family, as a couple -- is that I feel that is something that is also for -- at least for my own side, it's something that is, um, (inaudible) every moment. It's something that, I'm learning a lot from being with her, you know, as a human being, as someone who's coming from a different culture, and I'm coming from a different culture. And it's a lot, and I find it very enriching. And I also find it, in fact, I find it interesting the way people look at us as if, like, we dropped in from the clouds or something like that. You know, you know, even at this phase of human history. You know, as if you've got interracial couple -- that is, like, something that is, like, just not usual. And I find it also surprising, because I didn't know that -- that we can still have that kind of reaction, even within New York. You know, it's not like people voice it out in terms of antagonistic confrontation or anything, but they can still see it in the eyes. The surprise -- like, "Oh, how, how do they manage?" You know: "how did that happen?" And all that. You know. Which for me, I think, also still being -- apart from being, what I call, an educative experience is also something I find very humbling. You know. It just is very, very humbling, and I hope that such -- what I call it, such fate, fateful visitations will continue in our world. Yes.

FIONA GARDNER: Yeah, I would say about that, too, is that, like, I think that, you know, it's been interesting, like, getting to know each other's families, too, because it's like, I come from this very kind of wild, you know, characters. Like, I mean, in some ways, my family is like less of a unit, maybe, than Uche's family here. It's like, my parents aren't together, and everyone in our -- in my family, it very much kind of like an individual. I mean, we're definitely like similar in certain ways, as like, all families have some kind of like family sort of culture, but everyone in my family is very kind of like individual. And there's, there's this very, like, strong, kind of like artistic kind of bent to it, and while I grew up in a family that, like, practiced Judaism, my family isn't really so much like that

anymore, other than, like, my mother who sort of continued to do that, but my brother, sister, and I are all, like, not religious. My dad isn't like very religious. And then Uche comes from a family that has, like, a very strong, like, Christianity thing going on [01:05:00], and there's also much more of a sense of, like, tradition, of how you do things and don't do things. Whereas my family doesn't have that. We don't have, like, a continual, like, cultural tradition that has not been broken. So it's like, if you decide to do something differently, someone in my family is going to question that for like a particular kind of reason, because everyone in my family does things differently. So sort of, just the act of doing things differently is considered fairly normal, you know? And, like, actually a while ago, Uche's father, like, wanted me to come out and, like, meet him, so he could, like, you know, talk to me by himself. And I told Uche that it was basically going to be like the Spanish Inquisition, more or less, which, to some extent, was true. But it wasn't like an antagonistic kind of way, but it was definitely like, um, it was kind of clear to me that a lot of, like, where he was coming from was just the fact that he has a different kind of generational thing going on, different culture, you know, and in his wildest dreams, he would never in a million years imagine that there would be, like, some white lady in his family. Let alone a white lady that doesn't practice Christianity, let alo-- like, basically, everything about me is something he couldn't envision. More or less. And like, can't even b-- and for him to even, like, try to understand where I'm coming from is, like, a leap, you know, for him. And that was kind of interesting, because like, I think that, in a lot of ways, like, my experience of Uche is that he's so different from the, anyone in his family. So it's like we have this life together, and then when we encounter his family, like, you know, they love Uche; they're ultimately happy about, you know, Sula being in the world. And I don't think it's like, they don't like me or something like that; in fact, many, like his younger siblings, are, have always been very welcoming to me or whatever. But it's more just this, like, they don't know how to navigate this world that Uche's decided to be a part of. And even if they live in New York, um, for the most part, they live in Nigeria in New York. It's like they never left Nigeria, even though they live here. So when they get glimpses of, like, Uche and my life in ways that they might not have seen otherwise, it's just like, it's as though they came to the moon. And like, are

seeing like, looking into some window and seeing what's going on, and they're like, "We don't even begin to understand what's going on," you know?

UCHE NDUKA: Hm, that's true.

FIONA GARDNER: And I think -- and actually, at this point, our families haven't even really --

UCHE NDUKA: Met. Yeah, yeah.

FIONA GARDNER: -- been in the same space. Like, we, you know, I mean, not, it hasn't really been intentional. Actually some of Uche's family's met my mother, for example. But a lot of it has just been, like, you know, when things have happened or whatever. And um, so I think that will be interesting, like --

UCHE NDUKA: Yeah, to encounter that, yeah.

FIONA GARDNER: -- when they eventually, like, encounter more of each other, because there's just like so many, like, cultural, like, divides going on.

UCHE NDUKA: We'll be like spectators and witnesses. Yes. I mean, that's (inaudible), because they are themselves. I mean, you can't change them. That's it. So all you can do, you just observe. You know, and see how the reaction from both sides, I don't know what's going on. That's all you can do; what are you going to do about it (laughs)? (inaudible) won't change anything, (inaudible). It's a question of mostly being bystanders and how watching how they're taking it in, and how, how the interaction's going to be, which is these differences, you know, in terms of your beliefs, you know? In terms of lifestyle, in terms of religion, in terms of, um, how they envision the future, you know, and all those things. But I think for me, basically, um, there is nothing to be apologetic about. That's what I'm trying to say -- there is nothing to -- I think we both live our lives in the open; there's nothing really to hide, you know, but we seem (inaudible) just naturally open people. And in that sense, there is, for me, not much in terms of pressure, really, from the families. Because, the reason I know that, we already (inaudible), is that simply look at us as strange, strange people. That's all. "These people are strange." That's it; that's it. Might be the observation. Beyond that, there is nothing -- I mean, we're living our lives. We are very, we're busy (laughs). We're very busy; we don't even have time, actually, (inaudible) to cast on these sideway glances and all that. But family is family; that's why. You know, we're talking about, and -- you don't

choose your family, your blood family I mean. But as an adult, you've got to (inaudible) your family. People who you realize you have affinities with. That's when you really start making your own adult family, you know, beyond your blood link to your brother or sister or your parents. So just particularly, also, what we both have in our families -- expanded beyond the blood families, which of course you are one.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, it's different between given family and chosen family (laughs). Wow. I think that sounds like a good place to conclude, at least for today. I'm sure we missed a lot of stuff in both of your lives.

FIONA GARDNER: (inaudible)'s good.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah. All right, thank you so much.

UCHE NDUKA: Thank you too.

END OF AUDIO FILE