

The following interview was conducted , with Eisa Zayada for Star City Treasures AmeriCorps Oral History Project. It took place on March 29, 2007 at “F” Street Rec Center. The interviewer is Julie Frith.

JULIE: So, you want to tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

EISA: Hmm. Uh, I was born in Khartoum. Khartoum is located in western Sudan, which is in Darfur province. I grew up there and Khartoum is actually not very big town, is a small town of about 200,000 people. You want me to go further, or that is it?

JULIE: No, you can keep talking. Whatever you want to do.

EISA: Do you want me to describe the area?

JULIE: If you want to, sure.

EISA: Khartoum itself?

JULIE: Sure.

EISA: Well, Khartoum is very nice and interesting town. And Khartoum has good - it has like, small market, which is like people come and sell you their things. Like, small things [unintelligible]. And, it's kind of - people come from different places, like Qurma, Khartoum, [unintelligible]. And they sell their things - they sell their sheep, sell their things which you grow up there. And then, I like the place because it is among mountains. In the autumn, it was very, very beautiful. Became green, and the trees became green - it's like here now, which is in summer.

JULIE: So, like how far would people have to travel to go to the marketplace?

EISA: Well, it's like from [unintelligible], which is - I mean, the village which is also I know, Qatar, it's sixteen miles. And some people live very far away, like twenty miles. But some people, they live near Khartoum. I mean, like some villages near Khartoum, west and east and south, they are near Khartoum. Some are farther away, some are near Khartoum.

JULIE: Can you tell me a little bit about your family? Like, that you grew up with?

EISA: Well, my family is actually - my father is a tailor and my mother, she is a farmer. Most of them are farmers actually. And, as you know the villages people, they help each other, especially in the autumn times. They have to work together. I mean, family - all the family, they have to - if they are there - they have to grow up something called “dura”. “Dura” is - I don't know here, you know - “dura” is a kind of food, which is we feed it there. We - this “dura” is being made with [unintelligible], [unintelligible] is a kind of food also, we eat it there. So, we help each other, especially in the autumn times. In summer, people they don't have to - they

grow onions, tomatoes and other things, other stuff. They want to - if they grow all these things, also they bring it again to Khartoum. They sell it to Khartoum and they get money from there, from this kind of crops.

JULIE: Okay. Like, as far as your food, what would be like, the type of food that you guys would eat. Like for breakfast, do you have breakfast or do you guys just eat like a couple times a day? Like, what would be like, a meal? Like, where we have meat, vegetables, fruits in our meal - what would be like a normal meal for you?

EISA: Well, as I said, our traditional food is [unintelligible]. We eat [unintelligible] in the morning. And our breakfast is started in the morning, like seven o'clock. So, some - uh, some of the communities they have two meals, but for us, we have three meals. [unintelligible] in the morning, and then at the noon to like, three o'clock we have lunch. And in the evening, like eight or seven o'clock, we have what we call dinner, or supper? Supper, that is a large meal. But our food is, as I said, most of the time we eat [unintelligible]. We do not eat meat. We eat meat sometimes - maybe a week, once a week. Uh, people in our area, they don't believe in meat too much. They don't like to eat meat too much because they just - when they slaughter it on the market time, let us say on Friday, they eat once times in a month. So, I think it's very healthy to not eat meat all the time. So, you have to eat from time to time, you don't have to eat meats all the time. And we drink milk, instead of eating meals, we drink milk.

JULIE: Now, is [unintelligible], is it like a grain?

EISA: [Unintelligible] is like, made out of flour? And water, and then they have something stuff, I don't know what you call it, bittersweet or something like that. It's kind of like, put on it then you eat it together with this. [Unintelligible] is - you can put it as kind of bread, but [unintelligible] itself is very good meal. When you eat it, three hours you will be full. You don't - you're satisfied with three hours, you don't need any food when you eat it.

JULIE: Do you still eat [unintelligible] today?

EISA: Sometimes. Yea, sometimes. I go to some communities of Sudanese, they still - yea they still cook [unintelligible].

JULIE: Okay. Can you tell me about some of your family traditions?

EISA: Well, one of the best I can example to traditional of our family - for example, if somebody want to marry, get married, um - he is supposed to tell his family, either his father or mother, they has to know this. Uh, and uh, also if they don't agree, then it doesn't have to - I mean, for the man, he has to tell both of them. For the woman, uh - actually, in the past they do this, but nowadays they change - they have to talk to the girl, whether she like the man or not. In the past they forced the girl, but nowadays they understand it cause a lot of problems. I mean, it caused divorce and separation. Nowadays, they have to talk to the girl, whether she like the man or not. And if she doesn't like the man, then they don't have - she doesn't have to marry that

man. I mean, it's kind of interesting. The family itself, they help you if you want to get married. If you are a man, they pay for you, if your father have cows or something, he would help you, actually. He would help you in order to get married.

JULIE: Kind of a like a dowry?

EISA: Yea, to pay your dowry or something like that. This is in terms of marriage. In terms of food, we gather together and we eat together. One of our traditions, if the elder is there, then he has to start first. Nobody will start eating before him. He has to start, and then the other younger follow him. This one of the traditions. It's kind of respect, I mean. If you don't - if you are younger, you don't have to start first. Then the elder starts first, and then you follow him. Sign of respect.

JULIE: Is there any certain holidays that you guys celebrate?

EISA: Yes. Uh, we have holidays which we celebrate. Especially Friday. Fridays, as you know, like here Sunday. [Unintelligible]. On Friday, they have to go to work to pray or something. And then after they pray they can come to work. But they don't have to have the whole day off. They can - until 2 o'clock p.m., and they can resume working again no problem. This is Friday. And the other celebration, we have the same, like here, you have [unintelligible] let's say, Christmas Day. And we have there like, Eid [unintelligible], Eid [unintelligible] it's kind traditional, which is where the Muslim people, they do it two times a year.

JULIE: So you are Muslim then?

EISA: Mmhmm.

JULIE: Tell me a little bit about your education that you got in your country.

EISA: Well, actually I went to uh, elementary school in [unintelligible]. As I said, I grew up in Khartoum, but uh, later on my father moved to a village called [unintelligible], which is sixteen miles from Khartoum. So, I went to elementary school there, and middle school. This was in 1973, I believe it. I went to primary school until 1979, and then when I finished primary I went to middle school in 1980. '80 until '83 I finished middle school. This is the whole education which I get in this area. From that time, which is in 1983, I believe it - I moved from Khartoum to [?Kartom?] and I stayed with my uncle. Again, I did my uh, middle school because I wasn't very good, so I repeat it again. [Unintelligible] I repeat middle school. And I passed middle school. And then I went to [unintelligible] Technical School, which was in 1984. Uh, I wasn't able to finish technical school for some reasons. Then, 1987 I moved to Egypt, to Cairo. Then in there I did some courses in English [unintelligible]. I went to British Consulate, and I did some courses. Like, I believe ten courses or eight courses in English. At that time, I would like - I need to improve my English. So, British Consulate was helpful. I didn't spend very long in Egypt. I went back to Sudan in 1991. Uh, I didn't also spend longer time. One year - I came back again to Egypt and I stayed in Egypt like, three years. At that time, I wasn't go to school, I

just working. And then I go back to Sudan again. Sorry, I say I *went* back to Sudan again. In 1995, I start - I was, I resume, I was resume my school - I went to school. I went to one of the school which is very famous for refugee, which is called Sudan Open Learning Unit. I went there to finish my high school. I went there for three years, and I did my high school actually. And, in [unintelligible] like, I knew many, many, many people, or many classmates, like [unintelligible]. And my great teacher was from central Africa. His name [unintelligible]. I stayed there for three years. I also did my, my - beside my high secondary school, I did another course called "Teaching Assistant Courses", which is for the, for the teachers. If you want to teach English as Second Language, you have to do these courses. So it was very interesting, actually. Do you want me to farther?

JULIE: You - whatever you want to say, that's fine. I have a question about when you were like, in primary school? Is that what you called it?

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: Like, did you have to travel far to go to primary school? Or did you walk to school? Like, children here go on buses?

EISA: Yea, this very good questions. It's actually not very far away, but it's like, we walk to go there. It's like for about, I can say, two miles or three miles. Two miles or three miles we walking, actually. Walking in the morning. We don't have cars there.

JULIE: Did you have desks, or did you guys sit like, on the floor? Or was it in a building?

EISA: No, we have desks. We have desks and we sit on desk. Not chair, but desks. Desks, yea. It's like, made of wood. Not a podium.

JULIE: Did you guys use pencils and things, paper?

Yea, we used pencils, we used paper, we used all this kind of stuff. It was an interesting schools, I mean. Anyhow, in the primary school, I mean. Uh, which is - it's a long time ago, 19 - 1973.

JULIE: [Laughs].

EISA: It's a long time ago. But, I remember - I still remember some of the teachers. And like, my Arabic teacher, his name is [unintelligible]. I still remember him. My Biology teacher, his name's [unintelligible]. He was a great - they were great teachers, I still remember them.

JULIE: That's good.

EISA: And I still remember my classmates, like Ahmed, Ahmed [unintelligible]. Now he's a doctor. I mean, for example, you know your [unintelligible] until now, because some of them are doctors, they are whatever. They are, I mean, highly educated nowadays, and most of them

they are not in Sudan. We are separated. Some of them they go to Australia, Canada, some of them even Russia. Some people are separated and they - most of them are not in Sudan right now.

JULIE: So you went to your schooling there. Now, your primary and your middle school there...

EISA: Yea, yea.

JULIE: What happened that you had to leave your country?

EISA: Well, actually, this is - refer back to 2001. Uh, I was an [unintelligible]. I was working in one of the organizations called [unintelligible]. [Unintelligible] is United Nations Education for Science Cultural Organization. I believe that this organization is - their objective or aim to helps people, in terms of cultural and education. Uh, and uh, according to the government policy, they don't like this kind of organization to be existing in Sudan. So, we were in one of the [unintelligible]. I was an [unintelligible], an active element. I was leadership, and we were having like two-thousand students gathering together and they discuss different kind of issues, such as political issues or social issues, actually. And -

JULIE: What kind of -

EISA: - we concentrate... You want me to tell you the -

JULIE: Yea, what kind of like, political and - I didn't mean to interrupt you - political and social issues, like an example, maybe.

EISA: Yea, one example of political issues is, you bring a topic which is, let's say, related to education - what is the policy of the government to the education. Because most of us [unintelligible] teachers. So, we - as I said, this kind of politics, we want to discuss this because the government neglect, in terms of our, our languages, especially. At that time, let us say, Khartoum [unintelligible] was changed from English to Arabic. It was in English, actually, but they changed it to Arabic. And then people, they like to talk this, because education became very weak when they change it from English to Arabic. The curriculum. And it's very difficult for them to understand this kind of curriculum. That one, one of our issues which we discuss, like that. Why the government changed the education from English to Arabic. And then, this is one of the political issues, it is - I, I know it's [unintelligible]. Sometimes, we speak about social issues, which is related to society. Like um, the war, for example, in southern Sudan. At that time, the war was still going on and then, people they want to discuss uh, how can they find a solution for the war? For the war in southern Sudan. This is one of the two uh, two I mean - you can remind me - I mean, I mean *any* topic! I don't want to say that just only this. Any topic related to society, which is sometimes we discuss our uh, let us say - any kind of topic! Like marriage, for example. We can discuss about marriage, about love, all this kind of social issues. Marriage, we can discuss marriage in terms of what's the problem of marrying in Sudan? This is

one of the social issues, we sometimes discuss about it.

JULIE: You weren't allowed to talk - they did not want you talking about the problems? Is that correct?

EISA: They don't want to talk about the problems, and that why they arrest people. And uh, this is one of the problems. It just happened to be I was arrested by the police and by the security [unintelligible]. And then, I had been there for six, six, seven days actually. And then, when they released me, I just found out it is very dangerous for me. Then I escaped from there to Egypt.

JULIE: So, how... Okay -

EISA: It was terrible.

JULIE: So, what did they - I know you had to, you were a part of this group.

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: Correct?

EISA: Mmhmm.

JULIE: You were a part of this group. Now, how old were you when you were a part of this group, would you say?

EISA: How old am I? It was in 2001, and now I am 41 or 42, then let's try to say, it's like thirty - this is 2007, just go five years back.

JULIE: So five years ago is when this happened?

EISA: Yea, five years ago. It's 2001, six years actually.

JULIE: So about six years ago. So then, they arrested you and - what was the political things that you were talking about that caused them - was it just because you were a part of that group, or was there something...What, specifically, were you doing that they did not like? Was it just because you were a part of the group and you were talking about these issues, or was there something that you actually - that they said you did wrong? In their, in their mind.

EISA: Well, in their mind is like - one of the, one of the issues which we discussed, and I still remember it, we discuss about the civil war which was taken in southern Sudan. And, in this group, or in that group, there were so many different students who came from different part of Sudan. We had some of them came from southern Sudan, and, and eastern Sudan and, especially, western Sudan. We discuss this kind of issue, which is about - clearly about politics, and some people, of course, when you discuss kind of these issues, people talk [unintelligible]

that the government did something bad, and why did they kill these people and so forth and so forth. And then, uh - and then we, in both of these issues, because we, we accuse the government -

JULIE: You accused the government of being wrong?

EISA: Yea. Of course.

JULIE: I, I understand that. And someone told them, or they knew you were being active or - you know, because you were grouping together, and then they found out and arrested you?

EISA: Well, you know, you don't know what kind of - I mean, they secretly, they know what is going on. I mean, they are always there, they are among us, everywhere. They are among us, they came there and you don't know them, but they know you. So, whatever you are talking about they just record it and one day they will arrest you. They know what you are doing, I mean, when you are doing it.

JULIE: So, um -

EISA: Because many - my friend, now he's in Canada, he's [unintelligible], he used to be with me. I like, my two friends that are in Canada who are in the same group. And uh, most of us, right now, we are not in Sudan. I mean, at that time, when I fled from Egypt, I found [unintelligible] in Egypt. He, he came before me. And there is another guy, his name's [unintelligible], he came after me. And, right now, our club is closed, totally closed down. They shut it down, the government.

JULIE: So, could you form the group because you guys are here in the United States now? Could you guys form the group and talk amongst each other here in the United States? And maybe be able to help people in your country?

EISA: Well, it's kind of that, it's kind of that, yea. We have a little organization, other Sudanese from Darfur, we have other organizations uh, in Virginia, uh - I believe it, in Texas, I believe it, in New York. But it's kind of like, what you know. I am working here, so it's very difficult for me to go there. Any places.

JULIE: Right. So, so when they released you from jail - do some people get killed for talking about things that you were talking about? I mean, what made them release you? Did our government step in and help you?

EISA: Well, if they want to release you, you have to sign something called, I don't know what you call it - it's a kind of agreement, the conditions. You have to sign on it, that mean like, you don't have to talk about that again and so forth. It's kind of like [unintelligible], you don't have freedom anymore, of speech, I mean. I can say. So, you don't have to talk about that topic. And then, there are some conditions which is, you don't have to repeat these kind of things, and you sign this paper, and they will release you. But after that I decided to stay there.

JULIE: Basically, what you're saying, I'm just gonna kind of repeat it -

EISA: Okay, repeat it.

JULIE: - is um, they make you sign contract stating that um -

EISA: Of course. It's a condition.

JULIE: - that you will not do [unintelligible], and if you do it again, there's gonna be great consequences.

EISA: Yea, great consequences, I'd say.

JULIE: And you know, at that point, that you're in fear. And because you were in fear, you then went, like - tried to escape from your country?

EISA: Yep.

JULIE: And went to Egypt?

EISA: Yea, I went to Egypt.

JULIE: How did you escape from your country? Can you explain that a little bit to me? I mean, did you contact friends, did you walk out -

EISA: Well, my friends - actually a friend of mine, I got a close friend, he prepared everything for me. He prepare my passport and everything. And, my brother helped me out, he give me some money. And, my friend, as I told you, he prepare me the passport and ticket and everything. And then I just went there from Khartoum to a place called [unintelligible]. I took the boat. And then I came to Egypt.

JULIE: Did you like it in Egypt? When you were in Egypt?

EISA: Well, Egypt is, somehow, is a little bit better than Sudan. But, it's still there, you know? Uh, when you are in Egypt you're still not safe, because there still, sometimes, the government still follow people. I remember some people, they [unintelligible] from Egypt also, because - I don't know, there is a kind of [unintelligible] government, they have something we don't know, sometimes the arrested people. But the best thing is when we knew we became eligible, mean when you get something, they call it blue card actually, which is like a combination of the United States - of, of United Nations, sorry - it's called blue card. When they give you this one, you'll be protected for awhile, until you travel from Egypt. I mean, I was in Egypt for three years. Uh, the bad things is when I arrive in Egypt you just go to United Nations, you registrate your names as refugees, okay? And then, at that time, you have to wait forever to do your interview. And then, after I do interview I was accepted, and after I was accepted, they give me a blue card. I

was sitting in [unintelligible] for three years while I'm waiting for my process. I went to [unintelligible] from there today and I teach English language as a second language. I did also some course in American university, it was very interesting because the [unintelligible] did give us some chances to do some courses, even. To know more about the English language. Uh, one of the course which I did and I still remember, is called Community Interpreters. I did this course for a year. There is another course also, which is given by, hmm, it's a kind of scholarship given by [unintelligible]. I did it in Egypt also, it's called Teaching English as a Second Language. Is for two months, that's kind of like, developing your skills in the English language.

JULIE: So then, what brought you to America?

EISA: What, what brought -

JULIE: Yea, 'cause you were in Egypt right?

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: And then, you came to America.

EISA: Mmhmm.. [Pause] I don't understand your question again.

JULIE: Mmkay.

EISA: [Unintelligible].

JULIE: Okay, so you left your country because of your job and because you were speaking out. And then you went to Egypt, correct?

EISA: Mmhmm.

JULIE: Okay, and so you went to Egypt. And then when you were in Egypt you came to America, United States?

EISA: Mmhmm.

JULIE: So, why did you not stay in Egypt? What made you decide to come to the United States?

EISA: Okay, actually, the United Nation is - in Egypt is, if I want to explain to you more, there are three countries or yea - three countries - I believe there are four. Let me count all of them: America and then Canada, Australia and Finland. There are four countries in Egypt they can resettle you. Yea. So, it depends on your [unintelligible] or your cases. They resettle people, I don't know, by cases, by whatever - but they resettle according to their cases. So, you apply for

United Nations and you have a case. It might be rejected, it might be accepted. *If* - if they believe that, according to the law of the United Nations, if they believe that you have a fear, you will never go back to your country, then you might be accepted. And then when you will be accepted, they tell you that a couple of months we will resettle you. So, the resettlement itself, you don't have anything on it. It is not by your choice, it is something done by the United Nations. So, when you - when I did my resettlement, it is not my choice. I don't have any choice to settle in America or Canada or Australia, no. Just, I did my interview of the resettlement, and the lady told me that, "Eisa, now I will resettle you in United States. What do you think?" I said, "I don't see, I don't - I don't deserve it." If I said, for example, "no", then I lose my chance. Whatever that - the worker of United Nations say, you resettle you to Canada or to America, then you have to say yes, okay? It is better for me, I will be protected, and so forth. So, she told me that, "Eisa, now we resettle you to United States. What do you think?" I said, "It's okay." And she said, she told me that, "Can you sign a paper?" I just sign a paper. So it's a matter of no choice, not by *you* - you selected, I am going to America, no!

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: 'Cause the United Nations resettlement, as you know - most of the refugees came to America. The American is taken the parades of the refugees from the United Nations. I mean, for example, if they resettled one hundred to Canada, to America they resettled two thousand. And if you say, "I don't like America", they say "Okay, stay." They don't care. And I don't want to stay there, because I know if I came to America I can be able to educate myself, I can build - I mean, even when I came to [unintelligible], the guy asked me, "Eisa, I know yourself, I know you are very educated," and so forth. "America, what are you going to do in America, if you go to America?" I told him, "Okay, I need a protection." And they don't understand, the guy doesn't mean this, he [unintelligible]. "You see, Eisa? We have Vietnamese, we have Mexican, they do a great job, they have restaurants." "Oh, I got you." This means, if you go to America, what are you going to add to American society? Are you going to be educated, are you - this is what he's saying. Because, when you bring people here, I mean, they have to add something to society, to be a good part. So, he thinks something which is, I still - [unintelligible] about being back to my country. I said, "I need protection." But he went further and explained to me that, no, "In America, we have this and we have that, and you can educate, you are free to do what you want." So I thought, okay I will educate myself then. And, that's the good part. I mean, they encourage you, if you come to America, they know that you can be educated, whatever you want, you can do. Because here, freedom is there, nobody will just arrest you, for example. I can give you - I can compare between here and in Egypt. In Egypt, even in Egypt you can be, everyday you can be asked by the police, "You, you still a threat?" Police, they can ask you without any reasons. And I remember, one day the police asked me, without any reasons, they asked me, "[Unintelligible], you came here to Egypt, you want to go to Australia, you want to go Canada, you want to go to America - why?" I can give you - I bring him my, I show him my document. "Hey guy, I work with the United Nations, I'm a refugee." He told me, "I can put you to jail." I guess here, you are free, you can think whatever you want. I know myself, now, I am protected. And he told me like this, and he said, "Okay, you're free." So in Egypt, you still asking by the police, we still a threat. But in America, nobody will ask you. If

you follow the rules, nobody ever ask you. Unless you do mistake - but there, without mistake, without anything, people just think that they are working with the government, they ask in the street. Many times, in Egypt itself they ask me three, four times in the street. 'Cause they stop you and ask you, " Hey, what are you doing in our country? Can you show me your I.D.?" "Okay, I will show you my I.D." And so forth. At the end, he just want to say, "Okay I can take you to jail." You know what, you can take me to jail, I know. And then when they say you are free, they say, "Okay go." [Unintelligible] They can stop you. But here, they can't stop you without reasons. If you stop me, give me a reason, why do you stop me? But there, they just stop you. That's the difference, I mean, between America and there. It's a big difference.

JULIE: So you feel safe now that you're in America?

EISA: You feel safe, that is one of the questions.

JULIE: Okay. So, um, can you tell me a little bit about your family that you left behind there? Do you have a wife, or children?

EISA: Well, I miss my family, actually. Actually, I miss my family. Concerning marriage, until now I wasn't married. I am not married, but I talk to my, my - yes, last week I, I called my family and I talked to my mom and she told me that, "Eisa, I don't care. Whoever you want to marry, from America, wherever - it's free, it is your life. I don't care." So, I, I mess up sometimes, from time to time I call them, I just - they feel very, I don't know, they feel - they miss me. I miss them also, but it is better them to be there, because I help them. Sometimes I send them money. They're okay, when they need something I help them. And, I help them out, so they still, from time - when I call, they're worried about me. They ask me, "Eisa, you are in strange country..." So, I just tell them, "Hey, I'm okay. I don't have any problem. People are nice, no problem. We are living in many - we have many Sudanese, and Lincoln is nice. I don't have any problems here."

JULIE: So they - so your parents have a phone in their home?

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: They have electricity...

EISA: I have - my brother help with the cell phone, no problem. I can call them from time to time.

JULIE: So, like, where your family is right now, are they scared for their lives, because of fighting in the country?

EISA: Well, yes, they were scared, but they moved from that area. I mean, they used to be in Darfur, the region of the war itself. But now, they moved . I mean, my, my, my parents - except my father is still there - but my mother, my mom, or my mother and my sisters, and my brothers, they moved from the war. Now they are living in Khartoum. They tell me what's

going on, *every* day. Like last time, when I called my mom, she told me, “Eisa, our life is terrible now. People have been killed and you know, the place is very bad. Now, killing *everywhere!*” So, she is scared because many people have been killed. I mean - and you know I told you before, Darfur is getting very bad right now. So, they moved like two years ago, now they are in Khartoum. They’re okay, but I don’t know - to be honest with you, I don’t know what’s happened with my father right now. I don’t know where is he right now. Is he okay? Or is still alive? I’m not sure. I’m not sure.

JULIE: ‘Cause he doesn’t have a phone for you to be able to...

EISA: I haven’t called him since I came to America. I call, I only call my brother, my sisters, my mother. That’s all. But he didn’t have a call, and in our area there, it is very difficult to call, even from here. As you know, there is no line. I mean, there is no -

JULIE: Phones.

EISA: Yea, there is no phone to call.

JULIE: So it’s hard to know if somebody is okay in the country?

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: Because it’s not like everybody has a phone in their home, where he’s at right now. There’s no phone? I mean, there’s phones but not necessarily where he lives. Does he live in a village?

EISA: There is a phone, but, but he doesn’t have phone, actually. He doesn’t have phone. And you know, the life of liberty is just still difficult. So, it’s very difficult for me to reach him. Even if he had a phone, it is very difficult. Last time I tried to call the place, it’s [unintelligible], I mean the place where I was born, it is difficult to call there. Unless he is in Khartoum. Or let’s say in [unintelligible]. [Unintelligible] is a big town, actually. The [unintelligible] of Darfur. Of the north from Darfur is very big. If somebody’s in [unintelligible] you can contact him, but otherwise, very difficult to contact him.

JULIE: So your parents are not together then?

EISA: No, not together.

JULIE: They’re divorced?

EISA: Uh, yea. They divorced.

JULIE: Divorce - is that very common in your country?

EISA: Divorce is not common. Divorce is uh, it's um, not very common. And it is, it is a bad choice - it's difficult. It's a bad choice, actually. For example, for me, it was happened long time ago, it was in 1973, they were divorced.

JULIE: Okay. Did they divorce for political reasons? Or...And like, since you're Muslim, are they allowed to have more than one wife?

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: If they want to? Does your - did your dad have more than one wife?

EISA: My dad had more than one wife, yea, that's true.

JULIE: He did have more than one wife?

EISA: Yea, but I have a step-mother, but even my step-mother, she passed away last year [unintelligible].

JULIE: So your dad only had two wives?

EISA: No, now he hasn't had another one.

JULIE: He has no wives.

EISA: No.

JULIE: Okay. But, like since you are Muslim, because of your religion, you can have more than one wife? Is that very common in your country?

EISA: Well, it is permissible to have, but if you are afford to be able to raise your kids and so forth, it's okay. But it is really, I mean, if I tell you very basically - in our village, we have only one, two, three - three person only married twice. I mean, it's really - it's not *everywhere*, every place, no. It is rare. In one village you might find three person or four person married twice, but not...

JULIE: So you have to have lots of money to have lots of wives?

EISA: Yep. If you have - if you are able to feed your kids, you might have two wives. But if you are not able to feed them, then [unintelligible].

JULIE: And, are the women okay with that? They, they don't care that their husband has more than one wife over there?

EISA: Well, sometimes it make problem. That's true, sometimes it make problem!

JULIE: [Laughs].

EISA: Sometimes it make problem, yea.

JULIE: Can you tell me a little bit about um, coming to Lincoln? Like, what it was like for you to come to Lincoln? Is this the first place you came to when you came to America?

EISA: Well, uh, yes. It's not the first place, I came through Miami, actually. But -

JULIE: Through where?

EISA: Miami.

JULIE: Miami. Okay.

EISA: Florida. I didn't spend - uh, I spent only one day. Uh, actually, we supposed to come - most of the people, they came through Yemen to New York, and then they spread them out here in America. But, for us, we came through Yemen and then Miami, and from Miami to Chicago and then Lincoln. Well, before I came to Lincoln - I got a friend, he's living here in Lincoln for six years. And, I called him and uh, I told him that I want to come to United States and I need to write your address to [unintelligible]. He told me it's okay, no problem, you can write my address and give it to the I.M., which is international organization for immigration in Cairo. You can give them my address, my form and everything, and then - it helps, actually, it was helping because my process became very possible. I give them his name and his form and address, and then I.M. told me, "Oh, you get a response there." They send me everything, insurance, security clearance - very quickly. If you have a person in America, your process is going to be very fast. If you don't have it, your process is going to be longer. Maybe one year, because you don't have person. Then, the agency, they have to look and find a place for you to relocate you. Then, it takes time. But for me, my process became very easy. I give them his name and address, and they just told me that, "Eisa, your security clearance is okay, your response is okay. So now, you're gonna leave to America." And, I think, I believe it was six - 2004. September 2004, yea, sixth September 2004, we left Cairo.

JULIE: So did you um, were you at any refugee camps? Did you ever live in a refugee camp?

EISA: No, we are not in refugee camps. Actually, actually we don't live in refugee camps. One of the policy of the Egyptians, they don't like refugee camps because the United Nations told them, "Hey guys, we need to build refugee camps." They said, "No! We don't like to put up refugees." And it was a very good because they integrate the refugees with the uh, with the people. I mean, with the Egyptian people. So, and they, they don't like actually, to do that. We are in the - we live in Cairo, we rent house, we rent apartment. We don't have any problems, we - you can rent.

JULIE: So did uh, the United Nations or the United States, did anybody help you with money? You know, 'cause you were leaving your country, did people help you?

EISA: Okay, that's a good questions. This is also done by organization called uh, is it, International - yea, I'm not sure about the name, but it was a very well organization. This organization, the purpose of this organization, they just send ticket for the refugees. It's like seven hundred dollars. Uh, seven hundred or eight hundred dollars. Wherever you go. They send you a ticket, as a loan, and you can come to America. Later on, you can pay back to them. And, you can pay maybe fifty dollar payments, they don't care. You can just pay them little by little until you finish your [unintelligible]. So it was a big organization help these refugees, and they work with the United Nations.

JULIE: So when you came to the United States, like how much money did you have with you? Did you have any money of your own? To live on.

EISA: Well, it was very organized, actually. You know, the refugees - it's, it's, as you know, the refugees, it's not like they organize everything for you. For example, as I said, there is a organization in Egypt called [unintelligible] also. The [unintelligible] care also about the refugees who are leaving Egypt, if they need help like shelter. They give them money if they need a shelter or something like that. And, other help also like charities. Charities also helps, [unintelligible]. If they want to come to America, there are other agencies which is related to religion, like Lutheran or Catholic. This also their response. When you came to America, they, they tried to give you like, caseworker, and they help you until you get a job. For four months. For four months, which is one year - one, one hundred twenty days. They resettle you, they rent you a house or apartment, until you get a job. When you get a job, then they say, "Okay, now you got a job, now you can depend on yourself." So the refugees very organized. Every step is organized.

JULIE: So what happens - what happens if, after four months, you don't have a job? Will they still help you, or are they just like, "Four months, you're done."

EISA: They will tell you, actually. They will tell you before four months, they will tell you, for example, "Eisa, now you have three months, so you have to find a job because after three months, we are not gonna help you." So, you have to find a way. I don't think that you stay longer. People, two months they work, they don't want to stay longer. Because, they want to help themselves and be able to pay their rent and so forth. To be integrated. Within two months, they get a job - three months, you get a job.

JULIE: So -

EISA: And they will help you to get a job, actually.

JULIE: So within four months, you're totally self-sufficient?

EISA: Yea, if you get a job.

JULIE: Wow. That's awesome, very good.

EISA: You get a job, you work, then - if, if you get a job, you work, then some friends they might give you a ride until you know how to drive and so forth. And when you get a - when you know how to drive you can buy your own car and so forth. You can be dependable on yourself.

JULIE: Were you scared coming here? To the United States?

EISA: No. I wasn't scared, no.

JULIE: Were you ever scared that there was nobody to help you, like if you didn't have a job? Were you scared about that? That you wouldn't make it? 'Cause four months isn't very long, to come to a new country with new people, not knowing - only knowing one person.

EISA: Well, let me tell you something. The best thing is that, while I was working in Egypt, I have a lot of friends, American friends. They give me a background about America. I mean, even the culture. I knew a little bit about the culture, I'm not very good about the culture, but I knew - for example, if somebody invites you in America, you have to give something. It was happened to - to Egypt. You have different people, they come from different countries. But most of my friends from America. Even my boss, she's from California. And my coordinator, he's from Michigan. So, I mean - most of my life, I spend with them. Even I was very lucky, because my friend has got a girlfriend actually, himself. She's American. I went to her house, I spent all my time, and he told me, he said, "If you go to America, you don't have problem. You have the language, you don't have problem." The most important part, if you don't know how to speak English, that's a big barrier, when you have the languages. And I stayed with her, and even I told her, "Can you teach me English?" She said, "No, I don't teach you English. You know how to speak." I teach her Arabic. Now she speak Arabic well. She knows how to speak Arabic. And now they get married and now they came too, and he brought my friend. Now they are in California, and my friend now, they are studying in - actually, they studied in New York. She's doing her PhD, actually. She's very educated, you know, and she's very nice. She is from California, and she was nice because she know how to deal with the Sudanese. She go to their houses, she go to any community, and she know all the Sudanese people. How did they leave, how is their culture, that sort of things. And she teach me a lot about America, before I came here. She told me, "Eisa, before you go to America, you have to know how to drive." And when I came here, I found out she's true. She told me, "Before you go, you know how to drive. Because in America, you must know how to drive." And she told me that, and we are very lucky because we have computers, we have um, many people who come from different countries. Most of them from here and from America, from Canada, from Australia. They came and help us, I mean, help us out. If we need something to - if you need English languages or...they just kind of volunteers in our [unintelligible]. They help out there.

JULIE: So, like you were telling me like, earlier about like, some of the charities, like the Lutheran, which would be the churches here - um, do they try to switch you over from being Moslim - Muslim? I may have pronounced it wrong.

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: To, to their religion? Do they try to trans -

EISA: No, no.

JULIE: They, they accept - they accept your religion and don't try to change it.

EISA: No. No.

JULIE: That's good.

EISA: Nobody - nobody want to. They don't do that, no. They don't ask you to do anything.

JULIE: Now - they don't try to teach you their way? Or they do try to teach you their way?

EISA: They can tell, but they don't teach you or they don't force you, but they can tell you. Because, actually you have a lot of friends, uh - we have some friends who are Christians and - I don't know, you know, the culture - Sudanese are, they don't care if you are Muslim or Christian, we live together, we eat together. We don't have any problems, actually. You might have one family, they have mixed Christians and Muslims together. You don't have problem.

JULIE: That's good. So, um, in your country, like religious-wise, is it mostly Christian and Muslim? Would you say predominantly, are those the two religions there?

EISA: Well, actually the predominant religion, if you just, if I - like for example, north Sudan and west Sudan, Sudan is four parts, I can - and we have a [unintelligible]. We have like, just let's say 75 to 80 percent are Muslims, we have Christian who live in the southern Sudan. The rest of the others. We have a very few people who live in the north Sudan, that are Christian also. We call them, like uh, [unintelligible] who came from Egypt, we call them gyp - Gypsy? Gypsy, you know Gypsy?

JULIE: Gypsy?

EISA: Yea. It's a kind of uh, [unintelligible], it's kind of - it, it's not orthodox? Yea, orthodox, or something like that, in Egypt.

JULIE: Hmm, I'm not familiar with it.

EISA: Yea, it's a part of Christian, they have a lot of churches in Khartoum.

JULIE: Hmm. I'm not real sure of what that is.

EISA: Uh, actually it's Egyptian, we call them, I think they are Orthodox.

JULIE: Orthodox?

EISA: Yea, Orthodox.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: Orthodox, yea.

JULIE: In your country, did they try to force you - isn't that what some of the fighting is over, in your country? In Sudan, about people being - some people being Christian, some people being Muslim? Or is it more against like, Arabic people versus...

EISA: Well, I, I can say fighting itself is much more politics than religious. But this is [unintelligible] 1989, the politicize things. They said, they just want to mix up things, I mean. They want - why did they make it like that? Because they want to, I don't know, to brainstorming or something, like other people, doing [unintelligible] fighting against others. Let me tell you the exact uh, you know, the exact - I mean, the ideas about this fighting, I mean. Fighting itself, it's not just for the religious purpose, no. It's a politics more than religious. Because people, they want to get their rights and to get their rights, I mean, if you are [unintelligible] they are involving with Muslims among them. So, now, now the fighting is over. In the southern Sudan the fighting is over because they sign peace and everything. But in western it's still going on. The fight is still going on. Why? Let's say that, if we don't - look at me! If we said this kind of fighting is not - it's religious, the western are Muslim, those are Muslim. So why do they fight then? The question is here. So it's more politics than religious. The same people, that they fight those people because they don't have their rights. So, it is more politics than religious.

JULIE: Okay, so like, you're saying it's politics - so give me an example. Okay, so it's not over the religion, so what are they - what, what does one person want that the other person - what are they fighting over? What would be the reason? I know you're saying politics -

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: But what does that mean? I know what politics means, but like, let's say one person has an apple, one person has an orange, and they want the other person's - what, what is the fight over?

EISA: You mean, which one? The, the fighting, or?

JULIE: Like, you were saying like, for example um, both of them are Christians, or most of them are Muslims -

EISA: Yea.

JULIE: So what are they fighting for?

EISA: Okay.

JULIE: You say politics, so what is the political thing that they are fighting over?

EISA: They want to get their rights, for example, like now - if you just think about the western Sudan.

JULIE: About their land? They want their land?

EISA: Not only land. Not only land. They, they thought that they don't have a good development. I mean, if you come to the north -

JULIE: Uh-huh.

EISA: Okay, the southern is the same thing. They fight before because they don't have the same development. They don't share the resources of the Sudan. They are not equal. They feel themselves that we are minimizing them. They are not sharing them in everything.

JULIE: They don't share together?

EISA: Yea. So, they need their rights. And now they get it. [Unintelligible] But our western, they still fighting because they want to get the same things. They want to share the resources, they want to share the government, they want to share *everything*, they want to get the development. They want to develop places and so forth. So, now they still fighting, that's the reason why they fight. They want - they fight, they want to get equality. Equality in everything. In the development, in terms of politics, whatever. They want to be together.

JULIE: So they really want to be, they want to be one, and one person doesn't want them to be one?

EISA: Exactly.

JULIE: And they can't like, let's say, if I lived over here and this person lives over here, I couldn't just move over there and be a part of this? They would not allow me to do that, there? Like, in the United States, if I live in Lincoln, I can move to California. But, they would not allow me to move and be a part of that?

EISA: Well, in other words. I will put it in other words.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: You will be well-educated, okay? You graduate from university, wherever.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: Okay. The United States is different because it's a country very different, because here democracy or whatever - but the system very different, because we have what you call a dominant - I would say a dominant minority of the people who dominate everything by themselves. The resources, whatever. A dominant people, they want to dominate land forever. I mean, this land they want it dominated since 1956. They still dominate the land, and they think that they are superior, and others are inferior. You understand?

JULIE: Right, okay.

EISA: So those dominant people, they want to stay there, and even if you became well-educated, you would never reach that point.

JULIE: Really?

EISA: Whatever you do in the life, you see that you still are dominant - you still, you have to, you have to follow - not to be followed.

JULIE: So, the people that live up here, let's say - do they look different?

EISA: To put you in another way, that they - they don't like you to share everything. They want - they don't like you to share everything in the government. Let's say -

JULIE: Can you tell a difference between someone? Like, like in the United States you can tell people, like different races.

EISA: Yea. I can see that, I can see the races but I don't see any kind of racism there. Because, they have the same color. The problem is here, I don't know, they think that -

JULIE: So how do they know who's who? How do they know if I live here or you live there?

EISA: Okay let me, let me explain to you more, more clearly.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: People who live in this house -

JULIE: Right.

EISA: They're looks more African, looks more African, okay?

JULIE: Darker skin?

EISA: Okay. In western Sudan, they are looks more African.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: Okay? Those who claim they are, in north Sudan - people claim that they are, but they are not. But they claim. The clan or [unintelligible] came from our countries and they still believe that they are Arab. They are not Arab but they still believe that they are Arab, okay? Well, those who are dominating the country, I mean, who are [unintelligible] Sudan, if you hear them, they don't - those who are more African, to share them. They must be, you know, [unintelligible]. You can say the [unintelligible]. They don't want them to be like them, I mean. In everything I mean, in everything. In their sources, in the government, in everything. Now people, they are fighting because they want to get their rights. You understand.

JULIE: Kind of, yes. But does part of it have to do with like, AIDS and stuff? In the country?

EISA: The eight?

JULIE: AIDS? AIDS?

EISA: Yea, A-I-D-S?

JULIE: Uh-huh. 'Cause like, a lot of people - like in Sudan, it's like, very very high with AIDS?

EISA: Mmhmm.

JULIE: The disease that people are dying of?

EISA: Well, it's a lot of things to do, actually, with those kind of - with the Sudanese government. It's a, it's a very difficult. I'm not a good politician!

JULIE: [Laughs].

EISA: But, I can put it simply. People they fight, they want to get their rights in politics. They want to share the government. They want to give them their rights. They want, for example, their resources go back to them and develop their places. They need health, they need uh - yea, they need health, they need schools, they need - this is what they need, in their places, I mean.

JULIE: And they want to help them do that?

EISA: Uh-huh.

JULIE: And they're saying no?

EISA: They need that to be helped. And they - I mean, any kind of development. That why those southern [unintelligible], they fight twenty-three years. And now they come to conclusion, and they sign a peace, which is - I believe it, before - I don't know how long this take, but they signed it. Already they signed the peace.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: And, this peace, everything is there. I mean, this peace include everything, it include resources, include the division of the resources, include the division of everything. How they're going to develop this place and so forth. The same thing happened to us in Sudan right now. They want also the same things: their country to be developed, I mean the southern Sudan, which is Darfur region, must be developed. As always, they must share everything with the government. I mean, like resources, whatever. In, in Darfur for example, you have a lot of animals and other resources. But, we don't have any benefit from those resources. This is one of the examples. I mean, all these animals come to the north and we get nothing.

JULIE: Okay.

EISA: So we need development. We need our place to be developed like any other place in Sudan. We need airplanes, you need everything, I mean, in development. So, I can give you another example.

JULIE: They don't want to help them develop, they just want to forget about them.

EISA: Yea. And now genocide take place - not only this, they want to kill them, they want to, I don't know - they want to...go back to [unintelligible], find out if they want to kill them all, they want to genocide them.

JULIE: Yea, why do they want to um, why do they cut off, like the men - they cut, and then they rape their women. You know what I'm saying? Are they - why do they do that over there? I don't understand.

EISA: Why do they do this? Well -

JULIE: So they can't reproduce, are they trying to make 'em so they don't reproduce? Anymore children?

EISA: Mmm, raping is another issue. Raping is like, I don't know, but kind of - this stuff is kind of...

JULIE: But like men, like the men - they take off their, um...

EISA: Yea, I know your point. I know it. Uh, rape is, it's a kind of - it's kind of like, when you do this person - how can I put it the right way? I say it's like, kind of irrespectable, misbehavior or demeanor, however you say it. It's a kind of criminal, I mean. And the criminal [unintelligible] is very, very bad. I mean, [unintelligible], am I right?

JULIE: Yes.

EISA: That was bad, it was bad. And I hope that this thing's going to finish very quickly, but I don't know how long it will take. I mean, it was terrible. If you go to internet, you see how many people died. Like, 400,000 people died. Most of the people now in charge, 200,000 in charge for, because of before. You can say this is a civil war, it's kind of. But I don't believe in a civil war. Because, you can't name it that. Can you name it civil war? I don't know. You can [unintelligible].

JULIE: Can I name them?

EISA: You can name a civil war?

JULIE: They called it a civil war.

EISA: It can be. Because, those people are - people are [unintelligible] this kind of thing. And anyway, I hope that this thing's gonna finish later - soon, I mean. 'Cause, still terrible. If you read internet, it's still terrible.

JULIE: As you look back um, what do you think about leaving your country you were born in and coming to the United States? Um, are there any recommendations that you would give others, coming behind you? And what do you want your children to learn from where you came from?

EISA: Okay. Well, first of all, the recommendations for the others to come to the United States. I would say uh, this place is safe, for those who are refugees following me. And, opportunities here. If they want to educate themself, they can be educated. And if you need - if they need to get a job, they can get a job. They can help their family, they can be a part of this society, they can be a good part of this society. Um, my recommendation is just, they have to plan well. And they have to, even if they don't know English, they have to start learning themself before they come to this country, because they will help, for themself I mean. Language is a key, if they know English languages they will be able to, to improve more and more and they educate themself and be a part of this good society. I mean - and they can add more to this society. When they will be very educated. For my kids, I will just remind them that - what I have done in

my life, and what suffering, what, what was - what I faced, I was facing in my life, suffering and so forth. And this can be for me a lesson, I mean, from my kids I will just teach them to be educated, to be a good person, to behave well. I mean - and uh, to be [unintelligible]. They have also to plan well, maybe they want to [unintelligible]. If they go further, if they want to go further and they want to be a good part of society, I mean, I have to teach them the good things. And, I will be an example, I mean, for my kids, to be a good person. Not to be a bad person.

JULIE: Is there anything else that you'd like to share?

EISA: Well, I think uh, I don't have anything to share, but, but there is something which is confusing you, I don't think I'm - I'm not [unintelligible] about that point. It's not my part, actually, politics. I don't like it actually. [Laughs]

JULIE: That's okay.

EISA: Do you have any other questions to ask me?

JULIE: No, I just want to thank you very much for your time, and for sharing this with us.

EISA: Mmhmm. Thank you very much.

JULIE: Thank you.