

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL**

**ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF LOWELL, MA:
MAKING, REMAKING, AND REMAKING AGAIN**

**INFORMANT: RITA OFORI-FRIMPONG [AFRICA - GHANA]
INTERVIEWERS: SUSAN THOMSON AND CHRISTOPH STROBEL
DATE: NOVEMBER 8, 2007**

**S = SUSAN
R = RITA
C = CHRISTOPH**

Tape 07.05

S: So Rita, if you could just state your full name, and what your address is in Lowell, and the country you're from.

R: My name is Rita Ofori-Frimpong, from Ghana, West Africa. Right now I live at Meadowview Drive in Lowell. The reason why I migrated here was because I had the opportunity to come here with a DV visa so that I could eventually become a citizen here.

S: Oh, what is a DV visa?

R: It's a diversity visa, and it's a lottery, and if you put it in, if you're lucky, you're selected.

C: And that leads to a green card?

R: Yes, from the Dept. of State.

S: That's good. And is there any particular reason why you wanted to do that, why you thought it would be a good idea to come?

R: Yes. As a matter of fact I was in college at the time, and all the colleges in the country had gone on strike, so we were just home. So I took the opportunity to come here to further my education.

S: And how did your family react when you told them you wanted to do that?

R: My father didn't want me to come, because he thought when I get to America, I'm not going to go to school. But my mother was excited. And so when I got here, I enrolled in school, but it's taken me so long to complete, that they've given up on me!

S: And when was that, when did you first come?

R: I first came here in 1995, Oct. 4th.

S: So you've been here about 12 years now. And, what did you expect it would be like here, in the United States, before you came?

R: As a matter of fact, I had no idea! I had just heard of America, and I didn't do any research, but I had an auntie who was in New York. So I just knew it was going to be a good place.

S: Did you think, do people in your hometown have any particular idea...

R: The only thing that I remember, is that my auntie, when she came, she bought a lot a goods, and clothes, and I was well into that...

S: So, you came by plane obviously, and where did you arrive?

R: New York. At Kennedy airport.

S: And did your aunt meet you there?

R: Yes.

S: What was that like? Did you stay with her for awhile?

R: I stayed with my aunt for probably about six months, and then I moved to Lowell, to be with an uncle here.

S: So you came here because there was an uncle who was already here?

R: Yes, I came to visit one Christmas, I came here in October and within two months it was Christmas. So I came here to visit my uncle and I liked the way the city is, very calm, not busy like New York, so I decided to live here.

S: What were your impressions of New York City when you first arrived?

R: I was told that you couldn't talk to strangers. It was very busy, and there was a lot of crime. I was scared for my life!

S: It's a huge place, a lot going on. So when you came to Lowell, where have you lived? Where are the various places you have lived in Lowell?

R: When I first came I lived at, my uncle used to live at University Ave. So I stayed with him for probably about 5 months. And then I moved on my own to Washington Street, and then I moved to Riverplace Towers where I stayed for 7 years, and then I recently got my own place, on Meadowview Drive.

S: Would you say that your experiences living in the city were different depending on where you were living?

R: It didn't really matter much.

S: Were there some places you liked better than others?

R: I think so, I think so.

S: Was that because of their location, or the neighborhood...

R: Maybe because of the neighborhood, not really the location, but the neighborhood. Depending on who's living there and how it's perceived and all that.

S: And, do you think that eventually, do you have plans to go back to Ghana – well, the first question is, have you been back to Ghana since you've been here?

R: Yes, I've been going almost every two years. This is the longest that I've stayed without going, about 3 years, so I hope that I'll go next year.

S: And you have some family, some children who are back in Ghana...

R: Yes, both of my children and all of my family are back there.

S: What's it like when you go back?

R: It's like party-time.

S: You go around visiting everyone...

R: A lot of party food, everything.

S: How long do you stay?

R: I usually stay about 3-4 weeks, then I have to go back to work.

S: Do you think you might eventually go back to live in Ghana, once you finish your education here?

R: It all depends. Since my children were born here and they are American citizens, I may not be able to go to stay there permanently. And I want them to get a good start, what I didn't get I want them to get, so I want them to at least complete their education to a level that I'm satisfied with, and then I can decide if I want to go back and stay. But until then, I think I'm here.

S: Yes. And what is the name of the town, city, that you're from in Ghana?

R: I'm from Duayaw-Nkwanta. A long one.

S: Could you describe a bit about it, how big it is...

R: It's a city in the Brong-Ahafo area in Ghana, and has a population of about 3,000 people. It's well developed, because most of the people in the city are abroad. So the city has grown.

S: Most of the people in the city have gone out?

R: Most of them have traveled out. And we have, like in Lowell here, we have a very large population here.

S: Yes, that's what I found fascinating, you said that there are more people from your city in Lowell than any other place in the U.S. Do you have any idea why that is?

R: I think it probably could be because of relationships, how do I say, people have contacts with other people...

S: Like the way you came.

R: Yes, so like families, friends, and we all ended up here. Networking.

S: And do you think that most people come for education, like you did?

R: I think so.

S: And most of them are fairly young, in their twenties?

R: Yes. But those that are, like the pioneers who came, they were not in their twenties, but in their 40's – 50's.

S: So the ones that were in their 40s and 50s, why do you think they came?

R: I think they probably came for a better life for themselves and their children.

S: For economic reasons?

R: Yes.

S: And, we're jumping ahead a bit, but what kind of jobs do they get?

R: I think they're all over.

S: Okay. So perhaps we should explain, this interview is broken down into different topic areas. So we just talked about the process of migrating, and the next one we would like to know about is life in Lowell. So I was just wondering how you would describe the difference between your daily life in Lowell and your life back in Ghana?

R: One of the things I noticed, was that back in Ghana I didn't have a car. But I have a car here, so I can go anywhere that I want to go. Whereas, when I was in Ghana it was a little hard to move around, I would have to ask my dad to drop me somewhere.

S: Did you have a car when you first got here?

R: I think I got a car, probably about 4 months into being here.

S: In Lowell, there is some public transportation...

R: I didn't even know about it...

S: Oh, that's interesting.

R: I was paying a lot of money to taxis, and then after that I got a car. I spent so much on taxis. The bus is running around...

S: That's really interesting, yeah I think sometimes the LRTA, it's not as well publicized or the information about it is not that clear...

C: Or the service is pretty bad, there are no buses after six, and they are very unreliable.

R: Maybe nowadays it's going to more different places than before, say ten years ago?

C: It has expanded the service.

R: Because I didn't see it.

S: That's really interesting. So you mentioned that you've lived in many different parts of Lowell. In any of those places did you feel like you were part of a neighborhood, that there was a sense of belonging to a group, a community in a neighborhood?

R: I think I can talk about Riverplace here, we have a playground, we have a community room, so there was a lot of involvement.

S: You said that was the one that was like the UN?

R: Yes, United Nations!

S: So there were people from all over the world?

R: Yes.

S: That's the place you lived in the longest, right?

R: That's the place I lived the longest. And I know almost everyone there.

S: Do you still keep in touch with people from there?

R: Yes, I still go there. I have some friends there.

S: Would you say, is there any part of Lowell where most of your friends live? Are there certain parts where more of your friends live than other parts?

R: Thinking about it, no, I think they're all scattered across the city.

S: Would you say too that most of the people from Ghana are scattered, or are they in particular neighborhoods?

R: No, they're scattered all over the city.

S: Are there particular shops, or places that you go to in Lowell frequently...like where you buy groceries...do you buy things locally?

R: I do, I use almost every store. I go to almost every store, usually for little things, mostly within Lowell. And I chase cheap stuff all over!

S: Are there any particular stores that have things from Ghana, for example food?

R: Yes, Market Basket has a couple of food items that are very indigenous to Ghana, maybe the reason is because some people from some of the Spanish speaking countries eat about the same food that we eat – like plaintain, cassava, stuff like that, so you can find it at Market Basket. And sometimes at Shop and Save.

S: So you can get most of the food that you need.

R: Yes.

S: Do you cook mostly Ghanaian food?

R: Yes.

S: And so you find it pretty easy to get the ingredients that you need. What are some of the typical dishes?

R: Ummm, some of the typical dishes from Ghana, are probably Fufu. Fufu is made up of probably...

S: Some plaintains?

R: Plaintains, and maybe some yam...potato, what do you call it, potato flour.

S: And now that you have your own home, have you ever considered having a garden to grow your own traditional vegetables?

R: I don't know if they would do well here. I think I tried growing an eggplant, there is one that is very common in Africa, it is white – white and small. And I didn't grow it in time, so it didn't do well. It didn't come up until the bad weather had started setting in. But a friend of mine did grow some, and it was very good, she brought me some.

S: You probably have some space now. Do many of your friends grow things?

R: Those that have backyards, they do try to grow things.

Tomatoes, vegetables. The other crops don't do well here, because they're tropical.

S: Yes, it's hard to grow mangoes or something.

What about clothing or jewelry, are there any stores around here that you use? Or is it easier to just get it from Ghana yourself?

R: Yes, we have a lot of African markets here, and we also have some of the African markets owned by Ghanaians, so you can go in and find whatever you need in there.

S: Where are they located?

R: One is located off on Fletcher St. And then there's one on Bridge St.

S: That's useful. Now, perhaps we could talk a bit about jobs. Have you worked in Lowell most of the time you've been here?

R: I've worked both in Lowell, and in the neighborhoods around Lowell.

S: Maybe a bit later we'll talk more about the specific types of jobs. So the next area is about family, regarding intergenerational issues and overall quality of life, things of that type. So I was wondering if you could describe a bit about your family in terms of the

different people...thinking back to the anthropology class, the types of kinship studies we did...

R: I'm from a family of seven: five children, my mom and my dad. And everyone is in Ghana except me. And I also have two children, a boy and a girl, and they are both with my mom, who is helping me to raise them for awhile.

S: So she's taking care of them now.

R: Yes, and I'm hoping to bring them over soon.

S: And how old are they?

R: My daughter is 7 today. And my son is 6, or will be 6 next month.

S: And you talk with them really frequently...

R: I talk to them every day, just about, yes.

C: Do you use phone cards for that?

R: I do, I spend a lot of money on that.

C: I know, you don't want to use Verizon, because that's even more expensive, about a buck a minute.

R: Yes.

C: Do you buy those cards at the African store, or...

R: I do buy some at the African store or from the Spanish store. And also sometimes Shop and Save. Because they have other ones that aren't good...just a waste of money.

C: Okay.

R: You buy a phone card for \$5 and you get 2 minutes. And the real good ones, you pay \$2 and you get maybe 20-25 minutes. So it depends on which one you choose.

C: It certainly beats Verizon.

R: Yeah.

C: My sister-in-law lives in Senegal, so my wife calls her...so we're learning about the phone calls, too.

S: And your husband, were you married in Ghana?

R: Actually no, I met my husband here. I knew him from back home, from school. Not him personally, but some of his family members. So we met here. We went to the same college back in Ghana.

S: So it was a love marriage by your own choice.

R: Yes.

S: In Ghana, do they have arranged marriages?

R: They do, it depends on where you're from. Where I'm from they don't do that. But the Muslims, they do have that.

S: Okay. And what is your religious background?

R: My family are Roman Catholics. That's how I started. But currently, I'm going to a Pentecostal church.

S: That's right. And which one is it?

R: It's located at the Girls Inc. building.

C: Ah, okay, so those are Ghanaians.

R: It's really a good church.

C: No, that's not what I'm saying...but I've walked by...

R: No, but what I wanted to say is that we speak the Ghanaian language when we're in there.

C: Okay.

R: So you can't really invite people. Sometimes when we find out there are a lot of guests amongst us we speak in English, but we're kind of comfortable speaking the Ghanaian language. And that's why I was attracted to the church.

S: It's a nice opportunity to speak your language.

R: Yes.

C: Are people at the church mostly from your home town too, or is it more widely?

R: It's more widely. But the language that I speak is the most common in Ghana, and almost everyone can speak it. It's called Ashanti, it's very common.

S: Okay. And that's your ethnic background, too, Ashanti?

R: Yes.

S: And is the minister at the church Ghanaian too?

R: Yes, he's a Ghanaian. He's the presiding elder, he's not really an ordained minister.

S: And are services every Sunday?

R: Yes.

S: And, does the church have other community events, things that they do?

R: We're trying to get into things like that, at the very beginning grass roots level.

S: So are they thinking of any community service projects, or things to benefit people back in Ghana?

R: The overall bigger church – throughout New England – they are doing, but the little community here, we aren't doing, but are trying to get into something right now.

S: And how long has it been there? Is it relatively new?

R: Yes, we started off going to one in Boston, and then found out that there were a lot of us who were commuting down there, so we started one here.

S: That's good. What's the name of it?

R: Church of Pentecost.

S: About how many members?

R: Probably about 60.

S: Okay. So your family stays together by telephone calls, and trips back to Ghana...

R: Yes.

S: And you talked a bit about your children, that you hope they will get a good education, and then you will decide whether you live here or in Ghana. Now your parents, maybe you could talk a bit about your father and what he does...now he's still relatively young, so there's no concern about taking care of him...

R: Well, he's 60 years now.

S: Well, that can become another concern, if you're living here and then if your parents start to need help...

R: Well, he looks young for his age. And he's just started his retirement. He just retired from civil service, he was the CEO of the Dept. of Wildlife in Ghana.

S: And you said that he's done a lot of traveling, that he's come to Lowell a few times and liked it...

R: Yes. He liked it.

S: I was telling Christoph about his sister-city idea – I really hope we can get that moving. He seems to be someone who is very interested in civic exchanges...

R: Yes.

S: And what kind of work did he do as the Commissioner of Wildlife?

R: Dept of Wildlife, where they have protected areas in the country, protected animals, endangered species. So they have reserves all over the country.

S: So he was in charge of that. And your mother?

R: My mother had her own business. She is a trader. She owns her own store.

S: What does she sell?

R: First, she sold clothes, but now, more like provisions.

S: And they live now, are there other extended family members living with them?

R: Not right now.

S: It's mainly just them and your children?

R: Yes, in the capital city of Ghana, Accra.

S: So they're not living in the town.

R: They're not living in the town. But they have a house there, and they go almost every weekend. Everybody who dies there, they have to go.

S: Because they know everyone.

R: They know everyone.

C: How far away from Accra is it?

R: It's probably about, I can't tell, the roads are not that good, so you end up spending so much longer there...but it's probably not supposed to be that far.

C: And then if it's rainy season, it takes longer to travel...

R: Yes, my dad could have told you the exact mileage. But I don't know.

S: And so, right now, and this might be a difficult question, but if someone were to ask you "where is your home," what would you answer? Do you consider yourself more at home here in Lowell, or in Ghana?

R: Personally, I think my home is right here, because this is where I end up sleeping at night. But then, I also have all of my family and my extended family back home. But I really think that my home is here.

S: You've been here for quite awhile now, put down some roots....

R: Yeah, and when I need somewhere to sleep, that's where I go.

S: So you speak, obviously English, and also Ashanti. Any other languages?

R: There's a few of them that I can understand but I'm not very fluent in. I can understand Ga, and I was brought up in the northern part of Ghana, I can understand a little bit of Gonja.

S: Okay. And your kids are growing up bilingual, too?

R: Yes.

S: That's one of the things my son is complaining about, that he didn't learn to speak any Indian languages.

C: He'd be complaining anyway...

S: Yes, there always has to be something!

Okay, now in terms of economics, it sounds like in your situation, your parents are pretty self-supporting, or do you need to send money back home to them?

R: No. They are really self-supported. But if I do have some extra money, and want to be nice, but I don't have to.

S: They can take care of themselves.

R: And take care of my children, too.

S: Oh, that's nice. Would you say that within the Ghanaian community many people do send money back to support parents?

R: I think so.

S: Perhaps you could talk a bit more about the jobs you have had? What you would envision as your ideal job?

R: Mainly I've been working in human services. My current job is in human services. I worked in the nursing homes, in the assisted living settings, and also in the mental health sector.

S: And what were the names of some of the organizations?

R: I worked with Life Care Center of America in Billerica, and Eliot Community Human Services.

C: Were they affiliated with the Eliot Church?

R: No, I don't think so.

C: There are a lot of Ghanaians at the Eliot Church

R: Where is that?

C: It's up on the commons...

R: Appleton Street?

C: Yes.

R: Oh, okay.

C: Does your church interact with other churches at all?

R: Not that I know, but I know some of the people that go to that church.

C: So they're good people?

R: They're good people.

S: So, if you were to have your ideal job...you're hoping to go on in the bio-tech field eventually?

R: Yes, I studied bio-tech and am currently doing a job search. So hopefully I would like to get into research and development, that's my long-term goal.

S: And you did a...you were going to MCC and taking courses in bio-tech there, and I think you were doing that at UML too...

R: Yes. I got my certificate in biotech at MCC and my associates in liberal arts, and I'm hoping to go to UMass to do my bachelors in biotech.

S: It seems like such a good field to get into. There are a lot of jobs. And your husband, what types of jobs has he worked at?

R: My husband is working at a dental industry in Cambridge. His background is in real estate, and he also did some computers.

S: And has he been working there for awhile?

R: Yes, he's been there for awhile now.

S: And, if he were to have his ideal job...is he happy with that job, or is there something else he would like to get into eventually?

R: I couldn't answer that, I've never asked him.

S: Okay. Sounds like it must be going pretty well then!

We talked about religion a bit already. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the church? It seems like that's a focal part of the community.

R: Yes, I think the doors are always open for anyone who wants to come and worship. The only thing is, we start off by speaking the Ghanaian language. But that can be swapped into English at anytime. Depending on who is there.

S: It would be great to come and visit sometime.

R: Yes.

S: Even though we wouldn't understand it.

R: Once you're there, they would change the language into English.

S: I'd love to come.

R: You're very welcome.

S: What time is it?

R: It's usually from 9:00 to about 2:00. We have different things that we do. In the morning we do bible studies, where you go through the bible, and if there is anything that needs explanation. That is not part of the main church services, but is just something we do to help ourselves, to get into the spiritual. Then there are church services at 10:30, right after that, and then after that, we have something that we call socialization, where you can socialize a little bit and then you go home.

S: Is there food, too?

R: No, no food, unless there's a party. Sometimes people who are Christian they have children there, some have a party, then there will be food.

S: And it's at Girls Inc?

R: Yes.

S: Do you have an arrangement with them, that you have to pay rent?

R: I think they do pay rent to them. The building is owned by someone, I know we see him around, sometimes he wants to kick us out, because we stay too long.

S: Alright, what about leisure time, do you ever go on vacations, or travel around the US?

R: I've been to a couple of vacations around here. One, we went to Martha's Vineyard with some friends before I was married. And to New York, but other than that, I take all of my vacations back in Ghana.

S: And when your parents came, did both your parents come to visit?

R: The first time my mom came with my father, so we went to the local restaurants around here, and we also went to Nashua.

C: Are there good African restaurants in Lowell?

R: No. I think they started one, but it didn't survive.

S: Yes, there used to be the Mt. Kilimanjaro...

R: I don't think it's there. So no, they don't. And Ghanaians eat most anything. You should come to my house!

S: What other sorts of things would you do for recreation, in your leisure time, with friends.

R: It's like almost every weekend somebody is organizing something. The most popular thing I can think of would be probably a funeral. Anytime someone loses somebody back home, we also sit down here and celebrate their life and passage. And there are also birthdays, christenings, all different activities. Almost every weekend there is something.

S: And would you say that most of the people you hang out with are from Ghana?

R: I have friends from all over. From all over the world.

S: Are there any particular radio stations that are especially for the Ghanaian community?

R: No, but I know they do have a website.

S: For throughout the US, or is it mainly local?

R: We have one that is for throughout the US, and another that is mainly for New England. And most of the people are in Lowell here.

C: What's on the website – is there news reporting from Ghana, or local activities?

R: I can't answer, I don't even know the website. But I used to work with someone who was into that. But my husband goes to Ghana Web.

S: So do you think that people are pretty well connected within the Ghanaian community?

R: Yes, people are really connected, by every means.

S: Now we wanted to talk a bit about politics. Do you feel that immigrants in general in Lowell have a political voice? Do you consider yourself politically active at all in Lowell?

R: No.

C: Why is that – is it no time, no interest, you don't feel the city would welcome that?

R: Not really. I guess probably, I don't know my rights. So I should do some research and then take it from there.

S: Are you a citizen?

R: Yes.

S: Are you registered to vote?

R: No, I've never voted in my life, that's how bad I am.

S: Sometimes it's hard to find the information. They have voter drives, but if you don't happen to be in the right place at the right time...

R: And then I didn't start out in Ghana – my sister votes in Ghana, but I never voted in Ghana until I got here, it's like, oh well, how do I start.

S: Do you know any people from Ghana here that are politically active?

R: Yes. I think almost everyone is, maybe with the exception of me!
My husband just became a citizen just a year ago. So he's hoping to be voting. But for the city council, he couldn't, because he had to go to work. He works in Cambridge.

S: Do you think he would like to see more immigrants in the city council here, in Lowell?

R: Yes.

C: So even with the voting booth opening at 6, and going all the way until 8, he can't make that?

R: Maybe he could vote in the morning before he goes to work.

C: And again, sometimes it's not always actively advocated, but you can always check with city hall for voting information.

R: Okay. I think one of the reasons is that we probably don't know where to go.

C: They should be able to tell you that, and give you the information.

R: Okay.

S: Yes, we could try to get you information, I know the election is just over, but for next year.

R: We receive bills and stuff like that, but I really don't know what to do. I think I haven't been exercising my rights.

S: So do you think it's hard to find information like that?

R: I'm sure if you go to the city hall, you'll be able to find all the information, but I would have been comfortable, going to someone from my country, or someone who I know.

S: Do you think the African Assistance Center might help with that, I know we've talked a bit about Gordon, have you ever gone there for help?

R: No. I do everything on my own.

C: Well, that's good, that's how you get by in life.

R: I think I should be able to use services and rely on other people, but I do things on my own.

S: It's a good thing. But if you ever do need to turn to anyone for help, who do you go to?

R: It depends on what kind of help. If it's academic, I go to my school. I go to my doctor for medical.

S: It's true, there are so many types of help. But getting back to power...have you personally ever experienced any tension between ethnic groups in Lowell? In terms of, do you feel like it is a fairly open city, welcoming...

R: It is.

S: Or have you ever experienced any type of problem?

R: No, I haven't.

C: So no incidents of racism, just walking down the street, not even in Lowell, but in the U.S.?

R: Not really, I don't see anything. I try not to put anything like that in my head, I'm very open.

S: Well and I think Lowell, too, is such a diverse place, it is much more welcoming than some of the suburbs.

R: Yes.

S: And what about within the Ghanaian community here. Do people tend to get along pretty well, I know sometimes you can have real bifurcations within a group.

R: I think people do get along really well. But there are always a few people creating problems here and there. But other than that...

S: You still all hang together pretty well...

R: Yes, and people get over their differences really fast.

S: That's good. Now about health care. What do you typically do if you and your husband are sick – do you have health insurance...

R: Yes, I have health insurance through my husband. So I have a permanent care physician that I usually use, and the same with him.

S: And have you been pretty satisfied with the health care you've received?

R: Yes, I'm satisfied, the only thing is that when you need emergency care, you have to call and wait for an answer...that's about it.

S: Have you ever had to be hospitalized?

R: The only time was when I had my children.

S: Was that at Lowell General?

R: Lowell General.

S: And was that a good experience?

R: Wonderful, they were very good.

S: Are there any traditional Ghanaian customs that you do around childbirth, or any healing methods...

R: No, not really. The only time is when we have the naming ceremony, almost like christening. That's when it's a little different. We believe that everyone born has different names – we give the name the date you were born. So if you're born on a Tuesday, and you're a male, you're Kwabena...all the seven days, we have different names for that. So when a child is born, you have that name, depending on the date you were born.

And then we name you after, whoever, someone who you admire. Be it a friend or a family member. So you take that name. And then you have a Christian name, and you also take on your family name. So you probably end up with 5-7 names.

S: Oh, it's complicated.

R: Very complicated. But for the public, you end up using your Christian name and your surname, your last name. The other names are not often used.

S: So Rita is your Christian name?

R: Rita is my Christian name. And Ofori-Frimpong is my family name.

S: And with your kids, what were there names?

R: For my kids, we didn't give any of my kids Christian names, we wanted them to be called Ghanaians. So my son is Yaw Opoku and my daughter is Nana Akua. Nana is just a title, like prince or princess.

S: Okay. And is that, that's the title, and then they have a name that you refer to them as.

R: We named my daughter after my mother-in-law.

S: So is your family royal, in terms of the Ashanti tribe?

R: No, we do have a royal family in the Ashanti tribe, almost like the British royal family, and you have to be born into it. We are a separate lineage, I don't think I'm anywhere close to it!

S: But do members of one lineage stay together?

R: Yes, I get confused about this, I have to go ask my father. But I think we have 10 matrilineages.

S: I'll have to go read more about this...a lot of anthropologists have studied the Ashanti...

R: Yes, they used to be very powerful.

S: I'm sure there are a lot of books.

R: There is a guy on the travel show on TV, who is going to have a show on Ghana on Monday, at 10 PM.

S: Just one other question, are there any particular television shows that you like to watch?

R: Umm, I watch almost anything, but I normally watch a lot of gospel channels, home and garden, and CNN. I like travel channel, too.

S: Have you ever traveled to other countries besides Ghana and the US?

R: Actually, no. I've been to a border town in Ghana before where we crossed with my dad, but I can't remember it, I was so young.

S: So about education. I know that you've gone to Middlesex. Have you gone to any other colleges?

R: No. I applied for admission with UMass Lowell but I haven't started yet.

S: And overall, were you satisfied with your experience at Middlesex, or are there things you think need to be improved?

R: I was pretty much satisfied.

S: Alright, now about Lowell National Historical Park. Have you ever been to the Park?

R: I've never been there, but I'm interested in going, so one of these days I'll make a trip there.

S: Yes, actually we had discussed getting free passes for people who are interviewed, so we'll get that for you. It is really interesting, and is right down the road here...

R: Yes, right in the middle of the city...I have to work, two jobs, so every time there is something, I'm working.

C: I think that's an experience that a lot of people have.

R: It's not good though, I should know the city.

S: It's hard though, when you're so busy. Are there any particular exhibits that you would be interested in?

R: I know they have a lot of exhibits that I'm really interested in, because I have an arts background, and almost everything they're doing is in that direction that I'm interested in, but it's hard to find the time and it's hard to know exactly...I'm the type of person who has to know what I'm doing, I don't like to ask...maybe if I'm with you....

S: Well, I think that's something we could try to do, is find out what's going on and we could go there.

R: I would really enjoy that. I think my difficulty is asking people a lot of questions.

C: Do you feel that this is shaped, by having to come to a new country and take care of yourself, and that you're just in that mode, auto-pilot, that you're a stranger in a strange place and have to take care of yourself, so that now you may be just doing it because you've always done it that way?

R: I think probably what it is, was that when I first came here I was fairly young and have worked, never did anything, and when I came here I had to do everything on my own.

S: It's a lot to deal with all at once.

R: So I didn't develop a lot of character development, to the extent that I would like to. I'm always on the go and on the rush.

S: There might also be ways too, that things could be more available, more friendly...

C: For example, do you think if the Park would run an exhibition on the Africans in Lowell, might you check that out?

R: I know they do have this African Festival.

S: Have you ever been?

R: I work every Saturday, so I didn't get to go. So it's really not the city, I think it's my job.

C: Okay.

R: I work every Saturday.

S: It's true. Do you think if it were at a different time, say a Sunday afternoon, that it would be better?

R: Yes, right after church, yes.

S: So there's not really any other type of cultural festivals or events that you participate in here?

R: No

S: I think you've got a good reason!

R: I'm always left out.

C: How many people from your hometown live in Lowell, just approximately?

R: Maybe, I should know this. Probably about 8 people.

S: So, okay. If you were to say what your vision is for you and your family for your future – what dreams you have?

R: I would love to work for some pharmaceutical company, and maybe get into research and development.

S: And, in terms of for your children, what would you like to see them move into?

R: I would like them to do whatever they would like to do. I hope it would be something I would approve, but other than that, it's their choice.

S: And what about for the city of Lowell. If you could envision Lowell as the type of place that...it sounds like you're already pretty happy with it. But if it could just be the most ideal place to live, is there anything that you would dream about being here?

R: Maybe seeing the mayor outside greeting people.

S: Yes, that's right, we've had such a hard time contacting the mayor...

C: And he's not the mayor anymore, so...

S: That's right.

C: And also, the city council members are really busy, and the city doesn't have a real mayor, the mayor doesn't have much power. So maybe Bernie Lynch, the city manager, might be the person to talk to.

S: That's what we need to figure out, how we can approach them.

R: Back in my country, if people are in power, they're very available. Sometimes they could even...officials could pay a visit, and try to get personal. But here, it looks like they are far away somewhere that I don't know.

S: That's a really good point.

R: I think that's the nature of government in the U.S.

S: I think it depends on where you are. Certainly some politicians are very hands-on and try to go out and meet people. For example, at the school where I work, the governor's wife came out to tour the school and meet people. I think that's a wonderful dream, to have the mayor out and greeting people and really have a sense of presence.

R: Not really the mayor himself, but some other officials.

C: City council members.

S: Okay, is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you think we should know about living in Lowell and being an immigrant from Ghana?

R: No

S: Is there any question that you would like to ask us about this project?

R: I have a request, that I would like to do a sister-city relationship, especially with my hometown and Lowell. And I'm wondering how to go about this.

S: That's something that I really hope we can figure out. Maybe we should just try to make an appointment with some people at city hall. With Christoph, too, with your background in history, we could bring it together, with Middlesex and UMass Lowell. We should think about that.

S: Okay, just one other question, do you think, is there any one thing that you would want to change about your experience in Lowell?

R: Not really.

S: Any things that really did seem to go well?

R: I like the fact that you can always find a place to rent and stay, and probably mind your own business. I like that about the city. And you meet a lot of people along the way, I like that.

S: Great, thanks so much.