



African Immigrants Project

Interview transcription

Aklilu Senbeta

Interview date: February 1, 2001

Location of interview:

Country of origin: Ethiopia

Ethnic group/language group: Oromo

Religion: Muslim

Profession: Parking garage attendant in Center City

Level of education: Three years at Temple University

Location of residence in Philadelphia: West Philadelphia

Mr. Senbeta was resettled as a refugee in Philadelphia in 1982. He had fled Ethiopia shortly after high school, when youth who were involved in the opposition were being targeted by the military government. He walked to Sudan, and registered with the UNHCR. He spent three years in Sudan.

Mr. Senbeta was one of the founders of the Ethiopian Association, which was formed in 1985; he is now disassociated from it. He formed the Oromo Association in 1993, of which he used to be president.

Interview Transcription

Interviewer: Leigh Swigart (LS)

Interviewee: Aklilu Senbeta (AS)

[START SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

LS: Please give me your name.

AS: Aklilu Senbeta.

LS: And you are from what country?

AS: Ethiopia.

LS: And what is your ethnic group.

AS: Oromo.

LS: Oromo?

AS: Yes, O-r-o-m-o.

LS: And ---

AS: This is the second largest group in Africa.

LS: How many are Oromos there?

AS: In Ethiopia?

LS: Yes.

AS: Three quarters of the country is Oromo in Ethiopia. In entire Ethiopia, three quarters of the population is Oromo.

LS: What is the population of Ethiopia? I'm not sure.

AS: About fifty-two.

LS: So Oromo we're talking thirty-five million?

AS: Over thirty-five million.

LS: What is the largest ethnic group in Africa? Is it the Yoruba or something?

AS: It's around West Africa.

LS: I think it must be one of the Nigerian ones.

AS: Yeah, this is the second one.

LS: So it's the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia?

AS: Yeah.

LS: And what language do the Oromo speak? Is it also called Oromo?

AS: Yes, called Oromo. We call it Oromifa in our language, () Oromo.

LS: What is the relation of that language to Amharic or Tigrinya or another ---are they in the same family?

AS: Ah, no.

LS: So they're not mutually intelligible at all?

AS: No, completely different. If you take Tigrinya and Amharic, they almost interrelated but Oromo is completely different.

LS: What's the history of that group? Did they migrate from a different place or did the Amharas come into Ethiopia later? Are the Oromos sort of the indigenous group?

AS: () different kind of writing. Some people, they say they immigrated from Madagascar. Some people say from India but what I know is, the Oromo people before almost hundred years ago they were independent in their country. They had their own very democratic ruling system which they called “vedda”(?). They were established and they do the war, they ruled all over Ethiopia up to almost border of Eritrea.

LS: Did they have a monarchy or did they have a king or they ---

AS: That is why I said they are the one have the most democratic ruling system in Africa ---

LS: You mean they really had elected ---

AS: Yeah, it’s only for eight years. During your eight years you select young people. () after eight years they gonna to take over and the (), you stay until your death as advisor and their group took over, after eight years they give up the power and they become advisor.

LS: That sounds like the American system?

AS: Yeah. Have you heard about the Eritrean doctor who wrote about that --- “Gada”(?) --- the book.

LS: No.

AS: Really? It’s a very interesting if you read it.

LS: Oh, it sounds it. Later I’ll get the information from you. So, tell me, because my specialty is West Africa and not the Horn of Africa. When was the modern nation of Ethiopia formed?

AS: About hundred years ago. You know about the history of Italy, tried to colonize Ethiopia?

LS: Yes I knew that they ---

AS: During that time ---

LS: Went into World War II or something ---

AS: Yeah, yeah. After that, when the British help Ethiopia to drove out the Italy, it’s still the British, they stay, helping the Ethiopia, so when the military came to the power by the help of the British, they tried to make one Ethiopia, all the different kinds, at that time, they annexed the Oromo in the () ---

LS: And when was this? What year was this?

AS: I don’t know exactly, but I know over a hundred years ago.

LS: But it was still under colonial rule, right? Or it was never ruled like other ---

AS: Uhh, what the Oromo or whole Ethiopia?

LS: The whole of Ethiopia.

AS: No, never been in the colony. It's only tried by Italian. () within three, four, five years.

LS: So Ethiopia didn't go through a formal independence in the 1960s like almost all those other countries?

AS: It'd been independent.

LS: It had been independent.

AS: Yeah.

LS: Okay. So then the British kind of () different territories under the same political name, including the Oromo?

AS: Yeah.

LS: How did, then, the Amharic become dominant? How did that happen?

AS: Well, it was as I told you because they have never been under a colony, Ethiopia, the northern part area, excluding the Oromo, have been establishing diplomat with the Yiru(?). So when they tried to take all the surrounding and then make one Ethiopia, they had a good advice from the British, plus U.S.A., and then they became a powerful. Whenever there is a school established, has to be established in northern part. They have to go for schooling outside in Europe like British, French, and they become popular.

LS: Is Addis Ababa in traditionally Amharic territory?

AS: No, it Oromo.

LS: It's in Oromo?

AS: The Addis Ababa name itself is the (), which is Oromo name, just change it to Addis Ababa.

LS: Okay, I see.

AS: Whole province of the old province in the capital city is Oromo land.

LS: Okay. [Break in tape.] We can come back to the Oromo, because it's very interesting. But let me get some other information and then we'll come back to that. How long have you been in Philadelphia?

AS: I've been long, more than fifteen years.

LS: And did you come directly to Philadelphia or were you anywhere else before that?

AS: I came directly here.

LS: From Ethiopia?

AS: No, from Sudan.

LS: And how long were you in Sudan?

AS: Over three years.

LS: You live in West Philadelphia?

AS: Yeah, at all the time. [laughs]

LS: The whole time?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Well, it is sort of an Ethiopian section of the city.

AS: Yeah, that's true.

LS: And who do you live with?

AS: With my two kids, with my wife.

LS: How old are your children?

AS: Nine, ten.

LS: So they were born here?

AS: Yeah. [pause] They still Oromo.

LS: They're what?

AS: They are still an Oromo. [laughs]

LS: Do they speak Oromo?

AS: Yes.

LS: Excellent. Have they ever been back to Ethiopia?

AS: No, they never.

LS: Do you have other relatives around here or in the U.S.?

AS: Yes, I do.

LS: A lot?

AS: Not really a lot. I have a nephew here in Philadelphia. Another niece in Virginia. In Canada, too, I have another niece. Toronto.

LS: Yes, I hear that there are a lot of Ethiopians in Toronto.

AS: Yeah, that's true.

LS: Do you have other family members in other parts of the world outside of Ethiopia?

AS: Ah, no. Yes, yes, I do, in Kenya.

LS: In Kenya?

AS: Yeah, I have lot of relatives in Kenya.

LS: In Nairobi?

AS: Yeah, around Nairobi area. My () in Nairobi.

LS: And what is your occupation? What is your work here?

AS: Uhh, I really work for the parking garage. I manage for the night time, evening.

LS: It's in Center City?

AS: Yes.

LS: That used to be a very popular occupation, for not only for Ethiopians but a lot of African immigrants. How did you get into that? Why a parking garage?

AS: Well, whatever we do is whatever left over is ours. So, it's hard to compete for the other jobs. So, this kind of job, most people don't need it, so it's easy to get. It's easy to operate for us.

LS: Does your wife work too?

AS: Yes.

LS: And what does she do?

AS: She works for Villanova University.

LS: What does she do there?

AS: She work in admission office.

LS: My husband used to teach there.

AS: Oh!

LS: Oh, that's nice. But that's kind of long --- well, I guess she gets in the subway and goes to 69th Street and then goes up?

AS: Yeah. Oh, you know that area?

LS: Yeah, right now I live in Haverford Campus.

AS: Oh, really.

LS: So I take the same thing.

AS: You know what? When I used to be in Sudan, I used to work with a person from Philadelphia who graduated from Haverford College.

LS: Is that right?

AS: Yes, his name is Bruce. I still remember.

LS: And what was he doing in Sudan?

AS: He worked for World Food Program.

LS: Oh, interesting.

LS: I'm very interested in how you left Ethiopia and ended up here. But let's start --- you were born in what area of Ethiopia?

AS: In Western Ethiopia, at province called Walaka(?).

LS: And were you born in a city, in a small town?

AS: It's a very small town.

LS: A village?

AS: Yeah.

LS: What was your education like growing up? Did you go to school?

AS: Yes. I finished my high school there.

LS: So there was a high school in the town?

AS: No, I have to go to the other --- at least about five hours drive. Maybe gonna be less than an hour in this kind of highway we have here. [both laugh]

LS: Right, exactly. So it's really only about fifty miles, but there it took a long time ---

AS: It takes a long time to get there.

LS: Did you board in the school? You lived at the school?

AS: No, we just rent a house in a group of student. We live there in a group.

LS: And what was the language of instruction in high school?

AS: Amharic. We have to learn in Amharic. That must in Ethiopia at that time.

LS: And when was Amharic made the official language?

AS: Since the conquer of the Oromo land, over a hundred years ago, I think. Exactly, I don't know the year. Since then it's an official language. Any kids go in school has to learn Amharic. We don't have a right to speak the language in the campus of the school. It's a rule.

LS: Were you punished if you did it?

AS: Yeah.

LS: I've heard that in West Africa. Not between two West African languages, but between English or French and an African language. The children would be punished. They'd have to hold something or they'd have to wear it around their neck. It was called the symbol, so if the kid was speaking his own language, then the teacher would say, "You have to put this thing around your neck" until someone else made the same mistake and then they would transfer it. So it was sort of a mark of shame. [phone rings]

LS: Did English play a role at all in schools in Ethiopia?

AS: After to the seventh grade every subject will be in English. But the hard part for the Oromo is at all the time they go to school by their second language. Like (). When they go school they have to learn from the scratch Amharic. And then after seventh grade they go study English as a second language ---

LS: Yes, so it's your third language.

AS: Yeah. At all the time, it's a tough time. For all of them, the other tribe.

LS: So the first day you walk into school, they just start speaking Amharic as if you already know it?

AS: Yes.

LS: What about in your village? Was your village all Oromo or did you ---

AS: Almost. A few number of Amharic, but even the Amharic there they speak Oromo.

LS: Oh, I see. So you were not exposed to Amharic language at all?

AS: No. If you are in the countryside, not at all.

LS: So, after you finished high school what did you do?

AS: Well, that was the problem when they, when the military government overthrow the king. And there was the mass killing. They targeting all the young. That's the time I left Ethiopia.

LS: So when you were out of high school --- so this was when Haile Selassie got overthrown.

AS: Yeah.

LS: And when things were very insecure.

AS: Yeah.

LS: And then had people started leaving Ethiopia to go to Sudan or where ---

AS: Kenya, wherever they come ---

LS: So what did you do? You just got up and you --- how did you get to Sudan?

AS: Well, everybody had his (). At that time, there were a lot of different organizations who, which is opposing the military government, especially the youths was handled by the very popular organization at that time, EPRP. They have a liberated field(?), they have all chain(?) from the city to the countryside.

All, most youth of who easily can get outside of the city, and join the army ---

LS: That was Ethiopian People's ---

AS: Yeah, Ethiopian People's (unintelligible).

LS: Wait, Ethiopian People's?

AS: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party.

LS: Oh, Revolutionary Party. Okay. And the military government was sort of aligned with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Block?

AS: Yes, Cuba. Cuba was physically was there, their army. North Korea and Russia is there. Most supporters of army and strategy.

LS: So how did you leave?

AS: Where? In Sudan?

LS: Yes. How did you get to Sudan?

AS: Well, for awhile I really didn't go to Sudan. I'd been with the EPRP organization. And then after that, I left and went Sudan. When I went to Sudan, I was working for different organization.

LS: But, physically, how did you get to Sudan?

AS: Just walking.

LS: You walked.

AS: Yes.

LS: How long did that take you?

AS: [laughs] Four, five days.

LS: So you were pretty close to the border.

AS: Yeah. Oh, it is not close for five days walking.

LS: Well, I know but ---

AS: There is no street. There is no things you see. It is through the forest, desert.

LS: Wow. And Sudan at that time was very open to accepting people from Ethiopia?

AS: Well, they can't control it. It's a lot of refugees. There are Eritrean, Ethiopian and some other African countries, refugees there, too. They tried to accept and register, but most of us when we get there, they can't control all the flow of the refugee. After you get there, you can register by going to the UNHCR.

LS: So did you go to a refugee camp?

AS: They don't have a refugee camp when I came in.

LS: So you went and you registered with the UNHCR?

AS: Yeah.

LS: In what town?

AS: At a small town called Malakal(?) in a southern part of the Sudan.

LS: So UNHCR had an office there?

AS: No, just a police station.

LS: And who did you leave behind? You left your mother and your father, and your siblings?

AS: My father was already died, my mother and sister, brother.

LS: Did they support your going? Did you tell them where you were going?

AS: They had no idea that where I was going. They didn't know until I write a letter that I'm alive. For about seven, eight years they didn't know where I was.

LS: So you didn't get in touch with them until you got here?

AS: No.

LS: Was that out of concern for their safety ---

AS: It is a problem, too. For safety, too, is not good. If I say I'm right here, I'm out of the country, at that time it is trouble for the family.

LS: Had they assumed you were dead?

AS: Yeah.

LS: That must have been a big shock.

AS: [laughs] That time, this is not that --- they have no way. Any army has license to kill any who's walking on the street during the military government.

LS: So you were in Sudan for three years?

AS: Yes.

LS: And who did you work with --- an international group?

AS: Yeah, I did work for British-Sudan Aid. I did work with American rescue community. And finally I was working for International Committee of the Red Cross.

LS: And then you made an application for refugee resettlement?

AS: Yes.

LS: And when your time came, did they give you choice about where to go?

AS: No, there is no choice. Wherever somebody sponsored you --- church sponsor you --- you come, whether it's California, New York ---

LS: But, I mean, what about countries? Did they just say you are going to the U.S. or did they just say you can go to Australia or the U.S.? Or whatever? Or did they just say you are going to the U.S.?

AS: No, it's only U.S. is the one taking Ethiopian refugees at that time.

LS: What year was this?

AS: In 1982.

LS: So you were in --- 'cause the U.S. didn't take any Ethiopians until 1980, right? 1980, isn't that right?

AS: Uhh, '80, I don't know. I came 1982 here.

LS: And you came straight to Philadelphia?

AS: Yes. No, uhh, U.S. been taking since 1980.

LS: Since 1980. Yes, that's when they first started. Did any other Ethiopians come in the same plane or at the same time as you?

AS: Yeah, a lot of group came in the one plane. More than fifty refugees. But some of them from New York, they took another flight wherever they sponsored. I took to Philadelphia, and some other ---

LS: And only you came to Philadelphia?

AS: No, we were two. I don't know after that, he left the, uhhh, the Pennsylvania, the guy. I don't know where he is living.

LS: Had you have heard of Philadelphia?

AS: I never heard. Never. [LS laughs] No, I did heard. I used to have a friend who is from Pennsylvania working for World Food Program. He been telling me about Pennsylvania, that he went to Haverford College.

LS: Oh, right, so this guy, right, right. So you knew just that about it?

AS: Yeah.

LS: So what were your emotions when you were resettled? Were you excited? Were you anxious? I 'm sure living in Sudan, knowing where you were going must be a very unsettling sort of thing.

AS: To speak the truth, I did call the International Committee of Red Cross that I want to come back to work there. And I did call American Red Cross to arrange for a flight to go back.

LS: To come back to Sudan?

AS: I didn't like. When I come, I only given one cup, and which I can boil my tea in it, and twenty dollar. And in the room we were about five, six and we live and we slept in a cradle. And then, I did saw people who came before me, they don't have a job.

LS: That was a bad --- the economy was very bad then.

AS: Yeah, I was scared and then I have a friend who lived in England. I called him, I told him that I'm going back. He said, "No, no, no. I'm coming to Washington. I'm going to see you before you do that. Don't do anything," he said. He came Washington and he send me money to take a bus to go to Washington. And then he told me it gonna be all right. He gave me some money. And then I came back [laughs] and I settled in. Then I start liking it here. [laughs] It was frustrating when you come first if you don't know nobody or what to do.

LS: Was there any Ethiopian association then or any group to help you?

AS: No.

LS: There was nothing. In the ---

AS: It's our group who form Ethiopian Association, the big Ethiopian Association. I'm the one of the founder.

LS: Is that right?

AS: Yeah.

LS: When was that founded?

AS: It was in 1985, 1986.

LS: So how long did it take you to get a job?

AS: () it takes me long. I went a school at Temple 1983, and then I start working part time there. That the first job I got.

LS: And how did you finance your schooling, if you didn't ---

AS: Oh, but they give financial aid.

LS: Okay.

AS: And they give a loan. That's how I managed to go to school.

LS: And how long did you go to Temple?

AS: I went there for three years, but I didn't graduate.

LS: What about your wife? She also was resettled here?

AS: No, she ---

LS: She's Oromo?

AS: She is Oromo. She came after I settled here, so she didn't have all these problem.

LS: Oh, did you already know her in Ethiopia?

AS: Yes.

LS: And then you had her come over?

AS: Then I make her come over.

LS: Oh, so that was nice.

AS: Yeah.

LS: So you got things all settled. And then was it hard for her to get a visa to come?

AS: Oh, no because I've already got a --- no, she didn't have any problem to get a visa.

LS: Were you already married? Or you weren't married yet?

AS: No. According to our culture, the family can make a marriage. According to Oromo. So, once the two families agree, then they let you know that you going to marry that girl.

LS: But would the U.S. government recognize that as a legal marriage?

AS: Yes, they did.

LS: Oh, they did. So she came over as your wife, not your fiancé?

AS: Yes.

LS: So you were married even though you were here and she over was there? The families married you?

AS: Yeah, but we did remarried over here to make legalized.

LS: Oh, you did? At City Hall?

AS: Yes. [LS laughs]

LS: So your life probably changed for the better once your wife got here, huh?

AS: Yeah.

LS: And when did your wife come?

AS: 1987.

LS: That was a long wait.

AS: Yeah.

LS: What was it like being in Sudan compared to being here? Just in terms of how you fit in or how you were treated by the local population?

AS: All the people is always nice in Africa, except for being poor. The problem is administration problem like a police. Any police can stop you, check you, take you to the police station, arrest you for two, three hours with no reason. Over here, nobody ask you unless you did something wrong. That the big different. The people is nicer than here in Africa, except they are being poor. If you ask them somewhere to go, they walk and take you over there. But if you ask the police, they “Where you come? Why you need?” That’s another trouble.

LS: So the average person is nicer than Americans but the police are not? [both laugh]

AS: Yeah. The government, the ruling system in Africa is our trouble. Whole Africa, not only one. Have you been in Africa?

LS: I lived in Senegal for six years.

AS: How they are? How the people are?

LS: Oh, the people are very friendly. And that’s a country that has had a lot of political stability and just had a democratic transition from a president of twenty years. And he finally sort of turned over the government to the opposition leader, who won in the election. They had run against each other in an earlier election in the 1980s and the incumbent said he won and most people didn’t believe it. But I think he finally figured his time was up and he let his opponent take over. So, that’s pretty rare. In Africa.

AS: In Africa, very rare.

LS: Senegal has very few natural resources, but it's always kind of been the darling of Western powers. Because from the outside it's always seemed --- it's only had three presidents in forty years, and there's never been a coup d'etat. There're some problems with the south who want to secede and there's been some violence, but overall it's a very stable place. But, you know, every country around there has had problems.

AS: Yeah, all the time.

LS: And also I want to say, you know what, I'm not from Philadelphia, I am from ---

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

[START OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

AS: --- trust each other.

LS: Yes, people do not trust each other. There's a lot of racial tension here.

AS: That's true, too.

LS: I was struck by how much tension there was here after having lived in Africa where there really wasn't any. And me being a minority, there just wasn't any. Okay, so since the time that you came here you've lived in West Philadelphia?

AS: At all the time. [laughs]

LS: What do you miss the most about Ethiopia?

AS: Well, you know, you telling me that you born in the Midwest ---

LS: Mmm-hmm.

AS: U.S.A. is U.S.A. Anything in there is here. But it's still, you like where you're born. So I still miss my country. Really, if there is a peace --- I like either I go often or live in there. I still really feel happy if I do that. But still there is the problem.

LS: Have you been back?

AS: I did went once.

LS: What was that like?

AS: Ooh, there's a lot of different change.

LS: Is your mother still alive?

AS: No, my mother died.

LS: But your sisters --- Do you have sisters and brothers still there?

AS: My sisters, brother, yeah.

LS: What was it like to see them after all that time?

AS: You see, in Africa whenever one take over from the other, they change individual right. Not the rule, but they change your right, like where your house. Now the house has not to be here, move it over there.

[chuckles] This land has to be government, it's not yours. So you go to see where you grown up, where

the neighbourhood used to be. It changed into different people. Different people is living there. Yours is changing. So you feel sorry when you see that. But still you don't have a right in Africa to say, "Why this has to be. Is there anybody who can see this? Is this a right?" There is no such a right in Africa. Whatever it is, you have to accept it.

LS: And what have your brothers' and sisters' lives been like? Have they managed to work and make a living and raise families?

AS: One is in the countryside, is still work. He got the small business. The other one used to work for Ministry of Education --- a lawyer. They laid off him now. He got his own law firm. Is small. He survive like that.

LS: So he went to university and law school in Ethiopia?

AS: Ethiopia. Before.

LS: Mmm, okay. He's the older brother?

AS: Yeah.

LS: And what do they think --- how do they view your life? Do people think that if you're in the United States you're lucky? Or do they not necessarily?

AS: Well, all of the young, they say you're lucky, they wanna come here. All the young in Africa, they want to come here. The older people, they always want there. Whatever your life look like, they like to share what you have and live together. That what they prefer.

LS: I've talked to some other Ethiopians and Eritreans and they say that their parents have no interest in coming here.

AS: Their parents is not. The young kids.

LS: The young kids, but not the older.

AS: Yeah, that's true. Even I see some friend, they bring their father, their mother. When they come here, after a month they start crying to go back home.

LS: Because it's so lonely here.

AS: Over there, you don't close your house. Neighbours, they come and sit down and talk together.

They have more time to spend with their friends than they work over there.

LS: I'm sure it's very isolating. There is a church here, a Liberian church. They've got a lot of very elderly Liberians who came over because they were resettled as refugees because things got so bad there.

And these people get here and they are really, really, very unhappy because they don't speak English, they don't know how to use the bus. So a couple of Liberian churches have made a senior center where they go and get everybody and bring them together. So they at least have some social contact, because otherwise the older people just stay inside. Their children don't want them to go out 'cause they say it's not safe. And they are just extremely depressed, you know?

AS: Yes. It's for older people who () a problem.

LS: And it is for Americans, too.

AS: Yeah. Well, at least for a person who grown up here, he knows what to do, where to go.

LS: Yeah, yeah, you're right. And then if you don't read or write or know your numbers --- I know people who have colour-coded their phones so they can tell their parents how to call them at the office, because they, you know, have never been to school, they don't know that stuff. But for security reasons, they need to --- What do you like the most about the U.S.?

AS: The freedom.

LS: The freedom?

AS: Really, the freedom.

LS: Do you feel that you've been able to do things here that you wouldn't have been able to do in Ethiopia if you had stayed?

AS: Yes, I can do here more than in Ethiopia or any other African country. But the most thing here is, whether you can do successfully or not, you have your freedom. Even someone tells you, "No, you can't do this" to sue him. I did try to sue the state once. I bought a house from the city. The state used to own the house and after awhile the state workers they came. They broke in and they take stuff and trashed it and changed the lock.

LS: Did they think you were a squatter?

AS: They didn't know that I bought from the city. So, somebody told me, "You can sue the state for taking that." When I went the office, they apologized me. They want to pay forty-five dollars for the lock they broke. But I still, I said, "You shouldn't do that." If it was in my country, I can't ask. "Why you break in? Why you did that?"

LS: I see.

AS: So, it's a lot of ---

LS: So you bought your house through a program? Did take over an abandoned house?

AS: No. I bought from sheriff sale, from the city.

LS: Oh, okay.

AS: And had their own house, too. Had it, the state ---

LS: Oh, these are houses that people haven't paid for ---

AS: Yeah.

LS: So they get taken back?

AS: Yes.

LS: Where is your house? In West Philly?

AS: In Florence Avenue, between Baltimore and Springfield.

LS: Yeah. And on what street? On 40-something?

AS: I'm on 50, 52, in fact.

LS: Where do your children go to school?

AS: Saint Francis on 47th and Springfield.

LS: Oh, they go to a Catholic school.

AS: Yes. Actually I'm not a Catholic, but I like the school. [laughs]

LS: Well, there's a little bit more discipline in Catholic schools. They're very --- [laughs]

AS: They nice, yeah.

LS: Yeah. I know a lot of Muslims send their kids to Catholic schools.

AS: That's what I also do. [laughs]

LS: Do you think that being here in the United States has changed you? Are you different than you were in Ethiopia, so that if you went back it might be hard to live there?

AS: Oh, really. You know what I learned in here?

LS: Mmm-hmm.

AS: That I do everything for living and I teach young people that they can do anything for living and improve everything and patience. I used to be in the field fighting with the gun. I'm going advise not to fight. That they can solve in a roundtable. Really. I did learn a lot from being here.

LS: When you look around at Ethiopians here or yourself, do men and women have different relationships than they would do in Ethiopia?

AS: Oh, yes.

LS: And how is that different?

AS: In Ethiopia, the womans are very respectful for their house and their husband and the family. Over here, what the Ethiopians feel is that everybody is equal, not to take care with the house and the family just being go to work and come home. They feel it like a freedom, like it's being an Americanized, that's the way they feel. And they not hard workers for their house, as used to be in Ethiopia.

LS: Because they do not have the time or because they are not required to?

AS: One is that, another thing is it's not like Ethiopia. In Ethiopia the wife has to take care of all the house. Men does not.

LS: They just sit around and wait for their wives ---

AS: [laughs] No, you do something else.

LS: Do you help in the house now?

AS: Oh yeah, I have cook for my kids. I have to wash my kids' clothes, I have to dress them up ---

LS: So you get them off in the morning? Your wife goes to work and then you get them off to school.

AS: I'm the one takes them to school and she come and pick them up.

LS: Right, then you're at work. I see. Is that something that you have realized you wouldn't have done in Ethiopia, but it's kind of nice?

AS: It's nice, but in Ethiopia you don't do that. [laugh]

LS: Yeah

AS: In Africa, you don't do that, in general, really.

LS: But it's nice to be with children, isn't it?

AS: Yeah.

LS: And you help clean the house and things like that?

AS: Yeah, cook for the kids.

LS: Do you cook Ethiopian?

AS: Yeah, we cook Ethiopian food most time. The kids, they like American way, but we still eat the traditional food we which we used to eat in Ethiopia.

LS: Can you get all the ingredients you need?

AS: Yes, there are Indian store which is very similar to Ethiopia.

LS: Like over on Walnut Street?

AS: Yes.

LS: You mean in terms of spices ---

AS: Yeah ---

LS: Lentils and things like that?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Do you make injira?

AS: Yes, we make injira.

LS: You make it at home?

AS: Yes.

LS: Is that not hard?

AS: No. And there are people who make it and sell, too. The Indian store they sell it.

LS: I saw that last year they started selling it.

AS: There is a guy who make the tef seed grown here.

LS: Oh, the tef? He makes it out of tef and grows the tef here?

AS: Yeah. It's an American. I don't know what the place. He the one deliver the powder whenever you need it.

LS: Oh, the flour?

AS: Yeah.

LS: So your children like American food but they eat Ethiopian food?

AS: They eat Ethiopian too, but they like American.

LS: I'm sure they couldn't avoid that. Was it hard for your wife to adjust to being in a marriage in America? Did she expect that it would be like in Ethiopia and saw that it couldn't be? Did she know that she would probably end up working and all that?

AS: Yeah, but for the kids and the woman, it's easy to adjust to different surroundings than, I mean, older men. If you take your kids to Africa, any country, within three days they start speaking the language and they associate with the kids. The women are fast learners than the men.

LS: Why do you think that is?

AS: I don't know. I did observe it. It's true.

LS: Do you think it's that the men are unable to or sort of unwilling to give up certain kinds of privileges?

AS: It's easy to give up certain things for the young kids and the woman than a man. [pause] What I mean is, they really fast learners than the men. I'm not saying that --- [laughs]

LS: No, I understand what you're saying. When your wife came here, did she speak any English?

AS: Yes. Everybody who go to school speaks a little bit English.

LS: So she came here and she didn't have --- did it take her a long time to get a job?

AS: No, not really.

LS: In terms of your work, are you happy with the work you do? Does it pay what you want? Do you have the benefits you want? Or is this something that you ---

AS: Yeah, they pay.

LS: They pay ---

AS: Yeah, I can live with the pay. I have the medical, too.

LS: So your wife and children are covered?

AS: She got the coverage from where she worked.

LS: Villanova.

AS: So, we doing all right. As far as we try not to be rich, to live with it its all right, but we have ---

LS: Yeah. Well, you have your own home.

AS: Yeah, we do. We got two house. We rent one.

LS: Oh, you rent one out.

AS: Mmm-hmm.

LS: Do you rent it to other Ethiopians?

LS: Yeah, they are Ethiopians. [pause] Now, when we talk now and we say “Ethiopian,” “Ethiopian,” we forgot about the Oromo.

LS: No, we’re getting back to that. [AS laughs] Don’t worry. I’m just trying to get all the basic stuff. I know that to you they’re separate.

AS: Okay.

LS: Do you know a lot of people from your home region here, from Ethiopia or Oromo territory?

AS: Yes, I do.

LS: Do you have an idea how many Oromos are here in Philadelphia area?

AS: Yeah, I do. We are over a hundred families in Philadelphia and Philadelphia area.

LS: Over a hundred families. So we’re talking four, five hundred people?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Are your relations mostly with other Oromos or do you also interact with people who are Amharic and Tigrayan or whatever?

AS: We all Ethiopians, we interact each other. But usually when it comes to specific things, Oromo deal with Oromo, Tigray deals with Tigray and Amhara deals with Amhara.

LS: The Ethiopian Association of Greater Philadelphia, is that mostly Amharic or is it mixed?

AS: It's Amhara and Tigray. Used to be only Amhara, now since the Tigray took the power, they work with Amhara together.

LS: So you helped to found the Ethiopian Community of Greater Philadelphia in 1985?

AS: Mmm-hmm.

LS: With who else? With other Oromos? With other people from ---

AS: Ethiopia.

LS: Other Ethiopians. So, at that point you were thinking of yourself more than Ethiopian and less of an Oromo?

AS: Still I believe that we are an Ethiopian. At the same time, I need Oromo right has to be respected. Oromo has to have the right to participate in the ruling. That all of us has to have a right to select our own leader. Or if not, as the Oromo political group say, the Oromo are going to go independent.

LS: Is there an Oromo liberation movement in Ethiopia right now?

AS: Yes.

LS: Was there when you left Ethiopia?

AS: They were, but they not strong enough.

LS: Since then they've gotten stronger?

AS: Yeah.

LS: When did you pull out of the Ethiopian Association of Greater Philadelphia? Or did you pull out or -- How did you break your ties with them?

AS: Well, it was in 1990. On some issues, we did not agree. And then I did stop participating in Ethiopian Community.

LS: Are there any Oromos active in that association now?

AS: We used to, not only me. There was another Oromo.

LS: And now, are the Oromos now or most of them are not active?

AS: I don't think they have Oromo participants now.

LS: I have talked to a couple of Eritreans and they say it really bugs them because they walk into the community center and there's a map it still has Eritrea annexed to Ethiopia.

AS: That's true.

LS: And so, he said, just as a symbol, he thinks that they ought to take that down and they ought to show that Eritrea is an independent country, and they've never done it.

AS: They still draw whole, including Eritrea. They don't separate, still. They believe that still in Ethiopia.

LS: So in the early '90s you started to have problems and you pulled out. When did you form your own Oromo Association?

AS: That was in 1993.

LS: And how many members --- Are you the president?

AS: I used to be the president. Now we have another new president.

[discussion of updating the information in the Balch's African Immigrant Community Directory]

LS: Were you the first president?

AS: Yeah.

LS: How long were you president?

AS: For three terms.

LS: And how long is a term?

AS: We used to have one year. We amend it to two years.

LS: So you were for six years. And what were your objectives?

AS: Our objective was to teach the young guys after school.

LS: To teach them Oromo language or to teach them what?

AS: To assist them in their school what they learning and teach them how to stay out of crime problem.

And the elderly people, to help how they can answer the phone or go to clinic by themselves. In general, to

have office where we can reach each other and give assistance to each other. But we did arrange the office.

LS: Do you have a center?

AS: Yeah, we couldn't afford, we give up now.

LS: Oh, you had one and now you stopped it?

AS: Yeah, we give up.

LS: You should rent your second house to the Oromo Association. [AS laughs] So you used to have a center?

AS: Yeah.

LS: So now where does your association meet?

AS: We meet house to house. We make a turn: today this person house, next time this house. That's how we made a meeting. Whatever we gonna do, we just call each other on the phone.

LS: Do most people live in the West Philadelphia or Southwest Philadelphia area?

AS: Yeah, South Philadelphia () and we got some people live in Chester and Lancaster.

LS: Oh, Lancaster? Out there? Way out in ---

AS: Yeah, Lancaster city. Around Lancaster city. We have a group in Atlantic City, too. They participate here. They not too many over there, so they come over here.

LS: Do they work in the ---

AS: Casino?

LS: In the casino?

AS: Yeah. [laughs]

LS: What about the kids when you do tutoring? Where do you do that now that you don't have a center?

AS: That's the one we having a problem now. We can't bring them together. We used to bring them together. We make a turn and help them with their homework. At the same time, we teach them Oromo language.

LS: And now you don't do it anymore?

AS: Now we can't do it because we don't have a place. It is almost about three or four months we stopped doing that.

LS: When did you give up your center? Just recently?

AS: Yes, about --- When was the last time you called me for a meeting?

LS: Mmm-hmm.

AS: That the time we were giving up. Now we trying in a church, to get a church, at least once or twice a week.

LS: That's what I was going to say. A lot of churches are willing to have their space used or if you have a lot of kids, at the Saint Francis or something they might be willing to let you use something.

AS: Saint Francis, they don't.

LS: They don't have a parish house or anything?

AS: Well, St. Francis --- only if they are Catholic.

LS: Oh, I see.

AS: That what they want to help.

LS: So you have to be a member of the parish?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Where was your center?

AS: And plus, the Ethiopian community have a big influence around on the churches. And they () around there. So everybody say, why don't you go to the big community space they have, the Ethiopians?

LS: Where was your center?

AS: It was on 49 and Chester. Between 48 and 49 Chester Avenue.

LS: Does your Oromo community here have a lot of contact with the Oromo people back at home and also their liberation movement?

AS: Now we really have a good contact with Oromo community in Washington, D., in New York, and Minneapolis. Individual may have a contact with political groups. As a community, we don't have any contact with the political leaders or group.

LS: So you're not sending money to support the Oromo liberation?

AS: No.

LS: Do they do that in Washington, D.C. or in ---

AS: The Washington, D.C. community is richer than us. There are a lot of people there they can contribute at once a lot of money. They may do, I don't know really, but according to my knowledge, the Philadelphia community, we have a group from each supporters. There are different Oromo political group like the Islamic group, like the OLF, and then other group. So all of them are a member of the community. Because of that nobody has a right to contact or deal by the name of community with a political organization.

LS: Oh, okay. What's the religi ---

AS: We deal with the church and the Muslim. Most people go when it's the Eid . We celebrate for the Muslim.

LS: Well, that's what I was going to ask you. There are Oromos that are Christians and there are some that are ---

AS: Muslim.

LS: But you're not Orthodox?

AS: We are ---

LS: Oh, some people are Orthodox.

AS: I'm Orthodox.

LS: You're Orthodox?

AS: Yeah. We are about two, three, four Oromo who are Orthodox.

LS: Wait, so tell me again. So Oromos are ---

AS: There are Orthodox Oromo.

LS: And what percentage is that?

AS: Maybe ten percent.

LS: Okay, so it's small. And then there's Muslim, and what's that?

AS: About 50/50, here. You mean back home or the community here?

LS: Here.

AS: Community here? About 50/50 Muslim and Christian.

LS: And you also have a church?

AS: Yeah, we do.

LS: That's an Oromo evangelical church? Isn't it evangelical?

AS: Yeah. Oromo evangelical.

LS: And then what percentage of your community here is in that church?

AS: About twenty-five percent of active member of the church.

LS: So you all get along, and you celebrate each other's religious holidays?

AS: Yeah.

LS: That's good. So if there's an Eid or what about the Ethiopian New Year or something, do you ---

AS: Oh, individually we celebrate at home Ethiopian New Year. But the church sometimes celebrate.

LS: Who formed the church? And I can't remember where it is. Do you use another church? Is that what you do?

AS: That church was, uhh --- Well, you did talk to Gemechissa?

LS: Yeah, he came here on December 2nd to this event we had.

AS: Yeah, Gemechissa, he'd been always religious person. He's the one bring the idea of the church a long time ago. He come up here, he make arrangement around City Line with a church, every other Sunday, he make a prayer over there. I did went one. And then finally about four years or five years ago there is another person who came up here. He is a religious guy too, I don't know whether he is a pastor or --- So after that ---

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[START OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

LS: Then this other guy who's a pastor or whatever came?

AS: Yeah, whatever came. And Gemechissa encourage a group of religious guys to form a church and they form the church and Gemechissa found a place where they pray and finally they incorporate the church.

LS: So they have their own church now?

AS: No, the church gave a place. We have a church, but we don't have our own building. The church doesn't have a building.

LS: So they have their own church, but not their own church building? They use somebody else's church building?

AS: Yes.

LS: And that's in Germantown?

AS: Germantown.

LS: Do you know --- I mean, I know this isn't your church --- but what kind of evangelical church is it? Do you know what denomination it's associated with?

AS: That's the question you asked me before, "Are you Orthodox Greek?" Because of this, they side with no denomination, that everybody, as an Oromo, that we worship our god. But finally, I don't know. They did something with another Baptist --- or --- I'm not sure. I'm not very religious person, so ---

LS: So they had tried to make it non-denominational, sort of?

AS: It was. They did make (). Which I'm not sure.

LS: Now, do you go to church?

AS: Once in a while.

LS: Where do you go to church?

AS: I go to Oromo church.

LS: So you don't go to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?

AS: No. I go to Greek Orthodox Church.

LS: Like the Eritreans?

AS: Oh, they go there, too? [laughs]

LS: Yeah. [laughs] And why do you not go to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?

AS: Well ---

LS: Is it for political reasons?

AS: Not really political, because of --- what it is is, since we just started about talking about our right, they --- being an Ethiopian means they feel that being the ruler of their country. So they don't feel good. Like I told you, I enjoy freedom, having freedom in this country. So I can't talk about my right, being with them, unless it's just friendship, talking and say "hi" "bye". Really, we don't get along when we come to the real right.

LS: So everybody is so aware of the split, that it just ---

AS: Yes, it just naturally came. Even though we worked on or not, naturally it came. It's a big problem for Ethiopia now, the Oromo case.

LS: Can you tell from somebody's last name if they're Oromo or they're Amhara or whatever?

AS: Yeah. By last name.

LS: You can always tell?

AS: But not by first name. You know why? Because I told you. Being an Oromo was a problem in Ethiopia before. My name is Amhara name.

LS: Aklilu?

AS: Yeah. But my father name is Oromo name. So usually if you see his last name, you know whether is Oromo or Amhara.

LS: What about physically? If I see you, can I tell from your appearance if your Amhara or Oromo?

AS: Yeah, I can tell, but you maybe cannot tell.

LS: I could maybe not tell? And how can you tell? I know it's hard to describe, but is it skin tone? Is it face? Is it body build or ---

AS: Most people believe that the Oromo are huge than the Amhara, physically.

LS: They're bigger?

AS: Yeah, they're bigger. But not at all the time. If you see me, I'm very small guy. You see smaller Oromo. But by seeing the feature, you can tell the difference. If there is another Tigray or Amhara who is sitting here, when you see, my lips is bigger now. Theirs is smaller. The shape of the nose, ours is wider, theirs is --- Yeah, you can see different feature.

LS: So this is something that if I were an Ethiopian and I met somebody I would be able to place where they're from? I would be able to figure out ---

AS: Yeah, you can tell.

LS: You can tell, okay.

AS: But it's another problem, really.

LS: But people must be mixed marriages, too?

AS: Mixed marriages. If I tell, you don't believe it. The Oromo political leader, his wife is Amhara. So his son or his daughter is half Amhara and half Oromo now. It's a lot of problems going in there, too.

LS: There's an Ethiopian man who teaches at a college in New Jersey --- Melaku Lakew.

AS: Oh, Melaku? Yeah, you know him? I know him.

LS: He was saying, I think his mother is Oromo.

AS: Yeah.

LS: Yeah. So, I hadn't known that people --- what the interaction between the two groups was. Do most people in your community send money home to support their relatives?

AS: Individually?

LS: Yeah, to their family.

AS: Yeah, the individual, they do. They do individual.

LS: But would you say almost everybody does that to some extent?

AS: Yeah.

LS: [laughs] That's what everybody always tells me. How do you send money? Do you send by Western Union, to a bank or what do you do?

AS: Western Union. Bank draft.

LS: Isn't that expensive?

AS: It is.

LS: Someone told me there's something new called Moneygrams or something like that?

AS: I never heard.

LS: Someone said that it's cheaper.

AS: Moneygram?

LS: It's called a Moneygram, kind of like a telegram.

AS: Is that Western Union?

LS: It's not Western Union. It must be a competitor to Western Union. Someone told me that if you go to Indian stores, or something. Anyway, someone told me that it's a lot cheaper.

LS: Anything else you want to tell me about the Oromo community or association or church? Do people feel like they're here? People are not planning to move back to Ethiopia, are they? They're kind of settled here and expecting to be here? Or do some people, if things are good in the future, would they like to move back?

AS: In the future, most people that I talked to, they like to go back home and leave their kids here because they already used to this country, they went to school here, it's easy for them to live in here. So, for themselves they want to go back home. And that they work here sixteen, ten hours a day, if they go work over there, they blame that they can produce survival food that way. So they say, for our age it's better to be home. But the problem is, the ruling system in Africa, not only in Ethiopia. Everywhere you go is a problem. Now sometimes people come and tell me, being an Oromo is a problem in Ethiopia, they tell me. For being an Oromo, whether you participate in politics or not, the new government arrests you.

LS: So people are being actively persecuted?

AS: Yes. Tortured.

LS: So the government's doing that to Oromos and also to people who are Tigrinya, of Eritrean background?

AS: Eritrean backgrou --- no, Tigray background.

LS: Tigray background.

AS: Eritrea is already different country now.

LS: I know, but aren't most of the Eritreans, they're from Tig --- it's not my specialty, so I'm never really sure what's going on politically. But I know there are a lot of people who are somehow connected to Eritrea who are being persecuted now also in Ethiopia, isn't that right?

AS: Yeah.

LS: And so who are they?

AS: Well, it is hard to know which one is Eritrea and which one is Tigray unless they identify each other. For me, is hard. The president itself, Meles, is an Eritrean, when they say now. He is a cousin of Isayas Afework.

LS: Oh, really?

AS: Yeah. So, sometimes they kill each other, sometimes they are the same. I really don't understand about that. But what I know is now, most Eritrean is out of Ethiopia. If they are there, they must be in a jail.

LS: Are there any Oromos in the government in Ethiopia right now?

AS: Oh sure, there are.

LS: But have they sort of sided with the Amharas, then?

AS: No, there are two kinds of groups. There is called the Oromo Democratic Group which is allied with the Tigray government. They believe that Ethiopia has to be one. They are saying it's inner pride given to Oromo, this government. So they working with existing government.

LS: Coming back to Philadelphia now. Is there any particular restaurant that the Oromos tend to go to? Or any other place? A place of business that you meet in or a bar, a restaurant, or anything like that? Or you're mostly in each other's homes?

AS: The Oromo they don't have such, like Ethiopian and Eritrean, you see. Eritrean, they don't go certain restaurant. Ethiopians, too. Other Oromo are not business people. Most of Oromo you see, they are religious.

LS: So they don't go places ---

AS: They don't go most time. If they go, they go anywhere, whether it's ---

LS: Ethiopian or ---

AS: Ethiopian or Eritrean, they go.

LS: Do Oromos and Eritreans feel a certain sympathy for each other? Because they both have been fighting against the mainstream Ethiopian government? Do you have any contact with the Eritreans?

AS: Yes, we do. Our community always contact with the Eritrean community. We try to help each other, like asking for information where we can organize an event, where we can rent a cheaper building. Like that, we help each other. In politics, I don't know whether the political group is aligned with Eritrea, Eritrea helping them. I have no idea.

LS: But just here?

AS: We do.

LS: So when you get together, what language do you speak?

AS: They speak Amharic, we do speak Amharic, too. Either we speak English. Most Eritreans they know how to speak Amharic. We do, too. Anybody went to school before, everybody speak Amharic. We still use Amharic language.

LS: Do you feel like you fit in? In the United States or in Philadelphia? Do you have a lot of contact with Americans?

AS: Oh, yes. I have a lot of friend who help me, who give me a lot of information. I really like Philadelphia. That's why I never moved from here.

LS: And do you find Americans --- I mean, I know that in Philadelphia, people aren't too open --- but do you feel people generally accept you as someone from Ethiopia? People aren't hostile or anything?

AS: Well, used to be. Now, I know my right. I really equally challenge Americans. Like an American, so I really don't have any problem, really. When they call me "foreigner," I did ask them, "Where are your mother, father from? You are a foreigner like me." Because I know my right. They don't send me to jail or do something. If somebody challenges me, equally I challenge them back. So, I don't have such a problem. Still, there is a feeling that people feel, "Oh, this foreigner," but I don't give place for that. I know I am here, I know what I am doing. I used to not. I teach others to not to feel that way.

LS: What about your relations with African Americans? Do you feel particular sympathy with them? Do you have good relations with them or it just depends?

AS: Well, I was discussing with somebody once. I said, "Why marriages always broke up? Why? Is it because it's America?" I said, "No. Because of when you are poor, always problem in the house. That's why it broke up. When you are poor, you don't give money, you don't buy clothes, she don't have money ---

LS: You are talking about American marriages, you mean?

AS: Yeah, in general, in America. So he said, "That's why." Because if you get rich, the family stay good. When you are poor, we always argue each other. We fight, and after awhile we work together. I don't mind. I read a lot of African Americans' books about history of black. I fight, and then I --- we live together --- that's the way it is. I know we sharing they jobs from them. We not competing for upper level jobs. So any job we take over, is the one supposed to theirs. It's natural that we fight, that we argue together, so that's what I think.

LS: You live in a neighborhood that is probably almost completely African American?

AS: Yeah.

LS: What about your children? What do your children think they are? Do they consider themselves African American? If I said to your children, "Where are you from?" what would they say?

AS: They tell you they are from Philadelphia. They tell U.S.A. [laughs] They know history of United States than history of Africa, so --- But they know that originally they are African.

LS: Do your children look like they're from Ethiopia?

AS: Yes.

LS: So people must ask them where they're from?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Because they don't look American.

AS: Because of their name they ask them. "What this name?"

LS: So what do they say. They say, "My parents are Ethiopian, but I was born here"? What do they say?

AS: Yeah, they do say. My father, mother is from Africa, we born here.

LS: And do they speak like African Americans?

AS: No, because they --- Yeah, they speak like Americans. I don't know if they're different --- [laughs]

LS: You can't hear the difference in the different accents?

AS: Yeah.

LS: They speak Oromo?

AS: They do.

LS: And do they speak it at home?

AS: Yes.

LS: Do they sometimes, when you speak to them in Oromo, do they answer in English?

AS: They do sometimes. But they are smart. When I discuss about them with their teacher, they talk with me in Oromo. Then the teacher, she confused! They smart!

LS: How old are your children?

AS: One is ten, one is nine.

LS: Girls or boys?

AS: Two boys.

LS: When you look around at the city streets in Philadelphia, does it worry you that you have two boys growing up in the city? Or they seem like they're not involved and they don't get into trouble?

AS: Well, I believe that they will not get in trouble. I am trying to work on that. I don't know what will happen for the future. What they do, is that they go straight to school, after that they stay home. When

they want to somewhere, I take them and bring them back home. That's what I'm trying to do. That's why we designed the community, that we get them busy, that they don't have on the street, spending time.

LS: Who are their friends? Do they associate with Americans? Or do they hang out with other Oromo kids?

AS: They don't hang around. Only their friends is at school.

LS: They don't socialize with the other kids?

AS: No outside. ()

LS: Do they do sports?

AS: Yes, they at school, and summertime I take them to the sports play.

LS: What do you do with your kids in the summertime when you and your wife are working?

AS: We take them to where they play, to the shore place, like the Wildwood.

LS: But when you work everyday, what do your kids do? Do you have them in a day camp or ---

AS: No. If I work daytime, she work nighttime.

LS: So someone is always at home?

AS: At all the time, somebody will stay. So they don't get a chance to go someplace by themselves.

LS: So you're really trying to supervise them very closely so ---

AS: We try.

LS: --- that they don't get into trouble?

AS: Umm-hmm.

LS: Are you a member of any other association besides the Oromo Association?

AS: No.

LS: Do people pay dues? Do you have dues?

AS: We do have the dues, but we don't enforce --- it's like a voluntary. Because we are not doing much job, so we not forcing the members to pay.

LS: Did you apply for non-profit status? Do you have 501-C status?

AS: We do.

LS: So you were very organized with that?

AS: Hmm.

LS: When somebody new arrives in the area, and you know it's someone who's Oromo, does your association try to help them find housing or a job?

AS: Oh, sure. What we do is, we assign every other day to take him wherever he need to go and we share information where he can get a job or do something.

LS: Is that one of the reasons you always are renting your house out to Oromos?

AS: [laughs] Yeah. ()

LS: So before, when you had a center, you actually had Oromo language classes?

AS: Yes.

LS: Did the kids like that?

AS: Yeah, they do like. They happy to see each other. Different kids from different schools.

LS: Do most kids already speak Oromo or some of them don't speak Oromo so well?

AS: Most of the Oromo kids they speak Oromo.

LS: So if you have Oromo classes it's kind of to reinforce?

AS: Yeah. That they don't forget. Even though they come together, they speak Oromo. The problem is when they don't see each other.

LS: When they get together, do they speak Oromo to each other or do they speak English?

AS: Most time they speak English, but when the parents around they speak Oromo.

LS: When you got here, how did you do with your English? Did you have difficulty? Did you have to take classes? Or you already were good enough?

AS: I did take a class but it is hard to change the accent. One you learn English there, it is hard to make the way the American understand. I always have a problem that the people don't understand what I'm saying, the way I pronounce.

LS: Really?

AS: Yes.

LS: And your children?

AS: They don't.

LS: Do they ever make fun of your accent? No? They don't correct you or anything?

AS: [laughs] They'll correct me, but they don't make fun. [both laugh]

LS: So you never took classes? When you arrived here, you understood pretty well?

AS: Yes.

LS: When you arrived as a refugee, did somebody do a formal orientation for to show you --- I don't know, to help you find a job or to show you around the city or anything like that?

AS: It was hard the time I came. It was a reverend, a black pastor who sponsored me. He live in Harrisburg. I came up here, so I didn't get that much help, but I still appreciate the guy who sponsor me, the pastor.

LS: Did his church sponsor you or as an individual he sponsored you?

AS: The church is the God of Church, but individual has to take responsibility.

LS: Oh, is it still like that?

AS: It was like that at that time.

LS: It's not like that now? It's an agency that makes ---

AS: Maybe, yeah. [pause]

LS: What kind of music do you like to listen to?

AS: Oromo music.

LS: And can you get it?

AS: Oh, yeah, lots.

LS: Where do you buy it?

AS: Washington, DC, they bring it. The Amhara store, they sell it.

LS: Sell it where?

AS: In Washington.

LS: So there are lots of new groups that are coming out with music?

AS: Yeah, they do. They are.

LS: So your children have never been to Ethiopia, right?

AS: Never been.

LS: How do you think they would do if you got there?

AS: Well, they may not like it because they never seen there. They born here.

LS: They've never met their cousins?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Are you trying to transmit certain kinds of values to your children that would be typically Oromo? I know you say you really supervise your children, but are there other things that children would learn if they grew up in Ethiopia that you would like your children to do?

AS: Umm-hmm, umm-hmm, that's true. That's what () need. Really, one what I like to transfer to them is, to be proud for what they are. Like, for being an Oromo, being an African. That they're proud whatever they do, whether they work like an American, they still that they have to be proud being an African. Like, they don't ashamed of their origin, even though they don't go back and see families of their origin. That's what I like to transfer for them.

LS: What about their behavior toward older people? You can probably tell that young American kids are not very respectful of older people. Do you try to keep them ---

AS: Now that what we're working on. Until now they are respectful. After they grown up I don't know they are going to be. I'm trying to work on that. They very respectful now. If they are here, they give you chance to talk, they don't interrupt.

LS: And they greet people?

AS: Yeah. And their school is good in this manner, with the school they go to.

LS: They're well-behaved in school?

AS: Yeah.

LS: My children are well-behaved in school, too, but at home they always argue.

AS: Usually with the mother.

LS: They fight with --- your kids argue with their mother?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Yeah, my children do that, too. I think it might be a thing about mothers and sons or something.

AS: Yeah. Well, when they are bored they fight each other because they think that you like better the other one. They jealous to each other.

LS: Is there any part of Oromo traditions that you have, on purpose, gotten rid of? I know you said that you and your wife, your marriage probably like it would be in Ethiopia?

AS: Yes.

LS: But is there anything else about Oromos or upbringing that you didn't like, that you have not replicated for your children?

AS: () there are some culture which has to be improved. Like, used to be that like a marriage, when the girl is eighteen years old, she has to be married. Like that has to be improved until she get know each other, herself, and have a right to choose her own partner. Like that. The rest, clearly Oromo culture is a really better culture than any tribe in Ethiopia.

LS: There are a lot of African immigrants say they get --- just like in the United States until pretty recently, people tend to discipline their children physically. And here the government authorities do not like you to hit your children.

AS: That's true.

LS: Has that ever been an issue in the Ethiopian community here, that people resent that the state would say you don't have the right to discipline your children?

AS: Well, in Oromo, is very different. Amhara is very violent people.

LS: Who is that?

AS: The Amhara.

LS: They're violent?

AS: Including the Tigray. The Eritrean, too, they are very tough on their kids and their wives. If you see the Oromo, they are really cool people. When they talk, when they walk. They are very religious. That's

why they don't run to a gun like to fight if () population who () Ethiopia. Never pick up the gun and fight the government. They still negotiating in (). We don't have such a culture. If you see Oromo woman, they don't complain about their husband fight ---

LS: They're not beaten ---

AS: Yeah. If you see a complaint, out of hundred, maybe once. once.

LS: And what about you? Were you beaten by your parents when you were growing up?

AS: Naturally in Oromo culture, we are very respectful. Have you heard about the Ethiopian culture that when they --- like you say, "he" and "they", in Ethiopia, there are the respectful word you just say, like a double person for one person.

LS: Oh, you make it a plural for the respectful form ---

AS: Yeah. So even in Oromo for our father and mother, we have such respect for older brother, too.

LS: I wasn't suggesting that you were beaten as a child. I just hear --- this is something ---

AS: No, no, we don't. In Oromo, we are different people, really, in a culture way.

LS: Are you a citizen now?

AS: Yes, I am a citizen.

LS: When did you become a citizen?

AS: Five years after I came. I came about 1982. 1987, maybe. '87 or '88.

LS: And is your wife a citizen?

AS: Not yet, but she gonna be citizen.

LS: She's a permanent resident?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Why did you choose to become a citizen? A lot of people don't for a long time.

AS: AS: The politicians, they don't. Really, I'm not a politician. I'm a regular person, that's all. Whether I stay here, whether I went back home, nothing matters to me for being a citizen here.

LS: But did you think there were advantages to being a citizen? You could vote or ---

AS: Yeah, I can vote in here.

[END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2]

[START OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

LS: So if you are a citizen, it's easier to come and go.

AS: Yeah, if I wanted to.

LS: Once you're an American citizen, is it hard to get a visa to go back and visit Ethiopia?

AS: No, it's not.

LS: It's not. You just go to embassy, you get a visa ---

AS: You get visa ---

LS: Okay. Would you recommend to other people from your group who are back in Africa to come here and immigrate? If someone says, "I have a chance to come, should I come?" What would you say?

AS: I really tell them to work hard that they can survive there. Unless they have to come for school, like they got scholarship.

LS: But you would tell them to work hard there or work hard over there?

AS: No, over there.

LS: Over there, before they come?

AS: Yeah.

LS: Or they shouldn't come at all?

AS: If they got scholarship to go to school is okay. Just to work and live, I always advise them to stay there, to work hard.

LS: Why?

AS: Because if we work hard like we do here, we can survive in Africa. If I just farm, I can produce any food to live with it. Over here, to live, I work sometime ten, twelve hours a day. Seven days a week. So if they work, they can live. That's what I always say, the donors, like America and the Europeans, it's better if they teach us how to produce our own food where we are than helping us to immigrate to another place.

LS: Where would you like to retire?

AS: If I can, it's in my country, but I don't know if I can do that. They don't need me when I was young and worked, I worked here, in the garage (). [laughs]

LS: So you haven't built a house back home, planning to go, or to do anything like that? [pause]

Okay. This project, next October, we're developing an exhibit, a museum exhibit that'll have photos, and words, and, we hope, some video. It's for the public to raise their awareness of African immigrants, and who they are, and the people they might see on the street or driving a taxi or in a parking lot or parking garage, who they are, where they've come from. Is there anything in particular that you would like Americans to know about where you're from, or what it's like to be an immigrant, or to be a refugee?

AS: Yeah, but most Americans they knows what refugee means. And, really, they know where refugees are from, just by looking. But it's good that everybody who has an idea about a foreigner, that everybody knows that they are hardworking people, too. That they are contributing towards growth of United States too, by working hard as anybody. In here, the refugees, too, work hard to live and contribute toward growth of the country's economy.

LS: Is there anything else that you'd like me to know that I haven't asked?

AS: Oh no, you did ask me what you need or have to answer you. I'm going to work.

LS: Thank you very much.

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]