

**FELICIEN BIDZIMOU**  
**Transcript of interview on June 27, 2022**

**MS:** OK, excellent. I'm Maria Sprehn, and I am here with . . . .

Felicien Bidzimou.

**MS:** And today is June 27, 2022. We're on the Rockville campus of Montgomery College. And we will be having a conversation about Felicien's immigration story. So to start off with can you let me know where you were born, and then we'll move onto other parts of your life, and in particular, your immigration story.

OK, I'm glad to share that. I was born in Congo Brazzaville. There are two Congos: DRC and Congo-Brazzaville.<sup>1</sup> As I used to say to many people, those Congos are like twin sisters, and they have the same last name, which is Congo. The capital names, first names: you have Congo-Kinshasa, which is another country, and then Congo-Brazzaville, where I was born. So, I was born in Congo-Brazzaville in 1962, July 9th, so very soon I will be 60. Maybe in two weeks, I think.

**MS:** A very young 60, I think. [*Both laugh.*]

Thank you for your encouraging words. [*Laughs again*] And so I was born in Congo, where I grew up. I was born exactly in Pointe-Noir, which is the second city. Yeah.

**MS:** Can you say that again?

Pointe-Noir. Pointe-Noir. It's located on the Atlantic Ocean. We have a beach. We grew up well, playing soccer on the sand on the beach in the summer time, most of the time. But I moved to Brazzaville when I went to college, to university because the country at that time had only one university. Everybody from the country, from everywhere, was coming to Brazzaville, which is the capital, to study there and after I finished my college . . . .

**MS:** What did you study in college?

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<sup>1</sup> Situated on the central western coast of Africa, Congo-Brazzaville is officially known as the Republic of Congo or the Congo Republic. Congo-Kinshasa, the larger of the two Congos, is officially known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo or the DRC, and was formerly known as Zaire. The two capitals sit across from each other on the Congo River, making them the two closest capitals in the world.

I studied history. After my bachelors, I went to education school, the School of Education. And where I get my certificate, my degree on teaching. So I graduate as a high school teacher and I started teaching in 1985 in Congo-Brazzaville. And I was really attracted by sociology. [2:51] So while I was teaching history, I went back to school to. . . meantime, at the same time I was working as a teacher of history and French because at that time when you graduate, you do both, history and French, or English and French because they were looking for teacher of French. I taught French at that time in private school also to make the ends meet because what I was getting paid from the government was not enough to survive for my family. Also, like I said, I went back to school because there was no tuition. You just register for classes at that time. People don't pay for school. We were getting paid to go to school because the government would pay for lack of scholarship, for some money, some pocket money to eat and buy books. So, like I said, I went back to school at the same time I was teaching and going to school to get my bachelors in sociology.

**MS: Oh, excellent. You know, you're sitting in the Department of Sociology at the College and Criminal Justice. [Both laugh.]**

Yeah, so after wars in Congo -- we have civil wars in Brazzaville, two civil wars. So after that life become not attractive, in many ways, so a good opportunity to leave Congo and come to the US in 2004. [5:00] And when I arrived here, I was living with friends. I come to . . . the first city I was living in was in Conyers. It's a sub . . . it's a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, in the South. I used to live there with friends, and after three years, I decided to go back to school because I was doing . . . I was like a handyman or was doing any type of job, any type of work to survive. And after my immigration situation had been improved and approved, I decided to go back to school. So, I say I don't think this is my place this is not where I belong. I had the potential to go to school and become a teacher in this country. And what is funny, Maria, I couldn't speak English when I came to this country.

**MS: Wow.**

I couldn't speak in English, yes. And a funny story, I remember I was working in a factory, it was a factory for chemicals, they were building . . . they were making chemicals for swimming pools in Atlanta, GA. In the summertime they are busy, and I was working on a line putting those chemicals in the boxes and lifting boxes, putting on pallets. And it was so hot in the factory because there was no AC. And I was tired. I'll never forget that. And the lady who was in charge of the lane was asking me to bring, she asked me to bring some boxes, some empty boxes to her, but I didn't understand what she was saying. And I went over to her with lids, the lids we put on top of each box. I brought the lid to her, she said no, and then I went back, and so I was just guessing. And she screamed on me. [Maria gasps.] And I cried. I'll never forget that day.

**MS: Oh no. [7:00]**

Yeah. And it brought me back to those days when I was a teacher, an educated person who has something in his brain. So for me, it was like humiliation. And the supervisor was watching. It was in an office in the factory. So he was watching because his office is a glass office so he could see people working in the factories, and I think I was getting instruction . . . . So, I miss one part. My first application, my job application I filled out in Spanish because I studied Spanish in high school and in college, for the first year in college. So I was more comfortable in Spanish than English. So when I went to apply for the job, the application has the front in English and the back in Spanish. So I asked which one would apply to me, and they said anything that you feel comfortable with. So I filled out the application in Spanish. My interview was in Spanish. The person who interviewed me became my supervisor, so as in many factories every morning, you have a meeting to get instructions. "So today you're going to do this. You're gonna work over there. This is your job." So I was attending Spanish meetings, yeah, with Spanish speakers.

**MS: In Atlanta, Georgia.**

Georgia, yes.

**MS: And how old were you at the time.?**

I was 42.

**MS: 42, wow.**

I come in 2004. I was 42, and I worked there. So after that, after that day I said no, I have to move from these type of jobs. And my family, my wife and two kids, stay in the Congo in that time. [9:00]

**MS: So they were still in the Congo.**

Yes.

**MS: And how old were your children at the time?**

My son was eight, he was eight -- 14, he was 14 years old, because there was one in 1996. That was 2004, yeah. And my daughter was 10.

**MS: So you went to Atlanta, GA, and they stayed in the Congo.**

Yes

**MS: But you said . . . in the Congo, what were the main issues that you felt you needed to leave because of in the Congo. At the time, what was going on?**

After the civil wars, the war ended, but life was not like before in terms of opportunities and freedom of expression and strength (?). There were many things that were going around. Like before immigration, the living place becomes . . . horrible, not attractive. Yes, so for me, moving from that country, from my country, was a way for me to open a path to a better future, for my family as well, and also to survive.

**MS: Was it dangerous at the time?**

Yes, it was. It was. It was. Yes.

**MS: That's a big decision.**

It was, it was. Not to live. You never know what's going to happen. And also you have to watch your mouth when you speak. [11:00] I was teaching social science, you know. Sometimes when you teach social science there are issues on which you have to take your position and to analyze, and you're not free to do so sometimes, and you see, you put your life in danger in one way to another.

**MS: And you were teaching social science at the high school level, right?**

Yes.

**MS: Wow. So that must have been very stressful.**

Yeah. So, because, for instance, when you teach topics which are related to real life, you ask questions, and sometimes when you answer questions, the answer may be closer to what is happening on the ground in the country, which cannot please to the people in charge. So you become a target, and you become somebody who doesn't go along with the view of their opinion. either ideologies. that type of . . .Until now, because there are people who are in jail because of their opinion. So many things. Besides that, it was also the social opportunity, economic opportunity, to how to make a better life, because people were not . . . . So it's that type of things. Mostly to survive.

**MS: Right. So you're highly educated? And you end up working in a factory in Atlanta, and you get yelled at. (13:00) And you're speaking in Spanish, listening in Spanish. Wow. So then you decided to go back to school?**

Yes, and before doing so, I decided to . . . because my family has to come, to come here, and I didn't have enough money to pay for three tickets at the time. The job I was doing

like I explained to you, I was paid \$5.15 an hour. Yeah. At that factory because I was working for the staffing office, so those people found workers for the factories, and they pay those people, and they pay you back. So that was the only way to find a job very quickly. Yeah, so I was working for them for the staffing company for the factory, and the money I was making just for me to send back home to help my wife with the two kids, help them to attend private school because the public schools just collapsed after the civil wars. The system collapsed because people were not getting paid as they used to. And sometimes they would get paid once in three months. So those people preferred to go teaching in private schools where they were getting paid, and that was the issue. So my children were attending private school. I have to pay from the money I was getting here and also pay rent. I was living with a friend, so I had to pay rent. I did not have enough to put in my pockets and enjoy my life. So my concern was first of all to get my family over there in a safe place, for a better future for my children. [15:00] So what I did at the time, I met with one Congolese, somebody from my country, who was working in a boat, in a fishing boat in Alaska. And he told me how they were well paid over there. [*Phone goes off.*]

**MS: I'm sorry. And look, it's turned off. The sound is turned off. I don't know what happened. I'm so sorry. . . . Your friend, he had been away working in Alaska? On a fishing boat?**

Yes., and he gave me some addresses to apply, where I can be hired. Those companies were looking for workers. [*Phone goes off again.*] And I decided to go there, to get that type of job and get a lot of money in a few days, in a very short time. So with one of my friends we went there. We didn't go to Alaska because those companies hired people from Seattle in Washington state. So we went to Seattle.

We lived in a hotel for some days, and that was the hiring season because my friend would give me information about the hiring process, told me when they hired people and in which place exactly. So I targeted the time, and I went there for just a few days, two-three days. I did everything, and I was hired but I couldn't go working on a boat because there are many people are seeking for those type of job because they are well paid. At the same time people were applying to work on a boat [they] used to work in processing factories in Alaska, because when the boat goes fishing, they bring the product on an island where the factories on land process the food into the final product that they put on the market. So those plants, those sites were looking for workers. (17:30) Because those who used to work there just to make their resume better when they applied for the boats, so it was just a transition. So my friend advised me, if they didn't hire you to go on the boat, go start over there. So after that you put in the resume "I have experience in working for the fishing company" or something like that. And that's what I did. So I went back to Atlanta, GA, and they called me. I was hired. I went book a flight to Washington state to Seattle and from there I went to the company. It was American . . . something. No, what's that company. . . I forgot the name. We went

to the airport, I just remembered. We went from Seattle to Anchorage in Alaska. And Anchorage was not the final destination because we have to go to a small island. And you ride a small airplane with six people in the airplane. And the weather was not clement at the time and we have some trouble to land on the small island. So the plane has a very difficult time to land safely At that time I thought in Alaska, I told myself, So you are coming here to die for money, a long way from Congo. [Laughs.] [19:00]

**MS: That's really far. How terrifying.**

So finally the airplane landed. It was Dutch Harbor, Dutch Harbor, a small island in Alaska, Dutch Harbor. There are only factories there, fishing factories to process fish. Life was just the factory room, factory room. I had limited access to Internet to send emails to my wife and my son at that time. So after that after the end of that time, it was summertime. And in the winter time I applied for a fishing company at this time to work on a boat. I was accepted, and I worked there for six months, 12 hours a day, seven days a week for six months.

**MS: Wow.**

Yes.

**MS: And what were you catching?**

Any type of fish. But I was not actually fishing. Those boats are like factories as well. So when they are fishing, they are processing the fish into final product to put them in the fridge. Because they cannot keep the fish as they are. You have to proceed to make any type of product which has been ordered, depending on the type of order they have. If they need fillets or 'thing like that. I was working on a line, and on my line I was scaling. I was working on the scale, checking the weights because every basket should have 5 pounds. So you have to make sure you have about 5 pounds on there. So if you look, and it has 4.99 then it's OK. And when they found a lot of fish to catch. They have to go faster. At the time they increased the speed of the belt that I was working on and it become tense and stressful. And I work in that environment for six months.

**MS: Wow.**

Seven days a week. 12 hours a day. I was working from 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM every day for six months. When I got out of there, I got enough money. I got a saving account and I got about \$18,000. And that was my story. [Laughs.] And with that money, I told my friends -- I went back to Atlanta, GA -- I said, "Bye, bye. I have to go to Washington area" because one of my friends was living here, and I visit him. He was taking evening classes at Montgomery College here, and he was older than me. He used to be a director in Congo.

**MS: Of movies?** [22:30]

He used to be a director for research.

**MS: Oh, a research director.**

We have a research agency in Congo which was for [inaudible] research, [inaudible] research for the university, and he was a director there at that time. And he moved to the US, and I didn't know. I met with his son, and he gave me his contact, and I called him. So I come to visit them. So I was surprised, gladly surprised, that it was somebody who was one of those people who was looking up on the country on TV. And he was one of those great researchers in Congo, and he came here, and he was going to school. So for me, I said, if this guy can go to school, why you cannot do that? I get in touch with him, and I stay closer to him because I remembered what my father told me. "In life, if you want to learn how to play guitar, you have to be friends with somebody who plays guitar." So I said I want to go to school, so I have to be close to this guy; he will help me. So I talked to him about my project to go back to school, so he said come over here.

So after the fishing adventure, I got my money. I went back to Atlanta, GA. OK, and I have a plan. I have to go to my friend's -- he's a big brother for me, because in Congo, if you have a close friend, he becomes your family member. Since he's older than me, he's my big brother -- and I knew I have to come over here. At the same time, I have to go to work to find a job and go to school. So I needed a car. With the money I had, I bought a used car in Atlanta, GA, and I drove that car from Atlanta, GA, to Washington, DC. Without GPS. I went to the library to print the map, and I was remembering the next exits. So I drive, and I stopped in North Carolina, where I had a friend, and I slept there enough for a day and drove to Laurel, where they were living, where my big brother was living. [25:00]

So the following day he took me to Montgomery College, the Silver Spring campus, where I took the placement test for English. So my English was not where it was supposed to be. [Laughs.] I studied as a beginner at Montgomery College from 2009 to 2013. I studied in Montgomery College. The first semester I took classes in Silver Spring, and the second semester I took many classes over here in Rockville, yeah, English classes. So at the same time I was working. So I find a job in downtown DC. I was working in the afternoon, taking morning classes here at college in Rockville, and I was working in a hotel as a house man -- lifting tables, making rooms ready for the guests. Again, that was my story. [Laughs.] So I met great people here. Even when I finish my English classes. I want to . . . because my final goal was to teach and also to get a higher degree. And after English classes, I registered, applied for a Ph.D. for graduate school at

Howard. I was accepted because I had a master's in history, so that allowed me to register for classes at Howard in sociology.

**MS: Excellent. And so what did you do with your degree then? You completed at Howard?**

Yes, I graduate from Howard in 2020.

**MS: Oh, congratulations.**

In the pandemic. So I got my Ph.D. in sociology.

**MS: Amazing. Congratulations.**

Thank you.

**MS: That is so incredible. Wow. So then, how did your wife and children come? At what point were they able to come? [27:30]**

After my adventure in Alaska with the money I got, they were able to buy tickets and come over here. So I used to live with someone, like roommates renting a room while they were waiting for the visa. At the end of the school year in Congo, my family could join me in 2009. So, they came after that.

**MS: And they came here?**

Yeah, they came here because the friend I was talking about, the friend who helped me register for class and encouraged me to go back to school, he was a substitute teacher here in Montgomery County. So I was living in PG County in Bowie when I was renting a room with somebody, and my friend told me, "I'm a substitute in PG County and Montgomery County. But Montgomery County offers better schools. They have better public schools. So for your children, it's best for you to live in Montgomery County where your children will have a better education."

**MS: So that's what brought you to Montgomery County?**

Yes, in 2009 . . . the end of 2008 because it was . . . November 2008, yes.

**MS: So in four years you were able to leave Congo without speaking very much English.**

Not English, not at all. Not at all. Yeah, nothing.

**MS: But good Spanish, yeah?**

I was able to find my way whenever I have difficulties in Spanish, but not in English.

**MS: Wow. That is an amazing story.**

And I remember when I landed in JFK, and I went to the Port Authority. I was so thirsty, I asked for water. Nobody could understand what I was saying. I was saying, "wah-tayer, wah-tayer" until I wrote on a napkin WATER. So "wah-der"? -- so now this is another English. [*Laughs.*] So it was not easy. But my final goal, my objective, my desire, so. . . . I think there were difficulties during the path, but I met with people who encouraged me, who are true and telling me sometimes, "You are not the only one, and you're not the first, and you can do it." Yeah.

Even what I encountered here in Montgomery College was the essay, how to write the essay. I didn't know the format was different here in the U.S. than in the French system. I didn't know that, because in the French essay you don't say what you're going to say. You have to keep it to the end, and at the end you cannot end up saying like that. You have to ask a provided question which will make people think. In my first essay, I did it as a graduate in French literature, being a teacher back home, literature stating literature and history, so I was proud of what I did. And I turned my essay in, and when they came back with a score, I got a C, so I said, wait a minute. I want to talk to the teacher. [*Both laugh.*] I don't know why. But the teacher was nice, "You are from a French speaking country?" Yes. She helped me find another student from Cameroon, who was her student the semester before who had the same problem. And that student helped me how to write an essay in English. And also there was at that time, I don't know if it's still here, the writing center. I think it was close to this building. I was getting advice from the people in the Writing Center, and that was very helpful. I knew that in English now . . . I knew that in English, you have to say in the introduction what you're going to say, and during the body of the essay, say what you said you're going to say, and in the conclusion, to say what you have said. That's not what you do in French, so that was challenging. [33:00]

**MS: So do you miss certain parts of Congo?**

You know. At this point, to be honest with you. I'm feel like I'm an average person. Sometimes I behave like a Congolese. And sometimes I just have to live over here. So, the part of me that's from Congo is friendship.

**MS: Friendship.**

Yes, friendship. Like social interaction.

**MS: It's very different than . . . .**

Really different, yes.

**MS: How is it different?**

I was shocked the first time I was working at Mayflower Hotel. After work . . . so I have a co-worker. We are very friendly, very close. We laugh with the entire day, and when we finished work, he has a car. I don't know if he thought like I'm going to ask for a ride. And he ignored me. He did like, he doesn't know me after work. So he didn't say even hi. He put on his headphones and walked away. And the next day, it was not him, it was somebody else. We were on the Metro on the train. So I get next to the person, just to chat like we do at work. But the person just turned their phone on and start texting, and that was a shock for me.

**MS: Curious.**

And I learned from that that work is work. When you have a friend at work, your friendship stop at work. If the person wants to continue, it's OK. If someone doesn't want to, it's OK too. [35:00]

**MS: Interesting, yeah.**

So from there I learned that even though somebody I work with, if we meet at the mall, we don't do what we do at work. I take it in a positive way. What's something that I couldn't accept in Congo.

**MS: Right, right. Interesting.**

So that difference for friendship, for instance. It was a very cultural shock for me.

**MS: Absolutely, absolutely. So as we're wrapping things up here, do you want to . . . What would you want people to know? We're talking about your story. Is there something that you haven't told me that you would like people to know? Maybe future generations? Or even your children?**

Yeah. About my children, I would tell you, that their study should . . . Their having an opportunity to study should. . . not maybe be able to study in Congo. Because things are getting worse at this time. Decades ago, somebody from a very poor family can reach the top of the social hierarchy in Congo, because if anyone he can succeed at school they can get a degree and have a better position than his parents. And now is not the same way. Only those who are from family who are in charge now can get opportunity to succeed, or to attend those very famous schools. Even though you have a degree, to find

a job, they have to have connections. So I'm not that type of person, and I was not that type of person. I got the chance that got to go, like I said. You can go to school study and get a job when you have a degree; there is no distinction because anyone can go to a medical school at that time. But now, at medical school, you have to know any professor or somebody in connection with the government or be a friend of somebody who knows the president of the country to go to the medical school.

**MS: So very restrictive for people's careers.**

Yeah. Not only restrictive. Exclusive.

**MS: Exclusive. Definitely. [38:00]**

Because those who don't know anyone cannot go to that school, do not have access to that school. Because restrictive for me means like, you have to get this type of score regardless of where you're from. And now it's not about your performance. It's about your origins, where you belong to, where you're from in terms of social hierarchy, social environment. That's exclusive.

**MS: Wow, it really impacts young people's dreams and what they can do.**

And corruption. It's a big problem, because corruption increases discrimination and exclusion. Because you have to have money to corrupt somebody to get your child into a good school. It's like \$2,000. It's the money no one can save if you work as an honest person.

**MS: That's a big contrast to here. So I know your daughter just graduated high school. What is she going to do?**

My daughter graduated. So I have three children. My youngest one is the one who graduate from high school. She's going to Montgomery College.

**MS: Excellent.**

She wants to study nursing. My son who is the oldest is studying medicine. He is at medical school.

**MS: Where is he at medical school?**

He is at Duke.

**MS: He's at Duke studying medicine. Fantastic. You must be so proud.**

So something you couldn't go or do if you were in Congo. If you're in Congo, you couldn't study medicine, not because he's not smart enough but because we don't have connection. We don't. So what I'd like to add to your question, what I'd like people to know is that they are . . . the younger generation from those countries or those who come will have a mixed message. [40:00] For those who are still in those type of countries, with exclusion, discrimination still in place, they are killing talent because they don't have opportunity. They don't have the opportunity to do so. And for those who come here for the new generation is not granted. You have to sacrifice something, and when I say sacrifice something, because for me, it took me several years before being where I am now. Going to school and working and having a family which just come from Congo, nobody speaks English. You have to do your homework. You have to do your own homework. You have to go to work, overnight. So you have to sacrifice something. I didn't have time to enjoy the new life with the environment at that time. I cannot go to a restaurant or go to the park or go to a museum, attend a party at that time, because I have to make a choice. My Sundays, I was spending my Sundays in libraries, and my wife, thanks to her, understood all of that. You know what it means to go to graduate school.

**MS: Absolutely. And how about now? What do you do to enjoy life now?**

I have time for my family. We are living now things the way we could not live if we're still in Congo. For instance, having a family private period, being in a private setting with just my wife and my children, have a private conversation because in Congo you always have family around and friends around. People come visit without letting you know they are coming. There is no privacy. Anybody can go to anybody's house at any time. We don't call, we don't knock at the doors. We just come up here and you have to share your things. It's not bad. I grew up in that and that part of my life, I'm proud of that. That's what I do also when I go to Congo. I go to visit my friends without calling them even though they have phones now. No, I don't do that, and they come to visit me without calling me. That's the way we live. But here life is different, and I can raise my children the way I could not in Congo, because I may have open discussions with my children, to have them make choices in life, and sharing my story and telling them that when you struggle is not the end. You can do more than that.

I remember my son when he came, he went to middle school when they arrived here. He was in 7th grade. He was good at math. He was very good, but he couldn't explain what he did. He was having some hard time to explain in class what he did or how he did it because the language was a big obstacle. And he come home crying. Yeah. He gets a B because something went wrong. In French when you say like 7.5 in French, it's 7,5. And he wrote comma instead of point, and the teacher took a point. He didn't understand why he didn't get this thing right, and he didn't get an A. And he couldn't go back to the teacher to explain and to ask a question because he didn't know how to say that. That was the first week, and he come home crying. And I said it will be OK. I

went through that. They scream on me. Yeah. Somebody scream on me because I don't know how to speak English. And now he is here doing well.

**MS: I would think very well. Absolutely. Did you find the county welcoming for your family?**

Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Let me tell you, Maria, the good thing. I didn't have other experience from other counties, so I cannot compare from other county but Montgomery County did a good job for my family, especially for my daughter. She graduated from Barry University this year in Florida.

**MS: Congratulations. Excellent.**

She studied management, yeah. When we were in Congo, my daughter has an issue with her hearing. She has hearing deficiencies, so you have to speak aloud because we noticed that when she was young. But we didn't have the money to buy hearing aids. It was so expensive. I think \$2,000 at that time in Congo. My pay was . . . I was getting less than \$200 a month and sometimes getting paid after three months. So we didn't know how to correct that. So when we talk to her, we speak aloud. And when we come to this country, to Montgomery County the school, she went to the elementary school -- because she was in elementary school and her brother was at middle school -- we were referred to the specific service for Montgomery County, and they provided the assistance we needed. [47:00] And even the hearing aids, we didn't pay for it. And the first day she got hearing aids, we went to . . . so we got it by the school. It's a very, very, very organized system. The school got us in touch with a lady who was working for MCPS, Montgomery County Public Schools, and she put in touch with audiologist at Children Hospital at Shady Grove. I think it's Montgomery County. So we get what we needed. That day I remember, the day that my daughter got the hearing aids, we come home. She stand on the balcony, and she hears birds singing. "Say, what is that?" See the birds. She said, "Do the birds sing?" And she was eight. I cried. And when she went to the kitchen, she opened the water faucet. She said, "Do water make noise?" And now she graduated.

**MS: In management.**

Yes, in management.

**MS: That's a beautiful story. Wow.**

So yeah. [Clears throat.] Excuse me. So if I were to redo things, I would do them as I did them because I'm very pleased for what I get, what I got from Montgomery County. I don't know about other counties, and that was something I took in consideration when we decided to find a place to live. We said we had to stay in Montgomery County for

the children because they're getting the support they need. I worked in Virginia, so I could have found an apartment or a house in Virginia close to where I work, but the children would go there and start again. Maybe they may not adjust or adapt to the new system. They would be the big losers, not me. So our choice was guided by the fact that Montgomery County provided us with what we need.

**MS: Excellent.**

To have our children succeed.

**MS: And how they have. That's amazing. You must be very proud.**

. . . Not yet. [*Both laugh.*]

**MS: Not yet?**

My son's still at school.

**MS: Almost there, right.?**

Yes, almost there. He's doing his double major Ph.D. and M.D. He wants to do research.

**MS: So when he has his Ph.D. and his M.D. You'll be proud?**

Yes. [*Both laugh.*] I will say mission accomplished. Not now yet.

**MS: Wonderful, wonderful. Well, this has been such a pleasure hearing your story, going all the way to Alaska and back. That is amazing and hearing about how successful your children are already. Incredible.**

Yeah, but Alaska's experience was not a good one. If I were to, if I were asked to do it again, I would not go there. I didn't enjoy it at the time. I needed the money but not the job. Twelve hours a day, seven days a week for six months, Maria. Yeah.

**MS: My goodness. But you made it through, and you were able to bring your family.**

So now I'm be giving back to the country which gave to me what I got now, and for me, the United States and Montgomery County was the closest part which provided to me and my family things we needed to have our life better than we could have elsewhere. So yeah, I'm giving back to the community. I'm doing sort of volunteer. They don't have any judo facility in Montgomery County, so I do it in College Park. So I volunteer. I teach for free, my free time twice a week. I teach children.

**MS: You teach children.**

In our club we have many sections, yet I choose to teach children. So giving back to the community. And when people ask me which country do you find yourself attached to. So, I said, it's like you asked the same question to somebody who has been adopted, and you ask that person, who do you like the most, the biological parent or the adoptive parent? Because each of them completed each other, because if you are not born they could not adopt you. If they didn't adopt you, then you don't have the life you have now.

**MS: That's a really wonderful way of describing that. There's a lot of people like that.**

So I have some background when I came here, but if I didn't get what I had, I couldn't have achieved what I have achieved today. So I didn't start from scratch in terms of education. So I started from somewhere, and I just completed it. And if I did not get the opportunity to complete the missing part, the part I needed to complete, I would not be where I am now. So thanks to Montgomery County. [*Maria laughs.*] And I study here in Montgomery College.

**MS: Excellent. That's good to hear.**

I didn't have my transcript here. So I think I did well as well. And I have good memories of good teachers at that time. That's why I encourage my youngest daughter too to register for classes here. It's a very good school and a very good program, and I'm glad to participate in this research.

**MS: Thank you so much. I'm going to turn this off.**