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MK: I was born in 1960, Christmas Day 1960, so practically I'm 53 years of age. Sierra Leone, my home country, was at one time called West African paradise. At that time in fact it was a time when Sierra Leone was judged the most peaceful country in Africa. I left my country in 1986 to pursue my studies to Cuba. But when I left there was no civil war but immediately I left my country in 1990 the civil war started in my country. So I graduated in 1993 but because of I couldn't go home I decided to pursue a Masters degree. That I did and I was even doing a Doctorate degree when I have the opportunity to come down to Canada. In Cuba why I decided to sacrifice that, I do understand that I cannot have a healthy retirement in Cuba due to the fact that is a socialist country. So there is no hope for a healthy retirement, that's why I just decided to leave everything to come over to Canada. How do I come to Canada is that because I couldn't go home because of the civil war I decided to ask for refugee status on that United Nation high commission for refugees. They granted me the refugee status, then I decided to start looking for a country. But why Canada is my first choice was that I was involved in a program in my country that was sponsored by the government of Canada and that of my country, that is they call it CUSO. CUSO means Canadian University Services Overseas. I was an organizer for that program when I left my country. In fact, I was not even thinking of going to Cuba, I was thinking of coming to Canada to do adult education. But the first opportunity that arise was to go to Cuba, and I wanted to leave the country immediately because the country was becoming very hard. So I decided to go to Cuba. When I finished my studies I then decided to come to Canada after asking for refugee status. At first I was refused because there was a man by the name of, a French man who was a consul for the Canadian embassy by the name of Drapeau, a man from Quebec. That man refused me blatantly, saying that he sees no reason why I should come to Canada if; if I'm married to a Cuban I can live in Cuba. Then I said, no, Cuba is not my

country, I can't live here, I just came for studies. So fortunately for me and unfortunately for Drapeau he was sent back to Canada. So they sent another consul by the name of Nestor Schortz, a black lady just my colour, who has originally from Jamaica. She was just checking all the list of people that they refused. She saw my name and she asked the United Nations office in Cuba, what is wrong with this guy? Then the United Nations explained to her that this guy was refused by Drapeau being that he's married to a Cuban. Then Nestor Schortz said, no we have to open the file of this guy right away. I was a primary school teacher before I left my country of origin, I was a primary school teacher. I normally teach the kids, I have a poem that I normally teach, that if you fail, try again. So I decided to try again. So I went for the interview. Fortunately for me the lady told me that I have been accepted to come to Canada. She asked me where I want to go to Canada. I said, any suitable place where I can exercise my specialty as an agricultural engineer. Then she told me, you're going to Red Deer. Since the time I came in 2003 from Red Deer, it is a first experience to come over here. Ten years I've been in Red Deer I just visited two or three times in Edmonton and Calgary, but from there I never go anywhere again. I've been a Canadian citizen, I'm now even trying to renew my passport. I never went anywhere, even I have some family in England and the United States. My elder brother is living in England and my younger sister is living there, but I never went anywhere, just here. I'm accustomed to this system, and the people in Red Deer are very good people, so I decided to stay there. But what is a little bit discouraging is ten years I've been looking for a job, I couldn't get a job relating to my specialty. When I came I did all the necessary evaluations, and according to two organizations that evaluated my document, they said, you are into the Canadian standard of education. But getting the evaluation is one thing and having a job is another thing. That's why I decided to be in Olymel for these ten good years. Actually during this time a government institution invited me to an interview, but I was not chosen. By that time they had on their website preference will be given to Canadian citizen. At the time they invited me I was not yet Canadian; it's just six months when I came. They asked me a series of questions and I answered then, then they asked me one question – are you Canadian citizen? I also have

to ask them that question, I said that question is rhetorical. They said, what do you mean? I said, it need no answer. If I've been here for six months I can't be a Canadian citizen. Then they leave that question and asked me another question, Canadian experience. There were three in the interview and I looked and them and said, where do you sell Canadian experience? They started laughing. I said, no you can't laugh. You don't sell it in Superstore, you don't sell it in Safeway, you don't sell it anywhere. To have Canadian experience usually requires me to mingle with you so I can get that. They said I'm smart. I said, no, it's common logic; I'm not smart, but it's common logic. If you want me to have that Canadian experience, employ me so that I can prove my mettle. I'm in Olymel actually for ten good years. I've been a safety union rep for the past five years, I'm a safety union rep. Now I'm a union representative for the past nearly three years, I'm now a union representative. I'm a member of a joint health and safety committee of the company, Olymel. We meet once every month; I'm a member of that committee.

Q: You say those were ten good years at Olymel. What made them good years?

MK: Well thanks be to God because I'm still healthy, although they detected diabetes for me here. But why I say it's good because the Canadian people are good, not every one is bad. Just like in every country, you have bad people, but here the people that I've encountered in Red Deer, they've helped me and my wife. In the space of six years I'm able to buy a house. I have my own house, although I'm paying for it, but it's my own house. My daughter, my family, they are living happily. Half a loaf is better than none. I can say thanks be to God. That's why I said they are good years. I'm healthy, nobody is pursuing me here. Maybe if I would've been in Sierra Leone at that time I would've been killed during the civil war. People ? four years, many people are amputated. Over 5,000 people are in my country right now without arms; they can't walk. They were amputated because the rebels, when the civil war was in, the rebels will ask you, do you want to go to war or do you want to fight for us or not? If you say no, they cut your arm. Only two

arms, they cut them all, maybe they cut the foots. So they are over 5,000 people in my country right now that have no hands.

Q: What caused the civil war?

MK: The civil war really has a lot of causes. One was tribal something. The other one was nepotism, because the president that was in was just taking care of his own group. Another one was corruption, because all of them they are corrupt. Even before the civil war I had an uncle who was a function in minister, and it was believed that he embezzled a lot of money. That's why I'm persecuted, that's why I cannot return to my country. Those people that are not educated the idea, but we that are educated immediately when you are in they eliminate you. Even one of my daughter, my only daughter that I have in my country during that time in 2001, she was 17 years, they just wrote me a letter that they have killed her. They wouldn't ? me, so practically I couldn't return. I have been out of my country for over 27 good years since 1986, so it's really a very tragic situation, very tragic.

Q: Did the union help make Olymel a good workplace?

MK: The union has really helped in that even me professionally I was having problem with some of the supervisors because of rights, because of disappointment. You can just imagine working under people that have not even finished high school. I'm a university graduate, so they shout, they do these attempts. When I'm stressed I normally have to voice my opinion. So at one or two occasions they wanted to kick me out, but the union was so strong that... The union in Olymel is strong, this is what made me to join the union. Now even right now at this present moment the human resources manager of Olymel is just a brother from Africa, he's from Nigeria. He's trying to convince me now to be part of management. I said, no. I told him, I said, this is my work. In the forefront of my goals in life, humanity comes first. This is what I told him. I said, for me human

being is more important than money. So I have that in mind that nobody will convince me. I've been like that and I'm going to continue to fight for the union. Nobody will convince me. I told them point blank, I said, look Wally, because the guy is Wally ??, a Nigerian. We speak not only English but we speak the broken pidgin, how are you, how you do feel – we have the pidgin language because of after the abolition of slavery the slaves that were taken to America, some of them were illiterate. So for them to communicate with their colonial masters they had to invent that Creole. You can say, how you do feel, that's Creole, that is how do you feel. Where are you go, ya you going. How do you feel hungry, that's to say I'm hungry. Those are the Creole, those are the broken English words. So me and Wally, we speak that. I say, Wally, don't worry, we are all from Africa. But in the forefront of my rules in life, humanity comes first. I will be with the union. So this is the reality, my story.

Q: We all think of Red Deer as being a rightwing backwards community when it comes to racial tolerance. Did you encounter racial discrimination?

MK: Well actually in Red Deer as a matter of fact some people they might be racist, but they don't complain. If it's something straight, where I got that and that's why I decided, I said I will never work with management. I met a man, he has already retired, he was the quality assurance manager, the QA. So he's a doctor, Dr. Matt, a veterinary medicine doctor but not a PhD man. So when I came with my documents I showed him my documents that I have a double Masters degree in agriculture, he was nervous. He told me that he was not going to employ me. That guy made a bad reputation about me that they had, what can I say, an image that is not good about me. So after they've already analyzed some of them and saw that I'm a good fellow, now they want to take me to administration or to management. I told them, I said, no. As a matter of fact, I always tell people, I say there's no landlord for science. Science is the ? study science, there is no landlord for that. I told people, logically I said, if this is white it remains to be white for me. For you to say this is red, you have to prove that scientifically that this is red by

giving me some convincing fact. So the problem is that the supervisor at Olymel management are those people that when they say this is red you should see red. When they say ? on someone you should do that. When they say, suspend that guy to go home, you should do that. Me, I have to think; I can't do that. I'm a human being, human being is part of me so I can't do that.

Q: What about on the streets of Red Deer, what about when you do business in Red Deer? What about when you children go to school in Red Deer? Is everything okay there?

MK: I've never seen that. People say that, even people who say that, how do you call them, redneck, is it redneck? But I've never seen that. Me when I came, I've never seen that. Nobody has discriminated me, just as what I told you. When I came, I'm a Muslim but the Catholic church helped us a lot. I'm a Muslim but not a fanatic one, because my wife is a Catholic lady. My wife is a Cuban lady, a Catholic lady. When I came here, when I went to Red Deer I went to, there was a mosque that I attended on two or three occasions up to a fourth time. Then the fifth time the imam asked me, hey where is your wife? Is your wife not a Muslim? I said, no, she's Catholic. Why? I said, no. According to the Koran, because I've read a lot, I said, according to the Koran, we have a whole chapter in the Koran that's just about women. I said, God said the kids and the foods of the people of the book. When we talk of the people of the book in the Koran we are talking to the Christians, the Catholic. He said, God said they are lawful for you, it's lawful for me to marry a Christian woman because she believes in God. So they started harassing me so I decided no. I'm talking of the Muslim community. I said, no I'm not coming to a mosque again. At one time they went to my house. I called 911, they run away and from that time they didn't go to my house again. I called 911. Why? I don't know who is right. Religion might be dogmatic, this is my only thinking. Religion might be dogmatic, nobody knows who is right. So you cannot just, most of the problems in the world have been caused by religion. Look at what is going on in Nigeria. Look at what is going on in Burma, Myanmar. Muslims kill Christians, Christians kill Muslims. Look at

what is going on in Egypt, the cops and the Muslims. Killings. ? they didn't ? anyone to kill anyone. Life is so precious. I can read some words in the Koran and I can ? it in Arabic language. God said in the holy Koran, he said, sorry man is making the best way. And that ? has made it the best way, he will reduce man in the lowest of the low. Why? In Africa if a cow dies people run to take the cow to eat. They don't even check, they just want to eat. But when a human being die they throw you away, nobody will eat you. So God has reduced us in the lowest of the low.

Q: What things were happening with socialism in Cuba that made you not want to live there?

MK: Actually not because of socialism, that's not the main reason. It's because of freedom of expression. If in any country whatsoever the human being, according to the United Nations charter, according to anything, the first thing is liberty of expression. If you don't have that all the other things are very... In Cuba the people thinks like the revolution. You cannot think in your way. Immediately if you think in your way, you are against the revolution. So if I live there with my humanity concept, I don't think I could live there happily. That's why I just decided. And moreover, if you watch Cuba it's a country that has a high percentage of literacy, many graduates. But they don't have jobs. A labourer in Canada, I'm doing a labourer job. What I received for two weeks, a medical doctor in Cuba will not receive that for one year. It's money for you all month, maybe if you convert that money to dollars it'll be \$30. I'm receiving for two weeks only \$1,200, you can just imagine. That's why this is why education is free in Cuba, medical something is free, because you cannot pay for them. That's why they are free.

Q: Did you see the effects of the American blockade?

MK: Oh ya, that also affects Cuba. In one way or the other, they are very good doctors. There are very good things, but they don't have those sophisticated machinery or

anything to be able to do many things that other people can do. That's why when Fidel send those doctors to do international mission, they're always very good. Internally they go to Africa or Angola or these countries, these countries give them the necessary equipment to work with. But in Cuba, because of the economy blockade, they can't get this. There we are well up to date when the Soviet Union was existing. But after the fall down of the Soviet Union, there we are totally blocked and there's no one to help them again. So the economy blockade has a very big impact on Cuba.

Q: You're here at this school. What do you think of this experience at the school?

MK: Well actually I came to this school, I'd already done some safety courses that I did at Red Deer College. I came in first to detail myself about the union because I'm teaching the human being, I want to know, and I want to know how the union function. Moreover, I want to interact with other people from other areas so that I can gain more experience, because every day human being learns. Every day you learn new things. So ? experience in life, even the natural beauty that I saw when I'm coming, the mountains that I saw. It was just like recollecting of the past abdication, like a telepathist I was thinking about my country. Also in the capital we have mountains like that. If I tell you the ? Sierra Leone has, Sierra Leone is an English speaking country. But the first explorer that went to my country was a Portuguese man by the name of Pedro de Sintra. But when he went there almost the English were there. So he went during the time of the rainy season, there was thunder and lightening. But in the capital, Freetown, the mountains there have shapes like lion, like this. So he thought the thunder and lightening are the roaring of those and he called it Sierra Leo, which means Lion Mountain. He was thinking that it was the mount of lion, so that's why they said Sierra Leone, but in Portuguese means Lion Mountain. But actually to be candid with you, I didn't see a lion in my country in the first moment. It was when I went to Tanzania that was where I saw lions. But later I saw a lion in my country but they are very difficult to... What I saw in my country before I left my country, there are lots of elephants. But before I left the country there were only about

25,000 elephants. People were killing them to get the ivory to sell so they killed a lot. Not only in Sierra Leone, look at all those Ivory Coast, all those countries – they killed all those animals. It's really a pathetic fallacy. Even ? sympathize with those animals, but you can't do anything because it's lack of, it's poverty.

Q: You are now a Canadian citizen.

MK: Yes.

Q: What are your thoughts about what's going on in this country or this province? What do you observe about what's happening to our Canadian way of life and our society?

MK: Actually to be candid with you, Canada has a lot of good things. Just like in other countries, you have some downs. That's why when people ask me, if you ask me right now I will tell you I am managing life. I always feel life is full of ups and downs, so I always manage. In Canada a lot of things are good. For instance, I can give you a simple example. In Red Deer where I live many thing, well when you come to the local community like the City of Red Deer, they do the ??, I do believe that they are not doing the maximum thing to help. You go now you see we pay a lot of property tax. Well they don't even clean the snow; really they're supposed to clean it. So these are some obstacle that we have to change. Moreover, there are things most of the employers, especially most of these companies, I don't know for the government, they prefer to save ? the position rather than doing the job. If he's a manager he doesn't know anyone with smarts to get near him, he just want the people that say, you do this, they say yes. As long as they know they are smart, they kick you, you go to the corner. This is what rules will change the attitude of people. People will change the attitude, anyway what can you do. There is an English proverb that says, a fool at 40 is a fool forever. You can't change someone when he's 40 years old. You can change a little kid, you can try to modify the character of a little kid. But when someone is 40 years you can't do it, no. So it's very difficult to

change some people's mentality here. But to be candid, generally even in Red Deer if you ask me what is the percentage of people you feel are good, I will tell you over 85%. I've never met any bad guy from Red Deer. Why? Because I don't mingle myself with drugs. Why? Because I never drink in my life. Why? Because I never smoke in my life. I'm now 53 years and I never do any of these things. So I'm always with my family.

Q: Did your wife adjust? What does she think of Canada?

MK: Well actually if you ask my wife she will say she's 100% happy. Why? Because in Cuba she was an engineer just like me. When I went to Cuba she was already graduated. She graduated in 1986 and I went to Cuba in 1986. How we met, she came to do a course in my school. That's where we met and made friends. That was in 1990 and with my wife 24 years ago we are together. But she's happy because just as what I told you, there is no future in Cuba. If you come to a country, even if you are doing a hard job, very difficult job, they pay you \$500 or \$800 or \$900 that you can't get in Cuba for over five years, you'll be happy. She's happy over here.

Q: Did she get a job that was commensurate with her training?

MK: No, she's also working in Olymel with me. She's working in the morning shift and I'm working in the afternoon, because we have a lovely kid, a small kid that we are looking after. I don't want to take my kid to any babysitter, I want my kid to have my own values. So taking her to babysitting or anything of that sort, she'll have another different what can I say, discipline. Not that people are very bad, people are not bad. But when you take your kid to babysitting maybe the person that is doing that cannot only concentrate with your kid, because of the condition maybe she's having two, three or four. So any of those kids they have different will doing things. But if my kid is with me, when I stay with my kid up to 2:30. My wife finish work at 2:30. It's just five minutes drive where I live; I live in Kenwood in Street 77. Down 77 is where Olymel is, so it's just five minutes

drive. I go, I pick my wife, bring her home, then my wife will go with my daughter when she go from the bus, then I go back to work. If there's overtime I have a friend who is just a neighbour who live in the same neighbourhood, so she just stay with my daughter for maybe one hour playing with the kids of the other lady. When my wife comes she will pick her. So I don't want my daughter to be brought up by anyone, I want to bring her up myself.

Q: It's always interesting to hear from people who come from another country.

MK: Actually I have a very good opinion about the Canadians. You know why? Even when you need a friend, just you take, what can I say, a weighing machine, to weigh between the bad and the good aspect of your friend. If the good aspect are up, forget about the bad aspect and take him as a friend. Maybe after some time you might try to convince him to leave some of the bad aspect. For instance, I have friends, when I went to Cuba I had friends that are great smokers, they smoke a lot. So one day I call my friend and say, you have very good attitude, very good attitude. I said, but I would like you to leave smoking. He said, no I can't. I said, no you can. You know what I did? She always smokes about two packets a day, ya. So I said, alright come. I didn't tell him to stop smoking, instead of buying two packets I was the one who bought one packet for him. I divide the cigarette into two halves, so he started smoking that. He said, this is good. That's the first step. The second step, the old packet is about 20 cigarettes so we had 10. The ten we started dividing it, so he was reducing the way he was smoking. Finally before I left Cuba he's not a smoker, he's not a smoker. Just like what he said, the crocodile is a very dangerous animal. If you want to take the crocodile from the river, you give that crocodile good names. Hey, you give him good names everything, you take him from the river, you bring him down on land, you know he can't go so you can even call him crocodile. But you have to do something to take him from there, because if you don't do that you will never get him. So you have to use strategies to do things. Someone has been drinking for over 30 years, you just want to come and take him off from drinking

one day. You can't, you have to bring him to the logic, please drink when you are alone. Because if you drink in front of people they will look low upon you, even if you say good things they'll just, that man is a funny man. Ya, so you try to encourage that person, giving him the bad and the good effects of drinking. But you still tell him, you drink a little bit. Don't tell him not to drink.

Q: What kinds of things do you work with around health and safety at Olymel?

MK: Actually a Labourer in Olymel is a level 2 job. I've been doing this work for over five years. That's the last job that I have, as a Safety Representative. I told you that I was on the safety committee, it's true. The safety committee is there to see everything safe, people working in a safe environment, working environment. For instance, the floor is dry, everything is dry. I do even safety inspection if I'm going to the safety meeting. So I have to report to the committee on the situation on the afternoon shift, because I'm the safety guy. For instance, I have to do an inspection in the box room, in the knife room, in the pop court, in the chipper, in the laundry room – I have to do all these inspection. I even have to go to one part of shipping that they call packoff. So I have to do all these. After that I have to inspect if they are good mouse traps. I have to inspect all the other things. So after that I take this to the company. One part of the inspection I have to do is about SSOP, Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures – to see if the floor is dry and clean, to see that there's no smell in the meat. Sometimes you have a ?? smell in the meat, so I have to see all that. I have to see there are no leakages from the roof. So I have to see all those things. After doing everything then I write a report. When we go to the meeting, the meeting is from 1 to 2 o'clock. So normally I sacrifice my time or they pay me for that as overtime. So we go for the meeting and we analyze things relating all the safety procedure in the plant. Then after that we'll find solution. We don't normally analyze them all but we give solution to them, short term solution and long term solution. Some solutions they don't have immediate solution, some problems don't have immediate solution.

Q: It's the union that appointed you?

MK: Ya, it's the union. So it's a joint safety meeting between the union and the company. We are six members of the union and six members of management, with one neutral member. So this meets every one month, one in every month. Every Monday, the last Monday of every month we meet. So on the 27<sup>th</sup> I have a meeting. Ya.

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