

Interview with Kyaw ("Matrix") Zin Thu on March 31, 2023

0:00:03.000,0:00:05.513

Hello! Good afternoon, Matrix.

0:00:05.513,0:00:06.775

Hello! Good afternoon.

0:00:06.775,0:00:08.540

How are you today?

0:00:08.540,0:00:10.103

I'm good professor! How are you?

0:00:10.103,0:00:20.544

I'm fine. It's really nice to see you again. It's been a while, so I'm happy that you have the time to talk to me today. Thank you!

0:00:20.544,0:00:35.000

I'm going to begin with a little introduction about the project and a little quick biography of you, and then we'll get into some of the questions. I know you only have time for one interview.

0:00:35.000,0:00:39.000

So in this interview, I'm going to ask you a little bit about your life

0:00:39.000,0:00:55.480

in Myanmar, before you moved to the United States, and then in the second part of today's interview, I will talk to you a little bit about your experience here in Montgomery County, and at Montgomery College, and about your plans for the future.

0:00:55.500,0:00:56.000

Okay? We have about one hour.

0:00:56.000,0:00:57.000

Sure.

0:00:57.000,0:01:01.480

I'll begin with a little introduction about you.

0:01:02.480,0:01:03.000

I know you as Matrix.

0:01:04.000,0:01:12.000

You can tell us more about your nickname in a little bit, and I will try to pronounce your name correctly, Kyaw Zin Thu,

0:01:12.000,0:01:13.000

is that right? Can you say it?

0:01:13.000,0:01:18.000

Yeah, Kyaw Zin Thu, yeah. You did really good.

0:01:18.000,0:01:19.056

I'm trying.

0:01:19.056,0:01:20.000

Perfect.

0:01:21.000,0:01:36.000

So let's see, you were born in Yangon, Myanmar, and Yangon was formerly known as Rangoon, and Myanmar was known as Burma, and was renamed in 1989, I believe, is that right?

0:01:36.000,0:01:38.000

Yeah, that's correct.

0:01:38.000,0:01:42.000

Okay, and now you live with your aunt and uncle in Brookville, Maryland.

0:01:42.000,0:01:44.000

You speak Burmese and English.

0:01:44.000,0:01:49.117

You moved to the United States in August of 2022.

0:01:49.117,0:01:54.000

When you were back in your home country, you studied engineering for four years,

0:01:55.000,0:01:59.733

but you now plan to study Information Systems.

0:01:59.733,0:02:07.122

I know that you started studying at MC in the fall of 2022, and that you're planning to move to New York City,

0:02:07.122,0:02:16.538

which is very exciting, this summer, and that you hope to attend the Borough of Manhattan Community College or LaGuardia Community College.

0:02:16.538,0:02:19.383

That's very exciting, keep us posted on that.

0:02:19.383,0:02:26.229

And I know that in your spare time, you enjoy playing soccer, watching movies, and hanging out with your friends.

0:02:26.229,0:02:30.969

So thank you, Matrix, for taking the time to tell me your story.

0:02:30.969,0:02:38.372

My name is Heather Bruce Satrom, and I teach in ELAP, English Language for Academic Purposes, at Montgomery College.

0:02:38.372,0:02:46.200

This project is called History in the Making: Documenting Stories of Immigrants and Refugee Students at MC.

0:02:46.200,0:02:54.145

The goal is to help others better understand the experiences of immigrants and refugees in the United States.

0:02:54.145,0:03:04.216

Telling your story will help others to better understand the challenges that you face and appreciate the resilience and perseverance of people in your community.

0:03:04.216,0:03:07.280

So I'm very grateful for your participation.

0:03:07.280,0:03:11.084

Today is Friday, March 31st,

0:03:12.080,0:03:17.242

it is about 3:45 in the afternoon, and we'll take about one hour.

0:03:17.242,0:03:24.301

So could you.. to begin, a very easy question. Could you tell me your full name and spell it for me, please?

0:03:24.301,0:03:28.861

Okay! My name is Kyaw Zin Thu.

0:03:28.861,0:03:34.593

It's spelled k, y, a, w, z, i, n and t, h, u.

0:03:35.000,0:03:38.531

Great, and do I have permission to record this interview?

0:03:38.531,0:03:40.480

Yes, you have my permission.

0:03:40.480,0:03:43.988

Thank you, and you saw the questions in advance,

0:03:43.988,0:03:48.053

and, as I mentioned to you earlier, if you want to skip any questions,

0:03:48.053,0:03:50.502
just say I'd like to skip a question, that's fine.

0:03:50.502,0:03:53.233
If you need a break at any point, that's also fine, too.

0:03:53.233,0:03:54.720
So just let me know.

0:03:55.720,0:03:59.177
So first of all, let's talk about your name.

0:03:59.177,0:04:05.262
How you chose the nickname "Matrix." I imagine that there is a story behind that.

0:04:05.262,0:04:08.761
Can you tell us the story about why you use the name "Matrix"?

0:04:09.760,0:04:15.358
Oh, yeah, so English nickname are not very popular in my country.

0:04:15.358,0:04:19.466
We usually use our first name or something like that.

0:04:19.466,0:04:23.214
But when I came here,

0:04:23.214,0:04:26.228
when I have to talk to everyone,

0:04:26.228,0:04:36.052
we have to say.. name each other, so whenever I ask them, I say my name to everyone "Kyaw Zin," and they didn't really understand.

0:04:36.052,0:04:43.342
So I have to explain to them and every time I introduce to someone. That's why I had the idea,

0:04:43.342,0:04:51.277
it will be better if I choose, an English nickname, so that I can communicate better with other people in here.

0:04:51.277,0:05:00.124
So I chose Matrix, because when I was younger, I loved to watch the movie called "Matrix."

0:05:00.124,0:05:08.192
Like at the age of seven I saw the movie, and then I was really interested in the name "Matrix."

0:05:08.192,0:05:10.774
So that's why I decided to get the nickname.

0:05:10.774,0:05:13.091
What did you like about that movie?

0:05:14.080,0:05:24.339
You know what.. When I was a kid, you know, like, dodging bullets and then.. that kind of a crazy agent movies really inspiring me.

0:05:24.339,0:05:29.786
So, yeah, that's the coolest movie I've ever watched in my childhood.

0:05:29.786,0:05:35.810
I remember when that movie came out. It was very innovative at the time.

0:05:35.810,0:05:41.957
Yeah! So your name is easy to remember, because I think a lot of people are familiar with that movie.

0:05:43.920,0:05:45.070
So let's see, you know..

0:05:45.070,0:05:46.840
Go down here a little bit.

0:05:46.840,0:05:50.177
Tell me about when you..

0:05:50.177,0:05:52.751
you moved to the United States in what year?

0:05:53.720,0:05:55.233
In 2022.

0:05:55.233,0:06:01.867
Okay, so before that point, can you share some memories about growing up?

0:06:01.867,0:06:06.144
You grew up in the capital city of Myanmar.

0:06:06.144,0:06:09.792
Now known as Yangon, did I pronounce that correctly?

0:06:09.792,0:06:12.720
Yeah, that's correct.

0:06:12.720,0:06:14.086
Yeah! So that's a very big city, right?

0:06:14.086,0:06:14.873
Yeah.

0:06:14.873,0:06:18.585
Can you tell me a little bit about the city where you grew up? Tell us about Yangon.

0:06:18.585,0:06:19.768
Oh, yeah.

0:06:19.768,0:06:25.253
So Yangon was once the capital city of, Myanmar,

0:06:25.253,0:06:32.675
and later then the Government decided to build a new city called Naypyidaw,

0:06:32.675,0:06:43.193
and then they name it like a capital city, but Yangon was the popular.. the most popular city around the country,

0:06:43.193,0:06:50.844
and it's also a commercial city. So, all you can see, like all the people

0:06:50.844,0:06:53.838
walking at Yangon. It's really a crowded city.

0:06:53.838,0:06:58.948
And it's really fun,

0:06:58.948,0:07:02.456
you know, it's really an entertaining city, yeah.

0:07:03.440,0:07:05.527
Did you grow up in a big family?

0:07:05.527,0:07:08.861
Oh, yeah, actually,

0:07:08.861,0:07:10.831
my family,

0:07:10.831,0:07:14.774
my father, my mother, and my eldest sister and me.

0:07:14.774,0:07:24.581
Just us, but we live together with the other cousins. So we are really a big, you know, big family.

0:07:24.581,0:07:29.963
And even though they are my cousins, we feel like we are a sibling to each other.

0:07:29.963,0:07:31.392
I see.

0:07:31.392,0:07:32.455
Yeah.

0:07:32.455,0:07:36.844
And did you grow up in an apartment building? What was your house like, where you grew up?

0:07:36.844,0:07:50.244
Oh, yeah, until, I think when I was yeah... since I was.. I was living in an apartment since I was born to,

0:07:50.244,0:07:52.659
I think, around 2015.

0:07:52.659,0:07:57.680
But after that my family bought a house, and then we moved to there

0:07:57.680,0:08:02.302
and then we lived there.. we lived there since then, yeah.

0:08:04.280,0:08:08.438
And can you tell me, one of the

0:08:08.438,0:08:13.643
photographs that you sent, which we will post, shows you wearing traditional clothing.

0:08:13.643,0:08:18.431
Can you talk a little bit about that clothing, and how that reflects your culture?

0:08:18.431,0:08:26.557
Oh, yeah, I mean, you are talking about volunteering. I think, so..

0:08:26.557,0:08:30.733
I remember when I was in high school,

0:08:30.733,0:08:38.399
whenever we have a good grade, I went to the monastery to volunteer.

0:08:38.399,0:08:48.409
A monastery is like a summer camp for the kids. So I volunteer in, you know, for the..

0:08:48.409,0:08:53.457
for watching the kids, feeding the kids, or something like that,

0:08:53.457,0:08:55.794
and also

0:08:55.794,0:09:03.905
in our culture, we have to wear traditional clothes in a monastery, pagodas, or something like that.

0:09:03.905,0:09:10.675
I really loved to wear my traditional costume, because it is comfortable,

0:09:10.675,0:09:16.261
and it's really suitable with the weather also.

0:09:16.261,0:09:20.423
So you volunteered in a monastery where monks lived?

0:09:20.423,0:09:21.920
Yeah, yeah.

0:09:21.920,0:09:23.446
These were Buddhist monks?

0:09:23.446,0:09:31.744
Yeah. Buddhist monks. It was really a big.. really big a compound where, you know, multiple buildings.

0:09:33.720,0:09:37.803
Is Buddhism very important in your home country? Are most people Buddhist?

0:09:38.800,0:09:40.833
Yeah, so..

0:09:40.833,0:09:42.468
most of the majority of people

0:09:42.468,0:09:55.542
are Buddhism, so yeah, of course.. monks.. Buddhist monks have really, you know, a great influence on our people.

0:09:55.542,0:10:04.990
So we really, for example, from the aspect of religion, we have to respect them.

0:10:04.990,0:10:10.602
What is a really important holiday in your home country?

0:10:10.602,0:10:17.427
We have holidays in every month of the year,

0:10:17.427,0:10:28.787
but that most enjoyable and the most longest holiday was in April, I think, which was the Thingyan Festival.

0:10:28.787,0:10:37.346
So it is like the New Year, Burmese New Year. So we celebrate, as we welcome our New Year.

0:10:37.346,0:10:44.904
So during Thingyan festival, we splash water at each other, you know..

0:10:44.904,0:10:52.776
It was really fun, and it was.. we celebrate for four days, yeah.

0:10:52.776,0:10:57.285
Did you say, part of the celebration is splashing water at each other?

0:10:57.285,0:10:57.832
Yup, yeah.

0:10:57.832,0:11:02.278
Can you talk a little bit more about that? Explain the meaning behind that?

0:11:02.278,0:11:19.297
Oh it's like.. so during Thingyan festival, it's going to be based on the timeline. So, since I.. when I was younger, there's no, you know, entertainment stage, or

0:11:19.297,0:11:27.841
you know, a really big stage to celebrate the water festival. So as kids, we have to..

0:11:27.841,0:11:38.619
We have to carry the water bucket to the street, and so, whenever people pass the street,

0:11:38.619,0:11:44.839
we splash water, and then.. it's just like a tradition. They didn't get mad at us, you know,

0:11:44.839,0:11:48.605
because it is a tradition. During this period, you have to..

0:11:48.605,0:11:54.447
people will.. people will splash you with water, and then you can't get mad at them.

0:11:54.447,0:11:56.463
Then you get mad at them?

0:11:56.463,0:11:59.149
Yeah, as, you know,

0:11:59.149,0:12:09.752
in modern life.. modern timeline, there are a lot of entertainment places. People..

0:12:09.752,0:12:20.080
A lot of companies built a really big stage, a really big compound, where people can, you know, play with water, dancing or enjoying,

0:12:20.080,0:12:21.499
something like that.

0:12:21.499,0:12:24.022
So, yeah, it was really fun.

0:12:24.022,0:12:26.923
It does sound fun to splash water at each other.

0:12:26.923,0:12:27.724
Yeah.

0:12:28.720,0:12:35.192
Were there traditional foods associated with this New Year Water Festival?

0:12:36.160,0:12:41.831
Yeah, that it's called

0:12:43.800,0:12:44.940
Mont Lone Yay Baw.

0:12:44.940,0:12:55.784
It mean.. it's just a, you know, like a round of wheat. I don't know how to describe it, but it will be better if I show you the picture.

0:12:55.784,0:12:58.717
Yeah, maybe send me a picture later, we can include that.

0:12:58.717,0:12:59.986
Yeah, yeah.

0:12:59.986,0:13:08.565
When you were growing up in your home country, you mentioned that you saw the movie Matrix, which, of course, a science fiction.

0:13:08.565,0:13:17.271
But did you see other movies or television series that had images of the United States in it?

0:13:17.271,0:13:22.314
Did you have an idea about the United States because of movies or television?

0:13:24.280,0:13:31.839
Yeah, I mean, in my country, we call it Hollywood movies. So they are really popular in my country,

0:13:31.839,0:13:35.549
and also,

0:13:35.549,0:13:40.340
I also like to watch the WWE.

0:13:40.340,0:13:48.000
Yeah, it's my though.. I could see the American flags in, you know, in every matches. So I..

0:13:48.000,0:13:52.571
I was familiar with, you know, American culture,

0:13:52.571,0:13:57.289

not in person, but in, you know, but from my vision.

0:13:57.289,0:14:01.759
And how was it different when you got here?

0:14:01.759,0:14:09.278
What was the contrast between what you had in your mind, from Hollywood movies, and what the reality was?

0:14:09.278,0:14:14.389
Oh, yeah, that's a great question. So it was..

0:14:14.389,0:14:18.675
I mean honestly it was totally different, you know..

0:14:18.675,0:14:26.645
As a kid, I was thinking, if I move to the United States, it would be really fun. I will be always partying,

0:14:26.645,0:14:37.863
or people are all friends. We can watch a game like football.. American football, baseball, basketball something like that, but

0:14:37.863,0:14:43.747
when I came here.. In here, everybody is busy with their jobs,

0:14:43.747,0:14:51.507
and you know, they only have.. They only have a time for their family,

0:14:51.507,0:14:56.436
so they don't really much, you know, social things.

0:14:56.436,0:15:05.831
And then, I'm not sure, but you know, based on my experience in Maryland, it looks like it.

0:15:05.831,0:15:10.292
Do you feel like it's difficult to get to know American people?

0:15:10.292,0:15:15.668
Yes, of course! At first, it's really difficult.

0:15:17.640,0:15:28.232
I don't know. Based on my experience, they are really great people, but they are not the person who always.. who will always start the conversation.

0:15:28.232,0:15:39.118
If you start the conversation with them, they are really, great listeners.. good listeners, and then great communicators, so you will get a friend, later.

0:15:39.118,0:15:43.527
But all you got to do is, you need to make that first conversation first.

0:15:43.527,0:15:55.309
One thing that I remember you mentioning when you were in my class was that most Americans know very little about your home country.

0:15:55.309,0:16:00.420
That they don't know anything about it, or only a very little bit.

0:16:02.400,0:16:05.002
Maybe that's because of the name change of your country.

0:16:05.002,0:16:08.448
But it may be for other reasons, as well.

0:16:08.448,0:16:14.857
Do you find that frustrating that people in America know so little about your home country?

0:16:14.857,0:16:18.503
I mean, it's not..

0:16:18.503,0:16:23.690

It's not that frustrating things, you know.

0:16:23.690,0:16:33.470

Because I said a little people know about my country because all I ask is a student around here.

0:16:33.470,0:16:37.493

So for students, they probably don't know my country.

0:16:37.493,0:16:41.964

Because our country is not that famous, at the moment.

0:16:43.960,0:16:52.192

But whenever I ask adults, or older people, they always know my country, 'Oh, yeah! It was Burma."

0:16:52.192,0:16:54.142

It was Burma, that's what people say, yeah.

0:16:54.142,0:17:01.389

One of the pictures you sent that I love is of some of the students in our class on the last day,

0:17:01.389,0:17:05.994

and when I looked at that photo, there are students from everywhere.

0:17:05.994,0:17:12.395

So since you've been at Montgomery College, have you had the chance to learn about other cultures, as well?

0:17:12.395,0:17:17.915

Yeah, of course! Here, we can see

0:17:17.915,0:17:22.884

people from.. a lot of people from different cultures. So,

0:17:22.884,0:17:34.940

in our class, I met with (Eric), who is from Bangladesh, also (Estrella) from Mexico,

0:17:34.940,0:17:42.552

and (Ayusha) from Nepal, I think. It's like there are a lot of people from different cultures.

0:17:42.552,0:17:47.553

So yeah, whenever we talk about it, it's like different cultural things

0:17:47.553,0:17:50.210

from our each own country.

0:17:50.210,0:17:54.308

So I learned a lot.

0:17:54.308,0:17:59.644

When you were in your home country, how old were you when you first started studying English?

0:17:59.644,0:18:05.884

So we have to study English, I think

0:18:05.884,0:18:09.774

in elementary school. Yeah!

0:18:09.774,0:18:13.339

So English has been the..

0:18:13.339,0:18:22.462

Has been the major subject in elementary school, until through the graduate school, so

0:18:25.440,0:18:28.502

we have to learn English,

0:18:28.502,0:18:34.987

and then.. we have to learn only English subjects in University.

0:18:34.987,0:18:39.408
So we don't learn our own language in University.

0:18:39.408,0:18:42.149
You use English in University there?

0:18:42.149,0:18:42.906
Yeah.

0:18:42.906,0:18:47.269
Is it British English, because of the history of colonization?

0:18:48.240,0:18:50.733
Yeah, most of them are British English. Yeah!

0:18:50.733,0:18:55.908
But they.. I mean, we don't really

0:18:55.908,0:19:02.708
take serious about the British accent.

0:19:02.708,0:19:07.174
So when you came here, you had to take a placement test,

0:19:07.174,0:19:07.674
Yeah.

0:19:07.674,0:19:14.240
and you were placed into the ELAP program, English Language for Academic Purposes.

0:19:14.240,0:19:18.028
How did you feel about that, having to take English classes?

0:19:18.028,0:19:31.774
Oh, yeah. So, I took the IELTS test before I applied for the college in here. So I got 6.0 out of 9.0.

0:19:31.774,0:19:44.028
I think, so, I had to speak with the counselor.. One of the counselors at MC. So we made an online meeting.

0:19:44.028,0:19:50.542
And then she ask me some questions, and I answered, and then she said

0:19:50.542,0:19:59.868
"your English, is good, but I will put you in the ELAI 990 first," you know, if you..

0:19:59.868,0:20:02.658
A highest level class, the capstone course.

0:20:02.658,0:20:03.158
Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's why.

0:20:03.158,0:20:07.451
I'm okay with that, you know.

0:20:07.451,0:20:21.762
Actually, I was very happy about that, because I can see a lot of people from different cultures, you know, who are also maybe freshman in college,

0:20:21.762,0:20:24.362
so we can share our experience.

0:20:24.362,0:20:35.181
So in that class, that's the capstone course, and for people who are not familiar with it, there's reading, writing, speaking, and listening in that class. So it's a lot.

0:20:36.160,0:20:41.012
And you use technology in that class, too, because you are creating digital stories.

0:20:41.012,0:20:49.325
So you were learning a lot. Did you feel like that class prepared you well for the credit level classes that you took after?

0:20:50.320,0:20:58.375
Yeah, of course! It helped me a lot. Now I am taking English 101 class. So, you know,

0:20:58.375,0:21:05.391
I don't feel like I'm struggling in my English 101 class, because I took it.

0:21:05.391,0:21:13.026
Yeah, I already took the ELAI 990 class. I know some of the writing techniques, or concepts about that.

0:21:13.026,0:21:13.970
So, yeah, I'm okay with that.

0:21:15.960,0:21:19.882
What differences did you notice between your experience going to university

0:21:19.882,0:21:24.888
in your home country and your experience going to college here at Montgomery College?

0:21:24.888,0:21:34.122
I mean, there are lot of differences. Because in my country,

0:21:34.122,0:21:41.448
whether we pass the.. we are.. whether we are qualified for the next year or no..

0:21:41.448,0:21:49.398
The guide in whether we are qualified for next year or not, is based only on our midterm and final exam.

0:21:49.398,0:21:56.280
So, yeah. They don't give us homework, you know, assignment points, quizzes.

0:21:56.280,0:22:03.141
So if you pass the midterm and final exam, you're good with it.

0:22:03.141,0:22:05.573
But in here, you have to..

0:22:05.573,0:22:10.004
you have to make effort in every..

0:22:10.004,0:22:16.477
every assignment, every quiz, because they give you different percentage for the grade.

0:22:16.477,0:22:20.512
So I have to take care of everything.

0:22:20.512,0:22:22.141
That is a big difference.

0:22:24.120,0:22:29.266
I had a question for you about.. related to the final project that you did in my class.

0:22:29.266,0:22:36.406
You spoke about the participating in demonstrations

0:22:36.406,0:22:41.205
that happened during a military coup in your country.

0:22:41.205,0:22:48.569
Can you tell us a little bit about what happened at that time, and your decision to participate in those demonstrations?

0:22:48.569,0:22:52.685
Yeah, so

0:22:52.685,0:23:01.284

our country was like a developing country, and now we could see a great potential for the future.

0:23:01.284,0:23:07.430

There are a lot of great opportunity for us, especially teenagers or graduates.

0:23:07.430,0:23:15.516

But unfortunately, there was an outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and

0:23:15.516,0:23:24.745

once we recovered from the COVID-19, there was also another problem, which is the military coup.

0:23:24.745,0:23:34.340

So the military government take the country power, and detain the President and the other leaders.

0:23:34.340,0:23:41.567

Our current president was a President that we voted for.

0:23:41.567,0:23:50.272

So the military.. we don't really like the military government, but they control the country.

0:23:50.272,0:23:57.993

So we are not.. we are really frustrated about that and we are really angry.

0:23:57.993,0:24:08.806

So we started demonstrations and then protesting, I think, all over the country.

0:24:08.806,0:24:09.721

Yeah.

0:24:09.721,0:24:24.303

And can you tell me a little bit about what that was like? You mentioned in class that there were groups of teachers that were demonstrating, that there were students who are demonstrating, doctors, can you tell us about that experience?

0:24:24.303,0:24:29.008

Yeah, so, I mean, we made

0:24:29.008,0:24:42.635

a movement called, a Civil Disobedience Movement, CDM. CDM means Civil Disobedience Movement. It's like people who work in the government,

0:24:42.635,0:24:47.999

has.. who work in the government,

0:24:47.999,0:24:56.274

they didn't have to quit their job, but they just stopped working for the Government, for the military government.

0:24:56.274,0:24:57.543

They went on strike?

0:24:57.543,0:25:00.119

Yeah, they went on strike and a protest, yeah.

0:25:00.119,0:25:06.724

And what was it like for you? Was that the first time you had ever demonstrated in the streets? Had you done that before?

0:25:06.724,0:25:14.857

Yeah, it was the first. It was my first time, and then it was really all fine, you know.

0:25:14.857,0:25:19.869

At first, we just protested peacefully.

0:25:19.869,0:25:24.546

And then, we just went to our home, and the next day we protest again.

0:25:24.546,0:25:32.018

But, later then, the military started using leader weapon forces, like

0:25:32.018,0:25:34.760
real guns with real bullets,

0:25:34.760,0:25:43.174
not rubber bullets. And then teargas, and then, sometimes they used machine gun.

0:25:43.174,0:25:47.659
Were you afraid to participate because of that?

0:25:47.659,0:25:48.585
Yeah, I'm really

0:25:48.585,0:25:56.058
afraid of.. you know, when you are in a very crowded area,

0:25:56.058,0:25:58.925
you can't really escape from the bullet, you know.

0:25:58.925,0:26:09.387
So it was really horrifying. They will shoot you in the crowd there, and then, if you are arrested,

0:26:09.387,0:26:14.391
you just have to go to the jail straight. There's no

0:26:14.391,0:26:19.155
court or something like that. You have to go to prison directly.

0:26:19.155,0:26:26.533
How long did those demonstrations take place, over how much time? Was this something that was over weeks, months?

0:26:27.520,0:26:31.159
It took..

0:26:31.159,0:26:42.238
probably around five months. So, you know, I understand once the military government started using

0:26:42.238,0:26:51.046
deadly weapons. I mean, no one wants to come out to the street and get shot, or something like that.

0:26:51.046,0:26:58.478
So as they keep using the weapons then, there are less crowded areas.

0:26:58.478,0:27:04.210
Then we just stopped and then we just make a movement online.

0:27:04.210,0:27:08.280
And then, I stay at our home, something like that.

0:27:08.280,0:27:11.623
What year was that, when that took place?

0:27:11.623,0:27:16.208
It took place in 2021.

0:27:17.200,0:27:22.794
And did you demonstrate with your with your classmates? was there other students from the university?

0:27:22.794,0:27:27.227
Yeah, so it's..

0:27:27.227,0:27:36.431
It's really different every day, because one day I demonstrate with my classmate from my university,

0:27:36.431,0:27:43.256

and then the next day I demonstrated with my best friend, and then the other day with my neighbors, something like that.

0:27:43.256,0:27:44.293

0:27:44.293,0:27:47.720

Did your parents worry about you participating?

0:27:47.720,0:27:55.816

Yes, of course! They have been calling me every time. There was a moment,

0:27:55.816,0:28:02.938

I remember that I was demonstrating with my classmate from my university,

0:28:02.938,0:28:11.985

so that you know the military.. the military coup just came and then they just ran after us.

0:28:11.985,0:28:15.592

So we have to run and hide, you know.

0:28:15.592,0:28:20.982

At the time, I was hiding in an apartment in garage.

0:28:20.982,0:28:28.080

So that the soldier can't see me.

0:28:29.080,0:28:37.817

So, I was hiding in the garage, and then my parents keep calling me. I had to silence.. and then I had to turn off my phone,

0:28:37.817,0:28:41.321

because if I make a noise, I could get caught.

0:28:41.321,0:28:43.270

0:28:43.270,0:28:54.190

That must have been very scary, I imagine.

What happened at the end of the protest. Were they successful? Were they not successful?

0:28:54.190,0:28:57.206

What's the situation like now in Myanmar?

0:28:57.206,0:29:01.344

The situation right now is..

0:29:01.344,0:29:09.596

I mean, we made a great impact, not over our.. not just over our country, but also all over the world.

0:29:09.596,0:29:14.051

So they know what is really happening in Myanmar.

0:29:14.051,0:29:22.574

And then, like I said, they keep using.. the military government keep using deadly weapons.

0:29:22.574,0:29:27.553

So we were really afraid to go out

0:29:27.553,0:29:29.958

to the protest.

0:29:29.958,0:29:37.666

I would say not as successful. The protest was.. nobody wants to protest anymore because of the..

0:29:37.666,0:29:45.239

So did that influence your decision to try to come to the United States, that experience?

0:29:45.239,0:29:54.828

Yes, of course! Because of the our country's situation, I couldn't continue my.. our universities were closed,

0:29:54.828,0:30:00.768
so I couldn't continue my education. I had to

0:30:00.768,0:30:03.408
stay at home for like

0:30:03.408,0:30:06.072
over a year.

0:30:06.072,0:30:12.064
So I decided to.. I could go to another country and continue my study.

0:30:12.064,0:30:18.825
Because, I'm getting older, you know, if you're.. I need to provide for my family.

0:30:18.825,0:30:28.061
So that's why I decided to move to the United States, because they are my relatives.

0:30:28.061,0:30:33.424
So they said they could help me with everything.

0:30:33.424,0:30:37.341
So I decided to move here and continue my study.

0:30:37.341,0:30:42.326
So you have an aunt and uncle who live here, and they were able to help you come?

0:30:42.326,0:30:47.695
Yeah, so they were U.S. citizens in here.

0:30:47.695,0:30:57.279
So they helped me a lot. I mean, to get a visa I had to do it myself, but once I came here, they helped me with everything.

0:30:57.279,0:31:06.579
Did you come as an international student, or did you seek asylum here? How did you.. What was the process for coming here?

0:31:06.579,0:31:11.889
I came here with international student visa, which they call F-1 Visa.

0:31:15.880,0:31:20.894
And tell me about when you first got here. What were your impressions?

0:31:20.894,0:31:26.681
So it was, you know..

0:31:26.681,0:31:39.364
At first, I didn't really know about the surroundings or the culture or the living style. I was okay for the first one week.

0:31:39.364,0:31:50.440
After that I thought.. it was really.. everything's completely new, and the weather is also crazy cold.

0:31:50.440,0:31:54.008
Did you come in the winter time?

0:31:54.008,0:31:58.460
We have a winter in my home country, but not that cold.

0:31:58.460,0:32:01.896
So the winter was a shock to you?

0:32:01.896,0:32:05.282
Yeah, our winter is like summer in here.

0:32:06.280,0:32:08.656

So that was a big adjustment for you?

0:32:08.656,0:32:09.868
Yeah, yeah.

0:32:09.868,0:32:17.739
And you come from a very large city but you moved to Brookville, Maryland. So that must have been a big change, too.

0:32:17.739,0:32:27.414
Yeah, it was also a big change for me, too. I came from the city, so if I come out of the house,

0:32:27.414,0:32:37.578
I could see there are a lot of people walking down the street, and a lot of entertainment things, like restaurants, or something like that, but

0:32:37.578,0:32:46.449
in here, when I came out of my house, I can only see the corn fields, or something..

0:32:46.449,0:32:50.433
Also my place is really quiet,

0:32:50.433,0:33:03.212
so, you know.. Sometimes, I really get bored and tired of this, there's no neighbors or something like that that I could hang out with.

0:33:03.212,0:33:07.873
Is that one of the reasons why you want to move to New York City? To be back in a rich urban area?

0:33:07.873,0:33:11.899
Yes, it's one of the reasons, yeah.

0:33:11.899,0:33:15.817
And you sent some pictures of

0:33:15.817,0:33:22.058
hiking in Harper's Ferry, and where else did you go hiking? I'm trying to remember.

0:33:22.058,0:33:23.237
Great Falls.

0:33:23.237,0:33:30.527
In Great Falls, yes! So tell me a little bit about, have you learned to appreciate the nature around here? Is that important to you?

0:33:30.527,0:33:47.839
Yeah, it was really.. hiking is really important for me because I like.. I just like walking, just hiking. I need to keep my body moving, you know.

0:33:47.839,0:33:53.345
And the idea I got is that when I first,

0:33:53.345,0:33:53.845
I think it was

0:33:53.845,0:33:59.056
the first week of the school. So you know, I have no friends,

0:33:59.056,0:34:12.274
and I know people from my class but I'm not really familiar with, so I decided to find a club that I could try to make school activities, or make new friends.

0:34:12.274,0:34:18.960
So I found a club called International Friends Club, so I signed up for it.

0:34:18.960,0:34:29.384
The organizer is Mr. Hon, he is Chinese. Yeah, he is Chinese. So we could really related with the Asian culture.

0:34:29.384,0:34:34.277

So he told me about everything.

0:34:34.277,0:34:37.483
Everything like living styles.

0:34:37.483,0:34:50.710
about the weather, about which place you should go. So that's the.. this club organized all of the hiking that I went, and then

0:34:50.710,0:34:54.819
I got a lot of new friends. I met a lot of great people.

0:34:54.819,0:34:56.987
They are really nice.

0:34:56.987,0:35:05.994
Was this through the Student Life Office at Montgomery College in Rockville? The International Student Club, is that through student life? Do you know?

0:35:05.994,0:35:09.226
Yeah, I heard about that but,

0:35:09.226,0:35:18.217
I mean, in my first semester, I took only four classes,

0:35:18.217,0:35:24.105
so I had a lot of plenty time to spend.

0:35:24.105,0:35:26.825
Sorry, let me repeat that question.

0:35:26.825,0:35:27.325
Okay.

0:35:27.325,0:35:39.706
Let me rephrase it. When you went on the hiking trip was that through Montgomery College was that organized through a professor or a staff person at Montgomery College, who organized those hiking trips?

0:35:39.706,0:35:43.747
Oh, no it was organized by the International Friends Club.

0:35:43.747,0:35:46.900
International Friends Club, that's not through Montgomery College?

0:35:46.900,0:35:51.885
Yeah not in Montgomery College. Oh, no, it is a club in Montgomery College.

0:35:51.885,0:35:56.297
It is a club, okay. So it's probably through the Office of Student Life.

0:35:56.297,0:36:00.934
Yeah, I think so. I don't know how they work, but they always

0:36:00.934,0:36:07.019
send us a message that we will go hiking this week, which time which place.

0:36:07.019,0:36:17.226
That's great. So you went to.. tell me about your experience at Harper's Ferry, and at Great Falls. Tell me a little bit about what your impressions were when you were there?

0:36:17.226,0:36:27.622
Okay, so Harper's Ferry was the best hiking trip I went in America. It was really great.

0:36:27.622,0:36:40.803
It was really a long walk to the top of the mountain, but once you reach the top, the view is really breathtaking. It was really wonderful.

0:36:40.803,0:36:49.053
And also, I met new people, and then I talked with them, and then

0:36:49.053,0:36:55.890
we exchanged the contact with each other. Now we sometimes hang out on campus.

0:36:55.890,0:36:58.090
So, I mean,

0:36:58.090,0:37:01.280
I found most of my friends from that club.

0:37:01.280,0:37:07.246
So it was really helpful for me to meet new people.

0:37:07.246,0:37:12.222
That's great. Can you tell me where some of those friends come from?

0:37:16.200,0:37:23.303
Since it was an International Student Friends Club, most of them are international students.

0:37:23.303,0:37:27.670
They are from Mexico,

0:37:27.670,0:37:29.573
Mongolia,

0:37:29.573,0:37:31.826
Peru,

0:37:31.826,0:37:38.816
and Zimbabwe, also some of them are French, I think.

0:37:38.816,0:37:41.372
Yeah, that's a lot, yeah.

0:37:41.372,0:37:53.932
And it's one of my favorite parts about Montgomery College is just all of the places that people come from. When you meet people, either at MC or in other parts of your life,

0:37:53.932,0:38:01.437
what is it.. What is something that's important that you want to share about being from Myanmar?

0:38:01.437,0:38:06.282
What is something important about your culture that you want other people to know.

0:38:11.280,0:38:15.527
So..

0:38:15.527,0:38:23.457
I mean, there's not much to talk about my culture, specifically, but

0:38:27.440,0:38:31.855
I would like.. according to our culture,

0:38:31.855,0:38:35.759
when we are talking to each other,

0:38:35.759,0:38:42.747
we just respect each other. I don't know how to state that, but

0:38:42.747,0:38:49.909
for example, if you are talking, I would just listen, you know, I'm not going to stop you and then talk whatever I want.

0:38:49.909,0:38:52.747
No, I just.. I will listen

0:38:52.747,0:39:01.644
to you talking first, and then I would talk to you back. So that's kind of a thing. I had.. in here,

0:39:01.644,0:39:05.766
some people, they don't want to listen, they just want to talk.

0:39:05.766,0:39:09.223

So, yeah, I found that different.

0:39:09.223,0:39:10.574

It's not a big problem but,

0:39:10.574,0:39:19.206

from my perspective, it's really disrespectful.

0:39:19.206,0:39:23.599

So, listening carefully to other people, is an important part of your culture?

0:39:23.599,0:39:24.159

Yeah!

0:39:24.159,0:39:27.694

I like that. Thanks for sharing that.

0:39:27.694,0:39:34.819

Are there other.. you mentioned the International Student Club, and how that was really helpful to you.

0:39:34.819,0:39:40.939

Were there any other activities or experiences at Montgomery College that were helpful to you?

0:39:40.939,0:39:45.283

Or interesting to you, as you made your adjustment to life here?

0:39:49.280,0:39:53.647

I mean, there are a lot of other clubs and other activities you could join,

0:39:53.647,0:39:56.737

but for me I just..

0:39:56.737,0:40:04.257

for me I just want to make friend from the same place that I took,

0:40:04.257,0:40:07.507

from the International Student Club.

0:40:07.507,0:40:09.821

I would like to try

0:40:09.821,0:40:15.259

to join another club, but I guess that..

0:40:15.259,0:40:24.043

What about, for example, do you ever go to the Writing Center? Or do you use any of the Academic Success Centers to help you with your classes?

0:40:24.043,0:40:31.912

Oh, I see. So yeah, I sometimes went to the Writing Center.

0:40:31.912,0:40:39.634

So, whenever I have to write an essay, I wrote a draft, and then I went to that Writing Center,

0:40:39.634,0:40:50.433

and then, they help me pick a style too, or which part I would adjust a little, or which paragraph would you take out, or they give me suggestions.

0:40:50.433,0:40:53.079

And also I found recently that

0:40:53.079,0:41:03.761

STEM Learning Center at Rockville, in Science West Building, it really helped with my biology class.

0:41:03.761,0:41:11.756

I've been.. this semester, I took a Biology 101 class and I've been really struggling in that class.

0:41:11.756,0:41:21.696
So my grade in my first exam one.. lecture exam one and lab exam one was not that great.

0:41:21.696,0:41:26.591
So I decided to put more time and more effort.

0:41:26.591,0:41:37.028
And then I went to the STEM Learning Center, and then I met with tutor from there. And they really helped me a lot.

0:41:37.028,0:41:41.473
Which Learning Center was that? Can you say that again?

0:41:41.473,0:41:43.260
STEM? s, t, e, m.

0:41:43.260,0:41:44.344
Oh the STEM Learning Center

0:41:44.344,0:41:54.317
Yeah, STEM Learning Center. So, a lot of tutor from chemistry, biology, physics, you can take whatever you want.

0:41:54.317,0:41:56.897
So they really helped me.

0:41:56.897,0:42:02.356
That's why, because of that, on Monday, I had lecture exam two, and then I did a good..

0:42:02.356,0:42:08.319
I did a great job, and then I get a good grade, so yeah it really helped me.

0:42:08.319,0:42:16.974
I'm happy to hear that. I'm very happy to hear that.
If you met today a new student at Montgomery College,

0:42:16.974,0:42:25.516
who just arrived from maybe your country, or from some other country, what advice would you give him or her?

0:42:27.480,0:42:35.140
So, if they are struggling in academic problems,

0:42:35.140,0:42:39.886
I would suggest to them to go to the Learning Centers,

0:42:39.886,0:42:42.459
as I did before.

0:42:42.459,0:42:48.455
So you should go there and then take the help from the tutor.

0:42:48.455,0:42:56.302
And then, if they are not.. if they are really struggling in socializing or communicating with each other,

0:42:56.302,0:43:04.941
I will suggest them to join the clubs at MC. You could find new friends, new people, and communicate and make friends.

0:43:04.941,0:43:07.117
That sounds like a good advice.

0:43:07.117,0:43:24.244
My other question for you has to do with your thoughts for the future. Do you plan to make your life and career here in the United States, or do you eventually want to go back to your home country, or do you not know yet?

0:43:24.244,0:43:25.255
Are you still trying to figure that out?

0:43:25.255,0:43:29.789
Honestly, I'm still trying to figure that out.

0:43:29.789,0:43:36.997
Of course, I can't currently go back to my country because of the situation in here.

0:43:36.997,0:43:38.095
You can't go right now?

0:43:38.095,0:43:42.109
I mean, we can go, but it's not safe, you know.

0:43:42.109,0:43:45.583
Yeah, so it will..

0:43:45.583,0:43:49.729
It's the best not to go back to my home country at the moment.

0:43:49.729,0:43:55.310
So I don't know what will happen in the next three or four years.

0:43:55.310,0:44:03.564
Yeah, but I try to find a career in here, and I was thinking, to start a home in here also.

0:44:03.564,0:44:07.120
You are thinking to start here, you said?

0:44:07.120,0:44:11.024
Yeah, to start and my new life in here also.

0:44:11.024,0:44:19.049
I imagine that you must worry a bit about your family back in your home country with the situation there.

0:44:19.049,0:44:21.180
Do you feel concerned?

0:44:21.180,0:44:25.503
Yeah, I am concerned, but

0:44:25.503,0:44:33.256
it's getting more peaceful compared to back in the day, so..

0:44:33.256,0:44:42.315
They are all.. they don't usually.. my family usually don't go out much, so

0:44:42.315,0:44:52.547
it is a relief for me. If you are staying at home, you are safe. But sometimes, yeah, I'm concerned about them.

0:44:52.547,0:44:59.614
Where do you see yourself in five years? How do you imagine your life five years from now?

0:44:59.614,0:45:07.733
Five years? My first target is to graduate with a degree in the United States.

0:45:07.733,0:45:15.419
So, if I graduate, I will find a job, and then

0:45:15.419,0:45:23.849
also, you know, I'll find my life partner and then get married and get a great job.

0:45:23.849,0:45:27.544
I hope all those things happen for you.

0:45:27.544,0:45:29.480
Thank you!

0:45:29.480,0:45:43.803

Is there anything else that you would like to add for people who are watching this about your home country, or about your experiences here? About Montgomery College. Any last thoughts?

0:45:43.803,0:45:56.402

Yeah, so I always suggest that, it's really.. you've got a challenging, you know, if you moved to a new country, it feels like everything is totally different.

0:45:56.402,0:46:08.146

compared to your home country. So if you want to make friends and then communicate with each other,

0:46:08.146,0:46:15.093

you got to do you.. You got to make an effort, like a little effort by starting a conversation, or

0:46:15.093,0:46:20.378

by joining the club, or something like that.

0:46:20.378,0:46:25.036

So I mean, there are a lot of other international students.

0:46:25.036,0:46:33.889

And you know, you are not the only one who be lonely or struggling in a new environment.

0:46:33.889,0:46:39.375

So you will be fine later then when you find a way.

0:46:39.375,0:46:47.776

And one last question, how do you feel telling your story today? What emotions are you feeling as you talk about these memories?

0:46:47.776,0:46:57.304

Oh, I mean, it was really wonderful. And then I felt relief because I, you know,

0:46:57.304,0:47:01.722

I kind of want to.. I kind of have to talk about my experience,

0:47:01.722,0:47:11.871

and then, how I felt when I first came here, or something like that. So I imagine that,

0:47:11.871,0:47:18.105

for the first well, I mean people who moved to a new country felt the same way like me. So,

0:47:18.105,0:47:28.382

from my speak, or this interview, they will find a way to make their life better.

0:47:28.382,0:47:35.520

Those are great final words. Thank you so much, Matrix! I really enjoyed talking with you this afternoon.

0:47:35.520,0:47:40.721

Yeah, thank you for giving me a chance to participate in this event also.

0:47:40.721,0:47:45.000

I'm going to stop recording now.