

Interview with Maya Leon

Interviewer: Unknown

n.d.

Leon: My name is Maya Leon.

Q: Where are you from?

A: I'm from Lawrence.

Q: What year are you at KU?

A: I am a sophomore.

Q: What is your major?

A: My intended major is pre-nursing.

Q: How did you decide on nursing?

A: I am currently working as a caregiver. So I am really enjoying it. I decided I wanted to do pre-nursing before that but when I started working as a caregiver that is ultimately what pushed me in that direction. I really like helping people and I am really interested in medicine.

Q: How long have you been a caregiver?

A: I just started a couple of weeks ago.

Q: Oh ok.

A: But I have been taking medical classes. Then I decided to switch to art. Then I wanted to switch back to medicine. I am kinda switching back and forth between art and medicine.

Q: What were you doing in art?

A: I had a variety of different things. Initially I was working on some film projects when I was going to art school, but then I transferred to KU and I have been taking some film critique classes. There was not too much art involved; therefore I was inspired to begin taking art classes again. I had to reapply and submit and portfolio. I did that and I was accepted. I am currently taking 3-D animation classes. I am working with programs on the computer where I make animation just with a mouse. I am also enrolled in an independent study course where I can work in my own space. I am currently making a stop-animation film. Where I work with sculpty clay and balsa wood. When this school semester is over I am going to switch from taking math and science. I know that it will be well worth it.

Q: How did you find out about this intentional community?

A: It is an interesting story. I started coming here when I was about nine because my mom was a film student. She probably found out about it from a classmate and she started volunteering here with veggie lunches. I have been helping here on and off for about 12 years. I was a little more involved when I moved in here. When I came to college I started volunteering for the veggie lunches.

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Q: Do you have other family that is still at KU?

A: My mom is still here. She has taught here and then she is taking some classes. She is probably taking some art classes as well.

Q: Tell me about your regular day here?

A: Typically I wake up and go straight to class then I come back and spend time with my roommates then I go to work then I spend time with my roommates then I do it all over again.

Q: When you say roommates what do you mean?

A: I should actually share housemates, 'cause we don't share a room.

Q: What does your room look like?

A: We have a bathroom, it's kind of a half bathroom and we share it. I do share a shower with the roommate next to me. She is very generous about her shower.

Q: Are most of the members male or female?

A: 5 females. 2 males. We have a surge of male applicants right now. We got lucky with our latest roommate being a male because we didn't want Danny to be alone. But he says he does not mind it.

Q: That's good for him! You guys sound like you have lots of estrogen.

A: YEP!

Q: How about your eating arrangements?

A: We try to make sure that we are fulfilling our needs and being earth friendly. We are sharing our refrigerators as much as possible. We got a new refrigerator and we are using an old one as well. We don't typically share food on a regular basis, but because there are seven of us if we needed to we would. We also have our communal dinner, which I am sure Andrea has told you about.

Q: Yeah, you can tell me about it anyway.

A: Where there are these traditional rules we have to complete in the dinners. They are meant to cultivate positive social skills. So if we have someone who is being the facilitator as well as the cook. So we take turns. If we decide to have someone else help, then that works. For example, I have a friend whose meal was cut short last week so we are sharing. It is really fun if you like cooking for a group of people, but the people who are not so much a part of the cooking aspect are at least a part of the social aspect and vice versa. So we try to include everyone with a rotation and make living not so costly. We cook once every seven weeks so it is not so costly. What is really cool about it is the social connections with each other. There are some down sides to it as well. For example, if we have a topic that is not easy for some people to discuss, it's hard for everyone to agree that that is the topic that everyone can discuss. That is the one side about the dinners that is not the most positive. It also helps us talk about house busy, like chores and anything that has to do with insuring this environment is safe and happy. The last few dinners have had to do with the recycling bins and the lights outside. We can all come

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together and make decisions together. If there are conflicts we try to work them out as best we can. And the other downside is that you cannot bring friends. I don't think that it is a downside, I just we could do more activities together. I wish we could cook together, make dinners longer, um but people just don't have that kind of time. 2 hours is hard with seven people involved, more time would be pushing it.

Q: When you say facilitator, can you explain that?

A: The facilitator chooses the menu and cooks food and chooses the order of the meeting topics, we don't have to talk about anything important during the meal. They choose what the meal is going to be and they make a point to include everyone in the conversation.

Q: So the type of topics that people talk about: are they chores or personal?

A: The chores and lights would be house business. Some things are obligations; other things try to move life along more smoothly. Refrigerators also fall during house busy. Fundraisers would also be house business. Personal issues or questions would deal with break-ups and someone would deal with them. Generally they are more like Family Heritage, or lifelines. Lifelines is where we made posters as a way of introducing ourselves to the new member. They have insight on our personalities. We would sit around the living area and we would take time to talk to everyone about the topic.

Q: So you are saying there is a structure that the facilitator can choose?

A: Yes that is correct. Sometimes we have chosen topics that have not been that popular. For example, I choose to play a board game during this time and it upset someone who had not been apart of the meal, who is the pastor who works upstairs everyday. His aim is for us to share connections and meaningful. I thought the board game was meaningful, but he did not. I am still going to move the meal in a direction that I think is appropriate. I do not think that we have to do something "meaningful" for every meal; I think a fun activity also allows us to find meaning in each other and positive communication. I have not chosen a topic for this week, but it probably won't be a board game.

Q: Do the people who run the facility [the Pastor] does he have a lot of say in this community? Would he come down and be involved in your meetings?

A: I think he is the one other person who makes decision about the community. Sometimes he has dinner with us, however we cannot have other outsiders join us for dinner. It's just the seven of us, it's ultimately our space we pay the rent, we choose who lives here. He has no say in this, however he functions as an overseer who helps guide us. I think he is just there to keep it moving. We tend to goof a lot. He tends to goof off too; he is better about being less distracted. We have a lot of control of he situation.

Q: If someone is dating someone can they stay the night?

A: I think we have had this conversation before. We can definitely have people stay over. There are only a couple of us who are dating people. We have talked about if you are not home and the significant other is, it would be nice for the housemates to know. We don't want other people to end up living here without discussing it first, but we are pretty laid back.

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Q: Do you guys consider each other your best friends? Or do you have lots of connections to outside members?

A: Some of us would say since living here we have grown a lot together. So some of us would say that we are each other's best friends. I see them as my closest peer, especially during hard times. We have had conflicts, but it is definitely an amazing supportive environment. I guess I couldn't consider them my best friends, well maybe I could? I don't know, I haven't thought about the meaning of the word best friend in a long time so I'd have to think about it. However, I am very close with them.

Q: There are some graduate students?

A: There is a girl here who is in her late 20's. Actually 30. We see her as our elder.

Q: What type of process do you go through to live here? How long have you lived here?

A: I have only lived here for 8-9months.

Q: So you went through selection process. What was that like?

A: Every time I'd see Thad he'd tell me to apply. At the time I had a dog, I couldn't apply here, but as soon as I could I applied. I was very confident because I had been very active for the ECM for a long time. So I went through the application process where I was put on the hot seat. And I was asked questions about who I am, and why I would like living here, and what I would contribute. They liked my answers so I guess I moved in.

Q: That is generally how it works! So now that you are on the other side of the selection process what is that like?

A: One of the important things, and I hate to bring up the financial issue, but we want people to be financially stable. We don't do credit checks, but we have some applicants who aren't employed or aren't in school. So we have to ask about that. All of us are either working, or planning on going back to school. Typically we want students to live here. We really focus on that. I have interviewed one applicant before and I would like to see people who are more interested and have more knowledge about the community, like Nate did when he applied. He asked questions. Like what is your favorite aspect of living here?

Q: Do you know much about the history of this community?

A: Yeah. I know a little. Lawrence has about 6-7 community living residents: Sunflower, Yellow, and Greenhouse. Those are the ones off the top of my head and this is more like a broad history. But they became common during the Great Depression, when there was an economic downturn. People could no longer support themselves; they needed to work with a group of people to sustain themselves. So that's when Koinonia and the ECM came about was a couple decades after that. I am pretty sure it was built in the 60's. This was built with the ECM's chapel. So it was built specifically for students to live here. We probably have the same furniture. So one of the reasons for this community was economic.

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Q: Do you interact a lot with the other Intentional Communities?

A: No, a lot of people move here from other communities because other places have a lot more people. For example, the Sunflower House has over 40+ people. I convinced a friend of mine to move here from the Sunflower House because I feel like this is a more mature location. I feel like it is a step up from other community living space where there are lots of new college students. There is a level of maturity here that a lot of other places can't guarantee because we are a smaller community and we get to know each other better. And we currently have someone who is applying here that has lived at the Sunflower House for two years, and he loves living there. He loves being apart of it. He is moving here because he is very involved in the ECM. I think this will heighten his involvement in the ECM if he is able to support it on a regular basis by living here and paying rent. It will give him an opportunity to be closer to the ECM community, which I think is what people really want is a sense of community. Yeah, we have talked to other people. People have dated other people. One girl was dating a guy from the Olive House. He used to come over and help with gardening and cooking, but I am not really too familiar with other living communities.

Q: So you have a garden here?

A: It's huge it's in the back.

Q: Is that part of your responsibilities of living here?

A: I don't think it is part of our responsibility unless someone volunteers to help. I think someone in the house is a gardener.

Q: Besides the meal what are your requirements of living here?

A: Rent. In addition to the meal, we have to volunteer 12 hours a month, up to 50 hours per semester. Most of that has to include volunteering at the ECM. Thad has asked that that be 70% of the volunteer work, which is easy because there is so much going on here. You could even just take the classes offered here. That is really cool about the community here: we have lots of classes, like non-violent communication, sexual relations, fair food trade club, they include volunteer experience. We also have to do chores. We break it up into 7 different tasks. You can either have a rotation or everyone can pick the one they like the best. We have to coordinate laundry days. There is a list of days that everyone has a name under. We focus a lot of accountability. That is not a lot that is mentioned in the application. That we had to be willing to work with others the best we can. Just mainly helping each other out. Those are the main ones, cooking, volunteer, chores, rent, and stuff like that.

Q: Do you have any type of faith background?

A: I am affiliated with a Buddhist organization. So there is quite a bit of religious diversity here I think.

Q: Can I ask more about your involvement in your organization? Is it student? Or International?

A: It is a modern Buddhist movement. It is based in Japan and started after World War II when the country was in complete devastation. It is a sect of Buddhism but the government was against it and they wanted to control religion. There was a lot of persecution. Many died in prison. So then, the

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organization began to expand and currently they are in every country in the world. The main headquarters in Kansas are in Kansas City. There are meetings all over Lawrence. There used to be a student group but not anymore. I think that the person who was the president of that graduated and we haven't done anything about that.

Q: What do you call yourselves?

A: So-Ka-Ga-Kai. It stands for "Value, Creation, Society". SGR International. I practice here at home in my room, the meditation aspect.

Q: Are there any other stories or something that you would want to share about this community?

A: Yeah. I really wanted to make a documentary because of my film background. I am not really sure how I will approach that, but I would like to do what you are doing and interview everyone who is living here. I thought I would make it comical, like something from the "Real World". Like ask them, "How do you feel about it when someone ate your food?" But that would never happen here. I want my roommates to feel like they have liberty to express themselves. I would expect a funny answer, or funny situations to come out of awkward ones. I hope to make a storyboard on that soon and film the types of activities that we are involved in here. I believe that after we leave this place it would be pretty amazing to look back on how involved we are. It's incredible how involved we are. We are like 18-19 through 30 and I know that during a time like this when things are really uncertain about America's future, it's a big thing to say, but there are all these things about health care and food. All of the people I live with care about what is going to happen to Lawrence, and Koinonia, and them. With the documentary, I think that if I could hold on to something like that and share it with my housemates, I think they would be so amazed with themselves and the community. Because sometimes it is hard to step outside of yourself to realize that you are accomplishing a lot, sometimes it feels like you aren't accomplishing anything. If you think of it this way: You have all this school work to do and you miss one assignment or deadline, you feel like a failure, but you don't think about all of the other things you had to do and turn in on time. And here it's kind of like, there are so many things we want to do, so it gets hazy our accomplishments versus our failures. I would like to be able to look back and see the results of our work. I can't forget we have an 8th housemate, Pepper. Sarah's cat.