AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT C. "ROB" KIM

An Oral History Conducted by Kristel Peralta, Ayrton Yamaguchi, Cecilia Winchell, and Vanessa Concepcion

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White
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Preface

"I'm part of the generation where I've had my parents kind of give up their lives in a way… But they did that because they wanted to provide, and so obviously that's my goal and that's why I work and that's why I work hard and that's why I do what I do, for that reason."

Born in New York City, New York to two Korean immigrants, Rob Kim's life has been one exemplifying dedication to hard work and an awareness of the world that surrounds him. Having spent a significant amount of his childhood working in the various stores his parents owned, Kim saw the sacrifices and labor of his parents as an influence on how he would go on to pursue his own goals.

After graduating from Cornell, Kim attended both law school and business school at the University of Southern California. Upon receiving both a juris doctorate and an MBA, he found his first job at a firm in Las Vegas related to corporate and securities work. He currently practices in corporate law, business law, and gaming, as well as chairs the Nevada State Bar's business law section which allows him the opportunity to present a bill to the legislature during every session. He also has done considerable work with the Asian Bar Association of Las Vegas as well as its national organization, the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, to build and strengthen resources for AAPI practitioners of law.

Throughout the interview, Kim touches on various other topics ranging from how he has seen Las Vegas change and grow since coming to the effect that racially-motivated stereotypes can have on people and the changing perspectives surrounding that. His nuanced and hopeful tone reflects not only an awareness of how his life has been shaped but also a broader change in how children of immigrants understand their lives.

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March 5, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Kristel Peralta, Ayrton Yamaguchi, Cecilia Winchell, and Vanessa Concepcion

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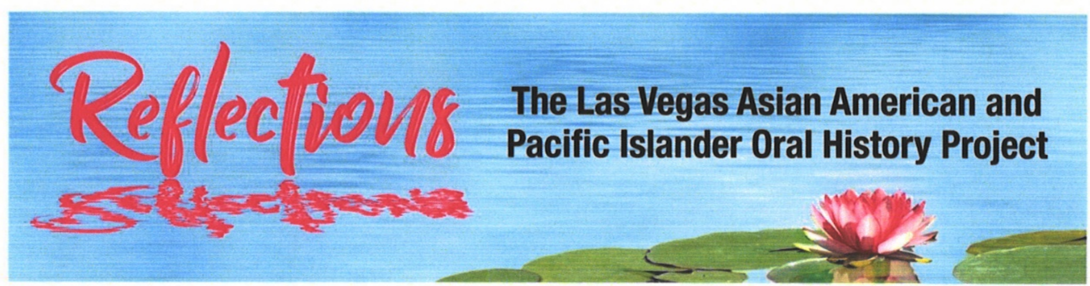
Kim begins with what it was like growing up in Woodside, Queens, as the youngest of three siblings. His father worked for the Korean consulate, which provided the path to immigration, until his assignment was complete, after which his parents purchased and ran a gas station in Brooklyn then later a liquor store in Manhattan. Kim recalls working at these stores all throughout his childhood while being raised mainly by his maternal grandmother as well as his siblings. He also touches on the activities he did in high school, his first semester in college, his hundred day celebration, and Lunar New Years………………………………………………..1-8

After graduating from Cornell, Kim decided to go to law school at the University of Southern California while subsequently applying to their business school to receive both a juris doctorate and an MBA. This led to his first job at a firm in Las Vegas doing corporate and securities work. While in Las Vegas, Kim has been a part of the Asian Bar Association of Las Vegas as well as its national organization and the Nevada State Bar's business law section. Kim remarks on the fast pace at which Las Vegas has changed since he first moved to the city in 1996, not only in terms of the development of The Strip, but also the growth of the local Asian community…..8-16

Kim discusses the changing perspectives on the model minority myth as well as the presence of racial ignorance that persists throughout both daily life and the workplace. As people have become more conscious of these preconceived biases, the AAPI community has become more vocal about these slights. Kim also compares the places he has lived to each other, noting that he was unused to the homogeneity he saw in Korea………………….………….……….………..17-25

Lastly, Kim touches on certain issues surrounding his AAPI identity including his parents' influence on his career path as well as how that affects his own parenting philosophy. He also notes the emphasis on conformity within Asian cultures and how it has affected the way the community reacts to issues and is perceived. Kim points to himself as an example of someone who rarely discusses his own accomplishments, but sees oral histories as a way of bringing out those unspoken details…………………………………………………………………………..25-34



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[Interview of Robert C. Kim on Friday, March 5, 2021, by interviewers Kristel Peralta, Ayrton Yamaguchi, Cecilia Winchell, and Nessa Concepcion. Recording commences during conversation.]

I was born in Harlem Hospital in New York City. I lived in Woodside, Queens, for about twelve years. I am the youngest of three siblings. There's a ten-year age gap between me and my next oldest sibling, and thirteen years between my oldest and me. Presumably, knowing that they were going to be moving to the United States, I suppose that was my timing.

My father worked for the Korean Consulate. He was waiting for an assignment overseas, and so he had different options before the New York City option; he passed on those and waited until he got that one, and then when he received an assignment in New York, that's when he moved. Actually, interestingly, as part of this, I actually googled his name and I found an old U.S. Consular Directory from 1970 that had his name in it, which I didn't even realize I could find, I suppose. It goes to show you what you can find if you actually look for it. He served in a consulate for a few years, and then when his assignment was over, he stayed. He got his green card ultimately, and my brother, sister, father, and mother became naturalized citizens.

Basically, growing up in Queens, it was pretty diverse. I went to a public school. In New York City, all the schools are numbered. Unlike locally—if you grew up locally, they're named after people. I guess there's too many schools in New York to do that, and so they just give them numbers. I went to Public School 152 in Queens and spent years K through six there. Actually, that's the same school that my brother and sister went to when they all first arrived in 1970. I actually had one or two of the same teachers as my brother, which is kind of interesting. I had a ruler with my brother's name on it—he wrote it in marker—and my third-grade teacher asked me

who that was. I said, “Well, that’s my brother.” “Oh, I taught him ten years ago.” That was kind of interesting.

I haven’t really gone back to the school. My parents decided to move from Woodside, Queens to, ultimately, New Jersey for better school, environment; that kind of thing. Typical story, I suppose. A lot of friends that I grew up, they moved ultimately—some before I did, some after I did, I’m sure—and they usually moved either to New Jersey, Long Island, or Westchester, everywhere other than where we were, for the most part.

That’s the general beginnings. I don’t know what other information you might want, and I can talk about what my parents did, I suppose. I could talk about my experiences growing up in Woodside.

KRISTEL: Yes, please tell us about your parents and that experience, and even your grandparents if you can.

What happened is, when my father decided to stay in the U.S. at the end of his assignment, he purchased a gas station in Brooklyn. I remember being there because I would just sit there and let him know when cars pulled up, and that’s when you couldn’t pump your own gas. Yes, you had to go out and pump the gas for the customers. There would be this little tripwire that a car would run over, and if no one was really ready, I would just tell them, “There’s a car here,” since someone would have to go pump the gas for them. My parents did. My brother and sister worked there; they were pumping gas. That was in the mid-seventies.

In 1977, they sold that business and bought a liquor store in Manhattan, and that was from 1977 and they owned that until 1999, and that was on the Upper West Side of New York City on Broadway. I was there all the time with them as well; I worked there every weekend because what else am I, as an immigrant's son, going to do? I knew all the customers. I knew

everything about the store. I knew where everything was. I have all this knowledge about random alcohol and wine that you get when you work there for twenty-two-plus years. Even when I was in college, I would still get questions about if I knew where an item was in the basement was because we had no inventory system. It was just everything was in the basement somewhere and you just had to remember where it was, and so definitely not very advanced. They sold that store in 1999.

Basically, a lot of motivations and things were all a reflection of my parents. Obviously, they worked very hard. I think the gas station was—I was probably too young to know this—but it was probably every day, but I can't really remember that far back. The liquor store was six days a week. At that time New York City didn't allow liquor stores to be open on Sundays, which was great. It was a good law at the time. I think that's changed since then. The hours were pretty long. They'd leave at ten and they wouldn't get home until eleven, midnight, so ten in the morning until eleven, twelve midnight. I didn't really see my parents, growing up, really. My brother and sister, they're ten and thirteen years older, like I mentioned, so they were basically surrogate parents for the most part.

I was told I didn't really speak a lot of Korean growing up because mainly my parents weren't home, and then my brother and sister were trying to learn English. That changed a little bit when my grandmother moved in with us, like in 1978, late '70s. At the time of my birth, she was the only surviving grandparent of mine. All my other grandparents had passed away before I was born. The grandmother that did move in with us that was my mother's mother, so that's my maternal grandmother. I know my paternal grandmother died giving birth to twins many years ago, and I don't have the actual timing for my grandparents on both sides.

She moved in with us in the late seventies, and that's when I started to speak a little more Korean. My Korean basically sounds like a person born in the United States learning Korean. I can understand it. I can speak it, I don't know, not as well as I used to because I don't really use it much anymore. I definitely understand, but my intonation is off. I sound, like I said, like someone that was born in the United States and learned Korean after the fact. It's a very traditional immigrant-come-to-the-United-States kind of "don't look back; find a business that you can own and operate and make something and ultimately provide for your family." That's basically what my parents did.

My sister decided to go into pharmacy, so she's a pharmacist. She went to Long Island University, which is an institution in the New York area. Then my brother went to—they both went to Stuyvesant for high school, which is a relatively merit based high school in New York City; there's a number of them in New York City. They both went to Stuyvesant. My sister became a pharmacist. My brother went to Cornell University for college and ultimately went to Albert Einstein for medical school, and he's a physician now. He practices in northern New Jersey.

I followed in those footsteps, I guess, by going to Cornell. We moved to New Jersey when I was twelve. It was actually interesting. It was pretty diverse. Yes, there were some scuffles and things, kind of nonsense, in Queens. I can't say there was more racism or more just stupid references and name-calling. There wasn't any violence at all. It was dumb phrases people would say because they were ignorant. I heard that more in New Jersey than I did in New York City mainly because New York City, at least where I grew up, the majority of my class was diverse whether it's Asian or African American or Latino. That being said, it was a pretty easy transition to go from Queens to New Jersey. I'd just kind of show up. Back then it wasn't that

big a deal to move. It was what it was. I started seventh grade and then I graduated high school in New Jersey in 1988, a very long time ago.

I actually went to Cornell, as well, for undergrad. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I thought I'd be a doctor, like my brother. At least the Asian parents I knew and the Asian parents that you hear of, they were almost able to mentally tell you what you should do without actually telling you that's what you should do. My brother, for example, he's a doctor, but he actually wanted to quit medical school and become an architect. I was eleven, twelve years old at the time he kind of dropped that on my parents. I just remember there was a bunch of yelling going on at the time. Ultimately, he took a year off and finished med school and became a doctor still. He almost quit school, but he stuck with it. Out of that inertia and high expectations that your parents make for you, I thought, well, I might as well be a doctor, too. I was good at math. I was good at science. Those were easy for me. And my brother is a doctor, so it can't be all that bad. I went to college thinking…at least I was open to being a doctor, or becoming a doctor. That was a lot of it.

I know during high school, again, I didn't see my parents that much. I saw them on the weekends at work, at the store. I didn't see them in the mornings because I was gone to school, and I didn't see them in the evenings because usually I was already asleep. My grandmother and my sister—my brother at that time was actually in school or going to med school or doing his residency, so he wasn't living at home. My sister was living at home at the time, so I spent lots of time with my sister and my grandmother.

I'm trying to think of what else to cover. In high school I did typical activities. I ran track. I tried to be involved in activities, but I didn't really have anyone to drive me anywhere, so I used to ride a bicycle to track practice until I got rides from people. Not only did I have to work

out during track practice, but I had to bike ten miles to get to practice and bike ten miles back from practice. Luckily, after a little bit I was able to get rides from other senior classmen that lived in my area, so it got a lot easier.

Living in Queens, though, there weren't a lot of activities to do like that. I mean, there was Little League, but that wasn't on my parents' radar, so we just did a lot of stickball in alleys between buildings, and we would just kind of hang out in different areas like that. A lot of little stories, like trying to walk under a bridge at night and not get a pigeon to poop on your head. A lot of times you have to watch where you're walking. There was a lot of walking going on. There is a lot of public transportation in New York City, subway, trains, everything.

One thing that my parents did make me do is take SAT prep classes, so I took them starting my sophomore year, probably a year before most people did them. Nowadays people start them as early as you can get them to do it, but back then it was more of a junior year kind of thing; you take some classes and you take a test, but I took it the year before that because I was in the city. I thought—well, it's better than working at the store, so I might as well go to my SAT prep class and just take the test and get out of the store and do something different—so I did that.

I did decently on the PSAT, just to try to go back a little bit as we go through these different details. I was a National Merit semifinalist, so I had done decently on the exam. I think there were three from my high school that did. I don't think any of us moved on. I know I didn't move on to be a finalist. I don't think anyone else did, either. Then I took the SAT. I got a 1400, which now doesn't sound great, but back then the scale was a little bit different, so that was ninety-ninth percentile versus nowadays a 1400 I think is maybe like ninetieth, low nineties. I can't remember exactly. The scale was a little different back in the '80s, many decades ago. I

was fortunate to get good grades that way. I think I finished top ten of the graduates of my high school.

I applied to a number of schools and I went to Cornell; that was probably the best one that I got into. I went there in the fall of 1998 thinking I would be a doctor, but ultimately, after about a year or so, I decided that wasn't for me. I actually had a friend—what's funny is this. My first semester of college wasn't great. I think I might have rounded up to a 3.0, but I think it was 2.9, not really that good. I just remember that my mom actually asked me…She drew a line with zero to a hundred. She told me, "Zero means no effort. One hundred means 100 percent effort. Point to where on this line the effort level you put in this past semester." I couldn't point to a hundred, clearly, because I knew that wasn't true. That was interesting. That was a good way to tell me that I'm failing not only myself, but I'm failing them. Obviously, a lot of typical guilt-ridden ploys or tactics that parents do. That being said, it was right. She called me out, which was appropriate, and so I did better after that. I think I ended up with a 3.4 when I graduated from college.

My decision not to become a doctor wasn't really intended to be my own. It happened because I had a friend that wanted to be a pharmacist and I actually connected her with my sister who worked at a hospital. They were talking about what she did during the day, and I was just standing behind them, walking. I had just facilitated the meeting. I was just walking behind them, kind of doing whatever. I'm looking around and I realized, this is exactly what I don't want to be; I don't want to be in this place; it smells like sickness; there's nothing motivating here. This happened over winter break my sophomore year. When I went back I actually still took my physics class and some other science classes because I liked them, but I decided my major was going to be government, which is basically political science. At the time, if you're not

a doctor, the only other thing you're allowed to be is a lawyer without someone screaming at you, "What are you going to do with your life?" I decided to go to law school ultimately.

I actually wanted to touch on more about your childhood. Were there any holidays or cultural events that your family did throughout the year?

We didn't do too much. For Lunar New Year we would definitely—well, I take that back. There are pictures of me when I was born having my hundred day celebration. In Korean culture, if a baby hits a hundred days that's an important milestone. Not anymore currently, but back in the days when childbirth had a lot more risk to it and obviously there wasn't access to medicine. There are pictures of me in my little outfit when I was a hundred days old. I could see there were things like that, but we didn't do too much. For Lunar New Year we kind of did a typical…we would bow to our elders and we would acknowledge our ancestors. We had a spread of food and some incense. We had the favorite drink kind of thing, and we took a little bit of it and ceremoniously acknowledged those that came before us. But other than that, it wasn't too much. It was pretty busy with the business that they had, so there weren't a lot of cultural aspects going on.

We had family friends that we would see, but I didn't really interact with too many other Koreans until we moved to New Jersey, necessarily, and we joined a Korean church, which is a pretty fascinating institution of sorts, both for religious and for other social reasons. Obviously, most culture's ethnicities is a really important aspect of just connecting with their culture and with others that are like-minded and, obviously, the same ethnicity. That was interesting for me.

KRISTEL: You said that you moved from New York to New Jersey. How did you get to Las Vegas? What is the story of coming to Nevada?

It’s a pretty easy story. I went to college in Upstate New York. I decided to go to law school at USC, which is in Los Angeles. Ultimately, I graduated and I decided to take a job in Las Vegas. I went to Las Vegas because I liked the job, I liked the firm, they did what I wanted to do, and I actually had friends here before I moved here because Cornell has this hotel administration school. Even though it had been four years since I had graduated, there was still a group who had been here in Las Vegas.

Could you tell us more about your job and what you do?

Sure. I took this job in particular because I knew I wanted to do more business and finance work. While in law school, I applied to the business school at USC. Law school is a three-year program, in my second year of law school I applied to the business school. I was admitted. For another year of school, I was able to receive both a juris doctorate and an MBA, so I was able to do that in four years. Interestingly enough, though, I was denied admission to the business school initially, and I talked to my dean and I wondered why because I had a seven-something on the GMAT. I interviewed. I didn’t have any work experience necessarily because I was straight from college to grad school. A big metric of business school is that they have people with years of experience workwise in their class and have people that are more knowledgeable and more experienced. That was probably a strike against me and, second, I was from the law school, so they probably viewed me as an interloper into their school. But I talked to my dean and told him why I wanted it, because I did have a business degree undergraduate-wise and this is the area of work I wanted to go into and an MBA would be important for me in my career. I can’t remember the details, but I think he spoke to his peer at the business school, and I think I then spoke to someone in the business school, and then they changed their minds and actually let me in. Go figure. I’m not quite sure why I asked them to think about it or why I contested it, but I

guess…You don't know until you try, and I think that kind of falls into that category. Fortunately, I really questioned why I didn't get in because I thought I deserved to get in; I had good reason to be admitted, and they admitted me. I was fortunate.

With my business background and law background, I joined my first firm in Las Vegas for the purpose of doing corporate and securities work. That is: representing companies in raising capital for their business from investors. Some of those companies are traded on the national exchange—New York Stock Exchange, American Stock Exchange—so we had clients that were traded on those exchanges back then. The Rio Hotel and Casino was its own public company, was a separate company. The Showboat was its own separate company. There were other companies that we had done work for that were publicly traded and that we represented and that we had to raise capital for, and so that was the work that I was interested in, and that spoke to me based on my schooling. I spent a lot of my early years learning that work and, also, learning a lot of gaming law as well because those are obviously gaming companies. The gaming law construct is pretty involved and there's a lot of compliance, as you can imagine, and there's a lot of recording that has to go on, a lot of coordination with the Nevada Gaming Control Board and the Nevada Gaming Commission as to what you're doing, how you're doing it, who you're doing it with; a number of things. That's all part of the practice. Currently I still practice corporate law, business law, and gaming; those are my main areas.

It also says that you're the former president of the Asian Bar Association of Las Vegas. Could you tell us more about that experience?

Sure. The bar in Nevada as a whole is not a large group of individuals. I'm actually licensed in California, also. To give you a comparison, my bar number in Nevada is 6018, but my bar license number in California is 194161—it's six digits. This shows you just the magnitude of

how small Nevada is compared to other states. I can't actually remember what you were asking me now that I'm talking about the state bar. I kind of got lost. I lost my train of thought there.

The Asian Bar Association in Las Vegas.

Right. The bar is really small, and so there really isn't—when I first moved here, within a year there was an attempt to create a local Asian Bar Association chapter, and that is tied to the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association, NAPABA. It didn't really work; there wasn't enough critical mass. A few years later, in the late '90s—because I moved here in 1996, so in the late '90s—there were more Asian attorneys in town, and so we decided to put that organization together, me and a few others. We established the Asian Bar Association here in Las Vegas in the late '90s, and it still operates today, to some extent; there's not a lot going on because of COVID. But actually, there's an event a week from today, first event in over a year, just to check in with people.

I'm not involved as much anymore. I'm kind of a director emeritus of sorts. I paid my dues, in a way. But forming that chapter we were able to hold a national convention here in Las Vegas, and that was in 2006, I think. I'm very fortunate to be a part of that organization. A lot has come from that. I've gotten a lot of business. I was named one of the best under forty recipients—I forget what year that was, 2008 maybe. You meet, obviously, attorneys that have an infinity for Asian American issues, and so it's a great organization. I served as a board member for NAPABA, the national organization, for a couple of years, as a regional governor for eastern California and Nevada, so I served as regional governor for two years, from 2017 to 2019. They do a lot of great things. It's great to have a central organization that you know at least where to go to find a starting point for information that relates to your profession and that

you as an ethnically Asian Pacific American, how that relates to your profession as well. That was a path that was fortunate for me that I was able to go down as part of my professional career.

Now we're going to talk about living in Las Vegas. What are the things you like most about living here?

When I did move here, it was a question of, what would it be like to live in Las Vegas? I was fortunate enough to have friends from college that were still here, and that were there at the time, and they're actually still here. So, obviously, I have pretty longstanding friends. From 1988, even, right when I started college, there were people here that I knew from there. Yes, I think ultimately what happened, what the mental calculus was, did I want to stay in a large city where you're a small fish in a big pond versus being in Las Vegas where you could be a relatively bigger fish in a much smaller pond.

I was fortunate to be with a firm that had a good reputation. I was able to come to Nevada and work on really good cases and work on really meaningful corporate governance matters for public companies. Through that experience I've been chair of the Nevada State Bar's business law section, which is basically the portion of the state bar that at least tries to be responsible for Nevada's business laws, and so I've been a member of that committee since I joined the bar, and I ended up being chair of that committee since two thousand and…I want to say 2005.

The interesting thing about it is that obviously you learn a lot about our laws because not only are we trying to improve them, but we try to clarify them, we try to add different things, and so every session of the Nevada Legislature, which meets every two years, we have a bill that I present to our legislature. I give testimony. I talk to legislators about it and I give them background information about it. I come here every time; it's not a surprise. A lot of legislators, they know a lot, but corporate law, laws relating to other entities, it's not really top of mind for a

lot of people, so it bears a little explaining as to what it's trying to accomplish and the policy reasons for that and the reasons why we do that, to keep competitive with other states in terms of business entities and organizations. I've been giving testimony since 2005. That's something, for example, I could never do in the state of California. I mean, you could, but in a state like Nevada, there's only so many corporate lawyers to begin with, and there's a clear need for a group to be sure our laws are current, accurate, clear, and it's something that I wouldn't really be able to do anyplace else other than Nevada. To be able to actually say, "I wrote that law. I can tell you why we did it, and I can you tell you why we didn't do it. I can tell you what's in it." When you think about it that way, it's a privilege, really, to be able to do that.

AYRTON: Thank you. I just wanted to rewind a little bit from when you first arrived in Las Vegas. What was it like? What were your first initial memories of moving to basically a town in the middle of the desert? What were your first impressions when you got here?

When I got here in 1996, the Excalibur had just opened; it was new. The Luxor was new; that was top-of-the-food-chain kind of thing. For many years after that there was always this buzz, like, "What's the next new property?" It was great. It was an exciting time.

Having lived in New York City and having commuted in New York City, whether it's living in the city or living in New Jersey and having to commute back and forth, and having lived in L.A., whether it's living on campus or dealing with the freeway traffic, Las Vegas, I found, was really easy to live in. In fact, people would come to see you; we didn't even have to go anywhere because everyone would just show up. It was interesting because you had a tendency to keep in contact with people much better because you lived in Las Vegas than if I was in L.A. and I had a friend that lived in Burbank and I lived on the west side. I would never see them, probably. But when you're in Las Vegas, everyone calls you; everyone wants to know

what you're up to, wants to see what's going on. Being here in my late twenties, when I got here, it was great. It gave yourself a lot of room; I was able to buy a house by age twenty-seven, twenty-eight. It was very accessible. There were a lot of things that were very accessible.

It was growing, obviously. The streets have changed a lot, obviously to reflect growth. Half the Strip wasn't even here when I moved here, the buildings that are there now. It's been great to see and it was great to be a part of that.

Touching back on that subject, you kind of included a multitude of what this next question is, but how did you see Las Vegas change over the years? Obviously, as you stated earlier, half the Strip wasn't even there. The Luxor, the Excalibur, what we kind of consider older hotels, and then currently those were the newest hotels on the Strip, how did you see the change on the Strip, and how did that affect the rest of Las Vegas?

If you're here for ten years, you kind of get your local card, right? That's long enough where you're from Vegas. As you know, and I'm not sure where all of you might be from, I'm sure one or two of you at least didn't live and grow up and go to school in Las Vegas. Las Vegas is full of folks that have come from everywhere else and have come here for a reason, because of jobs, a family life, to be able to support a family and live in a home versus an apartment, actually being able to own something. There were a lot of reasons for people to come here. The job growth was tremendous obviously for many decades, and still today, somehow, someway, there's still a lot of attraction to Las Vegas.

During the mid-nineties and ten years thereafter, it was pretty remarkable, the years that the Las Vegas area was number one in terms of growth. I think when I moved here it might have been just over a million people—I can't remember exactly—and now we're at two and a half million, for Clark County essentially, and that's pretty striking. Obviously when I got here there

were people telling me about how they were living here when there were only half a million people here. It's all relative, but the growth obviously is pretty staggering. There was a lot of positive outlook.

The next question I have for you is…Food is a very important staple in Asian culture. Food and family are generally associated together. Do you have any foods that you eat or that you remember when you were a kid that always brought you comfort, and can you find those foods here, or have you tried to make your own, when you came here?

Growing up in New York City, I ate a lot of foods. Obviously, we ate a lot of Korean food at home. I would come home and tell my mom—this is more when I was older and I was visiting from college—I would tell my mom, "Oh, I'm going to meet some friends." And like, "Where are you going?" "Oh, we're going to get some Korean food." And she'll look at me like, why are you going to get Korean? You can eat Korean food at home. She didn't even understand what that meant. But for me growing up in the city, there were all kinds of food, all kinds of ethnicities, and all kinds of food on the street, like hotdog carts and pretzel carts. Now it's at a ridiculous level in terms of the range of food you can find on a street in New York City.

Moving here initially in '96, it was pretty meager; the only market was Ranch 99; that was the only Asian market of any reliability. We used to call the other small markets museums because you would go there to see what you like so you could remember what it was, and then when you went to L.A. you would just go get a whole bunch of stuff and bring it back. The first five years of living in Las Vegas we went—my wife is from L.A.—we went to L.A. a lot, and we'd always have an ice chest just for food that we'd bring back because the critical mass of the Asian community wasn't really there in the '90s. The only market was 99 Ranch, which is a great market. Everything is fresh and they have a lot of variety. For example, they don't have all

the Korean things you want, or they might not have all the unique things for Korean culture. It had a wide array of things, for sure, and it was the only place to go. There were a lot of small stores. There was one down the street on Spring Mountain. There was one off Tropicana. I don't think it's there anymore. With Greenland coming in—that was about ten years? I think about ten years ago. With 99 Ranch, Greenland, and Seafood City, now you have some options of reliable places to go. Before though, with the smaller shops, it was kind of tough. But you'd go to the small shops because they had these Korean dramas on VHS cassettes, way back then, so that was mainly why we went back in the '90s, for our VHS cassettes.

Just to finish that point, the last ten years has been pretty amazing, the development of Asian food options, in the Spring Mountain area and in the southwest off Rainbow; there are so many places now that would have been unheard of before. It's been great to see.

CECILIA: You mentioned traveling to L.A. with your wife. How did you meet her, and do you have kids?

I have two sons. The younger son was born in 2004 and is a junior at Coronado High School in Henderson. Our older son was born in 2002 and is a freshman in college. He attends Cornell University as I did; being back on campus in August 2021 to move him in was great. I met my wife overseas, actually. By the time I got to college, I was trying to figure out what to do one summer. I never left a certain area of the country. I was born in New York. I traveled as far as Chicago to visit a school. That's about it. I was as far west as Chicago and as far east as Boston until I was about twenty-one. And then twenty-one, my junior year in college I went to Korea for a summer program with Yonsei University, and a few friends of mine from college, we went together. My wife now was there, herself with some friends, and—she grew up in L.A.—we met in Korea in 1991.

AYRTON: You touched on this a little bit earlier as well, but you talked about Asian parent telepathy, where they—

[Laughing]

Listen, I've known the unwritten rule that they came here to give you a better life; and, therefore, you have to exceed what their expectations were for you. How has the model minority myth and other general perceptions of your race affected you?

So many ways to think about that. Obviously, in the environment we're in now, the model minority kind of concept is being revisited in a way, and people are trying to understand what it means and what it should mean versus what people think it means. Is it a good thing? Is it a bad thing? I think we're seeing where it's being used in a passive aggressive way to say that…One, it doesn't apply to all ethnicities within the vast Asian landscape. Two, it's a convenient way to gloss over real issues because people are thinking that you don't have any problems; people are thinking that you've got it figured out; you don't need someone thinking that it's something bad happening to you, right? A lot of this is coming out right now about how people don't even realize that they're being racist, and people don't even realize that some things are entirely unacceptable; they think it's funny. A lot of it hides behind this curtain that people put off thinking everything is fine; Asians are the model and they do what they're told; they don't make any problems; they've got it figured out, or whatever it is. In some ways it's a very powerful tool to marginalize issues, real issues and concerns. Certain arguments you hear: *So, yes, you think that's a problem? Someone looks at you and thinks that you're not threatening, you're smart, you work hard. What's wrong with that?* Those biases, those preconceptions, they're not necessarily threatening whereas other ones can be, as we've seen last year, George Floyd and all the other just unacceptable situations involving African Americans; how those presumptions

are…they lead to violence pretty quickly. But the problem for us is that there's no audience for our problems as a group. Even though we're diverse in terms of our ethnicities, there's no outlet for it. One, your parents don't want to hear it; they don't want you making any problems; they don't want you kicking up dust and making a scene; they just want you to keep your head down and just work hard and get it done. At some level that's right because a lot of this is noise, a lot of this is nonsense, a lot of this is based on just someone's massive ignorance, which if you made a big stink about it, you're wasting your time on someone that really doesn't deserve your time. But that being said, I think we have a duty to stop this perpetuation of prejudice and biases. That's where we're at; I think a lot of us are at a point where we're making a point to let people know that that's not acceptable.

Earlier when you talked about growing up in New York, and especially in New Jersey, you talked about how you would have racial slurs said to you. Did that travel with you to the West Coast, in California, and even in Las Vegas, and if so, how did you witness it and how did that affect you, per se?

It's hard to…In New Jersey, it wasn't like people were throwing rocks at me or something. There were people that would call me *Chang*. My name could have been Chang, but it wasn't. Clearly, I know you're being…something I won't say. They'd say it and then they'd laugh. The severity of those kinds of slights are laughed at; they're viewed as a joke. No one really assigns the same gravity or weight to someone being called a *chink* or someone being called something else as they do with other racial epithets that are used with other groups. I think it's a problem.

I was just watching on HBO Max, I was watching Warrior. Have you seen that show? It's a Bruce Lee inspired storyline of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco in the late 1800s. This is clear racism, obviously; this is right before the Chinese Exclusion Act. There's a lot of

resentment for cheap Chinese labor coming in with the railroads and other industry. The funny thing is, you know they're racist when they're calling everyone, *chinks go home; go back to your country*, and all the things that go with it. Then 140 years later, it's just the same thing. It somewhat makes it kind of sad because you know in the late 1800s, not that there's an excuse, but it's immediate; these are people you've never seen before; literally you've never seen someone that looks like this, whereas in 2020 you still hear this nonsense. It's a perpetual case of being a foreigner in a country that you were born in. People look at you and they…I know that people have looked at me and, one, they don't think I'm old; they don't think I know anything; they wonder if I speak English. There are a whole bunch of things that they're already processing in their head before they even talk to me, and that's something that we all have to deal with. There is very little appreciation for that if you're not Asian because people will look at you thinking…they don't know what to think of you. They might think that you're just here to deliver Chinese food or something, honestly. I have no idea what they're thinking. Those are challenges that are still real and they're not changing anytime soon, unfortunately. They're so embedded within societies. It's very hard to know why. It's very hard to know why other than we're visibly easier to target than others. When I watch a movie like *Gangs of New York*—have you guys all seen *Gangs of New York*? It's set in the early 1800s where basically they treat all the Irish like they were Asian. They're stealing jobs, they sound funny, they bring disease; all these things. But that's in the early 1800s. But they're all Anglo-Saxon; they're all White, but yet because there are different groups that are threatening, they're treated differently. But for us, for Asian groups, that hasn't really gone away, over a century.

NESSA: Jumping off of that I'm curious if you think that your race has ever affected how you were perceived in the workplace?

I think in the practice of law generally, it’s relatively easy for someone of Asian descent to get a job, but where the big challenges are, are moving up, becoming partner, being more senior in a law firm, or senior even in other organizations. Who doesn’t want someone who works hard? Who doesn’t want someone who’s smart? Let’s have that person on our team. But then after that there is no upper movement. There’s a lot of…people call it a "bamboo ceiling," a glass ceiling, all kinds of different catchy names. What you have is a very established majority, the older white man, running a business whether it’s a law firm, whether it’s something else, and you don’t see a lot of other people that look like you in those senior positions.

How is that affecting me in the workplace? I’d say it probably helped me in the sense that people knew I was hardworking, people presumed I was smart, people presumed I knew what I was doing. One problem I have is I look relatively young. I probably don’t look as young as I used to because I’m really old now; I’m fifty-one. I’ve practiced law for twenty-five years. When I do talk to someone new, I try to make sure they know that I’ve been practicing for over twenty years, because they might think I just graduated law school. They might know and they might just presume. Nowadays law school isn’t just a linear college-to-law-school job. There’s a lot of people that have second careers in law. There are a lot of people that look older than me that just graduated law school, but they might assume that person is the senior attorney versus me because they don’t think I look old enough. I think that’s something that Asians have to deal with a lot; perception of expertise, experience, no matter where you are. Maybe in the tech world it’s a little different because of just the sheer numbers and obviously the sheer innovations that Asians have led in technology. I know it has to happen there, too, but probably not to the same degree. But business and law, very traditional, like service industries, it’s something that I’m very mindful of when I meet someone for the first time; that they know how long I’ve been practicing for.

Does that answer your question? I think it does. It does and then at some point it doesn't because they look at you more as a cog, like hardworking, doesn't cause trouble, gets the job done. Yes, let's have a thousand of those, but let's just keep them there. Let's not do anything else with them. It's like working on a railroad, I guess. They're going to do the job, but I don't really want them doing any more than that.

I know you spoke earlier about your involvement with the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association. I just wanted to jump off on that a bit. I'm curious about how closely connected you feel to the local AAPI community.

I really haven't spent a lot of time with the local community. I have been to local Asian Chamber of Commerce events and different things like that and I have obviously helped establish our local bar association chapter. My experience with NAPABA has been more national, which has been helpful because you need perspective a lot of times and you get perspective from those that have gone through different experiences, but you had a common platform to share them in, and so that's why being involved with the national organization has been helpful. I develop a lot of contacts and resources in terms of understanding what other people are dealing with. "What are you doing at your firm to address AAPI hate crimes recently?" We'd be able to compare notes and talk about what others are doing and then find resources for people that need help. We recently were able to identify a few persons that we wanted to speak with, some attorneys in our firm that have had their own experiences in their own communities with hate crime and help them process that experience and what it means to be a lawyer as well. Those are connections that we were able to make quickly for people by virtue of relationships that we have to the national organization.

I think it's pretty obvious from your answer that you have seen a change in discriminatory rhetoric practices against Asian Americans, and I'm just curious about how you felt about the use of discriminatory terms by high-ranking US officials.

I think like we talked about before, I don't know what Asian person hasn't heard—everybody has heard those phrases in their life. We're told to basically put it in a box and on a shelf and just move on. I hear it. It pisses me off. But the thing is I know no one's going to do anything about it; that's ultimately where you find yourself. I can complain, but who's going to care? Virtually nobody other than people that have felt the same thing will care. Should that change? Of course. Is it changing? It seems like. There's a lot more headlines about it. But the fact that there's any question that the person that was arrested for pushing the elderly Thai gentleman in San Francisco from behind for no reason, if there's any question that that wasn't a crime is ridiculous. The only reason why he was pushed was because he was Asian. I know that and I think you all know that, but to someone else, "Well, he didn't say anything. He didn't scream anything derogatory." You just know. Those barriers are what stand in the way for people to really understand the impact of things like that. But it's being called out, which is great. The more we can do to reinforce that and tell people that is not cool; that is a big problem; that is a hate crime; that is racist; that's being targeted for how you look, and the more we let people know that's exactly what that's supposed to be, and any question that it isn't is unacceptable, is the message that we have to tell people.

The funny thing is I never had to spell my last name more than ever anywhere else, and it's the simplest last name in the world. If you've lived in New York or L.A., you've dealt with a Kim before. But it's weird, when I first moved to Las Vegas, it was fascinating that I had to spell my last name all the time because people just didn't deal with as many Asians in Las Vegas as

they did in the bigger cities. I found Las Vegas…Those uncomfortable feelings I think you get from people are more based on ignorance than actual direct racism, to me, from the handful of situations I've seen locally with me or people that I know. I really haven't seen anything egregious or over the top. It's more that people are just more ignorant than anything else.

I just have one more question that I wanted to circle back to. You spoke earlier about how while living in New Jersey your family attended the Korean church. I was wondering if you could talk more about this religion, how it figures into your life.

That was a very negative experience. I think any ethnically focused church has very incredible uncontrollable dynamics to it. One, obviously, everyone shares the same religion, but, two, there's a layer of culture on top of it. Either you're all in or you want no part of it because it's just too much; that's what I've seen at least in Korea culture and from what I've talked to friends otherwise. For me it really hasn't been a big element because it seemed to not be what religion is for when you have your faith in God and you have the relationship building through that faith. You have, to me, a potentially destructive overlay that just…it's fine, but it could be very unhealthy. It's just more of a social playground than anything else at that point, which is great in the sense of having a culture, a center point for your own culture, to meet new people and if you're new you really want to find, which is great. But at some point you have to stop; diminishing returns at some point. I would think, if the environment has lost focus and it's been more about social than more about your faith. It depends. It just depends. We go to Central Christian now, Central Church. It's more about I think what it should be.

You talked a lot about the places you've either lived or been living in, and you mentioned how you met your wife was in Korea. I want you to elaborate more on the noticeable

lifestyle differences in New Jersey, New York compared to Las Vegas, and maybe even your trip to Korea, what was that like?

I mentioned in New York that it was very diverse. I lived in an apartment building. Actually, there were anywhere from five to six of us. First we lived in a one-bedroom apartment where my parents had the bedroom and my brother, my sister and I, we all slept in the living room. I think when my grandmother moved to the States, we moved to the fourth floor of the same apartment building, and then we had a two-bedroom apartment where my parents had one bedroom, my sister and my grandmother had the other bedroom, and I slept in the living room. I didn't have my own bed until I was twelve, until I moved to New Jersey. But when you're growing up, you don't really think about it. It is what it is. That wasn't a big deal. But it's fun now when you think about it that I didn't really sleep in a bed until I was twelve. I slept on a sofa until I was twelve, which is fine. It kind of makes you realize how far you can come from wherever you happen to be.

In New York there's people everywhere. You're walking with people. You're in the subway shoulder to shoulder with people. You're in the city doing things. It's obviously a much different dynamic. Then when you go to New Jersey, you don't walk anywhere. Homes are spread out where we moved to in northern New Jersey. You had to have a car to get around, really. I took the bus to school for a while, which most people did. There was no stigma to that at all. Most people just took the bus. Then at some point you drove to high school. But it was different. It was a lot less diverse where I grew up in New Jersey. I don't know if you know parts of New Jersey at all. Some parts are…As you go west from New York City across the Hudson, you have Fort Lee, a lot of Korean people. If you move a couple of towns in, you have Tenafly,

you have Park Ridge, you have Westwood, and we're a few towns further west, so there weren't a lot of Asians or a lot of other minorities in my high school. It was very different.

Then when I went to college, I essentially had mostly Asian friends when I went to Cornell, ultimately. I had all kinds of friends, but my best friends were Asian friends, Korean and Chinese they happen to be.

And then going to L.A., L.A. being L.A., you had to drive everywhere, also, and so that was a big change as well. Having such distinct different areas like K Town and J Town, it was a lot different. I guess when I grew up in New York, I didn't really think about parts of the city as being designated as different parts of town. I just kind of viewed it as one big city. But in L.A. it seemed a lot more delineated; different parts of L.A. were known for different things.

Going to Korea was different because I had never been to Korea before. Back in the '90s, there was a level of intolerance from people that were Korean by ethnicity but they couldn't speak Korean, so you would kind of get some static for that a little bit. It was weird in Korea seeing everyone is Korean. Everyone doing everything is Korean from sweeping the floors to stocking the shelves. It was kind of weird to see that. Everybody is…which is fine. There's nothing wrong with that. Whereas in the States obviously it's a lot more striated; you see people doing different jobs more than others, and so it's a lot different.

I've been able to travel through a business group I'm part of. I've been to India. I've been to Jamaica. I've been to other places. It's always good to see other countries, how things are just day to day, and so it's been interesting to take a look at that. I explore countries for that reason.

I wanted to touch on how earlier you mentioned that your parents pushed you into the direction of a degree and the telepathy of "you're going to do this." Considering how

common that is and how much you were influenced by your parents, what have you learned to pass or withhold to the future generation or your kids on this topic?

That's a tough one. I'm at a point where…My parents were successful in achieving what they wanted to achieve. Both my parents have passed away, by the way. I forget if I mentioned that, but they're both deceased. I'm part of the generation where I've had my parents kind of give up their lives in a way and…yes, I guess sacrifice what they want to do necessarily, because I'm sure my parents didn't want to stay in a liquor store for fourteen hours a day for over twenty years. They could probably think of a few things better to do than that. But they did that because they wanted to provide, and so obviously that's my goal and that's why I work and that's why I work hard and that's why I do what I do, for that reason. Clearly that's a function of my parents. Clearly that's a function of I owe it to them not to be a failure, in a way. I think that's the common proposition that's in a lot of people's heads. If you are maybe not meeting what you think their expectations are, it's really hard to process, I would imagine; it causes a lot of angst. It's unspeakable really, unfortunately. It's hard to really communicate because that's something that most Asians don't do. We don't sit there and just kind of give each other therapy; we just don't do that, period. We don't want to hear it. We don't even know what that means. I think that's the case for most people. So, yes, a lot of times you think you can just lead by example and say a few things pretty unequivocally about how they should be doing things and what they should be doing. I don't know. It's hard to say.

My son, he's eighteen. He's a high school senior. He decided to go into engineering, which I never told him to. But I guess he thought that was good for him, which is great. I'm glad he figured that out, I guess. I hope he doesn't have a revelation that that was the biggest mistake of his life, but that's part of living, though. He's allowed to make that decision within certain

guidelines. As a parent you don't want your kids just to do whatever they want in a way that you think for sure will lead to a situation that you don't want to see them in, because you're still caring for them, you still want to guide them without telling them what to do. It's similar in a way, I supposed, to what my parents did. Parenting is a challenge, a lot of factors at work that you have no control over, more so now than ever before. As we know nowadays…back when I was growing up, you could make mistakes and literally no one knew because there's no way anyone could have known, whereas now you can't make a mistake without everybody knowing because that's just the platform we live in with media and everything. There's no way that no one finds out about something. It's just impossible. The stakes are a little higher in a way, and that's one thing my wife and I try to be clear about: You can make mistakes, but you have to realize when you make a mistake, it's not just about you; it's a very public situation.

Have you ever felt out of place within your own community, like feeling not Korean American enough, not Asian enough? Has those thoughts ever crossed your mind, and how do you feel about that?

When I was in Korea, I felt that way because I felt like, yes, I really should know how to speak Korean, or better. I could speak Korean. Luckily, I could speak Korean better than my friends who really couldn't speak at all. But I don't think I felt that way, though, otherwise. I'm trying to think…It's kind of weird. In college there was a group of other guys that were a little more "Koreanized" than we were, to make a word out of *Korean*, but I didn't view that as what they were versus what we were and it wasn't a problem. It was just more that's just the way they were.

But obviously I think there's a high degree of wanting to conform. There's a lot of pressure for Asians to conform. I think that's a common philosophy. Even within our own

respective cultures, no one wants you to stand out, like you're supposed to do what you're told, and that carries over when we're dealing with people outside our culture just as much or maybe even more so. I can't figure out where I got this, but I tried to figure out where this actually came from, but I haven't really figured out the source of it. But it's that comparative analogy about the squeaky wheel gets the grease versus the nail that sticks out gets hammered. That's the east-west dichotomy of someone that stands out. I haven't really figured out which culture that "hammering the nail" comes from, but I think we all understand, though, nobody wants you to stick out. Nobody wants to hear from you. Nobody wants to care about your problems. They just want you to do what you're supposed to do. Whereas, in Western culture, people that complain, they get more attention because people just want them to stop. Seriously, can you just stop? The dynamics are different. There's a tolerance that's much higher in different cultures and much lower in other cultures.

Why is it valuable for the university to collect interviews such as yours?

I asked myself that question, too. I have been here for twenty-six years. I think it's interesting because I don't go telling people what I do. If somebody asks I just tell them, "I'm a lawyer." I don't tell them I run the office. I don't tell them I'm a partner. I don't tell them I run the state's business law section. I don't tell them…I just don't tell them. One, it's nobody's business. Two, I really don't care. I think it's good to identify people and let them tell their story because most likely they're never going to tell it themselves because they're not inclined to. As you go through this process, I'm sure there's people that are much more worthy than me that need to have their stories told, but this process alone is a way to identify those stories, is a way to make sure people that have compelling careers and compelling impacts on society and on their communities can actually be identified.

What always struck me as odd is that from all the discipline and from all of the attention to detail that we as Asians are presumed to have and be like, the written history is…it's very odd that there's very little written history, and it took so long, when you compare it to Western culture, for things to be documented, like for property rights, for example. That should actually be written down versus saying "oh that's his; that's mine and that will be yours later" kind of thing. For some reason…obviously there is some history, but the depth and the extent of it is oddly lacking, and it's unfortunate because there are probably a lot more details that all of us wish we could have had, but we don't. For example, genealogy in the Western culture is a huge, huge thing, but it's possible because of their records. There's records of people in jail. There's records of people…there's all kinds of records. When you see these shows whether it's PBS or NBC where they take a celebrity and go down a path, it's amazing the written connections that they find whereas I don't know how far any of us really go back and find anything in writing about any of our ancestors? Probably not that much. There's probably not that much there for any of us, so it's kind of odd to me. Thinking about that I think it's great that some effort is being done to catalog this so that out of that something worthwhile can be at least picked up through that effort.

Is there anything that you feel that we haven't touched on that you would like to talk about? Any questions that we might have missed in the interview?

No. It's hard to talk about yourself. I feel like I've done a lot of that already. I can't really think of anything in particular that's worth noting.

As a large, categorized group, I think there's a lot of impact that Asians in Nevada can have because our numbers are still increasing, much like they are for the Latino community, and I think they're supposed to the second-largest group in the state at some point soon. I think civic

engagement is something that Asians aren't inclined to have at the top of their list of things to do for their reason, a lot of reasons why, just no time, don't trust government, don't think you can make any change. But it's interesting. When I do my legislative work, I deal with our state senators and state assembly people, and there's always a couple of Asians and a couple of African Americans and a couple of Latinos and a couple of other people of color, but it's not that many. It is what it is. It's hard to say what it should be, but you definitely know when it's off a little bit or something's wrong or something could be different, so it's hard. I don't think my parents would have wanted me to be a politician because they didn't work hard for me to be a state assemblyman, I don't think. They worked at a certain level because they wanted me to do something more professional, I suppose, not to say that being a politician isn't. You can't just be anyone. You have to be able to support yourself. In Nevada, for example, being a state politician is a part-time job technically because the legislature only meets once every two years, so no one does it for the pay. No one is a state senator or assembly person because they're doing it for the pay because it's a part-time position, but it takes a lot of time. It's also because you're wired differently; you want to get involved at a certain level. I think civic engagement is not an area that is highlighted in the Asian community as something that people need to be doing or being more involved in. Because, one, we like to be private. We don't want people in our business. If you're a politician, you're a public figure. Everything is public, and so for that reason alone, it probably turns off 90 percent of the people, anyway, for just that reason alone. Obviously as the population grows, we'll see what happens and we'll see the changes. Obviously, this past election there were a lot of Asian elected officials on both sides, Republican and Democrat. It's pretty fascinating how Asian culture crosses different party lines for different reasons. Some groups tend to vote more Democrat and others tend to vote more Republican. It's kind of

interesting. But that's a whole other topic, I guess. Politics…it's hard to get people excited about it, I think. More so now you can, but traditionally it hasn't been, I don't think.

ARYTON: I was wondering if you could elaborate a little bit more about your siblings. Do you guys still keep in touch? Are they still living on the East Coast? How has that relationship grown over the years as you guys matured?

I have an older sister and an older brother; older sister Mary, older brother Charles. My sister is a pharmacist. She basically was a mother figure given the age gap and the fact that she lived at home a lot. She, herself, sacrificed a lot for…she sacrificed herself a lot for the family, to raise me because I was a lot younger. She could have done a lot more things probably than she did, and so for that obviously there's a lot of gratitude for that self-sacrifice. We talk at least a couple of times a month, we try to at least. It reminds me I probably should give her a call. It's been a little while.

My brother when I grew up, I didn't really see him too much just given the stages. He was at college. He was at med school. He was doing this. Then I went to college, and so I didn't see him as much. Definitely once I became a lawyer, once I became more of an adult per se, we relate a lot more, we talk a lot more about things.

My sister will still ask me if I'm really a lawyer; that's the typical sibling thing to ask. "Do you have a real job? What do you do?" All those typical questions that your older sibling will ask a younger sibling.

Like I said, both my parents have passed away. My dad passed away six years ago, and my mom about eight, nine years ago, and my grandmother about seven years ago, so about a four-year span. It's just the three of us in terms of family.

When your grandmother moved in with you, I believe it was in New York.

Yes.

What was that like? Did she tell you any stories, and any of those stories do you still hold onto to this day?

She didn't tell me any stories probably because…that's how my Korean actually got better, because she lived with us. Just being able to communicate was a win at that point. Obviously, my Korean improved a little bit here and there. There weren't too many stories. The tragedy of it all, at least for my family and I don't think this is a unique dynamic for other families, is that we don't really go into those stories on a casual basis. We only go into those stories when things are triggered.

For my father when he was months from passing away in kind of a hospice situation, I would visit him a lot and then we'd talk about some things. When he was growing up, his family moved out of Korea to Manchuria to avoid the Japanese occupation of Korea. He remembers. He grew up in Pyongyang, which is currently the capital of North Korea. He remembered going to a new school one day, or going to a new school, being at a new school, and then the next day they all left because his parents decided to leave, and they all moved to northern China. I think at the conclusion of World War II then they all moved back, and they survived somehow. Then my parents obviously got married. I didn't really know that until my dad—I knew my dad had moved to Manchuria/China, but the little minute details, you don't get that until it's almost too late, which is tragic. That's the problem of not being comfortable in communicating, which is, I think, pretty typical in families, especially immigrant families, but it still doesn't make it right. But this is what happens, so it's unfortunate.

So, no, no stories from my grandmother other than…no, there weren't really any. I had a great time with her. It was great. Obviously, she did what she could to help me and provide for

me. We'd walk to the market together with her shopping cart and that kind of stuff. We'd do things together. I would take her to her Buddhist temple before she converted to Christianity, but at first she was a Buddhist, so I'd walk her to the Buddhist temple every weekend or something. We spent time. Obviously, it was a caring relationship, but the stories weren't…it wasn't quite the same because the dialogue wasn't there, which is unfortunate because I'm sure she had plenty to tell me if I knew what to ask.

But that's the thing, too: Unless you know what to ask, people won't tell you. That's kind of what happens. That's a situation you find a lot of yourself in where you don't really…Someone might say, "Well, how come you never told me that?" Well, you never asked. Unless you know the questions, you know what to ask, it doesn't really come up or you don't want to touch upon it because…for me I have things I'm pretty clear are either boxes or areas, and so we're here, we're not here, we're here, and so we'll talk about this and we're not going to talk about that because we're not there. It's to a fault, of course, because then you've missed out on a lot that you realize way after the fact.

I'd like to hear from you guys what you're looking to do, what you're hoping to accomplish through this process. I've read a little bit about it. But as you're doing these interviews, I'd be curious to hear how you're seeing the path come together. I'd be curious to hear about that.

[Colloquy not transcribed]

I'm very happy that my two sons love Spam, so I passed one thing along.

ARYTON: Right. It's amazing. But there's a lot of things, like taking your shoes off before you enter the house.

Oh absolutely.

Just little things that their cultures didn't have, but mine had, so…

[Colloquy not transcribed]

It was cool to see the interviews that we've done so far, there's been a lot of similarities in mentalities, like talking about that telepathy thing. I definitely feel like there is that culture of forcing—not really forcing, but putting expectations onto you and the sacrifice piece.

You feel the weight, right? You feel that they're investing in you, and for you not to do something with it…that's a pretty sucky feeling if you feel as though you're not being reciprocal and at least trying. It's a horrible feeling. It's a lot like guilt, like a massive amount of guilt that you have to process. That you have to either not care about, but then if you don't care about it, what kind of person are you? Or we're told that what kind of person are you if you can't…? We're already told what the answer is to that question. Yes, it's hard. It's fascinating, too.

[Colloquy not transcribed]

You were saying that your story really isn't that rich, but we're happy to have you here to share your story.

Thank you.

[Colloquy not transcribed]

[End of recorded interview]