

AN INTERVIEW WITH YEON-KYUNG “MAR” CHUNG

An Oral History Conducted by Emilee Calvin

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

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
Director, Oral History Research Center
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PREFACE

“Here I think you can do anything. 40s and 50s you can do anything. I think that’s one of the biggest things I love about it.”

As a successful pharmacist and single mother of two, Mar Chung demonstrates the prosperity that Asian American immigrants can find in the United States. Born in Korea, Mar Chung was the only person in her family to venture to the United State and uproot her entire life in exchange for a new culture and new experiences. Chung represents the Korean community in her everyday life and finds new ways to connect and combine both American and Korean culture.

Mar Chung’s journey began in Texas where she went to graduate school for her Spanish degree. After moving to Las Vegas, she found a desire to attend both College of Southern Nevada and University of Nevada Las Vegas in order to apply for pharmacist school. Working and studying while taking care of her oldest child, she strived to create a career that would support her family and her in the future. She became a successful pharmacist and continues to work and make a difference in the Las Vegas community.

In this interview, Mar Chung describes her life in Korea and her upbringing. She explains the differences in culture and lifestyle she has noticed throughout her time in the United States. She touches on the Asian American community in Las Vegas and the trouble she had being able to receive a working visa and a green card. Chung also mentions the upbringing of her own children and how it compares to hers. As a whole, this interview is a representation of Chung’s life and her struggles and successes as an Asian American immigrant.

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November 10, 2021
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Emilee Calvin

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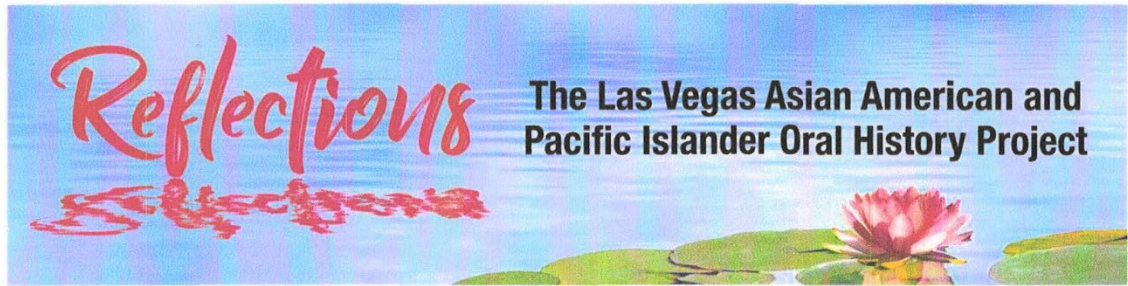
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[Interview with Yeon-Kyung “Mar” Chung, November 10, 2021, conducted by Emilee Calvin]

EC: The first question is to talk about your family and your childhood, like how you grew up, your schooling, what you did, your hobbies and stuff, your family, and what kinds of friends you had. Did you go on vacation? Stuff like that.

MC: They have any limitation of the time?

No. It just has to be about an hour.

I know, but about this question.

You can talk as long as you want.

My family, I have mom and dad still alive, and I have one older brother. I was born in Seoul, Korea. My parents, both of them, are pharmacists at the time, so I grew up with a working mom and dad, but my mom spent a lot of time with us, and I spent a lot of time with my brother and cousins.

My education, I grew up in Korea until graduating college. My education is just the same here, from here and there, so I grew up there and studied the same things, but my major there was Spanish. I was just interested in the language, so I just decided to go to one of the languages I don't even know anything. That's why I graduate over there in Spanish.

After that—talk to why I come here, too?

Yes, you can do that.

After I graduate Spanish there—when I was a junior, I just went to Spain because my dad wanted me to go just to experience another country. I spent about a year in Spain, and then I learned the language. I traveled a lot. I traveled in Europe there. I spent one year in my twenties, early

twenties, and I changed, I think it's a lot because I used to be I don't really care about my education. After I spent the one year apart from my family, I had to learn how to live by myself, I guess. After coming back from there to Korea, I tried to study really hard because before that, I don't really have interest in the Spanish.

After I graduated and spent the time in Spain for a year, I want to go out, I don't know why. I decided to find a way to come out of Korea. I decided to come to America to learn something new. I decide to come to America, and then I apply for the school. Actually, I applied for school in Latin American studies in UT [University of Texas] Austin for the graduate school. I got accepted. I had luck and was accepted. I studied there in Austin, Texas, in 1996.

Then I graduated from graduate school, and then I came to Vegas after that. The reason I came here is because at that time, my ex-husband, he tried to study for the hotel management. Here, we have UNLV, and so that's why we came here and married, and that's when we started as a family.

That's cool. You went to school in Korea as well, college there.

Yes, I finished college. I graduate there.

Then how did you become a pharmacist?

I already graduated here at UT Austin in Latin American studies for graduate school, but with that major, I can't even do anything here, so I'm not doing anything. I stayed home after I married, and then I'm pregnant. When I was pregnant, my mom just called me one day and just asked me, "Why don't you study pharmacy school?" I said, "No, no way," because my major was Spanish. I have to study everything again because I need to at least take all these science classes. At least I need two years to apply for pharmacy school, and then I have to study for at least a year because there is the one in here at that time. Still, pharmacy school here is intense

classes. My mom just told me, “Why don’t you study three years hard, and then thirty years you are going to be happy?” I said, “Oh, okay, let me think about it.”

That’s when I researched for the school, and then I decide to go into the school. I studied all the prerequisites, which is the science subjects, and then I apply for the pharmacy school and got in, and then that’s what I got.

That’s so cool. Was it hard to leave your family behind? Was it difficult adjusting in that way?

Yes. When I was in, like I told you, Spain, when I was a junior, at that time, it’s by myself. Nobody was around me. Then I only have some seniors from my college. At that time, it was kind of hard, but after that I came back to Korea and graduated college in Korea. I just want to get out from Korea, so I don’t think I have any problem. Then when I came here in America, my ex-husband came with me. He was my boyfriend before. I don’t really...

It was easier to come.

Yes, it was way easier because I have somebody here.

Is all your family still in Korea, or just some of them?

Yes, everybody is still in Korea.

How do you stay in touch with your family? Does your family come visit?

Yes. They’re old right now, over eighty. Used to be they would come every other year or something like that, and then we traveled together, but not anymore. Then I started going back to Korea almost every year, but now I stopped because of the COVID. Two years I didn’t go back to Korea, but before that almost every year, the last five years I went to Korea every year and spend time with my parents for about three weeks over there.

That's awesome. What were some of your first memories of Las Vegas? Where did you live when you first came here?

I lived in Austin, Texas. It is really, really country, so only their school there, nothing but school. Everything is focused for the school.

But when I came here, there's a lot of hotels and, plus, with all the lights. Especially Caesars, when I went there, the one with the shopping center, I was so impressed, for me, for the first time. That's what I remember for the first night is we went to the Caesars Hotel and all the lights, so beautiful.

That's so fun, oh my goodness. Do you think it was difficult living here at first just because you weren't working, and you were adjusting?

No, not the first time. Not working is difficult. When I came here, my ex-husband was studying, and then I'm staying at home. I tried to work, but at that time I can't work because of student visa. My husband has the student visa, and I have student visa, and because of student visa, we can't even work. But he worked I think because the school allowed him to work only related to the schoolwork. He was working in the restaurant, but I have to just stay home. It was so boring because I have to just keep the time. I remember I really want to work, but I can't. That's one of the things.

Then after he graduated the school, he applied for the visa, which is working visa, but at that time still, the wife of working visa can't work. At that time still, I can't do anything. That's one of the things: I can't do anything.

You were kind of just stuck.

Stuck, yes.

When you first came here, you applied for a student visa?

Yes.

After that how did you move from a student visa to...?

You're a student visa first. Then I keep having student visa and being a student for two years. Then after that I married, and my husband is student visa. I just got it under him. It's nothing. It's dependent visa, I guess, dependent student visa, something like that. The dependent can't do anything. Then he graduated and got the job, which they allowed him to have an H-1, which is the working visa. But also, as dependent of the working visa, I can't do anything. I still am not doing anything.

After I applied for the pharmacy school, what I can do is I'm just working as a student leader—actually, no, I can't even work at that time. They changed their policy or something because he has the working visa, and dependent of working visa holders can work. They changed it. I don't remember why it was. I remember I had kind of a working permit, I can say. It's not a working visa, but a working permit. I started working as I'm a student at the pharmacy school. I applied for the job, and I got accepted for the hospital and then CVS. I was working when I was a student, later time. I was so happy because that's what I wanted, to work. I'm just working a lot because I am so happy. That's when I got it.

After that I applied for a real job at that time after I'm graduating. I got accepted as a pharmacist at CVS, and then they offered for me for the green card, so that's what I got.

How long was that whole process?

First of all, when I got accepted for CVS, I'm just using the dependent of the working visa because I still had the working permit as long as my ex has the working visa. I was keep having that dependent of the working visa, but I have the working permit, and so that's why I keep working. Then I just one day, let's say two years later, I asked my boss about the green card

because I don't want to ask first because I wanted to show I have good pharmacy. I want to show him first that I can be your good employee and just prove. Then he said, "Okay, it's fine." That's when the process started. I think it takes about three or four years.

That's not too bad.

Yes, it was not really bad. A total of three or four years to get green card.

You've been in Vegas for how long?

Since 1999.

Okay, twenty.

Yes. I am a student from 2006 to 2009, I guess, and then I got the green card three, four, five years later from that.

Were you going to school when Chelsea was little?

Yes, Chelsea was little.

Was it hard?

Kind of, yes. I think she is very independent. When I am pregnant, I was planning to study, and then I have Chelsea, my first, oldest kid. After I get her, I tried looking for the prerequisites, which is I'm studying at UNLV and half at CSN, half and half, because that way it's going to be cheaper. If you are working less than a certain credit at that time—it was really different than now because now it's all the same; each credit is the same price. At that time, if you have less than seven credits, something like that, the price is going down, at that time. That's why I tried to do six credits in UNLV and then whatever credits in the CSN because CSN pricing is cheaper.

Yes, it's way cheaper.

That's what I did. I'm studying there when Chelsea was really young. Then when I studied in the pharmacy school here, she has to be independent, and it's really hard. I tried to study at night if

possible. When I came from school, I picked her up from the day care. I think it's day care or something. Then I take care of her first, and then nighttime after she is asleep, then I study.

That's crazy, wow.

Yes. But I think it's because I have family, and that's why I can't study better because I don't have choices. I have to study. I can't even go out with my friends anymore because I have to study. I think without Chelsea or my ex, I don't think I would have studied. I don't think so.

Yes, it would have been harder.

Yes, because he helped with her a lot, and then I focused on studying. I had little time. I think that's the reason I can study.

That's awesome. Have you just lived in this area of Vegas, or where else have you lived in Vegas? Just Henderson?

We lived in southwest first. I stayed in the southwest for about five or six years. I stayed in Henderson first and then southwest for a few years and then come back to Henderson.

What do you think is the most different from here versus in South Korea? What's the biggest differences that you've noticed?

Like?

Like neighborhood-wise, like familywise, stuff like that.

There are a lot of differences. I don't know what I have to talk to you about that. Hold on, let me think.

Take your time. Just anything that stands out.

The biggest difference I can say, in Korea, we had to have certain way, I can say. For example, if you are this age, you have to have this. For example, if you are a teenager, you have to study. If you are age twenty, you study or work. Middle of the twenties, you have to marry or keep

working or whatever. They have a standard that everybody needs to follow. Otherwise, it's just everybody saying something. "Oh, you're not really following this. You are certain age, and you have to do this way. Since you have studies, why don't you marry? Why don't you have kids?" Something like that. At a certain age, they have their own standard. I think it's culture-wise. But here, who cares? You can do anything. In your forties or fifties, you can do anything. I think that's one of the biggest things I love about it.

Yes, that's a really big difference.

Yes. Even though you are fifty, you can still change your job. That's one of the big things I can think of.

Yes, that definitely is something very different that we have here. Going through the school system here with your kids and going through it in Korea as a kid, did you notice any big differences? Do you think your schooling was better or worse than it is here?

When I was in Korea, they want to go to college, everybody, because they are really focused on education, education, education there. If you are not going to a good college, they're thinking your life is not good. For example, you're not going to college, you just graduate high school, they're thinking you might be a loser, something like that. I think still they're thinking that way, I guess, there because their standard is higher education. Everything is based on education there and good college. Then here, who cares? Everybody has a different way of their life, and they don't really care what others are doing. For example, here in Vegas, if you're working as a waitress, you can get a lot of money because here is a tourist city and that's one of the things. But for example, in Korea if you are still working as a waitress, let's say, end of the twenties, they're thinking you might be...

Interesting. Yes, that's very different. When you were young, did you guys celebrate certain holidays that you celebrate now, like Christmas and your birthday and stuff?

Yes.

I know the calendar is different, right? What different celebrations did you have and festivals and stuff?

We have our own holidays, and we just spend time, holiday, with the family. But we have a lunar calendar. It depends. For example, my generation—maybe my parents' generation, they still follow the birthday for the lunar calendar, so you have not the fixed birthday. They have the different day of the birthday because of the lunar calendar. But my generation, I think since then, we just have a regular calendar, like you guys have. But still, for the traditional holiday, we still follow some of them for lunar calendar. It's every year a few days' difference between, but still, some of the traditions.

Do you have any traditions that you brought here during your holidays?

For example?

I don't know. What do you guys do on Christmas?

Yes, we do it, but here, like Christmas, is family focused, and there it's friend focus. When you have Christmas, after I'm turning eighteen, I just spend that time with my friends, overnight usually. They're just invited. I don't know now because I stayed there until twenty-three, and then I came here, so I don't know after that. Maybe they changed now, but usually Christmas is focusing on the friends, usually, to spend time together. Maybe now it's different. I can't say.

Do you guys celebrate Thanksgiving now here?

Yes. They have a different kind of Thanksgiving, but yes, we celebrate. That's familywise.

That's awesome. What was it like when you were kid? Did you do ballet or...?

Yes. My mom wanted me to learn a lot of stuff because my brother doesn't want to do anything. My mom wanted to do my brother first, and then she gave up on him because he doesn't want to do it. He just wants to play with friends. She asked me—actually, she doesn't ask me. She just...I learned a lot process. I learned a lot of stuff, all different kinds, a lot of sports, piano for a long time, and then I did a lot of sports. Yes, I learned a lot of sports. I learned the guitar. I learned the Chinese characters. I learned...name it, I learned everything. That's my parents, for me to learn.

Did you like it?

Yes, I like it because learning the new stuff, I'm interested in that. Yes, I think I loved doing it.

That's good. I'm glad you found some fun stuff. Did you learn English when you were growing up in Korea?

Yes, because it's one of the requirements to take it. It's not a foreign language. You need to take it. Now they change it; the elementary is taking English class, but when I was young, middle school is the requirement, so we're just taking it. But there is not really much chance to practice.

Was that intimidating when you came here? Was that frightening?

Oh yes, really. Then grammar-wise, they just learn a lot of grammar, but it's not learning how to speak because there is not a lot of class there. Still in Korea, they go into a separate class, like a private class, to take English class.

Do you think it was harder going through school here after learning English in Korea?

Yes, it was kind of difficult, yes. But the thing is I studied Latin American studies, so my case is a little different when I was in Spain, I learned really good Spanish, I guess. I continued trying to learn it when I was in Korea for a few years after I came back from Spain because I am doing an interchange with one of the Spanish guys, and I meet with him twice a week, and we just talk a

lot, so I'm still having the Spanish. When I came here, because my major was Latin American studies, one of the advantages for me is that I can speak Spanish. A lot of class taking there is in Spanish, too. That's one of the things that's easier for me.

Interesting. What have you noticed politics-wise being different in South Korea and here?

Yes, it could be because in South Korea, there's a lot of people talking about the politics. If you don't have an opinion, they're just thinking you are something. "Really, you don't know anything?" Still, my generation, you have to have an opinion about politics, and then they argue a lot. They discuss a lot, arguing a lot. But here, you never ask about the politics.

Yes. They kind of avoid it.

Yes, try to avoid it.

Do you think that's better or worse?

I don't know. Here, everybody doesn't care about other's opinions. There is a difference. Which one is better, I can't say.

Just different.

Just different, yes, different culture.

That makes sense. I think you're religious, right?

Not really.

Did you grow up religious? Was your family religious?

Not really. One of the grandmas, my dad's side, she is Buddhist, but she never asked us to be Buddhist or nothing. I went to temple just once or twice in my whole life.

But you weren't pressured to do it or anything?

Not really.

That's nice. Are a lot of people in Korea really religious, or no?

Some of them. From my generation, there are a lot of Christians. I can say a lot of Christians. The older generation is Buddhist, but my generation from my age is Christian.

Is Charlie in a Christian school just because it's a better school?

No. I just let her go because at that time, as I am Korean, I'm thinking about the education. It changed a lot now, but when I had Chelsea, I wanted to have private school first because the thing is they have long hours. I need to put her somewhere with long hours because I was studying, and that's one of the things out. A Christian school is cheaper than a private school. That's one of the things I found out about Christian school.

Interesting. Do you think there's a lot of differences in lifestyle of Americans versus Koreans? Do you think there is a lot more rigidity, strictness in some sort of culture or anything like that?

Yes. You guys have more liberty for everything, like school-wise. I heard these days that high school students are doing make-up, but they are not showing you have make-up for the teacher, but they're doing it, I heard. Naturally, you can do it copy-wise, but doing it. When I was in school, some of my friends is doing it, copy before they come to school, but it's not like here.

Now they change it, but at that time, I couldn't have a boyfriend until I graduated high school—not really. They asked me not to. But culture-wise, you're not a good student if you have a boyfriend/girlfriend already.

Yes, it's frowned upon.

Yes, at that time, it's like that. But then they changed it now, but still, I don't think a lot of parents like it.

It's much stricter.

Yes, yes.

You think your parents were the same way?

Oh no. My parents are very, very liberal. I don't think they really cared. I kind of had a boyfriend. It's not really having a very close relationship, but we would all get together. Yes, my parents are not really...

It was a lot of different for you compared to your friends?

Yes, definitely. My friends were always saying to me, "You are lucky because you are not really restricted."

You just have one sibling, right, just a brother?

Yes.

Are you guys close?

Very close when I was a kid, but now that we are living far away, it's not close.

How much older is he, or is he younger?

Two years older.

Did you guys have the same friends?

Yes. Some of my friends, we went out together when I turned nineteen, twenty. That's when I started drinking, after I graduated high school, I think at nineteen, but I think the legal age—I think it's twenty right now. Yes, everybody is drinking. My brother asked me, "Okay, you started drinking, and I can bring friends." Then we just going out together with a lot of his friends. Now I'm not meeting them and not have any contact with them, but at that time when I was only twenty...yes.

Do you think you found a community within Vegas?

There is a lot of Korean communities, but I'm not into anything because they love rumors. I don't like the rumors because they are talking a lot of backtalk with me, so I'm not really into them. But there is a lot of Korean communities here.

But you found some friends, like Tara's mom, right?

Oh yes.

Through work and stuff?

Yes, usually through the work and then through the pharmacy school. When I was still here before going to pharmacy school, I met a lot of Korean friends. Yes, I'm still meeting them.

What do you miss most about Korea?

Sometimes food, but not anymore. It's not lost now because now we have a lot of good Korean restaurants here, so I'm not really missing anymore. I miss my parents. What else? That's it. Korea, where I'm from is very cold and humid, cold in the winter and a lot of snow, and humid in the summer. It's really hot there. I don't miss any weather over there. I miss some of the snow. There is some ski here. But still here, we can do the ski. It's not bad. I miss some of my high school friends over there.

Are you still friends with them? Are you still close?

Yes, I'm still friends with them.

That's awesome. Do you know anyone that also moved here from Korea, or are you the only...?

When I came here, not real close friends, but some of the friends came, but not the same area, a whole different area. Yes, we contacted each other for a few years, and now I lost contact.

I get it. What do you like most about Vegas in comparison?

I like the weather because I love summer. I can stand with all the hotness as long as it's not humid. I'm fine with it. The weather, I like it. Then here, it's not far. For example, I go to Korea, and it's really far and taking forever, the flight. Here, it's really close to Los Angeles, so just go a one-hour flight from here to there, or there is the direct flight, which doesn't take long. It's one of the things.

In Korea, do they gamble? Do they have a gaming industry?

Yes. They have only one city there that they permit for the gambling. People go there, but not a lot of people is interested in there, but some people gamble.

It's different from Vegas.

Yes, it's totally different, yes.

Here, we're kind of the only ones, too.

Yes, exactly.

What are your favorite Korean dishes, foods?

I like hot soup, kimchi-jjigae. I don't know if you guys know. Yes, I think that's it.

You said that you found a lot of places here that kind of adjust for not having it?

Yes.

That's good. Were you close with your grandparents when you were young?

Yes, because one of the grandfathers died actually before I was even born, but the grandma, my dad's side, we lived with her, together, until high school. Up until high school, I lived together with her, so it's very close. Then my mom's side grandma, I went and visited a lot. Yes, I was close to them. Both my grandfathers died before I was born.

Did they help raise you, or was that just your parents, you think?

Yes, my grandmother on my father's side, since we lived together, yes.

They definitely helped a lot.

Yes, because my mom was working and my dad was working, yes, she helped a lot.

Awesome. In regards to immigrating here, do you think you've experienced a lot of discrimination?

Actually, not really, because, I think, usually it happened to the guys. I heard it's a lot in the guys. But sometimes when I'm working, some people might say to me—sometimes I don't give the medication they wanted, and they are just yelling at me, saying, "Go back to your country." I don't think it's discrimination. It's because I made them mad, because I am not giving whatever they wanted. But, yes, that's what I experienced, them just saying it to me.

You think it's more of the men just because they...? Do you have a theory of why that is, why the men experience more...?

Why? I'm not sure, but what I'm thinking, because the girl, Asian girl, could be popular, I guess, for White guys, too, I guess. I think that's one of the reasons. But not a lot of Asian guys are popular to the...you guys' community. I can say I think so, but I don't know because we're just joking to them. Somebody is going out with a White girl, the Korean guy, an Asian guy. To the White girl you might say, "Oh, he must have big money," something like a joke. I think that's one of the things I can say.

That makes sense, yes. What do you think you would have done if you hadn't moved from Korea? Do you think you would have gone to pharmacy school?

I don't think so because, as I told you, here, it's different. You can do whatever you want to do at any age, but there, there is a certain standard. I don't think if I was in Korea, I would go back to study. I don't think so.

What does your brother do?

My brother is just regular...because my brother is an English major. He just works in a regular company, so it's not really heavy.

Did anyone else in your family ever want to come to the U.S.? Were you the only one that felt that need?

Yes, my brother never wants to come back to America. My parents, they're retired now. They cannot come here to live here because of insurance issues. Yes, my parents might be, but there are insurance issues with that, so don't know.

When were you born?

Nineteen seventy-one.

Were you exposed to any of the aftermath of the wars in that area? Did you experience any of that political unrest, or were you too young?

Yes, I don't know anything about that.

Have you seen a difference in Vegas in the Asian American population? Do you think it's grown? Have you seen anything like that throughout your time here?

Asian population, yes, I think it grew. For example, when I was here, there is a very small Korean market here at that time, and now it's really big. Some of them closed now only because of the COVID, but some of them are open twenty-four hours, and they're really big, and so that means it's growing. The population is growing because even restaurant-wise, it's how many times more? More than twenty times with the restaurants here than when I just came.

Good to know. What do you think your biggest culture shocks were when you moved here?

What was the hardest stuff to adjust to?

I don't remember.

Even now. Anything that was hard to grasp or change your mindset towards.

I don't know. I guess maybe you guys being independent at a very early age, I can say, but there, you are depending on...sometimes before you marry and even after you graduate college. Then you might be independent. We just live together with parents there. If you go to a different state or different college not in the same state with your parents, then they are not living together. But in Korea, usually they live together until you're married. That's the biggest difference. Here, you just move out at a very early age.

Got you. Do you think moving here gave you that sense of really strong independence just because you were alone from your family and everything?

It could be.

And Spain helped, too, right?

Yes, that's how it started.

Have you traveled a lot in the U.S.? Where have you been in the U.S.?

When I was in Texas, I traveled more and tried to travel in the Texas area. When I came here, then I traveled for the left side of America. But for the east side, I just went to New York once, and that's it. I didn't go further down in that area. But the west side, yes, and middle, yes, but not the east side.

How do you think your vision of living in America compares to how it is? Do you think what you imagined is what you're living? When you wanted to move here, what you thought it would be like, do you think that's what it is like?

I never even think about it. I never think about, for example—I am fifty now—when I'm seventy and going to be dead. I never even think about it. I don't know, but I like where I'm living right now. That's it. I don't know what I wanted it to be.

Growing up, do you think there's a strong push in your generation that wanted to go out of Korea, or do you think it was just a small population that wanted to leave?

Now a lot of people are going out, but my generation, not a lot of people.

Where in Korea did you grow up?

Seoul.

The big city, right?

Yes, big city.

Do you think living in a big city helped you understand living in a big city here?

Maybe, but I'm not thinking about this, really. But maybe, yes.

Raising your kids here, do you think it was a lot different from how you were raised?

Yes.

What are the biggest differences? Your family not living with you and stuff like that?

There, there is a lot of easy way to raise the people without really getting together. For example, when you are here, you have to drive everywhere. There is not really somebody who is driving you. For example, if you want to go to the piano, you have to drive there. But there in Korea, there is a car from that school coming to your house and picking up your own kids, and so you don't need to worry about it. If you are a working mom there, it's very easy to raise the kids over there. But here, you have to be everything, so that's not easy, especially for me without any family help. That's one of the biggest things. I want to let them learn a lot of other stuff, but I didn't have enough time to bring them from here to there and then waiting there and then bring them to another...I don't really have time for that, so I'm sorry for them.

Spread thin, yes. Do you think they experienced a lot of Korean culture just because—

Could be because my ex's parents, parents-in-law, they came almost every other year or every year, spent time here, four, five, six months, stayed with us. Especially my older one, she speaks Korean because of them. Two of their cousins spent time here with my kids, so they are exposed to a lot of Korean culture because of them.

That's really nice. You said Chelsea learned Korean from her grandparents, right?

Yes, and she went to Korean school here every Saturday when she was young. But still, she learned from them because they speak together.

She doesn't know how to read and write, does she?

She read and write the easy way, but not like a real Korean. But she reads, slowly, and she writes, kind of.

Do you think her independence—do you think growing up in a free country—not free, but how you said it was very structured in Korea—do you think that was better in a way, or do you wish you had grown up like that? Like, without all the pressure.

No. At that time, I didn't know there was another culture like that, so I didn't even appreciate. If I knew it earlier when I was a kid, "Oh, you guys have a nice life." If I knew it, maybe, but I never even...

Do you think it's good for you kids to grow up that way?

Not really. I don't really have any preference. But if you are living here, then you grow up whatever you can be growing up. If I would have raised my child over there, maybe I just follow...maybe. I don't know. If others are doing it, maybe.

But you said your family was much more accepting of whatever you wanted to do.

Yes.

Do you think you don't really care what your kids do, or you just want them to be happy and do what they want to do?

Exactly, yes. I don't really have...as long as they are not doing bad stuff.

Of course. You just care that they're happy and loved.

Yes.

Do you think that's a common thing in South Korea as well? Do you think there is a lot more pressure there on what they're supposed to do?

Yes, I think they have a lot of pressure. You have to be a certain way to be happy because they make their own standards for happiness, I guess.

You think that involves just like a lot of success, essentially?

Yes, I think so.

Interesting. Do you think your friends felt a lot of pressure as they grew up?

Yes.

Was it more success in getting a really good job and finding a wife and stuff like that?

Yes. Not only get the money, just get your background.

The education?

Yes. You're coming from a good college. You're working in a good company.

It's more about image and success.

Yes, you just show off whatever you are from. I think that's one of the biggest things there.

Did you travel around Korea a lot as a kid? Did you vacation a lot?

Yes.

Where was your favorite place that you went?

It's a small town I went with my parents, and that's what I loved because I'm from a big city when I was kid. Just with a lot of nature, I loved it.

For Nevada, do you think you really enjoy living in Vegas, or do you think you would want to live somewhere else in America, too?

Now I'm thinking, when I raised my kids here, I think it's a little more conservative, I guess, because here they are open to a lot of that stuff, too. That's one of my concerns.

Just everything that you can get into here.

Yes, it's easy.

That makes sense. Do you think it was a lot different moving here than it was in Texas just because it was so university centered?

Yes, there, it's totally different.

The people, did you experience more...?

Here, we have more diverse people here. There, I don't really even see a lot of other...yes.

Was that kind of jarring just because it was your first place?

Yes, it could be, yes.

In university, do you think you experienced any sort of discrimination towards you just because you were in such a country, Texas?

I don't know. I don't think that way. Maybe I had the discrimination, maybe, but I try not to think that way. I don't really know. I don't think so.

You said you've found a lot of Korean markets. Do you make a lot of Korean food at home?

Not really. Now I don't need to go to a Korean market to buy some stuff because other markets have...

All the stores are starting to carry it.

Yes, Oriental stuff. I don't really need particular ones these days.

Growing up, did you guys have any traditions that you hold in your mind? Did you do anything with your grandparents or anything with your parents during holidays or anything that was traditional in your family?

Yes, I'm thinking about the holidays. We just stayed together and eat certain things.

What all did you eat?

For example, for Thanksgiving here, you guys are eating turkey. Then there, their Thanksgiving, they're eating special stuff. That's what we make together, and then we eat together.

Do you think food has a big place in your culture?

Yes, I think so.

Did you grow up making a lot of food with your family?

Yes.

What about chores in your house? Did you do a lot around the house?

Not really. I think still they're doing it that way. I never even washed dishes until I turned seventeen or eighteen because my mom doesn't make me do that. "You just go study. You don't need to do this."

School is just the most important thing.

"You just study. You will do it after you're married. You don't need to worry about it. Don't do it." Something like that. I think it's not only me, but a lot. They don't really...doing all these chores.

Growing up in a big city, did you use a lot of public transportation?

Yes, we have a lot of subways, buses, yes.

When you were older in high school, were you very independent? Did you travel a lot on your own to school and stuff?

Going to school, yes, always. Since I'm in elementary, I go by myself. I walk to my school by myself. It's normal in Korea. Then they come with a school bus to pick you up from everywhere, not only from school but the other small school that you learn from, something like piano. I told you they have their own bus, and they just pick you up. Some are going here and there, and it's all independent, for anybody.

Was it public school that you went to, or was it private school?

My elementary was the private school, and then middle school and high school is public school.

Is that typical? Do a lot of people go to public school?

Yes. There are not a lot of private schools for the elementary. Also, elementary, there are a few different private schools, only a few of them. I came from there. For the middle school and high school, I think there is only special school for drawing stuff or art or the piano. There is only private school for that few different, only if you want to go there to just focus and study there to become...if it's the artist, then you're going to private school. Other than that, all public, I guess.

South Korea, is it a democracy? I can't remember.

Yes, democracy.

Voting-wise, does your family vote?

Yes.

Was your family very politically—

Kind of, they both were, yes.

You lived in a big city, right, so did you get your license? How did that work?

License of driving?

To drive, yes.

Yes, you can have a license from nineteen or twenty.

Did you get yours here?

No, there first. I drive junior...I don't remember. Yes, I drive from junior, so I got a license over there, and then I got it here after.

That's awesome. I think Seoul is a lot bigger than Vegas, right?

Yes.

Do you think there is a lot more nightlife here or there?

Vegas is a special city, so here is more, I guess. But Seoul still has good nightlife.

In high school, did you go out with your friends? Did you do a lot, or did you just study a lot?

We're supposed to not doing that stuff, but I did some of the going out at the club.

What kind of stuff did you guys do?

We went to club. We were supposed to not. We went to a lot of clubs, I can say.

That's fun. Did your school have sports like we do? Was that important?

Yes, we have sports, but not like here. There, if you're doing sports, you're doing only sports.

It's a little different. You can do sports and study together, but you have to focus on the sport, and then you go to college with that.

It's very one-track.

Yes. They are not even really taking class. They are only focusing on the sport. But certain college, even though really good college is accepting the people, only look at the sports-wise. They don't even care about your grades, nothing at all. Only for them is the exception. They can just focus on the sport, and then they can go to college with that even with a really good score.

Some are going to do the arts or piano or drawing, if you're doing really good on that and you are missing a lot of classes, still you can go there. Something like that. They focus on that 80 to 90 percent first, and then you can go to do some other stuff, like 10 percent, so you can do it that way.

It's very one thing you do, and you focus on that.

You have to be really good at it; otherwise, you can't be...

That's crazy. Did you feel really pressured by that? Did you feel uncomfortable with that?

I never even focused on the arts or sports or nothing at all that much, so to me, I don't know.

Maybe for them, yes, because I have friends. She is doing piano, and she is really having issues.

You said you're still friends with some of your high school friends, right?

Yes.

They all stayed in Korea, right?

Yes.

Did you notice a difference as you came here and had Chelsea, all of that, did you think you were on the same pace as them? You did say it was very paced out in Korea. Did you feel that you were following that, or that it was different for you?

I don't think I am following any of them. My friends' kids, they are totally different than my kids because they are just following what they are doing.

What they're taught, yes.

Yes. Me, I never raised my kids like that.

Did they get married before you? Did they have kids before you?

Some of them got married before me because I married at thirty—no, twenty-nine, twenty-eight, something, not early.

Did you ever feel weird about that? Was it uncomfortable for you, or was it freeing that you got to do what you wanted to do whenever?

My parents are not restrictive at all, so I'm not really having any pressure. But at that time, I married because my boyfriend has pressure from his own family, so that's one of the reasons.

You guys met in Korea?

Yes.

And then you came here together?

Yes.

Do you think it was easier coming with someone?

Yes, for me it's easier because I had only two children.

You said his parents were a lot different from your parents, right?

Yes.

Him growing up was a lot different from you?

Yes. I think he's really restricted, and his parents tried to control everything, still.

Was that hard for you when you were raising Chelsea and stuff?

Yes, because they care about what I am even packing lunch for her. If I'm packing lunch, like the same as you guys having regular lunch, they are just saying to me, "Why are you packing this? This is jelly." Something like that. They just want to control everything. That's one of the biggest things, control.

Did you get married here, or did you get married in Korea?

Both.

Both? Oh, interesting.

Here, I married because I need the visa. I was a student and at that time graduate of college there, graduate school. I have to have a reason to be here, so that's why I have to apply for the visa here as the dependent first, so that's why I married here first, just for the paper, for a few months only. Then I married there. Because we don't have anyone to come to our marriage, so we went back a few months later.

What are the ceremonies like? Are they very different?

Yes. You guys have a different way. I think your generation is different than before. It used to be you're at the girl's parents' house, usually. I've heard girls have to pay all this...

Yes, all the money.

That is you guys' tradition, is what I heard. But there, it's not really. The balance of the check would be paid half and half, depending on how many people you're having. You have a hundred, I have two hundred, and then you just pay a hundred part, and I pay two hundred, something like that. For wedding-wise, we pay half and half. Here, it's different. Over there, we eat together, but we don't have a party like here. You guys have a party after the marriage. We don't have a party. We just go to the honeymoon right after the things. After eating and then after the wedding, we just go on the honeymoon right after.

Growing up, did you have a big family? Do you have a lot of cousins?

Yes, we're very close with my cousins. My father has eight siblings, so...

Do they all live in Seoul together, for the most part?

Yes. His siblings, yes.

Did you have a lot of family over most of the time?

Yes, we all lived together because my father's brother and sister is older, almost the same age, one or two years' difference, so the kids are all the same age, and we are very close.

Living in Seoul, did you live in a house, or did you live in an apartment?

I lived in a house, and then later I moved to an apartment.

Did you guys stay pretty much in the same place most of your life, or did you guys move a lot?

No, I lived in the same place, yes, from when I remember. When I was a baby, I lived some other place, I heard it. But then when I remember, from five, six years old, I think I stayed in the same place.

Is your family still in that same place?

No, they moved.

I think we're good. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]