

Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho

The Reminiscences of  
Arnie & Awi

Asian American Comparative Collection  
University of Idaho  
2020

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Arnie and Awi conducted by Kathy M. Min on August 8, 2020. (Arnie and Awi are pseudonyms.) This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrators.

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|------------------|---|
| Transcriptionist | Kathy M. Min  |
| Narrators        | Arnie and Awi   |
| Interviewer      | Kathy M. Min  |
| Session Number   | 1   |
| Location         | Virtually through Zoom. Arnie, Awi, and Min called from Boise, Idaho. |
| Date             | August 8, 2020  |

**00:00:01**

Q: Okay, so today is August 8, 2020. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and I'm speaking with Arnie and Awi. And we are both calling from the Boise area, but through a call, so remotely. And the proposed subject is an oral history of Arnie and Awi's lives. So the first question is, what is your name, and when and where were you born? And so, Awi, do you want to answer?

Awi: Me?

[INTERRUPTION]

Awi: So my name is Awi. I was born in Indonesia, and is that all?

**00:01:03**

Q: Yeah. If you don't mind me asking, where in Indonesia?

Awi: South Sumatra in Indonesia. It's in Tanjung Raja. It's in South Sumatra, so Sumatra is kind of the second, maybe third-largest island in Indonesia. It's the western part of the country.

**00:01:40**

Q: Mhm. And then Arnie, how about you? When and where were you born?

Arnie: My name is Arnie, and I was born in Bandung, Indonesia. I think it's three hours from Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia.

**00:01:57**

Q: And what are your current occupations and educational backgrounds?

Awi: I'm a scientist. I'm a data scientist. So I have a PhD in physics, theoretical physics.

**00:02:24**

Q: Very cool. And Arnie, how about you?

Arnie: So I'm a contractor in a healthcare analytics company. I have my doctorate degree in industrial and systems engineering.

**00:02:46**

Q: So both of you, did you get your undergraduate and graduate degrees in Indonesia?

Awi: No, we got our bachelor's in Indonesia, but we got our PhD from the States.

**00:03:01**

Q: Could you tell me where in the US you got your PhDs from?

Awi: Ohio University.

**00:03:10**

Q: Very cool. And is that the same for Arnie?

Arnie: Yes, yeah. Undergrad in Indonesia, master's and PhD from Ohio University.

**00:03:22**

Q: Very cool. And I'm going to ask a little bit about each of your childhoods a little bit more, so maybe we can start with Awi. Yeah, maybe just tell me a little bit about what life growing up in Indonesia and Sumatra was like.

Awi: Basically, you mean my family and things like that?

**00:03:46**

Q: Yeah.

Awi: So I was growing up in the village area. It's kind of like not in the city area. And my parents were farmers. I have three siblings; I'm the oldest one in my family. And then, I think my father was not even a graduate from elementary school. I think he only got to the third level, third class, third grade of elementary school, and then he stopped. And my mom was also the same, so none of them had any formal education, like some kind of degree. But my father was a big fan of education, so a long-life learner, I can say that. He emphasized the importance of education for their children, so three of his kids, all of them has basically bachelor's degree, and I have a PhD, and my brother has a master's degree, and my youngest sister has a bachelor's degree in math.

**00:05:26**

Awi: So he was pretty successful as a parent, I think, even though he did not have any formal education. So I think we spent—at least as far as I know—since I was born, like when I was eight years old, nine years old, we moved to the capital of South Sumatra, and then from the village, because I think in the village, it's really hard to have a good education. Or even going to school, because in the village, the school is probably ten or fifteen kilometers away from your house. And you have to walk by foot to go to the school. So the reason we moved to the city at that time was to get a better education, or something like that. That's the story. Is there anything you'd like to know specifically?

**00:06:36**

Q: Yeah, and thanks for sharing. Did your father and mother continue working as farmers once you moved?

Awi: Once we moved to the capital, they do what they can do—for example, my mom started selling fish and shrimp in traditional markets, like the markets that you have a table and you get the fish from some distributor and you sell the fish, kind of retail sales like that. So she was doing that. Even up to now, she is still doing that. We already tell her not to do that, but she still wants to do that because she wants to have something to occupy her mind or something. And then my father was a driver after he moved to the capital, and he do many other jobs, not really full-time jobs, but all jobs he can do to support his family.

**00:07:49**

Q: Mhm. And then, yeah, I was wondering if there are any stories that come to you about your family, your parents, your grandparents, great-grandparents—if there are any stories about your family passed down to you.

Awi: What kind of stories?

**00:08:09**

Q: Yeah, good question. Any kind of story, really, I think. Something for example that's interesting to me about Indonesia is the history of the Dutch influence and Dutch colonialism, but that's obviously a little further back. But yeah, just any kinds of stories that your parents have told you about your grandparents or something like that.

Awi: Yeah, actually, many, because my father, he's not telling stories directly to me. So usually, he got a lot of friends coming to our house, and I kind of listen to the stories that they are talking about. The stories are about his adventures when he was young, because when we lived in the

village, we are kind of close to forests and things like that. So I think he walked around the forest and see some tigers, something like that.

**00:09:25**

Awi: And because when he was in the village, there was a Communist Party rebellion during that time.<sup>1</sup> It was in 1960s or '70s, something like that. And he told me stories about school. He quit school because his school got burned by the rebellion. And he told me stories that even though his school got burned—just like in the movies—he kind of reading books while he was doing the farming. You know the water buffalo? You need to prepare the field using water buffalo, and while he was doing that, he's reading books. So he told us it's really important to get education, because one thing that he always tell us is that—in English it's like, “Stupid people usually cost a lot of money. Stupid—usually you cannot even help yourself, not even helping your families. If you're stupid, everybody needs to help you. So you better be smart so you can help your family.” That's what he said.

**00:10:51**

Q: Yeah, that's very funny. And so it sounds like you and your siblings are very well-educated. Was that something was from your parents, like they just spent their entire lives saving up so you could have that education, or was there anything else that played into that?

Awi: I think in Asia, most parents are very hard on their kids in terms of education. My father, he was very hard on me in the sense of like—you know, it's very different from now and a long time ago. Usually, with sticks or with belt, if you're not doing well, he will stick. So are you from Asia also?

**00:11:44**

Q: My family's from China. But I was born in the US, yeah.

Awi: Yeah, the thing is with Asian people, the similarity between Asian countries, is around the '80s or '90s, the parent is very hard on you, because the thing is, they don't have money, right? They don't have much money. Real poor. We were really poor, I think. And the only thing that can change your life is having a good education. So if you are smart, if you are really good at school, you will get a good job or something like that. So that's the one that he emphasized the

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1948 Madiun Affair, some Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) leaders attempted to seize governmental control during the war of independence against the Dutch. In addition to the failed attempt, PKI land reform efforts and propaganda against religious leaders, as well as poor economic conditions, fueled resentment towards the PKI. On October 1, 1965, an armed group called the 30 September Movement attempted a coup d'état, killing seven army officials. After the coup failed, the Indonesian government blamed the PKI and imprisoned, tortured, and killed hundreds of thousands of suspected Communists. Scholars estimate 500,000 died and between 600,000 to 750,000 additional people were imprisoned between one and thirty years. From Katharine E. McGregor, “The Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966,” *SciencesPo*, August 4, 2009, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/indonesian-killings-1965-1966.html>.

most. Basically you have to be the top one, top two, or top three in the class. If you are not getting that, you will get a stick or you will get a belt. It's a very different way of educating your children. Right now, you cannot even hit your children, right?

**00:12:59**

Q: I do have a few more questions about your life, but I want to ask Arnie some questions as well. So kind of similar questions, Arnie, what was your childhood growing up in Indonesia like?

Arnie: I think my dad and mom, they have Javanese ethnicity, so I was born in Java, in the island of Java. I grew up in different cities, actually. We moved quite a bit due to my dad's job. I was living in Bandung for the first ten years of my life, and then we moved to Germany, and then to Jakarta after that. I think growing up with my parents—my mom and dad are lecturers, and then my dad got assigned to be working for the embassy in Germany. So our whole family had to move with him. But he had his degree in Germany. I guess that's why he was chosen to go back. And then he just took the work in the Indonesian embassy there.

**00:14:36**

Arnie: Yeah, and growing up with two siblings, it was not bad. It was fine. I had a really good childhood, I guess. Well, my parents, they are doing—I'm sorry, my daughter walked in, that's why I'm losing my train of thought—but yeah, my mom can speak two different ethnic languages. I guess I can tell my mom is a polyglot. She can speak—because Indonesia has a lot of native ethnic groups and races, and they also come with their own languages. And my mom can master two of the languages. And then she can also speak German and some other European languages. I guess French too. Yeah, she's always been good with language. I think in a specific way, she was raised as a Javanese family where you have to have a certain rule, where when you address elderly, you're using the polite way or the polite language in Javanese. So that kind of transformed me in terms of respecting the elderly. I guess it's part of the Javanese culture that I was embedded with when I was growing up.

**00:16:29**

Arnie: But I was kind of intimidated at some point, because I was living in Bandung—which the ethnic language there is Sundanese—but then my mom's family are Javanese. And I think my mom's siblings are teaching their kids to have Javanese culture on how to address elderly or how to talk politely in Javanese. And I wasn't able to do that because I was not really taught. I mean, we were not speaking formal Javanese at home, because we were in Bandung, where people speak Sundanese. So it kind of intimidated me, a little bit, when we gather with my mom's family, because I was awkward for quite some time, because I don't know how to talk or react around them. But that was because we also rarely meet, because most of my mom's family are in Jakarta, and we live in Bandung, which is three hours away. So we meet only once a year or twice a year, mostly. But yeah, I think that's what I can share or what I can think of.

**00:17:52**

Q: Yeah, I definitely have follow-ups. A quick question for both you and Awi, what languages did you grow up speaking, and how did you learn English? Arnie, you can answer first.

Arnie: Yeah. I grew up in—our first language is Indonesian, Bahasa Indonesia. We had to learn Sundanese when we were in school in Bandung, so I had experience or exposure to that language, and just daily life here and there. But I also had to learn German, because we had to move there and I had to go to school there. I was exposed to English when I was in elementary—I guess fifth grade?—before we moved to Germany.

**00:18:50**

Q: And then how about—oh sorry?

Arnie: Yeah, fifth or fourth grade, I don't remember.

**00:18:56**

Q: And then, Awi, same question. What languages did you grow up speaking and how did you learn English?

Awi: When I was growing up, the language we use is called Palembang, Palembangese I guess. Indonesian language is the second language. We only speak the Indonesian language when we are in class or at school. I learned English only at school also, and also watching TV, Hollywood movies. But mostly [unclear].

**00:19:38**

Q: But mostly what?

Awi: Mostly at school, learning English and speaking English at school.

Arnie: I was lucky my parents were able to send me to an extracurricular school where I can learn English in addition to what we have learned at school.

**00:20:00**

Q: Yeah. And then, Arnie, I just have a few more follow-ups for what you were talking about. What was the move to Germany like for you?

Arnie: It was scary at first. Me and my siblings, when my parents told me that they had to move to Germany, the three of us were crying. And we had a roundtable back then, and we were holding each other's hands. We were crying, "We don't wanna go! We want to stay. I don't



wanna go. We just want to stay.” So it was just scary, just because it’s a new thing, and we were still very young. Yeah, it was scary at first.

**00:20:45**

Arnie: But after a while, when we were there, I guess we got adjusted well. And then when we had to go home—before my dad’s appointment was supposed to be four years, but he was called for another duty only after we were there for two-and-a-half years—so we were told, “Oh, we have to go home.” And we were like, “No, we want to stay!” So it’s kind of, yeah.

**00:21:14**

Q: Yeah, maybe tell me a little bit about what settling in Germany was like for you and how you and your siblings adjusted to life in Germany.

Arnie: So I was ten years old. My brother was eleven. And then my younger brother was six. So I guess it’s easier for us to acquire the language, compared to when I lived or moved somewhere else when I was older. But I think we went to a *realschule*<sup>2</sup> where they had an international class, so that was the transition for me, personally, academically. I was accommodated in that school where we can speak English, because I knew how to speak English and I kind of understand. But yeah, that was the transition where the teachers were very lenient on the grades because we were still adapting. That’s the first year.

**00:22:15**

Arnie: But then the next year, I was moved to a gymnasium. It’s a higher level of education system, compared to *realschule*, it was a little bit more expected to be more strict. I don’t know. That’s how I felt. The teachers are also very helpful. It’s just, in a way, I can get that, in general, German people are very conservative—or I don’t know. It feels like they are very stern. One time, I went to a shop. I don’t know if it was a shop or boutique. It was a garment boutique. And I was looking from the outside. There were a couple of things that interested me, and I came in and said this right away, “I want to touch it,” touch the garment. I wanted to look at it. And then I was told not to in a traumatic way. I was like, “Oh, okay. It’s the wrong thing to do.” The shopkeeper was very stern with me. That’s when I felt like, “Ooh, they are very, very—kind of angry, all the time.” It’s just one incident, but the other people who we are interacting with are very nice, because our community was involved around the embassy, where we also have many other Indonesian students or Indonesian people.

**00:24:04**

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<sup>2</sup> *Realschule* and *gymnasium* are two types of secondary schools in Germany. *Realschule* typically covers grades 5 through 10, and “offer[s] more extensive education, leading to a vocational or university entrance qualification.” *Gymnasium* covers grades 5 through 12 or 13 and “provide[s] intensive and in-depth general education, general knowledge for university studies, and for scientific work.” From *Studying in Germany*, “Germany Education System,” accessed January 15, 2021, <https://www.studying-in-germany.org/german-education-system/>.

Arnie: Our parents sent me to the all-German school, which is the gymnasium. It's kind of hard, because we don't know any other Indonesian students. So that's why it was kind of hard and awkward at first. But yeah, I think I adapted a little bit easier after that.

**00:24:27**

Q: Similar question that I asked earlier, but were there any stories that you've heard from your parents or generations above them that have been passed down to you?

Arnie: My family?

Q: Yup.

Arnie: It's about my grandpa. It's more from my mom's side. I think my grandpa, he used to have—it's more of a spiritual, mystical kind of being watching over him, so he had a protection when he fought during the civil war. I don't know if it's a civil war or against the Dutch, who was colonizing us, or the Japanese.<sup>3</sup> But one of those days when he was fighting, their enemies were afraid of him, as if there's something big behind him that scared the enemy. So I guess in a way that my families are connected to a spiritual, mystical being. But my mom decided to cut that connection, because the way they are told, it requires sacrifice. So when you are having someone or some being, mystic being, watching over you, they will require payment. Something like that. So that's the story that I remember most, that my grandpa, he's been a very gentle person, as far as I can remember.

**00:26:20**

Arnie: But my grandparents from my dad's side, he was a soldier. So he had to move a couple of times around Indonesia. But I don't remember as much stories of him. But I just remember when we had to visit them, they had chicken. That's what I remember. Chicken. And my grandma always cooked very nice food.

**00:26:58**

Q: And I guess this is a question for either of you. But have you heard stories about life either under Dutch colonization or Japanese occupation? Have any of those kinds of stories been passed down to you?

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<sup>3</sup> Dutch colonialism spread unevenly throughout modern Indonesia, beginning with Maluku and northwest Java in the early seventeenth century. Resentment towards the Dutch, particularly over Dutch racial discrimination, fueled the Indonesian independence movement, and by 1928, the "second national youth congress formally adopted an independent Indonesia as the nationalist goal." In 1942, Japan invaded Indonesia, occupying the islands until 1945 and instituting puppet Indonesian governance. After Japan's defeat in World War II, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta—the country's first president and vice president—declared Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945. Over the next four years, Indonesia waged its war of independence against the Dutch. From Robert Cribb and Colin Brown, *Modern Indonesia: A History since 1945* (New York: Longman Publishing, 1995), 5-18.

Arnie: Maybe Awi.

Awi: Stories about my grandfather, story was about how they need to work one rice field to another rice field, just to make a living. Something like that. A lot of suffering, especially if you lived in the village. Your living is either you get it from the rice field, because in the area where we lived, there are only two seasons, dry season and rainy season. So during rainy season—so the house is like in the slum area in Louisiana. Have you ever been to Louisiana?

**00:28:14**

Q: Mhm.

Awi: So there is a house on the stick, right? The house is built on the sticks. So during dry season, there is no water, basically. The water is only in the river. So you have to create a well to get drinking water. And then during rainy season, the water can go up to two meters high. Your house is probably two and a half meters, and the water can go up to two meters—sometimes up to the base of your house. So during that season, you become a fisherman or something. So the story is about the difference between the time when Japanese came or when the Dutch came. So during the Dutch, was not that bad, but Japanese time, it was probably a little bit harder, because Japanese was a little bit crueller than Dutch. Basically the story.

**00:29:31**

Q: Yeah, thanks for sharing. Then, we can go back to Awi. Tell me a little bit about your life leading up to when you went to the US, so going to college, things like that.

Awi: Yeah, so thing is that I was doing bachelor's in physics at that time. So it's a four-year college, right? After the second year into my bachelor's, we had one professor teaching us one class in physics. And then instead of teaching us the class, in some of the meetings, he will tell us stories about his experiences when he was studying physics abroad. So he went to the US and also he went to school in France. And he told us stories about that. And basically because of that, he was giving his stories on how fun it was to study in the US, and then he told us, "Hey, you don't have to worry, because a lot of American students also are not as smart as you think, so we have a possibility to go there." So he said, "As dumb as you are"—that's what he said.

**00:31:05**

Awi: So then because he was telling us that story, I was encouraged at that time to think of maybe after I graduate, I don't have to find a job. Probably I can go to school to do graduate school in the States. The thing that makes me not want to get a job in Jakarta, or the capital, is because toward the end of my bachelor's, I got some internship program to Philips. You know the company Philips, from Germany? And then during that internship, I think six months time, I was back and forth from my apartment to the office. The traffic was horrible. And I was like,

“Oh, I don’t want to spend my life staying in traffic, like two hours or so just to get to the office and two hours just to go back.” And because of it, I was like, “Okay, I have to go to grad school.” And I was studying, I think towards the end of my major, not only studying for my graduation, but also in physics you need to take this GRE exam—GRE physics as well as GRE general—as well as TOEFL. So I was focusing on that for the last year of my bachelor’s. And luckily I got accepted, so that’s the story.

**00:32:48**

Q: And then, did you and Arnie meet in Ohio, or did you meet in Indonesia?

Awi: Yeah, it’s very interesting, because we came from the same university back home. We went to—I like to call it the best university in the country, other people maybe has different opinions—but University of Indonesia. That one is located in the capital. And we went there. But I was in physics major and she was in industrial engineering major, so we rarely see each other. I think we never see each other back in Indonesia. And we met only—because I came to the States in 2005. She came 2007. Yeah, 2007. So we came when we were in Ohio.

**00:33:53**

Q: Yeah, very cool. So then maybe same question for Arnie. Tell me a little about life before you got to the US.

Arnie: So growing up in Bandung and Germany, I ended up going to high school in Jakarta, an all-girls school. The reason why I ended up there is because when we moved back from Germany to Jakarta, I was in the junior high school. There’s elementary, junior, and high school. It was the third year of junior, and then I had to choose after that which high school I need to go to. Basically, I was schooled in a private Catholic school, me and my brother. Well, my elder brother went to a public school right away. The reason why we went there is because of safety. Even though I was born and raised Muslim, my parents are open-minded in terms of religion, I guess. It doesn’t matter whether we actually have to go to school to a certain religion, or a religious school. So they never sent me to a religious school. And this Catholic private school, they appreciate—even though we are not Catholic—they still practice their praying and mass. But if you are not Catholic, you are waived to do that activity. So in a way, they are very inclusive as well. They have subsidized students, where parents who could not afford to go to their school, they will have a subsidy from parents who are able to pay more. I guess it was a good system. So in high school, it was an all-girls school, I was able to express myself. I think I attended two or three extracurriculars. I played softball. I was also active in the choir. So I was given the freedom to express myself in high school.

**00:36:53**

Arnie: Then when I went to the university for my undergrad, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but my high school get that orientation to prepare for our choice for university. I kind of just picked industrial engineering. The funny thing for me is, in Indonesia, there's this national test that will decide what university you can choose. You can try to choose—there are options which university you want to go in, and what major. But there's a national test for that. So if you pass the certain standard for that major, you are able to get in to that university. So that's why when Awi was telling that where we went was one of the top universities, because it's hard to get in, because they had a certain standard of getting in based on the national test that was done every year. So I guess it was kind of a hard selection.

**00:38:00**

Arnie: I think I was told that my parents were trying to support me in a way. I don't want to go to private university because I didn't want to burden my parents because of cost, because it cost a lot compared to the public university, which is where we went. But my dad, because he's in the education field, so he's been very adamant about making sure that we get education. So he was telling me that if I were not to be accepted in any of the public universities that was done through the test, he said he would send me to Taiwan, although not for undergrad. At that point, I wasn't sure if I wanted to do that or not, because first of all, Taiwan doesn't really have any diplomatic relationships with Indonesia, so if something were to happen, we don't know. But yeah, since I was still [unclear], I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I was hoping, I was praying so hard, to make sure that I got accepted to the university that I chose. So luckily I was able to have extra study. There's this extra school that you can learn and study for the national test. So I was able to prepare for the test, like a month or two months before the test. So I had to do it everyday; I attended two different kinds of school, prep school, for that purpose. So I guess I was lucky.

**00:40:02**

Q: And then I have a question, before we start talking more about the US—the years that you both were in Indonesia, there's, I think, a lot of things happening in Indonesia. I'm thinking about like May 1998, the riots, the Bali bombings, and things like that.<sup>4</sup> And so I was wondering,

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<sup>4</sup> “Beginning in Medan in 1994 and recurring in such provincial towns and cities as Pekalongan in 1995, Situbondo and Tasikmalaya in 1996, and Banjarmasin and Makassar in 1997, a certain pattern of disturbances (*kerusuhan*) seemed to crystallize in riot form. In episode after episode, crowds attacked, destroyed, and burned shops, supermarkets, department stores, goods, and other property owned by Chinese Indonesians; Catholic and Protestant churches and other houses of worship; and police stations and other government buildings. By early 1998 these so-called anti-Chinese disturbances (*kerusuhan anti-Cina*) had become a regular feature of the political landscape, with a familiar repertoire of commentary and investigation by government, military, civic, and religious figures played out after every incident of rioting... In the event, January and February 1998 witnessed a series of minor riots along the north coast of Java that targeted shops, supermarkets, and department stores owned by Chinese Indonesians. In May of that year, simultaneous rioting in Jakarta and such cities as Solo, Medan, and Palembang led to the destruction of hundreds of Chinese business establishments, the rape of dozens of Chinese... women, and the deaths of more than one thousand people in Jakarta alone. These riots brought the country to a virtual standstill and helped to precipitate the resignation of the longtime Indonesian leader, President Suharto... But in 2002 a series of bombings led to the fingering of a previously unknown group, identified by the authorities as Jemaah Islamiyah. The bombing of a nightclub in Bali in October 2002, an explosion outside the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August 2003, a

were there any particular major events in your time in Indonesia that stood out to you and either affected your or are just things you remember and maybe have some kind of recollection of?

Arnie: I'll answer first. For me, when the riot in 1998 happened, I was still in Germany. The thing that was shown us through the media, through the news, was so scary that I was not sure whether we wanted to go back at that point or not. I've heard about stories of our friends who were there who experienced, who were in the midst of the riot, where they were student activists, and they had to hide. I don't know if you want to listen to their stories, because that's what I've heard. But I didn't really experience it myself, but I heard a lot of stories about how terrified they were during that time. It was just a very—especially in the riot of 1998—very political, where they were trying to have a coup d'état for Suharto, and it was just shooting for the students in the capital in front of the capitol building. It was just chaotic.

**00:42:01**

Arnie: I guess I have a couple points of view from the stories I've heard from a friend that actually experienced it. So one of them is the student activist that had to hide to make sure they weren't caught in the riot. And then there's mostly—one of my Chinese-Indonesian, so Indonesian who has Chinese descent, were the target of the anger from the crowd. There was looting of the shops, and raping as well that happened. So my friend didn't really experience it, but she had experience where she had to hide in some neighbor's house, just to make sure they were protected. And then we had a friend here, and she used to live in Boise, but she moved out now. She and her family had a company, like a family industry, that was protected by the local community because they knew they were so nice. They were a good family and they get the benefit and the kindness that they shared throughout the community, so they were protecting the family from the riots and looting. But it was just a scary, scary time.

**00:43:47**

Arnie: And then about the Bali bombing, we were not there. I mean, I was in Indonesia, but we were not in Bali. But the news and all the speculation on what was going on was scary. And at some point, Bali has having a decrease of visitors. But I guess at some point it was just scary for minorities, because me, with the Indonesian or maybe a Malay descendant, we are the majority. So I couldn't really experience on how the minority can feel or treated. But when I heard the story of my friend who are of Chinese descent, or other than the Malay or Javanese—well the majority of the Indonesian people are from Java. Most of the people live in Java. The most populated island is in Java. And then we are the majority. That's why any other ethnicity, although—it's just politics, I guess. You can tell if it's not Malay kind of descent, you are not Indonesian, per se. So the Chinese descent, that's how the politicians are trying to stir the pot

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detonation outside the Australian Embassy in Jakarta in September 2004, and a second set of bombs in the tourist resorts of Bali in October 2005—as well as a handful of less spectacular detonations—claimed hundreds of lives, both of Indonesians and of tourists from Australia, Europe, and North America.” From John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 1-4.

while saying, “This Chinese descent are taking your money, because they are taking the position. In terms of hardworking, they are work harder, compared to us.” It’s just politics in a way. Yeah, that’s from my side. I don’t know if Awi has something to add.

**00:45:53**

Q: Yeah, Awi, do you have anything you want to add?

Awi: Yeah, so during the riot, I was about to graduate from high school, going into the university at that time. But it could be bad or good. Good thing was I was not in the capital yet, so I was not in the center of the riot. But in my hometown, there were also a lot of burning, people taking stuff from the stores, people burned shops, things like that, it happened. Because I had to go to school and I had to go to some additional tutorial and things like that to prepare to go to college, so I saw so many of those on the street. You can see some smoke coming from some areas of the city. I had never been in a war area, but it feel like it probably. You see smokes, you see army around with weapons on the streets. Basically the streets are full with stones, many stones, and many, many houses got burned. Yes, it’s really bad experience, in a sense.

**00:47:40**

Awi: And then the riot is kind of—the peak of the riot is around 1998. But the riot kept going in 1999, even it’s a small one. And then in 1999, I was already in the capital. I think the riot was a little bit different during that time. It was because of the political party was trying to gain influence to the people. So if they meet on the street during the campaign—for example, different political parties, they will meet on the street, they will fight—so I was in the middle of a fight between two political parties when I was in capital. It was really horrible. So then, since 1998, since that time, I think it’s getting better, if I can say.

**00:48:45**

Awi: But still, it seems like America is very, very divided, the country. America is very divided, like the left and the right. In Indonesia, the same situation happened, even though here probably people use some kind of racist campaign—basically, using political identity. So that’s what people use here. And the same thing, what people use in my country. Because in my country, most people are Muslim, so they are kind of using that as their political weapon to win elections and things like that.

**00:49:30**

Q: Other major events in recent Indonesian history are a lot of natural disasters.

Awi: Yeah, that’s the 2004 tsunami.

**00:49:44**

Q: Yeah, I was wondering if those were events that have left an impression on you or Arnie, and if you want to talk about those in any more detail.

Awi: Yeah, the thing is, because South Sumatra—are you in front of a laptop or computer now?

Q: Yeah, I can look it up if you want.

Awi: Yeah, you can open the map. South Sumatra is pretty safe in terms of natural disasters. But Indonesia, if you know Indonesia, is located in the ring of fire. It is a lot of tectonic plates meeting, Indian Ocean plates, many plates. Basically, the western part of the island, Sumatra, is very—a lot of earthquakes happen in Banda Aceh, the most west part of Indonesia. That one is because of the Indian plate or something like that, hit one of the plates, and the center of the earthquake is twenty kilometers—it was really close to Sumatra island.

**00:51:11**

Awi: But because I was located in Jakarta at that time, and Jakarta is very safe also, in terms of location, because they are facing the side of Java Ocean. So Jakarta and South Sumatra, not as bad in terms of disasters. But the one that located on the western part and the southern part of Indonesia, usually many earthquakes happen, and if the earthquakes happen, tsunami will come. And so the tsunami in 2004 was really bad. I think it's almost 900,000 people died. So we kind of helped a little bit, in terms of donating money and things like that. But we didn't really witness the—it doesn't really happen near us. It was kind of far away from us.

**00:52:21**

Awi: And then another thing is that in 1999 there is a religious conflict in the eastern part of Indonesia, between Christians and Muslims. So that's another kind of thing that bring to me—I think it's a disaster, in terms of humanity, because a lot of people killed each other just because they have different religion. And so that happened in the eastern part of Indonesia. A lot of people ran away from that island and other parts of Indonesia. I think those are the two main events that I can think of. The Bali bombings—

Arnie: —it didn't really happen near us.

Awi: Yeah, it was in the news only.

**00:53:24**

Q: And then, Arnie, was there anything you wanted to add to what Awi said?

Awi: About the disaster and everything?



Arnie: Oh, the tsunami happened in 2004, and that was my first year of undergrad. So I was only able to see it from TV and from the news, but it was devastating regardless. But yeah, I don't know if there are any other historical events that might happen to us when we were still in Indonesia that I can think of.

**00:54:13**

Q: Yeah, and then I'm going to start transitioning the questions to your lives in the US. Tell me, each of you, some of the factors that led to you wanting to go to the US.

Arnie: Okay, I'll start. So for me, it was either working or go for a master's degree. But I think it has always been a target for me, I always wanted to go abroad for school. And so it's a good opportunity for me to go. And since my dad and my mom are from a university—they are university lecturers—so they are trying to support us in that way. So I think I've been trying to learn to make sure I can pass the TOEFL test for that.

**00:55:18**

Arnie: And the opportunity came in where my dad has this program [Beasiswa Unggulan]. He's working for the Indonesian education ministry. At that time, he was working at the division where he is the bilateral cooperative for other countries, in the education department. So he was starting a program where he can send students with scholarships, with government funds to fund the scholarship. To start with, he wanted to test that program, so I was encouraged to participate in the selection. So in a way, I passed the selection. I think there was twelve of us being sent to Ohio University. Apparently, so the agreement was from government-to-government, the Indonesian government will pay our stipends, and Ohio University waived our cost, the actual school fee—the tuition. They waived the tuition. So basically, we were able to get the scholarship.

**00:57:05**

Arnie: So at first we were sent to go there, Ohio University, for their English program. So they gave us six months to choose which department or major we can continue to do our master's. So within the first three months, I was able to get accepted into the industrial engineering department in Ohio University. But there were twelve of us, so two of them went back home without getting accepted in a master's program, but the rest of us managed to follow through with actual master's degrees. Yeah, that's how I came to the US, because I didn't really have any other options, other than going to the US, I guess at that point. It was just very fast, because it was in 2007. So I went right after I graduated my undergrad in July—so August 4th, I come here in the US. So Awi?

Awi: What was the question again?

**00:58:26**

Q: Yeah. And I know you've touched on some of these already, but what were some of the factors that caused you to go to the US?

Awi: I think that's the story, of my professor that gave us inspiration to go more. And I guess another thing is that I want to see the world. Other than that—

Arnie: —why US?

Awi: Why US? Because I got accepted to the US. I also applied to Germany and to Italy for master's degrees or PhDs. But none of those—I didn't get accepted in Italy or in Germany. I was thinking I wanted to go to Germany because we have a minister of technology from Germany.<sup>5</sup> He graduated from Germany, and he is very smart. And when I was little, I was like, "I want to be like him." So then I was reading about him, and in his biography, he went to Germany, so I said, "Okay, I'm going to Germany too." But then I got accepted to the US, US universities. I think that's the main reason, because I don't want to be ending up—I didn't know I wanted to be a scientist until I was in the physics department. Being a scientist is good and fun. And then, the thing is, also, if you want to be a scientist, bachelor's degree is usually not enough. That's why I want to go to do more graduate study.

**01:00:46**

Awi: And then the story that I didn't mention, was because I didn't have money to go to the US, right? So the thing is, I got scholarship from Ohio University. And the scholarship is for teaching assistant, if you know that, or research assistant, or something like that. So you have to teach in the university. You have to do lab instructor or something like that, or physics class. But all of those things, just when you are working, the first month, you don't get paid. You get paid after you get to the state and do the job.

**01:01:28**

Awi: So I didn't have money to buy flight ticket. I had some, but not enough to buy flight ticket. So then, the thing that I learned about US universities, they are very generous. At least at that time, I think they are very generous. So I contacted the university where I got accepted, and I told them, "I'm supposed to come in fall, right? In fall quarter." We were using quarter system. So I told them, "I'm not going to make it in fall quarter. I have to save some money to buy a flight ticket some more." And I told them, "I will come in winter quarter." So instead of waiting for me, they said, "Okay, we're going to pay your flight ticket. You just need to return it after a year or so, because you will get paid." Something like that. That's the thing I was like, "Wow,

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<sup>5</sup> B.J. Habibie, the third president of Indonesia (1998-1999), studied engineering in Germany. He was the minister of research and technology in Indonesia from 1978 to 1998. From Richard C. Paddock, "B.J. Habibie Dies at 83; Ushered in Democracy in Indonesia," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/world/asia/bj-habibie-dead.html>.

they are very nice.” So I didn’t know that they have a system that they will pay a flight ticket and things like that, and then after you get paid from your teaching assistant, you can slowly pay the money back to the university. And I think that’s the first impression I was like, “Wow, they didn’t even know me before my application. They only know me from my application, but they are very generous in terms of getting me to the campus or the school.” So yeah, that’s one of the stories that I still remember. I will remember it forever.

**01:03:14**

Q: Yeah, and then, how did you two meet?

Awi: I don’t know if she still remembers. She doesn’t remember!

Arnie: Yeah, we met when I went to Ohio University, because he was there in 2005, so it had almost been two years. I went in 2007. The first time we met, there were other Indonesian students who were part of the PERMiAS [Persatuan Mahasiswa Indonesia de Amerika Serikat], which is the Indonesian Students Association on campus. So we were welcome, me and my friends—I guess it was only me and my friend at first, because the rest of us who were supposed to be in our batch came later. So I was the first to come with my friend, but we were invited to meet other Indonesians there in a coffeeshop. It’s called Donkey Coffeeshop. It was just warm welcoming for us.

**01:04:26**

Arnie: And then I guess I was told Awi, he came from University of Indonesia as well. I was like, “Wow, there’s someone who came from—we have the same alma mater in this middle-of-nowhere.” After the long flight from Indonesia to the US—I think the port of entry was Chicago for me, or New York—after the 19-hour flight, and then all the other six-hour flight, and then after that, we arrived in Columbus. And then to Athens, we have to drive again for about two hours. So I was like, I don’t know. I wasn’t sure what to expect—

Awi: —one and a half hours—

Arnie: One and a half hours. But I didn’t know what to expect. But knowing that someone from the same university that I went was there, it was like, “Oh!” It was a good surprise. I guess that was the meeting that we had.

**01:05:34**

Q: Awi, do you have anything you want to add?

Awi: Exactly the same.

**01:05:42**

Q: And then yeah, tell me about what life in Ohio was like and how you ended up in Boise.

Arnie: Awi will start.

Awi: Yeah, Athens, Ohio, is one-and-a-half hours from Columbus, from the capital of Ohio. And the population is—how many?

Arnie: Twenty thousand.

Awi: Twenty thousand, when the school is there.

Arnie: Or forty thousand.

Awi: Is it? Oh yeah, forty thousand, during the school time. But when the school is not, when people are taking breaks and things like that—

Arnie: —it's a college town.

**01:06:32**

Awi: College town. So it's very quiet during when there is no school. And then the thing is because I like it, because I came from a village area. I like quiet places. So I think that Athens is pretty good. I spent seven or eight years there. So I consider it as my second home. And then because the Indonesian community were very few at that time—so usually, Indonesian people, they like to get together, you know. We like to get together, we like to eat, and we are very loud. And we like to play cards when we get together. And then—where are you located? Are you in Boise also?

**01:07:24**

Q: Yeah, I'm in Boise.

Awi: Yeah, if you ever—Boise doesn't have an Indonesian restaurant. So we usually cook fried fish and grilled fish, satay, so as you can see, I can't even remember what I do at school. I only remember what we do on weekends!

Arnie: Which is the food and gathering. It kind of us help us counteract our homesickness. It's kind of like we have a second home in the US and in Ohio. Awi has been going on. So he graduated earlier than I did, and he went to—do you want to tell your story about that part after Ohio?

**01:08:20**

Awi: Yeah. So I graduated 2011 from Ohio University and then after I finished my PhD, I went for a postdoc position in Berkeley. So I moved to Bay Area for three years. But the position at Berkeley was a joint collaboration with Chinese university in Wuhan, so it's 2011. So I have to go to Wuhan and spend four months in Wuhan doing some collaboration. So the good thing is, coronavirus was not there yet at that time. So I was in Wuhan for about a year in total, I think. And then, after Berkeley, I went back to Ohio, but this time in Columbus. Ohio State, I was teaching there for one semester or so. So that's the story.

Arnie: [Unclear.]

**01:09:47**

Awi: Oh, so you want Boise also? Boise, okay. So then, after Ohio State, the thing is, she was pregnant at that time. And then my dream is I want to be a professor, right? So I want to be a professor in physics. But there is no permanent job at that time. And it's only temporary job. So I was teaching at Ohio State for adjunct faculty position, something like that. And then, my friend from Utah, he kind of called me, like, "Hey, you should do this data science thing." And then he said a lot of needs in company, and then there were not many people at that time having experience in how to do this data science stuff, data science, machine learning, or AI [artificial intelligence]. And the good thing is I had a degree in physics, and physics is really hard. So then it's easy to do any other thing, other than physics. [Laughs.] Some people don't like it when I say that. So it was a good match at that time. I interviewed and I got a position, and then I started job in Utah. And then we moved to Utah, and after three years or so in Utah, HP tried to recruit me, and I said yes to HP, and then we moved to Boise in 2018. So that's the entire story up to Boise.

**01:11:43**

Q: Yeah, and so you've been in Boise for the past two, three years. So what's it been like living in Boise?

Awi: What do you think, Arnie?

Arnie: As family, I think we're doing okay living in Boise. As for me, before moving to Boise, I didn't know what is Boise, where is Boise. I hadn't even heard of Boise! So we married before I finished my PhD, so when we moved to Utah—well, before we moved, I was pregnant and delivered my first in Athens, Ohio. But I was still doing my dissertation, and I was able to finish my dissertation in Utah, the first year in Utah. We used to live in Provo, and then when he had a job closer to Salt Lake, we moved closer to Salt Lake, which is in West Valley City. And then I get pregnant with my second and we delivered him there. So they were two and a half years apart.

**01:13:08**

Arnie: So during that time, I was not able to—I missed the Indonesian community we had when we were in Ohio. But at that point, we know in Utah there's a lot of Indonesians as well, and also there should be an Indonesian community. But because of the move, and the stress of the moving, and then when I was trying to finish my dissertation while having a newborn, that stress didn't really help me in a way of feeling at home. It's just trying to get through one phase from another, from having the baby, to finishing the degree, and Awi had to move again, so it's kind of like a hectic time during that time when we were in Utah.

**01:13:58**

Arnie: So when he got an offer to move to Boise, we were not sure. I was not sure, because I was able to settle a little bit in Utah, after my second born. Because Utah has a lot of activities that are kid-friendly, that I can take them to museums—the children's museum—and all the activities that was very, very good for a parent with toddler like us, with a newborn and toddler. So I wasn't sure. And also it's very close to the stadium, where the basketball. A lot of concerts there. So it's just very close to us and convenient, that we can have all the access to different kinds of activities and lifestyles, especially when we already moved to Salt Lake.

**01:14:57**

Arnie: So when Awi's job trying to move him here in Boise, we were not sure. But the thing that was helping us decide was because they were eager to fly me and my kids to see Boise. So we were given a week or so to look at Boise and what we think of Boise. They want to meet with me and I had to bring the kids too during that dinner with Awi's colleague, or potential boss. And I think during that time, we were like, "Oh okay, I think this is nice." They welcomed us and they really wanted us to come here. And when we were looking at the area, we were not really sure what to expect. It's just the job is good, we can move, and I think the area is nice. We were able to find a house that's very close to where he works, so the commute is only five minutes by walking or biking. Because I was tired of him commuting from Salt Lake to Lehi, which is supposed to be 20 minutes if there's no traffic, but there's always traffic during the rush-hour. So it almost always taking him around 40 [minutes], one-way. So it's kind of hard for me at that time, because I wanted him to be spending more time with the kids and more support at home. And yeah, it's just kind of hard.

**01:16:43**

Arnie: So when we moved here, we were lucky we had the chance to eliminate that commute. Although after this pandemic, it doesn't really matter anymore, because we're working from home, which is even better at some points. Yeah, so far, Boise has been nice to us. In terms of the kids' activities, there are not really a diverse—or there's not too many options for the kids, other than the outdoor. But more and more, they are opening children's museum. And in terms of the education for the kids, I kind of like it here in Idaho, because I think we are thinking to

homeschool them. Even before the COVID pandemic happened, I always wanted to homeschool them because I want them to grow up having this Indonesian culture and experiences, so they won't forget who their parents are, their grandparents are, even though right now, ethnicity is just one part of your identity. It doesn't really define who you are. But I want them to grow up with it, because that's a part I want to introduce to them. Being a part of a global citizen, to make sure you know who you are, what kind of culture you're a part of. Mostly, the main reason was also to make sure they can speak Indonesian, because their grandparents are still in Indonesia. Especially from Awi's side, their grandma doesn't really speak English, so they need to speak Indonesian with her to communicate. So things like that we consider. But Boise and Idaho, the homeschool law is very lax, and we're pretty much given the freedom to choose how we educate our kids.<sup>6</sup> So that's why I'm thinking I'm going to like the way the school system is set up here.

**01:19:11**

Arnie: Yeah, I think more and more people are coming from different parts of the States. I guess people from California are most of the people that we know that came here. I guess Boise has been good. And the outdoor part of the activities, now that our kids are a little bit older, they would be able to enjoy more hiking and such.

**01:19:40**

Q: So are you currently homeschooling your kids, and are you working while homeschooling, or just homeschooling?

Arnie: My current job is I'm hired as a statistician. But it's a contractor job. If they have a job for me, they will give me the job; I will have to do the job. But since the first week of the hiring or orientation, I think I wasn't given any other tasks—or I didn't really request any other tasks, because I feel like in a way, I was trying to balance the work and homeschooling and the house chores and everything. It's kind of hard for me, even though I was telling them, "I'm not sure I can do this too much." Because this company that I work for, I had interned with them, so that's why they were willing to hire me as a contractor, even during this pandemic, after I was able to work again. Because I had to take a break, because after the student visa, we were given the working permit. So I was waiting for the working permit from the—like a different working permit that will allow me to work again after the student visa. So I was able to work, and I was reaching out to them, and they hired me just right there without testing. But it's just hard for me to balance the homeschooling, the kids, the house chores. They were really demanding, the work, because during that first work, I only had three hours everyday every day of the week. So I need to catch up with the skills that they want me to do, so it's kind of hard, also, learning and

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<sup>6</sup> Idaho has some of the least homeschooling regulations in the US. From Jessica Huseman and Lena Groeger, "Homeschooling Regulations by State," *ProPublica*, August 27, 2015, <https://projects.propublica.org/graphics/homeschool>.

catching up on the skills I had postponed on working after graduating from the university. It was kind of hard.

**01:22:13**

Q: How would you describe the Indonesian community here in Boise? And do you mostly interact with the Indonesian community, or do you also interact with a wider range of people?

Arnie: Sorry, I need to add the homeschooling. My kids, the older one, only turned five this year. And my youngest is two and a half years, so I wasn't really homeschooling in a way that is structured that I had to learn at a certain time. I'm implementing unschooling and then a Charlotte Mason-based kind of school, where they learn from outdoor and learn whenever we can learn. So we usually read them books before bed. So it's more the idea of school, home-study, give them education at home. And to answer your next question, sorry, I lost my train of thought. Sorry, can you repeat the question again?

**01:23:18**

Q: Yeah. How would you describe the Indonesian community here in Boise? And is that the main group of people you interact with, or do you have a wider range of friends and community?

Arnie: So when we first came here, I think Awi was trying to connect to the Indonesian community, so he was googling up "Indonesian community." He was able to contact one of them, and from there—they usually have three events, big events, a gathering for Indonesians here in Boise and surrounding Boise. Other than Boise, like the surrounding Treasure Valley area, might be too far for them to travel. So they gather for our Indonesian Independence Day, which is on the seventh of August, and then for Eid, which is a big holiday also in Indonesia, and also the Christmas celebration.

**01:24:17**

Arnie: So when we came, we were invited to the Eid celebration. So we met a couple of Indonesian families who live here. Mostly, the community consists of Indonesian families—so Indonesians who married Indonesians, or Indonesians who married Americans—who are working here. Mostly for those Indonesians who are married in Indonesian families here, they have a large Indonesian family who are still in the US. But the community are—just like we had over—it's a community where we like to gather. We cook, we eat. The gathering is for cooking and eating. It's an excuse to eat Indonesian food. So I guess it's a good way to gather when you miss home.

**01:25:28**

Arnie: But since we came here, the community had formed this nonprofit organization. It's called Indo Idaho Inc. The purpose of the organization is trying to promote Indonesian culture to



the Idaho community and also to strengthen the Indonesian culture, so we can preserve the culture in a way. And then I think the Indo Idaho Inc, we participated in the World Village Festival as one of the—I don't know if you heard about it.<sup>7</sup> Yeah, so we participated last year. We planned to do it again this year, but the pandemic cancelled the event. But I think it was our first public event. It was our first big event last year. We were trying to introduce our culture, which the easiest way is through food. So we were selling satay and Indonesian noodles and drinks, so it went well, I guess, for our first event. Before the organization, before the event, since the majority of the Indonesian community here are working, it's kind of hard to get together, and then finding the time to volunteer for the event. So at the end of the event, it was a really good experience, and then there's a lot of effect that we can move forward with this organization.

**01:27:12**

Arnie: Through that organization, I was able to connect with different kinds of groups. In the Indo Idaho community, there are also Americans and non-Indonesians who are interested in Indonesia. And we have connected to one of the volunteers from the MAF, Missionary Aviation Foundation, who have been in Indonesia for almost 17 years. But also, for the nonprofit, the key person—she lived in Indonesia before, so she connected to us—she is the founder of Glocal Community. It mainly involves itself with the refugees and immigrants.

**01:28:16**

Arnie: And then we've been involved with the Islamic Center, also, here in Boise. We've been lucky during this pandemic, because the Eid celebration—because we couldn't really gather and celebrate—so we decided to fundraise and then distribute—we call it Sembako Drive. That's what we do in Indonesia during the Ramadan month. People try to give packages, like food, sugars, more like staple foods, for people who are less fortunate. So that's what we're trying to do to honor the spirit of Eid. So even though the majority of the Indonesian population here or in the Indo Idaho community are non-Muslim, but the fundraising was successful. We managed to work with the Islamic Center to distribute the food packages that we managed to create from the fundraising. So I think we managed to help around ten to thirteen families with that fundraising. So we managed to do a couple of things with the organization.

**01:29:52**

Arnie: So for me, personally, I've been interacting with—well mostly—where my kids go. We went to the library and met a group of moms who are similar-minded and then we had a playdate together. And then I take them to a little gym here as well, so that's where we get to connect to different community, and we found a couple of friends who are now a good friend of ours. So from different kinds of activities, I was able to get more connection.

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<sup>7</sup> Christina Lords, "Boise celebrates culture, unity at World Village Festival. Here's what to catch on Sunday," *Idaho Statesman*, June 22, 2019, <https://www.idahostatesman.com/entertainment/arts-culture/article231861658.html>.

**01:30:40**

Q: And then, yeah, you've mentioned interactions with the Islamic Center and religion, and so I was wondering, does religion in you and your family's lives? And maybe as a follow-up as well, you mentioned that a lot of Indonesians here in Boise are not Muslim, or at least Muslim-practicing [sic], so I was wondering if you think there's a particular reason for why that is?

Arnie: Can you repeat the last question again? Sorry. Indonesian, Muslims, what?

**01:31:18**

Q: Yeah. Why the Indonesian community here in Boise—you were saying most of them aren't practicing Muslims, and I was wondering if there's a particular reason why that is, that you might know of?

Arnie: So I think what I said was the majority are not Muslim. They're Catholic, or they're just not Muslim. I think out of thirty people that I know, there are only five or eight—or maybe ten percent of, or twenty percent of the population—is Muslim. Most of them are non-Muslim. But I think you are right, even though I didn't really say it. Some of the Indonesians that I know—well, let me rephrase it.

**01:32:15**

Arnie: Yeah, so I think in a way, I cannot really speak for other Indonesians. But as for me, myself, personally, I was raised as Muslim, even though the way I was raised was not as the majority of Islam that is right now in Indonesia. But after going to the US and being exposed to different kinds of variety of people, with diverse backgrounds and faiths, I have become more a spiritual individual, I guess. That's what I'm trying to say. So religion played a role in my life when I was growing up, but after I was able to explore myself and then what I wanted to be and how I want to approach religion, it has become a more spiritual journey for me. So I guess that's what I can say about me. And Awi and I shared a similar view on religion. It's a good start. There's some good values in religion. But we want to expand to a little more to a spiritual journey.

**01:34:03**

Q: Mhm. And then I know you haven't been in Idaho for super long, but I was wondering in your time in Idaho, if you've encountered stereotypes or discrimination?

Arnie: In Idaho, since, because we—I don't know. I feel like I don't think so? Because most of my time living in the US, since I moved here, I've kind of been oblivious. So in Indonesia, we don't really know the term of "races." There are discrimination, but not really because of the race. So it's just a new thing to me. So sometimes I don't really recognize it, when I was being

discriminated or I was being put in a racism situation, but I get to learn more about it, why it was a big thing here, especially lately, also, with the [Black Lives Matter] movement.<sup>8</sup>

**01:35:20**

Arnie: But as for me, personally, I have never felt discriminated in a way here. I have always felt welcome. It's just more maybe I was too ignorant, or maybe I didn't even recognize whether I was being in that kind of situation. I mean, at some point, people have been saying slurs to me, even though I didn't really understand it. I didn't know how to react to it. But it was in Ohio, when I first came here, in the US. It was a slur about "going back to Mexico" and then—I didn't know what it was. So it didn't offend me because I couldn't relate to that kind of behavior. So I wasn't sure. And at some point, it's a really big there, and I guess I'm trying to learn more understanding about it, since I'm raising two of my kids here, and the awareness of it. And sometimes, yeah, I don't know whether being ignorant or not knowing about it. And then when you are in that situation, it's kind of like, "Oh okay, I don't know how to react. I wasn't offended, in a way, because I don't know you are trying to degrade me or something. So I was just passing through." But maybe if I knew more, I might be offended by that. But in Idaho, in general, I think I haven't been encountering that kind of situation. I don't know about Awi.

Awi: The same.

**01:37:07**

Q: Yeah, that's good to hear that at least you don't feel that you've encountered it—oh, yeah?

Arnie: But I think in terms of the political division lately, it's just hard to know. It's just hard. Because I've never experienced it personally, but it's reading and listening about what can happen and how things are lately. It's just scary. Although I haven't ever really experienced those things, but listening to the stories of others who are being discriminated, it just somehow makes me think, "Should we worry about it?" Or "what will happen if we encounter it?" So it's more like an awareness of we should be more careful, and we should be more cautious about things. Things like that, because these are not as easy.

**01:38:17**

Q: And by recent events, are you referring to the protests for Black Lives Matter?

Arnie: It's more like after the pandemic, and everyone is stressed out. It's more like a political stand of division where everyone has their opinion. And then sometimes, when their opinion is not heard, they're degrading others who are having different opinions. So in general, the hatred is increasing tenfold after the pandemic, even though it's there. I mean, it's been there for a while. I guess everyone is just frustrated at this point. And it's just so sad and scary when they're lashing

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<sup>8</sup> Arnie clarified that this referred to any humanity movement.

out at each other, despite what's right and what's wrong, what opinions matter. I mean, who matters, what. So it's just hard.

**01:39:14**

Q: Mhm. Maybe we could talk a little about COVID, since it seems topical. If applicable, how has COVID impacted you and your family?

Arnie: So for me, for us here, because, I think in a way, we are in a population that is less risky. Our kids are less than five years old, and we both in general are good and healthy. But we are trying to be as cautious as possible by staying home and then just making sure we are not spreading any viruses. So we always wear masks and such if we're going grocery shopping.

**01:40:12**

Arnie: But for me personally, it was hard, because my family back in Indonesia, so I think my mom got hit by it in the beginning of the year, or in December, I guess she already had it. That lasted almost a month or two months. But she didn't know what it was, but she was surviving that hard time. She recovered from it. And then I think my dad was sick starting in March, and he's been recovering ever since. He has the complications of things, so even though he was testing negative from the COVID part, but I think he got it because he got pneumonia, and he got other things related to it. And it got worse, because he had to undergo a surgery. And after the surgery, he didn't really get any better a month after the home nurse, like the home care. So he had to get admitted in the hospital, in the ICU. And he had to stay in the hospital for a month. It was a really hard time for me personally.

**01:41:36**

Arnie: And financially as well, because in Indonesia, the insurance is not really helpful. And I guess in the situation of my dad, they were not enrolled in insurance. And then we had to help them financially as well. So it's kind of balancing here emotionally and financially, and not be able to be there for them, physically, because it's only my mom and dad. My brother is in Germany right now, and my younger brother was not available as well for them. So it's kind of hard, knowing that my mom has to go through all this by herself.

**01:42:28**

Q: Yeah. I'm glad to hear that they've been recovering, though. That definitely sounds very difficult.

Arnie: Yeah, and at some point, it was just hard. I was prepared that he might leave us for good. But I'm glad God has another plan for him to survive this illness, so I guess in a way, it's a good thing.

**01:42:58**

Q: Awi, do you have anything that you wanted to add?

Awi: I think other than working from home due to COVID—because I'm antisocial people. So staying home, not talking to people, then that's good enough.

Arnie: Although if he had to talk to his kids for twenty-four hours, that might drive him crazy, a little bit. But I think the thing is, for him, because his mom still works. She still wants to sell. She still wants to go the market and sell her shrimp, even though we were so afraid that she might get exposed to COVID by doing so. She has been an active person. She could not stay home still. She had to do something. So I guess selling shrimp in the market has been a good thing for her to release and just to have her own activity that she can still do. So having her stay home because of COVID is also hard for her.

**01:44:18**

Q: And then this—as with all the other questions—is definitely a question you can skip, but I'm wondering if you want to tell me about what your immigration experiences in the US are? I guess you brought up to me that you're still in the process of certain paperworks and processes for settling here in the US, and I was wondering if that's something you want to share about. If it's something you feel has been a smooth process or a frustrating process. But yeah, it doesn't have to be a question to answer, but just something I wanted to throw out there.

Arnie: I think I'm more asking Awi, who's more comfortable sharing, because I'm, right now, depending on him. So I'm the dependent. So we're in the process of the green card—and he's okay. He's giving me his okay. I'm going to share the story.

**01:45:16**

Arnie: So he has been having an offer of the green card since almost two years ago. So why don't you tell them? He keeps giving me the signal, which parts to include, so I'm going to ask him. So basically, he wants me to tell the story.

**01:45:43**

Arnie: So yeah, we got approved for the green card. We finally get the approval for the green card, and also the working permit. That's why I was able to work starting from May. So we're waiting for the actual green card to be delivered, because we have the approval notice and hopefully the green card. But the process, though—do you want to share the process? Okay.

**01:46:15**

Arnie: So it's been—I think compared to other immigration statuses that we have been in, this green card process has been a smoother kind of experience, although despite whatever we had to

go through with it. We had to go to different kinds of immigration status before the green card, so it was kind of an easier process this time, because we kind of knew what to expect—we don't really know what to expect. We had some experience with immigration. So I guess the cautiousness part from the previous process made us a little bit more prepared for this, to anticipate what could have happened or what would happen, something like that.

**01:47:14**

Q: And it's good to hear that it feels like it's a little bit smoother too. And it sounds like it's probably going to have a positive outcome, too, since you're just waiting for things to arrive.

Arnie: Hopefully, yes.

**01:47:29**

Q: And then we're getting close to 5, so I'm going to try and start wrapping up the interview. So I have a few conclusion questions, so these are open to both you, Arnie, and Awi. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

Awi: For me, having the family, having a beautiful wife—I'm saying this because she's here. [Laughs.] Yeah, so I think the accomplishment is our family. I have my wife and two kids. So that's quite an accomplishment. I never dreamed to have this kind of life here, and with a very happy wife and genius kids, hopefully. And so that's quite an accomplishment, according to me. So making it this far is because of my wife—I keep saying this because I want to be nice to her. [Laughs.]

**01:48:50**

Arnie: So for me, I think personally my accomplishment is getting through my degree, even though I knew until now, I wasn't really enjoying the studying part. I really like to be involved in the organization, because throughout my academic life or even through high school, I was involved through different kinds of activities, other than the school part—so the extracurricular, also the student organizations at school and on campus. And coming to the US, being part of the student organization, being part of the International Student Union and also the Indonesian Students Association, helped me to connect to more people. I'm a fairly social person, so that's why I feel like all these opportunities for me to go here to the US and meet more people—I had a Ghanaian roommate—so meeting different kind of people from different countries, different backgrounds, has been really good for me.

**01:50:08**

Arnie: And then me and my achievements for now that I accomplished, just finishing through the education part. I was dragging my feet, because I wasn't focusing on it, because I was just too busy doing the organization part. So I think I kind of—I actually finished the degree, and then

was able to give the options to choose what I want to work, or even stay home and teach the kids and do homeschooling. So I'm lucky to have been put in this position.

**01:50:47**

Q: And then, are both of you thinking of staying in Boise long-term or is it someplace that you see as part of your future?

Awi: I think we're going to stay here for a long time.

Arnie: As for me, because of the education part, the law of the homeschooling, where the kids are very lax here, I think this might be a good fit for us in how to incorporate the education for our kids. And as far as the lifestyle, it's actually not too bad. We have kind of grown accustomed to it. The snow is not too heavy, the rain is not too hard, the rent is not too high, the summer's not too hot. So it's kind of been good. Yeah, I think we're thinking another five to ten years. But if we were to move, if we had to move, I don't mind moving, since we can homeschool the kids, to a place with not a lot of restrictions. But for now, this is it for us. But I want to travel the world with the kids as well, so hopefully we get the opportunity to do that, even though we don't really have to—not as a move, but to live there, to experience the actual culture, that might be a good opportunity for the kids as well.

**01:52:16**

Q: And then, what are your dreams and visions for the future?

Arnie: Like personal goal or the family?

**01:52:26**

Q: Either.

Arnie: My personal goal is to make sure that we—us being a parent that help our kids grow to the best potential that they can be. Maybe learning more about or trying to overcome our past on how we were raised, and how we can learn to be a better parent for a better kid. The never-ending learning of having to acknowledge the challenges around us, especially when raising them here in the US. The challenges are all the awareness about racism and how they would be exposed to different kinds of things, especially culture-wise.

**01:53:31**

Arnie: My goal is, right now, for me personally, is self-growth. I don't know if I want to work for other people again. It's just very tiring, to meet a certain goal. It's just hard. But as for me, I would like to establish a non-profit group and help either in the education field or in the environmental field, that has been a growing passion of mine since the last couple of years.

Being involved in the Indo Idaho Association is one step of that, but it's more a cultural kind of non-profit. But I would like to expand it to a more like educational-based or environmental-based. That's my personal goal, to be doing something in a non-profit way and reaching to more people.

**01:54:43**

Arnie: But for the family, it's just trying to make sure that our kids are growing up to be a good person, a well-rounded person. And that's a long-term goal of never-ending learning. Awi, what's your goal? What's your future?

Awi: My future goal? Getting a Nobel prize.

**01:55:05**

Q: Could you repeat that?

Awi: Getting a Nobel prize. So I have to keep working on it.

**01:55:18**

Q: Good luck. I feel like that that is a very ambitious but somewhat attainable goal.

Awi: Yeah. I'm working hard on it.

Arnie: Yeah, so our kids can also have that chance, I don't know. He's going to pass it down to our kids. So I don't know.

**01:55:43**

Q: And then, I think my last official question, but do you have any kind of concluding thoughts on what it means to be Asian or Asian American in Idaho?

Arnie: Do you want to answer?

Awi: No, you answer.

**01:56:05**

Arnie: Being Asian or Asian American in Idaho, I guess in Idaho is still lacking of sources, of Asian sources. I know there's this Chinese immersion school that I have been sending my kids to for preschool. But other than that, maybe compared to other big cities or big states, like California and New York, where most of the population are diverse, there are still a lack of diverse Asian American community here, even though they are here. There's very, very little. The presence cannot be felt, or it is not really being represented. One of the things that I measure



for that—the one measure that I can think of—is actually how the Asian market can fulfill the demand of the products supplied. So there's a lack of Indonesian food or Indonesian spices here. There's only one store that sell them. It's also not as many as I would like to have. So it's still little.

**01:57:43**

Arnie: But being an Asian American, I don't know. Because I haven't really experienced the discrimination, even though it's around us. I mean, it's here in Idaho too. It's everywhere. It just hasn't been affecting us directly. But being in the midst of it, it's just making us more cautious and more aware of what we are trying to say, how we behave. It's just a general thing that sometimes affect you in that way. So you're not really offending anyone or anything. So it's more like a continuous learning on how we can respect others.

**01:58:36**

Q: And then Awi, is there anything that you wanted to add?

Awi: Yeah, being Asian in Idaho. Yeah, I think the thing is, I'm not really social people.

Arnie: He's lying. He is very social.

Awi: No. I think so far it's good for me, because if you are asking to discrimination, as I said, probably I haven't experienced it in Boise or Idaho. And I hope I'm not going to get it in the future as well. When we were in Ohio, a lot of people—not a lot—some people, during the weekend or something like that, some students, they drive around, and if they see you—Asians—they say, “Chinese!” They will scream on the streets something like that. But the thing is, the concept of race—

Arnie: —racism—

**02:00:00**

Awi: —racism, I only found it when I got to the States. So that's why, according to me, it's a new concept for me. Because back home—I don't know how it is when you were born here, but I don't know how your parents in China, if they have those kinds of concepts—but in Indonesia, we know that we are different.

Arnie: And we have different ethnicities.

Awi: Yeah, we know that we have different ethnicities. And we know that people are different, and we know that and then we acknowledge that and—

Arnie: —we don't take offense over it.

**02:00:36**

Awi: And when people call us, for example, they call us—usually we are races based on the origin, ethnicity—like, “Hey, you are from Sumatra.” And we are proud of that, and we don't get offended. That's why when I got to the States, it's kind of a different experience. So I don't know.<sup>9</sup>

Arnie: I think in a way, in here, it's a systematic racism—

Awi: —that's happening, yeah.

Arnie: That's happening. Because in Indonesia, it's something like, “Oh, you're from Sumatra, so you're this ethnicity. And then this ethnicity is known for this.” And we joke around about it. It's just, I guess, I don't know.

**02:01:21**

Awi: Yeah, probably here, if it's systematic racism, then that's the problem, right? But in terms of day-to-day stuff, I think back home in Indonesia, we take it easy. We don't really have problems with that. That's why when we got here, I was like, “Wow, this is a big issue in the US.” But so far, in Boise, or Idaho, I think, I'm good. Yeah, we don't really like going outside. My wife does, but I just stay home.

Arnie: I mean, we don't interact with too many kinds of people. We're trying to avoid getting involved with the political way, because we know we are not going to be able to make any difference anyway at this point. So we are a silent supporter. We're just watching and learning from the events that's happened around us. So it's just making us more aware of what's happening, and how we can react, and how we can teach our kids. It didn't happen to us, doesn't mean that it won't happen to our kids. So that's why we are lucky to be exposed or to be living in this time when we are given so many exposures of awareness. And I guess in a way, we had to learn to select the news or the information we want to get. There's so many things out there. So many different points of view. But we were lucky to get that mindset, of able to research. To do our own research, based on the degree we had. So research, and then to supply your own knowledge. Filtering all the information, and then research it, and take what's good for you and what fits you best. It's just hard.

**02:03:40**

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<sup>9</sup> When reviewing the transcript, Arnie and Awi added: “I wanted to add a note on this racism conversation. I think the way we viewed racism has been influenced heavily by the privilege that we have as a majority of race (Malay descend). So I would believe that we would have a different view if we were from a non-majority race.” They also noted that there is subtle racism against Chinese-descended people in Indonesia.

Q: Well, the last—oh sorry?

Arnie: I'm sorry, it's kind of a vague answer.

**02:03:48**

Q: No, no, not at all. And then the last question is just—obviously we can't cover both of your lives in a two-hour interview in its entirety—but do you feel like there's anything important that we didn't cover in this interview that you'd want to talk about? And otherwise, you can have final words, but that's really the interview.

Awi: I think that's all.

Arnie: Yeah. For him, that's all. I think for me, it's kind of hard to think of anything else than talking about ourselves for two hours. We've said a lot already. So I think it's been—hopefully—it's been more informative. I think we are lucky we are able to move here and get to settle down here, a smoother process. But I hope there will be more Asian community here so we get to get more variety of Asian food. I miss where we can just buy Indonesian food from the Asian store when we visited other states. I hope that more Asian people will come here, or other Asian communities that can represent the community here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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