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

The Reminiscences of
Yul H. Kim

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Yul H. Kim conducted by Kathy M. Min on August 3, 2020. 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 narrator.

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Yul H. Kim
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	August 3, 2020

00:00:01
Q: Okay, so today is August 3, 2020. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and today I'm interviewing Yul. And we're both calling from the Boise, Idaho area, I believe, but it's through Zoom. And the post subject of the recording is an oral history of Yul's life for the Asian American oral history project. So first question. What is your full name?

Kim: My full name is Yul Hoon Kim.

00:00:32
Q: And when and where were you born?

Kim: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, March 1964. So I'm 56!

00:00:49
Q: And what is your current occupation and/or educational background.

Kim: I am a software engineer. Let's see. I have a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, a master's degree in computer engineering, and a master's degree in computer science.

00:01:13
Q: Very cool. And what are the names of your parents?

Kim: Let's see, my father's name was Jin Hwan Kim and my mother's name was Young Ja Kim.

00:01:28
Q: Can you spell those?
Kim: Sure. Jin Hwan Kim. And my mother's name was Young Ja, and then Kim.

00:01:50
Q: And what years were your parents born?

Kim: My father was born in 1929 in Korea, and my mother was born 1932.

00:02:03
Q: And how did your parents end up in the US?

Kim: So, let's see, they were born and raised in Korea. Obviously from their ages there, they lived through the Korean War.

00:02:21
Kim: My father had just started college in 1950 when the Korean War started. He did, you know—classes were suspended. School was over. Everything basically shut down once the war started. He joined, was drafted—I don't know what the word is—into the Korean army, and because he spoke some English, he was assigned to be a liaison to an American unit, actually the 8063rd MASH [mobile army surgical hospital] unit. So if you ever watched the TV show, that's the 4077th, but they refer to the other MASH, the 8063rd. He was a translator and liaison from the Korean army to the 8063rd MASH.

00:03:13
Kim: So he made friends there amongst the American soldiers. And after the Korean War, you know, the country was pretty much destroyed, devastated. His parents had both died. He helped raise his younger brother, and all this. And at some point along the way, some of his former friends from the American army—I don't know if they volunteered, or he asked them—but they were willing to sponsor for him to come to the United States.

00:03:50
Kim: So he came to the United States in 1958. He spent a year at a Bible college in Jackson, Tennessee, working on his English. Then he went to school in the United States, starting in 1959. My mother and father were married in Korea. I honestly don't know when. But they were married, maybe in ‘57 or before my father left Korea, and then my mother came over in ‘59 to join my father. And he went to school.

00:04:25
Kim: I have one brother, one sibling, who's two years older than me. He was born in 1962 when my father was a junior in college. He [Yul’s father] graduated in ‘63 and stayed an extra year to get a master’s degree. And I was born in March of that year, 1964. And then we moved to a

couple of places, but from the time I was maybe one, we settled in the suburbs of Philadelphia. And that's where I grew up until I left for college.

00:05:01
Q: Very cool. And do you know what parts of Korea your mom and dad are from?

Kim: My mother grew up just north of Seoul. And my father. I do not know exactly, as he was from a farm in the countryside. But he referred to his—he went to boarding school for high school in the city of Incheon, which you may know is where the big airport is now for Seoul. That's where he went to high school. So that's kind of what he referred to as where he lived before the war started and everything basically was fluid, chaotic.

00:05:46
Q: Yeah. And do you know what their life was like before the war?

Kim: Yeah, my father's family was poor. They were agricultural worker farmers. He was studious, did well, and therefore, was able to be able to go to boarding school in high school. But he came from a fairly poor background. My mother's family was actually fairly wealthy before the war, although presumably they lost a lot of that during the war. Because I believe my mother said her father owned a newspaper and a wool factory. They had servants, you know, so they were actually fairly well off, although the war kind of was a big leveler of society, so to speak.

00:06:47
Q: Do you know anything about their experiences during the wartime? Have they told you stories or anything like that?

Kim: So, you know I mentioned my father's history in the war. He never talked about the war. Ever. As a matter of fact, everything I told you, I did not learn from him and I did not learn until I was between my junior and senior years of high school. Because we had some family, friends, the Beals, who lived in Lincoln, Massachusetts, and we would visit them and vacation with them occasionally. And we were visiting them in the summer between my junior and senior years of high school, and Mr. Beal asked me. He said, “Oh, you know, does your father ever tell you the stories about how we were in the MASH together and we blah, blah, blah.” And I said, “Nope. I have never heard that before. This is the first time I have ever heard those facts.” So yeah, my father never, ever talked about the past. He was the stereotypical, inscrutable, show-no-emotion Asian male.

00:08:10

Kim: Now, my mother would tell stories. But she was totally different from my dad and her stories were always fanciful stories. I mean, it would be so, you know—according to what she said, they twice left their home in Seoul, carrying everything they could carry and became refugees and walked, rode trains, hitchhiked all the way to Busan, the Busan perimeter. For anyone who knows anything about Korean history, the North Koreans invaded, basically took over the entire South Korean country—except for one small little portion around the southern tip of the peninsula around this port city of Busan.

00:09:02
Kim: They left their homes and went there. And so she'll tell stories about going down to the harbor and watching the pearl divers dive for pearls in Busan Harbor. Or about how there was an artillery bombardment, but her younger brother had to go to the outhouse, and how her mother had to walk her younger brother out to the outhouse during an artillery bombardment. Or, you know, how they slaughtered their last animal and cooked it and then someone said, "The train was coming," and they went to go get the train. And of course there was no train, and they came back and their last food was gone. But, you know, she would all tell it in the form of some adventure or some fun story or something like that. Or how the loudspeakers would be saying [holds up hand to mouth as if speaking into a loudspeaker], "There is nothing to worry about. Everything's fine." Meanwhile, you know, if you had binoculars, you could see, you know, the North Koreans raising the North Korean communist flag on the top of the city hall in the center of Seoul. She would tell stories like that. Not—so she obviously had a totally different temperament, and the things she would describe were from a totally different perspective.

00:10:22
Q: And you've mentioned both your parents have siblings. I was wondering what your parents' relations with siblings are like, and also if you know any stories about your grandparents that have been passed down?

Kim: Gosh. I know very little to nothing about my father's father and the male side of his family. There's one story that circulates that said at one point he owned a gold mine, which sounds ridiculous, especially since he was poor. There's one story I heard about my father's mother that she was a saint. And, in the aftermath of the Korean War, there were many diseases and pandemics that swept through the population and she saintly nursed every person in their village back to health, and of course she was the last person to get it and die. That's basically all I know of my father's side of the family. And of course, like I said, he never, almost never talked about the past. So, you know, there's not a lot of information there.

00:11:54

Kim: I've met a bunch of his brothers and sisters. All of them lived in Korea. So when I met them, it was times when I traveled to Korea as a tourist or visiting. I'm old enough that this was still back in the day when there weren't as many Asians around and the big goal was assimilation. And people mistakenly believed that if you were raised to speak a non-English language, that you would somehow be "confused" and wouldn't be able to "speak English properly."[1]

00:12:41
Kim: So my parents never taught me to speak Korean, which means that when we visited those people—my father's brothers and sisters, I mean—my brother and I would sit there for hours and just conversation going on in Korean, basically no idea what they're saying. Except, every now and then, you'd know they'd be talking about us, because my mother would say something. And there would be one of two reactions. Either my mother would say something and gesture to us, and everyone would turn and look at us and go, "Ohhhh" [nodding]. Or my mother would say something and gesture to us and everyone would turn to look at us and laugh, "Ha ha ha!" We had no idea what she was saying, of course.

00:13:36
Kim: So really, there's very little I know about my father's side of the family, unfortunately. Except that both my brother and I were given genealogy books. I have a two volume book that supposedly traces our family back 200 generations, or something like that. Our names are in there. But I imagine this is the kind of thing, you know, now there's whole businesses around this where they keep track of your thing, and you give them money and they put your names in and republish this thing and give it to you. And you know, knowing how Asian culture is, I imagine it's not entirely accurate. Like if somebody married someone who is "no good" or something, they were discreetly omitted from a family register. Who knows? Ironic, because on my mother's side of the family, supposedly those genealogy books were all lost after the war, because some relative decided to wallpaper his house with the genealogy book. And so it was completely lost.

00:14:58
Kim: On my mother's side of the family, her oldest brother came to the United States, lived with us for some period of time, and lived not far from us, from where I grew up. Her youngest brother also came to the United States. And my mother's mother, my grandmother on my mother's side, came to the United States, lived with us for a year or two. Again, she didn't speak

[1] The concept of "language confusion"—that "children are incapable of becoming bilingual without becoming confused"—was acknowledged as early as 1981. However, a wide array of research refutes the concept of language confusion. From Mark M. Guiberson, "Bilingual Myth-Busters Series: Language Confusion in Bilingual Children," *Perspectives on Communication Disorders and Sciences in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Populations* 20, no. 1 (April 2013): 5-14.

any English. I didn't speak any Korean. There was only one or two phrases I could say to her. We played cards together, occasionally. But, after that, my youngest uncle, my mother's youngest brother, moved out, got a job, brought his family over, my cousins. Eventually my grandmother moved in with them. A typical Asian story, because of course he and his wife were working all the time. And somebody had to cook and clean and take care of the kids. And yeah, she lived to be 98, I think. Yeah, anyway.

00:16:34
Q: Also, I'm just muted, because I think the lawn mower's a little bit loud sometimes.

Kim: Yeah, no problem. Don't worry about it.

00:16:40
Q: But yeah, that's all so interesting. Do you know anything about your parents' immigration experiences to the US? I know you've mentioned some of the army sponsored them, essentially, but my understanding is immigration was a lot harder to do pre-1965, which your family falls into. So I'm just wondering if you know anything about those experiences.

Kim: Yeah. But they never talked about it. I think you're correct. It was fairly difficult. There were a fair number of hoops that people had to jump through.

00:17:23
Kim: You know, like I said, we lived in the Philadelphia area from—I was born in '64. I think we lived in these apartments from '65 through '70. We moved into a house in 1970. And my parents were of that generation, the older generation, where they actually got a 30 year mortgage and then paid it off. When my mother moved out of the house—my father died in 1988—so my mother paid off the house in 2000. A year or two after that, she downsized to a condo and we cleaned out the house.

00:18:15
Kim: At that time, my brother and I, helping clean out the house, found papers. And they were papers to some of, again, my father's army buddies, and the letters were—evidently the two people who had to sponsor my father, Mr. Beal and Mr. Pepper, had to put up a financial guarantee of $2,000 to the immigration officials, that, "if this guy turns out to be a bad guy that you're on the hook for up to $2,000 to tidy up his affairs and send him back," kind of thing. And we found several letters written from the two commanders of the MASH unit, which later became actually at the first army surgical hospital. It changed designation from the 8063rd Mobile Army Surgical Hospital to the first US Army surgical hospital. Letters of reference from those commanders saying, "Yeah, he's a good guy and he's okay and he works hard, he's not a

slacker, and blah, blah, blah." So my impression is that it was difficult, although, no, I don't know, more specifics on that.

00:19:44
Kim: I do know that they both became naturalized US citizens. This would have been sometime in the late '70s, probably some 20 years after they came to the United States. Because I remember going to a ceremony at the Media courthouse in Delaware County and swearing-in ceremony and all that stuff.[2]

00:20:12
Q: Yeah. And then, do you know what years your mom's side of the family started coming to the US? And also why they wanted to come to the US, and not your dad's side of the family?

Kim: I don't know what the deal was there. I think there was some internal politics between my mother and father about that. What my mother says is that in spite of whatever hardships there were during the Korean War, in the time after the Korean War, there was still some resources on her side of the family. And the way she tells it is, at some point, her father, whom I've never met, said to her, "Okay, tomorrow, you come here and bring your boyfriend. I want to talk to him." And she said, "Well, I don't have a boyfriend." He said, "No, you bring your boyfriend. You come here. I want to talk to him." And evidently the story was, "Okay, if you want to go to the US, I will help you financially to do that, if you marry my daughter and go and take her there." So, you know, there was some implied commitment there that there was some obligation to help in that respect.

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Kim: I don't know if there was specific motivation for why my mother's older brother and youngest brother wanted to come, except I would imagine it was under their own motivation. The younger uncle was fairly motivated when he first got here. I mean, he was the stereotype of the Korean grocery store owner who ran a grocery store in a predominantly African American neighborhood.[3] This would have been North Philadelphia. I think it was the 6300 block of North Broad Street. So—and then, again, this was back in the day. I mean, now if you go to North Philly, there's an area called Cheltenham, which is like Koreatown. You know, the Hanareum [H-Mart] is there, and the Koba-oo [which is now closed] is there and all that stuff's there. That stuff wasn't there back in the day in the '70s. And yeah, he was literally the Korean grocery store

[2] Media Pennsylvania is the city where the county courthouse for Delaware County, Pennsylvania, is.
[3] For example, see Calvin Sims, "Black Customers, Korean Grocers: Need and Mistrust; Shoppers Complain Of Hostile Treatment, But Choices Are Few," *The New York Times*, May 17, 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/17/nyregion/black-customers-korean-grocers-need-mistrust-shoppers-complain-hostile-treatment.html.

owner in the predominantly African American neighborhood. So, yeah. And again, their English is not so good. So it's not like we talked very much directly.

00:23:23
Q: Yeah, I definitely have a lot of follow ups for that. But do you know what year your mom's side of the family came to the US?

Kim: Okay, let's see. Gosh. I'm going to say her oldest brother probably came, probably in—because we were—probably something like ‘71 or something like that. Then the younger brother probably came somewhere around ‘75 or ‘76.

00:24:16
Q: And then, I know you said they don't speak much—actually did your mom’s side of the family come all together as one group or—oh, I guess you said—

Kim: No. So, in both cases, my mother's oldest brother came. He lived with us for a while, he got a job. He eventually moved out at his own apartment. And then I remember, yeah, his wife and two kids came two years, three years later, or something like that, sometime later. And yeah, I remember. They came, they stayed with us for a little while, and then, yeah, moved in with my uncle.

00:25:00
Kim: Same with my mother's younger brother. He came, moved in with us, stayed with us for a while. He got a job—a union job, amazingly, at the Alan Wood Steel Plant in Conshohocken, PA—and started working. Earned enough money to get an apartment, earned enough money to buy a car. And then, a couple years later, I remember we drove up to JFK in New York City, and collected his wife and his oldest daughter who was 10 months old at the time. Because he must have gone back [to Korea] because she was 10 months old, and he was here [in the US] for a while, so, I don't know. Maybe she got pregnant right before he came over, or something like that. And then since then, he had two more daughters. Yeah, in both cases it was, person comes over, stays with us, gets a job, eventually moves out, and then eventually brings wife and children.

00:26:06
Q: Yeah. And then you also mentioned your grandma on your mom's side came and she just came for a few years and then went back to Korea?

Kim: No, she came for a few years and lived with us, and then eventually moved in with my uncle to help take care of his daughters, while my youngest uncle and aunt were working.

Because, of course, you know, the grocery store was open every day of the year. Closed early on Christmas at noon, but was open every day of the year.

00:26:41
Q: And I know you mentioned that your uncles don't speak as much English. But do you know anything about what their experiences were like with the grocery?

Kim: I don't know. That's a good question because he kind of lived two lives here. He seemed very ambitious and he owned the grocery store and he worked so hard. But essentially, my uncle's wife worked herself to death, basically. She had some diagnosis of something—I think it was lupus—but didn't take the medication because she couldn't work as hard and didn't work any less and exhausted herself. And this was right around Christmas one year. Caught pneumonia, went to the hospital, was dead like two days later of multiple organ failure. Just, you know, basically worked herself to death.

00:27:56
Kim: And at that point, my uncle sold the grocery store, sold everything, switched careers, moved to Cherry Hill, New Jersey, went into a totally different line of work importing clocks and Korean ladies underwear. Left—so imagine this. My grandmother who speaks no English, the two daughters—I don't know how they were, maybe ten and eight—in a home in suburban Cherry Hill, New Jersey by themselves. He leaves, goes to Korea for about a month, five weeks, to find a new wife. And basically finds a new wife, gets married. My mother and I—we would drive there every weekend, go buy groceries, take the groceries to the house, see if there was anything else they needed. Because, you know, old Korean grandmother who doesn't speak English, two kids, no one who can drive, stuck in the suburbs in a house in suburban New Jersey, Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

00:29:18
Kim: And my mother even flew to Korea, went to the wedding, came back. And I remember, gosh, talking to them, visiting them after the wedding, and my two cousins, the two daughters, just, you know, they understood what was going on and they asked my mother several times. It's like, "Is she pretty?" They really wanted their new mother to be pretty. And my mother said, "Yeah, she's pretty." And of course, you know, she was an old maid, meaning she was single, she was in her 30s—oh my goodness, not married in her 30s, you know, oh my goodness, an old maid! And so yeah, she, through that whole, whatever, network of people and people who know people—it's like, "Oh yeah, let's hook these two people up." And she got married and they did their honeymoon on Jeju Island—is the tradition—and then he brought back his new wife, new mom.

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Kim: They then moved to Queens to Flushing. And she opened a boutique, a dress store, which they had for many years on Union Street. Right there in Flushing, you know, halfway between the Northern Boulevard and the end of the subway line there in Flushing. Had it for years and years, probably 20 years or something like that.

00:31:01
Q: And then, I guess just to back up a little bit, did your dad learn English through the boarding schools?

Kim: He learned English somehow in high school and something, because he knew enough English when the war started to get the assignment that he did. And, you know, again, when he first came to the United States, he spent a year working on his English at Bible college in Tennessee. He had very good English. He only had a few things where his English was not correct, things like—"stuff" and "change" were two words that he always had problems with. And he would use the plural instead of the singular, even though "do you have change?" refers to perhaps a plural of coins. But he would always say "changes," plural instead of "change." And he would say "stuffs" instead of "stuff," even though "stuff" can refer to many items. Besides that his English was very good.

00:32:14
Kim: My mother's English was also very good, although her weakness was always business-type things and talking over the phone. Face-to-face, her English, she could overcome whatever issue she had in her English. But after my father died in 1988, she was always asking my brother and I to call if she had to call the insurance, or had to call the bank, or had to call so and so, you know. If it had to do with something over the phone, it was very technical or specific or procedural, she knew that that was difficult for her and she would ask us to help.

00:33:04
Q: And what did your parents do as a job when you were growing up?

Kim: Yeah, my mother was a homemaker, did not work outside of the home. My father was a civil engineer, geotechnical civil engineer. Worked primarily on foundations and dams—foundations for large things and dams, because dams need to have good foundations. So a lot of his work consisted of drilling core samples into the ground and analyzing them and determining whether or not they could support structures and/or whether they needed some amendments to be able to support the planned structures—which also meant that he was away at times.

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Kim: When we were, gosh, like five, when I was five, I mean, he was gone a lot to a place called Crystal River, Florida, where, for some reason, they were trying to build a nuclear power plant in a swamp. And again, how do you get a good foundation for a nuclear power plant in a swamp is a challenge. And he spent—he was away for a long time.

00:34:27
Kim: Then there was a period where he spent a long time in Ohio—Sandusky, Ohio, or I don't even know what it was—but they were underground a lot, because he had to wear a gas mask at times. They were in a mine shaft and so on. He spent a long time off the Jersey Shore about certain drilling rigs and prospective oil exploration that was taking place off the Jersey Shore. He spent several stints in a drilling ship in the Gulf of Alaska and the drilling ship in the Bering Sea, because, again, they were drilling for oil and there were questions about whether the seafloor would support either a drilling platform or anchorages to moor the drilling platform.

00:35:23
Kim: He spent a ton of time just north of St. Louis on locks and dams number 26 on the Mississippi River, because locks and dams number 26 just north of St. Louis on the Mississippi River was moving a quarter of an inch a year and the Army Corps of Engineers needed to determine, "Do we need to build a new dam, or can we fix the existing locks and dams?" And he spent—that was like when I was in sixth and seventh grade, he was away a lot, [unclear].

00:36:01
Kim: So, you know, in my memory. It seemed like he was gone a lot, but I'm sure if you added up all time wise, it was not a lot, you know, like an eighth of the time. But it seemed like a lot. He was gone, because he had to go to these places and figure, you know—that was his work.

00:36:22
Q: And so was his employer the Army Corps of Engineers?

Kim: No, they were subcontracted. They subcontracted to a company called Woodward-Clyde & Associates, which was a geotechnical consulting engineering firm. They are—not that it matters. But in addition to—I'm blanking on the name—there's one other firm that's a large geotechnical consulting engineering firm. They're one of those firms. They had an office near Philadelphia and he worked in that office. Oh, Raymond International. That was the name of the other. Those are the two large geotechnical consulting engineering firms in the world and he worked for one of them.

00:37:18
Q: And so he studied civil engineering since he did college here?

Kim: He did. He did. He wanted to be a doctor. Maybe it had something to do with his exposure to doctors in the MASH unit. He felt that he was too old to go into medicine. It was one of the main disappointments and frustrations of his life. And, you know, unconsciously he communicated to my brother and I that if we did not become MDs or PhDs, that essentially we would be failures in life. So, eh. There you go.

00:38:08
Kim: Because he felt frustrated in his own career, because he "only had a master's degree." Did not become a doctor, which is what he had really hoped to do, or get a PhD, which would have given him more stature in his company and perhaps would have enabled him to advance farther. He never spoke about discrimination or other things. He was, again, not someone to share his feelings a lot. His mantra in life was always, "Okay, I will work harder." He was the hardest working person I've ever met in my life. His answer was always, "Okay, I'll work harder."

00:38:58
Q: With the MASH unit, was he the only Korean in that unit or were there others? And was he the only one that was sponsored to the US that you know of?

Kim: There were probably—he was probably the only one. I don't know of any others that would have been sponsored, but again, he didn't talk about it. So I don't know for sure.

00:39:23
Q: And then, did you spend most of your childhood in the northern Philly area?

Kim: Actually, we grew up in the suburbs, so we grew up in the suburbs. My uncle lived in north Philly. Yeah. Again, we would drive in every weekend to visit the grocery store. But no, we grew up in the suburbs. Suburban upbringing, with everything that that implies.

00:39:56
Q: Maybe tell me a little bit more about your experience growing up.

Kim: Yeah, well, I'm sure things are different today. Again, I'm, you know, older. I'm sure if I went back to some of the places where I grew up, there would be Asians there and there would be Koreans there. There were none when I was growing up, you know. I went to an elementary school, Coopertown School in the Haverford School District. There were three classes in each grade. My brother and I were the only Asians in the entire school. It was mostly white, but just off the top of my head, I can name African Americans—Paul Younger, Ricky Adger, Debbie,

Leslie, Peter Goss. I mean, there were—it was mostly white, but there were African American there. There were—no, not really Hispanics.

00:41:11
Kim: But like I said, the entire elementary school, K through sixth, my brother and I were the only two Asians. So it was a very common experience for us—I mean, I can't speak for my brother—I think, though, of being, you know, the weirdos who stuck out. I mean, my brother has told me that he made a point of—he lives in Los Angeles. And it's not because he speaks Korean—he doesn't. It's not because he likes Korean food. He does not like Korean food. He does not eat kimchi. But he wants to be in an environment where he's not the oddball, or he's not the sore thumb, and you know, I imagine that had a lot to do with how we grew up.

00:42:04
Kim: You know, I remember—one of the strongest memories I have from elementary school was, I think it was first grade. It was recess; we were out on the playground doing what kids do. And there was some older white gentleman who was there who saw me, who came right up to me—and you know, I'm a first grader, a little kid—came right up to me like this [leans into camera and wags finger] and he was really shaking. And he was like this [vigorously shakes finger]. And he said, "Surprise attack! A day that will live in infamy." And I was like, "Oh my god."

00:42:48
Kim: I mean, obviously, as a first grader, I was not responsible for Pearl Harbor. I'm not Japanese. Although you might say since Korea was essentially occupied by Japan starting in 1910 or whatever, maybe there were Korean who were on those boats, those ships that attacked Pearl Harbor, who knows. But, you know, he seemed to think that I was responsible or that I was symbolic in some way of, you know. And I'm sure he lived through something that was terrible. War by all accounts is terrible. I'm sure he saw his friends dying and stuff. But, you know, as a first grader out there—and of course, I'm sure nobody else saw it. There were no teachers who intervened. There was no notion of microaggressions, "oh, microaggressions," you know. There was nothing about "adults shouldn't be on the playground harassing the kids." And you know, I never told anyone about it either, because there was a notion that either you are supposed to just get over it, or that was your burden in life.

00:44:19
Kim: My brother, when he was an adult—when we were both adults—told me about how once he was in second grade. And, they were lined up somewhere to go somewhere in school, from the classroom to somewhere. And for some reason, there was a man there in the school smoking a cigar. And the man was careless and brushed up against my brother and burned him on the

hand with his cigar. And my brother never told anyone, because for whatever reason, he didn't feel like he could say, “Hey, teacher! I just got burned by a cigar. This guy. And what the heck?” He never even told my parents. And so, for whatever reason, there was some notion, like, “We're here, we're by ourselves. We're on our own, and you just gotta deal.” You know, hopefully it's different for kids today. And I'm sure it is. But that's how it was back then.

00:45:37
Q: It’s interesting because I've done a lot of interviews with people who are more of my generation, and I think it's interesting that there's actually a lot of similarities with what you're saying, at least for kids who've grown up maybe in this area—but maybe not like the cigar burns. But definitely some resonances, which is interesting. You were saying, I think earlier, there's this feeling of needing to fit in. Did you feel like you and your brother ever fully fit in or got close to fitting in?

Kim: No. I mean, not really.

00:46:20
Kim: You know, there's always those times when if you forget about it—you know, you'll be some place, you’ll kind of forget about it. But then all of a sudden, there'll be that sense of, “Oh my goodness, I'm here, I'm watching this performance. There's this whole audience and I'm the only non-white person here.” You know, and that slight feeling of unease of like, “Hm [turning head back and forth]. I'm the only non-white person here.” And you know, that's always kind of in the back of your mind in some way.

00:47:03
Kim: So, maybe my brother has had a different experience, because, like I said, he chose to live in Los Angeles, just for that reason, so that he wouldn't be the oddball. Oddly enough, part of my grad school years, I lived for four years in Wisconsin, which was very white. And, moving to Boise, it’s like, “Hm,” you know, it's pretty white. I certainly don't think I thought that out. But you know, that's certainly part of the experience.

00:47:50
Q: I guess this is a little bit of a different question, but what were family meals like growing up?

Kim: Yeah. So, you know, it's part of that whole assimilation plan. I don't know how Korean food is perceived by others. I would say on the spectrum between kind of user-friendly and easily accessible to a little more challenging, it's probably on the more challenging end of the spectrum, you know. There are some foods like kimchi that are quite pungent and quite unusual.

00:48:42
Kim: For whatever reason, my parents made the decision that, again, we were going to be raised as Americans. So my mother often cooked two meals, and my brother and I were given either Western food or the Korean food that's palatable. You know, there's a fair amount of meats [in Korean cuisine], like what might be called “teriyaki-style” beef, “teriyaki” obviously being a Japanese word. There's the equivalent phraseology in Korean, yangnyeom, marinated chicken or beef. Soups, mild soups that are not spicy. We were fed all of that food. I did not, and my brother to this day, does not eat kimchi. I did not eat kimchi until I was in my teens. And I decided, you know what, I'm Korean, I should be eating this stuff, even though I really don't like it. And I started eating it anyway. And it's an acquired taste. Now, I love kimchi.

00:49:47
Kim: There were times when she cooked Western food. She cooked a lot of Western food and fed it to the family, although my father almost always had to have kimchi. I mean, we'd be eating spaghetti with Italian meat sauce. My mother made a pretty good, you know, learned how to make a pretty good Italian meat sauce. And my father would have to have kimchi with it, and it's like, “You’re really eating kimchi with spaghetti?” But he would do it.

00:50:24
Kim: But yeah, my brother to this day does not eat—I mean, he'll eat the galbi, the marinated meat ribs. He’ll eat the bulgogi, the marinated beef strips. He eats white rice. He’ll eat things that aren't spicy. He’ll eat things that don't have the fermented bean paste. But he does not eat any of the more pungent stuff. Like I said, I started eating it as a teenager and now I love it. But it was, again, part of that assimilation plan.

00:51:02
Q: Yeah, kind of similarly, were there any holidays or family traditions you had growing up?

Kim: No. We did not celebrate the lunar calendar New Year. We did not celebrate Chuseok or the traditional Thanksgiving. We did not celebrate any of those things.

00:51:28
Q: That's kind of the same assimilationist mindset that you were describing?

Kim: Yes.

00:51:37
Q: And then—oh sorry. Go ahead.

Kim: No, I was gonna say, for whatever reason, my parents were nominally Christian. Again, I don't know how to judge the validity of the story that my mother would tell. My mother claims that her grandmother's grandmother met one of the very early Western missionaries that came to Korea. That missionary befriended her—so my mother's mother's grandmother.

00:52:44
Kim: And of course, traditionally in Korea, a man owns all property. And when a man dies, all property goes to the eldest son. That's what was tradition. But for some reason, when my mother's mother's grandmother died, with the help of the missionary, she was able to keep her assets. And in return, he asked her to build a church, which she did, and to raise her children as Christians, which she did not do, because they were already grown. But she did raise some of the grandchildren, which would be my grandmother, to be Christian. So my grandmother was nominally Christian. My mother's family was nominally Christian. My father's family—I don't know how they became Christian—but they were nominally Christian.

00:53:52
Kim: I say nominally because, let's see, from the time I can remember until we were 10, that meant maybe twice a year, we would go to church. We would get in the car, drive downtown into Philadelphia to the Korean church, which I think was Presbyterian. We would always get there late. The service would already be half over. It would be in Korean. So my brother and I would just sit there, patiently and quietly, not really knowing what was going on. And then we'd drive back home.

00:54:47
Kim: Until my parents decided that we should go to church for some reason, and so starting around when I was about 10 or 11, we started going to church. We went to a Western Methodist—Radnor United Methodist Church, which was, again, we were the only Asians there. It was all white except for us. And we went to church because my parents thought it would be a good thing to do. And I was actually confirmed in the Methodist faith when I was 13 or 14, but pretty much stopped going to church towards the end of high school and do not consider myself to be a Christian.

00:55:34
Q: Yeah, I find it interesting that there already was a Korean church at least somewhat in your area. How big was it? And was there a Korean community that you or your family ever felt a part of?

00:55:51

Kim: Yeah, I mean, this is Philadelphia, so, you know, it's a major American city. And yes, there was a Korean church, and I don't know how long it had been established. It had a pretty good sized congregation. Like I said, when the times that we would go, there'd be 200 people sitting in the congregation, maybe. Maybe more. So there were some Koreans around. But in terms of a Korean community or anything where we lived in the suburbs, no. Again, there was nothing that I knew of. I mean, we would go visit people from time to time, drive 20 minutes, half an hour, to visit the Yoos who lived over yonder. And we'd do that once a year. Or drive for an hour to visit though so and so's once a year.

00:56:49
Kim: My mother did have two lifelong friends that she had in Korea before she left Korea. One of them, Ok Joon Chang, was a friend of hers, who actually came to live with us, evidently, when I was a kid, but it was before I can remember. Actually, no, it was before I was born, excuse me. It would have been before I was born, she came and lived with my parents, while my father was in school. And my mother actually at that time did work as a secretary. She worked in the Necco candy factory in the Boston area for while. She [Ok Joon Chang] came and lived with them for a while, and she ended up living in the suburbs of Boston in Newton. And we would visit her every now and then. And another person whose name—I don't even know her name. She was always referred to as "Leonard's mom," who eventually came to the US and they lived in New Jersey. And we would visit them, like every other year, we would drive to New Jersey and visit them.

00:58:12
Kim: But yeah, there really wasn't a Korean community to speak of. Although I'm sure now, if you went back to the neighborhoods where we lived, there would be a Korean church within a five-mile radius of our house, probably two—now, but not back in the day.

00:58:30
Q: Did you ever notice increasing numbers of Asians or Koreans in your neighborhood or your school over time, or was it always just very white?

Kim: It was always white. But, again, I graduated from high school in 1982, so, you know, a lot's happened since then. I'm sure now it's a totally different story.

00:58:58
Q: Yeah. And then I guess the years of your growing up are I think quite tumultuous years in US history, like the '60s and '70s with civil rights and whatnot. And I'm wondering if that's something that you ever felt you experienced in your childhood.

Kim: No. That's the one thing about being in the suburbs. Nope. I remember as a kid, my parents would turn on the radio in the morning, listen to news radio, KYW 1060 in the Philadelphia area. And the news reports would talk about the body counts from Vietnam and the number of B-52 bombers that had been shot down. But I never saw a protest. I never saw any kind of, you know. Out in the suburbs, life was pretty stable. Any of the racial protests—nothing. I mean, in the suburbs, it was pretty white bread bland, which I guess is why a lot of people lived in the suburbs, they didn't want to be exposed to that kind of stuff. It was Brady Bunch upbringing.

01:00:20
Q: Looking back on your childhood now, especially with certain elements of it being kind of striving for assimilation, do you have any particular reflections of your childhood and upbringing? And maybe if you had your way, would you do it any differently?

Kim: Um, well, you know, I mean I didn't have enough self-awareness of the time to really do anything different. I mean, to be honest, my brother and I were following the path that was laid out and we didn't question it as much as maybe we should have. And my parents did the best that they could. They didn't know any better.

01:01:13
Kim: I remember being just terribly mortified when I was a kid when Halloween would come, because there'd be the Halloween party. And everyone would come into costume, and my mother just didn't get it. Because in the years that I was in elementary school, my mother got me two costumes, which meant there were many years where I would show up, and every other kid would be like, "Weren't you a ghost last year? Come to think of it, weren't you a ghost the year before that?" and, you know, just being terribly mortified.

01:01:54
Kim: But, you know, it was the suburbs. You couldn't ride your bike to the mall. If your mom didn't drive you, you weren't going. There was no Amazon. You couldn't buy one on the internet and have it shipped to your door. I remember at Christmas parties, there would be "the last day of school." And again, every kid would bring a present to the teacher. And my mom just didn't get it, like "Why would I get a present for the teacher? That's their job." You know, and I'd be the one kid who didn't have a present for the teacher and just being terribly embarrassed and mortified. But, you know, they didn't know any better.

01:02:41
Kim: I mean, you know, they're refugees from another country. They didn't know any better. And there was probably no parenting manual. You know, presumably there are Korean communities now, and if there are Koreans, there are Korean parents telling other Korean parents

in Korean, “Oh yeah, maybe it doesn't make any sense. But there's this day when these kids will be coming to your door, ringing the doorbell, asking for candy, and you just got to get candy, and you just gotta get a costume for your kid, and, no, it can't be the same one every year. I don't know why, but that's just the way it is. Or else your kids are going to be mocked and you just gotta do it.” And they're like, “Okay.” Presumably, then that's what goes on today, but it just didn’t happen in my day.

01:03:34
Q: And then with a quick follow up, do you know if your parents immigrated as refugees or they were just considered immigrants when they came?

Kim: No, I’m sure they were just immigrants.

01:03:52
Q: And then, tell me a little bit more about your childhood friends, childhood hobbies, things like that.

Kim: You know, it was always a push-pull, because, my parents being traditional Asian parents, all that mattered to them was that we go to school and get good grades and play the piano. So I had 10 years of piano lessons. That's all that mattered. So I did make friends with some of the other oddball kids at school. Again, none of them were Asian. And I remember my mom saying, “Why is this John guy always calling you? Does he have to be calling you? Don't you need to be studying?” Stuff like that.

01:04:52
Kim: I was in Boy Scouts for one year. And it was fun, because you're around other boys and you were doing stuff. I mean, granted, there was stupid bullying and nonsense that happens when you get boys together for some reason. But my parents made me quit after one year. It's like, “You can't be spending time doing that Boy Scout stuff because it's going to affect your studies and your grades.” And again, if I knew what I knew today, I would have told my parents, “You know what? I'm going to go. And if I ever get a report card where I don't get straight A's, then you can tell me to quit. Boy Scouts. But until that happens, I'm going to go to the Boy Scouts.” But I didn't have the assertiveness, or the awareness to be able to say that. Because that's all they cared about, was get good grades, playing the piano.

01:05:53
Kim: So I had friends and you know, the summertime, we did what we do. And of course, life was different back then because I grew up in a time where in the summer, it’d be like we eat breakfast and we'd be gone all day, as long as we were back for dinner. We’d be on our bikes just

going wherever and our parents didn't know where we were. And it didn't matter because it was fine. And then we'd be back in time for dinner, and always fine. So during the summers, it was more normal.

01:06:30
Kim: Once we started junior high, though, in seventh grade, my parents were pretty, you know, "You need to study." We supposedly weren't allowed to watch TV during the week.
But my mother almost always had the TV on, so if you just kind of lingered around the family room, you could essentially watch TV, even though you weren't supposed to watch TV. But yeah, it was kind of the traditional—of course they didn't have the term "tiger mom" back in the day—but it was that kind of challenge.

01:07:16
Q: And then what was school like for you, probably closer to your high school years? Favorite, least favorite subjects? If there were school activities you did, if you had a job, et cetera?

Kim: Yeah, so I guess my brother and I were fortunate that we were fairly studious and got reasonably good grades. So we buckled down, worked hard, studied hard. Yes, I had a part-time job, working in the library. From the time I started seventh grade until I graduated from high school—in the summers, actually, I take that back. There were a couple of summers where I worked in the library as a full-time, over the summer. So just weekends and evenings off. Come to think of it. And my brother really is kind of the classic Asian math science nerd. That's what he was. I would like to think that I had broader interests. I had interests in literature, foreign languages, and I did well in them.

01:08:37
Kim: But, you know, again, it was that thing. I can't blame my high school because I could have had more self-awareness and assertiveness, but essentially they stereotyped me as being an Asian math science nerd. And I remember, my senior year, for instance, I was actually discouraged from taking literature and anything that was in the humanities. But I'll tell you what, they were falling over themselves to set up an independent study in AP Calculus for me. For me, and one other student. And you know, I went along with it, and I took my AP Calculus test, and I got my five, and they probably felt vindicated like they had done the right thing. Even though it was like, again, I was kind of just like, "Okay, go along with the flow and do what they say." And, you know, now it's my fault.

01:09:45
Kim: Then, so at some point, I remember around junior year of high school, being quite world-weary. You know, it's like, just studying all the time kind of stinks.And I look at my dad

who works so hard, doesn't really seem happy. I remember this particular event stuck out in my mind once when over the summer we went to a seminar thing. One of these professional development things that lasted a week at some university. And he went to this class professional development classes and we went along and did sightseeing and stuff. And we met for lunch one day, and I remember my father, just the way that he ate. It seemed like he was short on time and it was a chore to even chew enough to be able to eat all of his food. And just looking at him and thinking, "Man, that just seems like a terrible existence." So I had kind of thought becoming an engineer was not a good idea. And yet I became an engineer. Go figure. How ironic.

01:11:13
Q: Yeah. Just kind of a slightly different follow up. But how would you describe your relationship to your brother?

Kim: It's okay. It's not great. My parents, they were inconsistent, of course, in the messages that they sent. Because my mother would say, "He's your brother. He's your only family." You know, "You gotta"—I mean, essentially, we were raised to be completely autonomous, independent, and not to rely on anyone. So it was one of those "you're telling me to do this, but the message we're really getting is we need to be independent and not rely on anyone for anything." That's what we did. And so, we keep in touch. But we're not close.

01:12:16
Kim: Okay. One thing that is different about us, I would say that he had probably the same relationship to Christianity as a kid. He did not practice Christianity or go to church at all as an undergrad. But somewhere in graduate school, he went back to the church and he is now pretty devout evangelical Christian, which also is different between himself and myself. Because actually, as an adult, I have tended to be—I have gotten an interest in a totally different direction towards Buddhism actually. And I would consider myself to be a practicing Buddhist and so that is kind of a [coughs]—excuse me—a difference that probably doesn't help in our relationship and our closeness. Because he definitely is of the view—and he's had this talk with me of "I really think you ought to convert to Christianity, because if you don't, here's what's going to happen when you die." And it's like, "Yeah [shrugs]."

01:13:35
Kim: My understanding of Christianity is you're a Christian if you believe in the Christian God and Jesus Christ who died on the cross for your sins. And given that I don't believe those things today—you know, goodness knows I can't predict tomorrow or next year or ten years from now if I live that long—but today I would not say that I'm in alignment with those things. I'm not a Christian. And we have that understanding, but I would imagine we would be closer if I was a practicing Christian and he felt that I was sincere in that. Which I am not, because I am not a

practicing Christian and I've been very honest in communicating. I do not consider myself a Christian and do not believe in the tenets of the Christian faith. So, you know, we're not as close as we could be. Yeah.

01:14:33
Q: And how would you describe your relationship with Buddhism? How did that interest start for you? Yeah.

Kim: Well, oddly enough, I got first introduced to it through some teachers that my wife was going to when we were dating. And my wife—I guess I should add this—is white. Caucasian. She's almost the opposite history from me. Her father's side of the family are two families, the Merrills and the Lovejoys, who came to the United States as pilgrims in 1636. So yeah, ultimately, they were immigrants too. They were not Native Americans. But pretty different. White, old white family from a long time ago. Came over on the *Princess* and the *Arabella*—were the names of the ships—in 1636, 16 years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.[4]

01:15:53
Kim: But oddly enough, she was interested in Buddhism when we were dating and that's how I first got introduced to it. And we're both interested in it. I'll just say a lot of the teachings have the ring of truth, to me, for whatever reason, and whatever that means. And we've both been interested in it. And I would say we're both equally interested in it. And it's not you know one of us who's dragging the other along or anything like that. So yeah.

01:16:27
Q: And then maybe tell me a little bit more about life after high school.

Kim: Yeah, so I went to college. Met a lot of people like me, both Asian and non-Asian. You know, and as it turns out, that was, again, one of the strange things about the suburbs. I grew up outside of Philadelphia, but I met people who grew up in Lincoln, Mass[achusetts], or Newton, Mass, or Huntington Station outside of New York City, or Skokie, Illinois, or Shaker Heights, Cleveland.

01:17:13
Kim: We all dressed the same. We all talked the same. We all watched the same TV shows. We all listened to the same music. The only real difference between us were the sports team that we

[4] In 1630, the *Arabella* (or *Arbella*) ship brought 300 Puritans from England to Massachusetts Bay. From *Mass Moments*, "April 7, 1930: Puritans Leave for Massachusetts," https://www.massmoments.org/moment-details/puritans-leave-for-massachusetts.html.

rooted for and some bits of regional cuisine. The fact that we called elongated sandwiches "hoagies," and other people call them "grinders," and some people called them "subs" and some people called them "heroes" and some people called them "dagwoods." And the thing with ice cream in milk is a "milkshake," versus other people called it a "frappe" or something else. Those were really the only differences.

01:17:57
Kim: And again, my parents, with their mixed message, they always said, "You should be with a nice Korean girl." But of course I didn't speak Korean. And I remember they kept saying, "You should go to the Korean Students Association, the KSA." And I went, much longer than most, every Korean. The initial meeting, right after school starts, it's pretty obvious. There's two groups, the ones that speak Korean and the ones who don't. And again, maybe it's different today because hopefully most Koreans are learning Korean. I didn't speak Korean, and by the third meeting, none of the non-Korean speakers were showing up except me. And I lasted longer than that, but eventually I stopped going too, because it's like if you didn't speak Korean you weren't accepted by them either, which is sad.

01:18:59
Kim: So I didn't really associate much with Asians or Koreans in college, because, again, if you didn't speak the language, you weren't part of the group. And there was not any sense of broader Asian identity like I believe there probably is today. You know, just based on things I read or podcasts I listened to, it seems like there's much more broader Asian identification and solidarity. It did not exist when I was in school from '82 through '86. It did not exist in graduate school. I was in graduate school from '86 through '92. So essentially, it was more of the same, being an Asian person in a white world and just, you know, doing what you gotta do.

01:20:01
Q: Were the people who spoke Korean in the Korean Students Association, were they—I don't know—international students essentially?

Kim: No, they were American. They were raised in the United States, most of them. And it's just their parents taught them Korean. It's funny, we've talked about my grandmother, but she didn't appear in my life until it was too late, really. I was in—I don't know—seventh grade or something like that. My cousins who were raised by her, of course, speak Korean. They had to. She didn't speak any English.

01:20:53
Kim: I don't know. I'm sure there were some Koreans who were peers of mine who were raised by their grandmothers, essentially, because their parents were always working. And they spoke

Korean because of that. Or their parents decided to teach them Korean and they learned Korean. But they were not accepting of those non-Korean-speaking Koreans.

01:21:22
Q: And did you go to school in Pennsylvania?

Kim: I went to school in the Boston area and then graduate school in Michigan, and then graduate school in Wisconsin. So it was not like it was a backwater amongst US college towns. It wasn't like I was in some obscure state. If there was a place where there would have been Asians, they would have been there. And they were there. I mean, there were plenty of Asians in school and college. In the dorm I lived in, there were a healthy number of Asians—Chinese background, Japanese background. Yeah, there were even some Koreans.

01:22:18
Kim: Of course it was not as diverse as it is today, you know, Thai, Philippines—there was some Philippine students. Vietnam was still not a thing back then, because probably diplomatic relationships with Vietnam had not been as normalized to the extent that they are today. There were no Thai people. There were no people from Myanmar. There were people from India and Pakistan, of that ethnicity. But again, there were Asians, but there was much less of any sense of community unless you were really in that core inside group. And there was no pan-Asian sort of identity or association, unfortunately.

01:23:18
Q: And then did you meet your wife while in college?

Kim: No. So I went to college, went to graduate school. Kind of woke up to the fact, while I was ostensibly trying to get my PhD, of some of the things that I discussed earlier—A, I do have interests that are broader than just technology and science and math. And really don't have some great passion for science and math, so what am I doing this for? And oh, by the way, understanding, finally, that unconscious programming, that the reason why I was trying to get a PhD had more to do with what my father had conveyed as a message than what I wanted to do. I would be also not completely honest in saying, again, I graduated undergrad in ‘86. I was mid-grad school in ‘88 when my father died. And quit grad school eventually in ‘92. I'm not sure I would have been able to quit graduate school if my father hadn’t died, which sounds horrible to say, but it's true.

01:24:43
Kim: My brother, who is two years older than me, was in graduate school. Did get his PhD, but he was an undergrad from ‘80 through ‘84 and was in graduate school continuously from 1984

through till 1998. 14 consecutive years of graduate school, after four years of undergrad. Because he couldn't let go of that. He had to get the PhD, or he was going to kill himself trying, because that was so ingrained in him.

01:25:27
Kim: And, yeah, so about that time, it was like, "Okay, this isn't really my thing. I'm going to quit." But having received all these degrees and this training, purely practical that I get a job. '92 was not a good year to come out, to look for a job. I got only two offers. One was working for IBM in Manassas, Virginia, for Defense Department related projects, all of which were related to the strategic missile threat from the Soviet Union. Again, this was '92. The Berlin Wall fell in '89. I had some reservations about doing primarily military work, but it also didn't seem like a good career choice to be working against the Soviet strategic missile threats, given the ongoing demise of the Soviet Union. And like I said, they were all the jobs would have been all software projects related to sonar software, strategic threat detection software, and so on.

01:26:47
Kim: And at the last minute, I got a call from HP in Boise, Idaho. It was like, "Hey, do you want to come to Boise, Idaho and work on hard drive disk firmware?" I came to Boise and said, "Sure, why not." So I came to Boise to take a job at HP working in the old hard disk drive division and worked on hard disk drive firmware. I had reservations coming here and because again, pretty white. And I think like a lot of Asians, at the time, or actually non-white people, pretty much I had it in the back of my mind, if I didn't meet someone or get into a relationship, a serious relationship within like five years, I would probably move away from Boise.

01:27:46
Kim: You know, there was still a lot of ignorance at the time. I mean I can remember being out at the bars and meeting drunk white women, where one would say, "Do you know karate? [Holds up both hands as if to practice karate.]" The other one would be like, "Come on. Did you really say that?" and give her a hard time and stuff, but you know. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt, that somebody born and raised as a white person in Idaho, just from the time that they're young, has a certain picture in their mind, of "this is the person." And some people, as they grow up and mature, that picture expands or the possibilities of what that could be expands. But I mean, just the bottom line is, I think, again, when I came to Boise—I came and moved to Boise in 1992. I moved to Boise July 6, 1992, one week before the connector opened, if you can imagine that. The downtown connector did not exist when I moved here. And, you know, in that day, just most of the women who were born and raised here, their picture of the guy they wanted to date or marry just did not look like me.

01:29:20

Kim: Now, my wife I met and she had a different view on the world. She grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and Detroit. We met in a coffee shop, more or less. Towards the December of '93 we started dating. We were friends for a while, started dating around Thanksgiving of '94. We were married by September of '96. So yeah. We settled here, have one daughter and have mostly lived here since. Mostly.

01:30:10
Kim: For two years—since you know even though I'm Korean I was basically raised as an American. I did [unclear] have it [in the back of my mind], and, like I said, there was a point in time when I was a teenager when I started eating Korean food. And when I was in graduate school, I actually took Korean 101. And have tried at various times to try to learn Korean. And I had it in the back of my mind, every time I visited Korea, I've been a tourist. I have been an American tourist. And that if I had the chance to have the experience of what it was like to live and work as a Korean in Korea, that I would try to do that.

01:31:01
Kim: So in 2006, I got an offer to go to Korea and work for Samsung in Korea. And I and my family moved to Korea. My daughter went to fourth and fifth grades in Korea, and my wife and daughter were both willing to do it. So we moved to Korea, lived in Korea for two years, and I worked as a Samsung salaryman.

01:31:37
Q: And what brought you back to Boise?

Kim: Well, I went there to get the experience of what it's like to live and work as a Korean. And guess what, it stinks. For 99 percent of the people, it stinks. I mean, I would get up in the morning in our apartment, which was paid for by Samsung; leave the apartment before my wife and daughter were awake; get on the Samsung company bus; take me to Samsung; eat breakfast at Samsung; work; eat lunch at Samsung; work; eat dinner at Samsung; work or go to Korean class—there were Korean classes in the evening; and then take the company bus home.

01:32:28
Kim: Now the first company bus left around six and my wife said, "You need to try to come home and eat dinner with the family once a week," and I mostly did that Tuesday nights. But most nights I was probably on the 9:30 bus. And most nights when I got home, my wife and daughter were already in bed asleep. So, you know, essentially, I would not see them, except for dinner Tuesday evening. The rest of the week, I did not see them. And, then there were nights—the last bus left at 11:45 and I was on that bus a bunch of times. Left Samsung 11:45pm and I was on that bus a number of times.

01:33:26
Kim: And that doesn't count the times, there were what are called "hoesiks," when you're supposed to go have dinner with your colleagues and go drinking and stuff. In which case, you go, eat—I don't drink. I interpret the Buddhist precepts to mean you don't drink, so I don't drink. But, you know, you'd go to dinner, they'd be drinking. Then there'd be phase two. You would go to what's called the "hof," which is a beer hall, or to the "noraebang," which is karaoke, or to the "pool hall"—and drink more. And then there might be phase three, where if you went to the karaoke bar, then you go to the hof. If you went to the hof, then—there might even be phase four, although often phase four was eating ramens at one a.m. because everybody else is hungover, and then you take a taxi home now. So I went, I had the experience, and it was like, "No, thank you." So we came back.

01:34:39
Kim: That and—I say this and I've talked to my daughter about this many times, and I don't know exactly what her perspective is—but she went to what was nominally an international school in Korea. And when we went on the trip to visit, it was an international school. It was a fairly small school, mostly expat kids. Seemed like a nice little school.

01:35:12
Kim: Now, between the time we went on our visit and when school actually started, the school was sold to a hagwon conglomerate. Hagwons are supplemental schools, that if you have any money in Korea, your kids are not only going to school, they're going to supplemental school both before school and after school, where they learn English. They learn other things. They learn all this stuff that they learn in school, plus, they learn other stuff like musical instruments and all kinds of stuff. I mean, I always aghast when one of my subordinates, my main submanager below me—I was a manager—said that her son was going to first grade, and he was in hagwon to learn English. He was also there for something called Ka-boo-li, which is this spatial reasoning with blocks and you make figures and stuff. He was also doing something called Questionnaire. He was also taking Tae Kwon Do and he was taking piano. And it's like, he's in first grade, really? [Throws hands up.] But yeah, they're doing that.

01:36:25
Kim: And so it was sold to this hagwon company, which marketed the school to Koreans as "this is where you send your kid if you want them to go to college in the US or Canada." And so by the time she went there, it was 90 percent Korean-speaking Koreans. And she was not accepted because she was half-Korean and half-white, but she didn't speak Korean. And she didn't go to hagwon—we were like, "Why would we send our kid to supplemental school?" But in retrospect, it might have been a mistake, because there was a whole social scene around it. And

it's like she was an oddball because she didn't show up at the supplemental classes after school where everybody else was, so she was kind of a weirdo. And, at the end of fourth grade, one kid gave a party, invited every kid—there were three classes or there were four classes of fourth graders—invited every kid, except for like three, and my daughter was one of those. And you know, that just killed me. The same thing happened in fifth grade. It was like, "We are not going to have our daughter go to junior high in this kind of environment." That was the other reason we came back.

01:37:43
Kim: Because, quite honestly, my white wife—who at first was like, "Oh my gosh. I'm here in a country where I don't speak the language, and my daughters in school, and my husband's working all the time, and I'm here in my apartment alone, and I don't know what to do"—she actually made quite a rich life for herself. And she met some Buddhist nuns and visited Buddhist nunneries. And she went back to school. She went to Sookmyung University, and got a TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] certificate and got hired teaching English to Korean housewives. And she actually wanted to stay in Korea, actually. But anyway, we came back.

01:38:34
Q: And then, you've obviously touched on a little bit of your daughter's experiences being mixed-race and I'm interested if you want to elaborate more on that, as well as for yourself being in an interracial relationship and what that's been like for you.

Kim: Yeah, so I mean, the relationship with my wife has been fine. Her family has been terrific. There's never been any issues with that, nor have I encountered any overt racism for the fact that my wife is white and I'm non-white. I joke about it sometimes, when we're traveling in the boonies, whether there's going to be people who give us a hard time. But I've honestly never experienced that.

01:39:25
Kim: Now you know my daughter has said several times, from the time that she was a young kid, "I'm not white. I don't seem to be accepted in this world. I'm not Korean enough to be a Korean and accepted in that world. So where do I fit in life?" And, you know, that's a tough road and quite honestly, I really feel for her. We don't have any answers beyond trying to be good parents.

01:40:01
Kim: I would say that things are much better, I think, for kids now than they were when I was a kid. She went to a school, and there were other Asian kids, which is, that's a positive. As a matter of fact, there were two half-Asian kids in one of the schools. When we came back, she went to

school and for, let's see, that would have been for three years, she was in school and for some portion of all those years, there were one or two half-Asian kids and there were two other Asian kids, who were actually twin adoptees. And so, I don't know, I would like to think that her experience has been less difficult than mine.

01:41:03
Kim: But, certainly I hear say things like that. I remember she first said that, probably, it would have been when she finished fourth grade. So how old are you when you finish fourth grade? 11? Something like that. And making statements like that is like, wow, that's a tough statement to make. And, and she's an only child too, which means she didn't have the support of a sibling who maybe had, you know, a more—what's the word I'm looking for? I don't know if they would have had similar experiences, given how different my brother and I's experience was in some ways. But, you know, someone with whom she could share the experience.

01:41:59
Kim: I know she has talked to some of her friends. Like I said, one of her best friends that she has known since she was a kid—but that she's been pretty good friends with since sixth grade and they're still good friends, even though they went through high school, went to college—who's half Asian, half-Japanese, half-white, they're still good friends. I'm sure they probably have talked about it. I would hope. So I can only hope that her experience was better than mine.

01:42:42
Q: And in your time in Idaho, have you encountered stereotypes or discrimination or microaggressions before?

Kim: Oh yeah, I mean I mentioned meeting drunk ladies who are like, "Hey, you know karate." Or, meeting guys in bars—now granted, this is in bars. This is before I quit drinking. And so maybe they were inebriated and stuff. But they'd do the "hoo-hoo-hoo," "oi" [swinging fists in circular motions], pretend they were Bruce Lee or something because there's that very strong "aaiii" [makes a stereotypical kung fu pose], you know, kung fu kind of stereotype. Granted, they seemed to think that it was a good thing and that they thought Bruce Lee was cool. But, you know. And yeah, kids who are like, "Oh, ho, he-yo, he-yo," you know, talk in some kind of sing-songy voice and somehow think that that's funny. So that happens a lot.

01:43:47
Kim: I remember, you know, just when my daughter started kindergarten, there was an orientation for the new parents with the principal. And people were probably looking at me like, "What's wrong with this guy?" Because I asked, "Is bullying tolerated in your school?" And she said, "No, of course not. We don't do that." You know, and there were other questions. And I

asked again, “Well, okay, now what constitutes bullying? If somebody were teased for being different, is that tolerated in your school?” And she said, “Of course not.” And then I raised my hand again. It’s like, “So if another kid says, ‘[imitating sounds of an overexaggerated, stereotypical Asian accent],’ is that tolerated in your school?” And she was like, “No, that would not be tolerated in our school. Of course not.” But, it's like I had to ask, because that was my experience and I can't say that it was a positive thing.

01:44:52
Kim: But at the same time. I mean, of course, people just don't know what they don't know. I had an experience within the last year with two good friends of mine who are both white and who are both open-minded, compassionate, not-racist people. We went out for lunch. We went to a Thai place. We went to a Thai place that they go to a lot. They often order off the lunch menu. They usually get spicy chicken in the Thai restaurant. And there's a choice. You can get the steamed rice. You can get the fried rice. And we're sitting there and we're looking at the menus, and the [waiter says, “What are you going to get, the usual?” “Yeah, spicy chicken.” “Yeah, spicy chicken, ‘flied lice’ or white ‘lice’?” [Yul imitates the person’s accent, replacing the r’s with l sounds.] And as soon as the one [friend] said “flied lice,” the other [white] guy said, “Yeah, flied lice.”

01:45:58
Kim: And as soon as he said it, I could see his expression on his face. And then he said, “Oh yeah, but that's not funny anymore.” But they were embarrassed and they couldn't—I could see the expression on his face, where this has been a joke that they told each other, and it was funny to them. And they were just now realizing, because I was Asian, it's like, “Oh, that's probably offensive. We shouldn't say ‘flied lice.’” And they were like, “Oh, oh, but that's not funny anymore.” You know, like, “Oh.” And they didn't apologize for it and they didn't have to, because I love these guys. They're my buddies. But it's just like, it didn't dawn on them before, like, “Oh, ‘flied lice’,” is offensive to Asian people, because it makes fun of [unclear], et cetera, cetera. You know, and that is a microaggression. But it's like people don't know what they don't know. So I do try to give people some benefit of the doubt.

01:47:07
Kim: Just things like I remember when we were in Korea, my wife met this one couple—Korean like me who was raised in the West, didn’t speak Korean, who had married a white woman. And we were friends, and his name was Richard. And at one point, they were talking, and Richard asked my wife, it’s like, “Oh yeah, your husband Yul. But what's his English name? What's his Western name?” And my wife said, “Oh, well he just goes by Yul. He doesn't have a Western name.” And Richard was just like, “Oh my god. You didn’t have a Western name?” Because he

just knew it must have been so difficult to have a "weird name" like Yul. It's like, how could that be?

01:48:13
Kim: And honestly when I first went to kindergarten, there was a period of time where I wished my name was Bob, because then I wouldn't have to explain and I wouldn't be different and I wouldn't be made, you know, whatever. And to this day, if I meet new people, or whatever, it's like when the end of the year comes and it's the holidays, someone, there's always like a, "Oh hey, Yul, how's it going? Yuletide! Yule log! Yul!" And I give them the "oh yeah. That's real funny. That's real creative. That's the first time I've heard that joke. Would you believe that?" And it's just like, I got to hear the same stupid jokes. Every effing year is like, "Oh yeah, here they come again." So like, [shrugs].

01:49:14
Kim: But what are you going to do? So yes, microaggressions still happen and that's part of the experience, I think, if you're this kind of person. And of course, today, everyone has an English name, right? My cousins, one's named Anne, Woochung [her Korean name]. One's named Jennifer. One's named Sarah. It's like, yeah. My brother's name is Ted. Why? Because his name is Tae Hoon. My name is Yul Hoon. And of course, my mother would say, "No one would get it. They'd be like 'Typhoon'? 'Tephoon'? 'Typhoon'? What's his name?" And "Ted" was reasonably adjacent, so they just started calling him Ted, and his legal name is actually Ted. Ted Kim. But I was Yul Kim, so it's like, what are you going to do?

01:50:25
Q: Yeah, and thanks so much for sharing. I'm looking at the clock and I think I have about 20 minutes of questions left. But I want to be respectful of your time. So I'm just wanting to check, would going 10 minutes over be okay?

Kim: You can go as long as you need to. I'm fine.

01:50:45
Q: I will try not to go too long. I think your life is also a little bit longer than most people's I interview so—

Kim: —yeah, I probably talked too much.

Q: No, no, there's just more to cover.

Kim: So, the long and short of it is, between my mother and my father, I probably have taken more after my mother. There you go. My brother is probably more like my father in that way, doesn't talk as much, not as much of a storyteller.

01:51:16
Q: I appreciate the storytelling. But next question is how would you describe the ethnicity of your friends? And this can be an answer that changes over time.

Kim: Yeah, so I don't know. Like I said, in college, the population was pretty diverse. I had Asian friends, I had African American friends, I had Hispanic friends. One of my better friends was some guy who's heritage was Mexican and you know. So it was pretty diverse in college, because that's what the environment was.

01:52:00
Kim: In Idaho, it's not that not so much because it's just not that way. Most of the Asians I know are through work, like I know your mother through work. But since we don't go to Korean church—actually, we did try to go to Korean church in Boise for—not Korean church, I shouldn't say that—Korean school. When my daughter was quite young, for like a month and a half, my wife and daughter tried to go to Korean school. So we don't know many Koreans actually in Boise. And so, our group of friends is mostly white, because that's what's here.

01:52:51
Q: And then I think it's also interesting—

Kim: —and oh, so in terms of Asians or non-white people, most of the ones we know are either through work or through, again, the parents of my daughter's friends, because by the time she went to school, it was more diverse.

01:53:14
Q: And I'm interested in the early years that you got to Boise. What was it, like '92, '93? Were there other Asians around? And maybe have you seen it change over time?

Kim: It's definitely changed over time. I mean, Boise, you know, has changed so much. I mean, it's definitely more diverse. More Asians, more of all kinds of people. I mean, goodness gracious. There's a guy at work who's from Burkina Faso, for crying out loud. You know, it's like somebody from Burkina Faso, who was a student at Boise State and was studying computer science. It's like, wow, that's great that there's a person like that at HP and in Boise.

01:54:07

Kim: But yeah, in the early days, no, it was, again, very white. I mean, even at work there weren't as many Asians, as there are now. There were some of us who have been here for a long time, but it's definitely changed, just like Boise has changed. I mean, the changes in Boise are hard to believe. I mean, when I first moved to Boise, there were really only like two good restaurants in all of Boise—Amore and B.B. Strands. Amore was the only restaurant in Boise where you could go and you could feel like you weren't in Boise. It's changed. You know, and there was one Asian restaurant, the Vietnamese restaurant. The Vietnamese restaurant that used to be on Curtis and Franklin. "The Vietnamese restaurant."

01:55:16
Kim: Now there's Korean restaurants. There's—I don't know how many Thai restaurants there are. It was a big deal when there was a Thai restaurant. Now, there's so many Thai restaurants I couldn't even tell you how many Thai restaurants there are, or pho restaurants, or Vietnamese restaurants. There was only Yen Ching, the only Chinese restaurant, basically. There were others like whatever that was over by the Red Lion Downtowner, which is not the Red Lion Downtowner anymore. And the one over, that finally closed, that was over on Orchard. So there were actually like three. But you know. It's like things have changed in a big way.

01:56:01
Kim: So it's different. But yeah, back in the day, it was very white. It was very white. And like I said, honestly, I had it in the back of my mind that it would be tough for an Asian and that if I didn't find some kind of relationship, whether it was an Asian person, non-white person, any person, within probably five years, I would probably leave Boise and move somewhere else.

01:56:38
Q: And this is a bit of a different question. But how would you characterize the role of gender and/or sexuality in your life?

Kim: Gosh. That's a tricky question, because I'm a heterosexual male. But part and parcel of the whole thing I referred to earlier about how my impression that back in the day, the majority of the white population in Idaho had some picture in their mind of who it is they were interested in, that it was doubly freighted. It was doubly freighted both for the man and for the woman. The stereotype that women of Asian descent have had to deal with, the whole "oh, you're so exotic, but you're quiet and submissive and you're just gonna look good and not," you know, whatever. And the whole thing from the male side about how un-masculine, non-attractive, effeminate, not-masculine sort of stereotype that goes with being an Asian man.

01:58:15

Kim: That's why I was referring to the whole Bruce Lee thing that was so ambivalent. As a person of my age, you're so ambivalent about it, because it's such a stereotype and it's so strongly influenced Western culture with all the microaggressions and all that. But at the same time, he was the first Asian male who was actually seen as being cool, tough, masculine, and attractive in some way. And so, definitely that was a huge part and parcel of everything I described about having this sense that many of the white people from Idaho for my age group didn't have as broad of view of what was attractive, and that generally they probably looked at Asian men as being not masculine, not attractive, and so on. And why there was that built-in notion of there was a limited sort of shelf life in living in Boise, and if things didn't work out that I needed to probably go somewhere else. Because that would be difficult.

01:59:44
Kim: I mean, okay, here's something. Again, this was back in the day, before there were dating apps, before there was really online gaming. Back when there were things called newspapers and people used to put personal ads in newspapers, I put the very first personal ad in the *Boise Weekly*. The *Boise Weekly* did not have personal ads. They said, "Okay, we're going to start putting personal ads in the *Boise Weekly*." This would have been about '94 or something, and I sent one in saying, "I'm a Asian male with eclectic interests and blah, blah, blah." Mine was the very first personal ad published in the *Boise Weekly*.

02:00:34
Kim: And you might have thought, again, that if there was a demographic that would have been open to dating an Asian male, that would have been the demographic. Things have changed since, because now the *Boise Weekly*—now the *Scene* magazine is distributed for free. The *Scene* magazine didn't exist when I moved to Boise. The *Boise Weekly* was considered kind of liberal, edgy, progressive when I first moved to Boise. I got one. One. One response.

02:01:20
Kim: So, you know, that was definitely part of the experience and part of the way things were for Asian men at the time. And, again, hopefully it's changed for both Asians, as well as for how exposed the dominant—the broader culture, I won't say so much the dominant culture—the white culture, the broader culture, how exposed they are to images of Asians. Because certainly there's movies, there's TV shows, there are things today that exist that certainly expose the broader cross-section of society to pictures of Asians in roles where there are relationships and romance and interracial marriages and relationships and things, but that just did not exist as an image that people would have been exposed to when I was young, when I was a young adult, or when I was even in my 30s. Right. I mean, what was the first TV show that depicted Asians? I wouldn't even know. Margaret Cho had a show briefly that did not last very long. Now, it would have been probably like in the early '90s or late '80s, her show. I mean, I don't know.

02:03:11
Q: I guess how—there's a lot of different labels you can always give yourself—but do you see yourself as an Asian American, Korean American, Korean, just American? Are any of those terms ones that you feel more comfortable with?

Kim: Yeah, I mean I would definitely call myself an Asian American and I would also call myself a Korean American. I would not call myself a Korean, although, you know, when people ask—and, you know, this is another one of those typical microaggressions, right—"Oh, where are you from?" "Well, I was born in Boston." "No, where are you from?" "I grew up in the United States." "No, where are you from." "Oh, my parents are from Korea"—"Oh, okay." Right? But I would say it that way, right. My parents are from Korea, and I would say I am a Korean American.

02:04:13
Kim: I would have never said that when I was a kid. I would have never said that as a young adult. It's only probably within the last X number years—I wouldn't even know. I would have to think about it—maybe the last 20 years that I was an Asian American and that I was a Korean American. Because of course, again, we were on the assimilation plan as a kid. No, you didn't call yourself that and it didn't exist as the term. As a matter of fact, "Asian" didn't exist as a term. Of course we were referred to as "oriental."

02:04:55
Q: So would you say before calling yourself Asian American, you might have identified as just American?

Kim: Yes, absolutely. Because that was the goal. That was the goal, and it was better to fit in. So yes, I would have definitely referred to myself as an American. And again, the whole thing about "what's your nationality?" "Well, I'm American." "No, I mean, what's your nationality?" You know. And I gotta say, in the old days, "Are you Chinese?" "No." "Oh, so you're Japanese." "No." "Oh, wait a minute, then you must be Chinese." You know, that whole thing, which I imagine probably still happens today, but I would imagine is much less rare than it was when I was growing up.

02:05:56
Q: And then, are there any traditions or beliefs that you wanted specifically to pass down to your daughter?

Kim: Sure. I mean, we do eat Korean food. I mean, fortunately, my wife likes Korean food. So we actually eat [Korean] food from time to time. They love going to Korean restaurants, Asian restaurants. They love everything, which is great. Obviously we lived in Korea. We had a lot of Korean food. They like Korean food, which is great.

02:06:28
Kim: We actually did some of the things in Korea, because we were in Korea, like lunar calendar New Year. We don't do that anymore. But we did it when we were there. My daughter knows how to play Yut, one of the traditional games you play. I didn't know how to do that when I was a kid. We've played Korean cards. And if I say, "Oh, Chuseok's coming up," she knows what that is, and she's like, "Oh yeah, that's cool."

02:07:01
Kim: If I say lunar calendar New Year's coming up, she'll say, "Yeah, but I'm not eating tteok. I don't like tteok. No tteok." Because you're supposed to eat tteok on lunar calendar New Year. My wife hates tteok. That's like the one Korean food she hates. Tteok. It's rice cakes. You know, those very chewy rice cakes that are boiled in a soup and kind of turns very much into this—in the worst case—gelatinous sort of mess. I actually kind of like it, but the family, not so much. That's probably like the one Korean food they don't like. That and silkworms, beondegi.

02:07:56
Q: Yeah, and then I want to talk a little bit about current issues. But COVID aside, how is the world today different from what it was like when you were growing up?

Kim: Well, I mean the whole Black Lives Matter thing is, you know, definitely a big deal. And we certainly support it. And of course I cannot claim to understand the challenges of being an African American, because having said that, yes, I have faced discrimination or microaggressions and stuff, I have never been arrested. I have never been pulled over for driving Asian. I have never been shot at for jogging through a white neighborhood or wearing a hoodie and eating Skittles in the wrong neighborhood. I have never been shot. So, my goodness, you know, that's just like a whole nother level of difficulty that just goes so far beyond what I can even imagine. So it's huge that these things are even being discussed. You know, like I said, I went to school, elementary school, with African American kids. I was friends with African American kids. I went to Paul Younger's house and played with him.

02:09:44
Kim: But it's of course a sea change in terms of what's going on. I can only imagine what it was like for just the differences in growing up for my daughter, the fact that she grew up in a post

9/11 world, because I remember 9/11 and all this stuff that happened there. And I can't imagine how differently the world looks for someone in that post-kind of 9/11 world.

02:10:30
Q: And then I think I also wanted to ask questions related to Black Lives Matter, which you've also touched on. I'm wondering, have the recent movements caused any kinds of reflection or conversation or action in you and your family? And it's quite interesting, I think, in particular, given certain—I guess—histories of tension between Korean Americans and Black Americans. [Unclear.]

Kim: Yeah, of course. I mean, I guess I'd say two things. Our family has just talked about it, but separate from that, I've also talked to white friends I have about it. I don't know if that's my place or if being an ally means doing that or not doing that, but I have done that. I've even done it in what might be interpreted as somewhat aggressive way, because I participate in this group, this discussion group. They're friends of mine. They're all good people. Again, they don't know what they don't know. And one of the discussion topics recently—would have been about a month ago—was about climate change and about the challenges of talking to your kids about climate change. Because it's like oh, do we want to scare them? Are we giving them this crappy world and kicking the can down the road? And are they going to get it, or is this, you know?

02:12:28
Kim: And I got angry. Because I said, "Every interview I have heard from a prominent African American in the last three months or so, they have said, without a doubt, that their parents sat them down and told them, 'There will be a day when the cops will pull you over for no good reason. And you need to act like this, because if you don't, you could get beat up or shot.' And their aunties sat them down and said that. And their friends sat them down and said that." And it's like, it seems so tone deaf to me that these people were talking, "Oh, can we have this discussion with our kids about some existential threat that 30 years from now our planet might turn into Venus," when there's a whole portion of the population that every time they walk out the door, they might not come back because it's some fill in the blank. Some police officer or vigilante gang or white racist. And you're debating about—it's like how tone deaf is that? And so, I would throw that out there. That's been part of my experience.

02:14:07
Kim: But yes, you're absolutely right. The other part is, I mean, absolutely, I'm part of that story. You know, my family, my uncle owned the Korean grocery store in the predominantly African American neighborhood. And my parents—I cannot speak for my father, because again, he was pretty closed-mouth—but my mother was a racist, straight up. I remember it's like, "Why do they [Yul's aunt and uncle] have to work so hard? Can't they hire somebody?" And my mother

literally said, “Well, who would they hire? You know all Black people steal.” And I said, “Mom! Seriously, you cannot believe that. Do you really believe that?” And my mother actually took a moment to reflect, and said, “Yeah, you're right. That's not true. That's probably only 75 percent of Black people stealing.” And it was like, [slaps forehead]. So, you know, I mean, I gotta own it, that, again, I gotta give people the benefit of the doubt, because my parents were racist, or at least my mom. Again, I can't speak for my dad. My parents, my mom was definitely racist.

02:15:39

Kim: And so, it's an imperative. I certainly hope that there's progress through all this, that this doesn't turn into just another Sandy Hook, like, “Oh my god, gun violence is so bad,” and then a year later, it's forgotten.[5] Gosh, I really hope that some meaningful change comes out of it, but I do worry about that. I worry about that. And, again, I personally have benefited from adjacency to white privilege, because “I'm the person of color, but I'm like the least colored person of color.” So somehow that's not as bad as the other.

02:16:29

Kim: And as much as it means white people having to perhaps give up some of their white privilege, there's again a halo effect that it means I have to give up some of my privilege too, because I've benefited in that same kind of way from the adjacency to that whole thing is being the—like back in the day when there was that advertising campaign of pork.[6] “The other white meat,” which is a total lie, but it was meant to somehow make pork more palatable. And it's like, “Oh yeah, we're like the not-so-bad, not-that-colored color,” which is awful, but it's true.

02:17:15

Kim: I mean, it's a reckoning that I'll say “we” as Americans need to go through and certainly there will be impacts to everyone's life. And I would like to say that I support it totally, but I understand that there is going to be even negative impact to my life and that's necessary, I think.

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[5] On December 14, 2012, a gunman killed 26 elementary school students and educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Although many people anticipated major gun control legislation on a national level in the aftermath, no major legislation passed. Instead, gun control legislation “basically moved in two opposite directions at the state level. Places that had relatively weak gun-control regimes made them weaker, and places that had relatively strong gun-control regimes made them stronger.” From Olivia B. Waxman, “'It's Almost About Anything But the Guns': Sandy Hook and the Original Meaning of the Second Amendment,” *Time*, December 14, 2017, https://time.com/5061579/sandy-hook-newtown-history/; Sarah Walker Caron, “My son survived Sandy Hook. I want to tell him it won’t happen again, but I can’t,” *The Washington Post*, November 7, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/11/07/my-son-survived-sandy-hook-i-want-to-tell-him-it-wont-happen-again-but-i-cant/.

[6] In 1987, the National Pork Producers Council began the marketing campaign “Pork. The other white meat.” From Mary Elizabeth Williams, “Fake news and the ‘other white meat’: How pork became poultry, and why it matters,” *Salon*, September 1, 2018, https://www.salon.com/2018/09/01/fake-news-and-the-other-white-meat-how-pork-became-poultry-and-why-it-matters/.

02:17:44
Q: Yeah. Thanks again so much for sharing. I found that to be very—I don't know—eloquent and well put and reflective. On a different kind of current events question, how would you say COVID has impacted you or your family?

Kim: Well, again, we're trying to do the right things like everybody else. I have not had any overt sort of consequences from some of the overtones of the "Asian flu" or "kung flu" or the "Chinese flu" or whatever. So I don't think we've been materially impacted any more than just the broader population who is choosing to make lifestyle changes in order to try to suppress the virus.

02:18:47
Kim: You hear about those things [incidents of COVID-related violence against Asians]. And I don't think I've been subject to anything like that that I've noticed. Now maybe somebody's glared at me at the store and I haven't noticed, but I haven't noticed anything. And of course, we're not going out. So the opportunity to be subjected to any kind of thing like that is pretty limited. And I guess we've been fortunate in that sense. But I imagine it's worse in other areas. And I imagine there is a certain racial overtone that some portion of the median society has kind of indulged in.

02:19:43
Q: Yeah. And then I think I'm going to try and keep everything within, so it doesn't go past 5:30, but I think we're winding down to the last couple questions as well. What accomplishments are you the most proud of?

Kim: Oh my goodness. What accomplishments am I the most proud of? Well, you know. My wife and I are both proud of our daughter. Raising a kid who seems like a fairly well-adjusted kid in spite of the challenges that she may have. Parenting is difficult. I'll leave you to consider for yourself how you view your parents and what that all means.

02:20:46
Kim: You know, I would like to think—and actually, I know this to be true—that I am respected at work amongst my peers, even if I don't think I'm highly valued, just because corporate culture today is devaluing in general and everyone is just another cog or number in the system. And that's just the reality of it. I don't think that's unique to me or my experience. But I know my peers respect me and I'm valued by them. In particular, I don't know if I can phrase it as an accomplishment, but I know that the people I work with, many of them come to me when they are struggling at work with stuff. And they may not consciously rely on me, but they come to me

when they have problems. And oftentimes I can listen to them, and then we can talk, and I can help reframe what they're looking at to say, "You know, okay. Remember, here's the big picture, and we're here. And you're doing this because of that, and this should turn into that and, you know, hopefully, blah, blah, blah." And they go away and they feel better. And you know I know that's the value that I bring to the place where I work. It's part of the fulfillment that I get out of work.

02:22:42
Kim: And I know I do a bunch of things around the community to help and to volunteer and to be in service. Those are things that I find fulfilling and that I see as accomplishments. And even for the broader community. I mean, maybe I'm too much of an idealist, but you know the cliches about "until everyone's free, no one's free" is something I believe in.

02:23:23
Kim: I was very active—before I had a kid, and then, you know, it's like your whole life becomes childrearing and so on, you know—I was very active in advocacy for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender community. And I was the first straight board member of the main advocacy organization in Boise.[7] '94, '95, '96, I was the treasurer. I was one of the main organizers of the Boise Gay Pride event in '94, '95, and ninety-some of those years.[8]

2:24:03
Kim: I campaigned hard for No on One. I don't know, it was probably was before your time, but there was a "Proposition One" that was on the ballot in 1994, which would have classified "special rights," you know, non-discrimination for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people as being special rights.[9] And it was on the ballot. We had to campaign hard against it. It only went down to defeat in Idaho by 10,000 votes. And, honestly, if I had not done—if we all had not done—our parts, it might have passed. And you know, I'm not gay, I'm not bi, I'm not trans, I'm not. But I believe in that stuff, that if we're not all free, then nobody's free. And if I talk about accomplishments or things that fulfill me, it's things like that, because, again, I try to give people the benefit of the doubt. But I do believe that we also got to work to make this world a better place. And I'd like to think that I've done my part and continue to.

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[7] The organization is called YFFN (Your Family, Friends, and Neighbors). The name is meant to remind the public that people with different sexual orientations and preferences are prevalent, whether people consciously were aware of it or not.
[8] The first Gay Pride rally and march in Boise was held in 1990. From Ellwood Howard, "Idaho LGBT Since Stonewall: Out in America's Conservative Mecca, 1969-2010," *OutHistory*, http://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/idaho-lgbt-since-stonewall/timeline.
[9] For more on No on One, see: Boise State University Special Collections and Archives, *No on One Coalition Records*, https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv92871.

02:25:42
Q: Yeah, that was all very, very cool to hear about.

Kim: Surprising, maybe, but yeah.

02:25:49
Q: Yeah, I didn't know that we had pride parades in the '90s, so that's very interesting to hear.

Kim: We did. And in '94 there were probably 1000 people that turned out, but there were probably 1000 anti-protesters who turned out at the Capitol steps with their signs and everything. I won't tell you what some of the signs said. They were nasty. And dogs. And yelling. It was intense.

02:26:29
Kim: And as part of the gay pride event, we would bring in outside speakers. We brought in a woman lesbian comedian from San Francisco, who came and did a comedy act and was part of the all-whatever, you know. Because it's supposed to be a celebration, not just—this was again in '94 when the anti-gay amendment was on the ballot and she said to us, afterwards, she was like, "Yeah, it's easy to march in the gay pride parade in San Francisco, because you got 100,000 of your people and you're out there." And she was like, "The thing you guys are doing here in Idaho, where there's 1000 people, and then there's 1000 people lining the streets yelling at you and telling you you're going to go to hell and with signs and dogs and stuff." And she was like, "Man, you guys are on the front lines, because this is where it's at."

02:27:37
Q: Wow. Yeah. Very, very cool. The last question is what are your dreams and visions for your future?

Kim: What are my dreams and visions of the future? I have three. I hope someday that I will live long enough to see grandkids. Okay, so there's one thing. And I apologize if your mom and your dad are hassling you, even at your early age, about getting married and having kids or even not getting married and have kids. I don't care if my daughter gets married or who she marries, as long as she has grandkids. So that's one thing.

02:28:20
Kim: But, honestly, having worked as an engineer since '92, the two other dreams I have in life are about doing creative things in life, one of which is to do more Buddhist meditation and to do some Buddhist meditation retreats—long retreats, like couple-month retreats, or a year retreat.

Now that my daughter's out of college—and we're not in a financial position to retire—but we're close enough that maybe we can even talk about things like that.

02:29:08
Kim: And the other thing is to work on some of the more creative pursuits that I have interests in outside of work. Those are the things that I have as future aspirations, if I live that long. I say if I live that long, because my dad—I'm 56—my dad died when he was 58. And actually, my brother is only the second man on my father's side of the family to ever reach the age of 60. He's two years older than me, so he might get there in two years, because he's in pretty good health. There is one relative, my cousin, who reached the age of 60 but he barely got there. Every other man in my father's side of the family has died before the age of 60, my father included. So we'll see. It's the kind of thing that makes you think about other things besides work.

02:30:22
Q: Yeah. I guess just the final thing is, obviously, probably can't cover all of your life. But is there anything you felt like we missed that you think is important and you want to be included? As well as if you have any final words that you want to end the interview with.

Kim: Oh gosh. Not really. You've been very thorough in your questioning.

02:30:57
Q: Okay, I will stop the recording.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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