

Chusunn and Chu Yunn Song (Side A)-converted - 2 files

JESSICA: (inaudible) change it. We've got --

SANDRA: Totally different names.

Q: Oh, you are what, then?

S: [Sandra?].

Q: Sandra?

S: Uh-huh.

J: I'm [Jessica?].

Q: Jessica.

S: Really different names. (laughs)

Q: Okay. So that will keep the [profs?] from [confusing?].

S: Uh-huh, that's right.

J: Yes, we take all the same classes.

S: Same classes.

J: Uh-huh.

Q: Oh.

J: Because we're the same age, so all the same classes we're taking, so it's very important they don't get mixed up.

S: Uh-huh.

Q: Sandra and Jessica Song, thank you for granting me this time --

S: Our pleasure.

Q: -- the chance to interview you. Let me ask Sandra to kind of speak for both of you, I think, for this particular question.

S: Okay.

Q: Okay. [00:01:00] Where and when were you born?

S: Well, we were born in Seattle at Swedish Hospital in 1967, July 8.

Q: Huh. And you were brought up and educated -- or still being educated -- in Seattle?

S: Still, all our life.

Q: Uh-huh.

S: Mm-hmm.

Q: Have you lived anywhere else --

S: No --

Q: -- in the United States?

S: We've never lived anywhere else. [All life?], Seattle.

Q: So you are pretty much native [Seattleites?].

S: Very much.

Q: Uh-huh. Let's see, did you both go to the same elementary school?

S: Same elementary school, uh-huh.

Q: Which one was that?

S: Briarcliff Elementary School.

Q: Uh-huh. That's located where?

S: Magnolia, [00:02:00] just a few blocks from where we live.

Q: And you were born in Swedish Hospital, but you were raised in --

S: Magnolia all our life.

Q: -- (inaudible) in Magnolia.

S: All life, yeah.

Q: All your life.

S: Yeah. (laughs)

Q: Okay. So what high school did you go to?

S: Well, we went to Blaine Junior High School, and after the eighth grade -- we never completed ninth grade -- we then went to the university [after that?].

Q: Okay. Yeah, that's a very, very interesting topic. That's the topic that I was interested in interviewing about. But let me go back to the time when you [00:03:00] first entered the junior high.

J: Yeah.

Q: Jessica, you want to talk about that?

J: Sure.

Q: The experience of what it's like to be a junior high school student?

J: Well, it's kind of strange because Briarcliff was a very small elementary school and the junior high we entered was

considered larger. It's still pretty small, but much larger than the elementary school.

Q: Oh yeah.

J: I was kind of scared at first. I was wondering whether I could find my rooms and classes. I was kind of nervous.

Q: How big was the junior high, the student body?

J: About 500 at peak. Five hundred. Not too big, but 500.

Q: And coming from a small elementary school --

J: Really small.

Q: -- that was kind of a shock.

J: Shock. (laughter) You can say that.

Q: Well, did you feel the same way as her?

S: Yes. I thought I'd never get used to it, like getting lockers for the first time and getting six different teachers. In elementary school, you're stuck with one [00:04:00] teacher all day, and all the sudden, we're taking all different classes and six different teachers and lockers and getting actual formal schedules. It was kind of different. We had a little more choice in what we were going to take because elementary school, you just took the subjects math and spelling and everything. But all the sudden, you have a choice of which gym class you take or [will even?] take French or German or Spanish. It was different.

Q: So you had the freedom to choose your elective subjects?

J: To a certain degree, yeah. You could take algebra if you want or geometry, your choice.

Q: So how old were you when you first became freshmen at the junior high?

S: Junior high, seventh grade? We were 12 years old.

Q: Twelve.

J: Twelve, mm-hmm.

Q: And not yet teenagers.

S AND J: No, not yet teenagers.

Q: Were there [00:05:00] some mixture of minority students in the high school?

S: There were not that many Koreans. Besides us, there were only two other Koreans. One was -- well, she was half-Korean, half-American, and we had another Korean in our grade level who actually was an orphan. She was born in Korea, but she never found her real parents. She was abandoned. Well, she arrived in America at the age of four.

Q: Adopted?

S: She was adopted.

S: That time, the segregation was enforced and quite a few (inaudible) in our school.

Q: Mm-hmm.

S: Still, of course, majority whites, but there were not that many Orientals, really. Only two pure (inaudible).

J: And there was no Japanese in our class.

S: No Japanese in our class.

J: There were about two Chinese and about three Vietnamese students.

S: So [00:06:00] not that many Orientals, really.

J: And Hispanics, there were practically no Hispanics, just about one or two in the whole school.

S: Uh-huh.

Q: You spent most of your hours at school during the junior high years, and yet you still had some social life outside school -- or sometimes inside the school, you'd make friends.

J: Right.

Q: So who were your good friends? I hate to put these ethnic (inaudible) to your friends. (laughter) You make friends (inaudible) your life. But let's say did you have Korean friends, American friends?

S: A mixture.

J: We had a mixture.

Q: Uh-huh?

J: [00:07:00] The Korean girl we mentioned who was an orphan, we were pretty good friends with her, and she was one of our best friends.

S: And we have three Chinese friends.

Q: Mm-hmm?

S: Uh-huh, and no Japanese friends.

J: No Japanese friends.

Q: Were there --

J: There was only one.

Q: -- Japanese American students?

J: I think only one.

S: No Japanese Americans.

J: No Japanese Americans.

S: There was one Japanese exchange student. She stayed, I think, from years fifth grade through eighth grade in Magnolia area.

Q: I see.

S: Yes, and she was in our same grade.

J: Yes. I think her father accompanied her here, and he went back to Japan after a few years. We never knew her that well, actually. Maybe there's the language barrier. She hardly spoke a word of English.

Q: Oh. Well, so in addition to these friends you mentioned, did you have other white American friends?

S: We did. We had a few white --

J: We had about two close friends. [00:08:00] One of them, well, attended elementary school and junior high with us, so pretty much we knew her all our life. But the other one, she attended kindergarten and part of elementary school, but after we went to junior high, she went to a different school, so we sort of lost contact.

Q: Right. I'm going to quote you something written by a Korean American student, and then ask you a question related to this. This Korean American student wrote about his loneliness experienced in his childhood on account of his Korean background. He wrote, "I remember many faces, [00:09:00] blurred and made vague by time from when I was attending school long ago in West Virginia. They were taunting, ridiculing faces that circled around me in the school playground and flung racial slurs and ridiculed. They were also the exaggerated faces drawn on my desk, ridiculing and caricaturing my appearances." And then he goes onto say that he experienced a deeply felt shame on account of his race. At that time, he said that he was feeling ashamed of being a Korean. Have you ever encountered this kind of experience?

S: Not that much, actually.

J: Well, the most trouble we got was from the Negroes.

S: The Negroes, yeah. [00:10:00] The one exception is [as we were, they?] --

J: Yes, and we had no problems on the white's account. But when we went through desegregation, we encountered more racial slurs. There was (inaudible). The Negroes taunted us, having small eyes and everything, and they exaggerated the face. A few of those things, but apart from the Negroes, we encountered no trouble at all. Well, we were not ashamed of our race. We were brought up to be very proud of our race and we were very, very proud of it and being Korean.

Q: Okay. Now, of the following three words, which would represent your identity best?

S: Okay.

Q: Korean, Korean American, American?

S: Korean American.

J: Korean American.

Q: Korean American. There's no question about it?

J: No question about it.

Q: All right. [00:11:00] You said you were brought up with a strong sense of pride in being Korean.

S AND J: Mm-hmm.

Q: Now, did you ever feel that this is a new strange country that you are being brought up at?

S: The only time is (laughs) when we first went to kindergarten, we did not know how to speak a word of English, and that was the closest I came to feeling that way.

Q: You mean you were born here --

J: Yes. We (inaudible) speak English.

S: We did not speak English.

J: We were four years old, and all the sudden when they took us to preschool, we suddenly realized, "We're different. [00:12:00] We can't speak English." And it was very, very strange for the first two or three months. (laughs) It was sad. The first three [weeks?], I did nothing but cry because I was so scared.

Q: Well, yeah --

S: Just hid in a corner. We just hid in a corner.

Q: -- being taken away from your parents, your mother especially --

J: Yeah, it was kind of strange.

Q: -- at that age is a traumatic experience.

J: Yeah, and on top of all these strangers talking -- we didn't understand them. They were really, really nice to us. They tried, I guess, to speak English, and gradually when we started getting used to the atmosphere, and -- since they made us speak nothing but English in the

classroom, so we learned really fast. And so we really [did learn?] fast.

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Well, they say that the younger you are, the faster you learn a new language. Of course, that applies also [00:13:00] (inaudible) you lose the one that you knew --

S: Uh-huh.

J: Yes,

Q: -- as you learn a new one. And so you were 12 years old when you first went to what became the seventh grade.

J: Mm-hmm.

S: Uh-huh.

Q: And so what were your favorite subjects in (inaudible)?

J: Math was my favorite subject, and I also liked American history. I liked American history and math.

Q: How about yours, Sandra?

S: Well, I like French a lot and I liked US history and I liked math. English, too. I like English a lot.

J: I like English too.

Q: Well, those were your favorite subjects, but apparently you must have done very, very well in all the subjects.

J: [00:14:00] Except physical education. (laughter)

Q: Except for physical education?

J: I could not do physical education.

Q: Why is that?

J: I just don't have the coordination, really. I was not a fast runner. I was kind of slow.

S: I was sickly. I spent more times burying my nose in books instead of running outside.

J: I'm not a good athlete.

S: The teachers always had to shoo me out of the classroom to get outside to play for about five, 10 minutes. My earliest memory is always staying in a library, reading.

Q: That's very interesting. Well, you are healthy now. What drove you to the libraries to bury your nose in the books and study all the time?

S: [00:15:00] Well, I was a bookworm. I really loved to read from different authors. I was a history maniac. I was really fascinated by ancient Egyptian history and English history, so the libraries provided the opportunity, and I wanted something which I could do well because I knew I was not too good at physical education, so it's not very fun to do something you're not good at. So that sort of drove me to the library and I really, genuinely love reading books anytime.

Q: So it's your curiosity --

S: Curiosity.

Q: -- to learn something new?

S: Yeah.

Q: What about you?

J: Same here, the same.

Q: Uh-huh. Were there some kind of competition going on between the two of you?

J: Well, we needed pressure to keep up with each other because people often try comparing us in classes. Sometimes we'd end up in the same class, [00:16:00] and when that happened, there was a little pressure, I'll admit.

S: If Jessica did better than me, they'd say, "How come she did better than you? You study together all the time. You should get the same grade."

Q: So these are the responses of the teachers?

S: Yes, to a certain degree.

J: To a certain degree, but especially our peers.

S: Especially our peers.

Q: Oh.

S: They'd say, "Oh, you're twins. You should get exactly the same score."

J: -- the same grade. We had pressure to maintain similar grades.

S: And teachers tend to compare, too. "Your sister did really well on this exam. Do you think you'll tie her?" That sort of thing.

Q: Did you get a similar kind of --

S: Very similar.

Q: -- pressure from your parents?

J: Not really. Sometimes, of course, when we told them our grades, they were surprised that there's some difference, but most times, they don't put that kind of pressure on us, I guess. I guess it's indirect pressure, you might call it, because we were sort of [expected?] the same grade.

Q: [00:17:00] (inaudible)? Let me interrupt just for a second.

(break in audio)

Q: Where were we? The pressure from the peers, from the teachers, not too much but a little bit from the parents, about what were their expectations of you. What are some of the unique things about being twins?

S: Well, one thing very unique is we have automatically our best friend. When you're twins, often you fill needs [00:18:00] which other people use friends for. We both are best friends. We share all secrets. That's often not done with other brothers and sisters. It's really special. We provide support for each other. When we're in trouble, we go to each other to solve it out, like if one of our peers are not nice to us, we can go to a person and they can help us solve it. (inaudible). I think there's to some degree

a mental telepathy between us, actually. We both have the same dreams sometimes.

Q: Is that right?

J: Yes, we both wake up at the same times from the same dream. We can just finish off each other's dreams. It's crazy, but it happens.

S: Yeah, and we can somehow sense what the other person is thinking.

Q: So you do believe that there's a kind of telepathic experience going on?

J: Sometimes.

Q: I mean, let's dwell on that a little bit more. It's [00:19:00] very, very interesting. You actually dreamt the same dreams?

J: (laughter) Occasionally.

S: Yes, occasionally.

Q: Occasionally?

S AND J: Occasionally.

Q: How many times would you say?

S: Like once in two months.

J: Once in two months.

Q: That frequent?

S: (laughter) Yes, it's very frequent.

Q: So this is from childhood on?

J: Well, especially when we were in, I think, this program we enrolled in -- the early entrance program. We started that somewhat, having mental telepathy. But early in our childhood, it wasn't that noticeable.

Q: I see.

J: I don't remember, at least.

S: Yeah, same. It's kind of strange, but maybe --

Q: Can you sort of touch on a little bit on what was the dream about? Is it too personal?

S: I don't have a good memory. She has a very good memory.

J: (laughs) Actually, it was sort of a nightmare. We had a nightmare about going to class. It was a university class, [00:20:00] and we had a huge final exam. It's in calculus or something. We were taking calculus at that time, and I had a really rough time with that. We both had a rough time. Well, we had dreamed that there was about a 20-page final and about 10 pages of proofs, (inaudible) going out of the -- and none of the things we knew. Uncanny enough, we had the same dream exactly. We both dreamed there was a 20-page final and it was a calculus class.

Q: Were you both taking the same test?

J: Yes, we were taking the same class. We were taking the same class at the time. Actually, that had something to do with it as well.

Q: I see.

J: But it was kind of strange. We dream of other things besides studying too, like sometimes we dream about food or something. It's kind of strange. Sometimes we dream of food and we dream of the same things, like we're eating something in the dream and we're eating the same thing. It's kind of interesting.

S: Sometimes we have the same [00:21:00] dreams. We've dreamed that we broke nine of our teeth sometimes. We're kind of superstitious. Koreans have some kind of old wives tale that if you have nine broken teeth, some disaster will fall, like a person will die kind of thing.

Q: So you are identical twins?

S: Yes.

J: We're supposed to be, but she's three inches taller than me, though.

Q: Uh-huh. So you do have differences in the appearance, and people can identify you. People have no problem identifying you?

S: Oh, no problem. I mean, the personality difference is also -- and only one thing where they can't tell us apart, on phone. Our voices are usually very similar on phones. It's practically impossible to tell us apart [00:22:00] on the phone, so we often trick people, (inaudible) switch.

(laughter) It's one of our favorite jokes. I pretend to be her.

Q: So you are now 18 years old and you are both seniors in college, and you are a senior at the age when other kids usually start their college days. So how did all this come about?

S: Well -- [the program?] specifically?

Q: Well, who got the idea? Where did you get the idea of going to the university?

S: Well, actually there's several reasons.

J: [00:23:00] One of our friends -- not exactly a friend, but she was a classmate -- and she was about 12 years old at the time, and she went into an accelerated program at the university, and we were very interested at the time because she was about a grade level lower than we were. At that time, junior high's enrollment was really dropping sharply. Somehow not many people were coming anymore and they were talking about closing the school on the year we would've been ninth grade, so our parents were really worried. They were wondering, "What high school are we going to send them to?" Because they [lost?] (inaudible) local high school at Queen Anne, it didn't have a very good reputation, in terms of academic programs, and they wanted us to get a really good education in high school. So they [were thinking of?]

moving to Bellevue, but that's real far away and they were not very enthusiastic about moving, so they were considering all kinds of options of where to send us. And then [00:24:00] all of the sudden, we remembered that one of our classmates had gone to an accelerated program at the university.

S: We met her just about a few weeks before we applied to the program, and we asked her --

Q: The program is officially called what?

S: Well, there's two names, actually. There's a transition component and there's an early access program. The transition component, you don't really attend the classes full-time. You just only take five credits, and they sort of train you in preparation for university classes, like you have one quarter to learn all high school mathematics or one quarter to practice writing so you can do decently in the English classes that you (inaudible).

Q: So they do have kind of a special program for those entering at an earlier age.

J: Yes, but right now it's much better.

Q: So it's not like just jumping into college --

J: Yes, thank goodness.

Q: -- of [00:25:00] five, six years younger than other kids are.

S: Uh-huh. At the time we enrolled in transition component, it was rather in its early stage. It was only the second year, and so there were not that many teachers there.

Q: I see.

S: We didn't have enough preparation as compared to right now. We hear there's a few new (inaudible) professors, actually, teaching at the transition component, whereas our time --

Q: It's called transition component?

S AND J: Component.

S: They have physics professors, calculus professors, chemistry professors right now at the transition component, but at our time, we had no chemistry class, no physics class, no calculus class, only an English writing class and French class and two science skills class and then history class, but nothing like the type of class they have right now. They're much more privileged right now than what we were --

J: I suppose we were the guinea pigs that they called. They're trying --

Q: It was still experimental.

J: Still experimental.

S: The failure rate was very high.

J: Very high.

S: [00:26:00] The first year, year before, we had an 80 percent failure --

Q: How do they judge whether you fail or succeed?

S: They have a GPA requirement.

Q: I see.

S: You must at least [possibly?] have a three-point-two-five GPA. Of course, if you don't meet that requirement, they'll give you a warning notice --

J: And then they give you about one or two more chances. If you fail to do it, then you're kicked out.

Q: So this is over a period of how long?

S: About --

J: Oh, about three quarters.

S: Three quarters.

Q: So about one year?

S: Yes, it's nearly one year.

J: One year.

Q: So you mean the first year is pretty much the transitional period?

S: Yeah.

J: It is very transitional. You take five credits --

Q: And then you prepare yourselves and see whether or not you can (inaudible).

S: (laughter) Precisely.

Q: Okay.

J: And they also [behavior?] code, though. So they certainly would not put up with drug dealing or [00:27:00] carrying weapons. There are a few cases in the transition component where people had to be kicked out because they have behavior problems. There were cases of theft and they stole books, and some were carrying weapons, like knives, and some were even drug addicts. So they were usually [spotted out?] quickly --

S: Very quickly, yeah.

J: -- during our program.

S: Mm-hmm.

J: They're still [in class?].

S: Mm-hmm.

Q: So when was it that you finally decided to apply?

S: Well, we asked for more information on the program from our school counselor and she had heard about the accelerated program, and she gave us a recommendation so we could apply. We were 13 at the time, and what we did then was we called up the transition component and asked the (inaudible) what you have to exactly do, and they arranged us to take a test -- a standard test which high school [students?] [00:28:00] [in the country?] take, WPCT -- and --

J: They usually accept the top one-third of applicants, people scoring the highest -- the top one-third of the test takers.

S: And they usually accept a maximum of 15 in one particular year at the transition component, about 15.

Q: I see.

J: Right.

S: And so we took about a three-hour long test and it was a typical test. You had to fill in standardized sheets and all kinds of things. After our test scores were tallied, there was a selecting (inaudible) process and the top one-third scores were selected out. Then came the interview. We had to be interviewed on exactly what our purposes of getting in the program, and why we want to get in the program in the first place, and basically discussed those kinds of things. And after the interview, if everything [00:29:00] goes all right and both sides are satisfied, then they accept them.

Q: When they asked you why you wanted to get into the program, what did you have to say? Do you remember?

S: I remember vaguely saying I wanted a challenge. I didn't get any challenge at the junior high school. I didn't even really study classes because I could get A's without studying. I was kind of bored. Plus, what I didn't tell

them was I didn't get along that well with my peers. I had a problem getting along with my peers. We were not really --

Q: Why is that?

S: We were too different from them. They enjoyed having fun and they found us weird because we liked studying --

J: We liked studying.

S: -- and books. They made fun of us because we were bookworms, they called us.

J: And they called us teacher's pet, that sort of thing. And everyone was at that time getting involved into dances and into boys and everything --

S: And we were not interested at that time.

J: No, we were not interested at the time. We were more interested in books and getting good grades. [00:30:00] They found us different and they teased --

S: They rejected us (inaudible).

J: We didn't think we'd be able to fit in the high school environment either. We were kind of disillusioned after junior high.

S: -- junior high, so we wanted to escape from our peer groups and try possibly the (inaudible), hoping we could get along better with the students over there.

J: And the challenge too.

Q: Looking back [in the prospect?], would you say that you weren't really different from other kids?

S: I still think I was kind of different. I should've made more of an effort to conform, but I guess at that time, I didn't really think of --

Q: Were you rebelling against [the kids?]?

S: We were rebelling a little bit.

J: Yes, because every--

Q: Against what?

J: Everyone was expected to wear clothes a certain way. If there was a fashion for slick hair, we were expected to do that. [00:31:00] And at that time, punk fashions were somewhat [getting?] in, and everyone did sort of -- they'd tint their hair, a few things. And I said, "Why should I do that if I'm my own person? I'll do what I want." And they didn't like that because we clearly showed that we were independent and if we didn't want to do something which they did, then we wouldn't do it.

S: That got us in trouble.

J: Sometimes there were certain people in the school who we really disliked. There was some discrimination. The Jew in the school had trouble, and nobody liked them. They called them names and it's really cruel, so it would be really cruel. And we happened to like that person, and we

didn't [have to?] show that we liked that person, and everyone disliked that person and called them weirdo, and so we got in trouble for associating --

Q: Was he or she --

S AND J: She.

Q: Oh. Was she as bright as you were? [00:32:00] Outstanding in classwork?

J: She was the one who actually went to that accelerated program --

S: -- that accelerated program --

J: -- and told us about it.

Q: Oh, (inaudible). Well, am I right in guessing from what I gathered (inaudible) what you said that you were so outstanding in your schoolwork and getting good grades all the time that the other kids got jealous --

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

J: There was a lot of hostility.

S: There was hostility through that. Of course, teenagers usually like rock and roll and disco music, and we were very fond of classical music. That also got us in trouble.

J: Again, we didn't conform, and everyone was talking about the latest hit from the rock stars, and we didn't know a single thing about it.

S: No, we didn't know a single rock group.

Q: [00:33:00] Were your parents an influence in developing your taste in music?

J: I'm sure to some --

S: From an early age, whenever there was an opportunity, if there was a concert, they took us there, and we had a huge record collection. We listened every day to classical music.

J: We still love listening to classical music.

S: And we took piano lessons.

J: (inaudible).

S: And that had a strong [reaction?]. Whenever there was a special on TV, like Carnegie Hall, a pianist playing, we watched it.

J: We love playing piano together. (inaudible). We played a few concerts, actually.

Q: Oh, you did?

J: Like nursing homes and school concerts.

S: Yeah.

Q: Oh. And this was when you were going to junior high?

S: Junior high and elementary school. From elementary school, they exposed us to that. And as far back -- [00:34:00] even when we were babies, they turned on classical music, so I guess it had a strong influence in developing our taste because we were exposed at such a young age.

Q: So when you were applying for the accelerated program -- transition component program -- who made that decision?

S: We did.

J: We did. The parents had no role in it.

Q: You were 13 years old and you (laughter) made the decision?

S: Yes, we made the decision.

J: They told us to think about it. They were really --

Q: Did the parents have any role at all in this?

S AND J: No.

J: They were mainly concerned whether we wanted it, and they were saying, "We're not forcing you," and, "We don't want you --"

Q: They showed you the existence of the program and --

J: Right. They found --

S: -- the information for us, uh-huh.

J: They called up.

S: Uh-huh.

J: We really were curious, and [00:35:00] after we interviewed and it seemed like we had a good chance of being accepted, "Do you want it? Tell us the truth. Are you willing to skip high school and possibly undergo a lot of sacrifice? Do you really want to do it? Think hard before you make such a decision."

S: And we did think a lot.

J: We thought a lot about --

Q: What were some of the things that you thought a lot about?

J: Well, we were wondering whether we were willing to maybe give up a normal high school education.

S: Give up piano lessons. That was a strong possibility. I knew if I had to study hard, I wouldn't have time for hobbies. I did eventually have to make the hard decision of dropping piano lessons. That was very hard. I did that when I was about 15.

J: And we considered all possibilities, like would we be able to make up the lack of a high school education in a really short time? They did warn us that it was going to be a very short period, and we really seriously thought about did we have the stamina to study for hours and hours?

S: Give up watching TV and [00:36:00] on going to movies and that sort, and whether we really wanted to do it and whether we'd be able to cope with the pressures of trying to match our university peers and go from a small junior high school to a huge campus. We thought of all kinds of things, those things.

Q: So yeah, okay. Through your counselors at your school and through your parents and through some UW representatives --

S: Right.

J: Mm-hmm.

Q: -- you must have been warned of all the things to --

S: -- expect.

Q: -- expect, so did have a good preparation for the things.
Well, then after you got into the program -- which year was that, by the way?

S: We just turned 14 when we got into the program. We were 13 when we were accepted, [00:37:00] but 14 when -- so September 1981. September 1981, when we got into the --

Q: I see. So you got into this program in September of 1981.

S: Eighty-one.

J: Uh-huh.

Q: Were there surprises?

S: Yes. (laughter)

Q: Despite all the warnings, all the advice and everything else? What were the surprises?

S: Well, one of them was we were taken aback at how young some of our classmates were. They were (inaudible) younger than us.

J: Yes --

S AND J: We were the older --

S: -- ones, actually. Some of them were 11 years old only.

Q: You mean you were surprised at how --
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

S: We were very surprised.

J: Incredible.

S: They were so mature for their age.

J: So mature.

S: They were talking Shakespeare --

J: Shakespeare.

S: -- and all those --

J: And *Jane Eyre* and they were talking about political science and --

S AND J: -- they were only 11 years old --

J: -- and 12 years old.

S: We were somewhat stunned.

J: [00:38:00] Stunned.

S: And they were very informal. In junior high, we addressed teachers by Mr. So-and-So and Mrs. So-and-So. But here, we were on first name basis. They were (inaudible) like a family, and it was kind of a shock after being very formal with the teachers in junior high.

J: All of the sudden, they say --

S AND J: -- "Call us Gene."

S: Or Mitch. It was just a shock.

J: Very shocking. We just kept referring to [all of them?] like Mrs. or Mr. and we found it astonishing that they expected us to be on a first name basis. That was one of the biggest shocks.

S: And the class sizes are so much smaller than they were in junior high. There were only 10 people in one class, sometimes five or six in a French class, as compared to 30 classmates in junior high. That surprised us somewhat.

J: We were surprised at some ages of teachers. One of our French teachers at the transition component, she was only 15. And when she first walked in, "Oh, she's a student." And then all the sudden, she says, "My name is [00:39:00] So-and-So and I'm your French teacher," and that was the shock of my life.

S: And she was only a year older than us, and we were very surprised.

Q: Your teacher was a year older?

S: Only a year older than us.

Q: A 14-year-old?

S AND J: She was 15.

S: We were 14.

Q: Oh, you were 14 then.

S: And she's 15.

J: She was 15, and it was a very strange feeling, being taught by someone a year older.

Q: Well actually, for the first one year after you got into the program, you were still dealing with the process

through that preparation or transitional component. And despite the surprises, you were still being prepared.

S: Right.

Q: I mean, you're not in the thick of the real college yet.

S: No.

J: It was about six months after we enrolled, we were starting to be exposed [00:40:00] to the --

S: Gradually.

J: Gradually.

Q: I see.

S: They let us experiment and take one university course along with some --

J: -- other classes -- preparatory classes.

Q: I see, uh-huh.

S: It was gradual, like dipping your feet in the water.

J: Five credits, and the next year you take 10 credits, and then you take 15 credits --

Q: Uh-huh.

J: Progressively. Some students take longer [other?] courses, full-time students. One student after the first course became a full-time student.

S: Yes, she was ready, and they sort of judge on your academic progress and how ready you are.

J: And they have advisors over there.

Q: So how long did it take you to become a full-time college student without having to take any kind of preparatory --

J: Well, a year, a year.

S: About a year.

J: About a year.

S: It took about a year.

Q: So by the time you were a sophomore, [00:41:00] you were more or less on your own?

J: (inaudible) on our own.

S: (inaudible) on our own. Once you're a full-time student, you're expected to be fairly independent. You're not supposed to depend on them too much, like ask them for help on this or that -- only if you're in serious trouble, like you have too much pressure and you can't cope with it. Then you're expected to go for advice, sort of counseling. Academically, pretty much independent.

Q: Did you ever run into any serious problems that made you think of or (inaudible) to the counselors (inaudible)?

J: No, we were pretty much independent. We tend to follow up our problems usually by ourselves, so we didn't really consult them at all.

S: No, we kept our problems to ourselves. We tried to solve it ourself.

Q: Well, between the two of you who share [00:42:00] all the problems and secrets and everything else, did you talk about your problems?

J: We talked a lot.

S: We did talk a lot to each other and try to give each other support.

Q: Okay, let me ask you this question. You go to -- well now, after one year of preparatory period, you were on your own. Now you're a sophomore, standing on your own feet, taking a full load of coursework. Now you're doing this when you are 15.

J: That's right.

S: Uh-huh.

Q: And doing it with 18, 19, 20-year-old kids.

S AND J: Yes.

Q: Now you're not surprised -- I mean, in the [00:43:00] normal classroom situation, you cannot be surprised by running into somebody -- an 11-year-old or a 12-year-old.

S AND J: (laughter) No.

S: We weren't shocked.

J: No, we weren't shocked.

Q: What was it like to be working with a whole lot of people who are three, four, five years older than you?

S: Well, it was a little surprising at first when we were a sophomore, especially when they found out about our age. Sometimes they found out at times, and they couldn't [deal with it?] sometimes. They were very shocked and they didn't exactly know how to view us, really. They felt very awkward around us.

J: And we sort of felt like a freak when they found out about our age.

Q: Did they feel insulted by (laughter) youngsters like you?

S: A little embarrassed.

J: Embarrassed. (laughter) They said, "Oh my God, [00:44:00] I was in high school at that age."

S: -- at that age. I felt really, really kind of self-conscious, like some kind of freak -- really different. That's why I really try and avoid people finding out my age because I want to feel like I belong to that group, and it's difficult, trying to fit in.

J: We try and act older [than our age?].

Q: But did it work?

J: It worked.

S: It did.

J: After the first quarter, we started getting more and more used to the situations.

Q: How did you succeed in making yourself look older?

S: I guess we just copied our other classmates and what they talked about and how they acted. I guess we started copying them.

J: We tried to dress so we looked somewhat older. We tried [all?] the fashions, some (inaudible). [00:45:00] We got major haircuts. We looked older.

S: Other teenagers usually giggle a lot in high school. We try to avoid giggling too much and try and act quiet and often we got away with it, if we look serious enough, that sort of thing. But sometimes we look older and serious, so we try and avoid giving away too many (inaudible).

J: Uh-huh.

Q: What is it like now? Now you are senior. But when do you graduate?

S: Next year.

J: Next year.

Q: Next year?

S: Yeah, we're taking a double major.

J: Double major, (inaudible).

Q: Are you planning on going to graduate school?

S: Yeah.

J: That's our plan.

Q: Where? What subject?

J: We have several universities in mind. We intend to
(inaudible) apply to 15 different graduate schools, and
we're particularly interested in chemistry. [00:46:00] And
we're thinking possibly of biochemistry.

S: [We love?] biochemistry.

J: Or there's several fields which we're [practically?] on the
verge of getting a major in. We have nearly all the
qualifications to be --

S: A botany major.

J: -- a botany major or biology, like that. But we're
particularly interested in chemistry.

S: Mm-hmm.

J: We might take up biochemistry as well.

Q: So --

END OF CHUSUNN AND CHU YUNN SONG (SIDE A)-CONVERTED

BEGIN CHUSUNN AND CHU YUNN SONG (SIDE B)-CONVERTED

Q: Well, you have about another year to think about it. What
if the best graduate school that you want to go to is away
from your parents?

SANDRA: Well, we would like (inaudible) away, really. Of
course, we'd miss them terribly.

JESSICA: We'd miss them all.

S: We're very close to the family --

J: -- but they wouldn't let that get in the way of our education. They're going [to wish?] we get the best possible education. (inaudible), definitely.

S: Yeah.

Q: I'm also a parent and I would know from my own experience that even though [00:01:00] you are finishing up the college and through your own work that you earned, and you're moving onto graduate school, nevertheless you are only 18. I would feel like keeping you around here. This may be a Korean (inaudible).

S: Right.

Q: Would your parents feel in a similar way?

S: Particularly our father. He's more protective than our mother. He would like us to possibly stay here if possible. If the best school is somewhere else, I guess he said he'd have to let us go. We'd probably have to write often our progress and probably they'd call us a lot, see what's going on. They'd probably expect us to write often to tell our progress and give them a call [00:02:00] (inaudible).

J: Mm-hmm. They said they're really ready, if necessary, [we have to?].

Q: Are you aware of the criticism about this kind of special program?

S: Yes.

J: Yes.

Q: That the kids who have to go through this miss the normal cycle of natural growth? The period in which the kids would have to play like the older kids and then [fight?] them and go through all that kind of stuff? If someone has missed out this period, it might have some kind of a negative impact in the future. Are you aware of that --

J: Very aware.

S: The most common criticism, they say, "It's [00:03:00] not normal sending a 12-year-old here," or saying, "What happened to childhood?" Or, "They don't have enough friends. They don't have fun. They don't have time to get used to socializing, and what are they going to do when they have to go out in the world and have to get a job and they're so much younger?" That's the most common criticism. Even some of our own relatives think it may not be the best idea.

Q: Well, from the things that you're going through and the experiences you've encountered, would you say that there is a certain degree of truth in that criticism?

J: Probably some degree. It depends on who you are, I guess. If you genuinely love the atmosphere, studying, not having much of a childhood or not having much social life, then [you feel right?]. That kind of program is [frugal?]. But if you tend to like to socialize, who doesn't want to give up [pleasures?] of perhaps high school activities, they shouldn't enroll (inaudible).

S: No. [00:04:00] I don't feel like I missed anything in particular, really, no. I know some of (inaudible), they miss it. They [would like to enjoy?] something with two of their friends, which are still in high school, like a dance or the prom, that sort of thing. But it never meant a lot to me. It wasn't much of a hardship, really. Maybe for [kind of a?] student, ideally, but for people who really enjoy those pleasures, it'd be [wrong?] (inaudible).

Q: What kind of the image of the person that you want to become in the future, after you are graduates? Is there a certain goal that you are -- what kind of a person are you [00:05:00] trying to become down the line? Let's say four, five, six years, 10 years from now?

S: Well, I want to mainly become a person who knows that I try my very best to succeed, and I want to know I tried my very best to become a good (inaudible) and interesting. I guess

that's my opinion right now. (laughs) I don't know what it's going to be like a few years later.

J: I want to be thought as someone earnest and someone who's hard working and not afraid to meet challenges, and someone who's sincere and someone who gave the best effort possible to become the best possible I could become. I mainly want to be thought of as really -- well, let's say hard working first, and (inaudible).

Q: So you had a kind of a delayed interest in boys?

S: Yes.

J: [Probably?].

Q: [00:06:00] When did you start getting interested?

J: About a year ago.

S: About a year ago.

J: We look at Oriental boys, of course. I, of course, prefer to marry an Oriental --

S: Yeah.

J: -- if I do get married.

Q: Why do you say, "if you do get married"?

J: Well, right now, there's quite a shortage of boys in relation to girls. It seems like there's much more Oriental girls than Oriental boys. At least, that's what I've heard from several of my other Oriental classmates. Girls had to fight each other, literally, to get a boy, and

the chances are pretty slim [to get a?] boyfriend. Usually boys are already attached to another girl. That's why I get a pretty slim chance to get married, especially me being in this state. Maybe if I moved out of state, I'd have a better chance.

S: -- have a better chance.

Q: How about you, Sandra?

S: (laughs) Pretty much the same view. [00:07:00] I know there's plenty of Caucasian boys or white boys around, but I really prefer Oriental, so that considerably narrows the choice. But marriage is certainly one of my future goals. I sure would like to, but I don't know if it's totally possible.

J: Mm-hmm.

Q: And do you feel the same way as Jessica does about preferring Korean boys? Or a Korean boy?

S: Usually in terms of the race, I wouldn't mind marrying Chinese or that sort, but my first choice, of course, is a Korean boy. But a Chinese boy is fine too.

J: Same here. I guess I could [put up with?] a Chinese boy, but --

Q: You are [00:08:00] saying Oriental.

S AND J: Oriental.

S: Not all Oriental.

J: Not all Oriental. [We're kind of?] choosy, just preferably Korean or Chinese.

Q: By saying this, are you excluding Caucasian boys?

S: Yes.

J: Yes.

Q: Why is that?

S: Somehow it's strange, but whenever I see a Caucasian boy or girl, it doesn't look right. I think if I have children, they won't know who to identify with, whether they should be Korean or whether they should be American. They won't really have any particular culture.

J: I'm sure it'd be very tough on a kid, and I guess I was raised that way too. Our parents always try and encourage us, "Marry an Oriental," and all their other friends also encourage their children to marry an Oriental. I guess in their [times?], it's much more rigid. They seem to have transferred some of their values onto us, and when we see the Caucasian or (inaudible) couples, somehow it doesn't [00:09:00] look natural.

Q: So when you're talking or (inaudible) or thinking about the future candidates for your husband, what kind of educational background are you thinking about?

S: Possibly [natural?] sciences. We hope natural sciences is a common interest, possibly, and preferably going to

graduate school also, someone that at least [possibly?] a master's degree or something.

J: Not too much older than us.

S: Not too much older.

J: Possibly four years older. That's my --

S: There'd be too much of an age gap if they're a lot older, and preferably (inaudible). Doesn't matter --

Q: Do you foresee any kind of problems because of the fact that you went through this kind of (inaudible) program? An accelerated [00:10:00] program?

J: Not really.

S: The only problem is maybe among the professors in our graduate -- there might be some condescension. That's mainly what we're afraid of because our age, we're very young. They might tend to condescend towards [us?] and that sort of thing and think we're not mature enough to deal with it because there's danger. I've heard of several graduate schools, they question, "How mature are these people who graduate early? Can they cope just as well as someone who's a few years older than them?"

Q: I'm kind of asking this question with this in mind. (inaudible) typical. Everybody's situation is unique and I cannot stereotype it. (laughter) But there's a sense of balance between the boys and the girls when they are

considering [00:11:00] marriage. So you've already touched on this somewhat -- the educational level, graduate school, people with master's or higher. The problem is when you get a master's degree, you will be, what, 24?

S: We're hoping to actually get a PhD by the time we're 24 or 25.

Q: All right. Then you're looking at -- I don't know, this is a very, very hypothetical question -- but the boy of your age would be about four years behind your (laughter) educational --

J: That's right, I have often worried about that.

S: I have [00:12:00] worry of that.

J: That's my only hope is when I'm at that particular age, when I get my master's degree, I'll possibly try to be in association with other people who are getting a master's degree.

Q: Yeah.

S: That's what I'm hoping.

Q: That's why you said about four years older?

J: Four years older, four years older. (laughter) I have to (inaudible). It would be somewhat a problem.

S: It'd be kind of embarrassing if you're dating a freshman and we were already graduate students. It'd be kind of embarrassing.

J: Very embarrassing.

S: Uh-huh. We're practically at a loss of what to do if we ran into that problem.

Q: Well, after you are married and you are settled down with a family, would you send your children to the same kind of accelerated program?

S: Well, only if they want to, really, and I think the kids, you have to judge their character to some degree and their willingness to sacrifice something.

Q: You say [00:13:00] only if they want to, but you know now -- I mean, you're college seniors and you're mature enough to look back and say that a 13-year-old doesn't really make up his or her own mind.

S AND J: No.

Q: There's a lot of parental influence --

S AND J: Yes.

Q: -- behind that decision. And so the question I'm asking you is this: so with this in mind, would you still have your own children go through the same kind of accelerated --

S: My main thoughts, our parents gave us a chance to try it, and I think I should give my kids the same chance.

J: Yeah, I won't deny them the chance, no. I think I would try.

S: But if they didn't want to enroll in the program, then I would definitely not force them.

J: Definitely not. But if they were not totally decided -- like [00:14:00] if they're wavering -- then I would be inclined to encourage them.

Q: They talk a lot about racial discrimination, sex discrimination, and all this, and gradually age discrimination is coming up too.

S AND J: Yes.

Q: Well, is this age something [of?] (inaudible). Are you want to (inaudible)?

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

Q: For example, your being able to carry on the university life with the people who are about four years older, and after some effort and struggle at the beginning, you're now perfectly at home in this. But does [00:15:00] that mean that the normal perception of the age gap can be overcome?

J: Well, I guess in some case it can. It depends how young, I guess, you are when you enter that kind of program. There are some cases in which the 11-year-olds who entered the program didn't adjust. They never adjusted.

S: They couldn't adjust.

J: After a year --

S: There's, in fact, an enormous rate of failure among the age group.

J: -- they couldn't cope with that, the age difference.

S: We know only about one or two cases --

J: -- who were 11 or 12 years old --

S: -- eleven or 12 years old and who could cope with it. An overwhelming majority just cannot cope.

Q: That is to say this program can go and can pick only the kids who are so young, beyond, let's say, 11 or 12 --

S: You're right. They have --

Q: -- if they go below [00:16:00] that --

S: They cannot cope.

Q: So that is an age maybe --

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

S: They've had the highest success rates with 13 and 14-year-olds.

J: Thirteen and 14-year-olds.

Q: And since a 13-year-old is a teenager --

S: That's right.

J: Yes.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

S: So the age does not exist. I don't think it would really exist for 13-year-olds or 14-year-olds. There's been a

high success rate among that age group. Yes, beneath would seem to be correct for --

J: -- eleven-year-olds.

S: -- eleven-year-olds.

J: Yeah. So it's true to a certain degree. It's not true (inaudible).

Q: Well, regardless of what one's physical age is, mental age is [so different?]. [One can be?] 55 years old and think like an 11-year-old (laughter) [00:17:00] or an 11-year-old who can think like a 55-year-old. Well, it's been wonderful talking to you. I think that you deserve a special mention in the [book of?] pictorial essays that I'm writing about Koreans in Washington state and in the northwestern [region?]. Is it possible for you to get me the picture of your graduation of junior high?

S: Yes, we have a yearbook. We have a yearbook.

J: We have a yearbook [from our?] eighth grade.

Q: A picture with the hat on or things like that?

S: We'll check around. We have a huge picture [album?].

J: We have a huge picture album, and --

Q: I mean, did you go through the --

S: [00:18:00] We were gone to Washington, DC at that time.

Q: Oh, so you missed the graduation ceremony there?

J: Yes. Well, actually, yes, to some degree. There's an assembly -- you could call it a graduation assembly -- about a week before school's out, and we were gone to Washington, DC during that time.

S: Yeah, I was involved in an extracurricular activity --

J: We were involved in --

S: -- in a national spelling bee. I was competing in there.

Q: In what?

S: The national spelling bee. We were involved in extracurricular activities, and I really enjoyed dealing with words, so I got into a national spelling bee.

Q: Did you go there too?

J: Well, I accompanied her. We both competed in regionals and she came in first place and I came in third place out of [205,000?] people, so it was our state competition.

S: I sort of won a prize --

J: -- to go to Washington, DC, and I [served as her coach?] and I helped her with her words.

S: Mm-hmm. So we sort of missed out on the assembly during that time. [00:19:00] It was just about the end of the school year when I went. But we do have some pictures just about the time we left for the program, so.

Q: It would be nice if I could get a hold of that picture of you wearing the cap. They do have sort of --

S: They don't have caps. (laughter) Not in junior high.

Q: Well, now they seem to.

J: Now they do?

S: Oh.

Q: Because they have middle school instead of junior high, and then they go to senior high, and the middle schools -- especially for the middle schools that are independent, separate from the school, they have to do something for the kids who are graduating, and they are holding this graduating ceremony on graduation day. Well, if you don't have [00:20:00] that picture, any other picture will do.

S: Sure, we'll send you a few. We have a few pictures from that time.

J: Mm-hmm.

Q: At the time? So that's when you were 13.

S: Thirteen.

J: Right about --

Q: When you were getting into this program?

S: Right, right.

J: We do have pictures.

S: We do have pictures just before we left for the university, mm-hmm.

Q: If possible, you separate --

J: Separate, sure.

S: We were separate in the pictures.

Q: -- not on the same picture. So individual photo of you, if possible you and your parents together.

S: Okay.

Q: One (inaudible) picture and one of each of you.

J: Okay.

S: Right.

Q: Around that age, maybe two (inaudible) of you, [00:21:00] of the latest or something. A picture taken this year.

S: Yes, we have some pictures taken.

J: Pictures (inaudible).

Q: Right. And so for the purpose of getting these pictures printed, the black-and-white's better, but it doesn't really matter.

S: Yeah, we have some black-and-whites. That was the yearbook.

J: Uh-huh. Well, we enjoyed this.

S: We enjoyed this.

Q: Thanks very much for talking to me and talking with the microphone. (laughter) I think you are very, very unique and, of course, your brilliant academic career, it really should be described and [00:22:00] told to other people so that you can become the model of other kids.

S: We hope that other Korean Americans or Koreans will enroll in the program. It was really nice.

J: We are all too willing to give advice.

S: Help and give advice.

J: Yeah.

S: Uh-huh.

Q: That's very nice.

J: We're really proud. There's another Korean American in the program --

S: Japanese Korean.

J: Japanese Korean. She's very brilliant.

S: She (inaudible) school just recently. She's summa cum laude. You can make a mention of her, perhaps. She's [real?] successful.

Q: (inaudible)?

S: [Stephanie Lee?].

J: Stephanie Lee.

Q: Stephanie Lee?

S: She was very [smart?].

J: Very smart. She was only 17 when she graduated.

S: Seventeen when she graduated.

J: She's too young to --

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

S: -- had to take a year break, and we're very proud of her.

Q: She's finished?

S: She's finished.

J: She's right now in [Stanford?].

S: She's in Stanford --

J: -- medical school.

S: -- medical school.

J: She graduated summa [00:23:00] cum laude.

S: Summa cum laude. We're all very proud of her.

Q: Do her parents live around here?

S: Yes, they live here.

J: They live here, mm-hmm.

Q: I wonder if it's possible to get a hold of her.

S: We can try contacting her.

J: We can try contact.

S: We're try and ask the transition program -- (inaudible) program -- if they still have a document. They save documents (inaudible). We could try and ask for --

J: She's truly remarkable. In her time, she enrolled before we did. In their time, there was no transition component.

S: There was no transition component. She just jumped directly into university.

J: Directly into university.

S: No preparation.

J: No preparation.

Q: Sink or swim, right?

S AND J: Sink or swim. (laughter)

S: That's right, sink or swim. She was one of the most successful [cases?], I think.

Q: Wow, that's very nice.

S: [00:24:00] So we hope that we can maybe inspire other Koreans to join in. We're all too willing to give advice.

J: (inaudible).

S: Mm-hmm. Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you for the time and [being?] willing to meet. It's

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