

8604 S1 Dr Rebecca Kang 24 Jan 1986-converted

REBECCA KANG: (inaudible)

Q: Looking forward to (inaudible). All right, shall we start by asking you to state your name?

RK: My name is Rebecca Ruth Kang.

Q: Where were you born?

RK: In Honolulu, Hawaii.

Q: When?

RK: September 11, 1949.

Q: And you were raised and educated in Hawaii most of the time?

RK: That's correct.

Q: What elementary school or which high school did you go to?

RK: You want [00:01:00] to know which elementary schools I went to, the entire?

Q: Uh-huh.

RK: In Hawaii? Well, I went to Ewa Elementary School, then I went to Ewa Beach Elementary School, then I went to Campbell High, and then I went to Mid-Pacific Institute.

Q: Is this in Honolulu, Hawaii?

RK: Correct, uh-huh. And then I attended college at the University of Hawaii.

Q: What did you major in at the college?

RK: In nursing.

Q: Nursing.

RK: Uh-huh.

Q: And where did you get your master's (inaudible) and PhD?

RK: I took my master's degree from the University of Washington in 1974. And I just finished my PhD [00:02:00] in nursing last May, 1985, from the University of Washington.

Q: And what's your area of specialty?

RK: Interested in early family relationships, relationships particularly between parents and children.

Q: Is that the topic on which you wrote your dissertation?

RK: Yes. The title of my dissertation is called "A Model of Parental Competence."

Q: Could you recall about your parents, your father and [00:03:00] mother?

RK: What kind of information do you want? You need to help me.

Q: The names, to begin with.

RK: Okay. My father's name is Hor Choo Kang, and my mother's name is [Ruth Kim Kang?].

Q: How do you spell your father's name?

RK: H-O-R, C-H-O-O.

Q: I see, right. And were they born in Hawaii too?

RK: That's correct.

Q: Okay. Do you know their birthplaces?

RK: Let's see. I think my father was born in Ewa on the island of Oahu. And I think my mother was born in Lilihua. I'm not real sure.

Q: Is your mother Korean?

RK: Yes. [00:04:00]

Q: And the level of their education?

RK: My father has a degree in engineering, and my mother is a high school graduate.

Q: I see, (inaudible). So, where did your father go to school [for engineering?]?

RK: At the University of Hawaii.

Q: So, now can you remember something about your grandparents? Let's say, what is your grandparents' name?

RK: My father's father, my grandfather's name is Chi Hurn, C-H-I, [00:05:00] H-U-R-N, Kang. And I believe my grandmother's name on -- my paternal grandmother, was [Chum Soon?], I think it was. And my mother's mother's name was Soo Yun, S-O-O, Y-U-N. And I believe my maternal grandfather's name was Chi Cho, C-H-I, C-H-O. I'm not real sure.

Q: Their last name?

RK: Whose last name?

Q: Your maternal grandfather's.

RK: Kim.

Q: I see, okay. Do you remember seeing [00:06:00] your grandfather in your childhood when you were young?

RK: Which grandfather?

Q: Your paternal grandfather.

RK: Yes.

Q: What was he like? Can you recall?

RK: Like what? You need to help me (laughs) and be more specific.

Q: What, in terms of personality, in his attitudes towards you, towards the chil--?

RK: To me?

Q: Yes. Children.

RK: To my brothers?

Q: Yes, mm-hmm.

RK: Well, he was, I believe, a very intelligent man. And he taught himself to read and write English. [00:07:00] Because he was firstborn, he was supposedly the leader of the family once his --

Q: You're talking about your father or your paternal grandfather?

RK: That's what you asked me to relate to, right?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

RK: Okay. I guess he had definite ideas about how to live because he was the firstborn in his family.

Q: Did he tell you when he first came to Hawaii?

RK: He didn't tell me, but my father told me. In 1904.

Q: Nineteen-oh-four. The name of the ship he came on
(inaudible)? [00:08:00]

RK: *SS Manchuria*.

Q: [How old was?] (inaudible)?

RK: He was 24.

Q: He was 24. And how many people came on with him --

RK: I don't know.

Q: -- on *SS Manchuria*? Did he work on the sugar plantation?

RK: I think so.

Q: Oh, I see. Any stories or episodes? Memorable stories of
his hardships --

RK: No.

Q: -- difficulties to eke out a living?

RK: Not from him because he spoke Korean, and I didn't speak
[00:09:00] Korean.

Q: But from your father.

RK: I mean, his stories of my grandfather?

Q: Mm-hmm.

RK: No. But I knew that because he was widowed in 1919, he was
responsible for my father. And my father and my
grandfather made it together.

Q: So, your grandfather taught himself how to speak English.

RK: And read, read English.

Q: Read.

RK: Read English.

Q: How would you evaluate, I mean, his fluency in reading and speaking?

RK: Well, I could communicate with him [00:10:00] as a child. I don't know what his level of being able to read, but I knew that he could.

Q: And you said your father was the only child.

RK: That's correct.

Q: And what did your father do after he got his degree in engineering?

RK: He continued to work at Pearl Harbor Shipyard.

Q: I see. And what was the living standard like in your family when --?

RK: In my family?

Q: Yeah.

RK: When I was a child?

Q: Yeah.

RK: We were a middle-class family.

Q: Well-to-do.

RK: No, we're not well-to-do. [00:11:00] We were an average family living in Hawaii at the time. We didn't live on the plantation, as did other kids. We had a family farm.

Q: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

RK: Three.

Q: Would you mind giving me the names?

RK: Okay. [Allen Homik?] Kang, Felix Anthony Kang, and [Nelson Kim?] Kang.

Q: Where are they now? What are they doing?

RK: Both Allen and Felix are in Hawaii, and Nelson died in 1983.

Q: And Allen is doing [00:12:00] what kind of job?

RK: He sells real estate.

Q: I see. And the other brother?

RK: He works at the shipyard.

Q: Are they all highly educated as you are?

RK: Both Allen and Nelson are college graduates, Felix is not.

Q: I see. Well, why didn't Felix graduate from --? Did he go to college and sort of drop out in the middle, or --?

RK: Well, he did go to college but I don't know why he dropped out.

Q: Are they all married?

RK: Both are married, mm-hmm.

Q: I see. Do you have any children?

RK: Do I have any children?

Q: Yeah.

RK: No. [00:13:00]

Q: You are married.

RK: No.

Q: No. Oh, okay. So, actually, you are a third-generation Korean American.

RK: That's correct.

Q: And how much of the Korean cultural heritage would you say has been handed down to you from your grandparents through your parents, if at all?

RK: I guess I would ask you, what do you mean by culture?

Q: (pause) For example, [00:14:00] eating habits, the way of life inside the house and arranging the furniture, things of that sort. Well, let's start with the eating habit.

RK: I would say in my mother's house, that is true. We probably eat more Korean food. But I think the kind of Korean food is probably by no means comparable to perhaps what you might eat or what is eaten in Korea. We have the standard fare: kimchi and bulgogi and namul and those kinds of things. But the more exotic [00:15:00] stuff, we don't know about and we don't fix. In my household here, I probably cook Korean food maybe six times a year. I don't cook it. I cook probably more what is eaten in Hawaii.

Q: I see.

RK: Local food rather than Korean food per se.

Q: Do you miss it? Let's say kimchi, for example? Or once in a while or once in a long while do you have the feeling to --?

RK: Oh yeah, I always have gochujang in the refrigerator. My mother sends it --

Q: Nice.

RK: -- with me when I come back from Hawaii. I always have [00:16:00] that. I have tried to make kimchi. But once I was successful, that was it. Yeah, I miss it if I don't have it. And if I want it, I'll cook it. But it's something that I don't go out of my way to cook every week or every day.

Q: Do you remember singing Korean songs when you were a kid?

RK: No.

Q: Not at all?

RK: Uh-uh.

Q: Did your parents speak Korean?

RK: English was the first language spoken in the home. My father speaks probably better Korean than my mother. But if you compare both to you or [00:17:00] to other individuals, they don't speak very well.

Q: I understand from Dr. Hall that you're interested in learning or taking Korean lessons (inaudible)?

RK: Mm-hmm.

Q: I was wondering what motivated you for learn that?

RK: Well, I think it's because I'm interested partly because of my heritage. And it's just something I'm curious about it.

Q: What level of fluency are you trying to achieve in Korean?

RK: I really haven't thought about it. [00:18:00]

Q: So, how many lessons are you taking a week?

RK: How many? One.

Q: One a week.

RK: Mm-hmm, one hour.

Q: I see. From that goal?

RK: Mm-hmm.

Q: I see. So, it's just out of your curiosity that you're taking lessons in Korean. Is there any professional need for some kind of acquaintance with the Korean language?

RK: I think it'll benefit me in some way or form if I choose to.

Q: Are you, in any way, [00:19:00] associated with the Korean community in Seattle or Korean community in Hawaii?

RK: No.

Q: So, you are very much in the mainstream life of American -- ?

RK: Like I said to [Mr. Moody?], I said, "I am mainstream."

Q: Since 1965, there's been an increasingly greater number of immigrants coming into the country. And they are in the

process of forming a [00:20:00] Korean community, Korean American community, whatever you call it. And in the process they are emphasizing the Korean heritage, Korean culture. They are trying to sort of transplant Korea, in a small way, into America. How do you see all this? What's your response? Is that a possibility and is that a good thing to try to do?

RK: You mean try to preserve the Korean culture?

Q: Mm-hmm.

RK: Sure. Why not?

Q: Specifically, they are sending their kids [00:21:00] to the K-12 American educational system. At the same time, on the weekends they're sending their kids to the Korean language school. The kids' response often is negative. They want to go out and play like other kids are doing on weekends. And they say, "We are going to an American school, studying with American kids. We are going to live here after we finish schooling. Why? Why do we have to go to the Korean language school?" Which is not immediately helping them at the school they are going to. [00:22:00] Nevertheless, the parents are sending them in the hope that when they grow up, they would mature to appreciate what their parents have done for them. If you had your children, would you send your children to the Korean language?

RK: Being third-generation Korean American, no. I wouldn't make them go to Korean language school on the weekends.

Q: If they wanted to on their own, then it would be --

RK: Sure.

Q: -- a different story.

RK: Sure, sure. And if there was Korean culture events, then I would make every effort to expose them to that [00:23:00] because it's just part of their identity of who they are. But I wouldn't make them go to Korean language school on the weekends because I'm third-generation Korean American. I am not first generation. I am third generation.

Q: Okay. Do you see a clear distinction between the first and second generation? I see by the time the third-generation people are growing up, the distinction is very, very clear. But do you also see that kind of distinction between the first and the second generation?

RK: Well, I think that's true no matter what the [00:24:00] ethnic group is when they immigrate. The second generation is different from the first because the second is trying to make that transition from the old to the "new". My parents are very different from their parents. Their experience is different just because of time and different environment.

Q: Because of the cultural assimilation.

RK: Yeah, they have to assimilate different kinds of information.

Q: Do you see the distinction that exists between the first and second in your generation and your parents' generation?

RK: Do I see [00:25:00] the same kind of distinction?

Q: Or is there any kind of distinction?

RK: Well, I think there has to be some kind of difference, just based on time.

Q: Like what?

RK: Just based on time. They were born in Hawaii, so they had to assimilate a different kind of information than what my grandparents knew. On the other hand, I'm two generations removed from my grandparents. So therefore, not only am I different from my grandparents because I don't know what the other world is like. I share a similarity with my parents because we grew up in the same world. But because my parents are much closer to that kind of lifestyle, then, of course, I am different. [00:26:00]

Q: Well, for one thing, the language barrier that the first-generation people had suffered from does not exist anymore.

RK: Sure. Information assimilation. The mode of assimilating information is different.

Q: The second-generation people are often referred to one and a half generation. I guess what they imply is that they

are closer to the first generation than to the third generation.

RK: I don't think that's true. It depends on how close, what you mean by close. Maybe close in culture.

Q: Well, in [00:27:00] cultural values --

RK: Sure.

Q: -- the attitudes toward the family.

RK: I don't know, it's really hard to say. I think it's different, you know. I don't think you could compare the-- I mean, maybe you're not asking to compare. For example, those people, like my grandfather, who immigrated in 1904 as being the first generation and those immigrating in 1980 as first generation. I think there may be similar issues, but I don't think you can compare the two in maybe what's going on because the time is different. But I think there are many similar issues that are going on.

Q: Well, [00:28:00] I'm not asking these questions to compare those two first generations very closely. But I think the first-generation people who have come recently have much to learn from what the earlier first generation had gone through. Although the appearances are different, their qualifications are different.

RK: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Q: Do you remember seeing your grandaunt who lives in Gresham?

RK: I [00:29:00] first met her in 1972, and then I think --

Q: Where? Where was this?

RK: In Gresham.

Q: I see. Did you go there?

RK: Yes, with my father and my mother. And then I think I saw her in 1974. I think so, 1974. Yeah, 1974.

Q: What's your impression of your grandaunt?

RK: I think she too is a very intelligent woman, very bright woman.

Q: [00:30:00] For the reasons that she didn't specify, she didn't like her kids marrying out of the Korean race. Is that a kind of perception that your parents have too?

RK: Of whom?

Q: Of your brothers and sisters.

RK: No. They don't care because my brothers are going to live with their wives. (laughter) Not my parents, they're not going to live with their wives.

Q: That's true. I wonder what your [00:31:00] grandparents' attitude toward your -- I take it back. This question is really irrelevant because --

RK: I don't know.

Q: -- he married a Korean. I mean, your father married a Korean. I'm talking about your grandaunt, who seems to say that in all things cultural, the -- well, mostly cultural

or values, I think. That she holds the Korean cultural values and cherishes [00:32:00] them so much that she seems to say that, "I just don't care for these American way of life." Is that something that you noticed?

RK: I really couldn't say because I have had very little contact with her. I think that probably the best individuals to ask would be her own family because I'm so far removed from her.

Q: So, 1972 was the first time for you --

RK: Uh-huh.

Q: -- to meet her?

RK: Uh-huh.

Q: I see. Well, I think I'm running out of questions to ask. As I said at the beginning, to sort of [00:33:00] reconstruct the genealogy for family tree is my purpose of this interview.

RK: You really should call my father.

Q: Would you like to --

RK: Sure.

Q: -- give me his number?

RK: Sure.

Q: Does he speak Korean a little bit?

RK: He speaks it but not as fluent as you.

Q: You haven't heard me speak Korean.

RK: But I can tell you probably speak fluent.

Q: For my English.

RK: Right, and you write in Korean too. (laughter) I would really call him. And what I would recommend that you do is to call him and then arrange a time when you could call him back when he has some time. And that what I would [00:34:00] recommend you do is that you record what you say, and at the other side he records what he says in response to your questions. And then he can send you the tape, so then you have record. Because then he can tell you about his father and life in Hawaii.

Q: Or I can send him a set of questions and he can just look at it and answer those questions and record those answers.

RK: Sure, sure.

Q: Have you had the chance to glance through the journal (inaudible)?

RK: I did, but I haven't had chance to read it.

Q: What kind of an impression did you get from the journal just by glancing through it, in the format [00:35:00] or the content level?

RK: I thought it was a good idea that you had it both in English and written in Korean.

Q: Awfully redundant for people who know both.

RK: Well, I don't think so. People make a choice. You know, if they know that it's the same, they just choose probably one. I didn't have that choice. And I think it's a good idea because I think people don't realize that there are a group of Koreans who immigrated to Washington State or to the West Coast a long time ago and made some kind of contribution to society. In contrast to seeing other ethnic groups, where they are much more identifiable because they have a large number of people who [00:36:00] congregate in one community and it's an obvious, defined population or group.

Q: Yeah, and also they've been here longer than the Koreans.

RK: Longer and in greater numbers, and people have chronicled that. For example, last Sunday, Shawn Wong who was featured as -- he's a Chinese writer.

Q: Yeah, I know.

RK: So, people really kind of appreciate the Chinese culture in that way, but I don't think that they understand much of the Korean group. And I think the Koreans are making a much larger impact now because of the huge numbers.

Q: Yeah, yes, some say it's close to one million, some are saying 800,000. Although they're all spread all over the country, scattered all around, [00:37:00] that's quite a

size and I think that's a comparable one. And the recent arrivals are here with better educational qualifications.

RK: Oh, sure.

Q: They are better educated than the people who had come -- well, let's say, Chinese Americans who had come in the middle of the nineteenth century. Some studies are showing that the Koreans are the most highly educated group.

RK: But what about if you compare Korean immigrants with Chinese and Japanese immigrants who also immigrate at the same time, like now. If you compare the Chinese and the Japanese now, are they as well educated [00:38:00] or equal or less?

Q: Well, the ones I've had didn't do that kind of a comparison. I guess that they are --

RK: I think they're about equal. Equal. And I think, again, it's the historical period that you look at when you compare different ethnic groups. But by and large, Asian Americans are well educated. But I think it might be really interesting to call my father or write to my father. And I talked to him last Friday and told him that you were coming, and he was interested. I didn't tell him that you might be calling him. I just told him that you were going to come talk with me, and I [00:39:00] think he could give a different perspective.

Q: Do you remember the address there?

RK: Sure. And he likes history. And my mother's name.

Q: I'll send him a copy of the journal.

RK: Yeah, I think he'd like that very much. That's my mother's name, Ruth.

Q: Well, thank you very much for your time.

RK: Well, you're welcome, Mr. [Yu?]. I don't know what I could add for you. Like I said -- I've been saying over and over again -- my father, I think, could really answer some of your questions, you know, much more detailed and [00:40:00] with a different kind of cultural orientation because he bridges the two. In contrast to Mrs. Kang's children, they were raised in Oregon. Some of them spent a lot of time -- like [Carl?], spent a lot of time in Honolulu. But my dad was raised in Hawaii and spent all his life in Hawaii.

Q: Your grandfather was the older brother or younger brother, or --?

RK: No, no. My grandfather was the eldest brother. He was seven years older than [Ti Quon?].

Q: I see.

RK: He was 24 and Ti Quon was 17.

Q: [00:41:00] Well, there was an anecdote that your grandaunt was telling me.

RK: What was that?

Q: That [Kang Chi Quon?] went to Incheon to go to Hawaii. And somehow Kang Chi Quon's father found out. Or Kang Chi's father was asking where Kang Chi Quon was, and Chi Quon's brother told him.

RK: [Chi Hurn?], uh-huh.

Q: Your grandfather, Chi Hurn, told the father that he's down at Incheon getting aboard the ship to Hawaii for immigration. And the father was hopping mad and told the older [00:42:00] brother, Chi Hurn, to go get him out of the ship and bring him back. And then when he got there to the ship, the younger brother persuaded him with such a force that they should go to Hawaii together and work as hard as they can and make lots of money, and come back to - - what's the word? To sort of rehabilitate the declining economic situation of the family that was originally pretty well-to-do. That was the story. But he went down there and got persuaded and they both went.

RK: You talk to my dad, [00:43:00] there's a different side of that story.

Q: Is that right? How different?

RK: You talk to my father. Yeah, you talk to my dad, yeah.

Q: I mean, are you saying that this anecdote, like --? I thought that was an interesting story, but --

RK: I guess the question is --

Q: -- if it is not right --

RK: -- could a younger brother persuade an older brother in Korea? Does the younger brother have that much power in Korean society than the older brother?

Q: In general, no. (RK laughs) But the generalization doesn't cover all of the exceptions and that are (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RK: But back in 1904.

Q: Did you say seven years difference in age? [00:44:00]
Well, no, maybe not.

RK: So, what I would recommend is that you write that anecdote down, and then you have my dad respond to that. That would be fun, you see. Their family was yangban? Was that the term, yangban?

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

RK: But the fortune was gone?

Q: Yeah, mm-hmm.

RK: My dad would love to have one of those little horsehair hats. So if you know anybody who can get me a horsehair hat for my father, I would be eternally grateful to you.

Q: Those things --

RK: Are hard to come by.

Q: -- that people used to hate so much because they were old-fashioned and they threw them away. Now the price for them has just --

RK: How much? How much are they? [00:45:00]

Q: I don't know. I don't even know.

RK: Really, really?

Q: They would tear down the old thatched-roof house and try to save every bit as an antique.

RK: Is that right?

Q: And those thatched-roof houses have gone up in value so much, I think.

RK: Really? He would really like to have one of those hats because my grandfather -- he said he had a picture of my grandfather with his father, and they had the hat on.

Q: Yeah, your grandaunt mentioned seeing those pictures that were --

RK: Does she have them?

Q: She didn't -- I don't know. I interviewed her twice, and once she said that she had all the pictures. [00:46:00]

RK: Did she?

Q: But that now she says that she doesn't find them.

RK: She is actually likely to have them or copies of them.

Q: I think your grandaunt is trying to come over to [Steve Kang?]'s house --

RK: Oh yes, her grandson.

Q: -- and try to arrange a meeting for me with Steve and --

RK: [Susan?].

Q: -- [Valerie?].

RK: Oh, Valerie is her granddaughter, Steve's sister.

Q: And I thought that would be interesting to include the third generation.

RK: Yeah, my dad has my grandfather's passport written on rice paper.

Q: That would be great.

RK: But that's priceless.

Q: But there's a way [00:47:00] to get it copied by one of those professional copiers so that they copy's good enough for reprinting on the journal or that kind of stuff. He shouldn't let it go.

RK: Oh, no. No. And then we have --

Q: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RK: -- my maternal grandmother's passport, getting permission by the Japanese Government for her to emigrate too. We have that. But if Mrs. Kang has pictures of my grandfather, we could make it an even trade--

END OF AUDIO FILE