

8605 Mr Steven Kang 27 Jan 1986

Q: Mr. Kang, I want to thank you for granting me this opportunity to interview you for the Korean American Historical Society's Oral History Project. Will you please give me the time you're born in, the place of birth, and the educational background? Let's start then from there.

STEVEN KANG: Okay. I was born on May 8th, 1947, in San Francisco Children's Hospital. [00:01:00] I grew up in Oregon, going to public schools starting from first grade, through high school through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Upon graduation from high school, I went to East Coast to go to school at Yale University, have my BA in history from Yale. And then, directly after Yale, I went to Columbia, for graduate studies and business administration. My concentration was marketing international business. And I received my MBA in 1971.

Q: What did you do after your masters?

SK: After my master's degree, I stayed in New York, working for an advertising agency called Doyle Dane Bernbach. I worked on [00:02:00] a couple of different accounts. I was in a training program. They're teaching me to become an advertising account executive, which is really the business end of supervising advertising. And I worked on Volkswagen

and American Airlines. And then, after about a year and a half, I decided that I didn't want to be in the advertising agency side of the business and would rather be on a company side of the business. And so, then I went to work for TWA, and worked for TWA in the marketing department for three to three and a half years. And then when Doyle Dane Bernbach came back and said, "I would like you to come back and work for us again." And it was a very good opportunity for me. Not the money was any better, [00:03:00] but they offered me a position to introduce a new product. And in the advertising business, Procter & Gamble products, or the, like graduate school almost, and they offered me the opportunity to introduce a new bar soap, coast deodorant soap, or Procter & Gamble. And so, I was able to do the introduction of coast deodorant soap, with all the marketing pill plans and media plans and everything surrounding that. And then, friends of mine called from Los Angeles, and asked me if I would be interested in moving to the West Coast, and of course, being from the West Coast, I was very much like it. I wanted to get back to the West Coast. And at that time, they offered me a position as director of marketing for a cruise ship line, which was from the aspect of being a glamorous business. Certainly, for me, it was a very interesting sort of move.

Q: I see. [00:04:00] Is this through Sitmar Cruises?

SK: Yes, in Los Angeles.

Q: I see.

SK: So, we -- at that time, I had just been married. And Susan and I had lived in New York as married for one year and then we moved to Los Angeles. I stayed for almost nine years working for Sitmar and for another advertising agency, Foote, Cone & Belding. And then, after that nine-year period, the current company I'm working for, Holland America West Tours, they were in the process of merging their East Coast company from New York, which was a cruise line company with their tour company in Seattle. And so, when they merged the two, they made the headquarters in Seattle. And at that time, they called me and said, "Would you be interested in coming to work and heading up our marketing department for this cruise ship line?" And so, that's how I came to [00:05:00] -- two years ago to come to Holland American West Tours.

Q: I see. So, it's been -- [hop wood?] moving all along?

SK: Yeah, pretty much so. Pretty much so. Yeah, I have been very lucky. Timing has been right, and I've been in the right place at the right time.

Q: And the right qualifications...

SK: Right qualifications. Yeah, now the... (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Yeah, so. It's luck and luck, and mostly luck. (laughter)

Q: I understand that your parents moved up to Gresham in 1943. Oh, oh, [00:06:00] oh. 1950. And the - according to your mother, the interview that I heard, she had a lot of difficult times, especially the beginning few years, was very trying and hard. Do you remember anything growing up in the palm? Or helping your parents? Would you recall? And...

SK: Very much so. Actually, the year we moved up, I think it was 1952. Yeah, I was five years old at the time. And I remember the first recollection that I have is, I remember coming up on the train. We took the train up from San Francisco, all the way up to Oregon and [00:07:00] seeing the evergreen trees. And it was something that I was only used to seeing, and Golden Gate part of the time. So, I felt, I think it was the common or was that maybe my mother that -- it was like living in a park, because we had the evergreen trees and the grass and everything very unlike the city.

Q: Yeah. And the ideal setting.

SK: Yeah, in the ideal setting so to speak. Yeah. And also, at the time, we had animals. When we got the farm, we had

a county Nelly, with certainly, you know, this huge animal. I mean, you're a five-year-old here looking at this cow. It's quite a bit bigger than a dog. And that certainly was a very big impression. Additionally, you know, having chickens -- we had chickens running around [00:08:00] outside. We had all different kinds of chickens, Rhode Island Reds, and we also had the little Bandy chickens. And I remember chasing those chickens around all the time. The recollection of fruit... There was so much, you know -- there were fruit on the trees or apple trees. There were prune trees, cherry trees, strawberries. We had a strawberry farm at the time that you just go out and pick strawberries and eat them right off the vine, which is, you know, a certainly a big recollection. And just the space, I think that was that you had when you got out of a city environment where you had wide open spaces with the, you know, you could see the sky with clouds and the grass and the greenery around, which that was a very big impression.

Q: [00:09:00] Do you remember helping your parents working out on the farm?

SK: Well, not in the beginning, when I was always a kid -- when I was little, I think it was more from my point of view. It was almost one of neglect, as a child in the city. You know, your parents were always with you. Your mother was

always with you, taking care of you. And what I found when we got to the farm was that because there were so many other duties that my mother had, she couldn't spend as much time with me as before. And so, for instance, when you wake up in the morning, in the city, your mother was right there. But on the farm, when you woke up, your mother was already out in the field. And, as a result, it was a little bit of a, I guess, a disconcerting emotionally for me anyway. And I think that... Yeah, [00:10:00] the reaction -- my reaction was anyways. So, it was, I'd get up I'd be crying. Because looking for my mother, more than she was not there. And it was a traumatic experience. I mean, as a child, having your parents suddenly out of the house. And then, no for so much of the day being out, she was just outside and more often than not, we would be out in the fields with her. And getting cut and covered from head to foot and dust and dirt. And we'd be playing cars and that kind of thing in the field. Also, it forced us I guess, to live a little bit more creative, perhaps because she was there to provide us with things to do. We'd have to go around and find things to do ourselves. But then later, you know, you're talking about helping, [00:11:00] I guess it was around... But we all started picking berries very early. Strawberry picking was this kind of a thing

with that, kids from probably starting at age five, six years old, on up could do that. And so, we started, I think picking strawberries, that's my earliest recollection of picking fruit. And then as we got older, we were able to do other things like hoeing. Driving tractor. I mean, when I was nine years old, I was out in the field driving tractors. I was doing and disking and actually tilling the fields with the tractor. And so, then I'll do the other regular chores that you have to do as a child with animals on the farm. You have to go out and feed the chickens, help feed the cats and the dogs, and slop [00:12:00] the hogs, and all that type of thing that has to be done as well. So, I mean, you learn very early that there are certain things that you're expected to do as your quote, chores, and as well as helping farm work.

Q: Were there times when you felt -- when you hated living on the farm, doing that kind of work? Or...

SK: Yeah. Yeah. I guess. I always feel that way at times.

Q: And then, not all the time but...

SK: No, but I mean there are certain times when, you know, your friends are out doing something else like going swimming, or whereas, if you have a crop that has to be harvested, or you have weeding that has to be done, it has to be done right away. You can't wait. And so, if there were times

where you had to sacrifice and work on the farm, when you would rather be [00:13:00] doing something else. But, I mean, it wasn't excessive. I mean, I felt that, you know, my parents were always very fair about that. And if there was something important, I can always go and do that.

Q: So, you lived there until you graduated from high school?

SK: Right.

Q: And so, you left when you went to Yale?

SK: Yep.

Q: Do you think that living on the farm or being raised on the farm have any effect on your, let's say, work ethics, your attitudes for life, or edit your attitude toward work?

SK: Yeah, I definitely think so. I think that, you know, [00:14:00] I think that if you want something, if you work hard enough, you'll get it. And I think that the belief in me anyway has its foundations and in the farm. I mean, if you're able to see direct results from your input in what you're from the work, that you're doing. We always -- my parents, always paid us as children or for the work that we did. You know, we picked strawberries. We would be paid and what the other people who were picking our strawberries would be paid. And so, you got a sense of: You could earn money. You could -- there was value to the work that you were doing. And it was always - I felt that no matter what



the task was that had to be done, it was always an  
[00:15:00] achievable task and already. You know, you have  
a whole field that you have to hold weed. You know, you  
can do it, if you just keep doing this, just keep digging a  
little bit more, a little bit more each day. And I think  
that, I guess, the dedication...

Q: The endurance.

SK: The endurance, the feeling of, and also the feeling of  
accomplishment, once you've done it. All of that occurred,  
I think, in the early days, when we were working on the  
car. And so, I think, and that kind of thing carries over  
to other types of work, whether the academic work or  
whether the, you know, working in business or what you  
have. And also, the competitive spirit was what was there.  
I mean, on the farm, you're always competing. We were  
always competing anyway, with each other on who could do  
the work the fastest or who could pick the right  
strawberries or do something like that. So, it was always  
goal oriented and competitive [00:16:00] oriented. And  
that too carried over into our lives today.

Q: I also learned from that interview with your mother  
conducted by someone else, that you bet your scholarship  
from Yale. And we just say that this kind of influence of  
the farm life impacting on your career goals. Have

something to do already, when you are going to high school.  
And...

SK: Yeah, I think from the aspect of being dedicated and hard work, it did. But, I think also from... [00:17:00] One thing you had to do on the farm was you had to plan your time better. I mean, you had to study more efficiently than other people. So, when you were given more time to study, it became that much easier. Because, before you had to plan your time. I got to go work out the field again. I got to go do this. And this is the time it's left for studying. This is all the time I have. Whereas when we went to school later on, as we got older, and we had to do less farm work, that additional time helped to make one, you know, succeed and get better grades. So, I think from that standpoint, certainly the farm work, and being able to plan your time helped. From the standpoint of encouragement, my parents were always encouraging us to do very well in school. [00:18:00] It was always expected that we would do well in school. And my mother did well in school. I don't know how my father did. My mother did very well in school and was always ready to help us should we need help in our schoolwork. And all she -- also, it was understood that we would all go on to school and graduate school afterwards. It was never a question

whether we're going to do that. It's where you're going to go to school and when and what subject. And they would all, you know, she would always set out people as goals. And one of the people that she set out as a kind of a figure to follow was John Kennedy. I mean, he was in that's where, you know, when I applied to college, it was Harvard, Stanford, Yale, in that category of schools.

Q: So, you're saying that your mother by having [00:19:00] great expectations out of you helped you get on and work harder...

SK: Right. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Definitely. Then also, was competition again. It was cool. I mean, in school, we had friends who were doing well and there was always a competitive thing of who would do better than the other in school. And it was not only in academics but also in sports.

Q: Let me give you these three words. Korean. Korean American. And American. Which of these three words identify our... Is [00:20:00] best representing yourself? Would you say which -- what, I'm not phrasing this question right.

SK: What's the best...

Q: Which would identify yourself best?

SK: Well, it's interesting because you look at different phases of your life, and it would be different description. I mean, as a child, it would certainly be Korean American. Okay, because the influence of the family was much more, you know, an umbrella over my life at that time. And with my grandmother and my grandfather there, and my mother, and my, all my uncles and aunts. I mean, it was a very Korean influence. But because my mother and father were second generation, I mean, you can say, [00:21:00] "Well, we're a little bit one step removed from being Korean, but really Korean American." So, that childhood was very much like Korean American. But you take my -- you start going into high school. Now, if you looked at my high school background, it was very American. I mean, you know, I was a football player. National Honor Society. I was in the choir. I was kind of involved in all school activities. And there were very few oriental or Korean kids in my high school. And then you go to college, and shoot, it's even one more farther removed from that. Especially in my case, where it was an all-men's college, and they were, you know, there was hardly any, quote, oriental Asian influence in that class, and then you take where I am now. [00:22:00] I mean, when I think through, I don't have any friends who are Korean at this point. And so, you can say, "Hey, I'm

American. My kids are very similar to that, to a very American Orient." So, I mean, from the beginning years, you can say, a Korean American. And then as I get farther and farther along in years, I'm getting more and more American. Although people probably outside don't perceive me that way. But inside, I perceive myself that way.

Q: Let's go back to your childhood experience again. And you, going to -- in your elementary or high school days, do you remember being given hard times on account of your race? Or... [00:23:00] From your friends?

SK: I've never had that. No. One of the, I guess, one of the advantages is, was when I was in elementary school, I was always bigger than most of the other kids. And athletically, I was usually, did very much better than most of the kids in my same grade. And so, more often than not, I think the other kids would look at me as being different, superior, maybe athletically. So, they're looking up to me, as opposed to looking down at me as being someone who is has had less prowess, I guess. And that carried through all the way through high school. And were, you know, athletically, I did very well, all the way through high school, and as in academically as well. And then, as a result, usually, if you did well, in athletically, and

[00:24:00] academically, you're also one of the student quote, student leaders, right, in the school...

Q: And now they obviously look up to you.

SK: Yeah, and that was always the case. So, I never -- never encountered that at all that I can remember. And again, you know, being from a small community, it was, Susan said before, "I mean, you just don't encounter that kind of thing. If there were lots of Koreans of my age, and we all kind of were a clique all the time. I think that, you know, certainly that was that kind of interaction or negative interaction could happen."

Q: Well, you said that being brought up on a farm and helping [00:25:00] your parents affected your outlook for work life in general computation? Would you say that the Korean heritage or cultural heritage in any way affected your goal setting? You would?

SK: Yeah, I do. I do. I do from the standpoint of -- well, Koreans, I think are very proud people for one thing. And that pride, I think comes out in... You take satisfaction in your accomplishments. And whereas some of the races don't seem to do that. I mean, the Koreans, also don't tend to be shy. I think they're very more outgoing [00:26:00] than a lot of the other, the Chinese, let's say the Japanese. They were a little bit more meek I think

than the Koreans. So, I think from a personality standpoint, and from being more aggressive, more social, I think certainly the Korean background is, has helped from that standpoint. As far as -- I think that people, when people, when you say you're Korean, people look at you differently than if you would say you were Chinese or Japanese, too. They may be because they don't know what Korean is, a lot of people. And they look at the, you say, "Something different." Okay. And so, from that standpoint, it makes it easier in interacting with some people too, because they don't have a stereotype of a Korean, like they have a stereotype of Japanese, the stereotype of a Chinese. You know? So, it makes it easier to break that ice and to get the, to make [00:27:00] the friends and begin the relationships, that it would be much more difficult I think if you were Chinese or Japanese. (child screaming) So, you're less handicapped. Yeah, I guess, to start out with.

Q: That's an interesting point. And I guess your grandmother was a big force of influence, especially in terms of cultural Korean, cultural orientation. What are some of the things that you would say were handed down to you, from the grandparents' generation, through your parents' generation, and down on to you?

SK: Well, I think that, you know, certainly from her standpoint, [00:28:00] and I don't think this is uniquely Korean. I think it's uniquely her. She's very, very disciplined. Very, very -- I'm an autocratic, almost. She's very, very much a, as I said, a matriarch of the family. She could call the family and manipulate the family. I think, you know, certainly respect for elders has to come out. Because, I mean, you see her, and the way she wields her power in the family, almost, that there is respect for the elders. I mean, all of us, all the way down the line, you know, respected and listened, and pretty much did what she had asked, she asked you to do. Also, she's very, was very careful about trying to give us [00:29:00] some family history, to, you know, to give you some feeling that there was more than this generation, that there was history in this family, and that there was, you know, the roots sort of thing. There is that there was a base, basis that this family started from in Korea. And it isn't as if, we're just, we just come here and this is, this is all we have. And you know, so there's some historical base, I guess. I think from the standpoint of, you know, you're talking about morality. Very, very strong in what's right, what's wrong, sort of the moral teachings, I guess. And also from her standpoint, that she has been



very religious through much of her life, although  
[00:30:00] it hasn't really filtered down to a lot of us.  
I mean, she has been very firm in her religious beliefs.  
And so, from the standpoint of being steady, being  
unemotional, being a, I guess, a figure that you could look  
up to, that had not necessarily rational ties, but it  
certainly had a point of view and was a stable figure in  
the family. You'll see someone you could look up to in  
that standpoint. So, and then, you know, I look at...

Q: I'm sorry. Would you say that she has been sort of a moral  
center probably...

SK: Yeah, she's a fighter. She's a fighter. You know, her  
children are all, we're all very competitive. My father  
was very competitive. My uncles are very competitive. And  
so, I think that she's, I think imbued that [00:31:00]  
competitive spirits certainly in the family, which is  
important.

Q: Do you speak Korean at all?

SK: No.

Q: Do you sometimes wish that you could?

SK: Yeah. Yeah, I do.

Q: Why?

SK: Well. It would be... Well, I've been to Korea three times,  
I guess.

Q: Oh, you have?

SK: Yeah. And it's embarrassing. You go to Korea, and you talk, you, well, you know, I can understand a little bit. And it's embarrassing when, you know, when they know that you have, your ancestry is Korean, and you can't speak to them. And so, at that time, I certainly felt it.

[00:32:00] And then...

Q: Were you out there on business trips?

SK: No, no. I, during the summer times, in college and graduate school, I used to go on merchant vessels, and I worked as a seaman. So, I worked over there, and I go over there. And back then, when she was over there, I go, we visited a couple of times. So, I had an interpreter, but it would have been very much nice to be able to talk to relatives.

Q: The recently immigrating Koreans... Well, it's a little bit complicated. The Korean American History is not just one stretch of time. There's your family who is beginning in [00:33:00] America, goes back to your grandparents' generation. And so, you are the third generation, your children are the fourth generation. The four people let's say who came here in the 60s, 70s, they are the first generation. And so, they're beginning anew. And I think that in this sense, they have a lot to learn from the

history of your families like yours. The recently arrived Korean immigrants are... But there's quite a number of them too. In fact, taking the [00:34:00] Korean American population as a whole, probably 90% of them are new arrivals. And they are -- while they are in the process of forming this Korean American community, they are emphasizing the need to keep their children bilingual. And some of them are sending their children to weekend Korean language schools. And kids hate them. (laughter) But is that their parents take them. They, then go and whatever they teach them. I guess then my question is, would you send your [00:35:00] children to weekend Korean language schools?

SK: No, I wouldn't.

Q: Why not?

SK: Well, first of all, I don't think it's relevant to them right now. These kids are really growing up as American kids. I think in the future, if they want to learn the Korean language, they can do that.

Q: On their own.

SK: On their own, when they're more motivated to do that. And if they want to go to Korea for a couple of summers to learn Korean, fine. They can do that. Or they can go to an Asian University in Asian Studies Center and go total

immersion for a few months if they want to do that. But I think that to try to make them do that now, I think if [00:36:00] I'll find a great deal of reluctance on their part. They're not going to be motivated. And they're not going to appreciate it.

Q: It seems that the... I don't know, if the word loyalty really expresses it best. But that's the best word I can come up right now. The loyalty for the home country seems to decrease as the generations are more removed from the first. Is this very much [00:38:00] -- do you agree with that?

SK: Oh, yeah. I mean, it makes logical sense. I mean, if...

Q: The first generation...

SK: ... Being loyal is something that's relevant to you. If it's not relevant to you, I mean, how can you expect loyalty? I think that, you know, if you were able to send your kids to Korea, every year or something, or for a few months, I mean, perhaps they have a better understanding of what they would be, they could be loyal to. But, you know, to have someone who's never been there, say you must be loyal to your country, and your heritage, it's just not relevant anymore. And I know from my standpoint, when I went over there on the ship, you know, when you come into the ports, you can smell the kimchi from miles up. Yeah,

there was let's say, a feeling say, "Oh, this is my home, my cool homeland." And spending some time [00:38:00] there, you can say, "Yes." And you can feel proud about certain things that you heard about now have had a chance to see. But when you come home and spend a couple of years at home, you don't have those same feelings anymore. And so, it's very difficult to be loyal unless you're continually going back and there's some relevance in your life to the country.

Q: How would you say your generation is different from your parents' generation?

SK: Well...

Q: Like, let's say, let's use the grandparents' generation as the kind of point of departure or our... Some measure.

SK: Well, it's really, it's really on an affluent scale. I think you can take a look at my grandparents' [00:39:00] generation, I think you talked about it as being very difficult, very labor hands, laboring with one's hands, almost. And then, as you go to the next generation, a little bit less labor with the hands. And then, when you get like, "Yeah," and it moves from hand to brainpower. And where I am now, it's no hands. It's always, it's all, you know, what you can do with your head and brain. And I think that's the main difference. Although I'm caught up

with the with, you know, the amount of time spent in that, in my work. My parents had to probably spend less time physically working than I do now. The number of hours spent. Although theirs were certainly intensive [00:40:00] at certain times, where you go from early morning to midnight. But then there were long stretches of time. I think, just like any other job that involves labor, labor intensive jobs, or you can even have down periods where you don't have to work. Whereas mine, is always at one level, pretty much. Pretty hectic level. But that's the difference. And it's a level of material goods. I mean, that one has is very different.

Q: While you're on the subject, may I ask you what kind of work, jobs, if I evolved as vice president of Holland America West Tours?

SK: Well, as vice president of sales. So, I'm responsible for the sales that come through the company through [00:41:00] travel agents. And I have a little about 50 people that work for me. Not directly for me, but for my head directors who report to me and managers and on down the line. But a total staff of about 50 people, who the main job is to educate and to serve travel agents, to have the travel agent sell our cruises and our tours. And I guess

the company probably responsible for 60% of the revenue of the company coming into the company.

Q: The company has how many ships?

SK: We have three passenger ships now about 1200 passengers each.

Q: And where do those ships cruise to and from or...

SK: We have cruises in the Caribbean and Mexico... In Mexico, [00:42:00] Mexican Rivera, Trans Panama Canal, Alaska, and then we have one ship that goes around the world.

Q: So, are the three ships are constantly on the move?

SK: Constantly on the move, constantly moving.

Q: And cruising? Each ship carrying 1200 passengers?

SK: Essentially, I got my job to fill 3500 people a week on the ships, paying about \$1000 a piece per person. (pause)

[00:43:00]

Q: You said that your mother said about her children. They love the Korean music also. My children also know how to sing Arirang, and things like that. And, of course, grandma had a very deep influence on their lives because she always lived close by. And so, [00:44:00] she taught me how to cook, and we ate Korean food 90% of the time. I used to make gimjang every Fall, and gimjang (inaudible), and making kimchi. And so, the Korean culture is not something foreign to them. They still, when they go out to

eat at a Chinese restaurant, they always ask for chopsticks. They wouldn't think of eating without chopsticks. Any they're proud of it. And I really sincerely feel that they are very proud to be Korean. Do you agree with her 100 percent?

SK: That's true. Very true. [00:45:00] So, I never wanted to be Irish (laughter) or English. No, I never wanted to be Caucasian.

Q: I have to get some scribbling down just shortly before I left the school. (pause) I interviewed Rebecca Kang. I don't know if you know her. [00:46:00] Last year, she got her PhD in nursing, and she's related to you.

SK: Yeah, we're on the... By the university.

Q: Just what she said, "I heard someone use a term recently that I had never heard before. Mainstreaming. Mainstreaming. That's a completely foreign term to be because I am mainstream. I'm just a typical mainstream American citizen." That's what she said. Do you sometimes feel like that, or do you always feel like that?

SK: I don't feel like a mainstream American citizen. Mainstream...

Q: As... I guess the question was put to her by [00:47:00] the interviewer asking what her relation, what her feeling



was to domain mainstream society. Caucasian White American Society.

SK: Yeah, I guess. Mainstream to me says the middle tier. Okay, that's mainstream right in the middle flow. I don't feel like I'm in the middle flow. I feel I'm in the upper flow, of your (inaudible). Because I, you know, I...

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SK: (pause) Yeah, it's from the standpoint of, you know, material goods, and travel, and all those kinds of things. And I mean, we -- I think as a family, we certainly do a lot more than most, what mainstream Americans do. We just have the financial wherewithal to do a lot more than most men do. So, I don't feel -- it's not that a superiority feeling at all. It's just that I feel that, you know, I, my values are certainly not mainstream America. I mean, I have a different perspective, just because of the, I guess, the level of affluence that we've attained than a lot of other people. And so, that's why I say mainstream doesn't really, I don't feel describe what I'm at right now.

Q: [00:01:00] Are you up and beyond the so-called mainstream society?

SK: Yeah, I think so. I, you know, I look at out there and I see what the mainstream, the, you know, the income levels are, and what they're doing, and that kind of thing, and it really, it's my life is very different from that in that. You know, I don't have any bills and that kind of thing. I mean, like I don't have the same concerns I think a lot of other people have in mainstream America. I guess from the standpoint of, do I feel like I'm American? Yes.

[00:02:00] From that [small?] standpoint, you could say, "Yeah, if you're, you know, that this is my country. It isn't Korea, that's my country." From the standpoint of, you know, you look at Olympic teams or something like that. I'm a proponent of the US Olympic team and not of the Korean National Olympic squad, that kind of thing. So, I mean, certain things, I guess, you can say that I'm, you know, kind of mainstream America but another ways I'm very different I think mainstream America.

Q: You don't have to answer me if this is becoming too personal in terms of income or... Can you give me or...

[00:03:00] Who were about the...

SK: You know, I have six figure income.

Q: So, I think, when you say that you will have all the economic wherewithal to do all the things that you can, you

want to do, from the upper class or beyond that height from the perch up there?

SK: Yeah, I got faced with the same. I guess, the same concerns that a lot of middle, I think, middle income people or you know, from the standpoint of financial problems, [00:04:00] is one of the main things that the middle tier faces. Right? Oh, how to buy a house and mortgage and all that kind of thing. It's really - - I don't have those problems. You know, I'm very lucky I don't have those problems. But from that standpoint, I have a different attitude I guess, and different look at things.

Q: Korean American historical societies looking at the Kang family history, with the interest for the reasons that I mentioned before, is there a certain way in which you would like to see the story of the Kang family written or...

SK: [00:05:00] I have no illusions about what this family is about. I think it's like, if you look back on it in depth, it's pretty much the story of a family, I think that's just very competitive and with a lot of grit and hard work. Is his, I think, certain aspects that we've done very well. Certain parts of the film. Certain other parts of the family had not done well. I mean, it's just... I think

that certainly my sisters and I have done very well. But that's not the case.

Q: Which sister? You have two sisters.

SK: Yes.

Q: I mean, you're talking about both of them.

SK: Yeah. Well, Valerie is a sociologist right now. She has her master's degree from Harvard, [joining the same?] university. And it's just that she got [00:06:00] started later. She got married and she had her, you know. And then, she had her divorce as lately. And so, she's really only embarked on a career just recently. Whereas my very younger sister now is doing very well. I mean, she's probably one of the foremost public relations people in my tech field. This one in computers and [Floppy Debbie?]....

Q: She's the vice president of...

SK: Public relations for the firm down in San Francisco. And yeah, I think she's what 33 years old, and she's doing very well financially and she's very well respected in her field. So, but, from but again, I mean, you know, you've got certain cousins who are not doing that well financially. And so. So, it isn't like kids, it's all successful, [00:07:00] or that all the kids achieve the same degree of success. (pause)

Q: So, your father had two brothers and two sisters?

SK: Yeah.

Q: And your uncles and aunts, all have families here. Do they all live in the West Coast?

SK: Yeah, we all do. California, Oregon, Washington. I have one cousin that's in Denver. It's about the farthest East.

Q: [00:08:00] I have hundreds and hundreds of questions.  
(inaudible) Do you remember just seeing your grandfather?  
Or when did you see him first?

SK: [00:09:00] Okay, I guess I was nine years old at the time. He came to Oregon. I think was he just visiting? I can't remember if he was just visiting or came like to live there. But he's a small man. About five feet. Wiry. Very good sense of humor. His English was not great, but he has very good sense of humor. Love to gamble. Like to play poker. Set the whole family seems to love to play poker. I guess...

Q: A little bit of your grandfather. (laughter)

SK: And for Panama hat, [00:10:00] I remember. A straw hat. I guess the word diamond ring, which was to me, was very, very memorable.

Q: You bought a diamond ring?

SK: A diamond ring. Yeah.

Q: It's very unusual.

SK: Yeah, it was very unusual. Men's diamond ring. Very dressed very sharply. And then, he was a carpenter, and very hard worker. And very, very strong. Little - - and here he was. Almost 70 years old, and he could do chin ups. One hand chin ups.

Q: One hand chin ups?

SK: Very, very strong. Like this. Very, very strong. And then...

Q: A seventy-year-old man doing a one hand chin up?

SK: But he was such a very light. [00:11:00] Five feet and very light. And I remember, he very hard work. He used to be the -- he'd help us in the whole farm work, and he'd be out hoeing. He felt whole faster than anyone else. Very, very competitive, and how fast he does. (laughter) And he builds things. So, we built solid horses. And then, one day, well you know who this is, he wouldn't be nice to have an addition to our house for that we needed another room for utility. We call utility porch with them, with the washer and dryer, and then another bedroom for me. Next day, he knocked down the old porch, and he started to build the add-on. And in about two weeks' time, he built the whole add-on himself. And now he's almost seventy years old. And he...

Q: All done by himself.

SK: Already done by himself. [00:12:00] And he was pulling up the things. And he got the wood, and saw the wood, and pull up piece by piece, and pound.

Q: That's amazing.

SK: He was amazing man. You know, he was a very hard worker, very competitive. And very, very, very, good craftsmen.

Q: One of the first impressions of him that you mentioned was sense of humor. Do you recall any things that he said to that made you laugh? Or...

SK: Well, he laughed one time. I mean, he, we were building this. This add-on. And I was helping him pull some things up. And he would speak and pick up [00:13:00] pidgin English, like he learned in Hawaii. And one of the words he used was hooky. Hooky. Hooky means if you were, you ever heard the Hawaiian song, "Hooky Lao"? It means to pull the fishnet in. So, hooky means to pull, okay? Well, I didn't know pigeon. So, he was yelling at me. He was holding it on as he said, "Hooky, hooky." (laughter) And I didn't know what he was talking about. And then, once I saw him pulling, so I started pulling. Well, the thing was nailed down. And he was saying, "Hooky," and I was pulling and pulling. And finally, he just let go. And he's just laughing and laughing and laughing because he -- he first he couldn't make me understand. And then, when he saw me

pulling, he noticed that it was nailed down. I couldn't pull it. (laughter) Even though I pulled it down.

(laughter) Yeah, so we had a great day. [00:14:00] Then another time I remember, he was, we were sitting down at dinner, we had some soup or something. And they were bringing my soup in. I think it was my sister. She spilled the hot soup on my lap. And he just thought that was so funny. So, I got very, very quickly, was running around, getting this done. He was laughing that it was the funniest thing. (laughter)

Q: Did he have the chance to tell you about how he participated in the Korean Independence Movement and how he...

SK: No. No, not at all. I didn't even know that that was, he was involved with it.

Q: Now, I heard from your grandma that [00:15:00] he was helping the military group.

SK: I could see how it happened. I could see that happening. He was very a fighter. I mean, he was very feisty. Very hot tempered. Right? I could see what how he could do that.

Q: He used to drive the food and supplies up to the little Korean military unit that was training off some jungle



area, someplace in Hawaii. And it was a pretty steep, very steep road mountain road that he had to drive.

SK: I know that. I can see that. Well, I mean, [00:16:00] he's very independent. Very feisty. A hot-tempered type of guy.

Q: I don't know like this -- this question, do you drink?

SK: No.

Q: So, nobody, no one in the Kang family drinks?

SK: Well, I'm allergic.

Q: You're all?

SK: Allergic to alcohol.

Q: Well, that's good.

SK: (laughter) We all get flood...

Q: We like it too much.

SK: We all get flushed. And this one drink and it's a terrible headache. And it doesn't taste good.

Q: Your Aunt Marian was telling me that all the Kang are...

[00:17:00] She didn't say allergic but the...

SK: Yeah, the physical reaction.

Q: Your sisters too?

SK: Yeah.

Q: And was it that way with your father?

SK: Yeah. No one... The only thing I can drink now is I can drink a little bit of very dry white wine. It has to be

very dry. If it's sweet white wine or red wine, I get this tremendous headache. We get all red in the face and feel awful. Is this something that's prevalent in? Have you heard this before from other people about other families?

Q: No.

SK: No?

Q: [00:18:00] I think it's kind of rare that every member of the family is allergic to alcohol. I heard of a family. One or two members but not every member. So, that's interesting. Grandma?

GRANDMA: Yeah.

SK: Could grandpa drink alcohol?

GRANDMA: No.

SK: No, he couldn't.

(Korean language) [00:18:41-00:19:16]

Q: When she's saying that your grandfather was the fourth generation in the Kang family that couldn't drink. So, with you, by now, you're about, you've reached seventh, eighth generation.

(Korean language) [00:19:33-00:20:00]

(pause)

S4: This waiting time. Of the... This waiting time.

(inaudible)

Q: Well, when did you meet? When and where did you meet your wife?

SK: It was May 31, 1972. Memorial Day. And we met a -- we went to a Memorial Day picnic with some friends. We have a mutual -- we had a mutual friend. [00:21:00] And so, we met at a picnic. And then, after the picnic...

Q: This was in New York?

SK: This is in New York. Then after the picnic, we went... Where did we go after the picnic with the ballet, right? (laughter) So, Margot Fonteyn, and... Who else was it? Louisa. Rudolf Maria. (inaudible) (laughter)

S4: I think he was trying to impress me. (laughter)

Q: What did you like about her that that made you propose? (laughter)

SK: Well, I don't know. I think that she had some basic intelligence. I think like just (laughter) she was... [00:22:00] She had a hard life, I think as a child two, which is I think there was some... I guess some similarity. And she worked, you know, worked very hard. I think she had aspirations certainly that... Which I didn't see in a lot of other people. And also, she was interested in art at that time, and being in New York. She was an art major in graphic arts. Not graphic arts. Fine art. We used to go to museums a lot and, you know, just enjoyed

each other's company I guess, that's more. And we knew that we didn't happen quickly. I knew her for two years before we got married, so.

Q: What schools... (laughter)

SK: [00:23:00] And she introduced me to a lot of good Chinese restaurants. (laughter)

Q: What schools did she go to?

SK: Queens College as an undergraduate. And Columbia for her master's in art.

Q: In fine art?

SK: Fine art. Yeah. Was it fine art?

S4: Yeah.

SK: Yeah.

Q: And so, what -- when did you get married?

SK: We got married in 1974. December. And then, she was teaching me at the time. High school for a year. And then, in the New York City system. And then actually, we were married... [00:24:00] She, I guess, worked for that year. And then we moved to Los Angeles.

Q: Oh, that's when you have the [job interview?].

SK: Yeah. And then Michael was born the following year. So that since then, she's just staying home with the children.

Q: You have three sons? Michael...

SK: Brian and Andrew.

Q: Brian and Andrew. What kind of people you want them to be grow up to be?

SK: Well, I don't know. It's tough to say what, you know, [00:25:00] you want them to be, you know, responsible, and to be honest, to be hardworking. To be, I guess looked up to leaders. You want them to be respected by their way, their peers. And you want them to be, I guess, to be self-sufficient. To have the wherewithal to, you know, to have economic crises and be comfortable. And hopefully take care of their parents when they get older. (laughter)

Q: Is that part of the Korean heritage? I mean, that way of sort of [00:26:00] hoping the children to take care of you when they grow up and when you get old.

SK: But isn't that any parents' ways? I mean, whether you're Korean or whether you're American, you want your children to be close by, to help you out, I mean, as you get older. I don't think that's peculiarly Korean.

Q: I see what you mean. I mean, it's universal. It's like kind of universal instinct, I guess. But Americans seem to be that they cannot have that kind of expectations of their children because they've been pounding on the importance of being independent and self-sufficient. And then as a result of which, [00:27:00] they have not done very much for the kids. And then, when the kids grow up, and when

the parents get home, the parents cannot have this. Do you agree with me or...

SK: I agree with you. I agree with you. Yeah... With our kids, I mean, we're doing a lot for our kids right now. And I think they understand that we're doing a lot for them. I don't think it ever come to the stage where we say, "You're on your own," without any direction. It's always, you know, "Here's what should be done. Here's how we think you should do it. Now go do it," as opposed to, "Go do what you want to do," without any reaction.

Q: [00:28:00] Your father died at the age of 49? How old were you when he died? What year was that?

SK: I was 24. 24, 25 right, when dad died. No, it's a little over than that. I was 27. 27. I was 27.

Q: Oh, you were already married?

SK: No, we've got married the next year. I think he died in what 71 is it? 72. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) No, 74. 74. Yeah, right. So before. April 74, he died.

Q: What are some of the things that you remember [00:29:00] liking him [up?]?

SK: Well, I think that he was very generous for one thing. Always, you know, the kids always like to be with him because he would always take them and give them candy or he take me, took them shopping and buy them something. And he

always came home from his trips when he went to see something with something for the kids. Oh, it's toys or something like that. He's very generous. Just a terrific sense of humor. I mean, just, you know, love to joke and love to play practical jokes on the kids and enjoy just about everything. I mean, loved food. [00:30:00] Particularly loved to be -- loved children. I mean, the little ones, he used to really enjoy taking with him. We had some very good friends from the with the seam and the ease to work with. Was always well liked. I don't think there was anyone who didn't like my father. He was sometimes a bit short tempered but I mean, never to the stage where, you know, physical violence or anything like that. I mean, he's just short tempered from the standpoint. He'd get angry and yell or sulk or something like that, but he'd always be fine in the next day or the next -- a couple of hours later, [00:31:00] he was always a supervisor, never the worker. (laughter) I don't know. I think the -- it's all the workers who we ever worked for us, always really enjoyed working for him. He had a real, I guess, real gift or knack of being able to supervise people and get along with him at the same time.

Q: A rare kind of leadership?

SK: No. Yeah, I mean, he was... I mean, he was supervise people aboard ships all the time. And I never met one person who said anything about bad or... I mean, it was usually very well a lot of praise for his supervision.

Q: [00:32:00] I think that... Running out of the question, out of questions, and it's getting pretty late. So, I want to thank you again for your time. And I want to thank you Mrs. Kang for wonderful dinner.

SK: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW