

Nelson Park (tape 1, side 1) 3-4-1981-converted - 3 files

Q: Okay, when were you born?

NELSON PARK: I was born on August 19, 1948, and (inaudible).

And I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Q: Do you remember your mother's maiden name?

NP: Yeah, it's [Yonso?].

Q: How about father's first name?

NP: [Sunyong?].

Q: [Sunyong?]. How many children in your family, and what is your rank among them?

NP: I'm the eldest of two children.

Q: They -- you got -- the other one is your sister. What was the social standing of your parents?

NP: Occupationally?

Q: Yeah, occupationally.

NP: My father -- well, spent 20 years military. And worked at Boeing, would sell natural gas (inaudible) and now works for the US postal system in Honolulu. [00:01:00]

Q: Is he still alive?

NP: Oh yeah, and my mother is a -- works as a key punch operator for Blue Cross.

Q: I see. How old they were, they are right now?

NP: My dad is 62. My mom is probably -- (inaudible) hide this, about 54, 55.

Q: Your father was in the Army for 20 years?

NP: Yeah, 20, and served in Korea from -- that's a whole interesting story in itself, but he served in Korea prior to World War II -- I mean, right after World War II, he went to Korea, and then also, formulate the Japanese surrender in Korea.

Q: Oh is that right?

NP: Yeah, he also, Panmunjom, in negotiations at the end of the war too, he also was in the negotiations.

Q: I see. [00:02:00] Do you remember what kind of position he was in at the time?

NP: We have never really discussed this at any length, because he preferred not to talk about his life. But, the brief conversations that we did have, he used to -- he was one of five. He was appointed by a naval officer to pick four Korean-Americans to go to Japan after, to formulate the surrender in Korea. And he picked four people, of which who all went to school within Hawaii, and they were second generation. They were the first -- they came in on Japanese mail plane into, I think Seoul. And they were the first Korean-American soldiers Koreans had ever seen. They could speak the language, and --

Q: Your father [00:03:00] speaks the Korean language fluently,
that's what --

NP: So does my father.

Q: Yeah, your father must have had a very important role in --

NP: And he plays it down, but he had been in meetings even when
Syngman Rhee was in office where he would interpret
negotiation. But he didn't talk about that too much,
because that was off my security clearance.

Q: (laughs) Yeah, I understand that. Did your family own some
land?

NP: My grandfather did, like one time, in both Oahu, and the
Big Island, Hawaii, on the Kona coast. They eventually
just, they were able to from a family in Hawaii a hundred-
year lease on just a real small hotel above -- you know,
like a drug store, or liquor store. You know, it's
upstairs above the [00:04:00] main storefronts. And my
grandmother still operates that in Hilo. And she is in her
nineties.

Q: In her nineties? Then, your grandparents came to the
United States.

NP: My grandfather came here 1905.

Q: 1905, one of the first immigrants.

NP: If not on the first boat, within that, within the first
three months.

Q: 1905 is the year, as far as I understand, the immigration, the first (inaudible) immigration start, it started 1903, I think, and it continued for two years. And the Korean government at the time stopped immigration to the United States.

NP: It was interesting. I guess during that time in Korea there was a depression going on.

Q: That's right, disease, depression.

NP: Yeah, and he [00:05:00] was living in the north, and --

Q: Do you know which part of North Korea?

NP: No. My grandmother **no**, but he came here mainly to work as a contractor for the --

Q: Plantation?

NP: -- sugarcane company.

Q: I see. Do you remember anything about your grandparents' life in Hawaii?

NP: You know, to this day, when we go around Oahu or the Big Island, that's the only two islands that both family -- I mean now, third-generation family, lives on, the families live on, is that -- on Oahu, dad can go around and note cane fields and pineapple fields, sewer systems that [00:06:00] Koreans worked on and built, where they used to live, and in the case of my family, they moved quite, often, depending on where the work was. And, it was a

large family, so he mainly, I guess my grandmother was an extremely, extremely hard-working individual. Also the children worked at an early age too. And, not that I (inaudible) historically.

Q: Do you know how large the family was?

NP: Yeah, they're -- four girls, four aunts, and four boys.

Q: Four boys. [00:07:00] It's -- your grandfather's next generation and grandchildren, including grandchildren, or just your grandfather's --

NP: Oh, just my grandfather's family, my dad and his brothers.

Q: I see, I see. Did you go to school in Korea? Of course not.

NP: No. I've never been there. I've been invited numerous times, but haven't been able to go.

Q: How many times did you visit Korea?

NP: I haven't. Closest I've been is Japan.

Q: When was that?

NP: 1951. My dad re-situated us out of -- because of the Korean War, out of Japan and (inaudible) [00:08:00] never came back.

Q: How long did you stay there?

NP: In Japan? Four years.

Q: Four years, so that's, during the period in which your father served in Korea, right?

NP: Right. No, well he was stationed in Japan, but he still did a lot with the Korean government. But it was based out of Japan.

Q: That's right, yeah. Many of the military, you know, persons were staying in Japan. Now, what are your oldest recollections of life in America, life in your childhood, [00:09:00] especially of your family and neighborhood?

NP: From a historical aspect, we came -- Hawaii was a territory when I was born. And when we came to the mainland, which the Hawaiians called "the States," like they consider -- at that time, the mainland a different country, is that, we came into San Francisco and port of entry, and --

Q: When was that?

NP: In 1955, and in 1955, my dad was able to save up enough money to have a car purchased in Japan, but he already was -- we traveled from San Francisco all across the United States to North Carolina, [00:10:00] and then up to Fort Knox, Kentucky. But my first impressions of the United States was kind of mixed because if you go to San Francisco, you see a lot of Asians. And I thought that was true of the United States as a whole. But as you, as we proceeded eastward, at that point in time you saw Native Americans that had -- and this is a very vivid recollection -- living in small huts along the side of the road, and I

didn't understand that. I didn't understand the civil rights movement that was going on in the south where we're traveling. It was a very peculiar situation, because we couldn't use white facilities and we couldn't use Black facilities; people didn't know how to treat us. We had -- at times difficulties in rent, you know, getting a place to stay for the night. At which point, you know, [00:11:00] I guess my father really buffered us from that as much as possible. Even when, even around Washington DC at that time, we spent, I can recall one day, four hours going around trying to find a place to -- lodging for the evening.

Q: Is that mainly because of the unfamiliarity you had --

NP: They had a real difficulty, especially in the South, in the Midwest, people didn't know how to -- they were really perplexed; a lot of people had never seen Asians before. And they knew who Japanese and Chinese were, but they -- other than the war, they really hadn't -- know, or knowledge of what the Korean people were like, or anything. So either you got a very inquisitive type of reaction from people, or you got a very silent, very [00:12:00] perplexed kind of standoffish type of reaction.

Q: How was the situation in Hawaii, when you, you know, before you left (inaudible) --

NP: Well I (inaudible). I think my cousins and I have talked about it another of times, is that, we all feel very fortunate that we were born in the third generation, in the sense that our grandfather and grandmother had to endure -- and our parents, all had to endure a lot of hardships. And the -- my dad is the eldest son, and the two eldest helped the two youngest brothers. And the two, the four girls in the family. And they would send money home. [00:13:00] And also as the two eldest daughters also did the same. And what you see professionally now is that -- I hate to use the word "middle-class," or you know, using class systems. Basically, the eldest children -- let me rephrase this. The younger four children all profited. Dennis, ophthalmologist. And we're also, you know, it afforded them, and in some situations, they had more flexibility to go to college, and they married into higher-income family systems. Everyone basically is [00:14:00] doing well right now. And the kids benefited from that, all my cousins.

Q: So in other words, parents were, you know, taking good care of their children.

NP: Yeah, for their sacrifices, and what they had to go through, we benefited from that. It'd say that however, and this -- there's a (inaudible) individual, I think his name -- [John Han?] at UC Davis, wrote a paper back in the

late '60 or early '70s. He was noting the high degree of divorce rate and juvenile delinquency and some other things, involving Korean Americans, and he did not, because of the limited research materials, he wrote just a position paper, which I saw. And [00:15:00] you know, not as a stereotype, just from my experiences, I have seen many Koreans strive, second-generation, strive to provide basically their children with the American dream. The house, the two cars, you know. And in our situation, for example, we spent 11 years living in a trailer going across the country. It took probably until about 1961 when we moved here to have that happen. But, you know, I think it's been, even for the second generation, many families struggled to get, to achieve that point where they feel that they're financially comfortable. So, that's just, that's something that [00:16:00] I read and I also agreed with.

Q: What do you feel about that personally, you know, looking at your past, and you think you have succeeded in that?

NP: I'll tell you, when I graduated from college -- when I graduated from high school, that was a major goal when I was growing up, when I was a kid. And you might find this prevalent in children -- my mom is a war bride. Children of war brides, and children of Army parents, is that,

because you change school districts every year-and-a-half, on the average, you can never settle in. So it wasn't until I got here, academically, I grew. And when I [00:17:00] graduated from the University of Washington, and also immediately got a job within four days of graduating, I mean I had achieved all the goals that I had set up professionally to achieve. I mean, even the pay range in which I was being paid. So as far as, kind of the goals or -- that I had set, I had done that with the first three months being out of school, basically. So I had to sit down, basically reconstruct. Because you know, there is no real role model to follow, in the sense of, the influence of growing up in, you know, (inaudible), and not growing up in Hawaii.

Q: Yeah, in that sense, your family is quite special, you know. Not settle down in one place for a long time, [00:18:00] was moving around.

NP: Consistently moving around. And, a couple interesting points. We -- there were so few Koreans that lived in the United States when we were moving around, this was back in the '50s again that during the 30-day leave when we came in from Japan, San Francisco to come across the United States, we stopped at a number of places across the country. We went all the way up to Maine even to visit a Korean family.

When Mo knew, we went to Chicago where there were a lot of college students from Korea, and different places in, small colleges in the Midwest.

Q: That's in the 1950s, right?

NP: Yeah. And that's a fact that there were numerous students that came from Korea at that time and studied in the Midwest, and around Washington DC. We went to DC.

[00:19:00] There still is a large pop, and there is a large population of Koreans in DC and in Chicago.

Q: Yeah, most of the students is, what is called, foreign students, went to east coast.

NP: (inaudible) but, this is kind of an abstract, but there was a, you know, there were certain pockets of areas where you knew there were Korean families, and somehow they were interrelated, and you always made an effort to stop in, even they were 100 or 200 miles away to see them.

Q: So you made any acquaintance with the Korean students who came from Korea?

NP: Most of those students were -- now are in their forties.

Q: That's right, now in their forties. [00:20:00]

NP: In their forties or late forties, so they were more friends of my parents. The students that, until just prior to me leaving the University of Washington sent me to, I met a number of Korean nationals who were studying here. But

prior to that, I'd never seen a large number of
(inaudible). In fact, in '70 there was only two third-
generation Korean-Americans on campus. It was myself and
Melanie [Han?] who was from San Francisco. And we knew
each other distantly through family ties.

Q: When you're quite younger, how did you get along with your
classmates?

NP: I think very well, mainly because of the fact that I was
used to moving. [00:21:00] I think, parents had more of a
problem dealing with me than kids did. I think younger --
I'm talking about younger kids, that were like six years of
age or younger, had difficulty relating to me and you get
the same racist remarks that everyone, you know, was
familiar with, when you went shopping. Which, that's a
whole different topic. There's discrimination, and on the
other hand, it was, you know, some people had always
remembered through those early years. But as a whole,
getting along with children my age, especially peers, is
that very well, [00:22:00] a lot of this has to attribute
to the fact that the areas in which we lived were
predominantly military, either off post or on post. And
there tended to be more of a racial mix within the
immediate area of the Army base, or the Air Force base.

And that made it a lot easier. Most of the school settings that I went to were multiracial.

Q: Did you come across any teacher who belongs to a minority group? Since most of the teachers are white, I suppose.

NP: Between K through 12?

Q: Yeah.

NP: Just one, [00:23:00] that I can recall.

Q: How did you relate to that, you know, particular teacher?

NP: Oh, this individual is quite unique. His last name was [Grinyon?], he was a sprinter for one of the South American countries in the Pan Am Games. And he's our track coach at (inaudible) Junior High School. And, (inaudible) pretty well. But at that time, you know, there weren't minority teachers within the school systems.

Q: Did he promote or disparage ethnicity, and this kind of idea, you know?

NP: No, that never really came up.

Q: No idea, you know?

NP: No.

Q: Do you have any typical -- remember any typical day in grade school? [00:24:00] And typical day in high school?

NP: Not really in grade school. Because again, we moved around so much. In high school, I spent four years going to the same school, but, typical in what sense, I guess?

Q: Well --

NP: Basically we went to school with white students, white curriculum, white perspectives on life. I was always outspoken, so. You know, like history, I'd often disagree with some things that we'd note in the history books. You know, I was only one of maybe four minority students in the school at the time. And one of the Black students [00:25:00] and myself, were one of two -- [Will?] participated in football and track and, this isn't a typical day, but I'll just give you the kind of environment that we grew up in in high school, is that he told me, "Either they're going to like you here, or they're gonna hate your guts." (laughter) And he said, he just pulled me aside one day when we were practicing, and he said, he said, "Just know that, and the only way that you'll be able to shine in any kind of athletic endeavor, is not on a team basis, is on an individual basis." And the same thing that -- we're still friends, (inaudible) are still friends to each other. He never got to play varsity football. They kept him playing JV football his high school career. He finally gave it up. But he was, [00:26:00] he played for Western Washington up in Bellingham, was their starting wide receiver, and was all-conference and played semi-pro ball for eight years. I never played in college ball, but

I wound up having to get that out of my system, the frustration of not being able to -- I got to at least suit up varsity, but never got to really play. For example, his advice was probably the best advice I (inaudible). I had to basically concentrate on track, track and field events. Because your performance is, it's not based on somebody letting you do something. Either you do it or you don't. And both him and I having to run the same events, which was the sprints, and broad jumping, and triple jumping. And [00:27:00] that's the only way that you could get any recognition, other than academics. Academically at that time, (inaudible) that you should be, you've got that stereotype of being, you know, academically high, a high student. And, I didn't fit that mold either, I was just, I finished in the, I was the, what is it, exactly in the middle of my class, graduated college. And there were some stereotypes about that, you know, about teachers not feeling that I was meeting their expectations. But the only way that I feel personally [identified?] in anything I did in school was basically track. And that afforded me a scholarship to go to college. [00:28:00] And also in Cecil's case too.

Q: You graduated from the University of Washington?

NP: Yeah.

Q: What was your major?

NP: My major was sociology, and at that time, they didn't have a -- I don't know, I don't think they still do now. They didn't have a studies program, a degree program in Asian American studies, but I must have at least 40 hours related to Asian American studies. Yeah, in those days, you had to use the academic system to your advantage, which meant we took general studies, general and accredited studies. We did like too classes in [00:29:00] sociology which dealt with certain issues, it would always be wrapped around like the international district, or domed stadium (inaudible) on the IB, things of that nature. So at least it kept you involved with the community and also issues that were relevant at that time.

Q: What was your parents' general attitude toward your education?

NP: To some degree, they really didn't have a choice in the fact that my dad's assignments, and they felt that I didn't really benefit academically from all the move. In high school though, I think the [00:30:00] powerless thing --

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BEGIN NELSON PARK (TAPE 2, SIDE 1) 3-4-1981-CONVERTED

Q: [00:00:00] Okay, and we were talking about your parents' attitude toward your education.

NP: I think the most -- the thing that probably, again with my (inaudible) is he felt most powerless about is the fact that it got down to athletics. You know, I, in high school didn't really try to excel academically, and I was very sports-oriented. Again, I was very outspoken in school, and the coach finally called -- who was then the vice principal, the school called my father and told him that, basically that I could never start for that school, mainly because of community pressure. And it would get, back to the point about Cecil [Simmons?] telling me that you had to excel at an individual sport, you could not do it on a team basis. [00:01:00] And we had, I mean we didn't talk about this until I was way older, I mean, a few years ago. And he said that was probably the most difficult thing, one of the most difficult things that he faced because he couldn't do anything. He had no power.

Q: Just to feel powerless.

NP: Extremely powerless to be able to do anything for his son. And he said, if I was a standing member in the community, if I, you know, were white, or you know, it would be all

different. And he said, and the thing is he told me that, the vice principal told him that during the course of the football season, and he could see my frustration, but he could never share that information with me. Because he didn't want me to basically give up, on myself or, or the time that I put in to doing that. [00:02:00] And I think he realized that, the racial bias that's going on, because he sent me to Hawaii the summer before, and my aunts had asked me if I wanted to go to school there. And I said no, and I'd prefer to finish up where I spent all my first, sophomore and junior years, first two years.

Q: Did you have a lot of fightings with other guys in your high school days?

NP: No, very lucky. In high school, most of my friends were bigger than I was. (laughs) No, there were a number of times where there was a lot of verbal confrontations, but for me to get into a physical type thing would have been a no-win proposition. It is comical, because two of my friends, they're very close [00:03:00] to me back then. But the two biggest guys in the school. And I, you know, I never had to do anything as far as physically (inaudible). A lot of fights in junior high school. (laughs) But I mediated myself from that. There'd be no way; it'd be a no-win proposition, there would be, just from the

animosities developed, so. I just, basically considered those folks ignorant. There was a lot of racial slurs, (inaudible).

Q: What were the typical racial slurs at the time?

NP: They were, they weren't pertinent to Koreans, because there's no slanderous word for Korean. So it would be, you know, they would use the word jap, or chink, or you know.

[00:04:00]

Q: So Korea is what --

NP: I mean, you know. Again, you know, I just sort of (inaudible). It was that type of racial slur.

Q: That's right.

NP: Especially when you got into interracial dating, if you dated someone's sister, that type of thing.

Q: You had some dates?

NP: Oh yeah. And it's very awkward at times. Because of the parents. Not so much because the girls in high school I dated, but it made dating in certain situations where a friend of yours had to go pick up the girl, or you had to meet somewhere. On very few occasions did you get to actually meet the parents.

Q: I see. [00:05:00] So what's the girl's attitude? Did they think that they were different from other girls, you know, who --

NP: No, I wouldn't say so, no, not at all. Again, you know, there were a lot of people that, at that time, I mean there were some people that they had very open attitudes, and you know, particularly three different family, cases, very open, very interested in me, invite me over the home, dinner, that type of thing. And there were some very awkward cases though, like I wanted to date, even a girl who I was going to the same church with. Parents wouldn't do it. I mean, good churchgoing members, you know. That [00:06:00] really perplexed me, especially being, her parents are one of the leaders in the church, I mean, I guess your Sunday Christians, or whatever you want to call that.

Q: Sunday church (inaudible).

NP: Yeah. But not, I think, you know, everyone's probably shared that type of discrimination.

Q: I think we have to, you know, to say more about the church. They are now are going on to occupational things. So when did you start working?

NP: I don't know where I didn't work. I worked when I -- since I was eight years old, doing something. It's either being a caddy, all these service type, caddy, I've been [00:07:00] a dishwasher, I've worked in restaurants. And

that was basically to raise money so that I could buy, you know, (inaudible).

Q: The things you want.

NP: And I knew that, as I stated before, that my dad was sending money home to help the family out. And a master sergeant's pay doesn't go too far. Back then it wasn't bad pay for, you know, a family of four, but it extends to extended family. It makes things more difficult. So, I guess (inaudible) I think, that's how I, you know, I can't play golf, technically the game of golf. I used to caddy. It was at exclusive all-white clubs, and they used to have, this was in the South, Black, and I was the only other [00:08:00] minority caddy.

Q: Did it pay well?

NP: For them, yeah. Because if you knew how to play the game, read the greens, and back then a dollar to a caddy for nine holes was a lot of money. And if you made two dollars in a day, that was --

Q: When was that, dollar --

NP: That was back in fifty, around '57, '58. That's a lot of money. And you hustled golf balls that people lost, you'd go in the lakes and dive for balls that people had hit in the lake, and sold those to the, you know, the golfers, and shagged balls. But going through high school, most of the

things I did were in the service industry. I think, like most kids' part time job. [00:09:00] As I got older, in the summer, I did everything, go truck, did anything that would bring in income. And even during the Boeing, the big Boeing recession, I worked. If that meant calling up every construction company every morning at five o'clock in the morning, that's what I did. I called everyone in the phone book and.

Q: So you worked all the way through your school days?

NP: Oh yeah. When I first began, when I first went to community college, I worked three jobs, because it was night school then. And I would wake up at about 3:30 in the morning, go to work at 4:30, work for construction firm, non-union, and get off at 12, [00:10:00] then I'd go and work for Bellevue Community College in the mail room, and distributing mail throughout the college, and running the duplication services and stuff. And then, go to school, and then when the school closed, I had a janitor job, cleaning out the (inaudible) facility. So, you know. Plus on top of that though, I had a free ride as far as schooling was concerned, but as far as anything else, transportation or just to get by, I was emancipated from the family, legally when I was 18. And that's something I tell my dad sometimes. I figured that, it was my time to

go out on my own. And I took care of myself from that point on.

Q: You got out of your parents' house [00:11:00] at the time?

NP: On and off, but mostly I was still there, but I was self-sufficient. I'd help them buy food. That type of thing.

Q: After (inaudible) you know, work after you graduated from college, university?

NP: Well let me go back. I worked at the University of Washington. And when I was at the University of Washington, I worked in the Office of Minority Affairs with Dorothy's brother, Michael [Castellanos?]. And recruiter, and the Asian student [population?]. That led to, when I graduated, that led to a counseling job at SYC, vocational counseling job. Which lasted for six months. I was offered a position (inaudible) as a career counselor too, [00:12:00] dealing with private nonprofit agencies, and at that time, cause the Vietnam War was, veterans were returning, dealing with the hiring of Vietnam veterans onto our program, dealing with special interest groups because the city at that time, this was [VA funding purchasing?] employment act, there was primarily a lot of physicians within state government, and very few minorities then working with the city. This was in '73. And I worked at, for about almost five years, and then I became a program

coordinator II, which was basically the assistant to the director, [00:13:00] as program, and since then I've done a number of different things within the program, and the administrative level. So I guess there's been some type of progression upwards, since I've got out of school. But you know, I feel very fortunate having been able to go to school at that time period, because of the degree I have, which was in sociology. With [Finn?], you know, that time period when Nixon got reelected, a lot of social service programs went down. That's basically what's happening right now. And I was able to get some type of formalized eight-to-five working [00:14:00] situation prior to coming to the city. And I really didn't want to come to work for the city. There were, I think at that time, I think the largest minority group within the city were Asian Americans. But they represented less than one percent of our total working force. And there were a few Blacks, hardly any Chicanos that would, they could be, other than their Hispanic names, be identified as Hispanic. And also Native Americans, I mean very few. And what that, the (inaudible) has been able to do, because of federal mandate tied with that money, is I would say a large, large percentage of minorities that are now currently working for this city have been (inaudible) through the federally

funded program. [00:15:00] So, it's basically what has happened up to date.

Q: That's a really good deal for the minorities, right?

NP: It was, but you know, it took free money from the federal government, and basically a federal commitment, like the [Cedar?] program nationally, for example, are about fifty percent minority. And it takes that type of inducement to make the personnel systems be receptive to hiring minorities, selectively certify for a certain position. So, I would say that it has benefited minorities in general that have been able to go permanent with the city. And it's also, to a large degree, has [00:16:00] helped other people go into the private sector too. But that is just a small percentage of the total group. Most of them have resided in the public sector.

Q: Do you know where to go after this program is closed down?

NP: If I have my own, the thing that I want to do now is I have to work in the private sector, in private (inaudible), to look at that whole spectrum. Realistically, that would be a very hard (inaudible), and would be a reduction in pay. That's something I'm looking at. The public sector is way more easier to get into, mainly because the bureaucratic skills that you have here are more transferrable.

[00:17:00]

Q: But that's your long-term career goal?

NP: My long-term career goal is to work for myself. And I think I need to have private sector experience to do that.

Q: Did you join a union or something?

NP: No, I've never (inaudible). I'm a non-represented employee, so whatever the average of the unions get, we also receive.

Q: Oh, did you, what church did you go?

NP: I was baptized Methodist. Our whole family's Methodist, and it all extends back to Methodist missionaries in [00:18:00] Korea, so.

Q: That's your parent's church?

NP: Right.

Q: You're still going to the church?

NP: Not at present. We've having a -- you know, my wife is Japanese. We just have a new, we have our first child, and we've discussed whether, the option between going to a Christian or Buddhist church, or both. That's something we have discussed about.

Q: Did you have any difficulty with your church pastor, or, no?

NP: No. As a whole, as far as the church goes, and as far [00:19:00] as the minister or pastors, I've always had a very, that was always a positive environment for me.

Q: In your church, there are some minority ethnic groups?

NP: When I was going to church here on the mainland, no, it was all white.

Q: Have you subscribed to any Korean newspapers?

NP: No.

Q: Well we covered part of it, but what was your family life like, particularly when you were young?

NP: It was always a situation of, I guess, adapting [00:20:00] from different regions of the country. I mean, it goes both ways, people adjusting to us and us adjusting to them. I wrote a paper on this at the University of Washington once, about, I wish I could be more precise about the experiences that I went through. But at a very early age, I definite feel like, that you knew who the power belonged to, and that it was a white society. You know, little things stick in my mind, but most have to do with the fact that you had to be very, you had to adapt to their system, their lifestyle. There are times when you forget that you're even an ethnic minority in a lot of cases, [00:21:00] because the word, I think, everyone was trying to use then was the word "assimilate," and to not speak Korean at home. I couldn't understand Korean. I can't speak it, because I wasn't allowed to. That has changed in recent years, and that's one thing I wish I could do is be

bilingual. And it's like talking to my grandmother. She can talk to me, but I can't respond to her. Back in the '50s and the '60s, the family wasn't, parents didn't really encourage you to know about your Korean history. Not until I went to college did that start to all, because of that time period too. There's a lot of different [00:22:00] ethnic minority groups basically looking for their roots and their vast history. And getting back into touch with their culture.

Q: How you think you did, you know, how did you get along with your parents and your brothers and sisters?

NP: My dad and I never had to really know each other until I was about 12 or 13. Although he worked in the military, he also used to have a part-time job. That left my mom to be basically, you know, the head of the household. And I hand it to her raising, there's only two of us. [00:23:00] It was trying at times because of the money situation. I've gotten to know my parents closer, actually since I've left home, and gotten to appreciate what they went through since leaving home. But, you know, I think, in any family environment we're talking about finances, and (inaudible) priority of trying to make, to earn income. The family did suffer. That doesn't apply just to poor folks, you know,

folks that are fairly rich, the kids don't get along with their parents?

Q: Who dominated the family? In your case, father or mother?

NP: My father.

Q: Father, with whom [00:24:00] did you get along better?

NP: I get along with my mom the best up until about 13. After that, my father went, took a very deep interest in the sense that he felt that there was something missing between the two of us. And, around about the age of 12, 13, obviously I had a close relationship with my father.

Q: I see. And you had, you said you had some dates with girls, you know. Whom did you date mostly?

NP: There was only one choice, mostly whites -- I mean all whites.

Q: All whites, virtually all whites. You said you married to a Japanese lady, right? Did your parents approve of your choice? [00:25:00]

NP: Oh yeah, they were -- yeah. We went together six years before we got married.

Q: I see. When and where did you meet?

NP: She was still in high school, and I was in my first year of college. We went through a mutual friend.

Q: How long did you court?

NP: Six years. And we've been married eight years. It's been a while.

Q: Is there any special thing about your wedding, you know, in terms of people --

NP: Oh no, we had a very, we just had immediate family. [The girls?], us, just immediate family, just family with my brother-in-law. We had a former military pastor do the wedding. So it wasn't any type of grand affair type things.

Q: Where did you first live after marriage? [00:26:00]

NP: We lived in Seattle on Beacon Hill, where I think everyone -- or all my friends (inaudible).

Q: It was near your parents?

NP: No. At that time, my parents were divorced. At that time, my mom was living in Bellevue, and my dad was living in (inaudible) [Hawaii/with a wife?]. So he had returned home.

Q: Oh your father remarried, again?

NP: They have both remarried.

Q: I see, I see.

NP: It's interesting.

Q: Did both of you work now?

NP: Both of them?

Q: Both of you and your wife?

NP: Yes.

Q: What kind of job you, (inaudible)?

NP: Monica is an account executive with (inaudible) television. And she solves TV commercial time at the station. And she's the only Asian [00:27:00] in this market area that I know of. Well she was the first I know in this market area, Asian American to be an account executive here, in the media.

Q: You said you have one child, right? What, she or he?

NP: She, she only.

Q: Naomi?

NP: Naomi.

Q: Naomi means, Japanese name?

NP: Yeah.

Q: Was she born at home, or in the hospital?

NP: In the hospital, Providence.

Q: How old is --

NP: She's six months, six days ago. [00:28:00]

Q: Do you support any political party?

NP: Not really. I've supported individuals. And, I supported both Republicans and Democrats. More Democrats than Republicans. But I don't have any political party (inaudible).

Q: Preference.

NP: That I'm affiliated with.

Q: You said you support, more or less more for the Democratic party, why?

NP: I think it's, it has nothing to do, I guess it was early on. It had nothing to do with the fact that I knew anything about the historic fact about the Democratic or Republican Party, but I think, because [00:29:00] of the Civil Rights movement, the gains that were made during that period in a Democratic administration, I think that's had a direct effect on who I support, and I tend not to be, I'm not what I consider conservative or support big business, or support state rights, or those types of issues. Although I do support Republicans who believe in many of those type of areas. But because of their past performance, especially in their dealings with the Asian community,

Q: Yeah. Do you like your present neighborhood?

NP: Okay, I live in -- yeah, I like my present neighborhood, which is, it's [green light?], but it's the area that we live in [00:30:00] is not all white. It has two Filipino families, ourself, and one Black family. So. But we plan to move.

Q: You plan to move?

END OF NELSON PARK (TAPE 2, SIDE 1) 3-4-1981-CONVERTED

BEGIN NELSON PARK (TAPE 2, SIDE 2) 3-4-1981-CONVERTED

NP: [00:00:00] We plan to move mainly to, just to get a better home. We worked on two homes, older homes. So, sold one and we're in another one now.

Q: Do you have anything to add, any special kind of memories, you know?

NP: Well, I think I shared this with you before. From a historical aspect, since there's so few Korean-Americans that are third-generation, even, there are more probably in the Los Angeles area, southern California, is that there is a larger population. There was at one time a large contingency of first-, second-, and third-generation Koreans that left in Gresham, Oregon. [00:01:00] And they originally were, that group of people originally were contract workers in Hawaii. They came, via somehow, via Portland. And they went to Montana. And there are Koreans in Montana also, in Butte and places like that. Some of them stayed, some of them returned and Gresham is similar to Portland, everything truck farming. And they now have, they own many of the large nursery, from which even those plants are shipped to Washington, provided by a three,

four-state area. There, it's comparable I guess to the Japanese community that's settled in the (inaudible) area. They were struck farmers, and many of them still are.

[00:02:00] Some, the Pike Place Market. In the Seattle area, I know, I have, I've met many third-generation, not third, second-generation Korean Americans. But I've really only met one third-generation.

Q: Who was that?

NP: That was Melanie [Han?].

Q: Melanie Han.

NP: She's from San Francisco. It was just, we were introduced, and it was a real odd conversation, because she, there's Ewha University in Korea. My mother's uncle was the president. And she --

Q: President of the university? Who was that, a long time ago?

NP: No, [00:03:00] I don't think it was. Something like president, or. But he's a doctor, a medical doctor. And she stayed with him. And she mentioned that she had gone back, just come back to Korea after studying there, and mentioned the family, and I, that struck, that rang a bell. And I asked, you know, what position he had at the university. That went back to my mom, and it was the same person that was her uncle. So it's just kind of, it's

interesting. Go back, all the way back to Korea, we know each other, but other than her, and cousins that live in the Portland area, [00:04:00] I don't know any Korean Americans that are third-generation. I think, as you study, I don't know who's going to be doing it in Hawaii.

Q: Hawaii is, you know, covered by Japanese/Korean by the name of [Danny Suragawa?], you know. And he's the original coordinator for our project right now. And I think there are some Koreans who might be able to work for this project, you know, under his direction. Hawaii's (inaudible) tremendous resource, unlimited.

NP: Unlimited.

Q: And I would like to know, some research person, you know, who can relate me to the Korean-Americans immigration Oregon.

NP: My uncle could. In fact, [00:05:00] it's a pity, the eldest Korean first-generation, there's still some alive. The eldest person just passed away last year, and he was still truck farming in 97 years old. My aunt's grandmother is still alive down there.

Q: Yeah, down there. Could you give me their address and (inaudible)?

NP: Sure, I can do that. I don't have that with me.

Q: All right, and if possible, you know, probably you can call them and you know, to explain a little bit about this project, and you know, just to connect me to them, and I can visit them, you know.

NP: That's a very interesting tie too, because most of the people there still have ties with Hawaii, very strong ties with Hawaii, and, as I do.

Q: I like to, I am very much interested in that, knowing about, you know, how [00:06:00] they move to Hawaii, and how their lives, you know, was in that area. Their experience is there --

NP: They're in a community, well, it's diversifying, it's changed quite a bit now. There's a lot of, there were a lot of Japanese farmers also in the same area too.
(inaudible) Philip, you know. I know that because there's some people that lived up here that were originally born in Gresham, that are sansei, third-generation.

Q: I know another Korean third-generation here in Seattle, yeah, [Lee Chapman?], you know? Oh he's not third-generation, [00:07:00] he came here as an orphan, [Lee Chapman?], he is operating a Japanese costume shop on the Broadway.

NP: Oh, I'll have to go see it.

Q: And the third-generation, yeah, I do know when third-generations can be, who is a teacher at [Barad?] High School. (laughs) He was also born in Hawaii, and he's a very, very interesting man. You know, I met him (inaudible), he's teaching. And I am going to see him sometime next week.

NP: Oh, well you know what I find, you know, there's a lot of rich history in Hawaii. [00:08:00] Very, I mean the contribution that Korean-Americans have made in Hawaii, and where they are now, in the stratus socioeconomically and everything, how they intermarried into different families, and, you know, about fifty percent of my aunts and uncles married Koreans. The other fifty percent married Japanese and Chinese families, so we have, what I feel is very, you know, extended system now of family. That's why, I guess, all of us kind of relate back to why, because growing up the way I did, and here in the States, you didn't have that sense of an extended family system. So I guess late in life now, you start to appreciate that, and you draw on that [00:09:00] when I go home at night, had long conversations with my father, about the family [past?]. I was fortunate enough to know to recall, you know, visibly my grandfather. He died in his nineties. And shortly after his fiftieth wedding anniversary. And, you know,

again, it's unfortunate that I'm not bilingual because, yeah.

Q: Well you know, the circumstances [in which?] you grew up, you know (inaudible) --

NP: No, what I'm saying is that it would have been, I could have probably talked to him for hours. He was an excellent storyteller. And he could recall, things on this, he could recall things from the plantation life and how, you know, all these [00:10:00] little things like, how he used to take opium and 1924 the [law changed?], and how the plantation owners didn't just discourage them from taking opium because they could work harder in the fields. And how a lot of people who either had to be sent back to Korea, or they wouldn't stop smoking opium, or the ones that did, almost killed a lot of them because there was no kind of withdrawal medical resources that they could use, and they were all poor. So just basically rested on the shoulder of the community people. And the tightness of which the Koreans operated. They had their own little bylaws and everything. You didn't disgrace basically, you know, your family, your friends, [00:11:00] and this whole thing, and this is just a point of interest. My grandpa there, and my dad wanted me to go back to see him before he passed away, but I was unable to. He went around the Big

Island, just prior to his death. And he stopped, and asked my dad to stop at all these little places that were on the Big Island, because he says, I know someone here. And all those first-generation, all the first-generation on the Big Island had gone, had passed away, and he hasn't been around the Island in four years. Came back chemo (inaudible).

It's time for me to go.

NP: Yeah. And so he called the whole time, he said it's, all my children are grown. I see my grandchildren. But I think that's the type of oral history, [00:12:00] if you could get it in Hawaii.

Q: Yeah, we really want to --

NP: That's extremely prices.

Q: Do you keep any pictures of your grandfather, and you know, even the pictures of yourself in your childhood, with a background of --

NP: Yeah, we have, I've had pictures of, you know, because they were poor. There was only limited number of pictures that they took of the whole family. But last year, there was a get-together, when I was back home, and they made, they took one of the uncles, my uncle blows a picture up of family picture of all with children. And with, I don't know how old my grandparents were at that time. That picture, and [00:13:00] there are a few others, most of

those coming probably in their high school and college, when, as they were getting older. But we have a few pictures of the original, you know, family probably when my dad was maybe 11 years old, and everyone else is younger, all the way down to toddler size.

Q: One of the integral parts of our project is to, you know, include the picture show, slideshow, lectures and everything, and we need some pictures, you know, at least we can use, you know, we can take copies of these pictures if you don't mind, you know.

NP: I don't have any problem with that, no. I'd have to seek those pictures out. [00:14:00] And again, those pictures were all sent out to each one of the sisters and brothers, my aunts and uncles, and so that's probably (inaudible).

Q: Okay, when you, you know, these pictures are ready, (inaudible) let me know, and I'll come here to pick it up. And I wonder if, you know, you can also let me see your father and mother if they are around?

NP: My mother is here. Father's in Hawaii. My father would talk to you. I don't know, well I think my dad would be probably most receptive. [00:15:00] He's a very easygoing person, and he's very calm, and he has a lot of information that we just have not had enough time to share with. But even, you know, like I said, we have gotten to know each

other more as I have gotten older. And some of the information, even like, that I was saying earlier, your discussion. I didn't know about it until just recently, you know, about he did in the service, things of that nature. I guess with time, he feels more comfortable talking about certain things. But, [00:16:00] there's a lot of side issues too that were interesting.

Q: And you know, we are particularly interested in a person like your father, because there are very few Koreans who served in the Army in the United States. There are lots of Filipinos and --

NP: Of that group of five, I know there are three guys that are still alive, at least. There's Kenneth Hong?], he lives in Honolulu. And a person I know only (inaudible), [Cheung?], that is still alive. I met him about six years ago. And, oh yeah, and also, I have an uncle on my mother's side that was also -- Harry, who was, he now is, he lives in Korea. He was, [00:17:00] I think one of the individuals was selected. But that whole era of time and how the Korean-American troops were treated, is very interesting. Because the Korean people had actually followed them on the street like hundreds, and in some places thousands because there were no US troops. They were coming in as, you know, no arms and in the face of, the Japanese surrender was a very

awkward situation. I mean, all these troops were lining up and at attention, and hanging over the command, and they were (inaudible) four years of awards, which is just a very awkward situation. Korean War was even more awkward.

[00:18:00]

Q: Okay.

(break)

Q: This is an interviewer's note. At this point, the interviewee, Nelson Park, wanted me to turn off the recorder. He continued to talk about his father's military life, but he didn't want the story to be recorded, apparently because of some security reasons. The talking continued for more than 30 minutes.

END OF INTERVIEW