

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

The Reminiscences of
Cheyon Sheen

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Cheyon Sheen conducted by Kathy M. Min on August 9, 2020 and January 12, 2021. At the time of Cheyon's interview, she used the pseudonym "Yun." This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Yun
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Yun called from Twin Falls, Idaho, and Min called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	August 9, 2020

00:00:02

Q: Okay, so today is August 9, 2020. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and today I'm interviewing Yun. And we're both calling from the Boise area, but through Zoom. And the proposed subject is an oral history of Yun's life for the Asian American oral history project. So first question, what's your full name?

Yun: My name is Yun.

00:00:25

Q: And when and where were you born?

Yun: I was born in November 2000 in South Korea.

00:00:36

Q: And what is your current occupation or educational background?

Yun: I am a sophomore at Boise State University.

00:00:58

Q: Cool. And what are you studying?

Yun: I'm studying civil engineering and environmental studies.

00:01:07

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

Yun: My parents' names are [redacted].

00:01:18

Q: And can you spell those?

Yun: [Redacted.]

00:01:34

Q: And what years were your parents born?

Yun: My father was born in 1970 and my mother was born in 1972.

00:01:47

Q: Could you repeat your dad's birth year?

Yun: My dad was born in 1970.

00:01:54

Q: And what do your parents do for a living? And what's their educational background?

Yun: My father went to school in business and finance and my mother went to school for nursing.

00:02:08

Q: In Korea?

Yun: No, my parents both went to Brigham Young University.

00:02:18

Q: The one in Utah?

Yun: Yeah, my dad went to the one in Utah, and my mom went to the one in Idaho.

00:02:26

Q: Okay. And then, do you have any siblings?

Yun: I do. I have one older brother who is 20. I have another younger brother who's 17, a younger brother who's eight, and younger sister who is 13. Actually, my younger brother is 10, not eight.

00:02:51

Q: How did you and your family end up in Idaho?

Yun: Before we lived in Idaho, we lived in Utah. And my mom wanted to go to school at BYU-I [Idaho]. And so we moved to Rexburg, and that's how we got here.

00:03:14

Q: And—yeah, what year was that?

Yun: I believe it was 2010, or 2009.

00:03:23

Q: Okay, so you spent a lot of your childhood in Utah first.

Yun: Mhm.

00:03:32

Q: Sorry. I think my audio is just not great, but did you say you were born in Korea?

Yun: Yes, I was.

00:03:40

Q: So, I guess what was your family up to in Korea, and what prompted the move to the US?

Yun: My parents got married and had my older brother and I, and—I'm not actually really sure what they were doing at the time because I was so young, but my parents wanted to go to school in America. And so we immigrated here when I was under one years old.

00:04:18

Q: Were they coming to the US on a student visa, then? Do you know?

Yun: Yeah. Both of them were on a student visa.

00:04:32

Q: So your parents probably immigrated when they were in their 30s, or 30s and 20s?

Yun: Yeah.

00:04:41

Q: So, they were well into adulthood by the time they immigrated, so they didn't have any college level schooling beforehand? Or do you know if they did?

Yun: My mom did. My mom had her Associate's Degree in Korea in tourism. But my dad did not have any college schooling before then.

00:05:07

Q: And do you know—I know you were obviously very young at the time—but do you know what their lives were like in Korea? And yeah, kind of what the circumstances of their life in Korea was like?

Yun: I actually don't know too much. I know that we just lived in a really, really small one bedroom house in Seoul, the capital. And at the time I believe my dad was just working and just hanging out. They hadn't been married for too long before then, only about a year and a half before we moved to the United States.

00:05:48

Q: And do you know why they wanted to specifically move to the US?

Yun: My dad always tells me that he felt like the quality of life was a little bit better in the United States. He also wanted to move here to be closer to people who are part of our same church. He thought we would have more and better opportunities if he raised his kids in America.

00:06:26

Q: Yeah. Is your family Mormon then?

Yun: Yeah, we are LDS [Latter-day Saints].

00:06:34

Q: Cool. And my understanding of Korea, it's not as common to be LDS. It's usually just—I'm not sure which denomination of Christianity but usually Christian and not LDS. And so I was wondering if you know what that was like for your parents or how they became Mormon?

Yun: I don't know what the dominant Christian sector is in South Korea, but I do know that some people practice Buddhism, but most are non-religious. But my parents, around when they were both 20—they didn't know each other at the time—but my father, he had met some LDS missionaries on the street and got to learn about it that way. And then my mom just knew a friend who also was part of the LDS Church and ended up just going with her friend and really enjoyed it.

00:07:44

Q: So they both converted to the LDS church before meeting each other?

Yun: Yeah.

00:07:52

Q: And do you know how your parents met?

Yun: They met through a mutual friend, part of the church. And they went on a blind date and then just kicked off of there, I guess.

00:08:15

Q: How are you and your parents' relationships with your extended family? Are they still in Korea? Do you keep in touch with them?

Yun: My entire extended family, except for my great aunt, is in Korea. So I've never been able to meet any one of them, except for one uncle and my great aunt and her kids. I know my parents occasionally call their siblings. My mom occasionally calls her mom, but it's only every few months. So I don't get to communicate with them often, or really ever.

00:09:04

Q: Have any I guess stories come to you about your family? Either about your parents or your grandparents or older generations?

Yun: Can you repeat the question? Sorry.

00:09:17

Q: Yeah, I think my internet is not very good in my house at the moment. But have there been any stories that have come down to you about your parents or your grandparents or more distant ancestors?

Yun: No, actually. I haven't been able to hear a lot of stories about extended family.

00:09:50

Q: Did you become a US citizen?

Yun: Did you ask if I've become a US citizen?

Q: Can you hear me okay?

Yun: I can hear you now.

00:10:08

Q: I might—maybe we should turn off videos because I think my Internet is just not not up to par today. So I'm going to turn off my video and hopefully that will be helpful. But the question was, did you and your family become naturalized citizens of the US?

Yun: No. I am still a Korean citizen. We got our green card, our permanent residence, maybe two years ago, two, three years ago, I believe. And so I still need to wait about two years until I'm able to apply for citizenship.

00:10:55

Q: And is that something that you and your family are interested in doing?

Yun: I'm not sure if my parents are. I believe my older brother and I are interested in doing that, though.

00:11:12

Q: And I guess why not for your parents and why for you and your brother?

Yun: My brother and I, we were raised in the United States. And so we have a lot of American culture that's just kind of embedded in our lives. And so we're most familiar with it, and we've lived all of our lives here. So I think it just kind of seems a little natural to become a US citizen, so we can fully have rights to vote, et cetera, et cetera.

00:11:53

Yun: My parents. I think they are still connected to Korea in a lot of ways. And I'm not sure if they're willing to give up their citizenship of Korean and become US citizens. I don't know if there would be any benefit to changing that for them.

00:12:23

Q: There's not a dual citizenship option?

Yun: I think there was at some point. I know my littlest brother,¹ he had dual citizenship, but I believe when he turned 17, he had to choose which one to take. I think at the time he had dual citizenship.² I'm not sure about that though. I haven't looked it up recently.

¹ Yun actually refers to her second-youngest brother here.

² Korean citizenship is based on jus sanguinis (right of blood). Men with dual US-Korean citizenship must choose one nationality “by the end of March of the year he turns 18,” a gendered policy rooted in Korea’s mandatory military service laws for men. For second-generation South Koreans like Yun’s older brother, military service is only obligatory if they report a “permanent return” to Korea. From the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in San Francisco: http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/us-sanfrancisco-en/wpge/m_4775/contents.do.

00:12:52

Q: If you don't mind me asking, what was the process of getting the green card like? Was it a smooth process? Was it a frustrating process? Yeah.

Yun: It was a really hard process. It took us maybe over 10 years to get it. First, my dad tried getting a work visa a few times. And for some reason, we were unsuccessful. I think we tried it about three times. And so we tried a lot of other routes, tried different companies to try and sponsor us. And then finally, my mom was like, "I'll try." And so she found—there was this nursing company that said that they would help us get her green card. But in order to do so, my mom would have to sign a contract and work for them for about two years. And so we did that, and after, we [were] able to get our green card.

00:14:05

Yun: It's quite funny though. In that process, the first time we tried applying for the green card, this company had messed up on our documents. And so they had stated that we had worked illegally when we hadn't. And so there was a point where we were almost deported for wrong reasons, so that was really scary. But we were able to sort it through with some friends who are lawyers and get the right papers in and successively get our green card.

00:14:43

Q: Wow. And do you know when that was?

Yun: Yeah. So we were doing our papers, I think, 2015-16. Somewhere around that time—

00:15:08

Q: —somewhere with your paperwork.

Yun: I'm sorry?

00:15:16

Q: Oh, sorry, I think my end cut out. But, yeah, keep going. Sorry.

Yun: Oh, I was just saying that I think we were doing our paperwork in 2016—'15 to '16—and then we officially got our green card spring 2017.

00:15:40

Q: And I guess what's the feeling now that you've [unclear] obtained a green card after so many years of waiting?

Yun: It's a lot less stressful. For a long, long time, it was like every single day, we were trying to figure out how we were going to stay in the United States. And I know it's really stressful on my parents too, like, "How are we going to raise our kids?" or "Do we have to go back?" And we didn't have the financial means to go back if we had to. And so there's more of a peace of mind now that we know that we can stay here for longer and more permanently.

00:16:22

Q: Are there any concerns that you still have now that your family has the green card?

Yun: No, not necessarily. I think it's hard because it took us so long to get it. And so my parents weren't able to purchase a house or get real employment opportunities. And so only now are they able to look into the options of getting a more permanent housing situation and finding more permanent things to put in our house and in my siblings' lives. And so I think that would be the only concern, if there were any.

00:17:16

Q: Yeah. And thanks for sharing. Obviously we're living through major world events now, but what world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? And did any of them personally affect your family?

Yun: I think there weren't any in particular that really affected us. Yeah, I can't think of any right now.

00:18:03

Q: Yeah, no worries. And then describe to me a typical family dinner. Do you eat together as a family? Who does the cooking? What are your favorite foods?

Yun: Yeah, so when I was younger. My mom used to always cook, and we would always sit together on the table and eat Korean food. When my mom started going to school when I was about eight or nine, my dad started to cook a little bit more, but we would still eat together as a family. And then it wasn't until about my senior year, when we kind of stopped eating as a family, and we just cooked meals for ourselves and kind of did our own thing.

00:18:51

Q: And then how are holidays celebrated in your family and does your family have any special traditions?

Yun: We celebrate the Korean New Year. And we eat a certain type of Korean food. I forgot the name of it. We don't really celebrate any other holiday. For Christmas, sometimes we put up a tree and sometimes we do presents. And for Fourth of July, sometimes we go see fireworks. We

celebrate Korean Thanksgiving sometimes, in October, but we don't really prioritize them and they're not really something that we think about too often.

00:19:37

Q: Oh, sorry. I think I didn't catch the last part of what you said.

Yun: I was just saying that holidays aren't a big priority in our lives.

00:19:50

Q: And then do you know any particular meaning to names in your family, like if your name has a particular meaning or if your last name has a particular meaning?

Yun: [Redacted.]

00:20:40

Q: Mhm. Yeah. And then how would you describe the personalities of your parents and your siblings?

Yun: My mom is really fun. She's really energetic and really kind. She's really selfless and a really hard worker. My father is more stern, I would say—more quiet is the right word. He's quiet. I'm not sure how to describe him.

00:21:32

Yun: My oldest brother, he works really hard too. And he has a lot of big ideas and is really visionary. He's really creative in art, specifically digital art. And he thinks of himself as an entrepreneur. My brother who's younger than I am, who's 17, he is quiet. He's really fun to hang out with, but you have to kind of catch him at the right moments. He really likes sports and video games.

00:23:04

Yun: My little sister is super, super nice. And really, really shy. She always is dipping her head a little bit, because she's so shy. But she's the most selfless person I know. And she's really funny. And we share really similar humor. All my siblings and I share so much humor, but her and I especially. And she writes a lot, reads a lot, and is a deep thinker.

00:23:56

My littlest little brother, who is 10 now, he is energetic and also likes video games and sports. He likes doing things and playing with cars and watching videos about cars and telling me about cars. He's really funny too. He likes making funny faces and just being goofy.

00:24:51

Q: Yeah, sounds really fun to have such a big, and it sounds like pretty tight-knit family. Also, I just wanna let you know. I definitely am listening and responding. But I try not to make any noise when you're talking because it can muddle the audio. But I am definitely listening. And then tell me a little bit about your experience growing up in Utah and in Idaho.

Yun: So we always grew up in—I always felt like I grew up—I was really happy growing up. And everything always seemed pretty good in my life. My family and I, we always went camping to national parks and stuff like that. I think it wasn't until I was maybe in the second, the third grade, I think, when somebody had told me that I was poor. Which I always thought was the weirdest. I was like, “What do you mean,” you know. And when I went home and asked my mom, she was like, “Oh, we're not poor. Look how happy we are.” And that's just like slowly when I started to realize the income level of my family compared to my friends' houses and such.

00:26:45

Yun: But besides that, I always grew up really happy with my family and my friends. I was always told I did well in school. I was the only person of color in my elementary school, besides my older brother. And so that was always different for me because I always felt like I was the same as everyone else. But there were always people who pointed out, like, “Oh, you're smart because you're Asian,” and other little stereotypes like that. But, at the same time, I feel like it kind of motivated me, just like trying to work harder and be smarter, I guess, when I was little.

00:27:43

Yun: We moved around a lot when I was a kid. We moved around over 10 times by the time I was 10. And by the time I was 10, we finally moved to Idaho, which is kind of like where my childhood begins in my head, or kind of where I imagine where I started growing personally. And we moved to Rexburg, which is a highly populated LDS area. And at the time I thought it was really nice being surrounded by people who went to the same church as me and had similar standards and morals. I had a lot of good friends there and really enjoyed living there. Same situation, though. I was maybe like one of three or four people of color at my school. And I think it was about when I was in seventh grade when we moved to Twin Falls. And I mean, same situation, one of the few people of color. Is there something specific that you want me to touch on, Kathy? I feel like I'm just kind of ranting here, just going off.

00:29:35

Q: No. I think that was all very, very valuable, and I appreciate you sharing. I think you're the first person I've spoken to who's spent time in Rexburg and Twin Falls, which is also interesting. I definitely have follow ups, but I think generally with these interviews, you know, whatever you

say counts, so I wouldn't worry too much. But yeah, I definitely do have some follow ups. I think first, do you know why your family was moving a lot as you were growing up?

Yun: Yeah. So on the student visa, you have to either be going to school full time, or right after you graduate from school, you can work for one year still under your student visa.³ And so, at first we were just trying to figure out a place to live. And then after my dad had graduated and worked for a little bit, we had to find another place where one of my parents could go to school. And then we had to find places to go to work after they had graduated school, and then had to find another place to go to school and then go to work, and then go to school and go to work.

00:30:53

Yun: And so my mom has been going to school since I was nine, and just finished school, maybe in—like I said, 2017, when [we] got our green card, or 2016. I don't remember the exact year. So she's been going to school for a long time, like purposely kind of spreading out her full time schooling, just so we could maintain our student visa. And so that was a big reason why we moved around a lot.

00:31:22

Yun: Also, my dad, he kind of traveled, tried to find work. So a lot of times, he would leave to California for like a year or two to try and find work. And then at some point he left to Alabama to try and find work. Last year, he left to Korea.

00:31:53

Q: Yeah—so sorry, my audio, I'm assuming it's all recording well and it's just my end where I don't hear things clearly. But I just didn't catch some of the earlier things you're saying, so I just wanted to double check. You were saying your mom essentially got a new student visa every time it was about to expire, so she kind of prolonged her education in that sense?

Yun: Yeah. She would just renew the student visa because, kind of like how I was mentioning, we couldn't figure out how to get a work visa. It just wouldn't work. We just couldn't get one. And so we just kept renewing our student visa by going to school.

00:32:41

Q: Yeah. And then I know you were saying you were generally the only person of color and a lot of the different places that you are at. But I was wondering with everything going on, just visa and migration wise, were there other people that you knew that were experiencing the same

³ F-1 and M-1 student visas only allow for specific types of work. Optional Practical Training (OPT) allows for up to 12 months of temporary employment related to the student's major area of study. From <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/optional-practical-training-opt-f-or-f-1-students>.

thing, and other people your parents could turn to for support with all of this? Or did it feel like it was something your family was just going through on their own?

Yun: It really felt like we were just going through it on our own. There were some people who had gotten their green card in the past, but not in like the same ways that we would go about it. And some other people who we knew that were Korean, they had really easily gotten their work visa or green card. And so we were just in this weird situation of “why isn't it working for us?” And so it really felt like we were just going through all this by ourselves. And especially because everybody else was an American and had no problems living where they wanted to live.

00:34:04

Q: Oh, sorry. I'm so sorry about my horrible internet. You said, everyone was an American, and then what?

Yun: I was just saying that because everybody else around us was a citizen of the United States. They had no problem of living wherever they wanted to live in the United States.

00:34:26

Q: Mhm. And then you also said growing up—and I think this was in Utah—but someone came up to you and called you poor. And I was wondering what the context of that was, and what prompted someone to say that, because it sounds—yeah.

Yun: Yeah. I have no idea what prompted this person to say it. But I just remember I was on the bus riding the bus to school, just like everybody else, every day. And this other girl, who was maybe about a year older than I was, came up to me with this huge bag of clothes, and said, “I heard you are poor. So here's a bag of clothes.” And everyone was just looking at me like, “Dang,” you know. And I was so confused, because I didn't know that I was poor.

00:35:20

Yun: And I don't know if I gave off the vibe that I was from a low income family or something. But, I just remember I just carried that entire huge bag around me that entire day thinking, “Do I get all these clothes, because I'm poor? Like, what?” But yeah, that's what happened.

00:35:44

Q: Yeah. Do you know why they gave you—it sounds like a lot of hand-me-down clothing? Do you know? Was there a drive or something going on?

Yun: No, there wasn't. There was no context. I didn't even know this person very well. I knew that she went to the same church as us, but I wasn't in her class. I didn't really ever hang out with her. There was no drive going on. It was just so random.

00:36:19

Q: Yeah. And then, how would you describe your house or neighborhood growing up? And I know you've lived in a lot of places, so you can answer it however you want to.

Yun: We lived in some family student housing when I was a lot younger, when my dad went to BYU. And then we lived in a little three bedroom apartment. And then when we moved again—we've always lived in a little small apartment. Thankfully, somehow we've always ended up in a nice neighborhood. At some point, there were seven of us living in a really small two bedroom apartment, where the carpet was ripped up and the building was super old. But it wasn't very bad, in my perspective, at all. And my parents slept in the living room—

00:37:25

Q: —yeah. Oh.

Yun: Go ahead, Kathy.

00:37:32

Q: Yeah, and sorry to interrupt, by the way. Yeah, it sounds like your family has always found community, whether it's been Utah or Rexburg or Twin Falls, with the local LDS churches. And I was wondering were those the main communities your family interacted with? Were there other sources of community, like with other Koreans, for example, in those areas? So that's something I'm wondering about.

Yun: Yeah, that is definitely the main community that we've interacted with. The way I see it, if we hadn't had support from the LDS Church, there's no way we could have lived in the US for this long. There was a lot of people in our church who helped us with a lot, a lot of things that we didn't understand as immigrants or we didn't have access or resources to. And so that's the biggest community that we do spend a lot of time with. There were a few Korean families that we knew in some of the towns that we lived in. But currently in Twin Falls, we only know one other Korean couple. And so there's not an Asian community that we have interacted with very much

00:39:06

Q: And did you have any hobbies or favorite games or toys or anything growing up?

Yun: No, I didn't have any toys growing up. I just played with my siblings. We just explored a lot outside and made up our own games and hung out with our friends. At some point, though, one of our neighbors gave us an old Xbox, and we played this racing game called Project

Gotham Racing, I think, and the first Halo for a long time. So I guess that could have been one of our favorite games.

00:40:02

Q: Did you ever experience a moment where you “realized” that you were Asian?

Yun: I always knew I was Korean. And, when I was younger, my dad was like, “Oh, look at your nice olive skin. This is your Korean skin.” And so I took a lot—I always thought it was really cool that I was from Korea, because nobody else was from anywhere else. And so I used to write my name in Korean right next to my English name.

00:40:48

Yun: But I think, maybe when I was in the second grade, there was some kid who I didn't even know who said some sort of Asian, racist thing at me. Something about my squinty eyes or something about how I was Chinese. And I think that was like the first instance where I realized an act of racism was occurring, or that happened. I guess I was too young to realize it was kind of a form of racism. But if I think back at it now, I think that's the first instance that I remember something like that happening.

00:41:45

Q: Mhm. And then, was Korean your first language and do you consider yourself multilingual these days?

Yun: Korean was my first language. But because my parents wanted me to learn—well, Korean was my first language, but now I know English a lot better just because I've been through American schools and I haven't had the opportunity to learn Korean too formally. I speak Korean with my parents. But I'm not as fluent as I am in English. But I do also fluently speak French. So I guess I could almost maybe be multilingual, but I don't know. I'm not sure if I consider myself multilingual.

00:42:54

Q: That's cool though. Actually, who were your childhood heroes?

Yun: I didn't really have any. I really liked Emma Watson, just because I thought she was a cool actor. But I didn't really ever see anybody that represented me or maybe even looked like me when I was a child that I could look up to, I guess.

00:43:37

Q: Mm hmm. And then you also mentioned a lot of times you were the only person of color in schools and whatnot. And I was wondering what that felt like for you being oftentimes the only—or, you know, [in a] handful of people of color in more predominantly white spaces.

Yun: For a long time, it wasn't a big deal. There was just little things that people said that were like, "Oh, you're smart because you're Asian," and stuff like that. But I didn't really mind. I always thought it was fine. I guess when I got older and I began to realize my identity a little bit more, it was a little frustrating at times when people would create this divide and point out that I was different for no reason, or ask me questions for their own personal satisfaction, or a lot of people tokenized me. It was like, "Good thing we have diversity in the room," and would point at me and stuff. I experienced a lot of squinty eye racial jokes, or the way I smelled. It was because I always smelled like Asian food, I guess.

00:45:14

Yun: It was tough because I always felt like I had to make fun of my culture and who I was, because I was different. And that was the only way a lot of people accepted me. And I also thought I just had to grow thicker skin, and I was just being sensitive sometimes when I would feel offended. So, yeah, there were a lot of times where I wish I could have somebody to talk to who could relate, but there wasn't.

00:46:13

Q: I think you were also saying, I think, you were feeling quite grateful to the LDS Church because the LDS community members were really helpful to your family, with everything with the green card and whatnot, and the different visas. And I was wondering, did you ever feel isolated because of race or culture or any other reason in the church?

Yun: No, I don't think so. I think we're really fortunate to always be in a ward, which is—I'm not sure how to describe it—but kind of like a section of the church that just meets together, I don't know. But I think we were always really fortunate to have a ward who was really loving. And I can't think of any instances where I felt like I was pointed out. I had some friends who were part of the same ward, or part of the same church as me who said a lot of things that hurt me due to my race and the way I look like. But nothing directly related to the LDS Church, I guess.

00:48:01

Q: Mhm. And then, I know you moved around a lot, but could you give me a list of the schools that you've attended since elementary school?

Yun: Sure. I went to Wasatch Elementary. I think the other school I went to was Castle Heights Elementary. I went to Madison Middle School. And then I went to O'Leary Middle School. And then Twin Falls High School.

00:48:38

Q: And so you stayed in Twin Falls until graduation and then went to BSU. Okay. And, how would you describe your experiences in school, like best and worst subjects, if there were any activities or sports or jobs that you had during school?

Yun: So during high school I did cross country and track. I did a lot of business-related classes, and was part of the student organization called Business Professionals of America, and also another one called the Academy of Finance. I worked at an engineering firm for a few summers and I also worked at a frozen yogurt shop. I did a lot of clubs. I was a part of robotics and I was part of a lot of random little things here and there. My biggest thing, I think, besides business-related stuff, was environmental sustainability. And so my whole senior project was focused on that. And I spent a lot of hours working with stuff like recycling and environmental club at my school. I think that's it, more or less.

00:50:16

Q: Mhm. And did you ever feel like you or your histories were represented in school textbooks or in media?

Yun: No. Not at all. Whenever there was an Asian country that was mentioned, it was for three seconds. And it was like—I don't know—there wasn't anything that really I ever felt really represented me and my heritage.

00:50:54

Q: And what ethnicity are your friends? And it can be growing up or these days or however you decide.

Yun: Growing up, it was always white, just because there was nobody else. These days, it's a lot more diverse. I have a few friends who are white. I have some friends from the Middle East. I have some friends who have heritage from Mexico. I have some friends who have heritage from Asia. Yeah, I definitely try to surround myself more with people who I guess are more similar to me. But I still do have a few white friends, I guess, just because that's the majority of the population.

00:52:07

Q: Mhm. And I guess, is there a particular reason for the shift in demographics over time of your friends?

Yun: Yeah. So after I graduated and after a year, I came to BSU. And Boise is a little bit more diverse than Twin. Not a whole lot, but a little bit goes a long way. And as I got more involved

with certain organizations and started meeting new people, I just realized the kind of maybe culture, almost, that was surrounding.

00:53:01

Yun: Just like the culture and just kind of like the atmosphere is different, when I hang out with people of color—or maybe even like, I would say, marginalized people—instead of white people. I think I can relate a lot more in a lot of different levels with people of color and people in similar situations as I am, than the majority of the white people. And also I think it's like, to me it's new. It's different hanging out with people of color than white people, because my entire life has just been hanging out with white people. And so it's a lot more fun and it's easier to be myself, I guess, and express my heritage and culture.

00:54:07

Q: Mhm So I guess related to that, obviously, you know, white people aren't a monolith, but do you feel like there's particular ways that you behave differently with white folks versus other people of color.?

Yun: Yeah, sometimes. Yes. Some of my white friends are super awesome and I behave just the same, but sometimes I feel like I can't share my culture or I can't share my heritage with white folks. Sometimes I feel like I have to be more careful about what I say around them. And sometimes I feel—yeah.

00:55:04

Q: Yeah. And in your time in Idaho, have you experienced stereotypes, discrimination, or microaggressions? And I know you've touched on it. But if there's anything else you want to add to that topic?

Yun: Yeah, no, I definitely experienced microaggressions all the time. And I know, my mom at work, she experiences that all the time. Whenever she gets a new patient, people are like, “Oh, where are you from? I like your accent. You speak so good English,” stuff like that. I think I get it less than she does, because I don't have an accent.

00:55:45

Yun: But I do face microaggressions. There are people who asked me where I'm from and then I'll say, “Twin Falls.” And then they'll be like, “No, where are you really from?” And other things like that. I've never faced any violent acts of racism, thankfully. I'm really blessed about that. Recently, I decided to leave my work, because I just stopped feeling comfortable there, due to an individual who performed quite a bit of microaggressions towards me and was very—to say it bluntly—just racist. But yeah, it definitely is present in Idaho. And I've gotten it my entire life.

00:56:51

Q: And then again, you don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but with the situation with your coworker, are there any particular things that you'd want to share about that?

Yun: It was my first—hm, I'm not sure. But we had this person. I've been working with this person for maybe three-plus-ish summers now. And I don't even know how the topic came up, but at some point, we were talking about COVID-19. And he referred to it as the Chinese virus, and I told them that they should refer to it as COVID-19, because using that other term can lead to a lot of xenophobia, and there have been violent acts of racism towards people who have Asian heritage. And so I asked this person not to use that term. And then somehow it came up that the President [Donald Trump] uses the same term.

00:58:33

Yun: And then it was like this whole waterfall thing of me realizing, like how—maybe the word is ignorant—this person was to my situation as a person of color. And at some point he asked me how many acts of racism I face each day. And he asked it in a way that wasn't trying to be understanding of the racism that I faced. But in a way, it's to try and prove that the amount of acts of racism that I do face wasn't that bad, or it wasn't that serious.

00:59:28

Yun: And so, there was a lot of other things that this person talked about that really offended me directly as an individual. And I just was like, “Okay, it's the end of work now. I'm going to leave.” And I talked to my boss about it. And my boss helped me find ways where I could talk to my coworker again to address, like, “Hey, my feelings were hurt when we had this conversation. Can we take action steps, XYZ?” And when I talked to this coworker again, I couldn't even finish an entire sentence before this person interrupted me. They had this whole thing about how the reason why this person says “Chinese virus” instead of COVID-19 is because it's shorter or there's less letters or something.

01:00:37

Yun: Yeah, there were just a lot of things that just made me feel like I wasn't welcomed. And I don't think this person even realized that when I tried to address the situation with him. And it just made me feel uncomfortable when I would go to work, because our cubbies are right next to each other. So I decided to leave earlier than planned. And I found a different job instead.

01:01:34

Q: Yeah, and I'm so sorry to hear about that. Sounds like a very frustrating conversation to try and engage in.

Yun: Yeah, it was like one of those things, like, “I'm not gonna win this battle right now.” There wasn't much I could do at the time. Just trying to find a safer space for me, I guess.

01:02:06

Q: I know you said you talked to your boss about it. Was it something that you felt like you were being supported in, with the boss? Or do you feel like they could have done more? Or yeah.

Yun: Oh yeah, for sure. My boss. I absolutely love my boss. He was really supportive and he really understood where I was coming from and helped me figure out what was the best way to approach this individual. And he told me that if the second conversation wouldn't work out, then there would be actions taken by the company. And so I feel like my boss handled it really appropriately and really well, and gave me a lot of support.

01:02:58

Q: Yeah, that's really good to hear. But it's still something where your boss gave support, but you still didn't really feel like being a part of the company at that point?

Yun: Yeah. I think it's hard because while my boss did give me support, I secretly knew that a lot of my other coworkers were very similar. And I think if I had conversations with more of them, maybe the same thing would happen. And so, I wanted to go somewhere where they really prioritize anti-racism and didn't make it acceptable in any way, and some place that was more proactive about it and more welcoming, I guess. So yeah. And also I have been wanting to experience new learning opportunities, and I thought this was just a good transition out.

01:04:15

Q: And was this workplace in Twin Falls or Boise or somewhere else?

Yun: Yeah, I was in Twin Falls.

01:04:23

Q: And were the other workers all white or were there other people of color?

Yun: I was the youngest person in the engineering field, I was the only female in the engineering field there, and I was the only person of color there.

01:04:49

Q: Wow. I guess this is a bit of a related question, but how would you describe the role of gender and/or sexuality in your life?

Yun: I'm not really sure. I guess sometimes when I'm at—because my major is civil engineering and there are not a lot of females in that role, I don't really get to relate to a lot of people or share my experiences with peers. And so sometimes that's hard because at my previous work, sometimes I would get teased for being a young girl. But also at the same time, I was really admired for being a really hard working girl. So I'm not really sure.

01:06:03

Q: Oh, sorry. Did you finish? I think maybe my internet cut out again.

Yun: Oh, where did I leave off?

01:06:22

Q: Sorry. I think maybe it's cutting out still.

Yun: Oh, I was asking where I left off, or where the video or the audio cut out.

01:06:32

Q: I think you were saying that you admired for being a hard working girl.

Yun: Mhm. That was it.

01:06:41

Q: Okay, cool. Yeah, sorry, this is probably the worst my internet's been in any of these interviews.

Yun: No worries, no worries.

01:06:54

Q: Yeah, I'm hoping the recording is still okay. And then, do you feel like you're included in the label “Asian American”? Is that a term you use for yourself? And do you feel like your experiences are represented in Asian American circles?

Yun: I don't use the term Asian American typically to describe myself. It's hard because a lot of times, if I did use that phrase, people would be like, “Oh, but you're not American.” Because I don't have any official documentation, I guess, of being American. But by culture, I guess I am. So I don't really use that term too often to describe who I am.

01:08:09

Q: Would you just use Korean or Asian then?

Yun: Yeah, I usually use Korean. Or Asian.

01:08:19

Q: Mhm. And then I think the topic of immigration is something that we see a lot in most news cycles. And I was wondering if that's something you feel related to or you feel like you have a stake in, given your own experiences of the immigration system.

Yun: Yeah. I have—a big portion of my heart goes out to immigrants and refugees, because I understand more or less how it feels to come to a different country where you don't look like anybody else. And you don't speak like anybody else. And also because, as I told you, we've had such a hard experience trying to get permanent residence here, and trying to find a better life. So yeah, with everything going on with ICE and stuff like that, I definitely try and keep up with it and try and find ways where I can support refugees and other immigrants who are here. And so, yeah.

01:09:52

Q: Yeah, and then—I'm not from Twin Falls, so I don't know how this was experienced by Twin Falls residents—but I think it was a few years back, there was a lot of controversy about these two refugee children who allegedly sexually assaulted a young girl in Twin Falls. And I think there was a lot of protests too in Twin Falls at the time—it was like 2015 or something, or 2016 or '17. I was wondering if that was something that affected you at the time.

Yun: I don't really know. So I remember when that happened. I was actually volunteering at the refugee center at the time. And there was just a lot of things about that case that were so wrong. And a lot of people who were like, “We shouldn't fund the refugee center.” A lot of people saying a lot of really horrible things about refugees.

01:11:11

Yun: To me, I think at the time of my life, I definitely had more of—I don't know how to say it—but I felt like that situation, just the way it was handled and the way that it was viewed by the community, was really hurtful. Because they were so easy to point a finger at all refugees and all immigrants, which is not fair at all. Because if it was a white person who had done it, it would have been a lot different, right?

01:11:56

Yun: And that was really hard and eye-opening for me as a person of color. It was kind of like, “Oh, what if somebody who looked like me did something like that? How would people point the finger at me,” right? So, yeah. Definitely, when I saw that, it was really eye-opening to see so many people in Twin Falls that definitely did not have the same views that I did, and definitely

did not support refugees and immigrants the way I did. So it was really—it was kind of scary to see I was surrounded by so many people like this.

01:12:55

Q: And do you mean “surrounded” as in just the general city of Twin Falls, or people that you knew as well?

Yun: General city of Twin Falls and some people I knew too.

01:13:13

Q: Mhm. And then, first question, maybe, were there any reasons that played into you going to BSU for college? And also I'm wondering what the transition from living in Twin Falls to Boise has been like.

Yun: Yeah, actually, I didn't want to go anywhere in Idaho at all. And so, my senior year, I didn't apply to any Idaho schools. I was like, “I refuse,” because I wanted to go somewhere that was more diverse and that was one of the biggest priorities on my college list. And I got into every school I applied for, which was awesome, and got scholarships. But in the end, I just didn't have the financial—I just did not have the money to go.

01:14:01

Yun: And so, I took a gap year and I went on an exchange program to Belgium and spent a year there. And while I was reapplying for schools, I didn't get into any, and Boise State was like my backup-backup. So I ended up just going to Boise State because they gave me a lot of scholarships. And so I came to Boise State with the intention of transferring, but within the three, four days I was there, I was like, “There's no way I can transfer. I just feel like Boise State is the school that I have to go to.” So yeah, that's what happened.

01:14:48

Q: Yeah, and I guess what's it been like living in Boise, compared to Twin Falls?

Yun: Boise seems a lot more progressive and a lot more accepting and open to cultures and people of different backgrounds. Obviously Boise is not perfect and there's still a long ways to go, but being in a university setting, and being with people who are from different states, and it's just more of a mix than just people of Twin Falls who have grown up in Twin Falls—that is a lot better.

01:15:37

Q: Mhm. And you were also talking about a gap year in Belgium. It sounds really cool. Yeah, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about what that experience was like for you.

Yun: Yeah, for sure. So I took a gap year. It was my backup plan, but it was the best backup plan and best decision I've made in my entire life, because I went to Belgium for a year. And that was the first time I had left the United States and lived somewhere else besides Utah and Idaho. And I experienced a lot of things. And it helped me grow my perspective and just widen and expand it in so many ways.

01:16:24

Yun: There were a lot of things, like the way I viewed people as good and evil, that changed a lot. The way I viewed religion changed a lot. The way I viewed the LGBTQ+ community, that changed a lot. And I was able to develop so many good friendships and connections to people there that it's now like another—it's like my home in a different country, so—

01:17:11

Q: —yeah. Sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. Did you have something else you wanted to add?

Yun: No, I was just gonna say, I just, I lived with a few host families, and I actually just called one of them—or one of them just called me a few hours earlier. And so I still keep in touch with quite a bit of people there. And it's really cool to just have another family.

01:17:46

Q: Mhm. Yeah. And then I actually had follow ups about some of the things you touched on from your gap year that I had meant to ask already. But you said that your relationship to good and bad, religion, and LGBTQ community changed while you were there. And I was wondering if you could explain those changes.

Yun: Yeah. Before I used to think there was only one way to be good, and then everything else was bad. And that's kind of the way I was raised. But when I went to Belgium, I met so many good people who didn't follow the same path of “good” as I did, or maybe that I thought that was right. And it just made me realize there are so many good people in the world and they don't have to be this one cookie cutter kind of “good” that I was imagining in my head, or that I had thought was the only way to be a good person.

01:19:08

Yun: So, like that. For example, I always thought drinking alcohol was a really, really big sin or was really bad. And in Belgium, they're known for their beer. It's like the capital of beer in the world. And everybody drinks. Not everybody. But a lot of people drink. And a lot of people drink socially and was still really kind about it. And all these stories I heard when I was younger and growing up about people drinking and being crazy or whatever were just so wrong and so

screwed. It just really opened my eyes that there are a lot of good things to things that I thought were maybe bad or inappropriate.

01:20:03

Yun: So that, and then also with religion. I thought the LDS Church was like the only capital T truth. And while there are still things in the church that I definitely agree with, there are a lot of things that I don't really anymore. And because I don't follow the cookie cutter sheet or whatever, it really helped me to become my own person and understand who I was and live my life in a way that I wasn't afraid of not being perfect. And then also with—there was one more thing that I was going to touch on, but I forgot.

01:21:07

Q: I think I was asking about the LGBTQ community, but I don't know if that was the other thing.

Yun: Oh yeah, that was kind of the same thing too. I was never exposed to any of that. And it always kind of had a negative connotation in the community that I was raised in and I always kind of had a really bad perspective on it and kind of had negative feelings towards the LGBTQ+ community. But the moment—there was a huge, long transition—but when I was in high school, I met the first person who was gay. And this person really helped me understand that gay people are still really good people. And then when I was in Belgium, maybe three-fourths of my friends are part of the LGBTQ+ community. And same thing. It just really helped me open my eyes and realize that these people aren't bad people at all. And now, I try to perform allyship all the time and I try to be really supportive of my friends who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. And definitely don't think it's a bad thing at all to be part of that community.

01:22:51

Q: And I guess, do you consider yourself part of the LDS community these days still?

Yun: That's a tough question, because I do love the LDS community—at least the community we are in Twin Falls, that my family is in in Twin Falls.

01:23:10

Q: Sorry, I think you kind of cut out a little bit.

Yun: That's a hard question, because I love the LDS community that my family has in Twin Falls. I love the people and I have so many mentors and friends in the community that have helped me so much in my life. I think, when people ask me if I am LDS, I respond by saying, "Yes." But sometimes I describe to them that I'm not really like a practicer. But I would never deny that I'm not LDS, because I don't have any resentment or hate towards the church.

01:24:07

Q: This question might not apply. But if you were to have children, would there be any traditions or beliefs that you'd want to pass down?

Yun: No, there's not any. I've thought about this a lot recently. I don't know why, just randomly. But I think I would try and help my children—if I did have any or adopt any—to have good morals and make good decisions and do what they believe is right. But I wouldn't force any of my kids to attend any religious activities or go to any churches if they didn't want to.

01:25:10

Q: Mhm. And then, is your family writ large planning to stay in Twin Falls and are you planning to stay in Idaho these days?

Yun: I think my family's planning on staying in Twin Falls. They love the community there. I will stay in Boise until I finish school. I would like to leave and go somewhere new, and experience a different culture and different population, but I'm not sure where exactly. But I could also see myself coming back after a few years and helping with initiatives in Idaho.

01:26:08

Q: And are mission trips through the LDS Church something that you've considered for yourself?

Yun: I used to consider it, but I don't believe that I will be going on one.

01:26:28

Q: Is there a particular reason for that?

Yun: I think to serve a mission, you have to be active in the church and you have to prepare a lot in a lot of different ways. And I don't think that is the path that I would like to take in my life.

01:26:48

Q: Mhm. And also, just so you know I'm probably winding down to the last handful of questions. So I think it will wrap up by 4. I'm just going to ask a few kind of current events questions, and then we'll do conclusion questions. So the first question is, COVID is obviously, you know, a huge event. And I'm wondering if it's affected you or your family in any way.

Yun: Yeah, so my mom's a nurse. And so she has to work with COVID patients every time she goes to work. So that's hard because there's a lot of things that—just the whole hospital's flipped upside-down. And so it's different and sometimes can be really stressful. And then also, it's hard because she was supposed to have surgery on her leg. But now it's been postponed for a long

time now. There's a lot of other things, little things, too. But I think financially, we are okay, more or less, and besides my siblings not being able to go to school in person.

01:28:30

Q: And then we also saw a lot of protests this summer with Black Lives Matter. And I was wondering, is that something that has affected you or your family, whether it's through reflection or action or conversation or anything like that? Yeah.

Yun: I've been having a lot more conversations with my sister and my mom about racism and making sure that we know when microaggressions happen in our lives, just so we're more aware of it. And also, I've been doing a lot more research and trying to have more conversations about this, just because I think it's so important. And like I was saying, in the past, I used to think that I would just have to grow thicker skin, but now it's like, "No, this is unacceptable and I'm not going to just let people walk all over me and not stand up for myself anymore."

01:29:31

Yun: And so there's a lot of things that I'm trying to change in my personal life, like holding people accountable and making sure that there aren't things that I do that support white supremacy or systemic racism. And then also, about a month or so ago, I was able to collect some stories like how you're doing, Kathy, about other Asian Americans, and put together a little zine to share some of our experiences, being an Asian American. So yeah, but I've attended a few protests and done a lot of writing to legislators and speaking up. But I definitely think it's such an important, important issue and it needs to be addressed immediately in all parts of our lives.

01:30:39

Q: Uh huh. The zine sounds really cool and it's cool to hear that you're also taking a lot of other steps for this movement. And then how is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child? I guess, aside from COVID.

Yun: Can you repeat that?

01:31:09

Q: Yes. Aside from COVID, how is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?

Yun: I'm not sure, because I think when I was a child, I wasn't aware of a lot of things. We never watched the news at my house. So I really didn't know what was going on in the world, besides what was going on with my friends and family. I think nowadays there is a bigger support for LGBTQ+. There is more things addressing racism and also sexual assaults. I think that from

what I've heard and seen, younger people feel like they have more power to speak up and do things. I'm not sure.

01:32:30

Q: Yeah, and it's also totally fine if you're not completely sure about your answers. And then I'm hitting my conclusion questions. But what accomplishments are you most proud of, thus far?

Yun: I think I'm really proud of some of the projects I've done pertaining to sustainability. I made an entire recycling program. I did everything involving that— raising the money, getting the budget done, figuring out the contracts, designing the bins, designing like how they would get—et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So in high school I did that. And that's one of my biggest achievements and then also like

01:33:21

Yun: And then also, I think another big achievement is just personally growing a lot when I was abroad and a lot of self-reflection. And then also the zine was a really cool thing that I did that was new to me. And there's a lot of other little sustainability projects that I'm working on at Boise State right now that I think are cool achievements.

01:34:01

Q: And then, do you think you'd ever go back to Korea someday?

Yun: Yeah, I really want to because I have never—I haven't had the opportunity to go back. We were planning on going back this summer, but with COVID, we were unable to. But my mom really, really wants to go back next summer. So I'm saving up money right now so we can go.

01:34:28

Q: Mhm. And then, what is one thing you want people to remember about you?

Yun: That's a hard question. I hope that people remember my genuinity—I don't know if that's a word—just how genuine, I guess, I am. I think my host dad said it best one time, that I have a way of saying words to people who are close to me that touch them. And I guess if it was anything that I would want people to remember about me, it's just I hope that I was kind to them.

01:35:53

Q: What was the most important and meaningful experience in your life. And also, what was the happiest moment in your life so far?

Yun: Most important experience of my life, I think I would say my exchange, my gap year, because I did a lot of growing. And my happiest moment in my life. That's so hard. I don't know.

I don't know if I would say there's a happiest, happiest moment in my life, but yesterday I was really happy because one of my friends invited me to dinner, and we had table nachos. And so that was fun. But I'm not sure if I can say what's the best thing.

01:36:59

Q: Mhm. And then, what are your dreams and visions for your future?

Yun: I want to finish the Sustainability Center in the Student Union Building at Boise State. That's one of my short term goals. I want to graduate Boise State with my two certificates and my minor and major. I want to be able to fluently speak Korean, French, and English, as if I was trilingual. I want to buy my mom a house. I want to develop better relationships with my older brother and my father and one of my younger brothers. At some point, I hope I'm a civil engineer and I can build sustainable houses for low-income families and people. And overall, I just hope that I can continue to stay civically engaged and help other people be civically engaged and environmentally sustainable.

01:38:49

Q: Yeah, those are all really, really awesome, I think, goals to have. So that brings me to the last question of the interview. Do you think there's something—obviously we can't cover it, you know, your entire life in two hours—but is there something significant that you feel we haven't touched on enough? And if so, you can talk about it. You can also leave your final words. But yeah, that's that's the last question.

Yun: No, I don't think there's anything specific that I haven't been able to touch on in my life. Overall I think it's really cool that you're doing this project and that you're getting oral histories of people with Asian heritage in Idaho because I personally would love to hear more, and love to hear more people's histories. And I think that it's so, so important to value other cultures and give them the chance and opportunity to voice their histories and their experiences and so I'm really glad I got to do this interview. It's just helped me reflect a little bit and just talk about some things that have happened. So thank you, Kathy.

Q: Yeah.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Yun
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	2
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	January 12, 2021

00:00:02

Q: So today is January 12, 2021. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer. I'm, again, speaking with Yun. Did I say the date? I did. So this is for the Asian American oral history project. And this is a follow-up interview. And so these questions I don't think are super chronologically organized, but my first question is, tell me a little bit more about why you study engineering.

Yun: I think I chose engineering because I got an internship when I was 16 at an engineering firm and that was when I first saw how things on paper become like things in real life. And I was just really awed by that. And also, I was pretty good at math. And I just thought, "Hey, maybe my skills are intertwining in this career." And then also, I think, it's part of the salary. You can earn a lot of money just by having a bachelor's in engineering. While I don't want to say money is my first motive, it would be super nice to not always be financially worried and I really just want to support my family and help them in that sense.

00:01:33

Q: And then on a different kind of question, I don't know if you follow immigration legislation super closely, but do you feel like immigration legislation over the past 10, 20 years—has it affected you or your family in any way?

Yun: I actually don't follow immigration legislation super closely and I definitely should. But I know there have been just little things here and there that have affected me and my family, because the amount of difficulty that we went through just to try and get a green card and the difficulty we went through by maintaining a student visa, when really we should have had some sort of family visa—there's a lot of things there. And when our papers got messed up and people were like, "Okay, now you're getting deported," it was just so shocking that there weren't more protections and more ways to become a more permanent citizen or more permanent resident.

00:02:46

Yun: I remember when Barack Obama, he finally created DACA and my parents were like, “Dang. Well, too bad we're not illegal because we would have fit right into this.” And it's like the people under DACA had, all of a sudden, more privileges than we did as people under student visas. And so there are a lot of just weird nicky-picky things here and there that really made our lives more difficult than it had to be, I guess.

00:03:23

Q: And then you also mentioned in the last interview that your dad moved around a lot for work. I was wondering if you could explain why that was happening?

Yun: Yeah, so my mom, I think maybe like after I was in kindergarten—my mom decided to try to uphold the student visa. So she started going to school and stuff. And so my dad, he started moving around into communities with more densely Korean populations, so he could find work. Because we lived in Utah at the time and nobody really wanted somebody who was Asian and had an accent. And so he went to other places to try and use his business degree, but could never really find anything. And the few times that he was offered to get a work visa, it never worked out. And so just a lot of moving around.

00:04:23

Q: Mm hmm. And you'd mentioned he'd gone to—I'm trying to remember—it was like parts of the South, right? Like Alabama or something, and maybe California or something. Do you know about his specific experiences or particular experiences he had while he was working in just around the place?

Yun: Yeah, he's actually back in Alabama right now working for a Korean company and he likes it way better than just chilling in Idaho. But besides that, the only thing that he's really told me is last time he was in Alabama and he was trying to get a work visa with a company, it was super conflicting for him to leave, because he wanted to be with his family. But then also, he wanted to stay in Alabama where he had found a community that was very inclusive and familiar, because a lot of them were part of the Korean community. But besides that, I don't really know a lot.

00:05:31

Q: Do you think your family has plans to move to places with bigger Korean communities?

Yun: Yeah, I think they never really thought about it until actually just recently. I was talking to my mom, and my dad wants everybody to come and move to Georgia, near Atlanta. And in Atlanta, they actually have a really big Korean community.¹ And my mom, she's just conflicted

¹ Korean is the third-most spoken language in Georgia, and Gwinnett County (one of the counties in the Atlanta area) has the ninth-largest Korean population of all US counties. From Matthew Pearl, “Inside #KOREATL: A spotlight on a community hidden in plain sight,” *11Alive*, February 12, 2018,

because she's very used to Idahoan life now. And my two youngest siblings grew up in Twin Falls and so they're very unfamiliar with moving, unlike me and my older brother who moved all the time.

00:06:16

Yun: And so we'll see what they do. But I was talking to my mom, and she was like, “Pros: you get to meet more Korean people.” My younger siblings will have more experiences to connect with their Korean heritage and maybe even go to Korean school. But then cons: My mom always complains Korean women always just talk a lot and gossip and just want to brag about their kids and prove which kid is better than the other. And so she's like, “But I don't want to deal with that either.” And big city life. Atlanta is extremely huge compared to Twin Falls. So we'll just see what they decide. But they're thinking about it right now.

00:07:03

Q: Mhm. And then is your extended family in Korea Mormon as well?

Yun: No—I don't—no, they're not. I think my late grandma was Mormon, but she passed away. And I think she's the only other person who was LDS.

Q: Was that on your mom or dad's side?

Yun: On my dad's side.

00:07:35

Q: And then I have a few questions about your time in Belgium. My first question is just why did you choose to go to Belgium?

Yun: Yeah. I don't know why I chose exactly Belgium, but when I applied to go on exchange, I could have went to South America, Eastern Asia, or Western Europe. And I was like, didn't want to go to Asia, because I felt like I would blend in too much—which is a horrible thing to say when I stick out, you know, in Idaho. But I've heard a lot of experiences of Asian Americans going to Asia on exchange and everybody just treating them differently and judging them hardcore because they're not really Asian, but they look Asian. So I was like, “I don't really want to experience that right now.”

00:08:36

Yun: And then South America, I was like, didn't really know a lot about South America. And honestly, I think I was just afraid of experiencing something too different. And I was like,

<https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/outreach/untold-atlanta/inside-koreatl-a-spotlight-on-a-community-hidden-in-plain-sight/85-517881994>.

“Western Europe is super developed. It's similar to the USA. It's not going to be anything that I don't know about,” which is why I picked Europe. And then I think you just have a list of countries to choose from. And I was just like, “Which one sounds the coolest?” I think I picked Italy, France, and Belgium, and I got Belgium.

00:09:13

Q: Nice. And then you also mentioned that prior to going to Belgium, you had a few sort of “ingrained biases.” And you mentioned having, for example, stigmas towards drinking. So I was wondering where that came from, like what you think might have contributed those ideas.

Yun: Yeah. It was definitely being raised in the Mormon church, because in LDS culture, there's one specific truth. And they believe, like, “This Gospel is the capital T truth, and this is how we live it. And this is the way Jesus taught it,” et cetera, et cetera. And so I grew up thinking, “No, you can never drink alcohol. Alcohol is a sin and everything associated with that was just bad.”

00:10:06

Yun: And my other stigmas with LGBTQ+ people and the community, you didn't realize talk about that in the LDS Church. They do more now, but when I was growing up, we never talked about it. And there was a lot of stories about how people tried to convert somebody again to be straight, and how being gay was a sin, and people were so ashamed of their families when that happened, and things about how only a true eternal family can only be between a woman and a man. Yeah, just a lot of those things were ingrained in my head because I grew up in the Mormon Church.

00:10:53

Q: You mentioned that it was more of—especially with the LGBTQ sentiments—that that's more of a facet of you growing up and it's less common now. Could you explain more about how it's less common now, or sort of what that change has been like?

Yun: Yeah, it's I think it's a very, very, very slow change. But a few years ago they put it on like their Mormon.org website or LDS-something website, and they basically were like, “Oh, it's okay to be gay as long as you don't act on it.”² And they shared these stories of Mormon people

² A 2006 interview with Elder Dallin H. Oaks reflects this perspective. Oaks said that the LDS Church emphasized an attitude of compassion to all, but that “homosexual feelings are controllable.” The LDS church’s policies towards LGBTQ+ people and couples in recent years also reflects the fluctuating attitudes within the church. In 2015, the LDS Church classified people in same-sex marriages as “apostates,” barring the children of same-sex couples from blessing or baptism until they reached age 18. In 2019, the church reversed the policy, but affirmed that same-sex marriage was “a serious transgression.” From *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, “Interview With Elder Dallin H. Oaks and Elder Lance B. Wickman: ‘Same-Gender Attraction’,” 2006, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/interview-oaks-wickman-same-gender-attraction>; Laurel Wamsley, “In Major Shift, LDS Church Rolls Back Controversial Policies Toward LGBT Members,” *NPR*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/04/709988377/in-major-shift-mormon-church-rolls-back-controversial-policies-toward-lgbt-membe>; Sarah Jane Weaver, “Policy Changes Announced for Members in Gay Marriages, Children of LGBT

who are gay who still went to church and were good people and stuff like that. And so that was a recent thing that they put on their website. And there's just been better wording around it, I guess.

00:11:46

Yun: But it's still something I don't really agree with, because in my opinion, it's like, if you tell someone it's okay to be gay, then you should just let them be gay, and not try and restrict them in XYZ ways. I don't know what caused that, but there are more conversations happening. And I'm just glad now people don't consider—or you're “not supposed to consider” gay people as being sinful, I guess.

00:12:26

Q: Mhm. And then this is also a different line of questioning, but I feel something we've seen in the past several years is the Korean wave, and so like the rising popularity of K-Pop and Korean culture.³ And I'm wondering if that's something that you've been noticing, and if you have any kind of reflections on the Korean wave, particularly, I think in your experiences of Idaho.

Yun: Yeah, I have noticed that. And it's just really crazy to me, because when I was younger, I grew up in small towns and people were like, “So are you Chinese or Japanese?” And I'd be like, “I'm Korean.” And they'd be like, “[Makes a confused face.] Is that Chinese or Japanese?” And I'd just be like, “What?” You know. And everybody thought watching anime or listening to K-Pop was super, super weird, and you're a weeb⁴ if you did it, whatever, whatever. And so I would just really repress my heritage, and really stuck to American culture because that was cool and in.

00:13:41

Yun: But nowadays it's like K-Pop is super in and the entire world loves BTS and stuff. And it's just this really weird flip, because even Boise State, I meet people all the time who listen to Korean music or watch K-dramas. And it makes me feel a lot better because it's like, “Oh, people are actually appreciative of my culture and recognize that there are so many good things that Korean culture brings and we have so much value.” So I think it's really cool. I mean, pros and

Parents,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/policy-changes-announced-for-members-in-gay-marriages-children-of-lgbt-parents?lang=eng>.

³ Since as early as the 2000s, academic scholars have documented the phenomena of the Korean wave (or Hallyu), particularly across Asia. In recent years, Korean cultural icons, particularly Korean pop (K-pop) singers and groups, as well as Korean TV dramas (K-dramas), have become globally popular. From Sangjoon Lee and Abé Markus Nornes, *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 4-5.

⁴ A “weeb” or “weeb” pejoratively refers to non-Japanese (and typically white) people who are “overly devoted to Japanese pop culture,” including anime, manga, and video games. From Jacob Stroth, “What is the Meaning of Weeaboo or Weeb?”, *GaijinPot Blog*, July 24, 2019, <https://blog.gaijinpot.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-weeaboo-weeb/>.

cons: Some people are like, “You know this member from BTS?” And I really don't know anything about BTS. And people just expect for me to know all the stereotypical Korean things, and I don't. But I think it's more positive than negative.

00:14:35

Q: Mhm. And then I think my last couple questions are just about your family. You, I think, mentioned in the last interview that you wanted to improve your relationship with your brothers and your father, and I was wondering if you could expand on that.

Yun: Yeah, I remember reading that when I was reading over the transcript. Growing up, I feel like I had a really close relationship with my older brother and my younger brother right underneath me, just because we were really close in age. And then, I think we all just went through the teen angst phase together, and was just really spiteful of each other. But now, as we're just kind of out of that phase and older and realized more things, it's like, yeah, we're very different now. But I still love and appreciate and value you as a family member, and as my brother or dad.

00:15:42

Yun: And so I remember during quarantine, it was so hard living with my family. And I know a lot of people experienced this. It was just like too much family time. And there was not really anywhere you could go to avoid them. And so I think tensions just got really high. But moving out just really helped release those tensions and really value time together. And I think I have better relationships with my dad now that we've created more space and time to relax.

00:16:25

Yun: And then my older brother, that's kind of hard, because we're just so opposites on everything. I've just had to teach him a lot about a lot of things. We have very different ways of how we view the world and interact with each other. But instead of giving up on somebody, it's like, “Okay, let's keep having these conversations and let's keep trying to interact with each other,” because I realize it's just important—

00:17:08

Q: —mhm. I guess—oh yeah, sorry.

Yun: And then my younger brother, that's a whole nother story. But yeah.

00:17:16

Q: Yeah, with your older brother, is it mostly like political or just personality difference or what is sort of the differences? If you don't mind me asking.

Yun: Yeah. One of my bosses used to tell me me and my older brother were exactly the same. We were both stubborn and hard workers. But that was two years ago. And now I realize he went on a mission, while I went to like Belgium and I went to college.

00:17:47

Yun: And just in the two, three years that we experienced very different things, he came back with his views very hardened, and then I came back with my views just very open. And he's like—the first day he came back from his mission, he told me racial microaggressions were not a thing. And I was like, “What do you mean they're not a thing? You face them all the time.” He just is very stubborn in his way of thinking, and is kind of like, if somebody threw a rock at you and you got hurt and you started bleeding, you started crying—he'd be the kind of person, like, “Why are you crying? Just get up and get over it?”

00:18:48

Yun: Obviously, both of our views are from very different experiences and stuff, but we both just have to really sympathize with each other and be like, “Why are you thinking this way, and where are you coming from?” And helping each other understand why we have these views and stuff. But yeah, politically, personality—everything is just so different.

00:19:12

Q: I know you mentioned the differences between the mission versus the trip to Belgium. Do you think gender is something that plays into the differences that you have or not really?

Yun: I've never really thought about that. I'm not sure. I mean, I bet there's partially—maybe if he was a girl, then he wouldn't have had so much pressure to go on a mission. And maybe he wouldn't have gone, because I know at first he didn't really want to. But I really don't know. I haven't thought about that.

00:19:51

Q: Mhm. And you were also talking about your little brother before I cut you off. Was there anything you wanted to say? You were like, it's kind of a different story with your little brother.

Yun: With my little brother, it's very different because he basically was kind of cut off from our family at some point, because he left the church when he was pretty young.

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Yun: And our entire family was just like, “Oh my gosh, I can't believe he did that.” And it was learning progress for all of us, to just accept him the way he is. But also during that time when we tried to invite him to do family things with us and go on trips with us, he also was very closed

off and was like, “I'm just going to stay home. I'm gonna do my own thing, play on the computer, play on the Xbox. Don't want to go on family things.”

00:20:51

Yun: And so right now it's not really about getting along with him. It's rebuilding that connection. But he's just like—I don't really know where he's at. It's so hard to communicate with him. And I just worry about him, because I have no idea what's going on in his head. And every time he says something, I'm always like, “Whoa, you're joining the army now? And now you're doing this?” Just things that are very different than I would have chosen for my life. But yeah, that's why.

00:21:31

Q: Mhm. It also kind of sounds like in your family, like maybe with you and your little brother, it sounds like there's a little bit of challenges or just questions that you have for the LDS church. Do you think that's common among your peers and their families, for the children to be questioning the beliefs they grew up with?

Yun: I think for my older brother, like after going on mission, it's really ingrained in his brain that the gospel is the only and one truth. But for me, and then my younger brother—like for me, I try to be open as much as possible and try and see the good, but also understand that there's things that are not good. And then with my younger brother, I think he just didn't feel welcomed with the church and completely just took a step back. And I don't know if he ever believed or didn't believe, but that's just something we haven't talked about.

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Yun: And then my two youngest siblings, I don't know because they don't talk about it, but I secretly know my sister is kind of like me, is kind of questioning, like, “Why do we treat gays like this? And why do we do XYZ?” And these are like the same questions I had when I was a kid. And so sometimes I have little conversations with her, like, “I think that we should treat people in the LGBTQ+ community with all kinds of love, right? And not just very selective support, you know.” And we'll just see what happens. But I think she's really smart and wouldn't just blindly believe one thing. My littlest brother, I think he's still too young and he's just chilling, so yeah.

00:23:45

Q: I guess outside of your family—if you're privy to those conversations—do you feel like your peers or people you grew up with that are in the LDS Church are also having those kinds of conversations, or maybe not?

Yun: Yeah. I grew up in Rexburg, so 86 percent of the population was LDS.⁵ And so I think majority of them are still LDS, because they continue to grow up in that. But then some people in Twin, there's a lot of people I know, actually, nowadays were either ex-Mormon or non-active or whatever. And they're all for—everybody has a different reason.

00:24:32

Yun: My two closest friends from high school, they're still practicing. And one of them I don't communicate with anymore, because she's very “one way or the highway.” But the other one just got back from her mission and is way more woke than she was in high school, and is kind of like what I envision a really good religious practitioner would be. And is very open to other people and open about how they feel and how they are, and it's not selective about giving certain people support and certain people love, but just to everyone.

00:25:22

Yun: Yeah, but in my friend group that I hang out with, I don't really meet a lot of Mormons. Actually, I don't think I've ever met a single Mormon my age, since I've moved to Boise. And I think that's just because I don't go to church here in Boise. So it's like I'm not meaning church people. But I do meet every once in a while ex-Mormons or people who went to church with Mormons for a little while and it's just like, “Oh, it's not my thing.” So, yeah.

00:26:00

Q: And then, you were mentioning in Twin, it's a lot more common for people to be not practicing or ex-Mormon, whereas in Rexburg—are you saying Rexburg has more of a culture where it's like everyone at least has to be publicly LDS? I'm just trying to understand a little bit more of this culture.

Yun: Yeah, I think so. I think for a lot of people who are ex-Mormon or non-practicing, they moved out of their parents' house and they moved out of the town they were raised in, so whether that be Twin Falls or Rexburg.

00:26:39

Yun: With Rexburg, the community there is like you grow up in Rexburg, you go on your mission. Then you stay and chill. You go to school at BYU-I. You just hang out at Rexburg for the rest of your life. And so to not be Mormon there, which would just be very—you wouldn't be included anymore. I remember there was like one or two people in my middle school who were publicly not Mormon and everyone was always just kind of, you know, nice to them, but still kind of weirded out or uncomfy or just treated them like a little differently. And so, just the society that they've created with these Mormon people, it's very—selective, I guess? Not

⁵ According to 2016 reports from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rexburg is actually 98 percent LDS. From *Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*, “Rexburg, Idaho,” 2016, <https://www.rwjf.org/en/cultureofhealth/what-were-learning/sentinel-communities/rexburg-idaho.html>.

selective, which is very like—it's a very tight-knit community. And so to leave the Mormon church, everybody would know about it. And everyone would talk about it.

00:27:49

Yun: And then in Twin, not as many people are Mormon, I guess. And it's not as strict, I would say. In Rexburg, there's like degrees of Mormon. You're either super, super Mormon, or you're kind of Mormon, or if you're this kind of Mormon, you're not a really good person. And there's just too many degrees of “being LDS” [makes scare quotes]. I don't know why I did this [square quotes].

00:28:24

Yun: I don't really know how to describe it, but it's just like when you live in a society or community where everybody around you practices the same religion, then the standards get higher. And you have to be like everybody else to be included and fit in. Not everyone's like that, but that's just what happens.

00:28:49

Yun: And then all my friends who have moved out, and who have experienced new things and realized that Twin Smalls is not the only place in the world—or Rexburg—or the people who started not going to church as much, or decided to become ex-Mormon because they realized there's just more to that. I'm not sure if that really answers your question. I'm not really sure what the answer is myself.

00:29:19

Q: I think the answer is great. And I don't want to take up too much time, but this is just the last question I have written. For your other siblings, are they—I know you mentioned your family's considering moving—but for especially your brothers that are closest in age to you, are they planning to stay in Idaho and Twin Falls?

Yun: No, actually, my older brother is going to Georgia to sell pesticides, which is crazy. I would never do that. But that's his choice. And then my younger brother, he decided to join the army and that's also in Georgia. Somehow, for some reason, the state of Georgia is calling my family, but yeah.

00:30:10

Q: Mhm. And then, yeah, that's all the follow-ups I had. So I think since you've had a chance to look at the transcript and then we've also done this, are there any other things that you feel are glaringly missing that you want included for these interviews?

Yun: No, I don't think so. When I was reading the other interview, at first, I was like, "Wow, I was being super vague." And as we went more and more into the interview, I said a lot of things that were kind of little highlights or pinpoints in my life that really defined what it meant to me as an Asian American or a Korean in Idaho. And so I think I said a good part, I guess.

00:31:04

Q: Nice. Okay, I want to stop the recording.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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