Sarah Imm **Narrator**

Sophia Kim **Interviewer**

May 7, 1994

SK: It is Saturday, May 7, 1994. This is Sophia Kim and I'm speaking with Sarah Imm. Sarah Imm is first generation Korean American. Or do you consider yourself one point five . . .?

With Society **SI:** I think one point five is probably more . . . more descriptive.

SK: One point five. Okay. How old are you, Sarah?

SI: I am twenty-two.

SK: Twenty-two.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: Okay. How old were you when you immigrated to the United States?

SI: I was two and a half when I came to the States.

SK: Do you have any memories at all of Korea?

SI: Yes.

SK: You do?

SI: Actually, my only memory, my first memory is of coming on the plane. Because I threw up on the plane. [Chuckles]

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: I remember that. So I was two and a half.

SK: And you were an only at that point?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. I was an only child for a long time.

SK: Can you describe some of the reasons why your parents decided to immigrate to the United States?

SI: From my understanding of like talking to them now, my parents . . . they decided to come the States because things in Korea at the time were not . . . were not good. I mean, economically, socially, politically, everything. And it's like, like [unclear – speaks Korean term] in Korea, like too much stuff, like too busy, too many people, that stuff. So my parents thought that like there would be more opportunities for them here in America.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: So that's . . . that's primarily the reason why they came.

SK: And can you talk a little bit about their education before and their occupations?

SI: Okay.

SK: In Korea?

SI: Sure. Sure. My dad, he went . . . [sighs] he went to like a pretty okay high school, I guess, in Korea. Not the best, only a few people went to like the best colleges or whatever. But then he was one of the few who went to Seoul National. And then he graduated with like a degree in philosophy there. And then he went to the States and was studying architecture for a while at the University of Minnesota. No. I think he was at Temple, Temple University in Philadelphia, which is where my parents used to live. And then my dad came to Minnesota and was studying architecture at the University of Minnesota.

My mother went to . . . I'm not sure about her high school. I guess a pretty good high school. She went to [unclear] University. And she studied fine arts.

SK: Is that in Seoul?

SI: That's in Seoul.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Yes. I guess it's very . . . like got an excellent reputation for the arts. And she graduated with a BFA, Bachelor of Fine Arts from there. And then she actually worked for a couple years in a textile company designing . . . designing like [sighs] not fashion, but designing like patterns for material.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Because, you know, there's a lot of textile industry in Korea. So she worked for a couple years then after school, and then she got married like two years after she was out of school

working. Yes. And then she got married to my dad, and had me about a year later. And then they both came to the States.

SK: Okay. And then where did you come? I mean, where did you live as soon as you arrived in the United States?

SI: I lived . . . well, I spent two . . . two and half . . . about a year and a half, I guess, with my grandmother, because my parents came here. And then my parents were in Philadelphia, they drove to Minnesota. I flew into Chicago, met them in Chicago and they picked me up and we went to Minnesota.

SK: Okay. Why Minnesota?

SI: Well, my parents saw this . . .

[Clunky shuffling noises – sounds of paper rustling]

This. They saw this thing in *Time Magazine*. This is [Minnesota] Governor Wendell Anderson. And it says, "The Good Life in Minnesota." And he's holding a fish. And this is like about Minnesota. And they saw this in a magazine and they thought, wow, this sounds like a *great* place.

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: You know, like it's nice and clean, nice people, not a lot of crime. You can go *fishing*! Look at that. You know. So they decided to come because of this reason. Yes.

SK: And where did . . . which city did you move to?

SI: Well, we lived on campus in Saint Paul. It's like married student housing, married graduate student housing area called Thatcher Hall. I still remember it. And yes, we were there for, I think, like three years. Three or four years, because I went to Kindergarten, I was in first grade, and then I changed schools.

SK: What are your earliest memories of the United States?

SI: Hmmm . . .

SK: Of growing up in Minnesota?

SI: My early memories are of a lot of frustration, especially when I came. Because I couldn't understand anybody. Like . . . I mean, I only spoke Korean. And I guess my Korean was fairly developed at two and a half or whatever. And, yes, I remember that. I remember being like frustrated and crying a lot, because I didn't understand what was going on, and then sort of not really being aware of a lot of things.

SK: Were your parents busy?

SI: They were. My dad was studying and my mom was working. So I went to daycare for a while, which was very difficult, I remember. I remember like crying into this green cot because I didn't understand anything or anybody. Yes.

SK: Can you talk about the friends that you made at . . . when you first came here?

SI: I don't really recall anybody special, actually. I remember just like playing with kids at the daycare.

SK: How did you communicate with them?

SI: Well, I guess, eventually, from what my parents tell me, after about a year . . . or maybe not even a year, maybe like three months, I *really* started losing my Korean. I really lost it. And then I just was speaking English and that was it. But still like I didn't understand things, I think. Just . . . socially or culturally or . . . I don't know. So I remember playing with kids, but then like I vaguely remember being kind of alone, too. Just . . . for whatever reason, I'm not sure, maybe because I looked different or . . . I don't know.

SK: Hmmm. Was there a point when you were young where you switched languages and started speaking to your parents in English?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: How old were you?

SI: I guess I was like close to three or maybe three and a half. I think . . . from what my parents have told me, like, I switched pretty quickly. And they just let me forget the Korean. Because they just wanted me to be like happy and just be able to make the transition into living here.

SK: And your parents, were they fluent in English?

SI: No, not at the time. I think that they themselves were trying to learn the language and all of that. But, you know, they would speak to me . . . from what I understand, like they would speak to me in Korean and I would speak to them in English. And then, you know, that whole kind of listening passively worked.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm. And then how was elementary school for you?

SI: Hmmm. Elementary school was pretty bad. [Chuckles] From what I can remember. [Coughs] I think I'm going to get some water.

SK: Okay.

[Recording interruption]

SI: Elementary school was . . . for some reason, I guess, I don't remember a lot of it. I don't remember much of it. I just kind of remember flying through and then, you know, there were like incidents that I remember of . . . like I was sitting in the front of the bus one day and like all these kids . . . like the whole rest of the bus, it seemed to me, were like . . . they were making fun of me, like shouting things at me like being a chink, all that kind of stuff. And I remember like missing things. Like we were supposed to be doing something, like taking these tests or something, and I . . . I just . . . missed it . . . I didn't know what was going on. Like all of a sudden we had to do these things I didn't understand. And I just kind of remember . . . I remember being alone a lot. Just like . . . [whispers] six, seven years old. [Normal voice] I guess I remember like . . . I remember not doing very well in school, and my parents being really sort of upset with that. But then that changed in like fifth grade. All of a sudden I started doing really well in school, like I was acing these tests or something. [Snaps fingers] Well, just kind of everything just clicking in my head. So I think around fifth grade things started getting better. I started getting more aware of what was going on. But generally, elementary school was sort of like confusion, not fitting in, not being aware.

SK: And this was in Saint Paul?

SI: This was in . . . actually, I went . . . I moved to New Brighton. My family and I, we moved to New Brighton because my dad . . . I think my dad . . . yes. He was working for the state at the time. State planning agency, I guess.

SK: Mmmm. Can you describe your neighborhood in New Brighton?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Kind of . . . middle class, I think. Probably mid-to-lower middle class [chuckles] if you want to characterize it that way. All white. We had a pretty cool house though, I thought, in comparison to other people's houses, it was built kind of in a cool way. It had a cool design. Hmmm. Not a lot of kids, actually. There was a family that lived next to us. They were the Cortis'[sp?], they were Polish. And they had a daughter named Kim and a son named Tony, and I would play with Kim. She and I were actually pretty good friends up until about junior high school. So and there were some other kids in the neighborhood, but really not too many.

SK: Do you recall there being more students of ethnic background in Saint Paul as opposed to New Brighton in your school?

SI: Yes. Yes. I do.

SK: How do you think that change affected you? Did you notice that?

SI: No. I don't think I was aware of anything like that at all.

SK: No.

SI: Nothing. Just . . . people. Just people out and about and around.

SK: Going back to that memory of sitting in the front of the bus.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And children making fun of you. Did that manifest itself into an embarrassment? And how did . . . how did you relate to other Asian students?

SI: Hmmm. I don't know if it was embarrassment. I think it might have actually turned into like sort of a self-hatred. Even . . . even as a child, like that . . . that young kind of . . . like being afraid that I . . . I wouldn't fit in, in a way, so that I . . . I think I kind of left people alone for that reason, just like . . . was alone a lot, I remember. [Coughs] The second part of your question. Hmmm. Oh, dealing with other Asians.

SK: Right.

SI: Okay. I just don't . . . I wasn't aware. I still wasn't aware, like . . . and then, actually, I was really shy. I remember now when I was younger. I was a very shy kid. Like I think it was that kind of self-hatred type of thing where you know I had already been in situations where people had kind of said or done things to me, and I kind of just stayed away.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: So the Asians, too, I didn't really . . . you know, think they were [unclear - any] special or I could talk to them in any particular way or whatever.

SK: And how did you like your new neighborhood and your new school in New Brighton?

SI: Well . . . I remember being confused.

SK: Now is this in junior high or elementary?

SI: No, this was in like first grade, like mid-first grade.

SK: Okay.

SI: I mean, so I was still pretty young. I was like five. Because I was always young for my age, whatever grade I was in. Honestly, I don't . . . it wasn't anything significant. It was just kind of like we moved to this new place. I remember thinking, I'm hungry, I want to eat breakfast. Where is everything? I don't know where anything is. We have this new house. And that was about it.

SK: Yes. How about moving to junior high?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: During this period were you . . . were you communicating with your parents effectively?

SI: No. No, not at all. I think what characterizes this the best is like I would tell them that kids would say stuff to me about being Asian or being Korean, and I would be really upset. And they would . . . my dad would be like, "Well, then just yell back at them," you know, whatever. And just get mad or . . . you know, do that kind of thing. Or just like ignore it. Or tell the teacher. And you don't do that kind of a thing. You know. When you're a kid, you're a student, your teacher is like . . . the *last* person you go to. Then you're a tattletale, right. And my parents didn't understand that. So, you know, I was kind of like left to my own devices. And then they were always like, "You have to do well in school. You have to do well in school. You have to do well in school. You have to do well in school." So, you know, it was kind of like missed, *missed* kind of communication.

SK: Did you feel comfortable talking to them about difficulties that you had in school?

SI: No. Not at all.

SK: Why do you think that was?

SI: Well, I think that my parents had their own things that they were going through at the time. I mean, my mother was working—like she started working immediately when she came to the States. And my father, finally, he got a job after not finishing the architecture program at Minnesota. I think they had their own things that they were going through. And . . . and these things that were problems for me, you know, obviously they were concerned. But they couldn't really do anything, you know. Their English was not so good. They couldn't watch over me at school, you know, they sort of relied on my teachers. And there was really nobody there to like make sure everything was okay. So I think that was just the situation.

SK: Can you describe how your family worked? I mean, was there a point at which you started speaking English better than your parents? And . . . and did you feel like there was a reversal in who was taking care of who?

SI: Mmmm. No.

SK: No.

SI: No, they were always taking care of me. I mean, I remember like speaking English better than them for sure. Like would have to say reading or something, doing homework, and I would be saying "the" and they couldn't say "the" the way you're supposed to say "the" and that would kind of piss me off. Like why don't you . . .? Why don't you know how to say this the right way? But it was always like they were the parents and I was the child. And I think it was because I was an only child, too, like, you know, they would kind gang up on me. [Chuckles] Just because . . .

and they admit it to me now. They were very strict with me because they didn't know. What do you know? There's no instruction manual for parents, that kind of thing.

SK: Can you describe the ways in which the way your parents brought you up were different than your friends?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. It was very strict. Very strict, like . . . basically, I realize now that I didn't really do anything wrong. You know, I never . . . deliberately disobeyed them. It was just they had these rules that I had to follow. And it was just very like controlled, like a very controlled environment. Whereas my friends, they would just like go run around and have fun and that kind of thing.

SK: How did that make you feel?

SI: Oh, it was really frustrating. In fact, when we lived in New Brighton and I was growing up, I would always love to go to the Cortis' house because things there were just so easy. It was just so easy, just like lay around and like watch TV and like do fun stuff. Go bike riding. And like they would . . . they would go . . . I don't know. They would like go and do things as a family. Whereas my parents . . . and it's kind of not the culture to like go out and do stuff as a family, I kind of pick up, anyway. Or at least the way my parents were then. So . . . yes.

SK: Did that perpetuate itself into a division between you and your parents as you grew older?

SI: Oh, completely. Yes. I mean, it finally manifested itself when I was like a junior or . . . yes, maybe even a freshman in high school. Where I was like, okay, I'm going to get the most awesome grades in the world and I'm going to like blow out of here, because I can't stand these people. I cannot stand my parents. I mean, I was just like . . . the only way I can get out of here is to do well in school. And then when I can apply to like awesome schools out East. [Chuckles] And I'm out of here. And I don't have to see them, I don't have to come in the summers, I can find stuff to do. I mean it just . . . it just grew. It multiplied like to the nth power when I was older. When I just said, forget this. You know.

SK: And were your parents aware of that sentiment then?

SI: Oh . . . yes. But they were very like, you have to do it this way. They were very adamant about it. Where I couldn't go to the football games, where I couldn't go to homecoming. It . . . it just became the *huge* problem and . . .

SK: So you weren't allowed to go out at night or . . .?

SI: I had to be home by nine.

SK: Every night?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Well, I couldn't even go out, like during the weekdays. And I could only go out like once a weekend. I couldn't go out Friday and Saturday night. I had to go out either Friday or either Saturday, or not even at all on the weekend. And even if I did go out, I had to be back by like nine.

SK: And how would your friends react to that?

SI: Oh, with derision. I mean, you know, what the hell? What is up with your parents? You know, like, why are they so strict? And then eventually they just stopped asking me to go out because I couldn't.

SK: And do you think that made you resent your parents more?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Yes. I just . . . I remember thinking when I was a freshman in college, like the first day, they just dropped me off. They brought all my stuff in. And like I saw them leave. Like I walked them to like the dorm, the doorway, and like, they were leaving. And I still see this like in my head. I still remember how I felt, like, [speaks in a hushed voice] *yes*. They're *leaving*. I'm *so* happy. And my mother was like crying. She was crying! Like, [imitates crying] oh, you're going to call and oh . . ." It's like, yes, I'll be okay. Good. [Shouts] Yes! I'm out of here!

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: You know, it's kind of the way I felt. Yes, it just was really bad for a while.

SK: If that was happening your freshman year, then how . . . how did it change or how did it increase in intensity as your years went on in high school?

SI: In high school. Oh, it was terrible. It was *terrible*. Like . . . I was, I think, very suicidal even. Not even, I was when I was a sophomore and a junior. Like, we went to counseling.

SK: Your family and you?

SI: Yes, my family. And I remember my father like crying like there because I was just like . . . I can't stand this, you know. I can't do anything. I feel so much pressure. I mean I literally felt like I wanted to die, because there was so much at stake. And then it was like my life was at stake, because there was so much at stake. It was terrible. Yes.

SK: Who pushed you into counseling?

SI: Hmmm.

SK: Whose idea was it?

SI: It was one of my teacher's ideas. Yes, to do this. Because she saw me under so much stress and under so much pressure, and she didn't understand it. Like she was not . . . there was nothing

she could say or do to make it any better. And I mean this went on like repeatedly, like sophomore, junior year. And yes, it was terrible.

SK: And then how long were you in counseling with your parents then?

SI: Oh, it didn't last for very long. We went like maybe . . . like twice that we met as a family.

SK: How did that feel? Talking about your problems with another . . . with an outside observer?

SI: It felt really good, actually, because it was . . . and it seemed to me like there was somebody there who could understand me, who was like, yes, I understand these things you're going through. But then, inevitably, they wouldn't understand. And I realize now because . . . because of the fact I'm Korean, there are just these things, you know, that are within your family, like . . . you know, you never yell and scream back at your father. You don't. That's just not something you do. But I did. [Chuckles] And, you know, I remember one of the counselors saying, oh, you know, my . . . like my parents . . . and this woman was like in her forties or whatever. My parents, they came from Norway or something and you know they were still very old world and blah, blah, and . . . But she didn't get it. You know. She didn't understand how different it is to be Asian, like culturally, and how that was a huge problem between me and my parents. So, in a sense, it was good. She addressed my very American side, my . . . like I want to go out, I want to just not deal with like the future as much as I have to. But then there was this other side that was like, come on, lady, you don't know what the hell you're talking about. I mean, Norway? Norway and Korea, there are two different, like, ends of the world. So that was kind of the way it was. Yes.

SK: And how did your parents feel?

SI: Oh, they were in hell, too. They were totally unhappy, too. I mean, I know. You know, it was like my mother was like . . . would like yell at me, "Why you have these problems? Why are you acting this way? Why can't you just be happy?" [Chuckles] And then my dad. My dad was just . . . I mean, I realize now they love me so much, my parents. They just tried to make everything work, but they just didn't understand. You know, my dad would get so angry. And my dad and I would have these *incredible* arguments, just yelling and *screaming* at each other. It was terrible.

SK: Did you feel . . .? I know this is a bit leading. But did you feel at all like you betrayed your parents once you . . .? I mean, I hear a lot about family secrets.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And . . . and not divulging information about your parents.

SI: Oh. Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And especially talking about these sorts of issues with your American friends.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: They don't really have the context in which to understand it.

SI: Right. Right.

SK: Did you feel that way?

SI: No, not at all.

SK: No.

SI: But I know exactly what you're talking about, because my mother would be like, you know, what are you talking about on the phone? Oh, nothing. I hope you're not talking about the fact that we got into an argument or anything because you're not supposed to talk about those things with your friends, Sarah. And I would be like, no, I wasn't talking about that at all. But I was. So I knew . . . I knew about what you're talking about. It's just . . . what the fuck? It didn't matter, you know. Like no, it doesn't apply to me.

SK: It seems like the problems that you went through in high school were because of this cultural gap between you and your parents.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: Do you think a lot of that is attributed to your loss of language and your inability to communicate with each other?

SI: Oh, yes! That was, obviously, a big part of it. I mean, had I been able to say like, you know...it's funny. Had I been able to speak in Korean and put the "yo" at the end of the word, at the end of a sentence...

SK: Which word?

SI: Which would indicate respect to them. Where I would be like . . . hmmm. You know, just speaking . . . if I was able to speak Korean and put the "yo" at the end of the sentence and say it properly, I could yell and scream as much as I wanted, because I would still be indicating respect. But I didn't have that at all. So I would just be yelling and screaming at my parents, not showing them any respect in any way at all, which was a big problem, I think. Yes.

SK: And why do you think respect was such a big issue for them? Do you think it had something to do with their inability to speak to you in English on your level?

SI: No, I don't think that they were trying to do that at all. I think, you know, Korea is very Confucian. Very Confucian-based. The mother . . . no. The husband and the wife, the parents and the children, the older brother, the younger brother, that kind of thing. My parents were just like,

no. You are our child, you are our daughter. We are your parents. And there is always going to be this difference in level. So, you know, they didn't feel like it was their responsibility to be able to speak to me properly in English. It was just . . . that's the way the levels worked.

SK: And how did your relationship change after counseling?

SI: Oh . . .

SK: Did it help?

SI: No, not at all. Not at all. I mean it was just kind of like, I felt at some point that I had an ally, because I kind of felt like, okay, there is my mom and my dad, and they are like together. And then there's me. And they can gang up on me whenever they want. I kind of felt that way.

SK: Did you feel that you could communicate with one better than the other? That one could understand you more?

SI: No. No, not at all. They were both just . . . I just hated them both terribly. Yes.

SK: And so you had a younger brother.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And how much younger is he?

ilem wicg SI: Fifteen years. So when I was a freshman in high school my mother had my brother. And I was very happy that he came. Not because of the fact that I would have a brother, but because of the fact that I felt like somehow the attention would be drawn away from me. And I could just do my own thing and just they would leave me alone. But that didn't happen. [Laughs]

SK: How did the birth of your brother change your family?

SI: You know.

SK: Or your relationship with your parents?

SI: It didn't really change it that much. It wasn't like I felt jealous. I mean, I wanted them to just ... nurture and take care of this little child, because I was ... I was done. I didn't need any more supervision, I felt, at that point. So in a way, it didn't change things, because they still put this pressure on me. And they still told me to do these things. It didn't really change things that much at all.

SK: And then you graduated. And where did you decide to go to college?

SI: I decided to go the University of Chicago?

SK: And why?

SI: Well, the whole East Coast rejected me. If you want to start in Pennsylvania and work your way down. All those schools. Princeton, Yale, they all rejected me. So I got into Chicago. And, you know, I figured, what, it's like . . .

SK: The University of Chicago?

SI: University of Chicago, I figured it's far enough away. They're not going to come and knock on my door or something. That's why. And it was just incredibly serious, the school, just kickass academics. And I... at seventeen, I was like, ah! That's what I want. That's what I need. You know.

SK: And you described earlier the feelings of being very happy when your parents left you alone.

SK: Was that pretty much how you felt your first year?
SI: Yes.
SK: Did it change?
SI: Yes, I did. It change? SI: Yes, I did. It changed a little bit. Like I remember maybe about mid-quarter, feeling very strange. Like . . . and I remember typifying this way as like I felt like my head was like . . . like in Wisconsin, like I dropped my head off or something on the highway in Wisconsin, but like my body was in Chicago. I didn't understand. I felt really weird. Like . . . I didn't belong. But then it was like, I didn't want to be back in Minnesota with my parents. So I guess I was kind of homesick in a way. Yes.

SK: And during your first year did you talk to your parents often?

SI: Mmmm.

SK: Or how often did you come back to Minnesota?

SI: I came back . . . actually, my parents came to visit me for parents weekend, which was like a month after school started. We got into a huge fight. [Chuckles] Then I went home for Christmas.

SK: What was the fight about?

SI: The fight was about the fact that I had not picked up my computer yet. That I had not set up my checking yet. That my room was a mess. That . . . I was just not, like, together, basically. It was about that. [Chuckles]

SK: [Chuckles] Yes. And then you went back home for Christmas?

SI: And I went back home for Christmas. And we had the fight of all fights. [Coughs]

SK: About . . .?

SI: About . . . it's sort of complex. This is the way it goes. A friend of mine, like . . . okay, we're on the quarter system in Chicago. A friend of mine, the week like . . . finals were over, there was like Friday, Saturday, whatever. A friend of mine was going to have a party. And there was going to be pot at this party. And I knew about this, right. So I didn't know what I was going to do. Jesus, you know, there's like pot, there's drugs, what's going on. And so I called my friend who was at Penn, the University of Pennsylvania. His name was Eric. I called him and I said, "Eric, I don't know what I should do. What do you think about this? What would you do?" And he was like, "No, Sarah. Don't go." Blah, blah, blah. He's a Republican and he's very conservative. He's white, he's male, whatever. And he was like, "No, I don't think you should go." So I was like, okay, whatever. I went to the party. I went back home. I met Eric at high school, because we had this little program where we talked about, you know, to the seniors at that age what school was like, what we were going through, that kind of thing. What to expect. And Eric wrote me this note, this letter which said, "Sarah, I don't know what you did, but I hope you didn't go to that party and smoke any pot or anything like that. Here's a little article about this writer whose son was at Madison and took LSD and jumped off the balcony and killed himself." [Laughs]

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: And he said, you know, "I hope nothing happened. I hope you didn't do anything," whatever. And I was like, well, whatever, Eric. Thanks a lot for your help anyway. Blah, blah, blah. Put the note in my bag, took it home. Was home, went to a movie with my friends. My mother went through my stuff and found this letter. And I went back home and my parents were waiting for me. They were like, "What is this?" And I was just like, "Oh, that's just . . . just a letter that Eric wrote to me." I was trying to be calm. And they were like, "What is this about *pot*? What is this about LSD? Were you doing drugs at school?" "No! I didn't do anything. What are you talking about?" So like for a couple hours we were like talking like, no, no, no, nothing happened. Right. Anyway, so we went to bed.

A week passed. Everything was fine. We went to church. And this was like around New Year's. We went to church and I was just like, *fuck*, I have to get out of here! Ah! I don't like being home with my parents, I can't do anything, blah, blah, blah. Finally, one night, I just . . . I needed to talk to like this guy I was seeing. I wanted to call him. And he . . . it was fine, I could call him collect, so it wouldn't appear on the . . . on the phone bills. So I went downstairs. It was like three in the morning. I went downstairs to the study. It was like I picked up the phone, started

dialing, and all of a sudden my dad like came through the door. Like I went downstairs and went like to pretend to go to the bathroom, flushed the toilet, whatever, so I would like have a reason [unclear] or whatever. And like I'm holding the phone and my dad is like coming through the door. He's like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "Nothing." Trying to put the phone down.

And like my parents, they used to spank me when I was younger. But they never really hit me when I was older. So this time . . . this time both my parents like were like, "Oh, my god, you are like on drugs. You are like . . . we don't know what you are anymore." You know, "What kind of a daughter are you? What are you doing at that school? You're not going back to Chicago! You are going to the University of Minnesota. We are not paying (like whatever amount of money) for you to go to this expensive school to be doing drugs, messing up your life," blah, blah. And then, like they actually *hit* me. Like I actually got *bruises* from this incident. It was terrible. I mean that . . . it just escalated. This . . . this like pressure, pressure. So finally, I was like, m li "Okay, fine. Then I am leaving. I'm not going to be here anymore. I don't need to deal with this from you." So I called up a friend of mine. I'm like, you know, "Can you come pick me up, please?"

SK: That night?

SI: Like, we went to bed.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: And then in the morning I called my friend. I'm like, you know, Barb, can you please pick me up? I . . . I am just . . . I have to leave home. And I was like getting my stuff together and then went into the closet and like picked up all my shoes. And my dad was like, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm leaving." And the way I said it was, "I am not . . . I am not a good enough of a daughter for you. Okay. I have to leave." And my dad was like, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Mom said that I'm not like a good daughter. So I'm not a good daughter. So I'm leaving." And he was like, "No, you're not." I'm like, "Yes, I am." I don't need to deal with this, right?

Finally, what ended up happening, he wanted me to write a letter home every week talking about what I was doing, how things were going, that kind of a thing. And he wanted me to write an apology to him, like, I'm sorry for doing this and blah, blah, blah, whatever. And so then they took me to the airport like when I had to leave. And we were like, okay, let's not let this happen again, blah, blah, whatever. I went back to school. And I wrote letters home every week. And then after that I vowed I would never go back here . . . I would never come back to Minnesota again for longer than maybe a couple weeks at a time. So I never came back home like during the summer.

SK: You stayed in Chicago?

SI: I stayed at . . . I was in Chicago that summer. The next summer I went to Korea. The next summer I went to Los Angeles. And this last summer I stayed in Chicago just . . . fucking around, basically. [Laughs] Yes.

SK: How did that incident affect you?

SI: Oh, it was terrible. I mean, it was just like . . . it was kind of like, well, look at this, you know. Jesus, I mean, well, look at this. What kind of parents are these? These are not my parents. I don't have parents. If these are my parents, forget it. You know.

SK: Yes.

SI: It just . . . it kind of firmed my resolve, like, I have no reason to go back to Minnesota. You know. Yes.

SK: And you felt that way for the following years?

SI: Hmmm. I felt that way . . . it wasn't even like I felt that way, it was just the reality. Like I cannot go back to their house and live. I can't. It's just not even an option. You know. So that first summer, I went ahead . . . I found a job. I found an apartment. What else could they say? You know, it was kind of like, this has already been taken care of. I'm earning enough money. I can save money for the next year. If you say no to this, you know how unreasonable you're going to be. So . . . they let me stay. [Chuckles]

SK: And do you think your parents felt . . .? Well, first of all, do you think that they believed you when you denied about having any involvement with . . .?

SI: I don't know. I don't know. I . . . I guess they didn't. Because what they said the following argument was, "You are on drugs. You are going to go to the hospital and get a drug test, because you are on drugs. You did something, didn't you?" And I was like, "No, I haven't." But they didn't believe me. So I guess they didn't believe me, you know.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Yes.

SK: And . . . has your relationship changed at all?

SI: Oh, yes. It has, quite a bit.

SK: You went to Korea, didn't you?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: When was that?

SI: I went to Korea the summer after my sophomore year.

SK: Okay. Is that when things started changing?

SI: Yes. Actually, that was like kind of the beginning.

SK: Can you describe what it felt like to go back to Korea?

SI: It was amazing. [Chuckles] It was really amazing. Like . . . all of a sudden, I fit in somewhere. It wasn't like people were welcoming me with open arms or anything, but just like . . . I kind of like to see your face, Sophia, or to see somebody else's face whose Asian. It was just so nice. It was so nice to like . . . feel like I fit in somewhere. I like looked like somebody else. You know, that kind of a thing.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm. And in retrospect, at that point, did you start to realize a lot of things about the reasons why you were having difficulty in your adolescence?

SI: Oh, yes. Very much so.

SK: What sort of realizations did you have?

SI: Oh, one was that I was full of self-hatred. I was just full of self-hatred. Like I hated the way I looked. I hated my body. I hated . . . I hated like feeling like I had . . . I wore these two masks. One where I was at school and I was all American and blah, blah, blah. And then I would come home and I would have to be this other way which was just so awful, I felt. And I'd have to like go and get the rice for my dad and give it to him and then set up the table and . . . you know. And get water for my dad or whatever. And yes. Yes, it became very apparent to me, you know. And then . . . and then I started to see my parents' point of view more so at that point. I mean, I just started.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: It wasn't like I believed [unclear]. You know, I love my parents, whatever. It was kind of like, oh okay. I see.

SK: Can you describe [unclear] how you felt when you got off the plane when you arrived . . .?

SI: Coming back [unclear]?

SK: No, actually when you arrived in Seoul.

SI: Oh. Well, it was hot. [Chuckles] I got out of the airport. I met my cousin and my aunt, my mom's sister, who looks very much like my mother.

SK: Had you seen them before?

SI: Yes. I had seen them. I hadn't seen them for a while, maybe in like two or three years. And I thought, holy *shit*. I'm in *Korea*. I don't know how to speak the language. I don't know anything about how to get around this city. *Oh*, *my God*. But then I was like, [whispers] *wow*, but I'm here! And I came all by myself, too. That was like an *amazing* feeling, but it was sort of overwhelming.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: And kind of scary. Like, I... don't know how to say anything to my aunt. I don't know how to tell her anything. But then it was, okay, you know, just pick your stuff up.

SK: But you could speak Korean, but just not in the respectful form?

SI: No, I couldn't speak Korean very well at all.

SK: Oh . . .

SI: It was like I... after so many years of just listening to my parents and speaking to them in English...

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: I... I, like I couldn't make the connection going this way. I could only make the connection going like this way, the other way, where I listened and understood. I couldn't say things, I couldn't make the words come into my head.

SK: And how long did you stay there in your visit?

SI: I was there for three months.

SK: What did you do?

SI: Well, I stayed with my aunt for like two weeks. And then I went to the [unclear] the Korea University program, where they have like you know, language and history or whatever classes you want to take and then you live on the . . . I lived at the dorms. I just . . . you know, I didn't want to deal with like moving back and forth. [Chuckles] And I just wanted to be independent and there and by myself. So, yes, I studied, I hung around with these other great Korean American kids and we went around and did all kinds of fun stuff and probably partied too much.

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: But, you know, it was a really good experience.

SK: How did your parents feel about you going to Korea?

SI: They were *scared* as hell! They called *every* week. And they tried to get ahold of me, but they couldn't *get* ahold of me because the phone system like at the dorm was like screwed up. They couldn't get through and I was at class, and all of this. So they spent like five hundred dollars in phone bills, like trying to make sure I was *okay*. And I was fine. I was like having an incredible time. But, you know, they were really happy. They were just really worried, you know.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm. Can you talk about the ways in which you felt like a foreigner and also how . . . being Korean and looking like you are Korean, yet being very American?

SI: Oh, sure. Yes. I think . . . yes. One incident that I remember the most, it's kind of a mixture of things. I went to a [unclear – speaks Korean term], I went to a department store with some friends. And we were standing outside, just like people watching or whatever. And there was this American guy, a white guy walking around, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. He had this *map*. He didn't know what he was doing. He was *so* lost. And he's like, you know, trying to find his way around. Finally, I stood up, because I . . . this poor guy

[Recording interruption]

[Tape 1 Side B]

SI: So I was at this department store, and this white guy was wandering around lost. And . . . okay? And so I helped him find his way, right. But all these Korean people around us were like, what is she doing? You know, [unclear] what is she doing, you know, that girl? So anyway, those people left after a while obviously right. And I just sat down with my friends again. And it was like nothing had happened. You know, it was like . . . because I was Korean and I fit in, I fit in again, because of the way I looked. But that one instant where they saw me talking to this white guy in English, they were like, Oh, she's one of those [unclear-kyup po] she's one of those Koreans who have left and is like really American. That's one incident that I just kind of . . . that kind of . . . schism, that sort of dysfunctional, disharmony kind of things there.

Another . . . a few other times there are some people who like . . . like Korean University students would like stare at us. I mean, because we'd be like walking around on campus, like a couple . . . you know, and I didn't go around in like a big group of people, but I think there would be like a couple of us and we'd all be speaking English. Mmmm. People would stare at us.

SK: Why?

SI: Because we were speaking in English.

SK: Oh.

SI: And that was *weird*. They were like . . . they would tell us sometimes, you know, why don't you speak Korean? You're Korean, you should speak Korean.

SK: How would that make you feel?

SI: It would make me mad. Because I would be like thinking this: listen, buddy . . . [Chuckles] I am like going to one of the top universities in the United States, okay. So don't give me any problems. Of course I couldn't say this in Korean or anything, that was a problem. But it made me mad. Because it's like, you know, what are you complaining about? What are you complaining about? This is not your problem, okay. Like, I'm doing the best that I can. So leave me alone.

SK: Mmmm.

SI: Well, I couldn't say that in Korean. I would be like, [unclear – speaks in Korean] okay, yes, you're right. Yes.

SK: Would these be older people that would tell you that or students?

SI: Students. Some students. Yes. So there was that kind of . . . kind of . . . rubbing against the sand or you know, or something just not comfortable.

SK: And that was your first time back to Korea?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Well, no, that was my second time. I had gone to Korea when I was like nine or ten with my parents.

SK: Okay.

SI: But that was like . . . I don't know what was going then, too. [Chuckles]

SK: And then did you go back again?

SI: No, I haven't been back. But that was like . . . that was like, what? Like maybe three years ago now.

SK: Yes.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. So sort of recent, you know.

SK: And when you came back, how did it change your relationship with your parents?

SI: It made it better.

SK: Why?

SI: I could understand their point of view more. I could understand when they told me . . . when they told me like to do things like a certain way, I could understand what they were saying.

SK: What . . . what made you understand?

SI: Hmmm.

SK: Seeing certain things or understanding the culture?

SI: Yes.

SK: But what about the culture?

SI: Well, I'm trying to think . . . Well, I just . . . I saw . . . I saw more examples. I think that's the best way to characterize it. I saw more examples of the kind of behavior in Korea that is accepted. Like women being [unclear – speaks Korean term] I don' know if you know what that means. It's like being like . . . really nice and . . .

SK: Quiet.

SI: Quiet and . . . [speaks in soft high voice] [unclear – speaks in Korean] that kind of like high voice. Not this like, [speaking in a deeper voice very authoritatively] I am very confident of my abilities and I am going to go and kick some butt! You know, it's just like [speaking in soft high voice] ah ha, yes, yes. [unclear – speaks in Korean]. It's just like kind of . . .

SK: A little more passive.

SI: More passive, more sort of that kind of way of being. And then I saw also like the relationship between my aunts and uncle and their children and what they did and that kind of a thing, and the relationships between like my peers. I met some Korea University students there just because I . . . I kind of wanted to just meet some real Korean people. And I saw the relationship between them and the way that that worked. And it just . . . it gave me more points of reference. Like, oh . . . I see. So that's why like I should go and get my dad a beer or why I should go and get him soup or you know why they wanted me to study so hard when I was in school.

SK: Yes.

SI: Because it just gives me more . . . it gave me more points of reference to understand why they were the way they were. Yes.

SK: When you saw that . . . that, I guess, ideal image of a woman in Korea, and you didn't see yourself in that, how did that make you feel? What did that . . .?

SI: It didn't make me feel good.

SK: Hmmm.

SI: Again, it was that sort of self-hatred thing again. And then actually I went through that again, too. Like I went through self-hatred living in America and then I went through self-hatred like in Korea. Like, why the hell am I so tall? Like, why am I so individualistic? Why am I so independent?

SK: Did it make you want to be different?

SI: It made me want to be different. And then I purposely tried to change myself to become that way.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Which was a *terrible* experience. [Chuckles]

SK: Describe it.

SI: It's of course connected with a guy. I met this guy there. He was a little older. He was like er listoi twenty-six, and I was . . .

SK: Was he Korean?

SI: He was Korean American.

SK: Oh, okay.

SI: He was Korean American like me. But more conservative, definitely, he was from California. And . . . to make a very long story short, he proposed to me and we were . . . we got engaged. But of course like we didn't tell anybody, you know, that kind of thing. It was kind of like, okay, you know, you graduate from college and then you come out to California and you marry me and we'll be happy. But . . . I tried to change myself to be more Korean because of him also, because he likes ... liked women to be that way. He would tell me, you know, why are you studying political science? That's like something a man should study. You know, you should be studying like English or education or . . . something like that.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: You know, and then things like, you know, are you talking to any guys there? Like do you talk to any men there? I don't really think you should. Like you could talk to your professors or something, that's it. And . . . and . . . just like . . . let me order for you. You know, just . . . it's a more beautiful way of doing things. And then I... I changed. I purposely tried to change myself, you know, to be very passive.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: And like, no, I don't think I want to do that. Okay, sure. Things like that. Just like . . . I mean, it was . . . it was *disgusting*.

SK: It lasted for a long time afterwards? Why do you think . . . it seemed like when you describe yourself in high school and your first year in college, you were very . . . you had a very strong personality.

SI: Yes.

SK: You were very rebellious to your parents.

SI: Yes.

SK: Why do you think you . . . you changed so quickly?

I wante ko SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Because I wanted something else, because I wanted to be a different way, because I didn't know what I was; that's the bottom line. I didn't know like . . . [sighs] All my life, like all the way up to college, I was always pushing, fighting against something, right. Like, no, I want to go out. I want to go to prom. No, I want to go to the football game. "You can't." Why? "Because you can't. Because I said so." [Makes frustrated noise] You know, I was angry, I want to fight, I want to do what I want to do, that kind of thing. And then . . . and then I went to Korea and then I was told in so many ways from somebody who I cared about who . . . whatever. You're doing this the wrong way. Oh, okay. I'll go the other way then. You know, so it was like. .. I had been fighting, fighting, fighting, and then I didn't quite know what I was because I had just been concentrating so much on fighting, not cultivating myself, not figuring out, okay, you know, these are the kinds of boundaries that I have. Instead of fighting, I didn't know what I wanted, I didn't know who I was. So I went this other way, to try to figure out, oh, Korean women are this way. I must be this way too then. Do you see?

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: So it kind of . . . I was lost. Very lost.

SK: Was he your first boyfriend?

SI: No.

SK: And did you have boyfriends in high school or . . .?

SI: No, not in high school.

SK: In college?

SI: Not in high school, in college. Like my first year I just went *insane*.

SK: You dated a lot?

SI: I dated too much. [Chuckles]

SK: Did you date Korean men?

SI: No, just white men.

SK: Really.

SI: Yes. White men, Jewish men, black men, Hispanic men, everything but Asian men.

SK: Why do you think that was?

SI: Oh . . .

SK: When you look back on it?

SI: I didn't find Asian men attractive. They're too short, no hair, not very big, not very cute, whatever.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm. And why do you think that changed once you went to Korea?

SI: I was surrounded by Korean men. I was surrounded by Korean people. And all of a sudden I could see, wow, he's really good looking. *Wow*, he looks really good! It kind of . . . it's just like what you're used to. I mean, it's so amazing how environment shapes you.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Here, there are no . . . no Asian role models. But in Korea, it's all Korean people, you know. What else have you got to look at? So then all of a sudden I started noticing, oh wow, you know.

SK: But when you first arrived, was your first impression that, oh, these men are not attractive?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: Was that your first impression? Did it change?

SI: Well, I don't think it was so overt. I think it was like I had a sense, but like, I wasn't sure. And then gradually with time. Just . . . I mean, it's just . . . maybe . . . I don't know. It's just so amazing to be in a country where everybody is . . . it's just such a homogenous nation. It's just amazing. And I think that's the only way I can characterize it. Where everybody, everything that

you're taking in, the media, the press, radio, just . . . people walking around, everything, anything, the bus driver, the postman, everything is Korean. You know. And being in that kind of environment, it changes you. It makes you think about things.

SK: Did it make you feel more connected? I mean, did you feel . . . let's see. In the United States, I mean it's a nation of immigrants.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And a lot of people have attributed the problems of the nation to the fact that the population is composed of immigrants who come here and don't feel any sense of ownership.

SI: Mmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And when they see each other, they don't see themselves. They don't identify with one another.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: Would you say that when you went to Korea and you saw people who looked like you, you felt like you cared about . . . about . . .? Did it feel like coming home? Did it feel like family?

SI: Yes. It did. It really did. And then within my own family, I was just amazed that like my uncle could come . . . come to the city, in the [unclear] which is a little bit south of Seoul. It's like where all the government like military science stuff is. He would . . . he could just come to my aunt's house and take a shower and like say, hey, what's up? You know, what's going on? And like say hi, whatever, eat dinner, and then he could leave. And then my grandfather would just be like down the street and then people were there. It was amazing, you know, like yes, definitely. It's like, I belong in this country, I felt initially when I first got there. Like there are all these people, and they're all Korean. What's going on here? [Chuckles] You know. And they all speak the same language. Holy cow. Yes. By all means, I felt like I came home.

SK: How did you feel when you came back to the United States?

SI: Oh, I was so lost. I was so lost. First of all, being in an environment where everybody is Korean, you get used to it. You get used to seeing people like yourself. Everywhere. Coming back here, people looked so weird. Like, that hair color. What's up with that hair color? And their faces! Why do they have such big pointy noses? I mean, well, what is that? And . . . and it's so strange, that feeling. Like seeing and seeing and just seeing white, white everywhere. *Everywhere*. It's very disorienting.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: And then, secondly, I was doing this like change thing. Where I was like all . . . it's called [unclear – speaks Korean term].

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Where I was all [unclear – speaks Korean term] and just like . . . really kind of meek and kind of quiet and not very sure about things and . . .

SK: Did your friends notice that change in you?

SI: Yes, they did. They were like . . . But they didn't say anything about it, you know. They were just kind of . . . well, she did that cultural thing. Because all my friends were white. Okay, you know. So yes, it was very strange coming back.

SK: When you came back did you seek out other Asian students?

SI: Yes. Boom! When I came back to Chicago, boom! Korean Club, I was there. Boom! Right there. And, you know, just like, I have to be with other Korean people. I have to be able to like, see them and like see their faces. I need it. Yes.

SK: And how did that change your . . . how did that change your social life? How did that change you? Changing your circle of friends.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. It was a very difficult year, my junior year. I seriously contemplated transferring. And I didn't do very well academically either. It changed me because I began to realize that I didn't fit in Korea, and I didn't fit here, in the sense of, okay, I'm not entirely Korean, but then I'm not entirely American either. And I'd begun to say, oh, my God. Who am I? [Chuckles] You know, it's like . . . because I was with these Korean Americans. And inevitably my real personality would come through. I'm very strong, I'm very independent, I'm very like I can think for myself goddammit, leave me alone, personality would come through. And I became sort of . . . like different from these people, these other Korean Americans. And there is my boyfriend in California who was like, what are you doing acting this way? Blah, blah, blah. Basically, that's what he was saying. It was very difficult.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: It was . . . again, I was just very lost. I didn't know what I wanted. I didn't know who I was. You know. Because it's like . . . I wanted to be something, but I couldn't possibly be that way, because that just wasn't the way I was, you know. Even though I had been fighting, fighting, fighting, when I was younger, I was growing up, I was figuring out who I was. Despite that fight. And I . . . you know, but then I went on to Korea, I didn't really know what I was, and then I thought I was this way or I could be this way. Or I wanted to be this way because that was the way Korean people quote/unquote "were."

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: Especially Korean women. So then . . . yes. I tried to hang out with these Korean people, these Korean American people, but I didn't fit in with them. I was too . . . too loud, too aggressive, too abrasive, too American.

SK: Seems like you were very alone at that time.

SI: Oh, yes. Yes, I was.

SK: Did it push you towards your parents?

SI: Yes. I would call them up, crying, I can't stand it here. I hate it here. I want to transfer. I don't have any friends here. I don't like anybody here. And they would . . . my mother . . . they were so sweet, you know. They were . . . like at one point during the year, like February or something, they were like, "We're going to go to Florida. Do you want to like come for the weekend or something? Like do you want to just come down and spend some time with us like Friday, Saturday, Sunday?"

SK: In Florida?

SI: In Florida. They were just like, "Well, we'll fly you down if you want to come." Oh, okay. Sure. You know. And so I flew there like for the weekend. They were so sweet, you know, they were like trying to make me feel better. Then, of course, I was going to California like every four weeks.

SK: You were?

SI: Yes. Like winter quarter, because of this guy. Yes. It was pretty awful. Because I wanted to be with him, because he . . . he was some source of stability and like . . . even though he himself was not very stable.

SK: And did your parents know about him?

SI: Well, yes. They knew that I was seeing him and that I was in love with him, which was bizarre for them to know, but, yes, they knew. But they didn't know I was going to California. They didn't know that at all. I mean, had they known that, they would have just been furious, really.

SK: And did your relationship with him end?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. It ended terribly. [Chuckles] Basically, he was both emotionally and physically abusive toward me. And I sort of realized . . . Oh, when was it? Close to the end of the school year, like around . . . February, that this was not healthy for me. [Chuckles] I came back from like . . . oh, what was it? Spring break. January, February, March . . . March, it was. I came back from spring break with like bruises on me. And my . . . my roommate said, "Sarah, where did you get those bruises from?" Because I came out of the bathroom with a towel on, and I had

like bruises on my arm. And I said, "Oh, I fell skiing." And then I was like . . . wait a second here! That's not what happened. He hit you. And then I was like, yes, he did, didn't he? Why am I covering this up? Why am I in this relationship? What [unclear] what's going on here? And then I was like, you know, this is not good. I've got to get out of this. So it ended, eventually.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: You know, I mean there was one phone call where he called me like all day. He was alternating between I love you, you're a whore, you're a bitch, you know. Why were you on the pill before I met you? All that . . . basically that was like what it was about. Why were you on the pill before I started seeing you? All that means is you're a whore. I love you. I mean, he was just very unstable.

SK: And who helped you through that time?

SI: A couple friends of mine at school. One girl, her name is Nicole, she's at UCLA Law School now. Another friend who . . . yes, another friend who is at University of Iowa Law School now. Both who . . . they said to me, "You know, Sarah, if you ever like run into him on the street, beat him up, kick his ass, and we'll defend you in court." [Laughs]

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: You know, it . . . it just . . . yes, these two girlfriends of mine, they just really helped me out a lot.

SK: Did that change your image of Korean men?

SI: Mmmm. Yes. Yes.

SK: How?

SI: Well, for some reason, I just felt that all Korean people were . . . would be my friend, you know. And I . . . I realized, you know, Korean people, even though they may all look alike and they may look similar to me, and they may present this sort of familiar feeling to you, it doesn't mean anything. It's what the person is, you know, whether they're American or whether they're Korean, or they're white, or they're black, or whatever. You know, then I . . . I just kind of came to terms with that, that not every Korean person just because they grew up in the States and they faced various forms of racism and they, you know, they went to Korea in these programs, not every one of them would be my friend. It's very individual, you know. That's what I realized. It was tough though to realize that.

SK: And did you ever get involved with Korean men after that?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: You did?

SI: Yes. I still leave that open. In fact, you know, I still . . . I still just want to date Korean men and marry a Korean man. So . . . but not like that.

SK: You've kind of decided for yourself that you will?

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Yes.

SK: Why? Why do you think so?

SI: Well . . . [sighs] I feel like, again, there is more opportunity for . . . like more points of convergence. I mean, whenever you want to . . . whenever you date someone, whenever you meet someone, you want to feel these points of convergence. You know, there are things that you are very similar . . . that you have very similar between you, that you see things from a certain point of view. I mean, obviously, I mean, that's what you want in somebody that you're going to marry, you're going to date, whatever. And I just feel like there is more possibility for that being there, being with another Korean man. You know, obviously, not a man like that man who I was with, you know, when I met in Korea. There are a lot of men out there, just in general.

[Chuckles] But yes, I... I just feel like... that that's more of what I want. I don't want to have to explain anymore why I'm pouring your beer for you. It's not because I love you, okay. I may think you're great or whatever, but it's not because I love you. It's because it's the way to do things. Because I still have that, you know. And the reason why I'm serving you first is not because of some undying desire to serve you for the rest of my life. It's just the way things are.

SK: Has that made you want to limit your circle of friends to Koreans?

SI: Well, I'm trying to do that, yes. But it's not going very well. [Chuckles] Here in Minnesota there are not a lot of Koreans, in comparison to say, L.A., New York, Chicago. And the other thing that I'm finding out, too, is that I'm a very liberal Korean person.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: And a lot of Koreans here in Minnesota are pretty conservative. Chicago, it is disgustingly conservative.

SK: Really.

SI: Yes. Yes. Like several of my friends . . . in fact, one of . . . one of these people who is in Theater Mu, said to me, half-jokingly, "Well, Sarah, now that you've got your career in line, you've got about three years before you have to worry about getting married." [Laughs] I was just like, "Where are you from again? Oh yes, you're one of those Chicago Koreans."

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: Really, really conservative.

SK: Really.

SI: Yes. So, you know, I mean, I'm trying to be with all Asian people, like all the people I associate with outside of work are all Asian.

SK: Not . . .

SI: Not necessarily just Korean.

SK: Oh, okay.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. But because I... nobody at Piper is Asian, you know, I can't [unclear].

SK: Right now you're a financial analyst at Piper Jaffray.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm. Yes.

SK: And it's a predominantly white [unclear].

SI: Oh, it's very white. Yes.

SK: Do you see that parallel with your schooling in Minnesota? That you are now in this corporation with predominantly white men.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And you used to go to school with . . .

SI: Predominantly white people.

SK: With white people

SI: Actually, I haven't thought of it that way. Yes. But you're right. It is that way.

SK: Are you feeling any of the same sorts of . . .?

SI: I did in the beginning. Like the first week, the first day I was so freaked out. Every day at seven, seven a.m. we have meetings where we talk about what happened the day before in the market or any new research that's coming out. And the first day I went there, I stood in the meeting wearing my suit and just . . . okay, here I am. I looked around. I saw all white people. And then I saw a couple women, but they were all blonde. [Chuckles] And I was like, well, I

guess I'm back in Minnesota again. And then I was just . . . I met so many people that day. And they were all white. I'm like, "Hi, yes, nice to meet you. Great . . . What's your name again?"

SK: [Chuckles]

SI: You know, and I was thinking, "God, you know, they all look alike! What's going on?!" [Laughs] Yes. But it's . . . I guess I'm used to it now.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: But whenever I meet an Asian person, I'm so happy, you know. One of the companies I follow, their communications person there, there is like a public relations guy. He's in California. And his name is Henry Kim. And I had to talk to him one day. I was so happy. Hi, you know, Hi Henry, this is Sarah, and I'm calling from Piper Jaffray, blah, blah, blah, you know, this and that. Say, you wouldn't happen to be Korean, would you? Oh, I am, yes. Why? Oh, I am, too. And he was like, Oh [unclear- speaks in Korean] blah, blah, blah, blah, in Korean, my name is such and such. And I was like oh, yes. [unclear- speaks in Korean] blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, blah, blah, whatever. And it was just like, wow! But that's very rare.

SK: Mmmm.

SI: But I'm used to it now again. What else can I do, you know? I can't stand up and say, "Why aren't you hiring any Asian people here?" I can't say that.

SK: Do you go to a Korean church?

SI: I do. But I don't like it.

SK: Really.

SI: It's too conservative. The pastor is a joke. [Chuckles]

SK: What do you mean a joke?

SI: He's just an incredibly egotistical guy who . . . is very happy he has so much power. And the Korean people there are not very interesting.

SK: Mmmm.

SI: They're pretty one-dimensional people. But that's just okay [unclear].

SK: Do you go regularly?

SI: I was. But then I realized, I'm wasting my time. I mean, I consider myself a Christian but I like to be with interesting people. And I don't want to feel like I'm wasting my time, so I don't go anymore.

SK: The Korean community that goes to . . . well, the Korean church community seems very strong.

SI: Oh, yes.

SK: Can you describe why it's so strong?

SI: It sort of feeds on itself. It's also a cultural thing. It's very cultural.

SK: It's not very religious? Is it more of a cultural social gathering than religious?

SI: Yes. Here, in Minnesota it's not as strong as say in Chicago. In Chicago, oh my God, it's like this *grip*. If you don't belong, nobody knows who you are. If you don't belong to that church or those several churches. But here, you know, it's not as tight of a grip. But, you know, it's fairly strong, I'd say.

SK: But you don't feel comfortable there?

SI: Well . . . [sighs] I feel comfortable in the fact that I've known these people my whole life. And they always say such nice things to me because they don't have anything else to say. They don't know what else to say. Oh, you're so tall. You're so pretty now. Oh, it's great. Your parents must be happy you're here. Blah, blah, blah. [unclear – sounds like Neh, neh, neh, neh] Yes, yes, yes, okay, fine, whatever. But, you know, I don't socialize with people who are my parents' generation. It's just not possible to. Besides, they don't want to socialize with me. So then there are people who are our age. But they're not very interesting people. They're just . . . a lot of them are from Chicago. Some of them are very Korean in the sense that they came to the States when they were a little older. And they speak Korean to one another. I don't fit in there. And . . . they're just kind of really nice people but not very interesting.

SK: Hmmm

SI: So I don't go that often anymore.

SK: It seems like . . . it seems like you're very isolated in a way.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: Even when you're in a community with a lot of Koreans.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And especially when you are at work, for instance.

SI: Yes.

SK: Do you see that changing? Do you see ways in which you can make that change?

SI: Yes. Like I mentioned to you before, I really want to move to New York. You know, just in terms of my career, in terms of this kind of thing also. I mean there are so many more Koreans or Asians in general on the coasts.

SK: But do you see yourself . . . can you see yourself fitting in there? How is it different there?

SI: Mmmm.

SK: I mean, there's a pretty large Korean community here in the Twin Cities.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: And . . . and you go to a Korean church, and yet you don't fit in.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: Although there are so many Koreans who are . . . consider themselves part of the one point five generation.

SI: Right.

SK: It seems like they don't fit in anywhere.

SI: Mmmm-hmmm.

SK: How do you see that as being different in New York?

SI: There are just more. There are just like . . . population density is just so much greater. So, I just have to make the initiative, you know. Go out and meet as many people, try to find as many points of convergence as possible, throw out the ones that are not any good. And see what I come up with. I just feel like there's more opportunity, you know.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: While I'm here, I am going to keep on moving, keep on pushing, keep on trying to meet more people. I have this date tonight. I got set up on this blind date, you know. I mean I'm going to try to keep doing this kind of stuff because if I don't try, I'm going to get really upset. I mean, knowing that I have tried and I did my best and I couldn't come up with anything, makes me feel a lot better than knowing that I didn't try and I didn't meet anybody. And I'm not talking like

meeting a man or whatever, I'm just like talking about like friends in general. And then I'm sort of thinking, well, you know, why do I have to limit this to race to be friends with people? Why do I have to limit it? I . . . I guess I really don't, you know. It's just kind of like what I want. But what I want and what I can get are two different things, so . . . be flexible. You know, that's kind of what I tell myself.

SK: And how is your relationship with your parents these days?

SI: It's pretty damn good.

SK: Yes?

SI: Yes. They are . . . I get this impression from them that they are just *extremely* happy with me you at to Unive these days. They are just like, [unclear] look at our *daughter*! [Laughs] You know. She's working, she doesn't live at home. She went to [unclear]—she went to University of Chicago. Look at her. I kind of get that feeling from them.

SK: And how do you feel about that?

SI: I feel very happy about that.

SK: Yes.

SI: I mean, I am just finally to the point where I can make my parents happy. And I'm not a problem to them. I'm not a source of like . . . ah, an argument or a fight or discord or anything. It's just like I'm doing the right things now, finally, you know. So things are great. You know, like . . . like I call my mom to chat about stuff, you know. And just see how she's doing and . . . but you know, it's not like I share any intimate secrets or anything with them, it's just like, Hi, how are you? You know, what are you doing? Are you feeling okay? And then like how was work? Oh, it's going okay. It's kind of tough these day. But, you know, and then we'll talk about stuff like that. And like pretty specifically. But you know, I'm not like, oh, you know, I hate it here and oh, I don't have a boyfriend and I can't get any sex and . . . you know, I mean [Laughs] You know, I can't say things like that, obviously. It's just like . . . it's like things are good, you know, just overall. And there are certain things I know I can share with them. And then there are certain things that I know that I can't. So I don't talk about them with them. And they would be upset then anyways, so . . .

SK: Do you speak Korean with them now?

SI: I'll speak a little bit of Korean with them, you know, as much as I can.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

SI: And then sometimes it's sort of handy, because I have an officemate, and if I'm like pissed off with my mom and like she's being ridiculous or something, like I'll tell her in Korean. You know, like, Mama, [unclear – speaks in Korean]. Just like, don't worry! [unclear – speaks in Korean]. You know, and she'll be like, oh . . . you know, blah, blah, blah. And I'm just like, no, really. Don't worry about it. And then my office mate will be like, "Cool. You can like talk to your mom in Korean." [Laughs] So yes, I mean, sometimes I will. And sometimes like sentiment that I feel. That will be more easily expressed to them. And then I can tell them like . . . my grandmother passed away a few weeks ago. And I told my mom, you know, I just didn't feel good and [unclear – speaks in Korean] like [unclear] my sort of feeling that I have inside of me, it's just not good. And she'd be like, yes, you know, and she'll understand. So . . .

SK: Do you see that as one of the main reasons why your relationship with your parents has improved? That language acquisition?

SI: Somewhat, yes.

SK: Mmmm-hmmm.

ρ as much ..ore. That's ab SI: Yes. But I think that had I not . . . had I not picked up as much Korean as I did, it would still be better now, you know, just because I understand more. That's about it. Yes.

SK: Okay. Well, thank you, Sarah.

SI: Oh, sure.

[End of Recording]

Transcription by Marilyn Olson-Treml October 2011