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SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT  
INTERVIEW SUMMARY

INTERVIEWEE: SUSAN AHN CUDDY  
INTERVIEWER: AMY KITCHENER  
DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW(S): 7/29/93, 8/12/93  
LOCATION: NORTHRIDGE, CA  
ETHNICITY: KOREAN AMERICAN  
OTHERS PRESENT: NONE  
SUMMARIZER: AMY KITCHENER

INTERVIEW NUMBER: SH-4  
NUMBER OF DAT TAPES: 2  
NUMBER OF CASSETTE TAPES: 2  
LENGTH:

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Note: Interviews were recorded on DAT (Digital Audio Tape) and transferred to standard cassette tape for transcribing and listening purposes. The three digit numbers are indexed from the cassette recording and not the original DAT recording.

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TAPE 1, SIDE A (CORRESPONDS WITH DAT TAPE 1)

000 Introduction

004 Born in Los Angeles in 1915

006 Meaning of her name in Korean -- change from Korean to English in kindergarten -- meaning of father's pen name -- Susan's name is patterned after his -- Susan retains her maiden name of Ahn as is Korean tradition

029 Parents from Korea -- came to U.S. in 1902 -- mother decided to marry father (a man with no future) -- came to U.S. with him -- they married before they boarded ship -- landed in San Francisco -- came as students to study Western democracy to better Korea

048 Koreans in San Francisco were ginseng merchants -- they were not Americanized at all -- father worked to educate the community and encouraged assimilation -- worked to help them clean their homes and plant flowers in gardens -- 1905 Japanese-Russian War -- Japan took protectorate over Korea -- 1906 father left for Korea -- he returned in 1911 -- he was preaching how to save his country -- 1910 Japanese annexation of Korea -- father couldn't stay there -- 1903 wave of Korean immigration to Hawaii for work in the sugar cane plantations -- then to Western U.S. -- early pioneers

were vital to Korea's independence --they gave half of their wages to Independence Movement -- Father organized Korean National Association -- now a historical landmark on Jefferson -- now area dedicated as Dosan Ahn Chang Ho Square

- 106 Mother alone raising children -- first in San Francisco and then in Riverside -- Riverside cluster of Koreans who were orange pickers -- had their own school and meetings
- 122 Mission of the KNA -- aid to Korean immigrants -- mediators for labor disputes -- immigration consultants -- civic organization-- recognized by Federal Government as representation of Korean people
- 134 Mother and father were some of the first Koreans -- mother may have been first Korean student to leave -- later community developed by picture brides and laborers -- every student who came went through their family home -- idea was to study subjects that would be beneficial to Korea when freedom came -- brother Philson took chemistry (not architecture which he wanted) -- Susan and sister studied sociology -- younger brother took education
- 166 Philip became an actor -- was a minor -- friend of Anna Mae Wong -- met Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. -- he wanted to give Philip a part and gave him a contract -- needed parental signature -- mother said this would be a disgrace to his father because in Korea acting was not a recognized profession -- had low class associations - - later in 1925 when father returned Philip talked to him -- father gave permission because it was an "art" and told him to do his best -- Philip then pursued acting and achieved great fame -- he was widely accepted (crossed "color lines") -- Korea was forgotten nation and Philip sought to keep Korea on the map
- 208 1914 family had home at 1411 W. Fourth Street -- Susan born there in 1915 -- moved to 106 N. Figueroa Street - - sister born there in 1917 -- Korean communities outside L.A. until about 1926, in Riverside, Claremont, Willows, Sacramento -- during 1926 crop failures the families moved to L.A. -- during Susan's childhood they were the only Korean family around L.A.

- 233 Mother was open to the Americans -- welcomed into the home -- brought friends home -- learned English in kindergarten -- Figueroa area -- mud driveways -- little store -- no prejudice problem -- presently Dorothy Chandler Pavilion -- had little money -- lived by Temple street Jewish community -- barrels of salted fish -- close ties with Jewish community
- 278 Mother had to cook for father's associates on small budget -- served salted herring, rice and Kim chi -- Flower and First grocery store friends -- Susan tutored daughter at school -- the father gave them credit and borrow from him -- Susan still friends with daughter
- 315 Susan attended Fremont Ave. Elementary School (now demolished) -- Central Junior High School (now Board of Education offices) on Temple -- school experience -- ate Pumpkin pie at school and was strange taste for Susan in Kindergarten -- didn't encounter prejudice -- All her siblings were leaders -- Susan president of home room and baseball teams
- 345 Father away for years -- they accepted it as the way of life -- mother was very strong and never complained -- mother was great patriot -- father didn't have time to write to her until he was imprisoned -- allowed to write one letter every two months and wrote them all to her mother -- saddest love letters -- letters of hope and sorrow
- 377 Susan went to seminar in Korea in 1992 on fair elections and they used the basis of her father's speech in 1898 -- was hero of the country -- was a feminist too -- in letters he called her mother by first name (never done in Korean tradition) -- on earlier trip to Korea in 1984 with brother Ralph -- media interview about father -- media couldn't find any faults with their father and wanted to know some to make him more human -- only fault Susan and Ralph could find was that he was "a bad father"
- 420 Perception of father in childhood -- "he's not your father, he's the country's father" -- they accepted that
- 438 Brother Philson was V.P. at Hughes Aircraft -- reflections on being children of great leader -- has suppressing effects -- a shadow and pressure to perform -- children "could not disgrace" father with their actions -- boys counted and girls didn't -- emphasis on boy's education -- Susan was one of first women to go away to college

- 476 Plan to go to San Diego State University -- mother didn't support or denounce Susan's decision -- Susan's friend was going to SDS and invited Susan to room with her -- Her sister loaned them \$50 each to begin school in 1935 -- another girl was going to room with them and her mother protested it because "she objected to Orientals" -- Susan found her own place and had a side room single in the dorm -- Friend Sylvia remains lifelong friend
- 524 Students at school had never encountered a Korean -- mistaken as Japanese, Chinese, Eskimo, etc. -- Sylvia helped Susan "balance ethnicity" -- Susan worked for a speech professor at SDS -- helped her become more confident and assert herself and speak publicly
- 564 Studied sociology -- mother and whole community was proud -- Susan was one of first Korean American women to go to college -- was only Asian American woman in her graduating class -- after graduation stayed to work as counselor in dorm because there were no jobs (tail end of Depression)
- 603 Navy program opened up and Susan applied -- did not tell family because they would have stopped her -- not a woman's role -- she swore in and then told them -- 1942 WAVES program (women's volunteer program) -- Susan applied for officer's training and was turned down because she was Asian -- in Navy there were no Asian Americans previously -- in Army there were -- one month later the enlisted program opened and invited her to enlist -- stationed at Cedar Falls, Iowa
- 662 Did not encounter prejudice in Navy -- Susan made press nationally because she was "Korean working against Japanese" and her father's status
- 687 Motivated to join Navy to "fight the Japanese" -- Father's dream was for Korea's Independence and to move the family back there -- as family got older it was too late -- it was difficult for those born in Korea to never return -- no regrets for herself because they had the opportunity to be American -- it is a blessing for her (continued on Side B)
- 733 End of Tape 1, Side A

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Tape 1, Side B

- 001 Never wished to be Korean in Korea -- pride in heritage but American identity is cherished -- today in Korea and even after Independence they don't have the freedoms allowed in the U.S.
- 016 Career in Navy -- "first Asian American in Navy" -- stationed in Miami as Link trainer operator -- 6 months later recommended for officer's training school -- attended Smith College and got commission -- selected as first woman to go to Pensacola Gunnery School -- First woman gunnery officer in the U.S. Navy -- Susan taught gunnery training to fighter pilots -- strategy was to begin training women as instructors to release men to go overseas -- had some feisty fighter pilots -- one three stripe commander declared, "I'm not shooting until I see the whites of those Jap's eyes" -- Susan retorted, "I don't care what you do up there, down here you do what I tell you to do" -- She had to hold her own with these types
- 065 Training enlisted women as gunnery officers
- 070 Stationed in Atlantic City as gunnery officer -- she loved it -- participated in athletics -- then transferred to Washington, D.C. in 1943 to Naval Intelligence -- Susan hated leaving her post and did not want to stay in Washington
- 092 Encountered skepticism in Naval Intelligence as "first Asian" -- made her do filing with enlisted "girls" -- thought she might be in espionage, lack of trust -- gradually gained trust -- sent to Library of Congress to do research -- Susan found Navy Annex on subfloor and set up communications center to Navy Intelligence -- after 6 months she was summoned back to the office to work as a code breaker -- made many friends
- 145 In 1956 National Security Agency was formed as Susan worked as civilian there -- 1956 got fellowship to study at USC -- husband stationed overseas
- 155 Met husband in 1944 -- he was also in the service -- he was fond of the Korean women he met in Hawaii -- they were introduced by mutual friends -- married in 1947 -- Susan's mother did not talk to her for five years because her husband was white -- Her parents wanted her to marry a Korean

- 187 Tradition of arranged marriages in Korean American community -- the Korean marriage arrangers (jung-maa) used to bring eligible bachelors to the family home to meet Susan and her sister -- the sisters used to run upstairs and hide -- their mother would have to face them and lie about her daughters -- one time their mother said, "Next time I lie for you girls, don't make any noise up there." -- the idea of arranged marriage was repulsive to her -- the bachelors were Korean born and were very different from her
- 226 Mother was receptive to the sisters making own choices in marriage but expected them to marry Koreans -- neither one did
- 243 Susan's daughter at age 2½ was the one to reconcile Susan and her mother -- She had dark hair and dark eyes and was smart -- when son was born, mother came to Washington D.C. to take care of him "Korean style" -- they bonded
- 268 In 1956 Susan returned to L.A. to live with mother on Victoria Ave. in West Adams in large Victorian house -- Susan was on fellowship at USC to take graduate degree in East Asian Studies -- after two years returned to post in Washington -- developed migraines and needed a rest
- 291 Brother Philip enlisted her help to run the Moongate Restaurant -- Navy allowed her husband to choose his stations wherever Susan went because she was a "key person" -- Susan resigned and wanted to spend more time with her children -- previously a nanny took care of them
- 315 At this time (1950s) most women did not return to work after having children -- pediatrician said, "If you could find a nice nanny the children would be better off" -- It was obvious that Susan was a career woman
- 340 Stories about bringing up her children -- infant daughter (Christine) was irritable -- nanny said that Christine was only upset when Susan was around -- pediatrician advised her to hug child immediately after returning home and it solved the problem
- 360 Susan decided she wanted to return to L.A. and family -- husband got stationed in Long Beach -- Susan resigned and worked at the Moongate Restaurant

- 368 Moongate has a big story -- opened in 1954 -- sister Sarah started it -- mother wanted to make it a family operation and brought in all the siblings -- dignitaries dined there -- family named it "Philip Ahn's Moongate Restaurant" because his name was known as an actor -- built it in Panorama City (heart of San Fernando Valley) -- sold restaurant in 1990 and now is now a Mexican nightclub
- 423 In early days Philip was host -- Ralph was bartender -- Sarah was nighttime hostess -- Susan was bookkeeper and organized banquets -- mother was "queen bee" and was paid as a director -- mother then had financial independence after her many years of hardship
- 452 Mother had birthday party at restaurant the night before her death -- she took ill later that night -- went to the hospital the next day and mother died at age 86
- 512 Mother's personality -- in 1926 her father was leaving and her mother was three months pregnant but didn't tell him -- she didn't want to burden him -- father left and son Ralph was born but he never met his father -- Ralph accepted this -- brother Philip was 20 years older and served as a father figure
- 542 When her father left in 1926 he told Philip, "In the eyes of God I am a sinner, but I'm leaving you the responsibility of the family" -- Father left for China to work in Independence movement -- Father imprisoned in 1932 because a Korean had thrown a bomb at a Japanese official -- father was warned that there was a search for the criminal -- Dosan Ahn Chang Ho had promised a child a birthday present and went to the home where he was picked up by the Japanese officials in Shanghai -- took him to Korea and charged him with the Peace Preservation Act and imprisoned him for 8 years -- 1936 released on probation -- but father continued working for Korea's Independence -- later in 1936 he was imprisoned again -- 2 years later he got sick and died -- as he was dying in the hospital in Korea he asked to be pushed over near the window so he could look out over the land he loved -- died in 1938
- 623 In 1936 when Dosan was on probation he built a home in North Korea -- in the mountains -- was a model home -- it incorporated his philosophies -- stones in garden were set up right to parallel his principles -- he built it himself with the help of one carpenter -- Susan's cousins lived there with him

661 Susan dreams to visit there one day

667 End of interview

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PART II OF INTERVIEW -- 8/12/93

Tape 2, Side A (CORRESPONDS TO DAT TAPE 2)

- 005 Beginning of the Korean American community in L.A. in 1915 when Susan was born -- example of 1918 picture of annual meeting of Young Korean Academy (Heung Sa Dan) organized by Ahn Chang Ho in 1913 to prepare young people for leadership in Korea -- purpose was to work for Korea's independence -- college students were members -- women were not accepted as members until later
- 032 Father was "feminist" and later brought in many women as members in Shanghai -- provisional government in Shanghai -- he sent women from there to the U.S. to get education to become future leaders and teachers
- 043 Separate organizations for women formed after Independence Movement -- Women's Patriotic Society -- active as counterparts to other organizations -- during wartime they collected food, wrapped bandages -- picketed shipments from U.S. to Japan, collected money, etc. -- mother was member and all the Korean women Susan knew
- 067 Patriotic Women's organization was mostly first generation -- were differences in second generation who organized their own groups -- ie. Young Korean National Organization -- after the war there was the A.K.C.O. (American Korean Community Organization) which was active in keeping the spirit of the Korean community together
- 094 Focus of the Korean community was Korean Independence - - everything was related to that
- 103 Second generation has great appreciation of being American also -- many joined the armed services during WWII -- present day community doesn't have the same cohesiveness -- in early days there were small numbers and a focus

- 120 They were dedicated to becoming part of American mainstream -- Mrs. Bartlett was executive director of the International Institute on Boyle Ave. -- many immigrants were included in their program -- young Korean Americans went there as Girl Reserves with the YWCA -- learned sports and competed with other teams -- great community affair -- festivals with ethnic foods, etc.
- 156 Susan was one of the first women to go away to college -- her brothers and sisters spanned 20 years and so they were connected with all the second generation Korean Americans in L.A. -- there were always friends at the house who would come for advice from Susan and her siblings -- brother helped youngsters by tutoring physics -- they also used to come to consult Susan's mother, advise on how to make dumplings, etc. -- she was a great American cook
- 212 They wanted to be part of the American community -- no contact with Korea due to Japanese occupation -- no heirlooms from Korea -- the Korean flag was most important symbol because Japanese would not allow it -- here it was a great freedom to fly it -- one home had an embroidered picture of the Korean peninsula -- Korean items were very precious to them
- 248 Korean folktales were told on special occasions -- it was all in oral tradition (unwritten) -- importance of incorporating heritage into identity as American -- Susan instilled the spirit of Korean culture into her children (who are half Caucasian/Korean) -- her grandson is proud to say he's one quarter Korean -- Susan gives them appreciation of Korean food -- rice and Kim Chi
- 300 Family ate traditional food until Jr. High School -- Susan learned American cookery in Home Economics classes and taught it to her mother too -- had best of both worlds -- traditional food is important to upbringing -- example of her mother's influence on her son through food
- 335 Size of Korean American community in 1918 about 50 people -- in 1936 about 40 families

- 348 Church life in L.A. -- Korean Methodist Church was first -- in 1937 it divided to form a second church, the Korean Presbyterian Church on Jefferson Blvd. -- Church was focus of social life -- basketball -- in 1937 the Korean National Association moved to L.A. from San Francisco and they built a building next to the Presbyterian church (now a historic landmark) -- Susan attended the old Methodist church
- 392 Methodist church had many locations -- on Robertson Blvd. -- now on La Tijera -- Presbyterian church started at 2 Olive Court -- also community center -- Koreans from Delano and Dinuba would come there
- 411 Main organizations were the KNA, the Dong Ji Hoe (Syngman Rhee's support group), the Kuk Min Hoe (recognized by the U.S. as the Korean representation) - - not political differences because they both worked for the Independence Movement -- difference was the other group worked for Dr. Sigmund Rhee who was an opponent to the other leaders
- 455 2-8 Club -- young second generation kids -- learned to assimilate to American ways -- picnics, dances, social life -- provided an avenue for socializing because they weren't allowed in white restaurants, buy homes in certain areas, on Santa Monica Beach -- the 2-8 club meant 16 (which was 2 times 8) -- group was for ages 16 and up -- 10 members -- Susan's brother organized the group
- 503 Getting into college was difficult for them -- Susan advised her friend to go to Woodbury College
- 538 Community events -- 1932 Olympics -- 5 Koreans came to compete but they had to participate under the Japanese flag -- Korean community accepted them and whole community had a banquet for them -- 200 people there (that was everybody)
- 577 Picnics were big events in the community -- choose activities that would not be a "problem" or highly visible -- now everyone's into playing golf (but they don't have to worry about getting their country back)
- 602 Work -- many Koreans were shopkeepers -- laundry -- domestics -- early immigrants worked at Ambassador Hotel as janitorial workers -- these men gave them leftover flower arrangements, etc. -- was a big treat for Susan as child -- brought the outside world to them

- 640 Brother was an elevator operator at the Bryson Apartments -- wealthy women tenants gave him their old shoes for Susan and her sister
- 652 Figueroa and First Sts. was the first area where Koreans lived -- her home was there as were other families -- near 2 Olive Ct. location of church and Bunker Hill
- 682 In 1926 a new wave of Koreans came from Willows -- rice fields and crop failures brought them to L.A. -- they settled near Western, Vermont and 36th, 37th, and Jefferson Sts. -- location of KNA and Methodist Church
- 703 Ahn family moved to 37th and McClintock (now on USC campus as heritage home) -- most of the second generation Korean Americans came through that house -- was a vocal point in the community (continued on next side)
- 730 End of tape 2, Side A

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Tape 2, Side B

- 003 Koreans in other cities were connected with L.A. community -- Chicago and New York families were known -- Korean National Association had chapters in many cities -- father organized KNA in 1906 -- the group took care of Korean immigrants in the U.S. -- Koreans all over the U.S. were connected because they were so few in number and had the same mission of Korean independence
- 026 Relations with other Asian Americans -- friendly with Chinese -- not with Japanese Americans -- "silent protection" from Japanese regime -- they boycotted Japanese products
- 040 Susan's Caucasian friend helped her go to San Diego State University -- later she gave Susan a loan to send her daughter to Harvard -- other longtime friends
- 067 Relations with Filipinos -- they were few -- worked as "houseboys" and were in Navy -- Filipinos didn't have a community -- Chinese and Japanese had communities

- 080 Ties to Korea -- little contact during Japanese occupation -- father corresponded with family when he was imprisoned -- wrote to her mother -- letters express his hope to reunite as a family and thanks for taking care of the family -- one letter tells Susan not to let Ralph (youngest brother) ruin the plants -- Susan never knew her grandparents -- has cousins in North Korea -- differences in ideology -- story about father's arrest in Manchuria in 1928 by Chinese -- Kim Il Sung group of students who claimed to have saved her father's life
- 123 Susan visited Korea in 1973 for opening of father's memorial park -- 25 ft. bronze statue of him -- only green park in Seoul now -- mother buried there too
- 136 Her experience in Korea was limited because she was identified as a celebrity -- as Dosan's daughter and Philip Ahn's sister
- 150 Second visit to Korea to give father's records to the Independence Hall -- her mother had saved all his papers from 1902 - 1938 -- she carried them to Dinuba to pick grapes -- to Riverside to pick oranges -- total of 3,125 pieces of paper
- 161 Mother had a vision -- she foresaw her father's greatness
- 167 present day Koreatown -- 1960 -- Susan feels Koreatown should be bilingual in English
- 187 Relationship between "first wave" Koreans and new immigrants since 1960 -- not cohesive -- two separate communities -- new Koreans were intolerant of American born Koreans due to language barrier
- 219 Present plans to develop Korean American National Museum -- planners represent pioneer Korean children and new Koreans -- nice blend of two groups -- young Korean nationals know little of history
- 242 Most important life events for Susan -- joining Navy -- talents recognized and accepted -- did not encounter prejudice
- 265 Greatest successes -- working for U.S. Govt. -- position in National Security Agency -- trusted -- first Asian accepted in Naval Intelligence -- greatest joy are two children -- daughter entertainment lawyer - son's work on documentary film on his grandfather

- 295 Feels immigrants need to learn to "blend" -- to become  
part of the surroundings -- need communication with  
other groups
- 310 Disappointments -- "Pollyanna, I don't have any  
disappointments" -- accepting of events
- 321 Mother was great role model -- mother never felt  
remorse about husband's absence -- Miss Esther Bartlett  
of the International Institute was another role model
- 336 Speech professor at San Diego State was another  
important role model -- worked as his assistant -- he  
led Susan into participation in social groups --  
advised her to take oral interpretation and speech to  
learn public speaking -- he gave her confidence and the  
tools to be successful
- 393 Perception of Korean American community of Susan --  
clouded as daughter of Ahn Chang Ho -- treated with  
great respect
- 420 Experience of 1992 Riots -- not involved too much --  
many younger spokespeople involved -- she didn't feel  
the need to speak out -- sees it as an African American  
problem -- not a Black/Korean conflict -- Koreans were  
victims
- 476 Greatest changes in L.A. during her lifetime -- influx  
of immigrants -- solution is to assimilate and "know  
your neighbor"
- 498 Present plans -- organize Philip Ahn's papers and  
memorabilia to give to archives
- 524 Hopes to remain healthy and be available to help others
- 554 Grateful to be American citizen and privileges of that  
-- new immigrants should take pride in what makes them  
different, but participate in mainstream -- anecdote  
about people not knowing what a Korean was when she was  
young -- voting privileges -- her mother pushed all her  
children to vote -- mother was remarkable person --  
seen as Ahn Chang Ho's wife -- mother not officially  
recognized
- 632 End of interview
- 632 to 732 is blank

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PART I  
TAPE 1, SIDE A (CORRESPONDS TO DAT TAPE 1)

029

AK: And who were your parents and where were they from?

SA: My mother and father are from Pyong Yang in North Korea. In fact they don't even call it Pyong Yang anymore, they call it Pyong Yong. They were born and raised there and they came to the United States in 1902. And my mother, the great warrior, decided that she was going to marry this man who had no future. And her father did say to her, you know, he's a very nice man but he's never going to make any money. But she had her eyes on him and so she decided to come to the United States with him. And she would have come without getting married. I mean she would have just come with him, but the missionaries there, Dr. Underwood, said you cannot go as a single woman, you have to get married. So they were married before they boarded the ship in 1902. And they came and they came to San Francisco and that's how they

started their lives here.

And it's ironic. He came, she came to study because my father had felt that the Western democracy was the way that Korea should go. But when he got here to the United States, he found that in San Francisco, he found that there were a few Koreans there -- merchants. They were the ginseng merchants. And they were still wearing their top hats and their little cues that they put on top of the head. You know, they hadn't cut their hair, they were not Americanized at all. And so when he saw this he thought, you know, this is not the way, you know, that these people should be. So he went on an educational tour of the community and got them to cut their hair and look Americanized. And if there were any homes, you know family homes, the story goes that he went into the homes themselves to help them to clean it up, and put up clean curtains and to put flowers in the garden. But he felt that if we were going to live here for any length of time that we should be as Americanized as possible and you know, go along with American customs. So that's how he got sidetracked.

062 Then of course, 1905 the Japanese went into Russia and there was the Japanese-Russian War in 1905. And of course that's when Japan took a protectorate over Korea. And Dad knew that, you know, we were in trouble, so in 1906 he went back to Korea and tried to teach them, you know, that they can't accept this kind of deal. And so he didn't come back. I mean he stayed in Korea -- Manchuria. And he didn't come back until 1911. And when he came back in 1911, he came through Vladivostok, Russia, all through Europe and still preaching the story of how to save your country. Because in 1910 the Japanese had come over and taken over the country. And so Dad escaped. I mean he couldn't stay there so he came to United States and he taught people how to live a life of, what shall I say, sacrifice for the country.

So he inspired the Koreans who had come here because in 1903, I think there was a big labor wave that went to Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations and so there were quite a few Koreans who had come in. And subsequently those Koreans came to the shores of United States. And a community developed. But wherever the Koreans had a community, Dad was there giving them the lesson of preserving and helping your country. Therefore, the early pioneer immigration group that came after 1903 is very important to the independence of Korea, because without them there would have been no way that they could have helped themselves. These people who are pineapple pickers in Hawaii and rice field workers here in Los Angeles -- picking oranges, but if they earned a dollar, 50 cents of it went to the Independence Movement. And without that kind of funding, as meager as it may seem, but that was what kept the Independence Movement alive and going. And so the present day Koreans have a great obligation to remember how they saved their country. Of course my father was

the great organizer. He organized the Korean National Association which still has it's building today on Jefferson, and which has been declared a historical landmark. And they have dedicated that area as the Dosan Ahn Chang Ho Square. I think that's in remembrance of a dedicated hero who worked for the love of Korea.

106 And in the meantime, my mother who was always left alone with a bunch of children --

AK: Well, that's what I was going to ask you, you said he left in 1903? or 1904?

SA: He came in 1902 and then left in 1906. Philip was born in 1905. Then he didn't come back until 1911.

AK: So your mother was in San Francisco, alone?

SA: Well, we're not really sure whether she -- It was back and forth, San Francisco and Riverside. But there was a huge, not a huge, but a cluster of people living in Riverside -- Koreans. They went there to pick oranges. And very interesting, they -- (pause while looking for photo) This is a picture of a Korean school in Riverside.

AK: So the Koreans who came there, they organized and had different kinds of institutions like schools, and --

SA: Schools and of course, Independence Movement meetings. 121

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

208

AK: Going back just a little bit, we were in Riverside, then when did your family come to Los Angeles?

SA: (laughing) I'm not really sure. In establishing our residence, I don't know what happened between Riverside and, you know, where they went or how they went, but it looks like we established a home in 1914 on 1411 West Fourth Street. It's what it looks like to me. And then I was born there. And I was born in 1915. And then since there are no records or letters or anything that I can tie it down to, we moved to 106 North Figueroa Street and my sister was born there. And she was born in 1917. And so I think that's the way our residence went. We were -- The Korean communities were all outside of Los Angeles until about 1926. They were in Riverside, they were in Claremont, they were in Willows, they were up north, Sacramento. And then when they had crop failures in, I think it was 1926, yeah, all the families started to move into Los Angeles. And

that's when Los Angeles became a Korean community. (AK: I see, so there were very few families then, at that time.) Yeah, well, when we were growing up we were the only family, one family. (AK: Really?) Yeah, one family.

AK: What was that experience like?

SA: I mean, I had a very pleasant childhood. I mean for one thing we were -- My mother was very open to the Americans, you know, there was no such thing as you can't play with them, or you have to be careful of them or anything like that. They were welcomed into the home and Philip brought them home and we brought all our friends home, you know. And it was fine so it was -- That was one burden that we didn't have to carry. And we didn't speak English until we went to kindergarten. We learned, because we only spoke Korean, and even that was not very traumatic. I mean, I just sailed through.

AK: And what was that area on Figueroa like? What do you remember about that location?

244

SA: It was wonderful when we were growing up, you know, because the house was on a hill and we had mud driveways but that didn't matter. We used to slide down the banks, you know, but the area was, well, there were all kinds of little flats around the street and there was a little store. Ironically, USC had a print in the Los Angeles Times, maybe three or four years ago of that corner where we used to live so I cut it out. It was very convenient. There was -- In those days there was no problem of prejudice, you know, of Orientals, et cetera. So it was kind of pleasant living there. Now, it's what, the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion?

AK: So you were right on the edge of downtown?

SA: It really wasn't quite downtown. It didn't become downtown until about six blocks later, huh?

AK: So did you do all your shopping downtown?

SA: What kind of shopping?

AK: For groceries or whatever you were going to buy? Did you have much occasion to go downtown?

SA: (laughing) Well we didn't have much money so we didn't go very far. We lived near Temple Street which was at that time -- was a Jewish community. And as I remember that street it was like an old town. I mean, they'd have barrels of salted fish out in the front. But that was our help. I mean we got along very well with the Jewish community. I mean they were helpful to us. And I remember my father when he was home, you know we were very

poor in the early days when we were not able to go out and work. They would be hard put to bring any food in. However, my father used to have these guests come in all the time, you know, for consultation, et cetera. And he'd have them stay for dinner. And my poor mother -- So I remember running down to Temple Street to pick up a couple of salted herrings. And she would broil it and she would always have rice and then she'd have kim chi. And so that's what she served his guests.

287 Eventually, though we had a friend, let me see, (pause) I'm trying to figure out what year it was, but I had a -- It was a grocery store man who had a store at Flower and First and his daughter came to the same school that I was in. And then I was appointed to tutor her, you know, and to show her around. And it was a Jewish family but he owned this store at First and Flower. And if it wasn't for that man we would have gone hungry sometimes. Because he would let us charge our food. And he even let Philip borrow car fare from him. And bless his heart, when we got money and we paid him for what we owed him, he would always give us cake or something of that sort. Just a wonderful man. 306

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

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AK: So was your father away all during this time?

SA: Uhuh, uhuh.

AK: And was that very difficult for your family?

SA: No, as my brother says in that article, he says he thought it was the way of life (laughing), you know. (AK: The youngest brother [Ralph]?) Yeah. He accepted it as the way of life and I think that's the way we also did. And since my mother was very strong it really created no real hardship in growing up. And she never complained, you know. I believe that if she suffered emotionally then it would have been a hardship on us. But she herself was such a great patriot. I mean, she knew when she married my father what she was doing. I mean that this is a man of destination and she did nothing but nurture him and help him, and did nothing to stand in his way or be a burden on him. Some letters that he writes from prison -- He didn't even have time to write to her, you know, because he was so busy. But when he got -- When he was imprisoned he was allowed to write one letter every two months. And he took the opportunity to write to my mother. And they are the saddest love letters you've ever read. You know, "I will make up to you for all you've done for me. And when we get together and live as a family we'll do this and that and the other." It was always a letter of hope and a letter of sorrow because he couldn't be a husband and a father. But, there's one there that just makes you weep. Since he was a writer, you know, he also wrote very well. He was -- an unusual

man. I mean, it just, the good Lord provided him to the country because they need him so desperately. 377

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

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AK: At the time did you realize his importance? [Dosan Ahn Chang Ho]

SA: From the time that I can remember it was always, you know, "He's not your father, he's the country's father." And that was what we were raised with.

AK: And you could accept that?

SA: Yeah, we all did. I mean, it's a strange phenomenon, you know. We all accepted that fact. And we all accepted this terrible thing they held over our heads, "You can't do this because you'll disgrace your father." You know, "You can't do that because you'll disgrace your father," et cetera.

AK: Do you think that was a motivating force because all of you are so successful in your lives and your careers. Do you think that propelled you forward?

SA: You know, I don't really know how to describe that. When I look at my family I think that we're average people that have not made a huge success, I mean Philip was the only one that made startling success as far as I'm concerned. My second brother, Philson, brilliant mind, was very successful at Hughes Aircraft -- became a Vice President in the days when it was not acceptable. He was the president of the, what do they call that club, they have a club -- manager's club. But he had some leadership. You know, I think that actually being the children of a great leader like my father -- It suppresses you more than it enhances you because you always have that shadow of, "You can't do this because you will disgrace your father," "You can't do that," but since we are all of the same blood we have that same courage, you know so. When I --

AK: For you personally, what were some instances of where you couldn't do something because of who your father was -- of something you wanted to do but couldn't do?

SA: For me personally? I don't think that there was anything for me personally. It was only Philip and Philson. Boys counted, the girls didn't. Yeah, we were brought up in a very traditional type home. The boys were the ones to be educated and the girls, you know, forget you. However, being of the same metal, we, Sarah and I both went to college. I was one of the first women to leave the area to go away to college. And my poor

mother -- She really was great though. I made my own plans and I have another story to tell you about how I did this but -- I made my own plans and I went down and said that I was going to go to San Diego State. And she didn't object at all. You know, and she never did anything to bar me or suppress me on that. She just didn't say anything so that she didn't have to say, "Well, I sent her," you know. 483

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

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SA: And then when the Navy program opened up I applied and I didn't tell my family because I knew they would stop me, you know, my big brother and my mother. (AK: Why?) Well, you know, no woman leaves home and goes and joins the Navy. I mean, that just isn't part of their -- (AK: And you had already picked up and gone to college, now you're going into the Navy --) -- Yeah, now I'm doing something else. But I swore in before I told them because I knew that they would stop me and so --

AK: So what year was this and what was the program?

SA: 1942. And what they did was, they opened up a -- They called it the W.A.V.E.s program. It was a volunteer organization for the women and it was part of the Navy. And it was the officer's group that first opened up. So I went down and I applied for the officer's training, and do you know that they turned me down. And so I had a friend at USC who was in the Dean of Women's office and she said, "Oh, I'm going to find out for you what went on," because the reason they turned me down was that I had not enough experience. And I had been working and I had friends who were joining who had no work experience, just a degree. And so she said, "There's something wrong." So she went down and found out that because I was, you know, Oriental, that they couldn't accept me. And in the Navy, especially, you know, there were no Orientals accepted. No Orientals in practice at all. (AK: What about in other arms of the -- like in the Army?) In the Army, yeah. But in the Navy, it was so elite, but anyhow, so they turned me down. Which is O.K.

So a month later the enlisted program opened up and they wrote to me and said that I could enlist. Of course there's a big difference between being a commissioned officer and enlisted personnel, I mean, you loose rank you know. But anyway, I went down and I said to them, I said, you know you turned me down for officer's training, you know what would this mean if I enlist? And they said, "Oh, you can work yourself up to be a Chief Petty Officer." I said, "Great." So I signed my papers and they sent me to Cedar Falls, Iowa and I also had a wonderful career. I mean, I had no -- I hear about stories of racism and prejudice and all this and I don't understand it, you know, because I never

experienced [it]. I just, I don't know. I mean, I was well liked every place I went. It didn't matter -- the communities, the churches came to me and asked me if I would speak to them. And I made press every place I went because I was Korean working against the Japanese and my father was a patriot. So with that kind of a aura I went into -- Atlantic City was my -- no, no. Yes, Atlantic City was my first real station where I had to -- went to link training school.

AK: Let me back up for a second. What were your sort of ambitions or your interest or your motivations to join the military?

SA: Oh. Just to fight the Japanese, that's all. But that's sort of in you, you know. Because of your father and your country. You know, you have no country. I mean its -- growing up without a country, you're a Korean and you see all these people who have struggled to have your country back and you're not getting it. But that was my motivation -- was to fight the Japanese.

AK: Was your plan -- the family's plan to return to Korea when independence came? It was always sort of when independence came?

SA: Yeah. Well that was one of things that my father really thought would happen, that we would get our independence and all our family would come to Korea. And we would all live as a family unit. But as time when on it just got too late and then all of us got older. I mean the plan just wouldn't work out. But the same thing happened to so many of Koreans here. They were waiting for an opportunity to go back and that time never came. And I feel sorrier for the people who were born in Korea and wanted to go back than -- And I don't feel sorry for ourselves at all. Because I think that it's great that we're Americans. I think the good Lord really really gave us a blessing. Never one moment that I ever wished that I was Korean in Korea. I pride myself in my heritage (continued on next side)

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TAPE 1, SIDE B

(narrative continues)

001

Never one moment that I ever wished that I was Korean in Korea. I pride myself in my heritage but being American is the thing that I really cherish. I'm very grateful, very grateful to this land for the way I've lived and the way I can think and the way I can speak. I mean, freedom ... People who don't understand the lack of freedom can not really appreciate this country. 009

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

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AK: Can you tell me about your career in the Navy, in some of these articles here it was saying you were the first Asian American woman in the Navy? Is that--

SA: Yes, I was the very first Asian American woman in the Navy, and actually probably the first Asian because they did not accept, you know, Asians before. Then I -- Oh, six months after I was enlisted and I was working in Atlantic, not Atlantic, Miami Florida. I was stationed as a link trainer operator. Six months later they recommended me to officers training school. And it was done by a reserve officer out of California. I mean it's very ironic, you know. I went to Smith College at that point and got my commission and because I had some link training experience they selected me as the first (pause) person -- female to go to Pensacola Gunnery School. And so I became the first woman gunnery officer in the United States Navy. But --

AK: So what did you have to do as a gunnery officer?

SA: Well, I only taught. I mean, it was -- I taught theory, you know. They had a simulated thing, you know, how you should shoot the zeros in the air and everything. And I just taught, you know, from that machine, however, I had all kinds of sub-lieutenants, you know, we had chief petty officers who were experts in marksmanship. So my gunnery school was very well taken care of.

AK: So when you were selected to go the gunnery school was it with the idea that you would teach or that you would actually be in an airplane?

SA: In those days there was no such program as to go actually and be a fighter pilot. So, what they wanted to do was to have people trained in the gunnery field -- the women -- in the gunnery field, so that they could release the men to go out and to go overseas.

AK: So it was that kind of economic?

SA: Yeah. That way if they needed the manpower, the women would stay on the bases and the men would go out. And that was the philosophy in those times.

AK: So, how large were your classes?

SA: Oh, I had some, I don't even remember, thirty? Thirty-five. Oh, I had one commander (laughing), he was a three striper. I was a one striper and he was about six feet five inches tall -- He was a fighter pilot. Now the fighter pilots have a different personality from bombadeers and transport pilots, et cetera (laughing) -- They're feisty. Well, anyway, and they had to come back for a refresher course. You have to go through my class. This guy looks at me and he says, "I'm not shooting 'till I see the whites of those Japs eyes." I said, "I don't care what you do up there. Down here you do what I tell you to do." (laughing) But you know, you have to hold your own. First of all you are a woman, you know.

AK: Yeah, I was wondering how they responded to you?

SA: There again I had no problem. Maybe it was the way I behaved. I don't know, but there was no real -- in fact there used to be a bunch of fighter pilots coming around all the time, you know. And we lived in the same barracks, same officers quarters I should say. And we all shared the same social halls, but never had any problem. 065

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

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AK: We forgot about your husband. When did you meet him?

SA: Let me see, when did I meet him? Probably in '44 maybe, because he had come back from Hawaii from a station. And -- (AK: So he was in the service then?) He was in the service in the same kind of an outfit. We were all security checks, you know, which made it easy. Otherwise it would be difficult for you to even talk to them, you know. In those days we were much more security conscious than there is today. And so, but he came back and he had known some WAVES out in Hawaii and when they got stationed back with Washington D.C. they'd say, "Oh, there's a Korean girl down there," that they wanted him to meet. So they introduced -- (AK: Why was that?) Well, because he was so fond of Koreans out in Hawaii and all these girls knew it, you know. So they were being very friendly to him. And so one of my friends introduced me to him and I thought, oooh, you know I was not too impressed, but eventually he kind of grew on you, you know. That's how come we finally got married in 1947.

But my mother, oh, for five years she didn't talk to me. Which wasn't as bad as it sounds because my sister and my brothers kept in contact with me all the time, so it was only her. And then I was in Washington and she was here in Los Angeles, so it wasn't like, you know, isolation things, but it was that she was very unhappy.

AK: Why?

SA: Because I had married this white man. Oh, my goodness she was ---

AK: -- What did she say? What did she expect of you and -- ?

SA: Well, I don't really know what she expected. Maybe to be -- stay single because I was 32 at the time that I got married. And she, you know, she and Dad were both hoping that I'd find a nice Korean man and be homogeneous I guess. But, you know, I --

AK: Did people have kind of arranged marriages?

SA: The Koreans?

AK: Uhuh.

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SA: Oh, I have to tell you about that! (laughing) We used to get -- They call them Jung-maa, they were marriage arrangers. We used to get them all the time at our house, you know, and some times they'd bring the fellows even, for my sister and myself, both of us.

AK: You mean other families were trying to --?

SA: No, there's a person who's interested in your welfare so he thinks that this man is a good match for you. And so he's going to bring him to meet you at the house, O.K. (AK: One of these marriage arrangers?) One of these marriage arrangers. And these marriage arrangers can be a professional or they can be a friend of a friend. Just somebody who's interested in your welfare. Well anyway, (laughing) my sister and I -- Oh, God we used to have a fit. But they'd bring these marriage arrangers plus their client, and my sister and I used to run upstairs -- We had a two story house -- We'd run upstairs and hide. And my mother used to have the problem of facing these people (laughing). But so one time she said to us, she says, "The next time I lie for you girls, don't make any noise up there." (laughing). Oh, gol, I tell you we had some times.

AK: So starting at what age were they bringing the eligible bachelors?

SA: Oh, I'm not really sure. I think at that time I must have been (AK: In your teens?) eighteen or something like that. Sarah was sixteen.

AK: And so that idea was really just abhorrent to both of you?

SA: Oh, repulsive. (laughing) Abhorrent isn't [strong enough].

AK: Was that because you had ambitions of pursuing a career, or?

SA: Oh, no. It was just a repulsive idea (laughing) to have someone come to say, "Marry this guy." And it never worked out because they were always somebody from a Korean background, you know. But, it's really strange because if you're born and raised in this country, you live with a sense of freedom and you know -- And do whatever you need to do, you know. There's really no curtailing your activity.

AK: Were there other Korean Americans who --

SA: -- Who were victims? (both laughing)

AK: Yeah. (pause) Or did that pretty much die out?

SA: No that -- Well they kept trying but I don't think it really took effect in the second generation. I think they all kind of married their own choices. I mean it was just something that we didn't --

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AK: Do you think your mother was -- you know, she didn't make you and your sister meet these men. (SA: No) Was that sort of just because she had made her own choice [in marriage]?

SA: Well, that might be it. But I think that she kind of respected our feelings. She was a very wise -- wise woman.

AK: But it was still expected you would marry a Korean or Korean American?

SA: Right, right exactly. Exactly. (pause) Which neither one of us did (laughing). Yeah, Sarah married a Scotchman.

AK: So you kind of paved the way for her? Maybe it wasn't so bad or did she ---

SA: Well, by the time that she got married, which was years later, it wasn't so much that I paved the way for her, but she was older and very mature and well into her -- At that time we were running the restaurant and -- No, I think then my mother was kind of adjusted to the idea. She -- I don't know how to explain this but, my daughter was the one who really kind of brought us all together. 243 Ironically my husband was overseas and I was alone with my two, no only one child at that time. And my brother was getting married and so they were going to have a reception and my mother said to Philip, "I wish Suzy was here." And my brother didn't say one more word. He came on the phone and he says, "Get out here as fast as you can." So I took my -- I brought my daughter and came out and she was two and a half years old. Fortunately, she was bright. Fortunately, she took

to my mother. And so that was the blending of the first union. And she made a big -- the daughter made a big hit with Grandma. And so, very lucky, she had dark hair and dark eyes, you know, because you know, if she had blond hair and blue eyes like my grandchildren, it would have been a little bit harder for my mother to accept. And so then, that was great because at that -- We all had a reunion, et cetera, but when my son was born she came to Washington D.C. to take care of him Korean-style, you know. All the mothers come and take care of newborns. And she came and took care of him. And then she became very fond of him because he was a boy. Always they're brought up with that, I guess that's the way it is. And so he's been lucky to have her as his kind of spiritual guide and guardian. And then in 1956, I got that fellowship and came out and I lived with them. 268

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

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SA: Just to show you what kind of a woman my mother is -- My father was leaving in 1926. And she was pregnant three months. And she didn't tell him. She didn't tell him, you know, because she didn't want to burden him. And so, he went off and then Ralph was born in September. And always we thought that some day he would see his father, you know, I mean there wasn't a question in our minds that he wouldn't see his father. But it's so strange, that time never came. And he (pause) -- but that article says about him, you know, that he kind of accepted this is the way of life. So he was never perturbed, you know. And mother being the strong woman she was evidently, was both mother and father to him and it didn't matter. And then of course, Philip and Philson were so much older than he also that he had a male image around also. (AK: Oh, what's the age difference?) Let's see, he's ten years younger than me, so he would be twenty years younger than Philip. (AK: Really? Did Philip -- wait, is the oldest?) Philip is the oldest.

AK: Did he sort of take a father role in your family?

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SA: Well, that's another story too. When my father left in 1926, he said to Philip, he said, "In the eyes of God I am a sinner, but I'm leaving you the responsibility of the family." (AK: In 1926?) In 1926.

AK: Where was he off to in 1926?

SA: China. He was going back to China. He had come in 1925 and he could only stay a year. So he went back to China in 1926.

AK: And what happened then when he went to China?

SA: Oh, he was still in the Independence Movement. I'll give you an article on him (searching for paper). Take it with you.

AK: So, when was he imprisoned and when did he die or how?

SA: Well, he became very ill. He was, let's see, I think this tells you. It says -- (AK: Well, just as you remember it, you know.) He was imprisoned in 1932, taken as a prisoner in 1932 because some Korean had thrown a bomb to some Japanese official and he was warned that, you know, that people were looking for the person who threw the bomb. But somehow or other, um, he had promised a young child that he would bring a birthday present to him. And Father, being the kind of person whose always kept his promises. So he, in spite of the fact that the area was being searched, you know, he took the present and went to this home. And that's where he was picked up by the Japanese officials. (AK: In Shanghai?) In Shanghai, and then from then of course it was a no deal with the Japanese once they got him they were going to -- So they took him to Korea and charged him with the Peace Preservation Act and imprisoned him for a term of eight years I think.

AK: Is that the period where he's writing to your mother every two months?

SA: Yeah. In 1936 he was released on probation and at that time the Japanese said to them, you know, "Will you stop working against the Japanese government?" And my father said, "As long as I -- Whenever I eat or whenever I sleep as long as I have a breath left in my body, I will always work for the independence of Korea." And so, he was -- Then after four years he was released but they imprisoned him again in 1936 and two years later he got sick. And Ralph heard the story, I think it was in one of the articles that I wrote, about that he was very sick but when he went to the hospital he asked them when he was dying -- He asked them to push him to the window so he could look out over the land he loved.

AK: And this is in Korea?

SA: This is in Korea, in Seoul.

AK: So then he got out of prison and then he was sick at that time?

SA: No, he got out, he was released on probation in 1936. (AK: Right, and then what year did he die?) '38. Then he was imprisoned again after 1936, not too long. (pause) Oh, before they went into South China. Before the Japanese went into South China. (AK: Uhuh.) And he built a home while he was on probation.

AK: Just tell me about that?

SA: Well it was a home that he built in the mountains. It was called Songt-ae Sanjan (Pine Moss Mountain Villa). I'll show it to you after we take this off. And it was supposed to be a model home -- a kitchen that was made up especially for the convenience and expedience for the housewife. It had a sign someplace they tell me that had the American word "Smile," because he like the word smile very much. And he -- I'll show you the stones that he set up as a walk and everything is upright, but that was his principal. Everything is upright.

AK: Oh, you mean he set the stones so they were facing up, they were vertical? Like making a fence.

SA: Yeah. Making a garden or a walkway. But when I show you the pictures it will --

AK: So he designed it?

SA: Yes. And he built it himself with the help of one carpenter. (AK: Really. And this was in Korea?) This was in North Korea. That's where his home was.

AK: Did he want your family to come there, (SA: I think so.) Or was he just going to stay there, was that going to be his base?

SA: That was going to be his base because my cousins did live with him there as a home. So (pause). It really was a beautiful spot. I ask about it and no one's able to tell me whether it's still standing or not. (AK: Oh.) You know how the communists are.

AK: Wouldn't it be amazing to be able to visit that?

SA: Ohhh. It's one of my dreams. I mean to be able to visit and see what he's done there. 666

END OF INTERVIEW

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PART II OF INTERVIEW (8/12/93)  
TAPE 2, SIDE A

004

AK: Today we were going to talk about the Korean American community in the early days. When would you say there was the beginning of a community here in Los Angeles?

SA: Well, as far as I can remember it certainly was here when I was born which was 1915. As an example if you look at this. (showing a photo) This is a picture in 1918, but already we had group activities. But the purpose for being was to work for the independence of Korea.

AK: I see, and what was this occasion for example, this group activity?

SA: This was an annual meeting of what they call the Young Korean Academy better known as the Heung Sa Dan, which is now, which my father organized in 1913 in order to prepare young people to take over leadership in Korea whenever they got their independence. And they had to be morally and academically clean in order to be a member. And they had a meeting every year. But the whole purpose for existence was to somehow work for the independence of Korea.

AK: I see and so what ages were the members? It's the Young Korean Academy.

SA: Yeah, they were young. They were mostly college students. Here, let's see, my father in 1918 would be (pause). I don't know how old he was, maybe, I can't even guess or figure it out.

AK: Were you a member?

SA: No. No way. In those days the women weren't accepted as members until later. When they first organized it was only men, as you might expect. But as time went on, my father being a feminist, he brought in many women. And most of the women that were joining were in Shanghai because that's where the provisional government was. And the women who had fled the Independence Movement tortures had gone to Shanghai. And they all became very dedicated independence workers. And he sent some of the young women into the Los Angeles area, or United States I should say, so that they could get an education. And they all developed into leaders for the country. And they went back and they were mostly teachers because that was a good field for women at that time.

AK: So were there separate organizations for women?

SA: The separate organizations for women didn't develop until after the Independence Movement and then they developed what they call the Women's Patriotic Society. And they were very active as a counterpart to any of the other organizations, even though they belonged to the -- maybe the Korean National Association, they still had their own organization so that they could independently work as women.

AK: What kind of activities would they do?

SA: Well, during the wartime they (laughs) well, I'll get into that later -- It was funny. But they collected food and they wrapped bandages, you know, whatever that was necessary, you know, like any other patriotic organization. Then they also picketed the Japanese shipment to -- or shipment from U.S. to Japanese countries, you know. And they did things like that which -- and they collected money, they kept their patriotic mission alive. But they did a lot of community work.

AK: Did you know people who were in this organization?

SA: Yes. I think we knew almost everyone.

AK: Was your mother?

SA: My mother was, yes, yes, yes. Almost everyone that I knew. There was kind of a sin if you didn't belong to it, you know.

AK: Was it sort of the older women who -- Would you have been a member?

SA: Oh, no. At this time, you know, we were too young and somehow or other as it is today the first generation and the second generation -- There was no, what would I say, compatibility? So that the Patriotic Women's Organization were doing their thing and the rest of us growing up -- I think we were all teenagers, so you know we were not going to join that kind of a group. We did -- As an offshoot though, we did organize our own groups which was called the Young Korean National Association. And we tried to do the same objects as the Korean National Association, but just try to keep it alive. And as time went on, everyone, you know, dispersed, joined the Army, joined the Navy and went off. And so that organization kind of split up. And then after the war they developed a community organization called the A.K.C.O. which is American Korean Community Organization. And that was very active in trying to keep the spirit of the Korean community together.

AK: About what year was that?

SA: 1945, 1946, something like that. I just really am hazy about -- My problem is I was not here (both laugh). But my family was a part of it and everybody that I knew participated and it was kind of a strong organization.

AK: You were thinking about a story about the Women's Patriotic League, a few minutes ago, you started to laugh as you remembered something about them?

SA: Let me see, what was I going to recall on that (pause). I can't recall what my thought was there.

AK: O.K. So how important were these organizations that you mentioned which were primarily politically focused on the Independence Movement? (SA: Right.) Was that the focus of the Korean and the Korean American community in the early days?

SA: That was the focus. The independence for Korea was the focus of living. I mean that was the big aura that we all lived under. I mean we just -- Everything you did was for the Independence Movement. You were always under the feeling that you had no country. However, those of us who are born in this country, you know, we were grateful we were Americans. I mean, we were told by our parents that we were very fortunate, you know, to be born in America and have the freedom of life that we had. So I think there was a great appreciation for American life and American ways. And when wartime came, I mean, almost everyone -- well, there were some who were drafted and some voluntarily joined. And I think quite a few made their contribution to American society. 110

And as you look at the present day community you don't have the cohesiveness. Number one there are too many, number two there's no one object that you're working for. I mean it was kind of a closed community when you think about it because everything you did was for the Independence Movement. And it gave you a goal and it was easy to bring people together. And it was easy because there were only a few -- a few families, you know. So, we had a very comfortable kind of community life. And we also were very dedicated to becoming part of the American stream -- American life. I remember that we were helped a great deal by outsiders, you know, American people.

There was a lady by the name of Miss Bartlett and she was the executive director of a place on Boyle Avenue called the International Institute. And their mission was to take all the minority groups, as many as they could, the White Russians, the Slavs, the Mexicans, the Japanese, the Chinese, and finally they got us corralled into that kind of a group. And we went there under the banner of what they call the Girl Reserves. And that would be YWCA. And we learned to participate in sports because they would have sports events vying for each other, you know, like volleyball, and basketball. They would be in group teams. And it was really great because our parents used to go with us, you know, to cheer us on. And it was a great community affair. And maybe we were only fifteen, fourteen, in those days. And the other thing they did was they would have, what would you call them now, like fairs.

And they would have different foods you know. So that you kind of understood what the other ethnic groups were about, you know, the Chinese would have their Dim Sum, and the Russians would have their tea -- they used to have a wonderful kind of a tea and they used to serve that. And so it was a great

experience. And those girls, maybe, see the Koreans were so few in number as I recall now, maybe there were only about ten in our group -- And as time went on, from that group, many of us became group leaders for the younger children. And they also participated in sports and in exchanging with the other ethnic groups. So it was good experience. And then as time went on they all went off to school someplace. Not many of us left home to go to college. 155

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AK: Did they [second generation Korean Americans] also look to her [Susan's mother] and to their to parents -- Was there an interest in keeping traditions alive or was it more a focus on sort of assimilating?

SA: No. I think it was more, with the youngsters, a problem of assimilating. But it was not a directed thing. It was just a searching affair. They didn't know that they were trying to assimilate. But, now a days they talk about racism -- They talk about all these things and come up with psychological blurbs, you know, in those days we were just living it. You know, and it was not too uncomfortable when you stop to think about it. But, we tried, you know, very hard to be part of the good American community. As far as traditions, the traditions -- Because there was no communication or contact between ourselves and the Koreans in Korea because of the Japanese domination, it was very difficult to have or maintain any Korean items, or Korean books, or Korean anything. And so we kind of grew up with thinking that the flag -- the Korean flag was the most important artifact that you could have, you know.

AK: Well, you see it in every picture almost.

SA: I know, and that still carries today, you know, because that was so important to us because it was something the Japanese had taken away and that you could not fly it. You could not revere it. So in United States or overseas, I mean it was your privilege and your pleasure to have it in your home. And so -- As I recall now, you know, I have a lot of Korean artifacts now. That wasn't the case. There was nowhere to get the Korean artifacts. So, we had some fans, these traditional fans. And I remember one home had a embroidered picture of Korea, the peninsula. They had embroidered and put the -- And that was so -- It was so pretty because it was done in silk. And I don't know who did it actually. I remember just seeing it on the wall. But Korean items were very precious in those days to us. It's a wonder that these people even cultivated anything they felt that they were Koreans. I mean, because outside the flag -- 247

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SA: The Korean tradition was never pounded into us, only the flag, you know. But the food was always there -- the rice and the kim chi was always there for us. (phone ringing -- pause)

AK: You were talking about the traditional foods, Susan.

SA: Well, as we were growing up it was always traditional food until we got to be maybe in the Junior High School age. And then we sort of spread into the American menu. And of course, in Junior High School I remember taking a course which taught you how to set the table, and to make certain basic foods like mashed potatoes, all very American. But it wasn't for an Americanization program it was just part of their -- (AK: Home Ec?) Home Ec, yeah. And so we used to come home and practice that and my mother was very open to it. And so as life went on, I mean, we were half and half. You know, traditional Korean food and the very good American food. So we had the best of both worlds, I think. I think as far as the food is concerned I think it's kind of important that the traditional food be part of your upbringing. The reason I say that is that my mother was very good to my son in fixing traditional Korean foods. And it gave him an understanding -- an insight into what part of his heritage was. And she wasn't doing it for any lesson or anything. It was just living and some of the foods that she made was absolutely out of this world. I mean, just very simple -- like barbecued ribs, and like just plain rice. But she was very good at doing Korean foods for my kids.

335

AK: We were talking about the community and community organizations -- About what years then -- oh, we were talking about 1915, since you were born, definitely there was a community -- How large was the community?

SA: Let's see. Looking at the pictures. (counting people in photo) Two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen, looks like about maybe fifty. (AK: How many?) Fifty.

AK: About fifty people you think, in 1918?

SA: 1918. Yeah, I would say.

AK: And then we were looking at another photo of the church there.

SA: 1936. And we say that's about forty? About forty families we're saying. I think you're about right there.

AK: Now, can you tell me about the church and what church was this?

SA: This was the Methodist church -- which was probably the first church in Los Angeles area. I think 1937 they split off and they divided into the Presbyterian church which is still standing today on Jefferson Boulevard. And even though it was a two congregations, our social life was always combined with the youngsters. They used to have basketball games in the yard of the church. And everyone went there to play. I mean it was like a community playground. It was like a real community center. Then in 1937 they moved the Korean National Association to the Los Angeles area. It was in San Francisco. And they built this little community building and it's still standing today. And it has been declared a historical landmark. Is it historical landmark? What do you call those -- It's a heritage home or something. (AK: O.K.) But anyway, it's been declared. (AK: It's registered.) It's registered so that you can not tear it down or do something with it.

AK: And where is that? Next to the church? The Presbyterian?

SA: Yeah. Next to the Presbyterian Church, maybe a hundred feet away. I mean it's in the same compound.

AK: And which church did you go to?

SA: I went to the Methodist Church because my mother stayed with the Methodist group.

AK: Oh, was it the same? So the Methodist church stayed -- was the original church and stayed at the same location. And then the congregation split and started a Presbyterian congregation.

SA: Yeah. And the people that went with the Presbyterian group went to the Presbyterian church.

AK: Was the community growing? I mean, obviously -- Well, to sustain two churches?

SA: At that time it could take care of two congregations and it was no problem.

AK: And the Methodist church. What kind of activities and events do you remember? What's the full name?

SA: (Looking at caption of photo) Korean ME Church. What does that stand for? (AK: ME is Methodist?) Maybe it's the Korean United Methodist Church. It had several locations and then it finally spent many years on Robertson Boulevard and they called it the Robertson Methodist Church. And now it's out in La Tijera, but that's the Methodist church. The Presbyterian church

says that they began their congregation at a place called 2 Olive Court. And I remember going there and I would have to be about two years old. But that was also a church and a community center where a lot of Koreans used to come from other cities like Delano, Dinuba, up north they used to come down. So it was a center for Koreans.

AK: Oh, this was the Methodist church at 2 Olive Court?

SA: No. The Presbyterian church started there. And then it evolved into various spots.

410

AK: This is one thing I was curious about was -- For the most part, was everybody, all of the Korean and Korean Americans together in the same groups? Or were there different points of view represented by different groups?

SA: Well, there were a couple of main groups. And that was the Kuk Min Hoe, the KNA, and then the Dong Je Hoe, I don't know what their American, or English equivalent is. But the Toon Ge He was Sigmund Rhee's support group. And the Kuk Min Hoe was -- well, it was not my father's support group, he organized it but it was the organization that was recognized by United States as kind of a quasi-Korean representative group. And so if there was any immigration problems, or if there were any legal problems, or if there was anything that had to do with any community problem the State always referred, or the United, or the government always referred to them. So it was kind of an official organization for the Korean immigrants.

AK: So those were the two basic groups?

SA: Two basic groups. The Dong Je Hoe was just a support group. It did not do community work, per se. And eventually some of the Dong Ji Hoe people were even members of the Korean National Association. So --

AK: So what was the difference in the political views then between the two groups?

SA: Well, I don't think there was any political difference. I mean, they were all organized for the Independence Movement. And the Dong Ji Hoe was just in support of Dr. Syngman Rhee who was an opponent to most of the other leaders. And they supported him.

AK: I see, but then in terms of other organizations, like church there were -- Were there -- and besides the church and political, I mean church and sort of national and political independence organizations -- Were there others? Other kinds of organizations?

SA: I can't really think of any. There was one in the early years and they called it the 2-8 club. And it was made up mostly of the young second generation. And we were fifteen in the group. But it was a group where they met and they learned to do things [the] American way. You know, to try to assimilate into the American mainstream. And they would have picnics and they would have dances and they would try to do things so that -- that they had a social life. Like in those days you couldn't be part of the American white social life because you weren't allowed into restaurants, you weren't allowed to buy homes in certain areas. You're weren't allowed on the Santa Monica Beach into some areas. And so having this group as an entity for your own social life was quite good.

AK: What did two eight mean?

SA: Well, I guess it means sixteen. Two eight. Two times eight. But we never did figure that out. I don't know whose idea it was to organize it.

AK: Oh, sixteen, do you think they were sixteen year olds?

SA: Yeah, sixteen years and up. Yeah. Because including the sixteen year old, which was me, that would make it ten or twelve people.

AK: Where did you go?

SA: Well, mostly to my house -- at 106 North --

AK: Did you organize the group?

SA: No, no, no. My brother. My big brother did. No. Because, yeah, well if I was sixteen then he would be twenty-six. But he was quite a leader in the group activities. And this was when he was, when we were all young. You know, but after we all got into different fields of endeavor -- I think it started to break up after we went to college. 499

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AK: In the early days -- Let's say like in the '30s -- Well, with the first wave, really -- What work were people involved in? What kinds of work?

SA: Oh. Some people had stores, grocery stores, you know like those Mom and Pop stores. But they were not Mom and Pop stores in those days. Many had. There were cleaning shops as they have today. There were people who were out -- there were domestics.

Oh, I remember that some of these early immigrants used to work at the Ambassador Hotel as clean up boys or whatever. But the thing that I remember most about that is that these young men used to bring home to us the leftover baskets and things like that -- that were table decorations. And some of these were gorgeous. Like at Easter time they'd have a fabulous arrangement of Easter eggs and bunnies, you know. Here we are very poor, you know, had nothing to eat -- but these things -- And they used to bring us everything that was kind of left over from them. And you know, that was a big treat. I mean, and it also showed you how other people lived. I mean it brought the outside world to you and so that you didn't live in a little community. 638

And then my brother was an elevator operator at a place called Bryson Apartments -- It's still standing. And there used to be very wealthy women who lived there. And they used to give him all their old cast off shoes (laughing). And so my sister and I used to clomp around in these shoes that hardly fit. But you know it was a treat.

AK: And they were probably designer shoes.

SA: Exactly. And you know and they didn't fit but it was just nice to have (laughing).

AK: Was there any specific geographic area where the first wave lived?

SA: Well I would say the first geographic area was around First and Figueroa. That's where our home was. But there were quite a few families there. One of our neighbors was this Colonel Young Kim who was the most decorated World War II veteran. And he's very instrumental in helping the Japanese National Museum come to being. His sister is a Tony award winner for designing sets and she lives in New York. But they lived a couple of houses away from us and so, that I would say the first community was in that area. Because it was near 2 Olive Court where the church was -- Bunker Hill which is famous as a Korean area. And then ours and these few people that lived down the street. And so I would say that was the first community. Then we moved.

682 Oh, in 1926 the wave of Koreans came in from the country, like Maxwell, Willows, Colusa, where they had the rice fields and where they had crop failures. And so they moved -- Then they moved into the Los Angeles area and they started to settle down around Western, Vermont, around 36th, 37th, Jefferson -- In that area.

AK: Areas that are now present day Koreatown?

SA: Right. No. It's outside Koreatown. It's a little south of Koreatown.

AK: Oh. Jefferson, yeah. O.K.

SA: It's where the church and the KNA building is. And then we eventually moved to 37th and McClintock. It's now on USC campus and they will -- and they promised that they would keep it for us until we could move it. And they will keep it as a heritage home. It's very interesting because I think most all of the second generation went through that house at one time or another. Because as I say, because there was such a span of ages in our family. I mean we got everybody. And all during the war, like anybody that came home came to that house. Because it's just sort of a focal point.

AK: That must have been a lot of fun.

SA: It was. I mean it was great. And you had no enemies, you know. You were all friends (laughing). 729

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A --- CONTINUED ON TAPE 2, SIDE B

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TAPE 2, SIDE B

002

AK: Was there a network with Korean Americans in other cities?

SA: Yes. There was no set network but you knew -- in our days. I mean, present day is impossible because of the numbers. But in the early days if there was a family in Chicago we knew who they were and they were organized you know, like the Heung Sa Dan. If they were in New York it was either through knowing who they were or through the church. And they also had a Korean National Association group. The Korean National Association group, you know expanded nationwide or even to Hawaii. Oh, I shouldn't even say that -- even to Cuba and Mexico.

AK: Did you father start this group?

SA: Uhuh. Yes.

AK: When was that?

SA: 1906.

AK: And that was really the first organization?

SA: Organized. I mean he had started a couple of other things in the early years but this was the first really strong organization that took care of the immigrants who came to the United States and needed aid. And there again I think it was practicing your Korean heritage and -- try to assimilate into the American way of life.

AK: So were there visitors coming from other cities all the time? Was there a lot of back and forth with people in the other cities?

SA: Yes. Between San Francisco and ourselves. I mean there was constant movement -- Dinuba -- Reedley. Oh, there was constant movement. If you lived in Los Angeles you knew almost everybody in United States. You knew who they were.

AK: It's really incredible.

SA: I know. But it was so few in number. It's so few in number and your mission was the same. It was for the independence of Korea. I think that makes a great deal of difference of how a community reacts.

AK: What relationship did Korean Americans have with other Asian Americans in Los Angeles?

SA: Well, in Los Angeles I think we were very friendly with the Chinese group. And that was because it was allowable. With the Japanese group it was not really the thing to do to have any participation with them except maybe an odd friendship. You know, and that was O.K. I mean that was no problem. But in our house though you didn't have any Japanese people come as friends. It was sort of a silent protection. Like if you didn't do that then you weren't protecting yourself against the Japanese regime.  
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AK: And what about relationship with Filipinos in the early days?

SA: There wasn't any. In fact they were -- In the early days if they were, I've forgotten what field they were in, mostly houseboys I guess. But they were in the Navy. Most of the Filipinos in the early days were in the Navy and there was no reason to be sociable with them. They didn't have families. They didn't have a community. The Japanese and the Chinese had communities. 073

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AK: I wanted to know what ties were maintained with Korea and whether there was correspondence with your extended family there?

SA: Not during the regime under the Japanese. Well I shouldn't say that because my father was in prison in 1932 and died in prison in 1938. But he did write to my mother. He couldn't write to her before, you know, because he was so tied up with the Independence Movement but when he was imprisoned he was allowed to write one letter a month. And so he took that opportunity to write to her. And so we have file of his letters. Well, the originals are in Korea at the Independence Hall. And it's (pause) very sad. I mean he promises her that -- or he hopes that they would get together and be a family and that he thanks her for taking care of the family. And he's concerned about the girls' marriages, and you know. And in one letter he writes to me, he says, "And don't let Ralph ruin the plants." (laughing) And I thought to myself, and we laugh about it -- The nerve of him to think that his son that he has not seen is going to ruin his plants. (laughing) Oh, God I tell you it was so -- But that was the only communication that we had with Korea. 103

\*\*\*BREAK\*\*\*

151 [talking about going to Korea]

SA: Probably the next time was for handing our stuff over to the Independence Hall. My mother had done this great deed of saving papers from 1902 to 1938 to the last breath of my father. And she carried these things all over with her -- whether she went to Dinuba to pick grapes or whether she went to Riverside to pick oranges. I mean she took these with her. (AK: Was it really boxes of papers?) Boxes of papers. And it ended up with their accounting -- 3,125 pieces of items that she carted around with her. I mean this woman was something else. When she married him she knew she had married somebody. And that was in 1902 before Korea ever had any problems, well, they had problems but not being overtaken by the Japanese. But she came with him to study Western democracy. 165

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AK: What are some of the differences, or what is the relationship between the older generations of Korean Americans and the newer immigrants in Koreatown?

SA: You mean the pioneer Koreans here? Yeah. It never developed into any kind of a cohesive arrangement. The new Koreans that came in went on their way and the pioneer Korean elements stayed their own way. By this time the pioneer Koreans had gone into different areas and had split up as families and there was no one community. So we were no longer a community, whereas the Koreans that came were developing their own community and unfortunately they were not tolerant of the American-born Koreans. Mostly

because we didn't speak their language and so there were some bad feelings. But you know we're such a minority of people that it really makes no difference. The only thing is that I think the Korean community ought to learn to be a little more tolerant of not only other ethnic groups but of their own ethnic group that they don't understand.

AK: Why do you think that is? This "non-tolerance"?

SA: I would just think it was lack of direction, lack of education. I mean they all piled into one place to make a living and as long as they could make a dollar it was O.K. with them. And many of them were successful. I don't know. And now they just depend on each other. 213

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AK: And who have been your role models?

SA: I guess my mother is my role model. I mean her -- She was such a brave woman. I mean she never complained about her plight. And I think that's one reason my young brother would say too that we all came out halfway decent citizens is because there was never an aura of being misused. I mean she never felt that she was handicapped by her husband being away. She raised the kids on her own. She taught us whatever else we had to learn. She guided us and I would think that she becomes my role model. 332

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SA: I just think that the oncoming generations have to learn to blend their Americanism with their Korean heritage. And you know, the Korean heritage I think is very important. I mean, for one thing your face is never going to change, you know, you're going to be different. And so if you can take pride in what makes you different. I mean you can go to school and they say well -- You read some things about people being called Japanese or Chinese et cetera. So what? When I was going to college everyone would say, "What nationality are you?" I'd say, "Guess." And they'd say, "Japanese?" "No." "Chinese?" "No." "Eskimo?" "No." "Samoan?" "No." Never heard of Korean. Didn't know what a Korean was. But now everybody knows what a Korean is.

590 Now I'm very happy that I was born in United States and that I'm American. And voting privileges. Ha ha. My mother was the one that used to push us out to vote. (AK: Oh, really?) Really. You know when you're young it doesn't seem so important. Voting day comes. Out you go to vote. I mean she realized --

AK: She would vote?

SA: She was never a citizen so she never could vote but she made sure that all of us did. She was an unusual woman.

AK: Has she received much attention as being --

SA: No, I think the same, like the rest of us -- because she's the wife of this great person, recognition for her is very hard to come by. I think they had a little inkling of it when she -- when we sent to the stuff to Korea that she had saved and gathered, gathered and saved. I think they realize. But in the early Korean days, you know, a woman was just nothing. And that's the way this gender was brought up and so you're always second class and I think until they got educated. But I don't know. They may do something for my mother, I don't know. I hope they do it before I die. 629

END OF INTERVIEW