

Hadley Murphy  
HI244  
Professor Diederich  
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Transcript

Hadley Murphy 0:03

Hi, my name is Hadley Murphy. Today is March 12, 2023, and I'm interviewing Jung Shin through Zoom for the Colby College Korean Oral History Project. Do you, Jung, agree to grant the college permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Jung Shin 0:19

Yes, I agree.

Hadley Murphy 0:22

Right. So just to jump right in, how are you feeling about this interview?

Jung Shin 0:29

Good. I'm also a Colby grad, class of 2021. And we actually didn't have any Korean classes when I was there so it's very refreshing because I did try to take some East Asian Studies classes and Korean. But it's good that the college has that exposure now to everyone, because I think Korean culture means a lot to me and it's good that it's taught at the school that I graduated from, and I had a really good experience.

Hadley Murphy 1:01

Oh, that's good to hear. Yeah, I had no idea. This is my second Korean history class that I've taken this year. So that's interesting. I didn't know it was new. What is your current occupation?

Jung Shin 1:14

I work in finance, and joined finance straight out of college. So yeah.

Hadley Murphy 1:22

Perfect. So, tell me a little bit about your early childhood. I know you mentioned that your family traveled a lot when you were young. Can you describe kind of where your family has lived? And during what time periods?

Jung Shin 1:35

Yeah, I'm originally from Korea. I was born in Seoul, South Korea, and my dad got a master's degree in the U.S. at Georgetown. So, I lived near Washington, D.C. when I was younger, and we

moved back to Korea and he traveled a lot for work so I lived in Singapore, New Zealand, Canada, and everywhere. But I've been back and forth between those countries, and Korea a lot growing up, but we finally settled the US I think in fifth grade 2010, 2011, and ever since that I've been in Virginia, in the U.S.

Hadley Murphy 2:16

Was that a lot of traveling, kind of every six months? Was it kind of systematic? Why did your family like to travel a lot?

Jung Shin 2:29

It was definitely for my dad. He worked in global sales for Hyundai and Kia. My parents really valued global wisdom and they wanted us to have a lot of different experiences, so every time my dad had an opportunity at work to live in a different country, he always raised his hand for us. It was a really great exposure for me, not a lot of people who I grew up with in Korea, they didn't really get to travel as much or live in different countries. So all these countries, I lived in for about a year and then moved back to Korea until we finally settled in the US.

Hadley Murphy 3:08

That's awesome. I love the travel experience. Why did your family choose to settle? Finally, does your dad want to kind of have you guys stay in school in the US longer or did those opportunities to travel just not come up as much?

Jung Shin 3:28

It's a combination of both my parents really wanting to settle, for sure. They didn't really like traveling and shipping all their furniture around the world. And my parents had really great experiences at Georgetown and in the DC area, so I think that's why we decided to settle. And my brother was going into high school so my parents really wanted him to stay in one high school. And my dad actually started his own business then so he could pretty much work everywhere. My parents really had a great experience in the US and in DC. They're both permanent residents. They got green cards when my dad was getting a master's degree, so it just ended up working out.

Hadley Murphy 4:13

Oh, that's awesome. That's great to hear. I'm guessing that the US has met your family's expectations if you guys were happy enough to settle here?

Jung Shin 4:24

I guess so. I'm here now, I'm in New York now, so yeah.

Hadley Murphy 4:29

What was it like attending so many different schools when you were in kindergarten to fifth grade? How did that make you feel?

Jung Shin 4:40

Yeah, it was definitely odd. For sure. There is a very, very funny story that may not be 100% appropriate, but we went to New Zealand. When we settled in New Zealand I was in preschool and kindergarten, I don't really remember this but my parents told me this. As a kid, apparently I loved chocolate milk, and one thing my parents told me so that I wouldn't drink so much chocolate milk, was that your skin might turn darker, or something like that. And when I went to preschool in New Zealand I saw a Black person for the first time. And I freaked out and apparently told my parents that "Oh my god, I think they drink a lot of chocolate milk!" Growing up in Korea, it's not as diverse as many other countries. It's mostly all East Asians and Koreans there. So I think that's one thing that a lot of people in Korea that I grew up with didn't really get to experience. Because growing up there you don't really meet a lot of diversity, you don't really, interact with different kinds of people in different [contexts]. You don't really experience diversity at all. And at a young age, it was definitely a really good thing for me, because I got to see a lot of different things and got to meet a lot of different cultures and people and everything like that. So that's one story that my parents still like to make fun of me for. But overall, traveling and living in different countries definitely helped me a lot and really helped me be more comfortable around other people and really learn about different cultures and everything.

Hadley Murphy 6:17

That's so funny. And so I'm guessing, obviously, you were surrounded by more diversity when you were traveling. Were you also surrounded by people of similar backgrounds? And if so, did this create any challenges for you? If you were just one of the only kinds of Koreans just in your new schools?

Jung Shin 6:42

Yeah, definitely. It was definitely a challenge, for sure. Because I think a lot of first or second-generation immigrants around the world experience this, where they feel like they are two different person [*sic*]. I think, especially in the US you hear about this a lot, that—especially some young immigrants—they feel like they have to put on a different mask in front of their parents versus their peers because they're just not used to that. I think the prime example of that, with my family at least, is we only speak Korean with each other. But when I'm in school, I don't speak Korean at all, and I only speak English and everything like that. And that was a little bit confusing when I was a little bit younger, because I just didn't know what kind of "masks" I had to put on every single day. But as I got older, I really learned how to embrace my culture and where it came from, and really learn from it, but as a young kid it's definitely challenging. And it's something that I spoke a lot about, with other first-generation and second-generation immigrants and other Korean Americans or other immigrants in general. I think that's really

tough. But it's all a growing pain at the end of the day, and a lot of people were able to find their own fake personality and figure from that, which is really important. And I think that was a really good growing experience for me, because I like to tell people I'm a little bit unique, and I think that really helped me really build my personality and my character.

Hadley Murphy 8:29

I liked how you talked about the different masks. That was really interesting. Were there any kind of communities or anything that your family joined when you were in the US or in any other country that made you feel more connected to your Korean heritage with them? Or was it mostly at your house?

Jung Shin 8:50

Mostly at our house. My parents really wanted us to experience different cultures, but when we settled in the US, especially where we settled in Virginia, there's a really big Korean American community there. And there were frequent monthly meetings or picnics where we would attend, just to meet other Korean Americans and have little Korean festivals or anything like that, attend all of those things. That was really great because that's where you meet a lot of people like yourself because, when you're young, when you're in middle school, high school you're going through puberty and everything and you have a lot of different thoughts, but it's good to see how other people are adjusting to it and how other people are experiencing whatever you're experiencing too, because the end of the day it's your own experience, and it's good to know each other's experience and just learn from it.

Hadley Murphy 9:46

Yeah, definitely. This project is also focusing on food as well, so I'm going to dive into some questions into what your home food looked like and what food around the world looked like for you in your childhood. For your school lunches, since school lunches is such a big topic around the world and US lunches look, I'm sure, a lot different from Korean school lunches. Did you usually bring your own lunch to school, in the US, Korea, wherever you were? Or did you get the meal provided? What was it like?

Jung Shin 10:26

If I remember correctly, I think all Korean lunches—or it might be the schools that I attended in Korea—are provided by the school, so no one really brought lunch. They actually had, the elementary school I went to, they actually had carts that would be prepared in front of the classroom by the time its lunchtime, and we had selected students to go outside and basically be “lunch lady” for a day. It was like a rotating system, and they would bring the cart into the classroom, everyone will get little lunch trays, and they would just distribute food like that. And that was normal for me, and that was really cool. When I went to different countries like Singapore, or New Zealand, Canada, that was definitely not it. A lot of people bought lunch and

a lot of people brought their own lunch, which was a really different experience for me. But my parents, my mom at least, she really loves cooking and she always packed lunch for me. She would pack us Korean food or just simple sandwiches or anything like that. [We were in a] really diverse area, but as a young kid I think I was a little embarrassed because not a lot of people were bringing Korean food to lunch in New Zealand or Canada so I didn't really like being the one who was like sticking out or anything like that. I learned to embrace it by the time I was in high school, but it was definitely hard for me. When I was really young, I used to act like I already ate my lunch and eat it elsewhere or something like that because I was “embarrassed.” I didn’t want it to stick out or anything like that. But by the time I was a senior, or not a senior, in high school, I think I learned to really embrace that and everything. But food is definitely an interesting topic, especially school lunches and everything like that.

Hadley Murphy 12:24

The debate about school lunches—that's really that's really interesting. [Can you] tell me more about your mom's cooking at home? What's your favorite meal that she cooks for you? Does she really cook very traditional Korean cuisine? Or does she have some more American influences with it now?

Jung Shin 12:44

She “hates” fusion foods, so it's either very—what's the word for it—Americanized food or Korean food. She was a trained chef as well so she's really into cooking different cuisines, but she ultimately hates the cuisine of mixing different types of food. I've been exposed to a lot of different food, but I'm going to say I think my favorite Korean food would be, let's see... *bibimbap* (mixed rice bowl), which is basically, on a very high level, like Korean Chipotle. You get rice base and put different veggies and meat and put some Korean pepper paste and mix it all up. I think that's my favorite food, and I think my mom kind of programmed me to like it because it has a lot of vegetables when I was younger, and I didn't really like to eat those. She really programmed me just to make sure I get [*sic*] enough nutrients when I was a kid, but I think that's my favorite meal. But yeah, it's been everywhere. My mom, like I said, my parents really valued different cultures and everything so they really made an effort, she really made an effort, to cook different types of food. They actually lived abroad for a very long time before having me and my brother. They actually majored in Arabic and they lived in Arabic [*sic*] countries in their twenties. So they really loved introducing those cuisines to us as well. Very different types of food on every single dinner table, which is definitely unique.

Hadley Murphy 14:34

Wow! I wasn't expecting that at all. Do you have any specific memories at the dinner table with you and your family that stick out to you? Specifically like a Sunday lunch, or your mom cooking something for you on your birthday every year? Any traditions like that?

Jung Shin 14:52

Yeah, when I was young, my mom—you could probably already tell she was kind of a health freak and she really didn't like store-bought cakes—so for my birthday when I was younger she used to make traditional Korean rice cake for my birthday cake. I think that was a really cool experience for me because she would ask, “Oh, what kind of rice cake do you want? What kind of color, what kind of ingredients do you want in it?” She really made it customized for me, and I was really involved in that process. She'd really bring me into the kitchen and show me how to make it instead of just picking up a cake from a Walmart or something. That was really cool experience and something I still remember to this day.

Hadley Murphy 15:45

That's awesome. Do you feel like your mom, since she was a trained chef and since she did kind of show you how to make some things, do you think that has influenced your relationship with her? Do you think that a lot of your relationship has been through cooking through learning to cook in the kitchen?

Jung Shin 16:02

Yeah, definitely. My parents really valued family dinner type things where, no matter how busy we were, we'd always have dinner together. We always had a pretty early dinner because we all had commitments. My dad will swing by from work really quickly just to grab dinner. I think that dinner was around five when I was in middle school and high school just so everyone could make it, because in high school you have after-school stuff. I played sports all throughout middle school and high school, and practices were after five so we always had family dinner, every weekday every weekend, around five. I think that's when you really get to connect with your family and something I really value as well. It's a little weird working in New York City, especially in finance, when everything is fast-paced I have to eat lunch by myself. It's definitely a different experience. I think my family were definitely a little bit closer because we would have conversation at our early dinner every day.

Hadley Murphy 17:05

Yeah, I love that. My family was always the same, we always tried to have family dinners together. What about thinking about your mom's pantry? If you could go into your family's kitchen right now, what are three different ingredients, three different foods, that you could find in the fridge, in the cupboards? Something that you just know [is] in there?

Jung Shin 17:27

The Korean household staple would be *kimchi*. I think my mom has a few different types of *kimchi* in the fridge right now and all the different pastes and spices from Korea. All pepper-based different kinds of soy sauce. A couple of months ago I went home for New Year's and we made dumplings. You need a soy sauce for dumplings, and I remember going through cabinets

and grabbing a soy sauce, and my mom basically said, “No, that's for the soup. There's a different type of soy sauce for dumplings and sushi and everything.” And I was like, “Oh, I didn't even know.” So yeah, she's a master cooker. She's very particular about her stuff, but a lot of different East Asian spices, Korean spices, Japanese spices, Chinese spices, but I think *kimchi*—you'll always find that in a Korean household.

Hadley Murphy 18:27

Does she make her own different kinds of *kimchi*? Or does she have one go-to?

Jung Shin 18:33

She does make her own. But for me, personally, I'm not a huge fan of traditional *kimchi* with the red pepper-based ones. I really like the non-spicy—there's a white *kimchi*, they like to call it. I'm more, I wouldn't say comfortable, but I like those better, so my mom always makes those whenever I'm home for me. Those are one of my favorite kinds of *kimchi*. And I'm not a huge fan of—obviously you can tell I'm a picky eater—but I really don't like super fermented *kimchi*. I was never really a huge fan of the smell or anything like that. They definitely get sour over time, and I wasn't really a huge fan of that so my mom would make [quick *kimchi*]. There's a quick way to make kimchi—it's like a shortcut kimchi, where you can make it really quick and you don't really have to ferment it. It's for a quick meal, basically, and I think she always makes those whenever I'm home.

Hadley Murphy 19:43

Oh, that's so nice. Does your brother feel the same? Does he like the traditional red-based one or does he prefer the white *kimchi*?

Jung Shin 19:51

I think he prefers the red-based one, so we're terrible sons. We just make more work for my mom.

Hadley Murphy 19:58

Is your mom cooking for anyone else outside of your house? Is she a chef in the daytime or does she just cook for you guys at home?

Jung Shin 20:07

After we went off to college, she's been involved in this foundation actually—it's a Buddhist-based foundation. My mom is Buddhist; her entire family is Buddhist back in Korea as well. There's a small Buddhist temple in northern Virginia where she has a really good relationship with one of the monks—I don't know [what they call “monks”] in Korean Buddhist culture—but she goes to that temple there. They don't have a lot of folks going to the temple; it's a very small Buddhist temple. I don't even call it a temple because it's out of a townhouse. But she goes there

and she cooks for everyone there. She cooks Korean food, American food, or anything she wants and she really enjoys that. And surprisingly, recently, we have a close family friend who owns a catering company in Washington, D.C., and she's been helping that catering company a lot with menus and she sometimes goes to events and acts as a chef. I think she introduced a lot of Korean food for the catering company, as well.

Hadley Murphy 21:19

That's great. Is your family all Buddhist or is your dad not? Is he a different religion?

Jung Shin 21:30

I think they're both Buddhists. My grandparents are definitely more in tune with Buddhism, but I don't think it really carried over to my dad or me or my brother. But my mom is definitely the most "hardcore" Buddhist out of our family.

Hadley Murphy 21:53

What are your mealtimes? I'm curious what your meal times look like now, since you're saying they're a lot more grab-and-go [and] you work a busy job. Now that you live in Manhattan, you have so many different cuisine options right at your doorstep [and] you can DoorDash pretty much everything. Do you find yourself gravitating towards a particular cuisine when you eat out? Maybe you cook at home, but you might not have time to cook at home? Give me the rundown.

Jung Shin 22:22

Yeah, the cooking genes from my mom definitely didn't carry over to me, so I'm a terrible cook. So I rely on something that's very easy, like pasta, or salad, or fried rice, even, where I can cook it up really quickly. But when I'm really busy, I just get something really quick bite to eat. But on the weekends when I go out with my roommates, we try to get something that we don't usually get because we're always getting pizzas, burritos, or anything like that. When experiencing different cuisines, like I said, Manhattan has everything that you can think of. It's been really cool, but in the past of couple months I was able to find some Korean restaurants in the East Village, where I live, which is really unique. The East Village is not really known for Korean food, they have a lot of Japanese food and Chinese food, so I've visited a few of those places. It was definitely interesting and it's good to try different cuisines. But I think I'm geared more towards quick eats. Like I said, DoorDash, and my firm pays for it after 7 PM so I have to stay until 8 PM if you want to. It's been really tough. But something I really want to learn and improve on is cooking for myself.

Hadley Murphy 23:41

Do any of your roommates like to share cooking with you? Or are you guys mostly takeout? Do you ever cook a fun Korean dish for your roommates, or not really because you're not that big into cooking? Or would you want to?

Jung Shin 23:57

I would, but I just don't trust my cooking skills as of now, so we'll see. That's something on my to-do list, for sure.

Hadley Murphy 24:06

That's fair. Next year I'll come back to you and maybe you'll have cooked something for them.

Jung Shin 24:13

We'll see.

Hadley Murphy 24:15

Well, that's pretty much the end of my questions. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your story with me. I'll definitely pass along the final product of the Korean Oral History Project to you, which will have the culmination of all the different class interviews for you to listen to and read about if you're interested in. Other than that, thank you again, and I hope you have a lovely rest of your weekend.

Jung Shin 24:40

Sounds great. Thanks Hadley.