

Hannah Junn

알겠죠? 시작했네. 그냥 난 콩글리쉬로 할게 아빠는 하고싶은대로 해.

Got it? Seems like we started. Okay. I'll use Konglish, you can do what feels comfortable to you.

Eunsung Junn

M-hm.

Hannah Junn

시작하겠습니다.

I'll begin. My name is Hannah Junn. Today is March 23, 2023, and I'm interviewing Eunsung Junn in person for the Colby College Korean Oral History Project. Do you agree to grant the college permission to archive and publish this interview for an educational purpose?

Eunsung Junn

Yes.

Hannah Junn

Thank you. 그렇다면 인터뷰를 시작하겠습니다. 인터뷰를 시작하려고 하는데 어떤 감정으로 준비하고있어?

Then we shall begin the interview. How are you feeling going into this interview?

Eunsung Junn

I'm very excited to have this interview.

Hannah Junn

Wow. Very nice. 자기소개 한번 부탁드립니다. 어디서 태어났고 어디서 자라셨습니까?
Could you introduce yourself? Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Eunsung Junn

I'm originally born in Shintaein, in Jeollabukdo, South Korea, and then I grew up in Jeonju city of Jeollabukdo of South Korea. Then I moved to Seoul to get a college education. I got a Bachelor of Science from Yonsei University; major is biochemistry. Then I moved to Daejeon for my masters degree and PhD degree from KAIST, which stands for Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. Then I moved to the United States. Firstly, New York City, and then Rockville, Maryland, and now in New Jersey.

Hannah Junn

Thank you. Who did you grow up with?

Eunsung Junn

I grew up with four sisters and one older brother

Hannah Junn

아빠가 막내였는데 형이랑 누나들이랑 친했어?

You're the youngest of your family, so were you close with your siblings?

Eunsung Junn

Yes, I have a very close relationship with my sisters. But I'm not that close with my older brother.

Hannah Junn

왜 형이랑 많이 친하지 않았어?

Why weren't you that close to your brother?

Eunsung Junn

I don't know. We have different traits, different personality and character. It was a little bit difficult to get along with him.

Hannah Junn

누나들이랑은 약간 케미가 좋고?

Did you have good chemistry with your sisters?

Eunsung Junn

Yes. Because my sisters like me and then they were more proud of me. Myself. That's why we had a good relationship with my sisters.

Hannah Junn

약간 누나들이 아빠를 예뻐했어?

Your sisters looked out for you?

Eunsung Junn

Yes, yes.

Hannah Junn

아빠가 어렸을 때 기억 남거나 인상 깊었던 친구? 베프 있어?

Do you have any friends or best friends that you remember?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah, I have many friends. I Remember one friend, [his] name is Jeong Hyun. He is, right now, a doctor in South Korea. Actually, he's a physician of internal medicine.

Hannah Junn

아직도 연락하고..?

Are you still in contact with him?

Eunsung Junn

Not really.

Hannah Junn

그럼 그때는 몇살때 친했던거야?

When were you friends?

Eunsung Junn

We met [in our] second grade of high school and then afterwards we were a very close friends before I moved to United States.

Hannah Junn

You said that you grew up in Jeollado and then moved to Seoul for school. So in comparison to Seoul How was life in Jeollado?

Eunsung Junn

Compared to Seoul, Jeollado is very not advanced region. It's a kind of a rural area. But I have a lot of good friends, and I have a good memory of my Jeollado period.

Hannah Junn

Did you experience anything regarding *Saemaul undong*¹?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah, actually. I remember sometimes on Saturday morning we have to go to clean up the street. We were handed brooms or something like that, and then we clean the street, so that is the obligation of the people.

Hannah Junn

How old were you then?

Eunsung Junn

How old I am?

Hannah Junn

During that time?

Eunsung Junn

I think less than 10-years-old.

Hannah Junn

Saemaul Undong had the common people participating in the cleanup and not just having...

Eunsung Junn

¹ *Saemaul Undong* is a rural revitalization campaign instituted during Park Chung Hee's rule in an effort to improve the conditions of rural Korea so it could provide effective support for its economy.

Clean up, and not only cleanup but also making the village look nice, and then also widen the street; something like that.

Hannah Junn

Okay, on to our next topic. 아빠가 제일 좋아하는 음식이 뭐야? 아니면 if that's too broad, 엄마가 해주는 음식 중에 뭐가 제일 맛있어?

What's your favorite food? Or, if that's too broad, is there a favorite food you enjoy made by mom?

Eunsung Junn

Everything. Everything.

Hannah Junn

하나를 꼽자면?

If you had to pick one?

Eunsung Junn

For example, *Kongnamulguk* (bean sprout soup).

Hannah Junn

Kongnamul guk?

Eunsung Junn

Or *Miyeokguk* (seaweed soup).

Hannah Junn

What was your favorite food that *halmeoni* made or 아빠의 엄마가 해주던 음식 중에 뭐가 제일 기억에 남아?

What was the most memorable food made by your mom?

Eunsung Junn

Kkomak (cockles).

Hannah Junn

Kkomak?

Eunsung Junn

Kkomak. *Kkomak* is a kind of shellfish

Hannah Junn

그럼 할머니가 직접 무쳤어?

Then she would prepare them herself?

Eunsung Junn

Yes, yes.

Hannah Junn

꼬막에 대한 막 에피소드 같은 거 있을까? 그냥 제일 맛있었어?

Are there any specific episodes or memories you remember about *kkomak*? Or did they just taste the best?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. Do you remember the Korean soap opera *seulgirowoon*... Not *seulgirowoon*.

Hannah Junn

응답하라?

The “Reply” television series?

Eunsung Junn

Eungdabhara [Yes, the “Reply” series]! So in *eungdabhara*, they have a lot of *kkomak*.

Hannah Junn

꼬막이 그때는 잘... 자주 못해먹을수있었던 음식이야?

Was *kkomak* a food you couldn't have often?

Eunsung Junn

No, it is just normal people's food.

Hannah Junn

그럼 어렸을때 자주 먹을수없었던 음식이 있어? 기억에 남는거 있어?

Then are there any foods you couldn't eat often when you were younger that you remember?

Eunsung Junn

Galbi, beef.

Hannah Junn

언제 갈비 아니면 비프 먹었어, 그럼? 어떤 occasion?

When could you have *galbi* or beef then? What occasions?

Eunsung Junn

One time a year, something like *Seollal* (Korean New year).

Hannah Junn

아빠가 한번 그 옆집 사람이었나? 요구르트 줬다고 했잖아. 요구르트도 그때 잘 먹을 수 없었던 음식 중 하나였어? 요구르트 아니면 콜라였나?

You once told me, was it your neighbor? That gave you a yogurt probiotic drink. Was that also one of the things you couldn't have often? Was it probiotic drink or Cola?

Eunsung Junn

Cola. Our family [was] kind of poor. That's why drinking cola was not that common for us. Only on some occasion could we drink cola.

Hannah Junn

점심은 주로 학교 갈 때 뭐 싸 갔어?

What did you usually bring to school for lunch?

Eunsung Junn

Danmuji (Pickled Daikon radish).

Hannah Junn

With rice?

Eunsung Junn

Rice, *Kongnamul guk* (Soybean sprout soup), *miyeok guk* (Seaweed soup).

Hannah Junn

다음 topic 으로 넘어가보도록 하겠습니다. 아빠는 왜 과학을 선택했어? 대학 갈 때?

We'll now move on to the next topic. Why did you choose to study science when you went to college?

Eunsung Junn

Because to study science guaranteed good job in Korea. That's why I chose science

Hannah Junn

다른 거 공부하고 싶었던 건 있었어?

Was there anything else you wanted to study?

Eunsung Junn

Yes. History.

Hannah Junn

Really?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. I like history.

Hannah Junn

What about history...

Eunsung Junn

Korean history.

Hannah Junn

What about history enticed you?

Eunsung Junn

Interesting question. I think that we can learn a lot from past history. If we know something from history then we can make plans for the future, [for a] good future. That's why I want to learn something from the past history—Korean history. How Korea has a 5,000-year [long] history. So, I think that I think we have a lot to study. That's why they make me intrigued for Korean history.

Hannah Junn

That's pretty interesting, since history is looking at the past while science is looking forwards and trying to advance new discoveries or research.

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. So, after I retire, I have a desire to study history.

Hannah Junn

What clubs were you involved in in college?

Eunsung Junn

Say again?

Hannah Junn

대학 다닐때 동아리...

Any clubs in college...

Eunsung Junn

Ah. I joined what we called Group Sound. The band. Heavy metal band.

Hannah Junn

Heavy metal 밴드, 그 동아리 들었을 때 어떤 에피소드 기억나는 거 있어?

Do you have any episodes that you recall from when you were in the heavy metal band?

Eunsung Junn

Episode... many. A lot of girls liked me.

Hannah Junn

Okay.

Eunsung Junn

Okay.

Hannah Junn

연세 졸업하고 나서 아빠가 카이스트 갔다고 했잖아.

After you graduated Yonsei, you said you went to KAIST.

Eunsung Junn

Yes.

Hannah Junn

그럼 아빠는 연세에 정이 더 가 아니면 카이스트에 정이 더 가?

Then do you have more affinity towards Yonsei or KAIST?

Eunsung Junn

Yonsei

Hannah Junn

왜?

Why?

Eunsung Junn

I don't know. Because I studied biochemistry at Yonsei University at a younger age than KAIST. I got a Master's and PhD [at KAIST when I was] kind of old age. I didn't have any good friendship building or good memories in KAIST because I just did the research. But in Yonsei, I had a lot of stories with a lot of cute girls.

Hannah Junn

Was KAIST mostly male?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah.

Hannah Junn

And you mostly did research in KAIST?

Eunsung Junn

KAIST is educational institute doing only science and engineering. We don't have art and science, only science and engineering in KAIST.

Hannah Junn

What made you go to KAIST?

Eunsung Junn

If I went to KAIST, military obligation—the military duty—was waived. Also we didn't need to pay tuition. [The] nation paid for our tuition. So that's a big advantage for us. That's why entering KAIST is

very, very competitive. That's why entering KAIST, and then graduating KAIST, is one of my big achievements in my life.

Hannah Junn

If you didn't have to go to *gundae* (Korean military), then do you think that you missed out on anything in your youth? Because I'm sure a lot of your other friends went to *gundae*.

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. I don't miss anything. I don't miss anything. Everybody in Korea wanted to evade, escape *gundae*.

Hannah Junn

Okay next topic. You mentioned a couple times, not during the interview but in our daily lives, how you used to protest or *daemo* (demonstrate) in college. When did you *daemo*?

Eunsung Junn

From 1987 [or] 1988?

Hannah Junn

Could you describe what you were protesting for?

Eunsung Junn

Because we wanted to pick our president by ourselves. So that's the democracy. At that time, we didn't have a democracy, only military government rule in Korea. Some of the members of parliament were picked by... No, the president was picked by just one of several representatives, not [by] normal people. So, we wanted to pick our president by ourselves. That's the reason that I protested against the Korean military government.

Hannah Junn

Did you protest during your time in Yonsei?

Eunsung Junn

Yes. Yonsei was the hub of the protest [movement] in Seoul.

Hannah Junn

If Yonsei was the hub, or the center, for college students protesting during that time, then I'm sure that there was more surveillance around the students from the government. Did you ever experience that surveillance?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah, I was caught by the police when I protesting. When they grabbed me and guided me to some kind of police station, I ran away. I escaped.

Hannah Junn

What would [the police] typically do when students were caught?

Eunsung Junn

They [would] hit the student and then, sometimes, they brutally hit the student.

Hannah Junn

If you were caught back then would that have any negative effect on your student life?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah, because if I go to jail, then it's going to be a problem. But before I [was] moved to the police station, I ran away.

Hannah Junn

그럼 대모 때 제일 기억 남거나 인상 깊었던 순간 있어?

Then during your protesting, is there a moment that you remember most or left a big impression on you?

Eunsung Junn

One day, when I protested inside Yonsei University, the police troops, they fired some kind of bomb [that] makes people tear [up]. I don't know what they call in English, but at the time one of our colleague students was dead because that bomb hit his head. I was in the same [area]. I was so scared, and if I was not lucky I could [have been] one of them. Sometimes I remember him. Right now he's [become] a symbol of Korea democracy. His name is the Lee Hanyeol.² He's very famous now—he's very famous in Korea democracy history. Also, that was filmed by some of Korean movie.

Hannah Junn

Was he someone you knew personally?

Eunsung Junn

No. No.

Hannah Junn

But he was around you with [inaudible]

Eunsung Junn

Yeah, yeah. Actually, he was the same age, same grade [as I was].

Hannah Junn

He was also a student at Yonsei?

Eunsung Junn

² Lee Hanyeol is often known as the face of the June Democratic movement. Lee Hanyeol was born in 1966, like E. Junn, and was a sophomore business Yonsei University student. During one of the protests, Lee Hanyeol was struck with a tear gas grenade which penetrated his skull, ultimately resulting in his death, which symbolized a sacrifice for the cause. Today a memorial exists to him in the Mapo district near Yonsei.

Yeah. He was probably from the business school [at] Yonsei.

Hannah Junn

During these protests, what did students typically do?

Eunsung Junn

Do? We shouted. And we strung together and then we shouted our demands. Something like, “We want to pick our president by ourselves!” Something like this, and then we also speak about the bad military government.

Hannah Junn

Were there any sayings that you remember shouting? Even if it's in Korean.

Eunsung Junn

Gunbu dokjae mulleogara.

Hannah Junn

What does that mean?

Eunsung Junn

Military tyranny... Move out! Military government. Something like this.

Hannah Junn

Do you remember any songs, or were there any songs that you guys sang together or any drumming? Because I know sometimes in Korean movements drumming plays an important part to bring sounds together. Was there anything of that sort during the protests?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. There were a lot of songs. Something like... *Sanjayeo ddareura* (The March for the Beloved).³ Something like this. Hm. I don't remember.

Hannah Junn

Were they songs that students made, or were they already songs that existed?

Eunsung Junn

Student made.

Hannah Junn

How did the school react at students' participation in the protests?

Eunsung Junn

³ A 1981 Korean protest song, commemorating the posthumous “soul wedding” of deceased labor activists Yun Sang-won and Pak Gi-sun.

They try to prohibit or sometimes they close their eyes. Basically, they tried to prohibit [student participation in political protests] because the government ordered the university to stop these demonstrations. That's why they tried but sometimes... they didn't like the military government [either]. That's why they closed their eyes.

Hannah Junn

민중운동은 다양한 사회운동인데, 데모를 통해 대학생 빼고 노동운동이나 여성운동을 참가하는 사람도 만나셨습니까? 어떤 관계를 맺었습니까?

The *Minjung* movement was a movement that involved several aspects of society, so other than the college protests, did you encounter many others participating in the labor movement or the women's movement?

Eunsung Junn

Our core member of the student movement later advanced to the labor movement, and then also the *yeoseong undong* (women's movement). So many of them later participated at that kind of movement. I have many friends [who were] working there. Actually, I have know several people [who are serving] right now in Korea's parliament.

Hannah Junn

Those were people who participated in both these movements?

Eunsung Junn

Daemo [Demonstrators], yeah, actually, [the person I am thinking of was] at that time our student leader in Yonsei University. He is now one of the big politicians in the Korean government

Hannah Junn

Are you able to give his name?

Eunsung Junn

Woo Sang Ho. He is a five-times elected congressman.

Hannah Junn

During your protest, did you make any new relationships? Or did you go in to protest with your friends?

Eunsung Junn

With my friend, with our friends in biochemistry department.

Hannah Junn

Did the professors participate too?

Eunsung Junn

No.

Hannah Junn

What do you think caused mostly students to participate in these types of protests? Not just regular adults.

Eunsung Junn

What causes?

Hannah Junn

What made students participate in these movements and not just regular [adults].

Eunsung Junn

Because we pursued justice. Because of justice. Because the military government was doing injustice.

Hannah Junn

So, the demographic doing the protests was largely students and a lot of regular people too?

Eunsung Junn

Actually, we students initiated first, and then, later, adult[s] in the company also joined. That's why they were going to the big protest in 1987.

Hannah Junn

That was in June?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. June, we call it *Yuwol Hangjaeng*⁴ (June struggle).

Hannah Junn

Where was that held?

Eunsung Junn

Where? Everywhere. They started in Seoul, and then moved [out] to everywhere in South Korea.

Hannah Junn

And you were part of that, too.

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. So, we started [it].

Hannah Junn

Was there bigger government pushback during that?

⁴ The June Democratic Struggle of 1987 was the climax of the protests occurring in the time leading up to democratization. Thousands of Koreans participated in the protest across the country, consisting of students, working individuals, the poor and peasants, and ordinary citizens. The protests, which lasted approximately 19-days, were instigated by the death of Lee Hanyeol and the uproar it caused in the Korean public. After the protest, president Chun Doo-Hwan promised to enact democracy and allow the election of the president by the Korean people.

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. Using some armed police, they tried to stop and prohibit our protest, and then they fired some kind of tear bomb at us. Sometimes they threw their pebble stones.

Hannah Junn

Did your family know about your participation?

Eunsung Junn

No. I didn't let them know because, probably, if they knew my mom [would have worried] a lot more. Every time she [would say], "Sonny, don't do protests. Don't do protests. Because if you're caught, then your life could be in danger."

Hannah Junn

Did you tell them after?

Eunsung Junn

No, not really. But she probably knew. She sensed that...

Hannah Junn

Did you have any other siblings living in Seoul during the time?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah, my sisters.

Hannah Junn

Were they also part of it?

Eunsung Junn

No. Probably not. They are housewives.

Hannah Junn

Do you think that the protests changed Korea a lot?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah. Our protests made the military government change the law. That's why we can pick the presidents by ourselves. So direct vote for the president. So that's why we won at the time.

Hannah Junn

So then after Yonsei, and after KAIST... you got your PhD at KAIST, right?

Eunsung Junn

Yeah.

Hannah Junn

And then you moved to the United States. 왜 미국으로 이민 왔어?

Why did you immigrate to the United States?

Eunsung Junn

Because in order to get a professor job in Korea, I need to have a background, to have postdoctoral experience in the United States or somewhere else. That's why I came to the United States, for the post-doctoral training.

Hannah Junn

Your intention was to become a professor in Korea?

Eunsung Junn

Initially, yeah.

Hannah Junn

And your post-doctoral background needed to come from somewhere other than Korea?

Eunsung Junn

Yes. But, not really. But to get a decent job in a decent university I need to get post-doctoral training, most likely in United States.

Hannah Junn

Where did you first work [when you came] to the United States?

Eunsung Junn

Rockefeller University in New York City.

Hannah Junn

이민 하면서 뭐가 제일 힘들었어? 제일 힘들었던 부분이 뭐야?

What was the hardest part about immigrating?

Eunsung Junn

Language. Speaking English. Still, I have some problems. Still problems.

Hannah Junn

How did you learn English?

Eunsung Junn

I learned English from school. We learned English from middle school to college

Hannah Junn

Did you take any other additional classes or any other programs to help you with your English?

Eunsung Junn

No, not really. Sometimes I watched movies—American movies, American soap operas.

Hannah Junn

Do you remember any titles?

Eunsung Junn

Rambo, Pretty Woman.

Hannah Junn

Science writing, in my opinion, is a bit more difficult to read and write even from the perspective of someone who can speak fluent English. So how was writing in English for you when you had to begin your job?

Eunsung Junn

I read a lot of science literature, so that's why I am used to [writing] this scientific English. Writing scientific articles [and] reading scientific articles is not problem for me because this is my job. But, if I read the *New York Times*, it is much harder.

Hannah Junn

When you first came to America, in New York, what helped you adjust or cope with the new setting?

Eunsung Junn

In New York, actually, we didn't have a car because even parking was very expensive. At the time, we didn't have a car. Actually, when we were in Korea, I had car. So, without a car, that was a little bit uncomfortable. But I had to adjust to New York life without car. And the cost of living is expensive in New York. Yeah, that kind of stuff.

Hannah Junn

What helped you adjust then?

Eunsung Junn

I don't know. I don't know whether I adjusted or not, but anyway I adjusted [by] doing research at that time.

Hannah Junn

Did you make other Korean family friends in New York?

Eunsung Junn

Yes. I had some. I don't know right now where they are. Probably they [went] back to Korea, I think.

Hannah Junn

How did you meet them?

Eunsung Junn
In Rockefeller.

Hannah Junn
They were also working?

Eunsung Junn
Yeah, they were also postdocs.

Hannah Junn
Did you ever want to go back home?

Eunsung Junn
Yeah, because I missed a lot of things from my hometown, especially Jeonju. I missed a lot of good food in Jeonju. Jeonju is very famous for good food in Korea, especially. So now, I missed many, many, delicious good food in Jeonju.

Hannah Junn
What did you miss most?

Eunsung Junn
Kongnamul-guk (Soybean sprout soup). And *bibimbap* (mixed rice bowl). *Jeonju bibimbap* (Jeonju-style mixed rice bowl). A lot, you know.

Hannah Junn
When living in New York for those first couple of years, did you guys find ways to make Korean food at home, were there Asian marts around?

Eunsung Junn
Yeah, actually there is big supermarket in Queens, Flushing, so we went Korean grocery shopping there. So, we made Korean food at home.

Hannah Junn
What made you stay in America, since you were intending on becoming a professor in Korea?

Eunsung Junn
As time passed by in the United States, I built some of my career, and then I think at a certain point, I thought that I was ready back to go back to Korea. But, my first daughter was already grown up, so I thought that if I went back to Korea, my daughters probably could be left behind in the Korean education system because they didn't even speak Korean well and then they couldn't write Korean that much. So that made me stay in this country. That's one of the reasons, but that's one of the big reasons.

Hannah Junn
...다른거 뭐 있을까?

... Is there anything else?

Eunsung Junn

I don't know.

Hannah Junn

40 분 했네.

Well, we did 40 minutes. Okay. Well, thank you, for letting me interview you.

Eunsung Junn

You're welcome. It's my pleasure... 끝났어?

Is it over?

Hannah Junn

Nice!