

Interview Transcript

Jacob Ju: Okay Daniel, thank you for joining me in this interview today. Before we get started can you just give me a brief introduction about yourself?

Daniel Ju: Sure. My name is Daniel Ju and I'm fifty-three years old, born in 1970. I'm working in the construction industry as a product manager and the company I work for is Exbon Development. And I worked with the company for about five years now.

JJ: Awesome thank you for that. We'll just get started with some startup questions just to break the ice. So, can you provide a brief overview of your life before immigrating to the U.S. like early experiences or any significant memories you had in South Korea?

DJ: I was born in Korea, in Seoul. Well, I was living in a poor neighborhood, but my parents weren't poor. We just lived in a poor area. We were living in a house with my grandma, my older brother and myself, and my mom and dad. We lived a decent life. My dad was a government worker in public works. He worked for the financial districts and he dealt with a lot of merchants like street merchants who had to pay taxes, so he was in charge of collecting taxes from the merchants in the old-school market mostly. And my mom was a housewife which was typical back in the old days. So the man provides and then the woman normally takes care of the house with the kids. I wasn't much of a healthy kid when I was little – as a matter of fact, I was really weak. There are more days I was absent from school than days I was attending school. A lot of times I was in the hospital I remember taking those big old needles in my butt. I remember going to this room and actually, they were probing my nose [laughter] taking all this gunk out. I was sickling when I was little and that was the thing that I remember. One thing I also remember was my dad was very strict and conservative, a very stubborn person and he used to scold me and my brother a lot. He has certain standards; anytime our behaviors or our school grades kinda deviate from his standards he scolds us. I remember we were doing homework – I think it was mathematics or something. He kind of tested us, going through questionnaires of mathematics, and every time we got incorrect answers he smacked our heads [laughter], and I remember I was crying and my brother was crying. Those days I remember, there were some good memories and bad memories of my dad. I grew up watching my dad rise and fall. My dad used to, like I said, work for the government and I think after a while, he was beginning to look into other ways of making money by partnering up with his friends on some kind of entrepreneurship ventures. I don't know the exact details but some of the business he went into with his partners did not go well. Part [of this] is because the partner actually ran away with the business money or he got either conned or his partner abandoned him and then just flew away or ran away with the money that he couldn't recover. My experience was that a bank or some financial institution that he owed money to, was asking... Was actually that some of the days where he was hiding from them because he couldn't pay the debt, the amount that he owed. They were coming knocking on our house and then asking for my dad, and some of the private investors and private debt collectors were shouting and screaming and swearing and things like that. My mom was crying ... It was some horrible moments of my chapter that I witnessed and it wasn't a pretty sight, and I was scared, I was crying. So we had ups and downs. More of the downside, I remember. At one point my mom wanted to change the lifestyle living in Korea. My mom's relative – the aunt, the older sister – her husband was a pastor or senior pastor, and in big churches, he built from the ground. Through him, my mom was able to have the church sponsor my dad and he

went through seminary school. But you're supposed to finish in four or five years but he crammed it somehow and then finished in two years. The pastor, the senior pastor, pronounced him as a vice pastor, a *bumoksa* [부목사 associate pastor], I think. I don't know what you call it, but that's what got him to have the visa to go to the United States at the time. So he got on a plane and went to the United States by himself with a religious visa. Of course, that was just a medium to try to get to the States. He was never a pastor. He used that to just go to the United States to try to make something of himself to change the life that is in Korea. He came to the States in I believe 1988 or 1981 by himself. He told us that in the beginning, he was living with a bunch of other pastors; Korean pastors – similar situation, there are some religious pastors and there are some with similar reasons as my dad. They came to the States but with really only one mission in their mind; to obtain a green card to stay permanently in the United States. At the time everybody's dream was to get a green card. He told me because he was actually sponsored by the senior pastor in Korea in fairly large congregations, he was able to hook up with one of the senior pastors in a large church in in States – he didn't tell me which one but that pastor actually sponsored him and that was actually what got him a green card. He told me he was the only one to obtain the green card among the group that he was in. My mom's still telling us that that's really a grace from God, so that was a very special case for him. So he was living by himself. He had to make a living, right? So in the beginning, he did a lot of things. He was working at a gas station, he did day-to-day labor-type of things. He was living day-to-day and after six months he told me that he was not going to cut it to bring his family to the States. He was barely making a living by himself. He was barely getting food just working on the on-the-day labor.

He was thinking to himself, "This won't cut it. I won't make it. If I continue to this, I won't make it here." So he was looking around and then some street hustlers... One particular thing that caught his eye was there was a guy selling plants and birds in the street. Little knew about the business or little know about speaking English, but he had only one thing in mind he's a responsible person as a man to take care of his family. He courage. He had no options. He was put in a corner. So he doesn't care if he gets embarrassed, he gets yelled at. He didn't care so he approached the man who was selling plants and birds in the street and said, "Hey, I want to learn this. I want to learn the business. I want to make some business like you." To make a long story short, somehow, he got partnered with the guy. He learned the ins and outs of the business that required him to sell that product on the street. Shortly after he parted away from the partnership because he had to split up fifty-fifty or however the partnership was. Probably he was getting less. He saw him making money so he parted away so he got himself his own business because he learned pretty much everything. That's how he actually started making some money but he needed some support, not only physically but emotionally, so my Dad turned to my mom and asked her to come to the States right away. So my mom flew and joined my dad. They were street hustlers. They were selling anything that could make money in the street. They were selling birds in a cage. They were selling plants. He was selling other products in the street – I forget what it was – but during the time they were dealing with all kinds of people. Imagine you're selling a product in the street and you're facing all kinds of people – I don't want to say “low lives” – but you know how it goes, right? There are street gangs you have to deal with. There's the homeless you have to deal with. There's also a cop that you have to deal with. He was getting citations a lot of times. He had to appear in court. Not only paying the fine, but he was violating... Repeated violations because he was selling in the street without any part permits, basically. Can you imagine an immigrant with very limited English had to go through all this legal process? He had to appear in court before a judge. There was no interpreter. There's no helper there. I don't know how he managed to defend himself. I'm sure he couldn't defend, that's why he paid a lot of fines. But he had to continue work.

Why? Because that's the only way he knows how to make money, to make a living. This is one typical story of one immigrant family. I'm sure there are a lot of similar stories about it in my older generations. But it all leads to one thing. The one thing is about seeking an opportunity to become better, to have a better life. I was talking about my childhood to my parent's life but I think that's pretty much... I mean, I can go on and on, but I think I spent too much time on it, so I think we go on to the next questions.

JJ: Yeah that was very insightful thank you. You talked a lot about your parents but I was kind of curious about how your relationship with your older brother impacted your upbringing and experiences in South Korea as well as during high school and your college years in the U.S. If you could talk a little bit about his life and your relationship, that would be great.

DJ: I talked about how we were living in a poor area in Seoul. We live in a place called *Seokgwang-dong* [석관동 a neighborhood in *Seongbuk-gu* district in Seoul] and that's a very small area with hills filled with houses. Well, I wouldn't say houses, but it's a very fragile, like a tin can-like structure that is crammed in. So your street and the corners are very narrow and if you walk there's limited light in the alleys, and it's so narrow, it's like pitch black sometimes when you walk at night. Because it resides in hills, there are a lot of stairs. I'm talking about high-elevation stairs. So if you go from the ground to the upside hill, I mean, you have to have pretty good health. The older folks would not last on the top. I'm talking about the really poor area and the majority of the people that were living at the time was either selling stuff in old markets or we had the... I don't know how to say it, but back in the old days, especially in the winter time, it's so cold because the weather was sub-zero, but they're so poor they don't have a boiler. They don't have a no heater. But they're using the old-fashioned style coal; it's shaped like a cylinder and it has a lot of holes in it. It's coal and then you light it up and then you put it on the underside of the chamber and you heat the room with it. They have a factory making that type of coal - I don't even know what they call it but we call it *yeontan* [연탄 briquet]. In America, I don't know what it's called, but let's say it's a cylindrical-shaped coal - C-O-A-L - coal. There's a large factory nearby and a lot of people work for that factory. I remember I used to go to this public elementary school - by the way, my brother went to a private elementary school. So in the public school, the majority of my friend's parents used to work for the factory. But imagine the coal factory making that cylindrical thing and every time the weather is bad where there's high wind and stuff like that if you're passing the days and you're wiping your faces, you get this black dust - sometimes you look like a black and become dark faces because you got this dust clumped in your faces - so imagine how the air quality was at the time. So after elementary school, I went to the middle school. The middle school was a newly built middle school. But then, guess what? Because of the bad air quality, they had to make the window double-sided. Because all the dust is coming in and it cannot filter through with one window [laughter] they made a double-sided window. I remember that part of it and growing up with my brother, we had a special relationship. Like I said I was a weakling and my brother was taking a leadership role in the alley - he's a Captain in the alley. So I always look up to him. Whenever I got beaten by little bullies and stuff like that, he always beat him up for me. Back in my younger days - I was thinking like a weak person. So I used to get beat up by the younger guys too and I was so ashamed of it at the time. Everybody said, "Well, how come you were beat up by younger guys?" "I don't know." At the time I don't know how to retaliate. I just stood and just got beaten up. I was like analyzing myself in my old days my past days, but I don't know why I did it. I just stood there and just got beaten up [laughter]- without swinging a fist or anything like that. I was crying and wouldn't do anything. But I was telling my brother I got beat up by this guy and then he was upset

and he got revenge for me. So I looked him up a lot when I was young. He was my older brother. I just totally looked up to him. Unlike me, he was popular, he was hanging out with, at the time, rich kids because he went to a private school. So he was a cool kid and I was just nobody. So he was taking care of me, so to speak, when I had little or no friends and he took me to just hang out with his buddies. There was a time when I was staying home and then he just took me to just play with his buddies outside. So I was relying on him big time. We had a special bonding relationship. When we came to the States, the first couple of years we had nobody but each other because we had no friends and we had limited speaking ability. Well, I was actually one of the people who changed the whole scheme of my life compared to my lifestyle in Korea versus my lifestyle in the States. Also in terms of health, I got a lot stronger. I got taller, I got stronger, and not only physically but mentally I was able to grow from the weak mold and came out of that weak mold and then got stronger. I was mentally stronger for some reason because I thought I was in survival mode because I literally had to survive. For the first couple of years, I wouldn't say I've got into fights a lot but, I got into a few fights in the beginning because I didn't understand English at the time at all but I knew, that person or that group was talking some stuff at me. It's bad stuff – you get the feeling, right? Even though you didn't understand, so that's how I got into a fight. Next thing you know I was in a principal office and my parents came and all that stuff, so I had to experience it a few times. Same thing with my brother, but my brother was smarter than I was. Again, my brother was a cool kid even though he didn't speak English. We spent two years... I would say it was kind of the dark days. We didn't want to go to school. I don't know about my brother, but I didn't want to go to school because school was boring, first of all, because I didn't understand a word they were saying. I was put in ESL [English as a Second Language] and then the other classes were just regular classes. My favorite subject was math. Math was the only subject I was good at because math [in Korea] was far more advanced than in the States, so it was just a piece of cake. I didn't have to listen to what the teacher was saying. I didn't understand anyway, but I knew all those questions because I learned them in Korea already [coughs]. So that's the only subject that I was good at, and the other subject was just boring. I was either sleeping or just not paying attention at all. So we got through middle school and my brother was in high school a year before me. Then I was in high school and that's when my relationship with my brother was separated because I was beginning to understand English well and I had my own group of friends. There were a lot of friends that overlapped each other, with my brother's, because we are only a year and a half apart. So we have common friends, we have separate friends. We hang around sometimes together, sometimes not. It's a natural thing that we gradually separated and I was hanging out with my posse and he was hanging out with his friends. We got busy working and helping at my parent's store all throughout high school. That was pretty much it with my brother. I can talk about my relationship now with my brother but I can talk about it later.

JJ: I also heard that he went to medical school in Mexico. I was just wondering if you could touch base on that and how he lives in Puerto Rico now with his family.

DJ: That's really a special case. He wasn't majoring in biology or pre-med in the first place. Me and my older brother both went to a junior college after high school. I'm still helping out at my parent's liquor store. Of course, we had different schedules. Sometimes I was working at night or my brother was working days and vice versa, so our classes and even the school that we attended were different - anyhow he managed to finish junior college and then went to USC [University of Southern California] as an architect major. He wanted to be an architect. He was there a year, I think. A year and a half or something,

I forget, as an architect major. He was trying it out and ultimately it didn't work out. The study of architecture wasn't for him. It wasn't his taste. He was starting to fall apart. He didn't know what to do or he didn't know what other major he wanted to get into. We have an older cousin who advised him to go to medical school, but at the time he wasn't sure if he could get accepted into the School of Medicine at USC. He had to go through taking a series of classes related to pre-med meaning he had to probably take another year or two to take all of those classes – pre-requisite classes – in order to be accepted into the school of medicine. He didn't want that because he was concerned about his age and also he was concerned about him being able to get through all that schooling just to get into the pre-med school. This means that there are certain grades that he has to get in order to get accepted so he wasn't sure. He doesn't want to take a risk, so he started actually taking my cousin's advice that there's another route he can take to go to medical school. One of the routes that appealed to him was going to Mexico and getting into med school there. So he gathered all the information, he told our parents, and he took off to Mexico; Guadalajara, to be exact. That's the second largest city in Mexico I believe. So he went to the medical school in Guadalajara - I don't know if he took an exam or... I don't know how he got in, but I didn't ask him about it. He went to that school and during that time he met his wife, Christina. She is Puerto Rican and happened to be in Mexico studying medicine. So they both went to the school and graduated and got their degrees. After that, I'm not sure if he did more schooling, but I know for a fact that after graduation they got married and then moved to Puerto Rico – that's the homeland of his wife. She wanted to be closer to her parents. So they moved to Puerto Rico and they settled down there, found a job, and during that time I believe his wife helped him quite a bit in terms of getting him getting a job in the hospital. Also, she helped him a lot to learn Spanish. That's how he lives in Puerto Rico now as an ER [Emergency Response] doctor and he serves that particular hospital. I know he changed quite a few of the hospitals in Puerto Rico. For that particular hospital, he served there for more than fifteen years as an ER doctor.

JJ: That was very interesting to hear about your journey. Going back a little bit, can you tell me a little bit about your mother's journey? I know she's a defector from North Korea so can you just tell me a little bit about some hardships she faced or anything she heard about how she met your father, or my Grandma, and stuff like that?

DJ: As you described, my mother, she was a defector but she was a young defector. She was five and was born in North Korea – I don't know what part of the region, but it wasn't Pyongyang, for sure. She was born and raised until she was five years old and during that time it was during the Korean War. The family of eight – she has eight siblings. Two older sisters and one younger sister and then four brothers. I think she was number four or five in the siblings. They weren't able to come down to South Korea. There would've been the chance that they could come down to South Korea if there was an agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States to intervene in the Korean War to have a thirty-eighth parallel, but they didn't. I guess they weren't ever able to do that. She said when she was five years old, "It was a pitch-black night trying to defect from North Korea to South Korea, crossing the river of Amnok River" [River between China and North Korea]. To escape from the North militia and at the time, if they get caught, they will get killed instantly or they are sent for trial but mostly you get executed. The sentence is probably that you will get killed. So either way if you get caught or put in jail your life will just vanish. She was five years old when the family was defecting to go to South Korea and they were in a boat, a flimsy boat crossing the river. Then her younger sister, who was still an infant – it was the help of a guide, a paid guide who led a pathway to South Korea, told the mother who is my grandmother, or mother's

mother, "Put the baby and drown her, because when she starts to cry, we all die. Because we're gonna get discovered and then the bullets are gonna fly by and we're all gonna get killed." She begged him not to and promised him that she wouldn't cry. My mom remembers that she was relying on some kind of a pot that had a pointy lid and her back was in excruciating pain. She remembered she put one hand on her back and then rotated her hands to ease the pain. And that's how they defected from North Korea. Sad story though. The oldest sibling, the brother, who at the time was a high schooler was kidnapped or taken by the North militia and never heard from him ever after. Whether he was dead or alive. After he was kidnapped, his mother, which is my mom's mother, every single day she prayed for her son's safe return. But after that, they never heard from him ever again. It was rumored or there was speculation that he was taken and immediately thrown into the battleground. We call it *chongalbaji* [총알받이 cannon fodder] meaning "bullet-taker." So he was most likely killed in action. Imagine a high schooler with no training, no military background at all – [no] training background at all – was thrown with probably a flimsy rifle. Probably did not have much protection gear that he got to wear when he was shooting at the enemy line. It's a tragedy. The Korean War is a tragedy because we are pointing guns at each other in one nation. A brother. Because we don't have power it was a tragedy. Because of two different ideologies clashing and the powerful nations were taking sides; the U.S.A. taking South Korea, the Chinese and Soviet Union taking the North Korean side. The Korean old proverb – *Gorae ssaume saeu deung teojinda* [고래 싸움에 새우 등 터진다 The shrimp's back is broken in the battle between whales], that means two giant whales fighting but in the middle, there's a shrimp that just popped. So we're the shrimp because we just had no power. It was controlled by these big giant whales clashing with each other. It's all a power game and we're the victim in the middle. It's a tragedy in our history. So that's how she was able to come down to South Korea and start living from there. That's pretty much the story.

JJ: Wow, that was a pretty crazy story. Well, could you kind of touch base on how she met your father in South Korea? Then you also mentioned that your grandmother – she was praying for her son's return, so was your mother raised in a Christian household?

DJ: No, no, no. When I meant praying, it's not in a Christian way. It's more like a shamanist way. So back in the old days whenever you had things to pray, mostly the females on the mother's side would have a small portable table, then put it outside. They didn't have food to offer so what they did [was] they put water in a ceramic jar or bowl and put it on the table with a candle. Then with their palms or hands together, they just pray. They don't pray to God, to what Christians believe. They don't know. They just pray for someone's well-being. They don't have a religious figure per se. I know sometimes they pray to the Moon or maybe an object. Something like that, but it's not in a Christian way.

JJ: Can you talk about how she met your father after she escaped North Korea? Obviously, she grew up in South Korea.

DJ: Yeah she grew up in South Korea. Went through the education throughout high school. I know she met my dad through a mutual friend. I think it was a mutual friend. They were dating and I think they dated for a few years, I think. Then they got married. I don't have the details on their marriage or how they got ... I know how they met through a mutual friend, but don't know much about the details.

JJ: I see. That's perfectly fine. Then I guess we'll talk more about your immigration experience to the United States. So I was wondering if you could share your reflections on the political events in South Korea during the 1980s, talking about the Gwangju Uprising [Mass protest against the South Korean military government that took place in the southern city of Gwangju between May 18 and 27, 1980] and the anti-American sentiments.

DJ: Well, I was born in 1970 so that's the heart of the era of military power taking over the government regime. President Park Chung Hee was in the presidency for sixteen years [Editor's Note: Park held the presidency for 16 years, but his total period of power counting the military junta was 18 years].

DJ: By law, there's only a five-year term for a President, by law [Editor's Note: When Park came to power it was the same as the US – four-year terms with a two-term limitation]. When the Republic of Korea was established, as you know President Park was a military general and he overthrew the government by coup d'état. So he was using his military power to overthrow the political parties and he was controlling the major cities with the military and that's how he became a President. Then he's supposed to come down after five years, but every time he changed the law and renewed his presidency over and over again. He probably would've been in the presidency for more than sixteen years had he not been killed. He was killed by his own man – I don't know if you know Korean history. Yeah, he was killed. I don't wanna go into detail about President Park's family, the tragedy of Park's family, but it's pretty messed up [laughter] but it's a story about his side of the story because his kids and wife got assassinated. His kids got all messed up. Especially the son was a drug addict and he was thrown in jail for many years. His only daughter – she was in a political party, she was a leader and she became the President of Korea and during her terms, she was ... What do you call it when she was thrown out by the people? What is that one word?

JJ: Impeached?

DJ: Impeached exactly. She was impeached and went to jail, so the whole Park family was just a tragedy. So I was living in an era of a military regime government. After Park was assassinated, there was a temporary presidency for two years [Editor's note: Chun Doo Hwan seized power in a December 1979 coup, less than two months after Park Chung Hee's October assassination]. After that another coup happened by President Chun Doo-hwan. There was political turmoil throughout my childhood and there were a lot of demonstrations to fight and the oppositions to fight the military regime for democratic freedom. Because at the time there was no freedom of speech or freedom of the Press. There was very limited freedom because it was controlled by the military. I remember for a young male you're not supposed to have long hair. It was against the law. And for women, they're not supposed to wear a short skirt or even a shirt or fashion that's showing cleavage. That's just forbidden. You're probably caught by a cop and he put you in jail for a day or two for public indecency. That being said, watching the Gwangju Uprising fight against the military government regime ... And remember President Chun Doo-hwan? He was also the guy who was enthroned for the coup d'état. Right? That's why the Gwangju Uprising started. It was against President Chun. That's when tragedy happened when President Chun declared the military to allow them to shoot back at the innocent public. There were a lot of casualties - innocent people died at the time. I was a little and remember watching TV and people got killed and were lying in the street. People were screaming, there was crying, and there were all kinds of chaotic scenes that I remember watching on the TV [coughs].

JJ: So do you think that the socio-political climate in South Korea influenced your family to move to America to start a better life and escape the political injustice?

DJ: Not so much. Yeah, I don't think so. That probably would have influenced a bit but I wouldn't say that was the main reason. The only main reason is that we had an economic hardship and my parents didn't think there was a future living in Korea.

JJ: I see. Then for the economic factor, you mentioned that your family opened up a liquor store and you also helped out. Can you just talk a little bit about that entire experience and how you adapted to the cultural differences from wherever you lived in Koreatown or Torrance?

DJ: Yeah, I was talking a bit about my parent's life in the States - how my dad came to the States and after that my mom came about in the States and lived with my dad, then started doing middle-of-the-street business. They were having so many difficulties hustling in the streets and selling their stuff. They were making money but they were also losing money because they had to deal with a lot of people including the police at the court and stuff. So they got fed up with it and they were looking at other ways to make some money to make a living. At the time, I think my parents saved up a good amount of money to do another business. My dad was looking at this particular business which is a landscaping business. He was a gardener for a few years, I think. Several years. He was happy. He was mostly outside doing the lawns and trimming and things like that. On the weekends he was doing some side jobs like installing flowerbeds or installing new grass like Sol grass. Or he was doing some irrigation work like installing sprinklers and things like that so he was doing some side jobs. My brother was helping him, doing some sales pitches and things like that to help my dad out. That was actually the happiest moment in our family's life because he got up early in the morning but he was able to come home at five o'clock, six o'clock. We were able to be together at dinner time and spend some time together. We sometimes went outside on the weekends. It's either just driving on the coastal areas for a scenic drive. Then on the way back, I remember we stopped by a Pizza Hut or Kentucky Fried Chicken just to have a family dinner at a restaurant. I remember those were the happy days. After that, my parents wanted to have a more stable business. While he was doing a landscaping business there was quite a bit of case where his truck got stolen. It's either his truck got stolen or his equipment like a lawn mower or that expensive equipment got stolen and he had to replace it with a brand new one and that cost him an arm and a leg. Also, year-by-year, depending on the economic situation at the time, people spent less on other necessities so he would lose his membership from his customers. So either cancel the monthly service or they can't get a new account. It was kind of unstable income-wise, too. He wanted to have a more stable business and he saved up pretty good money to look into more. He wanted to have more of an inside store type of business where you don't really have to hustle and bustle to get a customer by yourself. He wants to let the customer come in and then do business in that fashion. As a typical immigrant looking for business, there are three major businesses they are looking for. The first one is a liquor store. Well, the first one is actually the dry cleaner. The second most popular was a liquor store. The first one was actually a gas station, but a gas station takes a lot of money. You need to have a lot of money to actually buy the business. Of course, liquor stores, too, but gas stations require more money to obtain the business. But he was able to obtain the liquor store of his dreams. It was actually his dream to own a liquor store. Because at the time he thought it was easy money. Because all you have to do is just keep people coming to your

store and if they find what they want, just pay for it and just leave right? So he thinks it's pretty easy money. Ultimately my parents ran the liquor store for a total of eleven years. Eleven years is not a short time, it's a long time. Me and my brother were in the middle of high school when they bought the business and of course, we had to help them out as a family member. I remember I really hated working there. I think a part of me seeing my parents spend so many hours. Looking back and seeing their tired faces just feels miserable. Because they had no employees, my dad was mostly doing the stock up of the products. It's either on the shelf or the back of the cooler. But going inside the cooler is so freezing because you're not going in there for a few minutes. Sometimes you have to spend a couple of hours in the cooler doing all these stock-up things – your beer bottles or beverage bottles or whatever it is. All kinds of bottles or beverages – wines, spirits, and all that stuff. It has to be put in an orderly fashion then you have to take the old ones out, put in a new one. You have to rotate. It takes a lot of coordination and a lot of time. I hated going into the cooler because one time I spent a few hours there and I was cold but I was sweating. Can you imagine? I was so cold I was sweating. And the sweating becomes so cold so it adds to the cold. So when you get out from the cooler, your whole body is just numb. So I really hated the feeling of it. I didn't go into the cooler much. My dad did the most work inside. But one thing I remember I was good at was making six packs. Normally on a special promotion, my dad used to buy the whole truckload of let's say Budweiser or Miller or whatever. Cans. In a suitcase. Like a twenty-four canned suitcase. We used to break it down into individual packs and then turn the twenty-four packs into six packs. Which requires this plastic binder that you put in to make six packs. I was really good at making six-packs. So here I was in the stock room right, the storage room. Twenty-four beer cans or boxes were up to the ceiling. Can you imagine? It was stocked in a pile of rows and I was by myself making six packs. Doing it for four to six hours just by myself. For a comparison, imagine you're a pirate on the ship. Long journey into the sea. From point A to point B but you're at the bottom of the deck, filled with potatoes and you're peeling them off. Your job is to peel off the potatoes. That would be a good comparison. So I was doing that a lot. I was a cashier most of the time. Most bad memories, there are few occasions that I could have been shot during a robbery. To this day, I lived through the grace of God, I think. There are several stories I can tell but there are two stories I wanna share with you. One is, I was by myself in the cash register behind the counter and it was pretty late at night. It was like nine or ten o'clock or something. There are not much of patrons or people around the store or area. And one guy came to the store and then he was way in the back trying to grab some kind of beer or something like that. Then all of a sudden he took out his gun, a pistol, and he was pointing it at me. My parents were inside the little office. They were actually having dinner at the time and weren't paying attention so I was all by myself. He was pointing the gun at me - normally when the gunman points a gun they normally go like that right? [Editor's Note: Interviewee demonstrates holding a gun in a textbook, upright position] Maybe this way or that way. But this guy actually did sideways like this [Editors Note: Interviewee demonstrates holding a gun to the side instead of upright] and he was pointing in my face. Literally this close. I don't have much of a reaction to it and I didn't have time to think, or how to react to it. All I saw was the gun barrel this big pointed at my face [Editor's Note: Interviewee shows with his hands of the gun barrel is the size of approximately a tennis ball]. I thought at that moment. Just one thing. Is that, "Today, I'm gonna be gone." Because he was about to pull the trigger. But like I said by the grace of God, he demanded money. So I gave him all that I had in the cash register. I gave him everything and he grabbed it, shoved it in his brown paper, and fled. Then my parents came after without knowing what happened. They were dazed and confused as to what happened. We got robbed. All the money in the cash register was gone but I didn't say anything about how I was held at gunpoint because I didn't want them to worry. The second occasion was just a crazy story too.

Again, it was late at night. Me and my dad were behind the counter. My mom was in the office doing her thing. This one guy just came into the store. He was standing around the wine area and acted like he was choosing a wine or something. Then all of a sudden [coughs] - well he didn't have a gun but he had a knife and he demanded money. But then my dad was actually standing behind him. He actually didn't see my dad who was behind him and he immediately knocked the knife off. Somehow he got to knock the knife out of his hands and grabbed his two arms then just kind of bear-hugged him to try to hold him off from escaping. But he was pulling my dad's hair off. At the time he was scratching and he was bleeding. My dad was trying to fight it off and his hand was bleeding too - both sides were bleeding. That's when he came shouting and said, "I have AIDS!" and I was stunned. I was stunned. What if he actually has AIDS? But I couldn't think so all I knew was I had to stop him so I grabbed the two bottles of wine and tried to strike his head like this [Editor's Note: Interview demonstrates a striking motion with both hands]. But first attempt, I didn't succeed. The bottle is supposed to break and he's supposed to be knocked unconscious but it was a miss. The second attempt was a miss one of the bottles struck his head and it [blood] gushed from the head even more so. Ultimately, he was brought to the ground and we were able to detain him until the cops showed up. When the cops showed up, he was handcuffed and he was taken to jail. It was quite a scene and it was quite a night because my dad was covered with blood all over his body and I was scared. I was scared that he might get AIDS. But luckily nothing happened. But I was really freaked out. Then after that, my mom had to clean up the floors and all the blood that was sprayed all over the place. I remember my mom crying but they had to clean up the place. They were wiping the blood off of the shelf and the bottles and cans and things like that. It was just a sad moment. There are some other stories but I think that's the two major events that I can remember. Having the liquor store was the worst era of our family's life because we didn't have any time. I mean, we did have money, but we didn't have time to enjoy each other or to share each other as a family. We were always tired. My dad was always tired. My mom's always tired. We didn't go to church. We didn't do much as a family because I didn't have any fond memories during that time. We didn't do much as a family.

JJ: That was pretty crazy. I guess just going off of what you said about the liquor store and your experiences, do you recall any instances where you witnessed any forms of adult entertainment while you worked behind the counter maybe when making deliveries? So this could be a bunch of drunk college parties or fraternity bros just coming to your store or if you witnessed any other forms of adult entertainment.

DJ: I mean I'm running a liquor store so you're faced with all folks from different lives. Whether it be low lives, mid-lives, or high lives. Among you mostly run into a lot of low lives - especially local gangs and thugs. Drug addicts. Sex addicts. A lot of bums. Homeless. Old folks who have really crazy attitudes. I mean I've run into some gentle people. Caring people. But mostly they came to party because we were selling hard liquor. Mostly booze at the liquor store. Beers, wines, hard liquors, you name it. We have everything. Small, big, miniatures, cocktails, mixers. All that stuff. They came to enjoy themselves. Of course, where there's alcohol there's drugs and sex so we were selling condoms. Contracepts [*sic*]. We were selling the wire scrubs. the copper kind. I didn't know why people were asking for those copper wires or copper scrubs. Later I found out that they use it for crack. Light it up. I don't know how they do it. They put some of the copper or something and then they light it up with drugs and they sniff it I guess. Then we sold a lot of Zigzags. You know what Zigzags is right?

JJ: [Shakes head no]

DJ: Zig zags is a thin smoke paper you roll up normally with weed. You roll it up and you just light it up. Joints. That's what Zigzags is, the brand name. But it's actually rolling paper. Thin paper. You put tobacco or weed and you roll it up [laughter]. I remember this doctor – I think he was an anesthesiologist or something – and every single morning, sometimes he came in the afternoon after his shift was over, he bought four bottles of miniature Smirnoff Vodka. One day I asked him, "How come you come here every day and buy the same old shit?" And he said, "This is what I need to go about the day." So I said to myself, "You're a freaking doctor and you're drinking, yet you're dealing with a patient. He shouldn't be in this profession. Period." He chose this way and that's his prerogative, I guess. So my experience working in a liquor store... I wasn't happy working there. That's why I wanted to get out of the liquor store as fast as I could. That's why when I was actually accepted to USC, of course, I had to work and help them out but after I graduated, I immediately got a job because the only reason I wanted to get a job was to get away from the store. Because when I had a job, I had the perfect excuse. I have my job. I have to work. I have to support myself. So they couldn't say anything about it.

JJ: Thank you for sharing that. That was very personal but I appreciate you sharing that. Just kind of adding on to that, I was just curious about as a son of a business owner, and I was curious how you guys fought through the events like the LA riots [Editor's Note: Los Angeles riots, also known as the Rodney King riots and Los Angeles Uprising, were a series of widespread civil disturbances and violent protests in Los Angeles, California, in 1992, triggered by the acquittal of four police officers involved in the beating of African American motorist Rodney King, resulting in widespread looting, arson, and violence], especially for small business owners. Specifically for immigrant business owners, it must've been really difficult so I was wondering how your experience was during those times.

DJ: The LA riots were one of the biggest memories I had working at the time. The liquor store that my parents used to own was a little bit off of Koreatown. It's about a twenty to thirty-minute drive to the East of Koreatown. So we were not really directly impacted by the riots per se because the heart of Koreatown is a majority of the impacted area. When the riot broke out there were people out in the street, looting all these stores and they were setting a fire in the store and all that stuff. The store owners or shop owners wanted to protect their properties by fighting off, right? And we did the same thing even though we were a little bit further distance away from the main happening area. We had to protect ourselves and our property. So what we did was we knew this local gang in the area and we know the leader there. So we paid them a certain money for our protection. So during the riots... I don't know, I forget how many days. During the riots, the local gang was actually protecting our stores. The gangs were guarding our stores actually from outside, controlling it. They literally had guns and we were protected from the inside. We don't own guns at all because we don't believe in violence but we had instead of guns, we had bats. Baseball bats [laughter]. I remember we spent the night, at least a couple of days making sure that our property was protected from the looters or from the riots. But luckily nothing happened.

JJ: That's good to hear.

DJ: Yeah, but my parents have mutual friends who own stores in Koreatown and I've heard a few of my parent's friends were impacted by the riots. They lost their stores or their belongings or assets and their products were stolen, looted, damaged. All that stuff.

JJ: Then do you think through the events like the LA riots that there was a rise in racial tensions within the black, Latino, and white communities? Because I remember you used to talk about how you were friends with a lot of black and Latino communities, playing basketball and stuff like that so through them you picked up a lot of the dialect and slang and stuff like that.

DJ: When I came to the States, I was actually transformed into a survival mode and I had to force myself to learn the language and the only way to learn fast or quickly, or blend in per se was to play sports with the local kids. So we used to live in an apartment, in a two-bedroom apartment in Torrance, and I remember next to our apartment there's this middle school that I used to attend. I go to a basketball court most of the time after school or even on the weekends and there were always kids around, especially the African American kids or the black kids. And unlike the white kids, they treated me like a brother instantly without prejudice, I guess. So I had a fun time playing basketball with the guys. That's when I actually learned some of their language and dialect. I picked up the language pretty fast too because of them. As far as the racial tensions from this incident or series of events, yeah sure. I mean California especially is a melting part of races. You can find any race you can think of in California. There's a whole lot of races you have to deal with. If our life has no racial tensions... There are so many races that have different cultural backgrounds with different languages how can you not have racial tensions? With different beliefs too. On top of that, you have sexual preferences. People from different avenues. They have different beliefs. Different cultural beliefs. There are different philosophies. A different way of living a life. Even the same races have racial tensions because it is divided into different classifications - whether you're high class or low class, whether you're poor or rich. There are always tensions because of our differences.

JJ: Yeah, what you said was completely right. We're nearing the end of the interview so I just wanted to kind of finish off on a positive note. I just wanted to ask you how play and leisure contributed to family bonding. I know you mentioned that there weren't too many instances within your family where you had fun memories but I was wondering if you could, even the little things because that's what matters, recall any of those memories. If you could share that.

DJ: Well, like I said, my fondest memories with my family, my parents and my brother was the time my dad was a gardener. Like I said he went to work early and came home early. He took us, a lot of times, on scenic drives and we didn't go to any of the fancy restaurants or anything but we went to fast food restaurants. With the little money, we were happy because we were together. We shared laughs. We shared our thoughts. We shared daily activities. Just being together, we were happy. Seeing my dad talk about how much he made today, doing his side job, put a big smile on his face and we were happy because he was happy. He's the one we look up to because he's the head of the household. Without him, the family wouldn't exist so whatever made him happy, we were happy. I remember we went to Las Vegas and I was there for the first time and seeing the Flamingo Hotel was amazing. He was showing me around and I was overwhelmed by the grand scheme of things in that area. Seeing the casinos was just like a dream. I remember going to Disneyland for the first time ever in my life and it literally felt like I was in a dream

because I never had a similar experience back in Korea. But regardless of going places, we were happy as a family and even at a typical dinner table. My dad, my brother, and I had a big appetite. I remember we bought a box of mackerel and we were eating the whole box. I remember we bought twenty or thirty pounds of pork belly and we ate everything. We had a big appetite. But we were happy. My mom was a great cook so we had soups and stews, and we had a traditional Korean food that she made. We gathered around dinner time on the weekends just sharing food and enjoying each other. That was the fondest memory I have, more so than going to places.

JJ: One last question. You mentioned that going to Disneyland felt like a dream and on that topic, I was kind of wondering as a Korean immigrant as a kid, did you have any specific dreams personally? Did you wanna become a baseball player or did you wanna be in a rock band or anything like that? Or was your dream just to set up a happy loving family that we have now and just live a happy life that way?

DJ: Well, I don't know if I told you - I think I told you once or maybe twice. When I was little my dream was to become a professional baseball player. I was pretty good at it too. Of course, I was never at a competitive level. It was just in a neighborhood, playing in the dirt. There were no lines. No gears. It's just a bunch of the neighborhood kids gathering around and playing baseball. But it's not really baseball because it's not really a baseball bat. It's just probably like a four-by-four wood stick with a rubber ball. But I remember I really hit well. That's when I kind of dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player someday. I knew it was a long shot but I wanted to try it out. That's why I was so envious whenever I was looking at those kids in school who were on the baseball team. At that time, you need to pay money to get into the team. But after my dad failed a few businesses like I said, we were pretty poor, we didn't have much money. With that fact, I knew I couldn't ask them to support me in sports. So I had to swallow it. I had to hold it in. I never told my parents what my dream was. Then I just gave it up on my own. I know this interview was supposed to have a lot of good memories and positive notes but I know I've been telling you mostly negative and sad memories but that was a part of my life. That actually continued on even after my adult life. My dad passed away and then a tragedy happened after that. My mom met this con man and lost her fortune and all that so that's another sad chapter of my life.

JJ: Well through your hardships, you somehow managed to curate a loving and thriving family that we have now so what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I really appreciate all the hard work that you've put in and that you're continuing to put in now. I really appreciate your time and this was an extremely insightful interview. I feel like through this interview we also got closer as a father and son so I think it was very memorable as well.

DJ: I'm glad we had this type of session together because probably most of the stuff that I've been telling you, you've never actually got to hear from any of our families. I'm hoping that just a little glimpse of my life, telling you a story about myself, Grandma's, the relatives, and some of the people in the past who you never knew existed that through all this sharing I'm just hoping that we would be stronger. That you are blessed to be here. Also, we should be thankful for what we have and just remember that God is watching over our family. He is a good God, so ultimately he's blessing our family. I wanna give a good note that your generation will thrive and flourish because of all of these hardships that your parents and your grandparents went through.

JJ: I think that was a very solid way to end the interview. It's getting pretty late now so I don't want to hold you back. I hope you get a good night's rest.

DJ: Okay.

JJ: I really appreciate your time, Dad.

DJ: Okay.

JJ: We'll call again maybe tomorrow or something like that too.

DJ: Alright. It's late at night - what time is it over there?

JJ: It's almost twelve AM. But I don't feel tired at all, it's fine.

DJ: You need to hit the bed.

JJ: Yeah, I'm going to probably watch an episode of K-drama [Editor's Note: Korean drama] and hit the bed actually.

DJ: Okay.

JJ: Okay thank you, Dad. Bye, have a good one.

DJ: Love you.

JJ: I love you, bye.