

**S:** My name is Sydney Sick. Today is October 3rd, 2025, and I am interviewing Jooyoung Kim through Zoom for the Colby College Korean Oral History Project. Do you agree to grant the college permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

**J:** Yes.

**S:** Awesome. Alright, let's get started. Do you mind introducing yourself? Tell me a little bit about your connection to Korea, where you grew up, stuff like that.

**J:** My name's Jooyoung. Currently a college student at UC [University of California] Berkeley. My parents are both Korean. We grew up in San Jose, but they moved to Ohio first—before I was born—for a few years, and then they moved to Santa Clara, and then we went to San Jose after that.

**S:** Cool. When did your parents come to the U.S. [United States]?

**J:** I believe they moved into the U.S. 20... In 1997 or something, so that's almost 30 years ago now.

**S:** Cool. Do you have siblings?

**J:** Yeah, I have an older sister. And she was born in Ohio, so almost a few years after they arrived.

**S:** Cool. Tell me about your sister, growing up with her and stuff.

**J:** Honestly, growing up with her, it was a pretty large age gap – like, 6 years. We got into a lot of fights. But I think after she got into college she got a lot nicer to me and the relationship got a lot better. Yeah, it's more of a mutual respect now. We get along a lot now, buy each other food and stuff. More like, she begs me for food [laughter]. But, yeah. There was a lot of fighting over the TV, or who would get the rights to whatever back in high school, but yeah.

**S:** What was your first language?

**J:** First language was... I can't really remember, but first language is English I guess, because I grew up here. But in the house, we would only use Korean. So, I guess inside the house would be Korean, but then outside and out and about it would just be English.

**S:** Gotcha. How often do you speak Korean in your daily life now that you're out of the house?

**J:** Honestly, coming into college, I don't use it. I barely use it. I use it if my Korean friends start talking to me in Korean, but even then I don't really use it that often. I only really use it when I go back home. Or when my parents come to visit.

**S:** Gotcha. So then do you still mostly speak Korean with your parents instead of English?

**J:** Yeah, yeah. My mom prefers Korean a lot more.

**S:** What about your sister?

**J:** My sister... Honestly, a mix. We speak something that we call Konglish, so Korean-English mix it in.

**S:** Nice. Did you go to Korean school growing up or anything?

**J:** Yeah, I think I went to Korean school from first grade to 4th grade? 3rd grade? A few years. My mom used to be a Korean school teacher at this place I went to, and my sister went until she was in 9th or 10th grade, and I quit when she quit, because I didn't want to keep going if she didn't keep going [laughter].

**S:** What a win for you. Let's see... So, with this experience, do you think you mostly hung out with other Korean people growing up, or other Asian people, or just a mix? What do you think?

**J:** I think it definitely influenced the people I hung out with. Just cause my mom would make friends with the other Korean moms that she saw during open house or whatever school events were going on so I would naturally get closer to their kid, and it turned out to be a very good time. But then growing up into, like, middle school, high school, I think I hung out with almost anyone, just whoever came into my life. But I think the ones that stuck were definitely the Korean friends, or the more Asian friends.

**S:** Have your parents ever talked about Ohio? I'm assuming it was less of an Asian community than San Jose. Have they ever told you about that? Has that influenced them in their decision to move back and stuff?

**J:** I know they moved to Ohio because a lot of my mom's side was in Ohio already. That's where a bunch of my mom's side of the family... two of my uncles moved there first. But they were talking about how when my sister was born, she was the only Asian person in the entire hospital, or Asian baby in the hospital. They would all come to her and be amazed it was like a museum. All the nurses would be like, "Oh my god, it's an Asian baby!" And they would all go there and go see her. I know my sister recalls saying that she hated Ohio because it was too many white people, there's no Asian people. But I know my uncle stayed in Ohio for

maybe, like 10 years after we left. I don't think my parents ever even considered going back to Ohio, ever, after coming to California. Especially because my sister never wanted to go back. My dad hates Ohio now, but... yeah.

**S: How old was your sister when they moved back to Santa Clara?**

**J:** I think around... 6 or 5.

**S: Okay, so right before you were born?**

**J:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**S: Gotcha. When did you move from Santa Clara, then, to Almaden?**

**J:** When I was in second grade, so that's when I'm like 7 or 8? Around then I think we moved to San Jose.

**S: So then, I don't know, did you notice, any... Obviously you were really young, but looking back, do you think there was maybe a difference in the Asian communities there between where you spent the rest of your life, and then I guess continue that on to Berkeley as well.**

**J:** I think Santa Clara to San Jose was very similar from my experiences. Just because it's not too far. And I feel like the demographic is pretty similar. It's not too far off. So, I think moving there to there was not any huge culture shock. I think coming from San Jose to Berkeley, more of the same. I think Berkeley's also a very Asian population. So, I don't see too big of a difference. Honestly a lot of my friends... Actually, I think coming to Berkeley, I definitely don't have a very wide variety of friends compared to high school. I think in Berkeley it's a lot more just Asian friends I've been meeting. Yeah. Many other people... A lot more Asian people in Berkeley.

**S: Interesting. That's a good, fun fact. Let's see...let's transition to visiting Korea. What would you say your first memory of visiting Korea was?**

**J:** I think my very first memory is probably just meeting my grandparents and going to their apartment. I think I just have a very strong memory of just our entire mom's side of the family being in Korea and just being in that one tiny apartment. Just hanging around. I just remember it being very hot.

**S: How old were you?**

**J:** I think I was in like 4th grade? So... How old am I? Like, 10? 9? 9 or 10? I definitely went before then, too, but I don't really remember too well.

**S:** Right. Where in Korea was that?

**J:** It's a small place in Seoul called Ilsan. It's a small district in there. It's not really the city-city. It's kind of more... Can I say rural? It's a lot more where the senior citizens live. Like, that area. More seniors. A lot more older folks.

**S:** Oh, I see, yeah. Is that where you usually visit when you go with your family?

**J:** Yeah, that's where I usually stay and visit because it's not too far off from other places, too. It's maybe a 30-minute subway train max to the main city. It's not too bad.

**S:** How many times have you visited Korea since then? Or how often do you go, I guess is a better way to...

**J:** I used to go every two summers. But then, starting in high school, it became a lot more random. I think I went... around 6 times I want to say? Yeah. Probably more.

**S:** Have you only gone with your family or have you gone with friends, or other times?

**J:** My senior year, I went with friends, but other than that, it was all with family. I know in like junior year or sophomore year of high school. My mom was already there, so I just flew in there by myself, and just met her there.

**S:** How was that, traveling by yourself so far?

**J:** I slept through the entire 13-hour plane ride [laughter]. And I think that people sitting next to me were very worried that I was dead or something, because they kept poking me, trying to wake me up [laughter]. But...

**S:** Oh, no—

**J:** But yeah. I thought that—

**S:** —You made it!

**J:** —I did make it. I don't know, I didn't even know I could do that. I just slept through the entire plane ride, and it was actually very nice. Oh, and then when I had to take the taxi to my grandma's place, my mom gave me the address to where I had to go, but then my Wi-Fi wasn't working, and I was outside the airport already. So, I was like, "Uh-oh." I kind of guessed... And it kind of worked out. I made it.

**S:** All right. Yeah. Do you feel comfortable, I guess, navigating in the place where your grandparents are from?

**J:** Yeah, I think I've been there enough to where I kind of know where everything's at. And they have it pretty well set up, so even people that don't speak Korean too well can kind of figure their way out [inaudible].

**S:** Would you say you're one of those people that doesn't speak Korean as well, or do you think you're more proficient when you're there and stuff.

**J:** I think I definitely am an average Korean-American speaker. If that makes sense. And then... Wait, what was the other question? Sorry.

**S:** Yeah, that was just the question—or how comfortable are you using your Korean in Korea?

**J:** Mm, mm. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**S:** I guess, do you feel uncomfortable about it because you're speaking with—people who...

**J:** I definitely speak a lot slower in Korea. And I respond a little slower, just because they speak very fast there. But I think, as I kind of stay there—the longer I stay in Korea, the more I get used to it, and the more—I honestly get better at Korean a lot faster when I'm in Korea. And then I just get a lot worse when I come back home. [laughter]

**S:** [inaudible] ...Do you feel like when you're in Korea, people can kind of recognize that you're Korean American, or do you think they just assume you're Korean, or [inaudible] American.

**J:** I want to say in my experience, a few of them definitely know on sight just that I'm not born from Korea, just because probably what I wear is not very Korean fashion. But some people definitely are [clears throat] they can't tell until I speak. Because when I speak, it's a big tell. I don't have the exact Korean accent that most people would have, like the tones. But I know when I went to a barber, they were immediately like, "Where are you from? Not Korea, right?" And I was like, "yeah, I'm from California" [laughter]. They're like, "Yeah, that's cool."

**S:** How was the barber able to tell? Was it something about your hair? Or just...

**J:** I think it's just... I actually don't know. I think it's probably half fashion and half just... I think it's mostly fashion. Also, a lot of people in Korea don't really pierce their ears, so I feel like that's also a big one. Yeah.

**S:** That makes sense. Tell me more about when you went to visit Korea with your friends, like how was that different from visiting with your family? Did you also go to Seoul, or did you go other places with them?

**J:** Yeah, so we stayed in a college town called Hongdae. It's one the most touristy places, I think, right now. It's definitely an experience. It was a lot more hectic. It was just 11 dudes in an Airbnb in Korea [laughter]. We had two other Korean people in our group. But one of them can't really speak Korean, and the other one didn't really want to do anything. He was there for the vibes, but then [clears throat] I planned basically everything. It was definitely chaotic. It was fun, though. But...honestly... they kind of just followed me around, and I would just [laughter] play Follow the Leader. They would just follow me around the whole day. Some of them actually went on their own, and—traveled—explored, so I think they also had a good time. Yeah.

**S:** Didn't travel in a pack of 11 at all times?

**J:** Yeah. Originally, the plan was to split half and half, because we had two good Korean speakers, but then everyone decided, let's just go as one group, and we were like, "okay." And honestly, we've got a lot of side-eyes from the subway, or in a mall or something. Just because we had two really tall Indian people in our group, and you don't see that very often in Korea.

Especially yeah, taller people—and they're Indian. We got a lot of looks. [laughter] Yeah.

**S:** Yeah. Did anybody say anything to you, or just the looks?

**J:** No one said anything, I think. It was just a lot of people just would stare a lot longer at us than usual. Yeah.

**S:** [inaudible] Alright, here's kind of a...more... I guess a harder question. When I was doing background research for this, I found a paper that was talking about second generation Korean-Americans, and how they identify and stuff like that, and they sent out a survey to a bunch of different Korean-Americans and asked them. If they would say they are Korean, American, or Korean-American, like, primarily. So, I was just wondering what your answer to that would be.

**J:** I think I would identify myself as, like a Korean-American. Just because I think my parents tried really hard to integrate me more into Korean culture. But obviously then being in America for 20 years is gonna make me American. But I think my parents definitely really tried hard to sprinkle in some Korean here and there. Especially—they only speak Korean to me, especially my mom. She refuses to speak English to me. Because she can't speak English very well. And then they'd always do all the Korean culture stuff, so when family friends would come over, we'd play Korean games and all that. And I think we're pretty well connected with our

Korean family that stayed in Korea. So, we definitely learn a lot from there, too. I think a mix of both is what I would go with.

**S: Cool. What aspects of Korean culture growing up that your parents gave you were your favorite, or are most important to you?**

**J:** I think my favorite was definitely the food. I think my parent's cooking was really important growing up. The types of food we ate. I think also the music. My sister would listen to almost Korean music religiously. And she would have control over the aux when we were growing up, so it would always just be Korean music. It was lowkey—it was fire. I liked it. Other than that, we learned a lot from Korean school, just, like culture-wise. This is like everyone's Korean, right? So, it would be just kind of just... everyone being together. What else is there... Yeah, I think also just living in San Jose, there's a lot of other Korean people, and we had a really close, like, family friend. So, we would always do Korean-style dinners, or we do a Korean-style New Year's celebration that would just be all Korean food, and be a potluck-type thing. Yeah, I think growing up, I never actually really had a purely American Thanksgiving, either. I think it would always be some type of fusion, which I guess also kind of symbolizes our mixed heritage, I guess. But yeah. [laughter]

**S: Yeah. Cool. Do you have a favorite dish that your mom would make?**

**J:** I think my favorite food growing up was definitely *Kimchi-Jjigae* (Kimchi stew). So, kimchi stew. That was definitely a fan favorite growing up. I feel like the types of marinated meat was also very big when I was growing up. I loved that. There's also oxtail soup that's really good—I really enjoyed...a lot of food. Yeah.

**S: Wait, there was one other... oh, yeah, so your grandparents live in Korea? What other family do you have living in Korea?**

**J:** So, my mom's side: grandparents live in Korea, my aunt still lives in Korea. And then my entire dad's side, besides one aunt, lives in Korea. So, a lot of Korean family. And I know a few of my uncles who have moved to Ohio. Another in Michigan. They're planning on moving back to Korea after they retire.

**S: Oh, interesting.**

**J:** Yeah.

**S: Cool, so, because the place in Seoul that you visited was your grandparents on your mom's side, right? Did you ever visit your dad's family?**

**J:** So we go to our dad's side. But definitely not as long as our mom's side, just because there's more family on our mom's side staying in that area. But we go to our dad's side, but they live in a very, very rural area outside of Seoul. It's like, I want to say a 2-hour bus drive away from Seoul. So, we'd go there occasionally, but me and my sister didn't really enjoy being there, because there's really nothing to do. Because they're just the apartment complex, and then it's, like, nothing much. And then my dad's side uncle, his little brother used to live with our grandparents. So we'd have fun with their kids, because they were, like 3 or 4, so we kind of just messed with them, and had fun with them. But then, after they moved out, there was really nothing else to do. And our grandparents also work as pharmacists still, so they're still busy.

So we'd kind of just be left alone in the apartment, and we'd just be like, "what are we doing here?" [laughter]

**S:** All right...let's see... I think that kind of might have been all of the questions that I had—unless... Do you have anything else that you want to bring up? Is there anything that I missed with the questions that you think would be important to talk about?

**J:** I'm trying to think... I guess there's also—Kind of cool when I visited Korea. I would go during our summer break, right? So, American summer break. In Korea they're not in break during that time. So all the kids are in school. So my mom would take me to a zoo. Whenever we'd see another kid, it'd always be a kid from somewhere else, and I would make friends with that one kid. I remember one time we went to a zoo, and there was like one other kid at the zoo. It was a

pretty big zoo, too, but we somehow intersect each other at the entrance, and this kid was from Argentina, I think? Yeah, I was like, damn, I didn't know there were Korean people in Argentina. [inaudible] there's a pretty decent population there, when they were saying.

**S:** Oh, really?

**J:** Yeah, I didn't know that, and he was really cool. We definitely became friends after that, but it was at the age where none of us had phones so we can stay in contact at all? But that was definitely a really cool memory. There'll be other times where I met Korean people from East Coast, so, like, Boston. That was cool. I know I had a family, or a close friend from elementary school who moved to Korea in like middle school, so I would hang out with her a few times. Yeah, I think the really good part of Korea is you can move easily around the city really well. There's no traffic or anything, you just literally walk, or subway, or bus. It's pretty cheap. And that's my favorite thing about Korea is everything is so easily accessible. Let's see... Is there anything else? I don't think I have anything on the top of my head anymore.

**S:** Do you still keep in touch with any of the people that you met, or was it all when you didn't have phones?

**J:** I know a few of my friends, if we could keep in touch, we did. So, with one of my friends from Korea—she goes to an international school in Korea, and then she goes to [the University of] Chicago now. But we're friends on BeReal, so we always see each other's BeReals. Yeah, honestly if I'm in Korea, and I just know some of my other friends are in Korea from America, we'll just be like, "oh, let's hang out", and it'd be really easy to just meet up for a little bit.

**S:** Yeah, so it's like a real kind of community of having that connection to Korea and stuff, makes it easy to make friends?

**J:** Mm-hmm, definitely. And I think there's just a lot more to do there, too. Yeah, just life-wise...you can just wander around, and you can find something to do. Everything's so close together. Compared to, here, where it's just, like you have to drive, like, 20 minutes to each different spot. Like, even figuring out where you want to go. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

**S:** And the public transportation, it's just... not great.

**J:** It's not great. It's not amazing.

**S:** What about, like, size-wise, though? Is it... Do you think that it's, like—I have no idea, actually, but, how big the public transport systems are over there compared to the Bay Area and stuff.

**J:** I think you could kind of compare it to, like, New York Subway, kind of? Yeah, but then it's just, kind of not as busy, just because it's a little bit more spread out for Korea. But there's a lot of methods, like people subway, the buses are really nice...taxi, they bike. Everything's not too far. I think the subway station is very comparable to New York, but cleaner. Yeah.

**S:** Yeah. Can you rent bikes over there? Or, have you ever done that?

**J:** I've never done it, but I feel like you can. I think you can. I think I've seen things like that. Yeah.

**S:** Just curious, because I feel like in a lot of places where biking is a main means of transportation, there usually are bike rentals and stuff.

**J:** Yeah. Some rental. I think... I think there definitely are. I think I remember seeing a few. I just never have.

**S:** All right, well... Thank you so much for taking the time to...

**J:** ...Of course, of course.

**S:** Do this. Definitely learned a lot about you and your background with Korea. I think that is all that I have to do on my end. Thanks.

**J:** Yeah, thank you for having me.