

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH JIMMY LEE**

An Oral History Conducted by Nessa Concepcion, Kristel Peralta, and  
Stefani Evans

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE

“...the point I was trying to make about the Asian culture in Las Vegas is that it has evolved dramatically to where I think it’s a huge part of the culture in Las Vegas ....”

Financial advisor Jimmy Lee immigrated to the United States when he was six years old. Lee’s parents worked in the music industry in South Korea and Vietnam and traveled and entertained troops during Vietnam and Korean wars. The parents, wanting a good education for their sons, arrived in Las Vegas via Durham, North Carolina. Lee attended Lewis Rowe, Doris French, and Jo Mackey elementary schools, Woodbury Junior High School, and Chaparral High School before enrolling at UNLV. He is actively involved in the community, sponsoring the entrepreneurship program at Faith Lutheran High School, participating in the Asian Chamber of Commerce, serving on the Board of Directors of the Runnin’ Rebels Club, and donating time on the executive committee to the Shriner’s Children’s Open golf tournament.

Lee stays connected to Korean tradition and culture in several ways, through its food, especially enjoying his mother’s Spicy Crab Stew. He also talks about frequenting Korean and Asian markets and restaurants, which have grown significantly since his childhood. Lee contrasts how hard his parent's life was in South Korea—where they grew up and survived World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War—to growing up in the United States. Lee credits his hard-working Korean relatives with his entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic.

Lee attributes his success to the many friendships, mentors, and coaches who have allowed him to build his financial advisory company, The Wealth Consulting Group; he is proud his firm has been recognized with an industry award for diversity and inclusion, especially for advancing the careers of women in a field dominated by white males. He marvels at the “super diverse” growth of Las Vegas, crediting the growth and development of Las Vegas’s Korean community to people such as the founding family of Lee’s Liquors, Randy Char, and The Kim Sisters, who put Las Vegas on the map for Koreans and Korean Americans. He discusses the excellent business climate in Las Vegas to a small-town feel that connects longstanding residents.

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May 25th, 2021  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Nessa Concepcion

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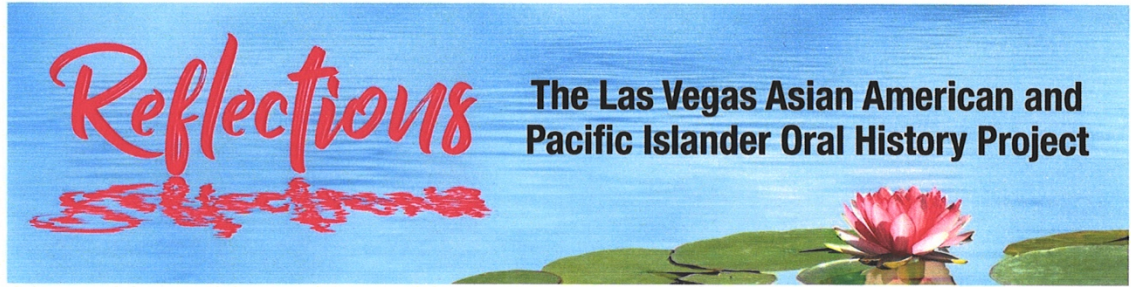
Lee talks about family, his parents, and their work in South Korea’s music industry; reasons for immigrating to the United States via North Carolina, and their decision to settle in Las Vegas. He recalls public schooling in Las Vegas, elementary through UNLV, and the Boys and Girls Club. He describes the growth of Las Vegas and its Korean community, real estate, hotels, markets, and restaurants. He credits The Kim Sisters and their entertainment act with bringing Koreans to Las Vegas.....1–8

He relates his community involvement in WCG Academy for Business and Entrepreneurship at Faith Lutheran High School; The Runnin’ Rebel club, and the Shriner’s Children’s Open. He shares that to “locals,” Las Vegas is still a small town where everyone knows one another. He mentions his daughter’s career path, his interest in golf, and his dream to produce movies. He keeps connected to Korean traditions and culture through Las Vegas’s diverse Asian markets and restaurants. Lee also talks about languages, the Asian Chamber of Commerce, and the growth of the local Filipino, Chinese, Thai, Japanese, and Vietnamese communities.....9–17

Lee addresses discrimination and anti-Asian sentiment, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic; he also talks about the role of social media and politics on international perceptions of the U.S. He compares life in the U.S. to his parents’ lives in Korea during World War II and during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He believes he inherited his entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic from his hard-working Korean relatives and discusses immigration, equality, marriage, education, and diversity in business. Lee talks about The Wealth Consulting Group and its approach to gender equity. Lee talks about the Clark County School District’s desegregation plan, busing, and attending Jo Mackey Sixth Grade Center.....18–28

He talks about his wife and places to vacation and play golf. Lee reflects on his success and names the influential friends, financial advisors, coaches, and mentors who opened doors for him. Lee talks about his family in Korea and his brother in San Diego and reflects on how learning English and “becoming Americanized” helped them succeed.....24–32

Lee discusses the importance of capturing Asian cultural history in Las Vegas, including figures like the founding family of Lee’s Liquors, The Kim Sisters, and Randy Char. He touches on real estate development and local business diversity, concluding with a story about The Kim Sisters and a client that highlights Lee’s belief in God.....33–39



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**Good afternoon. This is Nessa Concepcion, and today is May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021. We're here today with Jimmy Lee, Kristel Peralta, and Stefani Evans.**

**Jimmy Lee, if you could please spell out your first and last name.**

It's J-I-M-M-Y, L-E-E.

**First, if we could speak just a bit about your family background as far back as you can go, even if it's your grandparents.**

I didn't know my grandparents very well. I, of course, met them when I was born in Seoul, South Korea, in 1970. When I was six years old, we moved. Our family—my mother and father and my brother and I—moved from Seoul to Las Vegas because they had some friends that were working here. I really remember my grandmother on my mother's side a little bit just from her babysitting and being at her house when I was a young child. And then I remember I've had experiences with my father's mother and my father's sister because we've gone back to Korea a couple of times since and saw her one time when we went back. That's my memory of them a little bit.

My parents and I and my brother moved here, like I said, when I was six years old when I entered kindergarten. I went to high school here, grade school, and high school. I went to UNLV and graduated from UNLV in 1994. Then I immediately got into this industry [financial advising], which is the only industry I've ever been in since I got out of college.

**You grew up in Vegas.**

I did.

**Could we go back? What schools did you go to?**

I started...my first school was Lewis E. Rowe Elementary; that's where I did my kindergarten through second grade, and then I went to Doris French Elementary from third grade to fifth

grade. Then I went to Jo Mackey [Sixth Grade Center] in sixth grade, and that was interesting because that was at a time when they were trying to do integration. We were bussed from the part of town that I lived into a different part of town, and that was interesting. In seventh and eighth grade, I went to Woodbury Junior High School, which is right where I lived. Woodbury Junior High School is right near where I lived and grew up. Then I went to Chaparral High School, and then after that, I went to UNLV.

**What do you remember Vegas being like? You seem to have seen it throughout the years growing up here.**

Obviously, I've seen it grow a lot. I remember when we moved. Sometime after graduating high school and during the time I was in college, we moved from where we grew up, which was considered East Las Vegas; Sandhill and Harmon were the major cross streets. You know Harmon from UNLV, but Sandhill would be the street east of Pecos. I grew up there. Then we moved to the Eastern and Warm Springs area, which nothing was out there at that time. That was probably the early '90s, and it was just developing, so we were sort of on the outskirts of town at that time. Even though there were some communities further south, it wasn't very developed. I've seen the real estate and the community expand from a much smaller population to where we're at today with lots of different things going on. Yes, I remember seeing lots of different casinos and hotels being blown up over the years and new ones going up, and all the tourism and expanding even bigger than it was before; all these people migrating from other parts of the United States to Las Vegas to live.

**Could you also speak about your parents, like what they were doing for work?**

Yes. Back in Korea, my mother was a pretty famous singer. She had a band called the Arirang Sisters. That's A-R-I-R-A-N-G, Sisters. It was always her, and she always had a sidekick, and



several throughout her career of singing. Most people that are Korean that are over sixty years old would know who my mom is if they lived in Seoul. I run into people all the time that are retirement age. If it comes up, I'll ask them if they've ever heard of that band, and they'll always say, "Oh, of course," because back then, she was one of the first people on TV, doing TV commercials, those types of things.

**That's a big deal.**

Yes. Anyway, she did that. My father was like a production person, so he produced entertainment, and that's kind of how they met. That's the industry that they were in. The reason why I've ended up here [Las Vegas] is that some friends of theirs from Korea, they were famous—famous—the most famous, I think—musical band at that time, The Kim Sisters. [They] had a show on the Strip. The Kim Sisters are friends of our family. One of the Kim Sisters was one of my parent's best friends and her husband. We stayed with them for a few weeks when we first moved here, in their house, and then we found our own place. I think they convinced my parents that Las Vegas was a great place to go for entertainers because there were a lot of casino jobs. Even though my mother and father never worked in the entertainment industry here...they worked in the casinos. After that, when they got to Las Vegas, they worked in the casinos as dealers primarily—their whole career—until they both retired.

**That's insane.**

Yes. Isn't that funny?

**Yes. Can you speak about a bit about that? Being Asian and producing, was it as diverse?**

For them? Well, I think [it was] for them because they traveled. My mom had an opportunity to work in Vietnam during the war. She's been on the same stage as Bob Hope, singing. She was hired to entertain both the Korean troops, as well as American troops, and my dad was producing

a lot of shows. They traveled to Vietnam; they both flew on bombers before, going back and forth from Seoul to Vietnam. They went to Hong Kong to go shopping. They were both earning a lot of money at that age. I think that was probably the height of their financial life during those days. But my father was always attracted to coming to the United States because he had met a lot of people in the military and business people in Korea and Vietnam during those times. So, he really wanted to become an American and wanted to move here. They wanted to educate my brother and me here in the United States; it was a big goal of theirs. When that opportunity came...my aunt came here first. She was married to an American man and was living in Durham, North Carolina because he was working at Duke at the time, her husband. She is the one that sponsored us in the '70s. That's what happened.

**Can you speak about that sponsorship and that process of migrating, if you remember?**

I've asked them about it a little bit, but somebody had to sponsor you, I think. I haven't researched it too much. But I do remember that when my parents became citizens, I was there with my brother in this place here in Las Vegas, and I remember that process a little bit as a young child. But because they were citizens and we were younger, we were able to become citizens. It was a lot easier back then. They were trying to promote immigration more in certain ways than maybe we experience today. But obviously, the United States was a lot smaller back then, so...yes, I don't think it was quite as difficult, but that's something that we experienced.

**Was Vegas the first stop?**

We stopped in North Carolina, in Durham, and we stayed with my aunt for a little bit, and then we moved to Las Vegas and lived with my parents' friends for a week or two until we found our own place to live. Virtually it was the first stop except for visiting just a little bit with family and friends.

**What is your fondest memory as a teen?**

I thought until I had a car that, I had a very stress-free life; that I had no responsibilities, and I could just play, pretty much. I remember I really did enjoy playing sports and just playing sports in the streets and the playground with my friends. I think those are probably my fondest memories, playing sports on the streets.

**What kind of sports did you do?**

I played football and basketball. We played stickball. I also have a supportive feeling about the Boys and Girls Club because there was one at the junior high school that I went to, Woodbury Junior High School. I remember I used to go there a lot during the summer. When school was out, I would go there and pretty much spend all day. I played sports in there all day long and learned how to play some sports in there, so that was fun, too.

**Now we can't really not talk about your career. How did you become the CEO of Wealth Consulting Group?**

When I was in college trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my career, I knew I wanted to do something that was related to money and investing. At that time, I didn't know exactly what financial advisors did or what [they] do. At that time, the terminology was "stockbroker"; that's what they called a lot of people that were investing money for people. It was either that or to go into investment banking, which I knew a little bit about, and that was working more in the corporate world. I remember that my father had met this Korean man who worked for Merrill Lynch in New York as an investment banker, and I had a phone conversation with him. My father was able to get his phone number, and I called him; he took my call. We had a conversation, and he said that I had to go get my MBA, "And then you get a job on Wall Street, and you work about a hundred hours a week, and you're not paid that much money, and then if

you're lucky and your bosses like you, then you can be successful like me someday." I was telling him what my other thoughts were because I also had met someone that still is an acquaintance of mine in Las Vegas, who was a very successful financial advisor back then. One of the jobs I had [I] worked at a golf course in the bag room cleaning the golf clubs at a private country club here in town because I grew up playing golf. That's a funny story, too; I'll get into it. But that gentleman was a very successful financial advisor, and I think he liked me, and I asked him lots of questions about the business. He got me interested and helped me know more about what financial advisors actually did a little bit. Then I did an internship in college with a financial advisor at a big firm. That's kind of how I got into it.

My first job was interesting. My first job in this industry, I was self-employed, but I didn't know it. The firm that I was interning at, and the gentleman from the golf course I told you about, said that he would hire me at his firm and to be on his team, but they didn't hire new trainees until March. I graduated in the summer of '94. While I still had some part-time jobs—I was working at the golf course, and I was also a runner at an ad agency—I wanted to work; I wanted to start my career. I was still interning for a financial advisor that worked at the same firm called Dane Bosworth at the time—that's the gentleman that I knew—who worked at the same company. I was interning for a different financial advisor for credits, for summer credits to graduate, and all that. While I was doing that, in the same office building on the second floor, upstairs, one of my college buddies, Rob, came downstairs with a sales manager and recruited me and said, "Hey look, why don't you get licensed with us, and if you want to go work with Ken," that was the guy's name, "later on, you can do [that]. But in the meanwhile, before they hire you, you can get trained and get licensed and all that stuff." And I said, "Fantastic. I'll do it." While I got licensed and did all the work that I had to do to get ready to be a financial

advisor, the first month of earning some money was a great financial month for me, more money than I had ever seen, and so I never looked back. That's how I got into it.

**Wow. Just odd-end jobs and pushing through, meeting the right people.**

Yes, I had a lot of odd-end jobs and just different things because I always liked to have my own money and worked, so I always worked part-time jobs or whatever. I'm proud of that.

**You said you got trained with them and eventually got hired by the other guy, but what led to the Wealth Consulting Group?**

What I didn't know, which is interesting, you guys...my industry is interesting because things have changed a lot, but it's not easy to get a job in my industry in certain types of firms. Back in those days, it's still the same in some ways, but back in those days, companies like Merrill Lynch or UBS or Morgan Stanley—some of those had different names back then—it was very difficult to get jobs because they would pay a salary to somebody, not a big salary. But it's a risk for them to train them and to license them, so it wasn't really easy to get that type of a job. They were making a real big commitment. Usually, if you're a young person and you don't have any experience in sales, or you don't know people that are wealthy, they typically don't want to hire somebody out of college. Whereas another sector of our industry, for example, the first company I started with is called MassMutual Financial Group; they're a great company. But those companies will hire people because... if they hire you, they'll give you a little bit of a subsidy, but not nearly as much money as the Merrill Lynches would back in the day, still just the same, but you're basically on commission. If you can't bring in new clients and sell stuff, and bring in assets, you're not making anything anyway. The retention rate is not very good because most people that are younger don't typically succeed that way.

I was just fortunate that I had the right circumstances and the people around me to help me have a good first year and then just not look back. I was very ambitious, too. That's how I started. But in that environment, I was self-employed. That's the other thing that they do, is while they give you some quasi-benefits and so forth—like I got health insurance as long as I did enough production and there were retirement plans and all that stuff—we had to continue to qualify for it every quarter. You have to keep making commissions and earning money in order to continue the benefits, and that's how that works, but they're much more willing to hire you because they're not going to invest as much upfront financially. That's how it kind of works. I started like that.

Our industry has evolved. Nowadays, when somebody graduates college, a firm like ours would hire them on salary, because I think that's the right way to do it. Unless they're just one out of a hundred and they're extremely ambitious—and maybe they have contacts—even then, when you're young like that, you don't really know what you're doing yet. Even if you have licenses...you still need to be part of a team, in my opinion.

I guess what I'm saying to you is even back then, I was independent and self-employed. I've been self-employed my entire career. Within a few years, I ended up with my own DBA (doing business as), which was a different DBA from the company [Wealth Consulting Group]. Then at some point, I don't know how many years later, I started the Wealth Consulting Group. That's what I call my practice. I also became a manager in that branch, so I was in charge of compliance, overseeing sales of investment products, and training people. I got into that just a couple of years into the business. I was a financial advisor, but I was also a manager and what they call a Registered Principal.

**You're really involved in the community now. What other services are you involved in?**

I wouldn't say that I'm really involved. There are a few things I wrote down. But I am proud of helping to fund what we call the WCG Academy for Business and Entrepreneurship at Faith Lutheran High School. Are you guys familiar with that high school?

**Yes.**

They have different academies. Did you guys grow up here?

**Yes, I did.**

Where did you guys go to high school?

**I went to Southwest.**

**KP: I went to Las Vegas Academy.**

Did you grow up here, Stefani?

**SE: I did not, but I've been here since 1980, so less than you.**

My daughter—who just graduated college, by the way, in New York from Parsons—went to Faith Lutheran. Then one of my clients who I love, Robin, became their business development director. He's a fundraiser for the school. He came up with an idea. Anyway, they wanted to start an entrepreneurship academy. At that time, they told me...we believe it is the first high school that officially started a program to become an entrepreneur. He asked me if I wanted to help sponsor that. I am passionate about that, and so I did. That's what we have over there. I'm passionate about that school, that program, and the opportunity for young people to learn business skills and what being an entrepreneur means. Las Vegas and Nevada are great places to own your own business. There are a lot of reasons why, but we're a great place to be a small business owner. The corporate tax structure is good, with a lot of different things. I think for people that work hard and are honest, and are doing the right things, can do well here because

there have been a lot of opportunities to be in different types of businesses here. That's something I'm involved in.

Since I went to UNLV and...I graduated (from) UNLV. During the time that I was a student—and I loved basketball—we won the National Championship. In 1990, we won the National Championship! I used to go to the games and got addicted to the games. Anyway, now I'm on the Runnin' Rebel Club as a board member. It's a group of people that are passionate about UNLV basketball and supporting that program, helping to raise funds, and making decisions to help the student-athletes and those kinds of things. I'm involved with that.

Then also I grew up playing golf. My parents got me into golf as a young child, and I played high school golf, and I played high school basketball, and football, but I've always played golf. Going back to that story where I had a part-time job, the gentleman that ran the Southern Nevada Junior Golf Association, Joe Kelly, who is a great Las Vegas—he's still here, and he's a client and a great friend—he hired me at the country club that he was in charge of. It was called Sunrise Country Club at the time. It's a private country club. I had met him through junior golf, and his son played, and we were in the same class. He played at a different school, Valley, and we played a lot of golf against each other, so I knew Joe from that, too. Then he gave me the opportunity to have a cool job working at a golf course. That's how I met Ken, the member. There are lots of things like that.

I'm also involved with the Shriner's, the professional golf tournament we have here for men. It's called Shriner's Children's Open. I'm on the executive committee there for that tournament. One of my friends who is involved in it asked me to participate. That's a fun group of people in town, too.



Those are the kinds of things I'm involved in with the community, but I wouldn't call that a lot.

**Your story has made me think about how Vegas is a big city but also a very small city.**

It is.

**Have there been people from your childhood that you still keep in contact with now?**

Sure. Las Vegas, if you talk to people that have been around here a lot—are your parents from here? Were you guys born here?

**I was born here, but my parents aren't from here, no.**

**KP: I was not born here.**

How long have you lived here?

**KP: I've lived here for eighteen years now.**

You both have lived here for a long time. I would say that if you've been around here a long time, Vegas still is a small town in the sense that there are groups of people in the business community that all know each other from those times. I know some of those people, and I know a lot of the names, and some of them are very successful in business. They run casinos or other businesses here that service the community or do whatever, so it's a small town in that sense. You can always call somebody that knows somebody from that world, and then their children that might be older now doing business themselves or other things like that. But we've had a lot of people move in over the years that I've seen. I think it's still considered a small town because a lot of those people come here for a little while, and then they leave. But people that really grew up here and have roots here, they always have their primary home here. They might have second residences maybe and go to other places, but they always call this home. Since my business is

headquartered here, I think I'll always have this as my residence. You never know. But I think that's the case for a lot of Las Vegans.

**Is that why you stay in Vegas, too?**

It's a great business culture and climate. Nevada has no state income taxes. Like I said, it's a great place to run a small business. Is that what attracts me? My parents still live here, so that's part of it, although I would like to have them move closer to my brother and spend the rest of their years [there] because they're older. My brother lives in San Diego, in Carlsbad. Have you guys ever been there?

**No.**

San Diego is amazing, and the weather is amazing; it's super hot here. He's there with his wife and their two kids. Anyway, my parents are here, also, and I have many friends here and so forth. I don't know. I don't think anybody can really predict the future, but my current plans are to have this as my home base. I like to travel, so I get around a lot.

**You mentioned your daughter earlier. Is she also interested in business like you?**

No. She's a creative person, so she has no interest in my industry. I would say that she has a business mind, but she's a creative person. She is into art and creative stuff. She went to Parsons, which is a great school in New York, in the city, and she's trying to get a job right now. She is probably going through the same...She hasn't been in contact with me a lot since she graduated last week, and even before, and she told me she put in a lot of applications. I imagine she's going through a lot of anxiety and feeling pressure that I want her to get a job, or we want her to get a job. We're supposed to talk today, so I'm going to call her later on and see if she picks up the phone. But she's trying to get a job there, so I think she's going to work in the city. There are a

lot of great opportunities for creative people in places like New York, so hopefully, she'll end up with something that is a good job for her to start her career.

**You mentioned you liked golf and basketball. Are there other hobbies that you do, like creative passion?**

I always thought that I'd want to be in the movie industry after I got past fifty, and I'm fifty now, so it's good timing. I bought a script once that involved Al Pacino, so I thought there was an opportunity there, and I met him. But I'm not sure anymore if that's really the direction I want to go. But, yes, I do have other interests that I'm not sure I'll pursue outside of my business now, but that sounds fun. I don't want to lose money in that industry; I know most people that experiment with stuff like that don't necessarily always make money. But if I were to try to do that, it would be to try to earn a profit on money invested in those projects as a producer, but I'm not sure if I'll do that anymore. That's something I used to say that I want to do. It's still in the back of my head, but yes, I'm not sure.

**Las Vegas is super diverse, and you've said how it's grown. Even the casinos didn't used to be here. Now there's a lot more restaurants and stuff like that. Do you like eating Asian foods?**

Oh yes. Casinos have always been here, as far as my experience, because they were around, and that's what helped Las Vegas become what it is long before my time. But my mom is an amazing Korean cook, so I grew up eating Korean food every day. Ever since I moved out of their house, I typically don't go a week without eating Korean food at least once. Either I'll try to go hang out with them and go over there, which is the best meal, or I love going to some local places that I go to for Korean food and other ethnic foods. Because Korean food has a lot of spice in it and lots

of flavor, I typically eat and enjoy food that has lots of flavor, so I'll try all kinds of different stuff.

**What kind of foods does your mom make?**

My mom makes everything Korean. With every meal is some sort of soup, even if it's summertime, with some sort of a protein, and then there will be tons of sides. Have you guys ever eaten Korean food? —Of course—I love all that stuff.

**Do you have a favorite?**

Of type of Korean food?

**Yes.**

My mom's spicy crab. She does a spicy crab dish that's not typical in a restaurant. She does these crab claws in a spicy stew that's off the chart, so I love that. I would call that my favorite.

**Do you cook it yourself, or have tried to?**

I have done that before, and it tasted okay. I just don't do it regularly. But I need to learn more recipes of hers.

**Do you find yourself still practicing Korean culture and traditions like that?**

It's funny because I was reading an article on a plane ride back from somebody who was in the yoga industry. She was talking about how she grew up in the United States. She's an Indian from India, not American Indian. She was talking about how when she moved here and she was growing up, she didn't want to be Indian because of the racism, or what you want to call racism, just discrimination, whatever it was at the time. Then, later on, she said, as she got older, she embraced wanting to be more Indian and wanting to know more about her culture.

I think since I grew up here, at the beginning of my schooling age and I was too young to remember a lot of stuff before then, I remember getting teased and stuff like that, so because of

that, I remember I wanted to be American as soon as I could. It's funny...I remember that my handwriting used to be really good. It looked exactly like the strip of letters on the walls in elementary school because I wanted to be really good at it. It's unfortunate—I was six—I knew Korean, but my parents were also trying to learn more English; my brother is fluent in Korean, but I'm not. I can understand some of the stuff and speak a little bit of Korean, but I always felt like I never lost the culture because we always ate Korean food. I don't know. I always went to Korean restaurants. I didn't hang out with Korean people necessarily, but I always went to Korean restaurants and saw Korean people, Korean supermarkets in town, and stuff like that. In fact, one friend of my parents owned a Korean supermarket, so we went there every week. I went with them to Commercial Center down on Maryland and Sahara, where all the original Korean restaurants and everything were.

**You mentioned you are involved in Korean culture and stuff like that. You didn't see a lot of Koreans growing up? Or it would just be in those centers?**

I didn't seek it; I think most people in Las Vegas during those times, if they were in the Korean community, it was because they attended Korean church. My mom is a big-time Christian, and I remember her going to church, and we went to church with her—Korean church—but she said that the Korean ladies just gossiped way too much about each other, and she didn't like it. My mom, I always watched her pray at home before she went to work every night, and I'm Christian. Because I don't think we were in the church setting, I didn't see a lot of Korean people that way. I just hung out with people I went to school with and played sports with pretty much. But I always saw Korean people because I went to Korean restaurants all the time, and my parents had Korean friends that they knew. A lot of their friends they knew from Korea, but they also lived in Las Vegas.

**Now I want to ask about the model minority myth.**

The what?

**The model minority myth. Are you familiar with that?**

The model minority myth? I'm not familiar with that...I'm not familiar with that at all.

**Basically, it just has to do with how people perceive Asians and how they will group them together and not understand the diversity and complexities in the subgroups. I was just wondering if you've ever been teased about that; if that's ever affected you in your career.**

Back growing up, I can remember getting teased, just stupid jokes. Of course, it bothers you a little bit, but it never really affected me. If anything, it just gave me more drive. It's usually just about stupid stuff that kids do anyway today. I just think that it's normal to tease people that are not like you or to make fun. Again, I'm sure that somebody who is not Korean or Asian went and lived there, that sometimes they might tease them about whatever. To me, I just understand it, and I'm aware of that, so that never really bothered me that much. As far as getting grouped into the Asian culture, Asia is so big, and there are so many different countries and different cultures that are so different, and so, yes, I guess. I would say even Indians—I've talked about Indians—they're Asian, but they don't seem like what seems as Asian, which is more like Chinese, Japanese, Korean maybe, Thai, Vietnamese. I don't know. But I remember those three big categories people would talk about a lot: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Now we have a lot more: Thai, Vietnamese, and Filipino. In Las Vegas, I remember being a part of the Asian Chamber of Commerce because one of my friends and clients was the director of it for a long time, and I would support that in business growing up here. Through that, I learned that the Filipino community was way bigger than any other Asian community here in Las Vegas for a long time. I think they still are. Are you Filipino?

**Yes, I'm Filipino.**

My assistant Dera, also, her last name is Assumption, not Concepcion.

**That's cool.**

What's strange is that I've seen now a few Filipino restaurants. But I don't really see that. You have to go to somebody's house to eat Filipino food. Are there a lot of Filipino restaurants here?

**That's actually interesting because they're not as popular as Chinese restaurants.**

It's just starting to pop up now, isn't it?

**It's not as popular as...**

[Do] You say it's not as?

**It's not as popular, but there are some restaurants here, yes.**

Now you can't drive a block without seeing two or three Thai restaurants, or now Vietnamese is popular now because everyone is eating Pho. But it's interesting that there are so many Filipinos, and you don't see as many Filipino restaurants. Of course, there are Korean barbeques all over the place, too, now. It's funny how trending things work in terms of food, fashion, and all things like that.

**I also wanted to bring up the anti-Asian sentiment that has been happening recently, especially with the pandemic and people calling coronavirus something else. I just want to ask you, how has that made you feel?**

It's an interesting subject because my daughter told me last year—she was in New York—that these Asian hate crimes were going on and Asians getting beat up and things like that. But New York is New York, so there are a lot of people in New York from a lot of different places, and I just think it's more noticed now. I believe that it exists, for sure, but I think we hear about it more, and maybe they keep track of it more because the statistics show that it's gone up a lot

since the pandemic started. I think it's just shared more now because of social media, and everything is reported on the news. One of the things that I am very aware of is...I also do media stuff to do branding or advertising for the firm, and I know how powerful the media is. I've always known it. The media, in my world, in the financial world, they just want to create conflict in it because that sells a lot. Sometimes, for example, if I've been interviewed on a show, it's great for me to [be] opposite somebody else who has a different view, possibly. Negative news sells more. In relation to what we're talking about on the subject of Asian hate crimes and so forth, I just think that the media...I don't know if "manipulate" is the right word. We have to be very aware of where we're getting our news and information and make sure we do our own fact-checking and our own research. It's unfortunate that there are really stupid humans out there that will do stupid things. This thing with Asian hate crime stuff, because it's in the news, maybe it's a reason for them to have that thought implanted in their head and then do something stupid. But that stupid person was probably going to do something stupid anyway. I think it's reported a lot more now because you can share it very easily. Now since we have social media...well, let me back up. I'm pretty sure at this moment that there are probably more negatives from social media than positives for most people, not most, a lot of people.

But overall, having more transparency and having information being able to be more accessible to the world is really great. It's just...I think that companies that own media companies and people that are trying to sell a product know how to manipulate people. Just like here in Las Vegas, the engineers that engineer the games for gaming, they know they can make you addicted to that. They know how to do that. So, I think it's important for people to be aware of that because just like people can get addicted to gambling here because machines can be addicting, so do a lot of kids get addicted to video games—much more than when my generation was playing



video games—because those tools weren't available to make those people so addicted. They know this. I don't know where I'm going with that. Anyway, I think that's something that we need to pay attention to in terms of understanding where we're getting our information and so forth.

**Could you speak a little bit on generational differences that you've noticed?**

Here's the sad part. My daughter goes to an art school in New York that has very, very liberal views on society and human rights and all those types of things and equal rights. That's amazing and great. But what's sad about what's been going on with this issue over the last couple of years is that I believe that we've made so much progress in this country regarding equality.

Our firm, by the way, The Wealth Consulting Group, won an award in 2018, an industry award for diversity and inclusion. It really wasn't because I, as the CEO, decided, "Hey, let's go intentionally be diverse." It wasn't that. It was just natural. It came out of...there are way more white male financial advisors in the entire industry than anything else, and women are not that represented. I just happen to know some very successful women advisors, and we're buddies. For example, since I employ people, and I've always employed people, I never looked at paying a woman less than a man. But I know that's happened, and it's been systemic in the corporate world. I never looked at somebody that way. There are things that we look at in research that suggest maybe, possibly, women won't ask for raises as often as males might, just because of the nature of being a female versus male, generally speaking. I don't know. But the females that are around me they're the ones that always ask for raises. Anyway, I've surrounded myself in my industry with successful female financial advisors and other employees we call team members, and I just personally never experienced that stuff. Still, I know it exists, so I can't ignore it because I'm aware of that.

I believe from the way that I grew up—versus today—and the diversity that we have and the multiracial marriages and relationships that exist today—versus before—I just think we’ve come so far. For me, I think some of the stuff that we’re seeing, unfortunately, was influenced by politics, because a lot of this stuff happened during the year that had one of the most contentious elections of all time, if not the most, probably, in our recent memory. I think some of that had a little bit to do with how the media portrayed some of this stuff and still continues to do it to an extent, and so I don’t like that at all. I think we’ve come so far as a country and a nation. I travel the world sometimes, and I have in the past, and I’ve seen how it is in some of these other places. I love the United States. My parents came here because they knew—and I knew this early on—that in this country, if you worked hard, you can make a living and support a family, whereas in some countries, you just can’t do that. You can’t become really successful in other countries, even South Korea, because for a long time, you had to be a part of the right family to become a really big business, or else it was too hard to compete. In the United States, that’s not the case. Someone like you could become the next founder of Amazon, seriously; or me or you, anybody can in this country. I just know that doesn’t exist everywhere else.

In the two other largest economies, China and Russia, they’re communist. Still, in 2021, they’re communist countries. I look at the progress that we’ve made, and they’ve gone backward. Many people forget in the last few years that in China, it’s back to a dictatorship over there, or a monarchy, whatever you want to call it. There is no free election anymore. It’s crazy. People don’t even pay attention to that stuff, but that’s what’s going on over there. In Russia, I don’t know; I think it’s gotten a little closer to what it was like during the Cold War. I think those countries have gotten worse, whereas the United States has gotten better; but the world looks at us differently because of a person, one individual. It’s sad. It’s sad to me because I think

we've come so far, and I think we've become much more diverse. We do need to have immigration reform for a lot of reasons, but we need to do it in a smart way.

I guess I'm sharing with you guys a little bit about my personal views, but I'm very proud to be American, and I'm telling you the reasons why. Even in the country where I was from, one of the reasons my parents wanted us to move here is they didn't want us to go [in]to the military automatically, but there you still do. When you're done with high school—well, in other countries, you do too—you have to serve in the military for a couple of years.

**Did your father have to do that?**

He was in the military, too, yes.

**Do you know what he's ever talked about when he did that?**

He was never in a war or anything. He is more of a lover than a fighter, I'll tell you, and so he went into the music production stuff. But he was around a war because they experienced—I can share with you guys some stories about what my parents told me about. My mother remembers a Russian soldier being at her house, stories during different wars. It's funny, too. Recently, I asked my mom—because my brother and I are fairly athletic—I wanted to know if it came from my mother or father. I asked my mom, literally, in the last twelve months in the car, “What did you guys do? What sports did you play growing up?” And she said, “We didn't play sports. We worked. It was always in a war era. We just had to work, even as kids.” They didn't have time to play sports. They went through World War II, and then the Korean War, and then the Vietnam War kind of affected the country a little bit—not really, but they went through World War II and the Korean War kind of back-to-back growing up. For them, it was very interesting.

Another story is that my mom's side of the family lived in Tokyo. Her mother—maybe this is where my entrepreneurial side comes from—her mother was a very successful

businessperson in Tokyo, and the Japanese ruled the Koreans back then. They were living in Tokyo but under Japanese rule. They had hundreds of employees. They owned a junkyard in Tokyo. But when the war was over, they could move back to Korea. They left everything behind, all the property that they owned, all the assets. They just wanted to go back home, because they were there not on their own terms. They were there because they were forced to be there.

I think about how my parents grew up as kids compared to how my daughter grew up, and I'm thinking we made some serious progress in my family. They tell me stories of when soldiers were coming from the North, and they literally, in the middle of the night, had to leave, like in the middle of winter; which, by the way, in Korea, the winters are brutal. They are the most brutal winters in the world. They remember having to leave to not get killed.

My aunt, I'll give you a story about her. She came to the United States first. But my aunt, when she was a very young child, all the men were out of the house, and the soldiers came in. I think it was the North Koreans [who] came into the house, and they asked where all the men were. My aunt, maybe as a four- or five-year-old, three-year-old, pointed over there to where they were hiding. Some men came up, and they shot them right in front of her. Besides her father not liking her that much, that's what drove her to leave Korea as soon as she could. But think about that. My aunt works for me here in the office.

My mother, father, and aunt have these stories in their life that are just traumatic. Then we think about how we live and the stress that we have to deal with, and to me, it's night and day. Again, in the two other biggest economies—I've been to Russia before; I've never been to China—but if you don't do the right things there... You don't have freedom of speech and stuff like that, the constitutional rights that we have here. Again, I really like our country because of

all these things that I'm telling you about, which are personal experiences of mine which make sense to me.

**When was the last time you went to Korea?**

I went a couple of years ago, but just for one day. I did an Asian trip. I went to Vietnam, which is phenomenal, by the way. I recommend that you guys try to get there if you can. The nicest people ever, by the way, the Vietnamese people. Then I went to Thailand. Then on the way home, I was able to fly through Seoul for a day. I got there really early in the morning, had somebody pick me up in a car that was a tour guide, and then we drove all around. I was talking to my parents, and they told me where to go. I went to places like temples, where my mom sang before in different areas. I didn't really remember anything. But it was a cool one-day trip.

**What was the temple called?**

I don't remember. I've got pictures of it. I don't know what it was. It was a place to go, like what would be equivalent to a museum kind of a place. You can go see some artifacts and things. It's a temple, a huge temple area.

**If you have any questions, Kristel and Stefani, you guys can ask them now.**

**KP: I had a couple. In what ways has COVID-19 affected your business?**

We're very, very, very fortunate that our industry was one of those industries that could stay open. We were considered an essential business. Also, our industry is such where the clients that we work with, we don't have to meet with them face-to-face necessarily because of the technology out there. Most of the people in my industry and a lot of the people that work with us, we're Zoomed out, and we do tons of Zoom and stuff. We're extremely fortunate to be in an industry that didn't go backward; it went forward. A lot of financial advisors that I know had their best year financially last year, because the stock market went up. Usually, during times of

stress, when there is volatility in the stock market, that's when clients might move from one person to another or want to stop and do it on their own and seek some professional advice. So, there's an opportunity for people in our profession that are good to gain new business.

I think we were fortunate to be in that category to where we grew pretty well last year. We're very, very, very fortunate for that. It also set a new precedent on what a really good client-advisor relationship could look like; that it doesn't have to be necessarily face-to-face all the time, or maybe not even much at all. Las Vegas is not too bad for traffic, but if you're living in New York City or some other urban area that it's very difficult to get around; or even like San Diego where there is tons of traffic, or L.A.; clients would probably much rather just sit at home on a computer on a Zoom. If you do it well, it's just like you're in the office together.

I've always used video technology in the office, so I've always loved doing that anyway. Then there is great software out there for people like us to take advantage of [for] interaction with clients, for financial planning, and other things to where it forced a lot of advisors that weren't up on technology the way they should be to get up on it. Then for many of our clients who are older, that weren't as tech-savvy, they were forced to get on Zoom to talk to their kids and grandkids, so they learned how to do it. They got the app put on their computers and iPhones. It's been a real plus. I think for society in general; it's been really good in the sense that you had to slow down. You were forced to slow down. You weren't always looking for distractions. I think people had much more time to really focus on what's important to them, maybe, or what their purpose is or to think more; although I think there are lots of positives to social interactions and a lot of negatives that came from that too, of not having that, for our business, I think it was a very good thing.

**KP: That's great to hear.**

Yes.

**KP: It's pretty common for second-generational Americans to experience a lot of pressure from their parents when they come here.**

Yes, that's true.

**KP: I've experienced it. I just wanted to know, what kind of expectations did your parents have on you growing up?**

I think, for example, they always would have wanted my brother and I probably to marry a Korean woman, and neither of us did. I think that was probably, at the end of the day, a disappointment for them. But I think as part of being the Asian culture, that's an expectation or a hope. But obviously, my mom and dad—"Hey, you moved here"—so the majority of the people aren't Korean. But anyway, I think that was probably an expectation.

Of course, there is the stereotype that all Asian parents want their kids to be lawyers or doctors or something like that. I will say the one stereotype that I believe is correct—and one of the reasons I believe, for example, certain Asian cultures are business owners more than maybe other cultures or ethnicities—is because they just work hard. They put in the hours. Back at home, they're used to working a lot of hours. Back in South Korea, the men are out all day long. I saw it. When I first went back to Korea with my parents, I remember my aunt's husband leaving in the morning and then not coming home until literally after ten p.m. at night or something like that, just working all day. That's a normal day. Also, the kids are like [that] from school. They start school very early in the morning, and then right after school, they're doing after-school activities. It's more education or music or sports. But they don't come home until ten o'clock, either, or maybe like eight. Then they eat and study until midnight or eleven. It's crazy. I think the work ethic—at least from what I've experienced and what I saw myself—I

could see how that translates into possibly working more hours, or just being used to it, or being a part of the culture or DNA, and then maybe that leads to—I don't know—potentially more financial success.

Also, I know that education—that stereotype—is also very important. I believe that's the case. My parents, for sure, they believed coming here that education was a way to more success. They truly believe it. I'm not sure a hundred percent I believe it. I think those stereotypes or expectations... We didn't have a choice to not go to college, and so that was always expected. In today's generation, I'm not sure we should go to college. Honestly, I know I'm talking to UNLV here, but I'm not sure if the cost of [college] for everybody versus the benefit and what they're going to do in their careers is always the best. For sure, for somebody that's eighteen to twenty-two, they're not old enough yet, or mature enough yet, to be on their own. I think that experience and that time for somebody to mature is really valuable. Education also can be extremely valuable, but I'm not sure if it's for everybody. I might have another child, and I would expect that child to go to college, but who knows? If I do have another child, that's a long time away, and I might think differently then. Those are a few expectations.

**KP: That's all I had.**

**SE: I did have a couple. Basically, drawing back on what you talked about earlier, I'd like to ask you about the sixth-grade center.**

It was called Jo Mackey.

**SE: Right. What was that experience like? You got on a bus in the morning and...**

Yes. We walked. It's funny, because me and my friend that I grew up with at that time walked from our homes. We lived in the same neighborhood. We walked over to a farther bus stop, because even as a sixth grader, you wanted to be a ladies' man, and there were cuter girls over



there, honestly. We walked to this farther bus stop, which was probably about two miles away. We stopped in the 7-Eleven and got breakfast burritos. It was really funny. You're bringing back some memories. Then we got on a bus ride. From Tropicana [Avenue] and Sandhill [Road] area, it probably took us about forty-five minutes, I'd say, on a school bus to get to our school. It was a decent ride. Then when we got there, it was in the inner city where Jo Mackey is located. It's near Martin Luther King [Boulevard], in that area, and D Street. I remember playing in the playground, and it was fun. I remember being in the sixth-grade drum class. I played some drums back then, and I played, also, drums in seventh and eighth grade in the band. I didn't think of [Jo Mackey] as anything different.

**SE: Just another school.**

Yes. Obviously, in that community, there are a lot more African Americans that lived there, then and now, but I didn't notice any difference because we didn't leave the school confines. I didn't notice if there were more—I had some friends that were Black before, in elementary school, and so we all just went to the same school afterward. For me, it didn't resonate or press upon me that something was that different, except for it was a longer bus ride.

**SE: How did that work? Did all the kids in your elementary school go to Jo Mackey?**

Yes. I think we were zoned. I think it was based on where you lived, and then you went to certain middle schools or sixth-grade centers.

**SE: But they kept you together pretty much from your elementary school?**

I'm not sure exactly how that went, but I know that people I grew up with in my neighborhood, we all went to Jo Mackey, so I believe it was geographical zoning. I don't even know how many sixth-grade centers there are or were at the time. I don't know. But I believe it was at that time during integration for bussing and all that stuff.

**SE: You talked quite a bit about people that helped you along the way. Who do you consider some of your mentors here in Las Vegas?**

I'm not sure about Las Vegas. There are people I met who were certainly integral into how I got to where I'm today, like that gentleman Ken, who was a financial advisor at Dane Bosworth at the time, who is somebody that I bring up. His name is Ken Bodd, and he still lives in Las Vegas. He is a really nice guy. Joe Kelly, who was my boss, who is now my client. It's kind of funny; I've seen him more recently. Joe Kelly was the gentleman that ran the golf course. I'm trying to think in terms of career or direction. Then Rob Davenport, who is a very successful financial advisor in town and a good friend, I don't see that often anymore, but he's the one that recruited me to the MassMutual office upstairs. He was my friend that brought in the managers. Then my sales manager at the time was a guy named Steve Beatty, who is still a financial advisor in town, and Chuck Cleveland, who is the person that ran that office. Those are all people that are influential, so to speak, in my life in that way.

Then I've had a lot of experiences since then. I have today one of my friends that just left my house yesterday, who is a great friend of mine named Dave LaRue, and he lives in Florida and some other places, but he is a very successful entrepreneur. His passion is coaching, so he loves to coach. It's not about making more money, necessarily. He coaches on how to become more successful in business, but in alignment with what's really important to you about your values, knowing your values, and having a purpose. He cares probably more about the success of someone in their personal life. He is somebody that I would call a mentor that I would come to and talk to all the time.

There are other people, industry people, that I look up to that, I've seen how they've grown their businesses. There's a gentleman named Ron Carson, who is a very successful

financial advisor nationwide and has a large firm. I've been friends with him and watched him, and he shares information with me, but I've observed him. He has a coaching program, too, that I've been in for a long time. There are people I've looked up to and have become friends with and talk to regularly. Then I've got my inner circle of good friends here in Las Vegas that I spend time with as well.

Yes, I'm lucky to have good people around me. The older I get, I think that we have to be very conscious who we surround ourselves with, because just by the nature of our surroundings and our environment, we become like them to a degree, and so that could be good; that could be bad.

**SE: My questions are very random.**

That's okay. It's great.

**SE: I jotted them down. When your parents decided to move here, it was your mother's sister that was already here in North Carolina?**

Yes, my mother's sister, Sue Lee.

**SE: Are there still relatives in Korea?**

My aunt lives there, my father's sister and her children and they have kids. We keep in contact with them. Then my mother's nephew is somebody that my parents keep in contact with, or they try to, anyway. But that's it. My mom is one of eight children, and she and her sister, I believe, are the only ones left of that group.

**SE: And they're both here.**

And they're both here in Las Vegas, yes. My father's side, except for his younger sister, his other two siblings have passed. But we keep in contact with her and her daughter, who is great. She

comes to Las Vegas once in a while. We saw her last year. They usually stay at my parents' house here, but they come with their family.

**SE: You've talked about your brother. Is your brother older than you?**

He is. He's four and a half years older than me. He went to UNLV as well for his undergraduate degree. He was smart enough to get into Duke University to get his physical therapy degree, a master's, and then he became a physical therapist. Now he's a professor of physical therapy at a college called Mount Saint Mary's, which is in Los Angeles. He commutes on a train from North San Diego to L.A. a few times a week, and then he also works in a hospital setting as a physical therapist one day a week.

**SE: In L.A. or San Diego?**

In San Diego. Their family is in San Diego.

**SE: Nice. You said he is fluent in Korean.**

He is.

**SE: Did he go to a Korean school, or is it just a function of age?**

Just by age, because he was older and better at memory, remembering it, I guess, and speaking it more to my parents, probably.

**SE: Did your parents speak Korean when they didn't want you to understand?**

In hindsight, I'd probably say yes. I didn't realize it at that time, probably, but I would say yes.

**SE: That didn't work with your brother.**

No, but I also think that's just because he knew the language and spoke to my parents more in Korean. I think what he would probably do is help explain American things to them better as he got older. I would imagine that's what he did more of. I couldn't do that. If they had questions, I

think he was probably the communicator for the things that he could teach them or explain to them better as he got more knowledge on the language and so forth.

**SE: For parent-teacher conferences, did he translate?**

Not really. My mom, for example, she still is not amazing at English, but my mom would sit there and just pretend like she knew. She worked in the casinos as a dealer, and she had to communicate with customers and her coworkers, but she would nod her head a lot. She would understand just by body language what people were saying sometimes and just by the context of the situation she might have been in and the surroundings. It's funny how people learn to adapt like that. But, yes, it's interesting.

**SE: Was there a Korean school here that you could have gone to?**

Probably a Korean church school for kids. I believe so.

**SE: Saturdays or after school or something?**

Yes, there was stuff like that, I think. I'm assuming there is now. The population is bigger now of Koreans here. We were all trying to learn more English, though, quite frankly. I think at home, it was all about trying to learn more English and getting more Americanized to a degree from that standpoint so we could communicate better.

**SE: And become American?**

Yes.

**SE: Do you still play golf?**

My wife says too much. I just got married. I've never been married before. I just got married in December of last year.

**SE: Congratulations.**

Thank you. I've been playing a lot more recently. During COVID, golf was one industry that also benefitted dramatically. Everyone had to move out of the urban cities, so all the real estate prices of high-rise condos in all the cities in the United States has gone down in New York, San Francisco, San Diego, you name it. Everyone wants to be out in the suburbs where there is air, and there is more space. Golf is one thing that I think saved a lot of men, especially, from being inside all day. Being a golfer, I was able to do that. I also play tennis recreationally. I don't play as much anymore. My wife plays more. She's a really good tennis player. Many people that play golf got better last year because we played much more of it. In fact, the most we've ever played. Yes, that's continued on a little bit, and I have a lot more time free than I used to, so I can play more golf now, and I'm interested more now than I was before.

**NC: How did you meet your wife?**

My daughter introduced me to my wife. Her best friend in high school, her mother is in the tennis business where her family is, and she knew my current wife and wanted to set us up. Four and a half years ago or so, they both were giggling one night, and they wanted to set me up with her, and that's kind of what happened. We dated on and off and were friends for a long time and decided to get married last year, so that's how that happened.

She's from the South. She's from Georgia. I'm actually going there tomorrow. I'm going to Georgia tomorrow to play in a member-guest golf tournament with her father at a great, cool place called Sea Island, Georgia. It's close to the Florida-Georgia line, and it's an island, and it's a really cool place. We got married there at a hotel called The Cloister. It's a cool place you guys should check out. A place that I would highly recommend is from Charleston, South Carolina, all the way down to Sea Island. You can hit Charleston, Savannah; before you get to Savannah, you can hit Kiawah Island, which is where they had this big golf tournament this last weekend called

the PGA Championship, where Phil Mickelson won, who is fifty years old. It was a big deal for people that are in the golf business to know that. Anyway, Phil Mickelson won in Kiawah Island. It's beautiful down there in South Carolina. Then Savannah is a really cool place. There is a very popular art school there called SCAD in Savannah, Georgia, and then Sea Island is only an hour away. The South is beautiful down there, and the people are really nice, and the food is really good if you like Southern food and good food.

**SE: Why does it matter that we're collecting interviews like yours?**

I know that you guys are trying to capture some of the history of the Asian culture and community here in Las Vegas, right? That's the objective here, to document it and put it in the archives at UNLV so that other Asians twenty, thirty years down the road can see what the Asian community was like. I guess from that perspective, I can say to you that I have seen the Asian community evolve a lot. For example, here in Las Vegas, the Asian Chamber of Commerce has always been a very large organization. I think they still are. One of the things I learned about that organization is that they would have their monthly lunches and always invite politicians. These Asian Chamber of Commerce people have always been really smart. They've always been very smart at building relationships with people that make decisions on policy, on things like that.

Another really good friend of mine is a gentleman that used to be the national president or chair of a real estate organization called the Aria. His name is Randy Char. He's a very successful Asian Realtor here in town, who is another guy I recommend you talk to if you need more content. He is Chinese, and his family was in the Northern California area, like in San Francisco. I've learned about Randy because he's talked about equality issues that relate to Asians. This real estate organization called Aria is a big organization with thousands of members worldwide. They get involved sometimes in a political standpoint, too. Of course, because there

are so many people that might vote a certain way, politicians and companies are interested in supporting that.

What's funny about the history of—let me back up—On the point I was trying to make about the Asian culture in Las Vegas is that it has evolved dramatically to where I think it's a huge part of the culture in Las Vegas. If you go down Spring Mountain [Road] with all the stuff that's been developed there, it's amazing. I'm not sure if you guys have interviewed Kenny Lee or his father, the Lee's Liquor family. He developed, I believe, the first—well, not the first, but one of [the] Korean Asian shopping centers. There are influential Asians in Las Vegas who have done well here that have invested in the community to expand—whether it's for business or not, who cares? We have a plethora of choices for many different Asian types of cuisine and different things you could do in Las Vegas. I think we all get to benefit from that, and it drives...

A funny story about that is, my friend Randy was selling a home here to one of his friends who was moving from San Francisco, an Asian family. The gentleman's wife wanted to see what the Asian community was going to be like here before she decided to move here. San Francisco obviously has a huge Asian community. They went to Summerlin and looked at the houses and saw that it was a very safe community—because that's one of the reasons they're leaving is they wanted to get out of San Francisco because there are all these crimes going on, seriously. Then he said he took the wife down to all the restaurants down on Spring Mountain that they like and shopping centers. She said, "That's it. We're good. There is enough Asian stuff here."

That has grown. It went from Commercial Center to Asian businesses opening up on Spring Mountain when the real estate or the leases were very inexpensive there, to now it's a



place where people want to open up restaurants whether it's Asian or not. It attracts tourists to go eat at those places, too, and a lot of locals like to go. I think that's been awesome.

It's kind of funny about Asian discrimination in the other way, in the sense that with all the social justice stuff going on lately, the Asians were kind of forgotten in that; it's been another narrative that we hear about, and it's kind of true. I think there is even an Asian group that's suing Harvard right now because of discrimination, isn't there?

Anyway, I just think that whether that's true or not, or whatever is going on there, that for all of us that are Asian, we have a lot of opportunity in the United States. Las Vegas, in particular, is a very friendly place because it is very diverse. Being an Asian person in Las Vegas isn't like "not normal," and I don't think we get discriminated against here by other people for anything necessarily. There are always people out there that have their own issues with racial issues, but that's who they are. I would not say that's the majority of people necessarily in the world or in the United States or Las Vegas. I feel that we're all fortunate to be here; I really do.

Las Vegas is changing a lot, meaning going from a single-industry economy, really—everything around gambling and the casino industry—to now we've changed a lot to where there are other businesses that are here that are not in the casino industry. Now we have professional sports, as you know, and so the Golden Knights are very popular. The Raiders are here. You'll probably see an NBA team here someday. That's pretty cool that now you've got all these sports and different things, which drives, by the way, all the real estate that we're seeing being developed.

At some point, the problem with us is, unless the BLM releases a lot more land, there is nowhere else to build. Now we're seeing real estate prices go up a little bit—a lot, excuse me. What I'm afraid of, though, is that we've priced out a lot of people that want to live here that

can't afford to buy here like they can't afford to buy in San Diego. I have offices throughout the country, and I've got one in San Diego. It's very difficult to own a home in San Diego unless you have a lot of money or make a lot of money. Las Vegas still is okay, but I hope we don't get too crazy numbers like some of these other places.

**SE: And we did before.**

We did before. It went up a lot, but it never got to, I don't think, what it is in San Francisco. For example, I know people that have moved here, sold their fourteen-hundred-square-foot house in L.A. somewhere for two million dollars, and they move here, and they buy a five-thousand-square-foot home for their family for the same amount of money. That's a lot of money, two million dollars. I'm saying relatively speaking. Or you can sell a condo in San Francisco that's a thousand square feet for two million dollars. Relatively speaking, the lifestyle differences are, from a home perspective, so much more affordable here, still, even today. There are some communities that are ridiculous in terms of pricing now in Las Vegas; there really are. There is a community here called The Summit, where one of the people I know you interviewed lives. It's beautiful for people that really love golf, but just for the land itself, for a lot, it's multimillion dollars.

**SE: It's stunning.**

It's crazy what's happened here in Las Vegas. Then I've seen, since I'm in the financial business, very, very wealthy people moving here from lots of other places to call it their home, but a lot of it is predominantly because there are no state income taxes here, and it's still relatively affordable. They want to become a resident here so they can take advantage of those things. If those things change here in Las Vegas, I think a lot of things can change. We're one of

the few states in the United States that doesn't have a state income tax. But if that were to ever change, it would dramatically change the landscape of who wants to live here or not.

**SE: I think that's it for my questions. Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we didn't bring up that you thought we would?**

What would you put the purpose of these interviews? How would you guys explain it?

**SE: I think you stated it well. We're trying to document some voices that aren't currently in our archives. Parts of this community that have been here for a long time—like your parents knew the Kim Sisters, they were huge here—but we have nothing about this community.**

You should go interview her.

**SE: What is her name?**

Hold on a second. We always call her Anthony's mom because that's what we...

**SE: That's going to be hard to look up.**

Bonifazio, Sue Bonifazio. She just wrote a book. I would say to you that they were very influential, as far as an Asian family here in Las Vegas, especially for the Korean communities. I think them having such a successful business and a show on the Strip so early on in the days of Las Vegas probably made a lot of Koreans feel comfortable that Koreans were accepted here in Las Vegas. Us being an entertainment town, they fit right in, and that's what I think her sister—Sue's sister is my mom and dad's friend, and her husband, who is now passed—they were some of the people, anyway, that told us to move here, told my parents. That's what they saw. They saw that the entertainment was alive and very successful and vibrant here in Las Vegas. The Kim Sisters were as popular as some of the legendary musicians and people that performed here. They were in that circle.

You know, a crazy story about that is how I believe God works. I did a business deal with a gentleman that made him a lot of money in Las Vegas, in my industry; that guy is the guy that brought the Kim Sisters to the United States. I know that they just wrote a book. Her daughter is somebody that I keep in contact with on social media a little bit, and I see her out, so because of that, I know that they wrote this book. This guy Bob is the guy that brought the Kim Sisters in. He told me—this is a crazy story. We’re having lunch. I earned a lot of income working with him, and this investment that he put money into was very good for him. It was very fortuitous for him and for me. I took him to lunch one day. He was in his late seventies at the time. I asked him what he did before he got into the real estate business here because he owned a lot of real estate down on Boulder Highway, and he said he was in the entertainment business. He asked me, “You’re Korean, aren’t you?” I said, “Yes.” He goes, “Do you know who the Kim Sisters are?” I go, “Oh my gosh, they’re kind of one of the reasons I’m here.” He goes, “You’ve got to be kidding. I saw them and scouted them when I was in the military when they were teenagers, like thirteen-, fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds.” They were very poor, living in Korea. He got them their visas and everything. He thought they were really great as entertainers—the family—because there were brothers and sisters that were all in this band. He got them their visas and stuff and brought them over. That’s a true story.

**SE: And you didn’t know that when you were doing business with him?**

Of course not. Literally, this guy, who I helped make a lot of money, is probably the reason why I’m here in Las Vegas. Isn’t that crazy?

**NC: That’s crazy.**

**SE: I love it.**

I believe that's how God works, and that's an amazing story. Yes, I think they would be an amazing family [to interview]. I could absolutely reach out to her. My mom could call her, but I'll reach out to her daughter that I keep in contact with a little bit. Maybe through her they might be interested. I think that would be great for the archives, right?

**SE: It would be wonderful, absolutely.**

Sue Bonifazio. Her husband was one of the people that ran one of the casinos in town for a long time, too.

**KP: What casino was it?**

It was the Sahara, I think, is the one that he ran for a long time. That family, the Kim Sisters, is an interesting family.

**SE: And they were the first—I don't know if they were the first Koreans here, but they were certainly the earliest family that was well known here.**

Yes. If you want, through a friend of mine, Kenny Lee is an acquaintance of mine, but if you guys wanted to try to talk to him, he's the son of the Lee Liquor family, he'd be interesting, I think, because they've been very successful here in what they do.

**SE: They have been. And they have great commercials.**

Yes, funny.

**SE: That would be great. Thank you so much.**

**KP: Thank you.**

**NC: Thank you.**

You're welcome.

**[End of recorded interview]**