

A TEI Project

Interview of Kim Boone

Table of contents

- 1. Transcript
 - 1.1. Session 1 (May 6, 2009)
 - 1.2. Session 2 (May 13, 2009)

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (May 6, 2009)

Cline

This is Alex Cline interviewing Kim Boone--do you like to just go by Kim Boone? Okay--at her classroom, actually, where she teaches in South Pasadena at Monterey Hills School. Today is May 6, 2009, and this is our first session.

Good afternoon.

Boone

Good afternoon.

Cline

Thank you for meeting with me. It's hard to schedule these sorts of things, especially when we're on opposite ends of town, but I get the grand experience of crawling to and from South Pasadena on the freeway, and you get to stay within the luxury of your own realm, which is--

Boone

Well, thank you very much.

Cline

--that's how we want it. We want you to be comfortable. We're going to do what we usually do and we're going to start at the beginning, asking a very basic question and with the full awareness that this could have a very different sort of answer than my usual interview. So I'll ask the first question, which is, if you know it, where and when were you born?

Boone

Well, I don't know exactly where and when I was born. The birthday that I was told that was given me was January 14, 1955. I actually started out, that I know of, in an orphanage down in Pusan, Korea. It was called the Isabella Orphanage and so that's the beginning that I know of.

A man named Harry Holt started a--he at first adopted his own eight children and then decided to help others get children, and I was probably one of the first hundred that came over. So when he was beginning to kind of gather children from mainly orphanages that decided that they weren't sure if--sometimes those children were very sick, things like that, and he said he would start off with them. So I came from Isabella, which one of his children actually had come from also.

Cline

I see.

Boone

And so he would take his truck there, gather children and then bring them up, and so one of the stories I was told was that when they got me that I was very sick and that they weren't sure if I was going to live. So I was taken up into Seoul into a reception area there, and I guess at the time my parents had decided that they wanted to adopt from Korea, had heard about Harry Holt and had applied through there, so that was kind of my beginnings, so that's, as far as I know, as far as the beginning.

Cline

How old were you then when your parents adopted you?

Boone

Almost two. I came over--I landed in Hawaii about October thirty-first and then came on over I guess November first, so I was almost two. January I would have been two.

Cline

What information, if any, do you have about the orphanage, about how many children were there, what the kind of conditions were like?

Boone

That I don't know. At that time, in fact, Harry Holt did not have is incorporation--

Cline

Oh, interesting.

Boone

--and so my passport says World Vision. So that was at the very beginning, and so that's how his children came over, and then basically a year later--in fact, theirs came over I think in October of '55, I think, and then I came over the next year. I know there was about, I think, seven of us that came over, and since I was the youngest--and I just heard this after I got to be an adult. I knew that I had sat on "Grandma" [Bertha] Holt's lap coming over and then my parents didn't actually have to pay for a seat for me. I found out later that that was the first trip that Bertha Holt had actually taken to Korea. She had gotten her children with her husband going over there and seeing the conditions and everything, and so she had told me when I was up there a little before she died, I guess--but she remembered, of course, because that was some of the first, and she said, "Yes, that was my first trip and then we escorted children home." So I was one of the first ones to come home with her.

Cline

Wow, fascinating. We're obviously talking about the postwar years of South Korea, which was then South Korea, and the orphan situation being a known condition at that time; some of these children, no doubt, biracial children, children of G.I.s. Maybe just for the sake of this series, since this is a series on Korean Americans in Los Angeles, generally speaking, maybe you can just give a basic description of who the Holts were and how, perhaps, they became interested in this pursuit that they became so famous for.

Boone

Harry Holt was actually a fairly wealthy man up in Oregon in the Eugene area, actually owned a whole mountain for timbering and things like that. I think he and his wife had come over from like Iowa or something like that. I'm not really sure. It's been a while since I've read anything on it. But I know that at that time he was a very religious man and kind of got a sense that after the war that there was a lot of children, I think probably seeing pictures and things like that, and so he kind of had this dream that there was a little Eurasian girl, which is what people were called at that time, standing by him.

And so he pursued it, had children of his own, six children of his own, and so he went over to Korea and saw the conditions, chose to go ahead and adopt eight babies himself. I think they ranged from, like, I don't remember, maybe one year to three years, something like that, but they were all fairly young. And so they felt like they could care for them. They had a big house there in Oregon and so, I think, that's the way it kind of started out, and then he went ahead and devoted his life to that pursuit.

Cline

Right. This became Holt International.

Boone

Right.

Cline

What was your sense, particularly now that you can look back on it, of what the awareness or concerns might have been, considering what then was a rather early notion of what we now would call transracial adoption, not a common thing in America at that point?

Boone

No, and, in fact, every time at that time Harry Holt would bring over a group of kids, he would actually have to get a bill through Congress. So what I had heard from my mother was that I was one of the last of the first bill. They said you could bring over so many children, and his eight and then he had to go and get a bill, and so then he brought over so many more, and then I was the last of that bill. Then I think in like--I came over November first. I think at the end of that December-January, and then he was able to bring over a group more.

Cline

Interesting.

Boone

But at that time, they basically had to get seats in a plane and then, like I said, Grandma Holt was one of the escorts, and they would escort some of the kids over. I was almost two, and I was the youngest. They were trying to get--in fact, I spoke with Grandma Holt about this and she said they were trying to get the kids that were the oldest they could over here as fast as possible because of the situation that Korea was a very homogeneous area and didn't like the mixed kids as much. Completely different story today, of course, but at that time--and you still had the Exclusion Acts, the--

Cline

Right, anti-immigration laws.

Boone

--the different Asian, right. And so that's one reason that the kids had to get bills or Harry Holt had to do that in order to get kids over here. And, of course, then things changed in the sixties, but this was in the fifties.

Cline

Right. Just to paint the historical picture, people forget that in this country there were anti-Asian immigration laws--

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

--and that were finally struck down as late as 1965--

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

--which is what opened the door to all this immigration that is now the subject of this interview series. What can you say then, just by way of background, about the cultural attitude in Korea towards adoption?

Boone

Well, at that time Koreans themselves would not adopt, because it was very bloodline based. And so you were registered, or at least you were supposed to be under whoever your father is. In fact, those laws have just changed like very recently, that now a mother can register, and they're doing that so that the children will be maybe more prone that there won't be as much adoption. But at that time it was not very cultural to keep a child, especially if they were biracial, and also a lot of times single mothers, and up to, like I said, recently, it was very hard on single mothers to keep their children, and some other aspects. So that was part of the--of course, when I was a baby I didn't know all of this. [laughs]

Cline

Right. Of course.

Boone

But as I have gotten older and heard and studied and things, it makes more sense to what has happened.

Cline

Yes. if you hadn't been adopted, what is your sense of the direction your life might have gone?

Boone

Oh, I don't know. I kind of have the sense that I might not be alive, only because when I came over I was malnourished. I did have the big stomach and boils all over. My mother used to say, "Now, only a mother can love you." I said, "Oh, is that nice?" [laughs]

Cline

Gee, thanks, Mom.

Boone

Yes, exactly. "But I love you." You know how mothers are. They always--but anyway, and that's true. So I kind of had the sense for myself--now, maybe not for everybody, but for myself--that I might not have been alive. When the orphanage started, and one reason some of the kids were malnourished is because there wasn't a lot of money. And so I know one of the stories my mom told me, and it was confirmed--I mean, I've heard--is that sometimes there wouldn't be enough meals, and the older kids would get the rice, and the babies would get the water.

Cline

Oh, golly. So who was operating these orphanages?

Boone

I don't know about other orphanages. I think my particular orphanage was actually operated by Koreans. But some of the other orphanages were operated by different people, probably Americans, Europeans, things like that.

Cline

Church-related, or not?

Boone

You know, some church, I think, but World Vision was a big entity over there that was getting money to help out with the orphans and things like that.

Cline

Right. And people forget that aside from the fact that this country was engaged in a war over there for a little while, that what we would think of as Korea now was actually like a Third World country back then. It was not what we think of now.

Boone

Right, right. It was--yes, now I've heard it's like the seventh-largest economy.

Cline

Wow.

Boone

But back when there--and actually, my parents were there in 1948 and then again after the war [the Korean War], my father was part of the Army of Occupation, which has been, I always felt like was very good for me being able to have a sense of being Korean, because my mother knew what Koreans were like or had a sense of the country, so she could tell me things that maybe in some of the other adoption cases that wasn't the case. So even as far back as then that was very unusual. Sometimes I'd say to my mom, "Oh, my gosh. You went to Korea back in that time." [laughs]

Cline

Yes, very, very unusual, to say the least.

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

Well, we're going to get to your parents in just a moment. I know this is highly unlikely, but do you have any memory at all of your pre-American life?

Boone

You know, there's a memory that comes to me, but sometimes I don't know if it's a memory I have or a memory that I've seen, because, you know, when you're young. But I have a sense that I was on a floor and there was almost like hula hoops or something on the floor, and I was kind of sitting there with some of the other kids. So one time I said something to my mom, and she said, "Well, you know, they probably might have placed you like that so that you would maybe know, oh, you can't get out of the circle, or something like sometimes you do to young kids. So I don't know if that's it, but that's just a memory that comes back, but in that case I don't know a whole lot.

I know the doctor has told me that I must have gotten good nutrition at the beginning, because I have very good teeth. And I always felt like I might have been with my birth mother maybe the first six months of my life or something, because I just have a sense of love and things like that.

Cline

Attachment.

Boone

Yes, attachment and stuff. So I think that maybe I had a good start even if there may have been--I don't know who it was. I do have--my mom said that back in those days that women would tie their

kids in the tree to keep the wild dogs or animals, and I do have marks on my ankles where it looks like that maybe I had been tied in a tree or something, so she that--and then there again, that's because she was there and she observed things, but so that could have been that I may have come from a place where down in that area--and, of course, even Puson was not as metropolitan as it is now, so.

Cline

Yes, for sure. Wow, interesting. And you don't remember the trip over here, then, the plane ride or anything?

Boone

No, that I don't. I have a picture of my mom with me that was taken once we landed, but not--I came into Los Angeles, I know.

Cline

Right. And that was a very long trip.

Boone

Well, we stopped off in Hawaii, I guess, because I got the lei and everything from Hawaii too.

Cline

Wow. How long were you in Hawaii then?

Boone

I'm not sure. I think probably a stopover and then on--right.

Cline

And then back on another plane. Wow. So you came into Los Angeles, and you now have new parents. Who were your parents?

Boone

Charles Daniel Boone and Mary Boone.

Cline

Let's start with your father. What do you know about his background?

Boone

They're both from Texas, and I know from the family tree that he's related to Daniel by a brother, and so we have the family tree back, so a very old family. He was in the Air Force when I was adopted, and when I was five he retired from the Air Force, so a very kind man. And then my mom was also from Texas, and they didn't have any children, and so that's one reason that they decided when they heard about the Holts' adoptions, since they had been there. They were very excited, I guess, about being able to have children.

Cline

So first of all, you came into L.A. but it doesn't sound like you stopped here. Where did you go?

Boone

Well, they were stationed out in Victorville, so it was still very close. So I've always lived in southern California since.

Cline

Okay, you weren't in Texas then.

Boone

No, no. I didn't go to Texas. They were stationed in Victorville. That's just where their relatives were.

Cline

Yes, they were from Texas. Okay. I also was curious to know--now talking about your parents, we're going to get into your early life now--you said that they were not able to have children. How old were they, then, when they adopted you?

Boone

My mom was thirty-two and my dad was forty, so they had waited a long time.

Cline

Yes, right. Do you know how long they'd been married?

Boone

My mom was twenty when they got married. I think my dad was twenty-eight, so what would that be, twelve years?

Cline

Yes, right. Okay. So now you're having your first family home in Victorville, California.

Boone

Right. [laughs]

Cline

Which for those who are maybe listening to this who don't know anything about this area, it's in the high desert east of Los Angeles by quite a ways. What are your first memories of life as a child with your parents, if you have any in particular that stand out?

Boone

I remember being in a crib, but my mom, of course, remembers me crying a lot, because I guess I wouldn't sleep in a crib for about six months. Nowadays they know it's because everyone sleeps on the ground in Korea, but back then she didn't know, and so I guess she held me and rocked me for six months because I wouldn't sleep, I'd scream. But my actual memory is of a crib, and then, of course, going to the big bed, because my sister was adopted and all of that.

Cline

Okay. We're going to get to your sister too.

Boone

Yes, we'll get to my sister later.

Cline

Yes. What is your memory, if any at all, of noticing that you did not look like your parents?

Boone

It was just something at the very beginning. My mom always talked about adoption. I think it was just something that I can't remember it being like weird or anything.

Cline

Oh, wow.

Boone

It was just there, and we were part of a church there in Victorville, and so they knew I was coming, and so I had a lot of auntie and uncles there, and so it was just a common thing, and I don't think anyone ever made a big deal out of it. I mean, we were adopted and you knew you were different. I think my first memories of being really different amongst probably very white kids was probably kindergarten, and all of the boys wanted me to play the Indian. We'd play cowboys and Indians, and they always said, "Kim, you're the Indian." And I thought, "Why do I always have to be the Indian?" [laughs]

Cline

There you go.

Boone

But I'd play the Indian, because--yes, so, I always had this affinity for Indians as I grew up, because I thought, "Oh, well, at least they're kind of close to me." [laughs]

Cline

Interesting. Also to sort of create a context here for anyone who's listening to this or reading it, this is certainly long before the idea of what we now call open adoption. Adoption even within one's own race and one's area was not something that was normally advertised or even known or talked about.

Boone

Right. But mine was in the paper. [laughs]

Cline

Well, I was going to say, and you were rather conspicuous, so I was going to say, how was that handled? Okay, there's your first answer. You were in the paper.

Boone

You're right.

Cline

How do you remember that being handled, then, in your community, with your parents?

Boone

Oh, that I don't remember. Like I said, it seems very common as far as no one ever made me feel funny there. Now, ask me about traveling to Texas, and that would be a little different.

Cline

Well, it sounds like we're going to get there.

Boone

Right. But you know, I think because of the war and people had experienced going out--and especially, that was an Army post, or Air Force, my dad was in the Air Force, so I think it wasn't quite as-- but probably a good place to come in. And then also at that time, and I don't know if a lot of people remember this, but Dale Evans and Roy Rogers also had adopted a Korean girl, so--

Cline

Oh, yes. And they were in Apple Valley, right there.

Boone

Yes, right there. Yes, every so often you'd run into Dale Evans going to the store or whatever, and there was a couple of other families out there that adopted, so--

Cline

Okay, that was one of my questions.

Boone

Right, right. And so I think southern California, there were quite a few people that had adopted.

Cline

Interesting.

Boone

But out there, my mom really wanted us to not feel odd, so I guess that's how you would put it. But she always kept contact with as many of the other families as she could, and so we would see other families with adopted kids, and so it wasn't--we knew that maybe you were a little different in school, but not different in that the fact--just different because you looked different, not because you were necessarily adopted. So anyway, and then so as we would meet with other people, it just seemed natural, and some of those people would have their own birth children and adoptees, and we'd just all kind of mix, so it didn't seem as strange, I guess, as it probably looked to other people. Now that I'm older I realize, oh, well, I guess it did look probably different, but as children I never felt that, so I guess that was good on my parents' part, that they kind of kept us in--

Cline

Yes, really good. When was your sister adopted, then?

Boone

I think it was in '59. I was going to ask my mom that, but it's not something that's within my brain. But she's about three and a half

years younger than me, so I think it was '59 when she came over, and she was a baby. She was only about nine months old.

Cline

What was that like for you? Do you have any memory of that?

Boone

Oh, yes. She came into Portland [Oregon], and so we drove up there, and I told my mom years later when I was an adult, I could still remember the hotel room. It was such an event for me to be getting a sister, and so I could still describe the hotel room. She was like amazed. But I was four at the time, so I was old enough then to remember those kind of things.

Cline

Okay. What was your relationship like with your parents, and how much did it possibly change once your sister was part of the family?

Boone

Oh, I remember having to sit in the back of the car. [laughter] And my sister got to sit in the--well, back then you didn't have all the seatbelt laws and stuff.

Cline

Yes, no car seats.

Boone

So that's a big memory, because I remember my dad would turn and I would slide over, and I'm thinking, guy, this isn't too fun. But being girls, we really played with each other and that kind of thing, and my dad always said I was such a good experience for them, because he had wanted a boy next, that they just decided to adopt another girl. So I guess that was good.

Cline

Right. Wow. And that's a long drive too. I'm trying to imagine driving back from Portland down to Victorville with a nine-month old--

Boone

Right. And that part I don't remember. I probably slept most of the time.

Cline

Wow, an amazing thing. So how long were you in Victorville then?

Boone

Till I went into first grade. So I went to kindergarten there, and then my parents owned a home in Hawthorne. My dad retired and so then we moved to Hawthorne.

Cline

What do you remember about moving, and what your new neighborhood, a very much more high-density neighborhood, was like?

Boone

Well, we lived in a city in Victorville, so at that time Hawthorne was basically homes--

Cline

Yes, suburbs.

Boone

--yes, the suburbs. Now you see a lot of apartments and stuff, but back then you really didn't. It was basically housing, single-family housing and stuff, so we'd been there a lot. My grandfather actually lived in my parents' home. They had bought the home before, and so we would go visit, and so I just remember laying on the couch with all the movers moving stuff and kind of watching them. I do remember that, because it was a move, so that. Then we moved here, and I started first grade, and it was a little neighborhood

school. Of course my mom, even at that time, never wanted anything to happen to us. She was very paranoid something would happen, so she would walk me to school and walk me back and things like that.

Cline

Do you remember any feelings, any emotions about the idea of relocating? Or because it was familiar, was it that much easier?

Boone

It was familiar, so I don't think it was as big of a thing. Like I said, my grandfather lived in my parents' home while they were there, and then he actually moved across the street--

Cline

Oh, okay, I was wondering.

Boone

--so I grew up with my grandfather always being nearby.

Cline

And whose father was this?

Boone

My mother's father.

Cline

Your mother's father, okay. Now you're going to first grade in Hawthorne. What was the school?

Boone

It was a little local school. It was only kindergarten through fourth grade, and so Jefferson Elementary [School], and so I guess I entered in pretty good. Now, my mom's a storyteller, because, of course, she's southern, so one of the stories she likes telling is that when I started there--of course, this was back when you didn't necessarily say the politically correct thing.

Cline

Sure.

Boone

She said, "Well, Kim, if you're not good in school, you're going to have to go back to kindergarten." [laughs] So anyway, so I mean, that was the way she was raised, and I don't give her any like, she's bad because she did that. Well, they decided that I should go into really the higher class, because they were trying to group kids after testing or whatever. Well, they didn't tell me that, and so they were changing my class. Well, when they changed my class, I thought I was going back to kindergarten--

Cline

Oh, man.

Boone

--and I took the coloring paper and got the black crayon and just colored it all black. And my mother said, "Why'd you do that?" Or probably my teacher asked me first, "Why'd you do that, Kim?" I said, "Well, I had to change classes." But actually they were putting me in the--[laughs]

Cline

The elite group.

Boone

Yes, the better class. But, of course, that's the story that--and I'm sure I did it, because--[laughs]

Cline

Seems like you?

Boone

Yes, it seems like me. [laughter]

Cline

Okay. And then you stayed at that school then through fourth grade?

Boone

Through fourth grade, yes.

Cline

And when did your sister start school then?

Boone

Let's see. I was probably third grade when she would have started. She is three years behind me--or maybe second grade, I guess second grade--and then she went to the same school.

Cline

What is her name?

Boone

Robin [Boone].

Cline

Did we get both your parents' names?

Boone

Yes.

Cline

Let's make sure that's in the record there.

Boone

Yes, I said that.

Cline

Where did you go after that school, then?

Boone

Then everyone went to a bigger school, which is called Washington Elementary [School]. That was a little further walk. By then my mom wasn't walking me. [laughs] But I would meet up with friends, and we would walk over to Washington Elementary, and fifth and sixth grade then was in that school. They kind of kept us like separated from the younger kids, so it was kind of like its own, like, part of the school, so there was more fifth grades and more sixth grades. And I feel like I had a pretty good education. The Hawthorne School District at that time was pretty good.

Cline

Let's talk a little bit about your neighborhood. What kind of folks were living in Hawthorne back in those days?

Boone

It was basically white, but we did have some Hispanic neighbors that were next to us, and then across the street there was a Chinese family, so it was a little more, I guess, mixed. And then in my class, I grew up with a boy that was Japanese. But at that time, and I don't know if people realize it, but it was sort of segregated, so most of the Japanese actually lived in Gardena, and then we were, I suppose, more blue collar there in Hawthorne. And then many of the Hispanics lived in another area, and many of the blacks lived in another area, so you didn't have as much mix, but within our neighborhood we had a few families that were--so it was nice being that way.

Cline

With some Japanese and Chinese in your neighborhood, what was your sense of the level of awareness people had, who were non-Koreans, of course, of what being Korean was, or even where Korea was?

Boone

Oh, most people had no clue. They'd ask me if I was Japanese or Chinese, and I'd say--if I said I was Korean, they would say,

"What's that?" That was kids. I think most adults kind of had an awareness because of the war.

Cline

Yes, you would think.

Boone

But the kids, there was not really, and so there were times I would just say one of the other ones. [laughter] I'd say I was Japanese or I was Chinese, because it was just easier.

Cline

Wow, interesting. Now, you said that your parents had been to Korea and they, I guess, felt some kind of a connection there. They were inspired to do this. What do you remember about how your parents may have been keeping you somewhat informed about what being Korean was, or what Korea was like as a country or as a culture, if they did any such thing at all?

Boone

Well, my parents--my mom had a lot of things from Korea, dolls and animal statues and things, which she since has given me. So those were always awareness. She had like a wood statue of a man with an A-frame on his back, and she said, "This is how they would carry." She said she saw a man carrying a piano with this A-frame going down the street, so some of those things that she was able to tell me I think really stuck with me so that I kind of knew some of the culture of that time, and so I think that was pretty good.

Cline

Yes, it's pretty unusual.

Boone

She would sing the national--I guess it's the national song, "Ah dee dong" ["Arirang"] didn't quite sing it the right way I found out later as I would hear other Koreans after I was grown, but we sang it along, and so she was able to that. And then, of course, when you

do your country reports, I did Korea, so then we were able to do things like that.

But I didn't have a lot of awareness of food and stuff, because there weren't Korean restaurants at that time.

Cline

Right, for sure.

Boone

My parents really didn't particularly like the kimchi and things, so I wasn't really aware of that until I got older. In fact, I think my mom said there was such a thing as kimchi, but she couldn't--she doesn't like hot things, so I can kind of understand that. But as far as what she could remember or what she would say and tell us and things, so at least we had some--I never felt like that I was just completely pulled out of the country and I was just completely American but I looked this way. I think they were more aware, I guess. She even said herself, "I don't know where I got that except for we were there, and so we wanted you to know as much as you could."

Cline

Right. And there were other Asian faces around.

Boone

Right, so it wasn't completely that we were the only--like if you were in the middle part of the country or something.

Cline

Right, like Minnesota, like many of the adoptees were.

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

Who, then, were some of your close friends growing up in the neighborhood there? What kind of people were they?

Boone

Mostly my school friends. There was one other family that had adopted from Korea that was in our neighborhood that I actually went to school with, so the daughter was my age.

Cline

Oh, wow.

Boone

And so, yes. And after we got grown, in fact, I ran into the younger brother, and he has now adopted from Korea, so anyway, they were there.

Cline

Now, was the younger brother also Korean?

Boone

Yes, there was three of them. There was a girl and two boys. There was a girl and a boy, and they were actually my age, and they would always say there were twins, but they really weren't twins. They actually--because I used to say, "How can you be twins and have different birthdays?" [laughs]

Cline

Good question.

Boone

And they said, "We don't know, but we're twins." See, that's how much you know as a small child. But then we figured it out later that they were just close to the same age. But anyway, so--and for years we had contact. We've finally lost contact since we got older.

Cline

And your other school friends, they were just all kinds of people?

Boone

Yes, different kinds, different kinds.

Cline

You said that when you were out in Victorville, you went to a church there. What about the religious side of life in your family growing up?

Boone

Yes. We always went to church and involved in church. It kind of gave you a bigger family, I think, because like I said, most of our family, my parents' families were back in Texas, so it kind of gives you a sense of belonging someplace and being able to go someplace that's got that scheduled thing, amongst other things. I had a pretty busy life, because my mom wanted us to experience everything. So we did the music, we did the dance, we did the singing. You name it, we probably took it as a class when we were kids, because she always said, "Well, I didn't get to--." She kind of grew up during the [Great] depression, and so she wanted us to be in everything. So nowadays they say kids have so much. Well, I was experiencing that back in my day. [laughs]

Cline

Overscheduled. Wow. What about in school? What was maybe either beginning to interest you or that you found that you had some sort of aptitude for as a youngster?

Boone

I kind of had an aptitude for math, which I thought, hmm. So anyway--although I didn't pursue it as I got older, but I liked it. And then I enjoyed school. It was fun to be with other people and the kids and things like that. You know, every so often I had a little--as I got older, had a little trouble with some of the kids, but my teacher would probably jump in. I don't remember it really well. Or my mother would jump in. She's kind of one of those kinds of people, so if she had heard that I'd been slighted in the least, I'm sure she was down at the school. [laughs] I probably didn't tell her about everything, because I knew she'd be down there at the

school. So she was very overprotective, like I said before, which, you know, then I became that way with my kids. I said, "You can blame Grandma." [laughter]

Cline

Wow. Interesting. You mentioned going to Texas, now. It was a little different when you went to Texas, I presume to visit relatives?

Boone

Yes, we visited relatives and friends of my parents and things.

Cline

How did you feel you were received by the extended family?

Boone

Well, the family we would visit, I think it was fine. My mom said that the first time that--like I said, she has these stories, so the first time I came and then she took us, took me to Texas, she had an uncle, and he said, "Why'd you get one with eyes like that?" And so she said, "What's wrong with her eyes? She has two of them. She can see out of them." So that was the way my mother was.

And then another story that actually a friend of hers has told me, she said that someone said to my mom, "Don't go with a chip on your shoulder," as she went back with me the first time. Of course, that was in the fifties. And she said, "Well, I'm going with a two-by-four, and I dare anyone to knock it off." So that's the way my mother is. She is really Texan.

So anyway, but amongst the family that we visited and things, it just seemed very natural. They didn't ever say anything at least bad to me. My grandmother was back there, my dad's mother. I learned to braid her hair. That's how I learned to braid. She had long red hair, and so as I was talking to cousins later on--she died when I was a teenager, but as I talk to cousins, even still I have contact with them, and we talk about her, and that's my memories of my connection with her. So they were saying, "Yeah, I remember her hair," and things, so it's just a connection that you have.

Cline

Interesting. So what was different about being in Texas, though?

Boone

Well, a couple of times I--like I said, personally to me nothing was said. But I remember my dad used to say that one time when they were going--we would travel in the car, and we stopped at a gas station, and my sister was there and I guess he was holding her or something, and someone mentioned something about her skin. And my dad just said, "Oh, we drank too much coffee," [unclear] and went off. [laughs] So that's how my parents would handle things sometimes. But I guess they were very aware that there was going to be--they were kind of pioneers in transracial families and things like that.

Cline

Interesting.

Boone

But they wanted children and that's how.

Cline

Right. Now, you said your father was retired from the Air Force. What did he do after that? When you moved to Hawthorne, was he involved in--

Boone

Yes. He got a job. He was with a company. It was called Stratoflex. It had to do with the aerospace and that kind of thing.

Cline

Yes, I figured. Very big back then.

Boone

Right, right. So he worked with them for many years, well, until he finally retired-retired. He said someone asked him if he was going to

work at the time I was five, and he says, "Oh, yes. I have a family to raise." So he went back to work, so then he retired from them. How we ended up then moving to Orange County when I was between eighth and ninth grade was because his company moved, and that's when Orange County was just starting to grow and burgeon out.

Cline

And your mom, stay-at-home?

Boone

My mom was a homemaker, so she babysat and did things like that. But she said she hadn't waited this long to have children to go to work, so she always was home with us, so it was typical back then, though--

Cline

Yes, totally.

Boone

--that Mom was home, Dad worked.

Cline

Right. How was your relationship with your sister as you got older?

Boone

Now, as we were growing up we were fine. As we got older, she kind of went her way, I went mine. She lives close by, but we don't have real close contact.

Cline

Interesting. What were her interests?

Boone

I don't know, she got married.

Cline

I see.

Boone

But she hasn't had children, so that could have been one reason that we haven't stayed real close.

Cline

How would you describe her relationship with your parents?

Boone

Pretty close with my mom, and I'm pretty close with my mom, but we're just not real close to each other. But I think it's because I have certain interests, and she has certain things, and so that's just the way it is. [laughs]

Cline

That's how it is.

Boone

Families.

Cline

So how old were you, then, when you moved to Orange County?

Boone

I was fourteen, I guess, because I was just going into ninth grade. It was just starting--my high school was brand new, Edison High School in Huntington Beach, so I was the first graduating class to go through the school. And actually, I actually wrote the words for our school alma mater--

Cline

Wow.

Boone

--so, yes. So I won twenty-five dollars and they still sing it, I guess.

Cline

Amazing. That's also a pretty kind of a critical age in so many ways. What was moving like for you as an experience at that point in your life?

Boone

Oh, I wanted to and I didn't want to. I had my friends in Hawthorne. But it was kind of exciting knowing that I was going to a brand-new place and meeting new people and things like that, so I guess it was scary and exciting at the same time.

Cline

Okay. And when you were living in Hawthorne, how much, if at all, did you get around to other places in sort of the greater L.A. area? I mean, did you ever go into the city, downtown L.A. or other parts of the area?

Boone

Yes, some, I mean, not a lot. But my mom was actually my Campfire Girls leader, and so in Campfire Girls, just like in Girl Scouts, you have kind of different things you're supposed to do and things. So one of the things that she wanted all the girls to know was something on the Korean background, and so we would go and attend--I don't know how many times we did it, but--the big Korean church. There was a big Korean church in L.A., and so we would go there and all sit together and things like that. So, of course, it was as interesting to me as to any of the other girls, because--[laughs]

Cline

Yes, right. Were they speaking Korean?

Boone

Oh, yes. Yes, they'd speak in Korean.

Cline

Do you remember which church this would have been, then?

Boone

I don't know, and I would have to ask my mother.

Cline

Yes, downtown L.A., though?

Boone

Yes, I think it was downtown, but I'm not really sure.

Cline

It wasn't the one on Robertson Boulevard?

Boone

It could have been. It could have been. I don't know.

Cline

Yes, okay. Interesting.

Boone

And my mom has never driven, so I don't even know if she would know. I think my dad took us.

Cline

Interesting. So then when you moved to Orange County, what year would that have been?

Boone

1969.

Cline

This is leading me into the question which is, you could say, a sixties question. Culture was changing. A lot was changing in the sixties. You're now on the early part of the teen years. What, if anything, do you remember about how that started to kind of affect your life in terms of what was going on in the country--

Boone

You mean being Korean?

Cline

--pop culture, just in general. What was your awareness of that?

Boone

Well, I remember the hippies and the music, and, of course, my mom being conservative, my mom and dad being conservative, they--

Cline

Okay, this is where I was going.

Boone

You know, I wanted to wear short dresses, and they didn't want me to, and oh, yes, the normal kid stuff. No, I just thought that, they don't know anything, they're old. You know, those kind of things.

Cline

Right, the usual thing. Right. And part of my question is, your parents whom you just termed conservative, where were they in terms of the political point of view that you recall at that point? I mean, your father was in the military, I know, but--

Boone

Right. Well, you know, I say conservative as far as religious and stuff like that, but actually my parents themselves were probably more liberal as far as, like, my mom didn't always hold to exactly what the church would say. So it's like, you weren't supposed to dance. Well, we took dance lessons. We went to dances. So I think many people are like that. They kind of have both sides. So my parents, basically, I think voted Democrat. Yes.

Cline

Okay. Because '69, we're talking about the beginning of the [Richard M.] Nixon era. That was a big shift in the country at that point. I don't know if you have any memory of where they may have felt that was going.

Boone

Well, I remember my grandfather didn't like Nixon. [laughs] But I don't know much with my parents and stuff. I know--and this is no slight on anybody, but because they were Baptists, I know they didn't vote for [John F.] Kennedy because he was Catholic, so that was a big change in there. So, you know.

Cline

Yes. Right. That's how it was then. It's a point of view. So now you're in Huntington Beach, which was kind of a fresh place, it sound like.

Boone

Right.

Cline

How would you describe that in terms of comparing your Hawthorne experience, the type of people, the type of students at your school, your neighborhood; what was that like?

Boone

I didn't realize it at the time, but we had moved into what you would call probably a more upscale area. A lot of people there had businesses and things like that. One of my best friends, her father was a professor and stuff. But probably in Hawthorne it was more blue collar and probably your more upscale would have been Torrance or getting out towards Pacific Palisades or things. But because I didn't know any difference, and everybody at that time wore jeans--

Cline

Yes. It was the late sixties.

Boone

Yes, it was the sixties, and so people weren't differentiating that much between classes or things like that, so I felt very comfortable. My dad was a worker, but it's not like we ever lacked anything.

Cline

Interesting. And racially, what was the area like?

Boone

Oh, very white. [laughs] Very white. I know I was looking at my yearbook one day--after now, of course, because things are so mixed here in southern California, and I was going, "Oh, my goodness, it really was white." Because almost all my friends were. I did have--there was a few Hispanic families in there, but I would say that they were probably more upscale also. So I was laughing the other day, because I was talking to a friend and I said, "Yeah, the Hispanic kids were the good kids in this school." [laughs]

Cline

Interesting.

Boone

And innocent, because their parents were very strict on them. So they would have parties, and if I was invited to one of their parties, it was fine. It was some of the other kids around that were doing the not-so-good things.

Cline

Well, it's also a surf culture there, I presume.

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

What do you remember about that?

Boone

Oh, our school had a surfing team. Oh, yes. My school was about probably half a mile from the beach, so we would wear flip flops and go down to the beach. I mean, it was very--it was pretty free. But I felt like I got a pretty good education. I had some good teachers and things like that. My mom didn't like me to go down near the pier, because there were hippies there. [laughs] I remember that, so that was one of those things.

Cline

Yes. It's hard to imagine hippies in Orange County, but--

Boone

I know. But I was talking to a--really? Is that how--

Cline

Well, yes. Just people think it's--

Boone

Oh, well, the Golden Bear was there.

Cline

That's right. Of course. People think of Orange County in the sixties, it's like heavy Republican territory. You think of a pretty big cultural divide.

Boone

Right. But remember, we were near the coast. It was a little different.

Cline

Yes, the beach town. That's right.

Boone

Right. But, in fact, I was just talking to a friend the other day online, and we're all the same age, but she was saying, "Yeah, you know, remember when Orange County you didn't have to worry about going down to the beach by yourself and just walking along or

getting away and stuff," because you never heard of anything bad happening. Of course, now I would never allow my kids just to go by themselves. No, you go with somebody else. But it's a different time. But it was actually probably to be growing up there at that time was very nice, because it was pretty free and you didn't really have to worry about getting hurt or anything like that.

Cline

You mentioned a little bit about kind of style clashes with your parents.

Boone

Oh, yes.

Cline

How did it go with them as you started to become more of a real teenager and now growing up in this beach town?

Boone

Oh, we had our clashes. I wanted to dress one way. My mother didn't want me to dress that way, so I would sneak things in my bag. You didn't have backpacks at that time, but in purses or whatever, and change. I remember one day even when I was younger than that, in junior high, oh, my mom came down to the school. I had rolled up my skirt. [laughs]

Cline

Oh, golly.

Boone

Oh, yes. We had all of those. You know, people probably laugh about that now, but that was very serious--

Cline

Oh, yes, a big deal.

Boone

--that, oh, you would show that much leg or whatever. Of course, by the time I graduated from high school, we would basically be able to touch the bottoms of our skirts with our hands. They were very short. I look at it and I think, "Oh, my gosh, I can't believe I would dress like that," look in the yearbook and things, but it was the style and it was that time.

Cline

And there were dress codes in the schools.

Boone

Oh, yes. Oh, there were, but you know.

Cline

Yes. And, of course, one of the funny things I'm thinking back now from my own memory is that the novelty of girls being allowed to wear pants.

Boone

Oh, yes. When I was a freshman in high school, during that freshman year we were finally allowed to wear pants, and I think like we were talking about, you couldn't tell who had money and who didn't, because everyone wore jeans.

Cline

Right.

Boone

Now, as things went on, I think by my senior year, then we got Jordache.

Cline

Oh, yes, yes, designer jeans.

Boone

So then you started--yes, yes.

Cline

Right. So what about, now, teen culture. Things are changing and there's always the boys question. How was family life changing for you because of this new era that you'd entered?

Boone

Well, it was so funny, because my mom always said I couldn't date till I was sixteen. So when--she was pretty good about, like, if a boy wanted to come over or something like that, but I couldn't go out on a date. So when I turned sixteen, my sister said, "Are you going to date now?" And so my response was, "Well, you've got to have someone to date," because I hadn't dated. But like I said, there had been boys as far as friends or whatever, and so you kind of have your crushes and things like that. So, yes, that was part of--sometimes I would have a crush on somebody; they didn't care for me. Or someone liked me and I didn't care for them. It was typical.

Cline

Right, standard.

Boone

Yes.

Cline

What about other aspects of pop culture at this point, like music or TV. How much was that an issue, if at all, with your parents or anything you remember?

Boone

As long as I didn't play my music loud, it was fine.

Cline

What were you listening to?

Boone

Well, anywhere from Led Zeppelin to Bobby Sherman. [laughs]

Cline

There you go, the full spectrum of popular music.

Boone

Yes. [laughter]

Cline

Okay. One thing that I was curious about, as media culture becomes far more important and more engrained at that point, and people are watching TV a lot, what, if anything, do you remember about the kinds of people that were being depicted on television, and how were starting--especially now you're living in this very white area--how were you starting to kind of see yourself during this time? A time when things like what we now think of as self-image, when you're a teenager girl, it's a huge issue. What were your feelings now?

Boone

Well, I always wanted to be Marsha [Brady of "The Brady Bunch"]. [laughter] Of course. The only thing that was great was people loved my hair, because it was so straight, because at that time people--girls were ironing their hair to become straight, and they said, "Kim, you don't even have to iron your hair!" I said, "No, it's just straight." So that was good. It wasn't blonde, but it was straight. So that was one thing. I think you identify with the people, which were basically white people, on TV at that time. It was starting to change a little bit, but I remember being younger and like I mentioned the Indian thing, I would sometimes hope the Indian won, the Indians won in those shootouts, which was probably kind of not so good.

Cline

Interesting.

Boone

I'd even tell people that, just because they were--probably I was identifying a little bit more with them. But at that time, of course, the whole thing was changing with more African Americans on TV and things like that. But you still didn't see a lot of Asians, so even to this day there's still this whole issue about Asians being more foreign than just about anybody else, so I think we're still going through some transition. Now finally on commercials and stuff I see Asians, just speaking English and being--and I think as we see more of that, that it will be better as far as for anybody else that's growing up.

But I think I really did notice that there were more people coming in, especially in the eighties as the Huxtables [from "The Cosby Show"] and some of those, of course, came on, that it was better. But I still remember, too, a lot of clashes going on, because it was a change and it wasn't willingly that people were mixing. We had the whole busing issue. We didn't where we were, but maybe people don't want to say this, but people were moving down to Orange County because they didn't want to be in the busing areas--

Cline

Right, yes.

Boone

--and so there was all of that going on at that time, so it was quite an adventure through that time. Although I'm glad I lived through it.

Cline

Yes, right. And I was, of course, as you were talking reminded of [Lieutenant] Sulu [George Takei] on "Star Trek"--

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

--as a real pioneer. And speaking of these sorts of issues as well, what about studying American history? What, if anything, do you remember that might have been of interest, shall we say, during that time? Especially when you start getting into World War II.

Boone

World War II? Right. Well, of course, you always study about the Japanese being interned, and I think around fourth, fifth, sixth grade is probably the awareness that you start really starting to talk about it and that kind of stuff in history class. So I was really concerned for a while in my own little young brain that if that happened again, if I would have to go. And so I asked my mom would she come with me if I had to go into a camp, because I think even at that time there was the acknowledgment, of course, that European Americans were the majority. [laughs]

Cline

Hard to dispute that.

Boone

Yes. Now, of course, things are changing here in California, but that's just the way it was and so you just kind of--and through history and everything, things that had happened. So I didn't feel necessarily bad. I just thought, oh, if this happened, what would I do?

There was also another thing that--one time we were talking about segregation in school, and so I raised my hand, and I don't think my teacher knew how to answer me. I raised my hand and I said, "Now, if I went someplace that there was a white toilet and a black toilet, which one would I have gone to?" And so I think my teacher just kind of skimmed over that one and went on. [laughs]

Cline

Wow.

Boone

Because, yes. And it wasn't real concerning for me, but I was questioning, where was I in this black-and-white community that seemed to be around.

Cline

Yes, and certainly a lot of that was being discussed at this point. This is also the time of the Vietnam War. What do you remember about any feelings that might have been surrounding that issue at that time, you being Asian, if it all?

Boone

I don't think it bothered me as much. I was hearing the same thing everybody else was, that we didn't want communism to spread and that this is where we were trying to stop it and that kind of thing.

Cline

Yes, a similar situation to Korea in many ways.

Boone

Right, right, in some ways, you're right. Except I don't think Korea was ever declared war. I'm not sure Vietnam was either. I don't remember.

Cline

Yes, I don't think it was. [laughter]

Boone

But anyway, so at that time there weren't Vietnamese here, so it really wasn't, to me, a form--where I was Korean, they were Vietnamese, so I didn't really connect the two, really.

Cline

But I'm thinking of how other people don't know how to make those connections.

Boone

Right. I only had one--and this is interesting. When I was grown, I had moved up to the Fullerton area, and so I myself was attending a church that had kind of a young college-career group. And so unbeknownst to me, I didn't know that our leader had been in Vietnam, because he had not said it. So one day they were supposed to be--I don't know, you kind of make confessions or whatever, and so he was saying, "Well, I have to confess I am so glad I ran into Kim and that she's with our group and everything," of course, that was me. And I'm kind of sitting--I'm thinking I'm very puzzled with this, and he said, "Because I really did hate Asians after I was over in Vietnam." And it was like shocking to me. [laughs] So that was an experience, you know. You don't know how people are thinking, and so that was something that he shared, and later on I had to think about that. So I felt like, well, I'm glad I was on the good side.

Cline

Yes, really, the face of the enemy.

Boone

Right, right, right.

Cline

Amazing. Wow, yes. So you're in Huntington Beach, it's high school. We're getting kind of a sense of where you were culturally, which is, I mean, you're kind of right in the middle of a serious white-dominant culture sort of experience. What did you ultimately decide to do in terms of life after high school?

Boone

Well, I was going to college. Then I decided that I didn't know that I wanted to stick with college at that time.

Cline

Where were you going?

Boone

Cal[ifornia] State [University] Fullerton. And basically, a lot of my friends were going to UCI [University of California, Irvine], but--

Cline

Which was new then, I guess.

Boone

It was pretty new. But my parents couldn't afford to send me to UCI. It was more expensive, and I couldn't--at that time they would count what your income of your parents were, if they owned their house or not. Well, my parents owned their house. That's one reason--owned it outright--so that was one reason we were able probably to do the things we were able to do with probably the class of people we were in. But because they owned their house, even though my dad was just a working person. But they considered that for any loans and things like that, and so I just knew that my parents couldn't afford UCI, which I probably would have--oh, I'm sure I could have gotten into, because I graduated third in my class.

Cline

Oh, okay.

Boone

But so I went to Cal State Fullerton, but then I decided, I don't know if I want to--I had a freshman program. So I went ahead and quit, and I said, "You know, I'd really like to go to business college and get some experience in that." So actually my parents sent me to a business college at Anaheim, and so I took bookkeeping and accounting and stuff like that and then started working for a CPA [certified public accountant]. But then, you know, things go on, and I ended up getting married, so I was pretty young. I was twenty.

Cline

Oh, wow.

Boone

And so started the marriage-baby thing.

Cline

I see. Okay. Leading up to this, how much of a sense of expectations or guidance were you receiving from your parents about marriage or the kind of husband they might have been hoping for you?

Boone

Right. They were probably a little old school, where as long as you choose well. It wasn't as much, oh, you have to choose a professional or things like that. In fact, my husband had gone to college but hadn't finished, but did very well in the automotive industry, so, actually, I had a pretty--I could stay home and be with my children at that time, so I was basically a homemaker for many years. All during that time, though, I myself wanted to go back to college, so I would take classes, and so eventually got my bachelor's as I was doing that.

Cline

In what?

Boone

In psychology.

Cline

Okay. Different from business school.

Boone

Right, right. I decided, well, I don't know about business.

Cline

I see. Okay. So who is your husband, then, and how did you meet?

Boone

I met him at church. His name was Michael Mayher. So we had one son and then have also two adopted daughters.

Cline

I presume he is not Korean.

Boone

No, no, no. And he's my ex-husband now.

Cline

Yes, right, right. So how long were you married, then?

Boone

Actually, we were married twenty-five years, so I could say some things about that, but I'm not sure that I want to.

Cline

Right, okay. But you did have two children.

Boone

Yes. We had three children.

Cline

Well, you had one and you adopted two.

Boone

And we have adopted two. And then, actually, I had a second son that was stillborn.

Cline

Okay. I think probably next time I'll want to talk more about your children, since they were adopted, but we can set the stage now by talking, if you would, about the decision to adopt, what your feelings were about that, and certainly what his feelings were about that, since, obviously, I guess he knew you were adopted.

Boone

Right.

Cline

Pretty hard to miss that.

Boone

Right.

Cline

How did that topic sit with him, and what was the discussion like in terms of that?

Boone

Well, we had talked about it before I got pregnant the second time, and so we'd actually put in an application with Orange County and it was in the process, and--this story, I know, comes up a lot--I got pregnant. So that adoption then had to be cancelled, because it was with the county. You had to let them know, of course. And then my baby was stillborn. So then we decided that after a time that we would adopt again. But then we found out that somebody on his side of the family, a little girl, was in foster care and not going back to her birth mother, and so the birth mother actually wrote his mom and said what was happening, and, of course, she was frantic at this point now, because she knew she wasn't going to get her back. Well, when we found out, we said, "Well, why don't we find out about this," which the birth mother was very glad, because that way, hopefully, the daughter would stay in the family. So we pursued that and then that's my middle child, is my daughter.

Cline

Oh, okay. Now, we have to talk about the racial situation here.

Boone

Oh, yes. [laughs] That's very interesting.

Cline

You're a mixed-race couple at that point, and you have a biracial child, and so when you were talking about adoption, what direction were you thinking at that point? It still was not common to adopt outside one's race--

Boone

Right.

Cline

--but what is your race at that point? I mean, what were his feelings about that? And what I really am kind of interested in--what were his family's feelings maybe about that?

Boone

Right. Oh, they were very open. At that time, like I said, we had applied in Orange County. At that time they would not place a child--they wanted to place children only within the racial thing, because that was in the eighties. So it would be Asian, and so actually we did find out later that they sort of had a match for us, except then I got pregnant, and then so, man, was I devastated that all of that. But, you know, that's part of my life. But no, it was very--my son is half and so it was not a problem that we would probably adopt Asian. I told the social workers, actually, I would adopt Hispanic, because my son looks kind of American Indian in the mix, but they wouldn't do that.

Cline

Right. Well, there's also kind of the culture and language component. I don't know how much they were considering that. But part of what I'm curious about, too, is that in Orange County at that time, how much of a pool of Asian or biracial half-Asian children were there?

Boone

Not very many.

Cline

I would think.

Boone

They said that it could be a long time, but we had found out that-- you know, by then the Vietnamese were here--

Cline

Yes, starting to come in.

Boone

--and so we did find out that it would have been a little Vietnamese boy--

Cline

Oh, I see.

Boone

--which, probably as we go through the interview, that my youngest is Vietnamese, so, yes.

Cline

Okay, right. We'll definitely be talking about that. Of course, this is also an interesting thing in terms of the story of Orange County, which was quite the bastion of the Caucasian racial sort of identity, and, ironically, due to involvement in the Vietnam War, becomes very much--well, that's the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam.

Boone

Right, right, is Garden Grove.

Cline

Yes. Very interesting. But at this point, when you're raising your family and you're in the early years of your marriage, where were you living?

Boone

We lived in Santa Ana, then we lived in Costa Mesa.

Cline

Still in Orange County, then.

Boone

Oh, yes. We stayed in Orange County until my son was about nine.

Cline

Okay. And then where did you go?

Boone

Then my husband got a job up in the Santa Clarita area and so we moved up there.

Cline

Well, this is going to be sort of the wrap-up portion of today's session, but I wanted to ask you, now you're kind of going to the southern and northernmost extremes of the area, and somewhere in the middle is where all the Koreans are.

Boone

Right. [laughter]

Cline

How much contact did you have with what was at that time, certainly during the eighties, becoming quite identifiably Koreatown?

Boone

Not a lot up there, but we did have kind of a Koreatown in Garden Grove at that time and so actually I had a little bit of contact. I actually dated when I was in high school a Korean adoptee that had come over as an older child, so he very much was into the cultural aspects, so he actually took me at that time into Garden Grove to a couple of restaurants and stuff, so that was--

Cline

What was that like for you?

Boone

Oh, for me it was different, because I had not experienced that. [laughs] But it was kind of funny, because his mom and my mom just thought it'd be a perfect match, but you know how that goes.

Cline

Yes, right.

Boone

You're a teenager. You don't want to do what your parents say. [laughs]

Cline

How much of the language had he retained at that point, if any?

Boone

Quite a bit, because he was practicing. He wanted to retain, so that was--it was almost like foreign to me.

Cline

Interesting, very interesting. How much awareness did you have of the growing and developing Korean community in the Los Angeles area?

Boone

I knew it was there. I didn't go up to it per se during that time. I take that back. I think he took me one time up there, but I really didn't know much about it or anything like that, right.

Cline

I was going to say, what was your level of interest in it?

Boone

Probably not a lot. I was more interested in what was going on at my high school and the football games and things like that.

Cline

Very interesting.

Boone

Yes. Like I said, he was very interested, because he came over as an older child. But for me, I thought it was cool, and I liked the fact that I blended in sometimes, but at times you kind of like standing out. [laughs]

Cline

There you go. How much awareness did you perhaps have of your parents' interest or awareness in what was going on in Korea while you were growing up?

Boone

I think if they heard about things, they might have mentioned it and things like that. But it was probably more of the adoption, what was going on through adoption and things like that. At one point, I think I was about fifth grade or so, there was this whole--because Korea always had the proxy adoptions up to then, where a child could come over without you going over and picking them up, and there was this whole issue through Social Services, and, in fact, my mom with other families and us went up to Sacramento for some bill that they were trying to pass, because they were trying to say that the kids were being brought over to be slaves, more or less, and so all of these parents were wanting to show, no, that we were just as spoiled and everything as all other kids. [laughter] So I can remember sitting there in the big tundra room, because they were discussing this bill. I didn't understand everything that was going on, but I just remember that that was something, because then for a while they were making it harder for people to adopt transracially. And, of course, my parents felt like it was more of a racial-bias thing then, what they were saying, but anyway. So for a while, parents did have to go over to Korea and adopt, but I think it changed again. But anyway, but that was kind of my introduction as far as that people really didn't all like us coming over here. [laughs]

Cline

Wow. Well, two more questions before we knock off for today. First of all, how much did your parents keep in touch with the Holt organization and what was going on?

Boone

Oh, quite a bit. I'm still friendly with some of the kids, and so we always called Bertha Holt Grandma Holt, and we would go up there to their picnics, not every year but enough that we were very familiar with the family. And Grandma Holt actually came down and stayed at my house in Corona one time when she was here for a picnic or something, I don't remember. Anyway, and so I knew her birth daughter. Her youngest birth daughter used to live in San Diego, and she was actually married to a Korean man--

Cline

Oh, interesting.

Boone

--so her kids are [unclear]. But in the meantime now, she's now back up in Oregon. So it was a pretty close contact that we had with them and their organization.

Cline

And since you were interacting, then, with other Korean adoptees, what was your sense of how similar or different their experience in their families was, and consequently what their perhaps level of adjustment or contentment they had compared to your situation?

Boone

I think most of the ones that I grew up with, it seemed like things were fine, as far as I know. It actually hasn't been--I mean, it's only been since I've gotten to be older, an adult, and that I've heard some of the stories where some of the people really were not very happy being adopted or things like that, so there is both. But I would say on the majority that probably adoptions have been pretty good.

Cline

Right. And that's at least what you were aware of then.

Boone

That's what I'm aware of. Right, right.

Cline

Okay. You didn't meet any grumbling adoptees at that point?

Boone

No, no. Actually, people--but then I think maybe people are certain ways when they either like joining groups or don't like joining groups or things, so my parents were ones that wanted to be part, and so their parents probably were, too, so it was probably kind of a contingent there that was closer.

Cline

Yes, wow, interesting. And particularly when you start to get around college age, a lot of people tend to start kind of looking in a different way at who they are and maybe what their roots are. How much did that happen to you at that age, or did it ever happen, or when did it happen?

Boone

You know, because there are a lot more mix in college now--but honestly, in the seventies it really wasn't like that. You kind of had a different--maybe small groups and stuff, but, for example, Cal State Fullerton, it was still pretty much like the people that were in Orange County, because a lot of Orange County kids went there. And so for me personally, that wasn't a big time, "Oh, I'm Korean now and I'm going to really search these roots." But it was a different time. I think now kids can be more aware, because there's your different studies that you have--

Cline

Right, the studies centers, right.

Boone

--and you don't--that wasn't really then.

Cline

Yes, which, in some places, came out of the late sixties and the seventies.

Boone

Right, right, right. So it came out of that, and people were starting or trying to see that, but it didn't get established until probably the late seventies, eighties, and then those people, then, were starting. So it's funny, because I always think some of the driving force on some of that stuff isn't my group. It's more the group that's probably ten years younger than me, or fifteen years younger, so we're kind of the older ones there, and there are a lot of us.
[laughs]

Cline

Right. Interesting. Okay. Well, I think this is a good place to stop. Does it feel good to you?

Boone

Yes.

Cline

And we'll continue with your family life at least after the children, when they start to get older and when you adopt your third child, the Vietnamese child. Thank you for today.

1.2. Session 2 (May 13, 2009)

Cline

It's May 13, 2009. This is Alex Cline once again interviewing Kim Boone in her classroom at the Monterey Hills School in South Pasadena. This is our second session.

Good afternoon.

Boone

Good afternoon.

Cline

Thank you for talking to me again and for making a little bit of time in your schedule for this sort of an activity.

We left off last time talking about your growing up in southern California after coming here from South Korea at around two years of age, and we got up to your marriage and the beginnings of your family, and we're going to continue with that today. I had a couple of follow-up questions that I wanted to start with, though. These deal specifically with your parents.

One thing that I meant to ask that I forgot to ask was, when your parents named you Kim, did they do so knowing that this was a very common name in Korea?

Boone

They knew it was common in Korea, but that's not why they named me Kim.

Cline

That was my next question.

Boone

I guess it was some popular TV people, like Kim Novak, and they just thought that would be kind of cool and that it was a very short name, so it would be easy for me to learn to write in school and things like that.

Cline

Okay. So it's not short for Kimberly, then?

Boone

No, no. They named me Kim, and, of course, all of my life people would say, "Is your name Kimberly?" and I said, "No, it's just Kim."

Cline

Wow. It's like mine is not Alexander, it's just Alex.

Boone

It's just Alex, yes.

Cline

Okay. Also, we talked about your sister, who was adopted a little while after you and who is younger than you are. I did ask about how her relationship was with your parents and how your relationship was with your parents, but one thing I was curious about. You said you sister never adopted--

Boone

No.

Cline

--I mean, never had children--

Boone

No, she didn't.

Cline

So I just wondered, in light of that, since you adopted and had other children, if her relationship with her experience of being an adopted child was different from yours, or if that was maybe just like a personality thing of hers.

Boone

I think it was just personality. I think her husband wasn't necessarily really--

Cline

Excited with the idea?

Boone

--enthusiastic about adoption. He had grown up in a big family, and I'm not sure that--they just chose not to pursue adoption. I think she wanted to have children, but they just never did, and then their lives are pretty satisfied, I guess, by not having any children right now.

Cline

Okay. Because it seems that one of the things that I find is that many of the adopted adults that I've talked to do actually wind up adopting themselves--

Boone

Right.

Cline

--which I think is a very encouraging sign. The other thing that I wanted to ask you about, I wanted to just kind of pursue this rather mundane topic a bit more, food. You mentioned that, for example, at one point you befriended, with what sounded like the encouragement of your parents, this young man who had been adopted when he was a little older, and he was taking you into the Korean community occasionally and I guess in some ways maybe introducing you to certain aspects of that community, one of them maybe being food. I just wanted to ask you, bearing in mind what I think we can imagine you probably grew up eating during that time, with Caucasian parents originally from Texas, what was the experience like for you discovering not just Korean but sort of just real Asian cuisine for the first time, once you were pretty much already grown up?

Boone

Right. Well, one thing is I discovered I liked rice, because--

Cline

That would be key.

Boone

--I never liked the way my mom fixed rice, and I thought I just didn't like rice. And then I discovered she--and I've even talked to her about this since then. I said, "You know, Mom, we grew up with Uncle Ben's or rice that wasn't supposed to stick together--,"

Cline

Minute Rice.

Boone

Yes. "And now I've discovered, you know what? Asian rice is really good." So that was the one big aspect. The other was pulgogi, or at that time I didn't know what it was called, but I really enjoyed that.

Boone

Anyway, but at that time, of course, the Korean national dish is kimchi. I did not like kimchi.

Cline

Oh, you didn't.

Boone

I tried it with him, and as a teenager I just kind of ignored that and ate the rice and the meat when we went out to some Korean restaurants. But it wasn't till I got older, and older meaning in my early twenties, I was working at this place, and they hired a girl that was from Japan. So she wanted to introduce me to Japanese food, and so we went out and I enjoyed the Japanese food a lot. And so I thought, "You know, I'm Korean. I need to learn to eat kimchi." So I started out eating a little bit, well, a lot of rice, I guess, and a little kimchi, because that's what they said, "You need to kind of get the taste for it." Now I've talked to other adopted Korean friends, and they just liked kimchi right off the bat, but for me, I had to learn. I learned to eat it. Now I love it. I love kimchi in all the different forms. But at that time I was more used to Mexican food or regular American food, and so kimchi was just like a foreign taste to me.

Cline

Yes, sure, absolutely. Well, it's interesting too. People don't even realize how unusual it was at one time to even find Japanese restaurants. And now, of course, there's a sushi bar on every corner.

Boone

Right. [laughs]

Cline

But growing up in southern California, Mexican food is the closest thing you get to kind of like soul food--

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

--the local cuisine. Okay. Now you're married, you're raising your family. You have your own, what some people call biological. Let's say you're the birth parents of your first child. You adopted the second, who I presume is a Caucasian child.

Boone

Right. She's--

Cline

And we're going to get to the third child in a moment. But you're a bi-racial couple. Was there any thought given--or I shouldn't ask a yes or no question. How much thought, if any, was given to culturally the kind of spin you were going to put on your children in terms of how you were raising them, even all the way down to things like what kind of food you're eating?

Boone

Right. Well, by that time Orange County had gotten more Asian food, and my husband had actually grown up in the Fountain Valley area, which they had quite a few of the Japanese farmers that had settled there after the war, because the reason it was called

Fountain Valley was because there was a lot of water in the land, and it was hard to farm at that time. So the Japanese farmers had come in, drained a lot of the land, been very successful at growing strawberries and asparagus and some of the other food items, and so he was a little more familiar with some of the cultural aspects, just because they were in the school.

So he enjoyed Asian food and so we--I don't know that we made a conscious effort to raise our children in one or the other, but we just kind of were very international in the way we would eat or we would go out or things like that. So my children were raised, then, with the different kinds of food. In fact, my Caucasian daughter, one of the first things she'll say if she comes to my house, "Oh, do you have any kimchi?" [laughs] Because she was raised with the Asian food also, of course.

Cline

Right. Well, you just answered my next question. I was thinking particularly at this point about that daughter. You know, she doesn't look like her mom.

Boone

No.

Cline

Any feelings there, when she was younger, growing up, that you're aware of?

Boone

Oh, about not looking like me?

Cline

Yes.

Boone

Well, yes. Especially as she got to be a teenager, some of the kids would, of course, say--and if you're not used to being around a

transracial family, for us it's normal. But for people that aren't, they look at you, and she would introduce me as her mother, and they'd say, "No, you're not. No, she's not your mother," which, of course, I got also when I was a teenager introducing my mother, so it was for me kind of normal. The only difference was, is that being Caucasian, she was part of the majority race, let's say, and I think it was different for her. And so at one point she asked me--and I did understand. It hurt me a little bit, but I understood. She asked me if she could say I was her stepmother, because it was easier for her to introduce that.

Cline

Wow.

Boone

And so I said, "You know, that's okay." So she did a couple of times and then she says, "I'm not going to do that. You're my mom. I'm just going to tell her." So there was this big something that was different for her that nobody else has had.

Cline

Well, you actually also walked into an area that I was going to ask about, which I guess I'll ask about now. Coming as you do from an experience where you are an Asian American raised by Caucasian parents and then an Asian American mom raising some Asian, some non-Asian children, you have a unique point of view available to you, which is a point of view that has potential insight into the dominant culture, the so-called majority, which isn't really a majority in this part of the world anymore, but--

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

--and a point of view from a so-called minority point of view, in this case an Asian American or Asian point of view. It's hard to know even just how to kind of walk into this question, but what,

particularly as you're raising your children and raising children tends to make one more aware of how one was raised, if nothing else, what sorts of potential insights do you feel that you had from your experience, about both the dominant culture and the so-called minority culture, in this case the Asian American culture in this part of the world at the time?

Boone

In the sixties or--

Cline

Yes, in southern California--

Boone

--just southern California now?

Cline

--or just in general. Let's just open it up and just in general.

Boone

Well, I think that especially when I was growing up in the fifties, sixties, seventies, there was a big distinction between the dominant white culture and if you were minority Asian American. Although I don't think--I think that there was a big difference as far as how people maybe viewed you, but being Asian American they didn't--I didn't feel like, anyway, the dominant culture tended to look down on Asian Americans. They tended to look at them as being different. So if I was talking to somebody--in fact, most of my friends tended to be Caucasian, because that's who I grew up around. But if I was talking to somebody that was Caucasian that didn't know me, at first they would start off more gingerly with me. But then because I speak the language very well, really understand the cultural aspects and can do the idioms, can do all that kind of thing, then they would just get comfortable and then it's just like talking to anybody else.

Now, a couple of times as an adult with my Caucasian daughter, I would go into stores, and this is something that I never thought of

until she got a little older, and so as she got older and we would go into stores, some of the salespeople would actually talk to her first.

Cline

Interesting.

Boone

And so that was an eye opener for me, and she'd look at me and, "Mom?" and so that was--and so I realize that there still is maybe within the cultural bounds, that people feel more comfortable talking with somebody, not knowing that she was actually my daughter and had no clue what they were talking about. [laughs] So it was interesting. I think it's getting better now or different, because I haven't noticed that since she's actually been grown. It was more when she was a teenager, but that was still in the nineties, and so things were still changing, and so things are still changing.

Cline

Wow, they continue to change. So how much understanding do you feel you have of the point of view of the dominant culture, then, of sort of Caucasian America?

Boone

Oh, I think I have a pretty good understanding, growing up in it and even the southern culture, because that was--both of my parents were from Texas. And so, you know, I guess I'm like some other people. I don't necessarily put it down. I think that that's the way it was in the world at that time. I'm glad that it's changing and that it has changed, but growing up in it, you just knew that you had to walk gingerly at times, kind of not be maybe so abruptly negative or different than the people you were around if you wanted to get along, because that's kind of how it is. And that's kind of how it is anyway, whether it's cultural or whether it's religious or whether it's other factors.

Cline

Well, it's interesting that your parents, of course, I think by adopting transracially, one would think they would have to be thinking about race in a way that the average Caucasian Americans would never have to think about it, which would benefit you ultimately. But one of the things that occurred to me was, when talking about your Caucasian daughter and her experiences, that adoption is still not the subject that is totally open to a lot of people's discussion. There's still, I think, culturally, there's a lack of certainty about whether it should even be discussed at all. And so whenever you are with a child that's not the same race, you're also potentially conspicuously announcing to the world, "My child is adopted."

Boone

Right.

Cline

What do you remember about anything maybe pertaining specifically to the adoption aspect of your relationship with your Caucasian daughter that might be noteworthy, that might have been interesting for both of you?

Boone

When we actually adopted her?

Boone

Well, anytime during her life when, well, you mentioned this experience in the store of having--but something that maybe is more related to the fact of adoption rather than maybe the fact of race so much.

Boone

Oh, well, one thing is when we first got her, and we picked her up from Oklahoma--right.

Cline

Oh, okay. Didn't know that part of the equation.

Boone

Oh, yes, because she is related to my ex-husband.

Cline

That was mentioned, yes, but I didn't know where she was.

Boone

Right. She was in Oklahoma, so actually Social Services here came to our home, did all of the paperwork. It had to be exchanged with Oklahoma. So we went and got her, and poor little thing. We go, we meet her one day and basically we're taking her back on the plane the next day.

Cline

And how old was she?

Boone

She was almost three. Yes, so she--I remember my husband, who was not adopted--we were sitting there in the airport, and so she's sitting there just staring at us. We were at a McDonald's, and she was sitting there staring at us, and he says, "What's she staring at?" And I said, "She's trying to imprint us on her mind, like who are these strange people that now I'm sitting with, after she's been in a foster home for a while." So that was a very interesting thing. Now, and something I did knowing that I would not look like this daughter, is that I carried her adoption papers for a few years with me whenever I was out, because I thought that would be all I would need is for somebody to come up and question this child being with me, so I just always did that. Because I had enough awareness that that's the thing people--first they look at you as--not that it's bad. I mean, you look at someone and the first thing, of course, you see is kind of the race thing, so, you know.

Cline

Right. Whether they appear to be connected.

Boone

Right, right. Exactly.

Cline

Yes, interesting. What issues may have then come up for her in adjusting to this new life? I mean, three years old, she's pretty aware now.

Boone

Right. Well, luckily, her foster mother had an adopted disabled Korean child that was older. She was actually I think a young adult at the time. So I thought, how more perfect could that be--

Cline

Yes, really.

Boone

--because at least Robin had been around this Korean girl, and so it wasn't such a shock for her, so that was kind of good.

Cline

Open adoption was probably not a very common thing back then, but how much contact did your daughter maintain with either her mother or her foster mother?

Boone

Well, there wasn't contact with the mother, except I--she knew always where she was, the mother did. So she could send her--like she would send Robin a birthday card or a couple of times a Christmas gift, but on the most part she was over there, and there were reasons that Robin was no longer with her, so we didn't keep close contact. But when Robin got eighteen, of course I had the contact information, so then she did contact her. Just in my own opinion--this is nobody else's--I think through the teen years I think some open adoptions work. But I think they're in such flux--

Cline

Yes, it's a big heavy time for identity.

Boone

--that it's very--it's good that they can have a family that's supportive, but they're not having other people pulling on them, and so that was one thing we didn't want, so that was one reason that--and she knew we knew. We had pictures of her mother and everything. But we said, "When you get eighteen, you can go ahead and contact," which she has. There's been some ins and outs of that now, but that's how--

Cline

Right. That's part of what you get.

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

So how old was your first child when the second daughter was adopted?

Boone

He was eleven.

Cline

Oh, interesting.

Boone

Yes, so he was all for it until she got here. [laughs]

Cline

Right. But even at eleven the rivalry.

Boone

At eleven, right. And, well, she was little. She'd go into his room, mess it up, things like that. So he says he didn't say this now, because I mentioned it to him, but he did. He said--one time he was very frustrated with her, and he says, "I wanted a brother, Mom,"

because, of course, she was a girl. But it's those kind of things. But he loved her, and they grew up. I mean, they got along, because I think he really--he said it was really nice having someone else to blame if something got broken. [laughs] Not that it wasn't him when he was an only child and you knew it who it was who did it. [laughs] So that was a funny statement. I never thought about that one.

Cline

Yes, but he had a lot of years being the only child, so that's pretty hard to overcome.

Boone

Right.

Cline

How old were both children, then, when the third child was adopted?

Boone

Robin was seven, and I don't remember how old Christopher was now.

Cline

He was a teenager.

Boone

Yes, he was a teenager. But he was pretty good about having another one come in.

Cline

Wow. So let's get the story of number three, then. You mentioned in the last interview that she's Vietnamese, and this one is through the Orange County system.

Boone

No, this was through the L.A. system.

Cline

Oh, L.A. system.

Boone

We were living up in Lancaster at the time.

Cline

Oh, okay. But we left you in Santa Clarita before, and I wasn't sure how the timeline worked.

Boone

Right. So we got Robin when we were in Santa Clarita, and then we moved up to Lancaster and decided--I'd always wanted three children, kind of to balance off the two, I guess, and so it seemed like a good time. We had just built a big house out there and we had plenty of room, so we went ahead and applied and actually went pretty fast getting her. They had said it would go slower, but at that time we had kind of a new go-get-'em social worker, and so after she had pulled our file and then done the home study, she kind of went through the--this is what I heard anyway. She went through the office saying, "I have an Asian family. Anyone have an Asian child?" And this other social worker who was a nurse poked her head out and says, "I do." Well, that was Pamela.

So we were willing to take someone a little older, which a lot of people, of course, want babies to start with, and so because I had already been through the baby stage, and it was fine with me this time. So then we found out about Pamela. She had a cleft lip and palate, and some of it hadn't been fixed, and she had come into the system, and so anyway, we were willing to take her. I guess I just never thought about the fact that she wouldn't be part of the family. Now, years later, people have said, "Well, she could have been mentally retarded," because she wasn't functioning at a five-year level. But I don't know, the first time I met her I thought, "You know, this kid has a lot of spunk." [laughs]

Cline

How old was she then?

Boone

She was five and a half when we got her.

Cline

Oh, wow. Okay. It's pretty typical to have children available for adoption with cleft lip, cleft palate. It's, I guess, viewed as a defect.

Boone

Right.

Cline

Is this one of those cases? Do you know anything about her story?

Boone

It is. It is. She had been given up by her mother here. She was actually born in Oakland and then her mother was down here actually in the San Gabriel Valley someplace, and so she was a cleft child, and we were told that the mother just never bothered with her. So I guess somewhere in the time her mom found out that she could bring her in, and she walked her into Social Services one day, so she was already given up for adoption and everything when we-- and so within six months from the time her birth mom I guess walked her in, we got her, and so we're very fortunate, we felt.

Cline

And a very different scenario from the other adopted daughter.

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

I don't imagine, then, that she was in touch with her birth mother.

Boone

No. And she remembered things afterwards that, when she started speaking English, that she told us, and it was very sad, some things, that she was contained in a room and some of those kinds of things. So at one point I had gotten a phone number that probably was her birth mother, but she didn't choose to act on it, and she says, "You're my mom."

Cline

Great. So for some children, for a lot of children, the whole experience of adoption is kind of traumatic to say the least, depending on the circumstances, the circumstances here sounding pretty traumatic. What, if anything, did you have to deal with emotionally with her, to support her through this experience of basically being raised by a new family at age five and a half?

Boone

Well, she was in special ed, and she had to have a lot of speech and language help.

Cline

Did she have more surgeries?

Boone

Yes, yes. She had quite a few more surgeries. She had some things, like her ears she had to have a couple of times have the tubes put in. But I was lucky I was a stay-at-home mom, and so I was able to be with her through a lot of this. And then at a point that I felt like she was coming along academically, we actually pulled her from the public school and put her into a private school so that she would have a teacher that there wasn't as many children--

Cline

Yes, more individualized attention.

Boone

--and so more individualized so that she could get that. And I'd actually had--my degree is in psychology, so had had come

counseling experience and stuff, so I was able to help her. But even times now there probably are things that she's experienced that, you know, I don't want to go into all of it, but there's things she's had to overcome--

Cline

Sure. Right. They're part of who she is.

Boone

--that are part of who she is, as we all do. [laughter]

Cline

Well, I mean, what interests me, among many other things, is that each one of the situations with your three children seem so unique, plus just their age differences, everything, their own stories. They're all very different, and you, of course, have to be a mother to all of them, ideally equally. How did you navigate the different dynamics of each child and what I think must have been their unique needs, and particularly in light of the fact that you gave birth to the first one, and you're adopted, so I don't imagine this is so relevant, but it's an issue for some people how they treat their children either differently or not, depending on their origin. How did you approach this in your own family?

Boone

I think for me they were all my children and so it just didn't--I guess it just wasn't an issue for me that I know that with my son it's neat, because I can look at him and say, "Oh, he looks somewhat like me." But then, of course, people in their thinking that all Asians look alike, think my daughter and I look alike, my Vietnamese daughter. But she looks very Vietnamese and I look very Korean or northern Asian, so I don't know where they get that. But I think that just like if you birth three children, they're all unique and they all have their likes and dislikes and maybe things that you need to support them more on and things that you don't. So once they're in our home, of course, each one has their own uniqueness. But I think I was very fortunate when I adopted the

third one in the fact that my older daughter really wanted a sister, and so she was like a little mother to her. And even though they're only eighteen months apart in age--I think that's what they are--because each one could have time with me, we had Robin I think four years before we got Pamela, so she was able to be the baby for that length of time before we got Pamela, and so then, of course, the other two tease Pamela that she's always--that she's the baby of the family. [laughs] So essentially when she would tattle on them. [laughs]

Cline

Oh, wow, yes. People talk about sort of the typical dynamics, especially you have three, so there's the middle child, there's the first, there's the last, the young, the baby, and you just mentioned something about the dynamic between the two girls. But now that you had three children and all of them coming from these unique circumstances, how did the dynamics within the family change, according to your perception of it, not only with each other but with you and with your husband? Since I guess you were still married then.

Boone

I think that at some point my husband probably got a little closer to my son, just because he's the oldest. But my son was very much--my husband worked kind of long hours, and so my son was usually there teasing the girls and you know. But he was a teenager, so he was kind of doing his own thing, too, so they kind of had each other then to play with, so it was kind of a--Christopher, my son, was still kind of an only child in a sense, because he was doing his own thing, he was the brother, and so the two younger ones were definitely the two girls and things. So I have a picture of him holding both of them in his arms, because he was big enough and both of them were small enough, so it was kind of easygoing. It wasn't like--I guess it would be different maybe if they were all boys or if the girl was only the youngest and then there was a brother just over her. I don't know, because I know that all families are

different. But in our family, there was still the uniqueness that he was the boy, the oldest, and he had the little sisters and things like that.

Oh, he liked using them, though, once he started liking girls. Well, girls just thought, "Oh, your little sisters," so, yes, he said, "Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah." [laughs] "Oh, Mom, can I take them someplace, because I want to impress a girl." [laughs] And that was funny.

Cline

Wow. People do that with pets too.

Boone

Oh, yes, yes, that's true. [laughter]

Cline

The dog bark. In terms of, say, if you're all out to eat someplace, it's a pretty unique-looking family. Anything you remember about that that might have been interesting? Because also I'm headed towards the Lancaster question. I mean, you keep moving to these areas, and most of them are very white areas.

Boone

Right.

Cline

But, yes, what was that like?

Boone

I don't think I noticed anything really unusual, only because, of course, my son and my Caucasian daughter, when they were together they kind of looked like family, so even though he's half-Asian, it's not like she was so completely different looking than the rest of the family. I know the youngest daughter, one time when she was at school, one of the kids asked her, "Oh, are your parents here?" And I was sick that day. I couldn't go to the open house, I think is what it was. So she said, "Oh, yeah, my dad's over there."

And they looked, and they said, "I don't see your dad." And, of course, they were expecting an Asian man and they couldn't find him. And then she says, "Oh, the white bald guy," I think. So anyway, so that was kind of--so each one has had their own unique experiences.

My son, even though he's mixed Asian-white, when we lived in Temecula, which is the next place we moved after Lancaster, people thought he was Indian, because he looks a lot like the Paola Indians down there. And so they wouldn't know he was Asian per se unless, until I walked up and, "Oh, that's your mom." Then they would know. But he kind of looks more mixed and so people wouldn't know what he was. So each one kind of had their own little unique things.

Cline

What, if anything, do you recall that might have been memorable in this way for your husband? I'm thinking particularly, and this is based on personal experience, for example, when you're a Caucasian and you have an Asian daughter and, say, she has to go to the restroom or something like that, as time gets closer to the present, people are a lot more aware of certain kinds of let's just say safety issues and things.

Boone

Right.

Cline

Was it anything like that? I mean, this isn't something most families have to think about.

Boone

Right. Hmm. I don't think we thought about it. I think back in the, it would have been the eighties, nineties, I'm sure stuff was going on, but I never thought of it, I guess because it just wasn't an awareness for me.

Cline

Okay. So why did you move to Lancaster?

Boone

Oh, I can tell this funny thing about my dad, though, that you brought that up. One time I think he was taking me to the dentist or something, and I was older, I was a teenager. And my mom mentioned it, and I would have never thought of this, but she said, "When you're out in public, you might want to not be hugging and kissing your dad," because we were an affectionate family. And I kind of looked at her and I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because people will think he picked up some young girl, because you don't look like him." And I guess, you know, I forgot that I didn't look like my dad.

And then on the same vein one time when my Caucasian daughter and I were in the store, and there again she was very affectionate, we were very affectionate, and she says, "Oh, Mom. We'd better not hold hands." And I said, "Oh, why?" And she said, "People will think we're gay." And I never thought about that one, so she thought about that one. [laughs] So that was different too.

Cline

Right, right. And like I said, something most families don't have to think about.

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

Yes, so I'll go back to the question. So you moved to Lancaster. Why? Why Lancaster?

Boone

My husband got a job out that way.

Cline

Then how long were you there?

Boone

Boone

We were there four years altogether.

Cline

And you were just still stay-at-home mom during that period?

Boone

Yes.

Cline

Then you moved to Temecula, evidently.

Boone

Right. He decided he wanted to open a business, did the mid-life crisis thing, and--

Cline

What was the business?

Boone

It was a parts store like for automobiles and things. So then we moved down there for a couple of years and it didn't go so well. Temecula started growing. He had a small shop, and so Pep Boys I think moved in, and he couldn't compete with them, and so then he went back into the automotive business, and so then we moved again and moved up to Corona.

Cline

Oh, okay. Wow, you keep kind of moving to these outposts.

Boone

Right. Well, that was actually moving in, because Temecula is way out. So we moved in, and he had gotten a job actually out in the South Bay, but it was closer in. And at that time we were having to kind of rebuild our finances, because--

Cline

Because of the business.

Boone

--yes, we'd gone through some tough times. And so, here we go.

Cline

Interesting. So how was moving around for your daughters, then?

Boone

Pretty good. They had each other and most of the time I put them in private schools at that time, and so they were in private school, and they got to meet friends. And in the neighborhood we moved into in Corona, they eventually met, of course, the kids in the neighborhood, and there were quite a few, like, Filipino or Hispanic or different kinds of people, so Corona was probably one of the, like you were talking about least-white areas as far as that we had lived in. So it was pretty mixed.

Cline

How long did you stay out there?

Boone

In Corona? We were there I think about six or seven years, but in the meantime, that's when my husband and I--

Cline

That's when the marriage ended?

Boone

--yes, got divorced.

Cline

Ouch. How did that affect the children, from your perception?

Boone

Well, quite a bit, even though they were older. My youngest daughter stayed with me. My oldest daughter decides she wanted to go with her father for a while, because he was little less strict than I was, to say the least.

Cline

I see.

Boone

So then she came back to live with me so she could go ahead and finish high school and stuff, so we were kind of on the ins and outs. But that's how divorce is.

Cline

Yes. Where was he then?

Boone

He moved on to Buena Park and then I stayed out there for a couple of years.

Cline

So particularly I'm curious to know, now, you've been raising this Vietnamese child, adopted. What, if anything, did you do to keep her in touch with her own culture? It sounded like she was already speaking some Vietnamese when you--

Boone

Right, right.

Cline

What was that like?

Boone

Well, she didn't speak a lot once we got her, because she wasn't even speaking at maybe a two- or three-year-old level, even though she was five and a half.

Cline

I see. Because she was developmentally delayed?

Boone

She was developmentally delayed, mainly because environmentally delayed, because she just hadn't been introduced. She'd been kept in a room, in the bathroom. But luckily, and she kind of thanks everybody for this, but including us, that we got her when we did, because language is something that if they don't develop it I think by the age of eight, that they will be delayed for the rest of their lives. But luckily, she was able to go ahead and speak English and learn English and had a lot of, like I said, speech and language help with her cleft. Now people don't even really know that she has a cleft, maybe a little bit if she maybe does her mouth a certain way or something, but it's very unnoticeable. She doesn't speak like nasally like a lot of cleft people do, so very, very fortunate.

Cline

But to continue that--

Boone

Oh, oh, I forgot what you asked me. [laughs]

Cline

No, it's okay. That's okay.

Boone

Okay. Vietnamese restaurants, we'd go to restaurants. I had books for her. I actually have a friend that's husband was in Vietnam, so some contacts in that. She had a good friend when she was in high school that was Vietnamese, but she was always--she would tell me, "Mom, I'm glad you adopted me, because--." They were of the old school, so the boy really was the one focused on, and the friend her age, two years younger, they would tell her the un-political thing like, "You're ugly," and those kinds of things that do happen in

families. So it was kind of interesting in that way. Not to say that all Vietnamese families are that way, but--

Cline

Yes, of course. Right. They're are plenty of non-Vietnamese families that way too.

Boone

Right, that are that way too. [laughs]

Cline

Ouch. But also I was curious how much of an interest or affinity she felt with her culture, or if because of her experience, maybe there was somewhat of an aversion to it.

Boone

Right. I don't think--I think that she knows--she loves pho, which is the noodle--

Cline

Right, noodle soup.

Boone

Right. And when she's around other Vietnamese, she'll ask them about things. But she tells me, "Mom, I think I'm more Korean than I am Vietnamese." [laughs] Just because--and then it's funny, because her best friend was Filipino and now her boyfriend's Filipino, so she seems to--she says, "Oh, I just knew that I would always be around Filipinos."

Cline

Interesting. Wow.

Boone

Yes. So she's pretty--I think she's very open as far as culturally, and she's learned a lot. She has a necklace that she loves wearing that's the shape of Vietnam and things like that, so I don't think she

has any aversion to it, but it's not like everything has to be Vietnamese to her. But I think that probably like I am.

Cline

Right. Yes, this is what's fascinating about the whole development of these blended identities. How much do you think it really helps children to have this sort of presentation of their own culture, when you yourself are from a different culture and can't--for example, you couldn't give her her language.

Boone

No.

Cline

You're not Vietnamese.

Boone

Right.

Cline

How important do you think it is to make the effort anyway, or do you think it really makes a difference, or it doesn't really?

Boone

I think it makes a difference in the fact that they know that you're very interested in who they are, and then they can ask you anything about them and you're not going to put it down. I think that you showing the interest in who they are, trying to--like I got her a Vietnamese outfit, but then I got my other little daughter kind of the Swiss-German outfit, because she's half German.

Cline

Wow.

Boone

And I have some pictures of them, some that I used to hang up on the wall, just to acknowledge that this is who they are, but not to

push it. I think that I had a couple of adopted friends that their parents made them go to Korean church, and they didn't want to go to Korean church. It made them stick out from their peers in their school or whatever. So I think just having the openness that maybe us as a family are going to go and see what this is like, and to be open enough to either have friends or to know people that are of a different culture or the culture of your child, but it's not necessary that you push them, rub their nose in it, but that they know you're open enough, too--

Cline

I see.

Boone

--that you're open enough to be however they want to be, but that you aren't--I'm not Vietnamese. She's not Korean, even though she's been around Korean people just as I'm around Korean people or around other kinds of people. But I tried to, with my Caucasian daughter, be just as open with her also, because I went to Scotland one time and came home and I said, "I saw people just like you, your auburn hair, your white skin!" and she thought that was really cool. [laughter] So I think just this is such a world community now that I think everybody needs to be open, actually, to other people.

Cline

What about when the family would leave this area? Early on in your life, you talked about going to Texas with your parents. What about leaving the multiculturalism of southern California for other parts of the country that--

Boone

You mean living there, or just visiting?

Cline

Just visiting.

Boone

It's been interesting. When my daughter and I went on one of the bus tours--and actually I took my mother also--we went on a bus tour through the New England states during the October leaves and everything. Boy, after being here where I live here close to South Pasadena, which, of course, has a big Asian community now, and going there, which was very white--and I think we were the only, and youngest, people on the tour, but we were the only non-white, my daughter and I. But I think growing up in a very white community, I mean, it's not like white people scare me or anything. [laughs] I mean, I feel just as comfortable around--and I didn't find anybody not feeling comfortable around me, so it's fine. I just know we do look different, and it's just an awareness that you have. There's nothing you can do about it. [laughter]

Cline

Interesting. So how long were you in Corona, then, after you had divorced and you have this sort of post-divorce sort of familial scenario going? Which sounds kind of uncomfortable, but how long did that go on?

Boone

Well, in '02 I got my--we separated in 2000, and then by '02 I had applied for a job up here in South Pasadena, and I had gotten my teaching credential and was trying to find a job. Since then I had started dating and was starting to date a man that was up here, and I was surprised when I got on the Internet and saw that they had a job opening. So I applied and got interviewed and everything, and I got the job, so I was able then to move up here, and then in '03 we got married.

Cline

Oh, wow, okay. And that's the job you're in now?

Boone

Well, I started off in a high school, but now I am over at an elementary school.

Cline

Okay. So let's try to sort of bring things up to date here. You've got your son Christopher. How old is he now?

Boone

Now he's an adult by this time.

Cline

Right. But specifically, how old is he now?

Boone

Oh, how old is he now, at this time? Thirty-three.

Cline

Okay. And then you have the first adopted daughter, the Caucasian, Robin.

Boone

And she's twenty-four, almost twenty-five. She'll be twenty-five in August.

Cline

Right. Now, college for these first two? What did they wind up doing?

Boone

Well, my daughter just had a baby, so I'm a new grandmother.
[laughs]

Cline

So you're a grandmother. When did that happen?

Boone

April twenty-second.

Cline

Wow, very recently.

Boone

Right, right. So my first grandchild. I can't believe I'm old enough. Anyway, and so, yes, she's with her boyfriend in Long Beach, and then my youngest daughter is in San Diego, and she attends college down there and has a job and has a boyfriend, so--and my son lives with his father in Buena Park.

Cline

Okay. And there are a lot of both Filipinos and Vietnamese in the San Diego area.

Boone

Right. That's true.

Cline

That works out. So now you're in South Pasadena. For the first time in a certain number of years, you're actually, like, closer to where a lot of the concentration of the population, of the diverse population is. Speaking in terms of the present day, now, how much do you, (a), perhaps go to, say, Koreatown? Which I think invites the question, (b), how much of a connection, if any at all, do you feel with the Korean population in Los Angeles? Los Angeles, of course, has the highest concentration of Korean people outside Korea. Any feelings about that? Any sense of a connection at all?

Boone

Well, I think I kind of weave in and out. I can't say that I'm part of the Korean community, because I don't speak the language. When I've had Koreans in my classroom, their parents have just loved me, because for them I think it's nice having somebody that they know would be caring for their children and things like that. I've gone to events in Koreatown, but I can't say that I really--I don't go to a Korean church. I actually go to a Japanese-American church.
[laughs]

Cline

Where is that?

Boone

In downtown, in Little Tokyo. And the reason being was my new husband, who happens to--and I don't know if you knew this--is also an adoptee--

Cline

Oh, I did not know that. Oh, wow.

Boone

Yes. So long road around, his ex-wife was Japanese American and so they attended this church, and so his daughters are part Japanese, and so it just kind of--you know, stories weave in and out, and so he wanted to still attend his church--his ex-wife has since moved--and so I attend it with him, have met some of those people.

Cline

Right. How is your relationship with his daughters?

Boone

Pretty good. His daughters--in fact, his two oldest daughters--my daughters, they're the same, eighteen months apart in age, so we have birthdays that one turns twenty-five, the other one turns twenty-five, one turns twenty-four, the other one turns twenty-four. It's very interesting. Then he has a younger daughter who is fifteen now.

Cline

Wow. How did you meet?

Boone

Through the Association of Korean Adoptees. [laughter] I'd been part of the group for a while, and then he had kind of joined, and I'd met him once before my divorce and his divorce, but we had not even talked to each other then. During that time, both of us were

kind of going through some difficulties. Had a mutual friend that said, "Hey. You guys ought to talk to each other. You're both going through divorces." And so that's kind of how it kind of started.

Cline

How does your adoption experience compare with his?

Boone

Different. We're both close to the same age, but his actually, he came through World Vision also and through Holt, but his family didn't as much integrate with the other families that had adopted and things like that.

Cline

Where did he grow up?

Boone

Actually, he grew up in Monrovia, so he's kind of stayed here in the San Gabriel Valley.

Cline

Interesting. If you could speak for him just briefly, what are his feelings now that he's come through this experience? I mean, you described yourself to me when we met as, "I'm one of the happy adoptees." What about him?

Boone

I think he's different than I am. [laughs] He said he'd probably be doing the same thing if he was in Korea, so being male, I think, maybe he has a different view on things. I don't know. I know if you go through--if you look at group listservs and stuff, sometimes the males are fine and sometimes they aren't, just like, I guess, the females, so it just depends. You know, Holt International now has a CEO that is a Korean adoptee, that I've known for quite a while.

Cline

Right. Well, and they've had people I know, adoptees on the board sort of guiding it, too, for a while now. There's been a lot of interest in the Korean adoptees, particularly in the transracial adoption community, because of the number of essentially disgruntled adoptees who have, I will just say, helped the more recent adoptive parents, perhaps learned from some of the mistakes that maybe their parents made.

Boone

Right, and I think that's a positive thing. I think that because of some of the experiences they've had and just so that some of the parents that are adopting now are aware that you can't just make someone just completely American because they're here, and things like that. I think it just makes it a much more open and the communication, and I think--and especially parents nowadays that are adopting. It was a strange phenomenon when people started adopting that were my age, because always before, of course, it was older and I was the kid. And I thought, wow, that is really weird that they're adopting, because these were some of the people maybe that I thought didn't even like people that weren't of their own--so it was interesting, and I'm not saying that it was true, but in my mind's perspective it was weird, because I thought, wow, these people are wanting to adopt from Korea or from China or from India? So that was a little shift in perspective for me, personally.

Cline

Right. And taking a child out of his or her culture, transplanting them in a different culture, having the parents who are doing it not even look like their child, you can say, to take another point of view, it's potentially seems like potentially kind of an arrogant thing to do. Maybe it--

Boone

I don't look at it that way. I know some people do, but.

Cline

Right. Maybe at best kind of presumptuous. But now that transracial adoption has been going for a while, and you're one of the early stories here, how do you see it in terms of having or not having value, and what do you think maybe its significance is for particularly the children who are growing up outside their own country and culture?

Boone

For me personally, it's fine. [laughs] I think that as long--because a lot of people now are traveling, moving to different countries, are Americans. I have a friend that now is down in Australia that actually is a Korean adoptee, but really likes it down there. Someone else I know that's Hispanic from Mexico, his sister moved over to Australia as a Hispanic person--I think she was working for the government--and enjoyed it so much that she became a citizen. Her kids now, one of them is married I think to like an Irish person or something, so this is such an international world now. It's not the world of fifty years ago or seventy years ago. So I think for some people, maybe they feel like that they would have thrived more had they stayed in their own culture, but for me personally, and for I think many people that I know are sort of the happy adoptees, I suppose, it was fine to grow up here in America. In fact, I'm glad we're a country of immigrants, so just about everybody can count just two generations back--I don't care if you're European, Hispanic, Asian, whatever--that there's somebody in the family--I think they did a study that out of your four grandparents, one of them probably came from another country. So we're such a country of immigrants that I think that has been different than some of the people that have been adopted into Europe or Europeans that have adopted, because that's a whole different story, that even the ones that are doing fine over in Europe--for example, in Norway, if you're Korean there, the chances are you're probably adopted. It's something like 90 percent of the Korean population that are Korean Norwegians are adoptees, not from Korea, where in America it's not like that.

Cline

Right. Interesting. I have to think of these questions. I have a lot of questions in this area. For people who are interested in adopting and maybe formulate ideas, let's say, about the culture from where maybe they're choosing to adopt, and let's just take Korea as an example, how do you think the situation looks now, based on what you know, for orphan children in places like South Korea? And how do people who come from a totally different cultural point of view, say, Americans, how can they approach this different cultural point of view without--well, let's say, how does one change a very old traditional point of view without in some way disparaging that point of view? My sense is that people here think that we're right. You know what I mean?

Boone

[laughs] Right, right. That's typical, being American. [laughs]

Cline

Yes. They shouldn't be doing this, you know, they shouldn't be just getting rid of their children because they're biracial or because they have cleft lip or cleft palate or whatever it is. How can one address these sorts of traditional, very old, very ingrained cultural attitudes respectfully, and how much of a chance do you think of changing them there even is?

Boone

In Korea they're already changing. There's more Koreans adopting now. I think the last thing I read was that there's almost an equal amount that are actually adopting in Korea as foreign adoptions, because Korea itself is trying to overcome some of the things. Some of the old things where you could only be registered under the male's name has now changed, so legally things have changed in Korea, just as they did here in America when a lot of the segregation laws were being changed. So I think just like here in America, just like in South Africa, Korea is having to make some of those adjustments and changes, and many more biracial children are there, whether from--I know Koreans have been marrying, and

especially in the next generation, they're not necessarily just sticking with Koreans. They're going out and maybe marrying Asian Indians or marrying Chinese or marrying other racial groups and having children in Korea. For many years, those children used to be considered kind of second class or something, but now things are changing.

One of the children that actually grew up, I think it was in an orphanage there, has become quite wealthy over there, and so money always talks--[laughter]

Cline

Oh, yes.

Boone

--in Korea or anyplace, so that shows that, well, there's been success, and things like that. So I think Korea and as Korea changes and becomes maybe more up to date--so sometimes I think we in America do kind of say, "Oh, well, look at us. We're doing this and we're doing that." But we've got to remember that it wasn't that many years ago that we were doing the same thing. I know before transracial adoptions, many white people would adopt white children and not tell them that they were adopted and things like that.

Cline

Right. Absolutely.

Boone

Or, of course, having a child out of wedlock. They would send the daughter away and then she'd come back. So as things change in Korea, I think there probably will be, just on a natural course, probably less children being adopted out. Of course, here in America I don't think people realize that other people adopt our children. Canadians have been adopting American children and things like that, so we just don't want to announce that.

Cline

Yes. Yes, right. Transracial or inter-country adoption has also become sort of the, dare I say it, fodder for tabloids, thanks to certain celebrity adoptive parents.

Boone

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Cline

And probably a lot of people have had to think about what that might mean, whereas otherwise they may never have given it much thought.

Boone

Right.

Cline

What are your feelings about where transracial or inter-country adoption seems to be going, in light of celebrity adoptions and also, of course, countries that become open and closed and open again. There's the subject of trafficking. There's the subject of all of these really unsavory things that tend to taint the process. Where do you see that heading as we're looking at it right now, since it's so much kind of out there in the news media?

Boone

I would not want inter-country adoption to ever be closed. I hate the trafficking thing. That's just so horrible, because there are so many children that need adopting, that they don't need to be stealing children from someplace else. That's just horrible. That's just money. That's just money talking. But as far as celebrities adopting, I think there's always been celebrities adopting. It's just that it wasn't quite as--the news didn't--I don't know if people realize it, but back in the forties, fifties, whatever, it wasn't as much--private lives were kept more private. Back then if you were, let's say, a gay celebrity, people never knew it because that was a private thing.

And so now everything's out in the open, and as my husband would say, "I wouldn't mind Angelina Jolie adopting me." But I just hope that they're good parents, that just like any other parents that are adopting, that they are thinking about what their child needs. Of course, they can provide them usually monetarily, but any of the other, psychological, because it would be hard enough being a child of a celebrity anyway, and then you add on the adoption. But I think many of them are really--you don't see their pictures in the papers all the time and everything. I think they're keeping their lives as private as they can, and it's more the paparazzi, of course, trying to get photos or things like that. But there still is some sense of the children are not being photographed as much, unless the celebrity is wanting them to be photographed, which, you know, I don't know the ins or outs of it. I know I wouldn't want to be the child of a celebrity, only because I had enough attention when I was growing up just being a transracial adoptee, so I can't imagine being a celebrity adoptee also. But, anyway.

Cline

Did you ever consider adopting from Korea?

Boone

Yes. We were going to at one time, and then my ex-husband chose not to.

Cline

I see. Okay. Some people would say, "Why adopt outside your country when there are so many children in the country that need to be adopted?" And, of course, you did adopt within your own area. What are your feelings--how would you answer that in light of what you were just saying about you really would ideally want to see inter-country adoption always be open?

Boone

I think that--and I have had a little experience with this--I think that it's good if you can adopt within our country. I think, though, that so many times it's hard, because many people in our country

don't want to give up babies, and when they are given up, a lot of times it's through private adoption agencies, and, of course, nowadays with the open adoption, the parents have to show everything about who they are, their income level, their background and everything, which is good, but it does tend to make it harder, then, to adopt an infant. And in my own mind I think, especially your first one, it should be an infant. That's just my opinion, just because it's good to go through the baby stages and everything.

Many of the children here have had a lot of trauma in their lives, and so sometimes it's hard to adopt kids here. I'm not saying that you shouldn't, because I have, but I do understand the point that there are more children available in some international countries just because either people don't want to adopt, they don't have the money to adopt, there's a cultural negativity to adoption, so I don't see that there's a problem with people adopting internationally. So that's my opinion.

Cline

That's another option.

Boone

Yes.

Cline

And, of course, to adopt domestically does not mean to adopt, not necessarily adopt something other than transracially. Of course, so many of the children that are available for adoption are not Caucasian. Most, in fact, are not Caucasian.

Boone

Right. Right.

Cline

What are your feelings, then, in terms of adopting transracially here in the United States, and what would your sort of advice be for

parents who are curious about that? This is a country with its own history--

Boone

Oh, yes.

Cline

--racially speaking.

Boone

I think that if you can adopt transracially as far as within your own family--you do have to have support within your family, usually, because you're not just an island--I think it's fine. I think that, of course, let's say you are a Hispanic family, and you choose to adopt a black child, I think you still have all of the transracial things that you have to be aware of to deal with, but it's not to say that it's going to be bad, but it's not to say it's going to be good. So I think that people just have to be very aware that you are going to look different. People are going to view you and look at you that your child doesn't look like you. I don't think that that's a bad thing, and just making your child aware of it.

I was always very open with my children that--and, actually, both daughters, although with the Vietnamese one people said we look alike--but that, you know what, we are a different family. We aren't going to be like all of our neighbors, but that's okay. It's okay to not be the same as everybody else.

Cline

And particularly during those teen and adult years, how did that sit with them?

Boone

Like I said, my white daughter had a few issues in there. One time my youngest daughter had just started to high school over where my other daughter was in high school, and it was kind of funny because she said--at that time they would have pictures on the

front of their binders, and so one of the pictures was her sister. And so someone didn't like her sister said, "Oh, why do you have that girl on your binder? Blah, blah, blah." And so first of all my youngest daughter said, "Why?" because she wanted to hear what was going on, and I don't know what had happened, but you know how people like each other, don't like each other.

Cline

Sure. Right.

Boone

Okay. So then my Vietnamese daughter says, "Well, that's my sister." "No way. That's not your sister. Don't lie to me." And so all of that went on. So it was kind of funny, because she said, "Hmm. I can find out about Robin, because--without people knowing."

Cline

Right, incognito.

Boone

Yes, yes. So that was funny. So all these little scenarios that you never think of until they happen.

Cline

Because we ended last time talking a little bit about how, particularly when people get to be a certain age, when they go to college or whatever, and they start really thinking about their identity, it happens to everyone, not just people who are adopted transracially. You were saying how like a lot of the Ethnic Studies Centers and things, where they weren't in place at the time when you were that age, but they certainly are now--

Boone

Right.

Cline

How much of that did you see, that kind of questioning with your own daughters when they got to be that age, if at all?

Boone

I think that probably with my Caucasian daughter, probably just knowing more about family and things like that, we tried to be as open with her as possible, although not revealing any of the, quote, "gory details." And so as she got older, she wanted to know more, and so that kind of was more revealed. And I don't think that you have to tell a four-year-old all the things that you tell somebody that's twenty. It's just some people do, and I don't think that that's necessary. Maybe a child's just wanting to--it's kind of the old story of if a child wants to know where I was born or how I was born, and someone goes into this elaborate detail, and they just wanted to know if they were from Kansas or something. So, you know, adoption is the same way, I think. You kind of--as mature as the child is, or questions or seems, they'll question, if you have an open enough relationship with them.

With my other daughter, like I said, she's kind of learned along the way, and when she meets another Vietnamese person, she might talk to them or something, but I think because it's always been so open that she just feels like that she can ask or investigate herself or whatever it is that she wants to know. But I think she's very comfortable in her own skin.

Cline

Wow. You can't ask for more than that.

Boone

Right.

Cline

And how, especially after giving birth to your son in the beginning, how did your adopted daughters wind up attaching to you when they were children?

Boone

I think they just attached as we went along. Obviously they wouldn't even know who I was to begin with, and I didn't ever make them hug me. It came when they wanted to hug me. When I didn't--I would say, "I love you," but not in a sense that you would, you know, "I want my child to say--," that expectation, because I knew that love comes as the relationship grows, as the little things you do with each other grows. And so I think that's within any family that those kinds of things kind of work out.

Cline

Okay. How much do you think being an adoptee yourself informed your parenting?

Boone

Oh, probably a lot, in that sense. I think that there was probably more awareness of--because you tend to go back to your own modeling you had. And so one thing that I realized as I got into my adulthood, that my parents always let us know that they adopted us because they wanted children. They really were--they didn't have any children, and they weren't trying to save us from Korea.

Cline

Yes, yes, the rescue scenario.

Boone

And I think that was--right, that rescue syndrome. And I know a lot of adoptees, grown adoptees, that had to grow up with that sense that, "Oh, you were the poor child from someplace." And even though at that time Korea was a pretty poor place, and I guess probably my parents did say something about that, "They just couldn't keep you. Your birthmother--." I think it got down to the birthmother thing, that, "Your birthmother, for whatever reason, couldn't keep you." It was never that she didn't want you, that you were an inconvenience, that she might have been single, whatever it was. It was more that she couldn't keep you and so an adoption in Korea was not really that much of an option at that time. And that is a cultural thing, so--

Cline

Yes, definitely.

Boone

And so that Holt [International] decided to come in and started this, and they were so glad. And I used to think, "Boy, I'm so glad," because I think they asked for a child under four, and I used to think, "Oh, I'm glad I was under four at the time." [laughs] Because my mom wanted a younger child, of course.

Cline

So this is a series on Korean Americans, and you're a Korean American, although from so far all the other Korean Americans I've interviewed--

Boone

Right.

Cline

--and when it comes to your own sense of your identity, obviously we have various categories available, Korean, Korean American, American, Asian American, all these various things. How do you, if you do, define yourself, and how do you think of yourself after this rather unique experience growing up in the way that you did?

Boone

I always have a little bit of an issue when American is supposed to mean white, because to me, you know, your Native Americans are really your Americans. So I always--when they started putting these two words together, it always seemed odd to me, because they're saying, "You're Korean American." Well, to me, I'm American Korean, because I'm American first, because that's where I grew up, and that's what my culture is. But I think that for me personally, I think that I weave in and out between the cultures. It's kind of fun in a way, if you want to call it that, because I'm very accepted with other Koreans being around, except for they always kind of look at

me funny when I say I can't speak Korean. But then I just tell them that I'm an adoptee, and so, "Oh." I think some other adoptees have had some experience of then Koreans being rude to them. Now, I've never had that experience. Other Koreans have always been very open to me and seem to appreciate, maybe wanted to know a little bit about adoption, but to me--of course, maybe they were speaking Korean and I couldn't understand them about something that I wouldn't have wanted to hear. I don't know. But as far as I know, I have never had a bad experience in that.

With Americans, as far as white Americans, because I pretty much understand the white mindset, and not to say everybody's the same, but it's basically they think of themselves as being American, you know, if you've grown up here and you're white.

Cline

Yes, exactly.

Boone

So, I mean, there was not a question about that. But I think that I've had a few times when a couple of people have--I remember opening the door when I was first married one time and this salesman saying, [imitates slow talking] "Do you speak Eng-lish?" And I said, "Very well. What do you want?" [laughs] So kind of I like to jab a little knife in people that were like that. But on the most part, I feel like that I'm American, that my heritage is Korean, just like a white American would say, "I'm American and my heritage is Scottish," or, "My heritage is German." So that's how I look at myself.

Cline

I see. Although speaking of looking at yourself, you understand the white American point of view, and yet you don't look like a white American.

Boone

Right. [laughter] Really?

Cline

Yes. I noticed that.

Boone

Oh, did you.

Cline

I mean, are there any feelings about that? I mean, you said that weaving in and out is kind of fun, but confusion? Any difficulty developing a sense of identity, anything, enjoying the fluidity or the--is it liberating? Is it challenging?

Boone

I feel like that I grew up unique, and it's that uniqueness that has allowed me to be who I am, and it's okay with me not to fit in a box. It's okay with me that I'm not fully, quote, "Korean," I'm not fully, quote, "white American." I think it's nice being able to understand others and that others are also unique. When someone--you're supposed to have this idea of "Ozzie and Harriett," that when someone tells me that, oh, this happened to them or their families this way, for me it doesn't, like, "Oh, really?" I mean, I might talk to them about it, but it's not shocking, because our family was so different and unique, which sometimes I didn't realize, actually, but now it's that I realize that everybody has their own story, and so it's nice. That's why I took psychology was because it was interesting to me how people were and why they react to things the way they do, and why I react to things the way I do sometimes.

Cline

You mentioned this a little bit already, but how now do you look at--in terms of your uniqueness and looking back on your experience as an adult, how do you look at your parents and how you were parented?

Boone

I probably wasn't quite as strict as my parents were, but that's the way it was back in the fifties. It was interesting, because you could go to anybody's house and their parents were the same way, more strict [unclear]. Because I came through the sixties when I did, when there was a lot of changes going on, it's interesting now, because I don't know if my mother will hear this or not eventually, but she used to say it was for the Japanese Americans' own good that they were put in the camps, that they were being protected, because she bought into the line that the government was giving. And so now she'll say, "Oh, I feel so sorry that that happened." So just like everybody else, your opinion changes or your perspective changes as the world goes along, and so I think that, just like everybody else, probably mine has changed as the world goes along.

Cline

But compared to maybe some of your other adoptee associates, it sounds like you felt like they did pretty well.

Boone

Oh, yes. I think I was very fortunate to have the parents I did, in that the fact, like I said, it was kind of a unique thing also that they had--and that my mother had been over in Korea, besides my father, so that she was able to at least relate to me and some of her experiences, and she never did learn to eat kimchi, though. [laughs]

Cline

How much of a sense do you think they have of what appears to be now kind of their status as pioneers, so to speak?

Boone

Well, now they realize it, but I don't think back then they really did, and it was kind of a small community to begin with. But like I said, there was more here in southern California, and they would get together, and many different kinds of people were adopting as far as mostly what were called Christian people, because that's how it kind of started. But I know one time when Grandma Bertha Holt

was at my house, she was saying that at that time, many of the black Korean children they were trying to get over here as fast as possible, and they kind of blend into the black community, so they stick out as much as far as that goes, so some of them--we talked about the transracial adoptions--they don't know that they're adopted. So there have been actually black Korean adoptions that--and now since I've gotten older that I've met some of them--that now they know, but they didn't know growing up that they had been adopted, so that's even a whole different transracial thing.

Cline

Boy, yes. You have this insider's view of the dominant culture, growing up in a Caucasian American family. What is your sense of your awareness of being what it is to be Korean or even kind of Korean in this culture? Especially having lived in these kind of peripheral Caucasian bastions of kind of the middle class.

Boone

I think in some ways I was almost privileged, just because I think it was harder sometimes for actual families that were in the Korean American community to break out into--

Cline

The mainstream.

Boone

--what you would call the white community, and where I was living it and I was there. So there were times that I would talk to people-- I didn't have that many friends that were, because I was in such a white community. But when there was the occasional person that was my age that had obviously just come over here or things like that, sometimes I think they were almost afraid of the white community, and I would think, "You can talk to them." [laughs] "There's nothing wrong with those white people." So just because it was a cultural difference and things like that, and so I think that's probably been something that's grown now to where maybe it's not

quite the same. But you've got to remember that in the sixties, they were still having lynchings down in the South, so--

Boone

People forget that.

Boone

--yes, so it hasn't been, I mean, that long.

Cline

Right. What was your sense from some of these Koreans, the Korean immigrants, once they knew your background? You said that they were generally open and accepting, but what about their take on sort of your loss of their culture? Did you ever get a feeling about that?

Boone

Yes. Yes. Sometimes I think that they probably were sad, that I probably didn't know, because kids grow up learning their cultural background, and, of course, I was learning it then, learning a lot of it as an adult. And so they probably felt sad and maybe felt like, well, see, there's that why transracial adoptions can be hard is because of the sense that maybe there is a loss for the actual person, and there sure is, which there is. But that's just part of growing up in another culture. Because within two generations, you really don't have anyway. It doesn't matter.

Cline

That's right. It's on the way out. It's morphed into something else.

Boone

Right, right, exactly.

Cline

Well, with that you walked into my next question. So, okay, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to talk about before we wrap this up?

Boone

I think your questions have been really wonderful.

Cline

Good. Gee, thanks. Okay, because I think we've gotten what we need. Do you think so? Do you feel okay?

Boone

Yes.

Cline

Well, then, on behalf of the Center for Oral History Research and me personally, who enjoyed this very much, thank you for taking this time to talk to us and for contributing to this series.

Boone

Okay, thank you.

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