THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. ANDREW KANG

FOR THE
VETERAN'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WAR AND SOCIETY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

INTERVIEWED BY
G. KURT PIELER
AND
ROBYN LEE HENDRICK

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE
26 DECEMBER 2001

TRANSCRIPT BY
ROBYN LEE HENDRICK

REVIEWED BY
GREG KUPSKY

ANDREW KANG: Now how far back would you like me to start? This could be a long interview or a short interview.

KURT PIEHLER: It's … as long as you'd like to do it.

KANG: Okay, and I don't want to bore you to death. But I'll go back as far as you …

PIEHLER: And we don't—if you decide, you know, we've had enough for today, we could do it another [time]…. I know you don't come this way that often. Well, let me just formally begin by saying that this begins an interview with Andrew Kang on December 26, 2001 in Knoxville, Tennessee with Kurt Piehler and …

ROBYN HENDRICK: Robyn Hendrick.

PIEHLER: And let me just begin by asking you to just tell us a little bit about your parents, your mother and father.

KANG: Okay. My father was a practicing internist by the time I was born, in Seoul, Korea. And my mother was a housewife, as most women in those days [were] expected to be. My father was born as the eldest son for the ninth generation or more of a very wealthy landowner who happened to reside [in] what now is part of North Korea. But he, as a teenager, left that countryside and went to Japan for his education. And my mother was also educated in Japan, remembering that at that time Korea was part of Japan. Let me just pause and give you a little short history of this.

Korea was taken over and annexed by Japan in 1910. And the time context I'm talking about is, I guess, 1920s when my parents were educated in Japan. So we were under Japanese occupation and we were legally supposed to be Japanese people. And it was in that setting that they were educated in Japan. They returned to Seoul and, were married, through, as was the custom then, by the mediation of a marriage broker, for lack of a better term. Usually the marriage broker is … either friend or a relative of either one party or the other party. And [he or she] picks out [an] appropriate mate for the man and woman and makes sure that both households have proper lineage, social class, education, and so on and so on. So, I am a product of [such a] marriage. I am the eldest son, I guess, now … for the tenth generation, but the second child. I had one elder sister. And I have a total—well, I am one of a total of six siblings, two boys and four … girls. So I was born and raised in Seoul, as the grandson of a wealthy landowner, and educated in Seoul through elementary school, through middle school, and high school, and [then] the Korean War broke out, yeah.

A little bit—few words on my … mother's side would be probably useful. My mother's father was a very well known scholar of Korean history and Korean literature, really. He is credited with having introduced a new style of writing, a Korean prose. So, he is well known in Korean history. And he resided close to where we lived within a relatively short walking distance from where we lived.

So I grew up in a milieu in which scholastic attainment was valued. Not only valued, it was just the expectation of a child that one grows up with. So, I grew up in that environment. And if I came back with anything short of [an] A there was a cause for a frown. If I came back with all As, that was just as things ought to be. So, it was that kind of household in which I grew up. And obviously, we were relatively affluent by their [Korean] standards, and therefore to some extent I was a spoiled, but not rotten child, who was well behaved.

PIEHLER: … You even mentioned … that Korea was a colony. What was the attitude of your family towards the Japanese?

KANG: In fact, my grandfather that I'm talking of, maternal grandfather, spent half of his life [in jail] under Japanese occupation. Largely because he would, being a historian, write history as [it] properly should be written. A lot of what he wrote was contrary to the official Japanese policy. Let me take a step back. It's an interesting form of colonialism that Japan practiced in Korea. To go back to a little bit earlier, 1905, there was [the] … Russo-Japanese war, which Japan won, and as a part of a negotiated settlement of the ending of that war, the U.S. was the broker, political broker, and they passively, they meaning the Western countries, passively recognized Japan's sphere of influence to include Korea. So, essentially Japan felt that she was free to do whatever she wanted to do in Korea, and the Western powers looked the other way. So, officially [Japan] annexed it in 1910.

The initial phase of [Japanese] occupation apparently was characterized … by brutality and they forcefully put down any resistance as they saw it. But then in 1919 there was a big peaceful movement with a Declaration of Independence, and it was influenced by the ending of World War I and the League of Nation formation and President Wilson's declaration of the right for self-determination by the people. That influenced the Korean patriots, if you will. And they started an independence movement and they elected to go the route of a peaceful revolution. And actually, my grandfather was the author of that Declaration of Independence.

So, in 1919 there began a series of resistance and demonstrations for independence, and so on. And Japan again brutally tried to suppress it. And then they realized it wasn't working. So, they did a sort of a midair spin on a dime and sometime during the 1920s they recalled the governor to Japan and replaced him with a new governor who came in with an olive branch and, the line they began using was that Japan … and Korea are really the same country. It's the same people. The Korean people are really Japanese people where some time during the past for whatever reason history flew in such a way that they parted but that … it is now a [time for] reunification, okay. And they even came out with a slogan, which said Naiseng ittai…. Nai is a part of Naichi, which designates mainland Japan. And Seng, Cho Seng which is what Korea was called. So, Naiseng Ittai is a Japanese way of saying one body. Okay, that became a slogan and they passed a series of laws whereby all the Koreans had to change their last names to make it sound like Japanese. I mean, after all, if we are Japanese citizens we ought to change our last names back [to Japanese]. So, we were forced to change our last names. And Japan was selling this idea that this is the same nation, the same people who are reunifying.

Well, how does that sound to a historian, okay? (Laughter) So, my grandfather kept on publishing scholarly articles saying that this is essentially a … bunch of nonsense. Well, that got him obviously into jail repeatedly for writing such a thing. And it so happened that his brother, this is my mother's father's brother, was a businessman, owner of a Korean newspaper. And, of course, he would publish, or try to publish, articles that [were] contrary to Japanese policy. So, the long and short of it is both of them spent a lot of time in [a] Japanese jail. Now, in retrospect, ironically enough, the thing that saved … my grandfather's fate was that there were some few honest Japanese scholars who came to his aid. And said that … from the scholarly point of view you can't really suppress this man because … however misguided he may be, and however erroneous he may be on the facts, he is a real scholar and therefore he should be treated like a scholar. So he had a special privilege even in prison to have a library of his own, and was allowed to continue to read and write and communicate with the Japanese scholars and so on and so on.

So, as I was growing up, my attitude toward Japan was quite mixed in the sense that you go to school … [and] some of the schoolteachers were … Japanese men and women. The moment I come home, I hear this, adults talking, you know, "Don't ever say this out of the house, but this is a bunch of malarkey you are learning at school." (Laughter) And I recall one naive instance, which got me into deep trouble. And that is, in Japanese schools or Korean schools in those days, they have a class called civics class once a week, wherein they teach essentially what's right and what's wrong, and what to do and what not to do, kind of a thing, right. And typically, it would start with meditation and we were expected to wait for the classroom teacher to show up at 9:00 or whatever [time] that class is scheduled for. And each class had about sixty, seventy children there. We were supposed to close our eyes and wait in total silence and meditation for the entrance of the schoolteacher. Then the schoolteacher would come in and says, "Okay you can open your eyes." And then she would—but by and large, they would teach you the right sort of thing. Thou shalt not lie; Thou shalt not steal, and all that sort of thing. Well, one particular session the teacher started with how it is important to be honest and … always to tell the truth. And then she throws in one curve, which I didn't realize what it was. She said, "Is there any child in this room who would not like to grow up to be a brave soldier of [the] great Imperial Japanese army?" Well, you know … you'd been told you should always tell the truth, right? Up comes a few arms, including mine. Well, that landed me in the principal's office immediately, who was a Japanese man as well. And he realized I was the grandson of my grandfather, and he decided that this [was] a serious matter. And obviously, this man [was] still doing a lot of subversive things. So they called my parents into the principal's office and he let them have it.

And as I was taken home, my father was so furious. [He] said, "You fool, you shall always tell the truth. But there are times you can't always tell the truth." And I looked at him as a child, you know. What am I supposed to do? (Laughter) I had some understanding of what I did wrong, but the point was … somewhat hilarious. [But] at that time, not so hilarious.

PIEHLER: Yes, but in retrospect, I mean …

KANG: I was a naive child and that total naiveté got me into trouble, although I was following the rules. And the position of my parents was an interesting one because, on the one hand they

[couldn't] say that you got to learn to tell lies. On the other hand, you'd better get some sense into your head. (Laughter) So, that sort of a typifies our attitudes towards Japan.

PIEHLER: Now your parents were educated in Japan partly, and your father went to the medical university…. What were his attitudes towards Japan? I guess similar to his, to his father, or …

KANG: His attitude was … the same. Like all educated Koreans they knew that Korea was made essentially a colony and being taken advantage of. But active resistance would get you into deep trouble. So, he couldn't do anything, at least overtly. Now, there were some Koreans who escaped to Manchuria, to China, and to the United States and [were] forming a resistance movement of some kind. And some of those formed small fighting units to fight the Japanese forces in Manchuria in guerrilla style, and so on. But we were trapped in Korea. So we were expected to act like Japanese citizens. And as a matter of fact as World War II began and as Japan began to experience defeats they needed manpower. So they drafted a lot of Korean men and women to do—some of them went into their fighting forces. Some of them into labor camps. Some of them into, particularly women, into essentially enforced, what do you call it; they had a name that says they are a group of patriots to provide convenience and consolation to fighting forces. I think you know what I am trying to say. So, yeah, so that there were some tragic events.

PIEHLER: Now your father, he was not drafted, was he?

KANG: No, he was beyond the draft age by that time, and I was too young to be drafted.

PIEHLER: But it sounds like you knew people who were drafted.

KANG: Oh, yes! For example, my mother's youngest brother was of draft age, and he was constantly hiding from the authorities. Going from his father's house, [staying] there two days, and then he'd go to his brother's house for a couple days, [and he] would come to our house, [and] hide out for a week or whatever. It's in that sense, and in that context in which I had to raise my hand because I knew what my uncle was doing, for example.

PIEHLER: Your, your father was a doctor, was a physician. What was his practice? What was his practice centered on and who were his patients?

KANG: He was an internist.

PIEHLER: Internist.

KANG: Right. His patients were essentially the Korean people living in Seoul, who [were] able to afford medical care, private medical care, yeah.

PIEHLER: And your mother had a traditional, was it … by the standards of the day, a traditional housewife?

KANG: Right, right.

PIEHLER: Could you sort of define what that meant? Because I know so little about Korean culture.

KANG: Yeah. It's influenced, heavily influenced by Confucian teaching and Confucian concepts of how society should function. And as Confucius thought of it, the society's basic forming unit was a family. And family [consisted of] the parents and the children. And then the relatives into a larger family. So that anybody who was a fourth cousin or closer [was] considered to be of one household. This is going back four generations now. And since [my father was] the eldest, we had a big clan. For example, New Year's Day we have a custom of everybody having to come and pay greetings. And they would march in and our household was just like, gosh, it was an incessant parade of relatives that I didn't know the relationship exactly, coming to visit. (Laughter) And, of course, it's a Korean custom to properly feed them with whatever. So, our household was, [for] several days in a row, a parade of people coming in to pay greetings. And my mother fulfilled the role of being the woman in charge of running that household. It was more than a full time job. She had at least a full time cook and two maids and a cleaning man to be able to run the household. Now mind you, in those days there were no conveniences like [an] electrical refrigerator or even electrical cooking ware. So, everything had to be done by old-fashioned methods. And obviously, it took that kind of manpower to be able to do that.

PIEHLER: Your household, you were clearly in the upper class of Korea at the time.

KANG: [Ours] was one of the elites, yes.

PIEHLER: Yeah, in terms of sort of the standards of America today, what comforts, you mentioned you didn't have a lot of the electrical conveniences in the kitchen. Did you have, say, electricity? I assume you had …

KANG: Yes…. In Seoul, where I grew up, our house had electricity and electrical lights. But electrical appliances were not yet available.

PIEHLER: What about a radio? Did you …

KANG: Radio was available and telephone was available. And the hot plates were available but not the electrical stove, for example, or the refrigerator, which [was] the biggest problem.

PIEHLER: So, you had an icebox?

KANG: We had an icebox, right.

PIEHLER: Did your father have an automobile?

KANG: No, he did not. Very few people in Korea owned an automobile in those days, yeah.

PIEHLER: So, even though you were part of the elite, an automobile was, was out of reach.

KANG: It wasn't. It may not have been out of financial reach, but automobile ownership was not done except by real, real elites. (Laughter) We weren't that elite.

PIEHLER: Yeah…. How much traveling, I don't know Korea very well at all, but how much traveling were you able to do when you were growing up, and were there any traditional vacation places you went to?

KANG: Oh, yes. Every—in Korea the school system is a little different. We get forty days of summer vacation and forty days of winter vacation. Starting from July 21 to September 1 for the summer vacation. And the winter vacation starts December 21 and ends January 31. And every vacation I was expected by my paternal grandfather who lived … deep in North Korea, that I shall spend my vacation in his house. So, as far back as I can remember, somebody had to take me by train ride. And although by distance wise it is only a matter of several hundred miles, it was a long train ride. Because it was going, you know, stop by stop by stop, yeah. Until really the Korean, the World War II ended and Korea got divided. By that time my grandfather had passed away anyway the year before the war ended, about 1944. So, yeah, I had to go to North Korea all the time.

PIEHLER: So, that was a very traditional thing for you to do. It sounds like every, every winter.

KANG: Right, right.

PIEHLER: I'm curious…. What type of radio programs did you listen to? And were you ever able to get overseas broadcasts on the radio?

KANG: Not really, for several reasons. I think one reason is, remember in those days radios were relatively primitive, okay. And it took short wave to be able to go any, any distance. And really, the furthest place where you could catch [a signal] was really Tokyo from Seoul. That's as far as it [would] go. And, and therefore, where else [could] we tune in? Of course [the] number of broadcasting stations was limited, too. And what was being broadcast in Seoul was essentially the same thing as what was being broadcast in Tokyo anyway. Because this was all [the] party line that was being given down. So, yeah, I mean sure we had the news. We had music. And we had, what do you call it? Little drama that comes on the radio. So, all this was interesting actually. As a child, I listened to it, yeah. And then we had a phonograph. And when I say phonograph, I mean really [a] phonograph. It was kind of a …

PIEHLER: The old hand crank.

KANG: Yeah, hand cranked, spring-loaded, and it was a slate recorder writing that I think finishes the whole thing in about three, four, five minutes. So, listening to a symphony was not easy to do.

PIEHLER: What types of music … did you listen to? Did you listen to traditional Korean as well as …

KANG: Both. Very much. By that time obviously, there was the traditional Korean music. By that time, also [a] great deal of a Western influence began permeating even under Japanese occupation so that when we were in elementary school, and I was in elementary school through the first five years before World War II ended and the Japanese occupation ended, we were taught the folk songs from many different countries. So that I remember singing things like "My Old Kentucky Home," to "Santa Lucia," to "Return to Sorrento…." Translated into Japanese words. The lyrics were all translated into Japanese words, without knowing necessarily [in] what country [the songs] originated. Actually, I was amazed as to how many different songs I knew when I came to this country. And I looked at my classmates as ignoramuses. They don't even know all these songs. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I'm curious [about] one of the things I ask US veterans of World War II. I mean, one of the memories they have is Pearl Harbor in their consciousness. Because … it seems striking how many date World War II with Pearl Harbor. But it's a very, for Americans, it's a very distinct [period for] those who were here when the Pearl Harbor attack occurred. What's your distinct memories of World War II?

KANG: Again, they were twofold. There was [the] official doctrine, and the line that the schoolteachers were teaching, and the newspapers were printing, and the radio broadcasts were rolling. And then there was this hushed conversation at home that went among my parents, uncles, and grandparents. The official version was that [a] surprise invasion, if that's the word, or bombing of the Pearl Harbor, was touted by the Japanese press and schoolteachers as the greatest success of the Imperial power's wisdom, bravery, and you name it, okay. At home it was actually a worried look, but at the same time somewhat of a sigh of relief in that maybe this could be the beginning of the end. So there was a sort of mixed current of [the] official version and [the] unofficial, what was being talked about at home. Now, as a tangible sort of thing I guess I could point to one interesting memory I have. And that is, after Pearl Harbor was bombed, within six months Japan went on a blitzkrieg into Southeast Asia to secure oil and rubber sources. What now is in China and Indonesia. And when General Yamashita ran over the Philippines, and I don't know who led the conquering of Malaysia. I think that may [have been] Yamashita as well. But whoever it [was], to commemorate the victory and the securing of this natural resources all of a sudden they gave every school child a rubber ball. The pride of that. The rubber balls were rationed. And you know, rice was rationed. Every day necessities were rationed and this [was] one specific, concrete celebration they had by every child having a rubber ball. And we had a ball. 'Cause we could play with a rubber ball. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: So that was, I mean, I guess that would be very memorable if you didn't have that before.

KANG: Yes. Right. Yeah, now we could play … sandlot soccer at our will and not worry about [the] ball being lost or punctured or whatever the case may be.

PIEHLER: Well, let me give Robyn a chance to make sure she gets in a word or two.

HENDRICK: Well, I was just wondering, … what were your parents, at home, what was their attitude toward what would happen with America? Were they rooting for America against Japan and Germany and everyone? Or was it just Japan, and the fall of Japan. Did they care much about the world scene?

KANG: I wouldn't know, because I was young enough to not have the picture of this sort. I do remember my parents, when they talked to their brother or brothers at home snickering about some of the mottoes that the Japanese put out. Their justification for invading Southeast Asia, for example, is what they called the formation of a greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Circle. And there was a big motto. Okay, that was a loose translation of what they were saying into English. But anyway, their justification was that in fact they're going to make the greater East Asia much more prosperous by bringing [it] under Japanese control. And they [my parents] used to snicker at this. So we knew, even as a child, … what was going on and what they were rooting for. Now, whether they were rooting for the Japanese defeat, it didn't really matter to them as to who won, how they were defeated, I do not know. Until I guess a few years later. As you might know, World War II ended a little earlier than America figured. That is by the explosion, the dropping of the atom bombs in Hiroshima, and then Nagasaki a week later. Japan was apparently prepared to fight it out, until they just ran into what they saw as a completely different kind of bomb.

Let me just digress for a moment because I remember the headline on, I believe it was on August 7 or some such date. The day after [the] Hiroshima bomb was dropped, the biggest letters in newspaper headline says, "Enemy Uses New Type of a Bomb? Atomic Bomb?" Next day they flipped around. "New Type of Bomb is not Worthy of Being Afraid." And then several days later, [the] Nagasaki bomb fell. And by that time, I don't know how our parents knew, it was all they knew or they talked as if they knew, it's over. My point of mentioning that, though, is the geopolitical events at that time.

Take it to [the] early part of the World War II when the leaders of, I believe, three countries that included Great Britain, America, and either China or Russia met in Cairo. And they affirmed for the first time the principle that when the war is over Korea will be made an independent country. That's the first declaration. A few years later … they met again and again and finally it was confirmed and reconfirmed at [the] Potsdam conference which is, I believe after Germany fell, they reaffirmed or re-reaffirmed the principle that Korea will be made independent. Russia, obviously, had different designs.

Towards the end of World War II, after, Germany surrendered, Japan knew it [had] had it. So on the one hand they were touting that we would fight till the last drop of blood. They were discretely contacting [the] Russians to see whether they [could] negotiate something other than a cease-fire that, that was something less than a total surrender. Russia kept it from [the] Allies. And instead, Russia turned around and declared war and invaded Manchuria, and into North Korea. And the Americans weren't quite ready militarily to occupy [the] entire peninsula, the peninsula of Korea. But … there was enough awareness in that department, the State

Department, that if you allow the Russians to come in, that Korea [would] become a communist country. So, they basically negotiated for a zone of disarmament along the lines of [the] 38th parallel. And the Russians agreed to that. So that's how the 38th parallel, how North Korea and South Korea got created as a sort of arbitrary line. The south of which would be basically the territory of the US. Not territory, but zone in which the U.S. [would] be responsible for disarming the remnants of [the] Japanese army. And the north side of which the Russian army would be responsible for disarming the Japanese armaments.

Well, only it didn't turn out that way because Russia had a different side, and Russia quickly turned around and established a puppet regime, and gave them their arms and confiscated the Japanese arms, [and] trained the army even as … Americans were disengaging from the war mentality. You know, from [the] American point of view the war ended. The last thing they wanted to do was go into another confrontation with a communist, or anything of that sort. So, they wanted to disengage out of South Korea as soon as they [could]. And [the] long and short of it is they could not reach an agreement. They met, they meaning the foreign secretaries of the four major powers, in the wake of World War II, met several times to talk about the unification of Korea. Well, Russia basically storm-rolled any positions that the western countries had. In retrospect, for obvious reasons they had designed.

And out of a—I guess somewhat of a frustration, the US decided to petition to the United Nations as to what to do about it. And as fate would have it, the UN resolved that there should be an election at least in whatever zone election [was] possible. And of course, the UN delegates came to politically supervise the free election. They were met at the 38th parallel by armed guard. And "Thou shalt not cross." So okay, the delegates said that "We will just hold elections in South Korea." So, [an] election was held in South Korea. And that's how the South Korean government was born. That was … '48. And then as soon as … [the] South Korean government was born, [the] U.S. disengaged and withdrew its troops and left only a few military advisors. That's the background of the Korean War I'm leading into.

Between 1948 and 1950 North Korea had trained and armed their army with Russian tanks. South Korea was left with approximately 60,000 soldiers in the entire army. And the entire so-called air force had five TUI training planes. [The] South Korean flagship of its navy was a converted fishing vessel. And the heaviest armaments of South Korean … army [were] 105 mm howitzers. Those were small artilleries of World War II vintage, and they had all of five. And the rest of the soldiers were armed with a carbine. [The] carbine is a police weapon, not a fighting weapon. The standard weapon of the foot soldiers then was an M-1, a much, much heavier caliber machine. And carbines were used essentially by the police, the riot police. So, such was the relative disparity in [their] armament.

And there comes now some tragic things that American people may or may not remember. In January of 1950, President Truman then gave the State of the Union message and that was of course, as all of you know, twenty minutes. [It was a] broad stroke report. And that was followed by a series of what's known as a white papers that detail the specific aspects of different polices. And unfortunately [the] foreign secretary then, Secretary of State, was a fellow named Acheson, Dean Acheson. [He] seemingly went out of his way to emphasize that the U.S. defense

line in the Far East is a series of islands that link, starting from Hokkaido to Honshu [the] main island of Japan, Kyushu and Okinawa. And pointedly left out South Korea. That was interpreted by the Russians, the Chinese, and the North Koreans to mean that the US would not care if they invaded. So, that was the last straw that gave them the go-ahead to invade…. By now I'm talking about … [the] beginning of February. I was getting older by that time. By that time I was a, I was a middle school student. So, I began to be a little bit more aware of the international sorts of things.

South Korea panicked. Then the president was a fellow known as Sygman Rhee. [Rhee] panicked and sent a special emissary to the U.S. government to correct that omission. And actually, the special ambassador that he picked to send happened to be my great uncle, my mother's father's brother, the fellow who ran [the] newspapers. So, he went to Washington to plead South Korea's case. As a result of that, in, I believe, early June of that year, John Foster Dulles was sent as an emissary by the U.S. government. At that time, John Foster Dulles … was an undersecretary in charge of I believe East Asian affairs. And I recall a translation of the speech … he gave to the bicameral body, the combined lower and upper house representatives in Korea at that time. And he went as far as he could go to give the idea that the U.S. was interested in defending South Korea. He didn't have obviously the presidential authority to say that, "Okay boys, get off my back, otherwise I'm going to kick you hard." So, he made as reassuring a speech as he could possibly make. But that wasn't enough. By that time, the dice had been cast and North Korea was ready, and they pushed on June 25, a Sunday morning.

And all of a sudden I could, I could hear artillery shells at a distance. In three days Seoul fell. And really, the vast majority of people were caught by surprise, including our family. And we were caught behind … what is an enemy line. And we suffered, our family suffered some tragedies as a result of that. Basically, my mother was murdered, and my father was caught by the North Koreans, as what's known as a counter revolutionary element. It was some euphemism they used to designate political enemies if you will. And, and his fate is unknown. He is … presumed dead because nobody has seen him, and he's not been heard from since he was captured. And I lost a cousin and a cousin-in-law and their infant baby in that massacre. So, that sort of leads up to the Korean War.

PIEHLER: Well let me just back up a little bit. I just have a few questions…. You were still very young, but what was the feeling about the division of Korea? Because I've read that, there was no precedent in Korean culture for society to have a sort of North/South split. That Korea didn't really have those regional differences in the way, say, the United States does, or a lot of other countries do.

KANG: Well, if you go back far enough in history they were divided at times.

PIEHLER: Yeah, but you have to go really far back. I've got to understand …

KANG: Oh yes, at least 1,500 years that Korea was a unified country. And North Korea and South Korea was sort of a non-existent term that just got coined. And at the beginning everybody thought and hoped that as soon as the disarmament was over, disarmament of the

Japanese army, that both the U.S. and the Russians would hand over to the Koreans some way of evolving a country. Well, with each passing week and month it became increasingly clear that that was not about to happen. So there was a great deal of anxiety and angst among the Koreans. And I guess the South Koreans really got the message when North Korea cut off [their] transmission of electrical energy. Seoul electricity, electricity in Seoul, was supplied by a dam in North Korea, by transmission lines. And one day, and … I forgot exactly what year it was, it was somewhere around 1946 or '47 or thereabouts, they simply just cut it off.

PIEHLER: It sounds like that was very memorable for you because you lost power.

KANG: Yeah! [The] whole city went dark. And the emergency facility that Seoul had was a coal fire generating station that generated all of 50,000-kilowatt hours, okay. The only thing that was lit was essentially government buildings and important, very important people, presidential home. And the U.S. had to call in a ship that [could] generate power in a port outside of Inchon, which is about twenty miles west of a Seoul. And those two ships generated enough power to supply the U.S. facilities, [the] U.S. ambassador's office, and the remnants of [the] U.S. army. But the civilians [were in the] dark.

PIEHLER: And how long did you stay without power? Do you remember? Was it …

KANG: Well, we went on a ration system so that by rotation you would get electricity for two, three hours in the evening. During which time you were supposed to do what you needed to do and get it over with. And things really didn't end, [or get] much better until, until after I left Korea in 1955.

PIEHLER: … Do you have any memories of American GIs or the occupation? Again, you were, you were very young still.

KANG: Actually, I do. Some memorable, some random thoughts. The first time I saw U.S. GIs come riding in on a jeep, they wore funny hats, funny caps. And I had never seen a cap like that before in my life. I had not seen too many westerners. It's a uni-racial country and in fact, I had not seen anybody other than Far East Asians. And the vast majority of soldiers were white men in those days. Very few blacks, or there were only occasional blacks always. And they were taller, they had funny-colored hair. All Koreans have brown or black hair and brown eyes. And some of these guys had, you know, yellow [hair], some of the guys even had red hair. And they all chewed gum for some reason. And I remember that very [well]. And they were very generous. And, you know, they would say hello, and I had no idea what that meant at that time. I was a fifth grader, right, in elementary school. I had not … begun to learn English. And yet they seemed to be very friendly in that if you'd say hello back, whatever the heck that meant, sometimes they would throw, you know, a pack of gum at you, or a Hershey bar at you. And wave, and the vast majority of them were very friendly sorts of guys. So, we weren't, we weren't afraid, although my parents cautioned, you know, "Don't go near those guys. You don't know what they're going to do." They weren't quite sure what they would do. And particularly against my sisters they were warning, "Stay away from them. Don't go near them."

PIEHLER: But I guess it's a very different attitude than, say, the Japanese soldiers during the …

KANG: Oh, sure. The Japanese soldiers were feared because they were brutal.

PIEHLER: And so you got this sense as a child that American soldiers were just a friendlier …

KANG: Oh, not only friendlier. [American soldiers were] very different kinds of people. In some sense of the term, they were senseless people because they did, they did funny things. But at the same time, you know, a smile is a smile. Its not threatening and you get the idea these are friendly guys. And if you say hello back, you know, they'd throw a pack of gum at you, and whatever. So, no, we learned to be at ease. At least I did learn to be at ease much quicker with these guys. And with each passing year … it became very obvious that the American soldiers were a very different breed of cats than the Japanese soldiers. Yeah, yeah. You know for three years Korea was governed—between '45 and '48, was governed by military regime. And General [John R.] Hodge was the military governor. And I remember one time as a measure of public, I guess, public health measure, they would send an army truck loaded with the DDT and spray all the kids inside their clothes to get rid of body lice or hair lice or whatever.

PIEHLER: And so you remember that coming …

KANG: Oh, yeah. Standing in line, and these guys would laugh you know, *boisan*, they, they found out the word *boisan*. San is a Japanese word for … making the noun preceding it a little more polite. "Come on over here, *boisan*. Open your shirt and squirt." You know, that type of thing.

PIEHLER: Hold that thought for just a sec….

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE----------

KANG: … the experience during the Korean War as to what I saw. Is that—would that be okay?

PIEHLER: Oh that would be fine. In fact, I wanted to ask you some questions about that.

KANG: Right, now let me … just set the stage for that by talking about what's happened, what happened to me during the five years between 1945 and 1950. [In] '45 the end of … World War II, and liberation of Korea. And then three years of military regime, and two years of a chaotic South Korean government, and the North Korean invasion, and the few years thereafter, and what happened to me. And I think I probably ought to start by what I was put through by my family, to lead up to why I am the way I am, or turned out the way I did turn out. Are we on tape?

PIEHLER: Yes, oh yes …

KANG: As far back as I can remember as a child we were under pressure, if that's the word, by everybody that's important to me, including mother, father, uncles, grandparents, that "I shall

achieve. And not only shall I try to achieve, I will do better than anybody else." So, that was deeply ingrained into me, and that was even, not even a subject of conscious thinking. And therefore under Japanese occupation my father's wish was that I [should] learn Japanese so well that I could go to Japan, like he did, and learn medicine in the very best university in Japan, which is Tokyo Imperial University. So I was forced, if that's the word, to learn Japanese very well. And then indeed, I spoke Japanese very well. Better than most of my classmates, and I easily could have passed as a Japanese. Well, the war ends and my father says, "Well you can't go to Japan; it's an enemy country." And he decided that the next best school that he could think of was a Peking Union College, which was established in Peking by U.S. Presbyterian missionaries. So, outside of Tokyo Imperial University, he thought that the next best place for me to go was Peking. So, he hires a tutor. And I had to learn Chinese. (Laughter) This is outside of school, you understand. And school was rigorous enough. Our school was five and a half days a week and full of homework. So, it was really not a heck of a time, but nonetheless what are you gonna do? Your father says you will learn Chinese, you will learn Chinese. And then China falls. Communists take over, that's 1949. He thinks about this and says, "Well, it's obvious you can't go to China anymore and you're going to learn English, much better than you are learning in school." And by the way, English became a required subject as a second language from seventh grade and so on. So, I had been studying a little bit of English anyway. You know, A, B, C, D, and how to read. But suddenly I was told that I would study a little more. So, yes, I put in extra time learning English.

That brings [us] up to sort of 1949-50. And it was in that setting that the war broke out. And I don't really think anybody expected the ferocity, and the ruthlessness [of] what the North Koreans would do, or could do, but it was a terror regime par excellence that would make any Stalinism mild. In the three months they occupied Seoul in 1950 they arrested, and otherwise killed, what they perceived as a counter-revolutionary element. Translation: anybody who had any wealth or influence by definition had to be, as they saw it, [the] sucker of the blood of the proletariat, or the common people, okay. So we were—our entire household was labeled as counter-revolutionaries. And that's how my parents became victims of this ruthless regime. Suffice to say, that alone made me a raging patriot, anti-communist, pro-Western or pro-democratic person.

But nevertheless, for the first time I experienced deprivation, by a combination of the war itself [which] made a lot of things disappear, and I was suddenly the eldest boy, responsible for my siblings. Yes, I had an elder sister who was two years, two years senior to me. And I was fifteen. And suddenly I had the responsibility of the younger siblings. It was a tragic time. I don't know how I made it fit, so to speak. We went hungry. We, we could afford only two meals a day, even with all the help we got from some of the uncles, particularly [our] maternal uncle. And I was peddling things in the street. And what killed me was, I suppose, pride. I mean, it was so humiliating as the eldest son of … this particular family, peddling cigarettes for a few pennies on the street. It was so humiliating that I could hardly bear the thought. And yet, the hunger drives you. The work has to be done. And then you know a few more years of chaos followed because [the] Chinese intervened.

And let's take a step back. After three months the UN forces … led by the U.S. was able to push back to North Korea. That included the famous Inchon landing, a tactical genius of a success. Because … Inchon, is twenty to thirty miles west of Seoul and Seoul is at the heart of highways that crosses north and south. And everything that moves north and south must go through … Seoul. So, once you occupy Seoul the country is essentially divided. And by landing at Inchon and occupying Seoul, essentially enemy forces … in the south [had] nowhere to go. So, it was an easy defeat. I suppose, you can imagine [Douglas] MacArthur is my hero and he remains my hero. And he, in fact, defied even the U.S. President. [He] said, "We will demand total surrender of [the] North Koreans, and if not we will invade and occupy. We will occupy all the territory south of the Yalu River." That's the border to North Korea and Manchuria. "By Christmas our boys will be eating turkey at home." And Truman apparently was persuaded, "Okay, let him do it." And he almost pulled it off. There was one thing that he did not know. And that was in the meantime, China was making it very, very clear that any crossing by the U.S., or the U.N. forces, of the, what used to be the 38th parallel, will be regarded as a direct threat to the Chinese interest and China will intervene. And apparently this was well known, well-said, widely disseminated among diplomatic circles all over [the] world. This information apparently was not available [to] MacArthur. Apparently it was well known in Washington, but not to MacArthur. So quite apart from whether that's right, wrong or otherwise, MacArthur decided to cross. And suddenly we saw the specter of total unification just then, because South Korean forces had just reached the Yalu River.

Well, two things happened. The winter came, and the American soldiers were unready for the ferocity of North Korean winter. It's like Minnesota. And secondly, they were not ready for the massive number of Chinese forces that intervened. And by, what do you call it, the "sea of men," tactics just wave after wave, they were able to surround
and defeat some of the … American forces as well as [an] entire brigade of South Korean forces. They were decimated. The vast majority of casualty happened in the hand of [the] Chinese army and then [the] Chinese army began pushing down and re-took Seoul a few months later, Christmas 1950. Seoul was retaken.

By that time, [the] vast majority of people in Seoul knew that they were coming, number one, and number two, [they knew] what communists can do to you. There was a massive evacuation of civilians. And, of course, by that time I was sixteen, I guess. I had to take my younger siblings and make our way south. And we had to get on retreating trains that were carrying casualties from the battlefront. They were using boxcars to carry wounded soldiers. It was chaotic. And all the civilians could do was [to] get on top of the boxcars. The U.S. would allow that. And although it's again a matter of 300 hundred miles to [the] Pusan perimeter, it was in the winter. And when [the] train moves, that wind feels colder. (Laughter) And we froze our butts. And I got frostbite. Many people got frostbite of the toes and fingers. But we were able to get there and follow another about year and a half of a—God, I don't even remember how I survived, period. I don't even, during that period of time.

And then MacArthur was fired and Ridgeway was replacing him. And the mandate to General [Matthew B.] Ridgeway was "Fall back to the 38th parallel or thereabouts. And then you're not going to go up to North Korea. Just maintain that line." And then [the] U.S. began [the]

diplomacy of seeking a cease-fire. And that negotiation lasted 2 years. And along the 38th parallel, roughly now the DMZ, they were probably changing hands thirty times over, in [a] small area, to position themselves at the negotiating table. And the war ended in a cease-fire in 1953.

Well, by that time I was older. In '53 I graduated from high school and matriculated in [the] pre-med class of Seoul National University, which … was and is still the elite university in Korea. But schools were meeting in tents. Much of the school facility had been either bombed out or damaged or otherwise occupied and used by U.S. and/or UN forces anyway. And I was as a young man thinking, you know, "How much are you going to be able to learn in this setting? I gotta go somewhere. I got to go to some country and learn real science of medicine and I can't do this." But we were having a difficult time, having two meals a day, much less going to study abroad.

And then I guess this is where fate comes in. And I can't explain why and how this happened. A few friends of ours got together one Sunday morning and decided for reasons unknown, "Lets go to the ecumenical church run by [the] U.S. Eighth Army, and see whether we can understand the service." So, three, four of us went to a Sunday morning service run by the Eighth Army chaplain for the benefit of soldiers, any international people, diplomats, any other person. And including the Koreans, [who were] free to come also. So, we went there and I didn't understand much of what he said, in fact, in the way of [the] sermon. The outline of the service was vaguely familiar because always there is the reading of the Bible and the singing of the hymn, and the New Testament. So that structure you could follow. But the sermon, I didn't really understand what he was saying. But at the end of the service everybody stood in line. So … we were going to stand in line too. We looked at each other and said, "Well, let's stay in line." So, my turn comes and I don't know what to say to [the] chaplain. So, I said something to the effect of, "Thank you very much for your nice sermon." And all of a sudden this guy's eye opens up and [he] said, "Young man, you speak good English." I said, "Well, thank you, sir." And he said, "Son, what are you doing this afternoon?" Well, I mumbled something to the effect of "Nothing very important." And then he said, "Well, why don't you come and visit me?" So, I said, "Well, I can't very well enter Eighth Army headquarters." He says, "Well, you come to, you know where the Eighth Army headquarters is?" Of course I do. Everybody knew that. It was in the heart of the city of Seoul. He said, "You show up at 2:00 and tell the military police that you're looking for Colonel Crumpton." I said, "Sure." I showed up there 2:00. Sure enough, the MP calls, so Colonel Crumpton can send a jeep, so I was to go to his tent. His office, his office was a tent. He offered me Coca-Cola. It was in the summer then. It was the first time I tasted Coca-Cola and I thought it tasted dreadful. (Laughter) But out of politeness I had to finish that glass. And we really didn't do very much. He would take me around from his office to, you know, [the] next tent and introduce me to somebody. You know, he's my clerk or whatever. And then [he'd] take me to another building. And you know, "This is where we conduct our service."

And then, the about thirty minutes later he said out of the blue—well by that time he'd found out I was a student at the Seoul National University, and then finally out of the blue he says, "Young man, how would you like to study medicine in America?" And I said, "I would love to, but I don't have any money to, you know, be able to do that." He said, "Well, how would you feel about if I got you a full scholarship?" Well I said, "Now that's a different story. If I have a full

scholarship I might be able to." And then "You'll hear from me." Well, two, three days later [I] get a call from the registrar's office at the university there, you know. And I don't know how you feel when you get a invitation from your dean's office to come and speak with a dean. How would you feel? Immediate reaction was, I didn't do anything wrong. What did I do wrong? So … I had a little mixed emotion about this. I didn't know what this is about and, you know, I didn't violate any rules that I could think of.

So, I showed up at a time to [the] registrar's office who happened to be a professor of English, Professor Chun. And he said, "You know, do [you] know a certain chaplain Crumpton?" So I thought. A chaplain Crumpton. [I] said, "Oh, yes, the Eighth Army chaplain. Yeah, I met him last weekend." [He said], "You know, I had a very funny visit from this man and what he wanted to know was who were some of the best students in the class." Specifically he was interested in knowing [about] me, Andrew Kang. [He said], "So, you know, I told him you are one of the top students and he said, 'Well, hallelujah. I got a full scholarship for him.' So, lets go talk to your grandfather, who was still alive then, to get his permission.'" Get the patriarch's permission to be able to do that. So, Professor Chun took me by the arm and went to my grandfather who … by that time had had a stroke and was since lying in bed, and he told him as though it was his discovery, how he had a visit from Colonel Crumpton who had a full scholarship, and "Would you give this young man permission to go to the US?" So, he said "Yes" because he's a radical in his own times, right? He spent his time in jail enough times to know. So, "Sure you can go to America and study and I will take care of your younger siblings."

So, that's how I got to the United States. And then I found out what a magnitude of the problem that was. To obtain a passport it took me about six months because I had to get an exemption from military obligation, a la Korea. Well, Korean civilian bureaucracy was totally chaotic anyway. Cause could you imagine in the wake of the war much of the government buildings were bombed out, documents weren't available, inflation was rampant, the older bureaucrats were corrupt, to say the least…. They couldn't make a living on a salary so they took bribes. So everybody who had to affix his signature I had to bribe. It took me six months to get that passport. And then I had to pass [the] consulate, alright…. [The] Consul General was a woman … named Ms. Pomroy. [She said], "I'm not going to issue, I cannot issue a visa because you do not have an affidavit of support. And the full scholarship given by Wofford College is not sufficient because it does not pay for your transportation. And therefore you have to obtain an affidavit of support by somebody who has access to and has enough U.S. dollars."

Well, how [do] I go about finding an affidavit of support? So, I did what I could, to see what I could [do to] take advantage of my connections, such as my great-uncle who was, after-all, the Korean ambassador, special ambassador to America, and later became ambassador to Washington, and later he became a prime minister under Syngman Rhee. So he had some connections, and he obviously knew this Consulate General because for diplomatic reasons they had met. So I took him, and he did [the] best he [could]. He says, "I will guarantee this young man's passage." And Ms. Pomroy says, "Well, under the present Korean law that controls U.S. currency, Mr. Choi, how in the world are you going to expect to propose to come up with $1,500 or whatever might be the fare?" Well, obviously he was stuck. So, he couldn't pull that off. And so I went through a height and then sudden disappointment. It looked like nothing's going

to work. So, I wrote a letter to Wofford College saying that "I cannot get a visa and therefore I regret that I cannot basically come to the United States."

And again here's another luck, fate, call it what you may. The guy I was communicating with was a fellow named Frank Logan, who was registrar of the school. And he went to some considerable machinations and came up with a statement that they would pay the return fare. That satisfied this Ms. Pomroy, and I was finally given a visa. That took another six months. So, a year passed by. So, finally I left Korea in 1955, April 13, with one suitcase, and grand total net assets of $500 in my pocket and [a] one-way ticket to Spartanburg, South Carolina.

And then I faced something that I did not realize I would face, a complete misunderstanding, which was that it took me a few weeks to realize that the scholarship I had was given by Wofford College for what was an undergraduate school. In no sense of the term did that have anything to do with medical school. To my understanding of a system, it was a difference in systems. In Korea, the men and boys are sorted out at the time we are accepted to pre-med. It's an automatic promotion into medical school. So, in a sense you can look upon it as a six-year medical school curriculum….

PIEHLER: But the states are very—yes.

KANG: It's a different university. There is absolutely no relationship. The fact that you are studying pre-med at Wofford College, or at any college, is totally irrelevant as far as the medical schools are concerned. And I found that out and then I thought, "I have to go down to, all the way down to the bottom. Now, I got myself into a total fix. I can't go back because the entire money I had in my pocket was less than the plane fare, and then there is the question of face. All my friends and family and relatives." And I went to Mr. Logan and I said, I cried, "I don't know what to do. I simply did not know that the system was so different between this country and Korea. And I really thought that I was coming to a medical school." And Mr. Logan said, "Don't worry, don't worry. There is a way. There will be … a way. So, young man, you concentrate on your studies and don't you worry about a thing." Well, it didn't mean very much to me, except that that was at least a straw that I could hang on to, right.

And I said, "Well, doggonit, now I'm caught between the proverbial blue sea and the devil." And the only thing I could think of doing as a young man was, in fact, burn up every book, course, in every subject I take so that they could [not] possibly deny me a scholarship. It was the only solution that came to my mind. So, I said, "Okay. I am going to have to dig in and I cannot afford to make anything less than an A+." So, I dug in. And my English wasn't that good enough, right. So, I had to read with a dictionary and it took me twice, three times as long as an ordinary student. But luck was with me. I was able to burn through distinctly.

And then Mr. Logan, this is about a semester or two later, calls me in. And oh, by that time I found out one more thing. That I was not the first Korean student at Wofford College. What happened was that there was a Korean student who, however, was not adjusting, was failing and homesick and having [a] problem adjusting. And they, the occasion was this, 1953 was a year of a centennial celebration for Wofford College. So, college trustees decided that, "Gee, wouldn't it

be the most cogent way of celebrating the centennial by … sponsoring a poor Korean student." They asked their alumnus, then in Korea, Colonel Crumpton, to find a Korean student and send him, and it turned out that he bombed, okay? Now, the college authorities went to the local Rotary Club to raise that scholarship and they lost face because this student flunked out and was on the verge of disaster. So, Frank Logan became the man to go back to the Rotary Club one more time and said, "We can't let this happen. We gotta find a solution. And one solution is he's obviously homesick. He needs another Korean student who can help him." (Laughter) So, I was going to be the savior. And this is the reason why this time Colonel Crumpton—"You're gonna find not just a Korean, but he's going to have to succeed." That's why he took the care that he did take, in retrospect, that's why his eyes lit up when he thought that I was speaking English better than ordinary Koreans. That's why he went to Seoul National University to check out what my record was. I didn't know any of this until I befriended Mr. Logan well enough.

Anyway, couple semesters later Mr. Logan says, "Well, you know, Andy, I don't understand something. Please explain to me. This fellow who came and went and flunked out came from the same university as you did. And ostensibly [he had a] good enough record, and the difference is like a day and night. How do you explain that?" So, I said, "Well, Mr. Logan, what would you like for me to say? That's how it is. You know, I can't be responsible for a person I have never seen in terms of why or how he failed." He says, "Well, no I'm, I'm not saying that you should be responsible. But it is marvelous, it's just marvelous, it's just marvelous, just like day and night. You saved my face." So, that was the saga. That was a great fortune because Mr. Logan became my, not only my friend, supporter, protector, [but] my American father.

And a year later I had to apply for medical schools and by that time obviously I knew that there was no sense in applying for a position in any of the state schools because the residency requirement could not be met. I was [a] foreign citizen. Therefore, what [could] I do? Except to start from Harvard, Hopkins, Cornell, Columbia, Duke, Emory, Tulane, and what's that school in Houston, Baptist supported school, Baylor. So I went down, applying, submitting my applications. And just think about this naive boy. They usually ask you to make, you know, a one- or two-page personal statement, right? And … like a fool, I would say that, you know, "This is why I want to be a physician and so on, but I don't have any money … [and] for me to successfully complete a medical education I need the support of a full scholarship." Well, half [of] the schools sent a very polite letter back saying that "As a school policy we do not offer full scholarships to freshmen students, and therefore we will not be able to process your application unless you remove that condition or assure some financial know-how." Well, luckily, about three, four schools elected to interview me without making [such] comments. One of them was Harvard. And Mr. Logan was happy. So I was called to interview with somebody in Charlotte, North Carolina with a designated person, [at a] designated time. And so, [I told] Mr. Logan, "Don't worry. I know how to take a bus. It's only seventy miles from Spartanburg anyway. I can find my way around by that time." [He] said, "No, no I'll take you." So he took me to [the] interview and [the] interviewer was Dr. Pitts. And the interview went as usual, as interviews would go. And then at the end of the interview, Mr. Logan says, "You wait for me here. I want to have a talk with Dr. Pitts."

And they disappeared behind the door. They spent an hour. (Laughter) And I didn't know what he was doing until about a week or two later I get a call from Mr. Logan saying, "Well you know what Dr. Pitts did? He just sent you a check for $100. So here it is." Apparently he told him a sob story, and how great a kid I was. And obviously that helps because this interviewer was convinced that you are worthy of his support. So he wrote an obviously, some fabulous letter, and I was accepted to the medical school.

And … listen to this naïve boy again. I get a telegram. In those days Western Union really sent telegrams, you know. And the telegram came through the telegraphic office and the operator would call you first. And she says, "Congratulations Mr. Kang, you have a telegram from Harvard and it says you are accepted. Congratulations." So, I was ecstatic.

Except that, other than that, the money comes up again. So, I had to revisit that territory and the telegraph basically said that a letter will follow. And in two, three days, sure enough there was a letter. And the letter was a routine letter, obviously: "Congratulations, you have been accepted…. Please make a deposit of fifty dollars if you want to accept this position." So, I went to Mr. Logan. I didn't have fifty dollars anymore. I said, "Mr. Logan what do you think I should do? I don't have fifty dollars." He said, "You have to, you have to use the fifty dollars. You just cannot do that and be able to get in." So that represented by that time about 50% of my net total assets. So I put in the fifty dollars and I enclosed an acceptance letter. The acceptance letter says, "I am sorry that I cannot really accept this position unless I am guaranteed some sort of financial help. So, I am sending fifty dollars conditionally." I told this to Mr. Logan. He couldn't believe it…. But I got a tremendous letter of the sort that you couldn't believe. And it basically said, "We cannot make a determination and commitment for a scholarship for any student until the entire class is constituted, and be able to assess the needs at that time. But we will assure you no student has ever had to leave Harvard medical school for purely financial reasons." So please be assured, basically. And I showed that letter to Mr. Logan and he said, "You know, I can't believe this, I can't believe this. You are lucky. You are lucky." So, yes, I was lucky. So, that was the beginning of my American career. For the first time in three years I took a deep, deep sigh of relief. [The first time] since I left Korea.

PIEHLER: Well, I have a whole bunch of follow-up questions and I guess I want to go back all the way to when the … North Koreans came into Seoul. And you gave the impression that it all happened very quickly. And, I mean, it did. Seoul is so close to the border. Had your family had any sense it should flee, or did they try to flee?

KANG: I cannot remember a specific conversation to that effect. But suffice to say, very few people thought that Seoul [would] fall. 'Cause even as the sound of artillery was coming nearer and nearer and nearer, there was President Syngman Rhee on the radio reassuring that [the] situation was under control. The brave South Korean army is now initiating a counter-attack and that Seoul [would] be defended. Guess what? That was recorded in Pusan. Okay, so in a sense he deceived people, and in any case it happened at such a lightening speed that very few people had the sense or wherewithal to flee. And Seoul, [the] city of Seoul is bisected by a river. It's known as Han River. Most of the business and the residential area was on the north side of the river. And when they blew the bridge connecting the north and south side of Seoul to retard the

progression of the North Korean army, in effect we were isolated. We had no means of … crossing or going in.

PIEHLER: When did you have your first sort of contact with North Korean soldiers?

KANG: Contact? I saw them for the first time on the morning of the 28th. I heard this funny noise which sounded like a tank. So out of curiosity I went out into the street and sure enough, there was a parade of North Korean tanks with the soldiers standing up in the cabin of the tank with a North Korean flag. [I was] scared half witless.

PIEHLER: When did North Korean soldiers and police enter your home?

KANG: Within a matter of two, three days later and arrested my father and he was taken away.

PIEHLER: So that was the last you ever saw of your …

KANG: That was the last I ever saw of my father.

PIEHLER: I'm curious…. You mentioned you used to go to North Korea, what was then northern Korea, when you were a child. Did the division of Korea separate your family?

KANG: Yes, as a matter of fact it did. Because my father's parents lived in North Korea. The bulk of his wealth, the land, were in North Korea. And … most of my father's cousins and relatives were in North Korea.

PIEHLER: And how much contact did you have with that part of the family, say, between '45 and '50.

KANG: None.

PIEHLER: None. So …

KANG: North Korea might as well be on the moon. It would be easier to communicate with them.

PIEHLER: And during the Korean War was any part of that family ever, were they ever able to flee south?

KANG: My father's stepbrother and his family fled North Korea just ahead of the Korean War, before the DMZ was really built so tightly. And he came and lived with … our family for, well, really until [the end of] the war. And then we got dissipated.

PIEHLER: Now you mentioned your mother was murdered. Do you know how? Was she arrested, or …

KANG: She was arrested. During that three months period—I guess I'll have to go into a little detail. One of the first things that happened after a week or two was for the North Koreans to issue … an edict that any man between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five shall show up at a designated local gathering place. And they scooped up all able-bodied men. Me included. And some of [my] friends, classmates included. And we got interned in what used to be one of the schools, and it became very evident to the young mind that this is nothing short of either a forced labor camp, or we were going to be made into soldiers. So, a classmate of mine [and I] escaped one night by jumping over the fence and came back to my friend's house to hide because my house was by that time designated as the home of a counter revolutionary, right. So, I hid with my friend in his house, which was several doors adjacent to ours. My mother, however, continued to live there with my siblings. Three months later, … two and a half months later, [the] Inchon landing happened. To give a time frame Korean War began on June 25th, Seoul was taken by North Korea [on] June 28th. So the event I just described about being drafted, if that's the word, and escaping and going into hiding, is a some time in the middle of July event. And Inchon landing happened on September 15th. Okay, so … a couple months later, [the] Inchon landing happened. Of course, we knew by that time American planes were bombing. We knew something funny was happening, and we were really looking forward to this happening, because all of a sudden the number of bombing and the artillery sound became vastly increased just before the Inchon landing. So we were really looking forward to the reunion as we were all in hiding. Well, unfortunately, September, the night of 23rd, going into morning of 24th, the UN forces crossed [the] Han River to the northern part of the city and the street fight was raging and some of the G-2 elements—G-2s are the army version of the spies—were guiding American bombers and artillery as to where to shoot. So they were raising relatively [a] primitive signal, known as a—what do you call it, not fluorescent, but the combusting light?

PIEHLER: The flares?

KANG: The flares. And apparently one flare came out near where … my mother was living. Alright? So the North Korean soldiers came searching for … what they thought was a G-2 man that was guiding the artillery pieces and found out that my mother was hiding and they captured her and all adults in that house, which included my cousin and his wife. And continuing the same search they came to search in the house I was hiding with my friend. And we were caught. And we were tied.

PIEHLER: Hands tied behind your back?

KANG: (Nods) And we were about to be executed. And out of the blue, a staccato of machine gun fire comes right near. I mean, it felt like it was right outside. And one frantic sound, North Korean comes and he says, "Let's go." And all of a sudden everybody dropped [their weapons], and went. We were liberated. And the guy and the family with whom I was hiding were Catholics, and they all, we untied each other, and they all sat there and prayed. This was God's interference. I was not yet a converted Christian then. And I was watching. What are they praying? And yet the, the thought that this was a very remarkable incident that I was saved didn't escape me. [I] didn't necessarily believe the Christian or the Catholic interpretation of what they were saying. This is, you know, that God came to save them. That afternoon I went

back to the house because by that time [the] North Koreans had evacuated from that part of the city, and [I] heard the story from my siblings that my mother was captured, as best as I could make out, about the same time that I was captured. And our hope was, "She will come back. Maybe they took her behind [the] lines, and by the time they get defeated she will come back." Well, of course, she didn't come back. Two, three days later somehow a rumor began to spread that there was a mass grave in the neighborhood. Well, there was nothing for me to do except go there, and [I] began digging. And it was somewhat of the most gruesome sight that I have ever had to go through. People were tied from the back and slit from ear to ear.

PIEHLER: They had their throats cut.

KANG: And they had [a] lot of other wounds. So they were tortured. A lot of cut wounds, stab wounds before they were slit. Well it turned out that the very first body that I uncovered in that mass grave—there must have been fifty bodies. Remember, this was in September. It was warm enough for the bodies to begin to rot in three days. I couldn't recognize her as my mother. So I kept on digging through all fifty bodies…. And out of sheer exhaustion, I looked around one last time, and suddenly I see my cousin's body, that I could recognize. And then that forced me to look closer, and sure enough, the first corpse that I had dug was my mother's corpse. So that she was tortured and executed as [a] collaborator of the enemy. And you know, it was a matter of only minutes. And that I suppose, in a way, was a very significant life's experience for me because although I didn't become an instant Christian at that moment, that event or experience left an indelible memory. Years later, some friends of mine, particularly one friend [who] was Episcopalian, began persuading me to go to church with him. So I began going to church with him. And I was sort of converted to Christianity. And I say it's not him. I say it's not his father who was a churchwarden and a very devout Christian. It was really that experience. That can't be a coincidence. And to this day, it's difficult for me to remember the event without consciously trying to dissociate the emotional aspect of that particular memory, yeah. It's both a source of a great deal of weakness, potentially a liability I have, and at the same time it is a great source of the strength. Because that sort of prompts me to, "Don't fail, you don't allow yourself to fail."

PIEHLER: How did your other brothers and sisters fare during the occupation and North Korean invasion?

KANG: Well, they were left—they were younger than I was. And that's one reason why they were spared. They were left motherless [and] brotherless for three days when my mother was captured and killed, and I'm trying to think. My youngest sister at that time was five years old.

PIEHLER: So they were very young.

KANG: Very young.

PIEHLER: Then after this in many ways miraculous liberation, I mean you'd almost been executed. You mentioned earlier about having to sell things, selling cigarettes. Is that, that's when you had to sort of …

KANG: Right. In the wake of that it became inevitable. I mean, [it is] obvious that we were orphaned. Anything and everything we own had been pilfered. Nothing of value remained. We had a big house and [a] clinic portion of the house where my father practiced. So, in a sense we had something left. But that was useless in … a war situation. I mean, you couldn't rent it in that chaotic situation. So, we had to scrape up every pound of the rice that may have been left and whatever that was edible left, and that is what we had. Money had no …

----------END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO----------

PIEHLER: This continues an interview with Andrew Kang on December 26, 2001 in Knoxville, TN with Kurt Piehler and …

HENDRICK: Robyn Hendrick.

PIEHLER: And you'd mentioned sort of scraping what remained of the food and then …

KANG: Wasn't very much. And it became evident that I had to find some means of generating some sort of income. And to a fifteen-year-old kid, at that time that I was, the only thing that I could easily think of was peddling. So somehow or other I found out how you [could] buy things a little cheaper and then you can peddle on the street at a small profit. It's difficult to remember how we survived in the next three months when we had to escape Seoul because of the Chinese pushing down to Seoul.

PIEHLER: Did you ever get any relief, say, from the Red Cross or from the U.S. army or from any aid agency like any church groups?

KANG: If there were any, I …

PIEHLER: You did not …

KANG: I was not aware of any.

PIEHLER: So you were really, you were on your own.

KANG: We were on our own and my uncle had survived, my mother's brother had survived with his family. And he was a pediatrician. But his house, too, was pilfered and he didn't have very much. But he did what he could, to give us whatever he could give us. So, that and whatever I could scrape together. And as I say, it is difficult to explain how we survived. We survived. I remember distinctly being hungry every day. Because we were having at best two meals a day.

PIEHLER: And it strikes me, I mean, you've alluded to it that this was a real shock because you had had a very comfortable life until this invasion in a lot of ways. I mean you would …

KANG: Oh, yes! I was blessed with being born in a, by their standards, elite family with a good deal of wealth. I didn't know deprivation, meaning of deprivation.

HENDRICK: Well … do you know what happened to the people that were in the camp, the internment camp that you were with, before you and your friend escaped? Do you know what happened to those people after you escaped?

KANG: You mean my friend's family? Or the people who went to the intern camp?

HENDRICK: When they went to the camp with you, the men.

KANG: I have no idea what happened to them. Many of them escaped later. I know of one other friend of ours who escaped later. On the other hand, some of them were never heard from. So presumably either they were drafted into [the] North Korean army or alternatively they were sent to some sort of a labor camp to provide for the war effort.

HENDRICK: How much did you know about the concentration camps in Germany?

KANG: At that time?

HENDRICK: Yes.

KANG: Relatively little. Yes, I remember seeing some of the movie clips. In those days, if you went to a theater to see a movie they had a ten-minute clip of the so-called news. So, yeah, I remember seeing some of the horrible sights, but those things were sort of remote from my day-to-day consciousness and that thought didn't occur to me. But, it did occur to me after I dug out my mother's grave.

HENDRICK: … I know you were only there for a few days, but what did you do during the day when you were in the camp with the other men?

KANG: Nothing very much. We were being essentially herded around from one encampment area to another encampment area. They were giving us a bowl of rice a couple times a day, anyway. And most of us were planning, discussing what this could mean. Quietly, because you couldn't be overheard. And you don't know who to trust and who not to trust. They could have been spies. So you could only talk to people that you really knew and most of them were planning to escape one way or another.

HENDRICK: Do you know of any people that tried to escape and were stopped?

KANG: I don't know of any. But I wouldn't be surprised if there were some that were caught and shot.

PIEHLER: You'd mentioned the sort of the second taking, the conquest, capture of Seoul, and this time you knew to get out, right?

KANG: Right, oh I think [the] vast majority …

PIEHLER: Vast majority …

KANG: … pulled out.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you had a very harrowing journey aboard these, these boxcars. I mean …

KANG: It was a harrowing journey for several reasons. We were headed to a city called Taegu, which was, I want to say, some 300 miles south of Seoul by road or railroad. And needless to say, civilian transportation system did not exist. Any train or buses that ran were under government control. So, every whoosie-doosie who wanted to escape either had to do so on their feet or get on one of these. And there is only so much [the] military police can do. You can say "By U.S. military codes civilians should not be allowed to get on the military train." At that point, at some point they just threw their hands up. "Be our guest. Just be careful, don't fall off." Yeah, so we, we got on. And I assure you there [was] no extra square foot to spare cause unless you held onto something you were subject to a sudden stop or sudden movement and you'd fall off, yeah. And it snowed and it rained and that's how we got frostbite. But it took something on the order of a little over twenty-four hours to reach Taegu. And once we reached Taegu there was a family, my uncle, this maternal uncle's wife, my maternal aunt, [her] family lived there. So, they were able to accommodate us, at least to keep us from freezing, and fed us. They were well-off people as well, by their standards. And so they put us up in various corners. I mean, you know … our siblings got one room. One six-by-six and four of us slept there, for example.

PIEHLER: But you had a place to stay.

KANG: Yes, we had a place to stay. And we were provided with meals.

PIEHLER: In many ways … it's probably obvious for someone reading the interview later, without this extended family you, its hard to imagine you making it, surviving.

KANG: Oh, sure. Without that kind of extended family, we would have, something bad would have happened.

PIEHLER: I know it would have been very, very difficult. And how long did you stay, stay away from Seoul? When did you return?

KANG: I stayed there about—stayed in Taegu and then a little later [in] Pusan, a total of something like a year and a half. After six months or so, the UN forces were able to stop the Chinese just south of Seoul. A place called Osan, and they were able to push back. And the … battle line stabilized, relatively speaking, and some sense of "stability" returned to South Korea. So that living in Taegu you didn't hear the artillery guns. You didn't hear the airplane bombing

anymore. So some sense of semi-normalcy occurred. And in the wake of that a lot of—there were only two places that people who escaped from Seoul could go to in terms of a sizable city. One was Taegu and the other one is Pusan, a port city, and they were forty miles apart from each other. And a high school classmate of mine happened to visit me in Taegu and he said … they re-opened the branch of the high school that … we were students at [school] in Pusan. "Why don't you come to Pusan and begin to attend high school again?" Well, it's simpler said than done for a couple a reasons. I … had to have a place to live in Pusan, had to provide for meals, and at least supplies and a modicum of tuition, however cheap though they may be. So, I had to go and see my uncle and say, "They opened up a branch [of my] high school in Pusan and is there any way I can return?" And he scraped up some money and [said], "Yeah, I think you had better go back to school." But it wasn't much. So, I had to find a friend who would give me free room and board. And people are more generous under that setting than—so, yeah, I was able to get free a room and board and stay there a semester or two. And then Seoul became repatriated, and it was open to the civilians returning.

So, I returned to Seoul as soon as that was open, and finished high school education there. By that time, this may have been '52 now, some sense of a stability had returned so that I could rent the clinic portion of my father's property. And that gave me a modicum, a reliable source of income for me. And then by that time I was able to work as a tutor because I knew English better than most of my classmates and I was able to teach math, and so on. And so I was able to do tutorial work at night, and had a modicum of income. So, between those two sources of income we could [have] at least two meals a day without stopping, yeah.

PIEHLER: So, the house survived. How long did it stay in the family, or is its still in the family? The house in Seoul. How long was it able …

KANG: Well, [a] funny thing happened. After I came to the United States, my initial intention of course was to finish medical education and return to Korea. A funny thing happened in the process of doing it because I met, what now is my wife, a girlfriend, who looked like a Korean in one of the Hawaiian [parties] that I crashed at a Harvard house. (Laughter) And she asked me, "What island are you from?" So I said, "No, I'm not from Hawaii. I'm Korean." She says, "Well, I'm a Korean too." She was a second generation Korean. She was born in Hawaii.

So, we befriended and she became my girlfriend. And she was in training in Boston and we fell in love, and [the] long and short of it is we got married. And we had some discussions as to whether she would, what my plans were and how she would go to Korea with me and this and that…. Well that's all great when you're a girlfriend and a fiancé and when you are in love and that overrides all other practical considerations. The first child gets born and she begins to say, "Do you really want to subject our lovely daughter to the rigorous living condition in Korea? Don't you want to give her the benefit of …?" I resisted, I resisted. And finally when the second daughter was born, she overcame me. And said, "At least, if not the citizenship, you could get a permanent residency. At least that way we will have some guarantee that if bad things happen to South Korea again, you won't be kicked out of this country." So, I obtained a green card.

Well, then … sort of a chain reaction took place … unbeknown to me, okay. Then we had a universal selective service requirement, right. Although it was generally understood that selective service obligation applies to young people of ages between eighteen and … twenty-four or some such age group, there was one exception. Those [who] are MDs, the doctors, because [the] Vietnam War was brewing and the draft age was more like twenty-eight rather than twenty-four. Well, I beat that deadline by just a matter of a month. And the next thing that happens is that I have to register for selective service and the next thing that happens, I get called for physical exam, and the next thing that happens is I get an A+ [on the] physical, passing. "You're going to be going into U.S. Army." And then at the exit interview the sarge, the recruiting sarge says, "Mmm, we have a problem here, Doc. The medical officers are supposed to be officers, lieutenants, of the U.S. Army. But U.S. Army … officers have to be U.S. citizens. And you are not a U.S. citizen, so I don't think you can become a medical officer. So you will have to serve a medical officer's function as a foot soldier, as a PFC."

And I was thinking, "Well, you know, I really don't want to do that," number one. And number two, [the] Vietnam War was beginning to come up, and "I'll be almost a certain shot to be sent to Vietnam War, and if I ever get caught by a North Vietnamese, I won't have a chance." So, a lot of us who were caught in that boat knew what the legal draft dodge mechanisms [that] were available. One was to sign up [in] what's known as a Berry Plan, okay. And what that says is for a given number of years of deferment they would be willing to give you for completion of your training, you pay them back at the end of the completion plus two more years, which is a selective service obligation. So if I took advantage of it, let's say for three years' deferment, I'm gonna have to stay in the army for five years. Well, by that time I was hell-bent on becoming an academician, going into research. And I was going to do some, you know, Nobel Prize winning, world-class research and what's this army stuff? That didn't strike me right. The only other thing that was brand-new that came to our attention was that they were recruiting for yellow berets. What's known as a yellow beret as compared to …

PIEHLER: Yeah, I like the term.

KANG: Green Beret was the thing to do. What it was, was that [the] NIH, National Institute of Health, was offering a research fellowship, [and] at the same time [would] give you an appointment in [the] U.S. Public Health Service as an officer. And if you were also selected you get to go to Bethesda in the NIH and do a couple of years of research. And you discharge your selective service application. Now, you imagine a deal like that! The competition for that was pretty, pretty fierce. Obviously, because every young man who did not want particularly to go into the army wanted to take that advantage. So I did, and I was fortunate enough to be selected and by that time, I had enough time to obtain a citizenship so I could be appointed as a public health service officer. So, I served proudly as a yellow beret in Bethesda.

PIEHLER: With the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

KANG: With the rank of Lieutenant Commander, yeah. And in fact, that happened to be one of the most affluent years of my life, you know, because when I was in training, you can imagine even with a scholarship, you know, I graduated medical school with a debt, right. And in those

days, during our internships my annual salary was somewhere around 300 bucks, my first year, okay.

PIEHLER: … I've had a number of interviews with physicians who went to school in the '30s and '40s and '50s, and I have to say I've been shocked at the way, the way medicine operated.

KANG: Oh sure, we were abused. It was regarded as an extension of medical school training and it was a privilege for you to be training at our highfalutin Massachusetts General Hospital, Johns Hopkins Hospital. Therefore, you should regard this as a privilege. What do you mean salary? What do you mean salary? So, it was awful, yeah. Brigham was a little bit better. They paid twenty-five dollars a month. But not even a free meal for the night you were on call. I mean, that was just [a] very, very difficult time. But that was the norm of the day, so to speak. So by the time I went to Bethesda, frankly, I was relieved. Doggonit, for the first time I had a salary and my salary was $13,000 a year that year. And that felt like, "Oh my God, I have so much money I don't know what to do with it." (Laughter) I bought a pair of, new pair of shoes and a … suit that year. And I was so proud because I had a new suit and I had [a] new pair of shoes. This was the first time since I came to [the] United States that I could afford that, yeah. And I saved enough money to make a down payment for a house when we returned to Boston.

HENDRICK: About how many of your friends from your adolescence and childhood did you stay in touch with after you came to America and they were still in Korea?

KANG: It's amazing. Out of a graduating class of 360, about 100 or more of them are now residing in the United States. And another hundred probably came to the US, studied, and went back to Korea. So, I have lots of friends.

PIEHLER: And your family, you're the only one that came to the states and—or did any of your other brothers and sisters come? I see they all went to Korean universities or high schools.

KANG: Right, actually, the youngest sister did immigrate after she got married, with her family, her husband and three children, two girls and a boy, and took residence in [the] L.A. area. Unfortunately, her husband is a very good man, but very naïve in terms of business savvy. So, they brought apparently everything they had, sold [it], and brought the money here. [They gained] in excess of, I understand, about half a million dollars. And they ran into a fraudulent businessman who basically absconded [with] their money. They had to file bankruptcy. And at that point, I was willing to, and I did help them to try to … establish a livelihood. By that time I was established enough to be able to afford to help them. But they saw fit to return to Korea. So that, strange, my sister is a U.S. citizen who is [a] naturalized citizen, and therefore she is required to come back to the U.S. at least once every two years or some given interval. Her husband is merely a permanent resident. So … he is a Korean citizen, but a permanent resident, and he doesn't have to [return to the U.S.]. He can keep the permanent residency forever. But my sister has to come back every once in a while to reestablish her, her residency here. And her children, of course, [are] U.S. citizens, and one of them is married and lives in San Francisco area. Married to a lawyer, another second generation Korean. The youngest daughter married and went back to Korea. And married a Korean man. And she's a U.S. citizen, but lives in

Korea now. And she makes a good living because if nothing else, she speaks English fluently. And these companies that do international trade, have to have somebody who can translate back and forth. So, she makes a good living.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you—there are strong ties between—you still have strong links to Korea.

KANG: Oh, yes. Well, that's traditional Confucian teaching. Though some of that is changing, and for better or worse the Westernization that is going on or has taken place has brought with it both advantages and disadvantages of being Westernized. One of them is a weakening of Confucian influence in their social structure. So, a lot of old customs have become, I guess, thinner and thinner.

PIEHLER: I guess which customs do you see that have become thinner and thinner?

KANG: Well, for example, [the] marital system.

PIEHLER: The broker system.

KANG: The broker system is completely gone, and now the vast majority of them marry on their own. That was totally unthinkable in my parents' generation, and even in my generation. Similarly, the idea that the eldest son of the family and the wife … shall take care of the entire family … essentially up to fourth cousins. And that family has become weakened so that the custom of caring for elderly parents at their home is now becoming an exception rather than the rule. Again, this, I don't mean to blame the Western influence, but nonetheless, Westernization brought with it different behavior on the part of women, and men I guess, in terms of their willingness to take care of their elderly parents. So, [now] you see [an] old people's home. Back then you didn't know what [an] old people's home was. So, yeah this is the sort of change that's taking place. It's both good and bad I guess in a way, yeah.

PIEHLER: What would you say are some of the positive changes … particularly in Westernization?

KANG: Oh clearly by far the most important one is [the] importation of technology. Believe it or not, in 1955, the year I left Korea, South Korea was voted by the cognoscenti as the least likely country to be able to [be] put together economically. They were rated below Afghanistan as being the most unlikely country to be able to put itself together. Well, if you look at Korea now, they are, I think, the eleventh largest economy in the world, South Korea. So, that's really the benefit of the importation of Western technology. And they are still working at the low end of the technology, obviously. They don't compete with the Intels, but they will compete with the national semi-conductors. They won't compete with a Lexus but they will compete with the Toyotas.

PIEHLER: Well, there's a memoir of a Korean War veteran, American Korean War veteran, he served with the military as a civilian in the 1980s and he went back to Korea, to Seoul, and he

couldn't recognize anything except the old Parliament building. And … when you go back to Seoul, what do you recognize from your youth?

KANG: The only the part that is remaining—earlier you asked me if my home survived and somehow I got distracted. It survived, except the clinic part. That got damaged. They demolished it…. By virtue of the fact that I took an American citizenship, I had to renounce the Korean citizenship, and therefore it went to the next of kin, which happened to be my younger brother. So, he became the owner of that.

PIEHLER: So it's still in the family?

KANG: No, he sold it.

PIEHLER: Oh, he sold it.

KANG: Yeah. And he divided [the money] according to the then existing formula wherein he kept the vast majority of the proceeds and gave [an] applicable percentage to his sisters.

PIEHLER: But through all the wars, you were able to, in a sense, maintain ownership of the house until it was finally sold off.

KANG: Yes, our house survived without really major damage. I mean, there were a few broken windows and bent frames and so on, but it did not receive the strike of an artillery shell. It took a lot of machine guns and bullets. So, damage was relatively minimal, and it [was] spared.

PIEHLER: I'm curious. You had had some contact with Americans in Korea. But what were your impressions of America when you actually, actually arrived? Where did you arrive? How did you arrive? I mean, did you fly or did you take a …

KANG: Yes, I flew. Actually, the first [place in] America [where] I landed was Honolulu, but that's not typical of America because there were a lot of Asians there. And really, I was so poor that although I landed in L.A., I didn't stay there any length of time, only long enough to change the plane. And in those days, it was propeller planes, right? Transcontinental flights were rare, so I had to fly to Dallas. And again I had to sleep overnight to make the connection to Atlanta, and then from Atlanta to Spartanburg. So, I came in one fell swoop of successions. Oh, I have several impressions. Obviously, I had some impression through the American armed forces personnel and American soldiers. And I'd seen enough of them and talked to enough of them, unfortunately to learn colloquialism. Although I didn't know quite all of the colloquials, just what those fellas used, and I can share an anecdote or two with you a little later. But nonetheless I've known America through American GIs' eyes. And as a part of my attempt to study English I read *Time* magazine sort of cover to cover religiously, to learn English. So, I wasn't totally naive. But nonetheless it's quite something else to land here and see American people. They were so affluent. So, in a way, diligent but at the same time lazy. They were so wasteful in terms of whatever they used. Those were some of the mixed emotions, and of course, I had to contend with the airport phenomenon of white only, colored only…. I had to make a pit stop and I didn't

know where to go so I stood there to see who was going into each one. And obviously, blacks were going into coloreds only and whites were going into whites only and not a single Asian was there to tell me which one to go to. I couldn't stand it any more. So, I said, "Okay, I'm going to go to whites only" because it looked a little cleaner to me from outside. As I went in there and did my thing, and nobody batted an eyelash so I just walked out of there. I said it must be okay, so …

PIEHLER: And that was in the airport. The segregation …

KANG: Yeah. The Dallas airport. It was the first place where I saw it. I saw this again in Atlanta, and then, of course, in Spartanburg and every bus stop in the southeastern part of the country. The entire Wofford College, it was a boy's school, small school of 800. There wasn't a single black student. The only blacks there were floor sweepers, gardeners, and, you know, laborers. So, segregation was still very, very much in force. You go to the theater, there was a separate entrance to the theater for whites only and the coloreds only, yeah.

PIEHLER: When you were in Korea were you aware how segregated American society was?

KANG: I heard about it, but I didn't realize the extent.

PIEHLER: So, it sounds like it was pretty shocking. The extent of it.

KANG: Yeah, it was shocking.

PIEHLER: At least, at least in the south at that time.

KANG: Yeah, and I was a little bit paranoid as to, you know, what am I gonna be treated as? And I had some basic degree of anxiety as to whether they were just being polite and overlooking my mistakes, or am I really supposed to use their facility? It took me some time before I began to feel confident that I'm not going to be molested or in some way shouted at. But again, my impression. Very generous people. Very wealthy, or at least affluent people. Very diligent in a way, but at the same time very lazy. And I'll, I'll define that in a moment, a little later. And were very wasteful in terms of the things they used. When I say lazy, I mean I was … hell-bent on studying and I was going to burn, right. And therefore I wouldn't dare think of going to bed before 1:00, all right. I studied every Saturday afternoon [and] every Saturday night. And I would fain to take a Sunday evening off. I would study all day long Sunday, outside of church, all afternoon. And these crybabies would complain about having to take exams next week or, you know, term papers due. And they were not putting in half the time, half the effort that I was putting in. So I said, "Well, these guys are spoiled." You know, those were some of the mixed emotions I had. And they would, of course, go to weekend dances. There was a woman's college called Converse College, and they would have mixers and dances and so on, most of which I did not go [to]. In part because I didn't have a car, and in part because I was afraid to date. I knew what "date" was from the way the boys were behaving. But I wouldn't know what to do if I went out with a woman. I mean I was educated in a boy-only school. Throughout high school.

PIEHLER: And you, I guess, you had the assumption that you'd have a matchmaker. Is that what …

KANG: No, no I knew what the, what the situation was in America. But I was …

PIEHLER: But you weren't trained in the world of dating.

KANG: I was afraid to ask a woman for a date for fear that she might say no, and then when she says no, I was afraid that I may have to do something. But I didn't have the foggiest idea what to do, other than [that] they seemed to go, you know, to the movies and they seemed go to … putt-putt golf and whatever. But outside of that I did not know what I was supposed to do, and my English wasn't that good…. But more than that I was conscious of my English, or inadequacy in my English. So, I had a certain degree of anxiety every time I met a stranger, anyway. I wasn't used to [the] American way of dining. I mean my first exposure to Rotary Club was a thing of beauty. Since I was sponsored by Rotary Club, at one Rotary Club luncheon they invited me you know to have lunch and give a few minutes speech. Well, I was nervous as hell because I was gonna have to give a speech anyway and I had written as much as I could. And unfortunately, that damn lunch was a barbecued chicken. And in [a] school cafeteria boys pick up, fried chickens you know by hands and eat them, right? Well, … I looked around at businessmen, and they were using knife and forks. I was forced into sort of a—there were a couple of knives and didn't know which knife I was supposed to use. So, I had to watch until this fellow began doing something and I just imitated until I got the idea that the outside fork is what you use to eat a salad. And then I watched to see whether he would pick up that barbecue chicken with a hand, and nothing doing. And I was looking around to the left to see somebody must be doing this, nothing doing, and they were doing this. Well it requires just a little coordination between the right hand and left hand to be able to carve chicken, right? In the process of so doing, I tipped the damn plate and some of the food contents spills over into my lap. I couldn't find a hole to hide. And you know, the fellow who was sitting beside me was gracious and was saying, "Don't worry," and called the waiter to bring in some more napkins and … wipe it off as best we could and all was forgiven. And I gave my speech and got the heck out of there as soon as I could with my tail behind my back. So, that was a sort of a mindset.

So, yeah, some of my, some of my closer friends, if you will, would force me to go on a blind date. They'd say, "You gotta learn how to do this. You're not gonna die. Just sit in the back of the car and do whatever I do, okay? You won't go wrong. Don't worry." So, I went out on the date. I was so nervous the whole evening, I couldn't enjoy it because I was thinking—I was constantly in fear of committing some sort of faux pas, or saying something wrong, or inappropriate, or say something in broken English. All right, now I don't care if I speak broken English, but then I was very sensitive to broken English.

PIEHLER: It sounds like you did make some friends at Wofford College.

KANG: Oh yes, very good friends. Yeah. In fact, some of them I still keep in touch with. Yeah, yeah.

PIEHLER: So it sounds like you were treated, you were accepted by your classmates. Is that a fair …

KANG: Oh very! I consider myself fortunate to have been introduced into a U.S. college at small college like Wofford, rather than being landed in New York University or the University of Tennessee, or any other big places where students had to be a little impersonal … just because you have big classes and a big student body. This [was] a school of 800 students. Everybody knew everybody else. And I was accepted in a very friendly way. And every student [who] went there, [went] way out of their way to try to be helpful.

PIEHLER: So you never had anyone who hurled any ethnic epitaphs at you, you know?

KANG: Not really, not among the student body.

PIEHLER: Not among the student body.

KANG: No I encountered a little bit of that out in the town, and I'm not sure it was a malicious one. You know you go into some, whatever store and little child [would] say, "Hey ma, look! Chinese."

PIEHLER: So, they thought you were Chinese.

KANG: Right. That was, and I was thinking to myself, "I'm not Chinese!" (Laughter) So, yes, my assimilation into U.S. was made immensely easier by the friendly way and the forgiving way in which I was broken into and introduced to society. And they were enormously kind. I used to get some check, five-dollars enclosed in an envelope, anonymously, without any return address.

PIEHLER: It would just come in the mail when you weren't coming.

KANG: Yeah. So it was a very friendly place.

PIEHLER: Did you work at all while you were in Wofford? Did you have any odd jobs?

KANG: Yes, I did. Yes I did. As a matter of fact, [the] first job I had was that summer between the end of the regular semester and before the summer school began. There were, I forgot, two or three weeks. Mr. Logan gave me a job. He says, "Do you know how to type?" Not really very well. He said, "Do you know how to type at all?" So, I said, "Yes sir." "Well show me, show me, show me, what you can do." And I was just sitting there …

PIEHLER: Pecking?

KANG: Actually, I was doing a little better than pecking, but I was very slow. And he says, "Well, okay, there are several thousand labels that I need to type." This essentially turns out to be a label for mailing school catalogs to prospective student applicants, to high school grads. So

all summer long for fifty cents an hour I typed the labels and wrapped them up and labeled and packaged them, you know. So, that was my first job. Then it got better actually. By the next semester they had a job for selected students for being a teacher's or professor's assistant. So that, for example, if you are good at chemistry you grade the homework for a professor of chemistry, to setting up a chemistry laboratory for the students to come in and help clean up later. Those are a much easier job and paid a little better. And I could grade papers at my own time rather that at designated times. So, those, those were easier, easier things to do, and actually the fifty cents an hour seemed big at that time. Well, you know, a flick was seventy-five cents.

PIEHLER: Oh, no, then fifty cents then was a much more respectable salary. It's just [that] wages have changed so much because at one time 13,000 was a great salary. I mean, you know, and now 13,000 is …

KANG: Is the poverty line.

PIEHLER: Yeah, poverty line. You went to this small college, Wofford, and then you went to Harvard Medical School, which is—you sort of can't get higher than Harvard Medical.

KANG: Well actually, I wasn't the first, as it turned out. Two years before my graduation there were actually two kids who went to Harvard from Wofford College.

PIEHLER: Wofford.

KANG: So, I wasn't exactly the first, or the only one. And subsequent to that, I think there were more students from Wofford. It's a quality school apparently. And I guess I do tend to believe that at least in the south, in the southeast, Wofford College is deemed a reasonably quality school.

PIEHLER: It strikes me you were well prepared, then, for Harvard. Is that a fair—from Wofford, you know, your academic …

KANG: Well, yes, I—well let me put it this way. For the first, for the first time in my life I felt inadequate, and that's when I entered Harvard Medical School. And I met, obviously, the classmates. And these guys are Phi Beta Kappa and valedictorians from all the renowned schools. And in fact, they seemed smarter than I was! I was scared witless! God, I am not the smartest boy anymore. And that was very unsettling because, well, I just never had that emotion. I always, always thought that I was the smartest boy and therefore I could, you know, keep things under control. And I was no longer the smartest boy. Boy that was very threatening to my self-esteem and ego.

Nothing will prepare adequately for medical school. The amount of work that they throw at you is essentially impossible to keep up with. And it's only a question of how inadequate you are, as opposed to being in charge. And it's a weird situation because really throughout the college life…. As I walked into the final exam, I felt I was in command. I knew this stuff, and therefore there is nothing that can go wrong. They can't possibly ask me for anything that at least that I

didn't have some idea for. The opposite was true. As I went into a final exam, Harvard had a very, I thought, as it turned out, a very humanitarian system, but I thought very inhumane system, which was [that] they didn't give any exams, mid-term exams. One final exam per semester was it and if you flunked it, you flunked. And you can imagine the anxiety the students have, because in no sense of the term did I know everything about anatomy or physiology or all the subjects I took. I felt very inadequate, and there was going to be only one chance…. You either make it or break it. It turned out that it was a very humane system because basically the exam was, you choose—it was all a written exam not, [an] objective exam. "You choose five problems out of ten questions we're giving you, and tell us everything you know about that subject," was basically the way it was phrased. And therefore you have to be some irresponsible student to not be able to write something on, you know, five selected ones that you get to select. So, it turned out that that anxiety evaporated rather quickly and, and then somewhere I was reconciled to the fact that "I am no longer the smartest boy in the class." And that was fine with me. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: But it was initial shock.

KANG: It was a shock. It was a shock because they were very smart people.

PIEHLER: Harvard strikes me as very important for you. You met your wife, you mentioned meeting your wife at a party you crashed. How did you like Boston as opposed to living in, in some ways rural south? I mean small town, southern town to Boston?

KANG: Yeah, no, Boston is an interesting place. It is a very liberal people, society. At the same time, it is … the most parochial community that you could think of. I mean, you know, the first joke I heard after the first class welcome ceremony I attended, [the] dean usually says the usual sort of thing, "Welcome," this and that and that. And the next guy stands up and said—this is the first joke—about "Where you from?" He says, "I am from New York." "Well, where is New York?" "Well, you know, New York is southwest of Boston." He says, "Is that west of Worcester, or what?" (Laughter) And that's the attitude. That's what I mean by [a] parochial attitude that they have. But it is a very education-oriented city. And it obviously has all sorts of historical—Harvard Medical School is an important one for me, and really for a lot of people, because it is the elite center of medical research in the world. There is not anywhere [with] nearly the collection or the talent that Harvard affiliated hospitals have, and it's truly impressive. Nobody comes even close, I don't think. Now, my wife argues with me all the time. She went to Stanford, and she says, "Well, you know, Harvard is nothing but the Stanford of the east." And she, she really doesn't know what she is talking about. Well she does, because she trained there, and how can I put this here?

Not only was I made to feel like the dumbest boy in the class by comparison, it's just that the collection of their talents at every level, professors, young faculty, fellows, the trainees, at all levels are very smart people. The first year I became an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard, at Massachusetts General Hospital alone, there were 500 assistant professors of medicine. Just imagine. And every one of them [was] hell-bent on being the best. There was only one tenured slot. So, obviously, staying there to obtain that tenure is not one of the things that you could realistically look forward to. So what they were doing, including me, was do as

much as is possible, accomplish so that you can be saleable to other institutions, and hope that you will succeed at that institution so that you will be invited back to Harvard as the now tenured professor. No other medical schools, I mean, by comparison, for example, UT medical school, it had the largest faculty in the department of medicine while I was the chairmen of the department. And even then, we had 125 in the entire department. So [the] amount of research that can take place in that setting is vastly different from the amount of research that can take place in an institution where the workload can be spread out so thin that it is incidental, so that you can really concentrate. Wouldn't you like to have a job like this? You can give only one lecture and [fulfill your teaching obligation].

PIEHLER: Oh, no, its—well, I guess to that point, because … last year at Celebrate Freedom we had Dr. Hermes Grillo, and I was very impressed because one, I can put on the record here, he didn't charge us to speak, and he was a full professor at Harvard and a visiting surgeon, you know, visiting surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital. I really did think that I've gotten a member of the elite, that this is an elite of an elite. And I say that your interview is sort of saying that my, my perception of just being so fortunate to get someone like that.

KANG: There is obviously an arrogance factor involved … as well. But truly objectively speaking, there is no other medical center that can have the depth and the breadth together that Boston has put together. Now any given institution may have a depth in a given area that may be just as good. But they won't have the breadth in all areas that Harvard can boast. So, that is why I call it really an elite institution.

PIEHLER: But … Stanford is also a pretty good institution.

KANG: Yeah, Stanford is a very acceptable medical school, very adequate. (Laughter)

----------END OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE----------

PIEHLER: What led you to Tennessee? Why Tennessee?

KANG: I guess you want the truth. (Laughter)

PIEHLER: Well, close to the truth is fine.

KANG: Well, the short answer is that at the time I felt like I wanted to leave Boston, Tennessee had the best opportunity to offer me. That's the reason. Now the longer version. Why would you want to leave a place like Harvard? And that's an interesting one because I never thought that I would leave Harvard or, for that matter, even survive had I left. Such was the, not only the indoctrination, but such was the conviction. And in relation to what I wanted to do, by that time I knew I was going to have a career as a researcher anyway. I was very successful and I had a very successful start, a promising young career, and all that. And as far as I was concerned I was getting every grant funded that I applied for and [the] sky was the limit in terms of what I could achieve.

So why would I want to leave? Well that's the interesting thing. There comes a time when psychology changes, and it happened seemingly for very a trivial reason on the overall scale of things. And yet, if I look back at that, you know, if I had to do that over again, doggonit, I'd probably do it the same way. And the occasion was … a close friend of mine, classmate of mine at Harvard and I were doing together a fellowship training in rheumatology, arthritis, and related diseases…. He took a job as a, after completing his fellowship, he took a job as the head of rheumatology at Dartmouth Medical School. So I said, "Ted, why would you want to do that?" He said, "Well, Andy, you ought to look around. You never know, you really never know until you look around what your value is. So, you know, you don't have to take anything. Just go look." This qualifies as a bull session chat, right?

So I filed it away, didn't think anything of it, and then the trivial event that I'm referring to was an occasion in which I wrote a career development application grant to be submitted to the NIH, and under the then existing NIH rules, the maximum salary that they would allow is $25,000 a year. And I thought that—first of all, I was scheduled to be promoted to associate professor coincident with when the grant would become active. And by that time I had three children, still neck deep in educational debt, and I thought I deserved a little more than $25,000. Well since that's what they were allowing, I would of course ask for $25,000. Didn't think anything of it. My boss approved, and in fact my immediate boss said, "I will somehow find some additional supplemental salary for you for a few thousand dollars." Piece of cake.

Totally unexpectedly, I get a page from the chairman's office. So I called and the secretary says, "Dr. Leaf refuses to sign your grant." I didn't quite understand what she was saying. I said, "What do you mean he won't sign the grant? The application was approved by the research committee." He says, "Well, that's not the problem. The problem is you'll have to change the salary." So I said, "There's nothing to change." She says, "I'm only a secretary. I'm trying to tell you what I'm told to do, okay? He says you have to bring that down to $23,000." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because you'll break the curve. He has a lot of associate professors who are getting paid only $23,000 and therefore he will not allow a young, first year associate professor to get that kind of money." And its laughable. It's totally laughable.

However, at that moment, I went into a momentary rage in my mind. And I said, "This place stinks." And all of a sudden, a lot of little beefs that accumulated began to bother me. You know, "By golly, there isn't a medical school that wouldn't welcome me. Maybe Ted is right. What I ought to do is look around and see what I'm worth." So, I sent out a message to the usual academic channel that I would be interested in considering a position elsewhere, and, of course, you know about [how] ten of them come up in a matter of several weeks. So I visited half a dozen of these, among which was Memphis. And I wasn't serious as I began writing the letter that I [was] interested.

Well, by the time, in the course of making visits, I realized that "By golly, I am worth more than the maltreatment I'm receiving at the hands of Mass. General. They're willing to offer me a lot more space, a lot more of everything, a lot more of the salary." And somewhere imperceptibly I had undergone an emotional transition. Suddenly everything that was Harvardian … became unbearable, ranging from their arrogance to their parsimoniousness, to all the things. So I said,

"Okay. Then now it is a question of where to go, not if to go." And at that particular time, UT had the best offering. So I took a job at UT, thinking that "Well, this is going to be a temporary job, and I'm going to establish myself and a reputation in five years, and I'll do it in the absence of my powerful mentor (who was a world leading scientist in the area I was working in anyway) and nobody will challenge and question anymore that I did this body of work, not my mentor." So that probably [was a] more important element. You know, the bird wanting to leave the nest and fly on his own. So that's how I ended up at UT. I took it upon as a five-year job.

PIEHLER: And you're still here.

KANG: And I'm still there. And I did look at a job every five years. It's just that when I weighed the pros and cons it seemed not so advantageous for me to leave. So I ended up staying and finishing my career here. And you know what, as I said earlier, if I had to do it all over again, oh yeah, there may be a few things that I might do differently, but essentially I wouldn't change very much.

PIEHLER: So in the end you were, even though … it almost started out like an accident…. In some ways a very small incident, but in many ways it was the outcome.

KANG: Eventful, yeah. Very fateful, the B.S. session that I engaged in.

PIEHLER: … When did you decide you really wanted to be an academic physician, a researcher?

KANG: I think that goes back to my childhood. It was deeply ingrained in me. My grandfather was a scholar, and as far back as I can remember he either read or wrote all day long, every day. And that was the life of a scholar. So that's what I was going to be.

PIEHLER: And your research, what is it focused on? I mean, I know I'm asking you a very simple question, but I know it is much more complicated than that.

KANG: Yeah. My research … began to explore a tissue known as a connective tissue in the body. And connective tissue has been long neglected by [the] medical community because—well, lets pause and look at the history, at the evolution of science. Well, the first real understanding of multi-cellular organisms, like mammalians and humans came from [the] Schwann theory of cell, cell theory, right? And that's only 100 years ago. And the thesis is that it's the cell in the aggregate that make the human body function. And some of the examples were if it is a cell [from the] thyroid gland, it makes thyroxin, a necessary hormone to maintain metabolism. It's a group of cells known as "beta cells" of the pancreas that makes all the insulin and regulate our blood sugar. So the beginning of understanding of a science, biological science, began with the Schwann theory of the cells. And naturally the focus went to studying the intrinsic cell of that organ, because that's the one that was making thyroxin; that's the one that's making insulin; that's the one that [is] making digestive enzymes. Completely ignoring for the moment the thing known as a connective tissue that's holding this together as an organ. In other words, a human being is not a hapless mish-mash helter-skelter collection of cells. There is an order.

There is an organization, and unless that's put together properly the body doesn't function. And it's the connective tissue that's doing this, okay? And yet the only people who are seemingly interested in connective tissue were [the] leather industry, because they could take the skin and make leather shoes out of it.

And the … scientific understanding of this was minimal, even when I was a medical student. So that in the textbook in 1957 that I read about connective tissue, for example the major protein in connective tissue is known as collagen, and it was defined as "That protein which upon boiling gives rise to glue." Now what the hell kind of a scientific definition is that? (Laughter) But such was the state of understanding. But then came a lecturer. The Harvard lecturers were [a] parade of stars. There was no course, there was [a] course master for organizational purposes, but the lectures were given by the experts. Okay, so a given course of biochemistry is liable to have thirty different lecturers herding through. Fatefully, my mentor, Jerry Gross, showed up and gave what I thought was a fascinating lecture on connective tissue and collagen. And I became interested in collagen.

So that was the beginning of, you know, "I want to know more about this." Well, starting from that it turned out that the clinical interest came into being after I began medical curriculum and I became interested in a group of diseases known as connective tissue disease or rheumatic diseases or a set of diseases that includes arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis. [A] whole area where very little is really understood in terms of basic pathological and physiological reasons [as to] why things go wrong. And it so happens that many of the tissues that are involved in this group of diseases is connective tissue. I said, "Boy, do I have a chance. Since not much is known, whatever discovery I make is liable to be a major contribution" was that argument and reasoning I had. So I said, "This is the area I want to go [into]." So it happened at Bethesda, the yellow beret town, one of the people who was looking for a research associate was then the leader, one of the leaders in biochemistry known as Karl Piez. So I lucked into his lab and I did research and went and came back to Boston and continued with Jerry Gross.

So that's how I got into connective tissue research, and after I left Mass. General I [came] to the University of Tennessee. All of a sudden I realized, "I'm on my own. Nobody is telling me what to do." That's the good news and the bad news. So I had to think of what to do. I had to formulate the question. I had to formulate the experiments. I had to come up with the results, interpret it and put it into some sensible paper, publish it and convince the peers that this is worthy work, that you should give me some more money to support [the work]. This is the game of the academician in research, right? And that challenged me, because things were going so well in Boston. I was too comfortable. I didn't have to think day to day. Suddenly I got to a point where I must think. So I began using my God given brain again, and lo and behold I did some either lucky things or significant things, so that I became recognized as one of the "who's who" in this field.

PIEHLER: So in many ways you almost give the impression that Harvard—it's in some ways also a cocoon, that in many ways once you left Harvard, in some ways you were forced to become more of an entrepreneur …

KANG: Sure. In the sense that by Brownian motion alone, if you are in a milieu of 500 bright people, you are likely to do something. Just bright by being along there, okay. If you're out in sort of an outpost like UT, [there was] nobody who gave a dang about connective tissue anyway. So I had to construct a whole research edifice. I had to recruit people who had the similar interest I did. I had to find ways of paying for them and so on so on and so on. I had to find ways of equipping and so on.

So with a variety of help, and I was aware Harvard helped me in several areas. One is obviously the training I got. The other, the other thing that helped me was the fact they established my vintage, and therefore I had the benefit of the doubt as I was competing for the grant. "This man knows what he is talking about," yeah. So that made it easier for me to obtain grants, and of course [the] grant is the stuff of which research is made. Without money you can't do research. So then it becomes a growing concern, and somewhere, however, your term ends. In the sense that they no longer respect your Harvard connection. Now sort of like when you are an athlete. It's not a question of "What you did for me last year." [The] question is, "What are you doing for me this year?" (Laughter)

So, yeah, from then of it was an open competition. And I had to compete. But I was very, very, very well prepared to compete in this particular area of research. And you know, I didn't think that I would be still doing, at age sixty-seven, cutting edge research, competing with all the young minds in the world, but I'm still doing it. And doing it very, very well. Call it luck or whatever, but, for example, in the year 2001 we were selected by the University of Tennessee system as one of the research centers for excellence. You may have heard something about that. Similarly, we went after what's known as a specialized center of research, abbreviation SCOR, in rheumatoid arthritis and another one in [a] disease called Scleroderma, and yet [a] slightly different center grant known as a rheumatic diseases research core center grant…. We had the audacity to go after all three, and we landed all three of them. And in the process of so doing, we had to knock off some powerful competitors. And I'm delighted to tell you that those competitors included Harvard and Duke. (Laughter) So things are going very well.

HENDRICK: What was the award that you won, like recently, in the past year or so?

KANG: Oh, that was an award given by a foundation created by Samsung Company. You may have heard of Samsung Company for making televisions and electronic toys and things of that sort. Its founder's son is now the chairman and chief executive of the company. In honor of his father, he established a foundation known as the Hoam Foundation. Hoam is the name of his father. And the foundation gives annually an award in five areas: medicine, engineering, arts, public service, and I can't remember the fifth one, maybe science. Yeah, medicine, science, engineering, public service, and art. To a Korean, defined in the largest sense of the term. Obviously, if you are living in Korea, you qualify. If you are born but live elsewhere such as the United States, you also qualify, apparently. So I was nominated, and was fortunately selected for the award, yeah. It is a big award. It is probably the most prestigious award given in Korea, anyway.

PIEHLER: I noticed that all three of your children have gone to medical school. How much is that parental prodding?

KANG: Who is to know? Obviously, it's difficult to neglect the fact that both of their parents are physicians. That may have had something to do with it. I will say that with the eldest one, Cindy, when she was in high school, I guess I did make some suggestions that let it be known that it would be my desire that she might go into medicine. But that's really as much as I said, for fear that if I did anything more, that essentially she would rebel against it and run away from it as fast as she could. To my great delight, when time came, she declared that she was going into medicine. So I said fine. The second one didn't care about medicine, so she said, "I don't know what to do. So I'm going to college and then will decide." She did, she went to college. And then she came back at the end of her sophomore or beginning of her junior year, and she said, "Well, Dad, I'm going to apply to medical school. And I hope that you will support me." So I said, "Of course I will support you." So she applied and she got into Penn. And then the last one, I decided to sort of dissuade her from going into medicine, because medicine was beginning to deteriorate. The emergence of [a] political attempt to interfere with the practice of medicine, together with a general deterioration in the minds of the general public for the entire profession. It used to be that the medical profession was perceived as an altruistic profession by greater than 95% of people polled. That number began going down. Though interestingly, most people still believe their own doctor is a good guy. But the number came down until it was more like in the 80% range. So I didn't particularly like that idea. So I sort of went on a little bit of a campaign, not a … strong campaign, just a sort of low key campaign to consider other fields such as architecture, because she's a hell of a good artist. So I even arranged for her to go to a summer school in Boston to take a course in architecture…. Well, long and short of it is, she ends up going to medical school…. Years later now, she tells me, "Dad you shouldn't have done that if you really wanted me to not go into medicine, you shouldn't have gone on a campaign. What did you expect me to do? My elder sis, my two old sisters going into medicine. My interpretation of what you were doing was you didn't think I was worthy, or capable, and I was going to show you that I was capable!" (Laughter)

PIEHLER: You mentioned the change in medicine…. Regarding politicization, … particularly you were disturbed about your third daughter enough to think maybe this isn't the right career anymore. What were your concerns or what are your concerns about it?

KANG: Well, I think the respect in which the physicians, as a group of people, are held is not what it used to be, number one. Number two, in terms of what might be called a quality of life, as a practicing physician or anybody who enters care, has become far more meddlesome; a lot more hassles got thrown at our profession. Beginning from having to fill out simple insurance forms to all kinds of rules and regs as to what you can do and cannot do. Gotten to a point where it diminishes and detracts from the pleasure of practicing medicine.

PIEHLER: … Whenever I go to a doctor's office, I'm just struck by how many people it takes to do the paperwork. You know, I'm just like stunned that … there are two or three people in a group … that are just doing paperwork.

KANG: Yeah, and even then the federal government and the insurance company routinely "disallow," and reject payments across the board, arbitrarily. And you have to go back arguing they're wrong. Well it costs time and money and aggravation to go back and argue with these guys. And the same thing with prescription of the medications and treatments…. But in our profession for example one of the most commonly used medications is known as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, of which there may be more than forty different preparations. Well many of them are off patent and therefore [the] price is cheap. Some of the newer ones are still under patent. They may have some superior characteristics, but they're expensive. And there are circumstances in which the … medical indication is clear that you have to use this latter expensive newer drugs. Yet according to the TennCare we set up, as an example, we cannot do so without prior permission. Which … means I have to fill out a form, meaning I, meaning somebody in my office, and send it in, and until we get an answer back we don't know whether we can use that medicine or not. And who is suffering in the meantime? It's the patient. And yet, I cannot simply give this patient a prescription for her to go into a pharmacy and buy it, because I know doggone well that its going to cost them $200 for a one month's supply and that the patient is not going to buy it. You see the dilemma that we're thrown in?

So this kind of a hassle—let's say you have a kind of a patient that requires hospital admission to need or care for some aspect of illness, or to make diagnostic work done. You have to have prior permission. Otherwise they may deny the entire hospital expense, and then unfortunately, under the Medicare rule the fella that gets caught between the hospital who wants to collect and somebody who pays, which is the federal government, is me. And I am personally at risk of having to pay several thousands of dollars unless I have prior permission for admitting this patient to the hospital.

And yet if you try to get on the phone and talk to them, you are talking … not to a physician, but to some immensely less educated person who goes by the book. Punches on a computer. And [says], "It's not allowed." "What do you mean its not allowed? The patient is bleeding to death." "But his hematocrit is above twenty and we are not allowed, not allowed." Well, it depends on how fast [a] patient is bleeding out, that the hematocrit has a meaning. In other words if you just, if you bleed slowly, yes, twenty is a reasonable point to admit that patient. But if patient began bleeding this morning and is down to twenty-two, that patient needs to be in a hospital. Okay, and yet the medically untrained person doesn't understand that. So I have to then … take a chance that I'm going to have to talk to your supervisor. In the meantime It's going to kill this patient, unless I admit this patient and give him transfusions. I have to take that risk, and admit that patient to the hospital. And then I have to argue with her supervisor, and, of course, you get the run around finally until you get to talk to somebody who has the knowledge and authority to talk some sense. So this is the kind of a hassle that our system has generated. And that's what I object to, yeah. Now, the interesting thing is happening. I grew up in [the] Golden Era, [when] the physician was respected.

PIEHLER: I was going to ask you, 'cause … I often have interviewed doctors and it seems like that period in the '50s, '60s and '70s in many ways was a Golden Era.

KANG: Golden Era in the sense that there was not even the Federal government [interfering]. Until really Johnson's Great Society, Medicare didn't exist. All you had to contend [with] was at the worst Blue Cross-Blue Shield. It was usually a one page form and there was no hassle. You submit it, you get reimbursed, alright? But [the] introduction of Medicare began mounting the paperwork pressure, and bit by bit and by the time managed care came into being, it became immensely more complicated. So, yes, there has been a decay in the quality of life of a practitioner. At all levels. So in that sense, yes, the '50s and '60s were [a] Golden Era. Another sense as well, from [the] academic point of view, NIH funded a far greater percentage of applications that were submitted. So that was another way one could define the Golden Era of science. But things have gotten worse and worse and worse. The … interesting comment I was going to make is that I view … this with horror. What is this? The kids who go to medical school now … don't know any better. They just take it in stride. "Oh, that's what we have to do, that's what we will do." To them [medicine] still is a desirable profession to be in compared to whatever else they can compare it to. So they don't seem to mind as much as I have minded. So, this funny thing happened after World War II, GIs returned, medical school applications peaked. And then it gradually came down, gradually came down. And it's really plummeted at the nadir of this managed care fear and anxiety. And the knocking of the medical profession and so on. And an interesting thing happened. There was a demographic line there as well, when the number of [people] that reached that particular age [for entry to medical school] has diminished. It's lifted back up now, its going up. Medical school applications are increasing.

PIEHLER: Though it's interesting, having interviewed a number of doctors, … it's a very tough profession. I mean, not just the academic side of it but it's a very demanding occupation.

KANG: It is a very—well, I think your mother is a physician, and your mother and my daughter are both in Dermatology, not a specialty in which they have too many emergencies. Nonetheless, the responsibility given to a physician is an awesome one. Often times the right decision or the wrong decision could make a difference between, at its worst, life or death. Or at its not the worst, could make a difference between disability of varying degrees or less of degrees of disability. So it weighs on you. Our minds, at least. As I treat the patients, and almost by definition we're not going to succeed 100%. There is going to be an adverse outcome. That's what generates a moment of reflection, "Did I do something wrong? Could I have done something different? Should I have done something different? What is it that I did not foresee?" Second guessing comes in, and that's enormously burdensome. This is especially true during the formative age of a physician where the physician has not quite had the experience of dealing with a different variety of illnesses, different outcomes, and so on. But it never goes away. Even as I go through as a teaching physician now, on general medicine patients, there are adverse outcomes. And I'm second-guessing myself. Have I given close enough supervision to these kids, trainees? Could they have done better had I whipped them a little harder and breathed down their neck a little closer? Maybe I should have gone a step further in instructing them. Yeah, this responsibility does not go away.

PIEHER: Do you have any questions?

HENDRICK: I think they've been answered.

PIEHLER: … I always sort of ask this question earlier, but you experienced America's small town southern living, you then went to Boston, which is a very different place, both cosmopolitan and also very parochial. My wife lived in Boston when I met her. We were dating in Boston. So I can relate to some of your comments. And then you moved to Memphis, which is sort of on the Mississippi, and sort of a very different culture, even … from small towns in South Carolina.

KANG: Yes, obviously it's very different from Boston. I think, however, my experience and a favorable experience and memory thereof, at Spartanburg helped me overcome this anxiety and bias about living in the south. So to me Memphis was not that far out a hinterland, although my colleagues thought that I was going to a hinterland. Actually, the boys, boys meaning my colleagues who remained in Boston, gave a skit before I left. And in the skit … [they were] conducting my academic funeral. (Laughter) "I'm going to a hinterland. I'm going there and will never be heard from again." Well, it didn't quite turn out that way. But I didn't have that deep bias and anxiety. I think my wife may have had more of an anxiety about living in the south, because she'd never experienced living in the south. But I think the fact that our children were able to accommodate themselves and be successful in their education helped a lot in terms of our accepting Memphis as a living place. So as I said, you know, I had several job offers every five years. And each time I weighed [them], it seemed not that advantageous for me to move. So I don't mind Memphis. There are a lot of things … to dislike about the city, as well. (Laughter) And a lot of things I can be critical about the UT as a system as well as State of Tennessee for its politics. You know, I'm no raving, raving liberal by any means, but by golly, do we have to be stupid about this? (Laughter)

PIEHLER: I guess what are … your thoughts about … the university structure which …

KANG: It's a very—I'm not sure how widely I want it recorded, but I'll say it anyway. It's a very unfortunate situation in which UT headquarters, or if you want to call it "[the] real UT," is in Knoxville, and the medical school or health care related, health science center is in Memphis. It's historically different, politically different, culturally different. Moreover, these people [in Knoxville] have never regarded UT medical unit, as it began to be called, now [the] UT health science center, as really [part of] UT. So we get discriminatory treatment, which is very unfortunate. And it's deeply ingrained in the culture of the university. It is damn near impossible to change that by any conscious effort ….

Yeah, we have a lesion that is deeply rooted in history, of how the university evolved. There's a certain amount of an attitude [at] UTK that tends to regard Memphis as "I wish they didn't exist as a part of us."

PIEHLER: The impression I've gotten of the administration here, and … it may be a false one … [but] I think there's a very large group of administrators and trustees that really think of this as the University of East Tennessee…. 'Cause when I came here from outside of the state I just thought "It's Tennessee, its one state…." But there are regional differences in any state. I was sort of struck by how strong they were.

KANG: Yeah, it's really three states.

PIEHLER: … I mean, in New Jersey there's a south and a north Jersey split but northerners I think never quite realized that, or really you don't feel it's that pronounced. And … it doesn't matter in places like Rutgers or other state institutions the way it matters here. I mean, it was to me quite pronounced very early on.

KANG: There are, to say the least, a lot of inconveniences in being in the Health Science Campus of UT in Memphis. In many little, subtle, but nonetheless important ways. And I don't know how to fix it.

HENDRICK: Well, I know that … the amount of funds and stuff sent to the medical center here, like their teaching facilities, has shrunken in the past few years. Have you seen that change? Have they given more money to your campus or anything, since they, like, reduced the stuff here?

KANG: We had to shrink rather … seriously. Much more so than perhaps UTK. For example, this gives you another example of why being a part of the UT system, but located separately in Memphis, may give rise to a problem. We had to suffer the same sort of shrinkage in the state appropriated dollars. So, as an example, the department of medicine, when I was the chair, had 125 faculty people. I don't know what the exact number is [today]. I'd be surprised of it is 100. So we had to shrink in terms of faculty. Second thing, … as we came into this particular academic year, [the] state mandated a 3% pay increase for the employees, including faculty. But the sum of the increase was gonna have to come from the increase in tuition. You follow me? Now that sounds logical and reasonable and benign until you look at the real number. How many students do you have here, 20,000? Okay, so you talk about raising, I don't know what the actual raise is, but lets say for the sake of argument you raise tuition by $1,000, multiply that by 20,000, you are suddenly looking at real money, right? Well, we have about 1,000 students. We raise the student tuition by the $1,000 like we're permitted to do. You multiply that by 1,000 and it doesn't add up to a hill of beans. So this may not be perceived by UTK people as being unfair. I'm not sure unfair is the word, but it doesn't work. It may work on the UTK campus. The only way we could come out with a 3% pay increase, regardless what the legislature said and UTK people said, was (to cut some more?) people. You see what I mean? Because we raise tuition, but it doesn't add up to anything. We are one of the most under funded per capita medical schools in the United States, in terms of state medical schools.

PIEHLER: That, that wouldn't surprise me given how under funded we are here.

KANG: Yeah.

PIEHLER: What is your assessment of TennCare and both its past and its future? … 'Cause you've alluded to TennCare and the problem of approval.

KANG: It's a very, very difficult problem and I don't pretend to have enough wisdom to know how to solve it. But it has some serious flaws that was not adequately anticipated or addressed. And that is the fact that when it was implemented to substitute Medicaid, then the governor and whoever were putting this together broadened the eligibility such that approximately, a 50% greater number of Tennessee citizens became eligible to be under this plan, with the same amount of money. Now, you can slice it any way you want to. If you have 50% more people to care for with the same amount of money, obviously somebody is not going to get the care or is [not] gonna be paid, alright? So, in effect, people who are willing to accept and see and care for TennCare-insured patients had to see 50% more patients to be reimbursed as previously with a ten times more paperwork than they used to have to do. So from that point of view, that puts a monkey on the physician's back and that led to the following phenomenon. Most physicians say "I won't accept Tenncare patients," okay?

Now look at it from the Tenncare patient's point of view. There isn't a rheumatologist apparently in east Tennessee who will accept TennCare patients. So, where do they have to go? A limited number is seen by Vanderbilt. But Vanderbilt is a private institution. They can decide whatever they want to. We are a public institution, supposedly [a] state-supported institution. And therefore, according to the governor we have an obligation, though not a legal requirement, [to] see these people. I don't resent that, except that when a patient has to wait six months to see a rheumatologist and then must travel 300 miles to come to see me, and by the time I get to see him all the x-ray departments have shut-down because nobody else will see these people. We are teeming with these patients, right? The laboratory shuts down. I can't do the x-ray for them because TennCare does not allow me to do the x-ray or the lab test. So the poor patient, having traveled 300 miles, saw me for fifteen-to-twenty minutes or however long, and then had to travel 300 miles back to get the lab test I ordered, and come back 300 miles to see me to receive proper diagnosis and treatment. Is that functional or what?

But such is the reality of TennCare. It is so grossly under funded that it is really penalizing the patients, never mind the physicians. There aren't that many orthopedic surgeons who will operate on some of the patients that I care for who need surgery. And is that good medical care? Well, there are two ways of seeing it. I guess it's better than no care at all, is one argument. But by golly, is that the way we should do it? What I'm coming back to is this. If, if the political decision is that we are going to care for 1.5 million people, by golly, you ought to fund that amount of money that's reasonable for 1.5 million patients, not try to stretch 1 million people's money into 1.5 million people. It's generating all kinds of stresses for the patients and all kinds of stresses to the physicians. And I wish sometimes we would refuse to see TennCare patients. I can't tolerate it anymore, what they're putting the patients through. It's not fair to the patients, it's not fair to us. The only justification that I heard, that I can agree with, is that it may be better than no care, because otherwise … several hundred thousand people would be without any coverage whatsoever.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed 10/9/2002 by Greg Kupsky
Edited 1/5/2003 by Kurt Piehler