

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Suphal Samreth
Interviewers: Bryan Shapiro, Wanna Zhang
Date/ Time of Interview: March 26, 2012, at 5:00PM
Transcribed by: Bryan Shapiro
Edited by: Sara Davis (7/17/17)
Audio Track Time: 55:36

Background:

Suphal Samreth was born in Siem Reap, Cambodia on September 7, 1953. She grew up and became trained as a midwife before the reign of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. In 1980, she walked through the jungle and into Thailand where she spent four years in a refugee camp. After this time she was moved to a refugee camp in the Philippines for six months where she learned to speak English, and found a sponsor with the YMCA. She moved to the United States knowing no one, and hence moved directly to Houston, Texas. She worked as a maid at the Four Seasons Hotel for four years, and raised three sons, mostly as a single parent. She has resided in Houston since February of 1985.

Setting:

This interview was conducted at the home of Sondra Shapiro in the Braeswood neighborhood of Houston. It lasted about an hour. Suphal described her experiences growing up in Cambodia as well as her experience fleeing the country and moving to the United States. She also described raising her children in Houston, as well as her experience becoming a citizen and her religious practices.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

SS: Suphal Samreth

BS: Bryan Shapiro

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, ect.]

SS: In 1975-1976, I have three kids already. In 1976, my husband died, the Communist kill...in 1979, '80 I come into Thailand, came into Thailand. I took only one daughter, but go the jungle, she died because the... pneumonia, pneumonia, and like, like sick very sick, like, what they call?

BS: Pneumonia?

SS: Pneumonia (BS: Yeah), and...

BS: The flu or...?

SS: Flu. And pneumonia and she sick. And so I cannot go back because, when I go back I go, I go back to Cambodia, they still, Communists still here, but not in the city, but in the jungle. I cannot go, so I come into the United States, and so I live in the—in the Thailand 1980 to 1984.

BS: And what did, what did you do in Thailand?

SS: In a camp. Don't do anything, the refugee camp. You know, like, they had me like, America everybody had in another county, had (BS: Yeah) had the people refugee, you know. I don't do anything. 1970... 1984, I came in the, I go in the Philippines (BS: OK) about six months. I learn English language, and, and then because I cannot go back because I'm scared, you know? (BS: Yeah) And I leave two, two kids in Cambodia with my mother-in-law, but I cannot find because before the Communists come, and Communists all go out; the people go around because not stay in the—in the city, or not stay in the [unintelligible]. (BS: Yeah) They leave before, you know, because Communists go out take the people out in the...the house. (BS: Yeah) You know? So I cannot—cannot find the two kids. I come here, then my kids, take one kid, baby, but they died, she died, and then go 1984, I came in the Philippines. '84 something because Philippines [unintelligible] I learned Philippine camp. You know? Philippines camp [unintelligible]. And then 1980...no, 1985, '85, February, I come in United States, with YMCA.

BS: OK. Where in the United States did you first come to? Houston?

SS: Houston, Texas, I never go anywhere.

BS: Why Houston?

SS: Because I don't have family in anywhere, I...I come in by myself. (BS: OK) Because I don't know. Go anywhere. I stay here.

BS: How did you know about Houston?

SS: Uhh... I don't know because, YMCA choose. (BS: OK) They choose, the...the people, refugee, they choose. And then they asked me, they interview, they asked me, 'Where you go?' I say it's up to...it's up to, uh the...like, YMCA take, what they call? They called uh...?

BS: Workers or...?

SS: No, not workers, they called, uhh, like...they take care of you. What they called?

BS: Uhh...I don't know, social workers?

SS: Like...

BS: Personnel?

SS: No, no, no, they called...uhh...sponsors.

BS: Oh, sponsors, okay.

SS: Yeah, they called sponsors. Because I on, I don't have any family in United States. (BS: Yeah) So...uhh...the people who don't have family, who don't have family the YMCA or I..., or IC [perhaps referring to the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)] sponsor. You know? (BS: Yeah) I go...so YMCA sponsor me come here. And I say okay because I don't know nothing! [Laughing] (BS: Yeah) They choose. They say...they, they call me; they say they want me go to Houston, Texas. I say okay. Cause I don't know. I stay in the YMCA about one month and I—I go stay with the people, share with the people who live here. And then...and then 1970... oh 1986, no nineteen...I come here 1985, February. (BS: OK) And... only three months I go to work at the Four Seasons Hotel. (BS: OK) The YMCA put me in Four Seasons Hotel and then what are you ask me?

BS: Umm...so where did you—you lived at the YMCA when you first got here? (SS: Yeah) And then where did you move once you moved out of the YMCA?

SS: Because the YMCA take care only one month. (BS: Okay) Put in the YMCA ran for the Dallas, the Dallas Street YMCA before a long time, you not born (BS: Yeah) yet. I stay with everybody refugee here. One YMCA invite (BS: Yeah) all the...take...put and then one month the YMCA looking for the place to live, they give me to live. They give everybody to live. Looking the place and YMC—no—but the government help me.

BS: Okay.

SS: The first time one year and eight months and finished. Help everybody one year and eight months and then find a job by himself—by herself. And I find a job. I asked YMCA, YMCA looking for me the Four Seasons Hotel because Four Seasons Hotel easy for, [chuckling] easy for people to do! (BS: Yeah) Yeah I work about three years and I quit.

BS: How long did you...or how long per week? How many hours a week did you work there?

SS: I work \$4 hour...\$4 hour.

BS: Okay. And how many hours?

SS: Uhh, I work because, you know, hotel sometimes slow. I work three...three days a week. But eight hours, but three days a week. (BS: Okay) Yeah. Very slow. Sometime, you know, but before very cheap, you know? I work two weeks I have paycheck. Sometimes two weeks \$230. (BS: Yeah) Something like that. Sometimes \$180. Slow! Very slow (BS: Yeah) hotel. Some low, some high.

BS: And where...where did you live in Houston? Did you live close to the hotel or...?

SS: No, I live...first time I live LR (?) Boulevard. (BS: Okay) And...and then I...then LR Boulevard the friend, my friend I lived with they moved in California. But...so I looking for the...somebody to live and I don't know but there's somebody looking for me. They have two bedroom. I want to share, like you share with friend (BS: Yeah) roommate (BS: Roommate) yeah, but I live at the Stella Link. (BS: Okay) After LR I...I live at Stella Link and then after that I live in South Post Oak, 1989. (BS: Okay) I live in South Post Oak, and then I live in '89, and I live in South Post Oak and I don't know what. I move here...I move around here (BS: Yeah) 1999. (BS: Okay) Yeah, that's it.

BS: So you've always lived pretty close to this neighborhood.

SS: Yeah, pretty close. [Chuckling]

BS: Okay. Umm...are there any other refugees who live close by or...?

SS: No, now they move. They move.

BS: When you first got here there were though?

SS: Yeah. Now, like, they have to good job, they have family, they move California. A lot they move California and Boston. (BS: Okay) But...so I don't move because I don't have family. I don't go anywhere. I don't know. Because when I move, I have no life [laughing] because I don't know area. (BS: Yeah) I cannot find everything. Because they moved, they have family, they have sister, brother over there, friend, you know that? (BS: Yeah) My friend want me to move California, but I say no because I want to stay here. I don't know... [laughing] (BS: ...anybody up there) Yeah, I like Houston, Texas more than...because I don't know anywhere [laughing] (BS: Okay) Okay? What else you ask me?

BS: So, you were born in Cambodia. (SS: Yeah) Where in Cambodia?

SS: Siem Reap. Angkor Wat. You know Angkor Wat, Buddha, Buddha, big Buddha (BS: Okay) the...the tourist go. (BS: Okay) You saw that... (BS: Yeah) ...in online? Yeah, I born over there (BS: Okay) Siem Reap.

BS: Is it a bigger city or rural?

SS: Big city.

BS: Really big city?

SS: Yeah. The same. But in a small country, but I thought big (BS: Yeah) because yeah.

BS: And did you grow up there for your whole childhood?

SS: Yeah. I grow up over there. I...I go to school over there. And I go to school about maybe finish high school. (BS: Okay) I think, I quit, I go to the...learn midwife. Go to, like, what they

call like New York? What they call? They call the... capital, right? (BS: Yeah) Yeah I, I, I go to Phnom Penh capital. (BS: Okay) Learn about one year and then come back. And I come back to...I not...when I, I work I learned...finished. They give me go, not go to, I born here, I go to the...another place, another city near the...near the Thailand. They call uh...they call Oddar Meanchey like Preah Vihear, you know Preah Vihear? Oddar Meanchey the call Oddar Meanchey. (BS: Okay) Uh and I work over there and I married over there [laughing].

BS: Did you have uh siblings growing up? Brothers and sisters?

SS: Now?

BS: When you were growing up.

SS: Yeah. I...I got...two...two brothers I only first and I have three sisters, but the Communists—Communists—Communists kill brother, but sisters, one sister died. Now they still...I still two sister and one brother. That's it.

BS: Are they in the United States as well or they're in...?

SS: No, no. They're in my country.

BS: In Cambodia.

SS: Yeah, only me come here.

BS: Only you came here.

SS: Yeah [laughing].

BS: Umm...so what did your parents do? Did your parents work?

SS: No he died. He died. My...my mom died uh very difficult, for no food no—1975. (BS: Okay) The Communists kill. But my dad died...he passed away before Communists come in my country. He...blood...blood pressure. (BS: Okay) High blood pressure. (BS: Yeah) Yeah, he died.

BS: So did you have to take care of your brothers and sisters who were younger than you?

SS: Oh no, no, no. I'm separate because I'm not live with my...my parents. When I was young nineteen, uhh...I was...I six years old, oh no, seven years old. My grandma take me go take care, I'm not living, my brother, my sister, my mom, I'm not living them. I live with my...my uncle and my grandma in Siem Reap in my...I'm born. (BS: Okay) In different place my mom lived another place. The capital in Phnom Penh. (BS: Okay) My father work soldier, and...but I don't live with us long, long time, so, so I know the bro...but I go visit, but I know the brother and

sister, but I don't live with us. I don't know they grow up, I don't know nothing. (BS: Yeah) Because I live with my grandma.

BS: Gotcha. And you said you lived with your grandma and your uncle?

SS: Yeah.

BS: What did your uncle do?

SS: Uhh...teacher. (BS: He was a teacher) Yeah, both teachers. (BS: Okay) And one...one worked, like, police...policeman. All the Communists kill because they worked. (BS: Yeah) Yeah. But...so my—my grandma Vietnamese... (BS: Okay) ...not Cambodian, she Vietnamese.

BS: She had moved to Cambodia...?

SS: Long, long time before she leave Cambodia. Long, long time when my mom's born Cambodian. I don't know when they moved because...but I know she speak Vietnamese... [laughing] (BS: Yeah) ...to me. And my mom speak Vietnamese, too. (BS: Okay) But...so Communists don't like that. (BS: Yeah) They don't like Chinese, Communists they kill all...they don't...they don't like everything is so make sure Communists they don't like anything. [Laughing] They like only the too not smart... (BS: Yeah) ...work for them. Like young people are not smart. They smart, they smart, they learn, they work, everything. No they don't, then kill.

BS: Um when did you – how old were you when you met your husband?

SS: Uh I was 20.

BS: How did you meet him?

SS: Umm...you know culture Cambodian, I don't, I don't meet him. My...my uncle, his uncle...his uncle...I, when I go to work, my uncle asked my...my grandma, and married. But I don't know him, he don't know me. The culture before, they cannot, looking like you stay every, like now, no, no nothing. [Laughing] Only like married, I don't know him, he don't know me [laughing]. Don't looking. Yeah, different, you know, before different, not...now they know two and three years go together it was no, no...before I don't...I don't know, I don't know when they asked. When I...they...my, my grandma say you married, with who? Oh, you don't know, you don't know, you...you don't want to know. When they married you see that—him. But he don't know me either, well I don't know he know now, but sometime he know me he saw me but I don't never see him.

BS: Wow. So you had never seen him until your wedding.

SS: No, no, no, no, no. No. Because culture before.

BS: So did you move in together after the wedding or did he move into your grandma's house or...?

SS: No, no. When I married Phine, only one...only one...one after the married. Married three day. three day, we were not married long. Three day. After that, like honeymoon, stay with one grandma, you know culture they...when they sleep together, the people, old people around here look [laughing] they...they no talk. I don't know I never talk, when I married Phine I go outside sleep with my mother. My mother, 'Go! Go sleep with your husband!' I don't know him! He don't know me. [Both laughing] Shy, each other, you know. When I married and then make sure I sleep with him, sleep with him only one time, three times, never look at him. Only one held, one...one child and look at him, each other, but no. It—it different because shy, you know. The culture in my country before, but now the same American.

BS: Now it's the same?

SS: Yeah, the same. They met...they meet each other, they talk, they send the letters, online, but before no, no, no. Only send the letter, the mother, but 100% only two and three person they do like that, but 80% of the culture the same culture. They don't know. I married, I don't know him, [laughing] he don't know me. When they sit here, sit here.

BS: And did y'all...did you two ever get a house together?

SS: Yeah, after that one day, one night, go stay together because he...he stay in the like he soldier, he stay in the soldier place. Yeah, go to moving. And then, and I go to work outside with the people.

BS: And he was a soldier for...for who exactly?

SS: He...he soldier for the...he, he not—not go to everywhere, he stay when the people sick, everything, accident, he...he work in hospital, he soldier in hospital, he...he don't work...he don't go anywhere, yeah, he work like help people. Help people.

BS: Help soldiers or help just everybody?

SS: Help soldier, help the soldier go to war with the Communists, the soldier, like, the bomb, he help here.

BS: So there was already a war going on between the Communists and others, when you were getting married?

SS: He worked before. (BS: Okay) He...he helped the, because he go to school...he go to school after that he come to work here. When I...I interview in before I came here, the American interview me, like you, ask me about be...be...before they say...they say uh before the people lie to...to him a lot, they say ooh, work every...but ask they don't know nothing. When I interview, they...they asked me what, what your husband work? I told him, I say he work soldier, what he have, I don't know nothing. They...they call, like, he work high or low, like, I say medium, he not high. He like, he not a doctor, he like nurse, you know nurse here? Yeah.

BS: Okay. Umm...so maybe going back to the camp in Thailand, how did you get from Cambodia to Thailand?

SS: I go with the people in the jungle. Too many dangers, they put bombs, only one line for all the Communists put the bombs here.

BS: You had to walk all the way from Cambodia to Thailand?

SS: Yeah, yeah. They, they know, the people, some people know the...the way. Because when I...I come here, I came here with one man, the one man, the bomb. Because he go bomb. And I stay the jungle so my...my daughter don't die because I stay in with my...my daughter about three months together, no eat, no food everything because the...the man take me go. The bomb. Had a bomb here. Very difficult. And so my...so in the jungle, in the mountain too—too much uh mosquitoes. Mosquitoes and too much, you know, scorpion. OOOHHH! Too many scorpion. Big, big scorpion, but at nighttime, I walk, I scare the Vietnamese and everybody come find me to run in Thailand. When I touch the tree. OOOHHH! Scorpion a lot. Big scorpion here. Oh my God. (BS: Scary) Scary. And at nighttime, you can stay, but ooohhh, the mosquito, ooohhh so my daughter died like that because mosquito kill her, the...so she have pneumonia and...flu.

BS: So you had one child while you were in Cambodia?

SS: Two child.

BS: Two children.

SS: And now and still one child because 19—1994, I took my daughter come here, but now my son.

BS: Your son?

SS: With family. Yeah. Yeah. But that's okay now.

BS: So once you got to Houston, and, I guess you were in the Philippines first, then you got to Houston, and then you worked at the Four Seasons, (SS: Yes) and then did you...how did you find work after the Four Seasons?

SS: The...my friend. I...I don't work because I came here, I tell you I come here I married again. But...but not—not took the license married only boyfriend and girlfriend. I have two sons here, and 19...19...1997. Oh 198...86 I married, and '87 I'm...[chuckling] when I...I have child. I...the not go stay with him anymore, you know? And then...so I work Four Seasons, very difficult for me. I cannot take care the kids because small money, so I quit...I work three and two years, I quit the job. The manager call me; I help you, I help you find a place for free, but I say no. So I...I called...I go to put applica...application for government help me.

BS: For welfare?

SS: Yeah. Welfare and food stamps. And then...so that's it.

BS: So have you...you've been on welfare since then or...?

SS: No. No, no, no, no. Now, no because son grow up everybody grow up they don't help me anymore. Yeah. So now I got the...I got the Medicaid from government. And the government help me...the food stamps only \$65 a month now. \$65 a month.

The...the divorce no President, Barack Obama, they...two years ago, or one year or two year they help, the Barack Obama, they...they help three year, two year, now three year.

BS: About three years.

SS: Yeah. I got two years already.

BS: Of food stamps?

SS: Yeah. And Medicaid, that's it.

BS: That's it?

SS: But, I cannot tell about that...

BS: No problem. Um did, so what do your...your children do? Do they work in the U.S.? Did you or did you, I guess, did they go to school when they first got here? Started here?

SS: Who?

BS: Your children.

SS: Here?

BS: Yeah. I guess, your...your son came in '94, you said, right? (SS: Yeah) From and he was he grew up in...?

SS: '94. And my son...my son came with me, I take from, yeah, I take two sons, two I forgot. One daughter died, one son still here, like I'm pregnant when I come in Thailand, I'm pregnant. I'm pregnant only one month. And then I come here, I...he born 1983, and 1983, and then '84, one more year I come here, I take him here. Darren?

BS: Darren.

SS: Yeah. I take him here.

BS: And did he go to public school and...no?

SS: You know that, he...he go high school, and he run out. And he go 11th grade. And then so he take the GED. The GED diploma, that's it. And another kid, too. 11th grade he quit the job, he take the GED. I have boyfriend here, so one, yeah.

BS: So when your...when your son was growing up and your other sons when they were growing up, did you try to raise them to be just American? Or did you try to teach them about where you came from or...?

SS: Try...teach, talk? (BS: Yeah) I talk like easy words and home like eat, he talk American, he like to talk American more than...more than country, but sometimes I don't have time to tell him because he not here. He go out all the time, and I want take him, when I went to Cambodia I...I bought the...the ABC but Cambodian, but he don't look at here. He don't want to see that. He want going...hang out, it's up to him, but now he grow up I don't know [laughing].

BS: But when he was...when he was growing up did you tell him about the Communist Revolution? Did you tell him about how you had come through and...?

SS: Yeah I told him. Yeah, yeah, I told...I told him very difficult for me. I told him about that. He know that. He knew.

BS: Umm...and what is, so he's now working or...?

SS: Uhh...little son, so one he 25 years old, 26, he have two kids, he work...he work the Chacho's restaurant. You know Chacho's? Yeah. He work Chacho's restaurant. He work three years ago. Three years ago yeah. Before he work the first time he 16 years old he go high school, he work at Subway serving near the Main Street. You know Main, near the Children's Hospital? Yeah. He work here. And then 17 years old he quit he work at the Subway, Subway sandwich and then after that he, oh no, he not work there, he work the Pappa...Pappa...the Pappadeaux's near the, you know, you know the Hillcroft and now...

BS: Yeah, on Southwest Freeway right there?

SS: Yeah. Hillcroft and there. Yeah, he work about two years and then he quit here, he work at the, one year, he work at mmm...like police, but not police. He work in...around...around apartment they call, security. One year and then he put application but he...he bad crown, they don't take him and then he go to looking the Chacho's now he work three years already.

BS: Okay. And your other children?

SS: He very...

BS: Have you...have you gone back to Asia since you've been in Houston?

SS: Who?

BS: Have you gone back to Asia, Cambodia, or the Philippines, or Thailand?

SS: Me? (BS: Yeah) Go back? (BS: Yeah) No I go back to Cambodia three times already, but Philippines, no because Philippines no sister, brother, but the camp, now they don't put the camp anymore because refugees, they don't take refugees anymore.

BS: So you've gone back to see your brothers and sisters?

SS: Yeah, family. Yeah, brother, sisters, and my son, family's son. That's it; three times I go over there.

BS: When was that?

SS: First time? First time, uhh...your grandfather here, 1993, second time...two thousand, I think 2006. Third time, 2011.

BS: Okay. Has it changed since you've been back? Or since you left, and since you've been back?

SS: I don't understand what you say.

BS: Has the country changed?

SS: Yeah, it changed.

BS: How so?

SS: Changed, now they have...they have too many people, a lot people, and, like, I don't know because...because I was when I came here, I came first time to Thailand, the country to...not too much, but now very difficult for me, you know? Because the too many countries go over there, you know? I don't know. They change everything.

BS: And it's still Communist now, right?

SS: Oh, Communist? (BS: Yeah) No, no. (BS: It's not anymore?) No more, no more Communists, no more Communists because they rest the...now they go to court I saw, you know, you see online, they go to court, they put the, like, Communists, like, on the...kill someone, like, two or five Communists they...in the court, in the jail. No more Communists.

BS: So what is the...politically what is it...is it a Democracy now or is it...what is Cam...or I guess what is Cambodia like? Is it a little bit more free? People are free to do what they want to do?

SS: Yeah...they...the...you, what do you mean? Do you mean the Communist people like the freedom, or no?

BS: Uh I just mean more your brothers and sisters, for instance. Do they feel more...?

SS: Feel more happy? Yeah. They feel more happy, they work, but they...they work, take care of family, yeah. But more happy because not scared the Communists come anymore because now they changed, they take the...before in the house, any house have the gun, now they take out.

BS: Take all the guns out?

SS: Yeah.

BS: Umm...let's see. Di...when you, I guess, when you grew up in Cambodia did you belong to any religion? Were you religious at all? Or did you go to church or...?

SS: No. Buddha. (BS: Buddha?) Yeah, Buddha because... hundred, no 90% Buddha, and one, 10% or...church. Because before they...the...they, they don't, they don't like church, you know? They like Buddha, you know that?

BS: So when you came to the US did you continue to be a Buddhist or would you say?

SS: First time I go to church, Mormon church, and... (BS: Mormon church?) ...yeah but second time, and then I go to temple again. Temple because my culture, to go to temple, and so I have uhh...two granddaughter, uhh...two grandchildren now about two weeks ago I start go to church. Christian church, yeah, because I take my...my grandchildren, my grandchildren go, I don't want to the same father, I go take them, go to church.

BS: Yeah. What church do you take them to?

SS: Cambodian church.

BS: A Cambodian church?

SS: Yeah. Christian church, Cambodian church.

BS: Where is that?

SS: You know Main, South Main, South Main, South Main the 45 North. Yeah, the South Main, I don't know where because I drive...South Main and Washington Street.

BS: Okay, there's a Cam...is it a big church or...?

SS: Medium church. [knock]

BS: Sorry about that.

SS: It's okay.

BS: Back we go. Umm...so it's a...would you say it's a large church or a smaller church?

SS: Like your mom's house. Not too big.

BS: Oh, very small.

SS: No...bit more than, maybe because they just build big church, not too big, that medium church...medium.

BS: Is it mostly Cambodian refugees?

SS: No, the now not refugees anymore. Now they make, like, I saw the American because they have married with Cambodians, you know, like you and...and you Chinese, Chinese, not Cambodian, Chinese, American, Black, and Spanish, mix.

BS: Hold on one sec. So you've been taking your grandchildren there? (SS: Yeah) And do they... is your son Christian, or is it just for...?

SS: Oh my son, he go to church, he baptized, and you know the church, big church, the big, big church, you know, the by the Galleria? (BS: Yeah) Yeah. He baptized over there.

BS: By the one in the Galleria?

SS: Yeah, by the Memorial Street, you know that? You know churches?

BS: Sort of. I don't know all of them in Houston, but I know some of them.

SS: Oh. You don't know that. He...he baptized two years ago. Two years ago. And my...my big son he go to small church. Baptist church, big black, all black. Yeah. Near the Fondren Street over there.

BS: Uhh...why? I guess, uhh...did your...so both of your sons were recently baptized, right?

SS: Yeah. Bapt...

BS: In the last couple of years?

SS: Small son baptized in two years ago. He not baptized yet, but he baptized before he was with me at...at the Mormon church. Yeah, but now he changed the church he go...he go church with the Black, American Black.

BS: American Blacks. Is there...does he live over in that area is that why he's going to that church or is it...?

SS: He live with me.

BS: He lives with you? (SS: Yes) And so is that...is the church close to you or...?

SS: Yeah. You know behind Fiesta, Fiesta here, Fiesta, uhh...I don't know the Fondren and...Fondren and...umm...guess, I don't know, I forgot. San...uhh, I forgot. Sorry.

BS: No problem, no worries. Do you uh, do you think he relates more to the Blacks in church as opposed to Whites or is it just that it's a closer church?

SS: I don't know he...he was like go to church over there. I don't know, I don't know.

BS: You don't know why he chose it? Okay.

SS: He go to church three years ago. (BS: Is when he started?) Yeah, he start three years ago, he start church, Black church, three years ago.

BS: Does he have a girlfriend?

SS: Uh-uh. Big son (BS: No?) [laughing]. Nobody like him, he big. He big, but my small son he have a girlfriend and two kids I told you that, but now divorce, now not stay with her. He have another girlfriend, she have another boyfriend.

BS: Does he keep the kids, or do they split the kids?

SS: He pay child support but I took...he took, like... Saturday afternoon and, Friday afternoon to Sunday I take them go to church and then Sunday afternoon I...I put them back because he go to school. Yeah, go to school.

BS: And so they live in Houston also?

SS: They live here. They live near Fiesta.

BS: Okay. Also near Fiesta.

SS: Yeah. They live Fondren and, and Gessner. Fondren and Gessner.

BS: Okay. Umm...so how old are your grandkids at this point?

SS: Uhh...the big one five, five and half, the boy. Named Junior, Junior. And girl three and half, three and half, her name is Soriah. Soriah. But...

BS: So they...they're not going to school yet?

SS: Pre-K. Oh, no, the...uhh...he go, she go to the... daycare. (BS: Daycare) She go daycare and her mother work, her mother work.

BS: Her mother works. What does her mother do?

SS: I don't know because I never asked her. She work, she work only restaurant, yeah restaurant, she work restaurant I think.

BS: Umm...so did you when you...I guess, when you first came to the US and after kind of moving out on your own from the YMCA, how did you meet people?

SS: Oh, the...because YM—YMCA when the refugees come stay in YMCA like camp, stay in two and three families stay here when they come, like, after one month they have refugees come again, but refugees they stay with me two and three families they know...they know the family around here so I know from...from them.

BS: So you got to meet them?

SS: Yeah.

BS: Are there still people that you are friends with from that time period, I guess, still refugees that you're friend with now are have they all kind of moved away?

SS: They...they move away. And they have a house, they have a live in someplace now...sometimes they have a house, sometimes they have the...the donut shop, sometimes they have, they, them now, they, they, they don't stay again, again here they go somewhere, they move, and they...sometime they move and make sure and uh 288 a lot people Cambodian, 288.

BS: Over by 288? (SS: Yeah) Why?

SS: Because they have the house, they want to plant the...plant the...plant the vegetable (?) and sell and here. A lot of the people over there.

BS: Over there. Is that, like, east of 288, kind of by the...?

SS: Yeah, Houston 288, you, you, you know the South, oh no, 288, you, you don't know 288?

BS: I...no I live right off of 288, I just...

SS: You know 288, you know what, what they call the Rosharon? You know Rosharon? Rosharon.

BS: I don't think so.

SS: Rosharon past 288.

BS: Oh, okay.

SS: What they call, they call, I don't know when you ask me [laughing].

BS: Oh no problem. Um. Just a couple more questions I guess, umm...so I guess we've talked about most of the stuff that I was wanting to get through, but umm...let's see. Is there anything else that you think would be interesting to know, any part of the story that you think hasn't been told of your story?

SS: No. No that's it I told you. And this...you, you want I...

BS: So for that...so you said you became a citizen when?

SS: 1994.

BS: What was that like...what did you... (SS: 1995) ...'95? (SS: Yeah) Did you, did the US government help you out with that or did you have to do it mostly by yourself?

SS: I do my...by, by myself.

BS: All of it by yourself?

SS: Yeah I go to, I go to the lawyer, talk with lawyer and put application and send to the immigration and then about 6 month or 8 month they call me to interview, 10 questions.

BS: And how...how many did you have to get right?

SS: All 10, yeah, they say I'm smart! [Laughing] They ask me, oohhhh, a lot, they ask me the, which country the [unintelligible] and how many representatives they ask me a lot.

BS: Did you have to study for it before you took it?

SS: Yeah.

BS: How long did you study?

SS: 100 questions, (BS: Wow) I...I...I learned 100 questions I remember all because I scared because they choose, one I don't know they...they ask me which one, the question, I don't...I learned, I learned about a month. Two month, yeah only a month. I learn every day when I come here I learn, learn, learn but they ask me when I go to interview I'm not scared because I...I know and they ask me one first time, uh ask me about uhh...about the law. About the law and I told her about the law and then, and then after that they asked me, oohh very difficult, but American not difficult, me difficult [laughing]. They ask me, oohhhh, a lot, 10 questions, I not fail, only 10 questions.

BS: Yeah. Why did you want to become a citizen? Did you feel like you had to?

SS: Because I don't want go back. I told you I don't want go back home, home country, and easy for me to live here. When uhh...because when I have, like, resident sometime they don't care, but citizen because the people in here, like, American, American citizen, you know? But the

resident, no. When I go country, the resident, when I pass, passport, I pass, they don't take me come. When the citizen, not ten year, easy for me and easy for me take my son or my family come here and easy for me go anywhere, and easy for me to...I live here, I want to live for freedom, but I'm not scared...anybody, like, oh, I have a resident, not...not, not citizen, but no. I got the citizen, I...I'm not scared. I know the law everything, you know?

BS: So were they...were you worried that they would deport you if you didn't get the citizenship? Was it—did you have a certain amount of time before you had to get citizenship or was it just...you thought it felt like time and you wanted to make sure you could stay?

SS: I don't understand.

BS: Sorry.

SS: Please, complex....explain for me again.

BS: Yeah, so you got to the US in '85, right? (SS: Yeah) And 10 years later you became a citizen? (SS: Yeah) '95? So you were just a legal resident for 10 years?

SS: Yeah I legal resident.

BS: Were you worried during that time about being deported back?

SS: Before, yeah, I worried, but sometime...they...because I heard they say, oh maybe the...the in my country not war anymore, they bring back. So I'm scared like that, too. I go to be a citizen [laughing].

BS: So it was right after you heard the country was changing back?

SS: Yeah. Yeah, because when the sometime you know they change the law, oh, bring back, oh my God, sometime I...I lost the...lost the something like Green Card everything I cannot find, I...I don't know. When I citizen I have passport. I have...they put in computer everything. I'm not scared anymore [laughing].

BS: And does any of your family want to come to the U.S. at this point? Your brothers and sisters do they want to come to the U.S. or do they...?

SS: Oh, no, no, no. Because now I can't take care of the sister, brother can only mom and dad take...come in United States, but sister, brother, no.

BS: They don't let people do that like that.

SS: Yeah, they don't.

BS: Okay, gotcha. Okay. I think that's all I wanted to ask.

SS: Thank you so much.

BS: Thank you.

[00:55:36] Interview Ends