

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

Interviewee: Robert Ming Su
Interviewers: Joanne Wang and Grace Chang
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Transcribed by: Joanne Wang
Edited by: Chris Johnson (8/19/16), Priscilla Li (11/13/16)
Audio Track Time: 1:03:21 (Hours: Minutes: Seconds)

Background:

Robert Su was born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1968, but he did not live there long. He moved to West Beirut, Lebanon from 1969-1970, Johannesburg, South Africa from 1970-1973, and then back to Taipei from 1973-1977 because of his father's work as a diplomat in the accounting department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He immigrated to Kansas City, Missouri in 1978 with his mother, father, and younger brother. He moved to Kansas City, Kansas, Chicago, Illinois, and Maryland before attending the University of Texas at Austin for college where he studied History and Business. During his time in college he held a leadership position in the Asian Business Student Association and was one of the founders of the Asian fraternity Lambda Phi Epsilon. After college he returned to Chicago, Illinois to look after his brother after his parents were transferred to another location for work and had a job as a credit analyst of a commercial bank, Old Kent Bank and as an AT&T long-distance salesperson. After four years in Chicago when his younger brother graduated high school and entered into college, Robert decided to go to Houston to study law at the University of Houston in 1994. After law school, Robert decided not to practice but worked instead at an accounting firm in the state and local tax department. After working there for three years and paying off his student loans, he then decided to try something entrepreneurial and go into full commission commercial real estate. He currently is a commercial real estate broker and has his own business called the Su Real Estate Group, which he started in 2010.

Setting:

The interview centers on the areas of labor and capital to develop a working history around the context of childhood experiences, family life, and daily activities.

The interview was conducted at Joanne Wang's off campus residence during her Junior year at 2014 McClendon Street in Houston, TX. The interview was a little over than an hour long (the requirement was at least one hour). Robert went briefly over his childhood and the different experiences associated with each location that he moved to before permanently residing in Houston, TX. He gave much insight on the entrepreneurial lifestyle and how being an Asian American influences his interactions with his clients. His adventurous spirit and curiosity provides a very interesting addition to the work on labor and capital.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

RS	Robert Su
JW	Joanne Wang
GC	Grace Chang
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis

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(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

JW: Ok, awesome. So, I think I'm just going to ask you, like, questions even if you have already like, or if already know them.

RS: Ok.

JW: I'm just going to ask them again anyway.

RS: Ok.

JW: Ok. So I guess we can start with um, personal history. Ok, so you're from um Taipei, right?

RS: Right.

JW: Originally?

RS: Right. Born and raised—mm—born in Taipei, Taiwan.

JW: Ok, so what was that like?

RS: Uh, I don't remember much.

JW: Ok.

RS: 'Cause I moved uh, so I was only... I only lived in Taipei, Taiwan between the age of six and ten.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: I don't know if you remember my dad or your granduncle is a diplomat.

JW: I don't remember.

RS: So I actually moved and lived in uh Lebanon and then South Africa and then I moved back to Taiwan.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So I was there from six grade—no, no first grade—six—age six to ten. So what was that like? Taipei, Taiwan um I remember wearing uniforms uh typical Asian schools, lot of writing Chinese characters uh...Like that.

JW: So what did your dad do? Like, what is a diplomat?

RS: He works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And he's actually in the accountant part, so he handles the money for all the different embassies and counsel generals.

JW: That's pretty cool [laughs].

RS: Yeah, that's pretty cool. It's different.

JW: Yeah so um when you—how old were you were when you were in Lebanon, then?

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RS: I was like one years old to two.

JW: One.

RS: One or two.

JW: Oh ok, so you don't remember much about that?

RS: I remember uh few images. That was like when you're, you know, infant. But I remember actually one of the things that I remember was watching uh Sylvester and Tweety Bird.

JW: [Laughs]

RS: So they had that cartoon even back then.

JW: Nice.

RS: So that—that was what I remember.

JW: Ok, what about South Africa?

RS: South Africa I remember quite a bit um that I went to kindergarten there. Uh they—they had apartheid.

JW: Oh. Ok.

RS: Over there so obviously we lived in you know with the uh with the white. Uh and then I went to like private school and it was all mostly white and there were some Chinese and Indians.

JW: Mmhmm.

RS: Uh and obviously the blacks or the African Americans, or Africans, were separated but then you know. But it was very—at that time it was obviously very peaceful because they had apartheid.

JW: Mm.

RS: Uh it was nice environment at that time. It's a lot rougher now.

JW: Yeah.

RS: In terms of the crimes and things like that.

JW: Yeah ok—

RS: So you've heard about Oscar Pretorius—Pistorius, the, the blade runner that shot his girlfriend?

JW: What? Ok, no. Sorry, I don't know.

RS: Ok. South—there's a South African Olympian.

JW: Uh-huh.

RS: He lost his legs so he had those artificial...

JW: Oh yeah.

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RS: That's the guy...that's happened in South Africa. He had shot his girlfriend, and one of the things he was saying was, you know, he's-he had a lot of guns because of the crime in the areas.

JW: Oh, did not know that.

RS: Ok, you guys are way into school too much.

JW: [laughs]

RS: You need to uh, you need to uh Google and read all about the news and, you know, random, random useless information.

JW: Oh my god that's crazy.

RS: Current events.

JW: Yeah no, I definitely need to do that more.

RS: And then after that I moved back to Taiwan.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So that's uh lived with my, you know, grandparents, my parents. So that was more of your typical Chinese, Taiwanese growing up.

JW: Ok. Were there any like specific memories you have about Taiwan or like anything that pops out in the brain?

RS: Yeah. Um you know, school. Uh I remember I was very young and I took the bus and I remember, uh you know, there was a lot of street vendors and you would buy soft drinks and snacks and, you know, little, little games, knickknacks, I remember that. Um it was-it was a typical childhood. It was crowded.

JW: Yeah.

RS: It rained a lot, you know, but otherwise, it was-it was fun times.

JW: Sounds like it. So um ... so then when did you move to the United States?

RS: Uh 1978.

JW: Ok.

RS: So my dad got transferred, so the first place I, I came was in Kansas City, Missouri. And I, I do remember I was the only Asian in the entire class.

JW: What was that like?

RS: That was traumatic.

JW: Oh no!

(4:43)

RS: I, I didn't speak—I didn't know—ABC up to the letter F, and it was strange because I actually knew English when I lived in South Africa, but when I went back to Taiwan, I completely forgot it.

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JW: Oh ok.

RS: I was too young, so then I had to relearn it again, and uh I remember the teacher assigned like a buddy that was supposed to like watch over me. Uh but I just remember it was very traumatic uh—and maybe kids understand this—one of the things was—it was just the clothes. ‘Cause... like the American kids I just remember they were very casual. They wore jeans and sneakers, and my parents, you know, for whatever reason they thought ‘Oh, we’re leaving Taiwan, we’re going to America, we gotta buy some really nice, shiny black shoes and...’ And uh the clothes, I mean, I think I remember even at that age very early on, I’m like, ‘Oh my god I can’t believe you’re making me wear this.’ Uh you know, they had like clothes with like Chinese names on it. You were just like ‘Nooooooo.’ So I remember that part of it.

JW: Oh ok. Um do you think that you like learned English, maybe like, faster since you already had like previous exposure—

RS: No. No.

JW:—or were you still—

RS: No. I think I learned English at that time, you know you just, you don’t even think about it. Uh but probably you’re—at that age you’re still so young that you just kinda, you know. It’s almost like you’re learning a, a new language. It’s not like I had a base language.

JW: Oh, ok.

RS: It wasn’t like mentally you, you keep translating.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: That part I do know I talked like, usually if you come to the United States past a certain age, your brain is already thinking in the—in the old language, so everything else you’re kinda translating.

JW: Yeah.

RS: So at that certain age you can tell, at a certain age people will still retain their accent, or they’re mentally they’re still thinking in their native language.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: But I think I came young enough where it, you know, so now I actually think in English. I don’t, I don’t think in Chinese.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Yeah.

JW: So you were...

RS: I was ten years old I think.

JW: Ten years old. Ok, so do you remember your, your assigned buddy or anything? Did you guys become friends?

RS: Yeah his name was J.P.

JW: J.P. That’s cute. [laughs]

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RS: But you know it was traumatic too because I, I was there for one year and then I moved again. So then, so I moved from Kansas City, Missouri to Kansas City, Kansas, and then they hired, they got me another—Now this time that, that school had two Asian guys. One was a Vietnamese guy named Huy Hilvitz [sp]. He was adopted from Vietnam.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: He was uh, you know. And then uh there was another guy his name was Paul Lin, he was Korean. But those were the only two Asian guys in that class, and Huy was assigned to me as my quote unquote buddy.

JW: Oh ok. So did you guys become, like, friends?

RS: We became friends.

JW: Yeah, like solidarity in a sense?

RS: No, no because he was very Americanized.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: I think he- he was adopted very young.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: I mean, I actually went over to his house and it was, like, all American.

JW: Ok.

RS: I, I bet you, he probably, you know, except for the fact that he's Asian in, in, in, in, in you know, physical-ness, he's probably thinking all mostly American.

JW: Probably.

RS: Yeah.

JW: Ok. So did you um ever feel like you were becoming Americanized? Or like, you know, um think that or did you think that you were pretty much, like, Chinese up to a certain point? Or I don't know, you know what I mean? Like, did you ever feel like you were losing your, like, roots or something?

RS: I think I was too young. Uh I think it was more just keep adapting and survival and just so...But I think probably very early on, uh I don't think my Chinese-ness was that intact because you gotta remember I wasn't—I was only in Taiwan for four years.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So, I was [inaudible] by the time I was ten, eleven, twelve, I had actually been in non-Chinese countries—

JW: Right.

RS:—more than that, so um you know that's an interesting question because I never really thought about 'Oh I'm losing my Chinese—I, I remember the first year that I came, actually my Dad bought like all these Chinese books, so during the summer I was actually reading Chinese books. But then I think after two years from that it was—it was more, just, you know, living the American life, American culture.

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(9:31)

JW: Ok. Mm... ok, so then uh where did you move to after Kansas City?

RS: I moved to Chicago, so that was—Chicago was sixth, seventh, and eighth grade.

JW: Ok. Was moving around hard on you guys?

RS: Uh yeah. I think it was hard for my mom, but I think she got used to it. I think it was—now I look back, your typical self-therapy, but when you look back, I think—I think it's tough. I think it's tough 'cause you're constantly adjusting and, you know, you kinda don't have any long-term friends.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Uh but that's, you know, when you're a kid you—there's not much you can do about that.

JW: Right. So, what was uh Chicago like for you guys, then?

RS: Uh I liked it. I think that's probably the first time I kinda felt somewhat um... kinda fit in a little bit. 'Cause Kansas was mostly all white with a few Asians, so when we moved to Chicago the school that I went to had—it was very diverse. We had Filipinos, Korean, Chinese, some Vietnamese, um...so that, that *that* I felt more... where I belonged. And then also the... even the Americans there, I think the school district we lived in was also, you know, American and had, you know, a lot of Jewish community. So it was very diverse and no- it's not like everybody- it, it felt like everybody was different, and so everybody actually fitted in in one way or the other.

JW: Oh ok, that's good. Did you uh always move to like suburban areas or like city-type?

RS: Uh Chicago was kinda a city but even then we were in the suburbs.

JW: Ok.

RS: So, like, actually I had had a conversation with my brother, the high school we went to uh was a little bit more diverse, but it was actually your typical suburban Chicago—Chicago suburban—high school. Uh so I don't—you guys might be a little young, but like it was a typical John Hughes... type high school... You don't even—that doesn't even—

JW: Sorry!

RS: *Sixteen Candles, Breakfast Club...*

JW: Oh, ok I—

RS: Ferris Bueller...

JW: Ok, ok, ok, ok. I got it I got it I got it I got it.

RS: That—those high schools in those movies were actually part of the like the district or, you know, like when we played basketball or soccer we, we'd go to that type of school.

JW: Oh that's cool.

RS: So I can't remember any newer generation of high school comedies. Not like American Pie but, well actually, American—is that in Chicago? I think that might have been Chicago as well, so kin—kinda like that, yeah.

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JW: Ok, um so...oh shoot I forgot what I was gonna say.

GC: Can I ask where in Chicago?

RS: I was—Skokie, so like real close to Northwestern.

GC: Yeah.

JW: Oh yeah, she's from Chicago, so...that's why.

RS: Ok, where, where you live in?

GC: Uh I live near Naperville area.

RS: Ok, Naperville is what, northwest? Ok.

GC: Yeah, yeah.

RS: So you know, Glenbrook North, Zion Township, my brother when—we actually moved back there for a while, my brother went to IMSA. So she knows.

JW: Sorry, not me.

RS: She knows exactly, even if she doesn't know John Hughes, she knows. She knows *Sixteen Candles*, she knows *Breakfast Club*. She knows uh *Pretty in Pink*, *Ferris Bueller*, all those movies. That's, that's, that's, that's, that's, that's... her neck of the woods. [laughs]

JW: Ok. I'll ask you later then. [laughs]

RS: You need to go get those movies and watch it.

JW: No I do, I've, I've been planning on watching those, but school is hard. So how long did you stay in Chicago for?

RS: I was there for about three years, so sixth, seventh, eighth, again, freshman year high school. This is the part where I really hated my parents because they moved *again*.

JW: Oh.

RS: And then we moved to suburban Maryland outside of Washington D.C., and that was again a different school environment. I think even there it was mostly white, some Jewish, and then there's some Asian, but the Asians were more, really more, probably like you in high school. The strivers, you know, really on focused on studying. I mean, it has a very school—very good school district over there so it was very competitive, but I didn't like it 'cause I, I was—I grew up in Skokie, I kinda grew up junior high and high school in that environment which is more blue collar, lower middle class/middle class, whereas I kinda went to a very upper class type environment in high school.

JW: So how did you, like, adjust to that? Or like did you?

RS: Not really.

JW: No?

RS: Uh I mean, I think that high school years I could always look back and I tell my nieces—my other nieces like—if I stayed in Chicago I would have, you know, done this, done that, I would've been popular, right? Whereas when I

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went to another high school where I think the socioeconomic is a little different, and even like the Asians there. I remember in that high school I didn't hang around with the Asians that much because it was, you know, they had their friends, they grew up in that environment and they were more focused on school. And they was—it was also less, there was not as many. Not as diverse per se, but I think now I have a—one of my cousins live there now, now it's, you know, it's even more diverse now just because that area is—kept growing and growing.

(15:10)

JW: Well that's good.

RS: Yeah.

JW: So did you ever or do you remember, like, facing any, like, specific types of discrimination then?

RS: Uh no, not specific. I think when I first came to the States I did feel that I was—and kinda like for them it's kinda odd. 'Cause that first school I went to, they're like they've never seen an Asian guy before, you know? So- so they- but they were typic—very Midwestern, very nice. They were very open. So they weren't kind of uh—so they were all very friendly. Uh and then same thing with the second school in Kansas City, there were other Asians, but again they were Midwestern, well socioeconomic, so they were open, and then uh... so I never felt any overt-type, you know, may- it might have— maybe, you know, there was some ... I, I think they saw me initially more as 'Oh, he's a guest. Let's welcome them.' You know, and plus when you're fourth, fifth, sixth grade, I mean, kids are, at that time, not, not cruel or mean. You know, so.

JW: Ok. Well that's lucky for you.

RS: Yeah. I mean, yeah. I don't recall any traumatic or any specific racism. I mean, they might have thought 'Oh those are some funky clothes you're wearing,' but I don't think that was, you know, based because you're Asian or anything like that. Yeah.

JW: Oh ok. That's really good. So then um after you graduated high school then I guess you, um like, applied to colleges and then—

RS: Right.

JW:—you went to...

RS: I went to UT, yeah.

JW: Yeah, all right, did you apply to anywhere else? Or?

RS: I applied to the University of Illinois. They rejected me. And then uh the only other school I applied was Maryland and I didn't want to stay there, and so the other school that I got in was UT, so off in the sun. Off to Austin.

JW: Why UT?

RS: Uh it's interesting 'cause uh... one of my dad's friends whose daughter went to UT, and she was, she was an accounting major. And actually two of the top accounting schools in the U.S. is Illinois and then UT. And my dad is an accountant, my mom is an accountant. Even though I knew I wasn't want to be an accountant, but they just said 'Oh Austin's a great place. You know, one it's a good school, and it's a great place.' And uh I think, well heck, you know, my parents moved here, moved me around so much I'm going to go off on my own. And so I didn't, I didn't really think of any other schools it was just like someone brought that school up, and I'm like ok that's Texas. You

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know, there's some Romanticism of 'Oh that's Texas,' and uh and so, you know, I think my first choice would have been Illinois, now looking back I'm kind of glad 'cause Austin is a much funner town than Champagne, Urbana. And so I got in, it was, it was no long thought process. It was like 'Hey it's a school not in at home, let's go.' That's it.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Yeah.

JW: So um was there like any- not culture shock, but I guess like differences between Texas and Maryland? Like—

RS: Uh I'm sure there is. I didn't really, again, I didn't really notice it. Uh I remember I applied, we got in, and my dad and I took a trip by the two of us and it was probably around, you know, March. And we came down and it was just like wow, Austin's beautiful. Uh this is a great campus; it's a rich school. You know, I mean, UT has a lot of money. The facilities are really nice. It's sunny, you know, Maryland was still cold. And typical teenage boy, it's like (?), wow look at all these pretty girls, right? And but you know, I probably—that was just kinda more of a impression, uh and so that's why I came down. But I think later on I kinda noticed that, you know, that Texas is definitely a very, you know, kind of a white, you know, it's not as, it's not as diverse, you know. But—but there—and, and even now it's been almost twenty years since I got out. Um I think, you know, it's still not—it's still a very, I would say, a white school. Uh you know, obviously the Texas Admissions and the whole eight percent whatever. I mean, they are trying to diversify, but at that time I think only when I started going to school did I realize oh ok this is, you know, this is Texas. It's still predominantly, you know, pretty white.

(20:02)

JW: Mhmm. So um how was your college life like?

RS: It was great. I loved it. School was, I guess, simpler times. Not as competitive, you know, like you guys. I hear your stories. Uh, I, I, you know, I was able to basically pick and choose what I wanted to do. I was more active in social activities and that, and then there was—I think there actually was, there is a, a, a, a pretty tight knit Asian student population, so I had a lot of fun. I, I really enjoyed it. That kind of made up for the disappointing high school days.

JW: So did you change your major? Did you go in accounting at first? And then?

RS: No, I didn't go on anything. And, I don't—I was typical, you know, I think my parents did not—actually my, my mom and dad almost gave me too much freedom, and I think part of that was probably they felt guilty for moving around, so they let me do whatever I wanted. So I did not have any particular plans in mind. I went to co-, I went to school, I remember taking Engineering Calculus that first year and got a B without really studying, but then realized I don't even want to work that hard to get the A. So next, next semester I took Business Calculus and got an A in that, and then, so no med. Nothing against the medical field.

JW: That's fine.

RS: No engineering. I just kinda cruised. I, I went into business and uh took my first accounting class. That was ok. Took my cost accounting class, forget about that. Took my finance class. It was not that hard. I just ended up being marketing just because it was the easiest, and I was, I was more into social and stuff like that, so. So I was, I was a Business Major.

JW: Ok. So did you have to apply for like the McCombs School? Or not?

RS: It was easy to get in.

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JW: Oh ok.

RS: It's much harder now from what I understand. You can't even get in, so uh like I said, it was a different time.

JW: Ok.

RS: Yeah.

JW: And then um, so what did you do like extracurricular-wise?

RS: Uh let's see. First year I hung around with the guys in the private dorm. Second year, I kind of moved into an apartment and more hung around with like apartment people, and then—uh but then the guys that I met my first year, a lot of them were failing out.

JW: Oh.

RS: So that was ok.

JW: Ok.

RS: And then my second, second year I got, I got into more— then I sort of quote unquote discovered the Asian community. So I joined a Asian Business Student Association and then so I took officer positions there, and so I was like a Vice President of a membership, so that was kinda fun, you know. Like, hey you're in the business school, come join us. Through that. Actually the organization now is pretty—now I look back when we first started, and now it's like a pretty strong organization in the business school.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: And they actually do internships and business, you know, trips, so it's, it's kinda interesting how that started out in infancy. And then after that year I met, through that organization, I met all the different like leaders of the other Asian student association like the Korean Student Association, Vietnamese Student Association, all that. And then like there was about twelve of us and our senior year we uh, we formed an Asian frat. So I was, I'm a founder of an Asian frat.

(23:48)

JW: Dude, that's so cool.

RS: Yup.

JW: How did you guys decide to start it?

RS: Well, actually there was two other guys, two other guys there. They were with like...uh for—it was just like a, like a Chinese student undergrad association.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: At that time, they do like parties and dances.

JW: Yeah.

RS: And so those, those two guys somehow met—'cause at that time back in eighty-eight or eighty- nine, the only Asian fraternity system was in California. So there was back then there was like not—only schools that had Asian fraternities were in California.

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JW: Oh that's interesting.

RS: And so two of the guys, you know, they knew friends or whatever that went to Berkeley or UCLA and they met these guys and they said, 'Hey you need to start a chapter.' So those two guys in, in Texas we knew and he— they— kinda recruited some other guys. So like there's twelve of us, twelve or thirteen of us. So, actually this is documented history. We were the first Asian fraternity outside the state of California.

JW: That's really cool.

RS: Yeah, and so.

JW: And you started it. Or—

RS: Well, I was one of the founders.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Yeah, yeah, so actually like in Austin there are now other fraternities, like Asian fraternities. There are other Asian sororities. But in Austin, Lambda Phi Epsilon we were the founders and it's kinda weird because when they rush new, new classes—and I had never rushed. We were just the founders, so some of the stuff I'm like I would never join a frat, you know, now—but like so, every, like the twelve or thirteen members, the new rushees you're assigned to a fam—they call it a family.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: The family—the word for family in Japanese is called 'ouji,' so actually I have all these kids under me. Like oh god I'm part of the Su ouji. And so my—they know my name, they know my history.

JW: Oh my god.

RS: So a couple months ago, I went to a wedding, like my friend's second wedding. And like, my friend's, you know, wife's uh nephew went to UT, and he's like, 'Oh my god! I'm here with the founders!' And they like took pictures and he tagged them and put them on Facebook because he was so excited, and I'm just like 'All right, all right.' But you kinda know you made it, when your fraternity has been barred from the school for liquor or alcohol death, related death.

JW: Oh my gosh.

RS: We had an alcohol-related death like five years ago.

JW: Oh god.

RS: It was actually a kid here in Houston. I think he's Vietnamese or Laotian, and during Rush or whatever he got... alcohol poisoning and died. So they actually have been kicked off of campus.

JW: Really?

RS: Yeah, and, but—

JW: Oh god.

RS: My neph—my niece—my wife's niece is a freshman at UT. I told her, 'Stay away from the fraternity! Go to the parties but stay away. Don't become a, you know, don't—stay away from that.' But they are saying they are trying

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to get reinstated on school. And actually prior to that, like six, seven years ago, you know you kinda made it when even in the Daily Texan, they have these polls like ‘the best parties,’ it was Lambda Phi Epsilon Halloween Party.

JW: Nice. Look at you.

RS: Like the white people go there because they’ll, like, get rappers and I mean, I, but I was, you know, I was busy with wife and kids. I was like, [overlapping laughter] you know.

JW: So um like fraternities and sororities they have like a, not a personality, but some of them have like certain, like, they’re known for certain things. So when you guys started it, what did you guys want to be known as? Or like, what was your, like, goal for the fraternity?

RS: Uh well, just because there wasn’t one, and, you know, like, in my mind it was kinda like, well, you can be like—because it was different ‘cause we, the founders, were all already established. We were all, you know, either leaders or presidents or vice presidents of other organizations.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So, it was, in my mind, it was more kinda like, ‘Ok, here’s, you know, a, a group that you can say foster leadership among men,’ right? I think within a year or two you can see it was kinda became oh, I wanna meet girls, or let’s throw parties. So, I kinda, you know, then I was gone. I left the school, so and the first two years or three years when I went back I still knew some of the people, but I kinda just, you know, it was kinda like ok this, I started it. That’s fine. It grew, you know, grew on its own. Um I think that certain ideal, I think people kinda pay lip service to that, but you know, later on when I went back you can tell it was kinda like people want to join a frat because then they—but I think more than anything else now it’s really more about just friendship and brotherhood. I think they take it a little—it becomes a little too insulated. You know, I mean, the fun part about what I did was in college was, I could say I had literally four distinct group of friends. You know, sort of the private dorm freshman, and I was more all American. Again, in that, in that environment I was the only Chinese guy again. And the apartments was more, you know, people living in the apartments—independent, plus, and then the Asian Business Student Association that was— had— had one distinct characteristic, and the fraternity had one distinct characteristic. I think like just my thought of, you know, the kids who join a frat it’s kinda—and the frat or sorority—they kinda suck you in.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: You know, then you kind of close off. I mean, granted you probably do make really good friendships, and you can tell they really love—you know, people who really love it, really love it.

JW: Yeah.

RS: But for me, it was, you know, I like, I like a little bit more diversity.

JW: Ok. So did you um where did you meet your wife? Did—was she—she also go to UT? Or was she—?

RS: No.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: No I met her here.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: And she was actually a friend—a friend’s sister.

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JW: Oh ok.

RS: So you know network, you know?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

RS: Not like Facebook these days or, or you know. Back then I—when, when we date we still gotta like pay ‘cause you didn’t just [overlapping laughter] you know, no, no match.com or things like that. Like that. Yeah.

JW: Ok, so then after you graduated you went back to Chicago?

RS: I went to Chicago four years. My brother was high—in high school at that time.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: My parents got transferred back. For some reason they kept the house in Chicago, and they’re like, well here’s a house. Go live in it. And so I, I was there four years. He finish—he was—he went to IMSA, uh he finished four years, and that time was like, ‘I’m going out to California. I’m not—too cold.’

JW: Yeah.

RS: Too cold. So he, when he decided to go to California, uh I had a big dilemma where, where to do—where to go—and you know part of it was most of your best friends are your friends from college.

(31:01)

JW: Mhmm.

RS: And a lot of them were from Houston, so I came here. And that’s when I met, met my wife.

JW: Oh ok, so then in Chicago what was uh your, like, first job outta college, then?

RS: It was—my first job was a temp job, was I was in the men’s department for Lord and Taylor. I was selling suits, so that was, that was a temporary job until—and I was interviewing—and then so I guess my first official job uh is as a credit analyst with a commercial bank. Uh it was, it was the old Sears Bank.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: They had a bank in the Sears Tower building, and then they got bought out by Old Kent Bank. So I was a credit analyst. I was reviewing like loan credit worthiness for middle market businesses.

JW: Was that fun?

RS: I think it was actually very good training.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Uh again, I think since I moved around so much I had a very, like, I probably have ADD. I was, I was you know, I didn’t see myself being a banker long-term, so I—but looking back, I think that was very good training in terms of understanding cash flow businesses and all that. Uh but then I just, young, you know, the bank merged with another bank, and then they would say, ‘You are, you guys have to go out to Rollingbrook,’ or something like that.

GC: Bolingbrook.

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RS: RoI— r—somewhere on the west and I'm like, 'No man, I was working downtown. I was,' you know, 'taking the L.' I, you know, and so I just quit and then I...young, I was just interviewing, and then I got a job with AT&T.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: And I was a long distance salesperson for businesses.

JW: What was that like?

RS: It was interesting. That's where you get your little glimpse of uh where there's no office. You get a computer. You make whatever you make.

JW: Oh.

RS: And so, and then typical of a lot of young people. We didn't work 'cause they never watched—I mean, once a month you had a sales meeting. Not that we didn't do anything, but.

JW: No, right.

RS: It, the job, you know, it paid fairly well. Uh you learned a lot of sales, but when they say 'pounding the pavement,' we literally did that.

JW: Mm.

RS: We would go down to like an office park and just start knocking on doors of different businesses and say, 'Hi, how are you? I'm with AT&T. Who has your long distance service?' You know, at that time, again you guys weren't even born, probably. Uh before they had T-Mobile and then AT&T and they had—they deregulated it. There was deregulation, so all of a sudden, long distance you could get it with any company.

JW: Mm.

RS: And you probably don't even heard—haven't—heard of it, like MCI, Sprint, cable wire— basically, it's like your electricity.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Do you guys get your own electricity?

JW: Yeah.

RS: Ok so it's not like you just have to get Reliant. You can get TXU, Amigo, Reliant, TXU, whatever. So that was what we were doing.

JW: So um I mean, I guess you can't be shy when you're working in that type of environment.

RS: No, no. You have to like knock on the door and say, 'Hi, how are you?' And [they're] like 'What do you want?' 'I'm with AT&T.' You know, so...

JW: So did you have to go out of your comfort zone, or was that more like you were already, like, very social?

RS: No I think I'm—deep down I am not actually a extrovert person. And for whatever reason, uh I guess either subconsciously I knew... there's some value to, to being extrovert, or there's some value in terms of um social skills. Or I was too lazy to, like, do like a strictly analyst job. Ok, so I've had that conversation with my brother. My brother he's in IT. He's in web development. He can't stand people, you know. Like he'd rather sit in front of a

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computer and solve a puzzle. To him coding's like a puzzle. And so, you know, he'll have very little interaction with people. Um I'm probably actually more like that deep down, but I think when you age, you know, you soften up a little bit, or you change a little bit. But I always realized—I think I always knew that being—having—interpersonal skills were important. You know, so I kinda gravitated to marketing, I got a history degree, you know. Even though I, you know, went to law school, didn't even practice. I mean, now I'm in sales. I mean, full commission sales.

(35:36)

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So sometimes I wonder why I do that to myself.

JW: Wait, did you—you said you went to law school?

RS: I went to law school.

JW: You—so you took the LSAT.

RS: Took the LSAT.

JW: And you went to—

RS: After, after my brother finished high school. After I worked four years in Chicago.

JW: Uh-huh.

RS: I didn't know what to do, so I just went to law school.

JW: Oh my God. Ok, wait so after you decided to uh do the AT&T sales thing, you were like, 'Oh, like, lawyer?' And then you took an LSAT?

RS: No, I didn't say 'lawyer.' It was more like, 'Oh my brother is gonna leave. He's gonna go to California. What do I do next?' And, you know, I don't want to go to business school, 'cause I already went to busin—you know, had a marketing degree, and uh I, again, I had—I'm clueless, no plan in life. It was more like here's something interesting. Try it.

JW: Ok.

RS: And then I finished law school but I ended up not even practicing law.

JW: But didn't...? Ok, wait so what law school did you go to then?

RS: U of H.

JW: U of H? Ok.

RS: So he went to California, I came here. So that's when I—when you—if you asked me when I first came to Houston, that's in 1994. I, you know, finished college, finished four years, work experience, took care of my brother, did my family obligation, said 'Where am I gonna go next? And what's the reason to go?' So I applied to U of H, got in, came here, met my wife. So I've been here since 1994.

JW: Wow. Um well, since you moved around so much before, what made you stay in Houston for such an extended period of time?

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RS: Love. I met my wife, and I ain't going anywhere.

JW: Ok.

RS: She's uh Vietnamese. She's been here since—been in the States—since seventy-five since the Fall of Saigon. Uh I think they went to Palestine, Texas like through sponsorship and then they realized that's too small of a town. Houston's where all the Vietnamese are, so she's been here in Houston since seventy-seven.

JW: Oh wow.

RS: And she's from a big, Vietnamese, very tight knit Catholic family. Her mom and all her siblings are here, and so once I met her, she's kinda like, 'I ain't going anywhere else.' So it's either, you know, someone else, and yeah, it—I can say it's love. I mean.

JW: Ok, well that's nice. [laughs]

RS: It's very nice.

JW: So she went to UH?

RS: She went to UH.

JW: And then ok, so what was she studying at the time?

RS: Marketing.

JW: Oh ok. That's a nice common point you guys can connect—

RS: Right. And I think...man, this is being recorded. I, I think she was the, you know, typical, she was more like 'I'm marketing.' Marketing doesn't get much respect. It is like the easiest major in— even in the business school, uh but, you know, it's generally for people who are more—who don't want to study as much. [laughs]

JW: Ok. So, why did you choose not to practice law after four years of law school?

RS: Uh well, I think I went to law school without really knowing what I wanted to do. It was more like, interest. And I think, I feel kinda fortunate 'cause I—at that time in life, you were able to still explore and didn't get uh stuck per se, or you didn't have to make that major commitment. 'Cause I remember, and I'll tell you this: I got out. My student loan balance was only eighteen thousand dollars.

JW: That's really good.

RS: That's really good. So, and then, costs of living. I saved up from money—some money—at AT&T, so, you know, costs of living here in Houston was cheap. I had an apartment with three hundred and eighty dollars and an efficiency, you know. So, I was able to do that experience without, you know, coming out with—

JW: Mhmm.

RS: God, you know, some people coming out with maybe forty-five, sixty thousand? I mean, I talked to one of my ex-interns. He's gonna come out of four years of joint law school and MBA. It's gonna be like two hundred thousand dollars in debt. I mean, so he had to, he had to get a job. So I was able to not force myself where I had to practice law.

JW: Ok.

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RS: And so and probably it was...It was interesting studying it and... probably commercial law was interesting.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: But I probably—I'll, I'll say one thing is because I didn't plan it, I didn't have like parents who were in it, this wasn't my community. So it wasn't as though someone said 'Oh, come—here, let me introduce you to this lawyer, and he's in real estate law.' And do that, so I had a—it was both a positive and a negative, so I just got a job that, that someone was willing to hire that I had a legal background, and uh I just worked.

(40:29)

JW: So, what did you end up doing then?

RS: Uh strange...I went to an accounting firm. It was consulting. You know, they, they were hiring lawyers because they do tax consulting. So I ended up joining the (?) state and local tax practice, and so the whole job was helping companies in Houston reduce their state and local tax liability.

JW: Ok.

RS: And I was in the income franchise tax, so, you know, state income tax, state franchise tax. And so they had tax strategies and a lot of that is dri-driven by law, tax law, IRS code stuff, so and I, I studied tax law and actually did pretty well on tax. I did pretty well on the commercial side of the law, uh and I was interested. So at that time they were hiring lawyers, and so I did that and once I paid off my—I was there for three years, basically to pay off my student loan.

JW: Mhmm. And then after those three years?

RS: After that I told my wife that I'm still young. I'm thirty, thirty-one. I gotta do something on my own, do something entrepreneurial. If I don't do it now, I'll never do it. So I shocked her and I said I want to get into commercial real estate. And she asked me, 'How much does it pay?' I said, 'It doesn't.' She says, 'What do you mean?' 'It's full commission.' So I, I actually went—I went right into the purest of pure full commission sale—commercial real estate.

JW: Was she happy with that?

RS: Uh she was like, 'Why?' You know. But I think unlike some other—I mean, we've talked to other friends—a lot of her friends are like, 'Why are you letting your husband do that?' Uh but, you know, maybe it's love, maybe it's foolish. She said, 'You want to try, give it a try.' And uh she hasn't had to work in twelve years. So...

JW: Nice. Wait, so why did you, all of a sudden, want to go into something entrepreneurial?

RS: I don't know. I think I read enough stuff about the American Dream that I was brainwashed, you know. I—I think—I can tell you this, I—again, the real estate side was more probably boredom and running away from certain things. The bank is like, ok, after one year, you're like, 'Oh, so this is how the bank works.' But I didn't—I didn't make a commitment or I didn't say, 'Oh I want to climb the ladder, become a banker.' I was more like constantly trying to do something different. Sales—'Oh ok, this is AT&T, oh ok this is how these people climb the ladder, you know, get into department heads and whatever.'

JW: Mhmm

RS: And it was constantly just trying different things, and so I, I was more wanting to get away from KP&G. Um 'cause I just kinda saw how that career track is—actually I still have friends who are there, and I'm glad I left

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because after a while—be careful about what you guys do! Or what you choose ‘cause if you do it and you do it over and over again, after a while it gets old and you gotta really love it. That’s my only advice, uh so I mean, I have people who now, you know, they’ve been doing—well I left for twelve years—they still, still doing sales and use tax.

JW: Mm.

RS: And sales and use tax. Man, after one year I mean, after, you know, for, for the next twelve years I mean, and you can tell they’re like, ‘I hate what I do, but I can’t do anything about it. I have kids going to college.’ You know, and then they’re, they’re too old or too scared to change careers. So I think I kinda smelled that. I kinda sensed that early on, so I left.

JW: So how did you get the resources to start up your own business then? Or like your own real est—

RS: I didn’t. I didn’t. Uh I ended up joining a company, a national company, and that was like a— you’re like an independent contractor.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So it’s kinda like joining a RE/MAX or, but this was a commercial company, a national company, and it’s like a fifty-fifty split. They give you an office, a phone. You provide, provide your own computer. They give you a, you know, a phone book, and you just make phone calls. ‘Do you want to sell? Do you want to buy? Good deals to get.’ Uh so it didn’t cost any money.

(44:49)

JW: Oh ok.

RS: It’s just your time. And uh that was probably the toughest year, I mean, I’ll give my wife credit. I made four thousand five hundred dollars that year. So, she was working, I started in February. In March she got laid off, and then in November she got pregnant with our first kid, Francesca.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So that was the year. That was like, if I look back, you know, so most entrepreneurial, you know, small business owners, they all have a story—or even the brokers—they’ll have that story where ‘Oh we were dirt poor. I was making no money. We were about to, like, go bankrupt.’ You know, so that was our year like that.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: And then it, it—you put in the time. Eventually it, it, it paid off.

JW: So did you have any idea of *how* you were going to do it before you, like, went into real estate?

RS: No. And I look back and I pro-, probably, one thing I...I should’ve done was—and then the thing is, at that time, not, not everybody had the luxury of time. So when I was thirty-one I said I took three months, and whatever company says ‘ok,’ go with it. And I went with it. Uh if I look back, I probably would’ve done a little more research. Find out what area in real estate I like, what kind of practice—is it brokerage, is it leasing, is it development. That probably would’ve been a better decision.

JW: Mhmm.

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RS: But again, it's, you know, I, I think for me, everything was: I had to learn it on my own. And if I have any gripes against my parents it's, you know, I mean they—it's not like, certain families, you know, I don't know, it's you know, certain families like ok, if this family comes from a family of doctors, right, they can give you advice, right?

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Or if someone's an attorney or his dad's an attorney, uncle's an attorney, you know you can—I, I was more like the one that had to find everything out on my own. So no, that—a lot of the stuff I'm—I, I—it was just kinda go as you go along. But overall it's been a, you know, it's been a decent decision from a standpoint of enjoy it more than if it was sort of a nine to five job. Could've—could I have planned it better? Yeah, but you know, life doesn't happen.

JW: Right. I mean, you're, you're doing well now, so.

RS: Eh, well you know. There's, there's ups and downs, yeah. 'Cause it is a, you know, like I said, it's you're entrepreneurial full commission. You gotta rely on the market, but overall I think now I pref—I rather been here than versus like, let's say in a law firm or in an accounting firm.

JW: Mhmm. So um you wanted to do something entrepreneurial, but like, why real estate? There's like other things you could've done, right? So what made you interes—

RS: Uh I think part of it was uh, you know, again, I didn't, I didn't have other people tell me this 'cause usually peop—you know, I've heard many stories in the real estate community.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: You know, it's like, 'how did you get into real estate?' It's like, 'Oh, well my uncle did real well' or 'this guy says you have the talent to do this.' I think for me mentally it was more like I, I had—I knew—some friends from college, and most of them were Asian, and like a lot of the people I knew uh of that generation they owned businesses. And when they had extra money, they're not like the stock market type of people, you know. They're business people, and so the busi—either they reinvest in business, or they buy real estate. So if you're a restaurant, and you do well, well you lease a space and you open up Chinese buffet per se. And then you make a lot of money and then you buy the whole shopping center. And so, and then I, I had a real good friend from UT, you know, her family was in plastics. They made—manufactured—Houston's one of the few places that actually can afford to do manufacturing, and they don't do it that much anymore, but like they made a lot of money in plastics so they bought their own warehouse. And they needed storage, so they bought another warehouse. And then he made a lot of money, so they got invited to become a, you know, a shareholder on one of those Chinese banks on Bellaire. And they made their loan on an apartment building and said, 'Hey do you wanna buy it,' and so he bought an apartment building. You know, so I was like, ok, rich people go into real estate, so get into real estate. And so that, that was the impetus to get into real estate.

JW: Oh ok. So how did you, like, how—what do you do in real estate? Like, how do you get buyers or people who want to—?

RS: You hit the pavement. You pound—you make phone calls—you start meeting people. So like for my business, I ended up, again, I- without knowing, without doing any research, I initially wanted to do like shopping centers because I thought Asian people own shopping centers.

JW: Yeah.

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RS: Uh again, I think if I—if I wasn't kinda in a rush or knew better, I would've probably got into that field. The company I hired, I hired said, 'No you can't do shopping center. You gotta do apartments.'

JW: Oh.

RS: So I ended up—and so now I ended up learning apartments, but what would (?) you say, how do you know these people? So basically you just research who owns apartments. Start picking phone calls. Like ok, I'm assuming some owner owns this little apartment building. That, that's, that's something what you would do. Say, 'Hey, you know I know you own this apartment building. Are you interested in buying some more?'

JW: Mm. Ok.

RS: 'Are you interested in selling?' And so before you know it, you kind of know who the owners are, you know. That's, that's the rule of a broker.

JW: Interesting, so um do you think you're going to stick with this? Or do you want to do something different? Like—

RS: Yeah I'm going to, I'm going to stick with this. I actually had, had probably I would say, three years ago when the downturn came, I thought 'Oh I hate real estate. These people—they're all, they're all liars, you know.' And, and but I've done it for so long that now there's some—'cause not everybody can get in this field. Not everybody can even last twelve years that have [this] type of knowledge and the network and people, so I'm gonna—I'll, I'll do this probably for the rest of my life.

JW: Ok.

RS: And, and the other part that I'm doing is uh...Andrea—I'm helping her start her little business.

(51:10)

JW: Oh, what did she start?

RS: Uh well, she doesn't like real estate.

JW: Yeah.

RS: So I told her, you know—and real estate is really cutthroat—

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Uh actually it's not very female-friendly. Ok, I mean it's like—it's kinda of—there's like a, you know, if you talk about race-relations or whatever, it is kind of a more of an Old Boys network a little bit.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Uh and so she is gonna—she started her little boutique insurance business.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Yeah, so she's, you know, Mei—Mei is second grade.

JW: Yeah.

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RS: So now, and this one, again, uh as far as business goes, there's not a lot of—you don't have to lease an office space. She's, she's doing life insurance and disability income insurance.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: For families, you know, women professionals, business owners, and just, just families.

JW: Oh that's cool.

RS: So she just meets housewives or, you know, working moms, and just makes sure—and part, part of the inspiration was because when I started making money and then when Mei—Mei was—when she was pregnant with the second one—

JW: Mhmm.

RS: She's like 'I'm a stay at home mom, Rob works, what—what happens if something happens to him.'

JW: Mm.

RS: So she actually got the life insurance for me and the disability income insurance, so she kinda like thought about that too, you know, make that into a business.

JW: Oh ok, and that's in the works right now? Or?

RS: Yeah, well they just finished—she just finished her little website.

JW: Ok.

RS: And uh she signed up with—and she's more—she's kinda like the—so the stuff I learned from real estate she's doing too. She's kinda like, well, it's a little different there 'cause she can pick her company she wants to work with.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So like last week she went to Ohio to meet with one of the insurance company she signed up. Like a—, another life insurance company she meet—so she's gonna meet with like three or four—

JW: Oh ok.

RS: —and have a pool of companies she likes to work with. That she thinks is, you know, good companies, and so that's—I'm helping her with that.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So her job is real easy. Just, you know, have coffee with girlfriends, go to the, like, women's club. She says there's a—there's like a mommy's club, you know.

JW: Really?

RS: Yeah there's like a lot of moms who are new moms and they, you know, like—they may not—a lot of people may not have aunts and grandmas around.

JW: Yeah.

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RS: And so it's like well, what do you do? You know, what do you do with doctors, who do you with, you know, what do you with life insurance? What do you do with uh, you know, what, what kind of child seat would you buy? It's called a mommy's club.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So those are kind of stuff she, she, she'll, she'll network and...

JW: Oh ok, that sounds good.

RS: Yeah, and then, you know, she can pick up the kids whenever she wants.

JW: Yeah.

RS: You know.

JW: Very flexible.

RS: Very flexible.

JW: Oh ok. That's great.

RS: So that again, that's kind of—so that's the next evolution of, you know, when you're a little bit entrepreneurial you'll start—you can design—you can pick—now this one, you know, I mean. I, I wish twelve years ago, I would've thought more out in terms of what kind of real estate business I want to do.

JW: But it turned out.

RS: Yeah it turned out all right.

JW: Yeah.

RS: Yeah.

JW: Ok. So then I guess with your family, um do you speak to like your kids in English, then?

RS: Yeah.

JW: Or is it Vietnamese, or?

RS: Yeah, it's a, it's an English household.

JW: Ok.

RS: Uh Andrea speaks Vietnamese to her mom and her re—, family. And her family she speaks English too. She speaks a little bit of Vietnamese to, to the girls. I speak, unfortunately, mostly English.

JW: Ok.

RS: Very little Chinese. You know, a few vocabularies, but not like...

JW: Ok. So...

RS: 'Cause it's weird because Andrea and I speak English.

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JW: Yeah.

RS: So we don't have a common language besides English.

JW: Right. So, did you, did you forget a lot of it? Or?

RS: The Chinese?

JW: Yeah.

RS: It's, it's weird because I speak more Chinese now from—on—a business setting.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: There's a lot of apartment buyers and investors who are actually Chinese.

(54:52)

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Like the first generation that came to Houston were either the Hong Kong, and then second generation is like Taiwan and now most of the investors are from China.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: And they have a lot of money, I mean they're like cash.

JW: Right.

RS: So just yesterday I was walking a property and, you know, I was speaking—one guy speaks Cantonese, one guy speaks Mandarin—

JW: Uh-huh.

RS: Well the other one speaks Mandarin. Actually uh no but no one is Mandarin from Taiwan, and the other one is Mandarin from China. So we were all speaking Chinese, and I was the worst Chinese speaking guy, but they were like, 'Oh you speak great! Oh, you're so young. You speak Chi—' And you know they're like 'Oh American kids, ABCs, they don't speak Chinese.' But I was able to speak fluent.

JW: Did you have to like learn special real estate terms or anything?

RS: Actually I'm—I—It was funny because I remember when I was at Marcus—when I was at my company, my brokerage firm, you know, we were in these cubicles.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: You know, we were making phone calls.

JW: Yeah.

RS: And everyone was making fun of me. They're like, 'Oh yeah, Robert would be like speaking Chinese and next thing you know were—earnest money contract (gibberish) appraisal' cause I, I didn't know the words—Chinese words for that.

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JW: Right.

RS: Uh and so, I—I—you know it was funny ‘cause some of those words, if I want to get better, uh I could just you know Google translate and get it. But I actually think that the Chinese investors like it that I’m not a hundred percent Chinese. They kind of like ‘Oh, he’s actually American. And he knows all the Americans, and yes, he doesn’t speak’—I—we speak enough where we can, you know. If I speak fluent Chinese, they probably wouldn’t even trust me as much. And from that—it’s kind of a weird dynamic.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: It’s kind of like, it’s kind of like uh, if I, you know, come here, I don’t want someone exactly like me. I want someone who can bridge me to the other side.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: The fact that I, I speak some of their language, but I’m more fluent in the apartment world language.

JW: Yeah.

RS: They’re like ‘No it’s ok. You don’t need to—I understand appraisal what it means, I understand survey. I don’t need you to speak fluent.’

JW: Ok.

RS: ‘Cause they—they’re business people. They, they know English.

JW: Ok. That’s interesting.

RS: Yeah. It’s not like I’m doing social work where someone’s a refugee and speaks no language.

JW: Right. Ok, that’s cool. Or, that’s like an interesting dynamic.

RS: Yeah.

JW: Between.

RS: It is, it is pretty interesting.

JW: Yeah. So do you focus mainly around Chinatown area, or like?

RS: Well, I’m starting to, because, and it’s actually kind of strange ‘cause when I was in apartment business I actually thought of myself more just I’m an apartment broker, right?

JW: Mhmm.

RS: And then there’s some Chinese investors. Because to be honest with you, you can either be a Chinatown broker per se and then you’re doing houses, you’re doing a little bit of everything, but you’re not necessarily a specialist. Uh or like if you were a leasing agent in, in Chinatown, like, Americans not going to hire you for other parts of Houston. So I, I was more just of an apartment guy, and so my clients were all over and the Chinese was just a subset.

JW: Oh ok.

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RS: Ok, uh and then—but ever since I left the company, now I am actually embracing my Chinese roots a little bit because one, there's the opportunities are there.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: There's more and more Chinese investors, and then there's also a lot of Chinese banks. And then I think now—and I haven't really marketed myself, but I think I'm missing an opportunity. So now I'm making little bit more connections with like the Chinese banks. Like you go down Bellaire, you know those Chinese banks.

JW: Yeah.

RS: So, I mean, I'm like, why not try to get a bigger share of that business? 'Cause really there is no apartment broker who's Chinese.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: And there's no apartment broker that has my connection with sort of the American community. And so occasionally you see like a residential broker like selling an apartment, and I'm like I need to go market myself because if they knew me they're not gonna use those other guys.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So that's, that's, that's the thought process. But I'm not like going to go do other stuff in Chinatown.

JW: Right.

RS: Because I, I'm not going to do leasing. I'm not going to do shopping center. I'm gonna just to do apartments.

JW: Ok.

RS: Yeah.

JW: So when did you leave the company?

RS: Uh I started my own business 2010. Su Real Estate Group, so.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Yeah.

JW: How did you—mm how like how did you do that? Like, how did you start your own—

RS: It was hard. It was just more like ok, the business is dead. The market is dead. Uh I'm not going to stay with this company and give half my commission, or you know, that's, that's the thought.

(59:33)

JW: Yeah.

RS: And then at that time I had one client that I helped him buy. And so, I ended up helping him buy last year—the last three or four years. So uh how? You just kinda like, you know, call my brother, 'Hey, how do I do a website?' And mine is actually very simple. I didn't even design it. It was just on Google.

JW: Mhmm.

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RS: You know, my wife's we actually, you know, hired someone. Uh and then I, I think because I did it for nine years, and I already had a database and I had a few clients, it wasn't that hard. And I—and even then I was—ended up the last couple years just helping one client buy.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: So I think, actually this year, the market actually, and I'm getting probably boring you with economic market—

JW: No no.

RS: The markets picked back up and Houston is doing very well.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: And so, and then now I'm gonna—I'm gonna really gonna do this, so I'll probably do a little bit more marketing campaign. I think more just getting my name out.

JW: Yeah.

RS: 'Cause some—not everybody know—people who knew me, and some people who even knew me thought I was out of the business because I was focusing with one client. I was helping him buy a lot of apartment complexes.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So, so that's the kind of—if you're in that kind of professional businesses, uh part of it is, you know, how to brand yourself, how to market, how to get your name known. Uh so I'm still learning that.

JW: Oh ok. Well that's cool that you have your own business.

RS: Yeah, it's, it's a headache too. You know, sometimes there are days where I'm like, 'Oh, why can't someone just pay me six figures, nine to five, go home, give me four, five weeks vacation.' I mean, there are times where you're like that. But so but I think Andrea and I even when, when, when she was thinking about, you know, whether she wants to go back to work.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: She's like, and you will have this feeling too later on, 'Why? Why do I want to go back to work?' When you have kids and whatever, you know?

JW: Yeah

RS: She's like, 'I don't—why do I want to go back to work?' Especially if you don't have to.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: And so, so for us it's really more like freedom, lifestyle. Now granted we have different kinds of risk, right?

JW: Yeah.

RS: You know. I mean, she's had to learn how to budget my budget.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: Because I'll, I'll have months where I have no income and then, commission.

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JW: Mhmm.

RS: So that's, that's a little—so that's where you're—when you're self-employed or any other business, but then you know even if you're, see even if you want to be a dentist or doctor down the road, you're going to have to learn managing cash flows.

JW: Right.

RS: Insura—I mean, there's the practice of medicine and then there's the practice of the business.

JW: Yeah, exactly.

RS: Yeah.

JW: Ok. So what was she doing before um, like where was she working before she had the kids and everything?

RS: She was uh with BMC Software.

JW: Oh.

RS: So that was like a big software company here in Houston.

JW: Mhmm.

RS: It was uh like a mainframe database-type company. It's, it's a pretty well-known company here in Houston.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: So she was in the marketing department.

JW: Yeah.

RS: But, so she got laid off after the tech crash.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: She was in marketing, so when there ever there's a recession, it's always the marketing people that get let go.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Because they're really non-essential, you know. So, but she's never, she's never gone back to work.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Until now—

JW: Until now.

RS: Now it's—you know, she'll, she'll—it's not like a, 'I gotta go to an office' type setting. She works at the home.

JW: Oh ok.

RS: Yeah.

JW: So it's, like, really nice for her. Not too much of a transition then?

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RS: Well she's learning her, her stuff, her business. But yeah, it's, it's pretty—very flexible.

JW: Ok. That's great. Um ok, well, I think—Ok, I think that's good. Thank you so much for doing this.

RS: Ok.

JW: I'm going to stop recording now.

RS: All righty.

JW: Ok.

(1:03: 21)

[The recorder is turned off, the interview ends]