

A Second Life

By Elisabeth Ko

My grandfather, Kin Ko, was born on September 30, 1938, to Ko Liah Pi and Ko Lin Chao. He was born in a rural area in Central Taiwan, called Hwa Tan, which means “flower garden,” though there were no flowers there. Where he lived, there was no running water, electricity, gas, or toilets. The hygiene and sanitation was very poor.

“It looked like America five centuries ago,” he said, “It was all very backwards.”

Kin lived with his mother, father, and four siblings, though his father died when Kin was three and his sister died when she was only seven.

His parents’ occupation was farming, as it had been in his family for over 150 years. They grew rice and vegetables. His family was middle-class, so they always had enough to eat, but couldn't afford fancy things.

One of his most distinct memories of his childhood was when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese in 1941. Every morning he climbed a tree and looked up at the bomb-carrying aircrafts that zoomed overhead. Fortunately, his family was safe from any bombing. When he was little, Kin didn't have any toys or many friends. He stayed home and helped with milking and feeding their cow and many other daily farming tasks. He stayed close to his family with his siblings and only ventured out of his home for school. Kin went to a public school with his siblings and enjoyed it very much. Even though his school didn't have some key elements, like a play area, Kin was always the number one student in his class and was a bookworm. This was one of the reasons he was his grandpa’s favorite grandchild.

In 1961, Kin graduated college at the age of 23 as a mechanical engineer. After this, Kin served his compulsory military service for one year as a second lieutenant. When he returned to Taiwan, Kin found a job as a shipyard engineer at the age of 24. He loved this job, and he received a lot of valuable training and made many friends with his coworkers there. He was paid an equivalent of \$30 American per month, which compared to the \$20 dollar monthly wage of an average worker in that time, he was well paid. After working as a shipyard engineer for a year, Kin made a decision that would changed his life forever. He would study abroad in America.

Many people in Taiwan wanted to come to the United States. There were many Publications that gave information about America’s college applications. Kin found a college in Missouri that boasted being tuition free. Because he didn't have a lot of money, free tuition was important to Kin. He applied to this college

and he was accepted! Kin read all sorts of books and documents about America in the library in preparation for his trip.

During that time in Taiwan, there was no freedom, no liberty, poor quality schools, and the economy was struggling. These were the main reasons Kin and a lot of other people wanted to move to America. They went to America for the things their country lacked. They desired a new life.

Kin packed lots of rice for his trip to America, because he thought that there was none in America, only wheat and bread. He also packed lots of eggs and soy sauce. He didn't know much about the United States, so he thought this was necessary. He brought a rice cooker, his clothes, and his school textbooks. All in all, he had ten bags full of his belongings.

In November of 1963, when he was 25, Kin left for America. The ship he took was a cargo ship converted into a passenger ship. It was traveling to Portland, Oregon to collect grain and sell it. Kin didn't know anyone on the ship, so he was very lonely. Kin boarded the ship and it stopped in Tokyo for a week and Kohama, Japan, for a week. Every time the ship stopped, Kin and the other students aboard explored the areas. When they stopped in Tokyo, the 1964 Olympics were going on, so it was very busy there. At night, the students came back to the ship to sleep. On the voyage across the ocean, Kin and the others aboard the ship ate very well because the captain had hired a chef to cook whatever they desired. Most of the voyage was spent chatting with one another, especially since the captain was so talkative.

Kin finally reached America in late January. The ship docked in Portland, Oregon. Kin had to fill out much paperwork for the American government and had to show them his application for the college he was going to attend. He was breath-taken by America. It was so beautiful to him, especially after the long voyage he'd taken to get there. The ground was covered with snow, something Kin had never seen before. Some people still had their Christmas trees up, and they looked beautiful as well, a wonderful greeting for the travelers.

Because it was January, there were still many months until the fall school semester would begin. Many of the students who traveled with Kin became dishwashers at restaurants to earn money and pass the time.

When the fall rolled around, Kin looked for housing areas near his college. The first apartment he viewed was too expensive, so instead he moved in with an elderly lady who was renting an extra room.

After Kin finished college, he didn't have to go looking for a job. Five job opportunities were lined up for him immediately after his graduation. Kin took a job in New York City for ALLIED Chemical, which was located near Wall Street. His salary was substantially more than what he made in Taiwan.

After working in New York for a few years, Kin went to NYU to study part-time to earn a second master's degree. When Kin was thirty, he met his future wife, who was also from Taiwan and was enrolled in a master's degree in zoology at NYU. As he was part of the Chinese Association at NYU, Kin threw a welcoming party for the newcomers and she was one of them. They fell in love at first sight. Kin and Emile Heueh were married on August 2, 1969.

After the marriage, Kin and Emile continued their studies at NYU. Because Emile was still in school full-time and Kin didn't make much money with his part-time job, paying their rent in New York City was sometimes difficult.

In 1970, Kin and Emile had their first child, my aunt Alice. The two were overjoyed when she was born. However, since Kin and Emile were still in school, Alice was watched by a babysitter most of the time. When she was older, Alice loved studying like her father. At home, Kin quizzed Alice on her school material. They also prayed a lot together. Six years later, in 1976, Victor, my father, was born. He loved studying as well, and graduated school at the top of his class, like Kin did.

Now, Kin and Emile have six grandchildren. Kin doesn't regret moving to America in any way.

"The best decision I made in my life was coming to America. It gave me opportunity and it gave me enjoyment," Kin said, "I was in poor health, and now at seventy years old I'm still healthy. It was my second life."