

**Chung Lee**

**Interviewed February 2, 2008  
By Holli Connell  
Midway Village Museum**

Holli Connell: Okay if you could say your first and last name?

Chung Lee: My name is Chung Lee.

HC: Are you married?

CL: Yes.

HC: Do you have children?

CL: Yes, I have one son.

HC: What is your education background?

CL: I graduated from the university in my country.

HC: Where do you work?

CL: Here? Yes. I'm still at Rock Valley College.

HC: How long have you been in the United States?

CL: Over 7 years.

HC: And where are you from originally?

CL: I am from South Korea.

HC: Where in South Korea?

CL: You mean born in city?

HC: Yes city, village

CL: I was born in city Gunsan, South Korea and I grow up in Seoul.

HC: What did you do before you came here to the United States?

CL: Teacher

HC: What kind of teacher?

CL: Music.

HC: What was your life like then in Korea before you came here? Were you married? Did you live with family? What was it like; how did you live?

CL: Why did I leave my country? My son was studying here.

HC: So you came here for your son.

CL: Yes for my son's education.

HC: What was it like before you came? How did you live before you came to the United States? Let's see how can I ask this question. Were you married?

CL: Yes.

HC: So you were married in South Korea?

CL: Yes.

HC: You were a teacher?

CL: Yes.

HC: Did your husband work?

CL: Yes, my husband worked as a mechanical designer you know making mechanical designs in a company.

HC: And how old was your son would you moved here?

CL: 2000 years. 11 years old.

HC: Were you happy in South Korea?

CL: Yes, of course.

HC: And again what made you want to come to the United States? What made you decide to come here again?

CL: My son was studying, the education.

HC: What steps did it take to get here? What steps did you have to take to travel here and live here?

CL: First time we had to travel and the next time I was sponsored by the church. I was music director for the church and they gave a green card last year.

HC: And it was through a church?

HC: Last year, 2007.

HC: What made you decide to come to Rockford?

CL: My sister lived in Freeport.

HC: Did you have any other family that lived in the area?

CL: Just my sister.

HC: Had you been to this country before you moved here? Had you ever flown to the United States or come to visit before you actually moved to live here?

CL: Oh, a few months later we just decided to stay here that year is 2000 and a few months later my husband came back to my country to sell house and everything and he come back to the United States just to spend time one month.

HC: Can you describe to me the journey of when you left South Korea and went to the airport and came here? How did you feel about the idea of going to America when you had been here before? What was your journey like and your thoughts like on the journey.

CL: I just wanted to visit my sister's house and think about the USA. USA is a good country and I hoped if it is possible I wanted to live in America.

HC: Did you stop or stay anywhere between leaving Korea and coming to the United States? Were there any stops along the way before you got to Rockford?

CL: First I lived two months at my sister's house, next we moved to Aurora, for three months at that place and then we move here to Rockford. We still live in Rockford. Rockford is the hometown. I like the hometown.

HC: Was there anyone here to help you settle in?

CL: My sister.

HC: Did any members of your family come after you?

CL: No.

HC: Had you met anyone from your home country after you arrived?

CL: Of course, I met a lot of Korean people in Chicago and Rockford. Yes.

HC: Were there any people from the same part of your country?

CL: No.

HC: How did you find your first place to live in Rockford?

CL: My sister introduced us to this place because I decided immigration in 2000. People I visited two times in the United States and I decided on immigration the third time and I visited Rockford a lot because of my sister, showing me the city, Cherryvale Mall and any place. It's a cute city. I am very impressed with the city.

HC: Did you have a job waiting for you upon arrival?

CL: I'm not sure about the question but my first job was music director in Chicago. I live here and drive to do the church Sunday and Friday and Wednesday. I just visited the church in Bartlett.

HC: When you finally decided to come here did you have a job waiting for you or did you have to find a job once you moved here?

CL: I wanted a job because I need money. My second job was at Rockford Memorial Hospital as a housekeeper and my third job sometimes I had to waitress in Chicago and here. Now I'm at Rock Valley College.

HC: When you moved here in 2000 you had a green card?

CL: Yes.

HC: Did that limit you at all on finding a job? Did it make it difficult or anything?

CL: Of course, because the problem is my English. My English is low but I can explain everything that is the reason I want to really study English. I just started last semester.

HC: I can understand what you are saying but I can tell it is hard for you to understand me. I can tell it is hard for you to understand me but I know that what I am saying maybe isn't very clear. I'm trying to think of how to say things right.

HC: Does your husband work?

CL: Yes.

HC: How is his English?

CL: The same to me.

HC: Do you speak your native language at home?

CL: Yeah, of course all the time.

HC: How about with your son does he also speak your native language?

CL: Yes, of course. My son's English is very well.

HC: Is that because he went right into school?

CL: The school is an Aurora. The Mathematics and Science Academy. His grade is now a senior. He is smart.

HC: Where do you see yourself working in five years? Your future in five years?

CL: My plan is the course of music, my voice. I really want to be a music teacher in this place.

HC: Do you sing?

CL: Yes. My real major is voice.

HC: Do you do stuff local here?

CL: I have joined the Mendelssohn chorus and Artisan and St. Mark Lutheran Church, the choir team.

HC: When you first got here how did you get around town? Did you drive a car or did you take a private transportation?

CL: Yes I had a car I could drive.

HC: Do you own a car?

CL: Yes.

HC: Was it hard finding your way around Rockford at first and what were the challenges?

CL: My husband and I at the time my job going to Chicago was interchange near the place I was looking for the interchange place it was very close. My first house was a Halverson and Mulford and a new townhome and we moved in 2006 September to this place.

HC: Do you own now?

CL: Yes.

HC: How long did it take for you to feel comfortable on your own in Rockford?

CL: Yes.

HC: How long, a year or did it just happen? Are you comfortable on your own in Rockford now?

CL: Yes.

HC: Were you when you first moved here?

CL: 2001, July 30.

HC: Were you comfortable than in Rockford 2001?

CL: Yes.

HC: Were you able to get around on your own?

CL: Yes Rockford is like a hometown.

HC: Did you speak English upon arrival in the United States?

CL: Yes, I can read English before the first time I came here nothing. I can read every word and understand but speaking is different.

HC: Did anyone in your family know how to speak English or understand English, your son or your husband?

CL: My son very well and my husband's same to me.

HC: Has your son tried to help you with your English?

CL: Of course.

HC: Does your knowledge of English affect you and your family in a positive way here at Rockford? How did you integrate yourself into the community? Did you join any club's or churches or groups?

HC: Yes.

HC: What were those?

CL: I joined Mendelssohn club and St. Mark's Lutheran Church and we have a good Korean community but I know if just one church and Artisan member one time a month.

HC: Are you active in politics? Voting? Mayor's politics?

CL: I'm not interested in politics.

HC: How did it feel for you to come to a foreign country and become comfortable? How did it feel to integrate into this country was it confusing or easy or what was it like. I'm leaving this country that I know I'm going to make this my home.

CL: I think it's okay.

HC: How did people treat you when you arrived? How do people act towards you when you arrived here was any one mean or happy or sad to you? People were nice?

CL: Yes, I think American people are very nice, very good people. They helped a lot to me.

HC: Did you have any problems or differences in your neighborhood?

CL: No, my neighbor was very nice for my family. America's help my family a lot. Neighbors are good, so kind and so nice.

HC: Is that your neighbor now?

CL: Yes.

HC: What did you think of this country before you came and have your ideas about America changed?

CL: I'm not sure how can I explain. I don't think it really changed almost the same because my sister in marriage with an American guy and my brother-in-law is a very nice guy, good people.

HC: Has your move here turned out like you thought it would? Did you have an idea of how you would live here and are you living that life?

CL: Yes.

HC: What has been the best part about moving to the United States?

CL: Education.

HC: What has been the hardest part?

CL: English.

HC: What do you miss most about your former home? What do you miss about your country?



CL: I don't think I miss nothing. We are living very well in my country, no problem, good business, nice house, no problems.

HC: Have you gone home to visit since you have lived here?

CL: Yes just one time.

HC: What was it like?

CL: My country? Like nice people, nice society and I really miss my country but if I choose two countries to live, I'm here. Because my country is too small and very busy and sometimes bothering people. Korean custom is bothering people. I can't explain.

HC: Do you think you will spend the rest of your life here?

CL: Yes.

HC: In Rockford?

CL: Yes if impossible. Rockford is good.

HC: What do you want your son to remember about your culture from your home country?

CL: I think my son remembered everything, my family, school and I don't think he will forget it.

HC: Is there any one thing from your culture that you want him to keep it in his life either a tradition that you do or the way that you are because of where you are from? Is there anything you want him to keep from South Korea? Do you celebrate traditions or holidays?

CL: Yes of course. New Years, everything.

HC: Is there something you want your son to celebrate that we don't celebrate here?

CL: Yes, February 7 is Korean New Year, at the time we eat rice cake and popcorn.

HC: Will you celebrate that this year?

CL: Yes, we celebrate at that time and Korean Thanksgiving.

HC: When is that?

CL: Same season as American Thanksgiving.

HC: Do you have turkey?

CL: Of course I like that. I like that two times a year, at Christmas and Thanksgiving I really want turkey.

HC: Are there any foods that when you came here you didn't like?

CL: No, I think the food is very nice.

HC: Are there any foods that when your came here you were like ugh?

CL: No.

HC: Are there foods that you make here that are from your home country?

CL: Yes.

HC: What kind of stuff do you make that you don't traditionally see in America?

CL: Pasta, spaghetti.

HC: Anything else?

CL: Green beans. I like green beans and" hamburg".

HC: What do you like to do for fun?

CL: My life is fun music.

HC: Are you a citizen now?

CL: Not yet. I'm just a green card. Maybe five years later.

HC: Is your husband and your son going to be the same steps?

CL: Yes.

HC: How do you feel about the current debate in this country about immigration?

CL: I think it's very happy. I'm really happy.

HC: Are you concerned at all about going through the steps to become a citizen that the immigration laws might change and make that complicated or are you happy with the steps?

CL: Maybe if they stop my green card I go back to my country but there is sorrow, makes me sad.