

Written Memories (via Email)
From: Ilryong Moon, Esquire
To: Mary Lipsey

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(Mr. Moon responds to questions about his experiences as an elected member of the Fairfax County School Board and as a leader in the Korean American community.)

Below please find my responses to your questions. Please forgive me for not being able to meet with you and not giving you more detailed responses.

1. What attracted you to the area?

I initially moved into North Springfield area of the district for its proximity to my office on Evergreen Lane back then and relative affordability of the houses in that area. Later, I moved to my current home in Robinson precinct for its living space, quiet cul-de-sac, and affordable price of the house.

2. What were the challenges facing you as an immigrant family?

Preparing for potential identity crisis for children, encouraging children to maintain their mother tongue while learning English, and financial well being of Korean businessmen in Washington, D.C., who were my client base.

3. Describe your experiences as a school board member.

Being able to make a difference in a child's life and quality of life in Fairfax County has been an awesome responsibility and a privilege. At the same time, being the first Asian American elected official has also brought its own challenges as I have often become very conscious of my unique situation.

4. Describe your experiences as a leader of the Korean American community.

As the only Korean American to be ever elected to a public office in this area, I have often felt an obligation to lead and educate the Korean American community in joining the mainstream America. However, as many Koreans are busy with their own lives to establish firm economic footing in the newly adopted country here in the U.S., they do not feel the need of participation in electoral process or public service areas as urgent.

5. What do Americans expect of Korean Americans and are these expectations realistic?

I believe that there may be a perception among many Americans that Korean Americans are a model minority-hard working, law abiding, elder-respecting, excelling in schools, etc. However, Korean Americans also have their own problems-senior citizens not well adjusting to the new environment, generation, cultural, and language gaps between the immigrant parents and their American born children, lack of adequate health care due to its rising cost, employment or business stability, students not doing well in new school setting, etc.

6. What changes would you like to see for future immigrant families?

Becoming more courageous to associate with those who were born here or people of different ethnic background. A much more active participation in the political process and civic life.

7. What advice would you give to future immigrant families settling in this area?

Do not live in a self-imposed isolation. You need to step out of your small ethnic community and try to learn to live together with others. Do not give up learning English. Language acquisition does not happen overnight. Remember that a few votes can make a difference in any election. Politicians will listen to you only if you vote.

8. What do you consider to be the immigrants' greatest contribution to the community?

Economic vitality and cultural richness.

9. What is your fondest memory of this area?

Watching and cheering at children's sports games; being able to take a walk around a lake through woods or just around the neighborhood after dinner; winning in two school board elections; and, sitting down at a chair on the deck under tall trees with a glass of wine or beer and listening to favorite music after a long day's work.

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(End of memory)