



THE RUTH ANN OVERBECK
CAPITOL HILL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Mary and Steve Park

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photo by [photographer]

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START OF INTERVIEW

DEUTSCH: Hi. This is Stephanie Deutsch with Steve and Mary Park on January 22, 2017 at their office on Seventh Street.

S. PARK: Actually, it's January 23rd.

DEUTSCH: Oh, January 23rd. Thank you, Steve.

S. PARK: [Laughs]. OK.

DEUTSCH: And I'm going to start by asking Mary where did you grow up?

M. PARK: I grew up, well, I came to America from South Korea when I was six years old, and we grew up in Westchester, New York. And that's where I grew up. [laughs]

DEUTSCH: Do you remember that?

M. PARK: Yes.

DEUTSCH: I mean, that must have been quite a traumatic thing.

M. PARK: Coming to America from ...

DEUTSCH: Coming to a new country.

M. PARK: Yes, I remember when we got here. There were five us, five kids, and I remember when we first moved into an apartment the freezer was full of chocolate bars and we were really excited. I was really excited to just eat lots of chocolate and watch Tom and Jerry TV shows and cartoons.

DEUTSCH: The good life.

M. PARK: It was a good life.

S. PARK: Chocolate and cartoons.

M. PARK: It was exciting for us.

DEUTSCH: Did you have a sense of it being stressful for your parents? I mean, did you ...

M. PARK: No, not at that time, but growing up and talking to my parents. You know, both of my parents worked long hours running a store and raising five kids. I was letting Steve know that I never missed a

hot meal. So my mom made sure that we always had hot meals but then also worked full time at the store, at the same time took care of us, took care of five kids.

DEUTSCH: Where were you in the line up?

M. PARK: I'm the middle child, the third. So I've always played the mediator, made sure everybody was getting along ...

DEUTSCH: Yes, that's an important role in any family.

M. PARK: Yes.

S. PARK: [laughs] Difficult.

DEUTSCH: Did they talk much about why they came?

M. PARK: You know, it was wanting better opportunities for us, for us to attend better school, and have better jobs and not to worry because in Korea it can be very stressful. If you don't follow the right path or the correct track or go into the right school, it is hard to get a full-time job and so they wanted all those opportunities for us and so we had a family member who was willing to sponsor us and that's how ...

DEUTSCH: Who was already here.

M. PARK: Yes. And that's how we were able to come to New York, and that's where we stayed for most of my childhood.

DEUTSCH: And what do you remember about high school? Were you involved in ... Well, what about learning English? Was that, at that age it was probably not too hard?

M. PARK: No, it was hard. I remember there was a time when it was my first day and I had to use the restroom. And I didn't know how to ask permission and I didn't know how to ask if I could use the bathroom, and actually went. And then I remember ...

DEUTSCH: I promise not to say that when I introduce you.

S. PARK: [laughs] Yeah, right, that's not the opening story.

M. PARK: I remember kids moving away from me slowly and then the next day the teacher smiled at me. I remember that. I also remember that our landlord came up with our American names. And my dad asked her to. So she just went into "name book" and just gave all of us very simple American names.

DEUTSCH: What were your other siblings?

M. PARK: Their names?

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

M. PARK: So it went from Jane, my sister Jane she changed her name to Christine. Grace, Mary, John, Carol. So we just, they just asked her and we adopted those names.

DEUTSCH: That's interesting.

M. PARK: But I also remember when we first moved here, we moved into a three-bedroom apartment for the seven of us. We were sharing bedrooms and I think my parents even lied to the landlord to say they only had three kids. Every time the landlord came by we sort of had to hide in a bedroom so that she would not know that there were five of us.

S. PARK: So maybe she only named three of you because two of you were hiding [laughs].

M. PARK: You're right. She named all five of us so I think she figured it out that there were five of us.

DEUTSCH: And so they had a store. Was the store below, was the apartment above the store?

M. PARK: No. The store was in Manhattan, New York City, and, you know, I think that my dad saved up and he was able to purchase a store.

DEUTSCH: So did you live in Manhattan?

M. PARK: No, we first lived in Yonkers, New York. Actually, it was Riverdale, Queens. Was it Queens? And then we moved to Yonkers because they heard that they had better school there. So we attended a Catholic school for a little bit. My parents were not Catholic so attending a Catholic meant I would have to, I remember going to a Catholic service and took their service bulletin and tried to, because the teacher would ask the next day what the service was about so I would try to sneak in and get the program for the church. But after Yonkers we moved to Westchester, New York because of the school system again. So my parents, I know that they sacrificed a lot for us to really get a good education.

DEUTSCH: And how did they travel in and out? I mean, that's a ...

M. PARK: By car.

DEUTSCH: So, they drove.

M. PARK: My dad actually has a very interesting story in that when he was single, he wanted to own an orphanage and help lots of kids. But then after he got married, had five kids, he had to go into business,

something that he's not really passionate about. So social services is something that he was always interested in but never got to really for his life.

DEUTSCH: Is he still living?

M. PARK: He is.

DEUTSCH: He must be very gratified by what you are doing.

M. PARK: Well, what's interesting is he, from the beginning, he's always accepted Steve and we can I guess go into that story later on, but he actually, after he finished and retired he got a seminary degree in his 60s, late 60s ...

DEUTSCH: As a minister?

M. PARK: Yes. And then he started serving and now he volunteers full time working with senior citizens and he is giving messages, he is doing a lot.

DEUTSCH: Good role model. So, high school?

M. PARK: High school, yes.

DEUTSCH: Westchester?

M. PARK: Westchester, Scarsdale, New York. One of the best high schools, I would say, in America. It was a very small school, only 100 kids per grade, 100 students. And it was a predominantly Jewish community. And so it was great. I had a great experience, made great friends.

DEUTSCH: Did you have any extracurriculars? Or any subjects that you were particularly passionate about?

M. PARK: Not really.

S. PARK: Sports.

M. PARK: I played sports. I played lacrosse and field hockey. It was great because I got to really, I got to know teachers really well, but I just, it was a small school. I really enjoyed the small community.

DEUTSCH: Did your siblings all go there too?

M. PARK: Yes. We all graduated from the same high school. And then my parents moved out of Westchester.

DEUTSCH: Once you had finished, where did they move to?

M. PARK: New Jersey.

DEUTSCH: Is that where they are still?

M. PARK: Yes, cause taxes are cheaper. [laughs]

DEUTSCH: And college?

M. PARK: College, I went to Binghamton University. I went to a state school. I graduated with a degree in Psychology and really did not know what I wanted to do in life but, after college, I went straight to graduate school for counseling. Got a Masters in counseling.

DEUTSCH: Grad school at Binghamton?

M. PARK: No, at Teachers College, Columbia University in Manhattan. So I lived in Manhattan for two years after ...

DEUTSCH: To get a degree in counseling?

M. PARK: Yes.

DEUTSCH: And then is that what brought you to DC, or ... ?

M. PARK: So, I graduated in '98, my graduate school. And I was living in Manhattan and I just wanted the pace to slow down a bit. I was thinking about going to get my Doctorate and become a professor or become a psychologist. You know, I wanted to do good things but I wanted a slower pace in life. And so I decided for a little bit to move to Maryland where my sister was living at that time. I moved there just to rest a little bit. I remember one day when I was in Manhattan just everybody going by very quickly with their cup of coffee and I just thought, you know, where does it end.

DEUTSCH: Yep, yep.

M. PARK: Where does it stop from here. Why is that people keep on going and going and you don't stop. And so I moved to Maryland just for a slower pace of life. And then at that time I was looking for work in the counseling field. While I was looking, I ... I met Steve before briefly at one of my sister's gatherings and I was really fascinated by this Korean-American guy doing this type of work and not making a living, not earning a salary and I just thought this is not real.

DEUTSCH: Cause he was already doing this ...

M. PARK: Yes, he was already doing Little Lights and I just thought this is really interesting because in New York, you're just trying to keep on rising, keep on going, going and you don't stop. So I thought this is really interesting that he was doing this type of work. So when I moved to Maryland I remember Steve and what he was doing. I gave him a call one day and I said hey I would like to volunteer and at that time he didn't have any volunteer paperwork and so Steve said, do you have a backpack? And I said I do. He said come, and so I came.

DEUTSCH: Why did he ask if you had a backpack?

S. PARK: A camp.

M. PARK: I guess to carry things. You know, at that time we didn't have an office, there was no indoor space so you had to carry everything around with you and so I brought my backpack and I remember that was my first experience volunteering with Little Lights.

DEUTSCH: And what did you do that first ...

M. PARK: Well, I remember walking to Potomac Gardens and I remember kids coming up to you, and that was my first time meeting them and they were hugging me and greeting me with warm smiles and I jumped into their summer camp actually. It was pretty long, it went something like 9 to 6 p.m. It was all outdoors. I remember we were bringing tarps to a park, it was Watkins Park, and with a handful of kids Steve was running this day camp and I remember thinking this is so much fun. I really enjoy this a lot. So from day one I really thought this was a really exciting experience, meeting the kids and what they were doing. And then also Steve and some of the counselors were living in DC at that time. So instead of going to their own homes they would all live together. So I remember ...

DEUTSCH: Like a group house.

M. PARK: Yes. I remember moving in to this group house where it was very dirty and filthy ...

S. PARK: It wasn't that bad. [laughs]

M. PARK: You just had to like pull down a mattress and you just slept there. But I remember this is so wonderful. I thought it was such an exciting experience for me at that time.

DEUTSCH: Did you feel that you were able to bring your professional training as a counselor into service or was it more that it called on your personal, or was it a combination?

M. PARK: I'm not sure if at that time I was thinking about how I could bring my professional experience into this, but I do remember thinking that, you know, I did not grow up thinking I would work with kids

my entire life. I did not, that thought never came into my head. I like kids, but it wasn't something like I really want to go into this field. And so I just went in, I basically did what was asked of me, and I think, I felt like there were times when I was like, I'm not bad at this, I'm not bad at connecting with people who come from different places or different culture or different background. I remember taking initiative sometimes but it almost felt like, I really enjoyed what I was doing, whatever was asked of me.

DEUTSCH: Was that a bit of a surprise for you? I mean, it sounds like maybe it was. It wasn't what you had expected.

M. PARK: Um, I guess so, yeah. Because while I continued to volunteer at Little Lights, I did look for full time work to support myself and I did work for a couple of years because at that time Little Lights did not have any paid positions and so I did that and then came into DC pretty much every day to volunteer at Little Lights.

DEUTSCH: So what were you doing? What was your job?

S. PARK: Eventually it was at University of Maryland in career counseling.

M. PARK: Oh, my job? I worked at Korean Community Service Center as a counselor. I also worked at University of Maryland as a career counselor. So those are my two experiences, work experiences. But I just remember thinking that this was not exciting enough [laughs], that what was ...

DEUTSCH: ... a career counselor at University of Maryland.

M. PARK: Eventually it was more exciting for me to end work when I was done and come into DC and do random things with Steve. Whether it was visiting kids, hanging out with kids, shopping for Little Lights; it was just really random things but I really enjoyed doing all of that. But at the same time we were also dating [laughs], so that was, I don't know, [Steve also laughs] that added an exciting element as well [laughs].

DEUTSCH: I expect it did.

S. PARK: Interesting dates. [laughs]

M. PARK: So I would say a couple, maybe two months after I volunteered with Steve, we went out on our first date.

S. PARK: I think it was pretty soon after the camp ended.

M. PARK: Right.

DEUTSCH: Well, maybe it's time to switch over and hear a little bit from Steve.

S. PARK: OK.

DEUTSCH: I just want to ask you one thing – have you been to Korea?

M. PARK: Yes. So after I graduated from college I visited Korea for about three months.

DEUTSCH: By yourself?

M. PARK: On my own. I have lots of family members there.

DEUTSCH: That you had kept in touch with? That your parents had kept in touch with?

M. PARK: No, that my parents kept in touch with. So it was my first time meeting them after I moved to America, but I wanted to experience Korea on my own and wanted to know what it was like to be the dominant race. It was very empowering; it was exciting; it was great. But at the same time it wasn't my home. I'm not sure if that makes sense.

DEUTSCH: It does make sense.

M. PARK: It was after three months, it was time to come back to my home in America.

DEUTSCH: So, Steve ...

S. PARK: Yes.

DEUTSCH: Where did you grow up?

S. PARK: Some parallels to Mary's story. So I was born in Korea, moved to Houston, Texas when I was seven.

DEUTSCH: Very similar actually.

S. PARK: Um hmm, yep. Again, sponsored by a family member who was working for NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], that's why I ended up in Houston.

DEUTSCH: So you were seven and came with parents ...

S. PARK: Yep, came with the whole family. I have two older sisters, and I got to name myself [laughs]. I had a choice of names before we went to the first day of school, and I picked Steve because I liked Six Million Dollar Man which is something I watched in Korea [laughs]. It was Steve Austin. So I got to pick. And yeah, and so ...

DEUTSCH: Do any Korean immigrants keep their names?

S. PARK: Oh yeah, yeah. It's sort of like, I think it's sort of on the family, what they decide to do.

DEUTSCH: It's just easier, I mean it's easier if you have a name that people can

S. PARK: Right, it's sort of just to make it easier for both the people you meet and for yourself but there is something lost too when you sort of drop your birth name.

DEUTSCH: OK, you're the Six Million Dollar Man in Houston. Learning English, was that . . .

S. PARK: Yeah, you know my parents encouraged us to kind of almost exclusively speak English so that we would learn faster but then . . .

DEUTSCH: Did they speak English?

S. PARK: No, they didn't, but they were just learning themselves but they wanted us to learn quickly, but the sad thing is that I lost a lot of my Korean because I started almost exclusively speaking English. I remember a teacher from elementary school who sort of helped us after school and tutored our whole family, the three kids after school and really took care of us and taught us English while I was in second grade. And so I definitely remember this particular teacher helping us to learn English and really kind of taking us under her wing so that was memorable.

DEUTSCH: Anything else about school? Do you remember that as a hard thing? When you think back.

S. PARK: Yeah, I mean it was probably a mixture. I remember when we first, I think like especially math was a lot easier because I feel like we had more in Korea in terms of math. So, academically, I don't remember the transition being extremely difficult but having that teacher help us with English certainly helped. I think, I remember having experiences of racism in Houston, that was probably the hardest thing. There were some pretty, even overtly racist things that we did during the school assembly.

DEUTSCH: That you did at school assembly?

S. PARK: Yeah, we would sing songs during assembly and one of them was like, racist. I mean toward Asians [laughs] where they would make slanty eyes. It was an interesting experience. And then there were the occasional, just racial attacks from students or people in the neighborhood.

DEUTSCH: Generalized racism against everyone who's different as opposed to the racism against Asians?

S. PARK: Yeah. I mean, it was both. I mean, I experienced both. It wasn't like an every day occurrence, but it definitely was part of the experience.

DEUTSCH: Did you ever talk about it with your parents?

S. PARK: No, we didn't and I think that was, I think it's fairly common where a lot of young people sort of have to learn how to deal with those kind of experiences on their own and not always process it emotionally with parents. I mean, my parents owned a business, worked 80, 90 hours a week.

DEUTSCH: What kind of business did they ...

S. PARK: They actually ended up owning different businesses. They started out, it was like a little carry-out stand. For a while there was a little bit of an irony that there are these Korean-American immigrants and they were selling tacos to Mexican laborers.

DEUTSCH: Only in America.

S. PARK: Yeah, exactly. And so they had that and eventually owned like sort of a diner where a lot of truckers came into, so we owned a diner for a period of time.

DEUTSCH: So they were working very, very hard.

S. PARK: Very hard. And you know back then you didn't have after school programs, you didn't have, we didn't have babysitters. So my older sister would watch the two of us. So I was definitely your typical latchkey kid [laughs]. And you know played with neighborhood friends, played sports with friends and ... So there were some challenges certainly.

DEUTSCH: Was there anything of a Korean community in Houston? I mean, did you have a church or something that ...

S. PARK: We would go to church, but I found it most of the time pretty boring so we really pushed our parents not to go [laughs].

DEUTSCH: Typical kids.

S. PARK: Yes, and so we did for a period of time, but then stopped. And then I think there for a while my parents would go and the kids would stay home. But I didn't feel like long time I really had a sense of community among Korean-Americans. And there weren't that many back in that time in Houston to begin with.

DEUTSCH: So, high school activities? I mean particular ...

S. PARK: This was the mid-80s and so the economy was really bad in Houston and a lot of financial struggles, so my parents decided based on almost random advice from a high school classmate that my mom knew. They decided to move to the DC suburbs. So they found this store in Northwest on 14th Street.

DEUTSCH: They purchased a store?

S. PARK: They purchased a store from another Korean-American family and it was a very interesting story. They had, I think they sold ice cream, fresh fish and like gifts [laughs]. It was like the most random store.

DEUTSCH: Ice cream, fresh fish and gifts.

S. PARK: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: That is kind of random.

S. PARK: It was. But my mom, she said she really felt like God was telling her to buy this store [laughs]. So they bought this small business on 14th Street Northwest and got an apartment in Rockville, Maryland. I finished up middle school and started going to high school in Rockville, in Montgomery County. And so then that was a huge transition.

DEUTSCH: Yeah. It would be kind of hard.

S. PARK: It was hard. But then it was a more diverse community, it was more progressive. So I liked the transition that we made. But business was difficult so there was a lot of financial stress, so that was hard. And I could see that in my parents' demeanor ...

DEUTSCH: ... that they had to commute, that was a pretty long commute.

S. PARK: Yeah, fairly long commute. And so there was a lot of, I definitely remember a lot of stress, but, you know, I think by and large I liked this new school that we were going to and I was making friends in the neighborhood.

DEUTSCH: What high school did you go to?

S. PARK: It was called Woodward. In my junior year Woodward actually closed and merged with Walter Johnson in Bethesda. So I ended up graduating from Walter Johnson even though I started out at Woodward. And that so was, you know, by and large a good experience and good schools. And so, and there was definitely less, probably almost non-existent overt racism.

DEUTSCH: Hmm. As you say, a more diverse community, people were used to ...

S. PARK: A more diverse community, yeah. So you know I think that was definitely healthy and good. Looking back, I'm glad that I went to high school there rather than back in Houston.

DEUTSCH: College?

S. PARK: Went to Boston University.

DEUTSCH: Oh, like my daughter.

S. PARK: Oh, OK [laughs], great.

DEUTSCH: Great school.

S. PARK: Yeah, and so graduated in ...

DEUTSCH: Why did you choose that? Did you have something particular you wanted to study or ...

S. PARK: You know, my sister was already there and I think that the, kind of the two big choices for me, I wanted an urban school, I wanted a school in the city. So the big choices were NYU and BU, and I chose BU because they gave a lot more money [laughs] than NYU. And so decided to go there, you know I kind of wanted a city school.

DEUTSCH: Big city.

S. PARK: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: Did you live in Warren Towers when you were a freshman?

S. PARK: You know I never, irony, I never lived in a dorm [laughs].

DEUTSCH: Really?

S. PARK: They ran out of space I think and I got put into an on-campus apartment my freshman year so I was never on a meal plan [laughs]. I kind of missed that experience, I wish I did live in a dorm just to have that experience, but, um, yeah. I lived right near Kenmore Square. I majored in English Literature and Broadcasting and Film, but did a lot of journalism during college. And so, yeah, that was quite an experience.

DEUTSCH: Um, so did you go to the College of Communications or the Communications School?

S. PARK: It was both, liberal arts and communications. I double majored in those two schools. And, yeah, so, I don't know if you need, want to know anything else.

DEUTSCH: Well, what happened then? So you graduate ...

S. PARK: Yeah, so I graduated, moved back to DC to try to figure out what the next step was, and this is where I went through a big life change, my kind of conversion. You know I was a very devout atheist in college and didn't believe in the existence of God and didn't think about God and hadn't been to church probably since eighth grade.

DEUTSCH: Right.

S. PARK: And, you know, I was the type of person that would argue with people about how can anyone ...

DEUTSCH: You were an aggressive atheist ...

S. PARK: Yeah, I was fairly aggressive [laughs] and very arrogant. But after college I came back and was living with my best friend from college and got, he kind of convinced me to take this drug called ecstasy, take this drug and I thought oh this is the greatest thing ever invented. I was sort of purposeless at this point, and at first I thought this is the greatest thing ever invented and then I went through an incredibly horrible experience. And I can only describe it as sort of, it was almost, it was sort of a supernatural kind of experience where I just felt incredible fear and this experience is traumatic and it lasted like week after week and month and after month. It wasn't wearing off.

DEUTSCH: You mean after you took the drug you stayed in the terrified ...

S. PARK: Oh yeah, oh yeah. It was like, felt permanent. I mean it felt like I couldn't, there's no way I could shake it, there's no way I could sleep it off. And it felt really spiritual and I was an atheist. I was like, I'm not, you know, I don't believe in spiritual. But it was like, it was an experience I really can't describe.

DEUTSCH: Is that, um, typical with ecstasy? I mean, is that ...

S. PARK: I don't think it's typical.

DEUTSCH: That long effect, that long ...

S. PARK: No. I don't think it's typical but I think it does happen to people. It probably doesn't, you know, get a lot of attention when people have these types of experiences, but I was very helpless and I

didn't know, I honestly did not know what to do. I finally had to tell my parents that I was going through this. They didn't know what to do, you know, they just worked very hard at their jobs and they tried to provide but they didn't know how to ...

DEUTSCH: This was a ...

S. PARK: This was way beyond anything that they could handle. The book that actually started helping me was a book called "The Road Less Traveled" which was a bestseller back in the 80s and 90s. I remember the first sentence of the book was "Life is difficult." [laughs] And that grabbed my attention because what I was going through was so, so difficult and it also talked about like that the foundation for mental health is love. And without love, and without feeling valuable, you were going to struggle with mental health. And I realized I did not feel valuable. And I think that part of it was my parents worked so much and they were never really around, and so that emotional feeling of being valued just, I didn't feel I had it. And I realized that that was my biggest problem. It wasn't that I didn't have the right job or it wasn't that I didn't have the right, you know, whatever. It was that I did not feel that in the kind of core of my being that I was valuable. And the book helped me realize this. The book recommends seeing a therapist and so that's, you know, what I decided to go, I went to see a therapist to try to get some help.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

S. PARK: And, you know, the book also sort of encourages one to be vulnerable and, learn how to be vulnerable and transparent, so I tried to do that. It was the first time at the therapist's office that I was able to tell someone that I was lonely, that I was scared, and really be able to share with greater transparency. It was New Year's Eve of '93, I was sharing with my sister who also, she went through a very serious depression in college. I was sharing with her just how tired I was, how scared I was, how I was just ... I really told her I was losing the will to live and she didn't say a single word. She just sort of physically embraced me, but she did it with such tenderness that I began to just weep.

DEUTSCH: I'm starting to weep.

S. PARK: [laughs] Yeah. I just wept uncontrollably for 30 straight minutes, just in her arms. We didn't exchange a single word. I just wept. And she had such understanding and compassion that I really felt loved, really felt understood. And it's a powerful experience, and my heart really opened to what compassion was because I just experienced it and I kind of never saw the world the same way again. I realized before, I was just thinking about myself and what can I get, how much fun can I have. You know that was sort of my mindset. But after sort of this process and this experience, I started to see just how

much suffering and loneliness there was in the world and that compassion was really the most important thing.

DEUTSCH: Well it gives you a huge, um, a huge platform if you will for the kind of work you do.

S. PARK: Yeah. Oh yeah, I would've never imagined that I would be working with kids or, you know, doing a ministry or ... It would have been out of the realm of my imagination to think. But after this experience, it really did change my understanding of the world. And I really started having compassion for people I never knew I could have compassion for [laughs]. And so after this experience I started spending time with kids. Because my parents started a second business. So they sold their original business and purchased a thrift store. It used to be Valley Village and then they bought it and called it Valley Thrift. And then they, because that business as well they actually started a tae kwon do studio in this lower income neighborhood off of 14th Street Northwest.

DEUTSCH: They started, your parents started a tae kwon do studio?

S. PARK: Um hmm. So I started helping them out while I was going through my own, you know, struggles. But I started meeting kids in the neighborhood and after this experience I just fell in love with kids and just said oh, you know, they have so much openness and they, you could see that they had a lot of needs as well. And so I volunteered at a day camp that a neighborhood person was running in Northwest. So that's how I started really getting to know kids in the neighborhood and just ... You know, like Mary was saying for herself, experienced a lot of joy working with kids and volunteering. So that's sort of the heart for kids came through that (?). And eventually wanted to start a tutoring program after meeting kids at this camp because I wanted to continue to work with them and I saw that there was a lot of academic need. And I think that the person that convicted [sic] me that I should start something was a guy name Darryl. He was in eighth grade, big tall guy, played football on his middle school football team. But during the camp I was reading, trying to read a book with him and realized that he could not read a Dr. Seuss book in eighth grade and I was just mortified. And really brokenhearted for him as he really struggled to just sound out basic words. And just said this is such a deep need, I got to try to do something and basically started a tutoring program inside my parents' business for the neighborhood kids. So that's how, you know, Little Lights got started.

DEUTSCH: So what brought you to Capitol Hill?

S. PARK: So, yes, so Little Lights started in Northwest where my parents owned a business. There's a woman who was volunteering for us. She was with an organization called Child Evangelism Fellowship and so she would do like little Bible lessons at our site for kids who wanted to participate in that. And she

was also volunteering at Potomac Gardens with the African American pastor Edwin Jones. So she invited me to come visit her other classroom basically at Potomac Gardens. And so she was a great person so I came and just observed and just visited Potomac Gardens. So I remember walking in Potomac Gardens and walking into this little space that they had ...

DEUTSCH: What year is this?

S. PARK: This was '97.

DEUTSCH: OK.

S. PARK: 1997. And I remember just walking into Potomac Gardens and into this little apartment and just being almost overwhelmed, kind of by the sense of poverty in the community. I had not experienced anything quite like it before this and so my heart really broke for the kids that I met and really again felt like oh God I got to try to do something to be helpful. And so met this pastor, Pastor Jones. So I said you know, we'd like to help out in some way and so we actually started sending a van from Northwest to Potomac Gardens to pick up kids to take tae kwon do lessons on Saturdays. So we would pick up, you know, a number of kids that Pastor Jones had organized. So that's how we started working with Potomac Gardens was through this pastor.

DEUTSCH: Who lived there? Or who ...

S. PARK: He didn't live there but he was doing ministry outreach in Potomac Gardens. And so, yeah, we would pick them up, take them to the tae kwon do class and bring them back and then we would For one summer, this was '97, we would, we also bussed kids for summer camp. So we would send a van literally every morning from Northwest to Capitol Hill to pick up kids to come to the camp over in Northwest. That was in '97. And so, just yeah, again, felt the need was just so palpable and the level of poverty was definitely, you could just sense was deeper at Potomac Gardens.

DEUTSCH: Than what you were seeing in Northwest.

S. PARK: Yeah, and maybe more concentrated because it was public housing. So that's yeah, that was how the relationship got started. And then in 1999 the neighborhood in Northwest was changing, some of our kids had moved, were starting to move away. My parents' tae kwon do studio couldn't financially sustain itself so we were renting a church or borrowing a church space over in Northwest for a while, but we just decided the neighborhood is changing a lot, it's harder to pick up kids, we no longer have a permanent space, so we decided to kind of move our base from Northwest to Southeast in 1999. That was after meeting two leaders from the Salvation Army that was there right near Potomac Gardens. And so we

had conversations, I don't even remember exactly how we first met them. Maybe we approached them about using their space or ... But after a conversation, they really wanted us to partner with them to run a camp at the Salvation Army, sort of in partnership. And so we partnered with them and used, ran one of our camps, this was in '99, one of our camps there. We still maintained a camp in Northwest for four weeks, but they also, but we also rented a row house right next to Potomac Gardens.

DEUTSCH: How were you funding all this? How were you ...

S. PARK: We had done a little bit of fundraising and the Salvation Army also did pay us some for helping to run the camp. It was very minimal funding we had, you know just from a couple of fundraisers, newsletter. So we rented a row house right next to Potomac Gardens. So we got our camp counselors, we all lived in that house together with our college students who were camp counselors. And there was a basement unit and a higher, you know, the main unit and so the guys would sleep in the basement and the girls ... And so we kept renting that house throughout the year.

M. PARK: But that was 2000.

S. PARK: But then eventually we started attending a church that was meeting at John Tyler. It was called the Hope Center Church, and the pastor there was Samuel Sierra, so we got to meet him. And they were opening up this building.

DEUTSCH: Just one sec. So your church is in John Tyler and what was it called?

S. PARK: Hope Center Church.

DEUTSCH: Um hmm.

S. PARK: So that was in 2000.

DEUTSCH: And who was the pastor?

S. PARK: Samuel Sierra.

DEUTSCH: S-I-E-R-R-A? Sierra?

S. PARK: Um hmm. And actually, I mean one interesting story is that they actually, this church which was planted out of a big mega church out in Virginia. They actually had at one point tried to buy the Results building. So they were, and I think they actually bid higher than Results, but they ended up losing out cause, um, I don't know exactly what mistakes they made or I think they also talked about doing homeless ministry and so that I'm sure there was some people ...

DEUTSCH: Oh, I think that was part of it, wasn't it?

S. PARK: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: I seem to remember that.

S. PARK: So, I think, I'm not sure exactly what the process was like, but we weren't around for that, but they ended up purchasing this building here at Seventh and I [Seventh and I Streets SE], because they could not get that building.

M. PARK: But this is donated to ...?

S. PARK: Hmm?

M. PARK: This building was donated to them?

S. PARK: No. They raised money.

M. PARK: Oh, they did.

S. PARK: Yeah, they raised money and purchased this building and renovated, gutted it and renovated it and started the Hope Center here. And we started renting office space from them in 2000 when it kind of had just opened.

DEUTSCH: And that was about the time I met you.

S. PARK: OK.

DEUTSCH: Wasn't it?

S. PARK: I can't remember. It's all a ...

DEUTSCH: It was when you applied for your first grant, whenever that was, and I came here.

S. PARK: That was a little bit later. It wasn't right at 2000, it was probably a couple years later.

DEUTSCH: A couple years later, OK.

S. PARK: But yeah, that was a while back. And so we were renting this small office space but they also let us use space here for programs and so that's how we ended up in this building by renting this space.

DEUTSCH: And was that church largely Korean?

S. PARK: No. It was actually focusing on Potomac Gardens, so the pastor was Latino, but his target audience was Potomac Gardens and so ...

DEUTSCH: Did a lot of people from Potomac Gardens come?

S. PARK: I mean, it wasn't a huge church but it was, there was a sizable group. Probably the church attendance on a Sunday was probably like 80-100 people.

M. PARK: Lots of kids.

S. PARK: Lots of kids.

DEUTSCH: So were you going to church there too?

S. PARK/M.PARK: Yes.

DEUTSCH: So by this time you two were together?

S. PARK: Yes, we were ...

M. PARK: Yes. Because we were dating in 1998.

S. PARK: So we got married in 2001, but in 2000 Mary was living in the hot upper unit of the townhouse, I was in the lower unit, and so yeah, I think we were going to church together.

DEUTSCH: And where did you get married?

S. PARK: The church that my parents had been going to called Global Mission Church out in Silver Spring, Maryland. So it was a big church, they have a gymnasium, a parking lot, and so we actually ... The church we were going to, Christian Fellowship, they sent two school buses to Potomac Gardens to pick up people. So, we had school buses at our wedding [laughs], a lot of people from Potomac Gardens and kids from our program, you know, some of them sang at our wedding. It was very sweet. But we had lots of kids and it was a pretty big wedding.

DEUTSCH: Like how many people?

M. PARK: It was about 500.

DEUTSCH: Oh my gosh.

S. PARK: I know.

DEUTSCH: That's the biggest wedding I've ever heard of. Superstar.

M. PARK: That's why we had to go all the way out to Maryland.

S. PARK: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

S. PARK: We kept it simple [laughs] but, yeah, so we had the service and then the reception was in the church gymnasium [laughs].

DEUTSCH: Um, OK, so now you're married and you're, Little Lights is your, did you have other jobs? I mean, are you supporting this with other work, or ...

S. PARK: Mary was still at University of Maryland until 2002, so for a while after we were married she worked at University of Maryland. Um, I was doing Little Lights full-time at this point. I mean, there was a period of time where I was like working other part-time jobs, but then I think by 2001 I was kind of doing Little Lights full-time and living at, yeah, at the rental property.

M. PARK: But it's almost like you're doing full-time.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

M. PARK: But not being compensated [laughs].

DEUTSCH: Because it's intense.

M. PARK: But it helped us, me working at University of Maryland helped us to purchase our first home in Anacostia.

DEUTSCH: Is that the home where you still are?

S. PARK/M.PARK: No.

M. PARK: We moved a couple of years later to another house in Anacostia, Southeast DC.

S. PARK: 2003 is when we bought, 2002 is when the bought the house in Anacostia.

DEUTSCH: And I know you have two children.

S. PARK: Yes.

DEUTSCH: And when were they born?

S. PARK: Kayla was born 2003, July of 2003.

DEUTSCH: And how do you spell Kayla?

S. PARK: K-A-Y-L-A.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

S. PARK: And Dylan was born in July of 2005.

DEUTSCH: D ...

S. PARK: D-Y-L-A-N.

DEUTSCH: Uh huh.

S. PARK: Yeah and so they were both born in the same house and now they go to DC charter schools.

DEUTSCH: Two Rivers?

S. PARK: They were both at Two Rivers. Now they are both at Washington Latin.

DEUTSCH: Oh, OK.

S. PARK: So Dylan's now in fifth grade, Kayla is in seventh grade.

DEUTSCH: So let's get back to Little Lights. What were, what were the big challenges and what are the big changes that you have seen, or what, how did that all ...

S. PARK: Um, I mean, you know, for any small non-profit funding is always a huge challenge.

DEUTSCH: Right, but you've obviously done a good job with that.

S. PARK: Yeah, I mean once ...

DEUTSCH: What's the secret do you think?

S. PARK: You know, I think it was, um, just trying to learn from other people, trying to ... You realize you need help and so you begin to ask for help. So, you know, when Mary came on and she came on full-time, that was extremely helpful to have both of us full-time. I'm kind of more the visionary person. Mary is more the execution person.

DEUTSCH: You need both.

S. PARK: Absolutely. And I think that was actually essential for it to, for Little Lights to work. And both of us were willing to work for very, very little [laughs] and so the fact that we had two people working

together with different skills, that I think helped Little Lights to grow. So we started doing grants, in 2002 we got our first grant from I think it was from Department of Human Service, I think in 2002. I think that was the first grant we got. And then we got the DC Trust Grant in 2003.

DEUTSCH: Was that a relatively big grant?

S. PARK: For us, it was a huge grant. I think it was like, the first grant was like \$40,000. So for us that was an enormous grant.

DEUTSCH: That's an enormous grant.

S. PARK: And then once you get used to the grant writing process, you know it becomes a little easier. And then we participated through the AmeriCorps-Vista program and recruited interns to work through AmeriCorps.

DEUTSCH: Do you still do that? Do you still have ...

S. PARK: No we don't do that anymore. And you kind of have to, you're sort of encouraged to roll off Vista-Vista.

DEUTSCH: Are you?

S. PARK: You're not sort of permanently. So, but it did help us to recruit young recent college grads to help with the fundraising, with the grant writing and that was also ...

DEUTSCH: You also have a really strong, you know your videos and things that you make.

S. PARK: Yeah.

M. PARK: Yes, I think it was important to, from the beginning, to grow the donor base as well as write grants. You know, I think ...

DEUTSCH: To get individuals?

M. PARK: Yes, individual donors and church donors and you know partner with different organizations. And I think that Steve is really great at building relationships, meeting new people. He really is great at that, and that has helped us to grow. Meeting new people, looking for resources, I think he's not afraid to ask for help and try to learn how to do things better.

S. PARK: But I have to admit when I first started I really didn't know what I was doing at all [laughs]. I had no experience in non-profit work other than a couple of volunteer experiences. But I had this

conviction that this was what I was supposed and this was what was really important. And so that conviction has sort of stayed with me and, you know, learning things like fundraising and things happen over time.

M. PARK: But I think it's also like showing up every day. I don't think that both of us went into this thinking we were going to get rich or even make a living out of this. I don't think we even realized how we would support our kids or raise a family. I don't think we had those worries actually and maybe that's having family ...

S. PARK: We were a little naïve [laughs].

M. PARK: I think it's having our parents there with us, supporting us, helped us to not worry and that really helped, not to worry.

DEUTSCH: Having your parents there to help you financially, you mean, or just their support, the fact that they would ...

M. PARK: Yes.

S. PARK: Yeah, I mean and, you know, my parents gave us a little bit of financial support too.

M. PARK: I mean, after we got married

S. PARK: And they still donate to Little Lights too [laughs].

M. PARK: Right. After we married we lived in his parents' basement for one year and commuted from Maryland.

S. PARK: So we've had to mix and match and figure things out and try to be resourceful, but then always trying to learn how to this better.

DEUTSCH: What are the big changes you see at Potomac Gardens?

S. PARK: I mean certainly the neighborhood surrounding Potomac Gardens has changed a great deal. So, you know, probably when we first started, the row houses across from Potomac Gardens were [worth] 60, 80,000 dollars. And now they are 600,000 dollars. So the community has changed around. I do feel, I think the management of the property has also improved some too. I mean certainly a lot cleaner than it was before, things like the lighting has improved. But there's still a lot of the same problems, there's a lot of still, unemployment. And there's still, obviously it's housing that geared for people who are in poverty and so that hasn't changed.

M. PARK: But I'd also have to say that being here for so long in one community, we've seen young kids grow up in our programs, in the community and now they're working with us to provide services to more kids.

DEUTSCH: It must be tremendously gratifying.

M. PARK: Yes, to provide more job opportunities, you know, even through the Clean Green Team to help make Potomac Gardens look nicer, is really great.

DEUTSCH: Talk about the Clean Green Team.

S. PARK: It's a social enterprise that does job training but also provides employment.

DEUTSCH: Did you found it?

S. PARK: No. It was founded by an organization called Faith Works. Bob Boulter.

DEUTSCH: That's right.

S. PARK: ... was in charge of that. I don't think they're operating in DC right now. Bob and I had known each other for a long time. He was talking about how ...

DEUTSCH: How do you spell his last name?

S. PARK: B-O-U-L-T-E-R. But I remember meeting up with him and he was talking about how they were trying to train people on doing kind of contracting work, renovation type of work. But that was falling through and so they were thinking about transitioning to some sort of landscaping social enterprise. And I said oh, you know one of our donors owns a landscaping company. He is really great, it's a great family. So I introduced Bob to Dave and Blake Dunlevy who own a landscaping business. So it ended up working out and Dave and Blake and their company ...

DEUTSCH: Dunlevy. D-U-N ...

S. PARK: L-E-V-Y. Um, they decided to help Bob with this idea. They started doing free trainings and Bob was able to get a contract with CT Management that operates Potomac Gardens to get a contract to do the landscaping work there. Dave and Blake did the training. But then after a couple of years, Bob realized that Faith Works was not going to be financially sustainable to keep going.

DEUTSCH: Um hm.

S. PARK: So they asked us if we wanted to sort of take over the Clean Green Team because there was momentum and guys were getting work and they were excited about the Clean Green Team, but they didn't have the infrastructure to be able to sustain it. So I talked to Mary about it. She was a little hesitant at first [laughs]. She was like oh ...

DEUTSCH: Something else to worry about.

S. PARK: Right, exactly.

DEUTSCH: She's the practical one.

S. PARK: But then I think she caught a vision and decided OK, let's move forward with it. And so we took it on and, you know, met Antonio who was kind of the manager at that time.

DEUTSCH: And so where did Antonio come to you from?

S. PARK: He was already part of the Clean Green Team. And so Bob ...

DEUTSCH: OK. Did he live at Potomac Gardens?

S. PARK: He grew up

M. PARK: He did when he grew up, but he moved away.

DEUTSCH: Moved up.

S. PARK: But we never worked with him as a child. He was a little older.

DEUTSCH: Do you have a last name for Antonio?

S. PARK: Smith.

DEUTSCH: OK, that I can spell.

S. PARK: [laughs] And so we took it on and decided to that we would try to make improvements, continue the contract with CT Management and Potomac Gardens and then we started taking on more jobs in the neighborhood with private home owners and trying to get more work because we wanted them to get more hours. They weren't getting adequate hours to kind of sustain themselves. So over time we've been growing the Clean Green Team getting more private contracts, mostly in Capitol Hill. Yeah, our guys have really blossomed and grown and some of them are really taking on ... I mean they're taking on a lot of responsibility and ownership. I mean these are guys who show up at 7 in the morning, work through 100 degree heat. They show up on time every morning for very hard work.

DEUTSCH: I've heard great reports about them.

S. PARK: Really? That's great.

M. PARK: So about I would say about 30 guys have come through Clean Green Team. Currently we have six on the team. We have six at a time. And so different people have really come and they have left but they have gained great experiences.

S. PARK: We had that core team that stays on.

M. PARK: Right. But the number of jobs keep on growing and, you know, I shared with you, Stephanie, last year. We did about 350 jobs outside of Potomac Gardens, and then this year it went up to 690 jobs, just around Potomac Gardens.

S. PARK: And all of Capitol Hill.

M. PARK: Yes. And so yes, it's growing [laughs]. We've had, we have been, Clean Green Team have been with us for about five years now?

DEUTSCH: That's huge.

S. PARK: It's really life changing. I mean, Lawrence, he's like six foot eight. He was in our program when he was younger, but then he kind of got mixed up with the wrong crowd. And he was incarcerated for a couple of years, came out, had literally nothing to do. He would just listened to music on his headphones and walk around the neighborhood like all day, like just walking around, trying to stay out of trouble, but then having no work. But then we gave him an opportunity.

DEUTSCH: He was someone you remembered from when he was a child?

S. PARK: Yes, yes.

DEUTSCH: So you gave him an opportunity to work with Clean Green?

S. PARK: Yes, and so he took to it. He's real shy and he's shy, he's quiet, very gentle. But he started coming and started working and started being very consistent and now he's just an amazing employee. I mean, he is just so faithful, so hardworking, does things with excellence. I mean, it's just amazing to see when, people who get the opportunity after they've gone through difficult times and to just take that opportunity and just run with it and just an incredibly hardworking guy. Just willing to do whatever it takes to do the job and doesn't complain. It's just, I don't know, it's like working in 100 degree heat, outside, cutting grass or moving things and to never complain and always show up on time, it's just

amazing. It's amazing. And so a lot of these guys need that opportunity and need encouragement and need support, but lives can really turn around. We've seen that time and time again.

DEUTSCH: Where do most of your volunteers come from?

S. PARK: Kind of all over. We use a website called Volunteer Match so we get a number of people through that.

DEUTSCH: What is it called?

S. PARK: Volunteer Match.com.

DEUTSCH: Instead of Match.com?

S. PARK: [laughs] We also, people Google us and we have a web presence.

M. PARK: But I would say the number one way of volunteers coming through us, to us, is through friends and family.

S. PARK: Yeah, word of mouth.

M. PARK: Word of mouth.

DEUTSCH: Yep.

S. PARK: That's the number one.

DEUTSCH: And how many volunteers would you say work for Little Lights?

S. PARK: I think last year our total number of volunteers was close to 600, but on a kind of a weekly basis it's about 110 volunteers on a weekly basis. But we're needing to recruit more because we are expanding our reading and math to Hopkins so we'll need more volunteers. That's just starting out this semester so that's another 12 volunteers, so maybe 120 weekly volunteers.

DEUTSCH: Talk a little bit about Hopkins. About the expansion to Hopkins.

S. PARK: Yeah, so Hopkins is, I would say like a sister public housing to Potomac Gardens. They are separate but they are very close to each other. They are both managed by the same management company, CT Management. And Hopkins was a community that we didn't have a lot of relationship with until fairly recently. So in 2012, Gloria Matthews, who is the president of the resident council of Hopkins, reached out to us and we were talking and she said, you know, the space of the Boys and Girls Club [1000 12th Street SE] is vacant because they left and no one is using that space and she knew us from a couple of

special events. So we were talking and she asked if we might be interested in providing programs there. And she showed me the space and I said, you know, this has a lot of potential, Little Lights is in pretty good shape financially. So we talked with our Board, we talked with Mary and showed her the space. We just decided, yeah, let's take a leap of faith and ...

DEUTSCH: Did it feel, I mean it's like doubling the amount of work you had in a way. But did it feel a little daunting or ...

M. PARK: No I think there are some things that come to you, opportunities, and for this particular one it was exciting after seeing the space. Before seeing the space, yes, it's always daunting. You don't know what's going to happen but after seeing the possible space. And then also the idea of providing more services to kids and families, it starts to build, and you get excited over a period of time and then your team gets excited. And then when you are actually doing the renovation, you get more and more excited and so, yeah, I think it was a growing experience, of the excitement growing. And then now we look back and we're just really happy that we did this.

S. PARK: And so, yeah, it was really great experience.

DEUTSCH: And then you expanded to the other Hopkins site.

S. PARK: Right, last year, in 2016 at 1430 [1430 L Street SE] ... Again, Miss Gloria asked us, there's a space here, a lot of kids who can't access the program down the street because they're too young to walk. And so ...

M. PARK: But I think what's exciting is, after doing one, and then you go to another one, you learn also other skills like how to renovate, how to ...

S. PARK: Quickly [laughs].

M. PARK: ... how to put on flooring and paint colors and so you start to do new things that you didn't always get to do, so that's exciting [laughs]. New challenges, as Steve says, puts forth for the team.

S. PARK: Yeah, and I remember, you remember when we expanded to the community room at 1212 I Street, so that's when we got the Keller Award and we used funds from the Keller Award ...

DEUTSCH: 1212 I Street. Remind me.

S. PARK: Which is in Potomac Gardens.

DEUTSCH: In Potomac Gardens, right.

S. PARK: So we got space in Potomac Gardens for the first time, I think it was 2008 or 2009, I can't remember.

DEUTSCH: Right, then you got the Keller.

S. PARK: The Keller Award helped us to do that first renovation at Potomac Gardens and so we, going through that renovation and then going through another, we are learning how to do it more efficiently. And we have a great volunteer pool obviously to draw upon and get free help. So the more you do it, I guess in some ways the easier it becomes.

DEUTSCH: Mary, you said something interesting when I was talking to you a couple of times ago about how we're in this for the long haul. Can you talk a little bit about that?

M. PARK: Well, you know, I think meeting Steve and dating Steve and marrying Steve, I realize that I'm going to be doing this for life.

S. PARK: [laughs]

M. PARK: And Steve said to me one day when we were dating, I will give up Little Lights if that's, you know, what God is calling us to do and if it becomes too difficult. Just knowing how excited he gets doing this type of work, that's something I knew going in and marrying him that I could never ask of him, to let go of Little Lights. And so I went in knowing that this is going to be what I was going to do for life. That makes it easier [laughs] in that you don't have to worry or think about what am I going to do next or is this what I'm called to do, or am I happy to be here.

DEUTSCH: That's not the question.

M. PARK: No, those are not the questions you ask anymore.

DEUTSCH: The question is what comes next.

M. PARK: Yes. [laughs] How do we continue to sustain this, how do we continue to raise healthy, great kids while doing this type of work. And so, yeah, that makes it easy to know that you're here till the end.

S. PARK: And we have such great supporters, we have a great Board of Directors.

M. PARK: Yes.

S. PARK: We have great foundations like Capitol Hill Community Foundation who really support us and so that makes it a whole lot easier to keep going and there's always things to learn. I mean, you never, it's never boring. Even after 21 years, it is never boring [laughs].

M. PARK: And our schedules are so flexible now that I have to say to many of our kids, our own kids school events, we're always there most of the time. And so, that's great.

DEUTSCH: That's a luxury.

S. PARK: Yeah it is, it is.

M. PARK: So those are the benefits we are reaping.

S. PARK: And it's a short commute from where we live to get to the office and so we just drop off the kids at Eastern Market for their school bus and then come into the office which is just a few blocks.

DEUTSCH: Tell me about the work you are doing at Little Lights around race issues.

S. PARK: Yeah, so this started in 2016, but I started doing a more formal class on teaching, I guess what you call race literacy. So trying to help people who volunteer at Little Lights or who are in the community to learn more about the issues of race and have opportunities for dialogue in kind of a safe environment. Because it's not an issue that, it's a difficult topic and often the conversations aren't happening in diverse settings and so, and Little Lights is kind of in a great position because we have such a diverse staff, we have diverse volunteers, donors that we can sort of get people together who may often never speak to each other because they are in different circles. And so doing a class to promote dialog, to promote a better understanding of the issues of race.

DEUTSCH: So where do you offer the class?

S. PARK: We've been doing it here at the Little Lights office. Teaching about like the history of race, where did racial ideology even develop and how has it been used. One thing I realized is that very few people actually know that much about race. We talk about race, there are categories that are sort of, we sort of have absorbed by just being in the culture but we actually don't know that much about it. So if you ask somebody how many races are there, right.

DEUTSCH: Good question.

S. PARK: We just sort of take it for granted that we know that but when you actually ask that question and try to get a specific answer, you know, people don't know or they are guessing. And part of it is that there is never been any kind of definitive or scientific sort of definitions of different races. So things like that, helping people understand that history, understand some of the "science" and also have time for dialog.

DEUTSCH: So who comes to the classes? So when, have you offered them in like series? Or is it just one and off?

S. PARK: Yes, I've done it twice and they are about 11 weeks long.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

S. PARK: Yeah, so it's fairly intensive and so the first class there were people who were volunteers, but also just people who just found out about it from the neighborhood or some of it was just word of mouth, someone got an e-mail. So it's open, we opened it up to the public so to speak. And then this last session is volunteers or people who are connected through a volunteer or donor, but we also had a couple of our staff members participate, people that I know. And so, trying to intentionally have it be a diverse group.

DEUTSCH: And what's come out of it? What have you seen ...

S. PARK: I think people are definitely more aware of and understand race better. I think they have also built relationships with people who they normally wouldn't. So there's definitely been some relationship building but also a greater sense of awareness and greater sense of oh OK, I understand sort of some of the complexities of how race plays out in our culture better. And so, yeah that's been really fascinating.

DEUTSCH: Where did you turn for, I mean, did you just invent this all or did you have ...

S. PARK: I mean it's something that just ...

DEUTSCH: Something that you obviously thought about ...

S. PARK: ... developed over time. Yeah, I mean we use a core, the core of it is a DVD called "Race the Power of an Illusion" which was actually created by PBS in a California newsreel. So that's sort of is our base.

DEUTSCH: I see.

S. PARK: Because that has a lot of the history and the science but then adding additional elements to it, articles and even, sharing of personal stories. So that's been great and excited to keep ...

DEUTSCH: Is that something you're going to do in the future?

S. PARK: Yes, so I hope to continue it pretty consistently.

M. PARK: But I would also say that these are issues that Steve has always been interested in having dialogs about or having workshops or talking to people about but it's really nice that we're at a time when Steve can actually do this.

DEUTSCH: And I think this political moment that ...

S. PARK: Yes, yes.

DEUTSCH: Although many people see huge reasons to be discouraged by it.

S. PARK: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: I think actually it is going to open up more of this conversation.

S. PARK: Everybody's—it's on people's minds.

DEUTSCH: Because it's an issue on people's minds.

S. PARK: Absolutely. I'd say you're right, I think there is an opportunity that wasn't there before. And even in Capitol Hill trying to, I feel like Little Lights is also trying to play a bridge, be a bridge between kind of the professionals who live in the community, who've moved in maybe in the past 10, 12 years to the people living in public housing. Because there's an intimidating psychological barrier, maybe on both sides of the fence, you know fences that surround Potomac Gardens and Hopkins. So Little Lights is sort of, can be a bridge for people where it's safe for both parties to co-exist. So you know, volunteers coming in, you know a lot of our volunteers go into Potomac Gardens and Hopkins to volunteer. They are actually going into the grounds of the public housing where a lot of people have never been.

DEUTSCH: Where they might not feel very comfortable.

S. PARK: Yeah, and so trying to be that bridge building place and I think that a lot of volunteers have really enjoyed meeting kids and even adults from public housing who they may have just had no contact with at all in any other setting. And so trying to find a way to build bridges, even promote dialog. We did over the summer we would do things like karaoke nights inviting homeowners and residents from public housing.

DEUTSCH: How did that work out?

S. PARK: It was a lot of fun. People were singing, they were doing duets. So it was a lot of fun.

DEUTSCH: Did you do the karaoke nights actually in Potomac Gardens?

S. PARK: At Hopkins.

DEUTSCH: At Hopkins

S. PARK: Hopkins is our biggest space and they have a good sound system there. And so just trying to promote relationship building rather than just us versus them. And realizing that we can co-exist. You know, people in public housing can co-exist well and even benefit and actually have good relationships with people who are living in public housing and who are living in townhouses or row houses. So, I just feel like that's part of our mission.

DEUTSCH: That's a huge part of your mission.

S. PARK: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: That might be a good place to end. Building bridges.

END OF INTERVIEW