

Below is a transcript of the interview with Mary March that took place in church on October 4, 2015.

Tell us a little bit about your ethnic & cultural background.

I am Korean American, which means that I am ethnically Korean but I was born and raised in the USA. I am just as American as the next person born here in the States. My parents came to the States from South Korea in the early 70s—my dad as a church planter and my mom as a nurse.

In what ways did you feel connected to your Korean culture growing up in the US?

My dad was a church planter. He started one of the first Korean churches in New Jersey so on Sundays we went to an immigrant church where I was surrounded by Koreans who spoke Korean. We ate Korean food and celebrated a lot of the Korean holidays and traditions together. The church was my extended family of sorts. The kids in our Korean church were mostly like me either born in the US or came from Korea when they were young. We were called 2nd generation Koreans or 1.5 generation Koreans. As a result, we were dual-culture kids—we had one foot in Korean culture and one foot in Western American culture and we could switch back and forth, keeping track of the

social and culturally acceptable practices of either culture depending on what context we were in. We were able to adapt to what was expected of us in each culture.

I know that you spent time in a few different schools - some in inner city Jersey City, and some in wealthy suburban New Jersey. What was it like to grow up in a predominantly white NJ school system as a 2nd generation Korean?

I did move a lot and that had to do with my mom going back to get her Masters and Doctorate and being the senior pastor of a different church than my dad was. I was born in Jersey City and then we lived for some time in Madison, Demarest, Closter, Haworth—all wealthy suburbs somewhat like Edina. When I was in elementary school, I was less aware of how different I was; or should I say how I looked from everyone else because I just wasn't paying attention. However, I did notice that as immigrants, my parents weren't able to befriend a single one of my friend's parents. I thought that was normal, but now that I am a parent of elementary school kids I know it wasn't normal. I think they just were not included.

I had plenty of friends but I still got teased for being Asian by some less-aware students who called me "Chinky Eyes" or would pretend to speak in Chinese to

me even though I don't have small eyes, I'm not Chinese, and I probably had better grammar and syntax than they did. I believe they did it more just to get laughs from their friends but as an elementary school student, I didn't understand that dynamic. I just thought either my culture or I was inferior or not generally accepted here. When I moved from that town to more ethnically diverse suburb, I was shocked to find that people didn't make fun of me because I was Asian. Being Asian was kind of cool. I didn't dread going to school. The anxiety I didn't even know I had was gone because I didn't have to pretend to be more white than I actually was and I didn't have to be someone I wasn't.

What has your experience of racism or just cultural ignorance been like here in Edina and Minneapolis?

Regarding racism, I haven't experienced much overt racism here. But then again Minnesotans are not very overt about anything. However, I have wondered if people treat me differently because I am Korean-American. The stereotype of the Asian woman is someone who is meek, not loud, and goes along with other people. I sometimes experience people putting those expectations on me subtly. Sometimes, people don't like it when I express my opinion forcefully and I

have noticed that some people don't accept my "No."

Others are even bolder and they will just tell me what to do. There is an image of Asian females in media and pop culture and people can subconsciously bring these stereotypes into their interactions with me and I have to bear that. They speak to me in ways they wouldn't speak to a white male or white female, and there have been times when John (March) has been able to observe those interactions when people don't realize he is with me. People expect me to be more passive or compliant. It feels minimizing and hurtful and I have to make split second decisions to just take it or speak up. And then on top of all that, there is no one to eat Korean food with me here. I like my Korean food.

How can New City be a more multi-cultural place that allows everyone to be honest about who they are?

Be aware of cultural differences and ask questions when you don't understand something about me. Be interested in other cultures. Don't be afraid to talk about cultural difference and be aware that you bring your own culture to the table that is different from mine.

I have loved the Multicultural Potluck because it allows me to bring part of my Korean culture, aka Korea food, to you and you have responded so favorably to it and

subsequently me, which really has been encouraging. It feels like connection to me when you love the food that I love. It is one way we can celebrate or see "others" here at New City.