Immigrant Interview

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According to the textbook page 123, “Individual differences also exist in reasons for immigration and related hopes and expectations” (Manning & Baruth, 2009). I personally think most immigrants come to the U.S. to find religious freedom, to avoid economic pressure in one’s home country, and to find prospective jobs. However, my friend, Soyeon Hong, immigrated to the United States to follow her lover.

Soyeon Hong, who I interviewed, is from South Korea. She immigrated to the U.S. because she married a U.S. citizen. I think her immigrant story to the U.S. is a little different and funny compared to other immigrants. She never dreamed that she was going to marry a foreigner and also live in other country. Also, she hasn’t been to another country until she married and came to the U.S.

She was a normal elementary school teacher in Korea. She did not have any interest in dating a foreigner. However, her friend introduced her to an American man, Howard, by chance. Howard was working as an English teacher in a Korean public high school. Soyeon and Howard started to date for a year. Soyeon could speak a little bit of English and Howard could speak an intermediate level of Korean. So they communicated in both Korean and English. When Howard’s teaching contract was almost over at his school, he proposed to Soyeon to marry and go to the U.S. with him. While interviewing Soyeon, she told me that she cried a lot because she felt at her wits end. She was so in love with Howard that she wanted to marry him, but she was so afraid of living in another country with strangers. Finally, she decided to follow him to the U.S.

First, they married in Korea before they left to the U.S. Then, she entered the U.S. with her tourist visa (ESTA visa). Two months later, she arrived in the state, and she and her husband
registered for a marriage license. Then, they had a wedding ceremony again with Howard’s family and friends.

In the process of obtaining a U.S. green card, Soyeon and Howard retained an immigration lawyer so they didn’t have to deal with the complicated process. After their marriage, they applied for a green card for Soyeon. Howard submitted a visa petition (I-130) for Soyeon to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). One month later, they applied for a green card. USCIS informed them to visit to take a green card photograph and scan fingerprints.

About four months later, they got a letter from USCIS for a green card interview. She said that it was the hardest and most intensive time while they preparing the interview. It wasn’t a problem preparing many documents because they had an immigration lawyer who helped. However, she was stressed because of fear that she might not answer correctly or get a green card.

During the interview, their lawyer attended with them. She had a little difficulty with the language barrier, but her husband explained slowly and translated in Korean for her. They had been asked questions such as when was your wedding anniversary?, what is your wife’s parents name?, where did you meet first? She couldn’t remember all the questions, but she was asked about ten questions. The interview took about ten minutes. She explained to me that the atmosphere of the interview was so cold, sober and extremely serious that she was intimidated.

One week after the interview, finally, Soyeon got mail from USCIS notifying her that she is approved for a green card and they will send a green card and documents in thirty days. She got her actual green card two weeks later than that. Finally, she obtained her green card and stayed in the U.S. legally. It took six months to finish the whole process from applying for a
green card to obtaining it. Soyeon had a very hazy memory about the cost that they spent for the immigration process. She wasn’t sure of the exact amount, but they spent almost $2,800 (excluding the lawyer’s bill).

Her biggest challenge during the immigration process was the language barrier. According to the textbook page 130, “Understanding the spoken word and being understood while speaking English often pose difficult situations for Asian American learners” (Manning & Baruth, 2009). She learned English when she was in Korea. However, listening to English was much faster and used difficult vocabulary than she thought. When she spoke with a lawyer about the immigration process, she could not understand half of their conversation because of unfamiliar terminology.

Now, she has lived in the U.S. for five years. Before she came to the U.S, she did not have the highest expectation because she didn’t plan on living in the U.S. However, one thing that she expected was the home-party culture of the U.S. She watched American home parties and BBQ’s in the backyard on occasional days from American movies or dramas before she came to the U.S. She really craved those family or friends home parties because it seemed really happy and exciting in the movies. Now, her expectation is confirmed. She is very socialized. She likes meeting people and sharing ideas so she really enjoys inviting friends, neighbors, and family to her house and barbeque, play games, and talk. She has a home party almost once every two weeks.

The things that she likes best about the U.S. is the relaxed life. People in America do not rush or press, or are stressed. It seems like they enjoy their life no matter what their economic status. According to the textbook page 127, “The accumulation of wealth allows people more options, opportunities, and increased amounts of leisure time” (Manning & Baruth, 2009).
Koreans are really sensitive at social and economic status. They are eager to achieve high social status and economic wealth. In that process, they get stressed about their life.

Also, she mentioned that she likes children-centered or family-centered American culture. Manning & Baruth (page 128) describes the best thing about Korean family culture is that “Asian American parents seem to structure their children’s lives for academic success more than Caucasian parents do.” She is 8 weeks pregnant now. She is very pleased about raising her child in America. She hopes her child grows up in a happy and comfortable family, but does not stressed over academic success.

Her difficulty living in America is cultural differences with her husband. According to the textbook page 124, “Cultural misconceptions of oneself can have a detrimental effect on the forming identity and can result in undue and unrealistic pressures and demands: (Manning & Baruth, 2009). Her husband was born and grew up in the U.S. for thirty years. She was born and grew up in Korea for twenty-nine years. They were born and raised in completely different regions, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. Sometimes, Soyeon and her husband argue about very small things because of cultural differences. For example, she wants her husband to take off his shoes inside of the house because people do not wear their shoes inside of the home in Korea. However, Howard is used to wearing shoes inside of the home. Even though they are often faced with cultural differences as an international married couple, they still love each other and try to respect and accept each other’s culture.

Overall, Soyeon likes and feels satisfied living in the U.S. and she thanks her husband who brought her to a new world and let her experience challenges. Sometimes, she gets home sick even though she has her husband with her. She misses her Korean family, old friends, and
her hometown. However, she tries to overcome her longing because she’s in the U.S. with her new happy family and friends now.
References