

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization Asian Family Center Oral History Project

Date: October 7, 2014

Location: Asian Family Center, Portland, Oregon

Length: 1:20:06

Interviewee: Lyn Tan

Interviewer: Natalia Fernández

Transcribers: Avery Sorensen

[00:00:00]

NF: Natalia Fernández

LT: Lyn Tan

[?]: The word or phrase was unintelligible and not transcribed.

NF: My name is Natalia Fernández; I am the Oregon Multicultural Librarian for OSU's Special Collections and Archives Research Center. Today's date is October 7th, 2014, and we are at the Asian Family Center to conduct an oral history interview. So, if we could get started by stating your name and spelling it out loud.

LT: My name is Lyn Tan. L-Y-N, T-A-N.

NF: And, what is your birthdate and your birthplace?

LT: Birthdate is October 1st, 1964, and I was born in Singapore.

NF: And what cultural or ethnic backgrounds do you identify yourself with?

LT: I am from Singapore, so I identify myself as Singaporean, that's one. So, you know, in terms of nationality, I'm Singaporean. This is despite living here for almost three decades, but, yeah, I still see myself as Singaporean. In terms of ethnic culture, I am Peranakan. So, Peranakan is a distinct cultural group that you find in Singapore, some parts of Malaysia, and Indonesia. And so, that's one main cultural group that I identify with. In Singapore, Peranakans have been integrated very well into the more-mainstream and larger Chinese culture. And, Peranakans have been seen as almost a subgroup of Chinese Culture, so I am comfortable in Chinese-based cultures also.

NF: And, when and where were your parents born?

LT: Both my parents were born in Singapore. My mom is deceased; she's been deceased eight years – the exact dates, you know, the year escapes me, but she was 65 when she

passed, and it's been eight years since. So I guess we can do the math there. And my dad will be 83 in a week or so, you know, and he was also born in Singapore.

NF: And so, is that where you grew up, in Singapore?

LT: Mm-hm.

NF: And, for how long were you there and when did you come over to the United States, or did you live elsewhere before coming here?

LT: So, I was born and I grew up in Singapore and had done my primary and secondary education in Singapore and came when I was 19. So, when I came, it was specifically to go to the U of O for college, this was at the end of 1983 - yeah. And, I've pretty much been in the U.S. ever since, save for maybe about almost two years after I graduated from the U of O—had gone back for close to two years and then came back again, this was 1991 when I came back and have been here ever since.

NF: So what made you choose the U of O, and what made you choose Oregon?

LT: It wasn't my first choice—Oregon wasn't my first choice. I had applied to several places. So, I had applied to NYU and Columbia, UCLA, USC, and were accepted into all of them, but—in addition to the U of O—but, for my parents, I think at that time, the thought of my running wild in New York—I wanted to go to New York to go to a big city—the thought of my running wild in New York, my parents were not very comfortable with that. Neither were they very comfortable with me being in L.A.—same reason for me to want to go to L.A., it's like, "oh, okay it's a big, fun city, many things to do." And so, the reason why I had initially even applied for Oregon was I just figured that that would be an easy sell for my parents. I had a cousin who was attending college at Lewis and Clark at that time. My brother had started college a semester, a quarter before me, so he was going to school in Salem at Willamette. So for me, it's like, "look it, mom and dad, I have a cousin in Lewis and Clark, I've got a brother in Salem, so how could this go wrong?" You know, yeah.

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And that's how I ended up at the U of O. At that time, there were also quite a number of Singaporean students who were attending school at the U of O. So it's something that gave my parents comfort to know that I was away, but there were relatives close by and also a small Singaporean community. So, they knew—my parents were acquainted with some of these students because they knew the parents, you know, who had their kids at the U of O, so yeah.

NF: Is there a reason, or a few reasons, in particular why the Singaporean community was in that Eugene area or why the students were choosing to go to school there?

LT: Yeah. Several. You know, one was – this was in the '80s, and I believe, I'm not quite sure exactly right now, but back then when individuals wanted to go abroad, Singaporeans wanted to go abroad for study, they definitely wanted to go to an institution that was recognized by the local government, right. Because, you don't want to go to some place that was not recognized and then come back and not have your degree recognized. So that was one reason. And, the U of O, the fact that it was a state school, was a recognized institution. Tuition and fees for an international student, Eugene compared to other state schools, I mean, you know, i.e. UCLA – much cheaper at that time, so that was another big, big factor. And, at that time, I know the U of O has since changed its admissions policy, but at that time, the U of O did a rolling admissions, you know, had a rolling admissions policy. So, a student could apply to be admitted, you know, and enrolled from winter terms, you know, as opposed to – there were other universities where you only start school in the fall, and the U of O wasn't one of those - you could come in the spring, you know, or in fall or winter. And so, that made it convenient. And the final sort of like big reason was that the Singapore education system--at that time, students were only doing the British-based, the Cambridge-based GCE or A levels exam. And, we got our exam results typically in January or, you know, you took the exams September through, you know – or October through December, sometime around then during that window. And by the time the exams are graded, so a lot of it was graded in Cambridge, and so by the time it came back, so we'd only know the results maybe in January, February. And so if you didn't do well, right, you know, and you had blown your chances of being admitted in the university in Singapore at that time, that means, you had to go elsewhere, right. The whole application procedure, right, I mean, you know, it was favorable at the U of O. You know, it's like, by the time – if you found out in March, like darn, you know, I can't go to the National University of Singapore, I have to start this application process to apply for school. Possibly, you had missed the deadlines for fall, but you'd not missed the deadlines for winter yet; so it's like, here's a school that would possibly admit me in the winter, you know. So a lot of Singaporeans did that, including myself. I happened to stay on all four years; others, you know, used that as a stepping stone because they knew that that was the ticket to start as soon as possible and that after the first year, transferred elsewhere, you know, to the school that they actually wanted to go to but had not applied yet because they had missed deadlines, you know.

NF: So you mentioned that your brother and your cousin had also come to the United States to study, did you have other siblings that also came, or...?

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LT: I have a younger sister, and she didn't come to the U.S., but she went to – she did her post-secondary education in Australia.

NF: Oh, nice. And so, was your intention to come study here and return to Singapore, or were you thinking that you wanted to stay in the United States, or would you decide maybe after living here? Did you have a plan?

LT: I think, you know, I didn't have a firm plan. There wasn't anything specific, you know. I've heard, like, after I've been here and made friends at U of O, where definitely there were friends – not necessarily from Singapore, just from other places – where their intent was to stay here by hook. For me, I was open to staying here if there were opportunities. I was not averse to going back either, depending on whatever opportunities. So, I didn't have a plan, a firm plan per se; it was just you know, let's just see how things go, you know, and what unfolds. Plus, I was, I don't know, 21, 22, I mean I don't think I thought much ahead. When I think back now to opportunities that I missed at the U of O that I should have, could have – I wouldn't say "should" because I just didn't understand the process – but, could have taken more advantage of had I known. You know, these days I think like, "wow, I mean, I never do that." Internships for instance, because I didn't understand that concept, right. So even something basic where it's like I said I wanted a job but I didn't do these internships or things like this, jeez, how was I supposed to get the jobs? And, you know, it's like go figure, look at these friends that did it and then found the jobs, found offers and opportunities to stay – I didn't do that. It's part of like, my, I think, ignorance and naiveté, you know. Just like, I just didn't plan.

NF: Right. So what was it that you studied?

LT: I studied, well I mean, I did a double in film; so film, but more film theory and aesthetics and journalism in public relations and advertising.

NF: Wonderful. So you mentioned that you did go back to Singapore for a couple years and then you decided to come back. Did you come back to Portland then, or elsewhere in Oregon?

LT: I came back to Portland, yeah, so in '91.

NF: And what was the reason for coming back to Portland? Was there an opportunity in Portland that you were going after?

LT: No, it wasn't my first choice to want to come back to Portland, Oregon, for that matter. No, I mean, I met my husband, so we met while we were at the U of O in

Eugene; and so, we were dating. And so, I went back after I graduated so I—I was on an international visa so I stayed a year after and, you know, tried to find a job but was actually very clueless. When I think about it these days, it's comical. He was in Eugene, he was still going to school in Eugene; and so I was limiting my job search, internship searches to just Eugene and never even thought about Portland. So of course I didn't really find anything. And I didn't know any better to seek counselling or to work with the career center, you know, at the school so I didn't find an internship. You know, since I was on a student visa, so I returned to Singapore after my visa was up. But we--my husband, you know, my boyfriend at that time--we were still in this long distance relationship. This was before the internet and Skype and whatnot so we would spend incredible amounts of money on our long-distance bills—were just horrendous from just the contact that we attempted to maintain with each other. And so, and I had also strategically when I went back, found, you know—so my plan was to find a job with an airline, an international airline, or maybe a hotel chain knowing that these are jobs and these types of places would give me employee perks, you know, in terms of like free ticket, annual ticket to travel anywhere I want, you know. And/or, have subsidized or free accommodation if I were to come back to visit.

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So, that's how I went back and found a job, you know, with an airline and then had commuted back a couple times too. At the end of, close to, two years—it was just ridiculous, I spent more money that I could have bought myself several tickets back and forth—so it just wasn't a sustainable plan. The last trip that I had come back, previous to this decision to move back, I was—I had come back, I don't remember, I came back once for a work conference. I was working with Northwest Airlines at the time doing marketing and public relations and whatnot; and so, either it was that trip or one other trip that I came back—I was having just a hard time navigating the whole customs and immigrations check right after I got off of the plane. This was, I think, in an era where a lot of Chinese nationals from mainland China, especially women, were coming. And there was this whole thing of Chinese women coming here specifically to, wanting to stay for finding husbands or something, you know, and I don't know. So I had these questions at immigration like, "why are you here again? I've noticed you've come so many times in the past year, plus. Why are you here?" One of those times I was actually held at the airport for a while with my passport taken away. I wasn't told, so I was just put in a room—I wasn't strip-searched or anything like that—but, I was just put in a room with no reason provided to me as to why I was being held and why my passport was taken away. And after, like, two or three hours just says, "okay, you're clear to go," with, again, no explanation. I made up mind, in that very moment, I'm not going to go through this again. You know, it's like this is ridiculous, I have done nothing wrong; but this is the way it is, you know, with U.S. immigrations and customs and whatnot. I'm not going to bring—you know, I was convinced that, you know, I was not going to

win that fight and neither did I want to devote energies to complaining or questioning what was this all about. You know, instead for me it's like, "I'm either staying here or I'm not." And so, I came back, I think, summer-ish, you know it's like 1990 or so just to visit my boyfriend. And we talked through – it's like, so are we staying or are we not? And, you know, I stayed for that, you know, I think about the six months, you know, I was allowed to on the visitor visa at that time. At the end of that then, we figured, so okay we'll get married, you know. So we did. So it's like the whole process of then staying together, green card, and you know.

NF: So you went through that whole process and got through it?

LT: Yeah. Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm.

NF: Great.

LT: And yeah, you know, just because I just knew, I mean, I'm not coming back here again if this is going to be, you know, there's no guarantees that I wouldn't have been stopped at immigration again. Again, it wasn't like, you know, it was traumatic and whatnot, but I just thought that was just not anything I wanted to put up with or I needed to put up with. Plus, it wasn't like I was struggling in Singapore. I mean, I had a job, I had opportunities, so it was not like I needed to be here, you know, to find a job or for a livelihood. I had one, you know, where I came from and could build from that if I desired, you know.

NF: And so, did you parents end up staying in Singapore, or did they eventually move to the United States, or?

LT: So my parents have never been here, I mean, you know, as in residence. They've come to visit. But, they're from Singapore, and, you know, and it's never been their intention to want to migrate or want to live elsewhere, yeah.

NF: So then you moved to Portland in the early '90s, and how did you become involved with IRCO, and specifically with the AFC? So the AFC was established in the mid-90s, but how did you become involved with the organization?

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LT: Um. I moved back, and so, I mean, here is this – I was on a career path, and there was nothing like that I could do here. I mean, you know, Portland isn't the hub for major international airlines, or commerce, or banks, or anything like that. You know, at that point--if I had not come back here, I would have actually pursued an undergraduate program in China. I had already – my visa was accepted and I had a

place waiting for me in Beijing University, right, to do an immersion. For me, it's like, that was where I wanted to just brush up and focus on Mandarin. And to, you know, possibly study – so after sort of like the, you've done an intensive Mandarin immersion program, then to be able to transfer into just a university system and to be studying Chinese history. So I had my plans, other plans. It was never this intention that, you know, I move back here for love. That was about it. But, I moved back here, and, again, it wasn't like I chose Portland because it's like this place of my dreams, unlike my husband. I mean, you know, he grew up in Wisconsin and he made that conscious effort to move out to Oregon and the West coast because he climbed and he skied, and this was one of those places that he wanted to be at – to be near the mountains and the outdoors. For me, it's like, I didn't have any desire to be in the outdoors – I'm a city girl which is why I chose like a New York or a L.A. to go to when I wanted to come to the U.S. So I came back here and I struggled as to what I wanted to make of my life. And, since I was going back to – I wanted to go back to school and to do this thing in Beijing, so I figured, it's like, "well, I'm here." And, you know my husband was going to PSU at that time, had started his graduate program at PSU. So for me, it's like, I don't know what I want to do, might as well go back to school and figure that out here. So, I started taking post-bacc classes. I would have done – if I were to go back to school in the U.S., I would have gone back and done film – there was no film program at PSU. So as a post-bacc, you know, I just searched around basically; I did classes in the history department knowing that I wanted to do Chinese history, you know, in the mainlands. So it was just things here tried, you know; I just got to know what was being offered here, and getting to know faculty, and then found my way into the graduate program in the speech-communication department. It was true there, and my husband and a friend of his – who actually we knew even from Eugene days – she was then, at that time, going to a grad program in the same department as my husband and, I think, just about finished; and she was applying for jobs, and then she had applied for a job at IRCO at that time. That was how I got to know about IRCO. I didn't necessarily know before that that there was a refugee community in Portland. But, this friend of ours, Linda, had applied and gotten this job at IRCO, right. That was just then as this, "hmm, interesting," you know, there's this organization. I didn't necessarily know anything about AFC, I mean, at that time, I think I was just more-busy trying to settle in and find my own life and find a pace for my own life. But I remembered that, and one time I remember, I think, giving her a lift to IRCO – this was, I think it was at Burnside. You know, not even at the current building. I was just like, "oh, this is kind of interesting," and just forgot about that.

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During my own graduate school time, there was someone else in my department, you know, who started the program a year after me, then started volunteering at IRCO, you know, right from her first year of graduate school. So, to me that was like, "oh here's another person and here's that IRCO name again." And, a little later--also true, you

know, it's like grad school connections – I was teaching, I was a graduate teaching assistant, but I also adjunct, after I'd finish and also adjunct instructor teaching in a cultural communication classes there and at Mt. Hood. But, one of my grad school pals, who I think was working with IRCO in one of the AFC-based programs, had said something like, "hey, you know I'm involved in this project now, and it's this intercultural thing since, you know, you teach so much of this intercultural and you've got this unique perspective, you know, of intercultural and you're doing things quite differently. You know, we're looking for people to participate in one of these, this project that we're working and would you like to come?" And, you know, I was like, "sure, why not. I mean, what's involved?" And so, she told me a little bit more that there would be some trainings offered, you know, from these guests--people from D.C. or whatever talking about, just, community organizing, or getting non-English speaking populations to be able to organize and mobilize themselves better, and navigating this cultural landscape here. So, I thought that was all interesting, so I attended a few of those trainings. During one of the breaks I was speaking to this person, Rebecca, my friend, and we were just lamenting about budget cuts within higher education system, and whether we would have our jobs at PSU for much longer – you know with all these budget cuts. And, Mr. Lee from AFC happened to actually had listened-in and heard some of this; and, at that time, I mean, had just said something like, "you know, would you be interested to work for AFC or for IRCO?" And I was like, "hmm, you know, that's an interesting thought." You know, I didn't really think about it. On the one hand, I was worried about whether I would have a job at PSU, but I wasn't necessarily thinking about IRCO, working for IRCO. So, you know, I definitely made that contact with Lee. And things sort of, like, settled themselves and solved themselves at PSU, and I had my job, you know, so I went on doing that – so, I had forgotten about IRCO or the possibility of working for a job. But, at the same time, I was intrigued. So, after a little while, with the budgets and whatnot at PSU, and for me, knowing that oh my gosh, you know, it's like, as an adjunct masters level instructor, I'm always going to be at the lowest of the totem pole within academia in an institution like PSU. You know, especially with budget cuts and the PhD now coming to teach some of the, just, even basic 100 and 200-level classes that were usually assigned or funneled out to instructors. At a certain point I just felt that, you know, it was time to explore other things. So rather than just applying to IRCO, because I just didn't know enough still, I thought, for IRCO, I started volunteering at IRCO. So I volunteered in a couple programs, went to, you know, the website or whatever and just looked and then was hooked into a couple of the adult workforce programs run out of the main building. One was a home-volunteer assignment to teach English, so I worked for this Vietnamese couple for over a year. And then, one was a once or twice a week assignment in one of the IRCO classrooms assisting.

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What was interesting was that true, that process when I was volunteering, both the volunteer coordinator and the classroom instructor were saying like, "hey, you know you'll be so good working here. Have you ever thought about applying?" So, I think, finally when I was ready to just quit working at a Mt. Hood or a PSU, it was about the time when I saw all these jobs posted at IRCO. I applied and, you know, sort of like, that was, you know, and I got the interview and I got, you know.

NF: And around what year was this that you started volunteering? Was this the last '90s, early 2000s, or?

LT: No, this was in the 2000s. So this was, maybe, 2001-ish or so was when I first started volunteering – 2001, 2002, something like, you know, yeah. Around there because I was hired in at the end of 2003 or 4, or 2004. Yeah, so if I just count back, you know, a couple years, yeah.

NF: So what was the position that you were hired for? Or was it where you initially started?

LT: So I started as a SUN site manager for, it was [?] Middle School at that time, the school has since become, has morphed into Harrison Park K-8. It was, yeah – so I came in as a SUN site manager, and the ironic thing was that wasn't even the job that I applied for when I applied. I had looked at all the jobs that were open, and I thought, well this SUN site running after-school programing and whatnot, you know it's like, I think I can do it but I don't really have that direct experience. So, I was looking at the job announcements, you know, I think, and just going through each thing and, you know, being literal and thinking things like, "I can do it, but you know, don't know." So, actually never applied, had applied for a program coordinator position to do academic sort of like programing and coordination, especially directly coming out from my experience at PSU and Mt. Hood, just thinking things like, "Well, I mean I can do this." I'd applied for one other position, I think it was some youth advocate or case manager position. But when I got the call back, you know I mean, I got the call back and I was kind of excited and the person says, "Would you like to come for this interview?" I remember it's like in and of the moment, making a note of the time and the day. It wasn't until I'd put down the phone, you know, and hung up that I realized, "hey, I thought she said SUN site something or other," I says, "I didn't apply for that one." You know. You know, and having worked in HR before in Singapore--you know, my mother used to do that - and just knowing how the whole interview process, so I says, "They must be calling a lot of people, maybe they confused me or, you know, interview schedules or whatnot." So I called back right away and said, "hey, you know, let me clarify the interview appointment that you just gave me. I think you said SUN site, is that correct?" And she said, "Yes." And I said, "But, you know, I just want to make sure you're aware that I didn't apply for this position, is this a mistake?" And the person on

the other line says, “Oh no, I mean you know, but we think that, you know, you may be a good candidate to apply for this. Are you interested?” And I was like, “Sure, why not,” you know.

NF: So was that explained to you in the interview process? Did someone who was reviewing your application see the potential and they thought that you would be a good fit?

LT: It never, you know – I don’t recall that it was ever explained to me, but I mean, I just remember that after that phone conversation, I did – I mean, coming from a research background, you know, after I hung up the phone, I did my darndest to find out what is the SUN program and look through the job description and make sure that I could – I had already in my mind, sort of like, going through like every bullet point, you know, as the expected duties. Just doing my own inventory of what have I done; if not direct experience, you know, a transferrable, sort of like, core skillsets or experience that I could say that in lieu of, you know, this, I’ve done this, that’s a closely matching. So I had prepared and gone through, drove past the school just to have a sense of what is the school population like, where is the school located in relation to what kind of neighborhood.

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So, had done all that work and had possibly – I mean, I don’t remember exactly – I possibly had prepared, knowing I mean, again, having worked in PR and advertising and marketing and working with clients--I mean, I was a copywriter as working kinds of questions. So I knew that somewhere along the line--you know, having to make pitches for advertising, you know, to be the lead advertising agency, for instance, to win accounts--all these questions related to “why me? why our agency?” You know, it’s like, “why do I stand out?” So already having anticipated this probably a question on “why are you interested in this position or what can you offer?” -- so I don’t recall exactly in the interview if it was explained to me why I was given a chance to interview, but, you know it’s like, I was prepared to answer any of those questions.

NF: So after you did the research then you were interested in the position and then it was offered to you and you accepted?

LT: I was interested in a position, period. I didn’t need – I didn’t know, despite my volunteering for IRCO previously, I didn’t know the, sort of like, overall scope of what IRCO did, you know. I knew that they’ve got these job positions that worked with these new refugees, so I knew that was covered in my volunteer stint, in terms of orientation. But I didn’t know about, say, the youth department or, you know, it’s, like, seniors or all these other programs. So, I knew I wanted to work for IRCO, or I’ve gone this far, you know. The school that I was interviewing for happened to be located quite close to

my house. So that was a plus for me on a personal level, nothing to do with the professional. I was like, "wow, this would be a good commute," you know. And, just the type of students that I had worked with at PSU and Mt. Hood, and having encountered many former refugees who then are in, what I call, like this 0.5 or 1.5 generation. They may have been refugees and then come here, you know, and then are trying to fit in, or they may have come when they're very, very young and so are somewhat a little bit more Americanized and acculturated but are still questioning, "I'm not Vietnamese and I'm not, like you know, whatever this mainstream American whatever is," and, seeing the struggles in school. So I knew that – and then with my background both teaching and studying intercultural communication – I knew I wanted to work with populations to, you know, regarding identity and acculturation. And so, IRCO seemed like, you know, a good fit of an organization to work for. Since most of my experience, work wise, had come out from an academic-type institution, I looked at these programs, you know, or these jobs that I was applying for with IRCO like, you know, well, you know, it's working with college-level students and I always felt like, you know, it was a little too late--I wish I had the chance to work with them when they were in high school. So I came in with this mindset that that's probably like the age group that I can relate to best. Well, the school that, you know – and then the offer, you know, for the SUN site place was a middle school which I was a lot more clueless about. You know, I knew the high school programing; I've also done stuff with elementary school, volunteering to teach dance with my dance group, you know, it's my PSU dance group doing just extracurricular. So I knew how to relate there - but there was this middle school group, I was like, "hmm," you know. This is an odd one, working with these six and seven and eight graders.

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But, I made it work, you know, and I was like – got to learn the school, got to learn the kids, and truly got to love that age group. You know, it's like, when I look at school age groups--and to this day, that middle school group is, I think, probably my favorite group to work with, yeah.

NF: So can you talk a little bit about the SUN school program? So what the purpose is, the services, and the specifically what you do?

LT: Yeah so. The Sun school program, this is an initiative that we have in Multnomah County – so it's a county-wide initiative. SUN stands for, it's an acronym for Schools Uniting Neighborhoods. So the concept is to have, to use the schools and in the extended day hours; or extended day meaning before school, during the summer, after school, to use or to, I guess, facilitate and have these schools become like community centers - so, using the school as a center to unite the neighborhood. So the school as a venue, a physical venue where programing and support services and such could be created so that in the extended day there would a safe place for students to engage, and

students primarily from that particular school. I mean, it may – there is flexibility to enroll students from other schools, for instance. But, the fact that the plan is to have, to make every school a SUN school, so, you know, to each school to be linked more closely with its immediate school populations, right – so, the school like a community center so that there are these student-based programs, be it academic enrichment, leadership and such, for the students. Adult education-based events, so maybe it could be an ESL class, it could be a fitness class, it could be a financial literacy class, or parenting class to have the opportunity to offer adult education, right, that maybe the parents, the relatives of the students would like to come attend. And to work with the school, to organize school-wide events, so to be involved with back to school nights, conferences, maybe spring celebrations, multicultural events so that the school becomes more inviting for the various parents and individuals who have some connection, maybe to a student to want to come into the school, to step foot. So that's the, in a nut shell, the concept of a SUN school. A lot of the work is the ability to leverage resources, to secure partnerships with other organizations, to be able to bring their programing into the school. For example, let's say, a YMCA or Caldera, and arts program, right, you know: so at the SUN school, it's maybe, like, them working a partnership with the Y or Caldera since they've got an arts curriculum, an arts program, for them to able to offer the program on-site for the particular population at the schools. So, leveraging partnerships and then the recruitment, you know, all the things that I think every community center would have to do: so, promotion and registration, recruiting kids, in the day-to-day making sure that its safe and that kids and instructors are where they should be, monitoring just the functioning of the program, and working with businesses maybe for donations, supplies, food, whatnot, raising awareness of the school, the school community, the needs, everything almost and anything to unite neighbors and resources.

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NF: So how do you go about addressing the needs of the community? So, what the students are interested in or do you pick things and offer and see if there's interest, or do you ask first to see if there's interest in arts program or it'll depend?

LT: Both. Both, yeah. So, there's a fair amount of surveying that gets done ahead of time--to survey the various populations, right, a student population, their parents, the teachers, neighbors, you know. It's like, "if I were to start a yoga class, would you be interested to attend?" for instance. And so, there's a fair amount of surveying that takes place. In addition to that, there could be partners that were already waiting, or had been wanting to start programing--a community garden for instance, but had been waiting for somebody or some entity to provide this oversight coordination. Because they may have the resources, the raw materials, the dirt, the tools, and whatnot to do a community garden project, but to be hooked in with the school, you know, and the populations, and to coordinate days, space, time, who's going to be where, could not be something that some other partner organization has capacity to do. So sometimes

there's already some of these programing pieces, that's like, wow, I mean, you know, could go right away if we had these other pieces. So programing, it's a little bit of listening to both, it's a little bit of here are already opportunities that are willing to come in tomorrow, would have liked it yesterday. But you know, it's difficult, yeah. And then a live and learn; letting programs – doing the programing and figuring, like, well, we thought this but, you know, it's just like, it wasn't a good fit. And then, being willing to improve, and to be flexible, and to be able to revise programing if needed, yeah.

NF: And so you started out as the site manager for a specific school, but now you are the program manager overseeing the entire program? When did that happen? So you started in the 2003, 2004, and then you were site manager for a certain number of years and then you became program manager? Or, what was that transition?

LT: Um. It was—I don't think my experience at IRCO was typical, you know, of many others. So I started and, actually within that first year. So, we had three SUN schools at that point, you know, we we're just starting these three SUN schools; mine was one of them. And within that first year, IRCO had already written these grants, you know, knowing that they wanted to support these three SUN schools with, just, a different layer of programing. So, the SUN--the three SUN managers at that time was asked to gather data from each school site and to offer input on needs and gaps. So I was working with my supervisor on that, not thinking like, you know, just stuff like, "oh, I mean you know, you ask for this—oh here." And then I found out, you know, maybe within five months, you know, into my tenure as a SUN person that IRCO had been awarded this other grant through the city of Portland, right. It was meant to support our SUN program, and they needed a coordinator there and so it, you know, again, I was asked but not really, and it all was good opportunity that I think all lined up. It's like, you know, "hey would you consider coordinating this program? It's going to do the work specifically in the three SUN sites." And I was like, "oh, okay." You know, I didn't know what that meant, I didn't necessarily understand, I think, that doing the coordination for that meant not being a SUN coordinator. It wasn't clear to me; I was new to this kind of work. You know, I just thought like, you know, like, "oh, this is going to be in our schools anyway, and I already gave you all this data and we got this grant, you know, and these people are meant to help our three sites. What's there to it?" I mean, you know, it's like, "Oh sure," you know. And then I find out, you know, that oh no, it meant that now I'm going to be a full-time coordinator.

[00:50:08]

Running this program and, you know, which would also then be the lead and oversee the SUN, our three SUN schools. And for me, it was like, I accepted, you know, like both the position and the challenge, you know. It didn't seem like anything that I couldn't do. You know, for me it was like, well I lived through graduate school, I've lived through multiple research projects, what the heck, and doing thesis and gathering

data from so many pools; this is a walk in the park, I mean, compared to like the level, all those, you know – and to do research assistances and whatnot. So within that first year, literally, I mean you know, I was doing this and, like, being the lead, you know, in shaping our SUN programs and, you know. And then from there – so learning, just, then that coronation piece which, again, I mean you know, I didn't have necessarily this non-profit work – I didn't do this non-profit work like that previously. But, to manage budgets, to talk to funders, you know, it's all those things – talk to funders like talking to a perspective client, you know, in my corporate experience. To sit in front – to recruit staff to work in, you know, these programs, it's like, well how is that different from in advertising and PR? You know, looking for – or working in Northwest and sales. It's like, well I needed to work with others and being a part of that, kind of, interview panel to select, you know like, my specific team, support team – it's not any different. Writing reports, I mean, it's like how is that different from writing thesis or marketing reports? And budgets, it's like well, yeah, project manager, you know, to do those things like an advertising plan, it costs this much. So, I just plotted along and did that and then very slowly, yeah, from there, leading into more just grant writing. Before I actually – I think this is about the time when I was volunteering at IRCO – I had taken a continuing ad, you know, to Portland Community College. So I had signed up for a grant writing class. My husband, I think, during his graduate school days was – there was one term when I think he was doing a grant writing class. And I thought, well that's kind of interesting, you know, it's like, I'd like to have or to learn more about that, but I didn't necessarily want to take a graduate class or seminar in grant writing. So when this weekend-type, you know, class format came about through PCC, I took it. So I understood it; then at IRCO when all these other grants came up, my supervisor was saying like, "oh I need your input on this." And I looked at her and said like, "oh, I can write this, you know, this is easy." It's like. And I translated that back to – it's like, how is this any different from writing a thesis? I mean, thesis, of course, you phrase it in statement of the problem and your theoretical framework and your, you know, methods framework and whatnot, and where else this was. It's like, here's the gaps that you're addressing, you know, it's like coming from, you know, and here's the timeline on the logic model, you know. So it's same thing, different words. And they're all – you know, it's an exercise in argumentation, you know. It's like convincing, you know, why, you know, you need to fund this because of these gaps or whatnot. It's like I am based on hypothesis, this is what I'm proving, or based on these research questions, this is what I discovered. This is the process; so got into the whole, sort of like, grant writing exercise with my supervisor. So from there, you know, from there then we wrote one grant and then another one came about and we wrote that and we got this and we got that one. And so, in that three, you know, so – about the first four years at IRCO – so within that span of time, we had co-authored or, I mean, I was on this grant, you know, development team, you know, and we had successfully co-authored and written, let's see, you know, it was like five or six. And I mean, you know, and they were all from different funding sources, there was foundations through United Way, there was the State, there was the

Federal-type grants, you know, and then other county, city, smaller-type things, you know, and then there were like subcontracts with others, you know. So it's just written, and I was like oh, you know, because I was like going through this process and from there, incrementally it's like, guess what, you know, you wrote this grant, now you're going to manage it too.

[00:55:32]

It's this process where it became a routine, almost. I mean, you know, that by default, it became this thing where from one project, now it's this other one. And by the second or third grant, I just became a bit smarter, I think, about this where I made sure that whatever was writing to, I linked back to some of these other grants so I could build and layer. So there was this other vision that I was building towards, and it just kind of start spinning off that way. And then – at the end of, I think, my first four years, it's about '08, '07/'08, I actually left IRCO. Then, it was a lot, I was managing some ten programs at that time. You know, it's like if I counted just the budget, you know, it's like portfolio you know of like all these – it just was something like one and a half, one point seven five million. You know, like, across all the programs. It was a little too much, and I wanted specific things in my life, professionally and personally then. And I didn't think IRCO was just that conducive environment for me to get there. It was – by that time, it was all work, a lot of work all the time, long, long hours, including my weekends taken up, and something had to give. For me, it was I needed my personal space, and I needed to reprioritize my time with my family, you know, which had been sort of like lost in the shuffle. And then on a professional front, I wanted to learn a little bit more about high school-based programming and do that, you know, to be able to do it and learn how to do it. And IRCO didn't necessarily have the programs then, at that time. So, I left IRCO and I went to take a position at Portland public schools where one of the districts, to manage one of the federal grants. That was lovely; I learned what I set out to do, to want to learn, right – high school programming, learning how these kinds of things, academics support programs work on a district level. When that grant ended, or a year before the grant ended, I knew that, you know, I did not want to stay within the district for various reasons. I mean it was just this bureaucracy – more about the bureaucracy than actually getting some of these direct services work done at the end of the day. And, that was not how I wanted to focus my energy either, you know. To be doing that, to be always, like you know, like there's this game that you played with principles or teachers or people in the district office that I wasn't interested in. So, I started looking at where else I wanted to go, and IRCO was the top of, you know, one of the top places that I knew that if I were to still continue to do this kind of work, if there were an opportunity to come back to IRCO, I would seriously consider it. And to just again, I mean you know, it's just like, through timing and whatnot, I got connected with Lee again, you know. We had lunch and talk and I says, "You know is there anything?" And he says, "As a matter of fact, yes!" You know. And we had a couple lunches just to

talk about, like, what it would look like if I came back, and so mid-year 2011, I came back, yeah.

NF: And you came back to the managing the SUN programs, again?

LT: (*making "no" sounds*)

NF: Okay, it was something else?

[00:59:49]

LT: Yeah, so I came back—everything comes full circle—I came back and there was the program coordinator position open at that time for one of the SUN support programs. So it's a program within the larger SUN cluster, right. So, it was a case management-based program. The ironic thing was actually this was the position I had applied for way back then, 2003 or whatever, when I applied to IRCO. It wasn't what I interviewed for. So that position opened up. You know, Lee was saying "this is what's open, are you interested?" So I was like, "well, if it's just this one program, yes" because I want to scale back and scale down. You know, I've done the many grants, I've done the fancy, glamorous school district job, you know, with the big grant and the many trips to D.C. and wherever, you know, it's like, not interested, you know, in that immediate and coming back to IRCO, knowing this is IRCO. I mean, you know it's a non-profit, you do a lot with very little. And I've done that before, that first stint. And so he said, "Oh, this is just for this one project." You know, so I was like, "Good, exactly, that's even better," you know. So I came back and, you know, it was just the--this is what we call the SSSSES program, S-S-S-E-S, Student and Support Services for Education Success. So it's just to be the coordinator for the SSSSES program. I was happy because it's like, I don't have to worry about anything else, I just worry about this one program—it's plenty good enough for me. Well, of course, within six months, it's like, "oh Lyn, how about you do this other program now too?" You know, so from one grew to two. And the SSSSES is a big program in and of itself, and there's—it's two programs in one. So we have the contract for the African immigrant communities and then one for the Asian Pacific Islanders, so it was two really, you know. It's like, and then within six months, it's like, here's a youth gang prevention program, can you do that too? It's case managed-based too, and you know it's like,--and from there, then the process to like, let's, you know, like get, be included and put on to writing the grants. So it's just like getting involved in that process all over again which was, I mean, you know, it's fun—I had not written grants during that time I was in PPS—the small mini-grants, but not these multi-million dollar amounts, you know, and things with many zeros at the end, you know. And so, it was fun, good fun, you know, and invigorating to get back some of that. From there, like you know--and we're in 2014—so in this past year and a half there have been many other grants, and big grant competitions that have come up, so being more involved in that. With the grant competitions, whether, you know, it's like our own grants or

partnering with school districts, so people from the outside. We've done that and then had also then successfully been awarded for these grants, so the cycle sort of starts again. So now, okay, so there's these ones and then managing this and involved in the start-up of several other ones. When I left we had three SUN schools. Then, in that period immediately after I left, there was the county RFP competitions and IRCO was awarded three more SUN schools, so there was six. Just within this last year, within the last six to eight months, you know, following these most recent grant competition cycles, we were awarded four more – so now we have ten SUN schools at IRCO. So, we're just at the point, I think you know, where we're figuring out where do we want to go with Youth Department here at IRCO with these other grants and pulling things a little bit more tight together. The decision was made that, you know, it's like, "hey we would like you back to do the SUN programing, you know, there've been a few gaps, can you help, you know, look?" You know, just from my just personal experience of having run a SUN school, the experience working with the county on SUN service system programs, and my experience being able to link programs at IRCO. So coming back and, yeah.

[01:05:15]

NF: Well so, you talked a little earlier about vision. So do you have a vision moving forward for these ten SUN schools, for the program? Can you share a little bit about that?

LT: Sure. Um. I bring a personal vision but, at the same time, it's also something that then has to be aligned with the agency's vision, right--so the overall agency's vision. And then also since IRCO Youth Department is somewhat at a crossroads with these many new programs and so there's the opportunity to explore what the department's vision is. So, the – let me start with the big and then filter down, right. So from the IRCO standpoint, right, to support IRCO's mission – first of all, IRCO's mission is interested to work with the refugees, the newcomers, immigrants, and populations at large to grow toward self-sufficiency, to grow to a place where both sides, so mainstreams and new populations can come together and can become stronger, adopting the strengths of both, right. And using the strengths of both to then grow a better space and place that's integrated, that's based on strengths. So from there, then looking at the Youth Department and knowing that a gap that exists in Portland in the schools, our services for newcomers, services for English language-learners, and for many populations who do not speak English as a first language. So, as a department we are committed to serving these populations that I have just mentioned, right, through a network of academic services-- so it could be academic supports like helping them with tutoring, helping them to actually eventually meet benchmarks in schools, right, and helping them if they're in newcomer English programs to able to navigate out of that so that they can be in mainstream classes--helping the parents understand what this U.S. school

system is, how this school system is different from theirs, and how they need to, you know, giving them the means, the tools to be able to participate within the system - showing them the connections between school systems to the larger society, how it's connected, and what their role is in the immediate school and then the outside system. So, creating the bridges, facilitating the process where they can get from here to there. So, as a department, supporting this mission through all our individual grants, and all its complexities, and funder requirements, right, but that's that overriding mission and vision – to support. My role coming in as manager of the SUN schools and still having my hand in the SSES program and the Youth Gang Prevention, these case management-based programs, and working with the other fellow youth coordinators, right, to come to a common platform regardless of program or funder. You know, all our staff will receive this training, all our staff will come to this place. So what I inject there is a support of a department and IRCO vision and mission is then also to create a layer in terms of training in terms of programming of acculturation, right. So, you know, it's like, even if I start there, what does acculturation in action look like?

[01:09:59]

Theory of change here would include then, you know--it's like some awareness of acculturation in practice--what does that look like and how is that going to come down to a staff level so that they understand that and then work and do their work best when you work with the kids, work with the school, with the teachers to talk about positive acculturation. Right, so that's one layer. Beyond that, to make sure that as IRCO-- and knowing that one of IRCO's strengths is to be able to create this awareness and never negate culture, right, and identity. It's not about replacing my culture to become American, right, so it's like, how can they co-exist, and how can programming and support services embrace both and celebrate both? You know, maybe a new space is created with both. But, to create this, you know, to create, bring, I think, you know, on a theoretical, philosophical level these, sort of just like, ideas into something more concrete that can then be seen in programming across all our SUN school sites. Our contracts, culturally-specific contracts in the SSES are for Asian Pacific Islander populations and for Africans. These populations may or may not exist at certain of our SUN schools, you know, that's just not the kind of populations they have. Regardless, it's not about, if I don't have this population at my school, I don't do this kind of programming; it's the fundamental belief that, you know, we all are interested to support positive acculturation, and we all can do this regardless of one kind of population or not. How can we do it so that my SUN school programming, whether I have this population or not, has some cultural programming, yeah, that stresses this. You know, my culturally specific program within the API SSES, you know, has some kind of cultural programming that stresses this. Maybe focus on that, the API cultures directly but also outside. If I look outside, cultural competency is not about just knowing your own group, it's about the group, but then it's about then looking at the other unknowns and striving towards awareness and, therefore, competency when you're able to look

outside and explore beyond your own little comfort zone and group. So, bringing that level of programing into all our programs and our department to support, you know, the larger mission, yeah.

NF: And so, do you envision more SUN schools opening, is that part of the goal, to continue the program, to grow the program overall?

LT: Well, the county does say that their aim is to make every school a SUN school within Multnomah County. In turn, at IRCO, right, I would think that we would like to be at the table, at this table and to participate. Continue, you know, so to continue our participation; we've got 10 SUN sites. There are maybe close, coming up to about 70 Sun sites right now, we've got 10 of them. So we have a significant seat at the table. I would like, you know, to support IRCO's mission to continue to have this seat, number one, at the table. And if the opportunity arises and a fit is correct for us to, you know, be in that position to be able to manage the SUN schools, sure, yeah.

NF: Great. Well, in closing, would you like to share any of your--what you think are your achievements, your success stories, anything that... You've done so much, is there anything that stands out that you want to, that you want to share?

LT: Um. I don't think it's any specific program achievement, you know, it's just because it's just been this broad landscape – a little bit of this and that. You know, if nothing else, I think I just celebrate the opportunity I've been given to be able to dabble in this and that, you know, and to make it work.

[01:15:04]

There're some programs or some things that I think, you know, have been more successfully executed, right, sure. But, in the big scheme, like you know, is that then what I would want to highlight as a success, right. Like you know, for instance, in this school, oh yeah, you know, like I worked for two years or three years to get to this point where, you know, like we have this final multi-cultural celebration that incorporated all these groups. That was lovely, but, you know, does that then stand out as a bigger achievement than, like you know what, imagine we had three SUN schools and now we have ten. Is that a bigger achievement? You know, not necessarily. So I just, I think, celebrate that I've been given this opportunity here to IRCO to learn a lot of this programing. That I don't know when I interviewed, you know, the original interview did I think that I'd get from this SUN site position which I didn't really know what it was to where I am today? To be able to leave and then come back in, you know, when IRCO was in a different iteration, you know, youth programing was in a different iteration, you know, was it better before I left? Like I know it's like, gee, I mean you know, it's like, what happened to my original vision then, like you know. I don't think I'm necessarily attached to any of that. I – it's exciting to be in immediate challenges, it's

tiring, I mean you know. I am better these days at exercising self-care. I celebrate that. But, I think you know, to be able – when I reflect, to be able to think that, let's say the last ten years to people doing - to do this. My sister was an investment banker and, you know, at a certain point, she was in a position where it's like, okay so if you don't have ten million dollars, she's not the banker for you. That's the kind of like, you know, portfolio she holds. Well, I'm not that investment banker; neither do I aspire to want to be that. But, when I think of like – you know it's the amount of money, all these tax payer dollars and grants and whatnot that I am managing. I look at our SUN schools just in and of itself; each SUN school has a general, basic budget of \$100,000. We've got 10, that's a million dollars in and of itself there. I add on these other programs, I mean that's a lot of money, and so, I am very grateful – I am, you know, humbled that I'm in this place and space where there's enough trust that has been granted me to be able to manage to coordinate these programs. Because that's – and I take it seriously and with responsibility from a financial, I mean, you know, if I just think about the money, I think about the many, many staff that I supervise, and it's also their livelihood, my being able to come up with a vision to be able to get their buy-in to do this work, to sustain all our salaries on a very practical level is a responsibility that I take seriously, you know. And that I'm actually in this position to be able to do this. When I went to school to study film, film theory, you know, which is a lot of philosophy you know, and the many, many minors that I got out of that, you know, to do the international studies or the Asian studies or the political science or the religious – did I think I was going to do this, you know, no. Yeah so, it's – I celebrate all that as a success, yeah. Yeah.

NF: Wonderful. Well is there anything else that you'd like to share that we haven't discussed or anything you want to talk about a little bit more that we already discussed or any closing thoughts?

LT: Um. No, you know, I think yeah, I think I've covered, yeah. Yeah.

NF: Okay. Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate your interview, it was wonderful.

LT: You're welcome.

[end of interview 01:20:06]