

Interviewee: Professor Zhuang-Zhong Lehmborg (ZL)

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Location: Professor Lehmborg's office in New Jamrich, NMU Campus

Interviewer: Erin Kilbourn (EK)

EK: I am sitting here with Z.Z. Lehmborg and we're going to be talking about her process of immigrating to the United States from China, and also some other things that she'd like to bring up. First of all, just so we can get an established time period of this interview, I'm going to ask you, what is your birthday?

ZL: December 21st, 1962

EK: And where do you currently live, just say?

ZL: In Marquette, MI

EK: Very good, and your occupation?

ZL: Professor

EK: Very good. We're hoping just to see some fun topics that we have so that I can compare it to what we've learned in class, and that other people can look in the future. So, the first question of course, where did you immigrate from, and at what age?

ZL: I was born and raised in Guangzhou, China. I turned twenty – *TWENTY* – the second day I was in Marquette.

EK: Oh, that's cool. Did you come here by yourself, with family, friends?

ZL: I came here by myself to go to school, so, I came to attend Northern Michigan University.

EK: Very good. Really quick, just so we can get a good little base line, can you describe your life in China before you came on over?

ZL: My life in China? Well, how much time do you have? (LAUGHS)

EK: As much time as you need.

ZL: So right before I came here, I was a high school English teacher, I was 17 when I started, so I taught two years in China before I came here. I don't really know how much you want to know, I mean...?

EK: If you were involved in any kind of sports, religion that you had over there, occupations, clubs, kind of things where you lived?

ZL: Ok, because, I mean, I was born in 1962 and then I went to school like everybody else, but then China went through a period that's called the Cultural Revolution, between 1966 and 1976,

when a lot of schools were closed, and not too much was happening in schools, so even as students I could say we didn't learn much, we, did a lot of farm work and factory work, actually, to learn from the farmers and the workers. The idea was that we would learn practical skills rather than, book knowledge.

EK: Very good, oh, and, just speak up a little bit. You're very soft spoken. What did your parents do?

ZL: My parents were physics professors.

EK: Very nice, and how did they feel about you coming over here to the United States?

ZL: Well, actually my dad was the one that encouraged me to come here, 'cause he was a visiting professor at Wayne State University, and then when he came back home he said to me that if, because I was teaching English at the time, he says that as a student of English, you should really go to the place where they use the language, and immerse yourself in there, so he was pretty much the person that arranged for me to come here, because he had been to Marquette while he was at Wayne State University, and he came up here for vacation in the winter, and he thought Marquette is very quiet and safe...

EK: That it is, actually

ZL: Very nice environment for his daughter! (LAUGHS) So she would just be studying and not doing much else!

EK: When you were coming on over, was there anything that you found that was interesting about the process of coming in?

ZL: The process of coming in...

EK: Yes

ZL: Well...

EK: Like, the going through customs, the paperwork, all of that.

ZL: Well sure, that was definitely interesting, 'cause before I, came to the U.S. I had only traveled once by myself in my own country, so I wasn't a good, I mean, a traveler, so I was definitely very nervous, and I remember I took a train from Guangzhou, China to Hong Kong, and then from Hong Kong I boarded a plane to Tokyo, and then from Tokyo to Chicago, Chicago I took a Greyhound bus to Marquette.

EK: I think you knocked out all the major modes of transportation, maybe not a ship, but...

ZL: Not a ship yet, right, so the first thing I encountered was leaving China, in the customs they had to open my suitcase and check everything, I don't know what they thought I was taking out of the country (LAUGHS). Another interesting thing was getting to Tokyo and trying to go to the bathroom, I had never seen those women/men signs before, of course and then I didn't know Japanese, so I had to watch to see who goes where (LAUGHS).

EK: Since you've been here, have you noticed any customs that seem really off here in the United States versus what you were used to then?

ZL: Well, see that is a difficult question for me to answer now because I've been here for so long, so everything seems normal now, but I'm sure, back then, a lot of things were... very strange! (LAUGHS).

EK: Was there anything when you came on over that kind of helped you transition into society here in the United States? Like organizations, or...?

ZL: Well, I mean, I knew a little English when I first came here, and then, at the time, there was a local chapter of the U.S. China People's Friendship Association, I believe it was a kind of a club or local organization organized by a history professor, his name is Jon Saari, he has since retired from NMU. He used to teach Approaching China and other Chinese history courses here, so he was heading up that organization and that definitely, in fact that organization sponsored me in a way, because they helped me find lodging in Marquette.

EK: Well that was very nice of them. Has there been any social, economic, or political changes that you've noticed in the U.S. since you've been here?

ZL: Wow. That is a big question, isn't it? (LAUGHS)

EK: A lot of these questions are kind of big.

ZL: I mean, how many presidents have we gone through since '82? Even fashion, right? I mean, I've been here for a long time.

EK: When did you actually come to the U.S., just so I have that written down again?

ZL: December '82.

EK: 1982?

ZL: Yeah, and going back to your previous question, the U.S. China People's Friendship Association really helped me, and then there was a lady, she was a member of the club, and she pretty much established a scholarship at NMU that would, help pay for my tuition here.

EK: That's nice.

ZL: Her name was Ilona Anderson, and I've always referred to her as my American mom.

EK: Very nice. Now, I'm also interested in your husband, because he runs the Buddhist temple here in Marquette. Did you meet him here?

ZL: I met him at NMU, people always think that maybe I influenced him, since I'm from China and he's from Minnesota, but really, no, he's told me that he was raised as a Lutheran, and then when he went to college he started to read, books on different religions, and somehow was attracted to Buddhism, and he started the Buddhist temple here.

EK: And that's very interesting, like I had mentioned, prior to actually turning on the recordings, sitting in class and having somebody go, "How do you think Marquette would react if we had one?" and, telling them we do, and, you know, it's interesting, I've lived in several places around the U.S., and they're actually quite common, it's not as rare as you think. They just tend to be very quiet so you don't really notice them.

ZL: Yeah, they are very quiet people (LAUGHS)

EK: Is there anything - and like you said, you've been living here for a long time, but I know you do go back to China to visit your family - is there anything that you notice here in the U.S. that kind of brings back that, do we have anything here that's reminiscent of the vibes of China here in the United States? Besides the bad food knockoff?

ZL: Well, I mean China, after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, China really opened its door to the outside world, and you could say that it has changed a lot, China has changed a lot, and, in fact, it's becoming more and more, I would say, like the U.S. in many different ways.

EK: Is there anything that you miss about your life in China that's just not the same here in the United States?

ZL: Ummmm... I suppose you could say language, food. (LAUGHS)

EK: I keep getting told I need to try real Chinese food.

ZL: Uh huh. And the cultural, I guess the culture, customs...

EK: Lately we've just heard in the past few weeks Obama's entire switch to the immigration policy, as you know he is greenlighting lots of illegals to become legal citizens in the U.S. Of course, every president, like you said you've gone through several since 1982 being here, and so I'm sure you've maybe kept or heard at least some of the immigration policy that's changed here in the United States. Do you have any... Do you have any kind of issues that you think are important that this government needs address with the immigration policy, in maybe reference to your own or other stories you've heard?

ZL: Well, I think probably compared to many other countries U.S. is quite open-minded about the immigration issue, I do think that what Obama is doing is good because the children of these illegal immigrants, they should not be punished, and immigrants, I mean, I think that the reason U.S. is such a great country is because of a lot of contributions made by the immigrants, so, I hope... maybe one day we'll be world citizens instead of citizens of this country and that country.

EK: I hope for the same thing, and that's definitely been a big pull, is more of a global citizenship. Before I go into any more topic things, is there anything that you would like to talk about that would be on this record? I know that in your classes, especially your Chinese one I was sitting in, you like to bring some of the cultural influence of China so they learn... Is there anything that you'd like people to know about China?

ZL: Well, probably a lot, but it's hard to come up with something in such a short time (LAUGHS). I've always felt that if we could somehow combine the U.S. and China, then, in

education and customs and almost anything that would be good, then we would make something really good out of these two countries... All the peoples' way of thinking, sometimes we say the Western way, is probably linear and Eastern is circular, and, if we could somehow put them together, I don't know, be a square (LAUGHS), I don't know!

EK: And one thing I definitely wanted to get on this record, you had talked about it, is why you wanted to start the Chinese class here at Northern, I think that's a great way of bringing in the culture from China to make sure we have something like that here at NMU. So if I could get you to go into that, just a little bit of why you've....

ZL: Ok, well, I think that goes back to my earlier point is, if I could somehow combine the West and the East somehow, then we would be at a better place, and I think that's why I was very interested in creating a Chinese language course, because I feel as a university in the 21st century we should really teach languages, not just the Western part, but also since we don't have any other, although now we also have an Arabic class at NMU, that's really good.

EK: Yeah, I had heard about that, I knew someone who was going into it and I was like, good luck, I enjoyed that Chinese one but that might be a little bit, more ____, their writing is really confusing.

ZL: Yeah... Well, I think it's just for anybody, it's just the more you know about different things.

EK: And I think it's important to step out of your comfort zone and try something new. My parents were one who were very much, "Why are you taking Chinese, that's insane! Why would you ever do that to yourself?" But yeah, I think we are definitely moving more to this global idea, so if you can stretch out, and China is the biggest country, as far as I know, in the world, especially population-wise, and so to say that we can only deal with this small little Western part of the world, cause let's face it, anything below Texas doesn't really speak English either, so you just have Europe, and the U.S., and a little bit of Canada, and then the rest of the world speaks all these other languages. I also think it's kind of sad that in the U.S. we don't teach secondary languages as early.

ZL: Well, now it's changing, I was just at a conference, it's called ACTFL – American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages. A lot of presenters are actually talking about how immersion, Chinese immersion programs are popping up everywhere in the U.S., so that's a good thing. I – I, yeah, I really think that we should, in the U.S. we should encourage students to learn a second language.

EK: I'll go further and say, not necessarily Spanish, they're too close, I think, if you do a more different....

ZL: Yeah, well, even if it's just Spanish, then we'll be good, I think, I think everybody should really...

EK: I took three years of Spanish, I don't remember a single thing of it. But I take one semester of Chinese and I'm doing pretty good.

ZL: Good

EK: I admit, though, over the summer I was like, oh boy, I need to study. What exactly, if you remember, are you a citizen currently of the United States?

ZL: Yes

EK: When did that come about?

ZL: Oh, that's a good question, oh my God, I cannot remember, probably...

EK: Estimate's fine.

ZL: '92, '93? It was after my daughter was born.

EK: And what was that process like, do you remember? I'm sure it was long and painful.

ZL: Yeah, there was, I guess the, the...I guess the painful process was the filling out all these forms, and having to go through all these hoops. I remember I had to take an English test, actually....

EK: Did you pass?

ZL: Yeah, I did pass, in fact, the examiner, after she heard that I am actually an English professor, she just stopped, she says, "oh, we don't have to do this."

EK: Well, I can still imagine that it would be very, very, uh, nervous, I remember when, uh, oh, I'm terrible with names, was it Chen? The visiting professor that was here?

ZL: That's right, Professor Chen, yeah...

EK: You could tell he was almost nervous to speak to all of us because he got put on the spot (LAUGHING)

ZL: Sure, sure, sure

EK: So it's always nice to know that professors of English have the same anxiety students of Chinese do.

ZL: Sure

EK: My mother went and stayed with a family in Japan for two weeks. She stayed with them, lived in their house, they took them out to dinner, they never spoke to her.

ZL: Ok

EK: She's like, this is terrifying, she knew none of the foreign language, she was there with Girl Scouts. The last day she's there they spoke to her, and she found out they spoke really well the entire time, but they were so nervous that for two weeks they didn't speak to her. She was writing, I'm lonely here. Which I always find funny, cause I always remember that every time I'm like, oh no, what am I going to say?

ZL: Well you can actually say a lot with gestures, and your smiling face.

EK: It's true, I worked in a house in Sudan, I was a tour guide, through a Victorian house, and we'd get people who didn't speak any English, and we'd have to point and kind of nod. You can communicate, very limited, but, you can. Did you find when you were immigrating to this country, any kind of discrimination, or anything like that?

ZL: Hmm... I guess I haven't encountered any outright hostility, but I would say that whatever I encountered was a result of the person's ignorance maybe? Like, we used to have an air base here, and I think there were, spouses from foreign countries, perhaps from Korea. I remember going to Shopko, the salespeople would usually kind of look at me in a funny way, or in a way that I don't think they think I speak English (LAUGHS).

EK: You speak better English than I do, so, congrats.

ZL: And then, I remember taking a taxi in Detroit, and the taxi driver just was so surprised, "Wow, your English is so good!" "Ok..." (LAUGHS).

EK: I've lived in Detroit. You get a nice little mix. I swear every culture in every country has a small little region...

ZL: That's why I say it's all a result of ignorance, people don't understand, don't know, and that's why it, it has, I don't know if it's my mission or, I have always been very interested in, I guess, promoting multiculturalism and especially letting people know about the Chinese culture and Chinese language, so when my kids were going to school I would go to school to talk to the teachers, and teachers would invite me to go to do programs on Chinese New Year and Chinese festivals, and so... I think, I think just people need to know more...

EK: Then, do you find in this country, we're a nice mix of all these different ethnicities, countries coming over, do you kind of find it fun to learn about other cultures?

ZL: Oh, definitely, definitely. Yeah, whenever I, whatever chance I get I always host international visitors, like I'm part of the WIN program at NMU, it's the Wildcat International Neighbors program, so international students are partnered with local people, so right now I have two students partnered with me, one from South Korea, one from Nepal.

EK: That must be interesting.

ZL: Yeah, and then, the high school, every now and then, in fact twice a year they will host a student from South America, and since my younger daughter is learning Spanish we always host a student for a week, whenever they come.

EK: Oh, that's really interesting. And, of course, any questions you don't want to answer you're completely welcome. Being so interested in having this global community, after the events on September 11th, when there was this, at least I remember it, there was this huge thing about, against the Arabic and Middle Eastern people, how did you feel about that? I don't think it's founded, anyway.

ZL: Right, definitely not. I remember, when was it, not last semester, maybe two semesters ago I had a student from, was he from Turkey? I think he was from Turkey. Yeah, he was telling me

about how he was perceived, like, he had a beard, and he would always have to shave it before he went traveling.

EK: That's a shame. Was there an interesting shift in how the U.S. treated, cause I remember up to that people being very accepting of all the different countries, for the most part, you always heard, you know, fringe stories, but after that happened it's almost like they shut a gate down, it's like, unless you're from this part of the world. Was it shocking to see the U.S. switch like that?

ZL: Yeah, I think it was, maybe it was a natural reaction for anybody, because again, it's because we don't understand, so the more we learn about, the Arabic, the Middle East, I mean, I don't, I mean speaking for myself I never really used to pay attention to what was happening there. I knew there was oil (LAUGHS), but other than that I had no idea, but now I am definitely more in tune to what's going on.

EK: (PAUSE) I guess that I'm just taking notes. Yeah I, when that had happened I had just come out of high school, so it was weird to go from the high school shift to all of that happening. And so that was weird, because I graduated in 2000, so, I mean, I was right there. My Girl Scout troop, in 2000, went to New York, and there's a picture of all of us standing in front of the World Trade Center, and then to see all that come across was just terrifying.

ZL: Well, I, I think if a person just keeps on wanting to learn, I really don't think we should shut ourselves off, keep an open mind, last, was it last semester? One of my students went to Qatar, and before she decided to go there to teach English, I had no idea where this place was, I mean, I sort of knew where it was, but not exactly and what it was like, so because of her I went online and I learned about this place, and, this semester I have a student from Puerto Rico in my Chinese class...

EK: Oh, that must be interesting.

ZL: And, I never really thought about going to Puerto Rico, but because of him I now am thinking, hey, maybe I should go there! So I'm learning about another place. It's just, I wish everybody would do that, I guess, to, not to be narrow minded.

EK: I've actually been to Puerto Rico, it's very lovely, you really should go. I really do look forward to traveling more around the world. I've been to 47 of the 50 United States, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, England, Amsterdam, and a few other places.

ZL: Well, I mean, not everybody's going to be able to afford to go every place, right, but we can still read about it, we can still talk to people about it.

EK: Going back a little bit, because your dad came over here I'm sure he told you about his experience coming to the U.S., did you have any expectations before you actually came here, of what it would be like?

ZL: Funny to say, I really didn't. I think at the time, because I was, well, almost 20, even though that sounds kind of old, but I was really quite naïve, and then I, I believe I was pretty much in shock, even though I decided to come, I mean, he didn't just say, "You go there," and I have to

go, but it was my final decision to do this, but still, it was, I was numb, I didn't know what to expect, because at the time, we didn't have, not like now, the students who come from China to the U.S., they know more about the U.S. than some Americans do, I think –

EK: Probably.

ZL: (LAUGHS) But at the time when I came, I didn't know anything.

EK: And what was your first winter like up here?

ZL: Well, I came in December -

EK: Oh, so you arrived in this.

ZL: So, I arrived in snow, and, of course, I didn't know how to walk, I'd get lost once I got out of the building because it's all white and, where do you go, all the roads are white (LAUGHS). And I came from a tropical area, Guangzhou is, say, similar to Florida climate-wise. Had not seen snow before I came here.

EK: Desi, my fiancé, who was also a student in your class, came from the Carolinas, so right down in that tropical region. His first winter up here he ran outside, no coat, no hat, no gloves, nothing, made two snowmen and a snow angel, it was great, he was 25 years old and acting like he was about 5 years old. But I think it's fun when you come up here and get to see snow for the first time.

ZL: Yup.

(PAUSE)

EK: Just double-checking, making sure I have anything here. So, since you've been here, have you had any other jobs besides teaching, or has that been the only thing that you've done?

ZL: Ummmm...No, I have lived a very sheltered life, I guess (LAUGHS). I came here, I went to school, from one school to another, and then to another (LAUGHS).

EK: And now you're a professor, so school, school, school, school, school!

ZL: I know, in fact, all my life, ever since the minute I was born, I was with a school, because my parents were professors, and in China you live on campus.

EK: Oh, that's interesting that the profe –

ZL: I mean, the university is kind of like a college town, so... So I've never left a campus. (LAUGHS)

EK: What would you do with yourself if you had to?

ZL: I would like to, in fact lately I have been thinking, maybe I should go do something else, so that I can see how other people live.

EK: My dad always said, "If you have to get a job, get a different job than what you did before." So, my entire life, growing up, I've never had the same job twice, and now I'm finally settling down and going like, now it's time for the long-term job.

ZL: Right. Yeah, I'm still trying to figure out what I could do besides being a teacher.

EK: Well, we'll miss you when you're gone. I cannot keep this lead from breaking, which is weird 'cause I normally don't have that problem. So, just to recap on a few of these organizations, to make sure I have them, that helped you over here. You have the China....

ZL: U.S. China People's Friendship Association

EK: Which was right here, and that was run by, uh, what was the teacher's name?

ZL: Jon, J-O-N - S-A-A-R-I, Saari, I believe that's how you spell it.

EK: Ok, and you also, there was Ilona Andersen, was that L-O-N-A?

ZL: I-L-O-N-A, and Andersen is S-E-N.

EK: Ok. Just wanted to make sure I had those while I was thinking about them.

ZL: In fact, Ilona and I recently did a Story Corps recording I don't know if you know about them.

EK: No.

ZL: It's NPR Public Broadcasting, I don't think it's part of NPR, but anyway, Story Corps is a organization that goes around recording people's stories, and all these stories are archived in the Library of Congress.

EK: Oh, what was that like?

ZL: So, the two of us just, because the bus, the recording bus, they travel to different places, and it was in Marquette. I think it was in the summer, toward the end of the summer, and, it was Ilona's idea, actually, she wanted us to go and talk about how we met, our relationship and friendship and _____

EK: Oh, cool. I'll include that in the thing so if people want more information they can find that interview as well.

ZL: Library of Congress has our recording (LAUGHS).

EK: And now you're going to have one in the NMU Archives! (LAUGHS)

ZL: (LAUGHS) I know, I was just think about that, how strange all of a sudden. I must be getting old, everybody wants to archive me now! (LAUGHS)

EK: No, when we were told this assignment it was like, I know who I can get! (LAUGHS) And Des was like, oh, you took mine. But it worked out ok. What kind of recreational activities do you find yourself enjoying?

ZL: Oh wow. I like to play balls. (LAUGHS) I play badminton, tennis, ping pong. Those are the three things I am currently playing, I guess. I used to play volleyball and basketball.

EK: So you like almost all sports, don't you?

ZL: Yeah.

EK: Didn't you play baseball, too, at some point?

ZL: No.

EK: Maybe I'm just remembering class.

ZL: I was almost going to be a professional badminton player. Because that was during the Cultural Revolution when nobody was studying, so my dad thought, since I had so much time...But, I'm benefiting from that now, because, I can play, and nobody can beat me (LAUGHS).

EK: Well, I know they do badminton classes on campus, do you ever go down and challenge the students just for the fun of it?

ZL: They are not good (LAUGHS), not good enough.

EK: Yeah, I've never been an athletic person whatsoever. (PAUSE) Um, how often do you keep in contact with your family that's still over in China, what methods do you use?

ZL: Well. My parents are both gone, so, but when they were living we used to visit, and we, when I first came here I was writing letters to them once a week, because it would take seven days for a letter to travel from this place to that place, across the ocean.

EK: That's actually not that bad.

ZL: Yeah. And then, no phone calls, because phone calls were very expensive at the time, so I used to write letters, and now I still have stacks of letters that I kept, that my parents wrote to me. Nowadays, there's the computer, there's the internet, so we can, I can keep track of my friends and my brother travels back there every now and then...

EK: And, correct me, of course, if I'm wrong, I know that China has locked out a lot of the internet.

ZL: Facebook is not there, but people jump over the wall, the great firewall, but Skype...

EK: Ok, so there are things like that that are still allowed. And if I remember right, there actually is a, as they put it in this country of course, the Chinese Facebook.

ZL: Yeah, there's a platform called, WeChat, W-E-C-H-A-T, and I'm on there, too, with my friends. And it's a very convenient, you can video chat, you can do phone calls, you can send messages, wherever you have Wi-Fi.

EK: Ok, and I just have to ask 'cause I, occasionally I like reading the weird news, sometimes the actual news is far too depressing, and so I, I do occasionally catch wonderful news that's coming out of China, and some of the great things that I've heard in the past few years is things that China's outlawing, is being rather odd. Fantasy has been outlawed, time travel has been outlawed. How do you feel about that kind of news coming to the United States from China?

ZL: Well, I think, I think China trying to figure things out, that's why, it has been a closed society, closed country, and now it's opening, and so sometimes we don't know what to do with ourselves when we are all of a sudden, let's say, put in a pile of candy and then, how much do you eat, and do you not allow this kid to eat, and that sort of thing, so the government in a way is still, perhaps, playing the role of the parent, "I need to tell my children not to do this because this is not good for them." Of course, children will rebel.

EK: Now, your husband practices, I know it's Zen Buddhism, and if I'm right it would be the Mahayana?

ZL: No, just the Zen Buddhism. Actually I don't know, don't quote me on that, I have no idea, but it's, it's a tradition that comes from... At first it was in India –

EK: With Siddhartha...

ZL: Then China, and then Japan, and then U.S. So the U.S. is following Japan.

EK: Ok, yeah, the major two are Theravada and Mahayana, and Zen is a, like, grandparent, like, or grandchild way down there. But, China recently has done a lot with the reincarnation laws, and are affecting the Dalai Lama, is that anything that ever comes up in random conversations at home?

ZL: Uh, not really, I guess, but –

EK: Or do you know what I'm talking about?

ZL: But we all, I mean, it's not just recently, it has always been that way ever since, probably the '50s?

EK: Well, recently the Dalai Lama has actually said he might not reincarnate this time, due to the newest laws that are coming out of China, China has recently passed a law that if you plan on reincarnating, you need to file paperwork, and they decide who you come back as? Which is interesting...

ZL: But it doesn't work that way.

EK: I know (LAUGHS). So he's actually thinking of not reincarnating, which would be the end of the Dalai Lama...

ZL: But how could he even think that he's not reincarnating?

EK: Supposedly he can stop it, according to him.

ZL: Well, that's not my understanding of how things work, I guess...

EK: Well, that's the Theravada Buddhism, so I was curious if there's anything that was....

ZL: Ok, because I thought you never know what you will be reincarnated into, you could be a rock.

EK: Supposedly he gets that special privilege. He's a very interesting guy to listen to lecture and talk. (PAUSE) Um, looking down my list....Have you gotten to travel a whole lot in the U.S. since you've been here?

ZL: Um... Yeah, I have traveled a bit, almost every semester, once a semester I would go to a conference, a professional conference, and these conferences are held in different places, so, and then in the summer I go on my own. I love traveling, I could spend all of my money on traveling.

EK: My mom could too, so she went to school to be a travel agent.

ZL: Oh, good.

EK: That's her way of, uh, doing things...

ZL: Is she still a travel agent?

EK: She is, she runs her own little business.

ZL: In Marquette?

EK: No, I'm from downstate

ZL: Oh, ok

EK: So she's down there, but all my friends, I'm like, "Oh, just call her, she'll give you a good deal."

ZL: Ok. Maybe I should call her (LAUGHS)

EK: There was, if you're ever interested, I found it the other day, and I was like, oh, I have to do this, it was a map that you could actually click, and it would light up all the colors of all the different states you've been to so you can keep track of where you need to go. It was quite fun.

ZL: Online?

EK: Yeah. I don't have the website for that, of course...

ZL: Maybe if you remember you can send it to me.

EK: I'll send it to you. And you can share it on Facebook, so everybody can see where you've been, which is always fun. So what parts of the country have you seen? Because U.S. has very different regions.

ZL: Oh my gosh, yeah, I have been to, I would say quite a lot of places, but not enough yet. I can't remember, I mean, the neighboring states (LAUGHS) of Michigan.

EK: Have you been down to the South yet?

ZL: Uh, Georgia, Florida, down there, yes.

EK: Um, at least I've noticed in this country you can have culture shock just traveling from coast to coast.

ZL: In fact, I just came back from Texas.

EK: Oh, that's different down there, too.

ZL: New York, the East Coast, San Francisco...

EK: Did you get to, do anything in New York? Did you go to Ellis Island or any of that?

ZL: Yeah, I actually did, we took, our daughter when she turned 21, it was two years ago, the whole family went to New York. That was the first time for them but second or third time for me, actually, it was funny, I took my American husband to New York, if you can believe that (LAUGHS).

EK: Please tell him you took him to Ellis Island just to make that even weirder.

ZL: Yep, we did, we did. And he actually, he, I think he told me that he actually found some name that he recognizes, one of his great-... Because his parents, his grandfather? Uh, on the father's side, maybe came from...Germany?

EK: Oh, interesting

ZL: He's...he's Norwegian and German...

EK: Yeah, if you ever go out to California, the San Francisco area, you'll see Angel Island out there, too, and very much like Ellis Island was for the European immigrants, Angel Island is where the Chinese came through for the Gold Rush and the railroads.

ZL: I never made it to Angel Island.

EK: Now you've got something else to go look for.

ZL: Next time, yeah. For me, the most important thing for me to go to when I went to New York was to go to Broadway.

EK: Oh, did you see any of the plays?

ZL: Mmm-hmmm.

EK: Which one did you see?

ZL: Uh, well, I think last time with the family I was with my younger daughter, so she wanted to see *Newsies*.

EK: Oh, I wanted to see that, too.

ZL: So we saw that one with her, and then my husband and the older daughter wanted to see...Mormon?

EK: *The Book of Mormon*? I wanted to see that one, too.

ZL: Yeah, but I saw, um...The opera, what was that one?

EK: *Phantom of the Opera*?

ZL: Yeah, *Phantom of the Opera*.

EK: I was lucky, when I went to New York *Les Mis* was touring, and so I got to see *Les Mis* on Broadway.

ZL: Yeah, I saw that, too

EK: Which was amazing, I love Broadway.

ZL: Yeah, yeah, I would definitely go back.

EK: I've been to New York probably two or three times, the last time I went I went and stayed in Queens with family, and so we did the "local" stuff, which was really, really different. But yeah, there's a lot to do in New York, the newest thing I found out was the Tenement Museum, which you won't see any posters for, which is weird. They found tenement buildings, the old little shacks? That had been sealed up since those time periods, and they put them in a building, so you can travel through the different time periods, and they use it for educational purposes, and I was like, that's the next thing I want to do.

ZL: I should go there again. (PAUSE) Yeah, another thing I want to go to New York for is the U.S. Open, tennis. (LAUGHS)

EK: The family I went and stayed with, the guy who plays tennis, he's actually one of the coaches for one of the big schools, like the very wealthy, he gets paid, like, a thousand dollars an hour to coach tennis. And I was like, I'm still not that athletic. Have you had anything in your life that's made you think that maybe you'd rather go back to China, or are you pretty much going to stay here in the United States?

ZL: Well, I think for a while... I was thinking about that. Yeah, I think it's probably a thought, an idea that every immigrant thinks about. Yeah, there was a time when I was wondering, well, when I first...I think I came here, and then I didn't have money to go back until three years later, so, for the first time I visited China again, maybe that was when I decided that I was going to try to stay in the U.S., continue with my education. When I first came here, I really, I wasn't an immigrant, I wasn't immigrating to the U.S., I was just coming here for school.

EK: So there was always the plan to go back.

ZL: Mmmhmm, yeah, at the time it was always, I'm here to get my education and then I will go back, but after having been here for a while and then going back, then I found that I wasn't used to, what I was used to before, and I find it more... more suitable for me to be here. I'm more comfortable here, not in the, I guess, physical sense, but yeah...

EK: So if you did go back, would you take your husband and everybody with you, or do you think they'd want to go back, or go with you?

ZL: Well, they have to make that decision themselves now, right? My daughters, my older daughter, ah, both my daughters I tried to teach them Chinese, and then make sure that they understand, they know my cultural background, so my older daughter when she was in college she took Chinese classes, and after she finished, she graduated, she took a year off, she didn't want to go to work, or go to graduate school, she went to China, and she worked in China, she found herself a job and worked in China for nine months, and then she came back and now she's in graduate school. And my younger daughter, has always bugged me about going to China, I used to take her every other year, so now she's talking about going there again. So I think they are definitely interested, I don't know if they would want to live there, that would be a decision they make themselves. My husband would be a different story because he is, he does not speak Chinese, he claims English is hard enough for him, so, I think it would be hard to convince him to go to China.

EK: Oh, I bet it would. You'd think he would want to read a little bit of Chinese. Des originally took the class because he wanted to read more Buddhist stuff.

ZL: My husband, I call him a typical American (LAUGHS). In a good sense and a bad sense.

EK: You always hear, when reading things, especially with immigration, people being Americanized, or to become American, what does that mean to you?

ZL: Oh, well, that is a very interesting question. Americanized... to me, is the way I look at things, and the way, maybe, I express myself, too. In fact, just not too long ago I had a major awakening moment. There was an issue with a Chinese person, and I was kind of the buffer in between this, some kind of conflict, and I was trying to help both sides, and I approached it, perhaps in an American way, very straightforward, saying, this is how I see it, this is how I think it can be solved, and why don't we try it. And that didn't go too well (LAUGHS). And, so I talked to my Chinese friend, who has actually been in this country for as long as I have, but he's very original Chinese, and he lived in big cities, and they are circles, always, Chinese, like his doctors are all Chinese doctors, and he goes to Chinese grocery stores, and, but he goes to work in an American firm, but then after that, it's all Chinese. So, anyway, I talked to him about the situation, and then, he told me how to approach it in a Chinese way.

EK: Was that weird that you had to be told how to handle things in a Chinese way?

ZL: Yeah, mmhmm. And the Chinese way is not as direct, but still, you're getting to the point somehow, and it was a much better result.

EK: One thing you talked about in your class is how the U.S. is very much a very independent thing, where over in China it's more for the group or the majority. Was it weird adjusting to that here?

ZL: Oh yeah

EK: You have any fun examples?

ZL: Well, I mean, that's the thing, well, one example in...when was that, '92, '96? I took a group of NMU students to China, and we lived in a neighborhood, and then we were told that because we have U.S. passports, we had to report to the local police station to tell them that we are there, we can't just rent a place and stay. And so... I didn't think that was such a big deal, I said, "Well this is easy then, why don't I just call down to the station and tell them that...who we are, and why we are here, and how long we're going to be here, and then we won't have any problems," but our local host says, "No no no no, you cannot do that." (LAUGHS) "I have to tell them." So, I have to tell our local host what we're doing, and how long, and then, so he, even though I speak perfect Chinese, but I cannot just go directly to the station and...So I have forgotten a lot about that kind of thing.

EK: Well, is there anything else you want to say before we close this down, or...Pretty much cover everything you can think of?

ZL: We pretty much covered everything, I think (LAUGHS). But I really, truly think that the world is becoming more global, and that the gaps are narrowing. I think it's much easier now, if you're talking about traveling, for Americans to go to China and be able to get around, and in fact right now, just recently, I heard that the U.S. is granting visas to Chinese tourists with like a ten year visa.

EK: Oh that's interesting.

ZL: Yeah, and then the Chinese government is doing the same thing, so Americans going over there can get a ten year visa, rather than just one year or nine months.

EK: That is a huge difference. Wow, that would really change things. I look forward to seeing how that works out.

ZL: And then so you can travel freely any time you want within the ten year, I mean, ten years is a long time! (LAUGHS) But you used to have to apply for a visa every time you want to go there.

EK: Yeah, I think it's interesting where we're opening the doors to more people and shutting doors on others that...I think it's nice that we're starting to have this global friendship thing that you're talking about. So, just a final saying, this is Erin Kilbourn interviewing –

ZL: Z.Z. Lehmberg

EK: On December 3rd, 2014