

Kathy Matthew

Australia



Kathy: My name is Kathy. I am from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM Micronesia). FSM Micronesia consists of a lot of islands. But I'm from FSM. FSM, we are actually under the U.S. territory. We used to save money where we don't need a visa to come in and out of U.S. We could come in and out anytime we want, as long as our passports are valid. That's the only thing that we need. I moved out here back in '98. I went to Brighton High School. I kind of went there for a bit and then I went back home in 2001 and then I missed Utah. It felt like I already had some part of me in Utah as my home. So I came back again in 2005. So ever since I've been a resident of Utah. I was born back in the islands, so I came out here. My brother, he came out here. There was a missionary, LDS missionaries, that went to our island and baptized my parents, one of the first LDS members on the island. So they came back and brought us to U.S. It was through the returned missionaries that served their missions in the islands that brought a lot of us Micronesians out here.

Interviewer: When did you come to the U.S.?

Kathy: First in 1998.

Interviewer: Who helped you come to the United States?

Kathy: It was the LDS missionaries that served their mission and when they came back, they wanted to help our people so they brought some of us.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you were in Utah before and then you went back home and you came back because you missed it. What part of Utah did you miss that made you want to come back?

Kathy: To be honest, when you get a taste of the U.S., and you go back to your islands, or wherever country you come from, you kind of get mixed up in between because it feels like back home everything is much smaller. Because it's such a small island that everything feels repetitive- you're doing the same things- I kind of missed the freedom out here, and McDonald's, and all those other things.

Interviewer: What is your 'American Dream'?

Kathy: As of now I am part of three nonprofit organizations for the Micronesians. My 'American Dream' is really to build something for my son. I came out here to look for a better life, a better pathway. And so for my son, he's born here, but I want to help my Micronesian people here in Utah, get help in whatever they can. My 'American Dream' is just to help my people.

Interviewer: I was wondering about the three nonprofits. Can you describe what each of them does?

Kathy: Yes. I'm one of the board members for United Micronesian Women (UMW). So I'm part of that. I'm also part of UMC, the Utah Micronesian Coalition. The first one I said is only for women, so it's just for the Micronesian woman here in Salt Lake City. My husband is the

president for all the Marshallese- I don't know if you guys have heard of it, they are Micronesians Marshall Islands- so my husband is the president for that whole community in Utah, from North to South all the way. So I just helped out.

Interviewer: What do the UMC and UMW do within the community?

Kathy: UMW, we pretty much out the woman, or any family. It's really focused on women, but really, when you think about women, we have families. We are the main distributors, but we have family. So whenever somebody comes from Micronesia to Utah, and when you're going to a different country, you don't know what to do. You don't know how to apply for a job. You don't even know how to go into an interview. So what we do, we try to make sure that we come out and help them and say, 'Hey, these are the resources that we can help you with. This is where to go. This is what to say. And what can we help you with?' And even with scholarships for their kids, if there are any. And then the United Micronesian Coalition, like I mentioned earlier Micronesia consists of many islands, so my husband is the founder, but we pretty much spread out. It's bigger than UMW, but we go out for all the Utah Micronesians. We help if they need to apply for Medicaid, Medicare, SNAP... anything that we can help them with, even with jobs. We try to make programs for our kids so that they can be busy so that they don't end up doing other things. As parents, we sacrifice to come here for our kids to have a better life and we want to make sure that they remember that they still have their roots, but they remember why we moved there in the first place.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your religious or spiritual beliefs?

Kathy: Like I mentioned earlier my parents are one of the first LDS members back in Pohnpei. That's where I'm from. So I was born and raised LDS. Till now, I am still an active LDS member.

Interviewer: What are your hopes for your community?

Kathy: My hope is for my communities that whenever we come here that we know that there are resources, there are things to help us out. And that our kids know that they can do better. I know a lot of the immigrants or people that moved here, we work in warehouses or things like that, factories, but we want our kids to know that they can aim higher.

Interviewer: So going back on how you said, you guys help Micronesians who come to America with recommendations, what kind of strategies do you guys use to find them and help them?

Kathy: We are pretty much connected. We are actually partnering up with Utah Pacific Islanders. And so we have Pacific Islanders out here. We have things that we do during events. We have events for back-to-school events where other Pacific Islanders will get together. So we just have our sources through other Pacific Islander nonprofits as well.

Interviewer: So as you mentioned before, that you liked Utah more than your own country, what is something that you think is far better than in your country?

Kathy: I love my country, I will always love my country. You can always take that girl from the island, but you could never take the island away from the girl. Utah is my second home, but my country is deep within me. But what I would say is opportunities. There's a lot more opportunities out here in Utah then I would find back home. I took my son back home a year ago and it made me realize how it's so limiting. There's not that many things to go around or explore and there is limited education- You have to go out of the island to get higher education.

Interviewer: What is the story behind your name?

Kathy: So my name is 'Kathy.' It is really American. Thank you for that. But there was these two sister missionaries, they're not LDS, they're Methodist, but when they went to the island, my mom and my dad, they're so welcoming, so they became friends with these two Methodists ladies, even though we were LDS. So the sister missionary when my mom gave birth to me said, 'Can you name her after me, Kathy?' So I am named after a Methodist sister missionary, Kathy.

Interviewer: When in life have you felt most alone or most connected?

Kathy: Most alone, when I first moved here when I was 13 years old. Like I said, I went to Brighton High School, but I live with an American family. The food was very different. Good thing I love hot sauce, because everybody would be so impressed that I ate a lot of Tabasco, like one bottle a week. It was because I don't like the texture of the food, so I would pour a lot of Tabasco in my food so I could only taste the hot sauce. But I don't want to be rude, right? And my parents always said, 'If people give you food, you just eat it.' But, I tell my son now, 'If people give you food, if you don't want it, you don't want it, you don't need to eat it.'

Interviewer: What are you grateful for about America?

Kathy: I'm very grateful that they're allowing our people and other countries to come in, and that when we come in we can do things that aim high or do things that they're doing. I know there might be some limits, but I'm just grateful to be here and to make it my second home.

Interviewer: You mentioned that your community has built smaller communities within the United States to help immigrants coming into the country. Do you think they built that just to be helpful, or do you think they built it because there was something missing, and there weren't enough resources?

Kathy: A couple of weeks ago, I was in Washington D.C. up at Capitol Hill fighting to get some rights and things back for our people. I don't know if you guys are aware of the Marshall Islands... So the U.S. military tested a bomb in the Marshall Island. So now, there's still side effects where people still have cancer. So the Marshall Islands is really far away from Japan, right? But people in Japan also said that they kind of felt the movement when they tested the bomb. So when the U.S. did that they promised us Micronesians that that's how we come into the U.S. and go back- We just need our passports, we don't need green card. And then they gave us Medicaid, but back in 1994, they took that away from us. So our people, our older people, they would come and they don't have insurance, because the U.S. took that away even though they

promised this is something that we would have. So I think that's one of the reasons why. Like, 'This is what you promised us, and if you take that we're gonna fight for it.' But a couple of us were at the Capitol fighting to make sure that we get that back. You know, you don't just bomb our island and then forget about us and take away what you've promised us.

Interviewer: What is your favorite holiday?

Kathy: My favorite holiday is Christmas.

Interviewer: Is there any reason why it is your favorite holiday?

Kathy: Just traditions. Christmas brings not just what we celebrate, the birthday of Jesus Christ, but also it brings families together- That's what really makes it special. We always get together no matter how far away our families are, they try to travel together and at least get together for this.

Interviewer: You mentioned that there are these different islands within Micronesia. Do each of them have very distinct cultures or is there a big overlap?

Kathy: Each have different languages and different cultures. Even where I'm from, in Pohnpei, we have different islands around it, *atolls*, we call it, and each atolls have different dialects, different languages, and different cultures too. We have kings, some don't have kings, and things like that.

Interviewer: What traditions have been passed down in your family?

Kathy: Just being together on holidays, and always cooking. We make sure that everything that we do is homemade. And visiting families. No matter how far apart we are in the States, we try to visit each other.

Interviewer: What does it mean to be 'welcoming'?

Kathy: 'Welcoming' me can be seen in all kinds of ways because everybody's different. But to me, 'welcoming' is where you approach somebody and you just feel that connection and you feel loved, you feel respect, you feel welcome.

Interviewer: As you mentioned before, you have lived many years in the U.S., what is something that you will always be grateful for while living in the U.S.?

Kathy: I'm grateful that being in the U.S., like especially us Micronesians, that we're able to just come in and out, and we don't have to use green cards. Visiting home is easy- I can just hop on the plane whenever and come back whenever.

Interviewer: What is 'peace' for your people?

Kathy: I think all of us peace is happiness. Peace is being free. Just respect each other. As long as your family is fed, they have a roof over their head, and they have food, that can be considered 'peace.'