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## FACE TO FACE WITH... | John Kim Founder | The Kim Law Firm

BY DEON DAUGHERTY  
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Houston trial lawyer John Kim grew up a Korean in 1960s Lubbock, and he remembers well the first time he was judged for being different.

"Partially because of my parents' example and largely due to the community in Lubbock, I never experienced prejudice until I became a lawyer," he said.

Kim has fused his sense of humor with a strong work ethic as head of The Kim Law Firm. He also is president of the Houston chapter of the American Board Of Trial Advocates, a position he says both humbles him and reminds him of his age.

"As much as I joke about things, this is important. ABOTA's sole mission is the preservation of the right to a trial by jury," he said.

Kim said he enjoys reasoned academic debate, and those discussions could take place just as easily over wine at the swanky Brasserie 19 as they could in between chomps on a cigar at his River Oaks office.

Under the watchful gaze of an autographed poster of "The Highwaymen," a country and western super-group composed of Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson, Kim laid down the law as he sees it for *HBJ* reporter Deon Daugherty.

### How did you develop this habit of chewing on cigars?

I don't know. Probably some sick mama complex or oral fixation kind of deal. The truth is it keeps me from smoking, and most lawyers will tell you that in deposition they appreciate me having a cigar in my mouth because it means I'm not talking.

### If you had the full attention of a group of children, what would you tell them?

Be courageous. Courage is based on

being different and getting educated. It's OK to be different, but it's not OK to turn your back on education.

I learned very early that I was different on a number of fronts, but it encouraged me. I was taught that it was good. And of course, I came from the typical Korean culture, which is, 'Get educated.' We had one rule, and it was typical of Korean parents: education, education, education. They didn't understand my fascination with sports. They didn't understand my fascination with cars. They didn't understand my fascination with women. They didn't understand my fascination with booze. But our rule was, if you made straight As, you could do what you want.

And of course, I abused that rule because in Lubbock public schools, it wasn't that difficult.

If you can't accept the fact you're different and if you can't accept the fact that the world is made up of a bunch of different types of people, then your education is going to do you no good.

You have to have courage to understand that **1.** You don't know everything; **2.** What you do know may be wrong; **3.** You must imbue yourself with critical thought; and **4.** Be willing to accept criticism and the fact you may not be the smartest guy in the room. And, if you're the dumbest guy in the room, you can take advantage of it. Believe me, I do. I go into every proceeding as the dumbest guy in the room, intending to learn.

### What attracted you to being a lawyer?

I always knew I wanted to be a trial lawyer. I like to talk. I don't mind an argument — I love sports, and I love to compete, and trial work is one of the weird things where you get to fight, you get to compete and you get to demonstrate sportsmanship. There's a good fight and a bad fight, but



KIM COFFMAN/PHOTO

at the end of the day with a jury, there's a winner and a loser, so it satisfies that competitive spirit.

### What will people be surprised to learn about you?

That I'm generally prepared. Nothing beats hard work. That's not only a Texas virtue; it's an Asian thing, too. Part of it is insecurity. I don't want to fail for my client. I don't want to fail for the other lawyers on my case. There's no excuse to not be prepared.

Now having said that, I don't often give off the appearance that I'm prepared because I don't sweat it. I know I'm ready. I'm also a realist. There's a time and a place for everything, and I don't have to win every argument. I just have to win the important ones.

This is kind of like letting a secret out: I get ready. I work weird hours. People may see me in the afternoon, drinking away and think, "There he goes." But I work at night. I'm single, no kids, no pets. I've just looked at my country club bill and realized I haven't played golf in six weeks, which is a first in decades. But I'm preparing for a case, and there's a lot of work to be done, so I've worked the last six Saturdays and Sundays and driven everyone crazy.