WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies, other reproductions, and reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

- Brooklyn Historical Society is not responsible for either determining the copyright status of the material or for securing copyright permission.
- Possession of a reproduction does not constitute permission to use it.
- Permission to use copies other than for private study, scholarship, or research requires the permission of both Brooklyn Historical Society and the copyright holder. For assistance, contact Brooklyn Historical Society at library@brooklynhistory.org.
- Read more about the Brooklyn Historical Society's Reproduction Rights Policy online: http://brooklynhistory.org/library/reproduction.html#Brooklyn_Historical_Society_Reproduction.

GUIDELINES FOR USE

This transcript is hereby made available for research purposes only. These oral history interviews are intimate conversations between two people, both of whom have generously agreed to share these recordings with the Brooklyn Historical Society archives and with researchers. Please listen in the spirit with which these were shared. Researchers will understand that:

1. The Brooklyn Historical Society abides by the General Principles & Best Practices for Oral History as agreed upon by the Oral History Association (2009) and expects that use of this material will be done with respect for these professional ethics.

2. This transcript is a nearly verbatim copy of the recorded interview. As such, it may contain the natural false starts, verbal stumbles, misspeaks, and repetitions that are common in conversation. This decision was made because BHS gives primacy to the audible voice and also because some researchers do find useful information in these verbal patterns.
3. Unless these verbal patterns are germane to your scholarly work, when quoting from this material researchers are encouraged to correct the grammar and make other modifications maintaining the flavor of the narrator's speech while editing the material for the standards of print.
4. All citations must be attributed to the Brooklyn Historical Society:
    - Oral history interview with Narrator's Name (First Last), Year of interview (YYYY), Identifier/ Catalog Number; Crossing Borders Bridging Generations Oral History Collection, 2011.019; Brooklyn Historical Society.

Oral History Interview with Bette Yee
Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.021
Interview conducted by Cynthia Lee in the narrator's home on February 26th, 2012 in Brooklyn, New York.

CYNTHIA LEE: It is February 26, 2012. This is Cynthia Lee, interviewing Bette Yee, for the "Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations" Brooklyn Historical Society Oral History Project. I'm here with Bette in her home, um, in Brooklyn, New York. Hi Bette.

BETTE YEE: Hi.

CYNTHIA LEE: Thanks for being here with me today. Um, why don't we just begin with when you were born, and where, and um, we'll start from there.

BETTE YEE: Wow. I didn't know that we were going to go that far back. Um, I was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in Chinatown, on Harvard Street it must've been. Um, I only found that out much later on what street it was because, um, my brother Howard, um, had discovered -- was supposed to be Harvard, and this was only, like when he -- I was -- must've been about 12, and it was only because my -- that's when I saw the birth certificate, and it said, oh we were on Harvard Street, and my father said, yeah, Howard Street. And I says, is that what Howard was supposed to be? He said, yeah. (laughs) So that's how he became Howard. We couldn't figure out why he would like the name Howard, of all names, right? So yes. That's how life was like for us, being first generation. So, I was there for the first five years of my life, and there were four of us. Um, me, my brother Ed, who's 13 months younger than me, and then a year after my sister [Jeanie], and then my brother Danny. We all came, one, -- one right after the other. And then, um, because my dad had the opportunity or was called to New Hampshire, because one of our cousins, or one of his cousins, had a restaurant called the China Dragon, and so, my mother was interested in going. She had, because, she thought that it would get my father away from all his gambling, because he would play mahjong every night, and there's a lot of gambling in the -- in the houses, and within Chinatown. This, of course, I learned much later too. So, we -- he moved us, four kids, and -- and his wife to the China Dragon, and at that time it was called the China Dragon Inn. It was a big,

um -- it seemed to be a big monstrosity of a house. I've never been in anything so large, but the upstairs, I guess, used to be like inns, and they had converted them to all bedrooms, and it was perfect. All the Chinese cooks were housed there, and my Uncle Harry and I don't quite get -- his name -- his last name was [Moy], and, um, all I kept hearing for the longest time was that he had to change his name because he came over, under another -- under another name which was very typical of what happens, but the Moys also had, um, um -- they had a different -- they seemed to have like different facial features, or different, like, looks than we did, and so I never really believed it. I just thought that we were all called aunts and uncles because we would call everybody aunts and uncles anyways, whether they were blood-related or not. Turns out they really are related. Anyways, Uncle Harry also at that time had four kids, all under the age of four, all under the age of five, because his daughter Harriet is actually one month older than me, and um, we all just stayed, you know, up there. Um, when we first -- and I don't know how long it was, uh, but I know that they were looking for the house that my father eventually bought under the GI Bill, because my father had served, you know, in the US Army as an infantryman, and um, you know, he got out in 1945, and it took him until 1948 to finally get my mother here, and that's a whole other story, which I don't know that you want me to get into, about how my mother got here.

CYNTHIA LEE: Well actually, why don't we step back a little bit to Boston.

BETTE YEE: OK.

CYNTHIA LEE: Do you remember anything about that time period, living there?

BETTE YEE: Well, it was really like -- you know, I was four, four and a half, or five [05:00] by the time I moved, and of course I never knew how old I was because Chinese never celebrate their birthdays.

CYNTHIA LEE: Can you explain that a little bit?

BETTE YEE: Well, I mean, we had the Chinese New Year, and I don't really remember celebrating Chinese New Year either, but it was never -- it was never -- we never knew about birthdays until we moved to New Hampshire, because all the other neighbor kids would have birthday parties, and I remember my mother laughing that they would have

birthday parties for little kids. And it still never occurred to us, you know, that we had birthdays.

CYNTHIA LEE: Why would she laugh?

BETTE YEE: Uh, because you don't celebrate. You know, in the Chinese tradition, at least where my -- you know, at least what I knew, um, we were always told that it was silly because you don't -- you're not supposed to celebrate a birthday until after you're married, and then probably not until you're at least 40 or 50, um, uh, and I didn't know why. I just -- I just -- and that's all my mother would say. She would never explain anything, she'd just say that's just the way it is, you know, and of course, apples were bigger at home, at home meaning China, where she came from. Where really, she came from a village called [Toyson] and so the -- the vegetables were, you know, hardier, the oranges were juicier, the melons were fresher, whatever it was, it was always better back home, and we just grew up thinking that this -- this home was -- we knew it was far away, um, but there was just an image that it didn't exist, because she talked about it as though it was like a dreamland. So it never existed for us. And because we were the only Chinese family, I mean like, what we considered -- what my father would say, pure Chinese, because my Uncle Harry married a French Canadian woman, and his four kids were half-breeds, and that was somehow we were better than them. And just, just that little attitude, it -- it really shaped and colored the way we interacted with them. We played with them everyday, but you somehow at the end of the day, you just knew you were better. You know, it's just the way you carried yourself, and it wasn't even a conscious thing. It's never a conscious thing. You just, somehow well -- and sometimes you just felt sorry, you know, that they -- you know, because you knew that everybody was talking about them, they're half -- you know, like they're, uh, I don't know, there wasn't a name, but they used to call us, [juksans] which means, you know, the crooked bamboo. We weren't perfect because we were too Americanized, but they were even worse. They were way more Americanized than we were.

CYNTHIA LEE: And they didn't have a name necessarily.

BETTE YEE: And they didn't have Chinese names. We had Chinese names, yeah. And their name was Moy, not even, you know, daring to go back to Yee. Um, but the whole reason

was for that, you know, later on they could have -- it was just that all the legal papers in opening up their restaurant was Moy, and it was just too difficult. Uh, everybody got to know them as Moys. So, um, we actually lived together in that old house with four bedrooms upstairs, um, the two family, so there were eight kids, you know, Uncle Harry, and his wife Terri, and their four kids, and um, my parents, and us four kids, and it was long enough -- time just, when you're a little kid, you just don't know about time, but it must have been more than a year because there were fifth kids, fifth childs born on both sides. You know, Howard was born, who was supposed to be Harvard, and then Quentin was born, on their side, uh, and they stayed there for a little while, before they got their own home, uh, which was only like maybe a half a mile down the road from us. Um, and I remember, we were always shy because, um, you know, Auntie [Terri], she was French Canadian, and um, she's just, you know, she didn't talk like us, and you know, we just didn't want to -- it's -- I don't know, when you're a little kid, you're just shy. You know, you get embarrassed, so we didn't have much interaction with them, but we -- but she always bought, you know, that first notion of Easter, she would buy everybody Easter eggs, and go on an Easter egg hunt, and that was the first time we actually -- because we moved from Boston. On the side of the house, [10:00] was over -- was a yard that was overgrown with grass, and she hid the eggs in there, and her kids were like -- like banshees, and that we always kind of always thought of them as like banshees you know, like kind of these primitive people who would just like go out, you know, without any coats on, or without any shoes on, and they were like rough and tough kids. You know, not -- not like well-behaved, sophisticated like we were, and so that was the attitude, and that's -- that's kind of how you treated them, even though you played with them everyday, and you had a lot of fun, but you also knew that if they were a little strange, it was because they were half, you know, they were only half. And, um, but -- the first Christmas, that's the first time we ever celebrated Christmas was because of Auntie Terri, and it was just so much fun. But despite all of the -- despite all of the -- the acculturation, I guess, as I think of it now, and it's strange that I never thought about it in this light before. Um, the overall -- the overall cast of that, they always remain like half-breed, and thus, you know, not quite perfect. Always stayed there. It always stayed there. Um, and

I -- that's -- again it's not a conscious thing, but you always -- it was always on top most of your mind. If they didn't do well in school, it's because they were half-breeds. If they didn't, you know, if they didn't behave, which they didn't not behave in the way that a good Chinese model person would, but -- but then on their report cards back then, you got As, Bs, and Cs, but then they also rated you on, uh, like whether you were outgoing, or quiet. I wish I still had some of the report cards, because out at recess, they would get higher marks than we were, for what -- I remember something like leadership, because they would take charge of things, and they -- they weren't afraid, and it was amazing, when people made fun of us, they weren't afraid to go down, to stand up and punch somebody, which meant that, you know, they were always having, you know, disciplinary problems, but we were just scared to death, you know, of making any kind of waves. So it didn't make us like admire them. They were just still a little off.

CYNTHIA LEE: So where -- where in New Hampshire were you, at this time?

BETTE YEE: This was Hooksett, New Hampshire, and --

CYNTHIA LEE: What -- what was that town like?

BETTE YEE: Well this is New Hampshire, where they -- where the slogan is still "Live Free or Die." Um, so little did I know that, um, little did I know how, um, how -- how racist, you know, the community was. Not to say that out neighbors, our neighbors were really nice. They always were trying to get us baptized. Um, so there's always that effort of, you know, you know, going -- you know, sending, there was always somebody, uh, asking my dad, if you know, if us kids couldn't go to Sunday school, uh you know, not so much the Catholics. It was really the Protestants who were doing that. So the first congregation list, and um, me, and my brother Ed, a little bit of Jean and Dan, but they were a little bit younger than we were. We were, uh, pulled into uh, um, becoming inaugurated or whatever they do, because they don't have baptisms, as a first congregation list.

CYNTHIA LEE: What year is this -- what time of year --

BETTE YEE: This is 19 -- let me see, 19 --

CYNTHIA LEE: What year did you move to New Hampshire?

BETTE YEE: It was 1955, when we moved to New Hampshire. Let me say, [unclear] was born in November. He was born in 1955.

CYNTHIA LEE: And you were born in?

BETTE YEE: 1949. Um, so it was 1956, I was in the first grade, and I still hadn't spoken any English. Um, we really didn't have a TV until we were -- until I was like seven or eight years old, and um, and we didn't even know what other kids had. You know, we just knew that we were -- we were different, but we also kind of felt that we were special. You know, we were just a little bit better. Just like the fruits in China were better. Um, everything was a little better, but we were quiet about it. We wouldn't -- we wouldn't stand up and fight for it. So, we really lived two different lives, you know. We -- we really -- or I. I can't say we, because as I talked to my brothers and sisters, we each had a different experience. I would live a different life, and the nightmares that I would have, uh, [15:00] is that I would be in school, and it would be class, and I forgot my milk money, and at that time, you had to bring six cents. It was six cents a week in order to participate in the milk program, and I would forget my milk money, and I didn't want the teachers to laugh at me, like they laughed at some other kids. I mean, that's what it seemed like that they were laughing, of course, I didn't really understand it. All I heard was laughing. And, um, and in my dreams, I would speak to them in Chinese, and the kids would laugh. And that was my nightmare. That is something that I really lived in fear of, and that's because -- that's also because there was a bunch of bullies, um, in school as there always are, and they were older -- they were like third and fourth grade people, um, kids, and they were boys. So, uh, we were always called Ching Chong Chinamen, um, and when we went on the bus, they would steal our lunchboxes, or they would take my lunchbox, and dump out the stuff, and put snow in it, and we would never tell the teacher. And it's only like one or two boys that did that, but that shaded the whole experience because -- and furthermore, we'd never dare tell our parents. Did not dare tell our parents. Um, when I went to school, um, actually somebody said to my dad, Wingy, they called him Wing, because that is his first name. It's a whole other thing about our names. (laughs) Wing, your little girl is old enough, it's a law that you have -- she has to go to school. And so, oh, figure, OK, didn't matter that I didn't know a word

of English. Had not even -- you know, other than Auntie Terri, which again at a five year old mind, you don't -- you don't distinguish it. It's a different language. You just -- you just felt she talked differently because she wasn't a Chinese person. Um, so that's how we all kind of went to school, because Chinese was spoken at the home. We never spoke English, and so not just myself, but at least the first five of us all started school without really knowing English, and um, so that kept us really quiet, and really afraid, and of course, our -- our cousins, the Moy kids, who -- our counterparts, they didn't really know Chinese. Again, that's one of their failures. They didn't learn Chinese. But we would still play together, and um, they could hold their own in the school yard, and we all went to the same schools.

CYNTHIA LEE: Why do you think you didn't tell your parents about the bullying?

BETTE YEE: Um, anything that was -- I don't know. You know, my dad -- I always remember my dad yelling a lot, and my mom wouldn't understand the reference anyways, because she doesn't know what school is, I mean, she wouldn't have any experience of school, and my mother herself didn't -- when school was offered, and I only learned this real later in life, she said that she had -- she had the opportunity to go to schools, because back then, um, I mean she really was a peasant. Girls didn't have to go to school, and uh she was more attuned to working in the fields, and running the household, and you know, helping with taking care of the kids and all of that, and that was her whole life, and that was -- she never questioned that. She was happy doing that. So she did say much later on that she didn't have much of a mind, or an interest in going to school. So she was never really educated, either in Chinese. So she could not read or write Chinese, um, and -- and so it's -- she wouldn't have any reference, you know, here. She wouldn't have any reference, and for some reason we just -- I don't know. I don't know why we didn't. I don't know why, you know, uh, because we never talk about things like that. It's not because it was -- it was scared. It's not that we were punished, but you know, just thinking about it, and just you know king of being in the mind of a little kid, if it didn't come up at the supper table, and that's one thing that we always had, we always had dinner together because my father would always say, we always eat together. Always, always eat together, and -- and so it would be the grown-ups. Kids never talked. It

would be the grown-ups talking, so they would never ask us how did your day go. So there was no opportunity to -- [20:00] to say this is what happened. They would never ask, well what happens in school? They never, never asked. At least me. It'd be interesting, to you know, to ask my brothers and sisters if they had the same experience.

CYNTHIA LEE: Would you ever talk to your brothers and sisters about it?

BETTE YEE: No. No. That was -- if we were embarrassed in school, it was an embarrassment, you know. I know that the boys -- I liked school because I liked what -- I liked the activity, and it was just always interesting, and I know that the boys hated it. They would cry, and cry, and cry, and they -- they had a much harder time as boys. They had a really, really hard time, and I never knew it. They never talked about it. They just hated going, and so if you think about little kids, they don't always -- they can't always tell you why. You know, it's like, because nobody hit you. You know, there were no words for, like, embarrassment. We just -- it was just an experience. We didn't have the vocabulary, really, for that. It's just that you didn't like it. All you knew was that this is what I didn't like.

CYNTHIA LEE: I know you mentioned how your mom had always talked about China, in these sort of glowing terms, and it sounds like she referenced that as home.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: So, did that affect you in how you viewed New Hampshire? Was that home for you, or did it feel somewhat different?

BETTE YEE: I don't know that we had a sense of home. I mean we knew that home was -- was where our family was, but that sense of hearth, maybe that sense that you're talking about, rather than home, um, it was indistinguishable, hearth and home. It's only later on, when you get to be a teenager, and you leave, that you -- you really feel torn, because as much as I hated the limiting experience of being at home, going outside without any of that support structure is really scary, was really scary, and that was the first time the distinction of hearth occurred to me. Um, it was just an everyday experience of, you know, well do you -- I mean do you like this? Meaning that, you know, um, is it comforting, is it there? Mm, you were comfortable in that you know that these were your brothers and sisters, and -- and you didn't have to -- you didn't have to be anybody else.

It was comforting in that way, but I didn't have a whole lot of reflection time. Um, most of my days, I mean, from the time that I was six was just helping my mother with the household chores, washing my -- helping her, you know, bathe my brothers and sisters.

CYNTHIA LEE: Because you were the eldest.

BETTE YEE: Because I was the eldest, and for that reason, I also wasn't allowed to play in the sunlight -- I wasn't allowed to play. It was just, I was shamed into playing, so every time I played, my mom would say, you know, shame on you. Aren't you ashamed that a big girl like you, still playing, you know, like little -- like a little kid?

CYNTHIA LEE: So, would, um, being in school, and outside of the home, eventually feel more comfortable to you?

BETTE YEE: It was more exciting. So that kind of -- that definitely colored the way I wanted to experience life. So it made me unafraid to just do things that would terrify my parents.

CYNTHIA LEE: Like what?

BETTE YEE: Go on a date, which I was never allowed to. I was never allowed to date white boys, or -- yeah white boys, and God forbid any other color. (laughs) And -- and I remember distinctly my dad saying, you know, you're going to marry one of the Chinese cooks, and I was so horrified. I was so gross, because first of all, I wasn't even thinking about marriage. Second of all, um, uh, I remember in high school, I didn't -- I know I wanted to go to college, but I never -- I didn't know how -- how I was going to pay for it. I didn't know, because I -- we never talked about money, and all through -- all through my growing, it was, um, [25:00] you know, the boys go to school. The girls don't need to. And even Auntie Terri would say, oh, you don't want to send your daughters to school. You know, you know, you want -- you know, that's for the boys.

CYNTHIA LEE: So that's not just in your family, but maybe --

BETTE YEE: Oh sure.

CYNTHIA LEE: -- the thinking of the time.

BETTE YEE: Well I knew later on that that was the going, you know, theme, but you know, when you're a little kid, you don't think about -- you don't have an experience with the world. I mean, I certainly didn't. I didn't know what current events were. I didn't know -- I didn't really know what happened outside. I just knew that they ate different things, I

had different schedules. I didn't know that they went to movies. I didn't know -- I didn't know the games that they had.

CYNTHIA LEE: So outside being anyone outside of the Chinese home.

BETTE YEE: Anyone outside of our home, because we had no experience with any Chinese families, not 100% pure, so that's why for the longest time, I thought that we were the last of the Mohicans. It wasn't until really -- you know, until I started studying history, (laughs) that there was a whole two billion of us, you know, on the other side of the world, and the only reason I thought the last of the Mohicans, because we would, you know, they would have those awful shows now, you know, about the cowboys and Indians, and how you, you know, like slaughter -- you know, it was a good thing to slaughter all the Indians. So you really grew up -- we really grew up being ashamed of who we were.

CYNTHIA LEE: At the same time, proud?

BETTE YEE: At the same -- but only, we could only be proud in the family. We could not be proud once we stepped out the door, and that was definitely once we had television, and you know, um, and because, you know, we had -- sometimes we were called Injuns, because of our black hair, I guess. So there was always -- you know, there was always that, like, aimed at us.

CYNTHIA LEE: That's the frame of reference up in New England.

BETTE YEE: That was a frame of reference, totally. Um, the frame of reference at, you know, in 19 -- you know, there was a Korean War, and the kids there would just, you know, like um, to be -- you know, almost spat at, you know, by the other kids, calling you Chink, and how, um, you know their uncle, you know, was, you know, was killing us, or how we killed, you know, their uncle. And when you're a little kid, it's like you're horrified. You know, and you feel you must be terrible. You know, you really must be a terrible person. So that was -- so we didn't even have the, um, we didn't have a Chinese community. We were it. (laughs) Other than -- other than the Chinese cooks, but we never -- we only saw them on their day off, and they were all males. They didn't have wives. They didn't have children. They were kind of weird, but we didn't -- you know, and again, when you're a little kid, you don't think about it as weird, but it was -- what

was nice is that it was happy. Everybody was happy. They were relaxed. You know, and it was always around a huge meal, when my dad had his, um, day off, you know, we would have a feast, and it was great. It was great for the kids, because the grown-ups were happy, because when the grown-ups are happy, the kids could run around, and scream, and you know, do anything they want, and when there was company, they wouldn't yell at you as much. And as a matter of fact, you know, like the advantage of having a lot of them is that they would just all enter -- we would all just entertain ourselves, except for me, because I had to pick up the dishes, and do the, you know, wash the dishes, sweep the floor, wipe the table, um, and do all that. Did all that, but I never helped them prepare the food. Well no, that's not true. They used to make me stir the mustard, and they used to say, you have to stir it over a hundred times to make it really smooth, and so, um, yeah so that was -- that was -- so I -- you know, you just don't have the consciousness. You know, like, if I like really put myself back there to think in terms of -- so the experience was -- the outside experience convinced me that we were not really as superior as my mother said we were. And it was only in, you know, the family, but we never thought -- we didn't have a word for crazy. We didn't think that they were crazy. It's just -- you just kind of -- you just kind of accepted, you know, like -- you don't -- there's not much [30:00] thinking through that. You just accept, this is the way it is here, this is the way it is out there, and -- and you adapt accordingly. You adapt your language, you adapt, you know, your demeanor, because I was a holy terror in the house, because I was the oldest, and I could boss all of my, you know, siblings around, but outside, I was so shy. I would not open my mouth. I would just not ever open my mouth, and for -- until I was nine years old, I was in the fourth grade, did I ever dare to even speak.

CYNTHIA LEE: So, kind of living in two worlds, almost.

BETTE YEE: Definitely.

CYNTHIA LEE: And, growing up, as you're getting older, which world did you see yourself in?

BETTE YEE: I think the biggest thing that attributed to my maturing into this -- the world that we're in, was that when I was 16, uh, I got to work in, um, my father's restaurant. It

wasn't my father, it was my uncle's restaurant, but it was family-owned, and uh, well, it was really Uncle Henry's. Henry was the older brother to Uncle Harry. Um, and uh, and my father was somewhere down that totem pole, so we didn't have a lot of ownership. He just worked a lot with the promise that, you know, he'll get a piece of the pie, and that was always the bitter conversations. I -- we never figured it out until much later but those were part of the bitter conversations that I would hear my parents talk about late at night.

CYNTHIA LEE: Which restaurant is this?

BETTE YEE: This is the China Dragon. So at 16, at 15, they -- uh, they got angry at their dishwashers, which were, you know, it was -- they weren't Chinese dishwashers, they were white dishwashers, women, you know, just, um, you know your run of the mill, you know, average, uh, kind of factory worker because that's what was available for work in -- in New Hampshire was more -- you know, there were a couple of factories in Manchester and Suncook because the mills in Suncook, so that was -- it definitely, it's a blue collar community, and they had blue collar attitudes, which I later found out was blue collar, and racist. Um, but we were also racist, you know. Anyways, uh, some of the, the, um, so my father called me in, because I was old enough to do dishes. Curiously enough, my cousin Harriet, who's my age, didn't because their dad owned the restaurant, Uncle Harry owned the restaurant. They weren't, you know, they weren't going to be caught doing dishes, but we did, but I did dishes, uh, and my brother -- my brother and I, we worked at the China Dragon, we were the oldest. He was 14, I was 15, and they had him doing side work, cutting vegetables, or washing vegetables, pealing onions, things like that, and I would do peapods during the time that I wasn't washing dishes. So, um, so I -- so that kind of gave me the opportunity, and the waitresses were also nice. They were all white, but they were -- they were really friendly, and they would call you honey, and dear, and -- and I thought, wow, this is like, why can't Chinese families be like this, you know? They were so warm. They were so emotional. And it's like, um, that's the first time that I felt that there was such a disparity between, you know, the Chinese, even though you know that they loved you, but there was no physical warmth. There was no touching. There was no -- it was just no -- ever no acknowledgement that you -- the only acknowledgement that you got, was what you did wrong, or you know, that, you know,

you should be ashamed of yourself, because you know, you shouldn't -- you know, it was all a matter of what you shouldn't do. It was all defined in what you shouldn't do. Um, and again, that's only much later. You know, you only react to -- you only go to the places that you feel are inviting, and, and so you desire this, and that was like the wish that I had, but it was never verbalized. It's just -- it's just something that you do. So, you're going to tend to pay more attention. You're going to watch, you know, what they do. You're going to watch how they behave, and um, so that was like the beginning of my realization of what the outside was like, even though I was at school, but it was also, you know, I was coming of age. You know, I was in high school. [35:00] I had -- now my experience is more of the outside world, than it was inside. Um, but my father was still working at the restaurant, and there was still that -- there was still that, the closeness of -- of the family dinners, on Friday night, when my father would have his day off, and so, I could never sneak out of the house on Friday because he was home.

CYNTHIA LEE: (laughs)

BETTE YEE: And, I could -- I could on Saturday, when I figured out, you know, like you know what the bus schedules were. There was only one bus that ran between Concord, and, um, Manchester. Hooksett was right -- there's 20 miles difference between Concord, the capital, and Manchester, the queen city, because it was larger -- larger than Concord, and Hooksett was smack dab in the middle, and so you had to walk a half a mile to the corner, and stand on the side of the road, where there's not even a sign, (laughs) and you just knew that the bus was going to stop there if you wanted a ride into Manchester. The only way we knew Manchester, was that we had chosen, rather than go to Pembroke Academy, we went to Central High. Um, uh, for high school, so I got to know a little bit about Manchester, in a big city, and things like that, although never -- never really walked the streets. Never really went into a restaurant. Never really went into -- had dinner in any restaurant at all, um, until junior year in, um, almost senior year in high school, because the kids would hang out at the Puritan, um, smoking cigarettes, eating French fries, and drinking cokes, and that was how I got indoctrinated into the American way of life.

CYNTHIA LEE: So, did anybody help you?

BETTE YEE: What do you mean?

CYNTHIA LEE: Um, you know, when you go into Manchester, did you have friends who you met there, or was this really just something that you did on your own, or -- how did you get indoctrinated?

BETTE YEE: I had a friend -- I had a friend, uh, her name is Jamie Hartnett, um, she -- um, her mother worked at the brick house, oh, which is a, um, what would you call it, a -- a like a fast food -- fast food, um, hot dogs, hamburgers, frat kind of thing, um, and they would make -- the first time I ever had fried clams, and still to this day die for their fried clams, um, she worked there. I mean, her -- um, [Jamie] worked there. She was the middle girl with three of three, um, and I met her in -- oh, in -- in grammar school, they -- her mother moved into Hooksett, and so we finished our seventh and eighth grades together, and by the time I was seventh and eighth grade, I also realized that I really liked sports, and I really -- and it could be just a reaction to getting out of the house. It's like, you know, I -- I realized that I was like pretty coordinated, and I really -- so I was on the softball team, and I was on the basketball team, and Jamie got to be my friend. We were both, you know, doing things together. She actually more introduced me to the lifestyle of the tomboy, because she felt that she was -- she verbally would say she's a tomboy, and I just thought, wow, that's pretty cool. I like this. And it was also stuff that would be OK, you know, with my parents. Now she didn't have a dad, because her dad died, but she lived right in the back of her house, like there was a road that's a quarter of a mile down, the um, and it was a long driveway. It really wasn't, uh, a public access road, but there were the sandpits, the Manchester -- the Hooksett sandpits. It was a gravel company, but it was, um, but we would go there and play, climb the trees, and jump into the sand dunes. Uh, little did we know how dangerous that was, because we could've gotten buried alive. Well parents didn't realize it either. They just, you know, all the kids around that area just, you know, did that. Spent, uh, when I was 13, that's how I spent my whole summer with Jamie, almost every day, and I would walk to her house, which was like a mile and a half, maybe two miles away, and we would go and from morning until it got pitch dark at night, we would just play in the sand pits, and her mom would feed us whatever the brick house offerings had, and then drive us home. [40:00] And I thought, oh my God, her

mother's so nice. I mean she would drive her kids around, to anywhere they wanted to, and -- and it was such a difference from my parents, who never went out, and you know, we never asked them, but we just kind of assumed that they wouldn't, that they wouldn't be interested, and as a matter of fact, if we did suggest it, they would kind of laugh and say, why do you want to -- you know, what do you want to do that for? Um, only later did we realize that they just didn't have that experience. They didn't know what it was like. Their whole world was just, you know, my mother was, you know, taking care of her kids, her [unclear], my father was, you know, working ungodly hours, you know, at the restaurant, and didn't know what experience us kids were going through. But again, here's another stark difference between Chinese families, and non-Chinese families, or what we would call white families, and sorry, but it was a lot funner, and a lot nicer on the white side. So, so she and I would kind of plot things, you know, to get into Manchester, or, or do things like that. Um, so yeah, I don't think that I would've done it alone. Although, later, so Jamie was when I was like 13, and 14. Uh, we were going to high school. She, um, she joined the cheerleaders, and I -- I just had it in my head that they weren't going to accept a Chinese cheerleader. I don't know that they would have, but I just had it in my head that no, I looked too different. You know, they're not going to accept me as a cheerleader. So I -- I never tried out. Um, but she then had her own set of friends. You know, she was part of the cheerleading squad. She went out with, you know, having the football team, and that was a whole -- so during the high -- after 14, I really didn't hang out with her anymore, but I was working at the, um, China Dragon, and this time I was, uh, um, I was still doing dishes, but I was doing a little bit more side work. I never waited on tables. Um, uh, but they did graduate me to the cashier place, so I was taking orders to go. And, um, so I had -- I had a view of what people did at night. I had -- I could see couples coming in, couples going out, and so that was a whole other experience that, you know, a typical 14, 15 year old wouldn't have. So, I couldn't really talk about that experience to my high school people, because most of the high school people weren't working. So I then had another, what I call -- what I thought was -- I never distinguished it as an experience. I just knew, it's just that, well I'm not going to talk about something that they can't, you know, they won't understand what I'm talking

about. So my whole life, as I'm talking about it now, I realize that I couldn't talk about my experience to my parents about what it was like going to school. I couldn't talk in school about what my experience was at home, and it's not that anybody put a gag in my mouth, it's just, I either didn't have the words to express it, um. It was all just a matter of, there were all different feelings that I had. They were all just -- I felt this way at home. I felt this way at school. I felt this way with my friends. I felt this way, working, and to me they were all separate. I mean, that's how I -- that's, you know, that's how I dealt with it, because the other part of Chinese upbringing is that, you know, kids just don't talk. You don't talk. So you're always in your head. You know, you're always, always in your head.

CYNTHIA LEE: Was there a point when you would meet someone who you could talk about all this stuff with?

BETTE YEE: No. No. Because, what I talked about was, um, I loved hearing their experiences. And, I didn't -- they didn't press me for mine, so I didn't talk about it. Or, it was more like, I wanted to be so much like them, that I had to -- I had to find ways that I could relate to them, or they could say, oh yeah, I know what you mean, type of thing. And that's -- that's really what defined my whole teenage years, which you know, when I think about it, [45:00] you know, like when I was in my 20s, and married, um, I -- I realized that I hated my teen years. It was horrible. It was, you know, I would never want to be a teenager again, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever. So, it -- no, we never, never talked about that. It was never, never talked about. Not between, um, ourselves. Not between the siblings. You know, not with my parents, and not ever with outside people. Really, the only person that I really, really got to, um, talk about it to was, um, [Gerard], my husband.

CYNTHIA LEE: How did you guys meet?

BETTE YEE: Uh, he was a busboy at the -- at the China Dragon. I was a dishwasher, and I was 16, he was 19. He had just finished his first year at seminary, so I felt, I knew enough seminary, OK, you know, they're supposed to be -- they're not supposed to be into girls. So he was -- so he was a safe person to talk to. And that's all we do. We would just talk, and then he got drafted into the Army, uh, you know, while he took his sabbatical,

because uh -- and I didn't know that he was just having ambiguous feelings about, you know, pursuing a life as a priest, and that sounded good. Oh, you know, like I felt that I had made it to a different level. He wasn't like a working-class person. He had like higher sights, and he had this lofty, you know, ambition of becoming a priest. So you know it would never be serious. And so, I felt so bad for him. Everybody did when he got drafted. You know, this is the height of the Vietnam War. This is, well actually, not the height, it was the beginning of the huge draft of the Vietnam War.

CYNTHIA LEE: What year was this?

BETTE YEE: This was 1966? Yes. 1965, or 1966, right around then, and uh, after he finished, um, he went to Fort Dix in New Jersey to do his boot training, and I just started writing to him, because he asked me. He asked me if I would write to him, and -- and so, I wrote to him, and I wrote to him everyday, and the reason -- and he wrote to me everyday. Um, and the reason for that was, uh, I just felt so bad for him, and because, you know, he was interested. He was interested in how I felt. He was interested in -- in, um, you know, what I was doing. Um, and I was -- and he would always tell me about what life was like in the Army. He would tell me about what life was like, you know, being in the seminary. You know, if I really -- we really were very much two very like human beings, in our experience. He's French -- I didn't know, he was a white boy, but his French Canadian, um, culture was really almost a mirror of my Chinese culture.

CYNTHIA LEE: In what ways?

BETTE YEE: Um, he was automatically sent off, because he was really bright. He had a -- he had this photographic memory, supposedly, um, and of course, you know, the thing of a good Catholic family is to, you know, send your sons off to be a priest. So, he was sent off to be a priest, without him knowing. You know, you don't know what you want to do, you know, but you know, he was smart. He aced everything. Um, and uh, he had this, uh -- he had this Catholic upbringing, which to me, seemed more, uh, uh, I don't know, seemed warmer and more real, than uh, than the Protestant people, brought up in the Protestant religion. They were more, I don't know what it was. I couldn't put my finger on it, but they -- but to me, they were -- they were more erudite. They had more honor, or they had more, um, they had more sense of morality. Something like that,

because they themselves, you know, I -- I could hear the things that they were struggling with inside, whereas what I grew up with was kids taunting me, and not feeling -- you know, there was never a sense of guilt in what they did. But, you know, experiencing this Catholic boy, and he actually had a huge sense of guilt, and I go, oh, no I can deal with this. This is really comfortable. You know, like he can -- you know, like he can like really talk about it, and he actually talked [50:00] about it. So, it was really through him that I got to understand how to like kind of express some of the feelings that I was going through, that really for the first time, and probably because we wrote to each other every day for two years. For two years, because when he was stationed in Fort Hood, we knew that he could be called anytime to go, you know, um, to -- to overseas. But because, um, he was -- because, you know, because he had like, he was good at at least, uh, not so much following orders, but he was just good at processing things. You know, he -- he had -- he was smart, so they kept him, you know, stateside, you know, working at headquarters, and so that's how he got out of -- so he was lucky. That's how he -- he never saw the front lines. And then when he got out, um, I was already -- um, I had already finished my freshman year at UNH, the University of New Hampshire.

CYNTHIA LEE: You ended up going to UNH, and I know you had said that your parents weren't really interested in --

BETTE YEE: No. I had to do all this. I had to do all the paperwork myself. I never talked to them about it. They -- I just knew that they were proud of me. I mean, they never said it. Never once did they say it. Um, but I got -- I got pretty decent marks, and uh, and I -- and I wanted to take the college course. It was my decision, and that was a good thing, because they were never -- they were never interested in what I was doing in school anyways. As long as I didn't have to -- as long as I can go back and work, they didn't want me to be on the -- I made the special gym team. They wouldn't let me be on the special gym team. You know, um, so that's why I knew I couldn't try out for, uh, uh cheerleading. Um, and they didn't -- and I -- that was the first anger that I felt, is that they don't even know that it's a privilege to make the gym team, you know. They didn't even care. And that was my attitude, so that was like, probably like the first time I ever sulked, but they didn't know. I didn't tell them. I didn't express that I really, really

wanted to do this, and I think that if I had, if I could have done that, they would've relinquished a little bit, but see the conversation, again, my family was -- they were really a peasant family. They -- I mean, and that's my conception of it. They didn't talk a lot about -- they didn't talk a lot about what I thought were intellectual things, or -- or uh, uh, you know, things to develop, you know, your mind. Uh, they just kind of -- they just kind of assumed that you were, that you would be this, and now you're just finally like growing into this.

CYNTHIA LEE: So when you enrolled in UNH, they, University of New Hampshire.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: They -- they didn't stop you.

BETTE YEE: They didn't stop me, because I realized that they were proud, that they never said it. I realized that they were actually proud, and um, and I had -- and I had saved all the money that I was working to go there. I was able to get a small scholarship, which is what everybody does, you know, like you get a thousand dollars here or there, and because I was, uh, um, I was a resident, or a state student, um, you know, the tuition wasn't so great. I actually had money for a year and a half.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did you actually earn money from working at your family's restaurant?

BETTE YEE: No. Um, that was the money that I had earned since I was 15, working at the China Dragon. Um, during my first year at UNH was when my father decided to open his restaurant.

CYNTHIA LEE: OK, oh, but you were paid for your work at the China Dragon?

BETTE YEE: At the China Dragon, I was, but not at my father's restaurant.

CYNTHIA LEE: Because that was your uncle's --

BETTE YEE: That was my uncle's.

CYNTHIA LEE: Technically, your --

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: -- your uncle's restaurant. OK.

BETTE YEE: And you know, my father, still with his gambling habits, he would take, on his day off, or in the mornings, when you know, because he was head chef, he didn't have to be around for all of the side work, he would gather everybody's bets, and go off to the

tracks at Rockingham, you know, Raceways, and one of those times, he, he won a chunk of money. I don't know how much it was, but I knew that it was enough to open his restaurant. OK. And, and that's thanks to the push that my mother had, and at that time, my mother -- we ended up, because all of the kids were in school, um, for the -- and I forget what year it was that she ended up getting [55:00] a mill job at [Wanthat] Mills, in Manchester. Uh, they -- they were makers of the gauze, you know, for like Johnson and Johnson, or something. And so she saved her money too, from that. I mean my father did get paid, and he -- he got paid better than anybody else, as far as -- but not as -- but you know, it was the Moys that got all of the chunk of money, and my father was feeling the pressure. Uh, he -- I mean one of the things that we did know was that, um, that my mother always felt bad because she felt that my father was always kind of like the black sheep. They had, you know kind of described themselves as that, among that family, and even though they had promised him that, you know, Wingy don't worry, we'll take care of your kids, you know, they'll be able to -- but that meant they weren't going to give their girls any money to go to school, but they would give the boys money to go to school. So I never questioned that I -- I never questioned it. I just knew that I had to pay for it, myself. And it wasn't -- it was, when my money ran out, it was actually Gerard who said that I could take out a school loan, because I didn't -- even though I knew about it, I, you know, the machinations to do it, you know, were outside of what I could do, and I think then your parents still had to sign, but you know, I would just tell my father to sign, and you know, he never knew what he was signing anyways, so I would sign it because the other thing was that because his Chinese was limited, uh, and mine was getting better as the oldest in school, he would actually have me talk to the bankers, and everything, and it was terrible, because I didn't know what I was saying. I mean, I didn't know anything about banking. You know, I didn't -- you know, and I was supposed to translate for him. There were things that I didn't know how to translate.

CYNTHIA LEE: All right.

BETTE YEE: Anyways. Um, but you know, we all -- we all survived (laughs) through all that, nonetheless. Um, I don't know that -- I'm sure that there would've been different choices that we would've made, had we, you know, known better, um, about investing, about,

you know, about really using the banks, because in -- even when my parents had their -- they only had 13 tables, and the 13th table was what we'd call the wait station, where all the waitresses sat, and we had dinner and lunch there, and it was only cleared off during the rush hours, that you had 13 tables, but that little restaurant, uh, profited, netted, a million dollars. Not a year, but over the course of the time that they were there, and -- and that was all stashed under my brother Jimmy's bed. Jimmy and David, who shared a bedroom all through, you know, their years, um, uh, my mom stashed all the money underneath their bed, that I didn't know about until way, way later.

CYNTHIA LEE: Um, maybe we should get back to when Gerard comes back.

BETTE YEE: OK. So when Gerard comes back, we know that he's not going to go back to the seminary. Uh, he's going to go to UNH, uh, again, because it's the cheapest, but also, um, he didn't know what he was going to study. You know, all he did -- I mean he just had all these seminarian courses. So, uh, he actually said he was, um -- he actually picked his major as philosophy. So it was through his study in philosophy, and him talking about it every, you know, to me, every day, that I got to pick up ways of thinking, but also the college was huge for me, because that's when I took, um, that's when I took world history, uh, that we had to have as part of our requirement. That's where -- we had to take comparative religion. That was the most eye-opening experience for me. When I realized that all the major religions in the world, we're all going to the same place, whether they were Buddhists, Zen, Muslim, Catholic, you know, we're all headed for the same place, and um, that made it a lot easier to digest, and it also made me understand why I was attracted to Gerard. Also because, you know, we could actually talk, you know, in, in, in conceptual -- in a conceptual format, um, which was -- uh, which I always thought was missing [01:00:00] from my experience, so it was -- it was being able to really put on a different set of lenses, and like when you had a concept, you could, you know, see the -- you could see a whole different way of the world. You know, you just saw everything differently now. Um, it's only much later in life that I realized that those were also limiting, but that's later on in life. So, he -- so that was, yeah, yeah. That was that, and it was my first inklings of racism, uh, or anything like that, really came through Gerard. He had the words to explain it. He had the, you know, he justified, you know,

where my feelings were. Um, uh, he -- he just, you know, had the concepts that as soon as I heard them go, wow, that's exactly, you know, what was happening to me.

CYNTHIA LEE: And I would imagine at this time, like, because this is probably now the late '60s, right?

BETTE YEE: Let's see.

CYNTHIA LEE: Drafted in '66.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: And he was away for --

BETTE YEE: Uh, this was the late -- yeah, '66, he was back in '67, or '68, he was at UNH, but he was commuting everyday. He wasn't living on campus like I was.

CYNTHIA LEE: So --

BETTE YEE: Yeah because --

CYNTHIA LEE: A lot of --

BETTE YEE: -- Jonathan was born in '69.

CYNTHIA LEE: So a lot of things were happening at the time.

BETTE YEE: A lot of that -- this was such a hot bed, because even in sleepy UNH, uh, I think it was 1968, yeah, it was 1968, the sit-ins, the college, you know, all the sit-ins were happening, and I was going, wow, what the heck is happening? So that -- that just broke the lid, like totally broke the lid. You know, now --

END OF FIRST AUDIO FILE

Bette Yee (b)

BETTE YEE: -- I'm political. Like I -- you know, under -- you know, I didn't understand it, you know, from before, but you know, like here was -- you know, a set of students that could formulate some thinking, and some action, that I felt really excited about. You know, um, I didn't know about politics. Um, I didn't know it was happening. Uh, the Vietnam War was something that we just experienced, but I didn't -- you know, I didn't

know the fervor -- I didn't know the extent of the fervor, whatever cover-up there was. You know, that was all so new to me, it was so, so, so very new. But, you know, um, it just took -- it just swept all of us, you know, so there we are. You know, we being, now I'm feeling, you know, the real part of being that generation of what we now call the Baby Boomers.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did it change how you saw yourself as a Chinese-American?

BETTE YEE: It was the first time that I was proud to be Chinese. Actually, Gerard had dropped those seeds about, um, just -- had dropped those seeds about, um, you know, like not being ashamed of who you are. Um, because he was fighting the same thing, being French-Canadian. And, um, that actually allowed me to be open to what was happening with the sit-ins, because all of a sudden, you know, when that like breaks into your head, you have a whole different interpretation of the world.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did you find that your fellow students, maybe even saw you had a different attitude towards you as opposed to what you experienced in, you know, grade school, middle school, high school?

BETTE YEE: Um...

CYNTHIA LEE: Did it go that far?

BETTE YEE: You know, like my college experience, I didn't make a -- um, well I did, [Jerry Ann]. I mean just like anything else, I mean, I wasn't really, really popular, and I had enough, you know, like it was just the thing that, you know, oh who wants to be popular, type of attitude. You know, you didn't want to be the cheerleader, like floozy type of girl. You weren't going there for a popularity contest, but uh, in real life too, there was only a very small group of people, you know, from college. I didn't have a whole, large group of people. You know, not from the classes. It was really from the dorm that I was in, that we could, you know, get together, and -- and I realized that the only people that I could get close to are the people that I could really talk to, meaning -- I mean and that was natural, but what was in a comfortable enough setting for me. So, what I was attracting were all people who, you know, had some sort of, you know, thing that they were struggling with it. Jerry Ann was struggling with her weight. You know, there was something, you know, like -- I had some Greek friends, you know, and they were also

struggling with their ethnicity. Um, we never talked about it. It's just that, you know, we kind of, you know, your likes kind of just, you know, come together, but you don't necessarily talk about that. You talked about coming of age stuff. You talked about boys, you talked about, you know, your teachers, um, things like that. You really -- the only person that I really talked politically with, or philosophically with, was Gerard. He -- so he's, you know, like he really was my mentor in that way, but I also have a feeling that, you know, much later on, I learned that I was the only one who could talk to him also that way, because his friends from the seminary he never considered real friends, and they were never -- his friends were never as politically charged as -- as the Blazons were, but I found out later that it was really due to the father, who was really -- the father was a John Birch, (chuckles).

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: So he had -- he was always spewing his political -- venting his political, um, uh, um, philosophies, and it always amazes me, because um, Gerard would like, for awhile, as any kid, you follow along those, but then you know, when you're able to think about it a little bit more, he -- it was a shock to me, because he was [05:00] totally against his father's way of thinking, but hitched against it, but they were the opposite ends of the same thing, right.

CYNTHIA LEE: So, um, when did you guys decide to get married?

BETTE YEE: It was, uh, oh gosh -- we got married on February 2, 1969. But we had decided to get married, um -- I mean I was strong enough, and brave enough, to consider getting married, because prior to that, I was like scared. I was like really scared, um, but he had already been back, you know, to UNH. Um, we were both already, you know, seeking -- even finding fulfillment in the political fervor that was happening, and kind of doing your own thing. So we had already decided to get married by the end of -- by the summer of '68. I just didn't know how I was ever going to tell my parents, because I knew they would not be for it.

CYNTHIA LEE: Because...

BETTE YEE: Because he was white. Um, and there was no -- and I didn't have enough Chinese to explain to them that his, you know, that he may be white, but the French Canadians

were considered the blacks of, of New Hampshire. They were 60% of the population, yet they had the lowest jobs, they had the lowest opportunity. You know, all of that, which is why Gerard studied the French-Canadian history, and again, it was just so fascinating to me. You know, like had I never -- I don't know, if I had never met him, you know, would I be who I am, most likely not, but I also think that because we're both the way that we are, we would've just glommed onto somebody else, who would've been -- I mean there's not much choice, you know, there's not much choice in your life. I don't know if there ever is in any point of your life. You, you know, you attract who you're more comfortable with. They're exciting to you because -- and for us, it was a whole -- everything was exciting. You know, just everything, the whole world was just fresh, it was exciting, there was new music happening, and even though we weren't deeply into the music scene, um, his sister, [Joanne], was into Bob Dylan like nobody's business, and Gerard would always kind of make fun of her, because he wasn't a musical being. He, you know, his stuff came in through the books. He didn't really listen to the lyrics of Dylan, whereas his siblings, who didn't go to the seminary, but still had that political flavoring, they had -- and that was always amazing to me, they just always -- they were definite about -- they never made apologies about where they stood, politically, or philosophically.

CYNTHIA LEE: So, do you think -- do you think that, um, given who Gerard was, and his -- his family, that that helped you kind of make the decision to get married, and tell your parents?

BETTE YEE: I never told my parents. Actually, it was because Gerard's aunt, [Tippy], worked as a waitress at the restaurant. That's how he got his job at the restaurant, that you know, they knew about it, and it was, uh, my Uncle Henry, who went to my dad and said, what are you going to do about it? You know, Bette's thinking I'm going to take off and marry this guy. And, um, they were ashamed. They were ashamed. I was, like, such a bad daughter.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did they talk to you?

BETTE YEE: No. See, the thing is that they never talked to me, but they didn't have to. I -- you know, they -- I knew. Their glances, they wouldn't -- they would like ignore me.

CYNTHIA LEE: So you, in some ways, sort of understanding the impact of your decision, knew to lay low for awhile.

BETTE YEE: I laid low. I didn't come home, and it was easy not to come home because you were away at college. Um, I did during the summers, I did come and help with the restaurant, and um, and I knew that I was going to, and I knew -- I knew what I was going to do was going to hurt them, and I knew that I was being a bad daughter. So, it didn't make -- [10:00] it didn't make the time a joyous time for me. It was that this is what I wanted to do, because this is the person that I wanted to be with, and if we wanted to be together, and that was also the time, you know, you know, like everybody else was beginning to live together, and because of his Catholicism, and you know, you know, like, did that -- it was just going to be easier to just get married, so we -- so we decided we were going to get married, but it's only his family that knew, which then, you know, and that was in the summer of '68. And we didn't know -- so we went through another -- we had talked about it, talked about it, talked about it, and then, uh, I got easier with it, uh, around November, and uh, around Christmas, actually. It was around Christmas, and even though we were like -- like every other couple, we were experimenting with sex, and all of that, you know, and we were always very careful, but as soon as we decided to get married, you know, he decided to not be careful anymore, and that's how Jonathan was born. So, that's what caused us to up, you know, the date of the --

CYNTHIA LEE: Ceremony.

BETTE YEE: Of the ceremony. And uh, so we were married on February 2, 1969, and I didn't know I was pregnant. I didn't know I was pregnant until like a week later, when I was just so nauseous, like really nauseous.

CYNTHIA LEE: So, you know, it's sort of interesting, because your uncle was married to a French-Canadian.

BETTE YEE: That's right.

CYNTHIA LEE: And so, did your parents really get negative feedback from your uncles?

BETTE YEE: Yeah. Not only that, my cousins, because of the way I conducted my marriage, my cousins came to me. My cousins, my equals, you know, my --

CYNTHIA LEE: Generation.

BETTE YEE: Generation, said yeah, well, you know, they were kind of snickering about the way -- how I got married, you know, sneaking off and getting married, and that's the first time in my life that I just took umbrance to that and I said, oh, do you want me to tell you how your parents got married? You know, because Auntie Terri was only 16 years old. She was working at the restaurant, and Uncle Harry, who was like a good 10 years her senior, was dating a 16 year older, and believe me, there was no announcement of a marriage, you know, right there, and that like, you know -- I was saying that to Peter Moy, and Peter just went, whoa. I didn't mean to start that whole thing, I was, you know, I was only, uh, and then he says, mm, you're right. You know, and that was like for the first time that I had really, truly spoken my mind out, because I was mad.

CYNTHIA LEE: So that was less about -- the criticism was less about the fact that Gerard was not Chinese, and more about how --

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: -- you guys came to the decision, and maybe had gone about it.

BETTE YEE: Yeah, well I think that they assumed, the Moys assumed, because they were free about that discussion, that they -- they just assumed that our family was just as free. So that -- that made sense, right --

CYNTHIA LEE: Right.

BETTE YEE: -- that they would -- they would criticize me for that, but I wasn't free. I wasn't free.

CYNTHIA LEE: How did your siblings take it?

BETTE YEE: Well, uh, let's see, Ed, Jean, and Dan came, and my parents let them come, but they knew that they would never come, even though they knew him, they knew who Gerard was, they knew about him, they knew that I was seeing him, you know, he would drive me to school, drive me back, and um, uh, they were OK with that, but um, never -- and you know what, I don't know if they ever knew that I was like really seeing them. They don't know to the extent. They never knew that I was writing to him. You know, they didn't know that I've had a relationship with him since I was 15.

CYNTHIA LEE: Right.

BETTE YEE: So that I totally kept from them.

CYNTHIA LEE: So it was a little bit of a shock.

BETTE YEE: Yeah. Yeah.

CYNTHIA LEE: The seriousness of your relationship.

BETTE YEE: Right, right, right. And for them, it was just really scary, I mean, in retrospect, because they just knew, you know, this is their oldest daughter. She's marrying a [lawfun] it's like, uh, how scary could this be? And all my father, I do remember my father saying to me, you know, that summer -- and that's what really irritated me, at that point, I was ready to, you know, find the first black man [15:00] and marry him, because I knew how racist he was. He said, um, but your children, you know like, our grandchildren aren't going to look like us.

CYNTHIA LEE: So what happened when your children were born?

BETTE YEE: Well, it was, you know, babies just have a way of melting into your hearts, you know. Um, by that time, Gerard was working as a bartender. My father got to know him. He got to know him, because my father's notions of [lawfuns] were that they were lazy, you know, they were always asking for money. Um, they wouldn't put out an extra thing for you, and they realized that he was really hard-working. He really cared about me. They could see that he really cared about me. So, it was, you know, they had like gotten to know him, a little bit better. You know, he was -- you know, it was just so hard to like let somebody else, you know, into the family, and it's not that they said no, it's just that there was never a communication, so you never -- and it was like, you were afraid to come out with it because a no would've been a definite no. At least if you, if there wasn't a definite no, you know, you could push it from that side, which means that there's not ever a commitment anywhere. You know, there's not ever like a hard commitment, yes, I'm going to marry him type of thing, that fiery type of attitude that Gerard had. You know, he would just like flip his finger at the world, and say you know, we're going to do this. Um, and that was like -- that was so great. You know, like wow, I -- just, you know, I admired him. Like he was my mentor. He was everything. He was like everything to me, like you can possibly imagine. But the first year that I was without my family, was -- I was miserable. I was miserable, I was scared, and I dreamt about

death. I dreamt about dying. I dreamt about me in my grave. I mean, there would be nightmares where I didn't want to go to sleep.

CYNTHIA LEE: So when you say you were without your family, what -- what does that really mean?

BETTE YEE: Without my family, was that I didn't have my mother and father. I couldn't go see them. I couldn't talk to them. It means that, um, I know that my brother Ed, my brother Dan, um, not so much my sister Jean. I was never super, super close to them, and it could be that my mother wanted them to be with me. Could be that they -- and I'd actually have to ask them. I never, never asked them. They were just there, at my wedding, because we did have a wedding, uh, uh, you know, they would come and visit us, because you know, you know, I lived in Portsmouth at the time, and um, they also knew -- I think it was Chinese New Year. I was invited to the restaurant, because they always had something for Chinese New Year, and I was -- oh, it couldn't have been, because I was -- I was like six months pregnant by that time, and um, Gerard and I kind of came in, and we just were really quiet, and my father comes up, and he looks at Gerard, and he says, are you happy? And, you know, Gerard was scared, and you know, shitless really, and he says, yes, yes I am. And, that was it. That's all my father said, which shocked the hell out of me. Um, and then my mother asked if, you know, I would come back to the restaurant because I need -- they needed me to work. And I was -- and I was glad to do that. You know, I was happy to do that, but it also meant that we had to jiggle our way around that, and -- and, uh, the way that Gerard and I always had it, was that everybody was against us. You know, like that side of the family, not so much his side, but his -- his community, Suncook, New Hampshire, was still very prejudiced, and very bigoted. Uh, so we always felt that, you know, I mean it was our declaration and sense that everybody was against us, and uh, um, he had to -- I mean, so we never had a typical marriage, because you know, me going back into the restaurant, they -- my parents always felt, even in this marriage, that I feel that they -- they never felt that this marriage was viable or real, because I still belong to them. You know, if I need you at the restaurant, you need to be at the restaurant, not with your husband. [20:00]

CYNTHIA LEE: So did you feel that it was harder for you now that you had married Gerard, in that, um, in that community? I mean, what if you had married a Chinese person, being in New Hampshire? I mean it --

BETTE YEE: There was no --

CYNTHIA LEE: Was it more difficult to be a part of a mixed marriage, you think? I mean was there a different type of attitude towards people who decided to be in a mixed --

BETTE YEE: Well yeah --

CYNTHIA LEE: -- marriage.

BETTE YEE: I knew already that my Uncle Harry and Auntie Terri, I didn't want to be, you know, the object of their, uh, scorn for having a mixed marriage. I mean that was my reference point. So -- but the possibility of me marrying a Chinese person was so remote, because there's -- because of the attitude that I had. Because of my only experience with Chinese men were the cooks, were much older, and some of them were really leery, and -- and they always smelled bad, you know, from the food, and the grease, and the sweat, um, and I could never imagine a Chinese person being romantic --

CYNTHIA LEE: I guess my question --

BETTE YEE: -- or being philosophical.

CYNTHIA LEE: I guess my question is, was -- did you feel in New Hampshire that there was -- I mean there was the attitude that your family had about Uncle Harry --

BETTE YEE: Mm, hmm.

CYNTHIA LEE: -- and his relationship.

BETTE YEE: Mm, hmm.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did you sense that there was a similar attitude by other New Hampshirians about mixed marriages?

BETTE YEE: Oh yes.

CYNTHIA LEE: And how did that come out? How did you experience that?

BETTE YEE: Nobody would ever come up to you, and be nasty to you. You just, uh, you just knew in the political -- in their -- in the people who they favored to vote for, you knew what their stance was, because you know, nobody ever talks politics to your face, but the attitude was more of the attitude of what -- you know, that to me was just normal,

because that's what we experienced in the schools. But as you got older, they just got better at hiding it, but also, you know, and I understood from taking my classes in race relations, that you know, people one-on-one, and that's why it was easy to say, oh, I, you know, I'm best friends with, you know, this black kid. You know, it's great, so you love the individual, but you can still hate the race. They were the exception. So, I knew that I was the exception. You know, it never -- it was not the way that people experienced you, because that's what happens. It's one-on-one. I don't represent a whole race. I just represent me. Not even my family. I just represent me.

CYNTHIA LEE: So when people saw you and Gerard together, on the street, or --

BETTE YEE: We didn't have anybody snicker at us. We didn't have any, you know, we just didn't have any attitudes. Um, you know, when you get married in the Catholic faith, and he hadn't, you know, like he hadn't denounced his faith, at that time. Uh, I had to take, a six week course in how to live with a Catholic, because I knew that I wasn't going to convert to Catholicism, um, and because of that, we weren't -- we could only get married in the rectory, we couldn't get married at the altar. So in that way, yes, but it would've been any way with a non-Catholic, OK, but particularly so, you know, with a mixed marriage, because it was -- it was a big -- there was a big discussion about that. I mean, you know, the civil rights, you know, we're in the middle of -- and little did I know, the civil rights era was hot, was really hot. It was burning. It was dangerous, you know. It was the, uh, you know, there were some really, really militant groups out there that were really scary, and, um, what we've experienced, and I just -- and I was proud to be with Gerard at that time, was that he was so politically to the left that we experienced more of that flack than anything else, but also being aligned to the left meant that you were, you know, you know pro-mixed marriages, you were --

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: -- pro-civil rights, you were, [25:00] you know, it automatically meant that you were pro a lot of things, um and uh, and he just -- he just made no bones about it. So people would naturally not want to talk to him, or us.

CYNTHIA LEE: OK.

BETTE YEE: But -- but also because he never had a way of expressing himself. Whenever he would get angry, he would just like kind of fume inside, and he would write a couple letters to the editors, and some of them would come back, like, really, you know, like almost calling him an asshole, but he laughed about it, and felt great, that you know, he could like elicit such a response.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm, mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: And to me, that was like, wow, I finally made it, you know, into like white society, like I could be part of a conversation.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: Even though I never conversed, because still part of my upbringing is, that my identity is, you know, is a family, or my identity is my husband, but not just in the Chinese family is it that way, it is that way for women, and you know, my -- my feminist side didn't come out until I really moved to New York.

CYNTHIA LEE: Well let's talk about that. Um, how did you decide to leave New Hampshire, and come to New York, and in Brooklyn in particular?

BETTE YEE: Um, well by that time -- when did I move to New York? In 1985. So we're -- we're, you know, 20 years ahead, um, and I'm 37 I think. Um, by that time, I was with, um, a jazz musician, John, and he represented a whole other, again, exciting, dangerous, you know, side of life that I'd never experienced before.

CYNTHIA LEE: So your relationship with Gerard ended...

BETTE YEE: That ended.

CYNTHIA LEE: In...

BETTE YEE: In a divorce. He, um, he eventually ended up serving papers to me, and that was, let's see, we had the 15 -- we had been married, I think Jonathan was seven. Nat was five. Yeah I think Jonathan was seven by that time.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: But, uh, he had spent -- he had given everything that he could give. I mean, he couldn't get a job. He had, um, he had gone to school for his PhD in history, in particular French-Canadian history, and my family, you know, like I didn't want to move to Orono, Maine, and not because I didn't want to be with him, it's because my family -- my family

was always calling me, and I always felt the guilt of having left them, so I -- I came back to the family, with, you know, to work in the restaurant with, uh, my two kids, and uh, he was up in Orono, Maine, and then like, I think, a year and a half of that, he, um, he decided that -- I mean, he couldn't get a job. That was around the time when, again, getting jobs was like really, really hard, and uh, he came back, and he worked for the restaurant. Uh, and he worked hard. He worked really, really hard. Uh, he had finished with the Wing On, my father's first restaurant, and he was moving to Concord. We found this other space, and called it the House of Yee, and, um, we created -- we created the whole drink menu. We created -- you know, he created a really great wine list. Um, he really wanted to know how to cook, so he like was doing side work in the kitchen, and eventually, he knew that it's like, I guess, it's like anything else, and that was when my father first saw how hard he worked, that he was saying to my other cousins, my Chinese-Chinese cousins, legitimate cousins who came from Boston, he said to them, you know, there's some white guys that are really, really nice, and really, really good, and it was the first praise that I had ever heard, uh, because Gerard worked so -- I mean we worked hard, both he and I did. We hardly slept, but you know, the kids were in the restaurant. They grew up in the restaurant. It -- you know, we did -- we just worked there seven days a week, getting that stuff going, and he was trying to, um, uh, um, uh, create a system where we could have more consistent side work, and create a schedule where we didn't all have to be there. Uh, so he wanted to learn some of the recipes, and you know, like anything else, you know, when you do things, you have to keep trying. So he was -- he was just understanding the [30:00] the -- the whole process, of you know, of how to do the spare ribs, how to do the pork strips, and there was one batch that kind of spoiled, and uh, I -- bad timing, and it's not that they -- it wouldn't anyways because you know, it just happens, you know, you don't have it -- you know, you take it out, and you -- either, I think it was you made a little bit too much, because you didn't figure out how much you were going to, you know, need, uh, that following week. And uh, my brother Howard came by, and just said, see this, it spoiled. And it was like, not -- it was like, there was never a thank you for doing all this, because it was change in the process, and my mother, who you know, like she felt really insulted that this white person would come in and

change things around. You know, we had our way of doing things, even though it was less efficient. Um, and I would wash the floors. He would wash the floors every night. It was a huge floor, and we discovered that Ajax worked better than anything else, Ajax and water, and uh, and my mother would come in and complain about how much Ajax -- do you know how cheap Ajax it? She would complain about how much Ajax we'd been using. So it was -- you know, in -- in back thinking, it was just the typical way of how Chinese families deal. They never send you a compliment, they just tell you what you are lacking. So you never got this -- you never got this sense that you were doing a good job, you never got this sense of -- and one day he just says, I can't do this anymore. And I said OK. Yeah I don't blame you. OK, fine. So that's when he got a job at the American Board of Trade working as an office manager, and kind of -- and from there, and he hated working for -- his name was [Economo]. He was an investor. He wrote his own newsletters, and Gerard was in charge of, you know, answering the phones, and, and writing up his newsletters. From there, Gerard got a job at Wendy's. Did the interview, um, he got hired for Wendy's, and um, the guy who hired him kind of really knew that he was smart, and put him in charge of the region, and he was in charge of training up, because they were just opening up the Wendy's branches, and Gerard actually used out -- we had three dining rooms, and he actually rented out our dining rooms to do the trainings, you know. Had, you know, like lunch there for everybody, and brought cash registers in to like, to train, you know, the crew. And anyway, so you know, that with working me, still working at the restaurant, you know, he -- you know, like working, like dog hours, you know, for -- for them, we never saw each other. Um, you know, it just, we never saw each other.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm. Mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: Uh, and, and the fact that, uh, uh, I knew that he -- you know, this is where the pressure of the marriage of me not being there with him, and me still being at the restaurant really crumbled.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm.

BETTE YEE: It really kind of cracked right there.

CYNTHIA LEE: Right.

BETTE YEE: Um, but, um, uh, Gerard at that time was also -- I mean back then was hiring the bands, and we were hiring folk bands, you know, for the lounge, just background stuff. And so we had developed some relationships, you know, with some of the folk singers, and so when he left, I had to take that over. So then, you know, I was, you know, hiring the bands, and uh, so, you know one day, Dave Tonkin and John Sagert comes in, and these two brash kids, you know, they were still kids. You know, I just couldn't believe their brashness, and freshness, and their confidence, and like, you know, they had this jazz band. So I says, OK, you know, you can have Thursday nights. And, um, and again, you know, um, I think, you know, John, you know, being a solo person outside of his element, not really born here, you know, we clicked because of the similarities of background, and -- and experiences that we had, only he had so much confidence.

CYNTHIA LEE: And where was John born?

BETTE YEE: John was born in Uruguay.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm, and came to --

BETTE YEE: And -- and came to the States when he was 12. His mother is Brazilian. His father is Belgian. But his father came from a history of, um, in Rhode Island, where um, [35:00] you know, his family, the Sagert family owned a, um, a factory in Rhode Island. Yeah. Anyways, um, he was going to -- he was going to Berkley School of Music, and I was still at the restaurant, and he would come up every weekend. So, um, yeah, we developed a relationship. John developed a relationship with -- I mean, um, Gerard developed a relationship with someone else, and then, uh, eventually evolved to the point where, when John finished school, he -- uh, he was staying with me, and um, at that time, we were making for -- for arrays into Boston, and into New York.

CYNTHIA LEE: Because of his music.

BETTE YEE: Because of his music and un -- we would take two weeks vacation, and we would hit the -- uh, all the jazz clubs in New York, and we would stay with his friend Josh, who lived in Brooklyn, right here on 16th Street, and Fourth Avenue, and uh, so um, when it came time to kind of deciding what to do, I was at a turning point in my -- in my career. I had actually, um, gotten myself out of the restaurant, and got a job at community services counseling, for a not-for-profit agency, but you know, into the political, into the politics

of Concord. So I was beginning to have -- I was beginning to build a strong identity, a political identity on my own, without Gerard.

CYNTHIA LEE: Right.

BETTE YEE: Just constantly feeling more and more independent, uh, as I was going along. Um, so I -- so it was my idea actually, not John's, I said you know, like if you're going to really be serious about jazz, why not just come to New York? And in the back of my mind, I was -- I was also thinking, I would -- I wanted the opportunity to know, to experience what it would be like being a non-minority, I mean being a -- being part of a majority. You know, I wouldn't -- I never knew what it would feel like to be part of a Chinese community.

CYNTHIA LEE: And you got that sense that New York would give you that, from the different trips that you made?

BETTE YEE: From the different trips, and we would always come to Chinatown, and uh, you know, like experience the throngs. I wouldn't be the only -- because even, you know, Chinese restaurants in New Hampshire, you never saw Chinese people going to Chinese restaurants, but here, there are actually real Chinese people eating at these restaurants. Yeah that was a whole new experience for me, in understanding that there are loving -- there were some loving Chinese families. You know, like really -- the way white people did. Not many, but there were some that I could at least, you know, visually see. So it was just really exciting for me, and um, by the time -- and it took us, you know, it took like two years of thinking about it, but you know, as we made more trips, and then we would bring -- then I said, OK, let's see if the kids would like it. Um, you know, we brought them to Forbidden City. You know, they really liked it. Uh, some of the trips, because we would bring their friends, you know, [unclear] you know with us, and um, but it was still traumatic for them when we finally decided to make the move, and I said, look, I'm not going to make this move unless I can get my kids into some -- into some decent schools. And as I would have it, they got into some -- they were both able to easily, handily get into the schools. I didn't know how good the New Hampshire schools were. Uh, so that kind of sowed it up. Jonathan had a really hard time the first year, and I knew that he was going -- being depressed, and I said, look, I promise you, if you -- you

know, give it this year. I promise you, if we can't make it, I'm -- I'm going to move back. I'll move back. Uh, but, what was happening was that, on the -- on the holidays, on the school holidays, his friends, Morgan, Matt, would -- they just thought this was the cat's meow. They just thought, wow, this is so cool, and like, John -- John was never a parent, so he -- you know, like, it was just like, right at the -- you know, they were -- you know, at the -- at the height of their adolescence, you know, being adventurous, and John was never an adult anyways, so it was just --

CYNTHIA LEE: John [agert?

BETTE YEE: John [agert was never like adult stature anyways, so I think, um, that just provided them access to something, and all of a sudden it got to be exciting to be here, but I also was making weekly trios back to New York -- uh to New Hampshire, because my mother was dying. So that first year was hard, and [40:00] -- and I thought that I was going to, you know, head back. Uh, although, you know, the kids and I talk about it, you know, later on. We know that our lives would be really different had we stayed in New Hampshire.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mm, hmm. How so, do you think?

BETTE YEE: Um, they -- I don't think that they would've led the artistic lives, or made the artistic choices, and I think that Jonathan's decision, because he went to Art and Design, actually led to Matt [Kelley]'s decision to stick with his art.

CYNTHIA LEE: His friend --

BETTE YEE: His friend --

CYNTHIA LEE: -- back in New Hampshire.

BETTE YEE: -- right, right, right. Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: How does --

BETTE YEE: That could be total -- I could be totally off, but that's the way it looked.

CYNTHIA LEE: How different -- you know, and John Sagert, your new partner, is also not Chinese.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: Um, how different or similar was it, being in a mixed heritage relationship in Brooklyn, New York, versus New Hampshire.

BETTE YEE: Brooklyn was just so freeing. We could just, you know, we could just be that radical stuff. We could go out in the street, and, and, just not care, and nobody would care what we looked like. Nobody would care, you know, um, how we talked. Um, it was -- it was totally freeing. I mean, uh, you didn't realize it until you could like experience it at the same time, you know, like -- we had to like depend on each other too, because New York can be very alienating, but you know, he had his music, uh. I was -- I was gaining more, uh, ground as a, in finance, so I was able to -- I just constantly, you know, worked myself up the career ladder. I actually had a career, you know, in -- in New York, where I would've never had that. I know I would've never had that in New Hampshire. Never, never, never, never. Um, and again, because you know, and that was because of my work ethic. But the first thing that I did, is all exciting, again. You know, just driven by that adrenaline, and that excitement, and that desire to just experience something different, because part of -- part of the -- you know, going to college, part -- you know, every time, you know, like I could go outside of my cocoon, it was just so exhilarating. So, it was fortunate that I -- that I had those experiences. If I didn't, I don't know where. I don't know if I would still be, you know, the way I am. I mean, seeking that new door to go through. Seeking the, you know, like what is like kind of an unknown to me. You know, that allure, and that excitement, probably wouldn't be there. I don't know. Anyways. One of the first things that I -- we didn't have internet. We didn't have internet. (laughs) But I -- somehow, I learned of a group called the Organization of Asian Women, and I think it was because I bumped into [Kozu] old Japanese woman. I don't know where. I think it must have been at a conference. And she told me that -- about this group, so I said, wow, how interesting. Radical, Chinese women.

CYNTHIA LEE: What was the mission of this group?

BETTE YEE: We don't know. (laughter) I mean, one of the things that they worked on, and they have, is what we call tapestry, and they would just -- our lives as Asian women living in, you know, in -- in Caucasian society, or in a -- in a white society. You know, it was, because, they had identified for me the fact of, you know, like when I realized that,

you know, there's another thing that's very universal about Asian women. You know, there's millennia of conditioning about servitude, about, you know, um, --

CYNTHIA LEE: Female roles.

BETTE YEE: -- female roles, you know, supporting the husband, no matter what. Um, there was -- there was all this, um, that I felt that it was only me experiencing. All of a sudden, I -- I get other stories from other women like me, like myself, but they were part -- and I said to myself, but they are -- they are in the city. They had to go to Chinese school, and they hated it. But there's something about the Asian culture that just is so imbued, you know, in our tradition, [45:00] because even though we were a single Chinese family, you know, my parents still celebrate Chinese New Years. We still had all the foods. Uh, everything was still similar, and it didn't matter, you know, that we were isolated for 15 years. My experience now, you know, could be shared with somebody who understood my experience.

CYNTHIA LEE: Right, you didn't have that before.

BETTE YEE: I didn't -- I never experienced that before. Never experienced that before. So all of a sudden, I really have a group of people who really, I would talk politically with, I didn't have to, you know, watch what I was saying, uh, and as a matter of fact, they were so much more radical than me. It was -- it was scary, and I was thinking I was behind the eight wheel, you know, the eight ball. Um, um, you know, I was with them for all this time, and um, and it got to be a very small community. And so, Jack Tchen, you know, the -- the Chinese museum, the Chinatown History Project, you know, was -- um, and I forget who it was, um, that we got connected. It was the different fundraisers, and it was when we were doing, um, our Asian -- anti-Asian-American violence -- Association for Anti-Asian -- Against Anti-Asian violence.

CYNTHIA LEE: Committee Against Anti-Asian --

BETTE YEE: Well it turned out to be a committee, but first it was the anti -- it was just the group of us, led by ---- by Mini.

CYNTHIA LEE: Right.

BETTE YEE: And, um --

CYNTHIA LEE: What's [Mini]'s last name?

BETTE YEE: I can't remember her last name. I'll think of that -- that in a moment, but Mini, and I still see her every once in awhile. Uh, she's -- she's a lesbian.

CYNTHIA LEE: So this group was the precursor to --

BETTE YEE: Yes.

CYNTHIA LEE: -- the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence.

BETTE YEE: Yes. It was a precursor. And-- and um Mini led it, and it was through a bunch of uh workshops that we were just trying to expose you know, the um uh the prevalence of it. Um and so it just-- it's a first-- the-- it was the first time I ever understood community organizing. I knew community organizing a little bit, but I was you know, more on the secretarial side. We were really forming committees, and we were trying to get people to speak, and we were you know, trying to do outreach. And that means that we had to pull out all-- it-- and it was very different because the resour-- there were more resources here. You know, you had Asians who were head, you know, who you could access that had resources to um a conference room, and a stage, and a podium. Uh and that's how we got to um you know, uh uh get them uh the Chinese History Museum into this; the History Project, the Chinatown History Project. Um Man Power, Chinatown Man Power. Uh uh Pat Eng, who was just beginning-- no, that was a little later who we surprised uh when she opened her uh um uh uh safe home.

CYNTHIA LEE: The Asian Home?

BETTE YEE: The-- the Asian--?

CYNTHIA LEE: The Women's Center?

BETTE YEE: The Asian Women's Center. Uh we-- we-- OAW did a hu-- did a major part of that fundraising. I got my art friends to donate art to the fund-- for the first fundraiser that was there. So you know, here I am, I'm like all of a sudden, among a group of what-- you know, like and we would laugh at ourselves. We call ourselves radical, and yet we really don't know how to be radical. I mean we're not like radicals like SDS was, or-- or you know, those other-- other political things. We could never get ourselves like stamped on-- you know, get ourselves into the news. Um but we could--.

CYNTHIA LEE: SDS?

BETTE YEE: SDS being uh um Students for Democratic Society. Uh anyways, um but you know, they're-- they're-- they're professional women. We were all professional women.

CYNTHIA LEE: So to-- to sort of go back to the personal being political.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: Um being in a relationship that is of mixed heritage.

BETTE YEE: Mmhmm.

CYNTHIA LEE: I would imagine at this time, also being a political statement. Um--.

BETTE YEE: Totally.

CYNTHIA LEE: So I-- I would be-- it would be interesting to hear sort of how-- how you saw-- how you saw that. Or if you saw it in that way, or did you just find yourself realizing that or--?

BETTE YEE: Yeah. As you know, what-- as life happens, you know like you trip upon something; at least for me. You just trip on it. You don't know what you don't know. [50:00] And um but I-- but I knew what-- what ignited my-- my fire. So these are the people that I could choose to be with. These are the people that you know, I found purpose. Um and um so not only anti-Asian violence, it was you know, it just you know, took the whole race thing into-- into play. Not only that, you know, like it took the whole role of women. Not just for you and your family, but in the world you know. You got into sterilization, you got into you know, um mutilation, you know of genital parts. You-- you got into the whole role. And for me to like finally look at my life and understand that I had no say. We have no say in whatever we are as women. So you know, like some of it wants you to s-- wants you to just really scream, and-- and just say fuck you to the rest of the world. You know, like we're here. Um and-- and be really angry. Uh and the other part is just like you know, like you-- you-- you know, they're-- and-- and probably through age and-- older age. But you know, (pause) the-- the-- the six days were such a defining moment for-- for the world, and for us who were really in the middle of all that. I don't know that any of us thought further than that. That certainly, there was a leadership that was there. That was present and available for us. That I realize wasn't available for our mothers, or for even the generation that was slightly older than us. They escaped that. I was fortunate enough to be swept along in that. It would

have never been by-- you know, if I had seen them, and I had to choose that door. I would always be afraid. But it-- because I was part of a movement that just swept me into that. And because of my-- I could relate all that they were saying to my whole experience, you know, growing up. I never conceptualized what that was. You know, you just kind of live your life you know, the way you live your life. You know, you just find your happinesses, and your family usually. And-- and-- and that sort of thing. But um but also I knew that um reading the stories about uh the great heroines. Didn't know that they were heroines. Asian, you know, women heroines. You know, it was always about sacrifice, it was a-- and it was the sacrifice of their lives. 'Cause when you know, when-- when the personal becomes that political, you really sacrifice your personal life for that.

CYNTHIA LEE: So did (pause) did--. (pause) See if I can put this into context. Um for myself, when I-- you know, being I guess like a half generation um younger.

BETTE YEE: Mmhmm.

CYNTHIA LEE: Um I-- I always um (pause) the big issue in my generation had been um you know, Asian women not being with Asian men.

BETTE YEE: Turn around.

CYNTHIA LEE: It's turned around.

BETTE YEE: Mmhmm.

CYNTHIA LEE: And when I first met some of the folks you're talking about, who were very active in the Asian American movement in New York City. So many of them actually were part of mixed heritage relationships.

BETTE YEE: Yes.

CYNTHIA LEE: And I remember thinking being surprised by it.

BETTE YEE: Hmm..

CYNTHIA LEE: Because for-- for my generation's politics, it was trying to overcome this stereotype that Asian women would only be with non-Asian men.

BETTE YEE: None-Asian men.

CYNTHIA LEE: So I'm curious to hear your-- your thoughts about (pause) that personal being political and the choice of life partner that-- that you made.

BETTE YEE: Mmhmm.

CYNTHIA LEE: Um of course it was a different time. Like you said, it was a different political movement. Um what are your-- your feelings about that?

BETTE YEE: Well, one of the other projects later on that OAW took was a calendar of Asian men. (laughter) And so therefore, my introduction into you know, why aren't Asian men sexy? [55:00] (pause) You know? Uh and maybe the advent or the-- and-- and unfortunately they have to be the kung fu types. You know, (laughter) the typical-- the typical things of--of--.

CYNTHIA LEE: Beefcake.

BETTE YEE: Right. Exactly. Um so that was-- that was a curiosity for me. And-- and it was like wow, because uh what I knew as a-- I was naturally abhorred or turned-- totally turned off um uh by Asian men because Asian men were-- had-- you know, my-- the Asian men in my life were cooks. They were smelly, some of them were leery, they were old men already, and um-- and the boys that I knew were total geeks. You know, and that-- that also being a uh-- a stereotype. You know, of-- of Asian men. So um it was always about their in-- intellect. And-- and they-- you know, I'm sorry. They just weren't-- you know, they weren't romantic. You know, they didn't know how to open doors. Uh they didn't know how to-- they didn't know how to you know, romance a woman. Um and um and you kind of make the-- the general conclusion that I don't know of any male--. Cause the-- the-- the males that we came into contact with um (pause) the-- the-- the open minded men were-- were married to white women.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mmhmm. Do you think that that-- and of course, you know, you're not speaking from--. You know, you're not an Asian man.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: So you can't really speak to that.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: But it seemed to me that-- that their decisions to partner was political too.

BETTE YEE: I'm sure. Yeah. But it's also a self-- you know, they-- growing up in a s-- in a perception of themselves, and uh if you grow up in a-- in a-- in-- where the-- the larger society is not Asian, you-- you're just going to you know, have developed attractions to

non-Asians. I mean one of the courses that I did in uh in-- at UNH was um uh the role of sex and marriage. And one of the theories that the professor who's a visiting professor from California said was that he's not so sure that there's this you know, love you know, like you find your soul mate you know, at-- at opposite ends of the universe. As a matter it-- that it is more a uh uh (pause) uh it-- it is more related to how close you are in distance-- physical distance-- that's going to determine your marriage partner. And at that time, you know we were-- you know, I was thinking no, I mean you know, of course you know, you're going to-- throughout the stars and the millennia, you know you have this romantic idea that you know ,you'll search out your soul mate. But really, it's-- it's your next door neighbor, it's like you know where-- where's your network. And-- and now that's-- you know, it's-- it's, you know, it's certainly true. Um uh you know, I would never have been with John if he wasn't-- John [Sagert]-- if he weren't there at the time that he was there. I wouldn't be with-- had been with Gerard if he weren't there at, you know, at the time that he was there, and at the meetings that we had. You know, the rest was you know, can we-- can we kind of feel comfortable given all our backgrounds, and all our g-- baggage. You know, do we feel comfortable with one another? So yeah, it's really more of a function of well, does your baggage match my-- you know, match my baggage? And that's where you feel comfortable.

CYNTHIA LEE: So how do you think-- was it-- (pause) was it difficult for you as a mother to understand your children's experience? Since they're Hapa, they're of mixed heritage, but you are not.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: So did you find that there were moments when you just didn't maybe felt-- maybe you felt like you didn't under-- truly understand what they might be going through? Or did you feel like you could find some um (pause) that you could empathize because you were in-- what-- although you were not of mixed heritage, you know, you were sort of in two worlds (pause) growing up.

BETTE YEE: Right. Going through the '60s, it was such-- you know, we thought we had changed enough of the world. And-- and that the-- and-- and by that time, um (pause) the-- the friends that I had developed in Concord when I was working at the community

services council, and [01:00:00] I was with John Sagert at the time. We had developed a friendship of professionals. Mu-- both music and-- and you know, lawyers. There were two uh groups in-- in the small town that made up the whole town. You know, you had yours-- your not for profit social um network. It's um which were all pretty politically likeminded. And you had your lawyers who were also professional, politically like minded. So it was a very comfortable setting. And I felt that you know, we had like created this world. You know, from the '60s. And that you know, our-- our children is going to you know, benefit from all of this. Um (pause) uh it was also the advent of single mothers just being proud. You know, like struggling with being single mothers. So um the other part of the kids growing up was being part of you know, Abby, and-- and Sid, and Jane. We were-- you know, we were all like single parents. And we were really taking care of them. Now did we under-- you know, it-- and later on when we learned that you know, they-- it-- you know, they were-- uh when I learned that-- that uh Jonathan was having a hard time at school. Uh that shocked me. It shocked me. I didn't know what to do. Uh it was like I thought we had-- uh who-- who in their right mind would even dare to go out there like that? That kind of stuff. It-- it never, never-- uh it just shocked me. So that was also another impetus to just move away from New Hampshire for me. Um uh when that opportunity came, it was- there were-- there were more-- at that-- from what I knew, there were more things stacked in favor of moving to New York as opposed to not moving to New York. Because here I was, safely ensconced in a really nice community. Although I can't remember it much right now. But you know, we would--.

END OF SECOND AUDIO FILE

Bette Yee (c)

BETTE YEE: You know, we would entertain at each others houses. There's not much you can do in New Hampshire. So you know, and there were the restaurants that we would go to.

And we were-- we were all politically-- you know, we were all Democrats, we were-- we all railed against you know, the-- you know, the-- the governor. You know, and how backwards New Hampshire was, and all this. But it always occurred to me, well, why are we still here if we hate the governor? You know, that means that we are a small minority. Because we certainly didn't vote them in. Anyways, so that was uh-- and it was curious that they never-- I-- I don't-- Jonathan never came to me and said that something was going on. So it was like I didn't go to my parents, but why didn't he come to me? So to this day, I still don't know why. Um you know, not-- not exactly. Even though we talked about it, um I-- it-- it was such a shock. It was such a shock. Uh you know, that-- it-- it just-- you know, my head was just reeling from that.

CYNTHIA LEE: So you had hoped that New York would be different.

BETTE YEE: Right. I had hopes that New York would be different, that they'd get a different-- uh certainly get a different exposure, certainly get you know, different classmates that were a lot more diverse than the classmates that they had. Didn't realize the-- didn't realize the extent of the dangers that they were exposed to either. But I also kind of you know, had some probability saying well, there are eight million almost nine million people in New York City. And somehow they're all surviving very well. You know, Asian kids are doing really well, all of that. Had no idea that Long Island was still New Hampshire. (laughter) So or that uh outer borough kids h-- were scared to death of going into Manhattan.

CYNTHIA LEE: Now can you describe what it was like uh in Brooklyn in the '80s when you first arrived?

BETTE YEE: Oh boy. When we first arrived, um uh Josh-- the person that who was-- we stayed at his place for I think a month before we'd settled. And we settled on a place right at-- on Eastern Parkway. It was directly across from the Brooklyn Museum. And this was a big apartment that accommodated all of my furniture, and their furniture cause it was a furnished apartment. It was on the fifth floor, so it was the first time I was in an elevated building, it had doormen. Um (pause) uh it-- it was exciting. It was exciting. I-- I had to-- I didn't feel that I was quite in Manhattan because I had a job working for Choice's Women's Medical Center. (laughter) It was an abortion clinic uh out in Queens in Regal

Park. Um and I got that through um-- and it was great. Uh I thought I had like struck it rich. I was making $25,000 a year, oh my Chris. The-- you know, the-- the supervisor, the head of the finance uh at-- at uh Community Services Council at the time was only making $17,000 or $18,000. I thought that that was like oh my God, I couldn't imagine that. $25,000, I mean my God, how-- you know, like and-- and the interview was so easy. I just got the job like that. (pause) And-- and I couldn't believe it. So that was good, but I didn't feel that Regal Park was definitely not Manhattan. However, because John Sagert was part of the music scene, you know I would come home. Um I could like shop for my stuff coming home, make dinner, and then leave again at 11 to go to one of his gigs. Cause his gigs wouldn't star 'til well, 12 o'clock, one o'clock. We'd get home at three, sometimes four. I'd be up at seven, and it was-- it was like there was just so much excitement. Um I had to take off work to-- you know, like every once in a while, to-- to get the-- you know, to-- to-- the-- the kids in place. I-- there wasn't much that we had to do for Jonathan. He-- he went to art and design. Uh and it looked like he was going to-- um he was interested in going to visual arts. I didn't think visual arts was-- you know, I was hoping more NYU. But he really-- he really wanted graphic design. I wasn't-- I didn't know enough about the industry. Um but Matt had gotten into uh LaGuardia, which was a combination of music and art, and-- and performing arts. And they were one of the first graduating classes. So John and I were-- they-- they were trying to get the auditions going. Because at that time, the school couldn't afford for them to have a big show. So at that time, John had all of his sound equipment. [05:00] And-- and we helped organize the first show that [art and] design put up with all the kids. And that, you know, I-- I don't know, but I know that Matt's friends thought that you know, oh God, Matt's parents you know, they were-- we're pretty cool. You know, to do this. And-- and all the parents were so grateful because you know, nobody else could like help or-- I mean we weren't the only organizers, but it-- you know, providing the PA system. It--.

CYNTHIA LEE: This was for LaGuardia?

BETTE YEE: This was for LaGuar--.

CYNTHIA LEE: OK.

BETTE YEE: LaGuardia. It was a big, big deal. It was a big deal. And John realized too that all the kids at LaGuardia really knew how to sing. They really knew about music because they were clapping on two, rather than what everybody else does; clapping on one. He would go God damn, these kids know music! (laughter) Um so it was um-- it was- it was pretty-- it was pretty exciting. I mean for me, I was still part of uh OAW, I was still doing my political work. So to me, I-- I mean I like-- I seemed to have come and-- and inherited this world that was great. I didn't think about the work, I didn't think about you know, that uh I--I-- that $25,000 wasn't enough to (laughter) to support a family of four. You know, you just did what you had to do, which was also-- also why we always-- uh we invited Josh to come in. So that he could help pay for some of the rent. And um and that was not new to me because my-- my family had always hosted other families. We lived with the [Moys], so I always lived with people. I always, always lived with people. And-- and-- and that kind of filled in the space. Uh so I always-- we always had roommates, even when we moved to 7th Avenue in-- in Park Slope. And at that time, 7th Avenue and 9th Street was-- the gentrification hadn't quite hit. I was paying $700 a month for that apartment.

CYNTHIA LEE: How big was the apartment?

BETTE YEE: The apartment had four bedrooms. Uh two of them were really teeny tiny, but we converted the uh-- we were able to convert the uh dining room. What-- what-- what was a dining room into a fifth bedroom, which is where Josh stayed. And again, even with $700 rates, um um I was always thinking well, why not? We can do more. We could just do more. You know, we're all saving money. So he was-- you know, he was there.

CYNTHIA LEE: And did you-- did you like living in-- in Brooklyn?

BETTE YEE: I liked Brooklyn way more than I liked Queens. I couldn't understand Queens. You know, Brooklyn to me always felt that it had a sense of history. Uh not- and-- and I had-- we had a-- we had a van for the first couple of years. So we drove around Brooklyn, and there were some pretty scary parts of Brooklyn. Like really industrial, you know, where the-- you know, apartments were-- would never see the light of day, couldn't imagine people living in the-- in those conditions. So I was really happy because we had-- we-- this apartment had sunshine. It had -- it had a Laundromat right at

the corner. It always had a green grocer downstairs, a donut shop was always across the street. It was almost-- and I loved sitting on the windowsill watching the traffic go by. 'Cause to me, it was almost like a college campus. It was like being at UNH. You know, um being on campus. When-- you know, when it would get to be dusk, you know, um uh the kids would come out for their midnight or-- or evening school, and which would be a vendor truck, you know, going for the French fries. And uh when the street lights came on. Because you know, at UNH, it was a-- it was a campus. You know, where-- you know, this-- the streetlights would-- would you know, uh would light up the paths. And so walking down would just make me feel that it was my college days again. Um (pause) um didn't-- didn't-- didn't have to--. It was a first-- I do recall feeling that uh walking down the street and not feeling conscientious that somebody was looking at me.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did you--.

BETTE YEE: That was a definite feeling.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did you feel differently in Manhattan?

BETTE YEE: (pause) Um in Manhattan I just felt that you know, I-- I-- we made it. You know, we are-- we're in the big city, you know. Um I-- a year after um the-- working at Woman's Choices, uh that was also the year that um my mother was dying. So I lost my job because um um I was-- I was just with her for the last three weeks that she died. And they told me that if I wasn't back in my seat in two weeks, that they would-- they would have-- you know, they understood my decision, but they would have to let my job go. First time that I had to fight for unemployment because they refused unemployment because I didn't show up for work. Uh it was easily won. [10:00] The judges, you know, had no qualms about giving me unemployment. And it took me three months to find my next job, which was working at the New York International Festival of the Arts. And I had never hit it on such a big organization that had so much money. I actually had to buy gowns to go to their events (laughter) that we had to put on. Um (pause)--.

CYNTHIA LEE: And that was in Manhattan?

BETTE YEE: That was in Manhattan, right on 5th Avenue. Um uh while the-- um (pause) [Marty Seagle], who was uh head of Lincoln Center, who used to be-- who had just

finished his-- his (pause) uh time at Lincoln Center was retired. And this was going to be his last hurrah. So he had offices, he-- he had-- he owned an actuarial company, and had an office right in Trump Towers. And that's where I was hired. Um I created the-- the first set of books for him. And he was so impressed that he gave me an immediate raise. And I thought oh my God. (pause) Now it was up to-- I was making $35,000. And then a year after that, he gave me another raise, and I was making $45,000. And I thought I just fucking hit the lotto. Um you know, just my-- my-- my year-- my understanding no, understanding how to do hard work was-- was really good. But I also got to experience um an entrepreneur who really understood how important it was to s-- always know the receptionist's name. He was always, always really careful to never misspell your name. He was very careful. I couldn't believe how much time he took to-- to memorize that. And he would always say hello to the doorman, and the-- and the receptionist. Because he understood that those are really the gatekeepers.

CYNTHIA LEE: So really coming to New York gave you lots of opportunities that you felt you would not have had in New Hampshire.

BETTE YEE: Oh, no. I would have never had that. I would-- I would have had to have the-- credentials and training to get those jobs. It-- and they weren't available. The only kind of cushy jobs that were available were-- were in not for-- were in the not for profit, you know, arena. Unless you were specifically educated in finance or-- or health, or corporate you know, business. Unless you were really had that kind of uh education you wouldn't- -you wouldn't get those jobs.

CYNTHIA LEE: So you've been in Brooklyn since 1985.

BETTE YEE: Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: And have you seen changes (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

BETTE YEE: Oh my God. Uh I was in-- so my final-- actually, my final move was at Park Slope, 7th Avenue, uh 9th Street. Uh the uh the changes that happened was at-- the owners of the laundromat uh on the corner now is a Greek restaurant. Um but they were (pause) they were your typical, working class Italian, you know family. They made their money in the laundromat, and um-- and I guess the next move in New York was to move to Staten Island. Because you know, once you made it, Staten Island-- either it was

Staten Island or Long Island uh that you would go. You would move your family. So they-- and uh their-- their kids by now were running uh the-- the-- their mother would be there. But you could just tell, they were-- they were just your typical, working class family. Um no-- no better than you know, any other social ec-- you know, economic. Any other family within that social economic (pause) level.

CYNTHIA LEE: Level?

BETTE YEE: Um (pause) and-- and they ran their Laundromat like the Chinese- you know, (laughter) like the Chinese run their restaurants. (laughter) You know, who are family run. They just all-- they never put the profits back in you know, to the business. And but you could run it. You could actually run it for a generation. And-- and they-- it-- land up-- they had enough-- the father had enough money to buy the-- the-- the restaurant across the street. I don't know what restaurant it was, but now it's called the Red Roost. Um it's a-- it's a sports bar, so the husband bought that. Shortly after he bought that, they got divorced. (laughter) Um and they've always hired um Dominican or Jamaican women to run the Laundromat.

CYNTHIA LEE: So--.

BETTE YEE: And so that kind of-- that changed. Now it's a Greek restaurant. Uh and the gentrification, the gentrification swept through um and passed 9th Avenue shortly after I was there.

CYNTHIA LEE: Into South Slope.

BETTE YEE: Into the South Slope, right. [15:00] Right.

CYNTHIA LEE: I mean did you see a change in-- in demographics? And a change um (pause) you know, I-- I guess since this project is really about you know, multi-heritage families, and um you know, it's just curious to-- to think about-- about Brooklyn, vies a vie other boroughs. And if you felt that there was something about Brooklyn that might be (pause) um you know, somehow different than the other boroughs, or maybe not so much? I don't know what your perspective is. Um...

BETTE YEE: I-- I know that uh I didn't like Queens; no part of Queens. Uh I did relinquish a little bit--.

CYNTHIA LEE: Although Queens is extremely multicultural.

BETTE YEE: It's very multicultural. I did go and experience Jackson Heights, and the Indian you know, population there. Flushing, uh (pause) uh also Astoria.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mmhmm.

BETTE YEE: You know, really-- you know, really nice parts. To me, it just didn't have a feel of Brooklyn. Um but knowing Park Slope, it's very homogenous in that there's very-- there were very few black people. The only black people there are in the high school. And that's still a political issue right now. Not very many black people there. Um really not very many Asians. They-- they were owned-- they own the uh-- uh the green-- the green grocers, and they were Korean. Um they're mostly Italian; the old family, you know, Italian. And uh-- um-- um (pause) maybe Jewish.

CYNTHIA LEE: And is this-- are you-- are you speaking about today, or are you speaking about when you first moved?

BETTE YEE: When I first got there, but it-- but that demographic doesn't-- the demographic um has what-- has come in is-- are more young-- are younger families. Because Park Slope, you know from the day that I was there, and realizing that anybody in Manhattan traveling to the outer boroughs is like going to a foreign country; even Park Slope. Park Slope really wasn't part of the map when I was-- when I-- when I moved here. I was very surprised to hear that what? In 19-- I mean in uh 2006 it got to-- or 2008. Yeah, 2008-2009, it-- it was- it got to be the one-- the number one spot to live in New York City. So um-- uh so younger families decided that it was close-- see, Park Slope is close enough to uh the financial district. So professional families were coming in. Uh and they were starting families. Uh the playground. I-- I-- we-- you know, like I never really went. Because when you work in Manhattan, you-- you really-- you-- you don't-- we didn't do a whole lot in Brooklyn. Uh so we're-- we were really more Manhattan-centric. Um because the kids went to school in Manhattan, all their events were in Manhattan. Uh all of my social gatherings were in Manhattan, OAW was in Manhattan. The Chinatown that there was only one Chinatown then in Manhattan. Uh even though it was known that Flushing was there, I had never really visited Flushing until you know, maybe 10 years later. Uh you know, uh being-- from being here. Uh so um (pause) I don't even know when the Brooklyn Chinatown in Sunset Park started flourishing. I-- I

could hear inklings of it, but never really again visited 'til, you know, much later like maybe even seven years ago. Like actually-- and that was because you know, uh I was with the kung fu school with Matt, and we would do our lion dances there.

CYNTHIA LEE: Right. So your son Matt had his own kung fu school?

BETTE YEE: Right. Uh which was very interesting that-- that Matt really um decided to um choose his Chinese side.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mmhmm.

BETTE YEE: Um and maybe not so surprising. He-- I think he really uh-- he really missed that sense of family. Um he was much younger when he moved here. And he did take kung fu-- he did take karate when he was in-- in Concord. So he was looking for that experience again.

CYNTHIA LEE: Did you feel like you had to-- or did you feel maybe not had to, but (pause) um did you feel compelled to-- to sort of help give your kids (pause) sort of [20:00] that Chinese side of them? Or with their father not being around, did you feel that they were looking for their French Canadian side? Or was-- was it ever part of you know, discussion with them?

BETTE YEE: No. I don't think it was ever a part of the discussion. Um and much like a lot of Asian moms being afraid of having their kids to go into the martial arts school because of all the um you know, the [Tong] wars, and whatnot. Uh I was-- you know, I was concerned uh with-- with him spending so much time. And-- and this man-- this Chinese man who-- who had our surname, you know, even came from the same village. So we knew that we had to be related somewhere. Uh and that Matt had really taken his time and chosen this man to study under. Uh... uh [Yee Chiwa]. And he um (pause) Matt really loved-- I mean there was-- there-- there's such a bonding you know, in-- in martial arts schools in general. And most of the students were Hispanic. (laughter) There were very few Chinese kids that were there. Um mostly because the uh-- the Asian moms were really afraid of allowing their kids into the national arts schools. Uh so he-- um Matt really retained a lot of the tradition, a lot of foods uh through-- and even more so. Um because you know, he participated in the lion dance, participated in the ceremonies you know, like opening the eyes of the dragon; awakening the dragon.

CYNTHIA LEE: Were you ever worried about um (pause) or concerned about how your sons would uh-- were sort of dealing with their identity? I mean was it ever something that you (pause) I don't know. If maybe thought about that-- that they would need some help kind of thinking through?

BETTE YEE: No, I didn't-- not-- only because I-- I would-- we would talk more about um (pause) I wanted to support whatever artistic endeavors I wanted. Because we were discouraged to do-- because as a reaction to my own you know, upbringing.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mmhmm.

BETTE YEE: Um so I-- I wanted to keep encouraging you know, whatever artistic-- so we would talk about that. And I know that Matt, for the longest time just you know, was just at odds with himself trying to decide what to do.

CYNTHIA LEE: Mmhmm.

BETTE YEE: You know, 'cause Jonathan had already-- you know, very-- from very early on decided he wanted to be a graphic designer. And Matt was like-- so we-- it was talking more about what they were going to do as a future. But we never really-- we rare-- I don't think we talked about identity. It was only way later, after-- after they-- after John was in France for a while that-- that we-- that we actually got to sit and talk about you know, imagine what our lives would be if we stayed in New Hampshire. Imagining what our lives would be if um uh (pause) if you know, they didn't take up their art career. And um I mean now I know that they-- they're both clever enough that if they took up a profes-- a profession, um--.

CYNTHIA LEE: But it was never about their ethnicity?

BETTE YEE: No. I don't think so. It was never-- oh, about them being half-- half Chinese? I mean I was always proud that they were half Chinese. Um I don't know whether-- I can't be sure that they were always proud of it. Um but I think the ex-- the conversations that I heard for them at school-- coming out from school was that all the Asian chicks were into them because they weren't wholly Chinese. So they could bring them home, and introduce them to their parents because they were at least half Chinese, which was an interesting twist.

CYNTHIA LEE: So--.

BETTE YEE: So I don't know what their experience-- I-- I-- I don't--. I mean I don't know what their experience, experience was-- was like with that because--.

CYNTHIA LEE: It sounds like it really-- it didn't come up really as a concern.

BETTE YEE: No. No. No, not-- no.

CYNTHIA LEE: Do you think it would have come up more if you stayed at-- in New Hampshire?

BETTE YEE: Yeah. Because-- because we were out there like a sore thumb. You know, but we-- but I lived out there as a sore-- sore thumb. And it wasn't until I got into my own [25:00] political awareness that I was proud to be a sore thumb. You know, so that was my own political, social you know awakening that I occurred. But I attribute that awakening to coming to New York, you know from-- you know, like fully-- it fully matured, you know with the Organization of Asian Women.

CYNTHIA LEE: So--.

BETTE YEE: And I would have never found an organization like that; not coming here.

CYNTHIA LEE: OK. So coming to New York was a real turning point?

BETTE YEE: Oh yeah.

CYNTHIA LEE: For you?

BETTE YEE: Oh yeah. I don't even remember what my life was like. I-- seriously, I don't. It's like what did I do on the weekends? You know, I don't know. Although you know, there's some sense of it was a lot more idyllic. You know, just a lot more relaxed. I didn't have to worry about work so much, and things like that. Yeah.

CYNTHIA LEE: So (pause) we're-- I think we're nearing the end. Um don't want to tire you out. If-- if there's anything that we hadn't covered that you would love to-- to chat more about. Um that would be great?

BETTE YEE: Yeah. I wish that um... I could-- I mean now that--. Well, I mean this last phase, which is very recent. I mean I finally moved away from Park Slope, and I am in what is called Prospect Height-- Prospect Lefferts Gardens, which is due east, right across the park from Park Slope. And it's a very different community. It feels more like the time 25 years ago when I moved into Brooklyn. Uh it's a lot of diver-- but very, very different from Park Slope. It's a lot--

CYNTHIA LEE: But greater diversity than--?

BETTE YEE: A lot more diversity, but very family oriented. Um (pause) a lot more Hispanic, a lot more Dominican, and Jamaican, and Muslim uh um presence. Uh a very large Indian uh presence. I had-- although I don't see the Indian families as much as I see Indian restaurants uh here. So it's-- it's um it's very interesting. And this is on the verge of converting it's-- converting again because on the other side of that, um when I-- when I go to Lincoln Road tavern, uh the-- the (pause) there is a diverse crowd there. They're all young professionals or they're young. They're-- they're of the previous generations. So they're like you know, 20-40. Although it's broad. There are also-- there's also greater number of uh students that-- that are coming in, that's bringing in-- and foreign students that it's-- that's bringing in more of that flavor as well. And uh they're not as um-- they're not as afraid or obsessed with having a homogenous you know, look uh uh or you know, clean streets. If it-- if it were that because they're-- Flatbush Ave is-- is a little dirty. It's very commercial, it's always been commercial. Um but you see-- you know, what I'm seeing is like little um (pause)--.

END OF THIRD AUDIO FILE