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**Oral History Interview with Sebastien Fargeat and Vanessa Snowden**

**Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.026**

**Interview conducted by Charis Shafer on April 11th, 2012 in Manhattan, New York.**

CHARIS SHAFER: Um, this is Charis Shafer, and I'm here with Vanessa Snowden and Sebastien Fargeat, and we are doing an interview for the Brooklyn Historical Society. And, Vanessa, I'll start with you.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sure.

CHARIS SHAFER: If you could tell me a little bit about where you were born, and what your childhood was like. Who your parents were.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So, I was born in Caracas, Venezuela. Um, and I moved to the States, uh, pretty soon thereafter. I was only about a year old. Um, my dad is American. Uh, he was in Caracas because he got a job playing French horn in the orchestra there, and my mom happened to be his Spanish teacher. Uh, he didn't speak any Spanish at all when he went. And, uh, so, they met in class, and, um, my mom asked my dad out, because my dad's the shy one. And, uh, you know, they fell in love, and then I suddenly came along, unexpectedly, and so (laughter) then they got married. And ended up moving to the States, uh, because they thought that I would have, sort of, better opportunities over there. Um, we moved to Buffalo, because that's where my grandparents lived, and that's where my dad grew up. And that's pretty much where I spent most of my childhood. Um, it's funny because -- w-- uh, this interview's all about, sort of, cross-cultural families, and I grew up like that myself. Um, my -- like I said before, my dad's American, my mom's Venezuelan, so our household was always kind of a mix of different cultures, and, you know, Spanish and English were always flying back and forth. Um, I, I kind of -- I feel like it was a good thing for me, like, I learned a lot, and especially, like, learning the language. Like, having two languages in the household was really useful to me. But I also missed out on so many, like, typical cultural American things, because my dad is kind of classical music slash computer nerd, and, like, my mom's Venezuelan, so I grew up either listening to, like, Tchaikovsky or salsa music. So, like, I didn't know who the Beatles were, or, like, the Rolling Stones, or, like,

any of these, uh, like, really famous musical groups until, you know, high school if not college. So I, I feel like I'm -- I was very much enriched by my childhood experience, but at the same time it's just funny, like, the gaps in knowledge that I have. Um, because of who my parents are, and what they valued, um, and still value.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember the point at which you realized that you had different cultural references than your peers?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Super-early on. Like, my friends, like, in elementary school, they would call my house and they wouldn't understand my mom on the phone, 'cause of her accent. So -- and I grew up in a town -- I, I mean, my high school had -- I was the only, like, half-Hispanic kid. There was one half-Jew. Like, no black people. Like, no -- no, there was one Asian kid. And then everyone else is, like, just plain-old white bread, um, families. So, for them, I was always kind of an anomaly. I also really liked that, um, difference. Like, I don't know, I, I insisted -- well, OK, so when I was in second grade, for some reason I insisted on singing "La Bamba" to every classroom in the elementary school. Like, I convinced my teacher to let me do this. I just went around and sang "La Bamba" to every class. I remember, like, all these kids just looking at me like I was some strange creature, but I just loved it. I was like, "I'm so different from you. Like, listen to my fun song in Spanish." (laughter) It was really -- it was kind of funny. But, I mean, that was very early on. I always knew that I was different from the other kids. And for the mo-- uh, it was always a good thing. It became more difficult in high school, when it came to applying to college, because, um, when I -- like, when I got into Princeton, um, suddenly everyone who thought it was cool that I was from Venezuela attributed the fact that I got in there to, uh, the fact that I was Hispanic. And so that became, uh, really difficult for me, because, you know, I thought I had earned it, and suddenly, like, all these kind of weird feelings start coming up around my heritage, um, because, you know, I only got where I was getting to because of this, according to my peers. So that was -- that was the only time that I felt a little bit weird about, about, um, being sort of half-American and half-Venezuelan. Because I didn't know which one counted more. And I always felt weird, like, having to check off that box, and be like, "Yeah, sure, I'm Hispanic." I mean, I did it because I knew it would give me an

advantage. Um, but at the same time, I grew up in the States. I didn't really know my family in Venezuela that much. Um, so, I didn't really feel that Hispanic [05:00], like -- but I also didn't feel American. So, it was really -- that was always really hard for me, to identify myself in one way or another. And I think now they have, like, the "Other" box, where you can check that off and write something, but at the time it was like, you have to pick whether you're white or Hispanic, and so making that decision was, um, was a little difficult. Um, yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Were you close to your grandparents on your father's side?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, definitely. I grew up with them, so... I was really with my grandmother. I'm the oldest grandchild that she has, so she sort of had a special attachment to me as well. Um, my grandpa was always a little more -- or, is a little more distant. So I didn't know him as well. Uh, but I'm definitely really close with my grandma.

CHARIS SHAFER: Was there any -- ever any discussion about the fact that your father had gone to Venezuela and met someone and brought her back?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: And what happened?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, it's funny, because my other uncle also randomly married a Venezuelan (laughter) woman. Which is, like -- it's weird, because in my family -- my dad's side of the family -- there's, like, no one else who has married outside of, like, typical American cultural, uh, milieu. And, uh, all of the sudden you have, like, my dad and his younger brother who both married Venezuelan women. So my dad was the first one, uh, to kind of go off and, uh, get some exotic woman. But when, when he brought -- when my mom came to the States with him, with me, they actually moved in with my grandparents. Uh, and my mom didn't speak English at all. And she wou-- she said that she would basically just stay in their room upstairs all day with me, because she was too afraid to, like, go downstairs and, uh, you know, talk to my dad's family. Because they, they can be difficult too, like they're -- they can be -- they're wonderful, but they didn't really know how to deal with my mom, and my mom was really shy, and also just didn't really know what to do, and didn't really have the self-confidence to, um, sort of put

herself out there. I mean, she came from like a tiny town in Venezuela, and now, all of the sudden, she is -- like, she had never seen snow before. She had never been in weather below, like, 70 degrees. And it was just a huge culture shock for her. And it was really, really hard for her, which is why she was so protective of me when I, like, up and went to France without speaking the language, and without anything. Um, for her, she was -- and she was also really nervous about me marrying Seb, because she had a really different experience with that. She felt like, um, she was completely powerless when she came to the States, that she didn't have anything, that she couldn't take care of herself. And so she didn't want that for me. But the way that -- I saw it very differently. Like, first of all, I was -- she -- you know, she didn't have a college degree or anything, like... And, you know, I had already gotten my education. Like, I was going of my own accord. I didn't have kids, like... I was going to learn the language. It was a really different set of circumstances. I felt like I was on, like, the same sort of level as Seb, whereas my mom always felt like she needed my father at the beginning, um, just because she was so helpless in the States without him. Um, and this was the first time she had traveled, and I had traveled before. So it was kind of -- it was always a weird dynamic, because my mom wanted to protect me from what -- the cultural shock that she had gone through. But it was always just a very different situation for me.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember any stories that she told you about, that sort of exemplifies that cultural shock?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, I mean, I think ba-- the main thing was just her spending just days and days on end, just in the room with me. And just having no -- just no contact, with no one to talk to. You know, her family was so far away that, like, at the time -- you know, you -- now we don't really have long-distance calls that are expensive, but at the time, like, you know, she didn't have -- we didn't have money to, um, to call Venezuela. She felt very, very, very isolated. And also, we were in the suburbs of Buffalo. It's not like there's a real Hispanic population there to speak of. Um, so it took her a long time, like, before she even really made any friends. It was -- I mean, her first friend was, um, was Anna -- you know Anna -- who's awesome. She actually married a Jewish guy from Chicago. Um, at first -- it was mostly, at first, a story of, like, get her paperwork in the

States. She's from Costa Rica. Um, but they have -- they've been together forever. But, um, she met her -- my mom, at -- we had already moved into our house on, um, Linwood, which is the first house that my parents had on their own. It was a -- they rented it. And, uh, it was where I w-- I lived until I was probably like five or six. And, um, my mom had gone to the grocery store. And apparently the way they met was, I had, um, just, like, stolen a cookie or something (laughter). [10:00] Like, so she had in the cart, and I reached over -- there was, like, a -- I don't know -- like a baker -- a bakery area of the supermarket with, like, cookies out, and so I just, like, stole a cookie and was munching on it. And Anna thought it was like the funniest thing. So she came over and started speaking to me in Spanish, and my mom was like, "What? You speak Spanish?" And she was, like, so psyched, because she had been starved for anyone who, who spoke her language. And so they became friends, and have really been really, um, almost like sisters, uh, ever since. But, um -- but yeah, it was, uh -- for my mom, it's really -- it's -- that's always been a struggle for her. Is, is coming here to the States. It was, um, at -- she -- a lot of times, she says that she almost regrets it, um, because she felt like I didn't really get to be brought up, like, with that true Hispanic, um, sort of culture that she calls her own. But at the same time, I wasn't -- I wouldn't have been afforded the same opportunities over there. Um, and also, now, with the -- the way things are with Chavez and everything. I mean, she's obviously happy to be here. But, um, she definitely sometimes regrets that.

CHARIS SHAFER: And did you spend any time in Venezuela?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: We -- yeah, not much though. Especially at the beginning. I mean, my family just was, like, very poor. Because my mom -- like, she didn't have a job. She was a housewife. And my dad was playing in the Buffalo Philharmonic, and, uh, you know, working a second job as well. So, we couldn't really afford to spend a thousand dollars per person, um, to get out there. But we would -- we would go from time to time. It was only when I was older, like, probably the first time I went back I was probably, like, seven or eight. And then we went every few years after that. Um, but I always felt, um -- I was always really scared when we would go back. Because I felt like I wasn't Hispanic enough, and, like -- that I should speak Spanish better, and not with an

accent, because I speak with an accent. And so, going there was always, um, definitely, uh, anxiety provoking for me, 'cause my mom was like a totally different person. She was, like, totally into it, and the -- you know, they'd want me to salsa dance, and I didn't want to dance. Like, I was such an -- I, I was such an awkward kid. And, uh, you know, they'd be there, and they'd be like, "Here, come dance with your cousin Bruno!" And I'd be like, "Oh, I really don't want to dance in front of you, and I don't know how to dance. (laughter) Especially not salsa." Um, so, it was, uh -- it was -- I always kind of felt apart. Um, like I didn't really fit in, in either place.

CHARIS SHAFER: Are you -- did you ever make any friends with your relatives in Venezuela, or...?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Not really. Like, my mom would force me to, like, go spend the night with, like, a second cousin. And I would just be, like, traumatized. (laughter) Because I'd be, like, afraid to ask to go to the bathroom, and, like, I would just, like -- I, I felt totally out of my element. Um, now I'm, I'm very different. Like, I think having those experiences early on made me more confident in new situations later. But man, at the beginning, like, I just never really felt comfortable. So I didn't really -- I also didn't, like, have a lot of -- there weren't a lot of people my age, um, kind of around. Um, so, I think that made a difference too.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah. So you talked about, um, going to Princeton. And do you want to talk about -- through the lead-up to meeting Seb? (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sure. Um, well, all right. So at Princeton, uh, my senior thesis was about all of these different, um, sort of French theorists and philosophers. But I didn't speak French at all. And I didn't read it. I didn't ever take a French class. And when I graduated, I had -- I really had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I was -- you know, like an angsty college kid who was like, "Oh, I don't want to make money, and all these Princeton kids, all they want to do is go to Wall Street and make money. And I don't want to be person." And, whatever. So, I basically had no clue what I was going to do at all. Um, and so, my friend Lani -- and my roommate -- um, she had found this opportunity to, um, go be an au pair for, um, an alum who lived in Lyon. And I was, actually, at the time interviewing to, um, be an intern -- well, kind of like an assistant to a



professor who was doing, um, oral histories in Caracas. Um, which was really cool. And so I was kind of -- I was gonna do that, and then this other opportunity came up, and, uh, I said, "Yeah, I don't know what do." And I just -- on a total whim, just decided to go to Lyon. Um, and, so, uh, off I went. And, um, I got in contact -- well, OK, so through the family and through the previous au pair, uh, I got in contact with our friend Mel. Well, Seb's friend Mel, at the time. Um, she was kind of, um, the previous au pair's, [15:00] uh, friend there. She's -- I guess -- I mean, she's Jamaican, but she grew up going to French school -- is that what it was?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And then she was going to school in Lyon.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: In Switzerland.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: In Switz-- in Switzerland? Why was she in Lyon?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Well, she was --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh, 'cause she was dating W-- no...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: You know, when she was a kid she went to school in Switzerland, because her dad worked for the U.N.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: That's why she speaks French. And that's why she went to Lyon -

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VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- for school.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: OK.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Lyon.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So she was there, and, um -- but she speaks, like, English and French total-- like, totally perfectly. Like, her French -- she speaks with, like, no accent at all. And, um, so I met up with her, and then she's like, "Oh, well, I'll introduce you to, like, the French guys that I know. And, like, all the -- you know, all the people that I know." Because basically, like, Seb and his crew of friends were -- like, hung out with all of the au pairs for this family. Like, through Mel. Uh, like, there were how many -- there were two or three that you knew before me? Two before me?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Two. Yes. Two.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. So then --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Three.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Three?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, three.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: One was a (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. Yeah. Um, so anyway, I was, like, the next in line, so -- you know, we went out, and I met them all, and I was like, "Oh, OK, whatever, they're cool." And, uh, so Seb was one of the -- one of the people with whom I went out with on that first momentous night. And, um, I was really not interested (laughter) in a relationship with him at first. Like, I was just, like, oh, he was super nice, and we hung out, and everything. Um, but apparently Seb had a crush on me.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Apparently.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Apparently. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Um, and, uh, I, I was just like, "No, I think we should just be friends, and na-na-na." And he was -- he was quite -- he was quite persistent. Um, and, uh, it just ended up kind of happening like that. But we were really -- we were very, uh, good friends for, um, I guess it was, like -- I mean, three or four months really, before anything happened romantically.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Hm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: But yeah -- so that's -- that's kind of how that went.

CHARIS SHAFER: That's good. Um, maybe we want to shift gears? Seb, do you want to tell me about where you grew up -- your early life? What your parents were like?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Sure. So, um, I was born in Lyon. Um, my dad is, uh -- he's an electrician. He works for the, um, equivalent of Con Edison here. And, uh, my mom -- she is, um -- I don't how to say that -- she's a buyer. She buys fabrics for this --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: A lingerie company.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: A lingerie company. So I was born in Lyon. Then when I was, uh, two or three years old, we moved to, uh, the suburbs. Like, 30 -- 30 miles away from Lyon, in a house, because, uh, uh, my sister was born. So, you know, my parents moved there. Uh, so, until I was, um, 10 or 11, we moved there. Then my parents got divorced, and my mom moved back to Lyon, to be closer to her parents. And, uh, yeah -- so I al-- I always lived in the same area -- or -- either in Lyon or just outside of Lyon.

CHARIS SHAFER: Did you live in the suburb, or did you live in Lyon, or did you switch off?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, we switched -- so, yeah, so until I was ten years old, um, uh, I was living a suburb of, like, really a -- like, almost the countryside, it was. And then, uh, moved back to Lyon, um, 'til I was, uh, in middle school. But then we moved back to -- in the suburbs, but, really, uh, just outside Lyon, so it was still the city. Until I was, uh, 18, and then we moved back to, um -- in the city center.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: When I started, uh, university.

CHARIS SHAFER: And what was your childhood like? Who did you play with, or grow up around?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um, so -- I mo-- most remember -- it was in Saint-Priest -- it's, uh, where I went to middle school, where I, I met most of my friends that I am still friends with now. So Saint-Priest -- like, the suburb is not -- it's not poor, but it's not rich. So it's really a mix. Like, it was a lot of -- not like Vanessa, when she was the only white Hispanic kid. Me, I was not the only white, but there -- it was, like, really mixed, like, uh -- I mean, I had, like, black kids, Arabs, Asians -- it was -- that was really diverse. And, um, my friends [20:00], uh, were, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The class clowns.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter) The class clowns. Yeah. I was one of the class clowns too.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, I was in (laughter). Yeah. I was, uh, really serious at school, but I wasn't mean or anything, but (inaudible).

CHARIS SHAFER: Like, what kind of things would you do?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: What kind of things would I do?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (inaudible)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter) Uh, yeah, so example, uh, my -- the teacher would talk to, uh, one of the kids, and she would -- left the keys on my desk. And I moved all of them out of the -- out the window.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No, but tell them about the competition.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: 'Cause that -- that was part of, like, the whole competition you guys had.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, so, uh, in France, uh, they give you, like, this, um, book.

It's, uh, like the way the teacher talks to your parents. They would put notes on them -- when is the next, uh, parents-teacher conference, or, uh...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: When your kid threw my keys out the window...

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, right -- that was called the, uh, "observations." So if you get three observations, then you get, um -- (inaudible) -- that's when you have to stay after school?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Detention.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Detention.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So when you get three of them -- so every time you get one, you have to have it signed. So it could be, uh, "Sébastien threw my keys out of the window." That -- and I had to have that signed -- to my mom. So I said, "Yeah, I threw the keys." You know... And, uh --

CHARIS SHAFER: What was the reaction of your mother?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, she was -- she was pissed, but -- like, she would take PlayStation away for a week, or stuff like that. But there wasn't -- nev-- it was never

really bad stuff, like, uh, so -- she -- she was mad, but never too mad. Maybe not enough? I don't know. 'Cause -- so we had this competition, where it was the (laughter) -- we had to get the most observations in a year. And I came in second.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: But the keys were like, the last -- your last hurrah, right? Like, wasn't it --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- real-- like, at the very end, you guys were just, like, doing whatever.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Yeah. That was, like, the last week, and, uh, I lost. I, I lost, because this kid, uh -- he just started to sing in the class. (inaudible) On the desk -- on his desk.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Just stand up on his desk, so... So that was middle school. Then high school, I started to get more serious. I was, uh, better at school. And I stopped the competition. And, uh, well -- I still, uh, did some stuff like that in Spanish class, which I regret now.

CHARIS SHAFER: Uh-oh.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Because I can't speak Spanish. (laughter) And, uh, if I had --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: What did you do to that Spanish teacher?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, yeah, I would just sing in the class, or...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Wasn't that -- didn't Ben come in and pretend to be a student? Wasn't that the teacher?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, I had, um, had a, uh, friend who took German, but he would come in Spanish class and -- the teacher was kind of out of it. She wouldn't -- she would come and she'd say, "Oh, there's one more than usual." And I would tell her, "It's better than -- one more than one less." She say, "Oh, yeah, of course. (inaudible) Most definitely." (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: But -- but I was more serious in high school. And, uh, yeah, I had friends that -- where (inaudible). Not mean, but, you know, not really serious either.

CHARIS SHAFER: And so, for college you got more serious --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: -- in high school. And you were looking to college. Do you remember making that decision about where --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um...

CHARIS SHAFER: What to do and where to go?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, I'd -- the last year of high school I didn't know what to do. And, um, I just chose the same thing as my friends. It was, like, economy stuff. Like, uh, management. So, I said, yeah, why not, I had, like, good grades in economy, and... But I didn't like it, so, uh, first -- I spent two years at the university, then I dropped out. Then I did, uh, another thing -- I was, um, called a vocational diplomat. I took, like, um, a correspondence (inaudible) --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, in -- by a -- like, um, mail -- kind of like a -- well, it would be like the internet today.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: A correspondence course.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Customed to us. So I did that.

CHARIS SHAFER: Sure.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, I got the diploma.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: But didn't you not to anything 'til, like, the night before?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, I didn't really study. I was just (laughter).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Just screwing around?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Screwing around with the au pairs... (laughter) I'm kidding.  
(laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: What (inaudible) before my time!

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. This is before your time. I'd go out every night, like I didn't have to go to school. But I was still -- I still did that, uh, correspondence thing. Uh, I don't know how, but I got the diploma, which I was really proud, because only,

like, three or four percent of the kids who, who do the corres-- like, like the [25:00] correspondence course will get the diploma. So, uh, I got that, and then I went back to, um, university. I studied, like, this, uh, security thing, because I wanted to work for an NGO, like, (inaudible). In, like, NGO management, so, uh, I did that. I got my diploma at this time. And wanted to -- I was more serious, though, with Spanish this time. And she was in New York.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So at this time all of these au pairs that you -- your particular friend group would hang out with?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, I was -- I --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: These were all in Lyon?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, in, uh -- so, Ben -- uh, my -- the friend we talked -- like, who, who would come in the Spanish classes -- him -- he -- when he moved to, uh -- it was back to New Caledonia, and then he came back to Lyon, and, uh, he lived in this, um -- in this, uh, student, uh, residence. And, uh, he met the first au pair. Uh, so she was, uh, American -- a Canadian girl that liked to go out a lot, so...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: She was crazy.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: She was crazy.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: She was basically an alcoholic.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yes. Yes. Uh, so, uh, I went out a lot this year. So I -- and then, uh, when he -- he left with her in Canada, but I still, um, uh, still kept contact with the family that she was au pair with. So I met the other au pair and, uh, then when I was in university, most of my friends in university were, um, Erasmus students. That's the, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Study abroad.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Ex-- exchange program, between, uh, European universities. So, I had a lot of English-speaking friends. And, uh -- when I was in university.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And, uh -- when, uh, Vanessa arrived, she was the last au pair.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The latest?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: The latest.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I wasn't the last, because there was, uh, what's-her-face afterwards. What was her name?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Emma?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Emma!

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: That's the one -- that's the one I didn't like. That was --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. Nobody liked her.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: That was the fourth one.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, because Vanessa stayed two years. She stay-- she stayed for one year as an au pair, and one year as a English teacher assistant. So, we both knew the -- the --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The next au pair.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- the next au pair.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. And, uh -- yeah, so I had a lot of, um, foreign students friends, and that's how I --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like Vincente.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- started to -- Vincente, yeah. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: That's how I started to learn, uh, to speak English, for real. Because, in school, as I said, I wasn't really the most, uh --

CHARIS SHAFER: Serious.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- serious student. But... And, uh, yeah. And then, uh, Vanessa, after two years she wanted to, um --

CHARIS SHAFER: Wait, wait, wait. Do you remember when you met Vanessa? Do you remember the day you met Vanessa?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, I do. I do. It was, uh -- so it was through Mel. Um, she -- she said, "Yeah, we should go out tonight." It was Vanessa's -- it was probably your first weekend?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm.



SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And, uh, so, Mel told me, “Yeah, she’s really cute, and you’ll like her.” So I thought, “Oh, sure, why not? We’ll go out.” (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, I met her at the same student residence --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- uh, that my, uh, friend lived in, because all the au pairs -- the family would rent them an apartment at this, uh, residence. And, um -- yeah, I remember I had a car and, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, they call it “Seb’s Service.” Because he was the only one who had a car.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: He would just drive everyone everywhere.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: He had this beat up Clio. (laughter) Ah, that was really funny.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And, uh, yeah -- I remember --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Seb’s Service.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- she was -- she wasn’t -- she didn’t speak French at all.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, I didn’t speak French at all.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So I -- I spoke a lit-- a little English, so -- I ask-- I asked her dumb questions, and she was like, “Oh, do you like to go out?” Stuff like that. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter) “*Oui*.”

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter) Yeah. OK.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And then they’d, like, chatter off on the side. I’d be like, “Mel, what are they saying?”

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, ’cause, uh -- yeah, we went out with my, uh, friends. My bar -- the bar is, you know, it’s, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Davide and Olivier?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And Jean-Christian.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And Jean-Christian -- all right, it was --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And they all pushed me -- (inaudible). (laughter) Right? And, uh, yeah, I was pretty shy, so... But they put a lot of pressure on me.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: They did? (inaudible)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And I thought she was -- she was so -- we were at the table, there was Mel, me, and, um, maybe Jean-Christian, Olivier, and Davide. And like Vanessa said, she was kind of lost, and --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: We were speaking French really fast, and with some (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It wouldn't have mattered if you guys were speaking slowly.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I still wouldn't have understood. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um, yeah, and then, uh, um -- we went out more and more, because we had, like, mutual friends. Uh, there was -- there were those Mexicans brothers that were -- that lived in the same residence for three or four years. [30:00] So I was really friend with them, and Mel was friend with them as well. And Vanessa was a good friend, so, uh...

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, I bet.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, we'd all go out together, and... Um, yeah, and so we finally started to... (inaudible)

CHARIS SHAFER: But do you remember the moment when you knew you guys were going to be dating? (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter) I mean, well, we made out, so... (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I guess that was, uh...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: I think it was the night -- Ben -- we went out --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: We went out when Ben was being a brat. Remember? Ben was all in a bad mood. I don't -- we don't know -- I don't remember why.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: He was in a bad mood, so then we went --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Well, I stayed overnight at your place.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: 'Cause I think I was probably too drunk to drive back to -- the (inaudible) was five minutes away. So you said, "Yeah, you can stay for the night." And then --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: One thing led to another. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: One thing led to another.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I don't know if our grandkids want to hear about this. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Right.

CHARIS SHAFER: So then --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: But I wanted to for a long time, but she wasn't really interested. But I was persistent.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: You were.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (inaudible) Yeah, that was the --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I remember, um, in the morning, before you left, you asked, uh -- he was like, "Oh, so the next time I see you, uh, are we gonna kiss like this?" And then you did -- he did, like, the bees on each cheek. And he said, "Or are we going to kiss like this?" Then he gave me a kiss on the lips. And then I was like, "Oh my gosh." I was like, "Well, I guess like this." And I kissed him back on the lips, and that was -- that kind of sealed the deal. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: Did you guys ever have a discussion about, "Are we together?"

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No, I think that was pretty much it.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Because, like, the thing is, we were so -- we were spending so much time together already, that when it kind of crossed over into dating, like, we couldn't be casual about it, you know? Like, we were already really, really close, spending all this time together, and then it was like, all right, well, when we made that move, we weren't going to start seeing each other less. So it became very serious very quickly.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. And she had her own apartment, and I was spending, uh, kind of a lot of time there.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So... So, yeah, it did become very serious...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And then the second year we moved in together.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The (inaudible). So we started dating in January. And then the school year ended, and I went back to the States over the summer. Um, and then you came and visited me.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Then I came, yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. And then I went back for the second, sort of, scholastic year that I was there, and then we moved in together. Um...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: First (inaudible) -- we, uh, lived at my mom's for --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah. Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Until --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Until -- right, until we could move into Cecile's place.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Because I had a friend that was moving to Marseilles, and she had, like, this nice apartment. Uh, it was kind of --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It was a government-subsidized apartment.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, so she was paying, like, 200 euros a month.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No, but there were months we would pay, like, 80 euros, for a one-bedroom apartment.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And there was, like, a huge --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- waiting list to get those. And she had one, and she was moving with her boyfriend, but she didn't know it was -- it's gon-- it was gonna last, so she didn't want to --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Give up her --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- give up her apartment.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So she, um, she, she sublet it to, to us --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- because we, we were looking for something not too expensive, because --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I was only working part time.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, and I, I was going -- I was part time too.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: You were part time. You were working at (inaudible).

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. And -- but I was going to school, there, right? I think.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I don't remember.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, it was must last year, and so I was working. Like, I had a student job, and she had a student job as well. So... So, in the meantime, bef-- and she was moving in the end of October, around my birthday, I think...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, for the first two months, we lived at my mom's place. For -- that was -- that was not like with your mom, because --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No, not at all.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- by that time, she could speak French, and, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And my mom is pretty cool, so...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: She's cool.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: We had no problem.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, so, how long did it take you to be up to a level of, of conversational French?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I don't know.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Really fast.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: That's probably a better question for Seb to answer.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Because I kind of felt uncomfortable for a long time, but I progressed pretty quickly, because I didn't really have a choice. But, I don't really know when I started speaking, like --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, it was, uh, really fast. And she was -- she was really good at languages. I was really impressed, and like, in only three months -- three or four months -- she could, like, follow a conversation and, uh... Yeah, 'cause she had, like, [Janqui] --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- was our best friend. She is a Scottish, and, uh, she was in France for more -- more than you --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- and, uh, so I could evaluate, like, how hard --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Based on Janqui?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Based on Janqui (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, it helped, too, that I grew up speaking -- like, with Spanish.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: As -- because it was another romance language, so it, it helped a lot. And really -- it, um -- I studied, like, [35:00] a textbook. There is a -- my mom has, um, a friend who's Belgian, who taught with her. Because my mom's -- ended up being a -- she eventually became a Spanish -- a high school Spanish teacher. So another -- uh, the French teacher at the school -- she, she became good friends with. And so, she gave me -- she kind of tutored me over the summer, and so I learned stuff, like, in a textbook. Um, which was, uh, funny, because I, I -- you know, I learned some stuff, but obviously, like, not really how to speak. But, um, once I was immersed in it, and I had to know how to speak it, um, to sort of get along, um, I picked it up pretty -- pretty quickly. Uh, but it was -- it was hard at the beginning! You just tune out. Um, it takes so much energy to just follow a conversation. So sometimes they'd be yapping away, and I'd, like, tune out, and when people laughed, I would laugh. And say like, "Yeah, I just -- I sort of am pretending to follow the conversation." (laughter) But it was definitely -- it was definitely really tiring. Doing all the paperwork that I had to do for my visa? Because, forget it -- you go to the (inaudible) -- like, the -- I guess the -- I don't know, like the City Hall, or -- well, not really, no.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: No.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Not the same thing, but... To go take care of, like, my visa stuff, and they'd -- they don't care that you don't speak French. Like, I was -- I was there for, like, a couple of weeks, and I would go. I would be like, "I need a [*temble*]." And they'd be like, "What? We don't understand you." And I'd be like, "Oh, I hate you." (laughter) "Make an effort!" Um, but that was -- that was, uh, definitely hard. But, those guys were always so nice. And Seb spoke English pretty well, so, uh, I would always be able to sort of switch over if I needed to. Which was nice because -- I mean, my d-- I guess my dad spoke Spanish too, so my mom could sort of do that. But I just felt like, in, in French I always felt like I couldn't express myself intellectually as well as I can in English. Like, so I know I'm a smart person, but in French, I felt like my IQ dropped, like, so much. And so when I would speak in French, it would be frustrating me, because I'd want to express an idea, and I wouldn't be able to at the same level that I could in English. But a lot of times with Seb, if I just -- I could just switch over. And, um, so I didn't, like, necessarily feel that way with him. Yeah, um -- it's telling -- and telling stories -- I -- you know, when I -- I -- when I knew that I could speak French was when I could actually tell a story to someone else. Instead of just having, like, a present-tense conversation, like, "Yes, I like (inaudible). I would like to order the shrimp. And can I have a beer?" Like, the moment when I knew I could speak it was when I could recount something from my -- you know, from when I lived in the States, or from the week before, or something. And actually, um, present it in such a way that it was compelling and interesting, like a good story. Um, that was always the hardest thing. It's still hard.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you guys want to take a break now? And then we could eat --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sure.

CHARIS SHAFER: -- and come back to your life in Brooklyn.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sounds good. Sure. [37:54]

END OF AUDIO FILE ONE -- CES012\_0086

BEGINNING OF AUDIO FILE TWO -- CES012\_0087

CHARIS SHAFER: All right. So we're continuing the interview. Vanessa and Seb. And you guys were talking about how you met in Lyon, and then you started living together the second year. You came back, Vanessa. You guys want to take it from there?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sure. OK. I can go.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: You can go? Cool.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Did you have a good story to tell?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, yeah, I can tell, uh, about when we decided to, uh, get married.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: OK.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, um, Vanessa was finishing her second year as an English teacher assistant. Um, that was also, uh, basically the end of her visa, so she --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- had to, uh, go back to the U.S. And so we didn't -- we had -- yeah, at this point it was either, uh, she would stay in France or I would move to the U.S. And, um, we didn't really know how to do -- to do that. She -- I know she wanted to, uh, come back here, and, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: At the time, I wanted to go back and get my Master's.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, she wanted to come back and get her Master's. So, it was -- it was your birthday, right?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: We went to a Japanese, uh, restaurant, and, uh, we were talking about that -- what, what were we going to do? We don't want to split up obviously, and, uh -- and, um --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- she said, "Why don't we just get married?" And I started laughing. (laughter) (inaudible)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: He's like, "Uh, that was funny." (laughter) I was like, "Not."

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Because we were dating, like, for six months, right?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, uh -- and, um, three more than that, but --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm.



SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: 'Cause January and November I (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. Right, right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Seven -- seven (inaudible). And, uh, um -- then I saw that she wasn't kidding, and I said, "All right, OK. So let's just get married." And, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Let's do it.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Let's do it. Yeah. And later on, we met -- was it --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Uh...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- the same night we met my, uh, friends, at a bar. And I told them, "Yeah, we're gonna get married." So Vanessa is like, "Just like that?" Um --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Telling your mom was a different story.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, um, at this point, we, we thought that we would get married in France. I'd get my paperwork here, and then we would move to the U.S. That was the full plan.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. Like, we weren't gonna have a whole-day ceremony. It was just going to be like, "We'll just go to City Hall and do it." Because, really, neither of us come to the idea of marriage with, like, a very traditional family structure. His parents got divorced. My parents were, uh, separated on-again, off-again, in, like, pretty much my entire, uh, life growing up. So, neither of us were very big into the traditional notion of marriage. For us, it was, like, "Well, we want to stay together. And this is pretty much the only way to do it." So we weren't really big into, like, holding a ceremony. And, like, a white dress. Like, I never dreamed about any of that crap. And, I mean, Seb, I know, was -- really wanted to get the, the white wedding dress. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh-huh. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I told him it was my day, so...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Um, so anyway, I, I called my mom, and I was like, "Hey Ma, um, Seb and I are getting married. We're just gonna go to City Hall." And mom's like, "The hell you are." So, Mom is -- you -- you know, like a spicy Hispanic lady, um, who is

really -- and just really wanted to, like, do the whole big wedding thing. And this is, again, like, kind of a projection of, like, her relationship with my dad, because they went to City Hall and got married. So they never had the big wedding. So, when her first-born daughter said that she's gonna do the same thing, it was just, like, in that same narrative that my mom, like, felt that I was repeating, of hers. Um, and so she was like, "No, no, no, you have to have the whole -- like, we have to have a real wedding, and you have to have a dress, and, like, we're doing it in Buffalo." I was like, "Oh, OK." I was like, "Well, why don't we just do it in France, and make it easy?" She's like, "No, no, it will -- like, you're the bride. We're doing it in Buffalo, and, like, there's no way we're going to France." So, I was like, "Oh, OK." So I told Seb, and so it came time that we had to, like, tell his mom. (laughter) Which was a little nerve-wracking --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- for me. Because he had lived with his mom -- like, when we started dating, he was still living, like, at home. Because in France -- well, really, in Europe in general -- people will kind of live at home a lot longer. So, first I took her son and, like, had him move in with me. And then I was going to have him get married in the States, and move to the States. Uh, so it was kind of like, oh, I was a little nervous (laughter) about telling your mom.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. So we invited her and my sister for dinner --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, on our --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- at our place.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: On -- I was like, "You have to do it on our, our turf." (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And I made (inaudible) a fuss -- I was like, "We're eating my food." (laughter) "We're doing it on my turf. Because otherwise [00:05:00] I can't pull it off."

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, uh, I told her, "Yeah, we're gonna get married." And, uh, she was, uh -- she probably was -

CHARIS SHAFER: Shocked.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- shocked, yeah. She was --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, literally, in shock.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, 'cause, uh, I told her, "Yeah, we're gonna get married at the end of August, in Buffalo." So she was like, "OK. So you're getting married. Uh, we have to get the plane tickets. Uh, we have to --"

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No, she kept on repeat--

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: She -- yeah. And she was like, "OK, you're getting married --"

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: "What? You're getting married?"

VANESSA SNOWDEN: "-- in the States, in August? OK, so August? You're getting married, and, uh, (laughter) it'll be in the States? In August? And you'll be getting married?" And I was like, "Yes."

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. And my sister was laughing all --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right, because your mom was, like, freaking out. And I was, like - - oh my God, I just wanted to, like, crawl into a hole and die. (laughter) Oh, but -- I mean, she took it well, I mean...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, she took it well. She did.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: After the initial shock (inaudible).

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um, so, yeah -- so we started to --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Plan that.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Um...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: You moved -- you moved back in June or July?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And, um --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So we had to do all the paperwork for it. So, it -- it's a huge pain, because we had to get a fiancé visa, so he could come and get married. Because you can't just, like, go in as a tourist and, uh, get married in the States. Like, you have to apply first for a specific visa. So, we applied for it in February.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: For a wedding in August.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: End of the s--

VANESSA SNOWDEN: At the end of August.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Twenty-fifth.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: August 25<sup>th</sup>, was when we were supposed to get married. So we -- very -- like, that is more than enough time. It's fine. Well, they turned -- they ended up, uh, changing the law for the fiancé visa, after we had sent in our application. And so, it's not like the old law applied to us. Like, the new law applied, so they had to send us this -- first of all, they had to come up with a new questionnaire that went along with the law, which is basically a law to protect mail-order brides. Um, so, they had to come up with the, um, questionnaire, and then send it to us. And then we had to send it back. And meanwhile, we're, like, planning a whole wedding, and none of the paperwork is going through. So, the only way that I found out about all this stuff is because, after sending our application into this black hole and not hearing anything back at all for months, I, like, started calling, like, politicians.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, I called, like, Hillary Clinton -- 'cause she was our Senator at the time. Like, Schumer -- I called him. Their offices -- they were nice, but, like, whatever. Nothing ever came of it. Like, they never actually got back to me. And then I called my Congressman, and a dude in his office, like, called around for me. Because, I mean, they are representatives. Like, isn't that their --

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- job? Whenever I tell this story, people are like, "Really?" That's -- I was like, "That's their job! They represent you, like, to the government! Come on!" So, this guy found out all this stuff, and so he was giving us all this information. Meanwhile, there are tons of couples who had no idea what was going on with their application. So finally they sent me the questionnaire, and it's stuff like, "Have you ever been accused or convicted of rape or incest or, like, domestic abuse?" And I was like, "No, no, no." It was like a s-- stupid checklist thing. So we sent that back, and, um, we were just waiting. And so, I was basically just, like, calling this Congressman guy every day. And, uh -- and then he was calling the people that he knew, in the

Department of Homeland Security, and -- there was just, like, all this back and forth. So finally we find out that the application -- and, like, we'd get these things like, "Yeah, well, it's been shipped off to Vermont. And now it's, like, en route to Washington, D.C." I'm like, "What -- why is this being trucked around everywhere?" So finally we hear it's actually in France, where it needs to be -- like, at the embassy. And we're just, like, waiting for Seb to get the call from the embassy saying, "Come in for the interview." And then he could come to the States. But, at this point, it's a week before the wedding. All -- like, my family in the States have all bought their tickets -- like, the cake is bought. Like, everything's done. The, the dress, the -- like, all the planning and everything. His family from France has bought their tickets, like... Everybody is ready to be in Buffalo except for the groom. And we're just sitting there. I'm calling the embassy every day -- I'm getting up at four in the morning to call them when they open. And he went to Paris and was staying with Ben. And, uh, was just camping outside of the embassy, waiting for them -- to call them. So he had his ticket and everything, um, because he was just gonna come over on, uh, a tourist visa. Actually, you know what? We ended up getting -- we pushed the wedding back -- or I guess --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (inaudible)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- uh, forward or back? Like, so we pushed it into the --

September. 'Cause we figured, like, they told us like, "We just need one more week. Like, it will surely come through in a week." And the day of, Seb's on his way to the airport to fly on a tourist visa, and they call him. And they're like, "OK, we're ready to interview you." And he's like, "I can't. I'll miss my flight and the wedding. Like, I can't do it." So he got on the plane, and came over as a tourist, [00:10:00] and we had a fake wedding (laughter) with everybody there. I mean, just like -- we had everything, like, the same way. We just didn't sign any paperwork. And, uh, it was really fun. We did it -- the whole thing, um, was in Spanish, French, and English, 'cause my family in Minnesota doesn't speak French or English, and his family speaks some English, but not really that much. So, all three languages were represented, so there was a reading in each language, and -- um, it was -- it was cute. It, it, it was small, but it was -- it was really

nice. Um, and then, right afterwards, Seb -- uh, so, basically, right before the wedding, I didn't see Seb for two months. That entire summer --

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- I didn't see him at all. So I saw him --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And this -- this is when you -- you looked for an apartment here.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was looking -- I came to New York to find an apartment, and a job. 'Cause we want-- we were moving here. Um, and, uh, calling the embassy. The -- they (laughter) -- when he finally went in -- who was it that told you, like, about me calling them every day?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Oh, yeah, the lady there.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: When you went in?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Oh.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: She said, "You have tell your wife to stop calling me every day."

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I called every day. I'd be like, "So, uh, how is, like, the file, with blah-blah-blah?" I called them every day. Every day. Every day. I was so annoying. They validated me. I was nice though. I wasn't --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: You know... Maybe I was a little insistent. (laughter) Um, so then, right after the wedding, Seb was, um -- Seb left again, because he had to go back and finish the paperwork. And then he got, um -- well, no, we drove -- actually, we drove to New York.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: The U-Haul.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Our honeymoon was, basically, driving our U-Haul (laughter) across New York State, and moving into our apartment at Wyckoff in, uh, Brooklyn -- so, kind of, Bushwick area. Uh, and, uh, so we could -- we were like, "Well, instead of going on a honeymoon, we'll just move to Brooklyn." So, uh, we drove our U-Haul across, uh, New York, and, uh, moved into our apartment here. And then as soon as we got settled, uh, Seb went back to France to finish his paperwork, and then he came back, um, with that all set. And then I told my boss one day, I was like, "I'm..." I was like,

“Do you mind if I take the rest of the afternoon off, because I’m going to get married at City Hall.” My boss was like, “What? OK. Sure.” So then (laughter) we went with, um, my friend, uh, from -- my two friends from college -- Rachel and Rosie. They were our, um, witnesses. And we went to City Hall, and got hitched.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So it was kind of -- we ended up getting married the way that we initially had planned we would have done it. Which was super low-key, and, uh -- just like us and two of our friends. And that was -- that was kind of it.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And then your mom planned the whole thing, and --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, and we had another wedding in France, uh, with --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: In April.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: In April, right. With the French family and friends. So...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. Oh, and what was funny, too -- so, we count our anniversary as September 2<sup>nd</sup>.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So our original date was supposed to be August 25<sup>th</sup>. The date we count is -- the fake one, with all of our families -- September 2<sup>nd</sup>. But our actual date that we got married was October 8<sup>th</sup>.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, the one in City Hall.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Our real -- we don’t -- yeah, we --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: We don’t know. We don’t remember. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So when he -- so, in France, he had to go, like, register our, our marriage, right? Um, and, uh, he went, and the lady was like, “So, OK, so what’s the, the date?” And Seb was like, “Uh...” (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: “October 5<sup>th</sup>?”

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter) He was like, “I’ll have to get back to you on that one.” Meanwhile, like, we had gone through all of this work to prove that it wasn’t a fake wedding.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: A fake wedding.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, we had to have notarized testimony from friends. We had to have photos, bills -- like, things that proved that we were together as a couple, um, beforehand. And then --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- he goes to get registered and he doesn't know the date.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Yeah. I had to call them back the next day, because I didn't give them the right one.

CHARIS SHAFER: Did she question that?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: No, because she didn't care. She was the French, uh, authorities. It's --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So they don't care.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- the U.S. one that, that cares.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: She was a -- she was like, "Yeah, right. That's the real wedding, right?"

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah. But then we had a -- the other one in France. Like, a ceremony.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Because your mom really wanted to do that. So I got to wear my dress again. So I basically had three weddings. (laughter) All to the -- all to the same guy.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter) Who, who was that guy?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: All to the same babe.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It was -- it was cool, though, that I got to wear my dress so, uh -- more than once. So that was good.

CHARIS SHAFER: So, why did you decide to move to Brooklyn?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, um, I figured New York was the easiest place for both of us to get a job. Um, because originally I wanted to go to grad school in Buffalo, but it didn't really work out. Like, I didn't get enough money to do it, and I was like, "You know,



let's screw it. Let's just move to New York." And I didn't really know anything about [00:15:00] New York at all, so I just started researching neighborhoods, and what was actually affordable for us, since I had a job, but he didn't. And he also couldn't work for a while, because he had his fiancé visa, but it takes a while for him to get his work authorization. So the -- the first couple of months he technically couldn't work here.

You were just kind of --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- chilling. Well, you were doing the (inaudible).

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, that's true. There was four -- four months.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Four months, was it?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh, it was that long? But you were working under the table for those other guys. Or was that after?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, like a temporary, uh, position.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: But with a -- like, they would give me, like, a authorization. I can work for 30 days. But, you cannot find a job where (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right. A 30-day job. Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: It's all crazy.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So anyway, we were looking for a neighborhood that would be fun, and, um, affordable. And, so, we saw Williamsburg, but then we were too poor to actually, like, live in Williamsburg, so we saw that, like, Bushwick was really the -- kind of the --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: East Williamsburg.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right, and it, it was East Williamsburg, really. (laughter) So, found an apartment there, which I thought was pretty awesome. Like, it was newly renovated, and everything. And then we moved in, and it turned out that our -- first of all, the walls were super-thin. And second of all, we had crazy kids who went to the School of Visual Arts, um, who were -- really liked to party. And would, uh, weren't they, like, writing an opera for synthesizer? While taking various drugs, and just were

like so loud. The guy was, like, always breaking up with and then having make-up sex with his girlfriend, just loudly. Like, and everywhere in the apartment. Like, you couldn't get away from it. And I had signed a two-year lease. (laughter) And so -- and there was the, the bodega. So we were on the -- on the third -- on the second floor -- no, on the first floor.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um, yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, yeah, on the second floor.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: On the second floor, really.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: For, yeah -- for Americans, right. So we were on the second floor, and on the first floor was this bodega. So the kids next door would party until 4:30 in the morning. Then bodega would start up their, like, march music.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, the “bum-bum, bum-bum-bum-bum, bum-bum, bum-bum...” at 5:00 am. And, um, the bass would just go straight through our floor. So, forget it. For two years, I, like, did not sleep. The first year, I was doing random office jobs. But the second year -- that was the year I started the Fellows. And then I was teaching full time, and going to grad school. And then, like, these crazy kids -- and the bodega. It was -- it was rough. (laughter) I was like, “Oh my gosh, I can't...” And how do you know? It's so hard -- like, I just came and got the important. I stayed here with my friend Rachel for a week. And I was like, “I have to find a apartment in this week.” And you just, all -- you just make kid mistakes. Rookie mistakes. And, uh, that was -- that was a rookie mistake. It was a pretty big one.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So (laughter), when we -- when we looked for our second apartment, we were a little more discerning. We also had more money by that time.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: But yeah, so that's -- that's how we ended up in, uh, in Bushwick. And then in, uh, a little more Williamsburg-ish area.

CHARIS SHAFER: Can you tell me about some of the friends you've made while you've been here?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Should I talk about you guys? (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: You can talk about us (laughter) if it's relevant.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh, I don't -- sure. I, I guess I -- I'm pretty bad at, um, keeping friends when I don't see them. I'm very much, like, um, my friends in my city are who I kind of connect with more. And I've always been like that, and I've traveled a lot, so I feel like I have sort of pockets of people. But, um, the folks who I live close to are usually one-- the ones, like, in my life at the moment. Like, the most important. And, um, I met a lot of people through the teaching Fellows, so, um, my friend Amanda -- I met her in grad school. And she actually -- she used to live in Brooklyn, um, with her -- actually, she might be someone you could talk to. I mean, they're both American, but her -- well, Zack is Japanese -- his family is Japanese. But, um, they -- she lived in Brooklyn for a while, and now they live on the Upper -- Upper West Side. But, um, yeah -- I mean, she's just like another teacher. She's -- she's my little sister's age. She's Erica's age. So, um, that's kind of -- I, I feel like it's, uh, sort of a little bit of a different relationship with her. Um, but, yeah -- she's just -- she's great. And then, there's Bennett, who Erica knows, obviously -- and who was friends with before. Uh, Bennett was another teacher friend of mine. Really, all of my friends here are teachers. Except for, like, the few friends that I have here from college. Um, just because -- I don't know, I feel like when you -- especially when you teach in New York City, you just really make connections to the other people who are doing the same thing, and going through the same stuff. Because it can be a really trying job, and it -- uh, especially with the political climate right now [00:20:00] with education. It's like -- it's really easy to connect with other teachers. So a lot of my friends are teachers. And then, um, there is Cara and Erika, who we -- I met through Bennett, and, uh, I guess I got to know Erica -- or Erik-ay, I guess have to call her, because my sister's name is Erica with a "c," and Erik-ay is with a "k." Um, and so she hung out with us at our -- my family's farm, which is in the Poconos, and, uh, you know, a fellow lover of food and drink. And, uh, we obviously hit it off very well, so that was cool. And through that, we met Cara, who is doing the interview. (laughter) So that's -- those are our friends here, really.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah!

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sebby, you have [LV] -- you have your -- you have your soccer bar friends. You should tell them about...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: You should tell --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: I didn't really make any friends because I had, like, an easy, you know, transition from, uh, France to the U.S., thanks to Vanessa. So I arrived, and the apartment was already, um... And, uh, she already had friends there that, uh, I liked too, so I... And, uh, the first four months, I -- I didn't work, so I was at home, or doing some, uh, volunteer work for NGOs, stuff like that. Um, so I didn't really met a lot of people. And then, uh, my first job was at a hedge funds, and I was the office manager there. All the other people were traders or -- so, not the same, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Lifestyle.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Lifestyle as me, so... So, I would say the f-- friends, uh, I met --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, I guess --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- on my own. Yeah, were the soccer bar people, but -- they were like French people, (inaudible), uh, that -- they weren't --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, tell them about the soccer bar, because that's important for our cross-cultural... (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh --

CHARIS SHAFER: Where is the soccer bar?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, the soccer bar used to be on Third and --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: There's drama here. (laughter) Rah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, it used to be on Third and 12<sup>th</sup>, in, uh, Union Square. And, uh, this is, uh, where all Europeans that like soccer used to go, uh, to see, um --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: They had every game.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: World Cup games.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, they had soccer game.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: They had, like every game from every European country, so, uh, that was very fun. So I met some, uh, people that like the same team as me, so, some people from Lyon, and, uh... But those guys were, uh, often people that were here in

New York, like, for three or four months, or six months. But I also met this, uh, guy who was half-American and half-French. Uh, his parents are French, but he was born in the U.S., so he now is American. And, uh, he really likes (inaudible), so I've been watching games with him, like, for the last, uh, six years now. And I --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh my God.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Almost. Yeah. (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I can't believe we've been here that long.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So I met (inaudible), uh, and he's a really good friend of mine now. And, uh, yeah -- the other friends I met were, uh, at my, uh, second job in New York. French, uh, Tourism Agency. Like, there was, like, uh, French co-workers. That -- that's nice too, 'cause they had, like, a -- only a one-year visa. Or a two-year visa.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And Ondine, who is now -- who was dating Madonna's current boyfriend.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Which is, too -- and she's from Lyon too. And, uh, Madonna's boyfriend is from Lyon. He's one of the --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Dancers.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Dan-- back-up dancer. And, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Madonna, in our time, was a very famous, uh, pop idol. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yes.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: To the -- to the grandkids who may not know who Madonna is. (laughter) Hey, I was told to -- to explain any --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: In the '80s, '90s.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right, right. To explain any cul-- she might still be going. She might have once again reinvented herself. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter) Yup. So, yeah, I was friend with the ex--

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Uh --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- girlfriend of, uh --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Madonna's --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- Madonna's boyfriend.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- boyfriend in 2012.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter) Your claim to fame. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yes. (laughter) So, I almost dated Madonna. (laughter) Didn't turn out that way, but... (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: Have you acquired interest in American sports, or are you...?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Yeah, uh -- I like hockey, uh, even when I was in France I was watching, um, the -- (inaudible) to, uh, hockey too. So, uh, (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: A match made in heaven.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, I didn't like, uh, American football, uh, in France. I thought it was dumb. But, now that she explained me the rule, and I changed me -- I like it better now.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And you love the -- the song, too.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: How does the song go?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The (inaudible).

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter) The Saturday -- no, Sunday Night Football.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: "I've been waiting all day for Sunday night."

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, yeah -- I love that song.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah -- for Sunday Night Football.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. So now I'm waiting on -- for all week --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: For -- for Sunday night. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- for Sunday Night Football. [00:25:00] (laughter) And, uh, baseball -- no. Baseball, no. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah. Well, um, I'm not into baseball either.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: No. But, yeah, (inaudible), no. And basketball, I like. And basketball is huge in Europe, too. So, that's...

CHARIS SHAFER: So it was an easy transition then?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, and, um, I play soccer, uh, once in -- (inaudible). Like, in, uh, spring and summer, I play soccer in here with, uh, [Hendrick], and -- and that's fun.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, it's a lot of, like, Hispanic dudes, too.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Hispanic, yeah. And Europeans, too.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And some European guys too, yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And, and -- yeah. And, and Europeans, too.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So, I meet -- I meet people there, too. I forgot about that. Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: It's interesting, I think -- soccer in the United States? So many people play as children --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

CHARIS SHAFER: -- but then there's sort of this --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It's recreational. It's not, like, a lifestyle choice like it is in -- in Europe.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, if you're a kid that's, like -- who's playing soccer, and has potential, like, you're basically formed to be like a --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- a star player. Like, all of the big clubs have youth teams. And there's a whole system.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm. And, uh, I like playing here, because, yeah, it's more recreational, and, uh, I'm not a really good player. And, like, in France, I'm not good at all. But here I'm pretty good. (laughter) So that's -- that's nice. (laughter) And, uh, yeah, that's a good feeling.

CHARIS SHAFER: And do you feel more American now, especially with your work guiding tourists who come over from France? Do you feel kind of like a cultural ambassador (laughter) sometimes?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: You are a cultural ambassador, technically.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, I still feel, uh, French a lot. Like, uh, but I feel like I understand more, uh, things going here, like, now, then, when I hear, like, French people talking about the U.S., uh, I, I'm like, "No, that's not like that." Or, like, I can hear the cliché a lot more than --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- when I was in France. Then, I would say, these thing they say now, like --

CHARIS SHAFER: Can you give me some example of what would be said?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um, like -- like, uh, I don't know. Uh, like about the food.

There's a lot of, um, cliché about food, like, "All Americans eat crap, so, like, uh, McDonald's every day." And stuff like that.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: We don't eat vegetables.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Right, don't eat vegetables. Like, yeah, and, like, French people, they would -- they would come here and they're like, "Oh, there's, like, fruit and vegetables (inaudible)! It's even better than in France!"

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right, like, they see Whole Foods, and it's like --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Yeah. They're like --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- Mecca.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- "Oh, they have really nice food. I didn't know that you eat food -- you know, like stuff like that."

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, we (inaudible). "We didn't know you guys eat food!"  
(laughter) (inaudible)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter) Fruit. Fruit.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh, yeah, "food" can work, too.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, so, stuff that like. Now it's -- you know, (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, the ster-- like, the stereotypes.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, that -- they were, um -- like, the -- that they, they don't know everything -- anything outside of America, so... Which some Americans are like that, but --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: In New York, it's different, too, though.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, and -- yeah, New York is a -- a lot different.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do people, when they come over, make that distinction, between New York and the rest of America?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The rest of America?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Um, yeah. They -- because I tell them. I tell them that it's not  
(laughter) -- like, there's New York, and there's, uh --

CHARIS SHAFER: The rest of the states?



SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: (inaudible)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: And there's New York, and the Midwest, and (inaudible). So I, I try to explain to them -- explain that to them.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you do tours in Brooklyn, ever, or do you tell the tourists about Brooklyn?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: I haven't done any tour in Brooklyn yet, because it's so -- it's so big that, uh, I -- it's -- it's not like Manhattan. Manhattan you can do, like, a bus tour in four hours, and, uh, (inaudible), like... But Brooklyn is different, so -- but I tell them, like, uh -- because a lot of French people, they like, uh, to explore, uh, outside of Manhattan. So they can ask me where to go in Brooklyn. And I tell them, uh, um, Brooklyn Heights, or Williamsburg, if you want to see the hipster, uh (laughter).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The hipster games.

CHARIS SHAFER: (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, the hipster games. The hipster are the -- uh, the hip-- hipster capital, and stuff like that. But, but I could do a tour in Brooklyn, yeah. I -- I've worked on, like, itineraries, like a bike tour. Uh, trying -- trying to, uh -- 'cause there's a lot of stuff to see in Brooklyn that's -- that's cool. So, uh, but it's -- yeah, it's so big that it makes it hard to do a tour there.

CHARIS SHAFER: [00:30:00] Yeah. Vanessa, I want to ask you about your work, and more about the cultural environment of your classroom. What kind of kids do you have, and...?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, my first teaching job was definitely a culture shock. It -- the school, um, was -- is, um, kind of an under-served population. Um, it was, I would say, 90%, uh, black, and then maybe, like, a smattering of, like, Hispanic kids, and then, um, like -- there was, like, one white kid. So it was kind of like the absolute opposite of, like, the school that, that I grew up in. And, um, I didn't -- you know, I've had black friends before, um, but I just didn't realize how unaware I was of the culture, and of -- I don't know, just, like, how I -- it just -- like, it was so different to me. It was like a completely new world. Like, these kids taught me so much. Like -- and not -- and -- just like, about -- just being, like, assertive as an individual. Like, I came in wanting everyone to like

me. Like, being, like, the happy little teacher. It was -- I mean, "Yeah, you're going to love books," with me. (laughter) And these kids are like, "I --" Like, really, "Fuck you." Like, "I don't read books," and, like, "I..." You know, and a lot of them just didn't really get the education they deserve. And, I mean, we talk about public education as a great equalizer, but, uh, that's -- I mean, that's just not true at all. And so, I would have 18-year-old freshmen who read at a third-grade reading level. And, um -- but yet, they were all just, like, so smart, and just, like, knew so much stuff that I didn't know, and had lived through so much more. Like, so many things that I would just -- couldn't even imagine living through. Just the difficulties in their home lives, and, and navigating living in, in, um, such difficult neighborhoods. And, uh --

CHARIS SHAFER: Can you give an example that you remember?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Like, for example, I had, uh, a student one day come in and, uh, she was one of one of my more bubbly students. But this -- she came in late, and she had her head down on the desk, and just was, like, not responsive. I was like, "What -- what's going on?" I was like, you know, naïve little teacher. I was like, "Here, you can write it on a post-it note. Like, you can write me a little note. You can tell me what's wrong." And, uh, she writes on this post-it note, "I was just raped." And, I -- and I, you know -- I was in the middle of teaching a class, and she, like, hands me this post-it note, and I'm like, "Uh..." I just had no idea what to do. I hadn't been trained in what to do. I -- you know, I just had no idea. And, uh, I just kind of stopped everything and I kind of, like, pulled her aside, and I was like, "What -- like, what's going on? Like, what happened?" And it turns out, like, she -- it was one of these situations where she had stayed home to hang out with, um, like, a friend of her boyfriend's. And, like, you know, they were just, like, hanging out, and apparently he kind of just, um, kept going, and she didn't really know how to say "no." And it was, like, one of these situations. And, uh, I, I just -- I was completely -- I just felt completely ill equipped, um, to give her the support she needed. And at my school, like -- at the school I taught in before, you know, you have a guidance counselor, but he didn't really care about the students, and was rarely ever around. And so we had to, like -- you know, call in the police, and, like, have this whole thing. But, like, she didn't want her mom to know, because her mom was really

strict, and didn't know she had stayed home from school, and she felt like it was her fault. And it -- and so there are just, um, stories like that, or stories of kids who would come in so high or drunk that they would, you know, throw up in my class. And then I'd call their parents, and they'd come in high or drunk. And, um, it's just, like -- and I can't -- a lot of these kids just had nothing going for them. No support, uh, no one who really cared about them or their well being. And -- just early on -- I guess just, like, that whole bright-eyed, bushy-tailed thing, when you first go into teaching -- um, you know, I just wanted to fix everyone, and I wanted to, like, be that strong adult for everyone. And that was obviously, I mean, impossible. Um, and -- I, I mean, you just can't do that job without burning out, and that was -- that was really hard. It was really -- it was rewarding in a lot of ways that my current job is not. Just, like, the emotional connection to the kids, and just, like, actually feeling like I was making a difference for them, even in a small way. [00:35:00] My current school, if they had the shittiest teacher in the world, they would still be fine. You know, like, they're all really smart. They have parents who care. But at UAMA, my old school, um, I felt like they -- like I was actually doing something. Like, I was being a good teacher for them, and even if they weren't learning that much for me, I was at least being, like, a positive, like, adult role model. Um, and for me that felt, like -- that felt really important. Um, but I, I just couldn't keep on doing it at -- I just -- I was, honestly, more of a social worker than I was a teacher. And we're simply not properly trained to do that. Um, and I think that if they want teachers to be prepared, they really need to be giving them more, sort of, social-work training, and -- or, just how to deal with... I mean, these kids are emotionally traumatized in a way that, like, most people that I know could never really understand. And just learning how to help them deal with that, and even -- I mean, it just totally changes the dynamics of the classroom. Like, it's just not -- it's just not the same thing. Um, so I was there for three years, and now I am at, um -- still a public school, but it's a gifted and talented -- well, the middle school is -- the K-8 is gifted and talented, and then the high school is just, kind of, general admission. But they get some kids from, like, the gifted and talented program. Um, and so that is a very different population, so... In order to get into these programs in New York, it's really, like, your parents have to be in the know. Um, they have to be

well educated. They have to know how to work the system. They have to know what neighborhoods to live in. They have to know how to do the application, how to get everything in on time. Um, so, most of -- pretty much all of my kids are middle class, and then some of them are kind of, like, what we call "recession parents." Like -- so parents who, before the recession, could afford private tuition, but no longer can. So they send them to a s-- public school like NEST, which is, um, you know, well-known for, for being a good school. So, just the fact -- it, it's such a -- the difference that class makes is astounding. Um, these kids have been read to, since they were little. Their parents push them, um, to, you know, get straight A's. They check their homework. They do the readings with them. They talk to their teachers. And, and they have time to do all of this, right? It's not like they're working two or three jobs, and just, like, trying to pay the rent. Like, they're -- you know, they have -- these kids have stay-at-home moms who, like, can monitor this stuff. And, um, parents who went to college and can help them with their math homework. Um, and they're also -- I -- they also buy into the system. The system's worked for their parents, right? So, like, an authority figure in a school -- like a teacher in a school -- like, deserves respect. Like, the system works for them. And a lot of times, like, at my old school, people -- teachers would come in expecting to be respected, because they were an authority figure, when the truth of the matter is, like, this -- that system wasn't working for these kids and for their families, and so they no respect just because you were a teacher in a school. Like, it was one of those things where, like, you had to earn it. Um, and a lot of people -- I think that's where the biggest pitfall is for teachers in under-served schools. Um, is that they come in expecting that they deserve respect, when they -- I mean, you just have to earn it. You have to build relationships with the kids. But at NEST, it's a total cakewalk. Like, I walk in, and I'm like, "Do this," and they do it. Um, so it's di-- (laughter) it's certainly less of a challenge, which is nice in a way. Because I feel like I can be a teacher, and, like, I'll write my lesson plans, and they'll work. And I'll be like, "OK, like, you already know how to read at an eighth-grade level, so I can just assign you this reading, and you will do it. And if you don't, I'll email your mom, and you'll do it." You know? And it's, like, a totally -- it was a huge paradigm shift for me. Um, but it was I guess a shift back into the sort of learning

environment that I was used to growing up in. So, um -- but it, it's funny, because you hear teachers at my current school kind of complain about how kids are so bad, and, "Oh, they were talking, and so-and-so talked back to me." And I was like, "Really? You, you just have no idea. Like, these kids -- they're, they're fine. Like, come on. Like, you need to take it easy." But, I, I guess it's just the experience, um. And I will never do a job that was harder than that -- then teaching, uh, at UAMA those first three years. I -- after doing that, I can do anything. (laughter) Anything. [00:40:00] It would be -- uh, easier -- easier than that. But it -- I would do it again. I would totally do it again, because it really, um... It -- uh, talk about, like, a cultural ambassador. Like, honestly, people do not -- for the most part, people do not extend beyond their class lines. Um, I mean all of my friends are teachers. All of them are young professionals, for the most part. And, um, I -- I'd never really knew anyone who was on welfare, or on, uh -- or had food stamps, or, you know, lived in the projects. And, um, man, I just realized just, like, how incredibly naïve and ignorant I was in a way. That, like, I, I had no idea I was that ignorant, and still -- until I started teaching at UAMA. So it was, um -- I, I learned way more from those kids than I ever taught them, that's for sure.

CHARIS SHAFER: Oh, that's great. That was a powerful experience.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh yeah. It was.

CHARIS SHAFER: Where exactly was that school?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It was, um, at Flatbush and Tillary. It was right off the BQE, right by the Fort Greene projects. Um, kind of that wasteland that isn't, like, cool DUMBO. Um, but it's right where the Manhattan Bridge comes into Brooklyn.

CHARIS SHAFER: And most of those kids --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: At --

CHARIS SHAFER: -- at that school were from...?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: From the surrounding projects.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, or, like, Bed-Stuy, or East New York.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: So, yeah. Very -- very different from the kids at my school, who are from Park Slope, or the Upper East Side, or, like, Greenwich Village. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: And where exactly is the school that you teach at now?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: NEST is on the Lower East Side -- it's at, um, Avenue D and Houston. Um, so -- M14D.

CHARIS SHAFER: And the kids come from all over the city, and in Brooklyn?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm-hmm.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah. It's a good -- it's a good school. It attracts a lot of -- a lot of people. All the recession parents. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: I love that.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: The parents are way more intense though, that's for sure. Man, they're just, like -- they're on you. They are. Um, but luckily I'm organized, so I know what I'm doing.

CHARIS SHAFER: Can you give an example of how the parents are on you, in this school, where -- whereas they wouldn't be in your old school?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, I get parents who are pissed because their kid got a 94. Not at -- not necessarily at me, um, but at the kid. Like, "Why does my kid not have a 99 or a 98?" Um, and I -- I think the all -- the other thing, um, about the school, too, is it, it does have a lot of cultural diversity, so you have a lot of, um, um, like, recent Asian immigrants, who are very, very, like, concerned about school, and just getting top grades in everything. So, like, a 94 or 95 isn't good enough. Um, so I get that. And I get, you know, parents, you know, emailing -- I, I spend a good, I would say, four or five hours every week emailing parents or talking to them on the phone. Asking me, like, "What are the projects?" "Why didn't my kid get X on this test?" "Can you help him with extra test prep? He has a cello lesson the day you have test prep? Can you, like, take another extra day, like, after school, that you can spend time with my kid?" -- who is already gonna get a perfect score on the stupid state test, so why am I spending an hour of my time them? Or, um -- I had a kid -- actually, this year I had a kid -- uh, it was sad -- who

was diagnosed with leukemia. And so he was pulled out of school, and was getting, um, the -- I guess the DOE had sent a teacher -- they have, like, special teachers that go to hospitals. But, like, he or she wasn't doing a very good job, and so, his best friend's mom, who was advocating for him, because his parents are Japanese and don't speak English that well -- she was, like, trying to convince me to do, like, an hour-long Skype session with him every week, to, like, teach him everything. And it's like, I felt bad, but forget it. Like, I don't -- I'm spread too thin as it is, and I, you know, I said, "Listen, I can send him the materials, um, and I'd be happy to, like, email back and forth with him, but it's just -- it's too much." Honestly, teaching -- it's great, but it's, uh -- there, there aren't enough hours in the day, uh, to do everything you should be doing for the hundred and -- I teach 150 kids. And, uh, they all need individual attention, and they're all individuals who, you know, have different skills and different desires and different loves and hates and, um... It's, uh -- it's a lot.

CHARIS SHAFER: It's a lot of work.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: (laughter) We don't get paid [00:45:00] enough.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm.

CHARIS SHAFER: Is that as many as you had in your old school?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Uh-uh.

CHARIS SHAFER: One-fifty?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: In my old school, it was actually nice. It was, um -- they really prided themselves on having small classes. So would only have 20 to 25 students in a class, and I only taught, uh, four periods. So it was closer to, you know -- depending on the year -- like, 85–100 students. Um, but teaching -- teaching a class of 20 of those kids was definitely way harder than teaching my 34, um, prim, prissy, uh, NEST students, who all want to get A's.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Hm.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, can you describe that? Just the environment of those two classrooms?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, at UAMA, um, in every class there was always someone who I would be nervous would randomly get up and start a fight. Um, or, like, stab

someone with a pen. Or, like, pull out a weapon. Um, so, it was kind of about, uh, keeping them, uh, focused on me, but also, like, monitoring all of the little interactions that were happening, um, amongst all of them. I mean, everybody knows -- everybody's been to school before, so you all know that there are things that go on behind the teacher's back. Like, people are slipping notes, or whatever.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Right.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: But in that classroom, like, you have to be -- like, your antenna has to be, like, up and going, because you miss something, and suddenly you have a fight on your hands, where someone could get hurt. Um, and then also, like, there's always gonna be the kid who's gonna want to pick a fight with you. Um, and for me -- it's gotta be -- with teaching, it's really so much about your own personality, and your own style. There's never one way to do it, but for me, the way that I worked with these kids was a combination of being, like, super strict, but also defusing it with humor and, like, showing them that I respected them. So, I would just kind of be, like, um -- it's just -- it's hard to describe, like -- you know, I'd have a kid, um... I'd say, "OK, uh, whoever -- Dasheen -- you gotta get up and sit on the other side of the room, 'cause you're talking to Malik, and it's, like, forget it. It -- I can't teach like this." And Dasheen would be like, "No. I'm not moving." And, so, you can either go one of two ways. You can escalate, as a teacher, and be like, "No, you're moving like I'm telling you to." And then the kid says, "No." And then you say, "Yes." And the kid says, "Fuck you." And, like, it turns into this whole thing. Um, but instead, like, my style would just be like, "Listen, Dasheen, you don't get up, I'm gonna go to your house and kill your dog. So you'd better get up and move." (laughter) And, like, so I'd just take it, like, to this, like, crazy level. (laughter) And they'd be like, "Oh, Miss Snowden, you gangsta!" Or, like, something stupid like that. And, like, Dasheen would get up and move, you know? And so it's like -- this, like, fake strictness, coupled with, like, humor. And that just, like, worked for me. Because also, like, what -- I mean, I -- like, I'm not gonna go to his house and kill his dog. Like, I -- I'm like this tiny, like, 26-year-old girl. Like (laughter), yeah. No, I'm not gonna do that. Like -- and it was just, like, the -- I guess the combination of, uh -- uh, the irony there was so obvious to everyone that it sort of



worked, for whatever reason. Uh, but it wouldn't work for everyone. But, honestly, like, people just, like, trying to fight, like, and get l-- like, people who've got, like, the ego thing, of, like, having to have the authority, and being right all the time. It just doesn't work. Um, and then in my classroom now, I just tell the kid to move and he gets up and moves. And, like, I don't have to tell him I'm gonna kill his dog. (laughter) Like, honestly, I'll just like, "You're talking too much." Or, I'd just be -- or I just say like, "Stop talking." And the kid will stop talking. Like, they're just trained. They're tra-- like, they are 100%, like, trained. Uh, you know -- Pavlov or something, but... It just, like -- it's so easy. (laughter)

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you remember when you first moved to your classroom where you are now, and was the change jarring?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah. Oh yeah. 'Cause I -- well, I also, like, didn't really now to interact with them. Um, because I would be -- like, I started off with, like, my kind of tough-guy show, and it was a little much for them. They were kind of scared of me. And I was -- I was just, like (laughter) "Oh, I don't mean to scare you." They were really scared. "You're really mean." I was like, "Oh, really?" Because I had gotten so used to just being, like, out there, and, um, like just pouring on, like, the, sort of, abrasive humor. And, uh, they were just, like, a little taken back. (laughter) I was like, "Oh, I guess I gotta tone it down." (laughter) But, uh, yeah -- that was, uh -- but I was also teaching -- well, I was teaching an older grade. At UAMA I only taught [00:50:00], um, ninth-grade students. And, uh, at, uh -- at NEST, I was teaching 9 and 11. So my eleventh graders -- it's so -- it's very different. I mean, like, some of my ninth graders at UAMA were, like, 18. But, for the most part, they were, like, 14, 15. Um, but the 11<sup>th</sup> graders were different, 'cause they thought, like, they could be friends with me. 'Cause I also look young. I'm like, "Hm, no, you can't be friends with me," and that's really -- that's really weird. So navigating that was hard for me, which is why I'm actually glad to be teaching eighth grade, 'cause now there's, like -- there's a clear separation, whereas the juniors thought that, like, we would hang out. I'm like, "No, I'm not hanging out with you." That's weird. Yeah, so that's -- that's the difference, in a nutshell.

CHARIS SHAFER: Seb, I'm interested -- did you hear these stories from her when she would come home, about this classroom that was more challenging?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm. Yes. (laughter) And I would get scared, you know? Like the time she, uh -- like when one of the students brought a gun.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: That was, uh... So, that was scary, because I -- you don't know what could happen, uh, in those kind of, uh, schools. So I, I was a, a little worried. So I was happy when she transferred to this, uh, uh, new high school. Yeah. Yeah, I heard a lot of stories. Uh, like, there -- there was that, and there was the fight. Like, one of your students, like, punched a policeman in the face?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: I don't know.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, she actually attacked him, by -- from behind. And tried to choke him.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. (laughter) Yeah, crazy, like -- every week, there would be, like, a new crazy story like that. So, that was, uh -- that was stressful.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm. But --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, because I would also be the idiot to, like, always want to get in the middle of it, to, like stop it. 'Cause there's nobody around. There's nobody around. Like, there's supposed to be school safety officers. Like, there's supposed to be a dean. But, like, when it hits the fan, nobody's there except for you. You're the one in that classroom with two kids going at it. And, like, you're not supposed to throw yourself in the middle, but, dummy that I am, I would always do that, but luckily nothing happened to me.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: So there was no game plan for when that happened?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: No.

CHARIS SHAFER: When two --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: When kids had a gun? No.

CHARIS SHAFER: -- kids would start fighting, or there would be some violence?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: They'd say, "Call the dean's office." And you'd call, and it would ring. No one would pick up. And, uh -- oh yeah, well, um -- the thing with the gun. I -- there was a -- so, it was one of my students -- Shawn -- who was, um -- he was Crip. Well, his cousin was serious Crip. And he was, like, you know, a wannabe, kind of. But he was, uh, you know, wandering the hall with his cell phone out, and just being kind of, like, suspicious. And when my last-period class came in, they were all, like, bouncing off the walls. Like, going crazy. Like, they were all really -- it -- it's, uh, one of those things, like, you learn the flavors of, um, the craziness of the kids. And this one was, like, really anxiety-filled. Like, the kids were scared, and they didn't know how to express it. And so they were, like, bouncing off the walls. And I was like, "Wait a second." Like, this isn't just your typical, like, "It's Friday last period and I want to get to out of school." It was more than that. So I was like, "What is going on?" And, um, one of the kids was like, "Shawn -- Shawn has a gun." And I was like, "Uh..." And they're like, "Yeah, he got it from his cousin," who went to school in the same building, 'cause there were, like, four different high schools in our building. So I was like, "Uh, OK." Then -- right then -- so, Shawn is supposed to be in my class that period, but he was wandering the halls. Um, then, um -- our stupid assistant principal, Rob. He comes in with Shawn, and he's like, "Miss Snowden, Shawn is supposed to be in your class." Like, as if I had done something wrong by not having in class. Fine. So he -- he pushes Shawn into my room, and he's about to go. And I was like, "Uh, Rob..." And, like, I run out. And he's like, "What? What?" And -- it -- like, I have my whole class behind me, including Shawn, like, watching my every move. So I -- I have my back to that, and I'm like, uh, trying to, like, [miming]. Like that. I'm, like, [miming]. And Rob's like, "Oh, yeah, I'll take care of it. OK." And I was like, "What?" So he turns around and leaves. So meanwhile, a kid with -- who ostensibly has a gun -- chilling in my classroom. Uh... Like, so I was just like, "Uh, OK." So, I kind of go on with my lesson, and nothing happens. And the last period ends. And, uh, you know, the kids file out. And I'm, like, looking around for -- and I was like, "Why haven't they pulled Shawn out?" So I go and I talk to the [00:55:00] principal -- um, and, uh, actually, you know what? No, I didn't

talk to him that day. I -- I just kind of figured that they would have pulled Shawn, um, before he left the building. But I didn't hear anything about it. So the next morning, I went and talked to my principal, and I was like, "So, like, what happened with that?" And, uh, he's like, "What do you mean?" And I was like, "Well, like, didn't Rob tell you about Shawn, and, like, the whole gun thing?" And he was like, "Oh! Yeah, he said you mimed something at him, uh, but he didn't really get it." And I was like, "What?" He was like, "You really have to be more clear, uh, you know, if something like that happens." I was like, "So you didn't talk to Shawn?" He's like, "No, he just left the building." Uh, and -- and I was like, "And you didn't talk to Rob?" And he was like, "Well, you -- he -- he's -- he didn't really know what you were saying apparently." I was like, "I sh-- I made a -- I -- the kids are right behind me. Like, I made a gun sign with my hand, and I said, 'He had a gun.'" And, uh, so -- in -- in the eyes of the administration, it was my fault for not being, uh, more clear about the situation. But a couple of years before that, there was another situation with a kid -- with a couple of kids, actually, passing a gun around in school. And they -- you know, they had established some stupid, like, "Code Bluebird," which they were gonna say over the loudspeakers, that meant something. But nobody ever -- like, the plan -- there -- there was never really any real plan. And it's always the teacher's fault, too, um, for not, you know, reacting. Even though we don't know. W-- we were never really counseled as to what to do if, uh, such a thing happened. (laughter) Yeah...

CHARIS SHAFER: Well, we have probably just a few minutes left. Do you guys want to talk about anything else? Do you want to talk about moving into this apartment?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: You can go, Sebby.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter) All right. So, uh, yeah, our lease was, uh, coming to an end at the other apartment.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Thankfully.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Thankfully. And, um, Vanessa started to, uh, uh, look around. We started to look around again, right?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Mm-hmm.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: But, like, for a day or two, 'cause she was talking about our looking for an apartment at school, uh, one of her colleagues used to live here, and, um, he said that it -- that an apartment is --

CHARIS SHAFER: Available?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- available.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: You should go check it out. So -- so we were living in, uh, Jefferson Street stop, which is, uh, three or four stops away from, uh, this place. So we were visiting one night, and, uh, we, uh -- we decided (inaudible) like the, uh, nights.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, it was a really easy search.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause we really liked my -- we liked the neighborhood, uh, 'cause, you know -- where we used to live was, uh, more, uh, industrial. Like, a lot of warehouses. There were only one nicely old bar-slash-restaurant --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: -- in, in our street. Uh, here there's a lot, and, um, we liked the place, too. It's got the backyard, and it was a lot quiet--

VANESSA SNOWDEN: A lot quieter. Yeah. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Quieter. Quieter than the other place, so...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: 'Cause there's a family upstairs.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And, like, the owners live upstairs. It's not like our old landlord, who was never around.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Um, and, uh -- you know, it has the backyard, and the pool, and the grill, and, um -- and it was a really reasonable price, too. Becau-- they gave us a pretty deal, because they, um -- because I was referred by, like, my colleague, um, who -- they are essentially, um, best friends with. So, that was great. And it was also nice to get something through who you know. It just makes such a huge difference here, um, than to just, you know, look up a random ad, or go through a broker. So we didn't have to go

through a broker or anything, so we saved money on that, too. Um, so it was -- it was nice. It worked out really well.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It worked out really well. Oh my gosh. That first apartment was such a nightmare. (laughter)

I don't know how we got through it.

CHARIS SHAFER: Last question.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sure.

CHARIS SHAFER: Will you describe the apartment.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: This one?

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah, so it can be recorded.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Oh. Um, OK, so, we're sitting in the living room right now. And it's, I guess, what? Like, seven or eight feet by seven or eight feet? I'm really bad at that sort of stuff. Uh, and then behind us is our, uh, tiny kitchen, which is probably three-and-a-half feet wide. Uh, and is stuffed to the brim with lots of goodies to cook with. And then, uh, at the end of the kitchen, there's, like, a tiny bathroom, where one person can fit -- or two, if one of them is sitting on the toilet and the other one is in the shower. Um, but otherwise, it's [01:00:00] -- uh, it's very small. And then off of the living room is Mimi's room -- who's lying on the couch right now. So, Mimi is our dog, not our kid. (laughter) But she might as well be our kid. Uh, so she has her own, like, dog room, which is pretty luxurious for her. And then there's Seb's office, where he -- since he works from home, uh, doing the tourism stuff, um -- and it also doubles as an extra, sort of, guest bedroom if, uh, we have people visiting. And we have our little bedroom, which is across from the guest one. And, um, so, it works. It's nice. It's more of a square apartment than the rail-- the -- our old one was a railroad, um, so we -- it feels cozier, um, and, uh... We could probably re-do the floors, but that's OK.

CHARIS SHAFER: Did you paint it when you moved in?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, we painted -- yeah, we painted it, um...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: We painted the kitchen.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, the kitchen is yellow, and then there's a little arch that we painted red. And then the wall -- um, the one wall of the living room is, sort of, a deep blue.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: My mom helped us picked out -- pick out the colors.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Other -- like, the other walls are bare...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Our bedroom -- my dad painted --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Or was it...? Oh yeah, we painted the bedroom, too.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, it's purple. Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: But the other walls, we -- I keep on saying --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: -- I'm gonna paint them over the summer.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, the plan was to paint those other walls.

CHARIS SHAFER: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Still. It's still a plan. (laughter)

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: It's still a plan. Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Do you know how old -- do -- this building is?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Uh, I would say --

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I don't know. It feels old.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Thirty-five years old? I would say, like, in the '70s, right?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: That's what I would say. Yeah.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. So...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It's, um, a little crooked. Um, the --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: (laughter)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: We --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: When you eat soup, you notice.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: When we eat soup, um, you notice (laughter) the floors aren't really straight. Uh, and one has to pour the soup accordingly.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah. Consider the paper.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Yeah, we have, uh, paper --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Try to level the table a little bit.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Right, we have paper underneath the legs of, um, the, uh, the table -- two of the table legs -- in order to, um, level our eating surface.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Um...

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: But we have a nice backyard.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: We do.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: So...

VANESSA SNOWDEN: It also makes the Meem-ster happy.

CHARIS SHAFER: Mm-hmm.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And our friends, when we have pool parties.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

CHARIS SHAFER: Sounds good. Do you guys want to...?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Any last questions for us?

CHARIS SHAFER: Um... Do you think you -- how long do you foresee yourselves living in Brooklyn?

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Well, that's hard. We --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: We kind of -- initially when we came to New York, it was only for two years. And, um, we've been here for six. And --

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: What were you gonna say?

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: No, (inaudible).

VANESSA SNOWDEN: I thought you were going to say something.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, there's not really a plan, like -- it's not day-to-day, but -- I mean, we both have a jobs -- we both have jobs, so... (inaudible)

VANESSA SNOWDEN: And we like it here for now.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah, yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Sebby loves it.



SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Yeah.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Seb is a real New Yorker. (laughter) Sometimes I, I feel like I could use some more garden and outdoors stuff. Um, sometimes I get a little -- sometimes I feel like I'm over the hustle and bustle of the city, but there's always pros and cons with everything. And, uh, right now we're happy here. And we don't have kids yet, so it's, kind of, a -- it's a good time to live here.

CHARIS SHAFER: Great. Well, I think I'll end it there.

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Mm-hmm.

CHARIS SHAFER: Thank you so much.

VANESSA SNOWDEN: Thank you!

SEBASTIEN FARGEAT: Thank you. That was fun. [01:03:46]

END OF AUDIO FILE TWO