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**Oral History Interview with Janet Pinkowitz**

**Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations, 2011.019.067**

**Interview conducted by Manissa McCleave Maharawal at the Brooklyn Historical Society  
on October 29th, 2013 in Brooklyn Heights, Brooklyn.**

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK, let's get started. So, this is Manissa McCleave Maharawal interviewing Janet Pinkowitz on October 29<sup>th</sup>, for the Crossing Borders, Bridging Generations Oral History Project with the Brooklyn Historical Society. And we're doing this interview at the Brooklyn Historical Society. And why don't you just start off by telling me your full name, and where and when you were born?

JANET PINKOWITZ: OK, well, my full name, including my old middle name, I guess would be Janet Elizabeth Rhoads Pinkowitz. And, nowadays, I'm mostly Janet Pinkowitz, or sometimes I'll put in Janet Rhoads Pinkowitz, depending. And, let's see, my age -- is that what you were saying? (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No, just where and when you were born, yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: [date redacted for privacy] And I was born in Chongqing, China.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Chongqing? That's interesting. I've been to Chongqing.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Oh. And I've been there, obviously, at least once. (laughter) But after -- I don't remember. I mean, obviously, I was just an infant, so -- and we left there back -- let's see, probably within a couple of years, at least, and mostly lived in Canton -- it's now called Guangzhou. Have you been there, also?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No, I haven't.

JANET PINKOWITZ: I'm told that Chongqing is very big these days. It's just -- it's very different from, from what I've been told it was like before. But I remember nothing about it. (laughter) OK.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So, do you want to tell me something about your childhood, or describe your childhood?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Well, let's see. What I remember, in terms of my early childhood, is just -- I would say would be our time when we were living in Canton, in China. My family -- well, since I was born during -- still during World War II, and Chongqing was an area that was not overrun by the Japanese during World War II, after the war was over, we moved back to Canton, which is where my parents had lived before, with my brother. And so, I have vague memories of that. It was probably beginning with, maybe, when I was three or so -- three or four. And we lived on a college campus -- a university campus, because my father taught Chinese -- well, he taught English literature in the college. And so, we had a kind of a -- I think it was actually a pretty fancy house. It was -- because it was for university professors. And so, there was a cook and a gardener, and I had a -- an *amah*, or a sort of a servant or nursemaid -- someone that took care of me and took care of my brother. And so, I think it was a pretty easy, happy life over there.

And then I went to -- I have a vague recollection of going to the Chinese school, and that was near the campus. And -- but that's very vague. I'm really not sure. It's -- it becomes vaguer by the -- you know, by the month, I think. (laughter) And my brother, who is seven years older than me, went to a different school. He went to, obviously, a school for -- elementary school, or -- yeah, probably elementary school at that time. So, in terms of that, childhood -- it was mostly being taken care of by -- or looked after by the servant. And her name was Ah Hau, I believe. And my brother had his own -- had someone who looked after him. And we didn't really have too much to do with our parents, I don't think. We mostly were -- sort of lived more in our own world, to -- for the most -- for the most part, I think. I spent time sort of bothering the gardener, (laughter) you know, as he planted things, or did stuff. There was a -- another university professor who lived with his family down the road from us, again, on the -- [00:05:00] on the campus grounds. And I was good, good friends with the girl, or one of the girls in that family because we were about the same age. So, I would spend time with her, you know, in, in her, her house, as well. I think we played, like, water buffalo or something. You know, just -- as if we were cowboys and Indians. There were some kind of ca-- more wild patch of the -- of the university campus. And so, there was a little bit of

playing in, in the woods there, and just -- I guess regular kid, kid games. So -- and we ate a lot of rice, I think. (laughter)

I really don't have too much of a, a recollection of, of that period, because I was pretty, pretty young. There was a, a big porch or veranda with a screened-in porch. And I think my mother did a lot of knitting, so I believe I learned a little bit of knitting from, from her. I have, sort of, just vague recollections of that sort of... More, more having to do with locations than so much to do with interactions with people. It was just more sort of, kind of little fleeting impressions of, of things. So, so that was sort of the, the first part. And then, my father was given one year of home leave, or kind of like a sabbatical, I guess, or home lea-- well, home leave.

So, I think it was in 1948 and '49, we, we came back to the States. Because he, himself, was an American of, I guess, English or Welsh -- English -- the British Isles. He came from that, that famil-- that -- those -- that sort of person. And so -- and he was from Philadelphia to begin with. His grandfather, I think, was from the Harrisburg area, outside of -- (inaudible) to the west of Philly. So, for home leave, we came to -- we spent a year in Philadelphia, and just stayed in an apartment there. And my father's parents were both dead, but he had a first cousin whom we saw quite a bit of. You know, saw her, her and her husband, and her, her two sons. Because they were very close, my father and his first cousin. So, we -- I do have some memories of that, because the -- I think the apartment was small. It was a smallish, old apartment building on Rittenhouse Square which, I guess, is now sort of like a -- an up-- a popular spot in Philadelphia. It was nice then, and then it went through a pretty bad time, you know, where it was filled with junkies and winos and all. But now it's coming back up. I haven't gone to visit it at all, so I don't know. But when we were living there, I think I would have been maybe three and a half to four and a half or so. And so, I went to the -- a Quaker school. A Friend-- one of the Friends schools. And so -- and that was kind of a kindergarten, I guess, or pre-K -- I think kindergarten. And my brother also went to the upper grade. So, that's -- so, I have more memories of that, I think, just being in the school and taking naps, you know, for nap time. (laughter) And learning how to, you know, wash and -- you know, spending time washing hands in the bathroom, and sort of little, little things of that sort.

And so, that -- and that is where I apparently started to -- I switched over from Chinese to English. I do remember some story of my father's -- and -- which I'm not sure whether I have it right or whether it's just what I remember, because it's very hard to, [00:10:00] to really know about those things, I think. You know, sort of thinking about things going back. My recollection is that he told me that, when we were in Philadelphia, and we were -- there must have been some building where there was an elevator. And so, we would go up and down the elevator. And perhaps it was -- I don't know, it was some building where the door-- elevator man would, would say hello to me, or -- and to whoever it was. So, it must have been a f-- relatively familiar person. He, at some point, said hello. And I had previously only, probably not responded at all. But I think that, at some point, I, I said, you know, "Fine, thank you," or something. (laughter) Something like that -- I started speaking in English, and I, I don't know for sure, but I think that, then, when went back to China -- which was after a year -- I don't know if I spoke Chinese after that. I'm -- I just don't remember. The -- Ah Hau, the, the nursemaid would have spoken to me in Chinese. So, I'm sure I still understood it. But -- and my mother spoke to me in Chinese, but my father al-- I think always spoke English to me, although he had some -- he learned some Chinese when he was over there, but -- and I've heard people say that he knew, knew more than he -- than, than he pretended, in terms of Chinese. He probably just knew enough to get -- to get by if you were -- if were haggling with a shop -- you know, the store people.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right, yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: But he might have actually known a little bit more what they were saying than he pretended to know. So, when we went back... Well, I have a f-- a vague recollection of the boat coming, coming to this country. And I don't remember going back, but then, I know we did go back. So -- and then, we were there probably or maybe a year or less than a year, because that was during the period of the, the Communist takeover of China. They came down from the north, and then -- and, meanwhile, they drove the, the Nationalists, I guess -- Chiang Kai-shek and those people. They started -- you know, they were driving out, and most of them went to Taiwan afterwards. So, although my parents had wanted to -- had thought that when we went back that we would

just stay and -- I think because it was a, really, very nice life, and, you know, everybody was happy and all that. But it turned out that we really had to g-- to get out, because Americans were no longer -- were, were no longer welcome.

And my m-- so, it was a fairly difficult time, because I'm -- I think we -- although I didn't really know exactly what was going on, I know that it had something to do with the, the Communists coming in. And I think my parents tried to protect my brother and me from their concerns about everything. But I think it was -- it was still a, a difficult period. So, we -- then we d-- we left fairly -- in a fairly hurried fashion. My father packed up all his books, and -- into his crates, and, you know, shipped them -- shipped them back. And we -- well, I think they -- and we had some, some vases. He, he liked to collect vases, so those were all packed up. And there were a few -- a few things that they were able to, to put into crates, and to bring back -- to ship back. But it was a f-- I think it, it was stressful time for everybody. And so, then we came back. And we came back on the *President Wilson*, which was a big [00:15:00] steamship company the Pres-- it was called the President Lines. So, it a big -- one of those big ocean liners. And so, that was -- I have -- I have a better sense of that trip, because I was somewhat older, and it was pretty go-- exciting being on this big boat, and running around. And, and I do remember, for that time, we came in through the Golden Gate in, in San Francisco. And so, that was -- that was pretty exciting. So, all right, that's, that's my early childhood. DO you have any questions so far? (laughter) I've, I've been talking for -- going on and on. So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No. I was wondering how your father ended up in China.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Well, he had been in -- he had majored in English in, in college. He went to -- being from Philadelphia, he went to Penn for undergraduate. And then he went to Harvard for his master's, and then his mother took ill. She started suffering from a series of strokes. So then, he went back to Philadelphia to take care of her. And so, he completed his doctorate at Penn. And then, he had miscellaneous -- a couple of small -- a couple of teaching jobs at smaller colleges in the Pennsylvania area. But after his mother died, which I believe was in about 1931 or '32 -- and my father was born in 1900 -- so he -- I think he just wanted to do something different and more exciting. His first cousin

now had a small -- you know, she had a, a young family. So, she was much more focused on her family. And so he spent -- he didn't spend that much time with her.

And he had heard -- it must have been classmates. He had heard some stories about China from, from other people. For some reason, I feel that, you know Thornton Wilder -- wrote *Our Town*, the play? I think that his brother may have gone to China, and had some wild tales from other there, or... That's my recollection of what his first -- my father's first cousin told me, that, that he had heard about China, and how it was a really interesting place. And I believe there were -- there was a job -- there were jobs advertised by the, the university. And they were looking for American professors to go over and teach there. So, I think he just decided to go, because he was kind of at loose ends. He had freedom, because his mother had, you know, passed away. And he didn't have much in the way of family ties anymore. So, I think he was a bit of an adventurer, in some way. (laughter) He was always quite -- certainly an eccentric, in some way.

And so, that's... And then, when he got there, this university was one that catered to, I think, sort of the upper-class Chinese -- the wealthier Chinese families. And so, for instance, students who enrolled in the university spoke English in class -- at least they spoke English in, in his English literature classes. And I think they were definitely from well-to-do families. And my mother had taken secretarial courses when... She didn't go to college. She went to a -- I think to a missionary school, and then to a Methodist missionary school. And after she graduated from high school, she took courses in typing and shorthand and all that sort of thing. So, she got a job working at the university, and she was the secretary for the president. And he, he was a -- [00:20:00] he was not Chinese. He was -- I think he was an American. So, I think it was not uncommon in that -- in that time period, at least, for there to be quite a bit of mixing of -- especially for the Western men to meet Chinese women. I think that familiar with -- of my parents' friends, that there were at least a few where they were -- they -- they Americans met Chinese women, and they got married. And that's what happened with my -- with my father's -- my father and mother's case.

So, so that was -- I don't know whether she continued to work at the university after my brother was born. I'm -- I never asked her, so I don't know. When we had a



sort of hair-raising situation during -- well, during the war, my father had, had -- was imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp in Hong Kong. My, my, my -- my parents were, were in Hong Kong with my brother when Hong Kong fell to the Japanese in World War II. So -- and my father being a -- you know, the, the non-Chinese, he was -- he was put into a camp. And so, then, my mother and my brother went into the interior of China, to Chongqing. That's, that's that connection, because that was not held by the Japanese. And then, when my father was finally released from the camp, he, he was released in what you'd call -- what -- they had these prisoner-of-war exchanges. And so, he was one -- the Americans were released in exchange for -- I think for some Japanese.

So, my father was sent home. And he stayed with his first cousin in Philadelphia, and waited for a way to get back to, to China, which he eventually did. It took a number of months, but meanwhile, my mother -- who had these secretarial skills -- had gotten a job with the US Army base in Chongqing. So, she was able to make good use of her, her typing skills and all of that. So, she worked there, and my brother lived there with her. And then my father, eventually, came back. And after they -- the happy reunion, I guess I was conceived. (laughter) And then, finally, we came -- we went to, to Canton, to resume university life. That was -- that had been the, the -- you know, that's what everybody was, was counting on. So...

But, in terms of living there, I just have very vague impressions. Like, I do remember always saying to people, when they would ask me, that it was very dirty. You know, it was very dirty, and I'm sure it was. I mean, Canton is a city -- you know, a bustling, industrial city. It was -- it was probably very, you know, not well cared for. So, I had that impression. But I was mostly on the campus grounds. I didn't go -- I mean, it would have been unusual for me to go into the city, I think.

But, you know, then we, we came back, and we settled in Claremont, California, which is just east of LA. And we were there for a couple of years while my father was looking for work back in this country. Because this would have been in 1950 or '51. And it was not a good time for someone to be looking for work, because it was during the McCarthy Era. And he, being married to a Chinese, and having spent several years in China -- that was not -- you know, that was not good -- a good time for him. Meanwhile

-- so, he traveled a bit, looking for work. And then he finally found something in Springfield, Mass, which is where the *Webster's Dictionary* [00:25:00] company -- the, the real one -- the -- I mean, the main one -- the, the (laughter) -- is based. And he was able to get a job with that company, as an editor of definitions. So -- and then, we moved to Massachusetts, when I was in third grade, for, for that.

So, in, in California, there were other people who were -- you know, who weren't just Ameri-- what I think of as Americans, you know? There were -- because there were definitely some, some Chinese, or Asians, certainly in LA. So, that was -- I've -- I, I don't really -- I mean, back then, I don't really have much impression of, of feeling different from other, other people. And I think, when we were in Philadelphia during that one-year sabbatical, I was too young to be aware of anything, you know, at all. So, it's just -- I don't -- I just don't have much memory, or, if things happened, I don't -- I don't remember, you know, or I've just pushed them -- pushed them back, I think. I don't th-- I think when you're very young it's hard to -- I mean, I don't know that people tease you that much and that sort of thing. I would -- I mean, that's my impression. Or maybe I just don't remember these things.

So -- and then, when we came -- but when we came to the East, and settled in Springfield, Massachusetts, and I went to the -- the local elementary school, then I was much more conscious of being the one person that was -- that looked Asian at all. And so -- and for that I would -- you'd get teased sometimes. Not in school, but sometimes walking home from school or -- always by boys, it seemed -- (laughter) not by -- not by girls so much. So, that was kind of my -- I suppose my first real sense of feeling somewhat different from other -- from other people. My brother looks -- has fewer Asian features than me, and he doesn't have the, the sort of -- the epicanthal fold, or whatever it's called. He's got, you know, a bigger nose, you know? His lips are fuller, and he's, he's quite t-- he's about six feet tall, so most people don't think of Chinese as being, you know, that tall. Although my mother was tall for her generation, and her father was tall. I think it may have to do with -- well, she was from South China, so I, I don't know -- where they're not super-tall. I think they're taller in the -- well, I'm, I'm just -- I don't know. I haven't done -- I haven't read enough about it. But, at any rate, there is -- our

height is from our mother's side, actually. I suppose, too, my father, who was -- who was about five-eight, so, he was fairly, fairly short.

So, when we -- so, that was always a big thing for me, that my brother Edward was -- you know, looked much more white than I did. And I was kind of jealous of him for that, because I didn't want to look different from anybody else. And I think I've told Emily, my daughter, I used to, like, pull on my nose to try to be -- (laughter) have it be more substantial, so I wouldn't -- so I would look more like other people, and things like that. That, that took a while, to get over the nose pulling. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Were you aware of your family being different, or just you being different?

JANET PINKOWITZ: I was very aware of my mother being different. I was aware of my father being different because he -- because he was -- especially in Springfield, Mass, there were -- there were (laughter) -- well, he -- at the company where he worked, there were plenty of people with advanced degrees, who -- or who were [00:30:00] experts in their field, because they -- the dictionary needs people who actually know, know stuff -- you know, know what words actually mean, (laughter) and, and provide good definitions of them, and, you know, are, are aware of subtle, subtle differences in, in meaning, and all of that. So, so that company had a very strong -- large number of very intelligent and rather eccentric people. Because these were, generally, people who didn't want to, or weren't able to, get jobs in academia. They know that they just had -- there was something that, that they didn't -- wouldn't fit in so well in a university/college environment, in that kind of teaching setup.

And my father, I think, was -- although he had been a teacher, he, he was also rather eccentric. So, he was also different from other people, I felt. He always -- his English was impeccable. He always sounded a little bit as if he had an English accent, because he was very -- he was very much an Anglophile in his clothing, his -- well, really fond of, sort of, a tweedy -- the tweedy look. And rather professorial, and he would walk, sort of, with -- just swinging his umbrella like a proper English -- Englishman sort of thing. (laughter) So, he was already a little bit weird. And, and he had a dri-- he had a, a drinking problem, so that added to his -- just his... And he had problems readapting to

American culture after being away. I mean, he left here in about 1935 or so, and he didn't return, truly, until about 1951. And that was a very -- there was a big -- a big, big change in -- you know, in, in this country, and just in terms of where he was at, in his own life. So, he was already weird. (laughter) I mean, he was definitely stranger to me than the parents -- the fathers of children that I met through elementary school, because they seemed to be more just kind of happy-go-lucky, you know, all-American fathers. So -- or so it seemed to me.

And then, my mother, because she was really not -- this was a strange country to her. When she came, she really had to try to figure out how to -- how to fit in. And my parents were not very sociable. My father's -- all -- his friends were all friends where he worked. And so, he had his, his work friends. They would drink their two -- they would have their two-martini lunches, you know? (laughter) And then go back and sort of doze at their desks. And -- whereas my mother really didn't have any social -- any -- anyone that she could -- anyone that she -- who was her close friend. Because she was real-- there were very few Chinese in Springfield -- very few.

So, I took piano -- she had taken piano lessons in China, and then -- and I had -- she had taught me piano when I was very little. And then, I started taking piano lessons also. So, my mother and my piano teacher became somewhat friendly, so that was one link to, kind of, the outside -- you know, the outside world. But I think she was rather lonely and -- my mother was. And then, I so much wanted to feel that I was an American that I think I really pushed, pushed away the sort of things that I felt to be Chinese and, you know, non-American. So, although I did like Chinese food, there wasn't -- my mother would occasionally try to cook something, we, we didn't -- we couldn't -- we didn't have ingredients there. I mean, we had -- I mean, she was able to get a hold of some, you know, soy sauce that wasn't very good quality soy sauce. And -- but she had not cooked back in China, because we had a cook. You know, and she had to learn [00:35:00] how to cook. And so, although I liked the, the little bit of Chinese cooking that we -- that we had, she basically had to learn how to cook sort of plain, American-style cooking, out of the -- *The Joy of Cooking*, the old -- you know, that old standby. (laughter)

And so, I just -- I really was not as -- I wish that I had been more tolerant and understanding of her -- you know, where she -- her difficulties, you know, kind of adapting to this life. But I was just a kid, and I didn't -- you know, I didn't -- I just didn't think about it. And then, you know, when we would have -- at school, we would have -- sometimes parents would come to school for special events and such. And I never wanted my mother to wear her, her Chinese dresses, which, of course, were really beautiful. In fact, the, the kind -- you know, the high collar with the -- sort of the, the -- sort of the shoulder, but usually they would a-- sort of, there'd be an opening here, and you could -- it's sort of the classic old-style Chinese dress, very simple and very -- lovely fabrics, and all that. And she had some of those, and -- but I was always afraid she -- that she was going to wear one of them. (laughter) I wanted her to wear something like an American shirtwaist dress, that kind of thing. So, so that was -- you know, that was something I regretted later, that I didn't embrace more of that -- you know, that part of my heritage. Because it was just trouble for me, really, looking -- feeling and looking different. I didn't -- I didn't want to -- I just wanted to look like everybody else.

And then, people would ask me where I was from, and then -- or that they would say, "Well, what are you?" You know, and I would say, "Well, I'm an American." You know, that's -- and then, then they'd have to say, "Well, well..." Tried to think of some way to figure out what -- why it was that I didn't look like them. (laughter) So -- and then, with my brother looking more American than me, it was kind of just -- again, there was that kind of contrast between him and me. So, it was -- I think especially with the teasing and when I was in grade school, I would just adopt a technique of kind of staring those boys down, like, just -- I wouldn't say anything, (laughter) but I would just kind of glower at them. And, and then, I think they would get, like, "Gee, she's weird." You know, like... (laughter) And they would sort of go off and leave me alone. Or sometimes I would pretend that I didn't understand English, which is not a -- that's a useful thing to have. I don't think I could -- I've never -- I mean, I haven't done anything like that in 40 years -- for 45 years. (laughter)

So, so that was kind of my grade school. And then --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- I think that, by the time I got -- finally got into -- of high-school age, I started -- I started to -- started to come to terms with, with my, my Chinese heritage a little bit. But I did-- I did not embrace it. I just did not. And I didn't ask my mother stuff about her own experience. I really knew nothing about her, her own early years except -- I mean, I'm -- I think my father may have told me things, a little bit about her, because he must have had -- I don't -- I -- maybe she shared some of that with him. But with my father -- because, as I said, he had some trouble with alcohol, that would -- sometimes he would be more likely to, to talk about [00:40:00] the past. And those things -- more if he'd had something to drink, and then, for me, as a youngster, I really didn't want to -- I didn't -- I didn't want to, to be near him, you know, or around -- be engaged in conversation with him at those times. So, it was -- that kind of information -- I, I could have gotten more information out of him, I think, or -- had I been, at that time, more interested. And also, if I weren't so concerned or -- if I weren't so uncomfortable with, you know, his having -- you know, needing something to drink in order to, to then, sort of, talk about the past, and this and that. So, it was just complicated, you know, in that way.

I, I really only started to, to feel kind of good about, you know, being half Chinese, really once I got to college. And it was partly Emily's father, Andrew, who, who was just one of your New York City Jewish kids (laughter) who -- with his -- his parents were both from the Lower East Side, and I think either Polish or Russian, you know, of -- you know, not -- they were both born in New York. But I think that their parents may well have been born, you know, in the old country, so to speak. But Andrew, Emily's dad, was much -- he, he really thought it was cool that I was, you know, half Chinese. Because he -- you know, maybe because of growing up in New York and being much more exposed to so many -- you know, many different cultures and, and seeing all that wonderful Chinese art in the -- at the Metropolitan, you know, Museum. And, you know, just all of that sort of stuff. He, he kind of, in a way, helped me start to embrace that, that side of my, my -- that culture. I mean, that part of me. But, you know, college is pretty late to be -- to be starting to, like, face that, that aspect of oneself.

So, it made -- me, now, talking about it, I feel that my -- I think -- I think I remember that my father -- I must have -- there must have been some conversation with my parents, and maybe with people that were over that -- sort of asking me whether or not anyone ever asked me about my, my Chinese side of things. And -- because I do have some recollection that I had said something to him that, "Well, actually, it's -- I, I kind of like it," You know, "That I'm feeling -- I'm feeling kind of pro-- more proud or good about that side of things." So -- and I don't think that that conversation was, was after I went to college. So, it might have been more in high school -- you know, I was getting, getting older. And they were -- nobody was teasing me anymore. (laughter) So - - but I did go to a girl's high school. I didn't go to a -- you know, a -- so, the -- and I wasn't around a lot of boys. So, I think it just changes when you get older. The young -- young boys are more likely to, to tease people and -- than, than older, older ones.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I'm also just thinking about what you said, in terms of the years coming during McCarthy, and how, like -- how the politics of the time also probably really shaped -- and the changing politics of the time, also.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: By the time you got older, it was more acceptable.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yes, yeah. Well, one thing I do remember is that, at one point, my father was looking for -- trying to see whether he could find other work. And he had applied for a -- there was a job opening down in Georgia or the Carolinas or something, working for a text-- a textbook company. I don't know if -- I don't remember which one, but one of the big ones. And so, I think he actually went down there, and in-- and interviewed -- went for an interview there. But he decided against taking the job because he was concerned about, you know, what [00:45:00] -- how my mother and my brother and I would be. How we -- you know, whether we would be welcomed or not, you know? And so, that was something that I, I do recall. I mean, at that point, I think I would have been in junior high or maybe even high school. So it was later -- you know, later on. But in the South, of course, you know, things are slower to -- in terms of changing. We once took a trip -- I guess when we went to see the Civil War battlefields, or something. We went, like, all the way down to, to Maryland and Virginia and... But

the -- there was something about a, a bathroom -- you know, which bathroom to go to. Because, at that time -- well, this was probably in the early '60s. And there were -- you know, there were some bathrooms that were labeled "colored" and "white," you know? And I remember thinking, "Oh, what am I supposed to do?" You know, "Where am I supposed to go?" So, it's kind of -- so, I can imagine that, with my parents, that they might have been, you know, just concerned about that environment, just especially in the South. Because I think there would have been much less of that kind of intermingling of, of races there.

So -- but it was strange in Springfield, because, really, there were a few Chinese, but they were very -- because there were maybe one or two Chinese restaurants in a very small area of town. I mean, there are Chinese almost everywhere, I think. And are -- in almost any city, I think, you'll find some. And so -- but my -- it's not as if my mother went to seek them out. I think she would have felt that they were of a different class of people than, than her. Just would -- that would -- you know, that was not something that she ever considered doing. So, Springfield really was just -- it was unusual, you know, for, for me. And I did feel different, and people, you know, would look at me a little -- you know, a bit. When I got to college, there were more, more Chinese. There was a Chinese classmate in -- living in my -- the same dormitory as me. I think -- but I do think she was the only other Chinese, in fact, at that -- in, in that dorm -- in that dorm. There must have been some others, but there still were not too many Chinese. There, there may have been more Indian -- people of the Indian (inaudible) extraction, actually, though I'm not sure about that either.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What college was this?

JANET PINKOWITZ: I went to Smith. So, that was --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So, nearby Spring--

JANET PINKOWITZ: Pardon?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Nearby Springfield.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yes, yes. But I -- and I was a -- my parents splurged, and I was an actual boarder -- boarding student. There were -- there were day students. I mean, I could have gone as a day student. It was only a 45-minute drive. But that was never



discussed, really. They -- even though it would have been much more reasonably priced for them, but they -- you know, I assumed that I would live there, and they did -- they did, as well. And so -- and it was almost overwhelmingly white, I think, at the time. It's changed a lot, I'm sure. I mean, it's got many, many, many more students from foreign countries. And, in fact, I think it's made as its -- I don't know where you went to college, but -- I mean, it's -- where did -- where did you go?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I went to Sarah Lawrence.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Oh, I see. OK. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, well, a place like Smith has -- because it's, it's still a women's college, it's kind of suffered a bit, I mean, in terms of desirability. So, it's, it's had to reach out to students -- international students, where, I think, it still has a very high rec-- you know, its high-degree of recognition --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- you know? And, and I think it's probably still a great place, but it's, it's suffered a lot as a r-- as a result of not, not being coed. And so --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: But, at any rate, that's just there.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So, you were saying, in high school you started to embrace...?

JANET PINKOWITZ: I think so, maybe just a little bit, you know? (laughter) Because I feel that that [00:50:00] conversation with my father and his friends where -- I don't think that would have been in college. I think it would have been in high school. So, I think that when people asked me where I was from, I start-- I stopped just saying I was an American. You know, I started saying that I was born in China, and then people would ask me about it. And then, I do remember, I would often say that it was kind of a -- that, you know -- that, that I remembered it as being rather dirty. You know, again, that, that was kind of something that I remembered about it. But I never went into any kind of detail about anything. I guess my memories are, are so, you know, slight -- or so, so fleeting, of there -- of that -- from that time period.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Do you think it was similar for different -- for your brother? Or his -- you, you sort of sa-- have said that he looked different than you, but he was also older, so would have more memories, and...?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, I think he remembers a lot more, but his memories are very selective, as he has confessed (laughter) himself. So, it's been a bit frustrating for me to ask him, "Well, what do you -- what do you remember?" (laughter) And -- because I would like to try to, you know, salvage some of that time for myself, too. And -- but we have a somewhat -- we've never been extremely close. I know he cares a, a lot about me, and I care about him. But, because he was seven years older, that's quite a difference in terms of, of age. And then, he was also a lot more outgoing in high school, and he had a lot more friends than me. And they were just -- you know, it was a... I don't know whether people ever even were aware that he -- that he had a Chinese mother. I mean, maybe close, close friends would. But, looking at his, his high-school yearbook, you -- one wouldn't necessarily know something. I'd -- I always feel that I can tell if some-- if, if there's -- if there are -- someone is of mixed race. Or, I always -- you know, I think -- and Emily and I have talked about this -- you know, there's a certain kind of blending -- or of the -- it just -- it just looks a little -- there's a little bit of a difference, which... And she has said the same thing -- that people will say, "So, what's the story?" (laughter) You know what I mean? "What are you?" In a -- and in a way that -- with my brother, I think, I would see it -- that kind of -- the mixture. But it's not -- it's not -- it's not that blatant, at all. So, I don't know.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So, do you think because it's less visible for him -- how did he take it on, or did he take it on differently than you?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Well, that's interesting, because when he went to college, he majored in Chinese history. So -- and he and my mother were quite close. They were -- and she -- they were just -- they were very close. And I think it's partly from pr-- may have stemmed from his time with my mother, way back when he was just a little, little kid. And he and my mother were together, and my father was at the -- in the camp, and then had to be home. And he was probably gone for, perhaps, almost a year. So, the two

-- the two of them would have been -- you know, were, were very bon-- they really bonded. And I think it stayed, you know, through -- throughout my mother's life.

But, in terms of college, my, my father had encouraged him to think about Chinese as, as a major, or Chinese history, and all that. Because, you know, China was beginning to come up in the world, and he, he graduated in 1960. He went to Yale, and Yale was a -- actually, a, a place -- there was a -- there were some very distinguished professors of Chinese history, like, some of the [Wrights] I think. And then, they had a very active Chinese-language program, [00:55:00] and the Army -- I'm trying -- the Army Language School, I think, may, may have been at Yale. And there's a whole Yale in China program. So, there's been a long connection between those -- Yale and, and China. So, he, he followed my father's advice, and he majored in Chinese history, took intensive Chinese. He learned both Mandarin and, and Cantonese. And, and so, so that was interesting, because he is the one that has -- although the Chinese are often surprised if he starts, you know, making -- requesting things off the menu, and -- in a Chinese restaurant, you know? (laughter) They're -- they always, like, "Oh!" You know, "You speak Chinese so well." So, they tend to look to me first, you know, to... (laughter) But I say, "No, no, he'll, he'll order instead."

So, so he is the one that really was -- became -- embraced the, the culture, and -- or at least the study of the culture. And he is the one who has kept it -- kept up, or kept the connection between us and the -- my mother's relatives, who are still in Hong Kong. Because he can speak, and he can write. And then -- and he has a very... So, it's just much more comfortable for him to have interactions with them. When we went to Hong Kong about six, seven -- six or seven years ago, my brother was out there teaching for, for a couple of semesters at a university in Hong Kong. And so, I took that -- I chose that time to go out to visit him, and actually Emily and my son Ben went, briefly, as well. And so, we met all of those relatives, you know, of my mother's out there. And then we had a big dinner, and all of that type of thing. But it was my brother who would -- who was definitely the main person talking to them. They, they spoke Chinese. The younger ones spoke English fine. But it -- I still felt awkward, you know, with them, whereas he could lapse into -- or they would lapse into Chinese with him.

And, and he is the -- he is the one who, who still communicates with them, somewhat. And I have -- I have much more anxiety about, about even attempting to do that. I'm then one who keeps track of the relatives on my father's side. (laughter) So, I, I fill my brother in on who the various cousins are, or the cousins' children. So, we've kind of divvied up the -- those responsibilities (laughter) in that way. So -- but I have to say that, once I came to New York, you know, it was like -- there was a -- it was a very different scene, because there are just so many -- such a variety of different cultures and people, and there's plenty of Chinese, and Koreans, Japanese. You know, plenty of people with dark hair, you know? (laughter) And I live on the -- I've always -- well, aside from living in Brooklyn just briefly, Emily's dad and I moved to the Upper West Side early on. So, that's -- it was just very -- a real mix of cultures there. And then, after I started working at Columbia, which was back in 1983, they were a very, very strong presence of Asians. So, probably more Asians, at this point, than non-Asians, I would say. So, it's kind of like, "Gee, there's already -- there are so many Asians around here." (laughter) You know, I, I actually -- it's -- and they are -- you know, they're, they're very hip. They seem to be very -- you know, very -- they're -- I, I mean, I'm, I'm a lit-- I'm generalizing, of course. But they just seem like they're very cool, very with it, you know, and very savvy. Not, not, not like someone who is a first-generation -- [01:00:00] a first-born Chinese American.

So, after coming to New York, I just stopped thinking -- I really stopped thinking of myself as being, you know, Chinese -- you know, half Chinese, half, half American, or half, you know, British Isles, sort of, American. I just -- I just don't -- I generally don't think about it at all. And I'm not sure whether I should or not, (laughter) but I just -- I mean, I don't speak any -- English is my language. It's my -- I don't think I speak with any kind of accent. And my mother spoke with a bit of an, an accent, which I, I didn't really -- I wasn't really aware of until my ex-husband, after he met her, commented on the fact that, "Oh, she has her -- has quite a strong Chinese accent." Because he was hearing her completely separate from any long history of having been her daughter or anything. So, so, so that was an eye-opener for me, because I would never have thought of that. But it makes sense. I mean, she learned English probably in, in middle school or

high school. So, that would be perfectly normal, not to -- not to -- I mean, it would be normal for her -- there -- to be a trace of the Chinese -- the influence of Chinese. But, I mean, in New York, everybody is just so -- that's just -- you, you just are who you are, I feel. That -- if you can speak -- if you have a good command of, of English, and know your way around, and know what you want, and all of that, and you're not a tourist. And so --

# END OF AUDIO FILE

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JANET PINKOWITZ: [00:00:00] That's just -- so, that -- I guess that's why I really don't think about, about it at all. I'm -- I don't know whether that's just that I've buried it somehow, or it's just, (laughter) just kind of with time that... Well, I, I -- you know, I think, probably, I, I used to be, be aware, or consider what other people might think when my children were smaller, because, you know, seeing other people seeing my kids with me -- Emily, in particular, looks -- you know, unfortunately, doesn't look as Chinese, you know, (laughter) as I -- as I. She's, she's a, a lovely-looking person, but it's like, I wouldn't have -- it would have been nice for her to have a little more of the Chinese in her. (laughter) But she's -- you know, and she is what she is, and it's, it's all right. I'm not -- you know, I'm not disappointed at all in, in her appearance. But I think just that, for her, seeing her with me, I, I did think, at that point, well, I wonder what people think, you know? Who am I? Am I the babysitter, you know, or...? But that's where people are looking at you, with, with something. And, and I guess I feel that that would be true even now. That, if Emily and I walked down the street together, you know, and... I suppose -- I mean, I, I know I'm her mother, you know? And she -- we have -- I feel we clearly have a, you know, mother-daughter, sort of, interaction. You know, the...

So, I suppose I've... You know, and every now and then, I may think about it, but very rarely. You know, very, very rare-- rarely. If I meet new people -- for instance, if either of my kids introduces me to their friends, I may be slightly -- I might, might think about it for a second. Oh, you know, I wonder if they know that -- you know, that -- I

think they probably do know, but... And I'm, I'm very -- I feel very proud now, to -- (laughter) or glad to be -- you know, that I'm half Chinese. And, so -- because I know my kids are, are very -- you know, they're glad to be this whole mix of things. And so, there's nothing to be ashamed of or ambivalent of, or anything. I think they're very, very happy, you know, with their heritage. And so, there's that.

And then, I was thinking of something else, too, that had to do with... Well, I can't... Oh, oh yeah -- my last name of Pinkowitz, you know, which is definitely, you know, not Chinese at all. My, my maiden name was Rhoads -- it's spelled R-H-O-A-D-S, which is the -- a common way of spelling Rhoads in the mid-Atlantic states, or Pennsylvania in particular. Because a lot of -- well, my father felt that there might be some Welsh. There might be some Welsh ancestors, and, and a lot of Welsh settled in Pennsylvania -- the Welsh farmers. And there were Welsh Quakers. I think that might be ancestors on my father's side, apparently were -- came over with William Penn, and they -- which is -- he was definitely a Quaker. So, so, they go way, way, way, way back, you know, on that -- on that side of the family. And I was always proud of that. I mean, that, "OK, well, I am definite," you know, "on my father's side (laughter) I go back to the colonies. I could be a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution," which was not a very good thing to be proud about, you know, back, back in, in the days when they were very prejudiced, prejudiced against blacks. But now, I guess they're very OK. But I wouldn't put that on my résumé. (laughter)

But my -- since my maiden name was Rhoads, like, people are -- already were a little bit surprised of -- when they would hear my full name, you know, being Rhoads. Because that didn't seem Chinese at all. And then, when my -- when I took my ex-husband's name of Pinkowitz, and that was even more -- one step, you know? You know, "Oh, why -- what?" (laughter) [00:05:00] So -- because, when I worked in the -- I used to work in the music library at Lincoln Center -- the New York Public Library -- that was my first library job in New York. And we had a telephone reference desk, where people could call and ask questions about stuff, and it was -- it was very -- it was a very busy information desk, because there was no internet and that sort of thing back, back in the '60s and the early '70s. (laughter) So, people -- so, once someone called, and

normally we didn't give our names. It was better to, to remain anonymous. But someone called and -- about something, and I, I gave her the information, and then she asked -- she said she'd be coming in, and I -- and then she asked me my name. You know, she kind of was -- she was rather insistent upon it, so I said, "Oh, well, I'm Janet Pinkowitz," you know? And she -- so -- and that was fine. Well, she came in. She heard my name as -- she thought my name was Janet Pinkelstein. And it was close. (laughter) It's sort of one of those non-WASP-y names. And so, I had the -- and they figured that it must be me, Janet Pinkowitz. And so, I went out to talk to her. And so, she said -- so I -- said "Hello, you're..." You know, "I'm..." You know, "I'm -- you asked -- you asked for me?" And she said, "No, you're not Janet Pinkelstein." (laughter) You know, and I had to say, "Well, yes, yes, I am." You know, I knew -- but, except, I really wasn't --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, right. (laughter)

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- Pinkelstein. I was Pinkowitz. But it was kind of one of those memorable things. But, but that's just -- because so much of my work in libraries has been over the phone, because I worked -- when I worked at Columbia, in the law library, it was primar-- almost entirely a phone thing. People would call. Now it would be mostly email, but they'd call when they needed the stuff from the law library. So, I think people often had an, an impression of me based on my name. Or at least they certainly weren't expecting me to, to look, you know, part Asian.

So, if we had big law-library -- New York law firm, law-library gatherings, I would often prepare them, and say, "Oh, are you going to the such-and-such event?" You know, and if they were going, said, "Well, maybe we'll meet." You know, "I'm..." You know, "I'm kind of..." You know, "I'm a lit-- I'm a little bit Chinese -- Chinese-y looking." You know, "So, so, I don't want you to be surprised." You know, it was just kind of -- because it was always like, "Oh!" You know, there would be a little bit of a, like, you know -- I mean, it was -- it would be a pleasant surprise, not, not a... But it was always like, "Oh!" And then, that -- then they -- you could see that they would be, like, thinking slight-- like, "Oh, well, what's the story here?" Just -- plus, just getting -- when you talk on the phone, you -- you know, you have a impression of someone. At least, I always do. You know, are they blonde? Are they brunette? You know what are they,

this and that. And then, so, it was always -- you know, so -- but that's just been fun. I haven't -- you know, I've never felt any kind of, like, "Oh, dear. They're going to think something bad about me, or anything."

So -- but the name thing is just one of those -- it's just being that much farther removed from my -- from the Chinese side of things. But it's just more like -- it's just fun to, to have additional -- just to add that to my, whatever, complicated history, I guess.  
(laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's a Jewish name -- Pinkowitz -- right?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yes, yeah. Yeah, Russian, or Polish, or... I forget which -- it might be that they're, they're Russian. It's like Pin-- Pinkovitch, or the vitz, or the... The -- that, that ending, I think, refers to -- as if it were "son of such-and-such." You know, just as -- I guess, with Scottish or Irish --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- it's the "Mc-This, Mc-That."

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah. (laughter)

JANET PINKOWITZ: You know, that sort of thing. So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Did -- so, your husband -- ex-husband was Jewish?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: So then, tell me a little bit -- I talked to Emily about -- you know, about being raised, and her childhood, and stuff. But, yeah, why don't you tell me what it was like to have this mixed family?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Well, the religious part was, was [00:10:00] interesting because I think when Andrew and I got married, we never really talked about religion and what, what we would do, and all of that. And I think that's probably a mistake. Either -- that's always -- it's always a good conversation to have, I believe, with, with someone that you're marrying. (laughter) We may have just felt, "Oh, well, that will all just sort itself out." But it didn't, really.

I mean -- I mean, I was raised Christian. My father was -- I think both my parents were really atheists, but my father was probably a Methodist or something or other. And, you know, he was just -- he was not a Quaker, but he did -- his parents went to church, I



believe. He and -- but, after I was born, they arranged for my father -- they -- oh, the, the family that lived down the, the road from us, at the university -- the father in that family was an Anglican priest. And he also taught chemistry or something. He was -- he had the academic credentials. So, they asked him to be my godfather. I don't know whom they asked to be the godfather of my brother. But at any rate, I had this, this -- an actual churchman who was my godfather. So, he -- and they were family friends and all that, for quite some time. So, I was actually confirmed in the Episcopal Church, after my godfather kind of inquired of my parents as to, "Well," you know, "will be she be -- is she going to get confirmed? Does she -- does she go to church?" I mean, he was doing, sort of, godfather-like things, you know? (laughter)

So, they -- you know, neither of my parents had been especially churchgoing, but then they signed me up for a confirmation class, and I got confirmed. And, and then I sang -- I like to sing. And so, I sang in the church choir, and stuff like that. That was my big -- my main thing, because I liked the -- liked wearing the robe, and I liked singing, and the music, and all of that. And I was raised to -- we celebrated Christmas. I mean, that was the -- it was a -- you know, the holiday -- Christmas and Easter. And Thanksgiving was the, the big family holiday. But then, with Andrew, of course, he was raised Jewish. And he went to Hebrew school, and got -- he got bar mitzvah-d. And he liked the, the history and the heritage and, sort of, all of the s-- all of those -- the stories that go with the -- the s-- the stories in the Bible, and, and all of that. So, the way things worked, we, we could celebrate Christmas, just because I've -- that's what I was used to doing. But I never talked about what Christianity was all about. You know, I really didn't know very much about it. I didn't know the, the Bible stories especially. It was just like, "Oh, well, we have this holiday," you know? (laughter) That's -- we can have a tree. I liked having a tree, and giving -- and we had some, some presents. And so, it wasn't a very serious religious event. It wasn't a religious event. It was more a cultural event for me. And Andrew was definitely non-- not partial to Christmas at all. I mean, he would -- they never had a -- unlike some Jews, Jews, where they will have Christmas trees, or even celebrate Christmas, and -- that would have been like, sort of, heretical, I

think, in his family. And he was really pretty anti-Christian. He was most -- he would -- had most -- almost entirely Jewish friends.

And so, it was a clash of cultures, I think. But we would celebrate the Jewish holidays and -- which I like. I like the, the fact of all of these things going back so many, many -- many, many years. And, and I like the -- that historical aspect of things. So, it was -- that part, I was glad to have. I was -- I was glad -- it was good for me to learn about what the different -- what some of the different holidays were. And I always have loved Passover and the Seder, and, and, [00:15:00] you know, reading, reading from the *Haggadah*, and... So, it was a much more -- they received a much -- much more of a foundation in, in the, the Jewish religion than they ever got from, from the Christian. Because I just -- I always felt pretty ambivalent about it. I'm just not -- I'm not religious myself. I'm not -- I don't -- I'm not -- I don't consider myself a Christian. I feel I just have a -- but I have -- that's my heritage, nevertheless. You know, that I -- on my father's side.

So, we -- so, the, the Jewish holidays were actually -- I really liked them, because they seemed -- because it's something that just had more, you know, real substance to them, in a way. And so, that was -- you know, that was fine, I felt. You know, that was good. But, for instance, neither Ben or Emily was, was bar mitzvah-ed. I think we felt, well, they can decide when they grow up. But people don't usually decide -- or, are, are channeled, I think, in a, a particular way, as at least suggested to them. And there -- there's a modeling involved. So, so we kind of copped out, I think, on that issue of -- the issue of religion. And Andrew was tolerant of their Christmas tree. (laughter) And I, I liked the, the Jewish holidays. So, it was a bit of an issue, I think, because Andrew's father did ask -- (inaudible) -- did, did ask about, well, you know, is Ben going to be bar mitzvah-ed, and all of that? And I think that Ben went to a lot of bar mitzvahs, you know, because he had a lot of friends who were Jewish. And so, they'd have the, the big party, and this and that. So, he went to quite a few. I don't know whether he ever -- I, I felt that, if there were going to be a discussion about it, it would need to be between Andrew and, and his son, about that. And then, with Emily, she didn't go -- there were not as many bar mitzvahs. I think that she had more of a mix of, of friends, you know,

some Jewish, some not Jewish. So it wasn't as big a, a thing for, for her, one way or the other, I don't think.

So -- but, I mean, I do feel that it would have been good if we had had some kind of discussion about it, and just... But it would be -- because I -- I mean, just personally now, I just think that it's nice to -- it's good to at least be presented with, with options of... And, but, I don't know -- I don't know about schooling, and the particular one religion or another. I'm just not sure how I -- how I would feel about it. So, we, we sort of skirted the issue, I would say, except for celebrating some of those holidays, you know? That was the way it seemed to me.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Did you talk about your Chinese heritage with your children, or was that part of...?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Almost never, I would say. And I'm -- that was part of me not feeling -- I didn't know much about it really, because I hadn't grilled my, my mother, you know, way back. Again, I, I feel sorry that I didn't, asking her -- ask her more questions. And she was not the talkative type, at all. I think she just was, was glad to be able to get through -- you know, to, to live her life and not... I don't know. If I had asked her, I don't know whether she would have welcomed the opportunity to talk to me about it. I just don't -- I just don't -- I don't know, because I didn't. Because I was -- well, she died when I was 21. I was just, just barely 21. So, I think the, the time for me to have asked her would have been in my twenties and forward. I think I would have been much more [00:20:00] interested and more comfortable with asking her, whereas, you know, when -- I was still just very ambivalent about, about, about her -- you know, that heritage, and her, her -- the Chinese heritage. I think I did remember that she was, supposedly, descended from Confucius. You know, that that was the -- that I... So, that's kind of, like, "OK, yes, I can be a member of the DAR, but Confucius-ism is a much better person to be defend-- descended from than the (laughter) Daughters of the American Revolution. So, I mean, I was kind of proud of that. But that's just -- you know, that was just...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Is that something she told you?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yes. And -- but it was -- I mean, I don't remember the, the event of her telling -- you know, of her telling me. So, it's just -- it's -- but I know I -- it

wouldn't have been from someone else. I -- unless it was my father. I mean, he, he did learn a litt-- some things from her. He had met her father. My mother's mother died when my mother was very young, but my -- her father lived to be fairly old. So -- and so, he had met my father. So, there might have been -- who knows what went on then, you know, between them. And, of course, who knows how many people are descended from Confucius. It's a big family, I'm sure. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Did you -- did your family ever go back to China after they left?

JANET PINKOWITZ: No. Well, you know, it was closed -- it was locked down pretty seriously after the Communist Revolution in 1949. And then, it started opening up a little bit with -- in 1971, with Nixon -- President Nixon.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: That's right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: That was his thing, you know, that... And my father -- but my mother died in 1966, so she wouldn't -- not have. Her, her father died when, I think... Let me see. I'm trying to remember which house we were living in. I think when I was, perhaps, in sixth or seventh grade. And so, he was in, in Hong Kong at the time. I think he was living in Hong Kong, so my mother got -- heard via -- you know, he w-- I don't know if you've ever seen those blue aerograms that was like -- it's -- they're the old way of letter writing, where the -- you'd fold the paper. There's just one sheet, and they were usually a pale blue, and you'd just write on every part of it, and then you'd fold it over and over, and then you'd glue it on the one end. So, it was very common for -- you know, back in the old days. And so, she got a -- you know, heard via letter, I believe, about the fact that her father had died. And he -- it was -- so, I, I do remember that. Because I think he -- my father felt badly that, that they had not been able to see him since they had left in 1950, or whatever. And he had always talked about, perhaps, trying to have -- be able to get him out to come and stay in this country. But, you know, that, that never happened. I don't know whether they ever actually tried to do that or, or what. But it was hard to, to --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- there was -- traveling back and forth was not possible. But then, after 1971, my father did apply to go into China. He put in an application, I think, twice, but he was rejected each time. In those early years, it was -- after '71, it was still you had to -- you know, it was pretty special to, to get in. My brother, since he was a, a scholar, and, you know, a professor -- he was able to go in -- I think in the early -- let's see. Maybe in the early-ish '70s, I think he was allowed to go -- to go back. And so, he did that. And then, that time a few years ago, when my brother was teaching in Hong Kong, when -- and I went out to see him. That was in 2007. And so, we --[00:25:00] Emily and Ben and I were able to obtain visas to go -- to go, actually, officially into, into China -- mainland China. And so, we did go. We went, and -- it's -- we went into Canton, which is now called Guangzhou. It's the big, big industrial city in -- where the smog is horrendous, terrible, terrible, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Is it on the coast?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yes. It's right on the --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- it's on the Pearl River. And it's the big city that's closest to Hong Kong.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So -- and it -- you can -- and you go by train from, from -- let's see, how did it work? Hong Kong... Well, we took the, the -- yeah, we, we just took the, the train from Hong Kong -- the mainland China side of Hong Kong, into Guangzhou. It was, I think, maybe a two-hour trip or so -- between one and two hours. And we stayed there for one or two nights, in -- at a hotel. I had reservations to stay there. And we, we went to s-- to the, the campus, to see the university campus where, where I had lived, you know, back in the, the late '40s. And the house was still there. My, my brother had also gone, earlier, because he had been able to -- you know, to explore. And he said, yeah, yes, the house is there. So, I felt I had to go back, just -- I mean, I -- the idea that, somehow -- that it would be there, and I would not go back to see it was very disturbing to me. You know, I wanted to, to go. I wanted to return. So, I did, with s-- I had the, the map of the, the campus. And we -- I went with, with both kids, and saw the house. And,

of course, everything looks very different, you know? (laughter) If you left when you were four or five, or -- and return many, many years later, it -- everything looked a lot smaller than it was when -- you know, it was when I was very small myself.

And -- but, I was happy that my children were with me. And the house was in the old style, with the, the terra cotta, the clay roofs, and it was brick, and it was definitely -- it was one of the older buildings on campus, and it had been... They are, apparently, trying to keep the old buildings, because the new buildings are, you know, much more modern and more glitzy. But it's -- you can get a sense of what the old -- the old campus was like. And so -- and I was very happy that my children were -- they were the real movers, in a sense, in getting me to get over my fear, in a sense, of going back. I was -- I, I wasn't -- I was fine with being part Chinese, but I was not fine with China itself, because we left -- when we left in 1950 or so, it was under this -- in the strange situation of basically being forced to go. And, you know, there was all of that anxiety about it. So, that was my memory of it. So, to go back was -- it was kind of -- it was kind of scary for me, even though I didn't think anything bad would happen, really. But it was just the -- I had anxiety, you know, showing the visa to these uniformed Chinese guards who looked very strict, you know? (laughter) And all that -- I just -- you know, it was just taking -- in a way, taking me back to, to how I -- how I felt, you know, when... Because, because that was my last memory of that place -- was leaving, and having to get out. And...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So it was -- so, every time, in the intervening years, after I got used to the idea of being half Chinese and thinking, "Oh, this is great, you have all this heritage," and all that. But then, in terms of thinking about China and reading about stuff going on there, and just -- I had -- I still had anxiety about it. And the -- sort of felt very conflicted about going back or not. [00:30:00] So, Ben and Emily just really were -- said, well, "We want to -- we want to see you, where you," you know, "you lived when you were three and four," and, you know, all this and that. So, it was very, very helpful to have them be with -- both with me and to share the experience with me.

And, you know, I was really very grateful for that experience, because, afterwards, then, I found that a great weight had been lifted off of me, in a sense. I could read, you know, articles in the *New York Times* about China, or read about this and that, or see Chinese movies occasionally, you know, with the subtitles of course, and not feel that, oh, you know, I should -- you know, I -- I'm sup-- I should go back but, you know, I don't know if I can bring myself to do it. And so, now it was like, I, I could feel much more -- almost neutral about it, and must more open-minded about, about it. And I can see that it's not this -- I mean, there are a lot of big-time problems with China. I mean, the, the, the air quality, for one, is really horrible. And, you know, it's still a very, you know, totalitarian system. There's a lot of horrible stuff that goes on there. And I can -- and it's not just those beautiful scenes that you see in scroll -- Chinese scroll paintings --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughs) Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- and all that. So, I feel I have a more -- I can look it more in the eye, in a sense, that -- you know, the, the place itself. I would still like to go back and see those, those clay hills. I, I didn't -- we didn't get to, to do that, because we didn't -- we didn't have enough time, and I was -- I was extremely reluctant to try to just travel about on our own, just because I just felt -- it was just too scary for me, the, the -- they don't speak English everywhere, and I, I certainly had that kind of an-- traveler's anxiety. My brother has no problem, because he's -- you know, he can -- he's fluent, so, you know, if he were going, then I would feel much better about it. But I would like to maybe, sometime, you know, go and just do kind of a tourist thing over there. My boyfriend, [Jeff], would like to go sometime. So -- and that would be helpful, too, you know, because it would be like, "Well, he's there. He can protect me anyway, against any hooligans." (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So, me -- whereas, when I went with my kids, I felt, even though they were grown up, I, I still felt that I was, you know, trying to protect them.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Sure.

JANET PINKOWITZ: They, they probably felt they were trying to protect me, actually. (laughter) So, so -- but I have checked that off my list, at least, that I did go back. And

that was a very big -- a big, big thing to have done. So -- and I'm -- I just feel much better about everything related to Chinese culture, in a sense, going to the museum and looking at stuff. You know, the -- that -- those, those paintings, and those vases, and all of that st-- all of that, I just -- I feel I am -- maybe that I can, you know, embrace it that much more, because I was able to get that monkey off my back, so to speak. So, I'm -- I don't know.

Emily gave me a book one, one year which is -- I don't know what -- you may have seen it also. It's, it's basically just a book of faces, of, of people who are half -- who are mixed race, and it's just their -- it's, it's a little distracting, actually. It's just their faces, just sort of from the shoulders up. And this face on one side, and then, the -- their writing on the other side, opposite the page, just saying what they are, like, "I'm, I'm Korean, Scottish, Swiss," this, that, and the other. And, and I -- and little comments about themselves -- what they are, what they -- what they think of themselves [00:35:00] as, you know, and this and... And just in their own handwriting, so you get a sense of what their handwriting is, as well. And I've, I've looked at, at all of them. That -- that's where I see that -- you know, you can -- I've, I've said that -- I feel that I can, can often see if someone is kind of a mixed... You know, has s-- a lot of different -- you know, is a blend of different races. So, it was interesting to -- just to flip through that book, and see how, how strongly and how positively people write about themselves.

And, for me, I guess it just took me a long time to get to that point where I just felt fine about who I am, and, and it was all just an internal thing, I think -- I mean, mostly. Not when I was a little, and -- because people -- when people tease you about your appearance and all of that. But maybe com-- the fact that, you know, coming to this country, having my mother being -- having my father being the weird -- weirdo, in his own way, and having my mother being a total stranger, and not comfortable here, and that she just seemed so different from everybody else, and, and all of that. That was all -- it was not a, a happy experience for me, in that way.

But then, just gradually it's become more -- you know, I feel a lot -- you know, just a lot better about -- I accept who I am, and I feel a lot better about both my mother and my father, in terms of who they are. I have a -- I have much more compassion, I



guess, for who they -- who they were, and the -- all the things they had to deal with from when they were, you know, making the move back to this -- making the move to this country, when it was a, a pretty difficult time to be moving and getting adjusted and all of that. So -- and I'm really happy that I have kids who are, are comfortable, I feel, in their own skin. And they, they appreciate all -- you know, all, all sides of, you know, what -- of their ancestors, and, and what they -- what they get from, from, you know, every, every part of it. So, that's it. That's good. You know, I feel glad about that.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Did your mother ever, ever become more comfortable here? Or -- because you were saying, she was sort of isolated when you first came over.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, she -- well, yes, because she -- well, first of all, she had the - - my piano teacher, who --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right, that's right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- befriended her, and they used to go to monthly performances of the local piano teachers' association. It was called the Tuesday Morning Music Club, I think. And that was a pretty common thing, especially back in the '30s and '40s and '50s, for -- because I'm -- again, when I worked in the music library, I used to read the -- in magazines, there would be little reports about, "Well, the Pittsburgh," you know, "Monday Morning Music Club met," and, you know, blah, blah, blah. It's just because people would, would get together as a social thing, and then, they would -- there would be performances. The members would play. And it was just a k-- a very nice sort of thing. I don't know if they have that anymore in these places. But there is that. So, she was happy and glad for that.

And then, she, she got a job working in the local library -- a small town -- we -- well, in Springfield, outside of Springfield, there was a town called East Longmeadow, which is -- which is where we moved, back when I was in about eighth grade. It was a suburb of Springfield. And so, there was a local library, which is your sort of -- your basic, small-town library. It was -- you know, very -- everybody went to it, and she got a job there, helping with -- you know, getting the books ready to be put on the shelves and working in the -- in the workroom in back. And she applied for and took the -- sort of the

correspondence course [00:40:00] for librarianship. She could be -- she received a certificate of librarianship. And it's not the full-blown library-school thing, which is a different type of professional librarianship. But -- so she -- so she was successful in, in getting that. And so, through her, her work, you know, going to work every day, she made some more friends. They were a very nice group of people in the library.

And so, I think that was -- she was glad for that. She did -- I do remember her commenting that, you know, when they'd all be sitting around the, the work table, like some -- not all, but some of them working on getting the dust jackets -- (inaudible) putting the call numbers on, and the, the pockets for the slips, and this and that -- that the people there would just be -- there would be chitchatting, and she was kind of surprised that people would, would talk so openly about, about their private lives. (laughter) And so -- but she appreci-- she -- I think she enjoyed it. I don't think she shared that much about herself, but people really liked her a lot, because she was a very classy lady. So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's interesting, because you were -- you were a librarian, and then your father was a professor, and your brother is a professor now.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yes, yeah, although he just retired a couple of years -- maybe five years ago now, almost. Yes, yeah, we, we, we stuck with the books. (laughter) Yeah, I - - not that I was thinking about being a librarian, but as it happened, the year after I graduated to college, we -- my father and my brother and I moved to Cambridge, as my brother was at Harvard in graduate school there. And that's where he got his PhD, finally. And so -- because my mother had died, my brother had the idea that the three of us who remained should live together in an apartment in Cambridge. And he was kind of being very saintly about it, because, at that point, he was already 27, you know? And who, at 27, wants to be living with one's father and sister -- kid sister? (laughter) But that's kind of the way he was. He didn't -- he didn't want us to be out -- he didn't -- he was -- I think he was concerned that it would just be my father and me living together in the old house, in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, you know, after I graduated from college. And -- I th-- I mean, I should ask him about this someday, you know, that -- because I always thought he did it for me. Well, or, or for my father, or, you know -- he certainly didn't do it for himself. (laughter)

But -- so, we moved -- we moved there, and then I needed to find a job. So, as it happens, there was an, an opening at the Boston Public Library, in the music department. But it was an -- a job that required that one at least be in library school, because it was they called a librarian-trainee position. So, I hadn't been thinking about, you know, working in a library. But then, that opened -- since it was available, and it was in music, and I was looking for something that was related to my, my music major degree from Smith. I went in and talked to them, and they said that, well, they felt that I would be qualified except that I would need to be in library school. So, I, I enrolled in one course at Simmons College, which has a library school. So, that made me qualified to at least be considered for the job. So, so I worked there for a year.

And then, just as luck would have it, I had decided to move to New York City, which was where my then boyfriend, Emily's father, was living. And there happened to be a job in the music division of the New York Public Library. That was also for a -- either a professional librarian or at least someone who was in library school. So, because two of the top people in the music division had also gone to Smith, and had also majored in music there, I kind of had a -- sort of an inside track, in a sense, you know? Like, sort of, because -- since I had gotten my bachelor's degree at Smith, they figured -- well, they knew that I had [00:45:00] gotten a good education, especially in music, there. So, I was hired to, to work in, in the music library. So, so I didn't -- it wasn't that I was thinking that I would become a librarian, but it kind of suited my personality, because I did have this kind of -- my father was very professorial, and books were really important, and all that sort of thing. So, it worked out well for me, and there were -- my brother was -- as I said, he went on to a career and -- as a professor. And so, I think it -- you know, it was OK. I'm not -- I don't know what I -- it's a little bit strange. I guess I could have tried to do something else, but it, it was a -- within my comfort zone, at, at least.

It wasn't because I was mimicking my mother's path so much, but... She was a real hotshot secretary. Her typing was so good, you know? (laughter) And I did learn to type from her, when I was in maybe sixth grade or so. I was -- she said, "Well, you have to learn to type." And, and she was a very strict teacher. She would not let me go on to the next lesson if -- I had this typing book, you know, that you -- I don't know if they still

have them. But, you know, where you had -- you go through the exercises like *J, K, J, K, J, K, J, K*, you know? And then you have to, like, get all of these sentences -- you have to do everything perfectly, with no corrections. Well, there were no -- no self-correcting typewriters in those days anyway. So, so, yeah, she taught both my brother and me typing. And so, we were very happy in the end. We did, you know, learn how to type and... And the piano -- I did take lessons all through college, so, I was --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I was going to ask, did you major in music in college?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Mm-hmm. Yeah, mm-hmm.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK. I didn't know that.

JANET PINKOWITZ: At Smith, you couldn't major in, in performance, but you could take lessons all through. So, it was -- you could major in composition or music history, basically. So, I was a -- I did the music history.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK.

JANET PINKOWITZ: But I took piano straight through, and I sang in the glee club. And so, it was a -- it was a good -- a very strong program there. I thought I would major in history because, again, you know, my brother, like, the history major. And it was like, well, that's, that's what I should do. I was always thinking I should try to copy him, because he was -- he was the really good student, and, you know, the -- you know, the apple of his parents' eye, and all of that. But then, music was actually -- I was interested in it, and I was -- it was -- it seemed to work for me, so... And then, it was good, because I got a job, and was a music librarian, and that was really right up my alley. And the law -- I worked at Columbia in the law school. I'm still there one day a week, but -- and that was just a fluke, really, that -- well, you don't need to know about that story. That was just (laughter) -- it has nothing to do with being Chinese or not Chinese, or anything of that sort. But the librarianship part of it is -- it's, it's all -- my music-library experience was very helpful, working at the Columbia law library, which is another very large, large sort of academically oriented library.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: What is -- so, yeah, what is your daily life like now?

JANET PINKOWITZ: A little strange, because I'm -- still a transitional period for me. I'm -- I stopped working full-time in the middle of August.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh, OK.

JANET PINKOWITZ: But then, Jeff, my boyfriend, and I -- well, we, we had taken a little trip before that, and then we -- I spent a week up in -- where he lives, which is in central New York State, which is very nice. And so, that was my -- like another little vacation. And then, we went to -- we went out to Seattle to visit my son, Ben, for a week. That was in the beginning of October. So, I've taken a few little -- some little trips. But, because I'm still working the equivalent of four days a month in the law library -- I'm helping to -- with just the transitions to -- for the people who are replacing me in the job that I did there -- I'm sort of still there, but I'm mostly not.

[00:50:00] And so, it -- it's -- affects my, my, sort of, state of mind a little bit, in some way. I had thought it would be good for me, because it would be -- instead of being such, such an abrupt change from working full-time to not working at all, instead it's kind of, well, I'm sort of working. Like, I go in a little bit. But, you know, I'm -- you know, and I don't have to work the same day every week, and I can put in a few hours here, a few hours there. But I want to feel that I'm, I'm working enough to, to warrant the fact that they're paying me for those days. But I still -- also feel that, well, if I had a very distinct set of activities that I needed to do there, it would be a little bit easier. Because I'd just go in, do those things, and then leave. But, because of, then, actually being asked about this and that, and there's a little stuff, it's just -- it just feels a little bit strange.

So, it'll probably be ending at the end of December, because they really only needed me, I believe, till, till then. So, so then I will be, like, fully, like, retired. And I think, then, I can start thinking more about what I really want to, to do. You know, I have a big to-do list of things that I should be doing, (laughter) that I was supposed to do after I retired, and I've -- as I told Emily, "Well, I've got my to-do list, but I'm not going to do any of those (laughter) things today." Those things that one should do, that one puts off because they're not really fun things. So, like, I'm still putting them off. So, I have to come to terms with that. It's kind of like, well, it's now or never. I have the

time, and... But, I'm trying to give myself a -- you know, cut myself some slack, because I know that -- or I've been told by many other people that the first few months are very -- you know, they're just kind of strange, because if you've been used to just getting up, going to work every day, Monday through Friday, you know then -- and then, not to have that routine anymore, it's... Although it seems like it should be wonderful to have all this extra time that you wish you had, there's this sense of just being unmoored, I think. And, again, people have said that you just have to -- once one creates a real schedule for oneself, then it's -- then it's OK, again. It becomes OK. But I haven't yet, sort of, gotten a real schedule for myself. I like having things that I'm supposed to do every day, like coming here. I was like, "Oh, OK, I can do that." And I remind myself that I -- if I were working fulltime, I probably wouldn't be doing it -- I wouldn't have done this. And so, I'm trying to just, first, remind myself that, you know, I'm, I'm feeling good. I'm -- you know, I'm feeling healthy. I, I get to enjoy the -- you know, the nice day outside, and just, you know, not to, like, be down in the dumps about, you know, this... (laughter) So, that's kind of it. You asked me, so I'm telling you, it's, it's kind of... But it's also not unusual, apparently.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No, transitions are really hard.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: It's a big transition.

JANET PINKOWITZ: It is, and I'm -- it's -- there's no reason why it should be any different for me than it is for most other people. Just kind of... The -- one of the doctors that I see, when I told him that I was planning to retire very soon -- this was, was back in July -- and, and that, you know, I was a little bit worried about it, because I really didn't know what to think, you know, and how I would feel. And he said, "Well," you know, "the grass is always greener." Like, I think, for people who are -- who are still working, you know, 9:00 to 5:00, or whatever the schedule is. It just seems like heaven, you know, to be -- have so, you know, a wide-open day. Whereas, if you're the one that doesn't have that kind of very, you know, tightly scheduled day, it's, it's a little bit strange, you know, to just, like, "Oh, now what?" Even though I do have that to-do list of things that I should be doing. But I'll get to that eventually, so...

That's -- but Emily has been a wonderful -- [00:55:00] she's just been great, because it is she who signed both her and me up for this -- for a ceramics class that I'm taking, and which I'm going to after, after this. I'm assuming -- I just checked the time to make sure that -- because it's at 6:00, and I want to, you know... So, that's why I wanted to make sure I would be definitely finished by 5:00, so I can get there. But it's kind of -- it's a class that is easy enough for her to get to from her job. And for me, it's not an issue for me to get to, because I don't have to -- I'm not working fulltime anymore, so I have the time travel and get there. And it's something that she and I can do together. And I had done, maybe, three or four years worth of ceramics back before my first child was born. And I had enjoyed it a lot, but then, after I had kids, and then I was -- went back to working again fulltime. It was just like, "Oh, I don't thinking I..." I just didn't want to, to add something else to my -- busy my day. So, so, Emily was -- she thought, "Well, this is the perfect time. We can -- we can -- we can go now. You'll have -- so, that's been... And she's right. I mean, it's really -- it is the perfect time for me, and it's nice, because she and I have like a -- every week, you know, time that we do our parallel throwing of clay. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: That sounds nice.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And you still live in New York, then?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Mm-hmm. Yes, I'm still living in the -- a -- an apartment that's owned by Columbia. I may be -- probably will be moving to some other place that may also be owned by Columbia after a year.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK.

JANET PINKOWITZ: That -- that's a little bit up in the air, as to, to that. But I feel that I would like to stay, if I can, in New York, even though my boyfriend lives about a three-hour drive away. And I do spend a lot of time with him. But I'm -- I have some friends here, and I -- it's just -- I've been here for so long that I, I do feel comfortable. I know how to get around. I'm -- and I'm familiar with how people interact, you know, in, in the

city. I know -- you know, I, I feel OK here. And so, I don't think I want to just pull up stakes and move to someplace where I don't have any roots at all. So, who knows? But as my son, Ben, said, "Well..." He said, "Well, I'm told that grandchildren can make a difference in where, (laughter) where grandparents live." So, of course, he lives out in Seattle right now with his, his fiancée. So, that's pretty far. You know, that will -- but, it's true. I'd have to think about that. And then, of course, there's Emily. If, if things go, go well with her. And so, then, I don't know. I might have to move to St. Louis or something, in between the two.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh, OK, I see.

JANET PINKOWITZ: (laughter) No, I wouldn't do that.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Have you been in New York since you moved here af--

JANET PINKOWITZ: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I was --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: After you graduated?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, well, after that one year in Cambridge --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- which is where, you know, we lived for that one year. And, and after that year, yes, we -- I moved here. My brother had gotten a job -- offered a job at the University of Texas in Austin, so -- because he had finished getting his doctorate. So, he moved there. And my father had been invited to, to go out to Hong Kong and serve as the first president of the coll-- a new college, which was being set up by old alumni of the university where he had taught back in Canton, before. Those, those alumni had -- because that college had been turned into a technical college, and then it was some other - - that college in China. And then it was -- became Sun Yat-sen University. I think it had a -- it was no longer called Lingnan University, which was the name of the, the university where my father had taught.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So, so these Lingnan graduates wanted to set up a college in Hong Kong, and they would call it Lingnan College. So, they asked my father if he would be willing to go out and help set it up, and be the first president, and I'm sure be involved



with fundraising. I mean, that's, that's a big part of a president's job. So, he thought about it. And my brother and I both kind of [01:00:00] encouraged him strongly to go. And because my father -- my, my mother had died, you know, the -- maybe a year and a half before. And we just felt it would be good for him, you know, to have something else. He was maybe sixty-s-- 67, at that point. And he needed something to do that would give him, you know, a reason -- a reason to live, you know, a reason to -- you know, to, to do more with his life.

So, so he went, and he stayed for about seven years out there. He -- and he had a happy -- pretty happy existence, because a lot of his former students were now living in Hong Kong, because so many people left China after the Communist takeover. So, well, you know, Chinese are taught to venerate their, their teachers, you know? And so, all of his former students were very, very nice to him. They would in-- invite him constantly out to so-- to these big Chinese meals together, and they looked -- they looked after him, and really made him feel very welcome. So, it was actually a pretty happy time of his life. And it was a good -- a good decision, I think, for him to go.

And so -- and then -- and then, I came here to, to live with Emily's dad. And so -- and we thought at one time that maybe we would go out to Hong Kong ourselves, because Andrew -- Emily's dad -- was a -- he was very interested in photojournalism. And he had thought, well, maybe he could get a job out there, and we could go, and maybe my -- well, my father would still be out there and all that. But, you know, things just didn't, didn't work out.

#### END OF AUDIO FILE

JanetPinkowitz\_20131029c

JANET PINKOWITZ: [00:00:00] He -- Andrew ended -- he found part-time work in doing data entry for -- in the burgeoning computer, or data-processing industry. And so, he started doing that, and then he got better jobs. And then, s-- he got paid pretty well as a computer programmer, you know, back in the late '60s. And so -- and that's what he -- that's what his, his career was, sort of programming and then systems -- being a systems

analyst and then a manager of, you know, systems, and all of that. So, we didn't go. But that's, that's OK. I've been -- you know, I'm, I'm happy having been here in New York. It's been, been a good -- been a good place for me, I think, I mean, you know, as, as things have turned out.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK. I wanted to ask you if there was anything else you wanted to say before you wrapped up?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah. I -- I will probably think of something after I have left. (laughter) (inaudible). But I'm -- well, I guess, what I could ask is just how typical or atypical this -- my -- our -- this session has been, you know, you're your point of view? Because I did not listen to -- you did send me the link, but I didn't listen to any of those -- the other -- the other interviews or oral interviews. So, I was just -- I, I mean, I feel that I've been rattling on quite a bit, and I don't know whether I've just been (laughter) trying to fill up the -- this, this space -- you know, the dead space with, you know, "Oh, gosh, I have to keep talking." Or have I been talking too much? Have I been saying anything that's relevant to what you -- you know, what your project has been, and that sort of thing?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Well, I guess, to start, in terms of talking, it's always great when the narrator sort of takes their story and goes with it. And, yeah, so, that's been great. In terms of typical or atypical, everyone's, everyone's history has been really different. I think what stands out to me about your story is just that it seems so different in terms of generationally. I've done a lot of interviews with people who are around my age, around Emily's age, in their, you know, early thirties, mid-twenties. But not, not any, maybe, even in -- you know, with someone who is dealing with having a mixed family and taking it on in the '50s, you know, and the '60s. And so, that's been really different, I think. I think everyone I've interviewed has struggled with how do other people understand me, or how do I understand myself, but thinking about it in this different sort of era, you know, when there was, like, you know, a lot of explicit, like, anti-Chinese sentiment, you know? And then, having this sort of, like, you know -- the history of, like, Communism and McCarthyism, like, also as sort of interweaving with your personal history --

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- has been really interesting.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, that was -- well, it was just the time, you know? And there -- of course, the takeover of China, and, and all of that. That -- if, if the Communists had not come in, it's very possible that my -- that, that we would just have stayed there. Because I believe that my -- well, I think my father, in particular, was very happy over there, because that was -- that was -- he was living the -- a -- you know, it was a very easy life. He enjoyed teaching. The students were, were very nice. There were a lot of very interesting people there, because, if you think about Westerners who go out to China, you know, the -- again, they're kind of an odd -- perhaps -- or an odd bunch, or people who aren't afraid of, of new, new places, and being with different -- in different cultures and all of that. And he was always someone who enjoyed meeting unusual people. And he was someone who also, apparently, people liked talking to, I think because he was -- maybe because he was interested in them. And they -- so they felt at ease with talking with him. So, they, they recognized that he wouldn't -- that he wouldn't be judgmental towards them. So, there were a lot of odd -- oddballs like that.

And then, for my mother, it was different. Because [00:05:00] I think she had always had this sense of, oh, life in America, you know, would be -- would be -- would be good, and the American dream, and that, even though she wasn't poor, and she wasn't wanting for, you know, comforts -- daily comforts. But still, I think it's still American -- there was still a very strong pull, you know, to come to America. But they were -- but they would probably have stayed out there. They were just -- but then, you know, things didn't work out that way. They had to leave. And, and then it was -- it was hard, you know? It was very hard for my mother, because, despite the fact that it was -- this was America, it's -- for her personal situation, it was -- it was just difficult.

We had -- the neighborhood where we lived, in Springfield, had -- I think there was an Irish family on one side, and then a Greek-American family on the other side. And, and the Greeks -- the Greek Americans had -- they had more family across the street and down the road a little bit. So, there was very much that sense of family for them, which we, we didn't have at all. And I played a lot with, with the neigh-- the -- that --

those, those, those neighbors. And I missed that sense of the, the different generations, that -- because there were grandmothers --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- and aunts and uncles and all of that. So, that was... So, it was -- that part was a little bit -- it was kind of odd. But, yeah, families, they -- it was a strange time, really, the '50s here. It was very strange. And they did the best they could. You know, they lived with what they had. And I think they were happy that, you know, their children did well in school, and went to the colleges that other people had heard of. You know, that sort of thing was, was kind of -- you know, they felt proud of and all that. And so, you know, they, they did -- they did right by us, in, in that sense. You know, I still -- I think on my mother's side, I -- there was still -- she had a sister who still lived in Hong Ko-- in China. And she died a number -- I think many, many years ago. But that, that was kind of sad, I think, when she heard that her, her sister had died. And I think that sort of thing, being so far away from, from your relations, is -- was very -- was difficult.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So -- but I can't -- yeah, that's interesting what you're saying about the different generations, because it would be good if you -- I'm not the only one. (laughter) And I know you're wrapping up pretty soon with -- you know, with your project. So --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: You know, I think there are other -- I think there are other narrators in the project, but I don't know, did you have a sense that there were other people of mixed descent or mixed heritage...? Or that -- because I fe-- because I guess the feeling is, it's more common now.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: And is that -- do you --

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- have that feeling, or do you -- would you agree or disagree?

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, I think it's -- I feel it's much more common now.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: And, again, even going -- in terms of the, the Jewish-versus-non-Jewish thing, I think that is, you know, much to the distress, you know, of, of, of many Jews, where they -- who've -- who -- we know where they're -- the feeling of the blood being, you know, diluted, so to speak. Because it really -- it's -- other stuff is mixing in, (laughter) you know? It's -- so, so -- but I think there, too, I mean, there is -- there's an awful lot -- there are many more Jews who are marrying outside. So, yeah, I, I f-- I mean, I don't know for sure, but I do feel that it wasn't very -- it was not very common back, back then, except for, you know, in the sense of -- with my parents' specific situation, where their friends --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- who, who -- whom they had out there, in China. And many of those were mixed -- you know, the -- so, as I said, the... So, that was kind of a -- an unusu-- I, I think, at this p-- [00:10:00] I now have come to realize that that was rather unusual, because we would sometimes visit those friends, or they would come visit us. And that was -- you know, that wasn't uncommon. But that was, again, a very specific sort of situation.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right, right.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: I just did an interview last week with someone whose father is also mixed, actually. And he -- but he grew up in Sri Lanka, and so, his mother was Dutch, but his father was Sri Lankan. But in Sri Lanka there's this, like, history of mixing. And that was the other interview we've done, where the person interviewed was mixed, and then, had the parent who was also mixed. I'm trying to see if maybe her dad wants to be in the project. And then, [Ari]'s family, too.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Sure, yeah, that's true.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Well, because his mother is half Chinese and half Peruvian, I think.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Mm-hmm, yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: He hasn't dragged her in yet? (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: He tried.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Oh, that's so interesting. I've, I've met her a few times. She's, she's really -- oh, she's a lovely person, a lovely lady.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: (laughter) He, he tried. I actually saw Ari and Emily last week, and I was like, "Oh, Emily, I'm so excited to meet your mother." And she was like, "All right, I'm going to tell your mother that my mother is doing it, so (laughter) I'll see if she can..."

JANET PINKOWITZ: Well, then, she might be, "Well, if (inaudible) can do it, then..." Yeah. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, so, maybe great to also get her story, to fill in --

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- to fill in this sort of -- to -- because I think it's really -- for me, personally, as, as someone of, you know, mixed heritage, it's really interesting to hear the ways that, you know, you dealt with it, at, at a very different time, you know. Yeah, so...

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, it was a very different time.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So, well, with Ari's mother in particular, I mean, I would think -- I mean, I don't -- I don't know all of the history there, but the fact that, you know, she -- you know, Peru is already -- I mean, that's, that's not America, you know? I mean, she -- I think she grew up in, in Peru, I believe.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, she did.

JANET PINKOWITZ: I mean, that -- so, she sent -- or, I have some documents of her, pertaining to, I think, either her brother or her father -- passport photos and stuff that are in -- it's Chinese characters, which she asked me to show my brother, because he -- you know, he knows the language really well, and he can sort things out. So, he has -- he wrote up some notes for me, so I can be -- you know, giving them to her. And she has talked about how she's tried to get information from the Chinese consulate, you know, to

see if they know -- could tell her anything more about, I think it was her father, and this and that. So, she's, you know, trying to -- she's interested in, in trying to pursue --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- learn as much as she can about that part of her, her own heritage. So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Interesting. Yeah, I know, because I've interviewed both Ari and Emily now, and they both sort of talked about hav-- you know, having this Chinese inter-- ancestry in common, has been something really important to them. And they found, like, a real connection --

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- about that.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Did they -- did, did -- well, did Emily tell you the story how -- about how, when they -- I guess the first time they met, or maybe the second time, or whatever, they, they were chatting about this and that. And then Ari just happened to, to say something about, "Well," you know, "I'm part Chinese," or something. And, and she had no idea, of course. And she said -- and then it was like, "What? What?" (laughter) So -- and then they discovered that was something that -- you know, he -- not only is he part Chinese, he's one quarter Chinese, just the way she is. And so, I think that immediately made for a -- you know, like, "Oh, ah, something else to like about someone else." (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Even though it shouldn't be the only thing, of course. I mean --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- heritage is, is, is a nice feature, but it's not, you know, the be-all and end-all of anything.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: No. But I think finding something like that in common with someone, and just having that way to connect with them, can be one of the things --

JANET PINKOWITZ: Mm-hmm, yeah.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: -- that's important.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah. Well, they -- she's told me about, well, that they've talked about various things. "Oh, well, do you know about Chinese sausage," you know? (laughter) And (inaudible) he says, "Well, of course I know about Chinese sausage." Well, "What about mushroom -- some mushroom soy sauce?" And, "Yeah, I know about it." (laughter) And things like -- but she says she also has felt that sometimes he's like pretended to know more than he actually knows, (laughter) just to make sure that, that, that one quarter Chinese is, like -- you know, she has no doubts about it. (laughter)

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: That's funny.

JANET PINKOWITZ: So, it -- it's kind of -- [00:15:00] it's kind of funny that way. It's, it's delightful, though. So, I'm, I'm pleased about it. (laughter) So...

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: OK, well, thank you so much.

JANET PINKOWITZ: Oh, well, thank you. You've made it much less stressful than, than I was afraid it might be. (laughter) So --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh, good.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- and I hope you've got -- you know, I hope it fits in with the things, you know --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Oh, yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- that you've --

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah.

JANET PINKOWITZ: -- you know, you're trying to do.

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, thank you.

JANET PINKOWITZ: All right. You're welcome. (laughter) I should have said, "Thanks for having me," the way they do on the -- you know, the Channel 13 -- (laughter) the *PBS NewsHour*, or whatever?

MANISSA MCCLEAVE MAHARAWAL: Right. (laughter)

END OF AUDIO FILE