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**Interviewer: Angelica Diggs/ Olivia Fischer**

**Date: 07/28/2023**

**Location: Alice Young's Home**

### **Introduction**

Alice Young is the founder of Alice Young Advisory LLC that advises on Asia business strategies and potential resources. Ms. Young was in the first class of women at Yale College, a recipient of the 2020 Yale Medal, and one of the first Asian American women to graduate from Harvard Law School. Alice's parents were both born in China, meeting in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Alice's father was offered a position as Secretary of the Embassy after the war eventually leading them to Washington D.C. Working for the government, Alice's family called many places home including Maryland, Virginia, and Hawaii.

After completing her studies, Alice's law career took her to numerous places including New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo, China, Korea, and other Asian countries before landing in California. In time, the law firm Alice was working for opened a New York where Alice was the youngest partner to found and head a New York branch law office. Alice and her husband Tom eventually chose to move into the suburbs discovering the charm of Montclair and its welcoming atmosphere for multi-racial and multicultural families. Alice and her family have called Montclair home for over 35 years with two children graduating from both Montclair High School and Montclair Kimberley Academy. Alice recalls her efforts to incorporate Chinese culture and appreciation into the school system and amongst her children's friends in the 1990s when Montclair's Asian population was still relatively new and growing.

### **Timestamps:**

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So we are rolling. This is Angelica Diggs, and I'm the director with the Montclair History Center. We're joined by our history student intern, Olivia Fisher, and today, Alice Young, who will be interviewing with us for oral history. Today's date is July 28, 2023. So, Alice, thank you for being with us. To get us started, maybe just tell us a little bit about yourself and your family, and essentially what brought you to come to Montclair and choose that as your hometown for quite some time.

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Well, I was somewhat of an itinerant child. So, I started out in Washington. I was born in Washington, D.C., and then lived in Maryland, D.C., Virginia, Tokyo, Honolulu, various places. I went to 12 schools in 13 years. So I've had a rather checkered and very

international and national background. I was in the first class of women at Yale. That was the class of 1971. So I went [to the University of] Hawaii and then freshman year and then sophomore year got a scholarship to Georgetown. So, I went to Georgetown for a year and then Yale and Princeton went co-ed. And so I applied and got into both and decided, sight unseen, because in those days of course you, unless you went there, you really had no way of knowing what it was like. Decided that the program looked the best at Yale. So I went to New Haven and was suddenly confronted by preppies and New England and a whole other world. I then, after graduation, it was during the period of the Vietnam War and the Bobby Seale trial in New Haven, and thought that I wanted to do something to change the world. You know, just a modest goal.

We all have those feelings, yeah. ?

But didn't have a whole lot of money and wasn't sure how to go about doing that. Got into Harvard Law School. So I went to Harvard and hated it. I had no background in law or in anything to do with it.

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What did you study in your undergraduate?

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Undergraduate East Asian studies. I got a fellowship to study in Japan under the first Nobel Prize winner in literature from Japan, Yasunari Kawabata. I spoke, I learned to speak Japanese, and Chinese is my ethnicity background, so I could speak Chinese, and I also spoke French. So I thought, well, I'll go to law school and see if I can utilize some of those skills. There I met my mentor, Derrick Bell. He was the first African-American to get tenure at Harvard Law School. He was a leading civil rights activist and convinced me not to leave the [quit] law school, to stay there. And so I worked as his research assistant while I was going through school. He got me my first job in the summer of my first year working for the Office for Civil Rights in Boston during the Boston Schools Committee [CASE], which for many who don't know that era, it was desegregation and all of the attempts to get around desegregation. So when I graduated from law school, I had the option of either going back to Hawaii to clerk for the Hawaii Supreme Court Justice and go into Hawaii politics to try to change society, or to go into international law. Since Hawaii didn't really have much to offer in that regard, I decided that I would go with an international law firm at the time. It was called Coudert Brothers, Coudert Freres. I spent my early years in New York, Hong Kong, Tokyo, spent a lot of time also then in China, Korea, and various other Asian countries as well as the US. I was with various law firms, had an offer in my sixth year of being an associate to a sort of, it was an unprecedented situation, where I was offered the opportunity to become a partner in a law firm in California. And in those days, it took at least seven or eight years to become a partner. And so this was an opportunity that I couldn't resist. But all of my family and friends were on the East Coast, really- in New York based. So I decided to propose perhaps their opening a New York office, which was... They had apparently thought about it before, but none of their partners wanted to move to New York. And they couldn't find a good merger partner. So I ended up being the first woman and minority and youngest to start a

New York branch office for an international law firm. It was called Graham and James. So I did that, kinda pioneering because Harvard [Law] in those days was 92% men. There were I think three Asian Americans in my class at the law school out of 560. Yet again, I ended up having to start a kind of pioneering path, built a very big law practice, but during that period I was working, I had moved from Graham and James to become the head of the Asia practice at Milbank Tweed, which is a major Wall Street New York firm. I had decided that it was very hard to be head of a branch office when most of the clients expected that everything was done more centralized in New York. And Milbank had a very big office in New York. So I moved to Milbank and was living in a loft with my husband in Chelsea. Again, pioneering in those days, Chelsea was kind of a new area and was not the fancy area it is now, a lot of lofts. So I was about to have my second child and realized that living quarters were going to be a little tight. My husband loves the suburbs, hated the city, but because I did not want to commute, we were living in a loft in New York City. But he started looking around for areas in the suburbs and knew that I would not move unless it was really compelling. And so he discovered Montclair, and discovered that it was a terrific, very integrated area, and because he's white and I'm Asian, multi-racial, multicultural, bicultural I guess it would be. So we wanted to raise our kids in a place where they would feel comfortable. And [we] looked around, found a place that I fell in love with, and that was Montclair. I talked to my mentor, Derrick Bell, Professor Bell, and he said, you know, that town is one of the few towns on the East Coast who [that] successfully desegregated. I said, okay, that sounds like a good recommendation to me. We then decided, we... we looked around Montclair, found a house that was [built in] 1897 and had lots of fireplaces and a lot of backyard for Tom. We wanted a place to have the kids be able to run around in. So Amanda was two and a half, Steve was a few months old. And we signed to move to Montclair pretty much without knowing very much, aside from the fact that it was highly recommended by my mentor and we'd come a couple of times and really liked the feeling of the place. Much to our chagrin, we had already paid and then moved in on Black Friday, 1987. My husband was in finance, I was in international law and this was not greeted with great excitement by us because we'd just sunk a lot of money into Montclair. And everything was up in the air with respect to the financial district and I was at the time at Milbank downtown. But as it turns out, it was just an easy way to remember when we moved in. It all worked out. We put the children into school, and I became a commuting mother. That was not so happy, because in those days, the only way to get into downtown New York was via DeCamp bus. It was [the alternative] was a very complicated...

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I was going to ask if it was bus or train for you.

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So it was initially bus and Saul, who's rather famous in Montclair, was the bus driver for DeCamp.

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And since then they just closed the DeCamp.

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Yes, it was very sad, but he was the only cheery bus driver on the DeCamp line. Oftentimes if, I had a nanny at the time, and I would drop off the children at the bus, we would wait at the bus stop for the buses, the buses were never exactly on time so our nanny would race to the bus stop trying to catch ahead of the bus. And sometimes if I ran out of the bus, ran out to catch the bus, the bus would literally close the doors and speed up and leave. This was DeCamp in the old days. Yes, yes.

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But Saul, bless his soul,

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was this wonderful person who would wait for people. The bus was always a little bit late because he was always very thoughtful. On the bleakest days of the winter when I was just so unhappy with having to commute, he would, if I was lucky enough to get Saul as the bus driver, as we pulled into the Port Authority on some dreary, rainy, snowy day, he would say, welcome to the Bahamas. It's 80 degrees, your piña colada is waiting for you. Don't forget to remove the umbrella from it. Have a great day. Sounds like a good man. And it just really made my life so much better. However, I have a funny anecdote, which was one time I got on the bus because I kept getting on at different bus stops, depending on when the local school buses arrived. So finally, one day, he said, "Hi, good to see you. I have to ask you a question." And I said, "Yes, I'll what?" He says, "Are you Mata Hari?" And I said, "What?" And he said, "are you a spy? You get on at different bus stops every time I see you. Where do you really live?"

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That's too funny.

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So this was my Montclair. Eventually there was a Montclair direct [train], but that was a while. But there was a group of us who would get on the train at the same time, roughly the same time every morning. I would get dropped off at the Walnut Station because that was the closest to get into the city. There was a band of women that got together and had wonderful chats on the train commuting in as working women. One of the first people that I met in Montclair, at the time in 1987, there were very few Asian families. I think maybe there were three altogether. One of them happened to be the Eng family. And Shirley was working at the same law firm at Milbank Tweed. So when she found out that I had just moved to Montclair, she took me to every Asian grocery store within 50 miles. She showed me where the best this and where the best that was. She was my guiding light in Montclair. And as a result, she remains a very good friend today. I knew

her children growing up. They're now married and have children, and I know all of them. And two out of the three children stayed in Montclair and have families here. So I continue to be very good friends with Shirley. But it was difficult because there were so few Asians and my kids were biracial and they could relate very much to the integrated community that Montclair was. They knew the system almost better than I did because I was a working mom and I really wasn't here much during the week. But I remember Steve coming, I think it was second grade or so when they were assigned at the very last minute, usually the schools didn't tell you who the teacher was until the week before because they didn't want people trying to switch schools. So I got the letter saying that Steve's teachers, I think he was second grade, were Mrs. So-and-so and Mrs. So-and-so. I said, Steve, your teachers are Mrs. A and Mrs. B. He goes, no, Mommy, not possible. I said, what do you mean? That's the assigned teachers. He says, no, Mommy, always a white person and a brown person, not two white people. I said, really? These are two white people? He says, yes, mommy, not possible. So I went to the school and I said, by the way, my son happened to mention this. And they said, oh yes, it was a last minute change because Mrs. B had to go on maternity leave, and so. And I said if Mrs. B by chance well so Mrs. B sorry Mrs. C was substituting instead of, or Mrs. C was the original, but it's Mrs. B. I said, by any chance, was Mrs. B a brown person? And they said, yes, why do you ask? I said, never mind. It's very P.C. Montclair. Everything had to be balanced, male-female, racial composition, whatever.

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And when you moved, that was after the development of the magnet school system in Montclair. I think you said your son was one of the, attended Renaissance when it was [first opened]

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Yes, the very first year when Dr. Anan was the principal. And so, yes, we very much got involved in the... It was called Magnet, not really Charter, because it wasn't charter schools as such, but you had to apply, and then they balanced everything out [racially]. And we thought that it was a cool idea to have this Renaissance school with the new teachers and whatever, as it turns out it was a little bit of a mistake because you know boys have less, generally speaking, of an attention span at that age, like sixth grade, and the Renaissance school had one and a half [hour] long periods as opposed to the shorter 40- 45 minute periods. So it was really hard for those boys. And in retrospect, he was younger than the other boys his age. But woulda, coulda, shoulda, it was still, it was fascinating to see that things [productions] like at Nishuane and Hillside, because so many of the parents and teachers were involved, for example, in art and the theater in New York. They had Broadway-style productions, but all using cardboard and crepe paper. Impressive, right? It's not expensive materials, but fabulous programs. They got a wonderful art and music background, and creative writing. I remember there was a career day, and so they had 500 people from print and media who had volunteered to do the journalism, for those who were interested in journalism. So there were like six and

seven year olds who were going up to senior writers at the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, the Newsweek, and NBC.

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What an experience.

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NBC, ABC, and so I, what do you do? What does a writer do? So it was a wonderful community in that way. The tough part was, because there were so few Asians, I ended up feeling the lack of any kind of history or knowledge in the school system. Periodically I would volunteer, the schools would ask me to give a little presentation on what Lunar New Year is, for example. One year I took Steve's, I'm trying to remember what year class that was, but to Chinatown on a tour. Because I wanted them to get a sense of both history and culture and also make it kind of fun, I came up with this schedule which had them going to a little bit of a cultural artistic thing, a restaurant, and trying out different foods at a Chinese restaurant, and then taking them to the Taekwondo store so that you know the boys could play around with the sticks and some of the costumes and things like that.

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What a wonderful experience.

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Just have a feel for what it was like. It was difficult because there was really, because there weren't other kids that were bi-racial, there was one little girl that was a classmate of Amanda's and her name was Grace Jones. In those days, Grace Jones was this very popular, very tall model. I don't know if you remember who she was, but she was like six foot four or something. She was this iconic model and punk. So there was this little teeny-tiny Grace Jones whose parents were white, so she was adopted. Every time I saw her, I would just smile. Anyway, as a result, we tried to find things that would give our kids some context of what it was like [to be Asian]. We took their friends to restaurants. We had dim sum. We showed them how to use chopsticks, but I tried to put them into Chinese language school on the weekends, on Saturdays. There was one in Livingston. But because I was traveling so much; in Asia (I chaired the Asia practice at my law firm), my poor husband had to drag them to Chinese school. And most of the kids there were fluent in Chinese, but they were just trying to learn to write. So my kids felt like ducks out of water. So it was, Montclair in those days was very different from what it is now. I was so delighted in 2020 to find, I mean, it was not the ideal reason to find this big community, but the Asian, anti-Asian hate, the coronavirus and our own President attributing it to China and making fun, It was really quite upsetting and of concern and it was wonderful to find that there was this community that I think when I joined there were just a few hundred, but that was so much more than three families and now I think it's well over a thousand. And they're truly doing things that are making a big difference in terms of curriculum, in terms of information about different Asian cultures. They're involved in the

school board. It is really, I wish I could do it over with my kids growing up now, but it's making an impact. It is wonderful to see that so many of the things that I tried to do from a distance, I mean, not within Montclair because there really wasn't that community here, but I did a lot of civil rights related work and not-for-profit work with various groups. So it's just great to see that there is now an even more diverse community in Montclair.

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Absolutely. Did your children express and notice about having so few Asian families

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in Montclair when they were growing up? Do you or your husband? They noticed that there weren't... I don't think they felt it as a negative impact, because they had black, white, all kinds of friends. They didn't really differentiate, other than in ways like my son, in a kind of positive way. They are always astounded. They're now, of course, grown. They went to college. They've been in lots of different environments. They truly don't see the kind of racial lines that others do. They really see people as people, and they're, in a way, sometimes shocked [at racist attitudes]. In other ways, I think they have been very much proponents of helping others to become more comfortable in a very multiracial society. But they notice things in ways that I think many of their peers who have grown up, frankly, in either a very white community or a very black community, don't. And they're very perceptive. So I am really happy that we chose Montclair. I'm very proud of it. We discussed, because in Montclair everything gets dissected. Any issues become subjects of discussion and debate. And I think that that openness to talking about it and to understanding it, but then also having one's point of view has been really important in their upbringing. And I think that it continues to be, although at times exhausting, I think that if only we had more communities that were like this, that wrestled with all of the different issues, [and ]I think we would be in a better place as a society.

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Absolutely.

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Now, you said your Harvard professor, who was your mentor, who said that Montclair is one of the only fully integrated towns that he was aware of. Did you agree with that when you moved?

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Yes and no.

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I think that there were a couple of things that surprised me. Definitely the schools were integrated, the magnet system was such that it was, I think, a very good way to mix and match and diversify because it didn't matter whether... Montclair has various communities like all big towns, but I think the schools really meant that the kids were from all different

communities of Montclair and not just racial, also socioeconomic. So in that sense, I think it was very good. I did notice, for example, my husband liked to play golf, and so he wanted to join the Montclair Golf Club. I looked around and didn't see very many people of color in those days. This is 1988. And when I asked Tom about it, rather pointedly, he said, OK, let me check the roster. And in fact, it seemed that there were maybe one or two blacks and maybe one or two Asians, and that was it. And so I thought, hmm, this is not exactly what I would call an integrated group.

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Yes.

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So I didn't spend a lot of time there. But then again, it was tough. To be a working mother, I think Montclair was a good place in the sense that there were a number of working mothers, but the commute meant that, and it was probably about an hour and a half each way, an hour each way, meant I was often in the office until close to nine o'clock at night because my clients were either in Europe, so five o'clock in the morning was when it was ten o'clock for them in the morning, and nine o'clock at night for me was nine o'clock or ten o'clock in the morning for Asia. So I was always having to deal [with different time zones], and in those days of course there were no cell phones, so essentially my commute was a dead zone. So I had to be one place or the other. So it was really difficult as a working mother to have that commute. So I wasn't as involved in the community. Tom, because he had to be in the office by 7 o'clock in the morning, but was done by 4.30 or 5, he could participate a little bit more. He did all of the sports for both of my kids. He was actually the first man to head the Nishuane pancake breakfast. Before, it had always been women. He volunteered. I was, of course, traveling a lot to Asia, so I wasn't even necessarily around on the weekends. It was such a nice community, and our community consisted of the parents of the children who were classmates in schools. When I was traveling, the community pretty much had Tom and the kids over for play dates. We didn't have a nanny on the weekend. So it was good in that way. I think we really had a sense that there was a group of people who [watched out for each other]... It took a village to raise the kids, and boy, did I need that village.

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Absolutely. And I know you had shared with us, you were involved with a lot of other non-profit organizations or supportive of them in Montclair. Were there certain ones that you and your family got connected with or found that as a way of another support system to be involved with in Montclair?

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It tended to be more community groups that related to the families that we knew. I didn't really have any time so I would rarely show up at let's say, PTA meetings, or I would volunteer, I would call the teachers and say, I can go on a... I did occasionally go on the field trips, because I wanted to get to know the kids and the schools and whatever out of,



you know, separate from the context of what I was hearing at home, but there was... I had such a crazy schedule that literally I remember when Sesame Street first came on and the children were watching Sesame Street. Because I never watched Sesame Street, I went to Barnes & Noble, bought the cardboard book that had all the characters and memorized them so that I could say I knew who Big Bird was and the Cookie Monster, but the rest of them were alien to me. So I literally had to prep for it. It's kind of sad when you think about it, but my kids, looking back on it, say that although there were times that they wished that I was baking cookies and going to the various events, that in fact they do remember me being very much involved in certain things to the extent where my daughter reminded me that I made her fax her homework to me to make sure she had actually done it. She was enraged that she had to do this. How old was she? She knew how to use a fax machine. So that was, I...actually, one of my clients when Amanda was born was a Japanese company called NEC. And this was when we were still living in the city. When I gave birth to Amanda in 1985, the first fax machines were coming out, and in those days they were the size of a very large machine. I had been helping them with some of the issues involving faxes and trademarks and things like that. They gave me a fax machine as a baby present. In our loft, we have this large object, which is about the size of a changing table. Wow. I used it. It was in her nursery room as a changing table when it wasn't [in use as a fax machine]. That's great. So yes, we had a fax machine from very early.

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That's fantastic.

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But the advent of cell phones was both a plus and a minus. I think it meant that I was available 24-7 for calls from clients, regardless of where I was. It also meant that at some point my children had access to cell phones. And the famous story of Watchung Plaza, which to this day we tease them about, is whenever I couldn't reach them and then became quite concerned and thought, all right, should I start driving around? When they were teenagers, they would announce to me that the reason that I couldn't reach them is that they were in Watchung Plaza where the cell service didn't come through. It was not very good. So whenever I say Watchung Plaza to them laughing, they go, cell service? No cell service.

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Yeah, that's great. You noted that you also hosted a Toast to Teachers at your home one time for Montclair Fund for Education Excellence?

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Yes.

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Tell us a little bit about that.

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We loved the teachers. I can't remember all of them, but I do remember both Amanda and Stephen had Mrs. Foust and Mrs. Price and Mrs. Lennon. They had these wonderful teachers and I wanted to be able to do something, but because of the crazy schedules I really, for the most part, couldn't. But I cared a great deal about the teachers, so we had gotten some flyers saying would you be willing to host— there were a couple of times we hosted Toast to the Teachers and we had this large backyard because Tom wanted a backyard, that was the reason we moved to Montclair, and so we had the teachers and the students all come and it was just a wonderful, you know, one of those pre-summer days with the honeysuckle and everything out and the kids kicking around and having, I don't know, some kind of a... We had food and just a chance to chat with the teachers and thank them for their work. So I did always try to remember Teacher's Days and things like that, and I did do that. And for some of the political campaigns, I did, and my husband also got involved and for some of the things for Planned Parenthood. But most of the work that I did that was in the not-for-profit area. I was and still am a lifetime trustee of the Aspen Institute and the Asia Foundation which the Lotus Circle portion of that focuses on empowering women and girls. And we had over 250 employees in Afghanistan, many of whom were working on educating girls. And we had all kinds of programs for scholarships for girls in Asia and Books for Asia, which gave all kinds of printed material, readers and whatnot. So I've always, in civil rights, I've always been involved in the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. Been very active with them, with a lot of the civil rights- related organizations and international organizations. My feeling has always been, I've been very fortunate to have had a pretty interesting and amazing career and been a pioneer. I was then able to mentor, and I really started mentoring from, really, college days. When I was at Yale, I pushed for recruiting minority students from public schools. I was able to go back to Hawaii and recruit from the public schools. Most of the Ivy Leagues only really recruited from private schools, especially far away. I was very involved. I founded at Yale the Asian American Student Alliance, which celebrated its 50th anniversary a couple of years ago, and I was the keynote speaker. So there were things that I deeply cared about and felt that it was really important if you get a seat at the table, which was I joined the Council on Foreign Relations at a very early age, to bring other women and minorities along with you. So I mentored, I want to say now thousands of young women and minorities, some of whom actually remind me, you spoke at my college, and I remember you talking about how it's possible to go into international law and not to be intimidated. And as a result, I'm now senior partner in such and such a law firm. I go, whoa! I really feel old.

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What an impact that had on so many women. That's important.

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And so that's what I felt was something that I could do even with a crazy schedule. I could always make a little time to give seminars, to talk, to work on coaching. So I've coached

a lot of women and minorities for Law schools, for job opportunities, for getting into organizations that they cared about. And then what I've always said is my only ask of you is that you pay it forward. You never have to do me a favor, don't worry about it. I just want you to pay it forward. And if I ever call you up, I want to hear what you've done to pay it forward. And so it's wonderful. I'm [proud]. I've gotten so many calls and emails and whatever. People just saying, hey Alice, remember you did this and this. And so I'm doing this and this and this and this. And to me, I'm just one person. There's a limit to what I can do. But the ripple effect of paying it forward can make such a huge difference in so many lives. So there are a lot of organizations that, you know, Toni's Kitchen and other things that I was involved in to the extent I could that were community-based, the college women's scholarships, donating all these books that I have. So there's a lot of things that I've done along those lines, but not so much within Montclair in an organized way. It's been much more on a national scale of trying to organize. One of the things I did for my mentor, Derrick Bell, he left Harvard, went to NYU Law because Harvard, he protested their not having women of color on the faculty. And so he resigned, he went to NYU Law, and there was a fund that was set up on racism in American law, and I think it's called [Race and] Racism in American Society. It had not been fully funded. When he passed away, I decided that my mission would be to get that fully funded. Along with his widow, Janet Bell, we worked on raising the money. That is actually when I went back to some of the people in the group and said, by the way, you don't have to give me the money, but you need to find people to get the money for my mentor, Derrick. We were able to raise the money. They have the most amazing, if you look on the webinars, the most amazing talks every year in November given on, right about his birthday, and we all sing the Stevie Wonder version of Happy Birthday, and then a lecture is given. So there are lots and lots of things like that that I deeply care about, and I feel that living in Montclair encouraged that rather than in any way stymied or deterred that. My children, Amanda and Stephen, are both such amazing individuals as a result of... I'd like to think there was some parenting involved in this. Of course, yes, yes, role models of my husband and I. But they also, this community gave them such a sense of responsibility for doing good, not just doing well. And as a result, my daughter has been an activist, as well as she and her husband co-founded a brewery in Charlotte, North Carolina, which is where he's from, and she is the CEO of that brewery. But she is so active in Black Lives Matter, in LGBTQ, she does all kinds of charity events in Charlotte, and is a spokeswoman for the women in the brewing industry. So all of the kinds of things that she, the tools that she developed growing up in Montclair have have been really a part of her. My son has been active in so many community organizations and was involved in mental health after college for 10 years, was in mental health, and he founded a sober living facility for boys 13 to 17, and said that so much of what he learned about dealing with a variety of cultures, people, issues, the school systems, the police system, the therapists, and he did everything, the operations, whatever, really gave him that ability to understand and also be tough when he needed to. I mean, he can put on a really macho Montclair attitude or be the most well-spoken, soft-spoken person. So I think that he learned through, and now he decided after being out for 10 years that the system was in trouble, the mental health system, and that doing it one by one with kids was very helpful [but the problems were

systemic]. And frankly, there have been people who have come to me and said, “ you don't know anything about me and you don't know anything about my son, but I just want to let you know that your son saved my son's life.” And that to me was, okay, somehow we've managed to have these really amazing, caring kids. He decided at the age of 34 that in order to really make systemic changes, that despite the fact that he certainly didn't want to go into corporate law, seeing what his mother went through, that going to law school was probably a good way to make those changes. So he is now, he went to the school that gave him the most money and seemed like the best fit, Cardozo. He has just finished his first year of law school and he is working with a group of New York government lawyers protecting the rights of the criminally insane in the facilities at Wards Island and I guess Mount Sinai has a facility. Which is truly amazing because it's one of the most underserved communities you can imagine. As a mother, it makes me nervous.

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Powerful work.

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But he grew up handling every kind of situation and defending every kind of situation for his friends in Montclair Black and White. And so he is very able to handle and to understand what is needed. So I'm really proud of both of them. And I think that some of the... And they have said that some of the way that they think, the way that they feel about things, is as a result of growing up in Montclair. So I am very glad that that was their experience.

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Do you feel, it sounds like, your son attended Montclair High School, your daughter attended MKA, it sounds like those educational...

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She went through the public school system until eighth grade.

0:52:00

Right. And those high school systems, it sounds like it both supported them in ways to help launch them.

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Yes and no. I mean, I certainly think that the public school system [was really good] until high school. There were a few incidents in which I think because of the concerns of the administrators of appearing to be very fair, we did encounter a few situations where I think that it could have been handled in a better way. I think the high school at the time that my son went there was really good if you were very smart or if you were really struggling. I think it was very tough for the kids that were kind of in the middle because it was so big. I think it was the year my son was a senior, for 700-some kids, they had three high school guidance counselors for college and one quit in November. Worried mother,

Alice Young, type A personality, calls up the school and says, by the way, it's senior year and I understand that the counselor's quit. Has my son been in to see you? Is somebody watching out for the kids for college applications? She said, well, so-and-so has A through N and I have O through Z. Your son is S. I haven't gotten to him yet. I think this was like November, senior year. I thought, all right, I'm a little concerned. So I called back a few weeks later to this poor lady and said, I'm just checking in. And she said, well, your son has come in. He didn't realize that he needed reference letters. Yes. So he says he's going to go back and try to get reference letters and look for stamps. I said, okay. So that was, and then I said, well thank you very much for remembering that he came. And she said, look, there are two types of students right now. There are those who have redrafted their essay for the 81st time and are having a mental breakdown and they come crying into my office every day. And there are those who are just fine with it. And I said, yes, I appreciate that. I would prefer that my son be someplace in the middle. She laughed and I laughed and then I called home and told him where the stamps were. This was because he had told me he did not want me involved in any way, shape, or form in his college applications.

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So funny.

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Sounds familiar for me.

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I'm sure it's kind of a universal, but I think in the Montclair system, you know, you asked about the high school. That was the experience back in the day. And they were also changing principals. There was a lot going on. And so it was, I think, a difficult time. But in the end, they both went to good colleges, they both graduated and I tried to learn how not to interfere because clearly there wasn't much of a difference that I was going to make. Of course. With that regard.

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Yes, yeah.

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And you said your kids would hang out in the Walnut Street area, or they said because the Lowe's... Watchung Plaza. Oh, Watchung Plaza, I'm sorry.

0:56:51

Watchung Plaza.

0:56:52

Do not confuse them.

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Walnut Street has...

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Yeah, Watchung Plaza. Was there a certain spot they liked to hang out at Watchung Plaza, or a place they got, I don't know, sodas or candy or anything like that that the kids would hang out at?

0:57:06

Yes, the stationery store was a big hangout. Stationery was misspelled, which drove me crazy as a former, you know, as a young person I made side money editing and so I'm very particular about lay, lie, sit, set, stationary, stationery. Every time I would look at that sign and say, you changed the sign? They love the... They loved the Watchung Bookstore. And of course, Maddie was a classmate of Steve's. And I love books, so that was, I was always happy when they were parking themselves there. But I suspect that many times when they said they were in Watchung Books [Bookstore], they weren't.

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I'm so proud, yeah.

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They spent time at each other's houses, which sometimes was not so good, but most times was pretty good. I think that being a type A mother and a working mom, I remember many, many fights in their teen years. I remember one time, I think Amanda must have been about 15, I would say, when she said she wanted to go to a party on a Saturday. Maybe it was on a Friday. I said, so whose house? What's the name of the parents? What's their telephone number, and she had a meltdown. Mom, nobody calls! Why are you doing this? God damn it, you're such a terrible mother, you don't trust me! So, never mind, I'm going to call anyway. So I called the parent and she said, oh, it's so nice to hear from you. You're the only person who was called. And my daughter, who was in the background: see I told you so! You're the only one. Anyway, it was tough being the mother. they both somehow managed to survive my mothering. And they do say that some of that oversight actually was good because even though they hated it at the time, that they realized that it was because I cared, it was that maybe I didn't trust them, but also that I cared enough to [check]. A lot of the parents actually were not that concerned. Some of the kids did get into some serious trouble. It didn't prevent them from not doing certain things, but the more serious things, it made them think twice. And so they were mindful that if I found out that it would be terrible. So they either had to hide it very well or they would opt out and they had the excuse that everyone knew that I was this tough mother.

1:00:49

Sounds like they thrived, so at the end of it all, yes. Now, I realize we didn't get to ask, to

just know a little bit more about your family's ancestry, or where your parents came from. Because it sounds like you grew up and lived in so many places. If you would like to share a little bit about that, that'd be great.

1:01:07

Sure.

1:01:09

My father was Chinese, but he ended up being raised in Japan in his early years because his father was a Chinese diplomat that was seconded to Japan. My father went to Japan when he was about six years old and didn't know the language, had to go to public school, and was determined to be better than everybody else because he felt like he was such an outsider. He ended up going to the First Imperial High School in Japan, which was by competition only, got into Tokyo Imperial University, graduated first in his class, but because he was Chinese, they graduated him second, and nobody graduated first that year. The war broke out between China and Japan, and he was able to escape back to China and ended up... All his Japanese classmates were very high level. They were young, but they were from good families. They were very smart people. They cared a great deal about him, but to him this was war. And he managed to get to the capital of China, Chongqing at the time. And because he spoke Japanese and Chinese, and a little bit of English, but Japanese fluently, he became a kind of Tokyo Rose. He was the one who, for the Chinese government, was on the radio urging the Japanese to lay down their arms, speaking to, trying to get them to, mothers, don't let your sons go to this war, and whatever. Then when the war ended, General MacArthur came to investigate war crimes, and he was part of the side of the US military, and asked my father, asked the Chinese government if he could borrow my father, because he was fluent in Japanese and Chinese, to help him with investigating war crimes. So my father went with him, China and Japan, the POW, the prison of war camps of the Japanese, and then in China to investigate war crimes. And so he became, the name that was given to him was Yang is the Chinese name, but spelled at Y-O-U-N-G. And so he was known as John Young, another British, American, common name, but he was Chinese. When the war was over and the Nationalist government sent their ambassador to the US, my father became the Secretary of the Embassy, so he was in Washington, seconded to Washington under the famous Ambassador Wellington Koo. He was also on the War Crimes Investigative Commission, and also helped, was involved in the rewriting of the Japanese Constitution using the US Constitution as a model. He had quite an interesting history when he was in DC working on the Far East Commission, which was the war tribunal and also as the Secretary of the Embassy. In 1949, the Nationalists and, you know, the Communists won over the Nationalists in China. So the head of the Nationalist Chinese government, Chiang Kai-shek, went to Taiwan and the embassy, which was Nationalist, he offered my father the opportunity to either go to Taiwan or to leave his family and go to Korea and become the head of the Korean delegation from Taiwan. And my father, who had been taking courses and helping Georgetown University with their languages program, decided that he really didn't want to leave his family, and decided to stay in the U.S. But

that was during the McCarthy era, the 40s and 50s. So he was teaching Chinese history and working with the language program, and Georgetown said, I'm really sorry, you can't teach [history] anymore because you're Chinese. And he said, yes, but it was with the nationalist government. They were anti-communist. And [Georgetown] I said, sorry, we're not allowed to hire Chinese [to teach history]. So he then, he ended up getting his Master's and then going to Johns Hopkins to get a PhD in linguistics, and then went back to Georgetown teaching linguistics. But then got an offer from the University of Maryland to head their linguistics division based overseas. So at the time, we were living in kind of a ghetto area in Washington, D.C. because my father had brought the entire family over. So he was supporting my grandparents, my uncles, and my mother and us, my brother and my sister. So we had lived there, then we moved out of there to go to Maryland and then Virginia. And then we were living in McLean, Virginia. And there was a whole situation there where we were the only minority family in all of McLean. The only. So it was the Pentagon, it was the CIA, and it was the Kennedys. And McLean, Virginia, just had one grocery store, one drugstore. So I remember, I think I was in maybe third grade, where they had a Our Friends and Neighbors film, black and white film, and it showed a Chinese laundry man, long queue, dirty fingernails, say, "laundry, tiki, laundry", and then it showed a modern facility. So I went home crying saying, do we, are we, do we have A laundry? Why is there this man with this long braid

1:08:39

Who looks Chinese?

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And so my parents called the school and [the school] said, oh, so sorry, we've been showing this film for a long time. We didn't realize there might be an issue. Sorry about that. And then a few months later, there was a film on communism. And the communist was Asian. And so at the end of it, it said, if you notice anyone suspicious, call your local FBI. And when they turned the lights on, all my classmates had moved their chairs away from me. I went home crying and said, are we communists? And my mom said, no, no, no, we're not communists. We were against the communists. Calls the school again, they said, oh, I'm really sorry. That's put out by the State Department. It's like a [part of the] social studies curriculum. I'm sure they kept showing it. But anyway, so that was the experience in McLean, Virginia, all white communities. So I went from an all, essentially when I was a baby, a black community, then an all-white community, then my father got this opportunity at the University of Maryland and it was based on a US Air Force base in Japan. So we went to a completely Asian country. So I went to the rest of elementary school and junior high there. And then on base was people from places like Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin, places I'd never heard of, and all different kinds of military people. I didn't know what difference the ranks were, trying to learn military language. And then after two years, my father got an opportunity to become the chairman of the Department of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Hawaii. So we moved from an Asian country with an American military base to a 70% Asian environment that was very mixed. I would say Hawaii is one of the most successful of the racial melting pots. I went to a



public high school there because my parents could only afford to send two of the three children to private school. And since I was the oldest and under my parents thought I was the most able to manage all these different environments I had been in, I went to the public high school. And it was a very interesting education. So my father became the chairman of the department, and he completely restructured it. I just actually got an email from an 85 year old professor who said that he had remembered my father so vividly because my father completely restructured and built the Asian Language Studies program and brought all these innovative programs. It was interesting growing up in that kind of a family, but 13 schools in 12 years, and then freshman year of college because my parents couldn't afford college, I went to the University of Hawaii and lived at home. Georgetown, living with my uncle that my father had brought over decades ago, and then finally getting to Yale where I lived in a dorm and lived a real college life, but that was three colleges in four years. So talk about constant change and there's a lot being written now about resilience. I would have to say that I learned a lot of resilience from the kind of life that I led before. I also tried to teach that resilience to my kids, but it's partly something you can learn, but it's also mostly, I think, individual and DNA and whatever, because a lot of people fail terribly because of being uprooted constantly, and others don't. So the longest places that I have lived are basically Montclair and Hawaii to a certain extent.

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How did your parents meet?

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My parents met during the war. My mother was in Shanghai and my father was in Beijing and knew, I think it was her uncle. Okay. Or maybe it was brother. Brother or uncle. He was in Shanghai, fell in love with my mother. So then he came to the United States in 1946 and he got her into a college in, she was at Beijing University, got her into a college in Pennsylvania.

1:14:41

Okay.

1:14:43

and so she went to college and then they got married in '49. And I was born in '50, and my brother was born in '52, and my sister in '54. But it was a very tumultuous year. It was communism, nationalism, and changes. It was quite a time, yeah, that they met. It was kind of a complicated time.

1:15:13

Can you stop it [the recording] for a second?

1:15:15

I just want to thank you today. I've learned so much. You've had a very fascinating life

you've lived. Clearly, as you said, your children have felt the impact of growing up in Montclair, having parents like yourself and your husband, Tom, and giving back to the community, as you said. That's important to all of you as activists. Is there anything that you wanted to share that you didn't get to yet, that you've been thinking about? Want to make sure you have that opportunity. Because I know we talked about a lot. So.

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Are there any pieces in your mind that are kind of missing or that you wish you knew a little bit more about?

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I guess I have a question. Good, go ahead, yeah, yeah.

1:15:58

My local history session, the last couple years, I learned about Belleville being the first Chinese community on the East Coast. And I was wondering when you moved to Montclair if that was even a thing you had learned of yet. Because I feel like no one really knew about it until the last decade. I was wondering if you knew about it yet and if you had ever, like, because I know they do yearly ceremonies at the cemetery, been involved or heard about it or read about it.

1:16:23

That's an excellent question because one of the problems I think for Asian Americans in the United States is that so little history is known and so much of what actually did contribute or were very negative, speaks so much to our complicated racial history. So, for example, the largest lynching ever was 17 people and it was Chinese and it was after a Chinese had been accused of raping a white person and it was not true, but they just went out and lynched, hanging from trees, 17 Chinese. The history of the Chinese Exclusion Act, you know, 1860's banning Chinese from coming into the United States, and not allowing the women to come in, forcing really the Chinatowns. It wasn't because people wanted to stay within their small group, but they didn't really have a choice. The railroads, the fact that Chinese labor built those railroads and when they had the photograph of the spike and all the people involved in it, they took all the Chinese out of the photo. So a friend of mine who sadly is deceased, Corky Lee, who is quite well-known photographer of Asian American events, did several years ago on the anniversary of reenactment, bringing the relatives of the original Chinese who worked on that railroad together so that there would be a photo reenacting that history with the people who were really involved in it, as opposed to a fake history. Not, fake history, I mean, all the white guys were there, but the people who really built it were the Chinese. So a lot of the history, the Japanese internment, I think, is a little bit known, but the fact that they were behind barbed wire, that they were, that citizens, that their lands were taken, they were uprooted. We're seeing now more of that kind of history with the Native Americans that had also been so hidden, but it's not in the history books. There's this sense that there's this tension, black and Asian, right? But the fact is, the black

community has supported the Asian community, and the Asian community supported the black community. There are certain instances in which the Asian, like the Korean community was kind of like the Jewish community before, which is they had the stores and the whatever that were, that appeared to be the ones that were the enemy, which because you wanted to buy things, but you were forced to buy from this ethnic group and whatever. There's that tension of being poor and then having the grocers or whatever, the richer people be Asian or whatever. But if you look, Malcolm X, when he died, Yuri Kochiyama was right there cradling his [head], she'd been involved, and Asian Americans had been involved in the civil rights protests right alongside. Those are things that are not really ever mentioned. So what a surprise or not surprise that something like COVID comes up and it's the Chinese that are the enemy. World War, the fact that we were with the Chinese fighting against the Japanese, but now we're acting like this is a Cold War and that we're fighting for domination with China, which then has this impact combined with COVID on anti-Asian hate. The fact that just people would feel very comfortable in pushing an old Asian man or hitting them over the head or throwing them to a subway. Yes, some cases are because of mental illness, but an awful lot of them are hate crimes. They're targeted. That's because of a combination of the lack of knowledge of the general public of Asian-American history and the kinds of discrimination that's gone on for centuries. And the political fear mongering that's going on. So that's a very long winded answer to your very simple question which is I didn't know about Belleville until fairly recently. And Belleville wasn't known to anybody very much until a philanthropist discovered this and donated money for a monument for it. So I think that or how Chinatowns grew up, or how Chinese food spread across the U.S. It's a fascinating history of how the Chinese, why were they all stuck in restaurants and laundries, right? Because it was the only work that they could really get, or labor. And yet, as a result, there is such a widespread cuisine now, right? And it's become a part of America, so that some things, like chop suey, were invented in the United States, they're not Chinese and that's okay, but just recognizing that there is so much history that is rich and useful and gives people a perspective that maybe will allow them to appreciate a little bit more what the issues were and what can be done about them and where the prejudice lies and how to deal with that. When you really know others' history and understand it, it's very hard to hate people. I think that that's something that has been so undervalued, Asian American history. I'm really proud of New Jersey for being the second state in the country to mandate Asian American history in schools. Because frankly, when I was going to school, I obviously didn't know anything about it. When I was at Yale, we actually pushed for an Asian American studies course because no one had ever studied it or cared about it. To discover this history of Asians in America is really quite eye-opening as to how much we as a society have benefited from what Asian Americans have done over the years. And also the prejudice, the huge amount of prejudice that exists and is now escalating once again. So I think that there are going to be more and more, hopefully, more and more history that is more generally known, not just to people like you who are interested in the area, but just the more ordinary citizen. I think that slowly but surely— there were not people represented, even the Chinese people were played by non-Asians, right? I mean Mickey Rooney in Breakfast at Tiffany with the fake buck teeth and whatever. Keith

Carradine becoming Bruce Lee, it was Bruce Lee's story that was taken by them and was made to be the guy instead of Bruce Lee who had the martial arts background and it was his story. But that kind of utilization without credit. It's nice to see that slowly but surely that's happening and it's becoming more mainstream even. I mean the fact that programs like say Beef or as an example, not my favorite series, but everyone feels that it's kind of depicting American society and what's going on. And it just happens to have very Asian cast. But not seeing at every point the mix of what really is our society and having a little more of that history, I think is unfortunate. I'm hoping that everybody, not just Asian-Americans, I think AAPI Montclair has done a fabulous job in terms of, in a very gentle way, saying, hey, here are all these incredible cultural benefits and here's a little bit of history to remind you that it wasn't so great for Asian Americans but you know we can go together and learn together. I'm being corrected, it was David Carradine, not Keith Carradine. He's carried on. We'll put that correction on the record. I have to ask now. That's too funny. So, I am hoping that there are more and more opportunities

1:28:47

for kids to really learn about diversity, not having it crammed down their throats,

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but in a very useful way. One of the organizations I belong to is the Committee of 100, which was founded by Yo-Yo Ma and I.M. Pei back in 1986 after Tiananmen Square, June 6th, where suddenly in the U.S. people were saying, what's this all about? What is this protest? What's happening in China? What do Chinese Americans think about this? There was really no organization that could speak to this. Both of them, who are obviously icons globally, but certainly well-known, Yo-Yo in music and I.M. in architecture, founded this organization. We have a membership of about 130 now, that are the criteria are prominent Chinese-Americans are concerned about what is a dual mission, which is U.S.-Greater China relations, which includes PRC, Taiwan, the greater diaspora, and Asian Americans' contributions to American society. One of the cases I was very much involved in on a pro bono basis was the Wen Ho Lee case, and that was close to 20 years ago when a Chinese-American scientist at Los Alamos was accused of spying for China. He was taken away in chains. He was kept in a single cell. He was not allowed to speak in anything but English, even though they had a full-time Chinese speaking FBI agent there. This was part of this fear of, oh, there are Chinese spies everywhere in the U.S. infiltrating our institutions and learning our secrets. This was 20 years ago. As it turns out, he did nothing that would... He was not spying for China. He did nothing that would have compromised anything for China. The only thing he did was download a couple of documents which he took home to review. Every other person at the Los Alamos lab did the same thing. He was the only one that was prosecuted. He was, I think, almost two years, he was jailed while they were going through this. And in the end, the only thing that he ended up pleading guilty to one count, which was downloading documents and taking them home. Nobody else was prosecuted for that. It was not anything that was the result of national security issues. And now in the United States, it is happening over and over and over again to the point where Chinese American scientists do not really want to

be in the United States in most cases. And because they don't want their lives destroyed needlessly. I mean, Dr. Wen Ho Lee never was able to get his job back, spent several years while he was incarcerated, he wrote a math book for high school students. He was an incredible guy. But what Committee of 100, we went to the various organizations saying: this is disgusting and this is very much a lack of due process. I.M. Pei and I and another fellow, Henry Tang, went to the New York Times Editorial Board and they had written a number of articles, very negatively, about this. So one of the things I said to them, I mean I.M. gave a very eloquent speech about how he has embraced the U.S. and whatever, but this is the system gone awry. And I said, I would like you to go back to the articles your reporters have written, and every time it says Chinese American, or Chinese, put in Jewish. And then tell me if you think this [reporting] isn't slanted. And if you do that substitution, this Jewish scientist, blah, blah, blah, blah. It was very racist. And so the New York Times, for the first time ever, wrote a public apology printed in their paper about how they had made a mistake in their reporting. It was not fair reporting. But sadly, this is happening over and over and over again in the United States to the point where, you know, I'm an international corporate lawyer, very well known, one of the pioneers. There is, in, it was [in] 1997, when the Senate Finance Committee was investigating the illegal campaign contributions by non-Americans. They went through every single person who donated to any campaign in the United States who had an Asian name. They didn't find me for six months because my name's Alice Young, which is not a very Chinese name. But when they finally found me, they said, okay, you called the Commerce Department on such and such a date. What was that call about? And then they said, and you made contributions to a campaign. Who was that to and what was it for? I go back into my records. Fortunately, as a lawyer, you keep time sheets. You know, generally speaking, what you're doing. [The agent] came to interview me and I said, well, I called the Commerce Department because my client, Estee Lauder, was going to do a gift, free gift package for their Christmas gift, free gifts, and there was a cotton bag they wanted to use, and the question was whether it fell under the Hong Kong rules for cotton bags or the PRC rules for importing to the United States. That's why I called the Commerce Department. I [The agent] said, okay, fine. So this contribution, who was it to and what was it for? I said, well, the contribution was for \$250. It was a California campaign of Dianne Feinstein, and it was to EMILYs List. [The agent then asked]....Lee, is that spelled L-I or L-E-E? I said, you've never heard of EMILYs List? You are investigating as a finance expert. I'm paying taxpayer money for you, and you've never heard of the largest women's PAC in the country for financing political campaigns? It's known as "early money is like yeast" EM-I-L-Y's List, it's not a Chinese organization— I was horrified that he would never have come across EMILYs List, but just looking at my face and whatever, automatically [assumed it was a Chinese organization] . So that's when I realized that being American is not enough. Being a corporate lawyer, being high-powered, being whatever. I mean, I had all kinds of backing if I needed any help. But that would be the kind of automatic perception, just because of my face. So that's why organizations like this, I think, are still very important, because we could say, all right, we're famous musicians and astronauts and politicians and business people and we're not happy with the way we're being perceived- It's un-American. Hopefully, in your studies, you will see

more and more and can be part of that initiative to make more of this history known in a way in which both kids and general American society will understand better because whether we want to be diverse or not, we are going to be. And I really worry for the United States that we are kind of throwing out the best promises that we have for growth in the U.S. We are an immigrant country and some of our best work has been by immigrants. You know, starting from Irish, you know, Italian, it's not just Asian, but we are really changing what we stood for. I worry a great deal for the future. I'm hoping that there will be many many more Montclairs that there's going to be much, much more in the school systems to teach us things that we ought to know, and that people will have much broader minds about knowing and then picking and choosing however they want, but with some background and understanding. I think that Montclair is by no means a perfect town, but that attempt to mix races and socioeconomic classes— you know the socioeconomic is as big a divider as other factors. How do we really give advantages, advantages really give benefits, on what is not an equal platform, so that the best and the brightest can continue to thrive in this country. I think that certainly my parents are examples of the best and the brightest contributing, coming to this country and starting from scratch. I think my generation, for women and minorities, has done the best we can to pioneer that. And it was not a lot of fun. I can assure you. Being the only woman in the room really isn't that much fun. Being the only minority in a room really isn't that much fun. It's much more fun when you bring everyone to the table and it's much more interesting and it's frankly better I think for our society. But we have a long ways to go. So whatever I can do to build a little bit of this history and background, I'm happy to do so, happy to do more of it if that helps. I'll just show you a few.

1:44:09

Yeah, let's see the pictures. Thank you for sharing your story with us, Alice.

1:44:13

Oh, you're so welcome.