



City of Alexandria
Office of Historic Alexandria
Immigrant Alexandria, Past, Present, and Future
Oral History Program



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Interviewer: *Krystyn Moon*

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Abstract: June Shih was born and raised in Alexandria, Virginia by parents who immigrated to Alexandria from China and Taiwan. She worked as a speechwriter and went to law school before moving back to Alexandria to raise her own family. She recalls her parents' life and school years in Alexandria, her time in China during college and after working for a newspaper, and moving back to raise her daughters and take care of her parents.

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INTRODUCTION & PARENTS EARLY HISTORY (00:00:09)	
Krystyn Moon:	So this is Krystyn Moon and I'm interviewing June Shih on June 29, 2015 and we are going to talk a little bit about her family's history, actually a long history here in the City of Alexandria [Virginia] and um, sort of like explore the Chinese American experience here in the City of Alexandria. [Laughter] Both as an immigrant and growing up here, right. So, first I wanted to start by asking questions about your parents.
June Shih:	Uh-huh.
KM:	Stories. And what sort of stories they told you either growing up or when you were older in life? And, and maybe a little bit about where they came from in China and stories about their childhood.
June Shih:	Sure. Sure. So, my parents, my father grew up in mainland China in Fujian province. Southern part of Fujian province where they speak a dialect called Hokkien, which is what they also speak in Taiwan. So it's a part of China that is culturally close to Taiwan. He grew up there, he was born in 1929 officially. We think he was probably born sooner. Like his family believes he's older than that. But on all his papers he was born in 1929. And he grew up there, you know, suffered through the depression, yeah, whatever it was called, World War II and his father was an itinerant uh merchant. He went to Vietnam. So his father left home when he was a little boy. But my father, my father's, my grand, my grandfather went to Vietnam to be a merchant and my father really grew up with his mother.
KM:	Okay
June Shih:	Um, then World War II happened. They were separated so really he was raised by a single mom. And as World War II was, um, concluding, he got very lucky because he was too young to be conscripted by the KMT [Kuomintang, the Chinese National Party] or the Communist so he did not, he didn't have to do any military service, while his older brother did. And, um, and he was very good at school. So he managed to go to all these like schools that overseas Chinese had established.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	For smart kids. So he went to those and he then went to junior college. And once he graduated from junior college. This would be 1947. He realized there is nothing here, there for him. It's hard to find work. So he decided to go to Taiwan.

KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Where there's plenty, allegedly like more opportunity. So he went there and he thought he'd be a police officer like his other friends from Fujian. And he failed the police officer test cause he eyes were too bad.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So he's like, "I'll just to be a doctor." So he, he decided to test for the medical school. Which is a big deal cause it's really hard to get into medical school
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Back then. And like um, all the upper middle classes in Taiwan went to medical school. So he took the test and past and it was you know a big deal, but he didn't have the money for the tuition. So he took a year off. Is this getting to detailed?
KM:	No.
June Shih:	Okay.
KM:	This is exactly what we are talking about.
June Shih:	So he took a year off, went to school, taught school. Ah, taught school geometry or math. And took the test, saved the money. Took the test again. And got in. And got in again. And the whole family, my mother's family that's a big deal to pass the test twice.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Cause I think tens of thousands apply and only sixty get in, so it's a big deal he got in twice. So he went to medical school and that changed his life. You know, he joined, he just was really coming up. He joined the upper middle class and that's when he met my mother. My mother was, her family had immigrated to Taiwan from mainland China in the fifteen, sixteen, I guess it would be the sixteen hundreds when the Ming dynasty fell.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	I think it fell in 1644.
KM:	Yep.
June Shih:	So they fled to Taiwan.
KM:	Okay.

June Shih:	So they were ethnically Chinese but they are of the group that went you know three hundred years before the KMT people, the mainland Chiang Kai-Shek people.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So they went to Taiwan. She grew up in, ah, I guess a lower middle class family. Her father was an elementary school teacher. And he didn't have much more education beyond that. But he was able to be an elementary school teacher. Her mother is very interesting. Her mother was a daughter of a very rich merchant family.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	But back in the time they didn't value their daughters.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So even though you are terribly rich. Could easily support the girls. They gave away all their girls. So all the girls just got given away. A farmer could come and say, "Can I marry one of your daughters?" And they would just give it.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So my, my grandfather's family. A poor farming family they went to this house. They took this girl in when she was a baby. And that girl was raised to be my, my grandmother was raised to be my grandfather's wife.
KM:	Oh wow.
June Shih:	Yeah so it's—.
KM:	Okay, okay.
June Shih:	So it's a term called [unclear] and it was very common back then. So they, they grew up together and she was always going to be his wife so—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So that happened, so they got married when my mom, when my grandmother was eighteen or something and my grandfather was several years older. And so my mom was the second born.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	And so second born. Eventually they had six girls and three boys.
KM:	So your grandparents?

June Shih:	My grandparents had six girls and three boys. My mom was number two. And once again, my mom was very good at school. And my grandfather was very progressive for his time. So he, he insisted that all the girls go to school. Continue school.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Go to high school and go to college. And all the neighbors are like why are you doing that? You should save all your money for your three boys, you know that's where you should focus. But he was very insistent so that was very lucky turn for my mother.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So she got to go to college. And she was also good at taking tests. [laughter] So she got into National Taiwan University which back then, is still, is very hard to get into.
KM:	Uh hum, yeah.
June Shih:	She, she went there and graduated. And started working as a social worker. So she was a social worker at a hospital. My father was an intern resident at the hospital. They met. I guess. I don't know. They don't say love. They, they never said love. But they fell in love, or whatever they decided, they hooked up. And um and then at that time that would be the late [19]50s early [19]60s.
PARENTS COME TO U.S.A AND CANADA (00:06:11)	
June Shih:	Everyone in Taiwan in the professional classes was coming to America. Cause they just felt that there was just more opportunity in America and you aren't going to go anywhere if you stayed in Taiwan.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And especially given who they were. My father was from mainland China. And in Taiwan you know the, the Taiwanese who were there for three hundred years were like very discriminatory. Like just didn't, just didn't like the new Chinese. And then the KMT was in power. They were very repressive. It was a very repressive regime. And you know my parents were not very political people. So they just, so they saw no way. They didn't see a lot of future in Taiwan. So they left.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	And it's really hard. I have not, you know, spent a lot, I haven't spent

	a lot of time. My father has passed on. So it's hard to get more detail than that.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But so they left. And they applied to America. And my father—. They both applied to schools in America. Or applied for visas. And my father got rejected because he had no family in Taiwan. And they thought he was a stay risk.
KM:	Oh, okay.
June Shih:	And then, my mother because she had seven, eight brothers and sisters. Thought, oh no way she was going to stay. [both laugh] So, so she did. So she came. And she picked this Appalachian State University.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Oh no, back then it was Appalachian State Teachers College.
KM:	Yes.
June Shih:	In Boone, North Carolina. And I'm like why did you pick that place. She's like, 'It was the cheapest one.' [laughs] So, the tuitions is really low. And I've since looked at her immigration file and she told the U.S. embassy that also she got a five hundred dollar tuition [scholarship.] Or she got some sort of tuition rebate or discount. She got a scholarship, I guess. So she chose Appalachian State. Meanwhile, my father went to Canada. And they didn't get married. They just weren't married then. Just immigrated separately. He went to Canada. He got a residency in Montreal.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And she went to Appalachian State. So the story goes. In 1960, '63 she got a boat and took a boat to Portland, Oregon. And you know, I don't know if that's like a week or two week journey. She said she was like seasick the whole time. She never left her cabin.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	She was so sick.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So she went to Portland, Oregon. And from Portland, Oregon took a bus across American to Boone, North Carolina. Which is, I was like, "How did you do that?" She just did it, right. And my mom was a timid person. Growing up she would talk about how timid she was.

	But she just did it. You know?
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Um.
KM:	So what year was that?
June Shih:	It would be '63. October 1963.
KM:	Okay, okay.
June Shih:	So she came. She took the bus across to Appalachian State Teacher's College. And you know, she had all these bits, all these are bits and pieces [of information], right.
KM:	Right, right.
June Shih:	So she came and she had been she had been she was from a medium size city in Taiwan, then she'd gone to the national Taiwan university in the capitol which was already a big city.
KM:	[Unclear]
June Shih:	And she goes to Boone, North Carolina. She says she's shocked at how small it is was. And you go in there and it's a two lane road up winding mountains. We went a couple years ago. It still is up winding mountains. I think they're widening the road this year. You know. So it's like one lane in and one lane out.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Um so she's like oh my god, it's so small. But everyone in Boone was really nice to her.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	She was impressed by how kind and generous they were. And there were a lot of Taiwanese there. So—.
KM:	Really?
June Shih:	At the time. If you look at her yearbook and I'm sorry I don't have it. There are a lot of Taiwanese in the graduate program. The graduate program was library science. And you know they didn't have a lot of graduate programs at Appalachian State Teacher's College. And I've since done research. It's a tiny, it was just meant to train the teachers who were going teach in—.
KM:	Right in North Carolina?
June Shih:	Yeah, in North Carolina. In the mountains, right. And so she, ah, she

	went there. And she fell in love with American bread. Wonder Bread. [laughs] So she said she would eat a whole loaf of Wonder Bread every night. A whole loaf with jelly. And so she arrived in North Carolina eighty pounds and left one hundred pounds. She gained twenty pounds. But that happens in college.
KM:	That yeah it's supposed to be the freshman fifteen.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.
KM:	But—.
June Shih:	But she ate, she said—.
KM:	It's a little different.
June Shih:	She ate a whole loaf of Wonder Bread. Isn't that crazy?
KM:	That is crazy.
June Shih:	Um, so.
KM:	I've got to image she's not cooking for herself.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	And there's probably not—.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Chinese food or Chinese food she'd be acquainted with.
June Shih:	Right exactly. But she loved the Wonder Bread. So—and then I've since seen like, because I've looked at her immigration record. She did a lot of trips up to Canada.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	To see my dad.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	You know from North Carolina. And then she graduated.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And she said it was really, you know, her English wasn't—like I looked at it, like the U.S. Embassy interview said her English was okay. Like you have to take an English test to come here. I don't know if you still do.
KM:	Like a TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language], yeah.
June Shih:	But it wasn't a TOEFL. It was just like you go to the Embassy and

	they would test you.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And they—.
KM:	They talk to you basically to see how you do.
June Shih:	Yeah, no there was a written. So it said her writing was fair but her, her verbal was super, like, was barely passable, but the immigration officer said just pass her. But the immigration officer just passed her. You know said ok, good enough, you know. But it's really interesting just to look at it and she, so she, she said she struggled in school, but she passed and she got her degree. And she applied, I know she applied to the Brooklyn Public Library, she applied to some library in Toronto, Canada.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And she got a job at Bowie State University.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Which is a historically black college and university.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So that was her first job it was really impressive because she goes from the heart of Appalachia, which is super white right, to Bowie State.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So Bowie State hired her. She went there, and you know, once again she said she was very lucky. The library and her boss. Ms. Gary was super kind to her and she's very grateful. And you know, but she was, she was a no way around, she's a little racist right. So she's a little afraid of Ms. Gary because she was so dark.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Right. But, but also just overwhelmed by just how kind she was. So like, for Christmas Ms. Gary would take her home and she would spend Christmas with them and all this stuff. And then, and then by that time my father was up in Canada. He was in Toronto. He went to Montreal, Toronto, then he went for Master's in science in Alberta.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And got that. And then finally.

KM:	The University of Alberta.
June Shih:	The University of Alberta in Can[ada], in Edmonton. And you know she went up there to see him. So it's all that. Then they decided finally to get married. So they were engaged seven years. I don't know why it took them. We don't know. [laughs] My sister and I are like whatever. [laughs] So they got married. And—.
KM:	In Canada?
June Shih:	No, no, no.
KM:	In the U.S.?
June Shih:	They came down here. And you know my mom was already living near or outside Bowie [Maryland.] And he came and apparently she drove him up and down the eastern seaboard doing interviews. You know, all the public hospitals, the VA [Veterans Administration] hospitals. That, those were the hospitals that would take immigrant doctors, right. And they want, cause it's hard to find staff positions. There's a huge shortage.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Of positions cause of Vietnam and all these other, all these immigrant doctors were coming in to do—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	The public hospitals. So he did here up and down, he remembered he interviewed at Johns Hopkins. But they said his English was too poor. And then he got a job as a resident at Providence Hospital in [Washington] D.C.
KM:	Oh, okay.
ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN ALEXANDRIA (00:13:43)	
June Shih:	He did that for year. And then he had an offer at Providence and then [an] offer here at Alexandria Hospital.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And Alexandria Hospital, I guess the money they to offered to him was such a large sum, he was like, "Oh my god!" It was like, I don't know, seven thousand a year. He was like [unclear]. He had never made that much money. He said oh my god, I have to go there, right. So that's where, how we came to Alexandria [Virginia.] Alexandria Hospital gave him, they were looking for a staff position. They hired

	him and then he took the job. Meanwhile my mom had applied to the Chinese section of the Library of Congress.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	In Washington [D.C.].
KM:	Right, the Asia Reading Room.
June Shih:	No, the Chinese, Korean, cataloging section. So—.
KM:	Oh, okay.
June Shih:	She was a cataloger.
KM:	Oh, okay.
June Shih:	So, she, so all the Chinese books they were coming to the collection.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	She assigned them the LC [Library of Congress] number and all that stuff and description. She was a descriptive cataloger. So she described the book. So that's how they came to Alexandria.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	He got a job at Alexandria Hospital. It was in Old Town [Alexandria, Virginia] at that time.
KM:	What year was that? Do you remember?
June Shih:	I think it was [19]68.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Um '68, '69. He was in the hospital, was in Old Town at the time.
KM:	The original building.
June Shih:	The original building. Which is now the, what Atrium or the—it's near the Lyceum, right?
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And he opened a bank account across the street, which was the, I guess the Bank of Virginia at the time. Now it's the—.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	The BB&T [bank].
KM:	Oh, okay
June Shih:	Of Washington. And, apparently those people, those tellers for the

	longest time knew him. Like they knew him until he was like shuffling and at—.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	The end of his life. They still knew him.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And ah, and they bought, they originally bought a house in Franconia [Virginia.]
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And then came, and then my mom you know she was always into houses. And always wanted to do better. So there was a new development in Seminary Ridge.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	It was Pulte. The builder was Pulte. But they are building all these new houses in Seminary Ridge and she wanted one. Fell in love with one and took one at Templeton Place.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So, Templeton Place. So—.
KM:	So is that between Quaker and Janney. Over there.
June Shih:	Yeah, so it's Quaker, Seminary.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	You know where the Theological, where the Virginia Theological Seminary.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Then there's Fort Williams Parkway.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So there's a development of big house, bigger houses
KM:	Right next to the new Saint Stephens, Saint Agnes.
June Shih:	Exactly.
KM:	I know where you are.
June Shih:	So it's that development. So they took a house there. And they moved there in November 1974. So that's when we as a family. The Shih family came into the boundaries of the City of Alexandria. [laughs]

	So that would be I think fall 1974. I was two and my sister was a couple months.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Six months old. We moved in there. My grandparents had moved from Taiwan to take care of me and my sister.
KM:	So, that would be your mom's parents?
June Shih:	My mom's parents.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And at the time my mom was like a huge support sending money back.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Her sisters were all doing well. They all were getting into college. You know National Taiwan University. One was a diplomat for the government of Taiwan.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	But, but they're all coming and my mom sponsored a lot of them. So—.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	The immigration officer was wrong! [laughs] She just chained migrated them to America, right.
KM:	Uh, did she bring in her parents first?
June Shih:	Yes.
KM:	And then all the siblings?
June Shih:	Yeah, right.
KM:	And all the siblings.
June Shih:	Right, so she brought her parents to take care of me. I was born. And you know she wanted to go back to work. She went back to work within months, or weeks. I don't know. I think as soon as my grandparents could get here. She went back to work.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	At the Library of Congress.
KM:	Right.

June Shih:	And, um, and I was born at Alexandria Hospital.
KM:	Oh, okay.
June Shih:	Because my dad was already there.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And, you know, the gynecologist. Everyone knew him. Doctor. Doctor [name unclear]. Anyway, one of the doctors had delivered five thousand million babies and—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And delivered me. My mom was older so I was a caesarian section. Alexandria Hospital. Which is really cool, cause my daughter, my younger daughter was born at Alexandria Hospital too. So anyway, that was cool. So we were both my sister was also born in 1974. Also in Alexandria Hospital. So any way, we got and you know so this new development was super close.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	To Alexandria Hospital.
KM:	Yeah, especially when they moved here, right.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. So that was great for my dad. He was on board with that and so we grew up there.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Starting 1974. My mom, you know, they just worked hard.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	My dad worked super long hours in Alexandria hospital.
KM:	And your mom worked too?
June Shih:	Yes, she worked too. Which was very rare.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	In school like only a handful of moms of my classmates worked.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But she, she did. There was always, never a question she would.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	We were latchkey kids.

YOUR CHILDHOOD IN ALEXANDRIA (00:18:25)	
KM:	Do you remember, so growing up? Were, was there a sizable Chinese American community in northern Virginia?
June Shih:	No. I cannot remember one like, when my grandmother lived with us she found a Chinese church.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And there is a Chinese church at that, on Quaker Lane.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Where that I think that church now is called Convergence.
KM:	Yeah, yeah. Right across the street. They were there until I moved to this area.
June Shih:	Was it Chinese or Korean?
KM:	It was Chinese.
June Shih:	It was Chinese.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Okay so we went to that church. And then there was a splinter church. So my grandmother followed the minister. A minister left and she followed him to a church out on Route Seven.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Near um, I don't know if anyone notices, but there is a Presbyterian church called like Munson Hill Presbyterian Church.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And at some point the Chinese church bought that church for the congregation. Cause the congregation probably shrank. And, So now it's the Chinese Church of Northern Virginia. So—.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Or was it Chinese Church of Virginia? Anyways it was crazy because it was the Alexandria, Chinese Church of Alexandria.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Up there.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then there they splintered. And this new minister went to found

	the Chinese Church of Virginia or Northern Virginia.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Something like that.
KM:	Was it affiliated with the denomination like Presbyterian or a social gospel?
June Shih:	I think. I don't know. My grandmother was converted by the Baptists.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	In Taiwan.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Like the Baptist got to her, [laughs] she was whatever converted and baptized, and my mother was so stressed about getting into college that she like prayed to God. And like when to you know and got baptized and then the next day she got in or something like that.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So, so my mother was also baptized by the Baptists.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And, and I think they just found that Chinese church right there they went.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then she fell under this guy and I think it was just, you know, independent Chinese.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Christian church with roots in the in the, the evangelicals of—.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Of Taiwan. Yeah, they went there. And after my grandmother moved back to Taiwan. She would only come back for summers to—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Take care of us during the summers.
KM:	Okay, right.
June Shih:	And, after that, we were very sporadic attendees of that church. But that's were all the Chinese were and you know, we went to Chinese School at that church.

KM:	Was it on Saturdays?
June Shih:	Saturday mornings from nine to twelve. And then it was just torture right. [laughs] We just hated it. Hated it.
KM:	Were you learning Mandarin or—?
June Shih:	We were learning Mandarin and were learning the Taiwanese style of Mandarin, which is the phonics. Which is a whole new set of symbols that had phonetic meanings.
KM:	Oh okay.
June Shih:	Yeah, it's crazy. So my sister and I hated it. We were both very good students in American school but in Chinese school we were just like, oh my you know, we just couldn't take it and we'd get like Cs and Ds and just didn't care. And my mom's like, you just have to go. So we went. And then at some point she let us quit and then when I got to high school, I was like oh, I want to go again.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And that's when I found another Chinese friend, my friend was already going to another Chinese school. And it was in Annandale. It was called [name unclear] Chinese School. And it was in Annandale High School. So we would go there as teenagers.
KM:	On the weekends?
June Shih:	On the weekends. Sunday afternoons. So I went to Saint Agnes School.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	Um and so it was very white. There were no Chinese. I mean like—.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So there are not very many. There are no Chinese.
KM:	Was there any people of color at Saint Agnes?
June Shih:	So in my, yes there were.
KM:	In the '80s.
June Shih:	In the '80s there were not a lot, but there was, so when I hit fifth [grade] it was all white and then I remember there was like a girl who was Jewish in first grade but she left. And then there was in fifth grade, I hit fifth grade and then my friend Angela Chang came.
KM:	Okay.

June Shih:	And She's the daughter of Tony Chang. Tony Chang's Mongolian restaurant.
KM:	Oh yeah.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	In fact we might want to interview her parents.
June Shih:	But they lived in Stonebridge Road, near the hospital as well.
KM:	Oh okay.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And so she came in fifth grade and then another girl, a Korean girl came in fifth grade. Carol Hwa and I think her uncle was some congressman. Her uncle by marriage, some congressman. And then another girl, Pilipino girl maybe came in eighth grade.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And that was it.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	That was the four of us.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And, and then in other grades you would notice, like a grade ahead of me, had a Chinese girl whose father was also a doctor.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then there's some Indian girls, there's some African. Like Africa immigrant girls. And there's one African American girl in our class. Two African American girls but at different times.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And none of them stayed for graduations.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Though yeah, so that was it. It was like you know very smattering of this and this. I don't know what the record it is or the story is, you know, my mom wanted us to go to the best schools, right, and so we went to prep school. And she had you know, you have to test into private school.

KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Right and by then, like my grandmother had raised me, so my English was not, not where near English—.
KM:	Right, cause you're speaking.
June Shih:	Normal English.
KM:	Chinese.
June Shih:	We're speaking Taiwanese at home. I went to the Westminster Preschool, right up here.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So my mom sent me to Westminster Preschool and the first day I could not speak any English, right. And I remember I had to go to the bathroom and I was two and I was shy and couldn't speak English, right. [laughs] So I just went in my pants. I remember still to this day, I remember sitting and waiting for you know, sitting waiting to leave and I had like, full, like I had poop in my pants, you know. So I was three years old and I remember that. My grandmother was, when I got home she was horrified. She was like, "Oh my god." But you know you quickly pick it up, right.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I remember playing super hero with kids and all this stuff and I didn't have any Chinese complex so that was good.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But then so she my mom had me tested to go into private school. And apparently I did terribly. [Laughs] Like I just, nothing. I just, I don't know, very low scores. But they took me anyway cause they wanted diversity.
KM:	Minorities.
June Shih:	Yeah. They wanted diversity. So I got in. And I started in kindergarten. Went all the way through twelfth grade there. So. Cool.
KM:	So Saint Agnes what—?
June Shih:	It was Saint Agnes at the time, it was all girls.
KM:	It was all girls. Did you—?
June Shih:	All girls starting in third grade. Kindergarten through second grade it was coed [co-educational].

KM:	Oh really? And then it changes in third grade?
June Shih:	Third grade it went all girls. Yeah.
KM:	That's interesting.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. So they took boys. And then the boys would go to Saint Stephens. Okay, starting in third grade.
KM:	When you were, in school there, were you involved in any extracurricular activities? Or like music did you do music or girl scouts or—?
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Sports?
June Shih:	I did know, this so my mom worked, right? So I was at the mercy of our neighbor, who took us. Who agreed to take—.
KM:	Uh hum.
June Shih:	My sister and I to school and pick us up. So if their daughters were going to stay after, we would do the same activities. So whatever activities their daughters were going to do, we would do too. Because we wanted to just get the ride. So one year, they did ballet. So I did ballet. One year they did Girl Scouts, so I did Girl Scouts. I think she did it for two years. So I did Girl Scouts for two years
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	One year she stayed for after school art. So I stayed for after school arts. So if like if she was going to do it. My neighbor was going to do it, I was doing it. And I think it got a little annoying to this girl that cause we copied them, right?
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	We didn't know what to do. We were just copying them. And I think they complained and I was so embarrassed, but we didn't know. You know, we didn't know what was fashionable. We didn't know what to wear. You know—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So we just copied them and I think it was a little annoying to them. That I was always you know—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	What are you going to do, right?

KM:	Right. And your, I mean you parents didn't grow up here, so—.
June Shih:	My parents didn't care about clothes you know. [KM laughs] They didn't care about anything. They didn't care about the trends. So it's sort of like we just copied those girls, and you know they would comment on that, but you know we were horrified, but what were we going to do? So. [laughs]
KM:	And then in high school too, did you—?
June Shih:	So in high school—.
KM:	Sort of branch out?
June Shih:	Yeah, so I started I think, I started finding my own voice in fifth grade and finding out what I was interested in. So you know I tried out for drama, but I was having nervousness problems, so I never got a part. I was always in the chorus, which was fine. And then, and I couldn't sing. I was a terrible singer. I still am. But I did yearbook. I did newspaper. I did, one of the librarians at school wanted to start a Library Club for my friend, and I took pity on her, so we did Library Club. Yeah, we did, the good thing was, I just really become a liberal Democrat. I just somehow you know Saint Agnes was very Republican school, and, or the only open people about their politics were the Republicans.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I think all of all the teachers were Democrats but like—.
KM:	And not southern Democrats.
June Shih:	No, no, no.
KM:	Were probably like progressive.
June Shih:	Liberal Democrats. So—.
KM:	Kennedy Democrats.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah so I grew up in the Reagan era. And somehow I became a Democrat. You know like. Just watching TV, the news, reading the paper. I'm like I'm a Democrat. And I, and I found the comments similar minded another girl and I were Democrats. So we started the young liberals. And we started a little club. And like no one would join us. [KM laughs] And we were like three of us, right. But we were so open and proud. And it was really good because I found my voice.
KM:	Um-hm.

June Shih:	You know, until, until like middle school I was just not trying not to stick out.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And then I'm like, you know what these policies here are wrong. Ronald Reagan is bad you know and all these other girls are like what are you talking about? You know.
KM:	Was there something in particular that happened that sort of sort changed your perspective on who you were and what you were going to be when you, later in life?
June Shih:	I did, I didn't know what it was. I think it really was watching the news. And seeing what's happening and the cuts to all these social programs. And the cuts to this and that and I was just like I was just like, this is wrong. You know I can't believe Ronald Reagan wants to do these things. You know. And you know so yeah, if they want to claim a liberal media bias they're right, because I was watching it and it made me a liberal democrat, you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And my parents were like so apolitical they didn't you know. They were like, what is this you know when, they were slightly horrified because I was so vocal. I was vocal at school about it. And I had this weird impression about Alexandria. I thought oh my god. Such a Republic[an area.] I'm surrounded by Republicans you know. And only as an adult did I realize this is such a Democratic city, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But at the time, it was like what I knew was all my classmates and my classmates weren't particularly political. It was their parents. Who were, were Republicans and they just weren't as into politics as I was. So, yeah, so that's that was like my big thing. Like, my big like, I'm different and I'm proud to be different. It wasn't like staked on Asianess or Chineseness.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	It was like—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I'm just a liberal Democrat.
KM:	And I actually didn't know about Tiananmen Square in [19]89.

June Shih:	Yeah, yeah, yeah.
KM:	Something.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	That was a trigger, you know.
June Shih:	Yeah, That was. That was even, I think in third grade. Third grade we had the mock election. Right.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So that was Ronald Reagan versus Jimmy Carter. And I copied all the girls and I voted for Ronald Reagan.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then I like that's when I sort of like started watching the news and reading the paper and my father had this thing where just like you have to watch the news because everyone needs to know what's going on in the world. So we watched like ABC nightly news every day. And that's when I'm like, "Oh my God why did I vote for Ronald Reagan in the mock election?" It was like you know everyone it was overwhelming for my you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	In our third grade election. And that's why I kind of like ever since then paying, repenting for that [KM laughs] terrible decision.
KM:	Luckily your vote didn't really count.
June Shih:	Yeah. Yes, yes, so but yeah that was it and you know we were gong to Dukakis ran you know, I was like a big Dukakis person. And it was great. Walter Mondale. Yeah. I wore black when he lost. So I was so weird cause I was like fifth grade you know like—.
KM:	But political.
June Shih:	But political.
KM:	That's cool.
June Shih:	A little crazy, yeah.
KM:	That's good.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah, a little leftist.
KM:	My other question is sort of dealing also with being, you know, of Chinese ancestry and being in a place like Saint Agnes?

June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Like how does that play out in terms of understanding yourself and identity? I mean you talk about not knowing English going into grade school.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	How did people respond to you? In a very sort of unusual homogenous school?
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	A school setting particularly here in Virginia?
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. So I don't I think very quickly I bought into the American narrative and American history and everything, like you know, I was reading Thomas Jefferson.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	He was, like I would talk about how he was my hero. In second grade we all had to like write essays about what we wanted to be when we grew up. So I wrote I was going to be the first woman president. And it never, I never said first Chinese American president.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So it was like, retreated. It was kind, I was always there because I was always conscious about how horrible my clothes were and how my parents didn't know what was fashionable. My mom didn't know, she just wanted to save money. So she bought cheapest stuff, you know, so I was always afraid of that. I was always afraid of people saying Chinese you know and then I think kindergarten through second grade there would be boys would be like, um, Chinese, Japanese, dirty knees look at these.
KM:	I remember that as a kid too.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	I didn't even understand what it meant.
June Shih:	They would do that to me.
KM:	Yeah, yeah.
June Shih:	And I'd be like, that was kind of mean.
KM:	Yeah, it is kind of mean.
June Shih:	But I wasn't overcome by it.

KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I was like okay. And then there was this chant. You know jumping chant were you crossed your legs in and out, and then you go chining, chining China, try to make a dollar out of fifty-nine cents. She missed, she missed, she missed like this, and you just see where your legs landed.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And you know, I'm like they're making fun of Chinese people. That's not nice. But I just did it anyway, you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So it's all like very innocent and you didn't think about it. And you know if they did say something mean you're like hurt for a half second.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then you kept going.
KM:	Because you're just a kid and you just—.
June Shih:	You're a kid you kept going and, and it wasn't, um you know, it wasn't, it was ignorance more than mean spiritness.
KM:	Right, or they're replicating what their parents—.
June Shih:	Their replicating, you know they just didn't know about.
KM:	Popular culture.
June Shih:	Yeah, you know, maybe sometimes they made fun of my clothes but somehow I like brushed it off. I think.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	It was very good for my mental health [laughs] and it was sort of like my sister and I brushed it off. And you know, I was always conscious of it and slightly embarrassed about being Chinese but—.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Just kept pushing forward, you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I was just like colonial American history enthusiast. I was just very American.
KM:	Yeah.

June Shih:	You know. And you know and sometimes I like worried about friends. But I'm just very I was like. I was lucky, you know.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	I found some friends and even if they thought it or their parents thought it they were classy enough to hide it. You know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And it was there were a couple minutes when I was shocked because of like, you know, you get to know and these carpools with other mothers and I remember us in the car and one of the girls was asking the mother, oh I made a new friend. Can she come over? Her name is [unclear] and she's Chinese. Is it okay if she's Chinese? And they didn't, they forgot that I was Chinese and I was sitting in the car [laughter] you know and so, so I was like why is she asking her mom permission to invite a Chinese, you know? Like it was clear the fact that she was a Chinese girl was an issue.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Or she thought it would be an issue for her mother.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But they had forgotten there was a Chinese girl in the car.
KM:	But you were also there.
June Shih:	Yeah, and I was there. And then, and yeah there would be these episodes where we would come out, like another mother like some Chinese guy cut her off when she was driving and she'd say like horrible call him a Chink or something you were like [unclear] you know?
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	They forgot that I'm right there. And same with like, I think the girls loved, I guess a half catalog. I do remember all these things, they were talking about this. The A-Team was huge back then right.
KM:	I know I can think of the theme song, right now.
June Shih:	Yes, and their talking about Mr. T. and the mother was like I don't want you talking about the N word, and you were like whoa you know and—.
KM:	Wow.

June Shih:	But the daughters were horrified too. So it's like a generation thing.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So that generation but the generation, my generation was like they kind of knew right, it's not cool to talk like that right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So it's Northern Virginia versus you know other parts so—.
KM:	Other parts of Virginia.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So the just it's the generation, my gen, my classmates kind of knew or were kind of cool.
KM:	But they were probably, it sounds like they were navigating their parents.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	What they sense.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	[What] were the racial, ethnic politics?
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah what they sensed of their parents and they then what they sensed was acceptable.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	Going forward right.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So they were trying to do that. So that was it. Then I was good in school so that helped. Right.
KM:	Well I was going to ask you about that cause there is you know a bunch of stereotypes.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Tied to being Asian American.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	And especially Chinese American.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.

KM:	And one is being good at school.
June Shih:	Right.
KM:	Particularly math and science.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Which you haven't mentioned at all
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Did you ever get people talking about oh, you're Chinese, you're good at math and science, or you're Chinese you good at school, right?
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Did you see some of, so sort of the positive stereotyping of that emerges?
June Shih:	So I think the good part about going to this tiny private school that was where all the girls were very ambitious.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	They all wanted to go to good colleges. They all valued doing well.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	In school, right. There's none of that. Cause there is only forty-three in our class. Everyone wanted to go to good college. So I think I was like so there was none of that making fun of you being good at school because everyone wanted to be good at school. So that was good. That was a benefit for me. Um, you know, and that was also good because like Saint Agnes is still is a very sporty school.
KM:	Uh-hm, yeah.
June Shih:	Um, like lacrosse, field hockey, they're always like top in the league and I was terrible at sports, so that was a huge handicap. There's socially a huge handicap. But, but everyone is so good at school. So like we'd do science baseball. And everyone wanted me to be on their team in fourth grade and I felt like redeemed, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	They like me because I'm smart. But, but I do remember. I remember like teachers, like and this is shocking to me. Like for English class we had to keep a journal, right?
KM:	Um-hm.

June Shih:	And we wrote things and I just went to town on my journal. I was just very open in my journal about what I was thinking. And at the end of the year, the teacher wrote to me, I'm so impressed by your journal. And that you are such a multidimensional person. And all this stuff. I'm like. What?! [KM laughs] You know. And I really felt it was a racist moment cause there was like—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	She thought I was this like machine like this.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Academic machine. And like, you know, just math, science grade grubber, you know, but the she meant it as a compliment and I mostly took it as a compliment, right. But I also thought she was using stereotypes.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	To define me.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Because she was so shocked that I was so like thoughtful, you know. So, so I was like okay. What is it called about a back-handed compliment?
KM:	Um-hm. Yeah.
June Shih:	Um, so yeah so I don't know maybe people that thought way about me too.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	That I was a machine.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Or something like that. I don't know. It was, but the fact that there was no, you weren't embarrassed to be good in school. Cause it was such a small school.
KM:	That's so cool.
June Shih:	Yeah, that I was also lucky.
KM:	Did your parents get any sort of pushback from the community about being Chinese? And particularly during the Cold War or the end of the Reagan era about being communist or being suspected of being communist or?

June Shih:	So.
KM:	That sort of you know that type of rhetoric. That emerges in the cold war that a lot of Chinese and also then later Vietnamese have to deal with.
June Shih:	I think they were very heads down kind of people. Like they weren't very social.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And you know my mom at the Library of Congress was in the Chinese, Korean section. So all her work colleagues were Chinese or Korean.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So they were like there is no sort of social issue there.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then there the occasional white man who was awesome at Chinese [section] working there. And it's weird cause they were always senior, cause they were Ph.D.s so there's a little weird of a class thing there too. But—.
KM:	Gender.
June Shih:	Yeah, gender too, as these Chinese men who had Ph.D.s, white men who you know, Ph.D.s were the senior people, but anyways, it was okay. And, and then my father like worked like a dog.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	At Alexandria Hospital so I don't know, and he didn't really share his work life with us. Right.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	He was never home.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	He was always working at the hospital. My mom sometimes got a little jealous cause I know he was like, flirtatious with the nurses. But because when he died, all the nurses came forward, we loved him so much and they all had like pens that said, Dr. Shih thinks I'm beautiful or something. Cause he would say your beautiful, cause like today it would never flown right? But.
KM:	Yeah.

June Shih:	He's like you're so beautiful or you're my favorite nurse. He'd do all these things just to like win favor.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And, and then like, you know, and his English accent, his accent was pretty heavy.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And I'm, like how did you understand what you were saying? It's just like we've just gotten used to him, right? And they just, they just and one nurse said I would look at the floor and listen to what he was saying.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But, you know he never got fired. So apparently, and I don't think you know, I think he was a fine doctor. So—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So, so yeah, that was so it, was nothing—. They never brought anything home.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Like they would never share and they were always like, as I grew into my late teens and I was getting ready to graduate, and I would be coming more Chinese.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Like Tiananmen Square happened. They were a little horrified that I was going to be more Chinese, you know, that I was like sort of wanting to know more about China.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	They were a little surprised.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	They were like why, why you know and many years later when I was doing my wedding and wanted to incorporate Chinese things.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And my parents were like, why do you do that? Like, don't you just do what all the Americans do. You know. They were horrified, they are still horrified, you know. I was thirty-one and they are still horrified that I would try to emphasize any sort of Chineseness.

KM:	Right.
June Shih:	They were very much an assimilationists. They were lazy about language, besides forcing us to go to Chinese school. They didn't really care. They really did want us to assimilate so.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So that was their thing.
VISIT TO TAIWAN & EXTENDED FAMILY IN USA (00:41:21)	
KM:	When was your first time going back to either Taiwan or China with your family?
June Shih:	So that would have been when I was six. When my grandfather passed away.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Um, I just remember waking up and my mother said, "Your grandpa is dead." And I'm like whoa. So we went, my mother and I and my sister. My father had already gone back to China for his first ever trip back. He left China in 1947 and he did not go back to mainland China until 1979.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So he hadn't seen his family in thirty-two years
KM:	Wow.
June Shih:	And so while he was on that trip, my grandfather died, so we went to Taiwan.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	And, you know back then it was just letters so he had no idea if we were in Taiwan while he was in China.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	But she managed to intercept him at a connection and so like she was we met him at the plane. I remember seeing how shocked he was. "What are you doing here?"
KM:	Okay. So then you all went to Taiwan.
June Shih:	No, no. Then we all came home together.
KM:	Oh you all came.
June Shih:	Yeah.

KM:	Home together.
June Shih:	On the way back. So we went to Taiwan.
KM:	How long were you in Taiwan?
June Shih:	About two weeks. It was shocking. I was six, right? So, you know, the food was horrifying to us. And you know they like, because we were, they thought we were Americans, so they got peanut butter.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Cause they assumed we wanted peanut butter. And they got Sprite cause they assumed we wanted pop, right?
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	It was fake, it was Chinese, a Taiwanese sprite. And Taiwan in 1979ish was still pretty backward.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So we were like, my sister was like, “What is this?” You know, it’s like it’s just none of the conveniences of America. Squat toilets.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	Um, and so we were like pretty bad. “Like I don’t want to eat this.” And like the only thing we would drink was the fake Sprite. My mom had brought candies for all my little cousins and we were, we didn’t want to share them. We were like horrible American cousins. We were horrible. Looking back. But we were just so shocked. We had no idea. That you know, people lived like that.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	You know. And it’s so hot. There was no air conditioning. Everyone slept on a tatami mat cause—.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	You know Taiwan is Japanese oriented.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Um, so yeah, it was it was pretty shocking to us.
KM:	So that was your initial visit?
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Did you go back? Other times as a as a child or adulthood?

June Shih:	No, so my parents were not like that. They just were not like other families, like my Indian friends they would go back every year.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Right.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And other Taiwanese people would go back frequently. We went back that one time. And, and I think also helped that my mom's whole family came here.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So there was no one left. And, or no one close. No one that nuclear family was left. There's maybe one, one sister never immigrated.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But right, so yes, so her family would get together here.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	You know and they would all come to our house. Or we would all go to another house.
KM:	Would they, would you say here, do you mean they are all—?
June Shih:	In America, no.
KM:	In the D.C. metro area?
June Shih:	No, no, no. So the aunt who was a diplomat for the Chinese government stayed in America. Like she left and she settled in Seattle.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So, couple brothers and sisters joined her in Seattle.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And then, um, another one went to San Jose.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And Palo Alto and another one settle in Rochester. And you noticed these are all very scientific so the Rochester one, her husband worked for Kodak.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	The San Jose one, her husband worked for IBM. Another one went to

	Gainesville, Florida. For the university, to work for the University of Florida.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Um, I think that's it.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So there every, there very spread out, so the east coast, New York ones, we were closest to the ones who lived in New York. In Rochester. So we'd see them maybe once a summer.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So that's it, yeah.
COLLEGE & CHINA (00:45:07)	
KM:	And then your dad's side. Did you go to the mainland to visit them when you were young?
June Shih:	So I did not go to mainland China until 1993. When I was in college and I really wanted to go. And my father and mother just never really you know they were like, "Okay you want to go." I think secretly my dad was pleased I wanted to go to mainland China, but still they were like, "Why are you doing this, you know, you will never—." So ah you know in college I had this awakening. Or 1989 caused this awakening, which is like I am studying Western European history and I've been studying it for thirteen years. I know nothing about China.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So I got to college. Was like I got to learn all about it. So I became East Asian Studies major.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	To the horror of my parents. [KM laughter] That is a five thousand year old history, that's a five thousand history year history. You will never master it. You know.
KM:	Right. In four years.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. You will never get it. There are people who study it in China forever. Why are you doing that and why can't you be a doctor, right? [KM laughter] Why can't you [be a] doctor?
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Or engineer? Or doctor? Engineer.

KM:	Or a lawyer?
June Shih:	Lawyer is okay, right?
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But doctor! And so they were horrified. But '93 I said I wanted to go to China. And so I went to China.
KM:	Uh-huh.
June Shih:	The summer after my junior year. And they're happy to pay for it, you know. And, and my dad I think was secretly pleased. Cause at the end of the summer, I went to see his family.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And that was also like oh my god, you know.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And, still 1993 was very early in China's modernization. I was like once again horrified at how people lived, right? And they're just coming out of communism, so it's like tons of people squeezed into tiny apartments. And, and I'm like, oh my god, you live like this? So it was very eye opening for me.
KM:	Where did you go? Did you end up in Beijing or Shanghai?
June Shih:	I went to Beijing.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	I managed to get an internship at the New York Times. Cause Nick Kristof, Nick Kristof was a Harvard alum [alumni.]
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So I just used that Harvard thing. So we went there. I went there as an intern, but I was very useless. I could I could barely speak Mandarin. So I was useless to him. And to this day I'm slightly embarrassed. [KM laughter] That I went to work for him because I know he probably thinks oh, June Shih sucked. She was terrible at Mandarin. And, but still he was there. He and his wife, Sheryl were very classy people. And he took me to Xinjiang,
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Which is northwest China.
KM:	Um-hm.

June Shih:	Um, where there are a lot of, still to this day a lot of Muslim separatists.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So he took me there. And it was just amazing, you know. Just to see, a different part of it.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I saw, so I saw Beijing. I saw, you know I did independent side trips. I saw the terracotta warriors. I did this all by myself.
KM:	So you went to up the Xi'an?
June Shih:	Yeah, I went to Xi'an. And then I went down to [unclear] so see my family. And that was amazing. You know like, they were just so thrilled to see me.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Um, and um, just treated me like a queen. You know like—.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	A queen. And I realized how much, how important my father was to them. Cause he helped them build their house.
KM:	Was he still sending money back?
June Shih:	Yeah, he sent a lot of money back. And they built this, it was embarrassing, actually. It was like [KM laughs] and this happens a lot. Like a lot of overseas people.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Build houses.
KM:	Particularly in Fuyang.
June Shih:	Yes, yes [laughs] so there are a lot of these kinds of houses but on their particular street. They literally had like the biggest house. And it was kind even I was like a little horrified. Actually—.
KM:	Sort of like a McMansion [term for a large house].
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Actually, that didn't happen until [19]98. Or that didn't happen til '98 or 2000 when I saw it. In '93 they still had the old house.

KM:	Yeah, yeah.
June Shih:	And then when I saw the new house. I was like oh my god! But allegedly, like you know, one floor is ours in perpetuity. But we'll never claim it.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Um, so yeah, three or four families live in this huge house. On this narrow, narrow street. So, and then but they are all doing well. You know, they're all like merchants. And a couple of them went to college. But it's interesting because not all of them were going to go to college.
KM:	Um-hm
June Shih:	None of the girls went to college, so it's like interesting.
KM:	Have some of them come to the U.S.?
June Shih:	Not a one has come to the U.S. One moved to Singapore. And has come to the U.S. for conferences.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And has looked us up. Not a one, though my cousin who is my age, has a son.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And his dream is for that son to study here. So I expect that that will be the first one.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	To actually come to the U.S.
KM:	Okay. I was just curious. Since one side of family seemed to—.
June Shih:	Yeah, I know.
KM:	Come.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah, the mainlanders.
KM:	And not—.
June Shih:	The mainlanders couldn't come, right?
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And they were less academic. Like my father's family, only my father and one brother went to university. So they just have fewer

	opportunities to come.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Cause the best way to America is through the universities.
KM:	Right. Through student visas.
June Shih:	Through student visas. So he did a so, so it's this next generation. Like, our, my children's generation where I think there will be some cousin travel.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So.
KM:	That'll be cool.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. And, then also it's great cause they, they go on these [unclear] I don't want to coming to America until China is one hundred percent respected and Chinese people are respected. So I'm not going to send my son there until that happens. I'm like okay. [laughs] Well you're welcome when you're ready.
KM:	Yeah, yeah.
June Shih:	So.
KM:	But that's also great to hear that sort of political voice.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah, he was, they're very much like that, family is very much like that.
KM:	So, you brought up college.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Majoring in East Asian Studies. Coming from Alexandria to Cambridge, Massachusetts.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Probably a bit of a cultural shock in terms of demographics?
June Shih:	Yes.
KM:	And—.
June Shih:	Huge, huge.
KM:	In terms of activism in politics.
June Shih:	Yes, yes.
KM:	Do you want to talk a little bit about—.

June Shih:	Yeah, actually.
KM:	What is was like and the differences between the two?
June Shih:	So for me, actually the bigger shock was when um, I went to, Johns Hopkins [University in Baltimore, Maryland] has like a gifted and talented camp.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	CTY. Have you heard of that?
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So.
KM:	They do it at Saint Stephens [and] Saint Agnes.
June Shih:	So, in seventh grade and my mom was very focused on ways to get me ahead right?
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And they were very focused, my mom, my dad did not enter this, he didn't care. I mean, he wanted me to do well. But he was not personally involved in finding ways to get me, you know to get me academic enrichment. So she found out you could take this test. You could take the SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] in seventh grade. And you could go, if you did a certain score, you go to this gifted and talented camp in Pennsylvania. So I did that. And I got in. And um, I went there and it was the summer after seventh grade. It was mind blowing.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Because I would say more than fifty percent of the campers were Asian.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Or Jewish.
KM:	Interesting, okay.
June Shih:	And I had never had any exposure to Jewish culture either.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	You know. So it's like Jews and Asians. And my roommate was Chinese American and I was so shocked. Oh my god. You know, my roommate was going to be a Chinese American. To this day a best friend of mine. But like, it was just like this eye opening thing.

KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Because I'd come from this all white environment. And just to have all these things in common with the Chinese—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	[Chinese] American campers.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then the Jewish people telling me all about bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah and like what is that, you know.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But they all assumed I knew, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	They just, cause they had come from these, you know these affluent suburbs where there were all these Chinese and Jews already.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And Alexandria wasn't like that, you know.
KM:	No.
June Shih:	Alexandria was not like Potomac. Or Bethesda [Maryland.] Or even Fairfax, right. Or McLean. Cause some of them came from those schools, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I was from this Alexandria. So it was different. So that was where my shock happened and realized there are more people like me, you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	They would talk about Taiwanese American cultural camp and I'm like, "What?" [KM laughter] You know and, one thing is, where another way where we kept in touch with culture was my father went to National Taiwan University Medical School.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So they would have reunions.
KM:	Oh yeah.
June Shih:	Every year. So we'd go.

KM:	The alumni organizations.
June Shih:	Yes, the alumni organization is a big deal. So we would go and occasionally we would go you know we'd go far. We'd go to Toronto one year.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	We went to Rye, New York one year.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And that's where also ran into some of these kids that I met at camp.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And then when I got to Harvard. Some of these same kids I met at camp were at Harvard.
KM:	Oh, okay. That's cool.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. So, and then so Harvard was less. It was still a shock, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But I sort seen the future [laughs] at this camp.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then I got to Harvard and that was just sheer diversity. You know that's like gay people, not just Asians. Gay people.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	More Jews, more Asians.
KM:	You have sort of a huge international population.
June Shih:	Black people
KM:	Come in. Yeah.
June Shih:	Yeah, international. So it was all very different. And Harvard did a good job like our rooming group was like Asian, Black, very Jewish. And then like Exeter, you know—.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So it was like this mix, but it's of course classic, you know. We'd all segregated out again. You know.
KM:	Right.

June Shih:	The next year, though I stayed with my black and Jewish roommate. Like we did this, we stayed as a three.
KM:	Um-hm, yeah.
June Shih:	But you the Exeter girl took off. [laughs]
KM:	To be with other Exeter girls.
June Shih:	Yes. Yes.
KM:	Yes.
June Shih:	A true statement a very true statement.
KM:	So were you involved in political activities on campus at Harvard? Cause I mean, you—.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	You talk about being political young.
June Shih:	Yeah, I don't know somehow I sort went inward. I didn't like, like I would join them in name.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	I joined the Democrats and I joined the Asian American Association. But I didn't become active.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	I think it was like, maybe I felt they were like, like the Asians were too identity politicky.
KM:	Yeah, yeah.
June Shih:	And I just wasn't that.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	That's not me either and then the Democrats, I just I don't know. I found the newspaper.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And I ended up.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	At the student newspaper. And usually you don't have time for more than one major activity.
KM:	Right, right.

June Shih:	So I did that.
KM:	It's, it's interesting that you brought that up cause from talking to other folks who are Asian American who come from backgrounds where it's more white homogenous, and they get thrown into—.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	School environment where there is a large Asian American community
June Shih:	Yes.
KM:	That's politicized too.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.
KM:	Like they don't quite understand the identity politics.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Going on.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.
KM:	They have to be educated on it.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Too so.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	It, it seemed to be a common story. I saw it in California, too.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. I just didn't feel comfortable or I didn't want to be so like my thing. The way I'm identified was Miss Asian activist, you know, like.
KM:	Right, yeah.
June Shih:	I didn't want that to be my thing. And I was very much. I still am a, you know, one America kind of person, you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Like everyone should embrace American ideas. And really try to be American. Make America live closer to its ideas, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	That's my thing. I'm all about English. I'm everyone should learn English. You know, I don't want to cater to, like it's fine as a transition and a bridge but everyone should learn English. Right.

KM:	Yeah, yeah.
June Shih:	So that's my thing. And I wasn't going to be that kind of identity politics.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I wasn't going to do that. And then the newspaper just took over my life.
KM:	Yeah, okay.
June Shih:	So, That was my thing.
KM:	Yeah. That was your thing
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.
KM:	No I was just curious. I mean, it didn't drive—.
June Shih:	Yeah, somehow like being in this all white here it didn't make me more Asian there. Yeah it's interesting.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But it was—.
KM:	Usually, it often times it goes the other way.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. And then, at Saint Agnes, you know, I felt different but somehow like I dealt with it.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	You know it's weird.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I didn't have a, you know, I'm sure people thought things about me. But I just dealt with it.
KM:	Yeah.
CAREER (00:56:22)	
KM:	Did you get go straight to grad [graduate] school or law school? After—.
June Shih:	Yeah, no, no.
KM:	After.
June Shih:	No.
KM:	College? What did you do?

June Shih:	So after college. I was on this journalism thing.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And I knew was going to be hard. It was the, the still like the end of the recession.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So there were not very many journalism jobs.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And my parents were freaking out. They were like, “Why aren’t you going to medical school or law school?” [KM laughs] And so, I got a job in Florida.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	I got a job at the Tampa Tribune. And it was to be in the outer, outer most bureaus. You know because it was really like starter job for anyone starting in journalism.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	You gotta start in this small places.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And only like a lucky few start in the big papers.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So I got a job there. And I was covering cops and courts. And you know, all kinds of stuff and talking about Asian stuff. That’s where I had a little—. So my bureau was in Sebring, Florida. And it’s like an hour and a half from Tampa. And like two hours from Palm Beach. So it’s straight in the middle of the state.
KM:	Okay. What town is it again?
June Shih:	Sebring.
KM:	Sebring?
June Shih:	Sebring, Florida.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So it’s in the middle of the panhandle.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Not the panhandle. No, the—.

KM:	The peninsula.
June Shih:	The peninsula.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	In the middle. [KM laughs] And so it's orange trees, cattle and orange trees.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And oh, mobile homes. So it's where like a lot of the Midwestern retirees would go.
KM:	Um-hm. Yeah.
June Shih:	It's more affordable. You know a lot of them just spent the winters there. And, and that's where like you hang out it's a very small town. It's like very southern, you know.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Um, you know there, the black people lived on the other end of, literally on the other end of the railroad tracks. You know.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	The other side of the railroad tracks. Still very southern town. The All Florida Rodeo was there, you know.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	All kinds of stuff. So like the cops, like so I'd be friends with the D.A. [District Attorney] and the cops. And I'd remember I'd do happy hour at the Chili's [restaurant] with them. And they would say those terrible things, like they'd be like making fun of Godzilla movie. You know, like all kinds of Asian jokes. And once again, they didn't think—. They looked at me and they didn't think I was they didn't think, you know. They forgot I was there or something.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	An Asian woman was there or something. And then like a, one of the Democratic, liberal, Democratic activist, like was like, "Hey you see that Connie Chung, are you like Connie Chung?" You know. [laughs] I was like, what is this? And then there were like people like little, little girls would run into me and this was Pocahontas film came out. And there was a little girl and she was like, "Oh my god. You [look] like Pocahontas." [KM laughs] And I felt like she had never seen a Chinese girl before.

KM:	Right.
June Shih:	You know.
KM:	Or a Native American.
June Shih:	Right. Cause I, I had long black hair.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So they thought I was like Pocahontas. And I, I decided to be flattered because they were little girls and like Pocahontas is hot you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Oh, that's nice. But I was like, they've never seen a Chinese girl. Clearly. So, but it was a great year. Very interesting year. But I only did that for a year. And cause I got like, that was when my democratic genes kicked in again. Cause that was when Newt Gingrich took over Congress.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Like oh, I want to take a side. I want to have a Clinton Gore sticker on my car. So I wrote to the White House. I wrote to the speechwriter. Hillary Clinton's speechwriter at the White House and said, "Do you need any help? I'm currently a reporter. But I really want to get in the fight." And she—and then when I came to visit my parents, I like said, "Can I come visit you?" And she said, "Yes." And then that was it. I went back to Florida and three months later she called and like, "I have this opening. Are you interested in applying for it?" So it was totally random. Like, she did not know me. My friend was an intern in the office, so he knew who to write. He told me who to write. Cause he thought, why don't you work for Hillary. It was his idea. Why don't you work for Hillary? Which I'm like, why not? I love Hillary, right. But I never thought I would work.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then when she called me, I'm like are you kidding me? [KM laughs] And so, but I had to try out. And they took a long time to decide they wanted me. But then, at that time I was like going to give up on Florida anyways and go grad school. So I took the GRE [Graduate Record Examinations test.] And moved up, moved back to D.C. And I said okay, I'll volunteer, and she's like, okay. And then after I volunteered for a couple weeks, she's like, you can have the job. So, so that was it.

KM:	So you became Hillary's speechwriter?
June Shih:	So Hillary was writing a syndicated column.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So they needed a researcher slash ghostwriter. So I did that.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And then, from, but that wasn't a lot of work. So then I became, helped a started helping out with speeches. And that grew into speech writing. And then when Clinton, Clinton had openings, President Clinton had openings after the [19]96 elections
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	That's when everyone leaves.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So I got on the staff in '97. And then when Hillary decided to run for Senate, I'm like, oh I can't miss that.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So I left and moved to New York. And worked on her Senate campaign.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	By then it had been five years and I was like done.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I'm not writing another speech again. [KM laughs] I'm just going to do something else. I'm done.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And it was weird because you start at the White House and the thought of going to the Senate with her didn't seem exciting. Which is stupid, right? Because I'm looking back, I'm like that was a stupid decision. Cause Senate would have been exciting too!
KM:	Right. It's different.
June Shih:	Right, but it's different. But I'm like, no I'm done. I'm leaving. I'm not going with her to Senate. So I moved to China. And I—.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Hung out in China for two years. So that's it. That was my life.

KM:	What did you do in China?
June Shih:	I learned Chinese.
KM:	Excellent.
June Shih:	Finally. I was supposed to learn it in college but I didn't really study in college.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So I never learned it in college. I was a terrible intern for Nick Kristof. So I finally learned it.
KM:	Where in China where you living?
June Shih:	Beijing. So my parents were still in Alexandria. Father still working. Working, working in Alexandria Hospital. And my mom was Library of Congress. They never left. They live in that house. My mom still lives in that house.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So, yeah.
RAISING A FAMILY IN ALEXANDRIA (01:02:17)	
KM:	Okay. When did you decide to settle in?
June Shih:	Settle back here?
KM:	Back here? Sort of how did that happen?
June Shih:	So, it was because they were both getting old.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Parents were getting old. I was kind of horrified. I was realizing they weren't eating meals. You know.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	They were like missing days and meals.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And I like, "Oh my god." Right. And I tried meals on wheels. And it just wasn't working. Right. Cause they had retired. They retired. They both retired in 2003.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And I had my first daughter, Abby, in 2006.

KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Um, And they came out to help out with her. And they—.
KM:	Where were you at that time?
June Shih:	In San Francisco.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	That's when I went to law school.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And so, they come out and they go back. But it was when they went back, I just worried they weren't eating, right.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Um, and then finally, my dad had a stroke.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	In 2007. And then, so that's when we kidnapped them. [KM laughs] In the spring of, in the spring of 2007, we kidnapped them. And held them in California for several months. And then finally he's like I wanna go back. I wanna go back. So we let them go back. But I was never at peace with them going.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Back. And conveniently or not conveniently, Josh's—.
KM:	Your spouse?
June Shih:	My spouse's newspaper folded.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So he lost his job. And I hated my job. So we both decided, let's just go back. So we went back. We came back. And I just wanted to micromanage their care.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And then um, you know, Obama had won.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So I'm like wow, Obama, I'd love to work for [President] Obama. And Hillary was going to go to the State Department. Oh my god, you know, so.
KM:	Yeah.

June Shih:	And Josh is a reporter. So all of. He had more opportunities here too.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	In D.C. So we just came back. And we lived with them for four months. And we searched all over. And growing up, I had this dream, you know that Saint Agnes is in the Beverly Hills neighborhood. But I had this dream of living in Rosemont.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Cause it was so gorgeous Craftsman Houses
KM:	Yeah, little older than this neighborhood.
June Shih:	Yes, in Del Ray. You know all these gorgeous front porches. And the Sears, whatever custom—.
KM:	Craftsman houses.
June Shih:	Sears out of the box houses. So I had this dream.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So we searched high and low. But that was during the [economic] crash.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So nobody who had a nice house was going to put it up, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So, but we found this house in Beverly Hills. And I'm just like oh god, it's so close to Saint Agnes. Oh my god. But we, so we bought this house.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So there you go. That's how we ended up here.
KM:	Back, sort of.
June Shih:	Yes
KM:	Coming full circle.
June Shih:	Yeah, but it was kind of you know the neighborhood they live in is like new money.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And we find ourselves here. Which is older money. We like, sort of like weird. And then I heard this neighborhood had all kinds of

	restrictive covenants on it.
KM:	Um-hm. It did.
June Shih:	So it's kind of cool that it like. You know.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I live here. And there are these block parties. And Josh—I didn't. I couldn't go to the first party, but he felt like he was in the in the south again. You know. Like he felt like our daughter was like the only minority at the party. So things, things don't change you know.
KM:	Right. But they do change.
June Shih:	They do change. They do change for sure.
KM:	Cause you are here.
June Shih:	I'm here, yes.
KM:	And I'm here.
June Shih:	And yeah, you're here.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	But yeah, so it's still very you know this neighborhood is still very—.
KM:	It's a gorgeous neighborhood.
June Shih:	Yeah, everyone is friendly and nice.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I love it here.
KM:	The one, the last section I want to talk to you is about heritage. Not only the heritage that you've talked about, that your parents transmitted to you, but also now that you have two daughters—.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	How you try to maintain heritage and keep that going with your own daughters? And particular of course like holiday celebrations, behaviors, attitudes. And, food, which I know you like to cook.
June Shih:	Um-hm.
KM:	Um, and then language right?
June Shih:	Um-hm.
KM:	Those sort of markers, right?

June Shih:	Right.
KM:	The heritage, ethnic identity.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	How do you keep that going for the third generation here in Alexandria?
June Shih:	Yeah, so that's really difficult, right. So it, I was very excited because at George Mason [Elementary School], like in kindergarten there was an afterschool Chinese option.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Right. So I signed my daughter up. Each time. And by the third time or the second time they didn't have enough students. And I was like how is that possible that no one wants to learn Chinese? You know?
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Particularly considering the geopolitics. So, I was like what? So then they couldn't get enough students. So that was over. And it wasn't going to be effective to have Chinese once a week, you know. You know in that kind of setting. But I thought, at least it was something, right.
KM:	Right. Oh yeah, I get it.
June Shih:	That, and then um, then I tried the tutor thing. But that's so expensive.
KM:	Uh-hm.
June Shih:	And then, and then, you know, and then my husband and his and my father-in-law were like, just talk Chinese to her. To them, and I'm like oh, it's so hard. And I have a terrible accent. [KM laughs] I don't want to give them my horrible accent. But so it's my fault too. But you know my parents didn't talk to me either
KM:	Right. It's a classic generational thing.
June Shih:	So it's gone. And their diluted cause their surnames are not even Asian, right. And they don't look fully Asian. But we, you know, go to China a lot.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Um, when my father was alive, we went maybe every eighteen months.
KM:	Um-hm.

June Shih:	So my daughters have been to China three or four times already.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	We are gonna go to back this summer.
KM:	Oh, you are?
June Shih:	I am. We're going back to Taiwan. And um, I'm going to put them in Chinese language camp.
KM:	Oh, they're going to love that. [laughs]
June Shih:	They are not pleased. They are so not pleased. And this year I started them in Chinese school. Up at George Mason High School in Falls Church.
KM:	Oh, okay, yeah.
June Shih:	And there is a Chinese school there and it's not very good.
KM:	Is it on weekends or after school?
June Shih:	So it's a weekend Chinese school. Its two hours. Two or three hours. I can't remember.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	Oh, it's a third hour because they do Chinese dance. And that is really the way in. Because they love Chinese dancing. So they don't mind going to Chinese dance. They just mind the Chinese class and I never, I've never sat in on the class. My husband sat in and he saw. It was very old school Chinese style. Which is the teacher stands up and talks. So it's horrible. They're not going to learn.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So we have to. We're figuring something else out. We don't know what it is. So the first try, try is this summer language camp. But that's not tenable, because like I have to take them.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And stay. Air tickets. Too expensive. So—.
KM:	There's not a Chinese language camp in this area? Or like at the international school in D.C.?
June Shih:	They get older. There will be more options.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I think like all the fancy private schools in the district have some

	Chinese.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Language options.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	And yeah, and there's definitely Chinese culture camp.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And I think my Abby tried to get your Abby to go to Chinese culture camp with her. And she refused. Because she's not Chinese.
KM:	She's not Chinese. She's like—.
June Shih:	Um.
KM	There's Korean culture camp.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	We, we could have that conversation.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. She's like come on, it's all Asian cultures. [KM laughs] And that was that was, that was on Fairfax. But, so eventually I'm going to force them to do that.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But it's not the same.
KM:	No.
June Shih:	It's just, it's just going to be once again it's going to be up to them. Cause for me, it was up to me.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Right, and I decided to do all this stuff. And my sister has done less. She also took Chinese in college. And she's into it. But she's, you know.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	You gotta make that investment. In a personal investment. So I hope they will, they will do that too.
KM:	And it's also hard being hapa haole too. Sort of navigating. Sort of identity for themselves.
June Shih:	Right.
KM:	Particularly, they are pretty young now.

June Shih:	Yeah, and—. Very young now. And she already has complained that at school some kids are you know like talked about her being Chinese and she thinks, they think she was born in China. And she's like, "I wasn't born in China." You know. "I didn't grow up with a Chinese last name. I can't speak Chinese. So how was I born in China?" But at the same time—.
KM:	My Abby has had the same problem.
June Shih:	But at the same time, it's not the same. Like it's cause I don't think she's at all embarrassed about being Chinese.
KM:	Yeah, yeah.
June Shih:	And I was. I was always, you know. Until I grew older and just like dealt with it and decided to be an adult about it. And be proud about having that heritage. And understanding that people didn't, you know getting that perspective. I was like embarrassed. And any time my parents seemed more Chinese than others I was embarrassed.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Right. Or seemed less American. I don't think my daughters care.
KM:	Did they—?
June Shih:	I think it's really impressive.
KM:	Do they? Are they empowered by it? Do you think?
June Shih:	Yes. I think they are very proud to be Chinese.
KM:	Cool.
June Shih:	And I think that's the shift, right? They're proud of that heritage. They're proud of having gone to China so many times.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	They're proud of going to Taiwan. You know they get, they still get hurt when they. But they are also puzzled, like why are you making fun of me for being Chinese, you know? Or why is that a bad thing.
KM:	Right, right.
June Shih:	And you know it's like they don't understand why it's a bad thing. Whereas, when I grew up, I totally knew why it was a bad thing, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	It was different, right. Cause it was, you were just totally different.

	But it also helps that your mother is like, then me, that I'm not, that I don't have an accent.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	I'm American too. You know. Though they still call me Chinese. I'm like yeah, my mom's Chinese.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	You know, they don't have—. I'm like, I'm not Chinese. I'm American. I was born here. Learn that, you know! But yeah.
KM:	You also do Asian American literature which them? Does that
June Shih:	Well, yes, so yes, my daughter loved it. I, I bought a book just randomly Grace Lin,
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	And um, she loved it. And she just—.
KM:	Oh the <i>Mountain and Moon</i> one?
June Shih:	No, Pacy, her name is Pacy. It's a girl. It's like ten year old girl.
KM:	Oh, okay.
June Shih:	Um, and I meant to get that for Abby Moon for her birthday. But I couldn't find it.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	At the bookstore. And it was too late to order Amazon. So I was like sorry about that.
KM:	That's okay.
June Shih:	But, but um, it's the Pacy Lin Series. And it's, think Pacy Lin. Pacy something. And it's all about being, being Chinese American.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I've not read it myself. But she tore through those books. She loved those.
KM:	Yeah. She identifies with the characters. And—.
June Shih:	Yeah I think so. You know even though she's half, you know.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Like, my in-laws are very white. Like they can barely eat Chinese food. You know. [KM laughs] Like, they, it's always, I'm always, I

	can't help it but I'm like always slightly offended when they like—. They think Chinese food is gross, you know. I'm always slightly offended. You know. I can't help it.
KM:	Try. My family too. Anyways.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah, they cannot eat it. You know my mother-in-law still uses the term, oh, they both use the term Oriental.
KM:	Um-hm, yeah.
June Shih:	You know. And um, they don't mean anything by it. But they still say Orientals. I'm like—.
KM:	That's a thing, not a person.
June Shih:	Yeah, and it's so like yeah. But the thing is they can't stand Chinese food. So I'm still offended. And then they went to China. And they didn't really like China. So I was like—.
KM:	Oh really?
June Shih:	But you know, but they love India. And I'm like, how can you love India and, I understand. But you know. [KM laughs] But they didn't like China. So it just so I'm just always a little. But they are wonderful, wonderful in-laws. And wonderful grandparents. They are wonderful grandparents. And, my, my children are very close to them.
KM:	I've seen them at drop off and pick up.
June Shih:	Yes. They're good. You know they love them. So they love grandpa. So—.
KM:	You brought up food.
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Food is a classic. It one of things, the mainstay that often stays with multiple generations.
June Shih:	Yes, yes.
KM:	Um, did your, did you grow up with eating food from Taiwan? Or mixes [unclear]? And then do you cook?
June Shih:	Yes, so so yeah, we always had rice. We always had rice. Every meal, rice.
KM:	A certain type of rice?
June Shih:	Yeah.

KM:	It's not just one type of rice.
June Shih:	It's Kokuho Rose. Which is the Japanese brand. But it's grown in California.
KM:	Right. And it's sort of a white glutinous.
June Shih:	It's a white glutinous.
KM:	But not—.
June Shih:	Fluffy.
KM:	Sushi level?
June Shih:	No, it's fluffy rice.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	It's not the Tai rice which is drier and it's not the American rice where you—. I remember like a boyfriend—.
KM:	It's not Uncle Ben's. [laughs]
June Shih:	A boyfriend in college would put butter on his rice. And was like horrified. Like butter on your rice? What are you doing? So we still, so growing up you know, my mom would bring home a box of fried chicken from Popeye's. But we'd have rice. You know, that was the one constant. And when my grandmother was alive and visiting she made all kinds of amazing Chinese or Taiwanese food.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	You know, like the lotus leaves rice flower wrapped?
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	In lotus leaves. Dumplings. All kinds of stir-fries. And my mom was not as interested in cooking.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	But she would always do stir-fries, you know.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	So we'd stir-fries or you know she'd bake a chicken and then we'd have soy sauce and garlic to dip it in. So there's the basics. But when I moved to China for those two years, I discovered Chinese cuisine.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	Oh my god, it's so really delicious.

KM:	Right.
June Shih:	It's not Chinese food. It's not American Chinese food.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	It's just delicious.
KM:	Right, and it's wide varying,
June Shih:	Yes, wide ranging.
KM:	Ranging.
June Shih:	All kinds of cuisine. And all kinds of differences. So here, my children benefit from my searching out the good places.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Right. And Like trying to find the authentic places. So they get to eat the quote authentic. As authentic as it can be in Northern Virginia versus California.
KM:	And restaurants, too
June Shih:	And New York, right
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So that and I have Chinese cook books. And they both love to cook. So it's like, they know how to make dumplings. Right? They know how to make dumplings.
KM:	Good
June Shih:	Dumplings is exciting for them. We try to do dumplings for sure on Chinese New Year.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	But that's about it. And then like, there are these Chinese dishes that they love, that we cook. So they like that. But occasionally they'll go on like, I hate Chinese food.
KM:	Really?
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. Occasionally they'll be like, "I'm so tired." Because we have rice everyday. My mother's caregiver cooks for us.
KM:	Oh, okay.
June Shih:	And she, she, she's not adventurous cook either. So it's sort of like, we get the same things.

KM:	Right.
June Shih:	So they get tired of it. But yeah, I definitely try to like, introduce them and I'm a foodie. My husband's a foodie. So when we go to New York City or California, it's like for sure. We seek out the good places. And the same thing when we go to Taiwan and China. We're seeking out all the great food.
KM:	Right
June Shih:	It's like for sure. We're seeking out the good places. And the same thing when we go to Taiwan and China. We're seeking out all the good food. So—.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	They definitely have a better understanding of Chinese cuisine, then I did as a child. Um, and the one sort of constant is rice.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	Like we still have the rice cooker. We have rice every night.
KM:	You have a Chinese one or Korean one?
June Shih:	We have a Japanese one.
KM:	Oh, you have a Japanese one?
June Shih:	Yeah.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	I give credit to Japanese. Zojirushi there. The Japanese have perfected rice cooking.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So we buy the Japanese one. And it was like my Christmas present.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	I told my husband I wanted a high end Japanese one. So he got it.
KM:	Yeah, yeah. It's good stuff.
June Shih:	It is. It's amazing. It really is. I don't know if you are into rice, but it's—. There is good rice. And there is a good way to cook rice. So we do that.
KM:	Cool.
June Shih:	And my girls like rice. So.

KM:	Um, I think we've covered all our questions.
June Shih:	Okay.
KM:	Ah, do you have anything you want to add? Sort of any closing remarks?
June Shih:	No, I mean like. I really think like. Yeah, you're growing up sheltered in this. I would have to say this upper middle class thing. You really don't think what to write.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	You don't think about Alexandria as a community. And only now as an adult do I really have a better understanding of what the city was like or is like. And, and how, it's hopefully growing in diversity or not growing.
KM:	It stays the same and changes.
HONORING HER FATHER (01:17:31)	
June Shih:	Yeah it stay and changes. And it's interesting to see how the things have continued since the '80s. What things continued. And, how things are different. And, you know. So yeah. And at T.C. Williams High School.
KM:	Yeah.
June Shih:	So exciting. Like I went to the graduation, not the graduation, the scholarship ceremony.
KM:	Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. So talk a little bit about the scholarship. We should talk about that because I don't think we, we talked about that. For your, for your dad, right?
June Shih:	Yeah. So we wanted to do some memorial things for my dad when he passed away. So one thing we did was, you know, everyone seems, a lot of people endow scholarships.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Fund of Alexandria. So we decided we would, we haven't endowed it, which is funny at year by year, but we are going to endow it at some point, which is to honor his life.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Cause he served the community for thirty years. More than thirty years. And he was the staff physician at Alexandria Hospital. So he

	took in all the patients without insurance. You know, he took in all the indignant patients. He was the indignant patient doctor. So he really did a lot of you know, he volunteered at all the clinics. The KC [Kellar Center?] clinic.
KM:	Um-hm. Yeah.
June Shih:	Not volunteered. He worked there. And so we just really wanted to do something to sort of mark that he lived here.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And he served here. So we did a scholarship for a young woman who is interested in STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Math] fields.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	You know. So any of graduate of T.C. Williams. I told her it should be someone who needs financial aid. Who wants to study a STEM field. Because neither of his daughters. Well actually, my sister is a dentist. That's okay.
KM:	That's a science.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah. So, so, that's what. And then we endowed another one at the Alexandria Hospital. For the tech [technical] staff.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	Um, because my father at the end of his life was hospitalized so many times. I saw how hard the techs work. And how the hospitals really run on, are run, like hard work is done by the nursing assistants. Like lifting people out of beds.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So I met so many of them. And so many of them were immigrants. And they were all, so many of them were like studying at night or studying during the day and working at night. To get ahead. You know, you know, try to be RNs or be a phlebotomist. Or just to get to the next level. In the medical [field], whatever. So I'm like these people deserve something. Like so we endowed a scholarship for techs as well. For so any employee who wants to improve their medical education or health care education.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	So we have a scholarship for them too.

KM:	Cool. And did you give the first scholarship last year? To T.C. [Williams] or this year?
June Shih:	The first one was two years ago.
KM:	Okay.
June Shih:	And the first one for Alexandria Hospital was last year. And this year I met the girls. And it's so exciting because they're, they're immigrants.
KM:	Um-hm.
June Shih:	They're from Peru and I forgot, the other one, was it Bolivia? Columbia. Peru and Columbia. And you know they're, they're children of immigrants too. And, and they're studying to be nurse, you know they are nursing assistants, now. And they're studying to be nurses at George Mason [University in Fairfax, Virginia]. So it's just—.
KM:	So cool.
June Shih:	They're just so exciting. And they were talking about how all like, Latino community is so ignorant and about health, right.
KM:	Right.
June Shih:	And how they needed to go back and they wanted to like help their community. So it's just really it was a wonderful interaction. And The same with the girl who won my father's scholarship at TC Williams was also an immigrant. So it was just really interesting. It's still, you know.
KM:	Being passed on.
June Shih:	Yes, it's all very, yeah, it's just you know, you, you see so many different parts of Alexandria. You know this part of Alexandria is so different. The Alexandria I saw at the hospital and at the high schools.
KM:	Right, right. Cool. Very interesting. Cool. Alright. I think we're done. Yeah, I definitely want to make sure we did that.
June Shih:	Yeah, yeah.