

Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho

The Reminiscences of
Geneve Lau

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Geneve Lau conducted by Kathy M. Min on July 25, 2020. This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Geneve Lau
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from the Boise, Idaho, area.
Date	July 25, 2020

00:00:01

Q: Okay, so today is July, 25, 2020. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and today I'm interviewing Geneve. And we're both calling over Zoom, but I think we're both calling from Boise, or the Boise area. And yeah, it's just going to be about Geneve's life for this Asian American oral history project. So first question. What is your full name?

Lau: Geneve Lau is my full name.

00:00:29

Q: And when and where were you born?

Lau: I was born on January 14, 1999, here in Boise, Idaho.

00:00:37

Q: And what is your current occupation and/or educational background?

Lau: I am a full time college student at Boston University [BU], entering my senior year. Expected to graduate May 2021.

00:00:51

Q: What are you majoring in?

Lau: Majoring in public relations.

00:00:55

Q: And what are the names of your parents?

Lau: Whitney Yong Yan Lau and Jack Yuen Lau.

00:01:03

Q: And how do you spell those?

Lau: Whitney Yong Yan Lau. Jack Yuen Lau.

00:01:24

Q: Amazing. And how did you and your family come to Idaho?

Lau: Yeah, so my dad's family, so his brother, was here in the United States. And him and my mom had met prior to them coming to the US. My mom was in the UK studying, and then they went back to China to get married, and then through immigration, my dad came. And then, because of my mom being married to my dad, she was also—became a US citizen.

00:02:04

Lau: I'm not super familiar with the process, but I do know that they did the immigration test, because I remember we had those books in the bookshelf, and I was like, "What's this? Why don't I have to take this test?" And they're like, "Well, because you were born here, you never have to take this test, because, you know, if you want to become a American citizen, you have to take this citizenship test." I was like, "Oh okay, I understand that now."

00:02:28

Q: Could you maybe tell me a little bit about the dates for which this was taking place?

Lau: My parents arrived, or they became citizens, in 1997 or 1996, one of those years.

00:02:44

Q: Do you know when they came to the US?

Lau: I think it was '96. Maybe it was '96, and then '97 they became citizens. But it was those years that they came to the US and became citizens, all of those things.

00:02:58

Q: So, sorry, you were saying, a cousin or an uncle was in the US?

Lau: It was my dad's brother, so my uncle.

00:03:08

Q: And do you know the circumstances for your uncle being in the US?

Lau: I'm not too certain about that. I just know he was the first one. And I know that he chose to come to Boise, just because it was close enough to Portland, which is a major city, and you can get Asian goods from supermarkets there. And he was the first one out of our family to come here to the US.

00:03:34

Q: Do you know what year your uncle arrived?

Lau: I don't know. We're not super close, unfortunately.

00:03:41

Q: Okay, yeah. I'm just trying to get it all straight. So your uncle on your dad's side was in Boise first, and then your mom was in the UK for study? Can you tell me a little more about that?

Lau: I think she was studying for—it was English school, kind of. I actually just had to interview them for my anthropology class, or my mom specifically. So I learned a little bit more about her educational background.

00:04:11

Lau: So she had different career paths, even when she was in China. She had gone to a specialized, almost like a technical school. She did the assembly of circuit boards. So she was really good at that. And then she had like a state-owned, or the government jobs, that, you know, how they give you a job based off of what trade you were in.¹ But the way that the system works is that you can't really—like here in the US, you're able, if you work hard, you can climb the ranks and you can become a higher position. You can get paid more. But that's not how it works in China. You just are what position you were in.

00:04:49

Lau: So she wanted to try something new and she did it herself. She went to the UK and she did the English school, and then I think she was also studying accounting at the time. But those accreditations or certificates that she had gotten prior to coming to the US don't apply here. So

¹ Referring to the “iron rice bowl” (铁饭碗) system in China that began in 1951, whereby employment in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) was considered very secure. SOE reforms during China's economic modernization during the 1980s and 1990s closed thousands of firms and laid off 20 million people. From David Stanway, “Heralding social, financial change, China aims blow at iron rice bowl,” *Reuters*, December 17, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-debt-soe-insight/heralding-social-financial-change-china-aims-blow-at-iron-rice-bowl-idUSKBN14700X>.

I've always identified as a first-gen college student, because my parents didn't have that college experience in the United States.

00:05:21

Q: Let me see. I think you've said some of these things; I'm just a little out of it. Your parents met in China?

Lau: Yes, they met through a family friend.

00:05:33

Q: Okay. Do you know when they met?

Lau: I don't.

00:05:38

Q: Wait, where in China are your parents from?

Lau: Guangzhou.

00:05:42

Q: Okay, and so they're both from that area, and they just had a mutual friend that introduced them. And then, do you know what your dad was doing prior to coming to America?

Lau: My dad went to culinary school. He actually went to a specialized culinary school. And before that he was a lab chemist at a hospital. I'm not quite sure what the exact translation of occupation would be for in the United States. But he knows his blood type, because he was able to test that. And he worked in kind of the medical-related field, like chemistry. And then he went to culinary school and that's why my parents opened a restaurant when they came to the US.

00:06:22

Q: So, then your mom was in the UK. And then she went back to China. And that's how she met your dad? And a mutual friend was there?

Lau: No. They had known each other before, and he had actually visited her when she was going to school there [in the UK]. But I think they had a wedding ceremony in China, but they don't really talk much about their wedding to me. They're just like that. But I've seen pictures and stuff. And I saw the big ceremony, like the big hall and everything. I know that was definitely in China and not in the US, and it was also not in the UK, so it only makes sense that it was in China.

00:06:56

Q: Okay. And so then they were married. And then after they married they at some point immigrated to the US, like in the early '90s.²

Lau: Yeah.

00:07:04

Q: Okay, and then they went straight to Boise as a result of your uncle being there? Okay, cool. And then you said that your family owns a restaurant now.

Lau: They do.

00:07:16

Q: So has that been the main family occupation the entire time they've been in Boise?

Lau: Yep, the entire time, you know, until now, they've been only that restaurant.

00:07:30

Q: Cool. What's the restaurant?

Lau: Top Wok.

00:07:35

Q: Where's that? I feel like I've heard of it, but I don't think I've been.

Lau: Yeah, a lot of them have similar names. It's on Chinden [Boulevard] and Cloverdale [Road].

00:07:44

Q: I feel like my family does not eat out for Chinese food that often, so I've never been. But that's cool. Do you know when they opened it?

Lau: It was all the same years. '97 I'm pretty sure is when the restaurant was incorporated.

00:08:01

² Earlier, Geneve stated that her parents immigrated in 1996 or 1997.

Q: Okay. Do you know what they were doing? It sounds like they were in the US for a few years before the restaurant started.

Lau: I think they were just working for my aunt's restaurant. And they used to live downtown and in an apartment before I was born. And then after I was born, they slowly bought a house and settled down and stuff like that.

00:08:22

Q: What's your aunt's restaurant?

Lau: It was Wok King.

00:08:30

Q: Okay. Where's that?

Lau: It was near Broadway, I think. It burned down in a fire several years ago, actually. So they reopened a new type of restaurant. They open up Poke Bowl on Eagle Road. So that's why I said "was."

00:08:47

Q: And then, tell me a little bit about—you've talked a little bit about your parents' educational background. If you could just spell it all out here.

Lau: I mean, they both went to school in China. I know my mom went to a technical school that was for circuit boards or IT related things. And then she also did another type of education. It was another kind of specialized trade school, which I don't remember what it is at the moment. And then she went the UK to study English and also accounting

00:09:22

Lau: And then my dad, I don't know if he went to school for the hospital-chemistry side of things, but I know that he had that as his occupation. And then he also went to culinary school and then he worked at the restaurant when he came to the US.

00:09:40

Q: Do you know why your parents studied the things they did?

Lau: Well, you know, that's a really good question. I feel for my dad, it was definitely just passion more so, and interest in the topic. My mom was just kind of a free spirit when she was younger. She was good at a lot of things. She always tells me, "I was so good at math. There's no

way that you're bad at math," even though I'm kind of bad at math. So she dabbled, definitely, in a lot of those different things, and she was really smart though. I definitely feel like she just wanted to challenge herself and try a bunch of different things.

00:10:15

Q: And do you know about their families and what your extended family is like?

Lau: Not too much unfortunately. I know that my grandma on my mom's side used to be a manager at a factory. And then my grandfather, I think he did something with mechanics, but I don't know super far details and they never really told me much about it. I have an uncle still in China. He works doing, I guess, kind of tech maintenance at a hotel. And then I'm not sure what my aunt does in China.

00:10:59

Q: Are those aunts and uncles in China on your mom or dad's side?

Lau: Mom's side.

00:11:04

Q: And then so for your dad, he has the sibling, his brother, here in Boise. And then is that his only sibling?

Lau: He had an older sibling who passed away several years ago, and then, yeah, so there's there's one brother here, the one that was originally here in the US. And then he has three kids, two of them which have their own children. So that's great. And then the [other brother, the late brother] has three kids, and two of them just finished college and one of them is well grown.

00:11:42

Q: Are those cousins in China?

Lau: No, they're all in the US. All my dad's side is in the US.

00:11:48

Q: Are they all in Boise?

Lau: Mhm.

00:11:55

Q: Do you see your cousins often?

Lau: I mean, we kind of used to, several years ago, but not that much anymore. You know, people have grown up and things like that. We usually try to visit the younger ones, like the cousin's kids because they're young, you know. They like to have a birthday party or playdate or something.

[INTERRUPTION]

00:12:14

Lau: So usually we usually hang out with them, but not too much. And also, it's COVID so I haven't really seen anybody for that matter.

00:12:29

Q: Tell me a little bit—actually, do you have any siblings?

Lau: No, I'm an only child.

00:12:36

Q: Tell me a little bit about your mom and dad and their personalities, what they're like, what your relationship to them is like.

Lau: Yeah. I love this question. So I definitely feel like there are a lot of stereotypes or tropes to growing up as an Asian American. So I feel like when I was younger, there was a lot of pressure to, you know, do well in school. Can this bleed over to talk about me as well? I feel like it's really hard to have a conversation just about my parents.

Q: Oh, yeah. Go.

00:13:08

Lau: So I feel like when I was younger, I struggled a lot with—in the beginning especially. So how it happens is I was born and my grandparents were really lucky to be able to have an approved visa where they could come to the US—and then I'm pretty sure in the visa you can only stay in the US a certain amount of days, right?³ And then you go back to China, but then you can come back to visit and then it starts over the cycle. And I think it's a 10-year visa.

00:13:34

³ There are many different types of visas. The 10-year multiple entry visa allows non-Americans to go to the US anytime over ten years, with each stay lasting up to six months. From Immihelp, “USA Visitor Visa Interview,” <https://www.immihelp.com/us-visitor-visa-interview-guide/>.

Lau: So my grandparents were here when I was born. And because my parents were still running the restaurant, in the very beginning stages of running a business, it's really important that you spend a lot of time and attention on that. And that's what they did. And, you know, having a newborn child is a really big—not a hassle—but it's definitely something that you need to pay attention to.

00:13:53

Lau: Right after I was born, a few months after that, I actually went with my grandparents back to China to meet my family and just let my parents be able to run the restaurant. And I came back right before my third birthday. And it was actually really interesting. So language development in your brain doesn't solidify until the age of five. So from the ages of three to five, I had a lot of language confusion per se, because at home, it was Cantonese and spoken Cantonese. But then they sent me to preschool. And that was all English. And if I was to get excited or something, I wouldn't really know which words to use and what language.

00:14:33

Lau: Because of this I struggled making friends when I was younger, especially in the preschool ages. The preschool that I went to was really close to my parents' restaurant. And so my dad would recall coming to see me during lunch break and stuff, and he felt so sad, because I was sitting in the corner of the sandbox without friends or something. And I definitely feel like there was a lot of struggles there.

00:15:00

Lau: But in kindergarten. I was actually in an ESL program—English second language—because I was still having those issues with that. But then in first grade, I had an automatic 180—not 360, 360's the other way around—but 180, because I read a lot of books. And so I read a lot of books. I ended up getting into advanced reading for my age at that time and the following year in second grade.

00:15:27

Lau: I was in a gifted and talented education program where we went to a separate elementary school on a certain day or—I forget if it was a certain day every week, or if it was only every two weeks, or every month. But this was kind of the beginning of, “Okay, I am now an excelling student,” right? And there are higher expectations.

00:15:48

Lau: So Lowell Scott [Middle School] is the continuation in Boise for the gifted and talented education program beyond elementary school. And I didn't want to go to Lowell Scott. I wanted to go to Heritage [Middle School], because that was where I was boundaried to go and that was

also where a lot of my friends from elementary school were going to go. And so there was kind of this discrepancy of there's something that my parents really wanted me to do because this was good for my future. But there was this thing that I really wanted to do, because it was just where my friends, I was young, I wanted to do all these things, whatever.

00:16:21

Lau: So I ended up going to Heritage and I did fair. I was always doing well in school. I think in Heritage, I had advanced two grade levels in math. Not necessarily [because of] my parents' pressure, but just because, you know, it was just a given. I was expected to do well. My parents looked at my grades online; they had access to PowerSchool or whatever the thing was before that. And so they did, you know, track my grades and whatnot.

00:16:47

Lau: I also played piano since the age of six. And I was, I think, by the time—I don't remember exactly when I started competing. I had several different teachers. My first piano teacher was a Taiwanese woman who lived literally two houses down the street. And then their entire family ended up actually moving, I believe, back to Taiwan. So I got a new teacher that was also in my subdivision.

00:17:10

Lau: But then after a while, we actually moved me to another piano teacher that my mom had known because she was a regular customer at the restaurant. She has unfortunately since passed away, which is really sad as well. I never really got to meet her after I ceased taking piano lessons in high school. But I remember, starting with my second piano teacher and then going—the reason for the transition was because my new piano teacher, the last one I ever had, she was very serious in the competitive realm. So there were a lot of competitions that I was to perform in annually. There was a sonatina one, there was a concerto one, and then there was the spring festival where you got the cups.

00:17:56

Lau: So piano was a really big part of my life growing up. It first started with a keyboard. I was just messing around. And then I started to take lessons very seriously. There were strict rules, like I had to practice for a certain amount of hours every day. And that was monitored. I mean, at the time being, I was like, "I don't like this anymore." And there was obviously a certain time when it became more of a chore than something I actually wanted to do.

00:18:22

Lau: But I believe that it was good for just building up class and also just teaching you a lot of the things. It's just a good skill to have, I suppose. And in middle school at Heritage, in seventh

grade, I began the violin, and I actually continued into private lessons. But I played violin for a short amount of time. I think only six years, or five. I ended in high school, I believe, right before my junior year.

00:18:51

Lau: But another thing that was kind of a disagreement—so I mentioned a disagreement with going to middle school. I had said that I wanted to go to Heritage versus Lowell Scott, which was a better educational opportunity, per se. Going into high school, I wanted to go to Rocky Mountain High School, which was also my boundaried high school. And so one of my cousins was attending Renaissance High School. And we had heard about it, but we didn't really know that much about it. It was a lottery system. And so my mother didn't give me a choice. I had to enter my name into the lottery. And I was like, “Okay, whatever. It's just a lottery. I don't care.”

00:19:29

Lau: But I ended up getting drawn from the lottery and offered a spot, and there was no option. Because I got the spot, I had to go. At the time I was really upset about it. I definitely wanted to transfer out. Within the first semester I was in school, I really wanted to transfer back to Rocky, have all of those traditional high school experiences. But then I'm really glad that I didn't. I'm really glad that I stayed with Renaissance. I think I got a better educational experience that has set me up for more success because of that.

00:20:00

Lau: Well throughout high school, I still had, you know, my parents to look at my grades. So I began the international baccalaureate [IB] program my junior year of high school. So freshman year and sophomore year, I would say it was still as strict as it was in middle school, always checking the grade book and whatnot. But then junior and senior year, because so much of the grading is not necessarily in the gradebook, right? It's not just like you see it, but it's through the IB and the assessments and the scaling is different, so there was kind of a let back. I felt like my parents weren't as strict with looking at my grades and whatnot.

00:20:35

Lau: And then in college, ever since I went to college away, our experiences totally changed. They have become much more trusting. They kind of just let me do my own thing. There was a lot of pressure in my early education years to be a lawyer, to be a doctor, and even considering a concert pianist, because I was playing piano quite competitively. You know, Juilliard, all those different things. But they decided that it's best for me to follow my own journey. And so, hence why I'm studying public relations at Boston University, something I wanted to do, something that nobody pressured me to do.

00:21:18

Q: So it sounds like there's just been moments, a lot in your childhood, where you felt a lot of pressure from your parents?

Lau: Yeah, yeah.

00:21:27

Q: How would you describe the personalities of your mom and dad?

Lau: I would say my mom is definitely very practical. She has a lot of wisdom. I would say that she is—I don't know how to describe this—but she doesn't always say everything on her mind, but everything that she says is very helpful. And she's thought out about it a lot of the time. She's also very honest. Sometimes she'll say the things that you don't want to hear but need to hear.

00:21:59

Lau: And I think my dad, one of his strongest characteristics is he's a very, very hard worker. He's the hardest worker in our house, for sure. He's never just sitting and relaxing, and especially during COVID, he's always doing something out in the garden or cooking, all of these different things. My dad is very, very hardworking. And also I would say he's very passionate, because he knows what he cares about.

00:22:25

Q: Yeah. Also, I just wanted to say thank you for sharing so much. I think I'm just gonna have a lot of different follow-ups, so I'm interested in—we can start really early. So it sounds like you lived in China for the very early years of your life with your grandparents.

Lau: Yeah.

00:22:49

Q: I know it's really early, but do you know anything about what your experience of that was like and how it was? Did you have any feelings when you moved back to the US in terms of being separated?

Lau: Yeah, well, my grandparents actually came back with me. So that takes care of one thing. You're right, it is really early, so it's so hard sometimes to even remember those things. I look at photo albums a lot, especially in the past years. When I had my high school graduation party, I was pulling a lot of those old pictures. I looked at pictures a lot.

00:23:25

Lau: I definitely feel like I loved my time in China when I was younger, because there's just so much family. I mean, I told you earlier, I have some family here, but I never felt like my family here was super close. The closest is just me, my mom, and my dad. And being an only child—I don't have any pets—I wouldn't say it's lonely, but it's definitely not the traditional, you know, big family gatherings. We don't really have like a ton of those.

00:23:53

Lau: I would also say the transition back here was definitely different, because, as you recall, the last time I saw my mom would have been when I was an infant. And now I'm this almost three-year-old child. Because I remembered seeing pictures of my third birthday, and I was in the US, and I was still closer to my grandmother or my grandpa than my mom because I didn't really, you know. I was like, "Who is this lady?" in some of the pictures with my mom.

00:24:20

Q: Was it your grandparents on your mom's side as well?

Lau: Mhm.

00:24:27

Q: It sounds like since growing up here, your family's restaurant has been a part of your family's story. So I'm wondering what it was like growing up and having that be the family business?

Lau: Yeah, really good question actually. There are a lot of people who know me that I don't know. That's a really common trend. Especially when I started to know how to drive or things like that. Sometimes when I was younger, when I could say "hello," my mom would take me back to the restaurant on certain days, like Friday night or Saturday nights, whenever it was busy. And she'd always be like, "This person really wants to see you." And they'd always say, "When I last saw you, you were this small [holds hand up to indicate height]" or "you were just a little baby." And there are so many of those people. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I don't recognize any of them."

00:25:18

Lau: And now sometimes, especially over the summers or winter breaks, if I'm home and I'm hungry, and I don't want to cook, then I would be like, "Okay, I'm coming to get something to eat." And then I'll drive over there. And I always meet somebody like that. I definitely feel like it has been a really cool experience, just for my parents to—not meet other people, but be a part of that community here in Idaho.

00:25:42

Lau: And that's why sometimes, in terms of racism, I'm like, "Did I experience racism in my earlier years?" Because I always felt like my parents were accepted and I was accepted as—not integral members of the community—but we were part of the community. We weren't outsiders.

00:25:59

Lau: But definitely recognizing now, not in pertinence to the restaurant, but in pertinence with my personal life, there's definitely been instances where I'm like, "There was definitely some racism I experienced growing up." But I think the restaurant was a way for us to feel included in the community.

00:26:15

Q: What kind of food, by the way, is served at Top Wok?

Lau: It's very Americanized Chinese food, like the typical orange chicken, nothing like traditional dim sum or anything. But yeah, those [American-Chinese] dishes—you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know, the standard.

00:26:32

Q: Because your dad sounds like he has professional training as a cook, so I'm wondering how that translated into the creation of Top Wok and the food served there.

Lau: Well, I mean, I know that he had to do—you know, there had to be a way to make income in the States. And that was his trade, and that he could do that without having to get any additional training. And so they started a business. They incorporated it. Right now, it's COVID and we're uncertain if we're going to open again. That's why I'm not speaking in the now, but my dad always did the cooking, like the actual wok work. And then anything that you could just prepare, so fried food, for example, you just put in the fryer, you know. So that would be—my mom would do it. Or we've also had various employees throughout the years help with that.

00:27:36

Q: How would you describe the ethnicity of the patrons of the restaurant, if you can describe it?

Lau: I don't know if this is ethnicity. I mean, obviously, white is ethnicity. So if you recall Micron, a lot of Micron employees would be the people that would be coming in.⁴ So my mom would always be like, "Oh yeah, there's like that guy, he does IT or something," because Micron and the company. So I would say there was a lot of Indian people, because Indian people, technically, you know, they tend to have those tech jobs at companies like HP. ITT Technical

⁴ Geneve clarified that the employees were from HP, not Micron.

Institute used to be behind Top Wok as well, so we had a lot of people coming from there.⁵ But yeah, generally just standard white families.

00:28:25

Q: Okay, interesting. So your grandparents, you were saying—right, they had the visa and so they could come to the US for certain times. So were there particular years that they were in the US that are memorable to you?

Lau: Right when I was born. And when they brought me back, and then I remember it was second grade, I think they were here? And maybe fifth grade. I think there are two more times that they were here. They were never here for my middle school years. So it was in elementary school, they had been here for at least two times, I think, or maybe it was just one time.

00:29:05

Lau: But then, you know, starting in middle school, they had become too old to travel that far. Just because, as you know, Boise's not a major airport, so it's really difficult to try to fly here. And then we try to go back there pretty often. The last time I went back was actually last year. The last time my parents went back was earlier this year, because my grandfather passed away, and it was for his funeral. But I couldn't go back, because I was supposed to go abroad in Shanghai, in February. So I had to cancel my 10-year visa to get my student visa, but then COVID cancelled my program. So I didn't go and I still don't have a Chinese visa.

00:29:46

Q: I think we'll get to all the COVID messiness in a bit. But just to still talk about your childhood and your earlier years, you've mentioned that your dad does a lot of cooking. And so I'm wondering at home, is he also the one that does the cooking and—

Lau: Yeah!

00:30:06

Q: —yeah, I'm wondering about, just tell me what a typical family dinner looks like. Do you eat together as a family? Favorite foods?

Lau: So my dad does all the cooking at home, most of the time. My mom sometimes does, but she's just not as skilled. So it is my dad that does it. So usually—I feel like our cooking now has

⁵ ITT Technical Institute closed in 2016. From Collin Binkley, "ITT Tech closes all campuses including Boise's, after federal sanctions," *Idaho Statesman*, September 6, 2016, <https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/business/article100268822.html>.

changed a lot since before, especially because before [COVID] I wasn't really eating at home. I was either at school or something like that. But we typically have vegetables.

00:30:40

Lau: I think since I started going to college, like the fall right after I went to college, they started a home garden. So they have part of our yard that has some vegetables here and then they also have another part of our yard, so they grow a lot of choy sum and bok choy. I don't know how to say them in the right terms or in English terms. And then they also do spinach and the green onions, which are pretty standard. And so we'll usually cook vegetables from the garden.

00:31:09

Lau: We'll have some type of meat. We eat a lot of fish. My dad always says—literally every time we eat fish—he's like, “Oh my god, white people do not know how to eat fish like we do.” Because instead of just having a fillet—which we also do have fillet sometimes, because I really like salmon. So they'll cook salmon with the recipe that I tell them to cook with. But we also have, it's a red fish and then you just fry it in the pan—and we actually do it outside, so the smell doesn't linger in our house. And then we put a soy sauce and green onion mixture on top. Sometimes my dad likes to have a salty fish, like a preserved fish. I don't really like it, so I don't have it. Sometimes my mom will have a little bit of that.

00:31:47

Lau: We'll make a lot of soup sometimes. We also have winter melon, I think. So we'll make a soup out of that. I'm trying to think. My dad really likes ribs, so he'll do it with the black bean sauce and the ribs. I don't. So whenever that happens, I have something else. I'll make it on my own. We like to have seafood. That's not as frequent. I think it's because it's seasonal. But we usually do that.

00:32:10

Lau: I would feel like a lot of our meals are kind of half American food—not really American food, but it's something you can get from Costco, like the crab, and they just put it in the microwave. But then there's very traditional Chinese things, like the preserved fish and whatnot.

00:32:24

Q: And did you have any holidays that are celebrated a particular way in your family or special traditions from your family?

Lau: I'm trying to think, special holidays. I mean, we do Chinese New Year with the red envelopes, obviously. I would say it's more of the holidays we don't celebrate, like we don't really celebrate Thanksgiving. That's never really been a thing for my family. And we celebrate

Christmas, but not in a religious sense. Because, just growing up, I had always wanted a Christmas tree. I remember the first time I'd come [to Boise from China]—so what happened when I was three [years old], because my birthday is in January—but it was when I was four. We didn't have a Christmas tree. And so we had this fake artificial tree. And I remembered putting a little thing on top of it because I wanted a Christmas tree.

00:33:18

Lau: So then when I was five years old, my parents finally got this—it was a fake Christmas tree, but it was a Christmas tree that lights up. And we've actually had the same tree ever since. We got it because I love Christmas. So we do celebrate Christmas. We don't really celebrate—I guess I'm trying to think of other really American—like Halloween, I mean, we kind of celebrate it. We put a pumpkin outside but we don't do big crazy decorations.

00:33:47

Q: Yeah. And then I'm also interested if there's any particular naming traditions or significance to names in your family. So either your last name or your name, or if you have a Chinese name or anything like that?

Lau: So my Chinese name is Liu Qian Yao (刘倩瑶). My surname is obviously just from the family. So everyone in my dad's side, the naming goes with the female and the male. So for females, the middle one is Qian or Sin in Cantonese. So everyone has that. And then the last character is what you get to choose. And so mine—that was the choice of my parents or whoever named me—I think it was my parents—to have it like that. So the first two are predetermined. And then the last one is whatever you want it to be.

00:34:39

Lau: And I don't go by my Chinese name, mostly just because—I mean I feel like I don't have a problem with it. I mean, my mom doesn't really—look, they just call me “daughter” in Chinese. You know what I mean. They don't really call me by either name. But all my legal documents, it's my English name. Because in school, I never had to pick a name or anything. It was just Geneve Lau. I don't have a middle name. I don't have an English middle name.

00:35:06

Q: And then, of all the things you learned from your parents, which do you feel is the most valuable?

Lau: This is a really good question. I feel like my answer is different every time, as I grow up a little bit more. But I think now, in this current—sitting here today, I would say, everything works out the way it's supposed to. And you just need to keep going, and I definitely feel that, because

just going to school and having so many crazy experiences. And I never would have pictured myself here eight years ago. But if you just believe that everything will turn out exactly the way it needs to, then you just keep going and it does.

00:35:53

Q: I'm in the "growing up/childhood" portion of my questions. So I know you've touched [on] a lot about your experience growing up. If you could, in a paragraph or a word, how would you describe your experience growing up?

Lau: A paragraph or a word, wow. Those are two very different things. I'll go with the paragraph. I like painting things out. So I do like that question. So I would say, growing up, I was definitely very—I don't want to say anti-Chinese, but I was trying to fit in, and I think this is a very common experience shared by a lot of Asian Americans in Boise, Idaho, because we are a minority here. And I think the first experience I remember—so I actually had an aunt, or an uncle. Well aunt and uncle, I don't know why I said it like that.

00:36:49

Lau: It was my grandmother's little sister, so I don't know how that relationship works. But they visited us [from China]. And I remember, my uncle one time was like, "Have you ever been to the church in your neighborhood?" And as you know, that was an LDS [Latter-day Saints] Church. And I was like, "No." And I was still so young at the time, and religion isn't really widely taught in schools.

00:37:13

Lau: And so I didn't understand you have to be a member of the church in order to enter. And I think I remember one Sunday, we just went in, because we thought anybody—I mean, I feel like most churches, like if you went to Notre Dame, you can just walk in, right? It's not like there's this weird closed thing, but the LDS church is different. So I remember we went in, and I didn't understand why—it felt like all these people that lived in my neighborhood all knew each other. They were all very close. They all have these unspoken ties that I didn't understand.

00:37:47

Lau: And I had, you know, a decent amount of friends growing up, I would say. I definitely made a lot—kindergarten was really hard, but then first grade and beyond, I had a lot of really close friends. But I always felt like I didn't quite fit in or I was trying very hard to fit in with what that standard was, whether it be through clothing, through how I looked.

00:38:11

Lau: I think one of the big things too, for me, and this is just personal, is I struggled a lot with physical appearance, because I wore glasses. And remember how I said I read a lot in first grade? Yeah, that also caused me to need glasses at a very early age. And my mom especially didn't really want me to wear contact lenses. I don't even think it's safe for someone to wear contact lenses that young, because they didn't really know how to take care of their eyes. And so I struggled a lot with body image that way, because I had “four eyes” or whatever that that might have been.

00:38:42

Lau: And I had no Asian friends growing up. I think that that is one of the things that is so mind-boggling to me, because now—and I'll obviously get to the “now” part later. But now, when I was telling my friends—I had this one friend, she's Bosnian. And she's like, “Show me your friends at college.” And I showed her a picture. And she's like, “Your friends look majority-Asians.” And I was like, “Yeah, I mean I didn't really intend for that to happen. It just kind of was who I clicked with.”

00:39:09

Lau: Growing up, I had very, very white friends. And I don't really recall a lot of—maybe I was too young—instances of racism, until maybe—in middle school was when that was really prevalent. I'm sure you know the eyes [pulls corner of eyes]. That was something that is very triggering to me now. I remember that being a really big—not harassment, or maybe it is harassment—but it was a center of bullying. I know a lot of people would say, you know, “Ching Chong” or “Chink” and all those different things.

00:39:41

Lau: I almost feel like, even in the later years of middle school and in high school, I kind of just dismissed these thoughts or were like, “That didn't actually happen.” But now I think back, and I'm like, “No, that definitely happened.” I remember it might not have been like—and I don't think that experiences of bullying or experiences of racism need to be you being attacked by 50 people, right? One instance of inappropriate behavior, and you are on the receiving end of that? That's harassment, that's bullying, and that's racism. It doesn't matter how many people were doing it to you.

00:40:12

Lau: So I definitely think that I was kind of aware of that. And my way of responding wasn't to stand up for myself, but it was to fit into the standard even more. It was like, “The only way that I can get out of this is if I act more like the people that I go to school with, with the girls that I went to school with.” So I would dress a certain way. Aéropostale with a big thing. I was like, “I

need to wear this, so that people like me,” or “I need to do my makeup a certain way,” or “I need to like certain things in order to fit in.”

00:40:46

Lau: And now looking back, I think that that's so silly because it's just so unnecessary. I mean, obviously, now, even physically, I do my makeup a certain way. I like certain things. Am I a certain level of “whitewashed” per se, for lack of a better term? And I don't necessarily think that just the way that you act and those choices that you make, if they're free will, means that you're not cultured. I'm very cultured, I'm very aware, and I don't stand for racism, all those things. But I can still act and dress and look a certain way. So that was a really long-winded answer, but you can ask all the follow-ups you want on that.

00:41:25

Q: No, and thank you for sharing. Yeah, and I think definitely, like how do you “best cope” with all the microaggressions growing up? It's like, there's not a good answer. I think I'm just gonna keep hitting some childhood questions just because I'm always interested.

00:41:42

Q: I think you've touched on this too. But how would you describe your neighborhood growing up? I know you said it was very white. And so I'm wondering, was it only white folks? Were there any Asians in your neighborhood?

Lau: I don't think I grew up in one of the neighborhoods where there was even a small community of Asian people. I'm pretty sure the only Asian people I knew was one Indian family, and then the Taiwanese family that moved away that was two houses down. So, and I think—oh no, there's actually one more family that lives on the other side of this playground that my house kind of faces. But there is a very high population of LDS families, and I know because they have characteristics, where it's like they have a certain number of kids, or I just knew because they would go into the church.

00:42:30

Lau: I would say the neighborhood that I grew up in as well is very much still the same community that I went to school with. So I recognize the faces, like the people I rode the bus with were the same people that I sat next to in class or that I passed in the hallways. So it was all very much that same community.

00:42:50

Lau: And maybe this isn't the way it is, but I feel like this totally makes sense—is because you were surrounded by the same people that you went to school with in your neighborhood, because

of the way that they district it, it feels like that's your whole world. Because it's like as a kid, where else are you going? Literally nowhere. You're going to school or you're in your neighborhood. And so, that felt like that was the world to me, those were all the people I knew. There was no other way.

00:43:13

Lau: We aren't religious, or we don't go to church. So it's like, I don't see people that way. And then, I mean, I was involved in—like I did, swimming, I did ballet at YMCA. But I always felt, when I was younger, I wasn't as outgoing as I am now. So if you put me in a new class, I am sure as heck not going to walk up to everyone and be like, “[Imitates excited voice and waves] Hi, I’m Geneve, nice to meet you.” That was not me. I was sitting in the corner silent. So very much so school and the neighborhood, that looked like my whole world, embodied in one.

00:43:45

Q: And are you living in the same house that you grew up in?

Lau: Yes, I am. This is my childhood bedroom [gestures to her room].

00:43:51

Q: Have you ever moved? Or is this the only place?

Lau: No, I have never moved. I am one of those few people, because we just didn't have a reason to move. My parents' occupation didn't require me to move, and I don't have siblings. So we didn't have to upsize or downsize.

00:44:07

Q: And then when you were younger, did you have any role models or heroes growing up?

Lau: Oh, wow. That is an interesting question. I would say I had a phase where I loved American Girl dolls. So that was a really big—role models can be people that aren't real. American Girl dolls aren't real, but those characters, that was a big part of growing up.

00:44:35

Lau: They took me to the American Girl store in LA, I remember. Because that was just all the stories, I read all the books, I had multiple dolls, and I loved their stories. And that was a really big role model. I'm trying to think. I was never a celebrity person, per se. I didn't watch a ton of TV. I mean, I definitely watched movies and stuff, but I didn't idolize any of those people, but it was the American Girls. Yeah.

00:45:02

Q: And I think you've talked a lot about this, but I'm wondering if there was ever a particular moment where you “realized” that you were Asian?

Lau: This is a really good question. I think in preschool, that was like, I was not a conscious mind, because we're so little. But I think in elementary school was when I noticed that I was different than my friends, or that, you know, not a lot of people at school looked like me. And what's interesting to me is now that I'm in college, I tend to have a lot of friends who are Asians. And I'm like, “Why wasn't I like that in elementary school?” If there were one or two [Asian] people, why didn't we cluster together? And I think it was mostly because everyone wanted to fit in, that we just kind of tried to brush away our identity in order to fit in. So one way to do that is to avoid each other, right? To avoid being really close friends or associated with other people that are also Asian, so that you can fit more into the white community.

00:46:10

Q: So in your schools, growing up, there were a few Asians here and there, but just a hyper-minority?

Lau: I guess you could say there was definitely less in my elementary school, or maybe I just wasn't conscious enough to know, you know, there's always that thing too. But I think each year or each school that I went to, it [the Asian American student population] was increasing. So in middle school, there was more than elementary school. And then high school has a fair amount, just because Renaissance was a high performing school.

00:46:40

Lau: And in my grade, there were a few. There was one person who was Vietnamese, I believe. But it was very much so a token minority or token Asian, you know. I remember even the two, in particular, Vietnamese boys that were in my high school. They would have, with their friend, they would be like, “Dan, my Asian” or something like that. It was just kind of like, “Why do you need to identify like that? You're just you, I don't understand.”

00:47:08

Lau: But yeah, I would say there was very few minorities and even Black people. I know Asian is supposed to mean Indians and Chinese, Pacific Islander, all those different [groups], but there were some Indians. But still, we were all minorities.

00:47:28

Q: On a totally different kind of line of questioning, but did you have a favorite thing to do when you were younger?

Lau: Oh, good question. Oh, I actually totally left out this entire thing. I really enjoyed—so I actually did cheerleading from seventh grade, until I tried out to be on a team my sophomore year, but then I ended up not doing it. And it was mostly my parents’ doing. They were like, “We don’t want you to focus so much time on this anymore.” At the time I was very angry, but now I’m really thankful.

00:48:03

Lau: But, so I really did enjoy that [cheerleading]. So I started in seventh grade, and my personality completely changed from sixth grade to seventh grade, I became more confident. I became more outgoing. I was outspoken, willing to introduce myself to people. And without that, I don’t think I would have been as outgoing and friendly. So I do really appreciate that. And it was really fun, because I was really fit. I don’t think I am that fit anymore unfortunately, but it was a very good, you know, getting my body in shape.

00:48:36

Lau: When I was younger, we did a lot of bike riding along the Greenbelt.⁶ We actually rode from Ann Morrison Park or Julia Davis [Park]. I don’t actually remember where we started. I think it was Ann Morrison. We rode all the way from Ann Morrison to Lucky Peak [State Park].⁷ So that’s a pretty far ride. And we did a lot of that. I’m trying to think.

00:48:54

Lau: I did some dance classes. I was never really into it. I did some art classes as well. I was never really into that. I wasn’t into cooking when I was little; kind of am now. But yeah, I would say that the cheerleading was a really fun part of growing up. I said that was a part of growing up now, even though it feels like it was just like yesterday.

00:49:23

Q: Did you ever feel like you had to work in the restaurant, or did you ever do chores, or have an allowance, or anything like that? So work-related.

Lau: That’s a really good question. I’m glad you asked. So my mom had a really unique idea and philosophy. So she didn’t actually want me to work at the family restaurant. And that’s a really big thing that I see is very common in Asian American families in Boise, is like, whether it be

⁶ The Boise River Greenbelt, passing through Garden City, Idaho, to downtown Boise, is 25 miles long. The Greenbelt was developed in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. From City of Boise, “Boise River Greenbelt,” <https://www.cityofboise.org/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks/boise-greenbelt/>.

⁷ The distance between Ann Morrison Park to Lucky Peak State Park is about 11.6 miles.

the parents ask that the child work in the restaurant or the child wants to. My parents didn't want me to. They didn't want me to depend on them.

00:49:57

Lau: My parents are actually really nice. I feel like it wasn't an allowance. They would just give me money, put it in my account. When I was younger, I kind of got an allowance for cleaning, but it was also just like I regularly got money whether or not I cleaned. But now—so I got my first job—what's the working age in Idaho?

Q: 14, 15?⁸ I have no idea.

00:50:20

Lau: I think it's 15. So, I think a few months before I was 15—okay wait, no, that would be illegal then. No, I think it's [the minimum working age is] 16 or 15. And I think at 15 is when I started doing this. I was at the bridal store in the mall. And that was like, I found it myself because I think a part of me always loved fashion design and clothes. In my GT [gifted and talented] projects when I was in second grade, I think I did something on fashion designs. I just loved it.

00:50:51

Lau: And so I went to the dodgy bridal shop. And I said, "Hey, can I work here?" It was literally hell. I will never forget those days because the boss was really mean. And he made me count shoes as inventory. And I remember that was my first, first job and I worked Sundays. I think only Sundays, and I worked eight hours, and that was it. And I didn't work any other day and my parents would just—because I didn't know how to drive yet. Oh yeah, that would make sense, because you only drive at 16. So I didn't drive yet. My parents would drop me off. And then I would just work there for the Sunday, and they would pick me up at the end of the day, like five. So that was a very short, you know, not really a job. It was just a side thing.

00:51:31

Lau: And then I ended up working at Roaring Springs Water Park. That was my first, I guess, official job where they actually, you know, paid you a paycheck that was through a company. And I worked in the admissions department at Roaring Springs. I actually was promoted in my first and only season that I worked there. I was promoted to the guest relations office, where I

⁸ As of 2020, the minimum age in Idaho for nonagricultural labor is 14. From Idaho Department of Labor, "Frequently asked questions on labor laws," <https://www.labor.idaho.gov/dnn/Businesses/Idaho-Labor-Laws/Labor-Laws-FAQ>. This has been the case since at least 2010. From *LawServer*, "2010 Idaho Code 44-1301 – Restrictions on Employment Of Children Under Fourteen," 2010, https://www.lawserver.com/law/state/idaho/archv-2010-id-code/2010_idaho_code_44-1301.

might manned the computer and the phones and the in person—I guess not really inquiries. Those were really complaints. The people that would come and they would have issues and all of that stuff.

00:52:08

Lau: And that same summer, I actually worked a second job. I worked at Marshalls. And I think it was because I applied to both and I really wanted to work at both, so I just stayed. But Roaring Springs was obviously seasonal, so once Roaring Springs waned off, I worked at Marshalls on Saturdays and Sundays. So I never worked during the school week. I only worked on the weekends in high school. And then I worked at Marshalls the entire time up until I graduated and then went off to college. And then for the past two winters, I would always come back and work.

00:52:41

Lau: I think the first summer—oh, I didn't the first summer. I worked in school. So then when I got to college, I worked an office job at my college specifically for a graduate or undergraduate advising route, just answer phones and do documenting or whatever. And then I also worked as an orientation leader over the summer. And then I kept the same job over the school year sophomore year, and then I worked in real estate for my school as well. And then I continued work in the office. And then we're here now. I'm obviously unemployed because I'm out of school.

00:53:15

Q: Yeah, I guess. It sounds like you worked a lot during high school. Is there a reason why you wanted to be working?

Lau: I mean, I honestly don't think I worked a lot, because I think my friends worked a lot more than me. So that's probably why my idea of what is considered a lot is different, because I had a lot of friends, even—there was one girl that was hired with me. And she worked during the weekdays too. That's why I specifically mentioned I didn't work weekdays, because some days she would be rushing straight from our school to Marshalls to work.

00:53:45

Lau: And I guess, I don't know. I mean, I like to buy things and I like to buy them without having to ask permission, I guess. Or it just feels good to have my own money to use. But I also feel like I'm definitely not as financially independent as I'd like to be. I have a lot of friends in school [both high school and college] that are really financially independent, and I would say I'm not on their level yet. But I just feel like it's a responsibility thing, a growing up thing, you know.

00:54:13

Q: I think we've touched on a lot of different facets of your life. But for the sake of my questions' chronology, we're in the "school and community" questions. So, you've talked a lot about school, but here's a chance to expand if you haven't mentioned anything that you wanted to. But the question is, what was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Yeah, things like that.

Lau: Yeah, great. I mean, I love that, going back and reflecting. I would say, so reading and English and and writing, anything literature-based, was always a favorite, and came of ease to me, and still does to this day. And I think it is because I read so many books. I feel like books really helped elevate me from having a lot of struggles with the English language, and just education-wise, it elevated me. So that was always a good subject.

00:55:16

Lau: I think math. I was actually always quite good at math, and didn't decrease until I was in high school. And the reason for that being I remember being in the GT program, and they had particular advanced math classes that you would take. So in the morning, you would do one class. And then in the afternoon, everyone would be in math. And I think I was in one of the higher math classes. And I always felt like it was quite easy.

00:55:43

Lau: And then in middle school, I think middle school was when you start science. I was honestly fine at science. I mean, I wasn't great at it, but it was kind of common sense to me, I guess. It just wasn't that fascinating and so in middle school, I think in sixth grade, I was in eighth grade math. So I was in a very advanced math. And I was doing pretty well at it. I thought I was doing pretty okay.

00:56:05

Lau: There were obviously—my mom always tells me, "You missed certain subjects or areas in math, because you skipped advanced." And I was like, "Okay, whatever." But then in high school, my high school math program was just terrible. It was definitely a literature-focused high school, so I was already really good at that. It [literature-focused education] just added on top of that [Geneve's skill in literature-based subjects]. But then the math classes—I had mentioned that there were probably some subjects I had slightly missed for math. So I feel like that really was not beneficial in high school to just have not that much investment into the math program. So I feel like I struggled with that a little bit.

00:56:44

Lau: And then I was fine with math in high school. Also my math in high school was really weird. Especially for IB, it was very writing-heavy with theorems and proofs and stuff like that.

And that's math, but it's also not math. It's writing and math. So when I got to college, I was like, "What is math? I just can't." Maybe it's just a communication major—everyone says communication majors are bad at math, but I think I did try to take a math class and I didn't need it. So I dropped it. And I was supposed to do a business minor, and I dropped it because it was like all finance and accounting classes. And it was just not something I was interested or super talented in, so I didn't want to do it.

00:57:28

Lau: And I would say in terms of other subjects—science, I was in higher level chemistry for IB. And I thought I was good at it. I was good at science in the earlier years, but IB chemistry gets really hard. So that was always fascinating to me, and now obviously I don't need to take chemistry classes because it's not really in my major. What other subjects are there in school? History, geography, all those things. I was fair. I'm just good at memorization. That's what history is, right? Yeah, that's about it.

00:58:02

Q: Yeah. And then you've talked about some school activities like cheerleading and how you've also played a lot of instruments. Were there any other activities or sports that you participated in?

Lau: So activities-wise, my junior year, I got very heavily involved in an organization called One Stone. I don't know if you're familiar with One Stone. But they're a student-run nonprofit organization. And I actually—so how it came across, so it's a really funny story, because they came to Renaissance and they advertised this 24-hour think challenge. And I was like, "I need to do CAS [creativity, activity, service] hours for IB. I need to do 150 of them. This is a really great way to get a lot of hours [claps]."

00:58:51

Lau: So basically, everyone of my IB chemistry class signed up. So everybody did the think challenge, because we all wanted the hours. And it was this think tank event. It was at the CenturyLink Arena downtown. And it was 24 hours, you have to reimagine learning in Idaho, like there was no classrooms, there was no grades. How would you do all that? And then we presented to people in the J. W. Catherine Organization Association? J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation. That's what it was. Oh my gosh. I don't know why I forgot that.

00:59:22

Lau: So I loved that project and I loved the organization One Stone itself. I just thought it was so innovative and creative and I loved doing the design thinking process. And then they sent an email. They were like, "We're having this open house. If you really liked the think challenge, come to here and learn more about us." And so I went and I signed up for a few projects.

00:59:43

Lau: And then there was a “secret project.” And that project was actually the team that built the One Stone High School,⁹ so I ended up being on the team to help build how the curriculum would look, how would they assess students. I was a huge part of the outreach for the school. So, whether that be the big presentation and reveal day, whether that be—I even interviewed the first class of students that entered that school. I sat on One Stone’s Board. I was a part of their strategic planning committee.

01:00:13

Lau: And that was a huge, huge part of my junior and senior years of high school, I was always at One Stone. I recognize the road to drive there because I was there so much. It was like my second home. And I'm super grateful for that experience because without One Stone, I wouldn't have ended up where I ended up in college, because a lot of those resources that gave me advice on how to get into college and even just what colleges I should be applying to all came from One Stone.

01:00:39

Q: Yeah, that's so cool. I had no idea that was just something to be involved in. So that's really cool. These are all kind of more questions about identity that I have coming up. You've talked a lot about, I think, white norms and white standards that you've encountered growing up, and also a lot of your friends being white. The question is, of what ethnicity are your friends? And I think I'm interested to see your answer across time as well.

Lau: Oh boy. I'm trying to think because, you know, you're trying to remember all of your childhood friends. It's so hard to remember, because you have groups and stuff, you know.

01:01:37

Lau: It's almost interesting because I said they're “white,” but I'm sure they could be German. They could be Russian, you know. But I almost felt like we never talked about that, growing up especially. So I think in elementary school, it was just mostly white people I was friends with. I had friends that were Mormon, but I want to be clear that I never had a super best friend. Actually, I did have my best friend, her name was Emily and she was Mormon, but now they're no longer Mormon. I met her this year back in Boston; she was visiting for this one event. And her family has completely rejected the LDS practice.

⁹ One Stone High School opened in 2016, with a student enrollment of 70 as of 2018. From Alan Gottlieb, “Inside an innovation school where students run the show,” *Idaho Ed News*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.idahoednews.org/news/inside-innovation-school-students-run-show/>.

01:02:20

Lau: But I felt like there were a lot of these LDS people that I went to school with, and we were friends and acquaintances, but they were never really my best friends. I always felt like I was never on that same level with them.

01:02:32

Lau: So in middle school, I had this group of friends. Yeah, they were just all white, except for I had one Black friend. And then in high school I had all white—yeah, most of them. I had one that was half-Black, and I think, yeah, that was it. I didn't really have diverse friends until I went to BU. And now I have super diverse friends. I think I have more non-white friends than white friends.

01:03:07

Q: Is there a reason why you said you would never be super close with Mormons, except for your one friend? Is there a reason why you never felt as close?

Lau: I don't know. Now that I think about it, it just always felt like it's kind of like—I don't want to say a cult, but it was always like there was an inner circle that you can never tap into. And you didn't really know why. And it could be maybe their family told them they couldn't be friends with me, or maybe it was just an unconscious bias in your mind.

01:03:43

Lau: But I just, you know, I was never the girl that everyone wanted to be friends with. I was the girl that wanted to be friends with the people that everyone wanted to be friends with, right? I was never sitting in the middle of the seat. I was always sitting one seat behind or looking in. You know? That's kind of how it felt like, now that I think about it. I still remember there were two girls that I rode the school bus with, and they always sat together, and I just sat behind them. And we were friends. But they were obviously closer.

01:04:12

Lau: And now, obviously, you know, we're much older now and one of them responded to my [Instagram] story a few days ago, or something like that. We're all very different. But it really does make me wonder, because it was always like, yeah, I was never really like the one that everyone wanted to be friends with. And I just was always chasing after something, but I don't know what the “something” was.

01:04:32

Q: This is a related question, but how would you say you get along with white people?

Lau: This is a really good question, because I feel like it's really hard to have a sweeping generalization of “by white people, I was treated like X.” Because those are all separate experiences. I would feel like, for some people, especially my best friend that used to be LDS and no longer is, her family was so open and inviting, and I never felt othered by them. I always felt like—I mean, I saw a newsletter, I'm pretty sure, we made when we were little. I never felt like I was less than her. She always made me feel really important and valid.

01:05:17

Lau: And I don't want to say that most of my experiences weren't like that, but it was definitely [with] my best friends where that was how it felt like. Because with some other experiences, I think this was more prevalent in middle school, is middle school boys were so mean. So mean. I just remember a lot of race things, or if there was a boy I had a crush on, he would never like me. And I could never say out loud, “It's because I'm Asian.” But it's definitely like I would understand that their type is, you know, the white blondes. And that wasn't me.

01:05:57

Lau: And it's really crazy now to think about it, because it's like, yeah, most of these people would kill to have me even interact with them. Because not to, you know, toot my own horn, but I feel like I've done pretty successful for myself, like in order of education and just growing up. I think I'm in a really good spot. And a lot of these people aren't. And I just think it's crazy that I really let myself be demeaned when I was younger because of that.

01:06:25

Lau: And I think a lot of that, too, had to do with the combination of being an Asian and also just being a middle school girl. I know a really big one was like—I'm actually breaking out right now so I can talk about it. You know, breakouts. And a part of these too, I would like to address, is also trends. Now this is a very transparent issue that everybody talks about, but when you and I were in middle school, it was like, “If you have acne, you don't wash your face.” And it's like, no, there's no correlation there. It's just literally hormonal.

01:06:55

Lau: And I was really, really focused on looking perfect and everything. So I wore makeup at a very early age. I was covering up a lot of those imperfections which are very, very prevalent when you're in middle school. And so I got made fun of for that a lot. And I think I would group being made fun of that way, and also microaggressions and being an Asian American, into the same thing. It was just “bullying [uses scare quotes].” No, it's not “bullying,” it is just bullying, from when you were in middle school. And so that was a big part of it too, was just those little comments and it felt all these attacks.

01:07:28

Q: Yeah, and I think a lot of what you're saying definitely resonates with me as well. I think there's a lot of—I don't want to say difficulties—but things that come with being Asian American in a not Asian place.

Lau: Struggles, yeah.

01:07:42

Q: Did you ever feel connected with any racial or ethnic communities here in Boise? I'm part of the Chinese community here and I grew up around it. So I'm just wondering what your experience with it was like?

Lau: My parents were never really big into those big—my mom's just not a social person. I was like, “Mom, why don't you have any friends? You're so antisocial. Why?” And most of her friends are just people that aren't even here. I would say, in the Asian community in Boise, I was mostly—sometimes my cousins.

01:08:25

Lau: I remember I was kind of closer with them earlier on. I mean, obviously we don't really interact as much now, but we would have dinners at each other's houses, and the closest cousin to me I think is four years older than me. So there's a gap, but it wasn't that big all the time. So we made little stickers when we were younger, and stuff like that. So that was a really big part of being in the Asian community, when I was younger, I suppose, through my family that way.

01:08:52

Q: Yeah, I guess that's interesting to me, too, because I would consider myself part of Boise's Chinese community, but I would say it's very Mandarin-speaking and so I don't think I know anyone who speaks Cantonese, to be honest.

Lau: Yeah, I'm Cantonese-speaking. So my whole family, like my parents can speak Mandarin on the phone or if they needed to. But I don't. So I tried to learn [Mandarin] in college my first first two semesters, because I didn't pass the Spanish placement test even though I took four years of Spanish.

01:09:25

Lau: And so I tried to learn, and it's just so hard. How language development works, it's really hard to learn a language when you're a fully grown adult. It's so difficult now, because my mom really pressured me to do this when I was younger, was to learn how to write Chinese, because I just learned vocal Chinese, because for being in China and also just having spoken it at home.

But I don't know how to write it and I wish I did. Because it would be so much more helpful now, in terms of jobs, life, literally anything. Knowing how to write Chinese is so helpful and I don't. So I feel like that was always like, “Ugh, why?”

01:10:03

Q: I know there's a Chinese school in the area.¹⁰ And I'm just wondering, was that something your parents have ever considered?

Lau: No. They had never. I knew the thing, but I don't know why I didn't go. But it was never even a topic of discussion. It was never even “do you want to go to this?” It was like I just never went.

01:10:21

Q: Interesting. At home, do your parents mostly speak Cantonese still?

Lau: Yes. Yep. So we still speak Cantonese, and sometimes when I'm “home home”—by “home home,” I mean home right now for a long, extended period of time—I obviously speak Cantonese with my parents. When I'm in school and I call them, it's kind of a mix of both.

01:10:44

Lau: It's not necessarily because—remember, I told you earlier how I said I had always pushed away Chinese culture—I don't necessarily think I speak more English when I'm FaceTiming my mom at school [due to pushing away Chinese culture], because I think it's sometimes there's just a lot of things I can't translate, like my experiences every day or this one certain grocery item—how do I say “cauliflower gnocchi” in Chinese? I don't even know how to say “gnocchi.” So I would just, you know, say it in English, and different things. But with my dad, it's more Cantonese than with my mom. My mom is really good at the Chinglish and also just English in general.

01:11:20

Q: I think we've definitely touched on a lot of these topics already, but, are there any particular moments of racial discrimination or stereotypes that stand out to you from your time in being in Idaho?

Lau: Dang. I mean, I feel there is sometimes this idea that Chinese people come to the United States and they—okay, the thing is that never makes sense to me. If someone comes and is

¹⁰ Interviewer is referring to Boise Modern Chinese School, which she had attended since 2006. According to the interviewer's father, the school has been open since at least 1998.

successful, they are not taking away your wealth. Right? It's like they are contributing to the economy. They pay taxes and, you know, shop, and all these different things.

01:12:09

Lau: But I definitely feel like there were some microaggressions. I have this—is it an uncle? It's just a family friend's husband who always had some slight little racist jokes that he would throw in there about “you came to America, now you're taking my money” and stuff like that. And yeah, that was one of the things too, where I was like, I never recognized that's a microaggression. But I never noticed that when I was younger. I was just like, “He's just joking around. He's just messing.” But those are definitely inherent thoughts that are actually real. Otherwise you wouldn't be saying it out loud.

01:12:42

Lau: And I definitely feel like there are also this idea of “if you're Asian, you don't do a certain thing.” Or there's always those little jokes that are tossed around. I think I was lucky to not be on the receiving end of those jokes.

01:13:02

Lau: But yeah, and then I feel like especially—and I didn't even know this was that relevant—but in college, a lot of people have Asian fetishes, especially just college boys. And I thought it was something you see in the movies or something I read on the news. But no, it was a very real thing and I've heard about it a lot from other Asian women, having also received messages like that myself, which that's been really shocking, because I can't believe that happens in a place as diverse as Boston, but it does.

01:13:40

Q: How do you feel about it? I think simultaneously having encountered racial and sexualized fetishization at the same time as—not at the same time period—but while also having encountered people being like, “I wouldn't date you because of your race” implicitly. I guess, how does that feel, having encountered two different extremes of a spectrum?

Lau: That's a really good question. So I feel like—the fetishization part is really interesting to me, because a lot of people are like, “Okay, well, what's the difference between a fetish and a type? Because some people just have a type for Asians.” I'm like, “That doesn't make any sense.”

01:14:28

Lau: But then I had a really good friend, and I asked him about it. I was like, “Hey, you typically, pursue Asian women.” I was like, “And I don't want to say you have a fetish, but it feels like you do.” And he's like, “Well, no, I don't.” And I was like, “Well, can you explain to

me?” And he told me, for him, he thinks that Asian women have to deal with a lot of hardships, like racist remarks growing up. So when they're successful, he sees it as they had to work extra hard to get there. So it's very impressive.

01:14:57

Lau: And then some people just don't like physical appearances on white people, I guess. They think that Asian females are so unique and different. Like there's sometimes that stereotype where it's like people think that all Asian people look the same. I started to realize, especially in college, a lot of people think all white people look the same, and actually all Asian people look more diverse and different.

01:15:19

Lau: So I think that's one of the parts too. And for me it's really been interesting to kind of diversify, like there are some people who pursue Asian women because that's their type, and then there are some people who pursue that because they genuinely think that Asian females are submissive, which that's the type of I have a problem with. I don't like that. I don't like the nature and the language of that. All of that is just really disgusting.

01:15:41

Lau: And then just, I think from the experience of thinking about when I was younger, a lot of people were like, “I wouldn't date you because you're Asian” or “I don't like Asians.” I think that really is an attack on your self-worth, right? If you're growing up in a very white community, and you're already trying your hardest to fit into white stereotypes to look like the white people that you know, and then to have someone tell you—even if you on the outside are dressed exactly like your white friends, and even physical appearance-wise you try to do your hair, your makeup a certain way to look really white—that you still can't fit in. That you still aren't enough. I think that's a really big hit on self-confidence.

01:16:22

Lau: I mean, sometimes for fun, I'll look back through Facebook pictures. And at a time that I thought I was very confident and comfortable in my skin, I look now, and I was like, “No, I was so not confident, uncomfortable, and still trying to impress all of these stereotypes or norms back then.” So it's been really interesting to observe how I thought I felt then and how I think I really, really did truly feel.

01:16:46

Q: I think with everything, I'm so appreciative of you sharing. I really, really appreciate it. This next question is already quite related and might be redundant, but what would you say the role of gender and/or sexuality has been in your life?

Lau: I mean, I love that question, actually, because I think that topic is just one of extreme reflection and also just always something that we're examining more. I mean, I didn't have boyfriends growing up. I had crushes, but it was never like this thing. I had a “boyfriend” in middle school, but it was literally just someone I texted. It was a friend's friend and it was a one-week thing. So I don't consider that a relationship.

01:17:33

Lau: And I feel like it was never really a topic of conversation with my mom and myself. And even going to college, I also haven't dated in college. I don't know why. I think I just don't date in general. But I think when I have met up with—I went on a few dates with one guy, and I thought that would be something more. I've told my mom maybe about two guys in that instance.

01:18:00

Lau: But we don't really discuss that. I feel like definitely going to school somewhere else has given me more agency over those decisions, because I feel like here, I was never really able to—it wasn't like my mom was like, “You can't hang out with boys,” but it was just like we never really talked about it. And then it's like why would I go out at a really weird time? You know what I mean? So yeah, it's definitely been something I've been able to explore and be more comfortable with in college, rather than growing up and going to school here.

01:18:37

Q: You've touched on this as well. But how would you say you get along with other ethnic groups or other people of color? And I guess over time, since I think you've touched on it in certain points of your life.

Lau: So I think when I had other ethnic friends, like I had a Black friend in middle school, I don't think we really ever talked about being minorities. Granted that we were both in this friend group that had all white people except for the two of us. I don't think there was an opportunity for us to really need to talk about it. I felt we just kind of all wanted to fit in, and by “we all” I mean me and her.

01:19:17

Lau: And in high school, my high school had a lot of Bosnian students. So I felt like that was really interesting, because they have a really diverse perspective. And I think that was kind of me realizing, like, “Oh my gosh, there are a lot of people that have all these different experiences that should be valued.” Because I feel like in my high school, it was more accepted and people would talk about that more.

01:19:42

Lau: I also feel like now that I'm in school somewhere else, a lot of people in my high school just thought “because we have Bosnian refugees, we're a diverse school.” And it's like, no, try again. Not really. I feel like—so the question was how do I relate to other minority groups, correct? So I feel like now in college, especially with the—I mean, I know you talked about that we would talk about COVID later, but I feel like it's really relevant to talk about what has just happened in the past two or three months—but I have a really good friend who's Black. And we have had so many conversations about the racial injustices that Asian people faced during COVID and then that Black people faced with everything happening with Black Lives Matter.

01:20:33

Lau: I think that it has been a really unique experience for me to recognize inherent racism in the Asian community. I mean, even with my grandma, she would say, “Don't bring home a Black guy. Whatever you do, don't marry a Black guy.” I mean, grandmas are grandmas. They're literally not going to be able to control what you do. So sometimes she'll say, “You need to marry a Chinese boy.” And I'm like, “You're not going to tell me who I'm going to marry!” I'm going to marry who I want to marry.

01:21:05

Lau: And I think it's really interesting, because I've been able to engage in these conversations more now that I'm in college. You know, really feel like I have an active role in these social conversations and one that is important. And also, as an Asian American, I feel like it is critical for me to speak out about the, what is it, “Yellow Peril Hates Blacks” [sic].¹¹ It's something about how Black people and Asian people are usually pitted against one another and the whole model minority myth. That is so real. And I've seen so many things online too, about certain heavy Asian population groups in certain schools. Like, NYU [New York University], I think there was an Asian fraternity that uses the N-word.¹²

01:21:48

¹¹ The more common phrasing is “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power.” From Taylor Weik, “The history behind 'Yellow Peril Supports Black Power' and why some find it problematic,” *NBC News*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/history-behind-yellow-peril-supports-black-power-why-some-find-n-1228776>.

¹² The interviewer believes Geneve is referring to Lambda Phi Epsilon at NYU, whose anti-Black messages surfaced in May 2020. The interviewer is not specifically aware of the use of the N-word in these communications, but she personally knows Lambda Phi Epsilon members at NYU who have used the N-word before. From Lillian Weng, “Anti-Blackness in Asian American communities,” *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.thedp.com/article/2020/06/asian-american-community-minority-black-lives-matter-police-brutality-racism>.

Lau: And then, not to discredit that there are probably experiences by Asian people where they receive racist remarks from Black people. Not to say that that doesn't exist. But I'm just saying that it is wrong to pit these two minority groups against one another. But I've had a lot of really productive conversations with my friend, and just speaking about our experiences, and I feel like my experience during COVID is only a small glimpse into what Black people deal with in this country for so many decades and centuries. And especially pertaining to COVID—I know you said you were going to ask questions later. I really hope I'm not answering in advance, but—

Q: We could just talk about it, if you want.

01:22:25

Lau: I would love to talk about it. I think COVID has been such an interesting topic, because I—okay, so when I first came home—I'm actually going to take my headphones out, by the way, because they're dying, and I don't want it to die in the middle of me talking. Can you hear me now?

Q: Yes.

01:22:42

Lau: So when COVID was first really bad in March, we [Geneve's family] would wear facemasks, even riding our bikes outside. The first time we rode bikes, we were wearing face masks. And we passed by this couple just right outside of my house, and we were wearing our masks, and I thought that they had fake coughed at us. But I wasn't sure. And then when we got to the park that we were going to, to just do some laps around, they were like, "Did you see that earlier?" And I was like, "Yeah. Were they fake coughing?" They were like, "Yeah." My mom's like, "I think they were." I was like, "That was so racist! I wish I would have said something then."

01:23:17

Lau: Because I feel like before, when I was growing up, I was really quiet about racist remarks from people. But now that I go to school somewhere else, now I'm like, "It's wrong for you to say that." I have no problem standing up for myself and calling someone out if they're being racist. I will straight up do it. And I think that I've also seen a lot of these experiences online and I've unfriended—not unfriended. "Unfriended" is a button. But no, I have discontinued a friendship, because someone believes that the virus was made by this country.

01:23:50

Lau: I'm an American-born citizen. I wasn't born in China. I've never had a Chinese passport. But I still feel like that's my ethnicity. And like I feel like it's wrong for people to say, "Chinese

people made this virus,” or judging the things that Chinese people eat. No one says that chicken and cow is the normal animal to eat. They're just another animal. Cows are religious in India, you know. So I feel like the wet markets in China have been under extreme speculation and examination as a result of the virus. And although I personally myself have never eaten very foreign animals like bats or dog, I think I've eaten snake. That's the most foreign animal I've eaten.

01:24:32

Lau: But I've seen markets like that. I walked past it. And it's just a cultural difference. And if you think that's something disgusting or wrong, you're very uncultured to think that. And that's kind of how I perceive it for a lot of people. And I've, yeah, discontinued friendships, because I was just like, “You're so wrong in the way that you think and you're so ignorant.”

01:24:52

Q: I think I have one, maybe one—no, I have a lot of identity questions left. So I think we should finish talking about COVID since we're on the topic. I have you on social media, so I know a little bit, but just for the recording, do you want to tell me a little bit about how COVID has impacted your life or your family's life?

01:25:17

Lau: COVID has literally changed my entire life. I was one of the first groups to be affected by COVID, because I was supposed to go abroad to China. And literally, two weeks before I was supposed to fly out to Shanghai, my entire program was cancelled. At that point I had the option to still see, I think if it would continue. So I didn't do that. Or I could take a leave of absence for the semester, or I could start my semester at BU two weeks late, and that was the maximum for how late you could start the semester.

01:25:55

Lau: So I literally packed all my things up and I flew back to Boston. I hurriedly moved in and I started classes late. It was like a whole mess. And then I ended up having to come home, because of, the virus shut down our campus. We went on spring break, and then they said, “Don't come back.” And we were like, “What do you mean?”

01:26:13

Lau: I normally don't go anywhere for spring break, but I'd been stuck there for so—not stuck there for so long. I was supposed to go abroad. So my friend and I drove up to Canada, and we came down. We just stayed on campus because they didn't say you could leave. They said it's preferred if you don't come back, but you can. And then one week after that, they said,

“Everybody needs to go home.” So I packed up my bags, put all my stuff in a storage unit, and I came back to Boise.

01:26:37

Lau: COVID has affected my family uniquely, because we're not affected, but we have to be extra cautious, because my dad is diabetic, he's old, and he used to smoke. So he's three-way immunocompromised. So I take the virus pretty seriously. I don't really go out, except for I do a hike every week, but we wear masks, and I only see the same five people maximum. And I usually go with the same person hiking. So we've definitely had to be more cautious.

01:27:11

Lau: And I feel like—I wouldn't say I feel unsafe here, but I would feel safer in my state where I go to school just because I think people take mask-wearing more seriously.¹³ I don't understand why it's a political statement.¹⁴ It shouldn't be. In China, a lot of people wear masks for pollution, and here it's somehow a violation of freedom. So that's definitely been a heated topic of conversation and one that I feel is really important for me to talk about, because I live with somebody who is immunocompromised. And even though it sucks that I can't go out and do all these crazy things that I want to do—but I don't, because it would really kill me to know that I come back and bring something home and end up getting someone sick.

01:27:59

Q: Yeah. And then, with your family's restaurant, how is COVID interacting with that?

Lau: So because my dad is so old, and food service is really tricky, because I feel there's dual risks with the fact that it's an enclosed space and you're eating, so people aren't wearing masks. I mean, even if they were before, there's food to serve, you can't wear a mask and eat. And then also the plates and the forks and stuff, those all come into contact with people's saliva. So it was actually the same week that I came home from Boston, my parents had ceased operations of the restaurant. They had planned to open it back up again. But they're now still kind of uncertain. They haven't been working at the restaurant since then.

¹³ At the time of the interview in mid-July 2020, New England tended to do better than other parts of the US in controlling the number of COVID cases. From Melissa Buja and Asher Klein, “Coronavirus Cases Are Decreasing in Just 2 States, Both in New England: Report,” *NECN*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.necn.com/news/coronavirus/coronavirus-cases-are-decreasing-in-just-2-states-both-in-new-england-report/2298886/>.

¹⁴ Some people in Boise have protested mask-wearing. From Chase Biefeldt, “As Boise hands out face masks for Mayor McLean's health order, protesters say it encroaches on their freedom,” *KTVB7*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.ktvb.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/face-mask-protests-boise-city-hall-mayor-mclean-public-health-order-idaho-coronavirus/277-8173b157-2f7d-4429-b873-da198cd2ed16>.

01:28:49

Q: I'm sorry to hear that. I hope your family stays safe. I have a lot of identity questions still. So I'm just going to return to those. Did you ever feel like you or your history or your identity was represented, either in school textbooks growing up or in media?

Lau: Oh my gosh. Great question. I honestly don't think so. And I think history classes are very interesting, because they do kind of touch on different countries and areas. I feel like it's so surface level. The United States is such a young country and China is such an old country. I feel like they just group all the [Chinese] empires together and no one really even knows the order. I barely even know the order! And obviously I should know it more, but it's like I've never studied it in depth.

01:29:52

Lau: In terms of media, I think part of the reason why I loved the American Girl dolls so much is because there was a slight Asian representation. There was a girl who was one of the dolls's best friends. Her name was Ivy [Ling]. And so I had the Ivy doll. And they grew up in San Francisco. They talked a lot about—like the books too—they would mention specific Chinese things that they ate or holidays that they celebrated, so I felt like I really loved American Girl because they had that doll, even though that's the one doll they had. And they had one that was Native American, and one that was Black, or whatever.

01:30:32

Lau: But I felt like that was the first time I had really seen or had a character that looked like me, because I never had—I don't even think—they do now. They have a lot of different Barbies. I only know because I went to the Barbie Museum in Montreal, and I know they have Barbies in wheelchairs, Barbies of different weights. I know my friend who's Black, she's like, “I wasn't allowed to have white Barbies growing up. I could only have black Barbies.” I was like, “Do they even have Asian Barbies?”¹⁵ I don't think they did, unless it was the Mulan character, you know.

01:31:02

Lau: So I never had Barbies growing up that looked like me. I liked *Hannah Montana* for a little bit. You know, *Hannah Montana*, nothing in those shows really looked like me. So that was definitely a gap growing up that I noticed. Notice now more prevalently than when I was younger.

¹⁵ The first Asian Barbie was likely the “Oriental Barbie,” released in 1981. After the Oriental Barbie, Mattel began releasing country-specific Barbies, like the 1988 Korean Barbie. From Kelly Kasulis, “Tracing the history of ‘Asian’ Barbie,” *WordPress.com*, February 1, 2016, <https://kkasulis.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/tracing-the-history-of-asian-barbie/>.

01:31:21

Q: Do you see yourself as Asian American, as Chinese Americans, as Chinese, as American et cetera? Is there a particular label that you prefer?

Lau: I usually use Chinese American. I feel like “Asian” is just such an easy term to use and I do use it in my vocabulary a lot. I've been trying to work on it more because I feel like a lot of people say “Asian,” but they only think Chinese, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, or Thai—basically everywhere but India. People don't really think about Indians being also Asians. But I typically, you know, when I talk about—like if I have my LinkedIn bio or whatever—I'll be like “Chinese American” or something like that.

01:32:04

Q: And then I think you've talked about some dating pressure, mostly from your grandma, of “you have to date someone who's Chinese.” Is that something you felt from your parents or something that you feel has influenced how you approach dating or friendships or anything like that?

Lau: I feel like the “don't bring home a Black boy” has definitely been something that my mom has said at some point. Now, we've had a lot of conversations where I'm like, “Hey, you can't say that. That's really racist.” And like I feel like in recent years since high school, they haven't really said things like that. But before, it was definitely a really big thing.

01:32:52

Lau: With my grandma, we just don't really do anything she tells us to do. She has some wild thoughts. Even recently, she's like, “They shut down the Chinese consulate in Houston. Are you going to get deported?” And my parents are like, “We are literally American citizens. Trump might be crazy but he can't deport us.” And so, you know, crazy things like that. She just has these thoughts, so I don't really take anything to heart. I'm just like, “Yeah, sure, sure.”

01:33:21

Lau: But yeah, as far as dating goes, I feel like I have a lot of agency to make my own choices with that. I guess I just don't really have super serious dating experiences yet, where it's like, “Ooh, that's marriage.” So I haven't really had that opportunity yet, where it's like if I brought home someone who was not the ethnicity that my parents wanted. I haven't run into an issue with that per se.

01:33:47

Q: And then I think this is more of a hypothetical question. So it's like, if you were to have kids—which you obviously don't have to do—but if you were, would there be any traditions or beliefs that you'd want to pass on to them?

Lau: I think I would definitely hope that they could have a Chinese name, not one that's under their birth certificate or anything, but just so they know. I would like for them to be able to know some Chinese, in order to communicate with my father, their grandfather. I would definitely want them to know the different family members.

01:34:28

Lau: We do have—so one of my baby cousins is half-white. No, she's not half-white, she's Native American. She's half-Native American and half-Asian, Chinese. So she knows how to say “dog” and call her grandma “grandma” in Chinese, and “grandpa” and stuff like that. But she mostly, [when] speaking, she speaks English. We're talking coherent sentences, English, but she understands what we're saying if we speak in Chinese. So I definitely [would] like my child to have that too, because I feel like it would just be like, you would just kind of let the culture die, if you don't pass it on to your children.

01:35:18

Q: This is kind of a broader question, but what do you see as your “place” in America? And also, what are your feelings towards America?

Lau: Yeah, this is a really good question. I definitely feel like my place in America is more in a place like Boston, a city where it's just more diverse—and you could even argue that Boston isn't super diverse. It can be kind of gentrified. But I feel like—especially being home for so long, this is the longest I've been home since I've been in college—I wouldn't say I'm unhappy here, but I definitely do not feel like this is a place where I can thrive, where I am—I'm obviously respected—but I don't feel like I am respected as such an equal as I am there [Boston].

01:36:12

Lau: In terms of America, I don't really think it's the best country in the world. I feel like that's [“the US is the best country in the world” is] a really common thing a lot of people say, and I feel like a lot of people might also say all the struggles that I've been through, living in another country, this is such a great country to live in. But I mean, I don't feel like actively moving to another country, just because I feel like there's a lot of hassle that goes around with that.

01:36:37

Lau: I always talk about, “Oh, I want to go to Canada.” My friend always says, “Canada is just a better America. There are still issues though, you know.” I don't think I would ever pick my feet

up and actually immigrate to another country. I think that that's something that requires extreme diligence, dedication, and just qualities that I don't think I necessarily have in pertinence to immigration. But I think I can get by here [in the US] and in certain areas I'm more respected if it's more diverse than a place like Boise, Idaho.

01:37:13

Q: And then I'm going to ask you a few questions I just meant to ask earlier. But do you know what years—I don't know if I asked this—but you know what years your parents were born?

Lau: 1964 for my mother and 1956 for my father.

01:37:30

Q: And then also—I mean obviously COVID is a major world event—but aside from COVID, were there any world events or events in China, for example, that affected your family when you were growing up?

Lau: I don't think so. I know SARS is a thing, but they weren't there. And I don't think I was there.¹⁶ My family in China will kind of talk about it. But I feel like SARS was really well handled, right? It's not like COVID—I mean, obviously, probably, when you're in the center of the event you feel differently. But yeah, I feel like that was probably a major world event. I was too young to experience 9/11. Obviously airline travel changed for everybody, but I don't think it was devastatingly different for us [Geneve's family] because of 9/11.

01:38:28

Q: And then we're just in the “looking forward” section of my question so, the first question, what accomplishments are you most proud of?

Lau: I would definitely say I'm super proud of going to school so far from home. For some people, it might be like, “Why is that a big accomplishment?” But not a lot of people from my high school went to school far away, and, to go off of that, to stay in school very far away. Some people go to school really far away and they end up dropping out. They end up not continuing their education. And I think being persistent and staying throughout has been a big accomplishment in and of itself.

¹⁶ SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome, first emerged in the Chinese province of Guangdong in November 2002, eventually spreading to 26 countries and killing 774 people in total. There were 5,327 cases and 349 deaths in China; there were 1,755 cases and 299 deaths in Hong Kong. SARS was contained by July 2003. From Becky Little, “SARS Pandemic: How the Virus Spread Around the World in 2003,” *History*, January 30 2020 (Updated March 17, 2020), <https://www.history.com/news/sars-outbreak-china-lessons>.

01:39:13

Lau: And I think, really just being a student leader has been an accomplishment for me. Because I was just so quiet growing up, I was never really a leader. And I think that now that I've really been able to find my voice, that is something that I am super proud of.

01:39:34

Q: And then—I think this is a really hard question—but what is the most important and meaningful event or experience in your life? / What is the happiest moment in your life?

Lau: Oh my gosh. That is such a hard question. Okay. Happiest moment.

01:40:06

Q: Or moments? Plural?

Lau: I guess moments makes it easier. Happiest moments are traveling for sure. I think that one of the things that my parents really tried to instill in me growing up is seeing a lot of different things. So I grew up like road tripping to so many national parks, and the beauty there is just incredible. It's unlike anything else. I think the—it was proudest moment, right?

01:40:38

Q: That's also valid.

Lau: Okay. I'm trying so hard to think. It shouldn't be this hard, right? But it's the single-handed—okay, can it be something in the future, or does it have to be something that's already happened?

Q: Yeah, in the future.

01:40:54

Lau: I think when I graduate college and get my diploma. That's going to be—that's really sad right now, because I don't even know what that's gonna look like with COVID, you know. But I know, one of the things that people talk about, especially for this past class of 2020, is the first-gen graduates and how that's such a big part of those families. And I think, yeah, for me too, like I couldn't imagine if I was class of 2020 and my graduation got postponed or cancelled.

01:41:23

Lau: Because I know that one of the moments that I would be in tears is at my college graduation, because I know my parents worked so hard to be able to provide that quality of education for me. And a lot of people, you know, don't get that much support from their parents

for school. And I was so fortunate to get that. So being able to say that I did it and thank my parents for that is going to be one of the proudest moments for sure.

01:41:51

Q: Yeah, and then, this may be related. But what are your dreams and visions for the future?

Lau: Dreams and visions for the future. I truly want to manifest myself living in New York City. I feel like New York City is even more diverse than Boston. It's also just like it's so cliché, but I feel like whenever I am there, I feel so alive and thriving and just motivated. There's this energy in the air that I'm a really big ambitious and go-getter type of person. I always want to be moving to the next thing. I'm never comfortable with just sitting and being stagnant. So I think New York City is really the culture for that.

01:42:34

Lau: And I think I would like to be able to give back to my parents in some way, whether that be treating them to a really nice vacation or something like that to just thank them for everything that they've done for me. That might be a few years down the line, you know, once I have an actual job and make a lot of money. But I think that I would love to give them something that they've always wanted.

01:43:02

Q: So I guess that brings us to the last question. Is there anything that you'd like to add to the interview that you feel like we haven't covered well, or just something you want to have as your final words?

Lau: I guess, you know, even though my experience growing up in Boise hasn't been the most culturally diverse, or obviously there have been certain things I've encountered that might not have been always pleasant, but I think I am really thankful for where I am today. There are a lot of people who have supported me to where I am. You know, it's not always bad things, right? There's so many mentors and supporters who encouraged me along my journey, whether that be from when I played piano to applying to colleges. I had people who helped me look over my essays. So I'm super thankful for those relationships and those communities that have supported me to get me where I am.

Q: Yeah, okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Works Cited

- Biefeldt, Chase. "As Boise hands out face masks for Mayor McLean's health order, protesters say it encroaches on their freedom." *KTVB7*, July 3, 2020.
<https://www.ktvb.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/face-mask-protests-boise-city-hall-mayor-mclean-public-health-order-idaho-coronavirus/277-8173b157-2f7d-4429-b873-da198cd2ed16>.
- Binkley, Collin. "ITT Tech closes all campuses including Boise's, after federal sanctions." *Idaho Statesman*, September 6, 2016.
<https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/business/article100268822.html>.
- Buja, Melissa, and Asher Klein. "Coronavirus Cases Are Decreasing in Just 2 States, Both in New England: Report." *NECN*, July 16, 2020.
<https://www.necn.com/news/coronavirus/coronavirus-cases-are-decreasing-in-just-2-states-both-in-new-england-report/2298886/>.
- City of Boise. "Boise River Greenbelt."
<https://www.cityofboise.org/departments/parks-and-recreation/parks/boise-greenbelt/>.
- Gottlieb, Alan. "Inside an innovation school where students run the show." *Idaho Ed News*, January 9, 2018.
<https://www.idahoednews.org/news/inside-innovation-school-students-run-show/>.
- Idaho Department of Labor. "Frequently asked questions on labor laws."
<https://www.labor.idaho.gov/dnn/Businesses/Idaho-Labor-Laws/Labor-Laws-FAQ>.
- Immihelp. "USA Visitor Visa Interview."
<https://www.immihelp.com/us-visitor-visa-interview-guide/>.
- Little, Becky. "SARS Pandemic: How the Virus Spread Around the World in 2003." *History*, January 30 2020 (Updated March 17, 2020).
<https://www.history.com/news/sars-outbreak-china-lessons>.
- Kasulis, Kelly. "Tracing the history of 'Asian' Barbie." *WordPress.com*, February 1, 2016.
<https://kkasulis.wordpress.com/2016/02/01/tracing-the-history-of-asian-barbie/>.
- LawServer*. "2010 Idaho Code 44-1301 – Restrictions on Employment Of Children Under Fourteen." 2010.
https://www.lawserver.com/law/state/idaho/archv-2010-id-code/2010_idaho_code_44-1301.

Stanway, David. "Heralding social, financial change, China aims blow at iron rice bowl."
Reuters, December 17, 2016.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-debt-soe-insight/heralding-social-financial-change-china-aims-blow-at-iron-rice-bowl-idUSKBN14700X>.

Weik, Taylor. "The history behind 'Yellow Peril Supports Black Power' and why some find it problematic." *NBC News*, June 9, 2020.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/history-behind-yellow-peril-supports-black-power-why-some-find-n1228776>.

Weng, Lillian. "Anti-Blackness in Asian American communities." *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, June 1, 2020.

<https://www.thedp.com/article/2020/06/asian-american-community-minority-black-lives-matter-police-brutality-racism>.