

Interviewee: Celia Au
Interviewer: Ann Shi
Date of Interview: 4/28/2020
Transcribed by: Ann Shi
Edited by: Youngbin Lee
Audio Track Time: 59:50

Background:

Celia Au was born in Hong Kong and immigrated to the US when she was 3 ½ years old. She grew up in Brooklyn, New York. She explored multiple fields at the beginning of her career including business, law, graphic design and filmmaking, and finally landed in acting.

She is fiercely passionate about social justice and has always dreamed of being a superhero, which at first led her to pursue law; until she realized becoming a public figure could cast more influences on society as well as her passion in acting, she dived into acting, starting with non-speaking background roles. Her unique fashion style especially her hairstyle, her Asian look and personality has gained her attention from directors. She speaks Mandarin, Cantonese and English.

Celia casted as Ying Ying, a kungfu *sifu* (master) in Netflix series “Wu Assassins”, the role she was most known for; and has appeared in “Revenge of the Green Dragons,” “People Places Things,” “In a New York Minute,” and TV shows like “Iron Fist” and “Lodge 49.”

Celia lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Setting:

The interview was conducted in Celia’s living room in Brooklyn, New York, via online conferencing tool Zoom amidst the quarantine during COVID-19.

Key:

CA: Celia Au

AS: Ann Shi

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop; elaborations.

...: speech trails off; pause.

–: speech stammers.

Italics: emphasis; special names.

(?): preceding word may not be accurate; added note.

[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.); translation.

Interview transcript:

AS: Today is April 28th, 2020. Um, we have Celia Au here with us on the Houston Asian American Archive. My name is Ann Shi, and I want to thank you for taking out your time during the day to speak to us about your life stories.

CA: Yeah, no problem. How are you doing?

AS: Yeah very well. How's New York doing?

CA: Um, well, we're at—I don't know how many weeks now since um, social distancing, so I'm still just staying at home.

AS: Great. Um, how are you combating the isolation?

CA: Um, well, I've just been cooking, baking and writing, and you know there's days I was like, oh man I wish for like this kind of cuisine or just kind of dish from a restaurant; so I just look it up online and try to make it my own.

AS: Okay. Thank you. Um, so to start going back to your life stories, can you talk about your upbringing?

CA: Like, I was born in Hong Kong, raised in New York City. I came here when I was around three, three and a half, um, with my immediate family. And my parents decided to move to New York, because first of all my, my mom's family are mostly in um, New York City; and they also were a little bit um... They're like, partially unsure what was going to happen to Hong Kong after the handover in 1997; so they're like, we can always move back, if anything.

AS: Great! And I guess you speak um, Cantonese?

CA: I can speak Cantonese and Mandarin. And English and horrible Spanish.

AS: [Chuckles] And when did you start learning English?

CA: Um, I think I learned English and Cantonese at the same time. My parents are bilingual so. Well, and then like my aunts and uncles are also bilingual, so "Chinglish" I guess was the first language. [laughs]

AS: Um, can you describe your elementary education?

CA: Um yeah, I mean I went to kindergarten at PS 1 in the Lower East Side, and then we moved to Brooklyn so I went to PS 105, um graduated elementary school there; and went to Christa McAuliffe for junior high school; um then FDR high for freshman year and then I transferred to Tottenville high in Staten Island.

AS: So what was your favorite subjects back then?

CA: Oh my favorite subjects! Um, recess and lunch, is that consider subjects? Uh, I love... like history, um, and art, so those two are like some of my favorite subjects in school and— and gym of course because you get to run around and play.

AS: And what was your uh, middle school and high school education like?

CA: Middle School, well. In our junior high school we were separated to do three different academies, um and I was studying under global communications. So we learned everything about like business to stock market and law. And we have like a little courtroom when we have like law debates and, and... Yeah.

AS: Great. Uh, can you take us back in time and describe the neighborhood that you grew up in— in the Chinatown in New York back then?

CA: Oh, I grew up in, um, Brooklyn. So the area is called— I guess like right in the cusp of Sunset Park and Borough Park. When I was growing up like the area was basically all Irish and Italians. There's a couple of Chinese restaurants and I think there was one Chinese supermarket. And my parents owned a Chinese American video store, and there's— I think there's another video store. Um, so that was like considered Chinatown of Brooklyn because there's a little cluster of Chinese people. And Chinatown itself, I remember that it was like all on East Broadway and the Mott Street. I don't remember too much from it, but there used to be like Chinese movie theaters — they are gone now; and it's still Golden Unicorn, the— the go-to Dim Sum joint; Jing Fong has been there forever. So those are like the OG places if you want to go back to experience how Chinatown was like in the 90s and early 2000s.

AS: Um, was gangster a big thing in Chinatown back then?

CA: I don't know anything about that. Um, I think when I was growing up, I was either too young to know, or that phase has passed. But I heard stories from my uncles, and they were telling me that like, "Oh, have you ever hear something that sounds like firecracker? Most likely it's gun so be careful and duck." Um, but that's it.

AS: And you said your parents had a video shop. Uh, he... [**CA:** A video store. Yeah.] Yeah. Can you describe that?

CA: It's a- It's an Asian American video store. So in the beginning it was like the VHS tapes that we were used to rent out; and then it evolved into VCDs and then finally DVDs before the video business just doesn't sustain anymore, so then they— we closed that, uh, business down.

AS: Um, so can you describe like what you think is the American dream for the immigrants in Chinatown back then?

CA: The American dream. I mean, I feel like everyone has this idea of what the American Dream is. Is that your kids wind up being doctors, lawyers, um, living a better life. That's the whole reason why they even immigrated into America because we were the land of opportunity, or we were called the land of opportunity. So that's their dream. But then I guess for when you're first, second, third generation, as it starts going on, everyone like chasing their own kind of passion, which is different.

AS: And, who was the person who influenced you most during your upbringing?

CA: Um, when I was a kid, I'll have to say it's just my parents. You know, they taught me a lot. They ran a business; and through their business, I've also learned, I've met a lot of people. And those people have become my friends or also like mentors in a certain way. Everyone like- and there's different people in different parts of my life that has come in and out of my life, that told me, and provide me very valuable information.

AS: Um, in your middle school, I believe I read about your resume having— um, going through various subjects. Can you tell us a bit about like all these— um, your passion in, like social justice, and your Law— like going into Law degree in the later career life, and then acting. How did that transition, and how did your school impact all your transitions?

CA: Well elementary school is elementary school. You learn a little bit of everything, right. When I was in junior high school at Christa McAuliffe, I was in a go— a global communications program, which focused in law and business. So we had this thing called a stock market game, when we learn how to buy stocks and how stocks works. And I think that was the first time, I went to the stock exchange and learned about it.

And then another side of it, we have a law program, where we learned about how um, different types of law practices. Usually that time when we were studying was on criminal law, and our school by our— by seventh grade, we built a courtroom. So then we have like a defense side and a prosecution side, and then there's always debates and we were trying to fight in, in court. And for a long time, I thought being a lawyer is kind of like a superhero. You can help the good guys and put the bad guys in jail. So then when I was in high school, I also followed a specific track in law.

Um, I think it was like, up to my junior year, when I was like, "Oh wait maybe I don't like law, and politics as much anymore." Because I—I learned that through history in our books, there's checks and balances; but then when I'm actually learning and I'm questioning the checks and balances, it doesn't seem like it is that black and white anymore. There's a lot of gray areas and I didn't really like that. Um, then I changed into a special program called Virtual Enterprise. It's a business program, and our virtual enterprise was advertising and marketing, so that spiked up my interest in advertising and design. And then from there on, I've taken design classes and then in college, I started out in the business school with a focus in marketing.

And then after that, I realized that I don't like to finance classes, I don't like accounting classes. I switched my major into something called an "ad hoc major", basically I'm putting my own major together. So I have to write a proposal and get all the deans in these different departments to sign off on it. And then now it's actually an official major at my college. So it was a combination of, um, marketing, graphic designs, and communications. and focus with film— like filmmaking; and then, minor in theater, which is acting and everything else. And I think by the time I was a sophomore in college, I started dabbling in acting. And then I was like, "Well this is a lot of fun. I can do both at the same time." So I was a graphic designer and, and like a startup actor.

And as I was taking more acting classes outside, um, I was honing my skills and then one day, I was like, "Hey maybe I could be an actor full-time." I quit my job as a designer and luckily— knock on wood— um that year I did really well acting. And then it just started building up. I started, I think, with like— I think the first jobs I've done was like music videos, and then commercials. Commercials were the first um, time that I start making good money in the business. And then I started doing indie films, which are films that don't really pay well, but it was so much fun and it was so satisfying to be able to tell a story. Then from there it built up to, like you know, little parts in TV shows, and little parts in movies, and bigger parts in movies, and bigger parts in TV shows until today.

AS: Were you starting to all these adventures during your university? [**CA:** Excuse me?] Did you start all these adventures during university, like you mentioned...

CA: Yeah. Um, since like sophomore year of college.

AS: Um, so have you been always been passionate about acting or did you kind of just stumble onto it?

CA: It's weird whenever people ask me that question. Because my parents— own the video store right— I've always watched films and be like, I want to be them. So, in retrospect, I'm like, I want to be them. And they're cops, so I was like, I want to be a police officer; or they're a lawyer, I was like— I want to be a lawyer. And then I realized, as I was getting older, I'm like, "Oh, they're all actors, and actors get to play all these different parts." I was like, "I want to be an actor so I can have like multiple careers, and experience what it's like to be in— in these careers and you dive— you do a deep dive into these characters. So studying these characters was amazing and a lot of fun.

AS: And you mentioned you um, grasped all these skills in graphic design, marketing and business. How did it impact your fut- your career in the later life?

CA: My career in my later life? What do you mean like... [**AS:** your career in acting.]

Um, I guess like— marketing definitely helps because you have to view yourself kind of as a product, and how are you going to market yourself. For filmmaking and like communications, I've learned, you know, how to use a camera, how to edit like the basics. And then from there, I've also like you know studying more to hone my skills in doing so.

Um, so like, marketing— I remember when I was in the marketing 101 class in school— get my hair— and marketing 101 class in school. It was this, um, lesson about how to package. Um, for example right, um, it was a shampoo bottle design, and why it was designed a certain way; and how subconsciously a curvy bottle will remind you of a curvy body shape. And how like kids' shampoo bottles are always bright and colors, and in the lower, um, shelves, because it will attract kids with the happy funky colors, and then the kids will be able to pick it up— because it's at their height; and they can tell their parents that they want it. So there's a lot of like subliminal like advertising, um and talking about like psychology and how people think, and why certain people are gravitated to a certain bottle or whatever.

Um, so when I was starting out in my acting career, you know how there was like always, saying that like, "Hey you know sometimes a type will always look alike," and everyone's like, "oh there's just one type." Um, I was like, "How do I break away from this type in a marketing sense?" So I've decided to shape my style a certain way. Like, I started on cutting my hair shorter just in the front, and having this kind of like, a full hawk look. For in the beginning of my career, people are like, "Oh hey who is this kid with the full hawk Mohawk?" And they're like, "Oh yeah, the kid with the full Hawk and the Mohawk," and I start wearing like, really bright skinny ties, and like, "the kid with the full Hawk and the Mohawk, the kid with the skinny tie." And now like, they start calling me in for these cooler parts, whereas not just specifically as for Asians; it's for anyone like, "oh here, here's a punk kid here, here's the, the rocker kid" kind of type. I start going in for that, I start booking those types; and then later on the casting directors, then knows me by Celia. They're like, "Let's call Celia in." So kind of like packaging myself and, in a way, selling myself as a product.

AS: So did you kind of go, uh, through that way, to get out of the Asian stereotyping?

CA: I never even thought about it as like an Asian stereotyping in the very beginning, I was just thinking about how to market myself, so I can stand out in a crowd.

AS: And having learned about your major role in "Wu Assassins" which was a big hit in Netflix, um and you were playing "Ying Ying" who was a *sifu* kind of character, and has all these demonstrated martial-arts skills. Can you talk about your um, journey with martial arts?

CA: Um, I will say I am not as good of a martial artist as some of our other cast members like Iko, Juju or Lewis Tan. They have studied martial arts their entire lives. I've studied martial arts for five years. Um, I learned it under my *sifu* Tak Wah Eng, and he's like a father to me; teaching me you know, how to fight on screen specifically. He was like, "I can teach you how to fight in a competition setting, but that's also different when you're fighting on screen." So he taught me both. And he was like, "You're an actor. Let's focus on stuff that you would use more on screen." Um, so for five years, I've learned that from him. And "Wu Assassins" came along. I showed them some clips of my fighting for an audition tape. And I went through a couple of callbacks with the showrunner or producer, and then I got the job!

AS: Yay![chuckles] How about the kind of Hong Kong martial arts film industry? Has that impact your, um, kind of— early career in, in martial arts— I mean, martial arts acting?

CA: I, I don't think so. Um, because as a child— like I told you— my parents had a video store. So my brother and I, we love the Jackie Chan and Jet Li, Donnie Yen and Michelle Yeoh movies. But I never thought that I wanted to be an actor, so that never came across my mind. Uh, but my brother and I would, after watching, like Wong Fei-hung, we would be fighting at home and be like, "Oh yeah, let's do this!" like, you know, we're martial artists— like playing pretend.

Uh, it... The martial arts stuff came later when I'm actually serious about it, and thinking about it and studying it, was when I started acting as well. And there's so much philosophy behind martial arts, especially Kung fu that I find fascinating.

AS: So um, do you find it hard to be an Asian American actress in any way?

CA: Like I said before, I think I was lucky, um, in the way of how I packaged myself in the beginning of my career. And now, um, Asian Americans are on the rise, and we have films like "Crazy Rich Asians" that have like basically kicked open the door. Even though, years before we have a lot of Asian American films. I remember the first Asian American film I've ever watched was "Saving face" with Lynn Chen, Joan Chen and Michelle Krusiec. And I was like, "Oh my god! I've never seen Asian faces speaking English with a story surrounding an Asian family before." I thought that was amazing. And that- that was even before I started acting.

And then we have other films. I started attending Asian film festivals. I've seen our story being told; but these movies were not widely released to the general population. Until we have films like that, like "Crazy Rich Asians" and shows like "Fresh Off the Boat", like, they kicked open the doors for our generation. Like, if we're talking about back in the day, we have, we have shows like, "The All-American Girl", right? We have "Vanishing son". You have— I remember "Martial Law" when I was a kid with Sammo Hung. We have um "Marco Polo", that was before "Crazy Rich Asians" or "Fresh Off the Boat". But I feel like those are like, little in between and made an impact for a little bit, and then it kind of— the momentum stopped; and for "Crazy Rich Asians" it kicked open the door, and then people are like, "Whoa! Asians can actually sustain in the box office!" And their stories— people love to their stories, it doesn't matter what ethnic background are you— or, you are, or what um race you are. You can still relate to it, because it's a romantic comedy. It's easy, you know. And you just start making more films about it, and, and people are more open, um, to putting our stories on the big screen, rather than the small screen.

AS: So, what would you think would be the reason that people's aesthetics has changed?

CA: I think, um, Americans are— America in general is the one big melting pot. But we like to put people into these kind of niches, and these little like, like cliques right, almost. And now, people are realizing— hey, we all have a lot more in common than we used to think, and our stories intertwine with each other. Uh, and being able to, especially living in cities like New York or LA, it is so diverse. You

realize that, “wait! We are all just humans”. Like our stories relate. So why discriminate? And now we can make these stories and showing them on the big screen, and people will watch it and be like, "Oh yeah, I can totally relate to that." That's like how my parents got with me, even though we could be uh, a different ethnic background. So if we just keep on telling stories, I think uh soon, we can just see all humans or, you know, the humanity in general rather than, "Oh, you putting labels on everything."

AS: Yeah, we're all connected. [**CA:** Mhm.] And so I was looking your— your last year's new movie "In a New York Minute", and you were playing, um portraying Nina Wong who is an escort. That was very different from "Ying Ying", the *sifu* figure, that you were playing in the "Wu Assassins" series. Can you tell us about the challenges in that, um, in that character?

CA: I think that's the beauty of acting though. Like I was telling you before, why I want to become an actor is because you can have all these different types of career, and you can follow the lives of these different people. Like Ying Ying is not real. You don't have anyone that's like a 2000-year-old *sifu*, living on our honor— at least, I don't think so. Um, and that's something that's in a fantasy land, and that was so much fun.

And then cut to uh "In a New York minute", it's about a— an Asian American female who's moonlighting as escort at, at night, to make ends meet for herself. And dive into that character and doing research and watching other films about people living like that, you see a different side of humanity and different sides of struggles. And I think that's the beauty of it, being able to experience life through acting.

AS: Yeah. Since we're speaking of the research and the studies you were doing to the characters, what kind of uh methods do you use?

CA: I... I don't think I have one type of method. Um, my acting teacher has always told us, each actor is kind of like a treasure chest. You don't know, which is the right key that will fit. So there's not one method that I can tell you that this will work for everyone. And I—I just think that acting is like playing pretend. And it's your imagination, combining with like research and how you see these characters. So you can make it all unique and your own.

AS: Cool. Um, so what would you say— you were talking about your style being this first impression people will, uh, notice you immediately; and besides that, what would be your uh, unique selling point that um, you can market yourself?

CA: I hope now that it's like my acting skills are good enough that people want to hire me for my skills.

AS: Sure. So, um, can you tell us about your martial arts practice with your *sifu*. Is it Mr. Eng, right? [**CA:** Uh-huh, yeah Tak Wah Eng.] Yeah, like can you tell us— share us some memorable experiences about studying martial arts under him?

CA: That's an interesting question, like memorable experiences. I feel like— like his forms are Shaolin form I've learned from him, the tiger forms, Black Tiger forms. He has taught me a little bit of Tai Chi, a little bit of Wing Chun. The most memorable thing is probably we were practicing with my *sihing*¹, and we did a push; and he went back, but he went through the wall. Um, it was not because I was hitting too hard, it was just a force like, you know, he was taken and he pushed back; and then the whole wall, broke. So I guess that's a really memorable moment.

¹ Literally “elder brother in mastery”, meaning elder male classmate.

AS: Wow! So that's um, real martial art, I'm sure! [**CA:** No!] [Both laugh.] Can you also um, tell us about the kind of uh political correctness— sometimes as people are trying to um, have a cast that as more um, racially balanced, like in a way— how do you think that has done to, uh, increase Asian representation on TV?

CA: I don't know if I understand your question fully, but um... about casting, like you're talking about like having one of each race or something in the story or in the movie. Is that what you meant? [**AS:** Yeah. Like...] ... or trying to, trying to have a representation for every gender or race and, and ethnic background? I think as long as it does the story justice, it makes sense, especially if we're sending a movie in somewhere like New York City, and you, all you see is one type people, only one ethnic background, that's impossible. Because we live in such a diverse world like, don't tell me that you only have friends of one specific race. Almost— you would always know people from a different kind of background, and, and um, like you would know people from different types of background. Um, and I think as long as we keep on telling diverse stories, and stay true to humanity and like our own stories, and it makes sense.

Like if you're talking about um a, a story about an Asian American family. I'm going to go to school, the character is going to go to school, and you're going to see people of all different races and background. So tell it, genuinely.

AS: So I was just wondering how much political correctness has done to increase the Asian representation on TV? I was just wondering, because it might be a little bit edgy question...

CA: I just think that you should tell a genuine story, and stick to the source. I mean we live in a melting pot. Our country is a melting pot so there's going to be different race, gender, um sexual orientation, and people of all different ethnic backgrounds, so we'll just tell their stories.

AS: Um, and what's your favorite Asian cast movie or TV of recent times?

CA: It's hard to pick. I like a little bit of everything; like, especially where you're telling me like, "hey, pick one thing" and I was like, I can't think of it right on top of my head. I mean, a story is unique, and it's like someone asked me, "Who's my— what's like my favorite movie?" I was like, I'll tell you the one that I find the most entertaining that I watch over and over again, but that doesn't mean that it's my favorite movie. Because there's a lot of different movies, depending on the genre, depending on the subject matter. Um, depending on like multiple things. There would be a movie that I would say, this is the best for this, but I can't say like, "in general, this one is amazing! It's the best one of all time." I don't think I have an answer for that.

AS: Mmhm, Um, and how do you think the film industry, or the TV and entertainment industry in general, will go in the next 10 years?

CA: And the next 10 years, I just hope that there's going to be, I hope that Hollywood's gonna be more open, and telling more diverse stories. Like I was just watching a, a new show on Netflix right now it's called "Never Have I ever" and it's about an Indian family. And I loved it. It's so fresh and unique to see, you know, "hey, we're not so different." Like everyone— every teen has their own problems, and it's just that this- for this time around, the lead is the brown teen. Um, and I don't think that they are represented enough on screen and it's great to see that. Uh, and like if you're talking about the technical side, there's going to be VR, there's going to be AR. Um, all of that is going to change the way media is going to be taken in by the audience.

AS: Yeah, I remember you have a VR company that you set up a few years back. Can you share more background about that?

CA: I don't have a VR company. I—I made a VR film that I wrote and directed. [**AS:** I see] It was a short film called "Extraction". I made it around three years ago now. And it went through some film festivals I've shown around. It was a, an action, horror or action thriller.

AS: So what's your uh vision with this medium, with the VR, as a way to um, kind of portray our imagination further?

CA: I think VR is a very interesting medium, because um, or a very interesting media because traditionally we're used to watching so flat— 2D. And VR, it puts you into an experience. So it's more like you're inside a video game, or you're inside, um, you know how it goes, a— a roller coaster in Disney or Universal Studios; and you're going through this ride and you're in the middle of it. It's basically, that's what VR is to me. Or like you're sitting in the middle of a black box, uh black box theater.

I actually did a lot of research in VR before making my film and after making my film, I think VR is actually really good and great for medical studies, because our brains are wired a certain way. I'm not sure if you've read these articles, but um, they have used VR to try to help people in physical therapy, and people that were paralyzed before started feeling sensation in their hands and their feet through VR because basically you're tricking your brain that you're walking and you're telling— you're seeing this video of you walking down the street, and then slowly your brain kind of adjust. I don't know how effective it is, but I've read research that has happened, and people have felt sensations when they were paralyzed; or and during, like um, what is it that someone like, said that they were in a wheelchair, and then they started feeling the sensation in their legs and started being able to quote on quote walk again with some help. I think that's amazing because it's opening up something that we've been trying to study for as long as I think we're alive: our brains. And how that can trigger using, using like the media, and that can trigger something in your brain and can help, maybe uh propel something that you think that wasn't possible before.

AS: Um, do you have any plans to make more VR films?

CA: I need more money. [**CA & AS** laugh] I actually have written a second VR film, which is a comedy, an action comedy. And it— we haven't made it because it's gonna cost too much. So maybe one day I'll have enough money and— or I can find enough money to make another one.

AS: Yeah, we're looking forward to it. [**CA:** Thank you.] Um, do you see a way to um, kind of explore outside the traditional Hollywood path for, like the younger actors' generation?

CA: I don't understand your question. Can you ask again?

AS: Sorry! I was just wondering, do you see a way of, um, outside of the traditional Hollywood path for younger actors to explore? Like, besides going through, like auditions and going through like big tasks and companies and then building up their portfolio and... Is there— uh you see, like, with the changes in technology and the industries— um is there any way that, um, they can pave out a new way?

CA: I mean there is already a new wave. We went to school to study acting and we go through auditions, right? And the new wave of younger people who wants to, I guess, act or be in front of the camera, there's YouTube; there's Snapchat; there's Tik Tok; there's Instagram. Yes, they can make their own content and they can start their own stuff. But if you want to be like, "oh, let's— let's— I want to be in this movie or a Marvel movie," whatever. They're— they're still the same kind of stuff that you have to go, go through the audition process. So yeah, you can keep on creating content. Um, that's why we have these YouTube

stars. These awesome, like Snapchat stars, Instagram stars; and they're creating awesome content. I mean, right now during this pandemic, I feel like they've created more content, entertain people more than ever.

AS: Yeah, absolutely. Um, so during your uh, career paths, do you have to deal with any discrimination just by chance?

CA: No, I'm not gonna say that. I have been fortunate enough that everyone I've worked with has been amazing. From cast to crew. I have maintained a lot of friendships of um, people in different sets that I've worked with. I remember my first union commercial ever. The costume designer, her name is, her name was Vera. Vera Chow. And the same time she just started, you know, uh as a new costume designer, I just started as an actor. Until today, it's been, it's been 10 years now, I think. We're still friends.

AS: Yeah, all these connections and people that makes things different. And so uh, as the US is becoming more diverse, and do you think there's actually easier for the minority actors to land um, like, more major roles than before?

CA: Most definitely! We have a movie coming out right now called "Mulan". Like it's a full Asian cast. Talking about an Asian storyline: Fa Mulan. And then we have songs like, like... I was just talking about the show I'm watching right now, "Never Have I Ever", it's a show about Indian teenager trying to discover, you know, her way of trying to be cool in school. And we have stories about, you know, um, we have a story— um we have a movie coming out next week called "The Half of It" about an LGBT storyline. These are beautiful and it's amazing that we are now tell- telling more and more stories; and for the general public instead of for at least like niche group that we're talking about. And I feel like the more we talk about these kinds of subject, the more acceptant we will be, we start accepting everyone and I hope at one p- somewhere down the line, you can get rid of discrimination, get rid of these labels and, and just see the beauty of just a human itself. Humanity itself.

AS: Yeah. Um, have you received much help along the way of your career? From like community of actors, actresses or just like any community in general?

CA: Most definitely. I mean, when I remember when I first started acting, there were a couple of friends that I've met that show me the ropes. I'm like, how, how do you make a resume? You know, how do you— how do you have a headshot? What's a good headshot? They taught me and without them, I don't think I can even have a, a start knowing what to do.

Um, communities-wise like we have Asian Film Festivals. They are helping us highlight our filmmakers, highlight our stories; and different types of Film Festival as well. Like and the more we have talking about it in, in like the general media, the better it is. Like we had last year, we had— we had what— "The Farewell"; we have, um, "Ms. Purple"; we have "Yellow Rose". One is talking about, you know, um, a Filipino American story, which is "Yellow Rose"; "Ms. Purple" is talking a Korean American story; we had "The Farewell" which is a Chinese American story. And I think these are— it's beautiful. And now these are all films available to the general public.

AS: Um, so can you also share some of your favorite audition experiences?

CA: My favorite audition experiences. I feel like every audition is different. So I, like again, like how do I pick my favorite one? I can tell you I got an interesting one or like a fun one. I don't know like, what would you consider like a favorite one, but um, I think one of my more interesting one was I walked into an audition for this film that I ended up being in. It's called "Revenge of the Green Dragons". It was going to be directed by this director named Andrew Lau. And I remember growing up watching his films, his Hong Kong films. And going into his room, talking to him, I was like, "Wow, this is so cool." Like it's

like my two worlds from when I was a child, and now kind of collide it together in one. Like he made "Young and Dangerous". He made "Initial D". He made "Infernal Affairs". Those are some of the like, the films that I loved growing up watching. Um, and being able to work with him, I've learned a lot as well. Like he is an amazing one.

I've worked with um, a director named Tony Kay, who did "American History X". And that was amazing working with him and, and we actually got to be friends and we chatted, and he was telling me how we came up with certain scenes in "American History X". I feel like every set and everyone that I've met, has taught me a lesson and taught me something new about the industry. And it's fascinating to see people's creative process.

AS: Definitely. Um, so moving on to our special question series for the COVID-19 pandemic— which we are all experiencing as part of the moments of history right now, I guess; um can you talk about the uh engagement of "Wash the Hate" hashtag that you were very um active in and that was going viral on Instagram and Twitter?

CA: Well, "Wash the Hate" started because um, my friend was saying, he was telling me that he saw a tweet that I tweeted; and it was basically just a guy getting Febreezed in the subway. And I didn't think much of that tweet in the beginning. I just— my friend sent me that video and I was like, "wow, that's not cool." I'm going to tweet about him like, "Hey, this is racism, don't discriminate, because a virus doesn't." And it became a viral video online. And then my friend that's running "Wash the Hate", they called me was like, "Hey, we're doing this, this campaign called 'Wash the Hate', fighting against, uh, xenophobia and discrimination against Asian Americans, as COVID-19 becomes a more prominent virus and a more dangerous virus. Do you want to be a part of it?" I was like, "yes, of course, I would love to speak up." I mean, like with the little that I can do. I think if we don't start a conversation, no one's going to talk about it. So I agreed to that.

And then, since then, "Wash the Hate" has picked up. I— we have allies had joined in; we have different people that have been helping and spreading the message. It's just, you know, at the end of the day, we're just telling people like, "Hey, don't be racist." Uh, you know, xenophobia is not safe for anyone because we have our nurses, our doctors, our health care workers, our essential workers who are Asian Americans as well. What happens if they start getting attacked? They're afraid to go to work, then we don't have our doctors, and we don't have our nurses. Yes, not other nurses, but we'll lose a lot of the population of the, the minority now working in front lines.

How would you feel if we're not gearing that towards Asians, but then we're like putting it on other race, and other ethnic backgrounds. People like, like 9/11. We, everybody, like was so afraid of, of, um, you know, brown people for a long time and it's not their fault. And we see that it's not right, why let history repeat itself? I'm not trying to— like you know, "Wash the hate" is not trying to tell people that pinpointing that one person or whatever. We just tell people, "Hey, love is better than hate." And if we can just sit down and talk to one another, we can realize that we have a lot more similarities than differences.

AS: And going back to you, um can you describe how the pandemic has impacted your life? I know that everyone is home, and probably a lot of your auditions has been called off, or being done, uh digitally online. Um, can you describe what other aspects have changed?

CA: I cook a lot more. [**AS:** Right!] Because I can't go out and eat in different restaurants that I love, so I ended up trying to make those dishes at home myself.

AS: Um, how about any other aspects; like have your mindset changed? Like what- you notice have you done more often than before, besides cooking?

CA: I always like writing stories. Um, because I'm home a lot more, I have more time to write. Um, I also have more time to watch more television and more films. Um, Aside from that, I feel like you know, a lot of my friends thought that I couldn't stay home, that I would go insane, because I like to go out a lot. I actually don't have a problem with it. There's a motivation for me to stay home right now, because I wanted to keep people safe. One of the biggest thing I have was like, I am not afraid of getting sick, but I am terrified of getting other people sick. 'Cause if I get sick myself, then I'm like, "Well, I was— I was stupid." I got- I got sick. You know, I was not careful enough. But then it's the idea that I can get other people sick. I cannot live with myself if that happens. So that's keeping me inside. [CA & AS laugh]

AS: That's very kind of you, too. Very thoughtful, too. And how...

CA: ...selfish especially if you're in a time like this. I've been trying to tell people like, can you stop? Don't, don't be selfish. I know it sucks. I know that we can't go out. Well, it's really nice out today, you know, we can't go to the beach. The thing is, if it's a virus that will only affect you, and only you, and you can like, you catch a virus and yeah, you'll get sick. Maybe, maybe you'll die, God forbid, right? But you can't infect another person, maybe my views would be a little different. It's the idea of, hey, if I can infect someone, that someone is someone else's loved ones, I cannot do that to people. It's what's stopping me.

AS: Yeah, it's a very different type of viruses and an infectious one. I mean. [CA: Mhm.] So um, how has it changed your relationship with your loved ones like, are you closer? Like how, how has that changed?

CA: Well, I live with my mom. So we are home all day. My mom is trying to find anything and everything to do. She's basically renovating the house right now. She's like, I can't, I can't sit still. Like we can't go to work. So, got to do something. And we just, you know, cook dinner, we hang out more, because we're not working. Um, aside from that, I don't think anything else has changed in essence. Um, my brother and I talk the same. I don't feel like there's anything that's different besides not being able to see them at will or like go out for dinner or something.

AS: How about your friends or colleagues, who are uh all, uh actors and actresses? And like, how are they coping? Like, do you...

CA: If you realize on Instagram, a lot of actors have been cooking a lot. They went from actors to chefs during this pandemic. We're all just like, "hey, let's get together and cook." [AS: Yeah]. Um, we were making desserts, you know, I was teaching my other friend how to make dessert the other day. And we're talking about like, I posted— yesterday I made mahi mahi with like this butter garlic sauce. I posted on Instagram and my friends, like, "give me the recipe!" And they're all trying to make it as well. I think it's just, we're finding something else to do that's fun while we're staying inside.

AS: Yeah, we're entertaining other people as well.

CA: Yeah. Instead of like all hanging out and going out to dinner, we have like Zoom dinners. [AS: Oh wow.] Yeah, we'll, like drink and hang out on Zoom, and chat and catch up with everyone. So instead of like being in a room full of people, I'm on a screen full of little squares.

AS: So technology has definitely impacted your life as well.

CA: Definitely, technology makes it easier and made us more informed about everything. Because then we are all reading different types of news articles and you know, research about what's happening. And, and like yesterday, the CDC just added six other symptoms for COVID-19. Traditionally, without the

internet, we'll have to go out and get a newspaper to find that out, and news would travel slower. Now news is an instant, it can be literally like a tweet and then everyone's sharing it.

AS: Um, have you experienced any stress or anxiety during this quarantine?

CA: Not- not something that I can tell myself. I feel like I'm chill. Maybe um- the one thing I've realized is that I am very sensitive to sound. Like any kind of loud banging sound, I was like, "Oh man, I never noticed that the sound of this so loud." My brother was like, "that's probably anxiety." I'm like, "is it?" [laughs] But yeah, that's it aside from that, I think I am fortunate enough that I have not gone into depression or I don't have any anxiety attacks.

And I know that it happens with a lot of people, and that- and that's what we need: to check up on our friends and make sure everyone's okay. And sometimes it's just a phone call. Like, "hey, are you okay?" Will make someone feel a lot better. And especially people that are living alone, it's hard.

AS: So how has the pandemic changed your perspective about the future?

CA: Well, I think for myself, I am definitely going to be more sanitized. Like I don't usually carry hand sanitizer on me, or like a face mask on me; and I think now this will give us a different perspective and not be selfish again. You know, put a mask on if you're not feeling well and just trying to contain and be as clean as possible, so you don't infect other people, if like the next disease comes along and maybe the next virus comes along.

AS: How about the kind of, uh like, what do you think are the industry or are there perspectives, other people, will also be more focused on?

CA: Sanitation? [**AS:** Yeah., but like....] Like maybe sanitizing and keeping clean, that's going to be a part of it, especially in the film industry, because you have so many people working at the same time. We, we need to be more cautious and careful.

AS:

Have you ever thought audition might be done online, in the future even?

CA: Auditions have been done online for last couple years. So it's called "sending in a self-tape", you record yourself and then you send a tape out. We still go into rooms, but there's- the last- I feel like three years or so, there's been more and more self-tapes. So instead of just going to a room, you're sending your audition, which I- I feel like that hasn't changed. It's just that there's no audition right now, because there's no production that can start right now.

AS: Yeah. Um, so how do you think the pan- the pandemic has revealed about our social structure? Um, for example, we see people who are in poverty, like uh, in India, there's a lot less, kind of, healthcare, and people are act- actually dying more and people are also spreading out the virus more. How do you think the pandemic has revealed about our entire structure?

CA: I think worldwide, we need to focus more on healthcare. Um, that is something that I feel like was put- in, in a way that we keep on talking about healthcare, it was still put on the back burner, you know like, healthcare is really important, but we're just talking about it. No one's taking any action. I feel like now it's time to take action. You can see how devastating it could be without the proper healthcare.

AS: Um, so how- I guess where everyone has more time with themselves during this pandemic, uh how have you learned more about yourself during this period?

CA: I've learned that I can stay home and not go crazy. [**CA & AS:** Laugh] Um, aside from that, it's just like, doing everything as much as I can to stay sane. Like I talk to my friends. We hang out, we catch up with each other. I read the news. I actually, you know what, I realized that I have a lot more patience than I used to. Because I am, I'm, I'm a person that I- I would diagnose myself with ADD, because I'm constantly doing like 100 different things at once. Now, I'm just stuck at home so I can basically focus one thing at a time. I was trying to, I was trying to put together a puzzle the other day, and that was so frustrating, but I got through it. I was recording that whole process on Instagram. Like I was so excited to start a puzzle because I'm like, "Oh, this is gonna kill some time. Puzzles are supposed to be relaxing." It was not relax- relaxing at all. It was so frustrating when you couldn't find the right piece. And the most frustrating thing is that my puzzle was missing one piece.

AS: Oh, no, that's worse.

CA: Yeah. And then for a moment, I'm like, "Oh my god!" like after a week of trying to put this puzzle together. It's missing one piece. But my friend sent me a message was like, "Hey, you know what, you can look at it this way. It can still be beautiful when you're incomplete." And I was like, "Wow!" It sends a very, uh it's a— it's a great message. And that whole frustration just went away like, "Yeah, it is still pretty without that one piece." That's life. Life is never perfect. You can't just focus on that missing piece, and, and have it like, destroy whatever other positive things that have happened and you got to look at the picture as a whole.

AS: So on a positive note, as you just landed on, uh what would you think the pandemic has showed us on the positive side, or teach us?

CA: I think the silver lining is that we need to have humanity come together and how powerful we can be when we work together and unite as one. We can see it on a smaller scale where we see people in the communities, helping cook food and provide it for elders and want people in need, giving out food, giving out supplies, giving out TP, helping medical professionals. Um maybe even just a clap, they saying like, "Thank you!" when people are risking their lives, and it's beautiful to see people coming together. And in the larger scale, the scientists all around the world are trying to come together to find a cure or find a vaccine for the virus. And you know, there's a Chinese saying that: one stick is easily broken; but when you have multiple sticks, you can't break it. It's true in life. So we are stronger when we come together.

AS: Absolutely. Um, so that's the end of all the COVID-19, um, questions here. [**CA:** Cool!] [**AS** chuckles] That's a long one. Sorry.

Just wondering if you can, uh, just thinking about traveling back in time, what would you tell the younger self, if you would like to share to encourage or help her grow?

CA: I don't know if there's something that I can tell myself? Um, because this life is still a journey. I don't know what's going to happen next. I'm not sure if I'm still making the right choices, but it's to enjoy the journey rather than focusing on the— it sounds like such a Buddhism thing, but like, enjoying the journey, rather than focusing in the, in the goal — the end goal.

AS: And who is your role model growing up?

CA: I don't know if there, if I can say there's one person that's a role model, I take things from different people. Um, for example, my art teacher, who are like, who— we're still friends right now. Um, she's taught me a lot about like art, and how to view certain things, and not to look at things just plainly what it

is. Don't judge a book by its cover. There's a lot more in, in depth that you learn about something and I think that's amazing.

Um, I have taken away from like, my old boss about like life, you know, how things have changed throughout the decades, but then just keep being yourself, and keep, you know, being genuine and work together. Like I have some really cool, I feel like, bosses growing up, like people that I've worked for. And cool teachers have taught me a lot. Um, friends as well. Like I was in India uh last year shooting a movie and I'm not a religious person; and the head monk came and just talked to us— we were just hanging out— about philosophy of life. He's like, we have a lot of first world problems, we were focused on like, we don't have enough this, we don't have enough that. He goes like, just go outside and go look. People are still happy when they have nothing. Sometimes you have to appreciate the little things in life. And he was like, "You modern people from, you know, big cities, you're focused on, hey, why can't I do this better? Or like what can I do in the future? But then you are worrying so much about the future and the past you're not focused on the present. He's like what you have control over is now, this moment." So he's like, "Don't dread on anything in the future nor in the past. Because you can only control what you can and it's now." And he's like, "how can you make the now best, just like, most effective and productive that you can be?"

So yeah, that was like kind of cool. I was like, "Oh, cool. That's awesome." Like, when— meanwhile we're also stressed about like, "Oh, we can't get this done. We can't get that done." And I'm like, "Think of another way! What can you control now? What can you do right this second?" And we are like, "You're right!" So we all just picked up and went

AS: Yeah, that's definitely a mindset that will benefit us in the quarantine as well, right?

CA: Yeah, I came home from India, looking at my stuff, and I was like, "wow, I don't really need all these clothes or everything, you know?" Uh I actually, since India, I have shopped a lot less. And I realize like, sometimes happiness is not about the products that we have, it's about the human interaction. And the people that we surround ourselves with.

AS: Yeah, that's it. Would you call that, kind of a life changing experience for you?

CA: I don't think it's a life changing experience. It's definitely an eye-opening experience.

AS: Um, so what would you, um, say to people who are, um, kind of deciding whether to pursue acting?

CA: I mean, if your passion— you know, passionate for it, go for it— don't give up. I mean, there's gonna— it's gonna be hard. Um fine. You know as long as you have passion, I feel like you can conquer.

AS: Yeah.

CA: You work hard. You can't— I'm not talking about passion is, "I want to do it, I want to do it" and you're just sitting. But to actually take action and work on it.

AS: Um, and also, would you share some of your upcoming, um, like uh roles and acting or films or TVs?

CA: Well, I just did an episode, well it released already like two weeks ago, I was on an episode "Nora from Queens" in the season finale. And then aside from that, I did an indie film last year that didn't come out yet. It's called "Shoplifters of the World". There's at the World Unite. And then the movie I shot in India is called "Like family", but they're changing the name. So I don't know what the new name is going

to be. "That phone" is gonna be coming out as well. And any future projects, everything's on hold because of COVID-19. So I'm not even sure if any of these things are happening. And right now I'm just writing.

AS: Oh, great, is that something new for you?

CA: I've written before. Like I, like I told you, I wrote the VR film that I shot and directed. I wrote— everything that I've directed so far, I've written. Um, but right now I'm trying to write something that's on a bigger scale and see what will happen. Yeah. I guess I just keep telling stories. It's— it's an amazing thing.

AS: Um, I guess that's the end of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

CA: Stay strong, guys. We can get through this together.

AS: Yep. [chuckles] That's a great positive note. Well, thank you so much.

CA: Stay positive. That's, that's all you can do.

AS: Yeah. Hope you stay positive too! I know New York is still not opening up yet. And I don't know how long the quarantine will be. But let's, yeah, get through this.

CA: Yeah, I mean, thanks. Just keep in mind that we're trying to keep everyone safe and not to overwork and overload our hospitals, because these healthcare workers are risking their lives, they're literally risking their lives to save ours. And all we can do is to stay home to help them. And we can't even do that. Like. Come on.

AS: Thank you so much. So we asked for your time and all these very important notes and sharing your life journey. That's very, very inspiring. Thank you.

CA: No problem. Thank you.

[Interview ends]