

**Houston Asian American Archive (HAAA)  
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

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Interviewee: Gwendolyn Wu

Interviewer: Tian-Tian He

Date of Interview: May 22, 2020

Transcribed by: Tian-Tian He, Shreyah Mohanselman

Edited by: Kelly Liao

Audio Track Time: 1:49:54

Background: Born and raised in Northridge, California to a Chinese-Vietnamese immigrant family, Gwendolyn Wu grew up speaking a variety of languages, including Cantonese, English, Vietnamese and Mandarin. She has had a passion for reading and writing since early childhood and decided to pursue journalism in high school. She graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology and History and a Minor in Professional Writing. Wu currently writes the "Houston How To" series and covers the healthcare industry for the Houston Chronicle. She is one of the ten journalists selected nationwide for the 2018-2020 Hearst Journalism Fellowship. She is also actively involved in the Asian American Journalists Association.

Setting: This interview was conducted over a Zoom video call on May 22, 2020.

Key:

**GW**: Gwendolyn Wu

**TH**: Tian-Tian He

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

*Italics*: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

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

Interview transcript:

**TH**: Um, so hello, my name is Tian-Tian He and I'm interviewing Gwendolyn Wu for the Houston Asian American Archive on May, 22 2020. So, first off, where and when were you born?

**GW**: Yeah, so I was born on February 15, 1997 in Northridge, California. It's a suburb of Los Angeles and my parents immigrated there in the early 1990s, about a decade and a half after they immigrated from Vietnam.

**TH**: Okay. So they immigrated from Vietnam, did they land first in a different place?

**GW**: So, my parents both took pretty different routes coming out of Asia. Um, they both were—they were born in Saigon, they—my mom fled in 1979, she went first with her family to Pulau Bidong in Malaysia. Um, this island with about like a hundred—200,000 Vietnamese, Thai, and Laos refugees. And then after that, they got sponsored by an American family to go to Philadelphia first. She landed in Philadelphia in 1979, and then I believe it was 1992, my mom left Philadelphia for Los Angeles because she had met my dad. My dad fled Vietnam in 1981 I believe. He and his family went to Hong Kong first for about six months. After that he was sponsored—he—one of my uncles and one of my aunts were sponsored to move to Dallas. And then after Dallas, he left for Los Angeles because that's where part of his family was sent. And then he and my mom met through a mutual friend over the phone actually [**TH**: Oh.] and then they settled in Los Angeles full-time after that.

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**TH:** Okay. Um, so how old were they when they fled Vietnam?

**GW:** This might take a little math. My mom was, I believe, 23 or 26 when she left Saigon. My dad was nearly 30 when he left.

**TH:** Okay. And what was the like, the process like for getting a sponsorship?

**GW:** Hmm, I'm trying to remember if my parents ever told me about this. I asked my parents a lot of questions about this, I was a pretty like inquisitive kid. Uh, sometimes my parents would answer, other times they would not. But if I remember correctly, part of it for my mom's side of the family was because my grandfather had owned and operated a club that largely serviced American servicemen during the war in central Vietnam, he'd go back home every few months or so. And so he had some connections with American military officers, and so that was—if I remember correctly, when they fled to Pulau Bidong, you know he mentioned that he had worked with the Americans. And so it seemed in some sense, from what my—my mom's side of the family has told me, that they were able to get a little bit of priority because they have previously aided American servicemen. For my dad, I think it was a little different. Uh, you know, he had been saving up anyway, he was working as a day laborer in Hong Kong in the early nineteen—early 1981, mid-1981. And so he was just trying to save up funds to just buy a ticket out of Asia. I don't exactly know how he got sponsored to come to the US, but I do know that he ended up getting resettled in Dallas.

**TH:** Okay, wow. So, I saw on your survey thing that you speak Cantonese, so are your parents Cantonese?

**GW:** Yes. Um so—well my parents, it's kind of funny. Both of my grandparents—all four of my grandparents lived for the most part in Vietnam. My grandfather and his, and my great grandmother fled from I believe it was Fujian or Fuzhou, somewhere there in China, when he was a little boy he resettled when he was young in Saigon. Um and my grand—my grandfather on my dad's side grew up in Hainan. And so he also fled to Vietnam kind of during the civil unrest in China in the early 1900's. Um, so as far as I know [laughs] both my grandparents—both my parents' fathers are Chinese and both my grandmothers are Vietnamese. Well my paternal grandmother is, I believe, mixed Chinese and Vietnamese so she spoke like both a Chinese dialect and a Vietnamese dialect. And then, to kind of draw the line, it's easier for me a lot of the time to say yes, I'm half Chinese and half Vietnamese.

**TH:** Mhm. Okay, so they spoke—what language do they speak at home?

**GW:** Um, they spoke—so on my mom's side, my grandfather spoke Cantonese, Fukienese, and Vietnamese, and a little bit of Mandarin. Well actually I think he was fluent in Mandarin. Uh my grandmother only spoke Vietnamese on my mom's side. On my dad's side, both my grandfather and my grandmother spoke Hokkienese... wait no. Was it Hokkienese? No, Hainanese. [laughs] Um they both spoke Hainanese, and they both spoke Vietnamese as well. My dad learned Mandarin, I'm not sure if that was something that he learned attending a Chinese school in Vietnam, or if it was something that he picked up from his parents, but he speaks Mandarin and Vietnamese as well. So does my mother.

**TH:** Mhm. So was it hard to like pick up all those languages?

**GW:** Yes. I—oh my god, when I was a kid I was like, I'm gonna learn all the languages. [**TH:** Oh my god.] Uh, fast forward you know twenty-some odd years, I really only speak Cantonese, English, a little bit of Mandarin... I'm like proficient enough to hold a conversation pretty quickly, but I'm not like by

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any means good at writing it, good at really having long, complicated conversations with people about it. I understand Vietnamese, I don't really speak it. And I also like understand the occasional word in Fukienese which is my maternal grandfather's dialect.

**TH:** That's cool that you were so motivated to do it 'cause like I know a lot of kids are super resistant to like learning their native language.

**GW:** Yeah, definitely. Like my parents, I mean they really helped but I grew up in a multigenerational household, both of my maternal grandparents lived with me as a kid, so I used to speak Vietnamese fluently when I was a kid, but as I got older, I really kind of forgot it 'cause I don't communicate that much with my grandparents. There's that, and then my parents did somewhat, well, willingly on their part, unwillingly on my part, sent me to mandarin Chinese school when as a kid. I was taught the language there and you speak Cantonese at home. And so that's how my parents were able to get me fluent in Cantonese and English.

**TH:** Okay, cool. Um, do you know, would you happen to know what were the biggest challenges that they faced in immigrating?

**GW:** That's a good question. Um, I think the challenges really came before. And really, a little bit after when they settled here. It's interesting actually the research project I worked on when I was an undergraduate studying history at UC Santa Barbara was about the persecution of ethnically Chinese Vietnamese residents throughout (?) the war. And so that was very much so kind of born out of what my parents had taught me. Um, both my parents faced discrimination in the Vietnamese higher education system. Um, they went to a middle—a secondary school I guess. They went to a secondary school that was predominantly a Catholic school aimed at teaching ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese. And so, for them, both my parents—neither of them were able to get access to Vietnamese colleges and universities because they were ethnically Chinese. Um, and that was the same kind of discrimination they faced as well kind of doing jobs. Um, my parents wanted to save money to move to the US and they went to the same school, they just didn't really meet until they got to the US. Um, so for them it was very much you know not having the capital, being persecuted, I wouldn't—both my parents you know fled Vietnam...not willingly. Uh my mom, from my mom's side you know she very much—her family very much so knew that they had kind of a target on their back because they were ethnically Chinese. And actually, the day after they fled—fled Saigon for Malaysia, it turned out that—well my grand—my grandmother had stayed behind at a friend's house and the government came and raided their family, their properties afterward.

Um, same thing for my dad's side, you know he knew he had a target on his back. He was actually at the fall of Saigon. Um you know, he had made it his way up to the rooftop where American servicemen were taking troops and the few Vietnamese refugees they could out of the country, and he was unwilling to go because he had seven siblings and none of them were with him that day. He didn't want to be the person who left without taking his family alongside. [**TH:** Mhm.]

Um, afterwards—well for my mom's—when she went to Malaysia she fled by boat. And so she was with some relatives. Um, I believe she was with her sister, her cousin, my grandfather, and a few other relatives. I remember her telling me it was about a week long boat journey. Um, it was pretty terrifying for her because there were pirates on the seas at the time and so they're trying to seize any gold, any cash that they could find. And I remember my mom all detailing to me the struggles of like, you know my grandmother had to sew American currency into their jeans. And they were wearing several layers of clothing to hide all the gold and the jewelry that they'd taken with them. And a lot of it, just being terrified with the boat was going to sink when they were there.

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Um, for my dad who also fled by boat Hong Kong, you know for him one of the just more terrifying things was like, yes he was going to make it to Hong Kong. He's fairly certain he could because he fled you know two or three years after most of the unrest in Vietnam during the time. Um, but trying to get to the US was very much so a struggle. Because my dad was lower middle class, didn't have a whole lot of cash that could buy a plane ticket or anything to the US, and so he and several of his siblings worked a lot. I remember my dad describing to me he slept in this Hong Kong flat that was like eight by ten feet or something like that, and you know just kind of, you know, head to foot with his siblings because that's all they could afford at the time, and they needed to save as much money as they could to get to the US.

**TH:** Mhm. So for the—for them, was the US kind of like a dream place? Like the ultimate place that they wanted to go?

**GW:** Um, it's interesting I've asked my parents that question several times and both my parents' answer was just kind of like, you know, "We're willing to resettle anywhere that's willing to have us." [**TH:** Okay.] A lot of my family got split up. My mom's sister got sent to the US with her, but my mom's sister's boyfriend—my uncle, later to be my uncle—was resettled in Taiwan and then in Australia later on. Um my aunts and uncles on my dad's side got sent to Toronto, after the, after the war. So you know, they'd heard really good things about the US, you know, city of gold, they're hearing that it's so beautiful here. And of course they'd heard very similar things about Australia and Canada as well but you know the US was very much that built up to be the land of opportunity and promises for them. So they were just kind of like you know, "Yeah sure we'll be resettled anywhere, but if we're gonna get sent to the US that's great," so.

**TH:** Mhm. Uh, were they ever able to like reunite with their siblings?

**GW:** Yeah, so I found my family pretty fortunate. All my parents' siblings made it to—made it out of Vietnam. Um, I'd say a lot of their extended relatives...I would say that the uh majority of my extended family ended up getting resettled to Canada. Um, and they weren't able to kind of establish ties, and then later communication. Um, so yeah, I have family members who live in Sydney, Australia, I have family members who live in Toronto, Canada. Um, a lot of my mom's closest extended family got resettled in the Philadelphia and New Jersey area. And so for the most part, they've been able to stay in touch, they regularly try to see each other, try to do phone calls. Now that we're in like a very technological age, a lot of facetimeing. Um, so yeah.

**TH:** Okay. Um, oh what were their jobs when they came to the US, and do they have the same jobs now?

**GW:** Um so my mom, when she arrived at Philadelphia, she was still fairly young. She wanted to get enrolled in college here, but they were telling her she didn't have the English proficiency to do so. So my mom attended about a few months of high school, then went to community college and then enrolled at Temple University in Philadelphia. She got her degree in accounting, and then she did some time as a, some kind of clerk, I believe, for a local court in Pennsylvania. And then after that when she left Philadelphia, she worked in retail for a little bit when she get—when she got to Los Angeles. And then just—just two years ago she retired as a receptionist from a dentist practice here—not here—dentist practice in Los Angeles.

My dad when he got here, did a very similar thing. He tried to enroll in adult school English proficiency courses. He got his certifications as a...in a trade, I don't exactly know what he did. [laughs] Um I think it was related to welding or something like that. But he had pretty technical jobs his whole life. For most of my dad's life in the US, he started—he worked as a busboy for a little bit at a restaurant. Um and then he went on to become a technician of some sort, at a manufacturing company in the suburbs of LA. Uh he

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worked his way up to a lower level management position before he was laid off in the 2010s. Um, started a company on his own for a little bit and then he retired I think a couple of years ago. He still does like odds and ends like handyman jobs here and there but for the most part, both my parents are retired.

**TH:** Oh okay, congratulations to them that's pretty early! [laughs]

**GW:** Thanks! Yeah, my parents are definitely older, they had me pretty late, [**TH:** Oh, okay.] so I think that was probably why they're like, well, you know, "We're—we turned 65, it's time for us to retire." So I was just like, "Okay, cool!"

**TH:** [laughs] Yeah. Um, were—are they religious?

**GW:** Not really much. Um, I think it's funny, both my parents went to Catholic school in Vietnam and I think it made them extremely dedicated agnostics and atheists. Um they do adhere to Buddhism, I'd say it's like a guiding philosophical principle for both my parents, but it's not very much so religious. However, my mom does drag me to temple every time I go home and visit them. So, there is, there is that.

And they do celebrate like ancestral holidays, Buddhist holidays. Um, they observe vegetarianism on some of those days, and they do make an effort to go to temple at least once a month, and just you know, offerings for the ancestors, prayers at the altar, so.

**TH:** Mhm. And did you—do like keep any of those beliefs? Are you religious now?

**GW:** Personally, no. Um, I don't know, it never really connected to me as a kid. I think my parents are very much so like you know, make your own decisions. Um, if you don't believe in something, you don't believe in something. Um, they never really pushed Buddhism on me as a kid either. I remember years when I grew up, there was a Buddhist altar in my house. And I never really paid much attention to it although my grandmother and my mom (?) you know, very philosophical and a little bit religious in that sense. But for the most part my mom just reminded me to pray at the Buddhist altar before I leave when I go home and visit them.

**TH:** Mhm. Okay, and so how much did your parents try to assimilate versus maintaining their culture?

**GW:** What I always thought was really fascinating about my parents, I remember asking my mom once why they chose to move to the suburb of Los Angeles that they live in. Uh my family lives in the San Fernando Valley in LA, it's about thirty minutes north of downtown on a good day without traffic. Um, I was always wondering why they chose to live there as opposed to the San Gabriel Valley, which is a very large ethnic Asian enclave, about twenty minutes east of downtown Los Angeles. Um and honestly, the answer my mom gave me was, "There are just so many Asian people there, we wanted you to grow up somewhere that was actually very diverse." Um and the neighborhoods that I grew up in, in the San Fernando valley were very much so that. You know my parents' neighbors back home are white, Latino and Asian. Um, I appreciate that about my parents, that they were kind of like you know, "We don't necessarily want you to assimilate. But we don't want you to feel like you're going to grow up in a community that is very monolithic." And they didn't want me to only know Chinese American culture.

Um at the same time though, I think my parents tried to have kind of a very blended upbringing, both Chinese and American culture. Um, my mom taught me Cantonese as the first language, and enrolled technically as an English as a second language student when I was in elementary school, but I picked up English pretty fast. Um I would say my mom didn't really shy away from like cooking me Asian food to

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take to school, but both my parents were working and so sometimes it would just be easier for her to be like, “I’m just going to buy premade, ready-made American foods at the grocery store and you’re just going to take those to school.”

Um, my parents sent me to Chinese school every Saturday from when I was 4 to when I was 16. So they really wanted me to have some kind of tie to the culture that I was you know, I was born into and raised in. Um and you know they always made sure that if we were going to celebrate some sort of major holiday such as Chinese New Year, I had goods to bring into school and be like “Hey, like you know it’s Chinese New Year, we have these red lucky candies, [inaudible] to give to the kids and it’s just a little symbol of luck. Make sure that your classmates know what this is.” And I always found that my teachers were very respectful of that. Um, the other kids, not so much. There were definitely times where I brought Vietnamese food to school and it stunk up my locker and the kids around me didn’t really understand that’s how certain foods smell and taste like. Um so I definitely have a lunchbox story in that sense. [TH: The classic.] The classic lunchbox story. So, but other than that my parents are very much so like you know, “We want you to behave as if this was a melting pot. Um you don’t want your culture to disappear.” Um so maybe not melting pot, maybe a little bit more of a salad. Um where you know, we want you to be proud and able to say that you’re a Chinese-Vietnamese American, but still understand that there are a lot of cultures around you that you could stand to benefit and learn about.

**TH:** Yeah. Um, so kind of like related, what kind of community did your parents have in California, because I read your Asian auntie article. [GW: Yeah!] I was like, “Oh, who are these aunties?”

**GW:** The aunties, yes the ever present aunties. Um, yeah, my parents like I said I grew up in a pretty diverse suburb. My neighbors were white, Latino, Asian. Um, but every two weeks or so we would make a pilgrimage down to Chinatown, San Gabriel Valley. Um, my mom insists to this day that they have fresher groceries than the American supermarkets that we grew up here. Um but for the most part, my mom really reinforced that [inaudible] you go every few weeks to stock up on Asian vegetables, you go to temple, you go get your services done out there. Very much so my parents tried to, and still do to some degree this—to this day, rely on services predominantly in the Asian American community. My parents were always going to be more comfortable taking me to a doctor that spoke Chinese than sending me to a doctor who only spoke English. And so they, I would say, try very hard, to seek out, to seek out services that were, you know, culturally in their comfort zone. Um, they stay very connected to the community by always kind of picking up Asian newspapers when we were out in Chinatown in the San Gabriel Valley, just so they could really stay afloat with what’s going on out there. Um, some of my parents’—sorry. Um, some of my parents’ friends and family immigrated to the San Gabriel Valley and other parts of Southern California so we were also able to visit them a lot. Um, my mom definitely stayed in touch with a lot of her friends growing up over the phone as well, no matter whether or not they were settled in Hong Kong or settled just 20 miles south of us. So, very much so they spent their time largely in the Asian community, but they weren’t afraid or they weren’t hesitant to go seek out services in predominantly English speaking communities, if that’s what was available to them.

**TH:** Mhm. Um, so what influence did the people in like your parents’ circle have on you as a child? Were you able to interact with them?

**GW:** Yeah, my... It’s funny because my mother always like you know, criticized parents who very strictly parented their kids. [TH: Oh.] The so-called “tiger mom parenting style.” And my mom never really wanted me to be like that. Uh I described her once as a cheetah mom to one of my teachers. Like you know, very much so like, “you need to succeed and you need to go to college, but we’re not going to sit here and take away your computer if you get a B instead of an A” kind of, kind of parents. [TH: Mhm.] Um, my mom and my dad taught me to be proud of the culture that I was raised in, and to never be afraid

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to say I identify as Asian American, I identify as Chinese or Vietnamese. Um, and I think that a lot of that came from you know two things. One thing being that they were still very close with their relatives and friends who immigrated from Vietnam with them. Um, they were able to frequently see them.

The other part being that a lot—my parents had me a lot later in life than many of their relatives and their friends did. And so by the point that I was born and I started getting conscious—consciousness as a child and a young adult, my mom was seeing a lot of her friends' kids either completely disregard the culture that they were raised in, or forget the language that they were born speaking... get rid of Asian food in favor of American food. Uh so my mom always wanted me to be the kind of kid who would be able to come back and say, "Hey Mom, I'm really craving your cooking,." Or you know—I called my mom on the phone, even though now she's 2,000 miles away from me, I speak in fluent Cantonese for the most part of it, when we are on the phone for an hour. Um, my mom never wanted me to be like one of those kids because she never wanted me to forget that I identify as Asian American first, so.

**TH:** Okay, so those kids, did they have like tiger moms that were—that overwhelmed them and they just kind of rejected it?

**GW:** Yeah, it was definitely that, some of them—some of them also, I have some friends who, they were just working a lot and they didn't actively parent their kids as much as my mom did. My parents had the added benefit of having my grandparents around to help raise me, so there was that. But uh, I think that my mom saw what was happening with her friends' kids, and she was just kind of disappointed in her own way that they rejected a lot of Chinese and Vietnamese culture, and she didn't really want to have the same judgement I think passed down on her. [**TH:** Mhm, yeah.] So.

**TH:** What are the most valuable things besides that, that you learn from your upbringing?

**GW:** What I feel like the very—like one of the biggest things that my parents passed down is very much similar to Chinese American cultural value, is hard work. Um my parents were middle class to lower middle class, growing up in Vietnam. And so they understood when they were—found out they were going to the US or that they were thinking about having a life—better life for themselves outside of Vietnam, they wanted to live somewhere where hard work was going to be what got you stability, you know financial means in the future. Um unfortunately, American society does not always work that way. But I will say that, that, that value of hard work was something that my parents instilled in me since I was a little kid. And so that I think has really driven me to try so hard to succeed and to work so hard to get to a place where I've been, and where I am now. I don't think that I would have had the opportunities that I'd had if my parents hadn't pushed me from being a little kid to work hard. They were like, you know, "Yeah, you're not always going to get an A. But if you work hard, you'll have made your best attempt in getting that." And you know, that on top of always being proud of being, identifying as Chinese American, Vietnamese American, Asian American. That is all, those, those things have always stuck with me.

**TH:** Mhm, cool. Okay, so then moving on to school, what was elementary school like for you?

**GW:** Yeah. So my parents actually enrolled me at the local elementary school, it was, if I remember correctly, a predominantly Latino school. And also, it was a school that didn't always have a whole lot of financial resources. Um to be fair, might just be the school district I grew up in. I went to school and LAUSD, which is one of the largest if not the largest school district in the country. And so—they—I grew up very much so used to having to take furlough days because there wasn't enough money to pay the teachers. And my school wasn't really highly regarded as some of the other schools in our district were. When I was in first grade, I had, I was very fortunate to have had a teacher that looked out for me and she

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suggested to my mom and principal that I skip a grade. And so, two months into first grade they were like, “Hey, okay you’re going to second grade now ‘cause you know how to spell Mississippi.” And I was like, “Okay cool!” Then I realized, oh god I have no friends. [both laugh] But yeah, it was—I adjusted very well because I had very supportive first and second grade teachers who just made sure I was kind of academically... School came pretty easy to me as a kid, so that transition wasn't too bad at all. Um, around that—around that time in second grade they tested me for what LAUSD called the highly gifted program, which is just basically, the IQ test, but they did it by different criteria. So I tested as highly gifted. Um, to this day, I don't understand the percentiles they gave me. Actually there's a whole lot of sociological, psychological literature about how the phrase highly gifted... [TH: Lot of baggage.] Might have... yeah, might have left me with a lot of baggage. But that's a problem for later.

Um [laughs] but yeah so there was that, my mom tried really hard to get me as many academic opportunities as they could. That was partially why they enrolled me in Chinese school as well, was like I want you to be able to demonstrate mastery of your language. You know my mom tried to tutor me after school as well, she'd leave me worksheets on like multiplication tables and spelling and practicing cursive. Um and she tried to enroll me in other schools when it was possible, she tried to enroll me in a magnet school, which are originally invented for the purpose of integrating suburban schools in Los Angeles and other major cities but very much so morphed to become like specialty schools where kids are given more opportunities, more dedicated teachers, that kind of stuff. Um so, I wasn't able to get into those schools because the lottery system didn't work out that way but instead my mom really just kind of pushed me to learn as much outside of school as she could. She really encouraged my reading habit which I think led to a writing hobby and then later on a writing career. But she also encouraged me to learn as much about the world as I could, so.

**TH:** Yeah. So who were your closest childhood friends?

**GW:** For the most part when I was a kid—so I actually met my first best friend on a playground in our little suburb in the San Fernando Valley. Um, her name is Stephanie. She is a Vietnamese-American... Vietnamese-American. [laughs] She, she and I kept in touch, we haven't been extremely extremely close since elementary school but we actually still text each other pretty frequently. Um she still lives in our childhood neighborhood and she'll text me. She's like, “Hey, I saw your parents on a walk the other day.” She actually texted me the other day to be like, “Hey, your dad actually stayed six feet away and was wearing a mask, how did you get him to do that?” and I was like that is a great question. Um, a lot of texting [inaudible] to my parents.

Um I also largely hung out with an Asian-American group of friends in—in elementary school. I think, I don't know if my parents actually like said out loud to me, like, “Hey go seek out Asian American friends.” But I think it was easy for me to relate to them, because they were people that looked familiar to me. I had a pretty good core group of friends in elementary school who were predominantly Vietnamese. Um I had a few close friends who were Latina, and Filipino as well. And then later on in middle school I kind of tried to expand that circle a little bit. Um my friends identified as Mexican, Persian, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, black, white. And so, I really kind of took in my parents'—my mom's message—well both my parents' message really, to kind of look for good people no matter what race they identify as. But I think it also very much so reflected, you know, my parents exactly didn't force that kind of language onto me. And also, you know I met people who I felt fit in with me. Um and I think kind of subconsciously sought out fellow people of color and very much so fellow Asian-Americans.

**TH:** Mhm. So in middle school was that like a conscious decision? You're like, “I want like more diverse friends.”



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**GW:** That is a good question. Um, I've wondered this definitely. So I went to a predominantly white and Asian school in middle school. Um very much so like an academically gifted type of school. So most of the people who were enrolled in my classes were white and Asian people. Um however, I mean, the thing about middle school, the thing about mean girls in that school, is that when you aren't popular you're not like—you're not exactly hanging yet with the super well-off white and Asian kids. You're hanging out with other folks who are like, "Yeah we just kinda got lucky and our parents enrolled us in this school" kind of kids. So, the friends I made you know, we all sat alphabetically together and so I think that's how I made a lot of my friends who were, you know, not necessarily Asian. Um they had similar last names—they didn't have similar last names, excuse me. But you know, we were all kind of always at the bottom of the alphabet, not always the popular kids in school kind of people. Um and I think it just kind of happenstance in a way that they were more diverse than a lot of people that I've met. Like I said, I wasn't really popular in middle school. And for the most part, the people who were popular in my middle school were white and fairly well-off. Um and so I think kind of by a miracle of social-social classes, essentially classist (?) as you can get in middle school, the people I met in my classes, I really ended up hanging out with a lot of Asian, Latino, and black classmates.

**TH:** Mhm. So, as a child, young teenager, what did you like to do for fun?

**GW:** Was really into dolls when I was in elementary school, and dress up. I always thought I was gonna end up like doing like... I don't know, like I had a lot of like dream career paths when I was a kid and I always tried to make my like hobbies and my—what I considered fun reflect that. But the one thing that really stuck with me especially from the ages of you know like 9 to 14 was I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to be an author. And so really, fun for me was always reading and writing. I tried so hard and failed miserably many times to write novels when I was a kid. What I always found so fun was just that you could create a whole world. You could create characters, you could create whole lines of thinking that didn't actually reflect what's going on your life. I got bullied quite a bit at the beginning of middle school and so that really became like an escape for me, to be able to create this world where I was no longer the person getting bullied, I was the person at the top of the food chain. [**TH:** Mhm.] Or I was a person who was well off or, you know, was popular and had friends and all that stuff.

That kind of translated itself 'cause when I was in late elementary school, early middle school, my parents got a computer with a stable Internet, and I spent a long time reading fanfiction of my favorite uh books as a kid. Um it's funny 'cause now as an adult I'm like, "Am I allowed to say that I read a lot of fanfiction?" [**TH** laughs] 'Cause I used to keep that a secret when I was in—when I was a kid. But I read a lot of fanfiction of *Harry Potter*, [**TH:** Yeah.] which was my favorite book series back then. *Gossip Girl*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. And I also found communities where people like to co-write fiction, people liked to pretend that they were these characters. Um, I think it—it sounds weird to me now because I'm like you know that isn't really like a popular pastime by any sense. Um but what was always so fun to me was just like you got to pretend you were a different person for a while. Um and the other thing being that often times, the people I met in those communities took just as much an interest in Asian culture, and what I can bring to the table as much as whatever they brought to the table as well. Because I found so many like minded people on the Internet, and had these communities that I could go back to and be like, "Hey, today I'm gonna pretend to be, you know, this character at a boarding school whose big secret is that she's a shoplifter or something like that." Um it was really a fun way to be creative, but [inaudible] of time. I would do it as a kid, so.

**TH:** Okay, that's amazing, I think—I'm pretty sure I did the same thing like pretending to be characters on forums and stuff. [**GW:** Yeah.] So, many questions. What like, you said you wrote novels, like what were these about?

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**GW:** Not big novels, like thick novels, but I remember when I was a kid, I don't know if I was 8 or 9 or so. I wrote a—I tried to write a fairytale about a princess and a prince sibling, who wanted to go on adventures but their father was super restrictive and wouldn't let them go anywhere. So they had to learn to create things on their own inside their homes. Um, some would say I wrote the plot of *Frozen*, before it was *Frozen*. Um [laughs] but that aside, I felt a lot of strong bonds to my friends when I was a kid, specifically the friends that I made in middle school because you know, for the first time I knew so many people that came from such diverse backgrounds. And I always found their life stories really fascinating. Um middle school's also just an angsty time in general, and you just want to vent out all of your feelings on a piece of paper.

So I mean I wrote stories where [inaudible] the popular kids, where you know, no longer was I the one getting bullied or my friends the ones getting bullied. Um I wrote stories—I wrote one story, I was actually talking to my boyfriend about this a few days ago, about how one story I wrote when I was in middle school was about... I was such a big nerd at the time. So you know it was reimagining the European royal history from about Queen Victoria, the Queen Victoria era within colonial Asia instead. [TH: Whoa.] Seeing like what would have happened if, say for example, the Imperial dynasty of Vietnam had done something similar to what Queen Victoria did, and married off all their children to different countries rather than closing off and having wars. Um I think we would have seen a way more unified Asia rather than what you've seen now and what you saw in the 1900's. I was a really big nerd. I—I am one of those people who reads Wikipedia for fun. Um [laughs] and that was very much so what I did when I was a, when I was a young teenager. Um so a lot of my stories really kind of reflect that and my curiosities about the world and history, applied to storylines and characters that actually were really just thinly veiled versions of my friends in real life.

**TH:** Okay, cool. Um, and what was my other question...Okay. What were your favorite books?

**GW:** Oh man. I got asked this question once at a job interview and I was just like, I'm going to need like six minutes to think this out. But the good news is that I remember my answer from then. *Harry Potter* has always been one of my favorite book series. Um I got the first two books as a gift from one of my aunts when I was a very little kid and I was just hooked instantly. Um I think it's just something about the way that J.K. Rowling writes that just hooks you as a child. There's—there's so—someone takes magic seriously, an adult takes magic seriously. I love *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Another big book influence on me when I was a kid was *The Clique* series which is about rich—rich middle school girls in Westchester County, New York. But what it was was it was a validation of all the mean-girl behavior and consumerism, that now as an adult, I'm like, "Oh this is troubling that this was my favorite series."

But yeah, *Gossip Girl*, *Privilege* series, I was very much so into young adult chick literature. Um I actually got really nerdy and really into like non fiction psychological books when I was in late middle school, but I wouldn't say by any means any of them were like favorite books. My parents always really encouraged me to read. I loved the *Babysitters' Club* and the *Boxcar Children* series when I was a kid, and my parents always took me to the libraries in LA county and I would just go like rummage through all the used bookstore sales and come home with stacks and stacks of books. Um I remember my parents actually a couple years ago cleaned out my room, and they're like, "Why do you own hundreds of books?" And I'm like, "I have a hoarding problem and I never let go of any of the books I loved as a kid." Um but definitely my favorite ones were always you know, ones where the kids go on adventures. Or slice of life books where it's like, this is just what life is like for these young girls who started a babysitting club in New England or something like that.

**TH:** Yeah, like really immersive.

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**GW:** Mhm, definitely. And like especially fiction, it was just like you know you could tell—you could tell such a meaningful story that told you, this is what American life is really like, in just a hundred words. Or not a hundred words, a hundred pages or something like that.

**TH:** Um, and so how big of a part did the internet play in your like growing up?

**GW:** I don't think I really got on the internet so to speak until I was ten or eleven. Um I don't know if it was just that my parents didn't want to buy a computer quite yet, or it wasn't really—I mean it wasn't really like a necessary thing, the suburb where we lived, until I got to middle school or so. Um, I feel like my parents got very stable internet access when I was about ten or eleven. And then I was kind of at this weird stage where I didn't really have a whole lot of friends those first years of middle school, that I didn't—I wasn't spending my free time hanging out with my friends. And my parents were older, you know I didn't feel like it was appropriate—or like I thought I was too cool for dress-up and dolls. My parents didn't really get me involved in any sports at that time so I really turned to the internet as an outlet. I spent like you know hours a day on the internet, starting from when I was eleven or twelve or so.

Um, really got into Neopets [**TH:** Yeah.] in that stage of my life. Like I, I would just spend hours on the forums there, talking to people, making my pets pretty and stuff like that. And after that, you know really turned a lot to fanfiction. Turned a lot to online communities where I could still chat with other people in real life. Um but, you know, I would pretend to be another character. I would say the internet swallowed up a lot of my life. I would spend hours and hours a day just for fun on the forums and stuff like that, from about when I was, like, 11 to when I was about 14. Um and after that point in high school, the internet became yet again you know, a diff—slightly different outlet, but very much so a place I spent hours and hours a day because I used to play League of Legends and online games with my friends a lot. That has definitely changed since I entered college and became a working adult. So the internet is now oh god I already spent eight hours of my day on a screen. Do I really want to spend more, but social media has made it pretty hard to stay off.

**TH:** Yeah. Um, how do you think your life would have changed if you hadn't like spent all that time on forums and like online things when you were young?

**GW:** My grades probably would have been better. [**TH** laughs] But that aside, I think it stunted me for a little while because you know developing social skills on the internet is a lot different from developing social skills in person. Uh my parents fortunately lightened up a little bit on their rules when I was in middle school and I was allowed to go to a couple friends' houses, pretty, pretty frequently as long as my parents met them beforehand. Um so that helps but I mean for one, I think I would have developed healthier habits now. Nowadays, I could easily spend like six to seven hours on the computer without even thinking about it, you know. And not even doing anything productive in particular. Like, I could literally just scroll Reddit for like four or five hours. I'd be like, "Oh great, I have sucked up my time." Um, so yeah, developed better social skills, definitely would have had better grades. Um especially in high school once I started gaming a lot. Um this is a fun story I like to tell like high schoolers who are all freaking out about grades. But like I played so much League of Legends when I was in... junior year of high school... junior year of high school. All my parents' best efforts at making sure I got tutoring and went to free tutor sessions at school were pretty much for nothing 'cause I ended up getting a D in AP calculus, junior year of high school. And I had to retake calculus because that was not gonna fly. Um so I ended up going to college, so I gotta say, with all these kids worrying about B's, like trust me I've seen worse.

Um but I would've probably been a better studier if I hadn't had the distraction of the internet in my life. You know our brains are conditioned to chase fun, rather than things that are necessary you need to

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complete this long term goal rather than, you know, or I can go play League of Legends with my friends for four, five hours at a time. Um, would I have gone to a better school? Maybe. Would have been harder worker, I don't know. I think it just ended up being a void to have fun and do other things rather than actually have healthy hobbies, but I mean, what's done is done, so.

**TH:** Yeah, I mean it turned out fine. [laughs]

**GW:** Yeah, I think I'm adjusted mostly! Balanced mostly, so.

**TH:** Yeah, I think it's like the same for so many people our age, I don't know.

**GW:** Yeah definitely. It's like everyone I know is like, "Yeah, I spent a lot of time on Myspace and Facebook when I was 13 years or so. And I'm like yeah, that really much made up—that really feels like where my adolescent years went. Like I was on the internet. I don't know what other people did.

**TH:** I think other people were on the internet. But it's weird because we interview so many older people that like that's not a topic of conversation at all.

**GW:** Oh yeah, I definitely feel that. 'Cause it's like, a lot of my coworkers who talk about like, "Oh like these are things that—I like traveled to Belize or something when I was your age." And I'm like, first off where did you get the money to travel to Belize, and second, I couldn't afford to travel to Belize so I was just looking at pictures of Belize on Facebook. [**TH:** Yeah. [laughs]] So.

**TH:** Yeah. Um, okay so in middle and high school, like when did you first become aware of being Asian American? Or, it seems like it would be earlier because your parents like taught you to be proud of your culture and everything.

**GW:** Yeah. I think the first time I was really aware of Asianness and kind of—having it be synonymous to otherness was when I was in preschool, really. [**TH:** Mhm.] For Halloween, my parents didn't want to go buy me a costume, so they stuck me in an *ao dai*, which is a long Vietnamese dress. Um they got a bamboo dumpling steamer set that like was for me to play with. Um and they just dressed me up in that and sent me to school. And I remember a teacher at the time being like, "Oh I didn't know that was a costume." Like you know, "Isn't this from your culture?" And like I understand obviously what she meant to say was like, wow this is so special that you wore something that wasn't just bought off the racks at like K-Mart or something. Um but it really made me aware of like you know, oh this—this is central to my sense of self somehow? Wasn't quite sure how.

Um and then when I was in middle school, I made friends from all cultures. But I had one friend in particular who used to write "Asian pride" on everything. And I think it's 'cause she was very much so raised—she was raised in Koreatown, and she was very big on just being proud of being Korean. And so I, that was when I really identified Asianness as a race, I think. And it's like this is a defining aspect of you as a person in your culture. Um and then by high school I think Asianness really like became something like I consciously thought about. I went to a high school that was social justice and community oriented. And so a very big part of our junior year is spent studying racism, and how other cultures have become, become part of and shaped America. We had a whole unit dedicated to just learning about being Asian American, racism against Asian Americans, Asian American thought, Asian American literature. Um and it really all culminated with like you know, here are experiences from your Asian American classmates, brought and presented to you. Never really thought about race very much up until that point I think. That was very much so trying to be like, "Oh, I don't feel alone," and also you know, "Oh, my

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culture is worth studying.” Wasn't saying that that was not worth studying before then, but it wasn't something that people put emphasis on until in my life.

**TH:** Mhm. Yeah, that's really awesome that you had that program.

**GW:** Yeah, it was like a really interesting program, they did like very similar things for Latino culture, black culture, South Asian, Middle Eastern culture as well, it was very progressive I would say. And I think even though I professionally, don't really do a whole lot in that space anymore. Um I think it really shaped like how I thought about things, and also kind of what ended up interesting me once I got to college and needed to pursue a major, so.

**TH:** Mhm, yeah. Um, what were the best and worst years of school for you?

**GW:** If you can find someone who actually liked sixth grade I would be really really surprised. [laughs] Um sixth grade was definitely the worst one for me. I had, it was my first year at this predominantly white and Asian school, and the very big difference I noticed was just the class difference between my elementary school and my middle school. Um at my elementary school most kids were on free and reduced lunch, and our textbooks were so old and our teachers were overworked and really underpaid. My middle school is very different, you know, people have the option to go take computer lab classes. And I'm just like, we had like three computers at my elementary school. Um it wasn't, it wasn't abnormal for kids to throw lavish birthday parties at my, at my middle school. I really felt. Um class difference was pretty prevalent, this was the age of, like, Hollister and Abercrombie, and like people wearing brands all over themselves.

I have very formative experience in my sixth grade math and science class where I was paired up with one of my good friends, one of the few good friends I had in sixth grade, and two other popular girls in our math class—'cause the numbers were skewed, they couldn't be with their friends or something like that. And I distinctly remember one of the well-off girls, one of the popular girls, looking at me very subtly, and asking me, "Why don't you wear Hollister? Are you poor?" And I was just like, first off, manners! And second, I, I never thought about my clothes as something that could signify class status to other people. My parents taught me, you know, we don't like to buy used clothes and we don't like you to wear clothes with holes and rips in them. But I mean I didn't realize that the shirt I wore signified to them I was poor or something like that. I feel like I had a very snappy answer to that. I think it was just something like, I don't feel a need to wear Hollister or something, you know. Like when you're in sixth grade and you're like, I'm a really spicy person, I can say stuff like this.

Um but then I realized it formulated a lot of my psychology for the years to come. I constantly sought to prove myself in a way that didn't betray the fact that my parents were working middle class people you know who tried so hard to provide for me. Just, you know, they didn't spend the money on fancy clothes or cars or fancy homes or anything like that. No, they wanted me to have experiences. They pay—the money that, I don't know, these kids' parents are probably paying for Abercrombie and Hollister to keep their kids happy, they weren't spending on, you know, saving up for vacation so that I can travel the world as a kid or, you know, find books because books are a very expensive habit.

So, yes, it's great. Definitely the worst year. I definitely got a lot of stark comments about, like, “We don't like you because you're poor,” or “We don't like you because you don't wear these clothes,” and, “Why don't you wear makeup,” and stuff like that. Very much so tying that I think—I definitely feel like I got a couple occasional comments that were like, you know, a little bit race based like, “Why aren't you good at math?” You know, that's what race is linked to and stereotype does when you're a child.

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The best year of my life though, on the flip side, the end of high school was a really good year for me. I think particularly my senior year of high school. I had a really good group of close friends at the humanities school I attended. A very large group of friends too. I've only hung out with Asian girls and White boys. You know some of my, you know, some of the other people I was with, you know, identified as Latino and Black, but for the most part, it was a group of White men and Asian women. I think they really made high school a special experience for me because I was hanging out with all these people who went through similar formative experiences, you know, academic pressure and also this program that teaches you so much about racism and sexism and other cultures. You know, we had so—we had this program that was looking at classism and homophobia in America as well, and I mean, you don't really survive a really tough, you know, college preparation curriculum that also focuses on so many real world issues without coming out of it feeling like you're very bonded to other people. I think it also helped this was the group that I spent a lot of time in the internet with. Like I would—we would leave school and we would go home and then an hour later, all of us would be, you know, simultaneously doing homework and talking at the same time or we would be playing video games and talking at the same time. People really lived the experience from here, I think. School was very much so the kind of place where we could discuss very deep philosophical issues like, you know, how do you—how do you respond to someone who makes a racist comment to you, but at the same time, you know, it would be a place where I don't remember much about what I learned my senior year of high school, but I do remember that the friends were pretty awesome. Yeah.

**TH:** Do you still keep in touch?

**GW:** Oh, yeah, I'm actually still dating my high school boyfriend. [TH: Oh.] So there is that. We-we got together toward the end of senior year of high school and throughout all of college and now as adults, like, six years later? Six years later. So there's that. I went to college with one of my really good friends from high school as well. And then after graduating college, I lived in San Francisco for a year and I live with my boyfriend, and also one of our best friends from high school as well. I don't keep in extremely regular contact with a lot of those folks, but I mean, we still follow each other on Instagram, we still comment on each other's Instagrams, and on the rare occasions that we're all back home, in Los Angeles together, we go out, so. [TH: Yeah.] Definitely still kept in touch with many of them both people who identified as Asian American and people who identified as White.

**TH:** Who are your favorite teachers or the ones that influenced you the most?

**GW:** I think [inaudible] interest in history as a kid because I have really good history teachers that taught me about how history was in everything. History shapes how society is today. Particularly in my high school, I had very good history teachers who really reinforced for me that history is very much so a living thing. That's why I think I chose to pursue history as a major in college, but it was also a humanities program that focused on sociology a lot. And so I pursued a double major in sociology largely for that reason. The team that really influenced me a lot in high school were my group of junior year high school teachers. They were a very diverse group. Begin with—and they taught really complex concepts in a very digestible ways. You know, how do you explain colorism to 200 high schoolers who many of whom have never even thought about how skin color affects the way they are treated in society.

And in particular, I had a really good history teacher, his name is Tony Saavedra. He went through the program himself as a high schooler and then came back to teach AP US history. And what he taught was that, history and the concepts in the events that happened in history, often repeat themselves, and often have so much influence on, you know, how society behaves today. Like, you know, some things are very obvious, you know, like the Civil War is linked to the abolition of slavery is linked to the Jim Crow era and then you know, and how Black Americans are treated today. Obviously, like, I see this very

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clearly now as somebody who studied history, but this was not always so obvious to a lot of my classmates, and I appreciated the fact that he made history so accessible and reframed [inaudible] around a lot of what we end up learning in elementary school for people who never paid much attention to history before that. I would credit him as being a very big influence on why I pursued history, particularly the study of race theory and also minori-minority communities and their contributions to shaping American culture as an adult. Yeah, I think the teachers who taught sociology concepts in those years too were also so formative to me. You know, they really taught me to think about why is the world the way it is rather than how is the world the way it is and why-what it is about the world. And I think that question of why is something that I pursue a lot professionally as a journalist, you know, I'm very interested in why things are the way they are not just about the thing is the way it is and, you know, no question to be asked about it.

**TH:** Yeah. Um, so what college did you attend?

**GW:** So went to the University of California Santa Barbara, got a degree in history and sociology there with a minor in professional writing. [TH: Okay.] From when I was in high school, I wanted to be a journalist. So really, my top choice was to go to the University of Southern California and study journalism. But a D in AP Calculus did not do me very well, though. But I ended up going to UCSB, so it worked out in that sense, I guess.

**TH:** Yeah. Okay, so, you already knew in high school that you wanted to be a journalist?

**GW:** Yeah. I knew from when I was kid that I liked writing. Turns out authors don't get paid a lot of money. And that also requires me to finish projects which I had never really able to finish a book or fan fiction or anything I wrote. But in, actually, in eighth grade, I had the fortune over winter break of going to visit Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore for a trip with my mom, my aunt, and my grandma. And I picked up two fashion magazines at a kiosk in a store in Malaysia. And I was like really struck by how they wrote about fashion, how they wrote about clothing. But at that point in my life I had definitely been influenced by a few events where people were like, you know, "Why don't you dress very nicely," you know, I read *The Clique*, *Gossip Girl*, when I was in middle school. So it really cemented for me, oh, you can read about this world, you can write about what's first and new and, like, verified gossip by being a journalist. I thought I was gonna pursue fashion journalism and move to New York. Then I realized I'm not very fashionable. So that really put a damper on things, but I got really interested in writing about news journalism.

When I was in high school, I had a really excellent journalism teacher who pushed me to attend a summer journalism workshop where I would learn fundamentals of news radio that, you know, people in the industry still believe in journalism as an industry. So I really switched my focus to doing news writing instead of cover—I wanted to cover something else at the intersection of education and public policy and civil rights. Very different, I guess, in some senses from what I do now, I am a healthcare reporter and I also write a column about Smarter Living for the Houston Chronicle now. But there's still policy in that. There's still education in that, there's still a lot of questions about civil rights, and race, immigration in a lot of the stories that I write. So I've been doing news journalism since I was in high school effectively, and that's something that I really love. And I enjoy having the privilege of being able to be paid to write about people all day.

**TH:** Yeah. So what is it that makes you passionate about journalism?

**GW:** This is very cliché thing and you're in journalism to give voice to the voiceless. Which, yes, that is very important, I think it's more accurate to say that you're amplifying the voice of people who aren't

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typically heard in society. But I think what fascinates me about journalism is journalism is very much so the first draft of history. And I like having a hand in creating what generations from now people are going to know about as this was how life was like in the late 2010s, 2020s, and so on. What inspires me about journalism is its ability as well to make a difference. Like I have had so many colleagues, write stories that had ramifications on how societies change. Like I had a colleague who said something—she was one of the first, if not the first reporter, to report about family separations at the border under the Trump administration. That's really fundamentally reshaped how people think about immigration policy recently. I aspire to someday be that kind of reporter who writes something, that you know, exposes something that people didn't previously know about. And it really fundamentally shifts the way people think about things and how policy is introduced.

**TH:** Yeah. So are there any like specific journalists that you really look up to?

**GW:** I think, I'm trying to think like, if there's any particular one, I mean, I'm really inspired by a lot of different reporters in the way that they write. But I think one of the ones that comes to mind for me is Nikole Hannah-Jones for the New York Times Magazine. She—I had the privilege of seeing her speak in person here in Houston a few months ago, but last August she spearheaded and published this project called “The 1619 Project,” which makes the fundamental argument that America was really truly created when colonialist colonists brought African Ame-or African slaves over to the US. I knew quite a bit about slavery and that history from my high school and my college classes, but, you know, to see that so publicly accessible to people, to see that reshape high school curriculum, middle school curriculum around the country, and really challenge people's assumptions about what they do about the past was really, really inspiring for me.

I don't think I'll ever have the brains to conceive a project the way that she did. But I read it, and I was just hooked by the writing, by the very logically sound, and, you know, the evidence that she brought up that really cemented her point that, you know, 1619 was truly, you know, founded, you know, the way that the American society is today was built off of slaves and the slaves that were brought over at 1619 with that first voyage to America carrying slaves from I believe it was West Africa landed in New England. I think about that project a lot. And I—even though the journalism is kind of different than what she published in that project with other writers, you know, it's very different. I cover healthcare, you know, it's not, it's not exactly fun to actually fundamentally re-examine the history of America as we know it. But I think about how people that read that go, I think very differently about something that we are taught about from when we are little kids.

I'm glad that that was published recently, because that's like one of the things I'm like, this is an example of persuasive and public service journalism. Jones recently won a Pulitzer Prize for it. And I was like, yeah I would've rioted if she didn't. It was—it was just so fundamental, I think, to understanding how people of color have had such a huge role in shaping America to this day.

**TH:** If you were to do a project like that, like your career peak project, what would it be about?

**GW:** Oh my goodness. [laughs] I think at some point, I mean but I love journalism and I love what I do now, but really I've always been interested in telling the stories of Asian America. I don't get the chance to do it super frequently, maybe just because I cover healthcare institutions, insurance hospitals, I also write about new, smarter living things like you know, how do you escape traffic when you're trying to get on 610 rush hour kinda stories. But I've always been particularly fascinated about how the immigration experience shapes first generation Asian parents. You know, our parents' stories are going to disappear eventually if we don't ask them. And I would like to know, especially now that Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the US, you know, how is that going to shape American policy and



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culture for years to come? I don't know the answers to those questions. I'd rather the people tell me the answers to those questions. But ideally, a project that, a journalism project that I work on in the future is going to have something to do with that.

**TH:** So your parents, specifically, are they like very forthcoming about, when you ask about their stories?

**GW:** I wish. Sometimes they're better than others. As a kid, I used to ask my mom a lot like, "Hey, tell me about when you immigrated here. Tell me about the island that you guys lived on for a few months before you were able to get to the US." And I think my parents have a tendency to frame things in a very happy way or in a very, like, you know, everything was fine and dandy kinda way. I remember I once asked my mom about living in Pulau Bidong which is the-one of the largest, if not the largest, refugee camp in Malaysia during the Vietnam War era. I remember her describing it to me as like, "It was one of the happiest times of my life." And I was like, "Being a war refugee stranded on an island with very little infrastructure was one of the happiest times of your life?" I mean, even when I grew up, lower to middle class, and, for me, I'm like, "That sounds awful. Why would you want to live in those situations?"

But I have to remember, you know, where I come from, you know, I came from a very peaceful childhood. My parents were fairly financially stable when I was a kid. And my biggest worries were just like, you know, how is school going to be today? Rather than like, how am I going to eat today? My parents, you know, spent about half of their childhood and adulthood in what was essentially a perpetual state of war and, you know, to be free of the concept of war on an island where the only place to go was a place that was ideally wouldn't have opportunity and hope was really what drove my mom's motivation and relative's motivation on that, on that island, you know, but that explained to me a lot why, like you know, it was, to her, a very happy place, a peaceful place where she has, you know, she had regular food, no one was persecuting her because she was born the wrong ethnicity.

I tried so hard when I was doing this project in undergrad about the persecution of Chinese Vietnamese in Vietnam during the time of the Vietnam War. And after that, I asked my parents so many questions like, I would make excuses to go home and see them just so I could like record them talking for like, quite a bit of time. Didn't get a lot of recordings out, unfortunately. But I think that it—when I, when I phrased it as like, "Hey, I'm asking you these questions because I need it for an academic project." They're like, "Okay, whatever gets you the A," like, versus if I were just asking of my own interest, they're gonna be like, "Why do you want to know? You're gonna—you don't wanna—you wanna—you don't want to hear these depressing stories." And I'm like, "I do. I want to hear the full spectrum of stories. I want to hear about when you were happiest and when you hit a low because, you know, you were sad about possibly leaving the home you've only known your whole life."

I think as they get older, they're much more willing to open up. In fact, probably after this interview, I need to call my mom anyway. And I'm going to call and bug her again about all these questions, and it's something I definitely bring up every few months to be like, "Hey, I was just thinking, you know, how often did your mom actually cook when you were a kid?" And like, I try not to segue into like, tell me about how you feel. And then, I find that my parents, and this is like, this is something that a lot of other Asian Americans face, but your parents don't always talk about how you—how they feel. They talk about things that happen, things that are tangible, but they don't talk about the thought processes, they don't talk about the emotions, the feelings, the ups and the downs the same way that they talk about, yes, in the 1980s when my dad immigrated to Hong Kong. Then you know, I'm like, "Yes, you immigrated to Hong Kong. But I want to know, what was the boat like? How did you feel? How—how was it realizing you could only take two of your siblings with you?" I love my parents to death. But that is something that I wish they would be more forthcoming with me about.

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**TH:** Yeah, that's—I feel like that's definitely a problem that I face with doing interviews. But—and it's like hard because it's the first time you meet someone, but you know, that's a story for another time. [laughs] [GW: Definitely.] Um, okay, so going back to like when you first started out in journalism, how did your parents respond to your goals?

**GW:** I was really fortunate to have parents who took me seriously from when I was a kid. I don't know if it was just the fact that I've never been good at math, or whatever it is, I don't—they saw that like, like many other Asian parents, they see math and sciences as very—as pathways that could later on lead to a job that could make you financially stable and not have to worry about things. I think people tend to very much so reduce, you know, math and science to like, you know, saying like, “Oh, Asian Americans are good at it.” Well, I would say the argument is more—it's clear the link from math and science for careers that are grounded in math and science to financial stability. And what parent doesn't want financial stability for their child. What parent doesn't want them to not have to worry about whether or not there's going to be food on the table at the end of the day.

But it also helps, I think, that my parents have seen so many of their friends and relatives' kids pursue those math and science degrees and never get a job. So around the time that I started taking school way more seriously, was the tail end of the Great Recession. And my parents were just kind of like, “Well, look at us, we have math and science-ish, industrial-ish jobs. And we were affected by that.” And so many people we knew their kids are graduating college and they don't have those—they don't have those resources and those jobs that they were promised by getting a math and science degree.

And I think it also helped them my parents saw that I was genuinely passionate about writing, and they were like, you know, we didn't—we didn't immigrate for our children, our children's children, to not be able to pursue the careers that they wanted. I think so much of that has to do with the fact that my dad—my dad particularly wanted to pursue a higher education. And for him to be denied that just because of his ethnicity really shaped his outlook on education. He wanted to make sure that no matter what I was able to go to college, and I was able to pursue a dream that I had. Because I was never really good at math, and they're like, “Why would you ever want to make yourself struggle and hate yourself for a, for a career you're not particularly good at and you don't have a particular passion for?” I appreciate that about them. Because when I told them, “Hey, I'm gonna have major journalism in college,” and part of it was they were like, “Okay, but if you find something like a little more stable as an industry later on, could you please do that instead?” And the other part of it was like, “Sure, why not make something of yourself out of it?”

I think my mom takes very great pleasure in when her friends or relatives are like, your daughter majored in history and sociology like, what kind of job can you get with that? She's like, in her head, she's just like, “Well, at least my child is employed, what's your child doing?” I don't know, they're petty. But yeah. Like I never really had any resistance from my parents. When I said, “Hey, I'm going to pursue a career in the humanities rather than a career sciences or maths related careers.” I was very fortunate in that sense that they wanted me to make sure that I wasn't a complete failure at it, but they wanted to make sure that I was happy doing what I was doing.

**TH:** Was there ever a time that you doubted that you would be successful in journalism?

**GW:** Oh, yeah, like I have self diagnosed myself with imposter syndrome so many times. The thing about the journalism industry is that it's shrinking, unfortunately. People don't pay for news anymore. And that's always gonna be a struggle that people in this industry are going to have. How do you convince people that pay for news and believe in the news media? Definitely, there were certain points during college when I was working to get internships where I was just so upset that so many institutions hire their interns

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based off of if they had a degree in journalism. My school didn't offer one. And so I wasn't able to study that. And also, I didn't exactly attend the school known for turning out journalists. I wanted to attend one of those schools, but A) I didn't have the financial means to. And B) I never got accepted to these schools.

So it was very frustrating, those first few internships I did in college. I never had a choice. I was always just like, "Oh, this is the only place that wanted me as an intern, ok I'm going to work there." Even though it's not the hard news internship I really wish I could be doing, it's just gonna have to do for now because I want to have a summer on my resume where I didn't do anything and I don't have writing clips to back up the fact that I want to be a journalist in the future. It also led to me having to take a couple of unpaid internships because those were the ones that people didn't want later on in the end, and I would work a side job. I would freelance write on the side to make sure I have some sort of income to get food while I was, you know, living in my parents house, hoping that like my dad could drive me to my internship the next morning, or, you know, living briefly with my boyfriend for an unpaid internship in San Francisco off of savings that I'd saved up from working during the school year.

It really—I really thought for a while I wasn't going to make it, and my hard work was just like, all for nothing. I was really fortunate that I made really good connections through those internships and through my college journalism career working at the school newspaper. And later on people took chances on me even though I—my bachelor's degree didn't say journalism on it. Um, I don't think it's anything short of a miracle that I work at such a large newspaper in such a supportive environment that really is invested in creating good journalists rather than just taking good journalists from other outlets. And then you know good journalists who have fancy Ivy League degrees in journalism and stuff like that. So yeah, really, I think that drove me to keep working harder, so they couldn't say no to me. But like, [inaudible] "Hey I need a job."

**TH:** Yeah. So, personally, what do you think is like the future of journalism?

**GW:** That's a good question. Um. I think for journalism to survive, people need to be convinced of why journalism is vital. I think people don't realize, you know, you only know things you know, because the news media is there documenting it. I mean, I'm trying to think of an example that is not coronavirus pandemic related. I mean, think about like immigration policy and educational policy, like, how do you know what's going on with student loans in America if there aren't journalists around to write about it, because I mean a lot of these places that have to do with student loans don't have a vested interest in making sure you know the truth about student loans. Their best interest is in making money and ensuring practices that are going to continue to make them money. So there's that.

I think the other problem is that, you know, we are living increasingly in a society that is expensive to afford. You know, for some—you know, as a journalist, I often post about how like, "Hey, subscribe to your local newspapers. We're what makes sure that you know, the things you know." But if I'm telling someone, "Hey, that's gonna be \$15 a month for you to gain access to your website." Well, that's an affordability barrier that the majority of people don't have \$15 a month to spend. I mean, I've raised questions to my managers and other journalists in the field, I don't have any problems saying that in public for eternity on this recording. But I do really feel like it's, you know, we have to convince people why news is worth it, why it's worth that x dollar subscription, why it's worth that x dollar access to make sure that you know what's going on in the world.

I mean, I know there's the argument that information should not be limited to those people who just have means, but at the same time, you've got to pay people to make sure that they, they accurately write down what is happening in the world. I wish I had all the solutions to how the journalism industry is good to

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survive. But I mean, those are just my observations, really as a person. And who's been observing news media for the better part of five or six years now, so.

**TH** : Um, so you're in the Asian American Journalists Association?

**GW**: Yeah, I joined the Asian American Journalists Association, or AAJA, when I was a sophomore in college. I joined because I was applying to internships and I was like, "Oh, god, they don't know that I'm a journalist. I'm gonna go buy this \$25 annual, annual fee to be a member of the Asian American Journalists Association." And what I really found was that it was a really supportive environment for, you know, journalists who were not just interested in Asian American, but journalists who were interested in everything, but ensuring that our mentors in networks and who people who identify as Asian American hard at work in the news industry, were able to bring more Asian American journalists into the industry. And, you know, write from a perspective that will accurately reflect America's makeup rather than being a, you know, trying to, you know, have a majority white industry. You know. In my opinion, diversity really begets a more accurate portrayal and reflection of how the US is these days. So there is no fault to be a member of AAJA for that reason.

**TH**: Hmm. So how are you involved? Like, what, what are the activities?

**GW**: Yeah, so, for the most part, I just really try to participate in webinars. I have attended one of each Asian American Journalists Association convention. It's very much so a trade association where you're just swapping mentorship, you know, making connections and networking, finding out about jobs that are open where people are trying to be as unbiased as possible in hiring. These days, I'm trying to take a little bit more of an active role in making sure there are those webinars and other different things available for other young Asian American journalists. I mentor Asian, younger Asian American journalists, through AAJA. I believe this is my—this is going to be my second year mentoring younger journalists. But just you know answering their questions about like, "Is there discrimination within the industry?" You know, "If I am discriminated against what are my options?" And also just building a pipeline of younger journalists to pursue the industry. I think it's always really discouraging to pursue a certain career if you don't have people who look like you and people who you can relate to already in the industry. [TH: Yeah.] So I'm trying to make sure that we build our network as much as we can and also that younger journalists aren't discouraged from pursuing the industry or having a good experience working as reporters.

**TH**: Yeah. Yeah. So for you, how is like this Asian American network of journalists and peers, like helped you?

**GW**: Um, it's definitely nice to be able to say like, "Hey, I have had this really weird experience where someone mentioned my race [inaudible] or something. What would you guys do in that situation?" If I hadn't been part of AAJA, I don't think I know who to text and ask that question to. I rely on very largely to, a, you know, like having a kind of family of like minded people who understand the work that I do, because I mean, I love my parents, but they're not journalists, they don't get what it's like to be a reporter. And to be able to say, like, "Hey, I'm facing this really kind of weird, oddly specific to my ethnicity or race experience in the workplace, do you guys have any advice for this?" And aside from that just being a very—and sharing a common experience of identify Asian American or get in the workplace and just being like, "Hey, you know, we come from similar cultures, we hold similar beliefs, you know, we have similar experiences, can you give me advice on how to get to where you are today?"

**TH**: And generally, what are your ambitions with writing?

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**GW:** I used to be one of those people who have a five-year plan, like, life happened, and then I was like five year plans are overrated. Um, right now I'm based in Houston, I would like to return to California eventually. I moved here for a fellowship last year and I'm staying here full time afterward. But I, so far, feel like you know, my ambitions are to continue writing to be a better writer. I'm fortunate to write about something that actually interests me and challenges me every day. And so I would love to continue gaining skills in that. But even after that, you know, I think in the future, I would like to take on a few more academic things with my writing, you know, whether that's teaching the next generation of journalists or whether that's studying media from an academic perspective. I don't know that I necessarily want to become a household name as a journalist or as a reporter, or the way that people like Bob Woodward and Dan Rather are, but I really do think that I want to write things that have some sort of I'm—either some sort of impact on how people think about the world, or I want to write something that is going to be a defining snapshot of what this generation or what society, the way it is today is like.

**TH:** So how long are you in Houston?

**GW:** I was here last August actually. So I've been here about [TH: Oh. Okay.] nine months or so. I don't know when to or when to move back to California, you know. I hope to stay here long enough at least to know neighborhoods by name and not have to use Google Maps to go everywhere.

**TH:** Have you seen any differences between the Asian community in Houston versus California?

**GW:** I'm trying to get out to a lot of Asian communities here in Houston as frequently as I can. I miss feeling like I'm part of a community that Asian Americans are a little more noticeable or prevalent in. So for me, I wish I was more plugged in to Houston's Asian American community. But largely very much so the way I've experienced Asianess here in the community has been through food. I like going to Chinatown because I need to go get groceries at the Vietnamese or Chinese supermarket rather than, you know, going to HEB or something like that. But that aside, I feel like the Asian Americans I have met in the course of my reporting and my living here in Houston have largely been people who, like me, are first generation. And so we experience our Asianess through very weak lenses as opposed to people who immigrated here. I also feel like I meet a lot of Asian Americans who are middle to upper class here rather than you know, back home, I met people who were identified as Asian American from all sorts economic classes. I don't know. It's cheaper to live in Texas, that's for sure. California, super expensive. Oh my god. That's partially why I live here now. But I feel like the people that I did meet here, you know, are experiencing Asian Americanness from a much more privileged position. You know, we know you don't worry about things the same way our parents who immigrated from Asia here.

**TH:** Yeah, yeah, I can definitely relate like, I don't. I really don't know other ways to get involved in the Asian community here but besides like going to a restaurant.

**GW:** Yeah, that's absolutely how I feel. I was like looking for like the Asian American Journalists Association chapter here in Houston. Turns out it's just a Texas wide chapter and I'm like, "Oh, okay. Well, that's kind of a problem because Texas is a very large state." And, you know, when I lived in San Francisco previously, it was very apparent to me how I could get involved in Asian American communities there. I wanted to take Chinese classes again as an adult, but I missed the enrollment deadline in a local Chinese language center. When I went to Chinatown, I was reporting in Chinatown, and I wasn't just there for food. I was also there to go to stores. I was also there to go interact with people who had only lived in that Chinese or, yeah, Chinese American community their whole life. So you know, they still spoke very little English, and they, you know, identified first and foremost as Chinese rather than Chinese American. I also felt like I've met a lot of folks who were immigrants in California rather

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than here where I'm meeting mostly people who are either born in the US or raised from a very young age in the US, so their experiences were a lot different than mine.

**TH:** Mhm. How do you identify yourself as like, Chinese American? American?

**GW:** Yeah, I feel like what people are like, well, people are like, "Where are you from?" Like California. That's a stupid question. You know how to rephrase it better. But really when people ask you know, I say I identify as Asian American first, especially because I grew up in a mixed ethnicity household, but I largely identify with Chinese more than Vietnamese. I think a lot of it is because I still speak Chinese fluently, rather than speaking Vietnamese fluently, and I think it's largely because my parents also, you know, mostly cooked Chinese foods when I was a kid. They took me to Chinatown more often they took me to Little Saigon. Um, I also feel like it was a little reflective of the areas I grew up in. I mean, most of my, like most of what I remember of Asian culture as a kid was celebrating Chinese holidays and celebrating with Vietnamese friends and having to explain to them some slightly Chinese things to them. I think my parents just identified more with Chinese than being Vietnamese.

**TH:** Mhm. Um, have you ever wanted to like explore the Vietnamese side more?

**GW:** Absolutely. Um, I was looking, when I first moved to Houston, for Vietnamese language classes. I found some at HCC but it like required a lot more hoops than I was willing to jump through to like enroll as a student and stuff like that. I also missed the deadline to enroll. This is a common theme apparently. And I wanted to see if they're like independent Vietnamese language classes. But I think there's also one hang up for me, which is that I feel kind of embarrassed as an adult to go back and try and learn—relearn Vietnamese really. You know, if I go to a Vietnamese restaurant in Asia town here in Houston, I understand perfectly what people are saying at the tables around me but I'm afraid to converse back to them. And I really don't want to be like, "Yes it's me, the child who forgot all the Vietnamese when she was a kid that she's learned and now she has to go back and relearn them." But I think it's also just because I have no clue where to start. If I were to go back and look for Vietnamese classes, like I know to go look at the community colleges, but I don't know that I have the self motivation in a way to relearn languages. And also just because I would rather be learning Vietnamese in an environment where it's Vietnamese felt actually used, rather than, like, this is how textbook academics teach it.

**TH:** Yeah, there's a weird embarrassment with like, trying to go back and learn something that you feel like you should already know. [GW: Yeah.] And like continue.

**GW:** Yeah, it's like, I speak Cantonese fluently. I would like to take like, Cantonese language classes that teach me about business and government and more complicated things. At the same time, I'm like, "Why didn't my mom talk about politics more at the dinner table?" So I could like, learn how to say certain things again, to me, it's like, you know. It took me up until about late last year to nail down how to say like, "landlord," and "government," and "policy" in Cantonese. Like those are words I definitely learned as a kid, but I just in—as I got older, like, you know, in my head, it's like, nice to say something in Cantonese then I would just say government instead of "政府" in the middle of a sentence instead.

**TH:** Yeah. Okay, so more general like wrap up questions. Oh, how are you coping with the Coronavirus pandemic right now?

**GW:** I'm so the kind of person who's like, okay, something traumatic has happened, I'm gonna work more. That's very much so me. It is really weird to be 2000 miles away from your family when something is happening, but at the same time, it's also safer for me to be, you know, further away. I still occasionally go out for work. And so I worry about accidentally contracting coronavirus. That's a fear that would have

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been amplified if I lived back at home with my parents. It is really helped that my boyfriend who lives in the San Francisco Bay area actually flew out here just before Houston went on lock down really, and he's actually kind of been stuck here ever since. I feel really bad for him. Um, but he was like "Yeah, I'd rather be with you than alone in the Bay Area, or living with my roommates, but not really going out, you know, not really going to work." He's been working remotely from home. So, yeah, and also questionably panic I adopted a dog, which was like, [TH: Oh my gosh.] yeah, I don't know if that was a fully thoughtful decision. But my roommates, and my landlord, and my boyfriend supported me then. So far, it's a lot of work, and I—and I knew it was going to be a lot of work. But I'm now a proud owner of a very cute American Staffordshire Terrier mix.

**TH:** Yay. Um, how is working at the Houston Chronicle changed?

**GW:** Oh, we've been home since the day we all—I'm trying to remember—the day we all got sent home. It was weird, because I remember that Sunday the eighth I got sent out to assignment—I work a Sunday to Thursday shift currently—I got sent out to assignment in Galveston. And I was just like, "Hey," I texted my boss and I was like, "Hey, can I just work from home for the rest of the day instead of just go into the newsroom for two hours?" And she was like, "Yeah, no problem at all." And then I felt sick the next day, I remember, so I stayed home and worked from home that day, and that was when Coronavirus was still kind of far off, but we realized the transmission was a lot more viral and contagious than previously thought to be before. So I had a couple co-workers who were like, half jokingly worried that I contracted something while on assignment. I was like, no, it's not going to be that fast. And then the 11th we all started working from home.

I've been back to the office a couple times to get masks and gloves and hand sanitizer for when I go on assignment. Grabbing a monitor or grab my, like other equipment from my desk, notebooks that I needed with it's like, with interview information notes and stuff like that. But for the most part, I'm working from home. Working from home is hard because you don't work as efficiently as you do when you have your bosses watching you at all time, not that they were watching you at all times. But like, you know, there's that and also, as somebody who is a reporter, I go out in person to interview people to do a lot of these conversations over the phone has been a challenge because you know, the details I would write about, oh, you know, "their office is filled with robots," or "the way that they talk about their work is so passionate," it's not something that is very accurately, or is very detailed, and captured on like a FaceTime or a phone call. I did phone calls before this, so it's not like it was new to me to do everything by phone call all of a sudden, but it does sometimes feel like you know, I can't do my job the same way that I did before.

**TH:** Yeah. Did you say you're still going out on assignments?

**GW:** Yeah, mostly when it necessitates it. So, two-I've really been out like two main times. One was for a story I did on a low income serving clinic here in Midtown—I live in Midtown—that had don, -started doing drugs in pharmacies. And also we're talking about how this ha-this pandemic had dealt a very significant financial blow to them. I wanted to see for myself in person, you know, who are the people who are still having to work during a pandemic? And also, you know, how has your hospital like services changed? Ever since everything shut down a month ago. This was April when I started.

The other thing was I met two startup founders in person for stories I was working on, about how healthcare startups are pivoting to doing mask production and creating a few shields rather than the products that they originally were going to be doing. I got a sense when I was on the phone with those founders, I was like, this story would be so much richer in color and detail if I were able to meet these people and really see the office that they work at. So yeah, I was, I did go out on assignment for those but, you know, masks, gloves, staying six feet away from everyone as best I could. And I got my temperature

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checked at the clinic that I went to go work like, went to go on assignment [inaudible] there. Anyone who tests, who tests like 101 degrees. I was like, well, this is also my chance to see if I possibly had the coronavirus. [TH: Convenient.] Yeah, very convenient.

**TH:** So how did you meet your partner? What are they like?

**GW:** Yeah, so he and I went to high school together. It was funny, like, we met when I was—well we met freshman year of high school in our science class, but we only really knew of each other on the periphery. We were very good friends starting in like junior or senior year of high school, like we just ran in the same circles. And for the most part, I was dating someone else in high school, and then I broke up with, or that person broke up with me in high school, and then, you know, we got to be good friends. I think it really helped to have had a very similar educational formative experience as he had because, you know, he was really well aware of like, you know, racism and sexism and homophobia and all the things that we were talking about in society and for somebody—so my partner, my boyfriend identifies as white—you know, for him to have some understanding of it and thorough understanding of it really helps me because, you know, it felt like I met someone who had very similar views on life, and also understanding of kind of how society affects me as a woman of color. So yeah, I asked him to prom as a friend, we started dating after prom. We have been long distance for almost all our relationship. We were long distance all four years of college. I went to school in Santa Barbara. He went to school 300 miles north in San Francisco. We lived together for a year in San Francisco where I moved up to college, then I moved here to my job in Houston last August, so we went back to long distances. We're no longer long distance because he is working from home in my bedroom, most days. So yeah, we've been together for six years predominantly long distance over the internet. And yeah, we're pretty stable, so.

**TH:** What have been the most important friendships in your life?

**GW:** Friendships. I think my closest friends have mostly been people who can teach me something. Like I, And of course I have friends who you know, like, it's not like I go, hey, like you teach me something to you know be like this or something but like, you know, my best friend from college is the second person I ever moved out with. I got randomly assigned a dorm but like, it was like, I actively sought an apartment and I was also actively looking for new roommates because my high school best friend was going to study abroad. And so I didn't have roommates. I needed someone to help me financially afford where I was gonna live for the next year. She's taught me so much about living with other people. She came from a similar experience where she identifies as first generation but is also an immigrant herself. She came to the US when she was about five. And she is a really formative part of my life. I still talk to her almost every day, even though we now live states apart. But it was, it was always really fascinating especially, you know, to be with somebody, like, to be really good friends with somebody who identifies as LGBTQ.

**GW:** She identifies as bisexual, but for as long as I've known her, she's dated women, and you know, really being with her through the experience of coming out to her parents, and also navigating the world as a queer woman of color has been a big part of, you know, understanding how much grace she handles everything with, you know, how she thinks deeply about the world. She wasn't in school too when I moved in with her. So, also, you know, she was really the first person I knew and was close with who became an adult in that sense, who was done with college.

And I think the friends that I've had and the close friendships I've cherished, throughout my entire life have also been very similar where it was like, you are going through something so radically different from me and that I have not either not yet had the chance of having or would have never experienced it the same way that you do. And seeing the way that people carry themselves really, like, think critically about how their life experiences are going to be and handle these situations where there is no, there is no manual



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for how to come out to your parents, for example. Just as there are, there is no manual for how to handle when your parents die when you're in school or young. I'm grate-I obviously don't pick those friends with you know, knowing that like, "Hey, you're going to have to experience this at some point in your life," but you have the friends who I feel like I'm able to, you know, be with and be there for them when they're experiencing those hard times have always been the ones where, you know, I feel like we bonded very deeply over those things.

**TH:** Yeah. What are you most proud of accomplishing?

**GW:** That's a good question. I think for me getting my first job in journalism was something that I never thought I was going to be able to do. I think when you're, when you're a kid and you like fantasize about your career path as an adult, you never really know what it's actually going to be like. I had heard from so many people, it's so hard to break into journalism. And it's so hard especially for that to be the first job you take out of college because I have so many older coworkers and friends who you know, their first jobs out of college were not the career path they wanted to go down. People who worked in retail for a really long time. People who worked as field organizers for politicians where all they wanted to do was write for a local newspaper. So for my first job out of college to be a major news organization, covering something that they trusted me to cover was like no small feat for me. Honestly and like I was really thankful to work to walk into that newsroom every day. I worked a really awful morning shift. I started work at 6am every day when I was working in San Francisco, but you know, I wouldn't trade a moment of it because it was like the physical manifestation of like, I have worked for years to get to this spot, and my hard work paid off.

**TH:** Yeah. And what advice would you give to your younger self for any aspiring journalists?

**GW:** Number one thing is definitely to just relax. I think I put a lot of, like, undue pressure myself, you know, constantly comparing myself [inaudible] relax and stop comparing yourself to other people. I love my mother to death, like I said, but she occasionally would be like, you know, "you're not doing so well because you're not pursuing like biology or other science career paths the way your—your relatives kids are." And I always just kind of took that as a challenge. And also like to measure myself up against other people in the industry, you know. If I met someone at a college journalism convention, I would like track like, "Oh, what internships do they do? How do they set up their online portfolio? How do they tweet? How do they, how do we write their stories?" And it really bred unhealthy habits for a little while where I was just like, I am not doing the same things that they are doing to get to the spot that they're at. And not really having regard for the fact that everyone comes from a different place and success doesn't necessarily have to mean you go work at the New York Times straight out of college. When I finally realized that I needed to stop putting pressure on myself, I think I became a much happier person. And that's something that I wish I had instilled within myself from a younger age because I don't, A) I don't think I'd be struggling with it so much as I have done for much of my adult life and, B), you know, I didn't really take the time to stop and smell the roses so to speak. I feel like there are a lot of times in my life where I was too busy and not relaxing and not enough time spent interacting with other people.

**TH:** Okay, awesome. So that—those are all the questions that I had. Thank you for doing this interview with us.

**GW:** Yeah, of course. It was really fun to kind of like talk about what gets you there, and kind of how you get there, and what does it take, so to speak. So it was really—really fun to be able to do this interview.

[Interview ends.]