

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Julie Yau Yee Tam

Interviewer: Brittney Ailyn Olivarez

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Transcribed by: Brittney Ailyn Olivarez

Edited by: Chris Johnson (8/19/16), Priscilla Li (11/9/2016)

Audio Track Time: 1:11:48

Background:

Julie Yau Yee Tam was born in Houston, Texas in 1981. Her parents immigrated to the United States in the early 70s to earn their PhDs. Her mother was a petroleum engineer and her father was a geophysicist, both of them having worked for oil companies in Houston before the oil crisis, and were laid off after the oil prices crashed. It was during this time that they divorced; Julie was about two at the time, and her father then remarried and had two more children. Her mother never remarried and started her own realty company called Lyn Realty, and is currently a broker and owner of the business. Julie spent her time between the two households after their divorce and has grown up with two other siblings. Julie attended Banff, then went to Second Baptist, along with her other siblings. From there, she attended Rice University, where she became interested in TV News and began to prepare for a career as a reporter and anchor. After she graduated, Julie applied to be a reporter in mid-market level stations, and went to work in East Texas, where she was the first Asian American reporter. After ten years as a reporter, working in various cities across the country, including Louisville, Kentucky and Dallas, Texas, she left TV News and became a licensed realtor at Lyn Realty.

Setting:

A majority of the interview centered on Julie's time and experiences as a reporter and realtor over the past eleven years. The interview concluded with a look into her future and what she hoped to accomplish. The interview took place at Julie Yau Yee Tam's home in Houston, and took about one hour and eleven minutes to complete.

Interview transcript:

Key:

JT	Julie Yau Yee Tam
BAO	Brittney Ailyn Olivarez
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

BAO: And, yeah, it's recording cool. Okay, well my name is Ailyn, Brittney Ailyn Olivarez, and just for the record you can just go ahead and say your name. I know you had your Chinese name on there.

JT: Right, my legal name is Yau Yee Tam, and I go by Julie so, I—to combine it all it could be Julie Yau Yee Tam.

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BAO: Now, was it a decision on your parents' part to give you the name Julie, or was that kind of like your own?

JT: Um, so funny enough I was dancing at the Houston Ballet Academy as a kid and they asked me a name that I would like to go by if there was one. Um, and I know that my, my mom, both my parents actually, really enjoyed Julie Andrew's music and they had mentioned it before, and we had talked about that being an English name for me, an American name. And so I just said it to them and then from then on it just stuck. Um, some people still call me Yau Yee, and some people call me Julie, um so yeah, either way is fine.

BAO: Okay, 'cause I always hear a lot of stories of when they were younger their parents changed their name 'cause their name is too difficult to pronounce. Like most Korean names and stuff like that.

JT: There was an element of that, for sure. [laughs]

BAO: Oh, yeah, I would imagine. I couldn't pronounce it correctly, even it's pretty simple in terms of Chinese names. Um and I know when you said in your, in your pre-interview form, that you were, you were born here, so what chose your parents to come here in the first place and to Houston?

JT: Right, well my parents came from Hong Kong to the United States...um in the late 60s early 70s. And they first, um my father first landed in Louisiana, he came for grad school. He had already come with, you know a college degree from Hong Kong. And my mom, landed in Oregon and she had not gone to college yet in Hong Kong, so she came for college in the States. And um they eventually met in Oregon, when my dad moved to Oregon, um he had earned two Masters degrees, and my mom was earning her Masters, then they both moved to Texas. Um my mom actually went to A&M to work on her PhD, took all the coursework there. My father um also did her—did his PhD coursework at A&M, uh and so eventually they moved to Houston. Um and I should back up and say that my mom earned her undergrad at Oregon and um her Masters at UT Austin. And so they moved to Houston to go into the oil business um that was what was booming and hot back then. And their degrees—

BAO: Especially in Texas.

JT:—yeah and their degrees were appropriate for it. Uh my mom being a petroleum engineer, and then my father a geophysicist. So that's how they landed in the, what oil capital, of the U-, of the country maybe?! [laughs]

BAO: Now of course since they came from, from Hong Kong, you would have to assume that maybe they would have to—some money in their name in order to come to the United States to pursue such, you know, big degrees. Especially those that are—quite time consuming. So do you remember much of them talking about just how was their like status, economic status, who was in China, and whether or not it changed much when it—when they arrive here in the United States?

JT: Right, they were very middle class uh back in Hong Kong, they were certainly were not rich, they weren't poor, and starving or anything like that either. So they came um you know with very little money. Um they, I believe they had some scholarship money um but I know that it was clear, you know, that they were on their own now, um and they were trailblazers, they were among the first of the family to come to the United States, and left behind parents and other siblings, um back in Hong Kong. And so um you know certainly they had to work some jobs that aren't that glamorous, including washing dishes at the casino in Nevada over the summer. And um my mom was a keno runner uh at one of the casinos in, in Nevada while my dad washed dishes with another PhD student. And so it [laughs] was uh it was quite interesting. Actually at the time he was a Masters student, but then later the two were Ph students—uh PhD students um so yeah, very interesting jobs that they had to take just to uh kind of have money to be able to spend and live here.

BAO: When—when, —as you were a kid, by that time I'm pretty sure they were pretty well off. Had their own home, you know, were a lot more stable. But did they ever tell like about those stories, you know: 'Back in the day I

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had to wash dishes,’ and what kind of—how did that make you feel to know that your parents at some point were having to wash dishes at like a hotel or casino?

JT: You know I thought it was funny, the image of my dad washing dishes [laughs], but at the same time, I um certainly knew that that was very humbling. You know, they were students certainly, you know, extremely intelligent, talented, you know, going for these higher degrees, and eventually great careers. But uh those were, you know, humbler days. And um even as a child, I mean we certainly were not wealthy, um we, you know, had limited amounts of money to spend on things. I was told to spend one dollar at the grocery store, that’s, that’s what I had. Uh my mom said, ‘Here is one dollar. You can buy anything you want that costs one dollar.’ And back then you could find...

BAO: Go crazy, go crazy...

JT: ...Yeah, exactly, back then you could find a few more things that cost a dollar, but it was still limited, you know, to candy or a little children’s book or something like that. Um and so, we certainly, you know, lived a quite a middle class, you know existence. My parents, you know, had good jobs, that were well paying, you know, professional jobs, they weren’t, you know, crazy good paying jobs, you know, not like um, just, you know, millions of dollars, or anything by—not even close to that um, but, you know, they had company cars, and um we had a nanny for me, I’m the first born, and for the first four years of my life we had a live in nanny, so she lived with us, and, you know, we paid her, and um she ate with us and everything. She took care of me so that my mom could work. Um, because my mom, back then only had about a month of maternity leave, uh most women now a days have about, three months if they work for a company that, that pays for that, and so um, so yeah, certainly just a, a working family, middle class family in Houston, Texas.

(5:35)

BAO: In your, your, I’m assuming your siblings were born in Houston, or were they born in...

JT: Yes, yes. We were all born in Houston. So my parents actually, unfortunately, divorced when I was two years old, uh my father remarried, about a year or so later, and um had my sister and brother. And my, my mom never remarried, and so we kind of had a blended family, um where my mom obviously lived separately from my dad, and step mom, and I would split my time between the two households.

BAO: Yeah I know how that feels, my parents divorced when they were two, too. So you spend the summer months with dad, you spend rest of the time with mom, kind of thing.

JT: Well luckily, because they were both in Houston and only about ten minutes away, I just, split my time literally, like, every other day, you know, in each place, but roughly. So, yeah.

BAO: But how did it feel, like, as a kid, did you feel that sometimes maybe they divorced because of economic reasons, was it just personal, you know?

JT: Yeah just personal.

BAO: Personal? Oh, okay.

JT: So I mean as a kid, I um, I didn’t know what to think because I was so young, it was just kind of like, all of a sudden my family changed, and that was that. But certainly as I grew older I understood more. Um and I think, you know, it probably hurts more as an adult, definitely than as a kid. As a kid I, you know, didn’t really know any different, and now um it’s sad to think that my parents did not stay together, but such is life. And um you know I have a sister and brother, which is nice as well, and, and so, you know, we have uh, you know, this is kind of how things worked out. [laughs]

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BAO: Well, at least it worked out for the better. I'm, I'm, I'm happy. Sometimes divorces don't...Uh so that means did you spend a lot of time with your younger siblings?

JT: Yes, a lot of time. We were crazy, hyper kids. [laughs] We played a lot.

BAO: Well you're happy, cheery now, I could only imagine, a little ten-year-old you. Um so did you go to school with them, or did you go to a separate school?

JT: We did, um so my sister and I actually went to a private school called Banff, private school in northwest Houston. And then once my brother started school, by that time my sister and I actually had transferred over to Second Baptist. And so then he uh joined us there as well. So we went to Second Baptist, you know, for the rest of our schooling. My brother was there for his entire schooling years. And um yep, but, but then we diverged in college, so. [laughs]

BAO: Can't stay together forever, um at that—what—during that time, when you were in school with each other, like before, primary school, and all that what not. What would you say you guys were, like rich, middle class still?

JT: Still middle class.

BAO: Still middle class?

JT: Yeah.

BAO: And, and I'm assuming at a Baptist church in Houston you might have come across some wealthy families.

JT: Absolutely.

BAO: As a kid how did that feel?

JT: You know that's very interesting, that's a great question. Um going to Second Baptist, um you're surrounded by some of the wealthiest families in Houston. It's a very expensive private school, one of the top ones, in the city. And um, we were certainly not among the rich families. Um my parents definitely prioritized the kids, my parents and my step mother; they found education for us as well as extracurricular activities to be very important, and so they put their money there first they didn't spend frivolously, we didn't have a big house, nice cars or anything, we drove, you know, Toyotas and Hondas. Um and I remember, because my mother, at this point had left the oil business, after the oil crash, my parents were both, you know, laid off during that time and so they forged new paths and started their own businesses, and my mother was in real estate and so uh doing, residential sales, leasing and property management. Um she would clean the houses that she managed, just to save the money, instead of paying a cleaning person to do it, um and so she would want to go make that fifty bucks. And so obviously that's not very glamorous for someone who has such, you know, high graduate degree—

BAO: High graduate degree.

JT:—yeah, and very intelligent, um but you know what she did what she needed to do because she wanted to give me everything. Um and, you know, my dad and step mom as well worked six seven hour weeks, er, six to seven day weeks um throughout their career doing their business um doing custom drapes and upholsteries. And so you um know my mom who drove a uh red Toyota Corolla station wagon, during um kind of my middle school early high school years. Sometimes would have cleaning products sitting in the back trunk uh, in full view, you know, a hatch back with glass, and um you know, there were times where I felt a little embarrassed, rolling up at school when the other kids were coming in Jaguars and—

BAO: BMWs.

(9:35)

JT:—exactly, Mercedes and all the best cars, and, um our car was literally the worst. [laughs] And so I mean it was the lowest, lowest as far as um price of a car, and the way it looked and so, and certainly yeah, some people would make fun of that but I didn't really care too much, because I was near the top of the class, you know I was doing very well and my singular goal was, you know what I'm going to work hard. Do well in school; do well in my extracurriculars focusing on ballet and singing. And then eventually, you know, I would be successful, and, and we weren't you know we weren't living a, a bad life or anything we were just middle class. We weren't upper class like many of my classmates, most of my classmates were. Um or at least they were um the things that they owned definitely said that they were, we don't know what their savings accounts had, but you know, but certainly on the outside um we looked poorer than our classmates did.

BAO: And, and did that kind of like have any effect with how you kind of made friendships, maybe, how you interacted with people around you? Because I would imagine you would kind of want to guard that a little bit, because it's like a vulnerable part. I mean, like you're not as rich as everyone else, you feel disadvantaged—did at any point did that really come up to head in your relationships you were forming, either as a kid or young adult?

JT: No, um you know, certainly there were some class mates whose parents would...get together and um you know were among the circle of friends and what not. And I don't know that it was necessarily because of wealth difference, maybe part of that or maybe even racial. Um we were in the minority as Asians, there were not very many Asians, Hispanics or blacks in the school, or Native Americans, it was primarily white. Um and that was fine, uh but uh, you know, and I made friends with various people and so you know I, I had friends, who were upper class, [inaudible] upper yeah, upper class you know wealth as well. Um but you know, I [inaudible] so I don't know how much it played it wasn't something that was really brought up a lot, and I um, you know we never really had any friends over at our house that much, you know, I had a, you know, maybe one friend who would you know was very close to, who would come over and you know and that was fine and I would go over to her house and um...so yeah, I just I guess because I had my own confidence about my abilities and, and being successful in school that I didn't really care about the money thing.

BAO: Which is a good thing, there is a lot of people who are afraid like I know a lot of Hispanics when you have a poor very poor family, I come from a very poor family, you don't want to bring friends over because your grandpa sleeps in the living room and there's a curtain that separates the bathroom from the kitchen. It's like we live in a very very, I lived in a very very very poor neighborhood so it was kind of like you didn't want to bring your friends over because they would laugh at you—you felt like they would laugh at you. But it was a great thing that you were able to like overcome that even kind of like thinking but then again with a strong personality, and a strong drive I would imagine that— it's—doesn't matter, you like oh whatever, you know, but it was important that education was a good part. And I know you wrote about your ballet, you had quite some time there I imagine, how old were you when you started?

JT: So um when I was at Banff private school they had some afterschool ballet classes you know not really serious and so I did that when I was about four or five years old for a couple of years but then, my mom really wanted me to get serious into that and go somewhere where they would do *really* proper technical training and um just provide a very strict atmosphere to grow within so she took me to the Houston Ballet to audition for it so when I was 8 years old I was accepted into the school and then started from then on and then I finished out the pre-professional program um at the end of my junior year of high school. Um and basically I knew that my body type you know while I'm thin, I'm, I'm not ballet you know perfect, prima ballerina body, let's put it that way, and so um and my abilities you know while they were good, they weren't stellar. And so I knew I wasn't going to have a professional career in ballet and nor did I want to. I wanted to, you know, go to college and actually focus on something you know an academic career and you know and do something else, you know business, journalism, whatever it may be. Um, so when I finished the pre-professional program I was just happy about that and you know.

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BAO: It was like—another thing under your belt. It was just like...

JT: It was fun.

BAO: Something cool to do.

JT: Exactly ... and gain some skills and yep.

BAO: Like climb a mountain.

JT: And so yeah, so then senior year of high school, um I didn't you know take anymore ballet at the Houston ballet academy but I did take um there was a ballet class offered at school as part of the P.E program you could choose ballet instead of you know sports and other things and I've never been good at sports. So um, anyways, that's what I did and then I, since then, in my adult life I've taken adult classes at the Houston Ballet Academy and then you know I've lived in other cities as well, in Dallas I took classes at the Texas Ballet Theater, so yeah just keeping that up, because its hard once you get off of it to really keep it up.

(14:08)

BAO: Yeah it's like any other skill it's something you have to maintain. So you would say it was more like just a habit, but at no point ever did you really think this was going to be a career for you? Something...

JT: No.

BAO: Something that you strive to do as for money and support?

JT: No, I mean we thought about it for about five seconds, you know, we looked at, well how old do you have to, because there's actually an age limit, I think it was you know you had, by for girls you have to be about seventeen or, or younger when you enter the company—if you're older than that they don't want you or something like that. If you're—

BAO: Very biased.

JT:—a boy you have maybe a year more to get in, um and then yeah we just looked at—I mean I'm not a prima ballerina, you know I dance ballet and, you know in the best school in Houston and so I was good enough for that, but not to go on to the next step.

BAO: Well that's very interesting when I saw the ballerina thing, I was like, 'Whoa what does this woman *not* do, she speaks like what, four languages...'

JT: I don't know how to sew. [Inaudible]

BAO: Well neither do I [inaudible].

JT: I'm not good at contact sports. [laughs]

(14:59)

BAO: Well that's something I kind of expected. So where did you learn your four languages, the Cantonese, Chinese, Spanish and English. Spanish was a total surprise I was like, 'Whoa ho!'

JT: Yeah, so Cantonese was actually my first language my parents taught me that at home, and uh they figured that I would definitely learn English when I went to school and they didn't want me to not learn Cantonese and they also

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didn't want me to have their foreign accent so they didn't want to be the ones to teach me. 'Cause some children who even they're—even though they're born in the U.S they'll have a little bit of an accent if their parents taught them a lot of English. So my parents sent me to school with a just few words, poo poo, pee pee...um maybe a couple of others just so I could tell the teacher what I needed. Those things.

BAO: Emergency words.

JT: Exactly. Um and so yeah, I learned English immediately when I was essentially about three years old, and when I started preschool. And um then I learned Mandarin starting when I was about eight. Uh we went to Chinese school, my brother and I actually, and then I actually went there um for the full twelve-year program, 1st through 12th grade. And um so I learned to read and write Chinese and certainly I've forgotten a lot of it so now I can probably read about 25 to 30% of the words that are given to me in any random newspaper or Chinese book.

BAO: This is Chinese Mandarin correct?

JT: Mandarin, yes. And you know in written, the written language is the same no matter, what um spoken dialect that you're, that you're using, um but spoken obviously Mandarin is very different from Cantonese. Um and so, and then Spanish um I learned a little bit you know here and there in elementary school but I got really serious starting in 9th grade, and so by the time I was a junior or senior I was pretty fluent in it. We read novels in Spanish and I took the Advanced Placement exams and everything and so I went on to Rice and I took um a few more Spanish classes and then I've, I've used it in my career and so all of the languages have been very useful for me.

BAO: Now would you say that when you started to like, get serious into Spanish did you at any point think that, 'You know what, this is going to help me get a job?'

JT: Yes, yeah.

BAO: And in what particular job were you looking, thinking that Spanish would help you the most?

JT: Well, I just thought that in anything because there are so many Spanish speakers and the population was only growing and I, never foresaw that, you know that Hispanics would become the majority in Texas, but now it has, so for sure you know how useful the language that I thought it was then, has even become more useful now. Um and then same with Mandarin and Cantonese I figured, you know, obviously those are languages of my family and a lot of our friends um and so that's very useful and some of my parents' friends don't speak much English. And so I have to converse with them in Cantonese or Mandarin and...um you know that in journalism, Spanish was the most useful because when you're out just interviewing random people you don't encounter too many Chinese people in the cities that I have lived in primarily, but you do encounter Spanish speakers and so I was able to use that to get exclusive interviews you know for television news, um and so that, that proved to be very useful. Um, and then now that I have transferred into real state and joined my mom in her business, I've used all three languages and some of them on a daily basis. I'm literally sometimes getting confused switching from one language to another. I have to stop and think, 'Okay what I am trying to say?'

BAO: That's amazing. I speak English, Spanish and a little bit of French. So I know what you mean by mixing, especially Spanish and French they are sort of similar. I was once reading something in French but I thought it was in Spanish. I was like this doesn't make any sense. What is this? Anyway, excuse me I got a little side tracked, so in college you, you said you went to Rice, right? Um and when (?) you entered, did you find it particularly difficult especially since they always say, you know, the Chinese or the Asians always get into the best colleges, like they're taking up all the spots did you ever like feel any kind of like negativity that kind of any sort?

JT: You know, it's funny, back when I was at Rice, the Asian population was only about 15 percent. And now it's about 25 percent so it's much more now in 2013 than it was back in 1999 to 2003, which was when I was there. Um,

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so no, we weren't um, since we weren't really a majority at all...um I want to say that the Hispanic population was just a little bit smaller and then the black population was a little bit smaller than that and so it was primarily white, so we didn't feel like we were any sort of, you know, racial majority at all, because we weren't. Um, but it was difficult to the extent that the classes were hard...um a lot of them. I mean there were some classes that I did very well in and didn't really have, you know, that much problem—I felt like it was a continuation of high school I, you know had a very rigorous um academic slate in high school as well—it was a college preparatory school and so I felt prepared in those cases but there were some classes that were surprisingly difficult. Um I was really good at math in high school, I mean (?) always top of the class in math. And suddenly I took um, I think it was, it was Math 102 at Rice and I was like 'Wow why is this so challenging?' I mean like I was breezing through calculus you know, made the, got the AP credit and everything—

BAO: That's what Rice does.

JT: Yeah and I just you know. Anyway, and um even in accounting you know people would say, 'Accounting is easy,' but I'm like not at Rice. For some reason they just find complicated ways to make your life difficult, um you think, you know, I understand these concepts and then they throw some sort of curve ball at you and you are like, 'Wow, I guess I didn't understand it to the depth that I needed to.' So yeah, actually that was the very first time in my life I had ever felt dumb—was when I went to Rice. Um I always felt so confident in myself that I was just the smartest and I just, you know, I was very confident in my abilities and I would come into tests feeling great unless I didn't study as much as I needed to, but still, but at Rice, I mean I just always felt intimidated. You look around the room just the thought of the brain power and some people would sit there and not be frantically trying to study at the last minute like I was and so I thought 'Oh my gosh, you know, this person is very prepared like they're so smart and—

BAO: They walk like ten minutes early and you're like, 'God, there they go screwing up the grade curve.'

JT: There you go, so yeah.

(20:40)

BAO: Now at any point either throughout your high school, middle school, or maybe college years did every (?) one like jokingly chalk up, 'Oh, it's because you're Asian'? Because you know, you do well in math and did anyone say it's because you're Asian, you know, like that whole model minority of the intelligent, brainiac, hard studying, good math taking, nerd? Did that at any point did that ever surface?

JT: Yeah, yeah I can't remember specific incidents the most recent incident obviously because it's recent, I remember, was in real estate school. Um when I was taking the class to get my license, um someone in the class you know was asking me to help with the math questions because obviously real estate involves a lot of math you know financing, calculating this and that as it relates to real estate, and, and so I'm like, 'Why would you pick me of all the people in the class to ask, you know for help?' And he's like, 'Because you're Asian.' [laughs] So yeah. I mean it's funny, 'cause not all Asians are good at math but certainly you know, you find a lot that are and so that's a stereotype—

BAO: Stereotype—

JT:—that I guess is true for, for the most part.

BAO: But did at any point did that kind of a stereotyping ever like go against you, like, in especially I'm imagining in east Texas being the first Asian American um real e-, anchor did at any point, you felt like it was almost a bad thing, because there was a lot of discrimination particularly in the white population? Like, 'Oh it's an Asian,' you know, like, 'what does she know about Texas,' especially since in Texas, it was a rather small population of Asians

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back then? Did you like, was there any kind of like a negatively, kind of a rubbing of bad elbows just because of your ethnicity?

JT: You know, surprisingly no. I was warned um that you know east Texas, Tyler, Longview, Jacksonville, you know it's a —

BAO: Racist—

JT:—smaller, yeah smaller cities and that people aren't as used to Asians. In fact, when I first moved there I started counting each Asian that I saw out, you know in public and I had you know maybe like enough to fill ten fingers by the first week. You know that's very few. Um and so no, I didn't actually surprisingly in East Texas I don't remember ever encountering any outright racism where someone said something to my face or said something and someone else told me about it. So even if they thought things or you know said stuff behind my back and it never got to me I wouldn't know and so I felt like I was very welcomed you know actually. By all races including the white you know people and um, and so that was very good. Now, in Louisville and in Dallas, actually, which are bigger cities than east, you know, the ones in east Texas. Um, I actually encountered some, you know, just random ignorant comments you know. One woman outside a Walgreen's or a CVS store where my photographer and I had stopped to— I think we were buying something that we needed to use on a story and so um but she was I think she was either just very distressed or mentally ill or something, and she was just yelling outside the store and I—we were sitting in our car and about to pull out and I just kind of looked over and noticed her as anyone would, and then she just shouted though the window, 'Well I just don't like Chinese people anyway.' And I was just like, 'okay that's fine,' and but you know I ignored it because she didn't seem quite in her right mind. Um I've not had anyone that's, you know, that's just really in their mind and you know, whether an intelligent person or just a mediocre person for lack of a better word, say something like that to me it's usually someone whose really ignorant and just, just not, just kind of on the fringes of society type people, who might say stuff like that, which is unfortunate because those people are still part of our community and they need to be, you know, educated and um I guess, you know, learn about our culture and not say things like that. Um but I'm sure that kind of person says things like that about all sorts of other races. I would, I would assume.

BAO: Of course, I mean those kinds of people are under a lot of duress most of the time they are, just like you said they're in the fringes of the marginalization of society, so they themselves are under a lot of discrimination that's how they lash out, but do you, do you think that at any point that maybe your economic status, either helped elevate you above a lot of the racism or do you think that you feel that as someone, [inaudible] if you were at any point lower economic status that you would have encountered more racism?

(24:38)

JT: Yeah, you know um I definitely see the difference between what my parents encountered versus what I encounter. Um certainly because I was born here and um I don't—

BAO: Have an accent.

JT:—have the accent yeah, and I'm you know much more Americanized. Uh when people talk—it's funny because I've had a few instances where someone talking to me on the phone and they don't realize what race I am. And maybe they didn't catch my name or whatever, and then when they meet me they're like, 'Whoa I didn't realize you were Asian,' like as if you know we are supposed to all have accents. And they couldn't tell on the phone, but yeah I think—not so much based on economic statues because most people um...well I guess most people would assume that I'm at least middle class because I don't um look particularly poor. And so they um, and because of, of my television work over the past ten years being on television, that elevates you to that status and so people respect you to some extent. Of course, you still get, you know, very few and far between literally and in an entire years' time I

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might encounter *one* at most instance of, you know, the kind of racial comments. I mean that's quite good I would suppose. Because I encounter so many people you know on a daily basis, so you know. But my parents, you know, being that they have foreign accents, um they encounter racism a lot more, I mean they would tell us about it as we were growing up how random, you know, either customers or in my mom's case, you know, tenants or potential tenants of homes that she either owns or manages, um you know, would just say things like, 'Go back to your own country,' and stuff like that. Um no one's ever told me that, um I suppose they would assume that I was born here and this is my country in the U.S. Um but yeah I mean those are really sad remarks, because for most people living in the U.S. this is not their original country. They immigrated from somewhere at some point in time and so, even white Americans, you know immigrated from Ireland and Germany and places. So nobody needs to go back to their own country. People immigrate to all sorts of different countries around the world all the time. And you know that's the just way the global society works.

BAO: That's true, but that's sad that you still encountered it at any point but do you think that in your profession, if, if you had chosen a different one, would you have encountered it more? Because I know you started in economics I'm pretty sure you worked a little bit at a bank before you went into journalism?

JT: Actually no.

BAO: You went straight to journalism!

JT: Yeah my career was just um, yes strictly journalism. During college I worked you know some random jobs to just make some money and so I worked at a, online grocery delivery service, at one point. And then I worked at the Jones College office, on campus dorm office one summer. And um did some tutoring and things like that and so, in those jobs I didn't encounter any sort of racism, but of course I was dealing with people who were professionals or educated people and so you usually—

BAO: Different environment—

JT:—those types, yeah people don't say things like that. So it's hard to say if I would have you know, what I would have encountered—I'm sure if I did some sort of blue collar work um, you know as I've heard other Chinese friends of mine or people that I know um, you know maybe I would have encountered that kind of racism, and those kind of remarks.

BAO: That's interesting, because you know figuring a lot of people say you know like, they always attribute certain jobs to like certain low-classness, but do you feel that either being a woman or being an Asian American, had opened or closed any particular doors in your career? Like do you feel that being Asian, just put you an edge, or being a woman put you an edge, in anything?

JT: You know, it's a mixed bag. Um...you know when, for example in television because that's encompassed most of my adult life, um when hiring managers and news directors are choosing an on air talent to hire, they certainly want it to be somewhat representative of the population. So in places like Hawaii and California, where there are more Asians in the population, you'll see more Asians on air. In places like east Texas where I was the first, according to the news executives there, Asian American, or Asian on the air. And, and probably the last, I haven't heard of any other Asians um going on the air there, but I could be wrong. Um, and, and so, you know, if you are going to be the only Asian on air, because they can't I mean I've been told, we can't hire too many, because there aren't that many Asians, you know, around. So...

BAO: People will complain.

JT: [laughs] There you go. So you have to have the token Asian, maybe a couple of Hispanics, a few blacks, and then you know the rest of them are white. Uh and so, you know certainly if there was, if there were a bunch of

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Asians trying to apply for that same position, then of course only one is going to get chosen. Uh and then of course at the Fox TV station I worked in in Louisville, we had two Asians on air, me and another woman. Um and even though the Asian population there was very small as well, I mean a single day probably less than five percent of the population. But the news director back there was obviously open minded and didn't necessarily just look at race, alone. He wanted to look at the quality of work we could bring and so it's kind of a mixed bag there. And as far as female versus male, certainly on air we see, you know, a pretty well rounded representation of male and female reporters, meteorologists, anchors and the such. Um so I don't think necessarily that it really hurt me...I got, you know, the jobs I need to get and moved up, you know, to the top markets um in the country and so, um I certainly tried to use it as an advantage. You know, I can—especially speaking different languages, um I can kind of cross cultural boundaries and reach different people um and then having the Asian look, I can be the token Asian [laughs].

(29:56)

BAO: That's interesting that you say token Asian, because in our class we were learning about orientalism, and how Asians even in the past, because of whatever, all these other compounding factors, that Asians were thought of as the exotic, in particular the Asian woman was like the feminization of the like Asian society so that they were thought of as like obedient, subservient, beautiful—

JT: Until they met me [laughs]!

BAO:—you know. [inaudible] Which is making me think like why would you go into East Texas when, before history I'm pretty sure you would not have seen or even thought of that many Asians in east Texas. But why east Texas why did you want to pioneer through there, especially in an area that's been known for some of its racism, minute men, you know those scary stories about immigrants being killed out there because they were immigrants?

JT: Uh-huh... You know what's funny, I didn't focus on going to east Texas, really um, when you're starting out trying to look for your first television on air job, you just want to go anywhere. Um if you get multiple offers then you're lucky and then you can kind of pick and choose. But um you start out in a smaller market and so being that there are 210 television markets approximately in the U.S.; um New York being the largest, Houston falling in around 10 and then all the way down to—I don't remember the smallest, but somewhere like Bozeman, Montana, or Zanesville, Ohio, would be in the 200s or around there. But um yeah, this, this particular east Texas market was Market 107 so it was kind of right in the middle and um you know, I had that offer and I had the offer also to stay in Houston to be a reporter but I would have to be what called a one man band: so not only reporting, but also shooting my own video, holding, lugging a bunch of heavy camera equipment and um, and editing the video and all that. And so that would be extremely—

BAO: That would be too much.

JT:—you know much, especially in Houston heat, and um obviously this is just an audio recording but I weigh, you know, at the time around 100 pounds or just under 98 or something now.

BAO: The equipment would probably weigh more than you.

JT: Exactly now I'm about ten pounds heavier but still, you know, small person. So I thought, you know, I really don't want to do that if I can avoid being a one man band, which I did for my whole career in television, I, I would avoid it. Um so yeah, this, the job in Tyler looked very attractive to me, I would have a photographer and an editor, um I would not have to do all of that I would just focus on my reporting and so I went for it, and then the next job that called was Louisville, Kentucky, Southern Indiana market, um Market 48 at the time, and then next up was Dallas Fort Worth Market 5. And, so that was my path.

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BAO: Do you, do you know whether or not a lot of Asians took, I'm assuming that the markets are ordered according to prestige, no?

JT: Um it's actually the population that the broad cast signals reach so, for example, DFW, even though Dallas and Fort Worth, individually, are smaller cities than Houston—

BAO: They are huge—together they are massive.

JT:—but yeah together that whole area has actually more population than greater Houston, than the reach of the greater Houston signal. Um and so that's, yeah, and that's how it works.

BAO: Do you, do you feel that maybe some Asians—do you know whether a lot of Asians chose like higher prestigious jobs like going into bigger, bigger, bigger markets like, because they wanted to have more prestige—like why did you choose the ones that you chose? Or did they call you?

JT: Yeah and so, actually the path that I took is somewhat typical and it's a path that um you're told when you start out that this is what you're going take. So actually yes, most people whether they are Asian or not will start off in a smaller market and then move up to a medium size market and then you know—

BAO: The big times—

JT:—if they are still in the job, or you know they've made it, then they'll go up to the biggest markets and then eventually potentially national. Um and so that's kind of, it was a kind of a pretty typical path I would say. Nowadays because the industry is hiring at a cheaper [laughs], at a cheaper rate, they are paying less so then they are actually paying younger reporters that are fresh out of school to go into the bigger markets and paying them less than, than we are paid by going through the track of small, medium, large.

BAO: Because I would imagine when you start you have more experience, you should be paid more right? As you, as you go along.

JT: Exactly, yeah so someone who's fresh out of college going into a big market is going to get paid less than someone whose been in it for 8, 10 years having gone through the tracks. And you really don't want to make your mistake on national television or on television in a big city. You want to start, that's why they tell you, you got to go for those small markets, the big markets won't even want to hire you, at least that was the case in my time and so, um, you know that way in case you make any mistakes on air, uh the audience isn't quite as big. It's till large, I mean, there were over 300,000 people in the audience in east Texas, you know, so it's still a lot of people if you make any mistakes so uh—but I mean, you know people will stumble on their lines every now and then that's not really considered some egregious mistake but certainly you don't want to do anything you know bigger than that. And luckily I, I escaped making any big mistakes.

BAO: Or else your career would've ended then.

JT: [laughs] Right.

BAO: When you entered east Texas, did you know whether or not you were the only Asian fighting or looking for an anchor job?

(34:36)

JT: Uh, I've, I've known of people of other Asians applying for jobs there. Um whether they've got—whether they've got them and chose not to take them or whether they didn't get the jobs I don't know, but I know of people who've applied.

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BAO: Do you have any inkling as to why maybe they chose you like what, what do you think out of your resume might have been outstanding, you know, because of course you're Asian—I'm pretty sure people expect, math very intelligent, um capable. So do you feel that in your own resume either because of your own life or maybe in your own interview skills, how you could have stand out—stood out from like, stood out from all the other interviewees.

JT: Yeah, I mean certainly, my boss had mentioned that you know he was impressed um with my, what was called a resume tape, back then we sent VHS tapes and that evolved into DVDs, um and basically—

BAO: And now it's just flash drives—

JT:—that's right, um and or online videos. And so the résumé tape is just a reel of your work, you know samples of you on air, and so I put that—that together while doing internships um at different TV stations in Houston, and also during my senior year at Rice I actually had a paying job as a producer at a TV station here and so I would go out with reporters and shadow them and I was allowed to go by myself one time and shoot a story that aired in Houston. Um so I put that together and sent it out and so my boss was impressed with um, you know, my on air presentations, the look, um and then certainly my, my resume, my background, having gone to Rice University, um speaking different languages, um and then I had counted as a kind of a fun fact back then that I was a three time spelling bee champ among the private and parochial schools association in Texas. So I was the Texas spelling bee champ three years in a row and so he was impressed with that, or not three years in a row, but three years out of the four years I competed in high school. And, and so I think just um, I provided an overall interesting picture, um that, you know, could probably bring something interesting to the staff and some, some depth to the reporting I did in the community.

BAO: It's interesting that you bring up spelling bees, and stuff like that, it's, it's making me kind of lean toward the—

JT: Asian stereotype.

BAO:—idea that. Asian stereotypes and the model minority stereotype. Did you ever feel that like you just fit that boot, but didn't want to...

JT: I really did. [laughs]

BAO: ... did it ever make you feel bad like at any point?

JT: No I actually enjoyed it because I was kind of a goody two-shoes growing up you know I was a good kid. I was a hyper active little kid, like elementary school but I never did anything bad I was just, I just liked to laugh and talk, and you know just cut up and stuff; with my siblings especially. But um but yeah, I was always really studious and serious in class, and the teachers really liked me for that you know, I guess some people might call that a teacher's pet, I didn't suck up to them or, you know, try to brown nose the teachers.

BAO: You were just better than everyone else! [laughs]

JT: I was just a good kid, you know, and I did what I needed to do, and I knew I was responsible and disciplined so yeah, I absolutely fit the Asian stereotype, but in—in I guess *that* stereotype in particular was a good one, because there are other negative Asian stereotypes that I've heard and so hopefully I wouldn't fit into those.

BAO: Which ones have you heard? Because... [Inaudible]

JT: That, that Asians are you know stingy and greedy you know with money; it's a stereotype that people label Jewish, you know, people as well [inaudible] well you know, we're real, and you know, I'm frugal with my money, but I'm generous you know in charity and donations and giving gifts you know, and treating my friends and family

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to dinner. And so I thought about that stereotype, and I'm like 'Well, I am frugal you know with myself and I want to make sure I save and I have coupons and rebates and, you know, find the best deals.'

BAO: But in TV white people do that anyways so, why do you have to attribute it to Asians? Well, that's, yep, that's kind of cool. Did you think that you retained, any of the, like, Asian traditions that you, or did at any point did your family try to instill any Asians traditions that now as an adult you're trying to hold on to?

JT: Yeah for sure, just the typical, like, discipline, hard work, um honoring your parents. Um I know that, you know, a lot of people, um will put their older aging parents into nursing homes um, and for, for us that's just not an option. Um like I've always kept in the back of my mind that the day that my parents need to be taken care of and not being able to live on their own, that they are going to move in with us. Whether it's into our house or um some sort of adjoining, you know, kind of guest, guest house, or apartment or something so they have; if, if they are in the condition where they can have some freedom and have their own space, but then we still come together and we're close enough to be able to help them, then that's fine, but if they need to move into the house and have, you know, fuller part ~~time~~, either hired help or us helping, you know, whatever the combination it may be, that that's what we would do because that's kind of the Asian way, is to honor our parents, make sure they're taken care of. Um and when I say, 'we,' you know, any of our siblings, um as my husband is Asian and he has siblings, I have siblings, so any of us, you know, would, could take in any combination of parents that, you know, might need it. Um and so that's, that's definitely um, you know, very much instilled in us, and we respect our parents, um even though, you know, we are 18 and technically we're adults, or we're not 18, we're, we're beyond 18. [laughs]

BAO: I was going to say you don't look 18.

JT: No I'm not 18 anymore, but we're beyond 18, and, you know, technically we are adults and we can say, 'well,' you know, 'you can't tell us what to do.' And certainly that's true but if our parents advise us, and kind of give us recommendations, you know, and sometimes my dad will say, you know, 'Please,' you know, 'can you just listen to me on this,' and tell me what's something that he wants me to do. I'll respect him and just do it. Um because that's, you know, I guess, the Asian way—

BAO: The way you were brought up.

JT:—yeah exactly. Um and so we try to respect them, and you know with um, I don't, I'm not as familiar with um how other east Asians, necessarily greet their families, um but with Chinese, we greet everybody by their titles, so when you go to dinner and you're seeing your family for the first time that day, you call everyone, you say, mom dad, uncle this, aunt that, you know, everyone who is an elder, you greet them in Chinese by their title and you don't say their name. And I know in America some people call their parents by their first name, which is very strange to us. Um and so, yeah so we do that and even my younger siblings will greet me with my title, which would be older sister, or oldest sister. Um and so yeah, we, we do all that.

(40:42)

BAO: Now I, I would imagine since you're an Asian American, you have strong traditions, strong culture and connection with your family and your Chinese culture. Did you, how did you feel like being in the United States, like I'm, I'm imagining there's a lot of interplay with a lot of your own culture and how you feel as an Asian American within your own home, and within your own family? I imagine it's a different image and a different feeling than when you're out on the field working with non-Asians. And so like how was that, like, that, that dynamic? How did it make you feel?

JT: Right, um certainly I felt the dynamic more when I was a kid than I do now. Um I think obviously because my family has been in the U.S for such a long time now, longer than I have since they came before I was born, um that they're more Americanized. Um and even though, you know, they are still very much Chinese and have those roots,

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but I think it's also because when I was a kid, um you know, I was proud of being Chinese and my father especially would instill in us, that we need to be very proud of our culture. And he would talk about all the great stories of not only our family, but historical stories about Chinese, and um and just our values and, and why we should be proud of it and not ashamed of it. Because a lot of um children of immigrant parents and of, of races other than white will feel ashamed of aspects of their culture because it's different and maybe made fun or whatever. And so um you know certainly there were times when I felt slightly ashamed like, 'Oh, you know, my parents won't let me sleep over at the other kid's house because they're so conservative, and Chinese,' and that they were like 'Well, we don't know if they're safe,' and, you know, what, what might happen to our kid. And things like that um and then, you know, when they would speak in Chinese at school functions, you know when I was there and my friends were around, but then, I mean that really didn't last very long um, you know, when I was in very lower elementary school, but as I went through elementary school um, actually became really proud that I would speak these different Chinese languages, and so um even when I was around my friends if my parents happened to call me on the phone, I would just speak to them in Chinese and speak really fast and I felt like that was really cool, because, you know, I could speak a different language—

BAO: Different—

JT:— yeah, and um and so, so yeah. And then I'm just, I really enjoy the dynamic, I mean I, I definitely appreciate and practice, you know, the Chinese values and, you know, we celebrate the Chinese holidays like, Chinese New Year. And, you know, I—that's pretty much the main one, like I don't really celebrate the moon festival and some of the festivals I don't really, not too aware of why they exist or the history of them. I mean I've learned them but I just kind of forgot, but yeah the Chinese New Year I get into that, like I love the dragon lion dance and the fire crackers, that's my favorite, the fire crackers and you know just that whole atmosphere. And I have Chinese clothing that I've either bought or other people have given me you know from overseas and I'll, I'll wear, you know, the Chinese long dress for women, and some of the tops and things, and so I really enjoy that and I wear it proudly. And I don't think I would have worn that kind of clothing um when I was in you know, elementary or middle school, maybe not even in high school do I remember wearing that kind of thing. [inaudible] Yeah and you know what, at Rice, because we had a CSA, Chinese Student Association, and all, a lot of other cultural associations for you know most of the major ethnic groups at Rice, um so we really embraced that when we had, you know, a fashion show where all the different Asian cultures had their um, had their particular attire that they would wear and come across the stage and show it off. We had cultural performances and we would attend the cultural performances of the other ethnic groups, you know, the Black Student Association, the Hispanic, and, and what not, and just, you know, it was just really celebrated. And so I think that really um continued to enforce the fact that we're all of different cultures and we can be so proud of them and then enjoy and appreciate each other's as well. And so that's when, you know, I really um, I just really felt that pride.

BAO: Um I guess to back track a little bit, I, I understand that you were in the anchoring business for maybe about 10 years, and what made you change, why did you want to enter into your mom's real estate company?

(44:40)

JT: Right, so several factors, you know, I felt like I had achieved most of what I wanted to achieve in television news. I wanted to get all the way to the big market of course I had aspirations to have that national job, which um, I appeared on national TV quite a bit, you know, throughout my career, but from the local level, so the national TVs would either air my story um or interview me live about some big story that was happening in my local market. But I wasn't fully employed by a network like NBC national, you know, it was NBC owned by NBC network but not at the network level. And so that was the only thing that was missing but then at that point in my life, um you know, my last stop being Dallas/Fort Worth, and um I was 30, I had just turned 30 at the time when I left the business. Um I kind of felt like I kind of wanted to come home you know? My parents are aging, um they're still healthy and just doing fine, but you know, just kind of seeing; well do I just want to keep hopping around the country and moving

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around, and my husband too, you know, every time I moved, he'd have to find a new job and you know come tag along with me and I just felt like well, you know, it just can't be all about me and my career moves. And I had kind of had enough of TV news, you know, I, I, I—it was very rewarding, I had done a lot of interesting stories, met a lot of fascinating people and done a lot of work that I found really rewarding. Especially the investigative work that would, you know, would change policies and make, you know, government officials actually act on findings that we made, and stuff like that. And just some of the beautiful stories that um we were able to tell, you know, my photographers and I. And um and so I kind of felt like, 'You know what? I had a good run this is like the perfect timing for me to just come back home to Houston.' And my mom, you know, is close to retirement age, I don't know if she will ever retire, because she just works, works, works. But um you know I felt like this would be the time to really learn the business, you know, I grew up in the business and I did a lot of office work for her growing up, even as a kid, you know, like eight years old I would balance her check books and things, I just loved doing things that. I didn't like washing dishes and doing household chores so—

BAO: But you could balance a checkbook?

JT:—yeah so I knew I wasn't going to be a housewife, but I was like I want to work, you know, and so yeah. And I would help her answer her phones, and like do book keeping, I just loved that stuff and of course it had to do with numbers so I just loved the math aspect, very stereotypical. Um and so you know, I thought I need to come and really learn the business as a professional, as an adult and um you know, she's a broker, and I'm just a licensed real estate agent, and right now the requirements are that I need to be working for four years and earn so many points based on all my transactions to become a broker to be able to run the company. And so that would be the goal since I'm her only child that I would take over the company when she retires or if she wants to go part time and I would just move into a primary role. Um and so it really was just the right timing, kind of all the factors coming together.

BAO: That's cool, now, as a kid either through high school or college, did you at any point, then again with an economics major, I don't know whether at any point you either in your future saw an anchoring job or real estate. Like what, what, what did you see for yourself as a child, young adult?

JT: Right, I never thought I thought I would go into real estate, yeah, absolutely not. I had—that was not even in my mind, so it's funny that I'm here, but I'm enjoying it. Um you know, my father, funny enough, because this is very not stereotypically Asian, he suggested that I go into TV.

BAO: Medicine.

JT: No totally the opposite!

BAO: Oh okay, I was going to say medicine.

JT: Yeah he said, you know, 'you should be a TV reporter,' because growing up we watched Shern-Min Chow, who was an anchor and reporter for um different TV stations at different points in her career in Houston. And she was, you know, one of the pioneering Asian Americans, um I'm not sure if she was the first, but certainly, you know, for us as kids we watched her and thought hey she's Asian, she can do it and so that's the thing about being a minority, you see that one minority doing that one thing, and then that gives you hope that you can do it. Um and so my dad suggested it, because at the time I was really outgoing, and I was very comfortable in front of the camera. He had this huge um home video camera, you know, one of the first ones that was made in that era, and he would uh, he basically documented me since I was a baby, you know, and then later my sister and brother. And so I was literally born almost in front of the camera, and so I was very comfortable with it, and so and he said, you know, 'That would be a great career,' you know, 'you can speak, and um you're not afraid, and you're,' you know, 'confident' and all that, and that's what you could do. Um but at the time, funny enough, I thought that there were only tall people on television and I was petite, I've always been small. Uh you know, at full height now, I'm only five feet tall and so I

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thought, ‘Oh,’ you know, ‘I’ll never be on television,’ ‘cause everybody looks tall on TV, you don’t know how tall they are, though—

(49:14)

BAO: It’s the chairs. [BAO, JT laugh]

JT:—in real life, it’s the chairs and the camera angles. And so it wasn’t until my first um, semester at Rice, that um in a class that I took, which was about career and life planning, um one of our assignments was to contact two alumni. And so one of those alumni that I contacted was Ned Hibberd, a reporter for Fox 26 here in Houston. He was at that time and still is now. And um, basically I (?) sat down with him and interviewed him asking him all sorts of questions about how, you know, I would go about perusing this career. So he gave me all the advice, kind of told me different paths that could be taken, and things that I could do. And at the time at Rice there were only two journalism classes offered, plus a public speaking class, that would be relevant to um, to this type of career. And so I actually, during my time at Rice, I took eight classes at U of H, um in journalism, broadcasting, television, just so that I could learn those things. A few of the classes I was able to transfer and get credit for but it was such a difficult process that I just kind of gave up on that. I had enough credits, you know, I knew I was going to be able to graduate with more than enough credits, so I was just like, whatever I’ll just take the classes to learn but not worry about transferring credits.

And so yeah, and so really through that process I felt like, you know I can actually be kind of good at this. And then when I got my one internship after another, and got that reinforcement from the actual professionals at the TV stations, you know, getting their feedback, and um they all had a great sense that I could have a career in television and be successful. So I thought, you know, actually this is something I can do. Um and so that’s when I pursued it. Because in high school as I was applying to college, I didn’t think about journalism, I was, you know, that was in the back of my mind, but I thought, you know I’ll major in economics just so I’ll have something that I can do that has to do with finance or, you know, numbers, math. [laughs] And then I also thought about my grandfather on my mom’s side, uh was a, was a politician. He was in, you know, government service, um and, you know, a senator in Taiwan in his day, and so I thought I would love to pursue something like that; in public policy, you know, eventually be some sort of government leader and so that’s kind of my thought process was. But yeah I mean once I ended up on the TV news track, I was fully focused on that. And just knew exactly what I needed to do. And spent my entire four years at Rice, you know, going for that, and participating in Rice broadcast TV, on campus, and things like that, and KTRU the radio station, the *Thresher* newspaper.

BAO: They still have KTRU—

JT:— just in a different form.

BAO: Crazy hipster music. Your major—interesting that you chose economics, why not chose something that was more close to your whole anchoring business? Such as communications, journalism, I don’t even know if they have a journalism major.

JT: You know, I majored in economics for a few reasons. One, I didn’t want to major in anything that had too much reading involved. I didn’t like to read, it’s funny because so many people—

BAO: Now all you’re doing is reading.

JT:—but, but not a lot of reading, like I’m not an attorney, they got to read a ton of stuff, you know. But yeah I knew I didn’t want to read a lot, and then I didn’t want to do pure math, because that’s not the angle of a career that I wanted. So economics would be kind of in the middle, you know, you do a bit of calculus, quite a bit of calculus, deriving all of these equations and things, and um and uh, but then you’d also read some, but it wasn’t a ton of

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reading. It was just your basic textbook, not extremely long textbooks or you know novels that you would read in English or as a history major. Um and so, yeah, I kind of thought it was a practical major, um in a way a fall back major, in case TV didn't work out. Um I didn't want to major in communications or journalism 'cause I had the sense that those major don't get you jobs, outside of communications, journalism, PR, those types of jobs. And, and so that wouldn't really provide a good fall back. Um and it was, I guess, one of those um majors that people would say they don't pay very well, you know, unless you can become a top TV person. Um so yeah, economics seemed pretty practical to me, and I thought about being a financial adviser, or just doing something in public policy and having a good understanding of the economy would be a good thing.

BAO: And economics did help you get into the news casting, or was it still, like as you said, a back thing? Was it more your internships, or also your major that helped you get what you did?

JT: Definitely a combination. Your internships give you that practical hands on experience, um because you're actually going out with reporters in the field, helping them, and then learning and seeing what they do first hand, you're doing stuff in the news room, in the studio. But economics was a different major, than most people that go into TV. Most people that go into television, major in communications, broadcast, journalism something related to the field. But when hiring managers see a major like political science, sociology, psychology, economics, history something different, they like that. And I've been told; nobody said that they don't like that. In fact, they encourage it, and when they talk to students choosing their majors, because it gives you another area of knowledge, so that you're not just knowing journalism. And technically I had taken enough classes to have a journalism major, but because Rice didn't offer one formally, and eight of my classes were at U of H, I didn't have that as a major. But so I had enough knowledge of it to go into the industry and you do need at least some classes to be able to know what's going on, and have some basics. But a lot of stuff you learn on the job, you know um, and in fact the stories that you're covering every day you didn't major in, medicine, and you know, all these different things, and, and school board elections.

BAO: You don't go to school for that.

JT:— and all these different topics, right! And so, but you just kind of have to have that knowledge and way to synthesize information, and enough intelligence to be able to, you know, process that and put it all together, and obviously have writing skills and public speaking skills. Um but yeah, definitely it's good to have something different as a major, other than a journalism related major, so that you do, you are able to think in a different way and, and then, when there are stories about economic issues, that, you know, I can understand them. If someone majored in political science they could certainly process and understand better the political process and the systems and the theories behind what's going on in, you know, everyday politics that they cover.

(55:11)

BAO: Now as a realtor, what kind of a transition was that for you? How, how did that go?

JT: It was a very weird transition; I've been out of TV for just over one year now. And when you first get out of TV it's like you're just shocked, you know, like shell-shocked or something. Because you've been so used to being in the spotlight, and then especially when you move to a different city where nobody knows who you are really, versus when you walk around in the cities I've been to when, or in the cities where I've lived where I've been on TV, and you know you get recognized in public, not you know, not really often, it's not like I'm Michael Jackson, and just can't even go to the grocery store. I mean, certainly I can live a normal life but, you know—

BAO: A mini superstar.

JT: [laughs] But people would come up to me and, you know, and things. And, and then you were respected to that level, because, oh that's Julie Tam, on television. Um and then all of a sudden to almost being like nobody and

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you're like, wow how do I, how do I live life like this? I've not known life, you know, not on TV. I mean, obviously as a student, as a kid I wasn't on TV, but once I graduated from college, you know, that was it, TV; I was always on television. Um so it was very strange, it was hard in that sense that I was just like, 'wow, you know, I mean, I'm just not appearing on air every day,' and then it was also kind of sad from the Asian American perspective because um I had Asians tell me, 'Oh we're were really sad, we missed seeing you on TV.' And I'm sure that the way that Shern-Min Chow provided for me a role model that I could aspire to be, on television that I did the same for other Asian children and I just was thinking. And that was the hardest part, I was thinking, 'Wow, you know, I hope that there aren't little Asian kids that don't see an Asian face on this particular channel now that I'm gone or whatever. Um luckily there actually is another Asian female, it's a good friend of mine back at the station, the last station I was at. But you know, that that wouldn't somehow hurt that Asian dream, you know, little kids being on TV um one day. And so, yeah, it was an interesting transition from that respect, it was just like mentally. Um but I think now I'm fine with it. I mean, it's still a little bit strange to think about, um but really my stress level is much lower now um than it was on TV because those deadlines were just, you know, insane. And now, you know, certainly we have deadlines, you know, we got to make it to closing; we got to do all these different steps when we're trying to sell or help someone buy a house and different—but they're not those daily deadlines, like, eleven thirty a.m., four, five, and six p.m., you know, you got to make it on the air, and get your stories together in different formats and just this craziness. Um and I don't have to stand outside for several hours at a time, unknown lengths of time, in all sorts of weird weather; from snow storms to thunder storms to hail, to, you know, 110 degree heat. So that's [laughs] much more positive now.

BAO: Now you're in air-conditioned rooms, which is a lot nicer.

JT: Yeah, I mean we go into some interesting houses, you know, sometimes. It could be either hot or, you know, somewhat dirty, but it's nothing compared to, you know, I mean, the uncontrolled environment that you're in when you're reporting on events that you don't, that are unpredictable. Um, so yeah.

BAO: Now to step a little bit away, a little bit from, that. In real estate I would imagine that, just being an Asian American, knowing Chinese, knowing Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese and speaking Spanish, what kind of spheres do you feel that you were able to penetrate, social spheres, cultural spheres, to help you sell? Because I would imagine you don't sell just to Asians or Americans, White Americans, you sell to African American, Muslims, Indian American, and stuff like that. So what kind of spheres could you enter that you felt, as an Asian American, gave you an edge.

JT: Hey you covered it all, [laughs] I've literally have had clients of all those descriptions: Hispanic, Black, Asian, Muslim, you know, and Middle Eastern. Um, so yeah.

BAO: I'm too good.

JT: [laughs] You finished answering the question! Um yeah, I mean, certainly it helps because if you speak their language, they're comfortable with you. They think that you understand their culture, that you can relate to them, that you're not going to discriminate against them, that you can help them. And so it's all positive in that respect, um and then certainly it's been interesting, um you know, I've learned all the real estate terms in English obviously, you know, to get my license. And there were a number of terms obviously that were new to me and to all the people, you know, going for their license. And um and so you have to memorize a lot real estate vocabulary, a lot of vocabulary which you don't even use on a daily basis, it's kind of archaic but you just have to learn it. You know, just like we learn stuff in school that we don't necessarily use. Um but then, um when you come out and have to speak other languages, and use those terms, that's always interesting, and it's funny because I've heard my mom use a variety of the basic and most commonly used real estate terms in Mandarin and Cantonese. So then I was able to kind of remember how to say certain things, and then I would ask her sometimes, you know, how do you say escrow and earnest money, and just these different terms like, you know, that I didn't necessarily know even growing up in

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English but now I've learned, you know, as an adult but saying them in Chinese. And so, and then sometimes it's interesting because if you can't find um a way, if you don't know the exact term in a foreign language, you find a way to describe it, 'You know it's that money that you put up to do this and that,' and, you know, so you kind of talk around it. So you have to speak enough of that language to do *that*. And so yeah, I've had to explain a contract in Mandarin, I have to tell people about features of a house in Spanish so you get to do all of that. And sometimes, you know, you search for the words, because you're not perfectly fluent, you know, like I am in English, but you just, you know—

BAO: You try grabbing straws here.

JT: You can do it, yeah.

(1:00:27)

BAO: Has at any point had any Asian person, family, group, ever said you're too American? You're too American, why aren't you more Chinese, like, you're forgetting your roots? Did you ever encounter that at any point?

JT: No, because interestingly enough, among um our family friends, so, parents that would be my parents' age and their kids would be my age, I actually speak the best Chinese, you know, pretty much among all of them. So they always see me as, you know—

BAO: The more Asian one.

JT:— the good Chinese girl, yeah. Who learned her language and kept it, and went to Chinese school. Um whereas their kids are struggling to speak Chinese, so yeah, certainly no, um and funny enough I guess that's the nerdiness in me. So this is very ironic, at Chinese school, which *most* of the people are Chinese, there's a few that are mixed, you know, have Chinese half white or whatever, um but so virtually everyone is Chinese. And you would think with the Asian stereotype of everyone being Chinese that everyone would love to be in Chinese school because you love to study. But no, I actually have never met anyone in my life who liked Chinese school, you know, everyone said, 'Oh I hated Chinese school; my parents made me go to Chinese school.' And Chinese school is a thing you go to on the weekend and you learn your Chinese, speaking, reading and writing, and you have assignments in class and you do homework and you take tests. So it's like going to school except for it's only on Saturday or Sunday, or sometimes both days depending on where you go. Um but yeah, I loved Chinese school, I just, I loved learning, and I just I had a lot of fun writing the characters, and um I just enjoyed being there. And so, yeah, so I was I guess really Chinese in that respect. [laughs]

BAO: Oh, okay. Because I've known a lot of people, like, um at least in our classes [we learned] there's that whole generational struggle, where the younger children, the Generation Y, those who were born here after their parents immigrated, it's like, their parents feel like they're losing their children to the American society. Did your parents ever feel that, or did they, were proud of the fact that you were like a hybrid? That you maintained your Chinese roots, but at the same time were able to integrate well into the American society?

JT: I think my parents are definitely proud of all three of us for maintaining our Chinese roots um, and that we, you know, obviously speak the language. Um and certainly do see the American element, obviously we're, you know, Americanized, we go out with our friends and um we don't, um I mean we respect our parents certainly, we talk to them in a respectful manner, but probably not to the same extent as a kid raised in China. I mean certainly there's rebellious kids in China and Hong Kong and Taiwan, um you know, who don't respect their parents, but maybe the way that they talk to their parents would be a little bit different. I know that especially on my dad's side his relatives like his sisters, and um his parents, who would come to the United States and visit us, they saw a bigger difference. They saw that we were very American, because they lived in Hong Kong, and um they would say that, you know, my dad was not disciplining us enough, you know, the Chinese way, that he was letting us, you know, just go crazy

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and act hyper and run around the house and laugh loudly and yell loudly and stuff like that. And, and so, but my mom's side of the family is much more Americanized so, uh certainly they're pretty much in line with, you know, with our generation. Um and what's interesting is there's a lot of intermarriage now in our family. Um you know, we have, I have cousins who've married, you know, white and different races and my sister's engaged to a white guy, I married a Pakistani guy, there's fewer and fewer of us who are marrying our own kind. Um and so, but, you know, and it's funny because obviously our parent's would rather us marry Chinese because it's just—it's easier, and that way, you know, the families can get along easier [inaudible] and just, you know, and we already all understand each other, speak the language and it's just more, there's more comfort there of likeness. But they, now, just, I think they, they've been here long enough and seen not only within our family but just society in general that people are intermingling and intermarrying and it's just kind of the way it goes. And my brother is the only one left in my immediate family who hasn't gotten married, so we'll see who he marries. Um but uh...

BAO: So there any push for an Asian woman, is there any point in your—any part in your family that's like, marry an Asian girl, maybe she'll take care of you?

JT: Well certainly they told us, you know, that oh, it would better; we would like it if you would marry someone who's Chinese or East Asian so at least, you know, it's similar. But you know, but they're not against, you know, who we ended up marrying. I um had a lot of opposition, my husband and I, from both of our families, when we were wanting to get married, um because of our religious and cultural differences. But it was based largely on stereotypes, neither family had met the opposite person, I mean, my family had not met my husband, his family had not met me, they were judging based on stereotypes of what we were, and just very afraid, and not, of the unknown, you know. But once they actually met us, each side met each other, now, I mean, everybody gets along, we love each other. And it's just sad that we went through several years, I mean, both of our families, and then my husband and I, you know, when we were dating and even more when we were friends, we went through so many years of just turmoil dealing with this opposition. Um you know, my husband and I knew each other for six years before we actually got married, um so it was like the first two years were okay because we were just friends but the four years in between were just awful, you know, because of extreme parental opposition and it was very sad. Um but now it's like everything's worked out, which I predicted, but you know, it just took a while.

(1:05:40)

BAO: At any point did you ever think to follow through with your parents' wishes, like, did you ever look for Asian boyfriends first? And then maybe think, ah this isn't really for me, and then, like, and *then* found your later Pakistani husband? Did you at any point have to go through that?

JT: I, you know they never made me do anything. Um I had—the only other person I dated before my husband, for any length of time, was white. [laughs] So um, and then, you know, I had gone on, you know, just one or two dates with a couple of Chinese guys, and you know, I liked Chinese guys, I liked, you know, all types of people. But um ultimately the pretty much almost perfect guy for me, unfortunately he has a different religion and so, I mean, I wish that I could share the same faith as him, but we respect each other's faiths and allow each other to practice our faiths so it's not a problem. Um but it just turned out that other than that, I mean I found the perfect person for me and, you know, he's a wonderful person. And so, and my parents see that now. Um there was a lot of fear because, especially during that time right after 9/11, of Muslims and people from that part of the world, the Muslim world. And so, they were very afraid of that, and what kind of man this could be, and then now it turns out he's the complete opposite, and now they're saying, now make sure Julie's treating you nice. [laughs] Because I'm the more dominating one, and he's very gentle, and just you know, he's the docile Asian woman that I'm not, essentially. As far as characteristics.

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BAO: Well, wow. Now we can start to step away a little bit from the economics, the capital and the labor questions, and now I really want to get to know you as a person, because I can imagine within the time allotted here I'm pretty sure I can only just touch the tip of an iceberg.

JT: You've touched a lot so, I'm really impressed. You've really branched around the whole interview.

BAO: Now let's try and go back, have you ever revisited Hong Kong maybe to visit [pause] as a wrap up question because I know you have a meeting at one, it's already like 12. I don't want to press you for time, I want you to have a good lunch, everything to have a great day. I want to kind of ask you, what do you see for yourself in the future?

JT: Um yes, so I do see obviously continuing on the real estate track, and running the business one day, and so right now I'm trying to expand it and modernize it, and just really implement, you know, kind of put my foot print on it and implement changes. Um and certainly I have a very strong foundation with which to work because of what my mother set up. Um but you know, I am actually writing a book, um because of my move to this new house and, you know, all the unpacking and setting up and, you know, building the new house, it's just taken up so much of my time so it's been put on hold for the past few months. But the book is actually, the working title I guess is - well, I shouldn't say it, this is going public, I'll reveal it later maybe, well you know what I can say it, I can say it. It's uh, it's going to be, 'An unarranged marriage,' so as opposed to an arranged marriage, um my husband and I were obviously not arranged, quite the opposite, we wanted to be, our families wanted us to be unarranged, you know, get away from each other. But um so, it's the story about that, you know, obviously there will be some biographical information, of you know, autobiographical about me and biographical about my husband and our backgrounds, but then obviously how we ultimately came together and all the things that have transpired and everything that we have learned. Because it's been a wonderfully enriching cultural experience for both of us and our families certainly, and um not only cultural, as in our two cultures, but really its opened up everyone's eyes just about different people in general because you know we can't just base our judgments on stereotypes, we've got to meet people and learn about each individual. Um and so I see that in my future. I don't think I would return to TV news, but certainly if um, I would love to, you know, continue doing interviews about real estate, being a real estate analyst contributor in the media. And then, some of my friends, you know, who try to get media coverage for their business or their organizations or themselves um, you know, have sought me out to help them. You know, just how do you get, you know, media coverage and stuff, and since I obviously have all that background I'm able to help them. Um oh yeah, and one more thing, I run a little side business called TheApplicationMasters.com, where we edit writing from academic to professional, and um it was always intended just to be a side business just kind of um, not really to bring in tons of income, you know, we're profitable, but just more to, so that I could have started something, I wanted to start a business. My parents both started business so I thought, I'd follow in the tradition and start a business myself, and have something that I felt ownership in, and that I was proud of, you know, that I did all this to start this. Um you know, so I have that as an online based business, so I do that on the side, so I'll keep doing that, but real estate is really the focus, and um almost my sole focus. If people submit things for me to edit, I do it, but I don't even really put in any effort to market TheApplicationMasters.com any more, um just because I'm too busy with real estate so it's like when the business comes, you know, I do it, um...certainly writing background and editing, I can keep that up. Um you know, I am heavily involved in Rice right now, you know, I've always been—

BAO:—the alumni, you're, said that on there you had some of that, program.

JT:— yeah I'm on the Association of Rice Alumni board, and um Center for Career Development board, and the Rice young alumni ambassadors, which soon I won't be a young alumni after you're ten years out. I'm ten years out now. Um so yeah, we just want to be, you know, philanthropic and um you know we love animals so we want to continue to give to those charities, um and we just hope to make a difference. Um you know, people have asked me if I have a political career in my future, I don't know, um definitely I'm open to it. You know, I'm, obviously I have certain viewpoints and, you know, ways that I think things, you know, should be done, that I would like to contribute in that sense. But yeah, I mean, I just—I find education, cultural experiences, just being a responsible

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citizen are very important, and those are really, um you know, just the main facets of how both my husband and I live our lives. And we're, we're environmentalists; you know, we love to recycle and you know, help the environment, things like that. So just, yeah, just enjoying life but giving back to the community and um and just being good citizens is our, is our big thing.

BAO: Um and with that we should probably wrap it up I want, it's 12:25 I want to give you lunch, I want to give time to get to your meetings so...

JT: Sure.

(1:11:28)[The recorder is turned off; the interview ends]