

**Tinny Widjaja**

**November 10, 2020**

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**Eleonora Anedda** [00:00:01] Okay, so today is the 10th of November, 2020. My name is Eleonora Anedda. I am working as an oral historian for the Institute of Diversity and Civic Life. I am in Sardinia, Italy, on a Zoom call with Tinny. And Tinny, would you like to introduce yourself and tell me where you're joining this call from?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:00:24] Sure. Hi, good - well I don't know, is that good morning? Good morning there still? [Laughs] Yes, so my name is Tinny, Tinny Widjaja, and I am doing this interview with Ele from Austin, Texas.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:00:45] So I was wondering if you could start, go back in time, and if you could tell me a little bit about your childhood?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:00:53] Okay, yeah, sure. So from my name, you can see, Tinny Widjaja, that's an Indonesian name. So I am Chinese. Indonesian. I was born in - not a tiny town, but tiny town. It's the third largest city in Indonesia. It's called Medan. So Medan, Indonesia, that's when I was born, 1971, long time ago. And yeah, so I was born there and I'm Chinese-Indonesian. I went to school, Catholic school, from elementary until high school in Indonesia. Then I went to Australia, Perth, Western Australia to do my undergrad. And that's, I would say, about four or five years. And then my parents, my mom hauled me back to Indonesia saying like, "You come back, okay. Come and let's stay for a few years and see what happens. See where you want to go after that."

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:01:53] So I did. I came home. I went home to Medan for a couple of years, indeed, spent time with my parents. But I think that town is a bit too small for me by then. And I decided I needed it to be someplace else. So I went from Medan to Australia. And then I decided, "You know what? I need to start my career someplace else," straight out of college. So I decided it's Singapore. I went on to live in Singapore, started my banking career there for twenty years. So yeah, so that would be, I would say, my Tinny version 1.0. [laughs] Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:02:40] What did you study in uni, was it finance?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:02:43] So I studied, yes, finance and management at Murdoch University in Western Australia. That's right.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:02:51] And what was your relationship like with your parents?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:02:56] My parents - Well, my dad is a traditional, I would say, Asian man. Very closed, not much, I would say, emotion. And he loves me, and I know that. But very little expression, so to speak. I only have one picture of me and my dad, honestly, holding hands. Just one. Just that one picture. I didn't recall him a hugger. That's very typical Asian family, Asian men. My mom is, I think, my best friend. Still is, until now. Very liberal woman [laughs] considering an Asian woman. So she just let me be what I wanted to be, whom I wanted to be. And she was the one that said, "Oh yeah, you wanted to go overseas to study? Go ahead." My dad was going, "Are you sure? You sure you want to let her go?" And mom was like, "Yeah, yeah, sure. Let her go." And she did.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:03:51] And yeah, so relationship was great with my parents. My mom's a good friend, and my mom was the one that raised us Catholic. So we were baptized Catholic, born Catholic. But my dad though, my dad is actually agnostic. He has no religion, despite being Asian. Typically people are very Buddhist, that Buddhism is more a culture rather than a religion in Asia. But my dad is, "Uh-uh, no, don't believe in anything, honestly." [laughs] But my mom, though, yeah, because she grew up in a Catholic background as well. And she decided, "Yeah, I wanted my daughters to have a Catholic education, Catholic upbringing." So that's how I spent my childhood.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:04:42] And how was that like at home? I mean, with everybody else, I imagine that you were the minority.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:04:54] Yes, within, I would say, my dad's family. Because my dad himself did not have any religion, as I said. But his side of the family, they are Buddhist. My grandmother, for instance, they are Buddhist. And I won't say a minority per se, but I would say the way we look at a lot of things, family, upbringing, life, it's very different between my mom and my grandmother. [Laughs]. They do have conflicts. I mean, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, [laughs] like in our relationship to us as the grandchildren. Having said that, I think when you said "minority," interesting, not necessarily my family per se, but I would say within our community back then in Indonesia, being Chinese. Being Chinese versus the native Indonesian. The indigenous Indonesian we call it, or the Indonesian, we just call them that.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:06:03] Yeah, growing up I had an interesting experience because most people in Indonesia, they are Muslim. So that is the majority, as you know. I think about 60, 70%. They are all Muslim. And we have, I would say, the mosque, the microphone just blasting five times a day because they are praying. And that's something very common, very normal for us. We hear that. So, I mean, that doesn't bother us at all. Having said that though, yes, we are a minority being Chinese growing up in Indonesia. Our religion, our culture, very much so that. For instance, as a Chinese born in Indonesia, you get an identification card. You are tagged differently. So you have your code, one, two, three, four, five, and slash something. So they know straight away that you're basically not Indonesian. You're Chinese, of a different race or minority. So in that sense, yes, you do feel you are different in some ways, but still in a very tolerable condition.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:07:26] So it's very interesting. You were labeled different in your ID. How does that make you feel?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:07:37] Yeah. Growing up, I personally have friends that they're all different race, Indonesians or Chinese. But I do grow up with a lot more Chinese friends rather than, say, Indonesian friends. But I would say a generation before me, I would say my dad, that's a very different relationship whatsoever. And you hear things. You learn things from them about, "Oh, they're Indonesians. We are Chinese." So yeah, you see that dynamic for sure. I would say, though, I don't feel that racism so much in my generation, but for my parents' generation, it's definitely something that they portray and then were to communicate to us. For instance, I'm not supposed to have a boyfriend, let's say, who is Indonesian [laughs]. That's something that's frowned upon. You don't do that basically. Something like that, I do feel, not spoken, but it is the way I respond, I guess, to that kind of a subset of us in that community, in our culture.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:09:10] I don't know if something else comes up to your mind, but can you talk a little bit more about this and maybe give me some more examples?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:09:20] On which one? What do you mean?

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:09:25] What you just said about - sorry, there are people outside.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:09:30] It's okay.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:09:34] What you were just describing about, this sort of rule. I imagine it's not written down, but it's culturally, you cannot have an Indonesian boyfriend.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:09:46] Right, right, right, right. I think you grow up with that messages. We are different. We are different to them and them to us. And I think prohibited is probably not the word, but it's frowned upon, not to do that. And in context of not just culture, I guess. In context of a religion as well. So you have the Asian or non-Indonesian, versus the Chinese, and then you have the Muslim versus the not Muslim. So all of a sudden, Muslim and Indonesian is it's actually - not saying a bad thing, but it's not something [that's] that easily accepted, say if you are Chinese for instance.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:10:39] And I guess a bit of context to that as well. I mean, economic-wise, a lot of Asians or Chinese in Indonesia, we are business people. We own businesses, small business, big business. And typically we're doing okay. So I'm middle class. I would say I grew up middle class. My parents grew up middle class, too. And I guess we're not poor, we're not rich, but we're okay. We're doing okay. Good education and all that. And that in a way, I would say, created that gap, the wealth gap between a lot of Indonesians and a lot of Asians, and that created a lot of animosity, that relationship that transpires basically. So that's from one economic perspective.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:11:32] And also the other one is I think back in late 1960s, '65, '66, we recall the history of that's when communism is rampant, and not just in Asia, all over. We fought the war with the Japanese, with China as well being part of that communist story, so to speak. And in Indonesia, it's suddenly also become a story that if you are Chinese, you are communist. No, we were born in Indonesia. They probably don't even want me in China, honestly, because they don't even look at us as Chinese people, because, "You're Indonesian," so then we're not Chinese, but to the Indonesian people, we are Chinese people from China. No we're not. And, "You're a communist." So because of that, I would say, from then on, the gap suddenly become even wider. That animosity between us and them, the width is just even worse than it had before.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:12:42] So I remember after that, my grandfather, my father, my mother, they all had to change their Chinese name. So you're no longer supposed to have - for instance, my family name, my family's Chinese name, is Huang for Yellow. And you notice my surname now is Widjaja. That is actually an Indonesian-ized Chinese surname. All right, so if you go "Widjaja," the "wi" is equal to "Huang," equal to "yellow," the color. So I'm no longer able to - all my grandparents, my grandfather who was actually second generation born in Indonesia with his Chinese name, his whole entire family, no longer allowed to use that Chinese name.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:13:34] So they have to change their name. So we all decided, "Okay, fine, let's change the name." And we now become Widjaja family. And you have to go around carrying your changed name certificate, they call it. Because you are born with your birth certificate as "Huang Something Something." But no, you're no longer known as

Huang Something Something, you're known as something else. And you have to carry that certificate. So all that passport, all that has to change suddenly.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:14:01] And for me, when I was born, my parents didn't even bother to give me any more Chinese name. I don't have a Chinese name. And it's kind of weird. It's kind of weird being out here in America, and they ask me, "Oh, you're Chinese. Do you have a Chinese name?" [laughs] Especially when I'm with a group of Asian community. Because they all have Chinese name. And they ask me, "Oh, you don't have a Chinese name? You look Chinese. You're not Chinese?" So that's really weird, and I have to go through this story and telling them why. "I am Chinese. I don't have a Chinese name because -".

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:14:33] Because as much as it's terrible here in America, for instance, nobody could make you change your name. That is your name. It's your family name. No law can say that. At least we haven't got to that point yet [laughs]. Haven't got to that point. "Change your name. You must change your name." Indonesia made us do that. So you see that animosity came up, and if you were my dad or my grandparents, what would you say to that? If I say, "Oh, you know what? I like this boy. We're in love." And they would go like, "You serious? No." [laughs] And would you blame them? I guess I wouldn't. I know that I wouldn't. But as you grow, again - same thing as in this country. The younger generation, you feel less and less of that many generations afterwards. You slowly - not forget, but you get less [laughs]. So that's a bit long story short, why that happens and the story around it, basically.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:15:41] Yeah. That was a very good explanation.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:15:48] [Laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:15:48] It wasn't something that your grandparents or your parents did for safety. It was just a law. They had to change the name.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:15:54] Yeah, yeah, you have to. And you have to carry that certificate with you because you're not you. You wanted to show people that, "I changed my name from this to this." Because it's completely different name. It's not even just add a word. You're a completely different person. And oh yeah, back then it was very dangerous. I wasn't born yet, but we learned the history. That was very interesting. We learned the history. We learned the history of how the generals in Indonesia, they were executed by the communists. So that's the story that they told us that happened. I think it did happen. But you demonize. You demonize that communist, and you demonize that being Chinese even more. And we all had to sit down and listen to that. And I guess I feel that as, "Oh yeah, I'm Chinese, and they hate us," basically. But then again, like I said, we're not Chinese people in that sense. We were born here. It's nothing to do with us, basically. But yeah, we were demonized because of that.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:17:04] And do you remember how your parents told you that story? Were they angry? What was the feeling in the house about all that?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:17:17] I had stories from my dad back then, not so much from my grandfather, but from my dad and from my mom as well. And yes, they were running. They were scared. There were riots during that time. And you had to hide and, I guess, keep your head down. Not hide necessarily, but keep your head down. Your businesses - it's like here. They loot, they'll rob you. They'll loot you, they'll take away things from you. And

you have to change all your business name even. And that has to come down. And you can't be seen reading newspapers or watch a movie, Chinese movie and all that. Seems like they want to eradicate all your culture in one night. "Be us or get out," basically. And you can't get out. This is our family. We have business for three generations now. So yeah, it's very scary and volatile.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:18:19] But then again, that's 1960-something. And I can tell you, it's still ongoing. The last so-called conflict that we have, it's 20 - I'm trying to remember. 19 - 1997, I came back to Indonesia. And then 20 - I would say around 2000, the year 2001 or 2, I can't remember exactly. But that early part of the year 2000, there's another very, very huge riot. I mean, we can Google that later to see the exact year, but same thing, exact same thing. And that was back then, it was economy crisis as well. Doesn't help.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:19:01] Yeah, it was 2007, 2008. Pardon me. That's when the economy - do you remember the financial crisis happened? Yes, yes. Yeah, now I remember. Now I can tie them together. Seems like long time ago, isn't it [laughs]? So back then, 2007, 2008, and because of the financial crisis, again, people, they are robbed, they are robbed of all their livelihood. People lost their jobs. Indonesian rupiah got devalued so much. It's just happen everywhere, and somebody needs to be blamed for it. Somebody was angry. Someone needs to be blamed for it. And they started again looting all the businesses, all my friends. And this is year 2007, 2008.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:19:43] I was in Singapore already back then. My parents are all in Indonesia still. So they had to actually run. Modern time, 2007, 2008. Would you believe that? You ran. And then I had to take - I basically put them on a plane before everything stopped, and they had to - just to get them out, basically, my sister and my mom, my dad. So they flew to Singapore and stayed with me for a while. And I have friends who had no place to go. They are Chinese, and again, no fault of theirs. It's global crisis. They themselves are affected, but they don't care. People don't care.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:20:23] And I remember one of my friends had to run with nothing but just her shoes and grab her kid and just whatever they could and get in a car and just get to the airport. And they waited there for days for Singapore Airlines to get them out from Jakarta back then to Singapore. The only flight that will fly is Singapore Airlines back then. Everybody shut down. Everybody couldn't fly because it was crazy. Nobody fly. But Singapore Airlines said, "We will fly you guys out." And also any Chinese, anyone who felt unsafe, they just do that back and forth. It was only an hour and a big flight They continuously did that. Yeah, and it's 2008, and it happened again. And that was almost - you tell me, 1960-something to 2000, and you thought like it's over. But no. Yeah, yeah. Anyway, that's what happens. The fear is still there [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:21:20] Did your parents follow you in the US?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:21:24] Well, speaking of that, it's a funny thing. No, but they are here right now as we speak. They are here right now because they've been here since March to visit me. So my parents will come here once a year, ever since I moved here, 2013. It's been seven years now. So my mom flew out here every year just to visit us. She likes traveling, and alternate year with my dad. So this year, mom and dad together since March, but then pandemic hit. Pandemic hit, and they couldn't go home. And they've been stuck with me for nine months now [laughs]. Yeah, but no, I don't think so. I don't think so they'll move here. In a lot of ways, the States are - number one, I don't think so they'll be comfortable here. A lot of things they're not used to anymore. It's difficult.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:22:30] And I would love to ask you so many more questions.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:22:34] Please do [laughs]. Please do.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:22:38] So I imagine that this fear was going on when you were still - I mean, if it happened still in 2008, then it was still going on when you were a child. Do you remember how you felt? You had a different - they told you that you had to change your name. Did things happen in school or when you were in the street?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:23:04] Yeah. I can tell you this, though. The way we cope, our coping mechanism as Chinese people in Indonesia, we cope by, "Oh, just do business. Don't get involved in politics. As long as you keep earning money, keep having business, keep getting education and all that, you'll be okay." That's what we've been told, and that's how we cope, basically. You live among that. Like I said, the racism is there, but nobody talks about it, until of course, you have to talk about it. Until you have to be put on a plane and run like refugees. That's when people know the problem is still there. But until then, we all cope by, again, "Just earn money and keep your head down and study and don't talk about politics. Don't worry about it. That's somebody else's problem. Let them do it."

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:24:10] And also, I do believe that they close us off from being involved in politics. In Indonesia, you cannot join the army. I'm Chinese. I don't join the army. You can try if you want. You can try if you want. And if I have a kid and I want to be army, "No, no, what are you doing? Why must you join the army? Go be a business man or something. Why must you join the army?" That's what probably my dad would tell me, for instance, if I said, "Oh, no, I want to serve my country." And they'll go, "Why would you want to serve your country? Your country doesn't want you." [laughs] You see that?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:24:48] So for a long time, it has been like that. We don't care. We don't care about things like that. "Whatever you want. You'll tax me? Go ahead, tax me. You want to get that law? Go ahead, pass it." No one fights it. We accept it. We accept it, and we move on. Let somebody else fight it. And as long as I'm safe, as long as I'm safe, I earn my money, I feed my family. They have education, and that's life for us that we know, basically. And I would say only recently, the last - let me see, I've been out here, I've been away from my country twenty-odd years now. I was there the last ten years.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:25:30] The last ten years, you suddenly see Asian men in politics. It started coming up the last, I would say, the current governor or the one before, he's Chinese. He's now Chinese. So we don't see that until recently. And in some ways I think that's good because I do believe that without being involved in setting laws that can protect you, you'll always be you'll always be a victim. You're only playing defense, you don't play offense. I say that. You can only play defense for that long. You need to be on the offense side sometimes. And I think I'm glad they do that now. And also with that, you open up building that bridge as well to let the other side into so you can collaborate better that way. You don't get so suspicious of each other, let's put it that way.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:26:30] Yeah, and with that said, it's very strange that I'm here now the last seven years. And I will say the last six months, I've never been so political in my life [laughs]. But the last six months, like, "Why do I care?" When I moved in 2013, Hillary and Trump, everyone started talking about the other side, this side and that side, racism and all that. I just look at my husband - my husband is Black, by the way. That's another story we can talk about [laughs]. And come here, and I went, "Oh okay, racism, everybody's busy

with that. Yeah, a lot of noises. Yes. You guys don't know, I've lived it with all my life. Whatever."

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:27:15] So I am again using my coping mechanism by saying, "It's not my problem. It is not my problem. My problem is I'm here, I'm raising my child. As long as he's safe, he eats well, he's educated." Using the same defense mechanism that I've been raised. I do that to my son as well, to myself, too. And everything's gone fine. And every friend is a friend. I don't care. And I won't ask them their politics when I arrived here. Our household, my husband's, actually he's an independent. A lot of Black person is independent, and he's one of them that says, I'm not even Democrat. Clearly not Republican.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:27:58] And I came here, I never asked people, "What's your political background? Who do you - Why?" I never asked that question. You good person? I like you. You like me. We can be friends. Sure, no problem. So I've been functioning on that since I arrived here in 2013. The last six months though, no. It's been really, really hard to ignore that. And I think with George Floyd - that happened in May. Having a Black son, all of a sudden the reality just hit. This nonpolitical Asian is going - I don't function like that. I can't function like that anymore. I said I needed to do something. So that fear, I guess you deal with it by ignoring it. I guess no more. You have to be able to do something about it.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:29:08] I was just thinking when you were telling me that you couldn't be political. And I remembered, "Oh my gosh, she went to [inaudible] and organized the polls.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:29:20] Exactly. Like, "Why?" I go, "Why did you do that, Tinny?" So because I needed to do something. I couldn't even vote. I'm still an Indonesian. I don't even have - I'm not a citizen yet. But this is the least I could do, make sure that change needs to happen. I don't see how, I guess, being Asian, having a Black husband and a mixed kid living here in Texas among this community the next four years, knowing, knowing all of the division and animosity out there towards us, that I'm not sure how can I do that. So I have to make sure it stops, at least to stop [inaudible]. But between you and I, it's always there. Back to the Indonesian story, 1960, 2007, 2008, and I bet today it's still going on and it'll always be here. But you need to stop get that. You need to manage that. You need to change the rhetoric, the narrative. Basically, we can't go on with this narrative, I suppose. And that's why I said, "Look, I'll try and do my best [laughs] and help here."

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:30:47] You felt like you needed to do something.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:30:48] Yes. Yes, I needed to do something. Not doing something, it doesn't help my family. It does not, right now. It does not. And how do I educate my son, put it that way, and tell him to do the right thing when everything is not going right around him? And in some ways, I fear for him. I do fear for him, and I think out of that, out of your mama bear fear, you got to do something. And this is what I can do to I protect him in that way.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:31:27] So the first time that you - remind me, you first moved to Indonesia, then you went to Australia to study?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:31:35] Yep.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:31:36] And was that the first time that you left for a long period of time, your home?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:31:42] Yeah. Yeah. That's the first time. The first time I just took my two suitcases [laughs] two suitcases and my mom put me on a plane, and that's it. I've traveled, I think Indonesia to Singapore, that's probably - and I was eight years old back then and, probably a couple more times. But other than that, no, I have not traveled to America or on a plane sixteen hours. Never done that. That's my first time.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:32:13] And how did you feel leaving home and then living in a different place?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:32:20] Yeah. Can I share this with you that I'm actually glad I was out. I never felt I belong, honestly, in Indonesia. Never felt I belong. Call myself Chinese. Yeah. Call myself Indonesian also. Yeah. But you're neither. I actually felt I'm neither one of those. Chinese? I don't even speak Chinese. I don't have a Chinese name. You're kidding me. Indonesian? Yes. I hold Indonesian passport, but no, I don't think so. So I won't be proud to say - or as proud as I am right now, let's say, I'm protecting that poll. No, no. I tell you something. I've never voted as an Indonesian my entire life. No, I've never voted once.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:33:11] In no election?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:33:13] I left the country when I was eighteen. That was when I could vote. And I never got a chance to vote. And I couldn't vote when I was in Australia or in Singapore, for that matter. Never once. Again, not political. I don't really care what happens to that country. It's no longer my country. I still hold your passport. You are no longer my country. That way. You see what I'm saying? I just say I'm Chinese-Indonesian, because that's where I was born. But country-wise, I'm probably a very global person. So yeah, so happy. Happy to be out actually.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:33:50] And all the things that I watched growing up, listening, growing up. Not Indonesian music, not Indonesian books. I studied English on my own. I started on my own. And I just wanted to get out. I just wanted to live in a Western country, basically, for some reason. Maybe my past life, I wasn't Chinese. Who knows [laughs]. Was something else, I don't know. I felt like minute I arrived, I go like, "Yeah, I belong here. I'm good." And never looked back from then on. And I picked up the language very, very easily and yeah, I'm glad to be out. So people said - and that's when I said, when I went back for a couple of years, in that state, I couldn't stay anymore. It's like, "I'm done. I'm done with this place, basically. I have to leave."

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:34:44] You felt claustrophobic?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:34:46] Very much so. Very much so. It's a small city. Everybody knows everyone. Not saying over here, everybody knows everyone, too [laughs]. But it's more than that. It's you finding yourself back then. You're twenty-two, twenty-three. You started to - you just finished college. You wanted to start your life, basically. You're eager. You're eager. I wanted to start working, I want to build something for myself. All that. And you look around you. That little city? No. I don't see the opportunity for that, actually, honestly not, I said. So I had to leave, and I did. And I went to Singapore, and I started my career, and I had a successful one for twenty years. Yeah, happy to be out [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:35:39] What books or movies did you watch that -



**Tinny Widjaja** [00:35:42] Oh, wow. Okay. God, let me see. Grew up with music. Let's talk about music. So Michael Jackson, yes, and all that, Madonna, absolutely. I know every single song. Well, the old songs, not the new ones. George Michael, Wham!. Oh my god. Let me see who else. And I also listened to my mom's music, believe it or not. My mom loved Cliff Richard. I don't know if you know Cliff Richard. Yeah? Okay, so I know the songs of Cliff Richard, Elvis Presley [laughs]. My mom loves that as well. Yeah, so I grew up with all the pop songs, the American pop songs, so we're more American rather than the British - both are Western. But in Indonesia, a lot of those are American.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:36:32] So American books and movies, all the cartoons. So I watched some *Scooby-Doo* to *Thundercats* too. Oh yeah, all those, we watched those as well growing up. And books though, that's interesting, because it's hard to get children's books in English, for instance. So I ended up stealing a lot of books I'm not supposed to read. My uncle - so I can tell you my dad's background, my dad's side of the family, they are very Westernized in some ways. Again, my dad doesn't speak Chinese, being a Chinese person too, he does not speak Chinese, does not write Chinese.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:37:18] My grandmother is actually an English teacher. She's Chinese, but she teaches English, and put all her sons in an English - almost like international - school back then. Because my father's side, my grandfather was actually one of the richest families in my hometown. So they're well-to-do, English educated. You notice that, not Chinese educated [laughs]. They're English educated. So my uncle was one of those that had books, had novels, like those James - whatever those action [claps hands] - Stephen King, I'm just gonna put one out. He has tons of Stephen Kings back then. That's how I knew about Stephen King. I shouldn't be reading Stephen King when I was twelve years old [laughs]. And plus, I don't understand most of what's in there. So what I do is I have a dictionary next to me and that book and that novel, which I shouldn't have read, and I just underline things that I don't understand and then go and look at that word. And that's how I self-taught myself.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:38:33] And I self-taught this rolling of the tongue, to speak the language, by singing. And that's where the Madonna comes in. So that's all I do, entire day. I could be outside playing with friends or with my whatever. But I ended up in the room reading a lot, listening to music a lot. And that's how I grew up with that, basically. And yeah, that's really funny, come to think of it, of stealing books from my uncle. My parents didn't know any better. It's like, "What were you reading?" It's like, "I'm supposed to read that."

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:39:07] And the other thing that I do read a lot as well, believe it or not, is Bible. In English though. and I asked my mom for an English Bible, and I read that Bible back to front, I don't know how many times. It's a way for me to learn the language as well, but weird language, because some of the Bibles are written in - the word is "thou," "thus." You're like, "What is that?" [laughs] You don't get that in a novel, for instance. So, "Oh, okay. So that's a different way of writing it or reading it." So they teach all that. So yeah, and that's how I grew up, speaking of music and books [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:39:50] That's very interesting. Well, first of all, we have the same taste in music.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:39:56] Okay [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:40:04] Did you always feel like you needed to leave and you always knew that you were going to end up in the US?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:40:13] You know what? Yes. Yes, yes, that's a very good question. But yes, yes, I always knew that [I'm] not going to die in this country, let's put it that way, okay? So yes, definitely need to get out. Definitely. Don't know if it's going to be America, but honestly, I never thought it'll be the US, despite all the influence, so to speak. But I always knew it'll be a Western country, don't care where. So I guess Singapore is probably the closest one, if any. Because Singapore, as you know, is very westernized, and it's urban jungle out there, and it's a very metropolitan. If Singapore is your first Asian country you land in or travel to, you are so wrong. That it's not Asia, it's a very modern Asia.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:41:08] So that's probably the closest I could get, and that's why I decided, "Let's do Singapore. My mom is still very close. My parents will be an hour away, and I get to do all that." Speak English 24/7. Everybody speaks English there. Very Westernized. I can enjoy all the very American - or actually very British in Singapore, actually, that's more British influence there - and do all that in Singapore. So yeah, I started there.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:41:38] So I was married once in Singapore to a very nice Asian gentleman, and I divorced him after eight years. No kids because I decided, again, not for me [laughs]. It's just not for me. He's very, very nice, very nice gentleman. But then you don't see - again, I don't see that. That's not me, despite I'm trying, despite I'm trying to be that Chinese Asian person, marrying an Asian man and all that is. But it's just that after eight years, you keep on convincing, you're trying to convince yourself that this is you. But no, no. So we part ways, no kids.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:42:27] And then I met my second husband in Singapore as well, and he's the American. And he's the American, he's an African-American from New York City, an expat in Singapore. And that's how we met, in Singapore. Yeah, I always knew I'd end up not with an Asian person [laughs]. I tried. I did not disappoint my parents [laughs]. I married an Asian man. But then, yeah, I remember, this is my father told me this when I packed my bags, left for Australia. He said, "You can come back. You can come back with all of Asian men. It's okay. Australian Chinese is fine. But not blue eyes and blond hair, okay? No, no, no." Guess what? I married a Black person [laughs]. I tried and married an Asian person. Didn't work out dad, sorry. And that's another interesting story, but I'll stop there [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:43:37] Please continue. I love listening to you.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:43:41] So fast forward that twenty years - no, I take that back. So eight years, got married probably about ten years in Singapore. So now Singapore is a melting pot of Western culture. Very much so. And Singapore has its own, if you might call it, a reverse racism even. Because in Singapore, being Chinese, you are a first class citizen. And then you have, underneath that, you have the Malay, the one from Malaysia, Malay. A bit of sharedness in culture as Indonesia. And then you have the Indians, the South Indian, mean not the Native American Indian, but the South Indian. And then you have the mixed, the mixed between all those English colony, because Singapore is colonized by British for a long time. That combined, that's a subset of culture, that too.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:44:38] But Chinese on top, as you can see. So it's kind of that reverse racism, all of a sudden. You come out from Indonesia that you are second class. All of a

sudden you're first class. So that's why a lot of Chinese actually end up moving, let's say from Indonesia. They migrate to Singapore and bought homes there and leave their kids there to go to school and all that in Singapore. So yeah, that I find myself there better. I adjust better, I had a great career, made a lot of friends. Met my first husband. But then again, it's not - I worked for three American banks, and I will work for local banks [laughs]. Three American banks. Again, all my colleagues are a mix, I would say, of the Chinese and Asian and a lot of expats, basically. So it's that thing.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:45:37] But you still afraid. Afraid to actually embrace who you are and what you can be. A lot of that family, in the back of your head it's telling you, you have to be certain ways and all that. And being Asian, piety is very, very important to us. Respecting your elders and their wishes is very, very important to us. You don't disappoint them, basically. And I think that still back of my head. That's why for eight years I stayed in a relationship I shouldn't have started anyway. But I did. And moving out of that, though, oh yeah, I disappointed my parents. It's really, really hard. Really hard for them and hard for me as well.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:46:24] But we all moved on, and I met my husband, my African-American husband, and when I brought him home to meet my dad [laughs] - you just could imagine. I mean, he is adverse when it comes to dark-skinned person. Not because he's Black. He doesn't understand - you also have to understand, in Asia, we have no concept of a Black person. That is not like here, White and Black, that Black person to them, "Oh, are you from Arab?" That's a lot of [what] my husband gets when he lived in Singapore. "Are you from Saudi Arabia? Are you Indian?" Nobody asked him, "Are you Black?" Oops. You just froze then for a minute there [laughs].

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:47:16] Nobody asking if you're Black. So my dad is adverse to that because, again, his mindset, as I mentioned, if you hear that story of his background as being Chinese, and all his relationship with the indigenous Indonesian, they are darker-skinned than us. So when you look at a darker-skinned person, he just - and all that trauma comes in. All that PTSD comes in. You look at them differently, basically. So he asked me [whispers], "Oh, is he Black?" I said, "Yes daddy, he is." And the first conversation - again, my dad does not understand. To him, Black is - this is what he said to my husband, my poor husband: "So, you're Negro." That's what he said [laughs]. My husband didn't know what to do. It's like, "What did you just say?" But to him it is not - he has no idea that that is insulting to a Black person because - [session break]

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:48:33] It's recording, okay. So today is the 6th of February, 2021. My name is Eleonora Anedda, and this is part two of an interview with Tinny. So Tinny, the last time we talked, you were telling me about the first time that your parents met your husband. So would you like to tell me more about that story?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:48:57] Sure, sure. It is a very interesting one that I always tell people again and again, because it's funny to some people, not funny for other people. So I don't think my father realized or knew he was Black. I think not until I actually introduced him. I brought him home. And so they sat down, they talked, and it's very funny. My dad asked him, "So, are you Negro?" I didn't even know, because they were outside. They were outside talking on the balcony. So I thought, "Oh yeah, great chat. Looks like they're getting along. Looks like they're okay." My husband was actually smiling and laughing all the time, and I was like, "Ah."

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:49:56] I didn't realize, not until the next day. Then he actually told me, "Guess what your father asked me." [laughs] And I was just like, "What did he say?" What context? Not that my father is not racist against Black people. It's just that in his culture, growing up as an Asian and not Western educated, to him, it was okay to call someone that. So basically, "You're Black." And it's probably part of my fault too, not preparing him, and I'm telling him, "Please don't say that." Honestly, you know what? I didn't even realize that he didn't know that. Maybe that was it. I would have prepared him thinking that, "Oh, my dad should have known better." Just like me, should have known better. So I just assumed that, and apparently I assumed wrong.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:50:50] But my husband wasn't upset, and I think he realized that as well, that it's a cultural barrier, a language barrier. And then we had to reeducate my father and said, "Don't ever say that again to another Black person. So if this relationship went okay," I said - and indeed, I married him - "you are going to meet a lot of Black people [laughs], family. I was like, "Do not say that to their face." And he looked at me, he went, "Oh, was that wrong to say that?" "Yes, dad." I mean, that was 1960 or whatever. And he's never left Asia. So in Indonesian context, to him it's okay. So that's what you call them. So, "No dad." So that's how they met. But everything is fine now. They get along well, and yeah, it's all good [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:51:44] Yes, but I understand what you mean by it, he didn't know because of the cultural setting and he just didn't know.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:51:53] Yeah, yeah.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:51:56] So I think we also left off, you were still in Singapore because you met husband in Singapore.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:52:06] Correct, yes I did. Yes, yes.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:52:08] Yeah. And then how did you end up in Texas?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:52:11] Oh, how did I end up in Texas? Yes. So I think, again, I always tell people, and I might tell you as well before that, he came home, I moved. He moved to me. Because of work, I think predominantly, because of that for us. And also wed decided that we would like to raise our son. So we had a baby together, we had a child, a son, in Singapore. And we would like to raise him - and we need to decide at that point. He was going to be three. Would we like to raise him in the bubble that is Singapore? That is great. I mean, Asian, and do we want to raise him as that? Or do we want to - he's American, and raise him in more that culture? American culture, Black and everything.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:53:05] Of course, job came along, and there was an opportunity, and so we decided, "Okay, let's do it. Do it now." He was three, it's much easier. Why Texas? Okay, that would be interesting. It wasn't Texas to begin with [laughs]. It wasn't Texas at all. So it was California. Of course, it's California. I mean, he's tech, he's in tech, and look at me. I mean, Asian. But the last thing we want to go is Texas. But having said that, though, if he would say, "Tinny, let's go to Texas," this Tinny probably didn't realize how bad Texas was or what reputation it had. I'd probably say, "Yeah, let's go." So it was California, it was the Bay Area, it was all great.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:53:48] And we ended up there because of work. So he has an opportunity, tech. We landed in San Jose, about an hour from San Francisco. So we were

there for about nine months. And again, housing was an issue, looking for a house. House is great, school is bad. School is great, the house is bad. So that kind of dance for about nine months, solid nine months. We were renting in an apartment. Great apartment, don't get me wrong. I wasn't working, so I was just me at home. No driver's license [laughs]. Couldn't drive on the other side of the road. So I was stuck at home with a three year old, [inaudible] three year old. So it was very new. It was very new and very different, let's put it that way. And my husband had to drive about forty-five minutes every day, one way, to work. It's very common in the Bay Area.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:54:51] And so nine months like that, and you did not feel that you have roots, you have home, you know what I'm saying? You're renting, and it's very fluid, and it's very uncomfortable in some ways. And every weekend spent hunting for a home. Instead of building relationship, building roots, starting thinking about friends and all that. So after nine months, we looked at each other, we go, "We might need to rethink this." And I'm getting impatient as well, I suppose. I wanted to start my life [laughs], and this is not it. Doesn't look like it is. And I just don't want to get disappointed again. You put a bid on a house, didn't happen. And then you just get very disappointed.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:55:42] After a while we go, "Huh. Let's see what happens on another tech hub in America, in United States." Of course, it's just Silicon Hills of America. It's here in Austin. So to be honest, my husband didn't even realize, didn't think about it was me who was searching. Of course, I have time. The three-year-old, got nothing else better to do [laughs] but research. It's like, "Where would I live next if it's not here in lovely California? Where would I live next?" I go like, "Okay, tech hub America." So I got Silicon Valley and then Silicon Hills. "Where is this? Oh my god, it's Austin, Texas." And then I realized, as well, one of our good friends who had kind of same path as us, there were expat living in Singapore. They were working in Singapore, and then they moved to California, and then they moved to Dallas. And I was thinking, "Oh, if they can wing it, so could we. Why don't we check it out?".

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:56:47] So I told my husband when he came home, and he looked at me funny. "Do you know Texas? How much do you know about Texas?" And honestly, as I said, I didn't realize why he asked me that question. And I was like, "Why not? It's tech. You can get a job. So if they can do it, somebody else can, why can't we?" And he agreed. He agreed to entertain my idea. And we lined up Austin, Dallas, Houston, actually, we had a look at all three cities. And finally we decided, "I think it's Austin. It's better." And at that point, I think I got to know a little bit better, a little bit more research. And he points at me a certain direction and said, "Tinny, look at this, look at this, and look at this." I went like, "Oh okay, so it's a red state. Ah, okay. So are there certain places I don't want to go? Okay." He was like, "So Austin." I'm like, "Why not?" Austin seems to be the blueberry patch in a strawberry farm, they call it. And yeah, and that's how we ended up in Austin.

**Eleonora Anedda** [00:58:03] After your husband told you a little bit about Texas, what is it that scared you the most?

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:58:12] You know what, honestly, I was, at that time, somebody who just moved country. I try not to look at the negative, scare myself. I tried to have very - I tell everybody this - have a very low expectation, almost to no expectation. So if I'm disappointed, guess what? It's okay, because I set myself for it. So if not, then it's a bonus. So that's how I personally deal with things. And that was my mindset at that time. And when we arrived, same thing. We arrive here in Texas, we got a lovely home, and a lovely neighbor came out to say hello and all that.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:59:05] And the way I approach everything from then on, relationship, our friends, school, parents, all that, I have no expectation of who you are. I don't want to have any. Are you Democrats, are you Republicans? Are you racist, are you not? So you just a human being. I just look at you like that. And that's how I approach things. And with that, I just try not to be scared, again, not to be negative and all that. And that is how I lived the first, I would say, two years, and that was 2014. That was election. Yeah, okay, so just '14, '15, '16.

**Tinny Widjaja** [00:59:46] And ramping up to that, people are talking about politics, 2015, '16. Everybody that I met tried to nudge me. "Tinny, where do you live?" I said like, "Oh, I live in Bee Cave, Lakeway." Looked at me funny, it's like, "Oh, Lakeway. How do you like it? So how are the people there?" Again, I didn't think of it that they were actually maybe trying to send me some signal. "Are you okay?" [laughs] "Okay, Tinny." And these people are some friends that live in Austin, I mean, closer to Austin. It's a very, very different dynamic compared to here, Lakeway, the White Whale of Austin, they call it. So it's like, "Are you okay? How do you like it? How are the friends?" And I said like, "Yeah, they're very nice. Everybody's very nice."

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:00:34] And again, I try not to zero in on what they say to me and all that. And I was and still am the first one to reach out and say hello to people, to introduce myself, my culture without wanting to worry about, "What will they say about that?" And honestly, I haven't had anyone, I had anyone in that first two years being very negative to me, except when I walk in HEB, people look at me funny. Sometimes some of them do [laughs]. And I would say, "Oh, why is that person looking? Maybe he recognized me, maybe he thought he recognized me? Hey, we all look alike, right?" It's like, "Oh, some famous celebrity from somewhere, like cooking video or something." Who knows? So that's what I tell myself. They're not being anything, they're just like, "Oh, you look like you don't belong here as well. You look interesting. You look whatever." So I haven't had anyone come up to my face and say bad things.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:01:42] And then the first two years, again, coming 2015, '16, people are talking about politics a lot. Some of my friends started to, again, talk to me about that. "Tinny, oh, this and that." And I remember one of my good friends across the street, the first person - and we are still very good friends until now, and we are very close, all this neighborhood. She's - whole family's clearly Republican, day one and will never change, and they still haven't. However, here's the twist, okay? Here's the twist. So 2015, we're talking about politics. And of course, that's what's everybody talk about.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:02:20] You're sitting out on the driveway drinking. That is the only thing people talk about, Trump and Hillary. "So, what do you think?" Stuff like that. And I go, I would love to have the first woman president, but guess what? I don't think this country's ready." That's what I said, number one. I would want [inaudible], but I don't think this country's ready. And as far as Trump is concerned - and I know that they're Republican. [inaudible] and I must tell you this, I said, "He's an idiot, and he will be an embarrassment. I am not scared if he's going to destroy the country from economy perspective, all that. This country will go on. We have a lot of fundamentals. This country will go on from that perspective. But I'll guarantee you. Talk to me again in four years. We will be embarrassed to know him, because this person is just an idiot." And I don't want my son going to school and say, "This is my president, President Trump. And that's how he looks like. That's how he talks." I was like, "Uh-uh, no. I don't want that."

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:03:18] True enough, that came to fruition. And guess what this person say? They basically have AK-47 in their house, guns, everything. The whole thing. And he looked at me, "Tinny, I agree with you. I completely agree with you. He's an idiot. Guess what? They didn't vote for Trump. They did not vote for Trump 2016. They did not vote for Trump 2020." But they will tell me this, "Tiny. I will never be a Democrat. I'm always the GOP. I'm very sad right now," so we fast forward and, "I'm very sad right now, because I think we Republican, our GOP culture and person and all that, it's gone. The GOP that I know," that they know, "it's gone."

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:04:08] They're very embarrassed, totally. And there are certain things that we will always disagree on, as far as the values are concerned. But these people are definitely not racist, and of course, they are not Texan. They are not from Texas. They're from New York. But as far as that value, that concern, they're probably one of the few, the unusual ones. So friends that I made here that first two years, I try not to talk politics to them. It's just like, "You get along, we get along." I look at you as a person, great.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:04:52] However though, I must say - again, fast forward 2020, I have to be honest with you. I can't do that anymore. I cannot do that anymore. I cannot look at another person not thinking, "What are you thinking of me? What is your value? Where do I draw the line? It's getting harder. It's getting harder for me living my personal values or being true to my - basically, "I don't see politics. I don't see that. That's not what guide me,." But yeah, it's getting harder. It's getting harder. And all I see right now, it's not that me, Tinny first, a woman, a mom, all that. All of a sudden, I'm Asian, which was not the case when I first got here. I tried not to do that. So I'm just a person, you know me as a person, and I know you as a person. I don't care you're White, you're Black, you're Hispanic, you're what have you [inaudible]. But right now, not as easy. I do question. So yeah, that's Texas now [laughs] for me [laughs].

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:06:08] If I can ask, was there a turning poi in your life? [inaudible] "I cannot [inaudible] myself what you think of me."

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:06:23] Yeah, I would say two things. Two points. The first one was, I can tell you this. It was George Floyd. That was it. That was it. When the Black Lives Matter first came up, when people said, "Oh yeah, all lives matter Tinny, why Black?" And I couldn't explain to them why. When this all came out and all that, "All lives matter Tinny. Why must just Black matter?" I didn't know how do I explain to them. So I just thought, "Yeah, whatever." I just let it go. And I was like, "Yeah, fine. Let's not talk about that. Let's talk about something else." Although I do have a Black husband and Black son. So fine, again, "You're good human beings. You're treating me well. Let's not go there. Let's just ignore that."

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:07:17] And then you have Kaepernick being, basically, penalized for doing what he was doing. Everybody was going, "Oh, you're disrespecting the flag." Again, do I want to get in there and explain to people, or I just, "You know what? It's not important? Whatever. You say whatever you want." So I let that slide as well. You get what I'm saying? That moment when George Floyd happened, again, we're two months into pandemic. Everybody is on heightened [laughs] sensitivity anyway, for a lot of reasons.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:07:56] And then something just clicked. When I saw that policeman with his knee on that poor, poor man, I go, "Huh. So that's what it means. So that's how I explain it. Why when somebody kneeled, he's making a statement, you guys are angry, and he didn't kill anybody. And this dude here has his knee on someone's neck and killed

someone. Tell me. He's protesting the same thing, right?" But what else can we tell you? How else can we tell you? We tell you the nice way [laughs]. Not killing, not hurting anyone, no protesting, nothing, we're just calmly telling you we are protesting, so you pay attention. I'm kneeling. Let's have a conversation. That's what he wanted. And then we got to this point, nothing's changed, and then someone died. And we're all angry. Don't tell me you still haven't got it.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:08:59] So it's this a frustration that's why. And also the point that at that point, four years ago when all that - again, Black Lives Matter, 2014 when I got - my son is three. To me, it does not ring. It's not as urgent. You know what I'm saying? "Oh, it's baby, I have time." But now I look at the situation around me. I have a nine-year-old, or a turning-nine-year-old, and soon he'll be a young man. Maybe the police will go after him. Then what? How can I protect him? Because nothing's changed. I've been here for six years. Look at this. We said it nicely, nobody listened, [laughs] and then somebody had to do that again. So when is this going to end?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:09:48] And that's the turning point. And I go, "Enough." And that's enough. And I have a son to protect. If I want to continue to live here, I have to do something. I cannot ignore it anymore. And that's a point where I have to be more active. And of course, looking again at the - we are having an election, and if this person is still there, I can't tell you. How can I continue to be here and raise a child? What am I going to tell him? That we're just gonna take it every day? Take it and not do anything? No, that's just not me anymore. So yeah, that's the turning point.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:10:32] And another turning point would be, again, after we won - let's not talk about what if we didn't win [laughs]. What if he was still in office? So even after we won, clearly people are still crying, "fraud, fraud." Like, "What do you mean?" Smart, intelligent people. If you are not, I get that. You are the deep in a Q trench, that I get. I get if you're crying still, "Fraud, somebody stole it from me." I have friends who are, oh my god, highly educated, look nice, only speak nice to me [laughs]. I don't think they're racist or anything, or a bad person. But they did tell to my face, "Tinny, it's stolen." "What is stolen? [laughs] What do you mean? What is stolen?" I said, "What? So if it's stolen, how come we lost Texas? We would have won like crazy in Texas [laughs]. We lost badly in Texas. What do you mean it's stolen? Oh, if it's stolen, I would have steal it from you guys, from Texas." And then they go like, "Oh, okay." [laughs].

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:11:48] You know what? I have shut down so many people, and that's the second turning point. Why would I want to be nice or pretend to be nice or try to be civil, be the first one that say, "Hey, let's put all this aside, and let's talk." How can you talk to someone who is clearly just not logical whatsoever. And then from then on, do you want to peel that off? Stick with it and say, "Why are you like that? What's your [inaudible]?" I'm just so tired. I don't want to do it anymore, Ele. I just can't anymore. My compassion has a limit, [laughs] and my energy does have limit.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:12:42] Because of that, now when I look at my circle of friends, I slowly - I hate that. I hate losing friends, losing my contacts and all that. But I can slowly look at it squarely and say, "When was the last time you and I talked? Maybe six months ago. Are you that important in this relationship? Not really." I haven't talked for six months anyway. Or just Facebook, "hi" texts. Does it matter? It doesn't matter, really. And you're building different contexts now. I lost a few, and I gain many, too, here in Texas. I really do. And I think if I continue with what I'm doing right now with the activism that I'm doing.



**Tinny Widjaja** [01:13:29] Part of that thing, the turning point, the calling, I say, "What should I do? What will be the concrete thing that I could do?" Two things. One that I've been doing is getting involved in Lake Travis Progressives, a great, great, I would say, group. A movement, if any. I wouldn't even call it organization. We're not really. We were even told, "Oh, Lake Travis Progressives, the one that's six people sitting at a kitchen table and try to take the world." What they said to us. We have the opposing group, if I may. Here in Lakeway as well. The patriot group. Oh, they're very loud. They're so loud. Sometimes the banter on Facebook is just so funny, and they call us that. "Oh, those six people around the kitchen table who's trying to take over the world." Yes, that group.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:14:25] Anyway, so yeah, joining them has been a lifesaver. And I must say, that's not just for me. I would say for a lot, a lot of democrats, progressive families, moms, parents here, we found the group, and they found us, and we were able to give them a safe space to talk. To share and give each other support. I think it's very important. And the other one, it's also through my Buddhist community that I happened to find when I arrived here in Austin, Texas. The last six years have been a blessing to know them personally for my own cultivation, for my own reconnecting with myself. I think it's very important knowing that you have another way of, I guess, reinventing yourself, with a Buddhist philosophy, does really help a lot. Finding who you are again.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:15:28] And that has opened a lot of doors for me as well, to truly take actions through the interfaith community that I've built and cofounded here, again, in Lake Travis. It's called Interfaith Ambassadors of Lake Travis. We are the first one here in Lake Travis that it's trying to do that from faith perspective. And yeah, I'm just trying to juggle that, faith and politics. I know sometimes you just - Should you? Should they be one and the same? It's hard. Very interesting. I get an invite from Tiffany to contribute in Christianity. The White Christianity, if I may put it that way. So how is that compared to other religion? So how do you see that? I must say from this perspective, though, it's not that difficult.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:16:46] But I get that though, as a Christian nowadays, if you question what brand of Christianity you are. And that has fixed into politics, so to speak. So when I was doing my interfaith, I tried not to put your politics hat on, so to speak, not making them oppose each other. And that's always a funny thing. My friend in Lake Travis Progressives is always saying, "Tinny, Tinny, you will be the interfaith. You will be the one that helps everybody, unite everyone. It's like bad cop, good cop kind of thing. Tinny's going to play the good cop and always be the one that on the faith sides, hug them, bring them together. We're left, we're left side, but we're not all radical, let's put it that way. So as I'm trying again to use that faith side of me, the harmony, the unity, and the peaceful Buddhist philosophy to try to blend that into my activism. I don't know if I'm jumping all over the place, but yeah.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:17:52] No, not at all. I actually wrote down the organization that you are a part of, because I wanted to ask you, what's your role and how you came to find community with them? So thank you for sharing that. How does the Buddhist philosophy shape your life?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:18:13] Oh, good question. So when I first arrived here, a bit lost, yes. I must say a bit lost, yes. Because the first time ever, I did not work. I had been a very successful financial executive for the last almost twenty years when we decided, "Okay, it's time to refocus, raise family." Focus time. And I'm here in America and being in Austin, it's something that I consciously told my husband that it's maybe sacrifice from my end,

because if I wanted to do financial, I need to be in east coast. I need to be in Boston, Chicago, New York, not Austin. Or at least Dallas, but I don't want to be in Dallas [laughs].

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:19:00] So it's a sacrifice, and I was prepared, and that's when I set low expectations. So being a bit lost, yes. Trying to find myself, absolutely. That reinventing Tinny version, I don't know, one, two, three. Probably three, yeah, Tinny version three, trying to find Tinny version three. And I think Buddhist philosophy, one thing that I like and has helped me is it asks you to actually rely on yourself a lot. It's self-reliance, and find that strength within you, who you are, truly are. And I think that speaks to me because, yes, I felt I've been stripped. Been stripped of all the identities that I've known the last twenty years. Successful person, I earn X, Y, Z. And being a mother is very new.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:20:11] Being mother is very new. And it's okay. But all that I've known, of course, for the last - when I got here, I was thirty - let me see. So I had my son when I was forty. Forty-three, forty-four when I got here. So the last forty years, take out whatever, college, then have twenty, twenty-five years. That's all I know. Tinny is this: hard-working, always work, is always very successful, every year is always better than the previous year. And that's what I always had. Promotion after promotion. And I was the youngest managing director in my office, and all of a sudden I had nothing [laughs]. I had nothing.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:21:02] And when people ask you, "What do you do?" It's like, "Oh, I'm stay at home mom." It's like, oh, that feels really - roll of the tongue really weird. And I don't like that. Honestly, I didn't like that, but I know it's a decision I've made. So that helped me, that principle of self-reliance. Find who you truly are when you don't have anything else. What are you made of? Who you really are. And that principle helps. And knowing what is real and what is true, what will never change. You see?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:21:42] And again, if you bring that to whatever's been happening right now around us, you sometimes need to take a step back, and again, look inside. What is the "why" here? Why'd the person do this? Why the person did that. And who am I responding to that, truly? So what's truly happening here? That again, that practice helps to always look inside first. Understand, "Why am I doing this? Why am I saying this?" [laughs] And how should I do it then?" The "how" would be what is true, what is never changed? What is it? Kindness. Compassion. Never change. Always true. I don't care wherever you come from, whatever angle you come from, that's always true. Doing the right thing. It's always good.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:22:43] And if people ask, "What is Buddhist philosophy if I may sum it up into one line?" And that's what we always use in our temple as well. Very easy. Everybody will get that. Whatever age you are, whatever level you are, it's, "Think good thoughts, say good words, and do good deeds." And that's all it is every day. And you ask me, how has it changed me? That's how it is. So I think first good thoughts. What's good? It's good for everyone. It's good for me, good for everyone. Again, that good will never change. And then, what do I need to say here? Be careful what you say, because it matters. It does matter. So it's very important.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:23:33] And that's why nowadays, all the Facebook and everything that's going on, that's why people are too fast to react. And they'll speak like it doesn't matter, you just type something and you share something, it doesn't really matter. And it does. It does matter. And a lot of people get fooled, because we all know that. That is one of the problems we have right now. And then, do good deeds. That's all, and I don't care. I always tell people, "Talk is cheap. You can say whatever you want, but what have you

done? What have you done?" So just do good deeds and keep busy with that. And I always tell little kids who like to come visit our temple, "If you don't understand, whatever. Just keep on doing all those three things, and you're too busy doing good things, you won't have time to do bad things, so then everyone will be fine." So that's how it's changed me and that is how it's guiding me until today.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:24:32] That was wonderful. Thank you for sharing.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:24:35] Oh, thank you.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:24:37] How did you find community in Austin?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:24:43] How do I find community in Austin? It depends. I think, again, if you ask me, seven years I've been here, it changes. The path changes. And some of them just found me. Some I actively seek them out. And for me, when I first got here through the school, that is one community. Because that's all you do. Driving to school and back and getting to PTO [parent-teacher organization], that's how I get to know people. So to actively put myself out there. And then the community here in the neighborhood. So that was the first couple of years, it's just that. Basically more the social aspect of it, the family aspect of it, that kind of community.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:25:30] But as I grow out of that, again, once I got into the temple, be more active in that. And all of a sudden, I see there are other communities out there. So that's how I find that community. And then with the Lake Travis Progressives, and that also opens another door to connect, not just people around here, where I live in the vicinity of Bee Cave, Lakeway, but also outside. When you said community, it feels like, what is your community when you have to ask yourself that. The definition of community. What is yours? Politics, the Lake Travis Progressives kind. The Buddhist kind. Who is your tribe? Who is your community? Good question. I don't know.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:26:42] Right now it would be - it would be definitely - I know what it is not [laughs]. I know what it is not. I know what it is not. And the rest? The rest going forward, I think I would prioritize seeking those like-minded that will allow me to grow. I think my principle has been always, every year I do three things new, my three things. A new skill, new person, and just something new to do. I don't care what it is, however silly it is, that I've never done before. So to do meaning also to travel to a new city, and even little town that I've never been. So that's how I would find my community, so to speak as well.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:27:51] How do I find it? It's always new. I refuse to be stuck, let's put it that way. So yeah, new skill, what is it? New skills I can learn this year, every year. And hopefully with that, I can find my community too, that way. The community of that skill that let me grow. And either one would be new. A new person is very important. So you Ele, last year, you tick the box, someone new [laughs]. So I try honestly every month to get to know someone new, one person at least. Always my networking mantra is that one new person I've never known before. One person that I've known, but you need to reconnect with the person, because that's how you continue that relationship.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:28:46] So always, always trying to do that. And also one, I would say, a relationship that is, again, geared towards what I do as far as not just social, work, career, all that, that so-called professional networking kind of thing. So I would like to seek that as well. So yeah that would be - I think I would consciously do that now, seek that community that can support me, so it's no longer just, "Oh, you're having fun, social. Hey!" Smiling,

"All good." Neighborly, of course, but I think I want more now to see how can I continue to grow and also expand that to, obviously, my responsibility as a parent and for my child. I think that that's important.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:29:43] And how have you seen - if you have seen it - Texas change since you moved?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:29:55] That's an interesting question. Coming from, I guess, having very low expectations to no expectation of what's about, fast forward seven years. This past election has clearly opened up my eyes to a lot of things that how Texas politics, it's a steep, steep road to overcome. I mean, if we were Democrats. So from that perspective, how much has Texas changed? I don't think so it has changed much, I'm afraid [laughs]. And I would like to be proven wrong, or let's put it that way. I would like to be part of it that prove it to be wrong. So yeah, that's what it is.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:30:45] But if you ask me how much has it changed the last seven years, to be honest, from that perspective, now that I dig deeper, it hasn't changed much. However, I can see again from just the demography of where I am right now, I can clearly see that a lot more progressive than when I started, I would say seven years ago. I must say it is. A lot more people from outside with clearly a progressive mind and very open to other values than what Texas was known for. But yeah, I would like to be part of that change, so to speak, and see change.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:31:30] I don't want them to lose the uniqueness of being Texas. And everybody says, "Texas, oh yeah. Cactus, queso, cowboy hats and boots, and it's all great." I want those. Nobody wants to take those away from you, not even your guns. You're okay. Keep them. So we're all okay with that. But the Texan that is so to speak, the hillbilly - it's probably very rude to say that. But closed I should say, closed. Let's use that word, because I always believe highly educated is not the same as being highly intelligent.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:32:11] So I would say closed. I would like that kind of Texas change, open up a little bit more. And it's probably hard seeing Texas, while it is one of the largest states you have, and so many rural areas, it's kind of hard to change that, I think. But the city, the core city itself, look at Austin. The last seven years, want to know what changed? Just look at the property values. Look at the number of restaurants. Look at all the number of companies are coming in here. In that respect, it has changed a lot from that angle, I suppose. I've seen that change a lot.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:32:57] What does Texas mean to you?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:33:00] It's a good question. What does Texas mean to me? It is home now. I have had many homes. Let me see, born in Indonesia, partially educated in Australia, started my career, kind of started my life, so to speak - after college, that's when your life starts, real life - in Singapore, in Asia. So I would say Australia, maybe not as much a home, but I would say definitely hometown home, Singapore home, and this is my third home.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:33:45] And I would like to see it as home, and I've seen many people who moved here, again, having set an expectation, which is fine. I think it's what you have. And then they get very disappointed, either disappointed or never felt this is home, never wanting, or fighting it. They're fighting it now. Want it to be something else. But you can't. It's not. It's Texas. And they wanted it to be something else. And I try not to do that. I would

like to love Texas, and I do. I do. I do in a lot of ways. I find it enchanting [laughs] in Texas's way, because it's very different. Very different culture. And it will be home for me. It will be at least for the next - let me see - eight years. Until my son finished school, we don't plan to be anywhere.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:34:48] And also, I would say it's a little lab for me, laboratory for me to test a few things. That's how I see it. Because what's the point being in California? What's the point being back in Asia if you're doing the same thing? You can't test your mettle. You can't grow. The last twelve months have made me very uncomfortable. At the same time, I have also learned a lot, and I think I'm ready to bring it to the next level, so to speak, that it will be a place where I can test myself, a few theories that I still have. And a little social lab, if I may say, of raising my child, home. Yeah, raising my child, being in America with all that's going on right now, and here in Texas. If it's in New York, again, California, too easy [laughs]. So I love challenge, just put it that way. I love challenges. So home and lab, let's put it that way. That's how I see Texas.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:36:03] I love what you said about that California and New York, "It's too easy."

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:36:09] Too easy. I'm majority gal. You know that I've been Asian in the Bay area and many parts of [inaudible]. Trust me, I'm the majority. I look like this. I have no problems. And what's the point? I might as well stay in Asia. Wouldn't that be better? So I told my husband that. "What's the point?" This is great, and yeah, I would like to be part of that change. I do believe Texas is ready, and I think every four years, it will get closer. I think a lot of things still need to be done, and now I'm getting a bit smarter and educated [laughs] on where are the so-called pockets that need to change and some things that will never change unless something truly changed. It's nothing I can do about it right now. But those that I can do, I am starting now. So yeah, 2021, it'll be it.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:37:12] That's great. So I have one last question. But before I ask that, I wanted to see if there's anything that maybe I haven't asked that you'd like to talk about. And you can take your time to think about that. No rush.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:37:39] No. I think I've shared my journey as I was growing up, my faith or my faith perspective, yes. Present here now in Texas, before. Yeah, I think we covered mostly. I was thinking that Tinny version one, two, three, and I'm on Tinny version four now. So maybe we can chat again [laughs]. Come talk to me again by end of the year or something or by next year or something, or 2022 midterm [laughs]. It's like, "Tinny, how is it? How are you doing?" You know what? I don't want to be a politician, no, no, no. Everybody I know has said, "Tinny, would you run for school board? Run for something. You'll be very good at it." It's like, "No, thank you." [laughs].

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:38:40] First, I'm not a citizen yet. I can't be part of that. So I need to be a - oh, yeah. that will be one of the things to do this year. Probably go for my citizenship. I'm still like, "Okay, let's see. Let's see how it goes." But yeah, a politician? No, I don't think so I want to run for anything. But would I like to be part of someone's campaign? Maybe. Maybe I would like to do that. So that's probably another thing, if you ask me. I haven't covered it, it's that - How would like to see that? I don't know. I'm thinking. I'm thinking. Running for an office? No [laughs]. But yeah, I will support someone, truly support someone. So we don't want to be the six person around the kitchen table, we want to do more. I want to do more basically, to make that difference.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:39:40] So to conclude this interview, I don't know if you remember, but the first interview we had scheduled was on Election Day.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:39:55] It was [laughs]. What was I thinking [laughs]?

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:40:02] And I remember that you were helping at the polls and you were wearing your - how can I say? - your activist hat.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:40:23] Correct, yes.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:40:24] And you were participating, and you were very involved in that. And because this interview will be stored into an archive, and so people in fifty or a hundred years could listen to it, so someone in the future, your son, your grandchildren could listen to it. And is there something that you would like to say to future [listeners]?

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:40:50] Oh, okay. This is hard. What would I say [laughs]? Never take democracy for granted. I would say that. Never confuse freedom to recklessness and no limit, no boundary. That's a very different freedom. Understand what freedom means. With freedom comes responsibility. Remember Spiderman [inaudible] [laughs]. But yeah, freedom comes with responsibility. It's not to be abused. Do not take for granted that democracy is always here, especially in this country, the country that is one of the largest democracies in the world. It is also very vulnerable, let's put it that way.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:42:13] And also, I would like to say to whomever sees this in the future, that always, always do the right thing. It is sometimes very hard. It's difficult. But if you do the right thing, always remember, it's always worth it. That hard work is always worth it. And always remember that humanity wins. It sucks sometimes being the good people [laughs]. It sucks, feels like we'll be losing every time. But in the end, in the end, humanity will prevail. Truth will prevail. Righteousness will prevail. Justice will prevail. And compassion. Compassion should be the cornerstone of whatever you do. Because with compassion, you will be kinder to yourself and to others. To yourself first. It's very important.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:43:22] And also have hope. Always have hope, because I think without that, I don't think anybody can continue the next day. Always have hope. Doesn't matter how bad the situation is, always have hope. And also, last, I would say that even if you do not know what you're doing, just remember that do something that benefit other people. Because if you do believe in the word karma, that's what it is. Karma is not a myth, a mystical magic. It's about doing something to benefit others so that the benefit can continue, so that whomever that the person benefit later will continue to benefit and benefit and benefit. And that's when the universe will come around and protect other people, I should say. And that's how you don't let evil prevail, because if all that is good, somebody does good things, continue to do good things for the others, and make good circle around, they will protect us. That's all I want to say.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:44:32] Well, thank you so much for sharing all of that. It was a pleasure listening to you.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:44:38] Thank you. And again, I know it's taken a few months for this to finally come together. I'm so sorry. Time. And yeah, would love to chat. As you can see, I love to share and talk and hopefully not just the interview, we can continue, continue to talk and build our relationship. And thank you so much for whatever you're doing for us. I

know you've been doing a lot of things behind the scene for IDCL, and I appreciate that as well.

**Eleonora Anedda** [01:45:09] Thank you for participating.

**Tinny Widjaja** [01:45:13] Thank you.