

# Jin-Ya Huang



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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Abuse survivors, Activism, Artists, Arts, Break Bread, Break Borders, Buddhism, Colonization, Community, Culture, Discrimination, Education, Family dynamics, Immigration, Immigrant parents, Immigrants, Language, Lunar New Year, OK - Tulsa, Race, Racism, Sexism, Taiwan, Taiwan - Taipei, Taiwanese-Americans, The University of Texas at Dallas, Trauma, Travel, TX - Dallas, World War II

## SPEAKERS

Jin-Ya Huang, Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz

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Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:02

Hello, it's October 27, 2022. My name is Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz, interviewing Jin-Ya, and I'm located in Oak Cliff, Dallas, Texas, for the Gone to Texas oral history project. Jin-Ya, can you introduce yourself, share your pronouns, and share where you're located today?



Jin-Ya Huang 00:23

Absolutely, my name is Jin-Ya, Jin-Ya Huang. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I am located in Old Lake Highlands. That's a part of East Dallas, which is north of White Rock Lake and the Casa Linda area. For those of you who actually know any of where this is, I'm really close to the Arboretum. How about that? Thanks.



Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:47

I love the specificity of your answer.



Jin-Ya Huang 00:48

[Laughs] General vicinity, yeah, thank you.



Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 00:56

What is your ethnic background, Jin-Ya?



Jin-Ya Huang 01:01

So I grew up in Taipei, Taiwan. I was actually born in Hsinchu, which is a little town outside of

Taipei. It actually means "new bamboo." So Taipei literally means the most northern part of Taiwan, the city, and it is the capital. My ancestors are Chinese. My mother's side from the province of Guangdong and my father's side from the province of Fujian, but in the proper Chinese dialect, it would be Hokkien. So I identify as Taiwanese, but I do have Chinese heritage.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 01:54

Thank you. Where were both of your parents born, and what kind of work did they do?

J

Jin-Ya Huang 02:01

So my parents were actually born in Taiwan, and there are from a southwest part of the province. It's called Yunlin, which means "cloud forest" actually - and I am seeing a yard truck, uh oh, pulling up. I hope it's not for me. Anyways, if it is, this may get really noisy. Anyways, it's actually the one of the most impoverished provinces in Taiwan. My dad was born in a merchant village called Huwei, which means "tiger tail" actually, and my grandparents actually were fabric merchants. And then my mother's side, they were farmers. And so my maternal grandparents were in a little village called Douliu, it literally means "six bushels." Yeah, it's funny how [laughs] the names would coincide with exactly what they do.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 03:18

So yeah, my dad actually was a mechanical engineer. He got to finish high school and went to a technical institute, and so he was a mechanical engineer for a cement factory when I was growing up. And then my mother actually started out as a seamstress. She never got to finish elementary school. She needed to - actually, there were eight children in the household. There were six girls and two boys, and so she was asked to actually stop schooling to work, to help out with the family, and this was the beginning of my mother feeling very strongly about how girls needing to receive education. And she obviously cooked and helped out around the house a lot. So when my dad lost his job when I turned thirteen, Taipei was really expensive, because it's a very metropolitan city compared to the south where my parents were born.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 04:25

So when they moved to a bigger city to get us better educational opportunities, it really affected our economic standing, so when he lost his job, it was really challenging. And I grew up with five sisters, and so there - can you actually hear the noises? Oh, you can't? Okay. It may get closer. Anyways, so my parents had heard from my dad's younger brother, who was here in America already. They were actually in Missouri at the time. And my uncle actually went to school for a doctorate in chemistry, and my aunt - my uncle is my dad's younger brother, so the woman that my uncle ended up marrying, my aunt - had a MBA. Sorry about the noise. Is it bad?

J

Jin-Ya Huang 05:36

Yeah, let's take a break for them to leave. Yeah. I could ask them just to leave, but this is probably - [Session Break] - Thank you. So my parents were from the province of Yunlin, which means "cloud forest." And it was one of actually the most impoverished provinces in Taiwan. So my dad actually was born in Huwei, which means "tiger's tail," or "tiger tail." And the paternal side, the grandparents were fabric merchants. So my dad finished high school and was able to become a mechanical engineer at a cement factory. And he actually worked on site all throughout the years that I was in Taiwan. He loved being at the factory. I used to joke, because I grew up with five sisters, so including my mom, there was seven girls in the house, and we had one bathroom. And maybe that was why my dad didn't want to come home. He was at the cement factory, he was on site, he only came home twice a year. So Lunar New Year, and maybe a winter break or a fall break when the kids were more home, and he would come home and visit. And so that was the norm for twelve years when I was growing up.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 07:16

And then my mom was a seamstress, and she actually had to quit school at sixth grade. She never got to finish elementary school, because girls are like buckets of water, like spilled water you don't really invest in. That's a lot of the ancient Asian culture. It's actually an old Chinese saying that married daughters are like water poured out that you can't ever get back. So most people don't invest in girls. They only really more so invested in boys. So my mom was asked to start working right away, and she knew how to sew. So that was really, really helpful to the family for her to help earn an income to help support the families. I learned how to sew on one of those pedal Singer sewing machines, like your grandmother did, I'm sure. And it takes forever. But once you get into a rhythm a bit, it's actually quite interesting.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 08:20

And my parents actually met through an arranged marriage, because my dad has served in the national army, because Taiwan being so small, it's just like Israel. Every man has to serve in the military, so my dad was in the army. And when he came home, he actually didn't have any civilian clothes. So my grandmother on my dad's side actually saved a bunch of fabric and said, "Oh, there's this tailor in the village, just in the neighboring village, in Six Bushels," which is Douliu, where my mom grew up, "and you can just go and get some clothes made." So my dad went, and my mom was the new apprentice there. He forgot all about the clothes, and just ran home and told my grandmother that he finally met the love of his life, and she should hire the matchmaker [laughs]. And the rest, as they say, is history. It was really fun to hear that story, because for a long time, like any married couple, whenever they fought like cats and dogs, I would remind them, "Remember how you met?"

J

Jin-Ya Huang 09:42

So that was what they did in Taiwan. And my mom being one of six girls always helped out with the cooking. Definitely just an amazing talent in the kitchen. So when my dad actually lost his job when I turned thirteen, my aunt and uncle were already here in America, and they were starting a restaurant franchise business, it was called Eggroll Express. And they started them in Tulsa, Oklahoma out of all places. And when they heard that my dad was looking for something as the next step, they told my parents about the restaurant. They had one fancy, formal

restaurant called Peking Garden already, that did really well. And they were like, "Oh, we're gonna do a fast food concept." And so Eggroll Express went head-to-head with Panda Express. Obviously lost, but they were successful at one point. There was sixteen franchises throughout the Southwest.

J Jin-Ya Huang 10:46

And my parents thought about it, and with six girls, too, to raise, it was really tough. And it got really expensive in Taipei, when they moved up north so we can have more access to education. So in Taipei, my oldest sister had actually already gotten engaged. And my second oldest sister was seeing somebody very serious, that we knew that the first one was already basically engaged and married off. And the second one was really in a good spot. She had finished formal college and was going to teach, and so my parents said, "Okay, the two oldest girls are going to stay in Taiwan." So they brought the four younger ones, four younger sisters, here to America. So we actually first came to Tulsa, Oklahoma, from Taipei, Taiwan first, and then that was where a lot of the restaurants were. Uh oh [laughs] they're back.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 11:55

Okay, I can hear it a little bit. Is it very distracting for you?

J Jin-Ya Huang 12:03

Just when I thought they were done, so thank you for your patience. So when we came to the States, it was actually first to Tulsa, Oklahoma from Taipei, Taiwan. My mom was actually babysitting, was really my cousin's nanny. So my aunt and uncle had hired my mom first to be their nanny. And then my dad was helping out with the restaurants, so he was a restaurant manager. So it was a huge shift from a mechanical engineer to a restaurant manager. But they did everything they could. They sacrificed their whole lives to come here. My dad was forty-seven at the time, and my mom was forty-three. And my dad spoke a little bit of English, and my mom didn't speak any. So she started out helping my aunt and uncle with my cousins. And I want to say my cousins were eight. Jason was eight at the time, and Janice was four, and my baby sister was seven, and I was twelve at the time.

J Jin-Ya Huang 13:28

So my mom started out as the nanny, and then my aunt discovered how great of a cook she was. Started asking her to come basically cook in the kitchen, and she started helping her replicate the recipes for the franchises. So eventually, some of the franchises came to Texas, to all the different neighboring states, and that's how they got to so many franchises around here. And there was a franchise here in Dallas, Texas that my parents thought did really well, that was over in Farmers Branch, and that's why we moved to Dallas. So their lives changed from mechanical engineer to restaurant manager, and then seamstress to chef. It was big transitions.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 14:23

That sounds like it. Sounds like a lot of pivoting, which is good. Could you describe your childhood? What events or things do you remember about growing up?

J Jin-Ya Huang 14:39

The events I remember about growing up. How many minutes do we have for this? The strongest memories would probably be I knew that my mother was blamed for having girls a lot. They didn't know back then that the sperm is what determines the gender. So my grandmother on my father's side used to beat my mother every time we went to Tiger Tail to visit. And my grandmother would verbally abuse us and tell us that we were really dumb and stupid children that grew up in Taipei and didn't know how to speak Hokkien or Taiwanese, because we were asked to speak Mandarin in school, and that's more the universal dialect. And a lot of times you were prevented from speaking any provincial dialects, because that was considered the improper or the country bumpkin or the silly thing to do. And this was also done to indigenous people, because we weren't the first people on Taiwan. There were already aborigines and native Taiwanese people there. So this is where I struggle a lot calling myself Taiwanese, because I'm not actually native Taiwanese. There are people who were on the island already. They're coming back again, oh my goodness, these yard people.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 16:26

I wonder, is there a possibility of - are you on a laptop where you can pick it up and move to a different room?

J Jin-Ya Huang 16:32

I can, yeah. It's just if I go to the back, they're probably just gonna go to the back also.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 16:38

Okay.

J Jin-Ya Huang 16:40

Let me just, yeah, let me just go. Yeah, there's somebody back here too, but it's not as bad as the leaf blower. Let's see. Okay, I'll just be away from them. Okay. That's better, right?

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 17:08

Yes, yes it is.

J Jin-Ya Huang 17:10  
All right. Which part? The childhood memory.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 17:15  
You were talking about your grandparents.

J Jin-Ya Huang 17:17  
Yeah. So my grandmother beating my mother, this is on my dad's side. She didn't understand why my mother couldn't produce a male heir to carry down the Huang torch. So I remember, she would berate us, the kids, in person and say that we didn't speak her dialect, her language, and therefore, we were dumb and stupid. So it was really challenging going to visit my paternal side of the family, because of just the words, the narrative around girls are worthless. And also, if we didn't do what we were told, we weren't of any value to the family. So that was really challenging. I remember when we would visit, my mom would get beaten, and then she would try to sneak back into the bedroom, to bed, crying, but we would see the lash marks the next day when she was getting dressed. And she tried to hide it as much as she could, but we heard everything. We knew what was happening, but nobody ever talked about it.

J Jin-Ya Huang 18:46  
So we knew why we moved up north. It was because we needed safety, and my mom was trying to provide us that, and my dad, I think, did the best that he could, but he couldn't stop his own parents, his own mother from doing these horrible things to us, and the best he could do is - we were supposed to visit during holidays, but holidays were horrendous. So yeah, I remember that part. And I remember when my paternal grandmother passed away, the Chinese custom is that you - we rode the train from Taipei to Huwei, and at the train station, there's a bus stop. And you take the bus into the village, but then from the bus stop, you had to walk this long gravel road. And I don't even remember how long it was from the bus stop to their home.

J Jin-Ya Huang 19:49  
And it's this long gravel road, and for when my grandmother passed away, the funeral process is that on that long gravel road, you don't just walk it, you crawl on your hands and knees to show your grief. So I was crawling on my hands and knees and bleeding, but I was so happy. Ding dong, the witch is dead. And I knew that I wasn't supposed to feel that way. I was nine years old, and I was devastated that I was happy that someone died. But it was somebody that was hurting my mother for years and years, and hurting us for years and years. And I just knew it wasn't right. So a lot of the sense of justice came when I was really young, just watching these things happen and thinking that I couldn't do anything about it.

J Jin-Ya Huang 20:41

Meanwhile, on the other end, on my maternal side of the family, it was nothing but unconditional love. And it was just such a total opposite from my maternal grandmother. Now, my maternal grandfather was hardcore, he was pretty intense. And being a farmer, he woke me at 3am whenever I came down for summer vacation. I had a whole list of feeding the fish, cleaning the pig pen, and watering the cabbage and mango orchards. If I had to pick something - I was free child labor [laughs]. My cousins and I, there was no playtime. That was what you were supposed to do. And it was really funny, because out of all the six girls, for some odd reason, I was always the only one that ended up on the farm. And I never really asked my mother about this, and I wish I did, but for some - I just assumed that because I was the most unruly one.

J Jin-Ya Huang 21:54

I've always been the black sheep, just really different from my sisters. When you meet my sisters, you'll, you'll be like, "Jin-Ya, one of these things don't belong." And I will tell you, Victoria, I was adopted. I was picked up by the river. I'm an artist, the black sheep, all my sisters are analysts, supply chain specialists. I think the closest one may be the music teacher, but even her, she's so logistics, operations, she produced kids who are a dentist and [inaudible] and are super successful. And it was really funny to look back and think, "What did I define as success?" Because for my grandparents, selling fabric on the street wasn't successful. Coming to America to go to school is very successful. And those definitions were so interesting, like how we measured what those metrics were for success.

J Jin-Ya Huang 23:10

Just having those vivid childhood memories, like if my grandfather on my mom's side would say, "Hey, go catch some fish for dinner." And I would always take the shortcut. I would take the net, and go to the shadowy part of the tree, under the lake, and that's where all the fish would go for shade. And in basically, I would just catch a bunch of fish, big and small, when I was really supposed to only get the big ones. But then my grandmother would say, "She did great. Don't punish her for catching the little ones. She did great. She fished more smartly and not harder." And she would just cook all the fish. So much of the love language came from food instead of words, so you just found your ways around it. But yeah, with that family it was a lot more accepting, and so it was always like the worlds of good and evil almost coexisted in like a both sides of the family. And so those were some of the really strong childhood memories of my grandparents that really shaped my parents of how they parented, and how they raised us, and what their expectations were. Yeah, that's it for that. I'm sure there's other things that we can unpack as we go.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 24:59

Thank you so much. That was wonderful. What are some of your first memories of the United States?

J Jin-Ya Huang 25:07

We came by plane, and I remember that was the first time I was on an airplane, that I was

really mad at my parents for taking me away from my friends. And I was scared and excited, because I had just finished sixth grade, and I was starting seventh grade. And I just started my alphabet and learning the ABCs, but I didn't speak English at the time. So thirteen is just an odd age to go anywhere, and it was a good transitional age. So I remember we came through LAX. In the middle of the airport, my dad got really lost, because we had all these luggages, and we were supposed to do the layover flight from LAX to Tulsa. And after having gone through customs, we got turned around a bit.

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 26:20

So my father had asked for directions to get to our gate, and he didn't know where to go. So he asked this man for directions, and the guy took one look at us and said "Twenty dollars. Twenty bucks. I'll tell you where to go." And my father, desperate, has got his whole family around him and just watching this transaction happen. And he didn't want to lose face, so he produced the money out of his pocket, and handed it to the guy, and the guy walks around the corner, and there it was. And I remember, oh my goodness, I knew America was gonna be tough, but I didn't think it was gonna be this tough, and it was.

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 27:20

The discrimination we had faced from being girls, being poor, being socio-economically disadvantaged, from so many fronts, and my parents growing up, surviving the war, dodging shelling. To go to school, my father had to have - was forced Japanese education from Taiwan being Formosa, and the colonization, the oppression. And being one of many girls, my mom not being allowed to go to school, so many of that - it was just flooding back. It wasn't enough. I think I was at that point of I knew we weren't gonna escape everything, but I didn't know how much more difficult it was gonna be. And when that moment hit, it was like, "Oh, it's gonna be a lot worse [laughs] before it gets better." I think my mom was always the one that had a lot more hope, and my dad was more the pessimist, and I hope I'm a little bit of a combination of the two. But it was difficult watching that happen. That was our first interaction coming to America.

**V** Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 29:03

How long did the process of migration take? Were there any challenges that you can remember for your parents and filling out paperwork or anything like that?

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 29:15

It was a long arduous journey. it took more than probably ten years, in my opinion, for the migration to actually work. So that that comfort level, I don't think, is ever really there. Did we feel welcomed for the most part? Maybe. I think there were definitely people that had really big hearts, the uncle Norman and aunt Janes of the world. But did we feel included with our own family that were flesh and blood? Absolutely not. And it really produced a huge rift between the



adults, especially my aunt and uncle, and also my mom and dad. And my mom was the one that really kept us all together. My dad was like, "We can sever ties now. You don't do that to family." So that part made the migration very, very tough.

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 30:22

Where did you go to school and college, if you went to college, and what did you study?

J

Jin-Ya Huang 30:29

I went to University of Texas at Dallas, because that was the closest place I could go to school and actually still work at the restaurant. So unlike all my sisters who decided, "We're gonna get hitched and leave the restaurant," or "I'm gonna pick the closest school that is far away enough that I can't work at the restaurant anymore." So that was my baby sister's strategy. She went to UT Austin, and she was like, "See ya, wouldn't wanna be ya." And my two older sisters got married, and one moved back to Tulsa, and the other one stayed here and was close, but definitely just was a part of her husband's family, and that was it. She was no longer able to help out with the restaurant. So I was the only child left at the restaurant. So I felt really responsible to stay and help my parents.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 31:28

So I went to UTD, that was the closest school. And I really wanted to study the arts, because I just have this affinity towards everything that is creative. And I knew ever since I was three, that I wanted to be an artist, but being raised Asian and coming to America, I thought the expectations was to study business or medicine or law. All these other aunties and uncles that we knew, that's what their kids were doing. My parents didn't sacrifice their whole entire life for me to go study the arts. So I started out as an international business major, and I was failing accounting and math and science, just miserably. And at one point, it was just like, "I have to come to terms with this. I can't just keep changing my major, and I can't count on the Patel girls to help me through statistics every time. Somewhere, I have to really pony up."

J

Jin-Ya Huang 32:36

So that was basically what happened, and I had to have a moment of truth with my parents and say, "I really want to study arts and humanities. I want to major in literary studies and maybe minor in painting, or study photography and graphic design. Anything that is creative. I can't just do this whole business, law, whatever." And my parents were like, "That's totally cool. It's fine. You're helping out with the restaurant. We'll help you with tuition. As long as you're happy, that's the most important thing to us. We just want you to go to college, get an education, and when we're dead and gone, you can take care of yourself, you're self sufficient. That's all we care about. Because if you go to study something that's for us, then it's not for you. And if you're not happy, we're not happy." And then I was like, "Why didn't you tell me this sooner?" They were like, "We did [laughs]. You just didn't listen." I was like, "Oh yeah, because I was young and stupid. That's right." So yeah, it took a long time to figure that out, but that's where I went to school, and that's what I studied.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 33:55

Thank you. Did you or do you participate in any community events or organizations? And how did you build community in your young adult life and now?

J Jin-Ya Huang 34:09

In my young adult life, because I was so interested in the arts, that was really a huge part of my focus. And I became an abstract artist, so my visual art form was definitely in photography. So I invested a lot of that into the community in the beginning, just realizing that art is my love language, and that's what I did to share with the world. And showing in galleries in New York, Miami, and Dallas was really a nice part of being part of the community. I was raised Buddhist, and so my parents were really involved with the Buddhist Compassion Relief Foundation, which did a lot of disaster relief and social work. I grew up volunteering with my parents. Really, my mom was the one that did a lot of this. She was raising us to be tiny philanthropists. She was like, "We may not have the money, but we always have the time, and the time is the most valuable thing that you can share with your communities."

J Jin-Ya Huang 35:31

So we grew up, me singing very off key, tone deaf, at nursing homes. And because she was a seamstress before my mom became a chef, she taught us how to sew blankets for people who were in shelters and who are experiencing homelessness, or after a big disaster needed blankets and things to keep warm. And because my mom was such an amazing chef that she would cook for galas for hundreds, for the temple's fundraisers, and it didn't matter of anybody's racial, socio-economic backgrounds. Once the casework came in, she just gave herself very selflessly to help out. So cooking was definitely one of her superpowers. And growing up, I watched my mom transform other refugee immigrants and migrants lives in our kitchen. She would just train all these people with job skills and send them on to bigger and better opportunities, no matter the language barrier. She just really knew if she could do this, not speaking any English, not knowing how to drive. And if she was able to learn these job skills and do bigger and better things, that other people could do the same.

J Jin-Ya Huang 37:02

I think again, with the young and stupid theme, I didn't realize a lot of that growing up. And when my parents asked me if I wanted to take over the restaurant when I was done with school, I was like, "Oh, no way, Jose. There is no way I want to ever be in the food business. This is a hard life, yo." It's eighteen hour days at the minimum, and you get up at crack of dawn, you prep, and then you're still cleaning up at last minute. And you did everything. We were cleaning toilets. We were watching people prep, and it was just really, really hard work, and I knew that I was like, "I'm gonna run away to marketing and go into advertising and just do whatever, anything." I wanted to be on the creative side of things, and I did invest in a lot of that, the artists' community, because that's how I communicated.

J Jin-Ya Huang 38:12

But then losing my mom to cancer, she passed away from multiple myeloma back in 2015. Margaret Mei-Ying Huang was her name, and she just poured so much into the community and invested in so much as a chef, as a restaurateur, as a leader. I didn't want any of that to just be gone. So in honor of her legacy, we founded Break Bread, Break Borders, a social enterprise, to work with refugee women from war torn countries and using storytelling, the oral history aspect, to share the history of food and culture, and giving a face to everything that was produced. We basically cook food for good. And really pouring into the community in this way, using art and food, my love language, my mother's love language, and combining the two. We've really been just invested in social justice and in collective impact. So yeah, it's an interesting transition, because I think now that I'm a single mom to a fourteen-year-old boy, just realizing how much my mom made this world a better place for me to grow up in, I really want to do my part for my son to have a better world to grow up in. So I'm just doing my best to honor my mother's legacy.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 40:10

Legacy work, I love it.

J Jin-Ya Huang 40:12

It is. It's all about legacy impact, because it's never too early, and it's never too late to think about what that looks like, sounds like, or feels like.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 40:26

Jin-Ya, I know that we are at the time that we scheduled for, but if you can continue talking, I'm happy to press on in the interview. What do you think?

J Jin-Ya Huang 40:37

Yeah, I think I'm okay for another maybe - I need to double check the time. I don't think I have a meeting until eleven, actually, so let me just check on something real quick. I'll put this on pause, and I'll be right back, okay? [break] Okay.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 41:04

So the next question I have for you is what historic events have had an impact on your life, and how?

J Jin-Ya Huang 41:13

What historical events have had an impact on me and how? I think when I was mentioning

about World War Two, and what happened to my parents, and living through the war, and surviving it, and just experiencing all the trauma from that, and even for my grandparents to go through those kinds of hardships and escaping war to find safety for us, like we were talking about the migration and all that, I think there's so many of those historical events that happen, that creates that intergenerational trauma. And a lot of times I feel like those things are in your bones, that it's not something that you can - in fact, there's a writer that talks about this, and I forget her name now, is it Stephanie Foo? That kind of thing, like trying to figure out what to do with it, I think it affects different people in different ways. And I think for some people, they process it internally.

J Jin-Ya Huang 42:55

And I think at one point, for me, it was listening to activists like Grace Lee Boggs saying, "We're the leaders that we've been looking for." Instead of waiting for Superman to come and save us, it's like, "If not you, who? If not now, when?" That kind of thing. And Helen Zia used to talk about, still does, silence is a privilege. We can go through these injustices and not speak a word of it, which is what a lot of refugees and immigrants and migrants do, is you keep your head down, you work through things, and if you work hard enough, somebody will recognize you, and you'll be celebrated for it, or compensated for it, or thanked for it, but it doesn't happen like that. And I think it just got to a point where I'm looking at different events. We could go even further back to the Chinese Exclusion Act and coolies going around the world finding work and trying to figure out, "Well, where were we welcomed, and where can we work? Where can we find safety? Where can we find a economic harbor?"

J Jin-Ya Huang 44:23

To this day, even how a refugee is defined, it's by war, it's by trauma. It's not even by climate change, it doesn't count if you're escaping from any kind of climate change issues. It doesn't count, if you're trying to escape a economic hardship. It doesn't count if you're just trying to - they say "just" trying to escape violence, gang violence, and drug violence. And it doesn't count as refugees if you're trying to escape from that. Our definitions and our metrics for success also come into play when we talk about the metrics for devastation. I really challenge that, that term. What is trauma? What is the cost of not learning your history and understanding which side you want to be on? Those are really tough to see and understand.

J Jin-Ya Huang 45:38

And because for so long, if it wasn't for my mother telling me about the aborigines and how they were drove to the mountains and forced to speak Mandarin, not to speak their own native dialect, not to practice their ceremonial dances and to preserve their culture and heritage and history, being tortured in that way, I would have never known that side of history, because it's all - the brainwashing and the propaganda that goes around it was so blinding for so long. And if it wasn't for my father telling me what happened to him during the war, and the Japanese education that was forced on him, and seeing his family members, being raped and killed and becoming comfort women, and those those terminologies, those words being used, and even just - he still speaks Japanese fluently to this day of because of that. And is it a blessing? I'm not so sure.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 47:09

Those long term effects are so devastating, and to hear about the food rations that happened from soy sauce, rice, to eggs, and even in a farming village like my mother's, they weren't allowed to eat their own food. They were supposed to export out the flour, and to feed the government and the military families, anybody but themselves. And that's how that province, even though it's the most productive in cranking out food supply and the grains and everything necessary for the country to recover, it became the poorest, the most impoverished province, because they were asking people to give, give, give and not get back. You could tell by even just the years of studies of food nutrition, how much, as farmers, they were experiencing food insecurity themselves.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 48:05

That's tough to hear, but I didn't know any of that. I didn't know any of that. I didn't, they kept so much of it away from us, because we're kids, and they didn't want us to feel the pain or understand the trauma. They just wanted to shield us from all that and get us to safety, but so much of it is in our bones. We know. We remember. And in these current day events, from the anti-Asian hate, from COVID, from the shooting, from everything that's happening in our backyard, racial slurs. And working at the restaurant, I still remember when somebody was unhappy about something, "Go back to wherever the fuck you came from. Go back to your own country. You don't belong here, you're not welcome." All those words hurt. And that's the thing. It's the trickle down of all that, from all the historical events. You re-remember so many of the things, because it is experienced through your bones, your DNA, all that, your blood. You remember, and we remember, and we will never forget.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 49:33

How do we move forward from that together? That is a lot that I think I have been thinking about. There's never really just one historical event that really turns the pages. It's the multitude of them that I just realized, "Oh, this triggered this, and this reminds me of that, and here's what I think of this." And instead of just sweeping everything under the rug like a lot of our people normally do, having the gumption to speak up, and using our voice to tell the truth. As truth tellers, as an artist, especially as a social practice artist, one of my main models is when our community asks for fire, we don't bring it water. It seems so simple, yet it's really difficult to practice. The listening skill, the understanding capacity, there's so many things that come along with that journey.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 50:49

So I can't really say if there's any particular historical events, but I do feel like the stories that my ancestors, and my families, and the people around us that have been able to share fuels us to see what work needs to be done, and the necessary troubles that we need to start to find those creative solutions. And innovation is never about reinventing the wheel. Sometimes it's

just that little twist of adjustment that we can find a better way. And it will take a lot of people to get there together, but having these tough conversations and learning our history and really seeing the path together, it's a lot of work, but it's something that we deem necessary.

J Jin-Ya Huang 51:55  
Yeah.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 51:58  
Thank you. What kinds of traditions and practices do you keep, and why do you continue to practice them?

J Jin-Ya Huang 52:07  
Oh, there are a lot of things culturally. Very Chinese, that I used to throw a Lunar New Year party, because I was like, "Oh, when in Rome do as the Romans do." We did a lot of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year kind of things, but I never felt at home when it was everybody else's holiday, but mine. So when I started, I started throwing the new Lunar New Year parties, and my mom would make dumplings, and we would invite people to come through my house. And it was so nice to be able to have people under one roof and just share a meal. People would ask me, "Are you cooking?" And I'd be like, "No, my mom is." And they're like, "Oh, as long as your mom's cooking, we're there [laughs]. If you're cooking, not so sure about that."

J Jin-Ya Huang 53:07  
It was so fun to have - my dad would be like, "You're wasting so much money. I don't know why you volunteer to do this kind of work. It's so silly." My mom would be like, "This is so great. You know people from all walks of life. I would have never imagined for this for you kids." And she was always so proud. My dad was like the grumpy old man, still is, and a conspiracy theorist to the core, and and my mom was just unconditional loving, everything is great, "I will love you and support you no matter what." And it was just so funny and great and funny-haha to have both sides of that. And I think they instilled so much of it in us in that way that I practice things, a lot of the feng shui, feng being "wind," shui being "water." And just watching the flow and the chi of the world and celebrating, "Okay, you want to have a green fig plant, preferably real, for a money tree." My dad's like, "Millions of people don't practice feng shui, okay, and I think they're just fine." And my mom was like, "It's our culture. It's how we were raised. This is our heritage. We're gonna give red envelopes and money." And my dad's like, "No, not money, we don't give away money."

J Jin-Ya Huang 54:45  
They were so polar opposite. Sometimes working with them at the restaurant was the worst and also the best, at the same time. It's just watching all this, and you're just like, "Gosh, why are you still together? Oh, you stay together because of the kids." And they'll just go back and

forth. And we'll eat lucky foods on days, like birthdays, you eat long noodles for longevity, so you'll always have long life. You wish each other well, and there's never a parting word of goodbye. It's, "I will see you again." There's so many words and traditions that we honor that even - some of this may seem silly, but we talk about going to cemeteries, carrying a special little white envelope with a particular little grass that's called love leaf or love grass, and with a little money inside to keep the evil spirits away. And it's just a practice, maybe some people think it's a superstition.

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 56:04

My ex hated this. And he's fifth-generation Slovenian. He was always like, "You did all these stupid things, and you're making our son do these stupid things." And I'm like, "He's half-Taiwanese and half-Slovenian. He's gonna do these things to honor his heritage and culture. How else is he going to identify as a person?" Yeah, my ex used to joke like, "You're just doing dumb things." But through this, my son has gotten to know that the half of him that he understands. It's like, "Yes, this is what we do. We will eat oranges for lucky food because it rhymes with prosperity. Pineapple, the same thing, and fish rhymes with the word savings, and so you always have money to take care of people, yourself and people."

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 57:00

All these things that I honor along the way, it's to remember and re-remember our ancestors and celebrate them. And to me, it's always gonna come back to food somehow. But a lot of it is just everyday things, and I have fun sharing those with people. And the last thing that we were interviewed for was for moon cakes. And we talked about the mythical legend, and I don't know if you read that article. And we talked about the warring periods, how they used it - actual history - used moon cakes to literally pass war strategies, and that's how they won against Mongolian conquerors. And there's so many different aspects that comes through this. If you don't share that, how else are you supposed to know you as you, as a people?

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 58:01

Recently, my son, I saw that he's taking these AP classes in high school, and I had to dive in to pay for the exams, so they get college credit. And I went to his profiles just to look, because I'm nosy [laughs]. And you know how, in the racial ethnicities, you can check boxes and whatever, and they always make you pick one? Like I said, he's half-Taiwanese and half-Slovenian, and he checked the box for Asian. He identifies as Asian, and I'm like, "Damn, I'm so proud [laughs]. All that brainwashing worked [laughs]." I'm laughing like a mad scientist, like, "Oh, the corruption worked." But that was the thing. His dad knows how to curse in Slovenian. And fifth generation, coming through Ellis Island, they moved to Cleveland, Ohio and grew up in Euclid, and that's the extent of it. Yeah, they'll have blood sausage around the holidays and whatever. There were so few of those traditions and heritage, like cultural celebrations, that it was really difficult for Lang to really bond with that and to identify with that and to celebrate with that.

**J** Jin-Ya Huang 59:30

Whereas me, every day, there's something weird. Like "Oh, Mommy does this." But it's me, and I have fun doing it. And sometimes it feels like a beating. Like, "Oh boy, we can't go to the cemetery." And it's like, "What if it's Día de los Muertos?" It's like, "We're going to a different celebration. Oh no, we still got to carry the love grass and the money in the white envelope," because that's the Chinese thing. But that's just it. We really celebrate that all together. And so that's the fun part that I think - I love sharing these stories, so people understand it more. I love being able to pass it down to my son. And I even love letting his friends know. One of his best friends in school is half-Vietnamese and half-White. And going further with that moon cakes story, recently, with the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, we got little baby moon cakes from 85 Degrees and also Jeng Chi bakery, to hand out to people as gifts. All weird flavors. They had taro, and some normal, coconut, some pineapple, blah, blah, blah. Really fun different fillings inside.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 1:01:04

And Cooper's mom never taught him any of that. They were just very westernized and assimilated. And his dad, who's White, co-parenting with the mom, was like, "We just never talked about it." He was like, "What are moon cakes?" And I'm like, "Dude, here you go." And they had them, and he was like, "I had no idea there's this whole side to my son's culture." He was like, "I want to celebrate this every day." And I love the joy in that. It's like, "Oh!" If he came through it because of his son being half-Vietnamese, great. But if he came through it, just me sharing the story, because I'm crazy and weird, and I want to just shout it out from the rooftop and the mountain top and say like, "This is how great my culture is, and this is what I practice in my heritage. Here's a little gift of my history," with you, then by all means, let's do it together. And so I think that was really fun, doing that.

J

Jin-Ya Huang 1:02:09

And Lang, my son's always like a little bit like, "It's a little cringey when you do that, Mommy, especially when you go into the time loop with people. You can't stop talking and just zip it." And he's like, "But sometimes it's really fun to watch my friends' eyes light up, because they learn something new from you that I know -" He's like, "It may be boring to me, but it's all a part of us, and it's fun to watch people really enjoy and celebrate our cultures together." And he's like, "Sometimes it's a little weird, but sometimes it's okay." [laughs]

V

Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:03:00

I love that. Have your views about living in the United States changed over time? And if so, how?

J

Jin-Ya Huang 1:03:12

I think I really look forward to getting my US citizenship, because that was the moment that I thought I was really gonna feel like I'm a part of it, and I really belong. Surprisingly, I hear those stories from my friends a lot. I recently interviewed - I moderated a talk with Qian Julie Wang on her book, *Beautiful Country* of her undocumented childhood here in America. And she talked



about how her citizenship, the swearing in ceremony, being undocumented for so long, and at age - I think she was thirty-three when she was actually sworn in, and she actually felt like she belonged. And then I talked to another friend who's also Asian American, and her heritage really made her feel like she was an other for the longest time. So when she swore in as Frisco City Council, she was like, "Oh, I'm here now. I finally belong."

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:04:10

And to me, I really thought that was gonna be it for me, because when I was traveling with my Taiwanese passport one time, I actually went to - this is such a first-world problem. I had called the embassy and asked if I needed any special documentation. And they were like, "No, you have your green card, you have your Taiwanese passport, you should be fine visiting Paris, France." I remember, it was some crazy deal. I'd just graduated from college, and all my friends were going, and they were there already. I had something else going on, so I had to meet them separately on a different trip. And when I arrived, they looked at my passport, and they said, "Oh, you're from the People's Republic of China?" And I said, "No, no, no, I'm from the Republic of China, that's different." And this is literally the political standpoint of Taiwan is considered a runaway province from China and seeking independence in a democracy where China practices communism. So this French immigration officer basically was like, "Doesn't matter, you're gonna need a visa, and you need to go back to the United States to get this."

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:05:27

She proceeds to handcuff me. It was just one of those plastic handcuffs, but still, it's the shame of it, to be escorted from the office and all the way back on the plane. And of course, it was like, "Oh my God, they're sending me back to Boston. What am I gonna do?" Part of me wanted to - and I'm calling my friends and telling them this horror story. And they were like, "Oh my God, what are you gonna do?" And so many of them were just like, "Are you gonna go back to Dallas?" And I'm like, "Oh hell no." I mean, part of me wanted to go back and just - I wanted to curl up in the fetal position and just cry. But the other part of me was like, "Fuck a bunch of this. How dare they?" And I was like, "This is really traumatizing, but how do I rise from the ashes from this?"

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:06:30

And I remember somebody on the plane, actually the guy who sat next to me, was like, "Oh my goodness, that's the worst thing that could happen to anybody." And he was like, "My wife is Moroccan, and I'm American. When she became a citizen, she really celebrated getting that little blue book passport. But she still needs a visa to go visit Morocco, because of the dual citizenship thing. I have to take her to the embassy tomorrow, and I'm happy to drive you if you trust me, and we can go together, because you don't know anybody in Boston, do you?" I was like, "No," and he goes, "I will buy you a meal, and if you trust me, I would love to do this." And I was like, "Are you sure?" And he was like, "We're all immigrants from somewhere." And he's like, "We can celebrate this together." And he goes, "My kids love Levi's. They're gonna be all-American, but we all came from everyplace else." He was like, "We can celebrate this together." And he goes, "My kids love Levi's. They're gonna be all-American, but we all came from everyplace else." He was like, "We can celebrate this together."

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:07:59

And he was actually the restaurant manager for Cheers. Do you know the bar that - he was the restaurant manager. Yes, Norm. And he took me there, had lunch, he dropped me off after I talked to the American Airlines front desk. Those ladies were like, "We'll fly you back to Paris for a hundred bucks. Don't worry. This is a terrible story, but we're gonna give you a voucher for hotels, and vouchers for meals." I got to stay there, and I flew out the next day after I got the visa from the embassy, and I proceeded to have a great trip with my college buddies, all to celebrate our graduation. And I really didn't know if I wanted to become a citizen at that point, but at this point, it was almost in your face, "I am gonna become a US citizen just to shove it in your face." Because I was debating whether to go back to Taiwan to teach or stay here. And that was a really pivotal moment for me, to really feel like, "Oh, this is what I need to do." And I don't know if that answers your question entirely, but I felt that was life changing.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:09:24

It's beautiful, and it definitely answers my question.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:09:27

Okay, good [laughs].

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:09:29

Something that is so important to oral histories is that there's a storytelling component, and you are doing such a wonderful job, Jin-Ya, of the storytelling portion. I am having to skip some of the questions just for timeliness, but let me see. Have your views - you've touched on this already, but I do want to ask you have your views about living in the United States changed over time, specifically in regards to becoming an American citizen, and if so, how?

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:10:01

I think I always used to think I need to assimilate and become as American as possible to fit in. But then I realized that as Chinese as I am, I'm never gonna - you can move a girl to Texas, you can never take the Chinese out of her. And the Taiwanese part is so inherently me, that I do introduce myself as Taiwanese-Texan sometimes, and I do embrace that. And there are a lot of people that, a lot of times when I go up north or east coast, they're like, "It's only when you say, 'y'all,' [laughs] and there are certain phrases that I'm like, 'Yeah, you're not from around here, are you?'" And I'm like, "Yeah, definitely not." And I definitely embrace that I grew up in the south, and I definitely came from a different country. But I'm just as American as anybody else here, and just as an American as my son who was born here.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:11:06

I think a lot of times, we have these conversations about what it means to be an American, but I really honestly think of it more as what it means to be a global citizen. And recently, I went to visit my cousin in California, and she lives in the Bay Area, and she was just like, "You know -" I read the news, and I'm aware of global affairs. I'm like, "No, I know." And she goes, "It's just so hard to find time to do something about it." And I said, "You're right." And at some point you just get to a comfort zone that you can either be complacent, or you stand up to fight the good fight. And for me, she was like, "How can you live in Texas? It's just so -"

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:11:58

And I go, "Well, it is so - fill in the blank - but I can either run away and live very comfortably and ignore the fact that there's work to be done everywhere, even here in California, or I can stand tall, strong, and proud, and stay with the tribes that I have built and found, with the brothers and sisters that I know who are in it for the long run, in it for the movement, in it with the people, by the people, for the people. I can stay and fight." That, to me, is so much more important. I'm never gonna bitch about how crappy Dallas is. If we forever compare ourselves to New York, LA, London, San Francisco, Paris, you name it, if we continue to do that, nothing would ever be equitable.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:13:03

Look what's happening in Ukraine, Afghanistan, and in Yemen. There's injustice all around the world, and we have to remember that when we lift our own neighbors, we lift ourselves. And the sooner we learn that, the better off we will be. And so I think that was the thing, it was very instrumental for me to really think about our identity as a whole and to embrace what those social responsibilities look like. And that's what makes us Texan, American, and as wholehearted as that can be. Yeah, that's how we serve.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:13:49

I'm really fortunate, I'm so grateful that I found my calling to be in this space. And it's like, "Did I want to be? No." It's so uncomfortable [laughs]. Anytime I have to speak or do public speaking, Lang and I, just both my son and I just go, "Oof," like shutter. We have to do a whole thing where we have to pump ourselves up. If he ever has to give a book report, we do our little thing, and the day before or the moments before, and we talk ourselves into it. It's almost a very ambivert decision, because we're super introverted, but when we're amongst people that we trust, we're super extroverted. And being kind of ambidextrous in that part, meshing the two together to find that spot that it's very uncomfortable, being asked to lead, but it's what our community needs. And so how do we show up for it?

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:14:53

I always joke with the ladies that I can't cook to save my life. I'm not my mom. But boy, I'm really good about showing up, and I'm really, really damn good at taking out the trash. And if that's my job, then that's my job. So that's what I'll do. That's how I contribute. So thank you for

letting me contribute by taking out the trash today [laughs]. The CEO part is the chief of everything officer. It's not chief executive officer. It's you're taking out the trash, you're cleaning the toilet, you're doing everything. It's not just - [laughs]

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:15:31  
You're amazing.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:15:34  
Thank you.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:15:35  
This recording will be used as a resource in the future, so knowing that, how would you like people who know you to remember you, or if people have never met you in person, never been blessed enough to meet you in person, how would you like some of the listeners to be able to remember you?

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:15:56  
Oh my goodness. My mom had these top three golden rules that I always love to share. Number one is: always, always do the right thing. Number two is: whatever you do, be a good neighbor. And number three is: practice kindness and compassion every day. And I love how simple they are. Sometimes it is difficult to achieve, but I love how simple and easy they are to achieve. And I think she has just always focused on that, that if you do what you love, the rest will come. And that she centered so much on that unconditional love and coming from that place of just ultimate - just incredible, forever pouring love in that she's just love and light personified. And I love that about her, and I want you know people to see that, that it's okay to embrace that, and we need to find more love in our life, and more kindness, more compassion, and moving forward.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:17:31  
And so I would love for people to really embrace that together, because a little bit goes a long way. Yeah, those are the granules of truth I think we would love to share with people. I think there's an old Mexican saying, what is it? That you can actually die twice in your lifetime? Have you heard this? The first time is actually physically, when you take your last breath, and then the second time is actually when people stop talking about you. Have you heard that before? A friend of mine actually, Trisha, shared that with me, and I've always really loved that. And so all these forms of love comes in different ways. And one of them, I'll never stop talking about my mom. So to be able to share her love in this way with with others, and I think however people choose to share that love going forward, that's just - spread it. Spread it all around.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:18:45

I love that. That makes a lot of sense with Día de los Muertos and everything else that we celebrate. I feel so honored to have spent this time with you today Jin-Ya, thank you so much. Is there anything that you'd like to add about something that you shared that you feel might need clarification, anything like that?

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:19:04

No, not right now. I think I also need to hop off. But yeah, anything else, I'll probably just send you a note. This has just been such an honor. I'm so grateful to be able to share these parts of me with you and with everyone. So thank you again for this opportunity.

V Victoria Ferrell-Ortiz 1:19:31

Absolutely. If it's okay, I'll go ahead and end the recording now.

J Jin-Ya Huang 1:19:34

Sure.