Voices of Feminism Oral History Project

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

MARY CHUNG HAYASHI

Interviewed by

LORETTA J. ROSS

December 15, 2006

Hayward, California

This interview was made possible
with generous support from the Ford Foundation.

Narrator

Chung Mi Kyung was born in 1967 in Kwangju, South Korea, one of five children of Chung Yeon Sang, a businessman, and Hun Cha Yang, a tennis player. The family moved to Seoul in 1978. Several decisive changes occurred in 1980. Her older sister committed suicide. Within months, her parents separated and her father migrated with the children to Orange County, California. In the U.S., Mi Kyung took the name Mary and struggled with the competing pressures of maintaining traditional Korean family and gender norms while assimilating to the more individualistic U.S. culture.

After high school, Chung attended California State University Long Beach, where she was exposed to feminist ideas and literature. After moving to Oakland, she combined ongoing college study of Asian American history and culture with employment as a bookkeeper and community involvement in feminist, civil rights, and Asian American women's reproductive rights and anti-violence organizations. She became the first director of Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice (which became Asian Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health, and later Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice).

Chung remained profoundly influenced by her sister's suicide. She chafed at the silencing effects of Asian gender and cultural norms on the one side, which enforced silence about sexual and mental health and personal matters in general, and the U.S. myth of Asians as a model minority on the other. Inspired by African American and Latina women's health activism, Chung created the National Asian Women's Health Organization (NAWHO) in 1993. The first national organization dedicated to improving the health status of Asian Pacific Islander women in the U.S., NAWHO conducts surveys, generates data, and fosters women's leadership as advocates for Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. More recently Chung founded the Iris Alliance Fund, a mental health foundation dedicated to youth suicide prevention.

She earned a B.S. in 2000 from University of San Francisco, followed by an M.B.A. from Golden Gate University. In 2001 she married David Hayashi, a civil rights attorney. In 2006 Hayashi became the first Korean American woman elected to the California State Assembly. She is the author of *Far From Home: Shattering the Myth of the Model Minority* (2003).

Interviewer

Loretta Ross (b. 1953) became involved in black nationalist politics while attending Howard University, 1970–73. A leader in the antirape and antiracism movements in the 1970s and 1980s, she co-founded the International Council of African Women and served as director of women of color programs for the National Organization for Women and program director for the National Black Women's Health Project. After managing the research and program departments for the Center for Democratic Renewal, an anti-Klan organization, Ross established the National Center for Human Rights Education in 1996, which she directed through 2004. In 2004 she also served as co-director of the March for Women's Lives. In 2005 she became national coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. Ross is a co-author of *Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice* (South End Press, 2004). She earned a B.A in women's studies from

Agnes Scott College in 2007. The Loretta Ross papers are at the Sophia Smith Collection; the Voices of Feminism Project also includes an oral history with Ross.

Abstract

In this oral history Mary Chung Hayashi describes her childhood in South Korea and in the U.S. and discusses the circumstances that have led her to launch successive organizations addressing health issues in the Asian American community. She also discusses her path towards becoming the first Korean American elected to the California State Assembly.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Two 63-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Susan Kurka. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Sheila Flaherty Jones. Reviewed by Mary Chung Hayashi and Loretta Ross.

Biibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Hayashi, Mary Chung. Interview by Loretta Ross. Video recording, December 15, 2006. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Mary Chung Hayashi Avery interview by Loretta Ross, video recording, December 15 2005, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

Transcript

Bibliography: Hayashi, Mary Chung. Interview by Loretta Ross. Transcript of video recording, December 15, 2006. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Mary Chung Hayashi, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, December 15, 2006, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, p. 22.

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Transcript of interview conducted December 15, 2006, with:

MARY CHUNG HAYASHI

by: LORETTA ROSS

HAYASHI: These are all the questions that you have for me?

ROSS: Well, in addition to the establishment ones on the yellow form that I sent you, about family and background and stuff.

HAYASHI: Oh, I don't have that.

ROSS: I e-mailed it to you here.

HAYASHI: Oh, in the very beginning. Okay. Can I just take a look real quick?

ROSS: Yes. The family interview profile I sent you.

HAYASHI: Okay. Sorry about that.

ROSS: It's all right.

HAYASHI: Oh man, this is much harder than the other ones. (laughs)

ROSS: Well the thing is, so much of them you've already answered in your book [*Far From Home: Shattering the Myth of the Model Minority*], but I just wanted to make sure that — you know, not everybody will have access to the book, and the reason is, is that we're storing this in the historical archives, so that as people do future research and write future books, the story is told in your own words. It's really to focus not so much on what happened or what you did, but the meaning of what happened and what you did. Because any biographer can say, "Well, she went to college here, she did this, she did that," but only you can interpret the meaning of what you did.

HAYASHI: Okay.

ROSS: Okay? Let me see. I gave you my questions, so let me see if I have another copy of them. I do, so you keep that one and I'll work from this one.

So first of all, Mary, thank you. My name is Loretta Ross. It is December 15, 2006, and we are taping Mary Chung Hayashi for the Voices of Feminism Oral History Project for Smith College, the Sophia Smith Collection. Thank you, Mary, for agreeing to be part of this project.

HAYASHI: Thank you for including me.

ROSS: First of all, I'd like you to give us your name and tell us a little bit of background about yourself: when you were born, where you were born, your brothers and your sisters.

HAYASHI: Well first of all, thank you for including me. My name is Mary Hayashi. I was born in South Korea, in a very small town called Kwangju, that's where I was born, and I came to this country when I was 13, in 1980. My family is still back in Korea. We moved here together, but my parents returned to our native country because of language issues, and they had a very difficult time adjusting. So two of my brothers and my parents actually did return to Korea. My sister and I, the girls, stayed back and pursued independence.

I moved up to the Bay Area to attend school. I went to the University of San Francisco and –

ROSS: I'm going to stop you right there.

HAYASHI: Okay.

ROSS: Because I really want to find out more about the Korean story. You've told a very interesting story in your book about your sister and your family's struggles to prosperity in Korea. Since so much of your story is embedded in that context, I want to stay a little bit more with that. So in your biography, you talked about how your father had the foresight to open up the first gas station.

HAYASHI: Yes. (laughs)

ROSS: In a country without very many cars. So what was it like growing up in Korea?

HAYASHI: Well the place that I was born — Kwangju is the name of the city — was a very small place back then. It's changed now, and I haven't been back there for over ten years. At the time, you know, my father decided — and we weren't very wealthy or anything when we were little. We lived in a very small place, a two-bedroom. There were five children and my parents and my grandmother.

My father decided that he thought it would be a good idea to have a gas station for the buses and public transit system, basically, that was being put in. There weren't many families with cars. If you had a

car, a personal vehicle, that was a huge deal. I mean, you had to be a dignitary or an elected official or something like that, to have an automobile. He decided to put in the very first gas station before they brought in the public transit systems. So from there, he launched his business career. He's a self-starter, very successful, small-business person. His work basically took us to Seoul, which is the capital of South Korea, and we lived in Seoul for about two-and-a-half years. We didn't live there very long. It was obviously a bigger city, and my father thought that it would be great to take everybody to America because back then – 5:00

ROSS: Wait. We're going to come back.

HAYASHI: Oh, okay. (laughs)

ROSS: You jumped ahead so quickly — because I want to hear about your mother. First, I want to hear your parents' names.

HAYASHI: Sure. Well we basically don't — you don't really reference them. You don't say their full name, because in Korea it's disrespectful to call my father by, you know, Chung Yeon Sang — that's his name. We call him *mister*, or you called him *father* or you called him — you know, if he's a vice president of a company or he's a president of a company, then you reference them *President Chung*, something like that. But his name is Chung Yeon Sang, and my mom's name is Hun Cha Yang. They met when my father was a teacher, a professor, and she was attending school and very young.

ROSS: He was teaching Chinese, I believe your book says.

HAYASHI: Yes. Boy, you did read the book, didn't you? Wow, I am so impressed. (laughs)

ROSS: Well, usually you don't have that much material I had at some time for a subject. And your mother, she was active in sports, in tennis.

HAYASHI: Yes. She was very good. She won competitions all the time. She was gone a lot, I remember, when I was a kid. She was always busy preparing for the next tournament. My father was very unhappy about that because in our culture women are not encouraged to pursue sports or politics. Our lives are supposed to be about caring for the children, having a family, and taking care of your parents as they get older. So my mom was always very independent. She wanted to do something with her life. She never attended college. She married very young and started having children right away. She just fell in love with tennis and she was very good at it. I have a lot of photos of her with trophies and that sort of thing, but she eventually had to quit because it was clearly becoming a problem.

ROSS: Do you think you inherited some of your independent spirit from her?

HAYASHI: I think so, although I have to say that if I didn't get the opportunity to come here and have the opportunity to go to college and meet people like Byllye Avery and other women's health activists, I'm not so sure if I would have continued on the path that I did. Because even when I came to this country, I told myself that I would be married and have children, and that's my goal and that's what my life is going to be about. And that's what my mother had wanted for all the girls too. There was so much emphasis on having a family if you're a woman. So I think that the work of other women's health activists really gave me an opportunity to be able to be part of the women's health movement and also start my own professional career.

ROSS: You spoke very movingly in your book about the culture of silence, and particularly you talked about it in relationship to your sister. Do you mind telling us that story about your sister?

HAYASHI: Sure. The year that we came to this country, about six months before we immigrated, my older sister committed suicide, and she passed away. She was only 17 at the time. The day that she passed away, we weren't even allowed to be in the house. Our aunties came and got us, and we were never told, even to this day, that she had committed suicide. We obviously found out from our relatives, but my parents still did not talk about her. They've never told us exactly what happened. I've just gathered information from others who were at home that day. 10:00

I had seen my sister that morning before I left the house, and she told me that she had taken some pills. I was very concerned about it, but I was 12 at the time, and I just didn't know what I was supposed to do. It was very difficult.

ROSS: I can imagine. Was it pressure in terms of achieving or fitting into a certain role? What do you speculate was her greatest feeling which would make her choose that?

HAYASHI: That's what's so hard about mental illness and especially teen suicide. We don't really know — you know, we don't really know the reason for sure, unless they leave a letter or something like that. Thinking back, and now that I've been in the mental health field and the health care world, I really think that she had some form of mental illness, probably severe depression. Thinking back, I think there were signs. We just weren't — you know, we just didn't know how to deal with that. We just didn't even — we didn't recognize the signs. But now that I have learned more about mental illness, clearly she'd been struggling with some form of depression. Untreated depression could lead to suicide, and what's really unfortunate about this is that depression can be treated

effectively. Many people with mental illness live a great life and have a job, and they go on and get married and lead a very healthy life.

The silence that you've asked about, it's more than just not being able to talk about what happened to her as a family or as a community. It's very dangerous because she couldn't seek help because silence is viewed as strength, and we're not supposed to talk about our problems, let alone a mental health problem or other health issues. And so silence sometimes can be deadly. If we didn't come from a culture, if we didn't have stigma, if we didn't encourage girls to be quiet, then it's possible that someone like her could ask for help or at least talk to someone about what the struggle was, because none of us really know for sure. I think she was probably suffering from some form of depression.

ROSS: Which you've never forgotten and carry with you. So you came to this country in 1980.

HAYASHI: Yes.

ROSS: Tell me, how was it entering this country? Was it easy for you? Was it hard?

HAYASHI: My parents chose Orange County of all the places. So when we arrived, I think the first day we went to a supermarket, and I was just so impressed with the way things were organized, and it was big and clean. Trying to go through the checker with a credit card — and back then they didn't accept credit cards at supermarkets. They only accepted cash and check. I will never forget that experience, and I was so embarrassed because we couldn't explain — we couldn't really speak the language to explain what we have and what we're trying to do. Just things like getting a driver's license for my older brother and my father, who obviously had been driving — they know how to drive. But just little things like that — getting credit cards, filling out forms. It's certainly not an easy transition, but I think the most difficult part of the transition is not being able to speak just, you know, simple things that you want to be able to explain or communicate with.

I turned 13 that same year, like two months after we got here. And so, I'm a teenager; there's a lot of pressure to be a certain way. I was the only minority kid other than there was another Korean student, who didn't speak Korean very well, and I think he was born here. I didn't know how to ask for help, because that's not what we do in our culture. We take care of our own problems. 15:00

ROSS: So how did you go to school not speaking English? How did that happen?

HAYASHI: Well, you know, I just went and I was always a good girl. That's what we do, and we don't really say too much. So I had really perfected being a good girl. It was not that hard just sitting and listening.

ROSS: And being invisible, I guess.

HAYASHI: Yes, and that's kind of how I was trained. It was hard, and I really tried to learn the language and I studied hard. It took them a while to figure out; the school administrators didn't even know how bad things were. I think they knew that I had some language issues, but they had never had an English-as-a-second-language student. So it took them a while to find out that I was just really not understanding anything.

ROSS: So was the transition difficult? Because in Korea you were a cheerleader, you were a successful student. Then coming over here and feeling like, I'm a remedial student simply because of language and lack of language access.

HAYASHI: Yes. I was just so excited to come here, too. I mean, there was just — back home, there was just so much excitement. People want to come here to study. People want to live in California. We're not just going to some state in America, but we're actually coming to California. And so we were really excited.

Of course, while we were transitioning and getting settled, we've had some challenges. I think that what has always sort of haunted me and my family — coming over here after my sister's death and none of us being able to recognize that as a family, and then coming here, trying to adjust. It was just really hard. My parents had a lot of problems. Since my sister passed away, they've separated. They struggled quite a bit as well. So I think the transition was hard because the family was just so hurting, but then none of us could really articulate what's going on. So it wasn't just coming over and trying to adjust or learn the language, but it's also saying, Yes, about six months ago, we lost a family member and none of us are really dealing with that. That really, I think, made the transition more difficult, you know, thinking back.

ROSS: Was the Korean community of any benefit, of any support to you?

HAYASHI: Yes. The churches were great. We got immediately connected to the First Korean Baptist Church in Tustin, and they were fabulous. They helped us like, You know, you should go to Target to buy those items. I mean, if people haven't told you, you really don't know. And you're supposed to negotiate the car price; you know, you never pay the sticker price. So it was great, and I really bonded with people at the church. They were just — they were lifesavers. So we had a good time getting to know the community.

ROSS: Now you spoke about your parents returning home to Korea, but you didn't tell me about how that came about.

HAYASHI: Obviously my parents are very proud of me now, but we just had different goals. My father was so set on having me get married by — I was, like, 20 years old. He's like, Twenty is kind of getting on the older side, and you really need to find a mate.

ROSS: Your parents went back home to Korea, but you stayed. Could you tell me about that?

HAYASHI: My parents wanted me to get married, and I really wanted to do something with my life. I had friends from high school who received not-so-great grades, but they got to go to college. So I thought to myself, Well, I've got better grades, why can't I go? So I decided to move up here instead of going back to Korea with them, and they were very unhappy.

20:00

They decided to return because, as I mentioned, they never quite learned the language, which is very hard. If you're sick, for instance, you can't really tell the doctor what is going on, and you get misdiagnosed all the time. I mean, just little things like that become very frustrating. They packed up and left. My sister initially went back with them and then returned a year later.

So I was the only one here for a while, so I moved up here. I had some friends who went to Berkeley. They seemed different and they seemed more free, and so I moved up here, signed up at the University of San Francisco. They offered night classes. It took me seven years to get my bachelor's degree. I worked full time. Those were challenging days too.

ROSS: It seems like when your parents moved back, you were, in fact, kind of like a liberated teenager though. Didn't you maintain the house and –

HAYASHI: They weren't able to sell the house immediately, so they asked if I'd stay back and take care of the house. I did, and I still remember when, you know, I was, like, home by myself, I was cleaning. I always did what they told me to do. So I was cleaning the house one day and I thought to myself, Why am I doing this and they're not even here? (laughs) So yes. I really wanted to be on my own. I wanted my own place and wanted to go to college. I wanted to do something with my life. I just didn't want to accept what my culture expected women to become, so I packed up and left.

ROSS: Were there other significant people who influenced your thinking, your drive for independence at that time? Beyond your family.

HAYASHI: Well, I was actually taking a couple classes at Cal[ifornia] State [University], Long Beach. I remember going through the catalog, and

there was a course called Introduction to Women's Studies, and I thought, Well, that's really interesting. I'm a woman. I wonder what that is about. I really didn't know what that was about. I thought it was about how to be proper, you know, etiquette. So I thought, That sounds really interesting.

At that time, when I took the class now, I had been in this country for nine years. So I was a relatively new immigrant, so I really didn't know what some of these things represented. I took this course, and that really was just a turning point for me. I found out about feminism. I found out about women, you know, 100 years ago, standing up for their rights, doing what they wanted to do, or at least trying to do what they wanted to do, and that really inspired me. That was part of the reason why I wanted to go to school. I thought, This is great. I want to major in women's studies. I want to learn more about women's history and their contribution, and what they did and how did they do it? How did they change themselves and how did they create social change for other women? I would never forget the course I had, and I still actually have the books from this class, literature written by Virginia Woolf. I really fell in love with this one class that I had, and that was the turning point, I think.

ROSS: So where did your activist career begin?

HAYASHI: As you know, San Francisco Bay Area is the national headquarters for social activism. We really believe that many great things begin here in the Bay Area. So when I moved here, my first job — because I needed to get a job right away, because I was on my own and my parents weren't going to support me since I wasn't returning to Korea with them. So I was completely on my own, which was scary. My very first job was at a nonprofit called the Asian Law Caucus, and it's a civil rights organization for Asian Americans. I was a bookkeeper. I was good with that. Not to stereotype myself, but I ended up majoring in economics. I do like the business and the math courses. 25:00

So I became a bookkeeper, and I worked there for two-and-a-half years and really got to better understand the challenges of the Asian American community. That experience also allowed me to work with other Asian American leaders, and that experience led me to the Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice, which was a project that was created by somebody who actually worked at the Asian Law Caucus. So there were some women there who started that project, and eventually, when they were trying to hire their first director, I applied and got the job, and that's how I sort of started my activist work.

ROSS: Tell me about Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice. Why do you think API women began to organize around reproductive rights issues?

HAYASHI: In 1989, after the Webster decision — I mean, early '90s were an exciting time for women's health issues in general, but in particular I

think the pro-choice movement was so in the center. It was just really dominating the debate around women's rights and women's choice. Many of the mainstream organizations were reaching out to women of color organizations and leaders. The founders of the Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice felt that they needed to organize Asian American women so that they could be part of that larger movement because they are just as impacted, if not more. Women with limited English-speaking abilities, limited means — I mean, they're going to have greater challenges and barriers as a result of some of these bad policies on choice issues. So they wanted to organize the Asian American community so that we could also have a voice in the larger pro-choice movement.

After I became the director, I believe nine months into my job, I said to the board, "As I'm reaching out to our communities, they're not really connecting with us on this choice issue, but they have some serious family-planning issues." They were talking with us about reproductive health, contraception issues, women's health, access to health care, and so I really advocated for broadening our scope and not just focusing on the abortion issue. So the board had lengthy conversations — we've had focus groups actually, throughout the state, and I was at all of them –

ROSS: It's very scientific.

HAYASHI: Yes. We reached out to very diverse communities. We reached out to English-speaking [and] non-English-speaking communities. We did three focus groups down in the L.A. area, and it was clear to us that Asian American women's health issues are not just limited to choice or reproductive rights issues. So we changed our name to [Asian Pacific Islanders for] Reproductive Health from [Asian Pacific Islanders for] Choice. I think that I would have liked to have seen a broader focus, like women's health, and that's why, you know, when I left the reproductive health organization, I went out and formed a women's health organization. So that's why I started my own organization.

I think that after we changed our name, we were able to bring more people into the organization, because it was no longer just about abortion, but it was also about making sure sex education is available for their kids, that they have access to contraception, they understand the reproductive-health and family-planning programs that are available. It allowed us to bring more people into the organization, and I think that was really important for the movement and the community.

ROSS: So tell me about the founding of NAWHO [National Asian Women's Health Organization].

HAYASHI: As I was working on reproductive health issues with other groups, like Byllye Avery and Luz Alvarez Martinez — I'm sure you know her from

30:00

the [National] Latina Health Organization. We also worked with Charon Asetoyer.

ROSS: We've done oral histories on all of them.

HAYASHI: Okay, good. We were forming a coalition called Women of Color Reproductive Health and Rights, a coalition for reproductive health and rights, and I was one of the founding members. It was very clear to me that Asian American women needed to be at these national dialogues, and that there was virtually no organization or voice at the national level. It was very clear to me that, again, reproductive health still is just very narrow for the Asian American community, because nobody was talking about breast cancer rates among Korean women, Japanese women. Vietnamese women have the highest cervical cancer rates in this country, and yet there really wasn't a spokesperson or an organization who can speak for those communities. So my goal was to have a national organization that could represent Asian American women's health issues that are emerging, and reproductive health is important but so is cancer and diabetes. Korean Americans in Los Angeles are the least-likely-to-be-insured population now in the state of California. So health access issues — that was really what I felt passionate about, and mental health issues.

Women age of 65 in this country, Asian American women over — elderly Asian American women have the highest suicide rate in this country, and nobody was really addressing that at the national or state level. Thinking back — sort of my personal journey from Korea, and coming here, and losing my sister to mental illness — I really felt that I needed to contribute more. My passion really was women's health and educating our communities about breaking the silence on a number of issues and not just reproductive health.

After two years at APIRH, we called it — and I think they've changed their name again to broaden it, and so they're on the right path — I started my own organization.

ROSS: What year was that?

HAYASHI: Nineteen ninety-three I started it, and yes, like I was 26 years old. (laughs)

ROSS: Did it frighten you to be taking that leap of faith?

HAYASHI: Yes. It was very stressful, but I was just so excited. I don't think I could do that again because back then I didn't have a mortgage and things like that. (laughs) So I was more free. You know when you're younger, you're not aware of all the consequences in case you fail. I thought, I really have nothing to lose, and somebody's got to do this.

ROSS: What type of support did you get, both from the API community and from others, to support your dream?

HAYASHI: The Women of Color Coalition — the members of the Women of Color Coalition for Reproductive Health and Rights, they were extremely supportive. Honestly, I could not have done it without them. They were generous. They were extremely supportive, to the extent they would introduce me to other donors. They would take me to meetings, make sure I was meeting the right people. If they got invited to speak somewhere, they would always make sure that I'm there. They were true sisters. I will never forget them. Obviously I had a tremendous support from the Asian American community women because otherwise, I couldn't have really done it.

But at the same time, I had challenges. More established Asian American community leaders were not happy. There were two, I believe, two sort of groups of folks. There were women — you know, much older — who had been in this kind of work for a long time, who said, We really don't want this. We want to be the spokespeople. You're going to have that whenever you start something on your own or whenever you spin off. There's always going to be some of that creative tension. But quickly people realize that we all are doing this together. We're never asked, Well, how many women's health organizations are there? But we're always asked, Well, two Asian women's organizations — isn't that a lot? No, it's not a lot, you know. And so it's part of educating ourselves too, that it is okay to have multiple women of color organizations and Asian organizations. 35:00

And then there was a more conservative, I think, group of Asian American community leaders — you know, Why do we need a women's health organization? We have a health organization. Well, but they don't address women's issues at all. There were some challenges. I have to be honest, there were people who weren't happy with me that I did that. But I have no regrets. I think that any person who starts up an organization or starts a new company understands that there's always going to be some of that — you know, people asking questions. Who is this person and why is she doing this? She's so young, what does she know? I had that too.

ROSS: I want to back up a little bit. Because abortion is such a hot-button issue, were there members of the API community, when you were at APIC, who didn't think that you all should be focusing on abortion?

HAYASHI: Oh, absolutely.

ROSS: How did they express that to you?

HAYASHI: When I started working for the Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice — I mean, clearly the organization's name has the word *choice* in it — I would be making calls to service organizations, and many people told

me that they would have to check to see if we could do something together. They were very cautious, not as open, and we were seen as a political organization and not a health organization or an organization that's advocating for women's issues and women's rights. So it was definitely a barrier. Even with the name "reproductive health" — I mean, we had a really hard time getting other Asian American organizations to sign on to letters. There were just few groups that were willing to do it, but if you're a primary care clinic or a service organization, they generally wanted to stay away from us.

ROSS: No controversies, please.

HAYASHI: Right. We had the same experience with domestic violence issues too. I was a volunteer for Asian Women's Shelter in San Francisco. What a great organization. People would say that we don't need that, we don't have that problem. So there's always a little bit of that when you're starting up something new, a fraction of the community that doesn't want to see dirty laundry.

ROSS: Been there. Because we're recording this for the historical record, could you name other API women whose names need to be remembered by the history books, who were very helpful to you during this period?

HAYASHI: I don't know if you worked with her or not, but Suki Ports –

ROSS: I've known Suki for years.

HAYASHI: – in New York. She is a diehard activist who basically did the same thing. She had her own organization. She was always there when something happened in the community, or if somebody needed to educate elected officials or bring people to — I mean, she's always in the thick of things. She didn't wait for others to fix her problem and she was always just hands-on. She's out there, and I learned a lot from her.

What I really like about Suki is that she doesn't marginalize herself. She tries to reach out to other communities. Often I think that we get so used to working just with Asian American women or just the Asian American community, or we have a lot of ethnic groups like Korean American organizations and Chinese American organizations, and it's so easy to just work or only talk to each other. But she's always reached out to other women of color, and so that was really — she was fabulous and she was really a great role model, I think.

40:00

ROSS: Are there others? Because we want books written about these women in the future.

HAYASHI: Right, right. Another woman who I got to know — and I haven't talked to her for a long time — but [Yuri Kochiyama], is that her name?

ROSS: And she's located where?

HAYASHI: She's also in New York. I think it's [Yuri Kochiyama] is her name. She worked with Malcolm X, and she's a legend in the Asian American community. Do you know who I'm talking about?

ROSS: Yes. They just honored her at the NAPAWF [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum] conference in Los Angeles in September.

HAYASHI: Yes, yes. We honored her too, in 1995, and she was an inspiration very early on. There's also a woman named Grace Sison. She's a Filipina, runs one of the most diverse primary care clinics down in Los Angeles.

ROSS: T.H.E. [To Help Everyone] Clinic.

HAYASHI: Yes. So I guess the world is really small.

ROSS: They're SisterSong [Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective] members. I know them.

HAYASHI: Grace was wonderful because she taught us a lot about the challenges of clinics and service provider's perspective. Those of us in the advocacy work really need to understand what's going on. She was one of those frontline folks that we worked very closely with from the beginning, and I think she was one of the original board members. So she was great.

Afton Kobayashi is our executive director at NAWHO now. Afton and I have worked together for 13 years. I just think that she is one of the most hard-working, most committed feminists. She came from the Feminist Majority when I hired her. Yes. She has just done so much for Asian American women: research, advocacy, organizing. She's really helped me a lot too, and we've worked together for a long time. Those are some of the women that I've had the privilege of working with.

ROSS: Are there younger women who have come behind you, that you should say, "Let's lift these women's names up, keep an eye on them"?

HAYASHI: Yes. We used to do an annual leadership-training conference in Washington, D.C. I started this program in 1998, and we've held five of those. We had an annual leadership-training conference that was co-sponsored by the White House and the Congressional Asian Caucus and Women's Caucus. We would take about 100 young health activists from all over the country and we would put them through a week-long training. We'd take them to Capitol Hill. We have speakers come in, we do training. So there are actually quite a few women out there who have been through our program. So it's always fun to get a little note from people.

There's a woman named Susan — she's a physician now down in L.A., she's a pediatrician. She was a medical student and she came to our training several times. Another student of ours who came every year is Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker. She's now on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. So to see people in high places, too — it's really fun to have gone through training and that kind of growing experience together.

ROSS: So would it be fair to say that NAWHO seeded the API women's health movement?

HAYASHI: Oh, yes. With confidence I could say that we really made Asian women's health a priority nationally. Not just in sort of public debates, but we've trained women, we created forums where Asian American women can come together and talk about mental health issues, reproductive health issues and breast cancer issues. We're very proud of that. Whether our program-focus is on cancer or mental health, there are women out there, thousands of women that we've touched. Their lives have changed because of the work that we've done over the last decade and plus. So oh, definitely.

45:00

The examples that I've given you, the women who we've trained through our program, are out there running for office, becoming physicians, and more importantly, speaking for other Asian women and other women's health issues. Because we want people to take care of themselves, but we also want people to advocate on behalf of others, and that's what they're doing.

ROSS: So to me, I'd like to spend the last few minutes of this tape talking a little bit about the tensions between being a representative of the API community in the mainstream movement and going back and forth. I've been an activist. I'm very familiar with the tension. So could you speak to that? Because sometimes you're tokenized, sometimes you're empowered. How was that for you?

HAYASHI: My experience, I think, is a little different from others' because I was very fortunate to have yourself, Byllye Avery, Luz [Alvarez Martinez], and these other women way before I got into the work in the early '90s. So you guys sort of started to talk to the mainstream organizations and started demanding a seat at the table. So that work had been done and so, by the time I started forming a coalition with other women of color organizations, I already got the respect. I mean, they already invited me. I was at the table. So I'm very grateful for that.

When I formed the Women of Color Coalition with other members that you were talking to, I was already at the table and I was already talking about the issues of Asian American women, and they were very interested. So I think that certainly there is a lot of education that we had to do with many groups, but we also had to do a lot of education within the Asian American community. My take on this

whole thing is that we were always educating. Whether we were talking to our community folks or our board members, our donors, the mainstream organizations, the work was hard. I mean, you really had to want the job. It was a tough job because you're basically empowering yourself to be able to educate others to learn more about the community, and you're also trying to bring your community along. Sometimes it was Asian American women that we needed to educate. It was on all levels and not just with the mainstream community.

ROSS: So were there tensions in the API community about what you all were doing, and how were those expressed?

HAYASHI: Again, just the reproductive-health and, I think, abortion focus was always harder to do. Believe it or not, we did a survey on Asian American men and reproductive health, because we wanted to understand where the gaps were. We could empower women, we can teach them how to access family-planning services, but oftentimes it's men who also need that education. So we were the first organization to do a national survey of 1,000 Asian men, asking them, What types of contraception do you use, or why don't you use contraception, and where do you get your information? And it was very interesting. (laughs) So we really launched a program or focus that nobody has ever done. Those are very challenging issues to take on. We would get phone calls from people saying, Why are you doing this? This is so embarrassing. I heard that you were promoting condoms, and that is just so not acceptable in our community. We got some pretty interesting phone calls from people.

ROSS: Did anyone ever accuse you of being a lesbian?

HAYASHI: (laughs) I'm sure they have. I just don't know about it.

50:00

ROSS: Not to your face. (laughs)

HAYASHI: (laughs)

ROSS: You were a decade later.

HAYASHI: Some of the issues that we took on were very controversial in the Asian community.

ROSS: We're going to take a break right now, because we're getting to the end of this tape.

HAYASHI: Okay.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

ROSS: So, Mary, what were some of the achievements of NAWHO that you're most proud of, and how did these achievements have an impact on you?

HAYASHI: Well, if I had to choose one — because I feel like we've had many successes, and some you can't really measure because it's still going on. One of the most significant accomplishments, I believe, is creating the first ever presidential executive order, which was signed by President Clinton, that asked all the federal agencies to start collecting data on Asian Americans. This is very important because when I got into this work in the late '80s, early '90s, many of the government organizations had Asian Americans under "other" category. We were not a separate, own category until 1990. If we're not counted, then we're invisible, and if we're not counted correctly, then we don't really understand what types of health issues that impact us. We don't really understand what the community makeup is. So it's really important to be counted. I know it seems very simple and basic, but it's a huge victory. Through, I think, our work of organizing Asian American women and training them, and bringing them to Washington, D.C., for five straight years. We brought 100 people to Washington every year for training. Creating this momentum in Washington to make this happen was a tremendous accomplishment.

The executive order basically created the Office of Asian American Affairs at the White House. It has continued, and President [George W.] Bush has actually continued that office. So they continue to exist and they're sort of a policy-coordinating arm of the federal government, making sure that Asian Americans are counted in their programs. So I'm very proud of that work.

ROSS: And you seem to have invested quite a bit into the leadership development of young women. What was your thinking in putting so much of your energy and resources into that aspect of work?

HAYASHI: First I thought, This was great. I'm meeting all these leaders and I'm at the table. I'm presenting at these conferences. But it was very lonely. You know, Am I going to meet another Asian woman at this conference that I'm going to? So immediately I noticed the lack of spokespeople, activists who could talk about some of these issues. So what I wanted to do was, instead of expanding the staff all the time, expand the number of activists out there who could be the spokespeople. I really wanted to see more people who could go to these things and speak for the community. So the concept really came out of that.

The leadership-training program is something that people still talk about. It was funded through the Kellogg Foundation initially. We don't have that program anymore, which is unfortunate, but women and men — we started including men, I think, the last year. They still talk about what a wonderful experience that was for them. So having 500-

plus young people out there, talking about Asian American women's health issues and as trained activists, I just — I mean, I just think that it is a tremendous accomplishment of the organization.

ROSS: I've noticed that NAWHO has always been able to have an impact on public policy. What about the tension between doing local, direct organizing or advocacy, and having an impact on national policy? Did you have to walk a tightrope like that?

HAYASHI: We've always had a wonderful representation of the frontline workers. Through out leadership program, a lot of these people that we trained worked — I mean, they had to have some service component on their résumé. They had to prove that they were going to be able to use the skills, somehow advocating for a particular organization or issue. So most of the people that we've trained come out of the service sector, which is nice because we're empowering the community directly so that they can do the advocacy themselves. 5:00

NAWHO was never — we've never claimed to be the service provider. What we have always done from the beginning was to conduct focus groups, surveys. We've had leadership summits where we are serving as a convener of diverse voices, of people to come together and try to solve complex problems or issues. We were coordinators of many, many events and summits. We did the first Asian Women Clinical Trials Summit with NIH [National Institutes of Health], for example. We did the first Asian American Breast Cancer Research Summit, bringing together scientists and breast cancer survivors. So we've always played the coordinating, convening role, and gathering information, you know, doing the surveys.

I can't tell you how many surveys and focus groups that we did. We did a lot, on many, many topics, including the men's reproductive health survey that I mentioned. We did focus groups on mental health issues. We did that with young women. We also did surveys on osteoporosis. So we were really the national coordinating clearinghouse, if you will, where you could go and get information about Asian American women's health, and we used that data to create our advocacy and public policy platform. We've always trained the service providers to become advocates. It was, I believe, a really good combination of sort of diverse voices bringing together — you know, giving them the tools, always collecting the current information so that the service providers have that information too.

I laugh about this, but I know this happens all the time. People tell me that they use our survey data to get money. And I love hearing that because we've spent a lot of resources collecting information, and we make them available, free of charge, on our Web site. Anybody can download our studies, and people use our statistics to advocate for more funding for their programs, and that's exactly what we wanted to do and what we've done. We've empowered the local organizations to be able to advocate on their own behalf. So it was really never about wanting to

be the voice for service providers per se. Of course, we've had our public policy platform that came out of our research department, but I think that we've had really great partnerships with the local organizations.

Most recently, we've started these major partnerships with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where CDC basically contracts with us. We have these cooperative agreements with CDC, and our job is to go out and find Asian American service-provider organizations, and we fund them. We provide technical assistance and we provide a report, documenting what they do, because somebody needs to tell the story of these wonderful model programs that are out there. We're doing that with an immunization program right now. We've done that in diabetes, tobacco control. We're the first organization to receive a grant to target Asian American women and tobacco control, cessation program. So we've done a great service, I believe, to the local communities.

ROSS: At one time, I believe, there was consideration — or you actually had done this — opened up a Washington office. Could you tell me about that experience or what you've learned from it?

HAYASHI: We had a Washington office for about two-and-a-half years. I guess you don't forget anything, do you? (laughs) Because I had sort of forgotten about that. We always had a Washington consultant, because we did all these trainings out there. We felt that somebody needed to be at these meetings and continue to provide that important voice for Asian American women's health. But the reality is, unlike local government or Sacramento even, having one person or two people in Washington, you can't expect to make a huge difference because the process in Washington is so different, so complex. There's too much going on, and in order to have a big impact, you need a lot of resources. So we did try that for a few years, and it just didn't make sense for us to continue that, because of the money that it requires to have presence in Washington. At the same time, it's very difficult to get legislation sponsored and passed in Washington with a couple of staff people. It was a learning experience for the organization. The board was so excited to have Washington and San Francisco presence because very few Asian American organizations have that. So it was great, but for the amount of money that we were spending, it was just a resource question.

10:00

ROSS: I've often wondered that about NAWHO, because geography is not your friend when the majority of your population is on one coast, but the public policy impact you want to make is on the other coast.

HAYASHI: Right.

ROSS: How would you manage that tension?

HAYASHI: Right.

ROSS: Unlike the African American or the Latino populations –

HAYASHI: Exactly.

ROSS: – where it's certainly much more dispersed. Either coast could work for us, and either north or south, but for API, it's just that –

HAYASHI: Exactly. I learned a lot. That was certainly a journey that ended very quickly. (laughs) It didn't make sense for us, but I'm glad we tried, because you have to try in order to know that it's not working. So that was certainly an experience.

ROSS: Apparently NAWHO has perfected the way of having access and making an impact on public policy without being geographically there.

HAYASHI: That's right.

ROSS: So you learned something else in the process.

HAYASHI: Exactly. The environment was there, too, at the time. I mean, the political environment was there. The donors were very much committed and focused on empowering women of color organizations. So that was possible back then.

ROSS: Which donors were very supportive of you at the time?

HAYASHI: The Ford Foundation, obviously, was extremely supportive. Jael Silliman, who is at the Ford, she was at the Noyes Foundation. She provided the first grant to start NAWHO, so I will always be so grateful for that. I think the rest were pretty much all the same groups, like the Public Welfare [Foundation]. As you know, Adisa Douglas. She was always supportive and she's a leader, certainly, within the philanthropic community when it comes to reproductive health issues. The Moriah Fund was also extremely supportive. So those are some of the donors that we worked with.

ROSS: Okay. You had mentioned the Ford Foundation, and that's where you and I met, over the SisterSong project. So tell me how you got engaged with that, and what it did for you or didn't do for you.

HAYASHI: I never got to go to the SisterSong meetings, except for one gathering that we had in Oakland. I think that was one of the first ones.

ROSS: You all hosted one of the training meetings.

HAYASHI: I think the concept is great, and that's why I'm so pleased that you're continuing, because I know it's hard to build consensus among such a diverse group of people. I've been sort of removed from that for quite some time, so it's hard for me to say how I felt about the whole project. I think that I felt, right away, that some of the challenges of that group was the diversity, which is also the strength of the group. I think we had a couple of staff members who were assigned to the project, and I remember saying to them, "This is not going to be an easy project. It is not just going to be one of those fun, let's all — you know, we have all these great activists in the room, but it's going to be a real struggle to forge a common women of color reproductive health agenda." Because even with an Asian American community, it's hard to gain consensus, because we're so diverse. I really commend you for continuing it, because I know you really have to be committed in order to see that thing through.

15:00

ROSS: One thing I could say — just to interject a little piece of update on SisterSong — is that in our ten-year history, we've only had to take a numerical vote twice. We've learned to work together through consensus.

HAYASHI: That's great.

ROSS: And both of those votes were where to hold meetings. Would it be in Los Angeles or New York or Chicago? So, literally, I'm really proud of the fact that people are committed to us working together. But you're right, crossing up those ethnicities is quite like herding cats.

HAYASHI: What's best about it, though, is just learning about other organizations and communities. I would never forget the meeting that the Women of Color Coalition had at the Native American Resource Center.

ROSS: Right.

HAYASHI: You know? And just being able to visit a reservation and take a tour and learn more about their lives. Those experiences are very valuable, I think. It's a great collective and a great concept.

ROSS: Well, our tag line now is that we do collectively what we can't do individually.

HAYASHI: Right. (laughs)

ROSS: And that appears to work, because we are able to have an impact on a lot, I think. Were there key moments for you that happened during your leadership at NAWHO, that you say had a lasting and profound legacy for you and your life, made a really big impact? Was it the Cairo Conference or other things like that?

HAYASHI: Yes. Oh yes, definitely. The Cairo Conference was exciting, and it was '94. So it was, like, a year after I started NAWHO. I was, I think, not as settled. I remember being there and just sort of thinking about home a lot, but certainly, you know, the topic and what we did around the women of color reproductive health platform — because we prepared a report and we brought that. So I had a big role in that, and the work itself was great.

The Beijing Conference was, I think, more memorable. Just being around tens of thousands of women from all over the world. And it didn't matter that I was from California because there were so many Asians and there were so many African women, it just didn't matter. We just all are just one and just feeling like, Oh, I'm not a minority here. We're just all there because we care about women's issues. That was so exciting, and being part of that conference was, I think, certainly memorable.

One of the things that I talk about in my book is NAWHO's first conference that we had in 1995 — I think it was '95. That's when I publicly talked about my older sister's death. And I was really nervous too, because I've never really said it out loud, and I certainly haven't done it in front of 300 people before. I felt that it was important for me to do that so that others could do that as well, and that that is the only way that we can actually start working toward healing and solving or fighting stigma around mental illness. So that conference was also very, very meaningful. I remember just being really nervous and thinking, Gosh, how would people see me? Would they see me differently? There's just so much stigma around mental illness. But I'm glad I did it, because right after the conference, or right after I spoke, many people came up to me and told me that they had lost someone to suicide or that their mother had mental illness. You know, there were so many people who are connected to people who have mental illness. So that was also a very meaningful event for me.

20:00

ROSS: Has there been any pressure on NAWHO to connect with Asian women not in America, to establish transnational relationships? Have there been any opportunities to do that?

HAYASHI: We've had some wonderful visits. Whenever Asian women from India or China, Japan — whenever they visit, they always come by. It's just so exciting. I actually had an opportunity to go to Japan — now, this was many, many years ago — to visit with the Health Ministry and meet with women's health groups because they were trying to bring more family-planning options to Japan. So there were certainly opportunities for exchange and networking, but I think the public policy issues are so different. Asian Americans have a different set of challenges that are very unique to here, and so it was hard. We've tried that. We actually tried to have an international program. We tried to create some linkages, but it was always just sort of more of a networking and exchanging

information, and it sort of ended there. We couldn't really build any specific public policy program or anything like that.

ROSS: Has NAWHO ever participated in any of the International Women and Health meetings?

HAYASHI: The International Women's Health Coalition — is that what it's called?

ROSS: Yes. Adrienne Germain.

HAYASHI: Yes, yes. They sponsored a meeting; I think it was in Rio, in 1994. It was right before Cairo. It was sort of one of the preparatory meetings prior to the Cairo meeting. I was invited to that, and so I participated in that gathering. But that's about it. I don't think we've been that internationally active. It was always more of a –

ROSS: Remained domestically focused, which is okay.

HAYASHI: There's plenty of things to do.

ROSS: It's not like there isn't a lot to do here. Could you speak about some of the successes and tensions of working with other women of color that you've experienced? In general terms. I'm not asking you to do an exposé.

HAYASHI: Yes. Well, it was challenging. I mean, I think it goes back to some of the things that we've already talked about. When you say *Asian American*, there are so many groups within that category, and the same with Latina women — there's Mexican-descent, Puerto Rican. And so learning about everybody quickly was really hard for me. I think I didn't want to make a mistake of assuming what their backgrounds were. So I think it really — you know, in the beginning I was really nervous about working with other women of color groups because I felt like I needed to learn fast and know their histories and all of that.

I was very close to the National Black Women's Health Project. I was really inspired by what they've done for African American women. So I had a lot of dealings with them. I went to visit with them and learned their Washington operation. That's where I got the idea, too, by the way. (laughs) They also had a service component. I was just so inspired by them. So I've had great opportunities to learn about different women of color organizations, but in the beginning it was really hard. You know, different tribes, understanding different Native American groups, who did they represent. So yes.

ROSS: So how has the mantle of the word *feminism* fit into your life? Because for a lot of us, there's an uneasiness with calling ourselves a feminist. I actually remember the year I came out as a feminist. And so for

25:00

yourself, was it always there once you took that women's studies course, or was it something you had to grow to embrace?

HAYASHI: Well, I like the word *feminism*, but I don't think I've ever described myself as a feminist. I believe in equal rights and I like the word and I like what it stands for, but personally, I think I just never labeled myself as a feminist.

ROSS: Why not?

HAYASHI: I don't know. I think it's probably because I'm an immigrant. Although I was really active in women's health work, I wasn't really here when the feminist movement sort of began, and I don't really have that sort of personal connection to it, maybe. I mean, I am a feminist but I just don't use that title. I think maybe it's just something cultural.

ROSS: Or a third wave issue. But if someone called you a feminist, you wouldn't be offended.

HAYASHI: Oh, no no no. Of course not.

ROSS: Okay. In terms of other achievements with NAWHO, it seems like identifying problems was some of the pathbreaking work that you all did. And then you began to work on some solutions to some of those problems. Could you talk more about the solution-end that you were able to help NAWHO achieve?

HAYASHI: The executive order that was issued by President Clinton was — you know, working toward that and getting that done in 1998 was certainly exciting and, I believe, a huge solution to some of the problems that we've had forever. So I'm very grateful for that.

We actually have increased immunization rates among Asian Americans in the last decade, and I am just so proud of that because we've been at it for — now this is our seventh year trying to educate the community about immunization. So for children now, we're at the level of other groups, so we're very happy with that.

I think we're also seeing increased access and more screening for cervical cancer, breast cancer. More women are getting mammograms, and we're starting to see some of these things now. I mean, we've been at it for over ten years now, but you know, I'm not saying we did the whole thing. We worked with many other partners, of course, but we're the first group to bring a breast-cancer and cervical-cancer awareness program to the community.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had never supported an Asian American organization, to partner with them before we came along. We're just really excited about those kinds of accomplishments and being part of the solution, if you will. Because it's

one thing to say, you know, These are the problems, you need to include us. Well, they've included us now. So what do we do?

ROSS: Exactly.

HAYASHI: So I think NAWHO has taken that step, and we are seeing some of the results of our work, and all the hard work that we've put in over the last ten years. When we look at the data, when we look at the health outcomes, they've changed. The bad news is when you start to do that, people say, Oh, well, then there's no problem anymore. (laughs) Nevertheless, we're really happy with some of the things that we were able to do in the last ten years.

ROSS: When you decided to transition out of the leadership of NAWHO, how did you plan and achieve that?

HAYASHI: It was interesting because in 1999, I moved out of the Bay Area and I went to Sacramento. My husband got a job in Sacramento, so we moved. I had reduced my role just to working part-time, and I was just going to try to get other part-time work in Sacramento. I thought that back then, I was like, Well, this is my exit and transition, and we made Afton the executive director, and I became the president. So that worked out great, but then I was just always part of it. The time goes by, and three years later I come back to the Bay Area and I'm still involved. So then, when I got back and I had worked on some great projects in Sacramento, I got the opportunity to work with the American Public Health Association and Dr. David Satcher on the Eliminating Health Disparities Project. It was great. It was really a nice break from NAWHO and that work, while I was still involved.

30:00

And so when I got back to the Bay Area, I was still involved, but I decided to start a project called Iris Alliance Fund. I've always wanted to tackle mental health, and obviously, because my sister — and I think her being — you know, having that encounter with her the day she died — and just sort of memory of her just sort of haunting me, I think, even subconsciously. I really felt like, Well, what do I want to do now? I thought, I want to do mental health. I want to make an impact in mental health because it's not just within the Asian community. There is such stigma associated with mental illness that you have one in seven Americans with mental illness, but when you look at the funding for mental health education, prevention, you know, there's just not much there. So when I returned, I thought, Well, I want to start a project on mental health now. That's what I want to do.

Around that time — back then [California] Assembly member Darrell Steinberg, who is now in the [California State] Senate — he started talking about running a statewide ballot initiative. It was called Proposition 63: Mental Health Initiative. He came up with this brilliant idea to charge one percent surcharge on millionaires, which then will create about $700 million in the state of California for mental health

programs. When Ronald Reagan was the governor, he closed mental health hospitals, and he promised community-based intervention monies, which basically never came, and that's how we've ended up having all these homeless people who are mentally ill on the streets.

So then Assembly member Steinberg asked me if I would work on the initiative with him, so I did. I got to work on this bright initiative, and we passed the initiative. We didn't have a lot of money. Mental health isn't something that big corporations are going to want to fund, so it was mostly through family members, you know, who have family members who are mentally ill, and some very generous donors. We passed this initiative barely and created an over- $700 million a year funding mechanism for mental health programs, which is just so exciting and — just personally, what a great thing to be a part of.

ROSS: You said the iris was your sister's favorite flower.

HAYASHI: Yes.

ROSS: Which is why you chose that.

HAYASHI: Yes, yes. So while I was working on the Iris Fund projects and building that up, and working on the Prop 63 initiative, it was just — so my whole life just kind of became, oh, improving mental health. The Iris Foundation — we've had many important projects that we've funded, and we do an annual leadership conference. So we do that. We had our fifth one this year. We now have about 120 leadership members. They're all members of very diverse organizations. We train them, give them the tools — same concept — to go out and influence their own organization, because a lot of them work in organizations or companies where mental health is not a topic as a priority. So we're trying to change that through training the leaders.

After the initiative passed, the governor appointed me to sit on the commission. So I've been on the statewide commission to oversee the implementation of the act, which is very exciting. Because of the economy doing a little bit better than what we had projected, we are looking at over $1 billion in funding for our first sort of calendar year. It's a tremendous accomplishment and something that I'm just very, very proud of.

35:00

ROSS: And you like policy.

HAYASHI: Yes.

ROSS: You're actually a policy wonk.

HAYASHI: (laughs) I do, I do. And that led me to running for office.

ROSS: Which I was going to ask next. How did you make the decision to do that? And your present position — what are you now?

HAYASHI: After working on the Prop 63 initiative and — you know, running an initiative is slightly different from running for office, but the elements are the same. You know: getting endorsements, raising money, going out there and talking to people and then getting support for the initiative, and asking them to vote yes. So after that process, I thought to myself, You know, it would be so great if I could do this full-time, and so how do I do that? I thought, Oh, I could actually become a lawmaker. I didn't plan to run for office. It really didn't cross my mind, and I think part of it was, Oh God, that is so not attainable. You have to be somebody else in order to do something like that. I've always thought it was something that was not attainable.

After working on the initiative, I thought to myself, I think I would be good at this because I have the nonprofit background and I have social justice background and I'm an activist, and that's what we need. We need activists in Sacramento, in the legislature. I talked to Assemblymember Darrell Steinberg, who I consider one of my mentors, and he thought that it would be a great idea if I went to State Assembly. So, about two years ago, I launched my campaign. I formed a committee, I started raising money, which we know how to do, right?

ROSS: Nonprofits teach us that.

HAYASHI: I have to say, I think having nonprofit-management experience is so good because when you start a nonprofit, you've got to do everything. You don't have assistants or this or that. I mean, you've got to be willing to answer the phone, organizing the board, and it's very — The elements are the same: organizing a group of volunteers, going out and fundraising, having a good organization so that the campaign runs smoothly. And it's going out and speaking to groups and convincing them that they have to support you. Why they should support you. So I think the training, my nonprofit background training, was very useful for campaigning.

ROSS: But in nonprofits, we're selling a cause. In a campaign you're selling yourself. Doesn't that make it different?

HAYASHI: It was hard. (laughs) It was hard, and in the primary I ran against a fire chief. You know, men tend to have a very different style when it comes to talking about ourselves. I think my supporters would — I would constantly hear this from my supporters after a forum or a debate, they'll say, You need to talk about all your accomplishments. You need to talk about how you've been on the Planned Parenthood board and you've raised tens of millions of dollars. You need to talk about your accomplishments. Because I think women tend to shy away from that. We're so focused on whatever that's not directly related to us. When we

talk about our accomplishments we say *we*. We never say, Well, *I* did that. Just little things like that. It took me a while to sort of transition. So you're right, and it's very different asking people for money for your campaign. When you're asking donors to give money to an organization, then you're talking about programs and this and that services, right? But you're asking people to make an investment in you. Basically what you have to do is sell your platform. You know, You're not giving money to me, you're actually contributing so that we have better health care, better education, things like that. But you're right, it was a transition.

ROSS: How did the national women's political community support or not support you?

HAYASHI: They were fantastic. I have to say. The EMILY's List [Early Money Is Like Yeast], women's political committee, which is based in L.A. — there's a California list. They were fabulous. They all just organized and supported me very, very strongly. So I was very happy about that.

ROSS: That's good. They're the believers. They're the ones that don't say, Well, you're too long a shot for us to take you seriously. 40:00

HAYASHI: Yes.

ROSS: So that feels very good to hear that. That was actually quite controversial when I entered the movement 30 years ago.

HAYASHI: Oh, yes.

ROSS: Because candidates of color were not always supported by the women's PACs [political action committees] and — well, EMILY's List didn't even exist then but –

HAYASHI: Exactly. Well, I think also, too, for women of color, we have to prove that we're viable because often we're not given this immediate credibility that we could win. I'm the first Korean American woman to go to the Assembly in California. There's a reason why I'm the first. It's hard. I think it's very hard for women in general, but I also had to overcome a lot of my cultural issues too. Just standing in front of a group, talking about myself, talking about my background, is just something that I was so taught not to do. So it was hard.

We still don't have parity. There are more men than women in the legislature. Every year, because of term limits — not every year, every term we do lose women, and so it's important to support women too. There were many challenges, and I'm so glad I did it, but it was hard. It was the hardest thing I've ever done, was run for this office.

ROSS: But it sounds like one of the bravest too, which is pretty impressive.

HAYASHI: I'm happy that I won. Thank you.

ROSS: What does your family think about all you've achieved?

HAYASHI: Oh, they're so excited. My parents are funny because they are so proud, but they always end with saying, But she doesn't have any children. So I know that that's what they would like to see. When I got married, I was 35. My parents were so delighted that I was finally getting married because to them, 35 is like, Wow, she's old to be getting married.

ROSS: The clock done tock.

HAYASHI: So they were very excited. We get along better now. For a while it was hard for us to even have conversation because they were just so not happy with the way I was living by myself, not married, and just doing my thing. But we get along better now, and I think they're certainly very proud.

ROSS: Tell me about meeting your husband. Dennis [Hayashi], right?

HAYASHI: Yes.

ROSS: Tell me about how that developed, because you're rumbling through life as a single woman, being an activist, and all of a sudden, you have a new name.

HAYASHI: Yes. I actually have known Dennis for a long time, and he certainly had influence in many things that I've done. I actually met him at the Asian Law Caucus when I was just starting out. He was an attorney there, but we started dating much later. His parents were interned during World War II, and Dennis is very smart. He went to law school. He's a great lawyer but dedicated his entire professional career to civil rights. He's a role model. He's very smart, so I can talk to him about policy issues or just whatever. He's always just so valuable, and so I'm very lucky because I know that it's hard for spouses of legislators to be able to enjoy the events and do the things that I do, and he's just so much a part of everything I do. He really likes the politics and being part of what I do. We make a really great sort of team, if you will. We do everything together.

His personal background and his parents being interned during the war and losing everything, and then to have to start all over — that whole experience that he brings has certainly influenced me too, because before I got to this country, we were taught to not socialize with Japanese people. So Koreans and Japanese don't get along. And so when I came here, I learned the history of Japanese Americans and really got to understand the diverse experiences that Asian Americans experienced in this country, and how there's a strong bond between

45:00

these ethnic groups here. It's very, very different than what I was used to in Korea. He's been a great, great partner. He's just — he's the best.

ROSS: Now something significant happened to you September 10, 2001. Tell me what that was. That was just a special day and, of course, it was overshadowed by other events. What was going on September 10?

HAYASHI: Dennis and I were supposed to get married three weeks after that, three weeks after September 11. We were in New York City. *Redbook* magazine was honoring me and Hillary Clinton. It was very exciting. I got to sit with Paul McCartney and I guess his then wife, Heather. They're not together any more. We had a fabulous luncheon in New York City. I was recognized by the magazine and just had a great time. The next morning, we were waiting for our car to pick us up, and that's when the September 11 events took place. We were stuck in New York for about a week, and it was a very scary time because the whole thing is just so unexpected and nobody really — how do you prepare for something like that or expect something like that to happen?

While we were in New York, I was so certain that something else was going to happen and that we may not be able to return home. We would be at a restaurant and the owner would just come out and say, Well, everybody needs to get out because the Empire State Building just got a bomb threat. Something like — I mean, it was really the most horrifying experience. So Dennis and I were together the whole time. Thank God he was there because if I was there all by myself for a week, I think I would have been in pretty bad shape.

But we eventually came back, and my parents couldn't come to the wedding because the flights were very limited and they didn't want to fly, which I totally understood. So we didn't have all of our family members there, so that was very sad. We ended up canceling our honeymoon too, because we were going to go to Sydney. We decided to postpone that and, of course, it never happened. (laughs) So we always joke about that — at some point we need to do that. That was an experience that, I think, really taught me how we take so many things for granted and [have] so much to be thankful for. Anyway, it was hard.

ROSS: Not to get too personal, but I do want to ask the same question your parents ask, and that is, are there any plans for any children in the future?

HAYASHI: That's not personal at all. People ask me that every single day now. Now that I'm elected, there is no personal. Everybody knows everything. You know, we don't have any plans to. Obviously I'm much older than 35 now, but Dennis and I really enjoy our life together. We have a great time doing whatever it is that we do every single day. We both love politics and policy.

I have four nephews. I have two in Korea. I have two nephews in Orange County. And I love them and I spoil them, and so I understand

why people want to have children, because they're so wonderful. When they are here, there's nothing else that is more important. So I get that. I see why people would want to have children, but for us, you know, we're very happy with the way things are.

ROSS: And it's okay. The definition of woman is not automatically spelled *mother*.

50:00

HAYASHI: Right.

ROSS: That's at least one thing that the women's movement has contributed to society.

HAYASHI: That's right.

ROSS: You can be complete without the children.

HAYASHI: Right.

ROSS: And that's all good. I was just wondering if it was in your future. And you never know where Mother Nature is going to pop up. I've had many of my friends who had their first children in their mid- to late forties.

HAYASHI: Yes. I know. It's interesting.

ROSS: Were you engaged at all with the March for Women's Lives in 2004?

HAYASHI: A little bit. I had intended to go. I was actually in the middle of launching the campaign, so I wasn't able to attend. I know. I saw the whole thing on C-SPAN and I'm like, I think this is the first big women's rally that I'm missing since 1989.

ROSS: That's a million of our closest friends. It's quite nice. So are you —and I probably shouldn't ask this — but are you considering other future political moves? Will we hopefully one day see Senator Hayashi?

HAYASHI: Oh my gosh.

ROSS: We certainly could use you in Congress.

HAYASHI: Well, did you know this is my second week on the job?

ROSS: I know, but I can dream, can't I? (laughs)

HAYASHI: You never say never, but I do have to really focus on doing a good job while I'm in the assembly, and that's what I'm focused on. There are some people who plan things real early and they've got their whole career mapped out. I don't. If you had asked me three years ago, "What

are you going to be doing in three years?" I wouldn't have said, "I'm going to be in the state assembly." I'm always going to have other options. Wherever I can make social change, I'm there. So I'm going to focus on doing a good job in the assembly.

ROSS: I know we're a little short for time, so I'm going to move into some of the legacy questions I was actually going to put into the third segment, which I think we have enough time to do, and then we can allow you to make some final comments. I would say, as an oral historian, that NAWHO has seeded an entire movement. I mean, the reason we have NAPAWF [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum] now, the reason we have these other –

HAYASHI: It's very exciting.

ROSS: – Asian women's organizations is because you were brave. And now you have a group of women with whom you can be brave together. So, imagine 50 years from now, someone writing the history of this period. What would you like them to say about your legacy and your impact?

HAYASHI: I think I would like to be remembered as someone who wasn't afraid, because God knows how many challenges I've had to overcome. If we don't like ourselves, then we can change. We can grow and we don't have to accept whatever our background or culture or family expects of us. And so I think I'd like to be remembered as someone who broke down those barriers and wasn't afraid to pursue what I wanted to do.

This is really interesting for me because I feel like I owe the organization something. This was really great for me personally as well, because I was able to empower myself to continue and go on to the state legislature. I feel that I've contributed greatly to the cause and built a great organization. I'm also very grateful that I had this opportunity. It's very mutual.

55:00

ROSS: So if there's another young woman in Korea who is thinking about not wanting to just automatically get married and have kids and have a different life, what would you tell her?

HAYASHI: That if we don't like our lives, we can change and we can grow.

ROSS: Okay. What were some of the hardest things about doing the work that you encountered?

HAYASHI: Which part of the – ?

ROSS: In other words — and maybe I should give — We have a term in SisterSong that we call *sister sucker punches*.

HAYASHI: So where was I when you guys were having those conversations?

ROSS: Right. And we coined this term because they are the punches that only come because of proximity, because you've only let certain people you trust get close enough to hurt you that badly. So for me, that's sometimes some of the hardest part of the work, not dealing with the external problem, but dealing with the internal process of getting people to work together.

HAYASHI: Right.

ROSS: – who have far more in common than they have separating them. I don't want to impose that as your most difficult stuff. That was my most difficult stuff. So I'm asking you, what were some of the hardest aspects of doing the work with NAWHO and things that you encountered? And then, what were some of the most joyous aspects?

HAYASHI: I think the most difficult thing when I was at NAWHO was feeling appreciated. Because we don't do this work for money or glory or anything like that; I mean we do it because we care. Sometimes it was — I wouldn't say it was the most difficult, but I think sometimes it really made me feel that this is a thankless job. And those moments were hard when I felt that way. When you are involved in social change, you are going to be working with many, many different types of people. You've got to be able to work with everybody. I think it just comes with the territory. From time to time I would feel like, This is such a thankless job, and why won't they recognize that I'm doing my best? (laughs) So I had those moments too, and that was hard.

ROSS: Okay. What were some of the most joyous or rewarding moments for you?

HAYASHI: Whenever we accomplish something like the executive order. When we got major partnership grants with CDC or a foundation, I felt like, Wow, they're recognizing that Asian American women need help; that's great. One person that I really need to single out again is Afton, because she made my work at NAWHO so much fun. Yes. And we just — we shared victories. We've made mistakes together, certainly, and without her, I think the whole experience would have been very difficult.

ROSS: What intentional work have you done about collecting the archives and history and organizational records at NAWHO?

HAYASHI: We have actually developed this fabulous Web site. Everything is on our Web site. Yes.

ROSS: You mean going back to the beginning?

HAYASHI: Yes.

ROSS: Amazing.

HAYASHI: So we have — every report we produced is now downloadable on the Web site.

ROSS: But I'm talking about your records of your internal documents. Board meeting minutes and stuff like that.

HAYASHI: Oh. I think we have them in storage somewhere, because I know we rent a storage. I recently found some photos from 1994 and I was just really laughing, you know. We look so much younger. You age quickly in this business.

ROSS: Don't we all? Is there additional information you think is important that I should ask you about, that's important in understanding your life history accomplishments to date? Because as I said, I think this will be the first of many oral histories on you over time. Is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like to include? 1:00:00

HAYASHI: I think I'll just talk a little bit about what I'm doing now. Coming to this country as an immigrant and learning English, moving up to the Bay Area by myself and putting myself through college, and overcoming all the challenges with starting a nonprofit, and just being able to get here and serve in the California state legislature, to me, is just a great honor and privilege. I want to do a good job. I want to continue the work that I've been doing. Just because I'm in a different role doesn't mean I'm going to stop caring about the things that I've cared about for the past 15 years.

Being the first Korean American in the assembly, I really hope that there will be many more; and the fact that I won, you know, will inspire others to also run if they want to, if that's what people want to do. So, this taping is very interesting. Obviously, I'm very honored to be part of it, but for me, this is sort of another chapter. I'm only at chapter five or something like that, and I've had just tremendous support from other women and women of color in the reproductive health movement. All my supporters — you know, all those mentors, everyone who I've met and talked to — have really helped me get here. I didn't do this by myself.

My main sort of, I think, point today is that the work is going to continue. I'm sort of in the middle of it, and you caught me kind of in the middle of what I'm doing. And that's how I feel about it. Anyway, I'm just very honored to be part of it, and thank you for including me, again.

ROSS: My last question is, do you have papers, files, photos, correspondence, memorabilia, that you'd like to consider preserving at the Sophia Smith Collection, like the NAWHO records?

HAYASHI: You know, I think my book will be great because it has NAWHO stuff in it and my photos from NAWHO conferences and things like that.

ROSS: So you'd consider it? And my final, final question is, you will receive a copy of this interview. Do you want it on DVD or VHS format?

HAYASHI: DVD is great.

ROSS: All right. Again, on behalf of the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College, thank you, Mary, for letting us do this interview.

HAYASHI: Thank you.

END TAPE 2

END OF INTERVIEW