

**Voices of Feminism Oral History Project**  
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College  
Northampton, MA

**PEGGY SAIKA**

Interviewed by

LORETTA ROSS

February 20, 2006  
Oakland, California

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### Narrator

Peggy Saika was born February 26, 1945, in an Arizona internment camp. Her Japanese American family settled in Sacramento after the war. Peggy was the youngest of five children in a working-class, Buddhist family. Her father, Fred Taro Saika, was a farmworker; her mother, Dorothy Fukushima, worked in canneries and cleaned houses. After high school Peggy worked as a hairdresser while earning an undergraduate degree at Sacramento State College. She later earned a master's degree in social work.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Saika was involved in left study groups and in Asian American and multiracial community activism for education, immigrant, tenant, and labor rights in Sacramento. She became coordinator of Asian Community Services. Encounters with sex discrimination in employment, an abortion experience, and an abusive personal relationship attuned Saika to women's issues as well. While living in New York City from 1978 to 1983, she worked at the Chinatown Health Center and was active in Bronx Women Against Rape (WAR), the Organization of Asian Women (OAW), and third world women's activism.

Since returning to the Bay Area in 1983, Saika has continued to combine employment in nonprofits with community activism. From 1983 to 1991 she served as executive director of the Asian Law Caucus. In 1986 she became the first Asian American appointed to the Alameda County Commission on the Status of Women. She was a co-founder of the Asian Women's Shelter, the first shelter for abused Asian women in northern California, and in 1989 she helped organize Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice (APIC). From 1993 to 2000 Saika served as founding executive director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN). After attending the 1995 UN Women's Conference in Beijing, she participated in creating the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF). Since 2002 Saika has been executive director of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP). She is active in the Buena Vista United Methodist Church.

Saika has served on several boards, including the Ms. Foundation for Women, the California Wellness Foundation, the New World Foundation, and Choice USA. Saika is married to Art Chen, a political activist and physician. They have two children.

### Interviewer

Loretta Ross (b. 1953) became involved in black nationalist politics while attending Howard University, 1970-73. A leader in the anti-rape and anti-racism 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. Also in 2004, she was the Co-Director of the March for Women's Lives. In 2005 she became national coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. 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, Saika underscores the lasting impact of the internment experience as a call to vigilance and action. She traces her political involvements from pan-Asian student activism in the late 1960s forward, marking her journey through various forms of organizing: direct service, civil rights, community organizing, and philanthropy. The interview offers a general outline of Saika's path as a postwar progressive who embraces her generation's challenge to build an ethnic movement that affirms Asian American identity and rights while it also advances a broad anti-racist, feminist, class-conscious social justice agenda.

### Restrictions

None

### Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Four 60-minute tapes.

### Transcript

Transcribed by Susan Kurka. Audited for accuracy by Cara Sharpes. Edited for clarity by Revan Schendler. Transcript has been reviewed and approved by Peggy Saika and Loretta Ross.

### Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

#### Video Recording

**Bibliography:** Saika, Peggy. Interview by Loretta Ross. Video recording, February 20, 2006. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Peggy Saika interview by Loretta Ross, video recording, February 20, 2006, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 2.

#### Transcript

**Bibliography:** Saika, Peggy. Interview by Loretta Ross. Transcript of video recording, February 20, 2006. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Peggy Saika, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, February 20, 2006, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 23–24.

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Transcript of interview conducted February 20, 2006, with:

PEGGY SAIKA,  
Oakland, California

by: LORETTA ROSS

ROSS: Good morning. It is February 20, 2006. My name is Loretta Ross. I'm with the Voices of Feminism project of Smith College, the Sophia Smith Collection. I am in Oakland, California, interviewing Peggy Saika with Asian American Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, and we're here to do her oral history. How are you feeling?

SAIKA: Thank you, I'm feeling great. Thank you, Loretta. Thank you for being here.

ROSS: Oh, it's great to talk to you. (pause in recording) OK, Peggy, why don't you start off by telling us where you're from and your family background.

SAIKA: Well, I was born in Arizona, because my family was interned in one of the concentration camps during World War II in Arizona and I was born at the close of the war. But I grew up mainly in Sacramento, California, so I kind of consider that — you know, when people talk about hometowns or whatever, because I think there's a difference for me about the community that I was a part of and raised in, and then a more political kind of connotation of my birth, which just permeates my whole life and how I think I see the world and myself and my place in this world. I guess we'll talk about it some more later, but — I'm from Sacramento and I'm the youngest of five children. My sister, Gloria, is the oldest and then my parents had three sons right in succession. And I always kid that I was the mistake in the family, the menopause baby, but [I was] the youngest of five and just really raised, almost, by my sister, who I consider like a second mother to me.

ROSS: May I interrupt to ask you to explain more about the internment camps?

SAIKA: Sure.

ROSS: Because it may be knowledge that a lot of people don't have about what happened.

SAIKA: Sure. It's so wound up in thinking about the old questions about how we become politicized, how we become socially conscious: the legacy, for me, of having my grandparents, my aunts and uncles, my cousins, my parents, my siblings, all interned in a concentration camp during World War II. And then having that as a reference point for most Japanese Americans, you know, when they first meet each other. My parents' generation, the first question will be, What camp were you interned? And it becomes a way for really my parents' generation to connect.

And for my generation it's been about a consciousness and a political awareness about the fragility, what I consider the fragility, of democracy, of how, in times of crisis or peril that understatedly, I think — it's really been an invisible part of our history in this country is that for people of color, we've become enslaved in so many different ways. And so, in that context of understanding, that there were ten of these sites across the country. When I first went with my family in the '70s, that was the very first time that my parents went back to Arizona to the camp, how emotional it was for everybody but in particular my mother, who — you know, the camps were where all you could bring were what you could carry. So she carried her babe. They carried, I think, one suitcase, but all their babies — and she remembers so much that it was 119 degrees or something and there were pregnant women in the train cars that were passing out and they were handing out salt tablets. How when they first got there it's the middle of a desert — all of the camps were — they just cried and cried because the whole issue of where they were and — total, I think, just confusion about why they were there.

And so that legacy is steeped in me, and so it makes — I think it drives me, my head and my heart about why it's important to stay politically active, why it's really in the protection of, and the building of a multicultural democracy, that it's more important for those of us who have this kind of legacy. And I think that for all people of color in this country we have different levels of legacy but there's something that — our common history of oppression and exploitation binds us all. And I think it's in that spirit that I feel I'm a part of a global community. But I have a deep sense of responsibility about being able to be engaged around inequities, and that's a part of my legacy, that it's not only that it's a part of my genealogy but it's a part of who I am and hopefully a part of why I'm here.

ROSS: So when were you born?

SAIKA: In 1945 and in Arizona, as I said, at the close of the war. But as a baby I was in Sacramento or in California.

ROSS: So your parents' names are?

SAIKA: My parent — my mom, Dorothy Fukushima was her maiden name. She was born in Milpitas, California, which is in the Bay Area. She was

actually the youngest of three. Her brother and her sister were both born in Japan and then my grandparents came here, and so she was the only one that was born here, so, much younger than they were. My father was born in Japan but came very early to this country as a young boy. So in many ways they [were] culturally Japanese but culturally very much American — so, you know, Japanese Americans. And they worked and struggled. She had children to raise and all of that but she was a cannery worker, a farm worker, she cleaned houses, she was a seamstress. She did it all. My father, similar — farm worker, very small business person. He was a presser for a long time in a dry cleaners. A lot of different kinds of jobs in order to raise their family, and neither one of them finished high school and they were bicultural in many ways and really very much reflect their generation in this country.

ROSS: And your father's name?

SAIKA: My father's name is Fred, Fred Saika.

ROSS: OK. And the number of brothers and sisters that you have?

SAIKA: I have one sister who's the oldest and then three brothers. I lost one brother to lymphoma about ten years ago, and so it's been, it's been a loss. So there's four of us that are left.

ROSS: So do you think coming from a working-class background, as your parents represented, had an impact on the work you do today?

SAIKA: Oh definitely, definitely. You can't help but be shaped by what you see and experience, through the life experiences of your parents. For my mother to — you know, I have such a child's recollection of seeing her come home from the canneries, where she was allergic to peach fuzz and all of that, and so her arms and just most of her body, she'd have this horrible rash, because that's what was in season and that's what she would be working around every day. For her to clean people's houses and really make so little and — so for both of them, yes. I mean, it did shape who I am and how I see the world, similar to the whole internment during the war, all of this. I mean, you understand class differences. You understand poverty if that's really where your background really has come from. But all of this has been a gift about being able to look at and appreciate opportunities in a whole different way, to know how limited their opportunities were, to know how limited their options were, how exploited they've been. It's just something that is a much deeper lesson and education than going to college or to graduate school or any of that.

ROSS: So, what values, religious or otherwise, do you think you got from your family?

10:10

SAIKA: Well, I was raised a Buddhist. I always say that I am culturally a Buddhist and became a Christian as an adult. The main part of that has been, for my parents, especially my mother, always being very spiritual. Her sense of never giving up and her sense of family and what makes everything possible and being very spiritually grounded has been an important part of my own consciousness and upbringing. I always say to people, I feel very culturally a Buddhist still. But my parents were typical of many, many parents I think, that, you know, they faced adversity and always felt hopeful though. My mother is such an optimist still, even though now she's got Alzheimer's and she's definitely aging and very frail and fragile. We all take care of her and it's a part of what she has instilled in us, is a sense of hope and optimism and hard work and giving back and taking care of ourselves, our families, our community, being involved, being engaged. I mean, I think that that's really a spirit that's with all of us and I've inherited that from both her and my father, and my sister really, my oldest sister, who has really been probably one of the biggest influences on my life, because she's raised me so much, you know.

ROSS: Well tell me about her. What's her name?

SAIKA: Her name is Gloria and I always say that if she were born in a more privileged family, or born later, she would have been a medical doctor, but she became a nurse. And that was primarily because that's what she could afford, her family could afford, as far as going to school and all of that. But incredibly both maternal and community oriented. So we're very, very close and what a gift it's been for me to have her. I always call her my second mother, and she really, really is, and so that bond, that sense of sisterhood in the deepest sense, both biologically and politically, is really important for me. It's very grounding.

ROSS: Did your family talk about politics as you were growing up?

SAIKA: My family did not and it's really interesting for me, because I didn't really even learn, in a more political way, about the internment experience until I was in high school and then in college. And it's been so much a part of my own search and my own life journey to be able to understand it and, in the beginning, just be enraged by it all. You know, how could you just go into camp and all of that, but through the process of my own consciousness raising and self-awareness and social awareness that I've been able to grow and to learn and to understand. And not just to understand, but to internalize what it was for, you know, 120,000 people to be interned at that time and what it meant, and the hysteria and the fear and all of that that permeated this country. And so, my family, my parents especially, were a part of that and I just more fully and deeply appreciate what they've gone through, now.

ROSS: So Peggy, tell me about how you learned about sex and sexuality. That's always interesting to hear (Saika laughs) from a person who was pre-feminist when this is coming about.

14:27

SAIKA: That is so interesting to even hear, to have you ask me that question, because I have thought about it over the years. I think I'm really so indicative of so many of us, you know. I started menstruating without really understanding what it was about and the first time I menstruated I was horrified. I was so afraid that there was something really wrong with me. And my sister had to take me aside and my mother both, you know, and drawing me pictures and trying to really educate me about what was going on with my own body. And at the very end of all of this — it was just a very long — and I think it was crying and I'm so afraid. So my sister said, "So do you get it?" And I'm like, no. (laughs)

So, lesson number one, you know, Sexuality 101, not good, as far as even from that time as far as becoming an adolescent and starting to menstruate and all of that. And really, too, being raised in a community in Sacramento, a Japanese American, Asian American community, actually living in an area that was before urban renewal and all of that. It was a redevelopment area, so it was a very multiracial area. So I grew up with not just Japanese Americans but African Americans, low-income white folks and all of that, but in the midst of all of that raised still, I don't know if I would say conservatively, but much more traditionally than I hope I have raised my daughter.

ROSS: What do you mean by traditional?

SAIKA: Traditionally in terms of expectations of women, especially girls. Why I consider it different for my sister and myself is that we're really a generation apart, you know, over a decade apart. She was really raised much more as the first-born, and so our politics, and the way we have made choices about our lives reflect that generational gap. When I think about the kind of choices that and options that she had — I was the baby of the family and I think that by the time I became a teenager and I was growing up, my parents were kind of broken in. They had a daughter and three sons and so I was the fifth and I was fairly rebellious and opinionated and judgmental and all of that. So, I've really have been so fortunate and indulged in some ways in being able to go my own way within the confines — you know, I guess what I'm describing though still is within the confines of a Japanese American community in Sacramento which is, you know, not New York or San Francisco or Los Angeles. I had an interesting growing up, so to speak, with many conflicting messages, for cultural reasons, for generational reasons, for gender issues.

ROSS: Well, how did gender affect growing up and learning about your sexuality? Did it influence when you became sexually active?

18:40



SAIKA: I think that, to be perfectly honest, I really feel that so much of my teenage years and even into my early twenties, I was so confused and unconscious, to be perfectly honest about it. I wish I could say I was a raging feminist from birth, but it would be disingenuous. You know, I really feel that it was my overall political awakening as a person of color that has led me to really understand more the intersection of race, class, and gender. And then as I have gotten older and had many more life experiences, I hope I am a more substantive both thinker and doer around issues of gender and those intersections, that they are who I am. Those intersections all define who I am and it's still in the context of that that I place myself.

I lost two really good friends in December, both activists, both in their fifties. One good friend, we just had his memorial service. He was a writer, a teacher, a performer and many, many things, but at his core always a political activist. One of the things that he talked about was if being Asian American really works to be able — for us — to be able to engage and to think of ourselves as a part of a broader movement, then that's great. But if it's about defining ourselves because it's cool or it's about whatever, you know, the hipness of being Asian American or for whatever superficial reasons, then that doesn't work for us. If we're not a part of bringing our legacy and who we are — and how we are represents so many intersections — that if we don't see ourselves as a part of a broader social justice movement, as a part of a world movement, then our identity, our ethnic identity, is lost; it's really not meant for a greater purpose. And that really speaks to me.

So I've always seen myself in that way. I used to say, I don't get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say, I'm an Asian American woman, what am I going to do today? But I *am* hopefully contributing to really making this society and hopefully the world a more equitable place. We, as women of color, our life experiences have been shaped by so many challenges and at the same time so many opportunities. It's a gift, right, for us, and I always think that I want to reinvest all the opportunities that have been afforded to me, to be able to struggle and stay in the fight for social justice.

ROSS: So back to those life experiences, because I noticed when I asked you the question in a personal way we become political. (laughs)

SAIKA: Yes, yes, yes.

ROSS: And that's good, except that for future writers of the story of Peggy Saika, they're going to want to know, well, how did she get that way?

SAIKA: Yeah.

ROSS: So were there experiences of either a racial or a gender nature that woke you up? Because it would have been so easy just to melt into society –

SAIKA: Right.

ROSS: – and not be the sand in the gears.

SAIKA: Right.

ROSS: So, what do you think were some of the personal experiences that happened to you that influenced your consciousness?

SAIKA: You know, I talked a little bit about the whole internment experience of my family, my community, during World War II. And that is something that, at my core, continues to be a big part of who I am and how I see the world. But to me, understanding that, it's a process. You know, understanding that legacy and owning it and appreciating it and being able to hear it as a call to action, is a process. My understanding of and deepening understanding of racism and exploitation in this country, it's all been a process. I have been a part of the Asian American movement that's really a legacy of the civil rights movements and other people's movements in this country.

ROSS: When did you join?

24:21
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SAIKA: When did I join? What a good question. I would say that I very much reflect our generation of being politicized during the late '60s and the early '70s, that I became a part of building the first Asian American community organization — there were other Japanese American or other small family associations or other kinds of ethnic organizations, cultural organizations, but the first Asian American organization — in Sacramento, and in that, you know, fought for inner-city schools not being demolished. But not just the Asian American, the “Asian American school” but the Latino and the African American schools. And to be able to fight for the rights of immigrants and refugees that were being exploited. There were many places in Sacramento that were racist in nature, all the way from a miniature golf course that had racist signs that we really fought to overturn and to have demonstrations there. The owner's son, having been in Vietnam, wearing his kind of camouflage suits and all of that and coming out and yelling, “Get those goddamned gooks outta here.” And my feeling of, is he talking to us, right? But that transference of his experience in Vietnam and not being able to distinguish between supposedly the people that he was fighting in Vietnam to Asian Americans in this country was important. It's important for us to understand as Asian Americans that yes, we are united with people who were being exploited and plundered in Vietnam, but also to understand ourselves as Asian Americans, that Americans by and large could not make that distinction. The invisibility of being Asian Americans continues today. But I mean, everything from miniature golf courses to sitting in the office of the United Way

because of their discriminatory and exclusionary practices and being arrested, all of that is –

ROSS: You were arrested? (Saika nods) (laughter) You said that so quickly.

SAIKA: Well, I mean, it's one of those things where, you know, it's acts of civil disobedience which are important as part of our rights in this country. But I guess all of these examples, to me they're like little building blocks, you know? They become a part of who I am and who we all are. And so it's these life experiences that you take from all of this — and when you don't differentiate yourselves ever from other oppressed people, so that it doesn't matter whether we're organizing restaurant workers or garment workers or whatever. I think about my mother as a cannery worker and that solidarity and that understanding of what it means to be either unemployed or underemployed, or to live as just low-wage workers and to be able to prop up this country. To be able to be the source of the labor that keeps this country going and capitalism humming, it's all a part of our own experience to be able to understand who we are. I understand privilege in a much deeper way because of my own personal experiences. The question around the personal and the political — they're so interwoven. They're one in the same. For me it becomes the source of your passion as far as what you want your life to be, and so I very much feel that the personal and the political cannot be really divided.

ROSS: Did your parents value education and impart that value to you?

29:00

SAIKA: Yes they did, they really did. I think what they valued most was for us to be the best of who we could be, and so if that meant education, that's great, if it meant owning a business or whatever, that's great. But the sense of whatever one did with one's life, that you're part of a community, you're part of a family, you're part of a society — that is just so deep and impor[tant] — it's just ingrained in me. I hope it's just the way I've operationalized myself or my values.

ROSS: Well, do you think that sense of embeddedness is part of the Asian American culture that you were surrounded by?

SAIKA: Yes. And I think that although people talk about oh, you know, there are generational differences — and I think that's true, there's incredible diversity within our community — but I know for me, being raised always to think of oneself in the context of not just individual development or growth or ambition, but to place yourself always in the context, as I have said, [of] family, community, and society. That is so aligned with my own political development that I hope that that's what I reflect — is that it's not about Peggy Saika, but it's about the organizations that I've been privileged to be a part of. It's about building the social justice movement.

ROSS: Well, we're going to get to that. I want to hear more about Peggy Saika the woman.

SAIKA: You know what, you're just like hitting at it, as far as being that great difficulty, right, of really talking about ourselves — or myself, I guess — in that way.

ROSS: It is.

SAIKA: It's very difficult, very difficult for me.

ROSS: And we can take time with it and please, if I get intrusive, you can push back.

SAIKA: No, not at all.

ROSS: But I do think the future people that want to write the story will find the evidence of your work in other places.

SAIKA: Right.

ROSS: Where they may not find the evidence of your life but in your own words, only here.

SAIKA: Mm-hmm. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, it's so interesting, because in a deeply personal way, it is always the personal and the political and so even as you're asking me these questions about myself, I think you've already picked up on it. I always respond in a way that's talking about everything else except me. Because it's such an interesting thing for me — I haven't had a career path. I used to say when my kids were little, when they came home with those forms, what is your occupation, I wish I could say — well, what do you say, political activist, nonprofit worker or whatever, right? But I wish I could put, you know, architect or office manager or whatever, and I didn't have that kind of career path. But what I've had is these incredible opportunities to work in organizations where I've been able to grow as a person. And so that's why it just becomes even harder for me. They're so intertwined, right, and I think about my own public persona. It's always been in the context of the organizations that I've worked with and so it's really hard for me to kind of extricate the two.

ROSS: But you grew up, you went to school. Tell me about going to college. What was interesting, hard or easy about going to college?

33:10

SAIKA: I'm a part of that generation, you know, I dropped out, went back. It took me forever to get my undergraduate. I actually worked as –

ROSS: What school did you go to?

SAIKA: To Sacramento State College. But the interesting thing about it was that I cut hair for many years while I was going — to put myself through college because I always felt that I needed a backup. And I was also part of my generation, right, where a lot of people dropped out and worked in the factories and became hotel maids and different things. But it's interesting because for me, I just always thought that no matter what, I needed to be able to support myself. I needed to be able to be independent and in order to do that, I had to have a trade or a livelihood. I'm not a trust-fund baby. I wasn't going to inherit great wealth or anything so I really needed to be able to have stuff that I could fall back on. So —

ROSS: Well, where do you think that conviction came from?

SAIKA: I really think it's from my family and my community — and then the sense of not wanting to be a burden, right? So I cut hair for several years to support myself. It took me forever to get my undergraduate because I was always working, and then I started doing political work. It's a reflection of that time, you know, that period, that it was just such an amazing time to be growing up and coming up, and we were all — it was so exciting. Like we were just talking about, a bunch of my friends, that it was a time when if people weren't a part of the movement, you wanted them to be because it was such a great experience. You wanted everyone to be a part of it, and so how fortunate to be a part of that. I mean, at that time, too, it's just all of the different political struggles and all the drama of the movement and the personalities and all of that, but it was all a part of the mix.

And so, for me, yeah, going to college, dropping out, coming back, being in a relationship, that was for me very important. Even though ultimately I think it's great that we never ended up together. But it was important for me to be in a relationship with a very political person that understood racism and politics and community organizing. And being exposed to the [Saul] Alinsky methodologies, school of community organizing, it was just all a part of my growing up during that period.

ROSS: Do you think there were gender differences in how you and your brothers were treated?

36:28

SAIKA: Yes there were, and I — yes. So the answer is yes.

ROSS: Describe them. (laughs)

SAIKA: I think that there were gender differences, as far as — well, I'm going to back up, because I would say though they were — when you grow up in a low-income family and everyone's struggling to put food on the

table — my brothers worked in the summer and at other times and gave all of the money that they made to my parents. So we weren't raised with a lot of privilege in that way. So I think that issues around inequities become blurred, you know, because we're all struggling over economic survival.

ROSS: But there weren't differences in who prepared dinner or who was responsible in those kinds of –

SAIKA: Oh definitely, all of those, you know, because my mother did everything. My mother did everything. And even when they had a small business and all that, my mother still did it all. You know, wash, cooking, all of that. And so, you're raised thinking that that's the norm, right. Actually, those are those kinds of life experiences too that you don't fully appreciate until you're older and you have your own — you're developing a different consciousness about all of those issues. But I guess when I look back and I think about it, I try to put it into perspective, [there were] definite differences.

And I really feel that in the '70s, the first time I went to Japan is when I really saw and understood the craziness of being born a Japanese American. But the attitudes around women and your role and all of that, when I was in Japan I understood it much more deeply.

ROSS: Well what was different between what you were observing in Japan and what you had experienced here?

39:00

SAIKA: I think that you're raised — there are gradations, but definitely you are raised in a culture where the roles of women are greatly diminished. But when you're Japanese American, the larger context is here, which is different than to go be in Japan, where the larger context is the source of your oppression, where you see that you're considered [what] they would call a "high miss" at 25, meaning if you're not married and you're not bearing children by then, there is something deeply wrong with you — where there are very few options around career options or even going to work and all of that. So much of that has changed, but in 1976 it was still all there. There were so few single women that traveled by themselves, and I basically was going all over Japan with other women. So it was just a very stark experience. It was a time when — you know, the '70s were when Asian American women finally started getting into law schools or medical schools and it was just a very, very few isolated women had been a part of any of those opportunities.

On so many different levels your own awakening about all of this — you know, it's almost like when we describe the perfect storm. But in your early twenties and all of that, you're a part of these larger movements. You put your own personal life history and how you've been raised and the culture that you come from into this mix and so everything is happening. But it's the perfect storm around you're being able to really and much more deeply and in a much richer way,

understand what we call the intersections, now. It's only now, at this point, that you can look back after several decades, and being able to put it into perspective. But my personal history is rich with many challenges.

ROSS: I'd like you describe those challenges, because you're talking in broad terms when I'd like you to pinpoint down to what was happening to you.

SAIKA: Yeah. You know, it's so funny just thinking about it, but when we talk about pinpointing — having a personal relationship where you're really growing politically and at the same time on a personal level, that relationship is fraught with contradictions around being with an extraordinarily sexist man. It's kind of an oxymoron, you know, very political man, very sexist man. But it's not an oxymoron and I think that in that period and maybe even now right, you're talking about — it describes many of our relationships. But being in a long-term, you know, five-, six-year relationship, and understanding what it is to feel that you are becoming more and more politically empowered, externally, and then at home or in your personal relationship, you're being oppressed and exploited. That contradiction is so deep, and your own — my own sense of who I was, feeling that there was something so dishonest about it because you weren't living at home or you weren't really dealing with your personal life in a way that reflected your true politics. And not being able to break out of that and feel very bound to a relationship that was at its core unhealthy and exploitive and oppressive and abusive. It's really deep and heavy but it prepares you, I think, for looking for other options in relationships.

ROSS: So, speaking of which, what were the significant relationships in your life? I think you told me you have kids, so obviously you had some.

44:30

SAIKA: Yes, yes. So, to pick up on this thread about personal relationships, I was in a terrible relationship and came out of it wounded in many ways but really held up by important friendships, sisters, family, and really becoming involved with my life partner, who is a medical doctor but has been a community doctor, a public health person, all of his professional life.

ROSS: When and how did you meet?

SAIKA: We met at a meeting, of course, and he had been working and volunteering in a free clinic as a medical student. I was working in the community and so we of course met in a meeting. He and I shared a friendship for several years before we became a couple.

ROSS: What's his name?

SAIKA: Art, Art Chen, a political activist and somebody that I deeply admire and respect and love. He really is my life partner in so many ways, and so we've been together for over 30 years, and we both are blessed that we keep doing what we're doing and what we're passionate about, and we're both politically active in the way that we want to be. And hopefully we're nurturing and supporting each other to be able to be who we each need to be in order to be a better couple, I guess, so to speak.

ROSS: So how old were you when you got coupled? (laughter)

SAIKA: We were both in our 20s and, as I said, though, we were friends for several years and I think that's a real gift. And then we moved to New York. We were both in Sacramento. We moved to New York and he went into his residency program and we had our daughter. Our daughter was born there — talking about a significant relationship, our daughter Mia, Mia Saika Chen.

ROSS: What year was she born?

SAIKA: She was born in 1981, in May of 1981. And a couple of years later we moved back to the Bay Area, to California, and our son Kori Saika Chen was born in November of 1983. We always say they represent the best work we've done. I think that what they've really — having kids and a long-term relationship and all of that really teaches you how it's possible to have a family and still continue being politically active. You can work, you can be politically active, you can have kids and do all of that. It's totally crazy, always unbalanced. There is no balance, I always say, but that it's possible. It's possible to have the richness and the depth in one's life in all of these parts that are I guess normal.

ROSS: Well, did you have challenges with developing a gender consciousness and being in a long-term relationship?

48:28

SAIKA: You know, I think that I'm married to a feminist.

ROSS: That helps.

SAIKA: Yes, that really helps, and he's married to a feminist. (laughs) That's big for most men, I would say. And I think that through the years it's one of the core strengths of our relationship, is to be able to know that to have a gender lens permeates everything we do and that even in those instances — and I laugh when I'm with my in-laws, my mother and father in-law. My father in-law died several years ago but I used to always joke and say, Oh yeah, when I'm there I'm very traditional. I own that, that there are certain expectations, but to be able to put it into perspective and laugh about it and to understand the complexities of our



roles, but not in a purist or judgmental sense, it has really been very, very healthy for me. I'm grateful for the contradictions, you know.

ROSS: Well, Gloria Anzaldua says that women of color exist in borderlands and we get very comfortable there with contradictions and ambiguities.

SAIKA: Right. Our life is permeated by many contradictions and always ambiguities. So I hope that what it does is it makes us live in spaces oftentimes that are the hardest to be. Because to live and understand contradictions and not let them really drive you crazy is an important thing about staying healthy and keeping it real. But I think that for me, that's what it's meant, that's what it's really meant.

ROSS: Were there any significant events that stand out as you look back that says, well, in 19 something, something, something, this changed in my thinking, or was it all just an evolutionary process with no necessary markers?

SAIKA: There are so many markers for me when I think about light bulbs that go off. You know, the first time you're in a huge demonstration, the first time that — when I think about the late '60s — what's terrible about doing this interview now is I can't remember the exact year or whatever so I have to think in terms of a period, I guess, of time. To be able to think about and reflect about these moments when I saw the joy of working with seniors in our community when they said you can't bring Chinese and Japanese people together, they hate each other. Especially for seniors, the joy of being able to organize events where they are together and they're sharing food and they're — they can't speak the same language but there's a sense of commonality. To live in that, to have these racist remarks hurled at me —

ROSS: Tell me about one of those incidents.

52:35

SAIKA: You know, as I said earlier, being called a gook, and then in the early '70s — it was a time when the United Farm Workers were really organizing, and in California they started what was called the Agricultural Labor Relations Board of the state legislature here in California. So it was actually a committee that was housed in the legislature and they had work that was being actually implemented. They were hiring organizers and I remember going up to the capitol because I thought — I think this was maybe 1972 or '73 — and being told by the chairman of that committee that he would never hire a woman, it's too dangerous, that I would have to work with the Teamsters and the UFW [United Farm Workers], I would get dirty, and so he would never hire me. And it was just stunning to have someone just say all this in a very matter-of-fact way and a very protective way. Well, you would get dirty, Peggy. You would have to be in Delano. You would have to work with the Teamsters and the United Farm

Workers. It's going to be so complicated. All true, all true, but then to have it end by saying, I would never hire you or any woman.

ROSS: OK.

SAIKA: And my reaction to that was, of course, you know, so enraged, right, and thinking later — well anyway, I was so enraged. I won't go into how enraged I was, but I was, and also in the '70s [to] go through an abortion, you know, all those —

ROSS: Tell me about that.

SAIKA: It happened. Really, we couldn't afford a child. Art and I were going to move to New York. He was going to be in his residency program. It was not a time that we could be good parents or support a child, but going through an abortion really helps you understand how painful — no woman ever wants an abortion.

ROSS: Was this pre- or post-*Roe*?

SAIKA: Post.

ROSS: Because New York legalized —

SAIKA: Yes.

ROSS: — before *Roe*.

SAIKA: And knowing how many of my friends actually had to, you know, a few years earlier, have “illegal” procedures done. But even for me, just how deeply that experience shapes how you feel about choice and choices and options, and how we want — we should do everything we can to avoid women having to make that choice to have an abortion. But you have to have options, and that it is fundamentally so core to who we are and who we must be to be able to control our bodies. It's a fight for our lives and to know that every child must be a wanted child.

ROSS: So, in terms of your personal life, what would you say that you've learned as a woman, as a wife, as a mother that really informs your activism that we're going to talk about next?

56:50

SAIKA: I think I've described a lot of the — it's all of the different complexities, right, that go into it. But I think that it's these lived experiences of demonstrating, of sitting in meetings, of being in trainings where the light bulbs are going off for us — never separating yourself from all of the struggles that exist around inequities; living through an abortion, living through really abusive relationships.

ROSS: Mm-hmm. What does your family think about your choice of becoming a political activist?

SAIKA: I don't think they've understood it very much over the years, but as I have all the trappings of mainstream America — I'm married to a doctor, two kids, career — so they see the trappings and so you look like you're successful, you know, you've made something of your life, right? And over the years just understanding more and more that my life, the totality of it is about values and principles.

ROSS: All right. Well thank you, we're at the end of Tape 1.

SAIKA: Thank you.

END TAPE 1

## TAPE 2

ROSS: OK, Peggy, so tell me about how you became employed by the nonprofit world.

SAIKA: What a great question. So my first job was we were organizing in Sacramento and setting up the first Asian community organization [Asian Community Services]. The real core of it, what distinguished it from other organizations, is that, well, number one, it was Asian American, so it was kind of a Pan Asian strategy, but the other thing was that it wasn't just to create services but really to create a vehicle around empowerment. So it was very much in keeping with a lot of the other movements that were going on and actually the broader Asian American movement that was happening at that time. So this was 1970 — '69, '70 — and there was a real kind of confluence of students from UC Davis, Sac State [Sacramento State College] and a couple of other places, but community members and other folks that came together. It was a really important job for me, because I really feel like doing organizing work in your own community is totally different than moving to some other city and then settling there and doing it — you know, where your family is and where everyone knows you and all of that.

And so it was just until I left in 1978, that's basically what we did. There was so much around developing, for example — doing a survey first to find out what the community issues and needs were — to be able to even raise the whole issue of why you would want an Asian American organization. For some of us that were involved in political study groups — it was a time when so many of the “left groups” were developing and, you know, the whole progressive movement — the whole question was whether you supported China or the Soviet Union and all of that, right? That permeated kind of even the division that occurred.

But my first job was really being one of the coordinators for this group and it was in Sacramento. And it was interesting because we were working primarily with seniors and immigrants at that time, the reason being that it gives you — of course, you were trying to develop credibility and developing some services, but services that were actually vehicles to do other community organizing work and all of that. And so, we all kind of took turns being on unemployment or getting stipends from college or being CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act] workers or whatever it took to be able to economically or financially build the organization.

I had mentioned before that we fought for inner-city schools being rebuilt. We fought for senior services. We organized the first — we saw that none of the city recreational programs for seniors included anything for any Asians at all — so our seniors actually organized and went to City Hall and testified and all of that to demand relevant services, and

they're part of the city, and that would be accessible to them on a lot of different levels. So, they were quite successful.

We organized what we called the ABC Coalition, the Asians, Blacks, and Chicanos, to fight for the schools.

ROSS: ABC.

SAIKA: Yeah, and we fought for the schools, the inner-city schools. We were successful. You know, three to four hundred immigrant parents at different school board meetings demanded that they be held multilingually, in Cantonese and Spanish and all of that. So we were really out there as far as trying to do real organizing work and build an organization through that lens, as opposed to just developing services that would be good, important, but we always felt would not be enough. And so we were really very much were into an empowerment, self-determination kind of strategy, and that was my first job in the movement. It was quite amazing, quite amazing. There were so many things that happened during that time, lots of great issues.

There was one, the Chol Soo Lee Defense Committee, an Asian American that was on death row in San Quentin for many years, a young guy that was picked up when they were — the police were just really going through Chinatown and picking up whoever looked young and maybe, you know, were involved with the gangs. With no reason, no whatever, could just do that. That was — back in the day they could do — had these police sweeps and were doing that. So we were dealing with criminal justice issues but we were also organizing, which became the first national Korean organizing effort. You know, he was a young Korean American, as I said, that was on death row for ten years and so the — how we found out about his case was that there was a Korean American working in a newspaper in Sacramento and happened to hear about Chol Soo. So you know, we got involved in that.

We were involved in other struggles that were broader struggles outside of even Sacramento and so coming to the Bay Area and other places. We'd come to the demonstrations fighting against the demolition of the International Hotel, which was a huge, huge issue, which basically evicted all of these senior Filipino Americans, low income. And basically it culminated in the police going in in the middle of the night and evicting them and then tearing down this building. And the building lay dormant, or this big lot — it was like a hole — lay dormant for 25 years and it just was put back up again as senior housing. But anyway, just huge struggles that were going on, and a part of the antiwar stuff — you know, it just reflects the struggles of that period.

And so, my first job was in a time when all of the different political upheavals were taking shape. And I would say that the issue then, when I think about many women of color — not all, but many — the tension around the women's movement and where women of color could really find traction was really palpable, even then, around — and I think for most women of color, the whole call about being involved in antiracist

4:35

work, where you really had to be involved in the broader community struggles. Anyway, that to me was something that resonated with all of us, but it reflects the time and our age, as far as in our own consciousness, and just looking back, it really does, it reflects that era.

ROSS: Do you think that there will ever be a time where you don't have to organize to ensure that the API [Asian Pacific Islander] voice is there?

8:42

SAIKA: That we wouldn't have to?

ROSS: Mm-hmm.

SAIKA: I've always believed that even in the context of an Asian American movement that you're an ethnic movement that's a part of a broader social justice movement. It wasn't to just build a silo, an ethnic silo, and that that would be the beginning and the end. It was really to be an ally in the social justice movement, and that really is where it's so critically important. I think this issue about identity and where one places one's self is so important, because in many ways — one of the legacies of the ethnic movements is that by and large they have become silos and that the broader social justice movement has really suffered, because so many of our communities have been very busy building a strand of nonprofit organizations within our community — sorely needed, very important — but you go down that path and it just sucks you in, it sucks you dry, around being able to build and sustain your organizations. And you wake up one day and we have these ethnic silos. And I would say that there has been, to me, an aspect then at the expense of the broader social justice movement. So it's very important for Asian Americans to have a consciousness about their legacy, their past, how they are still perceived in this society and in the world, but to place that in this broader context, to be able to use that experience, that legacy — not to just build some hip and cool Asian American whatever, but that it really is about being a key ally, a key ally in the broader social justice movement. That's really the challenge and the call.

ROSS: Has anyone ever accused you of trying to do a separatist thing because you were organizing amongst the API community?

SAIKA: Yes.

ROSS: And how did you respond or handle that?

SAIKA: I think that it's interesting, when I look back, I probably handled it in the same way that many of us have, defensively and just reacting without trying to engage, to really be able to see how it's important to engage and to be able to struggle and to not react and to not become defensive — that in order for us to be who we want to be, we have to reflect that in our practice. I think I grew up and came up in a period

where the focus was so much on building our organizations and our movement. And the constant need to be able to build that within our own community, that consciousness, you know, it puts up blinders about what we need to do. The gift for me has been to be exposed and to be able to build relationships, great relationships, with people from many other movements, many other struggles. And so, that broader exposure, it makes you unconsciously or consciously a bridge person. Those bridges have been incredible for me, you know, because the bridge walks both ways and connects whatever sides, and that's just been so powerful for me.

ROSS: So when you left the ACC(?) — was that what it was called?

13:25

SAIKA: Mm-hmm.

ROSS: Where did you go?

SAIKA: I moved to New York. Art and I moved to New York in 1978, and we lived in the Bronx. I volunteered at Bronx WAR, Women Against Rape, when we first moved there and actually volunteered with a couple of organizations in Chinatown, and then found a job at the Chinatown Health Clinic, which was the community health center in New York's Chinatown. At that point it was a storefront and very small, and now I think it's multi-site and huge, huge, community health centers. But I worked on a training program for people who wanted to pursue some aspect of health work. And then to be able to work with them on developing a consciousness about the healthcare system and also have a direct experience in working in a community health center, but also to be able to do an internship in one of the major health facilities that served the low-income, primarily the Lower East Side in New York City.

ROSS: Did you encounter tensions between being a Japanese American working in a Chinese community?

SAIKA: Yes. I used to –

ROSS: Could you describe that?

SAIKA: I used to joke and say I think I was the only Japanese American working in New York Chinatown at that time in 1978. And I did, but not in an overt way. I mean it wasn't — I think I felt defensive about it. You know, people used to say, Saika, Saika, that's not Chinese, and I'd say, Oh no, but my husband is and his last name is Chen. But that was more because I understood kind of the historic divisions and animosities between different groups, especially the way that other Asians and primarily recent immigrants would react to a Japanese, because of the role that Japan played in Asia, or has played in Asia. So I

understood that but it was still a source for me of — well, part of it though is that what worked was that I worked in the Asian American, almost, training program. So even though it was housed at the Chinatown Health Clinic, it really recruited Asian American young people from a lot of different campuses and a lot of different places. And so, to that extent it was a good spot for me. But the Chinatown Health Clinic was a part of the whole Chinatown community and so, yeah, I would feel that a lot but my work itself was very pan-Asian.

And the reality was that it was kind of the path for the clinic to be involved in issues around looking at the broader healthcare system and you know, national service, but the economics that was driving it — you know, governmental allocations and where did community health centers fit into all of that. So it was great for me in that way.

ROSS: So when did you work start to intentionally include a focus on gender issues?

SAIKA: Well, at the same time I joined, it wasn't so much I think my work at the clinic — it's kind of all intertwined, of course, because there are many feminists in Chinatown — but I became a member of the Organization of Asian Women [OAW], which was actually a collective of Asian American women, multigenerational.

ROSS: About when was this?

17:15

SAIKA: This was in 1978.

ROSS: OK.

SAIKA: And I had been involved — when I first moved, I was volunteering with Bronx WAR. That was really great. So I went through their training and orientation and then — because I lived in the Bronx — and then when I started working I really couldn't volunteer as much and then that was about the same time I joined OAW. And it was really a small group of Asian American women, as I said, you know, multi-generational so some older, some younger. We did a lot of international solidarity work but also got involved in community struggles and also the International Women's Day celebrations in New York City. I joined the Third World Women's Committee to celebrate International Women's Day. It was the first time that third world women were coming together and so it was really wonderful to work with women from Harlem. There was Safiya Bandele from —

ROSS: Medgar Evers.

SAIKA: Yes, yes, and she was working with the women's section of the Black United Front. I mean, there were just many, many Puerto Rican sisters. There was just such a broad base. We'd have our meetings in Harlem



and it was amazing. It was an amazing, amazing time. I did a lot around, you know, my own involvement. I also gave birth to a daughter in 1981 in New York and so that just further added to just this whole personal political transformation around being, you know, a new mom trying to balance it out and just all of that, and being supported by so many amazing, amazing sisters.

Right before, when I was pregnant with Mia, Art and I joined the Antonio Maceo Brigade and went on a trip, a three-week trip to Cuba with the Antonio Maceo Brigade. And I was pregnant, but it was a wonderful time to be able to visit Cuba, to be able to actually go all over and to talk to so many men and women that were key participants in both the revolution and the way in which Cuba had really been dealing with both the embargo but the way in which they were still trying to build their model. And so, you know, it was all happening around the same time. It was an incredible period for me, once again, bringing the personal and the political together.

ROSS: Well, did you encounter any tension when you talked about gender issues in the API community?

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SAIKA: No, because I think that even my sense of how the gender lens was being operationalized or implemented in our community was still very separate. It was still very separate. You know, I belonged to OAW — I did other activities, like women's organizations, so to speak, but it wasn't as though there was a consciousness or a commitment to really being able to build organization that had a race, class and gender lens on their work. Because even when we said that that's what was happening, it was in the context of it being — well, I'm just really speaking for myself — very superficial around the gender lens at that point. You know, it's how many women are patients at the clinic and what industries do they represent, you know, what are we doing with restaurant workers? But it didn't stem from like a deep analysis of that and therefore how does it really transform the work of the organization. So I very much was still a part of antiracist formations and doing what I considered kind of, you know, feminist work, but it was still, I would say, very separate.

ROSS: Well, what did you think of the mainstream feminist movement at the time?

SAIKA: So here we are talking about living in the contradictions. I think that was part of the deep contradiction within our own community, I mean the progressive strand of our community. And the women's movement always though, it was just this place where you — the deeper contradictions around race were there and so there it is, right? In your own community you're struggling with issues around infusing a gender lens, what little lens we might have had at that time. And we didn't even call it that, but really being able to look at sexism. That struggle is

in your face every day in the community but then in the broader, societal sense, we're talking about dealing with racism within the women's movement, and that even though there would be those times when we would come together and these issues become sort of everybody feeling really tense, uncomfortable, defensiveness and all of that, I think there wasn't the kind of leadership or consciousness that could lead us out of it at that time. I think there were attempts. People were trying. I would say we were all struggling, you know, we were trying. I don't think it was — there wasn't that maturation of our own thinking, of our own analysis and how to get out of all of that and be able to really move forward, even though we were yearning for that and we'd always talk about it. How do we move forward? Let's not get stuck. That was the call, right? And then we'd be back in meetings; we're stuck and not moving forward.

ROSS: Well, we were a movement waiting for the idea that would propel us, I'm sure.

SAIKA: Right, right.

ROSS: So what was your job after your work in the Bronx or in Chinatown?

SAIKA: In Chinatown. We left in 1983 and moved back to the Bay Area, and I was pregnant again with our son. Art went to work for Asian Health Services, which is a community health center in Oakland. And I came to work for the Asian Law Caucus, which was the first Asian civil rights organization in the country, a legal civil rights organization.

ROSS: But you weren't a lawyer.

SAIKA: No, I wasn't a lawyer.

ROSS: So what drew you there?

SAIKA: They recruited me partially because of my politics, but the other part is that they really didn't want a lawyer. They really needed somebody — the organization was, like many of our organizations, struggling to be able to really stabilize financially and they wanted somebody that would come in and focus on really building the organization, not just the programs and the legal work. And so I came to work in 1983, when I was pregnant with Kori, for the Asian Law Caucus. What a great period. Nine years of my life I stayed there, and I always say I grew up there, having two babies and both Art and I working for community organizations. That was really, really stressful and hard, the hardest years of my life, but so meaningful and I really, I thank God and everybody else for those years.

ROSS: Well, what are some of the more significant things that you think you learned and contributed during those nine years?

SAIKA: Well, I think I learned about trying to manage and build infrastructure in a community organization that had its political point of view, had a political perspective. Did a complexity of work where it wasn't just about big cases or, you know, doing the legal work, but doing clinics and service work and community education and working in coalitions, you know, trying to build the broader front. But doing all of that on a shoestring budget, people making very little money, and working on developing cases that grew out of our services. Because of our reputation, credibility and legs in different communities, these big cases would come to us. We worked on this huge case about reparations, you know, which was to me a key case.

ROSS: The Japanese American.

28:08

SAIKA: The Japanese American reparations, so we were part of *Korematsu vs. the U.S.* Fred Korematsu was one of the three Japanese Americans who fought the internment during World War II, went to prison. His imprisonment, his sentence, was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court and our lawsuit was about reopening that case, and we won. The case was huge, it was huge.

We represented garment workers trying — and some of the first cases around really calling for manufacturers' liability, which is really about not just representing individual garment workers and then, you know, shutting down these small sweatshops, but really arguing for industry being held accountable for the conditions that existed within these sweatshops.

We were a part of the big national struggle against immigration reform, a huge, huge, repressive anti-immigrant legislation. We were a part of organizing the first Chinatown Tenants' Association, the first organized voice of tenants. We were a part of the first struggle of Chinese tenants in public housing against the Housing Authority that really grew out of a case of a young, 16-year-old woman being thrown off of a balcony and killed. Her case became the cause of the struggle around security issues and safety and all of that, which became the first organized rent strike of public housing tenants in Chinatown in the country.

We represented the Vietnamese fishermen when they were — because we had already been involved in some of the Vietnamese fishermen who were really targeted by the Klan on the coast. So we supported the legal efforts there and then in the '80s the Coast Guard was stopping the Vietnamese fishermen from fishing off the coast of California, and actually up and down the West Coast, by invoking what was called the Jones Act from 17-something saying that if you operated a fishing vessel over five tons you had to be a citizen. Yeah, it was an incredible case.

We fought to increase the minimum wage, because a lot of our clients were minimum-wage workers, and how long can you just fight for compliance to an unlivable minimum wage? And so we were a part of organizing the Northern California Coalition to Raise the Minimum Wage and became part of the statewide coalition. We won, we increased the minimum wage, because the analysis was that in order to raise the national minimum wage, you had to — anyway, you know, it was just great.

ROSS: No, no, no, don't stop. I looked away, but don't stop.

31:37

SAIKA: No, no, no. It was really a great effort, and they tried to create two subcategories both for students and for tipped workers and we represented one on both of those, and one went to the State Supreme Court here. It was at the same time that I was working there that I was on the organizing committee, which became the organizing board, which became the board of the Asian Women's Shelter, which was the first shelter for abused Asian women in Northern California. There was a shelter in Southern California but it was the first one here. So a lot of those first meetings were either at my house or at the offices of the Asian Law Caucus. And it's grown, you know, the Asian Women's Shelter now has become a nationally recognized shelter for women and I'm just so proud of having been involved in that. In 1989, while I was at the Caucus, we started Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice.

ROSS: Tell me about that because, you know, that's where our lives tend to more intersect.

SAIKA: That's right. It was 1989, 1988/89. Mary Luke was then — and just leaving, being one of the very few, if not the only, woman of color heading up a regional Planned Parenthood Association. She was in the Bay Area and she and I had known each other. She called me and said, "We need to create an Asian American presence within the pro-choice movement." I said, "Yes, let's do it," and we just went on this organizing campaign. We also knew, at that point, that at UC Berkeley, the highest number of the women that were most utilizing their abortion services on campus were Asian American women — little known fact. And you know, the issue around choice is charged within our community and some sectors of our community. But to be able to look at choice and to broaden, so that really we're talking about — and for me, you know, women having the choice to not live in an abusive household, to be able to choose to not work in an exploitive work environment — but to be able to look at choice not just about abortion but to be able to control our lives, that we have the right to that. That was, to me, why Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice, it was really important to form, to be able to redefine choice in that way.

And so, all volunteers put together the first survey in the Asian American community of attitudes about choice and I got my whole

family involved. It was a thousand-piece survey and I took all of those surveys to a family Christmas event in Sacramento, all these boxes of surveys, and after Christmas dinner I said, “OK, this is a family bonding activity. I really need everybody to help me divide all of these into zip codes.” So we did that so that they could be mailed out. It was great. They didn’t know what they were — you know, I explained it a little but it was really great. The whole clan, 30 of us, you know, got together and we’re dividing all of these surveys about attitudes towards abortion in our community. You know, why don’t you get those sent out.

ROSS: Did you get any resistance to talking about abortion in the community?

35:50

SAIKA: I think that we never talked about it in that way, just about abortion, but it was more in the context of — for example, we had a couple of key youth empowerment groups come, and one person though was a pediatrician in a teen clinic. So we had different people come and we’d talk about teens and young people in our community and choices around abortion rights and all of that. And so it was in the context of what they could identify with and then talk to us about what would work, what didn’t work. And it was really interesting, because even to hear some — you know, it was what, in the late ’80s, hearing them talk about how the attitudes and perspectives, even among the youth, were still very pervasive around being fairly conservative — sexist, very conservative. Very hard for us to listen to but, but then it really defined what we needed to do in our work. So it was a very exciting time, it was youth and then talking to other legal groups but trying to be able to look at sectors of our community, and then trying to figure out what our strategies might be.

ROSS: What was different about the API reaction to and access to reproductive health services that you were identifying?

SAIKA: I think the language and the cultural barriers, definitely, and then even within our own — having the consciousness to understand how to talk about these issues. So even the training programs that might have been there for folks to understand these issues, totally not inclusive of our folks. And of course, the people then were even working in any kind of family planning or health clinics who were having very little awareness and the skills to be able to talk to folks and work with them to develop a consciousness. It’s almost this thing about training the trainers first and, you know, we didn’t have any of that. So it was starting from ground zero. In many ways this really reflects, too, when that kind of racism still exists then it forces you back into a silo mentality about what we need to do, right, to develop this capacity within our own community. So there’s this continual tension about wanting to be engaged in the broader movement, the broader thinking about the broader context. But the reality in our own community, that broader context is so racist that it doesn’t provide the kind of resources or what we need. And then for

us to be able to — we don't even have it. So it's kind of really being impoverished on so many different levels.

ROSS: So did you feel like you had to raise gender within the API community and raise race in the mainstream movement?

SAIKA: Always.

ROSS: Again, that bridge. (unclear)

39:34

SAIKA: Always, always, that there is that duality of doing, you know, the cultural change work right within our own community and then being able to do the antiracist work in the broader society. And then, quite frankly we're talking now about the women's movement, that tension always being there.

ROSS: One of the experiences Bylye Avery described within the National Black Women's Health Project was trying to get a reproductive health consciousness in civil rights organizations, which is definitely an unfinished project. Did you have that same kind of task with the emerging API organizations?

SAIKA: I think that that condition really exists. That disconnect is absolutely there. I would say that the tension around it has not imploded. You know, there have not been those kinds of spaces where that has — when I say imploded, meaning where it's really put on the table in the most powerful way. That's still yet to come.

ROSS: So as far as — you're not concerned; there isn't an Asian American anti-abortion organization out there, either.

SAIKA: Well, there are but small still, small and individual voices. But the seeds are there. Because in a primarily immigrant and refugee community really the rightwing message resonates well. I think immigrants —

ROSS: Talk about that.

SAIKA: — and refugees are most susceptible to that messaging around economic prosperity and pulling yourself up by the bootstraps. And all of it now where you see the right, where they've been able to really connect the dots in the deepest way around both our spiritual sect, houses and community organizations and the kind of mainstream messaging around this. And all of that I think plays very well in many immigrant and refugee communities. This is the moment, this is truly the moment that the need for us to marshal all of our collective experiences and engage our newer generations to really build, you know, it's just crucial. This is the moment, at least for Asian Americans.

ROSS: One of the things you briefly mentioned was the rise of hate crimes and stuff in the 1980s.

SAIKA: Yes.

ROSS: And particularly, they took a very ugly anti-Asian cast with the murder of Vincent Chin. Tell me how that had an impact on your work.

SAIKA: Well, when I was at the Asian Law Caucus, what became the hate violence work was just exploding, because there were so many incidents of anti-Asian violence. And it's interesting to have you remind me with this question, because we were a part of what was called Break the Silence, the first conference on anti-Asian violence at UC Berkeley, and this was mid — no about 1984, so not too long after I had joined the Asian Law Caucus, '84, '85. And they had asked me to really talk about anti-Asian violence and Asian American women and it was so challenging for me because there was so little, at that point, written about women of color and racial violence, hate violence. And so it was very challenging for me. But I would say the backdrop though was the Vincent Chin case, other cases in North Carolina. You know, we're talking about killings in New York, different parts of California. The Klan was really doing its work in so many different places.

And the whole issue around how Asian Americans were perceived as being — Vincent Chin — that we're taking away all their jobs because we're Japanese, and it's because we're Sony and we're Honda and Toyota and we're all of that. Because there has never been the ability in this country to really understand the distinction between Asians from Asia and Asian Americans. And that is really the deepest and most profound challenge that Asian Americans face and continue to. This inability for us, for America, to really be able to embrace and to understand who Asian Americans are. And so anyway, it's this complexity around — so given that, then the scapegoating, the Vietnam War, for us to be seen as the gooks in Vietnam or in Laos, in other parts of Southeast Asia. And then there is the continuing need for us as a principally immigrant and refugee community, as Asian Americans, to understand what it is to be Asian Americans but to also unite with our Asian brothers and sisters in Asia around the struggles that they face.

ROSS: How has the myth of the model minority affected you and your work, because I would imagine that any time you're organizing around API issues, you run up against that stereotype.

46:16

SAIKA: Yeah, it's about boxes and to be conveniently placed in a particular box, and it just depends on who's calling the shots, what box you're placed in.

ROSS: Well, what is the myth, for those that don't know?

SAIKA: I think the myth is all of what you read about in the paper — the whiz kids, you know, everybody who's "made it." That enormous wealth, high educational achievement, all the businesses that are owned, that that represents all of Asian America. And so it has been dubbed the myth of the model minority because there's a very convenient way for if you're called the model minority to number one, for oppressed people to take that on and say, Oh yeah, we are the model minority. So the danger of that is enormous. But the other side of it is that — I think that it is still about putting you in your place. It is about defining you and not allowing any community or people to be self-defined. The myth is that we are all the owners of, as I've said, Sony or Hitachi or whatever. The myth is that we've all gone to Harvard and that we have our Ph.D.s. The myth is that we all are multi-millionaires, right?

That being said, we are, I think, at this juncture where we need to be able to — in order for us to be empowered and self-defined, we need to own the enormous wealth that does exist in our community. A number — you know, high educational kind of standards and values and all of that, entrepreneurial spirit, family values. I think we need to own all of that but we also need to engage that and harness that wealth in our community to take responsibility for the 12 percent in our community who are struggling, who are not doing well at all, and on all different fronts. You know, that there are sectors of the Asian American community who continue to be the most disenfranchised, and to be able to send that message out, to own who we are in all of its complexities. But also to do that work in our own community of engaging those who are very privileged to take responsibility for those in our society who are not.

49.30

ROSS: Well, I was going to ask you the next question about doing class work within the Asian American community. To what extent have you done it and what extent do you think it needs to be done?

SAIKA: Absolutely. I think that in the Asian American community or any community, if you don't have a class perspective, you cannot understand issues like affirmative action or economic injustice around exploitation in work places, issues around minimum wage, without a class perspective. You know, it's really difficult to engage without a class perspective when you're doing tenants' rights work. People cannot understand why you continue to do tenants' rights work and you fight for their rights, that it's fundamentally so important. And so I go back again to say this is really the moment. This is the moment that for us, as Asian Americans, that we have to own that. We have to take responsibility to do that work with that — and for those of us who claim to be progressive, then we need to really speak to that in the most expansive way, in a way that doesn't turn people off, in a way that disengages, but really in a way that is building bridges within our own community, that we need to be able to do that. And if we have credibility in our community, if we've built a certain persona or



reputation, then even more we have a deep responsibility to engage folks in our own community. I just feel that so profoundly.

ROSS: Well, one of the things that I observe as a southerner coming to Northern California is that there are parallels between what apparently is the ability of the API community to take care of its own and what I observe, for example, the Jewish community doing in New York — the schools, the senior citizen centers and things like that. Could you explain why that happens here and how it really is different than in other parts of the country?

SAIKA: Well, when you think about San Francisco and if it's 35 percent Asian, you know, population density has a lot to do with it. I think too part of it is a response to racism, right. You build this thick strand of organizations within one's own community because you have to because no one else is going to do it for you. And so that's why so much of this has happened. It's a direct response to racism. But the other part of it is that culturally it does feed into this sense that we do take care of each other, that we are family, community, society, that it is a way in which we are raised — or at least I was raised — and it's the way we're taught to be.

The danger of this thick strand, I would say, of organizations is — for me, it's so for what at this point. For what? If we take pride in having a great museum that is about our legacy and our past, if we take pride in a community health center that's become multilingual and multicultural — and I think that we have some of the best examples of great organizations that are built under community development organizations. You name it, even though we don't have a lot, the ones that we have are great examples of great work. And I respect it. I respect the work and the struggles that have really contributed towards this. But at the end of the day, we have to build institutions that are really working and acting and operating in a broader context — that it's great to have an Asian American something, but if it's only to serve Asian American interests, it ain't enough, it ain't enough.

And so I would struggle in our community around that — that it might look good, it might feel good, but at the end of the day, if it only serves certain interests, we are perpetuating that which we have struggled against and that which we keep struggling against.

ROSS: Do you think that younger API activists see the importance of the legacy work? I mean, I'm just calling it that, but the identity work, or are they perceiving a different role for APIs and activism?

55:00

SAIKA: I think they're doing a lot of different things. They represent the best of who we are. They grew up at a time when they've had enormous, enormous exposure and opportunities — for many, not for all. They're growing up at a time when I hope many of us are supporting their leadership and their development and their growth, because they're

much smarter than any of us are. You know, we have so many young Asian Americans now that are heading up organizations, great organizations. And I think that they're trying to build their organizations, trying to be respectful of those who came before them — standing on the shoulders of folks, but really doing it in different ways, because the times are different. Their context is different. You know, they have a much, much more complex community, much more diverse than when I first started out. I mean, we had diversity then but nothing compared to what's out there now. And so, their context — and hopefully, the criticisms that they would have of us and of what's been built, those reflections and observations are so great.

ROSS: Well, I find that young people apparently have done a lot more work around identity formation but I wonder if they are able to transgress identity enough to work on that unity that you're talking about. Do you see evidence of that?

SAIKA: I see evidence of it, because of the multiracial, multicultural formations that they all are a part of — that exposure, I think, has been really great, at least in California and I would say in urban centers across the country, where that's just been a part of their experience, their lived experience. But for the vast majority of young people, I think there is a disconnect around identity and what it really means and the way it's defined, you know, that they've grown up in an era where there's a lot out there that's Asian American, where we had to fight for creating anything, right, that was Asian American. It's very different.

58.20

END TAPE 2

## TAPE 3

ROSS: OK, Peggy. I'd like to hear more about your work with Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice [APIC]. What was your thinking in helping to form it and what were some things you learned in doing that work?

SAIKA: You know, I talked a little bit about the very beginning with Mary Luke and some of the other women. But it very much was wanting to build and create an Asian American women's presence within the reproductive rights movement. And so, to that extent it was really about being able to look at the challenges within our own community, but also be a part of this, what we considered important, important movement around women's rights and, really, community rights. And so, as that was emerging as Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice, it was really forming and going through all of the ups and downs with an all-volunteer organization. But it was really interesting because, as Mary would tell me, because at that point she became the main person that was going out and meeting with organi[zations] –

ROSS: Is this Mary Chung?

SAIKA: Mary Luke, Mary Luke.

ROSS: Mary Luke, OK.

SAIKA: Who was then the executive director of the Planned Parenthood in this region. She was going out and wherever she went, whether it was New York, Los Angeles, wherever, the idea of Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice just really resonated with women. It was a very exciting time because we saw how there was a need and a niche and all of that. And then on the other hand, how do you once again start a new organization? And so Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice, as we were emerging and starting to organize ourselves, build membership and all of that, we started getting invited to different meetings and conferences. And I think that it was the reproductive rights meeting in Florida — I think it was Florida, where all of the different state networks were coming together, that we really — they had invited us to come and we decided at a meeting that we would not attend any meetings unless two or three of us were supported to go, that we did not want to be tokenized as the only — and often times this happened, you know, over and over again for many women of color, that you were the only Asian face, the only black face, the only Latina. So just as a principle that we would not do that to marginalize, and the pressure that it really put on whoever was going was enormous. When you're by yourself, you're the lone voice or the lone face, oftentimes. And so I think that that proved to be a very, very important principle around which we were going to operationalize the work. So in fact to Florida, I mean, there were probably six or seven women that ended up going, women that we

supported and women that the convening supported. So it was great and because there was not another formation like APIC, it was an important time to be able to think through how do we form.

This also coincided for me at a time that I was leaving the Asian Law Caucus. It had been nine years. My two babies were growing up and in elementary school. My daughter was going to be going into a middle school and I really felt that those years had taken its toll on me. While it was an incredible experience for me, life-changing, that I had done my best, you know, to try to build the organization, contribute to stabilizing the organization. So I gave a year's notice and recruited a new executive director. They had a year's funding in the bank and all that. So I felt very good about being able to transition at that time and right before I was leaving, I had been invited to these organizing meetings for the National EJ Summit, the very first EJ Summit.

ROSS: EJ?

SAIKA: Environmental Justice. I'm sorry, the Environmental Justice Summit, the People of Color Environmental Justice Summit. And so, working with the United Church of Christ and other formations and then locally we were trying to organize. And so, as I was leaving the Asian Law Caucus, during my last several months, I attended the summit. It was once again, a life-changing experience for me and the whole framework around environmental justice and the movement and the other people of color, the women that were in the movement — all of that was just deep and profound. Many of us who were Asian Americans that had attended the summit came back and took the mandates from the summit quite seriously. You know, that the networks became kind of the key vehicle, that they wanted to create an Asian American presence within the environmental justice movement. So it's interesting for me now, looking back and thinking that APIC had started in somewhat — in some ways you think about it but in a different way, born out of a movement and a movement need.

And so, I was still involved with Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice, took a bit of a break as I was leaving the Caucus and I was going to these meetings around follow-up to the summit. This was all happening around the same time and I eventually, in 1993, worked with the founders of APEN, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, and became the founding executive director. It was right before that that I had really — because, you know, you can't create like ten different new organizations at the same time and I felt that APIC had really a great board and good volunteers and all that. I had just kind of transitioned out and even though I knew a lot of the people and all of that, that I was concentrating a lot more on starting APEN, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network.

It was during that time that I wasn't involved with APIC any longer that it became Asian Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health [APIRH] — very important transition, and eventually became ACRJ, Asian

Communities for Reproductive Justice, an important, I think, ally within the SisterSong network and the reproductive rights movement. So when I think about it, it's gone through these name changes that really reflect both the thinking and the analysis and the evolution of the movement. I think it very much reflects that. It's an organization that — or these series of organizations, as they've morphed into different vehicles, reflect the times, the leadership, the people that were involved. They've had their challenges and their ups and downs, but no different than any other organizations. They have great women, great men and women that have been a part of the organization and I take great pride [in] having had the privilege to be associated with that.

And I think that in the very beginning of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network we worked very, very closely with APIRH, because in our organizing work we took very — doing environmental justice work we really looked at of course the intersection of not just where we live, work and play but to where we pray and go to school. That became a broader framework around the environmental justice work. So one of the main — it's not even a component but I would say a commitment with our flagship organizing project, the Laotian Organizing Project, was the formation of a young women's program within that. And I think that that, to this day, really — it was interesting for me on a personal level because when we started AYA, Asian Youth Advocates, the young women that were a part of the first group, they were the same age as my daughter. So I was working with these 13-year-olds at work and then going home to a 13-year-old. So it was an interesting time. (laughs)

ROSS: So it was like the personal was really becoming connected to the political.

10.07
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SAIKA: Exactly, exactly. But I think that we learned so much about — and it reinforced, you know, we had an incredible convening in Sacramento that APIRH organized and APEN was really part of it, but APIRH really organized it. And there were many young women that attended that. And they were in one group and I was sitting in and listening, and they were talking. They were asked about what some of the issues were in an inner city, middle school, high school, and they talked about all of the challenges — gangs, unsafe conditions, bathrooms without any doors on the stalls, the lack of counseling support, the lack of, many times, parental guidance or support, because their moms and dads were working two or three jobs. And what was really instructive for me was to hear them talk about, you know, we could get invited to these conferences and these meetings to talk about our sexuality and how we feel about STDs or dealing with our own sexuality, about abortion and family planning kind of programs and all of that; but when we leave here, tomorrow we have to go back to school. The school still has no doors on the stalls. You know, our brothers are in gangs killing each other.

And so, just being in those conversations with them was a reaffirmation of, we cannot — as a movement, as people of color, as women of color — we cannot just focus on abortion rights, that if we cannot broaden what it means for young women to have control over their bodies and their lives, that definition of choice and the practice of it really has to be much, much broader. And so, I think that it was a really important time for me to, once again, not just think about it or be in other settings where as women of color, we're bemoaning the narrowness of the women's movement or the reproductive rights movement, but really thinking much more strategically about what we need to build, the kind of capacity that our communities really need, the kind of infrastructure we need to build. And it would really depend on our vision, our leadership, our strategic thinking. No one was going to do it for us and we needed to be able to bring that to the table.

So as I transitioned from the Asian Law Caucus and then going into doing environmental justice work, for me it was an important time of really understanding and reflecting that I, for years, had said I didn't have a career in the traditional sense, but as an activist, as, you know, someone who really believed in what this country says it is, that it's still possible for us to be that. You know, I had democracy and in the sense really in the context of the U.S. and this non-profit strand that gets created by our tax laws and all of that, and our IRS category, although it really reflects a corporate perspective and all of that. Given all of the challenges, unless we're going to dismantle all of that today or tomorrow, we have to live with, as they say, the cards that have been dealt us, right?

ROSS: Got to play the hand that's dealt you.

14.43

SAIKA: Yeah, you've got to play the hand that's been dealt us. And so for me it was really looking back and thinking that we need different forms of organization in the movement. I had worked in direct service organizations in a clinic. I had been a trainer. I went to work for a civil rights organization that even though we provided service and we did organizing, at our core we were an intermediary organization that brought a legal expertise to the table, even if it was in the practice of community law, that I had been able to work within these organizations. And so APEN was really, for me, an attempt to really zero in on building an organization that was at its core a base-building organization, and that that is really what we needed in the Asian American community, was to really have more base-building organizations that had accountability built into its very structure. And so that was the hope and the dream of APEN. And we're born out of a movement, incredible allies across the country and around the world. We built the Laotian Organizing Project and did incredible, I think, learning around what it means to do direct organizing and have community organizing models and a method that really can resonate with primarily refugee communities, which is a whole different context.

Where

And so I really see those years at APEN, 1993 to 2000, that I learned so much about rethinking my own political analysis and reformulating and trying to recalibrate how having an environmental justice perspective and lens really incorporates a way that we can continue to do antiracist work — but just get so much closer to thinking about both guiding principles, about the kind of organizations we want to build and then do it in the context of a movement that's here, albeit it's a movement that's had its ups and downs. It has its personalities but it has a vibrancy, it has principles, it is able to push to have an environmental — I mean, an executive order passed by a U.S. president, you know, Bill Clinton, opened up government coffers. Just an amazing, an amazing journey. And when I think back on it now to, once again, the whole issue around how environmental justice or injustice impacts women, women of color, and environmental justice and health, women's health, all of those issues kept coming up, because once again, it's right there in the movement. All of the opportunities and the contradictions, I think much of it largely still unanswered but it was an incredible experience.

ROSS: Well, there's a couple of questions that I'd like to ask you. First of all, how much engaging in international conferences and meetings, how much did that have an impact on your perspective as you were working in these organizations?

18.47

SAIKA: Well, it was really interesting because I had been invited to several international convenings, but they were very small compared to the 1995 International Women's Conference in Beijing. I had never been to anything like that, where there were 35,000 women. I was really concerned the year before Beijing, because there was very little organizing around Asian American women being able to be supported to participate in Beijing, and so I was involved in some of that. But basically, you know, we really went to Beijing not knowing how many Asian American women would even be there. That conference was deep on so many different levels for me. One, to go to what [was] for me the largest international convening ever and it was in Beijing, going as an Asian American woman was deep, very deep, in that most of the women that were there were from a country in Asia. So of course everybody thought Asian American — that in fact I was from Asia. So there would be this disbelief that I spoke English. So it was the same old kind of shit, right, but now in Beijing about how great my English was.

ROSS: Don't you just love that?

SAIKA: Yeah. And the whole thing about — and nobody quite understood what Asian American was, you know, and that just hit me, that if you — for us, we're just like a blip, you know, when you think about us in the world, who Asian Americans really represent in the world and then

Asian American women, right, even smaller. That we're just such a blip, a drop internationally, but here we are in this country trying to really build a sense of empowerment. So you keep looking at the demographics and talk about how large our community has grown, how it was the fastest-growing minority group and all of that.

But you go to a convening like that and number one, no one understands who you are or where you're from. No one believes you're American and you're not Asian. So there you are once again, caught kind of in between — all of that falling in the cracks, so to speak. And then on another level of not knowing and so we actually had organized a convening and put out a call to Asian American women that were there to come to a meeting. There were 75 or a hundred women that showed up. It was amazing. It was really, really amazing, and the joke was, for many of us from California, why do we have to go to Beijing to get together to organize ourselves? But be that as it may, it was an extraordinary opportunity and experience.

When we came back, we very much did not want the experience and the spirit of Beijing to be lost, and I became one of the founders of the National Asia Pacific American Women's Forum [NAPAWF] a year after Beijing. It was founded with 125 women, Asian American women, activists in Los Angeles, and the idea was really about taking the platform from Beijing and really looking at it in the context of what platform did we need to craft that would resonate with our communities. And you know, it's still alive and well and this year NAPAWF now has an office in Washington, D.C., and will celebrate it's tenth anniversary in Los Angeles in September, I think, right before our SisterSong event. And so, how great is that?

I feel enormously proud that all of the founding sisters are still there as supporters, but it's a whole new generation of women that have taken over the organization. It's very exciting. It's a national membership organization. It's very, very challenging. You know, they've only just staffed up a few years ago so it's very challenging still. But to know that it's been able to survive and that the point of view and the values that undergirded its formation still resonates with the new generation or two of women is incredibly gratifying. I'm so proud to be associated with all of its work, you know, and it's not about agreeing on everything or any of that; it's more just feeling so proud that an organization could not only survive being all volunteer, very little resources, but is kind of really going into its next phase. It's going to celebrate a decade of its existence and work and bring a multigenerational, I think, group together in Los Angeles. And that's very, very exciting.

ROSS: I'll try my best to be there too. Now, where do you find your faith and your ability to think outside the box, found new organizations or build a new movement? I mean, it seems to get re-energized.

25:10

SAIKA: Yeah. You know, that's such a great question. I am a believer in that we're not institutionalizing individuals but we're building institutions



that are important for the social justice movement, and that it's really important to have organizations that not just revolve around one personality or a position. The funniest thing about that too is that most of the organizations that I've been associated with have a lot of women in it, in the organization.

ROSS: You think that's an accident?

SAIKA: No, no. I completely own it where even with APEN I said, you know, this is not a women's organization but it is an organization that's being built through the lens and leadership of women. I think that it's different. It's different in the way that we structure ourselves and we work and we behave and we care for each other. You know, I want to be — I've made a lot of mistakes. I hope I've learned from many of them but at the end of the day, it's about building environments and organizations that we're operating the way we say we want the world to be. And so, we've really been — you know, what a life, I think, what a life. And I think that being at APEN has really been such — you know, it's all been important for me. I've learned so much. But leaving APEN and taking a break for a couple of years and just working on small projects before I came to work for AAPIP, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, it was important for me not just to kind of regroup and just refuel, but important in a reflective sense of understanding what my role and my contributions and my responsibilities still might be — you know, that phrase, God's not done with me yet.

ROSS: Well, tell me about AAPIP.

28:05

SAIKA: Well AAPIP started in the early '90s, primarily, just like many organizations, straight-up affirmative action. There are very, very few Asian Americans in philanthropy and so it started really as an organization that very much wanted to create opportunities and open doors for Asian Americans to be in the field. And the hope was that if we did that, then there would be more resources to Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrant and refugee communities overall. In the main, I think over the years, while there's a certain goal that has been achieved, there are more Asian Americans in philanthropy — far from done but certainly now we're at this point, eight chapters. We have 500 members across the county, so many more Asian Americans as staff and as trustees. Numbers still very small but many more than the early '90s. But if you look at the disparities around where philanthropic investments are made then — you know, in 1991 or '92 they published this seminal report, "Invisible and in Need," and it was 0.2 percent of all philanthropic dollars went to the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. And in 2002, when we looked at data, it was 0.6 percent. So if it was only about having more Asian Americans in the field then I think that those numbers would look quite differently. But

we know that it takes more than just having more yellow people at the table, but it's really about being able to change institutional practices and decision-making.

So I think at this point AAPIP very much is a vehicle to be able to create models of social justice philanthropy, to really be a vehicle for change and not to complain or bemoan these statistics any longer except for where that kind of advocacy is needed but really to develop action plans. I think it's fundamentally so important for us to be able to raise important information, bring it to the table, but ask everybody to look at themselves and the practice of their institutions in regards to some of these disparities and inequities. And what am I doing about it, not just to come and listen to something, take notes and then check it off as something that you did because you attended a briefing or whatever.

And so, we're in a very good, I think, space right now. I love the fact that we're a national membership organization, so there's accountability built into our structure. I love being seen as a colleague in the field of philanthropy, even though we have not done any funding or grant-making. We will in the next few years but we have not. I love that AAPIP is still seen as a community ally. So it's a position that we must take very seriously and leverage, that we are not a community organization, we are not a foundation but we have access to both and that's a very unique position. And we need to be able to leverage that to really then not just look for resources but invest those and insist that investments must be made into social justice organizations.

ROSS: So how does it make you feel when you see so little of the philanthropic dollar going towards the communities that you represent?

32:16

SAIKA: Angry, frustrated.

ROSS: Why do you think that is and what do you think we'll be able to do about that?

SAIKA: Well, I really appreciate the question, how does it make me feel, because you strike at my core. That's how it makes me feel: angry, frustrated. At this point in my life it's about, you know, it's déjà vu, being able to see institutional racism at its worst. When you look at the underbelly of philanthropy in that it is shrouded in doing good things but if you unmask much of that, it is not going to become a more equitable, to become a more just society. It's about keeping people down. It's about being able to blur this whole thing around why, when you have all of this sheltered money and it's not going into the government through taxes and that then it's individuals that get to decide where those resources are deployed. It is a field largely that is mandated by maintaining the status quo. It is not about creating change. So it should not be any surprise to us that therefore it translates into disparities for all of our communities, the continuing disparities.

And so, while I see all of that and I move beyond my anger and my outrage, I am more passionate now about being able to do something to make it have an impact — to be a part of building an organization that builds credibility and is a key ally and is seen as a trusted partner. But we will keep insisting and pushing that resources must be invested to create change. That if we truly believe in a multiracial, multicultural democracy then we've got to change the way we're operating, because that continues to be the illusion and the hope but not the reality and, you know, I don't want to be there. I want to be in a space where we can be hopeful and optimistic and love what we're doing because it is the right thing to do.

ROSS: So who is your base? Is it program officers at foundations or Asian Americans of wealth? I mean —

SAIKA: Oh, that's really interesting, because AAPIP is an affinity group to the Council on Foundations. So by its very nature the Council on Foundations is like the trade association within philanthropy. It is a national membership organization of grant makers. The founders of AAPIP were very, very progressive in that and visionary in that they created a membership class within AAPIP where community organizations, 501(c)3s are associate memberships. So 70 percent of our members are grant makers. They're staff or trustees or donors, and 30 percent are EDs [executive directors] and other folks from nonprofit organizations. And it is in this belief that you need to have the people that are working on these issues at the table. When funders are making their decisions about where they're going to invest, those decisions should be informed by the people who are doing the work. So AAPIP's membership is very unique in the field but I think it keeps us grounded, it keeps us real. It holds me accountable.

ROSS: But let's say a wealthy Asian American philanthropist who is an individual, has not started his or her own foundation: what could AAPIP do for them?

37:15
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SAIKA: Well, we're the only national Asian American philanthropic organization. There are a couple of smaller local funds, ethnic funds, and the question you ask is really interesting because, you know, we talked earlier too about the model minority, the myth and all that. But for a lot of community foundations and other foundations who are looking for individual donors, they're looking for the very wealthy Asian Americans and sometimes they find them and sometimes they don't because they don't usually have the cultural competence to be able to engage them.

So for AAPIP, what we've been trying to do is become that space where if there is an Asian American who is really wondering about what to do — and it doesn't mean someone with extraordinary wealth; it could just be someone who really wants to give in the community —

we've organized giving circles, which become spaces where a group of people, like-minded people, come together and pool their funds. We have several giving circles that we're hosting. We also provide advice to individuals who want to start small family foundations or who are just wondering about what to do and a lot of investment managers refer people to us that we could talk to. But I will say though that we are trying hard to cast a broad net but we do have a political point of view that may differentiate us from just going to say Fidelity or someplace that's just going to shelter your money but not give you any advice about where you could give your money but, probably more importantly, why.

ROSS: So what does that mean, that you have a different political point of view? I heard you say that, but is it approaching the field of socially conscious investing? I'm not quite sure what exactly you mean.

SAIKA: Well, part of it is just working with people regardless of what their political perspectives might be, to just even engage to talk about how important it is to be philanthropic — that it's one thing for us to be able to do philanthropic advocacy in the organized field of philanthropy with foundations and all of that, but how do we build community philanthropy. So it's in that duality that we really see our role and our niche, that we need to do both. And as we're doing that, we need to build a model of work that becomes very concrete. So if we have a campaign, a national gender and equity campaign, which is one of our campaigns, it really then becomes a very concrete example of where donors could invest their money. And I think that's what we're at the very beginning stages of doing this where we can be very concrete. We had another report besides the "Asian American Women's Report." We had this post 9-11 impact on Muslim, South Asian and Arab communities, and out of that we have a small mini grants pool of funds that's a collaborative fund where we will be doing mini grants but technical assistance and capacity building to very, very small Muslim community organizations. You know, we think that it's important to really do work where no one else is going to go there. There are examples of where government failure or philanthropic failure — but it's really our society's failure to really meet the needs in various communities and when that exists then we feel we can't be everywhere doing everything but we can hopefully make an impact in a few places.

ROSS: So how did you develop your career in philanthropy?

41:55

SAIKA: Wow, a career in philanthropy. I don't know if I've had that, but I used to say I was the accidental tourist in philanthropy. When I was at the Asian Law Caucus, I was introduced to the New World Foundation in New York. They were referred to us and they really supported the organizing work that we were doing around garment and restaurant workers. And through that they invited me to serve on their board. You

know, it's a small, national but progressive foundation. And it was in the late '80s Byllye Avery and some of the women that we know were also on that board. And it was really through that that I started just having exposure. When they first asked me I was thinking, Wow, you know, foundation board. I had no idea what that meant but it was great because it's very small. Funds direct organizing across the country.

And through that experience I joined the board of the Ms. Foundation for a few years. It's through those that you meet a lot of people and then you start seeing. Even though you're not working in a foundation, sitting on the board you just become privileged around seeing the field in a different way and it's really through that that I think I gained kind of a perspective on philanthropy. I've never worked as a — you know, I've never been a grant maker, never worked in a foundation or any of that. And now I really see, having sat on a few foundation boards and then being involved doing funder briefings like all of us have done, being on the other side of the table fundraising like crazy, right. You know, people used to ask me, What do you do most of time? Beg for money, you know.

But it's through that and really the different community experiences that I've had — I bring this blend to AAPIP and it's a great fit for me because of the interests of the organization and the experiences that I've had. They really align well and so it's just a great situation for me now.

ROSS: So as an accidental tourist –

SAIKA: Exactly.

ROSS: – you learned a lot about philanthropy that you're now using for AAPIP.

SAIKA: Yes, yes, yes. That's right.

44:45
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ROSS: Well, you talk about a career in social change that seems to have been more meandering than intentional. I hope I'm not mischaracterizing it. What are some of the things that you appreciate about yourself that you've learned in this meandering?

SAIKA: Well, it's interesting because I remember lamenting that I didn't have a career, so to speak, until my girlfriend said, "This is your career. You've worked in the nonprofit sector." So I thought about that a lot and I did reach that conclusion that this in fact has been my career. The privilege of being involved in different forms of nonprofit organizations that all reflect — they are all movement organizations, I just feel that that's been the path, or my life journey has been about getting up in the morning every day and being able to work in a setting where my politics and my values are infused in the work. And that is the greatest privilege. And so, it's been a meandering around different kinds of community organizations, different movements.

And the common thread has been my politics, the evolution of hopefully my consciousness and, you know, my awareness about being socially responsible — just understanding at every stage and within the context of every movement, every organization, that it is my life experience as a woman that so informed my work. I feel that it's what challenges us the most that creates the deepest learning and then refuels you to be able to keep doing the work. It's really that sense of purpose for me that every organization has brought me. And when I think about it, how extraordinary it is to live a life where you work in different organizations, then I keep saying, This is my last organization, but who knows.

Before I came to AAPIP I said, "I don't want to be the ED of anything else. I don't want to work in another Asian American organization. I'd like to do something else." But when the opportunity presented itself and people asked me to think about it, I really, really thought about it and I really concluded that when I look at, still, the kind of work and infrastructure that needs to be built, then there is an important purpose around my life work, to be able to at this stage, push really hard around resources. And it's not just resources to just kind of scatter out there but to really think much more concretely, cohesively about the social justice movement and the infrastructure that we need. I am totally fixated and I'm good to go on that as far as what I'm doing day to day. I'm very focused and intentional about this. I intend to give it a thousand percent and I just feel ready. I feel ready now to do this. I don't think I would have been before.

- ROSS: OK. We have a few minutes left on this tape, so I want to slightly switch gears before we come in for the homestretch on the next tape. What's the social Peggy? What do you do for fun?
- SAIKA: That's so funny you should ask what do I do for fun. I love — and I don't do it enough anymore — I love playing scrabble. I love going to movies. I love going to plays and performances. I love dogs and all animals. I love babies and kids. I'm a total people person and so I just love being in the mix with young people, old people, out in the world. I love food. I love cooking. I love feeding people. There's so many things I love. I'm looking forward to hopefully traveling more and being able to spend more time with my partner. There's a lot I love at this point. I love getting massages. (laughs)
- ROSS: So having said that you love all of those things —
- SAIKA: What do I do, right? (laughter)
- ROSS: What do you prioritize and actually do for yourself?
- SAIKA: Well, I'm trying to be much more religious about a couple of things. I do go to church. I love being there. I go to a church that is a social

justice organization that's been around for a hundred and some odd years in Alameda. It's a United Methodist church. I am very committed now to regular massages. It really relaxes me and it really rejuvenates me. I go for walks. A long walk is the six-mile around a lake and all of that right near my house. I am much more conscious about really being able to do the simple things, like going to movies [that] when you're just organizing and doing work all the time you don't do. But just even that. But I love going for walks with the dog. I'm hoping — I just said to Art last week that I want to start riding my bike again and maybe that will happen, too. Gardening, cooking.

ROSS: I find that amongst political people we don't approach having fun with the same seriousness as we do building movement.

SAIKA: That's right.

ROSS: And a result our lives can somewhat become unbalanced.

SAIKA: Yes, yes. I also work with a very young staff and they keep me very joyous. We do all kinds of things and so it's great.

ROSS: All right. I think we're going to pause right here because we're near the end of this tape.

55.40
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END TAPE 3

## TAPE 4

ROSS: Now Peggy, this is the point where I'd like you to talk more about what impact your work and life has had, and particularly talk about some of the challenges that you've faced and overcome. So why don't we first start talking about challenges.

SAIKA: Challenges, I think they really come up. You know, challenges come up almost categorically. They kind of organize themselves into different areas of my life. One is the continuing challenge, on a deeply personal level, that my mother has Alzheimer's. I had knee surgery last August. It was minor but I have some continuing issues with it that were totally unplanned. So you know, your own self-image as an activist is not that you're going to be on crutches or that you're debilitated in any way. You just don't see yourself in that way. But it's a challenge, because — and it's about that comfort level, living in your own skin as you age, that's one thing and actually not seeing yourself as aging. So the kind of contradictions around that. I think that the personal care giving for my mother, who has Alzheimer's, who's now in her nineties, is deeply challenging. And it's humbling because it keeps you grounded about what we need to do day to day to keep her at home and well and secure. On the other hand, it is once again a reminder of what our society, the most affluent society in the world, how the priorities around who we care for and how we allocate our resources are really just dismal. So you know, on that level I find that difficult because I want to be there more but it's difficult with my work and all of that.

And then it is very intertwined, the personal and the political, but as you go along and you are — for me, this stage of my life, you're seen almost as a public entity, you know, you're very public. So to that extent I think that I am very both aware but sensitized to the fact that — and conscious of my place in all of this, as far as our community. I get to meetings. I participate in a lot of convenings. And I don't want to be someone that just throws her weight around or is dogmatic or is stifling to others. But it comes with the territory around just being around for a while, and coming of age and all of this.

So I'm very conscious of it and it's stuff that I never had to think about before, you know, when you're kind of young and brash and just doing whatever the hell you want to do and saying whatever you want to. But I'm much more, I would say, conscious and thoughtful about that. I do see, for the Asian American community, the challenges around not being one to not be used by those who oppress others. And that becoming who you are, defining who you are — to not be quite as susceptible to rightwing tactics and attitudes and beliefs. And to the strand of nonprofits that we've all built, that they are once again reinvigorated about being a part of a broader social justice movement, that many of our organizations have become quite successful mainstream organizations. When I say mainstream, I don't mean that in a negative or judgmental way. They have become well resourced and



incredible organizations, great organizations. But I think I mentioned before, how do you put all of that to greater — just being useful in the context of the social justice movement. So there's that and then there's the newer, the challenges, the complexities of being a part of a really complex community.

ROSS: How many subgroups are in the API community?

5:55

SAIKA: Gosh, I don't even know exactly, but you know, over 39 languages. It's diversity, not just by culture, by economics, history, on every level. There are so many layers within our communities. So when I think about the challenges, they are formidable, they are formidable. Some of our best organizations remain very fragile or they're always on the border of sustainability. And so how do they become more, not just resilient, but more well-endowed and healthier, more viable organizations. So we have a multitude, I would say, a multitude of challenges within the community, and then just societally. This country is becoming more and more bifurcated around class issues and wealth or poverty. And we continue to be at war, not just in Iraq but with the world. Our tendencies around control and power are formidable. And amidst of all of this as women, as feminists, I think that both the challenge and the opportunity is for us to make sure that we are building and rebuilding organizations that have a true gender lens on the work. There are so few. You know, we talked about a human rights framework, absolutely, and to do the training with organizations without any means because they are actually doing it. They just don't describe their work in that way because they don't know what it means. I think that to deepen political consciousness around race, class, and gender and what those intersections mean, and how that may or may not — you know, your work may not look that different but you would have reframed it in a way that articulates this vision in a much more explicit way. And so, that deep challenge is also where I see the opportunity. It's in that that you can always see both sides of it.

ROSS: That's very Chinese.

SAIKA: Our challenges are our opportunities, right?

ROSS: Right. So what's been hard about doing the work for you?

SAIKA: When I was younger it was about not being understood by my family or those closest to me about what I was doing or who I was struggling to become, and that was so confusing because I don't think I had a clue or idea of who I was trying to become. And later, you know, the life struggles around work and family and activism, and the interplay of all of that and the total lack of balance — the impossibility of balance — and never to not have boundaries around that or being very good at setting boundaries so everything is connected, so your life is so

integrated you just keep doing more of everything. And much more recently I think it's making the transition in my own mind and consciousness about my place at this point in the movement and in the community, to remember that I'm never all that. You know, that I'm one person in kind of cahoots with a lot of other people struggling and fighting for the same stuff. But also, to be — so humility is a major thing for me.

But the other side of it is I also need to own my own space and to be able to claim the ground, if there's any, that I've helped to shape — to not be embarrassed or ultra humble about any of that and to be able to have great confidence and comfort about where I'm at right now and not rejecting all of it. You know, there's just a way that we kind of write a lot of the stuff off that we've done. It's the movement or whatever, you know. So it's just, it's really complicated. I feel like I'm having a therapy session with you.

ROSS: Oh, no. I'm not trying to create a therapy session.

SAIKA: No, you're not. No, no, no. I'm saying, as I'm thinking about it –

ROSS: But for the legacy of your work –

SAIKA: Exactly.

ROSS: – it's like what are some of those lessons learned that I may not write about if someone asked me to write the story of my life.

SAIKA: No, no, no, when I say that I'm having that — because it's very therapeutic for me. Because it pushes me to think about these things in a way that I may think about them but I don't articulate. Because it's very difficult. And so I think that it's in that that I appreciate being able to do this and to think about my life in a different way.

ROSS: Well, thinking of your life, all of us probably wish that we had an undo button like we have on the computer, you know, the reverse arrow up there. So if there was a do-over moment or an undo button, did you have any?

12:30

SAIKA: Many. (laughter)

ROSS: Again, not to get into therapeutic work.

SAIKA: No, many, I would say, many moments. Most often it's because I think that you learn by making mistakes and then once you've made them and you've moved on and you've learned and you've grown then you wish in a way though that you could hit the replay button with a particular organization or a particular set of people or whatever. I wish that I knew more about the kind of fundraising and resources that the

Asian Law Caucus should have had. I just didn't know enough. I wasn't experienced enough to be able to see the capacity that was going to be needed at a much higher level, to be able to — when I left them they lost some good people right after and I think if they had more resources, really, and could have ratcheted up salaries, it would have made a difference, because everybody made such low wages, low salaries. I mean, it's stuff that I wish I could have done better, I wish I had known, I wish I had the skills and the experience to have handled it differently. I wish that I had, during the time that APEN was starting and Asian Pacific Islanders for Choice was morphing into APIRH and all that, I wish I could have spent more time with APIRH and I wish I could have really just been involved a lot more. It just wasn't humanly possible to do it. But when I look back, I wish I could have. Not that I would have made that much of a difference by myself, but just in the mix of things, I wish I could have been there.

ROSS: Well, they haven't forgotten you because it was Eveline Shen [director, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice] that was insisting that we include you in this project as one of the founders. (laughter)

SAIKA: Thank you. You know, it's just that sense of, I think, just looking back and it's all hindsight, you have 20/20 vision. I think that I could have handled some of the divisions within the environmental justice movement in a better way when I was working at APEN. I just think that understanding how the executive order and the building of the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council and playing a role in all that, for most of the movement leaders, how that just sucked the movement dry, because there was so little attention then paid to building the networks versus this national agenda. It's all post that era that I could see it in a much clearer way, how that just really unfocused the movement, so to speak. I mean, it made some contributions. But then I think that it really usurped the movement in so many ways, as far as building infrastructure.

ROSS: Those are good do-overs, though. It says that there are lessons to be learned by those whose shoulders we stand on, that if we're paying attention, we don't have to learn the hard way.

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SAIKA: Yeah, I think so. We shouldn't have to recreate the wheel, so to speak, right?

ROSS: Something else that you seem to have successfully avoided is something called founder's disease. You don't stay there so long that you're no longer of use to your organization. Have you done that with foresight or has it just been timing, or what?

SAIKA: It's probably a combination, but I do really, really believe that I've never felt like I was going to go somewhere and leave with a gold

watch and a pension. That was not my trajectory. It wasn't in my game plan at all. But I've also felt that I want to be in an organization where it's very clear that there's need that exists, there's contributions that I could make and there's growth areas for me. And it's in that mix that I try to figure out, like, you know, so what are the three, four, five things that I want to really make sure are in place before I can feel comfortable or in order for me to feel comfortable about transitioning. And I've tried to use that as a way of approaching the work and to know that an organization, it may begin with me but it doesn't end with me.

ROSS: I like something you said earlier, in the vein of keeping yourself humble and understanding that it's about you but not about you.

SAIKA: Yes, yes.

ROSS: Could you talk more about how you keep that perspective, because a lot of people start believing their own press notices.

SAIKA: Yeah, exactly. Well, you know, it's so funny because if you have a family like mine or if you have good friends, they'll always help to keep you grounded. But I also think that it's in staying with organizations that are having — when you have organizational struggles, it really keeps you grounded, because you need to participate in those and take responsibility and it's collective responsibility. But you need to participate in being able to problem solve. As you do that, then you realize that you also have had a part in creating what's going wrong. So I think that that circular motion is very important around both reflection but also keeping it real for us. How blessed we are that you could reach this space where you feel more confident about yourself because you don't have the insecurities of youth anymore. You have the insecurities of aging but you don't have the insecurities of youth, which is very different. So you own up to a high level of transparency about your imperfections and that we're all just human. Like we say, we're all just doing the best we can and not giving up and keeping up the struggle and all of that.

ROSS: So, what is your definition of some of the characteristics of leadership that we should be looking for in people?

SAIKA: Vision, risk-taking, humility, an ability to listen, make decisions, own mistakes, be self-critical and always, always remember that you're one person but you're a part of something bigger, and that it's not about you. (laughs)

ROSS: Very, very, very important. Is there additional information you'd like to offer that you think is important to understanding your life and legacy?

SAIKA: Wow, what a big question. My life and legacy.

22.20

ROSS: You've had a large footprint, Peggy. I can say that for you. (laughter)

SAIKA: Thank you, Loretta. Larger than a size six shoe? (laughter)

ROSS: Much.

SAIKA: I like to think that the organizations that I've been a part of are my legacy. I hope the people that I've worked with have had a good time, have learned a lot between us, that we've learned from each other. And would have felt that whatever they learned while we were together they could take that to their next piece of work and reinvest what they've learned into the work of that organization. So I think, I hope, that when we start talking about legacy that it is this sense that it's possible for any of us. I consider myself, you know, just very humble beginnings, extraordinary opportunities. And as I've told my kids, you have one shot on this earth in this particular form. You'll be back again but not in this particular form, so make it the best journey. It's your journey and make it the best that you can. And I really think that if there's any legacy — and I find that quite interesting, that question, because it's hard to think about legacy when you think that you've — like for me, I feel like I've inherited so much. I've inherited so much and I've worked with some of the best people, still working with some of the best people.

ROSS: What I see as your legacy, if I could put words in your mouth, is that you've ensured that the API voice is everywhere you've touched and you weren't just representing yourself but you were representing community. And that is special, that is a tremendous legacy. Because now, many people following you know that they have the mandate of living up to that footprint you've left.

SAIKA: That's great, that's so great.

ROSS: But it's so real. I mean, I'm not giving casual praise. This is obvious in hearing your story and knowing about your story. Are there other key organizations, memberships, or affiliations that we haven't asked about that you'd like to mention?

SAIKA: Well, I think I didn't mention the Buena Vista United Methodist Church explicitly, but I would like to say that is just an important part of my life and I think that I've mentioned a lot over the years, the organizations certainly that have impacted me. I think that I've mentioned most of them. I do think that it's interesting because even in the '80s I was the first Asian American appointed to the Alameda County Commission on the Status of Women and I never fully embraced what that meant. Because even later I used to think, Oh my gosh, you know, what was that about? But I realize that so many of

25:40

these positions or formations that we, in some ways, we don't look at as important or valuable tools for all of us but they all are, but it's just that we don't own them as women of color. So for me, the question about seeking opportunities and being able to help shape a lot of this work, you know, what a privilege.

The one thing I was going to add to what you said — and I want to thank you for your very, very kind words about legacy, or footprint — that it is still about, for me, that duality or that space around, yes, I hope that I have brought an Asian American perspective or consciousness to the places that I've been and hopefully the places that I'm going to be at. I've always wanted to be seen as not just for Asian Americans but for all of us, that it is in that context that the Asian American voice is important, but only as part of a broader movement. To really find our voice in this society really means arguing for everyone's voices to be heard and I hope that it's in that that I — that's really a critical piece of it because in that is the depth of — it gets really complicated but, you know, it's this whole issue around that's how we want to be seen, as an Asian American but not only as an Asian American but as a social justice activist, and so that is much broader. But in the living and growing up in an extraordinarily racist society that we are forced, as people of color, as women of color, to keep arguing for this voice even though it's not the only way in which we define ourselves. And that, for us and certainly for my generation, has been our struggle. I hope for future generations that that struggle is certainly minimized but that the issues around marginalization, wherever that is, that people of conscience will continue to fight for the rights of everyone.

ROSS: Do you have papers, files, photos, correspondence, memorabilia, that you would consider preserving at Smith College if we contacted you and asked for that?

SAIKA: I think there are a few things that would be nice. I don't have a treasure trove of things but there are I think a few things.

ROSS: So is that a yes?

SAIKA: Yes, yes.

ROSS: I have to confess that they make it so unbelievably easy.

SAIKA: Oh, that's wonderful.

ROSS: You don't have to sort, you don't have to do anything but box them up and let them take them.

SAIKA: Really?

ROSS: They sort and do all that work. That's why they're an archive.

SAIKA: Oh, that's great.

ROSS: So if you're afraid that you'd have to do all this advance work, it doesn't exist. As a matter of fact, they prefer that you don't.

SAIKA: Oh, that's great, that's great.

ROSS: Now, you will receive a copy of the interview. Do you prefer VHS or DVD?

SAIKA: DVD.

ROSS: And are there questions you'd like to ask of me as we get to the end of this interview — and again, I want to say thank you on behalf of Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College.

SAIKA: Well, I want to just thank you, and it's not just because of the perfunctory thank you, but thank you, Loretta, for your life and your contributions. It's just a real honor to be interviewed by you, it really is. I appreciate it deeply. It makes this much more meaningful for me, so thank you so much.

ROSS: Well, it's a mutual admiration society, because I always wanted to hang out with you more. (laughter)

SAIKA: That's great, and we did it.

ROSS: We did it. Again, this is the Voices of Feminism Project of the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College and this is Loretta Ross ending the interview with Peggy Saika.

SAIKA: Thank you.

ROSS: Thank you very much.

SAIKA: Thanks.

31:48
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END OF INTERVIEW

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