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Interview with Josephine Chau

Josephine Chau

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Interviewee: Josephine Chau

Interviewers: Ariana Moniz, Janelle Weinert

Date: 24 November 2020

Location: Zoom

Collection: Auntie Sewing Squad Oral History Archive, SBS-112: Women and Social Change, From 1890s to the Present, Fall 2020.

Length: [01.08.48]

Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Bio: Josephine Chau was born in Utah, then moved to Colorado at the age of six. She then moved back to Utah for college then moved to the east coast, where she now resides in Maryland. Both her parents are immigrants, her dad is from China and her mom is from Hong Kong. She is bilingual in Chinese and English. Josephine is married with one daughter. She has a bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering. Her career was in the information technology department at the University of Maryland. She is now retired.

Thematic Outline:

[00:00:59.510] Josephine gives a quick briefing on herself and where she is from.

[00:04:09.630] She discusses where her parents are from and her experiences as a child.

[00:23:55.380] We discuss her daughter and her first and middle names.

[00:38:20.410] Josephine talks about her bachelor's degree and career in chemical engineering. She also gives her advice and experiences in college.

[00:46:53.740] Josephine discusses the effects of COVID-19 on college students and support that may be necessary for students under a lot of stress. She then talks about advice that she would give herself if she could go back and talk to her college self.

[00:57:06.270] She talks about the gender inequalities at the university where she studied chemical engineering.

[00:59:32.940] Josephine discusses her experience in the Auntie Sewing Squad.

[01:06:54.460] She finishes the interview with her final thoughts on civil rights and politics.

Interview Transcript

[00:00:00.150] - Ariana

How great. You did wonderful. OK, recording now.

[00:00:07.140] - Janelle

OK, recording now. OK, well, today's the twenty fourth of November, twenty-twenty. Location of this interview is a Zoom recording session, and this is for the oral history project of SBS-112. OK, so would you like me to get into the questions or maybe talk a little bit about your childhood?

[00:00:35.330] - Josephine

Just go ahead. I reviewed the questions that you sent. I still have them required a little bit thought still and still kind of pondering it. But I'm happy to answer any questions that you have.

[00:00:46.100] - Ariana

I think that you should brief us on who you are and why you ultimately decided to take on this extra little project for our class so that we have a little bit of background on you.

[00:00:59.510] - Josephine

My name is Josephine. I am, I guess what about me? I was born in America, so but my parents are immigrants from they're both Chinese. My mom is from Hong Kong, my dad, although he's Chinese, he was actually raised in Vietnam. I was born in Utah and I lived there till I was six. And then I moved to Colorado and lived there until I left for college when I went back to Utah and was there for another six years. And then I moved out east. So, to Maryland. We've lived in a couple of different places in Maryland and also in Rhode Island and then back to Maryland. And that's where we are right now, is we're in Maryland. My I guess my background is I'm I think part of it is I joined the Auntie Sewing Squad and I saw that people needed help. That's kind of why I wanted to be there. And this is another opportunity to help. So, I saw the opportunity and said, sure, why not?

[00:02:04.370] - Ariana

All right, awesome. So, I suppose we should get into the questions then.

[00:02:10.180] - Janelle

OK, yeah, thank you for your little introduction. That was nice.

[00:02:10.210] - Josephine

Not a problem!

[00:02:20.130] - Janelle

OK, so because I noticed that being raised in Utah and Colorado, but, you know, they have a lot of snow, they have a lot of resorts. Do you like to ski? Have you tried it?

[00:02:34.210] - Josephine

So I actually am I love being in the snow, but I have absolutely no coordination. So I tried skiing once and it was bad enough. I went with my cousins and they are avid skiers, so they're great. But I was so bad that they demoted me to like the kids class, the ones with like the little like four-year-olds in it. And I ended up knocking all of them down as well. And so the teacher is just kind of like. Maybe not, so I actually didn't I didn't really like skiing, I like being in the snow, I love shoveling snow. But as weird as that is, I don't actually like skiing or snowboarding, mainly

because I just it kind of goes with bike riding, too. If it's going a little too fast for me to process, what I should be doing so. It's more stressful. It's definitely not a hobby that I took up. So I mean, my cousin's a different story. They love skiing they're in Utah. So they are actually really, really close to resorts where they are. So they they have the whole family, all of their families season passes type of thing that I'm kind of the we're going to find something else to do now that you're here. Maybe you can mind the little kids who can't ski at all and the built in babysitter.

[00:04:03.00] Ariana

Awesome. So you mentioned that you were from Hong Kong, correct?

[00:04:09.630] Josephine

My mom is from Hong Kong, so lives from Hong Kong. So I was born in Utah, Provo, Utah. And so I've been back in Hong Kong. My parents actually sent me to stay there, long story short, as basically they realized that I didn't speak Chinese anymore. And so they said, you know, we got to fix this. So they sent me to live with my my mom's parents for six months or so when I was about 15, kind of like the second half of high school. So I was there for not even a year. But when you have to be able to speak to eat, you learn very quickly. So I can do that now. I can do that now, I can order food and get around town. Basic conversations for that. But my mom is from Hong Kong.

[00:04:55.910] Ariana

Awesome. So we're really interested about your childhood. Did your parents try to teach you with the idealisms from China or Hong Kong or try to like submerge you in the culture in any way they did?

[00:05:05.520] Josephine

It's actually an interesting thing. So far. I'm the oldest of four children and initially my parents, they came to the US for higher education, for college, for their masters undergraduate degrees. And initially, I don't think that they had the intention of actually staying in the States. So it wasn't until I was about five or six that they actually had made that that change and decided that they were going to put down roots actually in the United States. So for there's actually if you ask my husband, there's actually a market difference actually in the way that my parents interact with me versus my younger siblings. So there are actually there's me and then there's like six years between now and the next kid and then nine and the 12 years. So the three youngest were definitely raised more. With more American, I guess, kind of goals and considerations and kind of, you know, doing the team sports at school type of thing, kind of not as much as the academics. I mean, academics are so important, but it wasn't like the end all of everything. But for me, it was kind of and still is actually a lot even as an adult, they kind of treat us a little differently or treat me a little differently from the three younger ones. So for me, it was kind of more. It was a more traditional way of raising kids and sense of like the Chinese traditional way of kind of like academics and, you know, you know, kind of the parents have the absolute say and everything to say. So because the parents, you, your elders, not just your parents, but your older said so. Kind of situation with my younger siblings, you know, they were more encouraged to, when they're in school, go do sports, go to art, go to other things, extracurricular, have your friends over have parties. There was never a single party ever that I had ever went to in school.

But for my parents is more like not just go to parties like a socialize, get to know people. It was like, let's have the party at our house type of thing. So another thing, for example, is now the interesting thing to note is when I was a freshman in college, my parents' job, my dad's job actually sent them to Singapore since my parents are bilingual and everything like that to work. So my younger my siblings, they actually lived in Singapore for four years, especially one that turned into four. So for them, they actually got to live in a place that was Asian heritage. But my parents actually decided to send them to the American school while they're in Singapore. So it's kind of this like it. But for me was the opposite there. I was trying to find like a Chinese language school to, like, put me in an additional to like American public school. But my parents had the chance to have my sisters go to the Chinese school where that was like the thing. And they're like, no, no, no, we got to keep them in the American school. So one of my four siblings, I'm the only one that speaks Chinese.

[00:08:27.400] Janelle

Wow, So that's interesting, huh.

[00.08.28.110] Josephine

So I think it is kind of it it was kind of a thing. And so the story that I was going with is when I was growing up, a lot of the American traditions you have, like Thanksgiving, Christmas, we're not what I would say traditional kind of like like an average American holiday would be celebrated. Like my mom never made a turkey as those kind of like the deli crate, like Thanksgiving, where everything's in the plastic boxes. And it was like pre sliced turkey deli meat. I think that's actually what I think it was. So that was Thanksgiving for me. But when my parents came back from Singapore, it was like the full on, like mom baking the turkey, mashed potatoes, my hand, everything like that. So my sisters are always like, you know, Oh, don't you miss mom's turkey? And I'm just like. I didn't think I could go to the deli if I wanted to, but, you know, I don't miss mom's turkey because I never had it. And I think that's I don't know why that was. They never really discussed the decision behind that or if there's kind of a subconscious reason for that. But, yeah, they tried. I mean, between language wise, same thing with food is like the first. So people always laugh because of this story. But I actually the part of Thanksgiving I loved is they had this I called it like magical corn that came in the little tub. And it's like the only place I ever saw. You know, at school lunches or Thanksgiving, and one time I went over to my friend's house we're I'm in high school and after school we're hungry, whatever my friends like, I'll just I'll I'll make some corn. And she makes us corn. And I'm kind of like I'm like, this is like magical corn. Like, how do you make this? And she kind of looked at me like, OK, you know, come back with me. I'll show you how I made this corn. And it was canned corn is what it was, like canned vegetable, corn. And I had never had that growing up. It was just not in my life because everything was like my mom made like Chinese food from scratch, like that's what was for dinner on the table. Like we never had spaghetti, we never had tacos, we never had hamburgers. But on the flip side, for my siblings, like that was always on the menu. Like they were always having barbeque and chicken and pasta. And so it was kind of like, I'm not sure what happened. Maybe they said it didn't work out so well for with me, so they decided to switch. But so it was kind of food, language, holidays for me growing up. Like I said, you know, Thanksgiving, Christmas, those really weren't the big holidays for me. For me, I was like Chinese New Year was big, mid-on festival was big. And things like that were the big holidays in our house when I was growing up. I mean, we observed Christmas. We had the tree. My mom

was a big Christmas tree person. But like the big like the big, big holidays that were in the house were more culturally Chinese holidays for that. So, I mean, they tried and it was hard because there weren't I mean, the closest Asian grocery store was like two hours away. So it was kind of like on the weekends once a month, you know, we make the trek all the way down to the Asian grocery store, like load up the car with as much as it would hold and then drive back home because, you know, some of the stuff you just couldn't find at a normal grocery store. So but for my siblings, I mean, now there's an Asian grocery store like fifteen minutes down the road from my parents, so it's not as hard for them. Do you have any questions like clarify, just let me know, I tend to talk.

[00.12.30.420] Ariana

So what kind of holidays did you guys observe?

[00.12.31.005] Josephine

So the one the one is Chinese New Year or Lunar New Year. It's called in some places it's kind of happens sometimes between beginning of January and February for that. So that was a really, really big one. That was the one where most kids, I guess I feel the US like if they want something big, like a present, like the time they look for it is Christmas. But Christmas for us was like when I was growing up at least, so it's not the same anymore. Christmas is like you got like your new socks and like maybe a backpack if your backpack was wearing out and like a book like that was Christmas right there, like you knew that it was going to be like maybe you got a snack that you liked a book, socks or clothing or something and like something for school. And that was Christmas. But Chinese New Year, on the other hand, was like that was when, you know, who knows what will come out of like after Chinese New Year. That was like dream time for presents and all that being said. And also the other thing that was kind of cultural is that, you know, if you really wanted something big, like if you wanted the Gameboy or the Tickle Me Elmo or whatever it is that you wanted, it was like you did well in school because if you did well in school, then and then the big gift giving would happen for that. So Chinese New Year was kind of more of the one we got dressed up with Decorate House. We had a lot of you know, we do kind of cultural things that came with that, like cleaning the house, buying flowers, stuff like that. And then the other one that's kind of that I remember that was kind of a big deal was mid-autumn festival. And that happens more in October. It's kind of a harvest festival that's based around family. So it's kind of some people say it's kind of like Thanksgiving. It's kind of like you're done with the harvest you've set aside. Now it's time to give thanks and spend time with family and stuff like that. So that happens in October and usually gather there's moon cakes that people usually eat there. I call them the fruit cakes of Asia because they don't sell them any other time because people probably wouldn't eat them any other time of year because they're not that tasty. If you eat the whole family because they're traditional and it's like something you do with them. So, we I mean, with my family here. So, my family's actually my husband is of European heritage and so my daughter's half and half. So, I forced mooncakes on them and we all kind of grimace and like, say we're thankful for family and then put the other four pieces of mooncake aside. It's OK, but we try. And I guess I mean, that's not really a holiday, but there is also grave traditions that we do kind of like with gravestones. So, I was raised Christian, so but still there are ceremonies and stuff that you do to honor like your deceased ancestors. So, whenever we go, my grandparents lived with me when I was growing up. And so, their gravestones are here in Colorado where my parents are. And so there are kind of observances

that we do whenever we whenever I go back home, we'll make a trip to the cemetery so we can kind of pay a little respect and honor to my grandparents for that. So, and it's great when we can all be there because we can all do it together. But my dad does make a point for us to be able to visit grandma and grandpa's gravesite when we go home. I don't know if that's normal. I don't know if that's normal for, like, everybody, but it's like things we know that will happen if we go out when we go out.

[00.16.21.910] Janelle

That seems normal to me. Yeah. Anything specific, like a certain type of flower you leave behind?

[00:16:26.430] Josephine

So, it depends on the season. My mom's kind of the one that's in charge of flowers. But, you know, there are like for like chrysanthemums in the in the fall and. I don't know flowers very well, actually, my mom always wonders what happened to me, but there are certain things that go out there. There's usually the big part of it is, you know, you clean the gravestone off, you make sure it's kind of tidied up, no garbage, that's no water stains or the gravestone is the soil. And then at the very, very end, the oldest. Or the higher the most senior person, you know, kind of helps everybody do three bows is kind of what comes out kind of simultaneously all at the same time. And then we say thank you and then we'll be back until the next time. So. I'm pretty sure people wonder what we're doing. So, I mean, I think my parents, my grandparents, I think have the were like the only Asian gravestone like there. So, it's like a lot of the other ones are all in English. And then my grandparents is like English and Chinese on it. Like what is. This big black and gold thing out there.

[00.17.52.000] Janelle

So, living with your grandparents seems really great. You're close to them. Who did you look up to?

[00:18:01.740] Josephine

Well, I mean, as a kid or as an adult,

[00:18:07.560] Janelle

Mostly as a kid, but you can talk about as an adult as well.

[00.18.11.680] Josephine

As a kid. I have to say that for me, I think as a kid, making friends was a little difficult because as I mentioned a little bit in Colorado, there weren't a lot of Asians when I was growing up. I think I was like one of four in high school, like the entire high school. And one of them was Indian. So, we were kind of like we automatic friends. Right. But just kind of making other friends is a little difficult. So, I think that I don't know if I had a person like an individual person that I looked up to, but I liked the idea of writers because I did a lot of reading because that was just kind of a way I could find to connect to people because it wasn't easy to do it in person, like as a kid. So, I did a lot of reading when I was growing up, even from elementary, all the way up

through high school. And I loved reading and I loved the idea of people who wrote books and kind of were able to make this connection with people through their writing. So, it was kind of I'm not sure if there's like a person, but it was like the idea of that archetype of a person that I really liked. I have to say, I mean, I did have a teacher that I looked up to when I was in high school and he basically he was my philosophy teacher in there and he. I think he impressed me because he actually kind of. It was interesting to me to see him interact with people like everybody. The same because it was kind of. And I think it was like the first person to actually treat me kind of like everyone else was treated. I don't know if that makes sense is kind of. It's hard to say it's hard, it wasn't like I was treated poorly, but there are definitely was kind of a "oh, you're always going to do well in school because you're Asian." You must be you're going to be OK. But he didn't just give me a pass. He was he just kind of treated me like everyone else. And at the same time, he kind of took an interest in me as a person. And it wasn't like I was an exotic person because I had a different background is just kind of like, OK, well, that's kind of that's who you are. That's not any different from anyone else having any other hobbies or anything else like that. And he just kind of taught me to think rationally as a person and to kind of, you know, how to I think in high school it's kind of when you're deciding who you're going to be or what you're going to be or what does it mean to be you. And he kind of really helped me. Move down the path kind of in a good way to figure out.

[00.21.13.260] Ariana

Well, that's really inspiring. I had a teacher like that when I was in high school that made me feel the exact same way.

[00:21:16.530] Josephine

Those kind of like this is what it means to be you. And that's fine.

[00.21.21.000] Janelle

Yeah. Yeah, that is inspiring. It's great to hear that you have, that.

[00.22.00.000] Josephine

Like teachers and writers were my like I thought they were like the best people in the world.

[00:21:34.200] Janelle

Yeah. They tell it how it is.

[00:21:36.630] Josephine

They do. And then if you weren't like like, you know, they're like, you know, you can be better.

[00:21:39.990] Ariana

It's like, oh, so how old is your daughter? Do you have any other kids besides her?

[00.21.49.920] Josephine

We actually have one and she is 11 years old.

[00.21.50.260] Ariana

Do you have any fur babies?

[00:21:52.260] Josephine

No, no. So my daughter's terrified of dogs. I always wanted a dog growing up. I mean, all my sisters. So it's all sisters. No brothers, all my sisters and I, we wanted a dog like we begged our parents for a dog. And my mom did not want a dog because she's like, I'm not going to do, you know, I have four kids. I don't I don't need another one. And so the deal with parents was we'll get a dog. But the deal is you have to go and volunteer at the animal shelter for eight straight weeks, eight straight weekends, not even weeks, just the weekend like Saturday. I mean, it will drive you there since you can't drive. But it has to be you would be like, hey, it's my time to go. You know, it's time to go volunteer at the animal shelter. And I think the longest any of us made it was like three weeks or four weeks. So, we never got the dog because my mom's like, if you can't, sir, like, take care of the dog like once a week for eight weeks, we're not going to do it. And my daughter, when she is really, really little, we had a neighbor that had a really energetic but not really well-trained puppy dog thing. I mean, it was still it was a full grown yet, but we jumped on her and kind of pinned her down. It was kind of like trying to play with her, but she was like two or three. And so it was really terrifying for her. And so from that point on, she was like terrified of dogs, which rightly so even today. Like, if a dog catches, are unaware, she will. And where she's standing next to me, she will jump up and on like onto me because of the dog. Doesn't matter what size, Chihuahua, German Shepherd, anything, though, so we never go. And part of it now, too, she says, well, you know, I'm in school all day and before quarantine, it's like, you know, you and dad are at work. I don't feel like it would be fair if we had a dog because it would be lonely if we were all gone. So, she's like, I don't want that. It's like, well, that's a pretty good way to think of it, to be lonely either. So, it's just our daughter. She's kind of our little miracle, because I was actually told when I was younger in college end of college age that I wouldn't have kids. So, it was a little bit of a you know, my husband, I thought, you know, when he's done with school and we would maybe we would adopt or we would just be the best uncle and aunts in the world. Right. Here they come, bearing presents and fun. But no, we she was a bit of a surprise. That was probably how many years? Like seven years. Then six, seven years after we were married, we were married for a while, a long time before we were surprised. So. But it's been great. It's been great.

[00.24.43.000] Janelle

That's great. Yeah. What's her name.

[0.24.44.210] Josephine

Her name is Margaret. We picked Margaret because we figured she can't blame us if she can't find a variation of that she likes. She did. Maggie, Marge, Peggy, Peg, Mar, Garet, it can be whatever she wants to be, I picked it.

[00:25:03.000] Ariana

Did you ever consider giving her a more culturally...?

[00.25.08.000] Josephine

Oh, she actually has a Chinese middle name like I do. So, I actually, my the story, the way mine goes, is that my middle name is actually used to be my first name. But then when I started school, my parents switched it. So, it's easier or they gave me an American name so it would be easier for me in school. And same thing with my parents, my parents when they were in school, they actually both picked Western names so it would be easier for people to work with them. And so my daughter, her first name is Margaret, but her middle name is Yuusuu, which my father actually helped us pick. So, there's a naming tradition in some parts of China where however many. Centuries ago, one of the progenitor in your family clan wrote a poem with all these, so each character in Chinese is like one word. So he wrote this huge poem. And the way it's supposed to go is that each generation in the family is the name is. So the names are usually generated with two characters. And so one of the characters in that name is from the next in the poem. So if you hear somebody's name and you know about their poem, you can actually spot right on that genealogical line where they fall in there. And so my dad, like, skipped like five characters. So he's like, I don't know what kind of name you can make with that one or that one or that one or that was. So we're just going to pick this one. This is a character we're using for this generation. So but he helped us pick her name. So her Chinese name, when you translate it means always happy. Or always smiling. She's like a really, really she's a happy kid. So my dad picked well. So for me, the other thing is my grandfather. So my parents, my family being ethnically Chinese, kind of at the end of Vietnam War, they actually got pushed out of Vietnam. They were refugees. They were actually kicked out of the country for that. So, when I was born, my father actually didn't know where his father was. So out of all of my cousins, I'm actually the only one that has a different character in my name. So, everyone else's name, my sisters and my cousins all have the character that basically means like "of the people." So, like my sisters are like "part of the people", "voice of the people" and like "person of the people," like a leader or an advocate or something like that. And I'm "spirit of self," so I like what it means just doesn't fit into everyone else. But then there's me.

[00:27:57.640] Janelle

A spirit of self is cool.

[00:28.02.900] Josephine

Which is a pretty cool name, but yeah. So, it was kind of like, OK, we don't really like character even falls in anywhere. What is that, where did that come from? My parents did their best. They just picked something. So, her, she has a Chinese middle name from my father for that. And when my sister when her son was born, though her husband is of Chinese descent, but I think they're like fourth generation Chinese, so they don't speak or read or write any Chinese. So, my parents actually helped. Her in-laws kind of find a Chinese name for their son, so my nephew doesn't have the same character as. As Maggie, because they're from different paternal lines. That's after his dad's her dad's family. So and of course, my husband being Western, we just he doesn't have any dads. Well, we'll just pick it for you. So his name is. It's like "special one" or something like that and like "Chosen One." Like something like that, like "special kid" or "special one" or something like that, I think is what his name comes down to. I have to remember. He says it, he's like four. And he was says it like, "but I'm the special one" or something. And I was like, oh, yeah, yes you are, you're cute. His regular name's Nathaniel. That's it. His Chinese name is Detroit, which is like special language or. Good one or something like that.

[00:29:50.000] Janelle

That's a really cool tradition. I like that.

[00:29:51.080] Josephine

Yeah, I don't know if it's like all over China, but I know there are parts of it that do that. So, at least my parents are, we're southern Chinese. So, I know that they do. And a few my parents, my dad's been back to the ancestral clan village and they actually have like the home there, so.

It's kind of cool. Mm hmm. That's not that's not where my father grew up or anything, but, you know, that's the clan that he belongs to or we belong to, I guess, too. So, of course, if I go back, it's just so for me, it's interesting because it's like I don't belong on either side. I'm like too Chinese to be like considered completely American, but I'm too American to be completely by my Chinese relatives, to be considered Chinese. So it's kind of like I'm halfway in the middle, but it just kind of walk that tightrope.

[00:30:52.490] Janelle

So have you visited China or southern China?

[00:30:57.470] Josephine

So I get when I was there with my living with my grandmother, we was visiting relatives on my mother's side of the family for that. And also one of my, um, just recently, we actually brought my daughter back to visit when it was my grandmother's 90th birthday. So, we went back and kind of toured a bit of China, China for her. We went to see the Great Wall and the Terracotta Warriors, and we stayed in Hong Kong and stuff like that. But so, of course, my mom's my mom's my grandmother's generation, of course, is getting kind of old. So, there aren't as many in a lot of them were kind of they didn't have a lot of kids or kids who passed away from various things from before and disease and other stuff. So there aren't as many relatives above my mom's generation anymore for that. Wow. But I mean, I think, of course, you had here is also are you close to family? And we are we I think that's a that's a huge thing in Chinese culture, is family like that is like, you know, knowing who you are, like whose people you are and like who you belong to and stuff. This is a very big thing. So, I mean. I mean, I'm the oldest so I was the first to go to college, and so my parents were we're definitely even. I guess I had an advantage because both my parents are telecommunication computer scientists, so they program like phone systems. And so even though I was in college and this is back before, like cell phones or big or even long distance was not free, they it was definitely we're going to have a call like at least once a week on the phone. And we did the first things, of video conferencing and everything like that. So, they wherever we've been, wherever they've been, it's those we've always kept in very close contact. And it's kind of, you know, whenever my dad had a business trip and I was in college in Utah, it's like even though he came home to Colorado, he always made a trip to Utah to see how I was doing and then would fly to California and then fly back to Singapore to check on me and my dad's family. Actually, they eventually, as refugees settled in Utah because my dad was the only person where everyone else knew where he was or where one of the family was. So they actually ended up settling in Utah because they had they were scattered as refugees to all different parts of Asia. But they all knew where my dad was because he was in America. And so

they all came and settled there with each other. So ,my cousins are very, very close to each other because they went to school together and now all their kids go to school together out there. And a lot of them interesting. After college, they moved away for wherever their careers took them. But by now, a lot of them actually moved back. They've found a way for their careers to have them be able to move back so their kids could kind of be grow up with each other and, they could be near their grandparents and stuff like that. So my husband, I always joke about the idea if we ever were within a state of Colorado, like, you know, if my parents found out we, like, went and didn't stop by, it's like my sisters and I, we joke about things, like we don't even know what would happen. Like if mom and dad found out that we were within like three hours of driving and we did not stop in to see them. We can't even contemplate what would happen, because it just we have never let it happen that way. And so, you know, we are close. And every so even now, since we are far apart, I have a sister out in Washington State and I'm over here in Maryland, it's a little harder to physically gather. But still every Sunday, like every single Sunday, we have a family call via Skype. So, we it's all of us, too. So it's all four of us and mom and dad and the grandkids for about how long it last, an hour and a half? The family calls? Hour and a half every Sunday before that. And so, I mean, we do that and we do family vacations together is a little easier before the grandkids started being in school. But we still try to get together at least every other year, like all of us, to go on like one big family vacation. Or expedition, if you want to call it a vacation, it's more of an expedition with my dad.

[00.35.52.310] Ariana

And that's been harder since COVID happened.

[00.31.53.000] Josephine

It has. My parents were supposed to come out in November because they do now that now that my parents are getting closer to retirement is easier for them to travel. They used to come out. I mean, when Maggie was born, Maggie is the first grandchild. And it was like three, four times a year. They would just come out to be, with Maggie. And of course, we would also travel back to bring the grandkids we like. Until you have a grandkid. Mom, Dad might come see you once a year. But once you have a grandkid, it's like more like five or six times a year or something like that. But it's toned down, definitely with COVID. We they're older, so they're not traveling. They're, you know, they're staying at home. My youngest sister is still in Colorado, so she kind of goes and helps with groceries and picks up food for mom. Mom cooks food in exchange for groceries. So I don't know if it's completely altruistic. But they were supposed to come out in October. And then when things got bad, we pushed it to November. And then we finally just said, let's just wait. Whenever it happens, it'll happen, goes, we rather have you be safe and see you again in the future. And then have you come now and not ever be able to see you again. So it's like, look, you're doing Skype, we're all going to be OK. It has been hard for my parents because it is you know, it isn't the same to just do chats over Skype, even though we did it before even the quarantine happened. But it's a little easier too because the grandkids are older and they can interact actually through Skype. So, they usually play they play Pictionary. We're trying to find an Uno game that my youngest, my nephew can play with grandpa and Maggie. So, they find ways to do that. And my parents, of course. They like to send the grandkids little things that they know that the grandkids like, it's usually food. I don't know if that's traditional in other places, but it's usually food that my parents send, because they know what snacks Maggie likes. So they send her food. And pens, food and pens.

[00:38:20.410] Ariana

So you did pursue chemical engineering, correct?

[00:38.25.910] Josephine

That was yeah, that was that's actually my degree. And I have a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering.

[00:38:28.780] Ariana

We would love to know, like, why you chose to pursue chemical engineering and what your college experience was like, especially geared towards like your classes and GPA and also how that's different from your career at the moment.

[00:38:43.370] Josephine

OK, so initially when I went to started college, I was actually going to be an English major because I remember I liked writers and so I went and I took my first class and I was like, this is not what I thought it was going to be. And so I think it was like right before the deadline, whatever, I actually applied and I switched to Chemical Engineering because I also liked chemistry and science in high school. And so I kind of was like, well, engineering's applied science. I want so I want to do something with science. Why not? And so that's kind of how I got introduced to chemical engineering. And later on, my cousin actually she is a chemical engineer, so she kind of talked to me about it a little bit more. I said, OK, well, this sounds like what I want to do. I want to use science, not just kind of be a scientist in the lab, but somebody that uses science to do something. And so that was a really good fit for me. My emphasis, actually, in chemical engineering is energy and environment. So, it was kind of like a wastewater treatment, renewable energy. But the unfortunate thing is it happened about 20 years before anyone actually ever cared about the environment. So, when I got my it finished my degree there. I actually at the end, I worked for the university. And both my parents are telecommunication and computer scientists, and so my parents were kind of like, oh, you should actually you should be a computer scientist. And I hated I absolutely hated computer programming. We did it every summer with my parents.

[00:40:33.350] Ariana

That was my major first. And then I changed it.

[00.40.38.450] Josephine

I was I just I mean. I think that caused more strife than like anything else was that my parents were like, "why can't you do this?!" "I can do this, I just don't want to do it!" On top of all the regular teenage stuff. It's like that was like my mom calls it like my like the biggest. Not revolt, but like a form of defiance that I did at my major was picked as chemical engineering because like "if you're not going to do English, you should do Computer Science!" "I don't want to do that!" The ironic thing is when I got a job, when I was in college at the university, I actually ended up working for the Information Technology Department. And afterwards, the way things

worked out as my husband was supposed to graduate the same time I did, but some of his internships fell through, so we ended up having to stay and I needed a job. And so I kind of looked at engineering jobs, but it was kind of like, oh, we're not going to be here that long. What should I do in my office? Was like, could you work full time? Could you manage your offices like. Sure. And so my mom always laughs because I ended up working with computers anyways. She is just like, "Haha!" So the plan, though, was with chemical engineering is that after, you know, when he when we got out to start working on his Ph.D. out here on the East Coast is like, this is great. I will start my engineering career now. But it as it turned out, I found another job at the University of Maryland working in their information technology department because it paid about 20 grand more than my environmental engineering job that I had applied to and was called in for interviews and stuff. And so I ended up working in information technology for about ten years before I retired because Maggie came along for that. So I was kind of a funny little like my training is in chemical engineering. I've used it in terms of like helping Maggie and their engineering days at school and getting kids interested in science and stuff like that. But I never quite got to actually be the engineer because it didn't pay well, at least not to be an environmental engineer before anyone cared about the environment. So, if I had been 10 years later, it would have been OK. So right now, 10 years too early, no one really cared. So, the thing about engineering that was interesting. It was. Interesting to be there, because I think in the beginning class, it was probably... I want to say maybe like 40 percent, 60 percent. 40 percent females, 60 percent males in the first classes and like every year would kind of like shrink and shrink and shrink and shrink. And by the time I got to my senior year, like the last year, the, you know, the graduating year, I think there were like five of us. And I don't even know how many guys there were in the program or men in the program. And there are like five females left. And it was kind of interesting because, you know. Interviewing is always interesting, as you know, you. In a sense, like there's a lot of people there's pressure because companies usually won't come to a university to interview and find recruits if they don't have a good mix of students that they want to pull from or for various reasons. So, you know, it's kind of a lot of pressure to interview well, when interviews did happen, because it was like, you know, you're like our mascot, female student. Look, we've got female engineers. So that was kind of like a weird, thing to kind of be suddenly like, you know, not because you're a good engineer as a person, but you're a good engineer because you're female. And that's kind of weird. I think another hard thing was that there weren't. You know, the sad cases, like there's there are different standards in terms of, you know, when you go out to work that, you know, if you're female and you eventually have a family, you know, there are just kind of different standards in terms of balancing work, life, career stuff. And I think even as a student kind of backing it up, you don't necessarily have like a mentor when there are no female faculty members. And actually, you know, I've checked back, you know, whenever I get the homecoming emails to this day, they actually still don't they don't have any permanent female faculty members or those kind of like a visiting adjunct or something like that. Or there's like, oh, but we've got PHD. graduate students are kind of like faculty members, but not really. There are no faculty advisors actually in the entire engineering school. So not even just the chemical engineering department. When I was there, there are only two female faculty members in the whole engineering college.

[00.46.13.650] Ariana

I would love to ask you a question that's not on our list. So this is kind of relevant to me right now. And a lot of students right now are going through a lot with COVID-19 and trying to do

classes online. A lot of us, myself included, are not able to go home, we're stuck here without a support system all on our own. How do you think that our college is now versus your experience that you had in college? How do you think our colleges should be treating students who are failing classes currently? Because I know that I'm failing quite a few classes right now and am worried for my own college career as of now. And how do you think that differs from when you were in college?

[00:46:53.740] Josephine

So, I think it was kind of I mean, they both deal with the present and the future, right? Because they're like you have the present right now, which is like you need kind of some like, you know. Like real time first aid assistance in terms of like your academics, like it's never something as simple as, oh, you're not trying hard enough, right? It's not it's not that there's usually an underlying cause. And there are ways, I think in the past as well as in the present right now with COVID, there are ways to help alleviate the underlying cause. That is, you know, that makes it so people are having difficulty fulfilling their academic work, whether that is they don't have a support system to show them how to manage the work. Like in in terms of like between academics in your personal life, whether it's like you have to work or you have other obligations because of family life. There are things that, you know, I wish that there was there had been a faculty member to be able to say, you know, it's OK to come to your faculty member and say, hey, this is going on right now. I know that I have this due. I have the intention of finishing it. This is my plan and knowing that you could do that, I think. I don't know if I mean, it was a mixture of between genders and youth that you kind of get intimidated by faculty to feel like you can't approach them as a person like you're supposed to put on the front of like, oh, I've got, like, everything under control, like I am. I am A-OK when in fact, like, it's not I know at the end actually of when I was in school, actually got very, very sick. And so, I ended up withdrawing from school for a semester to address health issues. And, you know, at that point I was kind of this like it wasn't like one day I was sick and I went home. It was like a slide of, you know, between work and everything, just kind of. And if I could go back and talk to myself and find like I would have said, I wish the university would have let students know that you can be a person like you can have issues. And you should be able to talk to your adviser to kind of get guidance on how to balance that or how to address that instead of because I think part of it is as a young adult, it's not like you have life experience to be able to gauge how important some different, what impact some decisions will have, like long term, wise, like everything in the moment when everything is falling down on you feels like it's the most important thing that you need to do. And if you don't have the perspective that comes from somebody who maybe has already finished college or has gone through a career or has had family stuff, you can't really make good decisions like you might make a decision. It's like this is a decision you have to make without knowing you might have alternatives, without knowing that you know, what seems important to you right now with a longer view perspective is actually not going to be that big of a deal. And I kind of feel like I wish that there was like a more holistic approach to helping students, that it's not just academics, because in the end, whether they end up being successful is not a complete matter of academics. Like if they can't balance being a person like when you're in school, that same imbalance continues on with your career and the same thing happens. So, I actually for Maggie, I worked initially after she was born for a little bit, but it once again came to a point where we really couldn't keep doing both things. Maggie was two, two or three to something like that. And when she was an infant, as long as they don't do anything to lay on the

ground and they sleep and eat, you can keep working all you want. But when it came to be more interactive, there was some of the point where it's just like, I can't just keep working and I can't be a mom. I can't do everything I need to, as in my personal life. And the interesting thing is also with childcare is kind of like when we factored in how much child care would cost. I think my take home pay after that would have been like one hundred and seventy dollars, like after we paid for child care, like among those kind of like. No, this is not working out.

[00.52.00.00] Ariana

I guess what I'm wondering is how do you think students should be held accountable right now, if at all?

[00:52:09.080] Josephine

I think that there should be. Leeway in terms of how can people practically actually do what they're being asked to do, because there are things that like if you have a lab and you can't get to the lab or they've set up a lab that's kind of virtual but doesn't address everything you need,

[00.52.35.270] Ariana

Or if you can afford the supplies.

[00.52.36.920] Josephine

Yeah, if you can't afford the supplies on your own. I mean, there should be a way to say, I'd like to take a rain check on this. I'm you know, I would like to try it. I would like to give it my best. But at the same time, I think I mean, because my daughter right now is doing virtual school like where we are, it's a complete virtual. It is it's her first year of middle school. And if it is a balance for the teachers to try to find a way to make sure the students. Are receiving academic work, but at the same time in our county, being having equitable access is actually one of the big things. So even in our county, actually has a huge variance in terms of socioeconomic everything. So, you know, we have some of the richest neighborhoods in the country and we also have some of, you know, very, very densely packed poor urban areas in our county.

[0.53.41.300] Ariana

You've got to find the balance.

[00:53:41.320] Josephine

And so they so you have some parents are like, I don't know why I don't have a problem. Why don't you give our kids more this more that more than other parents are like, I don't have Internet access at home. Like, how is my kid supposed to do this? Our county has worked really, really hard to say, OK, this is like this is going to be the line. And we work really, really hard to make sure that people have resources to be able to meet this requirement. And so no one is happy. Of course, this is a situation. No one is happy, like some people are too much and some people too little. But I do think that universities kind of can follow the same line, which is what can students be reasonably asked to do, like in terms of finance, in terms of time, in terms of other resources? What can they be reasonably asked to do?

[00.54.36.200] Ariana

Our university did not lower their tuition costs this semester. So just throwing that out there it's It's kind of a, it's an interest because it's like you don't want the school to go bankrupt because you still want to be able to go to school. Yes, but at the same time, not giving us the same kind of education.

[00.54.56.300] Josephine

It's like I'm not sure I'm getting my money. And that's I think that's a difference between public school and universities. I was telling my daughter about this the other day is that, you know, when you go to university, you actually start paying for your education. It's not something somebody gives you anymore. It's something it's like everything else you pay for is a little bit sure that you're getting what you what you paid for, meaning.

[00.55.14.930] Ariana

Absolutely.

[00.55.15.000] Josephine

From her point of view, it's more like don't do the bare minimum, but be sure to go for excellence here. But I think there is balance that needs to be found in that in terms of. Whether there has to be some give somewhere, whether it's like, you know, they lower requirements, because I know when I was in school, you had to take a certain number of credit hours to remain like a full time student. And that would affect all sorts of things. But if your insurance or your tuition rate, your scholarships, everything, there has to be something to be able to say. OK, like this is now actually the credit hours that were then reality.

[00.56.08.320] Ariana

They should lower the credit hours at our university because there are 13 to be full time and it's too much for a lot of students, especially me. It looks like we have about three minutes left. The interview was an hour, correct.

[00.56.20.500] Josephine

Something like that, unless they've already moved on to Thanksgiving zoom then you have more.

[00.56.29.970] Ariana

What was that Janelle, an hour?

[00.56.30.200] Janelle

It should be like at least an hour. It Could it could go over a little bit.

[00:56:35.310] Ariana

OK, I do have a class at eight today, so if we could cut it off at seven thirty, that'll be great. We do have one, two, three, four or five more questions if you want to pick one of those Janelle. That would be like and I can be...

[00.56.49.000] Josephine

I'll try to be more succinct.

[00:56.900] Ariana

I can bounce out at seven thirty so I could jump in on my class at eight. And you guys want to stay on and continue that, the conversation you don't have to.

[00:56.59.000] Josephine

I'm flexible

[00:56:58.790] Janelle

I was like I just wanted to ask which university you got your bachelors at.

[00:57:06.270] Josephine

So, I actually went to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. So it is the school. It's owned by the Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints. So there is kind of an interesting thing there, because they are culturally they're a more stronger gender stereotypes that go on there. So that is sometimes why there aren't many engineering, science or math female students. But the education school is huge for females. That was a fun thing is they don't have a dance every year. That was like with the School of Education and the School of Engineering. And people be like, are you going? And I be like, Nope. Not going to be anyone there for me so I'll hang out with you guys, if you want. you need someone to be your safe person. I'll be there.

[00:57:53.130] Ariana

I really do appreciate you letting me throw that curve ball question as you whole time. And your answer was your answer. I couldn't agree with you.

[00:58.00.000] Josephine

There has to be. I mean, and it's the same thing with kind of like all sorts of things. There has to be a way to be able to find compromise on both sides, because if both sides don't compromise and it's not really a compromise so. And it's not a permanent thing. It's not like they're asking you and it's like this is what it's going to be here on out. It's like just right now.

[00:58.22.000] Ariana

Yeah. Especially like, I don't know. I've never I was a valedictorian of my high school class. I always got good grades. And I am I'm pretty sure I'm failing the semester like all my classes. So, it's I work to fifty-nine hours a week. I take care of myself one hundred percent. I live on my own. It's hard, its really hard.

[00:58:38.340] Josephine

I would say, I mean my advice kind of coming from having had difficulties in schools. Make sure you try to find I don't know if they have student life counselors at your school or if they have, you know, I mean if you have a faculty advisor, definitely speak with them because. They would be able to get you in touch with the resources of the school to kind of. Kind of voice concerns and to be able to find assistance that you might not know about because normally you

wouldn't need it. So, I would say if I had to talk to myself from back in that, I'd say. Talk to the adult, like reach out to them at least a little, because if they don't know, that's not even on their radar for them.

[00.59.20.900] Ariana

Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

[00.59.25.200] Janelle

So, are you glad that you joined the Auntie Sewing Squad and when did you join?

[00:59:32.940] Josephine

I was, I joined not at the very beginning. I was actually kind of more in the middle of summer, so kind of July-ish. So, I haven't been in there that long. I glad. I am very glad is something I was excited for. I had kind of been sewing masks and stuff like that on my own, kind of in our neighborhood for people that we knew that needed them and stuff like that. And that kind of eventually, you know, there are only a finite number of people I personally know that needed masks. And so, when I found that and I actually liked the idea because, you know, the idea of an auntie is kind of this this cultural thing, too, is like the idea of a person, a woman who goes out and helps other people. And, you know, volunteering is actually always been a really big. Part of like things that I like to do, especially since I call it early retirement, when I stopped working to help raise Maggie, volunteering has been a really, really big thing. You know, I was trying to be really active in school and community, and we've actually moved around a lot because my husband's career, he kind of needed to go and get a lot of experience in different sectors of industry. So, we've always moved. And we actually just finished our third move in five years. So, it was kind of like my job to keep the household together for that. So, I've always liked the idea of volunteering and I love the idea that it's not just kind of. Easy volunteering. It's like they kind of look for the people that really, really need assistance, kind of like the populations that are traditionally overlooked, like that was something that really spoke to me because there is a lot of inequity out there and there are a lot of people that work as hard as they want to never really have a chance to succeed because there are so many things stacked against them. So, I liked the idea that it wasn't just volunteering. It was like volunteering to help people that really, really needed help. So, I was excited. You know, it's one thing I announced very happily during our family call when I got accepted to Auntie Sewing Squad.

[01.01.45.280] Ariana

So, sweet.

[01.01.46.500] Josephine

It was something I was really excited about. And my daughter, she's my little junior auntie, so she helps me out with things that she's excited about it. It's kind of a way I can kind of connect her with the idea, you know, a cultural idea of like being an auntie and for that. But she helps about the exciting for her because it's something for her to do. And it's always good, I think, to introduce the idea of volunteering and doing something selfless to kids to help them. Hopefully keep doing that when they become adults, because society work unless we want to help each other out. Yeah, and as for my background in sewing, I had like almost no background in sewing. So, my mother sewed when I was growing up and she never taught us. It was more like

she had the sewing machine so she could make repairs. My husband's mother, my mother-in-law, on the other hand, she was a seamstress when he was a kid. She was like the work for the bridal store could make a bridal dress like a wedding dress seamstress, like the kind that can sew without looking at what she's doing. Seamstress. And so, my family is all girls and families, all boys. And so, when her sons get married, it's always those kinds of... Like I finally got a daughter, we're going to do all these craft things together, like we are going to be like best buds. So, she tried to teach me to sew and it was like for me, like a nervous wreck type of thing. Like I'm like, I'm going to lose the hand doing this. Like, I don't know this machine with a sharp, pointy thing like this is like madness. And so that was my background and sewing and I joke. And so for. For one of our Christmas gifts, she actually gave me a sewing machine. I was just like, oh, thank you. This is going to get so much use. And it basically came out in October when my daughter wanted a Halloween costume. Like, that's the only time it got broken out before this. Now it's like in the basement, on its own table, out of the way, as I do almost my masks. But before that, it was in the box in the closet until October. I mean, I can mend buttons. I can do minor stuff. But even to this, I don't really do well patterns. I don't know how to read them. So, I pretty much I call it more like I engineer stuff like so I'll Maggie's Halloween costumes. I engineered them with like math and stuff until they make things work out. I didn't use patterns and sometimes I'd shown to my mother-in-law because Maggie would love them. She's like, look at my costume and my mother-in-law knew how to open it up and look on the inside of it and just be like, "What happened here?"

[01:04:30.400] Ariana

Would you ever, would you ever be able to sew like a plus size pleated skirt? Those are so hard to find.

[01:04:41.260] Josephine

I like I said with my mother, she's just like opened it up like what happened here, like this is not like what is this sense of its being held together by a thread. But I don't know what you did to do this. Like "what mad voodoo did you do to make this work out?"

[01.04.57.000] Ariana

But it's being held together.

[01.05.00.000] Josephine

Yeah, I'm like it is in one piece for as long as it needs to be for now. Yeah. Pleated skirts are like not like not.

[01.05.09.500] Ariana

I want one, they're so cute.

[01:05:13.090] Josephine

So yeah, my background is sewing is pretty like I would not ever like proudly show anything. Like I would not do my own home decor or like clothing or then my husband's like, oh do you want like a new sewing machine, like you know, you have this like old kind of like Black Friday

sewing machine like you want. I'm like we after this thing is done, it's like this mask deal is done, this is going back in the closet. Like I'm only doing this to save lives. Like this is the only thing that would get me to do this right now is I am saving lives. Because I don't find enjoyment doing this. So, yeah, I mean, I like it. I like that I'm helping. But it's like at the same time I'm like, I hope no one who knows how to sew is ever like looking at any of the stuff that goes in the mail. It works, but it is not by any like, you know, Signer's rolling in his grave right now knowing that I'm using one of his machines like, you know, so but I haven't sewed over my hand, so.

[01.06.20.000] Janelle

Yep, yep.

[01:06:23.110] Ariana

Perfect. All right. Well, I have a class in 20 minutes, so it was an amazing pleasure to get to interview you. I think that even with the little sidewall like question, I think that you did extremely, extremely well. You're very articulate in the way that you talk. And I think we got very blessed with the answers that we chose because you had a lot to say. And I loved every word. It means a lot to us that you let us interview you and that you're a part of this Auntie Sewing Circle. You guys really are changing lives and helping people.

[01:06:54.460] Josephine

And in answer to your last question, I've actually never been in any civil rights things. I've never really been political until now.

[01.07.02.900] Janelle

Got it.

[01.07.03.250] Josephine

I was like, "Oh, we got to do something."

[01.07.08.900] Ariana

Especially now.

[01.07.11.800] Josephine

So that was the closest. And we're in DC, so we're only like fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes from D.C. So, if we wanted to, we could walk down and if it had, if it wasn't for COVID like we would have, we would have brought Maggie down to do, you know, just to kind of be part of something to help support people.

[01:07:28.780] Ariana

Yeah.

[01.07.28.900] Josephine

But then again, at the same time, like if we didn't have COVID, maybe none of this would have happened. Yeah, so but yeah, this is the first time in my life, even though I've experienced racism and prejudice and stuff like that, this is the first time in my life where I've like this can't go on. Just for the record.

[01:07:58.420] Ariana

Amazing. All right. Well, thank you so much for letting us interview you. I don't know if I should call you Auntie Josephine or just Josephine.

[01:08.02.000] Josephine

Either one works.

[01:08.03.000] Ariana

Thank you so much for letting us interview you and for getting the paperwork turned into us. I think we got some really, really great insight on who you are as a person and what it means for you to be a part of this movement, even just to be a part of the Auntie-Sewing-Circle is doing a lot, lot more than people realize.

[01:08:23.350] Josephine

Well hopefully we can continue on, even after everything's done, keep trying to help each other out. But if you have any questions or do you need anything clarifications, feel free to email me.

[01:08.33.700] Ariana

We will definitely be in contact with you.

[01:08.35.600] Janelle

Yeah. Thank you very much. You're very intelligent. It was great to talk to you and interview you.

[01:08.42.900] Josephine

I'm happy to help.

[01:08.48.000] Ariana

All right, thank you guys so much. Bye-bye.