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Interview with Tobee Chung Vanderwall

Tobee Chung Vanderwall

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Interviewee: Tobee Chung Vanderwall

Interviewers: Saul Bruno-Gonzalez and Horacio Barajas

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Overseen by: Dr. Chrissy Yee Lau

Biography: Tobee Chung Vanderwall identifies as Chinese, Japanese, and Scottish. Born in Hawaii, she grew up and attended schools in San Francisco, California. She studied biochemistry at a research lab, taught at a middle school, and is now a mother of three children. She became politicized through the Black Lives Matter Movement at the start of the Trump presidency. As someone who learned to sew from her mother, she joined the Auntie Sewing Squad because she saw a need and had the sewing skills to meet the need. During her time in the Squad, Chung Vanderwall played a role in initiating the name change for the Fu mask pattern.

Summary of Interview: 00:00:00 Tobee Chung Vanderwall discusses her background in Hawaii and San Francisco, how she learned to sew, and how she became interested in Black Lives Matter Movement and the Auntie Sewing Squad in response to the Trump presidency. 00:12:47 Chung Vanderwall shares the story of how she initiated a group discussion on the possible racist name of the Fu mask pattern and how that led to a revision of the mask name to Uncle Van Huynh (UVH) mask pattern among the Aunties. 00:22:27 She next discusses her thoughts on the racist use “Kung Flu” and “China virus” the Trump presidency used to describe the COVID-19 pandemic. 00:33:14 Chung Vanderwall then points to the longer history of civil rights organizing led by Black activists and her pride in her Asian heritage. 00:40:00 She ends by explaining how and why she uses Twitter, not Facebook, and the emergence of QAnon.

Interview Transcript:

00:00:00-00:00:03

Horacio Barajas (HB): Hi, my name is Horacio Barajas. I am attending CSUMB, and I am currently a second year student.

00:00:03-00:00:09

Saul Bruno (SB): My name is Saul Bruno. I also attend CSUMB, and I am also a second year.

00:03:09-00:00:15

HB: Okay, so the first question is what is your background and how is your journey leading up to the auntie sewing squad?

00:00:15-00:00:30

Tobee Chung Vanderwall (TCV): It's kind of a broad question, what's my background? Did you guys want to know like just how I would generally answer that? Or were you interested in...?

00:00:30-00:00:39

SB: Oh yeah, So I guess you could just kind of say, like, your name, where you're from and I guess kind of like just a little bit of your life.

00:00:39-00:02:43

TCV: Okay. Just a real general, okay. My name's Toby Chung Vanderwall. I'm originally from Hawaii, and I have been living in San Francisco Bay Area for a long time since before you're both born in the 80s. And so even though I consider myself sort of Hawaii native but also San Francisco native because I've been here, I moved here when I started in middle school. So I've been here a long time so I am very connected to both cultures and both places. And I've really have been in San Francisco all that time, I went to City College in San Francisco, I went to San Francisco State. And I did my masters in a program, the school was down in Pasadena, but I did a distance program, so most of the classes were like in Menlo Park, so I have never moved away really for a significant time period. My main careers in life have been I've worked as a biochemistry lab research associate and I've done some teaching at middle school, high school level and I also have done some pastoral work, but I no longer do that. And I have three kids who are school age, so my main role in life right now is taking care of them. I'm really like blessed to be able to stay home with them. And also the career field I had before, I wouldn't be making probably enough money to do childcare for them, so it kind of works that way as well. I'm married and something else I wanted add, oh, and I'm currently going back to school for

psychology, so I'm not in a program yet, I'm just taking some prerequisite courses in psychology.

00:02:43-00:02:50

SB:All right, yeah, that's very impressive.

00:02:50

TCV: I'm old, though I've done a lot in my life.

00:02:50-00:03:02

SB: I mean, that's good. It's great. You've gone through some things in life. Also, how did that like kind of progressed into joining the Auntie Sewing Squad?

00:03:02-00:07:23

TCV: Well, so, my mother is I mentioned I'm from Hawaii. My mother grew up on the island of Hawaii and her family background, she's not a direct immigrant, but her grandparents came from Japan. They were migrants from Japan in the 19th century and they came very poor. They worked in the farm. My mom grew up on a sugarcane plantation, so back then, all the girls and all the women had to learn how to sew. So she sewed. My grandparents sewed clothes. My mom learned, back then with my mom's generation, the women and the girls always had home ec. Home economics was part of standard schooling. So my mother is a very accomplished seamstress. She never worked professionally as a seamstress. She was able to go to nursing school, but she knew how to sew. And so when I was in my teens, I decided I wanted to learn how to sew. So she taught me to sew, and it's always been something, I'm more of a hobbyist. I'm not like a passionate love to sew. I'm not like the best sewer out there, but I can do it. I can hem my jeans or hem a skirt or whatever and make a really simple kind of dress. So I had those skills and actually, when this all happened, I didn't even have a sewing machine because I used to use my mom's sewing machine. And even when you get older, sometimes you still use your parents stuff. Like I don't need to buy that, oh my mom has one. So I would always just use, if I needed to sew, I would go up to her house because she lives near me. But when this all happened and I realized there were not enough masks in the beginning of the pandemic for health care workers, I was like I got to get a sewing machine. This is one way I can help. I didn't work in health care. And also just being a stay at home parent, I didn't feel like I had a direct way of really helping. I wish I were back in the science field, maybe I could be helping with the vaccine or something, but I just wanted to find some way to just give more than, you can give in a lot of ways, you can give your time, your money, your resources, whatever you have. And I was like I can give my time and some resources. When you buy sewing supplies, it's not super expensive. But I was in a position where I felt like that was one thing I could do. And initially I wanted to try to get my hands on some material that would be useful to actually

sew masks to be used in the health care setting like with people were thinking that you could get materials from operating rooms like they use on the instrument trays. I have a friend who's a physician, he's like, yeah, that material we usually we throw a lot of it away. We don't really use it. We open the box and we use one and we have these extras. So I was like, well, if you can get me some of that, I'll sew you guys some masks because in the beginning, I don't know if you guys remember, but there just weren't enough like N95s and good surgical masks, there weren't any. And I was really concerned for my, I had a friend who is an anesthesiologist, and so I was like if I can make you guys some masks, you can get them out to your colleagues, I'll do that. And that never panned out, but we needed masks just for ourselves, for our family. And it was really hard to find them, being a parent and having kids in school, we were very much on the alert system and just thinking, how can we protect ourselves and being in San Francisco, I think we the first city in the country to declare a state of emergency. So we were in the very early detection of COVID and really realizing, even though the CDC wasn't recommending masks at the time, I felt like the people in my community were all like, we've got to get masks. So I was like I can sew, I can do this.

00:07:23-00:07:29

SB: Yeah, that's great, that's really something, that's amazing, you actually tried to play your part during the pandemic. Was there like something like the Auntie Sewing Squad kind of pushed you towards doing that or ?

00:07:29- 00:12:47

TCV: I mean, at the time, gosh and March 2020, we were in the middle of the Trump administration and things were just every day, well, I have been very involved and I wasn't super involved in politics before Trump got into office, but I've been active in the Black Lives Matter movement since about 2015/2016. Had a very close family friend whose son was murdered by the San Francisco Police Department back in 2015. His name was Mario Woods and he was just killed execution style in the Bayview, and that was when, I had been paying attention to things in the Black Lives Matter movement when Trayvon Martin was killed and when Mike Brown and the protests, I can remember when they said they weren't even going to do a trial or the grand jury was like, oh, he's not guilty. I just remember those moments and it was on my consciousness, the Black Lives Matter movement, and I was aware and paying attention, but I never showed up for that until it came to San Francisco. And when Mario Woods was killed, it hit home. It was so close. And I just remember just feeling like physically ill for a few days. And it really hit me that if we continue living on this Earth and we have connections, this type of injustice is going to come to our front door at some point unless we're really living in a bubble. So I got pretty involved locally in Black Lives Matters and then when you live in San Francisco when you start getting involved at a certain level of activism, the whole world opens up, right? You find out that there is not just Black people being killed. There are, in San Francisco alone, there are so many cases out there and so many incidents out there of police injustice and brutality, so I was very

much involved at that level of activism, but I wasn't paying attention to national politics too much. But then when Trump got elected, I was just like, oh my god, what can we do? So I already had been doing some activism in that area, so it was a very easy transition to begin. There were so many people mobilizing, so I had spent I guess it was 2018, was he elected in 2016, yeah, I did a lot of phone banking, I did a lot of like door to door canvassing to help flip the house. And in California, there were about seven swing districts. Some of them were down in Southern California, some of them were up here and so there was a movement called like Red to Blue. And I was very involved with that politically and just being, it was also like I made some calls even to people like in New York, where there were some swing districts out there too. So I had been involved politically and was very aware, I mean, back when that guy was president, it was like it's not an exaggeration to say it was everyday there was something like every single day if you were paying attention, there was something shocking and not surprising. And so by the time this happened, I was already feeling very weary about how things were going with his administration. And when I realized there weren't enough masks and he wasn't going to do anything about it and he wasn't taking the pandemic seriously, it definitely lit a fire under me even more. Just the general political environment and the just the polarization about COVID at the time. I guess it wasn't even I didn't think it was being called COVID yet. But yeah, it didn't take much for me to feel very determined to throw my hat in the ring and to be able to do something physically during the pandemic was great because there weren't any protests going on about masks. So this is all before everything happened in the summer. So there weren't a lot of protests going on around this specific issue or anything else at the time. So I felt like I had the space to contribute in that way. So I was kind of ripe for the picking to do something like this at this time.

00:12:47-00:13:19

SB: Yeah. When Trump got elected, yeah, you're right, there was a lot of like it, seemed like every day there was just something new, something just horribly, horribly going wrong. Yeah, but also, like you said, you were making masks and everything, I remember in your little description on the google sheets, you said something about wanting to rename the masks?

00:13:19-00:22:27

TCV: Oh right. So I, like a lot of people, am a laptop warrior. And so I get online and so what we were doing, one thing I remember was trying to figure out like what would be a good mask pattern to begin to make, what you're trying to figure out, I never made a mask before, so in the very beginning, this was probably really early, there weren't a lot of mask patterns out there. The main ones you could find were for cancer patients and especially for kids. Because I have three kids, you'd have to scale down the pattern, which is not that hard to do for a mask, but the only mask patterns out there for kids were for cancer patients, there weren't a lot of people making masks at home because you could always just go buy them. You didn't have to make them, in our culture, we don't wear masks when we're sick. It's just not what we do. So anyway, I began to look for patterns and I found this one that popped up when you do your google search, and it was

called the FU mask, you know, it was you F-U and I'm just sensitive to that kind of thing when you see something named after an Asian surname and then you like immediately, on the website, you see the mascot called FU. But you see like all white faces presenting it, it's not something, it's just part of my consciousness. I'm like, ok, well, that's interesting, but there is no explanation for why it was named that. And I was very aware that President Trump, I don't even like calling him that, I don't know if he had already used the term "kung flu" or not, but I think he had because I think I remember being like the FU mask, like, what is that, like kung fu? Like what kind of? That's not even an Asian name. Like, I don't know anybody with the last name Fu. And I know a lot of Asian people, a lot of Chinese, Korean, I know Vietnamese. I'm mixed and I grew up in San Francisco, so I know a lot of Asian people and I was like, FU, you see F-O-O as a last name, but not F-U. So the only F-U you ever really see is kung fu. And so I'm like, I think like trying to call it the kung fu mask? It just bugged me. But it was a very good mask pattern. And at the time, it was very hard to find elastic because elastic, it was like flying off the shelves by the time I had gotten to this point in the mask making period. And it showed you how to make ties. It was a great mask pattern that I had already found and I was making it, and then you were able to scale, they were like, if you want to make it, you can do small, medium, large. It was great. It was a free source, open source pattern too. When I started, I was on they still on Facebook at the time so I found Auntie Sewing Squad through friends of friends, and I noticed a lot of people were making that using the FU masks too. And it was like, here's the most popular masks patterns we're making because people were asking, like the aunties were like, what kind of masks we make? And people were like, oh, there's this mask, this mask is the FU. And so a lot of people were using it and you're just doing that. It was just like, we're throwing that term around a lot and it was being used quite a lot. I think it was becoming one of the most popular mask patterns out there. And I just brought it up one day in a chat, I was like, does that name bother anybody else? Because I'm just curious, like, what do you guys think? Let's talk about this because it seems a little bit like there's just some at best unconscious bias around it. And I remember Kristina, I think it was Kristina, the founder, immediately jumped in on the chat. It was just a thread or something. And she was like, you're right, I'm going to contact them. She just kind of took it from there. And I sort of would chimed in a little bit, like I remember at the beginning, I was kind of like, hey, I want to take this narrative, like, I want it to kind of control the narrative and like, fix it myself. But she was just on it. And then I just ended up kind of like being her cheerleader. And then she and a few of the other Aunties had a back and forth with the person from the website, who's the designer of the mask and who named it. And I kind of found out about it. It happened so quickly. I was like reading the text threads and I think they were on a website and I was like reading the message board after it all happened. And, I was kind of like, I wish I could have chimed in, but it wasn't my group. I brought it up. And there's always that sort of like selfish part of you that's like, hey, don't forget, I was the one who brought this up, I am the one when you're talking about. I let that go after a while, I was like, you know what, it's great. They handled it, and they handled it in a way that I would like to think I would have handled it, too, because the first person who replied from their website, they were like, well, the designer of

the mask, the designers are Dutch, they're from the Netherlands, and so it wasn't the designer who answered, it was like his friend, and the guy's name was like Hans or something, he was like, Hans is the the the least racist person you would ever meet. So the first response was like, oh my God, yes, yes, we're dealing with people who are just like colorblind or whatever. So it took a lot of back and forth between the Aunties. And I had no input on it after that other than just like, peace you did a great job, I am glad it came up and then they renamed it. They went ahead and renamed it, and I thought it was interesting that they renamed it after one of the uncles there. You know, it's mostly women in the group. I would say it's probably at 90 percent or more women. You guys could maybe confirm that. But they renamed the mask because the website designers were resistant to rename, they had a really shitty attitude about it. But they were like, fine, we'll rename it to, because they always wanted to have their masks to have alliteration. So they were like, it's FU because it's the FU facemask, like they wanted to be an F and an F, and they're like, ok, well, they finally decided they would name it the Florence facemask out of from Florence Nightingale, you know that nurse. But their attitude about it was was not good. They were always just like, but you know, they did rename I'll give them that, they didn't resist 100 percent. But so Kristina renamed it, I think it was Kristina, and she renamed it the UVH mask, and it stood for Uncle Van Huynh, who was one of the members of the sewing squad and he was pretty active. I think his mom is a Vietnamese American and I think his mom, his family maybe had like a clothing factory or something like that. So he was very active in the group. And so she was like, we're going to name it the UVH mask, and we're just going to name it after Uncle. I can't remember his first name, maybe his first name was Van, and his last name was Huynh. So and I thought that was cool, that they renamed it after someone in the group. But I also thought was interesting. I was like there's so many women in this group and you rename the mask after a man. I just thought that was interesting. I don't know. I never kicked back on anybody about that, but that's just one of my comments. And then pretty much like from that point on, that mask was referred to as that, and people would come in the group later down the line and they were like, e what does UVH stand for? So it was kind of this origin story. I think that happened like early in the summer of 2020, but that was probably my that was my most significant or insignificant contribution to the group ethos at the time. Oh, I think you're on mute. Oh, I was like I'll just wait.

00:22:27-00:22:42

SB: So I want to talk a little bit about you did mention the kung flu. How did you respond to Donald Trump calling it the China virus?

00:22:42-00:26:50

TCV: In a way, you at that point you just roll your eyes, but it's always the feeling of solidarity in terms of being discriminated against. It didn't matter who he was disparaging or insulting, you feel a solidarity as a human being, but as a person of color, being Asian, whenever he would attack any other group, I was offended for that. But a direct attack on your ethnicity and your

how you identify as a person from East Asia originally because I'm Japanese, Chinese, Hawaiian, English, I just thought there was no surprise. And I thought it was sickening. But I also think he says the quiet parts out loud. He says "kung flu" and everybody laughs. It's not like people are like, I can't believe, but people laugh. They think it's funny. It's hilarious. What a good joke. It's perfect. So, it's not a surprise. It could have been 10, 20, 30 years ago would have been the same joke. It's not like Trump was the first person to be racist and to be xenophobic. Just even the 1918 pandemic, the Spanish flu had started in Kansas at a farm with some probably white farmers. It was a swine flu that was started in the Midwest in America, but it was eventually called the Spanish flu because that's the way that it got portrayed in the media. So as long as something doesn't originate in a country that's considered to be more cultured, that's always going to come up. So it was no surprise. And of course, I thought it was dangerous. I thought it was going to increase the anti-Asian sentiment that is already there. I think for being Asian, I think we fear systemic and institutionalized racism historically less than we fear individual racism, being spit out on the street or slur, like even in San Francisco, there were things happening. Like there was a woman in a Facebook group that I was in or maybe it was public just in the sunset district, like a residential district in San Francisco and someone spit at her and started cussing her out and telling her, you brought the flu here and you dirty shank or whatever. And so even in San Francisco, where there's a lot of people here. You just are more on your guard, it just it brings your alert level up, your stress level, your baseline goes a little higher. I feel pretty comfortable for the most part in San Francisco, but I like I said, I've lived here since I was a little girl and I've experienced racism so many times in the city. I'm not going to say every day, but you know, you just notice it. You know when somebody is treating you a certain way for certain reason based on how you look. So it happens in San Francisco, and so for it to happen on a national level, it made me angry, but like I said, he just says the silent parts out loud and it was always shocking, but not surprising when he would do those things and because of the the platform and the office that he held, it was even more disappointing. And it was just so embarrassing that he was our president.

00:26:50-00:26:57

SB: Yeah, he really is. It's really like crazy to think that someone like that was in office and how unlimited power and everything. So it is. Yeah. Do you think that him blaming the virus on China kind of like increase the attacks on Asian people?

00:26:57-00:33:14

TVC: I'm sure it definitely. I mean, it was already difficult because it was coming out of China, which people, there's going to be, historically in America, the way that a lot of mainstream Americans look at Chinese immigrants is that they're dirty. They bring disease. The Chinese Exclusion Act, that was a big part of it, was like yellow fever. It was literally a slur within the within the disease, calling it yellow fever. And so that's always something as an Asian person, you feel like people are going to think you're dirty or you eat with your mouth open or you're

loud when you talk. If you're speaking Cantonese, you're cackling or you have an accent, I think Asian people feel like they get made fun of a lot. Like that's the worst of our racism sometimes is that we get teased. Yeah, so I almost forget the question, because I get so... Oh did it increase? Yes, I think it increased. Absolutely. Because if you had had a leader who had said, just called it by its scientific name, like at the time, was SARS-CoV-2, like just call it that, it was a SARS virus. I think I read that the World Health Organization, their protocol for diseases is to give it a scientific name to decrease the chances that it will have a negative effect on the country or people of origin. So like Ebola, fortunately, Ebola stayed Ebola. But I'm sure that if Trump had been president at the time, he would have given it a really horrible, racist name. So, yes, he could have used the scientific name. He could have stressed that, and he could have said, this is something we're in together globally. Now with these like new variants like Delta and Omicron, that's what they're going to be called. You don't hear Joe Biden saying Omicron, oh it's a South, he's not like calling it the apartheid virus or something like, he's not coming up with a name to make it look like, oh, it's the Black people in South Africa who haven't gotten vaccinated because of vaccine hesitancy like it has been mentioned as part of the problem, but he's not pinpointing it on a specific people group, especially a minority people group. So yeah, it definitely increased it. I mean, I've never heard somebody in person use the term kung flu in a derogatory way, but I wouldn't be surprised. I felt like there was a potential for that to come up, if you bump into someone in the street and they don't like it, they might be like, get out of here, you stupid kung flu, like you just never know, it was like in my mind that something like that could come up and then he also called it the China virus, which was less offensive, but still ridiculous that he called it that. He didn't have the desire to refer to it in a way that it wasn't divisive and useful for him politically. For him, it was all about politics and getting attention and making his base happy so he he didn't care who he hurt along the way. And it did become very violent. I mean, there were the increase in Asian hate crimes, I'm sure you guys know, it skyrocketed. And it was horrible, and by a year later, when those attacks happened in Atlanta with those women who are working in that service industry, it was horrible. I mean, I was very stressed out. I was crying. I didn't want to travel and my husband's from the Midwest and I was like, I'm not going Midwest this summer. You're insane. I don't want to be. My husband is Caucasian and his family is nice and everything. But I knew they wouldn't understand and I was very honest with them. I was like, I don't feel like traveling to see you guys because I don't want to deal with the heightened racism that I know I'm going to experience because I always do. When I go there, I deal with it. And they were like, you do? Well, yes, I think every time I come visit you guys, somebody always says something really ignorant to me because it's very white area. It's West Michigan. I'm like, always, even you guys. And they were like, really? They were all surprised, like, oh, we didn't know people around here were racist. On the bright side, it made me speak up with them and I did say to them on a zoom call, I was like, you guys have all said something to me at one time or another that was very offensive. So, in a way, Trump being so vocal as a racist, putting it out there, it gave me a little more of an incentive to speak up. And I really don't think racism necessarily has increased. It's just more acceptable in the open again. So

as somebody, I feel like it gives me an opportunity to speak up more because it's more on the surface of relevance. It's not something that can be ignored. For me, I'm not willing to just pretend like everything's fine.

00:33:14-00:33:46

SB: Yeah, I think definitely opened up some doors where he or even the president himself were like saying racist remarks or I think he just opened up for a lot of people to like just the population in general, like, I guess, feel free to say, to speak their mind because I mean, the president is doing so.

00:33:46-00:35:10

TVC: Yeah and I mean, and then our fight in civil rights is always on the shoulders of the African American and Black American community. And this is all post-George Floyd too, that was happening, so it was much easier, we all had our hearts on our sleeves at that time and still do, always will, I think, to just be proud of who we are. And I think it helped us, for me it helped me really dig in to more just to be proud. I mean, I haven't always been proud of my heritage growing up in a white society, there were times where I was like, oh, I wish I could do my hair a different way or have my hair all feathered and look more white. I didn't know that's how I was trying to be when I was younger, but that was the standard of beauty. And now it's totally fine, being older, I think, thankfully come into a place where it's like, I am so proud of who my heritage. I'm so proud of my ethnicity. My ancestors is a big, really important part of how I identify is just being really thankful to and aware of all my ancestors from my Hawaiian culture and my Japanese and Chinese culture and I do have some Scottish ancestors, I really don't know that much about it. I feel like they speak to me less.

00:35:10-00:35:23

SB: Horacio do you want to address anything?

00:35:23-00:35:35

HB: Well, you said that there was a lot of like Asian hate during coronavirus, do you think as the year has passed, has it died down or is still the same?

00:35:35-00:37:23

TCV: I'd say in the American consciousness, I think it's died down. Yeah, I mean. In San Francisco, I live in a bubble here, so you have a lot of proximity to whiteness. Most of the people I hang out with are very liberal, so they weren't really bought into that anyway. But every now and then, I still see, I'm not active on Facebook anymore, I still have an account like if you search for my name, hopefully, you would just see my name and like my two pictures. And that's it. The main social media that I engage in is Twitter and you still see conservative talking points

of Joe Biden or Hunter Biden knew about the the virus coming out of a lab in Wuhan and it escaped from the lab in Wuhan, so they're still trying to blame, there will be conservatives around the world and that's probably even too nice to call them conservatives. There will always be xenophobic, racist people who want to blame this virus on evil, stupid Chinese people. That narrative will always be there. But I think the hate, the rhetoric around the hate for the virus has really shifted more to the vaccine and the mandates around vaccination. So yeah, I think that Trump not being in office and not having the platform and calling it the "China virus" on a regular basis and not having a real strong social media presence at the moment, I think it has gotten better.

00:37:23-00:37:45

SB: You said you used to use Facebook and now you use more Twitter, do you see any difference in how people speak their minds, like racist remarks or is there like less offensive things on Twitter or more offensive things on Twitter. Like, what is your personal experience on that?

00:37:45-00:40:00

TCV: I would say yes, because on Facebook, it was more everyday people. And on Twitter, it's more people who have big followers. I follow mostly people who are public figures, and on Facebook, I follow most people who are friends of friends or family. And so you would never know who would be on your timeline or you might see something, somebody saying something really ignorant. And that was one of the reasons I got off Facebook. And actually, I think I left Facebook because it was just becoming, it was not a healthy use of my time to see those remarks. And unfortunately, I think it kind of coincided with me not being as active with the Auntie Sewing Squad because most of that was the main way they connected with people. I mean, was maybe the only way they connected was through Facebook. And there were like some grandmas who weren't on Facebook, but they had somebody who would like communicate for them on Facebook. So I did decide to leave Facebook, ok, I didn't leave completely by stop being active on Facebook because of privacy concerns, and also that there wasn't so much the racism, but I had like one person who I used to know pretty well, like I used to take care of her daughter, and she had like declared that she was a part of QAnon. And I was like, I got to get out of here like I don't have time to be connecting with people who are who are part of QAnon so it was like someone I knew. I felt like it was just a I didn't want to have that in my space. I don't want to make space for that. So I did really stop using it. Yes, Twitter is the main social media will be on, and I don't follow anybody who I don't follow people that I don't really want to see their comments. So I just don't see it as much. And I was very intentional.

00:40:04-00:40:12

SB: On Twitter, personally, I've seen a lot of jokes being passed around. And do you think like you've seen a lot more jokes towards certain cultures or ethnicities on on social media?

00:40:12-00:42:10

TCV: No, I think my algorithms are more of I follow a lot of journalists, I follow a lot of politicians, so I don't even see a lot of jokes. My Twitter feed probably looks really different than yours. Every now and then, I think I have like 90 percent is journalists and politicians and then like 10 percent just because of people who I follow, I get a little bit of black Twitter, so I'll see some kind of funny things. Probably the funniest things I see are from like Cardi B or something. I don't see a lot of like my peers. I'm 51, so my peers are not on Twitter for jokes. So even if I do have friends, my algorithm is still, it probably be pretty accurate to say that I get a lot of my news from Twitter, and I trust the news that I get from Twitter. It's not like people who get their news from Facebook getting like Russian state media propaganda or something like that. I feel like I followed journalists who are actually journalists, like Nikole Hannah-Jones, people like that, the content that I get on there. And if I were starting to see more memes or jokes or reposting and things like, I would probably unfollow. I just don't. And if I did, I would probably try to change it because that's not why I'm there. I'm not on Twitter for any kind of entertainment, that's probably really boring in a lot of ways.

00:42:10-00:42:27

SB: I did want to ask you about that term you were using earlier about how you were taking some care of somebody's child. I have never personally heard that term. Could you explain a little bit on that? See what that means?

00:42:27-00:42:35

TCV: Oh, what term exactly?

00:42:35

SB: It was...

00:42:35-00:43:12

TCV: QAnon? You haven't heard of QAnon?

HB: I've never heard of that.

TCV: Oh my gosh, you guys. So, QAnon, obviously you can google it or you can look it up on any social media. So it's just the letter Q and then Anon like short for anonymous. Yeah, so it was probably around 2016, probably around when Trump got elected there, his base. There was somebody I don't know if you guys heard of 4chan.

00:43:12

SB/HB: Yeah

00:43:12-00:49:11

TCV: And so on those channels, there was somebody posting and I think I don't know if he gave himself the name Q or this person, I'm assuming a man, we will just say this individual was either identifying as Q or came to be known as Q. And he would say that he was able to interpret secret messages through like Trump or people in the administration, they were giving like secret messages, and he was like the person who would decipher them. So it's a huge, there's absolutely no basis of facts and what he claimed that he was able to do, but people glommed onto it and so they were just like, Oh, Trump is really, there's an army coming out of China and they're going to come and attack us and we have to be ready in Canada, just like preposterous things, but really racist, really nationalistic, really xenophobic. And so he amassed this huge following and the followers of this person, Q would consider themselves to belong to QAnon because he's an anonymous source and people would just be waiting for him. Like Trump would have a speech and then people would just be waiting to hear what Q had to say about it because he had some secret message, just always about the secret information that nobody else knows, except a certain special group of people. That's how cults are formed, right? You feel like you have this special information that no one else has and you are the enlightened few. So that's how this group feels and they have this really stupid sort of mantra, I guess it's like their tagline, it's like where we go one, we go all. WW1WWG or something like, if you see a hashtag, something like that, that's like I'm a follower of QAnon. And so it's still very much in play. And I don't know if you guys remember General Michael Flynn, he was was like the national security adviser for Trump, like he had the job for like a week and then he got fired, trying to bribe, trying to like make deals with Russia before he was actually national secretary advisor. Well, he became like a big QAnon follower, and he was like a former national secretary, not secretary, but national security adviser and this four star general. And then he was ended up almost going to prison for what he did against the United States and lying to the FBI, and then Trump pardoned him when he left office. And so he's been sort of like almost like the leader of the QAnon group as a public figure. And then he recently, I think it was just yesterday a story came out in *Rolling Stone* that he privately it was like Hot Mike or something, and he was like, oh, those people are idiots, like the QAnon people are idiots and they're stupid and they'll believe anything. And so now that the QAnon community is broken and just up, they're so upset. They're like, what is happening? He was our leader and he's making fun of us. So they are just a very, very gullible group of people, and they were a lot of the people, I would say if you did some research and or were able to find a pool of opinions about the people who stormed the Capitol on January 6th, I would say at least 50 percent of those people, or probably QAnon followers, if not more than 50 percent, they were like the main group of people who believe that the election was stolen and that Hillary Clinton, I think they've got their real core belief system around thinking that Democrats are pedophiles and that Hillary Clinton, I don't know if you guys remember Pizzagate, but that may have been where it started, where they said there was like a the Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, like all these prominent Democrats are the actual had a cabal of a pedophile ring. That's really what they

believe, and they think that Hillary Clinton, I'm not kidding, you guys can look it all up, they think that she eats babies. Yeah, that she is the one. They really believe it and they have no proof except they read somebody's blog that's like, hey guys, guess what I found out? That they really, really believe it. Like, sincerely. And they were all just like, the storm is coming. A lot of them think that Trump is still the president, that he's like, really, the president and Joe Biden is on a movie set. They're a lot of mentally unstable people, but also just very racist. I think it's the core of white supremacy is killing us. It's all, it's this. The whole thing is undergirded, in my opinion, in white supremacy. It's the way that they feel powerful and that they think they're still in control. So, yeah, look it up, QAnon. You'll be sad when you if you know more about it, you'll be like, I can't believe it.

00:49:11-00:49:15

SB: Yeah, I already see it enough on the news. On social media, I don't know what's going through people's minds.

00:49:15-00:49:49

TCV: I know it's our generation. It's mostly people like in my generation and a little bit younger. So we have failed you. I'm looking to you guys, to the youth, the next generation to really hopefully come into a different place. I'm looking forward to seeing what the future holds.

00:49:49-00:50:00

HB: So we're reaching the end of the interview. Sorry to interrupt you. Thank you for allowing us to interview and share your experiences. Is there anything else you want to add before we end this recording?

00:50:01-00:50:14

TCV: I guess I'm just curious, do you guys know each other, or are you classmates or did you just get assigned to each other? Can you tell me a little bit more about your class and your watch what you guys are studying? That's all I want to know. Just curious.

00:50:15-00:50:47

SB: So my brother and his brother were both friends in high school, so me and him are the same age, so we like as soon as we started high school, me and him became really good friends. I think it's been an ongoing friendship for like about six years. So, we're in the same class and we're able to choose our own partners. So I think we decided that because we were already friends, we're familiar with each other, I think we would form a good project. And what else did you ask?

00:50:48-00:50:56

TCV: Are you both business majors?

00:50:57-00:51:05

SB: Oh yeah. Yeah, I'm a business major so that I still. Horacio, would you like to say something about the class?

00:51:06-00:51:32

HB: Well, I first started the class week one and he entered like two or a week later. Basically, we, our teacher, talks to us about women history, all the basically history through a woman's perspective because it told that usually history is taught to a man's perspective and usually women history is blocked out. Or really a little bit is thought right through new viewpoints about women through history like the civil rights movement, then allowing themselves to be able to vote them, able to express like sexual freedoms and all that.

00:51:33-00:51:45

TCV: Oh good. Is it a requirement for you guys to take a course in women's studies? Is this a women's studies course or?

00:51:46-00:51:59

SB: I it's it's a required history like that we're supposed to take a history, of course, but there's different ones we could choose since I switched majors a little bit late. This is one of the only like history classes that seemed like interesting as I went with this history course.

00:52:00-00:53:33

TCV: Oh, good, well, I'm glad you guys are taking the course, I'm sure, and learning a lot. Yeah, yeah. I remember being in college and it was the first time I took Asian American Studies and it really opened my eyes a lot and gave me more pride for who I was. So hopefully you guys can take some courses that you really identify with who you are and just forming your future, like which communities you want to be serving and working in and and how you can contribute. And I just encourage you to do that in college, too. There's a lot of things, obviously you have to take classes that you have. I think I had to take the Asian American had to take some kind of Ethnic Studies because San Francisco state is really well known for Ethnic Studies. But I'm glad you guys are taking this course and hopefully it enriches you and gives you more respect for your mothers and aunties and sisters and women really do. We we do a lot. We do everything that we need to do out in the workforce, in the world, and then all the other stuff too. So I'm sure the women in your life are proud of you, and I'm proud of you guys for doing this. Interviewing is kind of weird sometimes, but you did a good job and if you have any follow up questions, just email me and help you out as much as I can.

00:53:34

SB: Thank you, appreciate that.

00:53:35-00:53:37

TCV: You're welcome. All right, thanks, you guys.

00:53:38

SB: Have a good rest of your day.

00:53:39

TCV: You too.

00:53:40

SB: Thank you.

00:53:41

TCV: Bye Bye.