

Asian American Reproductive Justice Oral History Project
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

BECKIE MASAKI

Interviewed by

JUHEE KWON

August 5, 2013
San Francisco, California

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Narrator

Beckie Masaki (b.1957) is a Sansei third-generation Japanese American, born and raised in Sacramento, California. Growing up in a close-knit community of Japanese Americans, she moved out to the Bay Area to pursue a bachelor's degree and master's in Social Work at the University of California, Berkeley. After having started work at a local battered women's shelter, where she endured isolation and tokenism as the first and only Asian American at the shelter, Ms. Masaki found like-minded Asian women and also other women of color through the group California Women of Color Against Domestic Violence. From 1984 until 1988, when the shelter opened its doors, she worked as a volunteer and founding board member to establish the one of the first Asian domestic violence shelters in the country. Ms. Masaki then served as the Founding Executive Director when the shelter opened in 1988 for over twenty-one years at Asian Women's Shelter. In 2010, she transitioned off and has been serving as the Associate Director at the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence since 2011.

Interviewer

Juhee Kwon (b. 1991) is an undergraduate at Brown University. She is set to graduate in 2014 with a B.A. in Biology and Ethnic Studies.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded in MP3 file format using Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-702PC. One file: 1 hr 20 min 50 sec.

Transcript

Transcribed and edited for clarity by Juhee Kwon. Reviewed and approved by Beckie Masaki.

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Transcript of interview conducted August 5, 2013, with:

BECKIE MASAKI
San Francisco, California

by: JUHEE KWON

KWON: All right. This is Juhee Kwon. Today is August 5, 2013. I'm here with Ms. Beckie Masaki at Asian Pacific Islander Institute for Domestic Violence or is it Domestic —

MASAKI: [Asian Pacific Islander Institute] On Domestic Violence.

KWON: On Domestic Violence. Okay. This is a part of the Asian American Reproductive Justice Oral History Project, and I was wondering if you could start with a little bit about your personal background. Where you were born, when you were born, and how you grew up.

MASAKI: Okay. Sure. I'm Beckie Masaki, and I am a Sansei third-generation Japanese American. I was born and raised here in California, in Sacramento, which is in the Central Valley of California, and I come from a very close-knit Japanese American community. My father had a Japanese fish market, and all of our families knew each other in that community. So I was lucky to be able to grow up with a lot of Japanese American culture and support. I also was a part of the Japanese Buddhist church there and that community, and that, I guess, spiritual aspect has always been an important part of my upbringing and then till today is part of my active practice.

I came here to the San Francisco Bay Area right out of high school, and have lived all my adult life here in the San Francisco Bay Area. I went to UC [University of California,] Berkeley for my undergraduate and also then went back for my master's in social work. And pretty quickly after that, I joined the movement to end violence against women. During that time, my first job out of MSW [Master's in Social Work] was—I was the first and only Asian person that worked at a battered women's shelter here in the Bay Area.

KWON: You were the only Asian American person?

2:15

MASAKI: Yeah.

KWON: Even though the shelter was in the Bay Area?

MASAKI: Yeah.

KWON: What about the population that it served then?

2:20

MASAKI: Right, well the population that it served was supposed to be for everybody, and in San Francisco, 35 percent of the population is of different Asian descent, but no Asians came to that shelter. This was in the early eighties, like 1983. I think a common misperception was that Asians didn't have this problem of domestic violence, because their families were harmonious, or if they did have the problem, they just keep to themselves, and they wouldn't utilize a shelter. So for me, that wasn't a sufficient answer, because I knew that survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence were a part of our Asian community, and I felt that it was because they didn't have access to meaningful services, that that's why they weren't coming to the shelter or accessing other resources.

KWON: Did you have experience with gendered violence before you got involved in that work?

3:29

MASAKI: Not really. Yeah, I never had any other direct experience with gender-based violence. I was interested in that job, because I had a deep commitment to anti-racism and to feminism, and I thought, Wow. What a wonderful place to be able to practice and contribute to the intersection of both. And in those days, I feel that that was a big question for a lot of us, that we felt excluded from the women's liberation movement here in the U.S. that was predominantly a white-women-driven movement, and we also felt excluded from a lot of the racial justice work of those times—or included, but in a way that was—we experienced sexism within our anti-racism work within our own communities. So for me, I kind of jumped at the chance of what I thought was going to be a place where I could express and contribute from the full of who I was and [my] identity, and help support my own growing or emerging identity in that time. I was in my early twenties. And so that was really a big disappointment for me, to work at that shelter, where I was the first and only Asian person, and I experienced a lot of tokenism and—

KWON: What do you mean by that?

5:24

MASAKI: Well, the first director that hired me was wonderful, and she gave me a lot of opportunities to grow. I created their first volunteer program, I created their community outreach program, and I learned a lot. But then she moved on, and we had another director, who was very ignorant around

racism. And so when I would challenge her about different things, she asked me, Oh, could I stay after work and give her trainings about culture?

KWON: Oh, culture? Okay.

MASAKI: Asian culture (laughs). And then when I told her that wasn't my responsibility, and of course, I'm happy to do trainings or to have conversations, but it's not the responsibility of those people who are the targets to educate others about racism. She did not understand that at all, and she felt like she was being very generous and even being open to the information. So that's what I mean by tokenism, or, I guess, what I would call racism among the well intentioned. Like she had a good intention, but she nonetheless was not being self-aware and not taking her own responsibility—for white privilege or for her position as an executive director as well, and what I feel like [was] her responsibility to create an environment within her organization that was welcoming of all races and culture and diversity.

So anyway, at that time, I felt like I—you know, it wasn't just that example but others that made me feel like, Okay. Maybe the women's movement and this kind of work is not where I belong. And I was exploring other fields or other interests, because I also had interest and had done a lot actually in school-based work.

KWON: Oh, like education?

7:42

MASAKI: Yeah, like education, like school-based social work and things like that. And I think I would've left this work [in domestic violence], except for then I met some like-minded, other Asian women in our community. Some of them also worked in the domestic violence field and others worked in other fields, like in law or healthcare and other things. And we all were having the same feelings about [how] gender-based violence needed to be addressed in our communities with the Asian-specific response, and what were we going to do about it, and I think we are the ones that need to do something about it, so that was—Oh, also another thing was I got introduced to a caucus of our state domestic violence coalition called California Women of Color Against Domestic Violence.

KWON: Oh, that's perfect.

MASAKI: Yeah, and that was perfect. And so then I also found a few other Asians, as well as other women of color, that were doing this work. So those were the two things that made me really feel like I could belong to this movement and continue the work. At California Women of Color Against Domestic Violence, that was another experience that was interesting and an important story to tell. Because [what] I found there was to break the isolation and find that many other women of color in the work were

having similar experiences to myself. And so we had to meet on Saturdays, for example, because our bosses would not let us meet during work time.

KWON: But it's related to domestic violence.

9:36

MASAKI: Yes, exactly. It's related to our work, but they wouldn't let us meet during work time, so we had to meet on Saturdays. We would meet, and we'd come—people would drive from all over California to be able to come together. I remember those as really wonderful meetings, where we would do some business, but we would also maybe have a training, like invite one of us or another person to speak, so we would have our own learning, and then [have] a support group for one another, because we were experiencing a lot of isolation and discrimination in our workplace and frustrations. So that was really a wonderful group. We had a little newsletter. This is even before the Internet, and —

KWON: How does that work then? (laughs)

MASAKI: (laughs) Yeah. How does that even work? It's like hand-drawn things. It was pretty incredible. During that time, I quit my job at the shelter, and I worked at community college and was actually very happy doing that job, as kind of a college advisor to help people get into four-year university, et cetera. That was a part-time job, and then I volunteered my time to be part of that founding group of Asian Women's Shelter. So for about five years, from 1985 to 1988 when we actually opened the shelter—1984-85—we met as volunteers, so a small group of us about eight or ten, to come up with the idea of, What would it look like to provide meaningful services and support for Asian survivors and community? So we came up with the idea of starting Asian Women's Shelter, and we worked on that idea, did some fundraising. We had to do a lot of winning over the hearts and minds of the community, and we were finally able to actually realize our dream and open the shelter in 1988.

KWON: You were talking about people from different backgrounds coming together and forming this, like eight to ten women. Could you name some of those women just to document it in history?

11:59

MASAKI: Sure. Gosh, I don't want to leave anybody out. Debbie Lee is one person, and she still works at Futures Without Violence. I think she's coming on her thirtieth anniversary there, and she was really one of the ones that I always credit for two things. One is she was one of the ones that I met that said, "Oh no. You're a part of this movement," and introduced me to California Women of Color Against Domestic Violence. And then she also, as part of this founding group, when we were actually able to launch the shelter, I hadn't even thought about applying for the job as the

executive director. I just imagined that I would be on the board, and I was pretty happy at my job at the university, and she really encouraged me, like, I think you should take this job. And when I thought about it, I thought, Gosh. I really want to see this through. Like here we have [spent] five years, given birth to this organization, and I would love to be part of making it a reality. And I think at that time, which I find still common among Asian women is, many times we don't see what others see in us, the leadership qualities. And so I just really want to appreciate Debbie Lee for seeing that in me and encouraging me to apply.

Alice Ito is another one of the founders, and she also had a long history in doing this work, in gender-based violence in the San Mateo county, which is a nearby county, and also had a lot—I think, at that time, she was a part of the Women's Foundation. So she had a strong background in philanthropy and as well as the program work, and now she lives in Seattle. She was also instrumental in taking a lot of the experience of us founding Asian Women's Shelter to help found what is now API Chaya, which is an Asian gender-based violence program in Seattle, and she's also done a lot of work in the Japanese American community, as well as the women's communities there.

Valerie Chow Bush is another one of the founder. Deanna Jang. Young Shin, who is also the founder of AIWA—Asian Immigrant Women
...

KWON: Is it Alliance?

14:51

MASAKI: Association. Yeah. Alliance? AIWA [Asian Immigrant Women Advocates]. LouAnn Nasaki was—and Peggy Saika and in fact, we at—Peggy has founded so many different organizations.

KWON: I know.

MASAKI: You probably interviewed her already, too. And just a little side story is — actually Peggy's also from Sacramento. She's a little bit older than me, and I remember her coming—she used to actually have a hair salon across from my dad's fish market on 10th Street in Sacramento, and she cut hair, while she was putting herself through college. And so I remember she would come over and have these heated debates with my father about politics and, you know, Japanese community things. My dad and the other workers there just looked forward to her sparking lively conversation, which was really unprecedented to hear this young woman of the [Japanese American community] coming to people of her father and mother's generation and arguing politics with them and things. So she was just such an awesome role model as a young Asian woman, you know, for me. I was just like bagging groceries or stocking shelves, and overhearing or listening to her.

And so it was so nice to then—when we were both adults for us to be able to come back together in the Bay Area and her—me being able to be with her as part of the founding group of Asian Women’s Shelter. Yeah, so she’s really just a wonderful role model to so many of us in the community.

Alexandra Tantranon Saur is another one of the founding members. Let’s see, who else? I’m sure I’ll add to the list, so I don’t have so much dead airtime. But those were some of the key members of the founding group. Yeah, and it was just really—Oh, Lia Shigemura, Anne Okahara, and Lynne Ogawa were founding members also.

It was such a wonderful group because this was the first time that I met like-minded Asian women, who were also struggling with this idea of how to address the intersection of women’s issues and Asian identity, and Asian issues and the civil rights issues, as well as the women’s rights issues of our day. So I feel like during the eighties, this was really the group, where I felt like I belonged to some progressive movement work. We actually faced a lot of backlash from our own community, and I think that was the part that was the most hurtful, like progressive Asian men in our community, who were actually quite prominent. Some of them, who called us race traitors—

KWON: Why is that?

18:15

MASAKI: Because we were airing our dirty laundry. We were saying, Hey, the domestic violence, the sexual violence happens for Asian women. And it’s not just men outside of our race that are committing these crimes against Asian women, but it’s within our own community. And it’s also patriarchal cultures and values that are upholding this or turning away or making it an invisible problem or blaming the victim. So that kind of critique of our own community, especially in a time or an era where there was still a lot of discrimination against our communities, I think, was controversial. And it’s really quite surprising that even then—the—it took till the eighties, the late eighties, before there were any women’s organizations within the Asian community, by and for women. Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, AIWA and Asian Women’s Shelter were started—I think Asian Immigrant Women Advocates was started in 1987 or 86, and then Asian Women’s Shelter in 1988, when we opened, were the first Asian women’s organizations here in the Bay Area. It seems like it should’ve—it’s a long time coming.

KWON: Had there been Asian American women leaders—

19:51

MASAKI: Yes.

KWON: in the mainstream organizations, but not like —

MASAKI: Oh, no.

KWON: No?

MASAKI: No Asian women leaders in mainstream organizations. Not at all. And some, actually, a lot of Asian women in Asian-based organizations. Like Peggy was the Director of the Asian Law Caucus at the time, but she was the first woman director in eighties. And of course, Sherry Hirota helped found Asian Health Services. So I kind of take that back. There were some definitely Asian women leaders, but no Asian women stand-alone organizations.

KWON: I mean, with AIWA, and then also with the [Asian] Women's Shelter and then the later like APIC [Asian and Pacific Islanders for Choice] and things like that, why do you think that period was specifically so geared towards founding women's organizations? What kind of spurred that, do you think?

20:41

MASAKI: I think that—that's a good question, and I do feel like it's finally where we could start asserting our own voice at the intersections of these issues, so not that we were adjunct people to a white women's agenda or adjunct to a male-focused Asian agenda. I feel like it was this kind of intersection time, and that's true for women of color in general. This is the era in the eighties, where you see like the first women of color writers, you know, Alice Walker and also Asian women writers coming out and being recognized, like Maxine Hong Kingston and those—more and more writers, more and more visibility. So I feel like that was kind of the era where that was starting to be recognized and seen as important.

KWON: That's really exciting.

MASAKI: Yeah, it was a super exciting era because it hadn't existed before.

KWON: Do you think you were also able to get more visibility after you established [Asian Women's Shelter] in terms of visibility in the API [Asian & Pacific Islander] movement or the women's movement?

22:13

MASAKI: Yeah, definitely, definitely. I feel like it was really key. I mean, I think that we started the program because there was a gap and a need. But I feel like because we always had the vision of this [shelter], not just as a social service organization but that our mission was to end gender-based violence, in particular in our communities but connected and understanding the bigger issue of—you know, the worldwide issue of gender-based violence. So because we had that big vision, we really understood the intersections of how—and that we really understood the root cause to be the devaluing of women and girls, and also how that is

compounded by race, class, gender, and culture, and poverty. So to get at the root of that that, we had to address all of those things. Also we knew what it felt like to be excluded, or we also knew what it meant if you just addressed one element of your identity and not the intersection of it, and so that also became important to us—that we were going to move forward with everything front and center, not like sacrifice one aspect of identity for another. So I feel like because we had that strong foundation, that really provided a base for a lot of Asian women activists to get training or to come together to build, to learn, to meet other like-minded Asian women activists, and really springboard for other activism and other organizations to be generated from there.

KWON: So would you consider Asian Women's Shelter to not only be a direct-service organization but also an advocacy organization?

24:30

MASAKI: Yeah, definitely. And we always felt like that from the very beginning. Even though the name is Asian Women's Shelter, we have always done advocacy as part of our work, and then gradually over time, made that a more intentional program area and area of our work. But even from the very beginning it was [like] that, and certainly my example of fighting or pushing back against the community members that would call us race traitors or try to diminish or challenge the start of Asian Women's Shelter, I think that, in itself, is advocacy work and trying to change the mindset of our communities. And we also did that on the front of the women's movement, you know, really pushing to be included and recognized. We still do that work, but that's always been very intentional. And part of our commitment in being part of these movements is to really create the space and change the movement to be stronger. We feel like we're enriching the dialogue, conversation, and the strategies by insisting that we're included.

KWON: Could you talk a little bit more about the actual programs that you did [at Asian Women's Shelter]? I know I mentioned before that I wanted to talk a little bit about the anti-trafficking work as well.

26:17

MASAKI: Yeah, sure. I can start—Well, let me start with the shelter-based program. We rented a house, and we had an all-women moving crew, and we just did a lot of things to reinforce this idea of empowerment of women. So we rented this small house in San Francisco, and we had our first residents the next day after we opened.

KWON: Wow.

MASAKI: Yeah, so this is the 25th anniversary and we opened on October 24, 1988.

KWON: You still remember?

MASAKI:

Yeah, we had our first clients October 25. So it's coming up, the actual exact date of our anniversary. There were two staff members, and my aunt was our first volunteer. All of these people that I mentioned as the founders were our board, who really pitched in and also helped to create the shelter. Mayseng Saeturn was our first staff person, along with myself, and she's still there as a woman's advocate at the shelter.

I feel like some of the special things that we did were create an environment where Asian women would feel like they're at home. So that meant the beds, the food, the people, the language, all of that, the way that we ran the household was what we call "a positive extended family," and I feel like that continues on to this day. Even though we've bought our own building, it's a bigger shelter, it's still not that big by intention because what we want to do is still foster—which we think is like a cornerstone to the successes—this idea of positive extended family, kind of re-creating family in a way that upholds peace and love, community, breaks isolation without violence.

Really pretty quickly on—I mean, I could talk more about the shelter but just to be expedient, moving onto anti-trafficking—pretty quickly on, in that first year, we had our first three trafficking survivors. The police uncovered a trafficking situation with three young girls from China, who only spoke Mandarin, and so they turned to us, as really the only shelter or residential place. And so the police—at that time, actually two Asian women in the police force worked with us, and that was really great, and they became our loyal donors and supporters. The police officers and we worked as a great team to be able to eventually reunite them with their families back in China, but meanwhile they stayed with us and were in a safe place. And pretty much a steady stream, I mean, every year we would have anti-trafficking survivors. Because even though we were a domestic violence shelter, where is an Asian woman or young girl going to go, who is escaping from a trafficking case?

We also were really instrumental in one of the biggest cases that was high publicity, the Lakireddy Bali Reddy case here in the San Francisco Bay Area, where a man of Indian descent had actually exploited people from his village back in India and trafficked them here for labor, and also three young girls that were sexually exploited, that were trafficked here.

Another thing that we had done was helped to support other Asian programs that are addressing gender-based violence here in the Bay Area, and one of them was Narika, which is a program for South-Asian-specific—it's non-residential but for South Asian survivors. So Narika and Asian Women's Shelter worked to try to cobble together, What are we going to do about these girls?—one of them died, ~~and~~ [but for] her sister and other survivors in this situation. So Chic Dabby, who is actually the director here of API Institute now, was the director at Narika, and she and I worked on trying to figure out who would be good legal representatives, [and provide] interpretation, housing, et cetera, for these girls. It still

29:56

continues to be a struggle for survivors of anti-trafficking, but this was—I always joke, because I remember having midnight meetings.

We know how to work with survivors of abuse, but I think the idea, especially when crime rings or high profile cases [are involved], such as in this anti-trafficking case, it's tricky to navigate. So we always felt like we needed to be undercover, keep a low profile, and we also got a lot of threats from, in this case, [Lakireddy Bali] Reddy and Associates. So we had to be very careful. So we had like midnight meetings and things like that, and Chic would joke, "Oh, I feel like this is amateur night at victim protection," because we really did cobble together our own victim protection plan. We just used our own networks to figure out a safe other city for these girls to relocate, because we knew that the Bay Area wasn't safe for them. We were able to help support the legal efforts to get their families to come here, to be able to relocate here, of course, to take care of the girls and rebuild a safe life here. But we just did that without any help or assistance; we just did that with our own networks of people we know and thinking about, Oh, what would be a good city that they would not stand out so much, but also not be known within a small, tight knit community? So things like that. We would just travel there and try to find them an apartment, and you know, and set them up, all of that kind of thing. Yeah, those were in the early days of the anti-trafficking work.

And then when the TVPA, Trafficking Victim Protection Act, was able to be passed, that did give a lot of more recognized or formal avenues of redress for trafficking survivors, such as the T-visa. So that really helped raise the awareness and the provisions and [gave] a little bit more support for trafficking survivors. So since then, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, Asian Women's Shelter, Narika, and then Cameron House here in San Francisco formed the Asian Anti-Trafficking Collaborative, AATC. The four of our organizations work really closely to provide social services and outreach, prevention work, and legal services to trafficking survivors.

31:48

KWON: How is servicing trafficking survivors different from your original work that you had done in the shelter for domestic violence survivors?

34:56

MASAKI: Yeah, I mean there's a lot of similarities and differences. I think that the differences are—Many times in trafficking cases, there's more than one victim at a time or one family at a time, and multiple survivors. For example, the police did a huge raid, which they called Operation Gilded Cage, and hundreds of trafficking survivors were a part of this case. So then that is a huge challenge. Asian Women's Shelter, even at that time, is a sixteen-bed capacity shelter, and also sometimes it's supportive for trafficking survivors to be able to be together, but sometimes it's not. And also for the prosecution or the legal aspect, sometimes for legal reasons, the prosecution didn't want trafficking survivors to live together. So there's these kind of complicated issues that most of other survivors of

sexual assault and domestic violence don't have as much. Also the difference about the crime rings. You know, very sophisticated networks of perpetrators. It's not just one isolated perpetrator that you might have in a domestic violence or a sexual assault case.

I mean, sometimes it's very similar. So in some kind of trafficking, like for example, domestic workers. A lot of domestic workers are trafficked and exploited, and that might be very similar to a domestic violence case, where it's one person that was brought over to be a nanny but then really kept like a prisoner in that home. So in that way, it's very similar to the kinds of situation that, say, somebody who married into a family, where the perpetrator was abusive, her partner was abusive, and even the extended family was abusive. There's a lot of parallels there. So both. There are a lot of things that are the same, and a lot that are different. Also the legal recourse is different. What are the legal remedies that trafficking survivors can access? As well as what the legal remedies for domestic violence survivors or sexual assault survivors [are].

KWON: Is trafficking a really large issue within the Bay Area and also within the Asian American community?

37:40

MASAKI: Yes. I would say, Yes. Like San Francisco is a major hub for trafficking, and so there's a lot more than is on the surface or that we even know. It's sex trafficking, but also all kinds of labor trafficking, like the domestic workers, I think, is pretty common and also other kinds of labor exploitation.

And then I think Asian—Of course, it happens in communities, but I feel like domestic and international trafficking is very pervasive in Asian communities as well. Yeah. So I feel like our—you know, what I've realized in doing the trafficking work and then also interfacing with others in the U.S., who are doing anti-trafficking work, is that we have a lot to offer—we, meaning people who are experienced in working with immigrant and refugee communities, because we know about language access, we know about the cultural issues, and we know about immigration issues and barriers and the kinds of concerns that trafficking survivors might have about their families and the safety and well-being of those back in their home countries, as well as here—so kind of the international or the transnational aspect of the work. So that's why I would say that a lot of the Asian-based programs for gender-based violence are also—probably if you ask all of them, and now in my new position at API Institute, I see that most all of the community-based groups are working also with trafficking survivors. Whether they advertise that or not, they are. And a lot of the trafficking survivors have the intersection of experience. They have been sexually abused, or they might be children, who grew up with incest or child sexual abuse. They might have been escaping domestic violence or sexual abuse, and then found themselves caught in a trafficking situation, or they might've been trafficked and then

sexually abused or in a domestic violence situation. So the intersection of all these gender-based violences really overlaps a lot, and a lot of them — the survivors—they will tell you the stories of their experience, but they're not going to say, Oh, I'm a sexual abuse survivor, or, Oh, I'm a domestic violence survivor, you know? Those are kind of artificial constructs, based on the law or our definitions, but survivors themselves often have the experience of the overlap of different kinds of abuse that they've experienced.

KWON: I was wondering if it would be okay to share some of the stories that you heard or ones that really impacted you during your work at Asian Women's Shelter?

40:57

MASAKI: Yeah. Gosh there's so many stories. I think that maybe one—Well, one story that I'll share is—it's fresh on my mind, because we did have a 25th anniversary celebration in May, and that was kind of the—This whole year is full of anniversaries. So I told you the anniversary of the October—of actually opening the shelter, but prior to that, in May of 1988, we held our first fundraiser that together, with some seed money from foundations, was able to actually raise enough money to hire our first staff person—which was me. It ended up being me—and rent our house. So that fundraiser, the anniversary of it was this year, May 2013. And as part of that, Asian Women's Shelter put together a little video of some of the teenagers and young people, who were born or raised at the shelter. It's really powerful. So you could actually ask them, maybe it's something that they could share with you, because it was so great to hear their stories.

One story I want to tell is of a family—of a mother and two daughters. At that time, I think the youngest daughter was maybe six or seven, and then of course, the youngest was not born yet. The mother had a high-risk pregnancy, because of the abuse, and that's very typical. During pregnancy, domestic violence is also—it's [pregnancy] a trigger and also [health risks of DV] escalates. So this woman had a high-risk pregnancy, and we formed this very intense labor team, where we would all take shifts of being on 24/7 call for her. And she actually took many scary trips to the hospital, because of the high-risk nature of her pregnancy, because the abuse she endured during it. But the good news is she was able to go full-term and deliver this healthy baby during her stay at our shelter, and that girl is now in high school—

KWON: Wow.

43:39

MASAKI: Yeah, so—I know. She's amazing. So she was in the video. She did a summer internship as an aid to Assemblywoman Fiona Ma at the State California Assembly. She's so active in so many things and just a great academic achiever. The older daughter is at UC [University of California] San Diego, and the mom is just doing great work and is just ready and has

already done a lot of public speaking to advocate against domestic violence and for programs like Asian Women's Shelter. So I just feel like that's a great example, and she really considers—that whole family considers us as her extended family.

One memory that I had was Thanksgiving at the shelter, the little—well, she's not little anymore, the one that's at San Diego State [correction: UC San Diego]—she introduced a tradition that continues to this day [to] be part of Asian Women's Shelter's Thanksgiving tradition. Because she goes—So we had our Thanksgiving dinner, and we were all around—the staff, residents that were there at the time, at the shelter, and this girl, she goes, “I learned at my school [that] we should all go around and say, ‘What are we thankful for?’ because it's Thanksgiving.” And I said, “That's a great idea!” So everybody that was there—which it takes a long time, because there were quite a number of people—went around, and said what they were thankful for. And so that continues to this day to be a tradition. Before we have our Thanksgiving meal, everybody goes around, and it's just so heartwarming, because I remember, at that Thanksgiving, that the little girl said, “I'm thankful that I have this place and that I'm here with my mom and that we have this new family.” You know, you hear so many stories like that as we go around the circle, and it just really, for me, gives a new meaning to Thanksgiving and started a great tradition at the shelter.

Thanksgiving is also fun, too, because a lot of the residents are immigrants, so they've never had Thanksgiving, and this idea of cooking a whole turkey, which is a little bit weird —

KWON: (laughs) excessive.

MASAKI: Yeah, excessive. So a typical Thanksgiving would be turkey, and maybe some lobster with oyster sauce, and some sushi or other—everybody contributing their favorite Asian delicacy to the meal.

KWON: Well, it seems like you have a wide range of people that you serve at Asian Women's Shelter, in terms of the API community, and I know the API community is so diverse and broad. I was just wondering what kind of challenges you encountered servicing such a broad, diverse community and how you overcame them.

46:37

MASAKI: Right. Well, one thing that I think I'm really proud about is our MLAM model, the Multilingual Access Model. So this founding group, when we were just sitting around the kitchen tables, thinking about Asian Women's Shelter, we thought, How are we going to meet the language need, you know? We're only starting with one staff, myself, and maybe two, and there's, what, 40+ different languages spoken in our area. We really want to be a welcome place to all Asian people. And we also knew that interpreters at large in the community are ignorant about domestic

violence or might not have the sensitivity and the confidentiality, and that was based on real experiences and stories that we had heard from healthcare workers and others, who had interfaced with survivors of domestic violence. So we came up with this idea that, Why don't we recruit and train bilingual women in our community and really build their skills as bilingual workers, bilingual advocates, as peer support? And that they wouldn't be like professional interpreters, but let's pay them as on-call language advocates, and that they could work together with the staff of the shelter to meet the language and cultural needs of the residents that came to the shelter. So that became our Multi-lingual Access Model, and we started with one or two different languages, and now, today, there's a hundred and ten on-call language advocates in over forty different Asian and other languages. They're paid by the hour. It's on-call work. It's not high wages like you would [expect] for a professional interpreter, but what the pay does is honor people's bilingual skills and also allows them to afford to work—I mean, afford to participate. Someone who might not be able to afford to volunteer, but their intention is there, and it's also kind of a supplemental income.

And what has happened because we had—I think it's because we had this framework of, Let's build the capacity, and let's change our culture's norms around domestic violence, and let's get more people engaged and active in this issue. So that's why we approached it in that way, and what has happened subsequently is it really has changed the face of bilingual advocates or Asian advocates in the Bay Area. Many of these advocates—the way we've done the training is really to create a peer environment. It's really to honor people's existing expertise and build on that. Because of that, many other organizations have sprung out, because of language advocates who've gone on to do things.

An example is Shimtuh, in the Korean community. Some former residents of the shelter, some staff, and some community members and language advocates and volunteers, all got together and created a Korean-American coalition ending domestic abuse, and that group decided, Asian Women's Shelter's great, but we need non-residential Korean focused services for Korean faith-based and Korean community, and so they created the Shimtuh Project. So things like that, that this capacity building and really investing in Asian women in our community has led to things beyond our original imagination.

Monsoon is a program in Des Moines, Iowa, where—one of our former volunteers in MLAM, she moved there to be with her mother and to raise her daughter. And so she started Monsoon, which is Monsoon Women United—or Monsoon Asian Women United in Minnesota [Monsoon United Asian Women of Iowa]. So there's many stories like that of multi-lingual advocates, who've really been able to just leverage so much change in their own communities, as well as to contribute to the work of Asian Women's Shelter.

KWON: Do you have any more success stories that you wanted to share about Asian Women's Shelter?

51:36

MASAKI: I think like—Okay, so I shared the one about the woman and the child that was born and others. I think that I would also share one about an older woman. An elder woman, I'll call Mrs. Lee, who—I remember doing a outreach program to a senior center, a Asian senior center here in San Francisco. We did it in Cantonese, and so I did it together with another co-worker. Afterwards, this woman came to us and said, "Oh, Why didn't you tell me that there was something like Asian Women's Shelter? Why did nobody tell me this?" And she left a forty—I think it was a forty- or fifty-year abusive relationship. At that time, she was seventy-five, and she just came with us to the shelter that day.

KWON: Wow.

MASAKI: And I just felt—and so two things about that, or three things I want to say about that. One is so many of the women were—I think a typical age is like twenties and thirties of the Asian women there, and many of them have felt like, My life is over. I had a failed marriage or relationship, and I'm stigmatized now. I have no future, or that kind of feeling, or What am I going to do now? And here this seventy-five-year old my woman said, "I'm going to rebuild my life, like what a great idea. I have a second chance. I don't have to be in this abusive relationship." And then she made wonton for us all, and she would freeze little bags and then make us fresh soup, and it was just so wonderful. So she was sort of a mother or a grandmother to so many at the center, and what a great role model, you know? How could you say, if you're [in your] twenties, ~~and~~ [that you] feel like your life is over, when somebody who's seventy-five is saying, "I'm going to have a new life. I'm going to rebuild my life"? And so that, I feel like, was such a great message.

The other point about that I feel like that was such an inspiration is her courage and our lesson that we need to really be building these partnerships, because it's not that people are staying in—Some people are staying in the relationship, aware of the services and still making the choice to stay there for various reasons. But others, if they know what the alternatives are or they can know what is possible, just really deserve those options and those choices and that opportunity to break the isolation.

And then I think the third thing about that [Ms. Lee] was we have this annual Lunar New Year party, where everybody is invited back, and it's like a big reunion; it's just beautiful. And I remember commenting to Mrs. Lee, "What's your secret? You look younger every year." And she really did. She got new clothes, she had a different haircut, and she said, "Well, this is what it means to be free." And she felt younger and was just so vibrant for like a decade and more. So I feel like that was also an important message for us to understand the lifetime spectrum of violence

and how it happens, and that it happens throughout the lifespan. And then also this idea or this message that you're never too old, or no matter what the circumstance, there's always that opportunity to continue to grow and change.

KWON: Oh my god. You have so many good stories (laughs).

MASAKI: I know. I have like a million, so yeah.

KWON: But I think we should make the transition over to API Institute on Domestic Violence. I was wondering how you made transition after, you said, twenty-one years at Asian Women's Shelter.

55:41

MASAKI: Yeah, you know, I thought about it very carefully. Because I think that in non-profit sector, they always tell you to be careful or watch out for Founder's Syndrome, meaning [the founder] staying on too long, like over your time when you're burnt out. I kind of always tried to self-check myself for that, but also what I was—And then another thing is intergenerational leadership, which I'm really interested in. There's a lot of studies, not just for our Asian community, but overall, in the non-profit sector in the U.S., about the baby boomer generation, which I'm kind of actually on the tail end of that generation. And this is the generation that experienced the Civil Rights Movement, Women's Liberation or Second-wave Feminism, or the Third World Strike, those kinds of big movements in the sixties and seventies, and then created a lot of these non-profits or progressive community organizing structures and community programs. Many of them are aging out of that and so, How are we passing on the next generations of leadership? And what they were saying is that there's kind of a crisis, in that many of the baby boomer generation don't want to retire. They're still very active, and they might be in their fifties, sixties, seventies, or even older, and they still want to contribute. But at the same time, we need to create the space and openings for new leadership to emerge and the other generations to emerge. And I really see that in the gender-based violence movement, overall in the U.S., as well within our API programs, and certainly at Asian Women's Shelter.

I felt like, Well, I want to be part of this the first wave of just being bold and creating new leadership. And I felt like I should do it on a high-note, before I was burnt out, while people still—like I wasn't—I actually wasn't ready to leave frankly, but I felt like, It's better to leave now and then give that cushion room for me to be able to support the transition, and also for myself to challenge myself to [figure out], What's the next thing that I can do to leverage my 21+ years of experience for the greater good? So that's why I actually reflected on that a lot, but then came up with the idea that I would transition out of Asian Women's Shelter for all good reasons. I made us a session plan and made my transition in 2010. That transition was not smooth, but I feel like it is good, and it was hard, just as

57:52

any—I think for any founding director, it can be a hard transition and unexpected things come up, and it's just a little bit rough. But I feel like it's just growing pains and part of the next era, which I'm really excited about and still continue to support. That's on the Asian Women's Shelter side.

On the API Institute side, what happened is—actually, I was part of the founding group of API Institute. Because when I was at Asian Women's Shelter, I felt like as a shelter director and as Asian Women's Shelter was one of the three Asian gender-based violence programs in the nation, I felt like we needed a national voice and others, too, like Debbie Lee and Mieko Yoshihama, Sujata Warriar, Deanna Jang, Luanne Pensarga, [Narrator notes: Mimi Kim, and Leni Marin.]. Others were really part of the founding group of API Institute, and so we formed as a national cultural resource center to represent and strengthen the grassroots program, such as Asian Women's Shelter. At that time, I was on the board of API Institute. Then when I transitioned out of Asian Women's Shelter, Chic Dabby, who is our Director of API Institute, offered me a position here. I thought about it—actually, she was really generous, because she just gave about a year or so to think about it. And it wasn't because I didn't want to work here, but I wanted to think about, What would be my next best contribution to the work? And really make sure it was something I could do a good job of. I was thinking broader, like it didn't have to be an Asian Pacific Islander community, gender-based violence.

But then actually, after I did a more broader scan, I did come back to home and decided, you know, this is great, because I could leverage—as a peer support, I've been there. So I can really appreciate and uphold and support other programs that are starting, or other programs like Asian Women's Shelter that are working on the grassroots level throughout the nation, and then also continue to explore and build this idea of intergenerational leadership. How are we fostering the next eras of leadership in our API community? Particularly API women but not exclusively, like across the gender spectrum. So that's what I feel like my personal mission is, and I just feel really fortunate that I could do that and get paid for it, as a staff member of API Institute.

KWON: How does your work differ from the Women's Shelter work? Because you said, it's a national voice, so is it more policy-oriented?

1:02:20

MASAKI: Yeah, it's policy, it's national, what we call, technical assistance, which is like training and consultation to programs, and support. And so how it — We don't provide the direct services, and I'm not responsible, like I was before, for the staff and the organization and the running of a 24/7 crisis organization. So I feel like in this capacity, it frees me up to really think about, What are the ways that we can hold up all of those on-the-ground programs and support them through advocacy efforts, like building stronger pipelines to funding, to raise the validity and out of invisibility,

the strategies and innovative program that API programs are doing and the particular issues that they're facing, and also how to connect them to one another? And wouldn't it be so powerful if we could do all of that work? It would contribute to the larger gender-based violence movement in the U.S., across the Asian social justice movements, as well as across the mainstream or, you know, diversity of gender-based violence work. So I feel like that's where it's different, [which] is really kind of exploring and working on representing us in that way.

KWON: How is it tied to Asian [&] Pacific Islander American Health Forum?

1:04:16

MASAKI: Health Forum. Right. When we started API Institute on Domestic Violence, we thought, Okay. It's just going to be a small institute, so we don't need to be our stand-alone 501(c)(3), at least not now. So let's go under the—ask somebody to be our fiscal sponsor. We thought about it, and we said, Should we ask—And it's a national organization that we're creating, so let's look for a national organization that could be our umbrella organization. We thought about it, Should it be like a national domestic violence organization, like Futures Without Violence that serves all populations, but we can ask if we could be under them? or Should it be a national Asian organization? And where we landed was a national Asian organization, because we felt like the particular thing that we had to contribute was to bring the API voice to the domestic violence field and also to reach the broader the spectrum of our API communities, that that was our primary constituency: API communities. So that's why we asked Tessie Guillermo, who was the Director at that time of the API [Health] Forum, and also Luanne Pensarga and Deanna Jang were staff members here at the Forum.

KWON: Oh, so you guys are all connected.

1:05:49

MASAKI: Yes, all connected. So we asked if they would consider being our fiscal sponsor, and they welcomed us with open arms. We became actually a department or a program under the Health Forum, till this day. In the more recent years, in the latter part of 2010, actually, the Health Forum was growing and had the vision of becoming a health policy institute, first and foremost, and really not doing so much of the community building work, the TA [technical assistance] and the training part with the on-the-ground programs. The base building work is already done with a lot of other programs, they felt, in the community, and so they were focused more as a health policy institute. And also at that time, they were consolidating and not having different departments or programs so much as all—just more centralized into a health policy institute. At the same time, API Institute on Domestic Violence was kind of—people know us as our name, not as the Health Forum, and we were growing in staff and the kinds of things that we wanted to do. So we mutually agreed that it would be a good time for

API Institute to spin off and become our own 501(c)(3). We're still doing that. We've just filed our incorporation papers, and the Health Forum has been really supportive in fostering us to spin off. Our goal is by next year, by 2014, hopefully we'll have spun off. It's going to be a transition period, but [we'll] be our own stand-alone 501(c)(3).

KWON: And have your name on the door.

MASAKI: Yes, and it won't be this big of an office.

KWON: (laughs) Oh no.

MASAKI: Right now, we just have a few cubicles in this big office. Yeah, so don't be too impressed. If you come and visit us next year, it will be downsized. But hopefully we'll have a nice office and a different location.

KWON: I just have a couple more wrap up questions before we finish up. I was wondering if we could back up and take a broader look at things. I wanted to ask you how you position domestic violence, anti-trafficking, gender-based violence work within the larger scope of Asian American Reproductive Justice or Asian American women's movement.

1:08:06

MASAKI: Right, right. Well, I think that gender-based violence is one of the primary and most pervasive issues for women in our API communities, and that because its root is the devaluing of API women and girls, that it's a central issue—if we are going to work on, say, API women's rights or women's movement, that it's a central issue that must be part of any work on women's rights or women's work in API communities. So that's how I position it or see why it's such a key part of a bigger picture. And also I really believe that if we were to invest fully invest and dedicate ourselves to the idea of truly valuing women and girls in our API communities and also examining the whole gender spectrum and gender norms—so meaning that gender discrimination and oppression based on the devaluation of women, girls, or anything that's feminine or anything that falls outside the box of male-dominance and heterosexual patriarchy—that if we're going to be able to disrupt that and challenge that, then we could really be at the forefront of creating new social norms that will allow liberation for everybody, you know, Asian Pacific Islander men, queer folks, women and girls. Wherever people are identifying on the gender spectrum, I feel like, will be liberated, if we could figure out how to advance the valuing of girls and women as well as people across the gender spectrum. So that's why I feel like it's essential that our specific work be part of the conversation and central to any of the work on any of the social justice issues in the API community.

That's part of the premise of why we are working so closely with AAPIP [Asian American/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy] on their National Gender & Equity Campaign. Because this thinking that, Wow, if immigrant rights programs and worker rights programs within our API communities could really take on that gender lens within the way that they do their work and in their mission, that will really go such a long way towards gender equality overall. And then also I feel like in the gender based violence movement, not particular to API communities, if we as API communities can really lift up our strategies and practices and be recognized rather than tokenized—because we've done, from the very beginning, our work in such an intersectional way and with some deep or thoughtful analysis, because of our lived experience—that's going to just make a huge contribution to the rest of the gender-based violence movement in the U.S. To me, it's an essential investment that's going to leverage big benefit for social movements overall.

1:11:14

KWON: Yeah, I think a lot of people have echoed that. I think Yin was talking about it, and Cindi Choi was saying, "If you uplift the most oppressed," like the most vulnerable, "then you uplift everybody," and things like that.

1:12:39

MASAKI: Yes, exactly. It's that value of those that are the most impacted are the key to their own solution, and it's also this idea of margin to center, that which is on the edge is often that which is on the growing edge or the avant-garde that can be such an enriching part of contributing to any kind of center or building critical mass for any center.

I feel like it's an exciting time, because like you said, other people are saying the same thing, and that's different. This is like a new era where people are recognizing it and being able to articulate it more, and so with that kind of intention, it's really quite an exciting time, I think, for the next era of leadership and our next era of movement building.

KWON: Let's see. I have one last question. It's kind of vague, so you can answer it any way you like. What's the long term vision for your work in gender-based violence, and what kind of work do you want to achieve with your work, which is like an extension of your work with Asian Women's Shelter?

1:14:02

MASAKI: Let's see. Yeah that is . . .

KWON: It's a big question.

MASAKI: I think for me, and my lifetime—I mean, of course, the bigger vision is like the world we want to see, the world we want to create. A world where women and girls and queer people and boys and men, all people—no matter how they identify, or in all the ways that they identify—can live to their full potential, and not live in a fear-based world but live in a world

that calls us to our best selves with creativity, strength, and courage, and that commitment to social justice and compassion for everybody. And that, I think, might sound utopian, or “That will never happen in our lifetime,” but I believe that it’s possible to—or definitely possible to—There’s so much work that we could do better to move, to shift the scale. When you think about it, look how far we’ve come, you know, just even in my lifetime. I grew up pre-Civil Rights Movement, where laws were—Even in my lifetime, I think maybe the year when I was born is when Japanese Americans had the right to citizenship. So it’s really within my lifetime that a lot has changed, and so I have a lot of hope in the next generations or, say, within your lifetime how much is going to change.

Given all of that, I think, for me, in my work lifetime—in the next, say, ten years, fifteen years, and longer—what I would like to see is really us figuring out this intergenerational leadership. One thing I really want to dedicate myself to is figuring out how people of my generation can do a better job of fostering new leadership and stepping aside, but still contributing and figuring out like, What’s a good way that we can still contribute but that still leaves room for new leadership and different thinking and new ways of organizing and pushing the work forward? So I want to figure that out. I want to help the new leadership to really step into that and have the courage and support and creativity to do that. I think another issue that I really want to work on is this idea of beloved community that—So many times, our progressive movement fight among each other or compete for limited funds and fight over the same little slice of the pie. Or there’s a lot of mistrust or broken feelings or legacies of that that we’ve inherited from each other and ways that we hate and divide ourselves from one another. So a start on that is to, at least, be able to start building, from our allies and our friends, ways that we could do true collaboration together and really look at the bigger picture rather than compete over a small piece of pie, or vie for strategy and attention.

I think that we did that at Asian Women’s Shelter. At one point in our—I remember, one time, lifting my head up from the day-to-day crisis and think[ing], Oh, am I a bad manager because I’m giving away 30 percent of our budget? Because I felt like that was what’s right in our value, to do these sub-contracts with other smaller non-residential programs, like Shimtuh and Narika and others that were doing that Asian Women’s Shelter couldn’t—like a Korean-specific faith-based work—and deserved funding to do that. So we did a lot of that sharing of funding and resources or saying, Oh, I think you should apply for this, or you know—really what’s better for the collective good of survivors and community, and always thinking from that framework. But I believe in that, because Asian Women’s Shelter always did well, financially, and it’s karma, I feel like. We had that greater good in vision and stayed true to that, and it was fine that, at some point, we had 30 percent of our budget ~~was~~ going to other programs. That was still a sustainable management strategy for us. Anyway, that’s a small example of what I would like to see now in my

position of being able to foster and help people see that it's doable. I feel like there are so many messages that go against that from funders and our capitalist nature of our U.S. culture, competition, and also the ways that, intentionally or unintentionally, our communities are pitted against each other. So let's break through that, you know, and that is also on my agenda in my lifetime, but I think it's achievable and will get us towards our vision that bigger vision and goal.

KWON: That's a great note to end on. Thank you so much.

1:20:13

MASAKI: Thank you.

KWON: It was really meeting you and [hearing about] all your experience in domestic violence. Did you have anything else that you wanted to add to the record or anything like that?

MASAKI: No. Thank you so much for this project. Yeah, I'm really excited that you're doing this. This is just a living example of some of that continuing the leadership legacy and building on that, so I'm glad that there's young women like yourself standing on our shoulders.

KWON: Thank you. All right.

END OF INTERVIEW

