AN INTERVIEW WITH KAZUKO ATOMURA AND JUNE MONROE

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White
Director, Oral History Research Center
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PREFACE

A story of a mother and daughter navigating through hardships and finding joy, Kazuko Atomura was born in Taiwan while her father worked there as a doctor during World War II. Her family would soon return to Tokyo, Japan, where she would spend the rest of her childhood. Though she has many happy memories of life in Tokyo, she also remembers tough times with food shortages and having to brush her teeth with salt. After graduating from school, Atomura worked a number of jobs including what was like a secretary at a shipping yard to the information desk at Haneda airport. Eventually, her job as a department store clerk with Seibu would give her the opportunity to transfer to Los Angeles, California. Originally only supposed to stay for six months, Atomura would reconnect with a navy man she had met in Japan years earlier and marry him. Despite strong opposition from her family, including her father who vowed to never speak to her again, Atomura persisted and would go on to have three children with him. She speaks of the alienation and loneliness she experienced living in a foreign country without any family and few people who could speak her language.

While living in Corpus Christi, Texas, Atomura and her husband had June Monroe. After Monroe's father had to donate a kidney to Monroe's younger brother, he was forced to retire from the navy and would go on to work in the geology field. Monroe detailed a very turbulent childhood as a result of her father's retirement from the navy that led to her mother and brother moving back to Japan. In 1989, Monroe and her father ended up moving to Las Vegas, Nevada,

when her father found a job working on the Yucca Mountain project. She remembers attending Las Vegas High School and Bonanza, worried about making friends but fitting in well with the theater kids. After high school, Monroe did a brief stint in Japan before realizing she had to go back to college for a degree. After getting her bachelors in elementary education, she would move to Los Angeles to find her way as an actor while working as a teacher, but eventually moved back to Las Vegas when she realized there was no future there.

Atomura describes the racism and discrimination she experienced as a result of both her Asian appearance and language barriers, naming an instance when she first arrived in Hawaii and was asked if she was a military wife. Monroe discusses the perception of being a petite Asian woman and how that has factored into unconscious bias in numerous places, and how she has come to be proud of her Japanese heritage. Atomura also talks about some of the community activities she has been involved in since moving to Las Vegas including the Japanese Culture Club and odori dancing. She details on various cultural practices such as flower arranging, kimono wearing, tea ceremonies, and the food they eat during New Year's. Together, they remember Monroe's brother, Brian, who received two kidney transplants; one from Monroe's father and one from Monroe herself. Atomura talks about the shrines she has built for Brian and the experience of him being on dialysis, moving around, taking care of him, and his final days. Since donating a kidney to Brian, Monroe has become more and more involved with organ donation activism, connecting with the Nevada Donor Network, participating in the Transplant Games of America, and helping to pass significant pieces of legislation within Nevada. Though mother and daughter have faced numerous personal and external trials throughout their lives, their shared bond keeps them close and determined to make the best of the days to come.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
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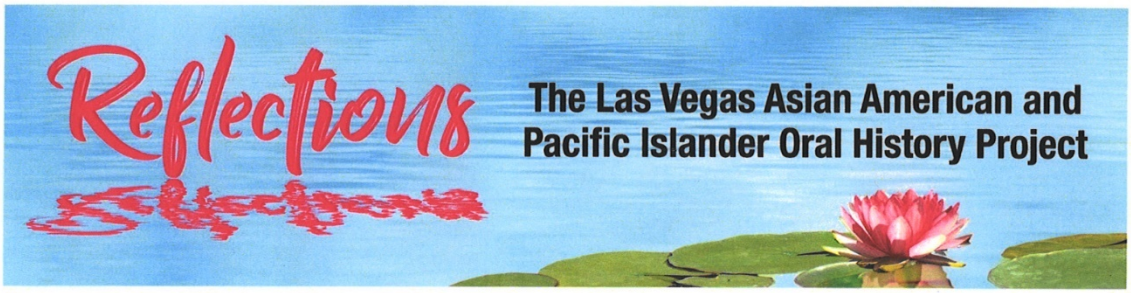

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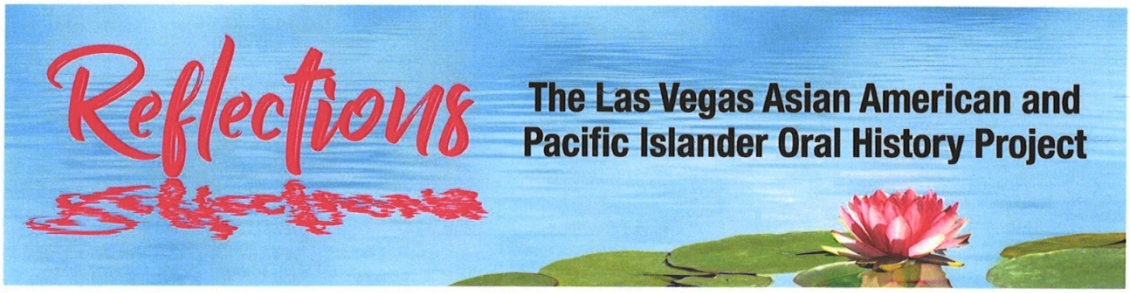

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Good morning. Today's date is July 14th. I'm Cecilia Winchell. I'm here with Stefani Evans, June Monroe, and Kazuko Atomura.

June, could I first have you spell your first and last name for the record?

June, J-U-N-E. Monroe, M-O-N-R-O-E.

And, Kazuko, can I ask you to please spell your first and last name for the record?

K-A-Z-U-K-O. Last name, A-T-O-M-U-R-A.

Thank you. Kazuko, could you start off by telling us about your childhood, where you were born, where you grew up, your parents, your family?

My father was a doctor in Japan, so he went to Taiwan to help people, and then he stayed for a long time. I was born in Taiwan and when I was three or four years old, I came back to Japan, but my father and all the brothers have to stay to take care of other people. They stayed over there, and they came back to Japan later on. I was just a short time in Kagoshima, but that's my hometown. My parents, we moved to Tokyo; that's most of the time I would spend my life.

Do you remember what years? She moved there, she said, when she was about three or four to Japan.

Three or four, yes. I don't remember anything over there because I was too little.

Do you remember anything about Tokyo?

Oh, Tokyo, ask me anything.

What was it like growing up in Tokyo?

I love it. She [indicating June] took me to Europe a couple of weeks ago.

Mom, she's asking about when you were a kid.

I know. Anyway, in Japan, the food and the way I live, I love it, Japan living.

Atomura (far right) and her high school classmates, one of whom she remains good friends with

Atomura (far left) and her high school classmates

Atomura (second from the left) in middle school with classmates

Mom, they're asking about when you were a child. What was it like growing up when you were a kid? That was during the war, right, or after the war?

Wartime, I don't know because I'm too little. After war, a struggle for food and everything, and we would try to save a lot of stuff. Government didn't have anything to give us, so it's pretty tough. But my family had a little bit of money.

Didn't you have to brush your teeth with salt or something?

Oh yes. In Japan, my father told me always when I was little…We don't have toothpaste, so we used salt and a stick for a toothbrush to brush our teeth. Gargle, everything, a lot of stuff I used the salt, yes.

And then also, for food after the war, you guys ate a lot of sweet potatoes, right?

Oh yes, sweet potatoes. No rice, so a lot of sweet potatoes, yes. We don't have much sugar. The government gave us a little bit of sugar, so not much sugar. That's what I remember, because I was little, and, "Sugar, sugar."

What can you tell them about your family, so your mom, dad, brothers, sisters? Your siblings, how many and what were their names?

Everybody passed away, and I'm the only one left.

What were their names, and how many siblings did you have?

Yasko is my sister. Tadashi, Akira, Noboru were my brothers, and me. And Yutaka, also my brother. Everybody passed away.

You're the youngest.

Yes, I'm the youngest.

Obachan [aunt in Japanese], Yasko was the oldest.

Sister, yes.

Yasko, her sister, was the oldest. And you had stepbrothers, right?

Oh yes, stepbrother on father's side, he's a dentist. My brother is passed away, but the son is also a dentist right now.

SE: Tell us about school.

Middle school was in Tokyo. It was Nakano Chugako. High school name was Suginami Koto Gako.

Did you wear uniforms?

Oh yes, always a uniform. If your hair is longer, you have to tie it up. Skirt, a certain length. It's really hard, very strict, especially in high school with all the girls. It's a very, very strict school.

She went to an all-girls high school.

Did everybody have their hair cut the same?

Not the same. If you have long, you have to tie it up. If you're longer than this [gestures chin length], you have to cut right there.

You could have long hair?

Yes, I had long hair, so I had to tie it up.

Put it in braids?

Yes, braids, some people wear them, and some people just tie it up right here.

Like ponytails?

Not ponytails, no. We cannot do a ponytail.

Pigtails?

No, no. Just tie them up one and two, right there.

CW: What do you remember about your mother?

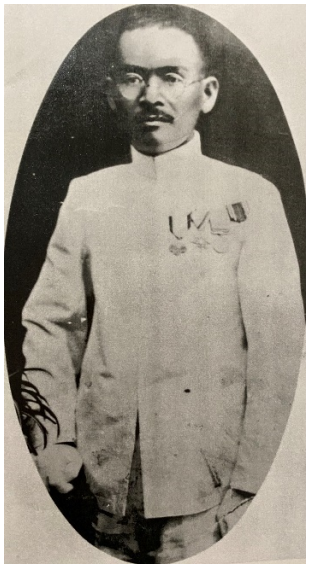
My mother is quiet. I don't know if she enjoys her life or not because she is so quiet. Never get mad. Not much laugh. She just so silent all the time and quiet, really.

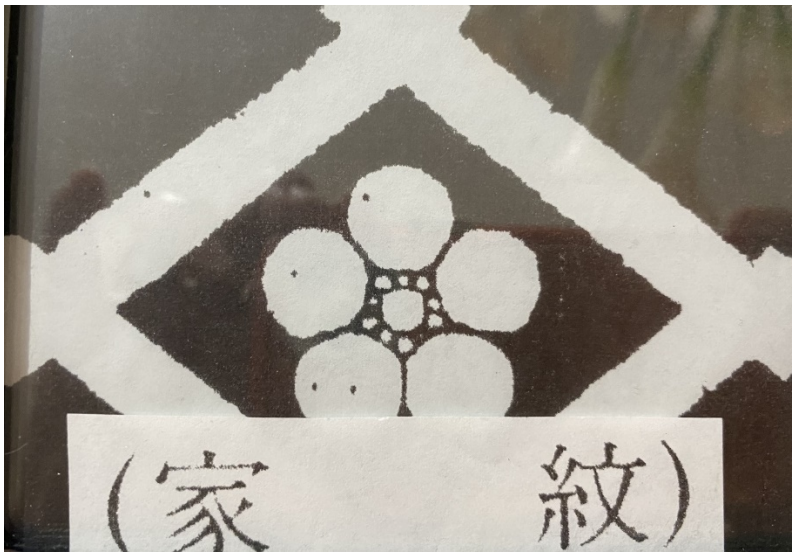
Did she cook? Who cooked in the house?

Oh yes, she cooked and everything. But when we were in Taiwan, she didn't do much because a lot of Taiwanese people came over to help.

What did your mom do for work?

She never worked. Her family came from Samurai.





Monroe's family crest from her grandmother's side

How old were you when your mom passed?

She passed away '76.

What did you do after high school?

I went to a shipping company. In Japan, a shipping company is way at a high level, and a lot of high government people, prime minister, and everybody come to one place for a meeting; that's where I was working.

What was the name of the company?

Nihon Kaiun Club or Nihon Shipping Kyokai. That's all I know.

What did you do there?

I was hired by the office, but we have to do a lot of things, more than that, because high-ranked people come over. We have to sometimes serve tea.

Office work, like secretary?

Secretary, they have a special person. We are not a secretary. We are too young to be a secretary.

What else did you do besides serve tea?

Accounting and all that kind of stuff, paperwork.

How long were you there?

About four years, I guess. Then my shipping company first built, in Japan, the highest building; it's called Kasumi-ga Seki. They are going to make this building a thirty-eight or thirty-nine floor building, first one in Tokyo, bigger building. They were going to build a bigger building. Anyway, they say, "If you want to quit, fine. If you want to wait, fine." But it takes a long time, big building.

I went to see my brother down south just for fun. Then before that I took a written test in the airport, Haneda Airport. My family said, "You passed a test, come back here." I went to work at Haneda Airport for a while. I don't know how long.

What did you do at the airport?

Information desk, just to talk to people that come from overseas. That's what we did.

How long did you say you were there?

About three years.

What did you do afterwards?

United States. At that time, the airport job is involved with, it's called, Seibu Company, and they own a big company doing a lot of stuff. They had a department store in California, and they send

me for six months for the job because I passed a typing—we had to go to school for typing, just how fast you can do it. I cannot write and read English, but I can…type? In the airport, you don't have to do a lot of stuff, just the flight and passenger's name and things like that. Anyway, they sent me to California, and I worked there.

Mom, was the company Seibu, S-E-I-B-U, right? Is that the name of the company?

Yes.

Something like that. That's a pretty big company in Japan.

Yes, it is, yes. Anyway, then I wind up married here.

Atomura at the airport on her way to the US

Atomura (left) with her sister Yasuko (right) at the airport

Where did they send you in California?

Los Angeles, I believe, yes.

Do you remember around what year that was?

Probably 1966, 1967.

They sent you to Los Angeles, California?

Yes, in the department store, I just did paperwork, a little bit.

Now, did you meet Dad there?

No, that's after I married over there. Yes, California, that's a start.

What was it like adjusting to living in America and California?

The company gave me a little place to live. Well, I did not cook very much here because I cannot use the oven. I did not have an oven in Japan. A lot of electric stuff, we don't have at that time. One time I tried to make bread, and I didn't know you had to have yeast. Anyway, it was really bad. I enjoy it very much right now, because of her [June].

How did you meet your ex-husband?

He came to Japan for awhile while he was stationed there in the US Navy.

Where was he stationed? Yokosuka?

Yes, Yokosuka, he was at Yokosuka.

And you were working at Yokosuka, right, for a brief time?

Just to stay in my sister's home for a short time. That's where I worked, on the Yokosuka US Naval base as a civilian.

As a civilian.

But I can't speak English or anything, so I didn't…

You worked as a civilian on the base, right?

Yes.

That's how you met dad. I think it was a restaurant, right, on the base.

We meet in Japan, and then we met in California again.

Coronado, right?

Yes, Coronado.

So, that's where they got married, was Coronado, California.

They met before she left Japan? When did she work at Yokosuka?

When did you work at Yokosuka when you met dad? Do you remember what year that was?

I came here in 1966. Three or four years before that, probably. I don't remember exactly.

Then you met him again when you came to California? How did you find him again?

Oh, I had his address, and he had my address. He was right there in Coronado, and I was in San Diego, and he was flying over there.

Wait, mom. When your job sent you to California—

That's after.

—was that Los Angeles or San Diego?

That was Los Angeles. Job is Los Angeles. San Diego is when I married, Coronado.

Did you and your ex-husband write letters to each other while you were gone, or how did you keep your relationship going?

Once in a while letters back and forth. But he was busy here. He is a very independent person. You know that. I had three kids, and he was never home. Three kids. Even when she [June] was born on Mother's Day, he was not there.

He was in the Vietnam War when I was born in 1972. He was in the military, and so he was gone a lot with the Navy. He served on the *USS Midway* Aircraft Carrier, which is now a museum in San Diego.

You and dad met in Yokosuka, right? And you were working on the base, and that's how you and dad met, right? And then you went to Coronado, and was dad still in Japan, or…? Who went to Coronado first, you or dad?

We got married, and then I went to Coronado. I was in Los Angeles the whole time.

You were in L.A., and dad was where?

He came over there to L.A. to see me.

I never knew this part. This is new to me.

Not Japan.

But you guys got married in Coronado, right?

Right, right.

Stefani was asking, did you and dad write to each other?

No, not much. Christmas card or something.

Would he visit you, or you visit him, or how did you guys end up getting back together?

That's not your business, my god.

Mom, that's a part of the story. They're asking that.

Just I'm here in the United States, and he comes over to see me, and that's it.

I did not know all this, that part.

You don't have to know. It's the past.

You said that when you were originally sent over here by your company, they only sent you for six months?

Yes, they promised me six months. My father was very much against it. "If you go to United States, you're going to eat potatoes and beans. That's all they're going to feed you. Don't go to America." And even, "Don't get married to anybody. Just come back in six months." That's what he said. But I thought, "Why not"?

Rebellious.

Being a bigger story, it's funny.

How did your father feel when you ended up marrying someone?

He never talked to me. Yes, my family was all against it.

And they never talked to you again?

My ex never see…When we did the wedding in Japan—we married here, but we went back to Japan and wore a wedding kimono and everything. At that time, he saw my youngest brother's wife and family, and that's it. He never seen much.

You're talking about my dad?

Yes.

I know he talked to Yasko.

Yasko is against it. They got in a big fight. My sister is against it, so we never saw them again.

Why were they against it?

Because she is older than I am, so she can see the person. She knew better.

But why was your whole family against your marriage to Dad; because he was American?

Of course, of course, yes.

They want you to marry a Japanese?

Exactly.

They were against the biracial marriage.

Where did you live after you got married?

San Diego.

For how long?

I don't remember. It's a pretty long time.

My older sister was born there.

Yes. She was born in '68.

August 1968.

This is about the time that you are born, and you wrote here that you were in southwest Texas. Can I have you maybe talk a little bit about your childhood and what you remember?

After they lived in San Diego—my sister was born there—then they moved to—was Dad stationed in Oakland? Is that why you guys moved?

Yes, but he was ordered to go to the Vietnam War.

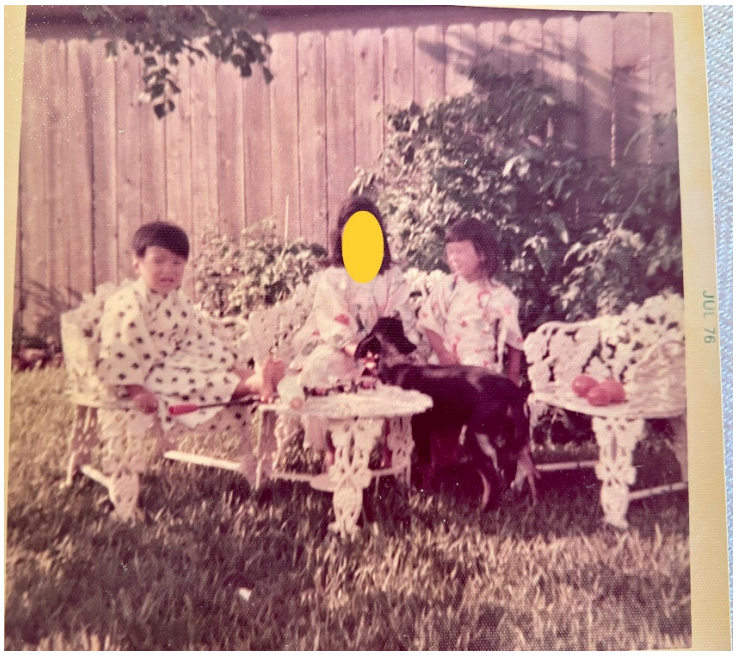
He was stationed in Oakland, California, and that's where I was born, May 13th, 1972. I was born in the Oak Knoll Naval Hospital, which I don't think exists anymore. At that time, my dad was serving in Vietnam. He served on the *USS Midway* Aircraft Carrier, which is a museum in San Diego now. He was an Officer of the Deck. So he wasn't present when I was born.

Was dad present for any of our births? Brian? No? He didn't see any of our births.

No.

He was serving in Vietnam. My mom said that I got the chickenpox when I was young. I don't remember, but she said it was bad, apparently. I was born early because I was supposed to be born in June, right? That's why my name is June, part of the reason. My dad liked a couple of the actresses named June, like June Allyson. There were a couple of other actresses that were big at the time named June. I guess, since I was supposed to be born in June—right? I was supposed to be born in June.

Anyway, that's why I was named June. But I was born early. I was born in May, and they just kept my name because they had already decided. My name is June Elizabeth Monroe. Elizabeth is based off of Queen Elizabeth, I think, because my dad wanted to make sure when all of us were born that our initials stood for something. JEM actually is a gem with a twist on it, with a J instead of a G. My dad became a geologist after the Navy.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At what point did Dad go to college to be a geologist? Was that in Texas?

Yes.

He went to college to be a geologist. My initials are JEM, which is gem. My sister's initials are ADM, which means admiral. Then my brother's initials were BPM, which is British Prime Minister. He just wanted all of our initials to stand for something. I don't know where those come from.

When I was two, we moved to Corpus Christi, Texas. I guess my dad was stationed there with the Navy. My brother was born there. Brian Patrick Monroe was born January 31st, 1974, in Corpus Christi, Texas. We were there for, I think, two years. I don't remember that because I was so young. Then, when I was four, we moved to Cypress, Texas, because my dad got a job as a geologist in Houston. Cypress is right outside of Houston. My dad would drive into Houston for work. He worked in the oil industry. He worked for Getty and Texaco.


Birthday
to you!
NAUTICA

My mom can tell you more about—I don't remember a lot of the details of my childhood. I do remember our neighborhood was not very diverse, and our school was primarily Caucasian. I was younger, so I don't remember much prejudice, but my mom remembers us as kids going to the school. We were some of the first Asians in the school, and so the administration basically told her to expect problems or something like that. My mom, English is her second language. Brian was put in speech.

Do you want to talk about how was our childhood in Texas because I don't remember?

This is really a big mess for me to marry him. My sister, I guess, to me is, "Now I know why he is very independent, not the family man." One day I find out I'm pregnant, and I told him I want to go back to Japan to have a baby because I don't know anybody here. He says, "No. My mom is going to be with you, so don't worry about it." But I got married, two best men and fathers—Coronado used to have the ship, and two captains are going to be helping for our wedding. Anyway, that's three people, really nice people I know. Then his mom comes. When I had my first daughter, a friend of mine lived nearby the base, and now we are far away. She called me.

About fifteen minutes. "You come to my place." I went there, and the mom is with me, my ex-mother-in-law.

It really hurt, ten minutes or fifteen minutes. If you have a child, maybe you know it. "How it hurts?" she asked me. The friend of mine said, "If you walk around a little bit, it's easier." I walk around the living room, and then I calm down and just sit there [making panting sound] like that. Then my ex-mother-in-law came to the table. She asked me, "How it hurts?" I cannot explain, first pregnancy. I'm just pregnant. Then she stands up, "Ahh," and hits the table. "I don't understand your English." That's what she told me. Just like a waterfall, blood come out of my nose, and it won't stop. That friend of mine gave me a big towel, warm cover. She brought the bucket and everything. "Just keep breathing." She called the doctor, and the doctor said, "Bring her over right away."

I went there, to the hospital. Once in a while, I would kind of wake up, and somebody is doing like that. Anyway, about three thirty I wake up, and the girl says, "I'm sorry, but we cannot do, right now, anything. Sorry you are sick like that." Anyway, three doctors are talking about what…They cannot do a Cesarean because I lost too much blood. My first daughter was eight pounds, seven ounces. She was big. First daughter is big. The next morning about four thirty, the doctor came over and said, "You almost died. You lost a lot of blood." That's what they told me. In the sense, I hated everything. I just didn't like anything. I just get like that.

In the United States.

Yes, everything, just go like that. She is born okay, but that's when my heart problems started. He said, "You lost too much blood. You have to take a pill for your lifetime." That's what I was taking. Then I went back to Japan after the divorce. In Japan, doctor told me, "If you keep taking this pill, you're going to die." What am I going to do? It was a big mess.

Mom, she was asking about when we lived in Cypress, Texas. When us kids were younger and we were going to school, there were problems, right?

Oh yes, yes. School called me up, and they read the paper, and they want to record because of my pronunciation. I can read some, but R or some word, I can't do it. They tested in the school. It is kind of embarrassing, but you cannot do anything about it. Brian has to go to special speech class because he picked up my words. School in Texas names us "Oriental" people. In the school, they call me "Ching," "Chang," and "Chink." All the kids were upset, and the older one, my daughter, is really an independent girl. When she was about four years old in California, the teacher called—kindergarten or first grade—the teacher called me, "Do you have a husband?" I said, "Yes." She knows; she has the paper, but he was away serving in the Navy. Anyway, she asked me, "Do you have a husband?" I said, "Yes." "Your daughter is acting very strange." She says, "She tried to protect you somehow, so she fight with other kids." That's what the teacher told me. I was so shocked. I tell you, it's just a big mess. Anyway, she tried to protect me.

What about in Texas. She had problems, right?

Yes, my oldest daughter still carried problems there. She just, I don't know, somewhere inside fighting. I don't know. But she really had the harder time, too.

Were kids picking on her?

Yes, sure. They never called [real] names, "Chin Chan, Chin Chan. Chink." I went to the school to play a Japanese instrument and show how to wear a kimono to the students.

Mom, what do you mean "they never called the name?"

Chin Chan. Well, maybe your time was maybe okay because you're so quiet. They called—even a teacher told me, "Everyone calls your children 'Chin Chan Chink.'"

Not by their names?

And Chink. I do remember the word Chink was used.

Yes. Cat eye and go like that [stretching eyes at outside corners].

I remember some of that and hearing, "Chinese, Japanese, dirty knees," things like that. I don't remember a lot of it. My older sister had more negative experiences than I did with that. I don't remember a lot because I was little.

It was a big mess when we came here. I talked to people here, a Japanese woman, they say, "Oh, my husband is sweet. You brought me here, and so you have to take care of me," to their husbands. But I didn't do it. Anyway, it was really hard. But now, she's here, so…[laughing] The problem is the Japanese—it's not all the Japanese. My mother is silent, quiet. That's how I got it. I cannot say much; that's my problem.

Argue and be confrontational.

Yes, I don't do it. I've never seen my mom fight.

How long was your family in Texas?

We moved there in about 1973 or 1974? Dad and I moved to Las Vegas in about 1989, my junior year of high school.

Brian was born there, in Texas, in 1974.

Brian was born there in '74. Then at that time—a couple of things that I did want to mention, too. My mom did not teach us Japanese when we were younger. She taught us basics, like counting to ten, and things like that. But she felt that we didn't need Japanese in the United States, so she didn't teach us Japanese, which I think was not right. I think it's beneficial for any child, if you have family members who speak another language, you absolutely should teach them. It's part of the culture. Jobwise, when they become an adult, and as an educator, I see the

importance of that as well, to be bilingual. Anyway, we've had that discussion, and it's too late now. She didn't teach us Japanese, really.

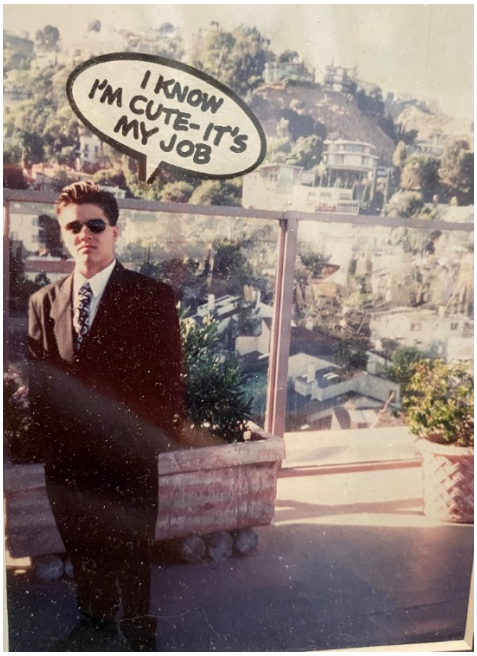
I did a little bit in Japan for a little English. A lot of people hungry for the English language. After that age school…

No, mom, I'm talking about something completely different.

Okay, sorry.

She didn't teach us Japanese when we were younger. Also, I think it's part of the Japanese culture, and I'm sorry to say this—but you already know this; we've had this discussion—in Japanese culture, the boys are treated differently than females, and it's so in a lot of countries around the world. Boys are treated better than the girls.

My brother, when we were in Texas, Brian was pretty popular. He had a lot of friends with the neighborhood kids. We were in a very family-oriented neighborhood, a lot of young boys my brother's age. Brian easily made a lot of friends. They played baseball and football together. We all joined a swim team, so we swam.



Well, Brian, eventually his kidneys failed when he was about ten years old. My dad—sorry that I am crying. My mom has a heart condition, and so she couldn't donate. My dad ended up donating a kidney to Brian in the '80s when we lived in Texas. Apparently, at the time, the Navy would not allow active servicemembers to donate; they couldn't be living donors. Dad joined the Reserves to donate, or [did he] retire?

No, after.

My dad donated a kidney to Brian. That's when we learned about the importance of organ tissue donation. I was a kid. Brian was about ten, so I would have been about twelve. I don't remember the exact age. That whole time was a big mess. There was a lot of trauma in the family. My dad had to get out of being an active servicemember. At one point he joined the Reserves. After twenty years, he retired from the Navy. Thankfully, apparently, the military has changed their policy, so now active servicemembers can be donors. I recently met an active servicemember who donated their kidney, and they're still active.

Anyway, you said that Dad's personality really changed after he got out of the active military, right?

Yes. It's terrible.

My dad is…

He is quiet, but he is very independent. But after getting out of the Navy, he was just…

It changed his personality. At that time in the '80s, it was a big mess because Brian needed a kidney. They had their transplant. My dad lost his job as a geologist; he was laid off. My parents got divorced.

Do you remember what year you guys got divorced? I don't even remember what year. It was just so much drama going on that I can't even remember years of stuff. Do you remember?

I don't remember. You want me to tell you everything?

If you want, go for it. It's up to you.

Police came twice. That much mess.

My dad was physically abusive to my mom.

Yes, just grab the hair and, wham*, and just step on,* wham*,* wham*,* bam*,* bam*,* bam*. He changed a lot. Impossible. Now he is an angel.*

He was never arrested because he left the house before the police arrived. Then my parents got divorced. After they got divorced, my mom moved back to Japan. My older sister ended up leaving the house. Was Dad ever abusive to her? I don't really remember. Or no?

She went there for a while with a lot of issues.

No, was Dad abusive to her? Did he ever hit her?

Everybody got the punch. Yes, all the kids.

After my mom left—sorry, you guys are getting the whole story here—after he was physically abusive to mom, mom left, and then he started in, I think, on my older sister. Then she moved out of the house, and then it started on me and Brian. My dad and Brian did not get along. Brian ended up moving in with my mom and moved to Japan. But dad was physically abusive to Brian and myself as well. Brian left, so it was just me left.

I did have a couple of incidences, and I remember—this is one thing I think laws need to change or police forces or something—I was, I think, seventeen years old. I had gotten a bloody nose. My dad gave me a bloody nose. I remember I was trying to get out of the house, and he didn't want me, obviously, to go to any of the neighbors. I was running throughout the house just trying to get away from him to get out of the house, and I was screaming and yelling. A neighbor heard me screaming and came to the door. When my dad went to answer it, I jumped out of a

window and ran next door to my next-door neighbor's house. Jason, my friend who lived next door, ended up calling the police.

When the police came, they asked me, as a child, "Do you want us to arrest your father or not?" That's where I have a problem. What immediately ran through my head when they asked me that—basically, I was in survival mode—these are my options: I live with my dad, continue living with him. I didn't even consider moving in with my mom because she was in Japan, so I didn't think that was an option, because schooling is very difficult in Japan. I can't just go over there. Or I would end up in foster care. I was like, there is no way I am going to do foster care, so my only other option is to stay with my dad. I told them, "Don't arrest him." I just knew that I needed to basically stay out of his way until I graduated high school, and then I could move out. My main focus was *I need to finish high school, and then I can live my own life and move out of the house*. I just told myself, like when I would come home from school—the last thing on my mind was doing homework. Homework was never done. I would try to go over to Jason's next door as much as possible. I ate dinner over there multiple times.

My dad was struggling, too. He almost lost the house. He lost his job as a geologist, he was laid off, and he ended up working several jobs. He worked at a convenience store. He worked as a janitor at either JCPenney or Sears. I don't remember what else. He was working and struggling financially.

I remember one day—I thought he was still working at some point as a geologist—and I decided I wanted to stay home from school. My dad got up and left the house for work. I was like, *Okay, dad's gone, and I'm just going to stay home today by myself*. I was still in bed. About twenty minutes later, I hear someone come in the house, and it was my dad. He had a friend come over. My dad didn't know I was at home because I was in my room and my door was shut

or barely open. My dad didn't know that I stayed home from school that day. My dad had a friend come over, and they were in the dining room. I crawled through the hallway to peak in and listen in to see what was going on. I remember my dad telling his friend, "I can't keep doing this," like he was putting up a front for me that he still had a job.

He went through a lot of suffering as well. Our whole family went through a lot of trauma. I remember he was like, "I'm going to lose the house. I need a job. I need money." That's when I knew my dad was not working and how bad we were struggling and how much stress he was under.

I would go to school. I would stay out of the way. Eventually, my dad ended up getting a job at the Yucca Mountain Project in Las Vegas in '89. My dad and I moved from Texas to Vegas in '89, and that was my junior year in high school. Mom was still in Japan, and Brian was still in Japan. Brian was in middle school when he was with my mom. We moved here in '89, and we were staying at the Algiers Hotel on the Strip because we didn't have a home yet. That's where we were staying temporarily until my dad found a home.

I was zoned to go to Las Vegas High School. It wasn't the Academy then. It was just Las Vegas High School. My dad did not want me going there because he had asked colleagues about good schools in Vegas. He wanted me to go to a decent school. Originally, he wanted me to go to [Bishop] Gorman [High School], but obviously Gorman is expensive. It's a private school, and he couldn't afford that, and so that was scratched.

That brings to mind religion. I just want to throw that in, so you guys know our religious, or non-religious, background. My dad is Catholic. My mom does not identify with any religion, although in Japan it's primarily Buddhist. When we were in Japan, we would go to the temples and pray and do things like that. But she does not claim to be Buddhist. I remember as a child in

Texas, in Cypress, my dad wanted the whole family to go to church. He was trying for all of us to become Christian, Catholic, whatever. My mom was not into it, but she was the proper Japanese wife and went to church with my dad because that's what he wanted. All of us as a family would go to church. He couldn't find a Catholic church close by, and so we ended up going to a Baptist church, which was close to the neighborhood. The rest of us couldn't stand it; we didn't like church.

This is basically my take as an adult, now, and I hope no one takes offense. I am a biracial female, and Jesus is depicted as a White male. Why am I praising a White male that does not even represent or look like who I am? It just doesn't make sense. I know he is not officially White, but that is how he is portrayed. Obviously, with my mom, she doesn't identify with that. I think being biracial, that gives me a different perspective, because being in Japan I saw how it's primarily Buddhist. They would go to temples and pray and do these things. Then there is my dad. I am not religious at all. Brian and my sister are not. My mom is not. My dad does, though, identify as Catholic, and he was raised Catholic. Originally, he wanted to do something involved with a church when I was younger, but clearly that didn't happen.

Also, I think part of the Japanese culture, I think I mentioned that already with the treatment between males and females. When Brian became sick, I noticed my mom—sorry, I'm backtracking, but I don't want to forget this—mom did spoil Brian quite a bit. I think it might be partly because he was sick, but also it may have been cultural. I noticed a huge difference in the treatment between…I think it was maybe a combination. We've discussed this, and I've brought that up with my mom. I think she was overprotective of him as well because he was so sick.

Anyway, I totally went off on a tangent, and I apologize. I don't even remember where I was going with that. We were talking about my dad being abusive. I moved out after high school.

You were in Las Vegas when you moved out?

Yes. We moved here in ’89. I went to Las Vegas High School for a couple of months, and my dad did not want me going there because it did not have a good reputation at that time, in ’89. It had a very bad reputation. My dad basically scared the bejeezus out of me, and he told me, “Oh, Las Vegas High School is full of gangsters, and you better be careful. They get in fights.” Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. My dad, I noticed, would scare me about things like that, not on multiple occasions, but more than once. I think he was concerned about my safety, obviously. When I wanted to move to Los Angeles on my own at one point, again, the same thing, “You don’t want to move there. It’s a terrible place. They’re awful.” Blah, blah, blah.

Anyway, when he was telling me about all these gangsters at Las Vegas High School, I got kind of freaked out, and it scared me a little bit. I was like, *I can’t deal with gangsters on my first day of school*. I ended up wearing all black clothes. I had black boots on. I wore my dad’s brown leather flight jacket. I put my hair back in a low ponytail just to look intimidating and scary, like “Don’t mess with me” type of thing. I’m pretty petite and I’m Asian. I’m like, okay, I’m dealing with all these gang members, so I need to…I needed to look scary, which apparently worked.

My first day I enrolled in theater, and the theater class was sitting in the auditorium. I walked across the stage to register with the teacher. That’s how you entered, on the stage. Basically, I walked on the stage in front of the entire class, so they all saw me walk in my first day. It was my first day; they had been in school for a while, and they all knew each other, obviously. One of the students, Jason, saw me. This is another Jason besides my next-door neighbor from Texas. Jason said to the entire class when he saw me, out loud, “That bitch ain’t being in our class.” That’s how bad I looked.

He ended up becoming my best friend and my first friend in Las Vegas. After that first day…Jason was Mormon. His family was Mormon. There were a lot of Mormons at that school. Although there were gang members, like the Crips and the Bloods, whatever, I realized after that first day, we're all kids; they're kids just like me. I'm not scared of these people. They don't intimidate me, and I don't know them, and they don't know me; who cares?

I remember the Bloods and the Crips, the Bloods wore red, and the Crips wore blue. I didn't know about this in Texas, so this was all new to me. I didn't know all these details, obviously, beginning in the school. I dressed my own style. I wasn't a jock. I wasn't a prep. I had my own thing going on. I ended up wearing a red bandana on my head one day. A lot of the students were coming up to me and saying, "June, you better take that off. You're going to get your butt kicked. You're going to get beat up, or you're going to get shot or killed," whatever, something is going to happen to me. I'm like, "What do you mean?" They're like, "Oh, because the Bloods wear red. That's their color. You can't wear that." I'm like, "I'm in school. I am free to wear whatever I want. I am not taking this off because someone else says I can't wear this color or this bandana." They thought I was a little crazy, which, of course, I was. I didn't care, and so I kept the bandana on.

Nothing happened. Probably the students were like, "Who is she? We need to stay away from her because she is crazy." No one bothered me. No one said a word. I'm like, "Try it," not that I would, obviously, fight or something. It's like, please, I'm a kid; I'm not a Crip or a Blood, obviously. I could care less. That was my first memory of going to Las Vegas High School.

My dad was not happy that I was there. He asked around with his colleagues where I should go to high school at the time, and it was between Clark or Bonanza because I couldn't go

to Gorman, obviously; it was too expensive. My dad rented or bought a home by Bonanza, and so I ended up going to Bonanza my senior year.

I had grown up swimming, and I didn't really like it or enjoy it. Also, my parents forced me to play the violin, which I hated. They had actually asked me what instrument I wanted to play when I was younger, and I told them drums. Mom even told me stories of when I was a kid, a baby, I would pull out the pots and pans. She had to lock them up because I would do it so often. Obviously, I had a thing there for…They asked me, "What do you want to play?" I said, "Drums." They made me play the violin. I hated every second of it. They made me take private lessons. I played it in middle school and high school. I would never practice. They said the drums would cause too much noise and bother the neighbors, or too much space or whatever. I would actually fake playing the violin in school. I would put the bow where it wasn't even touching the strings, air play, and act like I was playing because I was so bad and I hated it.

In swimming, too, I wasn't really into that, but I did join a swim team. I lettered in swimming and orchestra even though I faked my way through orchestra. Then I ended up joining theater. At Bonanza, I won two awards in theater. I won the Best Actress award. I was in a Clark County theater competition, and I won second place for Best Actress. I got the acting bug, and of course, I wanted to move to Los Angeles.

After high school, I had no direction and didn't know what I wanted to do. I ended up taking classes at CSN and UNLV. I had visited mom. When my parents got divorced, part of the agreement was—before Brian moved there—Brian and I would visit my mom during the summers while we were attending school in the United States. I guess that was part of the divorce agreement. We would go visit my mom. After Brian had moved there, in Japan, they all wanted to learn English, a lot of the Japanese people. They were paying big bucks to people who

would teach them English. I just figured, *I'm going to go to Japan and teach English and make a bunch of money*.

After two years out of high school—and, of course, I moved out of the house as soon as I could—I did live with a couple of friends, and then eventually I moved into an apartment. I remember I was looking for a place to live, and there were two women on the exact opposite extremes. One was very religious. Her house was immaculate, very clean and pristine. Older woman. The other one was—and these were the people I was interviewing with to rent a room from. The other one, Anita, was a hoarder. She was very "whatever" type of person. The other one was very strict, and I could tell she would probably try to enforce her views on me or give me a curfew or something. The other one could care less. And the hoarder lived in North Las Vegas in the projects. I was like, *That's where I'm moving*, because she didn't care. I knew I could do whatever I wanted. She also enjoyed theater so we had something in common.

When my dad found out, he was like, "No, you're not going to move into the projects in North Las Vegas." This was right off Donna and Carey, which is by 28th Street, some gang affiliation. The cross streets were Bulloch St. and East Cartier Ave. At that time, when you said "North Las Vegas" in that area, that was the worst at that time in the entire city. My dad was trying to tell me that I wasn't going to, but I was basically like, "You don't control my life anymore." That was a part of my rebellious side. I thought, "Guess what? Because he doesn't want me to move there, I'm moving there." I moved into North Las Vegas in the projects and went to the community college there at Cheyenne campus.

What I didn't know was my roommate—I think it was three bedrooms, yes, three at the top—let another person, John, move in that was a friend of hers. I didn't find out until many years later that he was a drug addict. I guess she was trying to help him recover or straighten out.

I think he was in recovery. But she didn't tell me at that time, which I think is not okay. He ended up moving in with us, and it was fine. We all did our own thing.

I was trying to figure out, *What am I going to do with my life?* I didn't know what I wanted to do or what I wanted to be. I thought, *I'm just going to go to Japan and make a bunch of money teaching English, easy as pie*. I did that. I get there, and they're like, "Oh. No. Do you have a bachelor's degree?" "No." "Okay, nope, sorry, we don't want you." I couldn't get a job teaching English because they wanted you to have a bachelor's degree. I ended up staying with my mom. Brian ended up coming back to the States during high school because he couldn't go to high school in Japan.

The high schools, you have to have a test to get into them.

It's kind of like college here.

Yes. He scored way low. Plus, American school is free and no tests are required to attend. I have to move here or there. I'm going to lose a job. It's kind of stress. He said, "Mom, it's okay. I'll go back to States." I said, "Okay." That's when he came back.

He came back and lived with my dad. That was a lot of drama, because Brian was completely out of control. He clearly did not get along with my dad, especially with the abuse towards my mom. Brian was very angry about that. There were a bunch of issues. That was partly why I needed to leave, too, because it was just out of control at the house.

I ended up going to live with my mom in Japan two years after high school in about 1992. I couldn't get a job. I ended up working at a video store, like Blockbuster, called Wing. I couldn't speak Japanese. All the people working there, they didn't care. They thought it was cool having an American working with them. A friend of ours had gotten me the job there. I basically really didn't help out at all because I didn't know what I was doing. I worked there for a little bit.

I did also apply for a job at a hotel in what's called Gunma-ken, which is the mountainous area where hot springs are, where people go to ski and do hot springs. I would have to live there. I thought, okay, I'm going to get a job at this hotel and work there. I think it was a year contract. My mom obviously wouldn't be with me. I was like, *Okay, no big deal*. The owners of the hotel, they loved the fact that I was American and I could speak English, and so they were like, "We'll take care of her." They invited me to their house every night for dinner. They wanted me to tutor their son, who was just a toddler, in English. But that caused problems at the hotel, because the employees knew that I was close with the owners of the hotel; so they were kind of scared and intimidated by me, and they wouldn't want to interact with me very much. It was also hard because I didn't speak Japanese and they couldn't speak English.

Also, there were three Filipino girls who worked in the showroom or the bar there. The owners basically told me to stay away from them because, I guess, the class level; that I shouldn't be interacting with them or talking with them and whatever. The thing is, is that the Filipino girls could speak English. In the hotel, most of the employees could not speak English because we were out in a mountainous area; it wasn't Tokyo, where you have a lot of people who speak English. I actually ended up getting homesick. It was very difficult. I ended up hanging out with the Filipino girls anyway because I was like, *We're all foreigners, and we can talk to each other*. I ended up making friends with them and hanging out with them.

I remember an incident where there was a cultural clash. When I was in the hotel working, there was a woman in the gift store. She was an older woman. My dad, when I was a kid, used to always come up and grab my nose and pinch it. You've seen that, right? How this is your nose, and you grab it [pretends to grab nose and places the thumb between the first two fingers]? Well, we were just kind of messing around. We couldn't really talk or interact. She

didn't speak English; I didn't speak Japanese. We were just kind of joking around. I just jokingly—and I didn't touch her nose—but I just jokingly did this, like "got your nose." She started screaming and yelling at me. I didn't understand what was going on. We were just having a really good time, and now, all of a sudden, she was yelling at me. I called my mom and said, "What is this lady's problem?" My mom explained that this actually means genitalia in Japan. I don't know if it's the female or male genitalia, but it's one of them, and I clearly offended that woman big time. I had no idea. Of course, she's telling all the employees how terrible I am that I'm doing this in her face. Now I learned about being careful of your gestures in other countries; they're different. That happened.

I didn't have a shower or bath in my room, so they would send me to a spa area within the hotel, but I noticed I was always by myself. There was no one else ever in there. They were sending all the other employees to a separate place, so I was always isolated. Not that I want to be showering and bathing with other people anyway. In Japan, that's very common when you go to the Japanese Onsen. I was comfortable doing that around other women. I was okay with it, I guess, especially when I was with my mom. But they kept me separated from the employees, and maybe they thought I wouldn't be comfortable or whatever. The water also was not heated or warm.

I just remember I ended up getting homesick. I was also kind of like a circus performer type of thing because my hair is pretty full and curly and much longer at the time, and people could tell I was not Japanese and I was not White. They could tell I was mixed. By that time, a lot of Japanese had seen a lot of White people. Initially, it's like, "Oh, my gosh, you have blue eyes; you have white skin; look at your hair." They would touch you. I'm sure you experienced this as a kid. Because you're so different from them. But I think by that time a lot of people had

been exposed to other foreigners from other countries. But being biracial was like, *Wow, that is really different*.

They would sit me at the front of the desk, outside at the front of the desk at the front of the hotel greeting people. They would have busses of Japanese coming in, and the Japanese would see me and clearly could tell that I was biracial, and so they would all want to take pictures with me. I was kind of like a circus—whatever—a side show. How long was I there, two months?

A little bit longer than that.

Two or three months? I was done. In Japan, they have the futons for beds. You're supposed to fold your futon up every morning and put it in a closet. I'm American so I thought, I don't have to do that. I don't use futons in America. I would leave my futon out and leave it there all night and all day when I was working at the hotel. Well, I know that when the other employees saw what I was doing with my futon, they're like, "What kind of girl is this? This is totally inappropriate." They would all talk about me. Again, that's a cultural difference thing. I guess while in Japan, you should do as the Japanese. While in Rome, do as the Romans do.

I did a lot of different jobs at the hotel. I cleaned rooms. I was a cleaning person. I would go into the restaurant and serve. I worked, like I said, at the front desk. I was the bellgirl and would deliver suitcases and stuff to rooms. I did a lot of different things. But after a few months, I couldn't handle it, and I went back to my mom.

I did tutor on the side, English, to a couple of students on the side, but obviously that wasn't good money. I realized if I didn't go back to college that that is what I would be doing the rest of my life, whether it was in Japan or the United States. I would be working in a video store or McDonald's. I ended up meeting friends who were English teachers and dating guys in the

military in Japan, and they were traveling all over the world. I remember a friend of mine, Jennifer, brought me back a thing from Egypt, like a genie bottle, and I thought that was so cool, and I was so jealous. I was like, that's what I want to do; I want to travel around the world; I'm not going to be able to do that working at a video store the rest of my life. That's when I realized that I needed to go back to college. I also did theater with other foreigners in Tokyo and played a blind boy/raped girl in the same play.

Speaking of school, with high school, remaining with my dad, I told myself, "I have to finish high school no matter what. I can't let anyone or anything prevent me from finishing high school." I don't want to talk too much about my siblings, but I went in a direction in my life because of what I saw my brother and my sister go through, and I didn't want to end up… Brian with his health conditions, and my sister with other issues. I was like, "I don't want to go those routes. I know I need to finish high school for my own life."

That's how I took it with college, too. I was like, "I need to go back to college." My mind was just set. "I cannot let anyone or anything get in my way of graduating." I came back to the United States to go to college.

After I was in Japan, my dad ended up getting a job with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). After he worked here with the Yucca Mountain Project, he actually ended up getting a job with the Bureau of Land Management as a geologist here in Las Vegas. Then he got a promotion with the BLM in Barstow, California, and moved to Barstow with the BLM.

When I came back, I ended up moving back in with my dad in Barstow. I went to the community college there in Barstow. By then, I knew where my head was. Then after Barstow, I moved back to Las Vegas. I moved into the dorms here at UNLV. I was an RA in the dorms. I

graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. I taught for two years at Hoggard Magnet Elementary School, I think from 1998 to 2000.

My acting bug was always in the back of my head, and I knew that I needed a backup. If you go into theater, acting, you need a backup, and so education was my backup. After two years of teaching, I was like, "I need to move to L.A. to try this acting thing out." I moved to L.A in I think 2000.

Obviously, Asians aren't highly represented in movies or TV, and I saw that. I tried. I worked as a background actor in various movies and TV shows. It was a lot of fun. I was teaching at the time, too, and I also started my master's degree while I was there in educational administration. I saw there was no way I was going to be a Julia Roberts or Susan Sarandon or Jodi Foster because I'm Asian. I knew there was a glass ceiling, and it was very difficult. What made me realize that was…There is a movie called *Monster House*, a movie. I think Steven Spielberg is involved somehow with that movie. It's an animation, and they use green screens. They were interviewing for people to play the three main characters, and I was cast as the heavyset boy in the movie. They selected me to be the green screen actor for him. I would have to work on the movie right when school was starting up again. I had to decide, am I going to work on this movie and quit my job as a teacher, or am I going to stay in education? I realized as an Asian, I will always be the background person. I'll be the fat kid in the movie where you can't even see my face. That's where I'm going to always be cast. I was like, "Clearly, acting is not for me."

I ended up finishing my master's degree at Mount St. Mary's College and I didn't take the job on the movie. I initially accepted it, and I told them, "Sorry." I ended up telling them no.

I knew education was… Acting was not for me. I ended up teaching in L.A. for six years. I finished my master's degree.

Brian's kidney that my father donated to him ended up failing in the 2000s, and that's when my mom came back to the United States, when Brian got sick again. My mom came back to help take care of Brian. My dad obviously is not a very good caretaker. My mom and Brian actually moved in with my dad so he could provide the house, and my mom took care of Brian. Brian ended up on dialysis for a couple of years. I ended up donating on March 9, 2005. We had our transplant at UCLA.

About a month after the transplant, I had returned back to school to teach, and I was hit on the freeway, and it totaled my car. I literally thought I was going to die; that's how serious it was. The other car hit me twice because I was spinning on the freeway; he was spinning, and then his car ended up hitting me again. Both times I was like, "There is no way I'm going to survive this. I'm going to die." While I was spinning that's what was going through my head. My car ended up stopping in the carpool lane facing the direction of oncoming traffic.

Obviously, I survived, but I was like, "This is a sign that I need to get out of L.A." It was so frustrating. It was so expensive. I kept getting parking tickets. Some of them were not even legitimate that I should never have received. I was like, "This is a sign I need to get out of L.A. Clearly, this acting thing is not working out."

I stayed to finish out the next year, and I think I had a mental breakdown between the transplant and the car accident. I was like, "Okay, something is off." I had told myself I wanted to travel the world years ago, and I wasn't doing that because I was so focused on school and work. I was like, "You know what? I'm taking time off." I pulled out all of my retirement money, and I went to Africa by myself. It was between Europe and Africa, and it was December.

At that time, I didn't want to go somewhere cold, which Europe was. I was like, "Okay, where is it warm now? Africa is warm, and that's where I'm going." That was always second on my list of where I wanted to visit. I had always told myself, after I had gone to the San Diego Zoo in my twenties—the San Diego Zoo where you can take the train and see the safari—in my head I told myself, "I want to go on a real safari in Africa one day." That's when I was like, "I'm going on a safari in Africa; that's what I'm doing, and while I'm there, by the way, I'm going to Egypt to see the pyramids, where my friend got that genie bottle." I went to Kenya, Tanzania, and Egypt.

Again, my dad was trying to scare me out of going. He just thought I was totally irresponsible; I pulled out all my retirement money, going to Africa by myself. He was really angry and upset and just thought I was nuts, which I was, and I didn't care. I was only gone for

two weeks. He just thought, “What is she doing?” I will tell you that is one of the best decisions I have ever made. It was a wonderful experience. I’m so glad I did it.

After that, I tried to get back into teaching both in L.A. and in Las Vegas, but they had the hiring freeze, so I couldn’t get back into a teaching job in either L.A. or Vegas. I ended up working part time jobs and collecting unemployment while couch surfing on my friend Jason’s couch who I was next door neighbors with in Tevas and he had moved to LA. I also lived with Jason’s ex-boyfriend. At that time, I think I moved back in with my dad for a brief period. Mom and Brian ended up buying a condo in North Las Vegas. They had moved out from dads. That was after the transplant that I had donated to Brian. It’s hard to remember all of this because so much happened.

I’m going on a tangent. I ended up staying with my dad in California, and my mom in Vegas until I finally got a job as a daycare teacher at a kindergarten.

CW: It’s okay. I don’t want to keep you guys too long, and so I was thinking we could do a second session.

SE: That sounds like a really good idea, because there are still several questions that we would love to ask you.

CW: Everything has been really great so far.

SE: This is amazing.

[End of first session]

[Second session July 19th, 2022]

Good afternoon. Today’s date is July 19th, 2022. This is part two of June Monroe and Kazuko Atomura’s interview. I’m Cecilia Winchell. I am here with Stefani Evans.

Just to jump right back in, our first question to you today is, how was the experience of the pandemic like for you, and did you experience any increase in anti-Asian discrimination, or have you experienced it throughout your life?

JUNE: I didn't really experience any hate crimes or any specific hate towards me specifically during the pandemic. I have faced—when we had talked during the first interview, when I was a kid and the neighborhood kids are in school being called names like "Chink" and "Chinese, Japanese, dirty knees, look at these," things like that, and people stretching their eyes out. I do recall, now that it refreshes my memory, as an educator—I take that back. Right after the pandemic, when the schools returned, I was monitoring the lunchroom. I'm not going to mention the name of the school. I was monitoring the lunchroom, and one of the students, when I passed by, started doing an Asian jingle, like *dee-nee-nee-nee-neh*, which is clearly directed towards me and clearly racist, did it right in front of me, towards me. I was not his regular teacher. I was just monitoring the cafeteria at the time. His teacher was Asian, and I confronted him, and I explained to him that what he was doing was inappropriate, and I explained that clearly he knows I am Asian; he could tell. His teacher walked in right at that time. I explained, "Your teacher is also Asian, and that's inappropriate." I had a talk with him. I think he was really embarrassed after that and realized that what he did was inappropriate.

I have had a few incidences like that even prior to the pandemic with students. I've had students, even as a teacher myself, stretching out their eyes. Even at the elementary level, these students are aware of differences. I have experienced that even as an educator with students. I would say even as an educator, being Asian, we're a minority as far as staff is concerned as well. People obviously will group together with certain people or make friends, and I would say as a minority, as an Asian, there are less Asians in education here in Las Vegas. I don't want to go

too much into it, but definitely I sense more of a struggle, and I do have some friends who are Asian in the school district who are educators as well. We clearly, typically would not talk about this openly, but amongst each other it is discussed a little bit. That's a little bit of the struggle with being Asian. Even amongst staff in schools we experienced discrimination. Even to this day.

I would say one of the main things is people trying to take advantage of an Asian female. I think people judging, looking at me or my mom, trying to take advantage because of the fact they see, "Oh, she's Asian; she's female; she's probably petite and probably quiet and won't speak up." An example of this, way before the pandemic, I was teaching at a school. Not Clark County School District, but I'm not going to say the name of the school. I was at a school, and I had been there for three or four years. The director had put my name in to be hired as the secondary director, which would be over middle school and high school, kind of like the principal or assistant principal. My director, my principal over the elementary, because this was a pre-K through twelve school, flat out told me, "June, they don't know you." They see me, and they have these stereotypes. She didn't say all of that, but it was pretty clear. They see, "Oh, she's Asian; she's female; she's not going to speak out; she's just going to be quiet and go with the flow." That's not who I am. I'm pretty outspoken especially if I don't think what's being done is right. I interviewed for it, and she told me more than once, "June, they don't know you." She was basically warning me. She knew it wouldn't work out, because they were wanting someone who would just sit there and be quiet and not say anything and be a doormat, and that's not who I am. She was right. It did not work out, and it wasn't a good fit.

I do face a lot of that, and I'll give you a perfect example. I just went to Honda last week to get a battery change. I've been driving since I was fifteen years old. They tried to charge me

three hundred sixty-nine dollars for a new battery. I about flipped my lid. I am sure part of it is because I am female that they think they can get away with stuff like that. I do face those things whether it's outright, and I do think that a lot of it is because of the fact that I am female and partly also because—I am Asian. But I do face stereotypes and racial profiling, and I've faced that throughout my life, and my mom as well. My mom especially, because she has a little bit of a language barrier and she's older. I know that people will try to take advantage of her. A lot of times, like here, she may not understand a lot, so I want to make sure that if she needs help or assistance that I'm there to help and support her. It's crazy the way people will treat you based on how you look.

When I went to Africa, I kind of did a social experiment. Clearly, I look Asian, but I am American. I went to Africa by myself. In the taxis, I noticed a difference from where I would say I was from. They would try to guess and say, "Oh, are you from Japan? Are you from China?" They have no clue because they can't tell, obviously. One place, if I said Canada, they were kind of neutral. A lot of the people in Egypt did not like Americans at that time. I noticed as soon as I said United States, the demeanor of the taxi driver changed completely towards me. If I said Japan…Their reaction to you is completely different based on where you're from. That was interesting.

I've been thinking about this the last couple of days. I wanted to throw in that when I was a student at UNLV, I remember walking on campus. I was actually coming towards the library or into the library. I remember passing some Asian students who were speaking in their native language; I don't know where they were from or what language, I just know it was an Asian language. I remember seeing them, and I thought, "I look like them; I should know another language, too." I was a little embarrassed and a little upset that I couldn't speak Japanese, my

mom's home language. I always remember that I wish I knew my mom's home language. I wanted to throw that in there because I've been thinking about that the past couple of days.

But nothing outright, like an anti-racism thing.

Mom, since the pandemic, you know how a lot of people have been against Asian people, like hitting and stuff like that or racist towards them? Did you experience any racism?

KAZUKO: I heard a couple of things. But myself, when I lived in Hawaii before coming to U.S., a friend of mine lived there, and I just stopped by at the airport. An old lady come right there. "Are you a war bride?" I wasn't even married at that time. I didn't say anything. She didn't say hi or anything. She just came up like that. [Looks up and down.]

SE: She looked you up and down?

Since COVID hit, has anyone been…?

I don't know.

Yes, during the pandemic, my mom was targeted. She was driving out of the Smith's parking lot and a car followed her and kept honking at her. She stopped and he told her she had a flat tire. She got out to check and he put his hands in the front seat and took her wallet and drove off. She didn't have a flat tire. She was an easy target.

CW: Jumping off of that going to your last point, how have you personally navigated your understanding of your AAPI identity especially considering how you may not have the cultural background that your mother has, and how strongly connected do you feel to it?

That's a great question, and I've actually been thinking about that since our first interview that I want to discuss that as well. Being biracial is a different experience. Growing up in a predominantly Caucasian neighborhood in Texas and knowing that I was a minority, my issue was… I remember looking at the TV and magazines and books, all White people. I didn't feel

like my identity was represented at all growing up, and I remember that. I always, as a child growing up, thought that White people were superior, especially in Texas. The blond hair, blue-eyed girls, they're… There is a difference. I remember I was on a swim team in high school, and this was in Texas. There was a girl, tall, blond hair, blue-eyed. We were at a competition against another school. Breaststroke is my strongest stroke. I grew up swimming. We were in a competition, and we were on the same team at Cy-Fair High School. We were racing in breaststroke, and I remember I was a little ahead of her in the race, and we were kind of head-to-head. I was a little ahead of her, and we were coming towards the finish. I was thinking to myself, "She deserves to win; I should not be winning." That was how bad my identity was as far as being Asian compared to Caucasians at the time. I told myself, "No, she needs to win." I intentionally slowed down to make sure that she could win the race. I'm not saying that I would have won the race, but I remember intentionally making sure that I did not win that race, because I felt that she should win it because she was White, blond hair, and blue eyes. That's how much it impacted me as a child.

I remember—you probably don't know this—when I would go to sleep at night—this is really weird—I would literally take my fingers, and I would hold my eyelids open to try to change the form of my eyes so they wouldn't be as slanted. The other thing is my mom's whole entire family was in Japan, so we didn't have support… My mom had friends who were Asian, Japanese, and mixed, biracial like me as well. Even my dad, his whole family was in Ohio. We didn't have a lot of family support, which to me makes a lot of difference.

What made a huge difference to me in my life was—when I grew up, I thought, Americans are just so cruel. White people are evil, mean. Basing off of my dad and my experiences. It wasn't until after my parents got divorced that Brian and I would visit my mom in

Japan in the summers, and then eventually I ended up moving there for a couple of years. That completely changed my perspective. In the U.S., I didn't see a lot of people who looked like me. But going to Japan, I was like, "Wow, all these people look like me. Everyone looks like me. Everyone has brown hair, brown eyes, or black hair." That is when it was really a powerful impact on me personally. That's where my respect for my background and my culture really grew, and I realized how important it was.

I couldn't speak the language. It was very difficult. I found out that even in Japan, everywhere you go, there's racism. I guess back in the day, if you're mixed, like me, biracial, that's looked down upon because you're not a pure blood, thinking of *Harry Potter*. Using that term, it fits perfectly because I wasn't a pure blood, and some of the older generations look down on that. Even with World War II, a lot of the Japanese don't like the Americans. It still exists here, too. All those remnants of the past, some of it still exists.

I had some incidences where people didn't realize I was American, and they thought I was Japanese. They would just come up to me and start talking to me. I'm like, "I don't know what you are saying." Normally, if you're a foreigner, people aren't really going to bother you in certain ways. I'm going to share this story. When I was on a train in Japan, I was by myself, and it was pretty sparse; there weren't a lot of people on the train. I was standing, and I remember a guy had a newspaper, and he stood fairly close to me. All of a sudden, I just felt something towards my breasts. I just felt like, "Oh, we're standing too close," and so I moved over to get a little bit out of the way. All of a sudden, I felt it again. He was feeling me up, basically. I explained to my mom later. I didn't know what was going on. I turned around to ask someone for directions, and I don't remember whether I was asking him or someone else. When I started

speaking English, the guy flipped out, got out of the car, and then went on to a different part of the train because he was completely shocked. I guess he thought I was Japanese.

I explained to my mom what had happened, and she explained to me that those men that do that on the train are called *Chican*. When they are a *Chican*, they're perverts, and they will do that on the train. When that happens to you, you're supposed to yell out *Chican* or *Ecchi*. What are you supposed to yell when they do that? You're supposed to yell pervert or whatever. Anyway, you're supposed to yell when they do that. Well, I didn't know he was feeling me up until after I talked to my mom about it. Some of these cultural things that were happening, that's not going to happen to a foreigner who doesn't look Japanese. I experienced that. He thought I was Japanese, but I wasn't.

That's a big problem in Japan because everybody uses the train to go to work. Even when I worked in a company, they are just pushing you on the train. But so much people take the train.

It's like sardines, packed like sardines.

Yes. A lot of guys just try to touch you or something. At that time in Japan, it was a men's world, so they didn't get much problems. But now you get in trouble if you do it. Now they are restricted, but it used to be… Nothing would happen.

Yes. Sorry, I know I went off on a tangent. I talked about as a child, but now I understand the importance of being Asian and wanting to help the Asian community. I see what my mom has struggled through, even with the language barrier. I joined the Clark County Asian American Pacific Islander Community Commission because I, personally, like I said, have experienced issues where I want to see the AAPI community represented more in TV, movies, education, leadership positions. Even in the police force and the fire department, I think if they were more

diverse, there would be less violence issues and less problems because the staff members could learn from each other, their colleagues.

I think I talked about the background of acting. I shared that already. AAPI needs to be represented more across the board, and so I'm an advocate. I'm proud to be Japanese now. I'm proud to be Asian. Whereas before, I didn't really understand or know who I was completely, my identity. After living in Japan—not only that, but traveling around the world, too, just experiencing different cultures—I feel like I need to speak for the AAPI community because the AAPI community, for the most part, is very quiet, and they're not going to speak out and speak up. I sometimes put my foot in my mouth and sometimes speak out too much, but I'm willing to go there. I feel like someone needs to speak for the AAPI community, and so that's probably why I got involved with the AAPI Commission. I hope that answers your question.

CW: Absolutely. It's just a prompt to get you talking about whatever you want to.

My next question is for Kazuko. Have you found a Japanese community here in Las Vegas?

Yes, JCC [Japanese Culture Club]. They have a couple more, but I don't know it. There are a lot of groups doing that. JCC has been here a really long time, over twenty years.

Atomura (center) in a yellow kimono

Atomura (back)

You were in the Odori Japanese Dancing Club. She stopped that, but she might get back into.

JCC is karaoke, right?

Yes. I'm going to quit, too, because I started losing my voice.

SE: What is the JCC?

Japanese Culture Club.

Is that the same group as the karaoke group, or is that different?

Yes, that's the biggest right now in Vegas, big in Vegas. But a couple more people made a group, but I don't know what the name is.

CW: Can you tell us what is Odori Dancing?

Japanese dance, typical Japanese.

Kimono, right?

I have a picture.

SE: Do you have kimono?

Yes.

And the geta, those shoes?

I only play for the girl. You wear the long kimono.

She's talking about the Japanese shoes.

The geta?

Not the geta. Geta is from everyday stuff, everyday shoes and summertime special. A long time ago, everybody wear geta that's made out of wood.

What is the zori for?

They are for kimono, made out of leather or some kind of vinyl if you were to get the cheap one, vinyl, but usually it's leather.

Isn't the zori make out of silk or kimono material?

Yes, some are, like a wedding or something special.

Who ties the obi?

Everyday stuff I can do by myself.

You tie your own obi?

Just an everyday one, but not the formal, more difficult ones.

Before I come to States, my family sent me to a kind of school on how to wear it yourself. I did a tea ceremony, and if you don't wear a kimono, you cannot go. I have to know how to wear a kimono. My family said, "You should know everything." Then I went to a kind of school. Some are an easy way to do it. But you do it in the front and then turn, and that's the easy way to do it. A lot of difficult stuff right now started, but I just do an old fashion.

Mom, if you have to wear a kimono with a difficult obi, does someone help you? Who helps you?

For myself, no, because I went to school.

Mom, when you did karaoke and you did the shows, did someone help you with the obi?

Those things I do by myself. But on a special for dancing, a different obi, you have to do it, that's the special stuff I cannot do it, so somebody helps, yes.

Tell us about the tea ceremony.

What can I tell you?

I want to know about the tea ceremony, if you can tell us how the tea ceremony works.

That's very difficult, because all the history and a lot of scripted stuff in there. If you're just a guest, you go over there, and whoever invites the people, she is going to have a place. We go over there, and she's going to serve tea, but very restricted; the mother is there.

What are some examples?

A lot of stuff I don't know. She makes stuff. I have everything in Texas, but you guys just threw it away after I left.

Some examples I know are when we go to Japanese restaurants, like the *ocha*, they usually fill it up to rim, and you're not supposed to do that; that's not the correct way to pour it.

But the tea ceremony is just a little bit in it. A big bowl like this, and then about this much in there. Use bamboo whisk to go like that [gestures stirring motion] to mix it up and powder tea. Then you mix it. She has a lot of manner to give to customer, and customer has a lot of manner to drink. It's very, very restricted manner that you have to know for tea. The girls, before marrying, you have to learn all flower arrangements, tea ceremony, and you wear the kimono.

Dressmaking.

Dressmaking, I went to the best school, so that's different. Every five years after war it changed stuff in Japan. I just talked yesterday to a friend, ninety-four years old, and we talked about it. I am eighty-three. Every five years it changed in Japan. I can't explain 100 percent. I went to

girls' school, and there were about thirty people in the one class. Only one girl went to college at that time. Not many girls go to college because men don't want it to start with, and the parents don't want it. If the woman has a lot of education, they don't want the woman to be strong. Only one went to college. I went to dressmaking for it.

Mom, for example, when you hold the teacup, is there a certain way you have to hold it?

Yes.

Can you explain that a little bit?

There is no bowl here. I cannot.

That's okay.

Just a turn. The bowl has a main side, so you cannot drink with the main, and so you have to turn. When you finish it, you just make a little sound, phh*, like that. Then you turn it around, and then you give it back. Even tatami has a material part.*

A tatami mat?

Yes. You cannot put on there. You have to over before. There are all kind of rules there. I cannot explain. It's a little hard. You have a chopstick. You serve a cake and whatever, how to eat. You have papers and hair always and kimono hair. You use the paper to put whatever, the sweet stuff. Cup is bamboo, made by bamboo in a cup like that. It's so many rules there, and so I cannot explain to you everything.

We're not asking for everything. She's just asking some.

For flower arranging and the tea ceremony and the kimono, are those the things that women are expected to know?

Not all of it, because after war, not everybody knows much unless they go to school. But probably half the people know. But tea ceremony is special, and not many people like to do it

because it's very silent and quiet, and you have to sit a long time. The language is really restricted, too. Flower arrangement, a lot of people did it. In high school, they teach you how to do a flower arrangement, some of the schools, some not.

The kimono, does everyone know how to wear a kimono?

I don't think everyone, no, no. A lot of people cannot do the obi to start with, and a lot of people don't have a kimono because moneywise.

When you moved to Texas, did you do a tea ceremony there?

I did it at San Francisco, California.

Have you done it since?

Since you were in San Francisco, after that, have you done a tea ceremony or participated?

That's very casual tea ceremony. I went a couple of times and that's it. A lot of people don't want to do it because you have to sit down.

How long is a tea ceremony?

If she invites me just to have a tea and to go home, it's not going to be… It depends on how many people, too. It's not going to be very long, a couple of hours probably. But if you want to do everything, like they have a picture in a special place, a flower arrangement with a picture there, if you go there, you have to bow about how wonderful who made this art and how it is very good, blah, blah, blah. You have to tell them. All of those together, it's a long time.

You're talking about a formal tea ceremony, right?

Yes, it's very formal.

Mom, she's asking specifically about a formal, real Japanese tea ceremony, how long would that take?

It depends on how many people because to walk to this place and explain; a tea ceremony house is very small, yes, and you cannot just walk in. There is all kinds of stuff, and it depends on how many people. I don't know how long. It was a pretty long time.

The tea ceremony house, where is that?

It's a lot of places. A very well-known place is Mito. I forgot the name. Some children made it a special place, but you cannot use that because it's a special place. Very high-class people can use it. That's very well known. But tea house is everybody. Teachers, they have it. It's a special place. A lot of rich people have it because you cannot have those. It's really different. It is gated to go in it. When you go to the mountain, a lot of trees that have a little more, and rocks. You can tell this is the place. There is all kind of stuff in there, and so it's pretty tough.

There are lots of objects that have meaning?

Yes. They experience everything, yes. Some people ask, too, "What is this?"

The conversation is a very important part of it.

Yes.

Thank you.

I do know a lot of people, when they're eating with chopsticks, they'll put their chopsticks just directly in the food where it's sticking up in the air. That's a big no-no.

Not the dead people. A person who dies, used to be, not right now, put the rice bowl and put the rice like that, and you put the chopstick like that. Some countryside people does that, but I don't think anymore. I don't know. I've never done it.

But that means dead person?

Buddha, he puts the Buddha first.

Kind of like the tombstone, the Buddhist, that's what it stands for.

Then they put the rice.

It's bad luck, and you're not supposed to do that. That means death, basically.

Yes.

To put the chopsticks vertical, to stand them up?

Yes. I see a lot of people, when you go to Japanese restaurants, people who don't know, they just stick their chopsticks in. But in Japan, that's inappropriate.

Isn't there a little thing that you lay the chopsticks on?

You lay the chopsticks on a pillow to rest.

Korean people use kind of metal chopstick?

CW: Yes, Koreans do, yes.

In Japan, we do that with just wood. What is it that Chinese people use?

I think they also use wood.

One thing I also noticed with the eating is that in the United States, slurping is disrespectful and rude. But I noticed, when we had gone to Japan, you had told me when you eat *udon* or ramen, when you *slurp, slurp*, when you slurp the noodles or the soup, it's a sign to the chef that, "Oh, this is really delicious; it tastes really good."

Right now, it's kind of… Because you don't make a sound. It used to be high-class people tried to eat very quiet, and other people tell you, "If you eat like that, you can't taste anything." It doesn't taste good, and not very good manners for the noodle. But now everybody is changing.

But I see a lot of men still doing that.

Oh, yes.

They'll slurp. When we went last to Japan, I was slurping my noodles. I was really loud. But I'll do that even in the U.S. sometimes when I go to a Japanese restaurant if I'm eating ramen or

udon, I'll slurp. People around me probably think I'm being rude and disrespectful, but it's actually the opposite.

SE: When we were talking about chopsticks, what shape are the Japanese chopsticks? Are they pointed on the bottom?

Yes, a little bit pointed and a little bit bigger on top. Now there are a lot of different designs. Anyway, every five years, Japan has changed; that's for sure. We're talking about it yesterday.

What are some of your favorite Japanese foods?

All sushi.

That's all she wants to eat every day.

What is your favorite sushi?

Hamachi.

Yellowtail, right?

Yes.

For New Year's, what is the red stinky stuff, the stinky beans that you eat for New Year's? You mixed up the paste, like brown beans.

Natto.

You like natto, right?

I like it. It's good for you.

Natto is for New Year's that you're supposed to eat.

Do you have a natto?

CW: I think so, yes.

It's good for you.

I don't care for it myself, but my mom likes it.

It's kind of like dog food, right?

Yes.

I remember the texture of that, yes.

SE: Is there a ceremony for eating natto?

No, just a morning food.

For New Year or anytime?

New Year's natto we won't eat, no. New Year's is in the box, all the stuff.

The obento?

Kind of obento, but it's fancy.

I thought you were supposed to eat natto for New Year's.

Natto is everyday stuff.

Okay, never mind, don't listen to me. But you're supposed to eat mochi.

Mochi is the stuff, yes, Japanese rice cake.

Is that New Year's Day or the night before, New Year's Eve?

New Year's Day. Night before is the noodle.

Night before, you eat soba noodles, New Year's Eve. Then you're not supposed to clean and do stuff.

The woman takes a break the day for the New Year's. That's why we make a big box of New Year's special dish. Mochi is the sweet rice. That's what we eat so that you don't have to stand up in the kitchen to cook it. For a woman, it's a break day.

Isn't it that they believe if you do dishes on New Year's Day, you're going to do it for the whole year? Or if you clean, or if you do laundry that day, they believe that you're going to do it the whole year?

Yes, but you have to wash it anyway.

Well, I know, but that's kind of like a superstition thing.

Yes. I don't have it.

SE: What traditions do you follow here in Las Vegas?

How I can say?

My brother passed away in 2014, and so my mom has the little Buddhist shrine in her bedroom.

It's not a Buddhist shrine. What is that?

It's Buddha.

What do you call it? What's the name of it?

Butsudan. It's a box. A lot of people make one, but I just bought from Japan a small one for my son. It's called Butsudan. Butsu means Buddha, and then I don't know the English. Butsudan. Maybe China has this, too, where they put the…? Okay. At that time, I bought a small one for my son. I made a Butsudan in Japan for my son and my family, and I go back there, too.

Some of Brian's ashes are in the Butsudan.

Ohaka, it's called, yes.

You have some of his ashes at home, right?

Yes, a little bit. You shouldn't do it because you're not supposed to spread the body.

You're supposed to keep the body together.

Yes. But I can't go back all the time. Every three years, I have tried to go back, but right now, it's COVID, so I can't go.

He is in the gravesite in Japan, but some of his ashes are in her bedroom in the little shrine, and then she'll put food and stuff like that on the little shrine in her bedroom for my brother.

Isn't JCC today?

JCC, yes.

Today after the interview, she is going over to her friend's house. They get together once a month, and they're having their JCC thing.

The woman is very strict. "Before you come, make sure you don't have COVID." I did it [tested] this morning. It's negative.

SE: And we're all masked, too.

What else does she do? She did do Odori dancing, but she hasn't done that in a while. She belongs to the Japanese karaoke group. They would primarily sing Japanese songs, but some

English songs, and they would actually perform at some of the casinos around town. They would have some of their shows in the casinos, and they would sell tickets.

Don't you guys have a recital coming up next week?

Yes.

Where is that?

Ohana Room at the California Hotel. I don't go now.

She used to dance and sing.

I'm going to quit because I can't hear, and if the group is all talking, I'm kind of lost.

I told her she can't quit. She needs to go out with her friends.

It's no fun because you can't hear.

SE: What other traditions do you follow here in Las Vegas?

Not really, no. Right now in Vegas, I'm not doing anything, but in Texas I went to school, and in Japan I had a personal art show because I liked to paint, but I did it a long time ago.

Do you have some of your paintings here?

Yes, about thirty-eight artworks I did in Japan. Some of it I did here because I went to Southern California College. I went at nighttime and took a class. In Texas, I went to some special class. That's my favorite thing to do.

She was a very good artist. She has a lot of her art in her apartment. She was a very, very good singer in her karaoke group, but she has stopped that because of the hearing; it's difficult. But she used to perform singing in the casinos at their Japanese recitals and the Odori dancing. I have a video of her singing, and then I have pictures of her dancing, too.

Yes, I sold my art, too, in Japan. The problem is, in some of Europe and the United States, the price is many, but this much; frame is the difference. I was going to make all the frames in

Japan, but expensive. Plus, I took some of the frames, and they won't fit because there is this much difference.

The size of the frame.

Yes, the size. I had a little problem for that, too. But anyway, yes, I enjoy the art.

We'd love to include some pictures of your art.

I'll get some pictures for you.

Award winning flower

A tiger in honor of Brian’s Eastern calendar zodiac sign

Great.

Yes, I have them in a bag, and I left it there.

What did you think of Las Vegas when you first got here?

My son had was on dialysis in Barstow at that time. On the weekend, I come here and look for the house. I don't have much chance. I don't know anything about Las Vegas, and I don't have a friend here. We just came here for them to take me to the place. Then my son liked the one place, a condominium, three bedroom, and pretty good size.

Yes, in North Las Vegas.

It had two patios, and he likes that. I bought that one. I don't know how long ago.

I looked this morning. The condo was built in 2004. I think she purchased it in 2004 or 2005. They moved in, I want to say, in either 2005 or 2006 into the condo.

You guys moved in after our transplant, right?

Yes.

They were still living with my dad in Barstow, California.

I bought it before, but I moved in…yes.

She bought it, but because Brian was still on dialysis, and they were still living with my dad, they would come back and forth to the condo, but they didn't officially move in until after the transplant.

Where did he have his dialysis?

Barstow.

Barstow, California. That's where my dad was living.

Where did he have the transplant?

UCLA.

Both times?

No. The first time when my dad donated in the '80s that was in Texas, and I don't know what hospital. I was a kid when that happened. Then our transplant was at UCLA.

How long were you hospitalized for that?

I think I only stayed one night. Yes, it was rough.

When he started having problems when he was a kid, in the morning he had a bucket of blood on the pillow, really, really about four or five cups of blood. I said, "There is something wrong." My ex-husband said, "No, all boys have a bloody nose."

Okay, mom, when you're saying "he," you're talking about Dad, right?

My dad was telling her, "No, that's normal because he's a boy."

Yes. "Nothing wrong." He says, "All the boys have a bloody nose problem."

Nosebleeds?

Yes. And he said, "Nothing to do with it." I said, "That's too much." Then I worried about it. The next morning, again same way. I just don't want to listen to him. I just took Brian to the hospital. Then the family doctor says, "He doesn't have much time. He needs surgery right away." I said, "Okay." They stay at the hospital.

That evening he comes home. "What did you do today?" I said, "I took him to the hospital." "Oh, what's wrong with him?" "He needs surgery." "What?" "Kidney." "You do it." That's his answer. He did it like that, "You do it."

I didn't say anything. I thought, "Okay, that's it." Then the next day, I went to the hospital with June and my oldest daughter, took the kids with me. By lunch, the nurse has checked everything for me. Then my ex-husband came over at lunchtime. "How are you guys doing?" The nurse says, "You're the father?" "Yeees." "Come over. He doesn't have any chance." He has to do it., and that's why he's a little bit stressed or something. That's what might have changed his personality. I don't know. But it happened at that time. It's just a big mess.

Then the second time, older daughter or her [June] to give the kidney. The older one had high blood pressure, and she was in Alaska, just struggling with a lot of things. I am so sorry because she [June] is too young to do it. Anyway, she did it for me.

I didn't do it for you. I did it because…

I know, I know.

How old were you, June?

I don't even remember. I was born in '72. The transplant was March 9th, 2005.

I don't know if this is the effect or not. California to Texas in the '70's, when he moved, he had the older daughter with him to drive from California to Texas, and he told me, "Take her to Texas." I've never been in Texas. I don't know anything about it. Then she was little, about three years or something like that.

I was four when we moved to Texas.

Then I have to change the airplane in Dallas or someplace—I can't remember—and I was nine months pregnant. Can you believe that? He told me, "Don't tell the airlines you're nine months because it's against the law," or something like that. "They won't let you fly." I obey everything, and I shouldn't do it. But now I know it. Anyway, I didn't tell.

But when I changed airplanes at the airport, she is walking around all over. There are a lot of people out there. I just sat there, and I can't move because it's so hard at nine months. Then I missed the one airline. I've never been to Texas, and he says, "My friend is waiting at the airport, so don't worry about it." But I missed it, and so he left home when I arrived. Then I don't know where to go. I only know the Navy base and the Hotel. That's all I know. I took a taxi, and I told him, "Take me to the base and the [hotel]." That's all I know. He said, "Okay." He took me there. At check-in, she is hungry, thirsty, and crying and screaming. I cannot even move. I can't even go to the bathroom. I'm crying. I don't know anybody, and I can't even pick up a phone. Two days later, they arrive. At that time, I am already in the hospital and had the boy, Brian. Three kids and he's never been with me for any birth. It's a big mess, to tell you the truth.

I don't know if I should ride with a car or what, but last minute, just fly in an airplane or in a car. He already made arrangements. He said, "I've got tickets for you to fly over there." That's all he told me. Something is wrong. He doesn't know a woman's life, I guess. I feel sorry for two or three days, hungry. It was a big mess.

It sounds very difficult.

June, tell us how you got involved with the Donor Network.

As a kid, when my dad donated to Brian, that's when obviously, organ tissue donation, I realized the importance of it. I knew as soon as I got my driver's license, I would automatically register to be an organ tissue donor. Right around when I was going to donate to Brian, that's when I started getting more involved, and I realized the importance. Just the fact that my dad had donated to Brian, I knew the importance of it. When Brian passed away, I wrote the obituary, but my dad wanted to add that in lieu of flowers for people to donate to the National Kidney Foundation. I didn't even think of that. Just the fact that my dad made that connection, I was like, "Oh." That really stuck with me, and I realized that it saves lives.

Obviously, there is a lot of turmoil in our family. But one thing I do regret is when Brian passed away—I remember I was talking to him when he was in the hospital. This is before he passed away. A nurse came in. She kind of interrupted us, and so we didn't really have that privacy. I didn't really get to say my final goodbyes, and I always regret that. This is a way to keep his memory alive, but also to save other people's lives, too. He passed away at Sunrise Hospital from heart failure and multi-organ failure.

I think a lot of people, if they're not involved directly with a situation like this, they don't really know, and it's important to get the word out because you never know when his kidneys first failed. Brian was ten. The doctors had no idea why his kidneys had failed. There is no

family history. They didn't know. You never know when this will impact someone. I just think it's really important work. It's being a part of a community, too. I've made a lot of friendships through volunteering, great experiences. Like I said, we're saving lives, and so I think it's really important.

But with the National Kidney Foundation, I got involved because of what my dad had put in the obituary for Brian. I was like, I need to get involved and somehow do something. I think also being a part of a community helps. You form your own little family when you join groups like that. With the National Kidney Foundation, we actually speak to legislators to try to get laws passed. I've connected with some of the legislators here in Las Vegas, and they have actually signed off on some of the bills that we're requesting support on. I just see the impact that we have. It's huge, and it makes a big difference, and there is a need for it.

We just had our meeting last night. We meet bimonthly, Region 9. The National Kidney Foundation does have regular meetings. I am vice chair of Region 9, and we have bimonthly meetings. Usually, we will go to Washington, D.C. to speak to legislators or their staff members to try to get laws passed and get their support. But because of the pandemic, we haven't been able to go the past couple of years, and so it's been virtual. The work that we're doing is really important.

At the end of the month, I'm going to participate in the Transplant Games of America that's happening in San Diego. That's been on hold, too, because of the pandemic. They hold it every two years. It's in person this year. It's a great community to belong. I started getting involved when I lived in California, when I lived in North Hollywood, and I started getting involved there with One Legacy, which is the local branch of Donate Life America. Here, it's Nevada Donor Network, which is the local branch of Donate Life America. I can't commit as

much time as I'd like to because, obviously, I have a full-time job, but I think it's important, and I like to be involved in supporting the community.

What are some examples of the legislation that you've helped pass?

One of them is called the Living Donor Protection Act. Basically, what is happening is some of the living donors are facing job discrimination and insurance discrimination. Let's say you want to donate to a family member or a friend, whoever; some people are having to quit their jobs because their jobs are saying, "Well, if you're not going to work…" Yes. They have to take time off to donate, or they could get fired because they have to take that time off to donate. If you're saving someone's life, you shouldn't have to make that decision: Do I need to keep my job, or am I going to save someone's life? That's ridiculous. That is what we have been working on.

The other thing is insurance discrimination. Some insurance companies are trying to claim it as a preexisting condition. That's one thing that they are trying to say that this would not count as a preexisting condition.

We've also asked for additional funding for research, federal funds. Right now, we're working on home dialysis. If someone would prefer to do their dialysis at home instead of going to a clinic, that's a no-brainer; that should be an option. I know I personally would want to do it within my own home instead of having to go to a clinic.

One was immuno-drugs. If I'm remembering correctly, it was after someone had a transplant, their medication would be paid for because once you have a transplant, you have to take antirejection medication every single day, and that's very expensive. That way your body doesn't reject the foreign organ in your body. Those meds were covered for the first three years after a transplant, but after that it was not covered. Part of the legislation was to have it covered

for the life of the transplant, or something similar. I can't remember all the details. Those are things that we've been working on.

SE: Why was it so important that you presented at the AAPI Commission for the Donor Network?

Since I've joined the Clark County AAPI Community Commission, I know we've had guest speakers at our meetings. I was just trying to think of what connections I have in the community that I could bring in and present to the AAPI Commission. This pamphlet that I gave you guys, there is a lack of minority registered organ tissue donors. My mom had mentioned, and I'm not Buddhist, and so I don't know what the religious beliefs are, but most major religions believe in organ tissue donation as a final act of kindness and a gift towards humanity, but there are all these myths and misconceptions out there. Some people believe, "Oh, the body shouldn't be separated; you have to keep the body together when you pass." I was even on Twitter one time, and I had posted something about organ tissue donation. Someone responded who claimed to be Jewish. I don't know if they were or not. They said, "Jewish people don't believe in that."

I actually have friends with the Nevada Donor Network who are Jewish, and one of my friends received a heart transplant. I reached out to them and said, "Hey, I'm kind of getting into a Twitter war with some of these people," and she gave me resources and things to share with this person to say, "Hey, you don't know what you're talking about because here are these resources."

I shut down the person because I had the backup. See, that was a perfect example that a lot of people don't even know what their own religion's rules and regulations, beliefs are. Like I said, there are a lot of myths out there. It's strange. People say, "Oh, I'm afraid they won't save

my life if I'm in a car accident." I'm like, "That doesn't even make sense." I just don't get some of the things that people say. It just doesn't really make sense.

I can understand the fear of it. Believe me, it was scary even to donate. To think about it, you're having an organ removed from your body. I've made so many friends, met so many people. I do not believe in pushing living donation. That is a very personal choice, and I do not think that anyone should ever give advice or push someone. If you had questions and wanted to do it, that's a different story. I've known someone who wanted to donate and had questions about it. Some people were all gung-ho, like, "Oh, you should absolutely be a living donor." I'm totally against that. That's a very personal decision because there are risks involved. It can impact your health, and a lot of people have had health issues since donating. That is a total personal decision.

Volunteering with Donate Life and Nevada Donor Network is about when someone passes, you're a registered organ tissue donor, and that's completely separate. I shouldn't say that is their specific mission or vision, but that's what their focus is on. I think it's really important. They go hand in hand with the National Kidney Foundation and Donate Life. I try to get them to collaborate more. I told NKF at the Transplant Games of America, "Set up a booth," because there are a lot of kidney patients at these events, and it's good to give them information.

I had a student last year. I don't know if she was or not, but she was saying that she was being picked on by other students because she only has one kidney. Her family were all pretty upset about the situation, and they were concerned about her health and whatnot. We ended up having a meeting with the principal, and I had already shared with her, "Guess what? I only have one kidney, too." She was completely shocked, and the family was completely shocked. Then I was able to provide her family with resources from the National Kidney Foundation. They were

very appreciative. They have information for children specifically. A friend of mine is an author who has written books about organ tissue donation for children.

Just meeting different people…I've had people who I have volunteered with that have passed away. We had someone who had a heart transplant. He lived many, many years, but he ended up passing. You just meet a second family, I guess.

I wish I could do more but, like I said, with work, it's kind of difficult. I do try to do what I can and support it in any way.

SE: Thank you. Can you tell us just a little bit more about the problem with having a lack of minority tissue donors? Tell us what that means.

Part of it might be a language barrier. I think part of it is also fear. We need more people to basically register as organ tissue donors. Reaching the community, I think that can be a challenge with language or, like I said, fear or not understanding completely.

When somebody is on the transplant list and they are of an ethnic minority, a racial minority, how much longer does it take for them to get an organ than it does for the dominant group, or does it?

I don't want to speak and provide misinformation, but it's my understanding if you're on the list, it doesn't matter what your…

As long as there is a match?

Right. A White person can donate to an Asian person or a Black person.

Does that impede the matches?

I think it can, but I'm not sure. I know that there have been matches that are from different races, and there are plenty of stories out there. It all depends on, like you said, the match, your blood.

They do a lot of tests. You do have to be a match, and so that will impact. But we do need more people to register.

Just more people in general?

Oh, absolutely. More information is in here and on the website as well that can give specific details and more information. The websites are: www.donatelife.net and www.kidney.org.

Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we haven't asked?

Going back to the minority list, percentages of people who are on the wait list and people who are registered organ tissue donors, I don't know all the specific data, but they do break it down based on ethnic group, and that information is available. I think it's important to look at that information to just have the accurate data. I don't want to provide wrong information, but I don't think we have enough registered. Kidney disease impacts minority populations more than Caucasian populations. I don't know if people are educated about that enough or know enough about that, and so that is one of the big things with the data. I don't know all the exact percentages, but I do know that minorities are impacted, for the most part, more than Caucasian.

Japan has a problem. You won't believe that after you die, you try donation, but the family is against it in the first place. They don't want to cut the body. That's the problem, too. Everybody started getting little by little, but it's still pretty hard in Japan. How is it in China?

CW: I'm not sure about China.

I would say—and I shouldn't say a lot because I don't know. That is how some people believe. They don't want the body to be messed with, and so they want to keep it intact.

There, it is really hard. Even I made a graveyard, and my nephew's mother passed away. I told him to put them together because it's expensive for the graveyard to make a stone and place.

Every certain time, you have to pay for the cleaning. I say, "Just go ahead and bury her there because eight people can get in there." They put it in a pot for the ground.

Anyway, very expensive to have a graveyard in Japan. It depends. They have a class. But when you do it someplace, it's expensive. I told him to go ahead and use it. My sister-in-law is against it. Once a woman like me is married to somebody, you cannot go back to the family graveyard. Stuff like that.

It's the ashes, like eight different people's ashes can fit into that one shrine.

Yes, my son and two other persons. I told her [June], but she said that she doesn't know yet.

I didn't say I don't know. I said I didn't want to, because I'm donating my body to science and education, and I'm a registered tissue donor.

Anyway, it's a lot of different stuff over there.

Those are the different traditions, cultural differences in Japan. If you're married to that family, you can't go to that gravesite.

Some of the people are okay, but some of them are, "No," very strict, like that. It's really hard in Japan.

Their roles and customs are sometimes just too much. I couldn't live there, not again anyway permanently.

CW: Thank you.

SE: Thank you so much, both of you.

[End of second session]

APPENDIX

Atomura's art show where she displayed many of her paintings

After donating a kidney, Monroe created a bucket list of things she wanted to do

A group of living donors (410) setting the world record for the most living donors in one location. Although the photo says 438, 410 were officially counted since some people forgot their documentation

Atomura and Monroe visiting Japan

Monroe competing in swimming during the 2018 Transplant Games of America in Salt Lake City, Utah

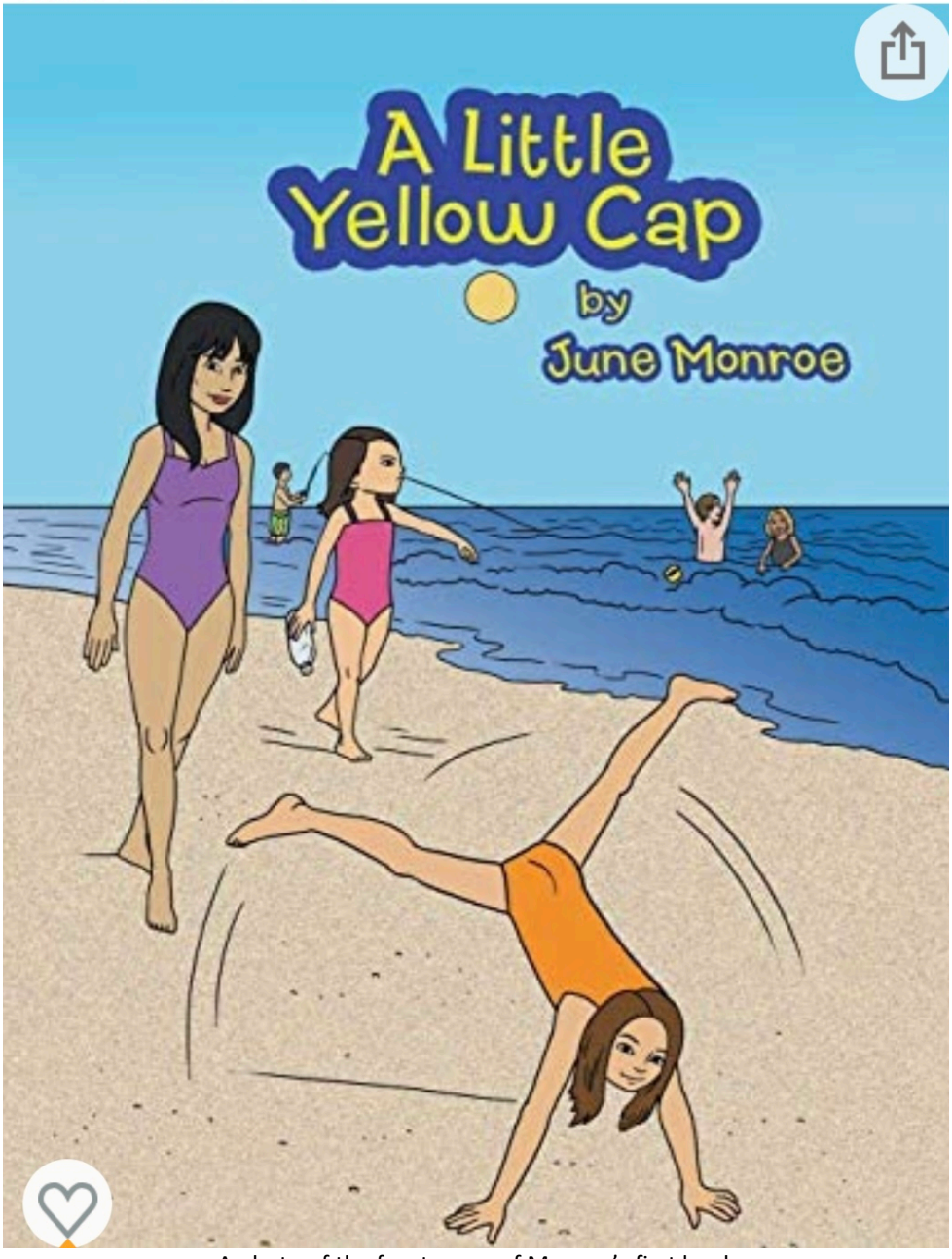
Monroe with a total of four gold and two silver medals from competing in the 2022 Transplant Games of America in San Diego, California


Dinorah Arambula

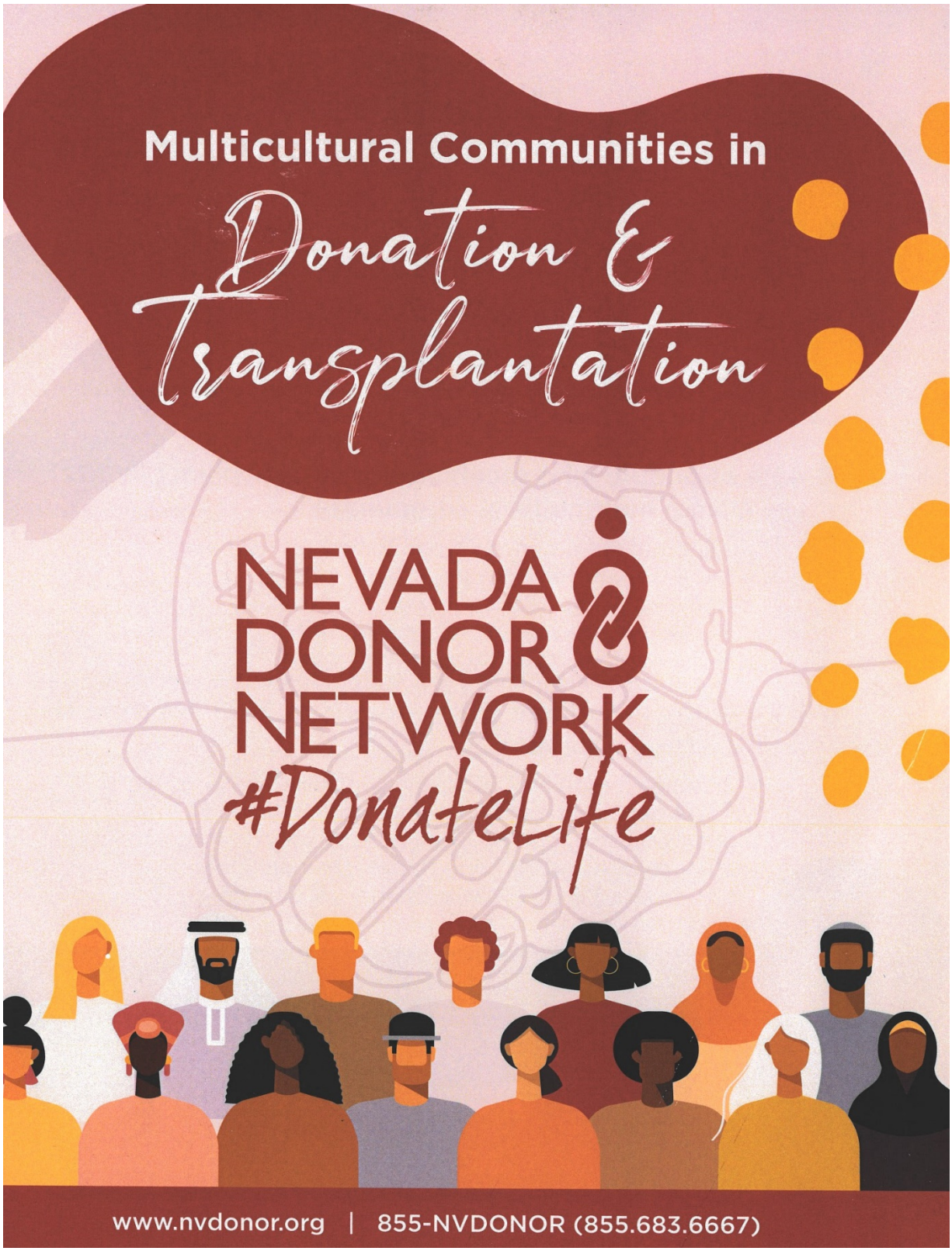
June Monroe

A Little Yellow Cap

★★★★½ (4)



A photo of the front cover of Monroe's first book



Nevada Donor Network, "Multicultural Communities in Donation & Transplantation" (Las Vegas, Nev.: [ca. 2021–2022])

Did You Know?

60% of people currently on the U.S. transplant waiting list are from a multicultural community

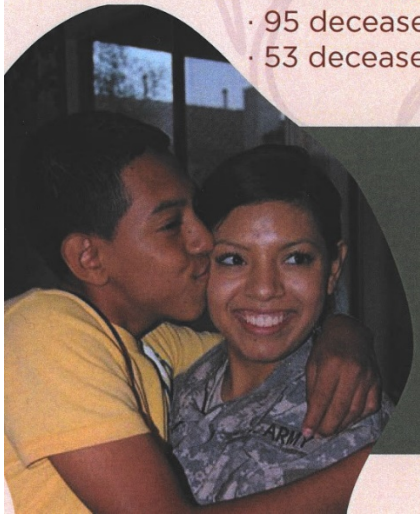
- More than 30,000 of those waiting are African American
- More than 22,000 of those waiting are Hispanic
- Over 10,000 of those waiting are Asian/Pacific Islander
- More than 900 of those waiting are Native American
- Almost 900 of those waiting are Multiracial

48% of people who received organ transplants in 2021 are from a multicultural community

- 9,252 African American organ transplant recipients
- 7,498 Hispanic organ transplant recipients
- 2,621 Asian/Pacific Islander organ transplant recipients
- 323 Native American organ transplant recipients
- 301 Multiracial organ transplant recipients

34% of deceased and living donors in 2021 are from a multicultural community

- 2,098 deceased and 483 living African American donors
- 2,084 deceased and 1025 living Hispanic donors
- 384 deceased and 280 living Asian/Pacific Islander donors
- 95 deceased and 22 living Native American donors
- 53 deceased and 100 living Multiracial donors



Angel & Jackie Velasquez
Donor Hero Siblings

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can be a donor?
People of all ages and medical histories should consider themselves potential deceased donors. Your medical condition at the time of death will determine what organs and tissue can be donated. Living donors should be in good overall physical and mental health and older than 18 years of age. Some medical conditions could prevent an individual from being a living donor. Transplant programs complete a full patient evaluation to protect both living donor and recipient health and safety.

If a doctor knows I'm a registered organ donor, will they work as hard to save me?
Your life always comes first. If you are sick or injured and taken to a hospital, the doctors' and nurses' priority is always to save your life. Donation is always considered after death has been declared.

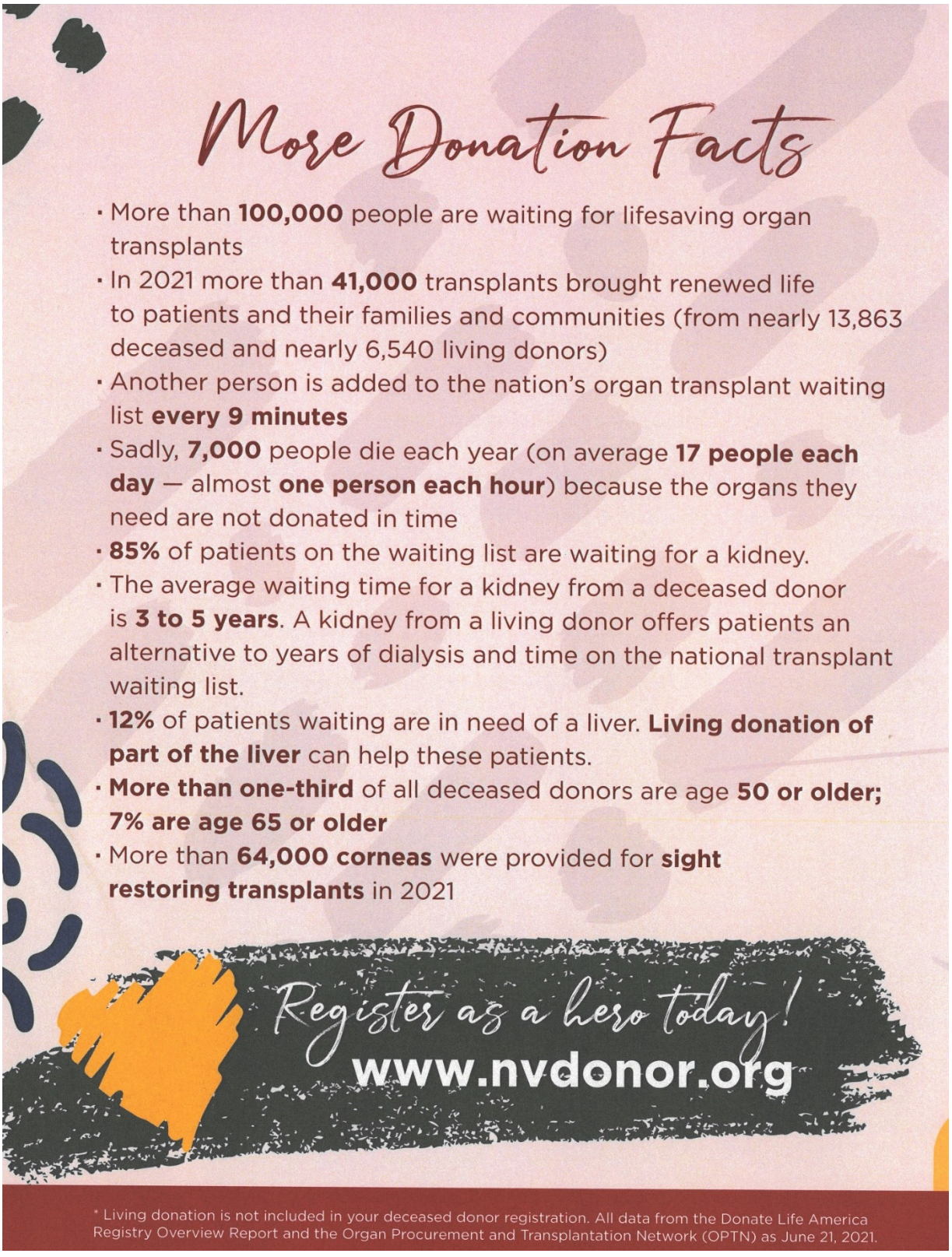
Does my religion support organ, eye and tissue donation?
All major religions support donation as a final act of compassion and generosity.

Is there a cost to be an organ, eye and tissue donor?
There is no cost to the donor's family or estate for donation. The donor family pays only for medical expenses before death and costs associated with funeral arrangements.

Does my social and/or financial status play any part in whether I will receive an organ if I ever need one?
A national system matches available organs from the donor with people on the waiting list based on many factors, including blood type, body size, how sick they are, distance from donor hospital and time on the list. Race, income, gender, celebrity, and social status are never considered.

Why should I register my decision to be a donor?
The vast majority of Americans support donation as an opportunity to give life and health to others. Unfortunately, many people overlook the important step of registering as a donor. Donors are often people who die suddenly and unexpectedly. Their families are then faced with making the decision at a time of shock and grief. Registering relieves your family of this burden.

Why is it important for people of every community to donate?
According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), transplants can be successful regardless of the race or ethnicity of the donor and recipient. The chance of longer-term survival may be greater if the donor and recipient are closely matched in terms of their shared genetic background.


More Donation Facts
• More than **100,000** people are waiting for lifesaving organ transplants
• In 2021 more than **41,000** transplants brought renewed life to patients and their families and communities (from nearly 13,863 deceased and nearly 6,540 living donors)
• Another person is added to the nation's organ transplant waiting list **every 9 minutes**
• Sadly, **7,000** people die each year (on average **17 people each day** — almost **one person each hour**) because the organs they need are not donated in time
• **85%** of patients on the waiting list are waiting for a kidney.
• The average waiting time for a kidney from a deceased donor is **3 to 5 years**. A kidney from a living donor offers patients an alternative to years of dialysis and time on the national transplant waiting list.
• **12%** of patients waiting are in need of a liver. **Living donation of part of the liver** can help these patients.
• **More than one-third** of all deceased donors are age **50 or older; 7% are age 65 or older**
• More than **64,000 corneas** were provided for **sight restoring transplants** in 2021
Register as a hero today!
www.nvdonor.org
* Living donation is not included in your deceased donor registration. All data from the Donate Life America Registry Overview Report and the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) as June 21, 2021.