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PATRICIA ENG INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
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Patricia Eng
Founder of the New York Asian Women's Center
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START TC: 00:00:00

Patricia Eng
Founder of the New York Asian Women's Center

INTERVIEWER:

So tell me about your family when you were growing up. How many siblings did you have? How did your parents get to New York of all places?

00:00:25

PATRICIA ENG:

Well, I grew up in a family of—My parents are Chinese immigrants and I grew up in a family of five girls. I was the youngest of five and I was my parents' last hope for a son that they really wanted. I think that that's true for many immigrant families. But that has for me... we grew up on the Lower East Side back at a time when there was really no Chinatown. So we grew up on a block that was all Italian immigrants.

INTERVIEWER:

This is Little Italy?

00:01:06

PATRICIA ENG:

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This is Little Italy. I remember very vividly, you know, being called names, Ching Chong, and that my parents would suffer a lot of name calling. They worked hard and persevered in a landscape that I think was really difficult. And for me growing up, again, having that responsibility of being the last hope for my parents to have a son, I grew up really thinking that... trying to prove myself. I think I grew up trying to prove my worth in the world as a girl, as a woman, and as now a person of color in-

INTERVIEWER:

When did it you that this was an issue?

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Patricia Eng

5th Grade, 1970

INTERVIEWER:

When did you realize that you were supposed to be a son, or they had hoped that you would be a boy?

00:02:08

PATRICIA ENG:

My earliest memory is of my parents telling me that they wanted a boy and that they had considered, it was a joke but I was young and I didn't understand jokes, that they wanted to trade me for a son with another family on the block that just had a boy. And so they talked about trading us so that they would have a son.

INTERVIEWER:

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How old were you when you were-

00:02:43

PATRICIA ENG:

I was... I think about four years old. And also I was very dark skinned for a Chinese family and so they would always joke that somehow I didn't belong or that I was somebody else's child. So that stayed with me for a long time. And I think for me, I was very color conscious as well as gender conscious. And when I went to high school, I went to an elite high school and for the first time really engaged with and went to school with people not from the neighborhood who were quite wealthy. And so for the first time, I was very conscious too that I came from a working class family.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's backtrack again. Just take me back to when you heard this news. You're four years old, your parents are... maybe they're chuckling, maybe they're not, but you hear that you were supposed to be a boy and you're not and they were disappointed. Did you sense the disappointment? Did you-

00:03:54

PATRICIA ENG:

No, my parents certainly were very loving, but because they worked so hard and because it was something that kept coming up, I think that it was a sense of that I had to prove, you know, that I could be of value to them. Again, they were a really loving family, so it wasn't that... I think there was so much pressure to prove myself and so much pressure to do good in the world and to make it in the world. And so I was always wanting to please them, I think, and I still am.

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INTERVIEWER:

So what did you do to prove yourself at such a young age?

00:04:49

PATRICIA ENG:

Worked hard in school, got straight A's and honor rolls. I still have the honor roll papers from elementary school and I think my parents, as with I think many immigrant families, education was highly, highly valued. And so my way of proving myself was to do the best that I can in school. So that's what it—And over the years, it's really morphed into different things. I still feel like I am proving myself in doing the best that I can in everything that I do, that it's never good enough. But that— what I want to do—So my image of success back then, my family said, "Be successful." And I didn't know what being successful meant. And so all it meant to me at the time was, "Oh, that means I'll have— I want to have a big office somewhere and make a lot of money." I mean, that's sort of what immigrants typically say. But over the years, you know, I've realized that my real calling, I guess, is to create change in the world where young people, children, women and men don't have to face the kinds of hurt I think that I've faced in my life through the years.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you also feel as a little girl that you had to be tough, that you had to deal with kids on the block?

00:06:41

PATRICIA ENG:

As a Lower East Sider, I certainly had a street streak in me. I certainly had to be street wise. I took the subway to school and remembered that sitting on the subway once, it was early in the morning and I was not dozing off but just

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daydreaming, and realized that there was this guy next to me standing up in a train that was practically empty, and then realized that, "Wait a minute, there's something that I feel in my ear." And he was masturbating in my ear and I didn't even realize. And so I got up and I said, "What the hell are you doing?" And it shocked him. I think that actually, other people in the subway— there were one or two other people on the train that saw this and didn't know quite exactly what was going on and were frozen. And I think after this, they cheered me for that. But I think it was a way of surviving in the city and I think growing up in the Lower East side really taught me that I have to fend for myself and that I have... yeah, I have to protect myself.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you do that though, say, on your block or in your neighborhood?
What was your response to-

00:08:24

PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah, well, you know, I grew up being called Ching Chong, slant eyes. And because we were all girls, people felt like they could pick on us. And so my sisters and I had to... literally sometimes got into fist fights around the name calling to be sure that people knew that they couldn't pick on us. It was a survival technique that I think has stayed with me through my entire life.

INTERVIEWER:

Has it?

PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah.

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INTERVIEWER:

Are you a brawler?

PATRICIA ENG:

Sometimes.

INTERVIEWER:

You look so dainty.

PATRICIA ENG:

No, dainty women are actually really, really strong.

INTERVIEWER:

Patricia's not an especially Chinese name.

00:09:15

PATRICIA ENG:

No. Well because I was the fifth daughter and my parents were running out of names, because again they wanted to have a son, and so they ran out of names, they didn't know what to name me. And so I have the privilege of being named by somebody else who, I don't remember exactly who he was, but somebody who I think a friend of my parents said, "Well why don't you name her Patricia because today is St. Patrick's Day?" So I say that I am Irish Italian Chinese, and that's how I got my name, so then you'll always remember my birthday.

INTERVIEWER:

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That's easy. So do you think that this period of your life had an impact? Do you see that time of your life as a defining event in terms of your response to gender and equality or your sense of it rather?

00:10:26

PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah, I mean, these earliest memories formed the core for me of what is sort of the— the fire and passion of the sense of injustice, I think. You know, realizing that girls somehow were less than, realizing that as a person of color or as a Chinese immigrant, I was less than, or realizing that because my parents weren't educated and didn't have a lot of money, that we were less than.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Patricia Eng's High School Graduation

PATRICIA ENG:

And I think I've always been trying to fight against this sense of being less than and proving myself and realizing that I think going through life and hearing the stories of so many people who have gone through all sorts of situations of fighting against racism, fighting against gender discrimination or sexism, I've really always felt like there was never one place that was home for me.

00:11:40

PATRICIA ENG:

Either we, you know, in high school, we'd talk about sexism because this was an all girls school that was turning into coed, fighting against racism because in college, working with and engaging with men who talked about the racism

that they faced in their lives, yet really not recognizing how sexist they were. And I think for me it was always that I had to divide myself into pieces, that either I was having to have an identity of being Chinese American that didn't have a gender piece to that, or having to think about and talk about issues of gender and being a woman and what that is, but not realizing that my experiences as a person of color and as a woman of color are very different from friends that I was growing up with in high school who came from very privileged backgrounds.

00:12:50

PATRICIA ENG:

That those issues were really different. And so it was always trying to find a real home for me that I could bring my whole self to the table and feel whole. So this has really, for me, shaped my life to really find that place where I can bring my whole self to the table and where I could feel totally human. And I feel like I'm still finding that place, but I've found so many people along the way that have helped me on this journey that are exploring the same issues and looking for that same home.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about Hunter. Tell me about high school. Where did you go to high school and how did you get there and was that a leap from where you were coming from?

00:13:42

PATRICIA ENG:

I feel really fortunate in my life that other people have helped me along the way in ways that I didn't even realize that I needed help or that it would change my life in so many different ways. I went to the local public school and

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because I did well in school, I was selected to take the test to go to Hunter College High School. And back then, I didn't know what it was, so I took the test and I passed. And so I got into Hunter and certainly realized that it was a special— it was a specialized school, but I didn't know that it was a track or a fast track to a different world. So I had a lot of—

INTERVIEWER:

Was it a different world in itself for you?

00:14:38

PATRICIA ENG:

At Hunter, it really was a different world. It was the first time that I interacted with people from different backgrounds. It was the first time that I interacted with people who came from wealthy families and it showed in the clothes that they wore, it showed in the kinds of things that they would talk about, and it showed in how they... the kinds of relationships that they had with their parents and the kinds of... certainly the kinds of occupations that their parents had and the life track, I think, that-

INTERVIEWER:

What kinds of relationships did they have with their parents that was different from yours?

00:15:39

PATRICIA ENG:

I think their parents were engaged in their lives in a way that my parents couldn't be engaged in mine. And certainly I think, you know, through my life, my parents would go to open school night because that was very important, but they never came to open school night when I went to Hunter because I

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think that they also felt out of place there. I think that when I saw my friends with their parents, their parents would talk with them about their own career paths and the kinds of work that they did and they said, "Oh, come to work with me and do..." you know, I don't know.

00:16:36

PATRICIA ENG:

One of my friends' fathers was involved in building the Citicorp building, so she would get to go onto the work site in a way that was really unique. And for me going to work with my parents was I worked with my parents every single day in the laundromat. They were also caretakers of a building and so I worked with them all the time in sweeping the floors. And it was certainly qualitative difference in terms of the kind of work that our families engaged in.

INTERVIEWER:

Your parents, they worked together. Tell me about how they got together-

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Patricia Eng With Her Parents
High School Graduation

INTERVIEWER:

-and how they came to put together their own business. You mentioned the laundromat.

00:17:24

PATRICIA ENG:

Right. This is probably not common knowledge, but the Chinese as a group were the first to be excluded from immigrating to the United States. There was a Chinese Exclusion Law, I think it was 18— I want to say something like 1865, but I'm not sure of the exact date, and it specifically excluded Chinese as a race from coming to the US. And the only people who could come were workers working on building the railroads. I mean those were really the first Chinese immigrants to come to the US, but families were not allowed to come because there was fear that we would mass populate, I guess, and dramatically change the face of the country. I don't know. And so for more than a century, for actually a century, Chinese families were few and far between, and especially here on the East Coast.

00:18:33

PATRICIA ENG:

So, you know, I think that somehow people managed through. My father was given papers to come to the US. He came when he was 14, but his papers said that he was 18 and the reason why was because he was too young to come on his own. Even at that time, I think they didn't allow somebody under 18 to travel alone. So he traveled by boat to New York and it took I think several months to get here. He worked hard at different kinds of jobs. And somewhere along the way he... there were papers I think, you know, that he corresponded with. It was an arranged marriage of sorts that his mother or his family back in China had arranged for him to marry my mother, whom of course he'd never seen.

00:19:47

PATRICIA ENG:

So they corresponded, I think, over the course of a year and he returned, I think, to get married and then came back to the US and she stayed in China

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with his family. And by the time she was able to come over, I think it was 19— I want to say 1950 or it might have been a little bit before that, and that's how they got together. It was an arranged marriage, which was very typical at that time.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they expect that from you? Did they expect to arrange a marriage for you?

00:20:32

PATRICIA ENG:

No, no, no. My mother had a very difficult journey, I think, to stay with my father. I mean, I think because tradition was that she would stay with his family and essentially become... essentially become a servant to his family. It was very difficult for her to live in those conditions. And so there was a [inaudible 00:21:03] streak I think in my mom, and I am only recognizing that now as I'm speaking to you because I think that she certainly didn't want for her daughters the life that she suffered when she got married.

INTERVIEWER:

And when she came here, did you get a sense of some sort of imbalance in power in their relationship? How did you perceive it at the time?

00:21:31

PATRICIA ENG:

No, I think because they both were working in the laundry, there was a sense certainly of being equal in terms of carrying workloads. But certainly, they had specific roles where my father took on the heavy machinery, if you will. And of course, my mother took on the role of house maker and would do all of the cooking and cleaning. But I think that she also worked really hard to

become a citizen of the US. I remember so vividly that she would memorize all of the presidents of the United States. And to this day, I know all of the names of the presidents. I don't know the order, but I know all the names of the presidents because she would recite them.

00:22:36

PATRICIA ENG:

I would remember that my mother would sing a song in Chinese that sticks with me, but I never understood the words and I don't know the words to that, but I remember that she worked so hard to be accepted. And for her, I think the greatest achievement that she felt is becoming a US citizen. And I felt like it was also so ironic because it was also a country that I think she struggled so much in. But like most immigrants, it was so important to come to the US to create a better life. So that was something that I really honor in my own life and really trying to honor my parents, you know, in certainly allowing me to have what has been a tremendous life and opportunity and life path.

00:23:41

PATRICIA ENG:

And for me, what I take from them is this whole work ethic of hard work and determination despite whatever you might face in your life and to create a better life. And for them, creating a better life meant earning money, and that was something that I think I struggled with them in my early adult life to prove to them, you know, that the path that I was taking, because I went to social work school after Princeton.

INTERVIEWER:

What were their expectations?

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PATRICIA ENG:

Their expectations were that I would be successful in terms of— I think successful to them always meant that I would have a good life. Good life meant to them having good income and, yes, getting married.

INTERVIEWER:

And what were your expectations for yourself?

PATRICIA ENG:

My expectations for myself were...are to create change in the world really.

INTERVIEWER:

When did you know that?

00:25:08

PATRICIA ENG:

In college, I think I was able to reconcile, again coming from the Lower East side and then going to a place like Princeton, which is a very elite, not just a very elite... Well, it's a very elite institution, a very elite environment, and finding some enclave with others who came from the Chinatown community, New York Chinatown community. I think I was finally putting words and an analysis, I think, to the deep seated feelings that I was having and experiences that I had growing up of being somehow less than. And it was at Princeton that I realized that I really— to reconcile the injustice in the world was to create a life path that meant I had to create change and to create the world that I wanted to see.

00:26:16

PATRICIA ENG:

After college, I decided to go straight in to get a master's degree. Social work was a way to work directly with people in the community. And that's certainly what I wanted to do. And it was only two years. So I decided to go straight into social work school because I knew that if I didn't go to school right after, I wouldn't return. I was on a roll, I guess, for school. And I knew that I wanted to work on issues facing women in the Asian community. But at the time the social work school didn't have any field placements that were specifically in the Asian community, and specifically addressing women's issues. There was no such thing.

00:27:23

PATRICIA ENG:

So I had to create my own field placement by finding a supervisor who was a social worker to be my field placement supervisor. And I somehow connected up with a woman by the name of Susan Schechter, who I did not realize at the time was really a pioneer on... in the area of domestic violence. So when I met with her, because I was really just essentially looking for somebody who would just be my field placement supervisor and that I would go and do my own thing. And she said to me, "Well, my specialty is domestic violence. And so if that's not an issue that you are working on, then it's not something that I can help you with."

00:28:15

PATRICIA ENG:

And I said, "Oh sure. I know that domestic violence, from personal experience, is an issue for women in the community. But I think that there are many issues that are facing women in the Asian community. And I'd like to really try to explore all of that." And so that's how I started down this path of

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really exploring and understanding what the issues were for women in the community.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you realize how big or how entrenched or how difficult it would be?

00:28:57

PATRICIA ENG:

No. And so I began this real learning for myself about... certainly domestic violence, but around the roots of violence. And at the core of the roots of domestic violence and violence against women is what we consider to be traditional roles of women. And I learned so much. That women didn't even have the words for... Back then, the words "domestic violence" didn't even exist. And so when my sister was abused, that's all we could say. The words "domestic violence" were just becoming part of our lexicon, I think.

00:29:54

PATRICIA ENG:

But I learned so much, you know, that at the root, at the heart of violence lies all of the issues that I've struggled with in my life, around issues of sexism. And certainly for immigrant women, issues of race here in this country. And so I became, I think, really so committed to... And domestic violence being the ultimate expression of, that men felt entitled and feel entitled to abuse women. And it goes to the very core of, again, those issues that I've been struggling with all my life around women being "less than." And I learned too that by addressing issues of domestic violence, it really touches on all aspects of a woman's life.

00:31:06

PATRICIA ENG:

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So women cannot leave a violent relationship if they don't have a way to support themselves, or if they don't have a job that pays well enough to support themselves and their children. Women can't leave if they don't have a place to stay or if no one will rent to them. Women can't leave if their family... if- if family is so deeply rooted for them that it becomes a shame on their family. And I think that that is what for many immigrant women is at the heart of why they don't leave. It is, often times... I think there's a difference between an American culture versus a traditional Asian culture, where there's an emphasis on you as an individual.

00:32:14

PATRICIA ENG:

And in traditional Asian culture, the emphasis is on family and community. That you are just not yourself, you are part of a community. And that your responsibility is to the community. And I find that that is at the core of, for a lot of immigrant women, beyond also certainly everything that I said before around housing, childcare, and all of the financial considerations. But beyond there, you know, the strong cultural consideration is such a barrier in the lives of immigrant women, that I think have kept women and continue to keep women from reaching out.

INTERVIEWER:

You started this as a graduate student-

PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Project. And at some point you made a decision that this is what you were going to do. Was there something that happened? Was there a particular-

00:33:20

PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah. I had no idea at the time of the student project, that it was going to turn into a major institution and anchor for women's issues in the Asian community. I really had no idea. It was for me just an exploration of my own, of what it was that was important in my life. And I knew that would be important for the lives of other women. And through this experience of helping to create the Asian Women's Center, and this journey of really learning about these issues ourselves, it was amazing that it was a Mecca for hundreds now, I would say probably even a thousand women, who have found a place to finally talk about the experiences in their lives and in the lives of the women around them.

00:34:32

PATRICIA ENG:

In a way, then again, really having a voice and an identity. And to say that our experiences of being women are not our individual experiences, but it's really a patterned theme that is in the lives of all women. And that is again this theme of being less than.

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Opening of The New York Asian Women's Center

PATRICIA ENG:

So somehow hundreds of women found their way to the center, to really talk about this theme in their lives. And to find a way to help other women,

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empower other women. And to really create a collective response that says, "This has got to change."

INTERVIEWER:

When you were first starting to do this work, what were the initial challenges? How do you break through those barriers of the privacy issue? The, "We don't talk about family stuff." Maybe even seen as a...

PATRICIA ENG:

Betrayal.

INTERVIEWER:

Traitor.

00:35:40

PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, when we first started, there were all sorts of issues that we had to address, both within the community and external to the community. When we talked with anybody outside of the Asian community, they said, "Really? This is a problem in the Asian community? Are you serious? We've never heard that before. Asian families are such a model for everyone else. There's such family harmony, there's intergenerational harmony," and that sort of thing. And so people were always shocked to hear that it was a problem. They'd say, "Well, it couldn't be that much of a problem." Within the Asian community, we would get pushback from people who said, "Why are you airing dirty laundry? This is really not a significant issue. You're making a big deal out of something. You're breaking up families."

00:36:35

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PATRICIA ENG:

We experienced all of... We've heard it all, both inside and out. And when we asked the women of... We decided that it was enough, that we heard... It was enough of a theme that we heard constantly from women, that we wanted to start a hotline. So we started a hotline, couple of hours a week. It was a locked file cabinet in some nonprofit organization. It was confidential. And we decided to open up this hotline and publicize it out in the Asian community. And people said, "No one's going to call you." And lo and behold, women started to call. And we asked women, "Why did you never reach out for help before? Because everyone says that it isn't a problem."

00:37:24

PATRICIA ENG:

And the women said, "It's because no one ever asked. No one ever asked us. And there was no place to tell. No place to go, no place to tell." And there weren't any options, and especially in the Asian community. It was something that I think that women felt very uncomfortable with, to go outside of the Asian community. And even within the Asian community, it was a real barrier to say, I'm bringing shame on my family. But I think that somehow women knew, and oftentimes the motivator was children. In whatever way, whether it was to stay or to leave. That the motivator was children. And that is what oftentimes for immigrant women was the deciding factor to stay or leave. More so than, again, these claims of breaking up the family and doing the wrong thing, or being not a good wife, not a good mother.

INTERVIEWER:

How did that make you feel when you're trying to help people along?

00:38:39

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PATRICIA ENG:

Yeah. Well, so that's why I got a degree. Felt like the Asian community really values degrees. I mean, I don't know that social work was particularly valued, but it certainly was a master's degree. I think I also felt like within the Asian community we gained respect and legitimacy because we had earned a presidential award. It was from President Bush. No comment. But it was a recognition from the highest in the land,--

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Patricia Eng With President Bush

PATRICIA ENG:

– if you will, and that counted for something, I think, in the Asian community. So I think these are some ways that I think we felt like we were taken seriously. Being the new kid on the block, creating an organization that was explicitly by and for women around issues that were previously never discussed was a big deal in the Asian community.

00:39:54

PATRICIA ENG:

But I think the more we earned recognition externally, the more I think we were taken seriously within the community. And more and more women started to come forward. We had more and more stories that couldn't be ignored. And it was a groundswell of consistent stories that I think could not be ignored. I think we were also offering options for the first time, and that women were able to take, and these women, in turn, the earliest women who came forward knew in some ways that they had to give back. And so they became volunteers of the center. They became essentially the movement

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within the immigrant community to address violence against women, and that was huge. I look back at it now, and I realize that that was huge.

00:40:50

PATRICIA ENG:

Certainly when we were going through it at that time, I didn't know. But we realized 10 years, when we said, hey, this is a 10th anniversary. And looking back to say, how many women have we worked with, how many women have come forward to tell their stories? And how many women are coming forward to say, we need for this to change. Both, either as volunteers or for women who've experienced violence in their own lives. And it really was a ground swell of women. It was a movement that we were creating. That is amazing to look back on.

INTERVIEWER:

This is a very difficult environment to work in when you see women in that condition. How did you personally deal with that?

PATRICIA ENG:

Again-

INTERVIEWER:

Did it take its personal toll on you?

00:41:48

PATRICIA ENG:

It does. So I go home and I can't read any more stories. I can't do any serious work. I love movies like *Finding Nemo* or *Harry Potter*, stories with great endings to it and fun and light. Not about the issues. And that's the way for

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me to decompress. And they have to be— I most love stories of inspiration, you know, of similar to the stories that I hear from women. It's all about really persevering against really some terrible odds and some terrible experiences, and doing something with that and giving back. Those are the stories that I most love, and continue to nourish and inspire me, whether in cartoon form or in real life. That's what I think keeps me going.

INTERVIEWER:

I know you're not there day to day anymore, but –

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Leaving The New York Asian Women's Center

INTERVIEWER:

–you've committed yourself to this. What do you think is the legacy of that work?

00:43:02

PATRICIA ENG:

I think the legacy is to continue to inspire this groundswell of women coming forward, not just around issues of domestic violence, not just around issues of sexual violence or around issues of violence or around health and reproductive health. To inspire and empower women's voices in every aspect of their lives. And to have women see themselves as contributing to change in the world, to create that change in the world that they want to see. And to create the world that they want to see for themselves and for their children and for their daughters and sisters. I think that the women's anti-violence

movement has so addressed the very core of that inequity, and the door can't ever be shut.

00:44:09

PATRICIA ENG:

And so the legacy is to address certainly the physical violence in women's lives. And I think that the options now are tremendous. I think that the acceptance of violence has dramatically changed. The level of violence hasn't changed, but I think people really get that it is unacceptable. Where 30 years ago, that was not the case at all. As I said to you earlier, it was acceptable. It was okay for men to beat their wives, and that it wasn't... that was par for the course. And that's no longer true now. That's a huge change in our culture. The fact that I think men see themselves as also having a role to play in understanding that violence is not acceptable, and that they also need to examine what it means to be a man that doesn't have violence at its core, this has changed the lives of women and men.

00:45:17

PATRICIA ENG:

I think men also are, because of the women's movement, are much more able to bring their whole selves to the table in a way that I think didn't exist before. Where I think men have more roles as nurturers in the lives of their children in a way that didn't exist before. I think that men are able to express themselves, I think, in ways that I think was not socially possible 30 years ago.

INTERVIEWER:

What's the most useful or meaningful piece of advice you've ever received?

00:45:57

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PATRICIA ENG:

I don't know that there's one particular piece of advice, and it's not verbal. I come from a family that has demonstrated by doing and not so much by words. And so, I think, for me, it's the hard lessons that I've seen that have been carried out, I think, through my parents. And I think that theme, you know, of working hard and being committed to what you're doing will result— will bring you great joy. And I think that's what I've really experienced in my life. To be true, I think, to yourself no matter what that situation is.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think you would like to speak on a piece of advice you would give to a young woman?

00:46:58

PATRICIA ENG:

I never thought of myself as having a career path. It's about really finding the inspiration in your life and sticking with it, no matter what anybody tells you. I think you have to have the passion in your life, and it has to inspire you and motivate you. I think it's not... To find something that is more than just a job. It's a life mission. And that will carry you through your life to find that life mission and to honor it.

INTERVIEWER:

The accomplishment you're most proud of?

00:47:40

PATRICIA ENG:

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Creating the New York Asian Women's Center was something that I never even imagined would happen. And looking back, it's what I'm most proud of, that I was part of a movement and certainly helped to spearhead that within the Asian community. And to help create that change for women in the Asian community, has continued to inspire me, and I feel very lucky to have been involved in. I've met so many women in my life through this work that continues to inspire me every single day. It really does.

INTERVIEWER:

What did you want to be when you grew up? Did you have a notion of I'm going to grow up to be?

00:48:32

PATRICIA ENG:

No, I didn't have a specific notion of what I wanted to be because I wasn't exposed to lots of different options that felt to me... I knew laundry work. I knew-

INTERVIEWER:

Did you imagine yourself in an office?

PATRICIA ENG:

I imagined myself in an office. I had no idea what I would be doing. But I didn't have an imagination of what form that would take. And now, I feel like it's the world. I think change in the world. I mean, it's huge, but my career is to change the world, change the way the world works.

INTERVIEWER:

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What was your very first paying job?

00:49:25

PATRICIA ENG:

My first paid job actually was when I was six, when my parents had me folding clothes in the laundromat and sweeping floors in the building. That's how I learned to earn money and specifically quarters.

INTERVIEWER:

What did you spend it on?

PATRICIA ENG:

Books. I spent money on little story books. I would go around the corner. There was like a five and dime store that sold these children's books, and so I would buy them and read them.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Well, that was good. At least you weren't buying candy.

PATRICIA ENG:

I did buy some candy.

INTERVIEWER:

Which three adjectives best describe you?

00:50:23

PATRICIA ENG:

Determined, honest, and fun loving.

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INTERVIEWER:

You sure?

PATRICIA ENG:

It changes every day.

INTERVIEWER:

What person that you've never met has had the biggest influence on your life?

00:50:41

PATRICIA ENG:

Here, again, it's not just one person. It's all about the collective experience. It really is. I think that one person can be an anomaly, but many people makes a movement. And so, it's the many people that I have not met whose stories I've heard, either through news accounts, reading, or through other kinds of ways of hearing it, that really continue to inspire me. That people really... you know, the human spirit is so resilient and so beautiful.

00:51:20

PATRICIA ENG:

I think about the woman, I think it was last year, who was abducted as, I think, as an 11 year old child and was found, I think it was 18 years later. And she had two children with the man who abducted her... I think forcibly. And was raising daughters of her own when she was herself just a young girl. I think, you know, we don't know a lot about her, but I think that she inspires me to think about how you live... create a life for yourself, and protect the children that you bring into this world, and to work with them in who they are. And to create that change in the world is, to me, just an incredible story that I really think deeply about because I think that there are an awful lot of

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children who have similar kinds of stories and who are abused that we don't know anything about. And their life journeys are incredible.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned that there were many people in your path. Would you say women were more helpful to you, or were there men that were helpful to you?

00:53:22

PATRICIA ENG:

I would say that I have had great mentors in my life. I had named Susan Schecter as the person who really taught me everything that I know about being an advocate around issues of violence against women. I would say that I also worked as a rape crisis counselor and coordinator for five years and learned a lot about how to counsel and work directly with women and how to hear those stories to help heal, but also to take that and to do something with it that tries to create the change in the world that transforms as we heal. And I think that has been, for me, what continues to inspire me.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm curious about one, about how your parents saw your accomplishments. You said that they expected you to make money, and then here you go and pick social work. So did they have a chance to see what you had done and what your accomplishments-

00:54:37

PATRICIA ENG:

Yes. I think that they've been very proud of that work because they used to read the Chinese newspapers and would see the work there.

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INTERVIEWER:

Was it good news or bad news about you?

PATRICIA ENG:

The good news. It would be about the issue and about the resource that was there. I think, certainly, the many awards. I had the privilege of getting different awards, primarily from women's organizations. And for them to be part of that, I think they recognized that it was a different life path than they expected, but that I was certainly making a life for myself that was really valuable.

INTERVIEWER:

So they were surprised?

00:55:32

PATRICIA ENG:

I think...I think so. It's a different life path, but I think that they came to honor as well.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How do you feel when you were identified as the first woman, and I know it's the first woman here in the East coast, but the first woman to combat domestic violence in the Asian community?

00:55:57

PATRICIA ENG:

I would say that there were many. I was one of many women who came forward. Again, one woman is an anomaly, and it's many who really create that change in the world. And I would say that, while it was my job, I guess,

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and responsibility to bring it all together, that it was a certainly collective effort. But I am really proud of the work that I've done. Say that. Yes, I am really proud of the work that I've done over these many years and have just feel... I feel so privileged to have...

INTERVIEWER:

What would you-

PATRICIA ENG:

-Learned everything that I've learned.

INTERVIEWER:

What would you say is the accomplishment you are most proud of?

PATRICIA ENG:

Other than the New York Asian Women's Center?

INTERVIEWER:

No, it could be the New York Asian Women's Center.

00:57:05

PATRICIA ENG:

Well, I think, so it is the New York Asian Women's Center. Proud that it now is an institution that has helped thousands of women go through and leave a domestic violence situation. I am proud that it is not, that we have created this movement to end violence in the lives of women, and that we've rallied immigrant women, who are considered to be dainty, to hear the rallying call

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of change and to add their voice to that huge movement to create change in the lives of women and in the lives of the men who love them.

INTERVIEWER:

What kept you from not distancing yourself from your own community?

00:58:05

PATRICIA ENG:

I think what fuels me is injustice, again, and that goes so far back from my earliest memories. And I think I feel most at home, because those roots go so deep. I feel most at home in a working class setting, amongst women and the men who love us and the men who understand that issues facing women are not just women's issues, but they're also issues for men as well. I've lost track of what-

INTERVIEWER:

Well, how did you stay in touch with your community when your path was taking you elsewhere?

00:58:57

PATRICIA ENG:

It's just that the roots go so deep. I mean, my parents continued to live in the same building that we grew up in, and it is a constant bringing home and coming home. I think that working class people continue to inspire me, and I think that they're the most real. It's the most authentic, and the only way I know how to be is authentic. It is really important to me. It's where the heart, it really is the heart is and where I think real change happens. It happens. We have to start change at home. And so, that's what roots me. It is the feeling of home that I think brings me back to those roots. It's the little girl in me that

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hear... every single story. Those stories continue to bring out the little girl in me and take me back home. That's what I experience every day and hearing whatever stories it is.

END TC: 01:00:16