SHERYL WUDUNN INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Sheryl WuDunn
Journalist & Business Executive
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Interviewed by Nancy Armstrong
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ON SCREEN TEXT:
Makers: Women Who Make America
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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So I'd like to start out just talking a little bit about where you grew up, what your family was like, what it was like growing up in your family?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:

I grew up in New York City with my parents and my brother and sisters, and we grew up on the Upper West Side. My mother fought really hard to get the two of us, me and my brother, into private school. Education, as you can imagine, is extremely important in our family. And she got us both into Ethical Culture, so we were very lucky because Ethical Culture then became Fieldston High School, so we were very, very happy then.

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And for the longest time ,both of us were always sort of math-science oriented and it was drilled into us that we would become doctors. My mother's side of the family, I think, almost everybody was a doctor. We didn't think of any other profession. And so I chose Cornell University, partly because it had a good biology and science department. I was going to be a biology major. So I got to Cornell and was really all hellbent on being a doctor and all the pre-med courses and everything, and then I ended up taking this intellectual history course.

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Intellectual history. I said, "What is that?" It was really eye opening. It was philosophy, comparative literature, English, all combined. And this professor was just this brilliant professor, and I just- It opened my eyes. I had never read philosophy before, and- I had never read philosophy before. So I decided to switch. And of course, that was a big deal in the family. It was like, "What is your major? Excuse me, what?" "Yeah, yeah, history is really, really good."

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"What are you going to do with it?" Well, of course, it was typical… I love my parents dearly, but of course they were thinking, "What are you going to do with history?" And so I said, "Oh, I'll find something, I'll find something." Little did they know that I was interested in graduate school, not in history, but in something just as probably weird from their point of view. So I actually ended up applying to graduate programs in comparative literature, and I almost was going to go to Columbia for French literature.

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And my mom said, "What are you thinking about? Why don't you just get a job? Try something- You can always go back to graduate school." And so I thought, "Hm, maybe she's right." So I got a job and I ended up in banking and with a credit training program, I learned accounting, learned economics, learned international economics, and so that that sent me on a different path.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Who did you identify with more as a child, your mother or your father?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Oh, my mom. My mom worked and she was a teacher, and when I look back at what she did, I'm amazed. Of course when I was growing up, I had no idea what she was going through. But she was a teacher. She came from Canada so

she was in the process of getting naturalized, so in the meantime, she was a teacher in the public schools as kind of a- not quite a sub, but she would go to a place for a year and then another place for a year. She ended up in the worst part of Brooklyn, the Bronx, and she taught home economics.

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So it was a class that a lot of the girls liked being in, in the middle school. They were middle school but they were really tough. I remember her telling me that one time a girl pulled out a dagger in class and she- My mom is tiny. She's 4'11", and she just yelled at this girl, who was even though she was holding this dagger, she was afraid of my mom. And so my mom's a really tough woman.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So were there gender roles or-

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
I don't know if there were really any gender roles. My mom did it all. I mean she had a full time job, she raised 4 kids, and she did the cooking, she did the shopping, she did everything. But my dad really was the diplomat of the family, so…

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
And the way she raised you and your siblings, was it sort of a traditional, strict, non-traditional? What would you say-

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Oh, no, it was pretty strict, it was pretty traditional. I mean, not in the sense that girls had to do this and boys had to do this. No, we were all raised to think about careers and getting a job, and it was more, "Go into medicine because you will get a job." I mean, it's a secure profession and it's one that we were all very familiar with.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
No sense of the limits of your own power, or that boys and girls were treated differently?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Not really, there was just my brother and three girls so there were no- we never really thought about discrimination against women. Not at all. I mean, there was no sense of that in our household. In my extended family, the women cousins and the men cousins, they were all interested in medicine. Even my- I guess, when we were growing up, my girl cousins, they were

always at the head of the class and so my mom always said, "Look what Eve is doing. Look what Penny is doing." And so we always felt that we had to keep up.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Did that influence the kind of student you were? Or were you driving yourself…

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
No, I think a lot of it was the family context. Education was very, very important and we definitely knew that they were always at- our cousins were always at the head of the class and- Oh, no, it was definitely out there.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
When did you know that you had talent as a writer?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
So… it was kind of interesting. So in college, I was always very interested in literature. So the history major that I went into, I learned a lot about literature as well. So this intellectual history course really focused on

interdisciplinary work that brought in literature and history and philosophy. And so I did my thesis on that for my undergraduate thesis. And so I have always been interested in literature.

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When I was at the bank, I had this colleague. We both joined at the same time and she was Chinese. She was Chinese from Taiwan and I'm Chinese American. And she was always interested in writing us a novel, so we would just get together and talk about how we both liked writing and or literature, and I thought, "Hm…" In my mind, it would always be nice to try my hand as a writer but I had never really taken it seriously. And so, I dabbled in journalism over the years, but then after graduate school, I really decided that that might be a possibility.

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And then my husband and I got married and he was posted, of all places, in China. And so I went there and there really weren't jobs at the time in banking, so people said I could do a few things. Three things. One is you could try and get a job with a bank, but you'd just be doing nothing because there really isn't much work to do there. You could start your own business in China. Starting my own business as a Chinese American in China with no network, forget that.

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Or you could go into journalism because that was a really good profession there and everybody thought, "Wow, wouldn't it be great to be a journalist and write about China?" So I tried that one and even doing that was really

hard, because in China, it's not easy to be a journalist and it's not easy to become a journalist because you need credentials. You can't just fly in there and start writing, you need actually government approved credentials. It took me six months to get them.

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I had to woo the foreign ministry and several different officials at the foreign ministry to convince them that I'm not going to be writing terrible things. I'm a Chinese American and I really care about the motherland, and I want to write about economics. My background is in business and so I can write about China's burgeoning economy. So I finally got my credentials, probably the day before the biggest democracy protest in China so I was very lucky.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Did you know what you were getting into given state of unrest in that period…

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
We, no we didn't really know. I have to say though, I was really skeptical, because I remember one time I attended this meeting where one of the democracy protesters, leaders of the movement, a real leader of the movement, pulled a bunch of people—it was like a political lawn party on the lawn of Beijing university—and he started saying, "We'd really like to discuss

what you think about how we can bring more rights or more freedom into Beijing."

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And so it had been billed as a democracy movement, sort of initiation project. I had really low expectations that it just seemed so childish. Little did I know that I was totally wrong. I mean, that in fact this little gathering would soon become this huge movement that ended up creating protests around the country and led to the Tiananmen Square crackdown. So it takes that first step.

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And that actually taught me a lesson that whenever you're starting something, it always seems like it will never come to pass but it's that first step that is really important.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What was the upside and the downside, if there was one, to being a Chinese American reporter covering in China?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
I think that on balance, it was an advantage, partly because in China they call foreigners "big noses." The people with the big nose. And so I wasn't one and so I could actually sort of maneuver through crowds and I would be less

noticed. At the time of course, Chinese were very wary of speaking to foreigners because most foreigners were journalists at that time and they didn't want to be caught talking to journalists.

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So of course as a Chinese, although I dressed very American, if I could put clothes that would make me look a little bit more Chinese, then that would be great. And also I was very careful. Very, very careful. I would ride my bike to a certain place, park it and walk a few blocks, winding around to get to a particular place. I was very careful. And I was looking in the back of me to see if I was being followed. You had to do that. I mean, it was really important if you were going to keep your sources safe.

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And so I'd say on balance, it was important—although I have to say that I did have some people, including one person who really appealed to my Chinese American background by saying, "You really ought to work for China. Look, you're Chinese. You've got to help the mainland. You've got to help us unite with Taiwan," which meant take over Taiwan. So he really tried to enlist me as an agent and I'm like, "No, I don't do this kind of thing. I'm sorry. I'm a journalist." But it made for a little bit tense relations but I was able to navigate out of that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

You've had some moments where your own personal safety… you've had close calls. Can you talk about those and how did it go…

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SHERYL WUDUNN:

Oh, no, definitely. You had to be very, very careful. They would question- If they knew that you were trying to talk- Specifically when you were writing about the democracy movement, when you were talking to quote unquote "dissidents," they wanted to know who your sources were, who those dissidents were, and they would go and question those dissidents and try and do whatever they can to either take them away, detain them, whatever. So you had to be extremely careful. And I'm very proud to say that in all our years there we never got someone in trouble.

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One of our colleagues at another news organization had one of her best friends and one of her best sources sent to ten years in prison and his wife was sentenced to four years in prison and they had a one year old baby. It's devastating when you think about the implications for them. Many people have asked me, "Weren't you worried about your own safety?" And frankly, it was less my safety that was in jeopardy, it really was the safety of my sources.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

And you never personally got into a scrape where your physical safety was at risk or you…

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SHERYL WUDUNN:

There were times where I did, actually. I was never beaten, thankfully. The TV reporters were more, more vulnerable because they had to carry the big cameras, whereas I could just go with a little notebook, no one would see it, or sometimes I would just go without a notebook or not pull it out. But there were times when I would have to take photographs. And so when you pull out your camera, that's when you risk getting caught, and that's- I did actually pull out my camera one time in a place.

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I was outside of Beijing in another city and some official saw me taking photographs of what I thought was so harmless, just some people from the countryside who had come in to probably do some protests but I thought it was interesting. I just took a photo. And they slammed down on me. We had a fight over my camera and they pushed me to the ground and so there was a tussle. But thankfully, I emerged fine and I wasn't hurt and I also wasn't detained, which was also really important. I was detained for a few hours but I wasn't put in jail.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So were you terrified?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Yeah, I was. I didn't know what would happen. In hindsight, it was only a few hours but when I was going through it, it was tough because I didn't know what they were going to do. And when you're not in Beijing, when you're far away—I was like really, really far away—these local officials, they have so much discretion and you have no idea what they might want to do to you. So I was very lucky. I was really lucky.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What was it like to be in Tiananmen Square at the time of the protests and what were your most powerful memories from that experience?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Right, well, a lot of different memories. I mean I think that I was pretty amazed when I saw it develop into something that was just amazing. I remember on one protest, we had a colleague, a Chinese, a local Chinese who was helping us do some translations, and we were sitting in the office. And Nick had gone around to do some of the reporting, and she said, "Why don't

we just go out there and let's do some reporting?" I said, "Well, do we really need to?" And she goes, "This is history in the making."

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And it just dawned on me then that this really was her moment, this is her country that is really standing up to a lot of the challenges, and so she really felt that she ought to be a part of it. And so we went out and it really was pretty impressive. There were many moments that just in a flashback, there were just so many moments that were just incredible. I mean the time when the students went on a hunger strike. And every time you heard the sirens come, that was a time when they were picking up a student to take them to the hospital because they were basically about to die of hunger.

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And just hearing those sirens made you really uncomfortable because my goodness, is this student going to survive? So it was pretty chilling. And then during the- I mean… There was tear gas at times and that was very scary. And I remember the moment when we were all asking ourselves, "Are they going to crack down?" And we were saying, "Oh, they were going to have to crack down." But even though we were talking about that, we never really thought through what that meant, to have a crackdown.

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You know, shooting, what does that mean? Well, so of course, as reporters we were out in the streets during the early evening of the crackdown, and I remember that I had decided to go back to the office and- Well, actually Nick and I were both back at the office. And then we had heard that there were

shots out around Tiananmen Square, basically east of Tiananmen Square and west of Tiananmen square.

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And people had heard these rumors all the time that there were shots and so- but we had to go check it out. And so Nick ran out to check it out and sure enough, there was the troops marching along the street. So Nick was actually out on the Square, he had ridden his bicycle out on the Square, and that's when the crackdown started. I had gone out a little bit and gone down, not all the way to Tiananmen Square, but I had went down and saw some of the tanks and started talking to some of the soldiers who were running the tanks.

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Were they really going to shoot- take their tanks and shoot on the people? And these kids who were manning these tanks, they were like, 19 years old. I mean they were soldiers from the countryside. They were really young and you couldn't imagine how could these people actually carry out an attack on the people. Sure enough, they did. And it was just frightening. Nick was actually on the Square and I remember the foreign editor calling me up after the crackdown.

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We knew that the crackdown was happening. And I said to him, "Oh my god, Nick is out on the Square." And he said to me, "Sheryl, calm down and do me a favor, start counting the dead." Well, that of course didn't make me feel any better, but it did give me something to focus on. So I started tracking the

number of people killed. And so we had to start calling the hospitals, and thank goodness I did that.

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That was a smart thing to do because I got to the hospitals before other people did and we started calling the hospitals and got some of the numbers. But it was really, really a grim task and I just thought, "Counting the dead…" Yeah, but in the end, that ended up becoming one of the most pivotal pieces of data throughout the crackdown, is how many people did they kill. So, I mean there were a number of other things, but that was one of the major things. And then after the crackdown, the day after getting back to the…

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What happened is that so there was one military unit that somehow still felt they hadn't demonstrated their power. And so they were marching down the main thoroughfare, which went right past our compound where we lived. And the compound we lived in was where all diplomats and journalists were forced to live, you weren't allowed to live outside. And they just sprayed the entire compound with bullets. Machine guns, all the way down. And I had never been so terrified in my life.

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Because somehow, although our building is kind of in the back, it felt like the bullet was right there next to me. And as soon as it started, we all got down to the ground and there was just nowhere to hide. You hear that… We heard those bullets as though they were just right shooting at us and you didn't know where to go. And that was the most scary thing. And it just felt like it

was half an hour. I'm sure it was something like a few… maybe ten or twelve minutes, but it felt like a long time. And that was probably one of the scariest moments because it just felt that you had no place to hide.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
You grew up in a nice childhood, in New York City, in private schools. Where are the internal resources to cope with that kind of a situation with bullets coming at you? How did you cope with your fear?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Yeah, you just- Then, it's just you take it step by step. So that was when my parents were like, "What is going- Get out of there." I mean, they really wanted me to leave, they said, "You should be on the next plane." And I'm like, "Well, I don't know that I can get on the next plane. I think that they want us to cover it." And so I was just trying to figure out- we were trying to figure out ourselves, where was this going to go?

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And so we just basically took it day by day. It was like, just day by day, hour by hour. And you just… I'm not a war reporter, and that is even more scary, but you just take it step by step and obviously we got out of it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
So how did you come to find out that you won the Pulitzer? Where were you at the time, what happened, how you found out, where you were, what you thought?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
We were in Beijing. So it was kind of isolated, no? We just got a phone call. Yeah, I mean that day the foreign head editor had said to us, "Well, I think they're going to announce the Pulitzers tomorrow," or something like that. So I was like, what were we supposed to think? So we just got a phone call in the middle of the night, and that was the one time when I did not mind being woken up at 3AM. It was very good news. And so… It was very good news.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What was that like for you? Did you…

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
I mean, we just couldn't believe it. We actually couldn't believe it 'cause you are in Beijing way out in the middle of nowhere and it was our first major assignment, so for us, this was all very new and just being able to cover the movement was a thrill to us in the first place. And this was just beyond our

dreams. I mean, it was beyond my dreams certainly. Because I hadn't been striving to become a journalist all my life, I had sort of landed in this great profession by chance and it was just amazing.

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We just couldn't believe it. And so we had a little celebration in Beijing and… We really were lucky. I mean, we were in the right place, at the right time, and we did the right thing. I mean that's what it was. It was luck.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
In the mid-90s, you travelled back to your ancestral village. Can you describe your thoughts and feelings upon making that journey? What happened there for you?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
So when I went back to my ancestral village, I didn't know what to expect. I am Chinese but I am also American. And so here I was, going back to a very Chinese place. Well, first of all finding that homeland, finding my ancestral village on my father's side was not easy. So my father gave me the characters for the village that he was from, and he actually was born in the US so it was his father that was born there. Gave me the characters. We gave them to a local official who was helping us arrange all the visits.

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And he comes back and says- See, the name that my father gave me was *Sun Tsui Tun*. And the official came back and said, "Oh, there are three *Sun Tsui Tun*'s, which one are you from? Which one are you from?" I said, "I have no idea." "It's okay, we'll go to all three. We'll go to all three villages." We literally went to all three. Actually, the second one actually turned out to be the village. The first one didn't work. The second one turned out to be the village of my ancestors.

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So we went there and this is when I really realized how lucky I was. So we go there and it's this really poor village. It is so poor. I mean, I had never seen poverty like that. And this is one of my early days in China so I really hadn't seen so much poverty. 'Cause Beijing is a big city and this was the countryside in the middle of the rice paddies and the house was just kind of like a lean-to. It was like, there wasn't even a major door. It was just like a few bricks and a little hut and that was it.

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And there was nothing inside and it was very little, inside. I don't know where they sleep and there was no food in the refrigerator or anything like that. And so everyone comes out. The entire village comes out because we were the big event. The foreigners there. And they started interviewing me and I started interviewing them. And so I found the oldest woman in the village, she was 80 years old, and I said, "Did you know someone named-" and I gave them the name of my grandfather. And then she thinks, "Oh yeah, I remember him."

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And then they go on to this big thing about remembering, "Oh yeah, yeah. He was really good looking." Like I remember that, "*Hou leng. Hou leng.*" We started sat down with the family, who said that they were my relatives, and we got to know each other and over the years I've followed up on them. But then of course what they really wanted was- they were poor, they wanted money. So my poor father ended up sending them piles of money over the years.

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And the funniest thing was when one of them, who I guess was my second cousin once removed, something like- some distant relative. He had five sons and he said, "This one is unmarried, do you want to marry him?" And I'm standing there. He's probably like a foot shorter than I am, like teeth falling out and in flip flops, and I'm thinking, "Uh, that's okay."

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And that's when I realized I was so lucky that my grandfather made that trip to the US. I was really lucky. Because obviously the family that stayed was still there, and the family- my grandfather who left, we are who we are and we were very lucky. So it made me just more appreciative of what my grandfather, what my parents and what my family had done.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What ignited your passion and your activism and your advocacy for the global women's right movement?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:

Yeah, well, first of all, my husband and I come at this issue from the point of view as journalists. So we're not steeped in the movement itself. We don't really have a history of it. We really have a history of being journalists who see an issue that is horrific and writing about it. The seeds of the book were planted when we were in China. So we covered Tiananmen Square and maybe, as I said, 500 to 800 people were killed.

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But in the ensuing years, as we started roaming the countryside, we saw things that really made this issue—Tiananmen Square was horrible—but these other issues were just so horrific and nothing had been written about it. I mean, so Tiananmen Square, 500 to 800 people were killed, it was horrific, it was terrible and many, many words were written. I mean, articles and articles and articles, front page articles.

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When we started roaming the countryside, and we were finding out that there were 30,000 missing female babies in the population and not a word had been written about it, we started thinking, "My goodness, this is this uncovered horror that no one has written about." So it turns out that over the years in China, partly because families mainly in the countryside tend to favor men, tend to favor boys, they want sons, they don't want daughters. And with the one child policy, every baby counts.

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And so they want a son. It turns out that there were 30 million missing baby girls in the Chinese population, so whether that's that they got the sonogram and they aborted the baby girls before they were born, or there probably was some infanticide. Midwife sees that, "Oh, it's a baby girl?" They don't even tell the family. "Oh, it didn't survive." That stuff… All sorts of things went on. And some of it also is that the baby girls were not documented because they didn't want to register the girls because they wanted another chance to get a boy. A lot of things.

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But from the official statistics, there are 30 million missing baby girls at the time. China… There are a lot of things that China was doing so well, so great, but this was one area where it was really pretty insidious. And so we thought, "It's just China." And then also, before we left, we started getting an editor for a book that we wrote. We ended up writing a book about China called *China Wakes*. And I wrote a chapter about women and I had found this girl-

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There's this phenomenon in China called the kidnapping and abduction of women. What they do is they kidnap a girl from a village in one part of China, transport her to another part of China where she does not speak the local dialect so basically cannot communicate, and they sell her as a bride to a local peasant. So these are poor girls and being sold to poor men. And they just end up being basically slaves.

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But we thought, "This is just a phenomenon peculiar to China." So there was discrimination against women but we thought it was China. And at the same time, China was also a place, partly because of Mao, where- Partly because of Mao who basically came up with the epithet that women hold up half the sky—very clever, very smart and very true. He also did promote the rights of women and the status of women so as far as developing countries go, China is probably one of the best places to be a woman.

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In fact, even if you include America, the top ten richest people in China? There are probably more women on that list than there are in the top ten in the US. So China has made some incredible strides, but it still has its problems. So we still thought it was isolated to China. Then we moved to Japan, and we wrote a book *Thunder from the East* about Asia, and I again wrote a chapter about Asian women and Japan being, in particular, has discrimination of women.

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That's pretty well known. And Korea too. And then Nick started traveling to Cambodia where he looked into the sex trafficking trade and found some horrific things there. So we thought a lot of this was just localized. The cultures in Asia were very specific and very traditional and had centuries behind them, and this is just what happens. Nick started traveling through Africa and started noticing these horrific things in Africa too.

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And so over the years, we started talking about this, teasing a few things, and thinking that there are some themes that we saw common to all of these areas. So that's how *Half the Sky* came about.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What's the overarching theme of that book? What's the message that you want to communicate with that book?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
So the message in *Half the Sky*- There's two. One is that we think the moral challenge of this century, of our time, is the gender inequity. The brutality that so many girls and women face in the world because of their gender. In the same way that slavery was the key moral challenge of the 19th Century, we think that this is the cause of our time.

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The second major theme is that if you just forget about the morality, just put aside the morality of it all, if we just look at the most practical ways of trying to fight poverty and even fight terrorism, educating girls and bringing women into the formal labor force is one of the most effective ways of accomplishing that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Building on that, what happens, cumulatively, when countries educate girls and women?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
So again, if you look at China for example, because it really is a decent example of that, so China a hundred years ago was the worst place to be born a woman. My grandmother's feet were bound. Foot binding is just a horrific thing. They start binding a girl's feet when she's 5. So you imagine, you're 5, how big your feet are, and the bones just curl. It's horrific. And so partly because there was Western help, foreign missionaries were aghast at this practice and they enlisted some of the Chinese intellectuals and some of the Chinese local associations to really start this movement.

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And it was only when the local Chinese, the intellectuals and these associations, realized that this was pretty horrific that they made it very unpopular, said it was the wrong thing to do. Foot binding was eradicated in one generation. So it was really, really amazing how they achieved this. And then Mao came along and said, "Well, women also hold up half the sky." And he may have been trying to manipulate the women to get them to work more because he wanted to create greater economic growth, that's fine. But he said that women could be truck drivers as well as working in the kitchen.

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So women were thrown into the workforce, which is a great thing. He went overboard, but it was great because the legacy now in China is that it's okay for women to work. People are used to seeing women in the workforce. The communists then educated all kids, including girls, so that meant girls could go to school just like boys, and they educated many, many girls. And then you had an educated pool of women. So what were they going to do?

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Well, it just so happens that they are very good at light industry, and as China started making all the shoes, the bags, the clothes, the toys, using women in the factories, and taking off, it was a boon to women. Because although people might call them sweat shops, they were the places where the women almost were the first person in the household to bring home a paycheck. Because you're getting a lot of agricultural families, you're getting a lot of peasants so to speak, people who work the fields. You don't bring a pay check home there.

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But if she gets a factory job, she brings home a paycheck and all of a sudden her status in the household goes way up. And that's been happening. And that phenomenon was just a really great thing for the status of women. Look, there is a downside. You have to make sure the factory is safe and it's not exploiting people. And there's going to be a level of exploitation, but then if the people can't take it, then they're going to move to another factory that doesn't exploit workers, and so factories will start having to pay more if they're not paying enough.

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Foxconn, for instance, is the infamous company that makes all of the parts that go into the iPad and the iPhone and lot of Apple products, and they really were exploiting people. And after a slew of suicides at their factories became very public, they had to raise salaries by 50%. So it's a process. Not pretty, but in the end, women have gained status in China.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What happens when foreign aid funding is directed at women as opposed to men?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Larry Summers, when he was chief economist at the World Bank, once said that, "It may well be that the biggest bang for your buck in the developing world is investing in women." Investing in girls, girls' education. That's because when you educate a girl there are several things that happen. When you educate a boy and he carries his education through to adulthood, he tends to get married later on in life. He might have fewer kids, but only at the margin.

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When you educate a girl, she carries that through to adulthood, she does get married later on in life. She does have kids later on in life. And when she has

kids, she tends to have fewer and she raises them in a more enlightened way. It's a really dramatic effect. And overpopulation really does have an impact on poverty. It is one of the most consistent contributors to poverty. When I went to Haiti, men and women who had 11 kids—11 kids—and when we met them, the kids probably hadn't eaten for two days.

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I mean, she can't feed them. It's just as basic as that. But then there are also other dividends. So women tend to, when they control the household purse strings, they tend to invest better in certain businesses. They tend to select businesses that are just more viable. They also tend to feed their kids better and care more about their welfare and their health. So they just take care of their kids better, and so it's better for the household.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
You're back in the financial world right now. What are the major differences between the world of journalism and the world of finance?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
In the world of philanthropy, especially when it comes to nonprofits, I have found that it's extremely valuable to have a background where I have understood what it means to run a business, to bring in revenue and look at expenses and to manage a bottom line, because so many NGOs, really now,

could use that kind of experience. And I just think that while it is harder and it's much more rare for people who go to business school to go into the nonprofit industry, it is increasing more and more, and it's really important because management of operations is important whether you are doing it for profit or not for profit.

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And there are a number of organizations that are having difficulty because they aren't great managers. They aren't great operations managers and that's what is needed now. It really is.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Do you consider yourself a feminist?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
No, I don't consider myself a feminist. I have never been raised that way, just as a person. I think of myself more as a Chinese American than I do as a feminist, and I think probably it is because it is a label that- Well, I'm not into labels but I also think it's a label that doesn't have a great connotation right now. Maybe it's a label that reminds me of extremism, of strident tactics, and so I don't think of myself like that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Do you define it in your mind?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Look, I know that the people who have been called the feminists of an earlier time have done great things. I mean, I have benefited from the path that they have- I have benefited from the path they have broken so I can't criticize them. At the same time, I just- I use different approach. I'm much more diplomatic and much more, sort of, results oriented and problem solving oriented, so I don't know. Maybe it's a little bit different.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
What are the challenges that face the next generation of women in our country?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
I think there are still- I think that a lot of things are changing, that now there is a certain kind of entrepreneurial spirit among both boys and girls, men and women, which is great. It would be great if there were more women at MIT who are going into the computer science industry, computer industry, the

internet industry. There are, and I'm trying to help find those women. I found a great company run by women and it's for AHAlife.

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And it's an internet company just to service women. I mean, I wish there were more of them but I think that it is changing. I do think that it's the senior level at the senior ranks in politics, in corporations, and even at NGOs that focus on women and girls, there aren't a lot of women. There are many more women than you would expect but some of them are run by men too. Not that that's a bad thing but it would be great to see more women there. Also in finance.

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When I was at my most recent large institution that I was at, that I was a part of in my office in New York, there were 10% women, and that was considered really good because it was an area where there tended to be more women, but it was 10%. It takes pushing and I think that there is going to be change, especially with people now saying you've got to find a diverse body of candidates for a board position or for a top level position.

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I think in a sense, you do need affirmative action. Not quotas, but I do think you do need affirmative action because I think that women have been handicapped in the past. And look, everyone uses any hook that they can to get up. Men use the old boys network. Well, that's kind of an affirmative action because they are getting help. I wouldn't say it's affirmative action- That's actually kind of a lever that they get, an advantage that they get, that women don't have. So women should use, or be able to use, or pull the lever

of something else, another network. So I think that the greater awareness is going to really help, but it is going to take time.

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

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
Probably the most meaningful piece of advice that someone gave to me was find your own thing. Really. It's hard in life to find something that you're good at, that you like, that really is something that you are passionate about, and I think finding that is really important and I think that was a great piece of advice. Not that I've found it. But it's a great piece of advice.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:
Have you found it?

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SHERYL WUDUNN:
I'm on the way.

END TC: 00:40:26:00