

UC Santa Cruz

Out in the Redwoods

Title

Alison Kim: Out in the Redwoods, Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5x2442k1>

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Publication Date

2004-04-01

Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5x2442k1#supplemental>

ALISON KIM



Interviewer, Jacquelyn Marie: *Alison Kim, a Chinese-Korean lesbian, graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz with a B.A. in Women's Studies/Art in 1989. As the women's studies librarian at McHenry Library, UCSC, I met and worked with Alison on her research about Pacific/Asian lesbians. I recommended she submit her essay to the library's Book Collection contest; she won second place. In 1987, she edited and published an anthology of*



Asian/Pacific Islander lesbians' writings entitled, Between the Lines, which included an early version of her bibliography. In the same year, with a UCSC Chancellor's Undergraduate Fellowship, she traveled across the United States gathering Asian/Pacific Islander lesbian newsletters, writings, and other memorabilia. The entire collection, with her finding aid and bibliography was donated to the University Library in 2001. Alison now resides in San Francisco with her partner, Christiane, and their twins. She is, in her words, a "double virgo, proud mama, and always a UC Slug." I did this oral history interview with her at her home on December 20, 2001.—Jacquelyn Marie

Marie: Let's start with some questions about you, when and where were you were born, your family background.

Kim: I was born in 1955 in Honolulu. My mom is Chinese and my dad is Korean. On the Korean side I'm second generation born in the United States. On the Chinese side I am second and a half. English is my first language, my mother's first language. She knew just a tiny bit of Chinese, and my dad knew probably equal amounts of Korean. I lived in Hawaii for nine months. I was a military brat; my dad joined the service. We all went to France, I think for two years. We spent a couple of years in France, and then moved to California. California is really my home. I grew up in the Monterey Bay area, outside and on the ex-military base, Fort Ord. We went to Germany for three years when I was in elementary school, came back and was stationed in Georgia. We lived there for an extremely brief time, which I was so grateful for, then came back to southern California. I graduated from high school in California, in the Monterey area. The town I grew up in was really small. I think it was maybe six thousand people when I was growing up.

Marie: Where was that?

Kim: Marina. It's right outside of Fort Ord. It's still just dunes. Now they have a higher population because they included part of the Fort Ord population as the city when they were decommissioning the base. So when we grew up it was playing in the dirt and walking to school. It was really small.

I started working in Monterey, and I worked for a long time before I decided at age thirty to go back to school, to quit my job. I moved back to Hawaii for a year, to get closer to family. I had come out earlier, but it was a very white community, so I was wanting to reconnect with family and my Asian culture. I knew my grandmother on my Chinese side was getting older, so I moved back to Hawaii, thinking I was going to live there for



awhile, and go to school there, and do some family and Asian lesbian research. But the island was way too small for me.

Marie: Which island?

Kim: Oahu. Small, just because there's so much family. The thing my mom told me when I went was, "Don't flaunt it." That's all she said: "Don't flaunt it." And that meant, don't let anybody know that you are a lesbian. The islands are so small. I have second cousins, aunts, uncles, the neighbors—you can't really go anyplace without knowing somebody who knows your family. To not flaunt it means don't be seen. So that was a little bit difficult. My aunt and my uncle really welcomed me into their house, and my partner at the time. I lived with them for a few months. But it was like, oh no I can't do this. We got our own place but the islands were just too small. I'm used to California where you drive for ten hours and you're still not out of the state, whereas in Hawaii you drive for an hour and you're around the island.

Moving from Marina to go to Santa Cruz was for me moving to the big city. People laugh because now I am in San Francisco. San Francisco has been really hard for me to be in; moving to Santa Cruz was my stepping stone to San Francisco. When I went to Santa Cruz it was like, God I'm really moving to the city!

Marie: So let's go back just a minute. You said you came out when you were in high school.

Kim: When I was in high school, I probably came out to myself—I knew when I was in junior high. We were in Germany between the fifth and the eighth grade. And I think around the sixth or seventh grade... You know how you hear those words about... Well, I don't know what words they said. They probably said faggot all the time then. We knew that was bad. Even though I didn't know... Faggot is male, but in my mind it just meant homosexual, right? I knew that it was really scary, and that it was not a thing to be. But also, with our neighbor upstairs... We (the daughter and I) were kind of fooling around on the balcony, and I thought, oh I can't let anybody know this. I think that was probably when I first started having that fear of anybody knowing who I was.

Then when I was in high school, when I was fourteen, I had my first sexual experience with a woman. I wasn't really out. It was sort of like—okay, you did this and it was done, and you never said anything about it. Then when I was a senior, seventeen, that's when I



came out to myself. I was in a relationship with two other Asian women at the time, which today to me is totally amazing, because it took years afterwards to find other Asian lesbians. But at that time I still thought I was not one of “them,” (lesbian) because the only image of lesbians was the butch diesel dyke, and that’s what people talked about. Also, it was in the early-1970s, so there was women’s liberation and bra burning, political activism, protesting the Vietnam War. All things I believed in, but knew a lot of people did not. So all of those things combined made for a very hard time coming out. But I was in a very private relationship until 1980, when I finally found a lesbian community. It took many, many years.

Marie: A lesbian community where?

Kim: In Monterey. Actually before that, in the late-1970s, I was taking classes at Monterey Peninsula College. I had taken a humanistic psychology class, and one of the course field trips was that we went to a retreat at Pajaro Dunes. There were all these people and I was totally wiggled out. We did some Gestalt therapy. And I’m going, okay, this is a little intense because this woman couldn’t let go of her mother, and they were trying to get her to throw this blanket (which represented her mother) across the room, and she couldn’t. And she’s crying, and we’re all sitting around in this circle. There was this guy who was coming on to me. He was really nice. I liked him; he was a friend. But it made me question my own sexuality. What’s going on? I knew I was a lesbian. Actually I had been in therapy for a little while dealing with other issues. I had a really bad therapist who was a military Freudian therapist, and basically said that my problem was being homosexual. Anyway, at this retreat I came out. I got into the center (of the circle) and I came out. I said, “I am a lesbian. Will you accept me for who I am?” One of my partners at the time was at the retreat and decided she had to leave. She couldn’t even stay. But when I came out everybody around the circle, of course, said, “Yes, we accept you for who you are.” In my mind I was thinking, this is such a sham. That’s what they’re going to say. They have to say yes, because we are sitting here in this classroom and we are all supposed to be evolved people. So I didn’t really buy it. But there’s this one person in particular who said, “Only if you accept me, because I am too.” I was like, yes! I’ve got a soulmate here. Someone I can talk to. But she was so removed. She was in her own thing. She had been out for awhile. She had been out in the Monterey community. I tried to talk to her and she was just not really approachable.

I think it was a few years later that I saw an ad in the *Monterey Herald*, just a regular newspaper. It said something about a women’s newspaper. So I said, let me order one of



these. I also remembered this woman from the retreat. I got her address and drove by her house and left a note in her mailbox, "Remember me; I'd like to talk to somebody." I was totally isolated and alone. She didn't call me directly but she actually sent me a newspaper, which was *Demeter* (the women's newspaper). She sent a copy to my house and it got there the day after I had seen the ad in the *Monterey Herald*. I said, this is fast! But then it turned out that she had sent it. I did go to her house and meet her, and talked to her a little bit. She told me that there was a community in Monterey. That's how I got hooked up and became really involved with the newspaper, and with the community. Just jumping in and doing...

That's the first time I started writing. I didn't really have confidence in what I did. I didn't think that I could write. I wrote a lot of poetry in high school, but my oldest brother sort of squashed me. He said, "Who ever told you you could write?" Granted, I go back and read some of this stuff and it's pretty elementary, the beginnings of love, nature, friendship, but actually a lot of the stuff I was writing... I'd do a lot of thinking and it was a lot of philosophy. I used to read *Siddhartha* and Kahlil Gibran. That was my style. *Be Here Now*. All the books of the time. Actually, a lot of the love poems I wrote to my "best friends" in high school.

Marie: So you were writing newspaper articles, too.

Kim: Yes. That's when I first started. I had never been to a women's festival. I came out into a lesbian community in 1980. I had never traveled alone. I was always kind of fearful. I went to the National Women's Music Festival when it was still in Urbana (Illinois). I traveled by myself. I had a few savings bonds. I didn't have much money at the time. I was working; I had a good job. I didn't have many savings. But I had met this woman and we got to be kind of tight. We were sitting at her house and she said, "There's this women's festival." I said, "Really? I've never heard of this. Why don't we go?" This is that burst of fresh energy. Let me have whatever I can have. I said, "Come on. I'll buy your ticket!" I didn't want to go by myself. I just thought, anything's possible. She ended up not being able to go and I ended up going. She said, "Oh, you're going to have to write an article for us for the paper." And I'm like, "You don't just ask anybody to write an article. This is a newspaper! There are reporters, people who do these things." She said, "No, you have to do this." So I took it very seriously. When I went there I wrote an article and it got published. They said, "This is great. Thank you for doing this." And from there I just kept writing different things.



Marie: This was for which newspaper?

Kim: For *Demeter*. Then I started helping them with the calendar. I'm sort of a behind-the-scenes person. I never liked to be the organizer or the leader. I would do a lot of the grunt work and footwork. I worked with different women on the calendar for about a year and a half. I took some photographs for some of the issues. I had a friend who's an elementary school teacher, whom I loved. She was doing what I considered some pretty radical things at an elementary school in Salinas, and she was a lesbian. At Halloween they had a little parade with the kids and chanted, "Witches Heal." They didn't have Valentine's Day. She had Susan B. Anthony Day. And instead of bringing candy she'd bring peanuts for the kids. She started a peer therapy group (without calling it that) for the kids, because a lot of the kids had issues at home. She was doing this big Women's History Day thing so she brought me in and said, "This is a writer for this newspaper, and she's going to do some photos." So I stayed there and wrote about her class and took photos. They did this collage. The collage ended up going to Sacramento to be displayed in the Capitol Building for a little while. The kids were really happy. It was great because they got that pride. I was like, hey you know this ain't bad! When the article and photos got in the paper, she took thirty issues so that the kids could all see it. This was about their class and their teacher and what they were doing.

Marie: That's great. So when you decided to go to Santa Cruz, I wondered whether you thought of it as a more welcoming community to lesbians and gays? What year did you come to UCSC?

Kim: In 1985. I moved to Santa Cruz in 1984. I think in 1981 I met Karen Belford. She's from Santa Cruz. She was very active in the women's community. She used to play guitar. This is how I moved to Santa Cruz. At Cabrillo College they had a [International] Women's Day thing. It probably was 1980. A lot of things happened for me in those first few years. They had a women's festival. That was actually the first women's festival I had been to, not the one in Illinois. They had different performers and different speakers. I was just sitting there by myself. I had just broken up with my partner. The three of us were together in high school. After two years Audrey ended up getting married to a man, someone I worked with. Then it was Shirley and I, and we stayed together until 1980. We broke up in 1980 and she got married to a man. That one was really difficult. With Audrey it wasn't so difficult. Audrey and I stayed friends forever after that. Until she died. She had a lot of health issues that came up because she couldn't reconcile her sexuality. She was really a lesbian. I guess you could say she was bisexual but she really



in her heart I think was a lesbian. She didn't tell me until a few years after we split that the only reason she got married was because she thought it would settle all her feelings that she had for women. She was trying to do the right thing by her family and by society. Instead, she got really sick. She ended up having kidney disease and all kinds of stuff. She ended up living for six years afterwards. They had given her one year. She was a fighter. She was always a fighter. So that was hard.

So Shirley and I had been together and we broke up in 1980. It wasn't because I wanted to. I was totally devastated. I was all alone and for the last ten years we had done everything together every day. We lived together for awhile and then we both moved back in with our parents, but still saw each other every day. All of a sudden it wasn't there. We were both different people.

So I was in a really low place, and I went to this festival and was just sitting there, kind of sad, but excited at the same time. I had never been around this many lesbians. And you didn't know how many were lesbians, but at the time the women's movement was really code for lesbian. I was just amazed. I saw all these women walking around. Some were together and some were not. So I was excited, and I was sad because I was there alone, didn't know anybody and I also didn't have a partner. I was watching the performers. There were some flamenco dancers and they were terrific. Then after the flamenco dancers came this single woman with an acoustic six-string guitar. She bounded onto the stage and said, "How do you follow something like that?" She was really filled with energy. That was Karen. She seemed just so down-to-earth, and very open. I saw her outside later on and talked to her. I ended up really crying and saying, "I'm so alone in this house and I've never... And I'm so excited about being in this women's community, and I don't know what's going on." She just was the sweetest person and talked to me for awhile and said, "Whenever you need to talk..." We became friends and talked for a little bit after that. So I already knew there was this festival going on in Santa Cruz. They've got things happening. Karen was really great. She told me about other things that were happening in Santa Cruz. So yes, I knew that Santa Cruz was a gay/lesbian friendly place. Plus it was closer to San Francisco, which I wanted to be part of.

By the time I moved to Santa Cruz, I was really looking at my cultural identity. Different things happened. I wrote one article in *Demeter* about racism, and was feeling kind of isolated. There was in Monterey an invisible women's community. There were three women of color and I was one of them. It was exciting because I could affirm my lesbian identity. But then it started to be where I felt like hey, there's another part. Plus, I was



trying to expand my own identity of who I was as being Asian. I've always identified more Chinese than Korean because I've known the Chinese [part of my] family more. I was doing funny little things, like I knew when we used to go to Chinese restaurants they would always hold the bowl of rice by their mouth and just scoop it in. So I started eating my food like that, holding it and just scooping it in. I could down four bowls of rice at one time, thinking okay, now I'm more Chinese because I can do this.

Santa Cruz was that stepping stone to San Francisco where I thought, well there's a bigger Asian lesbian community. The Monterey area has a good-sized Asian community but it's... I don't know how to describe it. In Pacific Grove, in Monterey they had a large Japanese... They were second or third generation, settled in, very comfortable, and very conservative, I would say. I was thinking, I can't be here and be a lesbian and be out. Plus, we knew a lot of people. My mom and my dad were very gregarious. The Hawaiian community, everybody knew who's who. So that was a little hard. I thought coming to Santa Cruz is a stepping stone to be that much closer [to San Francisco].

In that whole period Chris was exploring her Latina lesbian identity, and I was exploring my Asian lesbian identity. We were housemates. I had moved into this house. It was a lesbian feminist house. It used to be a white lesbian feminist house. Then it transitioned to being a women of color household.

Marie: In Santa Cruz.

Kim: Yes. Chris moved into the house after me. She was a student at UC and I wasn't a student yet. I'd drive to San Francisco every weekend, because I had heard about the Asian lesbian community. I started going to these meetings. The community in San Francisco was still in its beginning stages, especially compared to where it is today. There was a lot of political strife. I jumped in right at the time when a big split was happening. That was a little bit hard, but at the same time I was in a place where I could go in a room and they were not only lesbian, they were all Asian. It was pretty amazing. Chris and I started coming to San Francisco together. She'd go off to her Latina lesbian stuff; I'd go off to my Asian lesbian stuff; and then we'd go back to Santa Cruz. It was a really great time of mutual support and trying to find who we were in the community.

Marie: What was the split that was happening within the Asian lesbian community?



Kim: It was about visibility and ideology. Who do we serve? It was about political action versus social... It was like, “We can’t all be political. We don’t want to be. We just want to get together and be together.” Others were saying, “We’re not political enough. We’re just doing this.” So there was a big split. Actually that group was the group that started the newspaper *Phoenix Rising*, which was in print for a long time. Originally the group was called Asian Women. Then they became the group Phoenix Rising. Then they transitioned to the Asian Pacific Lesbian Bisexual Network—APLBN. They sort of took it over. At some point there was a group called API Sisters. Then it shifted. Someone kept the newsletter going for awhile. A different group took it over. The people in the original group went into these different groups and then they had the APLBN and then the NN, which was the national network versus the local network. Now there are so many groups in San Francisco—a Mandarin group, a Korean group, a Vietnamese group, a Japanese group.

Marie: The Asian group split up into these different caucuses?

Kim: I wouldn’t say the group split, but that new groups formed to address specific identities. Then there are younger groups. There’s this group—APIQWTC, “API-Cutesy” they called themselves. That’s supposed to be an umbrella group of organizations. Then they have a group called Quack—for young queer girls. They have AQUA for [people] under twenty-five years old. There’re just so many...

Marie: So what made you stay in Santa Cruz rather than come up here to go to school?

Kim: This was the city. It was too big. It was exciting, but I would have felt totally lost. Santa Cruz still had that small town feeling. I still feel like you can walk down the block and it’s just like the block in my little neighborhood. Whereas San Francisco was—the city. I didn’t know districts. I didn’t know where anything was. You were so anonymous, and I’m not really used to that. It’s even hard now being that anonymous. We know two of our neighbors, but we are not really friends. We talk to a few others.

I wanted to go back to school. Two dreams I had when I was young were to be a writer and an artist. I always thought writers and artists lived on the fringe. I thought that’s why I wanted to be one, because I always found myself a little bit different, not different in a bad sense, but wanting to not just be like everybody, to have a different way of thinking, I guess, a different way of looking at things. That’s who I thought artists and



writers were. I really didn't know just how much on the fringe I was going to be when I came out. It wasn't just the artist, writer stuff. It was a lot more than that.

Chris was taking a women's studies class. I had taken a women's studies class at Monterey Peninsula College from Paula Butterfield. And when I was in Monterey, in the area, Bettina [Aptheker] and her partner Kate [Miller] used to teach these women's history classes. But it wasn't school. It was at the Pacific Grove Art Center. It was upstairs. Hardwood floors. Just a big open space. There would be around twenty women there. Bettina would just talk, and tell these stories about different women in history. I hated history. I've always hated history. It was like history, what is that? You remember these dates and places that you have no connection to. It didn't mean anything to me. I never could connect history to anything. And all of a sudden Bettina is here, and her and Kate are talking about all these different women, and these women mean something to me because they were lesbian, or they were pioneers in what they were doing. They were strong, not just physically strong, but they were strong to live the lives that they were living. I thought, this is history? Okay, I can hang with this. But I also knew, this is history but this is women's studies history. So I knew there was the women's studies program in Santa Cruz.

Chris was in women's studies, and I wasn't a student. This is how it all began. I always tell this story and she goes, "It's not true." But my truth is that Chris was busy learning about herself so she wasn't going to class. She was in Bettina Aptheker's *Women and Culture* class. I would sit in on the class all the time. I knew Bettina from Monterey, and Bettina was cool with me going in. That's where I met Dafna Woo. She was in the class at the time. And I don't know if you knew Ruth Chin?

Marie: I did.

Kim: I adopted Ruth as my grandmother. Ruth was great. I just loved Ruth. She was such an inspiration to me. She told me that she was in the Seniors-in-Residence program and that she was going to go to China, and maybe when she graduated she might get into a little politics. I'd always heard that you're never too old to learn, but after meeting Ruth I really believe it. Now I don't have time because I'm raising the kids and working. But when I retire, I'd still like to learn some more and maybe go back to school, or at least be at school. You were also an inspiration to me, and made me consider library science. I've told you this many times. You being at the library. The library is full of resources and



all these people who are doing these amazing things, but you don't know unless you are there. And also, what's available and how you can help guide and be part of it.

Being in Bettina's class was just like—hey, this isn't bad. I can do this kind of school. I've always been really great at school. I've always gotten really good grades but I didn't like the pressure of the grade thing. I also liked Santa Cruz because of the narrative evaluations. I wanted to go to school for myself. It was sort of to get a degree, because I was the first one in my family to go to college and to get a degree. But mostly it was about me, and giving myself the opportunity to write and to do art. So I did the double major of art and women's studies. Santa Cruz has such a strong focus on writing. It didn't matter if you took the astronomy class, which I did as one of my core classes, you still have to write a paper. Or statistics, women's studies, anthropology. I got to really learn a lot.

Women's studies was great because it afforded me the opportunity to pursue whatever I wanted. I was already beginning to look at Asian lesbian writing. I really wanted to find more and just record it. I didn't know at the time how much I wanted to do. It started out with having a need for myself. When I'd find one or two things it was like, oh terrific. Let me have this. This is great! Look what I found! It led me to want to find more.

At the first Women's Music Festival on the West Coast that I attended, I organized a workshop. I went around the camp, and any Asian lesbian I saw I said, "Okay, we're going to have a thing here. We're going to meet at this tree," or whatever. I think I found six Asian lesbians and we all met and shared writings. Everybody said, "Wow, that's really cool!" They didn't know that things existed, or they also felt like they were the only one. I mean six of us was pretty amazing to me. It was pretty amazing at the time. That was even before I started coming to San Francisco. I think that 1980 is when I first came out in the community, and that's when I heard about these festivals. 1981 was probably my first festival. Probably 1981 and 1982 is when I started coming to San Francisco.

Marie: That was before you started at UCSC.

Kim: Yes. The reason I am remembering that, is that I remember us all saying we felt like the only ones in the world.



Marie: Once you got to the University, did you feel that there was a community there, as far as Asian/Pacific Islander lesbians?

Kim: No. Not at all. That was the really difficult thing. Prior to UCSC living in Santa Cruz... In the house where I lived there were no other Asian lesbians. People said, "Oh, have you met Cristy [Chung]?" I said no. Chris said she had her phone number because she had stayed with her, but she never gave it to me. I kept hearing, "You've got to get ahold of Cristy." Cristy was one name I had heard. I think I put an ad in *Matrix Women's Newsmagazine*, and a notice up in Bookshop Santa Cruz, at Café Pergolesi, and up on campus, saying that I was forming an Asian lesbian group, so anyone please contact me. The first person who contacted me was somebody in Vacaville! I'm like, "Okay, you are in Vacaville and you are on your way to Seattle. What's the connection with Santa Cruz?" But actually it was Kaweah Lemeschewsky. She was a student from Vacaville, and she was going to do some peace march from Seattle. Kaweah is Japanese and Native American, so she was involved in a lot of Native American things, but she also wanted to connect with Asian lesbians. She was going to be gone for the whole summer but she wanted to connect. My desire at the time was immediate: *I want something now*. "I'll be back at the end of the summer" seemed like such a long time. It's hard now to put time into perspective because I don't really remember. But eventually what happened was I met Kaweah. Then I moved to Hawaii. When I came back I met Cristy, because I happened to be at Bookshop Santa Cruz. I was supposed to meet Chris. Chris was living in San Francisco now and she had driven down to meet me because I had just moved back. I heard somebody talking to her friend Cristy. I went around the corner and said, "Are you Cristy?" We met, and afterwards we got together. Then Willie Wilkinson was also on campus and she knew my ex. She had come over to the house once. And Dafna from Bettina's class. Somehow we all kind of connected. But we never really formed a group. We really tried to, but it wasn't happening.

I wanted to get something together. So my second year at UC we said, "Well, let's try to do something. Let's form a writing group so we can start getting together." I don't know if the writing group came before the book idea, or the book idea came and we said, "Let's start this writing group." So we started putting up flyers, and did a benefit saying we wanted money because we want to put an Asian lesbian book together.

It's kind of funny, because it wasn't like we had this formal writing group. We'd bring our writing; we'd meet at a pizza parlor. George Ow, the Chinese philanthropist, owned one of the pizza places. He let us meet there. I was thinking, wow this is pretty



progressive. I always think of Chinese as being so conservative, and here we are with lesbians who are meeting here. I don't know whether he really knew, whether it was a formal thing, but in my mind it seems like he knew. Kaweah had approached him and asked if it was okay. So we would meet there. It wasn't a big writing group. It usually ended up being me, Cristy, and Kaweah. Every now and then we could maybe wrangle up somebody else. As we heard of people in the community, we approached them and said, "We're doing this book, please submit something! We'll help you write something. We'll help you edit. We'll type it. We'll help you do everything!" People kind of responded. Akemi Hamai was there. She had come out recently. She wasn't out to her family. It was like, "Okay, you can include me." By the time the book came out we used her name, because she said, "Okay, this isn't going to be in the Japanese community." We said, "Okay, we're going to have a photo shoot." One of us had a camera and we met at a playground in Santa Cruz. Roberta Almercz, a photographer, submitted some photos. And there was another woman who was anonymous because she was planning on moving back to her own country and she wanted to make sure that it wasn't going to cause any problems.

We sort of just grabbed people and said, "Please give us something." It wasn't that we had this group and we were all working together. It was like, "Okay, you have something for us? You don't have something for us. Okay, come on. We're going to help you right now get something. Okay, we just want your picture then. Whatever!" We wanted to do this because it was for us. I don't think we really thought beyond ourselves very much. Except I know that I had this need when I connected with Cristy to meet with other Asian lesbians, and she was exploring her identity too.

It was not until 1987 that we got the grants from the University to write the book. I also got the President's Undergraduate Fellowship to do the research. The research [money] was for me to go to different archives and then to go cross-country and interview people. That was all at the same time.

Marie: And what were the grants to do the book?²⁷

Kim: Chancellor's funds. [UCSC] had that Year Towards Community fund. And we raised a little bit of money on our own. Cristy's mother donated a little bit of money.

²⁷Cristy Chung, Alison Kim, Arlene Kaweah Lemeschewsky, eds. *Between the Lines: an Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz* (Dancing Bird Press: Santa Cruz, CA, 1987).



I laugh, because that's when personal computers were barely getting started, and none of us knew how to operate one, really, except for Kaweah. She worked in the lab and she knew how to use a Mac. She said, "You just type everything in and then I'll format it." We're like, "What does this mean?" It wasn't even a layout program. You know now you can do a whole layout and print it out just like you want it. She just formatted the text with bold and center text. We still cut it with exactos and pasted it up on layout boards. I think wow, to look back now—we spent until three in the morning sometimes, just trying to get it done. That's when Irene Reti and Sarah-Hope Parmeter were really helpful to us. Somehow Cristy knew them, and so Cristy and I, and Sarah-Hope and Irene met at a coffeeshop, and they literally drew on a piece of paper, "Okay, you do this for your layout. Okay, now if you are thinking about a book, page one goes here. Page two goes here. Page four goes here." I mean, [they] literally walked us through how to do this. We took their little sample and pages of notes and said, "Okay, this is what it's got to look like."

But that year, with the fellowship, Cristy and I went cross-country. We went to Los Angeles, to one of the archives. Then we went cross-country, and we met women along the way. We stayed in Chicago. We met this woman Lola, who was a carpenter, an Asian lesbian. She was great. On our way back we were running out of money, so she hired us to do some carpentry work, which we had never done in our lives. But she hired us so that we could have a few extra dollars to get us home. There were some great women in New York we got to stay with for a month while we did research at the archives. From there we went to D.C. for the March [on Washington, D.C.]. But all along the way we had our book. We were taking it into bookstores and taking it to people. It had such a response. People ate it up with eagerness. They felt, "We need this. This is so great!" I don't think we ever really thought about it. We thought for ourselves, "This is great." You always hope that people are going to want to look at it. But I never really understood how isolated so many of us did feel, or how much there was lacking in print and a sense of community. So by the time we got to Washington, D.C., we were walking across this huge field and this woman went up to Cristy and said, "You're in that book, aren't you!" We were like, "How could this be?" This woman was from Boston. I don't know if she was still in school. She probably was an intern in school to be a doctor. She is now my gynecologist in San Francisco!

Marie: [laughter] That's fantastic.



Kim: She delivered our twins. And she's an Asian lesbian. We didn't really have a connection other than her, "Wow, thank you for doing this book." So the first time Chris and I went for our ob appointment, I didn't want to say, "Oh yes, remember our book?" I was kind of nervous because of this whole pregnancy stuff. She said, "Your book made such an impact on me." I said thank you, but I didn't know what else to say. It was amazing because the book came out in 1987. The kids were born in 1998.

Marie: What was the impact of *Between the Lines* in the Santa Cruz community, and at the University?

Kim: I don't know the impact. I know that we got a lot of support from everybody, from teachers, from staff, from the library, from you, our friends. Everybody said things. I don't always take it in. That's my thing. But it was very well received everywhere we went. Even when we went into bookstores, not just in Santa Cruz... Of course the bookstores in Santa Cruz carried them. Even small bookstores where we had no clue what the Asian population was, they would say, "This is great." It started in Santa Cruz, and it carried us the whole way coming back. The support was there. We never could have done the book without the financial, academic, and emotional support.

Marie: It was from the administration on down, because you got a chancellor's grant.

Kim: Yes, completely. That was the thing about [UCSC]. That's why I always recommend Santa Cruz to everybody. If people go to other schools I say, "Just make sure you do what you want to do. I never would have believed that you go to University and do what you want to do, and get what you want to get." I believed you go and it's like everything else—they teach you something and you are supposed to absorb it. But not that you go and do your own work and your own research, and it becomes part of this body of work. I didn't really know the value of my own work until I heard people reiterate it. I'm really proud now that I have this body of work and it's part of the library, that it's accepted as academic, scholarly, of value. I never really could say that because it was always so personal. It was always my own thing. It was my search, my desire. I wanted to see myself. I wanted to read about other people like me.

Like we were saying earlier, in San Francisco before there was one main group and now there are subgroups. I've come to an identity of being Asian, but even within that I've always struggled about where I fit, because I am Chinese and Korean. I've identified as more Chinese, but now I don't really fit in the Chinese groups because a lot of them are



first or second generation and speak the language. I never spoke any of the language, and my family is really from Hawaii. So I identify with the local people. But then, I've been in California so long. Unless I'm around my mom and family I don't really talk much pidgin. So then I kind of don't fit in there. I am always struggling with my identity, about where do I fit, either within the lesbian community, within family, or within my social community.

Marie: You are a mother at this point, too. That's a whole other identity, bringing up children. Other people don't have that identity or don't always relate to that, at times.

Kim: Definitely.

Marie: Do your parents live around here?

Kim: My father's dead. But my mother still lives in Marina. That's why Marina, the Monterey Peninsula has always been my home. I think it will always be my home. Hawaii is my root, but the Monterey Bay...

Marie: Has your mother always been very supportive of your choices?

Kim: No. [laughter] Actually, when I first came out to her, one of the first things she told me, (because I was going through relationship angst) was, "If she wants to leave, let her go." That just totally upset me. Because if it was a boyfriend, no one would ever say, "If he wants to leave, let him go." As if you are holding them, right. But maybe because I was the butchier of the two. You laugh. I always say I'm butch and everybody laughs. But she was very femme.

My mother actually couldn't deal with it for a long time. I came out to my mother in 1974 or 1975. She couldn't deal with it. My family is not one that talks anyway. They do not talk to each other, and they definitely didn't talk about feelings and emotions. So it was very hard. She also told me, "Don't tell your father. He will have a heart attack and die." So in 1980, when I came out in this community and went to the festivals, I was very happy and beaming. I had come back home. I had bought... You know, when you first come out you buy all the labrysis. You've got your necklace. You have everything—T-shirt [that reads] "Witches Heal." Everything. I had a belt that said, "Women Loving Women." I wore it to work and I worked at the phone company. Every now and again



someone would catch it. I'd kind of wear it like I was proud, but I'd kind of be cringing and hoping nobody sees it. I'd walk backwards so that I wouldn't have to turn around.

My dad said, "Something is making her happy." He didn't really know. But I could tell that they were happy that I was happy. So I decided that was the year to tell my dad. My dad just said, "So what else is new?" I thought, wow. But then later on, when he was drinking, he blamed my mother. It was all her fault. A few years later I talked to him, when he got more comfortable with it. My mom never could say the word *lesbian* until the mid-1980s. When I talked to her she would run out of the room and say, "Oh, something's in the kitchen," or, "I've got to go check this," and just leave me on the bed and just not come back. So she didn't deal with it very well. She said, "Don't flaunt it." My dad told me later that his heart was really pounding very hard, and it was racing, and he just didn't know why. I consider my parents alcoholics. My dad, when he was drinking, said, "You're beautiful, it doesn't matter." He said, "Not outside. You are really beautiful inside. You are my daughter and I love you." I was both saddened and heartened at the same time. I was happy that he said that, but I was also very sad because... You have to wait until you are drunk before you could say something. So it was this give-and-take thing.

My mom really surprised me. It was the Book Collection Contest. Everything happened in 1987.

Marie: I was going to ask you about that. This is the McHenry Library Book Collection Contest.

Kim: I don't know how it all began.

Marie: I think I suggested that you enter it because there are some monetary prizes, and I knew about your research.

Kim: I think you're right because I wouldn't have heard about it any other way.

Marie: Yes, because usually students didn't pick up on it, so when we were at the reference desk we would say, "Hey, you have something going. Why don't you write an essay? You might win a little money."

Kim: Okay. Because I know I wouldn't have even thought about it. Not only would I not have thought of a book collection contest, I wouldn't have thought that my subject was



appropriate. That's a big thing. So to get your encouragement...I really think that you were at the beginning of me taking off and having this huge expansion, because without that kind of support, and encouragement I would have thought—who cares? I care. Cristy cares, and the other six Asian lesbians that I've met care. But I'm not one to say, "I'm in a group with all these Asian lesbians and look what I'm doing."

The Book Collection Contest preceded the book. That was the start. You told me that this had value. People are talking about this great literature and you are saying, "Okay, you have these magazine articles and a couple of books here and a couple of newsletters." Someone wants to know about that? Right. This is a university. I know there're not a lot of Asian lesbians there. Who's going to care about Asian lesbians? So you were extremely instrumental in having me do that. I don't know if you remember that when you read the essay you said, "Let's have Michael Warren..." He took a look at it and helped me edit it. He was a professor of literature. I never really thought that there was any possibility. I think I was encouraged that you had encouraged me. I just felt like, hey there's something to this. But it still didn't sink in. Then when I won, it was like wow, I can't believe this! She was right. There's something to this. I wanted everybody to see it.

I told my mom about it. She was so excited. She wanted to tell her friends. They do this annual trip. She belongs to the Nisei VFW. They take an annual trip to Reno. They all ride on the bus, and party on the bus, and chat and drink and eat. She said she wanted to tell her best friend, who is Chinese, that I had won this award, and that I had written this essay. I said, "But Mom, that would be coming out." I knew that she didn't want anybody to know. She said, "No, it doesn't mean that." With my mother, any time the word *lesbian* was there it meant something. But all of a sudden it didn't mean that. She was just so proud that it was recognized, and that it was valued by academia. She said, "No, I'm going to tell my friend. It doesn't mean that you are a lesbian. It means that's what you wrote about." So that was one of the first times that she was talking about it. That was the first time she started acknowledging it to her friends. That was her first time she ever said something to a friend. I think she had said something to my aunt, her sister, before. But my aunt, I say, is a lesbian. Her brother, my uncle, was gay. My aunt doesn't always say that she's a lesbian but her life and the way that she lives it...

Marie: These are your mother's siblings?

Kim: My mother's siblings. But actually I was going to say, that's the first time she acknowledged it to other people. The first time she started acknowledging it to herself



was I think in 1982, after I'd come out. They were doing some of those witch hunts in the military at the time. I had gone to Seneca, New York, to protest at the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment, so I had gone cross-country by myself. I was going to different peace encampments along the way. I was headed to New York and ended up staying in New York for a couple of months. I don't know how I managed because I get heat stroke really easy now, and this was in the middle of the summer, 107 degrees. I got mosquito bites. Dry cornfields. I was on this hypoglycemic diet, non-dairy. I was going through all kinds of stuff all at once. But when I was out there she was sending me articles from the newspaper, either about Seneca or about the stuff that was going on in Long Beach at the time. I was like wow, my mom is noticing this lesbian thing and sending me stuff. That was her way of being supportive of me. My mom is not one who emotes a lot or who will send me a lot of stuff or talk about it. So for her to send it was this major opening.

Marie: Perhaps the fact that it was university recognition. For someone who had not been at the university, that must have been...

Kim: No, it was. Absolutely. I know in me it's really strong, this establishment or authority figure. In school it's always the teacher and we are just the students. You always have this high respect for any position. So to be recognized by the University is this major acknowledgement. At the time I was still pretty naive myself. The University moves so fast. You are going from one thing to the next. You don't get so deep into things. I mean you do, but you don't. So with the President's Undergraduate Fellowship I said, "I got it! Yes." But I didn't understand what that really means. I look back, and I say, that was pretty good. And at one point earlier I had an application for a Mellon fellowship. But I didn't know to act on it. I could have tried to do something like that. I was like oh wait, now I am too late.

Marie: I'd like to ask more about your experience at UCSC. For example, were you aware of faculty members who were gay or lesbian? You mention Bettina Aptheker. I assume she was always out.

Kim: Bettina I knew. Other ones I don't remember knowing. There was one who I always had a question about. I found out later that she was, actually, and she was Asian too.

Marie: Did you have some contact with her around those issues? Either being gay or being Asian?



Kim: Yes, I took an Asian-American women class from her. I think there were two or three Asian lesbians in the class. We were very vocal. As a group, we were always talking about different Asian stereotypes. We said, “We’re not going to be those quiet Asian stereotypes.” It was an evening class and I remember making lots of noise after class and before. Just to be loud. Playing with the professor. Actually I wrote a piece in class about my mother and Pearl Harbor, because she was in Hawaii at that time. She told me, “Oh, you should write more of these, and you should try and publish this.” Again, this is another one of those things—“Okay, yeah, sure.” I thought there was lots of stuff written. But there weren’t as many personal stories, which I didn’t realize [until] later on.

Marie: Was there lesbian content in the class to start with?

Kim: We brought it up. We included it in everything. But it wasn’t part of the curriculum. It was *Asian-American Women’s History*.

Marie: Which lesbians are part of.

Kim: But we weren’t part of that. She did the traditional economic, political, social factors. But we always made sure we included it. We had to do some scenarios in class, and so we wrote a scenario with lesbians, of course. There were actually some Asian women, non-lesbian, who were very supportive and really friendly to work with. I have fond memories of them, because sometimes I think coming out as an Asian lesbian within your own community there is a stigmatization. We don’t want to cross those lines. We worked closely with some other Asian women who were totally comfortable with working around these issues. One of them played a lesbian in the scenario that we wrote. The reason why I said that I didn’t know if the professor was lesbian or not, was because of her ideology. I read something of hers later on, about not trying to influence. That’s why she was closeted, or maybe because she was new to the campus.

Marie: But you felt comfortable as an out lesbian?

Kim: Yes. We were like raging. We were really coming into the community. The whole stuff with the book collection, traveling to different Asian lesbian conferences. Organizations were starting to happen. I think because of the work we did at UC, people started to know a little bit about us, so that even when the organizing started to happen in San Francisco, it happened jointly: San Francisco-Santa Cruz. One of the retreats that we had for the Asian lesbian groups happened at the UC campus. People stayed in



dorms and everything. It was because of the connections that were made with us. There was a strong, vocal group of Asian lesbians in Santa Cruz. There wasn't really a big group, it was just loud and vocal. I don't know that I knew that many professors who were lesbian, but they were all very supportive.

Marie: Are there particular people who stood out for you?

Kim: In the American studies department, Ann Lane. She was one of my sponsors for one of my independent studies. Bettina, of course, because she sponsored I don't know how many. Kay Metz, who also sponsored independent studies for me in the art department. I don't think I did out lesbian stuff in the art department. But she was very supportive. Like we brought Mayuma Oda down to the campus. There was a woman named Amy; there was Cristy, and Akemi, and a couple of other Asian women. We tried to bring different speakers down. And we always had the support of women's studies. It was when Nicolette [Czarrunchick] was still kind of new in the women's studies office. She hadn't been there that long.

Marie: You didn't teach any student-directed seminars?

Kim: No, I had wanted to, but I was too chicken.

Marie: Did you work at all with the folks at the Women's Center?

Kim: Beatriz Lopez-Flores was the director of the Women's Center. I used to go hang out there some. I did my art show there. I didn't do many things like organized events there, because I wasn't living on campus; I spent a lot of time not on campus. I did a lot of independent studies, spent a lot of time travelling and doing other kinds of work.

Marie: Other than Bettina's class and this Asian-American class which you brought some lesbian content into, was there any other class you took that had lesbian or gay content?

Kim: Not really. Shelly Errington in anthropology. She did the South Asian women. There was no lesbian content. But I could read homosexual overtones in some of the literature and some of the writing. For my final paper I did something that used the basis of some of the religious and spiritual stuff in the community. Unfortunately I never got that paper back so I don't know what she thought about it. To this day I'm still really bummed about it because I still want to know.



Marie: Were there any LGBT organizations happening when you were here?

Kim: The Center was there, but I wasn't involved with it at all. I don't know how much it was going, I think because we were so focused on getting Asian lesbians together. I know that there were some conflicts going on at the LGB Center because Cristy was involved a little bit, and her ex was really involved. Cristy was pissed off a lot. So I said, "Okay, we don't really want to go there. They are doing their thing and we are really focused in our own direction."

Marie: It didn't seem like the kind of place where you could start the group and meet there?

Kim: No. Actually, you know what we started? We started LOCA [Lesbians of Color Alliance] at one point. I think that was the last year. It was at the very end. Plus, my memory is gone. After forty it sort of starts going faster than it did after thirty. [laughter] In the archive there are a couple of flyers for LOCA. I had completely forgotten about it until I was going through the archives and getting it ready for the library and I said hey, that rings a bell.

Marie: So you were at the beginning of it. You helped start it?

Kim: I remember being in at the beginning. I remember meeting outside of the Whole Earth Restaurant, and talking with Amy. I don't know if Akemi was also involved at that time. I remember setting up a mailbox. It was where the old Student Center was, across from the bookstore.

Marie: So it was an official student organization.

Kim: Yes. But much more than that, I don't remember.

Marie: But just that there was a need for a lesbians of color organization.

Kim: Yes, we did feel a need for a specific lesbians of color group, separate from the LGB Center group. For some reason I remember, I don't know if it's true or not, it was like we started it and then it took a break for a quarter. Or maybe we started it, and I had left because I wasn't on campus for a couple of quarters, and then it started up again. I'm not sure. But for some reason I have this recollection that it died down for a little bit. Those were the two things that I remember organizing.



Marie: In the community, were there any particular places that you socialized, coffeeshops or bars or organizations?

Kim: Oh God. Do you remember old Mona's Gorilla Lounge?

Marie: [laughter]

Kim: Not as Asian lesbians, but this is another thing. When I first came out in 1980, I had never gone to a bar in my life. In 1980, I was twenty-five. I guess that's not that old. My aunt used to tell me, "You should try to go to a lesbian bar. You can meet some people." She had gone with some of her friends. But my image is still truck drivers; some really butch woman is going to come to this bar, and it's kind of dark—all those pictures that you see. It's like reading an Ann Bannon book, right? Okay, I had no clue. I had never been to any kind of bar in my life. Plus, I'd never danced. My family, none of us have any rhythm, so that's part of the reason why we don't dance. And none of us ever went to any school dances. No one's ever gone to a prom. No one's ever gone to any dance function.

They said, "Well, do you want to go up to this place, Mona's Gorilla Lounge?" So I went up there. There were holes in the dance floor; that's how bad it was. There were a few holes in the dance floor on the back side. But that was my first experience. All of my friends were dancing. In those days I did get kind of wild. Then they closed down and became Cha Cha's. Then there was that Dragon Moon, where we used to hang out. Most of the lesbians of color, we'd all go to the Dragon Moon. It used to be a bar. Maybe on Soquel? It was a dance bar, and we used to go there a lot. A big old dark dance floor with mirrors on one side. We'd just go there and dance hard for a few hours and then go back home. Then later on in my Santa Cruz days there was the Blue Lagoon.

Marie: Was it a lesbian bar?

Kim: I think it was a lesbian/gay bar. Maybe it was a mixed place, but we never had any problems being there.

Marie: Either at UCSC, or before when you were coming out, were there any books or people who had a particular impact on you. You just talked about Ann Bannon. [laughter]



Kim: That was fun. That came afterwards. *This Bridge Called My Back*. Finding Barbara Noda's first books of poetry, *Strawberries*, and to realize she was from Watsonville. She was local, rural, Japanese. That was pretty amazing. I couldn't miss Kitty Tsui's book. There are so many pieces in there that were reprinted everywhere. And the magazines I always loved *Connexions*. That was out of Oakland and prints no longer, right?

Marie: Yes.

Kim: They were doing translations. That was amazing.

Marie: They published those two lesbian issues that were so important.

Kim: Yes, writings about lesbians in their home countries. And *Lesbian Connection*. I still get *Lesbian Connection* to this day. It's just fun to read because it's every lesbian's writing—down home writing that anybody can read. You don't always agree with what's being said, but there really is an exchange. You get very different viewpoints, different sides. There is very rarely any Asian lesbian stuff in there. I read it through all the time. Every now and then there will be a reference. There are probably a lot of people like me who read it. It's just not like we're always writing about Asian lesbian issues.

There was one article in *This Bridge Called My Back*, one of the very first by an Asian lesbian. I think that was Kitty Tsui? And Barbara Noda. And just the local papers. *Matrix* at the time, because it was talking about the local lesbian issues.

Marie: There wasn't really any strictly lesbian paper?

Kim: I would read *Matrix* to see what was going on, because there was always the calendar. I was much more involved with *Demeter* and *Plexus* in the Bay Area.

Marie: Did you write for *Plexus*?

Kim: No, I think I submitted something once. A poem or a letter. And *off our backs*. Then I used to read *Sojourner* from Boston. I had subscriptions to all of those at the time. It was good because it had wide coverage. *off our backs* always had the international section also. *Sojourner* I got because I had a long-distance relationship with somebody who lived in Boston. Another great book that I really liked was *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*. That was one of the first anthologies. When *Compañeras* came out I met one of the editors. I thought it was important. When I saw *Nice Jewish Girls* I was really



impressed. I had a lot of Jewish women friends and a lot of Jewish women in my life and I thought when I read that book that it was great. Here were these women... It was very specific. They've got their own book. There's a place to read and for me to learn a little bit more.

I think that's sort of how our anthology came to be. On a much smaller scale but thinking: "Look at this. Where are the Asian lesbians? We need something too. Look at this." Not just because we are entitled to one, but because it's really nice to see ourselves and for other people to see us. For us to see each other, more than to see ourselves.

Marie: Where *is* the anthology for Asian lesbians? There hasn't been one?

Kim: There are several anthologies that came out after ours.

Marie: Do you think there is one pivotal one like *Compañeras* or *Nice Jewish Girls*?

Kim: I don't think they were specifically lesbian. *Women Hold Up Half the Sky*, that's South Asian women. There's another one published by Sister Vision in Canada.

Actually going back to the connections and what we did at UC, Willie and I put together a proposal for putting together an anthology, to do a whole book. We were hoping to have it be a bigger thing. But that didn't happen. I don't remember if that came before or after *Between the Lines*. I think it might have come after. We always talked about it. *Between the Lines* got such a great reception. That book is still requested because it's never been marked out of print, so we still get library requests for it.²⁸

Marie: Can you make copies?

Kim: No, I can't. The book was used in some university classes also. At one point somebody had requested twenty copies. I wrote them to say, I don't have the actual book but I can copy it and spiral bind it if that's what you want. So that's what I did. I did twenty of those one time for a class.

Even though it was well received and people are still looking at it, *Between the Lines* was the voices of just a few of us. It wasn't as broad as it could have been. It could be very broad because there are so many different groups and different experiences. There are

²⁸*Between the Lines* will be digitized and re-published on the University Library's website.



immigrants. If you are first generation, second generation, third generation. Even if you are first generation, whether you were born or raised in Chinatown, or born and raised in Hawaii, or in Kansas, or adopted or biracial. There are so many experiences. The five of us did represent a lot [of diversity]—Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Hapa, Filipina, South Asian. It just so happened that way. It could have been bigger. But it was good.

Marie: Is that something you might like to tackle in the future? Have you thought about that?

Kim: Yes, I always have so many projects in mind you would not believe it!

Marie: Tell me some of the projects you have in mind.

Kim: Well, I still need to update that bibliography that's with the archive. The one I turned in was for right then, and I realized there is a lot of stuff that I don't have on the bibliography. The title is listed but it's not in a bibliographic form, which to me is so much easier, so much more accessible. So I'd like that. There is always the oral history project/video project that I would like to do. That's one of my dreams. In my spare time, I put together a whole proposal—what I'd like to do for an oral history project, what it would take. The interview questions. What I would need to do to set up the interviews. Set up releases. Put together the budget, the timeline. I've got this whole notebook on it. The advertising. The publishing costs. All those details. I am so detail-oriented. I did that at one point because this is something I've wanted to do since I was at school. Like you, I am fascinated with people's stories. Everybody says: "I'm nobody. I'm nothing." But everybody has a story. I love hearing people's stories. And I have a vision of having pictures. My book would be ten volumes [laughter] because I'd like to see photographs, even of family going back, who they are now, or of them as a child and them now. It wasn't that I was going to do all the interviews, but I had it set up so that I would arrange to have different people do the interviews. I started to make the guidelines for the interviewers, what I wanted.

Marie: You are very organized.

Kim: That's where the double Virgo comes in.

Marie: Tell me more about the oral history project.



Kim: I would get the stories of Asian lesbians. I have hundreds of projects that are focused around Asian lesbians. It's so hard for me now, still. I hate to confess that I'm not quite this woman of 2000. I get confused with all of the LGBT issues. I am still like—*Asian lesbian. Asian lesbian.* If I think about it intellectually, I can broaden my spectrum of queer experience. But I've always really been focused on lesbian issues. So it's kind of hard, because I feel like I haven't quite made the big leap, you know, where everything else has gone into LGBT. I'm still in "L". Or it's gone to "Q" instead and I'm still at "L."

So that's one of the projects. The other side of that, instead of doing a written project, would be to do a video project, but doing the same thing. I love seeing people's lives, their parents, or their family. The API PFLAG group just did one with the family. They had a lesbian and a gay man, and they were talking with their family about how it was for them to come out, and what their experience was. The siblings talked about what it was for them too, when their sibling came out to them, how it was hard or not hard, or whatever.

Then another project is writing. I'd like to write a book on the history of the small Asian lesbian groups that have sprung up across the country and come and gone. That's a big project, because that would be trying to get information from all over the place. In the age of the internet it's nice because you can get a lot of... It's not the same, but for some people it's just much easier in terms of time. They can be up at midnight writing. I thought of finding all the Asian lesbian groups on the internet and saying, "Okay, anybody please send me a story of what groups you've been involved in, and where you were, and what they were like." I know that everyone in that circle would have a different view of what was in the center. So, someone's going to be saying, like about the San Francisco group, "Hey, that's not what's going on. *This* is what was going on. We were just having fun. It was a party. We were doing all this stuff." And I'm saying, "What was going on was that we were trying to have political action and we were being thwarted." Trying to have a book that would have all those kinds of stories.

Another book—I have lots of books in mind—is like they have the gays and lesbians in literature, that book. I thought I could use that as a model. But when you look through those books there are maybe two, three Asian lesbians in there. I know there are so many more. I would like to do a biography/directory, a Who's Who in the Asian lesbian groups. It doesn't have to be Urvashi [Vaid] or Trinity Ordon. It would be Aly or [laughter]. It would just be different people who worked in the... Like this woman Patty who was in Seattle. I don't know who she is. I've never met her. Her name used to spring



up in the newspaper *Out and About*, the small paper in Seattle. I saw her name in that paper. She was active in the community there.

Marie: Unsung heroes.

Kim: Yes. From all the research that I did at UC and all the books that are in the collection, there are tons of books waiting to be written. I would like to do another book of [Asian lesbian] literature, a cross between a thesis and a reader, so that people know that this is out there. A literary history. In those books like the *Biography of Gay and Lesbian Literature* they will list the people, and say, "And they were published in this and this." Great. That leads me to say, what did they write? What was it? I'm so glad that they were published back in the 1970s or whatever, but I'd like to see what they wrote.

All of this stuff is buried. It's all there but it's a big task. And I still want to do my family. My mom is seventy-one. She'll be seventy-two this coming year. I think she's got stories still to tell. I'd like to have some more of those family stories.

Marie: What about your own personal story? What's happening with you? You're partnered with a Latina. You have children. It's a biracial family, so there must be all kinds of interesting issues.

Kim: I do think about writing about now. I think about writing for my kids. I think more about writing now, not from a lesbian perspective, so much as the mother perspective. Anne Lamott, the neurotic writer. I read some of her stuff. She says she's neurotic and she *is* neurotic, but it's fun to read. I kind of like that. I'm starting to write some stories about the kids.

I've wanted to write my autobiography. I've started several times on different things. I've also wanted to write a novel with different characters who are different parts of me. There was someone named Alison, which is my formal name. And there was somebody else named Aly. But then there was Kim. And there was so-and-so. They would play all these different parts. But then I thought, oh no, this is getting a little scary, dissecting my psychological, emotional self! And I've never written a novel before. I've never written much fiction. But it's an idea. There are lots of ideas in there.



Marie: Are there any particular issues that come up around being with a Latina? I mean, you still keep your Asian identity obviously, and your interests in terms of being an Asian lesbian and being active.

Kim: I think at the beginning. Now we are so much more homebodies, with the family, so it's not so...

Marie: It's not like you're going out to organizations.

Kim: Yes. There are still times when I'd like to, but it's more about time and stuff like that. Well, neither one of us have been that active for awhile. Before we had kids, and before we were really settled, we were a little bit more involved. It would be, "Well, do you want to come to this thing?" "Well you know, I don't really know anybody." Those kinds of issues. In terms of us in our relationship, it's been so long now. I don't know. I think there's more acceptance. We just know each other. It's more about our families. I don't know if it's so much a cultural thing as, "Okay, your family is like this, and my family is like this." And of course it's cultural because of our backgrounds.

Marie: And you are bringing up the children to know all their cultures that are involved.

Kim: Yes, we're trying. As much as *we* know, okay? I'm really keen on the kids growing up with Hawaii-style, and being around the family in that way. This past few months we've been spending almost every other week going down to Monterey, which is a bit taxing. We are going at least once a month or every three weeks. Because I want them to know my mother. I want them to hang out with my sister-in-law and her family, because they are the epitome of local-style. Harriet is a granny. She's seventy-six or seventy-seven. She doesn't care about anything.

Marie: This is who?

Kim: My sister-in-law's mother. My sister-in-law's family I love and adore. I call them all my sister-in-law, or my mother-in-law, or whatever. But her family is totally local-style. Everyone just hangs out together, sits in the kitchen chatting, or hangs out on the couch, or plays with the kids. They used to be really involved in all the Hawaiian stuff. They are still involved in a Hawaiian Club. I just like my kids to be around that. I wanted them to have that part of my culture. That's why we gave them a Hawaiian middle name. Their first names are both Spanish, and Chris feels very strongly about that, wanting them to



learn the Spanish language. Language is not really an issue for my side because it's not like I want to teach them how to speak pidgin. We spend a lot of time, as much as we can, with her family, too. Her sister is big on teaching them different kinds of things. The big party events we try to do bicultural. Chris actually cooks stir fry and fried rice better than I do. And I make the tamales and salsa.

Marie: [laughter]

Kim: So it kind of works out.

Marie: There are just a couple of things I wanted to ask you, and then give you a chance to say anything further. One of them, when you were talking about doing oral histories you were saying you still think in the frame of Asian lesbians. I was curious as to whether you would include somebody who openly identified as bisexual or transgendered. Have you thought about that?

Kim: I think about those issues. Would I include someone? In my politically correct state I think that I probably would. But, then again, I don't know. I guess it would be hard. I think that my heart would be in having Asian lesbians and not having bisexuals.

Marie: Are you talking about somebody who identifies as that now? Or if a lesbian was married before and now is in a lesbian relationship and identifies as a lesbian?

Kim: I think, okay they probably were married because they were following the rules of who we were supposed to be, and now they are a lesbian, so I would say that she's a lesbian. But someone who openly says, "I'm bisexual." If they are in a relationship with a woman, maybe. If they were in a relationship with a man, no.

The whole transgender issue is so new to me. I've been reading some things online, a listserv. There's been some discussion on this list about transgender issues. Willie considers herself transgender. It's opened up my eyes. This year at the gay and lesbian film festival I went to see some short films. The whole series, which I didn't realize, was on transgender issues. I got to hear the personal stories. So it made a big difference. It's not like this category or this name. It's the personal stories. I heard about the struggles and how difficult it was for many of them. And so, it was like okay, I can get down with this. But I don't know. There's still some hesitation and I'm just not sure about it.



Marie: The other thing I wanted to talk about was the incredible archive that you did. Can you run down why you gave it to Santa Cruz and how you actually feel about that now?

Kim: Why I gave it to Santa Cruz? To give back, and for preservation, and accessibility [of the archive]. I love UC Santa Cruz. I wish I could go back to school. I wish I could go be a librarian like you were in Santa Cruz. I really do! I keep thinking that... I've talked to Chris before about—wouldn't it be nice to go work at the University? She says, "Yes, but my family is still up here." I have mixed feelings about Santa Cruz the place, being there, because I had some really hard times because of a relationship there. After I left, it was really hard. Even when I went by there I had this feeling in my gut, going there a few times. The last times when I've gone down there, like to talk about the archive, it was fine. But I love Santa Cruz, UC, not Santa Cruz the city. UC gave me so much. The reason why I wanted to give it back was because I felt like I was given so much. Different people have different opinions. One very strong activist in the Bay Area told me, "Why are you giving it to Santa Cruz? Why don't you leave it up here in the Bay Area?" But I wanted to give back, was one of the big reasons, because many of these opportunities I wouldn't have had if I hadn't been there. I wouldn't have gotten the grants. I wouldn't have done the book. I wouldn't have traveled. I wouldn't have done the reader. I wouldn't have done any of it. Or maybe I would have. I don't know. But I got the financial support, the academic support, the emotional support, so I wanted to give back to the community. I always hear of people who go off and they make it and they give back. I think of people who are living in barrios and they go become a lawyer or a teacher or something, and they come back and serve the people. I don't think of UCSC as like a barrio, but it's the same kind of feeling for me. That's where something was given to me, and I want to give back, not to just give back to the University but for other people to have access to, to be able to use the material. I also want the material to be available. I don't want it to get lost. The other reason to give it to UC Santa Cruz is because I want it to be well protected, not just not getting lost, in the sense of being buried, but not wanting it to get lost physically. Chris has always known and Cristy always knew, if anything ever happened to me (this is way before the archive), I wanted something to happen with the collection, and I wanted it to be sent back to UC.



Marie: How do you feel about it now? I sent you the Cruzcat citation.²⁹ Now your name is across the world, across the internet. Fifteen cartons, the summary: “includes books, periodicals, and other issues important to Asian Pacific Islander women.” And there’s a finding aid, which you did yourself, which is absolutely wonderful. And it is on the Online Archive of California, which means that at a particular site that you can get into and you find lots of materials about the history of California. So even though yours includes more than just California, it’s on there as a particular archive from Santa Cruz. I just wondered if you had any feelings about it being out there in the world now?

Kim: I’m happy about it. I’m so glad it’s accessible. But I don’t know how to let people know about it. I’m not good at saying, “Hey look it, without feeling like I’m saying, “Look what I did. This is here.” Which is kind of what I want to do on this mail list. I have to figure out how to write something so I don’t sound like, “Honk-honk; look what I did!” But what I want people to know is this is here; this is available. Everything these days just takes time for me. Between being a mama and work and everything else...

Marie: What is your actual work now?

Kim: I work in construction management. My official title is I am a construction inspector. But I actually work more as an office engineer, for the city of San Francisco.

Marie: Is there anything else you want to add? One of the questions we are asking, is imagine someone in 2070 reading this oral history. What would you like them to know about your life at UCSC? Is there anything you haven’t said already?

Kim: [pause] It’s always changing but the one thing that will be constant is to really look at what you want. You might not know if it’s what you want or not. But try it. If there’s money available at UC, go for it. You’re not going to have that opportunity once you graduate. When you’re not in school anymore, you don’t have the time and you don’t have the money. You don’t have the resources. You don’t have the support. You can if you do private research and stuff. But if you are out working and trying to support yourself, you’re not going to have it. And it’s a good learning experience. If you take what you learn at UC, grantwriting and those kinds of things, you can apply it and do them. I think that’s the biggest thing. There are so many opportunities there. Just try them. Take them. Don’t just be there, but really, really use it. It’s a special time. Earlier

²⁹Marie is referring to the UCSC Library Catalog, Cruzcat, which has a citation for Alison Kim’s Pacific/Asian Lesbian Archive (MS40 Special Collections).



you asked about LGBT organizations and the need for specific lesbians of color organizations. I did feel the need to work with other LOCs in general and specifically with other Pacific/Asian lesbians. Since there wasn't an existing community, I and others created spaces for ourselves. For me, encompassing my needs as a woman, Asian lesbian writer, and artist meant using all the resources available, including guest speakers, funding independent studies, students and faculty and other organizations. And that was important to me—I could create what I needed and I had lots of support to do it.

To be able to sit here and say, “Oh, I’m published.” Or, “A university library has what I did!” It’s something. I’m really proud of it. It almost feels like nothing. But to do it, it was like you are just going along day-to-day doing it. It didn’t feel like work. It felt like, this is what I wanted to do. There were times when it was work, when you had a deadline, you had to turn in a thesis. When I wanted to do this reader I was spending late hours writing numbers and going to Kinko’s. But for the most part, it’s like the work was easy because it was something that I wanted and I was supported by the UC community. In the year 2070 the environment will change, the economy will change, all those issues will change. It will all be a little bit different. It might be a more crowded campus. But like I say, use the resources, because there are so many. Including using this Asian lesbian archive that’s in Special Collections. [laughter] And write something!