INTERVIEWING JORDAN YOUNG

MEETING WAS HELD ON SUNDAY NOVEMBER 19, 2023

THE TWO PARTICIPANTS ARE FERRIS LE AND JORDAN “SONG” YOUNG

INTERVIEW LED BY FERRIS LE

**Meeting: 1 hour 27 minutes and 53 seconds long.**

F: OK. Alright.

F: Hello Jordan.

J: Hello. Hello, hello.

F: Hello.

F: Umm, so I know you very well, but would you like to introduce yourself in terms of. Like a little ditty? A little ditty.

J: Like a little, little little brief summary, OK.

F: I could say what I know of you first, and maybe you could add on.

J: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, that seems like a good idea.

F: So I've known this guy for about like half my life now, nearing half my life. I I I know we're getting old. Ah, but I've known them since, like the 7th grade. They were the first person I probably came out to. We've been like best friends for a long time. Jordan is a Chinese American and we're both first generation Asian Americans. And I know them to be a wonderful artist, and writer, and poet, and one of my closest friends.

J: I might just bawl my eyes out.

F: Would you like to add on?

J: Do you? Do you want it to be like… to be known that we, like, have a romantic history or is that.

F: Yes.

J: Is that something that you are OK with?

F: That's just fine. That's just fine.

J: Okeydoke. Well.

F: Yes, Jordan was also my first girlfriend.

J: Yeah, we are little little gay guys trying to figure out our way through life.

F: Yes, yes.

J: Truthfully. Umm. Let's see. What else do I got? Yes, I am a first generation Chinese American. Complicated. Sort of like family, like nationality history.

F: It always is.

J: Honestly. I am I am 100% ethnically Chinese, however my mother grew up in the Philippines. My father grew up in Taiwan, so they were both born in the countries that they were raised in. However, my my paternal grandfather was a refugee, was one like both a political and militant refugee from Communist China right after the Civil War. You know, fun time, fun, good old times.

J: My my, my paternal grandmother was from Shanghai so and I'm not really entirely sure what her history was with her immigration to Taiwan, but she is also from mainland China and then my maternal grandfather was originally from Futian but he was adopted slash kind of child slavery sold umm. To a family in the Philippines because unfortunately that is kind of what happens when you don't have enough resources to care for your children.

J: And then my maternal grandmother was also born in the Philippines, but her family was originally from also Futian.

J: So yeah, so very complicated sort of history of just going places, guys.

F: And well, this will probably definitely play a role in later discussion. I I feel like it's a very Asian American thing to be like, like talk about our like intergenerational trauma but also like having to like delve into our family history right off the bat.

J: Exactly. I guess some other. So like well, technically. Well, part of it is. Well, part of it's kind of just like is like as we were like ohh so like like are you are you Chinese and it’s like well…

F: Well, let's get into it.

J: Well, like technically a bit and it's like, well, technically, but yeah, see, so we're from here, here, here, here, here, here, here and here and also a little bit here and now we're also here, here and here and here. So and so it's a, it's just at bare minimum, always a really fun, confusing, not particularly clear time when discussing nationalities or even ethnicities sometimes cause I probably have something else in my ethnic bloodstream because of colonialism, but. Chinese.

F: A lot of global processes that really stir the pot in terms of nationality and ethnic identity.

J: Exactly.

J: Some some other things about me I guess would be. So I am almost 21. I'll be 21 in like 2 ish months now. Just a crazy thought to think about.

F: Ohh yeah. We didn’t think we’d get this far to be honest.

J: I'm like, I'm almost 21. It's a very it's a, it's, it's an existential thing to think about, but I am currently. I'm currently a creative writing major at Southern Methodist University. I was originally a was originally a computer engineering major and I changed that path because I simply decided that I was better at the other thing. And in all fairness, I kind of am so.

F: And and you were you were. You were going a little insane. If I might say.

J: I was going a little kooky guys. I was having kind of a hard freaking time with just being like, yeah, I I just totally can do this. And the fact that I was very much like not having a good time and it just kind of wasn't my my schtick. It wasn't my schtick and I didn't stick with it because it wasn't my schtick. Now I write gay poetry.

F: So so I think you've already discussed your family's background, but let's kind of walk, walk back to like a young young Jordan. I know that before you met me, you were in California first as a youngling.

J: Yes, so I originally so I was born in Texas and then I and I moved to California, but I moved to California around when I was like 8 or 9 years old and I came back pretty much in like in 2015 when I was about 12 years old. So I spent some pretty transformative years in California, which is really funny cuz I really would just like I'm going to leave the Deep South. But don't worry guys, I'm going to California for just enough time for it to shape who I am. And then come back to the South like like that culture change wasn't like going to be a profound part of who I am. Umm. Umm, so I was in California. Was in California for three years before I actually before the first time I met you.

F: What part of what part of Cali?

J: I was in San Jose, so I was in a pretty much like as my father liked to call it, the armpit of California and he’s kind of right because it does kind of smell like \*\*\*\* over there. But it's like right, it's kind of like right in the area right below San Francisco.

F: Gotcha. Gotcha.

J: So not too much North, but also not particularly South, I was very decidedly Northern California. Umm it. It was a weird thing for me because, you know, I went from being in the Texas public school system to ohh to pretty much in the private school system in California. And one big landscape shift because we had these things called portables and they were like these little shacks instead of classrooms. And I went from having this, like melting pot of ethnicities in, like, Texas where it was like predominantly Hispanic and like maybe I would say that when I was in elementary school in the Texas public school system, a lot of my classmates were mostly Hispanic and black. And like white people. And then, like the Asians were like kind of there, like, we weren't dwindling, but we were like under there.

F: I felt that yeah, it was this DFW too.

J: We were. I was -ISD so.

F: I felt that cause of there was like one other Asian – maybe three in my grade I think in my elementary years.

J: I honestly, I honestly can barely remember the um Asian kids from my from my elementary school. And then I when I moved to California, the Asians were significantly the majority.

F: Wow.

J: I had like maybe one or two white classmates, and I actually distinctly remember their only really being one other like one African American student. And it was just him and his brother.

F: Well, that's crazy.

J: So yeah, it was coocoo for cocoa puffs. It was also like a super duper. It was like also a super super small school. So basically, you essentially knew everyone that was in your grade like these were your people. Those were your friends, yeah.

F: Because you were stuck in those shacks together?

J: Yeah, exactly.

J: So I had a very weird transitionary period in my like prepubescence, where I was pretty much surrounded by other Asian kids other like and you know, I didn't actually get to have a big part of that, like my a big part of my upbringing actually was people enjoying the food that I brought with me to school. I did not actually have a big experience of people being like ohh that's weird food because a lot of my peers by that time were I was saved. I was – I was spared from the culinary racism.

J: I mean basically everyone that I was eating with was either eating something identical to like what I was eating or something very similar or or \*\*\*\*ty school provided lunches. And of course, nobody wanted that \*\*\*\* because we cause they would give us pot stickers sometimes, and we'd be like, this is what is this \*\*\*\*? This isn't what umm, so I was spared that.

F: So like where the the other Asians on where they like typically like East Asian, Southeast Asian, South Asian, what was the deal?

J: I think the predominant group was mostly Vietnamese students, honestly.

F: Let’s go!

J: It was honestly actually a pretty, pretty, a pretty even bag of the East, like the the like, very much the East Asian ethnicities. So we had. So obviously we had like my group of like Chinese students, we also had a bunch of Vietnamese students we had, I'm pretty sure I'm pretty sure we had one student who was like half Japanese. And but again, I think I think it was really, truly mostly like maybe an even split between Vietnamese students and Chinese students. So yeah, no, no, like unfortunately, like. No, not like not a lot of Southeast Asia besides Vietnam, were in our school.

F: So like I guess like I I imagine that must have been another kind of like culture shock going from like a predominantly Asian community back to like Texas and like, ohh we were there, but it wasn't a a good majority around like 2015 was it?

J: It was like it was like it was weird. Like, again, you can attest to this case. We were literally in school together, but our middle school was our middle school was a really again it was another melting pot of just like we did have a lot of different ethnic groups at our school, but Asians were definitely not in in that majority. And unfortunately, I did kind of have to go come back to Texas to like reexperience this different sort, I say different sort. I came back to experience racism in the way that I never would have experienced in California, and The thing is, is like I did experience like some forms of racism in California. It's not like California was completely exempt from that sort of behavior, but it was it was different in that it was more. It was more of an internalized racism of like colorism and like classist sort of behavior between, like, like in-group fighting between like Asians, like, different, like groups of Asians rather than ohh, like t his is a complete different like other group of people who are like ignorant, ignorantly hating on my like, just generalized group of people as like, OK, at least if I'm at least when Asians are racist to me, they're they're racist to me with like some amount of accuracy but. Which which still isn't great.

J: I mean, like there was that one particular incident at like Hawaiian Falls for like the choir and orchestra and band freaking excursion and this kid like 1 yanked like floaty out from under me in the Lazy River. And then like I was like, hey, give that back. And he was like, no. And then, like, pulled his eyes back at me and did, like, the whole ching chong ching chong.

F: Yeah that’s burned into my memory. We we were both there, we we experienced that together.

J: Yeah, that's a core memory of mine of just like, wow.

F: Unfortunately.

J: It was unfortunate that it was it was from a black student, so it was really jarring for me to realize like oh \*\*\*\*. Gosh ohh God, so that was that was not a fun time. Not a good a good time.

J: What's funny is that I guess in relation to my like to my queerness that that transition between California and Texas. Honestly, I don't really know how to describe it because I actually never really had. A like a properly closeted phase, which I am very privileged to say that honestly. Because I just like when I was younger, I have a distinct memory of being in the 4th grade. I was sitting on the bench in in the courtyard, so I was in. I was living in California at this time and I remember thinking to myself, I was just like, OK, well, if I'm capable of liking boys, why can't I also like girls? Like this was literally the thoughts that played out in my head. I was like, girls are cooler. They're prettier. They smell better and they're just nicer. And I was just like, OK, so if I can, like a dude, then why the \*\*\*\* can't I like a girl? And I was like, OK, I've just. I've simply decided that's not obviously you can't really choose your sexual orientation, but that was my process of like, properly.

F: You you figuring it out.

J: Yeah.

F: At the young age of probably like 8 or something.

J: A the tender at the tender age of like 9, I was like, who says I can't also like girls? \*\*\*\* that. I and this was very much just like, no, I no girls are great. I love girls right they are awesome.Shut up and that was that was the whole process.That was the entire that was the entire process.

F: Very different to my experience like the. The prospect of like same sex attraction flew over my head so many times, like growing up I would… Now I know that they were like crushes, but like I'd have crushes on girls and like, umm, I'd like give them cards with like lyrics to love songs, scrabbled up with my like little chicken scratch kid writing. And I thought that was just the bestie thing.

J: That's just, that's just for the besties, that's that's, that's just for the girls in the in the gays.

F: Yeah, I uh, we had very different like experiences like in regards to like the closet like I think you always had like sort of like an ajar door. Meanwhile, mine was like a very…

J: Yours, like some people have, like the like the closet doors made out of glass. It’s a shower curtain.

F: Iron.

J: Yours was very much like the the iron door of a bank vault like. Locked shut and sealed with like the three different mechanisms.

F: It's two different locks. I I I don't think I realized to myself, like I couldn't even see past the like hypothetical like. I was reckoning with it while you were confessing to me.

J: Yeah, I that was true. Yeah. That was that was the time, you know, that was that was a moment in our lives. I was gut wrenched cause I was like man, I can't believe I fell in love with a straight person.

F: (laughs) With a straight girl.

J: I was just like, man, I'm screwed. I was stressed. I was like man. Man.

F: You you thought 100%. I was straight at the time?

J: I – listen. Listen, I so also for some like additional context.

F: I well, to be fair, I 100% thought I was straight.

J: For like some additional context guys, I probably have a little bit of ‘tism and when I say probably I mean I all I am lacking is a diagnosis from like a like a proper diagnostics exam. I've had my psychiatrist be like, yeah, when you said autism, I was like, yeah, that that makes sense cuz you mentioned some things. And I was like, OK, thanks. Thank you for calling me autistic. Politely /pos, but so I definitely did not have any idea that this could possibly be something that like would like. I really truly cause you. You were like I'm straight and I was like, OK, I believe you, bestie. And I just went on my day. Yeah, not my not my most shining moment, but that's OK. That's OK we fixed that quickly. I guess in a way.

J: But yeah, my my relationship with like my, my queerness when I was first starting like first starting out at the ripe age of nine was really weird cause I just knew that I liked girls. But I had no name with which to to put this.Like the idea of bisexuality was not something I had ever known, like and homosexuality was not was not a concept that I I honestly even knew anything about. I truly had no inkling of the fact that sexual orientation is a word or a concept or thing that anybody would ever have to like, say out loud. I thought it was just something that happened, so when I reached when I reached about 6th grade and it started becoming extremely clear like a lot like people my age were starting to kind of grow into their sexuality and grow into like learning more terms through the Internet.

J: I was like ohh the name for what I am is bisexual and in a very in my very performative way. I'll say like in my very in my way of like trying to like perform in my queerness in the way that I I very much like I I like made a little \*\*\*\*ty post on Google on Google plus and like announced that I was bisexual to like my circle of friends in California and like it the thing.

J: The thing is just like. It wasn't really. It wasn't a big deal to anybody I knew at the time. It was a combination of we were a little, we were still a little too young to like, understand the calamity of certain things, but yet old enough to know what they were and to know that they were serious enough to warrant certain things. And yet not having any way with which to like grapple with that sort of thing. So and The thing is like a lot of people just kind of like new, they just were like, well, that just seems that, yeah, just like they were just like that just seems like a thing that you are like, there's never been like, we've never really thought that you would just be 100% straight.

J: I lived in California for three years. With pretty much the people I had grown up with for those three years, all of them knew I was bisexual, and all of them just and like it really wasn't a big deal. Now I moved back to Texas and the story is way different and the and it's a completely different mood with how queerness is approached and how. Especially queerness, as someone who is feminine, presenting umm, who likes women and other women presenting people, and one part of like my middle school experience was realizing that to other people this thing that I was was bad or that half of what I was was unacceptable or meant that there was some flaw with my ability to appeal to that other side of me. And my biggest example of this is when I had someone, someone told me that the reason why I was dating girls was because I was too ugly for guys.

F: Ohh my God.

J: And so I Yep. Yeah, you remember that one, buddy.

F: That just resurfaced in my head.

J: But I became I started to become very aware of, like my queerness in relation to what was acceptable for me, to really, really be essentially like, as if as if me and not conforming to this idea of heterosexuality and unfortunately I was a very, I was very much a I'm-not-like-other-girls girl l at that time, which also plays into the fact that I was kind of figuring out my gender as well. I had just had my inklings of like I might be bigender. And then Nah, that's that's dumb. I'm just a tomboy. That's that's what it is. And spoiler alert I was wrong and I am in fact bigender. But it became especially cause of that specific incident where someone made a comment of like ohh well, the reason why Jordan doesn't is dating girls is because she's too ugly for guys. Became the first instance of when I made this connection between my queerness and my like. My validity as a person, as if like, as if me liking women and people who were home presenting somehow made me less than in a heterosexual, in a conventional or in a conventionally heterosexual space. And it was truly insulting.

J: So really, if I could go back in time, I would tell little little little Jordan from that moment, like dude, dude, screw them. So you're going to have so much more experience and have such a better time than they ever will. And it is not their issue.

J: But yeah, once I move back to Texas. Once I moved back to Texas, I just suddenly gained this awareness of queerness as something viewed negatively and negatively in the space of like my value, both aesthetically and as a person.

F: I think maybe I had almost an impact on it because I was. I had a lot of internalized homophobia but we we can get into that. Let's like kind of backtrack and like, let's let's get us to like to us meeting you saw some like I think at the beginning of school like uh, everyone would convene in like the cafeteria. And like I think one day like first day, I think maybe.

J: I can't remember exactly. Yeah, the time scale of it was a little bit weird, but I remember. Like I remember sitting along the wall of the cafeteria cause for some reason, like they congregated us like, just like in the cafeteria for some freaking reason. But I remember like sitting next to you. And I remember like, what was what was her name? I think her name was —- or something like that.

F: —- —------

J: Yes. I remember meeting her. I remember meeting you through her, and I remember, like sitting next to you when we had been all congregated in this, like crappy little like cafeteria for some reason, not sitting. For some reason not sitting on the chairs that were very much just in the cafeteria. I don't know why that was a thing, but it was. And I remember, like, I remember one of the first things we bonded over, I think was actually. Uh, Superwoman, Lilly Singh.

F: Ohh yes, yes, she was a very open bisexual at the time I think.

J: A very open bisexual I think she. I think she was pretty openly bisexual and she was also very. She had the very classic like, hey, mama's lesbian stereotype with ith the backwards like trucker caps and like the jerseys she was.

F: She had the aesthetic gay, like closeted little Sapphic kids would dig.

J: Yeah. No, she. Yeah, she had. She was the blueprint for like the like the tomboy gays of that of of the 2015 era. Thinking about that is so awkward now.

F: However, I remember, we also we also bonded over very like quickly we took to each other cause like I think you mentioned you were writing something and umm I got very interested in because I I think a lot of for queer people at the time time like middle school age queer people in like the late 2010’s online communities became something that was like a safe space for us and like suddenly it kind of marked that you were like a safe person to talk to because I feel like online fandom communities are already kind of on the fringes of being like inherently queer.

J: Yeah. They had this thing of like, especially if you're a marginalized like group, it's also a safe space for those type for like, those types of things. And like, yeah, I remember. I remember bonding over a fan fiction and like literate role play.

F: But also I think with writing, I think it's been such like a such a significant part of our whole like relationship with each other from then until now, because I think we used it as a vessel for like a medium to explore our identities and like different relationship dynamics in like a safe and controlled space with one another.

J: I would most definitely agree with that. It was really just a space for us to try and express. I think and also in a way, umm, like these facets of our lives that we haven't been able to explore in the like in a way that was safe to us really. Of course, our dynamic back then wasn't nearly as healthy as it could have been, but at the same at the same time when we were writing things together, a big part of it was like trying to express these parts of our life that we did not feel particularly comfortable expressing to anybody else except each other.

F Yeah, I think we definitely bonded on a lot through our shared traumatic experience we both shared growing up femme and Asian. And we kind of explored that and unpacked that with one another. Like I think despite me being like very I'm very straight I didn't like I I had like, my homophobia was not external, very much towards myself, so I would write queer characters with you. And I think that probably did help. In the long run with me, like after coming out to you and to myself, kind of repairing and like finding a healthy relationship with my queer identity. I think I really admired how open you were with your bisexuality. Since I think I thought you were brave in a lot of aspects it felt very, umm, safe and comforting. Cause for me I grew up Southern Baptist, which is a rare thing for a Vietnamese kid.

J: Most of the most of the other Vietnamese people I know were Catholic.

F: Buddhists.

J: Or Catholic.

F: But from a young age I knew I had to like, learn inadvertently that I had to perform straight in order to properly you conform and umm, just not stick out, not be a shame to my family, a shame to God. And I think writing, putting myself in characters that had a distance from myself gave me a lot of freedom to explore things without feeling like it was the end of the world, because when I did.

F: I forgot what the whole confession was like because I forgot my answer to it. Like, I don't think it was a clear yes. I certainly was crying.

J: It was so, if I remember correctly, which I probably do, I I remember like your response being like, because at this point we had already had a very close relationship where we had stayed up a lot nights talking to each other and unpacking a lot of these feelings that we weren't really allowed to unpack in our family units. So by this time, I remember, like telling you. And I remember telling you that I had feelings for you being very explicit about it. Like there was no room for imagination, it was like, nah this is for buddy pals only no, this is very this is a very explicit level.

F: I remember I remember it because you were like you. It started off with you like confiding in me like you usually did. And you were like, umm, I have feelings for someone but it was something like I can't tell them because they don't feel the same or something like that. And I started to have, like, a gut feeling. But I was like ohh no, no. Who could it be? Who could it be? I’m sure it will. It will be fine, you know.

J: Yeah. And I, and eventually I was like, you know what, I and I was very explicit with you.

F: It's you.

F: And I told you that it was you and umm.

J: I remember you taking a long time to respond, and your answer essentially being like something.

F: It was a shell shock moment for me.

J: It was something to the effect of like you needed. You needed space and time to really think about how you wanted them move forward like and how. What your feelings were about everything. What's really funny is that despite not actually having a true closeted experience, I cried in my closet that night, and which is I, it's just a bit of like, it's just a bit of like, situational irony that I'm just gonna hold on to for the rest of my life. Not because it was a necessarily. Just, it was just like. That is such I I just don't know how to express it of just like that was such. It's both sad and funny at the same time. It's just it's so cruelly comedic and it makes me wanna punch God.

F: I remember. Yeah, I sent that. And then what did I do? I cried and prayed myself to sleep.

J: I don't think I'm. I don't think you ever told me the prayer detail. I don't think you've ever told me the prayer detail before.

F: No, I I remember it very well. I was umm I I was like God, I don't know what is going on. You know, I'm sorry if I'm doing something wrong but like I don't know if I can. I don't know if I can like help these feelings, but I'm. I'm sorry. Yeah, I was just crying. Crying until, like I eventually passed out, I think, yeah.

J: Ah, those those good old cries. I hate those \*\*\*\*\*\*\* cries. Those God damn cries. Those are awful cries.

F: Yeah, but. That was the thing, right? I came from this household, unconventionally Southern Baptist, but also I came from Vietnam War refugees and. I feel and you could probably speak to this as someone who's also first generation and who has a lot of intergenerational trauma. But I thought, umm, being like cishet like a cishet daughter and like following this like trajectory of like meet a guy. Get married. Have kids was like my destiny. And like what I owed to my family, particularly my mom, for making all these sacrifices for me. I grew up seeing my mom, just like, work tirelessly for me. But her telling me like Ohh, it was all worth it. Cause like I'm working for your future and one day you'll find like a guy who loves you and will take care of you for me. And it was like the a monumental pressure, but something I felt I had to keep.

F: And also like my first. Conceptualization of what gay was was like on like a car ride home and the radio was on. And it was during the election season, like the Obama administration. And like they talked about gay marriage and my I remember my mom scoffing and saying that just isn't right. And that was the first time, one, that I knew a man and a man could be in a romantic relationship together. And right away I learned that that was wrong. Umm, so, learning I was gay was just like world ending.

J: Yeah, it's not. It's like it's this very and this is I guess where we get into the specifically like the the aspect of being Asian and queer, which is something I think that despite never having not having like an experience in the closet, I also very much understand, umm, this feeling of, well, what, where does my queerness go with my with my like heritage where yeah, where does, where does it fit all together? Because it's just not. It's just not even something that's really like talked about within our culture to be honest.

J: Like like you have, we have like there's like the underground culture across Asia of like lady boys, which is one. It's a controversial term in like Western circles, but in Asian circles it's a very it's a subculture. It's not meant to be any indication of someone's sexuality. Like they're like the men who are in a part of that subculture are not necessarily gay or trans or any or anything like that.

J: So even in that scenario, even in this very like, overtly nontraditional setting, it's still just not something that is spoken about in our families or just like in the spaces that our like heritage and habits and for me.

F: I think what we did have was like online media and like Webtoons and like anime. That's what where we looked to for that stuff.

J: No, that's I think that's exactly where we got from, which I think which is really interesting in how you think about how that specific idea like shapes Asian queerness.

J: But for me it was always weird because at the same time my father was stoutly anti-feminine and in and when they say anti feminine I don't mean like he. He wasn't necessarily an overt misogynistic, but he was a misogynist in the same way that women can be internally misogynistic, where he believed in powerful women. But he believed that those powerful women had to be masculine, or they had, or they couldn't have forms of femininity attached to them.

J: Which is why when I started growing my hair out, it was this huge big thing because I was departing from this exceptionally androgynous look that I have had, like all the way up until I was like 16, to be honest. And from my dad, this idea of a strong woman was vital to his idea of who I was going to become, because as you mentioned, like with your mom, my dad's idea was that my parents had given so, so much to get to the US and my dad, like, raised me, like pretty much at, like, my entire life with, you know, you're so lucky to be an American citizen like that. That phrase is just ingrained in my upbringing of you are so lucky to be in an American citizen and you're so lucky that you didn't have to immigrate here.

J: And the stories of whether it was like immigrating to the US from Taiwan and the stories of how my dad, like, lost friends because they got deported because they couldn't afford to stay in school, or they had, or they flunk out of school, which revoked their student visa because they were trying so hard to keep afloat during this time.

J: And so you grow up with this sense of suffering of just like, and it's suffering for your sake, and it becomes this huge freaking burden to, like, achieve all these other things that they are asking of you to achieve.

J: And the sad thing is that queerness has, like literally, there is no space where queerness in this idealized version of you that a lot of Asian parents tend to have. You're supposed to be like, even though even though my dad was, quote unquote feminist in his internally misogynistic way. My dad still believed that I needed to one day get married and one day have children. And I needed to have at least two, at least three if I was really financially successful.

F: I remember that was a big thing with our relationship like we felt like we needed. I think children were really stressed us both out cause that also that also was a big thing like ohh one day and that it always freaked me out. Especially now that I know that I'm that I'm on the asexual spectrum, having that looming over me was just like it was a lot.

F: But, umm, we we like, I think this connects to one of your poems. I don't know if it's titled umm. It's the one ‘to the children I’ll never have’ is the opening line.

J: I think it's, I think it's titled to the children I'll never have I if I if I remember my own poetry correctly. But yes, that is.

F: But yeah, but for us we we get into these discussions of like we'll, we know we know we both I mean, one day we're gonna have kids.

J: Yeah, it's not it. It's because it's not a matter of if you want, it's a matter of when will you. It's never if you want, it's when it's it's always a question of when.

F: Yeah. And just like going through the hoops of like, umm, like we were trying to find ways that are queerness could be fit into these like loaded expectations, like making concessions and like replicating, like these heteronormative dynamics, I remember going to your house and feeling this pressure to please your father. Taking on that kind of like bringing a guy back home and like seeing if he's like a good fit.

J: It's like, hello, Sir. It's nice to meet you. Exactly. It's it's that very traditional of like. Ohh can I have your permission to marry your daughter? Is like it's. It's so weird.

F: And then and then I I remember you take me like like we we go go off from the dinner table and and you'd be like yeah he I can tell he approved of that like of what you said.

J: No, I remember cause I remember like watching so intently and that watching being a very important part of how I like of how how things went, because things had to go well from his on his side in order for them to go well on anybody's side. And that was a big thing.

F: Yeah, I I, I, I I remember that like specifically one time he was asking me about like, what a thought about God. And I was like, like I was so nervous because also I was very religiously traumatized. But after that, you're like, yeah, he approved.

F: And it's like, thank God. (laughs) Literally.

J: (laughs) Yeah. So I very much like the the idea of, well, how does my queerness fit into all these dreams? My parents have for me and the answer is most of the time they don't. Your queerness does not have a space in those dreams that your family has for you. You're cause the dreams are almost always be financially successful. Have that have that nuclear style family and like, pass that on to your children. So it was like in the same way that for and from our parents perspective it was like in the same way that I suffered for your success, you will suffer for your children's success and.

F: It’s all about that intergenerational trauma. Gosh, yeah.

J: Exactly. And it's like you have to and again and and at least in my experience with my dad especially, it was this idea of continuing our family and this idea of heritage and the family line and the bloodline and that sort of thing. And I think this is something that honestly.

F: I remember a kid talk. It was very emphasized, like they have to be blood related to you.

J: Yeah, no yeah. And it was really different and it was really difficult, honestly, because it didn't fit with my idea of what a family could be. I did not think that a family had to be blood related, but here's this person, this very important person to me, telling me that that is what it is.

F: We both had those experiences like we personally were very like empathetic and open minded and liberal minded. But we would still like kind of concede to these certain things because our parents wanted that.

J: Exactly. And it was really what was it? I think my and I think the reason why that heritage side of things, I think because I think it's just so much more important, umm, in Asian culture to have that like bloodline, heritage sort of idea, I think it's just something more ingrained in US and the kind of makes sense when you think about it because like if you think of like white American families, I mean America goes back to I and it's like and it's also like and it's also like what like, OK, yeah, your family's been in America for like since like since what like 1776? Like cool. Great. Awesome. It's like my family's. My family's been like Chinese and Asian. We have roots dating back to like 500 BC and like my and my family can tell you that, like our family name is connected specifically to like the like, warlords of certain areas and things like that, like our. Our history is so rooted in our longevity, and I mean like literally one big a big part of New Year celebration is you eat something long for longevity. So it's like you, you gotta laugh.

F: I think it also has something like with like Asian American experience like we have very like a limited like connection to our community because like especially being first generation and like we both grew up with like not being like completely fluent like our only connection to our heritage is our family and our like these little spaces that are like connected to our family these like webs that like there are linked they are our link to our heritage and culture so there's there's the pressure of, like continuing that on, but also for me like come like umm, there's such there's such a risk and like a like a devastating risk for me like coming out as queer and like. My parents expected me sexually because I might potentially lose my culture. So it's like for me growing up, it was like either like I had to choose between my Asianness and my queerness. And coming out would be the sort of act that would mean like me losing practically everything.

F: And I think, and I think that goes for a lot of queer Asians of just like, well, if you do this, what what do you have left and what do you have left connecting you back to it because like, even if I can speak Chinese and like even I think it like my Chinese is like rough at best most days honestly and.

J: Like I can't read, I can't read Chinese. I can't read either traditional or simplified, and all of these stories that my dad taught like raised me on. They're all gonna once, once he's dead, they're basically gone. I remember most. I remember, like most of them, if not all of them, but I will never be able to quote any of the poems any of the idioms. I'm just never going to be able to do that. Those things are just going to be lost from my family and it's this is just this really hard thing because, like, what do you what do you do when you have these two parts of your of your identity and they're both necessary to who you are as a person. And they they can't exist in the same space. And yet they exist in you simultaneously.

F: Exactly. Felt that. I'm sorry I’m trying to be more insightful but I really feel that. It's it's. It's like the work I'm doing right now has been like healing me in that regard because I I'm in contact with the Dragonflies founder and like I've told you a little about them. They're this gay Asian support group, like based in DFW, you know, founded in the early 90s but kind being put in contact with them made me realize that I could be both gay and Asian and still be connected to culture and heritage and like feel like. I felt like I could let go completely, of like my family's like, like monumental expectations of me.

F: I wonder like what yout kind of experience was like, umm, like for you like letting go of like I need to have those two kids, two blood blood related.

J: Well, one, I started to really emotionally distance myself from my father and some quick context is that my dad and all his and all his quote unquote progressiveness and I say that because he wasn't really super, he like was progressive in the most superficial, unsubstantial ways possible.

F: In a very weird way.

J: Yeah, it just like it. It was just so weird, but he he had seen he. He always was the one to pick me up and he had seen us interacting at some point after school while we were waiting and he when we got home he was like, are you and Ferris dating? And he and I told him I was like, yes. And he asked, are you homosexual? I was like I'm bisexual and I was very clear with him. I have never and I like to be perfectly clear, I had never once told this man that I only liked women, cause I have never only liked women. I have always liked people by virtue of their personhood, so really the best terminology for me would be pansexual, but I've just find a lot lot of comfort in the bisexual term because it's it's the first one I found and it's a term that's growing in flexibility time, but I've never, I've never only liked women, I've never only liked men. It's always been both and everything in between and.

F: Same, yeah. Both and everything in between.

J: And my dad is my dads response to this initially was ohh don't worry, it's just puppy love and immediately. Immediately I have this incredibly important person just completely shutting down just everything in that moment of who I am, because I I wanted him to see me. I wanted him to

J: And that was a hard thing to have, because even though, because even though my father didn't start screaming and kicking me and and like, toss me out of the house and I wasn't displaced for my family. But that is one of the first times when I truly had to recognize that my dad did not see me as a person and he did not see me for who I was.

J: Flash forward to a few years later. I'm in a Catholic. All girls high school. I went to Ursuline for my the entirety of my high school years, by the way, such an interesting interaction with queerness as well, guys. Especially because it's it was a white dominated school, so that is how I formed a lot of my opinions about like Western society and trying to fit into that as someone who is not from a Western culture and who is decidedly both Asian and Western in my upbringing. But flash forward two those high school years.

J: At some point, my dad for some reason, like starts asking me about this random girl. This random girl had a crush on me or something like that, and I was like ohh freaking no dude. And he was just like, do you still think you're a lesbian?

F: I said I was bisexual!

J: I was like, no, he was like exactly. I was like, no, I've never thought I was a lesbian. I've always known that I am bisexual because I have always known from the from the moment over on the bench I was bisexual, and again it was just that proof that my father did not see me for who see me for who I was.

J: And again really funnily is that that first conversation that I had with my dad, he was like, don't worry, we all have those moments. He's like I had that moment too. I was like in junior high roughhousing with some buddies. You know, I was like, wow, that's a that's a weird thought.

F: Dad. Dad, what's going?

J: That's a weird thought.

F: Dad, what's going on here?

J: And I was like and like at the moment, I like didn't make any connections and now I'm like, now I'm here and I'm just thinking, I'm like, you are so stupid. You are so dumb. You are so stupid. And you know what? I'm just gonna have to let it go.

J: But yeah, so unfortunately I think I think the biggest person that I have been able to connect with on this idea of Asian queerness is you, Ferris, because I, unfortunately I am fortunately don't have a lot of other queer Asian people that I am close to.

F: I feel the same way.

J: Unfortunately, I don't have any queer Asian elders. I don't even actually have I don't have any queer elders. Period.

F: I never had a gay Asian elder before I met Dr. Chng.

J: Yeah, cause like I mean, you're Asian elders are supposed to be your family. Like they're supposed to be your grandparents and your parents is like, those are your elders. So you're not supposed to step out. Those are your elders. Those are the elders. And like your elders are your ancestors. And it's just like, OK, but none of these others are capable of seeing me. And it's just it's it's interesting. And I I said yesterday that I would probably bring this up, but I was just like, our our queerness is something that is so like, as Asians is. So isolated and disorienting, because our culture does not talk about it, our family itself does not talk about it, and even even outside of discussions of sexuality and love, like familial experiences in Asian culture are so, so isolating because you're not supposed to show a whole bunch of affection they're supposed to be this very, very hard respect from the children to the elders. So it's this very isolating thing to have the love that you receive from your family and then trying to translate well, what does that love look like in a romantic sense?

J: Because we don't see it between our parents, we don't see a lot of affection between our parents. I honestly, I honestly do not know if I have ever seen like my parents kiss, kiss. I don't think I've ever seen it. Because again, I I don't. I truly cannot recall if I've ever heard my parents say I love you to each other, and so we one, our familial love is. I so isolating, disorienting within this idea of filial tradition. And filial piety. And then even between our parents, the romantic love is something that's very distant.

J: But and then we're and then we're one, of course, like as Asian Americans were raised in a completely western, completely western environment surrounded by other people who are completely engrossed in Western American culture and western ideas of love, like, think about the like, high time of rom coms and things of that where we get like Julia Roberts and Pretty Woman. Our love, our perceptions of love are just so in contradiction with the Western form of love that we're meant to understand.

F: You know where we where, where we found models like like models for for romance. It was fanfiction.

J: Exactly like we had. It's just so it's hard for us to function one, because our queerness and our love are so entangled like, and this is literally my quote from yesterday's conversation, is like our parents and our love are just so entangled with what we crave from our culture and our family, because so much of it is like our queerness is just not seen or acknowledged. And this is big part of ourselves. They are just completely neglected and so we take all of that baggage. We take all of that need into the real world and then and then in our case, an American Western world. And it's really hard for us to function in that space because it revolves around Western love. It revolves around cishet love.

J: It revolves around and the very the very real way white love and what does white love look like and what does and like when you think about like all the like all the interracial like romance that that we see and I'm thinking like especially Bridgerton it's always a white person. And so where does? Where does like our our like our Asian heritage? Where does it go? Where? Where do we take it? And like where where do we put it in this world? That is just so dominated by these Western images and these cishet images of love.

J: And it's like we got a literally we step into the romantic world as adults for the first time, and we gotta literally build from scratch what we're supposed to do, because we have almost no model for it.

F: And in our case, our models were like anime, fanfiction, and like our parents.

J: Yeah. Which was. Not. It's certainly a model. I don't know if it's a good model, but it's a model that's for sure.

F: Yeah, but like with queerness, like, that's like very much. We were like stepping into like, a like unexplored frontier. It felt like just figuring and failing and just like trying to love queerly.

J: Whatever that looked exactly.

F: However, what that looked like we didn't know.

F: Yeah, but like on the aspect of like like I think really the only person who has, like. Though we didn't really have a healthy relationship t I still felt even like after all this time, the most seen I felt with like in regards to like my Asianness and my queerness, and someone who like accepted and loved and like cared for me with, like an understanding of the situation, situations that I was in. It was with you, and I feel though my situation was pretty bad, it was like this was a very rare and like wonderful thing that I had to experience because I feel like with being first generation Asian American, like, umm, if it feels like. We're like with our families, we're in our own bubbles and like, umm, it's not really in you to like seek out like like other. Like your family circles your family circle, and that's where you find Asian people, you know, ohm.

F: So like, how do you venture out to find other queer Asians? And we just happened to meet each other by chance.

F: I hope with our talks it reaches out to like another stray Asian kid out there.

J: Yeah, there's another stray feral cat out there who's just like, what am I doing? But a lot of the other clear Asian people I've met. Completely by chance. Completely and utterly by chance.

F: I wanted to like, uh, kind of direct that to your other poem you had, which is like colors and umm, I think after all this talk with all the talk we've had, I think we've established like kind of how impactful having each other as like fellow gay Asian people in our lives and like having each other to explore these like non-treaded territories without models without without clear like structures.

F: I like, umm, I genuinely believe like. You shaped a lot of who I am now because I I never felt more seen in regards to my identity than with you and with your writing. Those are like the first times. If not like the only times I've seen my queer experiences like put to paper and feeling wholly represented and like even if it's just like some really freaky body horror metaphor for like gender dysphoria.

J: Ohh God I I would love to expand on that short story more, but yeah, I remember. So Colors and I can read some of these if you want me to as well.

F: Yeah, I I would love, like, uh, we could, like, we're making a website for our exhibit. So if I like if I had like a little recording of you to like, have a play along, that would be very cute.

J: I'll read it here for now. So you have at least something, so this is Colors and this is a poem I wrote based on the experience that you Ferris told me about when you were in.

F: So this was I sent you a text back on January 8th, 2023 at 6:04 AM because I was at the airport and I said caps lock: “STARBUCKS CASHIER HAD TRANS FLAG LANYARD NECKLACE AND COOL PIERCINGS AND WE HAD A ZING INCOGNITO QUEER BONDING MOMENT”

J: And I ended up and based on that I ended up writing this poem Colors and it is and it is very much officially dedicated and the actual like official text I sent you for this project has a little dedication it says to Ferris, a man all young boys should strive to be. And again I I am proud of my role in who you have become because I am exceptionally proud of the person that you are today, and I continue to be proud of who you are.

F: Aw.

J: But this is Colors.

*You are a stranger to me.*

*Any other moment,*

*Had you worn something different,*

*Had you thought it was too much,*

*That those colors spoke too loud,*

*We would have stayed strangers.*

*Our words exchanged*

*Would be as flimsy as the bills I handed you.*

*Yet in these simple thick lines of blues, whites, pinks,*

*I see you.*

*You are family that I hadn’t known before,*

*Fellow fighter, we die by the same sword.*

*You were a stranger to me,*

*But as I say*

*“I like your earrings, your lanyard, and stuff-“*

*In my chosen voice*

*I tell you more about me*

*Than I once knew about myself.*

*When you thank me,*

*I know that you see me*

*As I have seen you.*

J: So so this is one of one of my most favorite things I've ever written, but it is very much meant to evoke that sense of, like, incognito, like seeing and that and like somehow in that somehow in that moment of like, with a pure, complete, complete, absolute stranger, you recognize each other and you see each other in a way that even your some of your closest people in your life don't see you.

J: And that is somehow just it. It is something that you would think should be lonely, as if, like a stranger can see you close and then your family can. But I think that that's something that's a very big blessing in the queer community is that we can have those moments and we can know you might be a stranger. But I see you and you see me, and that is what we have and that's good.

F: Yeah, beautifully said.

J: Thank you.

F: I I mean, I think I think we're people have a wonderful way of making situations that might seem like utterly abysmal and making it beautiful and joyous. And yeah, I I feel like we experienced a lot of those moments. In in like in sharing our queerness together, whether that was in our like very tumultuous first gay relationship or or just as as as we are as like as very close friends who have stood the test of time.

J: I I'm very glad I get to share. You're like basically one of the first people who get to read any of my poems like they like. I write them and then they stay in a vault. Either they stay in the vault, or I send them to you.

F: Or or you're like or or you go in my messages and you're like, hello. I have. I have writing for you, yeah.

J: Hello I have a little I have a little snazzy poem for you my friend. You wanna cry?

F: (laughs) Yeah.

J: But yeah.

F: I think we got through a lot.

J: Yay, we did.

F: Yeah, I mean, we could talk, we could talk of like umm, I guess we could talk more about gender if if you, you, you, you you you have the time though there’s a lot there.

J: There is a lot there. I'll talk. I'll talk a little bit about like my bigender experiences, like my little closing note because I was a that was that was way more complicated than my sexuality journey, my sexuality journey happened on a random playground bench in the 4th grade, but my gender journey is complicated, messy and that even like that is actually one of the things I am just now getting to a point where I'm actually open about it.

J: Umm, so I first got the notion of what being by gender was through.

F: Snailords!

J: One of my favorite webtoons. Yes, Snailords one of my favorite webtoon comic artists, and I read initially their slice of life comic, which was talking about specifically about them and included their feelings of being bigender. And it was the first time I had seen something like that because I only had the concept of being trans or being cis, like in my brain. Those are the options and those were the options you were one or the other. And so this idea of being nonbinary hadn't quite gotten to me yet. So when I first saw like Snailords and like, thereby gender experience, I was like I was. I was. I was thrown off by how much I related to it.

J: So for a second I was like, am I bigender and like and this was in middle school, so I was like, I was just like, am I actually bigender and then like, about a week? And I was like, Nah, Nah, Nah, Nah, Nah, Nah, that's not.That's not right. That's not what. No, no, that's no, no, no, that's.

F: But but it kept it kept coming up cause it's like in in our writing and in our, like our time together, you would like say yeah, I feel like a I feel like a man and I feel like, hey, and then you're like and then and then like I'd be like, OK and then like you wouldn't bring it up again.

J: Yeah. I would just say the most out of pocket stuff of like man, man, I wish I could just become a man. I wish. I wish I could just become a man. Ohh man and and then I would just drop it and pretend it never happened and it it was a it was a feeling that went dormant for I say dormant. It just kind of suppressed itself as I went through high school and sort of like battled with my own misgivings about, like my own internal misogyny and my relationship with my femininity and having to work that out.

J: And because I was working out my relationship with femininity and actively embracing that femininity, my assumption was no. I am completely cisgender. There is no way, no how I am anything but a woman.

F: That's I think it was also like ohh, since I'm a woman, I can't be a guy.

J: Yeah, exactly.

F: But then it's like but you can be both. You can be both.

J: Yeah, you, it's like, listen, buddy, you are the bisexual bicycle.

F: You're you're double bi.

J: Exactly.

J: So pretty much end of high school, I pretty much come to terms with the idea. I was like ohh hell I am bigender, aren't I? And I really fully like settled into that.

J: And at the time, weird weird relationship that was not good that we are not going to name because he doesn't deserve it, but. Uh, this person, this this past partner of mine was a pretty big catalyst to kicking me into the gender closet because I I only said or talked about it with people. I was extremely close to because I did not want my experience to be used as a reason to invalidate other peoples experiences, because at the time I had just been like oh, no, no, you don't have to like change what pronouns you use. For me, I don't. Care. I don't worry about, so I didn't want that experience to be used against people from my own community, so I didn't, so I was extremely quiet about it.

J: Umm, but and again this person has a very.

F: I feel like it's a I feel like such a undue pressure on nonbinary people in general like feeling that like they have to be this safe like they have to play as like the safeguards because they could ruin the community or whatever.

J: Yeah. No. Yeah. And then I mean and then also goes for, like bisexuals and pansexuals because you get those, you get people within their own community telling us to choose. So I think it's this idea of like if you don't adhere to a specific binary of whether or not it's sexuality or gender, you you have to deal with the sort of burden of, oh, I have to somehow constantly be a spokesperson for myself, but also disclaimer, I don't speak for the rest of my community, but also I. Yeah, it's such. It's such.

J: It's like a a horrible, horrible purgatory of three different states of being that you have to exist in one for yourself, one for your community, and one for the people that are trying to abuse your community. And it's it's so difficult.

J: So I got kicked into the gender closet during that relationship because this person could not possibly conceive that they could actually be attracted to someone who identified as a man. And so that was, that was unfortunate. But as I got in when I got into college, and as I started experiencing independence as a side of my family outside of those online social circles, which unfortunately just left me pray to a lot of predatory people, once I started leaving those circles and I started living a life that was entirely for myself, I started to really grow in to my gender identity.

J: And that's just started to really allow myself to feel a lot of the things that I haven't before because for a while I was like, well, there's no way I could be anything but cisgender cause I don't experience gender dysphoria. And even for the beginning of when I was like a little bit more open and a little bit more like confident in my identity as a by gender person, I still really didn't experience gender dysphoria. I was like I I my experience was that I was very comfortable with my with my female form. I just sometimes wanted and wished I like was able to be male and I, but at the same time I never experienced any dysphoria for my assigned gender at birth.

J: And then I again, as I was exploring these feelings more, allowing myself to have these gendered experiences. I then I started having some experiences of like man I do not want to have \*\*\*\* today. God, it just it's just like ohh God, I just something is missing right now from me. Of who I am. So I just start to feel have feelings of gender dysphoria this kind of discomfort with my body. It was different and but a big part of it was also like it wasn't like I just like, suddenly I like hopped on the gender train like it was just. It was always there. It's been there since I was like 12. I just wasn't.

F: It's just like you always had the impulse to just, like, kick it down whenever it came up.

J: Exactly. I like. I just was never. I never allowed myself and I never, and I didn't have a lot of people. Unfortunately, that were gonna were that were going to allow me to feel the things I needed to feel, to accept that part of myself. And now that I'm there, it's great. And I'm never \*\*\*\*\*\*\* leaving. But getting here was a time.

J: It was a time much more complicated than than like my sexuality, and the way I'm going to connect this to my Asian heritage is that we have these very specific ideas of what Asian femininity looks like, and even as and even with Asian men, there's just an idea of femininity and Asian men and this desirability of femininity and Asian men.

J: And it's and just the gender perspectives or gender perceptions of what Asian people should be is so infantilized, unfortunately, by Western media. Like if you look at like how koreaboos view K-pop idols, it's honestly terrifying. It's really freaking terrifying.

F: Those are adult men.

J: And if you look at how – those are adult men. Stop it. And in the same vein, we also have all of these different stereotypes about what Asian women should be like. We have, like, the loudest stereotype we have the dragon lady stereotype. We have so many visual cliches and stereotypes of what femininity looks like. An Asian women looks like and we also have so many stereotypes about what Asian men are supposed to look like. And it's so it's really jarring to the experience of gender and Asian people.

J: It's just like you have. So you have so much to fight. You've got the Western stereotypes and perceptions of what you should be as an Asian person, whether you are male or female men or man or woman, cis or trans or nonbinary. And then you have these ideas of gender from within your own culture. And then you've got your own \*\*\*\* with gender. It's like it's like you have like 3 different issues.

F: It's it's like it's about the. Yeah, the three spaces, right.

F: It's like, umm, I think there's this one historiography article I read. Like I think what I got from it, it's like it's hard for like, there's like pressure on queer Asians because I think sexuality and gender is at the heart of a lot of, like, discrimination that we face. And like the stereotypes placed on us but that, like kind of leaves us in like a tricky ground, a lot of like, cishet Asians. Umm have took to community denial in order to. Like, that's like the political ploy, because, like, we just don't touch it. And like we are not that. Umm so to like avoid being like hate crimes or like seen in these ways.

F: But, like with queer Asians, we're just stuck. Cause of how we inherently are just.

J: Yeah, deviating from the sexual norm. Makes you like. Makes you a sexual deviant in the same as like is like being queer and or Asian, and deviating from all of these things like and. It essentially almost like put you in the same sexual deviancy as like someone who is a \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*\*. So you already, so you're already having to deal with all this like sexualization. But then you're also being sexualized by being a sexual being outside of the cishet norm. And it's frustrating.

J: I have to take. I have to take my leave now.

F: OK. Thank you for talking with me, I I have to get. I have to. I have to get in my writing in so I'll be grinding.

J: Ohh boy. OK, well, text me if you need anything.

F: Of course, yes.

J: Obviously I will be more than happy to follow up on any questions you have. I will. I will be going now.

J: Goodbye bud.

F: Yeah. OK.

J: Good bye, my friend. You are lovely and wonderful and I'm very proud of you. And this is gonna be a great project.

F: I'm very proud of you too. Thank you.

J: Yeah, bye friend. Bye bye.

F: Bye.