

## Transcript of Laura's Interview

We're here with Laura, who's going to talk to us a little bit about what it's like to be Japanese-American in the American culture. Tell us a little bit about yourself, Laura.

Well, I'm 23 years old and am currently attending graduate school at American University, and I'm actually from Alabama where my parents still live. My mom is Japanese and my dad is American, and we moved here from Japan to America when I was about two years old, so I spent most of my life here in America.

So, you were actually born in Japan.

Yes, correct.

And I think you said so then you couldn't be President.

Yeah, yes, I wasn't born on American soil, so it doesn't work.

So let me ask you about how you feel about that. You were just a essentially a baby when you lived in Japan. What's been your contact with Japan since then?

Well, I've gone—when I was younger—my mother and my sister and I would go back and forth every other summer, but until I studied abroad—not last fall, but the fall of 2004—it had been about ten years since I had actually been back. My mom's side of the family is still in Japan, so my grandparents would come over for big occasions in my sister and my life, but other than that we would just speak on the phone or write letters. It wasn't an every year we would get to see or go back kind of thing.

Did you—when you wrote—did you write in English?

My grandparents only speak Japanese, so I would write in Japanese, not very well, but...

Yes, so you do write, you write...

I write a little, not very much.

Which alphabet do you write in?

I use all three—Hiragana, Katakana, and Kanji, but I also have the help of a great electronic dictionary, so if I don't know something I can use that.

Oh...

But it's usually easier for me to read the first two, Hiragana and Katakana, than it is for me to read Kanji, so...

Well, what about speaking Japanese?

I speak Japanese with my mother, for the most part, just everyday conversational Japanese, with my grandparents every so often when I go home and we call...we call over there.

When you were in Japan, did your Japanese improve a lot?

It... I felt it did improve. I was also studying it at the time, so...and just being immersed in the culture was very helpful. Since then I've graduated from undergrad and I'm no longer pursuing it as a minor, so I haven't had as much time to study since my...since my current work doesn't align with that.

What..I asked you before about how you see yourself, whether you see yourself as American, or Japanese-American, Japanese, and how...What culture do you identify most with, if one more than the other?

I...I feel I identify with both, probably more with one rather than the other depending on the situation, and then the context. I tend to look at myself probably more as an American since I've spent the majority of my life here, and been exposed much more to American culture. And also, if I was in Japan, or in...around a lot of Japanese people, it would still be...I would still be seen as a foreigner, even if I'm half Japanese 'cause I wouldn't be completely Japanese and speaking the same (you know) language with them as well. I'm here in America being an American encompasses so many different things, so...and different ethnicities in people, so I feel more American a lot of the times.

What about your sister? Does she speak Japanese?

She does. She speaks, as well, probably a little bit better...

Do you ever speak Japanese with her, or...

On occasion...

Like maybe a family thing where...

In a family...you know... when we're around our mom. When we talk on the phone to each other, we usually speak English.

What about your dad?

My dad doesn't really speak Japanese. He learned a long time ago, and I think he could read it pretty well, but (you know) it wasn't...it's something he picked up by living there, and not so much as he became fluent in, I believe.

Was he working in Japan, or...

He did, when my mom and my dad lived there for awhile. He worked there as an English teacher.

Oh, as an English teacher. Oh. And what...what about your mother? Did she work outside the home as well?

She worked...once we came back to America, she worked as a translator, and that's what she still does now. She does patent translation.

Oh...interesting. What would you say is the most Japanese thing about you?

I...I do a lot of Japanese cooking. That's where I guess probably you'd see it the most. I just enjoy it and it's a lot easier than American cooking a lot of the times... I enjoy it, so...

And how did you learn to cook?

Mostly from my mom...some from my grandmother, and then (you know) just recipes...and they...it's pretty simple, all...everything I do. I only do the simple recipes, so...

Well, sometimes I see you eating with chopsticks.

Yeah...

Do you switch back and forth between them, or...are you more comfortable with chopsticks?

I think that's just depending on what you're eating...kind of thing. I do...I do use chopsticks a lot but (you know) fork and knife, probably with more American food I use fork and knife anyways, so...

Do you make any effort to seek out Japanese culture here in the United States? Like look for movies or look for other people who are Japanese-American or are you part of that community?

I haven't met a lot of Japanese-American people that I can say. I...I guess I don't really seek it out just for right now, at this time in my life. I'm focused on my graduate work, and that's kind of taken over, as well as just working and trying to get by. So for me seeking out...events have been more in the arts 'cause that's what I'm...I've been pursuing in my grad work. In undergrad, I think I was much more open to (you know)... I had conversation partners; I would do...go to different Japanese events. But you're in that community...in a college community where you have those opportunities. And I'm sure I could find those opportunities now—it's just...[would] be more difficult to be able to devote the time to something else like having a conversation partner, that I would need to have in order to be able to sustain that. And I know I don't have that right now. So...

Have you thought about in the future something that you might do, and...and if you have children of your own would you want to expose them to the Japanese culture and their heritage in that way?

I would...I would want them to be exposed, and I feel like that would just happen naturally from my mother and just the...that side of the family that comes into it. I...I don't know if I would force them to learn the language. I don't...I think that's more of a choice on their part, and how much they want to be exposed is more of a choice on their part as well. You know, I can take them into certain contacts, and I can (you know) expose them to certain situations, but how much they want to learn and how much they want to take from it is up to them. So...

OK, well, thank you very much for speaking with us and good luck in your graduate program in...in dance, or fine arts, is it?

Arts management.

Arts management—right. OK, well, I hope you'll be managing some great venue in the future. Thank you so much.

Thank you.