

Maia Matsushita, Class of 2013
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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AL-JABER: Today is March 1, 2013. I'm here at Rauner Library with Maia Matsushita. Is that how you pronounce it?

MATSUSHITA: Yes.

AL-JABER: Who's a '13. And just to give us a little bit of context, could we start off by you talking about your life prior to coming to Dartmouth?

MATSUSHITA: Sure. I am from White Plains, New York. It's a suburb outside New York City. None of my family went to Dartmouth, but my grandmother lived in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, which is about an hour north of here. So I spent a lot of my time in New Hampshire growing up. And whenever we would take like a big day trip, we'd come down to Hanover. And so I spent a lot of time at Molly's when I was a kid, like wander around town. Like got a dress at Bella. Hanover was like the coolest place in the world.

So I always wanted to come here because it just seemed very much connected to my childhood and connected to my grandmother whom I loved so much and respected a lot. And she always encouraged me to come here, too. So, yes, it was always kind of on the radar, I think. I knew I wanted to apply since I was in eighth grade. Like I got a Dartmouth sweatshirt. [Laughter]

AL-JABER: So was it your first choice?

MATSUSHITA: Yes. I was an early-decision applicant.

AL-JABER: And did you think high school prepared you for Dartmouth?

MATSUSHITA: I think it did. I went to public school in White Plains, and it was a really good public school. There were a lot of resources on campus, which was really cool. Like we had free SAT tutoring after school which not a lot of people did, but I definitely took advantage of. I was in a science research program for three years, which was really influential in my life. I'm not doing science now but it influenced my decision to go into anthropology, which is my major here. And really helped prepare me for the kind of work I'd be doing

here. I think the level of work, because it was a pretty demanding program, a lot of independent work, which was cool.

AL-JABER: So did you immerse yourself in a lot of the Dartmouth traditions when you were coming here to visit your grandmother?

MATSUSHITA: No. I never went to Homecoming or anything or any of the big weekends. I just kind of wandered around campus. And I think the moment—I don't know. I feel like my dad would make jokes when I was little, like, "Oh you should go to Dartmouth," or whatever. And I was like, "I don't want to go to that school." Until I think it was eighth grade when I was here in the winter, and I was by the astronomy tower, which is just like so beautiful, the big stone tower. And I'm not even sure what it's called; I guess Bartlett Tower. And we were standing by it, and it was the most beautiful like moment in my entire life. And for some reason I just felt like, this is the place for me, even though a lot of the things...stereotypes, I think, that students have about Dartmouth didn't fit in with me. Like how I saw myself. I'm not an athlete really. I didn't see myself joining a sorority. There's a stereotype that Dartmouth is like really conservative politically, something that was left over from the '80s. And I consider myself pretty liberal. So I was like— All my friends were like, What are you thinking? This seems like the opposite of what you'd want to do. But for some reason I just felt really drawn to it. Yes.

AL-JABER: So when you came on campus, were a lot of the stereotypes that you had in your mind confirmed or—

MATSUSHITA: I don't know. I don't think so. I think that all those things definitely do exist here that people who are more conservative than I am politically. There is a problem in the Greek system; there is an emphasis on athletics. But what I've found in my Dartmouth time has like been what I needed from college. So I think it can be those things, but it can also be so much more, so much different. So, yes. I think in a way they were confirmed because those things exist. But I don't think that they were the monolithic emphasis that I thought it was going to be.

AL-JABER: Sort of backtracking a little bit. Do you think your upbringing affected your sense of belonging when you first came to Dartmouth?

MATSUSHITA: I was familiar with like the weather up here and the kind of environment, like actual physical environment that was in Hanover, which I think helped a lot because a lot of my friends were from Texas or California, and they'd never seen snow before. And I was like ready for the Hanover winters. This was not—like it's even worse up where my grandmother lives an hour north of here. So I think in a way I was prepared with my familiarity with the campus.

I mean, I walked on the campus, and I was terrified just because meeting a bunch of new people. It seemed like, oh, everything was pretty intimidating the first term or so. So I don't think I had like a... I wasn't like a legacy that was brought here for a bunch of weekends and stuff. It was more like a general familiarity with the space.

AL-JABER: Can you talk to me a little bit about your experience when you first came here? You mentioned that you were intimidated. How was it developing a sense of community? Did you go on those DOC trips?

MATSUSHITA: Yes. I went on a trip. I did not have like an amazing time on my freshman-year trip. My trip leaders were amazing. Our trip didn't really—like some trips really become like a group of friends. Like ours didn't really do that. They were all like really great people; we just didn't like click in that way.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm.

MATSUSHITA: So it wasn't like I found a community right off the bat like some people do. I did get a sense that there were a lot of people who cared about me from trips. Like that was a cool thing. But I got—which encouraged me to want to get involved later like as a trip leader. So these trip leaders were awesome. Like they checked in with me all the time. Like we ended up taking classes together, like especially when there was a '12, because she was just a year older than me. We actually stayed pretty good friends, which is awesome.

But, yes, I mean coming on campus, I was in Section A so I went home for a week and half before move-in day. And I just got back on campus. I remember telling my dad like turn the car around [laughs] as we were getting off Exit 13. I was so scared, so nervous. Like whatever, what if everyone hated me, what if like whether this was the wrong school and all that stuff. So, yes, the first term was hard. I didn't feel like I had any friends. I didn't feel like I was comfortable like socially.

But the thing that really helped that was I was really lucky because during orientation I auditioned for the Rockappellas and ended up getting into the group. And they've just been like the guiding force throughout my college career. They gave me the first real friends. They became my first like mentors, the older students. They encouraged me to get involved in different things that I became really passionate about. So though it was really scary and I did feel like homesick and nervous, I did have people who I came to understand were there for me.

AL-JABER: So I think you mentioned you weren't interested in Greek life when you first came to campus. Is that—why was that, and is that still the case that you're still...

MATSUSHITA: I think I just had the impression of like the *Legally Blond* kind of like sorority thing. And so I was not interested in that. Like I didn't identify with that at all. I ended up rushing my sophomore year and I'm in KDE, Kappa Delta Epsilon. It's not a big part of my life. It's a good part of my life. It's not something that I... Like I don't go to a lot of events. I just end up spending time with my friends who are outside of the house. But it's been...

AL-JABER: You don't live in the house?

MATSUSHITA: I did for a term.

AL-JABER: Okay.

MATSUSHITA: My junior year I lived there for a term. And otherwise... I've lived in a number of different housing situations. Like I moved every term since my freshman year until my senior year. So it was a lot. [Laughs] So I like lived in gender neutral affinity housing, which was amazing. Really life-changing. I lived off campus my sophomore summer. I lived in my sorority, I lived in regular housing. And, yes, so that was like one experience I had, yes.

AL-JABER: So that's not what you're going to take away from your Dartmouth experience, your time with your sorority?

MATSUSHITA: I mean, I'll definitely take away some things. Like the people I've met have been amazing. But it wasn't like a major part of my Dartmouth experience I think. Like what it did was positive, but I don't think I really threw myself into it that much. So I think, as

people say, you get what you give. And like I guess I just didn't give as much as other people do.

AL-JABER: Do you regret that or do you feel fine with it?

MATSUSHITA: I don't regret it so much. I wish I'd gotten to know people better because there are so many people.... The reason I wanted to join KDE was because there were a lot of women that I really respected but didn't know that well. And I do feel like I got to know some of them pretty well through it and I have made friends through it. But like there are so many people that I just am not... Like I don't have that really good friendship with, which is something I do regret, like not getting to know people better.

AL-JABER: So you mentioned you moved around a lot. Did that impact your sense of community?

MATSUSHITA: Yes, it did. I think one of the really hard things about Dartmouth is that the D Plan affords you so many opportunities and like really cool stuff. I was like off both winters, awesome programs off campus. What that meant for me is I moved every term. So I'd be really happy and like settled in a space for ten weeks, and then have to move again. I got really good at packing my boxes. Yes. So that was definitely a challenge.

What was really good my sophomore year is that I was off in the winter. I was able to move back onto the gender neutral floor like in a different room, but I was still on the floor, like in a different room, but I was still on the floor. So there was some sense of continued community there. But nothing compared to like when I've been able to spend time in a space for a year, like my freshman floor was incredible. Like I loved them so much. And right now I'm moving off campus with a group of my friends. And just being able to stay in one spot and really take root in a space.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm.

MATSUSHITA: With people that you care about is I think really, really valuable to sustaining community.

AL-JABER: So can you talk to me a little bit about all the different roles you have on campus? So I think you're involved in the Tucker Foundation, right?

MATSUSHITA: I have been. I was involved in a couple of different service organizations my freshman and sophomore years, through the Tucker Foundation, like volunteering at the Haven and doing work with the Dartmouth Cancer Society. More, I think, my serious commitments that I've like really applied myself to over the four years have been working on sexual assault awareness through different avenues. I've been a MAV [Mentors Against Violence]. I'm on the Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault, which is like my major commitment in that area. And those have been really impactful on me. I've really enjoyed my work and the people that I've met through that, like really passionate and really dedicated people. I am also in the Rockappellas, and I'm secretary for the Panhellenic Council this year. I've been a tour guide. I was a trip leader this fall. I was on Connection Croo which was a new program through DOC trips to kind of bridge the gap between when trips are over and when orientation begins. And just a number of other things throughout.

I'm really... I've started being really involved in the theater department as of my junior year, and that has been really good for me. I'm a theater minor, and I've participated through acting. And my main thing has been playwriting. So through the theater department, I've been able to put on three productions so far at Dartmouth, which has been a really awesome experience, and I hope to do at least one more next term.

AL-JABER: And your play, "Higher Ground," didn't it win an award—the Dodd Ward?

MATSUSHITA: Yes. I won the Dodd for last year, which was a really incredible experience. I was never in a play before, and this was like my first one-act play. And working with Professor Joseph Sutton to like write it for my class that I took last fall. And then like over winter break—winter term—to edit it and make it longer and get it ready for submission was like really awesome. He was incredibly supportive of me. And just the actual production experience, I was working with Professor Peter Hackett, who was the director and just an incredible person. And getting to edit it and continue to work and learn from him was really incredible. And actually putting on a show like, I was pretty surprised by the theater department. It was like pretty mind-blowing.

AL-JABER: That's something you're going to continue doing, right?

MATSUSHITA: I hope to.

AL-JABER: Yes.

MATSUSHITA: I had a play on in the fall which is another original one-act. And then I wrote another play for this term for like a play festival for Martin Luther King Day through the Office of Diversity and Equity and partnered with the theater department. And it's just like what I most enjoy doing, and really hope to continue doing that after I graduate. I'm looking into theater internships and apprenticeships for post-graduation.

AL-JABER: And you also interned at the American Society for....

MATSUSHITA: Muslim Advancement, yes. My sophomore winter I interned there.

AL-JABER: And you're involved with the Cordova Initiative?

MATSUSHITA: Yes. So those are like sister organizations. And so, I mean, that was an incredible experience. It was at a time in our country that was like really divided. It still is, obviously. I got funding through the Rockefeller Center to help pay for that, that unpaid internship, which was really cool. I was living at home and working at their office in Harlem. And I'm not Muslim. I didn't really have much knowledge of the issues Muslim Americans face today. But it was something that really interested me, and I was really interested in civil rights in general.

I found the internship on idealist.org. I just applied, and it worked out. And I was pretty shocked that it did, honestly. It was like wow! Really? They want to take me? I don't know much about this. But they were so excited to like teach me. And through—like during my time there, it was a pretty exciting but very frustrating time because that was when there were congressional hearings going on led by Congressman Peter King, who was like focusing on the radicalization of Islam in America.

And as you can imagine, those hearings were incredibly fraught with Islamic phobia and just kind of baseless accusations against a population of our country. And it was really impactful to me to be around these leaders in the Muslim community and how they reacted, in like a really constructive, positive way. And I was able to be a part of the planning of a rally in New York in Times Square against these hearings. And to just like bring attention to the

problematic things that were being said. And just like all of the really incorrect things that were being said that were alienating and really harming the Muslim-American population. So that was really, really cool and kudos to Rocky for giving me the funding to make that happen. I mean that was pretty incredible.

AL-JABER: It seems like you're very tapped into this idea of the global citizen that Dartmouth attempts to create. But did you come into Dartmouth knowing that you wanted to branch out and sort of be like an active member of the community and take on, become sort of an activist on campus?

MATSUSHITA: I don't know if that was something I walked in here with. I mean I think I always had a general sense of what I thought was right and what I thought was wrong and how we should treat each other as a small community and as a larger global community. But I think what really empowered me to start acting on those, that work and those feelings, was the people that I met here.

I mean Jim Kim's gone now. But his first fall was my first fall. And I was taking Anthropology I. And he came and guest lectured for a day. And he just...I was already super moved by him after reading "Mountains Beyond Mountains" and hearing him talk a couple of times. And just like the incredible leader that he was in our—like on a global scale. And just getting to hear him talk about his experience in Peru and in Haiti, and just like how thinking radically can make real change.

So like on a larger scale, people like President Kim and professors that I had were really encouraging, but also the students here. I think there are so many people who are so passionate and so driven to make change on our campus and in our world. And just being around that like really active spirit and those mentors that I had, really encouraged me to think that I could do the same. Especially in the Rockappellas and in their friends I found a lot of those role models.

AL-JABER: So has your group of friends stayed the same or has it changed throughout the four years that you've been here?

MATSUSHITA: A lot of my close friends now are people that were on my freshman floor. I've lived with a lot of people that were on my freshman floor but I mean, it's always changing for sure. With every new class comes like an opportunity to meet new people who are going to

help change you. They impact your life, and I love that. That's why fall is my favorite term at Dartmouth because you get to meet this whole new group of people. That's why spring is so hard because you're like losing... It feels like you're losing some important people.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm.

MATSUSHITA: Yes. But I feel like every time I've met someone or maybe more than someone, but at least one person who is like a new great part of my life. So at the same time there's like continuity of certain people, it has been really cool to see who else like...who'll wind up being really important to me.

AL-JABER: How would you define the Dartmouth community? Does it involve students, administrators, both? Like how do you see it?

MATSUSHITA: I think that's a hard question because I don't think there is one Dartmouth community. I think that word is used a lot in like a really broad, pretty vague way. My community at Dartmouth is my friends, is the Rockappellas, is the people I work with in different communities and in groups. And my professors who have been so amazing and encouraging. And like deans and just awesome people I've met that way. And they have all just pushed me to be the best version of myself and to expect better from people around me and to go after that.

I think on a larger scale, I think it's hard to really have a catchall phrase to describe the Dartmouth community. When I'm on a tour, when I'm doing a tour, I generally say like it's about the people. And I think that is the best way to describe it; it's just like...because every person's going to have a different experience, every person.

Like there's no one way to do Dartmouth. There is no like one Dartmouth experience. And I think that that is an impression that people can have, especially freshmen coming in here. Like there's this sense of like, oh, this is what I should be doing, this is what everyone's doing, this is the path that I should take, I guess I should. Whatever that is. Like being a premed or like joining a fraternity or joining like a certain group. And having that be the right way to do things.

But what I've seen through all the people that I know and just all the stories that I've heard, is like everyone's going to have... Like you may do the same thing, but that does not mean you've had the

same experience. And so, I don't know, like my friends freshman summer, this is like my core year, this is like my Dartmouth, my community. Mine. But I love it because it made me really happy at the time. He was on campus for his freshman summer doing research, and he was kind of lonely because he didn't know that many '12's. Like that was our sophomore summer, and, you know, sophomore summer to me it's kind of like into our time with your class. And just because we are mostly the only people there, and sometimes it's easy to forget that there are some other people on campus. And so he called me up one day, and he was like, "You know I really like the school, I do. But what I've realized this summer is that Dartmouth is not here, it's where all of you guys are." And like he was referring to the group of friends that we had found. And, yes, it was such an odd moment. And it is really how I think about this school, is like it's not like...Dartmouth is all the classes and professors and administration and structural things, and those are like really important. And like obviously we're here for academics and like here to grow and learn. But the thing that I am going to remember the most and the thing that has shaped me the most has been the people that I've met here.

AL-JABER: So do you think the Dartmouth community has evolved, or has it remained stagnant during the four years that you've been here?

MATSUSHITA: I mean I've been here for a four-year period and like a lot of change in a lot of directions. I mean we've had a new president, and we have another new president. And we're going to have another new president the second I graduate. Blitz has changed. Greenprint has changed. The Center for Women and Gender just changed their name. You know there are like a lot of structural changes that have occurred, like FoCo. Like DBA's not even like... There are a lot of things that it seems like they were Dartmouth things that have changed since I've been at Dartmouth. And I think that's sparked a lot of anger and frustration from a lot of people.

But one thing that... Amanda Childress, she's one of the sexual assault—she's one of the SAAP coordinators at Dartmouth, and she said to me the other day, when I was kind of joking about that, because the CWG just changed their name. And I was like, "could one thing stay the same here over four years?" And she said to me something that like really resonated with me like, "When I was looking for a job at a college, I was told by my friend that you should never stick yourself at a place that is not undergoing any

construction because that is a sign that they are like not interested in change and not interested in like moving forward.”

And I think that’s...I think that’s a good like metaphor. I think that Dartmouth in the last four years has gone through a lot of change. I mean, socially and structurally. Recently there has been the Group Leadership Council’s new policy on sexual assault, which I think is a really amazing step forward. I think I’ve heard a change in the dialog in a lot of issues over the past couple of years, where we’re not having the same conversation in the same way over and over again, which is really awesome. And so I think we’re at a pretty hopeful time, personally, where people are aware that there’s a lot that needs to be done. But there are a lot of people who are really excited to do that work.

AL-JABER: There have been some racial incidents on campus recently. Have you had time to process that? And are you involved in trying to make a difference in eradicating these racial tensions on campus?

MATSUSHITA: So my own issue and something that I’ve like really struggled with my entire life. And like in a concentrated way while I’ve been here. So I’m mixed race, and my dad is Japanese and Polish; my mom is Haitian and Danish. So my own like identity has always been kind of questioned because people say things like, oh, you don’t look like a Matsushita. Or like what are you? And like can I touch your hair? You know just like a lot of things. And that’s always been a part of my life. And I think being at Dartmouth has only like amplified my own questioning of how I identify.

I’ve come to identify as a black woman here. And I’m pretty comfortable in that identity right now. But because of my own issues with my own identity, it’s like hard for me to get involved in a lot of discussions on race on campus I think because I don’t feel like I always like can. And I think that’s more of a personal problem or issue than it is like the conversations are exclusive. I think it’s important that we’re calling attention to those issues, those incidents, what have been termed bias incidents. But I have not actively engaged myself in those.

AL-JABER: And this issue of sexual assault on campus, is that something that you’re going to keep tabs on after you graduate, as an alumna?

MATSUSHITA: Yes. I mean I think that alumni engagement in the issue is pretty crucial. And so I definitely would want to stay connected. I think that

recent alums have been amazing about that; like those students who were really involved when they were here have been coming back and being active forces as alums. And I think that is so, so important because sometimes I feel like alums have more influence than the students. I feel like a lot of them have more influence than the students who are currently here in a lot of things. And so I definitely will continue to do whatever I can to be a force for continued improvements in that area.

AL-JABER: Do you think the fact that Dartmouth is sort of isolated impacts its sense of community?

MATSUSHITA: I do. We're a small campus. You can see the same person, even if you don't know them, you see them like three times a day or something like that. And I think it just kind of...it's like a pressure cooker almost. In a good way, and I think also it can be a bad way where you feel like, oh, my gosh! Especially over sophomore summer I felt that way, where it's like there are a thousand people on this campus, and I feel like I know most of them, even though I probably don't. And it just felt like it was very small then. I think that is one cool thing with the D Plan, where it feels like, you know, there's new people that you get to meet every term. But I think... I think by nature how small this campus is, and how we're on this hill in the middle of New Hampshire. I think it really encourages people to get to know each other really well. It's not like we're at Columbia or in a big city where there's like places to go outside of campus. Unless you have a car, it's really hard to like even get up into the Upper Valley. And so I think that can be hard sometimes. But for me, it's been really wonderful because I've gotten to know the people around me really well, I think.

AL-JABER: So a lot of what this project is about is trying to identify where people fit in in the Dartmouth community. So do you see yourself as more of a Dartmouth insider or an outsider? And has that changed? Have there been times where you've felt like an insider and other times where you felt like an outsider?

MATSUSHITA: I mean for sure. [Laughs] I think I've felt both of those things. Coming into Dartmouth I didn't drink at all, and I didn't drink my freshman year really at all. I did feel like I couldn't fully participate in the social scene at times. Not because anyone ever pressured me to. But it just felt like...like I was saying before, it feels like sometimes there is this one way to do Dartmouth and just having it be okay with like finding your own path was challenging. And I think

definitely as an underclassman to just know myself and to know, if I want to do something, I'm going to do it. But not letting this feeling of, well, everyone's doing it—like everyone's playing Pong or whatever—influence me and who I was. I did feel like an outsider at times. And as an insider, I guess, you know, I think...I'm in an a cappella group; I feel like people have ideas of like what they think are like mainstream, and I balk against that phrase. But I think.... I don't know. I think everyone feels at times like they don't fit in or they do fit in. And I definitely have had both of those experiences while I was here.

AL-JABER: So have you had time now to like process your entire Dartmouth experience? And to sort of reflect on how it's changed you?

MATSUSHITA: I try to, I try to do that, as a consistent thing. At the end of every term, I try to have a reflection time with myself and usually with my friends. Just thinking about what has changed us this term or like, how have I changed? And honestly I think I've changed a little bit every term, hopefully for the better. I'm not sure. But I think one thing that has changed over my time at Dartmouth is that I think I'm more confident in myself and what I can do. And just felt empowered to go after what I want, especially in feeling like I could play a role in issues that I feel really strongly about. Which I didn't really feel before I came here.

AL-JABER: So I guess Dartmouth was an empowering experience for you.

MATSUSHITA: Overall, it has been. And there have been like really hard times here. I'm not going to not say that. And I don't think that...I think this is very much my experience where I felt this way. I think it can be a really difficult place for a lot of people, and I definitely have felt that. But thinking about the past four years and the person I was when I got here, who was pretty timid, I think.... I tell people now like, who didn't know me back then, that I saw myself as a really shy, pretty quiet and reserved person. I think that that is not how most people would describe me now. And they're usually pretty surprised when I say that and think I'm just being self-conscious or something like that. But I think Dartmouth has really pushed me to come out of my shell and to be strong in my convictions.

AL-JABER: So I think we've covered all the questions more or less. Is there something you want to add or something you think I neglected to ask you in terms of how you see the Dartmouth community or how you see yourself fitting into it?

MATSUSHITA: When I think of the Dartmouth community, when I think of what I want from it and what I expect from it, is pretty much summed up in the principle of community. And I wish that we could just have that plastered on like T-shirts and like posters and like have everyone just remember that that is how we have all agreed that we're going to treat each other? I think that would be a great step towards helping to resolve a lot of the issues that we have on our campus, whether that be homophobia or issues of racial bias, sexual assault. I think these are all larger issues that exist everywhere. I mean they are for sure, larger issues that exist everywhere. But I think that if we actually lived up to the, at all times lived up to the principle that we have, that we are supposed to hold pretty paramount, I think that it would be like a better place.

AL-JABER: Thank you for this. I'm going to turn off the recorder now.

MATSUSHITA: Thanks.

[End of Interview]