

Mashapaug Pond Oral History Project
Interviewer/Transcriber: Abigail Ettelman
Narrator/Interviewee: Cynthia Rose Pan
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Abigail Ettelman: [00:00:00] All right, so we're recording, it's April 9th, 2014, we are at Alvarez High School, um I'm Abigail Ettelman and I'm interviewing Cynthia Rose Pan for the Mashapaug Pond Oral History Project. Okay, so, before we, so we can start, um could we, could you just introduce yourself, so say your name, the year you're graduating, and maybe a little bit about yourself as a student or a person.

Cynthia Rose Pan: My name is Cynthia Rose Pan, I'm graduating 2014, I like to play volleyball, I like to cook, and I love spending time with my family.

AE: That's really nice. So um I've heard that Alvarez doesn't have outdoor sports. But do they have indoor sports?

CP: Um, past like year, this year we haven't had it, because we have a different principle, so there hasn't been any other like um other coaches to come and coach the students in the school. So as a team, athletic team, we go to Mount Pleasant to go play with other school and combine teams. Yeah, that's it. But wait, we had volleyball last year and soccer because we had somebody to coach but this year, since I guess we have a new principle, she doesn't accept other outsiders in the, into our school. So we don't have a team this year. They tried to have a basketball team but they said that the teacher who was going to coach it wasn't like, what do you call it, wasn't like at the, he couldn't do it because he wasn't a real coach. So they stopped the basketball team.

AE: Do a lot of people play sports here?

CP: Um, yeah, a lot of people do play sports outside of school, with the other school. But a lot of kids wish that there was a team for our own school because they don't like combining our sports with other people, because they feel like if our school would, should have a different team than the other schools, since we are a different school than the other school.

AE: Makes sense.

CP: Yeah.

AE: Do you, were you disappointed about the teams that sort of got disbanded?

CP: Well, for me, yes kind of, but I'm not part of the you know the basketball team, but I feel as if they should because other students, some students aren't like really like comfortable playing

in a different school with other students because people believe that they should play with their classmates at our school, not at other schools that they don't know of.

AE: So did you um know that the reason that we don't have facilities outside, or facilities for these teams, is because of the pollution?

CP: Yes, because the land near our school was polluted so they weren't able to build like a field over there for the students to go and play on.

AE: Do you remember when you first learned about that?

CP: Well, the first time that I learned about that was honestly this year. I really didn't know because I lived here a few years ago and I came back and then when I came to Mr. Evans class, he told us about the pollution of the land near our school. That's the reason why we don't have a sports at our school.

AE: What was it like learning that? Was it - how did you feel?

CP: It shocked me at first, that I really didn't know our, they would actually build a school near a polluted land, like I'd think they would feel like they were harming the students at the school but I guess they kinda trying to clean it up and trying to actually make a different for the school so that we can actually have like our own sports team and stuff and a recreation area for the students to play at.

AE: Didn't Mr. Evans say recently that they had, that they had succeeded in cleaning up a particular area so that there might actually be a ball field soon?

CP: I don't recall him saying that, I don't really remember.

AE: I might be spreading rumors. Um, but it sounds like that would be something you would like to happen if it could happen.

CP: Yes.

AE: Are there other things that you wish were happening here?

CP: Um, I wish they just clean up the area so that we can actually have our sports teams so actually kids can get out of their own comfort zone and actually go play a sport. Because I know there are a lot of students that actually want to play a sport but they don't, they're not comfortable leaving our school and going to a different school to play. Because I know a lot of my friends, it was like, "Oh, I don't want to go to a different school to play, like that's a lot of like work to go to that school and come back again." Especially for students who live near the school. So I feel like if they had a field for the school, like [00:05:00] kids would actually join more sports and be more active.

AE: That makes sense.

CP: Mhm.

AE: Do you think a lot of students live around here?

CP: Yeah, a lot of the students do live around the area, they mostly like live in walking distance, but as for the kids who lives close, they don't want to go over to the other side of the town just to go to, um, play a sport.

AE: And for the ones who live super far away too, it's sort of like "oh, coming back, leaving, coming back..."

CP: Yeah.

AE: It's a little...

CP: Because I know when I played volleyball, it was kind of hard, I had to, after school, we had to take the bus all the way to Mount Pleasant then like after that, after practice, it would be really late, we had to take the city bus to Kennedy Plaza and then back home, and that was just daily, every day, for me. And like when the bus stop is not really near my house, I had to walk. So it's really late at night and you feel like uncomfortable walking by yourself home late.

AE: Definitely. Um, so do you, whereabouts do you live?

CP: I live near um, I live on Narragansett Ave.

AE: So, sort of close.

CP: Yeah, really close.

AE: That's nice. So did you um know anything about Alvarez before you came?

CP: Um, I didn't really know anything about this school, because I remember when I was younger, when I went to elementary school, like I remembered this, there was no building over here, it was just like dirt and people like cleaning it all the time and my dad would, he used to tell me that they're trying to build like a park in a school or something, and like when I came back that's when the school was built already for two years or three years, I forget. And then that's when I came back here for my freshman year. And that's when I started finding out that our school was on a polluted land. Like, I didn't believe they would actually build it on another, like another like this.

AE: Why do you think they made that choice?

CP: Um, I think they made that choice because there's a lot of schools that's like already packed already for all these kids to go to school, so they probably made this another high school for like kids to come since like a lot of kids live around the area too and plus they shut down the school that's now called Paul Coffee, so like all those kids that went there came here. Like I think that they wouldn't be able to put all those kids in every other school because every other school already had a lot of kids in it.

AE: That makes sense. Um, so we've talked a lot about Alvarez and like what it's like a place on a polluted area. Are there things about it that are really good and positive that you see?

CP: About our school?

AE: Mhm.

CP: Well, the good thing is that all the like, it's a good thing that they built the school because since that school shut down all those kids can still actually be together in the school and it's right near their school so they can actually still be in the area that they got really comfortable with. And like the good thing is that they actually try to make a difference for our school, they're actually trying to clean up the land and make out like a field for us in a public like park for actually people around the area to actually explore. And know like how the school was like and like how it was and it was going to be a change to our community.

AE: That makes sense. Um, so do you think a lot of students know about these things or do you talk to your friends about these things?

CP: I mean, I think everybody knows the negative things about it but I don't think everybody knows the positives of it, because if you don't really have a science class, like an environment science class, I don't think you would actually learn like the good things about it and what's people trying to change. Because I don't think people are actually into stuff like that. Like, me, I didn't really know about it until I was introduced to it and I think that if we don't introduce other people to it and influence other people about, like around our school, nobody would know anything. They just know that our school was built on polluted land, that's it. But I think we should actually introduce it to other students in the school and tell them how it is so they won't be any negative feelings of the school, because there's a lot of good things about this school and why it was built. And I think it was a good thing that they built the school for other students to actually come here and like, I mean, like, we have more background knowledge than any other students from around the place that does in our school, cause everybody thinks our school is really bad because it's really little and our school was built on polluted land and stuff, but it's good things about our school. For why they built the school. [00:10:00]

AE: How do you think that you could share that information with the rest of the students?

CP: Um, I think we should maybe like put up signs or have like meetings and stuff like we do in our school and actually talk to them about it, like our class since we know more about it than every student in the school, like we should actually make a presentation on our like things that we been learning in our class about Mashapaug Pond and stuff and the Gorham Factory.

AE: That's actually a great transition into talking about the class itself. So do you want to tell me a little bit about the class, and who teaches it, and what you learn?

CP: Mr. Evans teaches our class, Environmental Science, and we're learning about how like our school was built on polluted land and that there used to be a factory over here that polluted the pond and that they're right now in the process of trying to clean it up and um make a difference to our community and have more people in the community actually be involved in how we're trying to make a difference in cleaning up the place so that we could actually have a like a park for the community to come to and see how it like made a difference in the past and to the present, that we live now. And right now we're just doing a project like to make posters and stuff and to get people to come together and see how like there's been a big change since the past when the factory was here, still.

AE: So um could you tell me what you're learning about with the signs and how you're making them?

CP: Um, with the signs we're trying to make timeline of how it the Gorham factory was there and they had a lot of strikes when they were here and when it got, what is it, I forgot how you say it, when it stopped, and we're doing a poster with paintings and like letters to like make it stand out to the community and have people come together to see it so people will be more introduced into it.

AE: Do you think that'll work?

CP: Um, I think if we get the whole community to come see it, I think people will be more into it than people just saying it out verbally to them. I think if they see it physically they would be more like influenced that there has been a change in our community.

AE: Um, I noticed that you kept saying our community - does Alvarez feel like it's part of the community or is it more that the students are part of the community and Alvarez is just where the students are? Sort of a weird question.

CP: Can you repeat that question?

AE: Sure, um, do you think that all the students at Alvarez feel like they're part of the community around the school or is it just students who live around the school?

CP: I think it's both. I think everybody outside of Alvarez and inside of Alvarez is part of the whole community cause like the pond is near our school but everybody's a part of it, because

I'm sure that there's still people who used to work at the factory that still alive today that maybe want to see how they're making a difference around our school and for the students and how the students are actually making a difference too.

AE: That makes sense. Um, so what do you, we've talked a lot about what's actually happening in the class and what is going on and what you're doing and what that's for, but could you tell me a little bit about what it's like to be in the class, the Environmental Science class, where you're learning all of these artistic practices.

CP: What it's like?

AE: Yeah, like have you enjoyed it? Has it been exciting? Has it been boring, has it been like "why am I learning art in a science class?" like all of these things.

CP: I think it's really fun because I enjoy art and I love making things and plus it's for to show a difference in our community and I really like that, it's really good that we're actually doing this, because if we wasn't to do, who else would have done it? So I feel like it's good and plus we're a part of the school, like, and its near our school, we should make stuff like this to make it stand out for everybody outside our school and inside our school [00:15:00] but I think it's really fun because we're actually drawing and we're actually making signs and it's really cool how we can actually put it on the thing - sorry -

AE: It's okay.

CP: Um, like put it on signs and actually hang it outside and let people see. And we can come back in a few years from now and be like "yes, we made that." And actually have people be like asking us how was like, yeah.

AE: Yeah, makes sense, that's perfect. So is that sort of experience of the things that you're doing in the class, is that different from your other classes or do you do these things elsewhere?

CP: Um, this is the only class that does it, every other class we learn the topic of it like I'm actually surprised in this class we're learning about Mashapaug Pond, I'd think we'd be learning about something else, maybe around other countries or the states or something. But like really like strike me that we're actually learning about this and I find that really interesting about this class.

AE: Is that a good thing, do you think?

CP: Yes, it's a good thing.

AE: Would you like to learn about sort of local stuff in other classes?

CP: Um it would interest me but I think the main focus of this we should actually learn about something around our community that's actually happening today. That like we're trying to work on.

AE: Why's that?

CP: Because we live around this area and we should make a difference. Like in other area I'm pretty sure they're trying to make a difference in their community, like we should be doing in our own community too. Cause I know in like other states or something they had like oil leaks and they're trying to clean that up too and for us we have like the old factory that polluted our pond and that we should make a difference for that too.

AE: I think that sounds perfectly reasonable. If you um, what do you think the, hm how should I say this. See, I told you I was going to stutter too. Um, do you have any sense of the stuff that you're learning in the class, do you think that that's going to help you in the future?

CP: Yeah, if they build like a park or something, I would actually enjoy to come and see it and how it actually like came together and how they actually fix it and if like in the future I was to have kids, I would actually bring my kids here and tell them how it was and I will actually tell them, maybe show them the sign that our class made and interest them too and then maybe they can show their classmates or their friends about it too. Just have people actually knowing about it and how it changed and made a difference for them in how they could use it in their life.

AE: Fantastic. I hope that happens.

CP: I hope so too.

AE: So I think we've exhausted all of my questions although I'm sure I could keep talking to you for hours, um, but my question, my last question that I'd like to ask is always just [laughs at the background noise] someone whistling, question is always basically, is there anything that you want to tell me that I haven't asked the right questions to sort of bring out, like is there anything about the pond or your time at Alvarez or your time in this particular class that you know you want to share about, that you think is important for us to know.

CP: Um, I think I covered everything.

AE: Okay, great, that's perfect timing because it's starting to get loud. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW