

**Nellie Wong on *The Monkey King*  
a lunchtime chat with Andi Wong, 10/20/25 at Hinodeya in Japantown.**

NELLIE: So, it is as if I've been living with Monkey King. Monkey King story has been part of my life ever since I was in my, probably in my... mid 20s, early 30s.

ANDI: So that's 60, 60, something years.

NELLIE: I think so. Well, it feels more like... I think it really goes back to my love of... books and cartoons and stories. Because that's what we did when we were growing up. We didn't have, you know...

ANDI: No television, right?

NELLIE: No, not, yeah, no TV until I was a senior in high school. And then, when my dad bought us a TV, we would all gather around, it was the biggest deal in our lives.

ANDI: OK, so you said that you started out researching your roots.

NELLIE: I was interested. I've been long interested... in... searching for my roots as a Chinese American. And I've always loved movies and cartoons, books, growing up in Oakland Chinatown. So, um... Also, I was, um, becoming politicized more and more from... The activism in which I was taking part...

ANDI: And this is around what year?

NELLIE: I would say that's about... In the '70s, late '60s, early '70s. And, um, finally, going to college as an adult, and learning, and, and then learning that we were considered bananas. (laughter) As Chinese Americans say. I always wonder where that came from. And I didn't know anything, so I said, Wow, this is what, you know, going to school means, I'm learning about our history and our culture even more, and also how, we're also, as Chinese Americans, and other Asian Americans, and women, et cetera, that we're seen as "others." And I wondered why that was, because I didn't feel like an other growing up in Oakland Chinatown. So... and I remember going into China Books here in San Francisco, and just discovering all kinds of things, because I was... I think becoming more active and interested in who we were, and why was so much racism and why, and also, I think, like, part of what does it mean to be Chinese American? All those issues came up, and a woman, et cetera.

ANDI: Yeah. And so how does Monkey King, like, happen?

NELLIE: Well, um, I know one of the 1st times I, and encounter Monkey King was that the film was being shown, I believe, at the Palace of Fine Arts there, and...

ANDI: This is the animated film?

NELLIE: Yeah, the animated one. *Monkey Reeks Havoc in Heaven*. And I was... driving, and such, and I decided to go see, and I wanted to see, but I said, oh, I want to take my nephew, Sam, who's now 42. And he was about five then, so I drove him and me to go see it, and that really helped, I think, further my interest in Chinese and Asian American culture, and all the stories, and why I just thought he was, that Monkey was the most wonderful thing I've ever run into.

ANDI: And was it because you saw Sam respond to it, too, or?

NELLIE: I don't know why, but I just felt I had to take him to see the movie, but also when I was, um, uh, beginning my activism and my writing, and doing, writing poems for the first time, um, when I was in my 40s, um, I, I remember that it was really important, somehow connected to, search for roots, but also why I was so interested in anime and in, uh...

ANDI: ...and that interest continues on to, like, KPOP Demon Hunters today.

NELLIE: Yeah, yeah. And even today, you know, as an old person, I love anime, and I love stories, and fairy tales, and... interested in fantasy and mythology, and all those things. So it was just so great to learn about Monkey, and I had been going in, I was in Chinatown with my then husband, and we were looking around for stuff, and I've been going to East Wind Book for a long time now. as well as to China Books and such, and through by my going to East Wind Books, I found these... Like this graphic art, and... with a little of, um... Not a lot of texts, but enough to tell the story of Monkey King. And then I was also had read *Journey to the West* and all those things. And when I found the books, I would go in and buy one or 2 and they'd be numbered. You know, and sometimes they wouldn't be in a row, and then I would go back again and look for another one, and... I started collecting them, and I would read them first before I gave it to Sam, my nephew, and... And from there, I was probably just teaching Sam something and helping him to be aware that there's all these wonderful things in our history and our culture that was very exciting and that I never really learned. I guess I didn't learn anything about that from my parents and growing up in Oakland Chinatown. So that's a part of that, too.