The Women of Harry Potter – Blessing Cho Chang  
Cho Chang With Kathy Tu

[intro music begins]

Vanessa: Hi, Kathy!
Kathy: Hi, Vanessa!

Vanessa: Thank you so much for, yeah, meeting me inside of a beehive today. A lot of people were really against us doing a show here, but I think it’s beautiful.

Kathy: Yeah, I mean, it’s beautiful *obviously*, but I do feel a bit bad that we’re taking up space from the bees. It’s nice that they’re making space for us though. I appreciate it.

Vanessa: Yes. We would like to thank our sponsors for today’s episode, the bees of this hive. (*Kathy laughs*) Today we are continuing our series—really trying to lift up the voices of the really few women of color in the Harry Potter universe, and we are lucky enough to be joined by the amazing Kathy Tu. Incredible podcaster, early supporter of our podcast, and we are just a huge *huge* fan. And she is ½ of the Nancy podcast on WNYC. Kathy, thank you for joining us.

Kathy: Happy to be here.

Vanessa: Okay, so we invited you to come on and bless the incredible Cho Chang. What are you blessing her for today?

Kathy: Well, I’ve been thinking about this, and I feel like it’s really hard for me to put to word a feeling, but I guess I’m blessing Cho Chang for being clearly a minority in the Harry Potter world but also excelling at everything and also suffering so much. And just, I guess, just being herself in this world where she goes through a lot but you don’t really learn a lot about her. So, I guess just existing in the Harry Potter world is enough for me to bless her.

Vanessa: Yeah, she is a character who just so much is put on. She has to be an excellent student. She has to be absolutely gorgeous so both Cedric and Harry want her. She has to be, not just a great Quidditch player, but be a great sportswoman of Quidditch. Right, like, have the best of manners on the Quidditch pitch. She’s the one who points out to Harry that he’s in trouble when they think there’s a Dementor. She has an ethnicity tax or a race tax on her by existing in this school.

Kathy: Yeah, and I mean, she’s a great student. She’s a great athlete. The way Cho defends Marietta—which I think is the right thing to do when Marietta rats out Dumbledore’s Army—and then Harry gets so mad at her, I’m just like, “I feel for you.
You’re taking on so many roles and, still, we don’t know anything about you besides the fact that tragic things have happened.” You know?

Vanessa: Yeah. And I completely agree. What she does for Marietta is 100% the right thing, and it is what Harry would do for Hermione or Ron, so I don’t understand why he judges her for it.

Kathy: Right!

Vanessa: The trio is *way* in the wrong, and Cho and Marietta are completely in the right on that whole situation.

Kathy: Yeah. I agree. I remember reading about Cho and being like, “This is the person that I’m going to identify with,” even though the way that she interacted with the world of Harry Potter, to me, did not signal an immigrant experience. At first reading the book, I was kind of like, “I don’t quite understand how to interpret this character except that I think they’re signaling to me that this is an Asian character by choosing to use their name.” Because I don’t learn anything else about her that would signal to me that she is anything but a white character. And then, I remember later on when the movies were coming out, there was so much press about who was going to play Cho Chang because we knew that she was going to be Harry’s love interest, and I remember thinking with my friends, “This person gets to date the most famous person in the Harry Potter-verse. She has to be *perfect*. Who is she [JKR] going to pick?” I also remember me and my friends thinking that when they did pick Katie Leung—I think it’s Leung, excuse me if I’m pronouncing her name wrong (note from transcriber: Kathy pronounced like “Lung”)—I remember thinking that they picked such a pretty person and on top of that, they gave her an accent that was not who I would have thought someone who was named “Cho Chang” would have. Does that make sense? To me, someone who kept the name “Cho Chang” would most likely have more of a native—say Chinese—accent or something like that, but instead I think she had a Scottish accent.

Vanessa: Yeah.

Kathy: Which, at the time—not really knowing where I fit in in the world—I was thinking at the time, “Wow, she’s so much cooler than us.” She seemed to me like an Asian-American almost, but so much cooler because she had a Scottish accent. And now, I cringe back at the younger version of myself because I know that that’s a fantasy world, but that doesn’t seem true to any experience that I know about. So, interesting choices. Interesting casting choices and just general character development choices there.

Vanessa: Yeah, and just interesting writing about any racial identity. Right, I feel like she probably called Cho “Cho” because she wanted an East Asian character and didn’t know how to describe her other than giving her a name that would signal that she’s East Asian and not catching on to—

Kathy: Right, right.
Vanessa: And that’s exactly the kind of thing that I would catch on to of being like, “Ok, that Jewish character is named “Shmuley”; you would only name your child Shmuley if you’re super Orthodox. If you know all of the rules inside of a world, you can pick up on to is in underrepresented groups—in groups that are underrepresented in mass media, there is so much hope and pressure pinned to every little decision on a character like Cho. You know, I mean I even find myself doing it whenever it turns out that a Jew has done something bad in the news. I’m like, “Ugh, Jeffrey Epstein! Why?” (*Kathy laughs*) Whereas every time a white Christian like Trump does something bad, it’s not like the entire Christian community is like, “Aaahh, you’re representing us poorly!”

Kathy: They get to be individuals.

Vanessa: Exactly, exactly. And Cho—Hermione, I think, rightly points to all of the pressure that Cho is under in that brilliant Hermione way of saying, “Well, obviously she has feelings for you but she’s still sad about Cedric, and blah blah blah. Here are all the reasons she could be crying during the first kiss.” But Hermione doesn’t know the added pressure of potentially being the only Chinese person at Hogwarts who is also under the intense glare of everybody for being the girlfriend of Cedric. Knowing that she’s representing an entire race of people in the way that she grieves and the way that she dates—

Kathy: Yeah, and I remember when she was introduced in the series, I did feel like I didn’t quite relate to her because at my school—which had a lot of Asian kids there—I felt like she would have been one of the popular Asian kids so we wouldn’t hang out, but it was nice to have her there. At the same time, I was thinking that she is supposed to be the Asian girl that we all strive to be. You know, I can’t think of any part of her in the Harry Potter books where she falters as a person, basically. She is perfect, kind of, all across the board, which is impossible to be. And, I feel like after the series is finished, she kind of vanished away. She was present for a little bit as this perfect person that Harry really liked, then she just disappears. I remember feeling like, “What happened to her? Is she not in this world anymore? What happened?” I would watch a whole spin-off, read a whole spin-off on just what happened to Cho Chang.

Vanessa: Oh my god, me too. I also think Harry gets disappointed when he perceives her as not being perfect.

Kathy: Yeah, that’s true.

Vanessa: When she cries on their date on Valentine’s Day and doesn’t just go with the flow with him saying, “Sorry, I have to interrupt our date to go meet up with another girl,” and she rightfully gets mad about a Valentine’s Day being interrupted to go meet up with another girl, he’s like, “Whoa! Emotions!” So we even see Harry judge her for anything that he sees as her stepping out of line.
Kathy: Yeah, I would also add—not that I’m defending Harry—but he just seemed real emotional during that time. Generally, he just seemed to be bouncing back and forth during that period of his life.

Vanessa: Yeah. Well, as much as it impacts Cho that her boyfriend died, Harry actually witnessed him die.

Kathy: Right. I feel like they’re both traumatized, and neither of them have worked through it.

Vanessa: Yeah, no. I mean, and you know, it really begs being said every time, you talk about the Harry Potter world that they’re 15 and trying to take care of each other when they’re both grieving.

Kathy: Yeah, right.

Vanessa: I am wondering if there is a discrimination component to the standard that he holds Cho to. Just, like, if Hermione were to cry, I don’t feel like he would be like, “Ugh, why are girls crying all the time?”

Kathy: Right.

Vanessa: He gets so annoyed with Cho, but I think you’re probably right. Rather than cry discrimination, (*Kathy laughs*) I’ll just have sympathy for Harry and say that he didn’t have the capacity to deal with somebody else’s pain in that moment, and that’s probably what that’s about. (*Kathy laughs*) Fine.

Kathy: I guess it’s hard to figure out when we’re not given too much more background information about what’s going on.

Vanessa: Yeah, I would totally read a spin-off series about Cho.

Kathy: I wonder what happened. I’m sure she went on to excel—probably also be an Auror. I mean, come on!

Vanessa: Yeah! She was so good in Dumbledore’s Army.

Kathy: Yeah! Ravenclaw, come on, very smart, and also, a Seeker! She can fly with the best of them! And I think she’s probably running the place!

Vanessa: I mean, it makes sense because at the end of the day, it’s a series about Harry, but as soon as he loses romantic interest in her, she sort of drifts away as a plot point.

Kathy: Yeah, that’s like—that’s pretty common. It’s a standard that’s starting to change, I feel like, but I feel like that’s always been pretty common in—not even just about an Asian character but the female love interest is just there to serve the main male character, so I’m not super surprised, but I did love her when she was around. I love her the older that I get, actually. I feel like I have more empathy for her. When I was first reading it, I felt seen in a way, but also like I could never hang out with that person; I
wasn’t her and I couldn’t be friends with her. But, it was nice that there was some representation! But also she would just be mean to me or something, I don’t know. So, it’s a complicated relationship, me and Cho.

Vanessa: (*laughs*) Yeah, sounds like it. I hope that now you guys are friends because you guys are around the same age.

Kathy: Yeah, I would say it’s one of those things where we probably weren’t friends in high school, but if we connected like ten years later, we’d be like, “Oh my god, you’re so cool!”

Vanessa: So, Ariana’s theory about Cho—about Cho and Marietta—is that Marietta is in love with Cho.

Kathy: (*deep gasp*) I HADN’T EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT THAT!!!

Vanessa: Yeah. I love that theory. She’s like, “Why would Marietta, whose mom works at the Ministry of Magic, go into the Dumbledore’s Army meeting unless she really loved Cho?”

Kathy: OH MY GOD!

Vanessa: She’s like, “And by that, I mean really love Cho.” And I’m like, “SUCH A GOOD POINT!” So…

Kathy: Oh my god, my mind is blown open right now.

Vanessa: So maybe Cho and Marietta get together eventually.

Kathy: Oh my god, I would so watch that show or movie or read that book!

Vanessa: I know, the two baddest witches of the age, like, joining forces.

Kathy: I think we just have to wait like ten years for when they start rebooting everything, and then maybe they’ll be like, “Yeah, we’ll do a thing that follows what happened to Cho and Marietta.”

Vanessa: So my two favorite Cho moments are her siding with Marietta and standing up to Harry in that confrontation—

Kathy: (*agreeing*) Uh-huh.

Vanessa: And my other favorite Cho moment—and that is because I am a total sucker for sports movies, like if I need a cry, I’m like, “Put on that Mark Wahlberg football movie.” (*Kathy laughing*) Put on “Mighty Ducks 2” and I’ll start weeping. So I’m very inspired by a moment that would absolutely make me cry in the film version which is when Cho is like, “Harry watch out!” and gives up going for the Snitch in order to protect Harry because she thinks that a Dementor is after him. So our quiz is about—it’s just 3 questions, and it’s famous moments of sportsmanship in history.
Kathy: Oh god. Okay, okay, okay.

Vanessa: Okay. Zero out of three is a passing grade (*Kathy laughing*) so you’re gonna do great!

Kathy: Let’s do it!

Vanessa: The first question: at the infamous 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Jesse Owens—the American world record holder in the long jump—had foot-faulted twice in his bid to qualify for the final. His rival, a German athlete named Long—aptly named—was clearly worried about Long. So what did Long do?

a. Give Jesse Owens a pep-talk and a hug
b. Give him his lucky charm to wear
c. Give Owens advice on how to adjust his run-up
d. Ask the judges if Owens could have one more chance

Kathy: Wow, these are very nice. Okay, I feel like maybe not the instructions because elite athletes are probably not open to hearing how to do something. So I’m going to strike that one off. Is it D?

Vanessa: He actually gave him advice on how to adjust his run-up.

Kathy: WHAT?!

Vanessa: I know. And Owens took the advice and then won the gold medal and Long got the silver medal.

Kathy: WHAT?!

Vanessa: I know! It’s amazing! It’s this incredibly beautiful story. Right as Nazism is on the rise, this German and American come together in this gorgeous moment of sportsmanship—very Cho and Harry.

Kathy: Wow. I was very cynical there.

Vanessa: I think that’s what makes the moment so beautiful. It goes against every stereotype we have about athletes.

Kathy: Gotcha.

Vanessa: And especially men but—

Kathy: Okay. Alright, so doing well. Doing well.

Vanessa: Yeah! You’re doing perfectly. So we’re going to fast-forward by about 60 years, and in 1992 at the Summer Olympics in Barcelona, Derek Redmond from Britain was placed to win the 400m dash when his hamstring tore with less than half of the race to
go (*Kathy gasps*). Redmond got up and attempted to hobble the rest of the distance to the finish line, but the following happened instead:

- a. His father ran onto the track and father and son completed the course with Derek in tears to a standing ovation from the crowd
- b. His second-place competitor, Warner, asked for the race to be called off not wanting to win if he didn't beat the best runner in the world
- c. The rest of the runners, after they all finished, came back and carried him across the finish line
- d. His coach came out and kissed him on the forehead in what is now a famous Olympic photograph

Kathy: Is it C? Did they come help him?

Vanessa: No. His dad came onto the track—

Kathy: (*disappointedly*) No.

Vanessa: Isn't that the sweetest thing? And basically carried him across the finish line.

Kathy: Oh my god. Oh my god.

Vanessa: It is really worth watching a video. It is so incredible.

Kathy: Wait, so did he still win or did somebody else win?

Vanessa: No. Somebody else won, and they disqualified him, which is rude.

Kathy: That's very rude. That's a good moment.

Vanessa: Last question! We’re going forward about 20 years. So in 2016, there was a group of 5 American gymnasts who won the 2016 Team All-Around. They were the last group of gymnasts coached by Marta Karolyi so they named themselves in honor of the fact that she was retiring and had coached for over 50 years in the United States. Did they call themselves:

- a. The Fab Five
- b. The Fierce Five
- c. The Final Five
- d. The Fantastic Five

Kathy: Oh, I really hope it’s “The Fantastic Five.” Is it “The Fantastic Five?” It’s “The Final Five” isn’t it?

Vanessa: Yes! It’s “The Final Five.”

Kathy: That’s my answer!
Vanessa: You got it right! (*Kathy laughing*) I know, I want it to be “The Fantastic Five” too. They were called “The Fierce Five” but in that Olympics, because it was going to be their coach’s last Olympics, they renamed themselves “The Final Five.”

Kathy: I love that.

Vanessa: It’s the Simone Biles team, and she’s a perfect person, so...

Kathy: Awwwww. That was a fun Olympics to watch.

Vanessa: That was a really fun Olympics to watch. I am very anti-sports, but writing this quiz made me really weepy again.

Kathy: Sports movies are the only movies that make me cry.

Vanessa: Yeah, oh, yeah. Totally.

Kathy: I don’t know what it is about them. Just coming together. They don’t even need to win—just coming together, I’m like, “YES!”

Vanessa: Oh, when they lose, if they do it with dignity, it’s so beautiful.

Kathy. Yeah. Agreed, agreed.

Vanessa: Well, Kathy, thank you so much for coming on and blessing Cho who deserves absolutely all of the blessings in the world.

Kathy: Yeah, especially now since I know that she’s queer. It’s great! (*both laughing*)

Vanessa: You heard it here first, folks!

Kathy: Breaking news! (*both laughing*) Thank you for having me. It’s always a pleasure.

[*outro music begins*]

Vanessa: This has been The Women of Harry Potter. We are a Not Sorry Production, and we are produced by me—Vanessa Zoltan—Ariana Nedelman, and Chelsea Ursin. A big thank you this week to the incredible Kathy Tu and to WNYC Studios and Zakiya Gibbons for helping with recording on their end. Thanks so much, and we’ll talk to you in two weeks.

[*outro music ends*]