

ON A BEAUTIFUL April day in 2002, a woman named Ai-jen Poo walked into the River Run Playground on New York's Upper West Side, where a cluster of Caribbean women had gathered, tending to children who were not their own. Kids ran chattering up the play structures, following the trail of a concrete stream that runs the length of the playground. A woman named Allison Julien pulled her eyes off the little girl she was caring for and watched as Poo walked toward her, pulling fliers out of her bag as she approached. Poo was there, she explained, to talk to the women about their rights. Julien, an immigrant from Barbados and third-generation domestic worker, was ready to listen.

"Here was this Asian lady talking to a bunch of Caribbean folk about domestic-worker organizing?" Julien recalled. She stood at Poo's shoulder and thought to herself: Who are you? A unicorn?

Poo is a lifelong activist with straight hair and a wide, calm face. She was in her late 20s when she first met Julien, already with a voice so steady it could talk down a thunderstorm. She spoke about the meetings her organization was holding...

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