Time	Speaker	
00:00	Joseph	So, here you were. You were in your early 20's I guess, in a foreign country, living in a castle, pregnant, and you have decided that *they* need to change what they eat.
00:13	Karen	(Laughs) Yeah, I did. I thought I could be helpful.
00:28	Joseph	Welcome to the Deep Culture Podcast. I am your host, Joseph Shaules. Yvonne van der Pol is away. You know, before information technology, before we Zoomed and Googled, before we were friending on Facebook and live streaming our living room, living in a foreign country was even more intense than today. It really cut you off. You were forced to dive into a different world.
00:58	Joseph	For many years, during that pre-information technology era, foreign residents in Japan had a kind of lifeline to help them adjust. Every week, The Japan Times published a column by Karen Hill Anton called Crossing Cultures. Karen and her husband Bill had arrived in Japan in 1975 and moved to a remote mountain top farmhouse in Shizuoka prefecture, where they built a fire every day to heat their bath water and raised their four children in a traditional farming community.
01:37	Joseph	Karen's dispatches from rural Japan introduced her readers to the very local life that she lived, her farmhouse neighbors, the PTA and a million and one cultural adjustments she had to make. Raising her children in a world so far away from her working-class New York City upbringing. Her column gave voice to the challenges and rewards of intercultural living.
02:06	Joseph	She developed a wildly dedicated following of people who would write to her, ask her advice and confide in her. And, she would share these stories. She also went on to become an intercultual trainer and consultant, and still lives in a rural Japan. Today, on the Deep Culture Podcast, we have a special treat. I will be talking to Karen Hill Anton about her new memoir,

		"The View From Breast Pocket Mountain."
02:45	Joseph	Karen Hill Anton, welcome to the Deep Culture Podcast.
02:48	Karen	Thank you very much, Joseph Shaules. I'm very happy to be here.
02:54	Joseph	I sometimes tell people that the first intercultural writing that I ever came across was Edward Hall when I was in graduate school, but that's not really true because the first intercultural writing that I came across was your Crossing Cultures column in The Japan Times. This was something I looked forward to every week.
03:18	Joseph	I know, in your memoir, you talk about writing the column, all of the loyal readers you had, and all the letters that they wrote to you. What was that column? What were you trying to accomplish? And, what did that mean to you?
03:33	Karen	Well, the column Crossing Cultures, it occurred to me that people would be interested in reading about the experiences, the life of an American woman, married to an American, living in rural Japan, raising four children, and participating in the society and community at every level. I wrote a column, and the editor wasn't particularly enthusiastic, I recall. She just said, "Show me something." And, I wrote something that became the first column, and it was a hit.
04:11	Joseph	You were writing about daily life, living in this rural community with the wives of the farmers in your neighborhood and your kids going to school. So, it was very local, but at the same time, there was something universal about it.
04:28	Karen	Yeah, I think so, because I think almost anyone, even someone who was not having this experience, could put themselves in this position, like what if they had it and ended up living in this kind of small community.
04:45	Joseph	You had some pretty extreme cultural adaptation, arriving in Japan and living in a *dojo*, living in, what should I say, a yoga

		community? And then, living in this farmhouse. And then, you have been, of course, living in Japan for many, many years now, and have a very strong sense of attachment here. I'm very interested in community, and what is it that makes us feel attached to community, but also, why do we leave the communities that we do. Now, you are originally from New York.
05:20	Karen	Well, I'm from New York City. I grew up in Washington Heights, which is Uptown in Manhattan. Growing up in the 50's and the 60's. It was somewhat, you know, a typical black community. My high school was probably quarter Black, quarter Jewish, quarter Puerto Rican and quarter Greek. It was working-class, you might even say poor, but we had the things that we needed.
05:48	Karen	We had a community where everyone was pretty much an active participant. I write in the memoir that my father was actually the founder of what was called the Community League of 159th Street. They would arrange outings and block parties.
06:10	Joseph	Well, your father sounds like a remarkable man. You talk about him owning the only typewriter, and people would come to him and ask him to write letters.
06:19	Karen	He had a Royal typewriter. It was a large, black, very heavy thing. People would sometimes come to our apartment and ask him to write anything that needed to, you know, to be official. Sometimes, he would take it to other people's apartment. And, these were, you know, these were tenements, so there were no elevators. He carried that out, the typewriter, you know, down our stairs and up someone else's, five flights, and write whatever they need it written.
06:51	Joseph	Well, it struck me as I was reading your memoir that there are these parallels in your life with you and your father. He obviously loved language. You talk about his interest in art, showing you the Pieta or loving Handel.

07:06	Karen	I don't know where or how he came to know the music of Handel, or to love the music of Handel. I remember the very first time, and I don't write about this in the memoir, when he said something to me about how beautiful the music was, and he said the name Handel. I just remember thinking at the time, "How come someone's name being Handel?" "Handles are on the door."
07:40	Karen	I do mention that he went to the Hampton Institute. The Hampton Institute was founded to educate Negroes and Indians, and to give them the skills to be able to be productive members of society. So it's not like he had liberal arts education. He was someone who was curious and interested, read newspapers from the very first page to the last.
08:08	Joseph	So, you had a strong sense of community where you grew up, but then, you moved to Greenwich Village. Was this after you left high school? That sounds like a very different kind of world.
08:23	Karen	It was a very different world. It couldn't have been more different. I was beginning to see more of the world outside of my small community. And, this was through taking an art history course that exposed me and my classmates to much of the great art that could be found in the world.
08:48	Karen	Once you start opening these doors, these windows, you know, there is a whole world to be found. In a place like Greenwich Village, the home of Bohemians, artists, writers, dancers, performers, galleries and unusual stores, you know, crafts and people who lived there, it was, in a way, just a perfect environment for someone looking to explore and see a different world.
09:40	Joseph	My guest today is Karen Hill Anton. In her memoir, "The View From Breast Pocket Mountain," she talks about how living in Greenwich Village was the starting point for her life of artistic self-expression and an exchange. She danced at the Martha

		Graham Dance Academy, met artists and writers. Her neighbor was the author, Joseph Heller, and she got a job typing out the dialogue of his novel, “Catch-22.”
10:08	Joseph	Later living in Copenhagen, she was a part of a jazz community that included Dexter Gordon, Freddie Hubbard, Kenny Drew. In Switzerland, she spent the afternoon with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. In Japan, John Denver came to her farmhouse and sang for her neighbors. She has practiced *shodo*, Japanese calligraphy, for many years. And, of course, she is an accomplished writer. We can’t fit all of this into our podcast, but at least, let’s hear some more about her intercultural adventures.
10:43	Joseph	So, your first experience outside of the United States was when you went to Europe. Is that right?
10:49	Karen	That’s correct, When I was 19, I went to Europe for the first time. Just took off. The whole world opened up as far as I was concerned. I hitchhiked the length and breadth of France, Spain, and Germany. I went into Belgium. I went to Denmark, I think, twice. I also went to Morocco just for a short time. I ran, I felt like I was running all over the places, in a way, taking it all in. It was just so exciting and I just absolutely loved it.
11:21	Joseph	In your memoir, you said, “The first experience of living outside the United States changed me in ways I don’t even know how to describe.”
11:30	Karen	Probably, I would say that I realized that there was so much more than what I had been exposed to. I saw interacting with... and could appreciate that there was an entire world of experience of art, food, clothes, ways to live, communicate that I had no inkling before.
11:58	Karen	I felt I could absorb it like a sponge almost. Everything had meaning for me. I was definitely very much affected by absolutely everything that I was experiencing.

12:12	Joseph	So, you came back to New York, then you were working as a model in New York.
12:19	Karen	It was 1966. I got some modeling jobs. It was somewhat fortunate that I got a few good assignments. I actually modeled for the first color edition of the fashion pages for The New York Times Magazine.
12:39	Joseph	So, was this at the time when there were increasing numbers of models of color?
12:45	Karen	Yeah, there were more Black models at that time, certainly than there had been previously. But, when I say more, you know, of the top models, instead of one, maybe there was two. I recall that I was introduced to a major modeling agency. I went there with this introduction, and was told that they already had a black model, that they had one and that was enough.
13:19	Karen	But, I also knew the world of modeling wasn't for me. One other reason, I'll tell you, Joseph, is that that summer, I had worked in a summer camp for disadvantage children, and I was paid to work as a counselor. I was paid for the entire summer what I made modeling in a few hours. And, I just realized that I didn't really want to participate in anything like that.
14:02	Joseph	After years in Europe traveling, living in a castle, on a strawberry farm, in cosmopolitan Copenhagen, my guest, Karen Hill Anton went back to the US and spent four years living in rural Vermont before hitting the road again, exploring Europe and heading overland to Asia in an old Volkswagen Bug with her partner, Bill and her four-year-old daughter, and eventually making it to Japan.
14:33	Joseph	So, you later were living in San Francisco, but then you went back to Europe. I was fascinated to learn that you were working as a cook at a Danish high school when you were pregnant.
14:49	Karen	That's right. I was, I think, about four months pregnant when I arrived in Denmark, and I heard that there was a position

		opened, and they were looking for a cook. And, it sounded like some place where I knew I would be able to get through the winter, you know, through my pregnancy. When I arrived at the school, I was aware that they were eating the typical Danish diet. At that time, you could say that the typical Danish diet was meat and potatoes. And, meat and potatoes.
15:29	Karen	I was a vegetarian at the time. I spoke with the headmaster and told him that I would like to introduce them to the idea that you could have a perfectly healthy and delicious meal without meat. He basically said, “Sure, the job is yours, take it over.”
15:52	Joseph	Well, let’s just clarify. This was basically in a castle on an island.
15:57	Karen	It was on the island of Funen, and the castle was still outside of Odense, so way out in the countryside, in a place where literally did not have an address. If you wrote to someone at the high school, you would say, “[*Danish*] Holmstrup,“ which means “near the village of Holmstrup.” And, the castle was... I believe it was built in 1860’s, and I guess for a castle, it was a small castle but probably had forty rooms or something like that.
16:35	Joseph	So, here you were. You were in your early 20’s I guess, in a foreign country, living in a castle, pregnant, and you have decided that they need to change what they eat.
16:50	Karen	(Laughs) Yeah, I did. I thought I could be helpful.
16:57	Joseph	I was impressed that you had this clear vision in your own mind. You know, there is a contradiction when we go out and explore the world. You need to have some sense of who you are to want to go out and see the world. You need to have your own vision, and at the same time, you are going into other people’s community, other people’s homes, and you need to adapt yourself. So, there is always this conflict between being yourself and adapting to others. So, that was really a unique situation.
17:29	Karen	It was. I believe that there is always that give and take. I said,

		"OK, I can make some of those things, and I will make it better, in fact, than you had, but I will also introduce you to some other ways of eating, and I will revive some traditional Danish dishes." Even something like pickled herring, I could get herring from the fishmonger. I found an old recipe for pickling herring that was simple enough, and I pickled herring.
18:20	Joseph	So, you got together with your now husband, then boyfriend, Bill Anton, and then you decided to go, both of you decided to go to Japan. This was in 1975?
18:35	Karen	1974 was when we left the United States. Bill was invited to Japan. He was invited to study at this yoga *dojo*, where yoga, martial arts and healing arts were taught.
18:53	Joseph	But, you decided not to just fly directly. You decided to drive across Europe towards Japan. How long did that take you, and where did you go?
19:03	Karen	One year. Well, we flew from New York to Belgium, and we toured, I would say, all of Western Europe. We drove straight across the northern Italy into the former Yugoslavia, and then from there, to Bulgaria, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. After that, we used public transportation to go to Pakistan, India, Nepal and Thailand. The drive was all in a Volkswagen Bug, an old Volkswagen Bug, with a five-year-old child.
19:46	Joseph	This is some hardcore travel.
19:49	Karen	It is, yeah. If you think about it now, you could not imagine, you know, driving all the land, border to border in Iran, in Afghanistan. I mean, you wouldn't do it, and you couldn't do it. It's no longer possible. But then, it really wasn't a scary thing. I mean, if I had been afraid, I'm sure I wouldn't have done it.
20:13	Joseph	But, it sounds like you got a lot of attention wherever you went.
20:17	Karen	Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I was stared at from the moment we left Europe. I was stared at all the time. Absolutely all the time.
20:28	Joseph	Was that because you are black? Because you are a woman?

		Because you are a foreigner? Because you had a child? Because you are a mixed race couple?
20:38	Karen	Really it was all those things, Joseph. Probably not the last one though. I doubt the fact that we were a mixed race couple, but just so different, you know? We were just obviously different wherever we went. I was even more different, you know, being black. And yeah, in places where women were not out on their own, like Afghanistan, it was almost like a revelation everytime I step forward.
21:10	Joseph	Then, you arrived in Japan. You had been on the road for, I guess, a year, camping next to your car, I understand. But, you arrived in Japan and moved into a yoga community.
21:29	Karen	Getting to the *dojo*, and this is after being on the road for a full year, it was a welcome rest break to be in a place where you knew you would be sleeping in the same place, you knew what time you were going to wake up, what time the lights went out, what you were going to eat, and pretty much what was expected of you all day long.
22:00	Karen	Meal times were set. Breakfast was always at, I don't know, 6:30 or 7:00, lunch at 12:00, dinner at 5:00, and it didn't change. There was no variation in it, none whatsoever. We all wore the same training suits that were blue. Everyone dressed the same. So, you just fit in, and it was very comfortable. In one sense, it was very comfortable.
22:35	Joseph	But, at the same time, you were in Japan for the first time. Japan has a very hierarchical society, and it sounds like that community had very clear lines of authority and not a lot of individual freedom. So, going from being this kind of artistic individualist to part of this very structured community seems to me one of the most difficult kind of adaptive challenges I can imagine.
23:04	Karen	It was. That part of it was probably most difficult. It was a

		community of trainees. They accepted and did what was expected of them, following the teachings of the *sensei*, the master, and also the fact that the *sensei* had absolute control. In that sense, he had absolute power. He could be absolutely tyrannical.
24:11	Joseph	So, you ended up leaving this community, and this is when you moved to a farmhouse in Futokoroyama. In your memoir, you have some photographs, one of you with a baby strapped to your back on with one of these traditional baby carriers. There is another photo of cleaning a pit toilet. It sounds like an extreme rural environment in Japan. Can you describe your life?
24:44	Karen	We didn't think of it as extreme at the time. When we found the farmhouse we both, Bill and I, said, we looked at it and just said, "Oh, this is it! Now, we found real Japan" or something. Of course, we were complete novices and didn't know anything. You couldn't tell us that not everyone in Japan was emptying their own toilet, didn't have hot water, or building a fire to heat the bath. We just accepted it: "Oh, this is the Japanese way of life."
25:16	Karen	And, we knew we wanted to live in the countryside if we stayed in Japan. That house had challenges to say the very least, but we were very young, perfectly willing to put up with all of those inconveniences, which we did for seven years. When I think about it now, I can tell you there's no way I would do something like that. Absolutely not. I have a bath now, just like I push a button that fills up and heats up, and maintains the temperature. Then, I was building a fire for the bath every night. It was quite an experience.
25:58	Joseph	And, you were raising a family.
25:59	Karen	And, raising a family, right.
26:03	Joseph	There is an attraction to going somewhere exotic and then

		seeing if you can stay there. However, there is a point at which it stops being exotic. You have to transition to it being your normal everyday life. The more exotic it feels when you arrive, the more difficult it would be to actually stay there and form connections. But, you did stay there, and you decided to stay and raise your family.
26:35	Joseph	So, you were raising your children in Japan, in this rural environment. Talk a little more about becoming a part of that community such that it started to become home.
26:48	Karen	I think something is exotic as long as it stays strange. I mean, if it's new and stays strange. But, I felt, after a relatively short time, what was certainly unusual for me or unknown became part of my daily life. You build a fire to heat your bath, and you keep warm by sitting at a *sumihori-gotatsu*.
27:19	Karen	You don't have hot water, and that's how life can be lived. I feel that having children in a small community like this, you almost had an immediate "in" because so much of what is part of children's lives brings the family into the community, school sports day, PTA, children's associations, all of these things and interacting with other mothers.
27:57	Karen	This was really a way to get deeper into the society and the community. I perfectly understood what was expected of me, and I know if nothing else, I was expected to cooperate, and I did.
28:14	Joseph	I know that Japan is not an easy society to become an insider. Part of that is that it's, even today, very collectivist compared to the West. Human relations often revolve around the sense of responsibility, responsibility to the family, to the community, whether it's the PTA, school volunteer board, or you would be expected to work late or whatever it is.
28:45	Joseph	And, this was a farming community, right? I think that has to be some of the most traditional in terms of these kinds of social

		responsibilities. So, how was it for you to kind of fit in to this network of obligation?
28:59	Karen	What can I say? There were times when I thought, “Oh, goodness, no. I don’t want to do these things,” go cut weeds on the side of the road, be the traffic monitor or whatever the thing was. But, at the same time, I could just totally accept as a member of the community, it’s my turn. That’s all that mattered.
29:27	Karen	And, it wasn’t that I thought, “Oh, this is how I will gain acceptance.” It was also clear that there was no other way to do this. I was not part of a Japanese family. At the same time, I felt my neighbors, especially my famer neighbors reciprocated. I was always given vegetables, green tea. They were just some of the nicest, kindest, most generous people that I have ever met.
30:00	Karen	I remember when my second daughter’s kindergarten was having a recital, and she was in the recital. I knew all of the grandmothers would be there. I invited three of my neighbors, Oi-san, Otani-san and Arai-san, all farmer ladies. They accepted the invitation, dressed in kimono and came.
30:31	Karen	It’s one of my favorite photographs I have, one of the most precious photographs in the world to me because I just felt that I had their support in that sense. And, I was very glad for it, still have deep feelings of gratitude for the people they were.
31:03	Joseph	And, this takes us back to this contradiction that we have to be ourselves, and we also have to adapt to others. I don’t think that those are opposing things.
31:14	Karen	I agree with you. I feel this is something that you gain from living interculturally; that is that you can be yourself, you don’t lose anything, but you can take something else on, a person you don’t even know you were or could be, and that you can learn to balance these things, switch these things and have these things color your relationships but without thinking, “Oh, I’m being a

		phony in this situation," or "That's not the real me," or something. Now, I realize they are both the real me, you know? I feel I gained something from them.
31:58	Joseph	One of the things that I like about your memoir, which I really appreciated, was that you also talk very openly about long periods of very stressful isolation, feeling physically isolated, very little physical contact in Japan, culturally isolated, linguistically isolated. I think that's something that many people who live interculturally can relate to. But, it's something that's hard to talk about because if you have not been in that kind of situation, it's hard to understand how distressing it can be.
32:37	Karen	I mean, I certainly didn't want to overdramatize it but as you said, I was isolated, in one sense, in the culture and by the language but also by the very physical circumstances of living on the top of a mountain in a rural farming village, where really there was no one to talk ever. While that can be a nice experience sometimes but not when you don't want it.
33:06	Karen	It's not like I wanted to be completely alone, but I was alone a lot. I am an independent person, but still, to be without human contact was a really big thing.
33:26	Joseph	Well, it strikes me, in your memoir, you talk about having had violent death in your family, having had little relationship with your mother, and things that are traumatizing. In this act of adapting to this very foreign culture but then creating a rich family life. Somehow, you came back to yourself, you come back full circle. And, I really appreciate, in your memoir, your willingness to be open about that journey.
34:08	Karen	I wanted to, I guess, moderate the experience of how people might perceive me, particularly, I would say, for someone might be Crossing Cultures readers. I had a dedicated readership of that column, but I felt, you know, "You don't know the whole story," "You don't know everything," "You know what I'm writing

		about for this 500 word column for The Japan Times, but there is more, there is a quite bit more."
34:42	Joseph	One issue that many expatriates deal with is how their children would fit in to this society they are growing up in, or immigrants as well, of course. Your children are obviously highly international, but they also grew up locally in Japan. How is their sense of home and self, an international self or intercultural self, similar or different to yours?
35:10	Karen	From my perspective, I feel they all appear to me to have made their place, you know, have come acceptance of themselves. They have American passports. They said that if they are called American, that might not fit. They have a Black mother and a White father, and they may be called Black. But, that label, certainly in my estimation, does not fit.
35:43	Karen	They might not have the identity, the total identity of the country where they were born, but that's also part of who they are. They've all studied abroad. The eldest studied in Mexico. Mie's... No, Nanao's studied in Mexico. Mie's studied in China. Mario in Ecuador. Lila in Ghana. That's who they are. They are literally children born with passports, and I feel they've been embraced that life.
36:19	Joseph	You used the words, "they've found their place." That really says something because you are someone who travelled a lot and came to a very different place. But, you've found your place, and you created a home. And then, they started there but then have gone out to the world, and they have found their place. That sounds like quite a legacy.
36:49	Karen	Yeah, I think so.
36:50	Joseph	Karen Hill Anton, thank you so much for spending this time with me. It has been a great pleasure. Karen Hill Anton's memoir is "The View From Breast Pocket Mountain." Thank you so much.
37:03	Karen	Thank you so much, Joseph, for inviting me to be on your

		podcast. It's an absolute pleasure to talk with you.
37:15	Joseph	Thanks for listening to the Deep Culture Podcast. It's sponsored by JII, the Japan Intercultural Institute. I'm the Director of JII. We are an NPO working towards deeper forms of intercultural understanding. Check out our Brain, Mind & Culture Masterclass. Just search for the Japan Intercultural Institute. You can find us on LinkedIn. Please subscribe to this podcast, or getting touch by email at dcpodcast@intercultural.org.
37:48	Joseph	Our sound engineer is Robinson Fritz. Chriss Koyama is our production assistant. Thanks to both of you, and to my co-host, Yvonne van der Pol, we really did get this thing going. Looking forward to spending time with you and all of our listeners on into 2021. Be well, and see you next time.