

AN INTERVIEW WITH GREGORY T. H. LEE

An Oral History Conducted by Stefani Evans, Kristel Peralta, Cecilia Winchell,
and Ayrton Yamaguchi

Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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Produced by: The Oral History Research Center at UNLV – University Libraries
Director: Claytee D. White
Project Manager: Stefani Evans
Transcriber: Kristin Hicks
Editors and Project Assistants: Vanessa Concepcion, Kristel Peralta, Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White
Director, Oral History Research Center
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

PREFACE



“I didn’t know that we were building what was going to be my career.”

As Chairman and CEO of the Eureka Casino Resort, Gregory Lee’s involvement and impact on the Mesquite community will reverberate for generations. Although he was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, his ambitions starting from an early age led him to live with his business-oriented father in San Francisco, California. His journey eventually led him to attend Saint Paul’s School and Harvard College.

His first stint in Las Vegas happened in the late 1980’s, where he lived in the Jockey Club, took classes at UNLV, did an internship at the Imperial Palace, and even met Steve Wynn. Afterwards, he returned to USC law school and proceeded to practice law in New York City. However, when his father called with one last business project in mind, Lee returned to help him out unaware of how important this project would become to him. Nowadays, it is known as the Eureka Casino Resort and is a vital component of the Mesquite community, hosting various events such as Chinese New Year or the Fourth of July, but also operating with an Employee Stock Ownership Plan.

In this interview, Lee talks a range of topics such as his ancestor's migration journey, his early childhood, his Japanese-Chinese identity, and how his mentors helped shape his business attitude. He talks about both his father's influence as well as their differences. He also discusses many relevant topics on race including his experience with racial stereotypes such as the model minority myth, discrimination, and how he approaches instances of racism today. As a whole, this interview presents Lee's well-rounded perspective on the world, a willingness to adapt, and his desire to provide new opportunities from the ground up.

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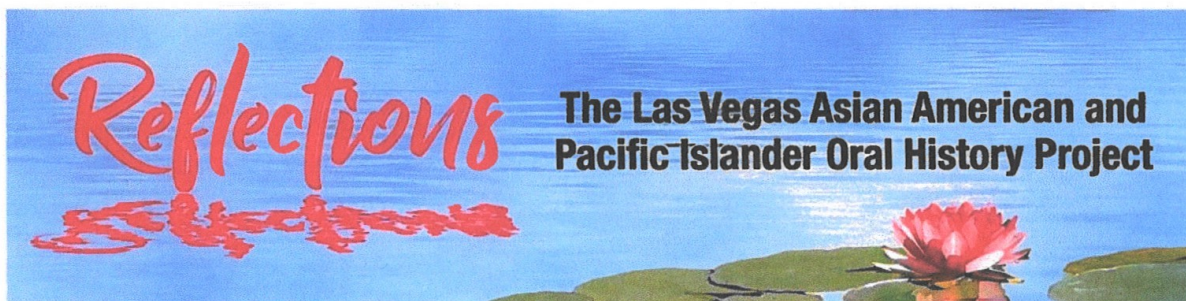
Interview with Gregory T. H. Lee

December 1st, 2020

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Stefani Evans, Kristel Peralta, Cecilia Winchell, and Ayrton Yamaguchi

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Box 457010, 4505 S. Maryland Pkwy, Las Vegas, NV 89154-7010
 Phone: (702) 895-2222 Email: oralhistory@unlv.edu www.library.unlv.edu/reflections

Good morning. This is Stefani Evans. It is the first of December, 2020. I'm here with Greg Lee. I am also here with three of the student assistants from the Asian American Pacific Islander oral history project: Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi, and Kristel Peralta.

Mr. Lee, I'm going to ask you to spell your first and last names for the recording, please.

It's Gregory, G-R-E-G-O-R-Y. Lee, L, double E.

Do you use any initials usually, middle initials, or no?

Middle initials, capital T period, capital H period. I mean, when it's formal. Most of the time it's Greg or Gregory, but for formal correspondence or things, I might put Gregory T.H. Lee just so that—I think there are other Gregory Lees—when I've Googled it.

Okay. Why don't we start by you telling us about your family, your childhood, where you grew up, what that was like, and all that?

My mother and father... My father is Ted Lee. He goes by Ted, but sometimes if you Google him, it will be Theodore B. Lee. My mom, Doris S. Lee, passed away about two years ago. They have been in Las Vegas, living here, probably thirty years, but I grew up with them since the mid '70s in San Francisco before coming to Las Vegas. We've seen Las Vegas change and grow really phenomenally since the early, mid '70s to where it is now.

I have one younger brother, Ernest, who also lives in Las Vegas. He's four years younger than I am. I was born in Honolulu. Ernie was born in California, and we grew up during our younger childhood in Honolulu I think from about four to around eleven. Our natural mother is Peggy Lee, maiden name Tanaka. We are biologically half Japanese and half Chinese. Doris adopted us when we were about eleven and seven, and so that's when we moved to San Francisco and began living there full time. Both of us know our Japanese half of the family and

we're close. We both love Japanese food. In a sense, growing up with Ted and Doris caused us to identify as Chinese because of our last names and just sort of simplicity in terms of our history, but both of us are proud of the respective families we have in Hawaii and our Chinese side in California.

I went to Punahou in Honolulu for a number of years. It's a pretty well-known place. Manti Te'o, the middle linebacker of the Chargers, went there.

When I was twelve, I decided that I really wanted to live with my dad and my mom as a more nuclear family, and chart what I hoped to be my life. My dad was already a successful businessman working with Doris. They had started a real estate development company, and by the time I was nine, ten, eleven, I could see the difference in the two households. A business orientation with my dad in San Francisco versus a living orientation in Hawaii where we did a lot of things with family since my natural mother didn't have to work. Peggy continued to be supported by my dad; she worked as a substitute teacher at times to keep active, to have additional spending money, and to keep connected with the outside world rather than just staying at home. She had an artistic bent, so for her, she could stay home making pottery and weaving and things like that. Except to get food—this is before Amazon and Whole Foods—she probably could almost never leave the house.

We grew up with two different ways of parenting and in two pretty different environments in Honolulu and San Francisco. When I say we grew up in San Francisco, it was downtown San Francisco, on the top of Nob Hill. Our home there—it was a townhouse—we could hear the cable car's bells ringing when it would come up the hill. I laugh because my dad would take Ernie and me to the local rec center to play basketball, and one day I dribbled the ball off my foot and it rolled all the way down the hill. I chased it for the first block, dove, skinned

my knee, but did not come up with the basketball. I saw it roll down the hill at least ten blocks, then down and out of sight. That's the kind of urban environment I grew up in, in San Francisco.

Ernie and I went to the Cathedral School for Boys, which is a very small school affiliated with the Grace Cathedral, an Episcopal church. It was started for choristers, but neither Ernie nor I have a very good voice, so we did not join the choir. I went there for three years—sixth, seventh, and eighth grade—and then I went to boarding school on the East Coast, in Concord, New Hampshire, a place called Saint Paul's. I went to four years of high school there.

It's an unusual thing to go away to school, but I think the reason that I went there is that my father was the first in his family to go to college; but, surprisingly, he went to Harvard. It was a pretty massive jump for him both academically, as well as culturally, from Stockton, California. Academically it was difficult. You think about what a big jump it is to go to college or even be away from home. He was on the opposite side of the country. And so while he appreciated Harvard for what it did for him, how it changed his life, and how it affected his own view of what he wanted for a career, I think he would say that his four years were very challenging. Much of that time was lonely and he was a little bit insecure about how he fit in there and what he could accomplish. And so knowing that he had gone to Harvard and that I aspired to follow in his footsteps, my dad encouraged me to consider boarding school. It was a type of school that he saw peers of his attend who seemed to have an easier time of it, where they knew a lot of people that prepared them well. So I went to Saint Paul's for four years and then after that I went to Harvard College as well, graduating in 1987.

After college, I worked for a couple of years in Las Vegas, from 1988 to 1989. I came out when things looked radically different. Probably the most famous Italian restaurant was Olive Garden rather than the fancy places, like Olives, that you see in Bellagio today. I worked on

opening up a small casino. It's now called Eureka, on Sahara [Avenue] between Maryland Parkway and Paradise [Road]. At that time, it was a tiny, little hole-in-the-wall place, in an old shopping center, probably about 20 percent of its current size. I spent a year learning about the casino business and the bar business, and I opened it at the end of '88 or thereabout. I also learned about real estate development at that time. We had some industrial buildings on Highland [Drive] near Spring Mountain Road, going up to Chinatown. I had my first job learning how to develop and build industrial buildings, and then how to lease and manage these buildings. That was my first job for a couple of years in Las Vegas before I decided to go back to law school, where I went to USC [University of Southern California].

I love football, so I studied pretty hard, but I actually missed very few home football games during those three years, which was a lot of fun. Some of my good friends who also practice in Nevada, I met at USC. It's been one of the nice things about picking a school where you make friends who come back to the same community. You get to work with people who you like and who know you. Many times the counsel that people give you, it's not given in a vacuum; it's given based on knowing you well and knowing what stresses you out. A lawyer should know whether you like to fight or would prefer to be kind of a conciliator. There's a different way of dealing with people depending on whether you like to fight. If you're in conflict or in court, having people who understand who you are and what a successful outcome is, is very important and very personal. Having that network of friends and colleagues, I think, comes in very handy and makes business smoother.

Who were some of your mentors, especially when you talk about coming to Las Vegas? You weren't raised here; why did you come here before you went to law school? And then who were some of your mentors here on the ground in Las Vegas?

I think the most obvious first mentor would be my dad. I grew up going with him to the office, going to construction sites, seeing how he dealt with people, seeing how he dealt with tenants. He is an attorney, as well as a businessman. What I would have learned from him is both a tremendous work ethic and an attention to detail. He was very much a one-man shop. He would hire attorneys, he would hire architects, but he very much internalized all of the aspects of developing or putting something together. He loved to do different things, but he loved to do them himself. He'd be my first mentor or role model. Wanting to do well in his eyes was something that drove me for a long time.

I think, though, that as you get older and you start learning from other people, you move beyond mimicking to also recognizing how you're different. I think by the time I was in high school and college, I saw that my dad and I had very different styles. I'm less independent in wanting to do things myself. I'm more collaborative. I enjoy having people around. Some of the lessons that my dad would want to give me would be the ones that I didn't necessarily want to learn. I think it takes both education and experience to know how to take all the strengths from those you see in front of you but also be realistic about what you'd like to learn from others.

My two years in Las Vegas didn't make me love that part of the casino business. It was a small, family business. It was very hands-on. It taught me about precision, things like balancing banks and casino cage amounts, running a bar to make sure liquor doesn't disappear out the back door. It also taught me that when you're starting something new, it's difficult and many times not much fun. But I also knew that I had a choice. I knew I was more interested in larger businesses, in more conceptual development, and in meeting other people, because that's what gave me more gratification.

After I got out of law school, I wanted to work in New York City. I worked for a larger firm, about a hundred attorneys. The offices were in Midtown, New York, on Avenue of the Americas. I liked having nice suits and dressing up and all that kind of stuff. There was a show called *L.A. Law* when I was in school, and it sure made the practice of law seem awfully glamorous with Jimmy Smits and Harry Hamlin playing lawyers. What I learned, though, is that the practice of law when you're a young lawyer is sitting at your desk, grinding through hours and hours of document preparation and writing things over and over again. When I wrote letters that would come out for the partner, he wanted them to sound like a twenty-year-old veteran and not like a lawyer who has been out for one year. I did like going into a high-rise and sitting in on some big meetings. I remember seeing Donald Trump in the conference room because we represented his bankers and he owed a lot of money back then. It was exciting when I was in the offices at nine, ten o'clock at night and they were working on some projects that were larger than what we had done.

While I remained interested in what my dad was doing, my new mentor at the law firm was one of the founding partners, Saul Pierce. My office, which I shared with another associate, was next to Saul's. At that time it could have been kind of like a little bit of a diss to have to share an office with another attorney, but it turned out great for me, because when you're learning things, you learn your own style, and to be able to hear someone else who's your same vintage getting on calls and dealing with clients and other lawyers and hearing how he handled it, I feel like those first nine months were terrific. I had so many more data points of experience between sharing an office and having Saul Pierce come in and ask me each day what I learned today, it really kept me aware that even as you're working, you have to keep your head up and pay attention. And Saul was one of the people in that deal with Donald Trump. It was a group of

Chinese investors from Hong Kong who were buying the Westside property, a huge piece of land on the Hudson River. Saul wanted these Chinese investors to see that they had one Asian associate, and he brought me up there with him to sit at this massive table. I'd say it could seat fifty people in there. Just to be around and to take it in and then to go back to my office was an experience that impacted me. Saul made me feel like part of something even though I was a lowly—the lowest lawyer on the totem pole.

What I learned is that I tried to treat all the people who worked in the law firm the way that Saul treated me. I would always have lots of people dropping in to talk to me. The gentleman who brought in the mail liked to talk about the horses, one whose name was Mr. Lee. There was a shoeshine guy who came into our offices and shined our shoes while we were on the phone. I realized I had a way about me that was very open because the gentleman who shined my shoes came to talk to me about the O.J. Simpson verdict. He had worked inside this law firm for years, but I was the person who he wanted to talk to. He was African American and to him it felt like a conspiracy irrespective of the evidence. His life experience told him the situation was different from what everyone else saw.

And the sum of that experience, these digressions of dealing with all of the staff who make a law firm work, I carried them with me when I came back to Las Vegas and my dad said, "I have one more project in me, I want it to be the biggest project that I've done up to date, and we're going to build a hotel/casino in Mesquite, and I could use some help. I could use some help running it. I could use some help getting it developed."

At that time, I wasn't wedded to living and making my career in Las Vegas. I liked what I was doing, and I probably would have started looking for a job with a real estate company or a developer rather than continuing working in a law firm, but this was a chance to work with my

dad—this time as an adult rather than a youngster. I came back in ‘95, and it took us two years to build the Eureka Casino Resort, which we opened in February of 1997. It was an interesting time. I could see at that point even though my dad had much more experience, that he was used to doing things on his own. But the size and scope of the project made it difficult to do everything himself. Remember, we were also still in ownership and running the Eureka Las Vegas and the real estate company at the same time.

I didn’t know that we were building what was going to be my career. As a real estate developer, he said, “Well, come out for a couple of years. We’ll get this thing built. We’ll probably sell it to someone, or we’ll lease it and someone else will operate it for us. After you’ve had that experience of being a developer and working with me, you can go back.” But I never went back. I made the Eureka my career. I think I’ve been at it, counting development, for about twenty-five years.

In the meantime, I met my wife, Dana. I met her in New York City, when she was an ad exec. She ended up moving to Las Vegas so that we could have a relationship during the time that the business was a pure startup and not running well or profitably in the first year or two.

I wanted to go back a little bit to 1988, when you first came to Las Vegas—why did you come to Las Vegas? Why Las Vegas? Why not Des Moines or some other place?

You know what it was, is that I had been away from home and from my family and their business for a pretty long time. Four years of boarding school, which is almost like college, then I took a gap year, where I studied Chinese and I lived in Asia. Then away to college for another four years. My dad, to his credit, said, “I don’t think you really know what your mom and I do. You know it in the broadest sense, but I don’t think you know what it’s like to work in it.” He

gave me the challenge of coming back and working for at least a couple of years and just seeing what a family business was and whether I'd be interested in working with him and my mom.

I talk about my dad as the primary mentor, but once I started working I really saw how important my mom was in the business and how much—even though she sometimes would be in the background—she fulfilled a critical, critical part of being the numbers person. I saw my parents spend a lot of time with bankers, making sure that they had confidence in what we were doing and that we were being fiscally sound in everything we were trying to accomplish.

I came back to work and live in Las Vegas, even though at that time they primarily lived in San Francisco. They had business in Las Vegas, but until we opened Eureka Las Vegas, they could run things from afar and visit maybe once a month, once every other month. But the casino businesses that we opened, starting with Eureka Las Vegas, required me to be here, and it was a very hands-on business. That's what caused my parents to move to Las Vegas in 1992, when I went to law school. Before that, they were in San Francisco primarily.

Where did you live, then, in 1988, when you came here?

There is a building that is now surrounded by Bellagio and Cosmo [Cosmopolitan] called the Jockey Club, and it was a condo project that never really took off. My dad had a condo there, and it has since been converted to time-share. I lived in that apartment. It was across the street from, at that time, the Aladdin hotel. If you remember the movie *Rain Man* with Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman, that is the exact time that I was living in the Jockey Club. I still remember, I could see when they had big fights or concerts at Caesars Palace, because where Bellagio is now was the Dunes Golf Course.

Before I opened the Eureka, I took classes at UNLV's Hotel School in Casino and Hotel Management. I worked an internship at the Imperial Palace and at this tiny little casino on

Tropicana, called the Granada, near where there's a Motel 6; it's now a restaurant. I worked the graveyard shift, learning how to do every job in the building.

I lived in Las Vegas during a time when it was just becoming the Las Vegas we now know. I remember meeting Steve Wynn in '88. I was working graveyard, and my dad belonged to the Las Vegas Country Club, so I would go there to hit golf balls on the range. I saw this man who was hitting, and someone behind him was saying, "Oh, the ball went fifty yards and then curved," or, "It went straight left." I was like, *Who is that?* I moved closer to him, hitting like one bay over, and then realized it was Steve Wynn. My family used to love to go to the Golden Nugget, which was the nicest hotel in Las Vegas at that time, and I loved the coffee shop. I had heard that he was losing his eyesight. Mr. Wynn was charming and had this great sense of hearing. He turned around and said, "Wow, you hit a good one back there." He probably said something like "What's a young guy doing at the golf club at this time in the morning?" And then I told him a little bit about myself. I said, "I just graduated from Harvard and I'm in Las Vegas helping my dad on this project, the little Eureka." This is when he hadn't even built the Mirage yet. He had a full replica, a model, inside of Golden Nugget, and he said, "Kid, I'm going to build the greatest resort in the world. If you get tired of making change, you call my office and talk to Joyce, and I think I can find a place for you in this company." I will always remember someone like that who had that much charisma and was always talking to people. I was like, *My goodness, I can go work for the Golden Nugget.* It's amazing how much inspiration and confidence that a person can inspire in another in a five-minute conversation, but I was never surprised at how successful he was or what he built and achieved.

Tell us a little bit about your family's migration story. From your mother's oral history, we know her father's story, Joe Shoong. Tell us a little bit about the Lee side of the family and that migration, and then the Tanaka side as well.

My grandfather, Bo Lee, was born in China, in southern China, Guangdong Province. He probably came in... I have to work backward. I think he lived close to a hundred, and he died in the early '80s, so he would have come as a young boy, in 1910, something like that; maybe a little bit later. He was probably about five foot two [inches], but the hardest worker. The lore is that he moved to Stockton and started and worked as a butcher. When he retired, I think in his forties or fifties, he owned a few grocery stores, one of which my father grew up in and worked at until he went to college. In Stockton, my grandfather is a first-generation immigrant.

What I always found interesting from my dad was when I asked: *How did grandpa know to come to the United States?* What gave him the confidence to leave [China] as a boy around sixteen was that my grandfather's grandfather had come to the United States to work on the railroads and was a foreman. He would have come in the 1840's or '50s and made money and then went back to China; he used all the money that he had earned to give his son an education. Unfortunately, by the time that his son (my father's grandfather) was ready to take an examination to join the bureaucracy, the Qing Dynasty was crumbling. At that time there were no civil servant jobs and the Chinese economy was in shambles. He was not equipped to work; he was equipped to be a Confucian scholar doing something bureaucratic. And so his son, my grandfather, was the one who had to leave home and leave the country to support the family and send money home for the next forty, fifty years.

My grandfather came from that background to live in Stockton, California. He married my grandmother. She is Chinese-American. She was born in the Stockton-Lodi area in Central

Valley, so her family may have immigrated one generation before. We're not really sure. Her family had restaurants, Chinese restaurants in the Central Valley. She was second-generation. Everything from language, English proficiency, and some education, she provided that for my grandfather. My dad grew up in a household probably with my grandmother speaking primarily English. I think my grandfather was working all the time, so I don't think my dad had the kind of relationship that you and I think of with our fathers, but my dad had that with my grandmother.

My dad's family had six kids—Betty, Ted, Dorothy, Sandra, Clifford. They all grew up in Stockton. Most of them moved to the Bay Area. We spent many summers together, so the Lee side of the cousins and aunts and uncles are still pretty close to this day.

In Hawaii my grandfather, Charlie Tanaka, lived to be about a hundred; he died about twelve years ago. He was born in Hawaii as well. The Tanakas are from the [Japanese] southern island of Kyushu, which is more of a fishing island. My grandmother died when I was pretty young. The women were the shopkeepers. My grandfather, born and raised in Hawaii, was sort of an outdoorsman. He liked to hunt, swim, dive; all that kind of stuff. He picked up the culture of the native Hawaiians. But his wife was Japanese, probably also from Kyushu, but much more prototypical of a hard-working immigrant, more like my Chinese side. They had a grocery store on the Ewa side of Oahu, and she worked long hours. My grandfather had everything from a cattle ranch to a pig farm. He liked to be outdoors. He was not much of a businessman, but he was a fabulous storyteller. He ended up living on the Big Island. When I would send friends to Hawaii, they all loved to meet Grandpa Charlie. He would take them on boats and take them fishing. He would take them chasing after wild goats and things like that. They just loved Grandpa Charlie.

What was a story that's a favorite of yours from Grandpa Charlie?

When I was a little kid, maybe about five, we went camping with him. He took us, my family, and another family from Los Angeles. It was like bushwhacking over the lava fields, finally getting out to the place where we could camp. I think he told me, “Be careful; be careful; don’t let the kids run around.” Sure enough, I think I tripped on some lava and I popped my head against a lava rock. It was bleeding enough that my mom said we had to turn all the way back and go to a hospital. I do remember that kind of set the stage. My grandpa always took me out with him but I was “the kid who had to go to the hospital to get a Band-Aid on his forehead.”

Years later he took me out to go deep-sea fishing for ahi off of Hilo. While getting the boat ready in the harbor, his friends are sitting around, and my grandfather likes to tell stories about catching something big. We get out there, and Hilo waters are very rough. I think I was probably about fourteen. We start trolling on the Boston Whaler, and I am sitting on the ice chest that—when you go over a wave—leaves the surface of the boat. So I’m holding onto it, and we’re coming up and down. I’m not sure we’re even half an hour into it, and I’m seasick. I go, “Grandpa, I think I’m seasick.” And he’s like “Okay, try this.” And he goes to the cooler and he takes out a Budweiser tallboy. He opens it up. He says, “Try this.” This is probably my first beer, at fifteen or fourteen. I’m drinking that beer. He goes, “Is it helping? It should calm your stomach down.” I’m like, “No.” It actually had the opposite effect. Now I’m seasick and I’m drunk, and soon I’m throwing up over the side of the boat. Finally, he just can’t take it anymore, so he comes into the harbor. His friends were still there on the launch, and they were like, “Hey, I thought you guys were going fishing.” We were out for such a short time, they thought we never went fishing. I will always remember he was like, *My grandson, he’s a city slicker from San Francisco.*

You probably never lived that down.

No. After that, we would go diving or something, but I would not get in a boat with Grandpa again.

When you think back on the places you've lived—San Francisco, Hawaii—what were some of the hardest things or people to leave behind? Obviously, you left when you were pretty young—when you were going to high school—but what were some of the things that you miss from there?

I think I'm pretty lucky, even living in Las Vegas, that I don't feel like I've lost anyone. Dana and I often spent parts of our summer in California where we could escape the heat at my parents' house. We still do that at our own house. Dana and I also kept up with a lot of our friends from the East Coast over the years. It's just been a high priority of staying connected and I don't think that I felt like we've missed out or left much behind as adults.

However, when I was twelve and I left Hawaii for San Francisco, I left because I wanted to be a different person. When I returned to Hawaii to see family and friends, I knew that I had gone to San Francisco for a reason—and that was the same reason I chose boarding school, which was even more of a different world than what San Francisco had been. Because this was my goal, I don't feel like I missed out on anything, but I do wonder what my life would be like if I had stayed in Hawaii. Just as one of the ways the world works, I joined a golf club in northern California, in Marin, a couple of years ago, and there was a guy [at the club] who was in my same class at Punahou. We became fast friends, and our friendship has filled in a lot of things that I wondered about. Not like I was worried that I left anyone behind, but I had questions about what life would have been like. What I could have turned out to be. Would I have been happy? That has been a friendship that I have valued as much as any, like family, because it has given me insight and peace.

I'd also like to go back just one more time. You talked about your grandfather coming to the U.S. in the early nineteen-teens. How was he able to get around the Chinese Exclusion Act?

While I've done more research over the years and I've been to Angel Island, I still don't really know. My grandfather's name was Wong Bo Lee. The story is that our surname was really Wong, but that he probably came as a paper son of someone Chinese named Lee.

Can you explain "paper son"?

Chinese often immigrated to the U.S. by pretending to be the blood relative of a Chinese son or daughter born in the U.S. My grandfather's grandfather came to work on the railroads around the 1850s to 1870s during the Transcontinental railroad. At this time, there were Chinese, Japanese, and Indian immigrants who came just to work legally. Some stayed, but I'd say most Asians came as sojourners to earn a living and then go back, and that's what my grandfather's grandfather did. When my grandfather would have wanted to come back to—say in the 1910s or 1920s—there was the [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Asian Exclusion Act of 1924].that prohibited Chinese immigration. The only exception was for some Chinese to come back if they had family, like if they were the son of a Chinese [merchant] who was in the United States or had been born here. What had happened was that in the Great Earthquake of 1906, the earthquake and fire caused every public building as well as all public records in San Francisco to be destroyed. Chinese who were in San Francisco immediately declared how many children they had and where they lived. Sometimes they'd say, *Well, I had these children, but then I went back to China and they were there now.* Immigrants would then come as the son or daughter or parent or something of someone who was already here, and they had to match themselves up knowing the history of that person. Immigrants were held on Angel Island to describe their stories. They

had to know everything about this fictional family: where they lived; were they in Lodi or San Francisco or Oakland; how many kids; what they liked to eat; where the grandparents were from. Someone would have to completely memorize that and pass through a pretty strenuous interrogation. Now, none of us knew enough to ask my grandfather what that would have been like, and he didn't talk about it, so we don't really know what it was like. But once my grandfather got to California, he brought most of his family. My grandfather brought most of his family to the San Francisco Bay Area to be with him.

Do you know if he was able to bring others out as well, paper sons?

He brought family but I don't know about others. When my dad was quite young, maybe around five or something, maybe younger, my grandfather thought about moving back to China, and he bought property there. He took my grandmother, he took my dad, and I think he took the older sister when I think there was the Chinese Civil War. When the Communists prevailed, they came back to the U.S. My dad's older sister got left behind. I don't know why. They probably did not expect the Nationalists to lose that quickly. Maybe the U.S. government was more willing to allow families to bring other family back? The Chinese—having fought against the Japanese and then fleeing Communism—might have been given the same immigration opportunities as later on with Vietnamese immigration after that war. [*Ed. Note:* In 1943 Congress passed the Magnuson Act to repeal Chinese Exclusion.]

What is the significance of the name Eureka? You started two casinos with that name. Is there a reason for that?

The first casino in Las Vegas was called Friendly Fergie's.

The one on Sahara?

Yes, on Sahara. I don't know if the Ferguson name that is connected to Tony Hsieh's Downtown Project is the same, but there was a Ferguson family around Las Vegas. When we took the business over, we owned the land and there was a tenant who ran Friendly Fergie's.

My dad wanted us to get into gaming and it was a great opportunity. At that time there were no publicly traded gaming companies and no private equity industries, and so gaming was a very closed industry. Ownership was very circular, whereby you can't be licensed to operate a casino until you already own it. Very few people would expend significant resources to have a non-restricted gaming license unless you were already a non-restricted gaming license holder. Friendly Fergie's was a nonconforming license that had more than fifteen slot machines, such that the license required to run Friendly Fergie's was the same that was required to run the Golden Nugget. Friendly Fergie's gave us an opportunity to get into the casino business at a relatively low cost of equity and risk.

The name *Eureka* came organically. We're from northern California, and if you look at a lot of freeway signs, they say "North to Eureka, south to San Jose." We also like the name Eureka. It means "I found it" or "Discovery." We actually couldn't believe someone else didn't already have the name. We loved the name immediately. But it was a small operation. It was not very fancy.

When we set out to build a resort hotel in Mesquite, we didn't expect to use the name Eureka. My dad was a planner by nature, an urban planner who had taken a lot of classes in that subject. He saw the project not as a specific hotel, but as an area. He called the project Rancho Mesquite because he thought we were going to have an RV park and a shopping center, all kinds of things around the hotel and casino area.

After we opened Rancho Mesquite, we did not run it particularly well in its first year or two. The joke around town was “You guys own Rancho Mistake.” My dad really felt that we had squandered our opening and that sometimes it’s hard to turn around a business after people already had a bad perception. It just so happened that we opened in 1997. The year 2000 was the change of the millennium and we had a one-time opportunity to change our name. In addition, we opened the hotel as a Holiday Inn, and we had the one-time opportunity to drop the name without penalty. Dad said, “Hey, we should clean the slate. We’ve been successful as Eureka once. It’s a shorter name to fit on billboards instead of Rancho Mesquite.” We renamed Eureka in the year 2000 as a way of starting over.

Truthfully, it is sort of funny, because when we reopened with a new name, people said, “Oh, you guys are successful in Las Vegas. Who did you take it over from? Did you buy it from those people? They were terrible operators. We’re so lucky that you guys are here now.” It did give us that opportunity to remake ourselves, but it was also humiliating. Whether we had more experience or a shorter name or the bull market that started in 2000 in real estate, we did turn things around starting from that point, and it’s still going strong.

What kinds of traditional festivals are important to your family whether they’re Chinese or from the Japanese side?

I would say Chinese New Year’s has become more important recently. My wife, Dana, is Chinese-American, and her family would celebrate Chinese New Year with a nice family dinner more so than our family did. Honestly, it became a really good, special event at the casino because we’re Chinese. It’s brand differentiation. We’d do a Chinese buffet. We’d bring in lion dances. We started celebrating it more as a Chinese family just to express a differentiation and pride of ownership within the property. Now we celebrate it as a time that’s enjoyable after the

Christmas holidays. Dana and I tend to send out Chinese New Year's cards instead of Christmas just because people receive only a couple of those versus a lot of Christmas cards. I'd say that's become something that we earmark not for Chinese history but just us being Chinese.

I don't think we celebrate any Japanese holidays.

As a family and business, we appreciate Thanksgiving, or I think I do the most. For many years, having the casinos made it hard for me to actually celebrate Thanksgiving. I always felt that I should be working on Thursday. When we got strong enough that I knew we could run everything without me, it was okay for us to have Thanksgiving at home or with my in-laws. Being away from the property was a big milestone where we became—I'm going to say—professionally run rather than mom-and-pop run. That was a big change and turning point in the life of Eureka. In fact, it led to Eureka becoming the only one-hundred percent employee-owned hotel/casino in America. In around 2015, we sold the operating company to the employees. I still own the real estate and I have warrants in the company, but for us, it's about sharing the responsibilities of a family business and family ownership with all the employees. We're all responsible for this business together. We describe Eureka as “an employee-owned family business.” For us, there is no contradiction in that. It's actually completely aligned.

How did you decide to do that?

I purchased a majority of the business from my parents in around 2004 when I was the 60 percent owner and my brother had the remaining 40 percent. I was making most of the decisions because I had chosen to make that my career.

Around 2012–2013 I thought of a couple of things that led me to this decision. The first was that I had gone through a period when we grew this business rapidly and then we went through real difficulty. During the global financial crisis, I had borrowed quite a bit of debt to

double the size of the project and to reposition it to be the market leader of Mesquite. I saw the town lose one casino, the Oasis, and I saw the town shrink in size. I saw the damage that had been done. I also had brought in a friend who was a very, very capable casino exec, Andre Carrier, who had been with Sahara Gaming and then MGM and Mirage, and finally, Tillman Fertitta. I brought him over to work with us and inspire our executive talent, but he didn't have any ownership. In a family business, it can be hard to buy in outsiders, because who is going to reduce their ownership to make room for others? I felt strongly that I had built it; I wasn't sure that my kids would want to do it, and they were way too young for me to count on them in the future. Andre and I had put a great team together, and I didn't want to ever be alone again running this big business. I looked at it and I said, "Well, it would be nice to do a few things. It would be nice to have almost a public company where my team and executives were franchised and they had a piece of the upside and they could help create the growth."

And if I was ever going to sell some of the business, I wanted to sell to someone who valued the jobs rather than someone who would want to fire as many people as possible and make it more valuable through cost-cutting. We had seen that happen with any number of companies in Las Vegas. The notion was, *Who else would value jobs as much as I do?* Not private equity companies or passive investors. It was the employees. My thought was if they owned the company and the company became valuable, then, when they retired, they might choose to continue to live in Mesquite. That way, we could have people that would continue to be here and maybe their kids would take the jobs. I could make our employees partners. I could create the right incentives to have executives stay with us. I could make the company so that it will take on a life of its own. By the time my kids have their own careers, and they know what

they want to do, there could be a place for them to rejoin the company, but it wasn't going to be required.

By selling to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), I loaned the money to the employees to buy it back from me. It's kind of a strange thing, but it works. I took some chips off the table, having spent a long time at this business and having survived multiple business traumas. It's been gratifying. It's been gratifying to actually see employees learn about owning something. We have a state-of-the-business meeting each year where we show them the stock growth. They will sell the shares back to the company when they retire. Each year they get new shares and they see how much the old shares have gone up or down in value. If there's one silver lining in the pandemic, it's that when we were required to close, we did things to support our people, like create a food pantry to give essentials to the employees. Our managers and employees served each other. I think everyone sees how, with business there is risk, but they also see how you can pull together. They're seeing that the company is doing fine. I think it's good to actually have some difficulty. I think it's important to see that stock doesn't only go up, but also that every employee has a role to provide, and that when the company does well, it can provide well for their future; that ESOP structure.

In 2019, we did our first acquisition. Andre and the team led our company to buy a former greyhound racing track in New Hampshire, where greyhound racing had become illegal and the track went into decline. We bought it for the off-track betting business and a charitable casino business, where you run table games and give 33 percent to 501(c)(3)s in New Hampshire. It's an informal tax. We're growing that business well. I think it gives the next-gen leaders an opportunity to have the experience of starting something from scratch; building it yourself, taking responsibility for its future, and making new investments succeed. It's different from

having a purely caretaker's mentality. I think the project is fabulous and it's going to make our team so much more able. That's just the first of what hopefully will be many new projects over the next decades.

It seems like what you're doing with your company is you're investing in the town itself and the people of the town.

Yes, that's part of our business philosophy; some it was, we're part of a small town in Mesquite; we're like our own ecosystem. We rely on the other golf courses to be good and to be economically successful. We don't want to own everything. We like to partner and have others bring their creativity and entrepreneurship to what they do. There's a golf course called Wolf Creek that we're really lucky is one of the more imaginative golf courses—definitely in Nevada, but maybe anywhere—and that people from around the country want to play that golf course. And because they travel all over, they want to stay at a nice hotel. We've upgraded our hotel's amenities and design very much around the fact that people will travel from all over the country to play that golf course and to visit national parks, like Zion. We consciously moved our property to a certain place in the marketplace, and we do believe that you're going to get better employees, whether they're younger and want to raise their children there, if there's good education and the city is vibrant, or whether they want to continue working but this is their last job and they want to live in a nice community. We partner with many groups like the Lions Clubs and others to support reading programs and volunteer opportunities, as well as the arts in Mesquite; things that bring the town pride; like we've brought the traveling Vietnam War Memorial to Mesquite.

We sponsor the Fourth of July. I should have said that. That's probably the biggest event we do in Mesquite. One year, in 2008, I think, with the global financial crisis, the city budget

was low and they were going to cancel the firework display. We said, "You can't cancel the Fourth of July," so we paid for the fireworks for the town that year. Then after we did that, my mom—she was one of the founders of the Las Vegas Philharmonic—said, "We'll bring the Pops, the Nevada Pops, because that music is more aligned with everyday music, and we hold an outdoor concert in the back of the parking lot." We have an amazing location to shoot fireworks from. I think it's the highlight of the year if you're a resident of Mesquite. It's the day you'll feel the highest pride with the concert and fireworks, and we often invite our Nevada Senators. They've come and they are often the masters of ceremony.

Did you do it this year?

We did it this year. We had KNPR put together a medley, which they did over the radio so everyone could be in their cars and watch the fireworks. We did something similar.

Nice.

Yes. We've been doing that for a while, so that's something. When you feel like you help an entire community celebrate an important day, it's meaningful.

I'm just going to switch gears just a little bit and ask you how you were affected, or if you were, during any part of your life by the model minority myth. How did that affect you?

I think that we grew up at a time when the model minority myth told us that we should feel responsibility. In a way, I think whether it's citizenship or a green card or immigration, that we didn't get it just by being born here, that instead we had to somehow do well. In one sense, I think people can use that kind of artificial standard as a drive, but it comes at a cost. I think our parents expected us to do well. They wanted us not to do anything that would embarrass them. If I look back as an adult, I see there was less freedom just to be.

There's a saying in business that trees don't grow to the sky, that things don't only go up, up, up. People don't only get better and better and better, or more successful; things happen. At some point there's going to be someone who is unlucky who is holding the steering wheel at a time when either the marketplace or business just doesn't fit. Maybe their skillset wasn't right to be the leader, but they take sole responsibility for the failure. I think that's unfair.

I think you can see examples in a business or a company or even a family, where there is a business family and someone says, "I want to be an artist," or something else. The model minority myth says that that's either not acceptable or that somehow you can embarrass your family or you can embarrass a community by failure. I think those things are damaging because I think it sets an unrealistic expectation—one that shouldn't be an expectation in the first place—because you're holding up one group to a different standard from the other. I think it could be said humorously, like everyone here has got to be good at math, right? I did think so when I was in calculus and all of the sudden midway through the year I had some problems. It never dawned on me that it would be okay for me to *not* be good at math. I think there are a lot of things, like that, which we carry with us. We as individuals sometimes feel we carry for a whole group. I've heard that, especially, with Black Lives Matter. One person does something criminally wrong and then it's attributed to an entire community. I think the same could be true for having higher expectations of someone else, or having lower expectations by assuming that that person can't do it because they've never seen someone like them do it before.

I laugh. We were friends with Jeremy Lin before he was Jeremy Lin. He played at Harvard. I laughed. I said to my son Graham, "A Chinese basketball player is like a circus animal. We have to go and see Jeremy play." We flew out from Las Vegas to Cambridge to see him play, because he was the first Asian American who was a basketball star. Later on he ended

up coming to Las Vegas to train, as an undrafted player. We saw him and he was practicing at a gym that we owned. We invited him to the house for dinner. This is before he had done anything; before he had a breakout Summer League; before he went to the Knicks; before Linsanity.

He said, “No one expects me to be any good because they’ve never seen a Chinese player,” and he’s been overlooked his entire life. He was happy to have gone to Harvard, but he actually wanted to go to Stanford or Cal [University of California Berkeley], but none of them would recruit him even though he grew up in Palo Alto because they had never seen a Chinese American basketball player play at Division I.

I think the model minority myth can mean different things. I’m just using it as a catchall for taking away the individuality of a person who is Asian and what you expect from them and what you expect them to do and what you expect them to be good at, whether they’re charismatic, whether they’re smart. I think Andrew Yang did a great job of being as successful as he was because I didn’t expect him to do as well as a presidential candidate; but it opens your eyes to doing it differently and being successful at it.

Now, I want to remark. This week Tony Hsieh died, and how much of a sadness that I felt when I learned of his death. I had met Tony a couple of times, but we weren’t friends. But I was so impressed with how big he thought, how audacious he was. He wasn’t tremendously charismatic or eloquent, but it didn’t matter. He had a heart of gold, and he said what he believed in, and he was not easily dissuaded. I tip my hat to Tony Hsieh and how much he meant to Las Vegas and what he did.

Yes. We owe a lot to Tony Hsieh, this community does, whether it understands how many ways we owe him, but we do.

Agreed. Agreed.

Have you ever experienced any racially discriminatory practices against yourself or against other Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders?

It's funny. Even growing up in Hawaii, which is majority Asian, and going to Punahou, I knew that there was discrimination. I knew that there were clubs that didn't take Chinese (at that time the Outward Canoe Club or the Pacific Club), and so we knew that there was a hierarchy. In daily living, because everyone was a minority, I don't think that racial epithets were quite as stinging; it was just kind of smack talk. But when I moved to San Francisco, I felt it because as a clear minority, things that didn't bother me as much in Hawaii bothered me more in California.

I went to summer school, a place in Pebble Beach called Robert Louis Stevenson School, and I went to summer school there. It was the first time I felt the social acceptance of racism. Before you'd say "kids would be kids," like in the schoolyard, but this was a summer school with wealthy students and teachers around. At lunch a person would pick up a pitcher to pour water for the table and say, "You want to have a drink, chink?" I'd look at him and I was so shocked. I'd look at a teacher sitting at the table and the teacher has put his head down like this is normal. This happened more than a few times. Things like that; cutting someone off by mistake on the highway and someone yells, "Go back to China," that kind of stuff has been around me throughout my life. I don't know if my kids have experienced it as directly, but it still exists.

At the beginning of the pandemic, when the virus had come from China, my wife felt this racism. She came back furious from Trader Joe's because she had some flowers and the checker refused to take the flowers from her hand and demanded she drop them on the conveyor belt. When she insisted that the flowers were delicate, he turned his head like she was going to give him the virus or something. I think this goes on constantly without being reported. This is shameful to many Asians who see themselves as Americans first.

Where I'm a little bit different today is amongst friends. I had a friend say the *Wuhan flu* or the *China virus* and I said, "Do you realize that that's racist, because it's being used as a reason to blame Asians? I'm not going to take any blame on this thing because it has been the American response that has made it so bad. Asian countries controlled it quickly."

They go, "No, no, no, we didn't mean it badly."

"But it is [racist] because of the person who uses it, and if you want to repeat it, you're doing the same thing. I'm not asking for an apology but I'm asking you not to use it with me; otherwise, our friendship is over."

I am much more comfortable in today's world holding friends accountable when at an earlier age I would have been more apologetic hoping that they didn't mean to offend me. I feel these aggressions could easily get worse, returning to an old normality when I was a kid growing up.

I think many people believe that "white supremacy" applies only to tragedies such as genocide or racism, but I believe white supremacy also applies to the myriad of slights such as when Blacks or Asians are made to feel that they do not belong or are not wanted.

In fact, once when I was playing in the Southern Highlands' Member Guest Golf Tournament, I was paired against the Hall of Fame pitcher, Greg Maddox. I was excited to meet him, as he is a Las Vegas legend. But when I came to the tee box to introduce myself, he said to his partner and my partner, who was also white, "No more Asian jokes from now on."

I was both furious but also ashamed. I didn't know whether to make a scene or pretend it didn't happen so that the guests wouldn't be made uncomfortable. It was so clearly intended to make me, the fellow member, feel uncomfortable. Not only did I not enjoy the round, but I didn't enjoy being a member of the club for a long time.

Today I would never let this slide. I would have stopped playing and let everyone know why I was offended. I would have made him feel shame and embarrassment instead of me.

You've already answered my next question, which was how you felt when the president of the United States and high-ranking U.S. officials called COVID-19 the *Wuhan virus* or the *Kung flu*. You've kind of answered that, but let's talk about the Black Lives Matter movement. How might that affect the AAPI population?

Knowing how to react to racism can be complicated. My dad told me growing up that there could be examples of people doing things to hold you back based on race, but that it would not be in my own personal interest to ever assume that to be racism or ever to take that as the reason, because that would give the person power over you. He told me very honestly that when he graduated UC Berkeley, he could not get one interview with a law firm because he was Chinese. He had done well, he had gone to Harvard, but the prestigious firms would not interview, let alone hire, someone who was Chinese. And it shouldn't be surprising. The same thing happened to Sandra Day O'Connor as a woman. He had said he had experienced racism enough, but that letting it affect what he aspired for or tried to get was counterproductive. We might talk about racism, but it wasn't something we'd dwell on.

I think that ignoring racism has some benefits, but it also comes with a cost. The cost is it allows people to ignore racism and not demand change. Furthermore, some racism is too insidious to overcome. In my case it prevented me from being empathetic or cognizant of what Black Americans have gone through in their lives, even when I was in school with them, and to ask them about what was happening. There was a certain kind of immigrant mentality of take care of yourself first, put your head down, and just go and don't ask that many questions unless it really helps you. But the Black Lives Matter movement for me was to take every situation and

critically look for racism. Did I get pulled over by a cop and asked to step outside for a good reason? “You didn’t use your blinker when you passed a car on the freeway,” is not a good reason. When I experience unfair treatment, I just imagine how much worse it has been for Blacks. I think the BLM movement has forced people to recognize how slow change comes and how much typecasting there exists about people. It makes clear how much Blacks face and the systemic, institutional racism, beyond what I have experienced. It gives me both empathy and desire to make more change and to try to be a part of improving things.

It goes back to the “model minority” being a justification for why the country and the states do not have to make up for the damage that they have done to Black Americans by saying, "Look at the Asian Americans; they’re doing fine without a handout, without reparations, without anything. See? It’s Blacks own fault that they’re poor and illiterate and that there’s high levels of obesity or diabetes; it’s their fault." I don’t feel that way anymore

What does it mean to you that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the fastest-growing group in Southern Nevada?

It means to me personally that I eat better than I ever have before, living in Las Vegas. I tell people we have the best Japanese, the best Thai, Korean, Chinese, fusion, almost everything. I don’t think you can discount that if someone who is Asian thinks about moving to Las Vegas [they’ll consider the benefits of having] that food and culture and people who look like you and dine the same way. I think it’s a real asset. It’s a real asset to people who live here, and it’s a real asset to people who want to visit here. Look at some of the tour buses of visitors from China, and they are amazed at the quality of our authentic food. They don’t mind having a buffet once but they don’t really want to eat that for their entire week or whatever.

I think, though, the growing population of both youth and established businesspeople, whether it's Tony Hsieh or others, I think what it means is in Las Vegas, there's more opportunity to be who you think you can be compared to almost anywhere else if you're Asian American, as a businessman, as an entertainer. Bruno Mars has his residency here. And Las Vegas having a wide range of magnet programs such as math and science at Clark High School, as well as the Las Vegas Academy. I think for a young person who wants to convince their parents that they don't want to be a pharmacist or a doctor; [they want to] be an entertainer, and there's more opportunity here, where the parent can see that, than almost any [other] place.

Why is it valuable for the university to collect interviews, such as yours?

I know personally I've learned from other people. Sometimes it's easier to find a mentor and to follow a partially trodden path than it is to do everything as a pioneer. I think it actually allows you to enjoy the journey a lot more than everything being a fight and hard work charting that path. If these interviews can help someone see both a path and a way to appreciate the journey, I think it's worthwhile.

Thank you. I'm going to let the students take over now.

Ayrton, do you want to start?

Yes, I can. My question, if I have one question to ask you, would be, how was it growing up in Hawaii? My dad is Japanese as well, so he grew up with a lot of that in Hawaii. You think it's this huge melting pot, but there is inter-island segregation . . . because they're Samoan or they're from Fiji. How did that make you grow as a person, and how did you challenge that idea when you moved to the mainland? Because it's very different when you're in Hawaii; you're like, oh well, Japanese are different from Chinese, or Hawaiians are different from

Samoans. But if you're from Hawaii, you're from Hawaii or the mainland. How did you approach that change when you moved here?

I think in Hawaii that segregation by both ethnicity and culture can be damaging, but it also can be just kind of a shortcut for knowing a certain culture. I very much believe that stereotypes don't always have to be negative. I told you about my Chinese friend in Marin. He's got another friend from Hawaii, and when we're playing golf, we can all laugh at stereotypes. When we play for five dollars, we say it's "Pake," meaning cheap. It connects to the immigrant Chinese experience of being frugal. These traits have truisms. I'm not ashamed of that because I think there are Chinese sayings about shirt sleeves, the shirtsleeves in three generations; that if you don't have a little bit of pake... Companies or individuals or families sow the seeds of their own destruction by being too loose or cavalier. I think that there are things to learn.

But I think if there's an advantage to what you said, to see the difference in culture and family and traditions, but to know that you shouldn't be limited just because you didn't grow up as one; that you can appropriate, and I think it's okay, because all of us have the person we're meant to be. Coming from Hawaii to the mainland, I think it gives you a wider range that people don't even know when you're appropriating; that it's just what you are and what you like. I laugh because I grew up in Hawaii seeing all those groups and cultures, but when I went to New England, my roommate was Jewish. Now I feel like I personally appropriate more Jewish traditions, of which many of them are Chinese, but my friends know more Jewish than Chinese, so it has more effect in terms of explaining a way of being or a set of values by using the Jewish example. I actually think it gives all of us ways to find archetypes and more completely explain the way we feel and that the more people understand all the nuance and the differences, it makes it more interesting. Hopefully you could do that too.

Any other questions, Ayrton?

No, that was it. Thank you.

Sure.

Cecilia?

I know you briefly mentioned taking a gap year in Asia. I was really interested in that. I was wondering why you did it and what you did there.

The idea, frankly, was more my dad's. When my dad saw that I grew up in boarding school where there weren't that many Asians, my parents felt that I could learn valuable lessons by traveling to Asia. We didn't speak Chinese at home, and I knew little about Asia. My dad, after he graduated from Berkeley, did a Ford Fellowship, and he lived in Singapore and Hong Kong. He really valued his connection to Asia, and he thought that there was a difference in orientation and world view of Asians who had been successful in Asia, where they were the majority and actually didn't think of discrimination versus how Asians who grow up in the U.S. where they are a minority. And that it would be very informative and freeing if I spent time in Asia the way that he did.

I went to Taipei and I studied Mandarin for a semester. He had actually encouraged me to be an East Asian studies major just to know more about the history of China and Japan, just for my own understanding of myself and how history has affected us. Then I also studied in Singapore—because in boarding school I started playing squash—and that's a game that was very big at Harvard and the Ivy League. I could train, I could study Mandarin, and also Singapore is another majority-Chinese city, but there are also immigrants, so their history and culture is very different. I lived with friends of our family there. I'd say that between language, between learning something about living in Asia, Chinese American versus Singaporean Chinese

versus Chinese Australian, there are a lot of similarities. Later on in college I did study in cultural anthropology about different Chinese communities in Jamaica, in Trinidad and Tobago and other places to see what their life was like in a different setting.

It was valuable. I'm really glad I did it. I encourage our son, he's a junior in college. He's an East Asian studies and international relations major, so actually he has studied over summers, like a language program, in Beijing, Kunming, so he's had some little bits. But I actually think to spend a whole time immersing yourself is better, because you're just starting to like change as a person in a summer and then you're coming home.

Any more questions, Cecilia?

Thank you.

And Kristel?

You mentioned that you studied at UNLV. [I saw] that you served on the UNLV Foundation Board in 2007 and the Lee Business School was renamed after your family, so I wanted to know a little bit more about your experience at UNLV and the impact and involvement on the Foundation Board.

I took my classes in 1987–88 at the Hotel School; that was my first experience. And then over the years I've kept up with different professors. I'm good friends with Bo Bernhard, who is in the Gaming Institute, and Sue Fawn Chung, who taught in the History Department. I'm involved both at the [Boyd School of Law] and the [Lee] Business School and with speakers and things. I had some experience before, but then when I joined the Foundation, I really got to know more and more about the university and saw, to me, how important it was in terms of affecting the community, especially first-generation students, the first in their family who are going to college. For us, having more programs and having both alumni and friends who are involved, I thought it

was really important for the same reason as I see the importance of an oral history, so that others can learn from someone else and extrapolate.

What I'd like to see from the university is that we have to continue to evolve in our teaching. When I took those classes at UNLV twenty-plus years ago, I was surprised by how many of my tests were graded on a Scantron, like multiple choice. As a businessman—and I tell this to students and I say this to deans and others—unless you're asking questions that are like calculus, where you can imagine that there is a tree of analysis, and if you get to the first stage, you pick A; if you're better and you go to the second, B; they're all right to a certain place where they take a divergence, and the someone who is better can get farther. I said, "If you can tell me that your multiple-choice exam does that, you would have my approval to continue doing that. But if it's not like that, and you think that there is an answer, I categorically disagree." In business, there are many ways to get to a successful outcome. Many times it may be an inferior idea but executed well, or pursued with more tenacity. That's where I've said that what I think is the most important in education: learning how to explain your thinking. And that only comes in either presentation orally or written, because even if I disagree, I can use elements of what you've written to benefit. But if it's only a conclusion and I disagree, then it has no use to me. If there's an area where I'd like to see change, it's that there will be more and more classes taught so that the education is useful, even if you think your boss isn't listening or is not wanting to do what you suggest.

I don't know if I answered enough of the question. Being on the Foundation and chairing it—I think it was three years ago now—really did help me see all of the facets of the university and how much it affects Las Vegas, whether it's football, basketball, or oral history projects, or arts and galleries, and the range of interests that all of us have.

As an institution that serves largely first-generation students, it really has that responsibility.

It does. That's why I think that responsibility is more than just teaching. What do they call it, the three R's, right? The three R's actually don't provide guidance to how you're going to use them, where you want to be, or what is a successful life, and I think it's important for a university to provide that kind of education as well.

[Colloquy not transcribed]

Wonderful. I think we've covered it.

Good. I hope I answered everything. There's always more. I have valued the oral histories that have been done of my parents. We had a personal one, which was for both of them, which was really more for just family, where the person asked them about who is the right spouse? Why? Things like that. How to be happy. I think it's important.

It is so important. The stories that you told about your grandparents and even your great-grandfather, those are stories that get lost over time and we need to hear them.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thanks for your time. Thanks for your candor.

[End of recorded interview]