

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANA SU LEE

An Oral History Conducted by Stefani Evans, Vanessa Concepcion,
and Cecilia Winchell

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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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
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PREFACE



“I identify with being part of the AAPI community, and our family has adopted Las Vegas as our town, again, doing what we can to make impact because we feel that this town has really blessed us with so much opportunity. It’s our joy to be able to give back.”

As a third-generation Chinese American, Dana Su Lee reflects on the realities her grandparents had to face in China during the 1930s and how her parents eventually were able to move to America and settle in New Jersey. She speaks on the glamorous life of being an arts major at Brown University and how she navigated university with a more artistic lens compared to her finance major colleagues. She speaks of her passions for art history and community involvement and provides relatable anecdotes on the culture shock she felt moving to Las Vegas from the East Coast after meeting her future husband.

In this interview, Dana Lee discusses themes of Asian identity, her experience during the rise of anti-Asian sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic, raising her children in Las Vegas, and the early days of keeping the production alive at Eureka Casino with her husband. While Dana’s dream of starting a Las Vegas Art Museum has not yet come to fruition, she is a founder of Nevada Women's Philanthropy, and she consistently serves the Las Vegas community through numerous non-profit boards with a focus on education and the arts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Dana Lee

February 10, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Vanessa Concepcion, Cecilia Winchell, and Stefani Evans,

Preface..... iv

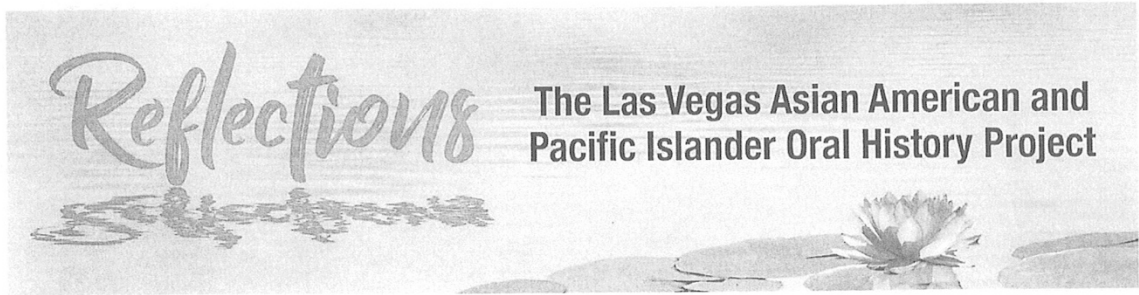
Family history and parents, who were both born in China: her father in Guangzhou and her mother in Shanghai; family history with Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church and family careers as medical doctors and SDA General Conference minister. Dualities of being Chinese and American; difficulties her parents faced with long-distance relationship when moving to the United States. Claremont, California, East Coast, and first graduating class of women in 1981 at Vivian Webb School, a women’s high school on the campus of the Webb School for Boys. Undergraduate degree Art History at Brown University, Andy Warhol Museum, Master’s degree in Arts Management at Carnegie Mellon University. Culture shock when arriving in Las Vegas with future husband, Greg Lee, and struggles of finding a sense of community. Finding community and meaning in nonprofit work through Nevada Ballet Theatre, Las Vegas Art Museum, Nevada Women’s Philanthropy, and Teach for America.....1-15

Political fundraising for candidates Rory Reid, Steve Sisolak, Jacky Rosen, and Susie Lee. The value of higher education; children Graham and Katie and importance of her children following dreams outside of the family business, Eureka Casino16-20

Being Chinese in diverse Southern Nevada and in predominately white Claremont, California. Immigrant mentality of fitting in; engrained her from her parents after watching them work hard, attain American citizenship, and master the English language. Her marriage to Greg, her sister’s marriage, and the comfort of being able to relate through cuisine. Relationship with ethnicity and feeling “not Asian enough” as a second-generation Chinese American who does not speak Cantonese; Model Minority Myth. The COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian hate and violence, and their effects on her multigenerational Chinese family 21-30

Questions from student assistants Vanessa Concepcion and Cecilia Winchell. Podcast episode with Severance Radio about “Otherness”; the importance of art and education in Southern Nevada; starting the Free Library Bookstand, the transformative power of Art, and her mentors along the way. Opinions formed based solely on racial background or physical appearance and naiveties about the Asian community and Chinese people and their effects on herself and her family. Asian tropes clouding perceptions of Asians in media and in day-to-day life. Annually celebrating Thanksgiving with family and friends by serving Mama Su's Chinese Sticky Rice..... 31-39

Mama Su's Chinese Sticky Rice (Give or Take) recipe..... 40



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Good afternoon. This is Stefani Evans. It is February tenth, 2021. I'm here with Vanessa Concepcion and Cecilia Winchell, and we are here to interview Dana Lee. Dana, I'm going to ask you to spell your first and last names, please, for the recording.

It's Dana, D-A-N-A. The last name is Lee, L-E-E.

Do you use a middle initial just in case there's more than one Dana Lee?

There are, usually. I do. I use the middle initial S, as in Su.

Do you use your middle name? Do you want the interview as Dana Su Lee, or do you want it Dana S. Lee?

It could be Dana S. Lee.

Thank you. Let's start with your family. Why don't you tell us about your parents and your childhood? Where were you born? Tell us about your siblings. That kind of thing.

My parents are Juanita Su, S-U, and my father is Kelvin, K-E-L-V-I-N, Su. Both my parents were born in China. My mom was born in Shanghai and my dad was born in a small village that would now be somewhere in Guangzhou, China. My mother's given name is Juanita, so it is highly unusual to have a Chinese person given a Spanish Mexican name.

Do you know how she got that name?

She got it because my grandmother, Oilene, played the piano and loved a song that was called "Beautiful Juanita." She just loved the name. My grandmother was adopted by American missionaries, so she spoke English as a first language. We have family names that are English. For instance, my aunt's name is Rena, and my family name is Marguerite. So, we're a bit different for Chinese immigrants. Both my parents were raised in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. My parents describe their childhood as enchanting, but I'm sure for my grandparents it was rather horrific, because they lived through several wars and occupations. Both my parents

were born in the '30s during the times of the Japanese occupation. At that time, they lived in Hong Kong and had to flee to interior China for safety. My grandmother was a strong, defiant lady, and she left her home only when a Japanese soldier pointed and jabbed his bayonet at her. They also experienced the rise of communism and the fall of China in 1949. That's when my mother and her family finally immigrated to the United States.

My father and his family were in Hong Kong, so they didn't have that need to leave for a better life. Plus, my grandmother's plan was always to join her husband, who had immigrated to the U.S. in 1939 and settled in New Jersey.

Both my parents knew each other growing up because it was a very small community for Seventh-Day Adventists. It was literally like a village, especially when they were being moved *en masse*, in and out of different parts of China due to the wars. My paternal grandfather was a doctor. Back then he did everything. He was a general practitioner. He was a surgeon. He was an OB/GYN. My paternal grandmother was his nursing assistant. He got his medical training by the American Red Cross. Even though we're Chinese, the Seventh-Day Adventist church influence was so strong that it culturally dominated their life. My maternal grandmother, Oilene, worked for what's called the General Conference, which is the international leadership for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She was a secretary/translator and held a privileged standing in the community. Both my parents grew up in esteemed families who had influence and access. Because my grandmother was American, technically, and adopted she had this duality and didn't really feel "Chinese," yet she was also abandoned by her adoptive family, the Wilburs, when they returned to the U.S. due to their fears of prejudice raising a Chinese daughter. Thankfully, another American missionary family, the Millers, took my grandmother in and raised her. Sadly,

the abandonment theme would continue when my grandfather later divorced my grandmother. He fell in love with a young American Jewish woman. He and Toby married and had four kids.

My mother immigrated here in 1949, so at that time she was sixteen years old. They eventually landed in Takoma Park, Maryland, because that's where the General Conference was headquartered.

My father didn't come to the United States until college. He first landed at the Seventh-Day Adventist school in Tennessee. My dad just celebrated his ninetieth birthday on Friday. At his birthday dinner, he was talking to my brother-in-law who asked him, "Boy, Kelvin, that must have been strange for you to land in Tennessee, not only a southern state, but here you are a young Chinese man with very little English skills." And he goes, "Yes, it was rough. It was really, really rough." You think about it back then, even then, everyone knew that opportunities were to be had in the United States, and that was always the goal, even though my father's family were wealthy, my grandfather still practiced medicine in Hong Kong, and he was very successful in real estate development. But my paternal grandfather felt that the future for all of his kids was in the United States, and that education was important.

What year did he come here, to Tennessee?

He probably came in 1951, maybe. My parents got married in 1955, and they got married right after my dad finished college. Or it might have immigrated in 1950, or something like that.

They stayed in touch all that time.

Yes. Also, because it's a small community within the Chinese Seventh-day Adventist community and for those that came to the United States, they checked on each other. And then, likewise, their childhood friends all came too, for college and for medical school. The Seventh-Day Adventist church, I don't know if you're familiar with it, but it is very tied to health. They've

always practiced vegetarianism. Kellogg's, like Kellogg's cereal, he [Dr. John Harvey Kellogg] was Seventh-day Adventist.

That I did not know.

Yes, he had a health sanitarium in Michigan. These are the beliefs that they held. The bulk of their family friends all ended up in Southern California for schooling at Loma Linda University, which also has a medical school and dental school. Some also attended Pacific Union College in St. Helena, California, so pretty much everyone in that circle are doctors or dentists. The SDA places high regard on medicine!

My parents got married in Maryland in 1955. My dad started work as a chemist; that was his major and he needed to figure out if he wanted to be a doctor like his dad or do something different. Eventually he decided on dental school, so that's why he went to Loma Linda. By then my sister, Robin, was born. We're five years apart. After that, they stayed in southern California. However, unlike most of their friends who had finished their various medical or dental degrees in Loma Linda and stayed within the area, my parents, having lived in Maryland, always loved the East Coast. When it came time for my father to set up his dental practice, my mom was very smart and did research on towns in southern California. They settled in Claremont, California, which is a college town. It has the charm of the colleges, sycamore-lined streets, and lots of trees. Claremont calls itself the City of Trees. She thought it reminded her of the East Coast. Also, it has an outstanding public school system. Even back then, in the '60s, my mom said, "These are really important factors for where we're going to establish ourselves."

I was born, though, in Redlands, California, while my dad was still in dental school. When he graduated and we moved to Claremont, I might have been a year old or six months old. I was raised there until I went off to college. Unlike my sister, who did go through the public

high school system, I went to private school from first grade to 8th grade, and from my sophomore year to senior year of high school. That's something that my mom always wanted for my sister, but there was one K-8 private school in town. It was very small with only twenty kids per class, so my sister never could get a spot, whereas they had a spot for me in first grade. It's kind of interesting from the perspectives of my sister and me, five grade years apart, but different academic paths—which I think really led us on different life choice paths—for better or for worse, or whether it's personality—I don't know.

My elementary school was called Foothill Country Day, and then I went to high school at what was then the Webb School for Boys, a boarding school where I was a member of the first graduating class of women (All Seventh-Day Adventist students) to make the school co-ed. When they started it [in 1981], the Women's Division was named the Vivian Webb School after the founder's wife. We started as a class of sophomores and freshman; I was a member of the sophomore class. For my freshman year I had to go to Claremont High School, so I had a big public high school experience for a year. It was intimidating and a challenge to be a tiny minority on campus at Webb; outnumbered one to eight by the boys. The boys resented us and felt we were encroaching on their campus. But the founders of the school wisely set it up, and to this day, it's still a coordinate school offering single-sex education, because they believe that in order to best foster learning matched to brain-based development, it's better to have the girls take their own science classes and math classes, and the boys to have their own English classes to eliminate any intimidation or hormonal distraction with your fellow classmates. There's a separate leadership structure and separate commencements. To this day, Vivian Webb School prides itself on graduating rather independent women who are leaders.

I loved my experience there. I didn't realize what a gift it was to be a member of this first graduating class, to be called a pioneer, to set policy, to set precedents, to set conditions. The administration was fabulous in letting us have a say in everything, which we thought was perfectly natural.

For college I went back East, to Brown University, I always dreamed of the East because I felt since I was the only one of my family who was born in California and everyone else—my sister was born in Maryland—had enjoyed an East Coast experience; it was my time. Even from the time I was young, I knew I was going to go to college back East, I was going to study abroad, and I was going to major in art history; these were all my mother's influences. So, I did that; I went to Brown University, majored in art history, and studied architecture abroad in Italy. Once I had a taste of New England, I never intended to come back to the West Coast.

Then, of course, after college everyone moves to Manhattan because that's where dreams are made. It's like that Sinatra song, "if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere." I loved, loved the stimulation of New York City, because you can be from anywhere and come from any family and rise to great success. Of course, there's a lot of people there from tremendous privilege. But if you have talent, dreams, and gumption and are willing to put in a lot of hard work, New York can be your city of dreams. I loved it.

What did you do there?

I dabbled. Unlike my friends who were finance majors, Wall Street at that time was very much the lure. My friends got those management training programs working for Goldman Sachs, J.P. Morgan, Merrill Lynch, and Salomon Brothers. I'm not saying I couldn't have gone for any of those jobs, because back then they loved students from Brown University because being a school that focuses on the liberal arts, we graduate as writers and thinkers with strong analytical skills.

One of my friends was an English major, and she worked for a consulting company, so I could have done that also, but that didn't attract me. I didn't know what I didn't know.

I started off in advertising in media buying at Della Femina McNamee WCRS. Then I did fashion PR for Harriet Weintraub Associates, a very glamorous boutique firm that had a lot of French clients and exclusive designers. It was quite the heady job because it was like a finishing school job. Not to sound pretentious, but all of us were Ivy League art history majors who did this work until we got married. I had the requisite boyfriend at that time—that fit into that narrative—though my belief system didn't match that, and I didn't want to use the words *divine* and *fabulous* and care about fashion trends.

Already the notion of community impact called me, and one of my college friends was the executive director of this volunteer organization called New York Cares. They would match volunteers with different nonprofits throughout the boroughs of New York. It was brilliant. I mean, this is 1988 when we graduated. You could sign up for any project based on your schedule. One of my projects was a monthly commitment during the week, but otherwise on Saturday I enjoyed the variety of places I could volunteer. I could go to a homeless shelter in the Bronx and take some kids to the zoo. I really saw the impact of what kind of life and privilege I had versus these other families and students who unfortunately were caught in a cycle of dependency and poverty. From that time, I was twenty-three years old, I said, "I want to save the world for the arts. I want to set up this dream center in the middle of this borough where children can be in a safe place, and they can learn about the arts or create art. They can just allow themselves to be and explore.

Because of that dream, I went to graduate school at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh for my master's in arts management. At that time only two universities were offering

this type of degree—essentially, it’s like an MBA, but it’s a nonprofit MBA—the Anderson School at UCLA and Carnegie Mellon. Of course, I didn’t want to go west; I wanted to stay east. Pittsburgh was a fantastic place to land. I adored Pittsburgh, I moved from my cramped little studio apartment in Manhattan to the first floor of an old Victorian house; I had a car; I was within walking distance to school and lived in an area called Shadyside. I loved the graduate program. It’s now called the Heinz School of Public Policy. I just loved it.

I took a three-year gap before I went to graduate school. It was really a gift. It felt like a vacation because I enjoyed it so much.

Fortuitously, right away—I’m trying to remember how I learned of the opportunity. Pittsburgh has the Carnegie Art Institute, which is quite an esteemed art museum. They also have the Carnegie Science Center. Andrew Carnegie is from Pittsburgh as are the Mellons’—two very important American families. Pittsburgh, for an industrial town, had so much art there. They have a symphony, an art museum, and experimental arts. For what one would call and think as a blue-collar town, it really has a very thriving arts community. The Carnegie Institute, in partnership with the Día Art Foundation and the Andy Warhol Foundation, developed the Andy Warhol Museum, when I was in grad school. I became their first intern and worked for them throughout my whole entire time at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). I worked there during all my breaks, conducting predevelopment research. I loved it because our offices were in an empty gallery at the Carnegie Art Museum. I never had the fortune to work at the actual museum, but in my little cubicle stall I had an Andy Warhol flower painting, an original flower painting hanging right behind me. Again, I thought, “how great.”

I could have stayed there to work for the director, Tom Armstrong, but one of my best friends from Brown grew up in Pittsburgh, and at that time I was still single, and she told me,

“Get out. You do not want to be single living in Pittsburgh. Who are you going to marry?” And I was like, “I don’t know. I didn’t really think about that.” By then I was twenty-seven years old, which I guess within the scheme of things, most of my friends were already partnered or thinking about getting married, so I went back to Manhattan and got a job at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum foundation. Again, it was one of these fabulous cushy jobs, but I was bored out of my mind because I had this fabulous degree, and I was going to save the world through the arts. They hired me to do foundation grants, and they weren’t quite ready, because they were empire building. Thomas Krens, who was the director, was too busy getting the Guggenheim Bilbao Museum, designed by Frank Gehry, built in Bilbao, Spain. What I was hired to do wasn’t important to the board or to him. I could have asked for something different, but I realized I couldn’t live on a nonprofit salary. My parents had cut me off by then. They said, “We’re done. It’s time to earn your own keep.”

I then found a job working for a global-branding identity company called Landor Associates which was owned by Young and Rubicam. Again, I floated into this amazing job, and they loved my background because I had an art history background and PR experience. I was a consultant and led teams on projects for the rebranding of companies like Kodak or Footjoy. I had a myriad of clients and traveled and did that until I moved to Las Vegas with a brief stop in Seattle to help Landor Associates set up an office there. Working for Landor was like the “sum of all things.” I could bring my tool set of skills and apply it as a consultant. During that period, I met my husband, Greg.

How did you meet Greg? You’re in Manhattan.

We were set up on a blind date.

Somebody knew what they were doing.

Yes. By then I was twenty-eight years old. I had been seeing someone, or a type of someone that I realized wasn't my destiny. I seemed to gravitate to men who were New Yorkers but came from prominent Jewish families. I realized that was a very big undertaking faith wise. I asked a friend to introduce me to someone who fit Greg's description perfectly. That was my husband. I met him when I was twenty-eight years old, and he was thirty. Again, we were on different paths in our lives. I think I probably was more ready to settle down than he was, but I was patient. He moved to Las Vegas about a year and a half later.

Why did you come to Las Vegas?

I came because of Greg.

You met Greg...

In Manhattan.

He already had his family's business here, right?

Yes, yes. When he was in Manhattan, he was practicing real estate law and getting a little bit of his own independence. Then they started to build the Mesquite property, they needed an owner's representative, and so Greg came out to dutifully see through the construction and the opening of the project, but not with the intention to stay and live in Nevada after, much less operate it. We reached a point that we realized if we were going to be a couple, one of us had to move. He couldn't do it, so I obviously was the one who had to, but I didn't quite move to Nevada right away; I took a stop in Seattle because my company was opening up an office there and needed a team of people to set up the office. I have always lived in Seattle, so I thought it was great fun to be moved there completely and at least get to the West coast. For a year, Greg and I had a long-distance relationship. Then we reached that point where if we're going to be together, we must be in the same city.

I quit my job and came here without a job. I tried to get a job before, but it was hard. The first six months I helped his family with the property doing what I could in terms of marketing, advertising, and PR.

But it was tough living out there and for all my girlfriends from New York, they were besides themselves thinking of me in a rural community. I showed them a photo from my hotel room window because we live in the Holiday Inn that was on their property. All you could see was dirt. They're like, "Oh my goodness, what has happened?" They were crying for me. It was really, rough. In essence, I made the biggest gamble of my life by moving to Las Vegas. Mind you, even though I grew up in southern California, Claremont, which is only 232 miles away, we had never, ever been here. I am not a gambler. It was really a distinct culture shock.

When I first arrived, I remember driving east on Sahara, crossing Las Vegas Boulevard. On the northwest corner is The World's Largest Gift Shop, and then catty-corner to that I remember sitting there and seeing all the neon. It was really, hot, and I don't like heat. I was like, "Oh my goodness, this is where I've come." At the time Greg lived in the Las Vegas Country Club, and right outside the Joe W. Brown gate, there was a carwash, and I took my car to get washed, and Elvis dried my car. He was an Elvis impersonator, but during the day he worked at the carwash. I was like, "Oh my god, this is just too much."

I remember meeting people and they would say, "So, what are you into?" I said, "Oh, I love art." And they're like, "What? Who are you?" They thought I was weird. They thought I was snobby, which I didn't think I was at all. I just wasn't like them.

Fast forward, I've got to be honest. My first five years here were not good. I didn't feel like I had any community. In those five years, Greg and I got married. He was working hard trying to keep the Mesquite property afloat. It was troubled because they were trying to operate

and run this casino on their own, but it was rough. They had to figure out the competition, try to establish their customer base and rework things. They had founding operating premises that Greg had to figure out and redo to eventually put them on the path to success.

We had our two children and lived in what was then Greg's bachelor pad in the Las Vegas Country Club. The Little Eureka Casino was also right outside the Karen gate. Greg is very close to his family, and they loved this tight pod. His parents just loved popping in at any moment to see the grandkids. I asked him, "Look, Greg if I was home alone with the kids and it's eleven-thirty at night, or ten o'clock at night, and one of them got sick, and I had to drive just out the gate to go to the Walgreens there, would you feel safe for me?" And he goes, "No." I said, "Well that's our answer. We are moving. Plus, we're living in your bachelor pad with two kids."

We moved to Summerlin. That's where all the schools are, and we knew we would be sending our kids to the Meadows. It wasn't until I moved to Summerlin that I started to feel community and really understand that Vegas is so much more beyond the Strip. Once you get beyond the confines of that area, or even where UNLV is, where it's all asphalt and concrete, we have greenbelts, we have the desert, we have desert beauty. I love to hike, and I met this wonderful group of women who hiked every Friday morning. Back then our meeting spot was the Smith's grocery store on Charleston and Hualapai because beyond that there really wasn't much more. We would show up at 8am and pile into cars. If you were there you got to hop in a car and carpool to Red Rock. We would go to the Red Rock Conservation Area and do this wonderful hike. That was my solace. Also, the neighborhood that we moved to in Summerlin, we called Mister Rogers' Neighborhood because we had a lot of friends there with kids the same age. It really felt charming. The house we bought reminded me of my childhood home in Claremont, same thing: It was on a cul-de-sac; it was a one-story house, so we had a courtyard

with a gate that you had to walk through before you came to the front door. There were so many charming aspects that made me feel settled and confident—we could make Las Vegas our home.

Mind you, prior to that when I came here, Greg said, “It’s only two years. It’s only two years. We just have to get the casino open, and then we’ll move to San Francisco,” where he grew up. He promised only two years.” I said, “Okay, I can do that.” Then two years became five years, and that’s also why we moved to Summerlin. Then five years became ten years, et cetera. Greg has been here longer, but I am going on twenty-five years. Time really goes by so quickly. I can say that this has been such an incredible journey.

With my professional background and choosing to be a stay-at-home mom I felt the urge to do something. I delved into community work. I started with joining nonprofit boards. I first joined the board of the Nevada Ballet Theatre. Then I quickly became involved with what was then the Las Vegas Art Museum at the West Sahara Library. I worked hard to try to find a new centrally located location—then the Great Recession happened. I also was on the board of my high school in Claremont and the board of the Meadows School. It was fulfilling to be a full-time mom, but I still feel I could make an impact.

Fifteen years ago, friends and I started this organization called the Nevada Women’s Philanthropy (NWP), which is a pooled fund, member-driven organization. Our goal each year is to fund a critical unmet need and make a large impact gift. A long time ago, an impact gift was \$180,000; today it’s \$500,000. We make it annually to an organization that best addresses a critical unmet need, so it can be anything. There are different needs that surface each year. Last year, SafeNest won for a community project with the Metro Police Department. It is for women who are in a domestic abuse situation. When the police are called, the police immediately call SafeNest, to provide shelter and a safe escape. That’s been gratifying. The year before was

hunger for Lutheran Social Services' new food pantry at their Boulder Highway campus. This year I have the sense, because we were amid evaluating our proposals, that it's going to be mental health. It's very gratifying to have been a founder. I was the second president of Nevada's Women's Philanthropy and for the first eight years I was very hands-on. For it to thrive it really had to transition from a founders' organization to one that fulfills its volunteer member-driven model. We have members now come to us saying, "We read about you," or "I just moved to town, and I heard about what you guys do and I would love to be part of it," and that's gratifying.

We have members who are recent college graduates to women who are in their eighties. There are members who are now grandmothers of teenagers, but when they were raising families, they were the Junior Leaguers: they were part of these organizations, and they took a break. Now they're back and actively part of NWP. Again, I love, love, love this community of amazing philanthropy women we've built.

Through NWP, I became exposed to all the amazing social service organizations within Las Vegas. I got involved in the education space at the time when education reform was really important because I wanted to figure out one thing that we can bring to underserved families and students, which is a quality education. If we can provide them with a quality education, then hopefully we can make these educational and personal gains and that they, respectively, can make a choice for themselves rather than being told, based on their birthright, what kind of life they're going to have. I got involved with Teach for America. I got appointed by the governor to the Blue-Ribbon Task Force Commission for Nevada Race to the Top application for a federal grants program. It was a competitive grant that states applied to get transformative federal

funding for education reform. I got involved in a lot of different spaces that led me to passionately focus on whatever needed to be done to create equity in Southern Nevada.

I call myself a housewife, but Nevada does not see those types of definitions or categories, and that's what I love about this state and about Las Vegas; they don't care. If you're willing to roll up your sleeves and play and get in and do something, you're welcome at the table. I think whether it's western pioneer attitude or that we're a city where so many unlikely things have happened, it's because of dreams and visionaries. I love that. My friends who stayed on the East Coast and moved to Connecticut or stayed in Manhattan, they're fascinated by my life. They go, "Oh wow, the things that you do or when people come to town, the people you've had dinner with, like politicians or other leaders, we don't have access to things like that. That is just totally amazing." I go, "Yes. That's what happens when it's a small state. You get invited to things and you get called to do things." Again, there's always what we call the usual suspects of people who are willing. We see the same people or same names of supporters championing different things in town. In that regard, even though I had a rough first five years, I wouldn't trade my past twenty years here for anything, because of what I've been exposed to, what I've been able to be a part of has just been so invaluable, so incredible for us.

You know the ethos of Greg, his family, and me. We are very devoted to doing what we can to make a difference here. We're not quite sure what the answer is, but obviously we support education, and we're very supportive of our respective alma maters, so that's why supporting higher education at UNLV was so important. Again, pleased and delighted we can do this.

Tell us about politics.

Politics, well, without revealing too much I tend to be full of opinions.

Most people involved in politics are.

Yes, yes. I would never dream of running for anything, but I like to support people. What I feel most comfortable doing—and maybe even in the organizations I’m part of—is I like to be in the background; I like to help and support and guide. Obviously, Greg and I have thrown fundraisers for everyone, from Rory Reid when he was running for governor to, of course, Steve Sisolak when he was running for governor; Jacky Rosen when she was running for congress and then senate; one of our dear friends, Susie Lee, who is now in her second term in congress for CD-3. She also happens to be our congresswoman. You name it, we support up and down the ticket because obviously Nevada is a purple state, but I hope blue is the way to go here.

It matches your decor.

Yes, yes, it’s nice decor. See, blue. It’s interesting. I haven’t mentioned my children, which obviously are the joys of our lives. Oh yes, I have pictures of Graham and Katie—they weren’t that young—at the first caucus for Obama holding signs up, or just standing there and helping count people who were voting. It’s funny. They’ve been around for all the different fundraisers. I think probably because I and Greg are so outward, they tend to be a little more inward—not in personality—but they’re not activists, though they did protest during the Black Lives Matter movement. Anyway, they’re doing things on their own terms. But then, when they share what they’re doing, I’m like, *Um, okay, good; good, good, good.* Everything that they were influenced by has seeded, and they’re doing it. I’m happy.

Back to the housewife thing, Greg doesn’t tend to keep track of things. “Dana, we have a situation that I need to call Jacky Rosen right now. Can you set it up?” I text Jacky and she says, “Right away, done.” Or “I need someone from Catherine Cortez Masto’s office to help us out.” Done. It’s access. We’re a small state, but we have access. Obviously only using access for good things, but we have access.

We do. If we could just circle back to the church. When you were living in the country club and lonely during the day, did you seek out the church at all here?

It's interesting. My parents both left the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My mom left when she was young. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a fundamentalist church; they observe the Sabbath, so it tends to be more restrictive. My mom was a free spirit, and so was my grandmother, but growing up within the confines of the church it was a challenge. My mother got a job at age nineteen and worked for five years for a synagogue in Silver Spring, Maryland. The congregants at the synagogue were her mentors, and they're the ones that exposed her to art, to music, to travel, just to all these things. To this day she'll say, "I thank the people there for exposing me to a life!"

My dad privately continued to go to church throughout my childhood, but then one day he stopped, and to this day will not tell us why; but something happened. All our family friends are still to this day practicing Seventh-day Adventists. Their kids may not be so. They've opened and freed themselves. There are dietary restrictions. You're not allowed caffeine. You're not allowed to wear jewelry.

When Greg and I got married, we were married in the Episcopal Church. Then, when our kids were born, they were baptized in the Episcopal Church, and we also got baptized. I went through confirmation. I guess technically I'm Episcopal now.

But that wasn't a community for you as a young mother.

We had a church right there on Maryland Parkway.

Yes, a beautiful church.

Yes, and we would go. The person who was in charge left, so it kind of changed things. Solace, times of solace, yes, after 9/11, going there, and sitting there, and just trying to make sense of

what had happened. But when I was lonely, no. I cried to my girlfriends who were in New York. I cried to my mom who was in Claremont. I was deeply, deeply lonely. I didn't know where to go or how to make friends. There were probably people I could have met early on who I would have liked. But also early on, Greg was a member of an organization called YPO, Young Presidents Organization, so I met a lot of the wives there. I got into a forum, which is a women's group. Those women were friends, but not my kind. I have to say, still to this day, my kind is still on the East Coast, but I have dear friends here—friends who have the same commitment and passion for community impact. But in terms of the people who know me best—when you haven't seen them in a long time, it's just like putting on an old pair of Levi's; they just feel good and it's like a warm hug—those people are on the East Coast.



Do your children feel tied to Las Vegas? Do they have this sense of place here? Do you think when they go to college that they would want to return here?

Not to create a bias against Las Vegas, but I told Greg, I said, “If our kids are going to be raised here, I don’t want them to feel like they have to be tied to a family business to be here. I want them to soar and to pursue their own dreams and vision.” I didn’t want my kids to go to high school here. Greg went to a boarding school back East, so Graham ended up attending the same boarding school, St. Paul’s School in Concord, New Hampshire. We tried to get Katie to go to boarding school, but she chose to stay here and go to Bishop Gorman. She also was a competitive equestrian, so that was her excuse: that she couldn’t pursue her equestrian sports in boarding school, because it doesn’t work.

I brag about this being such a great place because you can be a big fish in a small pond. I saw a lot of that, too, amongst kids who went off to college but couldn’t hack it and they had to come back. They couldn’t get over not being who they thought they were and thinking that they were special and going elsewhere where they’re not special. I wanted to make sure my kids were bold enough to explore. Even from the time they were young, we took them to the East Coast for summers. They spent time in Nantucket. They visited all our college friends up and down the East Coast. They went to summer camp in Vermont. For a lack of better reasons, Greg and I wanted them to be exposed to a different regional perspective. Since both of us went to college back there, we wanted our kids to do that too.

Graham is on the East Coast at my alma mater Brown University. Katie was a tough nut to crack in terms of that, wanting to stay closer to home. She did have an opportunity. She got accepted to Harvard but chose not to go and we respect that bold choice. She’s at UC Santa Barbara I couldn’t be prouder of her and her choice in how she’s thriving and creating that destiny.

In terms of identity for Graham, he still has several good friends from Meadows. These kids started going to that school when they were in preschool. He has known these kids since they were five years old. But he's moved on. Honestly, now I don't know what our kids are going to do or whether they need to come here. It's become less of an issue, I suppose, because I see opportunity. But I do think this is a rough place to raise a family. There's a lot of fun that Graham can tell his sheltered East Coast friends about, but this is a tough place. But also, my kids are unflappable, because a lot of my son's East Coast friends grew up in a very homogeneous, tight, insular pod. Our kids have been exposed to everything. They've seen everything. Nothing matters to them. For Katie going to Bishop Gorman—which I view as being like a regular public high school except they have the bishop telling them what to do—it's a really diverse school. I think for Katie, that's also why she probably chose not to go to that college on the East Coast, because she thought it was elitist. At UC Santa Barbara, she says, first and foremost, she goes to a state school. "I go to a state school and it's not a private school. My friends who go to USC think nothing of weekly sushi dinners. I have a lot of friends at UCSB who have to think about whether or not they can have Chipotle on a Friday night as a treat." She is very respectful of people's circumstances.

Now, we haven't addressed being Asian or Chinese in Southern Nevada.

That was coming up, but let's do that.

It's interesting, because Claremont is White. We were one of three Asian families in Claremont. There were two Black families. I had one Japanese American friend. I didn't grow up thinking that I was Chinese or really giving it much thought.

You must understand, my parents immigrated here during a time when, if you're an immigrant, you put your head down, you master the English language, you get your citizenship

as soon as possible, and you are proudly, fiercely American. I also think it's because they grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. First and foremost, as an identity, they were Seventh-day Adventist, and then they were Chinese. I think their church created a cultural paradigm, unlike a lot of first-generation immigrants who came over, that dominated their life in the late 1940s and early '50s. Unlike other immigrants, they didn't move to a community that was a particular ethnic enclave.

Obviously, my identity as a Chinese American is important enough to me that I intentionally wanted to marry an Asian-American man or Chinese American man. Greg and I are the only ones in our families, especially now that we're third gen, who married a fellow Asian. His dad has six other siblings. There is one cousin who married a Chinese woman, but, otherwise, all our cousins married Caucasians, my sister married a Caucasian, Greg's brother is married to a Caucasian. We're rather unique. Then, what does that mean for my kids? My kids are mongrel Asians; they have Japanese in them, they have Chinese in them, they have Southeast Asian, we also genetically found that they have Korean. Most Asians probably identify with a lot of other Asian ethnic backgrounds. We are a lot of different things.

Growing up, I think Katie probably grew up a little bit more self-conscious for some reason, Graham maybe, too. But, again, they were insulated by going to the Meadows, which is small and has an ethos of "you be nice; you don't say mean things; you don't call people bad names." That was my experience, too, in my private school. My sister attended the public schools in Claremont, and she experienced racism and was called every name. She grew up with that. You think about how that affected her, being told that she was ugly. She said that once, "someone called me an ugly spick." She started laughing because spick is the wrong slur to

called her. But they used to sing “Ching Chong Chinaman” to her, and they used to go like that [gestures] with the eyes. Kids are cruel. I didn’t experience any of that.

The first time ever I was questioned about my ethnicity was when I was in Pittsburgh getting into a cab going to the airport. Mind you, very friendly. He’s in the back and chatting. He goes, “So, where are you from?” I go, “L.A.” “No, where are you from?” I go, “L.A.” He goes, “No. What’s your background?” I go, “Oh, you want to know what my ethnicity is.” I go, “I’m Chinese.” He goes, “Ah.” Then he started chatting. It was very sweet, but kind of a naive way of asking where you’re from. I identify with being Chinese, foremost. Obviously, being married to Greg, it’s easy. We love the same comfort food, the same dishes; there’s just that commonality, that shared outlook. I don’t have to explain that, “Yes, we eat this at Chinese New Year,” or, “We do certain things,” or, “Oh my gosh, this is our favorite dish.”

Now, my sister married a Caucasian man who happened to study Mandarin Chinese and lived in Taiwan for a year, so in some regards this blond, blue-eyed man of Swedish-French-German extraction can be more Chinese. He’s just as comfortable digging in there. That worked to her comfort level and benefit.

Greg and I note every so often that we don’t have any Asians in our tight social circle. We’ll note another Asian couple and ask, “Why don’t they like us? Are we not Asian enough? Are we not... whatever?” We kind of joke about it, but it’s true. Again, I think there could be other Asians in Las Vegas who we could be close to, but if they don’t see you as being more like them or share a common path, they’re not interested. We’re multi-generational and probably seem more “American.” Greg’s grandmother was born in San Francisco, also his father and now

him, so he's third-gen, and my kids are fourth-gen on that side of the family.



I'm meandering, but I think for Graham, he has had more of a tough time navigating being a Chinese male because of the stereotype of Chinese males as being "less than" or effeminate or not bold or strong; meek or good at math or science or computers, or geeky, or "I am the Chess Club." I think Graham—obviously, it didn't come from us—but subconsciously he always didn't want to do things that were viewed as being too nerdy or geeky. He was really good at chess, but he stopped at a certain point. He goes, "I'm not going to do it, because only the nerds do it." He gets invited to be part of the Math Olympiad, and he goes, "I'm not doing that, because I'll get teased." He did do it; we made him. He didn't want to, for the classic stereotypes. There are parts of their childhood where Greg and I would be like, "Oh my god, we failed; our kids don't play an instrument beautifully. They're not taking Mandarin Chinese on the

side.” I’m joking, but I think to some degree, because there will always be people who will look at my kids and see Chinese, and not Graham Lee or Katie Lee, and to yet not have any tie to the language. Graham took Mandarin in high school, took two years of college-level Mandarin, and spent two summers in China. But he realized to be usefully proficient, it takes so much, and he wanted more academic freedom, so he gave up on that. At least he can speak a little bit of Mandarin. But Katie doesn’t have any of that skill, and I don’t have any of that either. I must note that Graham became interested in China in high school and thought he’d live and work there. His two summers there squelched that idea.

My parents grew up speaking Cantonese. That’s not a language that is taught. I can understand a tiny bit but have been away from hearing it. Plus, they never spoke it at home. They only spoke English. They only spoke it [Cantonese] if they didn’t want us to understand what they were saying or if my mom was gossiping with her friends. But my sister and I quickly understood what they were saying. I think if I spent more time, I probably could pick it up. I might be able to say a few things here or there. Again, academically, since my family treasured academics and for my interest in art history, my focus was very Western-centric. At that time, when I was doing art history, it was all Western European art. You didn’t learn about Asian art. You might have learned about Islamic art. There is an awakening now, because I am now trying to learn and educate myself about Chinese art and Asian art. I can do this at this stage of my life because my kids are off; we’re empty nesters. But it is kind of like this reawakening or this understanding of art history—my history—that I think is really, important.

The model minority myth, did that ever apply to you and your sister, or did it apply to you separately, differently?

I think it applied to my sister and me by my parents only because—not that we had to prove ourselves to be better—my mom and dad felt that my sister and I had tremendous aptitude, academic intellectual aptitude, and they expected us to fulfill our promise. Yes, I had to take piano lessons every week of my life until I got to high school, and my sister did too, but we also played tennis. She was a gifted tennis player, a tremendous athlete. I was a good player. But we also did other sports. We skied.



Now, I think Graham, when he went off to boarding school, the Asian students tended to be international students, and he came in as a sophomore. To break into the class of returners that got there as freshman, he felt like he had to prove himself more. He had to go over and beyond to distinguish himself. He goes, “Mom, I thought I was exposed to stuff, and we’ve traveled all over, but I’m a hayseed. I’m a hayseed from Las Vegas in the plummy confines of St. Paul’s School in Concord, New Hampshire.” That really pushed him more to define himself. He also

played varsity lacrosse right away, which isn't a very common sport among Asians.



For Katie, going to Bishop Gorman, where, yes, the stereotype is the cheerleaders rule and they all tend to look a certain way; there are certain families who send their kids there, and those names you might as well have in neon flashing lights, because if you're friends with them and part of them, then thumbs up; you're socially it. I was very hesitant, and I could not wait for her four years to be done because I was on pins and needles the entire time. She's kind of a fierce and bold girl, but I know she didn't want to be liked or dated by someone because they had an Asian fetish. It's interesting. She didn't have a boyfriend through high school, and, now, as far as I know, she still doesn't. When I ask her, she rolls her eyes and goes, "Oh, Mom." It's like boys are so silly. It's good enough for me. She has a lot of friends. Mind you, at Gorman she had a huge group of guy friends and girlfriends, so they all were in this big pod. But she's like, "Ugh, I don't want to date any of them." I think she has a sense of pride, but they must like her for the

right reasons and not because they think she's a cute Asian girl.



Have you or anyone in your family faced any racially discriminatory episodes?

Again, never experienced that—I wasn't woke about being Asian in a sense that, "Oh, here we're discriminated against." The jobs that I had here, I worked for Mirage Resorts in corporate advertising. I had a great boss. I loved everything. Through that I got introduced to basically all the people now who are the Strip presidents because I had a corporate job, so they used to work for Steve Wynn and now they're running the Cosmopolitan and MGM, etc. I didn't see any barrier there.

But during the pandemic, I did that piece for *Severance Radio*. [*Ed. Note: Severance Radio* is an on-air book club sponsored by Black Mountain Institute and dissects Ling Ma's satirical, dystopian novel, *Severance*.] In that episode, I talked about an experience. It was before we were shut down here. It was at Trader Joe's. The checkout guy did everything he could to

make sure I knew he didn't want to breathe the air or be within my space. It just shows when people say, "You don't see me; you see a race." Not that it should make any difference, but I had just come from a board meeting, so I was beautifully dressed, I had all my jewelry on, I was tip-top professionally attired, so I didn't look like I was consumptive and coming off the street sick with the "Wuhan flu." I don't need to go into the details about it, but I said, "This is not going right." Every step of my interaction fed to this narrative that this guy just sees Wuhan flu; he sees pandemic. I did call the manager when I got home because I thought about it on the drive back, and we chatted about it. This was almost a year ago. To this day, I will not go back to Trader Joe's because I was so traumatized by that experience. It's silly; I shouldn't. Well, okay, I did go back once with my daughter, masked up with a hat, and I saw him there, and he knew. I marched straight to the customer service desk. He said, "Hi. Can I help you?" I said, "Jeff, you know how you can help. Let's chat." We did talk about it, but still, I don't feel comfortable.

Then after that, because the pandemic shut-down occurred, everyone was home. We live in this neighborhood in Summerlin where we have a 3.2-mile walk. I was so self-conscious for the first two months. If people saw me coming, they would jump into the street or they would jump into the bushes. I was so convinced that they did that because I'm Chinese, and maybe they did. Maybe they didn't and just were trying to create a safe space. For a time, I was this-that; everywhere I went I was afraid. I was afraid because I'm Chinese.

With the recent violence against AAPIs, Greg had a disturbing memory reemerge. About 5 years ago, he played at a member-guest tournament at his golf club, Southern Highlands. He was the last to join the foursome. When he showed up, one of the players told the other three to "not tell anymore Chinese jokes." Greg was so shocked and appalled that he didn't comment, but

those words stayed and stung. The man who said it is a Baseball Hall of Fame athlete, Greg Maddux. Is he racist or just a stupid bully? I think it's both, sadly.

How did you feel the first time you heard the expression the “Wuhan flu” or the “Kung flu” or the “China virus?” How did you feel the first time you heard those terms?

Obviously appalled, but who it came from, I already have a long, long, long laundry list of grievances against that person. I wasn't surprised that person chose to use that term because he baits his base. From the very beginning of this campaign, we could all see he was doing it for promotion. I lived in New York, and he was regarded as a charlatan. No one in society treated him seriously. In philanthropy, he was a joke. He and his family are gauche and garish. A lot of people I know went to his wedding to Marla. I don't know anyone who went to his wedding to Melania. Anyway, just a showman, P.T. Barnum of the worst kind. When I heard it, yes, it made me more scared. It made me more frightened.

Was the incident in Trader Joe's before that or after that?

It was before, because I had an in-person board meeting. It was before we had our state lockdown, so it must have been before. When did that person start using the Wuhan flu term? I don't think he started using it until early or late March. I don't know. I can't recall. It could have been May or summer.

But obviously when that happened to you, you didn't connect it to that person.

I only connected it to the fact that at time rumor was it was all coming from China and that the Chinese people were responsible for bringing this terrible pandemic to the world.

Just like the Spanish flu started in Kansas?

Yes, I know.

How does the Black Lives Matter movement apply to the Asian American Pacific Islander people? How do you see that?

I don't really see it as interrelated. I happen to be very keenly aligned with social justice. You should see all the books I have on my desk. Along with education reform, its social justice, criminal justice reform, is very much something that matters to me. You can dial back what has led up to Black Lives Matter today. We must go way back to Reconstruction, to redlining, to why police forces are there; it's to keep Blacks away from certain parts of towns. Lack of financial gains and attainment and wealth for Black Americans, on and on and on and on. It's interesting, back to my Trader Joe's experience, because from the time I was little if I saw a policeman with a car pulled over, I used to stop and look and make sure it wasn't a person who was pulled over while driving Black. I've had this kind of thing in me forever and forever, from the time I was a little kid. You hear about celebrities, Black Americans, who have been trailed in exclusive boutiques because they're Black. Again, they're not seeing who happens to be Oprah Winfrey at Hermes. They just see a Black woman, which is, again, astounding. Nowadays fashions are so different, so the world's wealthiest person could look street with a hoodie and tennis shoes and jeans. But anyway, I was very aware of that. Then to see again the same thing happen, to have experienced that just for five minutes of my life rather than repetitively every day of their lives.

How has our AAPI experience been changed during the pandemic? I know there are Asians in America who have been discriminated against. You go back to Michigan during the time of perceived Japanese car competition and that poor guy, Vincent Chin, was wrongly killed because they said, "You're taking away our jobs." Racism and ignorance have always been in this country, but because we're immigrants here, we made that choice to come here, whereas

Black Americans—and I say, again, there are different Black American experiences, those whose families came not by choice, but by force, and then there are Black Americans whose parents immigrated here, from Haiti, Ghana, Kenya, or Ethiopia. There's plenty of Black Americans who did immigrate. Sadly, it doesn't matter where you come from, whether you came here by choice or by force, you are a Black American and you're seen by, unfortunately, a lot of people the same way.

That's kind of like a long roundabout way. Racism exists, but, like Stefani had asked about the model minority, we're dispersed enough [here] so there's not predominant pockets unless you're looking at Monterey Park or Alhambra in Southern California or urban Chinatowns. Now, Chinatowns in most cities are typically the blue-collar areas, and then it's the suburbs that had more the professional class immigrants. That's why Alhambra and Monterey Park, for instance, developed. Yes, we've had that benefit of being the model American where we're not going to typically be—and I'm talking about just the Chinese experience—we're not typically going to be on welfare. We're going to work hard and toil and emphasize education so our kids can go to college. There is also that saying within Chinese, you want each generation to do better. I think that's engrained in us, too, very much, working hard to ensure each generation does better.



For me growing up, there were Chinese, there were Japanese, maybe there were some Koreans, and then maybe there were Filipinos, but I don't remember ever meeting a Filipino. After the Vietnam War, our family sponsored a Vietnamese family

that came over. In Southern California, a large community developed. For me, growing up, again, there were predominately only two Asian ethnic identities, Chinese and Japanese, but it's a huge melting pot of identities, manifested by the food. I hope, for most people growing up, they don't see race, because they're exposed through food. This is how you bring people together around a table—through food, community, and sharing what is part of your heritage and your love and how it can be enjoyed by everyone.

Why is it valuable for the university to collect interviews from the AAPI communities here?

Because just like everyone else who has come to Las Vegas, this town has attracted people and it's part of our heritage, this is part of our story, the contributions of this community. Back to the Pacific Islanders, the Filipino population here in the community, it is a very rich community. You go up and down Spring Mountain, how it's grown in the last twenty-five years, any ethnic cuisine, predominately Asian, but also French chefs like Partage or if you want to do something interesting go to Sparrow and Wolf, Chinatown has become the hip, cool place that attracts people, so that's all part of the story.

Greg and I identify with being part of the AAPI community, and our family has adopted Las Vegas as our town, again doing what we can to make impact because we feel that this town has really blessed us with so much opportunity. It's our joy to be able to give back.

Now I'm going to turn this over to my student colleagues. Who wants to go first? Nessa?

VC: *Hello. I love everything you've mentioned so far. It's been really intriguing. I wanted to ask a question about the BMI podcast episode that you were in—I listened to the Severance Radio podcast with Vi Khi Nao—*

Oh yes. (1:23:08)

VC: *Yes. In your conversation, you mentioned “otherness.” I wanted you to elaborate on otherness and what that means to you, especially being a successful Asian woman involved in the Las Vegas community of arts and literature. If you could elaborate on what otherness has been like to you in those spaces.*

We had so much fun putting together that podcast. Can you believe it? I’m such a checklist person, so I forgot. It’s in my notes, *Severance* by Ling Ma. Have you read that book?

VC: *I haven’t read it, but I know it was written by an Asian woman, right?*

It’s set in New York, during a pandemic. It is eerie. You must get the book. It is so weird. It was written three to four years ago, but it could be today. Anyway, we discussed otherness as we recorded right at the height of my feeling of feeling discriminated against or having a negative interaction because of who I am. The notion of otherness now, fast-forward almost a year later, I can go about my day to day, be involved with my organizations and communities and not be identified by race, but there is that inherent consciousness of being different. Sometimes depending on my mood or if I feel vulnerable, I’ll say, “Is that person looking at me this way because they see Chinese and they think...?” Now there’s enough news, so they know that I’m not necessarily going to give them COVID unless I’ve not been careful. But, yes, I’ve felt not of or necessarily equal. We were talking about that recently. My husband loves playing golf, but there are certain golf clubs in this country that will not accept us because we’re Asian. You can only be a White Anglo-Saxon to join the club. Obviously, you can’t be Jewish. You can’t be Armenian You can’t be Lebanese. You must be White Anglo-Saxon. It doesn’t matter if you just made your money recently but you’re White. You can have someone of a different ethnicity that’s been in this country longer, has built museums and whatever, but you’re not welcome. Just the fact of that. There is also that concept, I guess of otherness that we talk about America as

being this great melting pot where it's a land of opportunity, but for better or for worse there are still institutions here where people want to keep things the way they are; that whole Western European White paradigm.

VC: I also wanted to ask, how did your passion for art history blossom into what it is now, and why do you think that the arts are important for a community like Las Vegas? I was reading about how you can Greg opened a little Free Library Bookstand, too, so it you could talk about that.

The Free Library Bookstand came as an honor by Communities in the Schools of Nevada. I was on the board of that organization for several years until I termed out. I joked and said, "You have to kick me out." I read through the bylaws after I was done with my official terms. I said, "Oh, according to the bylaws if you vote me in, you can give me one more year." I did that until finally they said, "You've got to go." But it was just an honor of ours, to support of the organization. But again, it's about getting books in the hands of the people.

Regarding the arts, I've been, sadly, a part of three failed attempts to have an art museum here in Las Vegas. We had NICA, which was early on before my time, and then the Las Vegas Art Museum, and then there was something called Luminous Park that became the Art Museum at Symphony Park. It then partnered with the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno which seemed like a good alliance to have a museum here. I think it was conceived as far too ambitious. As a kid my parents took me to the L.A. County Art Museum and MOCA. My parents love art. Everywhere we traveled around the world we went to a museum.

Back to the transformative power of the art, in graduate school one of my mentors founded this program. He came from a troubled part of Pittsburgh and just happened to be noticed by someone who said, "You need to do something; get off the streets." They taught him

how to become a potter, a ceramicist, and he discovered that he was talented. He saw how it transformed his life. He opened an arts center for kids to learn ceramics and expanded it to painting and photography and he also developed a job vocational retraining center that taught culinary skills to former steel workers. He was a MacArthur Genius Grant recipient because he changed lives, and so I saw the transformative power of the arts.

To me art is about access, and I have not given up on that dream. We will have something, I guarantee, soon within our community that anyone can come to and gain something. It may not be your traditional art museum that you think about where there are those valuable things on the wall, and you must be very quiet, and you must keep your hands down and not touch anything. We still may not want you to touch things. But my whole notion is that if anyone can cross through the door of this type of organization and come away with something that was interesting, maybe just a little rush of endorphins, or discovery. I want that. We deserve that here in Nevada. I know we have the Barrick, which does outstanding programming, but because of your parking situation it's not the most accessible place, sadly. We need something that will compliment what the Barrick does, but is more accessible. I don't know if that answered your question.

VC: No, was great. Cecilia—did you want to ask anything?

CW: Yes, I have a question. This is so fascinating for me. I think one part that really stood out to me was when you talked about being a third-generation immigrant, you really don't feel as Chinese as maybe first or even second-generation, and that stuck out to me because obviously I am very Chinese, and so I feel very connected with the Chinese community, and it reminds us that it can be a spectrum. I was just curious if and how, at all, your racial identity has affected your world view.

That's interesting. Maybe it has. In going back to that term of *otherness*, it's because most people could see us, especially because of the privilege of our backgrounds and our educations and what we've been able to do or achieve, but there's always that otherness. I think maybe that's why I've aligned myself so much with social justice, or maybe more liberal policies, because I believe in opportunities when I see that doors are shut on people because of different reasons or circumstances, because I know I'm viewed that way. For sure, Cecilia, I think that's a very apt observation, so I think there is a connection to that.

Back to the model minority, I love all these tropes. There is also assumption growing up Chinese, that they're going to give us a pass because I'm not going to raise any trouble or heckle or I'll be that good student; but, also because of my personality, I'm not that meek, quiet person. I was always the loudest, most aggressive, most competitive kid in every grade; that was kind of a nightmare for some of my teachers, but that's just my personality. Going back to my parents, my mom and dad were very forward-thinking. When you think about this for immigrants, my sister's name is Robin, and my name is Dana. They purposefully gave us gender-neutral names. At that time men were also Danas. There are still some Danas. Of course, my sister had to go into the medical field; she's a dentist. She took over my dad's dental practice. They knew me; I was a lost cause when it came to sciences. But they said, "You could be anything you want. Don't let being a girl stop you from becoming anything." That's the type of family I grew up in. But then again, there's also that other aspect of you as a model minority and you happen to look pleasing, so make sure you can take care of yourself and that you are that perfect person, so there was that aspect of that and I'm sure it was my parents' protection towards us of it's you are that person, then no one is going to give you any kind of gruff.

Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we didn't ask you?

I guess I wish I could have reflected more because this is about the AAPI oral history experience, and I didn't really relate much to Nevada.

Oh, yes you did.

I wish I could add more. But again, Nessa, I think that otherness also goes back to when I was joking about not having more Asian friends with Greg. It's because we're kind of like one foot here, one foot there: Asian, but not Asian enough; seemingly living in a White world, but not White. So, there is that distinct notion of otherness.

That's a question we should add: If otherness actually comes from your own community and not necessarily the white community.

Yes. I'll elaborate more on that. Also, it's like a focus. There are some wonderful AAPI activists here who are very involved in all the political things, and I admire their work so, so much, but that's more their space. Because Greg's and my space is not ethnically specific, maybe because we participate and support, but our day-to-day space and our work and everything like that is not driven by our racial background, that could also be why maybe we're not Asian enough. We're kind of like this amorphous category of Chinese, but not Chinese enough.

Do you think that's a function of your being here for so many generations?

I would imagine so. Again, back to the language, that's one of my biggest regrets is not being able to speak. I didn't live in Asia. I've never lived in Asia. Then when you think about my son, I know he's contemplated from an identity standpoint. Again, people see him as an Asian man, Chinese-man, who could have gotten off the airplane from Hong Kong, yet he is as American as more people here if you trace to his dad's lineage. I know Graham has struggled with that: You see an Asian man, but not an American.

One of my dear friends is Japanese American, and in high school several boys were not allowed to date her because their parents were prejudiced. I'm wondering if that's a generational thing, where the child might be amenable, but the parents are prejudiced.

I think it's where you find your people. For instance, for my kids within a university setting, obviously you're more woke. For my son, his group are stereotypical. A lot of them are all prep school kids, boarding school kids, and New York city kids. He runs with an elite group of kids. Likewise, his girlfriend—but it's very interesting—she is White, but he is attracted to international people, and she grew up in Hong Kong, New York, and London, but her last seven years were in Hong Kong, so I think there is kind of that connection. But also, her dad is an immigrant, a White immigrant from Scotland. How we were both raised, they see—I don't what—but they see that even though we're Chinese and she's White, the family values are very much quite similar. For Greg and me, even though he is a third-generation, there is still that immigrant desire; back to that generational thing, you want each generation to succeed. I know now it's harder for prosperity to happen for kids of your generation, but we can make up for that providing opportunity.

One of my college roommates, best friends, she laughs. She goes, “Dana, it's really been interesting to see how you've gotten so Chinese. When I met you, you didn't even know your way around a Chinese restaurant, and now every year you send out a Chinese New Year card.” Our family favorites for Thanksgiving dinner are a tradition and it's a recipe that I share all over the place. Rather than Thanksgiving stuffing we made Chinese sticky rice. We've always had Thanksgiving with three other families, and that's now become their favorite. Mama Su's Chinese sticky rice recipe is a recipe that gets passed around to everyone. That's a cultural heritage thing that I'm proud to share, but before it was like “other.” Oh my god, if my mom

made Chinese food when I was little, I wasn't going to tell my friends. They'd say, "what did you have for dinner last night?" Of course, I was going to say "spaghetti and meatballs" rather than "Chinese stir fry with pressed tofu" and whatever because that was other. Yes, even growing up in Claremont I wanted to fit in; I wanted to be as White as possible.

Thank you. This has been wonderful. Thank you so much.

Thank you for inviting me. This has been lots of fun. I've really enjoyed meeting all of you guys via video. I'm so thrilled that this project is being done. I look forward to following your progress and seeing how it goes. This is wonderful.

[End of recorded interview]

Mama Su's Chinese Sticky Rice (Give or Take)

Makes 12 servings

2 ½ cups sweet (glutinous) rice
1 ½ cup long grain white rice (like jasmine)

Rice seasoning:

1 TBSP soy sauce
1 TBSP Shao Xing rice wine (or sake)
1 TBSP sesame oil (or less to taste)
1 tsp salt

8 – 10 dried shitake mushrooms (depends on size), soaked in hot water to cover for 30 minutes. Save mushroom water to add to steam mushrooms.

¼ cup (1 oz) dried shrimp (use S size), cover and soak in Shao Xing rice wine for 30 minutes.

1 package Chinese sausage (eyeball proportions of sausage to mushroom – it's all to your preference), cut into ¼ inch discs.

2 small shallots chopped
1 package Chinese pickled vegetables, rinsed and chopped (optional)
1 bunch scallions chopped
Cilantro to finish

1. Rinse rice in cold water and drain several times until water is clear. Cover rice with cold water a knuckle height of water above the rice and let soak for 1 hour.
2. Prep ingredients: drain mushrooms and pat dry. Remove stems and cut into quarters. Pulse in Cuisinart to ¼" dice. Remove to a bowl. Drain shrimp and pulse in Cuisinart to fine dice. Remove to a separate bowl. You can also hand dice/mince.
3. Steam rice in rice cooker. When finished, mix in rice seasoning
4. Heat wok over medium heat. Add a scant bit of oil and cook sausage. Cook until sausage renders oil. Remove sausage to bowl. Clean wok of most of the oil, but leave enough to cook remaining ingredients.
5. Add oil if needed before sautéing shallots. Cook until slightly soft. Add mushrooms and cook until mushrooms soften (about 5 minutes – add some of the mushroom water to steam the mushrooms). Add scallions, Chinese pickled vegetables, and shrimp and cook another 3 to 5 minutes. Add back Chinese sausage and cook until flavors are combined.
6. Use a very large bowl or pot to mix cooked ingredients into rice. Finish and top with cilantro.