

AN INTERVIEW WITH KOCHY TANG

An Oral History Conducted by Kristel Peralta,
Vanessa Concepcion, and Stefani Evans

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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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.

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PREFACE

Second-generation physician Kochy Tang arrived in Las Vegas in 1999 to complete her Doctor of Osteopathy (D.O.) residency; she remained in Las Vegas because she enjoys its convenience, its amenities, its tax structure, her patients, and the congenial medical community.

Tang's father, Y. Y. Tang, left China in the early 1940s to go to France and then to Boston to attend Harvard Medical School. After graduating in 1945, he was drafted into the U.S. Army for the Korean War, where he served in a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (M.A.S.H.) unit. After the war, he practiced alternative medicine in San Francisco but in about 1983 he relocated his practice to Reno, where he and his wife, Katrina Tang—by then also an alternative medicine practitioner—opened a joint practice. While the doctors Tang found Nevada in the 1980s to be more welcoming to homeopathic medicine than California had been, these pioneers in chelation and homeopathy still faced legal hurdles that eventually, after Dr. Y. Tang's death, caused Dr. Katrina Tang to close her practice.

While Kochy Tang is the only child of her parents, she has half-siblings from both parents. Born and partly raised in San Francisco, Tang and her parents moved to Reno in about 1983, so they could practice alternative medicine in a state with a homeopathic board. In Reno, Tang attended a private middle school before beginning high school at home at age twelve and then attending and graduating from Bishop Manogue High School. After graduating from The College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific in Pomona, California, she went to Spokane, Washington, for her internship and completed her residency at University Medical Center in Las Vegas.

In this interview, Tang remembers the nanny who raised her until age twelve as example of the ways some parents have to live away from their own children in order to provide for them. She recalls the legal battles waged against her parents (especially her mother), describes the way the COVID-19 pandemic affected her own medical practice, and speaks of being an only child among several step-siblings who all have full siblings. She credits Tony Marnell, former owner and builder of the M Resort at the far south end of the Las Vegas Strip for his vision in housing a medical practice at the resort. She continues to enjoy a good relationship with the current owners, much to the pleasure of her patients, who include several entertainers on the Las Vegas Strip.

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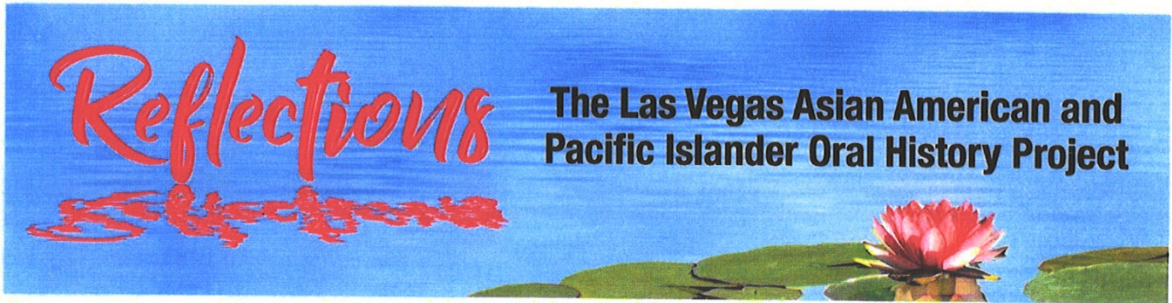
Interview with Kochoy Tang

May 26, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Kristel Peralta, Vanessa Concepcion, and Stefani Evans

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Good afternoon. This is Kristel Peralta and I am here with Stefani Evans, Nessa Concepcion, and Kochy Tang. The date is May 26th, 2021.

Dr. Tang, may I ask you to spell your first and last name for the interview?

K-O-C-H-Y, T-A-N-G.

Thank you very much. To start, please tell us about your family and your childhood and any experiences you remember growing up.

Both my parents are from China. My father came over a very long time ago. He graduated from Harvard Medical School in the '40s and had to learn English on the fly here in America. He is from a military family, and they were in France, so he came from China to France to Boston. He liked to tell people that he learned English from "All My Children," but I don't think that started until later. Then he was in the [U.S.] Army. I believe he was drafted. It was obviously in the '40s. He graduated in '45 from Harvard Medical School, I think. He was in the Korean War, so he was in a M.A.S.H. [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit there, which was quite scary being Chinese—a member of the Chinese ethnicity in Korea—since that's who they were fighting. He was on one of the last transport planes out of Korea, and he had to beg his way on, because the North Koreans and the Communist Chinese were coming. He was probably going to get killed if he didn't get out. But he made his way out. My brother said that he didn't speak of the war very much when he was alive. [After the war], he was in the Army Reserves for a while.

He was a physician, obviously, Harvard Medical School. He practiced in San Francisco. For a long time, he was very much into alternative medical care; that's what moved him from San Francisco to Reno, Nevada. He had a fairly successful career there. He had to fight the system because back in the '80s, alternative medicine was not very popular, nor was it very accepted. He was a pioneer and he was written up in several different places, but he really had to

fight the system a lot. He liked to play bridge. He liked to watch “All My Children.” He was a funny man.

I was his last child. He had three older sons by the time I came along. He met my mother in San Francisco. She was from Shanghai. She left Shanghai during that particular era where the Communists were fighting the Nationalists, so that was a pretty crappy way to grow up. She was raised by her grandmother and taken to Hong Kong during that conflict. She wasn’t very close to her parents because they had left, and Communism had come in. She wasn’t close to her mother. Her father was away. He was a journalist, so he had moved to Taiwan. I believe my grandmother stayed in China and was “reconditioned” or sent to a camp. It was very hard. My grandmother was a dentist, but I don’t think she was able to continue her career, because of having to go to those camps just for being an educated person. Communism didn’t like those. Everybody had to be the same. That was hard.

My mother had a couple of siblings, her sister who was with her in Hong Kong, and her brother who was left in China and had to grow up in Communism. My mother was able to bring all her family over after a while, which was nice, to San Francisco.

My mother then earned her medical degree and was able to practice later on in Reno. She helped my father out. She did a lot of odds and ends to be able to support her family.

SE: Did she also do alternative medicine?

Yes, she did, and she joined my father in that.

KP: You mentioned that alternative medicine was one of the things that a lot of people didn’t accept when it was first starting up. Could you tell us more about your father’s experience and how that ended up changing in Nevada?

It wasn't that it was changing in Nevada, it's just that I think they [Nevada] had a more open policy. They had a homeopathic board, so my father practiced some homeopathic medicine. In California at the time, even though California was fairly liberal, they didn't believe in chelation. My father believed in chelation quite a bit back in those days. That's where you use EDTA [Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid] to bind up anything that's related to coronary artery disease or peripheral artery disease. It's still around somewhat. I think it's more refined now, but he was a big pioneer of that. Then he moved into some homeopathy and some other things.

He moved to Nevada just because they had a homeopathic board. It was a little more open in regards to alternative medicine. Obviously, homeopathic medicine is a lot more accepted now, way more accepted with everything that's going around, but they really did have to pioneer a lot of things in those days. He opened up a successful clinic with people who were not getting the care or the improvements that they wanted in their health from allopathic medicine—if we're going to define it that way.

Now I'd like to touch more on your siblings and how you grew up. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

I have three half-brothers from my father's side. One of them is a photographer. The second one is an emergency room doctor. The last one is a pilot who also went to law school. They're all still living. I have four half-siblings from my mother's side. I have two older sisters. One lives in Reno. I have a sister that lives in Hong Kong. I have a sister that lives here. I have a half-brother that lives in Reno. My sister in Reno is widowed. She worked with my mother. The brother that lives in Reno is a physician. He does alternative medicine. I have a sister that does sales. Then the sister that lives in Hong Kong is married to a gaming family.

Did you mostly grow up in Reno?

I grew up in San Francisco for the first half of my life, and then we moved to Reno when I was ten.

Could you tell us more about your schooling? Where did you go to school?

I went to a Montessori school in San Francisco until we moved. I started in a Montessori school in Reno, but it wasn't really well hashed out there, so then I went to a private middle school, and then I went to Bishop Manogue [High School] in Reno for three years. I was twelve when I started high school, so I spent a year at home because I was so young. Moving from a Montessori-type of school to a regular school or a more traditional school, they didn't know where to place me, because [at Montessori] we didn't have grades. By the time I ended up in that elementary school, I was placed at a high school level. My parents thankfully were able to get a private tutor for me for the year. I took one class at the local high school just because her husband was teaching there, so they were able to do that. Then I went to Bishop Manogue because I believe that was the only private high school in Reno.

Could you tell us more about what growing up with your siblings was like? What kinds of food did you eat growing up, and what was your home environment like?

Both my parents worked, so I had a nanny up until I was twelve, and then she left to take care of my niece when she was born, so that was a big change from having someone constantly there being able to take care of me. She would cook. I think we ate a lot of rice. I don't know. That was a long time ago. We ate a lot of rice. She cooked. My mother would sometimes cook traditional Chinese foods. We would go out.

My father was very Americanized when I came along. He was older when I was born. He would eat anything. He did not speak Chinese by the time I came along. He hadn't spoken

Chinese since he left China as a teenager. He would have spoken Mandarin. He knew some of the food. But there was no one for him to speak Mandarin with.

Does your mother [speak Mandarin]?

My mother spoke all three dialects. My mother was very intelligent. She could speak Cantonese with my nanny. She could speak Shanghainese with her family. She could speak Mandarin to other people. That's obviously one way where we wouldn't understand what she was saying—I only spoke Cantonese, because my nanny was Cantonese.

Growing up we had basic foods. I don't know. A lot of rice, a lot of weird things that I would get packed for lunch. You get that a lot when Asian people speak of going to school and getting made fun of because their lunches smelled. I think I had a lot of them where you just wanted to fit in; you just wanted a bologna sandwich or something like that, and my nanny tried, but sometimes it would end up really weird. Then when she left, it was me fending for myself. We had a Filipino housekeeper whose food was sometimes inedible, so I started cooking. I would cook for my father and me; my father was edging towards retirement, so we spent a lot of time together.

You mentioned you had one sister in Hong Kong. Do you visit?

I used to visit a lot, every summer, especially when my niece was born, and then I started going to college, and then that stopped.

Have you been there recently?

The last time I went was four years ago, when my niece had her baby. It was Thanksgiving and that's the last time we went.

Now I'd like to touch on how you ended up in Las Vegas. What was your story about moving from Reno to Las Vegas?

I moved from Reno to Pomona, California, to go to medical school. Then from there I had to do a residency, so I ended up in Spokane, Washington, for one year for an internship, and I really didn't know what I wanted to do; I needed to find the rest of my residency. I interviewed at a couple of places, and I ended up here just because it was close enough to Reno, but far enough away; so that's how I got to Las Vegas. I stayed just because it was a good place to build a practice and be fairly successful and not have to worry so much. I think one of the main reasons is Dr. [William] Evans and Dr. [Gary] Mayman, just building a base and a community and knowing people. I think that's very important in medicine: it's not just being one man alone on your island, it's having that network of being able to call Dr. Evans or call Dr. Mayman and say, "What do I do with this kid?" or, "Who would you send to?" And I still do it to this day. I text Dr. Mayman and say, "What pediatric person would you send to?" You don't want to be alone on this ride.

Touching on alternative medicine and how you have a DO [Doctor of Osteopathy] degree, would you say that your father influenced you into pursuing that type of medicine?

Yes and no. From an early age, I wanted to be a physician like my father. But then, when I turned fourteen or so, I didn't want to do medicine anymore, but my mother drove me into it. Being Asian, I was going to be a doctor, and there was no way about it. I remember especially a big fight about it, and I really had no choice. I don't know if my father wanted me to be a physician anymore, at that stage of the game, because they had a lot—not so much hardship, but they had a big legal fight in regards to alternative medicine. I would say it was in the '90s, where they were being prosecuted, they were being brought up against all these fraudulent charges from the FDA for a very long time, and they ultimately won that case. My father was over it by that stage of the game. My mother was very... It was a lot, and I think it broke up their marriage. My

father was older than my mother, too, and he was towards retirement age. My mother still wanted to be in the fight, and she was very much a champion for what she did. She liked to be the center of attention, and she liked to be the healer. I think, when she had to retire, that broke her will.

Alternative medicine, I truly believe that there are certain things that are good about it. I did not choose to go down that path fully because it's a very difficult fight, and I don't think that I have it in me.

Could you explain the difference between a DO and an MD?

A DO is a doctor of osteopathic medicine. We go to medical school. We do four years of medical school with the same core classes and everything else. We go out on externships to different places in our third and fourth years. We do residencies, whether they are allopathic, which would be the MD route, or the osteopathic route. But in osteopathic school, you also learn the basic osteopathic manipulative techniques, so the “form versus function affects your body” type of thing. There are some DOs that go fully into the osteopathic path, where they do the manipulation, craniosacral, other osteopathic manipulative techniques that are a bit more than chiropractic techniques, but they also have that medical license behind them, too. I just don't think that everybody has that skill, because not everybody should be touching someone and trying to fix them that way.

Now I'd like to touch on Las Vegas and how you've seen the city grow. What are some of your fondest memories of Las Vegas, and what were your first initial memories of moving here?

I remember it was hot. When we moved here—I moved here with my ex-husband at the time—I think it was a good place to start. It was still a big city, but, yet, had a small-town feel to it at that

stage. That would have been in '99. It was starting to sprawl out. It was easy enough to get to places. The traffic still wasn't terrible. For me, the big draw was you could get on an airplane fairly easily, park, get to your plane, and be gone, and it was still inexpensive to fly out to anyplace. Driving to California is easy enough. Driving to Reno is not easy enough; it's very boring. But it was just an easy enough place to live, with a good tax structure. I had a good residency. I still have friends from residency that I see often. One of my best friends, I've known her since residency. I think that that's been important.

What has changed, obviously, is the growth. Again, back to this whole tenet of being networked, Las Vegas is a place where I've been able to build a business, but I also do a lot of things with people on the Strip—entertainers, being connected in that area—and I've been fortunate enough to be able to do that. When your name gets out, you do a good job. You don't blab on social media, "Oh, I just saw so-and-so and we're best friends," or any of those types of things. No. They [the Strip performers] are people, and they need privacy, and I'm here to provide a job. If I continue to maintain a good job, then they'll pass my name onto somebody else. I've had the pleasure of meeting a lot of the singers and other people connected to them on the Strip and connected behind the scenes, so that has been good for me. Not everybody has that opportunity in this town. I have people asking me, "Are you able to get me tickets for this or that?" just because I have those contacts, and it's nice, sometimes a pain, but it's nice. I've met people in other industries that—let's say I lived in Omaha—I would [otherwise] never have met.

Now I'd like to touch on some cultural traditions. Did your family practice any cultural traditions that you remember growing up, such as Chinese New Year?

Chinese New Year, yes. My mother was always busy with work, and my father was always disconnected from his heritage, but Chinese New Year was a big thing. Obviously, my siblings,

especially my two sisters that grew up in Hong Kong, brought a lot of culture, and then my nanny being Chinese. I think that's the biggest one. My sister still celebrates the Festival of the Dead and things like that. I can't think of any other major holidays that were super important. The best thing about Chinese New Year is the red envelopes and the money. I love eating Chinese food, although I like Korean food better at this stage of the game. Those types of things. I have a good friend that is half-Chinese, and so we try to keep up with some of those things, but it's difficult. It's going to be less and less. I have a daughter that's half-Chinese and half-Italian, so she's not even going to know some of these things, just not being in it.

What is your most favorite thing about living in Las Vegas?

No bugs. I can't say that I hate the heat. I'm not a fan of the superhot, but I'm inside 99 percent of the time, so I'm thankful to come to work and it's air-conditioned versus my home, which is not. The lack of bugs. Again, it's easy enough to fly out of here and go someplace if you want to. It's less expensive than going anywhere else except to Reno. It's very expensive to fly to Reno. But it's an easy place to live. I live out of town. I drive twenty-five minutes to work and it's not in traffic 99.9 percent of the time. I live on a piece of property that's way away from a bunch of people. I have no neighbors. I have the opportunity to do that here, and my tax structure is good.

Now I'd like to touch on some of the more recent events that have been happening in society. Have you ever experienced any racial and discriminatory practices against you or your family or any of those experiences you remember growing up?

Yes. We used to go to Chinatown every weekend in San Francisco when we lived there.

Obviously, you don't experience racism there, because Chinatown is Chinatown, and it's all Chinese people. I don't think that I really noticed things up until I was older and traveling more, and I still experience it to this day, where I will go into the store—whether it be [because I'm]

Asian or whether it be that I have an aura that says, “Don’t help me; don’t talk to me”—I will not get greeted, I will not be helped. It happens to this day. I think it happened last week. It’s good now because I’m very... I don’t like to be talked to outside the office. I would rather go get what I need to get, pay, leave the store, and have an easy-peasy transaction. But it’s very blatant when I walk into a store and a friend will be behind me, and I will get no greeting and they will come in and the staff will say, “Oh, hi, how are you?” It’s irritating. I’ll walk out of here; I’ll be carrying eight hundred boxes—and that may not be a function of me being Asian, it’s maybe just a function of people being rude or inattentive or whatever—they won’t help me; they won’t open doors. I make it my purpose to be as kind and pay-it-forward, let’s say, as I can. If someone is struggling, I am going to help them pick something up. If someone needs to have a door opened, I will do it. I will stand for five minutes if I see someone coming and they need help, because that’s the way I am. Hopefully, it changes their minds to do something for someone else, and if it doesn’t, too bad for them. If someone particularly makes me angry or something because they’ve blatantly done something, then I wish that they get herpes or something, but I don’t intentionally go out to do anything to them; they’re suffering on their own.

What about your experience with the medical field or in education when you were in school?

Education-wise, no. I don’t think I ever had any. Again, I think that I’ve always been somewhat of an isolationist. I don’t need a whole lot of friends. I don’t need to be the center of attention. I kind of grew up as an only child. I don’t have a great relationship with my half-brother who is the closest in age to me, because I think he’s an idiot because he’s a terrible person. But see, I don’t need that adulation. I don’t need to be coddled. I don’t need to have ten friends telling me how awesome I am. Going back to the question—what was the question?

It was about discrimination.

I get discrimination, again, to this day where patients will call up and say, “I want a doctor that speaks English.” It’s 2021. It blows my mind, but people are terrible. In this town especially, where a majority of the doctors are Middle Eastern or Indian or Asian. Yes, there are a ton that are Caucasian and there’re a ton that are not. There is a joke about the Indian Mafia or the Pakistani Mafia or the Iranian Mafia in regards to doctors, because there are so many physicians that are of certain ethnicities, and they all refer to each other. I do that somewhat, but only if that doctor is a good doctor. If they’re a crappy doctor, I’m not going to do it.

A lot of those "Top Doc" magazines, if you look at them, it’s the same doctors over and over. Early on in my career, I thought to myself, *Well, I am a good doctor, why am I not in this?* It’s because it’s nepotistic; doctors vote for other doctors who refer to them and who they like, but not necessarily because of their skills. I’ve had doctor’s wives [as patients], I’ve had doctors come to me, and people have said, “Well, that’s the highest compliment.” If someone is going to bring their family member to you, then that means they trust you. I’d rather have that than be in a magazine. And then I look at those names in the magazines, and I think to myself, *What is happening?*

How about in relation to COVID-19, did you feel a heightened sense of discrimination towards you in your experience?

Towards me? Not with my patient population. I do think that patients were afraid, and I did not close my doors. We may have shortened our hours because we weren’t busy, but people need care whether there is a pandemic or not. I know a lot of doctors’ offices closed for a long time because they were seemingly afraid. But I couldn’t. I don’t like telemedicine. I know that there’s a place for it, but there’s a reason why I need to look in your ear, look in your throat, or listen to

your heart and lungs. You can't necessarily do medicine that way. I've had a lot of patients, even before the pandemic, go to Minute Clinic or have Teladoc, and end up here, anyway. To me, that's a waste of time. If you can't just come to your doctor... I know I'm busy, and patients complain that they can't get in. All right; that's a whole different issue. But you need to be seen, you need to be touched. I think there is a big component to that as a physician.

Did I get discriminated against during COVID? No. Patients were afraid and didn't want to come in, because, obviously, we didn't know what was going on. But I was still here. I had patients come in this year and say, "Well, I didn't know you were open." Well, there is something called a telephone. I don't understand. All you had to do was call.

I know growing up there are a lot of superstitions that can get passed on with culture.

Asian cultures, yes.

Yes. "Don't sleep with your hair wet, or you'll get sick." That type of thing. How do you feel about those? What kinds of cultural superstitions were passed down from your parents?

None from my parents. Probably more from my nanny. My mother was very superstitious and had a psychic that she would call every five seconds if something wasn't right. "Can I buy this house? Can I buy this car?" or whatever. That type of thing. But I think I was more pragmatic and I take after my father more in regards to logic and reason versus superstition and that type of thing. I don't think I grew up with a whole lot of that. The number four, though, was one of them. The number nine. But then, growing up, people would tell me other things. My mother didn't like the color green, but that was her issue, not mine. Everything had to be red.

KP: I could open it up to your questions now.

NC: I just wanted to ask if you've noticed any generational differences between your generation, your parents' generation, and even your daughter's, if you've noticed anything.

Work ethic in certain generations and just basic logic and reason, I've seen it shift a couple of times because I take care of a lot of teachers, and I'll ask them from year to year, "How are your students this year?" or, "Are they dumber?" There was a time where the kids were dumber; it was very difficult for them, and then it's starting to come back again, because I think people are realizing we can't keep raising our kids like this. I don't know how my daughter is going to turn out. She is a free spirit and we butt heads already, and she's six, so I'm going to be taking a lot of heavy drugs later in my life. But she bounces back. I think she's a fairly intelligent child, and I talk to her like an adult most of the time, so that's different. I think that you have a lot of parents that are older when they have their children, too, so that's going to make a difference. I think we're going away from raising everybody with everybody getting medals just for "stepping out of bed," where that's going to make a difference. I think we're swinging back to having a more reasonable childhood and a more reasonable population that has life skills. Personally, in this office, there is one person that we hired right out of high school, and she didn't know where to put a stamp on an envelope; this was just two years ago. Those are life skills that she did not get taught. I don't know why. I don't know what they teach in school. I haven't been to school in a very long time. Yes, not knowing where a stamp goes on an envelope; that's a big deal. Not knowing how to make change; that's a big deal. New math. But I experienced that in Hawaii one day, where someone had to use a calculator to make change from fifteen dollars from a twenty, or thirteen dollars. It wasn't some round number. Yes, that's what I notice generationally.

Generationally from my mom to me, my mom was thirty-six when she had me, and I was forty when I had my daughter. Is there a generational thing? I would think so. But, again, I think

I'm a different type of mother than my mother. My mother had already had four kids and had a very hard life growing up, had to really fend for herself. I grew up very privileged. I'm not going to deny that. There is not a lot of hardship that I've ever experienced in my life other than fighting with my mother. But she always wanted the best thing for her children. She may not have been a lovey, snuggly mom, hug me, tell me I'm the greatest in the whole wide world. No. But she always provided for us and she continued to provide for us even now, after she's passed, and I realize that. I know my sisters, who are twenty years older than I am, are still having issues that she didn't love them or should have coddled them. I don't know. Everybody is different in how they handle things, and I'm sorry that they didn't feel that they were loved, but she did love them in her own way and they have to realize these things. Or they don't.

Do you see yourself teaching your daughter Mandarin or Cantonese?

I don't know it [well] enough. I'm terrible at it. My nanny is ninety years old and calls me, and I am struggling, struggling to say one word. I speak dim sum, and that's even hard; it has to come to me because I don't eat it enough. My partner doesn't eat real Chinese food, so going out to eat with him, I'm not going to get real Chinese food. I'm going to get Panda or P.F. Chang's, which is totally different. My daughter likes Chinese food. I would like to immerse her more, but I don't like to put her in a whole lot of activities because I'm lazy—I'm always at work—driving her here, or there, or whatever. Maybe if I had some more effort, I would have put her in Chinese school, but who would she talk to? Her father speaks Mandarin a little bit, so he wanted to do it, but I didn't. Again, at the end of the day, after work, it's a lot.

NC: Do you have any mentors that you can think of that have helped you along your journey to becoming the doctor you are now?

I think my father. My father was a very caring man. My mother in the fact that she—not mentored so much, but her career was a lot to her, being important was a lot, and having people look up to her and listen to her. I saw that a lot of her family was that way also, because when she couldn't help them anymore, she didn't know what to do with them, and then they just kind of went by the wayside. I've tried to see that in my own career in taking care of patients. Patients always want to know what's wrong with them, and can you fix them, and can you do this. There are certain periods of time when you can't. I think seeing that from my mother taking care of people and—not kicking them to the curb—but not being able to do anything more. I like to tell my patients, "I am not the one that is able to help you. There are other people that might help you a little better." I don't want to kick them to the curb, but they also have to see the fact that not everyone can help them, and there are other reasons why they may be feeling that way. Having that experience from her translates to me as a physician as a learning experience.

Mentors... There are great doctors here, like Dr. Evans, Dr. Mayman, not to keep coming back to them, but they are so caring. Having other people in the community here be supportive and care about their patients; that's been good for me. Growing up I had a principal that loved me. I was her favorite. Whether she was a mentor or not, she was very important. I only hope for that for my daughter. Whether that happens or not, I don't know. I had a professor in college that was like that. She was great. I can't find any information about her. I went to UNR. But she was very much a mentor during that time. I can't say that of anyone in medical school. That wasn't a great time. Residency...internship...there were some good doctors along the way, but not to the point where I'll call them up and say, "Hey..." I can't think of one.

NC: Thank you.

SE: I would like to ask about growing up Asian in Reno. What was that like?

I don't think I really...it was there. I don't know if it's me as a person just knowing that I was Asian, but nothing to me was ever different, nor do I have that personality. Even to this day, do I care about other people? Yes, as a teenager you care to some degree. I think there was one other Asian girl that I knew of, and I didn't meet her until my senior year in high school, and that was at girls' camp or government camp or whatever the heck that was—Girls State. Is that still around? You go into some camp in Carson City for a week. That was the only time, and I met her there. Her parents owned a Chinese restaurant in Reno. I had never met her before. We didn't really bond just because we were both Asian. There were not a whole lot of Asians. There were a lot of Filipino people, and my parents had all the Filipino nurses in their clinic. Did I necessarily interact with them? No. Were there other Chinese people in my class at Manogue? No. Some Filipino kids. So, no, not a whole lot of Asians.

We would go to San Francisco a lot initially, when my mom moved [to Reno], but then that tapered off, so not a whole lot of Asians. Did it affect my childhood? No. I didn't feel like I was lacking, because I didn't grow up in that environment, either. I didn't go to a Chinese school in San Francisco. I didn't grow up in a super-Asian cultural experience because my dad wasn't that much into it. I don't feel like I was missing anything because I didn't know. It was different when I would go to Hong Kong in the summers. They would make fun of me because they didn't speak English and I spoke Chinese like an American person, an A-B-C [slang for American-born Chinese]. Okay, so what? It's hot and sticky here, and I get to go back to Reno, where it's dry.

There are cultural differences when I speak to my niece or I speak to my sister in Hong Kong. "This is the way that things are, and this is the way we act." I'm like, "Okay. I didn't grow up that way. You can't blame me, and I'm never going to live here." Just having to do this way

or having to obey or the work ethic and all that kind of stuff. I've lived the path that I have lived, and have I missed out? I don't think I have.

SE: Your mom pressured you to go into medicine, but not your dad?

Yes. My dad was over it by that point in time. He had seen medicine and he had seen just how hard it was. It's still hard. It's hard to be a doctor to this day with the insurance companies. My parents chose not to take insurance, and so that was the environment that I grew up in, because insurance won't pay for alternative care, especially in the '80s. He knew how hard it was, because he had worked in the regular realm and in the alternative realm. He was retiring and I was there to hang out with him, and I think he just didn't want that for me.

SE: When he was in the military, he would have practiced more traditional medicine, correct?

Yes.

SE: What made him choose the alternative path?

I think that he saw better outcomes. He saw that people could get... especially with coronary artery disease rather than something that was not invasive. The only thing they had then was bypass surgery. I don't even think the stents were around at that point in time for coronary artery or peripheral vascular disease. When chelation came around, you could infuse the patients and they could get rid of these plaques and get better. He had studies and he decided that was a better, safer path for a patient to have. He had patients for thirty years. He had patients that followed him from San Francisco to Reno, and I even saw them after my father was long gone. After my mother stopped practicing, I would get some of her patients, people that were really loyal to them. They would have people travel from all over the world to see them. I think there was a picture of—I think it was Danny Kaye. One of the old-time actors came and saw them in

their San Francisco office. They weren't a flash-in-the-pan in regards to what they did. My father truly believed in it, but it was a hard fight, and he didn't want that for me.

SE: Was there a community in Reno, or was he by himself on that path?

He was by himself, but there were other alternative practitioners there, and they still are to this day, which I have an issue with. There's a lot of alternative practitioners here in Las Vegas to this day. Medicine is like anything else. There is enough business for everybody anywhere that you shouldn't have to fight against each other. But there's a joke: You have six doctors and eight different opinions. That's why no one can organize or unionize or anything, because everybody thinks they're better, especially doctors, because they're pretty egotistical.

SE: They've always been the smartest in the class. Your mother pushing you into medicine... What did you want to do?

I wanted to be a doctor from the time I was little. I always said, "I want to be just like my dad." Then at fourteen or so, I didn't know what I wanted to do. When you go through life and you always want to be a doctor you know nothing else. But really, you don't know anything else growing up unless you're exposed to it. No one ever says, "I'm going to be a systems engineer." What the hell is that? I like to travel, but was I going to be a flight attendant? I don't know. I don't like people enough to do that. I don't know what I wanted to do, and the world was open, but no one was guiding me in that path to say, "Your world is open and you can do anything you want." I'm not smart enough to be a computer person. I am not smart enough to be a writer. I'm not artistic at all, so those paths are closed. I'm not going to be a firefighter. I'm not going to be a police officer. What was I going to do? Is medicine easy? No, but I kind of know how to do it, so here we are.

SE: You mentioned the push because of being Chinese. Your siblings, did she push them as well?

No, because I was pretty much the only one she raised full-on from the time of birth or had constant contact with full-on from the time I was born until it was time to go to school. I don't know why my father's three boys—why my one brother went into medicine. He went into emergency medicine, and then he did alternative care, and I think he's doing ER medicine still. They are a whole different group. Then my mother's children, her two oldest daughters, after the divorce, were raised by their father when my mother moved to the United States. They weren't even necessarily raised by my mother during those formative years when they were little. Then she didn't get to see them until they were teenagers and they moved to the States, so that was difficult. But those are the things that people do.

People from the Philippines leave their children all the time to work in a different environment, because economically that's the only thing that they can do to help raise their families. They are separated from their families for years. Even my nanny. My nanny was a nurse when they hired her to raise me. She was with me for twelve years, and then she went and raised my niece and my two nephews for another twelve years in Hong Kong, away from her own family. These are the things that we do as people, as women, making money and taking care of your family, but it's to the detriment of your own family.

My mother raised me. She had the two girls and then she had another child who was raised by her father, and then she had a custody battle with her son's father and then they split custody. I would see him on the weekends. But we all lived in San Francisco, so that was a little easier. Then me. I'm the only child between my two parents, and I'm the only one my mother raised, so she had high hopes.

But the caveat to that is after I was grown and a doctor, she wanted me around more. Well, I have a career that you pushed me to do, that I need to do, so I can only do so much. There were a lot of issues there for a while. Things that she wanted, things that she could actually have, but ultimately—and because of everything that I have just said—I was the only one there at the end, when she passed away, too. Everything she put into me went back into her.

SE: You talked about your residency. You had one year in Washington and then you came here. Tell us about the residency here. How did that work?

I spent a year in Spokane, Washington, which was great, but very, very White and very—I think their religion there was focused on the family, so Fundamentalist Christian. I don't necessarily know that I was discriminated against, because it was Washington, but it was easier for me as an Asian than I think that it would have been for an African American. I was a little more accepted. But I really didn't care. I was there to do a job and I was only there for a year. Coming to Las Vegas was free, easy, and there wasn't a whole lot of discrimination at that point in time because it's Las Vegas. You see a lot of every group here, which I also liked.

The residency here, they offered me the rest of my residency. I didn't have to repeat anything, which is always great, because the internship year is not easy. It was a good place to learn because it was busy enough at UMC [University Medical Center]. The preceptors then were good. There are things that you learn in residency and there are things that you don't learn until you get out. How to code, how to bill, how to run an office—that's not what you learn in residency. It's not a business residency. It's a medicine residency. And they should have that [business courses], but, again, doctors think they know everything right off the bat and they don't. You get out of residency and you want to set up a practice. But you can't open the door. You've got a lot of money you've got to pay into the business before you can do anything—

credentialing, licensure. It's like when someone dies, you have to make sure you get twenty copies of their death certificate just so you have enough for everyone else; otherwise, it's thirty dollars a pop. Get you when you're dead.

SE: How did you end up setting up a practice in a casino? Tell us how that worked.

Initially, I think I did a year at Quick Care, getting some money in the bank and figuring out what I wanted to do. I was supposed to go into practice with a person I graduated with. I was in his office for a little bit of time, and I realized I can't practice with him. We're too fundamentally different. I decided that I was going to build my own practice. Then the vultures come out. My accountant at the time was like, "Oh, we're building a medical space. They're building the new St. Rose. You can get into this building easily and inexpensively," and all this other kind of stuff. Thankfully, my ex-husband helped me build out the office, which saved a lot of costs. But my rent steadily went up in the three years I was there, four years. It started at five thousand dollars a month, which is a lot for a doctor just starting out, to eighty-five hundred dollars a month when I left, which was not sustainable for me.

I made a comment to someone, which is ultimately how I got here. She asked me how things were going, and I said, "I'm not sure I can do this much longer on my own. I'm going to have to go someplace else." She spoke to her son who happened to be Mr. Marnell [Anthony Marnell], who was building a casino. She talked to him and he offered me some space. They've been very good to me. They are very good people. Unfortunately, they no longer own this casino.

He also wanted to build a pharmacy here, even before he ever spoke to me. They had a pharmacy upstairs, because it was going to save them costs for the employees, and people could play while they picked up their Viagra, or whatever they wanted to pick up. But that didn't work out. I just think they didn't have enough information in opening a pharmacy. Also, the pharmacy

didn't have the contract with their in-house insurance. That ultimately sunk them. They [the pharmacy] were gone within a year or two, and I am still here twelve years later.

I don't seem to be angering anybody enough for them to kick me out—the new owners, and they've been here for six years, I think—so things are going okay. I don't make ripples and I pay my rent. It's very good rent. I'm very thankful that they still allow me to be here. People still question the fact that, "Oh, you're in a casino?" It's space. It's nice that there is a deli upstairs. If I get hungry I can go upstairs. I used to go upstairs a lot more, but now there are months where I won't.

It was nice during the pandemic. They let me keep my office open because I was an essential business. They had it cordoned off, and they had the doors open for me during business hours. Casinos don't have locks, so they would have to padlock the doors when we left, which was crazy, because there are no locks on the doors when you walk out of here. The security guards had to stand there, lock the doors. I would call them. They had the parking lot cordoned off at the end of the day because yucky people would come in here and just do stuff. There were a lot of homeless people that came out during that time, people that would wander. It was great for me because it was just quiet.

SE: I want to ask about the Festival of the Dead. You mentioned that that was one of the things that you celebrated?

No. There is Qingming, where you're supposed to go and pay homage to your ancestors every year. I don't do that. I barely know when that comes around. My sister does because, again, she was raised in Hong Kong. Her husband passed away ten years ago. They recently went and did that. They went to the gravesite. My mother's grave is right next to her husband's. They burned the papers. There are papers you burn, you burn money, you burn houses, you burn cars so that

the people in the afterlife can have all these things. Once you burn them it's supposed to go there. She sent me a picture of this mansion that she bought for my mom with a maid and a car. I was like, "Is my mom going to be mad at me?" to the maids because that's what happened in life. They burn money so that they have things in the afterlife. I don't know if any other culture has that besides the Chinese. The Thais may have it. It's the festival where they go and celebrate their ancestors. I think in China, they will go and take their bones out and wash them and put them back and that type of thing. I don't think they do that anymore.

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

I don't know about me personally, but I think we want to know people's histories. We want to be able to connect. I think it's important to collect different people's experiences because we're all different. We get to our paths in different ways.

I've spoken to a lot of patients with this pandemic, and with all the terribleness that's happening, and with the pandemic, especially, that we should value life a whole lot more and value each other and be more kind, but that's not what we're seeing. We're looking for blame. This has opened up a whole can of hate in regards to a whole lot of things. We have all this Asian hate right now because of "Kung flu" and all the terrible things that have been said and how this virus potentially came out of China. There's not a whole lot said about the fact that this super deadly strain that went to New York was from Italy. No one is attacking Italians at this stage of the game. Now we're having people attack the Jewish people because of what's happening in Israel. We're always looking for someone to blame. It's never ourselves. We can't take responsibility, it seems. We always want to blame someone else for something that happened. We can't even put masks on without attacking each other, or washing our hands, apparently. It's a terrible thing that has happened.

Maybe my story is helpful for someone else. I don't know. It's nice to be interviewed and to share my story. It's always good to read a good story. Even though I've often thought about putting down my mother's story, I don't know my mother's story. I barely know my father's story. I can fictionalize it; that would make a good read, like Amy Tan or all those other authors out there, but I don't think I'm very good at that, and who would want to read it? I don't know. It's a distraction. It's a distraction from our own lives to say, "Oh, this person experienced something that I experienced somewhat." I listen to lots of podcasts, lots of murder podcasts. I listen to David Chang, the chef, and he has a Chinese friend that he talks to and about all the Asian kids going to lunch in school and they have the stinky lunch and the other kids make fun of them. Well, I think maybe that's less at this point in time. I don't know because everybody loves Asian food now. Everybody likes Korean food. Everybody wants to be different. I guess it depends on where you grow up.

KP: That is all. Thank you very much for sitting down to have this with us.

You're welcome.

[End of recorded interview]