

AN INTERVIEW WITH BRYAN CHAN

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

Claytee D. White
Director, Oral History Research Center
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PREFACE



“I came to this town in September 2004 not knowing a soul, went to a show, auditioned for a show I had never seen, ended up taking the job not knowing what it was going to entail, and from that fell in love with this city and took advantage of everything that it had to offer.”

Born to Robert and Anita Chan, Bryan Chan reflects on some of the cultural differences between his Chinese father and Filipino mother that have brought him to where he is today. Originally from San Mateo, California, Chan grew up in Pleasanton, California, where he attended a private Catholic school. Later, he would go on to graduate from the University of California, Santa Barbara, with a degree in communications.

His inclination for singing ever since he was a child turned out handy after his roommate told him about auditions happening for a boy band project television show. Although Chan did not end up in the band that was produced on the show, he ended up starting his own band, called LMNT, with a few other guys he had met from the show. As his boy band days waned, Chan

received another opportunity to go to Las Vegas, Nevada, to audition for a Chippendales show. Initially skeptical, Chan auditioned and witnessed the show, which immediately captivated his attention, and he cemented his life in Las Vegas. Since then, Chan has focused his attention on emceeing and hosting events for corporate clients as well as casinos in town, attracting and entertaining thousands of people a year.

Throughout the rest of the interview, Chan also discusses his real estate business, traditional foods, his daughter, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected his work. More recently, with the pressing issue of Anti-Asian discrimination, Chan comes at it from both a perspective of stereotypes and cultural misrepresentation as well as the physical violence that has manifested. At the end of the interview, he discusses a dichotomy regarding Las Vegas as being a place filled with both opportunities as well as dangers and absolutely loves the life he has been able to have as a result of that contrast.

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October 18th, 2022

in Las Vegas, Nevada

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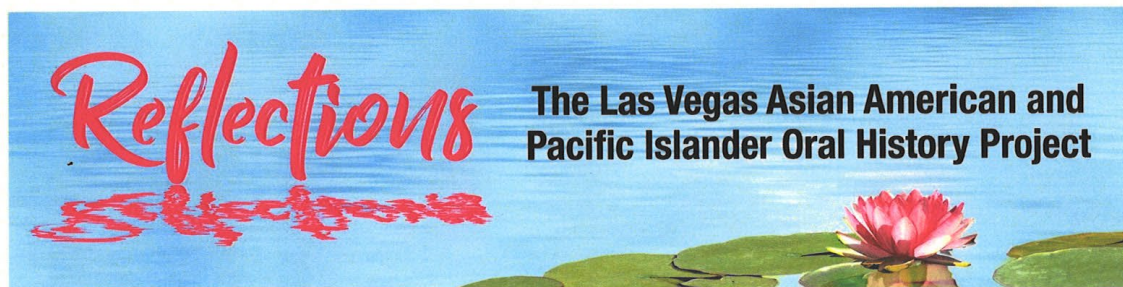
Going into college, Chan knew that he was social and wanted to work with people, and so he graduated with a degree in communications from the University of Santa Barbara. Chan also discusses reconciling his two different ethnicities. Although the two sides had different characteristics in their approach to life, they worked well together and balanced each other out. On the topic of cultural characteristics, Chan shares his views on stereotypes and how that plays into discrimination, as well as how he has felt discrimination come through in his career as an entertainer. Next, Chan retells the story of how he ended up in a boyband, and then later on his audition for Chippendales. From there, Chan immediately fell in love with both the show and Las Vegas, promptly packing his things and moving, all the while taking every gig that he could find.....9-21

Even though Chan had come to Las Vegas before on vacation, moving to the city gave him his first taste of the community he craved. In his eyes, the city has continued to evolve throughout his time here, getting better and better to attract more people. Moreso than ever, social media has also changed the way people communicate with each other, and has been especially beneficial in his line of work. Chan discusses his role in the casino industry and how hosting events drives business. He also divulges into his real estate business and watching the rollercoaster of a ride the Las Vegas real estate industry has been. Next, he touches on what it has been like to raise his daughter in the city.....21-30

As someone whose primary job is to interact and entertain people, Chan was in one of the harder hit industries at the beginning of COVID. He talks about primarily being concerned for his family and taking care of everyone, but also shares what the transition was like into hosting virtual events. Another challenge he mentions during this time was the rise of Anti-Asian sentiment across the country and his thoughts on the Black Lives Matter movement. On a lighter note, Chan recalls singing at an early age in the shower and how that prompted his later involvement with a gospel

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Chan touches briefly on subjects involving his family’s support, his grind in the entertainment industry, how social media has simplified many aspects of his job, and a video he organized with several other entertainers at the beginning of COVID. He concludes with the dichotomy of Las Vegas as a city filled opportunity and holes, but for those who understand Las Vegas, anything is possible here.....40-44



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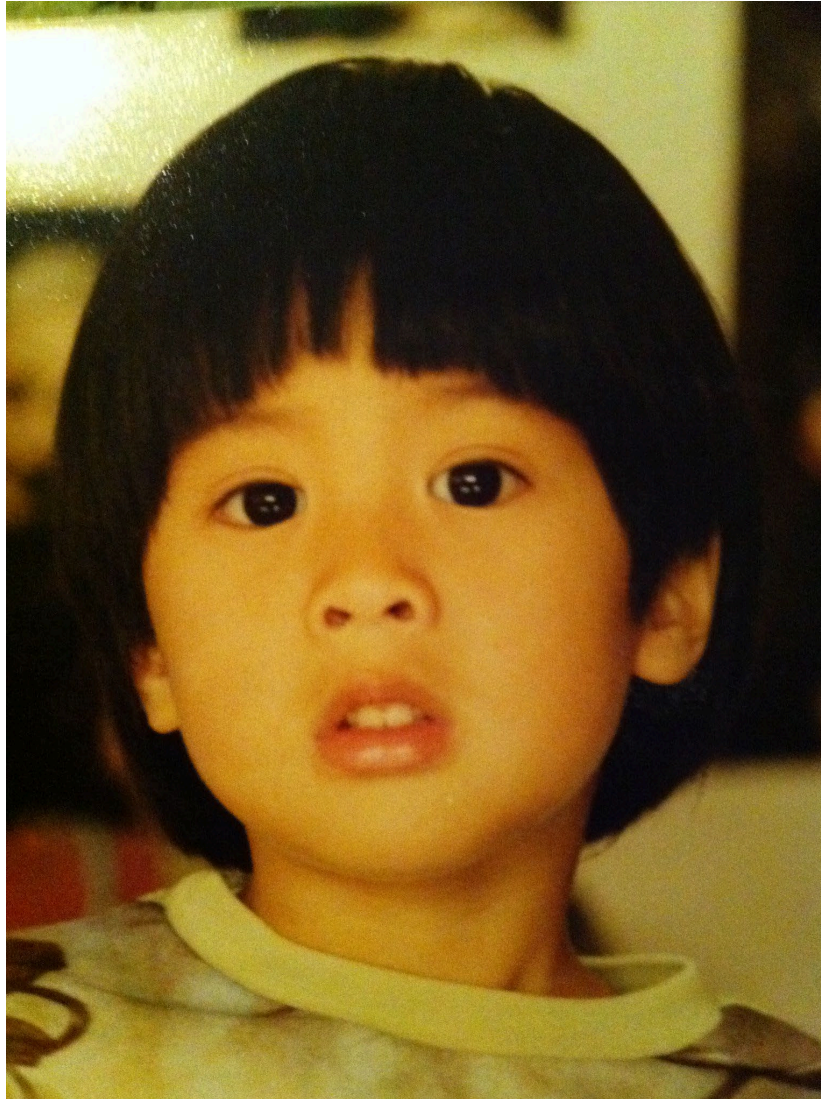
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Today is Monday, October 18th, 2021. I'm here today with Bryan Chan, Stefani Evans and Cecilia Winchell. I'm Vanessa Concepcion.

If you could just start off by spelling your first and last name.

My name is Bryan Chan; B-R-Y-A-N, C-H-A-N. I do have a middle name, Robert, but I don't use it.



Let's first start off by you telling us about your childhood. You can go as far back to your grandparents if you know about it; your parents. Just tell us some stories from your childhood.

I don't have a lot of stories about my grandparents other than of my maternal grandmother. My dad's parents, who I only remember meeting a few times, lived in Toronto, Canada. I'll start with them. My dad's side of the family is from Guangzhou, China, which is the countryside. I've actually been there. I went with my dad in 2003 just because I was always curious about that part of my family. I remember we had to fly from San Francisco to Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, we had to take a ferry that took us deep into the countryside of China. From there, we took several different buses, and then finally picked up by a distant relative of mine in a car. When I say he grew up in the countryside, up to that point, my idea of what a "countryside" was, was only from movies and television. You have to understand now we're driving down unpaved dirt roads, people are riding their bikes with baskets carrying vegetables and a chicken or...the things that you would see on television that I thought weren't still a way of life. I came to find out that's not only how my dad grew up, but it's so deep in China that that's still how they still live.

We actually went to the house that he lived in. I'm not good at square footage, but I will tell you that the size of his entire home, where him and his brothers and sisters and mother and father all lived, was the size of what my kitchen is now. There was no running water. You got water from a well. There was a fishpond that they used to stock fish. Again, these houses were very small, were really just big open rooms stacked next to each other. There was a place where you could stoke a fire. I just couldn't really imagine that life; that my father, who I knew at this time in my life; at that point I was in my thirties, had lived this way. It was incredible.

That's where my dad's family originated, to my knowledge how far back we go. While my father was growing up, it was a communist country, well, it was Communist China. They were able to escape from China to Hong Kong. Then from Hong Kong, they made it over to Toronto, Canada. From Toronto, a lot of his brothers and sisters stayed there, but some of them

one by one started to go to San Francisco, and so that's where my journey begins because that's where my mother met my father.

My dad got a job as a butcher in San Francisco because he was told that it was smart to be part of a union and have a trade. Being a butcher was a union and a trade. He had a little butcher shop in a corner bodega stand in San Francisco. My mother worked as a cashier in that store, and that's how they met.



Chan's maternal grandparents, Leonard P. Estuesta and Juanita Serrano Estuesta

My mother's side of the family is Filipino. Both of my grandparents were born and raised in the Philippines. My grandfather was born in Baguio, a city in Luzon, while my grandmother was born in the nearby province of Pangasinan. When my grandfather was seventeen, he was accepted into a college in Pangasinan, and happened to rent a room from my grandfather's family. He would go on to graduate and then make it over to the United States, where he was able to become a US citizen and serve in the US Army during WWII. During one of his R&R leaves, he went back to the Philippines and back to Pangasinan to find my grandma's older sister, so he could ask to marry her, but when he made it back, she had already gotten married. A family

friend suggested he marry Ninet, her younger sister (my grandmother's name is Juanita and her nickname was Ninet). There was a ten year age gap between them, and when my grandfather had last seen my grandmother she was seven and he was seventeen, so my grandpa only remembered her as a baby, but when he had made his way back fifteen years

They made their way from the Philippines to San Francisco because my grandfather served in the military for the United States. I guess at some point in there he got citizenship and then served in the military, and because of the fact that he served in the military, he was able to bring my grandmother over (there's a total of five siblings; my mother is one of five). Her three older siblings were born in the Philippines, and she was the first one to be born here in the United States. That was all in San Francisco, California.

I was born right outside of San Francisco, California, in San Mateo, on June 26th, 1974. That's where my story had begun.

Do you know anything about the immigration process that your parents went through?

A little bit, yes. There's a tale in my family that when my grandmother, my father's mother, was fleeing China and trying to make it into Hong Kong that the family was running from the Communists and they were shooting at them, and that a bullet went right past my father's head. He was being carried on my grandmother's back. The rest of the family was running alongside of them. Then the bullet went past him. Now, that's the story. I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what I've been told, and that's been in my family forever.

From the village that I know in Guangzhou where they were at, they somehow made it out of China into Hong Kong. How they escaped, how that happened, where that happened, I'm not quite sure. But once they got to Hong Kong, they stayed there for a little bit until they could figure out, how were they going to get to America. The goal was to get into the United States.

They couldn't, for whatever reason, go directly to the United States, but they had some family in Toronto. One by one, they would get people over to Toronto. What my dad tells me is that one person would go over to Toronto, get a job, make the money. They would be sending money back over to Hong Kong until they had enough money to send the next person over. It's like one person always leads, and they make it possible for the rest of the family to follow. From China to Hong Kong, from Hong Kong to Toronto, from Toronto to San Francisco; that's how it worked. One person would lead, and one by one they would all come over and follow. That person who led had to work, had to make the money, had to send it back, had to get a place where if somebody came over they could all stay. There would be three or four people in a little apartment because that's how it was. Once you got there, you had to keep working your job, but then help that person find a job for themselves, and now you had two people working, and both people would keep enough to live, but send enough back to bring the next person over. That's the traditional immigration story. Some people are lucky enough that they can all come in groups or as a family, but my family wasn't able to do that.

On my mom's side, my grandfather came over to the US and worked and made connections and had some family in San Francisco. I think him being in the military and serving in World War II for the United States in the Army really helped him build a big enough network where he could bring the rest of the family over.



Third Street, San Francisco, California

You mentioned San Francisco; that's where your story starts. I feel like that's really different compared to your family's process of getting here. Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood in San Mateo?

I was born in San Mateo. At the time we lived in a city called Daly City. Do you know it? Are you from there?

Yes.

(Nessa, the interviewer, is from Daly City). Forty-one Oceanside Drive is where we lived. I'm forty-seven, so for me to remember this is tough. That was my first home—no, I'm sorry. We had a house before that briefly, and then moved. The house I remember as my childhood home was 41 Oceanside Drive. I know there was a home before that in Pacifica where they lived while my mom was pregnant. But what I know is 41 Oceanside Drive; we lived there.



I went to school at Our Lady of Mercy. It was a private Catholic school. From there, I think it was third grade that my father got an opportunity to work the meat department or own the butcher shop in a bigger store in a town called Pleasanton, California, which is East Bay. It's about forty-five minutes from Daly City. That was where we moved and basically where I consider...when people say, where did you grow up? I say Pleasanton. They say, "Where were you born?" San Francisco. Where did I grow up? Pleasanton, California. Basically, from third grade all the way until I graduated high school was Pleasanton, California.

Pleasanton at the time, when we first moved there, my grandfather would joke and say, "It's like a one-horse town." Meaning that there was one stoplight on the main street on the main road, and there was nothing. If you look at Pleasanton now, if you look it up on a map, it is one of the most booming, most expensive places to live. Huge companies, like Oracle and other big companies are there. But at the time when we were there, there was really nothing impressive about it.

I was maybe one of five or six Asian kids in the community. I did feel a little bit different. I knew I was a little different. My family looked different. We made different food. Our traditions were different than when I would go to my friend's house. But I wasn't treated...I

didn't feel like I was ostracized. Luckily, I grew up in a pretty accepting environment. Our community didn't make us feel different or discriminated against.

I stayed there in Pleasanton for my childhood until I graduated high school and went to UCSB, the University of California, Santa Barbara. That was my first time leaving home, leaving the town, being away from my folks, and I grew up.

Did I skip too much of the childhood? Do you want to stay there for a little bit?

Yes, let's stay there for a little bit. You were talking about traditions, foods. What were those practices in Pleasanton and throughout high school?

I've met some Asian families that have super, very traditional traditions. The thing that I would say is that I can count on one hand the amount of times we would go out to a restaurant growing up. All the way up until I was eighteen, whenever we would do something, a get-together, it was always at somebody's home and somebody was always cooking and we were always there. If it was a birthday, if it was an anniversary, if it was a graduation, if it was a holiday, we were just at somebody's home, everybody cooks. Rinse and repeat; that's all we did. Whereas now, families go out to eat and they go to a restaurant, or they throw a big party and they rent a hotel. We just never did that. That wasn't our thing.

Food was traditional food for us. I come from a long line of very good cooks that know how to make amazing food that I grew up with that's hard to repeat and hard to find outside of that.

We didn't celebrate Chinese New Year in a big way. I remember amongst the family we would give *hongbao*, the red envelopes. But that was the most Asian thing we celebrated. Now I'm so much more aware of my culture and appreciate those traditions. Now, not only do we

celebrate Chinese New Year, but we eat moon cakes for the Autumn festival and throw red egg parties when someone has a baby.



On the Filipino side, again, there's not any traditions other than the major U.S. holidays that we celebrated. That part of my culture, aside from Filipino food, I don't really have anything else that we do that I would say is traditionally Filipino.

My grandmother spoke Ilocano. She didn't teach it to my mother or the siblings, so they don't speak it, so it was lost. My dad speaks Cantonese, and he can speak it to his brothers and sister. I would always hear it when they were together as a family, but they never taught my brother or I as kids.

So, you have a brother.

I do, a younger brother, two years younger than me. He and his wife live in Walnut Creek with my two nephews. He owns his own law firm in San Francisco.

Moving into you went to UCSB. What did you major in, and what were your goals?

I'm almost positive I went in undeclared because I just didn't know what I wanted to do, and then I think by the end of my first year I decided on communications. That, to be honest with you, was just due to a lack of really finding anything that I wanted to do. I was always a social

person, and I always knew that I wanted to work with people. I thought that I wanted to get into the entertainment industry, more so in producing the big events and the big premiers and stuff like that. That had this big allure to me, and I didn't know how I was going to do that. I'm sitting here looking at all the different possible majors. It wasn't going to be math. It absolutely wasn't going to be science. Sociology, I was like, eh, I don't want to be a psychologist. I felt like, okay, communications is a broad enough thing where it's like, I'll figure something out. I was always one of those kids that you couldn't put into a box, and so when I was forced to be put in a box in college and decide on a major, I just chose a thing that I thought would suit me best.

Was it weird transitioning from...you said it was a Catholic private school to a university setting?

No. When I was in Daly City, I was in a private school. By the time I moved to Pleasanton in third grade, it was public schools.

I just had another question about being mixed. How did that go about with the Chinese side and the Filipino side, or was it more natural with the food practices being so similar?

For me, the reason I can't even think if there was ever a rub is because I think they blended together so seamlessly. My dad's side is very different than my mom's side. My dad's side, everybody over there is very...Ooh, and I'm being recorded, so let me just make sure I get this right...they're very forward thinking. I don't know if this is the right term, but I'll say business minded in the sense that they would think, *okay, what is this job? Is this job good? What is the return going to be? How is it...?* You know what I mean. Whereas my mom's side, I would say they would follow their heart as to what they wanted to do. On my dad's side, everybody felt like business, money, then family, maybe not necessarily in that order, but that was it. Whereas my

mom's side, it was more like, go out there; try something; do what you love; find something that you really like to do. Let me give you an example. Maybe this will illustrate it.

My dad's side, very loving. I absolutely love them. I feel like they would jump in front of a train for me if needed, but it's almost like it's an unspoken thing. I know it, and I've never not felt that, but it's almost like an unspoken thing. My mom's side, the Filipino side is hugs and kisses and "I love you" a hundred times before you leave the door, and you come back in the room and it's all over again. It's two very different...what's the word I'm looking for? I don't want to say mentality. They were just two very different cultures to me. They worked very well together, but my mom's side was very loving, embracing, more open to things, whereas my dad's side, I feel, was a little bit more straight-and-narrow, like "this is what it is." Love from both of them, absolutely. I don't want to be like, oh, I didn't feel it. That's not the case. Two very different sides of my family that seemed to work well for me.

Are you familiar with the model minority myth?

No. Tell me.

The model minority myth is a perception of how Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were seen by Americans. Basically, Asians work hard. They're mathematicians. Asians either went with this theory and was, "Yes, sure, I have these qualities," and use that theory to blend into society and be more accepted in other aspects. Are you familiar with these ideas of being perceived that way as an Asian American?

I would have said, yes, those are the stereotypes.

Yes, yes.

I one hundred percent have heard of those and know those, and I can definitely see some of those in my family, but not totally. I'm terrible at math. I'm a fantastic driver. Some of these

stereotypes that have come along, I don't know where they come from, but I don't necessarily subscribe to them. Is your question, do you think because of those, I just use those and blend in?

I was just wondering what is your idea of that and how has it affected your family, or has it affected your life or your family that you've noticed? Have you ever faced discrimination in your life?

I feel that discrimination is something that exists, and I definitely feel that I've felt it throughout my life on different levels, especially later in life being an entertainer. I think I've felt it because there is so much of the perception of looks or what a leading man should look like or what...I don't know if you want to jump ahead, but I was in a boy band. I was on a television show called *Making the Band*. It was a reality television show put together by some producers, the same people that put together the Backstreet Boys and NSYNC. They were going to document what it took to make a boy band for the first time on network TV.

I, on a whim, on a recommendation from a friend, when on this audition not even knowing what it was. Very much like this interview. Okay, let me just do it, sure. I ended up being cast in this television show. They took a group of us, bunch of finalist, flew us to Orlando, Florida. From thirty guys, they narrowed it down to seven, and those seven people went and lived in a house, real-world style, in Orlando, Florida. From those seven people, they were going to select a group, and from that group came this group called O-Town, five guys. I didn't make that group. I almost made it. The guys that didn't make that group, we went and made our own group.

The point in that story is that group was made up of four of us. There was an African American, there was myself, and then there were two Anglos, two White guys. I also felt to some degree that I was pegged as, well, he can't be the lead; we can't give him too many spots,

because we want the other guys up front, the White guys. That's a very specific point in my life where I remember feeling Asian, or feeling like I was being treated differently because I was Asian. There's other aspects of my life where I would say it didn't matter, or I definitely didn't feel it, but there are certain points, case in point, where I felt it.

Was it that communications that you were talking about that led you into finally delving into the entertainment industry? How did that happen?

Up to that point, after college—again, I majored in communications, I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do—I took the best job offered at the job fair at college, the one that everybody was gunning for because it paid the best. I was like, oh, let me just go ahead and get this. I was a buyer for Robinsons-May. It's a department store in California. I was in the men's collection department. I was a junior buyer, meaning that we would decide all the clothes and what we wanted for the next season and put that in all the stores.

Was that what I wanted to do? No. But that was the best job and the highest-paying job that they offered, and so I was going to take it. I interviewed for it. I got it. I was there for six months and a day, and I quit. I worked there six months so I could get my one-week vacation and whatever my benefits were, and I was out. I hated that job, and every minute of working in a cubicle for a big company. I knew that career and lifestyle wasn't going to work for me.

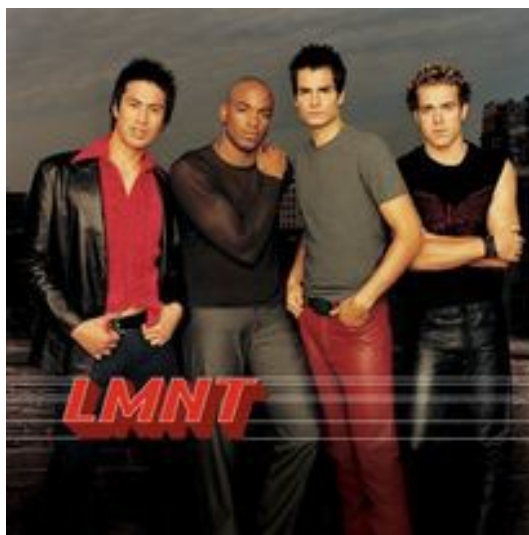
I ended up moving back to Santa Barbara. I started knocking on every door possible of companies that I knew produced events. I said, "This is what I want to do, so let me do it. I have no idea how I'm going to get into this. I have no connections. I have nobody to help me do this. But let me just start knocking on doors. I tried every major studio: Universal, Warner Brothers, Fox, Disney. Nobody would ever respond...I was one resume in a pile of however long. But I knew Santa Barbara because that's where I went to school, and I was comfortable there, and so I

was comfortable in those surroundings. I went back there and I just said, “Let me just find something here locally.”

I finally ended up finding a company that let me come in and intern for them, and they produced these big events. I started out literally picking up dry cleaning and taking out trash and doing every possible errand and then working my way up in that company.

While I was doing that is when I had a roommate that said, “Oh, by the way, there’s an audition. They’re trying to create the next boy band. You should definitely do it.” I always sing. I sing in the shower. I sing to annoy you. I sing in the car. Wherever, I’m always singing. People know that I sing. My roommate was like, “You should just go do this.” I went and auditioned for that and ended up being selected as a finalist.

Up to that point, I had never been in entertainment. I never wanted to be an actor or anything like that. All the sudden now, I’m on major network...ABC...I’m on television. I didn’t make the final boyband (O-Town), but I formed a group with some of the other guys who didn’t make it. We were signed to Atlantic Records. The group was called LMNT (pronounced element), L-M-N-T. We toured with Britney Spears. We have an album that was released. We had moderate success with a single called “Juliet.”



But if you weren't a tween or you didn't listen to Radio Disney or anything like that, you wouldn't know our song. It never went mainstream. Backstreet Boys and NSYNC and the other boy bands were up here, and we were right down here; we were just waiting to break, and it never happened. We did that for a while, and we toured, and I really enjoyed being in that boy band and living that lifestyle.

But then as things started to fade and I could tell, okay, things are going to start changing...what is my next move? I ironically got a call from a publicist here in Las Vegas, and she was a big boy band fan. I had met her at one of our concerts in California, she came up and introduced herself to us. She hung out with me and the guys for a bit, and I didn't think much of it. You meet a lot of people when you are in the music industry. I could tell we were starting to get booked less and less, and the writing was on the wall. How much longer can we do this? Ironically, she called me out of the blue and said, "Hey, I don't know what you're doing right now, but if you're interested, the Chippendales are looking for a singer for their show." I'm like, the Chippendales? A singer? In my head, none of this was making sense. I was like, "I really appreciate it. That's really sweet of you for reaching out, but I think I'm okay."

Then I'm thinking about. Timing is everything. I had already been thinking, what am I going to do? What's next? I was like, let me just call her back because I don't know how long this band is going to stay together, and how long we can survive as we get booked less and less and less. I called her back. "Tell me about it. What is it?"

She goes, "Well, it's here in Vegas. It's a three-month contract. In the Chippendale's show, there is a singer/emcee role, and I think that you would be great for it. The audition is this weekend."

I was like, "Um...okay. Why don't I come down?"

I flew into Las Vegas. I went straight from the airport to the Rio. This was five or six o'clock in the evening. I had never been in that casino. I had to find the theater. I went to the theater. She was sitting there with a couple of people from the Chippendales. She goes, "All right, great. Would you mind going up and singing?"

I was prepared. I knew what an audition was, and I knew that I would have to sing. I go up and I give them the track and I sing. I sing a song, and there's Laura Herlovich from PR Plus. She's a legend in this town. She is sitting there with one of her assistants and I think two other people from Chippendales. I sing a song. No reaction. I'm like, okay. They asked me to sing another song. I sing another song. This time after the song ends, I just keep going; I keep riffing off of it. The track has ended and now I'm singing a cappella. I'm just going for it because I'm like, you didn't give me nothing on the first song, so let me just keep going and see if you give me something on the second song. I'm just going on...(singing). It's over, but I'm riffing and running over it. I'm singing stuff like, (singing) "I hope you enjoyed yourself. I came all the way to Vegas." Then I just walked off the stage, kind of like I would do on a performance.

I come back out, and they're all huddled together, and they're all talking and whatnot. Then Laura comes up to me and she goes, "Would you mind staying for the show? Why don't you stay for the show? It's going to start in an hour. You can hang out in the back." I was like, "Okay." Still at this point, I'm not quite sure what I'm doing there. I'm not quite sure if this is the job that I even want or what this even is. I don't even know...listen, tomorrow if they called my band and said, "We're going to book you on a world tour," I would have done that, but I was like, let me just stay.

I'm hanging out in the back of the theater of the Chippendales. People start coming in. They're filling in the seats and the tables. Then all of a sudden, the show starts, and it starts with

this montage video, and you see all the guys one at a time, and they're all big and jacked, beautiful. They look like models straight out of a magazine. I'm like, okay. Then the curtains open up, and the music comes on, and the lights start flashing, and they're out in unison. I'm watching. Again, I've spent the last three years as an entertainer, touring the world, making music, so I know what a show is and what it takes. From the first eight count of them walking out, I was like...my jaw dropped. I'm like, this is incredible; this is not what I expected; this is an actual show; these guys are talented. They can move well and they look great, and these girls are going crazy. I was like, oh, this is it. By the end of that show, I was sold. I was like, oh, now all a sudden, now I want to be a part of this. You were chasing me, and now I'm going to be chasing you.

The show ended, and I just could not believe that I was here and had flown in. It was one of those moments in your life when you didn't expect something to happen, and something happened that you were so thankful that it did. They ended up offering me a three-month contract, and so I said, "Okay, I'll take it. I think this is amazing. I saw what this was, and I want to be a part of it."

I went back to where I was living, packed up my stuff, told my group what was going on, and headed out. I loaded everything up in my Ford Expedition and drove. By that point in time, my group had moved to California. I drove everything I had in my car from L.A. to Las Vegas where I rented a place. I remember going to rehearsals and getting into the show, meeting the guys, everything. It was a lot all at one time.

Then the show started, and the minute I was on that stage for the first time as part of that production, I was like, this is the most incredible experience. Even though I had done shows...I toured arenas with Britney Spears as her opening act. I was on a television show, on a major

cable network that was broadcast around the globe. Now I had even outdone all that. I was like, this is amazing; this is incredible.

After two weeks of doing that show, I went and bought a house in Las Vegas because I wasn't going anywhere. I was like, okay, I may only have a three-month contract, but this I feel is where I need to plant some roots and make my move. I ended up working for them for nine years after my initial contract expired.



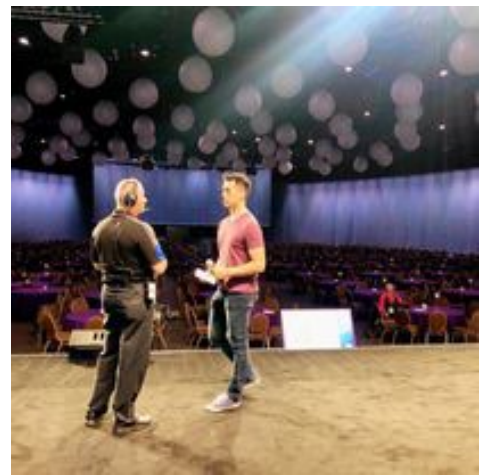
As I was doing that...this town is big, but it's small at the same time. People from casinos would go to the show as part of a bachelorette party or birthday, whatever brought them to the show, and they would see me, and they would be like, oh, this guy is pretty decent on a

mic; he can hold an audience captive; he's got a little bit of charisma. Then I started to get asked to do things outside of the show. "Hey, would you mind coming to host this event that we have? We need an emcee. We've got a charity function. We need someone to run our auction. Could you do that?" Sure. Then casinos started saying, "Hey, we've got our grand opening. Could you come and host this ribbon-cutting event, or could you come host this slot tournament?" Sure. Little by little, I just started taking every gig.

I didn't come from a lot. We didn't have a lot. I'm not going to say we were poor because I hate when people say they're poor and they're not poor. I've seen what poor is. We weren't poor, but we didn't have a lot. When you grow up and you don't have a lot, it's hard for you to turn work down. I took every gig. Even though I had a job at night that required me to be there from seven until eleven, my whole day was free. If this person needed me to come work a gig, I took it. Then I realized in Las Vegas there's this whole business of conventions. We're one of the biggest convention cities in the world. People were like, "Oh, you should get into conventions." When I first started, I didn't know what I was getting into. Why? Because I take the gig, and I ask the questions after, and that's not really a good way to do it.



McDonalds Convention for 5,000 people at Mandalay Bay



Corporate event in Long Beach, California

I remember my first convention gig was for CES. Do you know CES? It's one of the biggest conventions we have in town. We're known for it. Computer Electronics Show, I think. At that time it might have been called something else. My first gig was working for Microsoft in a banana costume. You couldn't even see my face, but you could see my arms. I stood out in the middle of these aisleways in the convention center, and I would pass out fliers to everybody that didn't want a flier. I was the annoying guy that was like, please take this flier because I've got a billion of these, and I've got to get rid of them. I did that and I remember that I was making twenty dollars an hour, and I thought I was going to be Richie Rich. I was working these gigs, an eight-hour gig in a costume, on my feet, passing out fliers that nobody wanted, making that check. Then at the end of that job, I would have a couple of hours of rest before I had to go and do my show. I would just double up. Any day I could do a double, I would do it. If I could do a triple, I would do it. The gigs, which started out every so often, in addition to Chippendales, came slowly but surely, but I understood how to work the system. I knew, okay, I needed to submit my resume; you need to go and meet this talent agency; oh, you need to get a reel together; oh, I need better headshots. The more you are in the industry, the more you understand how to play it. If you're smart about it, when you're a hustler—and I think that has everything to do with the fact that I'm Asian and I grew up as my father's son and I watched that—I knew that I might not always be somebody's first pick, but I will always be the hardest worker out of the group. Sometimes when you're given the opportunity to prove that, it can overshadow the fact that you might not have been somebody's first choice.

Ooh, I feel like I just condensed my whole lifespan into that thing. Where should I pick up and give you a little bit more?

When you went to that audition, was that your first time in Vegas?

It wasn't my first time in Vegas. Before that I had known Vegas. I love Vegas because in college we would come here at least twice a year. That's what you do in college: You sneak off. From Santa Barbara, we would drive and come to Las Vegas and do things that you do in Las Vegas. I've never been a big drinker or partier, but I loved the energy. I have FOMO, so I'd always want to go when a group was heading to Vegas. But my experience with Vegas was always the Strip and that's it, and not only the Strip, but in the casinos, the blackjack tables and slots and that's it. I didn't know there were shows here. I didn't know there were nice restaurants. I didn't know there was anything past the Strip, as most people who are not from Vegas assume. What? There's a suburb? You have stores out there? Yes, we do. I didn't know that.

When I came for the audition, I still to that point really didn't know what Vegas was about. It wasn't until I moved here and was exploring the city and realizing, oh my god, these are beautiful communities and you wouldn't even know you were in Las Vegas; you would think that you were somewhere in Orange County, all these incredible tract homes, and the cost of living was so affordable. It was amazing. It was incredible to me. So, was it my first time in Vegas? No. But when I came to work for Chippendales that was my first time seeing Las Vegas for what Las Vegas was.

Could you go more into that? What is your favorite aspects of Vegas, and what has changed over the course of you being here?

I love the energy. I love the energy and I love the sense of community. After I left college and started my adulthood, I lived in L.A. I didn't feel a sense of community there. I lived in New York with my boy band. I didn't feel a sense of community there. Las Vegas was the first time I moved to a city, and I felt like I was building a community for myself. A tribe. I was meeting people who were going to be part of my circle. I felt people were looking out for me. When I say

after two weeks I bought a house, I was that certain of it. I felt that from the guys I was working with even though I had just literally met them, and I just felt that energy from the city. It was very welcoming to me. I think in the course of your life, whenever it is, when you get somewhere where you feel that that is your place and that place is welcoming to you and you feel safe there, then you stay there for a little bit, and you try to make a home there.

What has changed? This city, more so than most cities, is constantly evolving. We rely so much on tourism that we constantly have to be bettering ourselves and reinventing ourselves because our tourists don't want to keep coming back to the same attractions and the same shows and the same restaurants, so that's why we're constantly changing. I have seen things go up and down and up and down. I remember I watched hotels being imploded, new hotels being built, a stadium. When I came there were zero professional sports teams here. Now we have two.

What have I seen change? The culture to me, I feel, is still the same. I still feel that welcoming spirit. I still feel very embraced by the entertainment community and by the Vegas community in general.

I think I've seen things change in general, not just specific to Las Vegas, but the whole onslaught of social media has definitely changed the way we communicate with each other, people's perceptions of each other. For me personally, social media has been a fantastic instrument for my work. For my type of work, you always want to be on everybody's minds. When I do a gig, it's posted. It's not just because, oh, I want to post a great selfie of myself. When I post about a gig, when I'm working at Wynn, I want Cosmo and Aria and Bellagio to see that I'm working at Wynn to remind them, oh, that's right; he's an emcee, he does big events. The more you can stay on people's minds, the better and the more work you get. Evan Louie, the person that recommended me for this interview, knows me through friends, but really he knows

me because I do events, and I've hosted several events that he was a part of, and he was just part of a network that uses me a lot.

How we network and how we communicate and how I personally promote myself has definitely changed. Before, you'd have to go to an audition. You'd have to physically be there. Now you can send a tape in, or I can send somebody my reel, or I can point somebody to my Facebook page. It's a lot easier for me to try to get work, and now I'm not just restricted to Las Vegas. I don't have to travel to New York for that audition. I can send them a reel or point them to my digital stuff.



Pictured above: Chan singing for a charity event, Las Vegas

Pictured right: Live stream emceeing for a corporate event



On the topic of social media and entertainment industry, what are your perceptions of gambling and the gaming industry in general?

My perceptions of it?

Yes, your perceptions and specifically that a lot of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders partake in gambling and those type activities.

Sure. My role in the casinos, the majority of the work that I do for casinos are to host their tournaments. I'm sure you understand and you know the premise of a casino is to make money, and the way they make money is to bring people in to play. People come into play on the perception that they may walk away with more money than they came in with. I get brought in at, I would say, a higher level. When the casino is going to host an event, it's because they want to attract people to come in. They want to give people a reason to come into the casino, and so how do they do that? They create something. They host an event. They throw a party. They create a tournament. "Hey! Come on in. It's totally free. You're going to hang out with us for five hours, and you're going to have a chance to win fifty thousand dollars." Of course, you're going to come in, and a whole bunch of other people, with the thought being that you're going to come and enjoy yourself, and then even if you don't win 50k, you'll go sit on one of their live tables or one of their live slot machines and put your actual money in there and hopefully give it back to them. That's their thought.



Chan hosting an event at Jacks Casino in Cleveland, Ohio

When I host these events, my job is to make it as fun, as inviting, as memorable as possible, and so I'm an extension of that casino. I don't work for them directly because I'm not an employee of MGM or Caesars or Wynn, but they bring me in to basically enhance their event. They provide amazing food. They bring in entertainment. They've got an emcee that's going to lead them through this whole thing. Their whole idea is to basically get them in to their casino so they can gamble.

I know the mentality of a gambler because I now have done this since 2005, so sixteen years. I know the difference between a slot player and a baccarat player versus a craps player and a blackjack player. I would say that some of the biggest ones are Asians, and not only Asians, but Asians that travel in from the Far East. These casinos have a department called Far East Marketing specifically to cater to that market. When we have an event like a Chinese New Year that we know is really important to those Asian gamblers, we will turn out and switch over the décor in that casino to cater to that so that the Asian customers feel comfortable in that casino. We will switch the menus over to dim sum when it doesn't normally have that. We will make sure we stock up on Peking duck when we don't normally do that so that when you come to Vegas, you're like, "Oh, I need to go to that casino. I need to go to that restaurant. They've got the best..." The Asian market is incredibly important to these casinos, and I see that firsthand, and I see the amount of money that is spent to cater to them to make sure that they want to come back over and over again.

You talk a lot about hosting, taking these odd-end jobs, any gig that you can take. What are you doing now, most recently? Are you still hosting?

Same thing. Here, you want to know what my weekend was? My weekend started out at Wynn, hosting an event for them. Then I went over to Allegiant Stadium to host with the Raiders. On

Saturday, I was the host for the Nevada School of the Arts Gala at the Nevada Room. Then I had to go to my daughter's fall festival and volunteer for that. Then last night, I was over at Virgin Hotel hosting an event over there as well.



Chan hosting the Broadway Bear charity event

I work for several different agencies here in Las Vegas. They all book me out. Sometimes it's a casino event on the strip and sometimes it's a corporate event for a company that's come to town. There's a big corporate convention right now for Oracle, and so I worked an event for them, one of several events throughout the city, last night. I gig. We call that gig life (#giglife) which means you basically don't ever have a permanent home, but you just kind of work for everybody. It's one of those things that I don't think a lot of people understand if you're not in it. I can see it in your eyes right now, you're like, what does that mean? How do you pay your bills? Well, you just go out there and you take whatever gig is possible. You're basically a contract worker. The technical word would be *1099 contract worker*. But if you can get in on it, and you do a good enough job, and you have a big enough reach and a good reputation, you will constantly get booked. There is no shortage of events and trade shows and openings of casinos in Las Vegas. People are constantly needing to hire and book people.

My main source of income is my gig work. I am also a realtor. I'm a third-generation real estate agent; my mom did it and my grandmother did it. It's kind of in my blood. When I first got

to Vegas in 2005, I was like, let me just go ahead and get my license, because the real estate was booming at that point. I have just continued to use that as a side hustle to continue to make money, so that's what I do now.

You're a realtor now, and what has that been like?

Listen, I have watched the crash and burn of Las Vegas, and I have seen the rise from the ashes like a Phoenix. In 2005, the market was so hot. Literally, people were camped outside of those new builds, trying to get a home, and by the time you wrote a contract, and by the time you closed on it, your home had gone up in value five, six, seven percent. People were making money. People were getting homes when they had no business getting homes, putting zero down and not having the money or the income to really afford it. It was a really crazy time for real estate in Las Vegas when I first got into it. Then I watched the whole thing just come crashing down. Nobody crashed harder and faster than Las Vegas. I saw it go up, I saw it go down, and then I watched it recover. Over the last year, we are one of the fastest growing markets as far as your equity than any of the major markets in the United States. I've watched it. I've watched that whole thing. There is no better teacher than experience. I've watched feast. I've watched famine. I've gone through all of it. I'm a better person for it. I'm smarter for it, and so now I know how to work those situations strategically.

For me, real estate was something I got into just because it was part of my family's history, but I love the aspect of getting somebody into a home. For most people, a home will be the biggest single investment of your entire life. For me, I take that seriously. I think that's really important, especially if it's something that's going to be your forever home, or you're going to raise your family in it, or you just got married and you're going to start a new life. I take that to

heart, and it brings me no greater pleasure than when I can get somebody into a home of their dreams.

Has there been a lot of Asian Americans moving in, like in the suburbs?

Oh my gosh.

Can you tell us a prime example of just...?

In 2020, for whatever reason, you wouldn't think that there was a pandemic going on, but by the end of that year, the Las Vegas real estate market was booming. I would say the peak was maybe March, April, May, 2021. You couldn't keep a home on the market. If a home went on the market, it had multiple offers that day of people wanting to buy it. A majority of those that I saw—I don't want to speak for the market, but what I saw—were a lot of Asian investors because I feel that those Asian investors saw an opportunity, wanted to capitalize on it, and got in. They were coming in and they were paying cash. They were beating out anybody else that didn't have cash. I just saw them seize on a great opportunity.

You also mentioned your daughter. What's it like being a father in Vegas?

It's so funny because I was just talking to somebody about this last night. My daughter is twelve, and she's got a school dance this weekend. She's in middle school. Homecoming for most high schools was last weekend, so she's going to have her dance this weekend. The dress that she wants, I feel, is too short. It definitely is too tight. Everything a typical dad would feel. I'm kind of going through this thing, and I'm having a conversation with a colleague of mine, a woman, and she is saying, "Listen, I totally get it. You're totally justified. You're right. But you live in Las Vegas, and we have exposure here to so much more than somebody in say, Tuscaloosa, Alabama." When we drive down the Strip and this taxicab has got a woman's ass hanging out, or we drive down this road and there's an advertisement for a strip club, my daughter has grown up

with that. She was born here in Vegas, and she's seen all that, and so that is normalized for her. On the one hand, there's nothing I can do about that. I've got to accept the fact that that's how she's grown up.



Pictured above: Chan and his daughter Mia attending WOW at the Rio

Pictured right: Mia Chan, 5 years old



On the other hand, I always question even though this city has been fantastic for me, and I don't know if I could ever do what I do or be as successful somewhere else, am I doing an injustice to her by raising her here? At the end of the day, I always say that she's going to be okay; that me as her father figure, as her role model, as her example just needs to steer her in the right direction. Even though she is being exposed to a lot more than I think if she lived in another city, I'm going to compensate for that by being a little bit more vigilant on explaining that that's

not normal life. We're not going to judge that. That is what it is. But I don't want you to think that that is normal.

That's interesting. Now I want to get into something a little sad. It's COVID. I wanted to ask, how did COVID affect your work, your family? It was a hard toll on a lot of people, especially Asian Americans because of the whole discrimination that was going on.

Yes, absolutely. February of 2020, I had a trip. One of my clients wanted me to go out to London and host a trade show for them. At the time we already had reports of what this was going on in other parts of the world. I already am a germaphobe. That's just my inherit nature. I was already paranoid about that, and paranoid about traveling. This is February 2020. I went and I got a mask and stuff. At the time people are already starting to feel it. It hadn't hit the U.S. at that point. I remember, and it's on my Facebook, I went to London, and I was the only person wearing a mask on the plane at that point. I went there and everything was business as usual. You would think everything was normal. There wasn't a high alert at that point.

By the time I came back, it had hit the U.S. That was the beginning of March. March 16th was the day that Vegas shut down. It was a Friday. I remember picking my daughter up from school that day and thinking, I don't think I'm going to have you come back next week. I don't know what's going on. It was either later that day or the next day, but March 16th is when I think we got the notice to shutdown; that's when the announcement was made by the governor.

For me, for somebody who makes the majority of my living off of live events, obviously everything I had that was booked from March all the way to the end of the year was cancelled. I saw my calendar go to nothing. Honestly, I wasn't even concerned about that. I wasn't worried about the money. My first concern was my family, my mother, who also lives in Las Vegas, and

my daughter. I said, “Everybody come to my house. Mom, move into my house. Everyone is going to stay here. I just want everybody together.”

I was the person that was walking around the grocery store with my cart full of the bottled waters, like overflowing. I remember some girl—I had my daughter with me—some woman looks at me and is like, “Ha, the apocalypse?” I just kept walking. I was like, I’m not going to give you any of these waters. It’s like, yes, the apocalypse is coming, and me and my family will be hydrated. I stocked up on the toilet paper. I was one of those. If you couldn’t find any at Costco, I’m sorry. I had maybe two or three of the big packs. Listen, I was the guy that was going to make sure that we were taken care of, and I didn’t want us to leave that house, period. For the first two weeks, nobody left the house. Nobody in or out. Then when the fresh food started getting low, I was like, okay, what are we going to do? I went out to the grocery store, and I would stock up on everything. Shelves were bare because everybody was scared. I got whatever I could and came home. Anything that was nonperishable sat in the garage for at least four or five days. Any of the fruit, I was the one of those people that washed the fruit and sanitized it when it got to the house. I watched that video on how to sanitize all the fruit. The clothes that I wore came off in the garage, and I changed. My thought was always, let’s be overly cautious, and if we’re doing too much, it’s better that way than the other way; I don’t want anybody getting sick. That’s how it affected our lives. Obviously, as time went on, I eased up a little. I was always overly cautious, but I eased up a little as time went on.

Within the first three weeks, I was like, okay, now we’re here; what am I going to do? What can I do? Let me back up. A couple of weeks into it, I was like, let me do something. I’m going stir crazy in this house. As an entertainer, you’re used to people, and you’ve got to give that energy out, you can’t hold it in. I called my friends and said, “Let’s do something. Let’s put

a video together. Let's do 'We Are the World.'" I got everybody from their homes to record a part, a line from the song "We Are the World," and then strung it together on my laptop, put it on social media and blasted it out. I'll send you a link to it so that you've got it. I basically got the entertainment community to come together and sing "We Are the World," and put it into the universe. The post said, "Dear World, we're all in this together. Love, Vegas." That was one of the first things I did before I jumped into work from home mode.

Shortly after that I'm like, okay, what am I going to do for work? Everybody is stressing out especially if you are an entertainer because we don't have unemployment benefits, and at that time nothing was going on to resolve that event. But I will say that I started calling all of my clients and saying, "Hey, I know that we had to cancel that show. I know you had to cancel that meeting. But what if we do it virtually? Do you want to go virtual?" I got some pushback at first, but then they were like, "Okay. What would that look like? How do we do it?" Me, who is not very technologically advanced, I had to figure out how to work Zoom, I had to order a new computer because that old computer was not going to hack it for this, slowly but surely, I started to get my clients to come back via Zoom and hosting their events from my living room. Then I started posting about it on social media, and people were like, "Oh, can you do my wife's birthday party? Can you throw a Christmas party for us?" All of these things started to come up. My business transitioned from doing live events to doing them virtually, and that carried me through the pandemic.

As far as watching how Asians were being treated during COVID...I don't even want to repeat some of the things that led to it...but watching the president at the time say things like Kung flu I felt was such a divisive and ignorant statement at a time when I felt like we all really needed to be there for each other, and this is not the time to start doing any of this. It was

heartbreaking, it was disappointing, it was infuriating, especially when I saw—everybody saw the clip of the woman who was attacked while walking in New York, and she was Filipino, and, of course, I just saw thought of my mom and my aunts. I don't know if I was walking, at that point in time, around in fear as much as I was walking around with anger, which was dangerous because I felt like I was so angry about it that that could have been a trigger. Had that been directed my way, I probably would have reacted a lot more severely than I normally would have. I saw communities reach out. I saw a lot of support for the Asian American community on social media. At that point, we still weren't out and about. We were still holed up in our house. You wake up and all you do is you scroll. That's all you could do because you couldn't walk out and see and talk to people. But I just was watching that and feeling like, where is this going to go? How far? Then I would see another story of somebody getting attacked, and then another story. It just started to build, and I felt like...to be honest with you, now that I look back on it, and now that the words are coming out of my mouth, I guess my personal feeling is that I definitely should have done more. I don't know what I could have done, but I do realize that I was so worried about the health and safety of my family and taking care of everybody that it led to probably some inaction on my part. I'm saying that because had that not been the case, had we not been in a pandemic or worried about being locked in our homes, I probably would have been out protesting or being a more active part of the solution.

On that topic, what are your thoughts on when the Black Lives Matter movement came to the forefront with everyone talking on social media, all these topics came up? How did you feel seeing that?

I definitely was very pro Black Lives Matter. I saw the George Floyd video. I remember watching that clip over and over again, and watching him just say, "I can't breathe," over and

over. I'm an empath, so I absorbed every ounce of that. Then to watch the community rally together and watch it spur so much conversation, it basically united, I feel, a large part of the Black community, but then it also united the opposite end of that who felt like that that wasn't justified. Once again, in a time where I feel like everybody should have been rallying and coming together and putting focus on an issue that I've felt like had long been overdue, people were still in that mode of, I've got to protect my family first. I felt, once again, even though it got a lot of attention, it probably would have gained a lot more momentum from everybody else had everybody not been struggling to just save themselves. Despite all that, I thought that that movement was such a big moment in the history for the African American community and something that definitely was a turning point for them as far as people at least recognizing or bringing a lot more awareness to something that people may have felt was not a big deal. No, it's a huge deal. It's a really big deal. It one hundred percent, absolutely, needed to be addressed and talked about.

I'm going to let Cecilia or Stefani, if you guys have any questions that you might have wanted to ask before we ask you to explain why you think your interview is important to collect, if you guys want to ask a question.

CECILIA: I just had a couple of quick questions. When did you start singing?

My mom will tell you that I would sing at the top of my lungs in the shower, always. I would sing in the shower because I felt like the shower was my safe space. Come to find out that my mom and the whole family, they would all just listen to me and gather around. Then when I came out, they wouldn't say a single word. My whole life growing up—listen, I've got a loud voice, and I'm a little obnoxious. You can only imagine if I'm singing at the top of my lungs, having a full concert in there, you probably heard it from every corner of the house. I say that because my

daughter does the same thing, and literally she sings from the shower and it fills the house. My mother will be like, “That’s what you used to do.” It wasn’t until I had my daughter and my daughter was doing it did I realize what went on. It’s like that moment in *Finding Nemo*, when Dori puts it all together. All the sudden, all the pictures flash and you realize, oh my god, I was singing all that time, thinking that nobody can hear me, and the whole time everyone was listening.

When I got to college, I was always singing in the hallway. I guess something must have happened in college where I felt free to do that. A friend said, “You should go join the gospel choir, because they’ve got an amazing music program and a gospel choir here at UCSB.” I was like, “Eh, okay.” Again, you suggest something to me, and I’ll explore it. I went and auditioned for it and got in. Again, it was like, “Oh my god, this is what it’s like to sing, to have music as part of your life, to have somebody instruct you on it.” Here I am singing a four-part harmony in a huge choir of a hundred and twenty people. I thought it was the greatest thing. So the first time that I sang, not professionally, but formally, would have been in college.



Chan and his mother, Anita Chan

After that, when I auditioned for that reality show to be in a boy band, again, I had auditioned, but I don't read music. I don't have a formal musical background. I just sing. A lot of people sing from their head and their heart, but I only sing from my heart because I don't know the theory of music. I don't read music. I don't play an instrument. That's where I got my start. Now it's just an inherit part of me. I think it took all of that time to get over...I must have had a fear or an insecurity to sing in front of my family because in my earlier days, I just wouldn't sing in front of people.

How strongly do you feel connected to your AAPI identity?

It's a huge part of me. There is a part of me that I don't always recognize it because, again, we didn't have all of these big traditions, and so I feel like the biggest connection to my cultural identity and to my Asian heritage is my family. I always feel that when we are together, when we're celebrating, when we're interacting with each other. On a day-to-day basis, though, it's one of those things that because I grew up not surrounded by a lot of Asians, I just always feel like I kind of blend in. Maybe that's a good thing; maybe that's a bad thing. But it's not until I'm with a group of people and someone will make a comment, usually in jest, like we're at a Chinese restaurant, and someone would be like, "Bryan, what should we all order?" Then I make the crack back like, "Why are you asking me?" When it's pointed out, all of a sudden the reality hits me and I'm like, that's right, I'm the Asian one. But most of the time, probably because I have such a strong personality, people don't really...In the example I just gave, it would be amongst a group of friends. If I'm amongst a group of people that I don't know, I think I have such a big personality that people would think twice before making an Asian crack at me, so I don't always get that reality check. Does that make sense?

Yes.

Most of the time, I feel I blend in, but I always know that I'm Asian. I'm so proud of that culture and proud to be Filipino and to be Chinese and proud of my heritage. I don't think that's the case with everybody as far as being singled out for it or being picked on. I think my height also has something to do with it. I think it's easy to be the target of something when people feel power over you. It's easy to make fun of that person or make a comment or make a joke or make a crack or make a dig when there is no fear of somebody retaliating against you. When you have somebody that's bigger, that's a little bit more intimidating, that's a little bit more bold, that's out front, you think twice about making a derogatory comment about someone's race, even in

jest. I feel like I've always had that on my side because I'm a little bit bigger in stature and I've got big voice and I carry a lot of confidence with me.

STEFANI: *You talked about how food is an important part of your—*

The most important part.

Even better. Tell us what foods bring you back to your childhood.

In the Filipino culture, we have this thing called adobo. My grandmother was the cook, *the cook*.

When we got together, and there was usually close to twenty of us, everybody brings a dish. It didn't matter what anybody else made because everybody wanted my grandmother's adobo.

When I would go visit her and she knew I was coming, she would make a pot for me, and she would say, "Do not eat this. This is for Bryan." Her pancit, which is a noodle dish, is another thing that I grew up on and always reminds me of home.

Everybody in the family would try to replicate her dishes, would literally watch her. She tried to teach us, and we physically would write it down. We would video it. We watched every move. To this day—my grandmother passed away in 2013—nobody can replicate it. Nobody could come close. Everybody swears that she must have done something when we weren't looking to make her cooking so amazing. Anytime somebody makes it, the comparison is always back to grandma. When we get together, Cousin April will be like, "Oh, I made adobo," and everybody will eat the adobo. We're just looking at each other like, it's okay, but it's not grandma's.

Lumpia is another thing. It's a Filipino egg roll. The women in my family, my grandmother, my mom, my aunts, would all get together and spend the day making big batches of lumpia. We'd freeze them and bring them out for special occasions.

It's rare that I see any of those dishes at a restaurant but sometimes I'll see it at a pot luck or someone talks about it and it makes me smile and think about my family. On my dad's side, my dad is such a great cook. My dad can cook anything. Especially, him being a farmer butcher, he knows meat. There wasn't anything specific that my dad makes that's his dish. My dad just cooks everything, and he makes everything well. I remember the day that he was teaching me how to make chow mein.



Left to right: Mia Chan (daughter), Earl Chan (nephew), Robert Chan (dad), Max Chan (nephew), and Bryan Chan

He was like, "I want to teach you how to make chow mein." He taught me the steps of taking the noodles and putting it in the wok and letting it boil, but don't let it get too soft because we don't want soft noodles. Don't try to do it in big batches. Try to break it up and do small batches and then combine them at the end. How to sear the meat. My chow mein to this day doesn't hold a candlestick to my father's, but when I make it, I always think of him and the day that he taught me how to cook it.

I eat everything. I'm constantly eating out, which is ironic now because, I told you, we didn't grow up eating outside of the home. But now with my lifestyle, I can't and I don't have time to cook. The times when we get together and I get to actually sit down and enjoy a meal that

somebody in my family has prepared is now a treat for me. It's one of those things where you look back on it and say, "God, I will never take for granted when we can get together as a family and people can cook," because I just don't get that experience that often.

What's your daughter's favorite?

I'm so embarrassed because this is going to be on the tape in perpetuity. She is the pickiest eater, she is. She doesn't like any sauce. She doesn't like any gravy. Everything for her is very plain. It's a good and it's a bad thing. I can feed her Top Ramen, the one in the plastic wrapper that all the college kids out here probably eat because they're on a budget, I can give that to her every day. She likes chicken with the seasoning packet and maybe a tablespoon of vinegar, and that's it. But don't let her see a speck of that green onion or anything...she won't eat it. She'll put it to the side.

When she was a kid, we would go to Chipotle because I like Chipotle, and she would get the kid's meal. The kid's meal comes with a taco, a scoop of the beans, and a scoop of the rice. She would not eat the rice because it had the cilantro in it. I would sit there and try to pick out all the green. Do you know how much cilantro they use in that rice? I would try to pick out the cilantro so she would eat it. Then I wised up and realized that if I mixed the beans and the rice and stirred it up, she couldn't see it, and then she was fine. But my daughter's favorite food, she'll tell you, is just chicken and rice, plain, which is a shame because when we go to family functions, and somebody, even though it's not my grandma's, tries to make the adobo, she'll pick at it. My grandmother passed away when she was three. She won't ever know what that experience was like for me. Hopefully, one day I can replicate it, and she'll know, or I'll make a batch and be like, oh, this is as close as we can get to what grandma's tasted like.

You've had so many different changed in your career.

I know.

Who can you think of who has mentored you along the way?

I didn't really have a mentor especially in my family because I think the path that I chose was so different than anything anyone in my family was familiar with. I'm the only person that's an entertainer, and they all think that that is the greatest thing. I try to tell them, it's not as great as they probably think. There are some not so great parts to it, too, like lots of rejection, struggle, and politics. There have been a lot of people in my life that have guided me. I've always gotten support, one hundred percent. My family was always one hundred percent behind me. They've been the safety net and gave me the ability to go out and feel like I can do anything because I always knew that if I fail, I could count on them. I didn't want to do that, but I knew that if that ever happened I would have a place to land and people who loved me.

As far as a mentor goes, I didn't have one. I didn't have one that said, "This is the industry and here's how to make it." I went to the school of hard knocks where, like I told you, when I got here, little by little I would try these gigs, build up a skill set, gain some experience, and create a network. I've been blessed by people approaching me with different opportunities, and then from those opportunities, proving myself to create success, wealth, and more opportunities. I'm talking a lot now, but usually in a new setting I'm a listener. I'm the one that sits and observes. I want to observe as much information as I can. I want to know who all the big players are. I want to see somebody else do it so that I know how to do it. But I never had somebody say, "Hey, come and let me take you under my wing." But I hope I can be that for somebody else.

You mentioned how the way you get gigs has changed because of social media and stuff. My question is, has it been easier to, say, send in a reel or something like that because you're already known in the field, or would it be just because of the growth of social media?

I think social media does so much to help me promote my work with a fraction of the effort it would take otherwise. If I go do something amazing, I'm taking a picture of it, putting a video up, and people are going to see that. People are like, "Oh, I didn't realize. Oh, he's an auctioneer; he can do auctions. Oh, he does weddings; he's a wedding officiant. Oh my gosh, he's a singer, he could do all these things." Then I start to get the DMs or the calls or the referrals. This was a perfect example: I came to you through Michael's wife who knows me as an emcee and was like, "Oh, he's also Asian and great at interviews..." I feel the networking ability, your ability to use social media as a positive networking thing. A lot of people don't. I use it for my business, and I think it's served me really well. If you look on my pages, you're not going to see the plate of food I ate at the restaurant, which is great for some people, but that's not going to help my business. I try to let my social media act as my marketing and my branding departments, so I'm very cautious and intuitive about what I put out there. I want people to know what my skillset is. I want people to know the level that I play at. I want people to know the clients that I work for because if they know that I'm working for a Fortune 500 company, if they know if I'm working for Home Depot, they'll assume I must have it together, because they wouldn't just hire just anybody. I could go the route of going out there and sending my reel out, because I'll definitely do that to people who don't know my work, but I feel like constantly putting myself out there on social media is basically like advertising that I don't need to pay for.

Who were some of the other entertainers who participated in your video, the "We Are the World?"

Are you familiar with the entertainment industry here in town, the locals? Kind of sort of? I'll tell you their shows, and you'll probably know their shows. I had people from Magic Mike, people from Chippendales, from Original Chaos, Divas, Fantasy, Tenors of Rock, Cirque. I just know people up and down the Strip, and so I just made all those phone calls. I think when I send you the video, you'll probably recognize a lot of faces...If you look up on YouTube "We Are the World, Las Vegas," you'll see us.

How many participated in that?

There had to be at least twenty-two of us, I think. Listen, everybody worked from home. They had to record on their phones. It is what it is. It's not a Beyonce video. It's definitely not a studio-produced thing. But the sentiment behind it of we're entertainers, let us entertain you the only way we can, and let us give you a little bit of hope at a time where everybody is scared and frightened and we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Out of everything that I did during COVID, even though I pivoted my business into something really successful, that was a highlight. That was a moment that I felt like I was able to bring people together.

Thank you.

This is the last question. Why do you feel your oral history is important to collect? Was there anything else that you might have wanted to mention that we didn't get to?

I think a takeaway from this interview is that I came to this town in September 2004 not knowing a soul, went and auditioned for a show I had never seen, ended up taking the job not knowing what it was going to entail, and from that fell in love with this city and took advantage of everything that it had to offer. I was smart about it because I think the flip side to this city is there is a lot of holes that you can fall down that are really easy to fall into because it's here in abundance. Drinking, gambling, the party lifestyle, and so many people do it, I don't think you

worry about that judgment. But I decided to take the route of: listen, work hard, show up with a smile, take advantage of every opportunity, don't say no and that's why I'm here. It blossomed into this amazing career that is very untraditional that most people probably wouldn't understand, but that I absolutely love. To me, it's a story of me taking a risk and following my heart and coming to Vegas and working hard at everything I did, and it has blossomed into an amazing career.

This is a town of opportunity. This is Las Vegas. This is where when somebody says they're a busboy to somebody who is not from Las Vegas, the person who is not from Las Vegas doesn't realize that that busboy is making six figures. The same thing goes for the valet. The same thing goes for the cocktail waitress. We're a town that's built on gaming and tourism, but...if you know, you know. If you're not from Vegas, you might not understand any of this. But if you are here in Vegas and you understand Vegas, you know that this is a city of opportunity.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]