

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAWRENCE CHIU HILL

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

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

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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

The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

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

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

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

PREFACE



“I’m excited to see what the next twenty years are going to be like. It’s really quite fascinating that in the middle of the desert you would have such an amazing variety of people and opportunities.”

Originally from Taiwan, Lawrence "Larry" Chiu Hill speaks about his experiences of living in Taiwan and the process of immigrating to the United States. First landing briefly in South America, his family would eventually land in Corpus Christi, Texas, where his father’s powerful enthusiasm for starting a new life would give him his unusual last name.

Similarly, his father’s interest in the gaming industry is what led to his family’s relocation to Las Vegas, Nevada, where his work at the Holiday Casino involved marketing to high rollers and starting mahjong tournaments. Following in his father’s footsteps, Hill also spent around twenty years working in the gaming industry while attending the University of Nevada, Las Vegas for a Bachelor’s degree in Political Science before transitioning into the legal industry. After graduating

from Boyd Law School, Hill started his own legal practice, Lawrence C. Hill & Associates, where he now specializes in the areas of personal injury, criminal defense, and immigration.

Throughout the rest of the interview, Hill touches on topics from food to cultural celebrations and his appreciation for Las Vegas. Deeply connected to the city, Hill's story is one that reflects all of the opportunities and unusual experiences that the city has to offer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Interview with Lawrence Chiu Hill

November 8, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

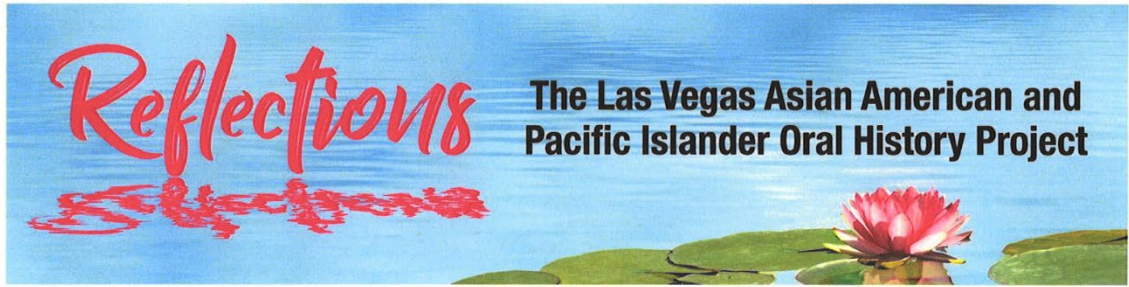
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell and Vanessa Concepcion

Preface.....iv

Hill begins with his memories of Taiwan and the process of immigrating to the U.S. After landing in Corpus Christi, Texas, Hill talks about the restaurant his parents owned, what it was like being Asian American in Texas, and why his father eventually relocated their family to Las Vegas, Nevada. He briefly touches on what he remembers of his grandparents, schooling in Taiwan, his first impression of Las Vegas, and how he has seen the city change since then.....1-7

After working twenty years in the gaming industry, Hill discusses what led to his career change into law and how he did it. After receiving his law degree from Boyd Law School, Hill recounts the process of starting his own law practice and how he helps out the community. He retells the story of how he got his unusual last name, “Hill,” and how that plays into his perspective on his identity. He continues to talk about what he enjoys most about living in Las Vegas, what it was like working in the gaming industry and marketing to high rollers, a memorable law case, and his favorite Taiwanese foods.....7-14

Hill continues to touch on miscellaneous topics including where his family first lived when they moved to Las Vegas, what schools he attended, how he would identify casino client, his father’s involvement with the casino industry working for the Holiday Casino and starting mahjong tournaments. Hill also expands more on his mother and how his parents met, how he has seen Chinatown affect the community of Las Vegas, and finishes with some last reflections on what makes the city special.....14-21



Use Agreement

Name of Narrator: Lawrence Hill

Name of Interviewer: Cecilia Winchell, Vanessa Concepcion
Stephani Evans

We, the above named, give to the Oral History Research Center of UNLV, the recorded interview(s) initiated on 11/8/2021 as an unrestricted gift, to be used for such scholarly and educational purposes as shall be determined, and transfer to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude the right of the interviewer, as a representative of UNLV, to use the recordings and related materials for scholarly pursuits. There will be no compensation for any interviews.

I understand that my interview will be made available to researchers and may be quoted from, published, distributed, placed on the Internet or broadcast in any medium that the Oral History Research Center and UNLV Libraries deem appropriate including future forms of electronic and digital media.

[Signature] 11/8/2021
Signature of Narrator Date

[Signature] 11/8/2021
Signature of Interviewer Date
[Signature] 11/8/2021
[Signature] 11/8/2021

Good morning. Today's date is November 8th, 2021. My name is Cecilia [Winchell]. I am joined here by...

Vanessa Concepcion.

And...

Stefani Evans.

As well as Lawrence C. Hill. Could you please spell your name for the record?

Sure. It's L-A-W-R-E-N-C-E. My middle name is Chiu. It's spelled C-H-I-U. And the last name is Hill, H-I-L-L.

Thank you. To start off, we would just like to ask you about your childhood; where you grew up; how you grew up; your parents; family.

I left the country of Taiwan when I was ten years old, and my family immigrated to Texas initially. We came to Corpus Christi, Texas, and my mom and dad had Chinese restaurants that my parents operated. I remember as a child always working in these restaurants with my mom and dad. As a family, we have always been together. I grew up working a lot even as a kid in helping out the parents and things like that.

As an Asian American in Texas, going a while back, in Corpus Christi, it wasn't a very Asian-populated town, so we were one of the few Asian families in that area that we lived in. In Texas, it was a very diverse area, but they just didn't have a big Asian population, so I grew up a little more conscious that I was an Asian American.

Eventually, my father, who has always loved Vegas and would take us to Vegas to do vacations here—eventually he had a good friend who invited him to work in Vegas, so he brought us to Vegas against my mom's protests. And we ultimately end up here, I want to say probably in mid-nineties.

I finished high school in Houston, Texas because we eventually moved from Corpus Christi to Houston, Texas, and then came to Vegas and went to undergraduate school at UNLV. Once we came to Las Vegas, I worked in various hotel/casinos for the most part of my career. I'm actually a practicing attorney now for the last twelve years, but before that I had a career in hotel and gaming, so that was really a big bulk of my life before I started practicing law. That's pretty much my childhood and formative years.

Do you remember anything from your ten years in Taiwan?

Yes. I remember reading a lot of comic books and having lots of snacks. I think I finished my second year of middle school before we immigrated. I have these memories of what Taiwan looks like when I was a kid. The last time I went back to Taiwan was probably about fifteen years ago to visit my uncles there with my mom. The whole city looks different now than the way I remember it when I was a kid, when I was eight or nine years old.

We lived in different parts of Taiwan. The capital of Taiwan is Taipei. It's a pretty big city, very citylike. My mom and dad came from different parts of Taiwan that's a little bit more rural, especially back then it was more rural. But now there were these places, they are not what I remembered them to look like, now. But I remember Taiwan was a great place. The people there are very friendly, and they're very eco-friendly. I think due to the climate there, they have great fruits and lots of green. It's very lush. They also call it the Island of Formosa because it's just not that big of a place. I remember that the people are very simple. I don't know if it's because life is more complex now, or just that Taiwan is simpler in the way that people live. But my impression of Taiwan when I was a kid was that it was a pretty simple, wholesome kind of lifestyle.

Do you know or remember anything about your grandparents?

Yes. On my mom's side, my grandma lived a long life. She passed away, I think, in her late eighties. I remember she was very paternal, but I didn't have too much memory about my mom's mom.

I do have more memory about my grandparents on my dad's side. They grew up in an environment at a time they were ruled by Japan, so they were more traditional in the sense that it was almost closer to a Japan type of lifestyle where they had to sleep on these mats that's very popular in Japan, and the doors were Japanese style where it's actually made of paper. My grandma and grandpa on my dad's side were kind of neo-Japan, I guess. It was interesting to me because they had different names that were not Chinese, and when I was a kid, I didn't understand why they had multiple names, but now I understand that during the time when Taiwan was ruled by Japan, they grew up in that environment, so they actually had Japanese names in addition to the Chinese names. It was always confusing to me as a kid, like why were there various references? But that was my memories of them. Again, they lived in a very primitive and simple kind of lifestyle. They were very big on Buddhism, so a lot of incense, a lot of fruits to provide for praying purposes. I remember that the food they cooked was very traditional. It wasn't like now where there's a lot of spice. They adhered to the more traditional cooking.

Do you remember what it was like going to school in Taiwan?

I really couldn't. I was too young. But what I do remember is that in the summer, even during summer break, you were supposed to do homework and turn it in at the beginning of the semester, and I was glad that we immigrated because I didn't do my summer curriculum. When my parents said, "Hey, we're moving to United States," I'm like, "Good, I haven't done my summer homework." I remember I was happy about that.

Why did your parents decide to come to the United States?

My dad has always been an adventurer. He was very big on risk-taking. He decided that United States was really where more opportunity lies, and he really wanted a better future for us where he didn't want us to be confined to just a relatively small country. He decided to make the leap not knowing how difficult this journey would be.

Do you know anything about what the process was like getting over here?

I remember we had to go to South America for a while, and then we went to California for a while. I remember we were in San Francisco for a while and ultimately Texas. My mom had some family in the U.S. at the time, one of my uncles, but that's all I really recollect about that process.

I remember that when I was a kid, just going to different places, I remember very long car rides because in Taiwan you can get anywhere within four hours. It's not like when I came to the U.S., what I saw in my dad's car as we were driving into another state, they were like twenty-hour road trips, and that was really a big surprise for me—how much you can be driving on that road.

You ended up in Corpus Christi, Texas. What was it like going to school there? You touched on it a little bit, but did you ever face any form of discrimination?

Oh yes. I was picked on a lot. Most Texans don't like a bespectacled little kid who is short in stature and didn't speak English that well. I would have to say it was good natured in a way. They would make fun of me, but it wasn't anything vicious. Every other day someone would ask me if I know kung fu or if I could fight like Bruce Lee, which I was able to do neither. Of course, they want to verify that, and that's when I would get into little fights here or there.

But aside from that, I made a lot of good friends. When you are kids, you don't really think about things in a racial way. It was more like we were all curious. I remember I had two best friends, Tom and Patrick. Patrick was a Black kid, and Tom was a White kid, and we were inseparable. We wrestled together. We ate together. We explored neighborhoods together.

As a kid, the name Lawrence was not a good name because when you're twelve and you have a name that's eight letters long, it's not taken very favorably. I remember Patrick one day, he said to me, "Hey, Lawrence, why don't you go by Larry?" Then I said, "You know, that sounds good." I started using Larry, and a lot of beatings stopped or diminished, so the name makes a huge difference. I've liked Larry ever since, so my friends will call me Larry, and people who don't know me well will call me Lawrence. One time I asked my father why he named me Lawrence, and he said that he was watching this movie called "Lawrence of Arabia" and he thought it was a great movie. It starred Peter O'Toole, I think, and he loved the movie, not knowing what a horrible name that is for a little Asian boy.

What did your parents do when they came over here?

Most immigrants, when you're not linguistically fluid and you have a limited skill set, you're confined by work that involves labor. But my parents were very entrepreneurial. They would open restaurants. Unfortunately, most of them were not very successful. They would borrow money and open more restaurants. We did okay. After a while, one of our restaurants did sustain itself, and that continued through my high school when I was in Texas, in Corpus. But most of the time, they were operating restaurants, and the restaurant business is a very tough racket. They still are, but back then without the Internet, it's even harder to calculate what kind of food you need, how much food you need to order, forecasting what the customer demand is going to look like. A lot of those logistics are just not feasible without a computer back then. What we would

do is we would just guess, and when we have too much food, we will take a loss; when we don't have enough food, then we could not satisfy our customers. I remember we were always working. We would open the store at six o'clock in the morning and then work until midnight. By midnight, you're scrubbing the floor, dumping out the frying pan, taking trash out to different places for disposal because with frying pan oil, you can't just dump it in the garbage; you have to process it and put it into certain confinement barrels and then take them to a disposal place. It was like that seven days a week, and we had some employees, but it was hard because when you're a small restaurant, you almost have to watch everything yourself. When an employee doesn't show up for whatever reason, then you have to do it yourself. I remember growing up and working a lot in the very physical sense. But part of it is that it brought us closer. We are a very close family.

After high school you came to Vegas. What were your first impressions of Vegas?

My dad came here before my mom and my sister came to Vegas. My dad was always interested in working in gaming, and he was in casino marketing and helped obtain high rollers' business to play at various casinos with his friend who worked at the Las Vegas Hilton at the time. When I came over here, it was really eye-opening because it was a big city back then, but it also had a small town feel where people were very friendly, traffic was light. People still had a western attitude about them, so it was informal, and it was pretty safe, in my opinion. I felt like my first impression was that this is going to be a fun place to live. I was too young to participate in any of the vices, but I felt that it was a big playground for people to come and be themselves in. I really felt like there was a sense of freedom and liberty when I came here.

How have you seen the city change during your time here since then?

It has definitely gotten more corporate. Even when I worked in the gaming industry, all the evolution and transformation made everything more efficient, but it also allowed corporations to take over a lot of autonomy that the managers and employees had. I'm sure that a lot of people complain that, hey, it was more fun back in the days. In reality, it really was more fun in the days. We got to know our customers better. We weren't so sensitive as to what the cost and benefit analysis were. Our job was just to take care of the customers as best as we can, and we had a lot of fun doing that. As I think back now, I just don't know which style was more profitable, but I did know as an employee we had a lot more fun. There was a real sense of camaraderie, not only within employees and management, also with the customers, and I really miss that about that industry.

Aside from that, I will also say that Las Vegas has become such a big town with the influx of population that it's not as safe as it used to be. In the past, I feel like we just went to see our neighbors and left our doors unlocked and didn't think anything about it. But nowadays, you don't get that sense of security because you really don't know who the people in the community are anymore.

How long did you work in the gaming industry?

About twenty years, roughly.

What led to your career change?

Into law?

Yes.

I think part of it is that I just wanted to do something more intellectual that was interesting to me on a personal level. It really wasn't because there's more money involved or a much greater future, so to speak. It's really more that I wanted to think. Practicing law and learning about law

allows me the opportunity to really learn more things, and it kind of opened my eyes to what a society is like, and it got me more interested in the community as a whole, I think. Also, I like connecting with people, and I've always liked that, but I didn't have the ability to help them. I feel like when I started working in the legal industry, I'm given more tools to be able to make a difference in people's lives, and I really enjoy that.

But part of it is that the gaming industry was changing at the time. I could see the writing on the wall that it was more number driven, and I knew that I wasn't interested in just a number driven kind of industry anymore. I really wanted to do something that is more impactful on a person-to-person level.

What was the process of getting into the legal industry like?

I was very fortunate because our law school here in Nevada, the William S. Boyd School of Law, they have a pretty high threshold to get in nowadays, but back then I think I was fortunate because I had decent grades and I did okay on the LSAT, but, frankly, being a minority really helped. Also, since it was a new school, there was this air of excitement that we were participating in something new. When I applied for it, I really didn't think I was going to get in. My undergrad degree was a little unusual; the journey was unusual because instead of doing your four-year program, it took me about a decade since I worked and stopped going to school for a while, and then I would take another class and stop going to school for a while. That went on for about a decade before I got my undergrad degree in political science.

I had a very unusual academic journey, but I'm really grateful that the gaming industry allowed me to do that because I don't think I would have been able to do that had I worked in another industry. If it were a regular nine-to-five job, I think it would be very difficult. Also, I was really fortunate that my employer at the time, which was Caesars Entertainment—I started at

Flamingo hotel, and then later, when they were acquired by Park Place Entertainment, I worked at Harrah's, and when Harrah's Entertainment merged with Caesars Entertainment, I was able to work in all the properties owned by Caesars Entertainment interchangeably—but they were very understanding that people should pursue their hobbies and interests. I was fortunate that I had a somewhat flexible schedule to pursue academic goals in addition to paying the rent.

What was it like starting your own law practice?

I think I graduated during the time when there was a depression, and that makes it hard to find a high-paying job. I was already making good money in the casino at that time. I was a casino marketing host, which means that my job was to interact and recruit high rollers. That was a very fun job for the first ten years, but after a while it became kind of redundant for me.

After I graduated, I looked around and I see that there wasn't a lot of opportunities, and I didn't want to take a pay cut, so I figured I would just rent a little office in downtown and see how that works. I was very fortunate that I had some coworkers and friends who needed legal assistance, and they reached out to me, and I just built it from there. It was a very unusual route because most of the friends I know were going to clerkships or working for other law firms. I think I just picked up a little business here and there and talked to older attorneys. Whenever I could, I tried to collaborate with more seasoned attorneys and see what they're doing and try to pick up their best practices, but I have always been entrepreneurial, and I think I get that from my parents that I wanted to own my business at some point. It worked out that I was able to start my practice, doing it my own way, which is a lot of trial and error. To this day, I don't know if that's a good way to start a career, but for me it worked. Part of it is based on my personality and that I enjoy trying to find my own way.

Do your parents still live in Vegas?

My father passed away about ten years ago. My mother still lives in Vegas. My sister lives in Southern California, and my brother lives in Vegas as well.

What cultural celebrations do you still participate in?

In terms of Asian events?

Yes.

Pretty much everything. My family and I celebrate Chinese New Year. We also celebrate Moon Festival. Any type of Asian events, we will try to participate in. When I say “participate,” I mean going out to eat.

Sometimes we would also try to donate time to help the marginal communities in Vegas. I will participate in food drives to help distribute food to folks who are not able to work. I also am a part of this organization called Asian American Advocacy Clinic, which is a nonprofit organization that my friends recruited me to basically provide legal assistance to Asian Americans and other minorities who may need help with domestic violence or other types of human trafficking. Unfortunately, with the COVID situation, we’re not able to do much in the last couple of years, but we do have a grant from the attorney general’s office, and we do what we can to try to hold an “ask a lawyer” program on weekends whenever we can.

How strongly connected do you feel to your Asian American identity?

Let me address that by first going to my last name. My last name of Hill, H-I-L-L, it’s a little unusual for an Asian person. The reason I became a Hill is because our last name was initially Chiu, spelled C-H-I-U. It literally translates into hill. If you take the word *Chiu* and translate it into English, it would mean *hill*. When we became U.S. citizens, my dad, said “let’s do it all the way,” translated our last name from Chinese to English, and that’s how I ended up with Hill as my last name. On paper, people who have never met me would think that I’m a Caucasian person

versus an Asian. Interestingly, I think society has become more tolerant where no one is surprised and meets me in person and blurts out something like, “Oh, you are Asian.”

When you ask how strongly do I identify with that, I will tell you that I do have dreams in Chinese sometimes. I’m still very in touch with the culture. I can read Chinese and I can write my name, but I lost the ability to write in Chinese now. I’m glad I’m able to stay connected in being able to appreciate a culture by watching shows in Chinese and also reading books in Chinese and listening to music by popular Asian artists. It is interesting that I have kind of a dual cultural identity, but I really don’t think about that question very often because I feel like it’s all merged into one identity, so it’s very hard to answer that question. I just don’t see a distinction in terms of identity. It feels like it’s all merged together, and that’s probably the best way I can put it.

What do you enjoy most about living in Vegas?

I want to say that this is a different and unique environment compared to Texas or California in that it has its own set of societal norms in that people are more in power to pursue what they want to pursue. I think part of this is that sense of independence and freedom, which really embodies America in my opinion. I think in Nevada there is this real sense of newness, and what I mean by newness is that it doesn’t have many hundreds of years of history. You almost get a sense that you’re crafting the future; that you’re making it what you want it to be, and it’s somewhat experimental, and that sense of experiment is quite exciting. That sense of excitement doesn’t seem to go away. Even looking at now in 2021 versus 1995, this city has grown in various ways that’s unpredictable, and there is a real sense of resurgence. Despite bad economy or catastrophe or economic meltdown or tragedies, this town just seems to rebound, and it transforms itself, and it seems to transform itself every five to ten years. For a while there,

there's not a set identity, because instead of just a gaming/casino driven town, it morphed into lots of different things. Now we're seeing a lot of new, exciting ventures, some are technology based, some are community driven. When I think about houses that are being built nowadays, there are wonderful homes. There's an influx of various personalities that come to Vegas and decide to make this their home, and they bring with them different perspectives, and it makes it a more diverse city and state, and I think that's very interesting. I think as a community it really embodies this concept that we can all do this together. Despite the fact that it's gotten bigger, I don't think it's lost its sense of this "let's get this done" attitude. When I think about how does this merge together, it really is, for lack of a better term, a huge melting pot, and I really enjoy that.

We touched on this a bit earlier, but have you ever experienced any racially discriminatory practices professionally?

Frankly, I personally have not. I know coworkers and friends who have, but I personally have not. I have been fortunate that I have not experienced that in Nevada.

I have a couple more questions, but I'll turn it over to Vanessa and Stefani.

VC: I had a question about when you were working in the gaming industry. In what ways were you guys marketing to those high rollers, if you could speak about that?

In the old days, you just call people up from a handwritten notebook, and that was your book of customers. As technology evolved, then we had database and CRM, customer relationship management, platforms to schedule calls and contact customers at scheduled times. A lot of times there are very sophisticated mailers that are tailored to the client's interest. It has evolved into a very sophisticated platform that really segments customers by their preferences and what

they enjoy doing. But when I just started in the industry, it was very primitive where we just called customers to invite them in. It was as simple as that.

Were any of those high rollers Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders?

There were. There were a large number of Asians from California and, also, internationally.

They tend to have a higher tolerance for risk taking, so they have a higher propensity for gaming.

So, yes.

My second question was just about your experience in the legal industry, and if you could tell us a story about a standout experience or person that you've helped out.

Sure. I practice in the area of personal injury, criminal defense, and immigration. I think one of my early cases, we helped this one gentleman who came to Nevada, was arrested for a DUI, and he was detained here. During that time, I knew enough about immigration to know that I needed to file a motion for his release since in the immigration system—it's very different than the criminal system—persons who are undocumented do not automatically receive bail. I drafted a motion for his release on a bail, submitted it to immigration court, and it was granted. When he was released that same day and when he reconnected with his family, he called me at midnight. I remember that I was so happy for his family and him that I was in tears. I remember I was working in the casino at that time, so it was twelve o'clock in the morning when I got his call, and I was in tears. That was quite a compelling part of practicing law for me. At that point I knew I really fell into a calling.

My last question was just about some of your favorite Taiwanese foods; if you could describe some of them?

There's quite a bit. There is congee. There is sausage. There is smelly tofu. There's quite a lot. I love all Asian food including Cantonese-style food and the spicy Shanghai-style food. I love all Asian food.

That was it for me.

SE: *Mine are all over the place because I was making notes as you were talking. My first question is: Why Corpus Christi? When your family came, out of the whole United States, they went to Corpus Christi.*

To this day I don't know the answer to that question. That's a very good question that I need to check with mom on it. I don't think there is a reason.

Did your family have a sponsor?

I'm not sure.

What did he do there?

He was operating restaurants.

He already had that expertise?

He learned it after we immigrated to the U.S.

In Las Vegas, where did you live when you first came?

I want to say in the southeast area, kind of close to Tropicana and Eastern. We lived in that area for twenty years.

Did you see it change over the time that you lived there?

Yes. It definitely became more populated, and people became a little less friendly because they didn't know each other as much as they did back then.

What schools did you attend here?

I went to UNLV for undergraduate and, also, the William S. Boyd School of Law here. I also went to CSN for a little bit in my undergraduate years to save tuition. I think I did maybe two years at CSN, and then the rest of the time was spent at UNLV.

You had graduated high school when you came here?

Yes. I graduated high school in Texas.

How did you identify your casino clients?

Oh, that's a very good question.

I told you they were all over the place.

Sure. Back in the days, we were using actual coins instead of ticketless machines. A way to identify the big players was looking at the wrappers that were around their slot machine because they would have to take these coins and unwrap them from their wrappers, and then the wrapper would be on the floor. The person playing a slot machine that has lots of wrappers around his machine was the big player. That's how we identified them on the slot side.

On the table games, it was always by their chips that they were wagering with. Black typically means hundred-dollar denomination. I think purple is a thousand. We typically looked at what color chips they were playing with, and that tells us what caliber of gamblers they were.

Were you involved in junkets where the casino would bring planeloads of people over to gamble?

I wasn't personally involved in that because I was more of an in-house casino host, but my father was very involved in junkets. He has operated junkets for almost twenty years for Harrah's. It was a lot of work. My dad actually launched these mahjong tournaments—it's M-A-H-J-O-N-G—mahjong tournaments and invited players to come and compete in these mahjong competitions. It was actually very festive and a lot of fun. My dad actually did a lot of work that

was innovative in gaming. Back then Harrah's was called the Holiday Casino. He was very involved in experimenting in the more innovative gaming programs.

How did the mahjong tournament work? You invite the people that you want to play.

Right. My dad would send out fliers and phone calls to customers that he had a personal relationship with. There would be prizes for the winner, for teams. I remember that he actually had these machine mahjong tables that would automatically recycle the tiles. I think he brought in eight tables, and they were very expensive back then, and then host these tournaments. They were not a weekly thing. It was a once-a-year thing. The prize money was pretty substantial, and it took a lot of planning. But my father enjoyed doing that. He was a real people's person.

He also had another program called the Non-negotiable Chips program, and that involves buying in a certain number of money in exchange for a margin more in chips, so that gives the player an advantage. For example, they would buy in for a thousand dollars, but they would get twelve hundred dollars in chips. The advantage for the casino was that these chips have to be played until they're gone; they can't cash these chips. They had to gamble it until they either win and actually recoup that twelve hundred dollars, or somehow get rid of them, but they can't cash these chips, so they were non-negotiable in that sense. It was very successful.

Yes, I can see that it would be.

It was a good program for the customers, and it was a good program for the casino. I don't know if they're still doing that today. Back then it drew a lot of new customers for the Holiday Casino.

Your dad did this for Harrah's. Did the other companies have similar hosts that would do the same thing with their Asian customers, or was Harrah's kind of out there by itself?

I should say Holiday Casino because I don't think it was Harrah's back then. It was just the Holiday Casino. No, I would say that my dad was kind of unique in that way. He really thought

outside the box. The other marketing executive would really just stick to the basic, which is writing their customers to come and to gamble, extending credit lines, and, also, wining and dining. But my dad had a more innovative approach where he wants to provide these experiences that's more tailored to the people's interests versus a simple wine-and-dine experience.

When he recruited people from Asia, did he target mainly Taiwan, or did he go broader?

Frankly, it was more domestic. It was really California, Texas, New York and some China and some Taiwan. But, yes, he brought people from all over the country.

I'd like to go back to your last name. Had your dad made that decision, do you know, before he immigrated that he was going to do that?

You mean my first name or the last name?

The last name. Sorry.

Oh no, it was spontaneous. It was a very spontaneous decision. It was kind of odd, frankly, because Hill seems like such a mainstream American name that for an Asian family to use that last name, it was very unusual. But I think we really did okay with that last name.

Does your dad have brothers?

No.

Are they here in the States?

He had two sisters; one lives in Asia, and the other one is the Bay Area, actually.

Did they change their names as well?

No, they did not. They maintained the last name of Chiu, C-H-I-U. Only my dad did, but he was a very spontaneous person.

How did you feel as a young person all of a sudden having a different name?

I really didn't think about that because I don't think I had much of a choice. I just accepted it. Like most Asian children, we don't really question our parents' decisions until you get older.

And you were getting to a lot of other new things anyway.

That's correct, yes.

You said that you went to South America first?

Yes.

Can you tell us more about that?

I don't remember much about that. I remember that my parents found a tutor for me to teach me Spanish for maybe six months, and then we end up in America. To this day, I don't know what happened there or why we were there.

Do you know where you want?

I want to say Paraguay, around that area.

Were there other Asian families that were making that particular journey, like through Paraguay?

Yes, there were.

That was a known migration route, do you think?

I don't think so. I think probably because my father had some friends there. I think they were gambling buddies, frankly.

There's a thread that runs through everything.

Yes. My dad liked to gamble. That's what also brought us to Vegas, too, much to my mother's dismay.

She never liked gambling.

No, she never did.

Tell us about your mother.

She is a very traditional lady. She worked hard. She believed in hard work ethics. She never believed in shortcuts, and she is very thrifty. She always taught us to not speculate. It was always one step at a time. She wasn't into a "get rich quick" lifestyle. That's probably the best way to put it. In her side of the family, they were all very modest and very humble people. They instilled in us strong work ethics and to never take shortcuts.

Do you know how your parents met?

I know that my mom's family had a restaurant, and my father was teaching high school. He was a high school teacher in his youth. I believe that's how they met, when he went to my mom's family restaurant, and somehow they developed a relationship. That's all I know.

In the restaurant, who did the cooking?

Both my mom and dad did. I would say my mom did more of the cooking, but they both did quite a bit of the cooking.

We talked about food before. What is the thing that you want to eat when you think about Taiwan? What's the one thing that brings you back to when you were a boy in Taiwan?

I would say sticky rice. The sticky rice was wrapped with tea leaf. Those are fabulous. I always think about that; that the Taiwanese sticky rice were very famous, and that always brings me back to the food flavorings in Taiwan.

Where can you get that here, the one that you remember?

There's a couple of small restaurants in Las Vegas in Chinatown that has it. I can't think of their names, but there are a couple of restaurants here that has it here now.

And you taste it and you just know that's it.

Exactly, yes.

How have you seen Chinatown in Las Vegas, how have you seen that change the city more broadly?

It's a huge game changer. I remember before Chinatown was built, our family would have to go to California to shop at supermarkets almost once every other week. We would make that four-hour drive to California with a van, load up the van with Asian produce and food, and drive back to Vegas. We had to do that constantly. I was too young to opt out of that, so I always had to be in the car for those long rides and shopping. Once Chinatown was built, then the supermarkets here have everything now, but it came very gradually. It wasn't a sudden change. It just slowly came about.

I don't think we all realized back in the time what a huge draw the Chinatown Plaza will be, and how the influx of Asian population will be such a significant part of Vegas. Back then it was just a matter of convenience. Somebody just said, "Let's have a shopping center that has Asian grocery stores and restaurants." Then it just became more grand over time. It was a huge game changer because it made life a lot more convenient for Asian Americans who really depend on these Asian staples. Now I feel like we just take it for granted. Before Chinatown, you always had to go to California for everything.

Chinatown here is unique because it's not quite as immersed in Asian culture as the ones in California, Arcadia, or Monterey Park for that matter. It's still a very small Chinatown compared to New York or Chicago or California, but it's big enough to make a difference, a big difference in most of the Asian communities' lives here in Vegas. But even though I'm not a kid anymore, I don't quite enjoy those long rides, so I'm glad I don't have to do that anymore.

Is there anything that we haven't asked you that you wanted to talk about?

I think living in Vegas, we're very fortunate. I have to say that I'm very grateful that we have such a diverse economy and diverse group of people and population base that twenty years ago I would never imagine the way it looks today. I'm excited to see what the next twenty years are going to be like. It's really quite fascinating that in the middle of the desert you would have such an amazing variety of people and opportunities. I'm really grateful to my parents for making this my home. I have to say that I'm a very fortunate recipient of all the great things that took place here due to the pioneers in the gaming industry, in the hotel industry, in the tourism industry, in the technology industry, in the legal industry, and I think there is this sense of excitement for folks that live here. I think it's transient in nature, but for the folks who decided to make Nevada their home, they really have a special place to live in that's truly unique and unlike any other city or town in the United States.

That's a great way to end the interview. Thank you so much.

Thank you guys for doing this.

[End of recorded interview]