

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIANA CHEN**

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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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



“For me, I very much have Western and the Chinese cultures mixed in me. I have my own personality, own style...”

“When I come to Canada, in Vancouver, I fly from Hong Kong to Vancouver. We’re in the airplane. I hold my passport in my heart. I’m looking outside the window. I know myself from today how high is the sky is how high I can fly.”

With an eye for the sky, Juliana Chen knew from a very young age that she wanted to be an entertainer. Born in Hunan, China, she started training in gymnastics from a very young age until she was recruited at the age of twelve for a regional arts school. From there on, she would train rigorously as a ballet dancer for the next several years, waking up at the crack of dawn to train her flexibility and going to school at night. At the end of this schooling, Chen was placed into a

ballet company until she was later selected for an acrobatics program, performing everything from foot juggling to contortion.

When a knee injury derailed Chen's acrobatics career, her love for the stage made her pivot to focus on magic instead, eventually joining the Guangzhou Circus in 1985 as a magician and becoming popular throughout China. During this time, her travels around the world took her to Canada, where she eventually ended up staying and obtaining citizenship in 1989. While in Vancouver, Canada, she was engaged in a range of activities from translating to graphic design until a new opportunity in magic opened up and she began practicing again. Interested in competing, Chen would go on to compete in numerous events hosted by those such as the International Brotherhood of Magicians and the International Federation of Magic Society.

Throughout this time, Chen would also perform many shows on the strip in Las Vegas such as at Caesar's Palace or Riviera. Prior to COVID, she would spend half a year performing in Germany and continues to engage in various opportunities in her free time such as judging competitions and teaching students. She recounts how the entertainment scene has changed during her time in Las Vegas and her presence in the magic community. Throughout the interview, Chen talks about many other topics ranging from food to culture to her family and connection with China.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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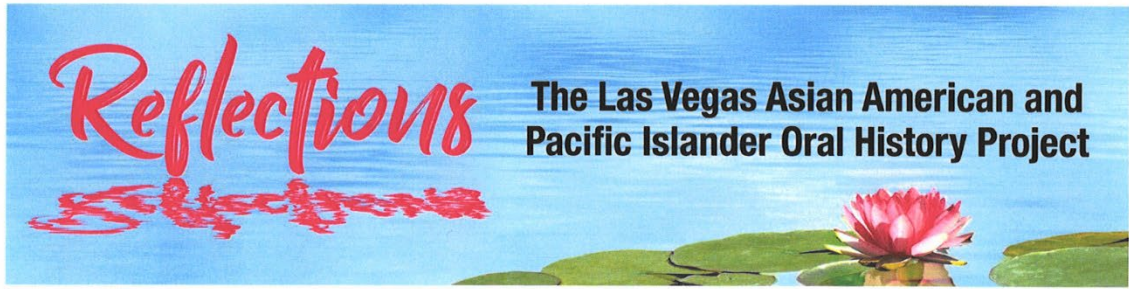
Before leaving China, Chen injured her knee while doing gymnastics and pivoted to magic instead. While performing magic, she caught the eye of a culture minister from France and eventually was offered an opportunity to travel to Canada, where she ended up living for several years. Her time in Canada included a number of endeavors ranging from graphic design to translation until she found her way back into magic and began competing internationally with manipulation magic using cards..... 8–17

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**Good afternoon. Today's date is March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022. I am Cecilia Winchell. I am here with Stefani Evans, as well as Juliana Chen.**

**Juliana, may you please spell your first and last name for the record?**

Chinese or English name? It's different.

**English.**

It's Juliana, J-U-L-I-A-N-A. The family name is Chen, C-H-E-N.

**Thank you. To start off, I would like to ask you about how you grew up, your parents, your grandparents, everything like that.**

I don't know very much about my grandparents because, at this time, my grandparents are living in the countryside, and also during the revolution in the 1960s, it's not very close; they're in the countryside. My mom used to be working in a company that was sewing silk, like sewing some tigers or flowers, like clothes, sewing some patterns. Xiang silk, because my hometown is Hunan. Hunan is very famous for silk sewing. That's my mom. Then my dad was working in the Chinese river station in Hunan.

**Do you have any siblings?**

Have what?

**Siblings.**

What is siblings?

**(Speaking Chinese)**

Okay. I have one sister, and she's older than me. She used to be working in a Chinese oil company, 石油公司, the Chinese oil company, but now she's living here in Vancouver.

**Do you know how your parents met?**



No, I don't know exactly. As I know, my father was in the city; my mom was in the countryside. I think somebody introduced. This is the first time people ask me these cute questions. The cute girl is asking me the cute questions. I have no idea, baby. [Laughing] We are not a young generation. My mom was age...not like today, romantic, no, not at all. Just to tell you a joke, even when they're married, they never turned the lights on when they make love. [Laughing] All China was very...Actually, China in the 1950s and '60s, '70s, it's very closed; they have no communication with America until 1972 when Nixon going to China, and that's a little bit open.

**What was it like growing up in Hunan during that time and in that place?**

Well, I was very young and very active. In Hunan, I was working in the school, which had very good gymnastics. I was training when I was very young. I was training as a gymnast in the one school, which in China, in Hunan, has two schools. One is Cu Yi. Other one is Xiu Ye. That's both the schools' names. The Xiu Ye, that's mostly young girls for doing gymnastics. Normally, you are given a Chinese sports teacher.

But I was really young, I think second year of the school, one day we see some very beautiful people walking in the school. You can see outside the classroom. They have a long coat and some T-shirt like this. In China, people in the show business, you can see immediately, so they know it's somebody coming to school. They come to the class, and they are looking at each kid. Teacher says, "We have some visitors." We sit there just watching them. They're looking around and then talking to the teacher, and then they left.

After class, my teacher says, "You're going to principal's office." I was there, and I see the three people sitting there. They asked me, "What's your name? How old?" Not like you, what do mean how did mom and dad meet? No. Asking different questions. Then they asked, "You can sing? You can dance?" Immediately, no. At this moment, the young kids, all want to

be the entertainer. I said, "I do the best that I can. I do everything." Then they make measurements about my arms are how long, my legs are how long, and take some photo shots of my front side. Then they left.

After a couple of days, I got information asking me to go to their school for the audition. Then I come to the second audition, third audition, fourth audition, then the final, and it takes one or two months. I got the job as a dancer. In the last audition, we're going to the school. This school, because it's the artist school, they have the stage. We come to the stage, have the name on, and they have so many teachers sitting there in the audience, the first row. Some teacher is working on Chinese opera, Chinese ballet, musician, and, also, the folk dance. All different show businesses. They decide what you do. You do what you have, so they pick me as a ballerina. In this case, I got the job.

But when you're going to the school...I am really lucky because they selected me in my same hometown, but some kids come from different provinces, so they are not able to go back home on the weekend, because the school selects students not just in one province, but in whole of China. Every two or three years, they're going to look for the new generation, new students.

Anyway, they put us in training for three months. It's a professional training. Every morning, we get up at five thirty. The school have alarms, the alarm used for wake up and others, just like a normal school. It's like a fire alarm, just turning, *ring-ring-ring*, so you have to get up. At the morning, it's stretching. That's why until today my legs go here. It's really a piece of cake for me. We're training at the morning training, like stretching under your arms, your body.

There are different ones. If there are musicians there, in the morning, they go and practice violins. The Chinese circus acrobatics at the morning do handstanding because handstanding is mostly foundation for them. Every movement, you need a handstanding. For me, I was stretching

for ballet from five thirty to seven thirty. It's two hours with the teacher there and all the kids going to warm up in the morning.

You got breakfast. They gave everybody one bowl and one spoon, and there were tickets for their food. They have a restaurant inside the school. You just line up for...she maybe knows it. That's like in university. They pay everything for you and, also, your clothes.

But in this training, the morning is the stretching. From nine thirty to twelve, it's a ballet class, foundation of the ballet. Then you got a lunch break. You are sleeping in the afternoon between two thirty to three o'clock because winter and the summertime is a different schedule. So then you're going to a different class that will be learning music because as a dancer, you must know how to listen to the music. Also, you're learning some theater performance, like drama using your face and your eyes. Then we're training also folk dance. Folk dance, includes a Chinese movement with the hand, eyes, and fans. The difference between folk dance and ballet is, because a ballerina must keep your chest up, the body needs to be vertical, but the folk dance has more delicate requirements for hands, eyes, body, and footsteps. Ballet comes from Western culture, while folk dance represents Chinese culture. Professional dancers are required courses.

At the night from seven thirty to nine thirty, it's like normal school, learning all the cultural language, mathematics, etc.

This training was three months. If you're selected, if you qualify, three months for your training. After three months, they have a final decision because some kids are beautiful, long legs, but after the training, they can't go far. That's it. Just like sports, you're looking like you're ready to go, but you're not ready and talented for that, your body. After three months, some are cut. Halved. If you qualify for this one, I have my life job for my life. That's why until today I am still performing. Be entertainer. Did you have this story in China, similar?

**No, not really.**

No? That's a Chinese entertainer's training, professional, sports and...

**SE: How old were you?**

At this time, I am nearly eleven, twelve years old.

**CW: How did you enjoy ballet and dancing?**

In the beginning, as a kid, you always want to be a performer. You always want to be a performer, but it's very hard. We do the stretching and spread like this because ballerina, always the legs go this. Now they go this way and this way. Stretching this way is easy, but this way was difficult. Every morning what we did, the first girl faced to the wall, opened the legs, go like this. The second one back, like a sandwich. Then they use a big bar to push the bottom to push. We are like this for forty minutes, sit there. We cry, cry. But the teacher knows because they've got to test you and how flexible you are. In the beginning...it's hard to be a professional, especially to be a good performer, it's very hard, but this is the way a ballerina has to go.

But every weekend I go home. I had this uniform and the tied-up, like a ballerina, head of the hair. You walk into the street, and you feel so good by yourself. As you go home, you can see the laborers. The kids open the window and watch you because they know you as a performer, so it feels good. Actually, I say it's difficult, but I enjoyed it very much. Your training, that's why your personality, your movement, your style, it's all different than other people working in the manufacturers. People know you are in the show business for sure.

**What was the experience of continuing to train after those three months?**

Then you stay in training. Normally, the school, it's like a university. When you get in the door, you hear the violins and pianos because it's all different but the show business is together. For the class, it's musician and the theater performance. They don't have movie stars, no, but they

have the drama, theater performance. It's four years to graduate. The Chinese opera, like the Beijing opera, Chinese circus, ballet, it's six years. When you graduate from the school, you will be going to the company and going to the local, like the Hunan 歌舞团, dance company, or 京剧团, opera, or 花鼓戏, local traditional dramas. As a professional performer, that's your life job. For the entertainers, as soon as you get in the door, we are entertainers. Some people get injured—like me, I broke my knee—or some women are coming who are already married. If you get retired, the first one will be the teacher for the new generation. When you go into any company, which are linked to the cultural—like library, theater, or publisher company or just like you guys, university—anything with the culture, they will find a job for you. So that means you have life job. That's the communist country like this.

**What was your job after you finished your training?**

After the training, I'm a dancer. I'm in the ballet company. But after the ballet company, that is a long story. I am supposed to be the life of a ballerina.

Before 1970s, China is closed for any Western country, no communication. Chairman Mao is head of the communist country. There is no communication with Western country. But in 1972, Nixon, American president, visit China. After Nixon returns back to the United States, they invite Chinese president Hua Guofeng to visit. At that time, the Chinese government decided that they needed a performance group to accompany the president to visit the US. It can be said to be “cultural diplomacy.”

But at this time in China, the show business is controlled by Chairman Mao's wife, Jiang Qing. In complete China, there are only eight sample plays “八大样板戏.” They include “红灯记” (The Legend of the Red Lantern), “智取威虎山” (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy), “海港” (On the Docks), “沙家浜” (Shajia Village), “奇袭白虎团” (Raid on the White

Tiger Regiment), “白毛女” (The White-Haired Girl), “红色娘子军” (The Red Detachment of Women), and “交响音乐” or “杜鹃山” (Mountain Azalea).

During the Cultural Revolution, there were some large and medium-sized stage art works that were established as literary and artistic models, mainly drama works, plus a small amount of musical works, collectively referred to as “revolutionary model operas” or “revolutionary model works” commonly known as “model operas” [4]. On May 1, 1967, the Revolutionary Modern Theatre Festival was held in Beijing. [3] Peking Opera “Take Tiger Mountain by Wisdom,” “The Harbor,” “Red Lantern,” “Shajiabang,” “Rapid Raid on the White Tiger Troupe,” ballet “Red Detachment of Women,” “White-Haired Girl,” symphony “Shajiabang” Participate in a play. [1] Later, these eight plays were called “eight model plays.”<sup>1</sup>

So there’s just a strong communist background in the show, they are not able to take this performance and come to America. The idea coming this time is to find the Chinese Acrobatic, because the Acrobatics show has no communist background, no story to tell. But because the wife of Chairman Mao don’t like acrobatic she disbanded most of the acrobatic troupe.

In the past, acrobatics was a low-level art, usually performed on the street and begging the money for a living. At the same time, many poor children sent them to practice acrobatic because their parents could not support them. Of course, I say there are history, although China has officially established acrobatic troupe, but this art is still at the lowest level, which is one of the reasons why Jiang Qing does not like it.

In 1972 when the Chinese president Hua Guofeng take Shen Yang acrobatic troupe with home and come to the US, it was very successful. After the government recognized how important its Chinese acrobatic, but because Jiang Qing disbanded and most in the countryside for longtime they have no new generation, no students, everything had to start from scratch. At that time, to resume Chinese acrobatics as soon as possible, the only way was to select a group of

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<sup>1</sup> Text inserted per narrator’s request.

young performer who already had basic skills from various professional literary and art groups to fill in Chinese acrobatics.

I was one of those who was selected. They made me practice as a foot juggler because of my ballet skills and besides juggling also my feet is looking good. I juggled umbrellas, also other stuff, doing a bicycle and the Chinese plates, 转碟, and the contortion. That's my life as a performer until the day I left China.

**Could you tell us about that as well?**

For what?

**The day you left China.**

The day I left China? That's another...not easy. In the 1980s, China slowly opened. They opened for the student exchange. At this time, I decide I want to go.

But before I decided, I was a juggler from Hunan because Hunan is in the middle of China. Hunan is more behind the big city, behind Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, so it's more like countryside. It's not the countryside, but if you're looking about anything, Shanghai and Beijing are always the best. I decide to come to Guangzhou. I do my audition. But in China at this time, because we're all government employees, it's nearly impossible to jump from this company to the other company. You had life jobs. Even the manufacturing employees, it's a life job; the government takes care.

For me, because I injured my knee when I was doing gymnastics for 翻跟头 (somersaults). Did you understand?

**Yes.**

I broke my knee, and I needed to have an operation. After I broke my knee, I'm not able to do juggling very much anymore. Every time I practice, my knee gets full of water inside, so it's very difficult. We have a magician in China in my company.

Talking about magic, in China the magic and acrobatic are always together (the difference between acrobatic troupe and circus—China calls it acrobatic troupe because it only has human performance and no animal in the show, but Western countries call it a circus because they have human and animals perform at same show). The magic is not independent. All of it when you have the show, they always have the circus performance with one or two magicians joining the performance. Those magicians do not have a school to teach, no. You have all others, but not the magic. But how do they find the magician? It's a family, generation by generation. The family, they have people doing the magic, and then they call the company, "Hey, my kids are doing magic." Then you go into the company for the audition. That's why the magicians coming to age are a little bit older. In the artist school, the youngest age is eight or nine until sixteen because the magicians, theater performance, they will be coming later, more old, sixteen. Nobody comes at twenty, no school. Between eight to sixteen, that's all different between magicians or whatever. But in magic, you can be a little bit older.

The parents call the company, and they do the audition. If it's good, the company keeps you, and you have your life job. You will have a special room for practice. All the others everyday train at a large training ground; you have different corners where you do all different things. But the magician has his own room.

For me, my job is a foot juggler, I never think doing magic. But after I broke my knee...I love the stage. When I come to the stage, I feel so beautiful. I said, "Well, I have to be in magic."



Every time when the magician performance on the stage I always watch her on the stage. She doesn't teach me, I practice by myself, I am working very hard. Then I become a magician.

I didn't have a chance to let my boss know, but one day, there was a big convention for 中南五省. Five provinces in the middle of China, like Zhengzhou, Hunan, Wuhan, have a circus festival. A gentleman from the Guangzhou Army Circus (广州军区杂技团), he is very famous and he is also in this convention. I was assigned to host the event at this event, so I had the opportunity to talk to him, "I am doing magic." He said, "Really?" I said, "Can I show you?" I showed my magic to them. They said, "You're already good." He says, "Come to Guangzhou." He asked me.

Everyday I spend a lot of time secretly practicing magic, because during normal working hours, I want to practice my foot juggler in the practice room.

Anyway, then I go in to audition with my magic in Guangzhou Circus, and they like me. Then Guangzhou says, "Okay, we want you, but we cannot go into company to pick you up, so you have to find a solution." I quit my job in a couple of days, put all my—before, we have a document, 档案. Because you're in each city, the Chinese government control all your food, rice. They have to give you a ticket to go in to buy. It's not like today where you can buy everything. But I go into the company and tell my circus, "Because of my knee, the doctor says I am not able to do it anymore." I quit my job to go into the different company, just a couple of days, and then I take my document to Guangzhou.

Then I move to Guangzhou, and then I was a magician in Guangzhou. I joined in 1985 or 1986. I come to be very popular in China. Popular on the TV all the time. I'm doing some shows with some very famous people.

I think it's the time, then I left China in 1988, so many reasons. That's a different story because I was in Guangzhou going to Spain for a performance. I have a lot of story between. That's the government watching me all the time. Then I think, okay...

I apply to study in America, but America rejected. Rejected is not to say they don't let me go. Normally, if America says no, you're not able to apply anymore. But American Embassy in China...every two years, they have interview with the students, so because the American Embassy controls Macau, Hong Kong, and China, South China, every time they come, they know this year we don't give any names for China, only give to Macau or give to Hong Kong. By this time, they have no name for China. Even they do the interview. The immigration officer tells me, "We'll let you apply one more time." They said, "Next time we come." Also, I have the school, ESL, study English. They rejected me because they have no name for coming to America.

One day I was at a performance, and they have the group from France. In this time, they have sister cities, like Shanghai visit Las Vegas, or Guangzhou visit this. They have sister cities in France. They have France mayor group, all mayors from different cities going to China. There was one very famous opera singer where I perform for the banquet. I was very popular in this time. After the performance, I was in the dinner, and I saw a gentleman looking at me from far away. Sometimes you have a little eye connection. I paid a little attention, and I know he watched me the whole time. After the show, we were all finished, and I was outside waiting for taxi while a hand is put on my shoulder. It's a Chinese man speaking very poor Mandarin, but he's talking to me. He said, "Your performance was great. We all love you. He is our culture minister from France, and he really enjoyed your performance." I said, "Oh okay. Hi." Then they

give me a business card from Beijing. He said, “When you come to Beijing, give me a call.” I said, “Okay.” I’ve got this person’s card, and my brain is stumbling.

Then I go home, and I call my friend in Beijing. She is working in the government in 中国人民对外友协 (People’s Republic of China Foreign Relations). Not just for cultural, 友好协会. She wants to perform with me in France, was like a translator. I called her about my story. She says, “Okay, I’m going to find this culture minister for you.”

Then they have a Pierre Cardin fashion show, and she is invited. She sees this culture minister, and she says, “Hello. My friend says hello to you.” He says, “Who?” She said my Chinese name. He cannot remember. She says, “Magician from Guangzhou.” He says, “Yes, yes, where is she?”

We communicated. He said, “Come to Beijing.” He asked me. He talked me into going to the Canadian Embassy because Quebec speaks French. I got in the embassy, and they give me everything right away, and so then I left China. I left China in 1988, but I didn’t think I will be staying in Canada. I was thinking after studying, I’ll come back.

I was coming in 1988, but then I had a show in Bangkok. On the way, flight to Bangkok, it’s the start of Tiananmen Square, 1989. You probably don’t know. In China, the new generation, they never talk about it. We see on the TV about the Chinese soldiers kill the people in Tiananmen Square. That was the history of China. New generation of Chinese government never say—you know a little bit?

**I know, yes.**

Tiananmen Square. I was in Bangkok, and then I went back to Canada, Vancouver. The immigration officer said, “You have a choice. You can apply as a Canadian, or you come back to China.” That’s the reason. I said, “Let me think about it.”

I called the Chinese circus, called my boss in China because this is my country because one day I still have to go back. I don't want to cause a problem, so I call my boss. I said, "I have this opportunity." He says, "On your own." I said, "Okay." Then I applied for Canadian citizenship in 1989, and then I was Canadian.

My story, in the middle, I have some very good stories, but that's the reason I came to Canada. In the beginning, I don't know English at all. I use A, B, C, D; I use my fingers. Until today, it's still the same. It's Tuesday, Thursday because it starts with a T. I have to...Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...go through from beginning to the end. That's why I come from Canada.

But in Canada, I'm doing very well in Canada. Before I come to Canada, I opened a business as a graphic designer and, also, translator. At this time, you don't have software for the Chinese, so I opened a business as a translator. They give us English, like magazine, TV guides. We are doing this translating software from English to Chinese because big Chinese corporation in Vancouver, so I started a business.

Also, one day the newspaper, one writer from China, somebody tell him, "We have a magician in here." The people know I'm a magician, but I have no magic props because in China, we never have magic theater before. I bring one suitcase, and one case is a magic box that I am shipping from China to Canada, but Customs has broken my gimmick. They don't know it's a magic trick; they're not able to open the case. They broke my case, so I have nothing for a performance. For me, I grow up with show business, and even the business, I still think about one day I'll go back to the show.

I saw this person, and the Chinese newspaper took a big story. It's a full page. They maybe have this. "A star living in Canada," a story about me being here.

Then the Chinese Cultural Center wanted me to do a performance. That's in the end of 1989. But I have nothing to do for the show. My friend, who is Chinese, says, "Hey, do you know he has a magical shop?" I said, "What?" He says, "You can buy the tricks in there." I said, "Really? Please take me, go." He took me to go to this magic shop, which is in Main Street in Vancouver. I opened the door and see all the stuff in magic. I was just like a little kid. In my life, I've never seen a magic shop. I was like a little kid, and I just touch everything. The owner is looking at me, and then he asked me, "Are you a magician? Because you are touching everything. The hand, that was very good." Actually, before I come here, in 1985 I already won the Best Magician of China, as a champion in China. I touch everything. Then he asked me, and I didn't understand what he is saying. My friend is telling me and says, "He is asking if you are a magician." Then I tell my friend, "Tell him I am a professional." He told the guy, and that guy was very impressed.

Then after, he says, "We have a magic society in Vancouver, a magic club. Do you want to join with us? At Christmas we have a show and have a competition." My friend told me, and I said, "Oh, okay."

I was buying everything and walking outside the door. I tell my friend, "Can you tell him if I can performance with Magic Circle?" So, he goes back. He says, "Yes, of course."

I was preparing and going to the Christmas night, going to the Vancouver Magic Circle. The old magicians today, they're always talking about what a night. They're not like in China where Magic Circle is just a little room and with old magicians. Here, it's not like China; everything is bigger. I walked in, and I was so happy. I go backstage and watch everybody. The guy says, "You have to go out," because they're loading the stuff. I was watching. I was like a little kid, so excited.

Then they do the performance competition after, so they make an announcement. They said, “We have a guest, a young lady from China.” I bring my costume, and I come to the stage and do three minutes. I shoot the cards, flying the cards everywhere. The Magic Club has a lot of older gentlemen. Every time, they fall asleep, because long night, like a competition, performance, dinner, and they fall asleep. I do three minutes. People do a standing ovation for more than ten minutes for me. They just got shocked. That’s why my journey is to start out in Canada, and that was the end of 1989, I think.

Then the Vancouver Magic Circle is talking to me. He says, “We have a magic convention every year, like IBM, called the International Brotherhood of Magicians, and we are having a Pacific Coast magic convention.” Pacific Coast, those are bigger. Then they have one show with a Canadian magician doing the show for the one night in Seattle. They wanted me to do the performance there. I was so excited. They put me in the end. The opening night, put me in the end. Until today, I always make a joke, and I say, “Oh, put me to close the show. It’s not because I’m good, but because I’m a mess.” After my show, a couple hundred cards on the floor, everywhere, so they always let me close the show.

The first night...then they have four days. It’s a full program. They have people doing the lecture or do close-up magic. Every time the magicians are holding the cards in their hand, they say, “Is there a Chinese girl in the audience?” Because I threw the cards. I’m so good with the cards that when they put the cards away, they make a joke.

Then after the convention, I got more magicians know me, and then an organization, one guy organizer for the IBM, which I won in 1992, he tells me, “We like your performance.” I speak very little English, a little. You saw my picture. He said, “You’re very good. We want to hire you to do the performance in 1992,” the convention. The Pacific Coast was in 1991. They

wanted me to do the performance. I asked somebody to help me translate. I said, “I don’t want the performance. I want to compete.” Then he says, “Don’t do the compete because the performance is at a higher level because you must be a star to come to be a guest performance and you get paid.” At this time, they were offering me one thousand five hundred. I was like, whoa, American dollars, that’s a lot of money. I said, “No, I don’t perform. I want to compete.”

Then they have me do the compete. Then I win the 1992; that’s the first time I won. Then after this, I won the Magical Castle Performance. Then in 1996, I do the competition in Germany, the same year I do the competition in Spain. Then in 1997, I do the World Championship, and that’s like Olympics. Every competition, I win; I never lose. I win it all, everything, so it’s a sin. I always tell myself—also for you, too—when you have a target in your life, you know what you want, you have a target in the front, you always go for it. You’re working hard for this target. It doesn’t matter whether you’re poor or you’re rich. As long as you’re working hard, you always can get it. That’s what I think.

**What kind of magic did you do? Could you explain what your tricks look like?**

Magic, the people who talk about magic...there are so many different types of magic. Today I’m a world championship, professional jury, licensed as a judge. The magic will be, for me, I’m going to do the stage magic. The stage means you have lighting, have movement, the costumes. You have to communicate with the audience, more like a theater performance. For me, my specialty is cards. I come with nothing in my hand, and I pull hundreds of cards from my hand. Throw away. I have more. Throw away. I have more. Then play some music with my performance, with my light, my eyes, my body movement. I think you’ve already watched my performance, didn’t you?

**A little bit.**

This is for the stage magic. But stage magic also has all different categories. Comedy magic is a stage magic. General magic is a stage magic. General magic will be separate about...those are different...to light the cigarettes, with the rope. They're separate. The rope will make the birds disappear. This is called general magic. You also have manipulation act. Manipulation is just skills. For me, I'm a manipulation act because the cards, it's a skill by my hand. That's for the manipulation act. Then you have close-up magic. It means like table to table, to make a coin disappear; think about one card. That is close-up, like Chinese little balls, little balls make disappear. This is close-up. Then you have illusions, like Criss Angel, like David Copperfield, they do, it's big boxes. The magician just does the pose, but the assistant is in the box. Also, you have micromagic. It's just for the cards, micro. They have so many set up a hand. You think about the cards and know what you pick up. This is also the coin. This is a close-up and micromagic for the cards. Cards have a special category, and also inventions. For me, I do manipulation as stage magic.

**Thank you. When you got to Canada, you mentioned that you didn't speak any English. Were there any other things that you had to adjust to, any other culture shocks that you had to deal with?**

What exactly do you mean, culture shocks?

**Anything about living in Canada that was really different from living in China that surprised you and you had to adjust to?**

I have to think about it. For me, I'm an entertainer. Before I go into Canada, I've already performed in many countries. For my life, it's very colorful. In 1982, I already went to Australia for a performance when I was very young. In China, we never have makeup, the kids, only makeup on the stage. Normal life, nobody [wears] makeup. The costume was blue, red, black



and white at this time during the revolution. For me, I only catch a little bit, but my sister, she's another age, they got the revolution. That's why I never go to the countryside to be a farmer, but my sister's age, they have people.

I remember first time we go into Australia for a performance. They take us, going to Beijing, and special people teach us how to use the fork, how to use the knife, and how do you eat. The soup (making slurping sound) will always make noise, right? They teach us how to behave for the Western culture, and they teach us how to do the makeup. Also, for the costumes, they give us a Chinese 旗袍 (qi pao), like Chinese style. We always sports clothes, and they give us, because we are so young, the kids, have low boobies, have two sponges to put inside 旗袍 to have a little shape. That was in Australia. I have a beautiful Chinese 旗袍. At night, I am going to sleep, and now it's a loose. I lost the boobs.

I don't have many problems. Also, in Canada, there are so many Chinese, Chinatown. Vancouver, they don't call Vancouver. When I come there, they already call Vancouver as Hongcouver because so many people are from Hong Kong, so you have Chinese food, everything. But it's hard for me when I come to Vancouver because—I was never here—I was a star in China. In 1984 and 1985, the Chinese newspaper has so many stories about me. Coming to Canada, I was like a little kid. I cannot communicate with people. I was like a little kid. I would go in the library and sit in the corner, looking for some children's books because you can see the pictures, and you can match the words. It's difficult. It's hard. But again, my personality, I never give up. I'm happy. Even difficult, I know what I have to do, and I will go for it.

**You went to Canada in 1985.**

No, 1988.

**Then you came to Nevada in, you mentioned, 1998?**

Actually, I moved here in 2000 officially. When I was doing the old competitions, I became very popular in the Western country in the magic world, until today, maybe not as popular as before. In Canada, I was really popular after winning the World Championship in 1997. That was a big, big thing. It's like the Olympics. I become the first woman in history to win the World Championship. This one was studying in Europe, called FISM, difficult, Fédération Internationale des Sociétés Magiques. It's a French name. But this one started in 1947. In the beginning, it's every three years. In 1947, they start every three years, but before it's every year. It's a very famous competition. This year it comes to Canada. In the magic world, I can say it's very famous at this time.

The old magazine *Around the World*, it's a magic magazine. After I win the World Championship, I'm on the cover. Finland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Las Vegas—even *Las Vegas* magazine, I was in the cover story. I was voted one hundred woman in the Canadian history, successful woman in Canada. Also, one hundred most popular influence Chinese in British Columbia. I am very, very popular in this time.

At this time in Las Vegas, Caesars Palace, NBC TV started covering TV specials. It's called "The World's Greatest Magic." They started this show. I was in "The World's Greatest Magic," number four. Also, ABC have "The Champion of Magic" shooting in Monte Carlo. I also was in that other TV special. I had become very popular. After becoming popular, I always got a contract in Vegas, or in America. They hired me to perform everywhere. It's a commercial performance.

I'm Canadian, and I'm not allowed to work in America because you need a visa. Every time people wanted me, I have to go and do all this paperwork, and it takes about a week. One day a friend of mine says, "Why don't you just apply for American citizen?" Then I go to apply

for the American green card. It took three months, and I got the green card, and that was in 1997-1998 that I already got the green card. I stayed living in Canada. But then after 2000, I said, "Okay, it's time to move." I moved to Las Vegas.

**What was that first performance like at Caesars back in 1998?**

Nineteen ninety-six. It used to be before Celine Dion, in Caesar's Palace, they have a basement. They have huge, big called Magical Empire. It's really high end, beautiful. When you get in, there are fountains and fireworks in the bottom, and they have a couple of different theaters inside. It's like a magical kingdom. You know it, Magical Empire. It's beautiful, beautiful. I was a performer here for one year.

Then I got at what used to be Harrah's hotel. The hotel already like me, I do the audition. Then they bring me to Lake Tahoe in Harrah's to work another year. I work another year here before. Then after I got the green card, I said, "Okay, it's time to move." That's when I moved to America. But until today, I still have dual citizen, Canadian and American.

**Why did you move to Las Vegas? Did you consider any other places?**

No, because you're an entertainer, and you always have the work here. This is the show business capital. Before I moved here, I had a contract here all the time. Every time here, it's a TV show, a theater, a casino.

**How integrated into the magic community are you here?**

Speak Chinese to me.

**Let me think. Stefani, do you have anything right now?**

**SE: I think what she's asking is, are there other magicians here that you have found a community with?**

Oh, yes. I'm very good friends with David Copperfield, with Criss Angel, and with everybody. For me, it's very good because my magic is the flying cards. It's my invention. I invented these cards that shoot very high, very far away. I don't have much competition with other magicians. That's why more money. The show business is jealous. For me, no jealous because for me it's very difficult. First of all, I am highly skilled. It's not just I'm looking like a doll, sexy and showing my boobs. I say it's my real magic, talented. I'm fully educated as a stage performer, as a theater, so my performances really can catch people. My eyes communicate and have really good expressions. I train. When I do the magic, it's always a little different than other people. When I do the lectures, I tell the magicians, if you communicate with people, how do you use the eyes for communication? As a woman, you don't have to be very sexy. You have to catch the audience and communicate. Then you move the other way, and when I catch you, then I move to you. I know how to communicate and have no competition. Even by the box, by the illusions, I still have my own style. As a woman coming to this high level, they really respected me. I'm really good friends with everybody in Vegas. Maybe one guy in the street performance don't like me because I was his jury, and he hated me.

But more money. Those people are very difficult to copy my style. China has so many Chinese magicians because I'm already popular, and they copy me, but they can't copy my skill. Maybe also skill because I had the skill they teach. But they're not able to copy your personality. For me, I had the Western and Chinese culture mixed in my show. Even though I have a Chinese costume, I have a skirt, but I made the skirt of chiffon, and you can see the legs. I always tell people, I can't have a G-string to make the legs look longer. But the G-string is looking like a dancer, not like a magician. People see you, it's not to see your body, but you still have to show your beauty. That's why I have a skirt so they can see the shape of my legs, but I have a Chinese

top. It used to be I have a little cutie heart. The Western girls, no chance to copy my style. Also, my music has a little Oriental touch. The Chinese girl, living in a Western country for a long time, the communication is different. Chinese TV now—my mom used to watch 春晚. Every New Year, they have a beautiful Chinese TV show. Everybody, complete China, waiting for it. My mom was cooking in the kitchen and says, “Oh, this woman is singing for a long time.” I said, “No, they changed five performers already.” They have the same makeup and the same words. Just a little different, but the personality is the same. You understand what I mean? For me, I very much have Western and the Chinese cultures mixed in me. I have my own personality, own style, so that’s why nobody can steal. Also, the Western people are not able to put on a Chinese costume when they’re beautiful because it’s looking silly.

Yes, I communicate with everybody. Also, before I win the 1997 World Champion, since 1995, every country has a magical convention. It’s like a society. Every country has their own magic club, and they always hire the star. I started traveling since 1995 until last year. This year, the Swiss wanted me to come and do the performance at the convention and do the lecture again. It’s very much I communicate with everybody. The magical world, if you say Juliana Chen to anyone, they will know me. It’s very well known for the magic world.

**Have you seen the magic community here in Vegas change over the past twenty years since you’ve been here?**

It changed a lot.

**How has it changed?**

How it’s changed? It’s not just magic that’s changed. Everything is changing in Las Vegas. Las Vegas used to be in the past. The new Las Vegas gamble and the entertainment, performance. Most performances that were here, like Folies Bergere, Jubilee, it’s like twenty, thirty years in

here; that's in the past, and a beautiful show. But fifteen years, they come to Cirque du Soleil. Cirque du Soleil is from Canada, actually from Montreal, Canadian company. Cirque du Soleil put on a beautiful show, but they started very strangely. They start forward because they want the theater. They go into the hotel and tell the hotel, "We want your theater," and they pay the rent for the theater. Slowly, it started the business. Las Vegas has changed today. It's a convention capital. The people are coming here not for the show. The show ticket in here used to be—you probably don't know—in the 1990s, the ticket is like thirty-nine, forty-nine, sixty-nine, very reasonable price. You can see many shows you have and some beautiful stars and very beautiful singers, beautiful stars. But when the Cirque du Soleil coming, they bring the orchestra from overseas whether it's Chinese or Russia, and their brand does not to promote a star. You have no more star. Today, Celine Dion is a super superstar. But the Cirque du Soleil, the new style, the Cirque du Soleil is not an original performance, so they hire all young generation. Slowly they take over all the theaters. The casino has to explain it, "Okay, we can make some money for the shows." Also, you have a paid union. Every drink, once you pay the money for the hotel. Then the good performance, some very good ones retire. That's the big change today. Today it's one ticket to come, three hundred, four hundred, impossible. Las Vegas biggest change. Even the parking, you have to pay money now, the locals. Those are the show business. If you can rent the theater, you don't have to be a source that has the money. If today I say, "Okay, I have my mom and daddy give me a sponsor," you go to the theater and rent theater for performance. If you try, then you lost the money, and then close. That's why.

Las Vegas before, one show was twenty, thirty, forty years. Today, open for two months or three months, and it's gone. So, next. Look at Venetian, like Venetian Theatre, it's a little stage that has more than twelve shows in the one theater. Every day after the show, they are

packing stuff in the back where they have the truck to put in the storage between two hours. Each performance pays like ten thousand a week. The owner makes fortune money. That's Las Vegas.

Today is a big change.

**Do you cook at home?**

I cook at home. Yes, I enjoy cooking. In the beginning...it's my background. When I was in circus, sometimes I like cooking by myself, fast cook. I make beans or vegetables. I just put in the hot water for one second and take it out. I use soy sauce, or I use chili sauce. I can eat right away. For me, you buy the rice cooker, put a little Chinese sausage inside, and you can eat right away. For my experience, I think it's very good to eat healthy and not fast food. I was thinking of going to Instagrub. I have two in Instagrub. Today I look in the paper, in the first book, Instagrub, all very bad stuff, so I just...no. But I cook. I'm very good. A lot of young kids coming here, I show them how to make food, eat good. Yes, I enjoy cooking.

**What kind of Chinese dishes do you like cooking?**

I come from Hunan. We are very spicy. My boyfriend says after he eats my food, you can't use the wok, it's all red. Spicy food.

**Are there any Chinese cultural celebrations or traditions that you still celebrate here?**

No. I cannot remember...Chinese New Year. The first day of the year is the New Year. Come to February, Chinese New Year doesn't make me very excited because already two months left, so I don't. I'm not very connected with the Chinese community here. I don't know why. A couple of reasons, I think. In Vancouver, it's the same. Many new immigrants come here, and they want to join the community because they want to know friends; they want to do business. For me, I'm an artist. I don't have to know the people doing the business. That's nothing. The market is like this. Chinese market, it's good, but half of Chinese don't speak English. They have to work with

the Chinese community. But for me, I will be more like Western because I'm already in the Western culture. The people that know me, it's not only Chinese. Chinese people...how I say? In Vancouver, if you open a restaurant and you're successful, they will be opening next door. They open next door. They will fight with the price. That's most of the culture. I'm not saying Chinese culture is no good. Chinese culture is good. But Chinese people, so many people, they cannot get away from the culture because they don't speak English. For me, I'm more open. Does that make sense?

**Yes. Have you been back to China?**

I really like China because for my highly training that makes me today be successful. In China for magic, the first time I perform in my life I see the magical shop. I know how much Chinese magicians need for Western information for the magic. In 1992, I win the IBM, the International Brotherhood of Magicians.





In 1993, I go into China, going to Chinese Magic and Acrobatic Association. That's in Beijing. One association controls all Chinese, complete China magic and acrobat, so I come there, and I asked them to join the Western country, the magic. I'm the bridge between China and the Western, the magic. I was sitting in there looking at all video tapes to select people to go Magical Castle for performance and that were in the past to come to Montreal. IBM in 1993 was in Montreal. I bring them to Montreal and opened the IBM ring in China. Today, they do very, very well. In the beginning, they copy a lot of the acts. I also have to bring the Western people doing the lectures in China to open Chinese kids' minds; don't just copy the people's act. That's China. China today is the same. America has a lot of inventors, but China for inventors, no. But China, to copy is the best. They're cheap. They copy the best merchandise. That's why they kill so many American companies because everything is made in China. I think it's a country developing from copy and then make their own. Now they have money to buy the high-tech company, and so now they're becoming very strong.

But for the magic, yes, I'm not just doing it as a bridge. Since 1993, I opened IBM ring. In 1994, I started a big magic convention with the Chinese in Shanghai with the Shanghai Circus and the Shanghai Media Group that comes every two years. This one has become very successful. I'm the director and the producer for the show. For me, it's not just a performance coming to the stage. Lighting, music, and everything. I'm the director since 1994 until today, very successful.

For this year coming, now I'm still working on bringing the Chinese magicians coming for the championship as a guest performance and I, also, training the students. Most students come to me that I teach here, they're very good. They win a lot of prizes. I have one student, she will be coming on April the fourteenth here for her practice. She has me and also other world

champion magician, we're both training her. I think her chances are bigger to win the World Championship this year. I'm not for sure, but...

For me, until today I'm always working, and I practice, too. I maybe have my own show again. Then I will bring all your university students to come to my show. In downtown I have a little theater. It's a very nice area, but downtown it's very hard to get an audience. It's behind the Heart Attack Burger. Inside the mall, when you got to Fremont Street, in the right, I have one little center. In the third floor, I have a theater, and the inside has five or six—I think nine small theaters. It's beautiful inside.

**SE: What's the building called?**

I don't know. It's very difficult—

**SE: But it's in Fremont Street Experience?**

Yes. I will text to you. But this one, I don't know. Tomorrow, I go to a meeting with one gentleman. He was in Lance Burton's show. He's a juggler. Michael Cordeaux. Me and him want to put a show together. I still always have a contract coming. But today, I already selected. If I have a good contract, I'll take it. If no good, no.

**CW: How long have you been teaching magic?**

I'm not 100 percent teaching, no. When I do a lecture, I will share my experience for the theater performance, stage presence, the costumes, and do the lecture. But for teaching, no. I have two students from China. They come to me. They share their story to me. The girl, she tells me, "Teacher, I love magic." She already wins a lot of championships in China. But she says, "My company boss wants me to be the best Westerner, wants me to be a boss. But he says what I do, be the boss. I want to change my act." Then I look at her and say, "Okay, I pick up you." Then I coached them.

I'm not a teacher of magic. No, I have no time for teaching. Also, the people opened a school because Western countries are different. Western countries, as soon as they have kids, how many families, mom and dad can bring the kids to go to the ballet school, go in to learn the music? But they are not good material. They cannot be very good. For me, I spend the time, and I want the people to be successful. I don't want to spend the time just because they pay me that I teach them, no. I don't need a lot of money. Wastes my time. Everybody brings their kids, driving to the school, the ballet school, music. They are no good. This is short legs, so how can you be a ballerina? I don't waste my time. I don't need a lot of money.

**Have you ever experienced any racially based discrimination while you've lived here?**

What exactly mean?

**SE: Discrimination where people...**

**CW: Treat you differently because you're Asian or because you're a woman.**

Oh, you're talking about racism. No. No, not at all. I always think about it this way. Maybe I'm too strong by myself. Maybe I'm successful. I don't care whether people like me or don't like me. I don't care, so I do what I want to do. I really have no racist feelings. Maybe one time—no. If you have already strong in here and very strong in here, if you are very good...Do you understand what I mean? If you feel really good, you don't pay attention for people. If you are good, you are always in the top. For racists...maybe I do communicate with many people, and maybe I just...

A couple of things you have to understand. People are racists, I'll give an example, if you are Chinese or you are other people, you come living in America, you have to put yourself to be American. You have to know American culture, and you have to speak American language. That's easy for going to join this country as a Chinese, Asian American or whatever. But if you

come here and you still are speaking Chinese and you still are eating Chinese food and you still cannot communicate, people are talking to you for a couple of seconds, of course, you'll feel racist. You understand what I mean?

I'll give you an example. When I was in Vancouver at a beautiful shopping mall, they have a beautiful couch to lounge for the people that are shopping to relax. One day I was shopping there, and a gentleman takes his shoes off and is sitting there in the chair and goes to fix the toes. The old skin falls down on the floor. That's in the big mall that's Chinese. I look at it. I think it's not just me; so many people watch it. Then I was walking, and then I come back. I walk up to him, and I said, "Can you put your shoes back on?" He looks at me. Normally, Chinese, this is not your business. But I come with a strong personality, and I'm very strong, and he has no chance to say, "Not your business." I said, "Can you put your shoes on?" I'm looking at him with a very, very strong look, and he's looking at me. It's a man. It's not a young man. It's an older man. Then I tell him, "I'm sorry, I was very, very angry for you, but the reason is because you are Chinese. If you do this, the people not say it's not you, the people say it's Chinese." I said, "Look at how beautiful it is in here. This is for your shopping. This is not in your countryside where you're outside cleaning up your feet." He said, "Okay, okay, okay." That's just an example.

Many people come to this country—if you come to America—in Germany, it's the same because my boyfriend is German. Germany has test for German language. You live in our country; you must speak our language. If you don't speak our language, why are you coming here? I say it's the same. Also, as soon as you join yourself in this country, in the culture...I don't have much feelings about racism. People always say racist, racist. I don't know.

**CW: I'll turn it over to Stefani now to see if she has any questions.**

**SE: I have a couple. When you left China, that day, how was it to say goodbye to your parents and your sister?**

One day I will tell you the story about the government watched me all the time when I was in Spain because they think I will defect. This is a gentleman, just on his side, he fell in love with me every day. He is from the Spanish company, which hire us for performance, from agency. But this is a story for long...Because of this, the Chinese, my company moved me from the team—circus always go into the country, always had the China performance—moved me to the magic team. The magic team always performs inside China. But this is because I have some very, very deep, very dark sadness in my heart, so that's why I want to live in China.

The other day I live in China, when I go into other country to perform, Chinese people have no possibility to perform. When a percent of our government go into other country for performance, the government helps you to apply for the passport. When you're going to go through the customs, always a gentleman, the boss, has a big bag to carry all the passports. We are all kids lining up, so they give a passport to each one, and then you have a passport in your hands. But he will be going through the immigration first. He is waiting on the other side. Each one by one, as soon as they pass the immigration, they take your passport away. That's in my life. That's in the 1980s.

When I come to Canada, in Vancouver, I fly from Hong Kong to Vancouver. We're in the airplane. I hold my passport in my heart. I'm looking outside the window. I know myself from today how high is the sky is how high I can fly. Before I feel always like my dog; I always have a leash on me. That is my feelings. I think from today I will be doing good and working hard. I say how high is the sky is how high I can fly. I think a new generation doesn't have that

because China today is very open; everybody has the possibility. At this time, we have no possibility, no, not at all. First time I have passport in my hand, I was like, “Get back. Don’t take away,” holding it in my chest. I feel like as long as I’m free, I think I can.

**SE: How did your parents feel when you left? Did they know you were going to stay away?**

My daddy died a long time ago. My dad died when I was in my twenties. My dad died in 1983 or 1984. My mom is strong, but when your kids—especially for me, I have a very strong personality. I know what I’m doing. Because sometimes they are just not listening to mom and daddy, so it’s generation. My mom says, “Don’t move from Hunan to Guangzhou because you will lose your job.” I’m not listening to my mom, but I just needed her to understand that it’s on my own because I am very independent.

I’ll tell you a joke. When I come to Canada, the fortune teller tells me I need a dog. I bought a dog. Her name is Christina. That’s before I won the first World Championship in 1992. Then I have another contract to go to another country for a performance, and I know I can’t carry the dog with me. Now I carry her everywhere. No dog, no show. But before when I was just starting, I don’t know.

I am begging my mom to come to Canada to stay with me. My mom is saying, “No, no, no, no, I don’t like it.” My mom says, “I don’t speak English. No.” My mom said, “No.” I said, “Please, please.” Then one day, my mom says, “Okay, I’m coming,” because now it’s more open. More Chinese people are coming to Western countries. My mom came in 1994. My mom said, “Okay,” and so she came to Vancouver. My mom, in her life, it was her first time to fly. They never fly in China before.

I pick her up from the airport and bring her back to the house. My mom said, “Well, I’m not tired. Can you take me to go outside to look in the city?” I say, “Wow, okay.” I drive my

mom. I said, "What do you want to see?" My mom said, "Oh, I want to see some fabric," because she makes clothes. She loves sewing. For me, I'm not interested about fabric. I said, "Okay, mom, you go into the fabric shop, and I'll go in to buy the food." I said, "I'll buy the food, and then I'll come and pick you up and go home." My mom says, "Okay." That was at three o'clock in the afternoon.

I show up, *boop*, driving the food back home. I was cooking at the night and watching TV because I really wasn't thinking. It was eleven, twelve years already independent. I watch the TV. I was thinking, there's something I have to do, but I cannot remember what.

**SE: You forgot to get her?**

I forgot my mom, complete.

**SE: How did you find her?**

Now it was nine o'clock. I said, "Oh my god." I jump into the car, and I'm driving there. My mom was sixteen hours in the airplane, and I left her at three o'clock. It's nine o'clock, and she is still walking the street, back and forth, back and forth. No English, nothing. With tears in my eyes, I said, "Momma, I'm so sorry. I just completely forgot you." I brought my mom back home. "It's okay. It's okay."

I have all Chinese channels, Chinese TV for my mom. After one year, one day my mom was sitting there looking at me and says, "Uh, the other day you left me in the street, so many people come and say, 'Hello, hello,' and I don't know what exactly they want. Now I understand." I said, "What?" My momma said, "They were asking me how much." I said, "Mom, nobody is looking for an older lady." My mom said, "It's dark. They don't know I'm old." Because she is walking back and forth for a couple of hours. My mom was so funny. I said,

“Nobody is looking for the older chicken.” My momma said, “No, it’s dark. I’m still cute.”

[Laughing]

She passed away last year, November, at ninety-four. My momma passed away, yes.

**SE: Was she here with you?**

Vancouver.

**SE: She stayed in Vancouver.**

Yes. I left, and my sister and my mom were living in Vancouver.

**SE: When did they go to Vancouver?**

My mom was in 1994, and my sister...she is twenty years already. I think in 1998 or 1999. I don’t know. I cannot remember.

**SE: After your mom, though.**

After my mom for a few years, yes.

**SE: What took your sister to Vancouver? Did she go there because you were there and because your mom was there?**

Yes.

**SE: The very first time you came to Las Vegas, the very first time the plane landed and you got out of the plane, what did you think of the city?**

In Las Vegas, I think it’s crazy. I see all palm trees.

When I am injured for my knee, at this time in China, we only have one TV station, which is CCTV, no satellites, nothing. The Chinese people would have no TVs before. In the company, they have a big TV in the one room, which is in the restaurant, and has all the chairs. Every night, we go in to sit in there to watch the TV, everybody together.



One day, I saw a magic show. I didn't do any magic during this time. I see a magic show. I don't know his name at this time. It's a juggling magician. It's a guy. It's beautiful, very, very beautiful. They're doing the manipulation. I just saw it one time, and it's in my mind, in here already. I always remember. I remember that face. I remember that movement. It's very catchy to me. Then I tell myself, "Well, I'm not able to do my juggling very well. I'm going to start doing magic." The reason I'm doing magic is because of the other gentleman I saw.

I have this story, this in my mind all the time when I come to Vancouver. When I joined the Vancouver Magic Circle, I tell my story to the people, what that guy is looking like. I don't know the nationality. The people know him. He is already famous. The show that I saw was a playback. That was 1972, the World Championship in Paris. They got all famous magicians. This gentleman, it's a Japanese man, and his name is Shimada. When I was in Vancouver, the people tell me, "He performs in Las Vegas in Riviera." He was in the show and was very popular, very famous, Shimada. Then I said, "Really?" I was so excited.

Anyway, before I come here, I was a performer in Magic Castle. I will never be shy. I said, "That's good I speak Chinglish." I never be shy, and I ask people. People tell me about him, and then they say, "Oh, his daughter is here." Shimada's daughter. Then I come to her in Magic Castle. I tell her how much I love her daddy. She says, "Oh, here is my dad's phone number."

I come here the first time to come for the magic convention. It used to be in Tropicana Hotel called Magic Seminar. It's hosted by Siegfried and Roy. I come to the convention, and I called the gentleman called Shimada. He has invited me to go see the show in the Riviera. The show's name is Splash. They used to have Spellbound and Splash. The show is called Splash.

I bought a whole bunch of flowers, and I'm holding in my hand when I go in to see the show. When I was in the theater before performance, I was waiting outside holding the flowers.

Then the one guy comes to me and says, “Are you Juliana?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Shimada wants to see you.” I was so excited. They bring me to the side of the stage. I saw Shimada, and those are his wife there. I just completely froze. I gave him a big hug in my mind, from way back there. That’s the first time coming to Las Vegas. It was a crazy time.

He put me in the first row when he performed, half performing, half watching me. Then we become friends. He teaches me his umbrella act. Also, I had his costume, too, in here. His daughter is also doing magic. Shimada, yes.

**SE: What a great story.**

I’m very...never be shy. Never be shy. I never gave up, always working hard.

**SE: Do you think that part of your ballet training and your stage presence, all that that was taught to you in China, separates you from other magicians?**

I think so. Here is the one. The Western people training, they’re good. Western people are very good, but the Chinese people is more detailed. Even the Chinese culture is more detailed. Let’s say the sports, ice hockey, they play the ice hockey. The Americans are working half a year, and the other half a year is holiday. China, impossible, twenty-four hours, from morning to—even today, all sports, the show business, it’s every day for training, the professional. Western people just half a year. When you have to do the competition, then you’re training together, but other time you have a holiday. In China, you have your life job; your job is just training and the competition. I think it’s very helpful. Also, for my magic, too, because of my foundation of training and how to use my body movement, body language, already makes me special. It makes me different than other people.

**SE: Did your sister have that same opportunity?**

No. My sister did zero, not in the show business at all.

**SE: What did she do while you were at this one school?**

She was at normal school. After school, she worked in an oil company as an employee. It's very funny, they are two totally different, yes. I don't think that she can dance or she can sing. She is just an employee, a worker.

**SE: Was that hard for her, do you think? Was it difficult for her that you were selected for this?**

No, not at all. It's different. It's totally different. I think she is never interested about the performance. For me, I just wanted to be a performer. I wanted to be an entertainer. Today, "American Idol," we look at how much kids appreciate themselves. Some people are not interested in it. Not in mind, no.

**SE: Did your family get to see you perform?**

Yes. In China at this time, every year when I finish school, I come to the regular ballet company or Chinese circus, every year the government give the job—because they pay your salary and prepare everything, and your clothes, we're in the school. Every year you have three months to go to the countryside to perform for the farmers, and then you go to the manufacturing, and you have to go to the theater. They gave you the job, yes, for work. You don't have to worry about your own performance. Today, maybe yes, when I get my audience, but in China, no.

**SE: But your family did get to see you perform?**

Yes, they do. Not just my family. Even in Spanish Trails, I have a lot of people see my performance when I was living in Linque.

**SE: Is there anything that you would like to talk about that we haven't asked you?**

I don't know.

**SE: You mentioned a story...**

That one, I will give you the magazine. I'll give you some book because my story—a lot of stories. One, it's in a Canadian schoolbook. In Canada, in middle school, they have my story in the schoolbook in Canada. Some of my story, the love story about the Spanish guy, it was published in Canadian magazine called *Saturday Night*. That's very much like a *People* magazine, American. It was a cover story. I had some documentary on CBC, Canadian TV. I also have documentary in Singapore, a TV documentary about some...I also rode with a tour of twelve successful Asian people in America, and those on BBC have one. That's a long time ago I have a documentary with me, 陈聪 (Chen Cong), some famous entertainers.

I was really active in the 1990s, from 1992 until I moved to Vegas. I don't know what reason I come to Vegas. I just...Oh, the reason is because after 1997, I performed a lot in Germany, even a year. I had half a year in Germany until last year, until before the pandemic. That's why in Vegas I gave up because, first of all, Cirque du Soleil changed this, and for me, I'm working a couple of minutes in the theater in Germany. I never become very popular in Germany because I'm just a performance in there. But this, they have a lot of newspapers talking about me, too.



**SE: How did the pandemic change the way—or did it—the way you perform?**

The pandemic for me, it doesn't really—of course, not the performance. Las Vegas closed performances in February two years ago. But when they closed this time, I was in Branson, Missouri performance. The theater is closed here, but in Branson, Missouri, it's still open. Until March, the Branson says, "Well, we have so many cases, and we have to close." I came back in March. Then last year, I was in Branson, Missouri again, and then it started again, the Omicron, new ones.

But for me, performance is one, but for organize and for the conventions as a producer, as a director, I always work. Now, every day, I still get back at two or three o'clock in the morning. I stay working lots. I don't feel very much that it hurts me because I'm working lots for China, and those I forgot to tell you. China has a problem with one very famous Chinese actress. We have one show called 超凡魔术师. It's like "America's Got Talent," this type but for magician. I was a jury in China in Jiangsu TV station. The program was very popular. But she cheated tax more than 149 million, but they catch her, and then they kill the complete program. She was very popular, very famous. We have this show in China. If you're looking for 超凡魔术师. I'll give you the Chinese name, and you'll see it, my name.

**CW: I saw it on your website, yes.**

They have this TV as a jury. I am very much working a lot. Of course, what I feel from pandemic, I feel people have to be distant right now. Before, you had parties and visit people. You go out for fun for a drink. Every year they have the Kentucky, the horse racing that they always have, together. I feel like people are distant. It's not as close like before. You have this feeling, too?

**SE: Yes.**

It's not as close as before where I always have parties or whatever. Now it's no more. If people invite me to go to a party, I have to think about, do I go or not?

**SE: Right. This is wonderful. Thank you so much.**

**CW: Yes, thank you.**

**[End of recorded interview]**

**APPENDIX**  
**AWARDS 1992–2006**





China Acrobats Association (n.d.)



International Brotherhood of Magicians (1992)



Miss Chinatown USA Pageant (1996)



The Magic Hands Show Competition (1996)





XXI Congreso Nacional De Magia (1996)



FISM Dresden, Manipulation (1997)



The 7th China Wujiao International Acrobatic Festival (1999)



Ben Chavez Memorial Award (2001)



International Magicians Society Merlin Award (2001, 2003)



