

AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTIAN GIOVANNI

An Oral History Conducted by Jerwin Tiu and Cecilia Winchell

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
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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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I dedicate this in loving memory of my mom.

With great appreciation for all of her invaluable accomplishments, and the legacy that she left behind.

She paved an inspirational path for others to travel and explore.



PREFACE



Born in Las Vegas, Nevada, to a Thai mother and White father, strong themes surrounding community and heritage surround Christian Giovanni's life. Her Thai mother, Oywan Sawyer, married her U.S. Air Force father while he was stationed in Thailand; after traveling the world, the couple eventually settled in Las Vegas, Nevada. While living in Las Vegas, her mother first worked for MGM Grand as a dealer before becoming sick with kidney disease and turning her focus to community building. Throughout Oywan's time in Las Vegas, even to the end of her life, she did everything involved in starting the first temple in Las Vegas to

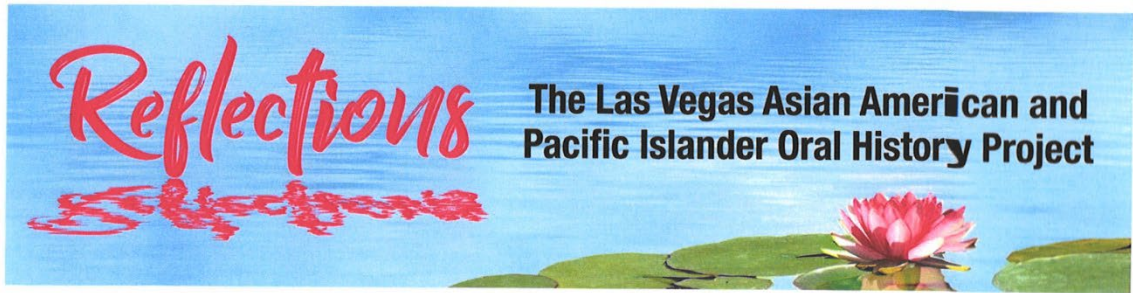
founding and editing Southern Nevada's first Thai newspaper, *Las Vegas News*. Giovanni speaks highly of Oywan in connecting with all kinds of people and bringing the Thai community together in a way that had never done before.

These are part of the values that Oywan passed down to Giovanni, who continues what her mother has started to this day. While Giovanni acknowledges not getting involved with the Thai community until later in life—due to her more Western appearance—she has since carried on her mother's legacy as a Thai community leader. Giovanni's leadership includes roles as owner/editor of the *Las Vegas News*, Commissioner of the AAPI County Commission, and Founder and Director of the Thai Culture Foundation. While the interview firmly focuses on Giovanni's mother, she also discusses her education, the foods she has learned to cook, and her own growth in and experiences with the Thai community.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Jerwin Tiu and Cecilia Winchell

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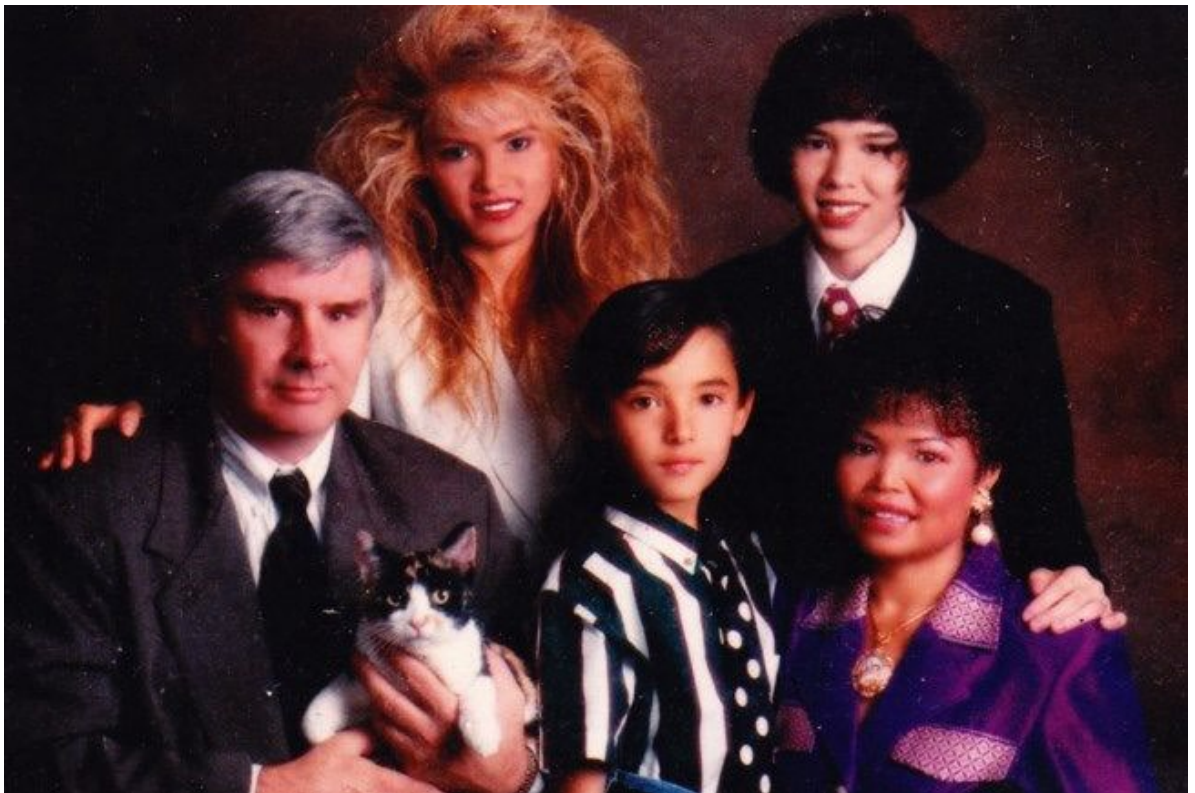
Good afternoon. Today is May 17th, 2022. I am Cecilia Winchell. I'm here with Jerwin Tiu, Stefani Evans, and Christian Giovanni.

Christian, will you please spell your first and last name for the record?

C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N. G-I-O-V-A-N-N-I.

Thank you. To start off, could you just tell us about your childhood, your parents, grandparents, anything?

I grew up here in Las Vegas. My mom was Thai and my father, American. My little sister Natalie and my little brother James, we all grew up here in Las Vegas, went to school here. Our childhood was pretty much like any other American household other than my mom being Thai. She taught us about the culture from Thailand. She taught us how to cook. She taught us about different customs that she grew up with. I feel blessed to grow up in a multicultural family. It was very nice. I'm very grateful she taught me how to cook.



Family portrait, Oywan's first love and main priority circa 1997

My grandparents, I didn't really see them that much. My mom's parents lived in Thailand, so I had never been back to Thailand, so I never had the privilege of knowing them, prior to them passing away. My dad's parents are from Michigan, so we would go back every so often for summers, and it was nice. They were the typical grandparents that liked to spoil us and give us everything that we wanted.

Just a typical American family. But I will say that I feel very blessed to have had both my parents because I couldn't have thought about two more generous, kind, caring, giving people.



Oywan and David Sawyer, 1997

Do you know how your mother emigrated from Thailand to the United States?

I do. My father was in the Air Force, and he was stationed in Thailand. He met my mom; she was a concierge at one of the hotels, and he had ordered his uniforms to be pressed. He came

down to the desk, and he told me that he just fell in love with her right away because she was tiny, petite, with long jet-black hair that passed her waist. And she was the sweetest lady, and he wanted to get to know her. He asked her out, and the rest is history. They got married in Thailand, and then they traveled around the world. Prior to coming here to Las Vegas, they were in England, and then they came to Las Vegas from England and settled.



Oywan Sawyer had a sense of style, she loved fashion and dressing for all occasions, 1997

Do you know anything about your mother's childhood?

I know that she grew up in Thailand, and she had to work. She came from a very hardworking family. She had four sisters and one brother. She was very close to my grandfather. She would

always speak about him. My mom's family owned a huge rice farm. My mom would go to school and then come back and help grandpa work on the rice fields. She said that she's happy that she got those experiences because she learned to work really hard. She had a happy childhood. Whenever she would talk about it, she would smile and laugh all the time.

After going to England, do you know why they chose to move to Las Vegas?

My father received an assignment, and they liked it so much they decided to stay here. He had that option. He did have assignments in between time. They bought a home here, and they still traveled to different places before they finally came back and settled for good.

What year was that, do you know?

I don't know. I just know that it was in the '70s.

After they settled here, do you know what your mom did?

Yes, as far as work, she worked at the MGM Hotel. She was a dealer. She worked there until she got sick with kidney disease. She battled with that for a long time. But in between working, she would go to the Air Force Base to do grocery shopping, and that's where she met a lot of other ladies that had migrated here from Thailand. I do remember she also had friends that she met in England, and they came here right around the same time. Some of those ladies are deceased now, unfortunately, and some are still alive. I know two that are still alive, but they're very old; they're in their eighties now.

After working at the MGM, what did she do?

She stopped working because of the kidney disease. She went on disability. She made friends. She stayed busy. She was very social. She was actually one of the first people to gather a group, and they started one of the very first temples here in Las Vegas, and that's where they would go to socialize.

SE: What temple was that?

It's called Wat Buddha Pavana.

CW: Was your mother very religious?

Yes.

Did she bring that into your life?

She did. We grew up in a very strict household with her values and morals, very strict, but she was also very open-minded and allowed me to make my own choices. I decided that Christianity was a better fit for me, so that's where I followed. But I always respected my mom's religion, and me, my brother and sister would go to temple with her. We knew all of the monks growing up. Like I said, I'm very grateful that my mom allowed me to make the choices for myself that I thought was best for me.



Oywan and some old long-time friends at Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam temple on July 11, 2019, her last visit to the temple prior to her passing

Could you talk about some of the other things that your mom has done while living here in Las Vegas?

Yes. The timeline when she started the temple—she did help to start Wat Buddha Pavana, her among several other people started that. But they had another temple called Wat Wapa, which is near the Nellis Air Force Base off Nellis and Kell. The ladies decided that the location was nice.

Wat Wapa means temple in the forest, and it has a lot of trees. They planted trees since its

inception in 1999. My mom helped to do that temple, and she was a steady member until she passed in 2019.

But also in 1999, she started the very first Thai newspaper, *The Las Vegas News*. Prior to that, there was no community other than what you would see at the temple. My mom was instrumental in developing the Thai community through the newspaper. She was very social. She had a vibrant personality. She wasn't afraid to make friends. She would write the newspaper and help promote events that were going on at the temple. From there in 1999, that's when the Thai community started to grow. They would read the paper because they were able to get this newspaper at the first Thai market called the International Market. They would read the newspaper and say, "Wow, I'm going to go to this event." My mom was in the photo with every community member that she saw. There is a community pictorial, the social section. When people would meet my mom, they would say, "Wow, it's so great to meet you in person. I feel like I know you from all of your adventures." She was very instrumental because of her newspaper in uniting the community, getting the word out, promoting businesses, anything that was important to helping the community grow and uniting the Thai people so that they can meet each other and make new friends.

Do you know why community building was so important for your mom?

Yes. Again, when she arrived in the 1970s, there was no community. She had the friends that she had from England, and she had friends that she would meet through the Air Force base, and she knew that there were other people out there that wanted to meet other Thai people. It's not that she was lonely because she had family and friends, but she recalls how...she came from a big family in Thailand. Everybody knew each other. She knew that she could recreate that feeling for other people that were just migrating or just arriving. Also, you have to understand that it's a

completely different culture. My mom came here and spoke very little English, and she took the initiative to learn. She took ESL classes. With her experience, she wanted to help other people that were getting here. She said, “I can get a head start and help other people so that they don’t feel so lost or lonely in a completely different country, a completely different culture, and a completely different language.”

Could you tell us some of the important Thai celebrations?

Yes. The biggest one of each year is Songkran, that is the Thai New Year that takes place between April 13th, 14th, and 15th. Everybody gathers at the temple. The occasion, of course, is to celebrate the new year, but religious-wise, it’s a new beginning. Everybody makes mistakes. Those days that you go to temple, you wash away past mistakes, and you get a fresh start.

The second one is Buddha Day. It takes place in November. They call it the Kathina, which is temple fundraising, and everybody gathers at their temples to raise money to improve the temples, just whatever they need at the temple, and that in turn gives them blessings for doing that.



Oywan and her dear friend Saipin Chutima of Lotus of Siam, and their temple friends during a Kathina Temple fundraiser event, November 4, 2012

What was your relationship like with your mother, and could you tell us about some of the values and ideas that she passed down to you?

My relationship with my mom was a close one. I can only describe her as the sweetest, most-loving mom, but she's also the disciplinarian. My dad never disciplined me. But I have that ultimate respect for my mom because she was such a strong lady. She was this tiny, little, petite lady that was very strong. She wasn't afraid to discipline and tell us what was right or what was wrong. I'm not going to lie and say that I was the perfect child. I was rebellious just like any other child. But she was so patient with all three of her children, especially me because I was the first one, so trial and error. She was so warm and willing to listen. She came from another country, but she was so open to allowing me to just be me, be this American kid, and be a part of my world. But she instilled the values that she grew up with, which was very religious. Buddhism was very important. It was a big part of her life. She taught me that no matter what religion you are, you have to offer respect to everybody else for their differences and for their own beliefs.

She was fun. She had the loudest voice. Our house was always full of laughter and full of smiles with my mom around. Not a dull moment. I remember on Halloween, she would go out to Sam's Club, and she would buy the big bars of chocolate, put them in buckets, and she would wait by the door. Our house was decorated, and she would fill up the little kids' baskets with the big candy bars. If she liked the kid, she would say, "Hold on, hold on. I'm going to give you more." Some of the kids would come back around. She would say, "I just saw you," with her little accent. "You already came here. It's okay. I give you more." That's how generous and kind she was. I never forgot that about her. She was so kind and giving to everybody.



Sending Buddha water cleansing ritual, an event that brings happiness, fun, and laughter. It is a ritual of cleaning the previous year and welcoming the New Year with new beginnings, April 21, 2016



Oywan was deeply religious and practiced Buddhism; she attended temple on a regular basis to give alms and take merit. This photo was taken during Songkran Thai New Year at Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam, April 18, 2017

Regardless of her disciplinary—in Thailand, they were very strict. Here in America, children are protected from being physically whipped, and my mom didn't do that, but she had that stern look of “if I tell you no, it's no,” and you didn't question her. But at the same time, she can turn around and say, “I do this because I love you and I care and I want you to become the best person you can be.” Being a little kid, I thought, sure, you're just mean. But now as an adult, I can't tell you how grateful I am because it made me the strong person that I am, and I appreciate her values more than I ever did.

Could you also tell us about some of the food that she taught you how to cook?

Yes. She taught me how to cook American and Thai food. There's nothing that I can't cook, honestly. It was amazing how she knew how to cook all these American foods. She knew how to cook amazing Thai food to begin with, but she took the initiative, even though my dad loved Thai food. He would eat anything she cooked. But she also wanted to embrace the American culture, the American food. She took the initiative to go and buy cookbooks, and she would watch cooking shows, and she just said, “Ah.” She had the basic knowledge, and she would get the ingredients and experiment. My dad and me and my siblings, we liked everything.

She taught me how to cook steaks, stews, meatloaf, and she taught me how to cook all the popular dishes that the Thai people have at the restaurants. But my mom's food is better than the restaurants because she did it with love. She did it with natural ingredients. She didn't cut corners. Everything is all-natural, the very best, used less salt. She just knew how to make the natural herbs, bring out the flavors without enhancing it with MSG or salt.

When your family would go out to eat, would you guys go out to Thai restaurants, American restaurants, a mix?

It was a mix, a mix of everything. We enjoyed going out to eat steaks. My mom loved to eat steak and grilled chicken. My parents liked big beefy hamburgers; we'd go out for that. We would go to the Thai restaurants, also. Even though I enjoy the Thai food, I did not like going to the Thai restaurants because...let me tell you why. Everybody in the Thai community knows my mom. She's been referred to as the mother of the Thai community. She's been referred to as the icon because everywhere there was a major event or everywhere there was some kind of historical event in the making, my mom was there. She was either an organizer, or she was just there to support whoever was putting on an event. With that said, when we would go to a Thai restaurant, the owner would know her. They would come out, "Hi, Oywan, oh my gosh." They would do the customary respectful Wai [the Thai welcome gesture], and then they would invite themselves to sit down during our family dinner, so that time was taken away from the family. Even though we all accepted it, she always had to give her time speaking with everybody in the community. When the owner would sit down, then there would be another person from the community, and it would become this big social gathering. That's why I didn't really like going to the Thai restaurants, because that would happen every time. I preferred to go somewhere where I could have my mom to myself.

Was your mother politically involved?

Yes, she was, but she was nonpartisan. It didn't matter if it was Democrat or Republican, if you invited her to support your event, she was going to go because her point of view was whichever candidate wins, the community has to deal with them, and they're going to have to help in one sense or another. She never got involved with taking sides or promoting a candidate. She would just go to support any candidate and be a part of whatever event would help the community as a whole Las Vegas, not just the Thai community.

Moving on to talk more about you now. What was it like growing up, and what was your schooling like here in Las Vegas?

It was great, my childhood wasn't much different from anyone else. With everything that my mom brought to our family, I just thought that was normal, having a crazy Asian mom with a loud voice and a fun accent and a dad that was quiet and let my mom run the house. I didn't think that was different. We would go to mom for everything. We would go to dad, and dad would say, "Ask your mom." It was a typical household. But it was a loving household. My dad was very much in love with my mom. I consider myself fortunate.

In school, it was pretty normal. I don't see it being any different than any other household in America or any other child going to school. The only thing that was different for me is that I am a mixed-race child being half-American and half-Thai. I do look more American. Growing up in elementary school, I went to elementary school on the base, and there were other children that were mixed of different heritages. But for me, I was bullied by the Asians, and I just never understood why. I saw, oh, you guys look like my mom and her friends' kids. I was open to being their friend, but they weren't open to being friends with me. Early on, I just said, "That's okay," and I did not have any Asian friends. That only occurred around 2012 when my father passed away, and my mom was very sick at that time, so I had to step up and help her. That's how I got involved with the Thai community at that time. By then, the culture changed, and they just thought I was the most beautiful human. The older ladies, the younger kids, they would stare at me. It was a completely different experience than when I was younger. When I was younger, I wasn't accepted, and now they think, wow. I thought, oh, this is a different experience. It changed.

But growing up, familywise, it was nice. I was just accepted by the American kids that looked like me, the lighter skin, lighter hair, lighter eyes. It just seemed normal to me, so I didn't really think anything of it.

After you graduated high school, what did you do?

I went away to college. I went to Texas for college. Then I came back to visit my mom. She was getting sick. I went off to Pepperdine for my doctorate. When I got back, I had to step up and take care of my mom. She was very young, but she developed a kidney disease in the '80s, so she got dialysis. She actually received a transplant in 1997, so she was able to go about and do her stuff. She said, "I have all this energy. I want to do the newspaper. I want to support my community."

That transplant, the kidney lasted until 2005. My mom had to go back on dialysis at that time. She was a very independent, strong lady. My dad was still around helping her all the way through that point. She did dialysis all the way until she passed in 2019. I was able to focus on myself some, but I'm just one of those people that was so grateful, I helped my mom with everything as much as I could. My dad would take her to doctors' appointments. She would get home, and I would help her. Dialysis days, the only way I can explain it, if you're not familiar with it, is it takes a lot of energy out of you. She would have to rest for the most part of the day, and then she was able to do normal things in the afternoon. I would help her with that.

SE: How often did she have dialysis?

Three times a week.

And how long did the treatment last?

Three and a half hours each day per treatment.

CW: Going back to your education, what was your undergrad and PsyD in?

Psychology and criminal justice.

Was there ever pressure from your parents to pursue higher education?

Yes. They didn't tell me what I needed to be, but both of them wanted better for us. They believed in higher education because they said that would be your oyster, and with higher education you can be whatever you want. No matter what you choose, just better yourself with education. They were very supportive. They saved the money to send all of us to school. My sister joined the Air Force because my dad was in the Air Force, so she wanted to follow in his footsteps. The Air Force paid for all of her education.

What made you interested in those areas?

My dad, after he retired from the Air Force, he worked for the criminal justice department. I would hear my dad's stories, and I thought, wow, that's cool; my dad puts away criminals, and he does these secret jobs. I still don't know what to this day. I thought that it was really neat that my dad did that.

Psychology is very interesting because growing up I was lucky that I had a dad that understood that you have to express yourself. He was teaching my mom that because in the Asian culture, at least with the Thai culture, it's taboo to speak about your problems. I was fascinated with the way minds work, and I knew that I could understand different cultures and different backgrounds. I just wanted to understand the human mind altogether, that's why I was interested in psychology.

What did you end up doing with your education?

I do criminal corrections psychology-wise. I deal with federal cases involving high-profile inmates.

How have you seen Las Vegas change since you were young to where we are at now?

When I was young, you could get from one side of town to the other in less than fifteen minutes. It was such a small town that you would know everybody, and you could probably look across the desert from where you are and see—we're in the southwest—you could probably see Henderson back in the day, but now it's become a major suburb.

When I was growing up, we didn't have cool malls—we had the malls, but we didn't have cool stores. We didn't have things like...I always liked the Hard Rock because I saw it on TV, but now it's here, and we have more than one. We have amazing venues that we did not have in Vegas. We weren't a sports town. Now we have the Golden Knights, the Raiders. This didn't exist back in the day. Las Vegas was a mob town desert with only casinos. It's grown from that small town to this amazing venue that people come to celebrate sports.

Different cultures. We have so many different cultures here. It's not just Asian, but Polynesian, everything. It's grown into a real diverse city.

What year did you move back to Las Vegas?

I'm really bad with math, and I obviously don't know. My parents came here in early '70s. It was probably '79 or '80. Don't quote me on that. I'm really terrible with math, and I really don't remember.

How have you seen the Thai community change?

It's changed massively. When I was growing up, my mom's friends would visit the house, or she would go over to their homes, and everybody knew each other. Everybody knew everybody. You could go to the little International Thai Market, and my mom would know every single person. Now it's this huge community. There was no community back when my mom first got here, and there was no temple until her and her friends did the fundraising to start that very first temple. Now everybody is involved. You'll see Thai dancers. You'll see a whole mix of people. Now

they have food fairs where you can buy different Thai foods, like street-style Thai food that you would see in Thailand, and they never had that before. It's really neat.



Oywan with local Thai talents during Thai Night on the Fremont Street Stage during Chinese New Year with guest appearance by Thai Consulate Banna Vang (pictured in the middle), February 8, 2014

One thing that never changed through my experience with my mom is that regardless of how big the community got, and I believe it's because of her presence in the community and her newspaper, people would come up to her and say, "Hi. How are you?" My mom was so gracious, she would say, "Oh, it's so good to see you." After they would leave, my mom would say, "Who was that?" "I don't know, mom." She says, "Everybody knows me because of the paper, and I don't want to hurt their feelings, so I interact with them like I've known them forever." It was really neat.



Chinese New Year Cultural Parade in Downtown Las Vegas, February 21, 2015

What do you enjoy most about living in Las Vegas now?

It's home. It's all I know. Prior to COVID—we're slowly getting back to normalcy—but prior to COVID, everything was twenty-four hours. If I get sick at night, I didn't need to worry if the store was closed. I could go get medication, or if I needed something unexpected.

The main thing that I like about Vegas is the diversity, and it's so clean. I've been to many different places in the United States, and they're beautiful, but it doesn't have a clean feeling. Our streets are paved. Our streets aren't broken up. You don't see the swamps pouring out into our roads the way you do in other places. That's what I like.

I do hide in the summer during the day because of the heat. But other than that, I don't know any other place that feels like home.

You mentioned a little bit about this earlier. Could you tell us more about how you got back into being involved in the Thai community and what you do with the community now?

Yes. Like I said earlier, I was never involved in the Thai community because it was my mom's thing. I grew up all-American. The Thai kids weren't very accepting of me because of my looks, my appearance. But when I started helping my mom, I did recognize a need for community help. They rely on each other. I had people coming up to me at my mom's funeral telling me, "Thank you so much. Your mom paid for my husband's funeral." These were things that I knew about, but I didn't know the extent of it. They would tell me, "Your mom is the one that took me to do the paperwork when my husband passed away." I had children say, "Your mom gave me the money to pay for my mom's cremation. I didn't have the funds." I was amazed. My mom was able to afford that so she helped people. They didn't really have the community outlet to do that, so I recognized that.

Prior to my mom's death, I founded the Thai Culture Foundation in 2012. We welcome young children to learn about their culture. We offer language classes. The other part of it is also that I developed a partnership with Asian Community Development Council where I'm able to offer Thai people medical assistance, mental healthcare for people that aren't able to afford it or just simply don't know where to go to receive these kinds of services. I noticed prior to my mom's death that people were in need of these things. I recognized that if I could help them, maybe they would broaden their experience, just make a better life for them here in America because they didn't have access to services, and they weren't aware of the full American culture. I said, "I'm going to combine this with my Thai Culture Foundation."



Dr. Christian Giovanni awarding special certificates of recognition to the youth performers of the Thai Culture Foundation for representing the Thai community of Las Vegas during their performances at the 2019 Asian Night Market event.

Now they recognize me as continuing my mom’s legacy in helping. My mom did it without a foundation or a 501(c)(3). She did it out of her own pocket, her love for her people, her native Thailand. She did it to just see people have a better life. She didn’t want to see anybody struggle. I’m doing it a little bit different, in my way. It is a 501(c)(3). I do fund it out of my own pocket many times, but with the partnership of...I call her Auntie Vida, Vida Lin. She is just a wonderful person, and she is very supportive of my mission and my goals to help the Thai community.

I continue my mom’s newspaper. People always run into me, “Where’s the newspaper?” Well, you have to understand I’m the only one printing. We’re getting out of COVID, so people have time to go to the market. If you need it, let me know. But they really look for these things. They don’t like change, so they’re happy the newspaper still goes on. They tell me, “Thank you

for continuing to help the Thai community,” the way my mom did. That’s what came about when I started helping my mom in early 2012.

Do you still celebrate any Thai cultural traditions?

Not at home, but I get called and invited by the monks and the people in the community to go to the temple, and I’ll do life celebrations for my mom during Songkran, and that’s basically doing prayer with the monks and the community members. It’s just giving honor to the loved ones that have passed on.



Sending Buddha Water during Songkran Thai New Year at Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam, 2016



Oywan celebrating the Songkran Thai New Year with longtime friends, April 18, 2017



Songkran Thai New Year is always celebrated with plenty of Thai foods made fresh at the celebrations, April 18, 2017

Could you also tell us a bit about your involvement with the AAPI County Commission?

Yes. The commission was formed to educate people, to prevent racism and xenophobia, and I believe that all people deserve equality. That's part of why I joined. But my role...they had a plan set out prior to me joining, and it was actually by the request of several community leaders that I join to help form a community cultural center, and that was my interest in it. I don't like stereotypes. I won't even refer to people as Asian. I personally feel that if we're going to have equality, we have to look at people as humans, and that's how I do. I don't care what your race is or color is. I focus on you as a human being, and that's who I'm helping. That's why I joined it. Hopefully my ideas will carry out. But again, the goals and the plan were already set out prior to me joining the commission.

You mentioned the Asian kids who bullied you, but have you ever experienced any other type of racial discrimination just being mixed-race?

No, not at all. I found that American people are generously accepting, and they like it. At least with my experience, they tend to feel this interest in knowing, wow, what's it like to grow up in a multicultural household? I've even received many questions: What's it like to have an Asian mom? What's the food like? You're so lucky you have all these foods. Then when I would invite my friends over to eat, they would say, "You're so lucky you eat like this all the time." The only discrimination or bullying that I've ever experienced is from the Asian kids.

How have you seen your own AAPI identity through growing up until now? Have you navigated that, and how do you see it now?

I never really lived as an Asian child. Again, with the bullying, I thought it was mean, and I didn't want to be that way, so I just said to each their own. What I embrace is my mom's background, my mom's culture, the elders that I grew up knowing when I was little. They

remind me every day, “I changed your diaper, so don’t you ever forget that. I’m your auntie.” I’m very respectful. I embrace them. Each one is very interesting because they grew up differently than I did. I just accept that they’re different, and I like it. They’re all crazy and fun and outspoken. I just embrace everything that they grew up with and what they’ve brought to America to share.

What do you believe is the primary issue facing the AAPI community today?

From what I see, as far as the commission itself, the teamwork is really strong. Everybody is willing to work with each other within the community, and we have a good program that’s doing outreach to reach above and beyond the Asian communities. Other than what’s happened during COVID—again this is just my experience—people out there, politicians, American community leaders, they’re all so open and very welcoming to help solve issues that have to do with the AAPI communities.



During the pandemic, Dr. Christian Giovanni, the Immunize Nevada Vaccine Team, and the ACDC team provided free Covid-19 vaccines and flu shots to the monks of the Thai community at Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam temple and various other locations

CW: I have one more question, but before that I'll pass it onto Jerwin and Stefani.

JT: I just wanted to know, where do you see the AAPI community headed towards in the future? What do you see the trajectory? Things like that.

I've noticed that everything that we're doing in the commission already exists in the Asian Community Development Council that's run by Vida Lin. She's very instrumental, and she started this right around 2015. Our mission has already been accomplished by her. Another assignment that we have is to collect history, much like this project is doing now at UNLV. I like that. I feel that in the past there was no offering for history where people would look at an Asian restaurant or an Asian supermarket, and people had no thoughts of, oh wow, what's the story behind that? I feel that now, because of the history collection and research that we're doing, and this project is doing, everybody in different denominations will now know history of how all of this began.

Education programs already exist teaching Asian studies in CSN and UNLV, and we're trying to get a little bit more of this education into the Clark County School District, and I feel that that in itself will help pass along the history for future generations.

You talked about it a little bit, but I just wanted to know more about your experience of whenever you ever felt like, hmm, maybe my family isn't very typical, ordinary. What feelings were involved? Were you just maybe shocked? Were you ever embarrassed, even? I just wanted to know more about that experience and that feeling.

I was never embarrassed about my mom. I was very proud of her, especially because I was so fortunate to grow up with the warmth that she provided as a mom. She was also a disciplinarian that taught me right from wrong. My dad was a wonderful supporter of everything that she wanted to do. But there were times when I would hear people say things, derogatory things

towards Asians in general. It wasn't any particular denomination, such as Thai, Filipino, or Hawaiian. It was just people out there that were uneducated and would say derogatory things.

It made me feel very sad that they felt that way, and it also put me in a position where I thought, well, I don't know how to correct this, and I don't really want to say anything because I can't change their minds with one sentence. But I knew in the future I could do something to change their minds because, again, I don't believe in stereotypes, I've never liked them, and I'm not a fan of, "Oh yes, we have the top Asian student, or the top Black student, or the top White student." I feel that we're going to come to a point in the future that we're all going to be one race as humans. I really hope, even if I'm not here on Earth anymore, that these things don't exist anymore so that regardless of what color you are or where you come from or where your family comes from, you're going to have equal opportunity, and nobody is going to look at you any different.

Just knowing that that type of derogatory mindset is out there, it was disheartening. It was sad to see. But at the same time, I thought, well, you're the one missing out because you have to broaden your horizons, your experiences, with different foods, different countries, different cultures, different people because you're going to learn from everything, eating foods. There's a story why pad Thai was created. There's a story why people look the way they look, because of the regions. I just hope that people will learn that and learn to respect everybody as a human being.

JT: Thank you so much. I'll pass it onto Stefani.

SE: I've got some really just picky questions. The second temple that your mom started with the Nellis ladies, how do you spell that one?

It's Watpa, W-A-T-P-A. It's actually short for Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam.

SE: Can you spell that one, too?

I can't spell that, but I'll email it to you.

SE: Okay. Can you tell us something about that group of Thai ladies that she became part of near Nellis?

These women have something very important in common. They all met their husbands during the Vietnam War. They met a wonderful man in the service and fell in love. They all traveled and settled here in Las Vegas. They had that in common. They came from Thailand. They knew the lifestyle. They also knew what it was like to marry an American. These women love America. My mom said, "This is my home. I'm from Thailand, but I love America. I love everything that the Air Force has provided your father and I. From there, we were able to better our lives and provide for our families." Those women have that common, and they're all missing home. That's why they were able to get together, talk, and say, "All right, we need to build our community. We need to meet other people." They have that bond.

Did you become close with their children?

No.

What schools did you attend while you were here in Las Vegas?

I went to Lomie G. Heard [Elementary School], which is the base school. My brother and sister went to Kenny Guinn and then Palo Verde. I went off to Santa Catalina.

Oh, you poor baby.

It was a wonderful experience.

I know. I was being sarcastic. You went to Catalina Island?

No. Santa Catalina School in Monterey, [California].

Oh, I'm sorry. I do know of that. You went there for middle school and high school or just high school?

Correct, both.

Tell us about the Thai market that you mentioned.

It was the International Market. It was the very first market. It's no longer because Aunt Tippie [Meevasin] who opened the market, is retired now, and she just didn't want to do anything further with the market.

That was in Commercial Center?

It was in Commercial Center for a very short time, and then she found a new location off Las Vegas Boulevard and somewhere by Main Street. It was near something called Odyssey Records.

Your brother and sister—I know you said your sister went into the Air Force—where do they live now?

My brother lives here with me. I made a promise to both my parents that I would always take care of the family. My brother lives here with me. My sister, when she retired from the Air Force, she joined the FBI. She's a nerd, and she likes cyber, computers. She does some cyber stuff with them. She's a proud nerd. If you know of a character, if you watch "Criminal Minds," she is very much like Penelope, but looks like Abbie from NCIS [Naval Criminal Investigation Service].

"NCIS."

Yes, that's correct.

I know it well. Can you give us the names of some of those early Thai families that you remember from your childhood?

Sure. Are these people that you would want to hear the stories?

Yes, perhaps, and we could talk about that after we stop the recording. But just to get an idea of some of the families that were here in the '70s.

Oh yes, definitely. The early settlers, I'll never forget them. I'm actually friends with Rane. She is the daughter of Golf Samerthai. She owned one of the first restaurants, the second restaurant in the Thai community called Sawadee. She is in her eighties, and she doesn't talk much. Tippi Meevasin was the owner of the International Market. She actually got here a little bit before my parents did. A lady named Ratchana Webb, she came from England at the same time that my parents did, her and her family. Many of them have passed away. Ratchana Webb is still around. She's retired now and hardly ever goes out. Tippi Meevasin, you'll catch her at the temple once in a while. Many of them moved away; they went to other places.

This is a later settler, but she was very good friends with my mom, Saipin Chutima. They were like sisters. Her family came here in 1999, and they opened up Lotus of Siam.

Oh yes, I don't know her last name, Nee, she opened up the Kung Fu restaurant; that was the very first Thai restaurant in the Las Vegas community. It started out in, at the time, Union Plaza Casino downtown, and now it's just the Plaza. Now that restaurant has moved to Chinatown on the corner of Valley View and Spring Mountain. Her sister runs it.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

The Las Vegas News, do you remember what years your mom published that?

Nineteen ninety-nine to current.

To current.

Yes.

Is it written in Thai?

It is.

CW: Is there anything else about you or your mom that we haven't asked about that you'd like to talk about?

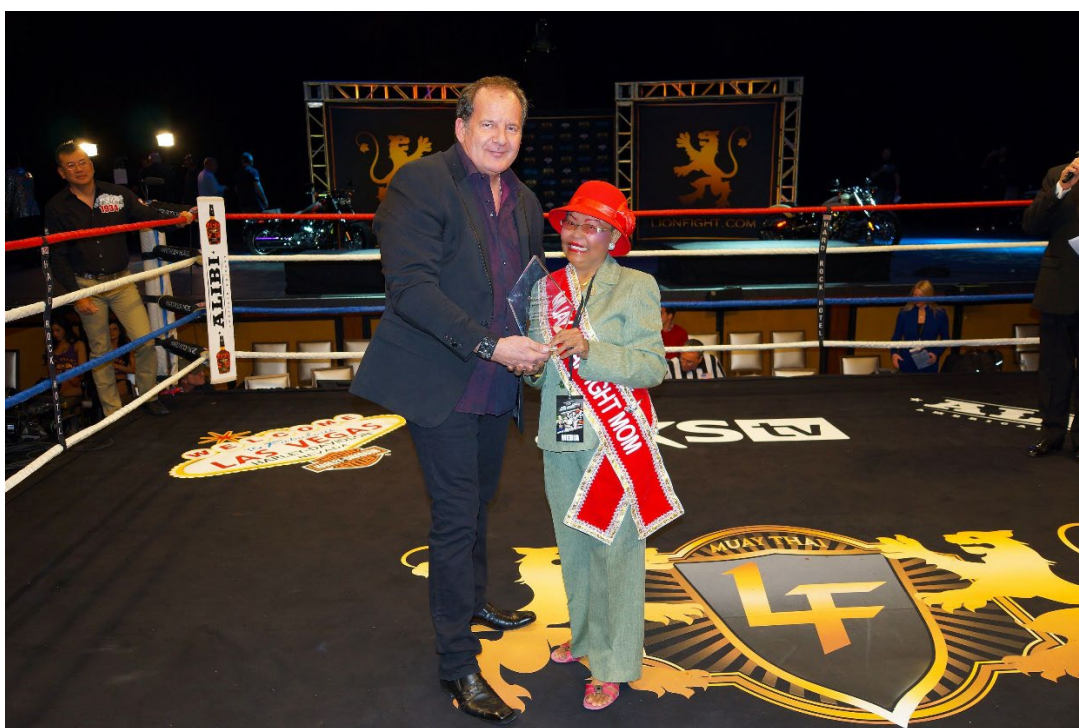
Part of the reason why I wanted to be a part of your wonderful program is because it outlines history, and because my mom was one of the first settlers here, she pioneered and made a difference. She made the Thai community into what it is today. Of course, her and her friends, they had these ideas. Their ideas started out as, we need more socializing. But I don't think they realized the difference that they were all going to make with their small contributions and their thoughts of, let's get a temple out here. My mom was so instrumental. She was considered one of the ultimate success stories because most Thai people are a little shy and docile when they're around other people. When they're amongst each other, they're very loud and outgoing. But my mom was steady; she was always outgoing and not afraid. She never met a stranger.



In the ring with Muay Thai Champion Yodsaenklai Fairtex and the Fairtex Team, his last fight, September 5, 2014



Oywan watching Lion Fight with former Nevada Governor Bob Miller and his son former Nevada Secretary of State Ross Miller, July 4, 2014



Scott Kent, president of Lion Fight Promotions, presenting Oywan with a lifetime appreciation award during the fights at the Hard Rock Hotel in appreciation for her continued support, March 28, 2014

She was recognized by many elected officials and Thai dignitaries. She was also well known as the Muay Thai Fight Mom. Muay Thai is the capital sport of Thailand. The sport is actually what saved the country, and that's how that developed. But my mom supported every single Muay Thai fighter. There's a promotion company owned by Scott Kent; it's called Lion Fight. When he was just getting started, he came to my mom and said, "I would like to get your help on how we can get the Thai community involved." After all her years of helping, he called her the Fight Mom. Everybody called her Fight Mom. She would be out in the ring when the guys were up in the ring fighting. She would say, "Okay, watch out, left hook, and soon," they would listen to her.

There is an award sitting right there that was presented to her during one of the live shows. This is the Muay Thai Award given by Scott. This one is from the prime minister of Thailand at the time for the newspaper being at its top, the top and first one in Nevada. She received many recognitions, many awards for the different contributions that she gave to the Thai community and in Las Vegas as well.

She was also highly recognized in Los Angeles, because that's where the Thai Consulate is based. They have terms of four years, so she would make friends with all of them. She would get invited to the Wat Thai Temple in Los Angeles for events, all council events, and all of the major leaders of the Thai community respected her. In fact, when she passed, I had two American ceremonies for my mom, and the Thai people came to me and insisted on having the Thai ceremony. They said, "You need to do the Thai service for your mom." I told them that I had already buried my mom. She's next to my dad at Boulder City, Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



Thai Town Los Angeles during their Songkran celebration with dear friend LAPD Officer Pete Phpermsanggam and other friends, April 5, 2015



Oywan with Thai LAPD Office Pete Phpermsangngam while he was in Las Vegas and made time to visit Oywan and pay alms at temple, December 30, 2017



Oywan and her friends from the Los Angeles Thai community at a special event concert at the Gold Coast; these ladies are regarded as High Society leaders of their Thai communities, August 30, 2016

They said to me, “You’re not going to do that to your mom.” They demanded that I do the Thai ceremony at Watpa Temple, and the ladies told me, “You don’t have to do anything except show up, come and bring your mom’s pictures. We will do the rest for you.” People from the Los Angeles Thai community drove up here to Las Vegas for that weekend to attend her Thai services. That’s how highly regarded and respected my mom was. I tried to get away with not doing the Thai service, but the Thai community wasn’t having it. They said, “Your mom wasn’t just some lady... You know how big your mom was?” I replied, “Yes, I do.” And the ladies went on to say “So, you understand why you have to let us say goodbye, you have to do, you have to do that.” So I told them, “Okay, all of you handle the Thai services.” And they all came together and did it in honor of my mom. They all had so much respect and love for my mom. There were so many people in attendance that they had to set chairs outside of the temple for the overflow. It

was in December and very cold out. I was very touched by that; that they wanted to honor my mom that way.

SE: Did that surprise you?

Yes and no. My mom had left me with this request that I take care of everything, all the affairs in order before I let the Thai community know because in all honesty, just like any other community situation, you have leaders and supporters, and you have the ones that aren't so successful, the ones that just want to bring other people down. My mom forewarned me, she wanted me to be prepared and watch out for a certain person. She wanted me to make sure this person didn't try to interfere with the running of the business. My mom's newspaper has the same staff that it did twenty-three years ago. They're still with me. They still work at the paper. My mom told me to take care of them until they are ready to retire. Keep the paper going so that they have livelihood. It wasn't just a business to my mom. She genuinely cared about the people. I did that for her, and the newspaper continues to run.

Because my mom had forewarned me to prepare, I became a rock and I said, "Okay." I'm going to do what I have to do...and I was prepared for any challenges that might come to me.

Believe me, the challenges did come. Some people said, "You're just an American kid. You don't even know Thai." Which I do, and I do speak it, but some people weren't aware of this, because I don't speak much in the community. I'm quiet, I just show respect. I'm just there to help. I made it known that I wasn't going to allow anyone to mess with me; my mom might not be here, but I stand my own ground, and I wasn't going to allow anyone to do this to me, attack me, or undermine me. All of my mom's businesses continue to run, and I'm going to continue to help the families. Regardless of what I look like being a mixed child, I'm here and I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to carry on my mom's legacy.

Now it's different, those people who tried to stop me from continuing the legacy have nothing but respect for me; they saw that I was as strong as my mom.

But the part where I am not surprised is my mom was so loved, she was deeply respected and highly honored. I suppose I should have known that would happen—the overwhelming show of love and support and extent of honor during her memorial services. It was endearing to see the extent of my mom's influence in the community.

Thank you so much.

[End of recorded interview]

APPENDIX



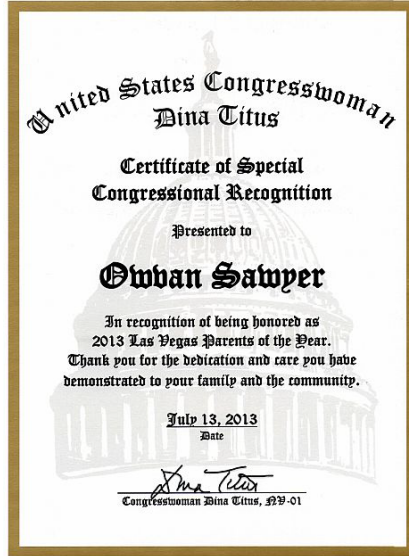
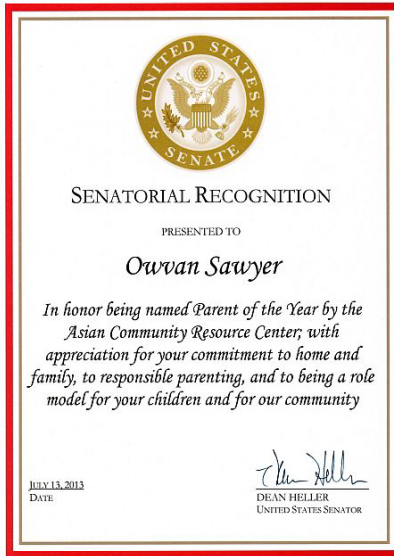
Oywan receiving David's service flag at his memorial and burial services, a devastating loss after the beautiful life they built together, July 29, 2012



Oywan receiving Parent of the Year recognitions for being a sweet, loving, and wonderful mom, July 13, 2013



ผู้ปกครองนานาชาติดีเด่นกับประชาคมนิวเวา 4 ใน National Parents' Day Las Vegas Parents Day Celebration-July 13, 2013 จากซ้าย... Eric Guideng Representative Congressman Joe Heck, D.O. (ที่ 2 จากซ้าย) Representative Dean Heller United States Senator (ขวา) Kim Poole Representative Dina Titus United State Congress Woman (ที่ 2 ขวา) Carmen Gilbert Regional Representative Harry Reid United States Senate มอบใบประกาศนียบัตรเกียรติยศผู้ปกครองดีเด่นให้กับ "อัยหวาน ซอว์เยอร์" ดินน์มีควานผู้สืบทอดได้รับเกียรติเป็นอย่างสูงถึง ที่ได้รับเลือกให้เป็นผู้ปกครองดีเด่น ประจำปี 2013



Oywan Sawyer, Nevada Parent of the Year certificates, July 13, 2013



Mayor Oscar Goodman proclaiming Oywan Sawyer Day in reflection of her continuous contributions to the Las Vegas Thai Community and for reaching the nine-year milestone of the Las Vegas News Thai Newspaper, April 29, 2008



Mayor Carolyn Goodman honoring Oywan with a proclamation for promoting tourism during the Chinese New Year events and attracting several thousands of visitors to Las Vegas while promoting cultural diversity, February 5, 2014



Thai event at the Gold Coast Hotel and Casino Ballroom in Thai cultural costumes, August 13, 2013



Event celebrating the birthday of Queen Sirikit of Thailand inside the Gold Coast Hotel and Casino Ballroom, everyone dressed in traditional Thai costumes, August 12, 2016



Congresswoman Dina Titus, Oywan Sawyer, and Kim Tanaka Poole at the Asian Chamber Christmas party, December 5, 2014



Playing traditional Thai instruments during the Songkran Thai New Year at Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam, April 17, 2018



Muay Thai Fight Mom Oywan Sawyer with Thai Champion Muay Thai fighters Coke Chunhawatt, Yodsaeklai Fairtex, and Malaipet Sasiprapa with Las Vegas Thai fans during a Lion Fight welcome event, July 25, 2013



Hanging out with the Lion Fight Crew, president of Lion Fight Promotions Scott Kent and former Nevada Secretary of State Ross Miller at the Hard Rock Hotel, November 1, 2013



Muay Thai Fight Mom Oywan Sawyer had a large extended family within the Muay Thai community; here she is with Team Malaipet during Lion Fight, one of the many large group photos with the teams she supported and sponsored, November 1, 2013



Oywan with Padma Lakshmi during the filming of Taste the Nation when Padma visited Oywan's family home to cook and film with her and her friends; afterwards they all went to explore the food fair at Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam, episode streamed on Hulu in June 2020, July 11, 2019



Oywan Sawyer in Thailand, April 1973



Private lunch with Royal Thai Consulate General Tanee Sangrat and the next generation of Thai children, August 19, 2016



Oywan Sawyer, Editor-in-Chief of Las Vegas News presenting the community service appreciation certificate to Sakorn Kue Cha Roen, a long-time member of the Watpa Buddhaya Nandharam temple who has continuously contributed her time to help raise funds for temple improvements.

ใบประกาศเกียรติคุณที่ทางสถานทูตสาธารณรัฐหรืออเมริกา มอบให้กับ อ้อยหวาน ชอร์เนอร์ และหนังสือพิมพ์ลอสเวกัสนิวส์ เพื่อในโอกาสครบรอบ 19 ปี

JACKY ROSEN
3rd District, Nevada
Washington Office
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 9, 2018

Las Vegas News
PO BOX 401644
Las Vegas, NV 89140-1644

Dear Oywan Sawyer,

I am delighted to congratulate you on the 19th anniversary of the Las Vegas News.

Through your role as founder and editor-in-chief, the Las Vegas News has become the leading Thai publication in the Las Vegas Valley. Your devotion and hard work has produced a publication that has kept Thai citizens in Las Vegas, and its surrounding areas, connected with news and events from their native home of Thailand, as well as the news in their local community.

On behalf of the Third Congressional District of Nevada, I extend my best wishes to you and the Las Vegas News.

Congratulations to you and your entire staff!

Sincerely,
Jacky Rosen
Jacky Rosen
Member of Congress

State of Nevada
Office of Governor Brian Sandoval
CERTIFICATE OF RECOGNITION

Awarded to
Oywan Sawyer

In recognition of your dedication of work as founder and editor-in-chief of The Las Vegas News Thai Newspaper, As Governor of the great State of Nevada, I congratulate you on this achievement and wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Given under my hand and the seal of the State of Nevada
this 9th day of September, 2018.

Brian Sandoval
Governor of the State of Nevada

UNITED STATES SENATE

SENATORIAL CERTIFICATE OF CONGRATULATIONS

PRESENTED TO

Oywan Sawyer

In recognition of successfully achieving the 19 year milestone of The Las Vegas News Thai Newspaper as the Editor-in-Chief; with appreciation for your commitment and service to the southern Nevada community

Dean Heller
DEAN HELLER
UNITED STATES SENATOR

AUGUST 27, 2018
DATE

Proclamation

WHEREAS, it is the tradition and practice of the House of County Commissioners to recognize and honor those non-governmental individuals, groups or programs which make the lives of many in their community; and

WHEREAS, Oywan Sawyer has successfully achieved the 19 year milestone of The Las Vegas News Thai Newspaper as the editor-in-chief since its inception on September 9, 1999; and

WHEREAS, the Las Vegas News has consistently provided the top quality Thai publication in Nevada, bringing those who live in Nevada stay connected with news and events from their native Thailand; and

WHEREAS, Oywan Sawyer has dedicated herself towards making Las Vegas from the successful publication that it is today, highlighting its role to the great state of Nevada as one of the best places to live and work;

WHEREAS, in the September 9, 2018 issue, Las Vegas News will publish a special edition on its 19th anniversary to celebrate the 19th anniversary with pictorials of statewide events;

NOW THEREFORE, the Board of Commissioners of Clark County, Nevada, do hereby recognize and congratulate

LAS VEGAS NEWS
on their 19th anniversary and wish them every success.

Chris Sanchez
CHRIS SANCHEZ, CLERK

Lawrence Weekly
LAWRENCE WEEKLY, CLERK

David Blazer
DAVID BLAZER, CLERK

Maureen K. Kirkpatrick
MAUREEN K. KIRKPATRICK, CLERK

Laurence B. Bann
LAURENCE B. BANN, CLERK

Carole E. Gibson
CAROLE E. GIBSON, CLERK

Lynn Marie Gage
LYNN MARIE GAGE, CLERK

คณะกรรมการบริหารของเทศมณฑลคลาร์กขอชื่นชมและยกย่อง อ้อยหวาน ชอร์เนอร์ ผู้ที่ซึ่งนำการมีอยู่ของบรรณาธิการหนังสือพิมพ์ลอสเวกัสนิวส์ Thai News สืบต่อกันมาตลอดระยะเวลาครบรอบ 19 ปี ของการมีหนังสือพิมพ์ ลอส เวกัส นิวส์ และขอแสดงความยินดีที่ฉลองครบรอบครบรอบครบรอบหนังสือพิมพ์ ลอส เวกัส นิวส์ ที่ซึ่งมีประวัติอันยาวนานในการสนับสนุนชาวไทยในรัฐเนวาดา ซึ่งก่อตั้งเมื่อวันที่ 9 กันยายน 1999 ซึ่งสนับสนุนการมีอยู่ของชาวต่างชาติในรัฐเนวาดา

CITY OF LAS VEGAS

From the Office of
Mayor Carolyn G. Goodman

CAROLYN G. GOODMAN
Mayor

LAS VEGAS NEWS THAI NEWSPAPER
19TH ANNIVERSARY
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA
SEPTEMBER 9, 2018

Dear Readers:

As Mayor of the great City of Las Vegas, it is my distinct pleasure to congratulate the Las Vegas News Thai Newspaper on its 19th anniversary. Since its inception in 1999, the Las Vegas News Thai Newspaper has worked to provide timely and accurate information to readers in both Las Vegas and throughout the world.

Of course, the publication of this newspaper would never have been possible without the efforts of Oywan Sawyer. As both the founder and editor-in-chief, Mrs. Sawyer has been instrumental in the publication of the newspaper, and I offer her my appreciation for her meaningful work.

The news has my best wishes for continued success for the next 19 years and beyond. Happy reading!

Sincerely,
Carolyn G. Goodman
Carolyn G. Goodman
Mayor, City of Las Vegas

Phone: (702) 251-2000
Fax: (702) 251-2000
TDD: (702) 251-2000

Web: www.lasvegasnevada.gov
City of Las Vegas
100 North Las Vegas Blvd., Suite 100
Las Vegas, NV 89101

Letters of Congratulations, September 2018

สารแสดงความยินดี
จากสำนักงานทนายความ The Tingey Injury Law Firm

The Tingey Injury Law Firm wishes to extend warm congratulations to 'Las Vegas News' as it approaches its 19th year anniversary. It has been a privilege to work alongside Oywan Sawyer, the Founder and Editor-in-Chief, as well as her team and staff. We appreciate the leadership and service that she has provided the Las Vegas Thai community for many years. We are grateful for the work she has done as the Editor in Chief to keep the Thai residents of Las Vegas connected to both their native home of Thailand and to their local community. Mrs. Sawyer and the 'Las Vegas News' are important and valuable fixtures in our city. To Mrs. Sawyer and her staff, thank you for all you do!

Don C. Tingey

Letter of Congratulations from Don Tingey



ร้านอาหารไทยบัวสยาม

620 E. Flamingo Rd
Las Vegas, NV 89119
contact@lotusofsiamlv.com

August 21, 2018

ในนามร้านอาหารไทยบัวสยาม ขอแสดงความยินดี กับหนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์ (Las Vegas News) เนื่องในโอกาสครบรอบ 20 ปี ซึ่งเป็นที่นำชมชมที่มีหนังสือพิมพ์ท้องถิ่นภาษาไทยในลาสเวกัสที่มีอายุยาวนานมาถึง 20 ปี ทางทีมผู้บริหารร้านอาหารบัวสยามได้มีความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีกับทีมงานหนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์มาเป็นเวลาหลายสิบปีแล้ว ซึ่งสิ่งเหล่านี้เป็นเครื่องยืนยันว่าความสัมพันธ์ที่เป็นเพื่อนที่ดีของเรา มีความร่วมมือในแง่ของการทำงาน การแลกเปลี่ยนข่าวสารให้ชุมชนชาวไทยในลาสเวกัส ทำให้ประชาชนได้รับรู้ข้อมูลข่าวสารระหว่างกันมากขึ้นและมีประโยชน์อย่างมาก

จึงขอแสดงความยินดีกับหนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์ที่มีอายุครบ 20 ปีมา ณ ที่นี้ และคาดหวังว่าทีมงานทุกท่านได้มีความสุขกายสบายใจ มีสุขภาพพลานามัยที่แข็งแรงและพร้อมที่จะดำเนินการสร้างความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีต่อไปอีกนานเท่านาน

ขอแสดงความยินดีมา ณ ที่นี้

Saipin Chutima

นางสายพิน ชุตินา

เจ้าของร้านอาหารไทยบัวสยาม

Letter of Congratulations from Saipin Chutima



LYONS SHARE
— REAL ESTATE —

"Espinosa Team"
2620 Regatta Dr Ste 102
Las Vegas, NV 89128
Direct: 702-460-4626
www.HomesForSaleinLV.com

September 1, 2018

Happy Anniversary to Las Vegas News!

Congratulations on achieving your 19 year milestone. My family has known น้า Oywan for a very long time now and we love her newspaper!!! It's the best Thai Newspaper and the only Thai paper my parents read! Las Vegas News has been a big supporter of my real estate business and I am so grateful, and thankful! They have also supported my sister Dr. Amy Tongsir's Dental business.

น้า Oywan is a long term active and respected member of the Las Vegas Thai Community for over 45 years. Despite the fact that น้า Oywan is a heart and dialysis patient who awaits a kidney transplant, she continues to live life contributing to her community, and continues to be an inspiration to others with her positive outlook as a whole. My family and I love you and your awesome personality!!! We admire your hard work and perseverance. Thank you for all of your contributions to our community. It is with great pleasure to wish a Happy 19th Anniversary to Las Vegas News!!! We wish you many more years of success and prosperity.

Sincerely,

Diane Sirikhan

Diane Sirikhan

Letter of Congratulations from Diane Sirikhan



สารแสดงความยินดีหนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์ ในโอกาสที่ครบรอบ ๑๙ ปี

ผมขอแสดงความยินดีในโอกาสที่หนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์ ได้ดำเนินกิจการมาครบ ๑๙ ปี ภายใต้การบริหารของคุณอัยยหาวัน ซอยอร์ หนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์ ได้ทำงานรับใช้ชุมชนไทยในลาสเวกัส และสหรัฐอเมริกาอย่างเที่ยงตรงและสร้างสรรค์ ทั้งในส่วนของบริการประชาสัมพันธ์ข่าวสารและกิจกรรมของชุมชนไทย สมาคมต่าง ๆ รวมถึงวิถีไทย และในส่วนของความเป็นตัวกลางเผยแพร่ข้อมูลข่าวสารจากประเทศไทยมาสู่ชุมชนไทยอย่างทันเหตุการณ์ รวมทั้งขอขอบคุณอย่างสูงมา ณ ที่นี้

ผมเชื่อมั่นว่าความมุ่งมั่นในการทำหน้าที่รับใช้สังคมและการดำเนินกิจกรรมอันเป็นสาธารณประโยชน์เช่นนี้ จะส่งผลให้กิจการหนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์เจริญก้าวหน้ายิ่งขึ้นไป และคงอยู่ในเส้นทางหลักของชุมชนไทยในลาสเวกัสและในสหรัฐอเมริกาต่อไป

สุดท้ายนี้ ผมขอขอพรให้คุณอัยยหาวัน ประสบความสำเร็จ ทั้งในหน้าที่การงาน และชีวิตครอบครัว และขออาราธนาคุณพระศรีรัตนตรัยและสิ่งศักดิ์สิทธิ์ทั้งหลายในสากลโลกจงปกปักษ์ดูแลให้คุณอัยยหาวัน และผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับหนังสือพิมพ์ลาสเวกัสนิวส์ทุกท่านจงมีความสุข ความเจริญ และเปี่ยมด้วยจตุรพิธพรชัยตลอดไป

Royal Thai Consulate

ธานี แฉงรัตน์

กงสุลใหญ่ ณ นครลาสเวกัส

Letter of Congratulations from Royal Thai Consulate
General

Commendation

WHEREAS, *Las Vegas News is an international newspaper published twice a month in Southern Nevada; and,*

WHEREAS, *the publication has consistently remained the top leading Thai magazine in the valley by helping those now living in Nevada stay connected with news and events from their native Thailand; and,*

WHEREAS, *since its inception September 9, 1999, Founder and Editor-in-Chief Oywan Sawyer has dedicated herself toward making Las Vegas News the successful publication that it is today; and,*

WHEREAS, *in each issue of Las Vegas News, Sawyer highlights the City of Henderson as one of the best places to live; and,*

WHEREAS, *the magazine will publish a special edition in their September 9, 2018, issue to highlight past events in celebration of their 19th anniversary; and,*

WHEREAS, *through the years, Las Vegas News has expanded to offer Thai and English websites as well as social media outlets to highlight Thai culture, travel and food; and,*

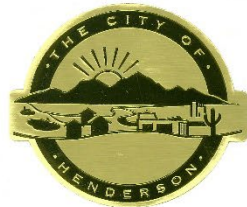
WHEREAS, *the City of Henderson has the mission to provide services and resources that enhance the quality of life to those who live, learn, work and play in our city;*

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Debra March, as Mayor of the City of Henderson, Nevada, do hereby commend and recognize

OYWAN SAWYER LAS VEGAS NEWS

in recognition of her 19 dedicated years highlighting our Premier Community in Las Vegas News.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the City of Henderson, Nevada, to be affixed this ninth day of September 2018.



Debra March

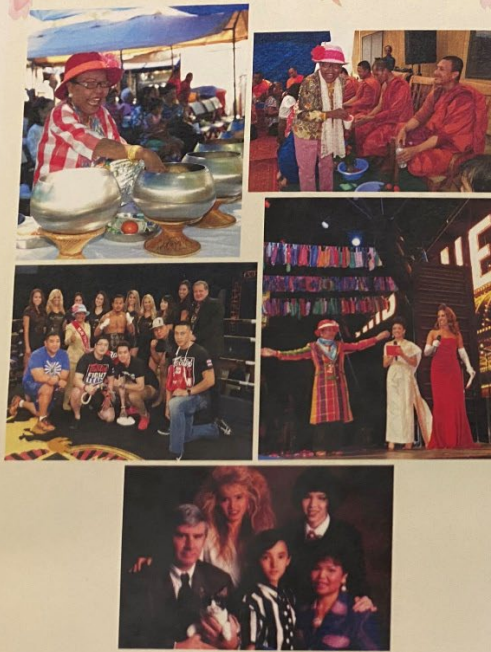
Debra March
Mayor, City of Henderson

ATTEST:
Sabrina Mercadante

SABRINA MERCADANTE, MMC
City Clerk

Commendation from the Mayor of the City of Henderson, Debra March, September 2018

Celebrating The Life Of A Legend



~ If you are considering flowers, in lieu of, the family requests that you make a (Tax-Deductible) donation to: **Thai Culture Foundation** (a non-profit, Scholarship) in honor of Oywan. Non-profit website: ThaiCultureFoundation.com



In Loving Memory Of

OWVAN "OYWAN" SAWYER

May 1951 - November 2019

Forever In Our Hearts

Oywan "Oywan" Sawyer passed away with her children and closest friends by her side on November 8, 2019. She became terminally ill in 1982 and had since fought a long and courageous battle with end-stage renal failure, followed by congestive heart failure.

Beloved mom, and second mom to many, Oywan was born in Thailand; her name means sweet sugar cane. She and her husband David made Las Vegas their permanent home in 1975 and started their family.

Oywan was an honorable woman who served her family and community. She was one of the first Thai settlers who helped grow the Las Vegas Thai community into what it is today, she is a fixture of Thai history. During the past 20 years she held the position as Editor in Chief of *Las Vegas News*, Nevada's largest Thai newspaper, which she founded in 1999. Through the years she earned numerous awards and recognition from Mayors Oscar and Carolyn Goodman, countless elected officials of the State of Nevada, and the Royal Thai Consulates of Thailand. She was considered the ultimate success story by her peers and associates. She earned a well deserved recognition as a "Nevada Parent of the Year" on July 13, 2013 by Congresswoman Dina Titus, Congressman Joe Heck, former Senators Dean Heller and Harry Reid.

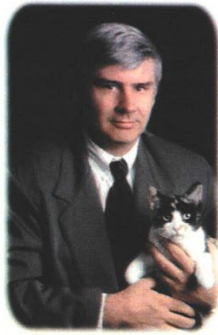
She never let it be known that she was terminally ill and kept her health challenges well hidden. Some days were more difficult than others, but she stayed strong even while enduring daily dialysis treatments for several decades. She was a fighter, and she lived each day with positive light and energy. Her doctors were always impressed with her positive attitude.

Oywan was a petite lady with a larger than life personality and presence. Everyone knew her as the little lady with the biggest caring heart; she always had a big bright smile on her face. She was always dressed nicely in her bright colored outfits and a matching hat - she loved cheerful colors. Her face was always glowing with happiness. Her large personality and loud voice livened up every room she walked into like no one else could. You could tell by her contagious laughter and cheer that she enjoyed life to the fullest. She always had funny stories to share and made people laugh and smile with her. Everyone who met her fell in love with her. She called everyone "Honey" and she instantly made people feel loved.

Her greatest loves in life were family, food, gardening, animals, and Muay Thai. She enjoyed socializing, and loved attending Muay Thai fights. She was affectionately known as 'Muay Thai Fight Mom' in the fight community. She was an icon. She was a loyal friend to many, a philanthropist who generously helped others without expectations. Above all, Oywan was a devoted wife and mother and her family was the most important element in her life.

To all who knew her, Oywan will be fondly remembered as a friendly, kind and generous lady. It was a blessing to know her because she was an extraordinary lady who will be dearly missed, a legend who will forever live in our hearts.

She was preceded in death by her husband David, survived by their three children, eldest daughter Christian, daughter Natalie, and their son James.



He Only Takes The Best

God saw he was getting tired a cure was not to be, So He put His arms around him and whispered "Come with Me". With tearful eyes we watched him suffer, and saw him fade away, although we loved him dearly, we could not make him stay. A golden heart stopped beating, hard working hands to rest. God broke our hearts to prove to us, He only takes the best.

In Loving Memory of
David J. Sawyer

Born
October 7, 1952
Grand Rapids, Michigan

At Rest
July 19, 2012
Las Vegas, Nevada

Service
Palm Mortuary - Cheyenne Chapel
Thursday, July 26, 2012
12:00 p.m.

Officiant
Christian Giovanni

Graveside Service
Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery
Monday, July 30, 2012
12:40 p.m.

Palm Mortuary
Las Vegas, Nevada



Share a Memory

Please join us in remembering David J. Sawyer by visiting our Memorial at www.palmmortuary.com. Through this site, we invite you to share your thoughts and fond memories with our family.

Palm Summerlin-Funeral Home
7400 W. Cheyenne Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89129
(702) 464-8480
www.palmmortuary.com



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Article for Mother's Day 2015, written by Christian Giovanni

Published in the Las Vegas News

Happy Mother's Day to all of the selfless, loving Moms!

Mothers are so amazing and special; no other kind of love can compare to the love that a mother has for her children. Every son or daughter is naturally going to say that they have the best mom in the world and that is the way it should be, all moms are important figures to their children.

Each year I write a special article for Mother's Day to honor my mom; I always want her to know how much I appreciate her for who she is and everything that she has done to raise me into the adult that I am today and everything she continues to devote to our family.

My mom is truly amazing in every way and she continues to inspire me. Everyone who knows my mom, knows that she is a petite lady who has a big caring heart, and she always has a bright smile on her face. Anytime you see her, she is dressed nicely in her bright colored custom outfits and a matching hat. Her face is continuously glowing with happiness. She has a large personality and a loud voice that always livens up any room; you can tell by her laughter and cheer that she enjoys life to the fullest everyday.

Some people know my mom as the Las Vegas News Lady, who has been producing her newspaper since 1999. That alone is amazing, but what is even more remarkable is that she can still do all of this while she deals with serious health conditions relating to her kidney failure and heart failure conditions. Not many people know that my mom is ill, and you could never tell by looking at her, because she refuses to let it stand in the way of her enjoying life, and she is not the kind of person who wants anyone to feel bad for her. Three times a week she has to undergo dialysis treatments which are necessary until she receives a kidney transplant. These kinds of treatments are tough on a body and can be very strenuous. Most people who go through these same treatments are not able to walk around or do normal day to day activities on their own. Because of my mom's positive and upbeat outlook on life, her health has improved tremendously during the past years and her cardiologists at UCLA diagnose her as being healthier than most people who do not have a terminal illness. My mom has apparently perfected the power of positive mental energy and thinking.

Some days can still be more difficult than others but my mom is strong and she is a fighter. Her doctors are always impressed with her positive attitude, as she didn't become bitter or angry like most people would have. Instead, she faces each day with a smile, a positive attitude and her strong will to be healthy. My mom tells me that I am the one who keeps her going, but I feel that it is her strength and will-power that keeps her going. I am so proud of her for being courageous and valiant every day. I know her body hurts but she magically makes her health challenges look so easy to manage. Mom truly is the strongest person I know. Despite her health conditions, Life just seems to get better for mom each day with so many amazing things happening and she certainly deserves all of the great blessings.

When my Dad passed away in 2012, it was one of the most difficult times for my family. It broke my mom's heart but she managed to stay strong. It made me appreciate my mom even

more; I only have one parent on earth with me now and I realize the time you have with your parents is a sacred treasure.

Many people have kindly praised me for taking care of my mom, but the compliments should go to my mom for raising me the right way, and teaching me the lessons in life to do the right things. I am only a living proof that she raised me right. She gave me life and generously provided me with the best of everything she could; she was strict and expected a lot from me because she wanted me to be the best that I could be, to be a good person, a good human being with good morals and values. Though I have had to make many personal sacrifices in order to dedicate the time towards taking care of my mom, I wouldn't have this any other way. I have expressed time and time again, my mom made many sacrifices for me and my siblings, she continues to give generously, and loves unconditionally. She gives more than one hundred percent of her heart and efforts to our family; I consider it a blessing to have the time that we do. I know I could never give back to my mom as much as she has given to me, I can only do my best to show my appreciation.

My mom has always been a wonderful mother. When I was a kid, all of my friends wanted to stay at my house because they loved my mom. She was kind to everyone and treated all of the kids like her own. All of the neighborhood children would come over just to visit my mom and eat with her. She always cooked the best foods and made enough to share with everyone who came over. Everyone enjoyed listening to her funny stories, she was animated and comedic. All through my childhood, our holidays were exciting because my mom would decorate our house for every occasion, her traditions made everything fun. While we were growing up, my mom gave me, my sister, and brother everything that we wanted, but she also taught us the value of things and how important it was for us to earn what we wanted and be self sufficient.

My mom always supported the decisions I made for my life and career, and I feel fortunate that I have worked hard to earn this good life that allows me the independence to take care of her. When I set my mind on becoming a doctor, it was because I wanted to change the world and make it a better place in some way, but most importantly; I'm blessed that I can make a difference in my Mom's life. I am grateful to my mom for so much more than words can describe, she made many sacrifices for me and I am happy that I can give back to her and help her with everything that is important to her. She always put me and my siblings first above her priorities; she is the greatest example of what a loving, caring, protective mom is. I know that I am genuinely fortunate to have been blessed with having this exceptional lady as my mom. She is generous to a fault, both my parents worked hard to provide for me and my siblings, we wanted for nothing, mom especially spoiled us most. She still continues to give us the best of everything. I love my mom dearly and I will always do my best to honor her and her teachings of good moral principles and continue to make her feel proud.

It touches my heart when I see other moms taking care of their young children, it makes me think of when I was a little baby and I can't help but to smile.

I have a true soft spot in my heart for all moms; because I know how much my mom has sacrificed for our family and continues to sacrifice, my mom is my inspiration for the Mother's Day Tributes each year. I commend all of the amazing mothers who make the sacrifices for their children.

Mother's Day is a wonderful annual tradition, but don't forget to appreciate your mother every day. Her love is never ending and she will always be the most important woman in your life.

Dr. Christian Giovanni Psy.D.

ดร. คริสเตียน จีโรวานนี ดุษฎีมหาบัณฑิตสาขาจิตวิทยา

Thai Thom Yum Chicken Soup Recipe



Thai Tom Yum Chicken Soup (Nam Sai) **(Nam Sai, means Clear Soup)**

Ingredients:

Filtered water (Approx. 1 gallon and 20 ounces for 10 quart pot)
4 Chicken breasts, use more if desired. Other parts such as legs can be included if preferred
Lemongrass 2 stalks cut into 3-4 inch sticks, pounded with a pestle
8 Kaffir lime leafs (crunch by hand to release aroma)
3-4 slices of galangal dried or fresh
6 Red Thai chili peppers (bird's eye chilies), use more if extra spice is desired
1 Fresh white onion cleaned and sliced
1 coriander/cilantro root (can be substituted with fresh cilantro stems if root is not available)
5 Jalapeño peppers
5 Serrano peppers
6 Limes, add more if more zest is desired.
Green onions, 1 bunch
Cilantro, 1 bunch
Ripe red tomatoes, 6 or more
White mushrooms, 1 pack
1 Can straw mushrooms drained and rinsed
2 tbsp pink sea salt
Fish sauce, 8 tsp, or more to desired taste. 3 Crabs Brand is recommended

Directions:

Place filtered water in a large pot leaving approximately 3 inches from the top of the pot to allow room for other ingredients. 10 quart pot or larger is recommended.

Rinse clean: Kaffir lime leafs, lemongrass, Thai chili peppers

Cut cleaned lemongrass into 3-4inch sticks

On a cutting board, use a pestle or cleaver to smash the sticks to release the aroma and flavor

Place Kaffir lime leafs (crunch by hand before placing into water), galangal slices, Thai chili peppers, lemongrass, coriander/cilantro root and white onion slices into the pot of water. Turn on heat to low and bring to a slow simmer, this allows the herbs to infuse their flavors and aroma into the water, allow to simmer on low while preparing the remaining ingredients.

Wash and rinse all herbs and vegetables and allow them to dry in colanders.

Cute Jalapeño and Serrano peppers in half and clean out all seeds. Can be cut into smaller pieces if desired, then set aside

Cut tomatoes in quarter sizes then set aside

Squeeze fresh lime juice into a container and set aside

Wash and slice whole mushrooms

Clean and cut chicken breasts into medium to small bite sized squares

Place pink sea salt into the pot then bring water up to boil

Once water is boiling turn down the heat to a steady low boil then use tongs to drop the chicken into the pot a few pieces at a time. This allows the chicken to cook slowly and evenly. Do not over boil; it was cause the chicken to overcook.

Skim out bubbles and foam from the top. Do not stir the pot until the chicken starts to float to the top. (Chicken will cook to done in approximately 10 minutes)

When the chicken is adequately cooked it will float to the top

Skim again if needed

Stir the broth

Add lime juice and stir

Add remaining vegetables: Jalapeño and Serrano peppers, tomatoes, white mushrooms, rinsed straw mushrooms

Add fish sauce and stir; remember to add more if a more robust taste is desired

Cut green onions and cilantro and add to the soup. (Do not chop, slice into small pieces)

Cilantro and green onions are added last to maintain the freshest flavor and color of the herbs

Stir and enjoy, Serve with White Thai Jasmine Rice on the side.

Refrigerate leftovers, should last for up to 5 days.

Can also be frozen for future use ~Tip: When you warm up your soup, garnish it with fresh cilantro and green onions to revive that fresh taste.



Notes:

- *This recipe is based on a 10 quart pot; increase the amount of ingredients according to pot size.
 - *Be generous with the herbs, vegetables and chicken for a more hearty soup
 - *The only optional ingredients are the Jalapeño and Serrano peppers, the other ingredients are essential to form the authentic flavor of this soup; they are the heart of the aromatics.
 - *This soup will be clearer in appearance than what you would be served at a Thai restaurant; this is because the bottled artificial flavor paste used in restaurants is not used in this home made recipe.
 - *Do not use any bottled flavors or bottled lime; it won't produce the same results. Will tarnish the freshness and flavor
 - *The natural flavor evolves from the fresh Thai herbs, chilies, and chicken
 - *There are no exact measurements in Thai cooking, it is measured too taste
 - *This is the true classic Tom Yum Nam Sai (clear soup) version, no coconut or artificial paste base
 - * Other parts of chicken such as legs can be included in the soup they do add more flavor, breasts keep the soup broth more clear
 - * Kaffir lime leafs; galangal, lemongrass, and lime all have medicinal benefits, they are rich in antioxidants. This is a wholesome healthy soup to help sooth colds and inflammation.
 - ****Fun fact:** My mom would always make this for me when I got sick, and I felt better within two days.
- * You can also use shrimp to make Tom Yum Goong Soup with this recipe; just replace chicken with giant shrimp or prawns.

10 quart pot makes enough to serve a 6 person dinner.