

AN INTERVIEW WITH ERNEST OON

An Oral History Conducted by Stefani Evans, Jerwin Tiu, and Cecilia Winchell

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Claytee D. White
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PREFACE



Graduating with MBA, Pepperdine University, 1995

In my entire credit career, I have done every role from the ground up, from an analyst to a loan officer to credit review, credit supervision, credit administration, underwriting, portfolio management, dealing with regulators, writing credit policy and procedures, which has prepared me for the eventual role of chief credit officer. That was my goal from day one when I started in banking.

Born in Singapore in 1969, Ernest Oon shares his story of moving to the United States, his career in banking, and his love of tennis. As a sixteen-year-old only child, Ernest left Singapore and his parents to move to the United States to attend California State University, San Bernadino. He did well in his undergraduate program, graduating in three years with a 3.86 GPA. He also earned a spot on the CSUSB varsity tennis team, making lifelong friends of his teammates.

He recalls how a celebratory graduation trip to Las Vegas in 1989 and a chance encounter at Hamada of Japan, the teppanyaki restaurant on West Flamingo Road, gave his future banking career an unexpected boost. Oon began his new banking career with one goal in mind: to become

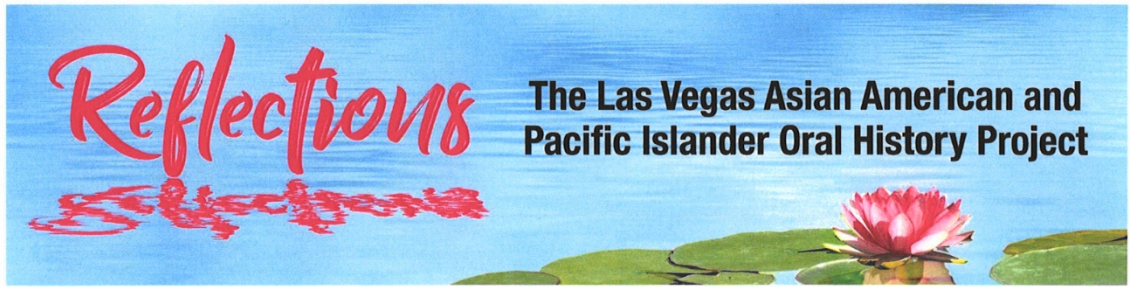
the chief credit officer of a bank. To prepare for that role, he describes the varied opportunities he took to learn all sides of banking credit. He remembers he was in Indonesia during the savings and loan crisis of 1999, but he describes his work as greatly affected by the Great Recession in 2008.

In this interview, Oon also describes childhood memories of Singapore, food in Singapore, and living in Las Vegas. His love of tennis continues to play an important role in his life. He maintains his United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA) Elite Professional certification and plays three times a week, reserving weekends for league matches.

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February 16th, 2023
in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Stefani Evans, Jerwin Tiu, and Cecilia Winchell

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Ernest Oon 2/16/23
Signature of Narrator Date

Jerwin Tiu 2/10/23
Signature of Interviewer Date

Cecilia Winchell 2/16/2023

Good morning. Today's date is February 16th, 2023. My name is Cecilia Winchell. I'm here with Jerwin Tiu, Stefani Evans, and Ernest Oon.

Ernest, may I ask you to please spell your first and last name for the record?

Yes. Ernest, E-R-N-E-S-T. Last name O-O-N.

Thank you. To get started, could you tell us about your childhood, where you grew up, what your parents did, schooling, stuff like that?

I was actually raised in Singapore, and I came to the U.S. when I was sixteen. My father worked for the Singapore government in the Singapore Sports Council. He has a PhD in sociology. He spent a lot of time doing a lot of research and developing facilities to promote health in sports in Singapore. My mother worked in television as an assistant producer. They're both retired now and reside in Redondo Beach, California. My father consults on the mental aspects of tennis and had authored several books on tennis. My mother volunteers as a Tai Chi instructor at the senior center in Redondo Beach.

Do you have any memories of your grandparents?

Only my maternal grandmother in my early years and a little bit of my great-grandmother. But I think when I was born, my paternal grandfather had a glimpse of me for a while, but I have no recollection. I think he passed probably before I was one year old.

Did your family consider themselves ethnically Singaporean or...?

Actually, the history is the paternal grandfather came as a child from China and settled in Malaysia and became a businessman, quite successfully, after many years of hard labor and owned rubber plantations and so forth. But then, my father moved to Singapore, and there I grew up. It's interesting that my father's brother, my uncle, did a DNA test, and he came back five percent Polynesian and 95 percent Chinese, so I'm not sure where the five percent came from.

You lived in Singapore during a time where it was growing very rapidly and developing a lot. What was that like having your childhood there? What was it like growing up in that environment?

Growing up was all about studying and doing well in school. Singapore is known for its education system, so there is a lot of emphasis on education and performing well in school. Based on your grades, you are channeled into different streams. The better you do...Let's say I was in the medical stream because my grades were excellent, and so they channel you into medical. If you don't do so well, you can be in a technical stream, and so forth, or arts or something. It's not really your choice; it's based on your grades.



Fig. 1: Ernest Oon, about two years old, with parents

I did, by myself.

By yourself. How did that happen? Was it your choice, or were you sent there by your parents?

Yes, a little bit of both. In Singapore, there is military national service. Every male at the age of eighteen goes into national service. You have to serve the army for two and a half years. Studies are interrupted. Let's say after grade twelve, males go into the army, and women continue all the way through university. The men finish the army service, and then they go back for university. Given that scenario, not wanting to interrupt my studies, a conscious decision was made, before the age of sixteen and a half, for me to come to the U.S., take the SAT and whatnot, and start university at the age of sixteen.

How was that arranged, do you remember?

My father did his Ph.D. in Queensland, Australia, and he met a chemistry professor there who happened to be a professor at Cal State, San Bernardino, and so I applied there, as well as other universities in the U.S. Some universities that you have that grade twelve in spite of good SAT scores, and I really didn't want to be on the East Coast. Both my uncle and auntie went to Harvard, and I could have gone to the East Coast, and they would be close to me, but I chose the sunny weather in California and started in the spring of 1986.

When you got there, was there any form of culture shock? What was it like adjusting to living in the United States?

I grew up speaking English in Singapore; it was my first language. Mandarin was the second language. Singapore being very Western, although more British, I had to adapt to the American way of writing.

For physical activity, I joined the college tennis team, and I got on midseason, kicked off the number six player, who actually became a good friend later on. He was a bench for the rest of the season. [All laughing]

In the first year, I stayed in the dorms. All-male dorm. Sometimes the music was loud. And I had to share a room with a wrestler named Ernesto Guzman, interestingly enough. At times, it was loud. It was not so easy to study. I learned to study with my Walkman headphones on, while reading books and stuff like that. So, a little bit of adaptation. Amazingly it worked, as I finished college with a GPA of 3.86.



Fig. 2: Graduation from California State, San Bernadino in 1989

What did you study in college?

Finance.

Why did you choose finance in particular?

In Singapore, I was in the medical stream, so I did pure physics, biology, chemistry. But having come here, I figured maybe becoming a doctor might take too long, so I switched to business and finance. With summer school and a couple of overloads, I was done in three years.

What did you do afterwards?

With a degree in finance, the most logical place, I thought, was to start in commercial banking. I was fortunate enough to get into a management training program with a local community bank named Republic Bank in Torrance, California, and that's where I started in banking in 1989.

What does commercial banking involve?

In that particular program, I went through all the different departments in the bank. I started as a teller. I did new accounts. I was a credit analyst. I spent a lot of time understanding the basics of financial analysis, doing spreading, looking at ratios. I analyzed a lot of insurance companies because the bank had an insurance premium financing program. Then after that, I became a loan officer on the platform and did underwriting presentations to loan committees and handling a portfolio of relationships.

How long did you stay at that community bank [Republic Bank]?

About four years.

And then what did you do?

I moved over to Sanwa Bank because I wanted to see the other side of commercial lending, and that's the auditing side in a function called credit review. This is after the loan has been booked and closed, and the file contains all the information of how the decision was made and any other follow-up information such as financial statements; if they're guarantors, their personal tax information and financial statements. We're looking basically at the file as is, what it contains, and determining the level of risk and assigning a risk rating. All banks need to have loans that

are risk-rated. Sometimes it's a level of, for example, one to ten, one being the best, and ten would be a loss, for example. There are different variations in between and that drives the bank's allowance for loan losses based on risks, appetite, and so forth. I was in that function, just looking at a file because a file should speak by itself and contain the information that's relevant to the monitoring and decision making during the life of the loan.

How long were you working in that field?

That was two years with the same bank. After two years, at the same bank, I was given a chance to become assistant credit supervisor for Southern Region II, which is basically L.A. all the way down south to San Diego. The region contained about fifty branches along with the portfolio of loans associated from those branches. In that role, I was actually making credit decisions and approving loans.

How would you say that your field and your job was affected during '08, during the housing crash and those events?

That was a little later. Before that time, I went on to become a senior credit officer for an offshore bank out of Indonesia. They had an agency out here in L.A. [Phone ringing]

Is it okay if we take a quick pause? [Pause in recording]

After the Indonesian Bank, I went onto work at another large international bank with over \$100 billion in assets, always on the credit side. I was an underwriting manager. And then, what is now Bank of Hope, which is actually the largest Korean American bank—at the time it was Center Bank—approached me, and I joined them as deputy chief credit officer in 2005. During my time there, that was when the financial crisis hit in 2008.

What was it like? We were looking at collateral values and how they plummeted by large percentages and working with borrowers if they continued to pay, looking at other sources of

repayment. It was very challenging because the bank had to set aside additional reserves. But it was all taken in stride, and every bank in the country was in the same situation, so no surprise there.

How have you eventually ended up here in Vegas working with the Bank of Nevada?

Living in L.A., there was really never a job location that was close to home, so I did the commute for many years from the South Bay to either downtown L.A, west L.A., Pasadena or the east side of L.A., El Monte, California. I think it was at least twenty-five years where I commuted, spending probably three to four hours a day in the car back and forth to work and home. We used to come to Vegas once or twice a year just to hang out for a couple, three days. The gentleman that I kicked off the tennis team back in '86, I actually helped him and his girlfriend, now wife, at the time move to Vegas in 1988, because he wanted to get into the hotel industry. We helped him move in 1988, and he is still here.

This opportunity came up in 2019, so I said, “Well, this is not a bad place to retire,” kind of looking a little bit into the future. Driving so much on a daily basis is actually not good for my health and my sanity, so I decided to take the plunge and move here. Obviously, my friend was here, and that was a factor in me coming here as well. It’s a different quality of life. My commute is now twenty minutes, one way. It’s a life changer with less stress on the road.

What was the climate like in Singapore, and how would you compare it to what it’s like here?

This is slow compared to Singapore. Singapore is really fast paced. As a child, all you know is going to school and taking ten different subjects. But everything is convenient, too, because it’s fairly small, but so are things here. It’s convenient and easy to get around and a lot of good food. Just like Singapore, it’s a melting pot.

What about the weather? You mentioned that you didn't want to move to the East Coast?

Yes, it can be cold here at times. Here, it's either too hot or too cold. I happen to have moved in July 2019, but in years past I had been here during the summer, so I knew what to expect. It's fairly dry, not humid like Singapore, so it's bearable. I play tennis indoors, so it's not a problem.

Since you've been in the States, have you gone back to Singapore and visited?

Yes, although there is no family there anymore. Everyone moved away, to Australia, to England, some relatives on the East Coast. [Phone ringing. Pause in recording]

Have you been back to Singapore?

Oh, yes. Before the pandemic, we traveled to Singapore. If I travel to Asia, we always make it a point to swing by Singapore for two or three days to catch up on the food. As I mentioned, there are maybe a couple of childhood friends, but no more relatives there. I mentioned my relatives are all over the world.

My dad is the youngest of eight, and there is only one elder sister surviving right now. Everyone else has passed. With my dad being the youngest, I am the youngest of all the cousins as well. On my mom's side, she has one brother and two sisters, one of which actually passed away in 2020. We were supposed to go in April of 2020 for her ninetieth birthday celebration, but because of the pandemic, everything was cancelled. She was going to have over two hundred people fly in to celebrate her birthday. Unfortunately, in December 2020, she passed away, and we didn't get the chance to see her.

Do you have any siblings?

I'm the only child.

Where are your parents now?

In Redondo Beach, California.

You mentioned the food in Singapore. What did you eat?

Singapore is a melting pot. It has every kind of food, any kind of cuisine that you imagine.

There's Chinese. There's Thai. There is Malaysian, there's Singaporean, there's European. It has every kind of cuisine you would want. It's all different. It's a blend of different local favorites, as well as international cuisines. There are some dishes that are probably not available here, right now. The closest thing we have in Las Vegas is probably the Malaysian restaurant; there are two on Spring Mountain.

What are your favorite things to eat in Singapore?

Actually, the Hainanese chicken rice. It's actually the best there, no country can replicate it.

Is there anything in particular you miss about living there?

I think the convenience of food at really any time of the day, even late at night. They have these centralized food centers where you can go in, and you can have twenty to forty different food stalls, and you can have your pick of stuff. They're open late, probably people wanting to have supper, probably open until ten or maybe eleven in some areas. That is something that is not available in the U.S. I have fond memories of those days when I was a child, having the variety of all these different foods, yes.

Since you've moved to Las Vegas, have you adjusted to life here? What do you do in your free time? What do you enjoy? Any activities, hobbies?

I'm an avid tennis player. I am also USPTA Elite Professional, United States Professional Tennis Association Elite Professional. In order to improve my own game, I took the certification, actually, twenty years ago, so I can actually teach tennis at a high level. I am still active in USTA League play, and I play tennis probably three times a week. Weekends are for league matches, and that's how I keep active and competitive. Other than that, I don't really go to the Strip all

that often, but maybe the occasional ice hockey game at the T-Mobile Arena or football game at the Raiders stadium, and those are pretty new within the last five years, I think. And exploring restaurants, trying out different restaurants and cuisines and adding them to my list of favorites.

Any favorites in particular you would like to share?

Actually, Thai food is my favorite type of food. I've been to Thailand six times when I was younger. It's a very peaceful country, and the people are very nice. But here in Vegas, there is actually a lot of Thai restaurants. I was very surprised. I found a couple; one of them is Weera; they have two locations here. Also, Nittaya's Secret Kitchen in the Summerlin area. Archi's is good, and so is Charm in the Henderson area.

Good to know. Since you've been in the United States, how has your understanding of your AAPI identity factored into your life? Has it been very important, or has it been less central than others, particularly your career?

During my career, I have worked for both mainstream, as well as some Asian American banks. I think it's really a balance of how things are, to me, and I hope that a lot of other people understand that people are people despite the different ethnic makeup or color. To me, I don't think it affected me one way or the other whether I was Asian or not, and working in different kinds of environments really didn't affect me. As a working professional you always try to maintain your professionalism no matter what environment you're in.

Do you feel connected to your identity in any sort of way? Do you celebrate cultural traditions or foods?

Maybe Lunar New Year because my mother still likes to celebrate Lunar New Year. There are certain kinds of foods that are not available here that she makes, so that's quite special.

Such as what kinds of food?

It's of Chinese origin, but it is actually a salad, shredded lettuce, radish, carrots, I think there is a little bit of jellyfish or raw fish, and it's symbolic of prosperity because everyone who is invited will have their chopsticks dig into this huge platter, and they just raise this thing; it's called *Yee Sang*, for good luck and good health.

Do your parents come visit you, or do you go visit them?

I try to go back every month, or they will come here maybe once a quarter.

Right now, currently with your job, what kind of community work do you do, or what other activities or professional associations are you involved with?

I'm a board member of the Las Vegas Business Academy. The Las Vegas Business Academy provides scholarships to graduate students, and in return, those students, once qualified, they have to stay in Las Vegas for at least three years and be employed here. The whole premise behind this nonprofit organization is to keep and maintain the talent in Las Vegas instead of people graduating from UNLV and then moving out of state to work somewhere else.

I'll pass it over to Jerwin or Stefani.

JT: Can you tell me why your parents decided to live in Redondo Beach, California? Was there any decision?

Because I was there. When they retired, I just brought them over and housed them and take care of them.

Growing up in Singapore, are there any specific fond memories that come to mind, any particular event with friends or any family things that come to mind?

Yes. I was fairly active in sports in Singapore. I did four-by-one-hundred relay; I was the third runner. A hundred- and ten-meter hurdles. I played soccer. I played badminton. I have a black belt in Taekwondo. And all that before I took up tennis, and I kind of left everything behind. But

having thought about things, all those activities helped me in tennis, actually. You use a lot of different skills, and my tennis game is quite unique.

Thank you. Could you tell me about your wife, how you guys met and things like that?

We met in banking in 1997 when I was working for that offshore Indonesian bank. But actually, I didn't start dating until I left. Only after I left did I start to date her because you don't want to cause any trouble within the company.

What does she do now?

She's involved in a lot of family business. She does property management for our own family. She has a jewelry business with her sisters. She used to own a former restaurant serving lobster in L.A.

Thank you. I'll pass it onto Stefani.

SE: I want to go way back. I would like to know how your father ended up in Queensland to get his PhD and your mother in San Bernardino.

No, I was in San Bernardino for college.

You were in San Bernardino, okay. How did your father end up in Queensland?

His undergraduate is from University of Adelaide in southern Australia. He then went to Eugene, Oregon for his masters. Having worked for a few years in Singapore, he decided to pursue his PhD. I think there was a specific program. Like I said, I was fairly young at the time. I didn't pay a lot of attention. He went to Queensland to do his PhD.

You were a child in Singapore when he went to Queensland?

Yes. We did visit him a couple of times, but he was doing his thesis and all that, so even when he was in Singapore, he was in private, behind closed doors, and then he went out for a little bit of time. We visited him, I remember, once or twice.

Why did he decide to go to Adelaide for his undergraduate?

At the time, he was pursuing physical education. He played tennis, too. He actually is a USPTA master professional, just as a hobby. He was also Davis Cup captain and coach for Singapore. He played on the professional teams circuit in the early days. Australia was a good place to also play tennis and study.

How did your parents meet?

My mom worked in television as an assistant producer, and actually my dad was a sports announcer—a part-time job for him—and so they met in television.

You talked about your tennis game as unique. What makes it unique?

Because of my Taekwondo skills, I have a signature shot called the Three-sixty Blackout. If a ball is coming to me, I can actually do a three-sixty and hit the ball, so the opponent doesn't know where it's going.

They also don't know if it's going to be a backhand or a forehand or...?

No, they know it's a backhand, but I will do a three-sixty, and they don't know whether the ball is going to the left or to the right from their perspective. Because of my badminton skills, I can do a high backhand overhead without looking at the ball, so they don't know where that's going, too.

Did the savings and loans crisis in 1999 hit your industry in credit?

No. Actually, in 1997 and '98, there was actually the financial crisis in Indonesia. If we look that up, that rupiah, which is the Indonesian currency, devalued by quite a significant amount, and there was a lot of social unrest back in Indonesia, including riots. Because of that, the operations here, although quite successful, were impacted because of that devaluation back where the parent company was in Indonesia. Not so much the S and L crisis, but more the local situation in

Indonesia. I kind of saw the handwriting on the wall, and so I decided to move onto more mainstream American company at the time.

And that was when you moved to . . . ?

Coast Business Credit. In my entire credit career, I have done every role from the ground up, from an analyst to a loan officer to credit review, credit supervision, credit administration, underwriting, portfolio management, dealing with regulators, writing credit policy and procedures, which has prepared me for the eventual role of chief credit officer. That was my goal from day one when I started in banking.

How would you compare your tennis game to your role in banking?

My tennis game is maturing although I started rather late, at fourteen. My father introduced me to the game when I was six, but I had no interest, and he didn't force me into it. Therefore, I went off and did all the other sports. Eventually, then I came full circle one day because I happened to be on the tennis team and the badminton team for school. The badminton teacher in charge said to me, "You can't do both." The practice sessions were on the same day and time. She said, "You have to pick one." And I didn't really like the tone in which she said it to me, so I said, "I'm going over there to tennis. Bye." From there, I became the school's number one within a year and a half, unbeaten, and jumped right into college tennis at Cal State, San Bernardino. That's a pretty quick start for me. If you put your mind to anything, you can do it quickly.

But you played all those other sports that are still with you in your tennis moves. In comparing that to all the roles that you've played in banking to the role that you play now...?

It's all similar, because I did all those different roles, like I did all those different sports, and so they prepare you for the eventual position. In tennis, it's the level where I'm at today. But I did



Fig. 3: California State, San Bernadino Tennis Team

sustain an injury more than ten years ago, and so I have a bit of tennis elbow. Most of my arm is not straight anymore; it's a little crooked. But still, I can still beat down a twenty-five-year-old because of guile, not necessarily power.

It's always good as you get older.

If you're mentoring someone, what do you emphasize?

I emphasize integrity, always doing the right thing. There is no shortcut. You've got to put in the time and reap the benefits later. These are just a few words I would say.

One more question. You were explaining the educational system in Singapore, and you talked about how the streaming happens based on your grades. How often does that happen? Does that happen every year? Does it happen every two or three years? How does that work?

At the time, I believe it started at fourth grade. Then sixth grade is a big examination. After sixth grade, you go into secondary school because it follows the Cambridge system out of England. At grade ten, there is the O level, Cambridge, and then grade twelve there is A level, before university.

And you never got to the A level because—

I skipped.

—you were here.

I skipped. I just had the O level and good enough SAT scores, and I started college. In essence, skipping grade eleven and twelve and then saving another two and a half years off army duty, four and a half years. That's significant in life because life is short, right?

Right. You came to the U.S. when you were sixteen. When did your parents come?

Year 2000.

You were here by yourself?

Yes. Well, I would go back, or they would come. It's not that I didn't see them for twenty years. Back in the day before email, it was telegrams, letters, and expensive phone calls. When email came about, it was much easier.

Did you have any cousins in the U.S. or any other relatives other than your friend that you kicked off the tennis team?

In Boston, yes, there were a couple of cousins, but that was it. I never really saw them all that often.

How did the uniquely American holidays—I'm thinking Thanksgiving basically—did you start celebrating that when you...?

Yes. That became more of an American tradition after my parents moved here, and that is the one day a year that I cook. I cook the full meal, traditional.

How do you cook it?

Turkey in the oven with all the trimmings inside and my specialty Brussels sprouts. It's seasoned lightly, and then twenty minutes before the turkey is done, they are thrown into the juices of the turkey and sort of cooked that way.

That sounds delicious.

Having come here at an early age, I learned to cook, clean do laundry, and fend for myself and thus develop independence fairly quickly.

What did you do over the holidays when there was no school? You're living in the dorms. You're sixteen.

Oh, one year in the dorms, and no car for one year. I didn't have a car. That professor friend of my dad would invite me occasionally. I made friends who had cars, and we might go somewhere.

Where was the first trip you took when you were a student?

Actually, it was Las Vegas, Circus Circus, playing for stuffed animals.

What did you think of Las Vegas then?

It was exciting. Circus Circus offered a lot of entertainment as a young adult. A little challenge getting those stuffed animals.

When you first moved here, what intersection did you live near?

Spring Valley because it's close to work, and I just purchased a condo. Then I have that rented out now and moved to Henderson in '21.

Have you seen the city change in the time that you've been here?

A little bit. There is constant road work construction going on. Also, it was different during the pandemic. I was here for 2020. It was pretty much shut down. It was very quiet. When I had the condo in Spring Valley, occasionally I would ride my bicycle to work. Even the clubs were shut down. We couldn't play tennis. I remember buying a bicycle on Easter Sunday in 2020 just to get some exercise in.

I think that's all I have. Any other questions? Is there anything we didn't ask you that you would like to talk about?

When I was ten years old, I remember writing an essay indicating that I aspired to be a lawyer. Things changed. Children really don't know what they want. Because of the streaming, I was getting really into the medical field. Coming here, I did a complete switch to business. Here I am, I guess. We all evolve.

Also, when I was thirteen, I took apart my racing bike and put it all back together because I would always do my own servicing and stuff like that. I found it fun. I'm also quite technically inclined that way.

As a little child, did you take things apart?

Not that I remember. I don't think I was particularly disruptive in the household. You would think being the only child that I might be spoiled, but seriously, I don't think I am. Being here alone at sixteen and having had the background of certain values and what my parents taught me, I guess I was able to survive and fend for myself and believe I stayed on the right track. I think I didn't go off too much.

You still have childhood friends in Singapore?

Yes, a couple that I would be able to contact if I made a trip back there.

How have you seen Singapore change in the time that you've been gone?

I think it's really transformed ... Other than New York, it's actually the most expensive city right now, too, to live in. There was a report a couple of months ago. Yes, it's very progressive.

Everything changes all the time there, like here. Constantly cutting up roads and improving and maintaining. I'm sure you saw the movie "Crazy Rich Asians." The Marina Bay Sands is quite spectacular, a lot of good hotels there as well, all over Singapore.

If you could transport one facet of Singapore to Las Vegas, what would it be?

The concentrated food stalls. I thought about that back in the late '80s, and I thought it might be a good thing to do here. But I think it must be health regulations, something. There is a food court on a smaller scale, but nothing like that. Sometimes it's even outdoors. It's in a big facility. It's all built up. You have different food stalls that people can pick from.

And they're cooking right there?

They're cooking right there. Then all these tables are all set up. They're all fixed. It would be a table like this, and then they're fixed. Fixed stools, fixed table with a table number. You just tell the vendor what table number you're sitting at, and they'll bring it to you. I don't know why that's not available. It's like an international food court, really.

I think you should do it.

Do you know some lobbyist in Las Vegas?

I think a bank might.

Well, I spent all day at the Vegas Chamber yesterday learning more about the city. It's a program called Access Las Vegas. They also have something called Leadership.

Leadership Las Vegas.

Yes. This is a concentrated program, just a two-day thing. Yesterday was the first day. Next Wednesday, I'll be at the new UNLV medical building. Is it Kirk Kerkorian?

The Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine. Yes, it's over by Valley Hospital.

The second session will be held there.

Beautiful building.

I guess they wanted to show that off, so we will be there. I'll learn more about the history of Las Vegas, the transportation system, the education system, the challenges. It's different community topics.

What surprised you?

What I didn't know was that RTC [Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada] has an On Demand program that serves the Southwest and western part of Henderson, primarily because their normal routes don't go through there, and so they have something called On Demand. It's a smaller bus that people can just pick up and get rides around.

Would it serve this area in front of your bank?

No. It's just more in the southwest area and west part of Henderson. I didn't know, but I actually thought when I first moved here—temporarily, because I was staying at the Wynn for five days while my condo was being repainted and refloored—I was thinking of staying a few nights at the Siegel Suites across the street. Luckily, I didn't, because I found out later, it's not the most desirable place to be. Do you know about the Siegel Suites?

Tell us about the Siegel Suites.

Do you?

CW: No.

If you go across the building, those are daily or weekly rentals, so a lot of things go on there. Drug addicts and stuff like that. But I didn't know about it then. We found out about it later. It's a bank client, and I know the markets he operates in; it serves that particular need of the community. But just the surrounding area here isn't that great. I was told the Scotch '80s and Rancho, Oakey, and all that, used to be a very ritzy area back in the day.

Very much.

Where all the rich and famous, the stars, and all that stayed there because they are bigger lots and bigger homes, right?

Yes.

But the question is, once you come out, it's different. It's just little pockets of communities like that in town. I guess you can say the same for everywhere in the city, right? Every city has pockets.

I think so, and maybe ours are more obvious because we're so isolated. We're just here.

There are four cities and then desert. Perhaps it's more obvious because it's concentrated.

Whereas, if you're in Los Angeles, it's more spread out, perhaps?

Yes. During yesterday's session, we were shown some pictures from back in the day, the early 1990s, and what is now Fremont Street. There were some buildings that were a part of UNLV campus now that I saw. It still has limited parking, like today.

I suspect that a lot of those photographs are from UNLV, historical.

Yes. There are a couple of professors that were guest speakers. Michael Green?

Michael Green is an amazing speaker.

Yes. And then Stream. Michael Green was one, and [Christopher] Stream is also a part of UNLV, I think. We had a tour of the Smith Center, Myron [Martin]. A gentleman from the RTC also came by and spoke, and some lady about education, K through twelve.

One thing that's interesting here to me is how hard the water is having moved from California. I really don't know the history, but I definitely need a water softener at home.

Then, when the inevitable calcium builds up, vinegar takes it off.

Okay.

And with that, thank you so much.

Anything else from me?

Unless you have to more say. Thank you so much.

JT/CW: Thank you.

Thank you. [Pause in recording]

In 1989, I can't remember exactly, but it was either just before graduation or right around graduation time. I think it was probably just before graduation. We made a trip here to Las Vegas and had dinner at Hamada, that Teppanyaki Japanese restaurant on Flamingo at the time. Four of us, and next to us around the table was Paul Bannai. I later found out it was Paul Bannai, the former California State Assemblyman, and a friend. He didn't speak to my friends, but he spoke to me. He said, "What are you guys doing here?" I said, "We're graduating from college and just taking a road trip here for a couple of days." "What's your major?" I said, "Finance." He said, "I'm a director of Republic Bank in Torrance, California. If you'd like to apply there, I can make the introduction for you." After that, the head of HR contacted me. I interviewed, and they took me on as a management trainee. That's how I got started in banking.

SE: What else did Paul Bannai do?

He owned other kinds of businesses. This was after his political career. He had an insurance company, real estate. He was a director. He owned shares at the bank. We kept in touch all the way until he passed away two years ago. He was in a nursing home in Gardena, California. He also got to know my parents. We actually got to see him. He was suffering from Alzheimer's as he was almost a hundred years old when he passed. He couldn't quite remember, but we took pictures with him when he was already in a wheelchair and stuff like that. We did see him before he passed in 2019.

What was one of his signature accomplishments in his political career?

If I recall correctly, he was the one that pushed for acupuncture to be legalized in the U.S. or in California, for us. But if you look him up, you can get his whole history on the internet.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]