**Esther S. Lee’s Prepared Answers to Rice University’s HAAA Oral History Interview**

**On 60/30/2022 by Karen Siu**

1. **Early Life/Childhood:**

* 1. To begin, where and when were you born? What was it like in your hometown?
* Remote, small, sandy, and windy town. . . Nearly died due to poor nutrition. My mother vowed to raise me for the Lord if I survive. So, she named me Faith in Chinese.
* My ancestry home is Chengdu, where is famous for Penda Bears
* 2. In your background information, you’ve noted that you have four siblings, how would you describe the household you grew up in?
* Christian family with a lot of love, supportive and open-minded parents. No discrimination between girls and boys; treated all equally in all areas. All siblings turned out to be well educated and productive citizens.
* 3. What were your parents’ occupations?

Father retired as an army general. My very talented and western educated mother played the piano, sang, performed, taught at a college, and was entrepreneurial businesswoman (housing for US servicemen and piano studio for their kids)

* 4. What were some of the values that your parents emphasized in your upbringing?
* Health, honesty and loyalty. Dad said, “An abled body is most important for survival!” Mother’s saying: “Ask God for Wisdom like King Solomon; Be smart and courageous like Queen Esther.” That’s why she gave my English name as Esther. In addition, “Must marry a Christian!”
* 5.You were born in Chen-tu, China, so when did you move to Taiwan? And how was the move for you?
* Actually, born in Chee Feng county in Gun Su province in 1944. Chengtu is my ancestral home.
* Family retreated to Taiwan fomr Mainland China with the Nationalist Government due to the occupation of Communist China by a navy ship in 1949.
* 6.What elementary school did you attend?
* Attended three rural elementary schools.

1. What some favorite childhood memories you have, of school, of friends, or family?

* It seemed I was well liked by teachers and classmates. I remembered my legs were very shaky when I was first assigned to lead or direct the national anthem on a high raised platform in fifth grade every morning. (My older sister often told people about the following story during my first grade. One day Mom sent her to buy some bananas and I tagged alone. I help the vendor to get rid of the flies when she was doing the selection. I was reluctant to leave after she paid for because I wanted to get more fruits. She told me that no more money for more fruits. I finally left with her but **murmuring**, “When I grow up, I will marry to a fruit vendor!!” Now, I am the wife of a vegie **gardener** . . .
* 8. I’ve read about your passion playing piano as a young girl which has continued to today and you’ve so kindly sent us a video of you playing (Chopin’s “Revolutionary Étude”). Could you talk about your experiences learning piano as a girl?

Before third grade, I was like a town boy and often got into troubles with neighborhood boys for so called “fairness/justice”. To tame me like a typical girl, my mother sent me to dance lessons. But no luck. In my fifth-grade class, there was a so-called privileged student whose parents were working in Hong Kong. She and her older sister stayed in Taiwan alone.  They had an imported piano, but no one could give them lessons.  So, I recommended my mother whose minor was music in Jin-Ling Women University in Nanking. Instead of charging for tuition, mother and I could practice piano daily in their house. Unfortunately, they moved to Hong Kong a year later. My compassion for playing the piano was so strong that I had overcome many obstacles to get 30 min of practice daily. I could write a book about my journey of piano practice - smiles. Three years later, my parents finally could afford an imported piano. In the following five years I was committed to piano practice at the expense of any after school leisure activities, i.e., reading novels, and going to the movies with classmates. My time was only divided for schoolwork, piano practice and Sunday church activities. At that time, the hymens Living for Jesus and Have Thine Way Lord have become my guiding songs throughout my exciting life.

1. **Undergraduate Education (B.S., at National Taiwan Normal University, 1967):**

* 9. You noted that you initially wanted to be medical doctor and concert pianist, but after I did not passing the test for medical school at the National Taiwan University, you attended majoring Education at the National Taiwan Normal University. Why did you end up choosing Education as your major?
* Not by choice. The college entrance exam was different from that of today in Taiwan. There were three areas a high school graduate could select and prepare for the exam. For the only one medical school in Taiwan, students had to choose Area C which focused on sciences that included biology, animal science, chemistry and so forth. I was so confident to get into my first choice, medical school, that I did not pay much attention for my second or third choices of disciplines under Area C. Yet, I failed and ended up in National Taiwan Normal University without a choice.
* 10. Thinking back to your time at National Taiwan Normal University, what were some defining moments that you had?

Not really. Yet, the courses I took helped me greatly in very practical ways such as raising kids and family life.

* 11. How was it becoming a concert pianist, winning the nationwide piano competition at 20 years old?
* Most of the time by invitation when people recognized my skills. I also gave benefit concerts.
  + Did you experience stage freight when you performed?
  + Not really, except that fifth-grade experience of leading the national anthem. My mother always recalled that I was so cal**m** and confident when I was 8-year-old reciting chapter two of the Book of Luke about Jesus’ birth for a Church’s Christmas gathering.
* 12. How was it balancing being a concert pianist and your undergraduate education?
* Just like in the demanding Taipei First Girls’ high school, my time was only divided among piano practice, giving piano lessons and schoolwork. I remember vividly that I asked myself if I really want to be a concert pianist when I was unpacking and repacking for a next trip. I felt tired.

1. **Graduate Education and Immigration to the US (M.S. at Northern Illinois University, 1969; Ph.D. at Purdue University, 1971):**

* 13. When did you move to the US? How and why did it happen?
* I came to the US alone as a foreign student after passing Government’s very rigorous requirements, including passing TOEFL English Exam, and receiving a scholarship or assistantship from a US university. If a student could not receive financial assistance from an American university, he or she had to pass a very tough Government Go Broad exam. At that time, I was still hoping to enter a medical school in the US eventually with some premedical courses I took during my college. Yet, I only got the assistantship from NIU majoring in education again. Strange??
  + 14. You were awarded a graduate assistantship in Education at Northern Illinois University. How was attending Northern Illinois University for your master’s then Purdue for your Ph.D. in comparison to National Taiwan Normal University?

15. How were the university systems different?

* + Not much differences regarding the systems but language and culture were certainly the major obstacles, even up to now – smiles. I even tried to record professors’ lectures in the classroom.

16. Did you encounter any difficulties in transitioning from National Taiwan Normal University to U.S. universities?

* + - I think the graduate studies require much higher levels of cognitive abilities. Grades are often determined by reports or presentations instead of only testing. Oral and written tests are very difficult for foreign students.
  + 17. Did any family members move with you?
* No, like most of foreign students from Taiwan at that time, I was single. Luckily, my older sister had been in the US for four years and working at Purdue University as librarian while her husband was working on his Ph.D. Meanwhile, my uncle was the counsel general representing ROC/Taiwan stationed in Chicago. That’s why I applied for universities in these two states.
  + 18. After you finished my master’s degree, you married Stanton Yao who was studying his Ph.D. at Purdue and then later to meet your financial needs, you applied doctoral assistantship for Ph.D. at Purdue. Can you talk about these experiences and what it was like receiving your Ph.D.?
  + I had no desire to pursue a doctoral degree even my NIU advisor and my father encouraged me toward the end of my master’s studies. Originally, Stanton, then my fiancée told me that he should be able to finish his Ph.D. a semester after we got married in the summer 1969. By April, he told me that he had encountered some dissertation problems. To ensure that we would have adequate income, I applied for an assistantship with College of Education. I frankly told my advisor, Dr. Phillis Lowe, that Stanton could finish up his studies any time, so I need to finish up my course requirements as fast as possible. Then I could take my thesis with me when we leave Purdue University. So, she laid out my degree plan quickly. I immediately began my proposal for the dissertation and took 19 hours each semester. I took French for the foreign language requirement during the summer of 1969 at University of VA where Stanton was collecting the data for his dissertation. Since Purdue did not accept the credits earned at UV, I had to take a test to meet the foreign language requirement back to campus.
* 19. What are some notable memories for you of your graduate education?
* I remember that I drank a lot of coffee. Walking around the huge campus in the winter’s snowing days and nights was a challenge. Graduate Education classes usually offered after public school hours in the evening. At the same time, I also played the pipe organ for the University Presbyterian church. After two morning services, I usually just collapsed and needed to take a long afternoon nap.
* 20 Did you have any mentors?
* Not really except a Chinese American professor at NIU. She was a professor of Early Childhood Education. She advised me to take some courses with her because of the newly launched Federal’s Head Start programs. At that time, less than 30% of women working outside home and most of them had low-waged positions. She pointed out the upcoming reality that the knowledge of early child education could apply to my own children or for employment. I basically had no mentor for studies, career and political involvements . . . I can share more later. One day I Cried out bitterly!!! Book on GOD IS MY MENTOR!!
* 21. What were the challenges when you moved to the US? Did you experience any cultural shock?
* Not really except the language. English was only required in high school not in college. I needed to continue it via self-study during college. Many funny stories about the language barriers. Initially, I did not feel the cultural gaps. Now, after being in the US for more than 55 years, I have learned more about serious cultural differences in many areas.
* 22. Did you experience any racism?
  + 23. In school, in the workplace, or in the community in general?
  + Not in schools. Back to the 60s-70s, the racism was more targeting the Blacks not Asians. People were very nice and helpful even though stereotypes of Chinese were unavoidable. Personally, I experienced more sexism than racism during job hunting in spring 1971.
  + Later, in the workplace, both racism and sexism were becoming subtle mainly due to competition.

1. **Career:**

* 24. What was your first job after completing your Ph.D.?
* I did not work full time after earning my Ph.D. for four years because I always wanted to be a mother and wife. I love to playhouse. I did not intend to pursue my Ph.D.
  + 25. When did you move to Houston and become an Assistant Professor with University of Houston/Clear City?
  + Stanton and I both finished our Ph.Ds. in June 1971, but he could not find a job until Feb. 1972 with Lockheed Martin in Johnson Space Center, Clear Lake, Houston. At that time, our first daughter was less than three-month-old. We had no choice except accepting the offer.
    - 26. How was it being housewife and mother to two girls then becoming a professor?
* I was a content mother and housewife for more than three years, but the demise of my father inspired me to launch a career. It’s a long and sad story. Certainly, it has changed my entire life. Consequently, I was named Outstanding Young Women and received Presidential Achievement Award from President Reagan within years.
  + - 27. How was it moving to and living in Houston?
* 28. Four years later after becoming an Assistant Professor you became tenured Associate Professor and then in 1992, you resigned due to government appointments.
  + 29. Can you talk about the government appointments that led to your resignation?
  + Usually, professorship requires to focus or concentrate a certain area as an expert. The more prestigious universities expect more concentration in a narrow field. However, my academic path did not shape me as an expert. For various reasons or incidents or events, my teaching responsibilities or assignments often presented unexpected challenges and led me to a broader scope of academic activities. Examples are Elementary Edu. And Multicultural Edu. I consider myself as a generalist with a broad scope of teaching and research experiences. In addition, I prefer to see the visible impact of my efforts, either in a long or short-term. Government appointments normally provide better chances to make impacts or changes.
  + 30. How was transition from professor to full-time government/political work?
  + Professors often work alone or with a small team. On the contrary, government appointments require more managerial skills for a much larger group or **constituents** and budgets.
* 31. You have been devoted to serving people throughout your life, establishing, organizing, and participating in political community organizations. Can you tell us about your work for the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and Organization of Chinese American Women (OCAW) in Houston?
* Many right-wing Chinese Americans in Houston went to the street in 1979, to protest President Jimmy Carter’s recognition of the People’s Republic of China. As a professor of Multicultural Education, I fully understood the importance of the political muscle of minorities and immigrants as related to their motherland. I learned of the successful political involvement of the Jewish Americans. Thus, I contacted the OCA with its HQ in Washington, DC and established the Houston Chapter. I asked an American born Chinese (ABC), Mr. William Derbing, a NASA employee to serve as the first president.  Later, I was also recruited by OCAW for forming a Houston Chapter. The formation of both chapters is fully documented.
  + 32. What are you proudest of in your long career of political community organizing?
* The results and impacts of my congressional race: Although I lost by a narrow margin with my congressional campaign in 1992, I have inspired and boosted many other Asian Americans’ confidence in their political endeavors. I was proud of my “fight” and pleased with the impact in the following years. Many Chinese American community leaders who took part in my campaign and fundraising efforts became involved in partisan politics and made great stride. They finally realized that it was possible to run and even to win an election.
  + Prior to my campaign, there were only four Asian American congressmen, excluding those in Hawaii, which had its unique political environment. Among these four, three were Japanese Americans from CA and one Indian. After 1993, a total of 16 Asian/Pacific American (APA) congresspersons were elected. In addition, currently there are quite a few APA public office holders throughout the US. In the year of 2020, there were 12 Asian/Pacific Americans running for state-wide office in Texas.  
    In the state of Texas, a Houston immigration lawyer, Gordon Quan, later was elected to the City Council in 1999. Mr. *Quan* was the first elected Asian American to serve as an “at large” member of the *Houston City Council*. In 2002, he was selected as City of Houston Mayor Pro-Tam. Dr. Martha J. Wong was also elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 2002. The 8th term state Senator, Mrs. Angie Chen Button of Dallas, recognized my inspiration to her political pursues at her November 2021 fundraiser in Houston
  + As I predicted and promised, my campaign did have the ripple effect in the political arena. Possibly these lessons paved the road for two future Chinese American Houston council persons and one Texas state representative. They were all American born Chinese and have no language barrier. At the national level, Chinese Americans are no longer solely exploited by the Democrat Party and are also recognized by the Republican Party. In 2000, Republican President Bush had one Chinese and one Japanese American cabinet member: Secretary Elaine Chao of the Labor Department and Secretary Norman Mineta of the Transportation Department. No previous administration, either Democrat or Republican, had any Asian American cabinet member.
  + I was the first full-time salaried Asian-American campaign staff ever appointed at a presidential campaign headquarters. I believed it was a good opportunity to mobilize Asian/Pacific Americans for the President's reelection. Previously, GOP presidential campaigns never had a paid staff in charge of Asian/Pacific American voting affairs; I was the first one. In 1988, Cindy Daub, the Korean wife of a congressman, oversaw the Asian/Pacific American voters as a volunteer.
* 33. When did you return to teaching in higher education and why did you decide to return?
* Political climate changed and no more political appointment for me. My tenured position at UHCL was filled with another person. Again, I was hoping to resume my full-time housewife with an empty nest in Houston. It did not workout. Without a third party’s involvement, my nearly 30-year marriage ended. For financial needs, I started searching for university positions around the world. Thank God’s mercy, I was able to return to the Higher Edu. and moved up to the position beyond my own expectation.
  + 34. January 1998, Dr. Lee Bearden resumed her teaching career at Southern Arkansas University as a full professor of Education.
* You were Department Chair of Education at DePauw University then the Dean of the Graduate School at Troy University/Montgomery until your retirement in 2006. What were some highlights of your career in higher education?
* I was proud to be appointed by President Bush to the Fulbright Scholarship Board, served on the Teacher Education Committee of Indiana Professional Standards Board, and was an examiner of National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). NCATE is a prestigious entity or authority to ensure the quality of ALL US teacher education programs.
* I was named outstanding alumni by my two alma maters.
* Fulbright trip to visit India’s 13 cities in 1986
* 35. Throughout your teaching and mentoring experience, what do you think is the guidance most needed by students?
* Critical thinking and work ethics due to today’s misinformation and corruption at all levels.
* 36. During your time at these universities, you served the public in a number of appointments, including being appointed by Governor Mike Huckabee of Arkansas to serve on the Early Childhood Education Commission and later serving on the National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women in the US Department of Justice. I’d like to ask what were some defining moments for you during these public appointments?
* For Houston local: Police Advisory Committee and Mayoral Advisory Committee that laid the foundation for Helen Chang’s visibility and influence in the mayoral office.
* At State: TARC and Pardon and Parole Board
* At the national level: My 1992 Congressional Campaign and Bush/Quayle as campaign staff set a record of APA Delegation and alternates at the GOP National convention. Proposed book on “Dirty American Politics”
* For myself: Commission and interactions with heads of states and worldwide leaders. Official trips to **Russia, S. Africa,** and **India** – All broadened my knowledge of international affairs.
* 37. How did you become involved in the GOP?
  + 38. You were recruited into Reagan’s reelection campaign. How was it working for the campaign?
* **GOP Involvement in 1980**I had a very interesting launch of my GOP/Republican involvement. Might be a little bit ironic.
* Recognizing my leadership via Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and Organization of Chinese American Women (OCAW) involvement, Ms. Esther Kee, a Chinese American volunteer of the National Democrat Committee contacted me in Feb. 1980.  Ms. Kee was trying to recruit me to support President Carter’s re-election. Initially, I was excited by such an offer to become an appointed or super delegate to the National Democrats Convention.I took the offer and my decision seriously. To make sure that the philosophy of the Democrat Party was consistent with mine, I went to the university library to study the platforms of both the Democrat and Republican Parties. At the end, I realized that the Democrat Party is not the one for me.  Thus, I decided to take part in the Republican Party from ground zero without any connection and knowledge.One day, I learned from the local newspaper that the Bay Area Republican Women’s Club was having a meeting and Vicki Hapke was the contact person. So, I called Vicki who quickly paid a home visit with a lot of books about the philosophy of the party and party leaders, such as the president Ronald Reagan and Congressman Jack Kemp.  She immediately recruited and led me to the Reagan’s reelection campaign. Since then, Vicki had become my political mentor in TX until she relocation to other state. All my GOP involvement in a chronological order can be found on the FNPL website.
* 39. You were elected as a delegate to the Senatorial district #11 convention and the state convention after two years of active involvement in the Republican party in 1982. How was it like being elected into this position.
* Serving on resolutions committee/policy making - Example of Abortion debate at the 1984 state convention – became GOP position for many years until the US Supreme Court decision in June 2022.
  + 40. You’ve noted that at this time you were also involved in the Asian Republican groups at the national level. Can you talk about these groups? What were some of these groups and what were some of the goals or policies that they advocating for?
  + Not solid, title/shows only for personal interests / no grassroots at local nor connecting to the mainstream political network
  + 41. Around this time, you also began to form the Texas Asian-American Republican Caucus (TARC) directly under the state GOP, but that it was a challenging to form an Asian/Pacific American GOP group due to its ethnic/cultural diversity. Can you talk about the challenges you faced in making an Asian/Pacific American GOP group?

TARC 1987 --This was the first year of the Texas Asian American Caucus (TARC) with new officers elected on December 27, 1986. Unfortunately, this newly formed group did not grow under the first chairman as expected. Thus, there is very limited information about TARC for the year of 1987. By the end of 1987, new officers were elected, and I was elected as the chair and Dr. Y. T. Huang of Dallas as the co-chair. My top priorities were to develop the newly founded TARC as rapidly as possible and encourage TARC members to become involved not only at local and state levels but also at national level.   Following my election, I sent out a memo to Executive Committee members and Chapter chairmen on November 24, 1987, to outline the goals and tasks for the upcoming Presidential election in 1988, including a directive to revitalize all local chapters.

At the national level, I was involved in the National Republican Asian Assembly’s (NRAA) inaugural conference held in Arlington, VA from June 14 and 15, 1987. I was a member of the Banquet Committee and tried to invite Asian American Texans to attend and even arranged meetings with GOP presidential candidates such as Senator Bob Dole and Republican National Committee (RNC) staff for them. I looked for opportunities for Asian American Texans for political appointments at both state and national levels.

* 42. You were appointed by Senator Bob Dole to The Congressional Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development (established in May 1987). You were the only Asian American on the Commission and one of the two female commissioners.
  + Can you tell us about your work for the commission as well as what it was like to be the only Asian American and one of two women on the commission?
  + Near all the time, I was the only/first woman on a board or commission and the only/first Asian. Proud of being a pioneer but bear great responsibility to represent my APA community/group.
* 43. Did you experience any racism during your political career?

Only until the congressional race.

**My Congressional Campaign**

1. **Background**: Hoping to have a better appointment during Bush’s second term that was commemorate with my credentials and background, I decided to campaign harder than ever to cumulate more “chips” for President Bush’s reelection.

In the early spring 1991, while I was serving President Bush at the Dept. of Education, I went to Mr. Ron Kaufman, the political director of Bush’s White House and sought his advice for my role in the upcoming reelection of President Bush. I asked him if I should stay in Washington, DC or return to Houston to campaign for President Bush.  Since President Bush’s popularity was sky high after the victory of the Desert Storm, Ron felt the President was very safe to be reelected without any problem.  Unexpectedly, he pointed out that the Democratic controlled Congress needed more Republicans to support President’s agenda.  He suggested that I ran for Congress in Houston.  
  
It was a struggle for me whether I should take Ron’s advice because I had never thought about running for public office. I prayed and analyzed a lot after meeting him. I even retreated to the Holiday Inn in Chevy Chase in NW of Washington, DC to seek God’s will and guidance.  After consulting family and church pastor, I finally decided to run as a calling and mission in the summer of 1991. I felt it was about the time for Chinese Americans to be visible in the national political arena, especially, the Republican Party. At that time, there was no Chinese American congressman representing the growing Chinese American population in the US. Most of Chinese or Asian American elected officials at state level was affiliated with the Democratic Party including all Japanese American legislators in Congress.

1. **The purpose** of my congressional campaign was not for personal gains or interests but for the Asian Americans as a whole. My goal was to inspire and galvanize the Chinese/Asian Americans, particularly the younger generation regardless of the outcome of my campaign. I used the analogy of ladder climbing to symbolize my efforts as the first giant step to reach the political top regardless of the results. I was not afraid to lose because I strongly believed that the foundation, I laid, would lead Chinese/Asian Americans to a higher ground. There were four political advantages to my candidacy: 1) Redistricting in Texas after the 1990 census added three more congressional seats. 2)  The newly drawn district consisted more middle class and professional voters than before. 3) The popularity of an incumbent Republican President would enhance the victory of a Republican candidate.  4) The 1992 GOP National Convention held in Houston would provide Republican candidates with more media exposure than usual.
2. **Actions taken**: Within weeks, I resigned from the US Department of Education (USDOE) position and resumed my teaching at University of Houston/Clear Lake (UHCL) in fall, 1991.  Before I left USDOE, I was invited by the UHCL president to be their summer commencement speaker in August.

Soon upon my return to UHCL, I contacted my friends around the country to organize fund raising events throughout the country in the fall, 1991. As a long-time community activists and newspaper weekly columnist with the World Journal with worldwide circulation, I was able to share my message at fundraising events throughout 14 cities in the USA including New York City, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Phoenix, Chicago, Albany, NY, Dallas, and Washington, DC. My reputation as a political activist at both state and national levels also attracted and motivated many Chinese immigrants. During the campaign, I pointed out the dire needs for Chinese Americans to take part in the mainstream politics based on the historical lessons and the fact of having no representation in the Congress.  I shared my conviction to Chinese Americans’ political participation and my struggles in the Republican Party with my contributors.  I informed them with great optimism that I had the support of the Jewish and Black communities in Houston even though they traditionally voted for the Democrats. They felt a minority Congresswoman will certainly better represent them than a white Democrat and pledged their support after the primary.

The challenge for me was to win the primary and then the minority groups in the district could vote for me during the general election where no separate voting places for Democrats and Republicans.  Although I could not guarantee of my victory, I assured my supporters that my campaign will pave the way for future generations. Indeed, my campaign inspired many Chinese Americans who started running for local, state and federal offices soon after my close call defeat.  Those candidates finally realized that it was possible to run and even to win an election. Meanwhile, those Chinese American community leaders who took part in my campaign and fundraising efforts became involved in partisan politics and made great stride.

1. **campaign process:** Immediately upon my return to UHCL I set up the campaign office in my house. The dining room converted into volunteers’ working area. I hired the leader of College Young Republicans at UHCL. He was smart and competent to get the campaign organized but was soon terminated for dishonesty with campaign expenses. He was found to use my campaign funds and spent time for his own congressional campaign in a different district. He later became Congressman Steve Stockman twice but was convicted on 23 felony counts in 2018. Subsequently, he was sentenced to serve ten years in prison, and was ordered to pay $1,014,718.51 in restitution. He was one of the last few people pardoned by President Trump prior to the end of his presidency.

After Stockman’s waste of my campaign time and resources, my campaign was quickly reorganized by a consultant group from Dallas. They hired a campaign manager, a campaign coordinator and a secretary.  With a local Chinese merchant’s generosity, the campaign HQ moved to one of his empty offices. Although the campaign was well organized and operated by the “professionals” the price tag was high.   
  
My campaign inspired and encouraged many Chinese American volunteers in Houston as well as around the nation. Mrs. Isada Lee of Clear Lake worked nearly as a full-time volunteer while my dining room was still constantly filled with local tireless volunteers. They prepared mailers, various signs and delivered and placed the yard signs. Later, on the eve of the election day, the main streets in the I-610 loop areas were saturated with my street signs.  Unfortunately, many of them were removed by some people within hours.

My opponent was Dolly Madison McKenna, a white investment banker. She was not a member of any Republican group and did not even live in the district. Her residence in Houston was much shorter than mine. Yet, she had the support of the lily-white Republican Women’s Clubs including the Bay Area club which I had contributed greatly my time, resources, and leadership for various campaign functions for years. Obviously, racial background became a major factor during a competition. At that time, the Capitol Hill’s Roll Call magazine in Washington, DC pointed out this congressional primary was unprecedented expensive one in GOP history.  At the end, the difference between McKenna and me was only around 1200 votes.

Houston Chinese Americans could have delivered the difference of 600 votes – divided the 1200 votes by two, if they had the faith and commitment to my campaign. A year earlier, a native young female Chinese American ran for Houston City Council but only received 6% of the votes. Thus, local Chinese Americans did not expect that I could have a close race and felt no need to come out to vote for me. From this close race, many Chinese Americans realized that they should not have underestimated their own candidates and political strength.

**e) The results and impacts:** Although I lost by a narrow margin, my campaign inspired and boosted many other Asian Americans’ confidence in their political endeavors. I was

proud of my “fight” and pleased with the impact in the following years. There were only four Asian American congressmen prior to 1993, excluding those in Hawaii, which had its unique political environment. Among these four, three were Japanese Americans from CA and one Indian. After 1993, a total of 16 Asian/Pacific American (APA) congresspersons were elected. In addition, currently there are quite a few APA public office holders throughout the US. In the year of 2020, there were 12 Asian/Pacific Americans running for state-wide office in Texas.

In the state of Texas, a Houston immigration lawyer, Gordon Quan, later was elected to the City Council in 1999. In 2002, he was selected as City of Houston Mayor Pro-Tam. Dr. Martha J. Wong was also elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 2002. The 8th term state Senator, Mrs. Angie Chen Button of Dallas, recognized my inspiration to her political pursues at her November 2021 fundraiser in Houston.

1. **Self-reflection:** I learned several lessons from my unsuccessful campaign. First, I over trusted the campaign professionals’ advice without trusting my own judgement and listening to my **own intuition**. Both of my first campaign manager, Steve Stockman and subsequent consultants took advantage of my well-funded campaign. Then, the campaign strategies adopted by the consultants, based on an expensive survey against immigration, might have damaged my candidacy greatly.  The sentiments of anti-Japanese imported cars and immigration policy were undoubtedly a bad timing to my race as an Asian immigrant. I was portrayed by my opponent as a Japanese immigrant on TV ads. My consultants insisted to “hide” my Asian face without TV ads nor public appearance, only radio ads. Meanwhile, the consultants used a negative campaign to “define” my opponent with “tons” of mailers. This tactic was truly against my belief and personality. I was only “allowed” to walk with my volunteers in certain precincts and to continue my fundraising schedule.  
   ​  
   I was leading based on the early absentee votes. I am convinced that the negative campaign, and **stealth candidacy** had negative impacts on voters’ decision toward the end. Obviously, my conservative candidacy was well received initially by voters until my negative mailers bombarded voters.  I should have insisted on my own intuition instead of relying on the well-paid consultants.

* As I predicted and promised, my campaign did have the ripple effect in the political arena. Possibly these lessons paved the road for two future Chinese American city council persons In 2000, Republican President Bush had one Chinese and one Japanese American cabinet member: Secretary Elaine Chao of the Labor Department and Secretary Norman Mineta of the Transportation Department. No previous administration, either Democrat or Republican, had any Asian American cabinet member.
* 44. You’ve mentioned discrimination during your time with the Bay Area Republican Women’s club. You said that you worked really hard for the club, but that in the end your fellow club members chose to support a white woman who was not even a member of the club. How did you react to this snub?
* Nothing just learned a lesson about other Americans. I always trust the final judgements are made by God who knows everyone’s heart.
* 45. You mentioned that during the 1984 Republican Convention, it was evident that the Asian Americans were not versed in the way things work in nominations and in gaining access to the public higher ups, not to mention knowing how to gain access to the convention floor. Can you elaborate on how this happened, and what do you think needs to be done to have Asian American heavily invested in this sphere?  
  It was a sad lesson. Education/knowledge is the key for political participation. Should not be blindly follow so called leader/leaders and be used for others’ agenda. Do your own dual diligence. From local and being mainstreamed, $$ talks at all levels.
* 46. You’ve had a prolific career of public service, political work, and higher education and have received numerous awards, written publications, and held many positions. Is there anything else you’d like us to know about your career? Any other defining moments you’d like to note?
* 1) Chinese school and Chinese church, more results than anything else bcs I could see the growing numbers.
* 2) There are many surprises in my life. Frequently, the failures of my plan, tragedies or “waste of time” led to a new path and world.
* **3)** Examples: dream of medical school, Stanton’s delayed Ph.D., Harrisburg Uni., column writing, father’s demise, lost congressional race led to Bush/Quayle for greater influences, divorce,
* **E. Perspectives:**
* 47. How did educate your children? As in, what are some values that you emphasized in your children’s upbringing?
* Long story, basically revealed in my publications especially related to parenting skills in a bilingual/bicultural society. Try to combine the merits of both Chinese and American cultures based on the foundation of my faith. My teaching in multicultural education helps me greatly in child rearing and political participation in my adapted nation. Let me share some of their own words: “Mom, you are conservative but open-minded.”
* They overall were very good and talented girls. I am blessed and proud of them. I often stressed “Doing your very best with God’s given talents.”
* Because they both have perfect pitch, I gave their piano lessons at age three after they learned the numbers and alphabets. They won many music awards at state and local levels. As a result, they both were able to perform piano concertos with Clear Lake Symphony. They also study Chinese daily until they reach the proficiency of second grade. They also were given the opportunities to explore other hobbies, and extracurricular activities. They were even cheerleaders and played flute and violin. I value children’s development more in Affective domain than cognitive domain. Reading, writing, foreign languages and debate team are more important than math and science. Besides Chinese, they also learned Spanish and Russian. They were raised with Self-discipline, self-motivation, self-confidence.
* Provided healthy diet, regular and simple life – experience for twirling performance about 11?? Home haircuts, no manicure, shopping for needs and fast. Not much time for TV watching. Only watch daily news on TV.
* 48 Do you belong to any church?
* No, but attending my husband’s church
  + 49. How important has your religion been in your life?
* Very important especially my attitudes and problem-solving skills. My faith gives me love, faith and hope for a positive and purposeful life. My whole life is a Journey of Faith. One day a reporter asked me how I set up my career goals when I was in my mid-30s. My reply was, “I wanted to turn right but God led me to the left or visa vera.” I rarely got my own ways such as dreaming to be a medical doctor and concert pianist. Yet, I always enjoy what I do. Even though Stanton often said, “You are wasting your time!” I still pressed on. No failure, No success. I really trust God’s lead.
* 1) Trust and obey bcs He is in charge, not me; I am his stewardess to manage what He bestows upon me with my very best!
* 2) Vengeance or judgement is on Him; Whatever I do are held accountable to God, not people.
* 3) Small rear mirror with a big front wind shield – no regret only learned lessons from the past and embracing future with hope or expectations.
* 4) Counting my blessings that I have, not what I don’t have

1. Two guiding hymens: Living for Jesus, like Colossians 3:13. And Have Thine Own Way, Lord.

* 50. How was it establishing the Space City Chinese School in 1972?
  + The school grew rapidly, garnering attention locally in Houston (example, Evergreen Chinese School) and internationally Ministry of Overseas Chinese (MOC) of the Republic of China (Taiwan). This weekend type of Chinese classes or schools spread out throughout the US and now there are thousands of them in the North America.
    - How was it for you seeing the school grow?
* I started the weekend Chinese Class at our two-bedroom apartment in Clear Lake shortly after our arrival in Clear Lake from Purdue in February1972. At that time, my first daughter, Faith, was only three-month old. I believed that American born Chinese (ABC) should be able to speak Chinese. At that time, daily Chinese classes were only available after regular American schools in Cantonese in Chinatowns. They were designed for those early Cantonese speaking immigrants’ descendants.  Later Chinese immigrants who arrived after WWII, especially after the new immigration policy effective in 1967, were highly educated and lived in an integrated community. Their children could not attend the Chinese classes/schools held in Chinatowns. In addition, back to the early 1970s, Chinatowns could only be found in major cities in the East and West coasts.  Thus, I started a weekend Chinese class named Space City Chinese Class, for those new immigrants’ children.  The classes were staffed by volunteer mothers initially.  With the support of Cynthia Chan and Peggy King, this new concept of Chinese class was formally established in March 1972. Cynthia was responsible for “operation”; I was responsible for teaching the Bible stories in Chinese and Peggy oversaw the singing in Chinese. All three of us were Christians and committed to Jesus. Since we relocated to the Sagemont area, the class had to be moved to the Nassau Bay Baptist Church in fall 1972 with Peggy’s church membership.  
     
  This Space City Chinese School was growing so rapidly that it caught the attention of the Ministry of Overseas Chinese (MOC) of the Republic of China (Taiwan). The minister of MOC and some legislators even came to Nassau Bay Baptist Church to visit the school. Their visits were covered in the Central Daily News published in Taiwan. Some interested parents from other parts of the greater Houston areas also came to learn about it so they could establish their own Chinese schools locally, including Mrs. LiuWei Shen, founder of the well-known Evergreen Chinese School in Houston. Very quickly, this weekend type of Chinese schools spread throughout the US.  Now there are thousands of them in North America.
* 51. Can you tell us about some other non-political community organizations, events, or activities that you’ve been part of?
* While my daughters were young, my community involvements consist of the
* **Space City Chinese Class (later became Clear Lake Chinese School) March,1972**
* **Space City Chinese Family Discussion Group in 1972**
* **OCA and OCAW 1980-**
* **Chinese Amateur Musicians Association in 1972**
* **Women Voters’ League in 1975**
* **Young Musical Festival in 1979**
* **Kuang Jen Children’s Symphony from Taiwan in 1981**
* **Minority Business Women Workshop** **Held on August 22, 1981**
* **Annual Chinese Lunar New Year Festival at UHCL** **launched on Feb. 8, 1982**

AARP in 1997 as a media specialist in Houston

* + 52. What are some **defining moments** for you in other community organizations, events, or activities that you’ve been part of?
  + I think the violent conflicts in the 1970s between Vietnamese and white American shrimpers in Kemah, close of Galveston got me involved into Houston Mayoral Office and its Police Department and lecturing at Houston Police Academy on cross-cultural understanding. Later TX Criminal Justice systems such as Member of the Pardons and Parole Board, cross-cultural lecturer at the Houston Policy Academy and even the US Dept of Justice’s National Advisory Committee on Violence against Women.
  + Two examples of personal defining moments: 1) I had to speak English with American Born Chinese at OCA meetings. It was a real challenge with discomfort to speak English with Chinese people, weird!! 2) Went into the first GOP event alone - language and cultural barriers.
* 53. What do you do for relaxation? Two phases:
* Before retirement: Changing tasks; from writing to cooking. Sense of accomplishment relaxed me!!
* After retired: lifelong learning satisfies my curious mind via internet on history, archaeology and even health information.
* I am somehow a little strange; tend to justify all what I do including planning my meals. I’d “reward” myself with a cookie with my afternoon coffee if I have maintained the weight or did some yardwork.
  + 54. What have you been doing since retirement?
  + A lot! Two required routines besides household chores and gardening: Bible studies and online exercise
  + Here are the cultural and generational differences. I never have any budget; simply spend the money only for my needs, not wants nor desires. Even though my current husband Bill is not richer than my late husband, he makes me feel rich while my late husband made me feel poor. Does that tell you something about culture? So, after retiring in 2006, we have toured the entire US except Hawaii with our RV, flied around visiting friends and relatives with our four-seater airplane, cruising and touring around the world, sailing in the east and west, and boating on our lake. Yet, I don’t swim – scary!!! After visiting more than 130 nations including my earlier professional trips, we have settled down more around the house during the COVID. We both love gardening; Bill grows edible fresh fruits and vegetables while I grow visible beautiful flowers both indoors and outdoors. Once I even grew more than 30 different colors of roses.
* 55. The political environment for Asian American women is quite different today compared to the ‘80s.  What are the advantages would you consider that are afforded to the younger generation of Asian Americans that did not exist 40 years ago?
* Based on various statistics, in general, only less than 30% of US women were employed outside home in the 70s. Very few were college educated. Now, over 60% with better education.
* Little outsourcing. I had no helper, no carryout, not use frozen food or fast food. The girls were never sent to day care only the UHCL Lab school for preschoolers.
* Discrimination against pregnant women (Harrisburg U.), asking about personal life during interviews, maternity/paternity leave, job security, better pay (I was 3/5 of Fred’s salary), childcare facilities/preschool programs. Internet for mentoring, career development/advice, networking . . .
  + 56. In what areas do you see the talents and efforts most needed for Asian Americans in public service today?
* **Two categories of public service:** administrators like businessman Trump and strategists like senator Biden. Cabinet members/secretaries require administrative skills and experience while Congressional members don’t. The formers, like Trump, tend to be doers without careful consideration while the latter, like Biden, tend to be talkers with meetings without action or results. They have different traits. However, 4-5 Cs are needed for both with different degree of emphasis: Communication, Connections, (Credentials), Character, and Competency. In addition, it’s important to learn or pay attention to your finance. $$$$

Again, Communication – oral and written; wisdom/discernment; integrity.

* 57. You had been appointed to government positions where you were hoping to apply your academic expertise. What do you think may be missing in the curriculum taught in school about public service? Moral standards, discernment/critical thinking, management skills in resources such as budget and time . . ., Interpersonal/social skills.
* 58. You’ve graded your career as B, but A for being a wife and a mother, yet you’ve devoted so much time and effort to the GOP and your teaching assignments. How your time and efforts spent on political engagements might have impacted your time with your daughters?  Have they been inspired by your career in politics? I promised my family that my political engagements will not jeopardize their interests and welfares. Teaching was good for me like a stay-home mom. My routines with required 15 hours/weekly in office usually, except supervising student teachings. Stanton called me 99-points woman; one point short is for improvement. Three homemade meals daily, healthy diet without helpers except my mom’s help during my overseas trips. My time management (organization/planning/Simplicity with only carry-on; ex. of cheer leaders’ mothers, girls did not like me reading during the half time) and keep normal/typical schedule, except the travels. (That’s heart breaking but the girls said that separation made them stronger and even more independent.) Experience of first paper presentation at TX A & M with the whole family without chances for networking. Child Labor: the girls helped serving, mailing, collating . . . People are changing constantly. Back to their high school or college years, I knew they were proud of my involvement and supported me. Yet, I doubt they have been inspired politically by my political involvement.
* 59. You remained politically active throughout your career. **A.** What’s your view of the U.S. policies on immigration in recent years and **B**. their impacts on Asian immigrants?
* A Big topic/area.
* a) Rationale for more open and manageable immigration via tracking, and flexibility. Labor demands/shortage, adequate land and benefit our economy
* b) Why against Chinese more than Indian immigrants? – (their colonial experience; know better to deal with the westerners.)
* Foreign policy/conflicts and political power in the US. Why the US supports Israel unconditionally? BCS Jewish Americans’ political and economic powers –(their exile history). They are an excellent role model for us.
* 60. How would you describe the Asian American community in Houston?
* Proud of their accomplishments in all areas since 1960s but can be better assimilated/integrated to the mainstream. We would invite more jealousy and resistance when we are making progress economically, and politically. Personally, I would do my best to mingle with my neighbors if I lived in a lily-white neighborhood, especially an upscaled community. Hope to see more Chinese churches use community church instead of Chinese for including other ethnic groups.
* 61. How do you want to be remembered?
* As a 1) community activist with nationwide and local political footprints 2) grassroot political ladder climberwho laid the foundation with the first step and pull people up to higher steps. 3) A pioneer representing Asian American community via many firsts in various areas of services. . . not professionally thorough.
* 62. You’ve been advocating for Asian Americans throughout your life, what do you think the rise of anti-Asian racism during the pandemic? Do you have any advice for Asian Americans today trying to combat anti-Asian sentiments?
* United for better strategic planning and actions like the Jews. Example of Chinese restaurants vs Jewish supply chains. Take our issues to the public or groups not just cover it up. Ex. after the Kemah/Galveston Shrimpers’ conflicts between Vietnamese and the local whites. Formed Kathy Whitmire’s Mayoral Office’s Asian American Advisory Committee and Police Advisory Committee in the Police Dept. under Chief Lee Brown
* 63. What are your hopes for Asian American communities in the US?
* Learn more about Americans and American culture. (ex. of giving and nosy), Indian Americans are doing much better than APA due to their English and understandings of Westerners. Meanwhile, we can help non-Asians understand us via more interaction. A discussion for the non-Chinese Americans on cross-cultural body language would be fun.
* More people to participate in all levels and in all sectors not just serving your own ethnic groups like I told Thresa Chang/Kay Baily Hutchinson – step out of your comfort zone and branch out to all walks of life.
* 64. Do you have any advice for future generations, young Asian American who are interested in becoming government officials or pursuing leadership roles?
* Knowing your ID – who you are. Be a solid person prepared with 4-5 Cs: Communication, Connections, (Credentials), Characters, and Competency/problem solving. Learning or pay attention to your finance. $$$$ We need leaders with substance like a rock not dreamers, talkers, liars, and cheaters.

(Note: The actual recorded and videoed interview is different from the prepared one toward the end.)

Website: [www.fnplweb.org](http://www.fnplweb.org/)