ML: Alright. Today is June 17, 2019. We’re here interviewing Mr. Edmond Gor for the Houston Asian American Archive. My name is Mei Leebron.

AD: I’m AnhThu Dang.

ML: Alright. So, let’s start off with the question: where and when were you born?

EG: Uh, where uh I was actually born here in Houston, Texas. Uh, born January 18, 1950. Native Houstonian.

ML: Awesome. Um, so how would you describe the household that you grew up in?

EG: Um, actually our household, my—my dad had a business uh, on the uh east side of town, the Fifth Ward, a grocery store business, and it was probably not more than 1,000 square feet in the front. We actually lived right behind the business which was probably about 500 square feet. So when my uh parents finally finished having kids, we ended up having seven kids in the house. And uh when I say four—it was a four-bedroom little house. Actually, it was four beds and one room - is how it kind of worked out. So, a lot of us were kin—literally stacked next to each other. So we shared one room um, we had maybe three bedrooms at the most. But one of them actually ended up being a stock room for groceries, you know, for groceries. So, so yeah, it was a little bit crowded but uh nine people in the house.

It was—it was uh interesting and fun for sure. I don’t know many people could survive that, but it is what
it is. You know, we, we uh we kind of had fun to some extent. So that was kind of how our house was back in those days. [ML: Mhm]

We eventually did move about—about ten years later, after I was born. My father, mother saved up enough money to buy a house in another part of the city. Uh, an area in Denver Harbor. And uh, and about ten years after that, they saved up enough money to buy another house in Sharpstown where my brother and sister, my youngest brother and sister actually went to school.

ML: Okay, did you ever work at the grocery store?

EG: [laughs] Yeah. Yeah, that—that’s—that’s a question that any Chinese uh, uh kid that has a business ever has to worry about. Yes, yes, everybody was—was—was uh part of the store, part of the business. So as you got older, you graduated from uh do—doing stock business, you know, stocking, you know, shelves and all that to working—work—being a cashier. And uh, you know, just kind of got to managing the whole store together as you got a little bit older as well. Yeah, there's—there’s no question about it.

ML: Um, so I guess what values did your parents raise you and your siblings on?

EG: Well, the first thing I would say that I got out of working at the store was I didn't want to work in the store anymore. [laughs] And that, and I think that was probably one of the things that they said, you know, because they work really, really hard. I mean the—the grocery store business is one of these where, you—you have to open the store by about seven, seven thirty in the morning and you don’t really close until about eight or eight thirty at night. So, you’re really open about twelve to fourteen hours a day. And we didn’t—we did close half day on Sunday though, so that was one of the days uh that they got to do anything. So I always have to congratulate and uh really admire my parents because they literally work side by side every single day that they’re—so, I—I will admit that very few of us today can think about working with our spouses literally 24/7, you know, b—but they—they—they made it work. And uh, that’s an example there, so hard work and just being able to work together on a common uh objective of, you know, I—literally of putting kids through college.

ML: Okay, so where did you go to school?

EG: I—well I went to school um, uh if you can kind of remember back in the 50’s and 60’s, school’s still uh very segregated. And so, even though I live in—in a predominantly African—American neighborhood, uh my—my parents, my dad actually was the one who could drive. Uh, he would have to drive us uh into a white neighborhood where we would go to school. And uh he did that, I guess for most of us until they bought another house in another part of the city, he continued to have to drive us back and forth every day. So you know, morning, uh open the store, got the store all opened. My mother ran the business and then he would drop the kids off to school. And then he—in the afternoon, same thing reverse go back, pick us all up, bring us back to uh to school—uh bring us back to the to uh grocery business to start working and then doing homework I mean after that.

So yeah, that was an interesting experience for that period of time. I did not uh, uh I think about my last year of high school was the first year that actually had integration in the school. So that’s my first experience having a black, African—American student in my school. Now, all through uh my entire life though, growing up in that area, I had nothing but African—American kids as friends and people that I knew. So I mean, played with them and everything, so to me, it didn't, it didn't bother me at all, that—that—that bothered me at first, later on after I come here, why am I going to a different school that has basically all white, very, very, very few Asians there at all? And uh, the other kids, I kind of wondered, “did they go to school or not?” That—that kind of, that didn't hit up upon me too much later. So, yeah.

ML: So, I believe you grew up when the Jim Crow laws were in effect?
EG: Um...

ML: Possibly?

EG: Um, um, you know, I have to say that I didn't really think about it that way. [ML: Okay] I—I really—it didn't dawn on my what the effect of Jim Crow laws were too much later after I figured out what it was. [ML: Mm] Uh, because I—I—I just never thought that that kind of thing would exist. [ML: Yeah] And that's why that until, until you think about history, and part of me is really mostly STEM, STEM person, growing up and all that. I don't even think about the historical aspects of you know, of separation and segregation. I—I do remember uh, on occasion, there were riots around the city of Houston, uprisings in the city uh because of the racial discord there that, you know, for me, I—it seemed kind of scary in thought because my—my parents that about, well what’s going to happen? Which was really nothing happened to us actually. We've heard about things in other neighborhoods. But for us, I think it was because we had a—a—a really good relationship with—with people that—that support our business, you know, came to shop with us, and all that. So we had good relationships. So, I—I never thought that I would be scared all, you know my parents were al—of course always scared of something because usually someone outside the neighborhood that creates a disturbance. So um yeah, I have to say that I was pretty uh I wouldn't say sheltered. But just the fact that it didn't, didn't dawn on me all these things were going on until think about it much later in life.

ML: So, when you did realize what all of this meant, how did—wh—what impact did it have on you?

EG: Well, I—I—I’ll tell you the first time I actually ex—experienced any kind of uh overt uh I call it uh discrimination was when I myself went to college. [ML: Uh—huh] So when I went to the University of Texas, it uh, it—it didn't dawn on me that other people didn't really like or were treating me differently until I got there. Because it was there that I discovered there were a lot of uh kids who had never see other minorities before. They grew up in small towns, or—or they grew up in—in areas where there are very, very few African Americans, Asians, Hispanics. So uh, it didn’t dawn on me until then—that—that's what—that was happening to me. Because in high school and—and you know, middle school, all through, all through school, you’re pretty much sheltered in a sense because you're always with people you know. [ML: Mhm] Friends, you know, classes and all that. So, and—and you get, you know, yeah, and yeah, I—I think I did have a little bit of issues in terms of bullying, because being a smaller kid and all that, but I have to really say I—my, my friends were really good for sticking up for me a lot. I remember a lot of those issues where, where a kid would—would—would start bullying me and I didn’t really have [inaudible] for a long time. Usually, if—if—if one of my friends who was usually bigger than me saw that I was being bullied, he would actually stick up for me. So he was a really good—a lot of good friends, I’ll put it that way. So um, but yeah, it wasn't until much later that experience that—it had affected me later. I—I think I didn't internalize all that until I saw some issues with why uh other’s were being mistreated, you know, it was more minority kids, it—mostly African—Americans, of course I saw that in the University of Texas, but it still doesn't int—you know, get really to me until somebody else kind of does the same thing to me. [ML: Mhm] That I figured, why are they doing this? Or why does someone have that kind of hate? That kind of discord, you know, to each other?

ML: Mhm. Um, how did you overcome all those challenges?

EG: Um… I have to say that for the most part, the—my thought process behind this was, was like it's out of my control, to tell others how to act. I have to respond in terms of, I will only let those people affect me if I let them. You know, I—I—I feel like if they do that to me it’s that it’s really their problem in terms of you know, how they want to treat people. My—my impression has always been that I should try to treat people as I would want them to treat me. And so if I kind of continue that, that thought process. If somebody does something bad to me or they—they—you know, I'm not—it’s not that I won’t be mad about it, it’s just that okay I’ve—I’ve figured out that this person has some—some problem or some issue
with being able to accept that everyone has not only the right but you know, the ability to determine their own outcome. And if you do that, I think you'll be a better person in life, you know. You just kind of maintain that a little bit of normalness in your own life. Don't let these other folks give you all this noise and so not to act to them, rather than try to, to react to something that I'm doing it. People like myself trying to, you know, just say, well, how do we harmonize this whole thing to where people aren't acting like there's someone that's either below them or above them.

ML: Um, did your siblings or your parents ever face any kind of discrimination?

EG: Um, I think so. Yeah. I—I have to think so. I—I don’t know about my parents so much but you know, one thing that I’ll say about my parents is that, I—I rarely ever heard them say anything negative. Even though all of our friends and I mean customers and all that were African American, I could say that they—African American families, probably 90% of their lives. I mean, we had friends uh and relatives, of course, who were predominantly Chinese. And we had you know, friends, a few friends who were you know, Caucasian but I never heard them say anything negative. You know, people always talk about uh is racism inherent or is it learned or experiences? It’s—I don’t think anybody is born being, you know, with racist attitudes. I think it is kind of learned in the home or experience through—through friends that you might have. So I—I really have to think that my parents kind of set an example about not being—being negative about—why—why should they be negative about their—their about their customers? It seems kind of crazy to try to be that way. But my, my, my parents were wonderful people that um just kind of a for—you know, forgotten concept but most of our customers were people who work paycheck to paycheck, week to week. And so in many cases, if they needed groceries, my parents were very good about sending credits to them. You know, just saying, okay, you can pay us you know, next Friday when you get paid. So they would have you know, ongoing—I mean, I just remember, the little, whenever we had a checkout receipt, they take their receipt and okay this friend has this and so this time they this and they put it on a shelf—shelf—shelf over here, and they came back the following week to pay, they just start going through their little book looking for their receipts that they hadn't paid and they added it up and they paid them. And so it was literally, you know, handshake agreement the way they um you know, signed agreement. And of course there were no interest fees. My parents had no clue about how to do that. [laughs] So, so anyway, they—they were good about that. I think that’s a nice thing about my—my folks. They extended that kind of courtesy. And uh, you know, they really take compassion on somebody, so why we should charge you at least twenty percent interest because you were, you didn’t hold onto this ticket for twenty days, three weeks, or even two days. So, I think that’s, that’s an example I learned from them to have compassion about everybody else’s situation.

ML: Okay, do you perceive a change in the way that Chinese Americans are treated today?

EG: Um, definitely yes because I, I see that just the, just the sheer numbers. There's just more. Um, I remember going to school, uh other than my own brother and sister who are either a little bit older, a little bit younger than me, going to the same school, I probably had no more than two other uh and it’s Chinese really, I mean long before, you know, more Koreans, uh Vietnamese, South Asians, uh coming into the city, uh immigrating to the city, that those that I knew were either my own siblings or related to me. So uh, I don't think I had more than five Chinese Americans in my school—entire school out of about maybe 2,000 uh at one time. So it's not until much later that we see that there's more. It’s just the sheer numbers. You know, that uh, you know, things are changing and uh and will continue to change I hope. And um, it’s uh to me it’s best uh as Asian Americans seem more involved with other communities. I, I think it's a really big mistake for us to kind of continue to congregate as, as Chinese or Vietnamese or Korean, just all in one group. I think it’s up to us to kind of reach out ourselves and uh, you know, talk—that talk about who we are and that we are not that much different than anyone else. We’re the same. We have the same problems as anyone else. Nobody wants to pay taxes, they want to see better roads, they want to see better, you know, conditions and those kind of things. So, we’re not much different.
ML: Um so, can you say again where you went to college and what you decided to study?

EG: Yeah. I went to University of Texas in Austin. Uh, I managed to squeeze a uh four year engineering program in five years. [laughs] So it was interesting thing. I did not realize how harder it was going to college, uh talking about the types of schools and I went to going to Stephen Austin High School, which is uh over on the east side of town, and I would say it was—it was a prominent mix of uh White, uh Hispanic, and just a couple of three you know, Chinese. But at that time the school was predominantly White and Hispanic. Like I said before, we didn’t have uh an African American student come in until I was graduating and he came in his 10th grade which back then, it was only 10, 11, 12th grade [inaudible].

So uh, I went to University of Texas in Austin. I started an engineering career uh studying that. I couldn’t decide between chemical engineering and electrical engineering. Uh well, so I decided I would go—I did not like the all the labs and uh, so uh—my—my apologies to uh Dr. Norman Hackerman who was here as uh—he was actually my first chemistry professor at University of Texas. He eventually came to Rice to become President of the University and so uh I—I really didn’t like chemistry that much. So, I ended up going to electrical engineering and that’s kind of where I used to—I—I graduated with a Bachelors in electrical and then started working on a career uh doing that. Working for Houston Lighting & Power, my first job out of uh college. I think one of the questions you asked me was what was my salary back in 1972 and it was—it was an amazing $10,500 a year, you know, so that’s just uh you couldn’t even think about try to raise anybody else—trying to live off of $10,500 a year but—but back in those days, of course, it was it seemed to be, you know, it was a good, it was a good enough salary for someone like myself coming out of college. So, that was my first job.

ML: Anh Thu, do you have any questions?

AD: Since you—since you just talked about your first job... [EG: Mhm] Was there any like lessons that you were taking as your value as it is important to shaping you as the person you are today?

EG: Um, not so much my first job. Um my first job taught me that there are jobs that say what is—what is the hurry to do something, you know. I—I’m someone that likes to uh get an assignment, do the assignment quickly as well as I can, and then turn it in. Um, it depends on the job you have someday — sometimes you know, it is a rush thing and sometimes it’s not. So, try to find out ways to—to occupy your time. But one thing that—that—that occurred to me after I took that job, I took another uh working with a major contractor here in town, um called Fluor Engineering. They do predominantly construction jobs throughout the Gulf Coast—refineries, chemical plants, that kind of things, you know, the South, uh the Southeast region of—of Texas is about refineries and chemical plants. Um, I—I took that job um as interesting thing that taught me how not to actually not so much work, work, but how to work in advance um I turned from that—I needed to find out about the business side of how this thing works. I—the engineering side is not, not difficult. Once they train you, they give you all kinds of ways to, to do their work, uh, you know, the process, but I think you try to find out about yourself. How do you advance in a career, and that’s something that of course comes from a parents uh parents, who had no business background, no—no professional background in groceries. But this is kind of thing I say to most um kids today. You don’t come from that background of business, background of knowing how to, to um act in a business place, things that you—you they would, might expect you to do. This is how one of my passions about trying to teach younger kids today. How do you survive advancement in the business world?

Everything is about business, it’s a matter of it’s about sci—about science and engineering, or you’re a math person, uh eventually business kind of tells you how you’re going to, obviously you—you turn your, your, your life, your, your, your degree into some kind of skill for productive life, right? You—that’s objective. So, I learned a lot from—from uh that experience uh because during the times when we had uh cutbacks in—in engineering, you know, I said, “well how did they choose me? Or how did they choose this person?” You know, and it—it doesn’t have to do with um, you know, the the uh kind of social
personality side of yourself in the, in the workplace, as much as it is. Because if you’re as good as anyone else at technical speak, it’s a matter of trying to find out, how do I engage with my boss? How do I engage with others that make decisions to—to advance? So I learned a lot from that experience there.

ML: Um, what’s the most significant change or difference that you have noticed or experienced at work when you first started compared to now?

EG: Um, I would say the biggest difference is that um there is a—a push for more people of color to be in advanced positions. So one, you know, you wonder yourself, you know, why is it—this is always been my—my concern when I was growing up too but more so now that I’m an adult and I see what’s going on. So I, I, I’ll look at this and see a point of view, if you look every year in high school graduating classes, and colleges as well, um, you see how many Asian kids are the top ten percent of their classes, right? I mean you don’t have to, even, look through the newspaper, but you know, every year I look through the newspaper and compare the kids who are in the top ten percent, or those who get [inaudible] scholarships and all that. And so at most schools you’re going to see Asian—Asian Americans, whether its Chinese, Vietnamese, or, you know, South Asian kids there and so—so you wonder. Okay, so that’s great, in college you—know, whether it’s University of Houston or Rice versus Texas, same thing, you have kids [inaudible] graduating top ten of that class, also Asian Americans. But once you get in the workplace that doesn’t, that doesn’t happen, you don’t see that those same, you know, top kids, or top people are rising toward, toward and advancing their career.

So you would think, maybe ten percent of the workforce should have some kind of higher level position whether it’s middle management, upper—middle management, even CEO’s in boardrooms. So you ask yourself what—what—what happened? You say the—did these children become stupid and dumb all of a sudden? Well, of course not. That’s not it at all. So we have to figure out what—what are the social skills, that—I have to think is probably a lot of social skills, a lot of being able to figure out how to do get advanced in life? Because I would say everyone has for the most part, similar technical skills that you turn into life—life uh, uh turning into income. But after that, how do you make yourself uh marketable to be, to advance? So, and that’s kind of the real uh that’s a question I will always kind of continue to pose to people. And it’s not so much I’m saying that—that every company needs a certain percentage of Asian Americans. I think the consideration has to be that these individuals are also as capable to—to rise up above. So something is keeping that from happening. I don’t, I don’t have answers to that right now. I have some possible uh answers to that question.

ML: Um, can you recall the biggest challenge you have faced in your career?

EG: Um, that is probably the one I would say is the challenge is: why—why is it—what am I not doing—what am I doing not doing enough of? I’m not saying that I—I would have done it. I’m just saying, you need the challenge saying, you know, what should I have done better uh to better myself and advance in career. Uh I will say I did have an interesting career change. And I think that this career change really did do, forced me to do many things. Uh so—so I decided okay I, I don’t know that I’ve had uh, uh enough of a challenge in engineering because you only get to a certain point where your technical ability is about the same as everybody else’s. So need—then you need to rise into a management position or, or, or, or something like that to—to kind of uh separate yourself there. So I decided well I needed to figure out what else I need to know how to do. So, I went a totally different area of—of work. Uh I ended up going in to—to uh sales! You know, I said, well sales like is totally out of the realm for most people in STEM. If you think, people in STEM, um and I’m, I apologize for some stereotyping all engineers, but they all tend to be very, uh quiet’s not the right word, they’re all very uh regiment in—in their personality. They—and uh and I can say this about my own engineering friends. They—they—they’ll probably say well they don’t have much of a personality. [laughs] So, it’s kind of one of these things where, where you stereotype engineers as being very—very much—very like analytic people, and they—they’re very good analytically. But as far as social skills, they’re not very uh comfortable there so, it forced me to actually to
go into an area where I can learn a lot about social—social skills. How — how to engage with others and
uh that really helped me a lot, all — many, many years, not just, you know, in my sales career, but in
many, many other areas. And I think that kind of helped me develop those — those kind of skills to where
I would say, I would look at everyone and say, you know, I — I uh uh my — one of my bosses in that area
always told me, that if you always look at a person and decide, you know, um look — look at them and
imagine that what’s — what’s written across their forehead is, you know, if — if I’m in sales I — the other
person I’m trying to convince of a product or ser — whatever it is. And it’s true I don’t care if you go to
Target or if you go to, you know, some other store, you know, grocery — million dollar projects. The —
the question is across uh if you look across the tables, written across their forehead is “what’s in it for me?”
What’s in it for my company if I agree that this is the best idea since, you know, [inaudible] So, so we
always had to look — I always had to look at it from the standpoint that if I were to put myself in that
person’s shoes, what would they, what would they want me to make sure that they get in exchange for
what I’m trying to convey to them. So yeah that — that was really a thing I’d gotten into more sales and
marketing, that was really a good thing for my person — it — it helped my personality change, and so
forced me to do those things I had to do.

ML: Uh, where do you find the drive to keep motivating yourself?

EG: Uh, [laughs] okay. I — I would say that um it’s when someone poses a challenge to me. And it’s not
so much they’re saying “well, you can’t do this,” they’re saying, “what are you going to do about this?”
This costs a lot of uh social stra — so — you know, social questions, you know. I — I think one of the first
times someone asked me about um doing something uh he — he said to me, because I had got — I had been
elected in a, in a fairly high position in this organization, and he knew this organization could be basically
an organization that didn’t do much in the community. And so he ch — so he’s the newspaper guy
actually, the Chinese newspaper, he said to me, “well what are you going to do is different thing.”
Because most of those individuals who had been in this position were predominantly Chinese speaking uh
they — they were uh you know some of the already, you know, [inaudible] to — to — the U.S. and
they’ve been in this business for years and years and years. And so for some reason, uh when I got elected
to this position, he said, “what are you going to do?” I mean, your — your — you’re an ‘ABC,’ an American
born Chinese. You speak English blah da blah well and all that kind of thing.” And he says — he says,
“What do you think you’re gonna do?” I said, “so what do you think needs to be done?” I mean, he knew
what was, he knew some of the problems in the community. He says, “well, um, we have a lot of seniors
of here, they — they have a lot of — the needs.” The Chinese seniors here they — number one, they can’t
speak the language very well. Two, they can’t negotiate health — health care systems or, or trying to
access uh uh benefits that they actually deserve beca — because just don’t know how to speak the language
or navigate the system. They just can’t get it. So I said, I said, “what do you think they need most?” He
said, “well, you find out, it’s your problem.” I said, [laughs] so, actually, and so it turned out that
throughout the city of Houston, they didn’t have a senior meal program for Chinese Americans, Chinese
seniors. Now, that’s not so much uh the issue, w — we kind of found a way because obviously though the
community is, whether Hispanic or African American a — and White too, they were, there were senior
meal programs, every, every day, five days a week, either you’re getting a Meals on Wheels uh meal or
you’re — you need a congregate setting at a center for instance a — and they’re serving 50 to 100 meals a
day. We did not have one in Houston back in… I guess it was the early 90’s, we didn’t have that program.

So uh I think that’s challenge, you know, so what can we do? So, I’ll always say this is that when
someone uh and this is uh I’ll give another example later, but when someone gives me a challenge like
that, I kind of feel like well what can I do to make — make something happen to this because clearly they
needed the program, not because all these seniors starving over here, it’s just uh they — they actually earn
the same right, have that benefit. So, I have to always thank my friend uh that I met at the City of
Houston, he helped me tremendously and I — I would say that — that’s one thing I will always say about
any project I work on, is I always have to find the right people who know better answers to the — to the
questions than I do. I would spend an eternity trying to find the answers but usually just have to find the right people, who know who—so he helped me uh, uh I found out how to do this, how—how—how do I set up a program for senior citizens, doesn’t matter if they’re, you know, white, yellow, black whatever. So he showed me this form and I was able to, you know, get all the information together, you know, spend days and nights putting the proposal together an RFP, and uh, uh lo and behold got, we got approved and so I’m—I’m like sitting here shocked. It’s like people who do grant writing for a living, you know, this this hey like here’s this idiot engineer who decided to come up pick up this stuff and start help—Rafael Medrano helped me out tremendously, putting that proposal together, we got approved by the city, we—the first program we had was 50 meals for seniors.

Uh, but here’s the other point of that, the City of Houston if you can imagine uh has one or two food vendors, so of course, are any of them proficient at cooking Chinese food? No. [laughs] So, so the first meals that were coming out were like meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and peas and carrots, you know, okay, okay—so what happened what was these—these, the—the first week or two or three I think, seniors are throwing away half their meals. So that’s not acceptable, the a—milk too, milk, throw it away, you know, they—they’re, you know, what’s they used to drink, you know, hot tea, you know, some kind of a Chinese meal that—rice especially, rice, gotta have rice. So—so uh we found a—a lady whose willing to help, cook meals, design meals, because she had a commercial style kitchen and so uh Brenda Chung, now unfortunately Brenda is no longer with us, uh but she and her husband uh took it upon themselves to say, “okay, we’ll provide the senior meal programs to the Chinese seniors.” And of course they can cook very nutritious uh meals for Chinese, so we talked about having cultural, cul—cultural sensitivity, cultural competency when we’re putting these programs together. So that was kind of my first uh foray into doing that, like I said, uh totally shocked me when uh this grant [laughs] got accepted. So anyways, the—the challenge, it’s the challenge to do it, you know, the people who say, you know, you can’t do it or it’s too hard, or it’s too much work or too much trouble, you know, it’s uh I—I would encourage you to go out and, you know, take up a challenge, uh go—just go do it, go do it.

ML: Um have you ever faced any case of racism or racial stereotypes at work? And if yes, did you fight back, or what do you—what do you think could have been done to alleviate the situation?

EG: Um, well when I was growing up in the workplace, I—I think things were much different than they are today, much, much different. I, I didn’t take racial comments made about not—not just about me, just about my race, in terms that it was a negative uh to me. These were people who knew me, I mean I—I if someone that I didn’t know said that to me I—I would get a little upset. But I didn’t—remember back then experienced that, I did experience a little bit but, you know, I kinda ye—I kinda brush it off. Number one, I have to think about my own survival, you know, who am I? I’m like 5’ 7”, hundred and you know, fifty, sixty pounds. Most of these people making comments are generally going to be 5’10”, 6 feet, 6 feet 3, 200 pounds, so I—I—I think about my survival first. I said, “okay, big deal, so that person’s ignorant or j—j—just that they’re un—they’re uninformed.” I don’t want to say anything right, just say they’re uninformed. They—they they follow but um so they—so today if a person said those things to me, I would say, I would react much differently because I think people, some people should know better now, I—I don’t hold everybody. I don’t think everyone is racist by nature, I think it’s mostly, just not being informed about stuff. And that’s why I say it’s so important for us to, as Chinese, as Koreans, as Vietnamese, as South Asians, any, you know, to—to be involved more in the community.

I always feel that the more people know about you and your community and who you represent, uh the more they are comfortable with, I think most people are fearful more than anything else. Uh well I don’t know—I don’t know if I should sw—speak to that person, because that, they look so different than me, I don’t even know if I can say hello, that—they may not understand, there—there’s a a fear of being rejected. I think that rejection’s sort of a thing, saying something and I have to say, “I don’t speak English” or something like that they would feel like “Okay”. But no I don’t—I think today is much, much, much
different, they, they, I think our sense of trying to get people to understand who we are is, I think uh people are just less tolerant today, I think, in terms of r—r—racism. That doesn’t mean there’s not racism, I’m just saying that that I think we need to start understanding that you can’t just jump off, jump off jump off, jump off from someone holler and screaming that we’re just not going to accept that person because they said that to me. I need to find out why. Because we’re all, we’re all part of our own, how we’re brought up, our own experiences in life, once we, once we’re away from our parents, everything that we absorb is part of our experience and how we, we treat everyone else and that’s uh— Hopefully, hopefully we’re trying to get better. I’m not sure it’s getting there yet but I think we’ll have to figure out different way, different path to understand the negative parts of racism.

ML: Um, you were the past president of the Houston chapter of Chinese American Citizen’s Alliance [EG: Yes.] C.A.C.A., a powerful organization created in 1895 with chapters across the U.S. and their missions include fighting against racial discrimination, encouraging anti—immigration, um et cetera. Members of this organization tend to be first generation Chinese Americans and immigrant parents arriving in the U.S. since the late 19th century. Do you have any concerns about the aging of this organization and the future of C.A.C.A.?

EG: Oh um, a—all great questions, uh and I, yes, I’m concerned about that, uh quite a bit. I think that’s a concern of every organization that’s been around very long. I think I see the same happening in the Chambers of Commerce uh first like Rotary or Kiwanis clubs uh, you know, uh other kinds of lodges that have been formed for a variety of reasons, and a variety of good reasons actually. And uh yeah the aging of this uh of the original members is extremely important to the—to why, you know, the organization exists. I—I think we need to figure out different ways to attract new members and, you know, part of the problem of course is older members have a tendency not to allow younger members to assume uh leadership positions very qui—quickly and that’s something that I know that, you know, f—for individuals and generations of recent college grads and those who, who are millennials, and even some uh some uh Gen X’s and all, they—they—they want a tendency, they have a tendency to—to want to, gravitate towards higher level position—responsibility too. I mean I love—I love having younger people working under me on the things I’m working on because they have a lot of energy.

But the organization was originally formed in 1895, and this is kind of an interesting point that this year is the 150th anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad, because this organization actually formed because of the mistreatment of the railroad workers back in 1890’s. After the railroad was finished, they were basically thrown out in the streets, many of them killed uh, you know, uh, uh beaten, uh and scapegoated for the ills of the economic [inaudible] of the country at the time. So a—so C.A.C.A., C.A.C.A. came about because uh se—several people responded back to—to, you know, pushing back on the, why—why are, why are you beating, beating us up, killing us. So, you know, we demand for civil rights. So a lot of the actual indivi—ind—interest in court cases uh this is where it’s kind of really crazy to me about, back in the 1890’s, is that you had Chinese actually had the courage to use a legal system. I mean I would never think, when we have part—time Chi—Chinese doing anything in the legal system, they get all scared to go to the legal system. I hate to pay to hire an attorney, that costs like 5000 dollars an hour. But I have to really say that these men and women had courage to actually retain the legal system to affect some of these things, so some of the—the—the court cases that, that you know about, and I have to attribute some people that were associated with C.A.C.A. then.

It was, it was first is the uh the issue of birthright citizenship uh Wong Kim Ark case versus U.S., Wong Kim Ark, I remember being, uh actually born here, went back to China uh uh to—to visit, came back and they wouldn’t allow him back in because they thought he wasn’t a citizen. And so he had to go prove, he had he had papers that said he was born here. So that whole court case kind of established those things. So that’s one thing, then um the other thing is pretty interesting. And I’m glad you two ladies are here because people always fi—figure that that Chinese value male children more than female children. You
ever heard that? Yeah, so, so uh one of the court cases had to do in San Francisco was they did not allow a Chinese girl to go to public school, so there was a—a, they had a landmark court case there as well in San Francisco where a Chinese girl, first born in this—this family was uh was subject of a court case, and I thought to myself, “gosh, Asian family society back in the, you know, 1890, 1900, that my daughter is so important to me to get an education, I’m going to spend every single penny that I have to attain a lawyer so that she can go to c—school that I want.” So—so it told me uh people who look at this said— said—see, somebody does value the female part of the—they want her to get an education. So, that’s one thing. And then the other thing that, that kind of um want my attention about why the members are old is many members join C.A.C.A. because back in the early days because they could not join any other organizations. We’re not allowed to join mainstream organizations, so that is another reason, and which kind of bring me to—to—to kind of a project I have been working on recently, um… when I was uh when I was the national president several years ago, I looked at our membership because I got the chance to travel around the country visiting various chapters and lobbies, and it is gradually older, and I said “You know it’s interesting that the demographic of older membership are people who are World War II veterans and many of them are now in their, you know, 80’s and 90’s. If they’re still alive, they’re probably close to 100 now” and one thing we could do for them is to see if we can get a Congressional medal for those who served in World War II because very few people even know that, that, that Chinese served in Civil War, World War I, Spanish American War, World War II, World War II, and all the through now.

And so um, um last year we finally got the bill passed in Congress, and signed by the President uh that would award Congressional Medal to Chinese American World War II veterans. And uh unfortunately 90 percent of them passed away now but I thought that would be a—a thing to do. Now, that was another challenge somebody said to me when I—when I tossed the idea out should we do this, it’s— it’s like a lot: walking on the hill, lobbying Congress, lobbying people here in the city, and then across the country really, because you need, you—you can’t just work on a few feet. You—you know good about those— very few Chinese in North Dakota, Idaho, Wyoming, those in Montana. Those—those states have very few. So it’s hard to find constituency to—to encourage them, the senators and the congressmen who represent—represent those districts to be a part of it. So when we finally got it done, we got the bill passed, so now we’re just trying to register all of the Chinese Americans who served in World War II, get them Congressional gold medal and uh, you know, just honor their legacy for being here because uh I look at them as no different than the [inaudible] Holocaust American raised generations American generations back and forth who uh served them. And I see, you know, Chinese Americans who are also parts of that generation as well. So uh to me it’s—it’s another challenge. Somebody said you can’t do this, it’s too much, it’s too hard. It is hard to pass a bill and if you tried to pass a bill in Congress, it’s hard to pass a bill right now in Congress. So I have to thank a lot a lot of our—our—our good friends and members of C.A.C.A. across the country who, you know,lobbed, you know, Congress persons who get to sign the bills. So you know, it’s, it’s another “Hey you can do this” and I say “Yeah let’s try.”

ML: Since a lot of um members are older  [EG: Yes] Have you been able to encourage and recruit members from the younger generations?

EG: Well um. It’s, it’s… the process is like this. Uh like this is [inaudible] but I have, have gotten more people who are younger now involved because a lot— When I say that the, the kids of these veterans, they are not kids actually. There are people from the 60’s and 70’s as well. But it’s the grandkids that I think they are gonna get a thrill out of hearing that their, their father, their grandfather, their uncle, granduncle, and, and actually there are several women who actually Chinese American women served in World War II who also be getting these Congressional Medal. I think it’s that generation that will see that if they see that’s you know, they see that’s you know uh C.A.C.A. or any other organizations— I mean there are some wonderful organizations out there and then I can talk about as lots of people doing wonderful work: people at uh C.A.C.A. do a lot of great work, committed to one hundred millions of
things as well, kind of supplying together the [inaudible] kind of fabric (?) of all Chinese Americans in
the country. Uhm I think to see that there are projects, activities that we’re doing that could involve them.
Now what gets them involved? What gets younger people involved? You know to me, there’s a lot of
things I can do with uh you know, some social justice issues. You know they are some social justice
issues around why haven’t Chinese Americans been, been recognized as well? And a lot of other things
that [inaudible]. But I think it’s exactly that kind of involve the process in the organization, help us recruit
members to help us out, something like that.

ML: Have you noticed changes in the perspectives of the younger Chinese Americans - Americans
relative to C.A.C.A.’s mission statements?

EG: I think there are very similar missions still going on. I mean the whole issue of uh you know civil
rights being – I think it’s being seen more today uh and civil rights with African Americans, Hispanic
communities, especially here in Houston. Um I don’t see as much issue with our Chinese so someone
says that it’s Asian Americans uh who have to embrace similar issues going on with African Americans
and the Hispanic communities you know. It did not happen in in Asian or certain …. I think it is. I think
there are still some uh areas, the Vietnamese community, because as newer as, some of the newer
immigrants, they still face some of the challenges uh you know stroke various areas of society uh you
know especially with police reinforcement that kind of things. So lot of language barrier, a lot of culture
um differences that that a lot of folks don’t understand especially [inaudible]. Wherever they were
engaged uh folks that do not have a culture or language, they have a lot of barriers. Um some of the areas
will have um health, health issues. So, so for instance, lots of people don’t understand lots of the
professions in the medical area may not understand how, how Chinese view medical issues like medical
um uh like [inaudible] Western medicine and Eastern medicine, there are some folks who still have uh
issues about that “Should I be taking this drug, you know there are some drugs that have uh a hundred
side effects to it whereas if I just drink a cup of uh herbal tea you know and everything is resolved” It’s
something that makes me try to figure out what’s the best of both worlds that it helps it helps to do that so
um...Yeah I think the whole thing of competency is the challenge of, for the generation. And I would say
if, if you ever want to get involved someday, you know health, health disparity is one of the big issue
because there are certain um ailments, diseases whatever there are specific to Asian Americans that are
not – don’t affect other races as heavily as our group, so that’s an area that you could [inaudible] yeah.

ML: Are you married?

EG: Yes… married to uh Beverly. Beverly Gor. She just retired from City of Houston. She’s a doctor in
um dietetics of University of Houston so she’s been very active as well in the community, probably more
active than I am. She’s more involved in the um culture competency concerning you know Asians uh—
She was among the ladies who actually started Hope Clinic. It’s been 20 years now, they started as a…
met once a week and in a s—small location in Southwest Chinatown and now they have 4 locations [AD:
Wow] across the city and recently it was designed to kind of serve Asian Americans but it turns out now
Asian Americans uh only account for about 40% of their clientele. The rest are, are from everywhere:
Hispanic, Black uh, White, so depending on where the community is. So it did start off in Southwest
Houston, in the Chinatown area. And for the clinics, uh um even for that clinic, there is, there is definitely
not Asian American as far as the clientele goes. But the key thing there is, I believe my understanding
was they speak 32 different languages. So somebody on the staff, there’s a staff person that speaks at least
1 or 2 languages that that so, for instance — you know that’s a big challenge. If you go to the doctor with
a uh with a group, well most of the time they don’t speak English right? So if you’re going there and you
don’t speak some other language that is not common but— and Hope Clinic — and it is a federally
qualified health center uh so, so uh people that go there, they have a - enough language competency there
so that they can speak to them, speak to the patients in their own language so that’s, that’s been the key of
their success and it’s widely uh you know touted(?) for all their work, so I, I give them all the credit for that. That’s that’s her doing, and she, she we kinda— we don’t necessarily challenge each other but I think it’s more like that we we’re really kinda involved in the community, and make sure there are things that we see that they’re being be— we wanna be there you know to help if we can’t— I mean if we can’t stop the problem but little by little uh examples said. So yeah.

AD: Uh did they intentionally look for people who are capable of speaking several languages [EG: Absolutely!] in order to reach out to more of the community?

EG: Absolutely! That is that is the whole key. I mean you can find clinics all over the place. You can find clinics you know, in the African American, Hispanic community and of course they’re gonna speak uh you know Spanish for the most parts of the Hispanic community and the competency for others you know, um, whatever they have, but language is the key issue for as far as access to health care because uh you know it’s, it’s hard to tell somebody where you hurt, how you hurt, how you feel in English you know because it, it is difficult— it is a more difficult way but if you express it to them in their own language, that makes a lot of difference to how a doctor or the nurse or the practitioners there do it. So they, they they’ve done that, they actually even expanded to dental and vision services to their [inaudible]. And thing— but yeah you’re right they— if you can speak several languages it’s kinda nice to think about the city of Houston is that there are people who do this, they speak different languages here that if they have interest in helping out in health with health background that would be a tremendous asset to have. Yeah you’re right it’sm it’s definitely something they’ve worked for.

ML: Um when did you and your wife meet?

EG: Um actually I was uh— her brother was my roommate in college so that’s [ML: Oh wow] that’s another story yeah. So obviously we uh we, we— our families kinda knew each other, you know, [inaudible] her family had a grocery business as well. And they, uh let’s see, her family business predominance in the ship channel, which is predominant in Hispanic area and so she learned how to speak Spanish. You know that’s, that’s kind of her language 1A; English 1, Spanish 1A. You know, so um I, I um so you know that’s actually how we actually had something in common and we were in the grocery business, kind of knew each other. Uh you had to work in the store, I had to work in the store, that kind of things. So uh that’s how we met. Yeah, my uh brother in law, he was my roommate in college. And so he, he uh you know we go to his house and I see his sister there, and so looks like an interesting person I’d like to meet. So that’s kinda uh how we met. So we uh we, we I think I started dating her like my last year of college. She was like 3, 2 years younger in the college at University of Houston. Yeah so we dated for a few years and it still worked I think. Yeah so we’ve been married for 44 years [AD: Wow] Yeah 44 years.

ML: Um do you have any children?

EL: Yeah. We have one daughter. One—one uh one outstanding daughter. I say—I’ve always said that uh “Hey girls are the way to go” [ML laughs] I think the Asians were— I think the Asians right. But you know I, I—I’ve always said that um “Yeah our daughter’s one of the-” You know we only have one child so I had nothing to base on except, “You know our daughter is an easy person to raise” Um she was always younger than the people in her class because the funny thing about it was she’s skipped 1 grade, I think it’s the kindergarten 1st grade, because um her teacher at uh one of the daycare schools heard somebody reading to the other kids and most other kids in kindergarten can barely know their ABCs let alone can read. So they told her, they told Beverly, “You know, she shouldn’t be here. She’ll get bored very quickly.” And so they skipped a grade for her so she’s always a year younger than everybody else in class but uh um she went on University of Texas to get an undergraduate degree in um Communications
and Journalism and all that, so, so uh— She’s full time mom now. She’s married to uh uh a fellow a pastor of a church in California and we’ve got 3 grandkids now: 8 year old, 5 year old. 8 year old girl, 5 year old boy and a 6 month old little girl so. So, so uh for [inaudible] to have a girl is awesome. And now raising grandkids(?) is our job from now on. So, but um yeah that’s all uh that’s always the challenge in raising kids. So I’ve always thought, now that I have a grandson, I’d say, he’s a big challenge, okay, he’s a big challenge so um. But yeah every everything’s really good, you know, in terms of all the kids we’ve got. They all seem to be focused on things um Asian raised student schools um… We don’t speak Mandarin but we, we speak a dialect of Toisan. But, but actually they go to Manda—Mandarin school where um it’s like Mandarin immersion school so she’s learning Mandarin and my daughter [inaudible] because you have to reinforce at home because if you don’t speak the language at home, they’re gonna lose it at home too, especially it’s the summer now. But she, she’s really good student so it’s some help. My grandson is a different story [laughs]. We gotta get him more engaged with the education, he’s a smart kid.

ML: So how do you feel - identify… Do you identify as Chinese, as American, or between?

EG: Um definitely American I would say. I haven’t looked at it or the funny thing about it and say… if, if I, if someone talks to me on the phone or they never met me before… My name is not a give away uh that I’m Chinese. Even I don’t have a name such as Wong, or even Lee is not necessarily a giveaway either…Uh I, I would say some names if it’s like a Wong, or or Tran or Chang, it’s pretty easy for you to figure out it’s Chinese but, but when they see my name they don’t think one way or the other. So, it’s not until they meet me, they just don’t expect [AD laughs] I have I have, you see later in the day, when I get lazy and started to have a southern accent, a really southern — they really get into that Texas [inaudible]. But for most part they don’t see me as being Chinese and I think that part of the whole thing too is that I’m kinda surprised I mean people when they talk to me, they don’t — they see me as Chinese. I mean they see me but they don’t see me as Chinese and uh that’s not necessarily good or bad. I think that’s okay. I mean I think that’s good they see me as a person who with, with either common interest or common you know uh, uh a personality is not one or the others. Just like I’m just saying regular person as being part of society, have the same issues of, of you know like I said before; not wanna pay taxes as much as anybody else, my taxes are too high, my roads are bad, my neighborhood’s falling apart, you know, trash didn’t get picked up uh you know the same issues a lot of people have around the city. You know, why are some people getting better services than, than others or you know that kind of thing. So I, I think people see me that way I hope, and that’s kind of what I hope I am you know necessary. I mean, I follow a lot of Chinese traditions and customs and all that too but it doesn’t seem that— And I want to introduce that to other people too. When I see them, that I want to take them to some of the things that we do in the community as well, to, to introduce them the fact that there are many good things about being Chinese, and there are so many good things about just being a regular person in the society that that um [inaudible]. And I think that’s what would help me a lot that my — I don’t try to force anything upon people like I’m Chinese, I need to be respected because I’m Chinese. Just respect me as a person who um trying to help, we’re all trying to survive in the same place, trying to make sure we all live together.

ML: Um do you have any advice for your grandchildren or the future generations in general?

EG: Um I would say that for anyone, and my grandkids too… I mean I, I hope they take the examples from, from um you know their parents, my daughter, my son in law and uh you know people who are driven to accomplish things, whether it’s in their own lives or for the benefits of others, um take on challenges. I mean if you don’t – if you’re going to try and challenge yourself today I figure let’s get – what’s good to hang around to absorb, to take advantage of, whatever we have here. I think we all owe ourselves, and the community we live in, in the world we live in um we’re here for a purpose. Figure out what the purpose is. It may take a while to do that. That’s, that’s always been a challenge. Figure out what it is, just get it, just step in, and get yourself involved. Just, just get dirty with it. You know. Figure out
what you need to do. Figure out what you want to do and uh keep going for that. I mean you never find your best first job at your first job. You, you’re applying, the first thing that happen to you is be the best but uh keep continue to challenge yourself. Uh but what I find better than everything else is get challenged by people around you who do the same thing and challenge you to do um— I always you know I always say “You should always find people who are just a little bit better than you, not totally better than you [AD laughs] because that would be too much of a challenge but find people that are a little bit better than you and, and follow them and they’ll follow you.” Actually a lot of times you think they are better than you are, but they think you are better than they are.

So we kinda challenge each other actually. We kinda want to make sure when we’re all working together and I think when you have a spirit of working together and you know some camaraderie and uh have some fun. I’m, I’m always about having fun too. You can’t just do this thing and not have a little bit of fun with the people that you’re working with. Um but I would say um just just kinda keep finding out you know what am I doing today that’s gonna make me a little bit better you know, I think most of us are not very fond of changes. It must be to try at least make it a little bit better everyday, just a little bit. Very very few of us are gonna be the President of the United States, or the Mayor of the city, or the President of Rice University for that matter. So, you we have to figure out, you know, what are the things that I can do as an individual to affect a little a little bit of change.

ML: Um so you have been a strong advocate for the Chinese American community in Houston. I know you have been involved with um Houston International Festival, [EG: Mhm] Texas Gulf Coast Workforce Commission, Sheltering Arms Senior Services, which is a United Way agency [EG: Mhm] um in, to the Holocaust Museum. Can you tell me more about what you have done for the Houston community?

EG: Well… Each one of those has been an area where I got involved with because they have similar objectives that I acknowledge. What they what are they doing with the Holocaust is that it gets their stories out because you know parts of the, the thing about Chinese community too is we don’t do a good enough job of getting our stories out there. We tend to want to continue on with another project, make more money, or get a higher you know those kind of things. We don’t do good enough job of talking about some of the positive aspects of our contributions to, to the mainstream society. So what I was trying to do is figure out ways how to do that in uh Holocaust Museum and, and International Festival which is really going well is that they try to, try to focus — the festival tries to focus on different cultures so each year they would honor different countries; so some years it’s just like a Uruguay, or China, or Brazil uh I personally like Saudi Arabian country who explain a lot better. It’s a little more exciting. But, but so we try to focus on different countries and try to highlight some of the aspects of each country, see what what’s, what are we doing here in Houston that we can highlight those specific communities. There are communities that uh I mean they call Houston the most diverse. I guess that’s true. So so that’s International Festival. Holocaust Museum focuses on the course of the, the uh you know all the deaths, and atrocities of the Jewish community and I think that when we look at that we have to look and say you know what uh what are people doing in other communities as well with such tragedies as that. And uh you know lot of people didn’t realize that uh Chinese in addition to being the railroad workers. There’s Chinese across the country, but especially the California area in early 18, 1900s and all where actually massacre in Los Angeles and it’s a huge, huge story a lot of people didn’t know about— the, the massacre of Chinese in in— in LA. And so um is that to say we should all bring up the negative side of it? No. Like I said, you bring out the fact that that everyone has suffered some amount of hatred, discrimination in, in the country you know, and uh no one is given anything I think in this country per say, uh other than those who may get refugee status. But everyone comes here, at least with equal opportunity uh to try to find the success, you know. This is—this is always equal opportunity? Not really— You have to think about, well, with my access to government, with my access to healthcare, how do I get to it? Because you
can say you have opportunities, but if you don’t have access to get there, you know you don’t have opportunities to grasp onto that.

So um what I’ve learnt from all those organizations, all mainstream(?) organizations, is this: you always learn from other groups, other people for how to do things better, or differently that makes it better. I, I don’t even—I don’t even imagine how I could have done something I have done without the experience and savvy of people who have been around uh—you just always. have to be a place where you uh—I mean today you have TED Talks right. You can go online and listen to TED talks all day and try to make yourself a better person. That kind of, that kind of works in sometimes I listen to the show, and they’ve helped me out. But yeah I think a lot of times it’s about learning and uh I kinda learn. I read some self help books; some are good, some are okay, we’re going to hang on that idea. But I think if you continue to concrete more thought, idea in your head you’ll figure out that uh some things works, some things don’t work. Take the one that works and just run with them until you see that can’t run with those anymore. But I would say that’s that I’ve learnt all these organizations. Uh I’ve tried to probably take away more than I’ve given from all these organizations. And so— but that was my objective. You know, I don’t know enough, but I’ve been fortunate to have people that come to me and say “You need to be part of this organization and this organization” and I think that’s a challenge too as in, you know, what can I do to help. But most of the time, they’ve helped me uh to learn things that I could not learn by just reading books, or just watching TV.

ML: So what would you say your legacy is?

EG: [Laughs] Oh I have legacy? I have legacy? [laughs] No. Ah my legacy, hm. Um geez that’s a good one! Good question! I don’t know if I can write a legacy by myself. Um I’ve—I, I think I’ve just like to—you know, people to know that I’ve done some things but do I want the credit for them? Not really. It doesn’t really matter. I think that the whole point of this—if someone would say “Okay there’s a—” Oh I, I guess I would say with me is uh things were getting better and getting the Congressional gold medal. Um I would say that it was yeah without, without the the, you know, the support of the C.A.C.A., my national organization, of course it couldn’t get done, first of all. But I like people to think that, um, I thought of doing things differently, and as a challenge, can you get it done. Um I would look and think like I could do them. I don’t know if they always turn out—I wanna say I’ve been pretty successful for the most part to help, you know, undertaking projects, because I always try to find the right people that help me. I think that that’s a real big issue about—as long as you continue to find people that have the common goal as you do. They have a vision—that’s, that’s probably the best word here, vision for doing those things…I, I don’t think I myself me have a lot of visions. I take visions from other people sometimes, you know that’s just ideas. I can respond to that. And I would be thinking about different ways to do these things and share some common visions and keep going. But yeah legacy? I don’t know. This is one of things that you don’t think about. I think legacy was about treat me as if I’ve been dead about 50 years you know. Yeah I think I did that so—you know that maybe then they’ll go there and say is “How did these guys get this Congressional medal?” I say “Because you know, C.A.C.A. started because this uh a crazy guy decide he’ll take on this challenge” but it—it was a challenge, I can say. Having—having to get a bill passed in Congress is, is, is pretty tough. You can see how many bills that actually do go to Congress and never get passed. They just like sit there do nothing because disagreements in both houses and both parties for that matter but um... Yeah I would say is, hey just take on the challenge and uh that’d probably be the thing I say about my legacy.

ML: Um so are you still working? Or are you retired?

EG: No retired. Yeah [ML: Um] Well I had retired to do more volunteer work than I get paid to do so it’s [EG & ML laugh] Yeah a lot of this, a lot of these uh things uh you know I take on these challenges because I’m more of a hands on person. [ML: Okay] I, I delegate enough, well, I, I’m always
uncomfortable until unless I know enough about what everybody’s doing. And, after I’m very comfortable with the people I work with and vice versa, comfortable working on things, and they basically leave me alone which is kind of key to how people can actually thrive and, and, and get better is that your, your supervisors, your bosses end up trusting you because they see that you are able to handle uh efforts and projects and you know assignments well. I mean that’s at workplace, is that, you don’t want a boss who is always looking over your shoulder because that, that doesn’t give me the flexibility or freedom for doing things differently because one thing I’ve said about— My boss has always told me, he said a couple things, is, um, “Whatever you do, don’t ever surprise me. Make sure you do the work” And as he says, you know, um, whenever I looked at my boss and said “What is my boss interested in? What is he, what is he trying to accomplish in his work?” And I would say “Whatever he’s interested in, I’m like three times as interested in because this is gonna help him get his objectives.” As long as he, he’s able to get his objectives, he’s seen that I’m helping him meet his, so it’s not just about me and my work, it’s about, about that.

So I’ve taken in that kind of attitude in other things as well. Now not all volunteers take the same attitude too. Cause it’s about volunteer. But I don’t think that’s true. I think, you don’t bring that same attitude to work uh the work aspect in the volunteering world as well. We find that volunteer um, um organization is not gonna survive either. Because if you have a lot of half doers and people be like “Uh I’m just gonna do it when I have time.” Well those organizations don’t survive very well. Because there’s an expectation, even when you volunteer, right? If you go to the organization you volunteer you should get your best effort just like you’re getting paid for it, because that’s success (?) very — Now I found it’s true for every organization I’ve joined, successful organizations are the ones where um offices and other members of that uh world are people who have high expectations of each other, and so they produce. So when you do beyond and pass to be on board, that’s, that’s really hopeful that’s these people are sharpening each other. So I try to bring the same aspect into some of the other community organizations. It doesn’t always work, but at least we— at least my expectations are higher and so maybe that’s a good or bad thing but I think even as a volunteer I—I would feel that in order for that organization to really be successful you’ll also, also have expectations of the volunteers.

ML: Um so do you like any books and movies, or how do you spend your spare time?

EG: Um I read parts of books. [ML: Okay] Yeah I—I, you know, I don’t really watch a whole lot of movies. I think Crazy Rich Asians was the last movie I saw, which was it—which was helpful in terms of Hollywood has finally recognize that we have [laughs] people—we have Asian Americans who are in the movie industry. Uh it’s a good thing. Uh so, so that’s another reason — I—I like to watch uh romantic comedies actually. I’m not much for all of the uh, Matrix and other shows. I—I figured out if— See my thing is I—I don’t like things that computer generated um action films, because I know—everything um— there’s no risk there. I—I mean it’s computer generated. I know that guy’s not really in trouble. I know that there’s no risk. I—I know that there’s not even some person because they can generate it so it doesn’t look like the guy’s in trouble at all. I, I wo— I rather watch an exciting movie if I know that there’s at least a stunt person doing the dangerous work because then I know that’s what makes it a little bit exciting so that there, definitely is not going to be the star of the show who gets hurt since it’s somebody, but at least it’s somebody that is there so I can identify there is a reality.

Well um so I read parts of books, because what I end up doing is that I read the beginning, and I said “Oh this part is a little bit boring. [ML: [laughs] Okay] Let me flip over to something else more interesting” And so, so that’s kind of the reason why I do a lot of um, um jotting down of notes on my phone and so I, I will say “Oh that sounds like a good thing to say” So I do a lot of— I’m going to say my degree is almost like a copy and paste degree [laughs] you know. You can’t take my degree very well(?) [ML: [laughs]] But I would say it’s more like I will, I will try to find things in books that I would use uh I could paraphrase or use as guide mind for how I like to do things. And you know one thing that I would say
about how I do things. You know I would always be uh try to be uh honest with people about things. You
know so I would say that you know, if I can do it I will. I can do something, I will tell you I will do it. If I
don’t know how, I’ll find out. Right? If I don’t know how, at least I’m, somewhat smart enough to find
out for you, if I can help you I’ll find out. But if I don’t know how, I’ll tell you. I won’t say “Okay I’ll tell
you in a few weeks” A few weeks pass by and I come back to you “Uh I couldn’t find out what to do” I
should find a way to tell you that immediately. If I don’t know how, and I can’t find out how I will have
to at least tell you that I can’t do it.

And um so I—I’m kinda operate by that principle, you know be honest with people, just tell them can you
do it or not do it. And I would, and if I can’t do it, I ju— I want to direct them to the right place, I would
say “I can’t do it” but where else can I go I’ll find out. That part I can find out. I mean I may not be able
to tear apart this camera, but at least if I want to find out how I find out how. But if I don’t, I’ll tell you
“He you need to go down to the studio(?) [inaudible]” So I think I try to find those kinds of things in the
books, and um use those as kind of like my operating principles in my own life, you know. Actually a lot
of them are kinda funny actually, I can’t think of them now, but I keep them on my phone so that if I need
something to think about, let’s say, something important but yeah, I can get some from this, so yeah. I
don’t read books per se, but I read parts of books to have something out.

ML: Um Anh Thu do you have any more questions?

AD: Yeah I am curious. Cause you were talking about legacies and [EG: Mhm] and you’re quite unable
to envision about. But is there any like desired change you would like to see in the Asian American
community in Houston?

EG: Um, hm good question! Desirable change? Um I would like to say that we invite more people who
are not like us into the community so they can see that all the things that we’re doing are, are really good
things. I mean they may not like them, I know a lot of people they don’t like Chinese food, I cannot
believe. [laughs] But they don’t, but I accept that. That’s fine. So I go eat where they wanna go eat when
we go out to eat. That’s fine. I—I have no problem with that at all. But I think it helps us to uh help others
see that we are different, but really not that much different. When we talk about some of the difference
that we do have, it turns out we don’t have that many differences. And so I don’t know exactly what
people put out for reasons why they would say “I don’t like Chinese” or “I don’t like Vietnamese” or all
that. Some of the issues have to do with uh things that are really popular are not necessarily true. They—
they hear things and they think and they embrace the same “Oh that must be true” or uh so so they always
get all these benefits or so and so is always getting things whatever.

So I—I think it matters to say how do we get more people involved in our community. It’s been really
uh— actually we are the minority of minorities of all the communities, right? It started numbers ago. Um
I think it’s up to us to, to make that engagement for - to help other people understand us. Because as long
as somebody else is in the majority the numbers, why do they need to, to reach out to us? You think they
should but, but that—that’ not even the nature. The nature says they stay in—they stay in their
comfortable area, you know their comfort zone. For us, we gotta kinda get out of our comfort zone. We
can’t just we hang out altogether because we still only hang out with 5% of people while everybody else
is out here. Well they can leave us alone because they maybe not really care. But for us is, I think for us
we need to be more proactive in getting ourselves out. And that’s why I say that even in history, we need
to help people. You know, we were there, fighting along side with you. We were there, we were we, you
know, working on the bridge with you. We were there, we were we were trying to help other people in the
hurricane. You know, and we were. There were a lot of people out there, in boats heling, in Harvey, and
other hurricane disasters. So I—I think it matters for doing that, and a lot of the time, it’s a matter of
showing up and showing our faces there because uh— some people say “oh there are no Asian Americans
helping during hurricane Harvey” Well that’s not true. But unfortunately there were not many of us out
there. Used to be in a limited number of places. So it does help if we get out little bit more. Hope that, that. is making sense to you, but yeah.

**ML:** Any more questions? [**AD:** No] Alright. Thank you so much [**EG:** Oh you’re quite welcome] for coming in today [**EG:** No problem] We really enjoyed interviewing you.

**EG:** I hope so [laughs] Well thanks so much!

**AD:** Thank you!