

Houston Asian American Archive

Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

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Interviewee: Alice Chen

Interviewers: Isabelle Soifer and Catherine Yuh

Date/ Time of Interview: March 18, 2012/2:00 pm

Transcribed by: Isabelle Soifer and Catherine Yuh (edited by Taylor Ginter: 4/18/2017)

Audio Track Time: 1:35:01

Background:

Alice Chen was born in 1955 in Taipei, Taiwan, where she lived with her two siblings and her mother. Her first job was as a junior accountant at Du Pont Taiwan Co when she was 19 years old. She left home *by herself* in 1978 at the age of 22 with a scholarship to Rutgers University, and earned an MBA in Finance. She lived in Berkley from 1978-9 then moved to Houston in 1980 with her husband and daughter. Both she and her husband accepted job offers at Exxon. They have lived in Houston for 32 years, and together raised two children, each of whom have careers in the medical field. Alice Chen worked as Chairman in the Asian Chamber of Commerce in 2007, as a Golden Bank Board Director, as a TV show host with International TV 55.5, and as manager of Metlife Financial. Her volunteer work includes Community Liaison for Congressman Al Green, Board Member of the Houston Community College Foundation, Founder of the I AM LIFE Foundation, and Associate Vice Chairman of the Global

Chinese Petroleum Entrepreneur. She has been an extremely active member of Houston's Asian American community, and started/helped with numerous side-projects, including bilingual education in Chinese for the Stafford School District and the translation of a crime-prevention book into Chinese.

Balancing all of this work with taking care of her family has been a struggle, but she still remains cheerful and with a very bright outlook on life.

Setting:

This interview centers a great deal on the experience growing up in difficult circumstances in Taipei, Taiwan, then moves on to discuss her professional and volunteer life. A great emphasis is placed on the importance of Asian Americans reaching out to the community and volunteering their time as active citizens of the U.S. She stresses the fact that without coming to the United States, her life would have turned out completely different.

The interview was conducted in a Study Room at Fondren library, and required about an hour and a half. She provides in great detail issues of identity, the importance of involvement in the community, and taking the steps necessary to ensure that language barriers in the U.S. are broken down once and for all.

Interview Transcript:

**Key:**

Alice Chen (**AC**)

Isabelle Soifer (**IS**)

Catherine Yuh (**CY**)

**IS:** Alright, so we are here interviewing Ms. Alice Chen, um my name is Isabelle Soifer...

**CY:** and Catherine Yuh.

**IS:** Um, so first off we want to start with some background information about your life in Taiwan...so when were you born and where did you grow up?

**AC:** I was born in Taipei—Taipei, Taiwan, 1955.

**CY:** That's when my mom was born!

**AC:** Really?

**CY:** Exact year!

**AC:** 1955?

**CY:** 1955.

**AC:** Oh my goodness. [laughter]

**AC:** Ok, and I was raised—born, raised and then go to middle school, high school, college, and then got a scholarship from Rutgers University. Actually I got so many scholarships from different universities. I think at that time all the—all the students from college, you know we would like to see USA It's like land of opportunity, and when you're in that position, of course I have so many, you know, options, I can finish my college and go to work. Actually, I already got job offer from one of TV stations in Taipei. At that time is only one TV station, and they wanted to train me as a TV show host for the kids. So—but when you graduate, just like you got so many different opportunities, but my mom told me, say, “go to USA, because there is more opportunity out there for you.” But it's kind of scary when you're 22, 23, you don't know anybody here, I had no relatives. And I just had a host family and got a scholarship for an MBA at Rutgers University which is a state university, Newark, New Jersey, I came all the way here. I remember still today, I was crying. My first time flying international flight, I said goodbye to my mom and my brother, my sister, and then flew over here like 18 hours, stopped in San Francisco. I was crying the entire time. I was crying. I remember that plane, it was all for graduate students, you know like. There was one guy sitting next to me saying “Would you stop crying?” [laughter] I remember he... Actually that flight is all for students, all graduate students, I guess cheaper flight, whatever, the whole flight is all for, you know, everybody came to USA, but they stopped in different cities. You know, we all stopped in San Francisco, but people would transfer flights to New York, to Los Angeles, or to, you know, different cities. But we all said goodbye at San Francisco. And that—is I know—that moment I know I'm gonna face my new life *by myself*. So I transferred flight to New Jersey, Newark. And my host family meet me at the Newark airport. I was—it was very scary, very scary, and just like I only had \$100 with me and a bookcase with my few clothes and books. With \$100, start my new life, 1978, September 17 that day, so. And started at my graduate school, but still there's a lot of—you know, there were still a lot of problems like English you know still you know when you learn. I'm accounting major so accounting major I know the numbers very well, I know debit, credit. I know them. So that's good because I don't have the problem with my academic part because debit, credit, and numbers always the same, right?

**CY:** My mom was an accounting major.

**AC:** Oh my goodness. [laughter] Yeah so I go through my MBA and I got my CPA license, 1983. Yeah, so, and I got a job offer with Exxon USA, Houston. My husband, that time, I dated a guy from Princeton, you know because Rutgers and Princeton we are very close.

Actually I knew my husband's brother, he is same class with me. So I knew this guy, said "You can visit my brother, he's in Princeton, very close to you" so I didn't know I would marry him. But you know we see each other in all the student events. And end up I married him, and yeah I kinda dated him, just like he know me, I know him but because his brother. So easier that way. So we got married, and then I moved to Princeton dormitory, graduate school dormitory. Then he went to R—Berkley, UC Berkley for another study because my husband is in the PhD program with Princeton, his professor go to Cali—UC Berkley, so he had to follow his professor. So we went to Berkley, that's the reason we got married. I had to get married to go with him so we got married and go—I went to the Berkley, California for one year. And my daughter was born in California. So we went back we finished up school, both graduate, 1980. He got his mas—PhD, I got my Masters. We both got a job offer with Exxon, I got Exxon USA, he got a job offer from Exxon research. So, Houston, we came here 1980, with my daughter.

**IS:** Why did you come to Houston?

**AC:** Because job offer.

**IS:** Job offer

**AC:** Yeah I got a offer from Exxon USA, my husband got job offer from Exxon Research. So we came here 1980 with my daughter, new-born baby. So, that's we start. I remember when I first got to Houston at Intercontinental Airport somebody said "Howdy!" I said "My God they speak different language here! Howdy? I don't know what mean by howdy!"

[laughing]

I thought, because you know in China we have different dialects, right? I go like "Honey, I think they speak different language here, they don't speak English here." We don't understand what "howdy" means. [laughter] But it's just like a joke, you know. But yeah we got here in 1980. And my son was born 1983. So we start our family, we both working at Exxon, USA, I work USA and he work for Research. And we under Exxon, but we both work like for Exxon for many years. My husband worked for Exxon for at least like 15 years and then he moved to Schlumberger. I worked for Exxon and then moved to Exxon Develop, which is like they have a real estate department in Greenspoint. It's called Exxon, I forgot the name, it's a real estate department so different you know because Exxon, they ask you what department you want to work for. So I said I like the real estate department. So they moved me to Greenspoint so I work for Exxon Greenspoint for land develop real estate develop. So I do accounting, everything I do is all accounting—accounting job. And then because my real estate development with Exxon there was a real estate group from California say we have a project in Houston do you want to work with us? I said sure I'd be happy...you know thinking about either this is my own business, I need to—you need to give up my Exxon, the good salary, good benefits, and it's like I had to own my own company. So I own my own company in 1990. Have my best investment company, which is

I do property management, and I also do some investment for myself for the commercial real estate for ten years.

So then the real estate business is very risky, you know it can be up, it can be down, right? The investor from California originally they wanted like—a real estate like when you buy a real estate shopping center then you want to get all these people attend it for you and then they are going to sell the property. But that time Houston's not that good, Houston the real estate's not like California. Our real estate school very slow, slow. So they did decide they didn't want to do it anymore, so they sell the property. We make some money because you know still all this—all this year I do measure very good experience but that time. Then I worked for financial planner credential, which is a financial plan, you know like they teach you how to do this. They start investment, I do start investment for many years, so that time when they sell the property I don't want to go to another real estate development because you know the market's so slow, it's terrible at that time, it's not that good. I think still today real estate market is not doing too good in Houston either. So that time credential, which is a financial service company, recruit me. So I worked for them 2000, and then moved to MetLife 2002. So I am the manager since—so the past 10 years, I worked for financial planning. So that's still related to my accounting background, my MBA financial background. But all these years I do my job, I'm doing very good job in my—in my area, but I'm very involved in to community, I always feel like that is my really...how do you say this...I enjoy doing volunteer work for 20, almost 30 years in Houston since 1980, yes.

**IS:** That's amazing.

**AC:** Yeah, because I think because my family background. It's all because my father, 1949, my father is one of the government officer come to Taiwan to do some business trip to talking to like—agriculture business. But when he came to visit for one week meeting, right, then he cannot go back to China because 1949, you know there's a fight between Mainland China and Taiwan, right, so it's just like when can I go home? He just lost all his, I think your father, maybe your parents know, some people from Mainland China come visit it just like over one night you just totally, you cannot go back. That's it. So it's like come into this country they fight, 1949, my father is one of them. He came here for business meeting and then suddenly he cannot go home. He just stayed here. It's very sad for him, he's very just like—he totally blocked from his family. And to this day we don't have any contact at all. Because, yeah because he then he married he stayed here he find a job with government, in Taiwan government. And my grandfather, which is mom's parents, he's very close to Jeng Hai She government. My grandfather is the mayor of the city. So my grandfather very powerful he's, he's...I would say he's very...how do you say, government official too. So my both, my father on my mother's side they both related to government, like doing one is mayor the other one is work for government. So that's why I always feel like because the—family was government, so I like to, when I came here, I like American politics. You know, I just study, you know I like to see the parties, you know like Democrat, Republican you know. Of course I'm not involved because Asian people, we don't get involved in government. Asian people, we never vote. We don't like to do anything with—anything with city, with government. It's like far away we don't want to touch that part.

**IS:** Why?

**AC:** I don't know why. I just like to, and also I like to—write articles too. I think all these, now I am thinking, it's all from my family history gene. Because my grandfather like to, he also later when he retired he is an editor for a newspaper. So all these really, I feel really have that blood, that gene in my blood. So I like to do news. I do radio for ten years in Houston. A Chinese radio station. I do TV show, I mean, radio show for 10 years and now I do TV show, you watched my TV show. Never have any training but somehow I don't know why I just like it you know when you like something you can do very good job. You got to have a passion to do whatever you do. It's—you don't need the training because it's in your blood. So I believe my grandfather, my father, all these have something in me. And it's very interesting. I like politics. I like doing the journalist's job. I just like it, I just love it, it's just because and I know how to write a Chinese article, I can write an article very easily. But not in English but Chinese one I can do very good job. I just born with it, you born with it. When I do interview, I just—I just know how to do that. But...but my father died very, when I was 5 year old. He died very young. But because my father died, so that's why, you know you lost contact, because he died, and then the China and Taiwan don't talk for another 15 years. It's like totally blocked so but it's like my father's side is always mystery to me. Because he died—you know he died, he married my mom but he's like 15 years older than my mom. So, to this day I feel like maybe my father have a family in China. I don't know. We don't know, because my mother never said anything to me about what happened to my father's family, you know. It just like, it's a mystery still. It's a mystery. But my father died with cancer. So I feel like still that—that all these cancer things is still it's still something from my father's side. So, again, because he died so, when I was so young, so there was no way I could trace back to his family. We don't know. Ok, my father died when I was 5, my brother, my sister, my brother only one year old, my sister three, so you know, and my mom, it's difficult with a single mom at that time, this is many years ago in Taiwan. She had to work so hard to raise three of us. And my mom did a good job because three of us we all came to USA, studied, we all got Masters degrees, and then later on I take, I took my mom from Taiwan to USA. She got re-married again—to another gentleman. Actually, my mother married again after I marry. So I told my mom, I say, I want you to get married. Because I feel like if I marry, nobody take care of you, you gotta marry somebody so I feel somebody will take good care of you, you know? So she did, she did marry again...she actually, my step-sister she's a very famous movie-star in China. So that's—but because that's another story I don't want to...so my mother married so I'm happy. But she have another family, which is the movie-star from China. So that's another story with my family tree. But you know, I'm not really content with that because we have within my own family too. So she married but we still with my brother and sister only take care of my own family too. Yeah, so, it's a long story short. I raised two wonderful kids with my husband, and my, they both, my daughter is a doctor, my son-in-law doctor, we have two kid—two grandchildren. One is my granddaughter is almost 5, my grandson's almost 3. And then the new one's coming next week so we don't know it's boy or girl. They don't wanna tell, they don't want to find out they have one of each. They said “Mom, we want it to be a surprise” so nobody knows boy or girl so I don't know, my third—my third one's coming. My son uh he graduate—he's Ophthalmology, so he has his own eye clinic TSO, you know TSO, **Texas State Optical**. He opened the store last year, July. And he got married too. My daughter-in-law is pharmacist,

works with MD Anderson. So all my kids, they're all in medical field. So, very simple life, but I'm still busy with my TV show, my community work, and all that so.

**IS:** Maybe you could expand a bit more on the community work?

**AC:** I spend, oh I love people, I just...sometimes my kids kinda complain. They say, "Mommy, you care about other people, not us." Because you know I've been so involved so many—actually I start with my kid's PDO, when they in the school. I'm very—you know when they go to school I come I do a lot of volunteering for my kids' school. Starting from elementary. Because I think—I think I want to learn more about what they learn in school. So I go to school for International Chinese New Year, I bring eggrolls and I bring the red envelopes to all the kids in my daughter's class, my son's class, you know, all the teachers love me because I always want to do the field trip, I will take all kids. You know I remember, they—actually that's a good way to, because I'm very close to my kids. So I want to do something for them. But that's why I volunteer. So I will start my volunteer with my PDO and then later on to the community events I'm very involved too. United Way, United Way 1995, United Way actually looking for somebody volunteer from the Asian community because Asian never get involved in United Way. So 1995, I'm the first one for United Way to Chinese community. So I know a lot of banker so I asked them and say "Can you help me to raise funds for United Way?" We call them Asian/Pacific-Islander—that's right they're Belgian, right, I'm the first chair for that Asian Pacific-Islander you know fund-raising. Uh what I do is I go to all the CEO for the bank or business owner, I want them to buy like tables—we have a gala. First one I'm the gala chair, that's 1995. I remember I raised about 50,000 just for that event. But that event bring a lot of awareness about how are we gonna work with United Way. So I got the, so the CEO, so we kinda like give those people my advice or the CEO, the bank, the Chinese bank on Bellaire, there are lot of banker right. I asked them to be advisors so they help me to set up each meeting in the bank. So a bank employee, like if you donate \$1 to United Way, the bank will match it, right. So that is a big one, it's a big one, for United uh—for United Way. So they gave me award, like Andrew award or whatever. It's like since that, United Way has really worked together with Asian community. They do have matching, they still do fundraising now. But I'm the first one have that program done. And also I helped the IRS because I'm accountant, remember, I'm the accountant. But Chinese people sometimes—they don't know how to do tax return because of the language problem. They don't understand the IRS form, you know 1040 all these forms. We do simple one for everybody. So if you need help, I train—IRS train 20 people, you know like bilingual. So we help our community, I go to school, I go to church every Saturday. I'm the team leader so I help them to get tax reform—tax return free, tax return help. I don't know what year, but it's called Vida program, they still have that. So I initiate program for the American community to the Asian community. Because volun—you know you need somebody volunteer. I got all my girlfriends to help so they would, they all say "Ok, good, I come." So I say, "Come help me because you can learn how to do tax return." And they say "Oh ok, that makes sense." So they got training. Then I say you go to training for tax return but you need to donate 40 hours you know to, to do the tax return after we train you, right. You need to do the volunteer for me, for me, for the IRS. So in a way it's one-way situation. So I got 20 people got training and then they do the tax free return to the people who come to the door. So we do that for one year, which is very good because I feel

like the more you do—get involved, the more people you see getting help, they all really appreciate our effort. That helped me, I feel like I'm so happy! I can do something, it's easy, it's easy, it's not difficult! You just have to tell people something you can do. And remember, I have a radio show. So I do a lot of it on radio too. Remember the Katrina, or Ike? Katrina or—a lot of people—I still remember, especially with the Ike—a lot of people, remember? tried to get out of Houston. And the traffic on the freeway is—you remember the I-f—I don't know if you remember; are you in Houston that time? Ike? Do you remember?

**CY:** I've heard a lot about it, so.

**AC:** Oh ok, ok, let me tell you what happened. So it's like, everybody's saying let's get out of town because the flood from Galveston is—you know it's going to flood everywhere, it's going to be dangerous. I think the news media make people scared to death, so people are trying to get out of town. But all the freeways, all, people waiting in line, stuck on the freeway like I-45, I-10, you know, every freeway they really want to get out. Remember I have a radio show, right? My husband's already packed, we have a friend in Dallas, they say "Come over" you know "just come over, escape" you know "for a few days." And I said nope. So my kids, my—my husband, they're all waiting for me to go home. My show is live show, you know radio show of course. So I left the house like 5 am in the morning. Five. My show is from 6—uh 7 to 10, so it's a live show, three hours. I'm supposed to go, download my news and everything. And what I do is I download all the news, I will translate in Chinese. So my live show was from 7 to 10, news.

**IS:** Was it local news?

**AC:** Yeah it's news—I'm doing a news show. News—So from 7 to 10 I'm on air—live on air. My husband, my kids waiting at home. So I'm supposed to finish my show at 10 and go home, and we're going to leave. You know, everything's ready to go. Actually when I say, it sounds like it's [?]. . .it was very scary at that time because everybody want to get out of town. You guys don't know, but it's really, it's like if you don't get out, you're in trouble. When I started downloading the news, I was like oh my God, this is really, really serious, and all the weather reporting is not good at all. But when I'm on air at 7. . .I have a room—the TV on my—you know my studio too. . .the mayor, Bill White at that time. He and the judge Emmet, he's still the judge Emmet. They said because traffic is so bad right now, they're going to open 45—you know I-45 from Houston to North right. Remember 45, right, they have four lanes, right, this is out and this is in, right. They blocked down, because traffic is so bad though so they blocked down the, the one—the other side of the freeway, they opened four lanes so people can actually get on this lane so you can get out easily. Because traffic—this is traffic it's like blocked—nobody get, it's like stuck in traffic. It's terrible right, but the other side of the traffic there's nobody coming in town, so they open that, so four lanes open. So I read it on the—you know I watched the news I say great [?] this is TV, right, so I'm on air right so I tell people I say: "Right now, if you're stuck in traffic, I-45, you can go on the other side of the freeway because that's open. And some people scared, they say "No, you cannot get on the freeway on the other side you can head-on, right?" And we said, "No, no, no it's safe!" You know you can—so people actually listened when they were driving on the freeway, they actually started moving to the other side of the freeway they

can get out of town quicker. And a lot of people, they got lost because they have all these older people, you know they're stuck, they want to go restroom right. So they get out of the freeway, but they get lost, they don't know how to get back to the freeway. So they call me on-air because we are call in, right. I said "If you are stuck in traffic you can call me and I will let you know how to get out, you know how to go to another route you can go to, wherever you want to go." We have two DJ help me get a call in to help them out. But anyway, that is a really good, I feel like I achieved a lot because people call in and they say "Don't come here, the traffic's so bad" and people said "Don't come to I-10, the traffic's bad, don't go that route right now—just go to the freeway, go some different route." So I said if you stuck in traffic, let me know where you are so people don't go that way. So in a way they helped people. The three hour, our phone lines were going crazy but we helped a lot of people. But when I finished at 10 o'clock, when I go home the traffic was so bad already. It's like—I remember, it's like a warzone, you cannot go anywhere. So by the time I got home, it's like 1 pm in the afternoon. It took me three hours to go home. My husband said "If we have trouble, whatever, it's all your fault. Because we want to get out, you're still helping people? Help us, you don't even come home!" You know, but anyway this is something I want to show, that I care about other people more. So my husband always complains "You care about other people more than us." But I say, "No honey, I love you but I need to do this first." You know, but anyway this is some information for you. I do all this but I feel like the more you do, you get more. Because I feel like our journey is actually helping people. That's—you know if you come here and you don't do anything, you waste your life. You just don't do anything to help people get better life, better—information, then I think you're wasting your life. You gotta give, giving is receiving to me. So, and working for Congressman Al Greene, I do a lot for the community also. Yeah, for instance, the Ike situation, afterwards because on Bellaire all these business people, they shut down for at least ten days, no power, no electrical, you know whatever. A lot of people, they lost a lot of business because of Ike. Right, so I sent in the FEMA, you know the FEMA, that's part of the Asian FEMA...

**IS:** What does it stand for?

**AC:** It's Federal Emergency [whispers "FEMA..."] Management Agency...something like that...and also SBA. What they do is they're helping people to get a like a temporary shelter and food—food stamps, and also they will send you to the hotel if you house destroyed by the hurricane, whatever. They will help people because of this—this Ike situation, they'll help you. Some people, their roof gone, their whole roof gone, they don't have insurance. So the whole family need to go to some shelter, so they would give you food stamps, all that. So we have a government to do—to help those people. Ok, but they don't speak English, right so people they come...the government agent only speaks English, but the people they don't speak English. So how are they going to communicate? So what I do is I have a whole team, we have a 100 people volunteer to do translation. So the government agency come, to like a church and also to the community center. I make arrangement to the government people, SBA people, help people to fill their paper work and get some—you know supply food stamps or shelter. You know their voucher, they need to get a voucher, but they have so many paperwork. You know, I mean paperwork, Asian people don't like paperwork, especially Chinese, because they don't know. So we have people volunteer do translation to help out. We helped about 700 family to go through

the Ike, because I have a connection with government because Congressman Greene have all these Washington people come help. So I put government to our Chinese people, you know, like hands-on. They help them. So that are big things to my community, but it's a lot of work, a lot of work, a lot of phone calls, a lot of nights and days and volunteers. So, but also Katrina, I don't know if you know that Katrina now, the people from Louisiana, they come Houston right? Those people, it's like refugees. The whole town is under the water, so a lot of Vietnamese people come here, Houston, looking for job, looking for place to go, so we try to make arrangement for Hong Kong Mall, you know Hong Kong Mall right here in Bellaire. They opened the mall, the whole mall opened. The people can stay there on the floor you know and the people delivered the food, a deliver the clothing, all these. It's just like we need to help people, somebody, you know in the way we try to help. That—that takes a lot of effort. But you have somebody, you need to tell people. Some people, they want to help but they don't know how. So what we do, on air, on radio, we tell them you know, if you want to help, you bring your food, you bring your clothing, you bring your comforter, or your sheets, or anything you want to help you bring to somewhere. What we do—what I do is on my show, I deliver all these public message in Chinese. I translate, I'm very good about translation. But when I'm sick, I just have no idea, I don't understand English anymore. [laughter] It's like when you're sick you're totally blocked. You don't know what is chemo, what is, you know you don't know I mean. They tell you you're going to throw up, you're going to take this. I say I have no idea what you're talking about, and so I told them my brain just, I don't know, maybe I'm too scared, I don't understand what the doctor tell me. I'm so glad my daughter, she just listened to the doctor and she told me what to do, in Chinese. My daughter speaks Chinese. So I feel like it's so important for—for people in this country, when they're in trouble, they have somebody to hold their hands, speak their language, and help them. A lot of ways, you know mentally, or maybe money-wise support, financially. And there's government have a lot of support and financial support, they don't know how to get those people. I feel like I'm a liaison, I can bring this information to them, they can get some help. And I feel like if God put me in this position, I will do it. I will love to do it, and that's my mission for my life. That's how I feel.

So I am enjoying doing radio, TV...community liaison for Congressman Greene. Oh, another thing I'm very, very proud...two years ago, Stafford school, the mayor come to me, the mayor, said "Alice, we got some budget." The mayor, first of all he said "I want to have a" like a "bilingual school in my elementary," you know the Pre-K, 5 year olds. Because when you learn language best time to learn is 5 year old, when you're go Kindergarten, Pre-K...They do have a budget, they can have another language. That means like the kids go to school, the Kindergarten they only go, if you don't know, the Kindergarteners right now only go half-day, you know like 5 year-olds. Only go half—for half day. But they have the money to pay for some Chinese-speaking teacher, so the kids can go full-day program, with a—with a lunch provided by government. You go half day in learning the Kindergarten in English. But another half, they're learning Vietnamese and Chinese. But you—when you want to do that, of course the school super-intendment wants to do that, but they have to go to City Council to get approved. They have to go to school-board, trustees, you know all these school trustees to get approved. Sometimes people can be very stubborn. They say "Why—why do we want to do this for another language? If they come here they have to learn English! Why we want to have a bi—" Some

people can be very, very stubborn, they say if they come to this country, they need to learn English. So why we have the bi-lingual class, for the—spend the government money for this program? But I feel like—like, I feel like the kids, they can learn different language when they young age. I think this money is well-spent. At that time, people narrow-minded, they only thinking we only teach English for kids. But I say wait a second, if you kids can learn two language, when they go to the job market they have a two-language skill, not necessarily only for Chinese, for different...doesn't matter who you are, if you have two language when you go to job market and compete with other people, you actually got more opportunity if you can speak two language right. And the Stafford, that district is all low-income kids, okay. Actually, right now if you go to my class, the class I do two years ago, most are black kids and Spanish [sic] kids. You know, but when I promote this Chinese school, they are thinking I'm going to bring a lot of Chinese kids to come here to take advantage of government fund, to learning Chinese and English. This is what they're thinking.

So I fight, I fought so hard. I go to City Council meeting. I tell them, say this is not only for Chinese kids, this is for every kids if they want to learn two language. And I go to the school, I'm actually fighting with—you know it's politics, ok, I win. They say "Ok, we're going to do it." This was two years ago. I was so—I was so moved by, first year they graduate they send me to graduation for the first—I mean when they finish with the first year they invite me for their graduation, for their first-year kids, the Kindergarten finished, those 5 year-olds they sing Chinese songs. I was crying my tears, but listen, in that class it's not Chinese kids, it's black kids and Spanish kids. And their parents come to me and say "Alice, thank you so much, my son started learning Chinese so one day hopefully he can go China to work, you know if he cannot find a job in this country they can find a job in China." So to me, a lot of thing you don't see it, until you actually...I hope I can see the first when they graduate from high school they can speak both language. I wish I can live that long to see my first high school graduate. Right now, they are finished their third year, this is the third year they're doing that now. But a lot of things it's like you plant the seeds, it's all in planting the seeds.

The reason I go—I find I know students, I know how hard it is to struggle with two language. I mean even still learning language still because my—I'm not English major. Because remember I told you my major is accounting, it's numbers, so my English actually is not that good. So sometimes I ask my son, my daughter about how do you pronounce that word. They say "Oh mommy, this is..." You know they have to teach me. I say "Honey, English is not my first language you know." It's just like you don't speak Chinese the way I do, good job, can you speak that in Chinese. You know sometimes have little conversation debate with my kids. But it's very difficult to have, uh, two ABC, we call them just like you. American-born Chinese.

But I do have my traditional Chinese culture in me, very strong, but I need to learn the American culture too to deal with my two outstanding kids. They are America-born and Chinese. So in a way I think I raised wonderful kids, they are—I am very close to my children. You know, so my son-in-law is an American guy. My daughter-in-law is Asian, a Chinese, she from—her parents are from Hong Kong. I deal with different cultures but thank God I don't have a problem dealing with my kids and especially my grand-kids. So, but as a first generation immigrant we go through

so much, a lot, because when you work, when you first time you have to raise two kids, fighting with politics at work, and then facing, I see a lot of story about my colleagues, my community, my people, a lot of the time there's a lot of unfair situations, I learn so much. We need to work together. We need to work—doesn't matter where you come from, we have to work together to find better society, better community. And in the future, in the you know, in the next generation it's not you are Chinese, I'm Russian, you are Japanese, you are—it's all, we all work together. Fighting with cancer, fighting with politics, fighting with economy. Right now we're in a—we're in a warzone because our economy, this country's terrible. We need to fight it for our better economy, for a better chance for our generation, next generation. I'm worried if the next generation, if they don't study hard, they don't have a job. The China right now, the China, the Indian, those they are training kids in Kindergarten to speak two languages now. And our kids, they watch TV, play Nint—you know all this, oh my god, I'm worried. This is my country now. But I hope we have better generation in the future, so.

Actually, I'm struggling between China, you know, it's like my mom. This is, USA is my mom too. It's like a hand, all—it's all my hand. This is my China blood and this is my American blood, they are all me. One's raised me, one's educate me. And I will die here, so it's all my—it's all me, it's all in me.

**IS:** That's beautiful.

**AC:** Yeah. Chinese, American, all in me but I hope I can do more for both countries. So that's my mission. I don't know, I'm sorry, it's just you guys, I don't know I just tell you so much about...I don't know why, usually I don't talk that much about myself. It's just like yeah, wow, first time I'm really thinking from when I was 22 until today. It's a long story, it's a journey, so. Any questions? Go ahead.

**IS:** So..um...well what I found interesting was you were declared by Houston Women Magazine's article to be one of the top 50 most influential women. I can see why now, um, how did it feel? I mean, I don't know.

**AC:** Yeah, I see your point. I think it's an honor. Because to me I am nobody, I'm a very—I mean I don't have any...Let me put it this way. When I was young, when I was remember before 5, I was like I'm a princess because my father is high-rank from government, got a good job. My grandfather's mayor of the city. I was like princess, like you know, it's like my life is wonderful, but after my father died, everything's change. Do you know why, because all my father's family never come visit us anymore. My father died, everything changed. And then after my father died, my grandfather, he had to go to Japan to do another job for government so he was from mayor to go to Japan as ambassador so...he's in Japan, so he's far from us. So suddenly we lost all the...how do you say this...

**IS:** Prestige?

**AC:** Yes, one night, it's like everything's gone. My mom is single mom, raised three kids, I'm the oldest in the family. I feel like, and I remember my father, I still remember, the day my father died. He say something to me, I still remember today, he say...he called my name, my name's of course not Alice, my name's Mau Mau, that's my nickname. Uh, he say: "I wish you were a boy." I mean I was like five...I don't remember but my mom told me that too, I said "Mommy, what did he say to me before he died?" And my mom told me, say "Your father wished you were a boy." So, you know in our culture, boy is one who will take care of the family, not a girl. So I remember I told my mom, I just grow up in that kinda situation, it's tough. And actually I still remember, I asked my mom, she don't want to say to me...Actually, my—I think my mom takes three of the kids, she want to jump the bridge. Because there's a huge bridge very close to my house, very close, we're very close to like a big bridge and there you know and I remember one night my mom actually takes three of us. She's holding my brother, and she take me and my sister, walk to the bridge. And I still, I...I actually asked my mom, she don't want to say, she don't want to say anything to me. I think she want to jump the bridge, bring the three of us. Think about this, if you're only, you're only like 30 years old, your husband died, and then with all the prestige everything's gone and we three young kids. How you're going to...and the little boy's only one year old...how you're going to handle life at that time—this is back to 1950...uh...1960, I was five, so that time it's tough.

Ok, I don't know if she don't know how to handle this, so I came and I think she want to jump from that bridge, I think something's wrong, my mom is crying so hard. So I remember one thing, because my mom holding my brother, you know, he's the boy, right. So I grab my mom—I grab my brother from my mom's arms, I hold him and run all the way home. My mom forget and just run after me. She like "What are you doing with baby?" I remember that, I hold my brother, in my arm, I just run, run, I just run. I guess that my mom forgot what she wanted to do. I think I saved my mom's life too, I think that...I still remember, I still remember I did something. I asked my mom, she don't want to, she said "No, no, no you're crazy, no. It never happened." I say "Mom, did you think about suicides when I was young?" My mom said "No, no, no, no." This is many years later. She don't want to admit to it.

But I worked so hard, I always worked part-time. You know I helped my mom to raise some money, I worked hard, I was 19 and got a first job in Du Pont Taiwan. They tried to get a junior accountant. Imagine, I was still in college. I go there compete with people who graduated from college. That job. When I interviewed, the guy I say "I'm not graduated from college but I promise you I can do a good job, like if you hired someone who graduated from college." I guess I was very sincere; the guy actually hired me as a junior accountant. And so I got on my first job when I was 19 and go to college and and bring money, bring salary, good salary to my mom. That salary's low, but still, better than nothing. So I helped my mom raise my brother and sister, so I remember that. Yeah, I was working, always working. I was working with Exxon, and then working with commercial property, I'm doing pretty good living. And actually the financial project, the uh, financial manager bring me pretty good, decent salary too.

Raised two kids from medical school. But I got a tough childhood, you know. That's why when I came here I was looking for opportunity for my brother and sister too. So when I finished my

master, I made sure my brother and sister came here get a master too. I helped them to get an application, and when they got here I gave them the money for living whatever—yeah, I kinda raised my—brother and sister too. It's tough, before—that time in Taiwan. That time in Taiwan's very tough for everyone too. I don't think a lot of people had luxury life you know because that time Taiwan's not booming like now. Now it's like a lot of people make money for real-estate, for business. But that time remember everybody, everyone's just like me, we all have tough life. But because of that training, because of that kind of like environment and culture, we had to work very hard, study hard, work hard. I think that built my work ethics. So I always work hard, you know, even work for Exxon, work for MetLife. Yeah, we work long hour, long hour. I remember when I was with Exxon, I was in financial analysis. I used to bring my kids, weekends, I do overtime work. My kids doing their homework, and I'm doing my work. Nobody in the office, only me. So I mean you know that's how I raised my kids. I guess the reason my kids can study very hard is because they see me and my husband always work hard.

I think that—your parents the same way like me. That's why, I bet you, you learn a lot from your parents. They struggle, because first generation we work so hard. We have nobody helped us, only us, which is really tough. But...

I'm glad, we do pretty good job so far, yeah. So I bet you, I think you see when your parents go through, maybe your parents had better family support. I don't know, but so you know what I mean, we have nobody, only...I remember sometimes, it's so funny, I have to take my kids to daycare and go to work.

My son that time he go to daycare, he cried every morning, oh my it broke my heart. He cried, he don't want to go to daycare, he don't wanna—but we had to work. I stayed home one month, then I go back to work, my job, so my son I needed to send him to the daycare. He's only like, two months old, I mean one month old. I just, I wish I can stay home and take care of him. I can't because the job right, I need to have a job to pay my mortgage. I remember my son, he always cried so hard, he said "Mommy, don't go to work, I don't want to go to daycare!" I said "Honey I'm sorry." Yeah he cried every morning I send him to daycare. I think that's worse, this is like not easy. And one day, it's so funny, it's so funny...we had to go to work every morning before 8, you had to click the clock when anyone works at Exxon. Imagine, we only have one car. So I need to take my two kids to daycare. You know when you go to daycare, you gotta make sure the lunch packed, you know lunchbox, you know. If he had runny nose, you need to make sure medicine, you know you write down what medicine to the daycare to give you medicine for runny nose or whatever right. And then, I had to take care of my—and the diapers, baby food, all that. Prepare, you know, for two kids, young kids. And then, I had to fix lunch for my husband, lunchbox, and also mine, and then put everything in the car.

And take it to the school. And then fighting "Mommy, daddy, don't go!" And then go to the...I'd drop my husband, because we only have one car, my—I'd drop my husband at work. He does Exxon research on Buffalo Speedway, I dropped him. And I had to drive all the way to downtown, and downtown parking is not easy. Ok, so I had to do everything, and go downtown. And sometimes I had to feed everybody breakfast in the car, have a big bowl for cereal. My

husband, he's driving, so one for him, I'm feeding him, I'm feeding the two kids in the back and then drop everything and go to downtown, and go to my work. Stay at my desk, 8 o'clock. And one day...you know this is everyday, one time I looked down and oh my gosh, I wore my sandals, I forgot to change my shoes! I wore my sandals at work, I said oh my God! I don't have shoes, so all day long I sit at my desk I don't want to go anywhere because it's so embarrassing, you wear sandals at work. You know, I mean you gotta wear high-heals, right. I was so busy with taking care of my two kids and my—my husband, everybody, I forgot to change my shoes. So anyway, so that I learned, I remembered to bring my shoes to work. But just want to give you some ideas, this life is so tough, so tough with two career and then raising the kids. It's very, it's not easy. But right now it's fun to think about, this is a joke, but at that time I always cried I said "Oh no, where's my shoes?"

But anyway, so, so far you know life is wonderful, since I survived from cancer five years ago. That's why I want to do something for the cancer patients with language problem. So that's always my passion. I think, like I say, I think everybody has a mission. I think my mission is serve to community, always. And at my Chinese school, that, see all these kids speak Chinese, English, ah it just...I'm very happy. I'm sorry, anything else?

**IS:** Oh, no, no...this has been really great. Um...hmm...

**CY:** We're at one hour, just so you know.

**IS:** Thanks...um... [shuffling papers] um...so have you ever sort of struggled with self-identity, like between Taiwan and America. Like do you—I mean do you...you provided the great analogy of the hand and...

**AC:** Yeah, yeah.

**IS:** Do you think it's possible to just sort of be a citizen of two different places at once?

**AC:** That's a good question. Um, identity. Seriously, I mean I've been in this country for almost 35 years, 1977, yeah, 35 years. I really feel like...well actually I visit a lot, I go back to Taiwan, I go over to Shanghai, I see them. It's very funny...I think they think I'm foreigner. It's kind of sad because everything changed, culture changed. Even I speak language, I know the culture very well...mm but the lifestyle, everything. I cannot go back to live in Taiwan or Shanghai anymore, I cannot live there anymore, I'm not used to the lifestyle. I feel I'm used to the...this is my hometown. And uh...it's like uh...It's kinda like I'm U.S. citizen for life. Even like still, my hand, right. This is my hand, right, both sides. But I'm more like American than I'm Chinese. But I'm still, like I said, I want to—there is no Chinese-American in my mind anymore, I'm just a... You know we all come to Earth, we all visitor, like I said we all visitor, it doesn't matter what country you come from. It's just one life, one life to live. So the citizen thing, it doesn't matter to me anymore. I'm not belonging—I just feel like God created me, one Alice Chen. I have all this culture behind me. Oh, I can say this. I'm children of God. Yeah, and that belongs to Chinese, American, no it just...I'm one...how do you say this, you talk about identity, right?

**IS:** Yeah.

**AC:** I...I would say I'm American citizen, new generation. Because it's like this country is diversified, so diversified so I'm part of the American citizen, American, this country. Yeah...does that make sense?

**IS:** Yeah, definitely.

**AC:** Yeah. Because really I feel like...am I Chinese again? And I want to go back to my house...I mean yeah, I actually go back two years ago. I mean every year, not every year, every other year I go to visit my old school. My elementary, my old house, it's all gone, no more. My house I lived in when I was in the college, or middle school, they're all tear down, have new buildings. I go there and I say, this maybe my house. It's all the high-rise, it changed everything you cannot even find anything, back to my old memory. No more, it's all gone. So it's kinda sad though. I had to go back to—I just feel, I try to figure out ok, if I am standing here, this is maybe my old backyard. You see it's already, everything's just...it's all in your dream. I actually had a dream one time, dreaming about, I'm going home to see my grandma. In my dream, I open the door, I knock the door my—I had a red front door, my house, it's a red door, with all the tree. So I knocked the door, there's no ring bell, and it's all I knock the door. Then usually my grandma would come open the door for me. You know I was raised by my grandma. Because my mom's busy with working two job to raise the family, so my grandma take care of me. So I open the door, I see my grandma there, I just walk into the house I say "Hi grandma!" just like when I was a little girl. And I just wake up and I say oh, it's in a dream, no more. But, my grandma still in that house in my dream. Because when she died I didn't go back to China, I was pregnant with my son. I cannot fly back to see—to go to her funeral. So I didn't go to her funeral, right, so I still...you know you have this—sometimes mentally, you have to see someone died, you go to funeral then you say "She really died," right? But because I was pregnant with my son, I cannot fly the international flight so I cannot go back to see her buried in the ground. So I'm always thinking she's still alive. It's so funny, but anyway...so, she still lives in my dreams, my grandma...yeah, so any other questions?

**IS:** Um...did you ever, I guess, have any funny or memorable experiences of culture shock when you first came to...

**AC:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah I do a lot. Uh...I can share one, maybe not...it's ok to share, right? First I, I speak English, let's just say I learned my English. You know, you learn English from...I tried to memorize from dictionary, you know the dictionary, from A, B, C, D...like garage start with G, "garage" right? And I remember "garbage," right "garbage." And "gorgeous," "gorgeous," you are "gorgeous," right? So when I talk...this is my first year, I'm talking to my classmates or my friends. It's so funny, I need to translate everything in English first, and I...just like computer, you put in, then I say, they ask me, so I say "Ok, he asked me a question and I translate in Chinese. And then I'm going to reply an answer, I'm going to think about Chinese first, and then translate English." So I—you asked

me something, I would think about it, I would return you a reply with your English. I remember one time I talked to one of my classmates, you know, in my MBA, this guy so good-looking. So I said, oh I want to say. He said "You are so pretty, Alice!" You know, compliment. I would say, I said good, he said I'm pretty, so I need to say "You are good-looking too." So "You are good-looking" to a man is "gorgeous," right? I can say "gorgeous," right? But "gorgeous" is starting with "G," right? I said "Oh my God, you are garbage!" [laughter] That guy said "I'm garbage?!" But I remember, it's like funny part, I said "Oh, no, no, no, no" I look at him and say "No, no, no, no, no hold on, hold on, let me think, let me think...[mumbling]... "Oh, you are gorgeous." So it's like—I remember that, it's so funny and people laugh so loud because of the way I tried to reply with my English, translate. But, you know...now sometimes, not anymore, I don't do that anybody but I remember the first year, the first year I had to do the translations. So that's fun, you know. I think that the one thing I learned: if you want to come to any country, you need to learn the language before you come. But academic-wise, I'm very good, I got all A's in my accounting, I graduated top in my class. But it's all in Chinese, so but accounting, you don't need to have language, English, writing, whatever, but that's actually bad because you are not well prepared for the language skill. So I'm very good at like cost accounting, management accounting, you know, all that accounting degree I'm good at, I can do very good. You know in accounting degree you need to do a big entry...like they would throw you a question for 60 points. Yeah, some people they flunked because if you cannot answer, then you flunk. So I said ok, uh, give me an accounting entry for small business in refinery. But you need to know how they do the booking, you need to know how they do refinery. What they do, refine, extra equipment, you know how much you're gonna, you know, just terminology, you need to know that, when you do the entry you have to know how to do that. I'm very good about that. But the language skill is a problem because I don't need to understand writing ethics to do accounting degree. No, you don't need to. But if you do a lager, you do balance shipment income statement it's all very simple English. So when you're going to doing the like paperwork that's the difficult part. So I feel I'm still going to struggle with my language. But in Chinese I'm very good, but in English-wise I can do translation very good but writing a paper, talking about, like, maybe medical paper. That's difficult for me. I understand, like when a doctor talked to me they talk about some diagnosis, about my disease.

I say "Can you spell that for me? I will look in the dictionary." So I tried to look up the medical terminologies to figure out what he's talking about. I don't understand because when you're sick, right, they give you...when you go to doctor, and they say "Ok, are you in pain?" What they say, what they give you is like scale from one to ten: are you in pain? You circle either "8" or "5" or "3" or "1," right? I say, "Can you tell me what is '1' How do you feel when you're in pain in '1' or when you're in pain '10,' you're screaming 'oh I'm in pain!' That's '10'? Or, I'm ok, that's '1'?" You know, and you don't know how to describe that. You see what I mean, that's a problem, it's hard to describe when you, when you—you're sick. Just like baby, when you have like two-year-old baby. When you...you guys don't take care of baby, right...when your baby cries, you only know they cry when they have fever, the baby cry. Oh you say, you cannot ask baby "Oh, what's wrong with you?" The baby cannot talk, right! So they don't

understand how to communicate when the doctor says...oh I don't feel good here, I don't feel good here, I mean you know it's just hard for patient to describe what is wrong with them in their—English, when they do not speak English, that's the problem. So I think language barrier for patient is so hard. I go through that, so I know it's important, so.

But another thing—at work, at job too, a lot of Asian, like ok, Asian people don't like to express yourself, that's our culture. I see a lot of good people, they never in manager decision, manager position. It's not that they don't want to, it's that their language problem, they cannot be manager level because they're not good about speaking in front of people and they're kind of shy. You know Asian people usually they don't know, they kinda like learn things very good in paper but they're not good about expressing themselves. I think that's it. And also speaking about politics, Asian people they don't vote, they don't like to vote. They say, "Politics has nothing to do with me. I don't want to vote because if I go vote and they have my registration, they can ask me to be called...for judgment...I forgot the terminology. When the court sends you to be a judge? How do you call that, how do you say that? Jury duty! Jury duty. Yeah, Chinese people think if you vote, they have your record, then you will be called to do the jury duty. I think that's good right. They don't want to do this, they say "I don't want to be there doing jury duty for 3 days or 5 days. I got a job to do. They will fire me if I am in jury duty for months, then I'm going to lose my job." Some people they are so selfish. But they didn't understand, this is the learning process, you gotta do that to know more about how do you're going to be mingle voice with community. A lot of public volunteer, they don't want to do it, because they're thinking this takes their time from...you know, they like to watch TV, but volunteer work takes their private time to sacrifice. But to me, I feel like you got to know the country, you got to know this culture. You've got to devote your time to do this, otherwise you're never going to learn. You know, you're never going to be mingle with them, you got to—you got to sacrifice something. That's how I feel about involvement to the community, and I hope I can bring more people to involve to this community. Mingle with mainstream. I think like—that why I'm doing the all volunteer, I got so many people volunteer, I want to hopefully, one day they're going to for younger generation understand. But for older generation, like people my age, most people they don't want to get involved.

Which is bad, you know, so. But I just do little things to try to, to get some influence, so that when they recognized me in Top 50 Influential Women in Houston, I was honored. I was like wow, I mean they don't see a lot of Asians get involved. I went to a lot of events where I'm the only Asian in the whole room. A lot of things, a lot of volunteer things, I'm the only Asian, only Asian woman in a lot of things. Especially like "donate blood," I'm the one go there. "Donate my blood," they don't, sometimes they don't see a lot of Asian people doing that. Like townhome meeting, nobody go show up, nobody show, show off. A lot of volunteers, for everything...like oh, I remember one time, remember the drink ad for the parade, drink ad for the illegal kids to getting—the right to go to college. Remember the drink ad. Several years ago, there's a parade in downtown, all the Spanish people come, they want to like protest, parade, they say "We want our kids to have a chance to go to college, to get a green card" or something, right, because all these kids in college, they are born here with illegal parents right. They don't have any legal status in this country. So those kids, I mean I feel so bad for those kids. So I told

my people, I say... a lot of people in Chinese community, they are illegal, they are illegal resident, so then their kids illegal too. But when their kids go to college, they have a problem, right. They're going to pay more education, tuition, and also there are a lot of jobs, they cannot get a job either. So they have unfair treatment for those kids. I feel sorry for those kids, so I say "We need to fight for this, we need to fight for the kids with you know with illegal status. We need to help them." So I try to get our people to do the parade with Spanish people in downtown. So I pull a lot of Chinese, I buy a lot of signage, saying we want to—get some fair treatment for our kids, for our generation. So I do a lot of signs in Chinese. I asked people to go on radio station, I write article in Chinese newspaper. I got a lot of people saying "Oh yeah, I'll be there Alice, I'll be there, I'll be there, I'll come."

Some people from Austin called me and said "Yeah we will come, this is good Alice, thank you for doing this." So I make a hundred signs in Chinese saying we want to fight for our kids. So I was there, only a few people showed up. I was so sad, I was bringing all these signs, want to walk with the parade right. Not too many people showed up, but they tell me they want to come, they don't want to come. Of course, it's a weekday... I think it's Wednesday morning, in the morning so people had to go to work. They said "Alice, I got a job at the restaurant, I cannot go downtown" and also if I go, they gonna—immigration people going to be waiting for me, they'll know I'm illegal, they're going to get me right there!" They're scared to come to the parade, they're gonna get caught, you know. I was like, but people have a life, if you are U.S. citizen, can you just come help me? Because you are citizen, right? You're holding the sign, they're not going to get you. But not too many people show up. So I was so disappointed, it's like when you're fighting for something you don't have the support. That is so lonely, you know. But, that day, I bring a hundred signs. Guess what, what I do: I give to all of these people in the parade, the Spanish people, they're holding my Chinese signs! [laughter] Those Spanish people, they don't understand Chinese, they're holding the sign, it's very nice so they're holding the sign. And then it's so funny, and then 11 news, actually showing that night for the TV because they have some news coverage for the parade. Ok, and Sheila Jackson and all these people they are there, and Spanish people they're there. They show a Spanish guy holding my sign in Chinese! Saying we want the right for our kids, I go like oh my God! But it's funny, this is probably funny. It's funny because I feel like I want to do so many things but... [sighs] still a long way to go. But that's ok. Just one small step, that's ok. Because I think God's trying to use me, with so many passions, so many enthusiasms to try to do something for Asian people, mingle with this, this country. Something, small step. Sometimes, when I watch Jeremy Lin play basketball... yes, yes! Yao Ming, yes, yes! You know, I mean I just feel like this part of our Asian people is part of this country. I feel so, I will cry just by watching them to do such a great job, I feel like oh my God, that's part of me! I'm not related to Jeremy Lin but when he do a good job I was like in tears, yes, yes! Our kids, you know I mean it's just part of, part of things I say this country needs more Asian people to mingle with mainstream. Yeah, I'll be—I'll be proud of my Asian heritage, to be part of this country. Jeremy Lin plays for Knicks, and Knicks is an American team, right? So I feel like it's all in me now, so and I'm God's child. God bring me here, and he's in control. I think I can survive with this cancer because God wanted me to do more, that's all. I'm a little people, but I try to do some big dream so, yeah. I hope my story will impact some people in the future.

Hopefully there's more Alice Chens in the community, hopefully more, uh, hopefully more first generation immigrants will be inspired by my effort do more. And we need more people come out to do volunteers for our community. And I think both of you will do good job in the future because if you are doing this interview for this project, you're going to learn from everybody telling their stories. I hope my story has a little impact in your life too. Volunteer. That's— because people, we only have one life to live, you go to leave some legacy, right? What is legacy? Legacy is do something meaningful for the people around you. And that's what I believe. So, just like put a stone in the pond, they come back, that is the thing I want to do. But only have one stone. After that, when you throw the stone, then make some waves, the stone going down. But that wave will have some impact. That's all I want, that's all I want to, so, yeah.

**IS:** Wow.

**AC:** I don't know, I just come with a passion for this community. Sometimes a lot of—I'm very disappointed. Sometimes I cry, I say "You know, why worry so much? If my mother jumped from that bridge, my life's over. Right, remember. I was like six or seven. If my mom dropped— just jumped from the bridge, there's no story at all. But, somehow, I survived with that bridge. I think there's a lot of things can happen in my life. So it did, it did happen since 1977, September 17 until now, until my grandkids, another one coming next week! Gosh, life is beautiful, life is beautiful. And also like I said the cancer, you never know, it can come back anytime. The cancer can come back any time. But I'm not...I have no regrets. I think my life is so...so blessed. And then, I try to do everything I can for the rest of my life. And every day to me is a blessing day. Yeah, sometimes if you don't go through the tough, tough things, when I go through chemo several times, the doctor told my husband, said "She's not going to make it." So, but I survived, still. I'm healthy today but like I said, you never know. But all these days, every day I count my blessings and I say "I need to do more" because I don't know how many days ahead of me, I need to do more. Including this interview. I want to do more. I hope, I hope everybody will do more for—and take care of each other, love each other, support each other and do God's job, glorify Him. So, yeah.

**IS:** Beautiful.

**AC:** Anything else?

**IS:** Um...

**CY:** We're at like an hour and a half.

**AC:** Already? Wow, I'm sorry!

**IS and CY:** No! That's ok!

**IS:** Should we continue, do you think? Do you have any questions?

**CY:** I'm fine, this is your interview.

**IS:** Um, I guess have you had any inspirations, like either in the Asian community or even outside? Sort of, just inspired you to do more?

**AC:** Oh, I do, I do. As a matter of fact, you know I like to read those uh history book, you know like all these Chinese history books, and also American history, you know all these hero stories. Actually, everyday, just put this way, I like to read those history books. For instance, in our Chinese history there's a lady called Wu Zetian. Wu Zetian she is a, she is one of the female queen in one of Dynasty. That lady, that lady she actually, you know, in China is all men dominate, king, you know, just like England, is all male, dominate the Dynasty and the kingdom right and she's only one, female, be a queen be a king, you know, and do a good job for her Dynasty at that time. Her name is Wu Zetian, ok. I read about her story, she's actually the role model for me because she goes very through tough, very tough life. It's like I feel like I go... I think the tough life I have in my childhood actually made me stronger. And also came to this country, have so many challenges in my life, especially cancer, it actually make me stronger. And I see life, it's actually easier after all these challenge. And everyday, and you say which is my mentor in history. Everyday in my life, even I deal with some clients, you know I'm a financial planner, I deal with people's financial uh...uh the planning things, retirement planning or estate planning. When I deal with estate planning especially, people tell me their, their life too, their net-worth, what they want to do with their money, and what they do before. So they accumulate all this money. So I actually listen to people's life story everyday. And their life, life story actually inspires me to think uh...how do you say this, you see, every—everyday...let's just say if I watch the news too, I will find uh everyone have a life story, everybody.

So you—if you see any like some story inspire me actually I learn a lot of things in my life, everyday I deal with people, they will inspire me too. It's like daily people inspire me. For instance, for instance, I can give you a story, uh...ok, Jeremy Lin, for instance Jeremy Lin. He was so hot since February, right? But last week I think he lost about—five games, something like that. And I think Jeremy Lin, they kinda critical, criticize about him.

The actually *New York Times* have a story or something, I didn't read it in detail, they kinda like downgrade him. Downgrade him a lot, say "Oh, it's over. Lin's, it's over. He's just only...he's not a star, he's just a starter." Something like that. And I actually watched Jeremy Lin's...one of interview in Chinese, on Chinese TV show. They interviewed him. He say—in this TV interview, he say he do this for God. God just gave him the faith to do his basketball things, you know. He goes through so many...like a lot of thing he go, like Stanford don't want him. Or I mean uh he go through a lot of challenge in his life. And then his success is not only one play, one game can determine his life. So when you say who inspire me, who can give me some, who be my hero in my life. Everyday I read something, I always see this beauty, this strength, the strengths—everybody have strengths, everybody have something special in their life. They will inspire me. So I don't have a particular, some so-and-so. But people, I can see people even in regular, even just regular people I talk to janitors sometimes when I work. People from Mexico and they come

here to this country and struggle and they get a job, they raise a family. Those people, I see the beauty in their life too. They will inspire me too, I say “Wow, keep up the good work, you can do it.” I talk to, I have a conversation with janitor in my office, the lady, she cleans my office every night! She tell me about her story. Sometimes she feels sad, and I will try to give her some money to support her. I just say “You don’t have dinner yet? Ok, just get some money to get some food.” You know. But, sometimes she just tell me something about her, I see her encouragement, I see the, their struggle, the umm...I don’t know how to say it. Just like, everybody have something in their life can make me think I can learn from them. So I don’t have particular hero or mentor, but everybody’s giving a life lesson, I learn from them, I’m still learning. Yeah, every little things can inspire me. Yeah...is that makes sense?

**IS:** Yeah.

**AC:** So. Like the Queen, the one I’m talking about, the Queen. I actually had a dream one night, I’m talking to her in my dream. Actually I have conversation, I guess I’m thinking too much. So I should talk I talk to her in my dream I say “How do you handle, in bad situation, how do you handle?” And she say “It’s not easy, Alice.” I mean it’s so funny, she talks to me...it’s just like sometimes, it’s like a, uh...did you watch the movie *Back to the Future*? Like, you know I love that movie, you go back to the old time you know uh to talk to those...that’s just like I love this you can talk to the people in the thousand years ago you know. Imagine...oh, oh, oh I think you guys, you guys do the job, actually you create something, the dialogue for the people a thousand years later, maybe they would read this script today and say “Oh, so-and-so talked to somebody about this story.” You know, we are creating history, right? So, I don’t know if I answered your question, but.

**IS:** Yeah, you did!

**AC:** Yeah, okay.

**IS:** Well, I guess um...are there any other memories you’d like to share, or what you’d like the next generation to know about the immigrant experience, or...

**AC:** Oh yeah, I hope I can...my story’s very, is not uh, just something I go through. And I think there’s a lot of immigrants that are right now have the idea want to come to the country, this country, USA I think America is the land of opportunity. It is a land of opportunity. I think we are lucky to learn here, we are very lucky to learn here. And because, imagine...if I stayed in my country, Taiwan...I’m always thinking if I don’t come to this country, I stay there, got a job...yeah I will have a job there, and doing the regular, and having my family there, raise my family there, and go all these, do all these things. Another, just like the same thing I through in here and there. Today, I will see the world like I see now. Because in this country, I see so many things happen. It’s like, all the news impact me, all the politics, all the community, all the culture. You know, because when you got here, you are not only deal with Chinese culture, I deal with my job, I deal with Vietnamese, because community liaison I can go to all the events with Congressman Greene. My—our district is Vietnamese, Chinese, Spanish, um, American, black,

white, and also Indian, Pakistani, we deal with...I'm the community liaison, I go through every community. I have opportunity to deal with different communities. I have opportunity to absorb all the news, my job as a news anchor, I see news everyday, right? But if I don't have this—if I don't have this opportunity being in this country, this never belongs to me. I will be in that little city, worried about...I don't know, maybe just a small, very simple family for the rest of my life. Don't have a chance to know so much today what I—I'm a chairman for Asian Chamber of Commerce, I'm the board member for one of the bank, organize, lead the bank, doing all these decisions for the bank. I'm the manager for MetLife, deal with people as financial planner. I, like I said, I work with congressman, I do the radio TV. I don't have that opportunity if I don't come here. I have two wonderful children. From them I learn a lot too, and from my—family here. I don't have that opportunity to learn so much in my life. Maybe I don't get a cancer, no I'm just joking, maybe the food or the air or whatever, for some reason. The cancer tricked me but, but I actually got treatment, the best treatment in the whole world to cure by all these doctors in this country. So if I thinking about going back in Taiwan, maybe I will die, maybe I don't have a...the best medical treatment I should receive to survive this cancer. You know, I mean all these things I'm thinking, just total different life, total different vision, total different maybe the inference, totally, totally different. So I'm lucky to be here, I'm lucky to have this opportunity to come to land of opportunity, and to have my family here. And I wish, I wish that people right now under their love of country...ok I don't want to name, because then people may be angry...they have a chance to come to this country, to explore more, to explore the world.

I think it's really good to have people to do the immigration, because think about this, you already have the culture built in you, but getting more, then you see more, do more. I think immigration is really good for anybody. You know, if you, if you want to get better, then you go to more developed country, right. But if you're already in USA, then it actually it's good to immigrate to China because you can encounter another culture, another language, another world. This world is, it's combination. So I think it's good for anybody, if they have the vision, open mind. To embrace everything if they can do more. I think it's good, it's just kind of scary though. I remember I was crying the entire trip to here. I was crying so hard, I don't know what to do, I said oh my gosh, what am I gonna do? There's nobody, I don't even know anybody there! I mean the future's uncertain and then this plane's gonna land in San Francisco and my classmates are going to leave me. They're gonna go to Chicago and one's going to go to Los Angeles, my buddy, my girlfriend, we all go, we come together. But at the San Francisco, we're going to say goodbye to each other, and for that moment it's like you're on your own. And that is so, I was like 22 years old, I was like I don't even speak English, I don't know which terminal I need to change my flight, I need to go to different terminal to change to next flight. I have notes, saying "Can you tell me which is my next flight?" I don't know how to say things, to tell people. I can go to Russia, go to the wrong terminal, I can end up on different plane right. I was so scared, I said oh my God, what's next? I only had \$100 in my pocket. So, if I get lost, what am I gonna do? I don't know. So, I remember that moment, I just I say, it's ok, you just do the best you can. So I think so far I'm doing ok.

**CY:** Definitely.

**AC:** Yeah so. I don't know, it's just yeah...anything else?

**CY:** I think that's it.

**AC:** Yeah that's good.

**IS:** Thank you so much for meeting with us!

**AC:** No problem, no problem! I think I want to cover, oh you know I also do one thing I'm very proud. In the Chinese community, several—about 10 years ago, we have a lot of crime happen because all the Asian people that like to have cash, they don't want to put the money in the bank. They want to carry cash in their pocket, so we have a lot of robbery in Chinatown, Chinatown. This is about seven years ago. So what I do is like I think a lot of people need to know how to protect yourself. For instance, very simple, you don't put your purse in your, in you car and you go you just leave a car, even you lock your door but you don't put your valuable in the, you know in your car so people can see from your window, they can break your window they can take all your belongings. Or maybe, some Chinese people always put a lot of cash in the pocket so a lot of things happen, like they grab your purse because they know you have a lot of cash right. So, and also to Chinese grocery store, they don't take credit card, they only use cash for transaction. Even today, you go to Chinatown, to do some, you eat some noodles, they don't take credit card they only take cash only.

**CY:** Yeah, yeah.

**AC:** You know what I mean. So all the Chinese people always used to have a cash in your pocket to go shopping because they don't take credit card. You know, so the robbery is so bad, you know like they just grab your purse and take your money or your vehicle. Go to the bank, take some cash, they are waiting for you in the car, they rob you. You know just to get gun, and give me all your money. So this happened a lot in Chinatown and I was so, I was kinda concerned about this so I talked to a policeman station you know in the west side, I said how do you prevent your American people...they said "We have a crime prevention book." Like they have all the telephone number, and they will tell you how you're going to protect yourself. Like when you park, park to the light—you know well-lighted area, or when you go shopping you get your key in your hand before you go to the car. Don't just grab everything and then you go to your door and you just find your key, that's very dangerous, right? I mean there's a lot of things, they have a crime prevention book. And I say, "that's a good idea." I said "can I have a copy, right, can I have a copy?" So it's a crime pr...you can get it from policeman station, they still have a...they tell you how to protect yourself. Like for instance if you on—you know if you go on vacation, just stop your mail, or take your newspaper. People stop and they look at the newspaper, then people will know oh, you're not home. They can vandalize your house because your mail is everywhere, your newspaper in front door everywhere, right, they still deliver, right. So it's obvious, they can just go to your room to ransack your house because

nobody's home, you're on vacation. So all these tips it's in the book. It's called crime-prevention book.

I said this is a good book, I read it, I say "We need to have this translated into Chinese." So I go to all the business owners, I say "Can you help me? I need to print this book for the...in a Chinese version." So I go to Houston police...at that time I talk to the mayor Bill White, help me to get approved they will translate in Chinese. But they say we don't have a budget to print, we can translate in Chinese for you. Actually I got a volunteer to translate. But they need to come—they need to go through, like make sure everything is good, complaints, whatever. Houston police have complaints about my review, they say we don't translate, but you translate and we can review for you. So anyway, take one year, I translate that book in Chinese. But printing costs, I need to go to get all the business owners donate the money, I put their ads in the back of the books so I got a book in Chinese. Print out 10,000, I send them out free to all my community. So a lot of the people were appreciative of me to doing that. So I did that, and for the community I'm very proud of that, because at that time all the people, especially senior citizens, they using...because that book have English version and Chinese versions, right, so they used that book for like learning, so like kids use that as a learning text book, to learning English and Chinese both, both languages. So they used that book, they are very valuable to them. So that, I feel like I spent so much effort on that because it's not easy to get something like that done but I appreciate the community support because they put the money, put the ad on the back of the page so I got money to print that. So that's several years ago I did that for the community. I like that, I think that's something I do for the community. That's really, really to me really it's like I'm proud of that. Just like the Chinese school I did three years ago. So I do a lot of things, just some idea but sometimes idea is good but you need teamwork. Sometimes very difficult—but I do have, I'm very lucky to have volunteers work with me. But I need more, need more to do more. So that's all I want to say.

**IS:** So what would you say to people who are looking to volunteer but they're not really sure where to turn or what to...

**AC:** They can call me. I got a lot of, I got a lot of job...no, no. Let me put it this way. Sometimes in a community if you really want to do something, you observe. You will find it, you will find it. Like for instance the senior citizens, a lot of old people there. You know on holidays, you can go visit them, you know just bring them some, you know like sometimes they don't have kids visit them, their kids may be out of town, whatever, the Chinese kids they can visit them. And ok, ok do a lot of things, a lot of...if you really want to do, you can see things. If you really put your mind, focused, you can do a lot for the communities. Especially for the senior citizens, those old people they need people visit them, read them a story, take them to shopping, just spend time with them, you know all that, you know. So I'm getting to that age too so, no I'm just joking [laughter]. But you know there's a lot of things for the kids, for Chinese school, they can help more people do more tuition, you know. Like for instance, the Chinese school I'm talking about two years ago, the Chinese-English class, they need more Chinese people to teach the students more. They can volunteer their time to help them with Chinese homework. Because their parents

are Spanish, right, their parents cannot help their kids to learn Chinese homework. They need Chinese-speaking people to volunteer to help the kids to learn more Chinese. Have a dialogue with them, to help them with Chinese class. You see what I mean? Because right now the kids they are either, some kids are black kids, or Spanish kids, so when they go home, their parents cannot tell them. They need some volunteers to help the kids to learn the language. You see what I mean? So I need more people to help them! Yeah, so there's a lot of work, but volunteer you need to have passion. It's not only one-day work, it's an ongoing project. So, yeah. So you need more love, yeah.

**CY:** Thank you so much.

**IS:** Thank you so much for interviewing with us.

**AC:** No problem, no problem. And do you want an article? I'll just give you a copy. {Included with the other archival documents}

Interview ends.

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