Background:

Linda Wu (née Linda Gale Gee) was born in 1947 to Albert and Jane Gee in Bellaire, Texas. She has a sister named Janita, who is four years older. Her father was the owner of the famous Poly-Asian Restaurant in Houston, Texas. After graduating from Bellaire High School, Mrs. Wu attended University of Texas at Austin, and graduated in 1969 with a degree in home economics.

Upon graduation, she married Ted Wu, whose work took them to the Philippines and Hong Kong. When the couple moved back to San Antonio for Mr. Wu to attend law school, Linda worked as a fashion buyer for Joske’s, a now defunct department store. She transferred to the Houston Joske’s after her husband graduated and got a job offer in Houston. In 1981 when her first child, Ted Wu Jr., was two years old, she became a real estate broker. She had another child, Kristen Wu, in 1983.

Now retired, she remains active within Houston’s Asian American community by serving on the boards of organizations like the Houston Taipei Society, Dance of Asia America, and the Chinese Community Center. She was also the president of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA) in 2011, a position both of her parents once held. She has been involved with the Miss Chinatown Houston Pageant for 30 years and continues to volunteer for the Pageant today.

Setting:

The interview focuses on the subjects of labor and capital, mostly through the career changes of Mrs. Wu and her family. The interviewers also attempt to reveal the unique experience of a third-generation Chinese-American growing up in Texas before the immigration law change of 1965.

The interview took place in a conference room of the office of Ted Wu, over the course of one hour and 23 minutes.

Interviewers:

Arthur Cao is an undergraduate student at Rice University majoring in civil and environmental engineering. He is from Fuzhou, China.

Victoria Eng is an undergraduate student at Rice University majoring in electrical engineering. She is from Houston, Texas.
VE: This is Victoria Eng.

AC: And this is Arthur Cao.

VE: We’re here today, on June 12th, 2013 in the conference room of the office of Ted Wu to interview Linda Wu for the Houston Asian American Archive oral history interview project. So to begin, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

LW: Okay, um, I was born here in Houston in 1947, and at the time I was born in, um, the Memorial Hospital, which has now been, um, you know—I don’t even know the address, but it’s no longer there. And, um, my parents were in the grocery and the restaurant business. And I was the second child. I have an older sister—four years older, named Janita.

VE: So, you were born in Houston. Did you grow up in Houston your whole life?

LW: Yes. I went to, um—actually, when I was born, we did—I lived above my parents’ grocery store. And when I was four years old, they, um, bought land in Bellaire, Texas. So, from the age of four through Bellaire High School, I lived in Houston. And then, um, went to University of Texas in Austin. So, I’m a real native Houston and Texan.

VE: Where was your parents’ grocery store?
LW: It was on Jensen Drive. Um, I’m not sure where, you know, the address was, either. I’d like to go back.

VE: Um, did you ever help out in the grocery store?

LW: Um, not in the grocery store, but, um, I did definitely help out in the restaurant. My dad had, um … Let’s see. As a child, he had two, um, dine-in restaurants, and one was a take-out restaurant. I think he was one of the first people to ever have Chinese take-out.

VE: Can you just—do you have any particular fond memories working in the restaurant?

LW: Uh, they were—very fond of some of—when I was probably just 12 years old, I was working in one restaurant he called—that was Poly-Asian. And it was kind of, um, multi-Asian. It was tropical, like, Polynesian. It was Japanese. It was Chinese. And, so, we had a gift shop. He imported a lot of gift items. So, it was a lot of fun. And then, in those days, um, it wasn’t, um, open-liquor. You had to be a member of a club and pay dues in order for liquor to be served. So, a lot of the celebrities in Houston—not in Houston, but who would come to Houston, would always be taken to my dad’s restaurant because it—you know, they were entertained very well. So, um, I remember as a child, uh, getting to meet a lot of movie stars. So, that was really fun.

VE: Do you remember any, like, particular ones?

LW: Ah, yeah. I met, um, a lot of people from the Rodeo—

VE: [overlapping] Mmm.

LW: —like, um, Roy Rogers, and Wyatt Earp, that was, um—can’t remember his name—Hugh O’Brain was the actor, um. Elvis Presley came to my dad’s restaurant, um. A lot. Bob Hope. [banging sound] Um, a lot of them. I have some pictures. I can show you.

VE: Did your father pay you like a [laughing] normal employee?

LW: Um, he didn’t. I—not—no. It was sort of like expected. And I was happy to do it because, you know, he never, um, put us really on—on an allowance, but if I work then, you know, he—I’d say, “Dad, you know, I wanna buy this or that,” and he would just give us whatever we needed. So, it wasn’t like I had to watch the clock or anything, but we were expected to be there.

And then, the take-out restaurant. That, um, was an experience, too because, you know, people were—two families were working then, uh, more and more. And so, people would come and, um, would take family dinners home, and my job was to be the cashier and pack up the food. And then, another restaurant, when I was a teenager, I worked in the kitchen.

And, um, I remember, you know, all the parties back then for the Chinese kids that worked in the grocery stores and their parents’ restaurants. So we didn’t go out until, like, ten o’clock at
night or later. You know, I smelt bad sometimes because I felt like I smelled like, you know, egg roll or something [laughs] being in the kitchen, and then going to parties. So, that was, you know, had from soup to nuts, from glamor to being in the kitchen, so, and everything. [voice fades]

VE: Did your sister work in the restaurant also?

LW: Yes, way (?), way (?) back then.

VE: Uh, how much older is she?

LW: Four years.

VE: Four years, okay. [pause] Um, when you went to Bellaire—sorry, I—I should probably know this, but was it segregated?

[0:05:02]

LW: Um, actually, it was, um—you know, the times were such that there were probably five Chinese at Bellaire when I was there, and for some reason it wasn’t really much of my memory. I think it was just starting. Um, where there were no really Black families, you know, in Bellaire. So, we may have had one or two, but it wasn’t at all an issue.

VE: What, um, elementary and middle school did you attend?

LW: Uh, elementary school, I went to Condit and then Braeburn Elementary, and middle school I went to Jane Long.

VE: And were they all predominantly white?

LW: Yes.

VE: So, the first neighborhood you lived in was—?

LW: Was in, um, on Jensen Drive—

VE: Right. So, what—do you remember the—you were very young, so do you remember?

LW: [overlapping] I was very young. And then, actually, probably still as a toddler we moved to, uh, like an apartment duplex in Montrose, on Pacific Street, and I—I have memories of that place. But, um, you know, not—basically, my childhood, I grew up in Bellaire, played—rode my bike, played with the neighbors, stayed out all day.

VE: What was the demographic of the neighborhood in Bellaire?
LW: All white. In fact, um, my parents were not able to buy the lot where they built their house. Um, they had a lot of friends, and one of, uh, their friends actually bought the lot in his name. He was a white, you know, Caucasian friend. And then, after he bought it, then he sold it to my father. Otherwise, we would not have been able to build.

VE: Do you remember how much that house cost, or were you too young?

LW: Um, I think it was ... somewhere in the neighborhood of, like, $25,000. That would have been—I was, like, four so—I was probably four. It was, like, 1951, something like that.

VE: You said that when you worked in the restaurant, you didn’t get to—you didn’t get to go out till late. Did you ever—did that ever get in the way of social interactions with your friends?

LW: No. Um, back in those days, I mean, I would—I—like I said in Bellaire there were so few Asians. I mean, like, Sharpstown, it used to be—it was the first air-conditioned mall, and if I saw any other Asian in that shopping center, I knew who they were. Um, so, socially, um, it isn’t like it is today. All of my social friends were kind of separate from my school friends. Like I did things—like I was in the Bellaire Belles. I, you know, was on the drill team. I was active in school clubs. I was on the student council.

But once, um, it came, like, socializing, we had the Chinese American Citizens Alliance youth club. And so, all my parties were, you know, with my Chinese friends in the youth club. And so, even though I lived in Bellaire—that was, like, far out. Most of the kids lived in the Black neighborhoods, where the grocery stores were, the mom-and-pop grocery stores.

So, um, we had a lot of parties at my house. My mother was really nice, and she liked having kids over. So, being in the restaurant business, my dad would, you know, fix some food, and so [laughs] everybody liked to come over just to eat. And, uh, we had, you know, like, a big record collection, and we had the old 45s, and so we, you know, had a lot of dance parties. So, it really didn’t, um—you know, we had it, like, late. I mean, as a kid, I would be out until two in the morning because, um .... One thing though is, I had an older, um, boy cousin. And so, he would take me, and my mom felt, you know, he was responsible; he was five years older. So, you know, that helped a lot.

VE: What were some of your favorite songs when you were in high school?

LW: Uh, well, I think in high school. I have to—like Everly Brothers, and, oh, the—uh, you know, who was it? Paul Anka, and, um .... All those, like, name songs, like, “Judy’s Turn to Cry,” and, uh, Johnny this or that. I didn’t really. Uh, Dion, and—who’s that—Dion and the Belmonts. I have to look at the list, but it was all of those, um, yeah, the 60s. Everly Brothers, did I say them?

VE: Mm-hmm. So, you went to UT. How did you choose UT?

[0:09:59]
LW: Uh, I actually wanted to go to UC Berkeley, but my mom said that that was too far away and I had to stay in, uh, Texas. So my mother went to Rice actually—

VE: [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

LW: —but, um, I wanted to go out of town. I wanted that college, you know, dorm experience. And my sister being four years older, she went to TCU, but most of her friends, or most of, you know, the older girls that she went around with went to UT, and I just—I always wanted to go if I couldn’t go to California.

VE: Did you live on-campus, off-campus?

LW: I lived at, um—on Blant—in Blanton Dorm for the first, I think, two years. And then, I lived, um, on another apart—I lived in two different apartments. And, uh, the last apartment I lived in, it was called the Granada, and now that’s where the LBJ library is. And one of the most famous people who lived in the apartments where I did was Farrah Fawcett. And so, that was kind of—even back at UT she was, you know, kind of a celebrity because she did local commercials on TV.

VE: Um, from when to when were you at UT?

LW: Uh, I graduated from Bellaire in ‘65, and I graduated [from UT] in January of ‘69. I finished in three and a half years. And that was motivated because my mother, she dropped out of Rice and never graduated because she met my father, and—and, you know, she quit. So, she always said that no matter what we did, we had to finish college. So, um, I was dating Ted, my husband, and he was a couple years older than me, and so I wanted to hurry up and I got married at [laughing] 20—21. So, that was …

VE: So, did you meet, um, Ted in UT?

LW: No, I met him in San Antonio, where he’s from. And, um, it was through the CACA, um, Houston Lodge and the San Antonio Lodge. They would have a social anniversary—each city would. So we met at a social there.

AC: Do you remember how much your tuition was?

LW: Yes, it was $50 a semester. And you could take as many courses as you wanted. My mother—I remember I got a check for $1000 dollars. That lasted me the whole year including tuition, including all my expenses.

AC: How about the student body?

LW: How much did the—like—how big was it, or—?
AC: How big was it? Uh, what is the demographic—

LW: [overlapping] I think it was about 35,000. And, I remember, um, the activity fee; I think it was, like, $35, and you could go to all the football games, and, you know, you could—like, I remember, um, it included different entertainers that would come on campus. And I remember going to see Simon and Garfunkel. That was really exciting. One of them. The Beach Boys came to campus.

VE: Was the student body very diverse, or is it still also mostly white?

LW: There were, um, not that many, um—you know, I really don’t know. Um, I can’t remember, but, um, you know, I knew all the Chinese students from Houston. And there were some, you know, overseas Chinese from Hong Kong, I remember. And, um ... but can’t give you any numbers. I wasn’t very active in any social Chinese organizations on campus, if there were any.

AC: At the time, were the Chinese students at UT mostly born in America or came from overseas?

LW: I think, uh, most of ‘em were from overseas? I really don’t know. You know, it could have been the same amount of people. You know, I have no clue. [laughs] Wasn’t very aware of it.

VE: You got a degree in fashion merchandising? So, what did that entail?

LW: Well, now they call it, I think human ecology, but back then it was home economics, and, um, textiles, clothing, and fashion design. And I always wanted to be a fashion buyer. Um, my aunt, my mother’s sister, um, is an artist, and she lived in New York City. And I had really no idea, you know, what a buyer was. But I went to visit her, and she just thought, you know, I would make a good buyer. I always like wanted—growing up, um, I always—my mother was born in San Antonio. She’s 92 today, so she was American-born, and, you know, my background’s a little different, but she always—you know, she put me in dancing school. She put—I had piano lessons. And so, um, I always liked costumes and things like that.

So, um, my goal was to be a buyer. Um, and my first job, you know, after college was, uh, being a buyer. Well, going on the executive training program for Joske’s, San Antonio. And, they’re not in business anymore, but, um, the Dillard’s store, um, is who took it over. So that’s what I did, um. I bought junior, uh, fashions, which, you know, were sort of like the teen here. Teen sizes. Trendy, fun clothes.

[0:15:46]

VE: Did you ever work in college, or did you not need to?

LW: Uh, [laughs] for $50 a semester. I—there were, um—I’m trying to remember. Did I have any jobs? No. Um, if—probably ... you know, no.

AC: Your, um, job as a fashion buyer?
AC: Did you have to do a lot of travel?

LW: Yeah, it was really a great job. I would go to New York, like, every six weeks, California, about four times a year. I traveled to Italy, um, Israel. Um, and, um, it—it was a fun experience for me because, um, not only did, you know, I get to see fashion, but, um, just the opportunity to meet other people from other sister stores around the country was a fun time.

AC: Why Israel?

LW: Uh, leather. They had a very strong fashion house called Bagadour (?). I don’t know if they’re still in business or not, but they had really nice, uh, leathers. And that too was an experience. I can’t remember exactly the time. It was probably in the late ’70s, but security back then was even very tight. We had to go through, um, being physically, um, patted down, and, you know, you had to go, um, and they would take your hair dryer, and, you know, bobby pins, and everything was checked. And, um, so that was interesting.

VE: You got the job as a fashion buyer at 27, is that right?

LW: Mmm. Probably younger. Let’s see. 20. Um, I was—when I first started, um .... When—when I first got married we went to Hong Kong. Well, we went to the Philippines because Ted was in the Navy. And then, we moved to Hong Kong. And then, maybe a couple of years—[inaudibly counting numbers]. I would say maybe even 25 because I was only on the training program for 10 months, and, um, I worked as an assistant for the Junior fashion buyer. And she quit. She had two young kids, and so then, uh, I remember personnel brought me in, and they said, “Well, we would like you to just take her job.” And so, I was really, you know, kind of nervous about that. I didn’t know what I was doing. But they said, “We would, you know, keep you as—you know, we’ll call you associate buyer, and you would have, like, nine months and see how it works out.” So, um, you know, I was probably younger. I can look it up if you want me to, but roughly that age.

AC: [overlapping] What—

VE: [overlapping] So, oh—

AC: What was your experience like in the Philippines?

LW: In the Philippines, it was—again, it was—really broaden my horizons. Um, back in those days, you know, you—you have to kind of visualize. When I went to, um, high school and college, we had to dress up. I mean, I think I even wore pantyhose to my classes. And we didn’t wear slacks. We wore dresses. And those days, too, when you got on an airplane, you dress up.
So, when I got to the Philippines. The, um—my husband’s station, it was in like—it was called Sangley Point. It was Cavite City. And, everyone just wore rubber thongs. I mean—which is really common today, but back then, I couldn’t believe how people were, you know, very poor. They were very—and Ted went first, and he emailed me. He didn’t email me. He wrote me a letter, and he said, “You’ll—you know, please don’t be shocked when you see how it is over here.”

So there were, you know, a lot of people that needed—needed medical care and, um, it was just, you know, third world, and .... So, we, um, actually, not that many officers in the Navy brought their wives, but we had only been married, like, six months. And, so, um, he and another officer who’s just married also had his wife come. So, we lived off-base in a, um, really nice, uh, apartment above our landlady. And, um, so, it was just a really cute, very nice house. Our air—we had air conditioning in our bedroom, but nowhere else.

[0:20:37]

But what really made me also very sad is, uh, there was a young girl who, um, asked us if she could be our house girl to work for us. And, you know, I thought, “Well, I don’t need a house girl. I’ve not ever had anyone work for me.” But, she said, um, you know, that the officer’s wife—family who lived there before we did employed her, so if I didn’t employ her, then she would be out—you know, not having any money to support herself. So, I said, “Sure, you know, we’ll do that.” But there was nothing for her to do, and it just made me laugh.

Like, one day, um, I went, you know, off base—I mean not off base, but away to the base—came back. And she was ironing my pantyhose [laughs] ‘cause there was really nothing for her to do. But, um, you know, we just .... You know, that was the, um—one of the things that I’ll always remember.

AC: Were there any, um, operations during the time you were there, for Ted?

LW: Operations? He was a communications officer, and so he would fly from, um, you know, the base in the Philippines to Vietnam. And he was ... you know.

AC: During the war?

LW: Yeah. During the Vietnam War.

AC: And the whole time, you stayed in the Philippines?

LW: I did, while we—yeah, while he was based there. But then, you have to remember too, that that wasn’t the height of the war. It was winding down. In fact, he was separated from the Navy in the Philippines because, um, you know, normally what you would do is you would fly—they would fly us back to the U.S. And so they were winding down, and so then, Ted requested, um, since we were already there and he had—he had a sister living in Hong Kong. So, from there, he just said, “Well, we’ll be separated, you know, released from the Navy here.” And then, we moved to the—to Hong Kong. And then, we lived there for a while.
AC: Did you work in the Philippines?

LW: Ah, no, I didn’t work there. No, I basically just, um, took classes, you know, went to the officers’ club, met whatever few, um, officers’ wives that were there, and went to Manila, did some sightseeing. It wasn’t there—I wasn’t there that long. It was probably six months at the most.

AC: What classes did you take?

LW: Um, you know, it was like, uh .... I don’t even remember. But, it was on the campus, you know. There weren’t, you know, things, like, towards a degree or anything. It was just whatever, like, leisure learning kind of things. You know, could have been cooking. I don’t remember, but.

AC: On campus?

LW: No, on the base.

AC: Oh, on the base.

LW: Yeah, on the military base there.

VE: Um, what year was that that you were in the Philippines?

LW: Uh, that would have been, like, uh, ’69.

VE: And then you went to Hong Kong afterwards?

LW: Mm-hmm.

VE: How long did you stay in Hong Kong?

LW: Uh, about a year.

AC: What did you do there?

LW: Okay, in Hong Kong, I did take Cantonese lessons [laughs] because being born here, um .... My mother was born in San Antonio, but her parents came from, um, Canton, so she knew Toisan. And then, um, [banging sound] when I—my sister learned Chinese first, but by the time when I was born, I didn’t speak because they spoke English. My sister was already going to school. So, I took, um, Cantonese.

And then, I also, um, was, uh, you know, interested in fashion, so I had some contacts in the—in Houston who wanted to see if I could find factories in Hong Kong to send back bell-bottom jeans. Do you remember? Bell-bottom jeans were real big then. So, I was trying to make
contacts, and it wasn’t the easiest thing, um. But, um, did a little bit of that, and then met
other, um, U.S. expatriates. Like, there was an American club, and just, you know, again, um,
more social and enjoy myself.

[0:25:13]

AC: Can you describe Hong Kong at the time?

LW: Um, at the time, we lived in this area—it’s really interesting. I just read where—where we
lived, uh, is the most expensive shopping space per square foot in the world. Are y’all familiar
with Hong Kong?

AC: Yeah.

LW: Okay, Heysen Avenue, Lee—the Lee. Um, it’s Heysen—Happy Valley, and we were on
Heysen Avenue, and there was a hotel called Lee Gardens. And there were a lot of, like, um,
automobile showrooms. And we lived in this mid-rise called Heysen ... Aven—

AC: The west of the island? The west part of the island?

LW: It was—I don’t even know. It was Happy Valley. It’s—it’s sort of—

AC: Is it on the island?

LW: Oh, yeah, it’s on Hong Kong Island. But, um, I’m trying to—Leighton Road. Do you know
where Leighton Road is?

AC: Not exactly sure.

LW: Okay, well, now I think they have all the designer couture, uh, you know, retail stores
there. So, I’d love to go back and see it. But, um, at the time, if you—if you want to know about
prices, we, um, were actually subleasing from a lady who was a, uh—a designer, and a—uh, she
had a retail store. And her name ... I can’t remember. First name is Dorothy. And, um, she
subleased her apartment to us, and it was $125, U.S., a month.

And, um, it had a balcony. I wish I had brought those pictures. It had a balcony, and, um, you
know, it was just a one bedroom, one bath, kitchen, living room for 125 U.S. [dollars]. And now
that—I don’t remember how—what the price per square foot is, but now, you know. But it has
been a long time, like, 40, over 40 years, so.

AC: Were there a lot of, um, foreigners living in Hong Kong?

LW: Yes, I like—like—our next door neighbor was British. Um, have you—have you heard of,
um—have you heard of Run Run? Well, never mind. That’s—that—well, it was very interesting.
Um, I was going to say Run Run Shaw, the movie. It was like Warner Brothers, Shaw brothers.
Um, anyway, some people that lived around us were involved—uh, connected with that. Um,
there were a group of, um ... mainly from Europe because at that time Hong Kong was a British colony. So, a lot of people from, you know, Britain. And also, uh, we had mainly American friends.

AC: Did you ever go off the island to Kowloon?

LW: Oh, yeah, we took the Star Ferry, and we would go to Kowloon and, um, my brother-in-law at the time was an architect, so he did a lot of projects in Hong Kong. He did, uh—what—I think it’s still the Sheraton on the Kowloon side. He, um, built that and Mei Foo Village, which was, like a community that Mobil Oil was involved with. Um, we .... We had a lot of, you know, relatives and friends that we were able to meet at the time.

VE: Was it difficult or easy to get around, um, using English in Hong Kong at the time?

LW: Not so much. I mean, my—you know, like, I was trying to learn Chinese, but it wasn’t very successful. And so, um, it—you know, most—because it was an English colony, a lot—most people did speak English. That, you know, as far as business and getting around any place that had a lot of tourists, we’d be able to communicate.

But, you know, locally, for me, like when I went to the market, um, I would have to, you know, try to use my Toisan, and sometimes that wasn’t so good. And I know, you know, at that time, you know, like hairdos and things, I would go like to the beauty shop, like, once a week, and they all would say—and I didn’t have enough Chinese to correct them, but they would say, “Oh, here comes the Japanese lady.” [laughs] Because I couldn’t speak, you know, like—but they, you know, but, before too long they would know I was not, you know, a native of Hong Kong.

[0:30:00]

AC: What did your husband do?

LW: At that time, he was, um, fresh out of the Navy. He had his bachelor’s degree in business from SMU. And, um, we met, uh, a developer from Hawaii named Chinn Ho. And Chinn Ho, um, was a big developer, and he bought a lot of property in Makaha, in Hawaii. And he wanted to build, um, condominiums, and market them to wealthy Chinese in Hong Kong because, I think, 1997 was when Hong Kong reverted back to China. So, he felt that if—these wealthy people might want to, you know, immigrate to the U.S. So, Ted, um, met Chinn Ho, and was hired, uh, to market his condominiums.

So, he had a office in, um, I think it was Union House in Central District, but that was a whole funny story because, right, he’s from San Antonio. And to be raised in Texas, you know, we didn’t even know what a condominium was. It was, like, totally a new thing. So, um, he—he uh—you know, after a year, you know, I don’t think he even kept the office open, so it was kind of like a, uh—an adventure, again. But, we did, you know, meet a lot of people, and tried to market that idea. So, we spent a lot of time just meeting people and trying to, you know, do business selling condominiums.
AC: So, you helped him?

LW: Well, it—everything there, I think, um .... I didn’t—you know, I didn’t go to the office. Like had his own secretary and people there, but when it came, you know, I (?) invited to social events and things like that, I went with him.

VE: And so, when did you come back to the U.S.?

LW: Uh, probably in ’71, something like that.

VE: And you came back, straight back to Houston?

LW: Uh, well, that’s ... no. We went to San Antonio. And that’s—[banging sound] he went to law school in St. Mary’s University. And then that’s when I started working at Joske’s, San Antonio. And then, I think we—we lived in San Antonio for about three years because I think law school takes about three years. And when—you know—I think he’s gonna be on the, um, program to be interviewed. But, um, when he was work—when he was going to law school, he was also working for the Bexar County Attorney’s office. It's kind of all fuzzy to me. [laughs]

AC: How did you like San Antonio?

LW: I loved it. I—I really like San Antonio.

AC: Was it a lot different back then?

LW: Um, it was much more—um, you know, the traffic wasn’t what it was. It wasn’t as developed. Um, it—it just to me seemed .... You know, the natural beauty of San Antonio. It was a little bit hillier, and, you know, it—it—I don’t know if it has zoning, but, you know, there weren’t as many, like, strip centers. It just had more charm to me, than Houston.

AC: Is there a location that left you particular impression?

LW: Uh, well, we lived with his mom, and his mom lives near Trinity University. And so, it was the older section, and very .... It just reminds me, um .... It’s just more green at the time, maybe. I don’t know.

AC: Have you gone back?

LW: Um, I was just there about, uh, two or three weeks ago to visit a friend, but we don’t really—and my sister-in-law still lives there. So, we do have family.

AC: Did it change over time?
LW: Um, San Antonio? You know, when we go, we just go to see the people. And when my kids were little, we did go and—Fiesta Texas, and Sea World, and all of those things, but I really, um, haven’t, you know, seen it, but I know the traffic’s not so good, and, um. I know there are a lot of restaurants in re—like, the Pearl Brewery. They have a really nice development of restaurants. And, you know, San Antonio, it’s such a—does so much with tourism and the Alamo that it is, um—you know, they do a nice job. But when I—when I worked at Joske’s in San Antonio, that was right next door to the Alamo, and so that was kind of a fun place, you know, to work, too.

[0:35:00]

VE: So, when you came back to Houston, that was after he finished the law degree?

LW: Correct.

VE: And, you worked in the Joske’s here?

LW: Correct.

VE: Was that the Galleria one?

LW: Yes, yeah. They were really nice, um, because when .... I was—I guess I was a buyer for maybe three years in San Antonio, so I knew all the Houston merchandisers. And so, um, my, uh—my sales were very good. They—and I think it was timing. I don’t think I had a magic touch or anything, but I had really good numbers. So, when Ted got a job in Houston, the—the people in Houston, they moved their junior buyer so that I can take her job. So, I just—it just worked out really well. They, you know, welcomed me. I just got a job transfer.

AC: Did you get a lot of Chinese or Asian customers?

LW: No. [laughs] No. Um, as a matter of fact, uh, I guess it was sort of, maybe, you know—again, I have to put things in perspective. Um, you know, growing up, fashion, I think became a thing, and it was that whole Beatles thing. There was, um, Carnaby look. There was like Mary Quant, and, you know. Fashion was a way of expressing yourself. Things became different. And so, after I worked at Joske’s—or, actually when I was still in San Antonio, I had a girlfriend, um, who was working at Joske’s in Austin. And, um, well, she wasn’t my friend yet, but we met. And then there was another—and she became a buyer and actually worked for me in Houston. And then there was another Chinese girl that went to UT, and she’s about two years younger than me. And she became a buyer, as well. So, at one time, there were three Chinese buyers at Joske’s, so that was unusual. I mean, not so mu—you know, our customers were part of whatever the demographics of Houston was at the time, but, you know whatever we bought was just mainstream. Like, you know, one of my biggest, you know, vendors was, like, Levi’s jeans, and, um, a lot of the people that I bought from are now no longer in business. But, um, you know, it was, uh, interesting.
VE: And how long did you work with Joske’s?

LW: Um, I stopped working for them in, uh, probably ’81, [whispering] something like that. Yeah, about ’81.

AC: Do you remember your salaries?

LW: You know, I was—I was thinking that I should go check any stubs. Um, I think when I quit it was in the 30,000 range, plus bonus. It was, like, around 37 plus bonus.

VE: Was the bonus based on how well your sales were?

LW: And on—well it was based on not sales, but profit. And so, you know, you always hear about inventory, so—and then markdown. So, it’s your gross margin, your profit margin.

AC: Why did you quit?

LW: Because I had, um, at that time, a two-year-old. And, I had a lady who, um, you know, helped me, and then she wasn’t able to help me anymore. With traveling, I just felt like, okay, it’s time. And then, I was also kind of interested in, um, real estate, so I got my broker’s license. So, then I started, you know, getting into real estate.

VE: What neighborhood did you live in at this time?

LW: Um, where I am now, actually. Well, when I—when we—the first house that we bought in Houston was in Bellaire. And then—um, I—I grew up in Bellaire. And then, we bought a house in Bellaire to be close to my mother. And then, in, um, 1980, we bought a house, what is now the Westchase area. It’s near Memorial and Kirkwood. So, west Houston.

AC: What was the demographic like?

LW: Uh, where? Or when?

AC: Uh, ’81.

LW: In my neighborhood?

AC: Yes.

LW: Um. Well, basically just white and a few minorities. I don’t think—I—I know I had one Black—you know, you want to know, like, ethnically? [interviewers nodded] I had one—in our subdivision, there was one Black family and, um, maybe a couple of other Asian families. And, I’m not talking anymore than, like, 150 houses. Not that big of a neighborhood.
VE: So, the demographic did change from when you grew up to when you got back—

LW: [overlapping] Yeah.

VE: —like not drastically, but it changed.

[0:40:25]

LW: Yeah, but this is in west Houston. In Bellaire, when we were there, um, I don’t remember any Black families in—you know, in the ... but there could be. I just don’t remember ‘cause at that—when we lived in Bellaire, Ted and I were both working. We—we were married for, like, 10 years before we had kids, and so I was basically just a career person. I didn’t—you know, just drive to and from work and didn’t really know my neighbors.

AC: You said you have a two-year-old in ’81. What—is that your only child?

LW: Uh, hat was my only child until ’83, and then I had another one. A girl [laughs]; I have a girl and a boy.

AC: What are they doing now?

LW: My son lives in Los Angeles, and he is a, uh—what is he? He’s a director of global marketing for Mattel. And, uh, my daughter, um, is a doctor of physical therapy in Chicago and works at the Rehab Institute of Chicago.

VE: Did they, um, attend school in Texas like you did?

LW: Um, they went to Kinkaid for, uh—well, actually, my daughter went to—they started out both in pri—uh, public, and then, uh, the Village School, and Kinkaid for my daughter. And then my son just went to Kinkaid from lower, middle, and high school. And then he went to Brown, and my daughter went to Northwestern.

AC: What are their names?

LW: What are their names? My son is Ted Albert Wu, or Theodore Albert Wu. He—he’s named after Ted’s—Ted is actually, uh, Junior. So, um, we named our son after their grandparents, my dad and Ted’s dad. And then my daughter is Kristen, K-R-I-S-T-E-N, Wu. Kristen Gale, G-A-L-E, which is my middle name, too.

VE: You spent the first 10 years of your marriage, you said, working, and did you ever feel—did you ever face discrimination working at Joske’s even though—because you mentioned that you’re a minority?
LW: Mm-hmm. Um, not—no, I never—I never felt, um, discrimination as an adult. As a child, when I went to, um, Condit, I remember feeling, you know, discriminated. I was sheltered, I guess. So I remember, um, going to, uh—in kindergarten, we stayed in our own little classroom, but in first grade is when you go into the big lunchroom. And I remember things like, um, you know, kids, you know, like pointing at me and saying, “Oh, you’re Chinese.” And it wasn’t malicious, but it made me feel different. And, um … you know. And then later on, like, lower school, just boys being mean boys, I remember, but, um, yeah. Because, I—it—I don’t think today, if—there’s probably different discrimination, but it was more like just being different, you know, not knowing exactly, you know, what to think about me.[1]

VE: Back—

LW: [overlapping] In the workplace, I never like it was—it was a negative.

VE: And you actually—uh, going back, when you said you were in Hong Kong, um, the natives assumed that you were Japanese because you couldn’t speak Cantonese. Was there any negative repercussions to that, or they just knew that you couldn’t communicate as well?

LW: Hmm, I never …. I—you know, it’s interesting, okay. I never felt, um .... I think Hong Kong is very, um, class-oriented, and I felt like because I was an American coming back that, yeah, I—I didn’t feel comfortable, like, being around some of, you know, the Hong Kong, uh …

AC: Natives?

LW: Right, you know, the wealthy. The wealthy people in Hong Kong, I felt a little less comfortable around because, you know, it’s—it’s kind of the same thing here when, um—I—I know they don’t mean to be, um—I don’t wanna use the word rude. But, you know, you always want to be—like, if you feel more comfortable expressing yourself in your first language. And so, you know, if you don’t understand it, well then, you know, you—people have to always say, “Oh, well what they said was, ‘blah blah blah,’” and so, you know, that would come into play. So that would be uncomfortable. Because I didn’t want people to have to take the time to a) you know, explain to me what everybody else was, you know, listening to, or the, uh, discussion so that—that always is ....

AC: You—you said you speak Toisan. Who did you learn it from?

LW: Okay, um, I would listen to my parents when I was younger, but they usually spoke Chinese to each other if they didn’t want my par—uh, you know, [laughing] my sister and I to know what they were talking about. But when, uh, I had my son, and I was working, my, um, family had a very good friend who had a relative who came from Hong Kong and needed, um, to stay with somebody. So, I thought, “Great, you know, that way my child would learn Cantonese and, um, that would be very helpful.” So she would—this lady spoke Cantonese to my son, and, um,
I learned—picked up some Cantonese, but it was mixed with Toisan. So—but that came later. You know, my—my learning Toisan came, like, ’79 forward, except for what I picked up—

AC: [overlapping] Did you—

LW: [overlapping]—as a kid.

AC: Did you only speak it at home, or did you ever use it working at your father’s restaurant?

LW: No, because my dad’s, uh, clientele were not Chinese. It was mainly, you know, uh, Caucasian. So when people came to the restaurant, I spoke English. It—it was so different because back then, there weren’t enough Chinese, um, even to be, you know like, waitstaff or anything. My dad’s—in fact I might have some pictures of his waitstaff that were basically, you know, either Caucasian, Hispanic, or—I don’t know if we had black waiters. No, probably not.

VE: Does your son speak, um—?

LW: He—yeah, he picked it up, but, um, she—she, um, didn’t stay with us so long, but part—you know, part of it always, when you’re young, I think it comes back. And he, um, he wish he could speak now because for Mattel, like, he goes to China, visits factories in China, so it would be very helpful if he could do that, but ….

VE: After Joske’s, you went into real estate.

LW: Correct.

VE: Uh, how were you introduced to that?

LW: Again, my mother was, uh, a real estate broker. And so, um, I got my broker’s license as well. So it was, you know, just part of, uh, connections with my mom.

VE: And how long did you do that for?

LW: Uh, I kept my license for quite a while. Um, I can’t remember. Probably to the mid-90s. [quietly] Probably to the mid-90s.

VE: And you’re currently retired now?

LW: Right.

VE: Um, so you’re very involved in the community here. Could you tell us about some of the things you do or have done?
LW: Um, it’s interesting because a lot of things I’m involved in now are because of, you know, my parents. The main one is Chinese American Citizens Alliance, and I started out as a member of their youth club. And, um, when we moved back from San Antonio to Houston—that was a few years later. CACA use to be a fraternal lodge. There were no women members. There were only women in the auxiliary, which was a separate organization. So after, um, coming back to Houston, then the men and the women joined together.

And so I was always involved, and main—one of the main reasons is the Miss Chinatown Houston pageant. And, um, that was started, like, informally probably in the late 60s. And then into the 70s, it became, you know, more of a—an event of its own and not part of this picnic that used—we used to have. So, um, I’ve been involved the Miss Chinatown Houston pageant for probably 30 years.

[0:50:04]

Um, another organization is the Houston-Taipei sister city organization, and I’ve been on the board of that for quite some time. My mother was, again, um, a charter member and helped, um, hap—you know, make that happen. Um, I love the arts as well, and I’m on the board of Dance of Asian America. Um, and, uh, vice-president of that, and that is, you know, bringing the arts of China to, uh, Houston. And they put on two shows, um, a year at Miller Theater.

And, um, I am involved in another organization that’s not Asian-oriented, but it’s called the Women’s Fund for Health Education and Research. And, you know, I feel like women do so much for everybody else, and sometimes they don’t take care of themselves, so I got involved with that. Um, my sister had open-heart surgery and that was about the time I got involved with that organization.

And, um, uh, let’s see. [looks at VE’s notes] What am I—? I can’t remember what else I have put down there, but, that, um .... Oh, a new organization that I’m really, um, very happy to be on the board of is the Chinese Community Center, and they do so much, not only for the Chinese community but for the community in general. So, that, um—I enjoy spending time there.

VE: For the, um, Taipei Society, did you—so you don’t have any relation to Taiwan. So it’s—

LW: No, but, um—what—that organization began before China was recognized officially, you know, as, um—you know, by the United Nations. And so Taiwan was always, you know, a great friend to the United States, and there was a long history there. And so, um, the Houston Taipei Society, I think they’ve been sister cities for 51 years. And so that was the natural allegiance. And a lot of the old Chinese here in Houston, you know, they helped Taiwan, um, you know, by donating a lot of money when, you know, they were, um, you know, our friends for a long time, and so it’s a historical thing. So although, you know, I don’t have any relatives or Taiwanese—or, um, Chinese relatives living in Taiwan, that association was, you know, more of a friendship for the freedom, the US.

AC: What do you think about the mainland-Taiwan relationship today?
LW: Um, I—it—it’s—it’s interesting because I think now it’s the green—I—I don’t know that much about the politics, and I know it’s very, um, tenuous, but it seemed like in Houston, anyway, it—there was not a big, you know, mixing between the people from Taiwan and, you know, China. But now, you know, a lot of them are very, um—you know, it’s not like two separate groups. And I think a lot of it is the economics. So, um, really don’t have a strong opinion about that.

VE: Have you been to Taiwan?

LW: I have, but it’s been years, years ago. I went for the first time with Houston Taipei Society when I was 16. And, uh, I don’t know. I think I may have been back one other time, but maybe not. I don’t—I think that is the last time I went, so.

AC: What was the experience like?

LW: Uh, it was—it was interesting. We stayed at, um, a hotel that, um—it—it was modern, but it was, um, you know, not up to, you know, like a—a US hotel at the time. And I remember, I w—this is just silly, you know, just my impression, just—I remember going into the bathroom and then I couldn’t get out because the door knob didn’t work. [laughs] And so, here I was, you know, stuck in the bathroom, and I was just, like, a teenager, and I was like, “Let me outta here! Let me out!”

And, um, anyway, to me it was um, again, you know, just a lot of bicycle traffic, and a lot of noise, and it was—it was interesting. I know it’s changed a lot, but it was—it—what I remember, also, how many people had perfect English in Taiwan. They were—we met a lot of people from Taipei, you know, in the—on the, uh, city council, and the mayor, and I was very impressed with them.

[0:55:32]

AC: How ‘bout the mainland? Have you ever been there?

LW: Only to the New Territories, you know, back when we lived there, and, uh, I made one other trip. But no, I want to—both of my kids have been to China, to Beijing, Shanghai, and had trips, but I haven’t been. It’s on my bucket list. [laughs]

AC: Are you planning to visit where your grandparents are from?

LW: That I would like to do. Um, one of my friends, uh, put out a survey. I think she’s been interviewed, Rogene Gee Calvert? And I’m a member of the Gee Family Association, and, um, she put out a survey a couple of years ago. And we were thinking about going in 2014, but I haven’t heard any, uh—haven’t heard an update on that. But definitely want to go to the Gee family village and—and, um, do that.
VE: Your, um, two children, did you—what are some particular Chinese traditions that you raised them with? Or did you raise them with Chinese traditions?

LW: Um, you know, it—I—I really was not raised with, um, Chinese traditions. My mother, being born in San Antonio, um, we never even celebrated Chinese New Years. Um, she was really very Americanized, and so we started observing Chinese New Years, I think, more from an educational standpoint, because it was, you know, celebrated actually at their schools, and—you know, for people—the cultural awareness. And so, um you know, we always just did the Chinese lei see [Cantonese for red packets] and, um, you know, that’s about it.

VE: Why did you choose to send your kids to the Kinkaid school?

LW: Um, I—I went to—you know, all through public school in Houston. And my husband went to private school in San Antonio. And so, you know, I think he was—took more of the lead with their education in that regard. But when my son was, um—he—he went to a school called—actually I forgot one of his schools. He went to, um, school at Grace Presbyterian in second grade. And, um, his teacher told me—every mother’s dream hearing this. Said, “Oh, your son is so exceptional and bright and I really think you ought to consider to sending him to, you know, a St. John’s or Kinkaid.” And so, um, I said, “Oh really?” And so, um, anyway.

So for third grade I—he applied at Kinkaid. We didn’t do St. John’s. And also the Vanguard program. And so, he got into Vanguard, but he didn’t get into Kinkaid. So then the next year, um, I think we applied again to Kinkaid, and so he got accepted. And he didn’t want to go. He said, “I don’t wanna go there. I’m just—I’ll be moving to three schools in three years.” And so, I said, “Well, just try it. You might like it.” So he did. And he—it was like he just really, really liked it. And the kids were all very welcoming, and he had a great experience, and it was good for him.

And then, with my daughter, she also went to, uh, you know, public school. And then, uh, Village is very close to where I live, and so we just had her go through lower school Village, and then she transferred in middle school to Kinkaid. ‘Cause at that time I don’t think Village had a middle school.

AC: What was the tuition at the time?

LW: Why did—?

VE: Oh, tuition.

AC: Tuition.

LW: Oh. Tuition, uh, I don’t remember what it was, you know, in the lower grades, but when my daughter graduated from Kinkaid in 2002, I think it was like $11,000 for high sch—upper school. Something like that.
AC: Per year?

LW: Uh-huh. So, I—and, uh, I wanna say, you know—I hate to do this, but maybe like in the lower school, maybe $2,500, maybe $3,000? $5,000? I don’t know. I could go look. [laughing] I save everything. I mean if it’s important, I can look if you want, but ….

VE: Um, while you worked as a real estate broker, what parts of town did you sell?
LW: Um, I did, you know, mainly the southwest. Like, um, Bellaire, um, close in, you know, like, uh, just southwest. That’s pretty much it.

AC: What was your client group?

LW: My client group were people that I knew, you know, just within the community. I didn’t—um, I mean I did work at, um, it was called McGirt at the time and then it became Prudential Texas. And so, we all had like office duty where we would answer the phones and, you know, pick up just walk-in type of people. But for the most part, it was just through my community.

AC: Was it a full-time job?

LW: Well, with real estate, you know, it can be more flexible. You can kind of make your own—own hours, but um, a lot of it—especially in residential, you do a lot of it on the weekends. And so, um, you know, I—uh, you know, also probably, you know, as my kids got older, that time became important, so didn’t do as much of it then.

AC: What is your political affiliation?

LW: Um, I am—you know, when it comes to—down to it, I really vote for the person, but, um, I am more like a moderate Republican.

AC: And why is that?

LW: Because I believe in smaller government. I feel like, you know, people, um—times have really, you know, changed. I’ve seen a lot change. And I feel like, um, you know, people expect more from the government, and not so much, um …. You know, I think that enables people. I mean, I—I think we need to help ‘em—people too. I mean I’m not saying that there are definitely legitimate—legitimate reasons, but I think sometimes when government gets too big, it’s hard to oversee, and therefore, um, you know, people have a tendency, you know, to not spend wisely.

AC: Would you say that you’re a, uh, politically active person?

LW: No, that’s not my, um you know, strong suit. No.
AC: How about your family?

LW: My family? Um ... not—I mean in terms of like—not—not really. I mean, I—I like to support people if I feel like they would, you know, be a good leader, you know, in their position. Like, you know, example is I mentioned Rogene Gee Calvert is running for city council. And, um, I think Rogene is a Democrat, but you know, I know Rogene, and I think she’d do an excellent job. And, you know, actually city council, it’s not like—they don’t have, you know, parties. So you’re never (?) a Democrat or a Republican. Um, but, you know, I really support her. So I’m really more for the—the person, um, and uh, rather than, you know, straight-line. I don’t ever go and vote straight-line Republican. But in general, my philosophy is not for big government.

AC: All the, um, Asian community, uh, organizations that you are involved in, do you see, uh, a lot of political, uh, activity among those organizations?

LW: Well, like this, uh, CACA, Chinese American Citizens Alliance, we’re, you know, for, you know, the Chinese, uh, you know, and protecting our civil rights. And sometimes that does involve politics, um, you know, to make sure that our voices are heard. And, you know, I feel very strongly about that. I mean I don’t follow anything just because I am Chinese, but I think, you know, it is, um, you know, definitely an area that I wanna make sure that whatever is fair and, you know, uh .... In other words, I don’t want to be a silent person, but I’m not—I’m kind of a reluctant, um, leader. I’m not a person that really enjoys, you know, going out there. I’m not a person that I feel that can do a lot in terms of, um, getting people roused up and following, you know—following my lead.

[1:05:55]

VE: Um, you were president of the CACA.

LW: Yes. [laughs] Well, I—I—you know, I’ve been so, um—I felt like it was a responsibility to do. I felt—um, my dad was, you know, CACA Houston lodge president. He was the Grand Lodge President of the national organization. My mother was the first lady—woman president. And I’ve been, you know, very involved, and I felt like it was almost my duty to do. And, you know, I wanted to support the mission, and, um, that’s—that’s the reason.

VE: Is there any particular, um, project maybe, that happened during your time as president?

LW: Well when I was president, we had, um, a national convention here. There’s, um—every other year, the CACA a biannual convention. And so, um, we had it here in Houston. So we had like 16 different lodges come during, um, the end of July in 2011. And so, that was, you know, one of the major things.

And then, um, another thing is, um, we were active in trying to get support from the—um, both houses on the national level to do a resolution to regret—an expression of regret for the Chinese Exclusion Acts, which, you know, covered a span in history that—where they would no, um, allow Chinese immigrate. So we had—you know, we contacted all of the congressmen from
Texas, and it—it passed first in, you know, the House and then the Senate. So that was, you know, a really good thing.

VE: You’ve been in Houston your whole life, and you even mentioned when you first were—when you first grew up, it was predominately white. And now Houston is considered the most diverse city in the country. Have you—what are ways that you’ve seen this change happen?

LW: Um, just, you know, being—observing the make-up of any activity you go to. Um, it’s really interesting. Growing up, you know, all of my friends were Caucasian. I didn’t really have any, um, you know, like Black friends until I really started working. Because when I was at UT, I don’t remember any Black, uh, students at UT. Um, I think that, you know—that just the immigration of all groups—and it’s not just Asians, but you can go anywhere and hear people speak German or Swedish. You know, like you said, it’s totally different. And I think back then, I would say, you know, I would say 80% was Caucasian, and, you know, Hispanics. We did have, you know, um, Mexican people, and the Black people. But um, you know, Asians—I don’t—what—do you know what the population is now in Houston? The percentage?

AC: For Asian people?

LW: Yeah.

AC: Uh, the Greater Houston area is something like 7%?

LW: Oh really? Okay. I couldn’t tell you, but, um, it was—like when I was at UT, when I would walk on campus there, and I—I would literally—it would annoy me, but if there were like young college Chinese boys, from—not from the US but overseas, they would—they would literally stop and stare and me. They would quit walking [laughing] and just stare at me. And I didn’t know what to do because they didn’t say anything. They would just look at me. So, it was just—you know, I think they were just surprised to see another, um, Asian a) and b) probably female. I don’t think there were that many, um, you know, students at the university-level that were coming over at that time that were female. So, um, it’s definitely changed.

[1:10:34]

AC: Do you see this change as a good thing?

LW: Oh definitely. Um, one thing—another change that’s funny to me is, um, because when I grew up, every Chinese was ABC or, you know, pretty much. My age group, they were born here, and their parents had the grocery stores and the restaurants. And so, I remember about three years ago, I, um, was involved with the CACA youth club. And there was a teenager, and, um, he said, “Oh, your English is so good!” And I said, “Uh, yeah, I was born here.” And he said, “Oh, well, you know, I’m so surprised because someone as old as you, they usually [laughing] speak with an accent.” And I was just—I was kinda like, [sarcastically] “Thanks a lot.” You know?
But, because, um with, you know, all of the immigration now, uh, I guess I’m a minority, you know, my age group to be—have been born here, there aren’t that many.

AC: How do you cope with that?

LW: Oh, it doesn’t bother me. I mean, you know, I don’t—I’m not offended. I just find it humorous. I know some people probably would, but it doesn’t bother me. I thought it was funny. I mead I had never given it a second thought until he said that, um, you know, from someone not, uh, you know—I don’t know. I guess I’d have to ask other people, you know, “Am I one of the oldest people you know that speak Texan?” [LW and VE laugh]

AC: Do you think you are more Chinese or more American?

LW: Um, I would say I’m more American.

AC: For all the, um, community involvement that you have done among the, um, Chinese people, some people may—may think that, um, you are too American to be representing the Chinese population here. What would you say to that?

LW: Um, it’s interesting. Um, I—you know, because I don’t speak particularly Mandarin, which I think is the more, um, common language here. Uh, you know, again, like I was just at a big banquet for the ambassador from Taiwan on Monday night at Ocean Palace. And so, um, he went—actually, he went to the University of, uh, Texas as a student. This is Ambass—Ambassador King. But, you know, most—most of the program was in—in Mandarin. But then they had someone who would speak English, and then all the speakers that spoke Mandarin also spoke in English. But, um, anyway, I’m kind of getting off track here.

But, um, I’m a member of the Houston Taipei Society, and they were looking for some people to chair. There’s the, um—there’s a friendship pagoda in Hermann Park, and it’s our mission now, we’re trying to either move it because the conservancy—the Houston Conservancy wants to move the pavilion or get a new pavilion. And so, there’s a lot of work being done by the Houston-Taipei Society. And so, another board member said, “I would like to nominate Linda Wu, because she is a bridge between the Houston community and, you know, the Taiwan community or Taipei.” And so, you know, I feel that, uh, being here for so long—and, you know, not me, but the pioneers that my parents were—that, um, you know, I don’t feel like, uh—if people question that, that’s fine. You know?

[1:15:11]

VE: A big part of—I think you said this was under the CACA. You worked with the Miss Chinatown Pageant?

LW: Right.
VE: Um, what do you think that means for Houston? It’s so—it’s very long-running, and even our 2012 winner won the USA—

LW: [overlapping] Correct.

VE: —level competition.

LW: Um, again, it’s a tradition. And I think that, um, it’s amazing. The—for me, people have asked me, “Well why do you”—some of the girls like, “Why do you do it? It’s volunteer work.” Um, but I’m just amazed. It’s been a gift to me to see young women who are, um, you know, doing so many things, not—I don’t like to call it a beauty pageant. To me, it’s a scholarship pageant. And they are able to, um, excel in many areas. You know, it’s talent. It’s intelligence. It’s—you know, what are your career goals? And, um, very often, the people, um, that have been in the pageant, you know, they have become—you know, they’re attorneys. They’re medical doctors. They’re, um—go into politics. And it’s just something that you can only do for a short time in your life. You know, maybe when you’re still in school or just getting out and working. And it’s a way they can network, and it is relevant.

And it seems like more and more girls want to do it. And I think with education being more, um, expensive, and, you know, we try to get, um, our scholarships higher. And the fundraisers are so loyal—not the fundraisers, the people that donate. They always come back year after year. We very seldom—I mean with the economy downturn in the last few years, some people have dropped out, but, um, you know, more, you know, still do it no matter what. And they just enjoy coming and supporting it. So it’s not difficult. It’s not something that we’re trying to hold together. It’s just—it is, you know, I think, a good thing.

VE: [to AC] Do you have any more questions before—[to LW] maybe we can move on to some of the things you brought?

AC: Do you do—what do you do in your free time?

LW: [laughs] Well, I’m not that organized, I would say. Um, you know, I just was president of the CACA, and I just stepped down in January, but there’s, um—I’m still very involved. So that—we meet once a month and try to—there’s so many things going on in Houston so I keep active in that. And just being on the boards of different things, there’s always something to do.

Um, you know, I am—uh, we have, you know, free time, and my husband likes to fish. And we have a place in Galveston. We try to go as often as we want. And I have two cats and a dog. And so, um, you know, just busy. I can’t—you know, I don’t have any regimen, but there’s always something going on. Right now, I’m gearing up for this weekend. It’s our first meeting for the Miss Chinatown Pageant. The girls are coming and we’re doing a little workshop seminar. So on August the third they’ll be all ready to compete and present their best foot forward, so I’m really looking forward to that.

AC: Who is the, uh, most memorable—
Memorable?

—contestant?

Contestant. There are so many. I can’t say. I mean, it—um, you know, we’ve had, you know, outstanding ones, most recently Steffi Hu. And, um, she was amazing because when she was, um .... You know, she would—she could be, you know, waiting for, you know, whatever group activity’s going on. And, you know, we—she was being pulled in so many directions for two years because the first year was Miss Houston, and then she won the national title, so everybody wanted Steffi as the Miss Chinatown USA. And so, you now, community things like fashion shows and all that. And while she’s waiting for—you know, being—trying on whatever, you know, she would be with her books and studying, and missing two weeks of school to participate in California. I know she was working hard and keeping up her grades and being a presidential scholar.

And so I—and that’s just one person. I mean, they all juggle. They’re—one of our former Miss Chinatowns is getting her, um, MBA in Houston at U of H now, but she’s working for Tesoro in San Antonio and commuting back and forth. And she’s offered to help us with this year’s pageant. And she’s active in the YLC. Are you familiar with that? They do it at Rice every summer. The Youth Leadership Council, I believe. And, uh, you know, we have other girls that, um—you know, they’re going to prestigious schools like Rice and Harvard and, uh, you know, Northwestern. And just—they’re—they’re very—you know, they’re the doers and leaders of tomorrow.

And, uh, I was really excited. Uh, one of your Rice, uh, alums .... I’m not a Facebook friend. I probably waste too much time on Facebook. But she’s a friend of one of my former contestant friends, and she just got married. And she did the pageant when she was, uh, between Rice and going to medical school. And I just saw where she got married a couple of weeks ago, so I was really excited because doing the pageant, you know, was something outside of her comfort zone. Nothing that she would ever think of doing. But, um, she did it, and, you know, you grow from everything. I don’t know. [laughs] Didn’t want to really name names, but since you know Steffi.

Um, I know you worked in junior fashion, but I’m curious because you were a fashion buyer, who are some of your favorite designers now?

Um, you know, one that, um—who’s Asian and, uh, her name is Khanh Nguyen out of Dallas. And her fashions are so—the tailoring is beautiful. I think it was about three years ago, and she did a show for the Asian Chamber, I believe. And I just noticed how beautiful they were. And so she’s an up-and-coming, uh, designer, and I know she sells to Neiman Marcus. Um, you know, other than that, um, I’m not—you know, I don’t really follow it anymore, which is kind of .... You know, I don’t—I think right now, um, there’s a lot of just different trends going on. It’s a lot different too.
VE: Okay then.

AC: Oh.

VE: Yeah. Would you—could we go see what you’ve brought for us?

LW: [overlapping] Okay! Okay, sure.

VE: Um, do you mind if we record while you talk about it—

LW: [overlapping] Oh.

VE: —or would you like us to turn it off?

LW: Let’s—why don’t we turn it off, and then if you want to know about a certain thing, I can tell you because there’s—

[recorder paused, then resumed for question]
VE: Um, in the restaurants growing up, would the patrons use chopsticks?

LW: Um, no everyone was, uh, served with forks and knives, but they would be asked if they wanted chopsticks, just kind of a novelty because very few people knew how to use them.

[1:23:23] End interview