

ENDLESS AMERICAN DREAMS
from an international student to a public elected Official,
and an advisor to six U. S. Presidents

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As a life time member, let me congratulate CALA for her 40th anniversary celebration and to commend CALA's leaders, past and present, from Dr. Li J. Jong, Dr. Lee Hwa Wei to Esther Lee and Lisa Zhao. Your leadership and contribution have made CALA a vital and successful organization. My Congratulations also go to 2013 CALA's Award honorees, scholarship recipients, and many others. This is the 3rd time I had the distinct honor to be a speaker for CALA. Twice before in the last century, once in Chicago in 1978 when Dr. Hwa Wei Lee was CALA President, and in 1981 at CLA conference in Los Angeles.

My job today is to share with you my Memoirs "Endless American Dreams. To cover my half century life story in 20 minutes is truly an impossible dream. To make the impossible possible. I did pay a high price. It took me 20 days to complete this 20 minute speech.

I was born in Nanjing, China during wartime. Spent my first 15 years moving around China with my parents. Finally we got settled down in Taiwan where I completed my high school and college education. In 1959, with a scholarship and \$100, leaving my parents & sister behind, I came to Los Angeles as a foreign student to pursue my American dream. Half a century has passed by. My life has evolved many stages, from a young lady to grandmother, from foreign student to a professional Educator, a public elected official, and an advisor to six U.S. Presidents. I have been a witness of history as well as a creator of history. I am gratified the American dreams I have achieved fully reflect my role as a trailblazer, planting seeds and paving ways for the younger generations to come.

Let me take a moment to recap my life as a foreign student of 50 years ago. Blessed with a tuition free scholarship from a prestigious Catholic college in Hollywood and 2 part time jobs as a teacher at the Confucius Chinese School and weekend hostess in a fancy Chinese Restaurant in Beverly Hills, I managed to make both ends meet and sent spare money home to help my family. Fifty years ago, cost of living was rather low. Minimum wage is only \$1.25 per hour, gas 20-30cents per gallon, Average rent for one bedroom apt. \$50. \$10 grocery last for a week. My life style as a foreign student was routine and boring. Each day I commuted from school to work, from work to school by buses. On weekend, as people were at play, I was at work as a hostess in the restaurant. Occasionally if I had spare time, I would either go to Catholic church, or volunteer to serve the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce or participate in community activities. But I was happy and in high spirit. My heart was full of hopes and dreams. And I was looking forward earnestly to the realization of them.

*First Foreign Student hired as Librarian by Los Angeles County Library

In two and half years, my first American dream came true. As soon as I received my Master Degree in Library Science. I was hired as a professional librarian by the Los Angeles County Library System, My first professional job paid me \$500 per month and \$6000 per year. Two weeks after I started working, the Library Personnel Director personally took me to U.S. Immigration Office to file petition to have my legal status change from foreign student to Permanent Resident. Since librarians were in great demand that qualified me for the First Preference, my petition was instantly approved. Thus I became the First Foreign Student ever hired as a professional librarian by the Los Angeles County Library System. Once I set the precedence for the Los Angeles County Library, more than a dozen of my friends from Taiwan were also hired with status change.

*Major Breakthroughs into two largest School and College Districts in the nation (2)

While I was working in the County Public Libraries, another career dream of mine began to emerge. I cherished a desire to pursue my teaching career in American education system.

* In 1969 after I became a naturalized Citizen, my second American dream was achieved. I became the First foreign born Asian American employed as Secondary School Librarian by the Los Angeles Unified School District, the largest school system in the nation. It was quite a challenge to meet the requirements for teaching in Los Angeles Unified. Between my full time library work and raising 3 young boys I managed to complete teaching credentials and pass the written and oral exams and was officially hired. Once I opened the door to Los Angeles Unified District, many applicants with similar background as mine were also hired.

*1972 marks my breakthrough into L.A. Community College District, the largest system in the nation. Due to the influx of new immigrants to the States in the 70's, there was a dire need of bilingual or multi-lingual teachers of English. With a Community College Instruction Credential and a M.A. degree, plus years of English teaching, I happened to meet all the job requirements. Luckily I was offered an adjunct faculty position in the English department. Thus I became the first foreign born Asian faculty in the English Department of Los Angeles City College, the oldest college in Los Angeles Community College District. In 1974 I attend Cal. State U. at L.A. to work on my 2nd M.A. It took me 5 quarters to complete the program. By June 1975 I was conferred a M.A.in Education.

*First minority appointed to U. S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science
1973 is the landmark year for the realization of my first political dream. I became the first ethnic minority appointed by President Nixon with Senate confirmation to the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. NCLIS is a permanent Agency advising the President in area of policy making. As a first generation Asian American, a school librarian, and the youngest member, I brought a unique perspective to this 15 member commission.. My first 5 year term on the Library Commission I served Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. In the 80's President Reagan appointed me for two consecutive terms on which I served both Presidents Reagan and Bush. My 15 year tenure happened to be NCLIS ' golden era when several milestone projects were accomplished. The White House Conferences on Libraries and Information Science took place in 1979 &1991, major task force studies of library & information needs were completed, and NCLIS signature & visionary study "Toward an International Network of Libraries and Information." just took off. I am proud that personally I have also made some contribution including Chaired two task force studies of the Role of School Libraries and Role of Cultural Minorities, Chairing NCLIS International Affairs Committee, initiating & coordinating international Bilateral Information Conferences between U.S. & Taiwan in 1987 & 1992, and sponsoring the California State Pre White House Conference on Libraries & Information Science.

*Appointed to the Barry Goldwater Scholarship & Excellence in Education Foundation Board
At the turn of the century I was appointed by President George W. Bush to "Barry Goldwater Scholarship & Excellence in Education Foundation Board. This Foundation in memory of Senator Goldwater was established by Congress with one major mission. That is to award scholarships to college students majoring in math, science, and engineering. The Board is composed of 13 Trustees including 2 U.S. Senators, 2 Congressmen, Secretary of Education as Ex Officio. Each year,\$3 million worth scholarships are awarded to 300 excellent recipients. I was delighted that 10 % of the 300 scholarship winners are Asian-Americans. My service on Gold Water Foundation Board ended in 2008. That concludes my public service era as Presidential appointee. And President George W. Bush was the sixth and the last U. S. President I have served.

*Perception and perspectives of the Presidents and First Ladies

In my years of experience of serving on presidential commission, through personal contacts and interaction with the presidents and first ladies, I have gained a lot of perspectives. Let me start with

President Nixon, my fellow Californian. Who has been regarded as my mentor. It is due to his (3) inspiration I become interested and active in American politics. In my early days as a foreign student, I had the honor of meeting then Vice President and Mrs. Nixon for the first time in the "Pacific Festival" sponsored by Chinese Chamber of Commerce in San Francisco. At the Festival the Nixons were the major VIP guests and I was a guest representing the Los Angeles Chinese Chamber of Commerce. The Nixons appeared interested in my foreign student's role, and offered me kind words of encouragement and a gold pen inscribed with President Nixon's name. I was overwhelmed by this big surprise, and deeply touched by their warmth & friendliness. Since that meeting, I became a volunteer for all Nixon's campaigns in 1960's and 1970s. President Nixon was also a great supporter of libraries. He was responsible for signing the law to establish the U.S. Commission on Libraries as a permanent agency, a model of its own kind in the world. His foreign policy to open the door to China has left a tremendous impact in the world.

In 1976 when I served as the Chair of Women for Gerry Ford, I created history for the Chinese Community again. I was responsible for coordinating Mrs. Betty Ford's visit to Los Angeles Chinatown. It marks the first time in history, an American First Lady ever visited a Chinatown. This historical event has generated tremendous public attention and media interest.

President Ronald Reagan, another Californian, was the 2nd U.S. President who appointed me to two consecutive terms to the U.S. Commission on Libraries. He was also a strong supporter of Education. Community College System is his creation during his governorship. As a great advocate for women, he appointed 3-4 hundred women to federal office, and personally meet and greet them in a White House Luncheon. His Literacy Program is a great contribution in education.

President George Bush's Family Values resonate with Chinese culture heritage. Barbara Bush, the heart and soul of the Bush family, is a supporter of libraries, and read stories to children in public library, NCLIS honorary commissioner. Barbara Bush was the first 2nd lady, Vice President's wife, visited Los Angeles Chinatown during Asian Pacific Heritage Month May, 1988. And I was again responsible for the arrangement. The Bush White House regarded integrity a top priority. Public gifts over \$50 in value is not acceptable.

President George W. Bush, the last president appointing me to the Barry Goldwater Education Foundation Board is famous for No Child Behind education and Anti-Terrorism legislation that generated lots of patriotism. Bush also valued and support community college education.

*First Asian American elected to Los Angeles Community Colleges Board of Trustees
In 1987 I created another history for Asian Americans in politics. I won a local public election and became the first Asian American Trustee ever elected to Los Angeles Community Colleges Board. The election was extremely tough. Running two races against a strong incumbent in a huge district serving 4 million population. Majority of voters are mainstream, Asians only account for 5%. At the end I won by 120,000 votes, ten times than votes average congressman gets. The Asian community played a vital role in this election. They are my strong supporters, particularly in fundraising. On this board I was elected and served for three terms of 12 years until my retirement in 1999. My great victory further affirms the importance of Asian-American representation on the Board. Since my retirement, my seat on this seven member Board continued to be retained by an Asian, Japanese, Korean, and now another Chinese.

*Founding" Performing Arts Foundation For Asian Americans (PAFAA) non profit organization
In 2001 my post retirement music dream came true when I founded the Performing Arts Foundation For Asian Americans. Based on my passion for performing arts and music, I founded PAFAA with a mission to award performing artists scholarships in career development and achieving excellence. And to expose community to performing arts by sponsoring free concerts.

In ten years PAFAA has awarded some eighty performing artists scholarships worth of thousands of dollars and sponsored numerous free concerts for the community.

Principles, Beliefs, and Values represented by my life stories

In retrospect many of my life stories reflect my personal principles, beliefs, and values.

1. **Work Ethics and Credibility** : Once I commit to a public service position, appointed or elected, with or without compensation, I would serve with full efforts and dedication. When I was first appointed by President Nixon to NCLIS I was a full time School Librarian and adjunct college teacher, and a mother of three young boys aged 9, 5, and 3. Thanks to my husband for his understanding and support so I was able to serve for 15 years and make contribution on the Commission. The elected college board position was supposed to be a part time job with part time pay. But I worked just as hard. During my 12 year tenure on the L.A. College Board, for 6 years I served simultaneously on the State Community College Board of Governors which was appointed to me by Governor Wilson. At the end I earned myself a nickname as "Workaholic college Board Member"
2. **To promote Asian ethnic Image and Asian Culture heritage** : Being conscious of my roots, my own ethnic culture, I trust it my obligation to promote my ethnic image and to serve as linkage with the main stream and other ethnic groups. For this reason, I have volunteered to help Chinese community since my foreign student's days. For the same reason I twice arranged for American First Lady Betty Ford and Barbara Bush to visit Los Angeles Chinatown, led our own children to a culture tour to China, and led delegations of commissioners and college educators to Taiwan for culture exchange.
3. **Ethics and Integrity** : As a public servant, my personal ethics and integrity are top priorities. Leadership is to set a good example and to take sacrifices, Two cases speak well for these priorities. One time my college district was facing budget problem. As the Board President, I urged the Board to exemplify by cutting own salary for District staff and faculty to follow. Another case is I declined a high pay position on the City Public Works Board appointed by former Mayor Riordan of Los Angeles because it was against my principle to resign from my College Board and walk away from my voters for the sake of a full pay job. Later, I accepted the Mayor's appointment to the unpaid Commission on Status of Women & served for 8 years.
4. **Public service for Good Cause, Not Self Interest** : I accepted the challenge to run for the College Board because it was for good cause. I helped to found Silver Lake Senior Club without taking credit because it was for good cause. I accepted Mayor's appointment to serve on Women's Commission without pay because it was for good cause. The list can go on & on.

It took me 8 years to have my Memoirs written and published. It served a tri fold purpose. To pay tribute to my deceased parents relative, teachers and benefactors who played important role in my life, to express appreciation to my family, friends, and community, and last but not least, to provide inspiration and revelation to the younger generation. Last year my speaking forum at 5 top notched universities in China was received resoundingly. I will repeat the speaking tour this fall.

Life is full of dreams. As long as there is life, there is dream. Any dream, big or small, will have some impact on the world. Together we make a difference. To put all our dreams together, we will make a huge impact. In closing, I would like to offer an old saying " Many a little pickle makes a mickle" and a Chinese saying "Many a little spark will cause a big fire to start " Therefore, the world must continue to have dreams. And dreams must continue to be fulfilled.