

My Life Story

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By

Tobby Yu-Yung Yen



Rosalinda Hollinger
Storykeeper

Acknowledgements

The Ethnic Life Stories Project continues to emulate the vibrant diversity of the Springfield community. So much is owed to the many individuals from Drury University-Diversity Center, Southwest Missouri State University, Forest Institute, Springfield Public School System, Springfield/Greene County Libraries, and Southwest Missouri Office on Aging who bestowed their talents, their words of encouragement, their generosity of time and contributions in support of this unique opportunity to enrich our community.

The resolve and commitment of both the Story Tellers and Story Keepers fashioned the integral foundation of this creative accomplishment. We express our tremendous admiration to the Story Tellers who shared their private and innermost thoughts and memories; some suffering extreme hard-ship and chaos, disappointment and grief before arriving here and achieving the great task of adjusting and assimilating into a different culture. We recognize your work and diligence in your life achievement, not only by keeping your families together, but by sharing, contributing and at the same time enriching our lives and community. We salute you!

Special acknowledgement to:

Rosalina Hollinger, Editing and layout design

Mark Hollinger, Photography

Jim Coomb, Mapmaker

Idell Lewis, Editing and revision

Angie Keller, Susy Mostrom, Teresa Van Slyke, and Sean Kimbell, Translation

Lee Lowder, Data Transfer and Storage

Heartfelt thanks to Kay Lowder who was responsible for organization and assembly of the stories.

Jim Mauldin

Ethnic Life Stories Project Coordinator.

The Ethnic Life Stories Project....

-giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Liewe Se Storie Afrikaanse | Afrikaanse (2) |
| ŌSŌ GAY HĀY WŌ TAN | Apache |
| قصص من الحياة | Arabic (2) |
| Ga-no-du Ka-ne-he-lv-s-gi | Cherokee |
| 自傳 | Chinese (2) |
| Life Stories | English |
| Histoires De Ma Vie | French |
| Mayer rah-Khaan Knee-Hindi | Hindi |
| 生きてきた道 | Japanese |
| 나의 살아온 이야기 | Korean |
| ഇവിത കഥകൾ | Malayalam |
| Povestea Vie Ţii Mele | Romanian |
| La Historia de la Vida | Spanish (4) |
| Kuwento Ng Aking Buhay | Tagalog |
| געשיחטע פון מאן לעבען | Yiddish |

Birthplaces of the Storytellers

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Martha Baker
San Antonio, Texas

Grace Ballenger
Shanghai, China

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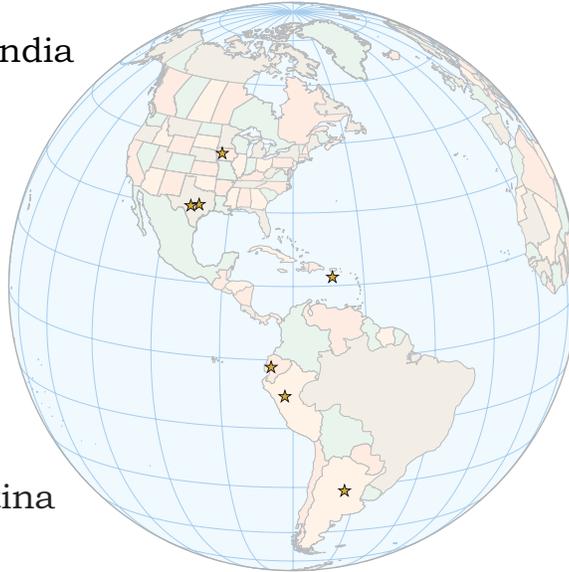
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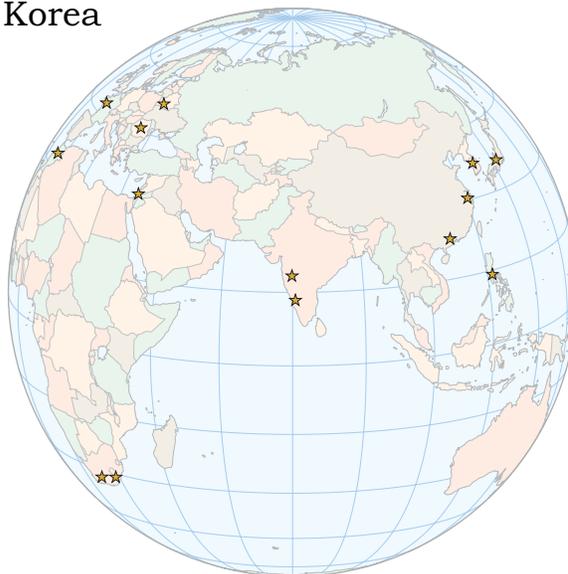
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Tobby Yen
Chung (Zhongshan), China





Tobby Yen
Chung (Zhongshan), China

Introduction

Driving into Springfield for the first time in August of 1999, an impressive, sizeable building, ornamented in splendid, traditional Chinese décor captured my senses. The first time I entered the restaurant, I pondered on its history while enjoying the majestically lavish surroundings and aromatic atmosphere. Bobby Yen, the visionary behind the restaurant's grandeur, proved equally as colorful and notable. In recording Bobby's story, I learned numerous and priceless lessons by listening to him share his culture and centuries-old, Chinese wisdom. I will always treasure the wealth I gained on the hill at Mr. Yens, in Springfield, Missouri. In addition, John demonstrated comparable strengths and a genuine zealotry for life. I am most grateful to Bobby for his intrepidity in telling his story and to John for his delightful support.

Rosalinda Hollinger

Tobby Yu-Yung Yen

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Family History



Yen Family

My roots and traditions come from China where I was born. I lived in the suburbs of Shanghai, China from my birth on February 27, 1945, until the age of two. The town of my birth was Chung in the Zhongshan province of China. My parents named me Yu-Yung and I kept that name until I came to the United States. My grandparents, Xiang-Chun Yen (Grandfather) and Zhu-Lan Yen (Grandmother), remained in Mainland, China also called the People's China, when my parents, Hsiang-Chun Yen (Father) and Chu-Lan Chang Yen (Mother), moved to The Republic of China (Taiwan), for freedom and to escape the communist rule in China. They left China in 1947, when I was two years old.

My parents and their three children, Yu-Jyh Yen (Bill Yen), Yu-Jen Yen (Edward Yen) and I moved to Taiwan without any close relations. The two oldest children are boys and I am the middle of five children. Yu-Hsin Yen (Raymond Yen) and my sister Yu-Mei Yen, (Mei Lee) were both born in Taiwan.



Leaving China meant leaving the older Chinese tradition of four or five generations living under one roof. It also meant missing the large family gatherings and closeness that the older Chinese tradition handed down. My father's family was very wealthy and it was very important to obey rules and to always do right. My parents had to live without their parents close by to help them raise their family. They left China right after World War II.

Mother, Grandfather, Father, Toby and Wife Lily

I don't have any memory of China at the age of two, but I remember Taiwan where my parents brought me up. I didn't see my grandparents again until People's China allowed visitors to enter much later. My parents took a chance for a better life in Taiwan, but they didn't know it would take so long to see the family and

relations they left behind in China. My parents left their wealthy life-styles and thought they could go back to China after a couple of years. They didn't



*Mother Chu-Lan Chang Yen
and Father Hsiang-Chun Yen*

think it would take so long to return and they didn't know they would never have the opportunity to live in China again. In 1972, Nixon began opening the door for the people of Taiwan to travel to China, but the door didn't completely open until about ten years ago.

Although my parents were wealthy in China, I remember growing up in Taiwan when it was still a very young and poor country. Our family lived in Tainan where my father worked in education as a Mathematics Professor. At that time, all industries in Taiwan were government ruled and regulated, so that meant that my father had a good paying and secure job with the government.

Growing up in Taiwan with Chinese Traditions

I describe Taiwan as a beautiful island, but hot, like the island of Hawaii. Our family spoke Mandarin and still does. During my childhood, I remember that life was simple and was free from communism and a safe place to grow up. There was very little crime and people didn't have to worry about locking their doors or letting their children outdoors to play in the

neighborhood. It was a well-governed island where people worked hard together but also "stuck together."

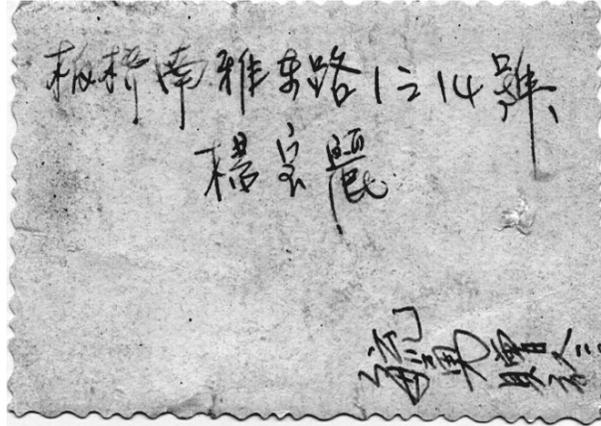
My father was a hard working, quiet man. He was very educated and had attended two universities in China. My mother stayed at home to take care of the house and family. She talked a lot more than my father, but I remember that they both taught us to obey family rules and government law. My parents were strict, but they loved all of us children the same. In my family, our parents didn't treat one child better than the other.

Our family was content, not too rich and not too poor. I remember that my father was paid one hundred dollars a month as a professor and with his salary he and my mother saved money and taught us not to waste anything. We didn't own a family car in Taiwan because everything we needed was close enough to walk or ride a bicycle to. My father rode a bicycle to work every day. Tainan is in South Taiwan and is an old cultural town with a lot of schools and universities.

Because television wasn't around when I was young, we played games outside and Chinese Chess and other board games inside. In the Chinese family tradition, younger generations don't ask older generations, especially the elder generation, too many questions. If adults are having a conversation, younger children cannot stay around and listen; they know they have to leave the adults alone. This is considered respect. The first generation loves their children; they teach them, but they expect children to obey adults.

I grew up speaking Mandarin at home, but I know about seven Chinese dialects. I speak Mandarin, Taiwanese, Cantonese, Shanghai and other

similar dialects. Mandarin is the standard Chinese dialect of all China and referred to as children speak first language, know Mandarin also understand a My first language, born in China, dialect. In China local dialect that in the area, but going out socially you speak a dialect that is common to everyone. Schools in China teach Mandarin.



Chinese writing on back of picture

pidgenese. My English as their but they also very well. They little Taiwanese. because I was was a local you first learn the everyone speaks when you start

Teen Years through Young Adulthood

My teen years included school and going to movies with my friends. We didn't have many school dances, like today. In my culture, parents give you more independence at the age of sixteen. My parents still gave me advice, but they let me make more choices on my own. Some were good and some were bad, but I learned from all of them. That's what my parents hoped for the most; that I learned from my experiences.

I went to school with most of my friends from elementary school through high school graduation. By the age of twenty-one, my parents considered me an adult and that's when I made all my own choices, but they supported me in every way they could.

Chinese Air Force



Tobby Yen in front of fighter

After I graduated from High School, I decided to join the Air Force and train as a pilot. To join the Air Force meant that you needed to pass a lot of testing before being accepted to train as a pilot. When I joined the Air Force about fifteen hundred people applied for the training, but only about a hundred and twenty five were chosen, so I look back at those days and remember only good things about it. I enjoyed my two years in the Air Force and the friends I made. We trained, worked hard and had a lot of good times together.

I knew I would always enjoy flying airplanes, but I decided to come to the United States for more education. I didn't know what I wanted to do for a living back then, but I did want a chance to see if I could succeed in the United States.

The Air Force taught us discipline; our day began at 5:00 A.M. and we kept a strict schedule in training hard as pilots. We had some time to visit family once a week—if we did well and weren't punished for any mistakes. Punishment usually meant not getting your day off and staying behind to work. Sometimes the whole class was punished for one or two or their classmate's mistakes, so it wasn't a good thing to make mistakes. If classmates fought between themselves or if someone didn't dress according to the rules, the whole class could end up in trouble.

I like that kind of training and I think it helped me in the way I work hard today. It also taught me how to plan and prepare for working. For example, we learned to make checklists before we flew. We started our checklists by first checking everything on the outside of the plane when it was still on the ground. Once that was done, we checked the engine to make sure it was in good shape to fly. Next, we checked to make sure that all the instruments worked before we took off from the ground. We kept using our checklists while we were flying, until we landed.



Tobby with Air Force Classmates

This kind of training taught me to keep mental checklists in life, for anything that I thought was important. Even today in my business I make lists and check them off and then recheck them, to make sure that everything is finished and done right.

When I opened up my business, I automatically went through the checklists in my mind. Many things in life are risky and I make sure I do what is necessary to make things go smoother and not fail. I think I started thinking this way in the Air Force. My class started out with about one-hundred and twenty-five students and only about eighteen graduated. Some classmates did not have the education they needed to train as a pilot,

so they left to continue their education; others couldn't handle the altitude at an accelerated speed and they kept getting sick. I think the main reason I learned to fly airplanes and stayed with the training for two years was that when I studied, I studied hard; just like now, when I work, I work hard. I



Group photo with classmates



Tobby (right) with friends on leave

don't believe in being lazy; hard work is important in order to succeed, in anything.

I was the only one in my family to get any Air Force training. I wanted to be a pilot back then, because of all the good training I knew I'd get. Anyone who wanted to become a pilot had to become a fighter pilot first. At that time, the whole country highly respected pilots.

Education helps young people to develop methods and procedures that help prepare them for other things in life. When you're young you can open up your mind to learn because you don't have as many responsibilities; then as you get older you start applying what you learn and apply everything you've learned, with caution.



Mr. Yen (left) with colleague

When you get older you are more careful and that it is why learning how to make mental checklists is so important.

I raised my children by teaching them what I learned in life and challenge them with many things and encourage them in almost anything, but I tell them to be careful in what ever they choose do. Some things you learn by experience and other things you have to make a choice. For example, if you drink too much one time and get sick, then hopefully you learn from that experience and make the choice not to drink too much again.

That's how I give my kids education. I want them to give their best, in whatever they want to do; I don't push them to do what I think they should do. I want them to receive University educations and make a living doing what they enjoy. That's all it takes to make me happy. I support them in what they want to do. If they want to go to school I think that is good, but I don't expect them to be number one in everything.

My First Years in the United States

I chose the name Toby when I came here because it was an easy name for Americans to pronounce and remember. When I first arrived in the United States in December of 1969, I didn't think my English was good enough to go to school so I started working in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant in Columbus, Ohio and took my job seriously. I worked hard and made choices and decisions, step by step. I knew I needed to learn everything I could about the business. I worked seven days a week and saved my money to some day open my own restaurant. I discovered that the cost of living in

the United States was much higher than it was in Taiwan, so I learned to save money and work long hours in order to live comfortably.

I decided to live in a Chinese community in Columbus, Ohio where I could communicate easily in my language. My education in the 1960's in Taiwan, didn't teach English skills, like schools there teach today. I wish I would have had more opportunity to learn the English language better. I've spent the last thirty years of my life learning the language on my own.

I appreciate how my parents taught me the importance of working hard and saving money. For example, my first car cost me six-hundred dollars; it was a 1966 Buick Special. I knew I needed a car to get me to and from work. I drove the same car for five years. I lived in Columbus for two years working seven days a week and saving money, before I married and moved to Washington D.C. My advice on how to save money is to not waste it and never spend more than you make. I believe in saving as much money as possible to stay away from having to live from paycheck to paycheck.

Marriage and Children

A friend introduced me to my wife. Her full name is Chun-Hua Lee Yen, but everyone calls her Lily. We became friends first, before we married. We've been happily married for over thirty years. My wife and I moved to Washington D.C. in 1972 when I decided to join a friend in a restaurant co-ownership. My wife helped me in the restaurant until our children were born and then she stayed home to raise them and take care of family business. John was born in Washington D.C., Paul was born in Charleston, West Virginia and Michael and Betty were born in Springfield, Missouri.



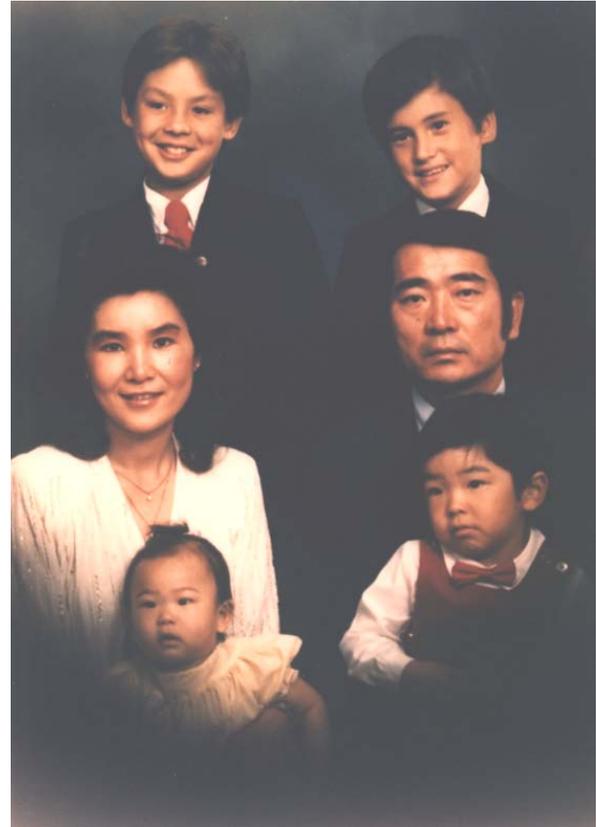
Lily and Toby Yen

I opened my first restaurant, Diamond Head, on South Campbell Street in Springfield, MO, in 1975. I kept working 7 days a week, raising my family; when I had the time, I flew my airplane, a Cessna 82, as a hobby.

I was the first in my family to come to the United States and in 1973 I applied for my oldest brother, Yu-Jyh Yen (Bill Yen) to join me here. My youngest brother Yu-Hsin Yen (Raymond Yen) arrived in 1974 and one by one all of my family followed, even my parents moved here when my father

retired. In 1978, I opened another Diamond Head Restaurant in Joplin and one in Kansas City. In 1979 I opened Grand Fortuna here in Springfield. I was busy all the time, but like I said, I still flew my plane when I could get away, until 1980, when I crashed it.

I remember flying to Columbus, Ohio and on the way back to Springfield the fuel indicator broke and I thought I had enough fuel to fly the rest of the way back. But, right outside of Springfield, I started losing power and elevation and radioed the tower to let them know I was having problems. I gained elevation again and all of a sudden, ten miles away, I started losing elevation fast, so I called the tower again yelling, "ten miles, ten miles." That's when the engine just quit. I was able to restart the engine for a few minutes. The tower gave me clearance to land and using all the emergency procedures, I was able to reach ten thousand feet elevation before the engine quit again. I don't remember thinking or feeling anything, except that I had to concentrate on landing the plane. I did everything I learned in training and crash-landed the plane in some trees. My children were young and I knew that they needed me, so after my plane crash I decided to quit my hobby. My family is the most important thing to me and that is why I work hard, but I knew my hobby was too risky and gave up flying my Cessna.



**The Yen Family (1983)
clockwise from top right: John, Paul, Toby,
Michael, Betty, Lily**

New Orleans, Louisiana

In 1984, I moved my family to New Orleans, Louisiana to open another restaurant. My two oldest boys were in school and I wanted them to have the best education and give them the best opportunities in life. That is why I sent John and Paul to boarding school. They went to the best boarding school I could afford, St Stanislaus in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. I thought it was the best thing for them, but one day my oldest son, John, came home and asked me, "Daddy why are you sending me to a boarding school; most of my classmates come from broken homes and their parents are divorced; don't you love me?" I sat him down and explained: "Yes, I love you, but I want better for you than I have now. I can't teach you what I don't know and it's important that you get the best education. Some things I can teach you, but not everything."

Family Values

In our culture the family does everything to take care of one another and when my parents came in 1978 they helped me and my wife out in many ways. They loved being around the grandchildren and my children learned to keep the old Chinese culture of respecting the older generations. We decide our own future, but family members in the Chinese tradition, help each other when they can, in anything they can.



Relatives in Mainland China

My parents lived here for almost seventeen years and never learned to speak English, but they helped in keeping the Chinese family tradition going. They learned a few words and phrases, but not enough to communicate in the English language. They were retired and learned to enjoy their retirement. They never stayed permanently with any one family. They would stay with my family for a while and then visit my brother and his family and so on; they helped all of us and reminded us of our Chinese roots and traditions. They also helped all the children in the family to learn how a Chinese family behaved and why.

We have a lot of family in China, so every couple of years I would take my parents there to visit. My children have also been to China to meet family. Because my children were born and raised in the United States, they visited Mainland China as tourists. At first they had a difficult time getting used to it, because it was a poor country compared to where and how they were raised. They had to adjust to the water and soda pop just like all tourists visiting any foreign country. My children have good memories and now remember all the good times they had on their visits to China.

China has changed in many ways since my parents lived there. In their days, China was a farming country and families were large. It used to be that Chinese people never divorced; that is all changing now too. The divorce rate is very high, probably higher than the United States. That isn't the way my family believes. My parents and my wife and I were taught that when you marry it is for a lifetime.

Communication and the fast way we can travel have changed the world. People used to walk to get places and now with airplanes we can go thousands of miles in a couple of hours. We use telephones, computers and

televisions to get messages across easier and faster and that changes how we live. It wasn't like this when I was growing up in Taiwan.

My parents became very close to our children and enjoyed them. Although my father was quiet, all the children learned to respect him. My mother enjoyed her grandchildren and while she talked and played with them, she used that time to teach them Chinese family values. My parents spoke in their own Chinese dialect with each other, but they spoke Mandarin when others were around so they could be understood and help the family learn the language.



*Lily Yen and children (l. to r.)
Paul, Michael, Lily, Betty and John*

In the older Chinese culture, names usually mean something. Chinese people that come from big families give their children names that follow a pattern like a poem to help them remember their generations. They memorize the poems to autograph all the family generations and one poem leads to another. It is also used as a form of respect.

Yen Family Order

Yu-Jyh, Yen (Bill Yen)

嚴毓智

(Father)

Yu-Jen, Yen (Edward Yen)

嚴毓仁

Hsiang-Chun, Yen

嚴象春

(Mother)

Yu-Yung, Yen (Tobby Yen)

嚴毓勇

Chu-Lan, Chang (Yen)

張祝蘭

Yu-Hsin, Yen (Raymond)

嚴毓信

Yu-Mei, Yen (Mei Lee)

嚴毓玫

Chun Hua, Lee (Lily Yen)

嚴李春華

Everyone in the family has to obey the first generation, and the third generation has to respect the second and first and so on, down the line. The first generation elders are treated like kings. Today it's different because everyone makes their own money and they think, "Why should I care?" In the past, you depended on your family to take care of you. The grandfather

had the money and the power, and all the generations would report to him for money. He made all the final decisions in a family. Of course if you are leaning on somebody, then you have to follow his worth. Now with smaller families, the husband and wife are both working so that tradition is changing. Today it is important to respect your job and goals too.



Lily Yen on vacation in China

Chinese have a five-thousand year old cultural background, so they always think about what kind of food is best to eat: what is good for your stomach, good for your health, good for your beauty and good to taste; so they consider it and test it throughout life for different age groups and people. Everyone thinks about food, because eating is something we do to survive.

Different Cultures

Every place and country has its own beauty and history. I was raised in Taiwan so I have many good memories there, but I have good memories of every place I have lived.

Food is different depending on the region where people live. For example, the people who live by the mountains in China are usually poor so they eat spicier food. People by rivers or lakes eat and cook good seafood.

American people didn't use to believe in acupuncture, but they do today, because it has worked miracles for many. Most Chinese have their own secret medicine for colds and other sicknesses. Most people can have common sense, but I consider knowledge a specialty. Thinking about what you say, before speaking is important. When I was young, Chinese people didn't say things just to hurt your feelings. If they got angry with each other, they fought without words, shook hands and became friends again. That was the way we handled anger when I was young, but today it is different and that too has changed.

In my childhood, children grew up thinking simple. Children's minds take in all that they see. My generation didn't watch television like children do today. Today, children at the age of two know more than we did, because of the many things they watch on television. Also through technology, five - year -old children learn about computers and technical things, because they grow up with it all around them.



Tobby and Lily celebrating

After living in Louisiana, I returned to Springfield in 1990 and handled Grand Fortuna again and finally began construction on Mr.Yen's in 1996-97 and opened it in 1998. Mr.Yen's restaurant is my dream and everything about it took many years of planning, working hard and saving money.

Dreams and Goals



*Mrs. Yen outside the entrance to "Mr. Yen's",
Springfield, Missouri*

My wife and I worked hard and limited our travel for many years. Of course now we travel more than we used to when we were still raising a family and working toward our dream. We are foreign people and since this was not our own country, we worked hard to make the

money we needed to become successful. For example, if a foreigner wants to make a living and protect themselves in China, then they must realize that only money talks. It is important to save money. "Know-how" in business is very important, but is not enough on its own. You must also learn the business and do everything you know right: customer service, quality and atmosphere. I cook for the customer, not for myself.

My parents lived a long time here in Springfield. They came to Springfield right after my father retired and he died here at the age of eighty-six. My mother lived in Springfield until she was 90 years of age. My parents helped me with advice all my life. I respected my parents and believed in their wisdom and experience. Life is much easier when you listen to the advice of the older and wise.

In the Chinese family tradition, second generations don't question first generation family members. We consider this a form of respect. First generations love their children, teach them, but want them to obey. The best advice my parents gave me was to do right and stay away from all wrong. My mother's brother was a four star general in Taiwan, so staying out of trouble was our way of life. We respect authority. Working hard and setting goals teaches us how to live life successfully and hopefully we will learn from our experiences and not repeat mistakes.

Each restaurant gave me better opportunities and I learned from each experience and kept working hard everyday toward my dream and by the time I opened Mr. Yen's I had twenty-five years of experience to dream big and help it come true. I still think about how to improve my business and restaurant. I continue to set new goals, but I know that my children may not carry out my dream. I believe that teenagers need guidance and I like the older Chinese tradition, where the parents handle independence and help guide their children through life.



Mrs. Yen in foreground of "Mr. Yens" exterior view

I also understand that countries change as the world changes so, handing down family values means that helping my own family is more important than passing on a country's traditions. I like the Chinese tradition, where the eldest grandfather holds the most power, authority and respect in the family and the younger generations honor the older generations.

I know that all people including my children have different personalities and I think that parents, teachers, employers or anyone who instructs or teaches them must learn to see others' strengths and weaknesses, in order to help them succeed. Some people work very hard, but they don't think. Others think, but don't do anything. In other words, I believe in balance and learning to both think and take action to succeed.

I enjoy working and when I'm working I feel happy. I am not a social person, but I am content with working hard. My restaurant experiences taught me a lot about many things in life. For example, good help in a restaurant shows you how good the boss is. If the boss is not good, the worker won't work very well, but if the boss is good the chances of finding a good employee is better.

Successes depend on how well people work together and respect each other. In the restaurant business, that includes customers. A healthy and successful business works like a family, treating each other with respect, and fairness. I believe in teamwork, but I also believe in taking responsibility for your own actions. As for myself, I am a self-made businessman.



*(Top L to R) Mei Lee, Raymond, Toby, Edward, and Bill
(Bottom) Mother Chu-Lan and Father Hsiang-Chun*

All of my brothers and sister are in the restaurant business. My older brother Bill owns "House of Yen" in Joplin and my younger brother Raymond owns "Grand Fortuna" in Joplin. Edward works at the "Grand Fortuna" in Joplin. My sister owns a "Grand Fortuna" in Harrison, Arkansas.

My Family Today

John and Michael graduated from SMSU and Paul from Drury College. Betty graduated from Kickapoo High School and now attends the University of Missouri: Columbia. I sent Paul to Taiwan for one year to learn Chinese communication. Paul started his college education at SMSU, but one day he came to me and said he would like to try the movie industry and so he finished his degree at Drury College and then moved to Los Angeles. A year ago he acted in some Chinese films in St. Louis. He spent one year in Los Angeles, but came back and told me that it was very hard to break into acting without any family or friends in the industry.

I know that my children have talents and dreams of their own and I encourage them to follow what they think is right for them, just as my parents did when I chose to come to the States over thirty years ago. I also know that education can help the younger generations and that sometimes they do not want to follow their parent's choices when it comes to business. I also know that what was good for me may not be the best for my children. My father was a professor, but I found success in a different path. I believe in the Chinese tradition to allow my children to go out and find their own dreams, but I still believe in staying close as a family. I love my family and try to use the Chinese culture and traditions mixed with the American culture to help them with life here in the United States.

What I want to hand down to my children is the family value that the young should learn from the older generations. Even the birth order of the family is important. Children need to obey the first generation, including aunts and uncles and learn to respect their elders to help them through their own life experiences.

I know that life was much easier for me by having parents who offered me advice and wisdom until they died and I want to do the same for my children. I helped my parents when they were older and tried to give something back to them. This way of life is the legacy I want to hand down to my children and future generations. Success comes by taking one step at a time; life is not a lottery and life is not like winning the lottery where success comes with one scratch.

A Second Generation Perspective: by John Yen

I remember my father's dad, my grandfather, as a quiet, stubborn, loving man, who definitely took care of the family. He was pretty much the bread winner of the family, which included all living generations. My grandmother's personality was the exact opposite of my grandfather; you couldn't get her to stop talking. I only remember her in her later years. She was short, round, pudgy with big red rosy cheeks and red hands, which meant good luck in the Chinese culture. According to Chinese culture, the redder your hands, the more good luck you have. She had an extreme amount of good luck. She would play Ma-Jong and although she had a lot of luck in other areas of her life, she always managed to lose money playing Ma-Jong. She loved playing the game and could lose a significant amount of money in one night, during her retirement years. I didn't matter though, because my father and uncles would encourage her to keep playing, by giving her more money to play with.

Neither one of my grandparents ever drove their entire life. They rode bicycles when they were younger, took taxis, but never found it necessary to learn to drive.

I remember respect as the most important value while growing up. We didn't eat until Dad ate, we didn't sit down, until dad sat down. The Chinese culture focuses on the male and the female is a couple of steps behind. It isn't necessarily right or wrong, it's just how that culture decides to live their lives.

I remember when we were very young, Dad would have some of his friends over and they would sit around the kitchen table, talking and laughing. If we

wanted to get a drink from the refrigerator, we'd quietly enter the kitchen, but never without Dad noticing. He would immediately stop all communication with his friends and give us "the look" which prompted us to get our drink and leave as quickly as we could. The minute we left they'd all start talking and laughing again.

I didn't feel comfortable approaching my father about certain issues in life, until I was about twenty-five; right around the time I started working full time in the restaurant. While we were growing up, we didn't see him too much, because he worked seven days a week. When we woke up for school he was still asleep, because he closed the restaurant every night and when he arrived home from work, we were asleep. We rarely saw him, but always saw him if we needed discipline. For example, if we brought home a bad report card, were involved in a fight or suspended from school, Dad made the time to see us. Mom stayed home to watch us, so we seldom got away with anything. We seemed to scheme quite a few mischievous acts. Mom made sure that Dad always knew when we were caught doing something we shouldn't have been doing.

I remember my Dad as a disciplinarian while growing up, but now, especially for me, my relationship with him is much closer. Our relationship was never bad, but my relationship now as an adult is much different. I eat lunch and dinner with him almost daily and he communicates with me on a more relaxed level, because he sees me as an adult now.

I think that traditionally Chinese families do not truly treat their children as adults until they are married and even then, not entirely, until they have children. Until you marry and start having children, you don't have any real responsibilities, but marriage and having your own family changes that.



Michael and Betty



Paul and John (L to R)



Betty

I intend to raise my own family by keeping the same family values I was raised with. It will be a greater challenge for me, since I'm second generation and married an American, but I believe in my parents values and want to teach my children respect, honesty, ethics and other values that have been instilled in me and my brothers and sister, since childhood.

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