

FHS Oral History Project – Lisa Gong Guerrero

Description:

Lisa Gong Guerrero was born in Guangdong Province, China, in 1977. Lisa emigrated to Tampa, Florida, at around five years old with her family. She explained the circumstances that prompted her family to leave China, emphasizing the limited opportunities, especially for young girls and women. Lisa recalled her K12 education experiences, particularly the racial and cultural challenges she faced as a Chinese immigrant. She credited her grandparents and mother for maintaining their Chinese heritage as they increasingly acclimated to American society. Lisa grew up in the Town and Country neighborhood in Tampa and remembered being around many African Americans and Hispanics. Attending the University of Florida in the late 1990s introduced Lisa to the Asian American community outside her family and relatives. She joined several student organizations at UF, including the Chinese Student Union and Asian Student Union, explaining the programs they initiated and their importance generally and personally. After graduating from UF in 2000, Lisa worked for several businesses, traveling in and out of Florida during this time. She attended Barry College of Law in Orlando from 2003 to 2006, working for the State Attorney's Office in the Ninth Circuit upon finishing law school. In addition to outlining her responsibilities, Lisa became the first Asian-American homicide prosecutor, the first Bureau Chief, and the first Asian-American Deputy Chief Assistant State Attorney in that office. During this time, she co-founded the Greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association (GOAABA), underlining the lack of legal organizations focused on the growing Asian population in Central Florida as a central motive for creating GOAABA. In 2024, Lisa ran for Orange County Judge Group Eleven, sharing her campaigning experiences and how it impacted her and the larger Asian American community in Orlando. She also discussed her broader observations about Orlando's cultural and political continuities, changes, and challenges over the past twenty years.

N.B. The oral history begins twenty-two seconds into the audio recording.

Transcription:

00;00;22 - 00;00;38

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Lisa Gong Guerrero on May 22nd, 2025, in Orlando, Florida, for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Can you please restate your name, date of birth, and where you were born?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Yes, my name is Lisa Gong Guerrero. September 9th, 1977. And I was born in China.

00;00;47 - 00;00;48

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Where in China?

00;00;48 - 00;00;56

LISA GONG GUERRERO: It is in the Guangzhou area, Guangdong province, southern parts of China.

00;00;56 - 00;01;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Can you tell me about your childhood growing up in China during [the] mid to late 80s?

00;01;03 - 00;01;30

LISA GONG GUERRERO: I came to the United States when I was five years old. So I have slight memories of my time in China. My dad was a teacher, and he would often have to go to remote areas to teach. So he was away from home. My mom was a nurse, and we lived in the dormitories for medical professionals when I was growing up in China.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And were you an only child?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: No, I had an older sister. Her name is Anna.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I know you were five years old at the time, and maybe older you found out later, but why did your parents want to leave China?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: When we asked them, they told us that growing up, they were hardworking people. They did not have a lot of means and in China, unfortunately, during that time, unless your family was wealthy or you excelled in academics and you were number one in your class, which is really hard to come by because everyone worked so hard and studied so hard, there really were not a lot of opportunities for females. China was a male dominant society. So the males would get the preferential treatment, the opportunities. And so unless you were excelling in everything, there were very little opportunities for females to grow and excel.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Were there other particular challenges that prompted your parents to leave?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I think they saw the limited opportunities in China for them. And we had this amazing opportunity that my grandmother gave us. My grandmother was born in the United States, and she went back to China, and she grew up in China, but she immigrated to the US, so she asked my mom and our family if we would be interested in coming to the US. And my parents, not knowing what to expect, were in their mid-30s, they were like our opportunities here are limited. We are really thinking about our family, the girls, and let's go and see what opportunities are there over in the US.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But your parents were born in China?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Yes.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So around five—so you left China in 1982?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: 1983.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And did you come to Central Florida [or] somewhere else first? Where in the United States specifically?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: So we settled in Tampa, Florida. And my family still lives in Tampa, Florida, that was where my grandparents and our family was.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And I know you were very young, so this question might be a little meaningless, but nevertheless, in what ways did your perceptions about the US change once you acclimated here and settled here permanently?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I did not know what to expect. I remember getting off the airplane, and my first kind of glimpse into the United States was foreigners, especially with different color hair, blond hair, blue eyes, blue eyeshadow. You know, these very exotic females walking around that looked nothing like me. And so it was a very big shock as a five year old. And so I remember hiding behind my mom and, and asking her, “Who are all these people?” And that was when my parents had to, on the spot, give my sister and I American names. So that was how we got our American names.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So what is your Chinese name?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Gong Xiao Hong.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From that point forward, you went to school here. So just talk to me about your elementary, middle school, [and] even high school experience.

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I started kindergarten in Tampa. My sister and I attended all public schools. I remember just growing up my mom would always stick to her cultural familiarities. And everything was different. You know, lunch was different. People around us spoke a different language. My sister and I had to learn a new language. But as kids, I think we adapt rather quickly. Of course, early on there were some bullying because we looked different, and we did not fully speak English. But I just remember my parents always encouraged us to

study hard and provided for us the best that they could. They both worked in restaurants early on. My mom was a hostess. She later became a waitress. And then my dad worked in the kitchen. But I just remember growing up we were different. Even in naptime in school, normally you would send along a blanket, and you would have the kid's name on the blanket, [and] instead of putting my English name, my mom had sewed in my Chinese name to my blanket. And so those little things really kind of kept our identity. But my parents wanted us to assimilate, so they were like, "Okay do not worry about speaking Chinese. Just learn English. Just try to be American." But I think we were blessed because I had my grandparents nearby, and my grandparents spoke very limited English. And so when we communicated with my grandparents, we had to communicate in Chinese. And so communicating with them and at home, I was able to retain my Chinese language, which I am very grateful for right now because it is so invaluable to know a second language and to be able to communicate with people who speak a different language.

00:07:44 - 00:08:00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, absolutely. And to that point, can you share other examples of how your mom and your parents sort maintained their Chinese heritage and culture living in America at that time?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Yeah, it was mostly through food. And they would cook food that was familiar to them. We still celebrated Chinese holidays. So a lot of it was customs and traditions that they had carried over from China. Another big thing was back then in the 80s, Hong Kong drama was really big. And so I remember one of our hobbies was going to the Chinese grocery store every single week picking up five or seven VHS tapes of Chinese dramas. And they were kind of like telenovelas, like they were very addictive dramas. And so, my mom, my sister and I would stay up super late to watch those. And my dad would be upset with us and say, "Why are you watching all that TV?" But I think watching that kept my sister and I just we related it to the Chinese culture more because we saw it on television, people like us. We kept the language, we understood what they were saying. And so that was something that I think helped us retain our cultural identity as well, too.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You also mentioned how you experienced bullying, of course, for being different. Can you share any specific examples of what you encountered during that time in school?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Yeah, I think in the playground I would have kids making fun of me because of my face. They were saying that I had a flat face and, my last name, Gong. You know, I think back then, the Gong Show was pretty popular. So they would joke around saying that I was the Gong Show. Kids can be quite cruel. And I think at that age, we do not realize that none of that really matters, but it really was hurtful.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What elementary school and middle school did you attend?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: In Tampa, I first started at Town and Country Elementary, and then we switched over to Dickinson Elementary after we moved. And then I went to a lot of different schools. I went to Dunbar Middle School for sixth grade. Blake Middle School for seventh. Webb Junior High for eighth and ninth, and then Jefferson High School for the remainder of my high school.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Somewhere around that time, in 1989, the Tiananmen Square event occurred. And I know, of course, you were here. But I am curious. How did your parents react to that event? And they did they try to hide it from you or show it and did it reinforce your family's decision to leave?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: You know, my parents, at that time, I think they were just thinking about surviving. They had their own challenges. You know, living in an unfamiliar setting, not knowing the language. I think for them, they focus more on providing for their family and just making sure that we were taken care of, we had the necessities. They really just kept their heads down. Just worked and spent time with us as much as they could. We did not really talk about what was happening in China. I am sure they probably talked amongst themselves, but Asian parents. they generally keep a lot of things to themselves. My sister and my cousins always say that that generation is like silent suffering. They want to keep whatever that is bothering them or, troubling them to themselves. They do not like to kind of tell their kids that they do not want the kids to inherit the trouble. They just want the kids to focus on school, be happy, just have a happy childhood. So my parents never talked to us about anything that was troubling to them or anything about China. We saw it on the television, obviously, but my parents did not really focus. Their big thing was you need to go to school. School was not optional. College was not optional. And you need to do well. And you need to graduate and get a good job afterwards.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And we are going to get to the college experience. But, before that, I wanted to ask, how was Tampa like in the 1980s? I know again, you were growing up, but what was Tampa's cultural scene or in general, what was Tampa like during that time?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: So we stayed to our friends and family. Tampa at that time was not very diverse. We lived in a lower middle class neighborhood, where there were a lot of Spanish and Hispanics. There were not a lot of Asian people. My parents worked in a Chinese restaurant, and that was the extent of the Asian people that we knew. Even in schools back then, they would bus us into the inner city schools. So a lot of those schools that I named, the middle and the junior high schools, were in the lower African-American neighborhoods. So I grew up with a lot of minorities, but the minorities were not necessarily Asian. It was not until I went to college that I had this explosion of Asian people everywhere, and it felt weird, because growing up, the Asian people I knew were my relatives and a couple of friends from school.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What neighborhood specifically in Tampa?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Town and Country.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And how did growing up with other minorities, people from different places and possibly other children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, how did that impact you at that time?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I think we all had similar experiences. We definitely had different cultures. And so there were a lot of misunderstandings. But, I think in that, there was also a lot of similarities, a lot of struggle, a lot of hard work. A lot of “we have to prove ourselves. We have to prove that we belong here.” And so we had to work hard. I had a lot of friends who were minorities because we just kind of got into a group and we were looking out for each other, and we just kind of, I do not know, we gravitated towards each other.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What year? And where did you attend college?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I started college in 1996. I went to the University of Florida.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Did you experience any cultural shock when you were in college?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Yeah, the explosion of Asian people everywhere. It was my first taste of freedom. Moving out of the house, staying in the dorm. I remember my first college roommate was an Indian girl. [I] did not know her. And so it was very different. But the great part was knowing that there were a lot of other people that looked like me, a lot of Asian Americans who are going through the same things as I am. And we just found to have a lot in common. And I gravitated towards those organizations. So when I was at UF, I was part of the Chinese Student Union, and then the Asian Student Union as well, too, and then student government and so forth.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What were some of the programs or events that those organizations created and initiated?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Just a lot of social events, a lot of performances. It allowed the students to get back in touch to their culture and their roots. Sometimes they celebrated

holidays that my parents had talked about, but then, like, were openly celebrating it in a big celebration. And that was something that was really nice to see. And then seeing all of my college friends embrace it. And you know, keep the tradition. We talked about it, we shared similarities, we exchanged stories. So that was very comforting.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And I might ask this question again, because you continue to serve in prominent positions in cultural organizations to this day. But why was it important for you at that time to reconnect with your culture, to maintain your culture?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: You know, I did not know at the time how important it was because growing up my parents were like, "Okay, be American, assimilate, do not worry about Chinese." But when I got to college, it just gave me kind of my identity. Like these are the people who are struggling the same as me. And they have the similar upbringing. And we were in some ways encouraging each other and supporting each other. So that was just a light bulb in me that I want to continue to hang out with these people. I want to, at that time I did not know that I wanted to make a difference in this area, I just was having a great time. I enjoyed meeting all these people. And not only was I meeting Chinese people, I was meeting Vietnamese, Filipino, Japanese, and so it was just like a new world opening up.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And to that point, what did you learn about yourself, other Asian cultures, but also what America is during that time?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I think I had a very limited understanding of America and the Asian American culture in America, because when I was in Tampa, we predominantly hung out with families, so Chinese people. I was not exposed to a lot of Filipinos or Vietnamese or Japanese people. And so just meeting all of them and expanding my understanding of the world, of the culture because at college, there was just such a nice melting pot of diversity. And so it was really nice.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was your major and why?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: My major was decision information sciences. That major is kind of like, part business, part computer. And at that time, I was just interested in that area. I knew I wanted to do something in business, but I also knew that I wanted to go to law school. So I wanted to major in something that was valuable and could if I wanted to fall back and did not want to do law that I could fall back on that major.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: When did you graduate college at UF?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: [I] graduated in 2000.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And did you immediately go to law school thereafter? What was your trajectory at that point?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: So I knew I would always want to be a lawyer, which law actually is a nontraditional occupation for Chinese Americans. But I knew I wanted to be a lawyer, and so I decided to take a detour, for a little bit. So at that time when I was graduating in the business sector, the big five consulting companies were really sought after, every business major wanted to work for Anderson Consulting, Price Waterhouse, PWC, Deloitte and so I had a couple of job offers right after college, had an offer from IBM, and I had an offer from Accenture. So I joined Accenture and worked for them for three years, traveled a lot as a consultant, and then decided to go back to law school.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Where did you travel?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I was working in Saint Pete, and I had a project that brought me to Austin, Texas for a year. And then I was staffed in Maryland for a good part of a year.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And I am curious, how was living in those in those different states for a brief period of time, how did that change or perhaps even deepen your perspective about America, and being Asian in America?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: Texas was different. Austin is very progressive and young. But our project was staffed in Taylor, Texas. So I would stay in Austin and then commute to Taylor, which is about a forty-five minute, hour drive, to the client site. And that was very rural. I think there was only one or two restaurant in town, one motel. So very small, rural living, which sounds like the heartland of America. And that was interesting. But the highlight of my job with Accenture is, they employed a lot of brilliant people from all walks of life, from all sorts of college majors. And so I met a lot of brilliant people who were just smart and engaging, and I was able to travel. Sometimes we worked an insane amount of hours, but we also, because a lot of people were traveling, we would also get together and congregate after work and just unwind and de-stress together.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: A few questions in one. Where did you attend law school? What year and what was your experience like as an Asian American woman?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I started law school in 2003. I went to Barry University School of Law here in Orlando. That was why I came to Orlando. I decided, at the last minute, to apply to law school. After about two and a half years, I was like, "Okay, now it is time for me to think about going to law school now." And so as spur of the moment I think it was after some family tragedies, I remember my grandparents had passed away, and I just thought that this is the time to go back to school, make a change. I was making a pretty good living as a consultant. You know, as a young person, being able to travel, meet all these people was exciting. But I just felt a void. I always wanted to be a lawyer. I want to do something that I could make more of a difference. I was making money for these large companies and corporations, but I wanted to be able to give back to the community. And so I decided to finally go to law school.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And when did you finish?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: [I] finished in 2006. And I started at the State Attorney's Office for the Ninth Circuit right after graduation.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what was that experience like?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: I had never imagined in my wildest dreams that I would be a prosecutor, having a somewhat technical undergraduate degree and then working as a consultant. I thought I was going to be an IP [Intellectual Property] attorney. I really thought I had even gone to Franklin Pierce over the summer, and specialized in their IP program, but I interned at the State Attorney's Office, [and] interning with one of the judges and did my first trial, I absolutely fell in love with the courtroom. You know, at that time, there were not a lot of Asian female trial attorneys or prosecutors that I could look up to. There was actually one person in the office at that time, who was a Filipino, and he was kind of like my mentor, but I just fell in love with prosecution. I love being in the courtroom. I love helping people and just going to work every single day and doing justice and making a difference in the community. It was a lot of work, but I just felt a great sense of fulfillment.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your Chinese heritage influenced your practice? If it has.

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: It has made me work hard. I was at the State Attorney's Office for eighteen years. You know, rose up through the ranks, started in county court prosecuting misdemeanors and criminal traffic offenses. Then going all the way up the ladder to prosecuting sex crime, homicide, then becoming a supervisor as the County Court Bureau Chief and then subsequently, Deputy Chief Assistant State Attorney. When you were there working, we were working an insane amount of hours, and the cases never stopped, and we were always in court. But when I left, I finally kind of was able to reflect on my path in that office. And it was amazing to finally realize that I was the first Asian-American homicide prosecutor in that

office, the first Bureau Chief and the first Asian-American Deputy Chief Assistant State Attorney. So when I left, I [supervised] multiple areas of the office. I [mentored] young attorneys. I [trained] them. I [created] policy. I [helped] the state attorney draft diversion programs. And so it was a very rewarding career.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And at some point during this time, and you could share the specific years, you also started to join cultural organizations in Orlando, like the Asian-American Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Orlando Bar Association, and the Asian version of the organization. Can you just tell me what year you joined those organizations, why you decided to join, and what was your roles within them?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: When I was a young attorney, I think it was 2009, a group of Asian-American attorneys got together and said, "You know what? There is not a group advocating and connecting Asian-American attorneys. There is a growing Asian-American population in Orlando." So we decided to form the Greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association. We recently celebrated our fifteenth anniversary last year. And it was an amazing celebration. We brought back all of our boards, all of our officers, all of our founding members, and celebrated the milestone. And it was probably one of the most rewarding parts of my career, being a past president, a founding member, and just knowing that that organization is thriving right now. Then after the Greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association, I continue to become involved. I was involved with the Orange County Bar Association, which is an organization with over 3000 members, made up of judges, attorneys, paralegals, law students. And I have been involved with that throughout the course of my career. I was lucky enough to join the board in 2000. And I am currently serving as their treasurer, and I will be sworn in as the president-elect tomorrow.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what were some things that you did as past president for the Greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association? And I know they are different organizations, but what do you plan on doing or implementing when you get sworn in as president elect for the Orange County Bar Association?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: So for the Greater Orlando Asian American Bar Association. What I am most proud of when I was president was, we knew that there was an increasing population for Asian Americans. We also knew that law is a nontraditional career path for Asian American students. And so, we started the career pathways in the law during my presidency, at GOAABA, short for Greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association. And we would bring this panel of attorneys in different practice areas, different backgrounds, and we would talk to high school students, college students, and kind of introduce them to the practice of law. Many of us are first generation attorneys. We grew up not having any attorney role models, not knowing what the practice of law was like. Not having any mentors. And so a lot of our parents worked in restaurants, nail salons, or grocery stores. And so having these people that look like them, attorneys, people that they can aspire to be, careers that they can explore, was really

meaningful. And I am really proud that we continue that program today. On May 2nd, we did our career pathways in the law at the Orange County Courthouse. And every single year that program grows and grows. And now we are having students consider, okay, maybe law is another area that we can explore. I think the more information they have, the smarter they can be. And so we are just giving them the opportunities, hoping to provide them with mentorship and letting them decide what direction that they want to go into.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: About a year ago, you ran for Orange County Judge Group Eleven. Why did you pursue that decision? Why did you make that decision? And just talk to you about your experience.

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: So after eighteen years at the State Attorney's Office and going up to as high as Deputy Chief Assistant, which is you know, supervising a vast majority of the office, I just decided I have had a very fulfilling career at the State Attorney's Office. And I was ready to move on to the next stage of my career. My husband and I often tell my son, who is a soccer player, that you miss a hundred percent of the shots that you do not take. And so if we are telling him this, I have to follow my own advice. And so when I became a lawyer, there were dreams and goals and aspirations that you always try to achieve. And one of those was one day to become a judge. And then the next one was opening up my own law firm. And so at that point, eighteen years at the State Attorney's Office, I was doing my job well. I was very comfortable in my position. I was in a place where I had a lot of influence, but I just decided maybe this is the time to kind of explore and see what else I can do. When I was feeling that that was around kind of January, February timeframe. And so I started exploring, "Well, what if I ran for Judge?" Not having any political experience, not knowing what it would entail. Not sure how I was going to do it. No specific funding. Being a government attorney, I just decided now it is time to switch career. I am going to leave on a high note and go into the unknown world of campaigning and running for judge.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: In what ways did you—because I am assuming you are probably, and you correct me if I am wrong, the first Asian-American woman to run for that position, or am I wrong?

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: We have had. They did not have an opponent. We had an Asian American male judge who did have an opponent and who had to run to retain his seat. The female judges so far have not drew an opponent, so I do not think they have had to fully run an election.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. And my question is essentially as a Chinese American woman, what was that like? What was the feedback, the reception during your campaigning? How did your upbringing or your diverse background help you perhaps? Just talk to me about those dynamics.

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LISA GONG GUERRERO: So it was hard. Campaigning is not easy. But I am glad I did it because I learned so much and I grew so much. You know, definitely one of the harder parts is going door to door. I knocked on so many doors trying to introduce myself to the citizens of Orange County. And I had to campaign the entire Orange County. Certain times my background helped. You know, there were a couple of doors where the citizens only spoke Chinese, so I was able to connect, and they were so proud. I think a lot of people, when they realized that I was Chinese and they themselves are Asian or Chinese Americans, they felt very proud, even though they did not know me. And I think I made it a point to also speak to the youth and tell them how important it is to engage in election process, register to vote. I spoke to a lot of different residents from different backgrounds, different organizations. It forced me. I never thought that I was an outgoing person. Introvert, I always thought that I am very shy, but it forced me to go out to talk to people, to meet people, to go to functions alone and to network, to be able to explain myself. One thing that I do not do well is talk about myself. I think as Asian Americans, we grow up with the sense of you work hard, you do not boast, or you do not brag about your accomplishments. You just work hard, and you let your hard work speak for itself. And so having to tell people my experience, my qualifications, why I deserve to be a judge was something that I had to learn. And as being an Asian American, that was something that did not come easily. But I have grown, and I have learned so much throughout that process. Even though I did not get the results that I wanted, and I did not win, it was really nice after the fact that, people approached me afterwards and said, "You know what? You really inspired me. You know, it took a lot of courage to run and you doing that made me think that I could do something like this in the future." And so it put a spotlight on me. And hopefully that inspired other people to kind of see that, "Hey, you can do this, you can succeed." And so that was something that I was very grateful for.

00;38;20 - 00;39;02

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And I want to circle back on the proud element. Did you yourself and other people, whether those people you were knocking door to door or even close friends, family, do you think that sense of pride came from the fact that in China, perhaps something like this would not be possible for you as a woman, in a state where there is a lot of political dissention and things of that nature. Do you think that was where that sense of pride came from?

00;39;02 - 00;39;56

LISA GONG GUERRERO: I think Asian Americans do not necessarily get involved in politics. And they just make money, provide for their family, they keep their heads down. They do not want to cause any ripples. They hate confrontation. So for me to get into politics and put myself out there and run was, I think, something out of the ordinary. I would have never imagined getting off that plane when I was five years old, that I would be running for judge or that I would someday be president of a bar association. So I think through my parents hard work, their sacrifices, I think, have paid off for them. This is exactly what they wanted for us.

00;39;56 - 00;40;25

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. You spent most of your life here in Florida. Different parts from the coast in the west, so Tampa. Gainesville. Orlando. So I am going to ask it more in a broader sense, but from your perspective, how has Florida changed since you have been here? You know, culturally, economically, in whatever sense you want to take it.

00;40;25 - 00;41;36

LISA GONG GUERRERO: So I have seen a lot more diversity, especially in Orlando and Tampa, the two areas that I predominantly reside in. And it is really encouraging to see the growth of diversity, the excitement that the diversity brings. On the other hand, I feel like we are trending backwards, with the country in general, with the dismantling of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion [DEI] initiatives. And so I think it is even more pressing now for me and some of my colleagues to go out there and create these opportunities for people who otherwise did not have these opportunities or did not have this exposure, and so it is even more important nowadays to be out there, to help build up these people, especially immigrants and people with lower income families, just to give them the opportunity and give them a glimpse of what is possible for them.

00;41;36 - 00;41;43

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And to that point, what other challenges does Orlando or Florida face today?

00;41;43 - 00;42;21

LISA GONG GUERRERO: I think a lot of businesses and organizations are just scared of the unknown. Before there was a big push on DEI initiatives try to diversify, try to give everyone opportunities. Now everyone is uncertain, scared. Should we not talk about DEI? Should we not have programs? Should we not have training about it? And I do not think they know what the consequences are, and I think that is the chilling effect for people.

00;42;21 - 00;42;28

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your perspective, how will Orlando change in the next twenty-five, thirty years.

00;42;28 - 00;43;49

LISA GONG GUERRERO: I hope this growth in diversity continues. Our Asian American population has been growing, in large part due to the investment in the food culture. I think that has carried a lot in Orlando. And I just hope this diversity continues because when we are more open and we learn about the different cultures, we understand each other better. I think that fosters a better working environment. Empathy. I think when we are closed off and we are only in our small segments, then we misunderstand each other, and we do not have the patience and the tolerance to work together to understand each other's differences. And so my hope is that we continue to grow in our diversity. We continue to understand and be open and accepting of different cultures. And every culture has its own beauty. We all have our own challenges, but I just hope people keep an open mind and not jump to conclusions and just work together.

00;43;49 - 00;44;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And I know we have discussed this throughout our conversation, but I ask explicitly, how has your Chinese heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in Central Florida specifically?

00;44;03 - 00;45;24

LISA GONG GUERRERO: I think it influenced me. We have an emphasis on working hard. We have an emphasis that nothing is given to you. Nothing is guaranteed. When we were growing up, my dad always told us there is no such thing as a free lunch. You do not get anything for free here. If you want something, you need to work for it. And that is the kind of the model that my sister and I have always held on to. My sister, who is very successful in her own right, she is a CEO of a startup in Singapore. And she continues to break the glass ceiling women in tech. But we have always prioritized education. We have always prioritized hard work. And we have always prioritized family. Because we saw how hard my parents worked, even though they had very limited resources, but they were still able to provide for us, even working in kitchens and restaurants. They were able to save, they were able to buy a house, they were able to put us in college. And so we see that as a role model of what we want. And I hope to do the same for my son.

00;45;24 - 00;45;35

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Lastly, if someone is listening to this recording fifty or a hundred years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;45;35 - 00;46;16

LISA GONG GUERRERO: I want them to know that the differences in our culture make us so beautiful and so interesting. I am so grateful for Florida for giving my family a home. It has been very welcoming. You know, the opportunities that my parents had envisioned for my sister and I, we were able to find it in Florida. We found that if you work hard, you have a goal, you can achieve it. And we were able to live out our American Dream here.

00;46;16 - 00;46;23

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Lisa, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day to speak with me and share a little bit of your life story. I appreciate it.

00;46;23 - 00;46;25

LISA GONG GUERRERO: Thank you for the invite. Thank you.