

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH LILY TEO**

An Oral History Conducted by Stefani Evans

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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Claytee D. White  
Director, Oral History Research Center  
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## PREFACE



“When you are young, try to make as much money as you can. Then when you are old, it will be okay for you.”

Born in the racially and ethnically diverse country of Singapore as the eldest of nine children, Lily Teo was raised by her strict paternal grandmother, who taught her to cook and sew. Singapore was then a British colony, so Lily was schooled in the British system. Lily was raised Buddhist but converted to Catholicism in high school. Following her graduation from Cambridge High School, she worked as a secretary in the Singapore office of a Chinese import/export company headquartered in Malay. She eventually married the Buddhist son of the company's owners and traveled with him on business for many years. She stopped working when her children were young, but when they got older, she opened her own catering business for construction workers. She went to the wet market every morning, bought all fresh ingredients, and, in her on-site temporary kitchen, prepared breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner for workers on the job site. Lily's son and one daughter are Catholic, while her other daughter is Buddhist. Lily speaks English and Malay; her husband spoke English and the Chinese dialect of his parents, and her children speak English, Malay, and Mandarin. Every Lunar New Year as her children grew, she sewed new pajamas and the Peranakan traditional dress, kebaya, for her family. Lily's daughter, Stella Kalaoram, sits in and expands on several topics.

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February 7, 2022  
in Las Vegas, Nevada  
Conducted by Stefani Evans

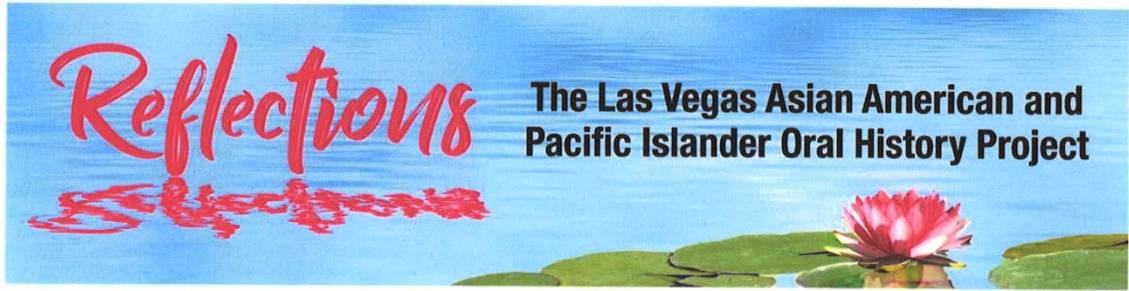
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Teo starts off by talking about what it was like growing up as the eldest of nine children and her grandparents, particularly her grandmother, who taught her how to cook and sew. She discusses the Peranakan food she learned how to make as well as how they would make it. Next, she moves on to her school days, what she did after graduating, and how she met her husband.....1-6

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**This is Stefani Evans. Today is February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022. I'm here today with Lily Teo and Stella Kalaoram.**

**Lily, may I ask you to please pronounce and spell your first and last name for the recording, please?**

L-I-L-Y, T-E-O.

**Thank you so much. We usually begin by asking you to tell us about your family, about your childhood, your brothers and sisters, your upbringing, anything you want to tell us about your young life.**

I am the eldest in the family of nine. My mother has seven girls and two boys. I was brought up by my grandmother.

**Where were you born and raised?**

I was born in Singapore and raised in Singapore.

**Was this grandmother that raised you your mother's mother or your father's mother?**

My father's mother. Because I am the eldest grandchild for them, so they picked me and raised me up. My grandfather and my grandmother loved me very much.

**SK:** *First grandchild.*

**Tell us about living with your grandparents.**

My grandparents are living with my auntie, my father's sister, younger sister, because my father is the eldest, and then my auntie is the sister. My father has three brothers and two sisters. I was brought up by my grandmother, and she taught me everything. Everything in life.

**Tell us some of the things that she taught you.**

She always said being a girl, you have to know how to cook, and you must know how to sew; that's the most important thing. Otherwise, nobody wants to marry you.

**What kinds of things did you sew?**

When my children were young, I used to sew for them. I go shopping. When I see the pattern, I buy material and come back and sew it for them for the New Year.

*We didn't have any clothes from the store. All the dresses we had were all handmade by mom.*



**What about the boys in your family, did you sew for them as well?**

I used to sew for my husband, his things, and my son, too. And their pajamas.

*We got new pajamas every year especially in Chinese New Year; that's a must.*

**Were you raised with cousins when you were raised with your grandparents?**

Yes. My auntie has one girl and one boy. We grew up together. But I'm the only one that knows how to cook. My cousin, she doesn't know. She doesn't even know how to cook rice because she is the one just reading books, and my grandmother is the one, whenever she's cooking or she's



sewing, she will always say, “Come here and see so you can learn.” That’s where I learned, from her.

**She was your mentor as well as your grandmother.**

Yes.

*And a very strict one, too.*

Yes, very strict. I have my mother’s side, and she’s a very good cook. I learned from my two grandmothers. One is good at sewing and making cakes, all the Peranakan cakes, and the other one is good for cooking all the food, all the Peranakan food.

**The Melakan food.**

*Yes. It’s a culture back in Singapore. They belong to a certain, I would say, culture that they make specialties, a certain kind of dessert. My mom belongs to that side, which is rarely seen nowadays. She is saying that her grandma on her mom’s side taught her how to do the dishes, how to cook dishes, any kind of curries and stuff like that. But then the other grandparents’ side, the other grandma is making at desserts. She got it from both sides.*

**Lucky.**

But the one is very strict. She will teach you all the ingredients she wants to cook, and you must remember it the one time she gives it to you. She will teach you again, but at that time, no.

Whatever she had in her hands she would give you.

*Yes, she would just sling it across to her.*

We don’t have blenders. We have to pound. We have to pound all the ingredients before we cook. We don’t have a blender.

**What kind of tools did you use? Given that you didn’t have a blender, what kinds of tools did you use to cook with?**

*We have what we call the mortar, so we have to actually pound it with the grain pounder. Back then they don't have blenders and things like that, so everything is crushed with hand and molded and everything.*

**Do you know some stories about your grandparents when they were young?**

My great-great grandfather comes from China. He migrated here to America, and from America he comes to Singapore. I think he has two or three wives. It's traditional for men to have two or three wives.

*Back in the days, yes.*

**Tell us about your education, your schooling.**

I went to school from...elementary school?

*Back then they would call it senior Cambridge; that means they completed high school.*

I completed my high school. It's from London; the certificate comes from London.

*During my mom's time, Singapore was ruled by the British colony. They make sure that everybody has an education, which she has. Being a girl, she has the same opportunity as the boys, also. When she finished Cambridge, she was that close to being a teacher because back then, having finished high school is considered pretty high.*

**After you graduated high school, what did you do?**

I worked. When I was about sixteen to seventeen years old, somebody came to my grandmother and asked my grandmother for my hand in marriage, and then my grandmother says, "No, no, no. She is only sixteen. No. She still has to go to school and complete all the school." So, no, my grandmother doesn't allow. Usually, at sixteen, seventeen, they ask you to go and get married, but my grandmother says no. She says, "No, she's too young."

**She was looking out for you.**

Yes.

**When you describe yourself, do you describe yourself as Melakan?**

Yes.

**Can you explain that culture, please?**

Our culture is girls. When you get up in the morning, the first thing you do is make your bed.

You do your bed, and then after that you have to clean the house, and then you have to learn how to cook. Every morning before we go to school, my grandmother will ask us to learn the spices she is going to cook for the dishes. She will ask you to pound first before you go to school, so we have to get ready for her. You can ask only three times. The third time you ask her again what she has in her hand, that's it.

**How long did that take you in the morning before you went to school?**

We had to get up about six o'clock in the morning and prepare everything, clean the house, clean everything, make everything clean, and then you can go to school.

**Tell us about what you did after school. After you graduated and you worked, what did you do for work?**

I worked in an import and export company as a receptionist, typing.

*She does a lot of typing work, secretary. She did secretarial work after she graduated.*

**How long did you do that?**

I think about five years.

**And then what?**

Then I get married.

*After that she married my dad. My dad was the messenger guy.*

**He was the messenger that came to your business.**

Yes.

**Tell us about your wedding.**

Very simple wedding. We go and register.

*You just went and registered and marriage and that's it.*

**What year was that?**

*I was born in '69.*

Nineteen sixty-eight.

**Where did you marry? Where was this registry office?**

Somewhere in town, in Singapore.

**Is that where you lived after you married?**

Yes.

*Yes, that's where she lived, but she traveled a lot with my dad because my dad is not the messenger guy. Actually, his parents owned the business. They have a timber business.*

**You worked for his parents.**

Yes.

*Yes. She traveled back and forth from Singapore to Malaysia because the business is centered in Malaysia for timber.*

**Malay, did you speak that language as well?**

Yes.

*The culture that she's from, it's called Peranakan, Nyonya Peranakan. Her race is actually Chinese, but she is fluent in English and Malay, but she does not speak a word of Chinese. That's why the culture, because the Chinese that were in Melaka actually all spoke only Malay and English because during that time they migrated to Singapore. She is fluent only in English*

*and Malay, but not Chinese. That's why she spoke fluently, and we do as well, and my dad is full Chinese.*

**Your husband speaks Chinese?**

Yes.

**Between you and your husband, you could go anywhere, then.**

Yes.

**How long did you travel with that business? That sounds like an exciting life.**

*When I was growing up, I remember not being home most of the time. I traveled with them as well for many years until we were ready to go to school, when it's time to go to kindergarten.*

When it's time for them to go to school, I have to stop.

*Then she stayed home with us, and my dad continued traveling a lot.*

**Did you stay home when the children were in school, or did you go back to work as they got older?**

No. My mother-in-law tells me, "If you go to work, all your pay will go to the babysitter." I stayed home after them.

**How many children did you have?**

Three.

*We have a stepbrother from a previous marriage, but between my dad and her, she has only two, me and my sister.*

**The first marriage, how long did that last?**

*It's not even a marriage. She was a single mom.*

**When did you come to the United States?**

The year 2010.

*After our dad passed away, I moved her here.*

**Had you visited before?**

Yes, every year. I visit her every year.

*Every year. I've been here thirty years, so she comes here every year to visit me.*

**When you first saw Las Vegas, what did you think?**

*Before Las Vegas, I lived in California, so she had been to California first.*

**San Bernardino, correct?**

*Yes, San Bernardino.*

**What did you think about Las Vegas?**

Oh, it's very good, and there's a lot of slot machines.

**Do you enjoy gambling?**

Sometimes. Sometimes if I'm in the mood, or sometimes no.

**When you go to the casino, do you enjoy slot machines or other kinds of table games?**

No. Slot machines.

**Just slot machines?**

Yes.

*She doesn't know how to play table games.*

**What was the hardest thing for you to leave behind when you came to the U.S.?**

Hardest thing is my mother.

**Oh, she was still alive when you came?**

She is still alive now.

**How old is she?**

Ninety-six years old.

**When is the last time you saw her?**

The last time was in 2010.

*When she moved here, that was the last time she saw her. She communicated to her sisters through Facebook to see how she's doing and all that.*

**That would be hard. The media really does make it easier, does it not?**

*Yes, it does.*

I am closer to my dad than my mom.

**Why is that do you think?**

I don't know. Maybe my dad loved me more than my mom.

*I think because she was raised by her dad's mom; that's why.*

**Tell us about religion. Was that an important part of your life?**

When I was sixteen years old, I converted to being a Catholic, but my upbringing is as a Buddhist, so I have two religions.

*Tell them how you had to pray to the Chinese goodness of mercy because the aunt that you lived with is Buddhist.*

When I was a teenager about fourteen, fifteen, my auntie prayed to the goddess of mercy. Every time I would pray that. After my high school, I went to the Novena, to the church, and that's when I converted to Catholic.

*Because she lives in the aunt's house and they are Buddhist over there, she has no choice but to pray to the goddess of mercy then because they're Buddhist, but she is now Catholic. She is raised both, anyway, and so am I.*

**You've got it covered.**

*Yes, exactly. That's why when she was over here, she brought the goddess of mercy along with her, and so now I inherited it. The goddess of mercy belongs to her aunt that actually pass over from her mom.*

**That's the one, Stella, that you have a picture of in your...**

*Yes, that's the one.*

**You're very fluent not only in several languages, but also in major religions as well.**

*[Laughing] Yes.*

**Have you worked at all since you've been in the U.S.?**

No.

*After we were born, she actually kept on working from home. She is a good cook after what she's learned from her grandma. She actually ran a business cooking for construction sites. She actually had a food court for the construction workers.*

**How did that work?**

*Good money but tiring. But prior to that she worked for her aunt who has a huge restaurant in the central business area in Singapore. She was a chef there for many years. We tagged along every day; after school we'll be at the restaurant, all of us. All the cousins are there. All the kids are in the back in the kitchen. I remember very well how we had to do homework all together.*

I won't leave my children to anybody.

*Between the age of, I would say, six to eleven, and then after that she stopped for a little bit. I know when I was about fourteen, fifteen, she started the business again, this time with my dad in construction business, having food court for the construction workers there. During my teenage years, we were helping her run the business as well.*

**A businesswoman, an entrepreneur, a cook.**



*Yes, anything to keep the family going. My dad and her were both doing it together, and he also drove a taxi during the nighttime, too. He was a taxi driver. After the food court closes, he will continue working as a taxi driver on his second shift.*

When you are young, try to make as much money as you can. Then when you are old, it will be okay for you.

**It sounds like you worked hard to do that. As a cook, what are some of the favorite traditional dishes that you make?**

Chicken curry.

*It's mostly traditional Nyonya food that she cooks that people were asking for that they don't see. She cooks that kind of food to sell them, and it usually comes out pretty good because they don't get that anywhere in the street.*

**Do you have some recipes that you would like to perhaps include in your oral history?**

I have a lot of recipes.

*She has a whole lot. She has a cookbook. She was offered the opportunity to write a cookbook in Singapore, but she declined it because she wants to keep it within her own culture.*

**If you would like to share a couple of recipes with the oral history...**

*She may give you a simple one.*

The fish stuffed with chili, very easy to make that.

*That's the simplest dish that everybody is asking for.*

**Fish stuffed with chili.**

*Yes, it's garlic and chili. You actually have the whole fish. You slit a little bit of the fish meat on the back of the fish, and you shove garlic and chili pounded together, or you can blend it*

*together with salt, and then shove into the side of the fish, and then you would deep fry the fish.  
Really simple but delicious.*

**It sounds fabulous. As a seamstress, tell us about some of the traditional clothing that you may have made. I know you made your children's dresses and pajamas, but what about traditional clothing?**

Yes, I sewed that, too. That's called a kebaya.

*It's called a kebaya that traditional Peranakan women wear. Every Chinese New Year, it's a must that we have to have one on, and so she would be sewing it a couple of weeks before the New Year. On New Year's Eve, we'll have new pajamas, and it's a must to wear new pajamas on the Lunar New Year, and then on the first day of Chinese New Year, we'll be wearing the kebaya.*

I sew it for my children, too.

**What fabric did you use to make the kebaya?**

*It's mostly cotton. But if you want a more elaborate one, it's going to be made of chiffon, but those have to be handsewn with flowers and all that, and those take a long time. Mostly, it's special occasions, like for weddings, somebody's church event that you'll be wearing those. But the kebaya was the more normal thing to wear. I'll send you a picture later of what I wore at an event that I attended a couple of weeks ago with the whole attire.*



**That would be amazing. Thank you.**

*You're welcome.*

**As a Catholic who was married to a Buddhist, how did you blend that with raising your children?**

*I can answer that. My dad is Buddhist. My mom is Catholic. I took Catechism when I was in high school because it's one of the majors that we have to take. I aced it. Going to the temple, I would go with my dad as well because we are just nosy and we want to learn. But it came out pretty good, and we learned both cultures. It's the same. I guess Mary is different; Buddha looks different, but it's the same kind of religion. It's just how you are offering and how you put your hands together.*

**The rituals are different.**

*The rituals are totally different. Catholics don't really have a lot of offerings. Buddhists, you have fruits, flowers, and things like that. To me it's nothing different. It's just a different way of doing it. Then my stepbrother, he grew up being a Catholic altar boy, staunch Catholic. He was an altar boy for many, many years, and then he changed religion; he wanted to be a Buddhist, so he had a Buddha tattooed on his chest. Then when he got married, guess what? His wife is a Muslim, so he became a Muslim now. Singapore is a multicultural country, so it doesn't really affect us. We celebrate Chinese New Year, Christmas, and then Hari Raya, which is the Malay New Year's, and we grew up with friends of different cultures and races, so it doesn't affect any one of us.*

**What is the one thing that you would like other people to know about Singapore?**

Very clean. Singapore is very, very clean.

**Why is that?**

*Well, the government makes sure it's super clean. They want people to actually follow the rules and not spit on the ground so that other people can walk on it or sit on it.*

Do you know one cigarette butt you throw? Five hundred dollars, fine, just a simple cigarette butt.

**Good reason never to smoke, I guess.**

*They have destinated smoking area out in public. You can't be caught smoking anywhere or even chewing gum.*

Chewing gum is banned.

*It is not allowed in Singapore.*

**Because it makes a mess on the pavement when people spit it out?**

*Yes, with the pavement, but, more importantly, it's actually unhygienic because when people are chewing gum—we take public transportation, which is a must in Singapore because public transportation is important for everybody. It's a luxury to own a car, not a necessity to have one because it's really expensive. The public transportation, when people are chewing gum, if they want to throw it away, they will just stick it under the seat or the handle of the bus, so the government can't take that. They spend millions of dollars cleaning up the streets, taking out the gum from the floor, so that's the main reason why they have it banned. You can only have consumption in your own home.*

**Was it always like that when you were growing up, Lily?**

*No. They changed it probably about twenty-five years ago. When I was growing up, it wasn't like that. But I remember touching the gum and everything when I was taking the bus to go to school. I didn't like that.*

**What else, Lily, would you like people to know about Singapore?**

We mix around with everybody whether you're Indian, whether you're Malay, or whether you are Chinese. You mix around everywhere, all neighbors, all different cultures.

*I agree with that, too, because we go to school, we have somebody in front of us that is a different race, side of us is a totally different race. We saw no difference. We're all as one.*

**How did that affect the way you thought about the U.S. when you came here?**

It's very, very different from here, different from my country, because here, feeling very different. The people in Las Vegas different from us, sometimes when they see you are Asian, they just ignore you, but in Singapore nobody ignores you. Nobody ignores you. You are my friend; you're my brother; you're my sister.

*I think on top of it, the language is also a plus because everybody speaks at least three different languages, so you communicate better. That makes you feel more comfortable to actually want to open up and say hi, hello.*

**Have you experienced discrimination here in the U.S.?**

*So far, no, we have never really encountered any discrimination where we live in our area, no. It's been good so far, nothing major.*

**But you've been ignored.**

*Yes. Yes, we have been ignored I think because we look Asian, but we kind of had to step up a few times to speak in English, and then they actually respect you. I think it's more of the language. If you can talk back, then they will talk more.*

Yes, they always think that we Singapore are from China, and we only speak Chinese.

*Yes. Sometimes she gets offended. She's like, "I'm not Chinese." "Oh, how was China?" It's like, we're not from China.*

**I remember, Stella, in your interview you said everyone in your family got sick with COVID except your mom.**

*Yes, except my mom.*

**Is that still the case, you've managed to keep COVID away from you?**

*Yes. After we are all triple-vaxxed, I know we are okay because we are safe at some level. As soon as the vaccine came out, she was the first that got vaccinated, and she kept calling the pharmacy every day for all of us. She actually made the appointment for all of us. She was bugging the pharmacist every day to get us in line even while my son was seventeen years old that they don't allow back then when we first had, and they told her no. When the announcement came that seventeen-year-olds were allowed to, she was the first in the line; she called right away. But they said, "No, he has to get on the app and do the appointment himself."*

**Everybody is vaxxed. You obviously were able to social distance even in one house to keep your mom safe.**

*Yes, right. As soon as I was positive, I moved down the street with my sister, so she was protected, yes.*

**What about your family in Singapore, have they been able to stay healthy?**

My two sisters, they are always every day in pain, she told me. She says she's always in pain, both of them. I say we are over it. One of them that got diagnosed has a brain tumor.

*This is the same one that has the COVID.*

No.

*Oh, the other one.*

My sister after me, the first sister, my younger sister, she's got COVID now.

**Does she have a bad case?**

No, no. She says it's only that she's feeling weak and tired.

*She is vaccinated, too, so at least that's some help.*

She got it from her in-laws.

*Yes, they came over to her house for a birthday party for their grandkids.*

**It happens. Your daughter works with the Culinary Union, and she's on the Grievance Committee. She is a really strong young woman that you raised. How did you do that?**

All of them I taught to be strong. "Don't ever give up," I say, "Always be strong, and always stand on your own feet."

*Yes, that's how we were raised. I came here alone when I was twenty years old.*

**What would you like to tell us that we haven't asked?**

My daughters, when they were in school, I wanted them to learn Mandarin, but at home I speak Malay and English with them. They are Chinese, and their Mandarin is no good. The teacher came to me and said, "Why our children's Chinese no good, and you are Malay. Why don't you let them learn the Malay language?" I said, "No, because Malay I can teach. Mandarin I cannot teach. I don't care if they don't know how to write. As long as they can hear and they can talk, I don't care." But the teacher says I'm really greedy.

**Actually, that sounds very smart.**

*Yes. That's how we were forced—in my last interview—we were forced to pick up Mandarin Chinese because we hated it, but it's a plus for us now.*

**Sure. How many characters are in the Mandarin alphabet?**

*Over ten thousand. It's not a twenty-six alphabet.*

That's why I tell the teacher, "I don't care. As long as they can hear what we speak, and they can speak to you, it's okay. I don't care if they learn how to write."



**Wow, ten thousand.**

*She actually herself had to pick up Chinese when she married my dad because she couldn't speak a word of Chinese or any kind of dialect. She actually picked it up from who? Tell them.*

From the children.

*From the kids. From the kids.*

All my nieces and nephews, I learned the dialect from them.

**And you trusted them to teach it to you, huh?**

Because when they would talk, I would ask them, "What are you saying?" They taught me how to hear and how to talk.

*My grandmother doesn't speak English. My grandma speaks a certain dialect and, also, Malay because being in Singapore, they still speak Malay, but English, no, because she is from China.*

My in-laws in the beginning spoke to me in Malay because I don't understand what you are talking about. They know to speak to me in Malay. In the end, I catch it from the children.

*She can speak a dialect, yes.*

**Where in China are they from?**

*They are from Chaozhou. It is Teochew in China.*

**Just geographically, what part is that from?**

*I'm not sure, but they only speak Teochew, only a certain dialect in that area.*

China, they have different dialects.

*Yes, they have Cantonese, the Hokkien, and Teochew. That's where my grandparents are, Teochew.*

**Do they still have family there?**

*I think they all moved out of China and migrated to Singapore.*

**What was the attraction to Singapore? Why did people leave China to go to Singapore?**

They follow the father. The father was a trader before, so they followed the father here and migrated here, in Singapore.

**That was the import/export business.**

Yes, yes.

**I'm fascinated by the cooking that you did for the construction workers. Was it similar to a food truck? Did you move your kitchen around, or did you cook the meals in a kitchen and then take the meals to them?**

No. I cook in the kitchen. They come in the kitchen to buy the food.

*They actually had a makeshift kitchen for her, and every construction, when they're building the buildings, they actually have a kitchen set up for her, and then she brings her own tools, her own utensils. They just have a room, so she brings her own pots and pans and stove and everything. Then they move around; when this construction is over, they move to the next job site. She would sell food like that for the construction workers instead of having them go out and leave the construction site to go buy food.*

**That saved time for the workers.**

*Correct.*

**Was it just the midday meal, or did you—**

No.

*No. It was tiring. Tell her how tiring it is.*

Every day I had four hours of sleep, only.

**Four?**

Four hours of sleep. I have to prepare breakfast for them, I have to prepare lunch, and I have to prepare tea break and dinner.

**Breakfast, lunch, tea break, and dinner.**

Yes.

**And you had to prepare different things for each meal.**

Yes.

*Yes. It was just her and my dad and us, the kids. She had to be in the market—at what time, mom?*

Four in the morning.

**You had to be on the job site at four?**

No. The wholesale market, wholesaler.

*She had to go get the food at the wet market at four o'clock in the morning.*

**Oh my goodness. You shopped every day?**

Yes, fresh.

*Everything has to be fresh.*

That's why I say I had four hours of sleep.

**Plenty of sleep.**

But it's making good money.

**Sure. And you had the free labor of your children, so...**

*Yes, yes. [Laughing]*

**How many years did you do that?**

Three or four years. Until I got sick, and then I gave up.

**I can see why.**

*I know, it's tiring.*

**Have you found other people here from Singapore?**

Yes, a lot. Many of them here.

*Yes, we have a Singapore association that we get together on occasions to hang out with the people from Singapore just to eat and exchange food.*

**What kind of foods are you making for New Year's?**

Oh, we have a lot of food. We have a lot of food every New Year's.

*Chinese Lunar New Year, you have to have hotpot inside the house to keep the family warm.*

*That's how we believe. We have a hotpot in the house, and then we have the prosperity salad that my sister makes every year, so that's a lot of preparation.*



**What's in the prosperity salad?**

*It's like raw papaya. They have yams. They have ginger. Jellyfish. All sorts of varieties of colors. I'll send you the picture. And carrots and then sweet, sour, everything. That's like the pot of life that's bitter, sour, sweet, salty, colors. That's a prosperity salad that we have to have every year.*

**Then what's in a hotpot?**

*The hotpot mainly is just soup base, and then you can put anything you want, fish, meat, vegetables, shrimp, all kinds of food. It's like shabu shabu, almost similar. To me it's considered very simple because back in the days when she moved here, she still continued doing the culture where we offer food to the dead. She has to come up with seven dishes. It depends on what grandma likes to eat, or grandpa likes to eat. All those dishes have to be set up on the table and offered to the dead. That was a lot of cooking for her. I told her that if you are no longer here and nobody is going to take over, I can't do it. I said we probably have to cut down on that part because that is more a ritual, tradition. I told her that I can't keep up with that, and so we're just going to do the simple one by offering flowers, fruits, and then we'll call the offering of the gold paper. That's pretty much it that I would do.*

**What is the offering of the gold paper?**

*The offering of the gold paper is just to satisfy the people that are dead that they would have money wherever they are at right now, so they'll be happy and comfortable. That's why I told my mom we are going to keep it simple. But back in Singapore, it's a big thing. It's massive. Most of the Chinese homes have that. They are doing the same culture. Till today, they are still doing it. It's a lot of fun. We get to eat all the food. But it's a small family here, so it's not as fun as back home.*

**But is it something where all the family gets together to enjoy these meals?**

*Yes, it is something. After we all do the offerings, then we get to eat the food, so that's why all the family gets together. My grandma is still alive, and it will be at my grandma's place. If not, they will all be at my mom's place. My grandma is Catholic, and she passed it onto my mom, and my mom has to take over. She is the oldest in the family. All the siblings and the children will all be at her house.*

**You're going to be cooking again.**

*Yes.*

**Is there anything else that you would like to say to close out this interview?**

*No. I'd like to thank you very much for this interview.*

**I'd like to thank you. I'm so grateful for the Culinary Union for arranging this. It's so wonderful to have your interview as well as Stella's because that gives us a multigenerational look at your family and your traditions and the things that are important in your lives.**

*Yes.*

*Yes. The value of being a family is very important to us. There is only me and my sister here, and she comes over for dinner every night, so nothing is lost. Yes, it's the values that we treasure.*

**Thank you so much.**

*Thank you.*

Thank you.

**Stella, please, we'd love the pictures, the pictures of the food, of the clothing, and that recipe for the fish would be amazing.**

*I'll have her write it out.*

**That would be excellent. Thank you so much. This is just fabulous.**

When you get the recipe, you try it.

**Oh yes.**

*If you have an air fryer, you can put it an air fryer. But frying the fish with a little bit of oil tastes better because you'll want to eat that chili part, the best part that we pick on every one of us.*

**I promise.**

*All right. Take care.*

**Thank you so much.**

Thank you.

**[End of recorded interview]**