



# ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

in Celebration of the  
City of Sugar Land  
60th Anniversary



CITY OF SUGAR LAND

Terri Wang  
Resident,  
Community  
Leader



**GOODSILL:** Terri, will you tell us how you ended up in Fort Bend County?

**WANG:** That's a great question. My parents are both from Taiwan and came to America on academic scholarships. They came to the U.S. for their master's degrees and then my dad received his PhD in Macromolecular Science & Engineering from Case Western Reserve University. My mom received her master's degree in Art (Music) from New Mexico Highlands University. She taught piano lessons from our home while I was growing up, which was really neat because it was a job that she could work from home.

I was born in Cleveland, Ohio on December 31, 1968. Our family moved to New Jersey for my Dad's first job at FMC Corporation and then to Florida to work with Critikon, a division of Johnson & Johnson. Later, they moved back to Dayton, Ohio during the time I was a student at Purdue University. When I graduated, my first job was with Procter & Gamble in Connecticut.

My future husband, Sam, was in his Family Practice residency in northern Kentucky, which is basically Cincinnati. We were "arranged" to meet each other; then started dating. After six months, we got engaged and after one year we got married on May 30, 1993.

Once my husband finished his residency in northern Kentucky, we could settle anywhere in the country, but we thought it made sense for us to stay near family. At that time his parents were living in Houston and my parents were living in Salt Lake City, Utah. We didn't like the snow and the cold weather so we moved to Houston. In addition, in the Asian culture, usually the eldest son takes care of the parents. Sam is the eldest son and his family lived in Houston, so that's another reason we decided to settle in Houston.

**GOODSILL:** Would you say that yours was an arranged marriage?

**WANG:** It was more like “arranged dating” (laughs). My mom wanted me to marry a good Asian, Christian doctor because her dad was a doctor, and all her brothers are doctors and her sisters all married either MDs or PhDs. My brother attended Harvard University, Yale Medical School, and Stanford for his residency. He is currently an Emergency Room doctor in San Diego, California.

I told my mom I didn’t want to marry a doctor. I felt like marrying a doctor was her agenda and not mine. I wanted to marry whomever I married for love. I told my mom, “I’m not marrying a doctor. As long as I have love, I will be fine. I can live in a trailer.” She accused me of being very closed-minded.

In the Asian culture ‘introductions’ are common so my mom sent me to California to attend a wedding to meet a single Asian Christian doctor who was also there. I met him but I decided I didn’t like him. Then my mom heard about Sam and wanted to send me to meet him. After finding out he was single, and came from a very respected family in Houston, Texas, she sent me on an all-expense paid trip to meet him. I thought, “I will go to prove to her that I am very open-minded.” When I met him he was very different and he caught my attention. Sam is a very humble and down to earth person. I thought all doctors were very intense and focused on their jobs. So when I met him, I was interviewing him to find something I didn’t like about him. But during that weekend I found out he passed my test! (laughs)

**GOODSILL:** Your mom got a lot of the things she dreamed of. She got Chinese, Christian, and doctor. She just wasn’t specific that he needed to be Taiwanese! (laughter)

**WANG:** They told us they preferred Taiwanese but they were so thrilled with him. I am very, very blessed.

**GOODSILL:** What did his parents do?

**WANG:** Sam’s grandfather moved to Taiwan in the winter of 1949 for a job change. Sam’s grandfather on his mother’s side served as a major general in the Air Force of the Republic of China. In early 1949 his division was stationed in Taiwan in order to defend the security of Taiwan against the communists. It has been proven successful even until today. Taiwan was part of China since the earliest history. It was lost to Japan due to a war. In 1945, the island was returned to China under the Cairo Declaration.

His parents also came from Taiwan on scholarships to study in the United States. His father graduated with his PhD from Syracuse University and then came to Houston, to work in the oil industry as a chemical engineer. His family has been here since 1968. They lived in the Fondren Southwest area so my husband grew up in Houston. He went to Bellaire High School and then Rice University. He decided he wanted to go out of state for his residency.

After Sam and I met, we realized that our fathers went to the same high school in Taiwan, the same college in Taiwan, both majored in chemical engineering but they were three years apart. So we had similar backgrounds.

**GOODSILL:** Your parents and Sam’s parents were both born in Taiwan?

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**WANG:** My parents were born in Taiwan. Sam’s parents were born in China and fled to Taiwan in the 1940s to escape communism. In the Asian culture there is a big difference between those from the mainland and those from Taiwan. The people from Taiwan are very proud of their country and when China took over Taiwan they felt a little restricted. I am not really equipped to detail the sensitive situation between the Chinese and Taiwanese. I helped the city of Sugar Land with organizing China 101. We invited delegates from China and from Taiwan and they said, “We cannot be in the same room at the same time. Can you un-invite the other person?” I said, “No, we can’t un-invite someone.” So we un-invited both of them. There is a breach between the two groups and they have difficulty even this far away from the homeland in cooperating because of their loyalties.

**GOODSILL:** When your parents got their academic scholarships and came to the U.S., was it expected that they would return to Taiwan?

**WANG:** Each of them came to America to study. Only the cream of the crop from Taiwan could come and get educated. They both told their parents they would get their degree and then go back to Taiwan. But my parents met each other in the United States and fell in love, and decided to stay here!

**GOODSILL:** Have you met your grandparents?

**WANG:** I have. When I was growing up they were able to travel only every so often to the United States. And I have been to China and Taiwan. My first trip there was in 1976 when I was only 7 years old.

**GOODSILL:** You are born in Cleveland, Ohio, first generation to be born in America. Did you learn Taiwanese language and customs?

**WANG:** My parents spoke to me in Taiwanese. I have learned a little bit of Mandarin. Most of the “good” Asian parents sent their children to Mandarin school on Saturday mornings, so they sent me and my brother when we were little. Since we hadn’t been exposed to Mandarin, it was a very difficult language

for us to learn. Plus, the lessons were on Saturday morning when cartoons were on TV. My brother, David, who is 11 months younger than I, begged our parents to quit Mandarin lessons. We also begged them to quit piano lessons. They let us quit Mandarin but they did not let us quit piano, since my Mom was a piano teacher. (laughs) I do regret that I did not continue with the Mandarin, especially because my in-laws speak Mandarin. I wish I could speak with them in Mandarin, but they are so gracious. They speak to me in English.

**GOODSILL:** How did you handle the imparting of your culture to your children?

**WANG:** In the Asian culture there were a lot of expectations for education. In the summertime we really didn’t get to play, we were at home, doing workbooks. We didn’t participate in a lot of sports activities because my mom worked from home and she didn’t have the time to shuttle me around to activities. Sports was a low priority, the emphasis was on academics. They really wanted me to have a marketable skill. I told them I wanted to be a realtor or a flight attendant and they did NOT approve. They actually made me major in a science degree at Purdue

where I got a Bachelor’s in Health Sciences. I decided that if I had to major in a science, I would work in a “glamorous” science. There was such a thing called cosmetic science so I doubled up on my chemistry and sent out resumes. I got my first job working in research and development with Oil of Olay, part of Procter and Gamble (formerly Richardson-Vicks), located in Connecticut.

I loved being able to make lotions every day. After more than twenty years I am still using Oil of Olay. Our job was to look at our competitors, the department store brands, and see how Oil of Olay could make just as good a lotion without the price. I used to buy all my cosmetics from the department stores. But after working for Oil of Olay I realized that what was important is the ingredients and the research. I didn’t want to pay for packaging and I felt like a lot of the department store products emphasized packaging, the glass jar, the gold pump, the mirror and all that. I realized that all you really need is good quality raw material.

I was in Connecticut and decided to move back to Ohio to be closer to my parents. After living a year and a half in Connecticut, wanting to be far from my parents because they were driving me crazy (laughter), I decided I wanted to go back. I found a job in the flavor industry. Flavor and cosmetics are cousin industries. So my second job was making flavors for the food industry. In our laboratories, we have made such flavors as taco flavor, pineapple flavor, blueberry flavor, turkey flavor, beef flavor, and kiwi flavor. If there was a food company that needed a flavor for one of their product lines, they would send a request to all the flavor houses and we would submit a sample. If we were chosen, we would be able to put our flavor in their products. Our claim to fame was the picante flavor in V-8. I really enjoyed doing that and it was a lot of fun, too. A lot of the cosmetic and flavor companies are in the northeast. When I moved to Houston and tried to find a job in cosmetic, flavor, or health care industries, it was really hard. Those industries aren’t in this area. I didn’t want to work in the petroleum/oil/gas industry so I prayed for a job close to home, part-time, and no weekends.

I found a job with Merle Norman so my third job was working for Merle Norman. I later became a store manager for Merle Norman. When I got pregnant I realized I didn’t want to be breathing the fumes from the salon, which was also a nail salon so I quit my job. That was one of the best decisions of my life. At first I felt like a lot of my self-esteem was in my paycheck, and how much I was making. I

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*Terri Wang*

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realized that there is no better job than to stay at home with your children and be able to have an impact on them. I felt as though any job was taking time away from my family and there was no amount of money that was worth that, provided we could afford for me to stay home. At first I was reluctant because staying at home with newborn babies was a lot of work and there is not a lot of glory to it. But I realized there is so much you can teach them at a young age. It was such a joy to spend that time with them.

**GOODSILL:** How did you decide how much culture from your Chinese roots did you want to share with your children?

**WANG:** It was hard for me because there is so much ingrained in who I am with the Asian culture. Education is a priority, as is saving money. There is a strict work ethic but also an emphasis on being polite, carrying on certain customs, and following etiquette. I believe that God has created every person with unique gifts and talents. It was a struggle for me to raise my children because on the one hand, I knew that God was creating them a certain way and it was hard not to bring the Asian expectations on them. I had to choose carefully which way I was going to raise my children and how much I would allow the Asian culture, the customs and expectations, to affect the way I raised them.

My husband and I decided we would raise them Christians first, and with our Asian culture. We are very proud of our heritage. In 2014, after my son graduated from high school, we took a trip to China and Taiwan. That was a way for us to show them their heritage and background. They were old enough to appreciate it and understand. Sam speaks fluent Mandarin. Ever since my son was in 2nd grade he has been good at going on Expedia.com and finding the best rates! He has been our travel agent for years and saved us \$900 per person on our airfare. I decided to use that money to splurge on a private tour guide in each city that we visited. We went to Beijing, Xian, Shanghai, and a town called Suzhou. After that we flew to Taiwan. I still have relatives in Taiwan so the kids met my cousins, who are their second cousins.

**GOODSILL:** They got to see what life might have been like for their grandparents. That sounds like a wonderful experience!

**WANG:** It was. There are not a lot of Taiwanese restaurants in Houston so they didn't think they would like Taiwanese food. But when I brought them to Taiwan, they realized that Taiwan is a hot spot and people go there on vacation just to eat Taiwanese food! 85° C Café started in Taiwan and opened their 1,000th location in Houston's Chinatown. It is named 85°C because that is the perfect temperature for coffee. They specialize in really wonderful coffee and bakery items. We went on a tour and they got to experience beef noodle soup, and pineapple cakes, which is very popular in Taiwan. We tried something called gua bao which is the Taiwanese version of a hamburger. My father arranged for a taxi driver to drive us to all the places of interest he felt were interesting including where he went to school, where my mother went to school, and some of the famous landmarks in Taiwan. It was really nice to have a "guided" tour.

**GOODSILL:** Do you think their careers will have anything to do with their being multicultural?

**WANG:** I'm not sure. My daughter loves percussion and is currently a Sophomore at UT Austin majoring in Radio/TV/Film. During the summer of her sophomore year

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in high school, we went on a tour at Paramount Studios and she heard about being a Foley artist, which is making sound effects for the movies. As a percussionist they are also making a sound on cue. That's why she decided she wanted to go into the film industry. Now that she's in her second year in college, she has decided she probably wants to do production work instead of post-production work.

On the other hand, my son decided on his career early. The science courses at Clements High School did not really fit his interests. He was more interested in history and English. When he was in high school, he was the president of the National Honor Society and held some other leadership positions outside of school as well. At Texas A&M, he got involved in a student organization, BUILD, which transforms shipping containers into portable medical clinics sent to developing countries around the world. My son was the CEO of that organization for one year. I'm very proud of him for giving back at a young age. Just last week, he graduated with a Bachelor's in Accounting and Master's in Entrepreneurial Leadership from Texas A&M. In July he will begin working full-time with PwC's Houston office specializing in International Tax.

**GOODSILL:** Which gets us to volunteerism. I know you are passionate about that. Tell us about some of the things you have done in Sugar Land.

**WANG:** My volunteering started in 1999. I was staying at home with the kids and I have a passion for getting a good deal, which is in my Asian blood. (laughs) Our church was having a fund-raiser and they asked me to get donations. Since I had little kids at home I started making phone calls. We had a Bike for Literacy event to help the Literacy Council for Fort Bend County raise funds. I called around to some of the sports related retailers. I got REI to donate 200 granola bars and Sun & Ski Sports to donate 200 water bottles. Then I asked corporations for money and people started giving. That was my joy. I started volunteering at church and at school wherever the kids were. I've worked as the PTA Volunteer Coordinator, Vice President, President, and many different positions in both of my kid's schools' PTA and PTO programs.

That led my friend, Jacquie Baly, former Sugar Land City Council member, to ask me to be a Co-Chair with her for the gala fundraiser for the Fort Bend Education Foundation. After several years of volunteering I became a board member. I have served with the City of Sugar Land Multi-Cultural Advisory Committee and Fort Bend Aggie Moms. Right now I'm a board member of five different non-profits: Fort Bend Education Foundation, Grant a Starr Foundation, Shape Up Fort Bend, Loving Houston, and Holy Child Charity. I have also supported the Texas Dragon Boat Association at their Regatta in Sugar Land for the past 10 years. In addition, I help to read and provide assistance to refugee children every week through H4OPE, a non-profit my friend founded.

I believe that if you want a good community, you need to give back. This is my way of giving back. I believe that God has gifted us with different gifts and talents and I wanted to be able to use those in the community.

I created this life statement on June 3, 2018:

We come into this world naked and we leave naked. In between is just a breath.

Focus on building heavenly treasurers, not earthly treasures.

Live each day intentionally with purpose to glorify God.

**GOODSILL:** Beautiful.

Ten years ago we were both on the committee for the 50th anniversary for the incorporation of the City of Sugar Land. I recall our accomplishments: we got an Arcadia book published; we got the bronze sculpture in the foyer of City Hall with a list of our sponsors; we did some historic walking tours and public speaking; we put a series of vignettes about the history of the city of Sugar Land in the local papers every week.

**WANG:** AND we had the 50th anniversary T-shirts. I was in charge of selling them. (laughs)

**GOODSILL:** Is there anything I forgot to ask?

**WANG:** My parents came to America and achieved the "American Dream". My dad was able to retire at age 62 in San Diego. One of the reasons I volunteer so much with the education foundations is I see how much a good educational background can affect a family. The opportunities afforded to my dad in America with his PhD were huge. I think he has 16 patents in his name! He did well to be able to retire in San Diego. I feel like they lived the American dream. With hard work and education you can make it in America.

**GOODSILL:** Thank you, Terri!

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