

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Interview with: Martha Wong**  
**Interviewed by: Uzma Quraishi**  
**Date: January 23, 2007**  
**Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola**

UQ: Oral history of Martha Wong, January 23, 2007, conducted by Uzma Quraishi at the University of Houston.

MW: So, do you want me to just go down and describe this? Are you going to ask me questions?

UQ: I'll ask you a few things, but why don't you go ahead and tell about your background.

MW: Well, basically, I was born in Houston, Texas back in 1939. I am the middle girl of 3 girls. I have an older brother who was in the Navy most of the time of my growing up. So, I have an older sister, Mary, who now is in Phoenix, and a younger sister, Ruth. We lived over in the Heights. My father had rented a grocery store and we lived in back of the grocery store in the store room for about the first, I'd say, 6 years of my life. I was born here. My family came to Houston because my dad, they were in Mississippi and my sister was about at the age of where she was going to start school. And in the 1930s, in

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Mississippi as in Houston as well as the South, we had African-American schools and we had white schools. So, we had segregated schools. And in Mississippi, the Chinese children had no schools to go to. They would have to go to the black schools. So, my father saw the condition of those schools and decided to come to Houston, so that my sister could go to better schooling and they did. So, they moved into that Heights area and when they came, he couldn't rent a house. Nobody would rent to him. No one would rent an apartment to him so they stayed with friends until he was able to rent the grocery store. And then, we lived in the store room of the grocery store and I was born after they moved. So, we had boxes along the walls and down the middle and a bed for my mama and dad and then a bed for me and my sister. And then, they added some more rooms to the store room so that we had separate bedrooms then. I shared a bed with my younger sister, I guess, up until about . . . I can recall when we moved into our other house, I still shared a twin bed with her for some time. When we were little about probably until we were 8 or so. And then, my older sister got her bed so we each had our own twin bed.

Our beginnings were very humble, I will say that. So, we lived in the Heights. When my father finally had enough money to purchase the house, again, they still wouldn't sell to him, so he got one of his customers to buy a house who then sold it to my father. And so, that is how we got our first home, was because one of our customers was nice enough to help my dad with that purchase of that home.

UQ: Was that home in the Heights as well?

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MW: Yes, it was over at the corner of 20th and 19th Street, at North Main and Studewood. So, we lived on Studewood. Our first house was there. Our store was on 19th, so it was just across the street.

UQ: How old were you when that happened?

MW: I think I was about 6 years . . . I know that I at least went to kindergarten when we were still in the grocery store. So, it might have been first grade when we bought the house. And then, we had that house and we shared a bedroom with my sister, as I said. And then finally, she got another bed. In those days, we didn't have air-conditioning, and my younger sister was supposedly allergic to dust so she never had to clean the house. It was me and my older sister that always cleaned the house. I can recall that. And I can recall when it was so hot, because we had no air-conditioner. We had an attic fan. I don't know if you know what an attic fan is.

UQ: I do but it doesn't serve to really cool a house pretty much, I do know that, too.

MW: Right, and so, even at that time, we did not have an attic fan. We just had fans. And so, my sister would fuss so much that I would have to fan her to sleep. I remember that distinctly. Isn't that funny how you remember certain things? I remember fanning

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her so she could be cool and go to sleep. We had neighbors that were very good to us.

We played with the neighborhood children there. I remember that.

UQ: Do you remember if it was a Caucasian neighborhood that you lived in?

MW: Yes, it was.

UQ: Were there any other people that were Chinese there?

MW: No. We lived in, I'd say, a laboring class neighborhood, most of them. I remember distinctly one family called the Grisoms and he had been in the Navy - I don't know what kind of work he did after that but it was a younger couple and they had kids and the younger couple played with us and their kids played with us. And so, I just remember we used to go outside and play in the evening because it was so hot and we would play games like Red Rover, Red Rover and we'd play hide and seek. That was how we passed our evenings, you know, and it was a good time. I remember that we had a radio and we used to listen to the Lone Ranger on the radio. I remember listening to The Shadow on the radio. That was our form of entertainment. And I think by listening to the radio versus seeing, you know, you had to really pay close attention. And I think that that probably helps sharpening your listening skills by listening to the radio and listening to stores on the radio versus seeing them. You know, you can take in so much by seeing but you don't really have to hear everything. So, that was our childhood.

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I can recall at our elementary school, and this is in, let's say, 1940s, 1945 . . . the war was still on. I remember my father being an air raid warden, you know, and we had to practice air raids. So, whenever the sirens went off, my father had to put on, I remember, a hard hat and go outside and look in the sky, I guess to see if any planes were coming or something. Our responsibility was to go into the bathroom and get in the bathtub and pull the shade down so they couldn't see any light and to do that. And I remember doing that. Three of us girls getting in the bathtub and my mother being in there and pulling the shade there, and then my father going out. And then I remember, you know, after that, everything was all clear and then we would just get up and play again. But I do remember that part of while the war was going on.

My father was really good to customers. You know, at that time, people didn't have a lot of money, so I remember him . . . as we grew up, we started working in the store when we started junior high school. So, we would be cashiers and we would help stock the shelves and we would sweep up the floors, you know, to help clean up at night and receive the deliveries of the bread and things like that. And we would help sack potatoes and things like that. So, we had all kinds of little jobs to do at the grocery store after school. I went to Hogg Junior High School. We used to walk to school or either we would ride the bus. The bus stop was right in front of our house so in the mornings, we would ride the bus to get there in time. It was down on 11th Street so it wasn't too far from 19th to 11th Street. And then, in the afternoons, we would walk home because, you

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know, we had more leisurely time. And I remember walking home from Hogg Junior High School. There was a drug store there on the corner of 11th and Studewood. I don't know the name of the drug store but I know it was the biggest treat for us to be able to go into the drug store and to order a cherry Coke which was a fountain drink or a cherry phosphate which was like a cherry 7-Up. And we would take those and walk home with those. That is how we cooled off to walk home. So, I can remember those things.

We were fairly active. My sister was active in junior high school and high school.

UQ: Let's go back a second. Your parents came here because schooling was integrated for Chinese and . . .

MW: For Caucasians but with the blacks, they still had separate schools for blacks.

UQ: And yet, they would allow Asians?

MW: Chinese, yes, to go to the white schools.

UQ: And how did your parents know that?

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MW: I don't know. I have no idea how they knew that. There were other Asians here, you know, who were distant cousins and so I am sure that somehow, that message got out.

UQ: So they came for that reason?

MW: Yes. Most of the Chinese that came to Houston . . . we had another family that bought a home over where it was predominantly Jewish at that time and they bought a home there in a white neighborhood. But most of the Chinese that came at that time bought in black neighborhoods, or they had their stores in black neighborhoods because most of the parents could not really speak English well but you can use numbers well. And so, they could communicate in that way, and I think that is true of each ethnic group that has come in -- that they know numbers and they can show them the bill without speaking and communicate in that way. My father actually was raised in the United States. He came over as a little boy with his father and lived in California for a while.

UQ: What year did he arrive in the U.S.?

MW: I don't know how old he was when he came as a boy but he grew up here, I think probably from about 5th grade to junior high school. So, he learned the English language.

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UQ: Was he fluent?

MW: He was but then, when he went back, he was so fluent in his English that his father sent him back to China to learn Chinese again because, you know, in those days, they would not let the women come. Were you aware of that?

UQ: Oh, yes.

MW: So, only the men could come, and for some reason, my father came. And then, his father sent him back to China to learn Chinese again and he stayed long enough evidently to marry my mom and brought her over. And then, they came over in about 1937, I think. And then, they went to Mississippi where we had cousins and they ran a grocery store there. And then, they didn't stay very long there and then they came to Houston, realizing the disadvantages there, I guess. So, we grew up in the Heights, enjoyed it.

I never saw any discrimination at that time. I did not know why we lived in the back of a store. I did not know that until much later. My parents told me. My mom told me. You know, I just thought that was where everybody lived, you know? And so, you just have no concept of what is happening in your family when you are in a fairly protected area.



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UQ: And kids at school never taunted you or teased you or anything?

MW: No, we never had that. We were mainly the only Chinese family there for a long time. Then, another Chinese family moved in later on. When I was about in the 6th grade, I think a Chinese family moved in. In fact, that was Dr. Daniel Louie who moved in and so we grew up in the same neighborhood. Then, when we went to junior high school, I still don't remember any Chinese in my junior high school.

UQ: And the kids treated you well in high school?

MW: Oh, yes.

UQ: You were just "one of the guys."

MW: Then, when we went to Hogg Junior High School, I remember running for cheerleader there and practicing and practicing but I did not win.

UQ: Well, that took a lot of confidence.

MW: Well, as I said, we were fairly integrated and I felt very comfortable. I am not really a very coordinated person. I mean, I am just not. I am not athletic. I enjoy sports but I am not athletic and I am not coordinated. And I would probably say that a part of

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that probably was . . . there was probably some discrimination that I was totally unaware of. And then, I went to Reagan Senior High School and there were other Asians at Reagan. So, that was my first experience in going to school with other Asians.

Now, during the time of elementary and junior high school, we had relatives that we would visit with -- cousins that we would go and play with, and I don't know if you know Harry Gee. Harry Gee was one of our cousins that we would go and play with. They had a home on West Dallas. And then, my other cousin that we went with was a family named Chu and they lived over, as I said in . . . it is really an African-American area now. It is right there on Wentworth, fairly close to downtown on the south part there.

UQ: And your interaction with Asians was limited to relatives?

MW: Yes, and friends.

UQ: There weren't any associations?

MW: Yes, we had the Gee Family Association and we also had the Ong Leong. That was the Chinese Merchants Association. And the Ong Leong building is still standing down in Chinatown. It is now a restaurant but I think it is vacant now. But I remember that we would go . . . my father, of course, joined the Chinese Merchants Association

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because he was a merchant. I think what the Ong Leong did at that time is when someone needed to borrow money, that they would lend money to them and help others get started in their business because a lot of people, at that time, again, the banks were fairly discriminatory, too, I guess. So, you know, that is how they started businesses is by helping each other. And I think that still holds true in many ethnic groups. I know that in the . . . I don't know whether in the Pakistani or Indian ... are you Pakistani or Indian?

UQ: Pakistani.

MW: The Ismailis, do you know them?

UQ: Yes.

MW: O.K., well, I know the Ismailis helped each other, big time.

UQ: And the Gee Family Association, was that just relatives who were in that?

MW: Yes, well, we have family associations in the Chinese community, so each family has what you call an association. And so, they would also get together and help each other, too, so you could get help through that also.

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UQ: It was a fairly large . . . when I say Gee Family Association, I am thinking of lots and lots of families.

MW: There were lots of Gees at that time. In fact, that was about all we had in Houston were Gees at that time that I knew of, of course, because that is who we associated with. So, it was one of the first family associations. It is still alive and well today.

UQ: Our orthodontist when I was younger was Dr. Kim Gee.

MW: Oh, yes, Kim. Kim is a Gee. I think he has been president of the association, in fact.

UQ: O.K., of the Gee Family Association?

MW: Yes.

UQ: I have talked to him about this as well and he's been helpful.

MW: Good. So, I remember we would go down to the Ong Leong for certain celebrations. Usually for Chinese New Year and they would pop fire crackers, you know, and all that kind of stuff. And they will have these big dinners where we would go and sit and eat. I remember that growing up. That happens now still today but the Gee

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family has their own family dinner and they invited all the Gees and friends and relatives and things like that. So, I can recall that happening as a young girl, that that was a celebration that we had.

We celebrated Christmas and Thanksgiving, you know, becoming very Americanized. We put up Christmas trees. I can remember putting up Christmas trees. I can remember my father whipping up, and you probably won't know about this . . . they had a soap called Ivory Snow. They had little flakes of soap; I guess is what it was. And if you mixed it with water and then you beat it, it would foam up, of course. And my father putting that on the tree to make it look like it was snow. Isn't that funny how you remember those kinds of things? Fortunately, my father never opened on Sundays because in that neighborhood, people respected the Sundays. In other neighborhoods, many of the black neighborhoods, the Chinese would open on Sunday. So, that was one day that we did not have to work. I can remember everyone kind of being jealous of my family, thinking, you know, y'all don't have to work on Sundays, you know, which was kind of nice.

As a teenager, another area of socialization was our Chinese Baptist Church, and the church was actually a mission of First Baptist Church. First Baptist Church was downtown. It is no longer there now. I don't even know . . . we used to meet there. There was a very dedicated missionary named Pearl Johnson who would visit with all the Chinese families and get the parents to allow the children to go to church. And so, my

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father and mother allowed us to go to church and people would pick us up and take us to church.

UQ: Did they go?

MW: No, they did not go to church. My father was actually a Methodist. He had been brought up Methodist evidently when he was a little boy. But on Sunday, that was the day, you know, that my dad would take care of all the books. So, that is what he would do on Sunday. But they allowed us to go to church. So, my sisters and I went to church and became members of that church, and it really wasn't until . . . I am trying to think when my father became active in the church, joined the Baptist church later on. I think probably when he sold the business or when he gave the business to my brother who had come back from the service, and allowed him to run the business. Then, my father became active in the church. On Sundays, our activities were to go to the church and then afterwards, I don't remember where we would eat but we would also go bowling. There was a bowling alley downtown. So, we would spend the afternoon bowling and, you know, doing things like that and going to the movies. And then, going back to church in the evening. They had what we called a . . . it was another study but it wasn't Sunday school. It was called training union. And so, we would go back in the evening for learning how to train to become a better Christian. And so, basically, Sunday was a day for church. And then the rest of the week, we went to school and worked at the store.

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At Reagan Senior High School, I became active in the speech department. I think they required everyone to take a speech course. I did well in that and went on speech tournaments and won a lot of speech tournaments. I can recall thinking as a young girl that because I normally worked at the store on Saturday and when I would ask my father, could I go to the speech tournament which usually we would leave like on Friday and then we would be gone all day Saturday and come back Saturday night . . . I was thinking, how is my father's store going to operate without me? And, of course, they did. I was allowed to go on speech tournaments and probably the only time that I ever went anywhere without my family and went outside the city of Houston other than to Galveston. I remember going to Oklahoma and going to Austin and Dallas and different places. We would all go on a bus and go. I have tons of medals that I won when I was in high school. I think I . . . I did poetry and I also did extemporaneous speaking. Those were the two contests that I would enter into. And then, extemporaneous speaking, they would require you to read news magazines and news articles and you would develop a file about different topics. And there would always be topics that you would have to prepare a speech on and you would have to prepare it either for or against or something like that. So, we developed files. And then, when you drew your topic, then you had 30 minutes to prepare your speech and deliver it. So, I think that training prepared me to be able to speak on my feet without a lot of preparation. I mean, I can trace my ability to get up and say something today to the fact that I know that that training helped me - at least if I know a little bit about something, that I could get up and say something about it.

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I remember reading Newsweek and Time Magazine. Luckily, at our dinner table, we always waited for my father to come home before we had dinner and I remember that we discussed the news at the table. And so, I think that was quite different for a Chinese family. My father read quite extensively, too. I remember he would come home and sit in his chair after dinner and read the newspaper thoroughly. And so, you know, that was a topic of discussion that we could have at our dinner table.

I also remember my father . . . the year that Eisenhower ran, we had trees in our front yard and the leaves would fall down and I remember spelling out his name with the leaves. [laughs] But yes, that was our first forte into politics, I guess is that, and then discussing who should be the president and stuff like that with my dad. My mother could not read English. She would read Chinese.

UQ: Do you speak Chinese as well?

MW: We did not speak Chinese. My mother tried to teach us Chinese. I remember her doing that when we still lived behind the grocery store. Because we were surrounded with Caucasians, they really didn't like us to speak Chinese. And especially in the grocery store, they didn't. So, my mother could speak enough English to get by and, I mean, her English was very good but they understood that we needed to assimilate. My mother tried to teach us Chinese. The best I can do is count! Not very much more than that. As an adult, I took Chinese 3 times at a Chinese language school. I still cannot do



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it. It is something you have to hear and the Chinese language has different idioms and accents, so you have to be very good with the accents.

UQ: Different inflections... I've heard it's more difficult when you \_\_\_\_\_.

MW: Well, one sound can have 4 different meanings and if you don't use the right inflection, then you don't have the right word. So, I am always afraid . . . for instance, the word "ma," can mean mother, it can mean horse, it can mean other things. And the inflections are from top down and then up and then down and up and then up and down. And if you don't use the right inflection, you could call somebody's mother a horse. And so, that is why I am always afraid that I am going to use the wrong inflection and that people are going to misunderstand me and make fun of me. So, I can say a few phrases and that is what I do.

[church bells toll]

So, I was very active in high school. My sister was very, very smart. She made straight A's. All of us were expected to make straight A's, so we all performed quite well. And then, we went away . . . my sister went away to college at North Texas.

UQ: Can we back up for just a second? When you were in high school, is that the time you said you found other Asians in school for the first time. Did you tend to gravitate

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towards them or were you comfortable, I would assume comfortable with everyone . . .

Who were your friends?

MW: We did not gravitate really towards them. Daniel Louie, as I said, lived nearby and he was not like, in our same grade. I had one guy that was in the same grade level with me and I would see him and we would be friends but the only time we really socialized was through church. But they did not go to our church at that time. And then, we also had a young people's group called the Dragoners. It was a little club. It cost 75 cents to join the club. And you could go to the activities without joining the club. I thought 75 cents was a lot so I didn't join. Isn't that funny? But I got invited to a lot of their parties, so I went to their parties. So, I saw those people who were at my school in the Dragoners. But I did not . . . like, at school, we weren't interested in the same thing. All of us went home to work. So, no one, you know . . . we were not in the same clubs. The other Chinese family that was there, the Ongs, his sisters were active in what we called the Red Coats which was a drill team. And they went that route. I went through the speech tournaments. I don't think my sister was active in any specific club that I remember but I know I was active in the speech club. I know that we were all in the Honor Society and we all held offices in the Honor Society and those kinds of things.

UQ: So, in school, the students, it seems like, were very tolerant. No one made an issue of . . .

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MW: If you are smart, they don't. And most of the Asians were pretty smart. So, you know, we were fairly well accepted. I do not remember any discrimination; let me put it that way.

UQ: Not at school and not otherwise?

MW: No, not at all. I am trying to think . . . when we were in high school, I was on the yearbook staff. I remember being accepted into that. I remember being accepted into speech club. I remember being an officer in the Honor Society.

UQ: Would you socialize with these kids outside of school, at dances and things?

MW: Yes. We started that in junior high school. We had some dances and things we went to after school and then I remember having a crush on a Caucasian guy, you know, and all of that. And I remember having a party at my house and having them come. My mom and dad let us do that. I remember going to some of their homes for parties and things like that. So, as far as I could tell . . . now, there may have been parties that I did not get invited to but if I can recall, there weren't that many parties at that time.

UQ: Not like now?

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MW: No, not at all, and the most popular kids would invite me to their homes. So, I remember that and going to their parties and inviting them to my home. And so, I remember that. And then, when we started socializing through church, we had parties at my home with the teenagers from church and through the Dragoneers. And my mom and dad let us have parties at our home. In fact, we were one of the few people that had a house at that time. After my father bought the house there and then he built a house around the corner on 19th Street, it was a two-story house and it was designed by the first Chinese architect in Houston [Charles Chan, graduate of Rice University]. It was a very, at that time, fancy house. And, you know, growing up, you don't think of yourself as rich or poor. I never thought one way or another. I never thought we were poor. I never thought we were rich. I knew that we had a house. I knew my father was able to build our house and then when he was able to build that house, he moved the other house from where it was and built a store there. So, my dad was doing well. But I didn't see him as being extremely rich. Do you know what I mean? But evidently, he was doing well. It wasn't until later on, years much later, when one of my friends who was a friend of my sister, said, "Well, you all were always so rich," because we had a two-story house and we had air-conditioning. We had window air-conditioning. At first, we just had attic fans. Then we put in window air. And we had television. So, we were considered well off. I never thought of it in that way. I mean, I just thought that was a better progression of what was happening. And so, one of my friends later on told me, she said, "Well, y'all were always so rich." I never got that other people perceived us as being wealthy. And then, other people started building houses and having homes and everything. But we

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were one of the few people that had a home at that time so that is why we could have parties at our home.

UQ: When she said, "you people," was she talking about Asian American people?

MW: Yes, in the Asian American community because the Caucasians all had homes.

UQ: Was there some celebration or holiday where the entire Chinese American community in Houston got together?

MW: Well, that was for Chinese New Year and that was down at Ong Leong. As I told you, the building down there. And we would all go down there. There would be like a buffet dinner. We would all have dinner down there. And they would shoot off firecrackers and then they would play MJ and the children would run around.

UQ: That was with the people you hadn't seen all year, you would actually meet on that particular day?

MW: Right.

UQ: Was it just one day or was it over a few days?

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MW: It was just one day. It was just one day. And then, you know, on the weekends, because my parents didn't have to work, we would visit our friends and our relatives and my mom would . . . the adults would play MJ which is Mahjong which was like families playing cards. And the children would all play with each other and we would have dinner at their homes. I remember some people lived in garage apartments. I remember that. Some people did have homes, began to have homes as we got older. A lot of people still lived in the back of the grocery store so that is why, you know, when they had parties, that wasn't very conducive for a party. So, that is kind of the social life that we had as teenagers.

UQ: So, it was a pretty well-developed community as far as numbers and then it sounds like because there were some people living in those back of the grocery stores, there were more and more new immigrants as well?

MW: Right.

UQ: About how many people would you say were living here?

MW: I would say probably [300]... [Phone rings. Tape pauses] Where were we?

UQ: We were talking about . . . your sister going to North Texas.

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MW: Yes, and then, I graduated. I chose to go to the University of Texas. I recall at that time saying I preferred to be a little fish in a big bowl rather than a big fish in a little bowl. And so, I went to the University of Texas and I stayed at Andrews dormitory. And, at that time, they had . . . they still have it today . . . a service organization that is called Spooks. Spooks was a freshman service organization. It was made up of sorority girls. Each sorority, I think, got like 4 girls or 2 girls to be a member and they would decide within the sorority. And then, they had 4 independents - people who were not sorority members. And, you know, you'd take your yearbook with you to college and some of the girls in the dormitory would look into my yearbook and then they decided that I should be a member of Spooks. And so, I was tapped for Spooks. It is a real cute little ceremony that they do. They usually tap . . . what they do with the selection, they tap you during the dinner hour. So, what they do is they go to the different sororities and they form this chain and you have one of the black uniforms with the little arm band that says Spooks. And they come around and they sing a song and they tap the girl to become a member of Spooks. So, they came to our lunch room and I was tapped. My lunch room was very, very surprised. But in that organization, I became the president of that organization my second year. You can stay for 2 years - freshman and sophomore year. And so, after my freshman year, I became the president and the person that is in charge of training the new people that come in is called the spirit of the organization.

The spirit was Carol Keaton Rylander who was the controller. So, Carol and I grew up at the University of Texas together and through the Spooks organization, she, of course, lived in Austin and her father was dean of the law school at that time. I recall her

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family, her mom, inviting us over to her home for some of the meetings that we had with Spooks and it was so nice to be in a home when you are at a university. And so, I can recall that and going up there. Very active at the university was a counselor there in the dormitory, worked with the Dean of Girls through that organization. And also went on to become a member of Orange Jackets which was another service organization. And then Mortar Board, which is a national service organization for seniors.

I had actually met my husband when I was in Houston. And all through my high school years, I dated a fellow named Tom Gee. And I was a Gee. And, you know, you don't marry Gees. But we dated and he played basketball and we went out. And then, the man that I ended up marrying was dating another woman named Elsie Wong and he was a Wong. It was real funny because all of us were dating people within the same [distant] family. But when we were in high school, because there weren't many Asians or Chinese in Houston, we would go to San Antonio to date boys. And the boys from San Antonio would come to Houston to date us. So, they had a club in San Antonio and they had a big dance there and we would all go to San Antonio. The [girls] would ride with the boys here and then be dating girls in San Antonio, and would be having a date with someone in San Antonio. So, it was a fun time. We would go there like on a Saturday and have the dance Saturday night. And then, we would come back Sunday. And we always had two or three cars that would do that. Carloads of kids going back and forth, because there were so few people to date in the city and so we would date that way. And we would also do it to New Orleans. So, people would go to New Orleans and date and then



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Houston. And then every once in a while, they would come but it wasn't a big deal, a big exam, a big dance. When they had these big dances, they went as formal as . . . and they didn't have them in hotels the way kids do now. They had them like in gymnasiums or something like that. So, that was our teenage years.

Then, when I went to the University of Texas, I had been dating the guy that I was dating here. And then, we all decided we would go up to the Texas/OU game. So, we went to the Texas/OU game. Then, I started dating the man that I ended up marrying. He was one year ahead of me in college. So, he had finished and then I was still there and my mom had told me I couldn't get married until I finished college. So, I finished college in 3 years. I went to school every summer. I took one correspondence course so I could get married. And I got married one week after I finished college.

UQ: O.K., wasn't that incentive!

MW: Well, so anyway, we got married and he was a pharmacist. We stayed with his parents.

UQ: Here in Houston?

MW: In Houston.

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UQ: What did you major in?

MW: I majored in education and I taught . . . when I finished school, I got a job with HISD. But the very first time that anyone ever mentioned about not being accepted or about any kind of, I guess, discriminatory things was when I went away to the University of Texas. I have a friend, a friend of my sister's, and what was happening . . . you had to go up to UT during the week and, of course, my mother and father could not go because they had to run the grocery store. So, my sister and her friend were going out to California so they dropped me off in Austin on the way to California. They were going to go live in California. They were going to go take a trip out there. My sister eventually moved out to California. No, they weren't going then - they just took me up to Austin. My friend and my sister took me up to Austin. And then, later on, they moved out to California when my sister finished college. When my sister finished college, she could not get a job here in Houston. She got her degree in accounting and could not get a job. So, that is why they went to California. Now, when I started going to the University of Texas, you know, I had all these boyfriend pictures and I was dating this boy from San Antonio and had a huge picture of him. And so, we were unpacking in my dorm room and my friend and my sister's friend said, "Oh, Martha, I think you need to put this picture up of Walter who was the guy I was supposedly dating so that the person you are going to room with knows that you are Chinese." I said, "Well, what difference does that make?" She said, "Well, you know, just kind of give them a warning that you are Chinese because they may not want to room with you." I thought, why wouldn't

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somebody want to room with me? I am a good girl. I am a good person. So, that is the first time that I ever had any inkling at all that I would not be accepted. I mean, all through high school, junior high school - never, never saw discrimination that I recognized, if I had it, because I was fairly popular, I had become elected officers in different clubs that I was in, so I never had any inkling at all that anybody would not accept me as who I was. So, that was kind of a shock to me.

UQ: Was she right?

MW: No. Well, I am sure that when we went up there, that they could see my last name. I had heard her name . . . (end of tape 1)

MW: . . . I became very active at the University and, as I said, became a counselor and all of that.

UQ: So, it sounds like it was just really a non-issue.

MW: I didn't see it as an issue, and then became a part of one of the select groups, you know, at the University and all of that. There were other Asians there - some of the kids that we went to school here with in Houston, also went to the University of Texas so my boyfriend that I decided that I was going to be his girlfriend, he was there. The boy from San Antonio whose picture we put up did not make it into UT and so he would come

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from San Antonio to see me and then that didn't last very long. But, you know, it was fine. I don't recall any problems at all going through UT. We did have, at that time, a Japanese girl who was one of our cheerleaders. She was very good and she could flip over. She evidently was a gymnast or something.

UQ: What year was this?

MW: I started UT in 1957. She was a cheerleader, you know, and we went to football games and went to concerts and I dated a number of different boys there. In those days, we had curfews. They don't even know what curfews are nowadays but at Andrews dormitory, if you didn't get inside by the curfew time which was, I think, 10 o'clock on a week night and 12 o'clock on a weekend . . . I remember going to some concert and going out with a guy from San Antonio - a good-looking guy - and we walked. We walked everywhere because nobody had cars, but we were trying to get back to the dormitory for me to get back in time and they locked the doors at 12 o'clock. And so, what they do is they blink the lights. If you are out on the porch kissing and you don't get in, they blink the lights so that you will come in so you don't have to sign in late. But we got there and did not get in on time because we were walking for some reason and couldn't get in and I had to sign in late. And I thought, oh no, this is my doomsday. I just took everything very seriously, to be very upright and very cautious about everything. I had to sign in late.

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I remember, in biology, I was taking what they called a Plan 2 biology. That was the only biology class that was open for me. Plan 2 was really for premed students. And so, I ended up in that class and it was the hardest thing I had ever taken. And the professor did not try to help those of us who were not Plan 2 students. But I had a friend from Austin that I had also knew and dated and he was a premed major. And so, he was in the class with me, so I would always study with him. But I remember on the first test, I was flunking it. So, in those days, if you are flunking a course, they send a notice to your parents. So, I remember writing a letter to my dad and telling him that he was going to get what I called a "pink slip," and that I was always studying hard and I went to the professor's class every day after the class to make sure that I had my notes right. And I wrote to my father, told him all this and told him I was going to pass the course, for him not to worry about me, because I had never failed anything in high school at all. It was all straight A's, you know, and that was the expectation, that is what you do. And so, I just remembered being so afraid I was going to fail that course. I passed it and I think I passed it with a B. But I was studying like mad, you know. It was probably the only B I made. And so, this perfection that you have and the perceptions that you have to do an A . . . and so, I did quite well in college. That was the only course. I swore I would never take another. . . and the guy helped me through it so anyway . . .

UQ: So, after that, you came back to Houston and then what did you do?

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MW: Well, when I was interviewing for jobs for a teacher, in those days, Spring Branch was supposed to be THE school district. So, I decided I would interview with Spring Branch. I had set up an interview to interview with Spring Branch in Houston. So, I had gone over to the administration building at Spring Branch and interviewed, and I had already been offered a job in HISD. But I told them I would let them know if I would accept it. So, when I went to interview over at Spring Branch, the guy that was interviewing me, he said, "Well, I want you to go into the teachers lounge and come back and tell me what happened." I went to the teachers lounge. Nobody was in there. I used the bathroom, came out. Nobody was ever in there. I said, "Well, no one was in there so nothing happened." So basically, what he wanted to do, which I figured out later was to see what the reaction of the faculty would be to an Asian. And they did not offer me the job.

So, I went ahead and took the job with HISD. I taught for two years. I taught first grade for two years. And then, we started our family. And I thought I could go back to work, you know. We had our daughter in October and I thought, well, by January, I will be able to go back to work. I just couldn't even get up! I couldn't even wake up in the morning. The lady that was my principal, Alberta Taylor, was a very well-known educator. Her son - I had gone to high school with her son. Her whole family was in education. And so, she wanted me back. She said, "Well, maybe you can come back in the fall after the spring and the summer." I said, "Yes, let me just postpone my return until then," because she wanted me back and she wanted to hold the position for me. So, in the fall, I still could not quite manage, you know. It was just . . . I think I was an

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overprotective mother and every time the baby woke up, I woke up. I just never could quite get it together so I just went and told her I just couldn't manage that. So, we just decided that I should stay home. So, I stayed home for 10 years.

UQ: So, January, 10 years later [was] when you went back.

MW: Yes, in the 10 years, I had two other children and so, you know, every two years, we had kids. In those days, I had a washing machine but I didn't have a dryer so I had to hang my clothes and diapers outside. We lived with my husband's parents and they had built a little kind of another ante room onto the house so that we had a living room of our own and a bedroom and everything. And so, we lived in that part for 5 years and stayed with his parents and took care of his parents at that time.

UQ: Is that the traditional way, to live with the parents?

MW: Usually, it is the oldest that will stay, the eldest son, that will take care of the parents and he was the youngest. And so, we did that. And then, after we had our third child, we built our own home. We built it in Meyerland. So, we raised three children. My daughter was about 4. She was getting ready to start school so that is when we decided that we needed to move. So, we moved and built our own home in Meyerland. In those days, we didn't have dishwashers. I didn't have a dishwasher. So, you had to boil the nipples to make them sterile. I burned so much rubber, I could hardly believe it .

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. .it stunk so much! I remember especially in the winter, it was very dreary when I had to go out and hang those diapers in the cold. It was tough. But I wasn't doing anything else so that was fine. And I can recall in the little place that we had, that I would watch soap operas at the time; I would spend the day. And my husband was a pharmacist, sometimes he would work day shifts and then sometimes he would work night shifts. And one time, he was at home in the day and I was ironing. I was a perfectionist in those days also. I ironed my sheets and my pillow cases and my mother-in-law thought I was crazy, of course. But that is what I did. I was going to do that. And I was ironing. I called my husband by the name of a soap opera person. He went over and turned off the TV and said, "You don't need to be watching that!" That was my vicarious living. So anyway, I quit watching soap operas.

As the kids got older, we found I had a cousin that lived over near Meyerland, in Maplewood and she had children the same age. So, I would go over there to let our children play. And we met other friends. We would meet. They would come to my place and we'd go to their place to let the children play. And so, finally when we went over and lived in Meyerland, we had always told our children we have a family room and we have a living room. I always put out whatnots and the children knew not to touch them, they never bothered them. They were taught very young these are things that are for decoration and you are not supposed to touch them. And every time my friends would come over, they would pick up all the things and put them up high because they were afraid that their children would break them. And I just thought, well, they can learn.



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They just didn't want to take the time to [teach]. So, that is just how you learn to live.

So, I remember that happening with our children.

I remember for entertainment, we would take the children out to the ice cream store. I don't know if you know about Westbury Square.

UQ: Yes.

MW: Well, in those days, they had a very nice little ice cream store there called Rumpelstiltskin or something. So, that would be our treat, is to take the children to Rumpelstiltskin and they had a good time. As our children grew, we were always active with the Chinese Baptist Mission Church and eventually, we had our own church. My husband's father was a deacon and my father became a deacon and my husband became a deacon and my father's oldest brother became a deacon. So, we were very centered in our church. I was head of the Sunday school, the Sunday school superintendent and the vacation bible school principal. You know, as the children are growing up, you do all those things with your children. So, we were very active in our church. And then, when we moved into Meyerland, our children went to school at Herod. We were very active in Herod. My husband and I became the president of the Herod PTA. This was when I still wasn't working. And then, my husband was a part of the Indian Guides which is kind of a pre . . . it wasn't Boy Scouts but it was like Boy Scouts. The fathers and the sons would get together and go camping and do all this stuff. And then, the girls couldn't come out to

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meetings so we had to go stay in the bedroom and the boys had their meetings. So, it was fun.

And on the street that we lived, it was all young couples. We socialized with them. We were in their home and they were in our home. And I remember this one couple that are still good friends of mine. We had invited her one time. So, we were seeing both Caucasian friends and Chinese friends. We had big parties at that time. We had a big house. The party that we had, it was a Chinese party but I invited my Caucasian friend [from] down the street. So, she came and she told me afterwards, she said, "You know, now I know how you feel when you come to my house and there are all Caucasian friends." She said, "Now, I know how it feels to be a minority," because she was the minority at the party. I said, "Well Susan, did people treat you badly?" She said, "Oh, no. Everyone was very nice. But I just now realize what it was to be not in the majority." I said, "Well, was it O.K.?" She said, "Well, it was fine. I just realized it." She said, "Do you feel that way when you come. . ." and I said, "No, because I socialize with those people anyway." I said, "No, I don't feel like I am in the minority when I come to your house."

And then, we became the PTA president. An African-American couple had moved into the neighborhood. And so, as the president . . . and also when I was the president of Spooks, I tried to bring in the African-American sororities. When I was the president, I said, "You know, we need to bring in [African Americans] – we didn't have

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African Americans on the board— and it was voted down. But eventually before I graduated, they did bring in the African-Americans. So, when we were PTA presidents, and this is how I am but people don't see me as being a civil rights activist - I am not an activist, I just do it, you know, and I am not one that is going to get out there and lead a protest but I have led protests. But in that case, what I try to do is when I . . . my belief is if you are unhappy with something, you join it, you become in charge and then you change it. And that is what I believe.

And so, when we became the president, we wanted one of the African-American people that had moved in. I don't think they lived in a house. I think they were in the apartments. I wanted them to become a part of the board, of the PTA board. The rest of the board was not ready to accept that. I kind of tested it out though on one of my friends there and she was a piano teacher for my children. And so, you know, sometimes I would go pick up the children, walk over and pick up the kids from my mother's, who lived in the neighborhood. So, I would go over and pick up the kids and I was testing her . . . "I think I want to nominate so and so to be on our board." She said, "Martha, I don't think that is going to work." I said, "I think that would be fine." She said, "No, no, I don't think" . . . I said, "Well, they are a minority and we should accept them." I said, "I am a minority and you are allowing me to be the president." She said to me, "But Martha, I don't think of you as an Asian." So, we had assimilated to the extent to where my Caucasian friends did not see me as Asian and, I think to a certain degree, that is good and yet . . . because you could do things in that way when people perceive that you are

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not that different from them. And so, we weren't successful at that time, either one of those times because, you see, previous to that time, the Houston schools were segregated. It wasn't until 1960 that they became desegregated and that was the year that we got married was in 1960. And, you know, so I am always just kind of right there, just trying to move justice forward but not pushing it; just, I guess, stirring the conscience of people. Anyway, we were the PTA presidents.

And then, what had happened is we had a big baseball field next to our school, a big park . . .

UQ: They're still there.

MW: Yes. They were going to change that into a Little League field. We practiced with Little League because my boys were in Little League. The city was going to put up these big stadium lights so they could play baseball there. Well, the neighborhood didn't want it. We didn't want it because we didn't want people playing baseball until 10 o'clock at night and we didn't want all the traffic that it was going to bring. We had just been the presidents of the PTA and then they were bringing this up . . . "Our PTA didn't want it. Our school neighborhood didn't want it." So, the president put me and my husband in charge of making sure that the park was not going to occur in that way. So, we got so busy and we got people to sign this petition and everything. And then, we invited the City Council member who, at that time, was Louis Macey, to an event that we

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had. We had a pre-meeting before he came and at the pre-meeting, we had all these people there saying why we didn't want the park and we were debating it. And then, when he came, then we had it all plotted out to where we would just tell him we don't want it. This is what we want in the park. We want tennis courts without lights, we want a playground, we want park benches, we want it for the neighborhood and we don't want all these other things. And that is what . . . it is a neighborhood park and that is what we wanted it to be. And we won.

UQ: It is still like that today. My son goes to Herod and I did, too.

MW: Yes, so that was my first bout in fighting City Hall and we won. Everyone just thought I was wonderful, you know. It is funny . . .

UQ: Was that when you decided to join City Council?

MW: No, not at that time. My kids were still young. They were still in elementary school. Our whole life was centered around the elementary school, around their activities. My daughter was in Campfire. The boys were in Indian Guides and Little League baseball. That was our life. Total dedication to whatever the children were in. And then, at church, we were active in our church. And so, that is how we spent our life.

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When the kids were old enough, my youngest started kindergarten. I decided to go back to school and to start teaching again. And, at that time, the schools had integrated. And so, it was much harder to go back to school because they wanted to send you on the other side of the city and I didn't want to travel 30 minutes and have my kids in school. I wanted to be able to get to my kids. I said, "I will take any assignment that is within 15 minutes of my home so that I can get home for my children." Well, in the meantime, my parents had also retired so they bought a home on one side of the school and then we had our home in Meyerland. So, after school, my kids would go to my parents' home until I got home from work. And so, at that time, special education had changed and now, all special children were to go into the public schools. So, there was a big need for special education teachers. So, they said, well, I could become a special education teacher but I would have to go back to school. Well, I had started my master's as soon as I finished college and so I already had some hours towards that. So, I said, "That's fine." So, I took one course at a time and finished my special education certification which then got me into my master's and also got me into my doctorate. So, I just always went to school after I went back to school. So, I got the job at Cunningham Elementary which is over off of Rice close to Bellaire but in Houston. So, that worked out very good because it was very close to my home and I could get home and the children could be at my parents and then I'd go pick them up when I got through with school and we would go home.

UQ: I did the same thing.

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MW: It works out very wonderful and I can say that I think staying home with the children gave them a great deal of confidence and all of my kids are very well-adjusted, I think, very confident and very successful. I think focusing your time upon your children at that time when they are young is very important. So, we did that. And then, when I went back to school and was a special education teacher, I did that for about 3 years. And then wanted to become a vice-principal but you couldn't be a vice-principal as a special education teacher which was stupid - some kind of crazy rule. So, my principal was very intent on helping me. She said, "Well, why don't you take a regular classroom?" I said, "O.K." So, she gave me a fifth and sixth grade split which was terrible. So, I took it, and did become the vice-principal then. And then after that, I applied for principalship and became the principal of Kolter Elementary. So, I was principal at Kolter. That worked out fine, too, because the kids were older and they were all in junior high school and high school then.

The third year that I was principal and I usually only stayed at a job 3 years because, you know, you learn everything and then it is no more of a challenge . . . I was about ready to stop and go back and finish my doctorate because my time was going to be up. I had a 7 year time line. Well, my husband died that year. He died of a stroke and heart attack. And so, this changes everything. And so, we just decided . . . they say, don't do anything different. So, we stayed the principal there. My daughter went away to the University of Texas and then my son was a senior at Bellaire and then the youngest

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was at Fondren. So, then I waited one year and then I quit and I took a leave and went back to the University. At that time, they made you go to school full-time when you are working on your doctorate. You have to have two semesters when you are a full-time student. What they want you to do is be there at the University and have collegial interchange with the other doctoral students and all that and you have your little . . . what do they call those tables where the doctorate students are? I don't know if they still do that or not.

UQ: \_\_\_\_\_?

MW: No, you have a table that is your doctoral table or desk out in the halls. Do they have those anymore?

UQ: No, they don't them anymore.

MW: Well, in the field of education, they did. So, you had a little kiosk or a little desk and it has a cover and you lock it and all that and you are supposed to spend time there visiting. So, I took one semester off, the spring semester off, and then I took the summer. So, that was two semesters that I took off full-time. And then I was supposed to come back to work in the fall to go back to Kolter Elementary because that was my time off. When it came time for me to go back, they had already appointed a principal. So, they told me, "Well, you can't go back there." I said, "But you promised me I was going to be



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able to go back." And so, anyway, Dr. Billy Reagan was the superintendent and he said, "Well, you just come on to work in the main building." So, I went in and worked under Dr. McIntire who was responsible for staff development at that time and I worked under him without a title. I was just called an administrator. I got the same pay as I would have as a principal but had no title and was just doing flunky stuff - whatever he wanted me to do. I did all the work. He got all the glory.

And then, I was starting on my dissertation and had problems with it because the man I had asked to head my chair, he had several other students and a couple of them were in trouble. He said, "Martha, I've got some students in trouble so I can't take you on now." I said, "O.K." So, I had to find someone else to take on my doctorate, to head my dissertation chair. And so, I was in the elevator one day with this man named Bart Hirscher. I think Bart taught community college, higher ed. I had had one course from him, I think. I said, "Dr. Hirscher, I need a dissertation chair. Will you be my dissertation chair?" He said, "Oh, Martha, I can't take on another student." I said, "Dr. Hirscher, I am not going to be able to graduate unless you do this." I had already started writing it and done all my research and everything. I just had to put it together. He said, "Well, why don't we do this? I will be the co-chair and I will take care of all the paperwork at the University but I cannot guide you through the study, so if you can get Dr. McIntire," who was also a doctor who I was working under at U of H, "if he will do your dissertation part, help you through the studies part, then I will do the paperwork." So, that is how we ended up doing it. So, I had two co-chairs.

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Then, the funny thing . . . the man who turned me down, I kept him on my committee. He was on my committee. And then, when it came time for me to defend my dissertation, he said, "Well Martha, you haven't quoted my article in 'so and so' magazine." I was so mad at him, I could have shot him. I said, "Oh, I am sorry I didn't see it. It was a very recent publication. I will be glad to include it." So, I included his. On top of all that, when he told me that he couldn't be my chair, he said, "Martha, I don't see why you want to have your doctorate." He says, "My wife is totally happy not having a doctorate." And I am thinking, what kind of a person are you? Because I was running into all of these . . . also, I was going to do a pilot study at HISD and I thought I could do that and Dr. Reagan wanted me to do it and I was going to do it on quality circles. But the research department would not let me do it. And it was some political crap going on there within the school district. So, he says, "You are having all of these problems. Why don't you just give up?" That is what this man . . . I said, "I am sorry but I am so close, I am not going to give up."

So, I never knew whether he really meant what he said or whether he did that to make me do it to spite him. So, you never know the psychology that he was using on me. But just to prove to him that regardless of what ever was in front of me, I was going to overcome it and do it and I did it. And so, I never knew, I never asked him why he made those statements to me but I thought, well, maybe he did that because he knew what kind of a person I was and that I would do it regardless of what happened.

Asians are supposed to want higher degrees but I also recall . . . because my husband had passed. So, I was getting the degree, my daughter was in college, my son

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was in college; there were 3 of us in college at the same time. And then, I had to go back to work at the main administration building. So, what I would do is I would work all day, I would go home, and this was before I was computer literate, O.K.? So, I would go home and type on my electric typewriter my dissertation. There was a woman in the central administration building that knew how to use the computer and so she would then put it on the computer. So, I would leave the papers for her at night when I finished typing them, I would run back over there, and then she would get them the next morning and the next day and in the evening, she would type them up for me. And so, that is how I did my dissertation. And my mother said, "I don't know why you want to do this." She said, "You know, you don't really need this doctorate for your job." I said, "No, I don't need it but, you know, I am going to do it."

And so, I did it and the funny thing is it certainly came in handy because then, once I was working with Dr. Reagan and then he quit.... I was at the top level management even though I didn't have a title - I sat in on all the big decision things. All the deputy superintendents were there. I was more or less the gopher at that time. I got to do a lot of things because I was the gopher, you know, and I got to set up a lot of things for Dr. Reagan. I got to go to a very . . . many great meetings and could see the inside, saw how he handled himself and all the things that he did. So, it was a very interesting time. And then, when he quit, then Joan Raymond became the superintendent. I don't know if you were in Houston at that time or not.

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UQ: I have been here since 1980. Was it right about that same time?

MW: Yes. She was a woman from the north and she basically let go of everybody that was close to Dr. Reagan. And so, I was working in central office and had finally gotten the title of associate superintendent. So, she decided that I was too loyal to Billy Reagan to become loyal to her but she never said that. She called me in and told me that she was going to put me back as a principal and called me in, because I was at that time in charge of staff development, associate superintendent for staff development and had developed all of the evaluation programs for every person in the district and had developed the career ladder at the state and had also started the first alternative certification program for the whole state of Texas. I got to do all of that under Dr. Reagan. And so, I am really proud of the alternative certification program and what it has done for education.

So, she wanted me to be a principal again. I said, "Fine." She called me in and I said, "If that is where you think I could best serve the school district and the children, that is where I will go." So, she sent me out there, it was like January, mid-term, to be the assistant principal and the woman that was principal came in and took over my job. We kind of exchanged jobs. I didn't want to be a principal again because I had already done that. I figured I knew how to do that.

But, at the same time while I was being the principal, I was still asked to go to a number of conferences because of the position I held. So, I would still get to go to conferences. I had been to a conference and one of the girls that I knew through another school district was going to school at Baylor University. She came up to me and she said,

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"Martha, Baylor is looking for an associate professor. Why don't you apply for that job?"

I said, "I don't know about that." She said, "They really want someone that has had experience and you are ideal. You have been the principal, you have been at Central." I said, "Well." She said, "Come on, come over. I want you to meet Dr. Estes." So, she took me over to meet Dr. Estes and we talked a little bit and everything. He said, "I would really like for you to apply." I said, "Well, I will think about it." This was towards the end of . . .in [May], it was towards the end of the semester. And I knew I wasn't going to stay at that school. I just wasn't going to do that. I was going to do something else. So, that opportunity came and I applied for it and I got that job. And so, I turned in my resignation to HISD and went on to Baylor. The amazing thing, because when you are a principal or you work within a school district, you don't get to negotiate anything. You get a title and that is where you are and you get what they give you." Well, as a professor, you get to negotiate. Were you aware of that?

UQ: No.

MW: So, when you become a professor, you negotiate good. I wasn't aware of that and I wasn't prepared for it. And so, they told me what the salary would be. I asked for more money. I got more money. I asked for an office. They gave me a corner office. I asked for new drapes. They gave me new drapes because the drapes in my office were terrible. And then, I asked for a secretary and they gave me a part-time student secretary. So, I got everything I had asked for. I probably would have gotten more if I would have asked

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for it. I just didn't know to ask for more. So, when you get ready to get your doctorate or anything . . . because I had never negotiated before and I had always heard about superintendents getting other people to help them negotiate.

But I went to Waco and enjoyed one year there. Another woman from the University of Houston here also went to Waco. So, we became fast friends. We were the two new faculty members in education and we became good friends. She was Episcopalian, I was Baptist. We could go out to dinner and she could order a drink and I couldn't! It was crazy. And I rented a little condo there and it was all good. So then, the next year, I was going to have to start into my research. I was in charge of a center there that would train principals and superintendents in central Texas on some leadership skills. So, I was responsible for that and I taught 3 classes and really enjoyed it. I taught a group of graduate students who were working on their doctorate on organization behavior. And then, that summer, we took our students to China to look at the universities there and the school. There, we had some Chinese students at Baylor who made arrangements for us to go abroad, so we all went to China.

UQ: Was that your first time?

MW: I had not been to China. I had been to Taiwan before. Anyway, when we went to China, it was a great experience. Of course, in China, they treat the professors different from the students. So, the other professor and I, we stayed at a university and in the university dorm, I had a room that had a rug on the floor that was this bare, thin rug and I

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also had a piece of tin in the room that was supposed to be a mirror, and I also had a mosquito net. So, those were the luxuries that they gave to professors that the other people did not have. So, they didn't have rugs, they didn't have a mirror, they didn't have a mosquito net. So, as a professor, those were our perks.

UQ: I guess they must have seen you and started talking in Chinese?

MW: No, they knew I didn't speak Chinese but they knew who were the professors and who were the students. So, they gave the professors the better rooms.

UQ: Can't do much better than that . . .

MW: Well, we all were together all the time. The funny thing is the hot water turned off at 6 o'clock and we never came in before 6 o'clock. We had cold showers and everything. It was just real funny. But we had a good time. So then, I decided the next year that I was going to have to get serious with my research, which I wanted to do, but I wasn't really happy with Waco. It was still very provincial. I would be finding the same kind of things that we were fighting in the 1950s - the discrimination and all of that. Even though I didn't feel like there was discrimination at the university, I thought in the city of Waco itself, it was so provincial, that I just didn't want to have to deal with it.

So, I decided not to stay and I came back to Houston and just lived here and did some consulting work. I had a friend, a good friend, that was doing some consulting

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work and she gave me some of her work and we did some consulting together. And then, I decided I would . . . I had a friend who was on the school board and on the HCC board and called her up and asked her if she could help me find a job at the college. She said, "Of course." She said, "Why don't you just call up JB and tell him you want to work?" This was the president of the college. She said, "Tell him I told you to." So, I called him up, we had lunch and I told him I wanted to do some work. I wanted to work at the college. He said, "Well, we have a job opening in staff development," and I had done staff development at HISD. So, he says, "But Dr. Harding is the person that is going to hire so you are going to have to meet with Dr. Harding." I said, "Fine." I said, "You will tell Dr. Harding though that you and I have met?" He said, "Well, you go ahead and meet with him." So, I met with Dr. Harding. He was an African-American fellow, a good old guy from way back. I just thought, well, he is going to hire a black. He is not going to hire me. And so, when we met, I interviewed with him and I said, "I want you to know that Dr. Whitely is the one who told me to come over and visit with you and he said I needed to pass through your approval before I could get this job." So, I was letting him know that basically, the president said I could have the job but that I had to pass through him. So, I kind of let him know. I said, "If there is anything you think I need to do or anyone else I need to interview with, will you please let me know?" Will you help me to get this job is what I was saying. He said, "O.K." So, I buttered him up good and I got the job!



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In the meantime, when I was at Baylor, one of my friends that I had gone through Leadership Houston with when I was still with HISD, was running for City Council. And so, when I was in Waco, I would come home a couple of times and he had asked me to help him. And I said, O.K. So, what I did was I took my church directory and everybody that lived in his zip codes, I sent them cards and other friends that I knew and told them to vote for him and he won. He got into the runoff and he won. So, we helped him to win. So, there were other Asians, Chinese, who were somewhat active in politics. At that time, they were just basically supporting different elected officials and they were doing that. So, when I came back to Houston, other people asked me to help them so I would help them if I knew them. So finally then, some of the Chinese got together with me and said, "Well, why don't we work together rather than opposing people and try to get people to understand the Asian community so that we can get things done for the Asian community?"

UQ: When was that?

MW: This was back in . . . I was elected in 1993, so go back 6 years. That would be 1987? In 1987, 1988, about that time when I was back in Houston. And they said, "Why don't we all get together and try to work together and have an Asian agenda?"

UQ: There were no Asians that held office at that time?

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MW: No, no. So, we got together. I had met some Indian people and I had met some Korean and Japanese people, so we called a group of diverse people together from different ethnic groups and said, "Let's try to have an Asian agenda, get more Asians appointed to positions, get more Asians positioned in government and try to influence elections in that way?" Well, the year we decided this was the year that Kathy Whitmire was the mayor. There were a number of Asians that supported Kathy Whitmire and she had done some things for Asians but it was superficial stuff. No Asians in significant places, let's put it that way. Asians were always at the mid-management level. And Fred Hofheinz was running against her who had been a mayor before that. So, it was between those two. So, we met every week and tried to set our agenda and tried to decide what we were going to do and who we were going to support. Whether we were going to support Kathy Whitmire or Fred Hofheinz became a big debate about what we were going to do. And other people running for office started coming to our meetings and telling us they wanted our endorsement. Well, we weren't a formal organization and so we finally developed an organization called the Asian American Coalition.

So, we finally decided that what we would do is we would try to get Kathy Whitmire . . . and that was the first political organization around – although we had bylaws and everything, we weren't a PAC. But we endorsed. We decided what we would do is we would try and get 1,000 Asians together, get Kathy Whitmire and Fred Hofheinz to come and debate. And so, we did that. We had it at the Chinese church over there on South Main. The church that I went to would not allow us to use their facilities. They didn't want to be political. It was so dumb. Still a dumb situation. And so, this

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church out there would let us use their facilities and so we held it right after their church.

We got a lot of their people to stay and we had about 1,000 Asians there which was the first time anybody had ever seen 1,000 Asians at a . . . (end of tape 2)

. . . my nephew got some sample voting booths to teach people how to use the voting booth because, at that time, you kind of punched with a punch card kind of thing. You would flip the page over and you would punch. So, we got that. We taught people how to vote and we decided to do a straw vote. So, we did a straw vote and how ever the straw vote came out, that is who we were going to support.

UQ: As an organization?

MW: As an organization, as a community. So, we all said, "I will work for who ever it is that we were going to" . . . Well, Fred Hofheinz won by 4 votes. It was so funny. So, we all decided to do that. And so, then we gave a fundraiser for Fred Hofheinz.

UQ: Was everyone okay with that once that was decided?

MW: Yes, we decided ahead of time that that was going to be it and regardless of what your feelings were and, oh, we had arguments on top of arguments. But we said the only way we are going to have political power is for us to all agree in doing this. And so, we did it. We all agreed that that was what we were going to . . . even though some people

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kind of weren't as active in it because their candidate . . . . So, we had a fundraiser and we raised \$60,000 for Fred Hofheinz which was a lot of money. We talked Fred Hofheinz into having a press conference to say that we were endorsing him, that the Asian community was endorsing him. Well, we made the front page of the city section, the second section. And there was our picture with Fred Hofheinz. As my little friend Glen Gondo, he said, "We have made it. We have arrived!" We were surprised that we would get . . .our agreement was we met with Fred and we said, "Fred, we are going to endorse you but these are the things we want from you. We want you, first of all, to recognize the Asian community and give some of our people appointments. Second, we want you to hold a press conference to let people know that we are supporting you and that we are giving you this money," and, you know, those are good things. And so, he did that and it turned out great. He lost the election! So, then we had to go kiss and make up with Kathy Whitmire.

Well, the thing is, is that Kathy realized that we were together and then she invited us all to breakfast. And so, we told her that we felt like more Asians needed to have city appointments and things like that. And so, I did get an appointment through the guy that was there – council member out here at [District] F, a Caucasian – to the Municipal Pension Fund. I got that appointment. And I think there were a few people that were appointed to the Convention Bureau Board. Still, not a lot of appointments. So, the next go around, we decide that we are going to run our own candidates. No more of this, you know, supporting people because they don't come through for us. Kathy didn't come through for us, not the way that we wanted. So, we decide who could do

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this? And we decide Harry Gee. He would be the best candidate because he is an attorney, he speaks well. He really doesn't speak that well . . . Harry kind of stumbles but he is better and better all the time. So we decided that we would get Harry Gee and we hired this . . . brought this consultant in to tell us what to do and all this. So, the consultant had Harry go get his hair cut and got a good picture made and he looked so artificial that, you know, that was the image that we were supposed to be. So, we did this. So, we got all the pictures, we got Harry looking good and we had the consultant, we were ready to hire him. Well, this woman named Glenda Joe - have you run across her?

UQ: No, I haven't.

MW: She has always been somewhat political, too, and so she just said she was going to run. She is a Chinese woman. Her mother was Caucasian, her father was Chinese. But she has always been out there.

UQ: So, the first year after all these years you decide to have an Asian representative of one community, someone else decides to run too?

MW: Yes, and she was not a part of our group. She never joined us. She was also always kind of on the fringe but she was an activist. She really did some pretty good things. When the Vietnamese came to Houston, there were problems. She helped solve

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some of those problems and things like that. So, she was a good activist but she was never a part of mainstream. She was always on the edge. So, when she decided to run, she had gone ahead and signed up. Harry hadn't actually put his money down. He decided he didn't want to run against another Asian and we didn't think that was good either. So, he withdrew. So, we let her run. She didn't have any money. She didn't get very much support but she did fairly well, you know. So, we kind of let that election pass.

UQ: What year was that?

MW: It might have been 1980. Probably 1980. No, it was later than that, it was probably 1989. So, two more years come and the city decides that we are going to have term limits. Well, they avoided term limits the first time by saying that if you get a petition of so many people, you can still run. So, \_\_\_\_\_ did that. I helped her get her petition. So then the next year, we decide, term limits - a lot of people aren't going to be able to run. So, we decide the guy in F which was the Asian community wasn't going to run. And then, the guy in my district wasn't going to run. And then, some at large weren't going to run. So, we decide, O.K., we are going to have Harry Gee in there. And then, we decide because F was an Asian area that we could win the Asian area. So, we picked the young man to do that. He was an engineer. After we picked those two, we were going to have a press conference out in Chinatown and everything. Well, the young

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man talked to his company and the company said, "You have to resign your position. You can't run and do this." So, he couldn't do that because he had a young family.

And then, the girl [Glenda Joe] signs up again for the same seat that Harry is going to run in. You know, we don't want Asians running against Asians. So, Harry drops out. That guy drops out. This is Saturday . . . we had met like Friday and we had all had it all set up for the press conference on Saturday morning. So, they call and they all drop out and so we don't have a press conference. So, we decide, well, we had better meet and decide what the hell we are going to do. And so, we meet Sunday at 9 now. Well, we look at the whole thing again and we say, O.K., where can we fill somebody that can win and it has to be a seat where, a non-incumbent is going to run. So, my district was the only area. So, they decided that I should run. Well, I was working at the Houston Community College then. I was in charge of the Southwest Community relations area and we were getting ready to do a bond issue at the same time. And I kept asking the lady, "What do you want me to do because I've got a lot of connections in southwest Houston. I have lived there, been PTA president, Little League president, you know, and working in the college, chambers of commerce and everything and have been active through the college and all?" She says, "We are going to handle it all centrally," so I had nothing to do. And I said, okay, since I didn't have to do anything for the college bond election, I said, O.K., then I can run because I didn't want to have to split my time. If I was going to work the bond election, I didn't want to help. So, then we decided that I would run.

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So, Sunday night, we decide I will run. And so, Monday is the last day to put your money down and I was scheduled to go to Dallas for a speaking engagement. I was still doing speaking engagements. So, I had to fly out . . . I was going to fly out Monday morning. I would go by the bank, I would go by and get my money from the bank and then I'll go downtown and register. Well, the bank opens at 7 but you cannot get a bank draft through the drive-in window. You have to wait until 9. So, I had to wait until 9 o'clock and go into the bank and get a bank draft. And I went down to City Hall. It is probably about 9:30. I am down at City Hall. All the lights are there. I didn't know what the heck to expect. All the cameramen are there, you know, waiting to see who enrolls at the last minute and there I am enrolling and there I was. And I get back in my car and I am heading out to the airport. I have one of these real old-fashioned phones at this time and I call my mom and dad on the phone and I said, "I am on my way to Dallas. I want you to know I am going to the airport now. If you see the news tonight on television that I am running for City Council, I want you to know that it is true," because I had not had time to talk to them.

UQ: They were here in Houston?

MW: Yes, they lived in Houston. I knew they would see it so I wanted to warn them. So, you know, I was away for a few days and then came back. Then, we sat down and tried to get a consultant. We couldn't get a consultant. Could you believe it? So, finally, we got Nancy Sims. We met with her. A number of people met with me and her and she



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said, "So, Martha, it is too late for you to enter this race. Everybody else has already been in it since January. You really don't have much of a chance and all the money is already taken. The people who normally give have already committed." Of course, it is September now. "Unless you can raise \$30,000 within 1 week, there is no way that I can take you on." I said, "O.K." We were all kind of discouraged. I went home and I am thinking, how can I raise \$30,000 in 1 week? So, I just call up my family. I have 3 children. I told every one of them they owed me \$5,000. My daughter was married and so, she sent me money. I had control over my other two sons' checking accounts so I started writing checks - now is the time for you to repay your mom back. And then, my sister in Phoenix sent me a check, and my sister in Los Angeles sent me a check. And my mom and dad gave me . . . that was my first \$30,000. So, we got that money. She was shocked that I could get that kind of money. And, of course, if your family doesn't support you, you can't do anything. So, we got there and then we started our campaign. I got Ed Wulfe who developed the Meyerland shopping center - I had met him because I was the president of the Meyerland homeowners group. And we were negotiating with him at that time about Meyerland. It hadn't been redeveloped. And he was telling us what was going to go there and we were telling him what we wanted, so I had met him through that route.

UQ: You were still living in Meyerland at the time?

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MW: Yes. So, I called him up and asked him if he would loan me some space and let me use some space. Well, my campaign had [just started] and they hadn't started redeveloping it yet. He says, "Well, we haven't really started it." I said, "I know that." He says, "Well, you will have to turn on your own water." I said, "That's fine." So, we did it and we had some space over there. We just got the Asian community involved and then because I was also on the Meyerland board, I got the Meyerland board to support me. And then, I had a lot of friends in the neighborhood through my PTA that supported me.

UQ: And all your years of involvement in that area.

MW: Yes, and so, that is how we planned our first [race]. We got to a runoff; they didn't expect me to get to a runoff. All the political pundits were saying we couldn't do it but we got in with the highest number of votes, so we had a runoff. Nobody still from downtown would support me. You know, I would go and I would ask them to support me and help - all the guys that, you know, gave money. But Harry Gee had been a roommate with Harry Reasoner who was the managing partner of V and E [Vinson & Elkins], but the political person was Joe B. Allen and Joe B. Allen would not give me any money because they were sticking with the guy that they had . . . and he didn't get as many votes as I did. So, Harry set up a lunch with me and Harry Reasoner and Harry Reasoner's wife and we all went to lunch. Harry was selling me to them. And then, I told Harry Reasoner, I said, "Could you get Joe B. Allen to give me some money?" I

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said, "He is not supporting me in this election." Harry had convinced Harry Reasoner to endorse me and his wife to endorse me. So, he says, "Yes, I will take care of that." So, by the time I left downtown, we were at Damians and I got back to the campaign headquarters in Meyerland . . . Joe B. Allen had a check for me.

So, Harry had some influence in some of the downtown law firms because he had worked with them. And then, he also . . . I visited all of them but none of them would endorse me because they had already helped the other guy. So, then I went back around the second time since I had won and called them and tried to get them to support me. And so, the Fulbright [Fulbright & Jaworski] people - Harry knew the Fulbright people and asked them to visit with me. So, I went down to visit with them and I visited with the Oliver Pennington and with Richard Hall. Richard Hall - he thought that they should support me because I had the most votes in the election. "I think she is going to win and I think we need to support her." Well, they had a little resistance there but they were the only downtown law firm that supported me without the pressure from them because Richard had seen the numbers. They gave me some financial help. So, that and then the Asian community gave me big help, and then my friends. And that is how we were able to raise the money. I always tell Fulbright, "You all have always supported me. I appreciate the fact that you came over to my side when everybody else was against me." [I] have always had a fond place for [them].

UQ: That was your entry into . . .

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MW: Yes, and then we won and even Mayor Lanier said, when I went in to visit with him after I got elected, he said, "You know, I watched your race and I didn't think you were going to win." He said, "I just didn't think an Asian could win an election."

UQ: That's honest.

MW: I said, "Well, we fooled you, didn't we?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You know, Mayor, there are a lot of things that the Asian community needs and I will be happy to work with you but we do need a number of things," and he said, "Well, I will work with you." We got appointments . . . my first thing was to get an appointment to the Metro board. And so, we got Harry Gee on the Metro board. We got someone on every major board that the city had. The only place we didn't get someone was on the Port Commission. We got on the Sports Authority, we got people in just about everything. So, Mayor Lanier was very good. I am still very fond of him. He was a gentleman and you are too young to know this but people at that time that were born in the 1930s, mid-1930s, they were raised in a certain environment and they were gentlemen. They were raised to believe that they were the providers of the family; that the men were the providers and the women were to take care of the house and children. . . the men were supposed to take care of the women. And there is that age group that is in there and most of the men that were raised at that time, that is how they were raised. And with my studies at the University, in studying to become an administrator, you know, the research showed that women could not be principals, and it showed that short women could not be

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principals because the principal had to have an authoritative look. So, it had to be somebody big and tall and that is why football coaches became principals and superintendents. And so, you know, when we saw that literature, I said, "Oh my God - here I am, a short woman," but I became a principal. And then, we went on to win that election.

I knew the way that Lanier thought. So, my strategy with him was to always let him rescue me. You know, that when I had a problem, I would go and tell him what the problem was and tell him how I thought it could be solved. "Mayor, maybe if you would do this, you could take care of it. You could help me." And so, I always went to him with 'I'm a poor little lady that doesn't know any darned difference and if you take care of this for me, it will be solved.' So, that is how I got everything I wanted from Mayor Lanier. And before when I was younger, I would have never done that because I . . . when you are a certain age, you become kind of belligerent as a woman. I can do this on my own. I don't need the rest of you to do it. I am smart enough, I am bright enough, I can do this, to hell with the rest of you. And that is where I was at one point in my life. And then, as you grow older, you realize, it doesn't matter how you get it and who gets the credit - as long as it gets done. I had come full circle in that whatever I needed to do, if it didn't break the law, then I would get it done that way, and I knew exactly how to play him. So, I played him for all he was worth. The Asian community got good things. We got an assistant police chief. I mean, you know, just about everything I wanted within 6 years.

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UQ: So do you think your success was probably a combination of factors that allowed an Asian Americans to finally have...be in City Council at that time in Houston?

MW: Right. So, I think that the Asians became a little bit more politically sophisticated. I think they have begun to understand that we could do something together and the fact that I was still elected in a non-Asian area because we had very few Asians living in that part of the city at that time. Now, there are quite a few Asians in that area. So, that made a lot of . . . and the fact that I had become so integrated into the community and, as my one friend had said, they didn't see me as Asian . . . The thing though that I had to always do was to not always speak out for Asians at the table but do it behind the scenes and that is what I did. And so, some Asians thought I didn't say enough because I wasn't saying it . . .

UQ: Very publicly.

MW: Yes. But behind the scenes, I got everything I needed. And so, some Asians would criticize me because, you know, if there was a situation where Asians were having a problem, I didn't speak out. And so, what I would do is I would go behind the scenes and I would tell the mayor, "This has to be solved. We have to do this, this and this," or "What do you think if we did" this and this and this?" He would do it and so it would get solved. But it is just that . . . because I knew that if I did that at the table, that the constituents that I had would think I wasn't representing them, that I was representing

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Asians. So, the Asian candidate always has this being the bridge but yet, can't be the complete advocacy. And that is what I did. There are still people who don't understand what I did because they don't understand politics. They don't understand. And then, one time when I went to interview with one of the men who was with the builders, Associated Builders, one of the older fellows says, "She doesn't do anything but help the Chinese. She doesn't represent all of us. She just represents the Chinese." So, somewhere, he had found out that I had done a lot of things to help the Asian community. And every time I would visit with the Asian community, I would have to tell them what I was doing for them because they wouldn't know otherwise. So, somehow, he found out everything I was doing. Anyway, I was asking for their endorsement and I did get their endorsement and everybody else at their table was very embarrassed by what he said and they apologized. They said, "We know that you do good things." And that is the one thing that I made sure that I did - that I helped everyone, that I first of all, helped my constituents. If there was a problem, I'd take care of them. And that is what they even asked me on the newspaper - "Well, are you going to be the Asian representative?" I said, very publicly, I said, "I was elected to District C and my loyalties will be to the people who live in District C." I said, "Certainly, I will be helpful to the Asians but my first loyalty is to them." And so, some Asians, of course, took that wrong because . . . well, that is true. You have to. Those are the people that elect you. You have to keep them happy. And to this day, there are still Asians who don't understand that and say that I don't do enough for the Asian community. When I hear that I just say 'that is the most naive person that I have ever run across.' That happens.

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And then, I have had people say, in this last election, one woman who said she didn't vote for me because I don't go to the Asian events enough. So, I called her on it. She didn't expect me to call her but she told someone else. So, I called her up and I said, "I understand that you are upset with me because I don't stay at Asian events long." I said, "I want to explain that to you if you will allow me the time." I said, "I will let you know that I get as many as 12 invitations for one night." And I said, "When I go to an Asian event and I tell them I am going to make an appearance, I do just that. I tell them I am going to come, I am going to say hello, I will be introduced and then I am going to leave." And I said, "If you prefer for me not to do that and not show up at all, I won't show up." I said, "But I have other events and I will probably hit 6 events tonight and yours is one I choose to come to. So, you let me know." So, you know, they want you to show. So, I go and I show and I say hello and I leave. And this woman was very upset with me because I didn't stay through the dinner. I said, "I just want you to know that that was an agreement I have before I go to something that that is how I am going to handle it, plus the fact that, you know, very few people in that room can even vote for me and I have to go where the voters are to get reelected so I can help you as an Asian American," because every time somebody got in trouble, they would come to me, regardless of whether they were in the district or not. And I would help them. And I would solve problems all over the city, you know. But people didn't know that. And the naive people didn't realize what was going on. People that were building things and the building code people were holding them up and I'd work that kind of stuff out for people



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- Asians all over the city. People's kids were in jail and they would call me at midnight and I would get their kids out of jail, you know. But you don't go around telling everybody that. But that is what I did. And people that I helped, knew that.

UQ: They think you're neglecting them when rather, you're helping them, even if it means publicly neglecting them.

MW: Right. And so, it is very interesting that that happens. In fact, there was an article in this Asian Week newspaper that was saying that some of the Asian organizations didn't support the Asians because they felt like the Asian candidates didn't pay enough attention to the Asian community. And I plan on writing that newspaper to let them understand what happens. You cannot spend all of your time in the Asian community if you technically don't represent them because of the lines. There is just no way you can do that and still . . .

UQ: And maintain your position well enough to continue helping them.

MW: Absolutely. They just don't understand that. So anyway, I finished out my Council days and then had a couple of years off. My mother and father had passed away during my last year as a City Councilmember. I did not get to do their estate until I was done with Council. So, that took me close to one year just to clean up their estate because I am the only daughter here. My sisters are in California. Everything was

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divided among all of us and we were trying to decide how to do things. They had a little bit of stock - not much, thank God, so we divided up the stock and everybody . . . we had to get their names and their Social Security . . . just lots of detailed stuff. And so, that took me close to one year and I became more active in other organizations and Republican organizations during this time because I had time. And then, when they redrew the district line, some of the Republican women said that it was time for me to run again. So, I ran again and that was an uphill battle because I was against an incumbent who had been there for 22 years. And so, we beat her. So, that is how we got into the State House [of Representatives, in 2003].

The State is quite different from the local politics and it is very interesting. The friends you meet there are . . . because you are up there in Austin and you are away from your family, the legislature becomes your family because most spouses do not go up there. A lot of the women will go up there with their husbands - the older women - but the younger women who have children stay at home. So, you really have breakfast with them, you have lunch with them, you have dinner with them, you go out at night with them. So, they really become your family and you become very close; whereas, when you are in Houston, you will see your fellow Council members at other meetings but you don't do everything with them. So, the ties of the legislature are much stronger than the ties are on Houston [City Council]. And, in fact, some people room with each other because, you know, you have to get an apartment there. So, some people room with each other. So, your ties become much closer at the legislature than they do politically in

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Houston. So, it is very interesting and I have some very good friends there. I am very proud of the friendships that I have there.

So, went through that there. And then, my last election. Lost that election. I think we lost it . . . I have not even looked at the numbers because as soon as I finished the election, I had to take care of my health and I found out that I had to have surgery. And so, it has just been one thing after another. So, that is where I am today.

UQ: What advice do you have for young people, young Asian Americans who are interested in politics?

MW: Well, I have tried to get as many of them interested as I know how. Many of them are not . . . some of them that are interested, I have asked them to work in my office. And most of them will work in the offices and some of them do that. But most of their parents want them to go out and get a job that pays better because we pay very little money and I know one friend of mine . . . I had one friend's son come work in my Council office and I paid them very little money because we don't have big salaries to pay them. I wasn't sure how our budget was going to be so I paid them very little money. And he stayed with me for, I think a couple of years, 4 years probably. Someone had told me that his mother was upset because I never paid him very much money. And I don't think that she realized that I hired him when he couldn't get a job anywhere else. He was fresh out of college. He wasn't getting a job anywhere else and because they were my

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friends, I hired their son but I don't think they ever knew that. I gave him a job and taught him how to use the computer, forced him to use the computer and now, he is working at the University of Houston with computers. And so, you know, a lot of people just . . . I don't tell my motivations. I don't tell people why I do things because I don't think it is necessary. But when I hear people criticize me for something that I did and helped them out when they didn't even realize I was helping their son out and providing the skills for him so he could go on and get a better paying job, I just think that is kind of ironic.

UQ: What is it that you think continues to draw Asians to Houston?

MW: Well, I think the climate has a lot to do with it. I think the climate is similar to many Asian countries' climates. I think because Houston is what I would call an open community, much more open even than Dallas and is very accepting of people, I think that that draws people. As I find most immigrants come to a place where they have relatives . . . if they have a relative there, you know, they will visit their relatives and then the relatives will say, 'Oh, come move here.' And usually, most people do that. If they have a relative here, they will come and live here. Then, some of them come to school here and stay on because they find the community open. And I think that has a lot to do with it. I think because Houston is an open and basically an accepting community, yet, there are prejudices . . . yet they are accepting, that that attracts many people.

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UQ: Do you foretell this is going to continue in that same direction as far as it becoming more open and accepting?

MW: I think it will continue to. I think that there are still some interracial problems within communities. I think that when the African-Americans see that the Asians have done so well, I think many times that they, so to speak "pick on" the Asian community because we are easy to pick on. We are quiet. We take a lot of things from people that we shouldn't take.

