

**Smithsonian Institution
National Museum of American History**

**Philanthropy Initiative
Oral History Project**

Interview with:

Marie Lam

Member, Board of Directors

**Charles B. Wang Community Health Center
New York, New York**

Interview conducted by:

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AMANDA MONIZ: This is Amanda Moniz, conducting an oral history interview for the Smithsonian's Philanthropy Initiative Oral History Project with Marie Lam. It's September 28, 2018. And we're at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center in New York, on Canal Street. Could you please state your name and place of birth.

MARIE LAM: Marie Lam. I was born in Hong Kong.

MONIZ: Great. Did you grow up in Hong Kong?

LAM: Yes. I came here for college. And I stayed on.

MONIZ: Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood and growing up in Hong Kong?

LAM: Well, it was pretty ordinary except that my—I have a lot of physicians in my family. My father's a doctor. His brother is a doctor. My brother-in-law became—you know, my sister married a doctor. And then my brother became a doctor. But my father wanted me to study medicine, but I didn't like it.

MONIZ: Okay.

LAM: I didn't want to have to go schooling for so long. I wanted to be able to go out and do something. So I decided that—I changed his mind.

MONIZ: Got it. So can you tell me where you went to school? What your school was like as a kid?

LAM: I went to a girls' school, all-girls school, that was part of the Episcopal Church. Anglican Church, actually—but I was born a Catholic. But it's pretty similar. And I went from kindergarten through 12th grade—or 13th grade, because we had to do one more year before we came here. And I came here in 1964 and went to a women's college, a Catholic college in San Francisco.

MONIZ: What was the name of the college?

LAM: It was called San Francisco College for Women. And now, it is part of the University of San Francisco. It was a Sacred Heart women's college. I just wanted to be in the city, so I picked that.

MONIZ: So what led you to decide to come here for college, to the United States?

LAM: My sister came already. She was at a design school in Oakland, California. So that's why I chose California also.

MONIZ: And so you said you had to convince your father that you could do something other than medicine?

LAM: Well, he didn't really pressure me, but he made me change my studies from a liberal arts-oriented to a science-oriented for one year. And I purposely flunked some courses. [Laughter] So I was able to get out of it.

MONIZ: And were you involved in any student organizations when you were in college—

LAM: [Interposing] No. Not then.

MONIZ: —or activism?

LAM: No.

MONIZ: No?

LAM: No. No. No. No. Nothing at all. And it wasn't until I moved to New York after I got married in '68 when I graduated that I—and then I came down to Chinatown to volunteer at the Chinese American Planning Council. And I wanted—so volunteering and it was basically teaching, tutoring kids which wasn't really my thing, but I was also doing citizenship classes and taking these new immigrants on trips to see the Statue of Liberty and things like that, so—and teaching them how to pass the citizenship.

MONIZ: And that was through the—

LAM: The Chinese American Planning Council.

Yeah. And then they have a part time job open. They asked if I wanted, I said, “All right.” So I did and there was more—for me, it was more full-time in a sense because I wanted to do things. And it was everything. I had a little bit of a social work background from college. And I liked working with people. I took care of all kinds of problems, you know the child abuse, wife abuse and also housing problems, relocating senior citizens, or free people from certain houses that they want to knock down or relocating. There was the—what was that—the—Andrew, what's his name? He was going after all the nursing homes for some of the abuses and closing them. There were some Chinese who were kind of scattered in ones around the Lower East Side. So I went with Tom Tam, whose idea was the health center—was the free clinic and getting Chinese hired into the new Gouverneur Hospital supposed to open then. So Tom and I went around to the senior centers and tried to talk to seniors into all agreeing to one place so that we can get them more help. But then eventually, I think somebody else took over and did that, but we tried. And we went to the—also, we did the organizing with the seniors and to get—because Gouverneur, that was our only chance to get people hired who could speak Chinese and English and be able to help the citizens of Chinatown. Because the nearest thing to here is New York downtown which is private. And then also Bellevue. Which you—I get lost. Yeah, it's a huge hospital. And I was thinking, I say, “Where would I be able to get people who works all the time to come to demonstrations?” And I said, “The seniors.”

So we went to the Senior Center at the Hamilton-Madison House and told them that this is their chance to get somebody. So they all came with us. And I remember one little old lady, she said, “I can’t walk.” So she said, “Give me a placard.” So she wore like a board here, board in the back. We made her one with the words about hiring Chinese-speaking workers. And she walked around Chinatown instead of going with us all the way to City Hall.

MONIZ: That's wonderful. That's wonderful. So I just want to back up a little bit. You moved to New York in '68?

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: And where were you living?

LAM: In Manhattan.

MONIZ: Okay. In Chinatown, or in another part of Manhattan?

LAM: No, on 14th Street and 3rd Avenue.

MONIZ: Okay. And what did your husband do?

LAM: He's in the import/export company that he joined. But his father founded it many, many years ago. And so he joined it. It was mainly export of building equipment and certain things and some food stuff, and import of Asian goods, like dried goods.

MONIZ: And what was your adjustment to living in New York like?

LAM: Oh, I hated it. After San Francisco—and New York in the seventies was pretty bad. There were piles of garbage. Things were—the security wasn't the best. But it's gotten so much better now. But in those days, every time I go away, I'm flying back, and I go, “Ugh.” You know. Yeah. But once I got involved with something like this, it was—you kind of forget.

MONIZ: So what led you to involved with the planning council?

LAM: I went to the Volunteers of America and I did some volunteer work with some handicapped young adults. And I didn't feel I belonged in a way. So I tried doing something in Chinatown, and I found my little niche, I think. Yeah.

MONIZ: And when had the council been founded?

LAM: Oh, quite a few years before us.

MONIZ: Okay.

LAM: Yeah.

MONIZ: And so the first thing you did with them, you said, was the citizenship classes.

LAM: I did tutoring.

MONIZ: Oh, tutoring, right.

LAM: And then when I had the—I don't remember when I did the citizenship classes. I think it might have been when I did the part-time. And that included—it was like a jack of all trades because you didn't have that many workers. So I just took over doing things. And anybody who walked in who was needing help, you helped them.

MONIZ: And so you got hired there, and you started doing the social work. Can you just a little bit more about that, and—

LAM: As I said, there was one that I handled that was supposedly—they said it was child abuse because the little girl got taken away from the parents and the parents were thinking of getting her back. I can't remember whether they tried to get her back or the family wanted to adopt the little girl. She had burns on her. So I think because the parents were so stressed from working and then they had another child, that this one was rather neglected. Yeah. So I got them to agree to let the little girl go and to stay with the family that's been taking care of her. So because they had—I didn't think financially they could have handled it. And also, emotionally, I think they had already moved on in a sense, although they didn't know whether they should or shouldn't. Yeah. And then, I help people with housing issues. All kinds of problems that you would normally get, I helped them get on—like senior citizens, they have very little social security. There were a lot of men. Because there was the Exclusion Act at one point and they couldn't come in, so the women couldn't come. The men stayed. So many of them—so we took them—I took them to get—what is it? SSI, which is like welfare. Many of them didn't want to. They felt it was demeaning in a way. But I told them that they deserved it. They worked all their lives. It doesn't matter that they were paid so little. That's why they always had so little. But it was—so I would take them—I had to, I said, “You get there this time because you have stand in line. Otherwise, we will be way in the back of the line.” So sometimes they listen, and sometimes they don't. So I tried to get there on time to make sure that we get in the line earlier and not later. And then they have a cut off. Yeah. So most of them were the men. And then there was one that was very interesting. Actually, he had active TB, and he would bring me food.

MONIZ: Oh my.

LAM: But he was a real character. And one of the things that we did at the health center, later on, was taking care of a lot of the TB patients that will refuse to go to the government, to Bellevue, or wherever, to the health department to check in. Especially the newer immigrants and some of the old, old ones. Because we found a few cases of active TB when we did the 10 days of the health fair. Yeah. And we had to do the follow up. And that's why we started the free clinic, because—with volunteers—because we had so much to follow up. Yeah.

MONIZ: So tell me about how you got involved with the health fair.

LAM: I was working at Chinese American Planning Council, or CPC they call it. I was supposed to do it part-time, but I was doing full-time. So one of my co-workers, Liz Young, said, “Hey, let’s go to this meeting and hear what Tom Tam is going to talk about.” So I went. And since I had some time, so I got involved. That’s how I got involved with community action and all that and started learning about it. So I got involved with the health fair. I didn’t really get involved with organizing. We had people—the whole dental department had a big van down there from NYU. And then they had people from Columbia, from Memorial, you know, hospitals all around. They had the—I don’t remember where the OB section came in. I think it was Bellevue. And the women had never had a pap smear. And then the dental department, they find people with abscesses, had to send them to the hospital right away. They’d never had their teeth checked. It was quite something. But there was a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of—that’s how people in those days got involved. Regina was one of them. Yeah, and that’s how I met her. And Dr. Lee came to volunteer. And Dr. Armstrong heard about it. Let me see, he came later. He came later when we had the free clinic. He heard about it—I don’t remember where from. As he was about to leave and come down, Dr. Yeh said, “Where are you going?” He said, “I’m going to the Chinatown Health Clinic to volunteer. He said, I’ll come with you. And that’s how they came.”

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: And Dr. Lee actually came, was at the health fair. Yeah.

MONIZ: Can you describe the fair a little bit more, the sights, the sounds, the smells?

LAM: We were all along Mott Street, all the way from Canal down to—let me see. You know where Transfiguration Church is? Towards the end of it. And then they were at—and there were big X-ray vans, vans for the dental department. They had it all set up inside. It was in the mobile vans. And the OBGYN, for the exams and everything. And we had people trained to do the hematocrit, to see if people are anemic, blood pressure, urine testing, all kinds of things like that. And X-rays, you had lung X-rays and testing for venereal disease. Which apparently, there were quite a few cases, which we had to follow up because all these men were stuck here by themselves. So they had multiple—they went to prostitutes. They went to—they all have girlfriends. And this one gentleman had a—was positive, so we asked if he had any girlfriends. And he said—brought in four. So we all tested them and gave them a treatment. Oh, the health department was there too, yes.

MONIZ: So then tell me what came next for you with the clinic.

LAM: So there was this priest who had a congregation on Henry Street. And he was very fascinated with what we were doing and the involvement of all the

volunteers and the young people. And so he offered two rooms in his church for us to do the follow up with. And that's how we decided—yeah, when we were meeting there and seeing patients and had all just social work kind of things too. And we got funding from the TB Association it was called at that time. Now it's the New York Lung Association. And we got a grant from them. We got a grant from the Episcopal Church, which that church [on Henry Street] was. So those were our small grants, 8,000 each. And basically, everybody was a volunteer, so this paid for whatever we needed. And there was a—one room was like social work, general office work. And then one room was examination. And so sometimes we don't have a doctor to volunteer when people walk in. So there was this doctor who was on—see, Henry is here. And then all the way two blocks down is Oliver Street. And there's a physician called Dr. Herbert Kee. He's in the book. And Herbert had his office there in a townhouse. And we would say, “Herbert, we have patients. We don't have a volunteer doctor.” He said, “Wait a minute. Let me finish with my patient and I'll be over”. Or he said, “Send him over, or send her over.” Yeah. And he would see them for free for us. So he was great, yeah. And he passed away last year. Yeah.

MONIZ: And so then you became chairperson of the—

LAM: Well, nobody had time, so I ended up being chair. We incorporated as the Chinatown Action for Progress. We couldn't put in health because we would have been approved by the medical thing. And basically, the doctor we didn't basically even have malpractice insurance or anything like that. And then we applied for a grant that we heard about for careers from the—I think it was health and human services—to promote health careers. And we called our Project Ahead, Asian—let's see—health something. But it's to get Asians into different health careers, not just medicine, not just doctors and nurses but radiology technician, all kinds of things. So we got funded. And from that, we were able to hire a full-time executive director, who was [Jane Eng]. And we moved to Catherine Street, but the stairs were like this. And there was emphysema patient, poor guy.

MONIZ: Oh no.

LAM: He would be—four times he had to stop and go [wheezing] before he got to the top. But anyway, so we worked with a lot of students. Some of them have become our doctors. Head of pediatrics is Loretta Au. She was one of them. And I think one other—two others that there were pediatricians out from the Project Ahead program. We want to do that because we want to get more people involved in our community. Then we—who else? Oh, Perry [Pong], our medical director, he was also from Project Ahead.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: Yeah, and then—but then we got—we had a contact that told us to—who knew someone who was on the board of the Robert Johnson Foundation and told us to go ask for a feasibility grant to study the possibility. And be able to get the data

to put a proposal together to apply for the federal government, for the community health center. And so we did. And Robert Johnson gave us a grant, and we put together a proposal. And he helped us, this gentleman. He was actually New York State Department of Health. Yeah. So he helped us through that, and we got funded and we started to look for a space that we could renovate. So we found a space. I had somebody that I knew that owned some property in Chinatown, and I asked him if he had anything. He said that he had this old warehouse on Baxter Street that used to do fish. So it stank of seafood. But by the time we renovated, it was fine. It was a smaller space. It was enough for that time. But after a while, we were so crowded we had to do our flu shots in the fire escape because we had to have two egress. And with these townhouses, the backend, there's nowhere to go. So we had to have the front door going in and then this other back side that we had to do for this. So people would line there for the flu shots because there was no room. The waiting area was full.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: Yeah.

MONIZ: And so can you talk a little bit more about your experience as chairperson in these early years? I know you were saying they were long meetings.

LAM: Oh, yes. Especially at Henry Street. Later on, once we got to Catherine Street, it was a little better because some of the people had moved on. At least one of them. And so it got to be more concrete. Before, they would want us to do things very democratically on certain things. But the problem is that they didn't speak Chinese. So they couldn't initiate and push the—do the programs. They had to rely on us to do it. Regina and I, and there was Jade and Donna, and so on. So, if they couldn't—and they had jobs, so they couldn't be there during the day. But then they wanted all these ideals, very, like, progressive ideas. Sometimes a little too much for a little group like us. But we had to listen to them.

MONIZ: Who were these folks?

LAM: Well, Liz Young was one of them. And then there was one called Kenny Chin [phonetic]. But—

MONIZ: Were they medical staff or were they—

LAM: No, no. Liz was another social worker.

MONIZ: Okay.

LAM: Yeah. But she worked mostly with young people, youth, high school kids and so on. She's very good. And she's now—some years later, she started her own program doing training—in fact, we brought her back to help us train the staff to

be more sensitive to and how to deal with patients in a gentle and caring way. Yeah.

MONIZ: Were people who were involved in those early years with the health fair and then clinic also involved in other activism?

LAM: Not really. Not really. There was another group that was called the Basement Workshop that helped us initially with the planning of the—members from there helped us with the planning of the health fair. But the clinic itself—these are all mainly new people. Regina was going to NYU at that time, and Joseph was going to Cooper Union. And these were our main people. And then he became a doctor, and he went off to medical school. Yeah.

MONIZ: Can you tell me more about the relationship with the Basement Workshop?

LAM: Not too much. Basically, just the health fair part of it, the planning, initially. And some people who were involved with them were helping out with it. Like Rocky Chin, Corky Lee, who was a photographer, and people like that. But once it got to the point where it's—the health fair was finished. And then we moved on and started the health clinic. They were not involved at all. Tom Tam, who was with the Lower East Side, something, Health Council, that was actually funded. Because in those days, a lot of—what do you call them? Private—yeah, like Beth Israel, NYU, those kinds of hospitals, they were using the federal grants, or the Medicaid money to buy equipment, to treat their paying patients and using and kind of like robbing the poor to give for the rich, in a sense. They're not providing enough services for people who really need it. And trying to turn them away, especially Beth Israel. Yeah. So this was set up by the—this was money that the feds gave for the community groups to organize, to get more community people into their boards, by the feds. And Tom Tam was working with another guy, Jose Morales, who was the head of it. And Tom thought of this whole idea of a health fair, in order to gather more data, because there was none on the Chinese health problems then down here. So we did—so he got us all together to do the—Tom was very dynamic. He got us all together to do—everybody to get the health fair. And then he said, “We have to have a free clinic!” So we slogged along and did the free clinic. Yeah. But it was really kind of people picked up and did what they had to do. We didn't really know anything about health as much. But we didn't have hardly any equipment. And one of the—the group that was—the groups that were very helpful to us, or the organizations was the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. They have a health center on 27th and 7th Avenue. And the Garment workers had to—at that time, there were a lot of them, Chinese. There were many factories in Chinatown because before everything got outsourced, they didn't want to trek up there.

So the health center decided that they would do all tests for free. So we had to run up with the—all the specimens, and they would do it for free. Because they figured that at least more than half of it is their members. Yeah. And they were

very helpful and kept on providing that to us. And then eventually they also paid for—because one of the main things that we wanted to do was health education. We figured that the number of people we can reach is very limited, but we want to reach a wider audience so that they understand their bodies or the health problems that are prevalent in our community and what they can do about it. And so they helped fund our radio program. Yeah. Because we had to buy time on the radio.

MONIZ: So tell me more about that.

LAM: Well, we would translate some health materials. And, in fact, that's a major—that's a big part of what we still do. Our health education department does the marketing as well as translation of health. They do workshops in workplaces, schools, and so on, on different aspects. You know, mental health, hepatitis B, smoking cessation. Yeah. Different things like that. Because Chinese men have the highest rate of smoking and lung cancer. So, we wanted to be able to help to reduce that, yeah.

MONIZ: What was your relationship like with the CCBA in those early years?

LAM: Oh, it was like this. They thought—see anybody that wanted change were communists. So we were communists. Yeah. But yeah, her father became the head of the CCBA. And his thoughts changed later. And then Angela, one of our pediatricians, her father was also, at one point, became head of the CCBA. But he was against us in the beginning until his kids came to Project Ahead, his daughters, and then his thoughts changed. But in those days, we went up to borrow chairs. I wanted to make sure that they knew we were going to do the street fair. And I said, “Do you have any furniture we can borrow?” “No.” He didn't even look at me, the staffer, or the secretary. And he just looked down. “No, no, no.” So they actually didn't—they just verbally said things. But there was like a—the Hip Sing [Tong]. There was someone there that wanted to harm us. But the head of the Hip Sing told him not to.

MONIZ: What is that? The Hip...

LAM: Hip Sing is another organization. Has a little like darker side to some of it, some of the people. And there was another one that was called the On Leong [Tong]. So these organizations were familiar—not necessarily, but organizations that people—some businesspeople or some people belonged to.

MONIZ: And so the—could—

LAM: They wanted to stop us doing the health fair.

MONIZ: Because they thought you were radical and communists.

LAM: Yes, yes.

MONIZ: And so then how—and you talked about a couple people becoming more comfortable with it. So did the tensions—

LAM: Over the years.... maybe 10, 15, 20 years later. More like 20.

MONIZ: And how did the clinic manage with those kinds of conflicts?

LAM: I didn't hear about this threat until later. Someone told me years—some years later, they told me about it. But we had no clue. But we just know that they didn't want to help us at all. But they saw what we did and then that we grew. So they became more—less aggressive towards us. But there was for the first 10—about 15 years, they were, you know, against us. Yeah. Because we were on Henry Street for two years, Catherine Street for maybe, four, and then we moved to Baxter in the late seventies. And because I moved to LA in [19]79 and was there for nine years before I came back. And we had the grand opening before I left. So I knew, yeah. So...

MONIZ: What took you to LA?

LAM: Oh, my husband. The company started getting into the automobile business. So we got a dealership in Paramus, a Honda dealership, and they were given an open point in California's LA area. So we went out there to open that one up.

MONIZ: And were you involved with—

LAM: [Interposing] Not really.

MONIZ: —similar causes while you were there?

LAM: Yeah, because my kids were young then. And actually, it was after Jane was hired, before I had my kids. Because I didn't feel like I could put in the time. And my kids were two and three when we moved to LA. We used to have meetings at my home uptown. But then my kids were into junior high and high school when we moved back. So it was much better. But meanwhile, nobody really is indispensable. So when I moved, other people took over, like Sandy Lee. Sandy took over. Regina had gone off to law school, I think, and Joseph to medical school. But he would come back and help out here. Did you hear about him making the hematocrit?

MONIZ: Yes, what a story.

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: So then tell me, when you moved back to New York, did you get involved right away?

LAM: Yes. I called and I said, "I'm moving back." And they voted me back on the board right away. And basically, because other people didn't have time to be the chair and I was—it was really—I didn't really—I had the time, so that's why I

took over. Yeah. So I didn't know that much about the medical part of it, so other people took care of that. So I just did a lot of the connections. Oh, Bellevue Hospital was very helpful to us. The executive director at that time was Bernie Weinstein. And his assistant—what's her name? Kathy Farrell [phonetic], she was so—they were so helpful. They would set up a direct line for us to call to when we have to take patients up. And we had a great working relationship with them. Yeah. I remember one time we had this patient that came in. He complained of having the flu and a low-grade fever. And I knew when you have that it would be lung—it would be TB. And I took him up myself, and the interns were so scared. They were trying to like—

MONIZ: Oh gosh.

LAM: I guess you don't come into with people with active TB. But they admitted him that day. And he stayed there for a couple months, got everything under control. He came back, and he was fine. Yeah.

MONIZ: So I wonder if we can talk about your experience as chair of the board. What was it like when you joined it when you moved back to New York? What was the board like?

LAM: I can't remember too much about that part. Where were we at that time? I—

MONIZ: How big was the board? How many people were on it?

LAM: I can't remember either. Oh, more than 10. Ten to about 15 maybe, 10 to 15.

MONIZ: And about half are patients—have to be patients at the center, is that right?

LAM: No, just whatever we can. But many of the patients at that time—oh, there was one, Pak Lee, yeah. He was a patient. He was on the board. But most people either were—couldn't speak English, didn't understand when we had meetings. But Pak did. So they couldn't really participate, or they didn't understand, or they didn't have time. Most of it was because of time, unless you get a senior citizen.

MONIZ: Right.

LAM: Right. But—

MONIZ: So you conducted the meetings in English?

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: And I understand that you've been head of the fundraising committee, is that right?

LAM: Forever it seems like, yeah.

MONIZ: Can you talk about your experience?

LAM: Well, when we moved to Baxter Street through my connection— actually, he was one of those two associations. He was very, very involved. But we knew him through different sources and friends. So I asked Peter if he has anything. So he rented this warehouse to us. And I said, well, the first year \$900 a month, the second five years, the first five years, \$900, the second five years, \$1,200. And the third five years will be \$1,500. He said, fine. So the lawyers—the lawyer was fine. And at that time Baxter Street was like a backwater. But by the fifth— third, fifth year—

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: —yes, it was very nice. But then we were busting out of the place. And then we—how did we raise money for that? I can't even remember. We did fundraising then. Oh, it was a radio station, Sinocast Radio. And they were very active in the Chinese community in terms of news. It was great. And when we—and I approached the head, Yvonne Liu, who was one of the owners—it was her husband, of the radio station—about helping us fundraising. And she came up with the idea of the one whole day of radio-thon—you know, calling in. They devoted the whole day to us. But meanwhile, months before, they were blaring the whole idea on the radio—and at that time, because of all of the sewing factories, it was a captured audience. This was going—the radio was in the factories. News, music, whatever, stories. And they were telling them about us. And so we decided—so at the day of—and then my thing was I was trying to get some people who had some name recognition in the community. So I knew one owner of Bobo Restaurant which has been on Pell Street forever. They're gone now. But he was called “Uncle Number Eight.” And he was a former opera singer. Oh, no—was he? No, he wasn't, but his girlfriend was. Yep. And then also the head of the Garment Factory Owners Association, Mr. Danny Lee. And I knew Danny, and I talked to Danny about it and he said, “Yes, we will help you.” And he got all the owners to agree. And, in fact, CCBA people went and asked him, how come you helping these lefters? He said, “Because they are doing a good job and serving the community.” Yeah. So he helped us. He told all the owners. That's why we have the radio station doing that. And then when we—that day, we had volunteers manning the booths. They wouldn't leave their stations because there was so much fun.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: They would—different factories would call in and said, “Come and get the money. We collected, let's say, 200–300. \$5 from one seamstress, \$5 from another one.” Because many of them coming to us, to see us, and then they—because of the—they didn't want to go up to the health center, the International Garment Workers. And then by the time we get there, the owner had pitched in half of it.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: Well, an extra half. So it was so rewarding. It was a lot of fun. But the radio station really did a great job promoting us. But then I had also—who else was? And Danny was singing his opera. And Simon Lo, who was taking care of health education before, organized the whole thing, did all the legwork. I did the connections. He did all the legwork. And now he's a bigshot up at Cedars-Sinai in LA. Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

MONIZ: Yes.

LAM: Yeah. Head of division of the gastroenterology, yeah.

MONIZ: How had you developed all these connections?

LAM: Through social. Because of my husband's company, some of these people we knew through socially. Like, you mean the radio? The radio was because I was working down here. Danny, because I—how did I meet Danny? He was very active in Chinatown. And he actually very much admired the young people for what they do. And I know he would be very helpful, if I can—and he agreed right away. But the health—the International Garment Workers Union, we went and asked them to help. And they were very helpful. Bellevue, they came down and saw what we did. And so Bernie Weinstein himself was very interested. In fact, he took me and Joseph Lau to Chicago to a conference to talk about the health center that we started.

MONIZ: When was that?

LAM: When was that? Let me see. I would say like the mid-seventies. Yeah, in the mid-seventies.

MONIZ: And can you talk about how your fundraising has evolved over the years as the center's grown?

LAM: Yes. So you build on your connections, and people know what you do. And they know we do—what they give us, we put out more than 100%. Because we have a lot of great supportive services. We've always seen that education was an important part, but also the social work part was very important. We have a program where—hepatitis B, in fact, it's a big thing in our community because of the newer immigrants coming in from China. So they wanted to do a screening, in all the Lower East Side schools that have the high concentration of Chinese students. And I got the—because of our company's connection, I knew the head of the HSBC bank. And he was very agreeable. He gave us \$40,000 as part of the project. Health Department gave us the vaccine and did the testing, the tests. But we had the people doing the legwork, like organizing at the school. So I just did that part of pulling together some of the resources, the outside, other than the government, and they did the part—Jane and her staff did the part about getting the government part to be part of it. And we really screened all the schools in the Lower East Side. I don't know how many they screened. But before we go in, we

have to send a notice home with all the students and ask if they would let their kids to be treated or to be screened. And then we also—if we see any problems, we would counsel the families. And we asked the families to come in, but many times they don't really have the time yet in the beginning unless they know it's a problem. Then how do you prevent—if they have a family history, how do you prevent it from the parents giving it to the kids? It's through eating together, saliva, any liquid, fluids. Yeah. So we've been keeping track since then. This is in the mid-nineties, before [19]95 that we started that program and we have a whole roster of these people that we ask to come—them to keep them—checking them every year until they—they actually develop an active—that it acts up but we make sure that they don't spread it to the rest of the family. Yeah. So, in fact, that's a very big part of that program, and we still continuously doing it. Yeah. And that we got funding from the federal government, but then—but, no, I think, from New York City, but you know, the ups-and-downs in the city.

MONIZ: Right.

LAM: So it got defunded, but the Robin Hood—Robin Hood Foundation came in and supported it. But on a little bit smaller scale. But they've been supporting it for the last—Regina would know how many—years. Yeah.

MONIZ: And so has—so I wasn't going to ask about that has most of your fundraising been in the Chinese American community or beyond it also?

LAM: Mostly Chinese American community and outside foundations. Like, for example, when we had to move—well, that first radiothon we built Baxter Street. I think we raised about \$70,000 to \$100,000—about \$100,000 on the radiothon.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: It was so—it was first time ever done.

And Yvonne and the staff at the Sinocast Radio was so happy. So then, when—once we moved to—then we—later on, we were busting out. We had been looking for space forever. So then, because of all the infighting amongst the community groups for the Walker Street one. . . . They decided to—I think that they had—oh, and the loan was coming due. So they had to find a tenant. And nobody had the money to pay the rent. And it has to be a community space. So then we go and ask, and then we moved in there on Walker Street, that's where now our dental and the pediatrics. Yeah. So and then we had to fundraise again. So I said, “Yvonne, you got to help us again.” [Laughter] So she did. And I think we raised about \$300,000 something three, \$400,000.

I can't remember how—what the—maybe, but enough. To start us off, we had a board member—no, he wasn't there then, this was for this place. Anyway, so we also got funding—Jane and I went to Illinois, I think, or Michigan, the Kresge Foundation.

Because they gave out major grants for community groups for bricks and mortar.

MONIZ: Right, capital campaign

LAM: Yeah. So we got a funding from them, a couple hundred thousand [dollars]. Yeah. So we were able to renovate that space. And we were so happy that we have three times the size of what we had, that the feds said, “You going to be busting out in two years.” [Laughter] The—

MONIZ: [Interposing] Right, right, right.

LAM: —our project officers. We did... [Laughter]

MONIZ: Yeah. And so then you were getting - - more space?

LAM: So that was—we moved into there, I think in early nineties. Was it there? Wait a minute. When did we move into Walker Street? I left in [19]79, I came back and the—and the—oh, the Walker Street was the first—the second radiothon. But I—my chronology is a little bit off. But anyway, so we were busting and we'd been looking for space for a long time, for a while. And then this had been sold. The Hang Seng Bank was 50—more than 51 percent owned by HSBC. And HSBC didn't want Hang Seng Bank to be in the—they want to be running the show. So Hang Seng pulled back to Hong Kong, and they closed this, this was their—one of the places. They had another place on East Broadway, but somebody had bought it, but then chickened out, so we came in and we bought it. And we—they were so happy. In fact, they thanked the agent for selling—for getting... [Laughter] Because they weren't—they didn't want to bother with it anymore.

Yeah. Yeah, so—and we were very happy to get this space, and we got it—we thought we got a bargain, but then we—one of our board members was from HSBC, and he was an officer there. And he saw that our books were very good. We were always very financially sound, so he said—he got us a pre-approved loan, construction loan. So we were able to—a loan to buy—to pay for part of the down payment for buying the building. Yeah.

MONIZ: Were you involved in getting the—a gift from Charles B. Wang?

LAM: Yes. Because I was also involved with the China Institute in America in Uptown. And at that time, the head of development was a girl—somebody called Gwen Wang. And we had applied to the Charles B. Wang, but he—his people turned us down. I don't think he even got involved with the decision. But anyway, Gwen's husband—Gwen's sister is married to Charles' older brother. And Gwen's husband is an architect for Charles, building the SUNY Stony Brook campus, the cultural center. So they helped us draft a letter to Charles. And P.H., her husband, personally handed it to the Charles and told him about us. So he agreed. Yeah.

LAM: What was your role at China Institute?

LAM: I was just a board member. And actually, they were going through different levels, because they couldn't get the right executive director or president. And many of them didn't know how to fundraise so they would use up all the budget. And I went through two cycles of it—three maybe. Yeah. So then I said, forget it. I said, health is a—health is a necessity. This is a—culture is a luxury. I said, forget it. I go. But then, couple years ago—two years ago, they made me join the board again. They moved downtown.

MONIZ: And how have you found the experience since rejoining?

LAM: Much better. They have a different board and then they been—they were in a lot of financial stress, because of the move, and also getting money enough to fix up the place and all that. But they've been—they've brought in some very active board members and happy really, building the board back up. Yeah.

MONIZ: Do you enjoy board service?

LAM: Not really. [Laughter]

MONIZ: Why not?

LAM: I'd rather be doing things. Yeah, but you have to learn and you have to caucus, you know, make sure other people understand what's happening, why you feel that way, and why they need to move in that way. Yeah.

MONIZ: And what about fundraising? Do you enjoy that?

LAM: If I believe in a cause, yes. I feel that—but I don't usually ask people just like that. I usually develop a relationship, as Gwen taught me. She said, “I never ask. They get to the point where they offer.”

MONIZ: It sounds very skillful.

LAM: But usually, you—there's a right moment and you know, never ask for the huge ones. You—I never ask for a big gift unless I know that person is ready to give big gift. But let them decide how much the gift might be. You give them different options. So right now, we're trying to do a capital campaign for our new site that's being built. So it's going to be [a] major ask

MONIZ: Yeah.

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: Regina was saying that it's going to be a very big budget.

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: So can you talk about the evolution of the center a little bit more and its growth. I mean, I'm interested in the way it's evolved from serving primarily a Chinese America population in Chinatown to a larger Asian American population.

LAM: From Flushing?

MONIZ: Yeah.

LAM: And, in fact, here.

MONIZ: Mm-hm.

LAM: We had these people off the streets. These people from Haiti and Africa. It's right here and they go, oh, we—they like—they love the service. So they—we get some of these people coming in too. And now, a lot of younger families—the whole area is gentrified. These young families, young couples, they come and use our service also. We were on something called—where they book online. We signed up for that and we got quite a few patients from them. Nice number. Yeah.

MONIZ: So have there been issues that you've encountered with the center's growth that are challenging issues?

LAM: I always ask Jane when we do fundraising, I know she always has something hidden in the back.

I said, “How much do we really need?” But she runs a very tight ship, sometimes a little too tight. So that's why we have done so well financially. As well as being able to expand as well. Yeah. And then on our, yeah, we—once we changed our name to Charles B. Wang, we kept our name Chinatown Health Clinic with a foundation. So that—and one of our—we had hired someone that was recommended to us and he was Chinese and had a good financial background record, you know, he was managing money for people, but he charged us a fee. And he was—he missed quite a few things and we didn't do well. So as a board of the foundation, the foundation decided that Raymond Fong who's an ophthalmologist. And also, when he was in college, he came and worked here for a little bit. So, Raymond's been very—he didn't have that much time for the board meetings, but the foundation only meets four times a year. So he's been running, he's been—he said, “I'll take over running the investments.” So we set certain parameters, how much in stocks, how much in fixed and - - and we only did index funds. And we've been doing so well. That's why, from the money left over from the—Walker Street, that we had raised—I think it was 200 something thousand. In the—by the time we were buying this we had enough money for the down payment.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: One and a half million.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: Yes. We actually—we had done—could have done two, but we wanted to save something in reserve.

MONIZ: What does the foundation do?

LAM: The foundation basically, does the dinner for us, the fundraising dinner and also the golf outing. Yeah, so it's basically—see, because of the federal guidelines we have to have less than 20 percent of our people involved in health care field with their income because they didn't want them to control these organizations. They wanted community and the patients to be able to control it. So that's why we moved people that have been involved with us, you know like, Dr. Lee, Dr. Yeh, and Dr. Armstrong over to the foundation, but they still involved in terms of doing other things. Yeah. But not on the board level of this. But the board level of the foundation.

MONIZ: I see. And so that's the fundraising arm and—

LAM: Fundraising arm, as well as maybe some ideas about what do we want to do next kind of thing.

MONIZ: So could—yeah, tell me more about the golf outing and the dinner.

LAM: Well, the dinner has always—we've always had it, for years. And one year we actually went up to Alice Tully Hall because our—one of our pediatrician's husband is a very famous violinist, Lin Cho-Liang. And he—she got him involved and excited, so he started asking all his friends. You know, Emmanuel Ax, who's a very well know pianist. And I asked the Wang Jian, who's a—our company's president's protégé with a cello. And who else did we have? And Lin Cho-Liang himself, the violinist, the cello, the piano, and they did a concert for us at Alice Tully, but the costs are very high to be Uptown. So we spent a lot, but we also made just about as much as we did or less than Chinatown. So we decided that we wanted to stay downtown, because the costs are so much less. Even though it's noisy, it's crowded, it's—but the—so, oh, in fact, some people complained, why are you taking the business away from Chinatown? You know? The restaurants, they complained. And then—but we have a big donor who insisted that we did things Uptown. I said, “Miranda, look this is what—how much we get from Uptown; this is how much we get.” Please yourself. All right. [Laughter] So that's how—but the dinner we've always had like different versions of it. Over the years and it's kind of grown. Some years are much better, and some are not. Around the [20]08, '09, then was pretty not great. With the golf outing, was started by Yvonne Liu, no Yvonne Gol [phonetic] a board member. In fact, her daughter—her husband used to work for my husband in the car business and Bernie was so mad, at his daughter, for delaying admission to medical school, because she wanted to come out and work for a little bit. And I said, “Stop getting mad, tell Olivia to come and work at the health clinic for a year or so and let her make up her mind because she was accepted to medical school.” He said, “Oh, alright,” and Olivia loved it. And so Yvonne—I said, Yvonne, you better come and be on the board. So she did. Yeah, that's how she came. And she's involved with a—they live in upper—Bergen County, Alpine

area, and there's a golf club that they belong to. So she got—she said, “Why don't we do a golf outing?” And she organized the whole thing. Yeah. So that's how we started, I think—what—six or seven years now. Yeah. It kind of started around the time of—I think it was maybe '09 that it was started—'08 or '09 or '10. And the club was—needed more business, because a lot of people—and then, later on, people lost their money on the stock market. Also, especially, with [Bernie] Madoff. There are a lot of Jewish people there and they had invested money with Madoff, so they couldn't pay their dues, so they had to drop out. So, Yvonne got some—yeah, some of us on the board who plays golf to join, because it was so low, the fees was like half of what it used to be because they were desperate. And so that's how we started having our golf outing then. Yeah. And it kind of grew a little bit. Some years are better, some are not. So, yeah.

MONIZ: Is your husband involved in philanthropy also?

LAM: Yes, but he's more into the cultural stuff. Yeah. But he's also involved with a group called ACE. It's Asians in terms of—I don't remember what the—a lot of people in—Asians, but mostly younger ones, professionals. They are business owners too, who are involved with ACE, that they try to go—be more—little more active in—what do you call it? When they see lots of things that should benefit us, but doesn't, they try to lobby and then do things like that, but they—but he in fact, we just—the keynote speaker was the—at last night's Gala at the New Jersey, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, of which my husband's also one of the members. But Chiling Tong came up from Washington. He got her to be the executive director or president of ACE nationwide. They have chapters all over and we started by somebody called Bill Imada, who's in the advertising—yeah, marketing business. And it's all Asians. And they wanted to have more political clout and to be able to have some say in—because the Asians have never been very much into politics. Yeah. So that's part what he does. He likes to get involved with them, but mostly in the cultural aspects too. We're involved with some of the Asian Art Department at the Metropolitan Museum. Yeah. And I joined the China Institute, but kind of feeling they don't really need me anymore, and so, we'll see. Yeah.

MONIZ: And what about any philanthropic connections to Hong Kong, where you grew up?

LAM: My father was a radiologist. He ran the department of radiology for the government and opened up all the—well, runs all the—that runs all the radiology for all the government owed hospitals in Hong Kong and trained four generations of radiologists. And at his time, they did separate diagnostic from oncology, like cancer treatment and so on. So he did all of it, diagnostic part, as well as treatment and—but with radiation instead. And later on, they had chemo because at that time they didn't have enough money to pay for all the drugs. It was too expensive. So in order to treat so many people they had—and he saw so many patients with nasopharyngeal carcinoma, which is the cancer behind the nose,

which is near the pituitary. And he said he'd seen thousands of them. And he said, I want to find out why, is it environmental? Is it cultural? Is it—what is—why are we getting all that? So he started a study and the government said, “Research is a bad word, so you go find your own money.” So he did, and he found out that it came from salted fish.

MONIZ: Oh.

LAM: And he found it in populations of Eskimo and the Chinese diaspora, that came to San Francisco, went to Australia, and so on. Yeah. And it was the chemical change that the virus grew in certain parts of it. So anyway, and he connected that to the—what is that called—what's that virus called? Epstein-Barr. Yeah. And when his patients came for treatment, at one point, the main center for doing that was on Hong Kong Island, but some people who live on the mainland part of the Hong Kong, so for them to come. And then, those days the transportation was not good, and after treatment, you're debilitated, so he decided to raise money for a hospital. Government gave him the land; he raised the money for—like a hospital where people can convalesce while they're under treatment or they're terminal. It's like a hospice. But then that got—all the little hospitals got closed up, but his students decided they want to continue this, and this was towards the end of his life, and they did. So they got the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which is a big philanthropy, to sponsor it, and they reopened the hospital. Partially, they have to use it for nursing home care. Yeah. But at regular rates, and then how many—some—a portion of the beds are free for patients who can't afford it. So they have Chinese medicine, Western medicine, physical therapy, everything in there. Yeah. So I helped a little bit, tiny little bit with that.

MONIZ: Tell me what you did?

LAM: Well, I just give money.

MONIZ: Okay.

LAM: I wanted to be able to give the money to for—because the drugs that the government buys is very—not as great. There might be some that are much better, but they can't—for mass kind of they can't do that. So the Hong Kong Cancer Society, which my father founded, raise money to subsidize. Yeah, for patients who really need it.

MONIZ: So when you were a child growing up—

LAM: I didn't know any of this. It wasn't until I came to college and went back, that I realized what he was doing, but not to the scope of how much he was doing. Yeah. I knew that he would be giving talks all over the world on the—because as one of the professors who was in Hong Kong, he was western, he was—I think an Englishman. He said that it is very unusual that someone can find the cause and the cure, and he—people even with fourth grade NPC can still live like 20–30

years. Yeah. If you can find it early enough it's even better. The treatment—in fact, we knew of a friend, he was going on trips and he was so uncomfortable that finally he—and he's being treated for different things, but he actually—so finally he went to Marmora, and they told him, you go back to Hong Kong, this is what they treat all the time. They see thousands of cases, we see a few, maybe 10, 15 a year. So he went back, and he found one of my father's old students, and he was—it was very tough because he was fourth stage. But he recovered completely, and he said, because of what—the protocol of your father set up.

MONIZ: So do you know where he fundraised for the hospital?

LAM: All his friends and patients, and years later, I would be talking to him after he retired and I say - - oh, and he said oh, he was my patient. And then this one, oh, that one was my patient. In fact, Lorinda's mother was his patient.

MONIZ: Oh. Really? Small world.

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: So when you were a child, did your parents encourage volunteering—

LAM: No.

MONIZ: —or civic involvement or giving?

LAM: No, not really. No. Not really. Yeah.

MONIZ: So it was—so your first experience—well, that was really where the China—

LAM: Yeah.

MONIZ: —council and the health clinic?

LAM: Yes. Yes, I was working at the planning council and got involved with this group of younger people who were very interested in doing something in Chinatown at least in health, and that's—I can relate to some of it. So that's how it all started. Yeah.

And in a way—in the beginning, it was tough, because there wasn't that much money and every—everything was a little bit of a struggle.

But because we feel that we needed to be there to support each other. And if one leg moves off, it might topple so we wouldn't dare leave. And also, because those three doctors really believed in us. We said—I was thinking—I said, if they can believe in us maybe we—yeah, we can go on. And they think that these kids worked so hard that they want to stay with us. So it was like mutual in a way, in that sense. Yeah.

MONIZ: How many hours a week would you say you were putting into it in those years?

LAM: I would get down here around lunchtime or maybe—and stay until dinner time I go home. Sometimes earlier, depends. Yeah. Before I had the kids, I was here like eight to 10 hours.

MONIZ: Wow.

LAM: Yeah. So it's definitely—for her too, she came right after school and there were other ones, like Joseph [Lau] came right after school. And there was a bunch of us, they had moved off to different careers, Joseph to medicine, Donna to Hawaii and medicine.

Jade was a—became a nurse, an RN, and her husband she met through us is a doctor. Yeah. So many different people.

In fact, Perry's roommate at Harvard was Project Ahead with us here, and he is Doctor [Jim Yong] Kim who was head of the World Bank.

MONIZ: Oh. No kidding?

LAM: Yes.

MONIZ: Wow. He was Project Ahead?

LAM: Yes, he was Project Ahead.

MONIZ: Did you know him then?

LAM: I didn't know him, but I wasn't here when he came. But Perry got it when we head out first to the Project Ahead reunion, he wasn't—he couldn't come, he was elsewhere, so he recorded a video for us. Yeah.

MONIZ: Well, let me ask you for a couple of final reflections. Is there something that you regret or hasn't gone the way you hoped for the center?

LAM: No. Actually, people have asked me how we got here, I said, I don't know, we just take a step at a time, you see a need, you just follow it and see where you can get the resources to fund it. And you know, move on then. I don't know the mechanics of running the health center, but I know how to go fundraise to a certain degree. And so I will pull in my connections or do what I can. And everybody do their part. Yeah. So it's like—I really didn't realize how we got so big and how we got to this. But it's due to the dedication of the staff too. Because many of them—Bettie had volunteered with us, and—I think she worked with us briefly when we were at Catherine Street. And she was a social worker, then she became—went to Saint Vincent's hospital which has since closed and then they—later on, after we moved here, Jane asked her to come back and be the—what was she—I can't remember the title, but she's grown with us a lot and she's really good at marketing and running all the clinical—the programs. Not programs so much as the medical part of the programs, the staffing and all that. Yeah. And the community outreach and marketing to get new patients.

MONIZ: Well, let me ask you one last question. What is your proudest accomplishment?

LAM: I don't know. I guess, how did we get here, how we got here. Yeah. So in terms of—I was thinking of a bucket list or when you get older, you look back at your life as to what you have done, and I think I am satisfied with what I've done.

MONIZ: So, thank you. It has been a wonderful conversation.