

(continuing Jean's family history, first paragraphs posted in Spring 2021 Connection)



In this Mother's Day photograph, my parents are dressed well as they always were in public. Father, 85, wears his familiar old hat, a gray suit, and a brightly colored neck tie (which my mother clearly selected). He looks unhealthy and his expression is, sadly, not one of being alert nor engaged. Father is three years away from his sudden death of pancreatic cancer. My mother is a smiling and young 79. She would survive well in Seattle, just as she had adjusted to her new home in America, as a widow with many accomplishments until age 92.

Queen Anne Hill on this holiday has a spring fragrance of flower buds in bloom. We are relaxed and reunited as a family. I continue to work at Boeing while assisting my parents to build their new home here. Yet, beneath the surface of this delightful day, and captured in the photograph, is my father's frailty. My mother and I do not see his normally stubborn and temperamental nature which concerns us.

Father, a retired electrical engineer had not been eager to move to a strange city to live with an independent daughter who didn't fit his picture of a serene and predictable woman like his wife. The photograph hardly depicts her as a lifelong career woman, beloved by her colleagues and managers at Pan American World Airways during her 30-year accounting career with this one company

I bewildered my father since I didn't raise children, cook, sew, embroider, knit, watch TV or remain married to one man like my mother. I sought two graduate degrees and worked in a hospital and a museum part time to support a husband through his MD and PhD programs before he was unfaithful. I changed my career and moved to Minneapolis and then Washington, D.C. to work in museums, and a university. Finally, I chose a corporate career and after retirement worked in an adoption agency.

In my Chinese family, we didn't discuss our fears, worries, feelings, sadness, bliss, paradise, or what makes us cry or laugh. The photograph neither depicts nor hints of our multi-State residences, similarities or differences, nor our tensions or worries about each other.

A question for both my parents, did they realize that many of my independent and personal life choices were similar to theirs of decades ago? I learned to be as independent early in life, just as they had to be as teenagers and university students during national problems and long, permanent separations from their parents.

My mother and father gifted me with the confidence to choose my own path in life and to stand strong during unexpected personal upheavals and difficulties.

When I look at this family portrait, I am pleased we are together at home in a location only an ocean away from China. Each Lunar New Year I'm able to honor their lives and their gifts.

Jean, 2/4/21