



Engle Martin Celebrates

Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month

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In 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a declaration stating that a 7-day period, beginning on May 4th and ending on May 10th, would be designated as Asian & Pacific Heritage week. This time frame was selected to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843 and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. In 1990, congress passed a public law that expanded this celebration for the entire month of May.

This month, Engle Martin celebrates Asian & Pacific American Heritage Month by learning from one of our very own team members, **Yanwen Guo**. Yanwen walks us through his journey as a first-generation immigrant, and what he has learned along the way.

Yanwen Guo: Culture, Family, and Moving to the United States

Born and raised in a countryside village in Jiangling County, Hubei Province of China, I was one of seven children in the Guo family. My father was a farmer, while my mother focused on taking care of the home. Although my family was poor, and often struggled to put food on the table, my parents instilled in me a sense of pride for who I was, and all the great things I could accomplish. I was raised to be respectful, to work hard, and to help those who needed help. Through this upbringing, I developed a strong work ethic.

I focused on my studies and was accepted to Wuhan University, the top university in China, where I studied Biology and I met my wife, Hui Zeng. Once we graduated, both Hui and I pursued higher education. I focused on a master's degree in Cell Biology at Shanghai Institute of Cell Biology, Chinese Academy of Science, and Hui worked on her master's degree at Wuhan University. In 1995, Hui and I made the courageous decision to

move to the United States and gain PhDs at Oklahoma State University. Although both Hui and I wanted to work in biology, I quickly realized that it would be difficult to support my family and achieve our goals. I made the decision to pivot to a Computer Science Master's Program to allow Hui to focus on her dream career.



Left to right: Yanwen's son, Aaron Guo (Junior at Purdue University, Aerospace Honor College), Yanwen's daughter, Emily Guo (9th grader at Galloway School)), and Yanwen's wife, Hui Zeng, Senior Flu Virus Research Scientist at CDC

Coming to America

Pursuing a higher education was one of the driving forces that led me to the United States. As a young adult, I grew up surrounded by Western influences, from music, such as Michael Jackson, to movies, and even fast food, like McDonalds. This love of Western culture inspired me, and I grew up with a strong respect and admiration for the United States. For me, coming to the U.S. opened up the opportunity to better my life, broaden my possibilities, and live in a country that I found to be inspirational.

However, making this life changing journey did not come without its struggles. As a first-generation immigrant, my decision would require me to leave behind my entire family. Although I thought I was prepared, coming to America proved to be incredibly difficult. I quickly discovered that learning textbook English did not prepare me for the colloquial and everyday language found in the U.S. For most first-generation immigrants, learning perfect English is something they all work towards, but often find difficult to master.

Removing Limitations to Lead

I also had to overcome the assumption that, because I was seen as introverted, quiet, or conciliatory, I may not be suitable for leadership positions. As a Han Chinese, I was raised to be humble and work hard without complaints. That did not mean that I did not have pain points or disagreements, especially when I encountered anyone whose behaviors went against my cultural foundations. However, it did impact the way I shared my thoughts in a group setting, or pushed back on ideas, especially if they were coming from my leaders.

Keeping Traditions Alive



Traditional Chinese Mooncakes.

Today, my family and I ensure we take time to celebrate important Chinese traditions and keep our native culture alive. For my family, Chinese New Year is very similar to Thanksgiving and Christmas here in the United States. There are large family gatherings, great food, and gift exchanges. During the Dragon Boat Festival, a traditional festival to pay respects to an Ancient Chinese Poet, Qu Yuan, we remember the poet by dropping rice dumplings into the river so the fish will not feast on his body. For the Middle Autumn Festival, we gather under a sky lit by a full moon, drink tea, and eat mooncakes. This celebration symbolizes prosperity, reunion, completeness, and togetherness.

I continue to remain grateful for the ability to embrace two cultures. I focus on the good from both, whether it is being respectful, working hard, or embracing my personal freedoms. It is my desire to pass these qualities and traditions on to my two children. When asked what I am proud of, I can confidently say that I am proud of many things, including my heritage and my courage to move to the United States. I am proud of our achievements, and my wife, who is now a Senior Research Scientist for the Center for Disease Control. I'm proud to be a part of Engle Martin and to contribute to its growth. And most importantly, I'm proud to be able to leave my children a legacy that they can one day be proud of.

