INTERVIEWING DR. CHEWW LYE CHNG, FOUNDER OF THE DRAGONFLIES OF DALLAS

MEETINGS WERE HELD ON SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 23, 2023

THE FOUR PARTICIPANTS ARE DR. CHWEE LYE CHNG, FERRIS LE, MIRANDA DEWBERRY, AND RYLEE WEATHERLY

INTERVIEW LED BY FERRIS LE

**Meeting 1: 24 minutes and 57 seconds long**

[0:00] F: [in response to the recording alert] Oh thats quite loud-

[0:04] F: So alright let's jump in. So could you tell me like, what are the Dragonflies of Dallas and how would you describe yourselves?

[0:16] D: Just a minute, your face is blocked off by this thing called recording.

[0:25] F: Oh yes I started the recording. Is it disrupting the…

[0:30] D: Yes it says the meeting is being recorded and uh… it’s pasted over your face so I can't even see you.

[0:40] F: Oh thats… unfortunate

[0:45] D: Umm… hm… okay let's figure it out… got it yeah, okay yeah.

[0:53] F: Is it alright now?

D: yeah, yeah. Okay go ahead ask me the question again.

F: Alright so could you describe and like tell me what are exactly are the Dragonflies of Dallas and why did you decided on that sort of name? What kind of like meaning does that hold to you and the rest of the group?

D: Good good, so let me introduce myself and then tell you a little bit of my background and as to why I started Dragonflies in 1994. I am- I was born in Singapore, you know, I'm sure you've seen the Crazy Rich Asians [referring to the movie that came out in 2018] thats, thats the sort of, you know, culture so and I grew up in Malaysia and completed my uh, high school, undergraduate and graduate degree and then decided to pursue my doctorate degree in the united states. And I went to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, cold cold cold Wisconsin. And in Wisconsin. Uh, when I arrived in Wisconsin in 1977 and then graduated with a PhD in 1981 upon which I came to apply for a job and was accepted you know to become an assistant professor at the University of North Texas in 1981. While I was in graduate school, I came out, you know, and embraced myself as an openly proud gay man and I did it the academic way, you know in 1980- you know it was a different world in those days. And so I went to the library and read every printed work and every book on it and sort of upgraded myself what was the science of the time, you know, sexual orientation and sexual preference. I called the gay hotline, joined a gay support group, had a healthy journey, and raised my identity as a gay man. I was surrounded by a lot of very very helpful, kind, supportive gay friends. I found that many of my… all my gay friends of those days were not Asian, and while they supported my gay identity, they didn't understand too much about my Asian identity. And I'm a traditional conservative asian who takes his Asian identity very very seriously. Uh, so when I first came out as gay, I sort of had to push aside my Asian identity for a while, while I focused on my gay identity.

F: Mhm.

D: And so when I came to the University of North Texas, when I interviewed I came out to the university to let them know that I'm gay

F: Yes, yes

D. And this was the 1980s and a very different time. And there was a little bit of risk involved in it but uh, at that time uh, while I was the University of Wisconsin in Madison, I met my current husband, you know, so I have been in love and lived with the same man for 46 years, almost half a century. We got married in 2015 when it became legal. And when I started at the University of North Texas I wanted to make sure they knew I'm a man with a gay husband. So Jackson was very much a part of my life. Wherever we had university wide events he came with me, people met him, they knew him and so you know whether they accepted it or not they have viewed that I'm an openly gay man who is very proud and refused to hide. And so while I was going through my tenure promotion process, I, you know, supported gay students and actually I became a sponsor of a gay student group called Courage, we can talk more about it later on if you want. But at that time I was also very aware that my, I'm sure you've heard of the popular concept of intersectionality

F: Yes!

D: Which is an academic device used, popularized by African-American law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw who talked about how many of us have multiple identities and all these identities converge, merge, and they, you know, compound a lot of these sort of complications and expressions and what they view. And so even though I came out as a gay man, very proud as a gay man, I didn't feel that I had understanding of support accessing the Asian part of me. I was an Asian gay man, so all my friends were non-Asian, except for when I went to professional conferences in San Francisco, New York, Washington DC, Philadelphia. I met up with other Asians who were professionals who were gay as well. And I loved the fact I finally met who finally understood my Asian identity and my gay identity. And so when I came back to Denton, you know my friends were saying “Hey, you know you're all by yourself there, why don't you start an Asian support group there?” and so after doing a bunch of research, at that time, for example, I was quite active as a openly gay man, I volunteered at the gay community center, the AIDS resource center, I even was sitting on the board of the gay and lesbian community center in Dallas. And– but in those early days whether if it was on campus or in town or all over the place, typically I am always the only Asian in any social group. Okay, and so when I told my board I was very serious about starting a gay Asian group in town, they were all very very supportive. It was so supportive that they said “When you start a group to support gay Asians in Dallas, they can meet in our community center, one year rent-free.”

F: That’s incredible.

D: So that was their way of showing support to me. So what I did was I put an ad in the local press, telling them I'm starting a gay Asian group in town, and the meeting was going to be in the community center the following Sunday.

F: May I ask what uh, what paper you posted that ad in?

D: I think it was the Dallas Voice

F: Right, yeah, I've seen a lot of your ads in the Dallas Voice

D: Yeah, so I put an ad there saying I'm starting a group for gay Asians in town and I say the group is only for gay Asians. I do not want to have non-Asians in this group. I want to help gay Asians. So on that day, four people turn up. They're all gay Asian men– one from the Philippines, one from Indonesia, one from Thailand, and one from Malaysia, so four Southeast Asian countries around. We met at the center, we talked, and all of us are just hungry for human contact from people who understand the two worlds of being gay and being Asian. And we became instant friends instantly. And uh, the first thing we need to do, let's agree to meet, let's agree to organize ourselves, and many of us felt that a lot of ppl in the US, even in the gay community, understand the struggles of being a gay asian. And so we decided our group was going to provide support for each other but was also going to be a group where were gonna educate the larger community to teach them more about the gay culture and the Asian culture. And the struggles and the joys of that. And first thing we need to do to decide to name ourselves. In this time of history, this was 1988 there about, oh no, 1994 sorry this is Dragonflies, 1994. We had to choose a name. Most of the gay Asian groups all over the United States had GAPI this and GAPI that- Gay Asian Pacific Islanders, you know, and I thought GAPI was not sexy.

D, F, M, R: [laughs]

D: So we decided that we were gonna choose a name that reflects more of who we are. So we talked about dragons, you know the symbol of the dragon that flies, so we decided to call ourselves Dragon Flies. Celebrating the magic and the power of the ancient star. But people later on thought that we were talking about the insect, you know, dragonflies that fly, I don't care. But it became the group. We were called the Dragonflies of Dallas. So the group started in ‘94, this is 2023, it is still in operation. It has changed and morphed slightly. We started out as being a support group for Asians that were gay, and we morphed into a service organization as well. So initially we did a lot of instruction, you know, educated people. So every time we had a meeting we focused on one Asian country, we talked about cultural stuff, we talked about food, we talked about music, talked about history and stuff, talked about politics and stuff, ‘kay? All of the early members were all immigrants. And they may be going to school here, or their family may have relocated here cause of politics and discrimination.

F: Right

D: And many of us in Asia probably would of never met each other because we were, you know, living in different countries. But here, in America, we felt we all connected easily. And so I say that the group is still in existence because in 2023, even though the group has discontinued the instructional, informational kinda you know, official thing, we are still in operation because we are still every month, every second Saturday of the month, we cook home-cooked meals and buy food to feed each of the residents who are men, women and children living in housing complex. And the housing complex we feed every month is the E-Wing house, housing complex at Oak Cliff in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Okay, so I talked too much now, so go on and ask the next question.

F: Well, thats wonderful. I uh, I wasn't aware if you were, the Dragonflies, were still continuing as an organization. I was aware that you held supper clubs and stuff

D: and again, I'm just saying that I'm retired, I'm a 75-year-old retired professor, I've done a lot of volunteer work, and Dragonflies and its ability to feed hungry homeless men women and children who are impacted by HIV and we’ve been feeding them for over 21 years is one of the proudest things I’ve ever done, it outgrows all of Dragonflies. I mean we organize directionals and we march in this and that– those things are fun. This one we feel really really has impacted real lives of people.

F: Definitely

D: And they always enjoy home-cooked Asian meals that we make.

F: I think that's beautiful because uh, personally for me as someone who grew up in a Vietnamese household it feels like making food for your community is like our way of showing love with one another– oh no sorry zoom prompted us a warning that they're gonna cut us off in 10 minutes.

D: Okay, okay, yeah.

F: We’ll just join the other link if its cuts us off. Yeah yeah, so you said you felt more culturally isolated as an Asian gay man in the 80s. Over time did you feel more like connected, did you feel like you saw more of yourself in like the Texas community going into the '90s and starting the Dragonflies?

D: Yes. Many of the members of Dragonflies like myself, even though we’re gay and function in the gay community, we don't see a lot of people who look like us, respond culturally like us, until we met the members of the Dragonflies. So as a result it became a sort of a clique for us. We hang out with each other. Even Chinese New Year, June festivals, we hang out, we have potluck parties, we socialize, some of them even go on vacations together, cruises, and whatever you do. The idea is people felt that they would be understood because for a lot of people in the United States, in their mind, all Asians look alike. They don't make any distinction between a Vietnamese and a Thai and Cambodian and Indian and Malaysian, all that. For them, were all Asian. “What type of Asian are you?” kinda thing. And because we are all, Dragonflies are a certain group of people, people who understood the, you know, differences, okay. So we had like potlucks where we say “Okay this potluck, everything is going to be Vietnamese food. You can either cook it or buy it but it has to be Vietnamese. And next week is Indian food” and so again we use it to celebrate s well as to educate each other. So in those days, we would have members from that cultural group take over you know, we would all cook a potluck and then they would do a presentation on the history and the culture and the artwork and the costumes and stuff. It was a fun fun fun cultural event.

F: Sounds like it! May I ask, like you were founded in 1994, when did you first hold your first supper club?

D: The first supper club where we feed the HIV folks or the-

F: Oh no no, just your potlucks and like meeting and eating food together.

D: Ah, almost immediately. Because for all of us Asians, food is an important… sharing food is a very important experience for many of us. So we’ll either go out to eat at Asian restaurants and because we are all from Asia we are very particular about what is authentic and not authentic Asian food.

F: Right right

D: So they often… we have friends let's say for example from Vietnam and they say “Ah there’s only one authentic Vietnamese restaurant that can pass the test” or if you want to eat Hong Kong food our friend from Hong Kong will say “ah this is the place” so we founded as a result of this as gay Asians, and we bring our friends along, its this cultural event of celebrating food, grocery store, concerts, music and what have you

F: So over time, I know all the founding members were all Southeast Asian but as your organization grew were there, uh, more sorts of ethnicities that joined you? Like you mentioned having Indian food as well as South Asian food

D: Yes we welcome, you know, the group is to support gay Asians and you could be, you know East Asian, West Asian, South Asian, it all depends on who is easter and willing to join. And it varies because sometimes people will relocate then you know or… die or what have you and then we have to sort of replenish and encourage more and more people. But for the most part, when we first came it was a core of 8-10 people and then we added more and more and more. And depending on the year or the decade, sometimes the numbers are larger, sometimes the numbers are smaller and what have you. So we were still meeting at each other's homes with potluck until the pandemic started and that sort of, you know, and we haven't really resumed that face-to-face stuff just yet. We are still keeping the volunteer, super club to feed HIV residents still operation. The social meetings in each other's homes have not happened in a while.

F: Yeah I was wondering if uh, the dragonflies were still active when I was thinking of questions. Like how the covid 19 pandemic impacted you guys. I know um…

D: it has impacted, yeah. I'm 75, my husband is 75, so we have discovered that it is a challenge for us to drive at night over long distances through Dallas. Previously, you know, it was no problem. Now you know our eyes are a little bit less strong so we have decided it was not a good risk to be doing that. So I haven't gone to the supper club to feed people, I've only done it through donations. I donate money to my friends and say “Hey can you go to the Asian grocery store/supermarket and buy egg rolls?” or what have you, you know, and stuff because I know exactly what we like. Occasionally our friends are saying “If you want to go, we will drive up to Denton, pick you up and take you down, and bring you back again” We haven't done that yet but I think we may one day.

F: Yeah yeah, so like kinda on the topic of the demographics of like the Dragonflies in general, was it just uh, I know gay right now its kinda expanded its meaning but was it just it mostly gay men that comprised the Dragonflies? Did you have lesbians, bisexual, transgender people in your group?

D: initaly, you know it was sort of, the ad in the original group was gay men. We never ban anybody who's not gay male from attending. In fact, we have non-gay people who were friends who wanted to support this whole project– feeding HIV-infected people– and so they decided to join the supper club. And that fines, again this is the volunteer work, to help feed people. You don't have to be gay, or Asian. Ans for the most part most of the active members historically have been gay, male, and asian. Typically sort of immigrants. We don't have as many American-born Asian folks, and we don't exclude them but thats not the people who respond to the invitation to join for the most part. To come back to the other question, we have found as our original group aged, we have been in operation for almost 25 years, 28 years, we haven't been very successful in recruiting younger gay Asians to join us. We've tried but it just never worked. We anticipate that when we all pass, the group will dissolve and another group will resurface. But 28 years, 25 years of existence is not a bad thing.

F: Not all all.

D: We feel very proud of it.

— INTERVIEW ENDS —-

**Meeting 2: 37 Minutes and 34 seconds long**

F: Alright, is it covering me again?

D: Uh no, you're okay

F: Okay. so you left off on saying you have trouble recruiting young gay asians to the Dragonflies over time. So like on that topic you said you like posted ads in the newspaper, were there other ways you tried to outreach to the community?

D: We, well, essentially, historically the way we recruit people is by word of mouth, kay? So friends of friends of friends who you know heard about it and were interested, and we invite them to accompany us to, you know potluck parties or social events, pool parties and what have you. And if they are interested they join the group– hang on a sec let me drink this– and for us joining the group is just joining the group on the email, thats about it. We communicate through email and letting you know about events and social events and what have you. One way we recruit historically is we participate in the gay pride parades, and we have an information booth and people stop by and we talk to them about it, tell them about this and the other and if they are willing to share their contact information we will contact them that way. So phone numbers, emails, public events and what have you. I also think as society becomes more, welcome you know, gay Asian folks are able to feel you know recognized and accepted and what have you, so the need to connect so that they are, they feel supported in a community, it maybe is less acute as it was before. I don't know for a fact. So maybe a lot of gay Asians these days can find support in social groups beyond that, whether it's online or offline. But for many of us in the early 80s, we didn't feel that so we actively had to carve a place for us and Dragonflies appeared to be the place that really really saved lives.

F: Right

D: And one of the reasons we are involved in helping feed HIV-infected men women and children, E-Wing, and what have you, is because in our early one of our members contracted HIV and subsequently died. And it severely impacted us so we decided to become more involved in health care and reception of HIV folks, and then we found E-Wing and we decided to volunteer. And so we decided that every second Saturday of the month we would get ourselves together, cook meals, interact with the residents, and represent the gay Asian community to them. And surprisingly a lot of people were willing to do that. It also gave us an opportunity to socialize with each other cause most of the people in Dragonflies lived in the Dallas metroplex. I lived in Denton. So it's not as convenient and easy so uh, I need an excuse to get out of town and drive to Dallas. And so when I volunteer I hang around a little bit and you know we’ll go to restaurants to eat food and hang out and stuff. So it helped us stay connected to the community, volunteer work, it doesn’t only help the residents it helps us– gives us means to keep our friendship alive and vibrant.

F: speaking of community, I wanted to ask what were the Dragonflies' relationships with other gay organizations in Dallas like did you feel connected to other gay orgs or did you kinda feel like in your own clique or bubble?

D: We- well I am very integrated in the gay community. Remember I serve on the board, I volunteer. Some of our members are also very active in the gay sports– gay volleyball, gay, you know, clubs. Other members are also very involved in the gay men's choir. So they are integrated in the gay community but they are active with Dragonflies because here they interact with people who understand the Asian culture and how it is integrated in their identity and stuff. So um,

I don't know whether that answers your question or not but thats..

F: I think it does!

D: So the Dragonflies serves a purpose that is not met in other gay social events and what have you so you know we have in those early days game nights, eat, hang out at each other's homes, and watch the Oscars. We had Oscars events, July fourth, cooking. We had costume parties and it was a lot of fun for us to spend time with our gay Asian friends and family

F: Right, speaking of family. Would you kinda describe the relationships the Dragonflies had with one other? Were they friends, were they partners, were they siblings, did you all consider yourselves to be each other's family?

D: I'm talking about the formative group, so you know again is like any group people connect with whoever they can connect with. Sometimes the connection is wrong, sometimes its very casual. But I found for example that I play a very important role in the lives of my Dragonflies members to the extent that they got married, they insisted that I'm the MC and the person who you know gets certified and stuff. So I played the role as the elder for them. If they had a drag competition, I'm obviously one of the judges to decide who gets crowned. To some extent, I play the leadership elder role and for many of them- for some of them, they are not that integrated in their own biological family, who maybe live out of town or out of the country. So they turn to me when they have issues they wanna discuss and get feedback. You know, they pick up a phone and call me “Hey, are you free to chit chat?” and we'll talk about stuff. So it's a social, emotional, support system that people can join if they want to. So for example I have been MC in marrying at least three couples so far.

F: Thats wonderful.

D: Thats how people, you know, thats family almost.

F: Yeah that is family, I believe so. Speaking of, kinda on this topic and the Dragonflies, I was wondering if you could tell us about particular members and friends, you mentioned one of the Dragonflies who sadly passed due to HIV and AIDS. were there any members you wanted to tell us in particular? And it's alright if you don't use their names. I'm aware in the gay community it's important to keep their confidentiality.

D: Right right, but again, I'm just saying, I'm a college professor, I’m very out at work and I volunteer in many organizations. I always feel it's important to represent. I speak as a college professor, I'm very invested in sexuality education and advocacy and stuff. And so but I have other members who are different. Very active in music, or very active in artwork, or very active in the historical society. So they represent the gay boys, gay Asian boys, whenever they are doing their volunteer work. And uh, each member, I think as we become more and more comfortable with the identities that we have, remember we talked about intersectionality. As we start to identify and celebrate and integrate all these identities and stressors and other views, you become healthier and healthier. And when you become healthier and healthier, you can represent, you can advocate, you can advance, you can really be integrated into society and what have you. I think the- we have very good, high-quality, sterling members. And we support each other. In fact, if any of the dragonflies are in trouble, the people they call are the people of the Dragonflies circle. Because this is the inner group that has understood who they are on different levels. So in some sense, I think the Dragonflies has become a sort of safety net for a lot of people. These are the people who understand them, the people they socialize with, the sort of people they turn to for comfort, for encouragement, for motivation, for help, and for celebration.

F: Right. I kind of wanted to get more into detail about sort of the social gatherings you had with one another. On the UNT archives what's most features are photos of the Miss Dragonfly pageant. Could you tell us about that? I know you were the MC for that event over the years

D: Unfortunately.[laughs] So I keep telling them I know nothing about beauty contests. But because I'm a college professor and they respect me, so I always end up being on stage and introducing and celebrating and interviewing. So we have members who are interested in performance, interested in fashion and some of them may be considering transitioning or what have you. So participating in a beauty contest is a lot of fun for them. And so we have for a while we had annual miss Dragonflies, but sometimes, and it all depends on interest and willingness to participate. So once we have a group who are eager to participate thats when we say “Okay this year let's have a Miss Dragonfly pageant” and we’ll have to look for a site and a budget. And usually, our budget is a potluck. People bring food, then we have volunteers who build the stage, we have a cameraman and what have you, and then we crown the individual. It is fun even though it is very very official. For a lot of people, it's just joy and fun. And that sort of becomes one of the recurring tools for us. We invite potential people who are interested and say “Hey hey hey we’re going to crown the next Miss Dragonfly. Are you interested and coming along and seeing?”

And thats how they meet a lot of people and we talk a little bit about “Besides drag shows we also do a bunch of other things. If you would like to participate, share your name and contact information and we will contact you when the event comes.” and stuff. So people… there's a lot of volunteer work and activity and fun, not only for the people who, you know, strut their stuff on stage, but there's a lot of background, so there’s a lot of volunteers who help. But we usually do it if there are enough contestants willing to perform on stage.

F: Right so this would be at like any time of the year when you'd be able to gather enough people?

D: Right. Usually, it's sort of in the fall or cooler days. We usually do it when we have a home, a pool, and people who are willing to build a stage. Once it starts there's music, there's fun and stuff. For what- we usually don't do it every year, every two, three, four years depending on whether there are enough contestants interested in it, and then it takes off. So we haven't had that for quite a while. Our focus has been, the original group, has sort of evolved into other things. The only thing we have kept going is the supper club where we feed the residents. The other parts are very lowkey. Like “Hey I'm getting Dim Sum on Sunday in Richardsons restaurant, you wanna come, come.” so we send an email out to everyone. Sometimes you have 12 people, sometimes you have 20 people. It's a little bit more lowkey than organizing, you know.

F: So may I ask when you think the last Miss Dragonfly pageant was held? And like, in general, when were the dragonflies at kind of like peak attendance and activity? Like these more formal events

D: I can't even tell you when the last dragonflies contest was, but one of the things we have introduced for a couple of years was that we decided to help us in touch, once a month, in addition to feeding HIV residents, once a month we would hopefully meet in each others homes and its called a game night. Okay so like usual I am lassoed as the MC of the game night. So I am the person thats organizing it. So we use that as an opportunity for people to just have fun. So the game night is a supper club where you bring a dish to share with friends, so we eat and hang out. and then the main event is a game. So well divide everybody into groups. Sometimes it could be a drag show, where we go to Goodwill and buy a lot of clothes and put them in the trash bags and assign one trash bag to one group and give them an hour to put together an outfit and volunteer and they have to perform. And then the full group will judge as to who is the winning contestant and stuff. So sometimes it's just a lot of fun like that.

F: It sounds like a lot of fun.

D: It's a lot of fun! So we have charades, we have hot cross buns we have all kinds of- we have So You Think You Can Sing, based on the popular talk shows and stuff. We sort of stopped doing that when the pandemic came. It ended a lot of these things there. And once you end things, it takes a lot more energy to resurrect it, cause people have moved on to other things.

F: Do you feel that sense that other Dragonflies have moved on?

D: Yes yes, yes, probably because it's also me. Because I'm 75 years old. And I don't feel comfortable driving to Dallas as readily as I used to. My husband is having health challenges so we are limited in what we can and can not do. Things have come to pass and we just have to evolve to something else differently and what have you. So we tried and it was quite popular you know. I may be able to even send you pictures of these game nights and stuff.

F: I would more than love to see those photos. Yeah we were actually thinking for our exhibit we would show off some of the photos we have of you guys and like just bring awareness to the work your organization has done, so having more photos would be wonderful, especially of you-

D: Give me a mailing address later on and I'll send them to you and then you can, you know. And photographs are photographs, it's fine, we can protect the identity of the people, thats fine.

F: That would be wonderful! So um, let me think…

D: Oh by the way, when we first started I would help put together a dragonflies newsletter magazine.

F: You did? Oh!

D: Where I had members write different articles about different cultures and stuff and it’d be put together. I may be able to send you a couple to look at and exhibition and stuff

F: That would be fantastic! I uh- this is more than I could have wished for. Thank you, that would be lovely!

D: Because I am going to donate it to the University of North Texas library and so they’re gonna keep a bunch of them, but I can definitely send one to you

F: That would be amazing! You would need like a physical mailing address?

D: Yeah cause I don't think I can send these things electronically. Just put together whichever physical address you think you want me to send, and I'll probably put it in a package and send it over there

F: That would be amazing actually. Thank you!

D: And then I will try to look for some photographs that capture, you know the stuff if possible.

F: Right because um, what's on the UNT archive right now are photos of the Miss Dragonfly pageant but from what I’m hearing is another core part of your group was just kind of hanging out together and eating together and we’d love to have photos that like kind of showcase that part of your organization bonded together

D: And again it's important to show how we are an integral parts of each other's lives. We are family members, and so we do a lot of family-focused things. Like Halloween with costumes- we have costume parties for Halloween

F: Yes yes, I believe we saw photos of your Halloween party and one of your members in drag.

D: I'll see what I can find.

F: Yes thats fantastic! Thats just incredible, thank you!

D: Is it possible then, that if I send stuff to you for the exhibition, after the exhibition, can you send it back to me?

F: Of course! Of course!

D: Okay so if thats possible, I will be able to just send it to you and you guys put it together and have fun with it. Because I really think what you do is important for the larger community.

F: Thank you. Yeah, we're more than happy to do this for you guys!

So any more questions?

F: I've just been saying the questions I have. Kiranda and Ry did you have any questions for Dr. Chng?

M: When you send the photos would it be possible for us to scan them?

D: Yes, yes but I want the original to come back.

M: Yes!

F: Yes of course!

D: But you have full permission to scan it and use it in whatever way you want to. I trust you.

M: Okay cool. Thank you so much!

D: It's an original and I wanna make sure the library has access to it so that everyone in the neighborhood can access it all the time. But I sincerely believe in what you guys are doing and how important, you know for the community to hear your voice and putting it all together.

F: I think it's important for our current community to hear your voice and what your organization has done so much for gay asians all this time. It’s like, I couldn't thank you more than enough for what you have done.

D: Again, we all have to do what we all have to do. One of the questions people ask a lot is “What was it like being gay in the 80s?” I say “Very different.” We have to assert, you have to sort of make- my point is there’s no judgment. Everyone has to do what they have to do to survive.

F: I was wondering on like– there's the 10-minute warning– on how like as myself, as someone who’s of the current gay Asian generation, how I’d be able to connect with you guys and continue your work. You said you had that ongoing supper club, do you have like an email list I could get into to help maybe like, also contribute to your guys' cause?

D: One of the things I am going to do as a result of meeting you is to invite you to join Dragonflies and support the mission of Dragonflies, supper club, and everything else there. So we need young people, people who are energized, who are interested, to do stuff. One of the reasons why we were able to do what we did in the early formative years of Dragonflies, for the most part, many of us were young. Yeah, I was in my 40’s, pretty young. So I definitely- one of the reasons I continue, I have been retired for 10 years. I still accept invitations to guest lectures to class, undergraduate and graduate classes, because I believe in sharing my experiences, sharing my knowledge, will give younger people an opportunity to sort of step out of their comfort zone and say “Hey, if he can do it, I can do it too in 2023.” So thats one of the motives of agreeing to be interviewed and to speak because I just want you folks to know this is a new world. We need your voice and we need your energy and we need your courage.

F: And I kind of speak for the others but we’d be more than willing to lend that for you and for our community.

D: Excellent! And I view it in a sense if you do that, you are continuing the foundational work that we have done, and the world changing, you know, [the work] needs to adapt and to change with it. My feeling is if that one person like me can make a difference, many other people banded together can make an even more powerful impact. I want to motivate, I want to inspire you, I want you guys to just “Hey, do it!”

F: We hope to make an exhibit that expresses our want to keep it going.

D: And I probably help to orchestrate the meeting you know, interaction, definitely email address and phone numbers what what have you will be important.

F: Yeah I will definitely keep in contact after this and we’ll get you a mailing address and all of that

D: And again I speak to all three of you, this is a connection, I will always be available to you folks if you need to bounce ideas, talk, interact, ask for referrals, what have you. As long as I am able to I will always always support you. I never regretted coming out, claiming my gay identity, and integrating it with my Asian identity, integrating it with my immigrant identity, integrating it with my professor identity, all these other things are integrated and I think it's a wonderful hodgepodge, delicious, edible wonderful meal.

F: Yes of course we will, thank you so much!

D: Are there any more questions?

F: I’ll have a look over and see if I missed out on anything but I encourage Ry and Miranda to ask things too

D: When you send me an email after this, I will send as an attachment my responses to all the questions you have shared. Remember I had told you I had it all down here, and so you’d be able to access them. I was kinda sleepy but I got it all done.

F: Thank you for taking the time to do that.

D: Oh you know. Since it's here I printed it out, I can send it to you electronically but I think I can send it to you with a hard copy as well.

F: That would be lovely, thank you so much!

D: So when is the exhibition?

F: Oh the exhibition, it'll be on November 29, end of November. It's gonna be held at UTD Galerstein Gender Center. Right now the center is kind of at risk of being shut down due to recent laws that have been passed. So were holding a really big exhibit kind of as a celebration of being queer in the south and queer at UTD

D: I know professors at UTD, so I will tell them. Send it to me and I’ll make sure that they go and attend it.

F: Yes, I'll definitely see to that

D: So as we end, can I ask a special request? Can each of you here tell me what is one take-home message you got from listening to this interview? I haven't heard from any of them directly- Ry and Miranda, you each tell me what is one thing that impacted you that you can take away from this? Okay, go! I'm acting like a retired college professor here.

M: Okay, at the end of the day it's the community aspect, finding your people and being able to connect with your community. Obvi if none of us were in this class we wouldn't be here right now. And I feel like our class itself is a mini-community, which someone said the other day in class. So yeah, just the whole just community… getting to connect with other people who share the same ideas and thoughts as you.

D: you use the word community, I use the word family. In America, in the Asian community, we are very collectivist, we are very community-focused, and for us, the concept of family is not nuclear family– father, mother, child– it’s plus extended family– my cousins, etc.– so it's like it goes generations in some sense. If you understand me, you hear my voice, you are my family. So I feel very very connected.

F: Ry, you have less than a minute.

R: Oh gosh. I was gonna say Miranda took my point of like the community because I grew up in north Dallas and I did not know any of these queer spaces existed until I started this class. I was not aware that Oak Lawn was a very prominent gay area even though I’ve lived here my entire life. So just being in this class and talking with people who have been there and lived there and supported the gay community in Dallas is really important because it’s for education, it spreads awareness too.

D: And you are not alone. Thats important. You are not alone. You are connected to a community, okay?

— INTERVIEW ENDS —-