

## **FHS Oral History Project – Christine Malamanig Berk**

### **Description:**

Christine Malamanig Berk was born in Tamuning, Guam, in 1973. Christine briefly recollected fond memories of her early upbringing on the island before her family moved to California when she turned five years old. Christine cited familial trends and improved opportunities in the contiguous United States as reasons they left Guam. She recounted the cultural shock she experienced once she settled in California, and the various ways in which her family maintained her Guamanian and Filipino (her father's side) heritage while living in California during this time. Christine attended California State University in Fresno, double majoring in Journalism and English. During college, she joined several organizations that connected her with other Asian communities. Christine emphasized how these experiences functioned as a "multicultural awakening" to embrace culture and promote diversity and inclusion, objectives she continued to pursue throughout her adult life. In 2008, after years working as a journalist in Sacramento and Kansas City, Christine moved to Florida to attend Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville. She explained how the law school's welcoming and multicultural environment motivated her to attend that institution specifically. Christine recounted her career as a lawyer, specifically how she has navigated the profession as an Asian American woman. In 2011, after completing law school, Christine moved to Orlando, immediately seeking communal and professional connections. As a result, she joined the Greater Orlando Asian American Bar Association (GOAABA) and served as its president circa 2014. Additionally, around this time, she joined the Asian American Chamber of Commerce, where she currently serves as president (as of 2025). In her discussion of both organizations, Christine outlined the organizations' missions, their significance to the Asian American community in Orlando, and what she has maintained and implemented while serving in various prominent positions, not only as president. Lastly, Christine shared her broader observations on the growing Asian community in Florida, the state's larger changes since 2008, and the challenges it faces in the contemporary moment (2025).

### **Transcription:**

00;00;00 - 00;00;20

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Christine Berk on May 18th, 2025, at the Vietnamese American Medical Profession's Community Health Fair in Orlando, Florida, for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Can you please restate your name, your date of birth, and where you were born?

00;00;20 - 00;00;25

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Christine Burk, born in Guam 7/7/73.

00;00;25 - 00;00;29

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Excellent. Where in Guam specifically?

00;00;29 - 00;00;31

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Tamuning.

00;00;32 - 00;00;37

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Can you recall your childhood growing up in Guam?

00;00;37 - 00;01;07

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yes. I was born in Guam, and I was there till probably about five, so I definitely have some memories before moving to stateside California. Very, very tropical, [and] very humid. I remember spending lots of time with family, a lot of family all the time evenings and weekends and barbecues and trips around the island.

00;01;07 - 00;01;10

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And were both of your parents from Guam?

00;01;10 - 00;01;30

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** No, my dad is Filipino, and that is where my middle name comes from—Malamanig is my middle name now—but he is from the Philippines. My mom is from Guam. I was born in Guam. And so at some point, they decided to chase the American dream stateside.

00;01;30 - 00;01;32

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Were you an only child?

00;01;32 - 00;01;46

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** No. I have two younger sisters. So one was two years younger than me. Her name is Jess, Jessica, and she was born in Guam. And the other one, Donna, was actually born in California.

00;01;46 - 00;01;58

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Do you recall why your parents decided to leave Guam to go to California?

00;01;58 - 00;02;46

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yes. Looking back because I was a child then, I think it was a trend of my family. We had a huge family. My mom is a family of, I think there is eight siblings in the family. And so I would say half of them stayed on the island. And then the other half ventured over to California. There were like one or two that ventured over to and settled in Texas, but the majority in California. And it was for a better life. And Guam is a US territory, but there are more opportunities within the contiguous United States and California tends to be the stopping point. Texas, I think, was a stopping point because it was military, and my uncles were in the military.

00;02;46 - 00;03;00

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Even though you were very young when you first moved to California, as you grew up, was there any cultural shock or cultural differences that you experienced?

00;03;00 - 00;03;57

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yes. And you do not really know that you are different when you first come here. When we first came here, like many immigrants just starting, we

were in a hodgepodge of different cultures. And there were a lot of different cultures, but I just remember being embraced by a lot of friends. And it was fine. But even as a young child, we would get these [teased], which now there is a term for it—politically incorrect—about the eyes and, like “sing songy,” racist remarks from other kids, which I am pretty sure they did not know any better, but that was what people would do back in the day. We are a little bit more aware and more sensitive because we celebrate cultures more openly now, which is fantastic.

00;03;57 - 00;04;01

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. And where in California did you all move to?

00;04;01 - 00;04;22

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So when we first landed, we stayed with some relatives who were establishing themselves in the Salinas area. So my relatives were in the Monterey, Salinas area, and my father found a job there. He was an electrician.

00;04;22 - 00;04;24

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And what did your mom find any job?

00;04;24 - 00;04;51

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yeah. So she was a nurse. So she found work immediately. So my mom worked as a nurse, and then she also worked in the deli, like at Kmart. I do not even know if Kmart is around, but. So she worked and juggled a couple of jobs, and my dad was an electrician for a sugar beet processing factory. So he did that for all of his life here.

00;04;51 - 00;05;03

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What were some things that you all missed about Guam?

00;05;03 - 00;05;45

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** I do remember missing the weather. Because it was beautiful, even as a kid, like it would be very warm, but it would suddenly rain. It felt like magic because the sun was out and the sky was blue, but it would just suddenly rain. We are in Florida now. And so Florida is kind of similar where it is sunny, but then it does turn dark and then it rains, but very tropical. I feel like Florida is very similar to Guam in a lot of respects towards the weather. Just being outside and being around family, those are my biggest precious memories that stay with me.

00;05;45 - 00;05;52

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** How did your parents maintain your cultural heritage in California?

00;05;52 - 00;07;03

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So a lot of it is through family and friends. So my father is Filipino, and my mother is from Guam. So they are two different cultures. So through family and then extended family friends—and the family friends were considered family. So it was a blur of family, like blood family and family friends. So I was not around a whole lot of other Filipinos in the community that I was raised in, and same thing with the Guamanian side.

So I tended to be one of the few, like after moving from Salinas, we actually moved to another area that was rural, a small little town of like 4000 next to a bigger city. And that was in California. So when there was another Filipino family that moved in, it was a huge deal. So we became fast friends with them. But we just stayed connected with the people that we knew. And when my dad moved to Fresno, he connected with the Filipino church. So they are definitely pockets now, like bigger, stronger [which] were not as connected before.

00:07:03 - 00:07:06

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And when did you all move to Fresno?

00:07:06 - 00:08:22

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So I moved to Fresno when I went to college. I think as time has progressed, there has just been more support and more community building, whereas before it would just be pockets—your family and the family that you knew and the family friends that you knew. And I feel that was the same with Orlando. You know, the organizations that we have here, I am part of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce, I am its current president, but I also served as past president of GOAABA, which is the Greater Orlando Asian American Bar Association. And they started gosh, I think now we are at maybe thirteen years with that organization, but they started because there were not so many Asians that were connected and a few, maybe four or five went to lunch and said, “Why do not we start an organization? Why do not we start a bar association so that we can welcome [and] connect with other Asian American attorneys?” And that was how that started. Likewise, Asian American Chamber was founded much longer, in the late 80s, but it was a similar thing, like, “let’s get the Asian businesses connected and let’s foster growth and community and outreach to the community,” which is why we are here today.

00:08:22 - 00:08:30

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And we are certainly going to get to that portion of your life. You mentioned how you went for college. What did you study?

00:08:30 - 00:09:32;

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So I was a double major in journalism and English. So I was torn between chasing after the engineer degree, something in the hard sciences. But I really enjoyed writing and reading, and I guess the liberal arts, which I knew did not pay, but I was encouraged by my mom to go ahead and pursue that because I got a full ride scholarship, Rodman honor, Rodman full ride scholarship to Fresno State. So I went ahead and proceeded with that and mapped out my four years and got through it extended another year so I could actually serve as the editor in chief of one of the school newspapers. There were two. So it was an awesome experience to be able to go to school and do what I wanted to do and have the encouragement from my family.

00:09:32 - 00:09:40

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What was a memorable moment that you could share during your time serving as editor in chief?

00:09:40 - 00:11:05

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** You know, there was a lot of, and I am not into politics, really, I mean, you have to be at least to be aware of what was going on in the community and local and state and national. But I think it was just thrown into politically charged, ongoing conflicts, in the Middle East because we had students from Palestine and then Israel, and that is still going on. And I went to school a while ago, and still decades later, still a major conflict. And campuses are still protesting. And so I was editor in chief where I had a writer, editor of one force. And then we had a whole—and so there was a lot of political discussions and heated moments there. So just to be aware that other cultures, you know, you have one culture, someone has another culture, and you may not agree, but how do we maintain the discussion without it being so volatile? And thankfully, we did not get to the point where there were protests where police were called. So we did not at that point get to that level back when I was an editor. But I know it can get to that level.

00;11;05 - 00;11;22

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. When you attended Fresno State, did you find yourself with more people from the Philippines and from Guam and from other Asian cultures or not really?

00;11;22 - 00;12;18

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Actually, that is a great point. I was actually very involved in campus. So I was part of the Student Union. I was part of the orientation group. I went through orientation. I am like, “This is amazing. And so I want to be a part of it.” So I was basically a student ambassador for three years after the first year. But there were also multicultural things, and there was a multicultural retreat and leadership retreat. And so I joined that. And I think that really allowed me to meet other people within the Asian community, because there is other you know, when we say Asian, it is collective, right? You have people from Malaysia, you got people from Singapore, Japan, China, Philippines. Then you have the islands. I mean, there is just so many. And I think that was really the opening of celebrating diversity and inclusion for me.

00;12;18 - 00;12;24

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And why was it important for you to join those organizations?

00;12;24 - 00;13;12

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** It was important for me to connect with other people and not just other Asians, right. But to connect with other organizations. Being part of the orientation student leadership group allowed me to see everyone that came through. Everyone and their parents. So I got to see them as they came in excited. [I] saw their backgrounds economically, socially, [and] their culture. So I have always been interested just because I have usually been one of two or one of three in a classroom or in a school. So when I went to Fresno State, it was like a multicultural awakening, like, look at all these people.

00;13;12 - 00;13;16

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Absolutely. What brought you to Florida?

00;13;16 - 00;15;03

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Florida was because of law. At some point I did actually go out and become a journalist. I worked in several newspapers, including the Kansas City Star. But at some point, I had to make a decision between journalism and something else. And what I was covering before as a newspaper reporter was real estate, business, finance. And so I was very interested in that. But I was also interested in what people were doing like the people I [interviewed]. I enjoyed what they did. I thought it was exciting. I thought it was fascinating. And I thought to myself, "I could do that." And one of the groups that I interviewed were also attorneys like the legal scene in Sacramento, as well as commercial real estate, residential real estate. And so at some point, I had to make a decision because I saw the dotcom world was changing news and I saw the shift in the news before it really started, where newspapers started to die, and newspapers are still here. They are just now in a different format. It is hard to find a real newspaper and you see it on a Sunday. It is skinny. It used to be so fat with the funnies and the ads and the different sections, and now it is just really thin because everything is online now. So it shifted to the dotcom. And so I shifted before the dotcom really shifted news. And I figured what would I want to do with my life and law was something where I could still continue to do those beats, those areas which I covered as a reporter, but I could cover them as an attorney. And I came to Florida because of law school.

00;15;03 - 00;15;22

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And sort of two questions. My first one is, what were some of the signs that enabled you to forecast this shift from traditional newspapers to newspapers in their current iteration?

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**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Well, I sat in on a few editors meetings because I was part of the business beat, the business section. So occasionally I would sit in on the editorial and I was also involved in their multicultural audit, where we would actually look at the newspapers and see what kind of coverage we did. And was it negative or positive or neutral? But I sat on some of those meetings, and there is a separation between the news editorial side and the advertising side. One is the pay side and what is the content side. And I kept seeing this push to really brand the dotcom and then push everything to dotcom. And how are we going to make the news fit dotcom. So when I heard these conversations of how do we push everything, we need to change internally and keep up, and that really was [when I knew] the shift happened. It did happen.

00;16;31 - 00;16;41

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And then my second question since you mentioned you worked for the Kansas City Star; you lived in Kansas at that point?

00;16;41 - 00;16;58

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yeah, I lived in Kansas City, Missouri. I lived on both sides, the Kansas side and the Missouri side. And I also lived in Sacramento. I lived in Bakersfield. You basically have to go and live wherever the newspaper is. But Kansas City was definitely different from California.

00;16;58 - 00;17;00

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Was that huge cultural shock for you?

00;17;00 - 00;18;04

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yes, it was a huge cultural shock because California is a melting pot. Even when I am in a rural area, like the tiny town is called Kerman, which is right outside of Fresno. It is a tiny town, and it has actually grown. It has grown, which is amazing. I still have friends who live there from back in the day. But, yeah, Kansas City is different. They are still cultural. You still have the farms out in the middle of nowhere outside of the city. And Kansas City was a city, I mean, it is a cultural city in terms of museums and arts and theater. But I did not really see as many Asians and diversity there. So, again, I was back to being like one of the very few. I came in with a friend like she was already there at the newspaper, and I followed her out there. And so it was two things. It was like, "Oh, you are Asian" and "Oh, you are from California." So you are kind of like a little bit of the oddity, the stand outs, maybe not so much now because I feel like people travel and move more now than people used to.

00;18;04 - 00;18;16

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And how did you in that more homogeneous environment maintain your heritage at that time?

00;18;16 - 00;18;53

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Well, I mean, I did have a friend who is also Asian. She is a Hmong. One of my best friends still, too, she just texted me on the way over here this morning, so we have stayed very close. But it was just maintaining your friendships. And so I had one friend who was Asian there. And so we maintained our friendship, and we were roommates for a bit, and we would cook, and we were not the same cultural heritage, but we had commonalities. And that is the same thing with the Asian American community, is that we are similar, but not the exact carbon copy of each other. We have differences.

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**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And so coming back to Florida, what year was this when you came to Florida?

00;18;59 - 00;19;02

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** 2008.

00;19;02 - 00;19;04

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** You have been here now for a little under twenty years.

00;19;04 - 00;19;09

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yeah. I know. Time flies.

00;19;09 - 00;19;13

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** So what school did you specifically attend?

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**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Florida Coastal School of Law.

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**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** That is southwest?

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**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So that was in Jacksonville. Yeah. So the school is not around anymore unfortunately. It is closed. It closed its doors. I do not know how long ago, maybe four or five years ago. But there are still a lot of grads out there, alums. And, in fact, my coworker and my predecessor at my current job are both graduates from that law school. So there are alums still out there. So it is great. I really am happy that I had the opportunity. And one of the reasons why I came out to go to that particular law school is that they were very welcoming, like they had a dean of multicultural affairs. There was a whole summer trip to introduce us. So they were very active and proactive in trying to recruit students who were of diverse backgrounds, multicultural backgrounds. And when I came, I was with maybe twenty prospective law students, and we got to know each other that summer for maybe a week. As we got to be introduced to the law school, some of the professors, to the city. And actually my law school roommate, I had met her through that introduction week.

00;20;38 - 00;20;49

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Interesting. In what other ways throughout your law program did the program foster that multicultural, diverse—?

00;20;49 - 00;21;30

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Well, yeah, the school was definitely proactive in that. And they [had] an Asian American Pacific Islander Law Students Association. And so I was active in that. I joined that right away. When I was 1L, that is the first law school year, there were people above me and they became my mentors. I also joined BLSA, which is the Black Law Students Association. So I was interested in joining different cultures. And that was amazing because we had cross collaboration and support.

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**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** So what type of law did you end up specializing in?

00;21;35 - 00;22;13

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** I serve as an in-house counsel, which means I work as an attorney for a company within the company, but my areas still include business and real estate because it is a real estate company that owns, operates, manages, [and] leases its holdings. So I am now doing corporate business, real estate and then anything that touches corporate law, which would be like human, HR, employment law.

00;22;13 - 00;22;24

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Throughout your career, has your cultural difference become an asset, if that makes any sense? Like you have a different perspective, a different knowledge of things or not really?



00;22;24 - 00;22;32

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So the question is if my being culturally different has become an asset rather than a liability or?

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**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** You can frame it in that positive-negative framework. I was trying to ask you more neutrally, but I do not know the right word.

00;22;40 - 00;25;38

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yeah, it is a hard question to ask. But I can tell you this, as a minority and as a female, you walk in the door already thinking that you are different because you are different. You are physically different. Now, my last name is Berk because that is my married name, I am now divorced, but I kept my name because I [became] an attorney and [used] that name for so long. Like my byline as a newspaper reporter was Malamanig. So when I shifted, it was not a big deal because I got married right around the time I made that shift. But when people hear my name or see my name as Christine Berk, that is neutral. You do not know what I am exactly. You cannot tell what Berk is really, [it] does not sound minority pr it could sound minority, you just do not know. But you do not think it is Asian. It does not sound like an Asian name or an Islander name because some people do not know what I am. They are trying to guess exactly what I am when they look at me. Sometimes they think I am Hispanic. Sometimes they think I am Indian. Sometimes they think I am Asian. Sometimes they think I am Islander. But you walk in the door and it is always, you are not sure how people are going to view you. I walk in the door, I typically do not think that way, even when I was in school, I never thought of myself really too much different. I just did my work, just went and did my schoolwork. I will tell you something recently. The last firm I worked for is a fantastic firm. And the founding managing partner of that firm, his name is Robert Lee, and he is actually a member of Asian Chamber. He is amazing. He wanted to establish a law firm that is corporate, that handles business [and] is business related and is related [to] real estate, and estate planning, but it is not a personal injury. It is mainly a big firm. But he wanted to establish, a law firm that really welcomed and encouraged Asian American attorneys. And I was one of the first attorneys that joined his firm. And that was very welcoming. And now that law firm has so many of its attorneys. So he has really built up his—and it is not just attorneys, there are other litigators in the firm who have different cultures. But it is that encouragement. But at the same time, at one point, I was the only female of maybe four attorneys. And so there is that question of like, “Oh, the female, the minority.” But it is really the viewpoint. How do you see yourself? How do you perceive yourself when you walk into a room? And so you have to keep yourself open and hope that the other people in the room are also open and welcoming.

00;25;38 - 00;25;42

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Well said. So what year did you graduate law school?

00;25;43 - 00;25;45

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So I graduated law school in 2011.

00;25;45 - 00;25;52

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And what year did you establish the Greater Orlando Asian American Bar Association?

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**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So that was established before me. So that was before my time.

00;25;55 - 00;25;57

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** But you served as president?

00;25;57 - 00;26;00

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yes. I served as president maybe five years in.

00;26;00 - 00;26;03

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What years?

00;26;03 - 00;26;15

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Now you are asking me to think back. Gosh, maybe it was 2014 area. I am so terrible with dates. So sorry.

00;26;15 - 00;26;20

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** How did you get involved with that organization?

00;26;20 - 00;26;57

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** When I first came to Orlando, I wanted to get connected. So I reached out and actually one of my mentors from law school who was my mentor from BLSA, the Black Law Student Association, said, "Christine, you need to join this organization. You are in Orlando now. Here is someone I know that is there now." And so she connected me and then I connected. And right away I got involved, I signed up, and even [though] I was not an attorney because I was waiting for my bar [exam]. But I am like, "Here is my money, please sign me up. I want to meet you all."

00;26;57 - 00;27;05

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** I should have asked [this] before. Did you move to Orlando immediately after you finished law school?

00;27;05 - 00;27;09

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Yes. 2011.

00;27;09 - 00;27;19

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And two questions. How did you become president of that organization and why was it important for you to serve in that position?

00;27;19 - 00;28;35

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So how did I become president? First of all, I was not on the board for a few years. So I sat back. But then I volunteered. I tried to go to everything.

Anything that GOAABA did and sponsored, I was there or tried to be. And then actually one of my bosses in one of my first firms in Orlando, he was like, “Christine, I serve on the board. Why don’t you serve on the board?” And similarly, he said that of the Asian Chamber Board as well. “Why don’t you serve on the board? So why don’t you serve on the board of GOABBA?” And so I did. I served on the board. He rolled off, and I decided to go in. And so I became secretary. [I] took notes and then just [became] involved. And then from there, it was really you want to encourage other attorneys, and you want to continue the legacy of the people before you, like the people who started it. You just want to keep doing more. You want to give back more. And we did. Every president that followed before me and after, they did more, they brought more visibility. They brought more members. Oh, I was part of the membership committee because I wanted to meet people and I wanted to encourage people to join.

00;28;36 - 00;28;46

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And when you served as president, can you share a specific example of what you implemented or what you created as president?

00;28;46 - 00;29;36

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Well, it is hard to say what I implemented because it was really continuing the work. So continuing to grow with the memberships. I think probably the membership is what I tried to focus on and trying to get people to come. But the presidents and the boards before me, had already [been] working on that. So it was a [continuation of] the work. But I try to make that a focus, try to make it engaging, and try to encourage people to join. And now that board is like I mean, we look back and we actually have a past presidents group. So we encourage, like we are about to have a past presidents dinner so the incoming president can have the wisdom from all the past presidents. And so it is amazing we still continue to support.

00;29;36 - 00;29;39

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What are you going to share as a past president?

00;29;39 - 00;31;13

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So I have to see what the other people say in front of me. So we usually go with the oldest of the founding presidents. And we move forward with one word of wisdom. But some things that have been said in the past have been lean on the people around you on your board, do not take it all, do not try to handle everything. You got people to help you, not just on your board, but here [in] this past presidents group. I think that is really the main one, is to know that you have people to help you because you are not alone. And I would have to say that of the Greater Asian American community, we are not alone. And sometimes we get siloed, or we get into our own little group of like, hey, the Filipinos are over here. Hey, the Koreans are over here. And that is great if you have your own church, or you have your own little group. But it is nice to be able to come together and for different things that happen, like we had that event yesterday at Ocoee [the Annual Asian Culture Festival]. And I do not know if it is year number four that the city has hosted that, but that started with one of our local chiropractors because he went to the city and said, “Hey, we should do something here.” And it has just grown, and now it is a full program that features the different cultures, performances, songs and dancing, drums. And so it is welcoming to all and not just Asians, the

whole entire community come to see and celebrate the different AAPI [Asian American Pacific Islander] community we have.

00;31;13 - 00;31;18

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And similarly, what year did you join the Asian American Chamber of Commerce?

00;31;18 - 00;31;39

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So I probably joined that shortly after I became an attorney. So that might have been 2012, 2013, because when I was a young attorney, I wanted to get out there network. So I try to join as much as I could, and [the] Asian Chamber was one.

00;31;39 - 00;31;54

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** You currently serve as president [in the Asian Chamber]. What do you think the board and other people involved in this organization saw in you as a great president or a worthy president?

00;31;54 - 00;32;53

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** I think they see me as a person who shows up. I shared with you that I currently live here in Central Florida. I live in Osceola side. I do still have a home here, but my attorney job is in Gainesville, so it is Monday through Friday, so I have a home there, and I kind of go back and forth [and] I try to return here on the week, especially when things like this happen. AAPI May Heritage Month. Oh my goodness. Lots of things happening. But I think they see that I show up, I show up when I can, and that I hope that encourages them to also show up, show up to our events and encourage other people to show up. Because if we show up, people see us. If people see us, then they will want to join us, or they will be interested in what we do and how we serve. And if they do not become a member, at least they know that we are there in case they have their own business or they are thinking of starting their own business.

00;32;54 - 00;33;00

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And why is it important to bring that awareness, to increase the visibility for your culture?

00;33;00 - 00;34;03

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** I think that because people sometimes do not know that they are resources and part of the Asian chamber is that we are also in partnership with the National Entrepreneurs Center [NEC]. And so our office is located in the NEC office, which is currently at Fashion Square Mall. And we [collaborate] with other chambers. So when you join AACC, you are not just joining AACC, you are joining a whole network of our collaborating partners. And so you will have that cross collaboration. There are other similar chambers, like there is a separate Indian American chamber. There are other organizations that have Asians that are part of that, that break out in industry specific, like AARA [Asian American Retailers Association], which is a real estate organization [for] Asian Americans. But we are kind of the overarching umbrella Asian American chamber. So all business, all industries.

00;34;03 - 00;34;05

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** How long have you served as president?

00;34;05 - 00;34;13

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** So this is year two. Each term is a two year term. So I am on the second year of my first term.

00;34;13 - 00;34;30

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And you kind of laid it out well, although I want to ask it explicitly, what is the mission of the Asian American Chamber of Commerce and how do you, as president, facilitate that mission?

00;34;31 - 00;35;39

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** We did talk about encouragement. I know it is on our website, but really, it is to be there. It is to serve. It is to be there and to serve as a network for the Asian American community. Yes, our chamber is businesses. We are a business organization. So we are here to support whether it is from beginning to start up to how to grow. We also have corporate sponsors, like Orlando Magic and Universal Orlando and Orlando Health because they also want to give back. And they also want to collaborate with our organization members. And so there is this—I hate this word because it is kind of overused but—synergy. This collection, this connection, this collaboration. And we do that when we have members who show up. When you show up, others will show up. And I think it is important for us to show up so that we are visible. So people know that we are out there. We are here to help encourage, to help growth, to help foster community.

00;35;39 - 00;35;57

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** You have served several prominent positions that have allowed you to gain a deep insight about Orlando, Central Florida's cultural landscape. From your perspective, how has Orlando, in that sense, changed since you have been here?

00;35;57 - 00;37;11

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** I still consider myself a newbie. There are other people out there. She is probably going to kill me, but I am going to drop her name. Her name is Shally Wong, and you have probably seen her because I saw you yesterday in front of her table. And so Shally Wong currently serves on behalf of Orange County, Mayor Jerry Demings. And she is amazing. And she is one of several people who are out there to champion collaboration, community, cultural awareness, cultural celebration, connection. She is always trying to connect. And so I think that is what I see here in Central Florida. There is a spirit of collaboration, a spirit of encouragement, of connection, and not necessarily, “Well, I am going to have this one organization. You are going to have that one and we are going to see who is better.” I mean, it may be out there, maybe I am not seeing it so much. As you know, we try to encourage each other whether it is the AAPI community or other cultural organizations and entities.

00;37;11 - 00;37;17

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** What challenges does Orlando, Central Florida face today?

00;37;17 - 00;38;38

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Right now, I think it is economics at this point. I think including business. It is a challenge. How do we do better? How do we grow better? How do we sustain ourselves with the challenges of uncertainty? You know, people are talking about tariffs. How are the tariffs going to impact us? You know, if we start and making that a thing. And the tariffs were actually activated. And we are actually having the tariffs like how is that going to impact? Because it would impact our all of our businesses and even our homes [and] our personal finances. So I think the challenge right now is we are still living our lives, but if you are trying to forecast for the next year, the next fiscal year, how do you do that? You know, do you try to save what you have, do you try to put your money into growth? You know, how do you maintain? So it is just this uncertainty. But we are actually in a new year with a new president. So hopefully the uncertainty will go away. And towards the end of the year we will have more certainty. So I think overall, I think the challenge is economics.

00;38;38 - 00;38;47

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And speaking of forecasting, in what ways do you think Orlando will change in the next twenty five years?

00;38;47 - 00;39;53

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Oh, Orlando is going to continue to grow. Do you see those stats? And I do not have them off the top of my hand. But the stats are people coming to Central Florida, and it is not just Orlando. Orlando is kind of the center hub, but there all the surrounding cities, like there is Ocoee, there is Claremont, there is Saint Cloud, there is Sanford. There are all these other cities, Lake Mary, that surround Orlando. And when people think Orlando, they think of Orlando. But Orlando is like the Greater Orlando area. So people are coming here, and they have been coming here. But I think Orlando will continue to be the go to spot because we are business friendly. You know no state income tax. It is just federal. There is no state income tax, and it is just business friendly. We are a climate that is very friendly towards business, and housing is relatively inexpensive compared to other areas. Again, Orlando is a little bit different though, because people are starting to come here more, and it is increasing the prices.

00;39;53 - 00;40;13

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** In what ways has your cultural heritage mixed—Philippines, Guam—influence your perspective on life generally and living in Florida specifically?

00;40;13 - 00;42;26

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** That is a good question. I look to other people. I try to join organizations that I can be connected to people. I know that there is a Filipino community here. I do not know how many Guamanians are in Central Florida area, but I try to connect, and I try to do that through the organizations I am involved in. How has that changed my perspective or how I do? I think, again, I will say you just show up and you show yourself. And I am hoping that others will do the same so that we can connect. And I think if you are out there, people see you. And I see this of other diverse cultures. People who are in leadership or they may not be in the leadership that they want to be, but they are striving because they do not

see people of their culture in leadership positions. So they are happy to see that there is an Asian American Pacific Islander in my position whether it is at work or whether it is in a different organization. But I am the face that maybe others do not see on the regular. And so I am a little different. And so it is like, "Well, how did she get there? And why is she there?" You know, "maybe I can be there." And I have no doubt. I see the leaders, I see my friends, my colleagues, and I see their kids who are starting to be high school and graduating college. It is amazing what I see them doing now because they are following, or they have seen what their parents have done that they are trailblazing. And so they are going to be the kids of the trailblazers. They are trailblazing upon trailblazers. So I am going to be excited to see what they do because it is only going to get better. It is going to get stronger. And that is the legacy that we all hope for, is that the younger generations or the people who take over your position will make that stronger than where you left it.

00;42;26 - 00;42;38

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Lastly, if someone's listening to this recording, fifty or a hundred years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;42;38 - 00;43;39

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Embrace your culture. Embrace your culture. Even if you do not have, say, people around you who are just like you and not born in the same island. But when you do see someone of your culture, embrace them. Make that dinner plan. Even if you are busy, try to schedule that one. Just try to schedule that dinner. Connect with them. It does not have to be some big cultural event that you have to wait for. You can set that up one on one. That was how, again, my family started. My family started and connected because a family and a family friends and again, the family friends became family. And so that is what I hope will continue fifty years from now or whenever is that this connection will continue that people will still want that connection and the culture. And you only get the sharing of culture and the continuing of culture by sitting down and a lot of times it happens at the table.

00;43;39 - 00;43;46

**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** Christine, thank you so much for taking some time out of your busy schedule, busy month, to share a little bit of your life story, I appreciate it.

00;43;46 - 00;43;48

**CHRISTINE MALAMANIG BERK:** Thank you for your time and for documenting.