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Interviewer: Today is April 30th, 2022. My name is Amanda (Reichenbach) and I am the project manager for Tumultuous 2020 World History Project. I'm here during the second session with Mrs. Bonnie Ho to finish talking about her experiences as the principal of Pui Tak Christian School. So thank you so much, Mrs. Ho, for allowing me to come back again today.

Bonnie Ho: Thank you for having me again.

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Interviewer: So we kind of left off talking about the horrible events of Asian hate that Chicago's Chinatown experienced. And again, I want to say how sorry I am for those experiences. And I guess there's not much more to say, is there?

Bonnie Ho: Actually, I forgot what we said, like what we covered or what we haven't covered.

Interviewer: Yeah, we finished talking about just the people who had been murdered.

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Bonnie Ho: Right. I think we talked about it on the street. Did we record it?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Bonnie Ho: We did. Okay.

Interviewer: Yeah. That was the - I think that was the last part we discussed. Yeah. And so I kind of wanted to talk about in a bit more detail, what the fall of 2020 was like for you. You had mentioned that you did - some people were back in person.

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But it was the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders who were still remote.

Bonnie Ho: Right, the fourth to eighth grade were remote for three quarters. And then we came back the last quarter because I noticed that something is not quite right. The parents did not notice that. But we monitor the student even during the day when they are online, and I'm starting to notice that they were hey, they look like they're looking at the teacher, but actually they are not. They're doing something else.

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And as we look into the chat group, realizing that they were using language that we did not teach them and totally not acceptable type of language. And the people that got into their chat group is also - you know, is potential danger because begin to realize that those are not their peers. Those are like grownups pretending to be their age and that is really dangerous.

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So that's the time that I call a parent meeting and ask everybody please come back, and they agree. They said, yeah, we should come back.

Interviewer: And what was it like for the preschool and elementary school coming back in the fall?

Bonnie Ho: It went really well. Actually we kept the school - I have to give credit to the admin team, the entire faculty, particularly the parents.

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Because if they don't follow the protocols, I don't care how perfect the protocols might be, it will not work. We were able to keep the school zero COVID from March 2020 and then the entire 2021. Entire and then the first part of the schoolyear for '21, '22 until omicron hit in the beginning of 2022.

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So we were able to keep the entire school community zero COVID for more than a year and-a-half. And then omicron hit. It was right after the break. And my goodness, it was like - but we were thankful, even though members like students, or teachers, or parents, they affected. But we were able to keep it contained so that there was no spread. So still following the protocol, able to keep it outside of the door.

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So I think from January till now - now is April 2022, May 2022. We have cases here and there. But we were able to contain and not let it spread among the classes.

Interviewer: That's very impressive. And when the students had come back, did you notice that the pandemic had taken an emotional toll on them? Were they different students?

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Bonnie Ho: They are. They are very different than those who were on campus. I'm not saying that the on-campus student are not affected, but it's not as noticeable compared to the upper grade. Actually, right before they came back, we had

a Thanksgiving feast. And we were not able to do it like we normally do, that the entire school, family looking forward to an event like that.

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We said, sorry, no sibling, no parent, just our internal students. We still need to separate them in groups. So the upper grade, they were in one large area. And I was going to join them. Normally like before I enter the room, I should hear like laughter, talking, you know, but it was completely silent.

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And said, oh, maybe I'm early. Maybe they were not there. But I walked in there. They were all there. Of course, they were sitting in a distance, but then I was looking. I said why aren't they talking? They talk online. You know, when we were online, you could see the frame. And then they were able to interact with the teacher, interact with students in discussion.

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But when they're offline, when they were seeing each other, they were going like this, kind of like observing, and did not know how to orchestrate themselves. And I look at that image and it's really scary. These are young people. Why aren't they talking? Why aren't they laughing? It took the teacher about 40 to 45 minutes to break the ice and then they begin to come alive a little bit.

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I went to the third grade, second and third grade. They were on campus. But because we keep - everybody kept a distance, there's a lot less interaction. We also did not have physical education that year because we figure it's very hard to keep them, you know, touching each other. And the second and third grade was quiet. But you see the smile on their faces, like the normal smile.

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And then as I strike some conversation, it takes about maybe a few minutes, they came alive. But the upper grade, I guess it's because the long period of time they were online. And they were so used to chatting with each other, but not really face-to-face talking. And it was so weird to look at an image like that. I would never forget that. I said, what is going on? I've never seen something like that.

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Interviewer: Certainly. I know you had mentioned that when he started there were more behavior issues and then things were getting kind of - they were better. Did behavior issues start to increase after students came back?

Bonnie Ho: Not necessarily. It's pretty much the same. Here and there, there are behavior issues that we need to take care of. But compared to ten years ago, right now it's, I would say, really good. Very normal.

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Interviewer: You don't have lines of students outside the door.

Bonnie Ho: Correct. Yeah.

Interviewer: And you know, kind of continuing in that chronological order, in fall of 2020, it was an election season, and the virus, did you feel like the virus had become politicized? If you feel comfortable.

Bonnie Ho: I do think so. I do think so. But my focus was really on the educational side.

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But even right now, even talking about 2022, mask mandate, there is a battle out there. If you ask us, are you still requiring students to wear masks, I do. I still do. Maybe we are only one of the - maybe we're the only school doing that. Do I get opposite voices? I do. I have very strong voices pressing on asking us to take the mask off.

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I do listen to that voice and I do address. And I understand where that voice is coming from. And it is totally reasonable from the voice's perspective. But as a principal, I must look at the whole picture. Because right now, we are not zero case. Just this week, we have a case.

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When we came back from spring break, we already have six cases. Thankfully, it's the half of them took place during the break. So by the time they come back, they already passed the contagious period of time. And then the following, this is like second week after we came back, we still detected like three cases. That means individual classes, there are cases.

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And I believe that the reason why it's not spreading is because of the mask. And this is not the time. I cannot call off, you know, say no mask. I think it's only six weeks until the end of the schoolyear and just hang in there. And we will get by, and prayerfully, we will be completely back to normal the next fall.

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But because I also have to - as much as I want to consider it, be considerate to that voice, I need to considerate to the majority of the concerns because our population, our culture are more Asian. They are more like cautious. They're more worry. I still have teacher and student wearing double mask. That tells me that they are still afraid.

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One of the student who wore double mask, she was the one who got COVID this week. Now she did not get it here. She got it from outside activity. So what can we say? And I knew that when she got it, her masks were off. Because the activity required her to take off her mask. And that was in that convention that she got it. So that like again and again proven that when you have a mask, you are under protection.

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But people using this as a political like card, but they need to know that we're talking about student. You know, every decision we make is affecting them. And when I made my decision, I not only looking at our own data. I look at Chicago data. I look at Illinois data. I look at CPS data to see and right now that the case is going up again.

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And this is not the time to take off the mask. And I just say, since we never call off this, let's keep it until the end of the schoolyear.

Interviewer: And I don't think actually we went through it. But when you guys came back in fall of 2020, what kinds of safety procedures did you follow? So obviously masking. What else?

Bonnie Ho: Social distancing. Actually it's quite simple. Just social distancing.

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Putting on our mask. We encourage people to take vaccination and right now we have regular testing every Monday. It is not mandatory. But whenever there's a long weekend it's mandatory. Everybody will take a test or if there's a long break, definitely everybody take a test.

Interviewer: And is it rapid test?

Bonnie Ho: Both.

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Interviewer: And then moving into the winter of 2020, that's the time when a lot of COVID cases started to rise again for a variety of reasons. But it sounds like you guys weren't really affected by that.

Bonnie Ho: I think, besides of the protocols that I mentioned, we were very cautious about not having cross contamination. We canceled some programs. Like for example, we canceled afterschool program. We canceled summer program. In the past, they were like visiting each other's classes.

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They have collaboration activities going on like that. No more. For the elementary, they normally will go. If they have math, they're in this classroom. If they take language art, they go to that classroom where the teacher is. Now it's not the student traveling but the teacher traveling. So then it will minimize the possibility of cross contamination.

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I think at the peak, we actually require a special subject teacher, because they are the one could be potential conductor because they go to different grade, they need to change shoe cover when they enter. So we have like - in their pocket, they have a lot of shoe - I said, you cannot wear the same pair and go to this classroom and that. You only use it for one classroom. You toss it and then you get another one. We use tons of gloves, hand sanitizer.

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Those are the must. Those are the things that we use a lot during those time.

Interviewer: And it was also in the winter of 2020 when the COVID vaccine became available and it was December 15th, 2020 that it became available to healthcare workers, long term care facility staff and residents. Do you know when it became available to teachers and schools?

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Bonnie Ho: We were the first batch right after the medical personnel. So I got it actually quite early with the medical personnel because my husband is a physician. Not that because, you know him, but because of clinic relationship, so they call me, and say I know that you meet with a lot of people, and you're a principal, would you like to take it, and I said of course, you know. So then I'm a little - I think I might be a month earlier than the rest of my staff will get the quota to go get the vaccine.

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Interviewer: What was that like for you being able to get the vaccine?

Bonnie Ho: I feel freedom. I feel at least, you know, more relaxed. I know some people do not believe in vaccination. Of course, we had discussion with medical personnel. And my husband keeps telling me that, yes, there's - you know, everything has a price.

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But then you have to weigh in, you know, the benefit over, you know, the negative side, and then you take that. So based on that, I'm for vaccine.

Interviewer: And then moving into the spring of 2021, I'm looking at kind of my outline and thinking about the pamphlets and stuff that you sent me. It looks like that in the beginning of 2021, you had a principle, parent meeting.

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Is that something that you do regularly?

Bonnie Ho: I do - I must admit that during this whole two and-a-half year, I have called parent meeting more than ever. I have a lot of parent, principal meeting, but usually it's one-on-one regarding their child.

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But as entire community, I felt like because for one, they don't enter into our building anymore. We don't allow stranger, not stranger I mean even parent, they don't, unless there's a valid reason. The only place they enter is enter the main door, go right into the office, take care of the business, get out, right? So I feel like there's a distance there. And then I do want them to embrace whatever decision we make.

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I don't want to leave them out, just because we lack this face-to-face contact. So then if there's decision made, I include them. I call a Zoom meeting and I also find that actually the turnout is better than sometimes in person when I ask a whole group to come in. Because it's really convenient and it serves the same purpose.

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Interviewer: And the parent, principle meeting then I'm referring to that I think that I had the slideshow of that you sent me was kind of talking about what it was like to go back.

Bonnie Ho: That was for the upper grade. We just talked about the upper grade.

Interviewer: Okay. That makes a lot of sense.

Bonnie Ho: Right. So I don't just say everybody come back. I need to talk with them and let them know. And that was during that meeting. There were quite a bit of interaction between myself and the parents.

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When I presented them our finding, they all agreed, yeah, this is time that we need to come back.

Interviewer: And I thought that it was a really well put together presentation because you used a lot of different sources to talk about the dangers of, you know, just consistent media interaction, being on screens a lot.

Bonnie Ho: Yeah.

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Interviewer: And okay, so we've talked about it a bit then, students coming back. And when the vaccine became available to Illinois residents 16 and above in April of 2021, that didn't really affect the school much, did it? Because it wasn't available to your student group.

Bonnie Ho: Correct. So I think, as the vaccine became like more available to the younger age, some of our parents, you know, had their child vaccinated.

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I do not have the data because it's their personal decision and I don't - I guess, I suppose I - there was one thought that should we do a survey and find out how many students were vaccinated, but at the end, we did not. I kind of know because they talk about it, or they need to ask for day off to go take vaccine. The upper grade, we have a number of students have vaccinated.

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Interviewer: And, you know, in the beginning of the interview, we talked about the way that Chicago's Chinatown was impacted intensely, just by the shutdown, the closures. Did that start to subside in 2021 or were parents still in a hard place?

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Bonnie Ho: I think it's beginning to improve. I can see that some of the restaurants are still quite empty. Some of them were beginning to see customers there, but people, out of survival, they become creative. Now it's more takeout order. So



they have like new surface, develop new company develop that will, you know, help restaurant to do takeout order.

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I think they are. There are a lot of business regarding takeout order instead of like in-house eating. And I also sense that more and more parents are now having job. But another thing that I observed is there are now job open, but no one doing it, even in Chinatown. You know, I believe it might be in any industry.

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There are always vacancy but no one. It's very hard to find worker. I think right now they could survive because of government subsidies. And you know, it's human nature. If I could pay my bill without working, why not? I do see that if it prolongs like this, it's not a good thing.

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You know, people say that there's a huge shortage for educators. Actually, there's shortage for worker in general.

Interviewer:

And did you guys continue providing aid to the parents throughout the entire pandemic? Or did it stop, you know, once the stimulus checks started coming out and whatnot?

Bonnie Ho:

We remained open and we monitor and see. We still have student owe us like tuition.

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It's not one month. It's like several months not able to pay. In our handbook, if you did not pay for the second month, your child is not supposed to continue. But right now we allow them to continue. I need to help them out, work something out with them. Sometimes we will work out payment plan.

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If payment plan doesn't work, honestly, at the end of the day, it will just be forgiven. So the funding would need to come from, you know, donation that we collected.

Interviewer:

And where is Project Nehemiah currently? Do you think you guys will start fundraising again soon or have you already started?

Bonnie Ho:

We are working. We're at the quiet phase right now, the leadership phase.

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I'm working on making connection, getting in touch with giver who has the ability to give. And I'm trying to look for major donor. Right now it's too soon to run a campaign because the total amount is too gigantic. It's going to scare people off. They'll say, "Wow, such a big amount. My little donation is not going to help, so I'm not going to give." People who need to - the general public needs to look at it and saying I think it's going to be successful.

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You know, let me add my portion. But right now we are not there. So we need connection. We just need God to build a bridge, the bridges for us to tell the story.

Interviewer: And in the summer of 2021, in August is when Pfizer received the FDA's approval for their vaccine.

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And so that opened it up to much younger ages. You mentioned, you know, that some students were vaccinated. But did you guys contemplate making the vaccine mandatory?

Bonnie Ho: No. I do not want to fight a lose battle. I know my - I know our population. I know our culture.

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And we have - actually we have some. Even Chinese, as soon as it's available to five and above, they got the kid vaccinated. The one who doesn't, no matter what you do, they are not going to do it. And I have to pick my battle. I leave it to the parents. It's their choice. We will do our best. Whether you're vaccinated or not vaccinated, we will do our best to keep this place clean and safe. And that's my duty.

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As far as, you know, whether they are vaccinated, I think it's their decision.

Interviewer: Are many parents hesitant, do you think?

Bonnie Ho: I believe so. Yeah. But there are parents that, you know, jump for the opportunity right away. I will say maybe 20% of them will opt for vaccination. Eighty percent of them might not.

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Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Bonnie Ho: There's a lot of communication out there. I don't want to call it a fake news or fake information. There's a lot of information out there that is very, very negative about vaccination. And this is an oral culture. When one learn about it, it just spread all over the place and people believing in it. But then actually, there's other sides about vaccination.

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But somehow it was not being talked about. So we might ask, you know, which one is right? Sometimes when I look at those news it's obviously this is fake, but people believe in it. So I don't think as a school, we should get too much involved into that.

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Interviewer: It sounds like you have had to bear the weight of making a lot of hard decisions over the past two and-a-half half years. Do these decisions fall completely on you? Or did you mention that there's a board that helps dictate those decisions?

Bonnie Ho: We have a school board. The school board actually authorized me to make all of these decisions.

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But it is my - I have to exercise my discernment at what point I need to consult the board. Because there's some serious thing that I think they need to know and they need to get involved with decision. Other than that, I make report, but the decision does not fall on me alone. It is on the entire admin team. So then I'm grateful to the admin team. I usually have discussion with them. We keep our stand-up meeting twice a week, maybe 15 minutes.

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But we need to exchange, you know, what's going on and things like that. And then we have lengthier meeting when we have to make decision. For example, like currently, there are voices saying that you need to take off your mask. Now this is the type of thing that I don't take it lightly, even though this is only one voice. But if we don't handle it carefully, it could flare up. So this is a thing that you know, not just me making a decision, that the entire team will contribute. And together we make a decision.

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Interviewer: Do you notice that compared to when you started when you had the teacher who had her arms crossed or their arms crossed, have you noticed that your style of leadership has resonated with the teachers, and with the board, and everyone?

Bonnie Ho: I believe so. I believe so. I think the school culture has changed. I cannot quite describe the school culture before because I was not in position to know that much.

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But at least I know that right now the school culture has changed. The school has been - I mean, the church - I mean, the school was founded by the church as an arm reaching out to the community. And the vision remained the same 69 years later. But then the content itself, every day was happening.

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I think the culture has become more and more Christ centered and children's centered, student centered. That is a big shift. I'm not saying in the past, the school was not running in a spiritual way. It has been. But right now is very like intentional. I think the time, how we use the time tells a story. Like every morning devoted 15 minutes.

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If you do the math, in 177 school days, then if you calculate that by 15 minutes, that's days, four days, right? And then plus the retreat, two full days. So if an organization is willing to devote and invest those minutes in shaping the school, that's expensive, too because these people are paying not to work, but just do devotion.

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We're paying to listen to God's work, and they're not doing lesson plan, when in other words, oh, this is not productive. But to me, that could lead to productivity. That could lead to ownership. That could lead to-

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The most important thing is every single one of us needs to face the same direction, seeing the one single goal, unite, and move forward as a team moving forward as one person. How do we do that? Started out like all over direction, like pointing to all different directions. But if we could identify the cross, the mission, everybody, let's go that way, it becomes a triangular position or shape.

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Then the more we get closer to the cross, the more we get closer to God, the relationship with these people are getting much, much more closer. So that kind of collaboration partnership, like coworking is a joy. It's like a family. A graduating parent just was in my office.

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She was very excited about her son getting into college prep, Jones College Prep, number two ranking high school in Chicago. She was downstairs and I entered into the classroom, into the office. And then she was just like jumping and yelling. I said, "What happened?" And said, "My son got into Jones."

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And now getting into Jones is not a - you would say, what's the big deal? As a mother of actually our graduates, a lot of them got into Jones. Right? And then what's the big deal? But for her, it was a big deal. Because her son struggled through, right? And from preschool, now eighth grade, there was a lot of intervention, a lot of support. And she reflected back on all those years.

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And thanking the entire faculty, the school staff for not giving up on her son. And to a point that he could get into such a high school, such a good high school. So she was in my office later on. And she said that Pui Tak Christian school is like a family. It's not you guys not helping my son. You know, when I have an issue, when I have problem, like family difficulties, you guys were there.

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So you guys are like family. Wow, that line means a lot to me. If the school can be our parents, you know from the standpoint that they look at us as family, I think it's a very high compliment. And I don't think we could have done that if we did not embrace the same mission and same goal.

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Interviewer: And I think that leads in perfectly to my next question, which is how do you measure the success of Pui Tak Christian School?

Bonnie Ho: I believe - now it would not be humble to say I believe we are successful. But I also do not want to take away the glory of God. He did wonderful work and therefore, it should be told.

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And so from that angle, I will say Pui Tak Christian school is successful. But we do not measure success with report card or standardized score only. Now even - and we are rightly so. Everybody measure it with that. And from that measurement, we ran - like particularly during the pandemic year we ran number one.

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I get into a habit of comparing our data with the neighborhood ten schools, public schools. I cannot get private school data, but I could get public school data. We take Iowa exams, standardized exam. This is a very mature standardized test that is national test. And then we compare with - before it was - CPS changed different tests. I cannot keep up with, you know, what's what, but whatever they're taking, we are comparing with them.

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And it's not apple to apple because Iowa is completely a standardized test. And then there were times that we will compare to the Illinois test. It's just comparing with student in Illinois, not nationally. And it might not be entirely standardized test, but it's a test consists with standardized questions in there.

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So then you can see the difference. But even so, we were always like number one, number two, number three, number one, something like that. And then during the pandemic, I know that we are going to drop, and we have, but then when we compare to the neighborhood school, wow, they drop even more miserably. So then I can tell the difference. Do I just be satisfied looking at that or how many people get onto the principal honor role?

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Meaning that they are straight A and then the character a straight one. If I have 30 of them, am I satisfied? If I have 50% of those students, am I satisfied? I think it's part of it only. We do character education. The most important thing is their character. So if I have straight A student, they could be a leader in the future.

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But they could be a president, but at the same time, they could be a criminal as a leader. Right? So it all lies on the character and the integrity. So and I also believe in like education is for everyone. If you ask me, how do you measure the success, I truly will say not on the grade. Maybe I could share with you a story that tells about how we measure success.

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We had a student. A preschool student came in. It was okay for the first month. The second month, all along, okay, until it gets to February. All of a sudden, she would not let her mom go. She cried on top of her lung. Just held onto mom, grabbed onto mom, won't let go.

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And at that time, her classroom was in the gymnasium. My office is up here. I could hear her cry. That's far. That's how high pitch and like to me, she is crying for life. She is totally frightened. Otherwise, no one will cry like that. Right? So the teacher did not understand why the change all of a sudden. People will look at it, you know, the child, you know, troublemaker, things like that. So then they reported it to me.

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Because I was out of town, you know, in conference, or something like that. So they call me, and said - you know, I'll call this child Lucy. Okay. Lucy is behaving like that and we anticipate It's been two days already. Tomorrow she come in. It's going to be another fight. What should we do? And I said, that's okay. Tomorrow I'll be back in Chicago. So then I stood by my window and watching, waiting for the mom to come in. Sure enough, I saw her hold on to the car door, would not let go.

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And there was a like struggle, a fight from the curb to the front. The mom kind of like grabbed her. And she was holding on to the door and would not get in. Finally, they get into the classroom. She held onto the door, would not get in and cry and cry. And mom just ran away because it's just like chaos.

Bonnie Ho:

TA, teacher tried to calm her down. She would not let go.

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Her face was red and I went down there. I watch and then I said let go. Because she was on the floor. She was like everywhere. And people trying to grab her because it's dangerous. She could be running into something. And so they were trying to constrain her. And at that time, two teachers tried to constrain her in a safe way. And I was standing there. I just use a very calm voice. I said let her go. Let her go. And then immediately the teacher let her go.

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And you would expect that she will shoot and go somewhere, right? But no, she was there. And I can see that it's like a balloon, you know, the air let out a little bit, and she kind of like, and she was still crying, but not like fighting like that. And I get down at her level. I know that you are hurting. I'm here. Come with me.

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Come with me. And she allowed me to take her hand. And we went into the office. I shut the door. I know that she's going to, you know, have a tantrum any minute. And then I signal my staff, time her. I want to time how long she cries and I said get me warm water. And then she was - and then she started out again when the door was shut. And she started kicking. It's a metal door.

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She kicked until her shoes was off. And it's very - like she's only three years old. But it hurts, right? So then I need to hold her. I held her from the back and in a gentle way, and I did not say stop crying. She needed to cry. She needed that. And then I whisper in her ear, singing Jesus loves me, this I know, just repeatedly. Jesus loves me, this I know.

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Keep singing, keep singing, keep singing until she quiet down and set her there. And I said, "Lucy, it's okay to cry. You need to cry. You must be very sad. What is hurting you? What's the matter? What happened?" And then she looked up with her teary eyes.

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She said, "Daddy is gone. Daddy is gone." One line explain everything, explain why she held on to all those doors, did not want to separate from mom because she just lost his dad. His dad walk and turn his back and walk away with no announcement and mom is the only hope. She's afraid. She's totally insecure.

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She's afraid that I'm going to lose Mom. What am I going to do? You know, I'm only three years old. That's totally understandable. So then I call Mom, talk with Mom. There's marriage issue. She herself is falling apart, has no bandwidth to take care of her emotional part of it because she needs healing. There's financial problem. There's marriage problem. There's violence involved.

[0:43:00]

So it was a mess. So that day, after the conversation I had with Lucy calming her down, taking her back to the classroom, I asked the teacher to observe her. She was fine for the rest of the day. And then she got transferred to after school. So I went to check on her. Of course, she's a very tense person, you know, as understandable. In after school, there are people doing like numbers of things.

[0:43:31]



There were like more than three grown up teacher there. And the minute I showed up at the door, she noticed me. I mean, there's a lot of thing going on. She already identify me and she run to me. Now I think somehow earn the trust, and then she know that this is a person I could trust, I'm going to hold on to this person. So fast forward, four-year-old now.

[0:44:00]

They call me. Lucy has another episode. So I went and said where's Lucy? I could not see Lucy and then they point to the corner. So she was able to move the book rack, the short book rack to a corner, and she was hiding, and then she put a coat on top to kind of like completely cover herself, would not - no matter what they do, she would not get out.

[0:44:30]

That tells me that she is hiding from something and she doesn't want to face reality. So eventually I talked with her in my like soft voice, and she recognized my voice, and said, "This is Mrs. Ho. I'm here for you. I know that you need to stay there. Stay there for however long you are. I'm standing right outside. When you're ready, I'm here to help you."

[0:45:00]

I did not ask her to come out. And then a few minutes later, she put her head. And then she came, and she grabbed my hand, and then she follows me. And then we were at the table. Everyone was doing things. And then her, of course, is undone. And I said let's try this. I gave her a pencil,. She look at the pencil kind of like afraid of the pencil, won't pick up the pencil. And I said, "Why not?"

[0:45:27]

"I'm dumb. I'm stupid. I don't know how to do it." I was tearing inside. It broke my heart. Who deposited that message in her mind saying that you are dumb, you are stupid? I was in her place when I was in Hong Kong, although I was a lot older. And this is only three years old. Who told her that message that she is dumb, and she is stupid, and she cannot do anything?

[0:46:00]

Who put that lie in such a young child? It was heartbroken. So then step by step, and I said, let's give it a try, I believe you could do it. And then eventually, she picked up the pencil, and one stroke at a time, she finished that page. And right at that moment, she threw the pencil. She jumped up. She picked up the paper. She ran to the teachers and said I did it. I did it.

[0:46:31]

And she went to the TA, I did it, I did it, and she went to the classmate and said, I did it, I did it. That is success. Because to erase a lie like that is going to change her whole life. What happened if no one noticed that and that lie stays in there continuously until she grow up as an adult? She will continue to think that she's stupid, and she's dumb, and she cannot do anything.

[0:47:00]

The fact that if an educator could help a child to pick up a pencil that she's so afraid to pick up because it's a big decision for her. If I pick up the pencil, what happens if I don't know how to do it? That confirm what everybody told me, that I am dumb. That's why I was looking at her. Why is she looking at the pencil like that? She was like kind of afraid of the pencil.

[0:47:30]

So with encouragement, she picked it up and she was able to finish the page. That's why I said no child get up in the morning and decided to behave bad, or to misbehave themselves, or not to do any homework, not to be a good student. None. And if they appear to be like that, there is a reason, and we should not punish them for something that they did not do. They are victims.

[0:47:59]

So we need to see beyond the behavior to give them the right kind of help. So I had - excuse me for another story. A second grader, a boy. I'm going to call him Billy. During an exam, the teacher call me and said you better come, we have a case, we have a situation here.

[0:48:30]

So I learned that during the exam, he crumbled up the paper, threw the paper, pencil, and then like turn over the table, and run outside. And the teacher needs to be with the student for the rest of the exam, so then they call me. And by the time I came, I found her - I found him on the staircase. You know, there there's like corners. For example, I don't know if I could create this.

[0:49:00]

For example, I don't know if the camera could get this. I'm getting up on the stair and then I see this corner, the wall. He was standing right here. The person standing right here with his face facing the corner. He was like glue to the corner. And I can see him wanting to like get inside, wanted to disappear. Doesn't want people to see him, but of course he cannot get inside a wall.

[0:49:31]

So you can see him forcing him like into that corner. It was heartbreaking to see that. No one could - you know, we had other educators there trying to, you know, peel him away from the wall, not successful, and saying, Billy, you know come with us. No, he was not responding. So then I said, okay, you guys, you go, let go, let go. Eventually, when he heard my voice, he detached from the wall.

[0:50:01]

He followed me and come here. Now this is not the first time he had, you know, episodes similar to this. What led to this? You know, I've been following him, you know, working with him. There are times that he's better. There are times he is worse. When I sat him down, he said that he wanted to die. I want to kill myself. When a child says that I cannot just dismiss him. I have to call outside help.

[0:50:31]

So a team came in. I contacted the mom for permission. So then the team and I sat in this classroom, or in this office and, you know, talk with him. They asked him, you know, how - you know, he continued to say that I want to die, I want to kill myself. So then they asked him, how do you want to - you know, how are you going to kill yourself?

[0:51:00]

"I'm going to use a knife." You know, "Using a knife to do what?" "Slit my throat." And so, "Where are you going to get the knife?" "Oh, I know where to get my knife." What knife are you going to use?" He said, "Oh, the knife my mother uses to cut fruit." "And where are you going to find a knife?" "I know where. She put it in the drawer." So and then after the whole interview, the team told me that we need to hospitalize this kid.

[0:51:30]

And because he is not just thinking about it. He's not just saying it to get what he wants. He contemplated it. He already have a plan. He ran through it several times. So that means he knows exactly how to do it. And it's very dangerous. You know, people need to watch him. So when we talk to Mom, Mom disagrees. Mom did not want to hospitalize him. And I said you need to be responsible if you are not. We're giving you this.

[0:51:58]

So we ended up did not hospitalize him. But I worked very closely with him. I hope Mom was and I found out why he wanted to kill himself. He told me that - we noticed every Monday usually is the pattern, Monday. You know, there

were certain Mondays that he will go see his dad. And when he came back, the emotion was like chaos. So he was really down and he told me that.

[0:52:27]

And I said, "What did you do for the weekend?" "I was with my dad." "What happened?" And he told me that his father's girlfriend slapped him on his face right in front of his dad. But his dad did not say a thing. He is already second grade. You know, how do you think he feel? Right? Mom and Dad are separated. It's already not a good thing. And now Dad has this new girlfriend and this girlfriend just like hit me on my face.

[0:53:01]

And my dad was not saying anything. He could equate to my dad doesn't love me at all and I'm not important. No wonder why he feel miserable to a point that he wanted to die. And sure that there's other things at home happening. Right? So it is children like that that we take in. So as educators, why would I want to, you know, just obey, do your homework, get your grade, graduate, done?

[0:53:34]

But to me, this is a total child. We need to care for the total child. Unless we care for this, and that they heal, they will not score well. He graduated, go to good school. In his graduation speech, he particularly mentioned thanking the school at the toughest time. He thanked the principal. He thanked the teacher.

[0:54:00]

The teacher and the principal helped me walk through the toughest time in my life, the darkest valley in my life. An eighth grader saying that. To me that is a success. To me, if you ask me what is a success for the school, and also ask myself what is this - how do I measure my own success as a principal, as a person? If I can help someone in such a way, their future is completely changed.

[0:54:34]

These people come to know Christ that I'm not talking about the temporary future. I'm talking the eternal destination completely change. There's hope. Bringing hope. I'm praying that, you know, our school is like a light torch, could bring light and hope to the one who really needed that.

[0:55:00]

I don't know. Maybe this is just me and this is how I run the school. And I'm glad that the faculty and the team members are following. We are going the same direction. And I believe in all measure, you know, measuring the team how we own up to the ministry, own up to the mission, and how we work together as a success. When I see lifechanging story happening daily, that is a success. As far as grades, I put it to third place. This is how I measure success.

[0:55:34]

Interviewer: What a wonderful answer. And we're getting to the end of the interview. And so I kind of wanted to bring it back a little and ask some concluding questions about the pandemic and just about overall, your life. And so did the pandemic change your vision for the future?

[0:56:02]

You know, did it change, you know, how you see the mission of PTCS? And yeah.

Bonnie Ho: I guess not. The mission remained the same. But it confirmed one thing because the pandemic gave us a golden opportunity to reach out to parents like never been before.

[0:56:29]

And parents needed that and they accepted it. And it built a relationship. And I think this is some good thing that we could learn from. It is not changing the mission or changing the direction of the school, but confirming it, and then moving forward with more certainty. And then way of operating things, of course, the technology and everything, all that, I don't think education will be the same in the future. I'm not adapting e-learning.

[0:57:00]

But then there are good things about e-learning, about the technology that we should adapt. As far as parent relationship, that is a big thing that, you know, God allowed us to build that kind of strong relationship with parents, and you know, receiving the acceptance from the parents. That is a big thing.

Interviewer: And what would you say to yourself before the pandemic, or if you could say anything to yourself before the pandemic, what would it be?

[0:57:33]

Bonnie Ho: Before the pandemic? What do you mean?

Interviewer: Like right now, if you could go back in time and say something to yourself at the start, or you know, at the beginning.

Bonnie Ho: Oh, at the start, okay.

Interviewer: Sorry. That wasn't clear.

Bonnie Ho: That's okay. I don't think I have an answer. I never thought about that.

[0:57:58]

But if I were to go back to the beginning, I would do the same thing. I think when we evaluate, you know, every step of the way, I think the staff, the entire team done a wonderful job. Being flexible, even though they're under a lot of stress, a lot of stress, particularly those who are not very savvy with the technology. I give them like a lot of credit, but I believe that bumpy road, we still need to go through.

[0:58:30]

I would do the same thing. I would do the same thing.

Interviewer: And what are some of your biggest reflections from the pandemic? You know, you described that, you know, some of these instances of Asian hate happened so recently, so I imagine it's hard to feel like it's over.

Bonnie Ho: Yeah. You know. It just happened to be the pandemic and then the Asian hate crime.

[0:59:01]

I don't know if it has any relationship to it, or whether they're relating to each other, but then it's just happening, like kind of overlapping. So then that means the community is suffering from both two major challenges. And I think the pandemic, we might be at the end of it. We are getting out of the tunnel, but then the hate crime is not. I don't want to say that it's going up. I hope not.

[0:59:30]

But definitely is not going away. It's more than just Chicago. It's more than you know. It's nationwide and this is a huge, huge issue. Is the government going to solve it? Is the psychiatrists going to solve it? You know, who has the key? I do not know.

[1:00:00]

But we are living through it because one, we are in a location that is saturated with Asian. And two, because we are here, it's like it hits home because it's happening to people that we know. And even walking through Chinatown is

unlike several years ago. We need to be mindful when we are walking. You know, my husband keeps reminding me, you know, you have to look when you walk, if you're walking by yourself.

[1:00:32]

I hate to be, you know, living in fear. I do nothing that I live in fear. But I think I'm trying to be responsible for myself. Because whatever happens to me affects a lot of other people. The same thing as people said that, you know, why are you, you know, wearing your mask all the time, and I say it's for me. I'm not afraid of dying. I really don't.

[1:00:59]

But I wear the mask for other people, for their protection. I need to take responsibility. And same thing is that's why I rang up my staff. We usually have people work like overtime. Not that I demand. It's just naturally we do. And you know, I did too. But I made a commitment. After this facility was robbed, I made a commitment not to leave like any time later than 6:00 unless there's like, really I cannot avoid.

[1:01:30]

I rang everybody up, and then at first they said, oh, I'm almost done. No, we're leaving. We're leaving at the same time. Like when the last student gone, rang up everybody. We're leaving. We're walking to the parking lot at the same time as a group. So my responsibility for my staff safety and also for myself. I don't want to say oh, you know, because I'm not afraid of dying, so I'm just going to go out and do whatever. I need to be a responsible person.

[1:02:03]

Interviewer: I didn't realize that the school was robbed.

Bonnie Ho: The school was robbed. It was ransacked. It was July 2020. It was the March we shut down.

[1:02:29]

And then at the end of the schoolyear, and then we were preparing for the next schoolyear, it was in June, July. If I remember the date correctly, it was summertime. And it was pandemic. Of course there's no one here but I come back to work. I'm usually the first one so I opened the door. The door was fine. No damage, just like normal. Plug the key, but when I open the door, like glass were shattered everywhere.

[1:02:58]

You know that the office door has the glass window. That was completely broken. The glass was all over the place. And I put inside. Whoa. It was like ransacked, like things were put like on the floor. Immediately I withdrew. I went back out because I'm not sure if there's any people inside. So I went back out. I called the facility managers and said you better come, and should I call the police, and he said no, wait until I come, I'm close by.

[1:03:30]

So he came. We both went in there. And I said I hope they did not make it to my office. So I went halfway up to the stair. I saw my door was broken. And I think my office was the worst. And then at that time, he said okay, we better call the police. So we call the police. And then by that time, other staff came into work, and I said, well go to the other building.

[1:03:58]

So this building is off limits because the police did not even allow me to come in because they are afraid that we're going to mess up with the evidence. So police came, and then I tell you, I have a little safe. No one knew my safe. Even my secretary, even my assistant did not know. It's not a big one. It's hidden and it's screwed to the wall. That safe was pulled from the wall and damaged. It was on the floor. Next door was the church accountant.

[1:04:30]

The safe was like a little refrigerator. The wall of the safe is very thick. It was right outside my door. It got pulled out, and banged, and ripped open. And of course, his room was also like a chaos. I looked through it and said, oh my goodness, you know, and nothing was on my shelf. Like everything is open. All the doors were open. All my laptops were gone.

[1:05:00]

My personal 35-millimeter camera, my personal video recorder. The school has no money to have this kind of equipment. So I am used to having the school using my own equipment. I look at that cabinet. None of them are there. So we've gone by several - for a long time, we did not have, you know, equipment because it was gone.

[1:05:29]

We did not have a decent camera. And I don't want to ask the school to buy a camera. So but and then we walk through the building. They destroy all the lock. Like I said why did these people go through a preschool classroom and pull things out like that? There's no treasure in there, right? So almost every



single room was affected. And the bad thing is, I know that these people know what they're doing because they cut the security camera.

[1:06:01]

And they cut the line to all the security cameras. They also took the black box. See, if they come in, they have to get through the camera to cut the line, right? So it will be recorded in the box. But honestly, I did not know where the box was until the manager said that oh, the box is gone. I said where did you hide it, and then he showed me.

[1:06:27]

I said, there's no way people could find it. But these people, I don't know how they found it. Like they take the entire box. And then for our system, all the like modem, whatever boxes, I don't even know the name, we're cut and took away. I said, why did you do that? But then immediately we were very busy. We need to call the insurance company. We need to call IT people because my computer has a lot of confidential information in there.

[1:07:00]

And then they took the - whatever they took, you know, has our internet system. There are parent information there. Like there are social security number of staff. You know, like my mind was going like quickly. What did I have in this computer? He took two of my computers, my personal computer, my school computer. I said I don't have a computer to work with.

[1:07:26]

So it was like quickly setting up another computer, trying to like change password, doing all that kind of thing. Then the insurance company hooked us up with this like security firm. And then we have to send letter to people letting them know. We give them like one year subscription that they could subscribe to protect their data. There were a lot of things going on right before, you know the school year because the school was robbed.

[1:08:03]

And because of that, from that day on, I decided not to go home too late. Actually it's a good practice. I go home now trying between 5:30 to 6:00, and then go home, eat my dinner, and then you know, start working at home in a very safe environment.

[1:08:26]

The reason why I did not go home is because sometimes when I'm so focused, I don't want to stop, and so I could finish. I could finish. By the time I

finish, oh, 7:30. So then I go home. But now I go home early with all the staff, and then take a break, and then start my work again. Yeah.

Interviewer: Did they ever find the people who did the robbery?

Bonnie Ho: They did not. And I think about a month later, a man threw a brick through the main door.

[1:09:00]

Now the main door glass has wire sandwiched in between. That means it's really sturdy. He was so strong, like must be using such a force that the brick actually went through that glass. And you could see the wire was like crooked and then glass was all over. It took place when our security was in the office. We thank God that he did not throw a brick, you know with the office window.

[1:09:33]

Because that window is just a piece of glass and he's just sitting right there. If he did that, he's going to have a damaged head. So they did it with the front door. So I don't know what to make of it. Is it targeted? Is it Asian hate crime? Is it just random? Nobody has an answer and I don't want to speculate but this is what it is happening.

[1:09:59]

So I think I think during the pandemic, people will put up signs in hospital, outside hospital, or outside school saying that heroes are here. We don't have a sign putting up here. But many times, that line came across my mind, heroes are here, people who work in here, much like, you know, people working in a warzone, right? There is potential danger. Of course, the intensity is not like a real warzone like Ukraine.

[1:10:29]

But there is certain risk, but people still decided to sign the contract and come every day to serve the student who needed this kind of love and care.

Interviewer: What an amazing staff you have. And I'm very sorry for all of the trouble that you have experienced.

Bonnie Ho: I believe, even though we are Christian, we are not exempt from adversity, or difficulty, or struggle.

[1:11:03]

What makes the difference is when those happen what is our response? Do we just we react to it or do we process it, take on a perspective of God and handle it properly?

[1:11:28]

Interviewer: Well, we have kind of reached that hour mark and I don't want to take more of your time. But reflecting over these hours that we've been talking, how do you look back on your life, you know, being born in Hong Kong, coming to the United States, all of it?

Bonnie Ho: You know what? One day when I'm with my Lord, what's left behind?

[1:12:02]

People will read the tombstone or eulogy. What would that be? What should I put there? I haven't figured out what to put on my tombstone or eulogy.

[1:12:26]

But reflecting back, I enjoyed my life for one, including the time that I was in Hong Kong. Those are valuable moments, those tough time. It carries some value. Those years made me who I am today. Same thing the years that I spent with SAIC made me who I am today. I believe I am the workmanship of God and he's never done with me yet.

[1:13:01]

He's not done with me even at this age. I count that this might be my last stop, my last mission, just logically counting - like calculating age wise, right? But until the mission he granted me is done, he's not done with me. I always equate myself as the clay pot.

[1:13:28]

You know, in a wealthy person's home, there are waves, and there are like beautiful waves in the clay pot, and I'm the clay pot. I'm just like an ordinary person. But what is wonderful is what's inside a clay pot is I have got inside. Until this clay part is broken, the beauty of God will not shine through, therefore there is scar. There is difficulty. There is toughness. When I was with FEBC, I was detained. I was hand - like gun pointed.

[1:14:00]

Those experiences, you say, ooh, that's horrible. You know, you've gone through that. But to me, those are like - I brag about those scars. You know, those are like wonderful experiences that, you know, God think that I deserve experience and allow me to experience that. Those are the times that we crack, like we broke the clay pot. We were being crushed. And therefore the treasure inside shine through.

[1:14:29]

I pray that my life will display that. If my life could display who God is, I think I live a life that is very fulfilling. If you want me to use one word, it's the word fulfilled or fulfilling. My life is very colorful and I never doubt. It's very - another word I would use is exciting. Exciting.

[1:15:01]

Interviewer: It's so exciting that we've had almost a five-hour interview and I didn't know you were held at gunpoint.

Bonnie Ho: That was another, you know, chunk of history about FEBC. So maybe some other time. I know that you have other activity to do today.

Interviewer: And looking over this interview, is there anything that you would like to add before we finish today?

[1:15:27]

Bonnie Ho: I guess we could end anywhere. It really depends on how much you'd like to know. If you want to know a little bit more about my days in FEBC, we could talk about that if you want too.

Interviewer: I guess I just meant like, you know, is there anything like, one like, you know, kind of final thing that you would like to say. Though, that's not to say that I'm not interested but I also-

Bonnie Ho: I understand. Yeah.

[1:16:00]

Interviewer: I feel bad that what was meant to be a four-hour interview is now close to five.

Bonnie Ho: No, I think I'm good. Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much, Mrs. Ho.

Bonnie Ho: Thank you.

Interviewer: This was wonderful.