



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHTS

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

May 2022

Jung Lee

Chief Operating Officer & Chief Financial Officer | Conning



Please share some background on your family heritage.

I was born in Seoul, Korea and immigrated to the United States as a toddler with my parents and grandmother. While I’m technically first generation, I feel more like a “generation 1.5” straddling two worlds, which may be a product of growing up in a small town in Indiana where there was no other Korean or Asian presence as well as the influence of living with my grandmother, who didn’t speak any English and was my primary gateway to learning about and experiencing Korean culture and traditions.



Jung, JJ, Sunny, Ray in April 2022

What does Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month mean to you?

I didn’t know much about Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month until recently. I do think it’s important to create space so that we all can celebrate our respective origins of where we come from. Designating May as “Heritage Month” gives us an opportunity to recognize the Asian American and Pacific Islander influence across our communities. Especially now as a parent of two young kids, I can see how this impacts the perspectives of the next generation. It serves as a good reminder for all of us to take the time to understand and share how we got to where we are today.

What would you say had the greatest influence on your career thus far?

It probably starts with what I learned from my family and childhood experiences, and the way this shaped my values, personality, and principles that I’ve carried with me and adapted through each stage of my life. I’ve only begun to appreciate the depth of this family influence as I observe how my kids approach the world (I’ve learned so much about myself and my wife through this lens). Looking back, I’d say the greatest career influence has been the people I’ve met along the way. In my professional life, I’ve been fortunate to have met some wonderful people – colleagues, friends, teachers, and mentors – who have shared in the highs, the lows, and everything in between along the way. The cumulative effect of these relationships and experiences has guided my approach to work as well as the choices and actions I’ve taken.



Celebrating Ray’s first birthday



Janhavi Kumar
 Head of Distribution, North America | Global Evolution

Please share some background on your family heritage.



Janhavi with her husband and daughters celebrating the festival of colors, Holi.

I was born in Hong Kong and have lived in eight different countries since. My mother and father are both from India. My father was a diplomat for the Indian government and therefore, indirectly, I have represented India from a very young age. I strongly identify with the country as an integral part of identity. Be it the language, movies, religion, and traditions, it is a strong influence in my life. That said, I have also had the privilege of being immersed in several different cultures and appreciate the beauty of each. I have lived in the United States for the past 22 years and am married to an Indian American. We are raising our two daughters to be very aware of their Indian background and make sure we visit India every year.

What does Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month mean to you?

Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage month is a wonderful opportunity to be reminded of our background, roots, and the unique attributes our cultures can bring to personal and professional relationships. Having lived in the United States for the past two decades, it is great to have a month where individuals from these backgrounds are identified and celebrated. With over four million Indian Americans

in the United States, they have grown to represent the second-largest immigrant group in the United States. We are increasingly seeing the contribution of Indian Americans in various sectors such as technology, arts, and business. I will continue to talk to my children, their friends, and other parents on the importance of our culture during this month and how we can celebrate what makes it special.

What would you say had the greatest influence on your career thus far?

My father has been my biggest support and influence on my academic and professional career. My father grew up in a very small town in India and ended up meeting world leaders and representing his country as the Indian Ambassador in many countries. It was my father’s dream that I go to college at the University of Cambridge, a school that many Indian politicians have attended. With hard work, focus and determination, I was thrilled to fulfill his dream. Getting into business school and my several career achievements thereafter were also sweeter because of his unwavering belief in me.



Janhavi with her mother, father, and daughters.



Kimberly Wong Lem
Vice President, Portfolio Administration | Octagon Credit Investors

Please share some background on your family heritage.

My mother was born and raised in Hong Kong while my father was born and raised in Guangdong, China and later moved to Hong Kong to escape communist China. They met via a matchmaker, which was typical of the time. My mother grew up on my grandparents' farm with five siblings. Being the eldest of the three girls, she was fortunate to have attended school, however it was very short-lived. She barely completed primary school before my grandfather had to make the difficult decision of who he could continue sending to school. My uncles' educations were more important. It was a choice that was nothing out of the norm.

My mother worked in textiles and manufacturing while my father worked in food services before they met. Shortly after their marriage, my father worked as a mechanic on cargo ships and spent a few years at sea. Being away from home for months at a time, his assignments brought him to Philadelphia and New York City. Eventually, my parents immigrated to the United States with my siblings in 1981. They came in hopes of providing my sister and brother the opportunities and education they never had during their own childhood. I was born not long after in the United States and raised in a traditional Chinese household in metro Boston. I was one of very few Asians in my predominantly white schools.



Kimberly celebrating Lunar New Year at her parents' house.

Growing up, I had struggles with my identity. Am I Chinese or American? I am both. I am Asian American; specifically Chinese American. I grew up trying to follow traditions my parents told me about, yet at the same time I tried to fit in at school. Sometimes it was difficult to do both, to belong to both. At school, I was viewed by many solely as Chinese, being different from Americans. All my relatives in Asia called me "jook-sing" (a Cantonese slang for a Chinese person born outside of Hong Kong or China, suggesting that such a person isn't truly Chinese). High school was when I met more individuals like me and with those friendships, I finally realized I didn't have to be one or other because I am both.

What does Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month mean to you?

It is a time of learning for everyone, but it reminds me of the importance of preserving the history, culture, language, and traditions of our families by teaching the next generation whenever there is an opportunity. I spend time with my nieces and nephews doing fun, educational activities, like cooking. We've made dumplings and noodles from scratch while discussing their significance during holidays such as Lunar New Year. Dumplings symbolize wealth while noodles are for longevity. Like myself, they are bilingual. We try to have conversations in Cantonese so the knowledge of the language isn't lost (for either of us). It is also a time to keep the stories of my ancestors alive. My nieces and nephews haven't had the chance to visit Hong Kong or China yet, but old family photographs that we flip through show an inkling of what life was like. I share my memories of my visits with them because they'll never see what I saw or experience what I did. So much has changed through the years and they will have their own stories to share and pass on one day. I hope they will remember what I've passed to them like how I have remembered what was passed to me.



Kimberly making noodles with her nieces.

What would you say had the greatest influence on your career thus far?

The perseverance of my parents for wanting to achieve the American dream but instead, how they created and achieved their own dream. Education has always been the top priority for my siblings and me. My parents ensured that we each had the opportunity to pursue and achieve whatever we decided to put our minds to. They have always given us the freedom to choose what we wanted. Like many immigrants, they overcame language barriers, discrimination, and racism to find business opportunities that allowed them to give us those choices. They laid the foundation for my sister to pave the path and set an example for my brother and me. Being the first in my family to go to college, my sister earned several academic achievements that bolstered her career. She was my role model and the one I aspired to be when growing up. She had also stepped in as an additional mother figure for me during the confusing times of my adolescence when our mother didn't understand American culture. My sister helped bridge the gap after having gone through it all herself. My family has made me what I have become today.