

This book is meant to be read by all foreign borns, whether you aspire to come to America or are already here, whether you have legal status or not. You may feel disappointed in life and have not accomplished what you set out to do. I asked myself why I have this burning desire to write this manuscript and to give you my wisdom and lessons learnt from mistakes in my 40 years living in America. You and your parents have helped me build my practice. Without you, I really would not be here. So, to return your faith in me, and to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to work with you for all these years - helping you get permanent residency (Green Cards), fighting deportation, and obtaining U.S. citizenship - I am writing this book.

I understand how disappointed and sad you can get when you worked so hard in this country for so long but cannot get a Green Card, the indicator of permanent residency and acceptance into the American system. Having experienced the same difficulties with the process of immigration to the United States, I wanted to help others along the way, which is why I chose to become an immigration lawyer. Now, looking back on these past four decades, I want to write down what I have learned so that other immigrants can benefit from my experiences, but more importantly, from my mistakes.

I think back to my own journey: leaving Hong Kong when I was only 19, a naïve school girl from an all-girl Catholic school; being fired from waitress jobs during college for not being able to distinguish between a Rob Roy with olive, a Manhattan with cherry, and a martini with a double twist; and now being a nationally known immigration attorney with offices in five cities, counseling thousands of foreign-borns on how to obtain and maintain legal status in the United States. I am living the American dream.

A lot of people probably wonder why we still want to come to America, with its high crime rate, interracial issues, highly publicized corruption, and shaky economic conditions, when the rising powers in India, China and Russia are starting to equalize the power structure of global markets. Yet it is my firm belief that the United States is still the best country in which to live, thrive, and become somebody.

Along my journey, I have become one of the honorees of the Ohio Women Hall of Fame, co-chair of the NAPABA District Immigration Law Committee, an honoree of the Ellis Island medal of honor, a life member of the 6th Federal Judicial District and the 8th Ohio Judicial District, and a board member of the United Way and Ohio Notre Dame College. For philanthropy I received the Margaret Ireland Award from the Cleveland Women's City Club and the 1997 Creative Philanthropy Award from the Women's Community Foundation. I am also named in Crain's Cleveland Business's "Women of Influence" list and Cleveland Magazine's list of "Most Interesting People." As the first Asian-American president of the Cleveland Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, the Cleveland chapter won the coveted Chapter Activity Award. I was also appointed by the Ohio Supreme Court as a charter member of the Continuing Legal Education Commission for attorneys, and I served as a member of its Ohio Supreme Court Racial Task Force.

While I have had many successes, there have been setbacks as well. My divorce was so painful that I have had to shut it out from my mind. After being physically and emotionally abused by my first husband, I was rendered so insecure that I believed even spending money on a Starbucks coffee would render me penniless when I grew old, with nobody to care for me. I still do not buy an ice cream cone or a nice mechanical pencil without thinking about it. In spite of my numerous awards and board memberships, that feeling of impotence, and of being an outsider, has driven me to write this book for all of us foreign-borns. There is hope for people like us, and dreams still waiting to be realized in America. I hope some of the experiences in this book will resonate with other zero-generation immigrants, who like me may often feel out of place both in the lands of our birth and our adopted homeland. (I use the term zero-generation to refer to those like me, who are immigrants to the U.S. and not born here. My children are first-generation Americans, although it is also valid to say I am a first generation immigrant, they are second generation).

How can more foreign-borns survive and thrive in this land and become truly a part of it, helping to make history along the way? How do we become what we are destined to be and make our parents, as well as our makers, proud? First, there are certain things that most foreign-borns, or at least that I, may never understand: the New Yorker cartoons, and for that matter, most American jokes. Despite this, most foreign-borns in the United States are tenacious survivors. We work hard to save and to bring our families to America to enjoy a better life—in living standards, personal freedoms, and environmental conditions.

We also tend to be stoic, do not voice our opinions often, and are generally more accepting and accommodating to the not-so-great things that happen to us or around us, while being thankful for the good things that do happen.

Please do not lose faith in yourself! Just because you were not born in this country and do not and sound mainstream does not mean that you cannot become successful here.