

On May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Beijing-born Major General John Liu Fugh passed away. Fugh was well known for breaking the “bamboo ceiling”, the figurative barrier that Asian Americans in the workforce face, which Fugh overcame while working in the world’s most powerful military. To pay respect to him, APAPA founder C.C. Yin led a troupe of eleven other APAPA staff and members, including myself, to the Arlington National Cemetery, where Fugh was laid to rest. Standard-issued and placed between two former sergeants, Fugh’s headstone reflected the humility that Major General Fugh maintained, despite his accomplishments and rank. We commemorated his lasting impact on the Asian American community with a wreath of red, white, and blue flowers.



Remembering Major General John Liu Fugh at the Arlington National Cemetery

Walking uphill through hundreds of rows of ivory headstones, we were silent, in deep contemplation of the soldiers who had courageously paid the ultimate price for our freedom. We soon arrived at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, built in 1932 to memorialize unidentified servicemen who lost their lives during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Tomb Guard stood watch in the sweltering, September heat as we waited for the ceremonial changing of the guard. Just a few minutes earlier, I had admitted to Nancy Chen, treasurer of the Tri-Valley APAPA branch, that wearing black dress pants had been a mistake, but the guard’s heavy uniform made me much more grateful for my outfit. In reality, however, the Tomb Guard, part of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, is a highly respected position within the United States Army.

Our group of twelve returned to Washington D.C. in two large, black SUVs, where we rejoined other APAPA members for lunch. Despite the chaos of a popular D.C. restaurant in the middle of the day, I was able to speak a few people in my general vicinity who were ecstatic to meet, in person, APAPA board members from across the nation. Tri-Valley chapter president, Andy Li, who introduced me to the organization with warmth and evident dedication, proved too beloved in the APAPA community for me to obtain a seat next to, so I introduced myself to those around me and enjoyed the ideal combination of easy, meaningful conversation and delicious food. I was a newcomer and separated by a generation from all in attendance, but seldom have I felt more welcome.



Meeting with the Chicagoans

Upon our return to the Grand Hyatt Washington, we mingled with a group from Chicago. There, I met a young woman who had immigrated from China to attend college in the states, where she'd met her husband. She would later tell me about her profession as an optimizer of internet marketing, which she utilized in her spare time to support various candidates in local elections. At dinner that evening, she and her husband acquainted me with another Chicagoan who was a successful realtor. It astounded me to meet such accomplished young men and women who seemed unhindered in their ascent in the professional world, despite being first generation immigrants. I thought of my own parents who, at their age, were still buying my then-infant brother Arby's one dollar burgers on special occasions in urban Cincinnati, and could see the vision of APAPA already coming to fruition.

Admittedly, there were a few technical difficulties that night, the most prominent of which was the microphone refusing to transmit noise consistently, but the attending congressmen and senators were unfazed by this. California's 41<sup>st</sup> district representative, Mark Takano, animatedly spoke to those gathered around the podium, expressing his great enthusiasm for the progress of Asians in the United States of America, both in politics and in the nation at large. Judy Chu, the first Chinese woman elected to the Senate, emphasized the underprivileged but crucial role Asian Americans had in our nation, from the Chinese Americans who, despite discrimination and unfair work practices, built one of the most ambitious transportation and trade projects of their era, the Transcontinental Railroad, to the working families of Japanese Americans who, during World War II, were forced into internment camps. We, who had persevered through the decades, listened on as members of Congress filtered in and out. The itinerary of our day was so packed that, when I returned to my hotel at approximately eleven that night, I fell asleep within thirty seconds of lying down.

The next morning, I took an Uber to 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW, more commonly known as the White House. Mike Honda, U.S. Representative of California's 17<sup>th</sup> congressional district, had arranged for APAPA to take a tour which was fortuitous because, normally, booking for White House tours must be done up to six months in advance. The night before, Honda had a great laugh with founder C.C. Yin as he shook his hand. Pointing at the handshake, democrat-affiliated Honda quipped, "See? Bipartisanship!"



Infamous portrait of JFK painted after his death

one of the best. Exiting the White House, we all temporarily felt how surreal it was to be within its gates, where so much of history had been determined.

On a whim, we decided to stop by the U.S. Capitol Building, where congressmen and senators gather to enact federal legislation. We had chosen a fortunate day to visit: all of Congress was gathered at its steps to address the nation about 9/11, that weekend marking the fifteenth anniversary. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan spoke of its impact on his and the following generation, how his children may never comprehend the terror and tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 as Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi stood by his side, all in solidarity and remembrance of the lives lost that day. When the congressmen and women dispersed, we spoke with California U.S. Representative Ami Bera before he left, sobered but optimistic about our prospects as a nation.

That night, I couldn't believe it had already been two days and my time in D.C. was coming to a close. Before embarking back to central Pennsylvania where I attend university, however, there was one final event to attend: the congressional dinner that the United Chinese Americans (UCA) had collaborated with APAPA to plan. I can say, with unflinching confidence, that this was the highlight of my stay. I had the great fortune of sitting

As we walked into the West Wing of the White House, we passed large, framed photos of the Obama family. Although President Obama is handsome in his own right, my attention was immediately drawn to the presidential dogs. Grinning, I leaned towards Nancy and said, "Look at how cute those dogs are. If we see Obama taking them on a walk, I won't even care about him, I'll be so focused on petting his dogs."

The inside of the White House was beautifully decorated—ornate without being too flashy. Several of the original rooms had been preserved to look as they had when Lincoln roamed through the halls and presidential portraits, from Washington to Bush, were scattered throughout. After a quick stop at the gift shop that left me \$100 poorer, Nancy and I noticed a few people snapping pictures on their phones of something outside of a window. As luck would have it, the president's dogs were being walked in the garden adjacent to the West Wing. We laughed together about the uncanny coincidence of their appearance as we glanced over the official China used by each president's family. Andy, Nancy, and I unanimously agreed that Lincoln's timelessly designed dishware was



Posing with Congressman Ami Bera outside of the Capitol Building

in between former Oregon congressman David Wu, who was endlessly patient with my interest in his tenure as a United States Representative, and APAPA Greater D.C. Chapter President Stan Tsai, who I'd only previously communicated with through a flustered voicemail that I'd left him a couple nights earlier, which he assured me was not as embarrassing as I'd thought it. Stan and I spoke of APAPA's future in D.C. and on the East Coast at large as people passed by to congratulate him on his tireless efforts to plan the events. David Wu recalled his interactions with 42<sup>nd</sup> U.S. President Bill Clinton and 2016 Democratic Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton, whom he referred to as "Bill" and "Hillary" respectively. Although the dinner served far surpassed anything I'd eaten in the past year, it was the last thing on my mind as I sat at that table, simultaneously terrified and thrilled by those in my company.

The three-hour drive back to Pennsylvania gave me more than enough time to reflect. I thought about the men and women, whom I had never imagined that I'd ever meet, who'd attended the APAPA-sponsored events, and of the legacy that they left behind them, being that many of them were Asian Americans who had overcome so much to reach the position in which they currently stood, proud of the people whom they represented. I thought about telling the police officer who pulled me over just five minutes away from my dormitory that I had, not 24 hours earlier, been walking down the steps of the White House (I didn't actually do so, and ended up with only a verbal warning to be aware of lanes). Most of all, however, I thought about the future of Asian Americans like myself and the dozens of others I'd had the privilege of meeting, and the dedication of individuals like C.C., Andy, Nancy, and Stan, whose contributions of indeterminate time and energy were already showing in the professional, political and civic spheres of the United States of America.