

Ambassador Sichan Siv
Remarks at the Asian Pacific American Heritage Association Gala
Houston, Texas, 8 May 2009

I am delighted to accept the George H.W. Bush Award on behalf of my former White House colleagues, on this historic day in 1945 when World War II ended in Europe. The namesake of this award was the youngest navy pilot, who served in the Pacific with distinction. Since then, he has established a relationship with our ancestral lands longer than that of any historical figure, having been ambassador to the U.N. and China, and director of the C.I.A. His was the only administration during which the president and vice president visited Asia-Pacific in the first 100 days. I thank the APAHA leadership for this honor: President Alice Lee, Gala Chairs Yuki Rogers and Gordon Quan, Executive Director Dorothy Chow, and my good friend Martha Wong. I was so excited that I made a day trip on my motorcycle here last week. Upon my return to San Antonio, I walked like a cowboy who had been on a cattle drive for weeks. There is an old saying that behind a good Cambodian stands a great Texan. There she is, my wife Martha from Pampa. I was not born in Texas, but I got to Houston as soon as I could. In fact, I was a naturalized Texan before I became a U.S. citizen!

Our 41st president said “there is nothing more fulfilling than to serve your country and your fellow citizens, and do it well.” He told us that “any definition of a successful life must include serving others.” We recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of his administration at the Bush Library in College Station. I reflected on my first day at the White House which was quite overwhelming. It had been only 13 years since I escaped the killing fields of Cambodia, having survived an indescribably horrible year and two death sentences. It was a great tribute to the president that someone of my background could make it that far in such a short time. He assembled an extraordinary team to work effectively together. He made decisions based not on popularity but on the greater good. He extended MFN trading status to China and received the Dalai Lama. He got high marks for his management of the post Cold War world. In 1990 he extended the weekly celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage to all of May. The following year some 60,000 people got together in Fountain Valley, California to salute his outstanding leadership. It was the largest presidential event in history. George Bush will always be my favorite American, a great president, and an even greater human being.

I congratulate our co-chairs on the “stirred, not shaken” 007 theme! Incidentally, the working title of my memoir was *The Man with the Golden Bones*. It is not “For Your Eyes Only.” It is “From Asia with Love.” It is for all ages, especially those who believe in the American dream, who consider faith, family, friends, and freedom as the most important elements in life. “You Only Live Twice,” in Asia and in America. We recognize again the contributions by Americans of Asian/Pacific ancestry, including those who built the transcontinental railroad, who served in our armed forces, who won Nobel prizes, Olympic medals, and whom we see and hear tonight, like Andrea Nguyen and Mindy Le. I am privileged to share this golden memory with you. Each of us can do so much. Together, we can do so much more, and continue to make America the greatest nation on earth. Thank you.

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