

# Dr. Anchalee Musikabhumma

As a young girl Anchalee discussed her career ideas with her father, a professor of architecture. She liked to draw and thought of being an architect, and she liked children and working with people. Her father encouraged her to become a doctor because in Thailand as a woman she would be able to advance further in medicine. Because of her love of children and wanting to be able to balance family life with professional life, she studied to be a pediatrician. She met her husband in medical school. They married in 1970, a year before coming to America to receive additional training at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, MD. In 1978, Dr. Anchalee started working at a

colleague's private pediatrics practice in downtown Baltimore. Following her colleague's death, Dr. Anchalee assumed his practice in 1989. Most of her patients were black, none were Asian.

As a mother, Dr. Anchalee wanted to pass on to her three daughters knowledge of and love for their Thai heritage. Growing up she studied dance until her medical studies became too demanding. To connect her children to their Thai culture, she became involved with the Thai temple, Wat Thai, in Wheaton, Maryland, where she helped with the traditional dance classes and arranged performances.



"It depends on the education of the patient, some of them were very rude to me. They distrust you. .... Some of them, even when the child is sick, had a high fever, .... [say] 'I don't want to see you.' .... From my point of view, I have no problem with the color. The opposite way, the American people are the ones who have prejudice about the Asian people. They even tell me, 'Go back to your own place. Don't come here.' I say, 'I come here to work and help.' Sometimes I have to teach them. .... Now I have good communication because they come often and they know me, know what I mean. I'm concerned about them."

"I think for the younger generation, the two identities, this is a privilege of theirs. They're lucky to have two identities. My daughter right now may not have much difficulty with two identities, but the other generation—the third generation, my grandchild—definitely will have difficulties, because the influence of the second identity will be more than the primary identity. They may have a hard time. I don't think

they can live with the two elements. .... We try to keep those two identities as much as we can. But, you know, I can not work by myself. The identity has to be a community, also. If the community is effective and so influences the younger generation, they will keep it. So I cannot say [that this will happen] just from me alone. It is a [big] job. That's why I try to get the community involved, to push them, to get the younger generation involved, also. If you don't do it, who else is going to do it? That's why I try to involve them with it. It is hard."

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# Suwattana H.A.

Suwattana, nick-named Toi, came to the United States to study in 1971, when she was 19 years old. She lived in Virginia with her uncle who had come two years before. When she first arrived, she went to an English language school where she met Manote, an Indonesian-Thai, and shortly afterwards married. Later, while studying business administration at Marymount College, she held a job at a local American food restaurant that wanted to expand to include Thai food,

and even changed its name to *Gin-Na-Ree*. It one of the first Thai restaurants in Virginia. In 1978, Toi and her husband borrowed money from their families in Thailand and bought the restaurant. Ten years later, they opened the *Star of Siam* in downtown Washington, DC., followed by second restaurant in Rosslyn, Virginia, and a third in Adams Morgan. During this busy time, they also raised their son Mark.



“Before I came here I thought it is heaven. I did not bring anything with me, not even a towel. I thought everything would be waiting for me. When I got here, oh my God, I had to do everything myself. [In Thailand] we had maids, many maids. .... In 1979, my mother was here [to visit]. She saw us work, she saw him working and she saw me working. It was unusual [for her to see me work]. I never worked [in Thailand]. She even told me she couldn’t believe I can work.... I feel proud of myself that I can work and don’t ask for money from her, [that I] can support myself.”

“We had a very difficult time. They want egg rolls, they want sweet and sour pork. Chinese. They even order

carry out sweet and sour pork and come back and throw [the Thai food] away in front of me. .... Some people they don’t like the food. .... One lady even said, “Go back to your country. I don’t want this kind of food.” .... We should have [called it] Thai Kitchen or Bangkok Cuisine. When they read the name they know right away what type of food. Before, *Gin-Na-Ree*, at that time they didn’t know much about Thailand. .... In 1988 I opened the *Star of Siam* [restaurant] in D.C. And we were very successful. So in ’89 we got the review, 50 best bargain [restaurants], and [it was a] very busy ’89, ’90.”

# Panida Puccinelli

Panida was born in northeast Thailand to an ethnically Chinese family. In 1974, after graduating from Chulalongkorn University with a bachelor’s degree in political science, Panida came to the United States for a graduate program in international affairs at Ohio University. She met Dennis in a study group. When they graduated, they decided to marry even though it was hard for their parents to accept. Finally, they received permission from both sets of parents. They married in Thailand and returned to the United States to live. Thinking that she would have to follow her

husband where his jobs took them, Panida figured banking would be a good job because there are banks everywhere. In 1978, she began as a branch teller at First American Bank, because they were the only bank willing to talk about career advancement with her. Quickly, over 5 years, she progressed from teller to the auditing department then to assistant manager and soon after was appointed as an officer of the bank. In 1990, Panida became a Vice President, making her the second Asian to become a bank executive at First American Bank.

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“The most challenging to me, [is] just overcoming that barrier, that language problem. Just overcoming that is probably more [difficult] than anything else, because once you get that out of your system, you can learn anything, you can do anything. If you’re in your own country, you use your own language. .... But for me anyway, since I work here, it’s more like, ‘Gee, if I have to write this ten-page report, will my boss like it? [Will] my English be okay?’ I have to talk on the phone all day, discuss all these loan problems, difficult problems. Will an American understand me? Once you overcome [the language problem], you don’t think of it. I make some mistakes. But as long as you understand what I’m saying [it’s okay].”

“Now I’m the supervisor .... I think it’s more of your attitude. This is something you have to go through yourself.”  
“I think the problem with the foreigners—not only Asian and not only Thai—you can talk to any Philippine, you can talk to any Vietnamese, you can talk to any Latin American people. The reason they don’t succeed in the big corporate American environment is they themselves think they can’t do it. They can’t compete with Americans. .... I was promoted about two years ago. I’m still the only Asian vice president in this bank, and I think it’s more because whatever they gave me, I’m willing to do. I know I have a handicap.”



# Thailand



Loy Kratong in Washington, DC, at the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall

Loy Kratong is a Hindu-influenced Buddhist ceremony which participants pay homage to Mother River for her gift of water. Kratongs are traditionally made of banana leaves, lotus blossoms, candle and incense.

