

# Making Dreams Come True

*Special story by Frank Navin*

(January 12, 2018) Suchen Lin was born in the port city of Kaohsiung, Taiwan in 1968. Her parents were educated on the mores of Taiwan culture and manual labor. Strong family values and dedication to hard work was the rule. What little was known about American life was skewed via Hollywood scripts. English was not a second language in the Lin household. The family moved to Taichung, Taiwan's second most populous city, when Suchen was in sixth grade. Opportunities for a better life were the prescription.

It came for Suchen soon after high school when she met Bruce an American businessman based in Taichung. He spoke fluent Mandarin. A linguistic romance was etched. They married in 1990 and moved to Hong Kong. Fearing the upcoming "Handover" (from British to Chinese Administration in 1997) they returned to Taichung in 1996 where their son Benjamin was born on May 9, 1996. Suchen stopped working to care for her newborn and unfortunately, Bruce's employment soon ended as well.

Bruce's parents lived in Naples, FL so the family packed up, shared tearful goodbyes and became residents of the USA. It was the autumn of 1996.

The marriage dissolved within two years. The good news is ... it was amicable.... the bad news is ..... those Taiwanese mores discouraged Suchen from accepting any child support and/or alimony. Tough times were in the forecast.

Suchen's first job was in the Coastland Mall working in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant. Relatives, friends and even Bruce helped care for baby Benjamin. Other "backroom" jobs came and went as Suchen concentrated on improving her English vocabulary. Her big break came in 2002 when she was hired to work at the Club Pelican Bay. Her energy, determination and enthusiasm won her a spot on the wait staff where she excelled and remains to this day. The membership never knew her by her given name Suchen but rather her adopted American name Joyce. "Little Joyce" continues to work hard every day and is thankful and proud to be part of the Club Pelican Bay family.

Benjamin is a graduate of Gulf Coast High School and is entering his senior year at the University of South Florida in Tampa with a concentration in medical studies. His financial aid package covers tuition, room & board. The Founders Fund of the Club Pelican Bay awarded him a scholarship of \$2500 per year with a \$10,000 cap. A monetary gift that both Benjamin and Joyce appreciate very very much.

The Founders Scholarship Fund was created in 1991 and is a recognized 501(c)(3) charitable organization. It was the brainchild of our Club's Founding members and has helped countless students of Collier County achieve post high school education and training. According to its current Chairman, Rob McNaghten, "almost 62% of Collier County students come from economically disadvantaged households". A staggering percentage one doesn't easily equate with the Naples area. After all, many seasonal residents consider this "paradise."

The Founders Fund was originally designed to help Club Pelican Bay employees and/or their kids and continues to benefit staff not only in the Clubhouse but Pro Shop as well. Over the years the charity reached out and now helps hundreds of high school seniors in Collier County. "Making Dreams Come True" is not just the Fund's motto .....it's a living reality.

Recently Rob McNaghten asked me to write an article on the Founders Scholarship Fund to enlighten the membership (new and not so new) of its history, testimonials and goals. We decided the focus should be on the recipients, namely the kids. What I wasn't prepared for was how heart-wrenching some of these kids' stories would become. Many are climbing out of impoverished neighborhoods to seek a better life for themselves and loved ones.

Here's just a sampling.

Maria was an excellent student and continued to achieve high academic performances despite being raised by a single parent, her loving mother. When her mom was diagnosed with terminal cancer, Maria, didn't fail, not in school nor at home. She kept up her grades, kept up the house chores and kept her mom's spirits up as well. After her mother passed, she not only lost the love of her life, but was forced to leave the house they called home. Facing homelessness, she found shelter with some friends. Undeterred, she maintained good grades and earned money working part time after school and on the weekends. Financial aid and a scholarship from The Founders Fund helped enroll her into the University of Florida where she continues to propel herself in the spirit of her mom. Coincidentally when she visits Naples during the school year she shares the drive home with another Founders Fund recipient. Both are immensely grateful to The Fund.

Then there's Luci, the teenage student at Immokalee High School who is also the mother of a two year old son. The "father" had abandoned both. She was determined to make a better life for her son. That meant getting a college education. Immokalee HS has a special program for pregnant girls and young mothers. The school provides needed support and day care so the girls can complete their education. Her academic achievements were recognized by out of state colleges willing to grant scholarship money. Instead she chose FGCU because of their day care opportunities. Keeping her son close by and secure was paramount. The Founders Fund is helping Luci (and her son) achieve their dreams. She will be forever thankful.

Back on campus (CPB), The Fund recently awarded Camilo Mendoza Vazqueza ( 20 years old) a renewable \$2500 per year for four years. He works in the cart barn and on the wait staff in our new clubhouse. A contagious smile embraces his youthful face. Dad works construction and mom is a cook at the Bayside restaurant. But life wasn't always so simple. The family immigrated to Naples, Florida, from Mexico with seven anxious toddlers in tow. Camilo was only three. The older brother turned five. Dad struggled to find steady employment and in 2008, desperate, he traveled to North Carolina to find work. The family stayed behind and mom was forced to move into a friend's house sharing one room with all seven children. Camilo remembers "there were moments when I can still recall them glaring at my mother whenever we'd use their belongings." Soon dad bought a used trailer and they all moved to NC. The siblings shared a portable heater and deflated mattress but they were happy to have a place to call their home. Florida kept calling and with NC cold winters, the return to Naples was inevitable.

Camilo is a proud young man with lots of ambition. He challenged himself academically by enrolling in AP and AICE classes. After school and on weekends he loved working in the Club's cart barn and the Fish Crazy restaurant. Now with the help of The Founders Fund he will be continuing his education at the University of Southwest Florida starting in January 2018. The responsibilities at the Club Pelican Bay will resume during semester breaks. He sums up his aspirations best....."teachers are the catalysts for learning; therefore I want to be a teacher. I saw how important children are in life while growing up with my younger brothers. Young minds are unopened treasures with so much potential." Camilo wants to help others define their goals and create their dreams.

Time constraints prevent telling the entire story of The Founders Fund. Suffice to say many many Club members have contributed much time and money over the past 27 years. Everyone is strongly encouraged to view and peruse the website. It's awesome -- [www.TheFoundersFundInc.org](http://www.TheFoundersFundInc.org). The tremendous accomplishments of The

Board, Club Members, high school guidance counselors, the students, our employees and their children are truly inspirational. An Endowment Fund was established a couple of years ago to ensure continuity for the seniors soon to be matriculating into college. Its goal of one million dollars will be exceeded in 2018 thanks in part to a very magnanimous donation (\$250,000) by an anonymous donor and the generosity and tireless benevolence of Schuyler and Penny Peck. Finally, to fully secure the dreams of these young aspiring achievers, it was just announced, at a recent Board meeting, that the same anonymous donor is offering a \$250,000 Challenge Pledge meaning any funds pledged and collected from other donors for the Endowment Fund will be matched dollar for dollar from the Challenge Fund.....a proud reflection of the Club Pelican Bay.

Help raise money for scholarships by signing up for "The Greatest Travel Show on Earth" sponsored by Preferred Travel of Naples to be held February 12<sup>th</sup> at the Club. All proceeds from the event go to The Founders Fund. Don't miss the out on the big event scheduled for April 9<sup>th</sup>, the 2018 Ed Brennan Memorial Brennan Memorial Banquet followed by the Golf Tournament April 10<sup>th</sup>. This major fundraising event for The Founders Fund is held every other year.

"Making Dreams Come True" is a reality worth supporting. Just ask Benjamin, Maria, Luci and Camilo how the Founders Fund is helping them realize their American Dream.

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