



Brenda Lo

JAN 2, 1922 - SEP 12, 2019



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Brenda Lo was born and educated in Shanghai, China on the 2nd day after the Lunar New Year of 1922. This “2nd” was the date our family celebrated every year. However, the Western calendar, January 2, 1922, was the year she used for official documents. Brenda was born to Shi Deng Fung and Ming Dong Shu, her father, Ming Dong was one of the 1st from China who went to MIT, her uncle helped to invent the Chinese typewriter. Brenda married Wyleon Lo in China. After the war, Wyleon moved back to Hawaii in the late 40’s, Brenda followed a couple years later. She perfected her English by listening to radio soap operas while sewing to help support the family. She worked at the famous Lau Yee Chai Restaurant in Honolulu. In 1951 her daughter, Linda, was born and 3 years later her son, Cy. Brenda’s self-taught sewing skills were coveted by the Chinese community. Brenda sewed Chinese dresses, Cheongsams, for most of the finalists and winners of the Narcissus Festival in Honolulu, similar to San Francisco’s Miss Chinatown contests.

<https://youtu.be/nKKjhES4vxM> She made dresses for movie stars and other celebrities. A regular client was Liberace’s manager and wife. Brenda designed the dresses and was known for her unique style. Sometimes her husband, Wyleon, an artist, would paint designs on the fabric in collaboration with her. Also, at Alfred Shaheen’s in Honolulu, she designed fabrics creating iconic 50’s Hawaiian prints. In 1960, she started a new life by taking her 2 children to San Francisco onboard the Matson Lines’ Lurline. Soon she got a job with BOAC, now British Airways, as an Airlines Passenger Services Agent and interpreter. She spoke 3 different Chinese dialects, and able to speak a smattering of Japanese and Spanish. The airline allowed her to wear a uniform in the cheongsam style as she never wore an American style dress. In the days of airline passenger service, Brenda was exemplary, for a typical 6 hour layover, she would arrange a quick SF tour and nice dinner in Chinatown for her passengers. Her special service received numerous thank you’s, and



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commendations from around the world. An all-expenses paid Peruvian “Victory tour”, was hosted by the Peruvian Travel Bureau, an example for how appreciated she was. With the closure of the San Francisco BOAC office in the 80’s, she was left without a job. Never giving up, she made ends meet by being frugal and cutting coupons with her children. No shame in any job, she did the best wherever she worked. For example, a job stuffing envelopes, she and her team broke the record in stuffing envelopes! As lovely as that job was, she got a job with the U.S. Customs. She took and re-took the GS tests rising through the ranks to become a Customs officer. She’d often do a procedure called “stream boarding”, while both ships were moving, in open heaving seas, beyond the Golden Gate Bridge, she’d climb down from the ship’s ladder of a small pilot boat and jump onto the ship’s ladder of a larger passenger liner or container ship to process the customs work. Because she was a woman, she did this wearing high heels! Sent to Washington DC, for training, she took pistol target shooting, but refused to carry a gun at work. She retired in 1987. During her retirement she continued to sew, make bags, silk screened and printed hand designed stationary, took piano lessons and started writing and enjoyed documenting her personal stories. Her multitude of friends are proud owners of something Brenda made that have a Brenda Lo label. She was very proud of her 3 grandsons, Christian, Sean and Ryan. She was a wonderful “Habu” to them and never held back on advice to them or her friends. She was also very happy to have a wonderful granddaughter-in-law, Vivi, and 2 great grandchildren, Gunnar (from Sean) and Olivia (from Chris and Vivi). Brenda volunteered at Children’s Hospital, St. Mary’s Hospital and On Lok Senior Center. When asked why she wanted to volunteer, her answer was “My purpose is to give back a little for what life has given me.” According to Brenda, quoting a Chinese proverb, “You save in heaven when you do good deeds.” The last 3-½ years she was in a board and care, due to a traumatic brain injury falling at home. Thanks to Marian Cua’s dedicated, professional staff for the wonderful care. Her favorite charity was St. Jude’s. In her memory, her family is inviting her friends and relatives to contribute to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital P.O. Box 50, Memphis, TN 38101-9929.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Brenda by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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