

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Suzanne Ahn, Neurologist and Activist, 1952-2003

In 2002 Dallas neurologist Suzanne Ahn shocked a convention of the Asian American Journalists Association by announcing that she had incurable lung cancer, and she was presenting their organization with a \$100,000 endowment. “Only by encouraging diversity in the newsroom can we ensure that all voices can be heard.”¹ As journalists, the doctor told them, they could affect an entire society. “As long as you have your life and health, you can achieve anything. You can speak up and fight for justice and fairness. You can reach your dreams.”²



According to family members, Suzanne’s whole life was one of giving back to the community. The family emigrated from Korea when Suzanne was seven. Although stung by discrimination, she excelled in school; after graduating from high school in Tyler, she earned degrees from The University of Texas at Austin and The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. As a practicing physician, she opened an after-hours clinic to serve working people. She took the helm of civic organizations devoted to rights of Asian Americans and of women physicians, and she started a Dallas chapter of the American Medical Women’s Organization, co-founded National Doctors for ERA, and campaigned for Governor Ann Richards. She was the youngest physician and second woman to be appointed to the Texas Board of Medical Examiners. She filed for 23 medical patents.³

When Dallas nightclubs tried to ban Asian Americans, Dr. Ahn organized a protest march. When the 1991 Civil Rights Act specifically excluded Filipino and Native American cannery workers in Alaska, she flew to Washington to confront legislators.⁴

The diagnosis of lung cancer was ironic, for she had never smoked and had served on the Texas Air Control Board. Ten months after addressing the journalists, Suzanne Ahn died at age 51.

Quotations

*I realize now that, compared to incurable lung cancer, all the challenges of my past were so easy. If I had only known it was this easy, I would have done more, taken more risks.*⁵

*I want my children to know what I stood for. I want everybody to remember me as a person who fought injustice.*⁶

Photo

Still searching

Endnotes

¹ “AAJA receives \$100,000 endowment: Dallas neurologist wants donation to aid diversity,” *AAJA Link*, Asian American Journalists Association, Aug. 10, 2002, online <http://www.aajalink.com/news/0809/endowment9.shtml> (May 24, 2005).

² Sam Chu Lin, “Proud to be Korean American,” *Asian Week*, Jan. 10-16, 2003, online http://www.asianweek.com/2003_01_10/feature_proud.html (May 24, 2005).

³ Information in this paragraph from Ibid; also from Susan Schrock, “Suzanne Ahn, neurologist, community activist, 51,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 23, 2003, online <http://www.dfw.com/mld/startelegram/news/local/6150662.htm> (May 24, 2005); and Lance LaPine and Sharon LaPine, “Remembering Suzanne: Dr. Suzanne Ahn Hays, 1952-2003,” *Asian Beat*, <http://www.asianbeatnews.com/media/publications/read.asp?ArticleID=166> (May 24, 2005).

⁴ Sam Chu Lin, “Proud to Be Korean American,” *Asian Week*, Jan. 10-16, 2003, online http://www.asianweek.com/2003_01_10/feature_proud.html (May 24, 2005); “AAJA Receives Largest Donation to Date,” Asian American Journalists Association press release, August 9, 2002, http://www.aaja.org/news/releases/020810_donation/ (July 15, 2005).

⁵ Sam Chu Lin, “Proud to Be Korean American,” *Asian Week*, Jan. 10-16, 2003, online http://www.asianweek.com/2003_01_10/feature_proud.html (May 24, 2005).

⁶ Ibid.