

Biography of Venancio “Ven” Lim Tan

By
Charles W. Paige
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Venancio “Ven” Lim Tan was born in 1945—the eighth of twelve children born to parents Sec Lay and Kiet Lim Tan at Imbang Barrio, Silay City, on the Philippine island of Negros. He was born during the waning days of World War II in the same bed that also hosted the birth of all his siblings. During that time his family was living in an outlying barrio to avoid Silay City itself, which was occupied by the Japanese. A little more than a month earlier General Douglas MacArthur had fulfilled a promise by landing on the Philippine island of Luzon.

Ven’s grandfather Vivencio Tan Kit (“Kit” meant he was adopted by the Tan family) emigrated from Fukien Province, China, to Silay City about 1903 in search of employment.¹ He was fifteen years old. Vivencio became a brick layer, carpenter, and architect, started a lumberyard, and with his own crew built a number of prominent homes and other structures including part of the base for the local San Diego Catholic Church. Because he built the local theater, the Tan grandchildren grew up with unlimited free admittance to movies.

When Ven was about three years old his father took him, his mother, and three of his siblings to China, where the father left them and returned to the Philippines. Ven’s Tan Kit grandparents had returned to China some years before and were living in the stately mansion Vivencio had built, but they were lonely and wanted some family to come live with them.

Ven had not been in China more than a year when, in 1949, Mau Tse Tung’s communist army defeated that of the legitimate, non-communist government led by Chung Kai Shek. The non-communist government was forced to flee mainland China and set up at Taiwan, and Ven’s father returned to China just long enough to retrieve his family. The grandparents remained in China as the Bamboo Curtain fell.

Ven grew up in a household where Chinese languages and culture took first priority in the children’s teaching. Besides learning Mandarin and Fukienese—used by the family at home and

¹ Ven was named after his grandfather, who had chosen a Christian first name to be more in-line with his Silaynon neighbors, but public records incorrectly spelled the name “Vivencio.” Previously he had been known simply as Tan Kit. For additional information about Vivencio Tan Kit, see article *One family, one city* by Rina Jimenez-David, published on page A11 of the May 30, 2006 issue of the Philippine *Daily Inquirer*.

known by most Chinese people in the Philippines and Taiwan—Ven also learned Tagalog (the dialect used in Manila and espoused as the Philippines national language), some Spanish, and English. He also picked up Ilongo, the local dialect. The family was now in the mercantile business, so most of Ven's formative years were spent either in school, tending the family general store in Silay City, or at the movie theater.

In those days Chinese people were not allowed to become Philippine citizens, and only Philippine citizens were allowed to own land, so the Tan family could only lease property for their stores and houses. It wasn't until the 1980s that the citizenship restriction was lifted. At that time a number of Ven's siblings became Philippine citizens, but by then Ven was already a citizen of the United States of America, which occurred March 5, 1982.

Ven became interested in photography after graduation from college and during his years of working in Manila in the textile industry. It was in Manila that he bought his first camera and attended his first photography class—around 1973-74. The camera was a 35mm Nikon Nikomat with assorted lenses. The pictures he took until 2000 were with this camera. In 2000 the Nikomat finally wore out, so while in New York City for the US Open Tennis Tournament Ven purchased a Nikon N90S with 300x telephoto lense. Once again he was “off to the races,” so to speak.

Ven immigrated to the United States in 1975, settling in Los Angeles County. Between 1975 and his employment at Xerox Corporation in 1981 Ven tried his hand at an assortment of hobbies. He took classes in working with stained glass, food preparation, acrylic painting, and even real estate. However, it was his photography classes—black & white and color film developing and printing—that stuck with him and he has used the most. It was later, when attending photography classes at Pasadena City College, that he became interested in collage work, especially inspired by viewing a David Hockney exhibit of collages at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Over the years Ven has found much grist for his photographic mill. Following are some of the states, countries, events, and points of interest that have consumed vast quantities of film, attention, time and other resources during and after USA and world travels.

California, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Washington state, South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan, New York, Washington, DC, etc. India, Nepal, Philippines, Mainland China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, Fiji Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Europe (twice), Canada. Tournament of Roses parades; Hollywood Halloweens; Hearst Castle; Bryce Canyon; Yosemite; Grand Canyon; bad lands; Mt. Rushmore & Crazy Horse monuments; Devil's Tower; New York City, Harlem, Manhattan; Mumbai (Bombay), Taj Mahal, temples, Ganges River; Mt. Everest; Banff; sports figures: renowned tennis players at US Open and other tournaments; etc.

Some of Ven's secrets for creating beautiful and intriguing photographs and collages include: patience and an excellent eye for composition before the shutter is clicked; patience and an excellent eye for the best composition, color and contrast during the picture-printing process, which he mostly performs himself; patience and an excellent eye for the variety of effects possible in the collage-building process, in which he is ever expanding his catalogue of techniques; and his patience and excellent eye in finding just the right frame for each completed work, whether simple photograph or complicated collage.

Although Ven has called Los Angeles County, California, his home since immigrating in 1975, he suddenly became a member of the New York City community on September 11, 2001, when he witnessed the destruction of the Twin Towers firsthand from his vantage on the Brooklyn Bridge. He had spent much of the day before photographing at the Towers, including a selection of angles and reflections, and was in the process of using up the last of his film before returning to California when he was thrust into the 9-11 historical events. Though he snapped several rolls of pictures that day and during the extra week he was forced by circumstances to remain in the city, the experience's residual trauma kept him from developing the film and making prints for another year. Since then he has created his series titled "Before, During and After," an important part of his varied, vast and growing collection of works.

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Collage: **André Agassi**