



## Brian Chang

November 4, 1956 - September 19, 2023

Brian Tiehan Chang, 66, died peacefully at home in Prior Lake, MN on September 19th surrounded by his beloved wife Rene Chang, daughters Natalie and Melanie, and his loving sisters, TieYing Zhang and TieWei Zhang. He is also survived by a third sister, TieRong Zhang, who lives in China, and nieces and nephews. He is preceded in death by his parents, Yu Lan Zhu and Zi Zhen Zhang. Brian succumbed after a spirited fight against a rare cancer, to which he brought the determination, resourcefulness and hope that saw him through other daunting challenges in his remarkable life. A man of rare talent, intelligence and charisma, Brian will be mourned, remembered, and celebrated by family and friends around the world.

Nicknamed "The Energizer Bunny" for his drive, diligence and energy, Brian had an exceptionally eventful career. A graduate of Changsha Railway College (BA) and the University of Minnesota (MBA), he worked as a grain merchant at Cargill and as a high-flying financial analyst at both SoftBank and Alliance Capital. But Brian was too restless and entrepreneurial to only be a company man. He invested in several businesses, including a car dealership and a lumber company. Before immigrating to America from China, Brian was a translator and teacher. After becoming a US citizen, he would return to China to help build a Radisson Hotel and manage a gas pipeline project. He was also a business consultant and member of the US China Business Council, who led delegations of Chinese executives and officials to the US,

and brought American missions to China, including that of then Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura. He traveled so frequently and so far that he earned rare status as a member of Delta Airlines' 1 million mile club.

Somehow, Brian also found time to teach popular Chinese cooking classes in the Twin Cities and lead seminars in the Executive MBA program at National Taipei University, commuting from Minneapolis to Taipei every week to teach his modules. As he contemplated a wine export venture to China, Brian decided he needed to learn more about the business, so he spent a week in Napa Valley where he crushed grapes with his feet and cultivated his palate, developing a love of Cabernet Sauvignon in the process. In his last year, while battling cancer, Brian wrote his autobiography in flawless English.

And what a life it was. Brian was born in 1956 in the northern Chinese port city of Tianjin seven years after the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war. Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tianjin - then known as Tientsin - had been a "treaty port" forcibly opened to Western trade following the Opium Wars, with European "concessions", communities, and architecture, including a cathedral built from bricks imported from France. Brian's father had migrated to Tianjin to escape famine in his native Shandong Province, begging for food on his journey northwards. Brian's parents were married on the very day they were introduced. They named their first of four children, and only son, Tie-han, which literally means "Iron Man" in Chinese.

Brian's childhood was profoundly marked by the political turmoil of Mao Zedong's China. During the Cultural Revolution, his father was hounded from his job and forced to clean latrines because he had once worked as an accountant for the Nationalists, the former ruling party. The family was poor - all six slept in a single bed in a one-room apartment - and Brian often went to bed hungry. And yet his parents made enormous sacrifices to provide for their children and always found a way to make the Lunar New Year seem magical,

with a feast of dumplings and lighting the traditional firecrackers. Brian made his parents proud by being an exceptional student who was always at the top of his class. But after finishing high school in 1974, he was one of millions of urban youths who were forcibly sent to the countryside to "learn from the peasants", and Brian spent two long years working punishing days of hard labor in a farming commune.

Education, and especially his love of English, would be Brian's ticket out of the commune and, ultimately, to America. Brian, who had started studying English in middle school, continued with his studies on the farm, listening to the strident English language broadcasts on Radio Peking on a transistor radio his father spent half a month's salary to buy him. He persevered despite the endless teasing of the farmers who called him a "lunatic" and said, "You don't need English. Are you going to speak English to a cow?"

But Brian's determination and self-belief would pay off. After Mao died in 1976, the national college entrance exam, which had been curtailed during the Cultural Revolution, was reinstated. Brian was one of only 5% who successfully passed the highly competitive test and gained admission to the foreign languages program at Changsha Railway College in Hunan Province, where he majored in English. His success in studying the language led to work as a translator for foreign visitors to China, including a fateful meeting with Andre Gillet, a French-born Minneapolis business executive. Mr. Gillet was so impressed, he helped Brian gain a scholarship to the University of Minnesota and immigrate to the US in 1984, and the two remained close friends for the rest of Brian's life.

Brian was an old-fashioned romantic who realized long-held dreams by marrying Rene and raising two brilliant children together in Edina, Minnesota. He invested himself deeply in his daughters' upbringing, cheering them on in

swim meets and piano recitals, taking them on horizon-expanding trips, and lovingly supporting them through life's challenges. Brian was also a caring brother, who helped all three of his sisters immigrate to North America and supported them and their children to build lives in Canada and the US.

Gregarious and funny, Brian was a born storyteller. He laughed easily and often, and punctuated his tales with perfectly timed jokes or insightful Chinese aphorisms. He made devoted friends everywhere he went, nurturing his friendship through good times and bad, often over memorable meals. A gourmand and gourmet, Brian was a talented chef who loved to entertain in his Edina home. He also loved visiting friends, grocery bags in hand, to cook them Chinese feasts. Among the friends to whom Brian was especially devoted were Andre Gillet and Mary McQuillan, whom Brian met as a student volunteer in Minneapolis. Grandma Mary, as he came to call her, inspired Brian through her devotion to enriching the lives of others. And this was a gift which Brian passed on to all who were fortunate enough to know him, and for which he will always be remembered. He will always be loved and deeply missed by his family and friends.

In lieu of flowers please consider a donation in Brian's memory to Cancer Legal Care (online [cancerlegalcare.org](http://cancerlegalcare.org) or by mail 3503 High Point Dr., Suite 270, Oakdale, MN 55128) Visitation Thursday, Oct 5, 4-7 PM and Celebration of life Friday, Oct 6, 11 AM with visitation one hour prior to service. Both at: Washburn-McReavy.com Edina Chapel 952-920-3996 West 50th St. & Hwy 100.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

OCT **5.** 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Edina Chapel  
5000 West 50th & Highway 100  
Edina, MN 55436

## Chapel Service

OCT **6.** 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Edina Chapel  
5000 West 50th & Highway 100  
Edina, MN 55436

# Tribute Wall

“*Brian was more than a friend; he was a force of nature—a person of extraordinary strength, energy, and impact, much like the immense power found in natural elements. Affectionately known as “the energizer bunny” by his colleagues, in China, he was the Iron-Man (Tie-Han). It was under this moniker that I first addressed him, during my time as one of his college English teachers in China. The name ‘Iron-Man’ embodied Brian’s personality, encapsulating his heroic journey through life and his remarkable achievements.*

*Raised by resilient and loving parents, Brian’s early years were marked by poverty, malnutrition, and the socio-political upheaval that robbed him of a conventional childhood and a normal education. Yet, it was this adversity that steeled his resolve to strive for success and happiness—for himself, his family, and the communities he touched.*

*In the late 1970s, Brian stood among the vanguard of Chinese youth seizing the opportunity for higher education as China emerged from the shadows of the Cultural Revolution that shut down schools and universities for more than a decade. He toiled in the fields by day and studied English by night and entered college by passing very competitive entrance exams, demonstrating not only foresight and ambition, but also intellect and discipline. The same fine qualities carried him to graduate studies in the United States, where, despite facing enormous challenges in quantitative subjects and foreign status, he earned his MBA from the University of Minnesota. This hard-won degree served as a key that unlocked doors to vast professional prospects.*

*As a sought-after consultant and partner for numerous American and Chinese businesses, Brian’s intellect was only matched by his pragmatism, his optimism tempered by discipline, and his pride humbled by a genuine sense of self. Each time he passed through New Jersey on his way to New York City, he made time for my family, allowing us to relive our college days and share stories of work, family, and life. His wisdom and down-to-earth nature always*

*left me in awe.*

*While Brian was unwavering in his professional pursuits, he remained gentle at heart—a devoted husband, father, and brother. Even in the face of sickness and the specter of mortality, he dedicated himself wholeheartedly to his family's well-being. He was of course blessed that they loved him back. His legacy, one of both material success and boundless love, friendship, and generosity, will endure for generations to come. Brian, rest in peace. You will always live in our hearts and minds.*

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**Chao-Chuan Chen** - October 05, 2023 at 06:05 PM

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“ From: Chen, Ren and Ken planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Brian Chang.

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**Chen, Ren and Ken** - October 02, 2023 at 09:37 PM

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“ Chen, Ren and Ken purchased the Magnificent Life Spray for the family of Brian Chang.



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**Chen, Ren and Ken** - October 02, 2023 at 09:37 PM