

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Alfred E. Lee Interview Number: 46
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 2
 Date of Interview: 2/17/79, 1/16/80 Length: 54 Minutes
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Rodney H. Chow

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape No.	Side
			<u>1</u>	<u>A</u>
1	000-016	My parents were both from here. Dad was from San Francisco and mother was from Apicamp in California near the Oregon border.		
	017-023	Both of my parents are from Southern China. We speak Sze Yup. My mother was born in 1891. I don't know when my dad was born. His records were lost in the 1906 fire in San Francisco.		
	024-031	I was born in 1910. My parents had two children, my brother and myself. My brother passed on in 1961. My father did a little of everything when he first came to this country, like carpentry. He tried to become a dental technician. A fellow by the name of Dr. Alfred E. Blake was instrumental in giving dad the opportunity to learn to become an apprentice dentist.		
2	032-044	I do not know how much formal education my father had but he was able to do enough dentistry and technical work so that we could survive as a family.		
	045-050	Most of his dental patients were Chinese.		
	051-057	I went to school in Los Angeles. I attended the Sixteenth Street Grammar School. I attended _____ Junior High School and Los Angeles High School. I went to the University of Southern California's Dental School in 1932.		
	058-059	There were five or six other kids in Dental School from Hawaii. One claimed to be Chinese, one claimed to be part Japanese, two were Japanese and two were Hawaiian.		
	060-068	I practiced dentistry from 1933.		
3	069-070	I married Holly Rose Leong in 1936 (her actual surname is Tom).		

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	071-079 080-082 083-094 095-100 101-115	My wife has had no outside career. We have four children. Our oldest daughter is a science teacher at Venice High School. Our son is a math teacher in Montebello. Our second daughter is married and living at Fort Bragg. Our youngest daughter is getting her Masters of Science at UCLA. She has been interviewing with Phillips Oil in Bartsville, Oklahoma and Disneyland. My mother lives with us and we take care of her. Our son also lives with us. I speak both Chinese and English with my parents. I have spoken only English at home with my children because I believe that our basic language should be English and that we should be able to enunciate English clearly in order for my children to have better opportunities in the U.S. It is better that we learn different languages from different people.
4	116-118 119-124 125-126 127-131 132-146	My mother speaks both Chinese and English. My wife speaks to her mother in English but her mother speaks only Chinese. It was a case where both understood both languages but spoke only in the one which they could more easily express themselves. My wife's family used Chinese herbs. Her father was a herbalist. One of my daughters was a mousketeer at Disneyland in 1957.
5	147-161 162-167 168-219	Our daughters, Virginia and Sharon were called the Lee sisters. They were involved in a few movies until they got married. One of our daughters was one of the first Miss Chinatown. Our children worked through an agent, Bessie Lew. She has been one of the few Chinese women to come out in the business world.
6	220-233	See that picture, that is Sharon in "A Chorus Line." She quit to go to Berkeley, from Berkeley she went to England, and now she is getting her Masters of Science degree. I don't know if she would ever go back on the stage.
7	234-248 249-252 253-275	Virginia now has two children. She has been working on and off but now has a dance school of her own. Pricilla was born on November 10, 1940, Warren on September 21, 1944, Virginia in October, 1946 and Sharon was born in 1953. Virginia started acting in the movies when she was seven or eight years old. The youngest, Sharon, started in the movies when she was three years old.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	276-280	Bessie (daughters' agent) was always watching Virginia but was looking for a certain "type." At the time Sharon was taking dancing lessons and that is how she got started. The girls had a little act and appeared in night clubs in Las Vegas, The New Frontier Hotel.
	281-297	
END OF TAPE 1		
1	000-016	I was born in Los Angeles. We were one of the few families who lived among the white neighborhoods. All of our children's education is in Los Angeles, except our youngest who went to Berkeley (University of California). Sixteenth Street School was a mostly white school. We were one of the first families that moved away from the oriental neighborhood. (We lived in a rented house.) Sixteenth Street School was on 16th and Grand, it is now Frank Wiggins Trade School.
	017-035	
2	036-041	I played with mostly white kids, there were also a couple of Chicano kids. The children accepted us as equals. Kids don't discriminate. The higher in education a person gets the more discrimination one encounters. It all depends on the attitude. When we were young our parents forced us to learn Chinese because our faces would always distinguish us as being different.
	042-065	
		I went to Chinese school at night after public school. Three hours each day and half days on Saturday afternoon. It was a private school in Chinatown with about thirty or forty students. The age bracket in the school varied. Since we did not speak Chinese as well as some of the other students, we were given some consideration by the school.
3	077-078	I spent about five years in Chinese school. I do not read or write too well in Chinese but I can speak though. I do not speak specifically Sze Yup but colloquially. I lived at 1454 or 04 Palm Street near the California Lutheran Hospital. I was born there.
	079-091	
	092-101	My father was practicing in Los Angeles as a dental technician since 1906 or 07 after the San Francisco earthquake, when he left San Francisco.
	102-117	
		I lived at Palm Street until 1927 when I went to Los Angeles High. Then we moved to 4226 Denker Avenue. I lived there until I was married. These places were ethnically white.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	118-142	I lived on Denker Avenue about 10 to 12 years. I played with mostly white kids, then little by little the neighborhood became integrated. A few Chinese families began moving in.
5	143-155	My playmates as a child were mostly white kids.
	156-164	When I was married I lived on 4503 La Salle in 1933 or 1934, I do not remember, maybe 1935.
	165-172	I lived there about 10 or 15 years.
	173-175	Yes, I feel completely at ease in the company of whites.
	176-182	I differentiate between Chinese only from the standpoint of where they came from and if they have different philosophies and attitudes different from mine.
	183-185	During World War II I volunteered my service to the State Guard as a dentist. But because they felt I was more valuable to the State Guard as a whole, and I had to enter the Armory Building, which one could not get into without a uniform, so I was given one. The local people in the State Guard had no uniforms.
6	186-212	I served in the dental medical corps from (3 1/2 years) early 1942 to 1947 approximately.
	213-218	I got interested in dentistry because of my father who was a dental technician.
	219-220	My father got into dentistry from Dr. Alfred Blake.
	221-228	My father worked in his own lab. My brother was also a dentist and my father worked for both of us.
7	229-240	At that time, 1932 to 1933, the oriental people were not able to go to American parts of town and explain what was wrong because of language communications.
	241-248	I have experienced this difficulty an awful lot since graduating dental school because I worked with Mexican patients. I took over the Methodist Clinic in 1934.
	249-250	The Clinic was open to the public. The poor people would go to the Church for help and the Church would accept these people. They charged them 50¢ and we did everything. The Church donated the material and I donated my service (to Mexican patients).
	251-263	My patients were mostly Chinese and some Mexican. My office was in the plaza area of Los Angeles Street and Sunset Boulevard. I was there about 12 to 13 years.
	264-279	My patients came to me by word of mouth.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	280-289	The Chinese were not too aware of hygiene. The biggest problem with Chinese was gum trouble. Before World War II dentistry in general was not too popular. Since then, after World War II, dentistry boomed.
	290-300	During World War II it was learned that 95% or more of the people had dental problems.
	301-312	When I was in the army I was in a field team and the drill was run by a foot pump.
	313-340	There were one or two dentists (Chinese) who had learned their trade by apprenticeship back in those days. I had gone to the University of Southern California and passed the State Board.
9	341-368	Dentistry has not been in high a status as medicine prior to World War II. Since World War II it has changed (in general).
	369-423	My income level was lower than the other professions because my practice was with the lower income level. There was discrimination in the white neighborhood, which did not allow me to practice in those areas.
10	424-470	I feel I was a success in that I was able to raise a successful family.

END OF TAPE 2

- Blake, Alfred E., 1A:1; 1B:6
- Chinese schools
 hours spent in, 1B:2
 location of, 1B:2
 students in, 1B:2
 years spent in, 1B:3
- Dentists and Dental work, 1A:1-2;
 1B:3,5-10
- Discrimination
 in education, 1B:2
- Education
 discrimination in, 1B:2
- English language
 importance of, 1A:3
- Families and family life
 language spoken in, 1A:3-4
- Friendships
 with other ethnic groups, 1B:
 2,4-5
- Herbal medicine, 1A:4
- Housing patterns
 in integrated neighborhoods,
 1B:1,3-4
- Lee, Alfred E.
 birth of, 1A:1; 1B:1,3
 children of, 1A:3,4-8; 1B:1
 courtship and marriage of, 1A:3;
 1B:5
 education of, 1A:2; 1B:1,2-3,8
 employment of, 1B:6-7,8-10
 father of, 1A:1-2,6
 friendships of, 1B:2,4-5
 language spoken by, 1A:3,4; 1B:3
 military service of, 1B:5-6,8
 mother of, 1A:1,3,4
 residences of, 1B:1,3-4,5
 siblings of, 1A:1
- Lee, Holly Rose, 1A:3
- Los Angeles High School, 1A:2; 1B:3
- Methodist Clinic, 1B:7
- Military, 1B:5-6,8
- Movie industry
 Chinese Americans in, 1A:5-6,
 7-8
- Occupation patterns
 among women, 1A:3
- San Francisco Fire, 1A:1
- Sixteenth Street Grammar School,
 1A:2; 1B:1
- Sze Yup dialect, 1A:1; 1B:3
- Teachers and teaching, 1A:3
- University of California, Los
 Angeles, 1B:8
- University of Southern Califor-
 nia, 1A:2; 1B:8
- Women
 occupation patterns among, 1A:3