

Tape 1 Side A

- 1 015 Q: Auntie Gee, please tell me your name.  
A: My name is Oak Yip Gee  
Q: Where do you live?  
A: I live in Monterey Park ???, number ???
- 020 Q: Auntie Gee, where did your father live in China?  
A: My father was born in Australia.  
Q: Oh, he was born in Australia. What kind of business was he in?  
A: The restaurant business.  
Q: He was in business in Australia?  
A: Yes, in Australia.  
Q: How come your father was born in Australia?  
A: My father's mother was an Australian woman. My grandfather married her.  
Q: How old are you this year?  
A: I'm 76 this year.  
Q: So what year were you born? Can you remember?  
A: I can't remember.  
Q: Where is your hometown?
- 030 A: In Wing Hing Li , in Dikhoi township.  
Q: In Toisan? In Szeyup?  
A: In Toisan, Szeyup.  
Q: Were you born there.  
A: Yes, I was born there.  
Q: What language did you speak in your hometown?  
A: Szeyup dialect.  
Q: When you were living in your hometown, could you understand Cantonese?  
A: No.  
Q: Where did you go to school?  
A: In my own village.  
Q: Oh, in your village?  
A: Yes, in our village.  
Q: How many years did you study?  
A: 4 years.  
Q: Then you must have studied many books.  
A: A few.  
Q: Did you ever work back in your hometown?  
A: No.  
Q: Your family had money, so you didn't have to work?  
A: That's right.  
Q: How many sisters do you have?  
A: I have 8 sisters.
- 2 040 Q: How many brothers?  
A: 3 girls and 5 boys, a total of 8.  
Q: That's quite a large family, isn't it?  
A: A very large family.

Q: Were you the oldest or the youngest?  
A: I'm the youngest.  
Q: Besides going to school for a few years, what else did you do back in your hometown?  
A: I didn't do anything else.  
Q: What did you do at home?  
A: There wasn't much to do at home, so I only sometimes wove a few things.  
Q: Did you help your mother with chores?  
A: No, because there were servants at home.  
Q: Oh, so you only did some handicrafts at home and played, is that it?  
A: Yes.  
Q: How old were you when you got married?  
050 A: I got married when I was 17 years old.  
Q: Oh, 17. Where did you meet Uncle Gee?  
A: I didn't know him. We were introduced by someone in our hometown. After we were introduced, we met at the town market, we met in Dikhoi township.  
Q: How old was Uncle at that time?  
A: He was 30 then.  
060 Q: When you and Uncle got married, did you have an old-style or a new-style wedding?  
A: It was new-style, called a "civilized wedding."  
Q: Oh, new style? A civilized wedding?  
A: Yes, it was a ceremony with a ??? on my head.  
Q: ????  
A: ????  
Q: Were your parents there at the time?  
A: Yes, they were.  
Q: How long after your wedding did you leave home?  
A: We came together to the U.S. 6 months after the wedding.  
Q: When you came to the U.S., where did you go?  
3 070 A: To Los Angeles. We arrived in San Francisco and came to Los Angeles.  
Q: When you came, were you detained by the Immigration authorities?  
A: Yes, but they didn't detain me for long, just 2 weeks.  
Q: Oh, 2 weeks. What was the name of the place where you were detained?  
A: It was called ????, that is, Angel Island.  
Q: Did you feel comfortable during those two weeks?  
A: Oh, it wasn't very comfortable. The food wasn't very good, and the place wasn't very good.  
Q: Do you know what the situation on Angel Island was like?  
080 A: The situation on Angel Island? They locked me up as if I were in jail. They wouldn't let you out the door and they wouldn't let you see the outside. But after dinner, the one called "mama" would take us all around the garden.  
Q: How many times a day did you visit the garden?  
A: Once, just once at night.

Q: How did you spend you time on Angel Island?  
A: We would sit together in a group and just talk and chat.  
Q: Wasn't it hard to pass time that way?  
A: The whole day passed very slowly.  
Q: Did they teach you to read in there?  
090 A: No.  
Q: About how many people were there that time?  
A: Many, they were counted by the hundred, including men and women.  
Q: Were you divided up, men on one side, women on the other side? ????  
A: We were divided up, men on one side, women on the other.  
Q: Did the other women find it hard? In Angel Island?  
A: Some who knew found it hard. Some who played mahjong would be happy.  
Q: Do you know how long some of the people there stayed?  
A: There was someone who had been there for 2 whole years. Later I heard that she gave the wrong testimony and was sent back. Quite a few were sent back that way.  
100 Q: How did you feel when you saw people sent back like that?  
A: I felt very worried, because I didn't know what would happen to me.  
Q: Why did you want to come to the U.S.?  
A: Oh, my husband wanted me to come, so of course I'd come.  
Q: So after you went to San Francisco, you came to L.A.?  
A: As soon as we got to San Francisco, we came to L.A.  
Q: After coming to L.A., can you remember what Uncle did in L.A.?  
A: He was a cook. It was very difficult. Sometimes whites would hire him. Chinese wouldn't hire.  
Q: Why wouldn't Chinese hire help?  
110 A: Because the Chinese only had 2 restaurants, and they'd ask their own relatives to work.  
Q: Oh, because there used to be few Chinese?  
A: Yes, so Chinese restaurants hired their own relatives to work and didn't hire other people.  
Q: Then when Uncle was working as a cook in a Western restaurant, he must have known a lot of English?  
A: He knew some.  
Q: Did he often work for whites?  
A: Yes, he worked everywhere for whites. At that time he didn't have the capital to do anything himself.  
Q: Uncle was working for others then as a cook. What did you do at home?  
A: At that time I had a baby, so I stayed at home to take care of the baby.  
120 Q: When did Uncle go into business for himself?  
A: The war broke out in 1940. In 1942 he started opening the restaurant.  
Q: Auntie Gee, you came to the U.S. around nineteen-what?  
A: I came to the States in 1923.

Q: Oh, you came to the States then. When Uncle opened a restaurant himself, did you go help him?  
A: Yes.  
Q: Where did he rent the place?  
A: On Los Angeles Street.  
Q: On Los Angeles Street here?  
A: Yes, here in Los Angeles.  
Q: Was business at the restaurant good?  
A: Yes, business was good, because the war was going on then, ???, all went to ???, so business was good.  
Q: Then the restaurant was very close to ???  
A: It was very close to ???  
Q: Then did you go down to help Uncle?  
A: Yes, the whole family helped, because during the war it was very hard to find hired help. Like dishwashing -- if she said she wouldn't do it, she'd take off the apron and leave, so you'd have to do it yourself. So our sons and daughters, we all helped out together.  
Q: Then you could make some money at that time?  
A: We made money, and later we opened a second restaurant.  
Q: How long did you have this restaurant on Los Angeles Street, Auntie Gee?  
A: We had it for 10 years.  
140 Q: Oh, 10 years?  
A: Yes.  
Q: Then why did you stop running that restaurant?  
A: Because that place had to be torn down to build a TV, they needed the whole street.  
Q: To build ??? TV?  
A: Yes, to build ??? TV.  
Q: So you had to move because the building was to be torn down?  
A: Yes, so we had to move.  
Q: Where did you move to?  
A: Then I moved to a household, because Uncle his ??? was in Chinatown running the second restaurant, so I moved to his place.  
Q: About how long did he work at the second restaurant?  
A: Uncle worked there for several decades.  
150 Q: So long?  
A: Yes, he worked there until he bought it himself.  
Q: Oh, he bought that entire building himself?  
A: He bought it himself.  
Q: Did you go help at the second restaurant?  
A: I didn't go help. He hired workers. Because there were shares, so it was forbidden to work there yourself.  
Q: You've left China for so many years now, have you ever gone back?  
A: I've gone back. I went back in 1930, and stayed in China 6 years. I didn't come back until 1938.  
Q: Why did you want to go back at that time?  
160 A: Because my children were young, and things were hard in

the U.S. There were no jobs, and sometimes there was hardly anything to eat. So Uncle suggested that I take the children back to our hometown in China, and bring them back later. That way we went back to visit for 8 years, and then the Japanese happened to start the war. They bombed Humen and Toiseng. Entry and exit was blocked then, so Uncle wrote and told us to go to Hong Kong immediately. That's how we went to Hong Kong, and later we came back.

Q: Were all your children born in China?

170 A: They were born in the U.S.

Q: They were born here, but went back to live in China for 6 years?

A: Yes, they went back to live for 6 years. That's why my children know Chinese, and they've studied it.

Q: So a total of 8 of you went back to your hometown?

A: Yes. At that time there weren't 8 of us, there were 6. I brought 4 back, and when I was back in China another one was born. My youngest son wasn't born until I went back to the U.S. I have a total of 6 children.

Q: 6 children. What did you do back home during these 6 years?

A: There wasn't anything to do except take care of the children. Back home the water disagreed with me, and we often got sick.

Q: The children got sick or you did?

180 A: The children got sick and I did too, because the water was no good.

Q: But you had money then, so you didn't have to do anything, right?

A: I didn't have to work, I just took care of the kids at home. Because back home, I couldn't work even if I wanted to. We had no land, we didn't have anything.

Q: Did you have a lot of houses back home?

A: I had a large house at home. There was a half-house (?) and a room which were mine. They were all newly built.

Q: After going back to China then, did you ever go back at any other time?

6 190 A: I never went back to our hometown. It was 1956 or 196x? then.

Q: You went back around 1943, didn't you?

A: Yes.

Q: Please tell me more.

A: In 1976 I went back to Hong Kong.

Q: Did you go back with Uncle?

A: Yes, I went with Uncle.

Q: How long did you stay that time?

A: That time we only stayed 15 days.

Q: Do you still write to people back home?

A: We write.

Q: Do you still have relatives back home?

A: I have relatives, and also a sister-in-law there.

200 Q: Living in L.A. now, are most of your neighbors and friends Chinese or black?  
A: Chinese, they're all Chinese from back home.  
Q: Do you have any Mexican friends?  
A: No, and no whites. At home they're all Chinese, all one kind.  
Q: No, I'm asking about now in L.A.  
A: Now at the place where I live in L.A., ???, I have Mexican friends.  
Q: Do you have Chinese friends?  
A: Yes.

210 Q: Auntie Gee, do you feel that you're Chinese, or do you feel you've become Western? You've been in the U.S. so long.  
A: There's some Chinese in me no matter what.  
Q: Chinese, right?  
A: Yes.  
Q: Do you feel your children are more Chinese or American?  
A: I feel my children are more Chinese.  
Q: But they were all born in the States?  
A: They were born in the States, but they all went back home to study.

220 Q: Now, if you're sick, do you take Chinese or Western medicines?  
A: Western medicines.  
Q: Western medicines?  
A: Yes.  
Q: Why?  
A: Because I often use them. Once I felt dizzy, and my daughter-in-law took me to see a Western doctor. So I often go see Western doctors.  
Q: Nowadays at home, do you cook foods with Chinese herbs?  
A: Yes, like I use tonic herbs to cook oxtail. That's Chinese medicine.

7 230 Q: Besides cooking herbs with oxtail, do you take other things?  
A: Yes, like , birds' nests, sharks' fins, etc. I make soups with them.  
Q: What do you do for recreation? Play mahjong or watch ???  
A: I'm not interested in mahjong.  
Q: Then what are you interested in?  
A: I like to go swimming.  
Q: Where do like to go swimming? Out of town? or in Chinatown?  
A: I like to go to Chinatown. I mostly come out to Chinatown.

240 Q: Do you come out once a week from ??? to L.A.?  
A: Yes, I come out to L.A., as many as 3 or 4 times.  
Q: Do you know how to drive?  
A: I used to drive, I used to drive the car out. Now I don't drive, I go out in a taxi.

Q: Is it convenient to take a taxi?  
A: Very convenient.  
Q: Do you like to watch movies?  
A: Yes. Every week when they show movies, I always go to watch.  
250 Q: Do you like to watch Chinese movies or Western movies?  
A: I don't watch Western ones, but at home on TV, I often watch Western ones.  
Q: When you're in Chinatown, you watch Chinese movies?  
A: Yes, I watch Chinese movies.  
Q: Do you have any relatives in China now?  
A: Yes, I have a sister-in-law back home.  
Q: Oh, a sister-in-law.  
A: Yes.  
Q: Anyone besides her?  
A: Some nephews and nieces.  
Q: Do you write to her?  
A: Sometimes I write and send some money back.  
260 Q: Did you join the ??? Association in Los Angeles?  
A: No.  
Q: Why not?  
A: Why would a woman join it? There are no women in it.  
Q: Uncle, for instance, is very well-known in Los Angeles. Do you know of any other people who have done a lot in L.A.?  
A: People who've done a lot? In L.A.?  
Q: Yes, in L.A.  
A: Then of course it would be the CCBA>  
Q: The people in CCBA?  
A: The people in CCBA. They've done a lot for everyone. But I'm not sure who they are.  
Q: No, I'm just asking about their names.  
A: Those who've done things are already deceased.  
Q: Which Chinese in L.A. do you consider to be well-known?  
280 A: The most famous one used to be Wong ??? Chung  
Q: What about now, in your opinion?  
A: I'm not sure about now. This Lee ???  
Q: The head of the CCBA is called Lee Kam Won  
A: It's Lee Kam Won.  
290 Q: You've lived in Chinatown several decades. Before the war, what kinds of jobs did most Chinese have?  
A: Before the war, Chinese were poor and didn't own any businesses.  
Q: Then what did they do?  
A: What did they do? Sometimes they wrote keno tickets.  
Q: Did anyone open restaurants?  
A: There were only two.  
300 Q: Oh, two? Before the war?  
A: Yes, two. There were perhaps 2 or 3 laundries.  
Q: What were the wages of Chinese like?  
A: Some worked on farms, some drove produce trucks, some sold tea leaves door-to-door. Chinese didn't have real

jobs to do.

Q: Then how much did they make?

310 A: I don't know how much they made, I only know they sold produce door-to-door.

Q: If they made so little money then, did they have enough to live on?

320 A: They had enough to eat. We Chinese are thrifty, when we make a bit of money we won't squander it on food. Some men saved money and brought it back, that is, they opened a laundry and saved up their money. Then when the time came they would go back home. The men before lived a very hard life!

Q: Do you know if the Chinese lived together in Chinatown?

A: Yes, they lived together.

Q: Why did they like to live together?

A: Because they didn't know English.

Q: Were there any other reasons?

A: They didn't know English, and secondly the whites were forcing away the Chinese, so they might as well live together. There used to be a lot of anti-Chinese feeling.

Q: Wasn't it all-Chinese where you used to live?

A: No, it was all whites, and also many Mexicans.

Q: Why do you like to move to ??? to live?

A: I like it because it's near my sons.

Q: One of your sons lives out there?

A: All my sons are there, except for one son in

9. 340 The second son is in ???, and all the others are in ??? That's why I like to live near my sons. If anything happens it's easier for them to take care of it.

Q: Before, what did Chinese do with the money from their jobs and savings?

A: They saved to prepare to go back to China. When they went back they would buy land and fields.

Q: Did they ever keep it in the bank?

350 A: Before, people very seldom kept money in the banks. Between Chinese, if they trusted each other, they could entrust someone to take care of it, so that it was readily available.

Q: So if someone opened a store, he would keep it with his friends?

A: Yes, because he didn't speak the language, so there wouldn't be the inconvenience of going to the bank.

360 Q: Do you know anyone in Chinese-administered areas?

A: In Chinese-administered areas?

Q: Yes, who do you know there?

A: I don't know any, because they're at home, how would I know them?

Q: Do you feel that many Chinese here are always very concerned about China in their hearts?

A: Yes. Before, Chinese, always wanted to go back to China. Here, they didn't speak the language, and they

didn't know how to go out and shop for things. So they wanted to go back home. At home, they could grow some produce and they would have something to eat.

Q: Many Chinese never went back. What did they do? Did they send money back to their relatives?

A: If they couldn't go back home, they would send money to their relatives, if they had wives there.

(End of Tape 1 Side A)

Tape 1 Side B

000 Q: If they had wives back home, then they'd send it there. Do you know if there were many Chinese who never went back after coming to the States?

A: Yes, I know of a man named Fong who came to the States 3 months after getting married. He didn't go back until he was 80 years old.

Q: I wonder if his wife recognized him when he went back?

A: Of course she wouldn't. He liked to gamble, and lost all the money he'd made in port, so it was hard for him to live because he was old.

Q: The world is very ???, the American economy was in crisis, and what happened in Chinatown then?

010 A: Those Chinese who had families mostly went back home with their children. I, for example, was like that. After going back, we waited till the economy improved before coming back. Many children who were brought back grew up in their hometowns.

Q: About how much did a gold piece used to be worth in Chinese money?

A: Each one could be exchanged for around 20 yuan or so. No, a gold piece could be changed for a dollar, it wasn't of great value.

Q: They didn't have that there. I'm talking about back home.

A: Oh, you mean back home. 1 piece of gold was worth 2. That's what my husband said at the time.

Q: That's when you went back home?

A: When I went back, one piece of gold could be exchanged for 5 yuan 6 jiao.

Q: Then you had a lot of money to spend?

023 A: Yes, a gold dollar was worth 5 yuan 6 jiao.

023 Q: You said that in the U.S., if you were near whites, there would be a lot of anti-Chinese feeling. How did you feel about that? Did you feel comfortable with it?

A: Oh, when you come here and all your children are here, you can't do anything even if you feel uncomfortable.

Q: Then were you afraid of this anti-Chinese feeling or worried by it?

A: No.

Q: Why now?

A: Because the whites had no jobs for you and the Chinese

had no jobs for you, and you had several children. So you only worry about your own family. Your husband is the only one out working.

030 Q: At the time, did you think of going to the government to protest about the whites?

A: No. I didn't know how to do such things.

Q: Do you feel that Chinese in the States have done better and made better progress than blacks and Mexicans?

A: No matter how much progress has been made, it very ordinary.

Q: All you sons are doing very well now, aren't they?

A: All my sons are doing well.

2 040 Q: Do you feel that Jews have made faster progress than Chinese?

A: That's true. All the Jews are in business, and they have a ???, they're sure to have money.

Q: What do you mean by ???

A: That is, when they sell something, they always add a ".99" to it, that is, they're making money to the round numbers. Then they must have money, and they also add taxes. Before, there weren't taxes, they only started those after the war. When the war started they began to collect taxes.

050 Q: Were there many Chinese who opened restaurants when Uncle opened his?

A: When we opened our restaurant, there were people who owned restaurants and people who owned warehouses, because the Japanese had been locked up and had to sell their businesses.

Q: That was in 1940?

A: That was 1940, '41, '42. They were being locked up at that time, so everyone went to buy up the Japanese businesses. They were relatively cheap, so they bought them and ran them. It was only then that Chinese started to own businesses.

Q: Why did Uncle go into the restaurant business?

A: He was relatively familiar with kitchen work, he knew how to do that.

Q: Do you think it was good that he went into the restaurant business?

A: Yes, very good.

060 Q: Why was it good?

A: Because business was good. I went out and helped him buy things like meat. After buying them, I'd bring them back for him to work on. That way all our children could help out.

Q: I believe you could say that someone like Uncle was very successful. He made money and supported his family.

Why do you feel he was so successful in his work?

A: It was run as a family business. There would've been no way if he had to hire people to work for him. It was run family-style.

3 070 Q: Auntie Gee, what sort of people do you usually associate with in your free time?  
A: I very seldom pay social calls on other people.  
Q: You seldom pay social calls?  
A: Very seldom.  
Q: What are the responsibilities of being a ????  
A: The responsibilities are to arrange the tables every day, and then the waiters will set the tables. Then when the elderly arrive you help collect tickets. At that time ??? was working there, and everyone told me to help buy things, so I helped to buy things.

100 Q: Besides working on this nutrition program for the elderly, have you joined any other organizations?  
A: I've joined the Club for the Elderly .  
Q: Any other organizations?  
A: No, just that one group before. Now I've joined the Kwan Yick Club, and also the Kwan Ying Club.  
Q: So you have many activities, Auntie Gee?  
A: Yes, I always have activities to tend to.  
Q: Why did you want to work so hard for the nutrition program for the elderly?

4 110 A: Because I have free time at home, so I come out and serve the elderly. Whatever I can do, I do.  
Q: Auntie Gee, how many grandchildren do you have?  
A: 10 grandchildren.  
Q: What do you do at home?  
A: I knit a few things or sew some clothes.  
Q: Do you have a house with a garden?  
A: Yes. Sometimes I pull weeds and work in the garden, and that takes up the whole day.  
Q: Have you joined any associations?  
A: I've joined the Women's Club.  
Q: How long have you joined the Women's Club?  
A: The Women's New Movement , I've been in it for 30 or 40 years now.

080 Q: What does this club do?  
A: When it started it was for the country, like fund-raising, etc. We women went to raise funds. That is, during the war, we worked for China.  
Q: There are many elderly here in Chinatown. What kind of help do you give them?  
A: For these elderly, we come out and serve them.  
Q: What do you mean serve the elder? What do you do?  
A: At meal-times, we seat them, and help sell meal tickets, etc.

090 Q: 6 or 7 years ago, we started to have a nutrition program for the elderly. What did you do in the program?  
A: I started doing this kind of work, doing ???  
Q: Do your grandchildren study Chinese?  
A: My grandchildren haven't studied Chinese. They study English in a white neighborhood, there's no Chinese

class there.

Q: If they could study Chinese where they live, would you like them to do so?

A: Yes, I would, but only if they have the interest.

120 Q: Have your grandchildren ever said that they would like to learn Chinese, but couldn't because they live too far away?

A: No, they haven't.

Q: Do their mothers know Chinese?

A: All their mothers know Chinese, they know some Chinese.

Q: What do you and Uncle do at home in your free time?

A: We weed and plant flowers in the garden. Now we've planted some tomatoes, peppers and ???, and we've planted a lot of lettuce.

Q: Besides gardening, do you have other forms of recreation?

130 A: Besides gardening, we sometimes watch TV, and sometimes we go out.

Q: What do you usually do at home on Saturdays?

A: I clean house and pass the time. Sometimes our sons ask us over to ??? for dinner.

Q: Do you ever go to other towns with your children?

A: We don't travel, because they don't have time.

S 140 Q: Did you go before?

A: I've gone before with a daughter, to Hong Kong. I've gone back twice with a daughter, and once with Uncle.

Q: Why do you like to go to Hong Kong so much?

A: Because my daughter's ??? wants to come to the U.S., so she goes to get her over here.

Q: Auntie Bee, what else would you like to tell me about your life, about conditions in the U.S.?

A: Life has been difficult. I've sewn garments by day before, and at night I came over and opened a small laundry where I ironed clothing.

Q: How long did you do that?

A: For one or two years, and then we opened the restaurant on Los Angeles Street.

Q: That is, when you first came to the U.S.?

A: Not when I first got here. In 1938, after I came back to the U.S., I went to sew garments in a garment factory.

Q: So, you've sewn garments before?

A: I sewed them for several years.

Q: Have you ever been to ???

A: Not until later, in 1950.

Q: Is ??? yours?

160 A: No, it's rented, it's Chinatown's.

Q: You mainly sit in the ??? and collect money?

A: Yes, I collect money. A quarter, a quarter each, that's how I collect it.

Q: How long have you worked at ???

A: For 8 years.

Q: Oh, so long?

A: I've been there for 8 years.

Q: Did you make any money during these 8 years?

A: For 6 years it was my own, and I made a bit. The last 2 years I worked for other people. He bid for it and did it his way. There was no one he could hire, so he hired me and I helped him out.

170 Q: Do you remember how much it cost to win the bid for this ???

A: It took \$600, \$600 a month to get the bid.

Q: How big was it?

A: 75 or 76 cars.

Q: Oh, 75 or 76 cars?

A: Yes.

Q: Then how much did you make each month?

A: Each month, a quarter, a quarter, after deducting \$600, I had \$200 left.

180 Q: Is that the monthly average?

A: Yes. An average of \$200 or so each month.

Q: Then you done many things, Auntie Gee. What else how you done?

A: Many things, many things. I've been through a lot.

Q: What else?

A: I also been in restaurants, I've worked in a restaurant, and sewn clothing in a white business. I used to have a friend who worked there, and she took me there to work. I didn't know the language, yet I still went to work there.

6 190 Q: Anything else you'd like to say, Auntie Gee?

A: Nothing much.

(End of Tape 1 Side B)