SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Bernice Leung	Interview Number:	137
Chinese Name:	Number of Tapes:	3
Date of Interview: 12/11/80, 1/15/81	Length: 1 Hour &	54 Minutes
Interviewer: Jean Wong		
Others Present:		
Language: English		
Summarizer: Ann Lau		

Contents

Time	Counter	
Segment	Number	Summary Tape: 1 Side A
1	009-013	Bernice Leung's (BL) mother was born in Canton City. Her father was born in San Jose, New Alamedan, a silver mine town.
	014-016	Father, at the age of three, was taken back to China with his three sisters. He stayed in China until he was twelve.
	017-018	BL's father worked as a house boy for a number of years.
	018-021	Worked in a restaurant as a cook at the age of seventeen. It was a large restaurant in Fresno, California. He became a proficient cook and baker.
	022-024	When he earned enough money he decided to go back to China to get a wife. He was 28 years old when he married BL's mother she was about eighteen.
	025-026	BL believes they came back together since her father was a citizen of the United States.
	027-031	BL was born in Fresno, but was living in Selma at the time. Father thought Fresno had a better hospital. BL's older brother was born in Fresno, the other children were born in Selma, California.
2	032-033	At the time, the population was about seven thousand. There were no Chinese but a lot of Japanese.
	034-038	BL completed her education in Selma Union High School. Her younger brother and sister went to school in Fresno.
	039-041	BL did well in school, but was not inspired. She felt prejudice because they were the only Chinese family there. BL did not want to be Japanese.
	042-043	BL was born in 1917.
	044-046	After BL's father got married he opened a restaurant in Selma called the United States Cafe. He had four partners. He eventually bought them out.

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2	047-057	Then he went into the grocery business. It was a delicatessen which also sold take out foods, stews, salads, etc. There was a butcher shop on one side. BL's father had the other side. It had all sorts of things a grocery
		store would have. There was good business but BL's father was not a terribly good businessman. He allowed people who were not too wealthy to run up bills. Ended up without too much. BL's mother was better at business.
	058-064	He got into trouble and she got him out of it. It was a family business. They hired two Caucasian women and a Chinese person helped with the groceries. They loved BL's father.
3	065-068	BL's mother did all the hard work. She always sewed the children's clothes. Did not give her enough attention. She is still alive. BL's father never spanked the children. BL's mother did.
	069-070 071-081	BL's mother is about 85 years old today. BL's mother was anxious to learn English, she spoke English to the children. Mother was educated and taught school in China. Wanted to learn English, that is why the kids lost their Chinese. They did know some Chinese as youngsters but it all came back. The kids would respond in English and that was how her mother learned English. It was not terribly good, but her mother
	082-092	thought it was very good. All the children went through school. BL's father thought there was no future for his children and he was a bit concerned about them marrying Caucasians. BL's sister went out with a Caucasian boy, Charlie, to the Prom. Father told him he did not want him to take BL's sister out anymore.
	093-100	After the grocery business, one of BL's father's customers opened a first in-door golf course in the area and a restaurant. Father thought it was a great idea but indoor golf was not popular and the business went down. In 1934, the Depression hit very hard. Father found himself in debt, but he got himself out all right.
4	101-107	BL's family moved to a smaller place and opened another restaurant. Father said never to go into the restaurant business because once you get in you are stuck, no holidays, no fun. Prior to the grocery business, he would
·	108-110	take two weeks off and go to San Francisco. The children helped out at the restaurant, when the Depression hit they went to school part time. BL was not the best waitress, but she tried.

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4	111-118	The restaurant sold American food. BL's father was a good American cook. When they moved to a locality near a hotel, they did have chow mein and chop suey, maybe egg fu yung. At that second restaurant, it was mostly family help. BL and her brother, and her younger sister was in the back cooking with her father. BL's mother made the salads.
	119-129	After leaving Selma, because father felt there was no future, no Orientals, Chinese, and moved to Fresno. Father worked at a small restaurant but it had gambling. Father was not very happy, he was very strict about that, but it was something to keep the family going. After six months, he did not like it although they were good to him.
	130-133	He went to work at a grocery store with open doors. He caught double pneumonia.
	134-139	A friend asked him to go into a restaurant business. BL's mother did not want him to do it, so he went back into the restaurant business. Within six months he died of a heart attack. BL was 18 or 19 at the time.
5	140-143	Mother decided to pay off the house. Father had some insurance. Mother decided all the children should go to work.
·	144-149	BL's sister went to school. BL went to work at a restaurant. There was a bar next door and BL would peek in to see all those sinful people dancing. It does not bother BL today, but she was shocked then.
	150-152	BL's brother worked too and the two of them sustained the family for a while.
	153-159	Mother, during the summer, went to pack fish. A lot of Chinese ladies there. Mother was educated and not a very good mixer she had to come down a little bit.
	160-163	BL has two brothers and two sisters there are five children in all.
	164-174	Older brother is in the television business, he recently retired. Younger brother died of cancer two years ago. He was a school teacher at Bullard High School in Fresno,
		very well liked. School raised a considerable sum of money because they felt he had a great deal of medical expenses. They also dedicated a baseball game to him. They gave a party for him when they knew there was just
		no hope there was a large attendance. There was a beautiful article in the papers about him.
. 6	175-186	BL has a younger sister, the youngest, who is married to a pharmacist in Fresno. She is presently running

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6	175-186	a knit shop, a weaving shop. part of the weavers guild. BI She was married at sixteen.		_
	187-196	BL went to Selma School, first Roosevelt High up to eighth gr High School and graduated. BI hand, typing, because she was most useful skills.	rade, then to S L studied busin	Selma Union Sess, short
	197-208	BL went to Fresno. She knew of decided to go to Fresno Tech thand short hand.		
	209-225	BL's sister, Gladys, who is you got married and went to Los Ar	ngeles. BL dec	ided not to
		stay in that town so she moved visited Los Angeles before the accepted in Los Angeles. BL terribly Chinese. The people of Spanish decent. She resent get along with them anyway. It she did not get the same feel: she was all right.	at and liked it felt that she d in Fresno thou ted that and sh When she came t	She was loes not look light she was lie did not lio Los Angeles
7	226-230	BL worked for the Navy for about was drafted in World War II. Fresno to take care of her most except for her younger sister	She had to go ther. She was . So she went	back to the only one back to Fresno.
	231-232	In 1941 she came to Los Angele		
	232-233	She told her sister that "if the let me know because I wanted that as the boys come back."	_	_
	234-240	BL's brother-in-law was first studio. They recorded a lot of in for advertisements.		
	241-247	There was this older person who know if BL's brother-in-law	w, Paul, knew a	ny Chinese
		person who might want to work glamorous job. She was the or in "Gone with the Wind." So I tary for about two years.	ne who played C	ra Munson '
	248-257	She was building a house and so BL did not like to stay like to to New York on her yearly trip and told her that she was not did not want to live there.	that. So when p, BL wrote her coming back be	she went a letter ecause she

me was something like a lifetime companion, but that

just wasn't my thing."

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		and the sales of t	Tape:	l Side A
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Time	Counter			
Segment	Number	Summary		
7	258-267	BL worked for the civil service. It She worked for the United States Arm years. This was when her brother wa	y for abo	out five
	268-270	Then BL came back up here and worked of Agriculture for six months.		
8	271-277	She worked for Western Auto Supplies as a secretary. When she first went remembered there was a big discussion because they had never hired a Chine They were midwesterners. That was a 1947.	to work on among se perso	there, she the executives n before.
	278-289	The Western Auto Supplies Company wa and Grand. It was a miserly salary understand why they made such a big was not that good.	and BL c	ould not
	290-296	The man who hired BL had been expose His wife worked with Asians at Bank knew they were fairly good workers, told her about it. A girl coworker know they had a big meeting about yo "Oh my God, what for? It isn't very were paying me." BL felt it was rather rewarding becathese big wheels came by and asked here these girls who would like to work needed a new secretary. BL replied.	of Ameri so he hi told BL, ou?" BL much mo ause with ter if th ter for the	ca, so he red BL and "Did you replied, ney they in six months ey knew any m since they

coming to them. After that, they sold out.
297-303 BL had two offers to go someplace else. That was when she came to Mr. Hong, in 1953. In the interim, she had also worked for an engineering firm for about two years too. She had a personality clash there so she just

quit.

304-312 She found that if she worked in many Caucasian places during that time and she did just a little better, there would always be some enviousness and they would always try to undermine her in some way. BL did not think it happens anymore. Maybe it still does, but she does not know because she has not worked for a

kind of salary you offer." BL felt that they had it

Caucasian firm for a good many years.

313-327 BL speaks mostly English to her parents. She speaks
Chinese to her mother but her mother responds in English
since she wanted to learn English. To BL, Chinese was
the new language (it was Sum Yup). BL's mother wanted
to show off her English.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	328-339	Outside the home, that is, at work, it had to be strictly Chinese. BL answered the phone in English. But to all the customers who are Chinese, she speaks Chinese. This is at Savings and Loans. If BL is just conversing with somebody, it would be in English. English has been the
	340-344	most normal thing for BL, even when she was younger. BL lived on 31st Street when she first came to Los Angeles. It was an apartment on West 31st where her sister lived, near USC.
	345-348 349-352	BL got married and lived in the Cypress Park area. BL got married in 1947. Her husband's name is Elmer Eugene Leung.
	353-354	They lived in Cypress Park ever since they got married. They have no children.
	355-361	They had a restaurant business for many, many years After the business closed, her husband went to work for the post office for five years. He got sick.
10	362-383	The name of the restaurant was Soo Chow, right in Chinatown on Chung King Road. They close about ten years ago. Her husband had it before 1947, it was a family restaurant. BL helped out as a waitress and dishwasher. The whole family pitched in. Very cooperative.
	384-390	BL's mother-in-law was very straight laced really from the old school and very religious. BL thinks she did not approve of BL at first, but they got along well afterwards. She was a very nice person.
	391-395 396-419	BL's husband was born in Los Angeles. BL did not miss Selma at first. Now when she goes back to Fresno, she likes to stay there longer. She was glad to leave Selma. She thought there was prejudice all over. BL's father thought it was a wonderful place. To the children, they always felt it was prejudiced, maybe because they did not feel they really belonged. BL has gone back for a few class reunions. She still had the feeling that she did not really belong although the people were extremely nice.
11	420-468	BL feels more Chinese than American. Now, she feels very much Chinese. She speaks the language better than some of the Chinese. Her exposure at East West Savings and Loans is mostly to Chinese speaking people. Only about two or three of them are native born so BL finds it fun to communicate with them. They laugh at her, since she makes mistakes. They told her how to say

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	
11	420-468	was, it was about December,	speak so good Chinese." It she knows is apparently and her Chinese from her lied a calendar 日本代本, 12" She did not know what it so she said, " 京本 元文" asked what that meant. Elinore thing.
	469-477	BL still speaks Chinese to he answers in English. BL has respond to BL in Chinese. Buthan her mother does now.	er mother but she still never heard her mother .
END OF	SIDE A		
		TAPE 1 SIDE	В
1	001-007	BL's mother's English is not English. However, she reads	
	008-013	BL's maternal grandmother ta grandfather died when BL's m	ught the missionaries. Her
	014-031	When BL was very young, her children Chinese, but she go a period when BL and her sib were Chinese. In their mind Chinese — they thought Orie looking at the mirrors thems as strange looking. When th to think why they were not b hair. There were Danish peo Andersons, etc. Only a few dark hair. BL and her sibli eyes.	t discouraged. There was lings did not think they s, they did not think ntals looked funny. Not elves since they were just ey were little, they used orn with blue eyes and blond ple there, Christensons, Japanese and Mexicans with
2	032-049		well. Later on, when BL ironed out their differences. nese goodies, gin dui ()

of those things.

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Time Counter Segment Number Summary	
3 050-072 BL did not know how to use chopsticks even when quite old. She made an attempt at one dinner in aunt's house and came home determined to learn. used chopsticks at home but not proficient at it Basically eats rice.	her She
BL saw Chinese opera when they went to San France She thought it was terrible noisy, smoke, and threw shells (京子) around. Her father loved i bought the Chinese records. BL and her siblings not appreciate it before, now they do. They als Chinese movies and stage plays.	l people t and did
4 097-113 For recreation, they played at the ditch. BL's had bicycles and skates but not the girls. BL's brother was allowed to go to football games.	
There was no conflict with her parents as to whe they were Chinese or American. Father did not we children to go out with Caucasians. Had a very Caucasian friend but when they got to high school decided no longer to be friends.	ant the good
126-138 Parents did not use Chinese medicine. Used to v a family in Fresno on Sundays, the family used t this or that is bu (春草), this or 春草 that.	
5 139-172 BL worked for a herbalist on her first trip to I She worked for T. B. Chew for a year. The elder Chew. Mostly Caucasian patients. The office wa on Figueroa, it is still there. 5500 Figueroa S	T. B. as located
6 173-191 BL's family used Chinese condiments for cooking. husband uses Chinese medicine and goes to acupu for nerve problems.	
192-203 BL's mother's sister died and her mother died. Father died on ship and there was a storm and ne returned. No relatives in China. Father may st have relatives in China.	
204-213 Father sent money to sisters and mother sent money af died and stopped later on.	_
7 214-228 BL does not join family associations. She goes Chow (点中) only because her brother-in-law, is a member of the family association.	
229-236 Before the War, most Chinese engaged in the rest laundry business. Not that many herbalists.	aurant,

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	237-275	Income was low. When BL worked for T. B. Chew, she got \$10 a week. She worked in Fresno waiting on tables for ten dollars a week. It was considered a good salary. BL worked for T. B. Chew in 1940. Managed very well on that salary. Saved a thousand dollars when working for the Far East and lived at home. When she worked for the Army, her mother was given \$40 to spend from the salary of \$165. Added a front room for the house for \$500.
	276-289	Before the War, the Chinese liked to live near other Chinese. In Fresno, they lived on the west side. Chinese liked to live together because there may be repercussions moving out.
	290-301	In-laws lived in Cypress Park for at least 50 years. It was an Italian neighborhood at that time. They did not want them to buy there. Now it is a Chicano neighborhood.
	302-310	In Fresno, on the west side, the Chinese started to move when blacks started to move in.
9	311-332	Most Chinese are very thrifty. Mother banked her money, set some aside for emergencies without her father knowing.
	333-358	BL did not feel hostility against Chinese. More opportunities in Los Angeles. Best job in Fresno for girl friends was bookkeeper.
•	359 - 369	When the War came along, they found out that Chinese were good employees. They were rated high in the Army. Chinese did not have the opportunity before that.
10	370-394	BL never rented therefore did not encounter prejudice in renting. Sister did when they tried to rent at Burnside Apartments. They were rejected because they had a daughter. Caucasiáns would not discriminate much if you are a professional person and making enough money.
	395-434	Could not say when the break came in discrimination against the Chinese. Got jobs mostly through recommendations. Now, there is probably none. But if a Caucasian and a Chinese are the same, the Chinese will not be hired.
11	435-450	Chinese managed during the Depression. They did not go on welfare.
	451-468	Now businesses come and go. There are many different Chinese, Vietnamese, etc.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary		
11	469-482	In comparing Chinese and Jewi two races both enjoyed eating		
END OF	TAPE 1			
		TAPE 2 SIDE	A	
1	000-017	According to BL, Chinese and way they do business. Gau Go are Chinese Jews. Both are obut really are very different	on (ルバエ) pe clever and shre	ople say they
	018-028	American born Chinese met the In Fresno, the mothers and grandances.	eir future spou	
	029-032	BL met her husband in the chu	urch.	
2	033-049	Most American born Chinese ma BL knows of American born Chi born Chinese too. Some boys but often these marriages are that native born should marry their similar backgrounds.	inese that marr married girls a not successfu	ried foreign in Hong Kong 11. BL thinks
	050-053 054-056	For American born Chinese, the BL thinks that American born least one son.		
	057-065	Interracial marriages are account sonally does not favor mixed would say that there is nother they are just thankful	marriages. Pe	eople her age o about it,
3	066-079	BL's brother-in-law married a English. His mother was very racial marriages were not acc	y much against	it. Inter-
	080-089	BL's father only wanted his of they were Chinese but he belt was impossible because they	children to realeved that Chir	alize that nese school
	090-096	BL thinks most American born school. They felt it was a wild did not learn anything.	Chinese resent	ed Chinese
4	097-120	BL was not disturbed by the pearly movies. She thought is Chinese in movies. BL knows resented it. BL thought that her parts. Gilbert and his was	t was wonderful that the East t Anna Mae Wond	l to have West players was great in

used to come to the restaurant, she was very thrifty.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	
4	121-127	BL's father only wanted his children and remain Chinese at the same time indicate what he wanted his children	but he did not
5	128-155	BL's father was more religious that family had to go to church every Sun high school age. BL's father insist go to Sunday school. They went to a Fresno. Father went but mother did that church is something basic.	day until they reached ted that his children thinese church in
	156-163	BL does not think that many Chinese did attend religious services becaus to do.	
6	164-186	BL thinks that her in-laws, the Leon minent. Her mother-in-law was a compresident of the New Life Movement C speaking organization. The Soo Hooprominent. Also the Hongs.	munity leader, the Club, a purely Chinese
	187-204	BL's mother always wanted to go back China, but she never did. Now she h	
END OF	TAPE 2		
		TAPE 3 SIDE A	
1	001-011	On BL's first trip to Los Angeles, s	she worked for a
	012-013	In 1940, BL came back to Los Angeles sister, Gladys Quan, on 34th Street,	to live with her
	014-022	Her sister got married at an early a worked for a recording studio, C. P. Western Avenue. Her husband's name now live in Hollywood.	ige. Her husband McGregors, on
	023-028	BL's brother used to sell television He had his own business and had a pa on his own.	s, later he did service rtner too. Now he is
2	029-043	When BL first came to Los Angeles, s with Chinese. She worked for the De culture, then for an engineering fir Western Auto Supplies. She original movie actress, Ona Munson, a madame Wind." BL worked for her for two ye worked for Mr. [Y. C.] Hong.	partment of Agri- m, then for the ly worked for a in "Gone With the

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3&4	044-107	Mr. Hong handled immigration cases, mostly. Practically all Chinese clients. Cases mostly of people who wanted to bring people over from China and Hong Kong. Mostly of low income background. Mr. Hong was the first Chinese lawyer to practice in the United States. He would take considerations for less in fees when clients were poor. During the first few years BL worked for him, Mr. Hong was quite busy. Later on, he was less so. He was getting along in years and did not want to take up more cases.
	108-130	Mrs. Hong did not work in the office. Now the office is used to take care of estates, their rentals. Mr. Hong's son is now in a partnership as an attorney. He used to work for the district attorney.
5&6	131-194	The Soo Chow Restaurant was on Los Angeles Street for many years. Later it moved to Chung King Road, and is now known as the Peking Restaurant. During the War, they used it as a canteen for the soldiers. Coucil Kan has Double Ten [Independence Day] parties there. It was opened from 11:00 to 12:00 for a while. Later it opened from 11:00 to 10:00, seven days a week. BL's husband, Elmer, his oldest brother, Edward, his sister, Margie, and his second brother, Gilbert, all helped. They did not get paid. They all lived in the family home. The mother was in charge originally, later Edward became in charge.
	195-212	During all BL's married years, they worked there for twenty years or so. She never got paid. She felt it was her duty since they lived in the family home. BL had other jobs at the same time. She would help out in the restaurant in between jobs.
7	213-266	The restaurant could handle one hundred people. Half of the customers were Chinese. They had two to five employees. The salaries were very low, about \$100 to \$150 a month, about ten to fifteen years ago. The employees worked ten hours a day, about seven days a week with an alternate day off each week (BL was not sure). They had a Mexican dishwasher.
	267-274	Most of the workers stayed on. They did not advertise for help. The workers stayed on probably because they could not find other jobs.
8 .	275-296	The cook was Bok Chin. He was like family. All the family members could cook if necessary. The cooks were tempermental.

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8	297-304	Employees did not get any benefits.
	305-322	The problems with the employees were usually in the kitchen.
9	323-326	The family leased the restaurant from the Wong family who lived upstairs from the restaurant.
	327-334	BL thinks that good service and good food are necessary for a restaurant to be successful.
	335-347	Restaurant never had problems of threats by gangs. They had one robbery in the restaurant at Main and Sunset, that was opened after the one in Los Angeles Street closed.
	348-355	The restaurant closed because everyone did not want to continue and therefore they sold the restaurant.
	356-376	Elmer's mother did not expect her children to continue and carry on the restaurant. She wanted her children to have an education.
10	377-385	The restaurant had no problems with the authorities. Sometimes the immigration asked for information, to see if they could recognize some faces.
	386-393	There were no restaurant associations at that time. BL noticed that there is a United Chinese Restaurant Association today.
	394-402	The restaurant had just friendly relationships with other restaurants.
	403-END	Edward took care of the supplies from the various markets. They bought fish from the Third Street Market. They did not have fish markets then.

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