

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Lillie Louie Interview Number: 135
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 3
 Date of Interview: 12/8/80, 1/7/81 Length: 2 Hours & 21 Minutes
 Interviewer: Jean Wong
 Others Present: _____
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Rodney Chow

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1 Side A</u>
1	001-013	My parents are from Canton. My father is from Sun Wui Village. Mother from Sun San (Canton City District). Father from country, mother from city. Father came alone. He was married in the late 1880's to consider the opportunities. He was here for two years or more, then returned to China. He got married in China and came back to America with his wife and first child. I am not too sure about the time before he was married regarding his activities over in America. It seems he went into produce and remained in this business until he (father) moved to the country to raise his nine children. He came over here with his wife in 1900 in the Spring.	
	014-033	Mother was carrying a child which was born in November, 1900. He was in the produce, not farming, in Los Angeles. His sister was a child. She helped him (father). The youngest was nine years old when they moved to the country where he struggled to farm. He knew nothing about farming then. It was in Artesia, close to where Knotts Berry Farm is. He raised sugar beets and vegetables for our tables, a pig and a cow. We were twenty miles away from the city. Most of our supplies were from the farm. Those days we had the street cars for transportation (Red Line).	
2	034-073	At that time there were no Chinese in Artesia. Father picked Artesia. I suppose it was lack of contact or there were not too much availability. If there had been, one does not know, or maybe he had some contact that told him land was available there.	

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	074-092	Somehow, being Christian, we had faith that they would be taken care of. They had a vision. I was six or seven years old then when Father moved to the country in 1913 or 1914. I am now 73 years old.
	093-103	Family farmed about six or eight years.
4	104-116	I do not know where the produce market was. It was not in Chinatown, perhaps on San Pedro or Central Avenue Terminal market.
	117-126	He was in his own business. I am the seventh child born in 1907 in Los Angeles, on Jackson Street, backyard of the Union Station.
	127-146	After he left the farming business, he suffered an accident. A horse kicked him and punctured his intestine and he expired soon, very soon, after -- at the age of 51 or 52, so that was the end of the farming.
5	147-162	So Mother was left with nine children. My oldest brother was able to take over and he rented some better farmland near Cerrepton. Meanwhile, our sister came to the city to work. Not everyone graduated. The majority had to work in nearby farms. We managed to get through until my brother felt a call to go to China.
	163-181	He was affiliated with an engineering group to build roads in China.
6	182-189	It was my oldest brother, George. It was a company formed in New Jersey, Engineering Company. He was to be the secretary. His farming was given up and we moved to Los Angeles. Then our brothers went to work for the big produce companies in Los Angeles. In fact, for Louie Produce. They worked many years. Meanwhile the family was kept together. The older sister was home. One was at U. C. Berkeley.
	190-210	We kept together but we lacked the basic education that every child needs. We were too busy working. I pray we were not too ambitious. What we did not learn in school we learned in experience in the world -- such as earning a living to get along.
	211-216	
	217-218	Our parents had eleven children. One sister is back in the country enjoying tilling soil in Newberry Park Vent. Company beyond Thousand Oaks.
	219-225	I had five brothers and five sisters. Mother was not able to work because of the little ones. We all helped on the farm. Mother stayed at the farm.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	226-246	Our father's name was Louie Quan. Mother was Chung Shee. I went to Artesia Elementary and Norwalk High School. There was Compton Junior High but it was very brief -- a year or two, after that it was work. The younger ones attended school west of Vermont. Berendo Junior High, Poly High.
	247-261	Only three or four graduated from high school. The youngest brother went to Berkeley. I do not know what he majored in. When the war came he was sent to India, two other brothers were in the service, none went to battle. It must have been in the First World War.
8	262-295	We were all together six or seven of us, from the 1930's to the 1940's.
	296-301	From there one or two got married so we separated.
	302-306	My sister and I stayed together right onto forty years, stayed unmarried. Only four out of the eleven got married and only one produced children.
	307-316	I guess that was a natural reaction to having to share with too many brothers and sisters.
	317-333	Only years -- working in department stores -- one became a nurse, a very successful one, in the San Francisco General Hospital until her death.
9	334-340	At that time there were very little opportunities. The only open field was minor, very modest, jobs at department stores, stock girls keeping merchandise in order and checked. Then came the motion picture era when Chinese pictures became popular.
	341-351	Beginning with "Good Earth" about 1936. We were among the first. We had no steady jobs. We were just in the age group so we spent many years, at times there were five or six Oriental movies in the making. We were kept very busy working in these Asian-type productions.
	352-370	In between time we did extra work here and there -- helping friends, always kept busy.
	371-376	In the forties I was asked to work in the casting office to cast the Chinese when there was a need for them at the studios. My Chinese was very poor and I was hesitant but was assured most of the work would be done in English. There was not that many production of films in Chinese.
10	377-390	I worked under Tom Gubbins. There were no organizations then that kep records such as now for Social Security, etc. At that time it was done personally by this man.

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Tape: 1 Side A & B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	377-390	Soon after the screen actors guilds were organized and we were one of the first members.
	391-411	At one time there were three of us girls working in the films.
	412-445	It was our major source of livelihood at that time.
11	446-450	It was in the late 1930's. Tom Gubbins pays a little as three or five dollars for a day's work. When the guild came into being, we got perhaps \$10 a day and up to \$20 a day.
	451-461	It was computed with overtime and if one wore their own wardrobe.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 1 SIDE B

1	001-022	We worked on call -- there was no warning and each job was different. We could not plan ahead. One of the coldest nights we worked on the film in Chinatown. In other words, we would not have the right clothing for the weather.
2	023-045	As for speaking parts, we had laughing only and speaking in groups.
	046-054	Those were the days we did not dare leave the phone for fear of losing a call.
	054-055	We had other employment. In between I worked in the Chinese shops. Sometimes months and years would go by between calls for film work.
	056-066	In those days Chinese were not used in scenes where they are today.
3	067-073	It took some negotiation to convince the movie people that we were always here and when there is a street crowd, etc. there should be a sprinkling of us in there. With that, more work was allocated to Chinese. Since now there is an over-abundance of people, the fees for guild membership has been going up because there is not enough work to go around.
	074-094	I worked for Tom Gubbins in the early 1930's before "Good Earth," maybe 1934. We older girls were not Tom's favorites. He preferred younger ones.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	095-111	We only took other jobs which were part time with the understanding that we were on call. We were not trained and had to take whatever was available.
	112-117	Often time the work was just helping someone being with the elderly care for other's children.
	118-149	I did this for five years. Caring for other's children. We made very good friends -- the children today are still our beloved friends. Every year for a period of twelve years, the family sent us snapshots of the children growing up.
5	150-159	To this day we are friends of this one family and the last photos show the children's children. It was a very rewarding association.
	160-170	After nine years living at Capistreano Beach we decided to come back to Los Angeles because we detected drugs, hippie types, arriving and because our brothers were still in the city and wanted us to come back.
	171-184	We came back to Oxford in the neighborhood of Western and Beverly.
6	185-198	I started to drive when I was fifteen therefore I knew the city. Now we are four sisters and four brothers left. One sister in Ventura County. The rest in Los Angeles.
	199-217	I may not have given correct dates and chronological order.
	218-230	When our parents came, Broadway was a county road, and Chinatown was across from the Union Station and in the front of the Union Station. Very few women. I remember on Chinese New Year we were dressed up in our beautiful Chinese clothes our parents brought from China. Very colorful. We would go out to shops and all the men would give us gifts of money wrapped in red paper and we would come home and empty our pockets.
7	231-260	This is me in front of the Chinese Congregational Church in 1907. I obtained this picture from a dear dear saint, Mrs. Emma Finley, who was superintendant of the Church. She sponsored and met the Chinese brides, guided them, and taught them of their new life here.
	261-286	As the Chinese people moved out and purchased homes, they became more Westernized. They have never been organized. It is not easy to get them to cooperate. Not like the Japanese or Koreans.

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	287-353	We have always been at home with Caucasians because of our background.
9	354-365	The Chinese have changed in their mode of living and thinking -- thirst for travel. I am amazed and pleased that so many who you would ordinarily think of as shy, self-efficient type women, traveling alone and enjoying it. Also changes in their taste, taking on all the modern styles -- I think they tend to want to do what Americans want to do.
	365-366	WONG: Being Chinese, do you find it disappointing finding Chinese becoming more Westernized? LOUIE: Yes -- No, I really am not in a position to say.
10	367-440	I feel that the crime, etc. is less intense amongst the Asians than the Latin, etc.
	441-479	My parents did not have intensions to return to China -- especially with so many children.
END OF TAPE 1		

TAPE 2 SIDE A

1	001-005	After my parents died, all the brothers and sisters contributed. Several went out and worked. I worked at the May Company. In those days, it was known by another name -- Backstones. In those days, they were all Occidental customers. Yes, we taught groups and sold them mahjong games for May Company. I was sixteen at that time. I was also posing in Chinese clothes for artists. I modeled at the university for portrait painting. Our background enabled us to live, it was a source of income for us.
2	006-061	These dresses we wore were from China. We got them from various people who would bring them back from a trip to China but ate so much on the boat that they could no longer fit the clothes.
	062-075	So they were willing to sell these clothes. In those days, the material came from Paris to Shanghai to be made into elegant clothes. Our parents did not wear Chinese clothes after arriving here.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	076-090	To earn money, we worked at home addressing envelopes. I now do volunteer work among the elderly at an old age home in Silverlake where one wing is occupied by elderly Chinese. I bring fresh fruits to them, etc. I also do volunteer work at the Shriners Cripple Children Hospital.
4&5	091-178	I do not know if many Chinese do voluntary work. I am out of the mainstream. I suppose other Chinese worked posing as models as I did. I do not really know.
6	179-200	We have completely divorced ourselves from the Chinese community.
7	201-245	We made that break when our father and mother died. Our living would not be possible in Chinatown after our parents died. But we did work in one Chinese art objects shop, not fine art but commercial -- the porcelain, bronzes, etc.
	246-275	In my early days, I felt I was a combination of both Chinese and American, but probably more American because we were taken out of Chinatown to the country. We associated entirely with Americans, not Chinese. That is the reason our accents do not have a hint of Chinese. We associated with other minority groups if they happened to be where we happened to be.
8	276-300	At home, our parents spoke to us in Chinese and we answered in English. Therefore our Chinese is very poor. But our oldest sister spoke better. The older ones went to Chinese school. But over the years, working away from people of our origin, it is lost. I regret not having kept it up. Mother spoke Sam Yup (三邑) and Father spoke Sze Yup (四邑). I feel more comfortable with Sam Yup (三邑) because Father had died and Mother spoke Sam Yup. We did not like to go to Chinese school. We were very rebellious against going. We were at the age of nine to thirteen. Mother wanted us to go, she was very educated in Chinese. But we would scatter in the field but we hid out and Mother could not find us. She wanted to teach us Chinese. I regret this.
9	301-400	There were no conflicts between the children towards our mother because we were Americanized. Our mother was very amicable, very intelligent. She was not of the old school.

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2 Side A & B
Tape: 3 Side A

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
9	301-400	They had taken us out of the highly organized Chinese community so we could be Westernized.
10	401-411	One sister was completely Westernized and married an Occidental, a USC boy. They had four children. One married an American G.I. when she was teaching in Germany. The son married a girl of British background.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 2 SIDE B

1	001-008	Regarding whether or not we were typical of most Chinese in being Americanized, the main difference between us and others is that we stayed in the city and had both parents. Those that migrated to Bakersfield and Sacramento where there were no Chinese -- they were Westernized.
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END OF TAPE 2

TAPE 3 SIDE A

1	001-005	I am grateful for the Chinese culture because I can understand both cultures. I believe the Chinese culture is the best.
		In my days, the techniques of modern medicine were not known. After our parents passed away, we did not use Chinese medicine. Our mother was very Westernized. She did not insist on any of the Asian ideas such as be quiet, stay at home.
	006-040	She wanted us to enjoy ourselves. She enjoyed music and we had a viola.
2	041-067	We had a very happy and content childhood. Grammar school was a mile away and on weekends we were allowed to bring tennis nets, bats, and balls. So our place was a gathering place for the neighboring children. In those days, we could stretch the tennis net across the street, tie it to a mail box, and not be interferred by anyone for long periods.
3	068-081	We did not have any Chinese recreation such as go to Chinese movies, or playing mahjong. We were out in the country. We had to work and mahjong was a leisure game.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	068-081	Although when I went to work in the department store I worked in the mahjong section and so had to learn the game quickly. An enthusiastic woman who was the head of the mahjong department. When I dropped in one day, she got the idea of dressing me up in a bright red Chinese dress and having me sit there as atmosphere and take the challenge of teaching the game to people who wanted to buy a set. I do not recall if my parents wrote to relatives and friends in China. I do not think they did.
4&5	082-163	My brother, George, went to Shanghai to work for the Asian American Electric Company but I do not know much about his work. When he realized how difficult farming was, he gave it up completely. It was so far back, I cannot recall much. I do not really know what kind of jobs the Chinese people held before World War II.
6&7	164-250	All the girls I knew were stackers, stockroom girls, in the department store. Regarding the average income before World War II, I recall when six of us lived in a bungalow, it was \$40.00 and it took all of us to pay.
8	251-354	During the Depression, the Chinese did not need much to exist.
9	355-361	In comparing the Chinese with the Jewish people, I feel that the Chinese are innovative, they have the ability to experiment and go after. Regarding the portrayal of Chinese in movies, a lot of it was fancy.

END OF SIDE A

TAPE 3 SIDE B

1	001-024	Regarding the portrayal of Chinese as coolies and house boys, I would not say I feel badly because it was the jobs allotted to us. We are not sensitive. They are not slurs, they are just an evolution for us. It offered us a start and we progressed from there. Personally I never felt too proud to do anything.
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Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	025-026	I think today there is too much pride and it is a fault. I think that there is an over-sensitivity. That is the reason why some young folks would rather be unemployed than take a job they feel is beneath them.
2	027-063	The movie is fantasy. There was hostility toward Chinese before World War II. In the older times, the parents could not buy property. There was hostility in restaurants around 1915 where the Chinese would not be served. I did not experience this, I only heard about it. In the country, we accepted them. We were the only Chinese family there.
3	064-100	It did not enter in our minds to hate or have an inferiority complex. Our house was open. Our father was kind, generous, and a Christian man, so our house was happy where people gathered. We made homemade ice cream, had watermelon.
4	101-120 121-134	I was never discriminated against. I believe a lot was imaginary. I think interracial marriages were frowned on, it certainly was not prevalent. Our sister was one of the first. She married a USC boy, an engineer. Our parents were both gone so there was no parental permission. She was a little sensitive about her marriage, but she was able to prove to her family by being able to raise three successful children. My sister got married in 1935, or somewhere in the early 1930's.
5	135-174	The other brothers and sisters did not have any objections. We grew up each one his own master. We were very fortunate to have this background of tolerance. Live and let live. Today our contemporaries have to admit of their in-laws being Italian, Japanese, Mexican, etc. -- any nationality.
6	175-193	It is so commonplace.

END OF TAPE 3

END OF INTERVIEW

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LILLIE LOUIE

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