

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: George Lew
 Chinese Name: 劉振宏
 Date of Interview: 10/18/79
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Suellen Cheng

Interview Number: 21
 Number of Tapes: 4
 Length: 1 Hour & 30 Minutes

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1 Side A</u>
1	001-019 020-043	Introduction. George Lew's (GL) parents came from China. Father was a tailor from Mexico. He went back to China several times. Later he brought GL and his nephew over.	
2	044-070	GL was adopted when he was a baby. Adopted parents had one daughter only. GL came to San Francisco in 1923, then to Los Angeles. Later GL and parents went to Arizona and returned to Los Angeles in 1925.	
3	071-082 083-094 095-101	GL was born in 1912. After his adopted parents adopted him they took him to interior of China. Parents came to America during World War I. Father went back to start a Fu Jok (福竹) store in Hong Kong. But during the war, he could not ship the goods to the United States, so he lost money and came back to United States. He returned to China to get married before World War I and started the Fu Jok business. He came back to United States to work again. GL spoke Sze Yip with parents at home. GL went to Chinese school for 7 or 8 years.	
4	102-121 122-126	GL went to American school in Arizona. In Arizona, there were mostly Mexican students. The Mexican students played a lot with him. GL came to Los Angeles and worked for an Irish woman as a houseboy. GL earned one dollar a month with room and board.	
5	127-134 135-164	GL went to Wilton Place Grammar School on 8th and Wilton. GL's father died before GL came to America. Father left money for his brother to take care of GL and went to college. GL's uncle took all his money and made GL worked for the family in Phoenix, Arizona. Uncle still charged GL \$30 a month.	

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	165-191	Uncle took all the money GL's father left. If were not those money, uncle would not have had the business. Uncle was a houseboy too. Father gave GL's uncle money to buy out the business.
6	192-200	GL never went to American high school. After graduated from grammar school, GL went to work. Then, he got married and went into restaurant business.
	201-236	GL got married in 1940. Through Public Work Administration, GL's cousin got him a job at the produce market. He worked from mid-night to six o'clock in the morning for \$16 per week. The cousin sent his brother, GL's paper brother (GL's father had two paper sons.), went to college. The younger cousin later became a major in the U.S. Army during the World War II.
7	237-243	GL's younger cousin's children all married to Caucasians.
	244-273	GL and wife opened their first business on Western Avenue. They started the business in 1942. Meanwhile GL worked in the Defense Plant in 1942. Later they moved to Culver City and opened an American coffee shop for over 20 years. Wife also worked in the restaurant.
8	274-309	GL was told by the foreman in the North America Defense Plant that he worked too fast. He riveted 18 rivets a day instead of 4 rivets a day. He was bored and was not allowed to quit until one and a half year later.
	310-318	GL had a picture taken with a Chinese General from China in the plant.
	319-350	His first Chinese restaurant named Fong's. They owned the American coffee shop for 20 years and later they leased the building.
9	351-363	GL moved to Inglewood and worked for Denny's as a chef.
	364-370	GL's sister married to Singapore and dided in China.
	371-403	Mother dided in China too. GL couldn't write to her in Chinese. Cousin wrote to China. Uncle and cousin made so much money and went back to China to buy 30 acres of land.
10	404-419	Mother passed away around World War II. GL had no relatives in China now.
	420-438	GL's cousin was suppose to send money to GL's mother from the profit of the business in Phoenix.

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Tape: 1 Side A
1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
10	439-455	GL always associated with Caucasians because of their business association. GL did not go to Chinatown that much.
11	456-461	GL used to go to Chinatown and gambled there.
	462-467	GL had a couple of Chinese friends who came to visit Lews on the weekends. Some weekends Lews would visit their friends.
	468-474	GL and wife spoke English most of the time.
	475-482	GL started telling how he met his wife, Mable Lew.
	483	End of tape 1 side A.
Tape: 1 Side B		
1	001-008	Blank
	009-035	GL used to work in Beverly Hills. Mable was going to take a singing lesson in Beverly Hill She got lost and ran into GL's boss whom later introduced Mable to GL. They got married in 1940.
2	036-045	GL and wife team up and worked for an American house. First they worked for a financier. Later, GL put an ad on the newspaper for jobs, and found a job at William Holden's house. Mabel took care of Horton's baby while GL took care of the house.
	046-049	GL has two children. Both of them were born in Santa Monica Lutheran Hospital.
	050-064	GL felt both American and Chinese. GL did not feel being a Chinese was anything special.
3	065-076	GL did not feel sorry for being a Chinese. Each individual is an individual. Wife felt the same way too.
	077-109	GL occasionally visited Chinese friends. Their friends would visit them too.
4	110-114	GL did not use Chinese medicine.
	115-122	Now GL does a lot of gardening. In his leisure time, GL and wife would go to show. When GL went to San Francisco he played mahjong with relatives. GL like baseball but not football.
	123-128	GL did not have time to join either Chinese or American club. Wife joined the Chinese movement but did not have time to go to the meeting, so she dropped out.

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Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	129-152	GL donated money to the family association but never had time to participate in the activities. It was \$25 to \$35 donation, so called yearly candle light money.
5	153-158	GL didn't associate with many Chinese so he didn't know who is prominent in the community.
	159-192	Most Chinese engaged in produce market, household help, grocery store, and laundry. The average monthly income was about \$30 before World War II. American company would not hire Chinese.
6	193-209	During the World War II time government made the defense plant to hire anybody including women. GL started working for defense plant in 1941. At that time GL had already started his restaurant.
	210-215	GL worked as a household help and quit right after the war started.
	216	END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B.

Tape: 2 Side A

1	001-011	Introduction
	012-031	GL was making \$60 a month as a houseboy. He got \$100 a month working for William Holden, and \$16 a week working in the North America Defense Plant (65 cents an hour). In 1970, GL got \$175 a week working for Denny's Coffee shop, and got \$275 a month working for Ships Coffee shop.
2	032-038	GL had his own coffee shop at Culver City in 1945 and owned it until 15 years ago.
	039-059	GL never went out looking for job in Chinatown. GL associated mostly with his own family.
3	060-084	Most Chinese helps in GL's coffee shop were single men with no family in the U.S. They gambled away their money in Chinatown. Sometime when they died the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association had to bury them.
	085-092	GL didn't know any Chinese who were involved in politics.
	093-101	The Depression did affect GL a little bit. Before the Depression, GL's cousin was able to do two to three thousand business a day. But after the crash the daily business was about fifty dollars. That's why GL had to leave Phoenix and came to Los Angeles.
	102-108	GL lost twenty dollars when arrived in Los Angeles.
4	109-123	GL started looking for job and couldn't find any job. He gambled the rest of his money away and had breakfast and lunch at the gambling house.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
4	124-141	Many Chinese single people gambled even during the Depression. Everytime GL went broke he would go back to his ex-boss' son who worked for a life insurance company. He always gave GL five dollars each time. Sometime GL got five dollars every other week.
5	142-187	GL became chauffeur for Anita Loos in 1938. During the Depression he worked all odd jobs. In 1932 GL worked for a Jewish fellow as a nurse in Chicago. GL would do anything during that time.
6	188-232	GL worked for Anita Loos for six months. The stealing of Anita Loos' maid caused GL losing his job as a chauffeur. A month later Anita Loos found out that GL did not steal so called him and asked him back to work. GL refused to go back.
7	233-240	As an honest Chinese houseboy, GL did not know any discrimination against him.
	241-252	At school, the classmates always made fun of GL as the only Chinese boy there.
	253-262	GL felt that Chinese ran into discrimination when they started looking for jobs. GL didn't want to fight with American kits.
	263-285	The Japanese government helped the Japanese in America. The Chinese Americans had no help from anybody. The Jews helped each other.
8	286-319	Chinese started everything from bottom up. Chinese are tighter than Jews. Chinese are doing better than Jews. If a Chinese didn't have business, he could eat a bowl of rice with a little salt. A Jew had to have his regular meal. Chinese would lived in the back of the stores, but the Jews got to live in a house. Chinese were thrown out from Mexico by Jews in 1928.
	320	END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A.

Tape: 3 Side A

1	001-012	Introduction
	013-025	There was a living quarter, a house, in back of the restaurant.
	026-043	The coffee shop in Culver City was called Mable's Coffee. A year after they opened the coffee shop, GL bought a house in Culver City. GL was the first Oriental owned a house in Culver City. The real estate agent wouldn't show properties to GL. Only way GL could buy the house was to find the owner of the property.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	045-064	GL had to fix up the house before they moved in. The neighbors were happy to see them moved in, because they cleaned and fixed up the house nicely.
3	065-092	Later GL and wife bought a brand new house on Washington Boulevard in Mar Vista. GL spent \$4000 to fix up the house. The children could not go to Culver City school. So they sent the children to Catholic private school.
	093-104	GL did not send children to Chinese school. The children even refused to speak Chinese with GL and Mabel. It was too far to send them to Chinese school in Chinatown.
4	105-112	Children didn't help in the restaurant. When they bought the present house, GL sent daughter to University of California Santa Barbara. Son is married but daughter is not married.
	113-126	Mable's brother married to a Caucasian. Her sister's two daughters all married to Caucasians. To GL it didn't make any difference, interracial marriage or not.
	127-146	GL didn't want his children to marry to Black, Chicano, and Filipino due to his personal opinion.
5	147-154	GL made Caucasian friends in business.
	155-163	GL had no trouble buying the coffee shop in Culver City. The ex-owner's husband was in the service and had to sell the business. The coffee shop was on 9315 Venice Boulevard. The ads appeared on one calendar read by Beverly Chan: Eat at Mabel's Coffee, Quality American food since 1944. GL spent \$4000 for the business.
	174-185	GL bought the first house a year after they opened the Chop Suey house on Western Avenue. The tenant refused to move.
	186-190	The house was on Jefferson Boulevard. It was all White neighborhood.
6	191-216	GL always lived in the White neighborhood. There were a couple of Chinese families on Western Avenue area near Vernon.
	217-226	Two three years later, GL couldn't move the tenant so they sold his first house.
	227-236	When GL worked in the defense plant he rented a room for the family. The rent was \$12 a week.
7	237-251	It costed two dollars to visit a doctor at the time. The gasoline was about twenty somewhat cents per gallon.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
7	252-277	GL always had a car. He spent two three hundred dollars to buy a used sports car. A brand new car would cost about eight hundred dollars to twelve hundred dollars.
	278-286	GL didn't have leisure time when he was young. He had to work six days a week and cleaned up the place on Sundays.
8	287-302	At first when they just opened the coffee shop GL opened the restaurant at five o'clock in the morning. Toward the end GL opened the restaurant at noon and closed at four o'clock in the afternoon. There was no parking on Venice Boulevard.
	303-308	The customers always stood in line waiting for seats. In those days both husband and wife and everybody were working so they had to eat out a lot.
	309-327	A cup of coffee costed a nickle. An order of hamburger was fifteen cents. When they just opened, they charged 35 cents for breakfast of two eggs, potato, toast, and coffee. They made a nickle out of every customers. During the war time it was difficult to buy eggs.
9	328-344	GL used to buy eggs from the black market and paid extra five dollars for a case of egg.
	345-354	GL used to open the restaurant for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. After 1955 GL started closing the store at 4:00 p.m.
	355-387	GL had two three American cooks and four five waitresses. Later GL added Chinese food and hired two Chinese helps. The Chinese cook wouldn't even wash dishes. GL had to pay the cook \$35 a week about 30 years ago.
10	388-402	GL cooked American food, so he had to hire a Chinese cook. GL worked for Denny's after he quit his own business.
	403-419	GL never asked how his friends or relatives met their spouses.
	420-448	GL preferred daughter. GL was not old fashioned Chinese.
	449-483	GL and wife planned for only two children, boy or no boy. GL didn't have education so he wanted his children to have all the education they could get. Son decided to go to service before going to college.
	484	END OF TAPE 3 SIDE A
		TAPE: <u>3 Side B</u>
1	001-007	Blank
	008-019	Son served in Vietnam War. When he came back, GL and wife bought a house for him.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
1	020-028	Children visited them every week. Daughter is an actress, a school teacher.
	029-049	Daughter was in acting when she was four years old. Mabel went into acting in 1942. Daughter was influenced by her mother's interest in acting.
2	050-066	When GL was working for Anita Loos he had chance to become an actor. Anita Loos advised him not to go into entertainment business. The income of an actor or actress was not steady.
	067-086	Chinese were portrayed as cooks and laundrymen. Now there are not many parts for Chinese actors. Chinese are not a fighter in terms of getting parts.
3	087-100	Anna May Wong used to play the role as a ganster role. She couldn't make it in America and had to go to England.
	101-112	Joycelyne Lew, GL's daughter had a regular role in King and I. She was born in 1946.
4	113-130	Joycelyne was twelve years old when she played in King and I. She had good memory. She also acted in Kung Fu.
	131-141	During the World War II many Chinese got into movie industry because of many war movies were made.
5	142-163	GL told his children the idea job is to work for government. To run your own business takes a lot of energy and couldn't make to much of profit. Now a day the restaurant couldn't hardly make any money.
	164-180	Engineering and medical doctor fields are good field, but it take too long of the training to get to that position. Working for the government is always a steady job.
	181-191	GL liked to travel but couldn't do so because he had to take care of his wife who had a stroke.
6	192-205	Wife's brother was working for the Canton Bank in San Francisco. When he died children got insurance from the Bank. The children also got social security money.
	206	END OF TAPE 3 SIDE B

1	001-012	Introduction
	013-025	GL went to Chinese grocery stores in Chinatown to get goods for his restaurant. GL went to Wing Chong Lung on 9th and San Pedro Streets.
	026-036	GL spent four cents for a pound of beansprouts.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
2	036-059	GL learned how to cook Chinese chop suey from the Japanese owner who later sold the restaurant to GL. Mabel wanted to run a chop suey restaurant but GL wanted to be a gardener. In those days a gardener in Beverly Hill charged \$60 to \$100 per month to each house. If GL could worked for ten houses he could make \$1000 a month. But Mabel said that she could not help him only in restaurant that she could help.
3	060-073 074-109	GL let his wife doing all the talking. Mrs. Christine Sterling started the China City on Spring Street area. GL's father used to have a tailor shop in Old Chinatown. When GL came to America his father was already passed away but his partner still stayed in Old Chinatown and later moved to the Spring Street.
4	110-117 118-125 126-131	GL didn't feel any special tie to Chinatown. GL felt like an American born and ran the business like an American. There were not too many Jewish people running the restaurant.
132		END OF TAPE 4 SIDE A END OF THE INTERVIEW

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