

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Lena Fong Interview Number: 116
 Chinese Name: _____ Number of Tapes: 1
 Date of Interview: 7/15/80 Length: 27 Minutes
 Interviewer: Bernice Sam
 Others Present: Pat (daughter)
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Stella Ling

Contents

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary	Tape: <u>1</u>	Side: <u>A</u>
1	001-006	Introduction		
	007-013	Lena Fong (LF) lives at the Garden Crest Convalescence Home, 909 North Lucille, Los Angeles.		
	014-021	LF was born in New Westminster, 12 miles from Vancouver in British Columbia. She was born on September 20, 1895, and is eight-five years old (at the time of the interview).		
	022-023	LF spoke both Chinese and English at home.		
	024-028	LF arrived in the United States in 1923 and became a United States citizen. LF's two daughters were born here.		
	029-042	LF went to school in Vancouver. LF worked very hard in Los Angeles. She was a waitress, a file clerk at the YMCA, and a cashier at Ah Fong's in Beverly Hills.		
2	043-058	LF was married in Vancouver. LF met her husband on her own. If she did not get married to him, her family would have sent her back to China to be a second wife. LF did not want to go back to China because she did not want to be a concubine.		
	059-068	LF misses Canada now that she is in the United States. Her husband conducted all his businesses in Canada. He was very well off. He came to the United States hoping to earn more money. Instead he lost all his money due to bad investments.		
3	069-073	In Canada, LF's husband owned a pawn shop and a jewelry store. He was also the president of the Heong San Association. (香山同鄉會)		

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
3	074-075	When he came to the United States, he had an herb shop and a restaurant business -- things he did not know how to manage.
	076-077	LF's husband was born in China.
	078-084	LF's husband sold everything in Canada then came to the United States and lost everything. LF had a hard time. After he lost everything, he owned a vegetable stand that did not make much money. LF worked hard herself at that time.
	085-088	LF's husband made enough money for the family in Canada, but not in Los Angeles.
	089-095	LF feels both Chinese and American. LF does not feel sorry for being Chinese.
	096-102	LF spoke Chinese with her family when she was young. She does not write Chinese. LF went to Chinese school but she forgot everything she learned.
	103-107	LF sent her daughters to Chinese school. They did not like it. They did not attend Chinese school for too long -- LF could not afford it.
4	108-112	LF's husband believed in using Chinese herbs to cure family members when they were sick. They used Chinese herbs half of the time, and American medicine half of the time.
	113-117	LF used Chinese herbs for cooking.
	118-131	LF used to play mah jong for recreation. LF's daughter used to take LF whenever she wanted to play mah jong. LF used to win. The stakes were not high -- a dollar a tile.
	132-134	LF used to be a baseball fan. She used to root for the Dodgers.
	135-140	LF does not have any relatives in China. She still has many relatives in Canada. LF does not write anymore, her daughter writes for her.
	141-142	LF's husband did not belong to any associations in Los Angeles.
	143-154	LF does not know what village her father was from. They are Sum Yup.
5	155-164	LF considers the Fongs to be an important family in the Los Angeles area. LF's husband's name is Fong Sow Oi.

Contents (cont'd)

Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
5	165-170	LF does not know of any important Chinese figures in Los Angeles.
	171-180	LF does not remember what kind of work the Chinese engaged in before World War II.
	181-190	LF did not make very much at the YMCA -- she made \$1.25 an hour. She worked as a file clerk under Mr. Jacobson. Her daughter said that this was around 1960. It was similar to volunteer work.
6	191-209	LF lived on Griffith Avenue for a long time. They lived at a cousin's place in Long Beach when they first arrived in the United States. Then they moved to Los Angeles around 1929. They just rented the house at that time. They did not have any trouble renting the place because a Chinese family was living there before they were.
	210-218	LF's family had a hard time paying the rent. LF does not remember of any incidents where they were badly treated by white people, even though all their neighbors were Americans.
	219-235	When LF was working for F. See On's arts store, she received \$125 a month. That was considered good pay. That was some time before the war. LF wrote his checks for him. He did not know how to write. He was divorced from his wife and his children at the time. F. See On's second wife is a Chinese nurse.
7	236-241	LF does not know of any politicians in China. LF's husband liked Dr. Sun Yat-sen.
	242-252	The Chinese in Canada at that time felt very close to the people in China. Some of them sent money back to China. LF's husband would send money back to his own mother. His brother would spend all the money instead of giving it to his mother.
	253-264	During the Depression, the Chinese did not make much money.
	265-267	LF did not feel that there was hostility towards the Chinese.
	268-285	LF's happiest years were those years that she worked for F. See On. He gave her more pay. That was around 1939. LF's hardest times was when she had her daughter, Pat. LF did not have enough money to pay the doctor's bill. Pat is not LF's oldest daughter, her oldest daughter is Lucille.

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Time Segment	Counter Number	Summary
8	286-294	LF always remembers her life in Canada. She always wanted to have another child.
	295-299	LF does not mind having daughters instead of sons.
	300-312	LF does not approve of interracial marriages. LF's cousin married an American. Those marriages do not last long.
	313-319	LF does not know of anyone who returned to China. LF would not like to go back to China. She does not know anyone over there.
	320-331	LF does not mind the stereotypical portrayals of Chinese in movies. LF's own father had a pigtail.
9	332-338	LF would not have any preference for her sons' occupations if she did have sons. It would be up to them.
	339-346	LF has to stay at the Convalescent Home. It would be too much work for her daughter and LF needs help. LF is comfortable at the Convalescent Home.
	374-360	LF eats breakfast in bed in the mornings. Then she goes to the dining room for both lunch and dinner. LF sleeps at around 9:30 at night. LF prefers to take a sleeping pill each night so she can always sleep well.
	361-387	LF tries to read a little bit but she cannot see very well. She is hard of hearing and has no sense of smell. LF stays in her wheelchair all day long because the girls do not want to pick her up so that she can take a nap. One side of her body is paralyzed and she cannot help herself up.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW

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- Fong, Lena
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- Herbal medicine, 1A:4
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- Sam Yup villiage, 1A:4
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