

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHINESE AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Robert Mar
 Chinese Name: 馬 晉 長
 Date of Interview: 3/8/80, 6/14/80
 Interviewer: Beverly Chan
 Others Present: None
 Language: English
 Summarizer: Diana Cho

Interview Number: 82
 Number of Tapes: 2
 Length: 1 Hour & 27 Minutes

Contents

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary | Tape: <u>1</u> Side <u>A</u> |
|--------------|----------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | 001-024 | Robert Mar's (RM) parent's origin - Father was born in Canton, Mar Village, "Bok-sa". Couldn't recall which dialect his father spoke. | |
| | 025-027 | Mother was born in Marysville, California and spoke both Sze Yup and Sum Yup. | |
| | 028-043 | Father immigrated from China in the 1890s. He borrowed the money from a cousin for the passage to the U.S. He became a cook. He had no education. | |
| 2 | 044-045 | Father's reason for immigration was that he thought America was the land of opportunity. | |
| | 046-048 | Father's family in China were peanut farmers. | |
| | 049-059 | Father learned to be a cook in the railroad camps for the Santa Fe Railroads. Father later went into business of his own, a fruit and vegetable (produce) business. | |
| | 060-071 | Worked as a family cook for Norman Chandler's grandfather on Huntington Drive. Later he went to work as a cook for the Doheny Family on Figueroa and Adams. | |
| 3 | 072-093 | RM's father later went into working as a door-to-door produce vendor. He drove a horse and buggy. | |
| | 094-098 | RM's father married at the age of 30. His marriage was arranged in San Francisco. | |
| | 099-110 | RM's mother worked in the restaurants. Did not complete an education. Youngest of nine children in her family. | |
| 4 | 111-139 | RM's mother later worked as a hairdresser at MGM's. She started in 1936 at MGM and worked on the "Good Earth" and other films. | |
| | 140-154 | RM's mother's name is Ann Mar. Her maiden name is Chow. | |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|---|
| 5 | 155-161 | RM's Chinese name is Mar Tai Chung, translated it means "straight line." He is named after his grandfather. |
| | 162-167 | RM was born in Los Angeles on September 16, 1912 in Central LA. |
| | 168-172 | Sze Yup was spoken at home. He also understood and spoke Sum Yup. |
| | 173-175 | Rm has always lived in Los Angeles. He worked as a waiter. |
| | 176-182 | RM's father started as a door-to-door produce vendor. Later he had not own wholesale produce business. |
| | 183-188 | RM attended Santa Barbara Street Elementary School and Manual Arts High School. |
| 6 | 189-194 | RM was born in the 9th and San Pedro Streets area. He later moved to the west side (Crenshaw area) in the 1930s. |
| | 195-205 | RM's parents had to go through a lawyer in order to buy a home since his father was not a U.S. citizen. |
| | 206-207 | RM's family were the only Chinese in the Crenshaw area at that time. Later other families moved in to that area.. |
| | 208-229 | RM's father's name was "Mar Moon Gong." |
| 7 | 230-241 | After High School, RM tried to join the Merchant Marines Navigation School in Long Beach. He was not accepted because he was Chinese. |
| | 242-274 | RM became a waiter after he was rejected from Navigation school. He also wanted to become a lawyer. |
| | 275-278 | RM married but not through an arranged marriage. |
| 8 | 279-282 | RM did not write or communicate with relatives in China. |
| | 283-314 | RM's mother was a member of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) and worked all her life. She helped other Chinese women by translating for them. |
| | 315-333 | RM's mother became a Kuomintang member through David Woo's (of Cathay Bank) wife. |
| 9 | 334-353 | RM has one brother - "Mar Tai Sing" was a ballroom dancer. |
| | 354-371 | RM has associated with primarily Chinese. He has also associated with about 30% non-Chinese. Spoke both Chinese and English to his friends at school. |
| | 372-395 | RM had to attend Chinese school after regular school. Chinese teachers were extremely strict. He didn't learn too much in Chinese school. |

Interviewee: Robert Mar

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1 Side A

Tape: 1 Side B

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|--|
| 10 | 396-418 | Chinese school was located between Los Angeles Street and Alameda Street. |
| | 419-432 | RM feels closer ties to Chinese culture having been raised in Chinese tradition. |
| | 433-454 | RM celebrated Chinese New Years by eating traditional food and shooting firecrackers. He received red envelopes with money on New Years. |
| 11 | 455-469 | RM was given Chinese medicine whenever he became sick. The family had friends who were Chinese herbalists. |
| | 470-479 | RM went to American doctors and hospital for two broken legs. |
| | 480-484 | RM's family played mahjong. |

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Tape 1 Side B

| | | |
|---|---------|--|
| 1 | 001-012 | RM's family preferred Chinese recreational games including mahjong and dominoes. |
| | 013-018 | RM's uncle was a professional gambler in Marysville. |
| | 019-022 | RM's uncle attended school with the police chief of Marysville. His uncle was like the "mayor" of Chinatown. |
| | 023-026 | The police chief knew of the gambling activities. Gambling was acceptable in small towns. |
| | 027-030 | RM was not a gambler, although Chinatown had gambling joints. |
| | 031-034 | RM played baseball with his friends for recreation. |
| 2 | 035-039 | RM was not allowed to join sports teams in high school because he was Chinese. |
| | 040-046 | RM did not protest the discrimination in high school. |
| | 047-053 | Discrimination against the Orientals in school. |
| | 054-072 | Orientals had to sit on separate sides in the theatres and restaurants in the 1930s. The feelings of discrimination were loosened in the 1940s after World War II. |
| 3 | 073-088 | There was no open hostility, however, Orientals were called names and made fun of at school. |
| | 089-105 | The Chinese used to wear black baggy clothes. |
| 4 | 106-117 | RM did not join any family associations. There are no Mar association in Chinatown. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|--|
| 4 | 118-121 | RM joined the "Lo-Wah" Club, the Chinatown bunch, and a basketball group. |
| | 122-130 | There were two groups, the "uptown" bunch and the "Chinatown" bunch. The uptown was the group in the Crenshaw area. |
| | 131-146 | In the old Barnyard area that is now Union Station, Chinese restaurants, medicine shops, grocery stores, etc. were located there. |
| 5 | 147-153 | Chinese resided in the Barnyard area, it was not a tourist attraction. |
| | 154-167 | The present location of the New Chinatown once was an Italian cemetery. |
| | 168-182 | The barnyard area was the crummy part of town. At one time it was a freight yard. |
| | 183-192 | The types of work Chinese were doing during the 1920s included restaurants, housewives, groceries. Did not hold office jobs since they knew they were not going to be hired. |
| 6 | 193-203 | Gambled at night for recreation. |
| | 204-205 | Women were mainly housewives. |
| | 206-209 | RM's mother was different since she had a job outside of the Chinatown community. |
| | 210-221 | RM's father had to work hard to make ends meet. He had an independent business approximately for 30 years and then he retired. |
| | 222-233 | Salaries were low for Chinese workers. They were paid \$10-\$15 per week. |
| 7 | 234-249 | On days off from work, RM would go with a group of friends to restaurants and movies. All chipped in \$4-\$5 per person. |
| | 250-263 | Chinese were not involved with other fields of work (white collar) due to discrimination. |
| | 264-279 | The average rent was low. Rooms were available at \$50 per month. |
| 8 | 280-289 | After World War II there was no increase in salaries. He had to work 10-12 hours per day, seven days a week with no days off. |

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|--|
| 1 | 001-029 | Most Chinese lived in two areas of the city: the Union Station location of the first Chinatown and in an area between 9th Street and San Pedro near the Produce Market. |
| | 030-033 | Housing discrimination existed. Chinese had a difficult time leasing from non-Chinese in other areas of the city. |
| 2 | 034-041 | In order for the Mar family to buy a home in the Crenshaw area, they had to go through a lawyer. They moved into the area in 1936. RM's family was the first Chinese to move there. |
| | 042-055 | They had to pay a real estate agent extra money to set up the deal to buy the home in the Crenshaw area. Later other Chinese families moved in. The non-whites subsequently accepted RM's family because they were "Americanized." |
| | 056-063 | The Soo Hoo Family and Dr. Lee (a dentist) were prominent in Chinatown. These people often had a say about what went on in the Chinatown community. |
| | 064-079 | Chinese did not have a voice in local politics. Chinese who were American citizens did not vote in elections in the 1930s. However, after World War II, Chinese were more active in the community. |
| 3 | 080-099 | The Chinese people saved their money (wages) to send back to China. |
| | 100-114 | Chinese could not buy land in Chinatown, they had to lease stores for their businesses. |
| 4 | 115-140 | Chinese gambled for recreational purposes. They could not go to different places such as theatres and restaurants. Therefore, they stayed within their own groups. Even if the Chinese had money to spend at theatres and restaurants, they were not treated equally. |
| | 141-150 | RM did not protest about the discrimination because the Chinese were not listened to by the whites. Chinese kept their feelings of discrimination to themselves since there were not many of them to complain about the unfair treatment. RM felt that whites would not have listened to the complaints. |
| 5 | 151-177 | In the 1930s, David Woo was involved in Chinatown politics--the Kuomintang. However, RM's generation of Chinese were not as involved with the Kuomintang. |

Contents (cont'd)

| Time Segment | Counter Number | Summary |
|--------------|----------------|--|
| 5 | 178-191 | RM thinks Chinese people have done well economically. Saw a significant gain in Chinese peoples' ability to invest and do well economically after World War II. |
| 6 | 192-222 | Unwritten restriction of letting Chinese live in white neighborhoods existed. RM lived in a Jewish neighborhood when RM's family moved to the Crenshaw area. |
| | 223-257 | Chinese men generally married Chinese women from China, although some married American born Chinese women. Most men wanted sons and celebrated when a son was born. Chinese families had 3 to 4 children in the family. |
| 7 | 258-270 | RM's family celebrated Chinese New Years with traditional foods and money packets "lei-see," and visited other families to wish them a Happy New Year. |
| | 271-283 | RM was raised in Marysville near Sacramento. About 100 Chinese lived there. |
| 8 | 284-297 | Most Chinese did not approve of interracial marriages. Chinese parents sent their children to Chinese school. RM attended Chinese school from 4 pm to 7 pm after regular school. RM didn't learn much in Chinese school. RM didn't like the school because the teacher was strict. |
| | 298-333 | |
| 9 | 334-350 | RM did not send his daughter to Chinese school. |
| | 351-365 | Chinese acted in army films and movies depicting opium dens. |
| | 366-390 | Many "old timer" Chinese wanted to go back to China to die but didn't have the money to pay for the trip. |
| 10 | 391-401 | RM has never heard any Chinese complain or be embarrassed to be a Chinese person. |
| | 401-439 | The Chinese thought that any office job was an "ideal job" in the 1930s. |

END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

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