

Interviewee: Marguerite Gee Royse
Interviewers: Chris Chan, Daniel Ngo
Date/Time of Interview: March 5, 2018, at 1:30 PM
Transcribed by: Chris Chan, Daniel Ngo
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Background:

Marguerite Gee Royse was born in 1944 in Houston, Texas as the youngest in a family of 12 children. As one of the early Chinese families in Houston, her father opened up multiple grocery stores in Houston, serving mainly the Black population during the time of segregation. Marguerite discusses her experiences and the conditions growing up in Houston as a Chinese American and sheds light on her occupational path as a teacher, a journalist, PR manager, and a career woman.

Setting:

The interview took place on March 5, 2018 in Fondren Library at Rice University. Marguerite Gee Royse was accompanied by her husband during her brief visit in Houston. She is based in Southern California, in Houston for the annual Gee Family Association dinner banquet.

Key:

MG: Marguerite Gee Royse
CC: Chris Chan
DN: Daniel Ngo
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
... : speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?): Preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, or interview notes, etc.]

CC: So today is March 5th, 2018 and we're here with Mrs. Margaret Gee Royse. My name is Chris Chan and with me I have—

DN: Daniel Ngo.

CC: Um, so let's begin. Uh, we're going to first start off with, um, your childhood and your family. Um, so can, can-can you start off with your date of birth and talk a little bit about your family and your siblings?

MG: Okay, um, I was, uh, born on June 13, 1944, and I am the youngest of, uh, twelve children. And, um, you know, now I look back, I think of my childhood years, uh, as my happiest years. Um, there – my oldest sister, Daisy was twenty-two years older than I, and then there was Ruby, two years younger, and, uh, uh, number three was George, four years younger, and, uh, then Robert, two years younger, David, two years younger, Mamie, two years younger, uh, Mary Ann, about a year and a half younger, and I think a year and a half between Mary Ann and my twin brothers, uh, Joe and John, and, uh, and maybe about... maybe two years of—between the twins and brother Tom, and then, uh, two years, um, between, uh, Tom and brother Alfred, and I'm the

last. And then there were three years between me and, um, um, my last brother. And, um, yeah, the-they were happy times, and, um, um, I don't know if you're – un-unfortunately my elder sister, who was older, old enough to be my mother, but, um, she took care of me, um, she died tragically in childbirth in Houston at the age of about twenty-seven, which was a-a shock. So, I only have, you know, young memories of her an-an-and they were good because she was like my protective mother. But then, um, the rest of my, uh, uh, siblings were with me, uh, a long time. So, I have, uh, I have memories of each of them, you know, and big family. Some you're closer than others [laughs] and, um, we just, yeah, gro-growing mostly up in Houston, uh, it was a good family period, and we had family dinners, and lots of get-togethers, and we'll have the friends, and our house was very open to people. Chinese coming from, uh, anywhere, particularly in the south where my, uh, my parents had been, uh, in Lake Village, Arkansas, where the first, um, nine were bor—uh, ten were born. And so, we used to, you know, so-so people from those families and friends of friends who came to Houston were welcome. So, it was a very open, uh, uh, period for me.

CC: Would you say you were, um, kind of brought up by your siblings, your elder siblings, um, or, uh, ho-how would you describe your relationship, uh, with your parents, uh, versus your siblings, as the youngest o-o-of twelve?

MG: Mhmm. Well, I, I realized my mother was older, you know, for a mother, and, uh, I saw because I had 'cause – my first language wa—actually was Chinese. I was the youngest so she, uh, kept me close to her and, um, I used to actually, uh, sleep with her, uh, o-on the bed as a child. And, but I-I – once I started school, I-I realized that, fortunately, I'm going to be candid, uh, that she was old-fashioned, and she was old country, and, you know, she only spoke, uh, Chinese, and that's why her English was, uh, always poor. My father had, uh, uh, spoken, uh, better at English. In fact, he was bilingual. He could read the Chinese daily's, and the English, uh, American, uh, newspapers. So, there were good memories of my eldest, uh, sister, who was protective even till she died. And, uh, uh, I wasn't that close to my-my-my second eldest sister, who was a little more stern with me – because I was a li—I was spoiled too, I was the last to come a—come a-along, and that wa—I was a s-surprise. My – they were always joking – my brothers would say things like call me, “the Mistake” [laughs]. They didn't – I wasn't planned or anything. Um, so, it was just, uh, I guess sort of, uh, uh, uh, the values that my parents, uh, had were passed onto me. Uh, the old fashioned to, uh, be polite and try not to be, you know, and to your elders. And try not to talk unless spoken to, and, um, you know, just act as, as, as you, maybe in a way, as reticent as you can be. But see, I was a young child and I was, uh – at the same time I was a—I was allowed to be very free. So, uh, I did speak my mind. So, uh, i-it was just a combination of, uh, the old—the elder siblings, um, uh, speaking to me and when I, when I really got out of line, telling me, no, you – that you do not act that way, and, you know. So, I think I had the basic values, but I was allowed a lot of freedom to, uh, to, uh, uh, yeah, to open up and, and, and, and, um, express myself.

CC: How did your parents, uh, spoil you?

MG: Oh... I-I don't know, uh, uh, I never felt I was that spoiled. My, my older brothers felt that I was a little spoiled. And um, I don't know, it's just that when my brothers would sort of pick on me, uh, I would be running, an-and, and my mother would, you know, grab – grab me and hold me in to her, and then she'd fuss and chide my brothers, don't you treat them that way. Uh, as, um, in Chinese, it was always Chinese from her, uh huh. And so – but then I got berated too, but you

don't think [laughs] it was back and forth. Uh, but I think the fact tha-that I was just allowed as a last child to be so free and open and, and say what was on my mind until I crossed the line, um, I think that might have – because I think my older sisters were raised, uh, to be more polite, an-an-and reserved.

CC: Mhmm, and why do you think that was? Just because you-your mother was younger at the time, or was the changing values of society a factor?

MG: Uh, I'm not really sure. It could be, you know, when they're older, they, the parents, uh, do, uh, treat the, uh, uh, elder siblings, uh, stricter and let them. But, um, it, that there might been in and, uh, and then, uh, um, during stay in the United States they realize that, you know, this was the American way of life and of course she's going to, you know, soon, too, be American. You know, I think my parents entertained the thought, at one time, that they could, uh, do well here financially, or something, and take the family back to China. And she would talk about it sometimes when I was young, but that did not become realistic because we were Americans, and we were, uh, we had American values, and we would've, we would've, uh, you know, never, never fit in.

CC: Do, uh, how old was your mother when you were born?

MG: Uh, I, I think the birth certificate says that she was, uh, about forty-seven... but I'm going to say, I tend to think they were both maybe two years older. There wasn't always, you know, documented proof—

DN: Yeah.

MG: —of their birth. So, I think they had a tendency to, to fib a bit on, on the ages and then, you know, they took, uh, you know, the hospital and everything, doctors took their word. And, so, um, yeah, so I-I think she was close to forty-nine. You know, if she, if she was. Because I was sort of a change of, you know, o-of a young-, you know, what do you call—b-baby, late baby as, as her, her system was changing into menopause. So, I think that's why I was a surprise.

CC: So, you think, um, you know, when they, when they fib a bit about their age, i-it would be to have a younger age as opposed to an older age.

MG: Yeah, it would be. Yes, because they realize they were older parents and, you know, particularly, uh, being I, number twelve being born.

CC: Uh, what memories do you have of your father?

MG: Okay, my – they're, they're good. Uh, uh, my father, though, already, um, he died, uh, when I was ten. So, according to the birth certificate or something, he was seventy-four. I tend to think it was more like seventy-six. Um, he, he was this grandfatherly man and always smiling and talking, wore glasses, read his, um, his, uh, daily papers, Chinese and English, drank coffee in the morning, and then, you know, that's how he started his day. And, and, uh, I remember as a child being, you know, when he's ve—affectionate, being pulled in between his legs while he's there, just being held. So, you know, you know, there was, there was love there. Uh, but I—but in time I realized that, gee, seeing other people, he's old enough to be, like, other people's grandfather, and I realized that later. Uh, but he was – and he was highly regard in the community because he was, uh, a generous kind man, very sociable, and, even my American, I,

you know, uh, Caucasian neighbors, the house, he was the friendly Chinese man on the block. And generous about giving, both of my parents, because we planted, uh, all the Chinese vegetables behind the house because at that time we didn't have a Chinatown to go to get all the fresh produce. So, all the Chinese vegetables. And that was part of buying the house in Houston. How good was the soil? Because they were going to be planting all the vegetables. So, he would share all that, you know, things that the, that the, um, neighbors liked, and also give roses from our, uh, rose, uh, when, when they bloomed. But I know he was so, uh, uh generous because I, uh, later I heard the stories where he loaned money to Chinese coming to this country, and it, sometimes it was, it was never repaid, but he never, you know, he forgave. He didn't, you know, make a big deal about it, because I think, um... generosity and, uh, goodness was part of, are part of it. So, I think that was passed down to, um, to us. [CC: Did he ever-] Better to give than to always receive.

DN: Mhmm.

CC: Did he ever teach you any lessons that, you know, like generosity? Um, do you remember him saying any sayings that you still remember and keep close to heart?

MG: The... Now then. Because both of them led by example. That's how you, you see how, how they treat others, but, uh, he would say, uh, he knew education was important for us to be successful in this country. And he said, "You go to school, you make good grades, you know, you study hard, you be a good girl, you be a good student." So, they know – they knew that A's and B's were good, and that A's were the best, you know, straight A's. And one time I got a C, [laughs] I think it was something in attendance (unclear), or they would grade you on your behavior and I wasn't paying attention, I got a C. And my mother saw the report card and she got angry, but I still had an A average [laughs] because I did well in the subjects. But here we were, here was, you know, she's moved in and out of her seat, she talks, so she's going to get a C for not staying in her seat! [laughs]

CC: Do you speak to your parents in Chinese or English or both?

MG: Okay, there goes – I don't speak – English is my first and only language now. It was, it was Cantonese. It was more of a sort of village dialect—dialect, you know, uh, say, uh, um, um, dad was Toisan (台山) and mom was from Hoiping (开平) and it, I realized it was a, uh, more of a country dialect 'cause, uh, I had, um, a sister-in-law who, who spoke more the city, uh, Cantonese dialect. No, as long as I, um, was home it was, it was, uh, Chinese, definitely to my mother an-and ev-even Dad. But sometimes, you know, he spoke English. You know, I-I could talk back to him in English. Um, and, uh, you see that, that's how I lost my Chinese once, uh, once I moved away, uh, I moved away, um, in '69 to Honolulu, Hawaii. And so, each time I would come home, my mother would notice that my Chinese was poor. So eventually – and then when, uh, then when my mother died in '72, after that, um, I just, um, um, started really losing my Chinese. And then there was – you know, there was also pressure to do, to um, improve my English to help me, uh, career wise. And particularly I was in journalism, English. Um, I-I felt I had to have high standards of, uh, speaking English.

CC: Okay, um, what about, um, your siblings? Do you communicate with them in English or at – and when you were young did you ever talk to them in, uh, Toisan?

MG: It was rare because we would want, uh – so I'm the last and they've all pretty much gone through the schooling. And so, uh, we were – no, it was mostly English with each other. It only was in – within the house and speaking with our mother, mainly, uh, that we spoke Chinese a-as, uh, we could. And then, to her, but sometimes, you know, we started speaking English that she doesn't always understand certain things. So yeah. Yeah. It's always. So, it's only, yeah, it's only English now. Very Americanized, yeah.

CC: Which, uh, sibling do you think you were closest with?

MG: Uh. I have to, yeah, it would be... I do – there are my two older sisters, um, that, um, that were quite different. We're all, we're all quite different, our personalities. But, um, I think I probably admire my eldest brother George, um, the most. So, he was, um, he was more like in my father's image. Um, very responsible, a member of the community, um, sociable, um respected. People, uh, people would, you know, take to his personality. He was just such a nice man. But, um, he, you know, h-he... what he said, y-you took him at his word and, um, yeah, and because, as the big brother, uh, when my father died, he had to take over the business and he had been going to a college. See, he had, uh, he had been going to the early days of U of H, it wasn't a university, it was Cougar College, or something, and he had to drop out, so he sacrificed his, uh, college career to take over the family grocery business and help, you know, secure, um, you know, the financial health fo-for the rest of us. And, um, and he, uh, he just died. I think he's, he's preceded me. See, you done an interview with him. George Gee.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: So, uh, he, he died at eighty-five in 20-uh-13. Mhmm.

CC: Did you ever, um, help out with the gro—the store, the grocery store, when you were young?

MG: Oh, exactly. We all had to work. That's the strong work ethic. And, uh, everybody – cause that's how we made – you had to put in your hours at the store, and after, after school, you know, you had to get your studies in, but y-you had to work and, um, as the youngest they had me, uh, uh, stacking canned goods, like, at the age of three, four. You, uh, you may not remember young, you young guys, but there were these little pet milk cans, and things like that that was small, and then you would put them on the lower shelf, and they would open a case for me and they say, “Okay, you stack ‘em.” They would give me tasks like that. And then, as I got older, by the time I was nine, I was, um, cashiering. And by the time I was, uh, twelve, I was sort of a junior cashier helping my sister. And, uh, you know, these are days of the, old, uh, uh, you know, it's the – Anyway, it's the immigrant story of-of the, you know, subsequent Ko—uh, Koreans an-and the Vietnamese, who start, you know, owning these 7-Eleven stores. But, those days, um, ou-our family grocery store – you didn't have the benefits of, uh, of the mechanization of, um, of pricing, you know? You had to know the price of every item and you had to, um, you know, in [gestures like inputting the price] and, uh, [laughs] and work the cash register.

CC: Do you remember some of the prices?

MG: Oh, things were cheap. Uh, a small loaf of bread, um, seventeen to twenty-one cents. Maybe, uh, gee, what was milk? I don't know. Uh, it was, uh, um, milk maybe, um, um, quarter something? Ten cents? Something like that. Um, this is – don't take it for accuracy. Uh, uh, but you know, much less, and, and even cigarettes. Um, and at that time I was allowed to sell the cigarettes underage, or at least they never came and check up on it. Yeah. Oh, oh God, what was

cigarettes at that time? Might have been, um, well less than a dollar, about a dollar or something. Yeah.

CC: What was the most expensive thing that you sold at the store?

MG: It's really, I'm trying hard to think about... Let's see, it, hmm, could have been, I don't know, it's probably, maybe, could have been in, in the drug department in – whe-where they were in, um, I can, what little, uh, maybe some, some drug items, uh, but nothing really, um, you know, um, stands out to me. These, um, um, beauty products that were on the line back there. Um, yeah, they tend to – the, the, the, the items back there tend to be more expensive otherwise, you know, its produce and groceries an-and the meat. Oh, of course, your, your, um, your steak, your well, uh, your top grade steaks would be cost more a pound. But, my God, that's, that's nothing. It's steak for, uh, a dollar, two dollars, something like that, you know, things like that, that product. But, um, uh, nothing, no one item, stands out in my mind as something terribly expensive.

CC: Uh, did you get paid?

MG: No [laughs]. We didn't really get salaries. See we, uh, money was given to us as needed for school expenses. I wa—food was always there. Uh, lunch, you know, lunch was, uh, uh, plentiful 'cause there was food and Mom would make sandwiches every day. Uh, it wasn't till I was probably in high school that I could get a little more change and go through the cafeteria. Like, I get twenty-five cents or something. You could get a whole meal for twenty-five cents! But even so, with our diet, um, I could take pork chop sandwiches to school. Meat sandwiches! Now the standard sandwich for an American Caucasian kid was peanut butter and jelly and that's what they had all the time. So, occasionally, I would trade off my meat sandwich to get peanut butter and jelly! I had no idea about the prices – it was so different. So, things like that, they were, you know, co-common [laughs]. No, food, food was never a problem. We, in – that, that was important to, uh, to us Chinese. Eat well, feed your family. And we would take up – my brothers all knew how to butcher, so they would bring home the top grades of the beef to cook at home. Yeah. Premium.

CC: What, what kinds of, um, dinner foods did you eat at home?

MG: It would always be a combination, American Chinese. Uh, had white – a pot – we had pot of white rice going the whole day, whether it was in the house or at the store or, see, behind the store, there was this kitchen—

DN: Mhmm.

MG: —and when – where we would take our breaks and we would eat. So, uh, it would, yeah, it would be, Mom could make, you know, any kind of stir fry chicken, beef, pork from the vegetables in the garden. Or, Mom learned how to make very good southern fried chicken. We would have that. Uh, and, uh, and as I get pork chops, just cooked American way. Um, uh, my mother learned how to make good, um, sweet potato pies, which is another sou-southern delicacy. And we, you know, w-we could have corn, uh, canned corn – we didn't grow our own corn – and corn off the cob. Everything in – whatever it was, whatever the meat o-or chicken wa-was the main entrée, it would be complemented with white rice and a Chinese vegetable. At least one green Chinese vegetable, and sometimes corn.

CC: What kinds of Chinese vegetables did you guys, um, sell at the store and grow?

MG: Well, I tell you, uh, at that time you didn't, uh, have Chinese vegetables at our store, because, um, our, uh, our clientele – we were in a Black neighborhood, uh, the Fifth Ward. And so, uh, they would be more, uh, American vegetables. It would be your broccoli. It would be your, uh, um, um, it, um, it would be your cabbage. It would be, um, collard greens. It would be mustard greens. Very southern, uh, vegetables. Um, but the vegetables came from the garden. So, everything bok-choy [laughs]. I can't remember the, you know, uh, uh, uh, gai-lan. Uh, uh, uh, every kind and, what am I saying, what, what is – siu-choy. I can't... I see them when I go – d-do you know, uh, Ranch Market? 99 Ranch Market.

CC: Mhmm. Yes.

MG: I see them when I go there. And I can't always remember the name of them.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: But we had them, you know, tha—we had most of those vegetables we're growing, including the winter melon. Yeah.

CC: Did you know where your parents got the seeds for Chinese vegetables?

MG: Uh, its... I think it got through, through people who were coming over and all from the village who we made friends with and brought things. And then once you started, li-like you'd do the bean sprouts, you just—

DN: Mhmm. Yeah.

MG: —that regenerates. So, you save them. I think that's where they – 'cause when people were first coming over here, you could get, you know, uh, request these things I think.

CC: Uh, how do you think your mother learned how to make southern specialties like pies and fried chicken?

MG: Oh, she just adapted! She just, um, I think she just observed, and she never took any formal cooking lessons. You know, she would, she would see, and that the – and, uh, occasionally we'd go out to, uh, American cafeterias. No, she just, just saw that, that chicken and, uh, was popular, o-or fried chicken. And, of course, this was be-before you had Kentucky Fried Chicken and Churches Fried Chicken. So yeah, she just knew. She, she learned, I think my mother adapted, she observed, and she just saw, and she, you know, came with her own recipe, and dipping it in flour and egg, yeah. Tho-those things she, I think so. I don't think anyone had to really come and teach her.

CC: Did, um, did she interact with neighbors a lot?

MG: Uh, not a lot. Uh, she, she was a little more, um, reticent because I think, um, uh, uh, she was aware he-her English was poor. But, but, you know, that doesn't mean, you know, occasionally and giving things and all, uh, you know. And, uh, also you have to reali—um, when, um, we moved to our house – well, we'll go ba—go, go back to when we had our first grocery store which was in the Black neighborhood, and that was the only way I interacted with, uh, Blacks, because we were in that neighborhood, and there was a family in the back who had a little Black daughter who was a little younger than I, because it was the days of segregation.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: So, I never saw them in school because – but they were our customs, customers. So that. So, she didn't... There, she was probably more reluctant, and I have a feeling it's probably prejudice on, on her part. Um, but then we moved, uh, into a house that, uh – purchased before my father died – into, uh, um, a labor class, a blue collar, White neighborhood. And it's, uh, I don't know how well you know Houston, northeast part of Houston. And it, um, when we first moved there, it was mostly Whites, and, of course, I was going to school, so, so the neighbors around, uh, White families who were employed by the oil companies, but they tend to have blue collar jobs. But then it changed in – so there she would know some of the neighbors – and then it changed into, um, Latinos. Latin Americans or, are you, do you, are you more familiar with the term Chicano? Which term do you--What are the terms that we're using?

CC: I hear Latino.

DN: Latino and Hispanic, probably.

MG: Yeah, Latino and Chicano. Yeah, for Texas, a lot of Chica-Chicano, and, uh, California's Latinos. And so, and I think to that, to this day, uh, it, that's still the neighborhood. In fact, um, uh, um, after, um, my, uh, you know, mother passed on, my, one of my brothers took over the house with his wife and raised two sons there, and they expanded the house. And he, right now, and that brother has passed on, and his widow and his eldest son are, in fact, they were in town taking care of it because it's on the market and there's a bid on it. So, they plan to sell that house. So, this gone to second generation. So, I would say, once the neighborhood started turning more, um, Latino, um, she was reluctant to, you know, get, get out as much.

CC: Did you interact with your neighbors when you were growing up?

MG: Uh, well, when – I-I probably knew them all when they were White because I was still in school. But then about that time, you know, I was going off to college, so I wasn't living there, so I didn't know who these people were moving in, but you, just next door, we always knew there was some Latino family. So, I was never around to, to uh, really interact with them. And then I think, uh, my brother John, who then moved in and take over the house, they got to know them, you know, better.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: But it was not like, um, you know, by that time everybody, uh, and um, since, you know, kids when I—going to school and, you know, same neighborhood, they would be transported out, you know, of the neighborhood. So... But for a period, and it wasn't till, uh, really more junior high and high school that, uh, I wa—we were in th-the White neighborhood and I knew the neighbors because I was going to school with some of them.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: You know, I'd go spen-spend time on the porches and—

DN: Yeah.

MG: —visit and stuff like that. Mhmm.

CC: Do you know if, um, your family had trouble buying a house in a White neighborhood at that time?

MG: I don't know. I don't think so. Uh, uh, it was because, I-I really don't know, because, uh, they, they were these model homes that I wish – I thought were impressive because they one-and-half story tall—story homes and we could go look at them and then they pa—you know, pointed it out that we're going to build that on our lot. We had a nice big corner lot. There was this old house there, wooden house, that we first moved to, and, um, then the new house was, uh, built, uh, uh, to the right. That was the one and a half story. So, it's, it's a, it's a big lot now. And, um, if I would think, they... building constructed on the lot, I-I would have hoped we didn't have any problem, uh, at that time.

CC: What was the name of the grocery store that you first worked at? Or your family's grocery store?

MG: Oh, th-the little one that we grew up in, and uh, in the back of the house, um, that was Sunlight Grocery Store, and little – but then we moved into, uh, uh, G&G Food Market on, uh, Lyons Avenue. You know, at that time the neighborhood was actually sepa-separated by the railroad tracks. So, so the Whites were on part of the railroad tracks, the working class Whites that we moved into, and the other was still moving into the Fifth Ward, which was the Black neighborhood. So that's where our store had to be. And so that market was a little larger. And then what happened is, um, probably by that time I would have, uh, others, older siblings were, going to college and, uh, uh, I, I, we, yeah, I, we had moved into the house in the White neighborhood. So then though I had to go work in that store, G&G Food Market where I spent most of my working years from, uh, yeah, probably... you know, it was only when I was small. I-I'm going to say eight, nine on up to, uh, close to eighteen when I continued working part time in the store. Uh huh.

CC: How would you describe the, the differences between, um, G&G Food Market at that time and the- the grocery stores we have today?

MG: Oh, they're... they are, uh, small, yeah, you know, it's a small, uh, store. But to me it looked pretty big, uh, you know, at the time because it was larger than the little grocery store on Market where, uh, I grew up behind. But, um, I would only compare it to – in, uh, I live in the, uh, California and, uh, not Southern California, but we – before we moved to Southern California, um, we were in, um, Northern California and living in Berkeley, and there were these little community stores in the Berkeley neighborhoods that remind me that, just for the people who live there, but even those, uh, uh, and, and many of them are run by Asians, uh, Chinese or, or Japanese, but even those, uh, an-and they cater just to the people in the neighborhood, um, even those are smaller than what we had. We had a, uh, uh, a market that had, oh, one, two, at least three aisles, and you enter and cashier on the right and all th-the dry goods on the right, left produce and canned goods, and all the way back was, uh, the meat market—

DN: Mhmm.

MG: —where things are all custom cut for you. Uh, so, it was very nice. But then you compare it to, uh, a first, well at that time, a first chain, um, I'm trying to remember, Weingarten was a big chain. Have you heard of that store, Weingarten?

DN: No.

CC: Only through the archives.

MG: You did? Oh, that's an old Jewish chain. Yeah. And that, that, that it would be Weingarten come in and, uh, uh, so to go to that store, uh, was something. And it was the Weingarten when I first went into, used to go there where I always remember the two water fountains, and one was for Whites and one was for Colored, and I knew that I could walk on the step to the White water fountain and drink from it. And it was at Weingarten's. So, I saw how big they were. They were not really our competition because of our clientele were basically, basically, uh, the Blacks, uh, um, African Americans in the neighborhood, who we were, who we really knew well, I had relationships with and we really were protective of us. And we know, [laughs] who would let us know when things were, were, were not happening right. When the, when the, uh, the, um, the sale boys who would, um, would deliver our flyers to the neighborhood, well, one time they just dumped them all in a ditch and they never got delivered. Well, they would get reported, and, uh, people, our customers, would tell us that, you know, you're, you know, they dumped your... And we knew who to, to reprimand, who was responsible for it. And uh, and, and there to, um, yeah, they will, they were Christian. They knew, um, particularly my brother, George, was very Christian, and, an-and extended credit to them. We had credit and then they would pay their bills when the checks came in, and, uh, the churches were around there too. So, in church Sundays, people would come in, were you, do you want, they're here, do you want to order a Sunday fried chicken dinner with all the trappings? Mashed potatoes, mustard greens, and you would order these for like a dollar fifty. You would order one to three, or how many, as part—they were good! But that was all part of also maintaining, um, good relationship with the, the customers. You know, so we knew them all, and they, um, it was, you know, was good experience. Um, I felt safe, and that was the only thing, when you would know when you wouldn't have to go... Anyone who would look suspicious was, was an outsider, because we did have some robberies in the old, in the old store, there were some robberies. And it was always a stranger, uh, coming in. You know.

CC: Have you experienced a robbery?

MG: Uh, not actually, uh, i-in the grocery. It happened, uh, I-I remember it happened when my parents were both working, and they would be taken advantage of, and I was little, when I went – I didn't actually see it, you know, it would be after the facts and Dad would be running out. "Oh," you know, "he, he, uh, he stole something!" You know, we gav—had to give him a little money. It was nev—I don't know how, how really, you know, big it was, I mean, I guess you might have to pull out and give him some bills from the cash register. But it was always, you know, of course, it was always a stranger. It was, it was not a regular customer, you know. But, but they were, they were few, just a handful. And that was the hardest thing also, too, about maintaining good relationships with your, uh, your customers and your community, you know.

CC: What kind of employees did, uh, your family hire for the, the store?

MG: Oh, they would always use, uh, uh, uh, be Black. Uh, they would be the baggers and, uh, those who, who, uh, uh, deliver-delivered, uh, the groceries.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: Yeah, we would hire, hire, yeah, and then when we would, uh, uh – circulars, we'd hire them too, you know. Th-there's this story, uh, it's that the, the, the two young men who we hired, uh, to, uh, pass around the flyers, one of ' became the congressman, Mickey Leland! [laughs]

DN: Oh, wow.

MG: Yes! Mickey! Uh, uh, he had been hired with another guy and, and, uh, he – and Mickey, later, when I saw him in Washington, he says, he said, "It was the other kid! He said, let's just dump these. They'll never know." And that was it, you know. So, Mickey's mother was a schoolteacher and she came in regularly, and then, there, then Mickey was the son and there was a sister. So, we knew the family!

CC: Wow.

MG: So that's [laughs].

CC: Do you keep in touch?

MG: With who?

CC: The – their family.

MG: They're, uh, I think they're, they're all gone. But Mickey Leland, uh, died, in congressmen while he was representing, uh, Texas. Um, this is the district that preceded, uh, Sheila Jackson Lee. Um, he, yeah, he was on an excursion or something trip, and his plane went into the mountains in Africa, somewhere in African trip. So, he died, yeah.

DN: Oh, okay.

MG: In office.

CC: So, you had mentioned that your parents, uh, always had a-a kind of dream to, to go back to China. Were they ever able to visit the village after they came here?

MG: Uh, not that I know of. I don't think they ever... no, not that I know of. I don't think they ever had the money. See, they never had – they're making living on – they never had that, uh, um, you know, uh, ex-extra discretionary money to, uh, go back, you know.

CC: Have you and your siblings had a chance to visit?

MG: Oh, the siblings have. I haven't gotten back to China, to the village. I've gone to China three times, mainland China, uh, uh, and yeah. And we also had, my mother had, um, a sister who had moved to, um, Sydney, Australia about the sa—um, uh, uh, a little after that when she met my father who brought her, uh, to, um, America. So, even that, uh, sister, my mother, uh, ever, you know, when di—never saw physically again. They, they, they communicated by writing letters, you know, Chinese, letters in Chinese. And so, I got to, um, I've gotten fortunately to get to know those first cousins, since who I had been corresponding with since I was teenager, because I'm fortunate enough to travel now. But no, I don't, I really have no idea. I don't think ev—it, it may have been before I was born, but I don't ever, my, remember my parents being on a plane. When we took trips, it was just by car.

CC: Have you, uh, has your family kept in touch with, uh, the rest of the family that might be related to your mother in China, who are still in China?

MG: I don't – I don't think any more. It would be, you know, second, third generation and all, uh, it's just, um, no it's mainly these two younger sisters, and then – then the younger sister was in Hong Kong. Uh, no I, uh... No, we, we, you know, we haven't. [laughs] I have a – I have a-a booklet that was given to me, the history, by my cousin in Sydney, uh, detailing what he had been able to piece together about my mother's family from his mother, um, before she died. So, um, I remember that I-I have to pull that out and, um, uh, see who I – who I need to share that with. But, no it was things that was, was, um, sort of lost. A – but, if it was happening, it was probably before I was born, because there's a family album, black and white photos of old Chinese sitting in chairs – very formal pictures – that were probably related to her or my father. And, uh, I-I, uh, we don't know who the—who they were, you know. It would be the older siblings who might have recollections of them.

CC: Were you close with, uh, Harry Gee's family?

MG: Oh yes, uh, it was, um – you're talking about, uh, Harry Gee Sr., who was one of the first to arrive here, and it was Harry Gee Sr. who, uh, wrote my father, assuming he wrote it, he contacted my father and said that Houston would be a good city to come to f-for Chinese. It was a growing city and, you know, not just, I found, he thought we needed to get out of Lake Village, Arkansas and that little grocery merchant store. And there was, there was prejudice there too, you know, against them in Arkansas. And, uh, it wasn't 'till... you know, more recently, you know, I mean last few years we learned, my eldest sister, uh, she might, fifteen, sixteen then, but she was due th—she was the valedictorian of her class and they weren't going to allow her to have the title because she was Chinese. And I don't know, all those circumstances might have prompted, well, get out of here, because she was still able to come here and, uh, go to Sam Houston High School and graduate valedictorian from there. See how my bro—most my family have been already valedictorians and salutatorians... not I. [all laugh]

CC: What's the relationship between Harry Gee Sr. and your father?

MG: Uh, is there – it some – goes back to the village. Sort of distant cousins, you know? Uh, the Gee family association, we're not blood rela—all blood related, easily. But it goes back to generations. My, um, and, um, and I think that they're related— He may have been the uncle of, uh, cousin Albert, Wallace, and Gordon, and Gordon's the only surviving brother. I have to, uh, see that. But, it was, you know, I-I, really don't— We always called him cousin and, let's see, you have a [laughs].

DN: Yeah, he has a big chart.

CC: So, uh, do you think, um, your family is blood related with Harry Gee Sr.'s family? Or village related?

MG: Uh, I think, yeah, at least village related. I think if you track it down— You know, uh, uh, uh, um, a cousin Lucille, who just, uh, died last year, uh, who was married to Wallace, she might have sat down when she visited me in, um, and in and – so then we were, uh, her son is – we were both in Washington DC and we were having lunch in Georgetown. I'll ask this qu—she says, "I think, uh, I think we're their, uh, uh, great-great-great-grandfather," [laughs] she says, "I think they had the same great-great-great-grandfather." I said, "Are you sure Lucille?" [laughs]

and shrugs] That's how she traced it. I-I have no idea, but I know this – I accept that we're all related, and that, that we're sort of a minority name, you know? We're not Wongs. [all laugh]

CC: Uh, although the, the village in, uh, Toisan has lots of Gees.

MG: Yeah, because of – there was, um, well, that village was financed by prosperous Gees in this country sent money back. And the – my father sent money back and there was supposed to be, at the middle school or something, names everybody who do-donated. And he's, he's up there along with other cousins who live in Houston and sent money back.

CC: Can you talk a little bit about, um, uh, your family's expectations on marriage? Uh, were you ever pressured to marry Chinese, or Asian, or was it very free?

MG: Oh, uh, well, uh, it was my mother who wanted me to marry a Chinese guy, and, uh, you know, uh, we would always, like, she, um, uh, she knew I had a, uh, American friends I socialize with, and, uh—Actually wait, one time, I did date a Shanghainese guy at University of Houston and I brought him home and she knew he was Shanghainese, and she didn't like him. [all laugh] You know they say village people sometimes they – because Shanghainese are very business and maybe not to be trusted because they're so fi—those are these prejudices. And she knew by way he talked. But she also made this strange comment: by the shape of his eyes she knew he was Shanghainese. Well, anyway, that aside, I'll show you, I'll share you those prejudices—

DN: Interesting.

MG: —from the very – are you, come on are you f—tell me you're Shanghainese, forgive me.

DN: No, no, no. [laughs]

MG: Yeah, from that point, yeah. But, yeah, she, she didn't – and then there was a time when, uh, uh, I was younger, uh, when these women, older women, were trying to get their son and nephew over, but it was actually proposing to my two sisters who were, um, um, in college or just out of college, coming over. But then I was young and they'd be having these conversations. But my mother, at least, she never forced us and she told us, she says, "Um, I can't force my daughters to do that." And, and they were, uh – you interviewed Mary Ann? Oh did – were you – yeah Mary Ann was one of 'em. And then she turned to me, "Well what about her?" [laughs] What was I? Fifteen or something? Fourteen? Um, no, no. But, uh, she, yeah, she would have preferred, uh, uh, that, that I find a, uh, uh, good Chinese boy, whether from, um, the old country or Chinese American, to have a family. But then, I was – you know, I'm very, uh, [laugh] a little unconventional because I-I-I didn't care about anything. I just worr—I just wanted to, um, have my career and travel and have my experiences. So, uh, and I-I-I didn't have that many involvements, uh, so I really, I really didn't marry 'til I was fifty-one, okay? I was a career person. So, I'm the exception of the sisters in the family. And I met my husband in San Francisco. And he's Caucasian, Royce. Mhmm.

CC: Um, just to understand, um, kind of the, the times while you were growing up, you had mentioned you, you had gone on a date with a Shanghainese person. What was a typical, what's the typical date, um, back in the day in Houston? Where would, where would someone go for a date?

MG: Well you would be – well sometimes if you like movies you go, you go to movies and, uh, uh, if you were fortunate you, uh, you go out and, uh, eat afterwards. Uh, but a, a-a nice date is, um, yeah, if you go movies or you would at least have a nice, nice dinner th-that he pays for, you know, uh, the menu. And, uh, yeah, I did, yeah, I sort of, you know, think that that would be, uh, um, a-a nice thing, that would be a typical one to just go. I didn't... It wasn't 'till later that I was, uh, I had broaden—I could broaden culturally to start attending, you know, ballets, and, and symphonies, things like that. But that was typical. Or there were parties, see, for, uh, uh, Chinese youth. We had parties at each other's house and somebody could maybe pick you up and take you to the party and you would eat there and you'd dance and all thing, and you'd be taken home. So, that would count also as a date. But I think a more typical date was just going to see a movie and, and, um, and they'd treat you to popcorn or, sometimes, you don't get a full meal afterwards, you just go, you get to go to a coffee shop and have a, uh, pastry and coffee and you talk. That was very typical, you know, modest type date.

DN: It's not too different.

MG: Oh, it's still the same? [laughs]

CC: That's right!

MG: What are you gonna pay? I mean, you got to be making a million dollars? It's got to be.

CC: Um, did you, did you attend very many of these Chinese house parties?

MG: Oh, yes! Yeah. There were lots of parties. This, uh... Uh, there would be my, my cousin, Janine was having parties. They had a nice house. Uh, somewhere there were always some sort of little gatherings. And they could, you know, get together if-if not, not at a house, (unclear) house, I guess sort of a... who would be... it was, yeah, it was generally in the home, but-but you could go to the protection, um, of, um, a rental place. Oh, they-they used to have these parties at VA halls. They-they cou—would be larger. And, uh – and then by time I was in college, let's say, uh, I was still at Uni—you know I was at University of Houston, um, there would be gatherings like I could, uh, go to and the international student organization, it was things that would tie to the, the university that I go—we go to. But, uh, bef—yeah, probably through the high school years there was par—you know, parties that were being held. They were always, you know, you were protected and, uh, you had – and, and, and normally, ooh, no, normally liquor generally wasn't served. It was, it was soda water and punches and things. So, then you started having anything like that 'til we're college age. But, it was, we were very, uh – group, it was very group socially, uh, involved.

CC: What high school did you go to?

MG: Uh, Stephen F. Austin. Austin.

CC: Um, and were most of your friends, um, Caucasian, or Asian? Were they mixed?

MG: Um, by a time, it – the – my friends tended to be, uh, more Caucasian because of my activities there. You know, being on the school paper, uh, of, um, honor's society, uh, um, I was even an ROTC sponsor. Do you know what that is?

CC: Yes.

MG: Okay, wow. Yeah, I was an ROTC sponsor. And, um – so it was all main-mainly that, all the school activities. But, you know, you have to understand too, the Asian friends would be in a separate category. The Asian friends that you had, either related to you or friends, uh, uh, and if – and they had been maybe, uh, developed through the church, and, and then outside the church would have parties – those groups were separate. So you'd have different crowds that, uh, that you could be with, uh, because, you know – yeah generally I didn't have all the same things in common with, uh, Asian friends as I had the school, the school, uh, uh, activities with. Mhmm.

CC: You mentioned you went to college at UH.

MG: Mhmm.

CC: Uh, what did you major in?

MG: Um, I have, um... Well, I have, my undergraduate degree from there is Journalism, English, Teacher Education. So, I had to have a double major and then take the teacher education credits the – because I decided it would be good to have because for a first job, being a teacher was a good job. It paid well. So, that's why I took all the education courses.

CC: What was your – how would you describe your career?

MG: [laughs] V-very, um, fluid, uh, uh, um, it was – but I – you know, yeah, it's v-very fluid path. It was – you know, my traj-trajectory has not been like that [gestures a straight path], it's been like this [gestures a curved path] because, because I took, um, positions and all because I en-enjoy the work or the experiences. I wasn't – well you're, of course you're always looking for promotions, and you're looking for pay increases, but if you're supporting yourself you got to take what's out there and what's offered to you. But, uh, um, but I always knew, uh, when, uh, when I was traveling, um, wherever I was, um, I could find work. Because, you know, I le—from here I went to, uh, Honolulu and – for seven years – and found work there. And there was where my journalism side--I was an editor and public relations specialist. And then from there I went to Washington D.C. wanting to use my skills to work for government. I stayed there nine years. And then from th—from D.C. I came back over to, uh, the west coast, uh, California. And so since '85 I've lived in the state of California. First in the Bay Area, uh, outside of, um, San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and now, uh, um, with my husband, our retirement years, we moved down 2009 to, uh, Claremont, California. So, generally, I was confident. I just always the thing – you know, the words of my father, “You need to work hard, apply yourself, get out there, and look for those jobs an-and fight for them.” So, I knew I would find something. Even when I would go to these areas and I-I didn't have anything lined up because I just had my savings that I thought I could exist on until I found the full-time job. That was always, that was my strategy, right? [laughs]

CC: What motivated you to, to kind of travel to these places to, to start anew over there?

MG: Um, because I wanted to. Uh, uh, even growing up in Houston, through my, uh... oh, you know, awareness years of middle, middle school, high school. And then I (unclear) college. Um, maybe it started more early years of high school, I just realized there was more of a world beyond Houston, Texas, and there was gonna time—be a time when I had to leave this place and just travel. Because it's a big United States and there were just too many worthwhile experiences. For me, experiences, uh, is part of learning, you know, lifelong learning. And meeting different people who don't, uh, who differ from you and bring different life experiences, uh, whether they

disagree with you, you know, or don't have to be – I-I enjoy that. That's why at U of H I-I sought out being part of the international students 'cause I wanted to learn from them. I wanted to-to be with them. So, I knew, so then, um, by the time I fini—graduated from University of Houston, and then I said, “Okay, go ahead and teach at Galena Park.” And then after one year I was little tired of teaching already [laughs]. And these were the good days, right? The biggest issues were—don't wear too much make up and have your skirts too short. Um, or you had to go see the dean. Um, and even I, as a teacher, had my skirts too short so the dean had to talk to me. And, um, so, in that I-I decided take a-a vacation, just visit my sister in Honolulu, it was during the summer, and, uh, said, “Okay, I wanna, I wanna go.” And, oh, to go to Hawaii for the first time. So multicultural and so free, where people are proud of their heritage and, you know, they, they accept you. And very tolerant, the lifestyle. I fell in love with the place and, and, uh, uh, I had, uh, had always kept up my professional organizations. So, what you do is you look up, you look up the chapters in these areas. If it's a editing group, it's a public relations group, uh, women in communications. Um, and, uh, their contacts there and, and you make, and, um, you know, it's a, it's a sort of networking. And they'll tell you what the jobs were available. So, I started looking for jobs. And, uh, and, uh – but I had to, you know, so I edited and, uh, within two weeks I had a job. And then, so I then, I just wired my school district because I had, I had, I was not obligated, uh, having only taught – after one year I would have had to sign a contract, so I was open. And you just wire and say, “I will not—I'm not coming back.” [laughs] You got to get a new teacher! Hire a new teacher!

CC: What were you teaching?

MG: English. Yeah.

CC: To-to which, which, uh, what kind of students?

MG: I was junior, it was junior and seniors, uh, I was – they hired three teachers. One White, one Black, and one Asian, like Chinese, and I think that was intentional attempt at diversity because, you know, Texas took its time in integrating and it was the first full year they were accepting Blacks at this high school. So, that's when I noticed the Black students, you know, there. So, I think that was intentional. But I was the oldest of the three, so they gave me juniors and seniors to teach. And they already had a journalism teacher who I knew from college. So. [laughs]

CC: Did you continue to be a teacher in Honolulu?

MG: No, I've never gone back. I-I've just gone into my field. Uh, journalism. And, uh, which has then led me to, you know, um, first off, first, um, uh, thirteen, fourteen years I was a writer and editor in a – and also a public relations practitioner. I would get these jobs that say, you know, public relations, you know, director, you know, slash editor. Stuff like that. So, I utilized my skills in-in that area, 'cause I could, uh, edit – there was generally a newsletter to edit and produce the brochures, uh, for the organization. And then I developed public relations context.

CC: What do you think has been your most meaningful experience?

MG: [laughs] Oh my! How very—what a diff—what a difficult, uh... You mean one experience in a job or—

CC: Y-y-you mentioned that, um, you-you really value experience. Um, that's what motivated you to-to travel around, to try new things. What – which – is there a particular experience that you think back most fondly of?

MG: Well that's a – I-I think it'd be more the early jobs. I've had, um, a lot – a number of – I've had, have had a lot of jobs, and then they have been, uh, they have been difficult and challenging. They're generally under pressure because, uh, you're meeting deadlines, you know, producing your products. And then when – I also, in Washington, I got into, um, I worked for a, uh, a higher education group where I took on a responsibility to be, uh, part, um, half-development director and then the, uh, the public information director. So, doing all these publications and, uh, and some PR activities I – issuing press releases, et cetera. But the development side is the fundraising side, raising the money for the, um, the non-profit, um, organization. And it was the organization for small colleges, which were your, um, smaller, uh, um, you know, sectarian groups, your Saint Mary's, Saint John's, New Hampshire. I think, I mean, I think even Washington University in St. Louis for a while. Anyway, uh, so there I learned fundraising and how – and I applied my skills to start writing proposals to, to, uh, bring in money for the group. And that, there's, that's when I moved into the area after writing editing-editing, because there was more call for being a fundraiser in non-profits. So, then the pressures became, um, uh, even greater, because I would be under pressure to raise money to keep the organization, uh, financially, uh, viable. So, I would say early on, and maybe when I was still an editor, I, uh, I got a, uh, uh, uh, my first job in Honolulu was for the Hawaii Heart Association was a non-profit, you know, um, it's a large non-profit health group. And what you, you know, you had, y-y-you educate, advocate for, uh, um, uh, education, educating people about heart disease. But, uh, because, um, I, um, I was so new there and I had so new experiences, and I had a very round ra—round, well-rounded, um, uh, opportunities to, uh, develop my skills, not just writing and editing brochures--I had to make contacts with the radio stations, the TV stations. I had to have contacts with the newspapers. Um, I had to, uh, maintain my professional organizations. And all that. So, it was very well-rounded and-and was a very l-learning experience. And I had support from my boss. He just, he just thought I was doing a great job and he-he, he would pay, he would pay for all my memberships in these groups because he though-thought that it was advantageous, uh, for the organizations. So, I find, throughout my yea—my life's experiences and career, whenever I am new to something, and I have new challenges, and I'm learning, and I'm growing, that I feel better. I feel that I'm not doing the same routine thing. I think I have a s-somewhat low threshold for boredom. So, I've had to, you know, just keep [laughs] doing these things. I don't want to do these things over and over. Some people more comfortable and then, you know.

CC: Absolutely.

MG: Mhmm.

CC: What, uh, what year did you leave Houston again?

MG: 1969.

CC: Do you have any memories of the Civil Rights Movement?

MG: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, sure. We were watching it on, uh, on, uh, television and, yeah. Uh, uh, (unclear) I-I wasn't active then and it was just, you know, horrible seeing, uh – I always very s-sympathetic with, uh, with, uh, Black people and-and, uh, seeing them, you know, sprayed, uh,

by water hoses, I remember those vividly on TV. So, then, uh, then, uh – but I didn't really – let's see, I was in Hawaii, then when Hawaii was from '69 to '76, then, of course, I kept, you know, up with that, uh, of, um, of, uh, um, what was happening. And, also, part of those later years in Hawaii, I was developing my feminism, because they had women who were fo—were, were early feminists in-in organiz—in, who were, uh, communicators, that made friends. So, it wasn't until moving to Washington that I really took on more, um, the activist leanings. And there was, uh, on behalf of Asian Americans working in government an-and all. An-and then, uh, I headed an organization for Afric—Pan-Asian American women, and then I helped co-found an organization with, um, uh, other, uh, women of color. Uh, Black, uh, Hispanic, Asian. They – were, we were Chinese and Japanese, mainly. And, uh, Native American. So, there, because I-I was an activist, I became, I became more, more committed. But still, it was, it was, um, yeah, it was towa—very—probably during, during the end, um, yeah, really, it's really, uh, you know, more towards the end of the actual C-c-civil Rights, but there was a-a period of, of, uh, um, where, uh, uh, affirmative action and, uh, civil rights were prevalent, um, under the Carter administration. S-so that was – it was a favorable period, politically, for us, until Reagan came in. Which we thought was bad then. Hah! [all laugh]

CC: Daniel, do you have any questions for her?

DN: Uh, yeah. So, kind of going back to your older siblings.

MG: Mhmm.

DN: You were talking about how they-they did some of the instilling of values in you. They would tell you, like, “Oh, that's, you can't do that.”

MG: Yes.

DN: Uh, what other parental roles did they take on? Like, um, I know they helped in the store. Did they, like, cook or drive you around? Things like that?

MG: Oh, yes. I couldn't, uh, you know, the brothers – 'cause I didn't get my license 'til I was nineteen, so the brothers had to drive us around to, uh, uh, activities. Um, actually, you know, it was so, I was so independent, uh, at so young with, um, with my, um, my two older sisters who would, literally, buy my clothes, but then, you know, by the time my-my, um, and things– Oh, here's the other thing, right? Clothes were passed down from my two other sisters by my mother and—to me, okay? And then, uh, once my sisters, uh, 'cause the sister closest to me was Ma—um, the brothers, there were four brothers between, um, me and Mary Ann. So, Mary Ann is eight years older than I. So, they were off in c—you know, college already. So, I'm, I'm, I'm at home and, uh, still in my, what, uh, uh, you know, uh, middle years, right? Um, middle, you know, junior high school years, and I was, so— I'm, I'm very independent, so I can go, uh, uh, when I s—uh, started having a little money, yo—I-I could go buy my clothes at Woolworths, you know, places like that. And buy my very first heels. Little things. So, I, you know, when I started – 'cause I was, I was tired of the hand-me-downs, and then I, you know, I wou—so I could buy my own clothes. Um, no, it was just, it would just be big sister talk. I mean, they-they, I-I, they didn't have to be that protective, uh, of me. I think they just had to keep me in line.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: [laughs]

DN: And then, um, I know George went on to open some of his own businesses.

MG: Mhmm.

DN: Did you ever, uh, work with those, or he also worked in a restaurant?

MG: Oh yes, I was very involved. Uh, once George, uh, le—turned the grocery store over to my brother Johnny, who had come out of the army, to run, uh, he had some jobs and he would be the manager of my cousin Albert's restaurant. Um, my cousin Albert Gee introduc—is, is noted for introducing Cantonese cooking to Houston.

DN: Oh, really?

MG: Yeah, his old Ding How Restaurant was very famous. Well then, he opened, uh, a Poly-Asian, very sophisticated Poly-Asian restaurant. It was very nice, you know. You know, um, the dark, tropical theme, the mai tais, and everything, and sitting on the mats and every—you know. It was, it was upscale. And so, he was the manager, so I would get recruited to go help.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: Help him, uh, and mainly it was to be the hostess to help seat them. And, and also, when the, the, the young guy didn't show up to park the cars, I had to park the cars. Yeah!

DN: So, how old were you for this?

MG: I wa—well I was in, uh, I was probably around, um, eighteen, nineteen.

DN: Oh, okay.

MG: Yeah, 'cause that was college age and, you know, I was still here, university. So, so that venture. So, I was always on call. And part time I had been living in – with, with them for a bit when I was going to UH, and then, my junior, senior years I moved out to an apartment with two other, uh, uh, uh, gals. And then he, uh, he, he had an export/import business, and I can't remember where it was. And, sometimes, I would get recruited to go out there and help him in that business. It was always like, "Marguerite, I need you. Come." [laughs]

DN: Okay.

MG: Big brother said he needed me and, uh, it was, it was, uh, it was, it was my responsibility to help. So, I did. And then he eventually got into the insurance business where he really, he really was successful. But he had – those two I remember – he had these two little interim positions, jobs, until he, uh, um, got into insurance. That's something. Mhmm.

CC: What do you do for hobbies?

MG: [laughs] I'm not a real, you know, I'm not into, to, to sports. Uh, I, uh, uh, and I never had a, really, you know, big hobbies like knitting, sewing, anything like that. I'm, I-I tend to be more active and, uh, I have interests. I-I love going to movies. I still go to movies. Um, th-they're, um, they're cultural activities. Uh, uh, my hus—uh, my husband and I go into, um, opera and, um, theater in, um, LA. We drive in there. I-I-I like the cultures. Um, so, so I don't have any, you know, any, what, conventional, uh, uh, hobbies that like women my age might have. [all laugh] 'Cause I was never good at knitting and crocheting, and stuff like that. And I'm a, I'm a fairly

good cook, you know. I can cook Chinese dishes, and other foods. Uh, um, listen, it's a, yeah, it's, it's, i-it's a lot and I-I, uh, I don't lead a sedentary life. I try to – I exercise, you know. I, I try to get on exercise. Uh, I belong to a gym, but I do walk, uh, two to three times a week and then go to a gym, um, to keep, keep my muscles up. So, to be active. But, I am – well my interests are now volunteering in the community and I'm, I'm, um, I'm quite active politically in Claremont, with the Claremont Democratic Club. So, uh, we are very righ—rea—active right now. I'm part of the resistance, okay? [all laugh] We are taking on projects and, uh, um, uh, for, to, uh, to, uh, uh, run Democrats against some of the, um, um, Republicans in (unclear) districts. And, uh, I do, for the club, number of activities, and, uh, one of, uh, one of them is, um, I do RRT. Stands for rapid response team, where I have people, through emails, I alert them of issues, national issues, and, uh, and also issues only in California, that they need to take action on and, and, um, uh, contact their MOCs. Members of congre—uh, uh, congress. You know, your two senators, your, uh, your le—your, uh, your representative. And then, California you have an assembly person and you have a local senator. So, this is to influence on the issues that are important to us and, of course, right now immigration is a very important—

DN: Mhmm.

MG: —issue for us. So, I spend a lot of my, my time now doing these kinds of things. Now I volunteer with the senior center. And I have a group of friends there an-and do, you know, just a little volunteer work and, uh, called upon the senior center and doing mailings and, and, uh, um, getting their newsletters out. So, I know a group of women there. And at Claremont, uh, College, uh, I participate within the, with the international students, and it's called I-Place, International Place. And they have various programs. And I have, I've really curtailed my activities now, so what I do is I take on at least one, um, international or foreign student who wants to improve his or her English. And mainly, they're Asian students. They're, they're, they're Chinese, they're Japanese, they're Korean. They, at least, assign those to me. But we only, we only, you know, speak Chinese. So, that really is what occupies my time [laughs]. You know, it's almost like a, uh, uh, uh, uh, um, part-time work.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: Because, um, you know, when you're, you volunteer, you—that's—those are all the things I—and then, then there, there are my-my-cultural activities and breaks. And then I – oh I travel with my husband, who travels a lot. Um, and, uh, we, yeah, we just got back from, uh, Jerusalem before we came here. And, uh, um, what else do we do? Yeah, th-the, the cultural activities when I, you know, arrange for the tickets or the symphony concerts and things like that, we go to. And check out good eating places, new, good eating places there that are near us, or, uh, uh, you know, around, you know. Before coming back to Houston, I go on Yelp, and I check out, I check out the new Mexican and barbecue places, so we can try them.

CC: Wonderful!

MG: You—So, that keeps me busy!

DN: Yeah, it sounds busy!

MG: I mean, I've slow down. I've slow down some. I'm not as active as I really used to be, but, you know, I-I got to do something.

CC: That's great!

MG: [laughs]

DN: You just reminded me of, uh, two more questions I had.

MG: Uh huh.

DN: Um, you said when you were younger, with basically every meal, you had white rice—

MG: Mhmm.

DN: —and at least one Chinese vegetable.

MG: Mhmm.

DN: How important are—is Chinese food to you in your diet today?

MG: Um, it's, it's not something I have every day. No. It is, uh, I-I have these dishes and we go out for, um, special meals, and, particularly, go out for dim sum. But my diet is just, um, it's probably more Mediterranean. I want to keep it very healthy.

DN: Oh, really?

MG: I don't eat white rice until we go out. I eat brown—I cook brown rice, quinoa, and couscous. So, I move that around the gra—health grains. Uh, with what we're having we either, uh, if it's, um, uh, broiled, uh, chicken, Jim, my husband Jim, doesn't like much meat. I have to have a pork chop every so now. I don't eat much beef. It's chicken, or, um, or-or turkey. I make – I use ground turkey for my pasta instead of – I have very little beef. And so, I will cook pasta and I always have th-th-this chicken, uh, uh, seafood. Always seafood. Shrimp. Uh, o-or fish about twice a week. He loves fish. So, it's salmon, and what you buy at the market. Um, but, uh, and it's not, yeah, it's – I have different sauces if I'm baking in the oven, but generally when I go buy a fresh fish at, um, Ranch 99, I steam it. I cook it the Chinese way.

DN: Oh, okay.

MG: So, certain things I kind of, yeah, I stir fry. No, don—but I do not have to have Chinese food every day. You know, it's just like, um, a feeling every so often, you know, we'll get Chinese food. And then, the really good restaurants are not close to us.

DN: Oh, okay.

MG: But, sometimes, if I'm really craving something fast, I go to Panda Express. [all laugh] You got that? Alright. But, um, yeah, it's, um, yeah, it's not, it's not, yeah, uh...

DN: Yeah, so, my other question was – you said you married when you were fifty-one?

MG: Mhmm.

DN: Um, what – how did you meet your husband and how did you decide, like, now is the time to get married and stop focusing so much on my career? Or your career?

MG: Yeah, I guess [unclear]. Well, I was – I'm not going to be able to tell you, um, exactly all the circumstances, since this is, what, for posterity after I'm gone? Uh, um, but it was – wasn't

some sort of a, wasn't exactly a dating service. It was something like their CVC. Looking for partners for compatibility and, uh, given, um, my characteristics. Because I was, uh, I was looking for, uh, someone who'd be compatible with me where I could start having, having a dinner 'panion—companion, have conversation with.

DN: Mhmm.

MG: You know, a lot of places, restaurants sometimes, you don't – sometimes they don't – you're not going to feel comfortable, or they don't make you feel comfortable if you're eating alone. And then you, if you can find a female friend. And they always put you at the worst tables too, you know. So, so I wanted a, um, a, um – so firstly, I just wanted male companionship, and I had, uh, a-a-at that time, um, I had almost resigned myself to being single. I said I'm just, you know, try it. So, he was one of the people who responded, and it, um, through his message and all we agreed to meet and what is— Okay, you know, when you, you go--you're doing good at that age to find a man who would pay for his share of the coffee or pay for your coffee. You know, he'll pay for his coffee. [laughs] So, he was treating me to dinner. He took me to a Thai restaurant. So, I thought that was impressive, that this man was going to treat me to dinner. And we went to a Thai restaurant and then I had, you know, uh, conversations, started talking, and, um, uh, he was a philosophy—philosophy professor at San Francisco State. So, I said, "Oh, he's employed." And [all laugh] well, okay. Don't worry. And he's taking me out to dinner. 'Cause, you know, I'm, I'm a single woman, a career woman. You pretty much are paying your way, a-a lot of these things, and, at that age sometime, that age, a-, single men you might meet are somewhat losers, you know. [all laugh] They're not going to pay for anything, so. So, I was impressed. We had good conversations. Uh, he's, he's, he-he's shy. He's an introvert. And the fact that he has interests in Asian, uh, um, culture. Uh, he, um, he, um, oh, he's multilingual, he's a scholar, uh, he, he, um, he, he can read and write some Japanese, and, through that, he piec— he's picked up kanji. He can read more Chinese than I can. Uh, and he's traveled to Japan on business and so, I would go to Japan with him. He belonged to the Asian Art Museum. We both belong there, and then we'd go to events together. So, he loves, um, the, um, bronze at the Asian Arts. So, we had things in common. And he was, because he loves the Asian culture I think he could, he, he would be attracted to an Asian woman and we would have things in common. And he had other Asian friends. So, it, it developed. It just developed. We started – we, we knew each other for, uh... uh, two, yeah, two full years before. Uh, he was divorced before, um, we decided to, uh, get married.

CC: Wonderful!

MG: [laughs]

DN: Okay!

CC: Did you have any other questions?

DN: No, I'm good.

CC: Well, that was all that I had, so thank you so much for your time.

MG: Okay, okay.

DN: Thank you!

MG: Thank you! So, what do we do, we, uh, uh, well, well, you're going to take me to the archives. Right?

CC: Right.