

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Rose Pu
Interviewer: Taylor Ginter, Steven Loyd
Date/Time of Interview: June 8, 2018
Transcribed by: Taylor Ginter
Audio Track Time: 1:37:39
Edited by: Sara Davis (7/17/2018)

Background: Mrs. Rose Pu was born in Beijing in 1927 and lived in the Forbidden City with her family. She moved to Shanghai when she was two, and experienced the Japanese bombing of the city during World War II. She came to America when she was 20 to finish college, but could not find a job even after earning an MBA from Baylor University. She ultimately became a schoolteacher and even spent time on a Fulbright fellowship in Scotland teaching. She now lives next door to her daughter in Houston, and was 90 years old when the interview was recorded.

Setting: The interview took place on June 8, 2018 at Mrs. Pu's home; lasted about an hour and a half; and focused on her life in China, the U.S., and Scotland as an immigrant and teacher as well as family member.

Key:

RP: Rose Pu
SL: Steven Loyd
TG: Taylor Ginter
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis (?): preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

Interview transcript:

TG: Hello. My name is Taylor Ginter. We're interviewing with the Houston Asian-American Archive. It is June 8th, around 9 in the morning.

SL: I'm Steven Loyd.

RP: I'm Rose Pu.

TG: And we're here in Rose Pu's house, um, which is off of Greenbriar near Rice University. Um, so, Rose, can you please introduce yourself a little bit, like where and when you were born?

RP: Well, I was born in Beijing in 1927. And actually, our family was inside the Forbidden City, and uh—but then, afterwards...because that was 1927, the Republic of China already established, and Beijing...was capital during the imperial China. But when Republic of China came over, they moved the capital to Nanjing. The word "jing" means "capital" and the "bei" means "north" and "Nanjing" means "south capital" so they moved the capital. Communists moved—I mean, Republic of China moved the government to Nanjing to the south. But we remained, stayed in Beijing until I was two years old. My father had only one job in his life, was Bank of China—he worked for Bank of China. And uh, when he was two years old, Shanghai has developed such metropolitan economic center of China. So Bank of China moved to—headquarter moved to Shanghai. And my father had to move to Shanghai with the headquarter because he was the auditor for the bank. At that time, banking business

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was very, very new in China. And as—my father had to come to Shanghai first, get place for our family, and we had a...large household. See, my...grandfather—my paternal grandfather, was government official for the imperial palace. In fact, I have his Mandarin square on the wall [TG: Mmm.] to show you. He had to wear the court dress with the Mandarin square in the front. And, of course, after the revolution started, and the imperial dynasty was destroyed, China became the Republic of China. And uh, my grandfather lost a job, you know, all the sudden he lost his income, his status, his everything. And uh, but he's so accustomed to the lifestyle we were used to, he insists we still have to—at that time no automobile, just horse carriage. [TG: Mhm.] We had to have horse carriage, we have to have servants, man-servants, and uh...maids, cook. And every child had—each, each one of us had nurse maid to take care of us. And it was a large household. And uh...but then...after—when we had to move to Shanghai, my mother has to disperse all these household—the servants, everything, and she took, well, I have three older sisters. And so, my—I was two years old, next sister was six, seven, and the oldest, uh, was...thirteen years old. So, my mother had to take a train from Beijing to Shanghai. At that time it took three days and three nights and it was unheard for a woman to travel that distance. You know, it's a big ordeal.

TG: With four kids too.

RP: Four kids too. And uh, but I think my oldest sister helped a lot. She was thirteen, you know. And so, we moved to Shanghai. And th—but then, I remember we moved several times until we...Bank of China built a huge compound for all the bank employees. And uh, well, whoever wants to live there, most of them do. And they have several sections. One's the executive section, only nine houses. And then, in the front, huge iron gates, you know, black iron gates, and the one on the left side has a little gate for people to walk through. Only when automobile—at that time automobile just started—when I moved to Shanghai it was already 1929 and Shanghai was metropolitan city. And then they opened the big iron gate if the automobile come. But, very seldom, very few people had automobiles. In my family I only remember my granduncle, my paternal mother's brother, has—had an automobile. But he was Bank of Shanghai's president, [TG: Mhm.] and in those days if you have automobile you always have a chauffeur, you never drive yourself, you know. And so, and that—go into the compound, on the left-hand side, there is a store—it's co-op store, f—you know, all this is for Bank of China employees only. And this is non-profit organization. You can buy soap, toilet paper, whatever you need from that store. And uh, then, right in front it's a big...yard. It's our exercise court for the school. Right behind this is elementary school. And uh, I can remember so clearly, and many, many steps go up to the elementary school. Again, that's only for bank employees' children only. And the standard very high, because at that time, just about anybody who could read and write could teach. And—but in that school, all the teachers had to be college graduate which was very rare at that time. And uh, down—downs—the first floor actually, almost like basement to me. It had a barber shop, we can get our hair cut, and it had a bookstore. We each have a r—little red...booklet, it's...anything I need—pencil, paper, notebook, whatever. Textbook—I can go to that bookstore. It's charged onto my booklet and they put down how much. By the end of school semester, my parents paid the whole amount. And it works for all the students. And uh, so, and then after the school, you go in...that side's the exclusives—nine houses, you know, it's nine houses, they connected together. It's one building but it's...individual house—row house like. And then, go in here, there are playgrounds, swings, merry-go-round, monkey bar, everything. And then the old section—they have four row houses, four sections. And then go in the next one section, is a new section. That's where we lived—in the new section. It's huge. And uh, I can remember, when you first go in, it's all concrete. And on the right-hand side, there were fountains, and, uh, on the left-hand side, there were apartment buildings. And uh...at that time, five stories was very high. And I could remember—I can remember, we went up to the rooftop, flying kites. And uh, because there won't be any trees or tel—telephone poles get in the way. And we roller skate, playing. And the,

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then the middle section—we live in the middle section. Again, it's like row house. Our house is number 15. Three story high. And I saw some houses in San Francisco, exact same floor plan. You walk in, there's staircase. And on the right-hand side is living room, in the back, bath—I mean, dining room, and in the back, kitchen. Under the staircase there's a half-bath, and upstairs two bedrooms, then third floor, again, four bedrooms, I think.

And uh, so I—it was very, very happy childhood. So, I was saying, actually, I lived in a very...sheltered life. Because all the people I associate was that area—in, you know. And uh, let's see...so that's where I lived until the war started. It was July the 7th, 1937 in the mor—in the, the night before, we went to bed. The next morning, there's war. And it was exactly like Pearl Harbor. That's the way Japanese operates. And overnight, they bombed Shanghai and people just panicked. And, uh, Shanghai had several sections, and uh...and my father was afraid the section we lived wasn't safe. Moved us to another section. And uh...it was very nice house, but they didn't have electricity hooked on or anything yet. And uh, in the—my family saw, but I went to sleep, I guess I was exhausted. And uh, the airplane with a ball of fire in the back, it looked like it was going to drop right on top of our house, but it was dropped next street, so we were saved. It was bad.

TG: So, what do you remember—you said you were, like, sleeping. But, what do you personally remember from that day?

RP: Uh, well, I remember my mother said, “You pack up your things. We have to—we are refugees for the w—from the war. We have to move.” And I didn't know—I had a, you know, very few children have their magazines, but I did. And I remember, I bundle up my little books. You know, tie up, that was my possession that we were gonna move. And uh, so, my father put me and my grandmother into this hotel. And it was bombing everywhere. And uh, and it happened to be my grandmother's birthday. All she was concerned about her birthday—she said, “Oh, we must have refreshments ready. People gonna come to greet me for my birthday.” You know. And uh...but of course, we never could talk back to our parents or elders. And we couldn't even say “you” to the parents. It's “mother this,” “father this,” “grandma this,” “grand”—you know. And uh, of course, nobody came. And I heard—could hear bombing everywhere, just two of us in the hotel, you know. It was—and that was, see, that was Japanese war. See, actually, Chi—Chinese nationalists and communists were fighting all the time, but, you know, it didn't affect us. It, it's small war here and there. But, never in Shanghai. But, that was Japanese war, it's just like Pearl Harbor declare war to the whole country. And uh, then, finally, we moved to one section. French counsel section, they feel it's neutral, safer, so we stayed there. And, uh, we stayed there and then World War II started in 1941. But for us, it was just war continuously for eight years.

TG: So, you left the banking complex, then you were in a hotel for a bit--

RP: For, uh, hotel, and then we moved to another house that's where we saw the airplane drop.

TG: Okay.

RP: And then, we moved to the French section, we moved with my granduncle and then another relative. Actually, three families lived in that three-story house. And uh, we lived until my father found another place near Ba in the French section. And we moved there—that's where we stayed. And when we move in, we had that three-story, it's huge Chinese-style storied house. Before that we had the Western-style housing. [**TG:** Mmm.] And uh...but then, as war getting more intense, people everywhere moved to the French section. And the—again, that housing was belonged to Bank of China.

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We lived in there—wind up, the other families moved to Sha—I mean, they’re from Shanghai but they want to move to this section too. My mother was very kind-hearted. Let everybody move in. Finally, that house, we had ten family live in that house.

TG: Wow.

RP: Yes, and uh—it’s—I can see the house, and courtyard. And ten family all shared that one bath—uh kitchen. And each has little [pauses while gesturing about the size of a microwave] that size stove. And it’s amazing—I never heard a fight or argument among the people. [**TG:** Mmm.] But, then it got to where my uncle’s wife and two children came to Shanghai, stayed with us, and it was really crowded. And it got to the way my cousins came. They all came to Shanghai to go to universities. All—and my uncle, my mother’s half-brother, moved away. It was really crowded. But that was war, you know.

TG: So, everyone living there was some kind of family member?

RP: What now?

TG: Everyone living there was from your family?

RP: Yes, yes. But, but in that house, not everyone is. They all bank employees.

TG: Oh, okay.

RP: Yeah. We had this one—finally, f—at first, we just give up the top floor. And then we had to give up the second floor. Then we give, give up the right-side wing. Then we left—give up the middle part. We only got the left side. [**TG:** Mmm.] But it’s like three sections. And then later on we put a petition here, make more sections, little more privacy. It, it was bad, but...

TG: So, were you still going to school during this time?

RP: Yes, yes. But, in China, for every year we went to school, was private at that time. Now they have public school, the government pay for. So only...say, the privileged ones, get to go to school. And I couldn’t believe at that time, they say only 1% people were literate, [**SL:** Mmm.] were educated. But others, not.

TG: Was your school in the French Concession area?

RP: Yes, yes, I had to move to that. And I had to go through a park. It’s a shortcut to school. And in park we have to pay, get the pass for the park, pay for it to go to park. Here, parks all free. It’s...and uh, even now, even, I remember last time when I was in Shanghai to park, they...you have to pay. [**TG:** Mmm.] And uh, I remember, I went there early in the morning, all the people were all...waiting outside, a whole crowd. And the gatemen evidently see the familiar face, know of them, let them in. But she—he knew I was a newcomer. He- he told me, “No, you have to pay.” And I didn’t bring any money. [**TG** laughs] Had to run back to the hotel, get the money to get in. And it was so crowded, the park. You know, you can just...you kn—I practice tai chi every morning, and for the past thirty years. And, so, I want—go over there for tai chi—you gonna—if you do this [makes outstretched arm tai chi gesture] you gonna touch somebody, it’s that crowded.

TG: Wow.

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RP: That's the way it was.

TG: So, what types of people were your neighbors? Like, were there a lot of French people? People from other places?

RP: Well all—well, in—in Shanghai it's very much metropolitan city, [**TG:** Mhm.] you see a lot of different nationalities. And I remember just a woman who was white Russian, we call them “white” because when communists came over, they were the original aristocrats in Russia. The communists came over, they have to f—leave, they came to Shanghai. [**TG:** Mmm.] And I remember Portuguese. In fact, I don't remember I met any French people. But Indians—a lot of Indians were policemen. They wear the turban. They were policemen. [**TG:** Mmm.] And all different nationalities. But, 'cause mostly Chinese. And English was very popular.

TG: When did you start learning English?

RP: Well, yes. In Shanghai, in elementary school, third grade you studied “I am, you are, he is, she is.” And even today, I can get “he” and “she” and “it” and all these things mixed up.

TG: Right, 'cause in Chinese it's all the same.

RP: Chinese all the same, the writing you can tell [**TG:** Mhm.] it's, you know, “woman.” You can, you don't have to— [**TG:** Right.] it, it's different. Yeah, I just finished reading Amy Tan *Where the Past Begins*. There's one section about the Chinese. Her mother had trouble with English and I can really relate to that.

TG: No, your English is very good though.

RP: Well, I've been here 70 years.

TG: Yeah. [laughs]

RP: So, I should.

TG: So, after—or how long were you in Shanghai, in that—

RP: We moved there when I was two years old. By the time I was twenty I came to U.S. and I had two years college. And I went to Plainview, Texas. Wayland—at that time it's called “Wayland College.” It's—now it's “Wayland Baptist University.” But, at that time only...300 or 500 p—students the most. And I came from Fudan University which is a big university. [**TG:** Mhm.] It was—but it was very good training for me because, go to a small city, and uh, they were very friendly. But I try so hard to speak like Texan and, believe me, in West Texas they talk like Texans. “You all,” I bet you they're saying that. I—and in Shanghai, the English we learned was British English. We say [with long 'a'] “half glass,” you know, “class,” “party,” “patio,” you know, it's...but, I try so hard to talk like Texan. So later on, my relatives were laughing at me. You know, here's this Chinese woman, speak English with Texas accent. [**TG** laughs]. But...

TG: So, did you know anything about Texas before moving?

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RP: Oh well, movies! American movies were very, very popular. And during wartime, especially in Shanghai, there's not much recreation except movies and dance...and that's about it. You know...so, we saw a lot of movies. Of course, you see the worst—I mean, I don't mean “worst” by...and, uh, I can remember—Annette Funicello, Beach Boys, those movies. And they think American people all act like that—which is not true, you know, a lot of American people are very serious. But...anyway.

TG: So, what were you studying in university and why did you go—

RP: Oh okay. Well I started university. I can remember at that time my father already died. My father died when I was 13 years old. And my mother had—we all sat at the table and she would decide what we—you know, we discuss what should we major in. My older sister majored in...[sighs] office management or something like that. And my second sister studied economics. My youngest—I mean my third sister, she studied medicine. [**TG:** Mmm.] When I left China, she was doing internship. And then she became internist, became head of internist, and then became vice president. When she retired she's the president of the hospital. Yeah. And I'm the fourth one. And uh, they decided—at that time, women really wasn't career oriented. The—we just had to be educated, but more for a piece—sheep skin in the dowry than anything else. But of course, an educated woman raised children different from an uneducated wo—mother. And uh, so...we decided I'd study economics. Which...they didn't have aptitude test or any of these things. So, I studied economics in the university, and uh...by the time I came to...the States...I went ahead, had...study economics. So, my bachelor's degree in economics. And then after I finished I came to Baylor. Got my master's degree in business administration. So, I have M.B.A. And uh...but when I was looking for a job—at that time, if you have college education, it was almost guaranteed you have job security. And here I was, back in 1960, I have M.B.A. in Waco, Texas, I couldn't get a job. I, I can remember, people look me in the eyes, “Why should I hire you? We have Americans without the job.” You know, I wanted to tell them I work twice as hard, I—you know, I'll be—I'll do all the right things, but it was—I was female minority and small in size, you know, just such disadvantage. See, when I first went to Plainview, Texas, there were some students from Mexico...couldn't even get a haircut in the barbershop. The president of the university had to take him to the barbershop, make them cut their hair, because they Mexicans. And I can remember the water fountain, “colored” at that time you have to say “colored” and “white.” And bathroom, “colored” and “white.” And I said, “Well, I'm 'yellow.' I don't [laughs] I'm not colored or I'm not white.” They just said, “mark it white.” You know, so. And I never can forget when I came—of course, nobody could afford—not nobody—we couldn't afford to go to American schools in United States. You know, we had a scholarship to come and I had to work in a nurse—school nursery. And I remember this four-year-old little girl look at me. She never saw a Chinese woman before and she said, “You're not colored, are you?” I said, “No, I'm not.” And she was really puzzled—didn't know what I was, you know. But that—and in Plainview, the only foreigners were the school. I mean we—there was another Chinese girl was there before we did. And when I came to Baylor I can remember—Baylor, the first football game always Baylor against Wake Forest. And they had a black football player on the team. When they came to Baylor to play, all the football players supposed to stay at the Rose Fair Hotel in Waco, Texas—Texas, that's the big hotel there. And the hotel wouldn't let him sleep there because he was black. [long pause] It's—it's quite different.

TG: Mhm.

RP: Yeah. Now, it's much more open, you know.

TG: Mhm. So, how long were you in Waco after you graduated from your M.B.A. program?

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RP: Uh...I lived in Waco twenty years. All my three children born in Waco, Texas.

TG: Okay.

RP: And they—at that time, the only Chinese—other Chinese family was another Chinese student, Chinese couple. There were very few Chinese there. Yeah.

TG: So, did you—were you friends with the other Chinese couple?

RP: Well...at first we was—not really. And uh, but then, when I had to have a job, I couldn't get a job as—at that time, job for women, not—I don't care if you're black or white...were bank teller, secretary, and school teachers. I think that's about—and waitresses, and whatever. And uh, so finally, when I couldn't find a job, I was desperate, and I decided I become a teacher because it's better hour for a mother with small children. [**TG:** Mmm.] And uh, when—when I was going back, when I was looking for a job, one time, I remember Pioneers Savings Association in Waco close to us, very good location for me, and the old man named Taylor hired me on the spot. I was—I got the job. And afterwards, we was sitting there just talking. And of course, I talk about my favorite subject: my children. And he said, “Oh, you have children?” I said, “Yes.” And he said, “How old they are?” Well, the youngest one was just a baby. And he said, “I'm sorry, we don't hire women with small children, because they always call in, ‘Oh my child has fever, my child is sick, I can't come to work,’ this or that.” He said, “We can't hire you.” So, I lost my job again. [**TG:** Wow.] You know. And nowadays, I could sue him! But, anyway. So, so, I decide I become a schoolteacher. I had master's degree and I had to get education courses. And...in American history, American geography, you know, American...Constitution, all that. And then, so, I thought, “well, I get—I have job security.” Well I apply job—no you can't! You don't have American citizen. [**TG:** Mmm.] So, I had to go through a whole 'nother, whole process, trying to get American citizenship. And I remember, they have to have—we have to have friends came to...sponsor us, whatever it is, you know, to get us to get a citizenship. Then I became a teacher. So, with a, a master's degree in business I wound up become—became an elementary school teacher.

TG: So, did you have a student visa before, when you were studying? And that's how you were—here.

RP: Well, when I first came I can, actually, I had, I was a...I hate to tell you, I was economic delegate from the government because connection, you know. And I looked like a child. But, anyhow. I got in and then changed to student visa. And then changed into permanent residence. [**TG:** Mmm.] But I didn't have citizenship until 1963. And after that I start teaching. I taught 17 years.

TG: Elementary school?

RP: Elementary school. I taught 5th grade. Again, they say, “Oh, she has an accent. You know, it's bad to teach lower grades becau”—well, I'm small so it's better for me to teach little kids because I don't have to overlook them, but—I mean, look up to them. But then—anyway. But then, the thing I remember the professor said, “No, small children probably will imitate her accent, so it's better for her teach 5th grade.” And so, I taught 5th grade. And...

TG: [overlapping] Were you the only foreign teacher at that school? [**RP:** What?] The only—

RP: Oh yes. And I remember, the principal was very hesitant to have me. My children went to the school nearby. And that school was nearby but it's not the—I cannot teach the same school my children go to. But I'm familiar with the school over there. And, uh...and usually, when you have a new teacher

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at a PTA, the principal will introduce the new teacher, and he never introduced me. And, and then, I, I remember, I finished my student teaching November the 15th, I think, that...six weeks student teaching finish, then I was done. And I thought, “Well, I will not get a job, until *at least* in the Spring.” Not—so I came home, I was making—sewing a dress, that was Friday. Saturday morning, in the mail say “You hired. Report to work on Monday.” I was glad, but—so I had to hurry up, rush, finish making the dress and then report to work. And uh, they put me...the first month they must put me in three different classrooms. They put me in this classroom, they changed me to another classroom, and I just got the names memorized, you know. And then they moved me again. But finally, they put me there. And then, like I said, principal never introduced me to PTA. And finally, the PTA president’s daughter happened to be my oldest daughter’s good friends, they were playing together. So, Mrs. Thompson was telling my principal say, “Aren’t we lucky we have Mrs. Shea in our school?” Then the principal feel much more at ease. And then, he start to introduce me to the PTA. Then I was thought more accepted.

TG: [To SL] Do you have any questions?

SL: Um...you said earlier that they said like, mark you down for white, rather than colored ‘cause there was this kind of, like, binary distinction that you had to make. How strange was that?

RP: What? Uh...what?

TG: Like, being—choosing “white” instead of “colored” even though you said you considered yourself “yellow”—was that weird?

RP: They just check “white,” I don’t know why, because I guess because I’m closer to white than black.

TG: So, was that a weird feeling for you?

RP: Well, well. It got to the way—after I lived in States so long I considered myself American, I really don’t think of my race. But because my looks, right away, people say, you know, “You...you Chinese.” You know, or at the airport they say, “Do you speak English?” You know. [laughs]

TG: So, during the ‘60s, obviously there was a lot of, like, civil rights movements, for colored people—

RP: Oh, no. No.

TG: No?

RP: No. We—we just took it. And I think Chinese people extremely tolerant. I can remember—see, I wound up have English minor. And uh, I can remember my English teacher, Mrs. Warren, she—everyday, I had to write a paper. And I grew up during wartime in Shanghai, there was no reference book, no library, it was—you know, chemistry has no lab. And I never wrote a paper before. And no one taught me, so I just slave over doing this, and that class was so small, I think seven students, and every day we hand our paper over, she would read to the class, and she threw my paper on the floor. I was so humiliated, I never can forget that. But then you live and learn and every course like studying two courses—Chinese—I mean, English, economics. English, government. You know, because, and eventually you learn the terminologies and you get by. [pause] I never could get an A in English. The best I could get was a B in English. [**TG:** Mhm.] No matter how hard I tried. People in Hong Kong seem like...they, they—their English standard much higher.

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TG: Mhm. So, you said—I mean, you’ve lived here for so long, um, what did you do to preserve your Chinese heritage? Like did you teach your kids about your background?

RP: Oh, I tried so hard to teach my oldest daughter Chinese. When she was little, I was determined she learn Chinese first. I figured, when she start school she’ll learn English regardless. And, uh...until she was three years old it really just did not work well. Because the babysitter comes, couldn’t understand her. You know, she couldn’t play with other kids. [**TG:** Mmm.] Sometimes, maybe play very well with other—communicate, somehow kids. And then, so I decided she has to learn English and Chinese. So, everything I say twice. The first thing—first time in Chinese and then in English. And then the Chinese just gone. Just they say is English because they play with other kids, they go to church.

TG: Um, so you, were you involved with your church? Are you religious?

RP: Yeah, I was involved in Baptist church. Yes. But now, because my poor hearing—impaired hearing, I really don’t go to church anymore because I can’t hear. I mean, I hear noises, but I cannot distinguish the words very well. I have to be close, one-on-one and depend on the person’s pitch and voice.

TG: So, when did you start practicing Baptism? Or like, being Baptist?

RP: Well, uh...my family were Buddhists. And, uh...and I still have a whole lot of respect for Buddhism. And, uh...and then, uh, I did go to Baptist church and I was religious, but then now I’m just retired, you know, just...

TG: Yeah. Um, so how—you said you were a school teacher for 17 years and then that was all in Waco.

RP: No, not all in Waco.

TG: Not all in Waco.

RP: I taught 13 years in Waco, it got to the way I was well-accepted, you know, they really like me. And uh, then I taught in Corpus Christi for 4 years. Then I went to Scotland, you know. And I liked that, that was very good experience. And uh, and I really like Scottish people. Again, I taught in Bathgate, which is a small town between Edinburgh and Glasgow. And uh, which...I really liked, and I liked my landlady. She was—treat me like her daughter. [**TG:** Mmm.] And it was—and I learned my landlady’s...spunky spirit. [**TG** laughs] You know, and it was cold! She, I can remember, she go to fishmonger—fish market to buy fish. And uh, it’s hilly and she would have one hand a bag—you go to grocery store, you bring your own bags. The first time, I didn’t know. I went to the grocery store. Wound up—I put fish, everything in my pocket.

TG: Oh no! [laughs]

RP: And my landlady she says, “No, you always bring bags!” [**TG** laughs] So I brought my bags with me, but even bags, cardboards (?) caught them, very rare, you can’t find them, you know. And then she also taught me, no matter how warm it looks, you always bring an umbrella and have a scarf [**TG** laughs] so I, I always did that. But it was so funny, I went to church, and I saw the first two rows, and, uh, this school teacher with all these little boys, two rows they just packed, and...you know, they

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couldn't move [laughs] it was—I mean, the teachers over there, evidently they not just teach during weekdays, [TG: Mhm.] they take them to church on Sunday too. And I thought it was tough when we were teaching, we had to monitor their dining room, you know, lunch hour really not free, you still watch over the kids. But they do even weekends.

TG: So, you went to Scotland through a Fulbright.

RP: Yes.

TG: Can you talk about the program?

RP: Yeah, it's—well, my girlfriend, another school teacher from a different school, give me this Fulbright program thing. And I, I thought, “well, I will apply for it.” But by that time, it think the deadline was October 1st, or 15th, whatever it was, by the time I turn in, it was little late—one day or two day afterwards. I couldn't—and uh, I thought I wouldn't get it. But anyway, they call me for interview. Four different people have to interview you. And then, and I remember one person say, “You are perfect candidate for this program, except your age.” I was too old. I was 57 years old. Well, if I don't get it I don't get it. Well, anyway, so, I was really surprised when I got it. And they—they assign you...you know, I was in Bathgate, I thought it was cold. But then a friend of mine was assigned to Ed—Edinburgh, that was really cold. She said she had to spe—say a prayer before she take a bath it was so cold. [TG laughs] And I [laughs] I—my landlady had, at that time electric blanket was popular. They didn't have electric blanket, but she had a sheet. It's not the whole—it's, maybe three feet long and one foot wide, put under the sheet—bed [TG: Oh.] and, to keep me warm. But I remember, you know, even, you know, I'm from Texas, and I put wool socks on my feet in the winter—I mean, in the summer! In August, to bed, my landlady said, “What you gonna do?!” [TG laughs] and the water, bathroom water faucet, cold and hot. You know, so finally I went to a hardware store, bought one of these things, hook on the hot water and cold water come out together, so I can have warm w—you know, wash hands. It was, it was interesting.

TG: Did you apply for Scotland specifically or they assigned you to go there?

RP: They assigned me. Yeah. And uh, my landlady...at that time, *Dynasty* the T.V. show was very popular. And uh, I remember people say, “Who killed J.R.? Who killed J.R.?” I didn't even know who was J.R.! I didn't watch *Dynasty*, you know. But anyway, it was very interesting. And Scottish people speak quite different from...other people. From the British, and even the Irelands, Irish talk a little different too. Of course, Welsh has a totally different language almost. And uh, and uh, I remember as soon as I got to Scotland, we went to this restaurant, it's called “Coppertine” beautiful place. I walk in, I just ordered hamburger. Somebody Scottish came to me say, “Are you an American?” I thought, you know, I was so surprised because when I was in states, people—during when I first came they said, “You Jap. [TG: Mmm.] You Japanese.” I said, “No, I'm not.” Then during Vietnam War, they said, “You Vietnamese.” I said, “No, I'm not.” You know, and people were, “You're Korean!” You know, nobody ever asks I was an American. I thought, “Oh, I've come to Scotland to become an Am—an American.” [TG laughs] And when I was walking in Edinburgh somebody asked me direction, I thought, “Oh dear they think I'm—” [TG laughs] Anyway. It was interesting.

TG: So, did you feel welcomed in Scotland?

RP: Yes. Uh, that's what I like about small town. People are very sincere. I call the Scottish a very real people. Not this phony, superficial thing. And, uh...my landlady, I have a lot of respect for her. And uh,

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she's very routine, that she and her husband run a flower shop. So, every morn—and uh, I can sit, I have, I have one room and the kitchen privilege and, uh, living room privilege and, uh, for telephone, every time I make phone call I put twelve pence in this little can by the phone. And I pay \$20 a week for my—£20 a week for my...rent. So, one month just £80 and at that time, U.S. dollar was very high—U.S. currency. So, I, that was the period I start saving money. Before that I never could really save money. And...and uh, it, it—my landlady, you know, I remember every night, ten o'clock we sat and watched T.V. news. She would have one glass milk and two cookies. And then 10:30 she closed the tin can, finished her cookie and milk, go to bed.

TG: How long were you in Scotland?

RP: I was in there actually just a few months. [**TG:** Mmm.] And uh, and uh, I came back—oh! I was there during the coal strike. Coal mine strike. And, uh... I feel the tension in the air. I didn't know what was going on. And uh, in the teacher's lounge, I heard they talk about industry action. And I had no idea what was industry action. And uh, finally came, f—industry action means strike. The teacher was gonna have a strike. And I didn't know whether I should strike or not strike or what. So, I called the American embassy, you know, Fulbright's related to that, and they told me, "You go teach, but do not cross the picket line." [**TG:** Mmm.] So, I did. So, I went there, some classrooms were empty, some classrooms were full. Some teachers teach, some teachers on strike. That was interesting. Yeah. And my landlady was saying her grandson, Jonathan, 11 years old at that time. She said, "Well, Jonathan has no future living in Bathgate, he grow up, be a coal miner."

TG: Mmm. So af—well, during Scotland, like your kids were already grown up?

RP: Yes, they all in college. I wouldn't apply, you know, yeah. [**TG:** Okay.] So, yes, it—and uh, uh, yeah, they all in school.

TG: And then you returned to the U.S. afterwards?

RP: Yes, I returned, and I went back to the same school to teach. [**TG:** Oh.] Yeah, mhm. And I ran into my principal at the uh...administration office in the, the school districts and he's so glad to see me back, you know, so.

TG: So, how did teaching in Scotland help you teach in America?

RP: The children over there are very nice. They're not as sassy as the children here. And, uh, I, I have students say, will look at my face say "look, I can get you fired, you'll lose your job." You know, [**TG:** Mmm.] you know, in Scotland they would never do that! They're very well behaved. And I can remember, this little girl had flowers wrapped in a wet paper bag, hold in her hand, came to school in the morning, and then came to my desk—put like this, go sit down. You know, kind of shy, but they're very sincere. And this little boy...I still have the two pieces of soap that he give to me. I'm sure it's very expensive to him. And uh, and he just, when I was leaving he just cried, you know, [**TG:** Mmm.] his parents are much older and doesn't seem they understand him, you know. And the Scottish food is not the best, but anyway, but the dietician was so nice to me, you know. [**TG:** Mmm.] And I say, "Oh! This is good." So next time she gave me twice as much, [**TG** laughs] I had to eat more. And the funny thing is they can serve you cake, it can be a week old. Just hard as rock. They pour the pudding sauce over it, and after thirty minutes, it soak in, it's all soft, edible, you know. And they say, "Oh, you have to eat haggis! Haggis!" So that's the goat's stomach stuffed with all these— "Oh you have to drink...Scottish whisky!" And uh, what surprised me was lunch time, we would have lunch and

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teachers all drank. And I thought, they have to go back teach in the afternoon. [TG laughs] They do! And, and they love their tea in the morning. Ten o'clock you drop everything, have tea. Four o'clock in the afternoon, drop everything, have tea. And uh, one time I was in the house, my landlady ran into the house. I thought, "Oh, she had to go to bathroom in a hurry." Well she went to the kitchen, put the teapot, because it was four o'clock. [TG laughs] But they say tea, you know, it calms you, you know that. But, and, at the Edinburgh airport, I met this American guy, he had a bike, it's a folding bike, and uh, he said he was just grumpy and griping and fussing, and...and he said, "Well, I travel all over Europe on my little—on my bicycle." He said, "I had French in high school but I didn't have trouble until I come to Scotland. I can't understand a word they're saying." [TG and RP laugh]. They say—they, and so I was telling my landlady that, my landlady they say—oh, you know, it's terrible. Milk is "mulk" you know, sweater is "jumper" [TG laughs] and, and, and then he say—she say, good day! Not "good die," you know. That's, a lot of them talk that way. It took me a couple months to learn to speak, to understand them, you know.

TG: Did they understand you with your Texan accent?

RP: Oh yes, oh yes, because they watched *Dynasty*!

TG: [laughs] Oh, okay. [To SL] Um, do you have any questions?

SL: So, when you left Scotland, were you back in Plainview teaching?

RP: What now? I—I live in Plainview? No, I s—stay in Plainview for a year and a half and then came to Waco, went to Baylor, and stayed in Baylor from 1949 to... '69 or '70. Twenty years. '69.

TG: And then—

RP: And uh, then I was in Corpus Christi four years. And it was when I was in Corpus Christi I went to Scotland. So, I came back to Corpus Christi. And then, then I...that was it.

TG: So, after Corpus Christi where did you go?

RP: I went to Missouri.

TG: Missouri state?

RP: Stayed two years only. I didn't like Missouri. I say, "Misery." [TG laughs] And uh, like Scotland, the natives called Edinburgh, they don't say "Edin-bur" they say "Edin-bur-ur." And Missouri, the native Missouri they don't say "Missouri" they say "Missur-ur." And uh, and I say, "it's Misery." Then we retired to Flor—Florida. [TG: Mmm.] Then I lived in Florida for twenty years. [TG: Mmm.] Then...you know my daughter lives here in that—well, in Florida I was very active with the Chinese association. Even today I just got an email from them, you know, they have active days but...but I don't—but here, somehow, I cannot get a connect with the Chinese association. It's all the way at the end of Bellevue, it's very far away. And it's very large, I don't—and I think mainly because my hearing is quite a handicap. And I'm getting new hearing aids with the iPhone. I have to learn how to use the iPhone and hopefully that would help.

TG: So what city in Florida were you in?

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RP: I was in Tarpon Springs. It's an hour, an hour drive from Tampa. [**TG:** Mmm.] Because I figure west coast, less hurricane. Well, we do have hurricane but not as bad as in the east coast. And uh...it—we were just like eleven, twelve miles from Clearwater. And uh, not too far away from St. Petersburg.

TG: Oh! Okay.

RP: Yeah. So, it was very—a quaint...Greek fisher village, used to be people do sponge diving there. [**TG:** Mmm.] It was very nice.

TG: What kind of activities did you do? Like how did you enjoy your retirement?

RP: Oh, well in Florida when we first moved to this adult community, it's 55-above community. Oh, we were, at the beginning we were partying [**TG** laughs], putting on programs, all these, all the time. And then...later on my husband died and, uh, difficult, so I did go back two years ago, it's not the same anymore. [**TG:** Mmm.] It's, uh, they sued so the young people can move in because that is a beautiful place right by Lake Ivanka (?) And, uh, but, anyway.

TG: And what did you do with the Chinese Association?

RP: Uh, I was a treasurer for them and then they did uh... they have a, like, tai chi group. That's where I learned tai chi. [**TG:** Mmm.] Every Saturday morning I leave house at seven o'clock, drive to—an hour to Tampa, start tai chi at eight o'clock and after eight o'clock we go eat breakfast or whatever and I usually get my Chinese grocery and go back home. [**TG:** Mmm.] And, uh, and they have uh, tai chi, tennis, ballroom dancing very popular. And uh, they have uh, people lecture, and uh...just all kinds of—calligraphy, you know, drawing—brush drawing, and all these things. So, it was—we—I still have close friends there.

TG: Do you ever go back to China?

RP: Yes! My sister still in Shanghai. [**TG:** Oh wow.] She's 95 years old. 94...94. She—no, she had her birthday. So, she's 95 now. And she, she had a cataract operation last year and uh...I was so surprised, she was 94 years old, has a cataract operation and I had one in '94, this one in '94, this one is probably last year. But anyway, she had it done, and after that she stayed in hospital, I think because she was president of the hospital—ex-president of the hospital. And she is—I asked my niece, my niece say yes, she is gonna stay there the rest of her life. [**TG:** Mmm.] In a way it's good, she'll have care. In a way it's bad because then she doesn't do anything, you know. They wait on her hand and foot. Yeah.

TG: So, you go back and you see her? Um...

RP: Yeah, I go back, I see her and my best friend, since childhood in Shanghai, died. So, you know, a lot of my friends died. [**TG:** Mmm.] And uh, so I used to—I go back, I always see my sister, and I still have some relatives there, but not anymore, you know. And now just my sister, you know. Now, I have some things I was asking G.G. if I should show it to you all. And uh, and G.G. said she doesn't know whether this is show and tell or not. [**RP** getting up and walking across room to retrieve items, long pause] This is my grandmother's shoes.

TG: Wow. From being—having her feet bound.

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RP: And...and see the embroidered—so fine, they take a piece silk thread, divide into forty-eight strips. It's very, very fine. And uh...but she actually wore them because I can tell it was rubbed off against her pants top. [**TG:** God.] But you can see the back, she hardly ever walked. [**TG:** Mmm.] She couldn't walk. I mean, when she take a step somebody help her.

SL: That was your grandmother you said?

RP: My gr—grandmother?

SL: Yeah.

TG: Yeah, so it was your grandmother. Was it your mom's mom or your dad's mom?

RP: My father's mother. My grandmother lived with us and I can remember every time we go out, went home, she sit in the living room with her glasses down to her nose, and reading. And she would tell me, she would sit on the sofa, have me sit right next to her. She would tell me the story, what she was reading. It's always about this fair maiden, drop in the lily pond, and somebody can rescue her. You know, same story. And she'll read a line and tell me, and read another line and tell me. And, and these were written in classic Chinese. [**TG:** Mmm.] But in China, grandparents always favor the oldest grandchild. And the parents always favor the youngest child. [coughs] And so I was not her favorite, you know, the favorite was my cousin. [**TG:** Mhm.] But, and my parents always, they do favor me. But my mother, the theory is...like, the youngest one can never have the parents as long as the oldest one does. Like when my father died I was only 13. My oldest sister was already 24. Graduated from college.

TG: Yeah.

RP: And so, so, 13-year-old, I was fatherless. And she was 24. It makes difference.

TG: Do you have any grandchildren?

RP: I have two—uh, three! G.G. has two boys. And, uh, my youngest daughter has one, so I have three grandsons. In China, they favor sons. [**TG:** Mmm.] It's so important to have a sons. And I do hear and do believe sometimes they flush them down the toilet if it's a girl. [**TG:** Mmm.] And, uh, but that was even back in 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, but after communists was one child per family, then they really want a son. Then they really do away with the girls, hope the next one will be a boy. But it got to the situation was...the boys couldn't find a wife. You know, there are more boys than girls [**TG:** Mhm.] and they even kidnap some woman to be their wife.

TG: Wow.

RP: Yeah, it's...so. But now, I think people are much more openminded. Girls are just as good. But my father never was that way. My grandfather was very, very unhappy with my father because my mother didn't have a g—son. See, in fact, my mother was my...grandfather's choice. How my mother married my father was when my paternal—we live in Beijing where every year they have several exam, or every three years or every how many years, you have, there's several exams. And my maternal grandfather lived in the south and at that time transportation was very hard, but they—the maternal grandfather's family reached this second level. Five generations reached the second level. The next level he had to go to Beijing to take the civil exam. So, he went to Beijing to take the civil exam. Met my paternal grandfather, the two old gentlemen admire each other's scholastic abilities, and by the time

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the civil exam was over, they had to be parted. At that time, it was almost impossible to see each other again. So they find out this one has a son, this one has a daughter. One is f—son is five years older than the daughter, so they say okay, let them get married when they get old enough. At that time, they were little. And uh, so they went back—my maternal grandfather went back to the south, and then finally they were ready—my father graduated from the finance school and ready to get married, and they are dragging their feet and finally they say “okay,” you know, “we get married. Send us a picture of her.” I still have the picture. So, my grandf—mother send a picture of my mother standing there with a long skirt with a flower vase on the side with one foot sticking out. They studied the picture, said “oh, she shows one foot, what’s wrong with the other foot?” You know. And uh, but anyway, finally they...had to, you know. So, and uh, they promised my mother the sun, the moon. My mother say—oh, I want to—she, they had the tutors at home, study at home, my mother was very scholastic. And w—supposed to go to University of Beijing to study and all of that and my mother said “okay,” so. So, then my father went to the south to marry my mother. And uh, on the wedding night was the first night, first time my father laid eyes on my mother. See, when they have a red veil over the face, with all the hair dressed up, all the reds, and then after the wedding is over, they set up bride on the bed, and then the servants will get all the guests out the room. Finally, after the—everybody’s gone, the maid closed the door, just two of them. Then my father can go to the—my mother to open the veil, to see her face for the first time, after they got married.

TG: Wow.

RP: Never—yeah. And my mother was very beautiful. And my father—after, of course, she didn’t—he didn’t say anything. Later on, he told other people, he say, “I hit the jackpot.” And so...and, and at that time, it sounds very, very unreasonable, but the more I think about it the more I feel there’s merit to it. Because if the two old gentlemen have the same value, tradition, belief, background, then they teach their children the same way, you know, so. And I never heard my parents ever had a cross word between them. You know, they, but...

TG: Yeah. It’s an amazing story.

RP: It is. It, it’s really interesting, and I have many interesting stories. See, my uncle, again, my paternal grandfather wanted my uncle to marry this woman, because this woman graduated from teacher’s college in Beijing, [**TG:** Mmm.] it’s very prestigious college. So...but my uncle actually had a girlfriend. And uh, but then nobody can say no to my grandfather. Whatever he says was law. And uh, so my uncle had to marry this other woman, the te—teacher w—woman, educated woman. And she—anyway. [pause] And then, in the meantime...the girlfriend still likes my uncle. And she was literally, physically sick, love sick, over him marrying somebody else. And before she died, she sent a letter to my uncle, said, “I’m dying. I would love to see you one more time before I die.” And uh, somehow, the letter delivered to my uncle’s wife and she intercept the letter, destroy the letter. So, my uncle never did see, never s—and she died. And my uncle ran into her brother! The brother said, “why didn’t you come?” And they knew the story. My uncle was so mad at his wife, but then yet he still couldn’t do anything. And the day after my grandfather died, my uncle move out the house. [**TG:** Mmm.] Had nothing to do with the...wife. And the wife’s daughter, daughter is living in Sugarland right now.

TG: [laughs] Small world.

RP: Well I mean, we know, we connect to each other all this time, yeah. My uncle’s daughter, in fact, she was educated in Beijing. She went to med school, sh—and she was sent to Russia. She stud—she lived in Russia for three years, studied medicine. [**TG:** Wow.] And then she came and worked for my

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son-in-law and she was M.D. but after she came here she became just echo cardiologist instead of medical doctor because her English, she couldn't. [TG: Mmm, yeah.] But the daughter is studying accounting and she's a CPA doing very well.

TG: Very nice.

RP: Yeah.

TG: Well we don't wanna take up too much of your time, [RP: Yes.] but I think maybe a couple more questions about your time in Houston?

RP: Yes.

TG: So, did you move from Florida to Houston?

RP: Yes. I moved from Florida—after...my husband died then. You know, since G.G. lives here I decided to move. So, sold the house, moved to here, I just thought 80 was so old, I had to move, move to a retirement home. So, I moved into Bayou Manor Retirement Home on South Braeswood and I lived there for three years and I really—still physical, very able. And I wound up pushing wheelchairs, volunteer here doing all kinds of things. And uh, when this house was vacant, we were eating lunch one Sunday. G.G. said, "oh, this house [the one the interview was conducted in] is vacant" I said, "Why don't I move here?" She said, "Why don't you? Why didn't we think of this earlier?" [TG laughs] so we move here, now we are connected. But I lived there long enough to—all my deposit money gone, you know, all the buying money gone, so. I have to think carefully, more carefully now. Yeah. And the move here was—uh, this is a lot of young professionals in this area. And uh, I, I, I, just don't find the connection yet, you know. [TG: Mhm.] But I belong to garden club, I go to the senior center in West U—West University.

TG: Yeah.

RP: But, so.

TG: Do you go to Chinatown a lot?

RP: Not a lot. I do go to Chinatown, you know, and get all my Chinese groceries. Get my fix.

TG: [laughs] Do you like to cook?

RP: Yeah. [TG: Mmm.] I think that's one thing all Chinese people can get away with. Chinese food, [TG: Mmm.] you know, just.

TG: So how else, like how do you spend your days? I think your daughter mentioned you like to travel?

RP: I—well, I do. I travel a lot, and uh, I want to move while I still can. But it got to the way, about the only kind of travel I do is cruising, [TG: Mmm.] because I don't have to pack, unpack so many times. This, up down, b—bus, and all this. [TG: Mmm.] Uh, so, I do. I've been to Iceland, all the—top of the world, down to bottom of the earth. Uh, Wella, you know, Falkland Islands and I do travel a lot but there's still a lot of places I have not been, or even the places I've been I didn't see ev—you know, everything, so. [TG: Mhm.] And I play a lot of computer games, and do email. And I read.

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TG: Mhm. What's your secret for staying healthy so long?

RP: I really think tai chi helps. I don't sleep well but tai chi does help me with the leg muscle, [**TG:** Mhm.] so I still can walk without a cane, without a wheelchair. I see a lot of people do, you know, in my age.

TG: Mhm. So, you do tai chi at your home every morning?

RP: Yeah, every morning. The first thing you get up. That's so important to concentrate. And when you still halfway asleep, you concentrate a lot better than later on the day you have lots of different things on your mind. [**TG:** Mhm.] So, I usually do first thing in the morning.

TG: That's nice. Do you like living in Houston?

RP: Yes! I like Houston a lot, because Houston has a lot to offer—to offer. [**TG:** Mhm.] The museums are excellent. And the Miller Theater, and the operas and the, the ballets. You know, very good. But what I don't like, the heat, the mosquitos, the traffic. These three things, I really don't like.

TG: Yeah, I think a lot of people would agree with you on that. [**RP** and **TG** laugh] Um, well I've got one last question but [**to SL**] do you have anything to add?

SL: No, I do not.

TG: Okay, so what advice would you give to Chinese immigrants coming to America, coming to Houston?

RP: Used to, I remember I urge people, I say, "First thing, you have to learn English. Second thing, you learn to drive. To be independent." But I found, I told the same thing to somebody went to Austria [Australia]. You know, lot of Chinese go to Australia, because it's close by. You know.

TG: Mhm, yeah.

RP: And uh, they...there are Chinese everywhere there. And uh, they can live in a Chinese community without speaking a word of English. So, what I, my advice not true at all, you know. But I think, uh, still, it won't hurt, during my travel I can see some people, language is so important, so you can communicate. And uh, but, whether it's immigrants or not. Whether young or old. I feel you have to learn to adapt. Regardless, you know, if the hole is round you have to be round. If the hole's square, you square to fit in. But then, also, I think east and west, the basic principle are still the same. Do to the others like you would like others do unto you. We have the same saying in Chinese. And, uh...and also my aunt, well, pass away now. She, she came to U.S. before I did. And she would say, learn what's good in this country, and retain what's good in the Chinese culture. Bring with you and combine the good together. And so many people came to this country, they think, "Oh, you know." During the '20s, America was on top of the world. You know. People do anything to come to this country. The street is paved—paved in gold. Once you get here everything's fine. But it's not true. You still have to work hard, to struggle. And uh...I just...you just really—there's no shortcut in life. You have to work hard to get to where you want to go. But of course, I, I wrote down a whole list of my life philosophies. What I learned in 90 years, I learned the hard way. Yeah.

TG: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

RP: Well, I still think this is a great country. You know, it, it really is. And American people...different country people have different characters. American people are more open, more outgoing, I think. As a whole, of course every individual case different. But then, when it come down, we all people. We're all basically the same. And I...and uh, too many people just look into outside appearance, without look within and as ourselves, we need to look within ourselves too. And I always—my favorite was Robert Burns: “See ourselves as other people see us.” Lot of times we see other people's problems very simple. And I think most problems are—people created themselves. And if you—we all run into hard situations. You, if you think clear, you have to th—have your mind think clear. And then work hard, you can get out whatever the hardship, whatever this situation you in. Situation, no matter how good, how bad, it don't last forever. It change. The world's changing all the time. And uh, my friend used to say, “I will never learn computer.” And I said, “Well, I feel I have to. If I learn—don't learn computer, the world go by, I cannot chase them fast enough.” But it's hard for old people. I'm not—these—I'm not good at that. But I try. Now I have to learn iPad. [**TG** laughs] I mean, iPhone. Yeah. But this is a great country, I love it.

TG: That's great. Well thank you very much for your time.

RP: Thank you very much for coming. It's my pleasure.

TG: Thank you.

[01:37:39]

[recorder shuts off]