

# Houston Asian American Archive

Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Jane Gee

Interviewers: Clarissa Cox, Pin-Fang Wang

Date/ Time of Interview: June 16, 2010, at 1:20PM

Transcribed by: Clarissa Cox, Pin-Fang Wang (edited by: Taylor Ginter 5/22/17)

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Audio Track Time: 2:14:34.8

## Interview Transcript

Jane Eng Gee was born in San Antonio, Texas. She has seven other siblings, of which only two were born in China. Growing up in San Antonio, Ms. Gee helped in her father's grocery store. Because of her father's emphasis on education, she attended San Antonio Junior College for one year before moving to Houston in 1939 to attend Rice University. Studying in the Pre-Med program, she spent most of her time in class or studying in the library. In July of 1940, she married Albert Gee, with whom she has two daughters, Janita and Linda, living in the Bay Area and Houston, respectively. She has worked in her husband's many successful Chinese restaurants, and since his death, has started her own real estate business. She was very active, especially as honorary chair of the Miss Chinatown Pageant. She is now retired, but continues maintain her presence in the Chinese community.

### Setting:

The interview centers on the areas of labor and capital to develop a working history around the context of childhood experiences, family life, and daily activities.

The interview was conducted in Mrs. Gee's living room. The interview required about two hours to complete. She recounted several stories of her childhood and gave us a very succinct outline of her life. Mrs. Gee was also able to provide several magazines and pictures to supplement her interview. Her answers were very clear, despite some problems relaying questions to her because of her hearing loss.

**CC:** This is Clarissa Cox—

**PW:**—and Pin-Fang Wang—

**CC:**—and we are here with Jane Gee doing an interview for the Houston Asian American Archive at Rice University. Would you like to briefly introduce yourself?

**PW:** Would you like to briefly introduce yourself?

**JG:** Well, I—

**PW:** Introduce yourself?

**JG:** Oh! [Laughter] You know, I'm a little bit hard of hearing.

**PW:** We'll try to speak louder.

**JG:** [Laughter] Yes, my name is Jane Eng Gee, and I've been an Houstonian most of my life. Although, I was born in San Antonio, Texas.

**PW:** Mmm. Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood? Where you grew up, something about your parents?

**JG:** Well, [Laughter] it's been such a long time since my childhood it's kind of like a blur, but I have—

**PW:** What were your favorite stories from—of your childhood?

**JG:** Well, for one thing, you know, my parents are from China, and my mother did not speak English at all. So my siblings and I never did learn how to speak English until we went to school, which was, you know, really a handicap because we didn't understand the language. So we had

to learn, and it was very hard. I think that was the most difficult problem we faced as kids when we were starting school. But it was hard, but we managed.

**PW:** What language did you guys speak at home?

**JG:** Could you speak a little louder?

**PW:** What language did you all speak at home?

**JG:** Chinese.

**PW:** Chinese?

**JG:** Because we didn't, we didn't know any other because our mother only spoke Chinese.

**CC:** Which dialect?

**JG:** Cantonese.

**PW:** Cantonese.

**CC:** OK.

**JG:** Toisan.

**PW:** And so the neighborhood you lived in—so you were born in San Antonio, and the neighborhood you lived in, was it all Asian Americans as well?

**JG:** No, uh-uh. It was Hispanic. Hispanic.

**PW:** Did you have any friends who were Hispanic?

**JG:** [coughs]

**CC:** Were your friends all Chinese, or—

**JG:** Well, uh, we didn't, you know, we didn't have a...neighborhood that has many Chinese in there. It's mostly Hispanic-speaking people, and my father was a—had—owned a grocery store. So we were exposed to the Spanish language.

**PW:** Would you like to get some water?

**JG:** Yeah, I think  
so.

[pause]

**CC:** Did you ever work at your father's grocery store?

**JG:** Yes, I did. All of us—I'm one of seven children, and as we got old enough to help out we did, you know, help out in the store. And we lived upstairs. [Laughter]

**PW:** What—how old were you when you started to work in your father's grocery store?

**JG:** Oh I would say about twelve or thirteen. You know, stack canned goods and stuff like that.

**CC:** What was the name of the grocery store?

**JG:** It was called Sang Tai. That's 'S-A-N-G T-A-I,' Sang Tai. Company. [Laughter]

**CC:** Was it only your family, or was it also—were there also other Chinese families helping out?

**JG:** No, we employed—my father employed two Hispanic young men to help. In fact, early on he used a horse and, uh, I wouldn't say buggy, but, you know, to deliver groceries to the customers' homes. You had to use a horse to draw them. [Laughter] To draw they—whatever he was using to carry the groceries in to deliver.

**PW:** So there was a delivery service as well as people coming in to buy things at the grocery store.

**JG:** Yes. They'd come in to buy the groceries, but they cannot carry them.

**PW:** Oh.

**JG:** They did not drive over to the store to buy their groceries. They were within walking distance, I would say, you know, within a mile, so whatever they'd buy if it's a big amount my father would deliver to their homes. But if they can carry it, actually, they'd just carry it.

**PW:** What were some of your duties in the grocery store?

**JG:** Well, like stacking canned goods and putting them on the shelves where they belong.

**PW:** Mm-hmm.

**JG:** And, uhm, and then we had a coffee grinder. [Laughter] You know, in those days the coffee beans—of course, they were already roasted, but they were still in the bean—what do you call it? They have to be ground before, you know, people can use them to make coffee with, so we used to use the grinder and grind the coffee beans into [laughs] ground coffee. We did that too.

**CC:** So, were you—you were working in the grocery store during the Great Depression, right?

**JG:** Yes. In the 1930s.

**CC:** Are there any...was—did you notice any way that working in the grocery store changed during that time, or um—

**JG:** Oh, yes, during those days there were no carts in the grocery store for them to push around and pick up the items that they want. What you do is that as each customer comes in, they tell you what—what they want and you write it down on a pad and you go get it for them. [Laughter] That's the way it was, and much later well then we did have carts for them to go around. The old way, you can only wait on one customer at a time. If you have two or three you would have to have two or three people to write down what they want and then go get the items for them.

**CC:** What type of school did you go to? Like through elementary school and high school, were there, like, different schools for each?

**JG:** Oh, yes. Uh-huh. We had elementary and then we had—what do we call—junior high school and then high school. So I went through all that in San Antonio, and I also went to first year college in San Antonio. I did not go to Rice until I was a sophomore because I had an older sister who was married here—who had a family and married here, and I—at that time I wanted to, you know, come here to go to school. Just to, you know [Laughter]. You know how young people are. They want to get away if they have the chance to. So, anyway, I didn't get over here until I was in my sophomore year. I went one year in San Antonio, my freshman year, and I did my sophomore year here in Houston.

**CC:** Were your parents supportive of you going to college?

**JG:** Oh, yes. Uh-huh. Yeah. Very much. My—especially my father. He placed a lot of emphasis on getting a good education. He said, 'That is the foundation of your,' you know, 'your future,

when you grow up.’ You know, ‘If you don't have an education,’ he said that, ‘you're not going to get anywhere.’ So he was always preaching 'education.' So [Laughter], so that helped us all because most of my siblings, you know, they finished college. I have four brothers and three sisters, and one of my brothers is a lawyer. And the other one majored in business, so he had his own business. He was also in the grocery business in San Antonio. So he did very well, too.

**PW:** So when you guys were in San Antonio and your father had a grocery business, did he expand ever? Or was there only one store?

**JG:** There was only one store. In fact, that's a picture of it.

**PW:** Oh.

**JG:** You know, that two-story building. You can bring it here if you want.

[pause]

**JG:** See here is the, um, the grocery store down here, and we lived upstairs. And then he had some stores here that he had leased out for different, not a grocery store, but you know, like— Well, I think one of them was a bar. One of them was—and then on this side there was some barbershops.

**CC:** Wow.

**JG:** And this side, upstairs, he rented out, you know, the rooms, and we lived on this side. [Laughter]

**PW:** How did you guys acquire this property?

**JG:** Oh, yes, he owned it. Yeah.

**PW:** How did he acquire it? How did he get the property?

**JG:** Well, in those days we had some relatives that were—you can just leave it here—that were also in the grocery business, and in those days people who are close relatives, they help each other. Financially and everything. So the reason that my father can spend that much money to build this building is because he had some relatives that would you know, help, you know, him with them financing. [phone rings] Excuse me.

**PW:** Mm-hmm!

[recording pauses]

**PW:** Where were we? Oh, right, you were talking about how your father—

**JG:** Oh, well, the relatives are pretty close knit, and they help each other financially and with advice. You know, those that were there earlier with experience would help the ones that are—you know, that came later, so that's how he was able to—he didn't borrow all of the money for the building, but he had some help with it. And if I'm not mistaken, a building like that in those days was \$50,000. [Laughter]

**PW:** That's a lot.

**JG:** And that was a lot of money because it was 1927 when it was built, and that was right before the Depression. The Depression—he big, you know, what they called—what did they call it? The Big Depression—

**CC:** Mm-hmm.

**JG:**—started in 1931, so that was, you know, very hard on—you know, in those days, like now we have what we call a recession, but you know, the way the government is now, it's structured where nobody starves to death. But during the Great Depression a lot of people actually starved because there was no provision for the government to help them. I remember as a kid that at the store, you know, we had, you know, we were lucky that, you know, our father had a grocery store. We never had to go hungry, but you know, some, you know, older people, mostly women, I remember two or three of them, they would come in, you know, with a potato sack. Of course, I don't know whether you all know what a potato sack is. It's a sack that they carry over their shoulder, and they would come in and ask, you know, for some food. So my father trained all of us that if we see those old women coming in, just to give them a couple of potatoes, an onion or whatever, and that's what we did. So it was really bad in those days.

**PW:** How did you guys get your food from—to sell and to eat during the Great Depression? Because if, were things—

**CC:** Because, like...farming wasn't good during that time either, right? So—

**JG:** Farming?

**CC:** Er, like, how did, how did you get your supplies for the grocery store?

**JG:** Well, there were wholesale grocers. In those days a wholesale grocer company would send, you know, a salesperson to come to the store to take your order, and they would write down, you know, what you order because you want to replenish the supplies that you had sold. And so they'd come once a week and take an order, and then they'd deliver it to our store.

**PW:** Do you remember any of the prices of the goods you guys sold?

**JG:** [Laughter] Yes. I remember, oh, they were very cheap. [Laughter] I remember that I used to help, you know, get paper sacks because like rice and beans and flour and sugar, they'd all come in a hundred pound bag, and you would have to sack 'em in five pound bags. So I used to do that, [laughs] you know, sack that stuff, and you know, put it on the shelves for people to buy. You know, either in one pound or five pound bags.

**PW:** Do you remember how much a pound—a five-pound bag of sugar was?

**JG:** They were nickel a pound [laughter].

**PW:** Wow.

**JG:** You could get five pounds of sugar for twenty-five cents. Five pounds of flour for twenty-five cents. And beans—pinto beans, that's what Hispanic people—that's the kind of beans that

they want, so five pounds of beans is twenty-five cents. You know, but you know in those days, the wages for a month—a month's wages is about \$30. It is a dollar a day. That's what people get paid when they work for somebody.

**PW:** Did you get paid while you were working in the grocery store?

**JG:** [Laughter] No, we just get about a quarter a week so we can go to the movies.

**PW:** Ah.

**JG:** And at the movies you can get a candy bar for a nickel. Get popcorn for a nickel. [Laughter] And we used to go—I used to go with my siblings every Sunday we'd go to the movies.

**PW:** Was there one close by? Was there a movie theater close by where you lived?

**JG:** Well, it was walking distance. Our store was, you know, almost, you know, well, we were in the downtown area of San Antonio. So we used to walk. Everywhere we went, we'd walk. Except when we started going to high school, we had to take a bus, but even elementary and junior high school, one of these Hispanic young men that my father hired, the one that delivers groceries, he would take us to the schools. But when we went to high school it was too far for him to go, and we had to get on the bus.

**CC:** How did—you had so many siblings, where did—did y'all all sleep in one room or like did you have your own bedroom or how did it work?

**JG:** Oh, well, no it's not all in one room. Of course, my parents had one room, and then my brothers had, I have four brothers, two of them is in one room and the other two in the other room. And then I had a bedroom with my sister, so we have enough rooms. [Laughter]

**PW:** So you said that your father's worker would take you guys to school for junior high? And could you tell us how you learned English and your experience for learning English because you said that you didn't speak English in your household until you went to school. Could you tell a little—us a little bit about how you learned English and difficulties of learning English?

**JG:** Well, it was very difficult in elementary school because, you know, when I first went to school I was so timid. Our parents never took us anywhere when we were small. They always, you know, stayed home. The store is open seven days a week. On Sunday, it close—we close at noon, but we do open on Sunday morning from nine until noon. So we were never taken anywhere except very seldom to relatives' store or house, and that doesn't happen very much. So we were just not exposed to the English language, and that is really a handicap when we started school. In fact, I did not start school—in those days there's no kindergarten, and when you start school it's the very first grade. And I was so terrified that I refused to go to school, and then my grandmother said, 'Well, I'll go, and I'll sit outside and wait for you.' [Laughter] So. Anyway, she did that, you know, the teacher gave her a chair and she sat right outside the door with the door open, but she didn't let her do that except maybe about three or four days and then she told my grandmother that she can't do that anymore. So when my grandmother couldn't do it anymore, I didn't go back to school until I was the next year. You see, you're supposed to start at seven, OK? When I was eight and my—the brother next to me was seven, and I went with him. I mean, you know, and I was so scared that I couldn't even start school by myself, so I waited for him and then I— [Laughter] I started the first grade when I was eight years old.

**CC:** But your older sister had already gone to school and learned English, or—

**JG:** No.

**CC:** No?

**JG:** No. She's the oldest one in the family. She was born in China.

**CC:** Oh, OK.

**JG:** So she did not even come over until she was about sixteen.

**CC:** Who did she live with?

**JG:** Her grandmother. My mother's mother because my father, you know, didn't bring her over when he brought my mother over. So they just left her in...with, you know, my mother's mother.

**CC:** What area of China—so [Mumbles] I guess Toisan—

**PW:** What area did they live in? Did your sister live in? In China? What area of China did your sister live in?

**JG:** Oh, well, it's called the Toisan County, which is in southern China. It's in the Hong Kong area, but where they live is not in the city. It's in the country.

**PW:** Did you ever visit when you were little? Did you ever go back to China when you were little?

**JG:** I have several times, but I never did go back when I was in Hong Kong. I had gone to Hong Kong, but I never went beyond there. Because I was on a tour. You know, I am connected with the Houston Taipei Society, and I was a co-leader for a group here from Houston five times. So I've been to the Orient, like Japan, China, but there's Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok. I've been to those places about, you know, five times in all. And that is, you know, after—long after my childhood.

**CC:** What year did your parents come to American, then, and why? If you know...

**JG:** Well, my father came first, and then he brought my mother over. I think my mother came in—I don't know what year my father came, but I have a good idea that my mother came in about 1919.

**CC:** And he came just to work in the grocery store business, or—

**JG:** Well, she is not—you know, in China they don't educate the girls, you know, in her generation. In fact, her father was a teacher, and he didn't—he taught—

**PW:** He didn't teach her.

**JG:** Yeah. All the students that they had taught were boys, and they—I guess they just feel like girls don't need an education. [Laughter]

**PW:** So could you—how did you get—become more—going through—you said you started school with your brother, right?

**JG:** Yes.

**PW:** And how did you—could you tell us about how you progressed through middle school and then high school? Did you become less timid, and what kind of friends that you had during that time?

**JG:** Well, not only did we go to our American schools, we also had a Chinese school. You know, the elders, the men, the Chinese men, they got together and they formed a Chinese school, and hired, you know, a couple of Chinese school teachers to teach, you know, the young people, the kids Chinese because they did not want, you know, their children to forget their heritage or to not know how to read and write in Chinese. They wanted to keep that going, so we also went to Chinese school from the time we were—I went from the time I was eight years old until the time I was fifteen. And you go to your Chinese school after your American school. Like you get out at three o'clock from American school, at five o'clock you're in Chinese school until eight o'clock at night. So, and Saturday mornings from nine to twelve you have to go to Chinese school. But we had a lot of fun, and I think most of the kids didn't get a lot out of it because they—when they go to Chinese school they're ready to play, [Laughter] they're ready to socialize, so—but it was a very good experience being, you know, we had a chance to meet a lot of other kids, you know, Chinese kids. We developed friendships with them and I had cousins in there and all that. I was a tomboy when I was growing up, and if they're playing touch football I'm playing that too with them. [Laughter] And I would play ping-pong, you know, and I had a real good time at Chinese school.

**PW:** Do you still keep in touch with any of your friends from Chinese school back then?

**JG:** Yes, I have in fact. There's a...couple of sisters, well three of them living in California, two of them live there all the time, and then one of them lives in Hong Kong. She married somebody from China, so she lives in Hong Kong, but she would come over here maybe about every two years and she would call me when she's in San Francisco to tell me that she's there. And...so I talk to her on the phone because I don't always go out there. But I did see her one time out there. And then about five years ago, the two sisters came into San Antonio because they had a brother there and had a reunion there. So they told me to come over if I could, you know, so I went to San Antonio and got to visit with them and that was really good.

**PW:** Nice.

**JG:** Oh, yes, and connection to Chinese school—I think this is kind of unique.

**PW:** Mm-hmm.

**JG:** There was a former drum corps...man—I don't know what you would call him, but his daughter was the drum major and he was the one that got the drum and bugle corps, uhm, he had one before that he approached, he—somehow he learned about the Chinese school, so he came over and approached us about if we would like for him to form a Chinese drum and bugle corps.

**PW:** Wow.

**JG:** Yeah, so he did that, and his daughter was one of the three drum majors. Because there was two girls from the Chinese school that also were drum majors, so there was three of them. And then we either played the drum or played the bugle. I think that the boys, most of the boys played the bugle, and I played the drums. But, you know, it wasn't hard to play the drum; you would just play like, you know, what you would beat when you're marching. And every year San Antonio has a festival, they still have it now, and they have a parade. And one is a day parade and one is a night parade, and we got into the parades and paraded—not the night one but the day one, our Chinese drum and bugle corps had paraded, you know, in April, and they still do that in San Antonio. I mean, the parade still goes on. One night one, and one day one. But our, you know, we had our costumes for the drum and bugle corps, and we paraded in the annual parades for a few years. So that was a real nice experience. One of my brothers and I were in there.

**PW:** Oh, not the rest of your—only you and your brother?

**JG:** Yeah, one of my brothers and I, and he played the bugle and I played the other— [Laughter] the drum. You'd just beat—you just beat the drum to the, you know, you're not playing anything, hardly, but you'd just- for the marching. So that was a very nice experience in my childhood. [Laughter]

**PW:** Did they provide you with the instruments, or did you guys have to get your own?

**JG:** With the, uh—

**PW:** The instruments.

**JG:** Instruments?

**PW:** Did the band director provide it?

**JG:** No, I don't remember whether—I know we had to pay for our uniforms buy I don't know about the instruments, whether he had them or not. I really don't remember.

**PW:** Did you have any mentors, maybe there were mentors when you were growing up who taught you certain skills that you still use today?

**JG:** Well, not really. I had an English teacher that was very—that took an interest in me and tried to, you know, help me to decide what I want to do, you know, when I get—go—went to college and all that kind of stuff.

**CC:** So how did you, uhm, just kind of moving forward a bit; How did you find out about the Rice Institute? How did you wind up applying there? Because I think you were, you were one of the first Chinese women to go there.

**JG:** I think I was the third one.

**CC:** OK.

**JG:** Well, the reason I wanted to come to Rice, I knew it was a, you know, a good college plus the fact that I had a—my oldest sister, the one that was born in China, she married and she and her family were living here in Houston because my brother-in-law, her husband, is with the

Chinese Consulate. He's an—I think he was a Secretary or something in the Chinese Consulate. That's how come they were living in Houston. I think the Consulate was originally in Galveston, and they move it here to Houston. So that's how come I came here. I thought that, well, I guess like many young people that have a chance to get away from home, not that I was unhappy at home, but I just felt adventurous. I said, 'Well, maybe I can, maybe I can go to Rice if I applied, you know.' But I didn't....My freshman year I went to San Antonio Junior College because I applied at Rice and the registrar wrote back and told me that—to go to, you know, first year college in San Antonio and take science courses 'cause I didn't have enough science courses. I think all I took was Physiology. I did not take Biology or Chemistry. So when I took my first year of college in San Antonio—it was called San Antonio Junior College at the time, but that's not their name anymore, I don't think. But anyway, so I took Biology and Chemistry, and I did real well in junior college. In fact, I tied with one of the young guys, students. We were, he and I were the top students. So I applied again with my grades, you know, from my first year of college to the registrar at Rice and I got accepted. That's how come I was doing my sophomore year when I first came and not my freshman.

**CC:** So what were you planning on majoring in?

**JG:** Well, I really didn't have any specific idea, but my father suggested that I go into pre-med. So, you know, I never even finished college, so I actually didn't go to medical school. But I married my husband, he said, 'Oh, you wouldn't—you wouldn't have made a doctor. You like to sleep too much.' [Laughter] But anyway, I regret that I never finished at Rice anyway because to me, having a diploma, you know, my high school diploma, my junior high diploma, you know, education, you know, it's from my father. He stressed education so much and it became, you know, very important to me, and I had it in the back of my mind that even though I got married and I couldn't go back to finish school, you know, college, I had it in the back of my mind that I'm going to do that the first chance I have. But, you know, my husband was in the restaurant business and he keep on expanding restaurants and eventually I had to help him in some of them, so, you know, I got sidetracked. You know, I didn't have the time, you know, to go...back to college like I had planned in my head. [Laughter] But, you know, that's the way life is sometimes, you just can't predict, but I'm grateful for the life that I had, my two daughters and my two grandchildren.

**CC:** So then how did you meet your husband?

**JG:** How did I meet him?

**CC:** Mm-hmm!

**JG:** Well, he and his uncle owned a Chinese restaurant on Main Street here in Houston, and my brother noticed at that time I think there was only two Chinese restaurants, and every summer, he and I and sometimes our father would drive over from San Antonio to Houston to visit my older sister and her family. So one summer when we came over, we noticed—looked around for a Chinese restaurant. We just wanted to see if we can meet some Chinese people over here, so we went into, you know, the one on Main Street and that's how I met my husband. I didn't know that was him, [Laughter] but after...meeting him, when I got into Rice and came over here I lived with my sib—older sister and my brother-in-law. And that's how, you know, I got to see my future husband again I came back, you know.

**PW:** Where did you live when you went to Rice? Did you commute to school, or did you

live on-campus? When you attended Rice Institute did you live on-campus or did you live off-campus?

**JG:** No, I lived off-campus 'cause it was about—my sister's home was about—I would say a couple of miles from Rice, so it was walking distance and I could ride the bus if I wanted to. But sometimes some of my—the students that—there's a couple of sisters that was at Rice at the same time that I, that I was, and they lived just the next street over from where I lived with my sister. So sometimes we would just walk home, but if I don't walk home I would take the bus.

**CC:** So how did you pay for, like, books? Did you have a job during that time, or did your family give you money?

**JG:** No, my father supported me, and at that time, there was no tuition at Rice, and all you had to do is pay for was the extra-curricular stuff. It was like \$105 a year. I remember it was like \$105 a year for the student—they called them student fees. [laughs] I don't know what they charge now, but—

**PW:** A lot more than that.

**JG:** But there was no tuition, you see. William Marsh Rice had donated so much money, and they even built a building and everything. So that was a lot of money then, so we didn't have to pay tuition.

**PW:** That's good. So you met your husband. What year did you guys get married?

**JG:** Oh, we got married in 19—July 1940, and I was in the class of '42. Let's see here, can you find me here?

**PW:** Oh. [Laughter] That's nice.

**JG:** I had fun that year there. You know, in those days in my, you know, age group, a lot of girls don't go to college. They do well to finish high school. And anyway, I had a German professor. Since I was supposed to be a pre-med student, I had to take German. You know, I'd been taking Spanish, you know, all the way from high school through the first year of college I took Spanish, and this was first time I took—you know, I took Spanish and then went to Chinese school, but never German. But since I'm supposed to be a pre-med, I had to take German. And the classes were small in those days. I don't know how normal classes at Rice now is, but we didn't have any more than twenty-something students. And in that twenty I think we had maybe about, at the most, five or six girls. The rest of them were boys. And this German professor actually came out one day and told us, he said, 'What are you girls doing here? You're wasting your time. All you going to do is—you'll graduate and get married and just—you're not going to use it.' I told my daughter that, and she said, 'If somebody—if a professor tells a class like that now he would get kicked out.' [Laughter] Of course now they have better sense now than to say that, but that the—was what my German professor said. But he liked me okay, he gave me an 'A,' a '1.' Are y'all still going by '1, 2, 3'—

**PW:** No.

**JG:** Is it 'A, B, C'—

**PW:** Yes.

**JG:** Well, when I was going if you make an 'A' it's a '1,' if you make a 'B' it's a '2,' 'C' is '3,' 'D' is '4.' [Laughter] That's how they graded you in those days.

**PW:** Well, at Rice since you were one of very few Asian Americans did you experience any prejudice, or difficulties while you were there?

**JG:** No, I didn't—I didn't experience any discrimination, is that what you said?

**PW:** Mm-hmm.

**JG:** No. I'm not—I guess if there was I would have felt it because I never felt it in San Antonio because there's such a big Hispanic population. And I grew up among them, you know, in my father's store. No, I didn't feel any. In fact, I think most of the girls—I had a good relationship with.

**CC:** What did you do for fun that year that you were in college for that year, or did you just—

**JG:** The year that I was at Rice?

**CC:** Yeah.

**JG:** Well, you know, what I noticed was there was a place across the street on Main Street, and I forgot what the name of it is—at the time I went to college—to Rice, I would walk across the street to that place, and there's always a lot of students there playing bridge. Do they still play bridge?

**PW:** No, I don't think so.

**JG:** [Laughter] They were sitting there with cards playing bridge. That's all they did.

**PW:** Wow. Did you join them in playing bridge?

**JG:** No.

**PW:** No?

**JG:** I didn't want to sit there because I sit in classrooms. I'd go to the library at Rice to study all the time. And the library is, you know, rows and rows of books on stands, and at the end there was a cubbyhole. Is it still there?

**PW:** I think so.

**JG:** A cubbyhole where you can walk to the, you know, next to the side of the—and sit there and study. So I used to—when I'm not in class I'm usually studying in the library. [Laughter]

**CC:** So did you not go on many dates, then, or— [Laughter]

**JG:** Did I go on many?

**CC:** Dates? [Laughter]

**JG:** No, no because we're not supposed to go out with anybody outside of our nationality. You know, it was a no-no. They teach—you know, now it's different. You know, a lot of Asians and Caucasians get married and it's commonplace now, but not then. I mean, when I was growing up in San Antonio, I...I don't think there was a handful of girls, Chinese girls, that married outside of their nationality, and if they are—if they did, they're ostracized. They have to leave town because just people look upon them, you know, look up on them like they committed a crime. [Laughter]

**PW:** Was that a something—was that a social value just among the Asian Americans, or did Hispanics feel that way as well?

**JG:** I'm not quite understanding you.

**PW:** I guess what I'm trying to say is was that only something that the Asian Americans thought was wrong, marrying outside of your—

**JG:** Yes, uh-huh. Yeah, that is taboo in those days.

**PW:** OK.

**CC:** So when you got married were you in a role as just a housewife, or did you start working at the restaurant?

**JG:** No, see, got out of—got out of school I would say at the end of May, and got married in July, at the end of July. And my husband was already in business, so I started helping him out at the restaurants. And that's what I had been doing until practically—most of my working life, you know, I was managing some at the restaurants. You know, he had five at one time. And there was—we were living in the City of Bellaire at the time, and we built our home there, you know. So there was a restaurant that I managed that's in—within the City of Bellaire which is close to our home. And I did that until later—he passed away, you know, when my husband passed away. Well, before he passed away somehow I started reading in a paper about real estate, and it interested me. So I went to, you know, college just to learn real estate, and I wanted to get a broker's license because if you have just a sale's license you have to work for somebody else. But to get a broker's license you have to get a salesman's license first, and my brother was in—he has a broker's license. So I was under him as a salesperson. Of course, I didn't work at the—officially. I was a salesman under my brother's broker's license. So I studied and after one year I studied and took my broker's license test and I got that. So I didn't really use it until after my husband died, and we just, you know, sold what restaurants that were, you know, that we had. Because I don't want to stay in the restaurant business. It's too much, you know, you just have to do too much, and that's not my cup of tea anyway. But the grocery store might do. [Laughter] So I decided I want to go into real estate, so that's what I did after he died. In fact, I kept—then I was about fifty—well, he passed away when he was only fifty-seven. He had cancer.

**PW:** I'm sorry.

**JG:** I'm a year younger than him. I was fifty-six and he was fifty-seven, so after he passed away I got rid of the restaurants and went into—you know, I had my broker's license already, and I never worked for any real estate company. I just formed my own company. It's 'Jane Gee Realty.' And I had my license until about, I think three years ago. I wasn't active. It's just my license did not expire, so I just let it, you know, expire because I haven't been active. But I was active quite a bit for several years, and I enjoyed real estate, you know, being a real estate broker much more than I did the grocery or the restaurants.

**CC:** Did anyone work under you as a salesperson in, uhm, Jane Gee Realty? Did you have any salespeople, or was it just you?

**JG:** Well, my daughter Linda, my younger daughter that is still here, she worked under my license until she got herself to be a broker. I told her, I said- She actually didn't work under me, but she was getting her license with, you know, me as a broker, but she also went to- I told her, I said, 'I can't teach you as much, you know, about the business as if you would get a job at a real good real estate company that is very active.' So she went and worked for a company for about a year, and then she worked on her own for a bit for a year a little bit—or a little longer. She didn't like the real estate business. [Laughter] My two daughters are very different personalities. First one, she was a very good teacher. She loved her work, and she really took a lot of interest in her students. And she's been in the who's who in teachers, you know, a long time, and she has students that after they went out to the real world, they would come back and see her and tell her how much they got out of, you know, their time—the time that she was their teacher. So she's very—I'm glad that she went into teaching, and it wasn't her idea; it was my idea. [Laughter] What happened was that she wanted to be a medical technician, and you know that six months before she graduated from TCU up in Fort Worth—she called me six months before, and she said, 'Mom, I don't want to be a lab technician.' I said—and she said, 'I don't want to go into the hospital for the last six months before graduation. So I said, 'Well, what do you want to do?' [laughs] I was flabbergasted. And she said, 'I don't know.' So I was just feeling, I just felt that teaching is a good thing to go into, and that most girls, you know, especially in my generation, they'd be going into teaching. And I said, 'You can really help young people if you're a good teacher.' I said, 'Why don't you go into teaching, and since you don't know what you want to do,' and so she said, 'OK, I'll come home, and I'll go to University of Houston so that you don't have the expenses of paying for' her dorm, you know, the extra expenses. When she's out of town she volunteered to come home and finish, so she actually got her degree from the University of Houston, whereas she spent her—most of that time at TCU. But I'd steered her the right way. She's really a dedicated teacher, so I'm glad that it worked out.

**PW:** Did you also do that with your second daughter? Did you suggest that she become a real estate—go into real estate?

**JG:** You mean, my older daughter?

**PW:** Yeah, your older daughter.

**JG:** No, she wouldn't be interested in that. When she came back she went straight to University of Houston, and got her teaching...

**PW:** Oh, I meant your second daughter. Did you suggest that she go into real estate? Your second daughter. Did you suggest that for her as well?

**JG:** Yeah, well, she, you know, she—her husband's a lawyer. She really didn't have to work, but she wanted to. So I suggested that she try real estate, but she didn't like it. She didn't like it.

**CC:** So did she not have a job before going into real estate, then, or—

**JG:** Yes, she was with—I don't know if y'all would know Joske's. Now it's a—it used to be called Joske's here in Houston, and it started out in San Antonio. It's a department store, and she went to work for Joske's at the time that she was working for them it was for Joske's. And she was a merchandise manager—Linda was. That's my younger daughter. And she really liked that because what they did was the store, they sent her to—you know, Joske's became Macy's, that's what it was. They would send her over to Europe, to France, to Italy to do the buying for the store, and she was doing the buying for...I think—I'm not sure if it was the junior department. But she was buying fashions for women for the store.

**CC:** When your daughters were growing up would their life mostly revolve around the restaurant, or like what did they do while they were in school? Did they just come straight home and study, or—I guess, how did—like raising your daughters, what was that like, or what did you do while raising them? Was there anything like emphasizing education? Or, uhm, [Mumbles] I don't know how to phrase that.

**PW:** How did you raise your daughters?

**JG:** How did I? [Laughter] Well, I was just trying my best. Well, to tell you the truth, you know it's a new experience to be a mother, especially the first time. It's hard, but um, I think they both grew up, you know, to be, uh, good people and good citizens like my, uh—well for instance my older daughter lives in California, so uh, I don't see her that much except, you know, couple of times a year when she comes in for the holidays, and then she's coming in, in fact, a couple of days from now, you know, to visit. So, I'm really, um, I don't know, it seems like they grew up so fast, it's like a blur. You know?

**CC and PW:** [Chuckles]

**JG:** They're just little and then they're gone. So, uh, I can't say that, you know, any particular way that I raised them, just, just whatever—it just happened whatever did.

**PW:** Were there any particular family values that you instilled in them?

**JG:** Yeah, of course. Most, uh, you know, Chinese in my generation, you know, we're pretty strict about, you know, doing things right and socially being responsible, stuff like that, because you can get ostracized pretty quickly, if you do something wrong. [Laughter] It's not like today, you know, people are a lot more lenient, you know, a lot more tolerant. Because the Chinese, especially the older generation, the way we were raised, we're not even supposed to date. My mother said, 'You're not supposed to go out with boys and when it's time that you want to, time for you to get married, we'll get a go-between'. What do you call one of those guys that would recommend somebody for you to marry? [Chuckles]

**CC:** Matchmaker?

**JG:** Matchmaker! That's how my sister, older sister got married—was through a matchmaker. That was the proper, acceptable way in those days.

**CC:** So was your marriage not acceptable, or?

**JG:** [Chuckles] Well, in a way, um, it wasn't because I think my father would be very upset if he knew I was going to get married before I finished my education. He always said that you got to get an education otherwise you're not going to get anywhere. I mean that would be his biggest disappointment, but when he finally met my husband, he approved of him. [laughs]

**PW:** That's good.

[pause]

**PW:** Could you tell us a little bit about your experience in the restaurant business? You said you managed a couple of them.

**JG:** Yes, well, I did not like the restaurant business because I guess I'm the nervous type. The reason I didn't like it was because everybody comes in at the same time, you know, at lunch. There they come in...well lunch is more hectic. Dinner is not quite that much, but I guess I was the nervous time. When everybody sits down, I go...well I hope they don't mind waiting.

**All:** [Laughter]

**JG:** I get antsy you know...for them. I never got over that when I was in the restaurant business. But, uh, one of our smaller ones that I managed, two of them—I managed two of them—that has a dining room, but it's a small dining room that takes care of, I would say, about 80 people, and uh they would come in for lunch, but most of our business was take out. You know, they would call in and we'd have take-out menus to give them and they would call in and put their order in and tell us what time they gonna come in pick'em up—pick up the food. I don't mind that, but for people—have a room full of people, especially at lunch, you know, you know that they have to go back to work, it makes me nervous. I really didn't like the restaurant business at all, outside of...but what I did like is getting to meet so many people, you know?

**CC:** So would you say that the restaurants you helped manage were successful? Or...

**JG:** I'm sorry?

**CC:** Were they successful restaurants then? Since, they were busy?

**JG:** Oh, yes, yes. My husband was, uh, pretty popular. [Chuckles] He was president of the Houston Restaurant Association and at the time, I think it was around 1962 or something like that, at that time—it was before the restaurants were integrated—I don't know if y'all. Y'all are

so young that I don't know if y'all ever know that there was a time when the black people were, you know, it was so unjust. They can't go into a restaurant unless it's a black person running it, you know, owned and operated. They can't even, you know, the public water fountains and public parks are...they have two of them. One says black. They have to use that one. But anyway, reason I brought this up. My husband was instrumental in integrating the Houston restaurants to allow the black people, if they want to come into your restaurant, you know, they can be served. Of course, there was some opposition among the, uh, among the restaurant owners, but he finally got them all together back, where you know, they all agreed. And that was when he was president.

**PW:** How was—how did you help to make the restaurant successful? Since you managed half of, almost half of them—what was your role in making them, the restaurants successful?

**JG:** Well I really didn't work that much in his big restaurants.

**PW:** OK.

**JG:** I managed the two take-out restaurants which were smaller, like I say, you know—actually we specialized in take-outs, those were the two restaurants that I managed. Of course, they have small dining room for people to come in at lunchtime. But, you know, in the evening, most of the customers just call in and they want to take the food home. So, I don't mind that. That doesn't make me too nervous. [Laughs]

**PW:** Did you get paid while you were working in the restaurant?

**JG:** Well, the owner, we don't get a salary.

**PW:** Well, yes, but how...like, what were some of the prices of the food, say how much, um...

**CC:** Well like, for...take out, what kinds of things would you, would you put together? Did they have set meals and did it come with a fortune cookie or I don't know, like what kind of meals did you give out for take-out?

**JG:** Well, you know almost everything that we would serve inside the restaurant where you go in, you know, it's all Chinese food, Cantonese food, like egg rolls. In fact, my husband, I think his—he had egg rolls stuff. You know, when the first Chinese restaurants were here, they didn't have what they call the Cantonese food, they just had chop suey and chow mein and egg foo young and that's about it, you know. But, my husband expanded the variety to include like, uh, lobster Cantonese and you know, more exotic foods.

**PW:** Do you remember what the price was for say a lunch special or one of the dishes?

**JG:** [Chuckles] Not really. I'm sure it was pretty reasonable.

**CC:** What was the clientele at the restaurants, either the take-out or the um bigger ones? Would you say it was more like middle class Caucasian or was it Chinese, or mixed?

**JG:** There's, uh, at his big restaurants there's a lot of people in city government, you know, that comes in. That's how he got to meet so many people in politics and he, uh, met like a police chief and the sheriff. You know, they were his buddies. [Laughs] Yeah, he got to meet a lot of influential people.

**CC:** So for take-out, was it mostly housewives ordering take-out would you say? Or was it just everybody?

**JG:** Well, it was everybody and I think a lot of the women that come to get the take-out, they usually have a family but they work so they don't have that much time to go home and cook a full meal, so they would, you know, for variety too in food. They would come to a Chinese restaurant just like we might go to an Italian restaurant, you know, get something different. Especially if they work outside the home they would do that, and then there are some men that come in, uh, they're professionals and everything and if they're, if they're not married or if they just want variety and—or if their wife didn't want to cook that day, well she'll tell him to bring some Chinese food home. [Chuckles]

**PW:** You also said that you met a lot of people working in the restaurant. Um, could you tell us a little bit about the people you met and how they might have helped you get into other things?

**JG:** Could you speak a little louder?

**PW:** Sorry, you said that your husband met a lot of politicians and that helped him, like get into politics. And, you also said that you met a lot of people during your time in the restaurant. Could you explain some of the people that you met and how they helped you later on?

**JG:** Well, he helped a lot of people, uh, especially Chinese people that had, uh, you know, besides the restaurant, in the beginning, when the Chinese peoples first came to Houston, they went into grocery stores more than restaurants. And, uh, lot of time—he had to help a lot of these people, Chinese people in business because they know that he knows policemen, he knows like congressmen, Bob Casey, you know in Houston, there's a building here called the Bob Casey building. Did y'all ever notice downtown? He was a congressman, and he was—he and his wife were very good friends of ours. And, uh, a lot of time if some of these Chinese people would approach my husband, if there is a problem with their store about the sanitation, and they get a citation, they don't understand what they're supposed to do or...you know...they want my husband to talk to the health inspector, or whatever. You know, things like that concerning their livelihood that uh, if they feel that he might have some clout somewhere to help them. And he does that, yeah.

**PW:** Did you go—did you meet any influential people yourself in the restaurant business?

**JG:** No.

**PW:** No?

**JG:** [l a u g h t e r] Well, I, I was, uh, in the Women's Auxiliary of the Houston Restaurant Association. I was President one year. And, uh, I was involved there, but uh, I wasn't involved that much otherwise. In fact, I don't know I think I have a book, about the time I was with the Women's Auxiliary. [Gets up] You know I had to have surgery some years ago. That's how come I can't walk that good. [laughs]

[Pause—brings back a photo album]

**JG:** [Pointing to pictures in the album] This is the Governor, I think, and that's Richard Nixon.

**PW:** Wow. You must have gotten to know a lot of famous people.

**JG:** Yeah, this is Mrs. Nixon and that's Mrs. Connelly. That was John Connelly's ranch house. They invited me and my Alber—me and Albert—to there.

**PW:** On what occasion?

**JG:** Hmm?

**PW:** On what occasion did you go?

**JG:** Well because Nixon was visiting here in Texas, so uh, Connelly was governor of Texas at that time so Connelly invited Mr. President and Mrs. Nixon to their ranch house and they invited, you know, us too. [Chuckles]

**PW:** Um...I guess, do we want to move on to organizations?

**CC:** Yeah, um, so you were the first woman president of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, correct?

**JG:** Well my husband was one of the founders and he was—he had been—I think he was about the second president. Um, and then we had a Women's Auxiliary but because at first they didn't—women were not members of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. It was just supposed to be men. Eventually, I think in 1979, they accepted women into—and then we had a Women's Auxiliary since they don't let us in, we had an Auxiliary until they let women in. [Refers to photo album] And then this is one of the livestock shows, here in Houston. They used to call 'em fat-stock shows. Now it's livestock show.

**PW:** [Laughs]

**JG:** So, these are our costumes that were made in Los Angeles at the time. He surprised me with the costumes. I didn't know he had them..he had them made.

**PW:** Oh, and I see you have that picture of you with the *Time* Magazine?

**JG:** Who?

**PW:** The *Time* Magazine.

**JG:** Oh, my sister-in-law—that's a gag.

**PW:** Oh!!

**CC:** [Laughs]

**JG:** I wasn't on *Time* Magazine. [laughter] She was just being funny.

**PW:** Well you should have been. You were in so many organizations. Right? You were talking about the Taipei-Houston Sister Cities Alliance?

**JG:** Houston-Taipei?

**PW:** Yes. Houston-Taipei Sister Cities. Did you start that? Could you tell us...

**JG:** My husband. Uh huh. He's one of the founders of that and also of the Houston CACA.

**PW:** OK. How were you involved in both of these organizations?

**JG:** How did?

**PW:** How were you involved? How did you—what—did you start anything? I think you said you started a tour, I think to Asia or...

**JG:** Oh, yeah. When Taipei and Houston became each other's first sister cities—Well, you know what the sister cities are about? OK. Um..Houston and Taipei were each other's very first sister cities, and we had tours from the—you know, from the sister city committee. Our members here and some of their friends came on tours—in fact I was co-leader of five tours to take people, you know. And, you know, we were welcomed like royalty in Taipei. They put us up in first-class hotels and furnished every meal and they had buses to take us sightseeing. We just, you know, we really had a great time.

**CC:** What year—do you remember what year Houston became sister cities with Taipei?

**JG:** What year it was formed?

**CC:** Yeah.

**JG:** I think it was in '61 or something. Yeah. 1961. Because I took a group and another founder—my husband couldn't go on account of his business—so I took a group with one of the other founders to Taipei and Hong Kong. We had five—I was involved in the first five tours and we'd just go to Hong Kong. And, I think the last one I took, we also included Singapore and Bangkok. Otherwise, we'd just go to Taipei and Hong Kong. I think it was '60, and 1962, and '71, and '78, '79, and '90. Those are the five years that I had gone.

**PW:** What other organizations were you a part of? Which other organizations were you a part of?

**JG:** Well, I belong to the, uh, I belong to another Chinese club. It used to be...I just belong to it in name only. One of the members called me a couple of years—I only joined a couple of years ago, two or three years ago—and asked me to join, and she said ann—if you want to pay dues annually it's one price and if you want to a life-member, it's \$100. It's the Chinese Professional Club. I think at first it was the Chinese...uh...it wasn't Chinese Professional Club at first; there was another name. But, now it's Chinese Professional Club, and she said if you want to be a lifetime member, it's \$100. So, I said put me down for lifetime because then they don't need to bother me every year.

**All:** [Chuckles]

**JG:** But, I'm not really active in that. The only Chinese club that—well not club—but the Chinese American Citizens Alliance and we have the Miss Chinatown Houston Pageant. Have you heard of that? Well, we're having our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this year on July the 31<sup>st</sup>—Saturday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, and it's going to be held at the J.W. Marriot Hotel, which is right across the street from the Galleria Mall. Linda is the chair. I was chair for about 15 years. I persuaded her to take over, and she's been doing it at least that long...if not longer. So, she's been chair for a long time, and she's real busy doing that now.

**PW:** While you were chair of the Miss Chinatown Pageant, how did you change—did you change some of the things? Or how did you make it better?

**JG:** Well, I don't know exactly. It just became better, it seemed like. We raise—What it is, is a scholarship pageant, and each year—I think I have last year's issue somewhere.

**PW:** I think it's right behind you.

**CC:** Is that it?

**JG:** Oh, OK. [laughter] This was the 39<sup>th</sup> one last year, and this year is the 40<sup>th</sup>.

**PW:** Oh, it's Cindy.

**JG:** Uh huh. And we give out scholarships. It tells you in there.

**CC:** You know her?

**JG:** How much the one that is chosen—Miss Chinatown for the year gets the biggest scholarship and we also send her to the national. They have a Miss Chinatown USA pageant in San Francisco every year. So, whoever wins here, we send her there to compete, and our last year's contestant, or the year before last, she won the top, the main title: Miss Chinatown USA crown. So, we've been doing that for forty years this year.

**CC:** Did you have anything to do with the founding of this pageant or did you just come in later.

**JG:** No, I was in the—I was there in the beginning but I did not take the lead. I wasn't one that started it.

**PW:** You said it was a scholarship, right? So, how did you get...

**JG:** Well it evolved into a scholarship. I think there's a thing here that says how much they get you know.

**PW:** Where does the funding come from?

**JG:** I'm sorry?

**PW:** Where does the funding come from?

**JG:** Oh, that comes from. Well, you can see from all the ads that we get, you know, from the people—that's how we raise money.

**PW:** OK.

**JG:** I even got Yao's Restaurant here. I went over to Yao's Restaurant—well he's not there—but I know his uncle. His uncle is the one that takes care of that. But, uh, I get it from his uncle. Here, see, we even have a Yao. Oh yeah, this is, this is the awards. That's what they get when they win a title.

**PW:** And I see you have a ribbon there as well. Did you win a pageant? You have a ribbon, posted there on your wall.

**CC:** It says Miss Elegance, or something like that.

**PW:** [Walks over to wall] You have this ribbon right here. Did you win this ribbon? Did you win that?

**JG:** Oh...that was when I was dancing.

**PW:** Oh...that's when you were dancing. OK.

**JG:** [Laughs]

**CC:** So how did Miss Chinatown start out then? Who—do you know who got the idea and who pushed it forward?

**JG:** I really don't know, see, I wasn't the one that ran with it. I don't remember. It was way back.

**CC:** Hmm, yeah.

[Pause]

**PW:** How did—how did you get involved in dancing? You said you were dancing when you were in your sixties?

**JG:** No, I was dancing, let's see...Oh, that was a Chinese couple here, and they were into ballroom dancing, and they took lessons. In fact they built a home in Memorial, which, you know, they don't have any more because they only had that one daughter, and she married and is living in Dallas. So, I think they keep a condo or something here now. But, they built a big home in Memorial and the upstairs, there's even a dance floor. That's how avid they were about dancing, and they kept on, they kept on asking me to go with them on a guest night. Those dance studios, one night a week, you know, they had a—that's how they get new students. They encourage their students to bring a guest. So I find that they keep—every time they see me, they try to get me to go. So, I finally went. That's how I got stuck. [Chuckles] But I really enjoyed it because we go to other places, like you know, I've been to...up east and over to Colorado, to San Antonio. We go out of town for competitions, so I got to see some other places, you know.

**PW:** Are you currently involved in any other, say, organizations or things around Houston? Or especially with Asian Americans?

**JG:** Am I involved in any other...?

**PW:** Organizations or events? Particularly those involving Asian Americans?

**JG:** No, I'm really not. You know...I'm kind of physically not, you know, up to par, so to speak. And, I'm just, you know, too old to do too much, so I'm not that involved. But, my daughter Linda, the one that lives here, she's involved in—besides the pageant, which is the big deal that she is vice president of the CACA this year and next year she's going to be the president, and they're going to have a national—the CACA is having a national convention here next year when she is president. And, they're still having a pageant...so Margaret Chang, one of her good friends, is involved in—with something else that helps women. I don't know exactly what it is, but it's another organization, and she's involved in that. So, um, ...[chuckles] I think...I tease her, I said—if you get paid for all you do, you'd be rich.

**All:** [Laughter]

**JG:** But, she enjoys it, and both her children are grown and living in LA, so. And her husband is very tolerant. [Chuckles]

**PW:** Do you get to see your grandchildren much?

**JG:** My what?

**PW:** Do you get to see your grandchildren much?

**JG:** No, because they live in L.A. My grandson works for Mattel Corporation, the one company that makes Barbie dolls. He's been with them ever since he graduated from college up East. He graduated from Brown with a degree in economics and in art. And, my granddaughter, she just got a doctors degree in physical therapy. She has a job working in physical therapy, and she got an offer from Kaiser, which is the—it's in California. Kaiser—everybody seems to belong to Kaiser—it's like a HMO or whatever. And, uh, so she's—she was offered a one year internship at Kaiser, so she got permission from her regular job to—see she had to do that, otherwise if they don't give her permission to split her work week—she works three days at the clinic and she goes two or three days. Anyways, she split her week and goes to Kaiser to work on her internship. That's gonna give her another designation...I don't know what it's going to be called, because she already has her doctor's degree. And the reason she went—right now, she has said this, it's only necessary to get a master's degree for physical therapy—but she...they told her that eventually they would require a doctor, and if you don't...you just have a master's you're gonna have to go back to school. She didn't want to, you know, interrupt her education, so she went ahead and got her doctor's, and now she's going to get something else for going to Kaiser for one year.

**PW:** Wow.

**JG:** So, anyway, I'm just real proud of them. They have these ambitions, and they're doing well.

**CC:** What does your grandson do at Mattel, exactly?

**JG:** Well, he, uh, I don't know. I had his business card at one time, but that's about two, three years ago I think. He's been promoted since then. You know Mattel would go to Hong Kong, they would go to Europe, go to South America to promote, you know, to promote their products. They would always send my grandson and a couple of other people to go for them. I assume he's doing real well. And, he likes this job. He's very artistic. Ever since he was a kid, he used to come over here when his mother brings him and he would have a sheet of paper and a pencil, and then he would sit down and start drawing. In fact, I got a thing up there that he drew. I'll show y'all afterwards. And, uh, but if he forgets to bring pencil and paper, the first thing he asks me is he wants, you know, me to give him pencil and paper. Seems likes he's compelled to draw. And, he worked for the *Houston Chronicle*, one summer. The, uh, somebody there that, I think, draw cartoons or whatever. He approached, he didn't approach

my grandson, my grandson approached him to ask him if he could go there and work with him and see what it's all about in the real world. And, he did that one summer.

**PW:** I just kind of wanted to go back, since our interview is focused on labor and capital, um, I wanted to go back to when you were in the real estate business. Do you remember, like, some of your duties then, and like how much a house cost that you were selling? Or...were you usually in residential or for when you were working in real estate, did you deal with residential houses or...um?

**JG:** I dealt with both, commercial also, because, you know, I've been—I'm one of the pioneers here in Houston, my husband and I, we were one of the pioneers, so we know a lot of Chinese people, and some of them have—they might look for something or they have something that they are renting out—but they would call me, and they'd want me to make a lease for them and stuff like that. So, I did that. I didn't—I don't think I sold any Chinese grocery people any property that I can think of. But, uh, I had dealt with them, you know, for some of their needs back then, and uh...and what was that other part did you ask?

**PW:** Do you remember how much houses cost back then? A house? Do you remember how much a house cost back then?

**JG:** Oh, yeah. You know the house that we built in Bellaire—that was in 1952; it was a one-story, but it was a big brick house, and it had three large bedrooms, and two—two and half baths. And, land and all, we figured it costs us \$32,000, and that same house, now, would command over a million, because it's on a half acre lot.

**PW:** Is that house still there?

**JG:** Yeah! It's still there. But the people we sold it to, I think they had sold it to somebody else. I think maybe to an Asian family because one time I was driving around by there and I saw an Asian woman watering the shrubbery. So, I think an Asian family got yeah.

**PW:** Well, you opened your—well you had your own real estate business, correct?

**JG:** It was good. I managed a lot of property. By that I meant I had sold a house to people and they move out of town—in fact I sold it to, uh,...there's a Japanese grocery store here, and I sold him a house. It's a real nice house; it's a two-story. And, uh, he came over here from Japan and he went into the scrap metal business, and uh, I think in—back in Japan, they wanted scrap metal, so he came over here to buy scrap metal and ship it back to Japan. Then, after...and he looked for a house because he had a family; he had two boys and his wife with him, so I sold him a house. It's not too far from my house here. It's right off of Briar Forest, and...then he said, he might come back, that he didn't want me to—I said, 'Do you want me to sell it your house?' and he said, 'No, I might come back.' e never did come back so when I wanted to retire, I talked to him on the phone. I said, 'Mr. Matsumoto, I'm going—I want to retire. Either you let me sell the house, or I'll find to fine somebody else to manage the house for you.' So, he said—it's been quite some time since he'd been back to Japan—so he said he knew he wasn't coming back, but he didn't mind leasing it out just in case, you know. So, anyway, I had to clean—had the house

cleaned up and painted and a lot of things done. I think it cost me, if I remember correctly, around \$40,000 to just get the house in, you know, real good shape. But he got his money back, you know, and everything. So, uh, I managed it for him for many years, and when I manage a house, and then there's another one I managed in the same area—when I manage a house for somebody, you know, I charge them a fee for—a monthly fee—because I keep, you know, renters in there and they get money for the rent, but I get a fee for, you know, from the rent. So, that's how I earn money in real estate, besides selling a place, not just selling a place. If uh, another broker brings a client, you have to split, you know, split the fee with them.

**PW:** How much is the fee usually?

**JG:** The fee is usually about six—total fee is about six percent of the price of the house, so each one would split about three percent...unless they changed it. That's what it was when I was...

**PW:** I see.

**JG:** But, I like real estate because, you know, being in the restaurant business, I'm used to seeing the public, you know, different people. Real estate is the same thing. You don't see them—if you have something to sell, you don't see the same people. You see another agent bringing a prospect but you have to be there to open up the place for them to look.

**PW:** Were you very involved in politics? Were you very involved in politics at all?

**JG:** No...[chuckles]

**PW:** Because, I don't know, while we were researching...

**JG:** Well my husband was.

**PW:** OK

**JG:** He was very involved in uh...you know I vote. I'm, uh...you know, I'm supposed to be Republican.

**ALL:** [Laughs]

**JG:** But I vote every year. Since I'm a senior, I just vote by mail.

**PW:** That's very nice. Is there anything else we're missing that you would like to tell us about yourself? Is there anything that we're missing that you would like to tell us about your life?

**JG:** No...I just feel like I'm lucky to be born in the United States, because, you know, my parents and a lot of my aunts and uncles, grandfather and grandmother, you know, they're all from China. I just feel like I'm really lucky to be—I'm the first one my mother had, you know,

when she came. There's—I had an older sister and an older brother, but I was the first one born here in San Antonio. Then I had—there were seven of us all together. I have another sister, and she's the youngest of the family and she's in Portland, Oregon. But, we're all here.

**PW:** How has being an American, um, helped you to get to where you are now versus your other siblings and your parents who were born in China?

**JG:** Well, my brother—well my sister was at least seventeen when she came, so there was an adjustment there for her. You know, it's not that easy, but for my brother—he was born in China, but he was only about three years old when he came, so it—it's just like he was born here. So, she was the only one, my older sister. In fact, y'all had interviewed Ed Chen. Okay. Did Ed tell you that I'm his aunt? My oldest sister, the one from China is his mother. Yeah...Ed is very historical minded. He's the historian for the CACA here, and he writes things, you know, historical things.

**PW:** How has being born in American given you an advantages...or been—helped you to get to where you are now?

**JG:** Well, I think being born here, just like anybody else born here. Since, I know, you know, since I have siblings that were born over there, my mother and father was from over there...naturally I know more about what went on in China in their day, but that doesn't affect me, really, because I always felt like I'm, you know, lucky to be born here. But it didn't have any—what they experienced, I know what they experienced because my mother would tell me. Her feet were bound. You heard about bound feet? It's horrible. And she said, had she been—she had a sister, I think about a couple of years younger. She said that had she been born a year or two later, she would not have had to bind her feet, that they abolished that. You see, I asked her, 'What is the meaning of bound feet? Did y'all hear what the meaning was?' They said that, uh, that means you're an upper-class. If your feet are bound, you're an upper-class person because you don't need to—you know. They had servant girls back in those days. You know, they have people help them in their house, you know, and do a lot of things, and they don't bind their feet because they need their feet to work. If you have bound feet, then you're upper class. You don't have to do menial jobs.

**All:** [Chuckles]

**PW:** Yeah.

**JG:** Which is so stupid. I'd rather be... have to work than have my feet bound.

**PW:** [Laughs gently]

**JG:** But they have no choice. You know, those girls that have their feet bound have no choice.

**PW:** Right.

**JG:** Because she had a younger sister and they didn't make her bind her feet. And what my mother has always been...she never was afraid of work. She told me one time, if she raised all of us seven children—she never had any household help. And she told me one time, had my feet had not been bound, I would've...could've done so much more work. I looked at her and I said, 'I don't see how in the world you could've done more work at all if your feet weren't bound.' But she said, 'I like to work.' I'm glad she liked to work because she had to work with that many kids and no help.

**PW:** Did you have help raising your children?

**JG:** No, but there were only two of them.

**PW:** Right.

**JG:** I have help, you know, when I moved here. Yeah, I hired a—my daughter had someone come in, a Mexican girl comes in every two weeks to uh, well she has her every week and I had her every two weeks, to come in and do the cleaning you know mopping and vacuuming and, you know, dusting, stuff like that. So that's very good. Now I do have someone here that is staying with me, a friend of the family. So, uh, I've been living by myself here for a long time until just about a year ago. And I can still drive.

**PW:** That's impressive.

**JG:** [Chuckles]

**CC:** I was, just kind of going back, I found this list of presidents for the Chinese American Citizens Alliance and it seems like a lot the people who were presidents are somehow related to you? Is that, um...

**JG:** Yeah, um. Let me see. I think my husband was the, what was he the second one? Or the third?

**CC:** Second.

**JG:** Ok. Oh yeah, Ed Chen is uh.... Wallace Gee is Albert's brother. And, uh, well there's Dr. Edward C.M Chen here. Harry Gee is a cousin. Gordon...no not Gordon Quan, there was a Gordon Gee, but he wasn't president. Well this Teresa Chang, she was involved in politics quite a bit and she had run...I think right now she's working for the, uh, for the city as a Municipal Court judge. She's a Republican. No, I think that's about all. Just Wallace and Albert and, uh, there's another Gee.

**CC:** How were presidents...presidents were selected by vote then?

**JG:** I'm sorry?

**CC:** How were presidents chosen?

**JG:** Well, by vote of the members. We have an election, you know, every year.

**CC:** So, when you were elected as president, were there many women in...

**JG:** Well, I was the first women president.

**CC:** Right.

**JG:** Yeah. Since then, there have been: Teresa Chang, Margaret Chang, Cathy Fong, Dorothy Chao. So there's only been five, huh?

**CC:** During the time that you were president, were there many women who were also in the Chinese American Citizens Alliance?

**JG:** Oh yes.

**CC:** Yes?

**JG:** We had, we usually have around 150 members. That's not a whole lot but that's about normal—about 150.

**CC:** Um, kind of off the wall question, but um...do you think that your father, like comparing the role of your father in raising you and comparing your husband role—your husband's role in helping raise your family, I mean like comparatively do you think your husband had more of a role, or was he always at the restaurant. I mean how much work did you do in like, percentage wise, in raising your children?

**JG:** Oh, you mean compared to my father?

**CC:** Yeah.

**JG:** As compared to my husband raising...

**CC:** Mmhmm. Yeah.

**JG:** ... our daughters?

**CC:** Mhmm.

**JG:** Well, there's no comparison because we lived above the store with—we're with our father so every day that we're home, you know, as we're in school. But with, uh, my husband, he did not have ti—as much time to, to uh, you know, to raise our girls. It's mostly, you know, I'm the one that, uh, is with them most of the time. You know in the restaurant business, you go to work about 11 in the morning and he doesn't get home until twelve at night, or sometimes even one

o'clock. So, uh, and he takes—he doesn't take a regular day off during the week. So, I mean, when he's there, you know, [laughs] he does really well with them, but he's not there as much as normal because of his work.

**PW:** But you worked as well as you were raising your children?

**JG:** No, not when I'm raising them.

**PW:** Ok...

**JG:** Uh, not so much. I think our—one of our take-outs—they were older, they're not little any more.

**PW:** Okay. Anything else to add?

**CC:** I don't think so.

**PW:** I think, yeah?

**CC:** I think now would be a good time to...

**PW:** Thank you so much for your time! Thank you so much for your time.

**JG:** I hope that was helpful.

**PW:** We learned a lot.

**JG:** So what are y'all going to do with all this information you get from different people?

**PW:** We're going to put it in an archive in the Rice library, and it's going to be a place where sort of historians or economists can go and look up information about the past. Because our focus for this project is on labor and capital and work experience, so um we're hoping people can use this information later on to kind of compare back then versus now.

**JG:** Yeah, that's good. [Chuckles] That's good for people that are interested in history.

**CC:** Right.

**PW:** We're also going to be writing a transcript of, um, this interview. So if, um, could we mail it to you and maybe you could look it over and make sure like we're spelling names correctly or whatever? Um, but, um like—we'll be listening to this and like transcribe the interview so can we—we'll send you a copy of—

**JG:** To see if there's something that was misinterpreted by me?

**CC and PW:** No, by us.

**CC:** To make sure—to have you look over it and make sure all the information is correct.

**JG:** Yes.

**CC:** Would you like that?

**JG:** Oh yes, very much!

**CC:** Okay. All right. Um...right, I have a couple of forms for—

[recording stops]