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Interviewee: Pam Lo

Interviewers: Mary Allen & Sheryl Lo

Date/ Time of Interview: March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012 at 9:00AM

Transcribed by: Mary Allen

Edited by: Priscilla Li (5/25/2017)

Audio Track Time: 1:08:33

Background:

Pam Lo was born in Guangzhou, China in 1962. As a young girl, she helped her family by working on the farm and cooking. She attended school for several years in China, but the Cultural Revolution affected the quality of her education negatively. She began to work as a teacher, but decided to continue her education in the United States. An uncle found her a husband in the States and she moved to Houston, Texas in 1988. Due to financial constraints, she was unable to attend more school. Instead, she juggled varying jobs—from working as a waitress to a stint in an electronics factory—while raising her children. Over time, she and her husband raised enough money to start a used furniture business that they currently run. Pam was able to bring both of her parents, brothers and sister to the U.S. Her daughter attends Rice University, and her son goes to school in the Cy-Fair region of Houston.

Setting:

The interview was conducted in the office of Mrs. Lo's furniture warehouse. Sheryl, Mrs. Lo's daughter, was present during interview in case she become confused. While Mrs. Lo was initially very nervous to be interviewed, she became more comfortable when she began to discuss her work history within the United States. A large part of the interview is devoted to her beliefs in the importance of education, her desire to be more educated, and her desire for her children to receive the best education possible.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

MA	Mary Allen
PL	Pam Lo
SL	Sheryl Lo
...	Speech trails off; pause
Italics	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

**MA:** Um so I guess my first question would be when did you move to the United States?

**PL:** April 22nd, 1988.

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**MA:** 1988.

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** Um, what were the circumstances that prompted you to move?

**PL:** I marry with him [her husband]. And so that's why I move here.

**MA:** Okay. Did he come here before you or did you come with him?

**PL:** Way before.

**MA:** He came before? Um when did he come?

**PL:** I think he told me 1970.

**MA:** 1970?

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** So where, where were you staying while he was here?

**PL:** I stay in China.

**MA:** With your family?

**PL:** My family, yes.

**MA:** Okay, um. When you um came here was Houston the first place you lived?

**PL:** First place.

**MA:** So you've been in Houston the whole time?

**PL:** The whole time, yes.

**MA:** Okay. And then um have you always been in this business or did you have any other businesses?

**PL:** First, when I came, I work for somebody. And then we slowly save some money and do the small business.

**MA:** Where did you work at first?

**PL:** Uh, first when I came I work in a restaurant.

**MA:** And what kind?

**PL:** Like Chinese restaurant.

**MA:** 'Kay.

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**PL:** Then I change to a couple restaurant. And then I think in 1992 we start to do the business. When we first start it's like a small, a small place like in the flea market. And then after we save some money we do a little—we buy another free market. And then after I find out you know when we sell the gift we don't make that much money. And then I save some more money to open like a furniture store. Mm-hm. And then from rent the space uh we save more money we buy the land and we build the store and then we stay here for over ten years.

**MA:** What did you, what did you do before you came to the States?

**PL:** Um first when I stay in the restaurant. Then I may—um after six months I pregnant with my first baby. Then I think I stay home for maybe couple weeks and then I look for another job because uh we, we don't want to fail in the kitchen, you know, and then hurt the baby. So I go to, after that I go to work in the factory and then after that I go to work in the cleaners and then after the baby born I went back to work in the cleaners and then I think couple months later I go back to work in the restaurant again and then there's another six years full time work in the restaurant. I mean, after the first one born I work in the restaurant again part time and then when I have the second baby, I stay home for few months when I was pregnant with the second baby then after she born I go back to work in the restaurant full time for six, seven years, then that time—I mean he get two jobs, I work two jobs, I work in the restaurant five days then I work in the flea market for two days and then he work in Mrs. Beards bakery and then he work in the flea market. So it's a hard life. Hard job. [Laughs]

**MA:** Yeah, lots of—lots of working...

**PL:** Yeah, lots of working yeah. And then in 1999, when we do good, he uh he left the bakery and he came here and we work together since 1999. Until right now.

**MA:** With all that working, what did you do in your spare time? What did you do for fun? Nothing? No fun at all? Just work and kids and...

**PL:** Only working and then sometimes I feel like I should stay you know I should stay some time, stay with the kids, but time gone I can't go back to the beginning, you know? But if you let me choose again I would choose give some time for the kids and the family.

**MA:** Um were both your children born in the States? Here?

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** Yes. Um—oh what was I gonna ask? When you first uh came here, what was one of the biggest like culture shocks for you?

**PL:** It's a lot different.

**MA:** It's a lot different?

**PL:** Yeah, like um in my country, because I get a government job, like teach in school, so I only work couple hours a day. I have so much spare time. And I can read, I can exercise every day and uh you know, talk to the student. But after I came here my life change. Because everything you have to work hard to get it. Over there, even you don't work you get it because they pay me salary. And plus the culture, you know. American is a lot different from Chinese. Um like uh you go out or you stay home—it's, it's a lot different here. And then plus the job was different. You have to work hard to make it.

**MA:** Do you miss the, the teaching job?

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**PL:** I do when I first came. I always want to go back. But then I feel like, what about my husband? What about my children? And then after a while I settle down. After maybe two, three years, I settle down. I decide to stay. And then I find out, in here you know, you work hard, but you make it. You make money, you support your family. Over there, no matter you work hard or you don't, you still make the same thing. So, so make me feel like right here I have more opportunity. And raise the kids. Like, um I can send them to a good school, to learning center, if you have money.

**MA:** Yeah. Were um—was raising your children in America one of the main reasons that you came to the United States?

**PL:** Before I came I didn't think about children [**Both:** [laughs]]. My mind still like a young kid's, you know, and then after I came here I face to the family like uh marriage and family, mother in law... but over there, nothing. My mind is like a student. Yeah. I don't have anything on my mind to be married with a man or have a new family, something like that. But after I have children then I think about—okay, I have to work hard, save money and then—so they can go to a good school.

**MA:** Um so, how old were you when you came here?

**PL:** Twenty-five.

**MA:** Twenty-five? That must have been exciting. What were you, what were you most excited about to come here and see?

**PL:** Before, I always want come here because life is not that—it's, it's a lot of free time for me over there but you know, if I want to buy something—just say for example, I love my parents, I want to buy them something, I don't even have extra money, you know, only a few dollars a month to buy my fam—my parents something. But then I always want—oh because somebody told me—right here, America, you—everywhere you go you can pick up the dollars, but it's not. That's how I, I was so excited to come here. But once I came, I get off the airplane, everything is changed. Because I don't see the, I don't see the high building when I get off the airplane. But then I say—I think I came in uh Seattle—and I see the big building, but once I get off the airplane, I—he pick me up, he bring me to the woods. I say [shocked voice] 'Where?' It's not like I thought, you know? It's a lot different. I say, 'Where's the tall building?' Because in my country, you know, the city I grew up—it's a lots of the tall building, you know? In here I don't see any until he bring me to um Galleria area and downtown area, I see a little city fun. But, in here I don't see any. Yeah, [laughs]. [**MA:** So.] So I feel down when I came, I feel real down to the bottom. I say 'Oh, my goodness. Everything is different like what I was thinking.' But then after a few years, I find out it's a lot of, lots of fun in here. You can have a lots of chances to change your job or do something else.

**MA:** Are there not a lot of like, different ways that you can change your job back in China? Do you have normally stay on one sort of track?

**PL:** Yes. But when I stay, it's like once you take a job it's almost lifetime. But now they change a lot. You can change your job. You can do it yourself. Yes.

**MA:** What um what family is still back in China?

**PL:** Only cousins. [**MA:** Only cousins?] Yeah, I bring all my family. My mom came first take care the baby for me. Then she stay after I get the immigration, like American citizen. And then um I apply my father came. First he says he didn't want to come, but then two years later he came. Uh then uh after that, I bring my younger brother, my baby brother, and then my older brother and my older sister, they came like uh six, seven years ago. So my job finished. That's how I want, you know, I want my whole family stay together. Yes.

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**MA:** Do y'all live in the same house? Or do you just-

**PL:** First, when they came my brother stay with me for four years, same house. And then—that's the younger brother. And then after uh he marry with uh his wife, and his wife—he apply his wife came and they bring a little, a little boy. They have a boy he born in China. And then they move out to apartment. And my family still together. Then um after my older brother, my sister came, we stay in the same house but I find out it's so many people. So I let them stay in my other house for a year, then they stay on their own. They can buy their house.

**MA:** Do y'all—do you live—or like, have you moved a lot over the years? Did you live in the main part of Houston and then move out or have you always lived sort of out in the suburbs or...?

**PL:** You mean my family?

**MA:** Yes.

**PL:** We only move—okay uh after when I came, my husband's family live in a house in Sugar Land, but then I find out it's far away from his jobs. So we, we leave the house. And also the house, you know, when the economy went down like uh in the end of the eighties. Uh so we left the house and we rent apartment over here. From Sugar Land he move—we move over here. We stay in apartment. Then after the second baby born we move to a bigger apartment. And then when we find the apartment is not good for the kids. They shooting, they fighting. Like, I remember my upstairs—every Friday they fighting. So we move out and we bought a house. We bought a small house that time. And it's good for the children, you know. They have more playground and they have more friendship with the neighborhood. And then when, when my first, my son, like uh go to middle school, we look for better school district. We still in Cy-Fair, but we move far to like [inaudible]. And then until my father die, uh we move back to the old house, but they still stay in the, in the same school like high school. It's a good school district. She graduate in Cy-Fair and he son graduate in [inaudible]. We proud, we proud of them [laughs].

**MA:** Good. Um what do you think were some particular challenges that you faced when you came here because you were a woman? Did you?

**PL:** I don't feel any but first when we came I feel like language is the first thing. But I learned some English over there. Not a lot. But I still need to learn so I watching TV, uh listen to the radio and then I go to the movie, too. So uh slowly I can talk better and understand when people talking. First when I came, not understand much.

**MA:** Um had your husband had English training before he came over or did he learn primarily in the States as well?

**PL:** I think he learned a little bit but he stay in high school. Like in a church high school, first when he came in Georgia. So he know, he know a lot better than me. So sometimes I ask him, 'What's that mean?' and this and that. [Laughs]. Yes.

**MA:** Um you said that—is it both girls? Or a girl and a boy?

**PL:** Boy and a girl.

**MA:** Boy and a girl. Uh what are some of the things you wish your girl had been able to experience in China growing up but didn't get because she grew up here.

**PL:** I think first I want to send them back to China for like, elementary or middle school because we always

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thinking education. Over there, they have uh a lots of rules for the student. But here they give the children a lots of freedom. So, in China, you cannot talk back to the teacher. In here, you can say what you want to say. I mean, that's the main thing. But then also they give you a lots of homework and study.

**MA:** In China or here?

**PL:** In China. In here, they don't ask too much homework when they stay in elementary. But then I think about you know if I don't watch on them, I let somebody watch on them, so I didn't do my job. So I prefer I can watch and I sent them to learning center to have more, uh you know, the learning center teacher they give them more homework to tie them up. Don't let them have so much free time.

**MA:** Um what about like, sort of, cultural elements outside of education?

**PL:** Um culture. I try to let them keep the Chinese culture. But after a while I find out, you know, if you're here you need to take what you can take. You cannot go back to China, you cannot ask your stu—I mean yourkids—like, same thing happen like when you grow up. It's different. So I take what we have right now, what we can do. Yeah. But I still teach them Chinese culture. And I make them take as much as they can take. Like love the family. I mean, I'm not sure American family, but I don't get I mean real close to American family. But to me I like my children to love their family, uh grandpa, grandma and mom and dad, you know. Um. Don't talk back to them and any time you eat you let the older people eat first, then you are the last one because you are the youngest.

**MA:** Um. Have you, have you gone back to China since [**PL:** One time.] you came here?

**PL:** 2002.

**MA:** How is it different?

**PL:** It's a lot different. I almost cannot recognize the street or the building. And then I feel like people change a lot. Yeah, before when I uh when I was a student, when I take the bus, you know, a lots of people they rude to you. Sometimes, when you walk—because so many people walking on the street—they hit your shoulder and they rude to you, they try to beat you up. But when I went back in 2002—you know, the young, the young generation they say, 'You like to sit down? I can stand up.' when you take the bus. And then also when they—you hit each other on the street you know, they say, 'Oh, excuse me.' Before you don't hear. So I feel like they are changing a lot.

**MA:** Um. How do you, how do you describe America when you're talking to people back home? Like, what kind of questions do they ask and how do you address them?

**PL:** They didn't ask me a lot. They just say, 'Is it easy to get a job and easy to make money?' That's all they ask. [Laughs]. [**MA:** Okay!] And I say, 'Yeah.' And then I say—another thing, American people, most of them like, uh I can't say right now but main thing American people, um just say when they hit your shoulder they say, 'Excuse me.' That's public. But in China we have to improve like lots of people don't even know, you know, how to solve the problem. And they choose fighting. Uh if you hit somebody like uh, by accident—but here too I saw one time they pull out a gun on the parking lot and make me scared too, you know. But they can, like most the time like uh when you go to the public, and people always say, 'Excuse,' or open the door for you for woman. Yes, that's a good thing.

**MA:** Um. You, you said that you don't know a lot of American families over here. Do you primarily hang out with, with Asian Americans?

**PL:** Mmmm. Not a lot either. Because I'm—I working every day, seven days a week and sixteen hours a day,

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so I don't have time. When I get home I go to sleep and then when I stay here I only talk to customer, you know, try to help them get their furniture.

**MA:** So you've, you've found it hard to—difficult to make friends 'cause you've worked so hard here?

**PL:** Yes, only by telephone. Sometimes when we are not that busy and call some of the friend. But um I only have couple of the good friend, that's all. Not many friends.

**MA:** Here in the States?

**PL:** In here, yeah.

**MA:** Um where do you, where do you meet friends? Like in what kind of groups and activities would you meet them?

**PL:** The friend I have uh it's like I used to work with them before. Like some friend—I have one friend, best friend, two of the best friend, I think. And one of them I used to work together with her. Uh when I first came I have a hard time to get a job but she help me because she came before me. She help me get uh like restaurant work and she tell me 'Oh, don't work in the kitchen. Kitchen is hard work and uh you don't make that much money. And plus it's dirty or something. But uh you, you speak English and you're young, you can work to be a waitress.' And then I, I start to be a waitress. Then we work together for a couple years and then we have been good friends since then. Twenty, twenty-four years. And then another friend—before I came, I met her in the hospital when we have the exam. Before we came we need to have an exam so we met each other and we talk and we came in the same airplane and then we, we start to be friends since then. It's twenty-four years, too. So it's a long time.

**MA:** It's a long friendship. Um...what about, what about at home? Like, do you still stay in contact with a lot of your friends from China?

**PL:** Sometimes. Because right here daytime, over there nighttime. So I can't make so much time to talk to them. Sometimes we email or telephone. But I met them like when I went back to China. And they all proud of me and I'm proud of them too. [Laughs]. They tea—they still teach in school and some of them are like principle or assistant principle and some of them they retire because over there uh when you get to fifty you can retire. And then another best friend over there, she teach—we were—she teach in high school and she get um the highest—the highest level on the teaching. Yeah. So I'm proud of her. I'm proud of the people, of the friend they are principle, they can, they can be, you know, over two thousand student and teachers.

**MA:** Oh wow.

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** So tell me a little about your childhood. Where in China were you born?

**PL:** My childhood? [**MA:** Mm-hm.] My childhood—when I was little, I remember we were real poor and we have to uh work for my mom, like uh when I was maybe—I was four year old I have to take care of my younger brother. And then when I was six, I cook. When I was twelve uh I work for my mom in the farm making a little money. So I just say the generation is a lot different. I just talk to Sheryl [her daughter] today, I say, I ask your brother to work here. Sometimes I'm busy. And he say—always say, 'Are you going to pay me?' And then I say, 'When I was little, when I was twelve year old I work in the farm. I never ask my mom to pay me.' And then—but my son always ask me, 'Are you going to pay me if I work for you?' I say, 'Yeah, of course.' And then, when I pay him he say, 'I want more money.' I say, [exasperated] 'Why?' He say uh, 'I'm not going to work for you for free.' And then I say, 'You're not working for me for free because I pay your tuition, I pay your light

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bill, pay your water bill, your car loans, your insurance.' That's American style. I say 'If you talk to me American style, I treat you like American style, too.' [Both: [Laughs]] But like I say, when I was a child, we don't ask for anything—nothing from the family, you know. We a poor family. So I tell, I tell my son, I say, 'If you want to talk to me on the money, you owe me too much. You never can pay me back all your life.' Because I, I spent a lot more time and money to my children than other—compared to a lots of family, you know. I know lots of Asian parents, they spend a lots of money to make the kids go to learn dancing, piano, violins, anything—but I don't send them a lot but I send them to learning center. And for them I buy um I buy another house so I can move there. So I can have a better school district for them. You know sometimes you cannot think about—you know, you want to get, get the money back. We don't talk about money when you is a family, you know. So it's different from American. [MA: Yeah.] Yes. But when I was a child, I remember once I get off uh from school I go to work, I don't study. And when I get home, I already tired and I want to go to bed. And then, plus, you know, I was born in um uh the time, like a ten years revolutionary in China. Um my teacher, everything—they only make me go to the farm to working, you know, plant the uh vegetables or the trees. I don't stay in school a lot. So, the uh the ten golden years for me is, is not a good memory. [MA: Right.] So I wish I could go back, you know [to] when I was ten [so] I can study. But now, no. [laughs]. When I retire I decide to go back to school.

**MA:** What, what do you want to study?

**PL:** If I have a chance go back to school? [MA: Mm-hm.] First thing I want to learn computer. Because I find out computer is so important. You don't have computer you can't do anything. For right now, I'm sure the next ten years is going to be the same. So, first I want to learn computer and second I want to learn more English so, you know, I can know American more and then uh have more fun, enjoy my life.

**MA:** Um. What ways do you, do you stay connected to your culture at home? Like, do you watch um Chinese television shows or read Chinese news? Or, like, in what way—

**PL:** You mean right now?

**MA:** Yeah.

**PL:** Uh I watch some Chinese movie. But the main thing I like to watch is the news. They, they are not—they have the Chinese news and American news but I concerned more about American news. Because I stay here I need to know more. Yeah, China—I'm not there no more, so, sometimes I just pay attention how the um how the economy is and how people life is. That's all.

**MA:** Okay. Um in terms of like, feeling at home here, how much, how much do you feel you belong in America? Do you feel like an outsider or an insider?

**PL:** You mean, to be like a home?

**MA:** Do you feel, do you feel like you're an American?

**PL:** I think so.

**MA:** You think so?

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** Okay.

**PL:** I don't hang around much in Chinese culture because I stay far away from them and then—plus every day I



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stay is American. So I have some good friend like, American, like uh um customer. They care about me a lot. So I care about them. I call them all the time. And then, um you know, the get sick or something I go see them. And sometimes I have customer they really, really sick and they die I even go to the funeral. That's my customer. Cause I don't, I don't met lots of people like, I don't go out. I only go home and working, so I make friends like—while at work [Laughs]. So I feel like I'm American [laughs] more than Chinese.

**MA:** So you kind of define like, your feeling American by the fact that you have American friends and that you're involved within like, American's lives.

**PL:** Um. Yeah, because I feel like I'm here, I make American friends. And then, plus, uh Chinese friend, you know, um I think maybe they, they are not—they don't have much time for me, you know? So when I stay here, uh one thing I can do my work and another thing I can make friend. So, like um easy for me to hang around with them.

**MA:** Um what has been one of the most like difficult things for you coming here?

**PL:** Mmm. The difficult thing is like, uh before, I always want to get uh a job in a big company. But I never can because, maybe, language, first when you came, language is the big problem. So, I went to interview before but they don't like—I went to interview for to be a mailman, like work in the post office, they don't giv—they don't even give me any answer. I fill out a form, I, you know, anything, but they didn't give me any answer. So I feel like I need to find my own way. And uh—but I did work in a small company—like a electronic company. But they don't pay, they don't pay good money. They pay four dollars per hour before. So I left. I left there. I went back to work in the restaurant. I making more money. And after I save some money I do my own business, then I, I continue to do business. Yeah, it's more, it's more freedom for me to work by myself.

**SL:** Um. What did you do in the electric?

**PL:** Electronic?

**MA:** Electronic.

**PL:** Assembling. I do the assembling line. It's a hard work, too. You sit there ten hours. Uh they do give you fifteen—every two hours they give you fifteen minutes like uh rest. And uh but it's a lots of work for a little money to me. I do—everything I do I do fast. I always get the first place in my team. And they are very appreciate of me but they never gave me a raise. Like four dollars per hour for a long time.

**MA:** How long did you do that job?

**PL:** Over a year.

**MA:** Over a year.

**PL:** They don't give me any raise. But, you know, I do a lot like—one person, I do two people job.

**MA:** Oh, wow.

**PL:** Yeah, I do because they, they give you a certain amount you do. Every hour they count how many you finish. But I go through a lots of the test but uh my head boss, I think he's from another state, he always say I do a good job and this and that but they never give me a raise, you know. So I go to work in the restaurant. But the customer, if you give good service, they give you more. Because you work in the restaurant you only make tips, right? Uh your boss only pay you basic, like, twenty dollars per day for twelve hours a day. So main thing is the customer. They give me good tips. You get good service they, they give you good tips. So I feel like I'm the

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boss. I can make money. I give the best service I get the best money [laughs]. Yes.

**MA:** Um have you ever felt sort of discriminated against?

**PL:** Sometimes. Not a lot.

**MA:** Like, could you give me an example of maybe one or two times that that's happened.

**PL:** One time, two times, I went to deliver—because first when I uh first when I uh do my furniture job, I do everything by myself. Like I pick up the furniture, I sell, I assembling and then I go to make the deliver. I remember a long time ago I went one deliver and they have uh a gate. You have to push the number and get in, right? And then one guy, I follow him to get in and he get mad. He get mad with me. He say, 'Why you follow me to the apartment?' And I say, you know, 'This is the door. Anybody can come in. Not just you.' And then I say, 'I come here, I make the deliver' then he didn't say anything. But another time, uh my customer always fight with the guy. He um—my truck came to the door and then he get mad, he say [him speaking to her] uh 'Why I came here?' And then I say, 'Why I cannot come here?' And then he say, 'What you come here for.' I say, 'You are not a FBI, you are not a police, and I didn't do anything wrong.' I say, 'I—anybody can come in, you know? 'What about I come visit friend or family?' Uh and then he still not let me go. And then my customer, upstairs, he saw—he saw what happened. He say uh 'He deliver for me. What you want?' and this and that. And then they get mad each other and then they almost fight. I say, 'Okay. Please, calm down.' I say, 'I just come here to deliver and I make my customer satisfied.' And then I say, 'Please, let me go,' and this and that. And then he finally, he give up. Yeah, sometimes I feel—not a lots of time. Maybe [because] now I don't go out a lot. But the good thing is most the time it's good. You know. Most the time people try to help. Yes.

**MA:** Um you said that your, your father didn't initially want to come to the United States. What sort of difficulties did your parents face whenever they first got here? And how did you sort of deal with them?

**PL:** First he didn't want to come because he know right here is different. Like, you go anywhere you have to drive and then over there, like, we stay in the city. You come downstairs you can buy—[if] you have money you can buy stuff you want. You don't have to drive. Because you can, you know, the, the house we have [in China] stay in the middle of the city. And um he can come down and get anything. That's why he say, maybe he come here, he don't have friend, or uh somebody to talk to—language different. Uh plus, he can't go nowhere. And that's why he didn't want to come. And then uh, after he came, he like a lot here too. Like, my mom, she still like America a lot. The only thing they face—they don't face a lot. When they came, they already old. They don't face job, information, job problem or transportation problem. They only stay in the house. That's all.

**MA:** Right. Um. You said—I know your daughter goes to, to Rice [University]—what is your son doing?

**PL:** He go to uh Cy-Fair college. Lone Star. And I always want him—that's a big problem for me—I always want him to transfer to uh UH [University of Houston]. At least UH. But he's not, he's not like a person like to study. So, we still—we still working together. I try to make him go [laughs].

**MA:** Uh-huh. Try to make him a better student?

**PL:** Yeah. Better student get better education because—I always tell my children, I say, you know, 'If you don't have a degree you don't have a good education, you cannot get a good job.' You know, no matter where you go, they ask for your uh your um education information. Even—I go to refinance the house, they say um, 'How many years you stay in school? You get a college degree?' I say, 'Yes.' But I don't get four years degree, I only get two years degree. But still, you know, college. That's how I tell my son, I say, 'How you face your family, your wife, and then uh your children later on.' If your wife uh is uh get a better education, how you feel? All your life is not going to be happy. Maybe she, she didn't mean anything or she doesn't want to ask you but you know when you face to your children. Like uh I don't go to the school meeting a lot. My husband does. When

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the kids, like Sheryl, have a lots of activities in school, they always talk about, you know, everybody engineer, the parents engineer, doctor, head manager in the big company. We, we, we are self-employed. We different. So I always want me children, you know, to be proud—their kids to be proud of them when they grown up. Yes.

**MA:** So what kind of jobs would you want your kids to have in the future?

**PL:** When—after they get their education, good education, I don't mind much like what kind of job they want. They can take the job they feel comfortable, they satisfied. I can't do too much on their job but, you know, at least education I want them to have at least like a four-year college. Yes.

**MA:** So, so, but they can get what kind of education they want.

**PL:** Yeah, they can get what kind of education they want. You can ask them. I don't ask a lot but I only want four years at least. Yes.

**MA:** You want smart kids.

**Both:** [Laughs]

**SL:** Everybody wants smart kids.

**MA:** Yeah, I guess that's true. Um. What, what kind of criticisms would you give to the American um way of life?

**PL:** [to Sheryl] What's that mean?

**SL:** Well, just um, do you see anything wrong with sort of an American way of life? Like, what do you think about an American way of life? Like, what do you think that's like?

**PL:** It's uh it's not a lot wrong but sometimes I'm thinking. To me, um American like um American people need to be—what to say—just my personality—American people need to save. Like I see a lots of my friend, they don't know how to save. [**MA:** Save money.] So when they get in problem, they say 'Oh! I don't have money pay my bill' and this and that. I have the same problem but it's not big like they have. They, you know, a lots of American, when they make money, they spend, spend, spend. But, to me, I always think about—I tell my children too—think about the raining day. You—sunshine today—beautiful, happy, don't overspend. And then when you save for the raining day you have money to pull out. Don't ask help. I mean, sometimes we ask help, but not like, 'Help! Help! You have to help me! I don't have a job! You need to give me this, give me that.' We don't—I don't feel like that. That's not my—that's not me. And then I feel like another thing. Uh Americans—some, some of them—they don't like, just say, students—they only depend most to the school. They—but, to me, parents need to watch their kids, too. Just not depend on school. Because your kids only stay in school for a few hours, right? And plus, school is so many, so many students. Maybe the teacher cannot pay attention to all of the students. But uh to a lots of uh like um parents, they only try to put their student, their kids to school and their—okay, that's your, that's your job in school. That's your teacher's job, not me. But, to me, I try to teach them in, in the house, too. Like uh, make sure they do their homework. Make sure they stay home—they don't running around with the friend.

**MA:** Um how did you and your husband meet? Was it, was it an arranged marriage or was it-?

**PL:** [Laughs] Oh, only uh, you know, he work with my Uncle's family. And then that time, first I was trying to come to study. But then nobody give me affidavit support. And then I still want to come to study. Uh like I say, I graduate when I was sixteen. Young. And I want to continue to go to school. But in China, um like um every—time graduate in school they don't have college, you know the ten years revolutionary, no college. But I

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think the year when I graduate they just started. They started to have a college again. So um I want to go to college but um—like, my grade, I think like uh five or six hundred people they only choose one or two people, student, and I'm not the top, you know, so they didn't choose me. So—but I—my uncle told me—my uncle was here—he told me, you know, when you came to America you have a lots of chances to go to college, so that's why I want to come. But then I apply for a few years and uh nobody want to give me support. So my uncle says, 'Do you want to marry a man because uh he want to get a wife—he want to marry a wife in China.' So we start to write letters and call each other and then um after six months he came to China and we get married. Yes. And then he want me to continue to go to school. But then when I came it's like um from the top on the sky I jumped to—I dropped to the ground. My heart broke. Like uh everything is difficult. Everything is different. So uh I decide I go to, I go to work, don't go to school.

**SL:** I just have to clarify something because I never understood this. Like, Uncle—he had a restaurant here?

**PL:** Not Uncle, Yi gong.

**SL:** Well, then, great uncle.

**PL:** Yeah.

**SL:** So he was already here?

**PL:** He, he came here a long time ago.

**SL:** And Daddy worked for him? Here? In Houston?

**PL:** Yeah, Daddy, Daddy get laid off in the oil company and he go to restaurant work.

**SL:** He had a lot of different jobs.

**PL:** Yes.

**SL:** What did he do in the—or well, let's—back to you.

**MA:** Um uh... You've mentioned the ten-year revolution. I don't know very much about that. Could you tell me a little bit about it and sort of how it affected your life there?

**PL:** I don't know much too because they uh—back that year—they really closed government. You don't even know what's going on the government. But after I came here I read a book. Like they talk about the ten years revolutionary over there. You know, it's like a government—government inside a government they fighting. They try to get uh like uh they try to get the first place of something so they make the revolutionary and they close up all the people. Young kids, you cannot watching TV, like um from American, from outside uh country. You cannot listen to the radio. I remember I have um a cousin—he's not real close, he's a far away cousin—um he, he lock himself door inside his room and he listen to the radio in America and then they put him in jail. Yes. But I'm not that time, I, I still young that time.

**MA:** Still really young?

**PL:** Yeah still really young. Little girl. And I remember if they give me a chance that time I can be a very, very smart girl. They just put me to factory. They put me to the farm and plant the vegetable, work with uh work with the people in the factory. That's all. No study.

**MA:** So you didn't get the opportunity to study?

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**PL:** No, no.

**MA:** Okay.

**PL:** I remember I have good memory. When I first grade, they give me like um little story. I remember when I get home, every time my teacher tell me story I always repeat the story to my family when I get home. You know, what my teacher tell me and this and that. So, you know, I have a good memory and I like to study. But it's no, no storybooks for us. No books when you go to the class. Um you—any day, any time the teacher say, 'Oh, we go to plant, we go to plant in the mountain, we go to plant in the farm, today we bring you to the factory and see how people making the bricks, how people making the dishes.' That's all.

**MA:** So they just tried to show you like working but not, not like-

**PL:** Yeah, running around waste your time for your education. So, like uh nobody can get good education to fight with them.

**MA:** Yes. Oh I see um and then, that's different from the golden period, right? That you said—um was that before the ten-year revolution?

**PL:** When I, when I was like... Okay, I think the revolution they start like when I was second grade. All the way affect to—that's why I graduate when I was sixteen. And then but when I stay in middle school, they change a little bit. I guess the revolutionary already finish. So we change a little bit. They, they teach us more than before. But it's already, you know, your good foundation already gone. The ten years already gone. And when I was sixteen, I graduate. I still young. Sixteen, don't know anything.

**SL:** But when was the golden age? Did you mention that before?

**PL:** Mm-hmm.

**SL:** But when was that? Was that after the Cultural Revolution?

**PL:** Yes. I was born in 1962. I went, I went, I went to school I think when I was seven year old. So, maybe like, uh 1969 I go to school. But then after that [the government] they still—the government they still don't let people, like students, to know more about the other country. Same like uh they close all the news all the country. They don't let you know anything. Even people come from overseas, they don't let you talk to them.

**MA:** Really? How do they do that?

**PL:** They don't let so many people come to China.

**MA:** Okay. Just tourists, I guess?

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** So, I'm confused. Did you grow up in a farming area or a big city?

**PL:** First when I was a child I grew up in a farm. Like in a country. And then when I get to middle school, most the time I stay in school in the city. I stay in school like um...

**MA:** In which city was it?

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**PL:** In Guangzhou.

**MA:** Guangzhou. Okay.

**PL:** And then I stay in school. I don't go back home once a while. I am a full time student. But I still feel like—like uh you know, like in America, twelve years education. I only get four years education. Two years in middle school, two years in high school. So, it's not enough for me.

**SL:** So it's like a boarding school? Like, you were away from your parents. You were away from-

**PL:** You stay in school. You have choices. You can go home every day or you can stay in school for twenty-four hours. You know, like uh after school they have a teacher come to the class and uh watch on you and then also you have homework problems. The teacher, you can ask your teacher. So I, I choose to stay in school.

**MA:** How far was it from home?

**PL:** Not, not far. But, you know, that time we don't have transportation. There's no buses or anything. So I, I, I uh prefer to stay in school because I can have more time to study.

**MA:** Do you have uh siblings? Like, brothers and sisters. Yes, I think you mentioned bringing a brother over, right?

**PL:** Right. I have two brothers and one sister.

**MA:** Okay. And you were the very first time come here?

**PL:** I am the first to come here, yes.

**MA:** Are you the oldest sibling?

**PL:** I'm the third one. I have older brother and older sister and me and younger brother.

**MA:** Okay.

**PL:** My younger brother is the one have the best education. He, he stay, he stay six years elementary, three years middle school, three years high school. Um my, my older brother, he like me. He graduated when he was sixteen. Uh uh graduated in high school. But I think I'm still proud of myself sometimes [laughs].

**MA:** I would be! Yeah.

**PL:** Thank you.

**MA:** That's very brave-

**PL:** I can write good. I can write good story. I remember when I was twelve year old, I speech to the whole school. It's like middle school and high school together. It's over twelve hundred student and teachers and I, I go to speech. Yes.

**MA:** Good.

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**PL:** My teacher like me a lot when I stay in school. Yes.

**SL:** Is that—[**MA:** Go ahead.] Did that influence you wanting to become a teacher? Did you want to become a teacher?

**PL:** Not really. [**SL:** Oh.] I always want to be a doctor. But maybe not—then later on, when I find out uh I cannot be a doctor 'cause I scared of blood, so I choose to teach.

**MA:** Okay. Um what subject did you teach, by the way?

**PL:** I teach uh English. But it's like a basic. It's not like here. Basic. I teach—first, I teach math. Then I go to uh two years to learn English. Then I tea—I start to teach English in the middle school. Then I go to another two years, um full-time two. And I come back to teach another six, six months—I think less than year. Then I marry him. But I'm proud of some of my students. They do real good. A lots of them, they are, they are boss. And then one of my favorite student, he is uh he work in the government, like in the city of Guangzhou. He—he's a Governor on one of the, one of the county, before. So he do real good, he do real good over there.

**MA:** You're proud of him, too.

**PL:** Yeah I'm proud of him. [laughs] He's very smart when I teach him. He's very smart student. His math, his physics, his uh chemical, his English, his Chinese language, he all get like a ninety. Straight A.

**MA:** What are some of the things you miss most about home? Like language, food?

**PL:** No, not a lot.

**MA:** Not a lot. No.

**PL:** Only friendship over there.

**MA:** Just the friendship.

**PL:** But you know, when I retire, I can always go back to, to stay with them for couple months and come back and when I want to, I go back. But now uh I can't go because I have business here. Not—I don't, I don't miss a lot.

**MA:** That's good. I guess. [mumbling]

**PL:** But right here you can eat good food too. You know there's so many Chinese restaurant right now. It's not compared to China over there but, you know, here you can eat uh you eat more comfortable. Because, you know, the government watch on the restaurant a lot in here, you know. Make sure all the food you know is clean. Over there they don't pay much attention. So sometimes people eat, they get sick, they go to hospital. I'm more concerned about your health, you know.

**MA:** What um—have you traveled a lot within the United States?

**PL:** Not a lot.

**MA:** No? What places have you seen?

**PL:** I only went to uh...where? Where I went?

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**SL:** Las Vegas? No, Nevada?

**PL:** Yeah, I, I went to Las Vegas couple days. Then I went to Los Angeles for a couple days. That's all. When we're young.

**SL:** Why, why did you go to Los Angeles? Or, why did you go to these places?

**PL:** I try to get a good like a wholesale company. Yeah, but we don't find anything and we came back. And when we go Las Vegas it's just for fun.

**MA:** So a wholesale company for the furniture store?

**PL:** Mm-hmm. For the furniture store, yes.

**MA:** Um. Would you say that you're, you're more...drawn to living in bigger cities? Would you ever move to a smaller city in the United States? Like maybe after you retired.

**PL:** I want the farm life again.

**MA:** The farm life?

**PL:** Yes. Yeah, when, if I retire I want to move to a small town. Like maybe Conroe, Montgomery County. Get away from big city people [laughs]. Uh-huh. But I like—my husband didn't like—I like the farm life a lot. You know, every day when you wake up you see the sun—you see the sunrise. You hear the birds. You see the animals. Like uh chickens, rabbits, and cows and horses.

**MA:** It's much more peaceful.

**PL:** Yes.

**MA:** Yeah. Um what, what has Houston as a city meant to you? Like, does it, does it feel like home? Like do you, do you feel more at home here because there's lots of different kinds of people? Like, what—when you think of Houston what do you think?

**PL:** I, I like it a lot. I like Houston a lot. And plus I don't like to move a lot. If you move you lose friendship. Uh you lose money too. And then, plus, you have to think about a lot. When you go to a new place, may be difficult for you to get another job. Like I do business, maybe difficult for you to start from the beginning. And then build up your relationship with the customer. So I don't like to move. Yeah, like to stay. I only like to um move over there like when—after I retire. Retire and then you don't have a job problem you don't have uh any tran—transportation problem. You can just stay there, you know, when you feel like you just come back to meet your friend here. That's all.

**MA:** Before you came what um what about Houston did you know?

**PL:** No, I don't know anything.

**MA:** Do you think NASA? Cowboys?

**PL:** No.

**MA:** Nothing.



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**PL:** No.

**MA:** You're just coming to Houston.

**PL:** Yes. But I'm an easy person. I don't ask a lot. So, anywhere I guess, anywhere I go I am satisfy. But once I, once I get my foot on the ground I don't like to move. I, I like my neighbor. I like friends and so, you know, it's good.

**MA:** Um what—when, before you came, what places did you think of like coming to. New York or Los Angeles or, whenever you're thinking of coming to America, whenever you're dreaming of it, where were you dreaming of coming?

**PL:** I don't—I didn't think about it.

**MA:** Okay.

**PL:** I didn't think about that much. But I think I satisfy with working here right now. Because in like uh—when you go to uh California, some of the friend told me the children they go there, they teach them Chinese in class they don't teach them in English. So what about when they graduate? They don't know English much. How they get a job? You can't work for Chinese culture, community for all your life. Then you have limit. You have limit on your children. So I want my children, you know, hang around with the people, American people. You know, all kind of people so they have more opportunity to get a job. Yes. So I like Houston a lot. And plus, you don't pay a lot you get a house easily. It's a big city and plus I like, I like—I buy properties, I like investment. If you have little money you can't buy property in California but I have little money I can start to do more business.

**MA:** A lot of people think that America as a mostly white community. What, what did you think when you first sort of noticed the very large Hispanic population in Houston and the African American population?

**PL:** They don't, they don't tell me much about the race before, like, my uncle. Um but I know uh when I came it's not a lot of Chinese people. And then after I came they, they try—they have more and more people moving and I feel like a lots of the Spanish [speaking] people they uh they grown a lot in their community too. So I don't mind any kind of people. I don't mind. I can be friendly with any kind of people. Yeah, not just certain kind. So, I can hang around with them—like most of my customer is black people. Black people and Spanish people. Yeah.

**MA:** Um and I guess, maybe last question. Is there anything that, that surprised you about being here—you surprised yourself in your, in your time here and your growth here.

**PL:** Only when I get off the airplane [phone rings] [**MA:** Just the negative.] it was different from what I'm what I was thinking. But then after a few years I like it a lot, not crowded like a big city and then um, you know, you can have more freedom. So, after I few years, I like a lot.

**MA:** Okay. Okay. Well, I think I'm done. Thank you so much! [**PL:** Thank you!] You're wonderful. Okay.