

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

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Interviewee: Bobby Joe Moon

Interviewers: Mijin Han (Sophomore); Alisha Zou (Junior)

Date/ Time of Interview: June 11, 2013, at 9:30PM

Transcribed by: Mijin Han and Alisha Zou

Edited by: Chris Johnson and Patricia Wong

Audio Track Time: 1:26:02

Background:

Bobby Joe Moon was born in Cleveland, Mississippi on June 15th, 1944 and lived most of his life in the South. Both of his parents originally come from Kaiping county of Guangdong, China. He studied at Mississippi State University and graduated with a degree in accounting. Throughout his career he worked as an auditor for different sectors of the government and has recently retired. He has also been on numerous boards and was one of the pioneers who served for the rights of Asian Americans. He is also very involved with the Chinese Baptist Church. He is married and has two daughters, who both live in Texas. Most of his close family members live in Texas with the exception of his two sisters, who live in Sacramento, California.

Setting:

This interview focuses on the topics of labor and capital as well as Mr. Moon's family history and experience as an Asian American.

The interview was conducted in the conference room at the Chinese Baptist Church, and the interview took about an hour and a half.

Interviewers:

Mijin Han is a rising sophomore at Rice University, and is majoring in English and linguistics. She was born in Ulsan, Korea. She is of Korean descent and is interested in the studies of comparative literature, especially that of comparing Asian and American literature.

Alisha Zou is also a rising junior at Rice University, and is majoring in Asian studies and study of women, gender, and sexuality, as well as minoring in business. She was born in Morgantown, West Virginia and grew up in Beijing, China and then later Boston, Massachusetts. She is of Chinese descent and is very interested in the exploration of Asian American identity.

Interview Transcript:

**Key:**

<b>BM</b>	Bobby Joe Moon
<b>MH</b>	Mijin Han
<b>AZ</b>	Alisha Zou
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]	Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

**MH:** This is Mijin Han.

**AZ:** And this is Alisha Zou.

**MH:** We're here today on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in the ...

**BM:** Chinese Baptist Church.

**MH:** Chinese Baptist Church to interview [laughs] Bobby Joe Moon for the Houston Asian American oral history interview project. So, um, can you first tell us a little bit about yourself?

**BM:** Where do you want to start? [laughs] My name is Bobby Joe Moon, uh, born and raised in Cleveland, Mississippi, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944. Got a birthday coming up, guys! [laughs] And uh, my father and mother come from the, uh, Kaiping—today it's called Kaiping area. Kaiping county of Guangdong. And, uh, [papers rustling] so, my father came here in 1908. My mother came here to America in 1939.

So, uh, like I said, I was born and raised in the Mississippi Delta because my father went there in 1925 for business, grocery businesses. They had a corporation called the Zhou Brothers Company, and they ended up having about six—five or six different stores, general stores, grocery stores mainly to serve the, uh, white and Black people in Mississippi.

And, like I said, I—I went to public schools in Mississippi. Uh, graduated as a honor student, of course. [laughs] Went on to Mississippi State University to get an accounting degree. I left Mississippi in June of 1965 for my first job as an internal auditor for the United States Air Force in Savannah, Georgia.

I moved to Houston in January 1967 to become an auditor with the Defense Contract Audit Agency. I stayed here with them until 1975 when I joined the U.S. Department of Energy until about 1986. And I went to work—I finished my career with the Metropolitan Transit Authority, here in Houston, as manager of auditing for contracts. I've been retired two and a half years now, enjoying my retirement, and, uh, glad to be here with you young ladies to talk about a lot of things.

**MH:** Um, so you first mentioned that you went to a public school when you went to school in Mississippi. Um, can you tell us a little bit about, uh, what the school was like?

**BM:** Oh, it's—uh, we only had one class, you know. We start—my little hometown was Boyle, Mississippi, where our store was, but I was born in Cleveland, Mississippi, which is a larger town. So, our school—our class had about 31 kids and one teacher. And there were two Chinese kids: me and another kid. And, but he later passed away in the second grade, uh, in a—a train accident when he—hit him on— hit—hit him riding a bike. I—I witnessed it, in a matter fact. So it was kind of traumatic, really. But, so, I've always been, like, the only Chinese kid in all my classes after that. So I went there from first to five, and then I transferred to the larger town of Cleveland, Mississippi six through twelve, and graduated there, from there, Cleveland High School, and went on to college.

**MH:** So you just mentioned that you moved to another school in, um, the bigger Cleveland. Um, so was it a bit different from the school that you originally went to?

**BM:** Say that again?

**MH:** Oh, was it different from the school that you went to in Boyle, or was—

**BM:** No, I was the only one that had left that little town of Boyle, see, to—to go up to the big town. Here's—an interesting story was that my two older sisters did not want me to go to the sixth grade because they had this very prejudiced white school teacher. They didn't want me to be subjected to that, and they suggested that I move up to—to live with my *cousins* in Cleveland to get away from that environment.

So I'm indebted to my two older sisters to getting me out of that environment where—where I could excel. I excelled in a bigger arena. And it was great for me. I made, uh, completely brand new friends and my old friends did not get reunited back with us until the ninth grade when they had to come up three miles away to join the high school because they closed the high school in the—in the little town. So—so I had—so I had—still had friends from the new school and the old school.

**[0:05:07]**

**MH:** Um, and you also mentioned that you grew up in Boyle and then later on because of school moved to Cleveland. Can you tell us a little bit about the neighborhood, um, that you were living in, in Boyle?

**BM:** Actually, we—we had a grocery—a general store in the heart of the little town of six or eight hundred people. But our living quarters were in the back of the store. Even though we had a home three miles away in Cleveland, we pre—we preferred to live behind the store because, of course, security reasons, more convenient, and everything. So we stayed, by choice, in the back of the store even though the house was three miles away. The only time we would use the house would be on the weekends, like Saturday or Sunday, and during the summers. So, we had two homes, really. We had this home behind the store; we had a home three miles away. Quite—kind of unusual. Like a little resort home, I guess. [laughs]

**MH:** Wow. So when you moved to the school in Cleveland, did you move into that house?

**BM:** No, I went to live with my cousins and *they* had living quarters behind *their* store! And it happened to be in the Black neighborhood. So, it was Black neighborhood. I—I really lived with them like, sixth, seventh, and eighth, I think. Three years with them, in an all Black neighborhood. And little did my white classmates know that I lived in the Black neighborhood. They didn't know! We went to segregated schools, you know? This is before integration.

**MH:** So you just mentioned that you lived in a Black neighborhood. Um, what was it like to be an Asian grew—uh—living in a black neighborhood?

**BM:** Uh, it wasn't that bad. It—because we—we were there to serve the—you know, we had a gr—they had a grocery store. We were—we interacted with the Black customers every day. And if you don't treat them with respect, they're not gonna do business with you. So, we had to learn how to treat the Black people with respect so they would come back.

And I used to kind of play with them a little bit. I, you know, talk to 'em, learn a little bit about their culture and stuff and some of the games they'd play, and stuff like that. You know, I—I know some of their card games, like, uh, Pitty Pat, Conquian. I'd learn about some of their Dozens, which is very derogatory toward—you know, is very bad stuff. Don't (?) playing (?) the Dozens and stuff like that. You get to learn a lot of the culture.

And, uh, I really consider myself 'tri-cultural'. You know, born and raised Chinese, Chinese first language at home, right? Went to school with nothing but whites, but our customers at our store and at my cousin's store were primarily Black. So, I really know three cultures. I—I'm quite unique in this, I know, being tri-cultural. It's really helped me in my lifetime to relate to people.

**MH:** So you said later on you went to, uh, Mississippi State University—

**BM:** [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

**MH:** —to learn accounting. Uh, was it very different from the other schools that you went to before?

**BM:** At first, uh, when some of the white people there would see us, they would look at us strangely because they weren't used to seeing a lot of Asians or Chinese. But once they got to know you as a person, it was no problem, you know? It just .... It was a good experience for us at, uh, Mississippi State University.

In fact, I was able to achieve quite a bit there. Uh, we were required to take ROTC for the first two years, and there were two branches: the army and the air force. My two older brothers had gone through the army ROTC, so they suggested that I choose army ROTC. So that gave me a great advantage on how to do ROTC.

And, uh, just—just imagine me, one Chinese boy, among seven or 800 white boys, competing with them. And I competed well! I got the Freshman Leadership Award, which was—you think about it; it's crazy! The Chinese kid out of all the seven or eight hundred others, and be chosen for the leadership. I was able to distinguish myself. And the very next year, I was selected the Outstanding Sophomore Cadet of the whole Corps.

**[0:10:05]**

So that's—that was probably my—my greatest achievements [laughs] during my college career, which—I only went three years. I finished in three years, so. I—I worked it out. I—you know, I took courses in the summer. We didn't have advanced placement back then, so I—I had to earn my credits during the summer, so I picked up 25 credits in the summer. I figured it out! You know? I said, "I can do this in three years! I can save my parents a lot of money!" And I did it. So, it was unprecedented among the Chinese. [laughing] Nobody ever finished in three years! I don't know if they've ever done it again. I don't know. But I was a good student.

**MH:** So you just told us that you graduated in three years, and you said that saved up a lot of money for your parents, so did you get a job right after you graduated?

**BM:** I had several job offers. Uh, I could have gone worldwide different places, but, uh, I chose to go with the government because there were not a lot of opportunities in the private sector for Chinese, even at that time. You know, some of the corporations wouldn't even give me an interview. You know? You could forget about the big eight accounting firms. They could care less about having an Asian on their staff at all. They wouldn't give us an interview even. It's changed a lot now.

So, [sighs] I had at least five offers from different branches of the government. I could have gone to Panama Canal Zone with the GAO, General Accounting Office. I could have gone to Japan. I could have gone to England. I could have gone to Waco, or Temple, somewhere like that.

But I chose to go with the Air Force as an internal auditor in Savannah, Georgia. I wanted to stay in the South 'cause we were born and raised in the South. We understand the people in the South. I didn't want to go up north where it's cold and we didn't know the people and the culture. I didn't really want to go to California. I wanted to cook (?)—stay in the South. That's why I chose Savannah, Georgia, I didn't know a soul there, but I—I got really lucky. My mother found some Chinese people for me to connect with. That network worked. It was great.

So I stayed there about a year and a half, and got a job over here in Houston where my two older brothers were 'cause my mother always wanted all her boys to be together. And her dream was realized. She had all five sons in Houston at one time, before she passed away. And so, we had—I have four brothers here and an older sister right here in Houston. Oh (?) we have family reunions right here, right? My other two sisters live in Sacramento. Easy. Okay?

**MH:** So you say you lived in Georgia for one and a half years?

**BM:** Right.

**MH:** Uh, what was the neighborhood like? Georgia?

**BM:** I lived more in a lower class neighborhood when I went there. You know, first job. you didn't have too much money. I found an apartment, a *furnished apartment, un-air-conditioned!* For \$55 a month. It was not in the best neighborhood, but it was a mixed neighborhood. But it was close to the—to my job location. \$55 a year—I meant a month. [laughs]

**MH:** Umm. So just to figure out how much everything cost back then. Can you tell us, like, what was the minimum wage. Or—?

**BM:** The minimum wage back in those days was probably like a dollar, a dollar a quarter an hour. And, uh, I was lucky to get a job for \$2.90 an hour, right? [laughs] My first job was \$2.90 an hour. \$6,050 was my starting salary at the government.

Think about it in context. Did you guys see the movie *The Help*? Remember they were getting \$3.00 a *day* at that—it was about that same time. I was getting, nearly \$3.00 *an hour*. Think about that. Put that in context. Those—those maids were making \$3.00 a *day*. I got a job making almost \$3.00 *an hour*. See, as a professional college graduate. It was pretty good.

**MH:** And what was the environment like at your work place?

**BM:** It was a combination of military personnel and civilian personnel. I think our—our boss was a—a Major, you know, a—a military guy. There were a couple of other military staff member—couple three, and there was one other civilian and myself. So it was a mixed environment.

**MH:** And you said you just moved—you moved back—I mean to Houston after that. Um, can you tell us a little bit about what the neighborhood was like when you first came to Houston?

**[0:15:04]**

**BM:** Oh we lived in a white neighborhood, uh, in an apartment. You know where Gulfgate is here in Houston? On 45 going south? Well that used to—w—my first apartment was over there off of Rustic Lane, uh, where the community college is? There's a community college. South—Southeast Community College. HCC? That's where—those used to be apartments over there. So that was a white neighborhood there.

**MH:** And you mentioned that your mom wanted—your mother wanted all of her sons to stay in one place together, so were you close to your brothers?

**BM:** Well, when I first moved here, uh, my brothers weren't married, so, I had two older brothers here already and they were rooming together. So, I moved in to a two bedroom apartment with them for awhile, and till my older brother got married, and then my second brother got married. They left me, and I found other roommates, and we moved from that part of town to the Southwest. Apartments are still there: 60—uh, 8850 Chimney Rock. Still there. In the Meyerland area.

**MH:** Oh, and can you tell us what—what the rent was like, in the apartment?

**BM:** The one on Chimney Rock was like \$165 a month, I think. When I—I—I later got a one bedroom apartment by myself when—when all the roommates .... Uh, one—one got married and we decided to go separate ways. I—I think I paid \$165 back (?), [laughs] pretty good.

**MH:** And what was, uh, your next job in Houston was like?

**BM:** From VCA? Uh, are you talking about ...? Okay, when I came to Houston, I came to work with Defense Contract Audit Agency as a contract auditor. My primary job was to audit the main

contractors and subcontractors at NASA, Johnson Space Center. So I have a connection with the space center, uh, also. And just so happens, my—my older brother Bill, or William, was a flight controller for the government on the Apollo program, so I worked close to him even. That's why we lived on the southeast part of town, heading toward the NASA complex. So I audited ma—the—the big companies like GRW, Billco, Boeing, GE. You name the big companies, I—I've been able to audit—I was able to audit them.

**AZ:** Um, could you tell us about your affiliation with this church and give us a brief history of this church?

**BM:** Okay, we were—we were a Baptist family because, um, my mother came in 1939 to Cleveland, Mississippi, and almost immediately she became a Christian in the—in the Baptist church there. Uh, First Baptist Church of Cleveland 'cause they had a Chinese mission attached to the main church. The pastor Dr. Evanson (?) had been a missionary to China, so he had a love for the Chinese. And so, he encouraged, uh, the mission growth.

And my mother became a Christian in 1939. Of course, she wanted her children to become Christians too, and we all became Christians, uh, at home. In fact, I had to go to church twice! I would go to church in the morning at the church in Boyle—Boyle Baptist Church. Then in the afternoon, we'd have Chinese service in Cleveland, and I'd have to go to church again! So I had church twice.

So, I c—uh, so, when I moved to Houston, uh, you know, you try to find young people your age group and stuff, so I gravitated toward Chinese Baptist Church 'cause this is where the kids were, you know? And, uh, I came here in 1968. Been here ever since! I've been here 45 years. I've been an ordained deacon here since, uh, 1972. I met my wife here, and so I've been involved in a lot of things here the past 45 years!

**MH:** Oh, so you just mentioned that your mom moved to America in 1939, can you tell us a little bit about the transition of your parents?

**[0:19:54]**

**BM:** Well, I .... Well, she didn't know English! At all! *At all!* So she had to—being in the business, she *had* to learn English! You know? You know, English is the language of commerce in a grocery store. So she had to learn English. I do remember her hiring American ladies to tutor her, you know? She wanted to always perfect her English—reading and writing. And she only had about like a sixth grade education in China because they didn't think girls needed, uh, education. But she was natively intell—very intelligent lady, of course. And she always loved to learn, and she always stressed education for us. It was a typical Asian family.

And my father had to learn English. Uh, he came over when he was a late teen. And they tried to put him in school with, uh, the American kids, like the second grade. You know, he couldn't take that! And so he went—he—he left the school and went to work. And on the farms and ranches, the—the ranch or farm owners' wives saw that he was very intelligent and they taught him how to read and write using newspapers.

And till the week that he passed away, he would read voraciously English and Chinese editions of newspapers. He kept up with current events and stuff by reading, uh, newspapers of—of English and Chinese. So, of course, in business, he had to know English. So his English was

pretty good.

**MH:** You mentioned that he first worked at a farm and ranches. Um, was it somewhere in the South? Or was it somewhere—

**BM:** No, my father settled around Sacramento after he arrived in San Francisco. So he—he worked on the farms and ranches around Sacramento. Once he mastered English, he went and got a real job. He went to work for a railroad. Oh, well first of all, he went to a sawmill, a—a—a lumbermill. And then he got a job with a railroad, not as a laborer, because he was very short—small guy, like five foot two, weighed 120 pounds, 110 pounds. They made him a cook!

So he became a cook! So that explains to me—whenever he cooked at home for us, he didn't cook Chinese food; he cooked American food! He cooked steaks, pork chops, apple pie, biscuits, grits, stuffed baked chicken, stuff like that. My mother had no clue. She came from China! They don't cook that kind of food in China! My mother always cooked Chinese food: stir-fry, soups, and stuff like that.

But when father cooked, we always looked for—forward to his cooking 'cause he—he loved to season. He seasoned the food very well for the—the American and Chinese, uh, camp crew, you know? So, that's, uh .... That explains that, and so, you know.

Well, he told me he worked for 20 Mule Team "Borax" Smith, and I—I could never corroborate that until the Internet age. And I typed in, uh, "20 Mule Team 'Borax' Smith" into Google, and sure enough, there was a person that owned this railroad! Called the Tidewater and Tonopah Railroad in Northern California, and—and Nevada. Because they used to mine bor—borax and bring it to Sacramento for processing, I guess. Mm-hmm.

**AZ:** You mentioned earlier, before the interview started, that you were very proud of being a Taishanese.

**BM:** Taishanese, yeah.

**AZ:** Taishanese [corrects pronunciation], and every time you returned back to China, you felt more Chinese even though you initially felt very American. Could you explain a little bit?

**BM:** I have a very good memory. Um, the Lord gave me a very good memory and I—I would listen intently to everything my folks would say about the towns and villages and customs and names of pastries and this and that. I just absorbed everything because I monopolized their time for four years. Because, the next child didn't come along until four years later after me, see? I got to monopolize their time. Otherwise, it was like two years—every two years, you know? But I happened to get that four year gap. And my dad would tell me stuff that he never told my other siblings, and I would watch my mother, uh, get around, uh, the table and—with the other ladies and making Chinese pastries and telling stories about different things.

And so, then I go over to South China to that area, everything comes back to me, you know? Since my momma used to mention this and this and that. And then, I say, "Gosh. I know about this." And—and—and the older generation people, older than me, when they meet me, they cannot believe that I'm an ABC [American Born Chinese]! Because I know so much about Taishanese, uh, heritage and culture and food and customs and everything. And I can still speak the language. That's another thing. That helps.



[0:25:36]

And—and when we go over there, they can look at us and see that we're not from there because we don't look like them. We don't. Because we're sturdier, stouter, our hair is different, our clothes different. But once they hear us speak Taishan dialect, they just go bananas. "This is— that's so wonderful! You can still speak the dialect! Welcome home!"

And they're so warm—it's a—I grew up watching the same type of ladies at home. I jus—that's why I say I feel so much more Chinese when I get over there. And—and it's just like going home, really. I feel so comfortable there, with the people. [laughs] I think you know what I'm talking about. I never thought that until I went over there two or three times. It gets better every time.

**MH:** So you—you mentioned that you're really proud of your heritage.

**BM:** Mm-hmm.

**MH:** Do you still keep some of the customs or traditions in your family?

**BM:** I'm sure we do. Yes, we do. We still eat the same pastries. We go to dim sum. That's us—that's our stuff! You've been to dim sum? Go to dim sum. There's the most authentic one here in Houston, on Bellaire Boulevard: Golden Dimsum. It's in—you know, right past the beltway. It's—it's pretty new.

But—but, uh, we do keep the customs and, uh .... But being Christian, we don't try to keep the more, uh, superstitious customs at all. We do celebrate with the red envelope, you know that *hong bao* [红包 translation: red envelope] it's the same thing in *pu tong* [普通 translation:

Mandarin]. *Hong bao* [红包], you know? There's some common [indistinguishable]—common term! It's pretty close to Korean, too, I betcha! You know? But—but that's why I say, we—we—we, uh—we still celebrate Chinese New Year here at the church. We—you know, but some of the more superstitious things we don't do as Christians. Okay?

**MH:** Do you still speak the language in the family?

**BM:** I speak it with my in-laws for sure. I speak it with the older generation. You know, we can—I speak it to my brothers and sisters. And, you know, we can—we go between—we intermix, you know?

But our kids can't speak it. They—they learned French and Spanish. My younger daughter spent four months at the Sorbonne in Paris, lived with a French family where they had to speak French. In fact, my daughter and her roommate from Minnesota had no idea that Madame and Monsieur Huchet could even speak English until we got there and we went to visit them for dessert after one night. They started speaking to me in English and I could see the girls' mouths just drop. "You can speak English?!" is what they said. That's why I ask Madame Huchet, "Madame, why is your English so good?" "I have to confess. I lived in England during the war!" [laughs]

So—so my daughter speaks French almost fluently because she spent four—four months

in a French family. And my other daughter took—took Spanish, but has not practiced it, so she—she doesn't keep up with Spanish. But they don't speak Taishanese. They can say a few words, you know, here and there. They can understand more than they can speak, okay?

**AZ:** Oh, sorry.

**BM:** We never sent them to Chinese school. Because we saw no point in it because they don't teach Taishanese language. They teach either Cantonese or Mandarin, and—and we speak really neither. We speak a sub-dialect of Cantonese. Okay? It's a little bit different. It's—we—we can understand about 60% of Cantonese. And then they have to speak it slowly too. [laughs]

**AZ:** Oh, sorry, really quick. Do you happen to know how to spell Madame ...?

**BM:** Madame?

**AZ:** Yeah, Madame...?

**BM:** Yeah, M-A-D-A-M-E.

**AZ:** Oh, no. What—what was her last name?

**BM:** Huchet.

**AZ:** Huchet.

**BM:** H-U-C-H-E-T. H-U-C-H-E-T. Huchet. In Paris. In the 17th District. You ever been to Paris? [Alisha and Mijin shake their heads no] Oh, you gotta go to Paris. My favorite city in all the world. Been there twice. We love it. It's, uh, the Chinese call it “The City of Flowers,” don't they? But, I don't know why. But, it—they do have a lot of flowers there, but I think the Chinese call it City of Flowers.

**[0:30:22]**

**MH:** So, sounds like you travel a lot, um, and you also mentioned about visiting China a couple of times. Can you tell us a little bit about your visits there?

**BM:** In China?

**MH:** Yes.

**BM:** I've been—the first trip was in 2000 with my wife and her parents. And, uh, this was—this was the first—well, that's the only time that my wife been to China. So it was a long time coming. Really, I had no desire to visit China growing up because we just didn't—didn't—it wasn't on our radar. Finally, my father-in-law had gone back a couple of times. He kept telling us how great it was, and we said, “Okay, let's try to go.” So we went.

And we took a grand tour of China, like 17 days all over. You know. Uh, what's the

name of that tour company called, number—uh. What’s the—everybody in China says “number one tour co—” uh, [drums fingers on desk]. I can’t even remember, but anyway. Very good tour. It’s—we started in Shanghai, of course, then went to Suzhou, and then went to Beijing, and Xian, and Guangzhou, and ended up in Hong Kong. But we didn’t go on to Hong Kong. We stopped in Guangzhou and detoured to the village area, okay?

So, it was very great. Great trip. And, uh, with like 60 people on this tour bus. And, uh, oh, Ritz Tour! Ritz Tour. They always call it—when you mentioned Ritz Tour in China, they always say “number one, number one! VIP, VIP!” I don’t know why. It’s considered to be the—the best tour company. It was an En—English tour, not a Chinese language tour.

Oh, uh, this is the first—okay so, the highlight of course was when I—when we went to the village. And where I found my father’s home. I found the portrait, and y’all read about that. And so that was my introduction to China. And of course, being there one time, you wanna go back! Most of the time, you wanna go back. You wanna ....

So, the next, uh, couple of trips was with, uh, Houston Independent School District to set up exchange programs with the city of Dalian’s public schools. Because I’d gone to China, I knew some of the administrators in HISD; they—they brought me along like a consultant. And I was able to really save them a lot of money. They were gonna spend so much money on accommodations and stuff. I told ‘em; I said, “You don’t wanna spend \$200 a night. You don’t need to! A three-star hotel is better than a four—five-star hotel here!” And I told ‘em, with the difference and everything. They said, “We’re with you.” And they—I really made them happy of my choices because the knowledge of—of—of being in China, you know.

And we were able to visit as VIP guests. Public schools, private school, colleges and stuff like that. We were treated to Peking duck so many times in Dalian, I got sick of [laughing] Peking duck! [laughs] It’s the same thing! They go, “All we know is—all we want is Peking duck!” I said, “Noo! We had it enough!” [laughing] You know?

It—it was great to see how the system works in China. Like, we saw classrooms with 60 to 72 kids, one teacher. [Pauses] We were walking by the classes and those kids would not look up. They were so ... instructed not to look up.

Did you go to elementary school in China? [directs question at Alisha] You know the story? How many did you have in your class? 42?

**AZ:** Roughly 50.

**BM:** But it’s always—seems like it’s always divide—divisible by six. You know, [AZ laughs] it seems like to me. 72, 60, 48, or something. Because, it’s just the way it is! And—and you go six days a week, didn’t you? [AZ nods] Mmm.

What I learned was the Chinese start—oh, in Dalian, they start ‘em six years old learning English, of course, now. In Beijing, I’m sure it’s the same way. The Chinese wanted to learn American method of group learning. In China, they didn’t—they didn’t have much group learning, like, projects. It was all individual. You know? So, that’s—that’s what I took away from what they wanted to learn from the American system: how to work together as a team, for the kids. Okay?

So that was the first trip. I mean that—tha—so I’ve been that way. I’ve led a couple of trips privately. Uh, [indistinguishable one word] three now, of course, so. Yeah. We went on our own for vacation, first one and two trips with HISD as a consultant. And, I led three trips myself, privately. Different parts of China.

[0:35:50]

**AZ:** Oh, and just to confirm, this is HSID?

**BM:** HISD. Houston Independent School District.

**AZ:** Okay.

**BM:** Public school.

**MH:** Um, so you mentioned that you were related—I mean, you were—knew and had connections in the HISD. Can you tell us how you got to know those people?

**BM:** I'm a participant and graduate of Leadership Houston. Okay? What that is is a group of people that come together to learn more about the city. We—we're presumed to be leaders already. Okay, (?) so (?) call it Leadership Houston. But you come together to learn about the city and varying aspects: government, education, culture, health and human services. It's a program, whole (?) one year. And you, uh—you make connections is what it is. And that's how I got involved with the public schools! Because I had friends also going through Leadership Houston with me and word gets out, you know, among the—our alumni people, you know, what your interests are and this and that.

And so, uh, I got involved with HISD back in the early 90s when I tried to get my older daughter into the gifted and talented program. But they had these crazy quotas back then. And my .... And even though the seats—even though my daughter qualified, but because she didn't fit within that quota system—we were considered to be white. And there were open seats for Black and Hispanic in this program. They wouldn't let her go to school.

I said, "This is the craziest thing I ever heard in my life." And I took it upon myself and got other people to help in the Asian community—Chinese community to talk out against this. This is unfair. So, what I did was raise awareness that these qualified Chinese kids, or Asian kids, could not get into these programs because of the crazy system! And we were able to change that. That's probably been my biggest contribution to the community, where they abolished these crazy quotas.

And because of that, their—the assistant principal T.H. Rodgers—you ever heard of T.H. Rodgers School here? It's the number one academic school in HISD. And, uh, at that time, they would not have more than 15% Asian students. I know the assistant principal. He happens to be a friend of mine. He's Chinese. His name is Donald Lam at T.H. Rodgers School in the San Felipe, Westheimer, Galleria area. I says, "Donald, how—what's your percentage of Asians kids in T.H. Rodgers now?" 43%. And he was not aware that I had been part of the people—of the group that was instrumental in getting that change.

That didn't get changed until about '95 or '96, and I started working on it about 1990. But because of my connections with Leadership Houston, I was able to—to get to know a lot of the top administrators and board members. So, there were a lot of articles written. You can—you can Google up the *Chronicle* archives. Uh, they used to be part of the *Post* too, the *Post*. They bought out the *Post*, so I think some of those articles are still in there, uh, about the fight to just change the, uh, enrollment quotas. You can—you can look up Bobby Joe Moon, Susannah Wang, people like that. And, uh, I still have copies of—of—of these things. But we finally got it changed,

happy to say.

**[0:40:13]**

**MH:** So you mentioned that you're very involved with the community, can you, um, tell us is there any other activities that you do? Related to Houston?

**BM:** Now, I'm kind of retired! [laughs] The church is occupying more of my time now, but I've served on various boards and committees and stuff like—I did work on—I worked within the system after I started making these connections with HISD. I started working within the system, not against them, but with them.

Now, you—I was against them in the beginning, but then one of the administrators was very shrewd. She recruited me to be on her team! Anne Patterson. My friend, Anne Patterson. She's with KIPP now. K-I-P-P, Kipp School. She left HISD and went to KIPP. She's a—she's a great lady. Very—have you've ever heard of an administrator inviting a public citizen to go to lunch? This lady took me to lunch! I said, "This is crazy! No way!" [laughing] I said, "She's unusual!"

So, we became friends and she—she took me along to China on her trips. She saw the value that I could give to the trip. I proved my worth, I think. And of course, she—she helped us get the quotas changed, somewhat, too. She—she saw the need; that it was unfair. That that's ...

So through a lot of my participation in, uh, United Way—I'm al—I'm also a graduate of the first class of United Way's Project Blueprint to include more Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics as board members and committee members within the not-for-profit arena, see? That was in 1988.

So I've been a pioneer in many things. I've been a pioneer a lot in my whole life. I've been the first this, first that. I've been the first minority on a lot of boards and stuff. I've broke the color line. It was easier for them to use an Asian to break the color line 'cause a lot of these not-for-profit boards used to be nothing but white people.

So, I was the first on the Houston School for Deaf Children. It's called the Center for Speech and Hearing now. I had an interest in that because my father was deaf. He—he—he got, uh, scarlet fever, or something. He lost his hearing as a young adult. So—so he wore a hearing aid for as long as I knew. So I got involved with that.

I've been on the board of the Children's Museum. That was—that's a big board. I worked with the Hispanic community on the Tomas Rivera—Rivera—Rivera Center. I was a board member with the Houston Area Urban League for about 10 years. That's an—an, uh, African American. I've been on, of course, Asian organizations: you know, Asian American Coalition, uh, CACA, stuff like that, APAHA [Asian Pacific American Heritage Association]. It's easy to stay within the Asian community, but I wanted to have a broad range, and I wanted to serve all aspects of the community.

Involved professionally of course, a lot, you know? And, in fact, uh, I was on the board of the—my professional organization, Institute of Internal Auditors for many years. I got a first there, too! I was the first member to be recognized as the Outstanding Member for that particular year. And that was back in '88 and '89! I was the first one that they ever gave it to.

So I've been able to distinguish myself a lot. You know? It's—it's all a matter of what do you want to do? You want to be just a member, or do you wanna be an outstanding member? It's easy to be an outstanding member! You—you just gotta put your mind to it, work at it, and—and

try to contribute, and people recognize it.

So I've been able to do professional participation and community participation, church participation. I've done everything around here. Just started a lot of new committees and things here, you know. When I first came to this church, it was very small, and I—I used a lot of my accounting background to try to bring business practices to the church, you know? Started the Stewardship Finance Committee, Personnel Committee, Prop and Space (?) Committee. You know, we're—we're, uh, a committee-driven church. So, I've been able to do a lot of stuff. We work with the schools, PTO's, and stuff like that. Support my daughter's schools, stuff.

**[0:45:12]**

**AZ:** Mm-hmm. Backtracking a little—

**BM:** Mm-hmm.

**AZ:** We noticed that you had a very impressive number of siblings.

**BM:** I do. [Laughs]

**AZ:** So we were hoping you could tell us a little bit about that family dynamic.

**BM:** Okay. My father's first wife, uh .... He went back, uh, and forth to China beginning about 1920 I guess. And so he married his first wife. And the birth—he was there for the birth of the third child, but the first wife passed away in 1937 ... or '36. So he's stuck with this child. He's gotta go back to America. What—what are you going to do? Okay? So, he engages a matchmaker.

This has been told to me by a 95-year-old gentleman who knew of my father's situation in China. He knew our family in China. He knew my two uncles. In—in fact I didn't even know that my two uncles on my mother's side had been owners of a *bus*. And they had a bus company in Cha—in the little villages fueled by *wood*. Can you believe it? A steam driven vehi—a bus.

But anyway, that .... Okay, my father—this is 1936 when my sister Sue was born to the first mom. So he engages a matchmaker. He says, "Matchmaker, I need a wife." He says, "No problem. I know the next village over, the Wang village, there are four marriageable age cousins." Think about in the 30s in China, very poverty stricken, on the verge of war with Japan, you know. Remember the girls are not educated; up to a certain point, that was it. So, there's four girls. They stand back behind a curtain. They bring the girls out. Of course my father doesn't know any of them, doesn't even speak to them, just sees them. Three are 17 going on 18. One is 18 going on 19. So my father says "I'll take the taller one," my mother, as simple as that.

So they get married. And my sister Lillie, my full sister Lillie, is born in 1937. And my father already come back to America. So my mother gave birth alone. And, uh, in fact my mother told me that when she got married, one of her nieces went along to my father's house to help take care [of] the infant. And she still lives here in Houston, the—the—the cousin. Yeah, she lives here in Houston. And my sister that was born in 1937 is, she'll be celebrating her 76<sup>th</sup> birthday next month. So I took her to China. I took my older sister, my younger sister, my younger brother to China back in November to go to the house.

So, anyway. So, that's what happened, and so my father saw the war coming and he sent

for them, and they came over in 1939. But my father—my mother came, my sister Lillie, the full sister, my half-sister Sue, and my first cousin, uh, Josane came as my father's son. He claimed my—my cousin as a son to bring him over. He was like 15, okay? So they—they came—they so—they—they arrived in Seattle in February. It's cold. They take the train from Seattle to Chicago, and Chicago to Cleveland, Mississippi; happened to be on a rail—railroad. Came straight from Chicago to Cleveland, Mississippi in early March.

My brother Roy was born mid-December 1939. And my older brother William was born April '42. I was born June of '44, and my sister Jane was not born until December of '48. And my brother Jimmy—he's a dentist here—born in Febur—uh, September 1950. My baby brother, who is an—an engineer, the last engineer at NASA, born in April 1953.

**[0:50:11]**

So we're all here. All of my natural siblings are here. Can you believe it? There are four brothers and one sister. And—okay, the .... My younger sister, the full sister live[s] in Sacramento with my half-sister in the same city. Just—just co—coincidental. Innit? In Sacramento.

Okay. A little bit—a history about my—my—all my siblings, okay? Sue the half-sister is a retired blank—bank employee with Bank of America, I think, in California. She went to college one year, but she was very smart. She probably was, uh, most intelligent of all the three sisters, but she got married. And, uh, she has, uh, a daughter that's a psychologist, a son that's a CPA, and a daughter that's a business graduate.

And, uh, okay. Now Lillie has .... Lillie and her husband had a grocery business after college. Sue did not graduate from college. She just went one year, but everybody else graduated from college. Lillie graduated. And she taught school for a year, in the public schools, I think, and then she got married, and she raised her family in—with her husband in a grocery store. She married Chinese. And Sue married Chinese too. We've only got one sibling that married out. My brother, uh, Bill, uh, older than me married, uh, a Caucasian lady. Okay, but okay.

Go back to—okay, Sue has three children. Okay, Lillie has a—has an MD daughter. She—she lives here. And she has a computer science daughter in Austin, and she's got a son here.

Okay, and then Roy, my older brother, he graduated general business. He became a sales representative for Gerber baby food. He's retired. His wife is a schoolteacher. Their son is a computer science graduate, and their daughter is a business graduate. [beeping in background] And then William, my brother that married a Caucasian lady, they have three children. Two sons are both dentists and one daughter is a dental hygienist.

And then me, my older daughter is a supervisor of accounting for EOG, uh, corporation downtown. She's, uh, just turned 30 and she's a supervisor which is very good. So the—the—you know, we—we paved the way. So they're—they're finally recognizing Chinese leadership, and st—you know. So. this generation is reaping the benefits of what we started.

And Amanda just got her master's a year—oh, it'll be two years in August. Uh, she is a speech language pathologist, works with children. And, uh, she's got a boyfriend. They'll be getting married pretty soon, uh, I think. [Laughs] It was—they just bought a house. That means something doesn't it? I think.

Anyway, and Jane, after me, her number one daughter—only daughter is a dentist; married to a dentist. Carl's been trying to get into dental school and hadn't been able to do that

yet. So I don't what he's gonna do.

And then Jimmy, uh, is a dentist here in town. He's a general dentist. His wife is a children's dentist. Number one daughter is an—a MD, uh, anesthesiologist. Number two daughter got her dental degree a year ago. She's doing her master's on ortho. She graduated as president of her dental class, which we're very proud of. And Mary graduated in computer science. She's gonna take a job. She was a Google intern for two summers, but didn't get the Google job. That almost broke her heart. So she's got a job, will be starting in August, a year late. So she—she's been taking, uh, courses to maybe go to dental school. She don't want to. She don't want to go to dental school. And my nephew JJ is probably gonna be a senior at UT in computer and economics together. I don't—we don't know what he's gonna do. He's the smartest of all of 'em, but the laziest of course. [laughs] Is that typical of a boy? Spoiled.

And Larry and his wife—Larry's the engineer still at NASA. They have no children. And, uh, he's still at—he's gonna retire from NASA pretty soon. I'm sure. He's worked on a space station. Three brothers have electrical engineering degrees. So we had three Moon brothers, electrical engineers on the staff at one time in '75, '76. And Jimmy left to become—go to dental school, and then my older brother retired. So that leaves Larry there.

**[0:55:22]**

And, uh, so that's basically uh, the, history of my siblings and their families in a nutshell. We've been very blessed to—to be here in America. My father and mother sacrificed a lot for us to get our education. We never got scholarship; we made our own scholarship. I got a little scholarship because I finished number one on this exam by the certified public accountants in state of Mississippi. And I—I finished number one. I got a little scholarship, like \$250, something like that, but at least I did win. And, uh, none of us got scholarships. We—we took care of ourselves, and my father paved the way. And even my two daughters I took care of them, you know. We—we made arrangements. We invested our money wisely. We never depended on scholarships.

**MH:** So you have a big family—

**BM:** [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

**MH:** All in Houston, or—

**BM:** [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

**MH:** —in Texas, basically near here.

**BM:** [overlapping] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**MH:** So do you guys have reunions?

**BM:** We meet together all the time. If—we have, uh—we at least get together maybe five or six times a year. You know, for whatever occasions, you know, Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, whatever. When visitors come in we—we al—we always get together. We usually gather at my



brother Jimmy's house in West University 'cause he has a huge house, two stories. And ... and so, we—we still get together. That's why my—my mother's happy. She would be happy. Because we still get along. And most families don't get along. Even in the same city, they don't get along. But we still get along.

**MH:** Oh, and you mentioned you met your wife at the church. Can you tell us—

**BM:** [overlapping] Right here. This Chinese Baptist Church.

**MH:** [overlapping] Can you tell us a little about how you met?

**BM:** Oh yeah. We just—I started attending here, and of course—and, you know, one thing after another you just start dating the—the girls around here and stuff like that. And we'll be celebrating our 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary on June the 20<sup>th</sup>. 42 years. We celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the Serengeti, in Africa. When we went to Tanzania in—two years ago. Yeah, we celebrated. Yes, um, 42 years right here. Mm-hmm.

**AZ:** And your wife is also of ...?

**BM:** Taishanese?

**AZ:** Taishan—oh, wow.

**BM:** Okay. They—her family comes from Taisan county, Taishan county, right next door to *our* county. And our dialects are like 95% the same. They have a few phrases a little different, but I can understand it 'cause I can transliterate or interpret. But, uh, the two counties—uh, two main counties—Kaiping or Hoiping county and Taishan county. There's originally four counties. Hoiping, Taishan, Sinwei [Xinhui], and, uh, Inping [Enping]. And now they expanded it to five county area. They put in Heeshen [Heshan], I think, Heeshen County. So this—if—if you read those—if you go to those links on—on my signature blog, or whenever, you know. You've—you got my email or some— maybe you don't, but are (?) on the bottom. Or, you should—if you don't you can email me like, and I can send them back to you. [Laughs] And, uh, okay.

**AZ:** Um, so looking at all this—all this amazing research—

**BM:** [overlapping] Mm-hmm.

**AZ:** Could you give us, like a little background as to how you obtained these documents? How—?

**BM:** Once I learned about how to do research in genealogy and stuff—it—it's easy for us to do genealogy because both of my parents are Chinese, and they're recent. And I've been on the ground, you know, so I wanted to know all the particulars about his immigration. And I—I found out how to get in touch with National Archives NARA [national Archives and Records Administration], nara.gov. And I got a person in the San Francisco office where I could email directly. It's easily done, you know. You just—it's public record now. You—I paid 50 cents a sheet, but I think they gone up to 75 cents a sheet. I spent some money, but I teach people how to

find the immigration files. It's—it's very simple, really just knowing the right contacts.

And, uh, I wanted to know when he came exact—I wasn't sure. I went to—finally on ancestry.com I found where he came on the ship. I thought he came in 1905 or 1906. I went to the Mormon church, Latter-Day Saints genealogy file and asked them for these tapes of the different ships and things that I—that I thought that he would be on. I came to a dead-end 'cause I had the wrong year. It was until I went to NARA that they—that I found out he came in 1908.

[1:00:58]

Not only did he come in 1908, they sent him home! Because he had an eye infection. He was admitted, but because he had an eye infection, which would be easily treated by antibiotics today, they sent him back. He had to raise another \$1,500. \$1,500 dollars in today's terms are like 30 or 40,000 dollars. He starved himself by eating nothing but rice and boiled sweet potatoes for almost a year to raise another \$1,500 dollars. That's how bad he wanted to come back. He finally got back here in 1909.

But the Chinese were very smart. Back then they helped each other. The Chinese Six Companies in San Francisco engaged these Irish attorneys. *Irish*. You know, they were new immigrants too. I looked through the file—I can show it to you—where this lawyer Stidger, Albert P. Stidger, wrote up a—an affidavit saying that “Jo Guy Moon was admitted to the United States in 1908 September, whatever, but because of his eye infection, he's being sent home. *Let it be known that he wants to come back.*” And—and they used that to make it easier for him to come back, so he wouldn't have to be subjected to all of this crazy interrogation. I can show you.

They ask you, what color was the roof of your house? How many steps is it up to your doo? How many rooms? Ridiculous questions that they probably didn't ask other racial groups that came from Europe. This was ridiculous! Remember they had to *buy* identity papers. They had to learn a lot of facts that didn't pertain to them! You know, they had to learn the other people's history. Can you imagine the frustration of trying to learn other data just to get through interrogation?

So, you could say that my father was an illegal immigrant. But he did what he had to do to get here. And if it took buying somebody else's identity paper, that's what he did. The earthquake of 1906 let a lot of Chinese come because the files were destroyed. The government couldn't disprove it. These were paper sons. If—you can look it up. You know about paper son. My father's a paper son. And the place where he said that his, uh, American side of the family was in Merced, Ca—Merced, California, I think they counted up over 800 people coming out of that paper son bill. Over 800. They had—they had to pay for this! My father had to pay for these identity papers. I can show you the pictures of what he looked like. I didn't know what he looked like when he was a kid. I'll—I'll go through and show you. It's very interesting.

I'm—I'm very fortunate to have all of this stuff 'cause it answers a lot of questions that a lo—I—I try to tell my ABC [American Born Chinese] friends, “Get your file. See what it's all about.” Some listen, some don't of course. But I'm very proud to know where we're from. I have no questions. I *know* where we're from. You know, how many people can say that? For sure where you're from. And that means a lot to me.

And the house is still there. I go there. There's somebody still living in there, and they think we're still the owners. And that's all. I could go there and take it over if I wanted it. Couldn't live there. We couldn't live there in there in those conditions. It's nothing like Beijing at all. It is ... you go 30 miles outside of Beijing, you see how. Going toward the Great Wall, you

see how—it—just night and day, right? Those—where the peasants live. How many times have you been to the Great Wall? Many times?

**AZ:** Too many times.

**BM:** But you know going north, you see those little huts and stuff. But in the south it's a little better than that though. Okay?

**[1:05:25]**

**MH:** So you mentioned that it was very hard for you father to come here to America. Can you tell me what encouraged him to come?

**BM:** Well it was poverty. They had to leave to make a living. Otherwise you'd be stuck there with no food and stuff like that. It—it was—it was poverty that drove them. They knew from other cousins about Gold Mountain, you know, an opportunity. They were always looking for better opportunity to—to live.

In—in fact they didn't intend to stay in America. They were sojourners. My father made money to get back to China to build his dream house. He wanted to go back and retire there. They have a separate part of the village called the new village. It's gated! It's a gated community! Can you believe this? Around the turn of the century, they had a gated community. And it's still gated! I says, "Isn't that crazy? They had gated communities back then!?"

We're—we're no—when we first went there in 13 years ago, they had to call—uh, first of all, you talked to the village chief. And I interrupted his Mahjong game. [Laughs] Okay, so he—he calls the person with the key to the gate. Then he calls for the person with the key to our house. That's—nobody was living in the house at the time we went there 13 years ago. And then, like, five years later, my younger brother and older brother took their families back. That's when they found out that somebody was living there. Somebody had moved—one of our distant relatives had moved back there to retire. And he had a microwave oven, and fans, and stuff like that. [beeping in background] And then I went back just recently; he's still living there.

And, uh, that—it was poverty driven. That's—that's why they came. It's called the great Chinese diaspora. You can look that up. The Chinese dia—you've probably seen it already, you know. It was poverty driven, where the Chinese went to southeast Asia, Malaysia, Australia, China—uh, United States, Cuba, Canada. Very few went to Europe I think. Some did. London, you know, the Crown Colony stuff, but .... There's a big Taishanese population in Australia and New Zealand. [quietly] So, okay.

**AZ:** Most people are content with not really knowing where they're from.

**BM:** Mm-hmm.

**AZ:** What really motivated you to go out and gather all this research?

**BM:** Well I—I've always been the curious type, you know, uh. And, you know—you know, when you get older, you want to know, "Well, where do we come from?" I—I used to hear my father and mother talk about, you know, the .... My mother would always say, "You think this

house is good we got here? Nothing compared to what we have in the village.” We got such a beautiful home. My father, you know, he lived here. He knew what American houses looked like. He took his money back and he had it built more like Western style and everything. My mother would describe.

And—an when I walked in the door I said, “This is exactly what my mother told me it was gonna look like.” And, uh, I mean the floors were like stone, you know, 18 by—stone, I mean brick. I mean the walls are white, you know. And had designs in the ceiling and—and you read my story<sup>1</sup>. It’s just—just like—she told me exactly where to go. The stairs right went upstairs, stopped at the middle landing, looked up I saw my father’s foot portrait. I said, “God knows this is it ‘cause I saw myself.” I said, “That looks like me!”

[1:09:51]

You know, it was so emotional. I mean, luckily my wife was trailing me and she wasn’t emotionally involved because—so she was taking picture ‘cause I was just overwhelmed, you know. When I saw that photo, I said, “I know this is it.” And you think about, you know, they lived there. They—this and that and, uh, my sister was born here, and—and, you know, stuff like that. It—it’s just so emotional.

You—you can just read that account. [laughs] With my—the writer made it very dramatic of course. My—my friend Beth Jacks rewrote—she’s a professional writer. She took my quotes and everything. You know, I’ve been paid three times for that story. Okay, she posted this story after she revised it and put in good form and concised it. She posted on, uh—on her website, uh, USA Deep South or something like that.

And so, the education of testing service SAT people picked it up. And they call her. Says, “Hey we want to pay you for this story. We want to use it.” You know, for whatever. I found out what they use it for. They use it for teaching SAT wri—uh, uh, essay writing. Can you believe it? ‘Cause they want to have some diversity in there, and so they picked it up. So they call her and she said, “No, that’s not my story. I just rewrote it for him. Contact Bobby Joe Moon.” And they did, and so they paid me one time. Then they came back and they wanted to use it some more. They paid me again.

They wanted to buy the whole thing from me I said, “No, I won’t sell it to you. I just rent it to you again for five years at a time.” So price goes up every time though. So I’ve—I’ve actually sold the story three times and I did not write it to make any money at all. I wrote it to inspire other people to go find their roots.

Okay, in 1983 I was at home in Mississippi. I took my mother there to visit. They moved over here in 1975 or so. So I took her back for a visit. And I saw one of my cousins in Mississippi, Jack Chao. I said, “Jack, you are my only link to the past because your English is good. You—you grew up in the village. Please, please, please take some time, sit down, write out our family tree both in English and Chinese.” And he wrote the characters in Chinese and he wrote it in English. He gave it to me in November of 1983. I kept it with the idea of maybe one day I will go to the village to find the village, the roots.

And I did. I kept it for 17 years before I finally went there. I regret not taking my mother there becau—but we had no desire. She had no desire to go back because she remembered the poverty and stuff like that. And most of the relatives had moved over here anyway.

And, uh, so I did make the visit to her village in November. And, uh, I saw where she

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1 “Pilgrimage to China: A Search for Roots” by Bobby Joe Moon & Beth Boswell Jacks

was born and everything and .... It was—it's—their village has one of the Diaolous, the tall watch towers. World Herit—United Nations World Heritage. They have one of the watch towers there. You—you know about Diaolous? Dilous or something like, D-I-A-L-O-U, d—diaolous. They're watch towers. Uh, it's a tourist attraction now. It is United Nations World Heritage designation and there's one in their village.

And I—I have this database of—of all the villages about family name, the clans. [Flips through file] I mean I've got—I could—unbelievable. Maps and stuff. So anyway, that's what I've done. Anything else? Or what—what we got else? I'm here. I got time. [MH laughs]

**AZ:** You actually mentioned you've been to France; you've been to Africa, you said.

**BM:** Mm-hmm.

**AZ:** So I'm presuming you love traveling kind of ...

**BM:** I love traveling. I love people! I love people. I'd rather interact with people than animals, right? [Laughs] No, I—I—on the—even though the animals and the scenery was great in Tanzania, I enjoyed meeting the Maasai villagers. We interacted with them. We went to an Iraqi (Sp.?) village. We went to a school, interacted with the children. I just enjoyed meeting the people in addition to seeing the sites. All over the world I like that.

**[1:15:00]**

And, uh, I get along with all types of people. I'm unique! Uh, it—it's really crazy. I learned early in life that being tri-cultural gave me a great understanding of people. I've always been an amateur sociologist. In fact, when I went to Mississippi State, I took introduction to Sociology. Have y'all had that? Do they still teach that? Introductory Sociology. The sociology professor came to me one day says, "Mr. Moon, have you ever thought about change your major to sociology?" I said, "No ma'am. I came here for accounting."

And there was a funny story. You know, I—they give you these pre-entrance exams and stuff. I go to the—the freshman, uh, registration line. And they look on the list. "Mr. Moon, you did so well on the English portion. Would you like to take these English special classes, honor's classes?" "No ma'am. I came here for accounting. I'm sorry."

We—we took the ACT test, which is common in the mid-west and the South. We didn't—we weren't required to take the SAT test back—that was 50—50 years ago. Think about 50 years ago. There were four—there are four parts on the ACT test. And they still give it, in the mid-west. And it was funny. I scored 99 percentile on all four portions. *All four*. There was no more than two points' difference in any of the four scores. It was crazy. I could have majored in anything! [Laughs] And English wasn't my best subjects.

Gotta funny story to tell about English. 10<sup>th</sup> grade. High school. 150 kids. One teacher taught all classes, like six—six—six different classes you know. About 25 people in each class, maybe, you know. Six—six classes. Miss Christine Jones. Never forget. First six weeks' grading period she gave one A. Me. The only non-white kid in the whole class. [laughing] Got the only A that six weeks. She gave those other classes a fit about that. She says, "Look! This boy, he's Chinese! He—he made the only A! What's up guys? [laughs] Gotta do better." That's a true story. I—I did not make that up. It's a true story. It's funny.

**AZ:** [overlapping] So why accounting then?

**BM:** Always been trained in business I guess, you know. Worked in the business. Always been good with numbers too. Uh, one of my responsibilities as a child. Uh, we all were expected to check in the merchandise when vendors bring in the goods and stuff. So you're auditing them when they're bringing it in. "Hey, I got 50 bags of flour here." And you gotta count 'em! Make sure they don't cheat you. "I got 10 loaves of bread." They could cheat you since they make it look like 10, there's only six you know. You know, they could cheat you.

And then my father, uh, showed me the—the business end, you know, how to—how he did his bookkeeping, and stuff like that, and counting money, and this and that. He used an abacus! [laughing] I never learned how to use the abacus. He could work that abacus so fast, you know.

And so, then I took bookkeeping in high school and I loved it. So I excelled in it, and then when I won that scholarship it had to be for accounting. That—that sealed the deal right there. I says, "Hey, I got a scholarship. I got to major in accounting. Hey." I liked it. I said, "Fine." You know, I thought about being an engineer. I thought about a doctor, but I ended up in accounting, became an auditor. Hah. It's okay. It didn't ... It worked out okay, you know.

It, uh—I achieved what I wanted to do. I still remember my cousin, the one I lived with beginning in the sixth grade—I used to work for them on the weekend in high school. And he asked me, "What do you want to do? What do you want to do when you graduate?" This and that. I says, "Well, I want to be able to be ... able to lead a team of people one day. Be a manager or a supervisor." And, it—I finally achieved that when I went to Metro in 1986. And I was a manager of auditing for 24 and a half years so.

[1:20:19]

The door—I felt the door was being shut because of my race and ethnicity a lot in—when I worked for the government. I know I was passed over 'cause I was Chinese. I wasn't Black, or I wasn't Hispanic. They let—or—or a woman. They'd promote a woman before the Chi—promote Chinese. 'Cause they want to make the—make the numbers look good. And—and we were—we were overlooked because we were Chinese.

Being Chinese never helped me in my career *at all*. I never got any preferential treatment *at all* being Chinese. They would use my Chineseness—ness as a minority statistic to make them look good. But when it came to the good stuff, being Asian did not help. And it's the same truth today, scholarships and stuff.

Uh, I don't know if you all ever experienced it, but I—I know that, uh, unless you make a perfect score on SAT, you're not gonna get anything. 'Cause Asians or Chinese are not viewed as disadvantaged minorities. It's—it's still here. And the—and the glass ceiling is still here for a lot of Asian Americans, too. But, uh, things are slowly changing.

But the fact that my daughter has been promoted to supervisor before she's 30 is a big plus. It recognizes her competence, and—and she's got—she works for great company called EOG Resources downtown, corporate. So things are slowly changing. But to get beyond director is probably hard, to get in to the vice presidency and all that, it's—it's kind of hard to—for Asians today. It's still—it's slowly ....

But, uh, we have a relative she is, uh, a vice president and treasurer of EOG Resources.

But that didn't have anything to do with my daughter getting a job there. She applied independently of that. But—but, it's—it's happening. It's getting better over time. Hopefully we'll improve more though for your—you guys' generation. You're going to stay here when you graduate, I hope? Yeah? Yeah. You don't think about going home? At all?

**MH:** Not really.

**BM:** No, uh, it's hard to leave America once you get acclimated here. How long you been here?

**AZ:** Five years?

**BM:** Uh huh.

**AZ:** Five years. Five, six years. [phone rings]

**MH:** Almost a year, maybe. [AZ laughs]

**BM:** Oh, boy.

**MH:** I mean I'm also thinking of maybe going to another country.

**BM:** Uh huh.

**MH:** I like traveling too, so.

**BM:** Oh! Okay. What else? So I've been to London. I've been to Paris twice. We've been all over Italy. Uh, we've been to—I've been to Tanzania. Been to Australia. We just got back from Australia. So, since I've been retired I made three major international trips in last two and half years. We went 17—two weeks in Tanzania in April of ... 2011? And then I went to China in—in November 2012, and we went to Australia for 17 days, uh, in January of this year. So it's ...

Uh, but, my wife's mother's been very ill and they're in their 80s, and so—so we want to—she's gonna retire in August. So we plan to go to Barcelona. We've postponed for two times. Uh, Alaska maybe. Uh, we've decided that we don't want to go anywhere there's so much heat and humidity like we have here. I said, "Why do we want to pay for that when we got it at home?" It is not comfortable.

Uh, we—we got the rainforest in Australia. That—that was brutal. Mosquitos. Then they had the cyclones, and that kept us off of the Great Barrier Reef. It rained. It flooded. So it's, uh ... I said, "This reminds me of home in Houston, all the hurris—of the—the hurricanes and ...." Now we—we'll probably stay away from lot of heat and humidity if we possibly can. But we plan to do a lot of traveling.

**AZ:** But ultimately will you still retire?

**BM:** Uh, we'll stay right here.

**AZ:** [overlapping] Why is that ...

**BM:** Now I've been—I've been retired two and a half years. And my wife will be retiring in August. So .... We just. We love Houston. We're not going anywhere. We just like to travel. I hadn't got her back to China yet. I can't believe that. She—she doesn't like those long 16, 18 hour flights, you know.

So I flew the, uh—what. Airbus A380, that's the new one. I hate 'em. [AZ and MH laugh] I hate 'em. It's so crowded. And the seats are so [gestures the thickness of the seat] about that thin. So I've—what I've done, I bought seat cushions. That was smart. People thought I was crazy. I bought one for me, my wife, and my younger daughter. We used seat cushions. It helped a lot. Yeah.

**AZ:** All right. Well, thank you so much.

**BM:** Oh, it's been great girls, guys.

**[1:26:02.6]**

**End interview**