Interview:

In this interview, Mr. William Orchard speaks about the various periods of his life. At first, he talks about his early life, his military service in the Navy in the US and in Japan, and his experience as a banker in the US before and after the war. Then he goes on to recollect his time working with American Express in Hong Kong and Shanghai, his family life in Shanghai, the arrival of the communists on May 25, 1949, and his subsequent return to the US. Throughout the interview, Mr. Orchard tells various specific stories from his past and reflects on how his life experiences in the US and Asia influenced who he became.

[0:00:04.4] WO: My name is Bill Orchard and I'm sitting here with Brian and he wants me to say something about my early youth. And I guess the most important thing is that when I was about seven, I got appendicitis, pneumonia, peritonitis, and the whole works. My mother says and still says, said for many years before she passed away, that the nurses had packed their bags to go home because I wasn't expected to last until the morning. And it's now 2011 and I'm 92 years old. I'm the one that has survived through all my close relatives, brothers, etc. They're all gone.

BH: Wonderful. Today is February 4, 2011 and I'd like to know more about your childhood. Where did you grow up and what was your family life like?

WO: Well my father was gonna be a priest and he went to Chicago in his youth from New York City. And I have gold medals that he got for Greek and Latin, and he got a job in the advertising business with BBDO and his job there was to approve the use of the English language in all the ads that they produced. Nothing left the shop until he approved the use of the wording. At night he taught advertising at Columbia University, Washington Irving High School, Pace (?) Institute, and a couple of other places. I never saw him at night, he always came home late. And when I was six or seven I became very ill. My mother almost lost me. She lost a daughter about three years before she lost me, and I must say that my recovery at her hands was very favorable. She took good care of me, she loved me, and she was frightened of losing me, and I'm afraid that she spoiled me somewhat in favor of my younger brother, Joseph, who's 18 years younger than I was, than I am. But he passed away in 2010. I went to grammar school, St. Agnes, in Rockville Center, Long Island, New York and my scholastic history is very on the negative side. I was not a good student, and I guess my main interest is when I became 16 years old, was in automobiles. I bought a Model A Ford, for maybe 30 dollars and I worked on 'em and I'd buy one for 25 dollars, and sell it for 30, 35 dollars. And that went on until World War II, and in World War II draft there were 3,000 names in the draft list and my number turned out to be about 2,980 and I figured I would never be called to the service. Of course, Pearl Harbor changed all
that and I ended up in the Navy for World War II, beginning 1942. I was a year or more in Chicago at Navy Pier, I learned automobile mechanics there, I went to an advanced school in carburetor technician in South Chicago, and ended up later, in 1943, in Rio Grande, New Jersey, which is about ten miles north of Cape May, New Jersey, at the junction of the road from Nine (?) which goes over to Wildwood, New Jersey, a famous resort, especially for girls from Philadelphia and the Philadelphia area.

[0:04:49.0] The job I had as a technician. I was an aviation machinist. I was in a group of about ten guys who reported to work around five o'clock every afternoon. We picked up the chits (?) from the aviators who had complaints about the planes that they flew there, and we worked on them. When we were finished doing the work, we were free to go back to Wildwood. I mean, you never saw ten guys more efficient, more productive, than those ten guys. So it was rather an interesting experience, especially since I had a car. A couple of us had cars, and one of the jobs we had to do sometimes was to dump gasoline out of the airplane, into the field.

And of course, some of that got directed into some big containers nearby which supplied our fuel for running up to New York on weekends or somewhat. A really difficult life in my war experience; up to 1944, when I was assigned to a squadron that was (?) and I ended up on the USS Bennington. We went on a shake-down cruise down to Trinidad, and then back, and then we went through the Panama Canal and left San Diego, California on January 1st, 1945. We were at Iwo Jima. Our planes, well, they did we hope sufficient damage to cause the Japanese some headache. The admiral of the fleet, it was one fleet but there were two named admirals. Admiral something-or-other and Admiral something-or-other. And these guys wanted to know what it would be like if the fleet went through a typhoon. And so they did, they sent us in. And thirty feet of the front deck of the Bennington got bent down in the front, and we went down to the Philippines. Subic Bay, and cut if off and dropped it in. And we were back at Okinawa, and at some point we were told to look in a certain direction in the morning to see if we could see anything. And they dropped the bombs on Hiroshima, and shortly thereafter the Japanese surrendered, we pulled into Yokohama, and we were there a week in a big Japanese naval base there. They loaded our hangar deck full of cots and irons (?). Don't know how many guys were put there, on board, every square inch was somebody, and we set out for Long Beach, California as fast as we could get there, where they threw us, all of us got off and I had an uncle, Uncle Ard, who had lived in California for many years, and he had a Model A Ford. And it took, we got, every, I got off a few days and we drove out to Death Valley, which, whenever he had any time off during those years, he went out there exploring it. So he knew something about it. And we went to Las Vegas and then finally I got assigned, I was first-class petty officer, and they assigned ten or twelve guys to me, and I took them to Long Beach, Lido Beach hotel, where we were discharged. I called my mother up in Rockville Center, and she came down to pick me up, and that's the end of my war experience.

Brian, what do you want me to talk about next??

BH: Thank you. Excuse me, I'm interested in a little bit more detail about that experience. Your service experience.

WO: What? What went on in Rio Grande? What kinda girls I had or what?

BH: What was your sense, like, you didn't think you would be drafted and then you said Pearl Harbor happened and then everything changed.

WO: In fact I was out with Peggy, a girlfriend I had at that time, in my car. We went someplace or other, and the radio was on and they talked about Pearl Harbor, so I just turned to Peggy and said, "Well, I guess I'm on my way."
BH: And what did you think?

WO: I thought I was on my way.

BH: On your way. Were you afraid, or what were you thinking?

WO: I guess one of the things that I was thinking, that I was sure I didn't want to go in the army, because I had been a Boy Scout and a Sea Scout and I knew that walking was not one of my preferred professions. So I joined the navy because we had a boat in Rockville Center. My father brother Frank, had found an old 26-foot trunk cabin cruiser in a boat yard on the Hudson River in New York City, Manhattan. And he told my father if we fixed it up we could have it free. So Frank worked on it, he was a brick layer in the city, so he worked on it, fixed it up, and we used it. That was in the 30s, very pleasant, weekends. So I knew something about being on the water. I joined the navy. And they sent me to Chicago, I mean that's training, and I was a pretty good mechanic, I had worked on cars. I never had a job working on cars, but I did it as a pleasure. I know one end of a wrench from the other.

[0:12:14.0] BH: So before Pearl Harbor happened, what did you know about Japan?

WO: Nothing. Just that when the war came along they moved all those Japanese out of the coast, and I felt that was kinda stupid.

BH: Were there any Japanese or Asians that you knew?

WO: No. Laundromat.

BH: Laundromat.

WO: That's my acquaintance with the Chinese, Japanese.

BH: And then, what did you learn in the process of being in the military about Japan?

WO: Nothing.

BH: Nothing. Ok. And when you went off to sea, when you went off to sailing?

WO: Nothing.

BH: Were you told anything about Japan.

WO: Not really. We knew they were getting bombed. I was a mechanic, I rose to be first-class petty officer, which was not... I guess I have something or other up in the brain.

BH: Yea, and so what did you do? You were a mechanic, what did you do? What was your daily?

WO: As I said, my work experience, I did a year or more of training in Navy Pier when I went in. Then we went to this, what I worked for was a "cashew unit" they call it, which means Carrier Aircraft Service Unit, so what they did at our field in Rio Grande, New Jersey, was to form the squadrons which would be sent to the Pacific and the islands as squadrons, or put on the aircraft carriers as the flight. Our planes that we had, SBDs that were all rather used, and they got new planes when they went onboard the ship or out to the sea. And we had to keep these old wrecks going. Change the carburetor, I was supposed to be a carburetor technician, but
we learned a lot of things about how carburetors should work, but we didn’t really use it. If they complained of something-or-other, it sounded like the carburetor, we’d just go and get another carburetor. And it was quite a technical job to change it, I mean you’re relying on your head with your arms up in someplace that you couldn’t see, but your hands felt which bolt had to be taken out or what not.

[0:15:16.3] BH: First place you went in Asia was Iwo Jima, or the islands, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, Philippines.

WO: Well we went there in the carrier. I was on board the carrier. There was a place called Iwo Jima which is in the Marshall Islands I believe, and a truck was nearby and one night, we were all at the movies, and I think three or four Japanese planes came over and one or two carriers got hit, just parked there in the lagoon, but the Bennington did not get hit. I might say something because we later got to the kamikazes and very often we had, I think on our end, 20 millimeter or bigger guns run by the best armor guys in the Navy, because any kamikaze that even came within sight of us, they hit it, and knocked them down. We often got pieces of Japanese kamikazes on the flight deck, but never anybody got close to the Bennington.

[0:16:47.1] BH: Fascinating. So that was kamikazes in Iwo Jima? Is that why then you went to the Philippines?

WO: To cut the piece off the front.

BH: Just for that purpose?

WO: Just for that purpose.

BH: Oh OK. And then you immediately went up to Okinawa.

WO: We got there prior to the Okinawa. And then of course, well we’d gone through the typhoon before that, after Iwo Jima.

BH: So Okinawa, how long were you in Okinawa?

WO: We weren’t…

BH: You just passed through?

WO: Well our planes supported the troops, our troops on Okinawa. The planes from the Bennington.

BH: Sure, sure, sure. OK. And then after that, after the end of the war, you went to Yokohama and you picked up…

WO: After the war?

BH: After the war.

WO: Well no.

BH: No?

WO: Yes, right after. The surrender, and got some shore leave.

BH: Oh ok. How long was the shore leave?
WO: Just a day. I recall, we went into one place and the door, the gate was open, and we went up to the door and knocked and one of the kids inside opened the door, and they were sitting down to eat, and the father looked at us and said, "Please, don't bother us." So we just went away. And then later, walking through the town, we found some little storage places in the street, and inside there's a bunch of rifles, which the Japanese civilians I suppose would have used if the Americans had landed on Japan. Later when we took one of them and brought it back to the ship with us, there was about five of us in our group, and as we got on board they took the rifles away from us, but when we landed later back in Long Beach after the end of the war, as we got off the Bennington, each of the people who got off was given a rifle to take home.

BH: *laugh* So what happened to, do you, you received a rifle?

WO: It was on my wall in Long Island in the house for many years, but that period of my life is another story.

BH: OK. So you got back to Long Beach, you said you called your mother,

WO: This is Long Beach, Long Island, New York.


WO: It's Long Beach. It's the Ledo Hotel, which is today even a nice hotel.

BH: Oh I was thinking California.

WO: No. Actually the Bennington came to Long Beach, California. That's where we got off, and there was a big camp where all these guys coming back from the war were brought and dropped. And then shipped by rail or plane. And that's what I did. They gave me ten or twelve guys as a first-class and I took them to Long Beach, Long Island where I called my mom. Rockville Center is about 15 miles away. She came and picked me up.

[0:20:39.1] BH: So, at that point, what were you thinking? What were you planning? Did you have plans?

WO: Well before the war I worked for American Express in the banking department at New York agency, for 75 dollars a month. And I had attended Hofstra University for some classes in engineering, and I knew some guys and I saw them around Rockville Center, and they said, "What the hell are you doing? 75 dollars a month in the city? Come out to Grumman and you can get 75 dollars a week." Which I did. That was after American Express. I went to work for Grumman, where I cut skins. We were building F4F's which Roosevelt was giving to Great Britain and the lend-lease. And then they made me a rivet inspector, but then the draft called me and I volunteered for the Navy.

BH: Can you go back, so when did you start working at American Express? What year was that?

WO: 1936, 38, 39. Somewhere around then.

BH: Ok.

WO: I got out of high school in '36 I guess.

BH: Ok. What were you doing at the bank at the American Express?
WO: I was in the New York agency. At that time, under New York state law, all foreign banks had what they called New York agencies. And American Express had banking offices around the world, but none, no banking. They issued travel checks. So they had what they called the New York agency, and I worked in that. And I went to the American Institute of Banking, and learned that the war was building, and learned the banking business, pretty much.

BH: So you made about 75 dollars a month. How large was that office? What was that like? Was it a big...

WO: 40, 50 people.

BH: 40, 50. And your wage, how would that compare to other people? Do you know? Or do you think it was pretty average?

WO: Well, clerks in the banking business like me, grow. I was not a highly considered employee.

BH: Well, you were just out of high school, correct? So it makes sense. And then you went off to Grumman Engineering.

WO: Right, and worked in the plant. I cut. Well actually, there was a pattern, and I had to drill all the holes for the rivets to go in.

BH: I see, I see. So then you worked there for how many years?

WO: Two years. I forget. A year and a half.

BH: And it was while you were working there that Pearl Harbor happened?

WO: Yes.

BH: Ok, ok. So your work was related to World War II, to the war.


[0:24:28.5] BH: So what were you thinking about the war at that time? Like the Europe situation at that time?

WO: Well, I guess that there were certain people in Britain who were in favor of the British surrendering to the Germans, and not necessarily Ge... but Hitler, what Hitler wanted was to form a combined economy. The British and the German. And at least that's one of the factors that sits in the back of my mind. I had heard about that. I was not really too much interested in it. I had uncles who had fought, two of my mother's two brothers had both fought in World War I, one was wounded, and they belong to the American Legion and stuff like that, but they lived in Jersey, and we lived out in Long Island. There's a shelter place called Shelter Island between the two falls (?) and my mother was taken there by some aunt or something as a girl, and she fell in love with, and I think she spent the whole of her life trying to move further out on Long Island to hopefully someday getting back there again, I guess.

BH: Very interesting. So, you came back to Long Beach, you called your mother, you came home...

WO: I got on the fifty-two twenty club. We got 20 dollars a month or a week or something, I guess it's a week, twenty dollars a week, as veterans. And I remember I had a friend, we skied and we wanted to go skiing together, so we arranged for the fifty-two twenty dollars to be paid to us up in a place in Vermont so that we
could go skiing. But the trouble is, that was January and we had what they call a January thaw. There wasn’t much snow.

BH: So your 20 dollars per week for how long?

WO: 52 weeks.

BH: 52 weeks.

WO: I finally got back to American Express because I went back to them and said I knew something about the international banking offices all over the world and I told them that I would not come back and work for the New York agency in New York as a clerk. If you put me in a training class to be sent overseas, to work overseas, I will come back and work for you. If you don’t do that, I’m gonna go out to Long Island and go back to Grumman, and claim a job from them, which I believe I could have had because there was a law that they had to re-hire the veterans. So they took me and put me in that training course and sent me. I ended up going to Hong Kong.

BH: So, you told them you were knowledgeable about international banking.

WO: Yes.

BH: How did you gain that knowledge?

WO: Well I worked in the New York agency, and I went to banking school in the Woolworth building. American Institute of Banking. Took classes there after work, or sometimes we were given off from work.

BH: What did you know, when you were working at American Express before, what did you know about the Hong Kong or Asia operations?

WO: Well, just that it was there. I knew that Frank Groves, vice president, was in charge of the Far East. I didn’t know him, but I corresponded with, wrote up correspondence on technical matters.

BH: Where was he based?

WO: Hong Kong.

BH: In Hong Kong, OK. And how important was East Asia to American Express in the 30s when you were still in New York? Do you know? How important was that to the company do you think?

WO: Well, American Express, the story, when the Depression came in ’29 the Chase Manhattan Bank owned the American Express traveler’s business, traveler’s check business. When the Depression, I can’t think of his name but there was some guy who was the Chairman or Chief Executive Officer of Chase, and they (they being I really don’t know who, the powers that be) decided to get him out of Chase. So they gave him American Express company and the traveler’s check business, and he was in 65 Broadway where the American Express traveler’s check business was. Plus of course our New York Agency, and of course they had a big travel, the international travel business was run from that office also.

[0:30:46.3] BH: Great, so you were trained, you went to Hong Kong...

WO: Well, after we got this training, they said, “Where do you want to go?” and I wrote down Hong Kong.
BH: Why did you say that?

WO: Because I knew that Frank Groves was very intelligent and good. And there's another little story that goes with it. And that is, my father's brother Arthur, in World War I, worked at the chemical plants refineries over in Jersey and at this point the doctors said, "Art, get out of here because you've got the startings of TB, and if you don't get out you're gonna be dead." So he rode the rails out West, and every five years he would come back and tell us stories about what he had gone through. And he ended up on the pier in Long Beach, California, looking at the Pacific Ocean and trying to decide whether he would go to China or not. At least that's what the story he told us, on several occasions. And so, I always had sort of in the back of my mind, if I ever came about I'd like to go where he wanted to go. So when the chance came to go to Hong Kong, that was one of the factors that led me, sort of the couple of buttons in there someplace.

BH: Great. But what did he say about China? Why did he want...?

WO: Oh he didn't... actually some guy came up and talked to (?) that, when they were finished he said, "Art, come on out to the place." Now the place in Long Beach today is a museum because it's the house of the people who got the original grant for Long Beach.

BH: And you're meaning Long Island.

WO: No, Long Beach, California.

BH: Oh California, right.

WO: Recently the grandson of the person that Art was talking to at that time sent us, a cousin of mine got into genealogy and we found this guy, and Arthur was like his grandfather. We've got pictures now of him in that family, what he did. He took care of the garden, he was the chauffeur, handyman, whatever, and this kid that we now have pictures of who was part of the family, considered Art like a second grandfather. My uncle Art had a Model A Ford which he, whenever he got, as I said before, whenever he could get some time off he would go out into Death Valley with his Model A and explore the area.

[0:34:23.8] BH: OK great. So then you went to Hong Kong, and what did your family think about that? What did they say? Did they care?

WO: Yes. Actually, my father was commuting to BBDO, my mother was playing, she was a great bridge player, and so my brother got a job after the war going, travelling for Vick Chemical. And then I left so they were alone, they sold that house and bought a smaller house in Amityville, Amity Harbor actually, and so I was in China and he was out.

BH: And how long were you...? So you went to Hong Kong, and what did you...?

WO: I was there nine months.

BH: Nine months. What year was that exactly?


BH: You arrived in Hong Kong.

WO: I arrived in Hong Kong.
BH: And you stayed for nine months. And what did you do in Hong Kong?

WO: I was working the bank. I was the junior. Frank Grove’s the vice president and there were two Englishmen who were superior to me, and then a large part of what was going on was the comprador. Now this word comprador is not something that is understood by modern Chinese, I think, I’m not sure. But what it was, that every large company, the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank has a comprador, the department runs all the Chinese business. The foreigners handle the foreign business, but the Chinese comprador and the comprador department run the Chinese customers run them. And of course, the relationship with me as a junior was very close because whatever they wanted from the English side came to me to work, so I’d work with them. And they studied me for three months very closely and they gave me a Chinese name. My Chinese name in Hong Kong is O See Da, which I understand means a tall, noble piece, tall wooden beam of some kind. But in Shanghai, that name is Ku See Da, not O Si Da.

BH: Very interesting. So can you tell me more about the office in Hong Kong? So there was the English side, the side where you were based, but how large was the office? How many people?

WO: Maybe there were 75 altogether employees.

BH: How many percentage of those…?

WO: We were right next to the Hong Kong Bank on Des Veoux Road, if that means anything. And we conducted business, I welcomed one of the most interesting groups who came in and who I had some attention to, were Chinese in zoot suits. I dunno. Maybe there’s some history of Britain, but these guys with clothes that were all from the United States or other places, that doesn’t, but we used to call them the zoot suiters. And they came after the war. They had come from wherever their parents had taken them or they immigrated, and came to China to get wives. Up in Canton. So they came to, nice, talked to a lot of them. Got to know them, what their way of life was.

BH: Interesting. So back to the bank. So before the war you were making 75 dollars a month.

WO: Well when I worked for Grumman, 75 dollars a week.

BH: Right, and then when you moved to Hong Kong what was your, what kind of wages were you making?

WO: Well I forget but it was quite adequate. I could afford to buy a nice suit, and they had a lot of those in Hong Kong at that time. In fact if you want a good suit I understand, you see the ads in the papers here in Houston of some guy, he goes into a hotel and for a couple of thousand dollars he gets a really top suit.

[0:39:36.0] BH: And, what about, did you have housing in Hong Kong? Where did you live?

WO: I lived in a hotel.

BH: That was paid for by…?

WO: In the Peninsula Hotel, which, well Brian you know the Peninsula Hotel I think.

BH: I do, I do.

WO: It was quite acceptable.
BH: So you commuted across the harbor?

WO: On a pod (?). One of the things, they had, a yacht club was there and the Navy had sailing of course, and a big naval base, and apparently when the British Navy took the German naval base, they found a great number of star boats, star sailboats, and sent them to the different naval bases all over the world. And we had six I think. So whenever Saturdays or Sundays I was over at the yacht club sailing, while Frank Groves the vice president was out playing golf. And I did not play golf, thereby, well, I didn’t get close to him.

BH: I understand. How were the Chinese employees hired? Do you know anything about who they were?

WO: No. Well the comprador. There were two that I remember and they invited me out to a party one day and a lot of very attractive girls around. And I did not get involved with the Chinese girls at that party, or any party I did not.

BH: Were the employees, were they men or women at the bank?

WO: Mostly men. In fact I don’t recall we had any women in the bank.

BH: OK, and do you know anything about the backgrounds of the Chinese folks who worked at the bank? Were they from Hong Kong? Were they from mainland China somewhere?

WO: I would say they were Hong Kong. For many years. There were families and some of them, they were not the wealthiest, at least ours, at least as far as I know. But the ones that I dealt with spoke English quite well. And one of the features which was kinda nice, there was one guy, a Chinese guy, that his only job was to walk around putting hot water into your tea glass.

BH: So how much money do you suppose they made in their jobs. Just curious.

WO: Not… not… You know, I don’t really know how much money they were making, but they satisfied Frank Groves.

BH: Right, right, right that’s fine. So you were there for nine months. Why were you there for just nine months?

WO: Well, in Shanghai, I think Don Griggs, he was 70 or something. He had been the manager. He and his wife lived there for many years before the war, and he was the manager, but he sent word down to Frank Groves that it was time for him to get out, retire. So there was a Frank Feast who was Catholic and rather sympathetic with me, and I think that he pushed me forward as a candidate for that job. And Frank Groves, whether he really believed it or not I don’t know. In fact, my relationship with him was being called, apparently we did gold business. We financed shipments of gold coming in, and this one day, an airplane carrying gold, some of it ours, hit a mountain and crashed. And I know Frank Groves called me, early in the morning and said he wanted me to come right away and I came. And he drove up to a mountain road near where the plane was crashed, and he said, “You stay here and watch the car.” And he climbed up the mountain to the gold area. And I always thought that was bad because I didn’t get a chance to put some of that gold in my pocket.

[0:44:57.3] BH: So your major primary work in Hong Kong was what?
WO: Dealing with custom people coming in, initially. Preparing certain things, and anything involved I would take to Frank Feast or Mr. Groves, but I handled a lot of different things. People losing traveler’s checks.

BH: Who were your customers in Hong Kong?

WO: Mostly travelers, people traveling. A few regular, but Frank had his relationship with the Chase bank manager called Lee Geotz. I did some of the paperwork, but no relationship with customers, financial customers. Of course, as I look back on it that was a big mistake on my part. I should have tried to find somebody to lend money to or something. Some business. My career and life might have been different if my attitude had been more of a “moneyman”.

BH: At the time, what was the relationship between the Shanghai Bank and the Hong Kong Bank? The offices. How did they work together?

WO: What do you mean? American Express?

BH: American Express. How did the Shanghai office and the Hong Kong office…


BH: Very independent. What did you know about it before you went to Shanghai? What did you know about the office in Shanghai?


BH: Ok. So then you went to Shanghai…?

WO: Frank Feast went with me. We stopped in Taipei in Taiwan. Had a nice meal on a small freighter ship, and we arrived in Shanghai. So I moved into the hotel and he was there a week, two weeks maybe, and Griggs left, and Frank Feast.

BH: What hotel did you live in?

WO: The Grand I think. It’s… ISI… Bubbling Water road and the Bund. It was about a two block, block and a half to the office.

BH: Ok, and where was the office located approximately?

WO: The word Sei Zon Lu (?) sticks in my mind but I’m not quite sure if that’s correct. It was on 2nd or 3rd street back from the Bund, about two block from Bubbling Well.

BH: Sichuan Lu?

WO: I don’t know.

BH: Ok. That’s fine.

WO: If you had a map I would show you.

BH: I’m curious, what was your first impression of Shanghai?
WO: A lot of Chinese on the streets. I need a map if you have it.

BH: Yea, I don’t have one. Sorry.

WO: It was downtown. I mean, the Bund is here, and then Nanking Lu is there, and we would run two blocks, there’s a big church over here, and we were opposite the church, maybe a block from the church. And the Bund is there.

BH: On the same road as the church?

WO: No. The church was a block or so this way.

[0:49:17.5] BH: That’s fine. So you were in Shanghai, and what was your position at the Shanghai office?

WO: I’m the manager.

BH: Manager.

WO: And I had a staff. A Russian Jewish guy called Spokoini (¿) and Mr. and Mrs. Schefflin (¿) were Russians also, handled the travel. We had a license, in uncertain times to exchange dollar instruments for dollar instruments. In other words, a traveler’s check is a dollar instrument right? A bank check in New York is a dollar instrument. We could give traveler’s checks for that dollar. Or currency, and ship the currency to New York. That was the main business.

BH: Right. And how long were you at that office?


BH: Ok. I’m interested in the office. Let’s go back to the employees. So you had two Russian employees working with you…

WO: Well three. One, Spokoini the Russian Jew, and the Schefflins were also Jewish. But Spokoini was the money guy, pretty much.

BH: So that’s interesting. How did your business change over…? You were there from ’46 to ’49. Three years or so. How did the business change over those three years?

WO: It didn’t change, it was pretty much the same. And you are aware, of course, that interest rates, in local currency, 30% a day.

BH: So how did that impact your work?

WO: Well, very much. I depended on the guy, Thompson at the Chase bank was very helpful to me. I had to set an account up, and I could keep drawing, drawing, and getting the local currency I needed. And then at some point he would call me up and say, “Bill you have to cover.” So I would send a telegraphic transfer to New York for 20,000 dollars, 50,000 dollars, whatever made him happy. And I kept drawing local currency from him, until… at one point they changed the law, and Frank Groves came up from Hong Kong, and he went to see somebody, he didn’t tell me who he went to see or what. And I got a letter saying, he put it on the desk and said, “Will that make you happy?” I said, “Yes.”
So then he went back. But he introduced me to some British guy who was willing to let me have local currency at about half the interest that Chase was charging me, the Thompson. So I got it, I dunno maybe 20, 30 thousand dollars worth of local currency from him, and paid bills and... But his check, for that money that I borrowed, didn't come. So what am I supposed to do? 4 o'clock, 4:30, 5 o'clock, I'm closing I want to go home, no check. Because, the only thing I could do with that check, was rush it over to Tommy at the Chase, and he could use it in the banking clearing house, which closed at midnight. So in other words, at midnight, all the banks paid one another or they got TT's, or whatever, or the things themselves. So that check had to be in that clearinghouse that night.

BH: What happened?

WO: Am I gonna get that check? Or am I not gonna get that check?

BH: What happened?

WO: Well finally about two minutes to five, he walked in with the check. So I called Tommy and said, "I got it. I'm coming over." I took it over to him and he put it in the clearing... But that wasn't... I didn't borrow any more money from him. Maybe I should've but, I mean I was too busy taking care of social, and I mean my life and I can't be worried about this incident, ... (?) like breaking the bank.

[0:54:53.7] BH: So, in your office there were 4 people? Is that correct?

WO: And Chinese.

BH: And how many Chinese folks were there?

WO: About eight or ten Chinese.

BH: And what were they like? Who were they?

WO: They were all employees. Only one was kinda young, recently married. I didn't have to hire any Chinese. Griggs had done that, had the office going. And they all did their jobs.

BH: How did you interact? All in English?

WO: Yea, all in English. Of course. I didn't know... and even if I did, if I had learned Chinese, Cantonese, when I went to Shanghai I wouldn't have been able to use it.

BH: Right. How did you manage then, salary payments. Inflation was so high.

WO: Cash. In fact, like you prepaid them.

BH: Did you pay them by the month or...?

WO: Whatever. I don't remember exactly, but I helped whatever. And they kinda ran it, I didn't have much to do with it. All I monitored was the money. (?) When they wanted money I got to call Tommy and say, "I need money." I didn't even call him, I just wrote a check.

BH: So you arrived in Shanghai, did you know anyone in Shanghai?

WO: No, not really.
BH: Who did you sort of know?

WO: Well, what happened is that there was, and there is still alive, she’s 103 years old now, and she’s ten years older than I am, and her grandfather was from England, and he came in 1850 I think, I’m pretty sure it’s 1850, as the accountant for the Chartered Bank. Now the Charted Bank in Hong Kong and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in Hong Kong, issued Hong Kong currency. Both of them issued Hong Kong currency.

BH: Ok. Yes.

WO: So he married, I don’t know whether he married or whether his children got married, who they were, but anyways, this Beattie, what was her name? Brain (?) I guess. I forget her maiden name, it’s slipped my mind for the moment…

BH: That’s OK.

WO: …but she was in the business of selling liquor. And her brother, or her sister was married to a leading, one of the in Shanghai the French concession. A Frenchman, ran a pharmacy, a very big pharmaceutical company and Beattie worked with him and sold whiskey. So as a young manager of a rather important company, I was looked upon by Beattie as a prime candidate to buy whiskey. So she cultivated me, and the relationship I have with her is one of the best things of my life, because she’s wonderful. She found me an apartment when it was impossible to get an apartment. In fact what she did, is found this, she had a one room place where she did her business, and this was an apartment became available. Two bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen. Garden apartment. So I got the living room and the dining room, and a Norwegian consular junior, Beattie got to move into the two bedrooms. And Nick Vagner (?) married Beattie’s niece.

BH: That’s the Norwegian?

WO: Vagner. He later became the ambassador for the Ivory Coast Norway. So he married Beattie’s niece, and I met Marie Louise, my wife, in Beattie’s apartment.

[0:59:57.2] BH: How do you spell Beattie?


BH: Ok. So that’s very interesting. So that’s one of your primary contacts in the city?

WO: Yes. And my contacts were the international guys and girls. We took a trip to Ning-Po. Took a ferry over to Ning-Po, about eight, ten of us, and walked up the mountain to Chiang Kai Shek’s cabin. I don’t know if you ever did that?

BH: I haven’t been but I know.

WO: Actually, Marie Louise’s sister was on that trip. She was part of the group.

BH: Who was the group? Were they Americans, or British, or French?

WO: No, no, maybe there were one or two Americans, but you know, Belgian, Norwegian, French, there was a number of French. And Marie Louise’s sister was teaching in the French school. She had graduated from Morori (?) University, a Jesuit university, with a degree in chemistry. And she was teaching in the French
school. And then Marie Louise and her father had gone to France, where she attended as a bridesmaid for some big wedding in Paris. And she came back.

BH: So Marie Louise was what nationality?

WO: French. Well, her mother was Chinese, but her mother was born and grew up in a place called Quanchuwan (?), which is on the south Hainan Islands, you know?

BH: Oh

WO: It's a town on the mainland, this is my understanding right? On the mainland, right near Dao Nia Nia (?) and that town was like a French extraterritoriality location and as a young girl, sixteen or so, she had married a Frenchman who, Bigot Destela (?), and they had a boy. And that boy would live with Marie Louise and her sisters and the Valentens (?) and every five years Mr. Valentin got about a year to visit France, and they went. Marie Louise first as a very small child, and then older. And that boy attended Sansia (?), which is the French West Point, and became an officer. And when World War II started, he was in Haiphong with the French. He when French surrendered Japanese, he was with some kind of a group, and the Japanese and the French had to go someplace together by plane and some guy didn't want to go, so he volunteered to go. And that plane, while it was flying, was shot down, and they were all killed. So this was a big tragedy for the Valentens in Shanghai. But that's before the war. Beginning of World War II. But then Roosevelt gave territorial and he tried to give Hong Kong back to the Chinese, but Churchill wouldn't let him get away with it. And the British kept Hong Kong, so Valentin was sort of out of a job. But then when the American's came in and took possession of Shanghai after the war, the chief of the police committed suicide, and Mr. Valentin was one of three sub-chiefs.

BH: At the French concession or...?

WO: In the French concession. The two others were arrested by the Americans, and Valentin walked free. And even under the communists, when he walked down Avenue Joffre the police would salute him as he went by. Moment he married, from Quanchuwan came to Shanghai. She brought two sisters with her, and one of those sisters married a Macanese. If you understand what a Macanese is?

BH: Yeah.

[1:05:17.0] WO: And they have children. And one of those children is Paul Cruise, who today runs a factory in Deerfield Beach, FL, making hydraulic valves. And every plane you see has at least one of his valves on board. He's very intelligent and hard-working and he has a big family. And my daughter, Anne Marie, lives in Deerfield Beach. She's a psychiatric nurse. She got her master's degree. So they know... In fact, her son who was born in Chicago but there was some kind of problem, and the hospital gave him $150,000 dollars, as a fund, and he's had trouble. But Anne Marie just told me that Paul Cruise has him working in his factory now.

BH: So you lived in Shanghai from '46 to...

WO: '54

BH: So you worked for American Express until the communists came in to the city, is that right?

WO: I still worked for American Express.
BH: So what happened in that transition, in that moment?

WO: When the communist army moved into Shanghai, that day I went out. I drove downtown, heard shots. The nationalists went across Suchow Creek and departed for Taiwan, got on some ships. But the communist army came along all the roads and Shanghai has all fences, you know. And they sat along the fences, didn’t bother anybody. No trouble. A guy would come along with a pole, he had rice with some kind of soup, and each guy would take out his little bowl or something and take some rice and soup. And the observation I made, “The Americans think that they can beat this army?” I said, “Who can beat this army?” I mean, my mind, these guys.

BH: That’s interesting. So before they arrived in the city...


BH: So what were you thinking? You must have known they were coming.

[1:08:42.6] WO: Actually, when they were coming, the American ambassador stayed in Nanking. People don’t recognize that. So what was the policy of the United States? The banks? My father knew this guy was the lawyer for BBDO in New York, and he was also lawyer for... was it not Rockefeller? What’s the name of the president? Roosevelt. The first Roosevelt. His sons had a business, some sons of his had a business in Shanghai, and this guy was the lawyer for them, so word was passed down to me, because they closed and got out. They did not stay. The banks all stayed right? Chase stayed open, and nobody told me to close, to get out. I didn’t get any instruction, so I stayed. Then of course, the communists took over. And I negotiated the closing of the office. And it took me about a year, closed it, paid off all the guys, everything. I’m sitting by myself in a PanAmerican office, over in the Grand Hotel or something. An interesting point here though that you might want to note, is that when Griggs left, he handed me a check for 10,000 US dollars, an American Express check, to a Chinese name, a woman. Mary so-and-so. And he said, “When she comes in, here’s the signature card, give her the check.” No report to anybody or nothing. Just the check. She never came. The communists came. And one day, when I’m sitting in that office, in the PanAmerican office, a big limousine pulls up in front. First a couple of guys brought me a card saying they represented Mary Cheng. And the signature on the card was a print. A chop. Not a Chinese chop. Mary Cheng. It was written like this. This is the card. So they brought in the chop and said, “There’s the card. We want the check.” I said, “Well, is Mary alive? Is there any way, can she actually come in?” “Oh, if you want all right.” So the next day, or a couple days afterwards the big limousine comes with curtains, and she gets out and comes in. Mary Cheng. I gave her the check and she went away.

BH: Who was she?

WO: She, as I understand it, was the concubine, or the wife, of a Chinese general who was the chief under the Japanese of the money in Shang... Hong... whatever district this is.

BH: Huangpu Qu

WO: Is that what Shanghai is in? Is it a province?

BH: The province? Jiangsu?
WO: Chang Su? Maybe Chang Su, or if not, Shanghai. I’m not quite sure. But the same day, Tommy called me. “Bill come over here.” So I went and there was a guy there who he was giving checks to. With much more money. And this guy looked like a devil. Really old Chinese. Who were they? I’m not… It’d be interesting to… if somebody wants to write a book.

BH: So you took about a year to close it down. So what, around May?

WO: Now I’m ready to go. Incidentally, I got married to Marie Louise in 1950, in January. So the communists came and we had a big reception at the French Club. Some American consulate people were there. So here I am, ready, and why can’t we leave? The guy at the bank called me. “Bill (?) I wanna see you.” So I went over there and he said, “this is your file.” I owe $66,000 dollars right? That’s cheat (?) money. I explained that to you, do you want me to explain it again?

BH: No.

WO: Anyway, I owed 66,000 and we had agreed that the Hong Kong bank would pay that money to the Bank of China on my arrival in Hong Kong. That was the condition. When I arrived in Hong Kong that money would be there. So he says, “there’s your file.” He closed it, put it there and said, “Go home, you’ll hear from us.” The Americans had invaded North Korea the day that that happened. So I went home.

BH: So you and your wife left Shanghai.

WO: Eventually. ’54. We finally arrived. We spent a month or so getting her papers in Hong Kong. Then we went to Marseilles, we went to London, and then, well that’s not what you want to hear about China.

[1:15:11.9] BH: So you were in Shanghai for eight years.

WO: Seven. I think it’s…

BH: Well about seven years. So what was your status? How did it change over those years? In terms of who you were and your position in the city?

WO: Well, as we got married in 1950 right? Billy was born in ’52 in Septemeber. We had a house. This house that we lived in was some kind of nationalist, people who were nationalists owned it. And in ’48, Chiang Ching-Kuo, have you heard of him? He’s Chiang KAI Shek’s son? Came to Shanghai and said everybody had to turn their gold in. Did you hear that?

BH: I don’t think I’d heard that.

WO: You haven’t heard that one yet huh? Well, that caused chaos among the people who were holding peanuts. You know what a peanut is? An ounce of gold. A lot of people had it. Including my in-laws. My mother got very nervous. So they gave those peanuts that they had for a chop, which was the owner of the house. Now that chop is now held, but this is a whole other story. But anyway, we moved into the house. There was a big Buick in the garage, which the police finally took away. We had a wash A Ma cook. We inherited the Valentine’s cook, which was an older guy. Terrific cook but, well anyway. He was a very… drunkard and a gambler. But he could cook. Wash A Ma, baby A Ma, house A Ma. Four servants. So we lived. Have you ever heard of this Merinole (?) order. Have you ever heard of this Merinole order of the priests in New York?
BH: I've heard of it.

WO: It's an order of priests. They're not members of an order which has charity. Not charity but, that don't own anything. These people do own, they have money. They're the same priests who are in parishes. They're parish priests. That's my understanding. So he had been sent to South China near Kwangtung in 1918. And he came back and he was chief of the Merinole order in New York. And then went back to China. And at this point, he's like in charge of the Catholic property. There's quite a large building that was owned and operated by the Catholics. And we used to get together a lot. He came to the house for dinner, we went to restaurants together, and after I left he was put in jail. But he said that he came to China in 1918, he's sent there to help the Chinese people and be part of it, and he would not leave unless they threw him out. So finally that's what they finally did. They took him to the border and said, "Go to Hong Kong." I mean this was after I left.

[1:20:16.4] BH: I'm interested in where you lived. You lived in a hotel, then you lived in an apartment with a Norwegian counsel employee, and then you got married and you moved to a house, is that right?

WO: Yeah.

BH: Where was that house?


BH: Very interesting, OK.

WO: And next door was some Chinese communist movie official. And the other side was a Chinese banker from the old... he was still there. I don't know what happened to him finally.

BH: What kind of interaction did you have with your neighbors?

WO: Well, now this is on the communists, after the communists. Every week, they would come and interview the servants, the police. Every month, they would come and interview us. Marie Louise and I, they would question, "What are you doing?" And they had what they called neighborhood associations, and I guess they still have them?

BH: Still do.

WO: We did not attend, but I understand that the neighbors watched one another, and if you went to the market and bought a lot of food, they would report to the police that you bought too much food. In fact, they were encouraged to do that. If they didn't then somebody would talk or something. That's the way the communists controlled society. Is what I understand. And we went on, lived at the house, the cook cooked, and...

BH: How did you find... the folks who helped you with your daily life in the home, you had four folks.

WO: Well I had a car for a while. Little tiny thing.

BH: Is that how you got to work?

WO: Well, not really. I didn't work after the communists came really. I was just home and I went down to this (?) for a while, and later I didn't do that even.
BH: How did you support yourself?

WO: Money. I just went to the Hong Kong bank and asked for money. And they would report to Hong Kong that they gave me so much money. Maybe I should have taken more advantage of that. Who knows? We bought things, but none of it, I discover now, not really anything really valuable that I'm aware of.

BH: So, the folks that worked in your home, how much, how did you, you said you inherited some of them from your friends. How much were they paid?

WO: Who?

BH: The A Ma, the cook. How did you compensate them?

WO: I gave them money. I mean, satisfactory. The money I got I just went to the Hong Kong bank. I didn't ask how much my salary was or anything. It was settled when I came back. We settled in, but that's another story.

BH: One more thing about Shanghai...

WO: Well Shanghai people.

BH: Yes.

[1:24:41.0] WO: One of the things. Marie Louise's mother conveyed this idea to me. I don't know if she spoke enough English. When I took up going with Marie Louise, some Macanese or some people came to me and said, "You know, her mother is very well regarded." Because she was after all, the wife of a chief of the French police. And people who wanted something. And Marie Louise said that, even under the Japanese, some things were brought to Mr. Valentine to do by some people in power, which he refused to do. I don't know the gory details of that, but she said... and that's one of the reasons I think that after the war he was still respected very much. But anyway, one of the things that I think of note is that Marie Louise's mother said that the Chinese for centuries, is run by a government made up of people who are more intelligent than anybody else in China. Because what happens is, the organization in Peking sends out teams to all the schools to find the best student. And then that best student is supported. And if he can still keep up, eventually he becomes a mandarin or what not, and a member of the control. I think that is going on today, the same system is being applied by these present emperors of China, which is a group. I wonder what that 100 group that you said the...

BH: Consultative, yeah.

WO: That 100. How much influence do they have on the party? But the party is not a communist party anymore. There's no communists.

BH: So going back to that question, did you see differences? You said there's a neighborhood committee in Shanghai after 1949, what other differences did you notice with that transition?

WO: Oh, I was not really into that.

BH: Yea, but anything. What was striking about it?
WO: Well Marie Louise was in it. I didn’t speak Chinese so really… People take care of one another. It’s very obvious that local help one another. Sometimes the police come or they find somebody and they arrest him and take him away. The attitude of the American politics to China to me is not very realistic. Maybe there are people in our government who, in fact when I came back I went down to the state department and they interviewed, but they didn’t invite me to be part of any committee.

BH: Interesting, so you came back with your wife via France, and you had one child at the time?

WO: Two.

BH: Two. Two at the time. And you moved back to New York, is that right?

WO: Yes. And I worked for American Express.

BH: So, what was your…

WO: Attitude towards China?

BH: Yea, attitude. What did you think about China after that?

[1:29:42.3] WO: I was in love with my wife, and I wanted her company more than anything else. I did not try, but I often thought I should do something perhaps, I should speak up. In fact, there was an article written about me. It was published in a magazine.

BH: Which one was that?

WO: I should know, but I forget. Maybe we can look it up. I have it at home in New York. But the office, the management at American Express made it clear that I should keep my mouth shut.

BH: Shut? What did they think you were going to say?

WO: You know, this article they reviewed it very carefully. I guess not really want to step out and see it.

BH: What did they think you might say? What were they concerned about?

WO: Well, I mean the way the newspapers and all the writing, and even the government treats China, oh this is one thing I wanted to tell ya definitely, is sort of some backward country. But what do the Chinese think of themselves? Do you have any idea? The guy in the street. What do they think of themselves? Have you ever been to Beijing?

BH: Yes.

WO: You have. Have you seen the Altar of Heaven? Did you stand in the center of the Altar of Heaven and say, “What does this mean? What’s the meaning of this?” and it is, the center of the world. In the ordinary Chinese mind, Chinese educated. To me, they believe that China is it. It is the center of the world.

BH: Yes. So what was striking? When you came back to the United States, what struck you?

WO: Well I wasn’t struck specially. I knew it, I saw it from China.
BH: You knew it from China. What did you see? What kinds of things? Can you give examples of what you saw?

WO: No, not really. It was just a general tone.

BH: From whom?

WO: Well, the newspapers and Kissinger, and even… Nixon? Who was the first president that went back?

BH: Nixon went back.

WO: Nixon. I mean he went, not as a subject. And the Chinese considered him a subject.

BH: So, back to your staying in Shanghai after 1950, '40.

WO: You mean after the communists came?

BH: After the communists came. What did your American friends

WO: They were gone.

BH: What did they think about that? The fact that you stayed?

WO: Oh, “you had to do it.” They kept me. They did not give me an exit permit. Because I had to pay these $66,000 dollars. And then the Americans invaded North Korea, and they just closed the book and said, “Go home.” But they didn’t bother me. There was nothing for me to say. And even today with career the way it is.

And you, I mean, you’re dealing here with educated upper class Chinese. What are their mind? Are they going back to getting positions in the government?

BH: Not necessarily in the government, but some of them. Some of them.

WO: I wonder, in the long run what kind of influence? Like, what influence does Sydney Shapiro have in his committee?

[1:35:05.4] BH: So going back to the ‘50s, what did you think about the McCarthy era? Remember Senator McCarthy? What were you thinking then?

WO: Well, I think the whole thing was just stupid. It was my opinion then, and I still think it.

BH: How did that…? What did you know about it? Part of the time you were in Shanghai, right?

WO: Yes, I really didn’t try to figure that out, as far as the United States’s concern.

BH: And when you came back to the US? What did people, your friends or your family say to you about communism?

WO: Because it wasn’t, I didn’t see any communism. I mean, when you really think of it, the communists came in on May 25, 1949, right? On May 26, 1949 what happened? All the markets opened. Huh? The boy went out shopping and brought home food. Strawberries, we used to cook the freshest strawberries. We cooked strawberry jam. Cooked it too much and it got too hard. But, the people, as a people, it’s true that there would be trucks packed with some guys taking out a town or we don’t know. At some point, see these
two sisters? The other sister married... The one married a Macanese right? Here in the States, Canada. The other one was a Chinese, who's Marie Louise's mother. Because when the girl married a Macanese, the Valentine's gave her a big wedding. When this second sister married this Chinese guy, she refused to give them a big wedding. There was some kind of contention between this guy and Marie Louise's mother. Marie Louise taught me once that Mr. Valentine received money off the books from this and that. And apparently at one point, this guy was involved with whatever was going on. And she told me that on the way home, they stopped at his house before they reported back to her mother. And Marie Louise said, how much money did he put in his pocket for himself? So there was this contention. And then, the Kuo's, K-U-O, they had a house two blocks or three blocks from our house, in that area of Shanghai. And the communists took the House, and Mrs. Kuo, Marie Louise's aunt, was put in like an attic room, and the house was given to other people. And there were some stories about why and what for. And the daughter was a prime piano player from the best school. She played some concerts. So I knew about them.

BH: What did you leave behind in China?

[1:39:55.3] WO: Part of my life, I guess. But it wasn't really China that I lived in. It was the French Concession. You can't... I don't know whether you can understand it. Did you ever go to the French Club?

BH: I have been. It's now a hotel.

WO: Well it's not a hotel. It's tennis courts and a swimming pool.

BH: I know, but now it's attached to a hotel. A Japanese hotel.

WO: Did they build a big hotel? Because across the street is a grand...

BH: Jiujiang Hotel.

WO: What?

BH: Jiujiang Hotel. Which hotel was across the street?

WO: All I know is that it sank.

BH: Oh it did?

WO: They say that when you walk into that hotel, you walk down stairs to get to the...

BH: Yea.

WO: Well when it was finished built, you walked up stairs.

BH: Oh. This is the French Club. This is the hotel. The French Club is here.

WO: And is there a street here?

BH: There's a street here? This is a hotel.

WO: But this is the Core Grovener houses, no? This is the hotel. That's another block right?

BH: Yes.
WO: Let's see now. Where...?

BH: French Club is here. Courts, there's a park, grounds. It's Joffre Lu.

WO: Joffre Lu is here. Right, right. Then you come here. But on this corner. This. Is that a hotel?

BH: Yes.

WO: But that's an old...

BH: It's an old hotel.

WO: That's the one that sunk. Unless it... I thought it was another, square, maybe they rebuilt it. Here, these were Grovener houses.

BH: What were these houses?

WO: Very nice apartments. The manager, the guy that took over, tall girl woman, and he was from the Dutch bank. And when the Bank of America representative. He closed the Dutch bank, and then took a job as a representative as I was, of Bank of America. She had a big sale of paintings by a very famous Ling Fu Ming. I don't know if you ever knew? We bought one of those paintings, I have it at home. Where's the swimming pool? The tennis courts were here.

BH: I think they're gone, yeah.

WO: They're gone, yeah. The pool was in the back I think.

BH: So if you think about...

WO: What I left in China?

BH: Yea, what'd you leave behind in Shanghai?


BH: Nothing.

WO: Not really. I mean the new life, that's one of the things. A company will install a business in China. They build a factory. Two blocks away, another factory goes up which builds the same things. Superior (?) says that that's... what's the word he uses? Fraud?

BH: Corruption?

WO: It's corrupt, but... and it's prevalent in China today.

BH: Graft, or something?

WO: Well it's not really graft, but it's taking advantage of your position to enrich yourself. There's a lot of that. And I say, if you ask a question. Why did we have extraterritoriality? Because those guys tried to came here and tried to do business with the Chinese, but unless they had control of the law where the business was done, they were cheated. They were taken advantage of. The Chinese, I mean, my view, the opium. So, we
have it in New York now. The original Chinese all came from Quon Tong. There’s now a lot of Fukienese on East Broadway that comes down. And the Bowery (?) goes up here. Marks Street (?) goes up over that way and that’s the old Chinese. Pu Chao is the Fukienese. And there’s a park in Chatam Square. A lot of streets. Actually, before the war, the L’s. I think there were three or four levels of L’s that met there. But the Fukienese put this big statue up. The first fighter against drugs. A general. Do you…?

BH: I don’t know who that is.

[1:45:50.8] WO: Well it’s before Hong Kong was Hong… before they got Hong Kong. And they put… the English and the rest of the traders were limited to a little area in Canton that was controlled. And the only thing that the Chinese wanted was silver. But the British saw them dealing in drugs, “Why don’t we compete with them.” They did, so they brought in drugs and competed. Now this statue is up to this general, much talked about. The fighter against drugs. But who was he fighting for? What was his job? They say the emperor sent him to fight against drugs. But was he fighting against drugs? You don’t know. He was fighting for the Chinese drug dealers who wanted to throw the British out of the business. That’s my…it’s stupid to call him a fighter against drugs. His job, I mean this is what I bring from China. That’s my certainty.

BH: So that’s the next question. So what did you bring from China? What else?

WO: Well, I loved the food, and the people. In fact there’s one story…I worked for the IRS. I had a couple of clients who failed to pay their employment taxes. So I went after them and I found that they had an accountant by the name of John Wu. And his office was there on Marks Street. So I went to see him, and I collected with his cooperation. Any cases that I had, I closed them and got the money. And then I retired and he called me up one day and said, “Bill I need some help.” I went over to see him, and he says, “I have this cousin in Amityville, that is a Chinese laundry.” And the net income for a month is 100 dollars. This guy and his wife and a son. This guy, that was one of the zoot suiters that came, married a girl, and she bore him a son, and he didn’t see her for 25 years, this guy. She stayed there, the boy came and went to school here. He married a Chinese girl. They have three children. Those three children, when they were in Amityville High School, all three of them were at the top of their class. And one of them I know quite well, is now a New York City attorney. The others is working for some big computer outfit I don’t know. And the third has some other engineering job. I went to see this guy, “What are we going to do?” So first thing, they were on social security, both over 70, I got them SSI. We closed the business and converted the building from a commercial to a residential. They got the SSI. They got their social security and they lived on it. They gave me a nice thing and they love me. They’re both dead now actually.

[1:50:51.0] BH: How did your experience working in Shanghai influence your career?

WO: I didn’t come in the banking business looking for customers to loan money to. I was always in operations more. In China I should have tried more to try to get into the lending, try to get customers, which I didn’t do. My fault. I should’ve done the same thing when I finally came back. I should’ve pushed. Because what I did I came and I said, “What are we doing here?” I worked for a vice-president in charge of a bunch of stuff. I got old and another guy who was a vice president, Tred Benny (?) who was in the Shanghai branch while I was there working with Thompson. So we knew one another quite well. What I did, I wrote letters to banks all over the world. I said, “We should try to get some customers.” The theme, basically, that you’d be better served sending American Express traveler’s checks that you cash to us, rather than… And we got a lot of accounts. But this guy Benny and Wagman, were not in fact. Some guys in Mexico City, bankers, wanted me to come down there. And someone in the upper echelon said, “No, we’re not sending Orchard.” So
anyways, that's why I finally, they wanted me to, at one point they hired, the Irving Trust gave up its foreign department and we hired a bunch of those guys. Benny was the top of them. They came in and they wanted me to go back down to the New York agency and act as a signator. Sit in a corner and just be a signist. Anything that had to be done, I would sign. And I said, "No, I don't feel like doing that. I quit." And I ended up in the IRS. Which, I think, I got a much better pension than I would have out of American Express. So that was one of things that gave me, my experience in China said, "You know, you don't really have to do what they say."

BH: Thank you very much. Pleasure speaking with you today. Thank you.

WO: I always like to have an opportunity to talk to someone. All right. Good bye.

BH: Thank you. [1:54:38.6]