

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

Interviewee: ED WONG

Interviewers: ANNE CHAO

Date/Time of Interview: January 27, 2016 at 10:00 AM

Transcribed by: CHRIS JOHNSON

Audio Track Time: 0:31:16 (Track 1), 0:30:43 (Track 2)

Background:

Dr. Ed Wong was born in San Antonio, Texas in 1932. After completing his undergraduate education at the University of Houston, Dr. Wong attended dental school at The University of Texas Dental Branch. Upon graduation, Dr. Wong served in the United States Air Force as a dental officer for two years. He would then go on to open his own dentistry business in Houston, which he owned and operated until his retirement in 2011.

Setting:

The interview was conducted at Bambu Desserts and Drinks, at the Stafford, Texas location. In its entirety, the interview spanned around one hour. Much of the interview focuses on Dr. Wong's history of working in the dentistry industry in Houston, as well as other business-related activities. Dr. Wong's niece, Teresa Lau was also present for the recording, and made several contributions over the course of the interview.

Interviewers:

Dr. Anne Chao graduated from Wellesley College and received her Master's and Doctoral degrees from Rice University, where she currently serves as an Adjunct Lecturer in the Humanities. Many of her courses have been centered in the History Department, focusing on the field of modern Chinese history. Other courses taught by Dr. Chao have been in the field of Rice University's Program in Poverty, Justice, and Human Capabilities. Additionally, Dr. Chao is the manager of the Houston Asian American Archive.

Interview Transcript:

Key

AC	Anne Chao
EW	Ed Wong
TL	Teresa Lau
—	Abrupt stop, false start
...	Speech trails off, pause
Italics	Emphasis

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(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
Brackets	Actions (laughs, sighs, etc) or interview notes

AC: Good morning, Dr. Wong—

EW: Ed, Ed. Uh-huh.

AC: Ed, thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. Um, today is January 27th and we are in Houston, Texas, more precisely in Stafford. And we're very, very honored that you have agreed to share with us your story. Um, would you like to begin to tell us where you were born, and then what you—what your childhood was like, and how did you come to Houston?

EW: Yes, well, first of all thank you for inviting me and I feel very pleased—very humbled to be a part of your program. Um, I was born in San Antonio, Texas. Uh, July 29th, 1932, that's a long time. Uh, grew up there, um, with my family. Uh, attended grammar school, and then high school. And then 1949, let's see, I just have to stop and think, uh, graduating from high school, then our family moved to Houston. Uh, the reason we moved from Houston was—this was right after the war. And business then was very slow, and so Houston offers up a bigger opportunity for my parents, and um, they were all—all in the grocery business. Uh, we called 'em 'Mom and Pop' stores, as you probably know.

And uh, from there, I attended the University of Houston, did my pre-den there, and then on from there into dental school, started in '52 and graduated in '56, and that kinda brings it right up to date. And then after '50, let's see... finished in '56—oh! During that time we all had to register as part of our draft as you—and so, when we were in a professional school, we were deferred, but after we graduated, then we had to remain in school with good grades, we had to choose a service to spend two years, and then '56 to '58, I was in the Air Force. And '59, married my lovely wife of last night—of 59 years. [laughs]

AC: Congratulations!

EW: Thank you! And, uh, I was stationed at Yuma, Arizona with the Air Force and made some really good friends there, and then moved back to Houston after we were out of the service and started my practice. Then, it was in practice, private practice from '59 until five years ago. So, that's sort of a—in a nutshell, and if there's any other questions you'd like to ask, I'll try to answer them.

AC: Great. Well, starting with your childhood, we are also mapping out all of the grocery stores that were in—run by Asian Americans in Houston, in the early days—do you recall where was the grocery store that our parents operated?

EW: Oh, yes in San Antonio, yes. The address was 930 Victoria Street.

AC: Okay.

EW: Now, Victoria Street is no longer there. You know, progress of the town took it over, they bypassed it and so forth, but we were there for, well, I was actually born at the quarter—we, our quarters where we lived was behind the grocery store. I mean, that's—you know because, it was convenient, and from there until, gosh let's see, when did the war—in '46 I guess it was. But, then let's see, um, yeah, that—we were there all that time.

AC: And then when you moved to Houston, do you remember where was the store in Houston?

EW: Of course—yes, it was on, um, Beechnut Street. The address was 25—2725 Beechnut, which is in the Woodland Heights.

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AC: Oh, okay.

EW: And, we were there for quite a few years, and during that time, I had started at the University of Houston. And, um, and then right after that, dental school, so we were there during all that time, uh, going to school and working after, afterward, you know. Now, that's—in fact, going back to San Antonio, uh, that was, that was our life, the grocery business. There wasn't anything else for us to do, y'know. So, but it—it was a great life, and um, uh, y'know had a great family relationship, y'know and uh, I had two sisters, um, of course Teresa's mom is one, and then my other sister is, um, Mame [Mamie Wong Moy] and she is still living, and she is with the University of Houston for quite a few years.

AC: Oh, alright. Uh, so, growing up in—well, attending the University of Houston, um, do you remember what the tuition was?

(4:59)

EW: The tuition? No, I don't. [laughs] Y'know, let me get back to that a little bit, y'know my dad, he did not have a very formal education because when he came to the States, y'know by the time—third grade time, my grandfather said, 'Time to go to work, son.' So, but he was a very learned individual from the standpoint of understanding life, but, he knew the value of education, he did not have the privilege of that, so he afforded us, my two sisters and myself, a well-educated background. So, let's see, what was I—

AC: You were thinking about the—

EW: Oh, the tuition! So, it—it didn't seem like it would compare to now, it wasn't very much, but at that time I'm sure it was. I do remember this, the tuition at the dental school—we were at a tri-semester system instead of two. And if I'm not—remember, I think it was like \$200 a semester, \$600 dollars a year. Of course, now it's what, \$15,000? Y'know, but, of course, of course everything has gone up. But, no I could not, I just don't remember.

AC: I see. Okay. And what made you decide to go into dentistry?

EW: Uh, when I was very young in San Antonio having—going to the dentist, y'know, for your teeth, uh, the dentist was a very good friend of our family. And, all the offices in dental offices at that time were all in little professional buildings, had to take in the elevator up, very, very small offices, and the treatment rooms, and the lab were just almost integrated. And Dr. Moran, who was our dentist, allowed me to go in there, and play with his things, a little kid. [laughs] And he was a big influence.

AC: Oh.

EW: So, at the time, I decided, 'Well, that's what I want to be'. So, that's what started—[waiter brings out dish] oh, thank you.

AC: Thank you.

EW: Thank you.

AC: Um, so, you alluded a little bit to the race relations—the fact that y'know, growing up in San Antonio, and coming to Houston, I think Houston must still have been under Jim Crow laws. Um, when you went to school, and then you became a dentist, was there any issue about what kind of patients you were treating, or you able to treat, or was there any kind of feeling of discrimination when you were going through University of Houston?

EW: Y'know, getting to that—in San Antonio, going back to school, back to high school. When we were through with going to school, our immediate job was to come back to the grocery store, so we didn't really have a lot of time to socialize. Uh, social—we had would be on weekends with our good Chinese friends, we'd go bowling and all, but it was all Chinese. There was no, what should I say, no other races included. At that time, it just wasn't, that just wasn't gonna happen. Y'know, I hesitate to say it any other way, 'cause I don't wanna sound like I'm bitter, but I'm not, y'know. As far as University of Houston is concerned, I didn't realize, I didn't really think about it. Our focus was to make good grades, get into dental school, period. [laughs] And that was, that was, pretty—our main focus at that time.

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And that was, that was my parents' wishes, too. And my dad says, y'know 'Whatever you do, do it properly'. Y'know, it doesn't make any difference, he said 'If you don't want to do that, if you wanna do something else, just do the best you can.' He was—he was, he had a lot of good common sense, and he, uh, he was—anything we wanted in school, he provided us. It was no question about not having it. Provided we did good in school. [laughs] If we messed up—out! You know that Teresa! [laughs]

AC: So, how long did your parents continue the grocery store after you and your sisters graduated from college?

EW: Um, let's see, uh, Dad got out of the business for a while and then went back into the grocery business—oh, I forgot, there was another on Lydia street, wasn't it?

TL: Right. That's the one my parents—

EW: That's the one your mom and dad took over?

TL: Right.

EW: So, um, I guess they remained in the business a few years—I can't remember exactly. I think once that we were all able to be on our own, so to speak, y'know, then Dad and Mom decided to retire.

(9:58)

Yeah, Dad was really was the worker in the store, my mother didn't speak a lot of English. She understood, but she didn't speak a lot of English. And, um, but I don't know, do you, Teresa, I can't remember how many years they were after—on Lydia street, it was...

TL: Yeah, that was before me—

EW: Maybe—

TL: So, [laughs]

EW: I remember I was still in dental school.

TL: But I think—

EW: I think—I think probably a year or two after I finished. '50, wait, I do remember now, '56, '50—I think '59, then they sold out. They sold—I think that's when y'all moved.

TL: And I was born in '59.

EW: '59!

TL: Right.

EW: 'Cause—

TL: But Grandpa—your dad taught Mom the business, and that's, and my parents were an arraigned marriage, and so my mom through her father teaching her the grocery business, that's—that was their living.

EW: Yeah. An interesting point, when we moved to Houston, Teresa's mother, my older sister, is named Helen. And my dad's name was Harry. And when we opened up the store there on Beechnut, it was called H&H Fruit Market.

TL: Oh!

EW: Yeah, it, no, it's no longer there. And then, uh, the other uh, well, I forgot the other name of the store on Lydia Street. T&H, was it?

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TL: T&H.

EW: T&H for...

TL: T&H Supermarket.

EW: I forgot why.

TL: Taihei? Taihei? Wasn't grandmother's name—

EW: Thomas and Helen.

TL: Yeah, well, and then uh, grandmother's Chinese name? Wasn't it Taihei Wong?

EW: Who was that?

TL: Grandma's Chinese name? Was it—

EW: *Fu Chin Shee Wong*. [?]

TL: Oh, okay.

EW: *Fu Chin Shee Wong*—she went by *Chin Shee Wong*.

TL: Okay.

EW: Uh, that's the only way, y'know, it was always very respectful, it was 'Mother', y'know. We never said, well, what is your name? [All laugh] Well you know that. So...

AC: Did you speak Chinese at home?

EW: Oh—

AC: All the time?

EW: One hundred percent.

AC: So is it Taishan?

EW: It was all Taishan.

AC: Taishan.

EW: But, y'know being away from it—Mother's been gone quite a few years now—she lived with us after we were married for many years. Getting away from it, we lose a little of it, but basically our dialect was Taishan.

AC: I see. And then when you were helping the grocery store, what did you do—did you stock cans, or did you run the cashier?

EW: Yeah, Dr. Chao, I did everything.

AC: Oh really?

EW: Yeah, we stocked shelves, worked in the meat, y'know, the meat department. Um, deliverer, just, we just did everything, yeah—we just did everything.

AC: Were you paid, or it was just not?

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EW: Uh, [laughs] are you kidding? [laughs] I think sometimes we got an allowance to go to the movies and all, but that was it. Yeah, yeah.

AC: That's what Jane—

EW: Y'know—

AC: That's what, when I interviewed Jane Gee, and she said, 'Yeah we got like twenty-five cents, and that gives us money to go to the movies, and maybe buy popcorn or a candy bar or something'.

EW: She's exactly right, because I think on any given Sunday, my dad, we didn't open the store on Sundays, my dad was really strict about that. He said 'Six days is enough'. Most of the stores opened seven, because business was tough. But on Sundays, if I wanted to go to the movies I got twenty cents. It cost us nine cents to go to the movies, and we could buy popcorn for a nickel, and then—

TL: Wow.

EW: And then, uh, yeah, catch the bus back home, and that was it, y'know. So, but, um, to get a salary, uh, y'know. [laughs] We wouldn't dare ask, because they said 'Well, y'know, I think we're paying for your tuition...'

AC: Right.

EW: It never got that bad. No, of course, y'know...

AC: So, did you go to high school in Houston, or you went to high school in San Antonio?

EW: No, high—in San Antonio.

AC: Oh, so when you came here, you went to University of Houston?

EW: That's correct.

AC: Okay.

EW: That's correct.

AC: So, did the church play a large part in your social life growing up, whether San Antonio or Houston?

EW: The church?

AC: Mm-hmm.

EW: In San Antonio [coughs], excuse me, yes, because it was a Chinese Baptist Church there, and it was a place, or a focus where all the Chinese would get together, and everybody in San Antonio belonged to that church.

AC: Okay.

EW: And it's still there.

AC: Oh, okay.

EW: Yeah. And then of course, after, um, we all grew up then we'd begin to think, y'know, otherwise. And, we, Emily and I, my wife's named Emily, we've been a member of the Presbyterian Church since 1958, the first Presbyterian church here.

AC: So, can you tell us a little bit about how you opened your first dentistry office?

EW: Oh, boy. [laughs] Well, that, uh, after graduating, uh, there wasn't a whole lot to do. My dad had a piece of property, uh, where my—I've only had two offices, and that was one on 11th Street, and it was next to an old house

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with property. And we built a very small dental office—it's about 650 square feet. We just started there, putting my name on the door, and prayed that we'd get patients. [laughs]

(15:22)

AC: And what is the address again?

EW: It was, the original address was 1204 West 11th, Houston, Texas. Uh-huh. And our present office, the one—well that's another story, but to get started, it was—it was hard. I, um, had equipped, we had two treatment rooms, and one I equipped for treatment, and the other room was vacant. And, during the day, I would build model airplanes, and—[All laugh] Stereo kit sets, y'know, and just to kill time, just to stay in the office, so if the phone rang, we would be right there. And we, of course, we had some—oh incidentally, I was the first Chinese dentist to graduate from the dental school.

TL: Oh, my God.

EW: But I was not the first Chinese to practice in Houston. A fellow named Solomon Chang was the first dentist. And ironically, I was in his wedding.

AC: Oh.

EW: Yeah, so when he—remember Solomon?

TL: Yes.

EW: Yeah.

TL: Yeah.

EW: And, uh, but—

AC: So, Solomon did not get his training in Houston, but you're—you got your training in Houston?

EW: Yes.

AC: Okay.

EW: The dental school's here.

AC: Dental school—okay.

EW: Yeah, it was University of Texas Dental Branch at the time, now it's called University of Texas Dental School. Over a period of years, it's changed, but it's all part of the UT system.

AC: Okay, so you graduated from U of H, and then you went to UT Dental School.

EW: Uh, U of H, yes, uh-huh.

TL: Uh-huh.

AC: So—

EW: Well—

AC: Wait, the dental school is UT, right?

EW: The dental school is UT.

AC: Okay.

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EW: Now, let me clarify that, too. I went to University of Houston with the idea of getting a degree first of course, but my third year, I applied to dental school and was accepted. So, I questioned about 'Well, I would like to get my degree,' and the University of Houston gave me the privilege, said, 'Well, if you finish dental school, we can apply those credits to your senior year in college, and at that time you'll get your B.S. Degree', which they did. Which I was very proud of, I didn't have to spend the other year—

AC: Right.

EW:—at U of H.

AC: Right.

EW: And then—

AC: Um, were there special courses you had to take at U of H in order to get into the dental school?

EW: Was there what, I'm sorry?

AC: Special classes you had to take, special, like biology or chemistry or special classes you had to take?

EW: Well, they have...in order to at that time, I don't know if that's the same now, you had to have certain curriculums. Chemistry, Biology, y'know, English, History, and I think it was like ninety hours, I'm not sure. Sixty or—I can't remember. And if you qualified with that, with the interviews then you were accepted. And I was privileged, I was accepted to a couple of dental schools, but I chose the one here because it was home, and it was less expensive.

AC: Okay. Do you remember what other dental schools you got accepted into?

EW: Uh, Loyola...

AC: Okay.

EW: Uh-huh. And I think that's all. Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I think Baylor, I think Baylor. I'm not sure, can't remember for sure, it's been so long ago. I would not say that positively, but, uh—

AC: Okay.

EW:—we did apply to three, two other schools.

AC: In terms of dates, what—do you remember the first year you entered U of H, and then the year you graduated from dental school?

EW: I entered dental school in '52, so that made me, what, 20? I was born in '32.

AC: Okay.

EW: And then I graduated from school in '56.

AC: Oh, it's four years.

EW: Four years, so, but, I hadn't—but my birthday's in July, I graduated in June, so, actually I was 23, if you wanna to [laughs] interesting thing. Everybody in dental school, they got their own grades when they were at freshman year.

AC: Uh-huh.

EW: I did not; they were still sent to my parents, I was really embarrassed. [All laugh]

AC: Well, I'm sure you got good grades.

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EW: I was—I was, there was another classmate of mine. In fact, I remember he was from San Antonio also. We were the two youngest in the school. I was the youngest to—along with Eddie Brooks to be accepted to dental school.

AC: So you mentioned you were the first Chinese to graduate from the dental school.

EW: Yes.

AC: Were there any African Americans at the time?

EW: Yes. There were two in our class.

AC: Wow.

EW: There were two—and they were the first two.

AC: Ever.

EW: Yeah, and, one of 'em practiced here in Houston—he was a very good friend of mine, his name was Poindexter, and he did a good job.

AC: Uh-huh.

(20:00)

EW: But, uh it was a lot of, y'know—

AC: Yeah—

EW:—at that time.

AC: So, how did you get your first patients?

EW: Oh.

TL: I wanna say one thing unique about—

EW: I think it was Teresa!

TL: Oh, no, no, no, no. I think because Uncle Eddie was bilingual, and a lot of, uh, referrals, y'know, Chinese, older Chinese people were very uncomfortable with going to maybe a Caucasian doctor, or one who cannot speak their language. So Uncle Eddie's business really thrived because he could speak in Chinese, and y'know, provide that dental service to a lot of Chinese immigrants.

EW: I—I—I think, if I think back, one of my first patients was a neighbor of ours, when we lived on Castlewood Street. The name was Davidson. And, she, she's still living today, and I think she [laughs]—

TL: Wow.

EW:—she came to me, and uh, in fact, I think she was my first patient. [laughs] And she still talks to me.

AC: Really?

TL: [laughs]

EW: Yeah, uh, she was quite a lady on our block, she, she helped Matt and Mike, ride, learn how to ride a bike.

TL: Oh, wonderful.

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EW: Do you remember them? No. Probably no.

TL: No—no, no, no. Yeah.

AC: So your—your neighbor was your first patient?

EW: Yes. I'm almost sure of that. And, um, y'know, it's been so long ago. And then, it, uh, y'know, at that time, dentistry and medicine—there was no advertisement like you see it today. Our signs on the door were limited to a certain size, just, from the problem of professionalism, ethics, et cetera, whatever. But now of course, y'know, it's whatever you want. And, uh, never did, never did and never could advertise, but it's just word of mouth that developed that developed my practice over a period of quite a few years. And the first few years, it was pretty lean.

AC: Yeah.

EW: Pretty lean.

AC: Were you able to break even in the first year or two?

EW: Uh, well, to subsidize, go back and so to subsidize that first year, I taught at the dental school.

AC: Oh, okay.

EW: I taught, I taught part time there, through a good friend of mine, Dr. Jim Rout, who is now gone—he, I asked him, he said 'Yeah, c'mon,' he said, 'Join my staff', and...

AC: Wow.

EW: And I taught up there with Dental Anatomy for a year, and that helped.

AC: I see. Um, we also would like to find out a little about the economics of the times. Do you remember, like, how much you charged for a dental service, and how much you got paid for teaching part time at the school? We'd just like to know, get an idea of how much dollars were worth in those days.

EW: I can't remember what it was at the dental school, but if I remember, we did a, we did cleanings, I think for five dollars.

TL: Oh my God.

EW: Y'know, yeah, that was—and I think an extraction was either five or ten dollars. Y'know, when fillings were seven or eight dollars, something—y'know, I just can't remember too well. Over a period of years, it just, y'know, your overhead increases, and things, y'know, inflation and so forth. But it was, it was not very much. [laughs]

AC: And did you have an assistant? When you first opened your office did you—were you by yourself, or you had an assistant with you?

EW: No, I had, I had hired a young, young girl to work. She didn't—she had never had any experience and, incidentally, she's still living too.

TL: Oh!

EW: Her name was Helen.

TL: Oh, Helen?

EW: Helen Dupree.

TL: Okay.

EW: Your mom helped me for a while.

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TL: Yeah, everyone worked the store—the orthodontist. [laughs]

EW: But it was just, uh, myself, myself and one, one assistant. Who also doubled as a receptionist.

AC: Right.

EW: Because we just weren't very busy, y'know. Then afterwards, then we had more help.

AC: And what was the name of your office? Is it just Dr. Edward Wong?

EW: Yes, Edward K. Wong, D.D.S.

AC: Oh okay.

EW: Uh-huh, yeah.

AC: Wow. And was it in a building with other dentists, or were you by yourself?

EW: No, no, we have a—it was a freestanding building that my dad was kind enough to let me have the land, y'know. And, next to it was the house where we lived. Kind of, kind of thoughts of the old place of San Antonio, but it was a separate freestanding building.

AC: Right.

EW: And it, it was there for a long time, but it's finally gone now.

AC: Right, I see. So, when you were going through University of Houston, um, did anybody live in the grocery store in Houston, or by then you had—your family had your separate house?

EW: No.

AC: And the grocery store, and the...

EW: No, when, by the time we moved to Houston, the grocery store was separate, and our house we had a house that was, two, two or three houses down, y'know away from the store.

(25:12)

AC: And you mentioned the grocery store was in the Woodland Heights?

EW: Yes.

AC: Is that the Woodlands we know now, or is that a different Woodland Heights?

EW: No, it's the same.

AC: Oh, so it's that far up north, there were—

EW: It's the north of town.

AC: I see.

EW: Yeah, it's, uh, an old section of town, and of course, just to digress, it's being revitalized now.

AC: I see.

EW: Y'know, and it's a beautiful part of town.

AC: I see. Was it a mixed community? Was there any problem moving into a white neighborhood at the time?

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EW: Uh, we did not experience anything y'know, outwardly, I'm sure underlying it was. But, y'know my parents are very strict with us. They said, 'Keep your nose clean,' y'know, 'Don't do anything bad because we don't want to have any problems', so that's exactly what we did. Y'know, we didn't—we just didn't.

AC: I see.

EW: And then after a period of time, I think the Caucasians that lived next to you realized, that y'know, these Chinese people aren't too bad after all. [laughs] You know what I mean.

TL: Exactly.

EW: And, um, it was quite an experience Dr. Chao, I mean, it just, uh, it's just something that you just, they just build on.

AC: Right.

EW: Just like in San Antonio, we—all our customers were predominantly—were non-Chinese. 'Cause everybody had their own grocery store.

AC: Right, right.

EW: There were a little Hispanics, or Caucasians, and when we delivered the groceries to them on Saturdays, the door was open, we just went right on in, and so there was not a problem at all.

AC: Right.

EW: Y'know, as far as that. But there was, there was some underlying things, I mean, y'know, you walk into a restaurant at that time, I remember, just to digress a bit—you would get stares.

AC: So, where would you go to eat out—do you go to Chinese restaurants to eat out?

EW: In San Antonio?

AC: Oh, in Houston.

EW: No, and—

AC: Oh, I'm sorry, that—

EW: I'm sorry?

AC: So, when you go out to eat at to restaurants, do you go to Chinese restaurants to eat out, or do you go to Caucasian restaurants?

EW: You mean now?

AC: In Houston, when you were younger, when you first moved here?

EW: Actually, we didn't go out very much at the time. But when we did, when we did, we probably went to Chinese restaurants. Ming Palace, you remember Ming Palace?

TL: Oh, West Gray and River Oaks?

EW: On West Gray?

TL: Yes. It's a—

EW: Do you remember that?

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AC: I—I when I first moved here, I think it was still Ming Palace.

TL: Yes.

AC: It's changed names now, many times, but I think it was Ming's Palace.

EW: Uh, no—this Ming's Palace was on West Gray, and it finally closed, closed up, yeah. How long have you been in Houston?

AC: Um, since 1986.

EW: Oh, okay, well she's probably, okay.

TL: [XX]

EW: Well, she's relatively, yeah. But, um...

TL: Ming Palace was next to that theater, wasn't it? In River Oaks on West Gray.

AC: Oh, okay.

EW: Mm-hmm. My mother would not like to go out to eat at American restaurants. She just, y'know...

AC: Yeah.

EW: Very, very, laid back. Y'know. Except at home she wasn't very laid back, boy. [laughs] She'd—[laughs]

TL: No breaking my rules! [laughs]

EW: Incidentally, just as a matter of interest, Teresa, my oldest son and my other nephew, Clifford, were all born in the same year within three months apart.

TL: Yes.

AC: So that you could play together a lot.

EW: Yeah.

TL: Well, we—I was in Georgia.

AC: Oh.

TL: So Grandma had to fly back and forth.

AC: Oh.

EW: Yeah—

TL: To provide who was—whose baby got born first.

EW: I'm gonna give you an interesting story about Teresa after this, I don't wanna get it on tape. You know what I'm getting at! [All laugh] We love Teresa.

TL: Uh-oh.

AC: Okay, so, when did your business stabilize to a point that you know you were gonna make it and succeed, and not worry about, y'know, the costs and all that?

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EW: Um, in dentistry, probably I'd begin to feel a little more comfortable, y'know at that time, our oldest son was born, Matt, in 1959. Uh, probably in a couple of years, two years. But I never, y'know, interesting you said that, my second son who's taken on my practice—he asked me the other day, he says, 'Dad, when did you feel like you were—your practice was good enough?' I answered him, I said, 'I never felt that it was good enough, I just kept going.' I said, 'I just felt like I can improve it.' Not only financially, but just technically. And, I just remained that way, that's just my nature. I just, y'know, I just—have to be, be there learning, and doing the best I can.

AC: Wow. Um, so, you—were you always, uh, did you take on partners or were you always by yourself?

EW: I was always by myself; I did not have a partner. The only time I had somebody come in to help if we were on a vacation or something, and we would ask a fellow dentist to take calls for us, and that's about it.

(30:05)

AC: Okay. Um, so, how, in your practice have you—how do you feel about the different improvements in dental practice, or, in the, in the materials you use, and the tools, and the skills?

EW: Oh, just, progress, progress—it's just wonderful. I mean they do things now that we couldn't have even think about doing when we started, y'know. And it was just, it still amazes me now, y'know. And I still keep up with it, with—I don't do any continuing education, of course, I don't have to, I'm retired, but I do by reading articles and whatnot. And the, the things they do now, it's just amazing. It's just, I mean, it's just awesome. And, everything from digital x-rays, to surgical procedures, to non-metal fillings. Y'know, it's just great.

AC: Right. Well, I remember as a child, I was terrified of dentists [laughs] Because I don't think anesthesia was very prevalent in Taiwan. So I would—my parents were, y'know, abroad, they were diplomats, and so every two years we'd go back to Taiwan, that's when I would get my dental.

[Interview is paused briefly]

AC: All right, we're starting again. Well, thank you for resuming. So, I think we were talking about—you treated five generations of patients.

EW: Yes.

AC: Would you like to share any other stories of, y'know, memories from your dental practice days?

EW: Oh, gosh, I really would like to share, but I'm trying, y'know when you get older, you —it's often trying hard to recall, y'know. Um...

TL: I think in regards to when you were asking about fees and how much he charged, didn't weren't—didn't you have some Chinese clients that sometimes would bring you a chicken, or..?

EW: Oh, no, no, no. Oh! Yes, I do have one.

TL: That's right!

EW: There was a delightful little Chinese lady, she must've been in her seventies, sixties or seventies—did not speak a word of English. Uh, she'd call the office for appointment, and started in Chinese to a non-speaking Chinese assistant. And, y'know, 'I don't know what's going on?' So, I'd answer the phone, and she said, 'Well, I'll be there!' Y'know, 'I'm gonna...I'll be there at this time', not 'Do I have an appointment?' so she'd show up without one.

TL: ...showed up, right.

EW: And every time she would bring something, y'know. Chinese people are very thoughtful of bringing something. Uh, and she would, there are a lot of times with older Chinese folks, that, y'know, sometimes they have it tough, y'know, they just didn't make a lot of money, and I just wouldn't charge 'em, just let 'em go, but at times, y'know, when there was a material cost involved, we'd pay a little bit. Well, whenever there was that, she'd always bring something.

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AC: Oh.

EW: And if we didn't charge her, she'd give it to me. And when we did, she'd take it back home.

[All laugh]

EW: Which was fine, we 'd just laugh about it, and that —always thought that that was always kinda cute. And I don't know if she's still around anymore or not, but she'd come in the office, just jabbering away, and, um...

TL: Yes, no appointment—just walked in.

EW: True Taishan dialect, and the girls would go—y'know. [laughs]

TL: And then you had a Hispanic assistant, 'cause, Uncle, you had a lot of Hispanic customers.

AC:—patients—

EW: Yeah, we had, yeah, she, we had—

TL: Rosie.

EW:—I had one that spoke Spanish because we had a lot of Hispanic patients, and y'know, we would, uh, in during that—well, in fact, one of my assistants worked for me for twenty-one years, and she was, uh, a Cuban gal. And, she just, she wasn't, as I said, she wasn't the most outstanding assistant, but she was the most faithful. She would just stay in there with me y'know, and understood all the Chinese folks you know? [laughs]

AC: May I ask: Do you remember what her salary was in those days? How much you paid an assistant?

EW: Oh, um, gosh, let me think. I think, if they made, six to seven hundred dollars a month, that was pretty good back then, back then, yeah, back then, y'know.

AC: This was 1960s, or, 19—

EW: Oh, it goes back before then. 1960, '70, and '80s and then, and then beginning '80s, and then it'd begin to escalate. Then, then you—we had to y'know, the salaries were a little bit more.

AC: That's good, yeah. Great. Is your patient base mainly Chinese, or Asian, or is it across the, uh, ethnic...?

EW: Actually, mostly Caucasian. And, uh, percentage, um, Asian—Chinese, and uh, and Hispanics.

AC: Okay.

EW: But not a lot of Hispanics, because primarily in that area, in Woodland Heights, it was mostly Caucasian. And we, we, uh, accumulated a lot of Chinese patients, because I was the only one.

AC: Oh, right, right.

EW: Y'know, now, of course...

AC: You were the only one in the entire city of Houston?

EW: Yeah, yeah.

TL: Yes.

AC: So everybody—

EW: For a long time.

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AC: Okay, so, so most Chinese would go to you, right? Or, um...

EW: A great number of 'em, I wouldn't say most, but a great number of 'em. Particularly those that could not speak English, 'cause they found out that I could speak a little bit of Chinese. [All laugh]

AC: Have you—did you ever go back to China to visit your ancestral village, or...?

EW: We—we have tried for many times to go, when—something always comes up, and of late, and we're both getting to the age where it's a little harder for us to travel, but we dearly miss it. Well, I'll tell you an interesting story about our village: Back in 1939, we took a family picture, black and white. You've seen it—you have it at home. Y'know, everybody sitting there. And my dad, my dad sent a picture of that back to the village. Okay, it hung on the wall of the house, dirt floor, and, um, World War II came, y'know, Japanese well... ran the country, and then, uh, the first time you were allowed to visit the Mainland China, you remember uncle Jack?

(5:26)

TL: Mm-hmm.

EW: He went back there, to the thing (?) and he took a picture of the old house that family lived in. Jack was my, uh, cousin. His dad was my brother, my dad's brother. Guess what was on the wall? That picture.

TL: It's still standing?

AC: Wow! After the war.

EW: After the war. Now, two years ago, Lu—you remember Luna?

TL: Yeah.

EW: She went, maybe three or four years ago, she went to pave the way to see if we could go, you know, to kind of tell us—we would be lost because my Chinese is not that good. That picture's still on the wall.

[AC and TL]: Wow!

TL: That's crazy!

AC: So, 1939, until now—

EW: 1939, yeah.

AC:—it's eighty-something years, almost eighty years, yeah.

EW: And it's been on the wall, and they've never taken it down.

AC: And it never got destroyed by anything. It's—

EW: It's still there.

AC: That is amazing!

EW: Amazing, yeah, I mean just—and I saw that, and I couldn't believe that, and I said Jack, did you put that—he said 'No.' He asked them and of course those people that live there now are third generation, fourth generation, cousins, or y'know, whoever, because we y'know, my dad, and mother had left there, and never did go back—

AC: Right.

EW:—y'know, uh-huh.

AC: But the house remained in the family.

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EW: Still there.

AC: And didn't get—

EW: It's still there.

AC:—destroyed or confiscated during the Cultural Revolution or anything.

EW: I think, uh, the—the government, uh, Communist government confiscated all of it, and now they're giving it back.

AC: But the picture is still there.

EW: Picture's still there.

TL: Still there! [laughs]

EW: The picture's still there! [laughs]

AC: That's amazing.

EW: Yeah, and we have that picture, it's one of these, y'know, looks like—[**EW** makes solemn face][**AC** and **TL** laugh]

EW:—y'know.

AC: Well, maybe—

EW: Nobody smiles. [laughs]

AC: If you can take a picture of a picture—

TL: Uh-huh.

AC:—we can put it in the archive.

TL: Oh, that would be cool!

AC: Since it's already in the story, I'm sure people want to know 'What picture is that?' If you can—

EW: I think we have a picture of that at home; I'll try to find it for you.

AC: Yeah, if you can send the picture, that'd be wonderful.

EW: Yeah, I don't know, let's see, anything else? Um, it's interesting, you know, pretty much, the life that we—that y'know, our family shared here was just pretty much standard after, y'know, the children were born, things, um, became a little bit easier for us. And I think, um, y'know as you progress in life, and, and, and you get, I don't know what the term I should use—your lifestyle gets a little bit better, then these other little problems kind of seem to go away, don't they? You know, prejudices, and whatnot you just seem to overlook 'em, y'know? But, uh, we, we, we felt the prejudices when we were growing up, I mean, but that's a long time ago. And, y'know, we just don't try to harbor on it.

AC: That's amazing, that's amazing. So, you're not bitter, you don't think about it?

EW: No.

AC: Just move on.

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EW: Yeah, yeah. Well, my dad said, 'Y'know, in order for you to' he never—he knew that things could get better, because he said 'Education is gonna be the answer to—of everything.' He knew that it would get better, but he didn't know when or how. But he said, 'In order for you to succeed,' he says, 'you just have to be better than everybody.'

AC: That's great.

EW: He says, 'You just have to be better, you have to be number one.' Y'know, not that, not that you absolutely have to, but you have to strive to be number one.

AC: Right, right.

EW: And you, and he says, 'Then, you can't—you don't have to look back'.

AC: Right, right.

EW: And that's true, you know, that's true.

AC: So, being the only dentist in the city, you must've been very highly respected, and the people looked up to you. Did they ask you to do many other civic volunteer activities, like joining the CACA [Chinese American Citizen's Alliance] for instance?

EW: Oh, yeah. Well, y'know as part of our things there, I did a lot of the—the thing that I did a lot, most of, was volunteer at this, what they call the San Jose clinic, which is here in Houston, I don't know if you're familiar—

AC: I saw, I saw you're, uh—you filled out the form, yeah.

EW: And, uh, I would go there once a month and spend a half a day, two-thirds of a day there, it was operated by the Catholic Dioceses, and that was an awful lot of fun, y'know. Just to see these four people, y'know, appreciate what you're doing for 'em, and that was sort of fun, y'know. And then there are other activities, which I can't remember, y'know the CPC, and it's all social, but a lot of that, I just, y'know, I just don't remember, y'know. It wasn't—

AC: That's great. How did you meet your wife, can you talk about that?

EW: Bowling alley. [All laugh]

(10:01)

AC: This is gonna go down in history.

EW: Well, well there's an interesting story about that. In San Antonio, as part of our activities, there was going bowling. I mean, and on any given Sunday afternoon, if you just wanted to meet the other Chinese, you'd go to the bowling alley.

AC: Oh, okay.

EW: And then there was a league night we used to bowl. And everybody, and same thing in Houston; so, uh, Emily was, uh, here visiting her cousins. She's from Amarillo, Texas. And, there's a friend of mine, his name is Jack Fong, he was the second Chinese to graduate. He graduated after I did from Amarillo, and he was down here, and we were sitting there talking, and finally, Emily came in with one of her boyfriends, I don't know. [laughs]

TL: Well, and Emily—wasn't she Miss Amarillo—

AC: Ooh.

TL: Or something, she was a, she was a—

AC:—beauty—

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TL: She was a fashion beauty.

EW: No, y'know—

TL: Wasn't she?

EW: Only Chinese girl there, so, y'know—[laughs]

TL: No, she was very attractive.

EW: Back then I didn't have much choice, y'know! [All laugh] Oh, wait a minute, I'm kidding, I'm kidding Em! But, uh, introduced us to her, y'know, that's how we met, and then after that, y'know, I just didn't think anymore about it. Y'know, just, I was going into my sophomore year of dental school, and that's a tough year. And I just thought, 'Well, nice to meet you and all.' And then, I think, uh, I think we met another time; She was down for one of the cousins' weddings? And then y'know, so, well, 'Why don't you drop me a line?' 'Okay, well, I might as well.' [EW and TL laugh]

TL: So you corresponded by letter? Because—

EW: There was no e-mail! [TL laughs] No long distance calls –

TL: That's right!

EW:—too expensive!

TL: Oh, yeah.

EW: Yeah, yeah. And letters were three cents about that time.

AC: Right, and then when did you get married?

EW: When did we get married? 1950—well, we had 59th year anniversary last night.

TL: Wow, oh, I didn't know that!

EW: Yeah.

TL: Happy Anniversary!

EW: 1957, I was still in the service.

AC: Oh, I see, so you graduated from dental school, and you went into the service?

EW: Yes.

AC: Oh, I thought you had a draft, or I misunderstood, you—you were...

EW: No, in that era of time in the '50s, uh, everybody was, had to serve two years in the service—

AC: Okay.

EW:—provided they didn't have any physical defects.

AC: Right.

EW: And then we all had to carry draft cards. And so we were deferred, because we were in dental school, provided we maintained our status in school. And then after that, then we had to go into the service as our obligation.

AC: Okay.

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EW: For two years.

AC: I see.

EW: And at that time, if you wanted to, you could select your branch of service: Air Force, Navy, Army or whatever. Or, if you just wanted to let the government make the decision, you went into the Army.

AC: Oh.

EW: So, and then that was—that was a fun two years for me. We just—

AC: You were in the Army?

EW: Air Force.

AC: Oh, oh, Air Force. And where were you based?

EW: Yuma, Arizona.

AC: Oh, I see, okay.

EW: And that's where some of these pictures were taken here.

AC: Okay.

EW: Uh-huh.

AC: We have to take—yeah, take pictures of pictures.

TL: Okay.

EW: Uh-huh.

AC: That's wonderful. And then, so when you were in the Air Force, did you—what did you do—were you trained as a pilot? Or were you—

EW: Oh, no—all dentistry.

AC: Oh, oh—dentistry.

EW: I was a dental officer, yes.

AC: Oh, okay, okay.

EW: That's the reason why I said it was a great two years, because it was two years of—of practice. [laughs] And getting paid for it, y'know! And we went in as a First Lieutenant, and after a year, they gave us a Captain's, uh, rating, and that increased our salary.

AC: I see.

EW: Six hundred dollars a month.

AC: Wow.

EW: Wow! At that time.

AC: Yeah, that's a lot.

EW: And Emily was teaching at that time; she taught third grade.

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AC: She also lived in Arizona?

EW: In Arizona.

AC: You were married by then? Oh, you got married during the service—

EW: Yes, yes, yeah, we were married in '57.

AC: Okay.

EW: And then she, of course came to, y'know, to Arizona, and then she taught school there for a while, and we just had a really—a wonderful time. Because, and y'know, work eight to five so to speak, and then the rest of the time, we did whatever we want.

AC: Did you live on the base? Were you living in—

EW: No, no—no, there was no quarters for us on the base at that time, we had to live off the base.

AC: Okay.

EW: We had an apartment off base.

AC: Okay, okay. Was there any sense that because you're Chinese American, you had to be a part of a Chinese American Service Corps, or was there such a thing, or—you were mingling freely with all of the different races?

EW: In the Air Force?

AC: Yeah.

EW: No, we were just part of the—

AC: Okay.

EW:—members of the Air Force. And supposedly everybody treated equal, but still underlying there was still a little bit. But, no we didn't have a bit of trouble. I mean, [clears throat] we were—in our dental division, and we just, highly, I'm gonna say highly respected with everybody—because everybody was in the same boat. All the other dentists were out of dental school, two years, and so we were all there to, um, do our job, do our obligation, and learn how to do dentistry, really. [laughs].

(15:19)

AC: You had a lot of practice.

EW: Yeah.

AC: Were you the only Chinese American dentist at the, in your—in your area?

EW: In uh—

AC: In the Air Force.

EW: In the Air Force, yes.

AC: Okay.

EW: Yeah.

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AC: So, all this time, I guess you don't think about the fact that you're the only Chinese American, you just do your practice just like everyone else, you don't put the idea, 'Oh, I'm uh, racially different from you,'—those things you don't think about as you go about every day.

EW: Um, during my practice I did think about it some. Uh, 'cause, and then, towards the latter y'know, as time came by, things get better.

AC: Yes.

EW: And, so, at first, yes, I did think about it, and I wanted to do the best I possibly could, because I wasn't going to embarrass my Chinese heritage, period. I was not gonna do that. And I was not gonna embarrass my parents.

AC: Right.

EW: So, yes, yes, I did think about it, but not to the point that it worried me. Just that, I guess you might say, motivated me to do the best I possibly could.

AC: Okay. Um, did you notice differences that had you not been Chinese but just Caucasian, do you notice differences in the way you could have gone about your practice or the way you were treated among your colleagues, among your patients, had you not been Chinese-American? Do you notice any difference?

EW: I think so. I think there was a little difference, you know, at that time, I don't think now.

TL: Right.

EW: I don't think now there is, y'know, if there is, it's a tiny, tiny bit. But at that time, yes, because it was still, y'know, we're talking about 1952 to '56, y'know, and uh, y'know, if you lived in Mississippi at that time...

TL: Right.

AC: Yeah. So, so when you have established your business in the 19—late 1950s, early 1960' in Houston, were you able to go to restaurants like everyone else instead of when you were younger you felt—

EW: Oh, yes—

AC: It was different—

EW: Yes, uh-huh. We didn't—y'know, again, we didn't go often. We had, y'know, Matt, and, uh, he was a baby, and, um, uh, y'know we, we pretty much had to work real hard at the office, and all the times that we had, we'd go visit our parents 'cause they wanted to see the grandbaby, you know. And, uh, but, um, no I think we could, and we did.

AC: Okay.

EW: We did.

AC: Um, so, once you left the Air Force, is that when you came back to start your dental practice in Houston, or?

EW: Yes, yes, yes.

AC: That's when you came back and opened the office on the land that your father provided.

EW: Yeah, 1958, uh, but then, like I said earlier, in '58, into, before I got started practicing, I taught at the dental school.

AC: I see.

EW: That was just—just for a little while. A year, year—or a year and a half, I forgot.

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AC: Okay. So, in your practice, did you have to do root canals as well as filling cavities, what practice did you do?

EW: No, we, y'know, um, at the time, uh, when we finished, uh, you—if, if you felt like you were good enough to do all these specialty things like they did now, you could do it. But, I realized because of my training that there were limitations, so I did limit my practice. If there was something that I didn't think I would be able to do it properly, I wouldn't.

AC: I see.

EW: Y'know. And I did do, y'know, some other steps, I did do some root canals, and all because we were trained to do that, but anything that was, um, super special, no, no. And it was just too much at stake. [laughs] Y'know. [All laugh] Y'know, that guy, y'know that blankety-blank, y'know, guy. [TL laughs] Look what he did to me! Y'know.

AC: So, um, and what—and when did you decide to retire from your practice?

EW: Um, well, you know, um, my second son, Michael, he, I always call him Michael-come-lately. [EW and TL laugh] He, um, he had finished A&M, and he went into, I used to tease him about him being into drugs, y'know, but he was with, um [TL laughs] with, with uh—

TL: He worked for Mark.

EW: With the same company as—as your brother. And he was a drug representative for the company. And, um, he was—he was happy with that, and then—and then at one time, I think he said he came home, and it was cold up in Amarillo. He came home on a Sunday after being at a meeting, and he had the flu. And, a cold house, and he says 'I don't think I want to do this anymore.' [TL laughs]

(20:09)

So, he call—he asked, he says 'I think I'm gonna quit—two things,' he says, 'I wanna do'. One, you'll be happy, one you won't be. And I say 'What's the one that won't be happy?' He goes, 'I'm quitting my job.' And I said, 'Oh, my.' And he said, the other, 'I'd like to go back to dental school.' Hooray, y'know.

TL: Hooray!

EW: So, he did. He went back and did his pre-den, and got into dental school—all on his own. I didn't help—I told him, 'I can't help you'. I said, you know, 'I can help you financially, but I can't help you otherwise.' I said, 'You have to do it on your own.' Because I knew Mike, and he had to do it on his own—and he did. He finished, and then, he practiced, we practiced together for a few years, and then it just got to the point where I was beginning to get a little tired, and I thought I—so that's when I retired, five years ago.

AC: Oh, you retired five years ago?

EW: Yes, uh-huh.

AC: Oh, wow. So you were eighty, uh, were you eighty—what, how old were—

EW: Seventy-nine, eighty, yeah, something—and I still, at that time, I went in for a day or two, but basically full time I'm retired. It's been a little bit longer than that.

TL: And Emily still goes to the office?

EW: Pardon?

TL: And Emily still goes to the office?

EW: Emily does.

TL: Yeah. [laughs]

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EW: Yeah. She goes—she'll go Monday, free lunch.

[**TL** laughs]

EW: Oh, sorry 'Em. [**EW** and **TL** laugh] Yeah.

AC: And has your office moved location—where is your office?

EW: No, from 11th, from 11th street, when I found out that Mike was gonna join me, then I—I, it wasn't big enough, it was just this big. So we built another—built another building, we bought some property, on not far from there on, um, on I-10 at Shepherd, and it's a lot bigger facility, and he's taking care over that now.

AC: And what is the name of the office now?

EW: Michael A—Michael Alan Wong, D.D.S.

AC: And he does not have partners, one-man practice?

EW: No, no, um, his wife is a hygienist, so they practice together. And, um, Mike, Michael's kind of an independent guy, he likes to—he likes to be on his own, so, y'know, I told him, I said 'You oughta think about getting somebody in,' he said, 'Oh, okay.' Y'know, so...

TL: Right.

EW: I just let him doing his own thing. I just don't want to interfere.

AC: So, um, it sounds like you had a—you had an amazing career, and you're very happy with the choice of profession. Did you have ideas of maybe doing something else other than being a dentist when you were going through college and grad school?

EW: Yeah.

AC: What did you want to...?

EW: I really wanted to go back to go to med school.

AC: Oh.

EW: But that was after I finished my service. And, I, boy, I really considered and I really wanted to go back to med school, 'cause I was ready to do, I wanted to do surgery, y'know. And of course, Matt came [laughs]. And I thought, 'Man, I can't, know if I can study like I—', and I just, take another State Board, and go through four more years of training and schooling, it was another four years of med school, another year of internship, and possibly three years of residency. And I thought, 'I don't think so.' I just got tired of school. When I say tired, physically tired, y'know. I don't think you should ever get tired of trying to learn, but y'know—but, so, that was the only thing. I don't regret it, but I wish I would have, yeah.

AC: That's great. So, I mean, I think you had an amazing career, and very successful, and you're such a y'know, wonderful warm person, I think, y'know patients would love you. But over the years, watching the Houston society change, and evolve, more diversity, more equality, um, what are your thoughts about Chinese Americans immigrating to Houston, and just the outlook, um, on all the race relations that have changed over the years. Do you have any thoughts about that?

EW: Nah, well, y'know, all of us here, all the Chinese here as the results of Chinese people immigrating from China, y'know, from Teresa's mom, and um—hey, look who's here, the boss. [laughs] That's my wife. [laughs] Anyway, uh, no I think it'd be wonderful, I think, y'know, it's a great country, and, uh, I think they can, if you come here now, the opportunities are endless, y'know, and I just—I think it's great. I, I don't, I don't—I wouldn't regret anybody for not coming, I think they'd just—I think it'd be great.

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AC: Okay.

EW: Y'know, we're all here as the results of immigrants, all of us—Emily's parents and so forth.

AC: So, but I think the hard work was done by your parents' generation.

(24:55)

EW: Oh, yes.

AC: Because we're—especially people like us, who came so late—we're the beneficiaries that you all have gone through. Um, so do you think it was a wise move for your parents to leave, or for your grandparents to leave Taishan and come to the United States?

EW: You probably know this, the reason most of those—my parents were to come to *jinshan* [gold mountain] y'know, want for a better life. And to make enough money to go back to China—

TL: Yes.

EW: And not live the life of a peasant farmer.

AC: Right.

EW: You know that.

AC: Right.

EW: This almost happened to us. Back when I was a junior in high school. Okay, this was after, y'know, the war and everything. Uh, my parents were getting really, real serious like to take us all back to China, and for me to go to the very famous school there in China for—I forget the name of it. Anyway. Um, and I was terribly disappointed. I wanted desperately to finish high school here. Well, the Communists came.

AC: Right.

EW: That changed the whole thing.

AC: Right.

EW: That changed it right there. And just overnight, parents says, 'No, we're not going'. Otherwise, we would probably be not having this interview. I'd probably be over there—I don't know what I'd be doing.

AC: Dentistry, probably.

EW: But, uh, we came that close.

AC: Okay.

EW: We came that close.

AC: So, do you have any advice for young, uh, Chinese who come now from China to make a life in Houston? What advice would you give the younger generation of immigrants?

EW: Oh, gosh. Hmm. I guess, like...just keep your nose clean and work hard. And, uh, just do the right thing and hold yourself in high esteem, and don't be—don't embarrass the rest of the Chinese. [laughs] I—we feel real great about that. Y'know. We've been very fortunate. My—our whole family, Teresa's siblings, and her mother and dad, y'know, my sister, we're just very proud of what we do, because no one—oh, and incidentally—let me give you a little insight about people in San Antonio. We had, during the time I was going from being birthed to the time in high school, there was not one single case of juvenile delinquency in San Antonio with the Chinese. Not one.

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AC: Wow.

EW: And that's a matter of record. So we're really proud of that.

AC: Yeah.

EW: But on the other hand, you know, if you were bad, we got disciplined pretty badly by my parents.

AC: By the parents.

EW: Another thing I wanna to mention to you too, was that when we were growing up in San Antonio, American school was from nine to three. Chinese school was from five to eight.

AC: Whoa.

EW: Everyday.

AC: Whoa.

EW: Eight, nine o'clock to noon Saturday.

AC: Wow.

EW: The only thing—we hated it because it was so much, y'know.

AC: Right.

EW: And I'll tell you about the teacher, about that, too. The only good thing about Chinese school is that they got us out of work from the store on Saturdays. [**AC** and **TL** laugh]

EW: 'Cause if you went to Chinese school, it was okay with your parents.

TL: Yeah, yeah.

EW: But if you wanted to go play, uh-uh.

AC: No.

EW: But, you're good, so—

AC: So, did you—so was Chinese school very rigorous, or was it more—

EW: Oh, yes, it was rigorous! [laughs]

AC: It was?

EW: Oh! It was the old Chinese way of teaching, and we had an old teacher there. *Guan Hom Bok*. Y'know, little bitty guy. And he, uh, he had, um...

TL: Chalkboard?

EW: Duster, y'know, feather duster. And he took the feathers off, and he stood there—when he rang the bell, if you weren't there immediately, he'd pop you when you come in. Another thing he did, too, if you continued to misbehave, he would take red ink and draw it around your eyes.

AC: Oh, my goodness.

EW: And make you sit in front of the class. [**AC** and **TL** laugh]

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TL: Wow.

AC: So you—

EW: And you couldn't wash that off 'till you get home, so you got it again when you went home. [**AC** and **TL** laugh]

EW: Fortunately that didn't happen to me 'cause I was—

TL: Yeah.

EW:—but that happened to a lot of our—my friends.

AC: Um, so you learned to read and write in Chinese in the school?

EW: At point, let's see, how was I...I believe I was maybe twelve, I could read a Chinese newspaper to you.

AC: Wow.

EW: And I could write a little bit of a letter. And my uncle in San Francisco, uh, Uncle Robert Lee, he's gone now. He was so proud because I would write to him in Chinese, but I've forgotten everything. It's just from non-use. I recognize characters, but I don't know what it is.

(29:59)

AC: I see.

EW: And I tried to learn, and the brain is getting too old. [All laugh] Well, what's confusing is the Mandarin, and the—

AC: Yes—

EW:—and then also, too the characters are changed.

AC: Right, the complex versus simplified.

EW: Y'know, that's—that's about it.

AC: I mean, it's a fabulous story, thank you so much for sharing. Do you have any other idea of thoughts you would like to share before we conclude the interview?

EW: No, where would you like to have dinner one night? [All laugh] That's one of our favorite things to do. [All laugh] If you'll honor us, and you and your family with Teresa, we'll go. Okay?

AC: Thank you!

EW: Okay, well let's do that.

AC: Thank you.

EW: Thank you, Dr. Chao!

AC: Thank you, Dr. Wong. Thank you.

[The recorder is turned off; the interview ends]