

Interviewee: Elsie Huang
Interviewer: Sara Davis, Tian- Tian He
Date/Time of Interview: June 29 2017
Transcribed by: Sara Davis
Audio Track Time: 01:16:29

Background: Elsie Huang was born in 1937 in Tucson, Arizona to Cantonese parents. At age 10, after both her mother and father passed away, she came to live in Houston with her older sister. She married her first husband CC Wong (?) at 18, and adopted two children from China. In her twenties, Elsie opened two beauty salons in the Gulf Gate and Westbury areas. She eventually sold her salon to become a full-time student at the University of Houston, graduating in 1970. After graduating, she taught at the Cypress Fairbanks school district for 8 years, and was then hired as a principal in the Katy Independent School District. As principal Elsie opened Mayde Creek Elementary and worked there for 13 years. She retired at age 59 and became actively involved in the Houston Asian community, serving as president of the Asian Chamber of Commerce and as a board member in various organizations.

Elsie married her current husband Merle Hall after CC passed away, and they now live together at the Buckingham retirement community.

Setting: This interview was conducted on June 29th, 2017, in Elsie's apartment at the Buckingham. Elsie discusses her experience growing up Chinese-American, being an Asian woman in the professional world, adopting her children from China, changing beauty standards, assimilation to American culture, and her current involvement in the Houston Chinese community.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

EH: Elsie Huang

SD: Sara Davis

TH: Tian Tian He

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, ect.]

SD: Okay, so my name's Sara Davis.

TH: My name's Tian- Tian He.

SD: And today we're interviewing Elsie Huang for the Houston Asian American Archive. So to start off would you like to introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about your childhood?

EH: Okay. Um,, I'm Elsie Huang, and now it's Elsie Wong Huang Hall (?). I remarried when my first husband passed away. Okay, you're asking me about my childhood when I grew- where I grew up and so forth. Well aAs a child we used to live in TausanTucson, Arizona and then we moved also to Los Angeles uh California and we lived there several times- anduh we would transfer from one to the other, and the reason we moved from TausanTucson to Los Angeles and back to Los Angeles is because my mother had asthma. And in those days they thought the weather was too dry in TausanTucson for people to have asthma. Then when we moved to Los Angeles the- the weather was too moist and everything, so then they would have us go back. So we- I lived in both places as a child. Both in TausanTucson, Arizona and then in Los Angeles.

SD: Okay, so you went to school in both places?

EH: Uh well we would live in one place maybe a few years and then the doctors would say well it's just too damp in Los Angeles, you need to go back to TausanTucson, Arizona. So that happened maybe about three times that we went back and forth within a certain length of time.

SD: Okay.

EH: But basically, I remember my days more in TausanTucson, even though they were short uh just because episodes that have happened. Mhm.

SD: Can you describe the neighborhood that you grew up in in TausanTucson and Los Angeles?-

EH: Well the neighborhood that I grew up, let me tell you this um, you know when people used to come from China they would be located in different places where there were relatives and my mother and father were born in Canton, China, and they uh arrived in the northeast part of the United States. But then people told them that there wa- business- grocery business was very good in TausanTucson, Arizona. So that's where they made their home in TausanTucson, Arizona. And so all the children were either born in the northeast or uh, oruh we were born in TausanTucson. Okay, and when I was a little girl uh there were very few Chinese in the schools- in the elementary school in TausanTucson, Arizona. And uh also in Los Angeles, going to Los Angeles now was different because there were a lot more Chinese in- in the elementary schools there because there were more Chinese period, you know. So basically speaking uh especially when I went on over- when I moved to Houston. I moved to Houston uh when I was around ten years old and I lived with my- my- my sister and brother-in-law because my parents had passed away. And coming to Houston it was a- was a real surprise because at that time there were probably between 500 to 1000 Chinese when I first moved to Houston. And so in schools and so forth, there- you know- you're the only Chinese or Asian in- in the whole school or even in that class, you know. So that's a tough background that I would have. But then when

I became uh a student in junior high, I beca-start becoming more outgoing. I was elected for the student council for our homeroom and so then I met other people and you know had to take a little more of a leadership role. And then when I went to high school I was quite active. Uh I was on- in the, the uh in the yearbook staff and I- I did speeches and I was in different organizations, like the Christian uh organization in there, at the uh at the Jeff Davis, and also bowling. And now like I said I was on the yearbook staff and then I was also what they called assistant cheerleader. There were you know several ch- regular cheerleaders and then they had some that were called assistant cheerleaders. And so that's, that's when I really start gaining more confidence and being a little more outspoken in that also through church, uh I was a member of the Chinese Baptist Church, and uh we would have training union in the evening, uh you know on Sunday evenings. And so when you get up and you know speak and so forth you begin to have more confidence. And that grew me all the way through, I mean you know I started gaining quite a bit of confidence through the school experience, taking speech and so forth, and then you know speaking up in church. So through my uh how you would say my elementary, junior high and high school years I could see myself really maturing in that direction and I- my situation was a little bit different uh because I got married when I was 18. Okay, when I graduated from high school I married CC Wong. And he was uh 12 years older than I was, but I was very mature as a teenager because when you start speaking up and becoming more of an individual person you know you- you change. And sSo as a teenager I felt like a little old woman already you know. And so you know I'm going backwards now you know, the older I age and I'm getting younger.

But uh I became quite active like I said but I got married when I was 18 and I went to work uh right away for the Chinese Consulate, which is from Taiwan, uh government, and I worked there for a couple of years. And then I decided to go back to school and that was when I went to University of Houston and- and I uh attended classes there. And then uh two years- after about two- two or three years after uh we were married I had an operation and so I could not have children. So we adopted two children. Uh, and- and I- I continued to go to school and so forth.

But my first job as far as business is concerned, I'll go into that a little bit here. Uh after going to the University of Houston for about a year and a half uh I- I- we'd adopted our first child. And uh Karen, uh when we got Karen from Hong Kong, we want a Chinese child because both my husband and I are both Chinese, and so we- when we adopted Karen I stayed home that first year. And our friends said to me uh that was in the hair business said, you know what Elsie, you're so active and I know you like being out and I know you like doing things with your hands and being creative, she says, you might want to go to beauty school. So I said, oh I got interested in that because I could go on weekends when my husband was home or in- in the evening to class. So I- I did, I went through the beauty school and got- graduated so to speak, graduated and got my diploma and so that- and I went to work for a- a couple in their beauty salon for about two to three months. Because there was a piece of property right over there in that- that in a little strip center that was not too far from our house that had an ideal space for a beauty salon. And so I wanted to have the Christmas business, because if- you know in most businesses if you don't get the holiday business, then you're going to maybe have to suffer through the other years. So anyway I opened the salon in November and there was a big article

in the newspaper about me at that time because I was only 24 years old at that time and here I had a beauty salon and, you know on my own so to speak and then I you know hired you know people to work for me- couple of people to work for me eventually. So that was my business experience and then I opened up another salon that was for sale in the Westbury area. Uh that was a salon that was already there, the- so the business- so I bought that business and got a- a partner in that one. And so I- we did that all total maybe about ten years in the beauty business.

But I used to always like to do teachers' hair and principals' hair because I was very interested in teaching. I started teaching Sunday school when I was only 13 so that was more or less a knack of mine and I always wanted to, you know, go back and be- you know become a teacher. And so after being in the beauty business for a while I thought, okay, I'm gonna take two night classes at the University of Houston. and if I can make two A's I'll give up my business. So I made two A's in the evening classes and so I start thinking about selling my business. And I end up selling one to a per- one- was an operator of mine and he ended up taking over the business, and then the other one, my partner took over. So then I went to school full time at the University of Houston. And then I graduated something like 1970, 71 um and then I- I went to teacher out in the Cypress Fairbanks school district in an open concept school. And I liked that very much, and the principal said to me you know you have administrative skills, you might think of, you know, becoming a principal one day. So And I thought, ah that's a good idea, so I went back and went full blast during the summer time, took as many hours as I could take, and evening classes so that I could get my master's in no time. So I was able to finish my master's in a year's time. And then uh, you know that's what I did. So I taught in the- the Cypress Fairbanks school district approximately like 8 years and was a counselor there for 1 year. And then uh I- I went- went to uh the Katy independent school district and became an assistant principal- I was hired there as an assistant principal- it was a growing school district as well, and so- so they needed, you know, new- new uh administrators. And so there were three of us that were hired at that time as assistant principals for the three new schools. And after being there uh after I was teach- uh there as principal- there as assistant principal for two years, then I became a principal up in Katy independent school district. And this was kinda unusual because in those days there were very few uh Asian that would become a- a principal- an administrator.

And see it's different now a days and for the young people to see what's going on now compared to what it was in those days,. it's quite different. Because I always felt like I had to represent myself not only as a Chinese but as a woman. And then you know how the family goes, whatever we do is a reflection on your family, so we always had to excel and do the very best that we can and so forth. But I enjoyed my years very much as principal over at Katy independent school district and I even opened a school. Uh I was at one elementary school for two years re- in- just completely changed that whole school up. And then uh I opened- they asked me if I'd like to open a new school, which I did. So I opened Maytrick (?) Mayde Creek Elementary, and I was there for uh- Maytrick Mayde Creek- Mayde Creek Elementary something like 13 years I believe.

Then I retired when I was 59, oOkay, and my husband was working for McDermott Engineering, and he had been uh in Singapore for a couple of years to open up an office there that they uh were doing a lot with computers and things- and doing that. So the office was in Singapore and so he came home a couple of times while he was there and I went to Singapore. And let me tell you a little illustration about Singapore, this was really funny because my husband told the people he was working with that I was a principal. Well before I got there they all had this envision of a principal, okay. That was old and grey- grey hair and very stern [laughs] so when they saw me they were very surprised, you know, that- that I wasn't that way. So that was- that was interesting.

Uh but okay, then so after being a principal uh and retiring after so many years, as I said I retired at 59 in education. Then shortly after that the Asian Chamber of Commerce in Houston contacted me to ask me if I would like to come and be interviewed so I could become the president for of the uh Asian Chamber of Commerce. So I did and I got the position. And then uh I- I really had a won- wonderful experience with the Asian Chamber of Commerce. It was very different in one sense, but I was already active in the Houston commu- community, not being that many Chinese and not many that- that kind and come out and discuss and do- do much talking- there were very few. So uh it's- it's something like you know, we- we were like pioneers so to speak in that sense. Um but anyway I- I as I was saying um, h uh I was the president of the Asian Chamber of Commerce and that was very different because I really dealt a lot with the city of Houston and- and all the Asians here. Um but that was a wonderful experience and there again being a woman, you know, you have to excel. And so you'd have a board of about maybe 13 to 15 people and being the president you'd have to be, you know, of course very organized and the thing that helped me really was the fact that my beauty business- having the business background, and uh I didn't mention this earlier but- but I had worked in a grocery store when I was in high school. And sSo that business training and thinking was- was a good experience and so when I became the president of the Asian Chamber of Commerce I had sort of that information that was locked up in my head before. And so, you know, we were very successful with of the Asian Chamber of Commerce during that time. We were even were able to buy uh buy part of a building uh over there on the Chinese area, in the Chinatown so to speak. You know, and so we did real well there and raised money and was able to do that.

And so, I mean, being active in- in that but also being active in the experience in Houston- in the Houston community- it was- I was on the board for the uh the uh the Pport of Houston, one of the (?) committees they had there. And I was on- I served on the different boards, you know, and let me back up and say this. Even as principal, before I was with the Asian Chamber. of Commerce I was very involved. There was an organization called Houston Proud and I was very proud- I was happy to be part of Houston Proud. But I got to know a lot of the city officials of that time.

So that also- so I would say to young people, any experience you have, try to assimilate with the community at large. Okay, right now Houston is a very diverse community so it's good to know people from different race and- and different cultures. And, bBut you- but I think that's very important for the young people to know that you need to assimilate so that you won't just be with

your Chinese group. And lot of young people when they go to high school even, they're just with the Chinese group in their school, you know, and that's good and not good. And then when they go to college it's the same thing, and when they go out to the workforce and they work with different people, they can see that the difference. So the more exposure you have with different cultures, as- as I have mentioned, and assimilate with other people, then I think the you're more successful. And I know we're still wanting to- the young people, especially women, to be a little bit more forward, and men too as far as that's concerned. And in fact a lot of the men used to say they couldn't get ahead, they couldn't get a job to be you know up there in the top- like vice president and so forth. But then when you start seeing what- what they do and don't do, you can analyze why. Uh I'll go back several years back before uh when I was still principal. I belonged to the Toastmasters Club, and that's very helpful. And I- I would urge young people to- to do something like that, and also take speech, and drama and all that, and debate. Because that's what you do in the real world. You're out there, you're debating, you're presenting yourself in one way or another. But in those days, I know in the 50s and 60s I used to hear a lot of the men especially that they just can't get ahead and they were very discouraged and disappointed that they couldn't get ahead in their business. But number one: they needed to be able to speak English because you're gonna be talking with people that are, you know, that fit- fit- fit-that nationality and that lan- language. So you need to have- have to know how to present yourself, and how to speak so people can understand, and when you're presenting something you have to be clear,. oOkay., Sso I see that ast- as at fault from what before and I don't know that's still kinda going on now or not. You know, because I know that Asians have- have you know, have excelled and- they're in a lot of the different positions. But you have to- you- you have to have a background to build yourself up to that point.

You know, so I think I've given y'all my resume and so forth, you know that I was in- uh, I'm involved in a lot of different organizations and a lot of boards. I'm still very active with the Chinese Professional Club and w- we give scholarships to students, and we have award- have awarded a lot of scholarships. So I was president there and then also on the scholarship board part of it which is called the Chinese Professional Club Fund Incorporated, uh I was president of that. And then I was also very active inwith the Houston uh they uh Chinese uh- uh what's the name of that- it slipped my mind. Anyway the organization that's over there on uh- the uh- Chinatown area, I was very active with that group. So I'm in different- different groups but also all this time that I was active with the Chinese groups or Asian groups, I- I stay busy with other- other things in theis city of Houston.

SD: Great. Um so backing up a little bit tso your hair salon, um, what neighborhoods where they in and what were your clients like?

EH: Okay, okay, at that time uh it was not too far from the Gulf Gate area- that was a growing area at that time. And uh- uh my first salon was there, it was- a strip center- uh near that Gulf Gate area. Okay, then the second one was near where we lived in Westbury. And Westbury was a thriving area, there used to be what they called Westbury Square. Andt- see when you're looking at it today wh- because the city changes so much- I mean th- then the population

changes a lot, uh it's very different than what it is today, but I had a salon way back then- uh in the Westbury area.

But we lived also- we lived not too far from the University of Houston area. Our first house that we bought uh it wasn't not too far from the University of Houston. Then the second house that we bought was in Westbury. Then we moved then from Westbury when I became a teacher. We moved closer to the Cypress Fairbanks school district because that's where I was teaching. And what my husband and I would do is that we would try to find a house that was close to one of us, so we both wouldn't be driving, you know, clear across town. So we- our- let's see- our third house we lived out in Lakewood Forest in the Cypress Fairbanks school district area. And then after that when my husband was in Singapore I asked him would you like to move [laughs]. You know to a place closer to where I became a principal in Katy. And so then he was there and I was here and we bought a townhouse off of Memorial. And the funny thing about that is- because he was there- we had to call him at closing that he was alive. [phone rings] Okay that he was well and alive. Okay, and so we did that we sold the house out in Cypress Fairbanks and Lakewood Forest area and then uh we bought- [Elsie's husband answers the phone] bought the place over there on Memorial. Okay, and then from that area- from Memorial- when we per- bought (?) heard about the- the Buckingham, it's a retirement community, I felt like this was something we might want to look into. So being the fact that my husband was 12 years older than I was, I was thinking that I want him to have a quality life and I want him to be, you know, enjoying his- his days here. And when we came here he was very active, he played billiards and he played bridge, you know, then I start an organization here, which has been going on now for 10 years. And that's teaching these Anglo women and men mahjong. So I teach them mahjong, uh which is the Hong Kong style mahjong, and they are thrilled. And wWe have approximately I would say about 35- 36, 36 people in our- in our group. And so because you know after a while when you have a community such as this, you know, some of the people will get sick and so forth. So I have a new class just about every year. That I'll have a few ladies- few p- people rather, that I will teach it to and they will be eventually with the whole group, which is right now we have about 30- 36- right about 36 people involved.

SD: That's so fun.

EH: So there again, see my experience working with all groups and Caucasians- there're almost all Caucasians here, at- at the Buckingham. Uh in fact right now we only have 2- 2 uh Chinese families here so to speak, and that's Mrs. Der Bing (?) and myself. And when we moved here it was my husband, it was CC and a good friend of ours Betty Chang, who that now lives in Dallas okay, so there again we're the minority, just like we were when I was little. Being the minority in a class or being a minority everywhere I went, okay. And- and like I said, right now I think back and all those years you learn different things I- I- I was faced- we were once faced- let me go back and tell you this. It- it sounds rosy and wonderful all these- that I'm talking to you about right? But there were hard times. When we bought the house in Westbury- let me tell you, when we looked around that area one of the sales people said to us, you know, well you- you might be happier if you're in Westbury rather than Meyerland at that time and uh it was- it was- and I knew what they were trying- to saying at that time too, because they wanted certain areas to

kinda probably have few- fewer Chinese, and that type of situation. So we went through that, so I knew there was always prejudice out there somewhere and it's a shame now I see things still going on in the world- here in the United States that is- that- that there's still prejudice. And that's something that I've kinda fought and- spoke about too, because I- I think that all people should be treated equally. Okay, so but so those are all experiences, and those experiences you have in your lifetime makes you a better person if you count and- and think back at what have happened makes you a stronger and better person.

TH: Going back even further to like, to your childhood, um did you want to be more American or more Chinese or, like how was that...

EH: Now that's a very good question. I never thought about if I wanted to be more Chinese or- or more American. Uh, I mean, uh- in fact let me tell you this. Let me go back and you can see- see what I'm going to relate when I say this to you. You know everybody likes to go to a prom, a high school prom when they graduate right? Well a Caucasian guy that I knew thereat, you know, and had classes and different things therewith him, he asked me to go to the prom. I said, oh I'm so sorry, I said I won't be able to accept y- your invitation. And he said, why Elsie, I know you so well, why wouldn't you want to go- go to the prom with me? I said, I don't want to fall in love with a Caucasian [all laugh] because I don't want to marry a Caucasian. Because I could see how difficult it was- that I- there was athis girlfriend that I had, that was half Chinese and half Caucasian. And the Chinese didn't really accept her real well and the Caucasians didn't really accept her well, and I saw what was going on. I felt sorrydory for her because of that. And I thought to myself, I would never whatdon't want that to happen to children that I would have. So I did not get involved so I could end up falling in love with somebodyone perhaps and itthat was (?) Caucasian. Now look at me, okay? [laughs]. I was married to a Chinese for 60 years and when my husband died, then he- his- M- Meryl's Merle's (?) wife had died first, and then later on CC passed away, and I didn't know Meryl Merle that well, I- he had a dog that I just loved very much, and I had visited with his wife before, but I- I- I- this never dawned on me that I would ever fall in love with a *Caucasian*, okay, when I wouldn't even date one or go out with one to a prom when I was in high school. So this is what I said- I said to y'all, my interview's gonna be quite different probably that people my age because I- what I do is- what I did- and do- is very different, okay.

So your- your question that youis asked me, am I e if I'm more Chinese or more Caucasian. Okay, I would have to say when I was younger I was more Chinese because I believe in all the different things they did and I still do certain things, okay, but after being a grown up and being able to be accepted and being so involved with- with Caucasians and everything, and living in a community like this, if you were to ask me today what are you more, I would say probably I'm more, what y'allou like to say, "American," more Caucasian, in thinking. Okay, and but there are still Chinese traditions I- I think are very good. Okay, I think one of the Chinese uh traditions that I really, really uh think is a great one and that is the encouragement of education. You know, the- the- no matter where your- your parents worked or had when they came over, they might've worked inat a grocery store, or a restaurant, and in some cities asin a laund- in the laundry business. Okay, so they di- those people did not have the opportunity to have the funds to be

able to go to college. But they had made sure that their children had the opportunity to go to college and be educated. So I've always thought the way the Chinese people, you know encourage their children uh in that asp- in that area I thought was very good. So it depends on what area you would ask me. If you had asked me food, I like both American food and Chinese food, you know, I like both of the foods. And I still like to be with my Chinese friends and also here inat the community with the Caucasians. But I will say this though, my closest friends are Chinese. I have had some Caucasians that were very close friends of mine that- and other principals, that we still get together like twice a year, and- and I treasure their friendship very much, but as athe bulk I would be- I would say my closest friends are Chinese.

Okay, in fact um, for, you know, like when my husband passed away we had a memorial service here. I mean, we had a lot of the Caucasian- there are a lot of the people here- I mean most of the people here came to the memorial. But then my- my Chinese friends, you know, close friends were here too.

So when you're looking in a mirrorat America and you likeyou're looking at what- what are you- what are you more like, I'm like both. But like I said I'm probably more- the way I dress, the way I look, the way I act, I'm pr- probably more Americanized. But in my heart and having close friends I would say I would say they're more the Chi- more the Chinese friends.

SD: So when you were raising your children, what Chinese customs or traditions did you raise them with?

EH: Okay, um, study hard in school, okay, study hard in school and make the best of- ofand- and know that you're representing your family in that you know you are Chinese and that you work very hard. Uh sSo I encourage them in that- that- those aspects. Uh also, the fact like um on New Year's- New Year's, you don't- you don't do certain things. Like yYou don't wash your hair, those-or some of those customs. You don't clean house, you do those the day before or a few days before, you know, and of course like I said I like to adopt certain things, I like Chinese foods. I used to- I used to cook and you know make you know like Chinese soups a lot and uh, you know, and cook Chinese dishes as well as American dishes. So in that sense, I but- I- I found myself I thinkg cooking more Chinese food than American food. But now that we live here at the Buckingham, and after I remarried Meryl- MerylMerle Ha- Merle, I haven't cooked at all. I'll heat things in the microwave and so forth, but we've got the facilities here, you know, and so I- I really haven't been cooking at all. And I've been married now to Merlel for a year and a half, mkay.

Okay, Aand let me back up and say this. I know this is very different, and probably the real "*Chinese-y*," old fashioned Chinese, I don't know what they think, me being married again. Okay, but really when you get to be my age you don't care what people think [laughs] that much, okay. I turned 80 in March and I decided then, okay Elsie it's time to do things you didn't do before and- and it's okay. You know, so it'- s- and you know- to answer your question for me to elaborate abouton that, yeah.

SD: Have you and your children ever gone back to visit China?

EH: Oh yes. Okay, let me- let me go back and say this. Uh when we adopted our son- a very good question. When we- when we adopted our daughter we didn't have the financial backings of moniesey to do a lot of things we were able to do later. And so we hired a nurse that brought her from Hong Kong to Los Angeles where I met my- my- met her, and- got- got- you know received care there, okay. And then I was in- living in uh TausanTucson- I mean I lived in Los Angeles to stay with my sister for about a week and then came to Houston. But now when- when we adopted Michael that was little bit different story. CC and I both went to Hong Kong to get Michael. And at that time I met his father for the first time, o. Okay, and so that- that was a real neat experience, and so we- we brought Michael back. And you're probably wondering you know how we raised them, 'cause youwe mentioned that- that other part about American and Chinese. We raised them as- as- just, you know, Americanized yes, and a lot of the things we do are Americanized but- but likeas I said earlier there are certain traditions that I like- that I have, you know, Chinese traditions.

Going back let me mention this. It was wonderful for me to go back- not go back because I had never been at that time to Hong Kong. And sSo it was wonderful for me to meet uh CC's father, his- his mother had passed away. And the one thing that his father cherished a lot was I was American-born Chinese lady and I served him tea. So he felt very proud of that.the fact hHe and his uh- he and his brother were there and I was able to serve them tea. So that opened up, more or less, a lot of- lot of feelings I guess. So in my broken Chinese I was able to speak to him in Chinese. And he could understand some of it and then what he couldn't understand then CC would, you know, would chime in and tell him what we were talking about. But tThat- that- that was a wonderful feeling and- and beginning of a family relationship that I didn't have before- not having- not met his family and his aunts and of course we always ate, and we ate so much there was unbelievable, you know how they have- have- one- this family wants to have you for lunch, the other one wants to have you for evening, you eat, eat, eat. [laughs] Which is good but it's too much of one- of a good thing at one time. Yeah, mm, hm, so.

TH: Um, as- as like a parent to like adopted Chinese kids, how do you think you were- you were different from just American Caucasian parents?

EH: Well, okay, it's- it's when we adopted our children it was- it was wonderful. But you know a lot of times people wouldill ask me, especially later, mokay, the- because there were children in China, you know, that needed, you know, a homes, and uh people in Hong Kong too. Let me back up and say this. The reason we went through- through international- it's called International Social Service. The reason we went through that adoption agency, even though the agency here made the study, because their other office is in New York. Okay, there were no Chinese or Asian cChildren in America, okay, that were available for adoption at that time. Because most of the children- most kids that were- were Chinese kids that were born that didn't have a parent for whatever reason, then the parents would go ahead and take care of them. Their- their, you know, their parents would take care of them, or their grandparents would take care of them. So there were no- no Asian children to be had. Okay, and because I- we wanted

our children to look as much like we were, like CC and myself, then we want to adopt a Chinese, you know, Chinese child. If there was a Korean child available, or- you know we- any other Asian we might've done that but we went through Hong Kong and did that- that. They were well accepted because there were many families here in America that had adopted you know Cau- Caucasian children, but then I could see the big change several years back when- when there were so many orphans in- in- in uh China and Hong Kong and the- the American families or- the Caucasian families here would adopt the- the, you know, a Chinese child. And that's- that's wonderful but then they sometimes had sh- problems with their children when they adopted a Chinese child into an American family home. Okay, and so, I was called upon several cases to- to talk to them and work with them a little bit. Especially being a principal uh I was able to do that too. Because they wanted their children to have an identity of being Chinese, okay, and yet they look at mom and dad, and if they had any children, all white, you know, Caucasians. And so there was a- a little transition there they had to make. But you see more and more families now uh overall, I would say, percentage wise, that American families have adopted Asian children. Okay, so and then not only that, let me tell you how different things are now.

You see a lot of the Chinese people marrying Caucasians. I mean most of my friends have someone in the- one of the children- one of the kids in their family have married a Caucasian. I can go down the line thinking of all the various ones that this has happened. Well my day as I told you earlier I wouldn't even *date* one because that was not the thing to do. You know, to- to go out with a Caucasian. But things have changed, so this is why me being married to Merleyl now is very different. And I so know probably some of the "old-timers," you know when I say "old-timers," they probably wonder, my gosh her husband has passed away not so long ago and here she already married a Caucasian. Well so many people have blessed me and said that this is wonderful that I've found a second love. And this is true because I mean, I *never*, never thought that something like this would have ever happened. I thought if something happened to my husband then I would probably be a- a, you know, be by myself for a while. And even a Chinese gentleman called me one day and said, Elsie you know you're still young and everything, have- have you thought about getting married again? I said, oh maybe 2 or 3 years down the line, well that didn't happen 2 or 3 years, I mean my gosh, you know, it was- it- less than a year I think- or right around about a year that all this happened. Meryle had uh asked me to have- uh be his guest for lunch. Some of the single men here, they got together they would ask a lady for- for lunch, you know, or dinner or whatever it was. And so he asked me if I' would be interested in being his guest uh for fourth of July, and fourth of July is coming up right. Okay, so I did, I- I said oh I accepted that. And so then uh he- he asked me if I would keep this dog that he had, which is a prec- was a precious dog, if I would keep him because he had to be going to Austin area for something for a few days, for a reunion there. And sSo then uh you know, it's really strange how love and how people are, because it's so different. MerylMerle was brought up on a farm. I had never lived on a farm, I was a city girl. So he's- here he's from a different culture and everything, be- you know being raised and thinking the way he did living in a farm, and then I- I- when he went to uh-- after he graduated from high school and all he went to the Navy, and then from the Navy and he started working, he worked for the US government as- in the internal revenue office. Okay, so he was a government employee. Okay, here I'm a

city person, never been to a farm, and would've *loved* to go to a farm because I thought- I love animals, and didn't realize all the work they had to do. Right, they had to get up early in the morning, milk the cows and- and feed the- the- the and do all that stuff. But to me, seeing it in movies, it's glamorous, right, because that's not the type of life I've ever lived, I was in California, where it's hustle and bustle and everything going on, and- and then you know here in Houston the- the things- so it's- our background is quite different, but even though our background is so different our value system is the same. We think so much alike, when we started talking and getting to know each other better I couldn't believe how much of his feelings and thinkings and values were the same as mine. So seeing- it doesn't make any difference whetherif you're Chinese or you're Caucasian, you can have the same values and think very much the same, even though you're from, you know, the city and the farm, you know, that's so different, you know. So I- I've been blessed with the fact that I have had d have found a second love, because I- this was not my intentsion, I had nothing like this in mind, this- especially this fast. So, you know that why when a friend asks me, have I ever- ever thought about ever getting married again, I saidy, oh I don't know maybe 2 or 3 years from now. You know, in fact this is what I'm saying is very different from all your interviews probably. You probably haven't had an 80 year old woman tell you about second love [all laugh]. Yeah, so anyway, go ahead.

SD: Um so when you were teaching what subjects did you teach and what were the students like that you were teaching?

EH: Ok alright I taught at the elementary level and I taught second and third grade a lot but then once I started going to the University of Houston for my Master's and knowing that I wanted to become a principal one day I went ahead and was able to do summer school while I would have kindergarten all the way to fifth. And then when I was asked if I would like to go to the junior high, which is called middle school now, I went to the junior high and I taught there for a year and then that year after- before the end of the year was over they asked me if I would become a counselor under an emergency certificate. They said you get along so well with the kids and everything I think you'd really like that. So I was under- under an emergency certificate for a counseling position which I did, uh in one of the new schools in the Cypress Fairbanks school district. So that was a- a very unusual year because then I- that was the year, the that spring that I had a phone call and asked me if I was still wantinged to become a principal or eventually be an administrator. They said because Katy is opening three elementary schools and there's going to be three assistant principals' positions available. And said, you know, because I knew somebody that went over there from another school district to work in an administration office. And so they called me and so I said, yes I'd- I'd be happy to be you know have an interview and see. So I did I interviewed at that time, was the superintendent uh that interviewed me and I got the position as assistant principal. Okay, and so that's what I did, you know, worked as the assistant principal- assistant principal for two years and then became a principal. And it sounds like it's easy and everything and everything's fast but you know it just again there- depends on how you present yourself, you know uh and you- you- you the more op-= opportunities uh- uh teenagers have, or young people have, to interact with other people, uh and build the confidence they have then you can present yourself that way. So I felt very fortunate that I- I got that assistant principal's position and then later on two years after that became a principal.

SD: Did your children ever go to or attend the schools that you were working at?

EH: No. My children never- oh wait- wait a minute- back- let me back up. Michael uh went to the Cypress Fairbanks school with me that one year. Okay, and then after that he- he went to school in the neighborhood, in- in the Westbury- the area- in that- in the areathat neighborhood that's the southwest part of Houston. Mhmm but it was just that- for that one year.

SD: Okay.

EH: Yeah, mhmm.

SD: And with your schedule being so busy and hectic was it hard to balance your work life and raising your kids, especially when your husband was abroad?

EH: Yes, okay, let me tell you this. Of cCourse they were grown by that time uh by the time- uh by the time- by the time CC went to-moved to Singapore Karen was working and Michael was still in school. Okay, and yes it was kinda difficult uh with my son because 'cus he was very active and everything like that, and I'm- I'm a strong disciplinarian. And so when I say- you know I want you home at a certain time, get home at a certain time and all that. And so forth- in fact I remember one evening- this is when- when CC was home though- back at home- when Michael was out and I told him, I said, Michael I said you need to be home by I think it was 11 or 12, and so I start getting concerned when he- he wasn't home. So then I would call all his friends up and so forth and I stayed up and so when he walked in the door, he was a teenager then, when he walked in the door he was surprised, at- at 1 o'clock I was sitting there waiting, "hello Michael," shocked. Because I was gonna see to it that he knew I was looking for him and that when I said a certain time, I mean a certain time. Okay, and I think all the discipline that I did with him hais worked out because his- my grandchildren arend lovely and wonderful and I think Michael had instilled on them discipline, you know and so forth and- and uh yeah. So yeah, what wa- what was the other part of your question I forgot what you asked.

SD: Oh no that was... the answer.

EH: Okay.

SD: So what are your children up to now? Are they in Houston still?

EH: Okay, my son is married, okay, and he has- we have two- he has two kids. And he- the- the unusual thing about our family is this, Michael is married to a uh a girl from Indonesia, okay, alright and my daughter was married to a Jew- Jewish person, okay, and here my husband was a deacon at a Baptist church so we were very, very mixed up all with all that. And now with three- three grandchildren we have my- my granddaughter Rachel whom I'm very close to- close to, she's married to a- a Jewish young man who's wonderful. Okay, and then uh Hunter is at UT Dallas, and uh Hallie is still in high school. And I must say this and I have to brag on

Rachel- Rachel just got her Doctor's degree uh she went to UT for her bachelor's degree and her master's degree and then sh- she was getting married so then when they talked about wh- what she wants to do for her- her uh doctor's degree she- she was admitted at several universities but her husband-to-be wanted her of course to be in Houston, so she accepted the University of Houston's uh program- doctoral program there. And so she just graduate this past uh let's see was it May or June, anyway, yeah May and so we're- we're real proud of- of Rachel getting her- her uh doctor's degree. And then like I said, uh Hunter is at UT Dallas and he wants to become something, let's see- some kind of biochemistry stuff with computers, you know, and I'm telling you computers nowadays you can do everything, you know, medical- in the medical field they're you use it a lot. So he- he's into that.

And then, okay, my- my son is working for an- a computer company um you know and all that and he- he's with uh- he was with- with Microsoft and now he's with Oracle and so he-- so he's in the computer business. And his wife uh Fi-fi when we call Michelle, and her name- nickname is Fi-fi, she's been with SAP, a German computer company, you know, uh so they're- they're- they're in Dallas now- I mean not Dallas I'm sorry- they're in Austin. They were living in Palm Springs, California, but when the kids were growing up they said that the area was mainly retired people and so they were- when they were in private school the only kids they- they could play with were with the ones in that area. So he thought we would you know back to- to here in uh Houston area would be good so he liked Austin so they're- they're in Austin, yeah.

And then my- my daughter has a good job with- with uh a distributing company, mmhm, yeah. So we're keeping busy. [laughs]

SD: Yes. Um So, how have you seen Houston change since you've been living here over time?

EH: Oh Houston has changed tremendously. I remember in the 1950s uh right around the time I was in high school and then graduating, the first freeway that took- took place here was the Gulf Freeway that went all the way to -to uh Galveston. We used to have the little farm road like so to speak to go to Galveston, you know, and- and back, but then that freeway was a biggie. Okay, now you look at it my gosh, they're so many freeways and concrete areas here now it's unbelievable. You know it has changed a lot. I would say the things that I've seen Houston change though, not only the population and all the tall buildings and we're on the map now, it's the way people work together. Diversity and I'm- and I'm sure you've heard of this, it is so diverse uh I'm seeing a very good mixture and how we've handled people here of all different nationalities and I hope that that it will continue to be that way. Houston is the city that is very friendly, the hospitality here is wonderful.

Okay, and I would say this to the young people, you can almost become what you want to become and what you want to be if you work hard. And being honest, having good values and working hard in whatever you do, that you can be successful. And successful to me doesn't mean that everybody has to go to college. I encourage people to but not everybody has to go to college. They can go to a voc- vocational school and be the best mechanic there is, or do whatever they like to do. So even though I- my background is education and I think education is

very important, I mean I'm not one of these that feel like I brown nose people or say bad thing if they don't go to college. But I think whatever you do you should be happy and be successful and be doing the best that you can do, and the best that you can be.

SD: Um you mentioned earlier that you always felt like you were a minority, in your work life or your personal life did you ever feel discriminated against in any way? Or that there was a glass ceiling?

EH: Okay, uh yes I know that- that there are times that have happened that uh, that- okay let me give you the illustration. One illustration that I remember and I have not been able to forget it is when I was a teacher in the Cypress school district um, it was- they were voting for the teacher of the year for that school. Okay, and my name was up there and there were two- two finalists, another person and myself were finalists. And I heard from the grapevine and people- some people in the offices that Elsie you have more votes, okay, then they brought this person- another person in- and- and another person in- and said well sh- she was nominated too, and this was after the first voting. And so then the principal encouraged in her own way to being able to manipulate so this other person got teacher of the year. And so, I mean when I found out all that the only thing I could think of was the fact that I was Chinese. Okay, now that was during the 1970s, okay, and things have changed a lot since then. And it pleases me to see that a lot of Asians are in- in the school business, you know, they're- they're principals now and they're counselors in their different areas. Okay, and I'm glad to see- or I hoped to see that this is the type of thing that's not happening. So I saw a little politics then, which I didn't call it politics, I didn't know the word- there was politics then, it was more maneuvering and- and manipulating. Okay, and so when you ask me if I've ever felt- that- that was a big illustration that I saw that other people felt bad and they came and told me. And so if they had not told me this I wouldn't have known, but then that made me stronger. You know, you become strong through all these little obstacles that happen to you.

Let me go back and tell you something else. This is in elementary school now. When I was in elementary school, when my mother died- my father had died before I was born. So I was born several months after my father died. So my childhood was sad, I didn't mention this earlier. I was very sad as a child. Okay, alright, my father passed away and then my mother passed away when I was about 9. Okay, and this little girl at recess, was a little American girl, "Caucasian," she said, oh you're an orphan now you don't have a mommy and a daddy. I got so mad I smacked her one. And I was a skinny little girl [laughs]. Okay, in those days I was a little skinnier- skinny- skinny girl. So the principal called us to her office and she knew what had happened and that my mother had passed away, and so we were not punished, more so the other little girl was punished rather than myself.

[husband speaking in background] **MH:** Would you ladies like some Dr. Pepper to drink?

EH: Bottle of water? Okay. Would you bring two bottles of water, okay, thank you Meryl Merle.

Okay, alright, so that- that was when strength- you realize how strong you are. Here she's a kinda fat little girl and I swung her one [laughs] and everyone was so surprised as I was saying and the principal was surprised but then knowing what had happened she, you know, she disciplined- talked to the little girl but nothing else happened in fact that here that I was the one that hit her, you know. That- that happened so anyway, so you do what you have to do and I guess even then I was even more of a person than I realized I was, you know. But being the youngest in the family- I was the youngest one in the family so you know how the youngest one is, it's gonna like, okay she's the baby, she'll always be the baby, even when you're 60, 70 years old. So anyways, yeah, mhm.

TH: Wait, uh so who raised you after-...

EH: What?

TH: Who raised you after...

EH: Okay, my sister, remember I told you I came to Houston when I was about 10. So my sister was married to a- a grocery man here in Houston and so they- they- she wanted me to come to Houston because she thought that the life here was a little bit calmer than Los Angeles area. And so then she went and got me and- and brought me back to Houston and that's one thing about I think Asian families and I can speak mba- mostly about Chinese. We always look after our own and so uh I had two other sisters that were not married so then my eldest sister took care of them and the sister here to- uh brought me- brought me to Houston. So, you know, there again it's fate that I'm in Houston and then I end up meet- meeting CC, my first husband, and then much later MerylMerle, you know, so that's- that's really uh, a verreally different story. In fact our story has been published in the Houston Chronicle about the fact that, you know, we found two- two senior citizens in the Houston community here in the Buckingham, you know, fell in love, you know, so they- they thought that was an article about something because this doesn't happen every day, you know, but it's a news item when- when you're,ve found your second love and- and you're at this age and so forth. And- and ours being so different because him- MerylMerle being Caucasian and me being Chinese.

SD: Um growing up who did you look up to, or who were your role models?

EH: Okay, who- who- who were my role models? Let me stop and think who my role models were. Oh I- I- I had- one of my sisters I- I used to think a lot of. She was a designer and she worked for the Roserie (?) bathing suit and designed and- and was a pattern maker for- for Roserie bathing suits, but you probably haven't even heard of Roserie because it's no longer I think in- in- on- there's such a- a company even named that. But anyway I looked up to her because she was so talented and was so good at designing and so forth. And then let me see who else I look- oh, this was not in growing up as a teenager or anything but as a young person. I used to think two women were very outstanding in Houston. And one of them was uh Dr. Fan (?), Dr. Joyce Fan. Um, sShe was a- a professor at the University of Houston and then she went to Houston Baptist. She was a wonderful person and very active at church, and I used to think

what a wonderful, you know person she was, you know, because she helped so many students of- of hers to become doctors. Okay, and there was another person and I- her- her name skip-slipped my mind. She was uh working with the Houston tuberculosis group here and she was so wonderful and- and she was there again at church but then later on she went to another church. But I looked up to them. So it's funny how I looked at these role models that they've done so much for- for different people and I thought that was great and wonderful. But as far as other people I guess I did- I didn't- and it was church related so I mean I got to know them and what they were doing, you know, Joyce Fan was helping the students, you know, go become doctors. And here this other lady be- be- was noted for all her talents and all her work that she did with tuberculosis, you know, and I can't think of her name right- it slipped my mind. Yeah, mmhm.

SD: Uh, you can go ahead.

TH: Uh do you have any memories of World War II or-

EH: World War II?

TH: Yeah.

EH: You know how old I was in World War II? [Laughs] In World War II, I remember- remember hearing Dewey- Dewey (?) didn't get president, but whoever he was running against, was it Truman, anyway I remember that because I was- I- we used to listen to- to the radio broadcast. You know we didn't have television in those days, we didn't have television. We would get next to a- a radio and hear what- what was going on. But I remember the- you know- those- those... [husband MH talking in background] Okay, alright, I don't know who... [laughs] Yeah.

But anyway um what- what were you asking, what- what was your question, I'm sorry.

TH: Just do you have any memories of World War II or any of those like things...

EH: Oh yes. My brother, let me tell you this. I'm glad you brought that up. We had in our family one boy and five girls. Okay, and at that time we didn't know that my brother would not have to go in the service because he was the only son. Okay, my father was dead, okay, I- I didn't know my father. My mother used to always look at his picture and cry, and so my memory of- of childhood is that I have this mother that- that's very sad. She would look at the picture and cry a lot, okay. Alright, then my brother was in the Army. Okay, my brother was found missing in the Philippines and so my mother never knew that he was dead because when the telegram came my two- my two sisters- my two eldest sisters didn't let my mother know because they knew that if she knew she would probably drop dead. Okay, she had asthma. Okay, and she would probably drop dead. And she never told my mother, but when my mother passed away then they came and talked to us younger- younger siblings and told us that our- our brother had died in World War II. So as far as you ask me what my memories were, that's what my memories were of the war. Okay, was the fact that my mother never knew my- my- my brother was- had died. Okay, and- and the fact that he didn't really have to go into the

service, but we didn't know that, no one ever said any- said anything to my eldest sister, who took over the family business and things of- of that tape- type. Anyway, so then now as a grown up I'm learning that he never had to be in- in World War II, but that was- that was- that was a really sorry because of course all that has changed probably the way we were all brought up, you know, and everything. My mother being so sad and then passing away in her 40s. My- my father was in an automobile accident and he passed away in his 40s, and my mother passed away when she was in her 40s. So now that I'm 80, I'm the only one in our family alive, but I- I feel again blessed that- that I'm still here because all my other, you know, sisters and brothers have passed away and my father and mother pa- have passed away when I was so young. That was another reason I think I got tough, [laughs] you know, you- you build these things you don't realize that, you know, that you- you become this strong. But let me tell you this too, when I came to Houston at 10, people knew that my mother and dad had- were both dead, that's why I came to live with my sister, okay. I didn't want anyone feel- feeling sorry for me, I always felt this way, I don't want people feeling sorry for me. So I always had a big front, and even though I'd be aching inside and you know crying, I didn't want them to be crying and feeling sorry for me. And you know how these old- or y'all maybe your parents aren't that old- old-timey- but you know how these old Chinese people always say- old Chinese people, oh Elsie we feel so sorry for her blah blah blah. I didn't want any of that to happen. So I was- I guess I got tough pretty quick. [laughs] Mhm.

SD: So what year did your parents come to America?

EH: Okay they came to America, that was way before I was born.

SD: Right.

EH: So that had to be- I was born in 1937- that- that had to be probably i- in the 20s- 1920s. [MH talks on the phone] Bbecause I'm the youngest, you know, so that- that have to be about the 1920s and I don't know very much about that.

SD: Okay.

EH: I know more about 1920s and that type of stuff 'cause- 'cause my first husband CC was born in 1925, okayk, and CC was a wonderful, wonderful uh person. Um, in fact his background is very interesting because when he- when he- the way he got to America was in- in Hong Kong Ma- uh Macau area, he got the news that- that uh they wanted Chinese interpreters. And so, you know, without thinking too much about it he applied, and sure enough- he was- he had graduated already from high school over there, which high school over there was a big thing, and I understand, you know, Ppoisit, Ppoiching is- I believe is the name of the school Ppoiching (Pui Ching Middle School?). So anyway um he- he- he came to- he- he-he was hired by the Chinese government to be an interpreter for the American government. Okay, and so his life is very interesting too, the way he came over and then he- once he was over here he stayed in here and- and applied for um citizenship- well not citizenship so much, but the green card as a student. So when he was going to UT he was not a citizen, but that's where he graduated was

University of Texas. And then he came to Houston to work and that's how I met him because when he came to Houston to work he- he attended the Chinese Baptist Church and I met him there at the Chinese Baptist Church. I was only 16, but at those days at I was 16 I was an old lady already, okay. But he- he- I was very much attracted to him and he was attracted to me I guess, but I had him all picked out for my sister in California. And I called my sister long distance and said I have somebody for you. And then he so happened to go to California for business and so he never met my sister but he talked to her on the telephone and said I've got to talk to you and let you know I've been trying to get in touch with you, or else Elsie will be mad, or- if I haven't spoken to you. So anyway, they never got together, and so then, I don't know, what- whatever love maker (?) cupid out there, whatever, the two of us got attracted to each other. So I married CC and CC was 12 years older than I was. And that was 60 years60 of- of a wonderful marriage and life and so that- that- that's- that was my encounter (?) but yeah he had a very uh interesting life coming over as- as an interpreter for the American uh government. Mhm.

SD: Do you have any more questions?

TH: Um, well, they're like kinda disorganized but um, what were your favorite movies and books and actors when you were younger?

EH: Okay, younger I liked um the- the one with the- the what was the name of that- the one with Margaret O'Brian and about all the sisters, what was the name of that one? I can't even think of the name of- name of that- the- maybe it'll come to- Little Women. When I was younger Little Women was my favorite. Okay, June Allison was in it uh, you know, uh and uh Margaret O'Brian and of course these people are either dead or else they're- they're pretty old, you know. So when I was a little girl Little Women was- was my favorite. But now as- as an adult my favorite is uh Gone with the Wind, My Fair Lady, Sound of Music and probably I could go on for a few others, but anyway, 'cause I like movies but those were the ones that are classical that I still like, those- those particular movies. 'Cause you can learn a lot, I mean Gone with the Wind, you can learn a lot, you know, from- the different- the ways and so forth, talking about women, I thought Little Wthe woman was wonderful- the way she stuck to things, [laughs] but then- but then her hu- you know, it-it ended up where she didn't have him but then you assume that they might eventually get together. Do you all know what movie I'm talking about? Gone with the Wind.

TH: I've- I've read the book butwhen I was little...

EH: Okay, you read the book.

TH: But I don't remember it though.

EH: Okay, right, okay. There's a lot you can learn from that, just like My Fair Lady. You know, I- I love that because of- of- of the whole story and how she became and- and all that. You know someone that was born in the lower echelon and – and- and in London area and become such a

wonderful person and- and how she was made later on in the end, you know, she was that- that's such a successful story, you know, too so anyway, yeah, but I've always liked movies.

TH: And what was your dream when you were a kid?

EH: What?

TH: What was your dream?

EH:? What was my dream?

TH: Yeah, as a kid.

EH: Okay, y'all are gonna be really surprised. When I was a little girl, let me tell you this. I'm sorry I keep going back and forth. But this is the way that- that I'm thinking. When I was a little girl I wish I could take ballet dancing and tap dancing. But let me tell old- you how old-fashioned things were in those days. My sis- eldest sister said, oh your legs will be showing if you're taking ballet. Yyou shouldn't take dancing. So as a little girl I wanted to, you know, take ballet and tap dance. Never did take ballet and tap dance. Okay, so anyway you- you- you- you can see how things have changed. [laughs] You can- in fact you know you didn't wear shorts, you know, you didn't wear your legs showing. I mean it was a whole lot of stuff like that- that you don't, you know, you- you- you- you didn't do then and you do now and it's very different. Mhm.

And then going back to what I was telling you earlier about wanting to be a teacher. Uh I would used to get, you know-, auh long time ago apples used to come in a wooden crate, way before your time. Oranges came in a crate that had a- a center section and then it had two sides. I used to have those in the back yard and playing and uh I would be a teacher. So way back then- oh wait let me say this to you 'causeus you asked a question earlier that I didn't really answer I guess at that time. What was- it was kind of different. The thing that was very different about our family is that most of the families that had grocery stores, the people lived in the back of the grocery store. Okay, and eventually they might've built a house. Well when I was a little girl in TausanTucson, Arizona, I can still remember the address was 227, we had a house and so my- my- my sister and probably my father, whom I didn't know, probably saw to it that- that eventually we would have a house because I never lived behind the store. Now my eldest sisters uh and brother might have, but I never did live behind the store, we always had a house. Mmhm, so that was something different too, about a lot of the families.

SD: Uh, what do you do for fun?

EH: What do I do for fun? Okay, I do a lot of things. Right now I'm playing on the little cell phone that has computer games. I play computer games. But anyway, I- I- I enjoy going to the theatre, in fact this coming Saturday we have tickets to go to uh Lion King. I've seen that twice but MerylMerle had not seen it, so I- I want him to see it. So we're going to the Lion King, you know, this coming Saturday, July the 1st. Um I like to play mahjong and I like playing with- with my

Chinese friends- girlfriends- mahjong. Uh I mentioned I like going to the theatre of different types. Plays and so forth. Right now I- I enjoy uh being at home and enjoy being at home- being retired. Like I said I've been working all on my life, and- and even now I do some volunteer work. And – and oh which I'll bring into in just a few minutes' time- what been exciting too, there (?). Um I still stay involved. Recently about a year and a half or, two years ago, right about a year and a half, two years ago, I was appointed with what they call special commissioner. And uh this is for Harris County. And so when a case comes up where a company, let's say, is suing the city um then we're called- the special commissioners are- are called to- to do um- this- and this is- this is before the person - would ever- the case would ever go to court. So we- we hear the situation and then we decide on our- the three commissioners- there's three of us, always use three commissioners there, so the three of us will decide on, after it's been presented, if we agree or disagree with- with what's being done and then there's- there's always a monetary um amount brought in. And then we would put down the monetary uh- uham-am- amount we think the party should be rewarded. So that's been very interesting. Uh this is just in my adult life now, you know, like when I was like 78, 79 when that I got appointed to this.

And then let me go back to this again. Whatever you do in the past, it helps you in the future. Because President Bush when he was governor appointed me to be as a public member for the State Bar of Texas. And that was another interesting experience I had. You hear so many jokes in those days, and even now probably, about lawyers, well I got to see and know many, many lawyers and they were wonderful. Of course those were probably the cream of the crop too. But they were on the board and then they- the- the board always had three non-members, public members, so that we could get feedback as- as to how we think and feel about different issues. Okay, so that was a wonderful experience. I was also, way back twhen, as you can tell by my resume, that I was a principal- I was president for this principal association here in the local area, which is called region four. Okay, when I say region four, there's different regions and these school districts belong to different certain regions. So for region four, which is all the Houston area and Cypress Fairbanks, Katy, Spring Branch, Alief(?), uh all this west and southwest part mainly, uh and Humble rather, and Humble, Spring, all of this belonged to what they call region four. And I was president of that association. So see what I was tell you about training you (?) and standing up for yourself and speaking and taking speech and that in high school, that all helped me to become a leader. Uh, even as my principal life, and I was the only Chinese, so you see- you see what I'm saying- all these others are Caucasians, Hispanics, or blacks, and then at that time I was the only Chinese. And then becoming principal- I- I mean, pre- president of the association was- was something. You know, and then I got to go of course to Austin and all the various meetings and so forth- so forth. So every one of your experience that you- you have encounters with, take that as a learning experience to- to help you become a better person and a better leader in your community.

TH: And I'm just curious since you had the beauty salon, um what were your attitudes towards beauty back then and how does it compare to today's?

EH: What- what was that again?

TH: Umh what were your attitudes towards beauty, um-

EH: To beauty?

TH: Yeah and-

EH: My attitude towards beauty, what?

TH: You know, like what was considered beautiful?

EH: Oh what are my attitudes? Ok, let me tell- okay you brought another good question. Let me tell you what. I think young people, especially ladies, sorry ladies, should make up themselves a little bit better. Okay, when you are graduating from high school and you're going to college and you interview for a job later on, you better look a little more like an adult and be groomed. Okay, I think they need to work on their hair, I think they need to work on makeup, and the way they dress. Okay, and I've done some talks about successful dressing and so forth with Asian groups. Okay, they look too much like- like they're too young- already we're blessed by looking young when we- we get to a certain age right now right. ? Okay, and- and- and Asian have that tendency to look young, but they don't know how to put themselves together well enough. And my attitude- you're asking me a question I'll be very honest and frank with you. They need to wear their hair a certain style, at least be- becoming of them, but don't look like a teenage, you know the teenage kid out there. You're an adult, if you work for a bank, uh if you work in any kind of business, you need to look the part, I'm sorry ladies. Dress makes a difference, and men the same thing. Men, you've gotta get a decent haircut, you gotta smell right and smell good, you gotta wear your coordinated clothes, wear a suits or a sports jacket, or something, coordinate yourself. You know, I hate to use this illustration, you know Steve Harvey? On- on...

SD: The Price is Right?

EH: What's the name of that show- you know those shows-

SD: Family Feud.

EH: You know the show that he had. You know what I heard recently? I heard that his success of dressing and then becoming what he is in so many different programs now- he's- he's a host. It's because of the way he's dressed. And dress makes a big difference. Men need to look good, women need to look good. Okay, and I'm telling you, just because the fashion is short dresses, you don't go for an interview with short, short dresses and you're having to constantly work with your legs so that your panties are not showing, this is crazy! Wear something that you look decent. If you do wear certain- put your legs a certain way so that you don't see everything- you know, hallelujah whatcha got there? That type of thing. Okay, I mean you need- and I mean this seriously- and makeup. Put on some makeup ladies, put on some eyeshadow if you need a little bit of eyeshadow, now overdo it now, put on some lipstick so you look like you're ready to carry and have a decent job. Okay, alright, so talking about beauty and dress, you know, I'm- I'm very

much on- on that thing. It's just the same thing that goes along with your home and your office, okay. Ladies when you all have an office make it look nice, don't not clutter ited all up, make it look half way decent, okay. And the same with- talking about dressing clothes, I mean, I'm- I'm real strong on that, I think that it's very important that people dress nicely.

Something I hate to see, and I'm tell you this- probably have people that hear me say this, they're gonna be, ahh Elsie you're old fashioned. In churches I don't like to see the trend that's going on and the way they're dressed. When I go to an opera or when I go to a play downtown at the Hobby Center or the Wary (Wortham?) whatever- whatever I'm going out there, ballet or whatever. I see dresses so casual. There's a certain thing about dress and. Let's- and I'll talk about this at schools too. If you- if you- if you're dressed sloppy you don't- you can't present yourself as well, and so for kids in school too I think they need to look decent. You know, none of this, you know, hair that's hanging down here in men, and- and colored hair, purple, black, blue, all mixed up and yellow and- and all this stuff. For special fun things yes, I don't have any problems with that, but for everyday I'm- I'm old fashioned I guess, I think that they're- they're overboard bored when they do all this stuff with their hair and- and clothes and so forth.

And ladies let me tell you, and I've told grown ladies this before, grown ladies., Ladies, you might have beautiful boobs but you don't need to show this. It bothers me when I see someone in a professional atmosphere trying to look like they just went to the bar. Okay, and I had to say something to a couple of people, especially when I was at the Asian Chamber of Commerce. I would never embarrass them, okay, in front of anybody. But when the young girls look the way they do I would- I would- I would compliment them when they had a suit on and looked nice. I'd said, oh you look so nice today, I really like that outfit on you. Because I was trying to encourage them to wear that type of clothes more than they- what they were wearing. Okay, because you don't need to impress your boss that way. And if that's the only way a boss or the man, I hate to say this ladies, that men look at you, then you don't want 'em. Okay, because if they look at you that way, they're probably looking at a lot of other ladies a certain way. But it's not necessary to come on that way because let me back up and say this. Some of the ladies at the Asian Chamber of Commerce said to me, Elsie you are so well respected and the men, you know, really like you and the board and all that, how do you do it? I said well be yourself and be professional. I said when it comes to things like this you have to be very professional. You're talking (?) to people and you're presenting yourself. And I said but if you come on looking sometimes the way people look, I said, the men are not going to respect you. And, you know, and- you- and what I think y- you should always come out profession- look professional where you're in that professional area. Now I don't mean you have to look- wear a suit all the time, you can wear dresses, but you have to see the way you're dressing, what you're showing and not showing. Okay, alright so did I hit you know enough on you on beauty?

[all laugh][laughs]

TH: Yes.

EH: Okay, wWhat other things do you want to know? If you ask me I'll tell you.

TH: Uhm what was your favorite decade?

EH: My favorite what?

TH: Decade.

EH: What was my favorite decade? Now. [laughs] I'm retired, I can do what I wanna do, I can go on a cruise, I can do as much as I wanna do and do what I wanna do, yeah. I- I- I'm enjoying my life uh I enjoyed my life every- every- every part. I enjoyed my life tremendously as a principal and being able to help teachers become better teachers. Okay, and being a role model, especially for- for the teachers and for the students. Uh so I enjoyed that. I enjoyed very much my activity with the Asian Chamber of Commerce when I was president, okay. And it- it thrilled me when I was able to help them build, you know, financially and otherwise. And people weren't in- in the Houston community didn't know much about the Asian Chamber and I- I'm- I'm glad that I was able to help out in and putting them on the map so to speak. Okay, so every phase of my life, and I'm enjoying it here now, I'm enjoying the people- the you know, the residents here, I'm enjoying teaching them mahjong. And not only do I teach them mahjong, I also bring in the culture, the Chinese culture. So we have two parties a year and I always do something that's Chinese-y. Um the last party we had I gave each of the- of- each of the mahjong players a- a little Buddha. Now I'm not- uh, that's- Buddhism is not my religion, but Buddha's are cute so then I give them that. The year of the horse I gave little horses that are on that red taping-tassel. The- the year of the monkey- all these different things I give, you know, that- that particular uh animal, you know, for the lunar calendar. And I always bring something uh Chinese into our, you know, into our- our game of some sort. So that they learn about the Chinese culture. [speaking to her husbandMH] What's all this about?

MH: E-Elmer called.

EH: Oh, okay. Oh wWas she on the phone- oh they're okay alright.

Alright. So anyway, what else, what other question do y'all have?

TH: Oh and that also reminds me, umh did you grow up Christian or...?

EH: Yes, okay, okay.

TH: Were your parents religious?...

EH: Okay, I taught Sunday school, like I told you, when I was 13. When I was younger in- ins Tucson and both in California I- I went to uh churches with my girlfriends. Like I went to the Presbyterian church and then in high school I- I always wenthen each summer from Houston to go to their retreats. And so I got to know, you know, a- a- a lot of the Chinese uh friends there at the Presbyterian church in Los Angeles. Okay, and then yes, I grew up as a

Christian and still I'm- I'm- I'm a Christian but I don't go to church uh on Sundays like I used to go, you know, younger, when I was younger. Um for one reason or another, whatever you know, but yes. And I still do a lot of praying, meditation to, you know, especially when there's a need- a special need, you know, uh I- I do that. Um so I- I know we're skipping around, I don't- I hope the other people you interview are probably this bad too. [laughs]

SD: It's perfect. Um what would you consider your greatest accomplishment?

EH: My greatest accomplishment I have to say was bringing up my two kids, and y'all asked me something earlier but I forgot to tell you this. The thing that helped me go through school and get my bachelors and master's degree and do the things I- I- I were able to do was because I had the corporation of my- my two children and- and my husband. If CC didn't help me in the evening, do what he did with the kids, and- and my kids did not behave the way they did, I would not have been able to accomplish as much as I have been able to accomplish. Okay, and then, what was your question again?

SD: Your greatest accomplishment.

EH: My greatest accomplishment. My greatest accom- accomplishment was the fact that here was a Chinese woman that became a principal. Okay, that was one of them. And then not being in the business world, but being asked to be the president of the Asian Chamber of Commerce. You know, because there's- there's a lot of business that goes on with that. Okay, and then now here and being retired and being able to be one of the leaders in Houston. I never realized that I was considered a leader until much later. And yes, because if you're an influence with other people you are a leader. And I did a TVtv show with international uh over there Wei Lee (?) I- I was on television and we did a show- a- a gentleman and myself did a show, week- week- let's see, week- we did it monthly and it was broadcast, um- and it was wonderful that people, Chinese people at home, the older Chinese enjoyed that so much. It was all in English because I don't speak that much Chinese, I wish I did but I don't speak- I don't speak Mandarin, I can't read Chinese, you know, and all that, 'causeus I was born and raised and never went to Chinese school. So um I- I was so delighted that they told me- when they- oh we see you on television it's wonderful. Because, you know, you're Chinese and- and- and you're just speaking in English and- and we know who you are so- so that was- that was good and successful during the time I was doing it. So each of my encounters that I felt were my favorite time, I mean I- I enjoyed, like I mentioned, being a principal of a school, being uh president of the Asian Chamber of Commerce, being retired and now doing what I want to do and not doing what I don't want to do, you know, and just being- being one of the leaders in the community.

SD: Do you have anything else?

TH: Uh well if you have any other stories or memories that stand out in your life that you want to tell...

EH: Well the thing I'd like to- to encourage young people, be sure that you register and you vote because we've got that privilege of being able to vote for, you know, all the politicians that we can vote and want. Uh like the- the mayor of the city, the governor for the state, and the president of the United States. Okay, so no matter whether, you know, you're a Democrat or a Republican, that that moment- take that time to know, you know who's running for what and what's going on and to vote 'cause we have that privilege. Okay, and the last thing I guess I would like to say too is always remember who you represent and- and be successful and the fact that you do the very best you can and do the very best you can for other people as well. Okay, 'cause you never know when you um can help somebody. It's just like the other day, I was uh playing uh cards with two ladies and they- they- they asked me if I was, you know, if I'd be able to play cards with them. And we did and that brought joy to me that I was able to- to help these two ladies who are much older, they're in their 90s. Okay, and when they think of me being 80 they think of me being young, right, okay. But helping these two ladies and it got them out of their apartment and we had a good time playing cards. And just doing different things, it's amazing how much you can do without realizing that you're doing it, you know what I mean. Yeah, mmhm so.

SD: Thank you so much for talking with us.

EH: What? Okay.

SD: Thank you so much.

EH: Well I hope you enjoyed it, I know each- you know each of the interviews are very different because everybody's different, right. But hopefully you know, that out of this interview somebody will gain something. Thank you.

SD: It was so much fun for us, thank you.

TH: Thank you.

EH: Thank you.

[01:16:29] Interview Ends