

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

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Interviewee: Mary Ann Gee Young  
Interviewers: Xingyi Li, Tian-tian He  
Date/ Time of Interview: October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017  
Transcribed by: Xingyi Li, Tian-tian He  
Audio track time: 01:40:51

Background:

Mary Ann Gee Young was born in Lake Village, Arkansas in 1936 and was the seventh in the Gee family's twelve children. The family moved to Houston, Texas in 1941 when she was five years old partly because of discrimination against Asian in Arkansas and opened their grocery store. She helped her family with the grocery store business since a young age. Mary Ann graduated from college and since then has been working as social worker. She worked at the Traveler's Aid Society at Downtown Greyhound Station after graduation and then moved to Hawaii to pursue her master degree in the University of Hawaii. After marriage, she settled in Hawaii and has been living there since then.

Setting

The interview was conducted in a video studio in Fondren Library at Rice University, on October 2nd 2017. Mary Ann's niece, Susan Gee, was listening to the interview and can occasionally be heard in the background. Mary Ann discusses her upbringing in Arkansas and Houston, working in the family grocery store, her family's relationship with the black community, her education and social work career, meeting her husband and starting a family, and the unique race relations in Hawaii.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

MY	Mary Ann Gee Young
XL	Xingyi Li
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, etc.)

[00:01:34]

XL: Today is October 2nd, 2017. This is Xingyi Li

TH: And this is Tian-tian He.

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

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XL: We are interviewing Mary Ann Gee for Houston Asian American Archive. So, can you tell me when and where were you born?

MY: I was born in Lake Village, Arkansas. January 13th, 1936.

XL: So can you describe your hometown in Arkansas? What is it like in neighborhood and what type of people live there?

MY: I left Arkansas when I was five years old. So I really have no recollection of anything. But I have seen picture and we had a grocery store. It's typical of the grocery stores that we're in the Mississippi and Arkansas area where they had a grocery store and at the back of the store, the family lived there. And I don't remember anything about Arkansas because I left there so young. But I have read a book called *Chopsticks* in Atlanta Delta or something and have a better idea of how they lived but I don't remember it. I came from a family of twelve so my older brother and sister remember but we never talk about it and they are gone, they are all gone.

TH: So which sibling were you?

MY: I'm number seven. There were five girls and seven boys. So I am seven and that's pretty far down.

XL: Okay, can you describe your parents? What kind of work did they do and where are they from?

MY: They were from Hoiping and they spoke Cantonese. My father was single when he was in Arkansas at first and he went back to marry my mother. And I'm not sure what day and year it was, but there is some question about the store: did he come there to work with another Gee? Because he was called Yum Gee and my father's name is Y-U-M, so there is no one around that I could ask, was there Gee family that had this store first and they notified my father and he came here? I don't know. Those are all questions that had not been answered but before my father went back to China, and learned this from his immigration paper. He had to be certified as being a merchant that was at the time of Chinese Exclusion Act was in 1882 it was passed. And so people could not enter the United States unless they were merchants or wives are merchants I think. Before he went back, he knew that he had to be certified but he had to be certified by white, white man. Could not have another Chinese say that he had a grocery store. So, he made sure that was done before he left and he went back to the village, married my mother and then he came back to that store. They both worked in the grocery store, my older brothers and sisters probably helped in the store. But I was very small so I don't remember anything.

XL: Do you remember when and why did your father immigrant from China to U.S.?

MY: Uh. This is something else that we didn't ask our father right? But I think he came to California with his uncle. He is a Gee. This is our correct name. He worked out there as a dish washer and get all kinds of job. He was only like fifteen. And if I had all those papers from immigration I can tell you when he came to Arkansas, we don't know why he came unless

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

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someone in the village said this is a good place, ask you to come: this is really easy to get a store and have your own business and work in the store. But he did stop first in California and how long he stayed there we are not sure.

XL: Okay. Did your parents speak English or only Cantonese?

[00:06:56]

MY: My father spoke some English, my mother very little. But since we were further down the line, we didn't speak much English, I mean much Chinese. My older brother and sister could speak Chinese. But we spoke English. Our playmates I guess must've been English. And of course our store was primarily, our customers were black. In Arkansas, the Chinese were kind of in-between. They were not part of the white group and they were not part of the black group. And the white grocers didn't really want to service black. Remember they thought they were, you know, above them and they used black as slaves. So the Chinese were smart enough to come in and serve that niche. They didn't mind servicing the black so most of the Chinese stores were in the black area.

TH: Can you give some more examples of how Chinese were in between whites and blacks?

MY: Oh this is back in Arkansas which I know nothing about. And the only thing I know is from reading.

XL: Reading the book?

MY: Uh huh and talking to Chinese who came later. See I wasn't even in school when I was in Arkansas. Four years old, how much did you know? [laugh] But through talking to someone later on and through reading I realize things like the Chinese in Mississippi could not go to school with the whites, they had to go to school with the blacks. In Arkansas, they could go to school with the whites. We came to Houston in 1941 I believe and the reason we came was because...I originally thought is because we had an uncle who was opening a Chinese restaurant here and he sent out to people from the village that he needed workers and I thought that was the reason my father came. Well that may have been one of the reasons but only in 2013, which was like only four years ago did we learned from a friend that he played with that we came because my sister, my older sister was gonna be valedictorian of her senior class and they said she couldn't be because she was Chinese. And in that book I read, this was not an unusual thing. A lot of the ones who could be valedictorian could not be. But it's strange that no one in our family told us this. [laugh] And it wasn't until my older brother passed away and Susan had a business transaction with this gentleman and it was his father that had been my brother's best friend when he was twelve years old. So I tell Susan that you might want to interview him because he knew about what was going on and he's not Chinese, he's Caucasian. [laugh]

TH: So your family didn't really talk about immigrating or like their past back in China?

MY: Not really, not really. I don't know if my older brothers and sisters ever ask my father about this. You know there were twelve children in the family and we just we were all working in the

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**Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

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store. And didn't ever talk about it, which may have been the case with a lot of Chinese family say that time.

TH: Do you have any idea why?

[00:11:11]

MY: Um maybe they just wanted to assimilate? Maybe they didn't think it is that important they were here? And how they got here weren't that important, which is the case for a lot of immigrant groups. It's not until when they were older when they are even senior citizens they started thinking about "Well, how did we get here?" And by then my father and mother were gone when I started being interested in finding out what they did.

XL: So you moved to Houston when you are five?

MY: Um-huh.

XL: So do you remember how did you get there? Why did you choose Houston?

MY: I remember we were on a train [laugh]. First time I've ever rode a train. And I remember always have to go to my mother to get food and snacks so she had this big basket of food. That's all I remember. [laugh] Five years old, that was big then.

XL: Okay so let's move to your family. You said you have eleven siblings or ten?

MY: Eleven siblings. We were a dozen.

XL: Okay. So what was it like growing up in a huge family?

MY: Well, we have playmates. [laugh] And there were always older ones to tell you what to do, but they were the one who helped my parents in the business transactions because they can speak English. Um, I am trying to think, there were three boys and then a sister just older than me. And then after that there were three boys then a sister and a brother. I was actually closer to my brothers but only because I was a tomboy. [laugh] So I played games with them and so I was not as close to my sister who was just a year and a half older than me. I was a tomboy so I played baseball, basketball, whatever with them.

TH: What would the girls do?

MY: Um. The girls, I can't even remember what they do. We did always play house in the yard. [laugh] I remember we would start out at one side that was shady and when the sun moves we would move over. And that's our family's boys and girls play together. We made things like mud pots and [laugh] acted like we were cooking. We didn't have many toys and we played with a lot of cardboard boxes and cans and bottles that we had in the store. So we may do with what we had. We ate well because we got a grocery store. But as far as toys we didn't have many. Now we lived in the black area when we came here. We had grocery stores and we didn't live in the

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

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back of the store. We lived in a house that was attached to the store. So it was similar to what they had known in Arkansas. And um...my father I know extended credit to a lot of the customers and you know, they would bring in their chick and they might not pay for everything, pay the whole debt, but he would allow them to charge again.

XL: Do you need to take care of your siblings?

MY: Um. We did have to take care of them. I remember taking care of the two youngest. Two of them were born here in Houston and my older brothers and sisters probably took care of us. But you know, parents were working in the store, but we were right there next door to the store, so it wasn't like they were away, but we did have to take care of them. We also work in the store. I remember at age six, I could check out groceries, you know, just a few items. And I could make change at the age six, but that was true of many of the Chinese because they grew up knowing about money and you learned how to make change at a very early age. And we thought nothing of it. We also had to...if we had a sale, if we had five pounds of potatoes on sale, we had to learn how to weight and package five pounds of potatoes. I don't know if we did rice. I can't remember all that. But one thing I do remember is that we had to package spices, you know like chili peppers and bay leaves and all of that. And the job we hated was packaging black pepper because we would sneeze [laugh]. So after you package so many, you sneeze and turn your head because you were sneezing. But all of us worked in the store, we would have to sweep up at night, we would have to stock the shells, we would, you know, have to put soda in the refrigerators. So we all worked in the store, so that's what my first job was, being a cashier in the grocery stores. [laugh]

XL: So that's when you were eight?

MY: I thought I was fifteen but you know, I could have been as young as thirteen. It was probably illegal to hire me.

TH: Did you get paid?

MY: Yeah. We didn't get paid in our family store. But I went out to work and I got paid. I would give the money to my mother. Didn't think about keeping it, I was so young.

XL: So you help support the family?

[00:17:35]

MY: Yeah so I remember definitely giving her the money and for some reason 35 dollars a week stays with me but that may have been when I was older. I don't remember what I made when I first went out to work. But summers in high school and even from college, I always worked in the Chinese grocery store in the summer. I didn't go out. I did go out one time trying to get an office job in one of the companies downtown but they were not paying as much. So I just went back to working in the grocery store.

XL: So what were your family's circumstances? Do you remember how much did they earn?

MY: Um...we were not middle class by any means I think. We were probably a little below but we didn't know it. And we always had more than enough to eat because of the grocery stores but we never went on vacations. I don't know if we ever went to movies when we were little. But my father was very generous and he would help out the families. And I have a cousin who worked for a meat company and he said whenever I could come to take an order when I got a car, you father would have put in the car a bag of rice and canned goods and items that we would use. So even though we might not have had much, he still shared. And we had a big yard and a big garden, my mother I assume brought seeds from China so we had Dong Gua, we had winter melons, we had long beans, we had Ong Choy, we had all of those and people always came over to get it because we were one of the few families that had a big garden but mom and dad would never accept money, we just gave it away. And I remember distinctively that most time they would bring something and it was usually a big box of donuts [laugh]. Maybe it was Shipley donuts, I don't know what kind they were but I remember they thought they should bring something because we wouldn't let them pay and it was Shipley donuts or some kind of donuts.

TH: So would that be the only source of Chinese vegetable in the town?

MY: Yeah, yeah. Probably. At least fresh. There might have dehydrated winter melon and dehydrated squash and it would have to come from San Francisco. And so I don't think they sold. I don't even know that they had a Chinese grocery store when we first came. But this is probably the source of fresh Chinese vegetables. I remember when beans were growing wild, we had beans every single day. [laugh] And then after than when I have to go to Alabama which I have those beans again but my mother cooked a lot of beans with meat. And maybe more beans than meat but we were well fed. We didn't know that we didn't have much money. We only have one truck and that was sufficient for all twelve of us but I don't think we've ever ate out. And so we never went out to eat. This means for all of us to be in the truck at one time.

[00:21:48]

TH: So would your family usually cook Chinese food?

MY: Yes, but my mother learned from the black people in the neighborhood, she learned to make sweet potato pie and she would make like half a dozen at the time. And I remember the sweet potato pie because I really liked it. She learned to cook chitlins and hog maw the way they fixed it. And so we were learning to eat the black food, I guess they would call I guess the black soul food because the black people would teach her how to fix it. So our I guess her repertoire of recipes was increased but we ate largely Chinese food. And my father was a cook by professional I think. He came and he cooked in a restaurant that my cousin or my uncle owned. But I don't remember, they didn't bake. And so when we got the...my mother learned to make sweet potato pies, that was really something. [laugh]

TH: Did your family have a really good relationship with the black people?

MY: Yeah. I don't remember playing that much with the black children but my brothers played basketball and baseball in the yard and the black people would come in the yard and play with

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

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them. Maybe the children, the girls didn't come that much. But um we had a really good relationship with them. We did not have the problem that the whites really look down on us like they did maybe in the Mississippi delta area. After reading the book, I thought that boy, I'm glad that my parents moved us to Houston because we didn't face that much discrimination. There was discrimination. There were areas that they Chinese could not buy home in. Maybe they couldn't get certain jobs or they couldn't get promotions because they were Asians. Because then they would be over the whites and the whites maybe wouldn't like that. I don't really feel that I faced that much discrimination when I was growing up. We did go to a Chinese church, but the Chinese church had been started by white people and we met in the First Baptist Church in Houston. And the workers sometimes were from that church, my sisters, my oldest sister became the first superintendent, I think this is the term they use at the time, we didn't necessarily have worship service as much as just having Sunday school classes. She and my sisters had attended the Baptist Church back in Arkansas. And when they were gonna move to Houston, they were given the name of, I remember it was, Mrs. Whittemore by the time she was the pastor of South Main Baptist Church. And I didn't know how they got today but I learned, I'm trying to think when it was, it must have been in the 1980s. My children in Hawaii were going to a Baptist high school and we had supportive in the Mainland who were in the Baptist churches and this gentleman, when he found out that I was from Lake Village, I had been born there, he said "Oh my uncle was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Lake Village.", which was where my sisters had attended but he said but he was there many years ago but his children were still in there and they have been given the name to my sister to look up and find the church and Mrs. Whittemore were the daughter of the pastor of the Lake Village Church. But I found out all of these things through the years and they come from so many different sources that I would have never anticipate learning about it. But there are still some questions that I haven't gotten answered. [laugh]

XL: When did you realize that "Oh, there is discrimination going on in your life"?

MY: I think when we are seeing more family move from Arkansas and Mississippi and we would hear the stories that they are not able to go to school. I feel like we could've go to church here with the whites and then accept it but our parents wanted us to be with Chinese and so they sent us to Chinese Sunday school. Also at that time, this is right after World War II started and all the missionaries in China had to leave and many still live in Hawaii. I know about that. Some though came to the Chinese churches. And there was a Chinese missionary named Pearl Johnson who could speak fluent Cantonese and she would catch the bus to our grocery store and I remember there were three Chinese family in that area and the children in their family would walk over to our house and she would have like a vacation bible school, she teaches us, you know, Bible lessons and we learned songs. I don't remember doing any crass and I don't even remember how often she came, but it sticks in my mind that she would catch the bus and come to the black neighborhood by herself and teaches us. So our lives were really revolved around the church because my sisters were involved and my brother were involved and all of us went to church, except our parents because they opened the grocery store on Sunday and run the grocery store. My brother of course by the end could drive, so we pile into the truck and go and sat on soda cases in the back. There were only two front seats. And we would sit in the back and we complained this: "so and so got to sit in the front than I did" [laugh] But we survived.

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

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TH: So um, were your parents Christian?

MY: They became Christian later but at that time, they were not. I think they were influenced by the fact that my older sister went to church in Arkansas. The whites wanted to Christianize the Chinese so they reached out to the Chinese and my parents let them go. And then when we came here, our first contact outside of my uncles and cousins at the restaurant were the West Norton family and he told us about the Chinese church.

TH: How did all the kids become Christians?

MY: In the Baptist Church you have to make a decision to um become a Christian. It's not like other church where you were baptized, you have to know. We went to Sunday school so we learned stories of the Jesus and how he died for us. I think all of us were baptized and joined the Baptist Church.

[00:30:36]

XL: Okay, so what kind of activity did your family do together?

MY: We celebrated all the American holidays. We never, I don't ever remember them celebrating New Years, Chinese New Years.

XL: Do you know why?

MY: I don't know. I never knew but we celebrated all the American holidays growing up. But we worked! The store was opened on Thanksgiving, the store was opened on Christmas. And my mother learned to cook turkey, well actually my father roasted the turkey and our family was big but we always have people to come over to eat with us. And there was always enough for everybody and even my brothers'...I remember my brothers' friends who were white would come over and eat Thanksgiving dinner with us because they thought my father's turkey was the best. And it had the Chinese flavor because he used Chinese seasonings. And my mother was good but not as good as my father. [laugh]

XL: Did you guys celebrate birthdays?

MY: Yes but I don't really remember really having a birthday party but we celebrated birthdays among ourselves. Remember we have enough people come in because our family was so big. [laugh]

XL: So did you remember what's the living conditions of your neighbors?

MY: Typical black I guess. There were some really nice home and then some that were shacks and the street were not paint so when it rained, it was muddy. We delivered most of the blacks that not have cars so when they came to buy their weekly groceries, we delivered it to their house and when it rained, slippery and everything, you had to drive through all the mud. But there are some of them that lived in nice homes. Um my friend Faye whose family has a store not far from

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

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us. I remember she come over to play with us and she would cut through all the black people's yards and had no fear. And we go visit her, we cut through all the yards and visit each other and we would even stop and talk to the black family because we knew them. They were customers and they watched out for us. I don't think they felt threatened by us and we didn't felt threatened by them. At that time, on the buses, the black had to sit in the back. And sometimes it was full, you know, so they moved up closer to the front but if a white person get on the bus, a black person had to get up and give them the seats. And when that happened to us, we hesitated sitting down because these are our customers that they may move. But the bus driver wouldn't move until we sat down, until they moved and we sat down. So we felt that discrimination against them, but not us. We were considered white, I guess. We were not classified as colored. At that time also there were different drinking fountains and they would marked colored and white. And I remember first time when I saw them I didn't know where I was supposed to drink. And they told me I was supposed to drink at the white fountain. But...

TH: Who told you?

MY: Huh?

TH: Who told you?

MY: I don't even remember who told me. But I know I would drink at either one of them because I wasn't sure where I was supposed to get to drink the water. [laugh]

TH: Can you describe the house that you grew up in?

MY: We had twelve children and every room was a bedroom because we needed all those room and I always set to sleep with my sister and I don't know how many other boys had to be in each room. But we had a kitchen and only one bathroom for all of us but we somehow survived! [laugh] And no one stayed in there too long. You looked back and you think how did you do it but you adjusted it. It wasn't a fancy house but it was suitable and we didn't complain. I know when I started going to my white friends' houses and they had the beautiful living room and diner and everything. I thought I never had that growing up.

TH: How did your parents decorate the house?

MY: I don't think there were any decoration [laugh]. I don't ever remember any decoration except we did have Christmas tree.

XL: Were your grocery store the only one in the black neighborhood around?

MY: No. Right across the street was the one owned by an Italian family. And as I said there were two others owned by Chinese that was walking distance for us when we were little. We probably wouldn't walk there now but uh, there were other grocery stores, yeah.

XL: So how do compete with each others?

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

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MY: I don't know. We just...they had their customers and we had ours. Remember most of the black customers didn't have cars so they walked to the nearest one. So I don't think there was any conflict. I am trying to think, I heard the story from my friend that before her father bought the grocery store that was kind of near us, he came to see us and ask if that was okay because they still had the loyalty to Chinese and didn't want to compete. But my father said it was okay.

XL: Were your family influenced by the World War II?

MY: What was that?

XL: Were your family influenced by the World War II, the war?

MY: The war?

XL: Yes.

MY: Um. None of my family served or old enough to serve in World War II. My oldest brother was only 12 when the war broke out. But there were many Chinese from China who came to Dallas, Texas. I don't remember if they came to Houston for training but I remember that somehow the other found out about our family so they were at our house a lot, eating meals with us and even spending the night. And so we had 14 in the house but I guess we had room for others [laugh]. Um my mother probably worried about her family, still in China. Because at that time she was the only one, no, she had come to the United States. She is the only one in the United States but some of them have gone to Australia. And um maybe into Hong Kong but I don't know about that really.

XL: So did she contact her family in Hoiping?

MY: She was in contact with them. None of us could write in Chinese so we would have to, you know get someone to write for us and she sent money back to them until her family was so big that she didn't have the money to spend but um my aunt in Australia told me the story about how they were always so excited when they got money from my family. And then when it stopped, they couldn't understand why and then they realized that she had so many children so she couldn't send it but then one time she did send some. My grandmother was so excited that she hid the money and then she couldn't remember where she hid it [laugh]. And whether or not she found it I don't know but my aunt told me that it was such a big and exciting time when after so many years my mother was able to send some money. Um, among my bro--my older brother's, uh, things, when he passed away, I noticed that he had some letters, from uh, the cousins in China. And they were try--wanted to come over to the United States. But uh, we never did sponsor any of them to come.

TH: Um, do you remember in World War II, were--did it affect Asians differently, uh--

MG: Did it affect--

TH: Affect Asians differently? Because of the Japanese internment?

MG: Uh, you always, uh, let people know you were Chinese. Because uh, they were fighting with the Americans. But uh, I don't ever remember as a child, being called a--a Jap, or, or, you know, been uh... being uh, having people think that I was Japanese. But we had Japanese friends, who were American. Uh, I remember my oldest brother had friends who were farmers, and uh, we were good friends--they were good friends, because they were Americans more than, than Japanese. And we did have, when we were teenagers, we did have a Chinese--well, at that time I guess they would've called it an Oriental basketball league. And there would be a team made up of, uh, American-born, you know, people who were born in the United States. And then there was a Japanese team I remember, and then there was a Chinese team made up of Chinese from China. And there were sometimes conflicts between the Chinese-born Chinese and the Japanese. But most of the Japanese were American-born, but they still--those from China still uh, I guess had, had bad feelings about Japanese wherever they came from.

XL: So um, let's go to like the time when the civil rights movement happened. Do you remember sensing any change in society's acceptance of like Asian, or women?

MG: I was not here during the civil rights movement. I left... I lived in Hawaii from 1957 to '59. And then came back for a few years, and then I moved permanently in '61. I was a senior when the University of Texas was opened up to blacks, on the undergraduate level. Uh, they had been admitted to the graduate level before that. Uh, but they didn't come in droves, you know, the blacks that--they were not that many, but--and most of them were Baptists, so a few of them came to the Baptist Student Center, and I was active with the Baptist Students' Union. Uh, but most of us, I don't remember anyone--well, one person was not in favor of them joining us, but the others, most of my friends just accepted them. But see, remember there weren't that many. Uh, maybe later years, they had more. The--so, leaving in '61, I missed all of the, the riots and the conflicts. The schools were segregated--were desegregated in those years, and I wasn't here. I was in Hawaii. And in Hawaii it was a totally different picture because those people--in Hawaii, uh, there was more intermarriage, there was you know, more uh--there was diversity, but they lived together more peaceably than on the mainland. So I missed all of the, the turmoil. The civil rights movement I missed.

TH: Uh, so what do you mean by they were--it was more peaceful?

MG: Well, they were all used to going to school together, and they were all used to... being in the same professional groups, uh, the Chinese could e--you know, had--had--gotten, had jobs, and they could get promoted, there wasn't this feeling that since I'm Chinese, I might not be promoted. This was a--Hawaii was already way ahead of the, the mainland. I'm not saying there wasn't discrimination there, there was, you know, maybe the Chinese mom--Chinese mother wanted all their kids to marry Chinese. But it, it wasn't widespread. You might find, uh... even some didn't want their children to marry Chinese from another group. Uh, I had never heard about Hakka and Punti, have you heard those distinctions? Well, they had them in Hawaii, and the Punti was a little bit higher than Hakka, and so they didn't want their kid to marry someone from the Hakka group.

TH: What's Hakka?

MG: Hakka were--they were kinda nomads in China, and they didn't really have a home, and so--I'd never heard that, but I got to Hawaii and there was discrimination--well, not discrimination, but parents not wanting their kids to marry a certain group.

TH: More of a distinction...

MG: Huh?

TH: More a distinction between different types of Chinese people?

MG: The, well--I don't know that, that it was that broad, but the Chinese that lived, that grew up there, knew about it. And I didn't know about it. [laughs]

XL: So, let's jump to your education experience. So can you tell me about your primary school and middle school experience? So what kind of stu--school, like did you go to?

MG: I went to Sherman Elementary, and then I went to Marshall Junior High, and then I went to Jeff Davis, which I ha--understand has changed its name, because it was named after a Confederate [laughs] Confederate general, and so they're getting rid of all those names now in Houston, I understand. Uh, I had very close friends among the whites, uh, my family may have been the only Chinese family in the uh elementary school, maybe there was one other in--in high school and junior high. But uh, I was accepted by them. I never had any discrimination as far as I can remember, in school, from the students. And I you know met the parents, 'cause I would go to my friends' birthday parties and things. And the parents seemed to accept me but I know there might have been some parents who didn't want their kids to run around with non-whites. But I was fine. Maybe I was so naive, I didn't know that anybody discriminated against me. [laughs] But I don't remember any discrimination.

TH: When was the first time you realized that you were Chinese, or you realized you were different from the others?

MG: Uh, I don't know that it was ever a big issue. I know that my friends said they'd never eaten Chinese food, and so when they would eat with me, "what's this, what's this?" I, you know, but that--that wasn't discrimination, you know, they just had not eaten it before. They always thought we were rich, because we came to school in a truck. We had transportation, and we had a gro--you know, we had a grocery store and during World War II, bacon for some reason was hard to get, and that was our Christmas present to all our teachers. And so uh, and we didn't even refrigerate it, we would wrap it up in that, that meat market paper and take it to them, and it stayed out all day. They didn't have a refrigerator for the teachers to put items like that, keep it cold. And al of the, the teachers just loved our Christmas presents, because they got bacon. [laughs]

XL: So did all of your siblings go to the same school? `

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**Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

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MG: Um, no. My sister came here and went to Sam Houston and was valedictorian. And had scholarships to go to college, but she didn't go because there were so many of us at home. Uh, most of them went to Jeff Davis, uh, my brother David went to Sam Houston, and Marguerite went to Austin, I think. We were, I think we were actually in the Austin district. Well, we were actually in the, the black school district, but at that time it was uh, segregated. So we did not go to school with the blacks. No one went to school with the blacks except the blacks.

XL: So, how--like who, who drove you, you guys to school?

MG: My older brothers. And I didn't drive at that time. And my younger brothers, I had twin brothers, and they drove us. And sometimes we got there late. [laughs] Quite often we got there late, because they couldn't get up in the morning. But I meet--when I come to Houston I meet with friends from 7th grade, there were four of us that were real close. They were all white, and I was the only Chinese. And they tell me now that they had to catch the bus to school, so they would get there, you know maybe an hour, 45 minutes early. And they would sit there and hope I would get there because they didn't do their math homework, and they were waiting for me to come, and then sometimes I wasn't there [laughs] 'cause my brothers were, were late. [laughs] But one of them said, "Oh, I was so upset when you didn't come to school on time." And I said, "I never knew that." I did not know, I did not realize that they depended on me for their math homework. [laughs]

TH: Did your parents have like that cl--the stereotypical Chinese attitude towards school, or?

MG: Uh, they--they valued school, and we all went to school, but... my sister just above me was the first one to go away to school, uh... I'm not sure which ones went to school--college, some of them went, you know, and maybe took courses, but they didn't graduate, that I can remember. My sister Mamie, just above me, went to Baylor. And she went four years and she graduated with a degree and became a teacher. And then I came up, and I went to what was called Texas State Women for--Texas State College for Women, in Denton, Texas, and only stayed there. It's now called Texas Women's University. And then I transferred to the University of Texas at, uh, Austin, and went three years there.

TH: So what were your parents', like, hopes for all the children to be when they grow up, and what were--what was your dream job?

MG: There was--there was never any discussion about us, you know, being doctors, or lawyers, or teachers, or whatever. Uh, I know that many Chinese friends, their parents wanted them to have a profession, but that was never an issue with us. Um, I don't think they would have cared if we didn't go to college. But uh, I wanted to go, I got a scholarship, so I went. And uh, I worked in the library, and worked for a sociology professor, and earned extra money and could help my brothers below me to go to school, so my three brothers below me, I--I helped two of them through college, and then my sister, younger sister, got a college degree. But uh, there was no pressure on us to be professionals or anything like that.

XL: So how did you get along with other kids and your teachers?

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

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MG: Um, they were fine. Meaning (?) the--the teachers--in those days, most of the Chinese kids did not make any trouble in school. You didn't hear of kids being sent into the office, or being held after school. We were good. [all laugh] Uh, later on when they start having problems, everybody says they became too Americanized. But I mean, I'm sure that the Chinese had [laughs] had kids who were problems, it's just that maybe we were--we were aware that eyes were on us, so we, we made sure we didn't get in trouble.

XL: Um, so what did you want to be when you were young?

MG: Uh, I always felt like I wanted to help people, uh, I did not want to be a doctor, I did not want to be a lawyer. And so, I studied sociology and minored in psychology, and then I applied for a graduate teaching assistantship to the University of Hawaii and I got it, and I went over there and it was still sociology, but I studied race relations there. And I didn't finish my master's, I came home. But uh that was a good experience, that was my first experience being in an area where there were so many Asians, I remember the first time I went to Sears Roebuck and was waited on by a Chinese, it was a funny feeling that I didn't know her. 'Cause here in Hawaii--in Houston, uh, I knew most of the Chinese. And none of them, or very few of them, that worked outside the grocery store. [laughs] And so they wouldn't have gotten a job at Sears. And um... I remember uh, my roommate, who was white, the only Chinese--the only Asian she ever knew were--was me and my brothers. And she went with me. And she worked with--in a, a laboratory at the hospital, and her boss was Chinese, and all the workers were Chinese or Japanese. And so for her, that was really a different experience.

XL: Um, so uh, was there a conflict between your American and Chinese identity when you, like when you grow up?

MG: I was probably more American. And so there wasn't a real conflict except that I knew that my parents wanted us to marry Chinese. So I didn't date white people. Even though I ran around with them, uh--my social life in Houston was mostly with Chinese. And when I went to college, my social life was mainly with whites. And I never would date any of 'em, because I always used to think, well you know--you don't know who you're gonna fall in love with, and so if you start dating 'em, then you're gonna have that conflict. But, but... I ended up marrying a Chinese, but uh, I'm thinking--my brothers all married Chinese except one married Japanese. And then my younger sister married, uh, a white person. I never used the term white before that much, I always said they were Caucasian.

XL: So--so you only date Asian people, Chinese?

MG: Only--only dated Chinese. [laughs] I guess I was a coward. [laughs] I didn't want to face that conflict, plus I knew of a family up in Dallas that had a white mother and a, a Chinese father and there were some conflicts there. But in Hawaii, it would've been okay. [laughs]

XL: So was there any conflict between like your parents and your younger sister or--and brother, who married non-Chinese?

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

---

MG: Not--well, my mother and father were gone when my sister married the white person. Um, and I don't know--I wasn't here when my brother dated the Japanese, but I don't think there was any conflict.

XL: Um, so did you learn to speak Chinese?

MG: I spoke a lot more Chinese when I was little. [laughs] And in Hawaii I never speak Chinese. My husband's dialect is different, although he speaks Chinese and his--his mother was from China, but I didn't understand her dialect, and I never spoke Jap--Chinese in, in Hawaii so the first time I came back, I realized that I had lost a lot of my Chinese. I could still understand it, but I would speak in half English and half Chinese. And now I've completely lost a lot of it, because I don't hear it.

TH: What language did your parents speak at home?

MG: Huh?

TH: What language did your parents speak?

MG: They spoke--they spoke Chinese mostly.

TH: And would you respond in Chinese or, English?

MG: Yeah, at that time I could speak some, yeah. [laughs] But uh, my father spoke more English. But my mother didn't speak much.

XL: So where did you learn how to speak Chinese?

MG: Only in the home. Hearing it at home. But we children now, we never spoke Chinese to each other. Even though the older ones knew more Chinese, we never spoke Chinese that much. We... now I know the--the most Chinese I know is the food. [laughs] So I can order in Chinese when I go to, to a restaurant.

XL: So speaking of food, what food do you eat?

MG: Every kind. Yeah. I cook every kind, eat every kind. Uh, I cook some Chinese, cook some Japanese, Greek, Italian, see a recipe I like, I try. So there's no distinction between foods, we just like 'em all. And when I come back to Texas I come back and get my favorites, I get k--chicken fried steak, I will get biscuits with the white gravy on it--this is soul food, I get barbecue, beef. [laughs]

XL: So when did you learn how to cook, did you learn from your family?

MG: Um, my father was a good cook but he passed away when I was a junior in college. But I kinda remember some of his dishes. My mother--I remember my mother's cooking so I probably

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

---

learned more from her because I was in the kitchen, chopping, um, but a lot of it was reading recipes and, and cooking from the recipes.

XL: So were there any like special recipes from your family that you remember?

MG: Oh, my goodness.

XL: [laughs]

MG: I remember some of the shortcut recipes that, that we would use when we go to college, 'cause you know you didn't know how to cook much. But I remember we used canned salmon which is what's--this isn't really Chinese--we used canned salmon and we would ch--heat it then you chop up green uh onions, and bacon and peanuts. Spread it over, and all the grandchildren learned to cook that, and that--they would eat that at college. There was this potato and uh lapcheong, a Chinese sausage dish. My mother learned to cook fried chicken, and her fried chicken was really good. And everybody talked about it. And uh, so she would always make fried chicken when I came home from Hawaii. I never--she would even show me how much salt she used and all that, but my--I never, I never learned to cook as well as she did, hers was moist. But uh, we talk about that now, and I was telling them that I remember my mother using the fermented bean cake, you know, the squares? And I--I never cook any dishes with that in Hawaii because no one else did.

TH: [in the background] Fu ru.

MG: Uh, my husband's family would take the squares and put sugar on it, and eat it with their rice, but they never used it, you know, to stir-fry vegetables or chicken or anything. So I'm gonna go back home, and I'm gonna do 'em again, so that my grandchildren will get that taste. [laughs]

TH: So what would you consider a comfort food?

MG: Uh, I have comfort food--American foods, and I have comfort Chinese foods. Uh, soups that my mother used to make were so good because we had uh all the bones from the grocery store. And uh, maybe they didn't want the chicken feet, we--we had chicken feet to flavor the, the soups. But I remember my mother making soups a lot, and that was comfort food. And as I mentioned, the American comfort foods were the country fried steak, and fried okra, and the biscuits and gravy. Uh, fried pork chop, you know, with the batter on it. Uh... probably everything that was unhealthy. [laughs] Was my comfort food.

SG: Oxtails...

MG: Oh yeah, oxtails. oxtail soup. My mother used to make it with peanuts. And, oh we loved it. Uh, black bean oxtail--with oxtails, was a comfort food. [laughs]

TH: Getting hungry now.

XL: Yeah, same.

MG: [laughs] You're familiar with those dishes.

[all laugh]

XL: So uh, you wrote on your consent form that you started forking for Mr. Joe's grocery store when you were 15?

MG: Yeah, but I may have gone there earlier, I can't remember, but it was a Chinese grocery store in a black neighborhood, but I was used to.

XL: Yeah, so who is Mr. Joe?

MG: Hobert (?) Joe was a friend of the family's. Uh, when we came, we were probably one of the first Chinese families here, and so we knew--and as more came in we, we got to know all of 'em, practically, but these were friends of the family and, and that's why I'm thinking it may have been younger, because he would have hired me even younger.

XL: So you mainly work as cashier in the grocery store?

MG: Mhm. Yeah.

XL: How much did you earn?

MG: We--we didn't--we had to remember the, the prices. They weren't automatically scanned. And so we had to remember the prices of the bread and all the vegetables. The canned goods were marked, I think, I--I have this feeling that they were marked. But uh... it was--it was harder to be a cashier in those days. You couldn't just run it over the thing and the price came up. And we also had to make our own change, it didn't--when they gave you 20 dollars, you didn't press something that tells you how much change you give. We had to learn, so if it was 20 dollars and 12 cents, and they gave you--I mean, like 15 dollars and 12 cents--you, you had to remember, you know, if they gave you a quarter, that you just gave them the change for the quarter. I don't know if the kids can do that nowadays. No? [laughs]

XL: Probably no. [laughs] So um, going to your college education, can you tell me again, like which university did you go to?

MG: I went to TSCW, and then I went to uh, University of Texas, and then I went over to the University of Hawaii.

XL: Uh, for your master's?

MG: Mhm, but I didn't complete it.

XL: Mhm. And uh, what did you choose--like what, what major are you?

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

---

MG: I was sociology, um, and when I came back to Houston after being away for uh, almost 2 years, I got a job as a social worker, with a uh agency called Traveler's Aid Society. Back in those days, to qualify for financial assistance, you had to be a resident of the state of Texas. And so Traveler's Aid was set up to help those who were non-residents. And so it was temporary. You know the uh welfare roads, for residents, they could continue on it. But uh non-residents were aided by our agency, but we didn't help them that--that long.

XL: So, what--

MG: And, and then I applied for a job with Red Cross, and then I--and that was also as a social worker, in a hospital setting. And I went up to Chicago area, to a naval hospital up there.

XL: So uh, so uh you moved back to Houston in '59, and then you left Houston on uh, in '61.

MG: In '60--I worked here--I--it was probably '60, 'cause I only worked at Traveler's Aid a year, and then went on.

XL: So why did you want to be a social worker?

MG: I've always wanted to be in a field where you help people. Uh, I remember when I came back to Houston, I applied at Traveler's Aid and I tried--applied at the department of welfare, and when they found out that I had worked in a grocery store with blacks, because a lot of the blacks were on welfare, they took out that application for me immediately, because I had had experience working with blacks. But I liked the idea of Traveler's Aid better, so I went with them.

TH: Wait, so you mean you had an advantage 'cause you worked in a grocery store?

MG: Yeah, that was an advantage because I had worked with blacks, and they thought tha I could work with the blacks easier in the department of welfare than someone who had never had any experience with them.

XL: So how much is the tuition in your college, by that time?

MG: Pardon me?

XL: How much is the tuition?

MG: Was 25 dollars a semester.

[all laugh]

MG: And I would take 21 hours if I could. I got my money's worth. Um, when they were gonna double it the next year, we marched on the Capitol. [laughs] And my friend was the one who organized it, so I went with him. But it was, you know, it was so low, we were probably number 48 in state tuition back then. And so they had never raised it, and so we paid 25 dollars a

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

---

semester. And I think my rent, uh, I rented uh, a studio apartment with a Chinese girl from here, and I think our rent was something like 25 dollars. [laughs]

XL: So that's during your college years?

MG: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

XL: So did you get any financial aid?

MG: Yes, I did. I--when I was in high school, I applied for a scholarship with the Tri-Delts uh sorority, the alumni, and uh, Mrs. Rosthecher (?) who was the head of the scholarship committee, had a friend, who uh, their husbands were in business together. And Mrs. Sterling helped her decide who would get it, and for some reason Mrs. Sterling decided that she would help me on her own. And so she gave me a scholarship for four years. The Tri-Delt scholarship I think was for one year only. And so I formed a real friendship with Mrs. Sterling, and she paid for my airfare to Hawaii, and I--I uh, kept up with her, even when I had my children, she sent things for the children. And the children in turn would remember their birthdays, and send money back. Mrs. Sterling's husband was the d--was the son of Ralph Sterling, who was a governor of Texas. And he--we would send gifts, you know, birthday greetings to him too, and the kids had to make them, I wouldn't let them buy cards. And uh, he was so fascinated with it that he would share it with his buddies, and then he decided to s--sponsor, uh, send--do a scholarship for somebody. But I think he only did it that one time, and that person didn't keep up. But I was so grateful for the help that I kept up with her, and you know, wrote her all the time, and sometimes she would call me. So I kept up with her until she passed away.

XL: So how many of your siblings went to college?

MG: As I said, I think the older ones all went and took courses, maybe one a year or so, but they were all working, and so they would go as they had time. But only... Mamie, Johnny, Joe--Joey didn't get a scholarship, he went to college. He was one of the twins, so it was uh, Mamie, me, Tommy, and Marguerite. So only four, huh? Five? Oh--oh, Johnny., okay. Okay, five of us had college degrees, yeah.

XL: Okay. Um, so what extracurricular activities did you do at college?

MG: Uh, it was largely uh with the Baptist Student Union. Uh, planning activities, you know, for the Baptist students. Uh, I worked at--in the sociology department and was a member of the soc--sociology honors thing, but we didn't do much. [laughs] And I was part of the French honor thing, and we would once in a while have cookies and punch set up, so I helped with that, but, um, you know I'm not, I'm not real sure what I did. [laughs] 'Cause I was busy working, and I used that money to help my brothers in school. They, they came the year after me, and so uh, I was not active in anything on campus, per se.

XL: Um, so, do you still work--did you still work at the grocery store after you went to college?

MG: In the--my brothers took over.

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

---

XL: Okay.

MG: Came back from college and they took over the store. But not now, you know, but they took over the store after, after they came back. One of them came back from college and had the store until 1980's, yeah.

XL: So were there a lot of Chinese students on campus?

MG: At Texas?

XL: Yeah, at Texas.

MG: Uh, yeah there were, there were a lot that came from San Antonio there, uh, well not a whole lot. But maybe I was one of the first few that went from Houston. The, the people that came after me said, "Remember, Aunt Mary Ann did well? You need to do just as well." [laughs] So they all--they remind me of this. "That's all we heard from our parents." [laughs]

XL: So were you connected more with the Chinese students there or with Caucasians?

MG: Caucasians, mostly Caucasians. My roommates were Chinese, and we did have some things I did with the Chinese, but mostly Caucasians, because I was active in the church. And they didn't go to church. Even though they were Baptist and they went to a Chinese Baptist church, in San Antonio or in Houston, but when we got up there, there wasn't any Chinese Baptist church, so they wouldn't go. But I did.

XL: So how did you get along with the Caucasian students?

MG: Fine. No--no discrimination at all.

XL: So did they ever like treat you differently because you're Asian?

MG: Not really, no, none of them did... They would tease me and say "when you gonna cook a Chinese meal for us?" but--[laughs]

XL: How'd you feel?

MG: I never did. [laughs]

XL: Okay, um, so why did you decide to go to the University of Hawaii?

MG: I... I guess the main reason was, I could go there and, and study and get to know the islands. You know, Hawaii was always a place I wanted to go to. [laughs] And that was the way to go, 'cause I had a job, when I got there I could go to school, and Mrs. Sterling gave me the airfare. So, it was set.

XL: So after you came back from Hawaii, so you started working at the Traveler's, uh--

MG: Aid.

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

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XL: Traveler's Aid Society, uh, can you tell me more about your social work there?

MG: I was the only Chinese on staff. Uh, most of our clients were, were Caucasian. I guess the blacks didn't travel that much to new areas. Um, the original, uh, Traveler's Aid was set up when travelers, you know, suddenly got robbed or something, or they didn't have money, uh by that time there were some people that just went to another area and immediately went in to get aid. Uh, but I got along well with my coworkers, all of whom were older than me, and had children my age. There were--there was one young one. Uh, they were willing to give me a scholarship to go back to college, and get a degree in social work. But by then I had applied for a job with Red Cross, and uh, was gonna go to another area. So I, I liked to travel, but I didn't have the funds to travel, and so I would have to get jobs in order to go.

XL: So I saw that you wrote on your form that it's, it's located in Greyhound bus station, in Houston, the Traveler's Aid Society.

MG: Yeah.

XL: Uh, so what's the working condition there?

MG: Uh, we had a, a big, I remember it was a big uh room, and it was glass, and so everybody could see us. So I never had any fear, 'cause it was always, we had to work there one night a week, and uh, I never had any fear because the agents selling tickets could see us. Uh, but we were in a place where people who rode the bus, if they needed help, came in and it wasn't, you know, some days you might have one person, some days you might have three, some days you might have nobody. But you were the only one there.

TH: Do you remember any people that stood out, any cases that you helped on?

MG: Uh, there were some people that you got to know better, there was one family whose daughter, I remember, had--what was the disease, breathing disease--and they got here and were scared, and so we helped them to settle in until the husband found work. But--got close to them, but I can't even remember their names.

XL: So how much did you earn by that time?

MG: I--see, I can't remember how much I made then. It's better than working in the grocery store.  
[laughs]

XL: What about like in Hawaii?

MG: Hawaii, now, I was only supposed to work part-time. And I got uh, my college--my tuition paid, and uh, so the salary was good. I, when I decided to not go for the second year, I went to work for a state agency called the Commission on Subversing Act--Subversive Activities, which uh was formed to uh investigate the ones that they thought were Communist. I worked as a clerk typist there. And uh, I think I made something like \$2.75 a month. Uh, but I had applied at a bank, and the bank was only willing to pay me 10 dollars more than I made at the university and it was a 40-hour week. So then I knew that my pay was pretty good at the university.

XL: So were you supporting your family still?

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

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MG: No, uh--well, yeah! Uh, I think Johnny and Tommy were both still in school, so I till sent--paid for their tuition, which was still 25--they hadn't doubled it yet. [laughs] And I paid for their rent, they didn't get--they didn't get a lot of money to spend on running around.

XL: Okay, so uh, why did you leave H--like, leave Hawaii for Houston?

MG: My, my roommate and I had plans to go home or a little while and apply for jobs, in uh, Japan [laughs] or Hong Kong. Now she wasn't Chinese, but she was game to go with me, so that's why we came back--to work a little while, and earn enough to go, and meanwhile apply for jobs to go overseas. And we never got there. She went back to Austin to work, and that's when I started doing the Red Cross, and uh, Traveler's Aid.

TH: Have you ever visited China?

MG: And--and then I married in '61, so I went back to Hawaii. What was your question?

TH: Have you ever visited China?

MG: Yeah. Um, I've gone to China and Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Bangkok. I've done Europe. Uh, I didn't visit all the countries in Europe. I've gone to Australia. So I've traveled more than my, my siblings, but I guess from way back I wanted to travel, which is why my college education and my work has been in different areas of the United States.

XL: So have you ever met any work discrimination?

MG: ...No. I'm trying to think of any incidents, no. In fact, they always felt that Chinese were more--Chinese were good workers, have you heard that? [laughs] And even today you hear that. I have a daughter-in-law from Singapore, she works for Wells Fargo, not in sales or anything but doing research, and almost all her colleagues are Chinese. Her superior tends to hire Chinese because he says they're good workers.

XL: Um, so after you moved from Houston to Chicago, so--and then you moved to Hawaii after you got married.

MG: Yeah.

XL: So do you--does your family still have like family reunion, 'cause you are like in different places.

MG: Um, I come back, uh, to visit, my sisters don't come back as often as I do, they live on the West Coast. Um, they--they will come back for funerals, I hate to say, uh, I don't know if they ever came back for class reunions. But I did. This time I came back for a class reunion. And last year I can't remember why I came, but--I usually don't come two years in a row. But now I only have a brother and his wife, and a niece and a nephew that live in Houston, and three sister-in-laws.

SG: Three?

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

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MG: Yeah, three sister-in-laws, two have lost their husbands, my brothers. So I come back to visit at least for that, and you know it may be in conjunction with a family--uh, college--I mean a high school reunion. It may be in conjunction with getting together with college students, college friends.

XL: So uh--

MG: But per se, we haven't had a family reunion, have we? [to SG] No, no family reunion.

XL: So when did you met your husband for the first time?

MG: Uh, when I was in college in Hawaii, I took a job in Sears for Christmas. And worked in the basement of Sears in the toy department. [laughs] And so we like to say we met in the basement of Sears. He had come home because--he was on the mainland I think in Chicago at that time. And he had come home because his father was sick, so he took a job, during the Christmas holidays, um, at Sears, and that's where we met. And he made a dollar five an hour, and I made a dollar. And I never did know, how come he got more than me. [laughs]

XL: So did you do the same work, the same kind of job?

MG: Yeah, we were just sales. Sales--toy department was crazy during Christmas. [laughs]

TH: Did you ever confront like the people who paid you?

MG: No, really it didn't matter. Nickel--[laughs]--but you worked on commission, and so we had a lot of sales during Christmastime. And then I continued to work at Sears, you know, they asked me to come back and so I would work a couple of nights a week.

XL: So was he a student? Was he a student as well?

MG: At that time?

XL: Yeah, at that time.

MG: I was still in graduate school, yeah.

XL: Uh, I mean your husband.

MG: Oh no, my husband, uh, was out of school and working. Well, maybe--he had gone to school in California--no, in Oregon, and then he was in school in Chicago and working at the same time.

XL: So how did you start dating?

MG: ...He just asked me out--I don't remember. And uh, I'm trying to think--he liked to play tennis but I didn't play tennis. But I would go to the tennis courts. [laughs] And sit there and watch.

XL: So, okay, what drew you to him?

MG: He was Chinese. [laughs] I guess he was college educated and he had traveled, so he had some sense of living in other places. And uh, we just you know hit it off 'cause we had some of the same interests.

XL: Uh, and like, when and how did you decide to get married and move together?

MG: I went back to be at a wedding, and uh, 'course we'd been writing, and so uh, we saw each other again. I'd been away I guess a year and a half by then, and then we decided that we would write once for each other, so I got married in October of '61, and I've lived in Hawaii since.

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

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XL: Did you discuss it with your parents or the family? ... Did you discuss it with your parents when you decided to get married?

MG: Not really. [laughs] My father was already gone, it was only my mother. But I knew she'd be happy, he was Chinese! [laughs]

XL: Did they attend your wedding in Hawaii?

MG: I had my wedding in Texas, I got married in Houston.

XL: So then you moved to Hawaii.

MG: Mhm.

XL: Is that because your--your husband is from Hawaii?

MG: Uh, well he had already uh started working in Hawaii, and so uh, I could leave. I had--I had, I quit uh working for Red Cross and came home, and then I didn't have a job. So when I got to Hawaii, I worked there for the p--the department of social services, which was the welfare department. And uh worked until I had my children, and then uh, after they were in, in school, then I did substitute teaching. I didn't go back to full-time work, although sometimes uh I would take a long term, uh, one or two months' job, tea--substitute teaching. But I didn't work full time. But I did volunteer work there.

XL: So how many kids do you have?

MG: Four. Four children, three girls and one boy.

XL: When were they born?

MG: What?

XL: So when were they born?

MG: Uh, one was born in '64, '65, '68 and '71. And three of 'em live on the mainland now, and one--only one returned to Hawaii. But they all went to college on the mainland so, they chose to stay there, they got jobs. You know, so they stayed on the mainland.

XL: So what does your par--your husband do?

MG: Uh, he worked for Sears and was a, uh assistant manager of the furniture department, and then uh Allstate came to Hawaii, and that was part of Sears at that time, Allstate Insurance. And uh, I don't know if he applied or they came to him, I never really knew about that. He was the first Asian hired by Allstate Insurance in the--in the United States. And of course now they have a lot of Chinese and Japanese, different nationalities, but he was the first one, first Chinese to work for Allstate Insurance. So he worked for them for 40 years. But he never wanted to become a manager or anything. He stayed as a salesman.

XL: So did you have any like expectations for your kids growing up?

MG: My expectations were probably what most parents wanted, wanted them to be happy. Uh, hardworking. I was pretty strict, they tell me I was pretty strict. And uh, we did a lot of things together as a family, took vacations. Uh, I was very active in their school, and so was on their, you know, on school campus a lot. Um, they went to church and were--made friends at church and at school. Uh, we expected college education and they all wanted to go, and they all chose to go on the mainland. Uh, they--we lived on the hill above the University of Hawaii, on one side, and a Catholic University, but they wanted to go away. And we really wanted them to go away because, you know you grow when you have to leave home and worry about your meals and your laundry and how to get places. We let them come home at Christmas and for the summer. Um, but they worked when they

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**Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

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came home. Usually even--at Christmas and, and the summer because the people they worked for wanted them there, wanted them to work. They were good workers. In fact I have had contact with the, uh, people that three of them worked for, and they, they always say, "Your kids were the best workers we had." [laughs] So that made me feel good. They had learned how to work for their pay and even do a little extra, and so they became good friends with, with their bosses. [laughs]

XL: So do you expect your--like your children to marry like Chinese?

MG: Uh, it didn't bother me because by then, there was more intermarriage and remember I lived in Hawaii now, for 50-something years. And so one of my, my oldest daughter married uh a Japanese, the second one isn't married, she's a career girl. The third one married a Caucasian, and the last one married a Chinese.

XL: So is there any family tradition you--you ever tried to establish?

MG: Well when I got to Hawaii I learned more about Chinese traditions because Hawaii--even though uh, there are so many different uh groups there, each one still adhered to their traditions; the Japanese still do things, you know, that they did in the old country, the Chinese still do. So I learned a lot about Chinese traditions that I had never learned before. My mother didn't do any Chinese traditions. We never served tea to her. And uh, when I got to, to Hawaii, the whole family was together and I had--was expected to serve tea to them. Uh, and they had a mandarin jacket for me to wear, I mean, they were pretty traditional. Uh and even now, uh, some of my husband's brothers, even though there's lots of intermarriage in the family, expects the grandchildren to serve them tea and do things like that. I don't expect that of my kids, they're too Americanized and maybe I'm too Americanized. But they know about 'em. I sent my two oldest to Chinese school, and uh, they can uh read and write, they can't carry on a conversation. The last two didn't go to Chinese school. But my son took up Japanese, so he can speak Japanese, not Chinese, and he studied in Japan for a while. Uh, all my children went away to the mainland, so they had to learn, being away from home, learn skills for taking care of themselves.

XL: So do you have any Chinese traditional culture that you want to pass on to your kids?

MG: Uh, it really doesn't necessarily have to be Chinese, I want them to continue to go to church, I want them to continue to reach out, uh, to people, and be helpful. I want them to study, go to college, but that's not necessarily Chinese.

XL: [to TH] Do you have anything to add?

TH: Um, [coughs] I just have one more question, did you and your siblings have Chinese names?

MG: Yes, and my--my own children have Chinese names, uh, and they also, the ones that are Japanese have a Japanese name. Uh, my daughter, who's married to the Caucasian guy, gave her kids a Chinese name and a Hawaiian name. [laughs] It was just their choice. And the names are on the birth certificate. Uh, our family, the names were not on the birth certificate. We know--our parents gave us the names, we know what they were, but in Hawaii, they put 'em on the birth certificate so when you graduate, they will say, "Sarah Chiami (?) Laila Nyong." Uh, "Nakomoto." And so they have this long name, and everybody has it, pretty much.

TH: So what's your Chinese name?

MG: *Mei Oi*, Beautiful Love. And at one time I knew how to write it, and I've forgotten how to write it. But my grandchildren now are taking Japanese and Mandarin. [laughs]

XL: So who did--who gave the Chinese name to your uh, to your children?

MG: I guess my mother. I never did find out. Now, my children, uh I have a sister-in-law from China, and she gave my children their Chinese names.

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**Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University**

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XL: Uh, do you think--do you have anything to add?

MG: No, not really. I, I didn't feel that I was--knew enough about what happened in Houston, to be a worthy candidate for interview 'cause I've been away for so long, and I didn't know anything about Arkansas or Mississippi, but--

TH: It doesn't have to be specifically about Houston.

XL: Yeah, it's about you.

MG: About me. [laughs] No, I don't have anything to add.

XL: Okay, so that ends the interview. Okay, thank you so much.

TH: Thank you.

MG: Okay, thank you. [laughs]