

10-15-2009

Interview with Barbara Fabella

Barbara Fabella

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Recommended Citation

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Chinatown Renewal Project. 5.
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Chinatown Renewal Project
Interviewee: Barbara Fabella
Interviewers: Esther Vargas and Allison Bostwick
Date of Interview: October 15, 2009 and October 25, 2009
Duration of Interview: 01:22:13

Esther Vargas 00:00

Because we already practiced, right? Okay, then just do it for the camera [laughs].

Allison Bostwick 00:08

This is Allison Bostwick

Esther Vargas 00:08

[whispering] You have to talk louder.

Allison Bostwick 00:11

This is Allison Bostwick and Esther Vargas and we are interviewing Barbara Fabella on October 15, 2009. Do we have your permission to do the interview?

Barbara Fabella 00:22

Yes.

Unknown 00:27

Okay, I'm already rolling

Allison Bostwick 00:36

This is Allison Bostwick and Esther Vargas, and we are interviewing Barbara Fabella on October 15, 2009. And do we—in her home in Salinas, California. Do we have your permission to interview?

Barbara Fabella 00:49

Yes.

Esther Vargas 00:52

Okay, so did you want to go ahead and read your poem to us? The poem that you wrote.

Barbara Fabella 00:57

Sure. It's right here. Sorry. I wrote this poem [unclear]. And when I wrote this poem, it's coming out of the—from the eyes of a three, four-year-old, because I was three and four years old when I was, you know, on my own walking the streets of Chinatown. Okay. "The Streets of Chinatown," as seen through the eyes of a four-year-old girl. Down the street of Soledad, I pull my little red wagon with my Shirley Temple doll. We're both mesmerized by the bright night lights. Like Christmas, busy streets are lit with colorful neon signs and lights. Out of the corner of my eye, one catches my attention, the Golden Dragon Saloon. We sneak a peek and then hurry on by. People of all colors and races keep up with each other's paces. I remember mama-san at the old Chinese restaurant with her long black hair all

coiled up and her ruby lips mouthing, "Come to me little [unclear]," she would say. But instead I would run away. Did they have babysitters in those days? What do I know? I was only four. There was the flower lady selling flowers and corsages each night as she walked from place to place with her neatly combed, finger wave red hair and brightly colored lips. Military men visit on their pay day from the base not far away. Some might say, "Didn't they have babysitters in those days? And why isn't this child in bed?" I might answer, "I don't know. That was a long time ago and I'm all grown up now." Still pulling my red wagon with Shirley in it, we passed by a cluster of pretty ladies with painted faces and store-bought hair, having conversations with well-dressed men. Strange how almost all of them are called Johns. But what do I know? I'm only four. Almost every Sunday on the street where I lived a "Mr. John" would pass by, would pass me by to see a pretty lady with painted face and store-bought hair. After his visit and with a big smile on his face, he would always stop by where I sat and say to me, "Put out your hand, little [unclear]," and a dollar he would give. "A dollar!" I would say. "This will buy me a lot of candy for many days." Now, who do you think had the biggest smile? "Mr. John" or me? So, that's the poem.

Esther Vargas 04:16

What inspired you to write this poem? Do you know?

Barbara Fabella 04:22

I heard that they—yeah, I heard that—John Steinbeck? They were looking for poems. The 2000—they were looking for how many poems? 2000 poems? Do you remember?

Allison Bostwick 04:36

I think I remember that.

Barbara Fabella 04:37

Yeah, and it's all about the area, and I thought, well, I could do something. So, I sat down and wrote this. It didn't take long to write it. So, the cat was out there. I mean, he came at the wrong time. [all laugh]

Allison Bostwick 04:56

You mentioned the Golden Dragon Saloon. What memories did you have of that?

Barbara Fabella 05:01

The Golden Dragon, it was on the corner of Lake and Soledad street. And it was visited by a lot of military men, and there was, you know, all kinds of people. And there was, like, the lady standing on the street, you know, waiting for the Johns, and stuff like that. But, of course, at that time I didn't know what Johns were, I just thought everybody was named John, and so, and I thought they were pretty, you know, because they were all dressed up in their wigs and painted faces and their, you know, glamour. I don't know where they came from, but some of them were really pretty. And so that's the Golden Dragon.

Esther Vargas 05:52

And you said that they called the men John. What did they call the women that were there?

Barbara Fabella 06:00

Oh, I didn't hear, I didn't hear that. I know they always used to give me money. And this "Mr. John" that used to pass by every Sunday when I was sitting on the sidewalk. I would always sit on the sidewalk and put my thinking cap on and just think. And he would pass by and, you know, he'd go visit his friend and, you know, he'd always give. I really—what I noticed about him that he was very well dressed. He wore this light suit, like three-piece. It was the vest, the jacket, the pants, and it was always light color, wasn't dark. And he wore these spectator shoes. They were either brown and white or black and white. And so, my—any other questions or are you going to—[laughs]

Esther Vargas 06:53

No, you can go ahead if you want to keep going.

Barbara Fabella 06:55

Okay, my mother and I came from Los Angeles, and we went to live in Capitola. We lived there I guess about a year, then we came back—wait, no, we came to Salinas. We came on a train, came to Salinas. And so, what we did when we came to Salinas, we settled at this house over here. I'll show you this house. This is the house we lived in, the first house. Can you see it? It's this one right here. You see it? Okay. And this is a big water tower. And I was always afraid of it, that it might burst and we'd drown or something. And I remember we lived by the train tracks. And every time the train came by the house would vibrate. We would shake and that was really scary. So then from there, we moved from here and then we went to live at the Republican Hotel, which is over here. I believe this is it. We lived there for a while. And I remember that I played with some of the children there—the Asian children. There was all kinds of people. There was Asian, Filipino, Japanese, Blacks, Hispanics. There wasn't too many Hispanics, you could count them on your hands. And I've tried to—and we lived there for a while. Then after that we went and we lived at the Royal Hotel. I don't have any pictures of the Royal Hotel. We lived there for a while. And when I was living—when we were living at the Royal Hotel, I went to school, to Lincoln School, and after Lincoln School—the people that owned the hotel, they were called the Lees. They would babysit, take care of me while my mother came home from work. And I remember they used to feed me and I told them, you know, they made dinner one evening, and I says, "I can't eat with chopsticks." You know, I said, "Can I have a fork?" And Mr. Lee says, "No, you have to learn how to eat with chopsticks first." So, I'm over there eating with chopsticks. Finally, after about 45 minutes or half an hour, I learned, I mastered it. So, then he put a fork there. And so, he let me eat with a fork. I remember that. I remember taking—then afterwards, my mother didn't, she always had babysitters for me and she would always farm me out. And so, I went to live over here again because a friend of hers needed a place to stay. She had five children and no husband. So, she rented this little house, and I lived with them. And my mother paid her, of course. I remember her name was Wicha, she had three boys and one girl, Gloria. And we—there was only one bed for the kids. We all piled in, piled on this one bed, you know, there's three boys and two girls. The three boys are sleeping by the headboard, Gloria and I are sleeping by the feet. You know, we slept there in this big bed. It was uncomfortable. And then Saturday, we would take baths, Wicha would give Gloria and I a bath in this big steel—it was round, I don't know what you'd call it. But it was—she gave us baths in it. And I remember that Gloria took a bath first because this was Wicha's child. So, she wanted her daughter, I guess to have the clean water. So, she gave Gloria a bath. Then I got a bath second, you know, with the, you know, with the water, of dirty water. And I used to wonder why my braids were always sticky. You know, they were

always sticky. And I figured it out later, because it was with dirty water. But it was once a week we took a bath. And I wasn't—I wasn't in this fire, but they were always having fires periodically. And I lived over here, but the house isn't there anymore. And they boarded that up. And I'm trying to think what I was gonna say. I lost my train of thought.

Esther Vargas 12:21

Oh, that's fine. So, can you tell me a little bit more about your house? How it was like? What it looked like?

Barbara Fabella 12:27

Oh, yes. I remember. You go in, and as soon as you go in the front, the bathroom is on this side. That's the first thing that there was, was a bathroom. And it was like three by five. It was real small. It had a little window but like that, you know. If you needed to crawl—no way you're gonna crawl out of that little window. And it was like a little dungeon. That's what it was like. And then it had the big room. I think that was supposed to be the living room. But they had a bed there. And that's where we all slept—the three boys, Gloria, and I. And then Wicha, the mother, slept—there was a bedroom on the right, and she slept, that was her bedroom. And then there was the kitchen toward the back. And that was a pretty big kitchen. And then they had a little pantry room. And that was it.

Esther Vargas 13:28

Do you remember how old you were when you lived in that house?

Barbara Fabella 13:33

Probably between two, two and three. I can remember when I came from Capitola. I was about, close to two years old. I was already walking. I remember the crib and the highchair. I remember that far back. And so, I remember—let me see some of these notes. Okay. What else did you want to ask me?

Esther Vargas 14:08

I was gonna ask you about your house again. Is that okay?

Barbara Fabella 14:12

Yeah.

Esther Vargas 14:12

Okay. You said that your little house was a dungeon and that—

Barbara Fabella 14:17

The bathroom.

Esther Vargas 14:17

The bathroom was? Do you think it was better living in the hotel?

Barbara Fabella 14:25

Oh, yeah, it was fun. The Republican Hotel was a whole lot of fun. It was big. I'm glad you mentioned the hotel [laughs]. I was going to leave the best part out. Okay, Republican Hotel, you go in the lobby, and then there was this big—it was a container where they had tea, and all the Asian men would go and dip into it and drink tea. So, me, I'm a—I was a little copycat, you know? So, I used to go and dip into it. When I got thirsty, I went and dipped into the tea and drank tea also. And I remember that, in the hotel room, I was left by myself. And I didn't have a babysitter during that day. I mean, during that time, and there was this one Filipino man that, I guess he was, like, the custodian or something. And I used to like to play hide and seek with him, you know. I had nothing else to do. So, I used to tease him and, you know, go like that and get him started. And he would chase me, and I would go running all over those stairs, and then I'd run into the room. And it was like a—it was a game. What else?

Esther Vargas 15:54

Did a lot of people live there? Or was it just your family?

Barbara Fabella 15:58

Yeah, there was quite a few.

Esther Vargas 16:01

So, you played with—did you play with any of the other children there?

Barbara Fabella 16:07

Not at the hotel, but outside I did. I played with the Asian children. Yeah, made friends with them.

Allison Bostwick 16:17

Did they live in, like, the surrounding area? Or did their parents have shops or something?

Barbara Fabella 16:21

Their parents had shops and they lived in the shops in the back. There was quarters in the back of the shops. So, they lived there. And I knew the whole area. It was, like, you know, I don't remember being supervised a lot of the time. I had this tricycle and I used to just, you know, ride my tricycle down the street whenever I wasn't supervised. And there was a shop, there was like a sandwich and soda fountain shop. And these people, they were friends of my mother. And they used to take care of me also at one time. And I remember that I got sick. I had a tummy ache, and in those days, they didn't take the children to the hospital, to the doctor. You know, you had to be almost dying. You really had to be real sick before they'd take you to a doctor. And this—I was dying. My appendix—I told them that I had a tummy ache all day. Nobody paid attention to me. Finally, I—my appendix bursted. And then I just went out, unconscious. And the next thing I knew, I was in the hospital, already had my surgery. So that was the first time I've ever seen a doctor. Because I had a bursted appendix.

Allison Bostwick 16:32

How old were you when that happened?

Barbara Fabella 17:56

Three years old.

Allison Bostwick 17:57

Three years?

Barbara Fabella 17:58

Three.

Allison Bostwick 17:58

You must have been really scared.

Barbara Fabella 18:02

No, I was in pain [laughs].

Allison Bostwick 18:03

You were in pain?

Barbara Fabella 18:04

Yeah, I was in pain, a lot of pain.

Esther Vargas 18:06

What did your mother do when she found out?

Barbara Fabella 18:09

Well, I don't know, she—I guess she took me to the hospital because she wasn't taking care of me at the time. I was with people that were watching over me, taking care of me. And so, I know they used to give me a lot of ice cream. I could eat all the ice cream I wanted. So, I don't know if that had anything to do with it. So, I remember when I used to—as I got older, I went to school, I was going to Washington School. And I had to cross the train tracks, you know, to get to school and it seemed like the train would always come by at the same time. When I had to cross, the train crossed. So I had to wait for the train to pass by and sometimes the train would stop. And I couldn't wait for that train. I thought, I'll be late if I wait for this train. So, I would climb over between the cars and jump the train. And most of the time I was okay. This one time, the train—the cars, they drifted and backed up, and I fell on top of a hobo. And in those days, they weren't called street people. They were called hobos. And I fell, you know. I didn't know that it was a person there. I just thought it was, you know, just bulk until he moved. And they were harmless. They never hurt you or, you know, did anything to you, the hobos. So I remember that incident.

Esther Vargas 19:49

What did you say once you noticed, once you realized that it was a person that you fell on?

Barbara Fabella 19:54

I really got scared. [laughs] I had the jeepers creepers scared out of me. Okay, another thing to this house that I showed you. Okay, this is where I used to—okay, see these steps? Okay, those were the steps I used to sit down every, all the time, and that's when that man used to pass by and give me a

dollar every Sunday. Well, I used to—back here where the house is, it was all boarded up. It wasn't dirt or concrete. It was all boards. So, there was a crawl space about that big under the boards, and I used to crawl under there. There used to be lots of cats, and I used to love cats. So, I'd crawl under there and play with a cat, so I caught ringworm, you know. So, then I had to—they took me to the barbershop, Lloyd's Barbershop, and he cut all my hair. Here it is—shaved me, and I was bald. That's his barbershop right there. Yeah, you see it? And I was bald, and that was from playing with cats. That was my first haircut. And he was a nice man. He's kind of spunky, on the spunky side.

Allison Bostwick 20:24

How did it look like in the barbershop?

Barbara Fabella 21:22

How did it what?

Allison Bostwick 21:27

How did it look like in there?

Barbara Fabella 21:28

Inside, it was real small in there. He had one barber chair. It was small. Oh, yeah, talking about that. Where's that picture? Oh, here it is. See that? That's like a rooming house right there on top. This is his barbershop. And, okay, I remember that. When I got married, yeah, my husband and I went to live in that rooming house, and it was a black lady. She was a landlady, and she was real stern, I remember. She said, "Lights out at 10." So, you know, young people, you don't pay attention, you really don't take them serious. So, it was like 10:30. She knocks on the door, and he opens the door. And she had a gun pointed, and she said, "I said lights out at 10, and I meant it." So, we really put the lights out fast. So that was something that was embedded in my mind. I never forgot that. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. This is The Black Cat, okay. My mother bought this tavern and we lived there for a while. We didn't always live in Salinas. We moved around. We went to Greenville, we went to Pacific Grove. Wherever there was work. My mother worked in the sardine factory when the sardines were around. So, we moved to Pacific Grove. We stayed there and then the sardines, they disappeared. So, then we came back to Salinas, and then we moved to Greenville. And she got married, and her and her husband and I moved to Greenville. And they had a bar and restaurant over there, and they did very well. And then we moved back to Salinas, and they got a divorce. And then she bought The Black Cat when we lived here. And there's a hotel that goes—there's a side door that goes up and it goes over here to this hotel.

Esther Vargas 23:59

So, your mother was a busy woman, right?

Barbara Fabella 24:02

Yeah.

Esther Vargas 24:02

She was always working?

Barbara Fabella 24:03

She was always working, yes. And I was always moving around because I didn't stay with one family that long. You know, they only took care of me for a while. I had a couple of families that wanted to adopt me, because they knew that my mother worked. She worked nights. And a lot of times, you know, I would have to take care of myself, especially as I got older, I was old enough to take care of myself. But when I was young, I always had sitters or nannies, and people, they thought, well, you know, here's a woman, she can't take care of her child. She's always working. So, they wanted to adopt me. It was two good families that wanted to adopt me, in fact—[pause in recording]—and after that we just moved around constantly. She worked in various places, restaurants in Chinatown. She was a waitress. She was—those days they'd call them bar maids. And she worked at the Chinese—sometimes she would take me to her job. And they didn't seem to mind, so. Any other questions?

Esther Vargas 25:35

Do you want to tell us about the first place you lived in, was the Republican, the Republic Hotel?

Barbara Fabella 25:40

Yeah, the Republican Hotel.

Allison Bostwick 25:41

How was that like?

Barbara Fabella 25:43

Well, they're mostly men there. There was a couple other families, and it was fine. I remember there used to be—they used to drink tea from a big [unclear]. And they had a dipper, and they would dip it in there and drink tea. And so, I used to mimic everything that I used to watch older people. So, I used to go and do the same thing. Go and get the dipper and drink tea myself. So, like I said, I lived there for a short while. And my mother lived there longer, and she got someone to take care of me. I lived with various families, and she would pay for me to live with different families. And I would stay there all the time. And she would go every two weeks to pay them and to visit with me. So, there was many families, and so, let's see, I have—I remember one family was from Prunedale, the Hewitts. They were very nice. I liked them. They had around—they had about two, three boys, and they never had any girls and they wanted a girl. In fact, they asked if they could adopt me. But my mother, she wouldn't have any part of it. Like I said, they were very nice. Then I lived with the Ortiz family on California Street. I remember she had triplets, there was like three. That's what I remember about them. And she had a few children. And then I remember another family. In fact, we lived in this house with this lady. She didn't have a husband. Her name was Wicha. And she had one girl and three boys. So, my mother gave up the house and let her live in this house, provided that she would take care of me. So, she took care of me, and I remember we used to take a bath about once a week. She used to give us this big steel tub, and two of us girls, we would have to bathe in the same water. Of course, she would bathe her daughter first, and then I got bathed in the leftover water. Which wasn't that clean. [laughs]

Esther Vargas 28:12

How was it like living in that little house?

Barbara Fabella 28:14

It was nice. It was small. It was—had a real tiny bathroom, didn't have—it just had a bathroom, didn't have a tub or shower. So, I don't know how the adults took baths [laughs]. I know they gave us baths in that big steel container. And, let's see, I think I have some notes.

Esther Vargas 28:46

What was it like living in front of the water tank. Was that—?

Barbara Fabella 28:49

It was scary. I always had this fear that it was going to just bust open from the seams and we were going to drown [laughs]. And then we lived close to the tracks, and every time that train would roll by, it—everything would vibrate. The house would just shake and, you know, and I would shake too. So, any other questions.

Esther Vargas 29:17

Is there anything specific you remember about the railroad tracks, besides the—

Barbara Fabella 29:21

Oh, yes. Every morning when I'd go to school, that train would always pass by at the same time that I had to cross those tracks. And this particular morning this train passed by and stopped and wouldn't move. And I thought, oh, I'm going to be late for school. So, what I did—I did it before, I got between the cars to jump between the cars, and when I did this, the train, it did like a whiplash. It just—like that—and I fell, and I kind of flew, and when I did I fell on a hobo, because they slept there by the tracks, you know. That was scary too [chuckles]. And today you call them street people, but back in those days you called them hobos. And they were harmless. They'd leave you alone. So, do you do you see any difference between—have you been to Chinatown lately? Recently? No, I haven't been there.

Esther Vargas 30:26

Well, we've gone, right? And there's a lot of homeless people, or what they would call hobos back then. Do you think there's any difference between how the hobos were before and how they are now? Do you think there's a difference?

Barbara Fabella 30:45

Oh, yes. Because it seemed like the hobos were always intoxicated. You'd never see them sober. And the homeless people, you know, they're not intoxicated. They just don't have a home to go to.

Esther Vargas 31:04

So it's safe to say that in Chinatown before, most of the hobos were there because they were alcoholics?

Barbara Fabella 31:16

Well, I guess, or some other problems.

Allison Bostwick 31:19

What do you remember of Chinatown as being little as you were growing up there that, if you went out and played and stuff like that—

Barbara Fabella 31:26

Well, I remember it was safe. I had no fear. And when you're that young, you don't have any fear unless the fear is put into you. And God, he didn't give me any fear. So, you know, I used to, you know, just go—and like the babysitters, I don't think that they even paid attention to where I was going, because I had a lot of freedom. Plus I was a free spirit. And I had all the freedom I wanted. And I got to play, you know, with the children there. I had friends there. And that's what I remember about Chinatown. And as I got older, I—oh, I'll just wait. You go ahead. Ask me the questions. Sorry.

Esther Vargas 32:27

No, go ahead. Are you sure? It's fine, you can go ahead and skip over to where you grew up.

Barbara Fabella 32:31

No, no, you go ahead.

Esther Vargas 32:32

Okay. What did you do with the children, with your friends? What would you guys do to entertain yourselves?

Barbara Fabella 32:39

Oh, we had toys. Let's see, our toys were like—mine were dolls, rag dolls. I had wagons, bikes, wooden toys with the string—those pull wooden toys with, you'd pull with the string. And we used to watch the older boys make kites, and they used to fly them. And they would have contests [unclear] which one would fly the highest. They would make them out of the Californian newspaper. And then we would sit on the curb, and we would count cars going by. And there wasn't very many models in those days. So, we used to name the models. And we didn't have that many to name [laughs]. So, we did that. That was fun counting cars and naming the models. And that's what we did.

Esther Vargas 33:44

So how did you guys know what the models were? Did you guys look into it?

Barbara Fabella 33:51

We were smart little kids. Yeah, we used to look. We used to look every month. Every car has a model on it. Trying to see if I overlooked anything. Oh, yes. And across the street from where I lived here, there used to be a church, and on Sunday—here it is. We called them the Holy Rollers, and they used to, you know, do their services, and so we used to go over there and look in the windows, and we used to mimic them. So we started rolling on the ground like they did. And so, the next Sunday, when we went over there to look in the windows, they had painted the windows black, so that kind of cut out our fun, you know. Okay, anything else?

Esther Vargas 34:58

Did they say anything to you?

Barbara Fabella 35:00

Oh, no. They didn't say anything to us.

Allison Bostwick 35:03

Did you ever find out why they were rolling on the ground at all in there?

Barbara Fabella 35:08

No, they just—someone said they were Holy Rollers. So, we just took that.

Esther Vargas 35:20

What about the kites that you guys used to make?

Barbara Fabella 35:23

They were made out of newspaper from the Californian.

Esther Vargas 35:29

Would all the kites look the same or—

Barbara Fabella 35:31

Some were bigger, some were smaller, some were neater. And some flew higher. And it was the older boys who used to fly them. But we used to watch, and we had fun watching.

Esther Vargas 35:45

Do you wish that you would have had a chance though, to be able to fly them?

Barbara Fabella 35:49

Yes. The boys were like 12 years old, and I was, like, four or five.

Esther Vargas 36:00

Did you see—speaking of children, did you see the children that, in the homes you used to live in with the families, did you see them as your siblings?

Barbara Fabella 36:09

No, I didn't see them as my siblings. They had their own family, and I was just—I knew that I wasn't going to be there long. So I didn't bond with the families. Because it was just gonna be, you know, short time.

Allison Bostwick 36:31

What do you remember most about some of the different families that you've lived with?

Barbara Fabella 36:37

Well, the Hewitts, I loved the Hewitts because they lived in Prunedale in the country, and they had chickens. And they had fruit trees and berries. And so, I learned a lot over there. And we did a lot of things. And it was a normal family. It was more traditional. It was fun. We used to go to the beaches. We used to do things. And I did these things with the other families also.

Esther Vargas 37:15

Did you get into any trouble when you were younger?

Barbara Fabella 37:18

I was mischievous in my own way, you know. Used to go places that I wasn't supposed to go to.

Esther Vargas 37:29

You said you had a lot of freedom around Chinatown. What were some of the things you used to do when the nannies were supposed to be watching you?

Barbara Fabella 37:38

Well, I would go down the alleys. I would go down Soledad street, and I would peek in the buildings. And stuff like that.

Esther Vargas 37:51

You said that you used to look, you did things, sorry, that you weren't supposed to. Do you want to share with us some of them?

Barbara Fabella 38:00

Why don't you mention it? Because my memory just got short right now.

Esther Vargas 38:07

How about when—what about the cats?

Barbara Fabella 38:10

Oh, that's right. Are we here? Okay, the front of the house didn't have cement or it didn't have dirt. It had like planks of wood. So, between the ground and the wood there was this much, you know, a crawl, where you could crawl, and so I used to crawl in there and look for the cats. And I found, you know, a cat to play with, but at the same time I caught ring worms on my head. So, I had to go across the street over here, which is Lloyd's Barbershop and get a haircut. He shaved my head—hair. I had no hair and—to get rid of the ring worms.

Esther Vargas 38:58

How did you feel when they shaved your head?

Barbara Fabella 39:01

Oh well, I wasn't happy. I wasn't happy. It didn't look very good, either. I looked like a boy.

Esther Vargas 39:08

Do you remember your reaction?

Barbara Fabella 39:10

Well, yes, I was crying.

Esther Vargas 39:12

You were crying? What about your mother? Did—is she the first one that found out about it, or did the family you were staying with—

Barbara Fabella 39:20

Oh, I don't know. I don't recall. I'm trying to think of some other things. Oh, yes. I used to go to work with her once in a while when she worked at the Chinese restaurant. That was fun. Because they used to have these dumbwaiters. And the busboys used to put all the dishes on the dumbwaiters, and then they would pull this pulley and the dumbwaiter would go down to the bottom where the kitchen was to get the dishes washed. Then they had the laundry chute where they used to throw all the napkins and tablecloths. And then they used to shoot down to the laundry room. So that was fun because I used to go down with the laundry—shoot down to the basement, then come up with the dumbwaiter. So that was really fun. And so, I always found ways to entertain myself.

Esther Vargas 40:22

What kind of people did you encounter in Chinatown when you were wandering by yourself?

Barbara Fabella 40:30

Well, I encountered families, children. There was—Chinatown mainly consisted of Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, American blacks, not too many American whites. I only remember one American white. And that was Al's Place. He had a tavern there. And all the other businesses—oh, there was some Mexicans also, not very many. And so, there was some, I guess Mexican restaurants. Filipino, Chinese, Japanese—mostly Japanese business were on Lake Street, on the street where I lived.

Esther Vargas 41:18

Do you remember any of the restaurants? Any of them your favorite?

Barbara Fabella 41:21

I remember the [unclear] Cafe. Okay, this is the [unclear] Cafe. It's on Lake Street. It's right next to The Black Cat. This was my mother's place. And I didn't live here until I was like, I believe I was like 10 or 11. Then, and then I went to live with a family. Then I came back when I was like 16. And then I only lived here a year. And I was going to school when I lived here. I used to go to school, and after school I used to come home right away. I wasn't allowed to have school activities. So, I needed to come home right away. And I never told the children, my playmates at school, where I lived. I never had them over for, you know, a pajama party or sleepovers. Because when you got older, you didn't want to, you didn't want them to know where you lived. When I was young, I didn't care.

Esther Vargas 42:52

Why was it—why would you not told the children where you lived, your classmates?

Barbara Fabella 43:02

Because I thought they they probably wouldn't like me. And so that's why I didn't tell them. There was other children in Chinatown that did the same thing. You know, they all did the same thing. We didn't tell, unless they found out by accident.

Esther Vargas 43:21

And was there something about Chinatown that made it like that?

Barbara Fabella 43:25

Well, it had a bad stigma to it. You don't know that when you're young, but as you get older you find out. It wasn't the best place in town to live in [laughs].

Esther Vargas 43:33

You had mentioned something about sleeping with the beer?

Barbara Fabella 43:51

Okay, I had to share my sleeping quarters with the beer.

Esther Vargas 43:55

Is this while you were at The Black Cat?

Barbara Fabella 43:57

Yeah, at The Black Cat. I slept in the beer room believe it or not, but it was okay because it was a place, you know—it was better than sleeping in the kitchen because I had slept in the kitchen, you know, before the beer room. So, when I went to the beer room I thought, oh, this is heaven [laughs]. The beer room would have been somebody's dream, you know, some teenagers dream. But no, not mine because I didn't, never acquired the taste for beer. But it wasn't bad because it was my little cubby hole that I could call my own. So, it wasn't that bad.

Esther Vargas 44:43

How old were you when your mom started working there?

Barbara Fabella 44:46

What, The Black Cat? Probably 10 years old. She had gotten a divorce. We lived in Greenville for about three years. She got a divorce. They did pretty well in Greenville. He was a bartender, and she was the cook. They had their own little restaurant, bar restaurant and they did really well. Then they built the labor camp. And then the marriage went bad and so they get a divorce. And then we came to Salinas and then she opened up The Black Cat.

Esther Vargas 45:23

What was your stepfather like?

Barbara Fabella 45:25

He was nice. I liked him. He was really nice. And I'll show you my first stepfather. I'll show you some pictures. When we came to Salinas, this is probably what my mother looked like. Okay. And this was my first stepfather, Al Doraso. I really liked him.

Esther Vargas 46:01

Is that who she had the restaurant with?

Barbara Fabella 46:04

No. I think she married three times. I'm going to show you a picture of my mother and myself if I can find it. Oh, here's one of the babysitters that took care of me. Agnes Tebo's sister. This is Agnes. This is her sister Tiki. Tiki took care of me. And this is a picture of me, three or four. This was at Central Park. And this is a picture of me with the Boutte children. Audrey was having a birthday party—Audrey Boutte.

Esther Vargas 47:03

How were birthday parties back then in Chinatown?

Barbara Fabella 47:08

They were just like birthdays like today. The same.

Esther Vargas 47:14

Did you ever have one—a birthday party?

Barbara Fabella 47:17

Oh, yes. I had one at Central Park, Greenville. And Chinatown.

Esther Vargas 47:31

Did they ever take you out to eat?

Barbara Fabella 47:33

Oh, yeah. I went out to eat a lot. Because my mother lived at—I mean, she worked in restaurants. That's what she did. So, I mostly ate in restaurants.

Esther Vargas 47:47

Do you remember any restaurants in Chinatown?

Barbara Fabella 47:51

Yes, the Republican. I believe it was called the Republican Cafe. That was supposed to be a really good restaurant.

Esther Vargas 48:02

How was it like in there?

Barbara Fabella 48:04

This guy's family used to go there. They used to take their children.

Esther Vargas 48:14

Do you remember anyone who worked there?

Barbara Fabella 48:19

Just a little lady, she had black hair. They called her mama-san, I believe.

Esther Vargas 48:31

What was your favorite kind of food?

Barbara Fabella 48:36

I liked them all. Because everyone that I lived with, they had a different culture. So, I learned to eat from different cultures. I learned how to eat Chinese, Mexican, Filipino, Japanese, food from the South, creole, Mediterranean. So, American food. I like them all.

Esther Vargas 49:08

You had a very cultured childhood when it came to that. Yeah. Do you think it was because you lived in Chinatown for so long?

Barbara Fabella 49:17

No, because a lot of these families that took care of me, they weren't all from Chinatown. The Hewitts were from Prunedale, so they cooked like Southern style. And the Bouttes, they didn't live directly in Chinatown. I think it was Front Street, which is in back of Chinatown.

Esther Vargas 49:42

Is there one thing that you loved about Chinatown when you were younger?

Barbara Fabella 49:50

Probably the people. You know, I liked the people.

Esther Vargas 49:56

What type of people were the—that you—

Barbara Fabella 49:59

They were from all cultures.

Esther Vargas 50:05

And did they have any parties or anything? Anything special that ever happened?

Barbara Fabella 50:10

If they did, I probably don't remember. I just remember—oh, okay, I remember I have some notes here. Oh, the Lees, I forgot to tell you about the Lees for the Royal Hotel. They used to watch me after school, and they would feed me, and I learned how to eat with chopsticks. And when I learned how to

eat with chopsticks, then they would give me a fork. Otherwise he says, "No, you have to learn how to eat with chopsticks."

Allison Bostwick 51:05

Did it take you long to learn how to eat with the chopsticks?

Barbara Fabella 51:07

About half an hour [laughs]. Then I think he felt sorry for me.

Esther Vargas 51:13

So, the different families have different rules like that?

Barbara Fabella 51:17

Yes, every family had different rules.

Esther Vargas 51:21

Do you remember which was your least favorite rule?

Barbara Fabella 51:23

No, that was so long ago.

Allison Bostwick 51:34

Know when we talked before you were talking about the johns in Chinatown? Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

Barbara Fabella 51:44

Oh, yeah. I used to go down the street. They had the prostitutes, you know, I did—at that time, I didn't know that they were prostitutes. They were just, you know, nice looking ladies. And I don't know where they came from. But there was nice looking ladies, you know, prostitutes, and they were standing there talking with their johns, that's what they call them. And so, they would always tell them, give us the money. And that's all I remember. And I remember going to the chicken fights when I lived with the Filipino family. They used to have these chicken fights. I think you'd call them cock fighters, or is that with—I think they call them cock fight. And so, I used to watch that. And they would always be betting. It was like a money thing—gambling. So, I was exposed to that.

Esther Vargas 52:52

Was there a lot of gambling that went on in Chinatown?

Barbara Fabella 52:55

Oh, yes. Lots of gambling. Like the first part of Chinatown where the Republican Hotel is across the street? And you know where Dorothy's kitchen is? Over there, there was a lot of gambling. Those are the gambling places.

Allison Bostwick 53:16

Did your mother ever go gambling at all?

Barbara Fabella 53:18

I don't think she did. She wasn't a gambler. And she wasn't a drinker. Even though she worked in bars, and she had her own business. She wasn't one to drink. And so, drinking doesn't really run in our family.

Esther Vargas 53:38

Since your mom had The Black Cat, did a lot of people know her in Chinatown?

Barbara Fabella 53:44

Oh, yes. Everyone knew everyone in Chinatown.

Esther Vargas 53:48

So did they treat you differently. Did they treat you special?

Barbara Fabella 53:52

They were nice to me. And her name was Nina, so they would always say Nina's daughter.

Esther Vargas 54:00

Do you remember any times when they, you know, an example of when they treated you nicely?

Barbara Fabella 54:12

No, they treated me nice all the time.

Esther Vargas 54:17

What about the soldiers from Fort Ord? Did they used—did they go to Chinatown often?

Barbara Fabella 54:24

Yes. On their pay day they would go to Chinatown. And I remember when I used to pass by there, I used to look into the Golden Dragon. Lots of soldiers. The whole town. There's lots of soldiers on their pay day, they'd come down.

Allison Bostwick 54:42

What was the Golden Dragon?

Barbara Fabella 54:45

The Golden Dragon was a bar that was on the end of Chinatown where it meets Lake Street. It's called the Golden Dragon Bar.

Esther Vargas 54:54

Do you remember what it looked like inside?

Barbara Fabella 54:56

Not really, just looked long. I would peek in and it was just a long bar that I never went inside.

Esther Vargas 55:04

But you've been inside your mother's bar, right? How was that like?

Barbara Fabella 55:09

Well, we had our living quarters in the back. So anytime I needed to go to the living quarters, I had to go through the bar. It was a long bar.

Esther Vargas 55:23

Did your mom usually have a lot of customers?

Barbara Fabella 55:25

She had a lot of customers. And the jukebox used to play loud at night. I don't know how you ever got to sleep. But I did. I slept.

Esther Vargas 55:37

Do you know if more people were out at night than during the day?

Barbara Fabella 55:43

I believe so. There's a lot of people out at night.

Allison Bostwick 55:49

Did you ever wander around at night? Did you ever see anything? Anything that ever happened?

Barbara Fabella 55:56

I used to see like fights once in a while. Used to see, you know—and those days they used to fight with their fists. You know, they didn't use weapons or anything like that or guns as much. But they used to—I used to see fist fights or a chain once in a while.

Esther Vargas 56:21

What about the lights on the sides? How was—

Barbara Fabella 56:26

There was lights and signs and it was lighted up in it. It just looked like—it just looked like a fun place. When you're little, you know, you'd see lights and you'd think it was fun.

Esther Vargas 56:51

Do you think it was it might have been fun for the kids but not so much for the adults? Is that what you're saying?

Barbara Fabella 56:57

Well, when you're little everything seems like fun. More so than with the adults.

Esther Vargas 57:06

Do you remember if your mom ever said anything about Chinatown about living there? Or if she liked it or not?

Barbara Fabella 57:15

No, she never mentioned it. We never talked about it

Esther Vargas 57:23

Do you still talk to a lot of people that used to live in Chinatown with you?

Barbara Fabella 57:26

No, because I don't see the people—a lot of them have moved out of town. So very seldom do I run into someone that I used to know. Oh, okay, so I have this that I wrote down. In those days, if you got sick, you weren't taken to the doctor very often. Something had to be seriously wrong with you—life threatening—for instance, like a burst appendix like I had. If you were sick with a cough, they would put, you know, they would do like home remedies on you. I remember one incident, I couldn't get rid of this cough. So, they did this home remedy where they cooked some tomatoes and they put them in a muslin bag. And then they put the bag on your feet—they would tie it up to your feet. So, your feet were in this bag of cooked tomatoes. Yeah, those are the home remedies. Like I said they didn't take us to the doctor's much. And then if you had a headache, or a fever, they used to put onions, like sliced thin onions on your forehead, or if they didn't use the—no, no this was potatoes. And if they didn't use potatoes, they would put onions on your forehead and then they would get a clean diaper and bind your forehead with the onion or the potato, and that was to draw the fever out. So that was another home remedy. They used to use a lot of home remedies back then.

Allison Bostwick 59:15

Did any of them ever work?

Barbara Fabella 59:18

Well I think the tomato one did [unclear] [laughs]. And I remember the plaster, the mustard plaster—what, oh, if you had a cough and you couldn't get rid of it, they used to put this plaster of mustard on your chest that went to—that was nasty.

Esther Vargas 59:42

Do you know all of these because they did them to you?

Barbara Fabella 59:45

He did all of them to me.

Esther Vargas 59:47

And how was the appendix? Like because, you can't really have a home remedy for that?

Barbara Fabella 59:52

No.

Esther Vargas 59:53

Do you want to tell us about that?

Barbara Fabella 59:55

Well, in those days you suffer. If you said you had a belly ache or a tummy ache, they didn't pay much attention to you. So, nobody was paying attention to me, so my appendix bursted. Then I—after that, I don't remember anything, until the next day I was in the hospital. And they had already did surgery on me, so.

Esther Vargas 1:00:18

How old were you when that happened?

Barbara Fabella 1:00:20

Three.

Esther Vargas 1:00:20

Three?

Barbara Fabella 1:00:21

Three years old, yeah.

Esther Vargas 1:00:22

Do you know who paid for it? For them?

Barbara Fabella 1:00:25

My mother. My mother and I, we went, I went to the—it was the hospital that was on Monterey and Lewis street. That was the hospital that I went to.

Esther Vargas 1:00:41

Can you tell us a little bit about school? How school was like?

Barbara Fabella 1:00:49

I remember school, the teachers were stern, and people—students respected them. And they taught us a lot. They taught us a little about everything. They taught us about etiquette. They taught us about discipline. And the children listened to the teachers. There was no back talking. In fact, we kind of had a little fear of them. We respected them. The teachers were very respected back then.

Allison Bostwick 1:01:23

Where did you go to school?

Barbara Fabella 1:01:25

I went to Lincoln School, Roosevelt School. I went to every school. All the old schools, [unclear], but every elementary school I went to in Salinas.

Esther Vargas 1:01:37

Was there ever any discrimination?

Barbara Fabella 1:01:40

Not that I remember, not back then

Esther Vargas 1:01:44

Can you like sort of compare how it was back then to now—the discrimination that you faced after that?

Barbara Fabella 1:01:56

When you're little or when you're—

Esther Vargas 1:01:59

More comparing both of them when you were younger there and—because you know how you were saying that there wasn't any discrimination that you remember? Well, compared to when you were a little bit older, and you started saying that there was. What kind of discrimination was it then?

Barbara Fabella 1:02:15

Let's see, I think I wrote a little bit about discrimination. If there was any, I didn't experience or see it. There was a mixture of different races and cultures, and everyone seemed to get along. I guess when times are tough, and everyone is striving to survive, there is no room for it. People who live there in Chinatown—there were Chinese, Japanese—already went through that. American blacks, Filipinos, a few Mexicans, and they all seem to get along.

Esther Vargas 1:03:12

That's good. Can you tell us a little bit about the holidays, who you spend it with?

Barbara Fabella 1:03:27

I spend them with different families. Once in a while I would spend them with my mother, but mostly with whoever the family was at that time.

Esther Vargas 1:03:38

Do you think Chinatown was different—the celebrations—because there was so many people there?

Barbara Fabella 1:03:45

During the holidays? A lot of times I wasn't in Chinatown. There was times that I was elsewhere.

Esther Vargas 1:03:57

Do you remember any of the different traditions or customs that the different families used to do for some of the holidays?

Barbara Fabella 1:04:04

They would all celebrate it the same way. Because they adapted and, you know, they adopted the same. And I think wherever they came from, I don't know if they have the same holidays.

Esther Vargas 1:04:20

If you can explain or describe Chinatown, in a sentence, how would you describe it? How it was then?

Barbara Fabella 1:04:30

Chinatown was a place where everyone got together of different cultures and they all seemed to adapt and get along together. And they shared, because I don't remember food lines back, you know, like, I don't remember like you could go someplace and get, like, stand in line and get free food. I remember that. And so, a lot of people shared like what they had. Even if it was a little bit, they still shared.

Esther Vargas 1:05:10

Well, what happened when something bad would happen, like fires or stuff? Or what happened then?

Barbara Fabella 1:05:18

Well, I was only in one. It was over here by Leon's Club. It was over here someplace on Lake Street. It was a small one. And it started from one of these stoves where you put kerosene or coals, you know, and I don't know what happened. But anyway, we got pulled, we went to sleep when we got pulled out because everything was black. You couldn't even see the room. You got pulled out because you couldn't see your way out. And it was like charcoal, everything was black. So, I don't know if it was the fire. If it was before the fire or after a fire. But I remember that for at least a month or so or more, I would cough up black. You've got that in your lungs. And they didn't even take us. I don't remember going to a doctor. You had to be dying before you go to the doctor. They didn't take us to the doctor for that.

Esther Vargas 1:06:43

Do you remember if anyone else had the same problem? The coughing?

Barbara Fabella 1:06:49

No, no, because we kind of all went our own way.

Allison Bostwick 1:06:53

At the time of the fire, were you close to Leon's Club? Like, where you lived? Was it really close?

Barbara Fabella 1:07:01

Well, I didn't live there. I was told that there was a restaurant there. And all these businesses had living quarters in the back. So, we were in the back. I guess somebody was babysitting at this establishment. And that's where it broke out.

Esther Vargas 1:07:23

Do you remember if there were any fire hydrants near?

Barbara Fabella 1:07:26

No, I don't remember. But here's the big fire. This is close to that little house I showed you. I don't know what year this was. But anyway, I was told that Chinatown one time completely burned down, and they rebuild it again. I didn't know that until recently.

Esther Vargas 1:07:59

So, does that mean that people usually didn't talk about it?

Barbara Fabella 1:08:04

Or maybe you didn't ask or maybe people knew and I just didn't know about it. I'm sure the old timers, they all knew. It was probably like the people like me that was younger. And they were there after they built it the second time.

Allison Bostwick 1:08:29

What were some of the other different shops like that were in Chinatown and around it?

Barbara Fabella 1:08:35

Okay, on this street, Lake Street—this is where I used to live. I think it's—they took it. Or they took it down. It no longer existed when they took this picture. But this used to be the cleaner's right here. This was like a rooming house. And this, I don't remember what that was. Okay. Over here, this is the church. I'm sorry. This is the church. This is Lloyd's Barbershop over here in the corner. This is where I got my first haircut. Next to it was like a fish market and a store. Then over here was a rooming house. In fact, I stayed there a month when my husband—when we first got married. And this lady, she had strict rules. She's—she told us lights off at 10 o'clock. Well, we didn't pay attention. We were having too much fun. So, we didn't turn the lights off. So, then she knocks on the door, and he answers the door. Then she's pointing a gun at him, and she says, "I told you, lights off at 10." So, he complied.

Esther Vargas 1:09:59

Where did you meet your husband?

Barbara Fabella 1:10:01

In school.

Esther Vargas 1:10:03

And how old were you when you got married?

Barbara Fabella 1:10:07

17.

Esther Vargas 1:10:09

Did he like Chinatown?

Barbara Fabella 1:10:12

He wasn't from there. But, you know, he went there because that's where I live.

Esther Vargas 1:10:17

And when you stayed at that, at that place, so he really didn't like it there after that?

Barbara Fabella 1:10:25

We both didn't like it.

Allison Bostwick 1:10:29

Where else did you guys live after you moved out?

Barbara Fabella 1:10:33

We went to live with his dad. But we didn't go to my mother's after that. After I got married. I never went back.

Esther Vargas 1:10:45

Is that what people usually did? They usually—the kids got married and kind of started going away from Chinatown.

Barbara Fabella 1:10:52

And I wanted to leave Chinatown. I liked Chinatown when I was little. But as I got older, you know, I didn't care for it anymore. I was older. And I wanted a better life like everyone else. So, you know, we moved away.

Allison Bostwick 1:11:10

How long were you and your husband married?

Barbara Fabella 1:11:15

I was married till I was 27. Then he passed away. I'm still a little—

Esther Vargas 1:11:24

Did you ever tell your kids about Chinatown, about how it was to live there?

Barbara Fabella 1:11:30

No, they thought it was boring. They didn't seem to appreciate it.

Esther Vargas 1:11:37

Did you think it was boring?

Barbara Fabella 1:11:39

They thought it was.

Esther Vargas 1:11:41

But did you?

Barbara Fabella 1:11:42

No.

Esther Vargas 1:11:43

Not when you were younger?

Barbara Fabella 1:11:44

No, I didn't think it was. I used to kind of tell them about things, and they thought I was making it up. You know, I told them about the tracks, how I had to climb, jump up between the cars to get to school, and they thought it was made up.

Esther Vargas 1:12:04

What did Chinatown look like to you? When you stepped out of your house and you said, "Oh, I don't know what I'm going to do today," and you're wandering around, what did it look like? Or what did you hear? What did you smell? What was Chinatown like?

Barbara Fabella 1:12:17

When I was how old?

Esther Vargas 1:12:18

When you were younger.

Allison Bostwick 1:12:21

When you—anytime when you lived in Chinatown.

Barbara Fabella 1:12:24

Oh, I just took it with a grain of salt. I didn't know any better. You know, I didn't know anything beyond Chinatown when I was little. And then when you go to school, then you know that there's, you know, there's a world out there that exists besides Chinatown. When you're little here in this little, you know, and you never leave it except when you go to the show or on vacations.

Esther Vargas 1:12:56

So, when you got a little bit older, when you were in high school—how did it look like then for you? How was Chinatown? Like, compared to the rest of the world, like you said?

Barbara Fabella 1:13:09

It didn't look very pretty [laughs]. It didn't look very pretty back then.

Allison Bostwick 1:13:17

Was it still fun though?

Barbara Fabella 1:13:20

No, because you're growing up and there's nothing for a teenager to do. Yeah, so you kind of outgrow it. It was only fun when you were a toddler where you were young. But when you get to be a teenager, you know, there's nothing for teenagers to do.

Esther Vargas 1:13:41

What did you usually hear? Like, was there music because I know that your mom had a jukebox.

Barbara Fabella 1:13:49

Yeah, there was music. When I grew up, my first—because there was no TV, we didn't have a TV. And since a lot of times when I got older, I kind of babysat myself, so I was by myself. So, I entertained myself with the radio. And the music was a lot different back then. There was a lot of—it was tropical music like Desi Arnaz music. And the music came from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and South America—a lot of South American music. Well, you wouldn't know who Desi Arnaz is anyway. It was before you were born. And then when the Braceros came during the 50s, then I started hearing the Mexican music. There was this man called [unclear] that had a radio station. He played a lot of Mexican music so I heard that.

Esther Vargas 1:15:01

Do you remember any changes with the Bracero program? How did Chinatown change?

Barbara Fabella 1:15:06

Oh, there's a lot of Braceros in the 50s.

Esther Vargas 1:15:11

Were they usually—did they usually go to the bars and stuff or what would they do?

Barbara Fabella 1:15:19

Well, a lot of them. Yeah, because they came over here by themselves. And they're all alone. They left their families behind. So, I guess this was the only place for them to go to for entertainment.

Esther Vargas 1:15:36

And was it really expensive to live in Chinatown or to go and have fun there?

Barbara Fabella 1:15:41

I don't know, because I didn't go there [chuckles]. By the time I got older, you know, I went elsewhere.

Esther Vargas 1:15:51

And I understand you wrote a poem. Right, a poem? What inspired you to write a poem about Chinatown?

Barbara Fabella 1:15:59

Well, when they were looking for the poems for the Steinbeck Museum, they wanted, I think, 1000 or more poems. So I thought, oh, I could write a poem. I'll just write about Chinatown.

Esther Vargas 1:16:16

Do you want to say anything else? Or would you like to read us your poem?

Barbara Fabella 1:16:21

Let me see if I have anything else to share with you before I read the poem.

Esther Vargas 1:16:29

Is there something we need to know before you read the poem? To help us understand it?

Barbara Fabella 1:16:35

Oh, no. Oh, I didn't mention I did have a sibling, one sibling.

Allison Bostwick 1:16:41

Oh, okay.

Barbara Fabella 1:16:42

Yeah, her name was Nadine. And when we moved to Salinas from Capitola, she was with us. And Nadine disappeared. And she—the babysitter, we had a babysitter that came with us. There was four of us, my mother, Marie, Nadine, and myself. And Nadine stayed with us until she was about one, one and a half. And then her and Marie disappeared. So, I guess Marie took off with my sister. So, I never got to see my sister after that. And so, I just wanted to mention my sister, Nadine. Because I did have a sister.

Allison Bostwick 1:17:27

Have you ever tried to find her at all?

Barbara Fabella 1:17:31

I would love to if I had all the information. But Nadine was born at home. This was during the war, and we were both war babies. And she—my mother didn't go to the hospital. She had her at home. In fact, I seen the whole thing and I got really traumatized by it. I didn't know my mother was having a baby. I was traumatized for years. I tried to figure it out, what happened? And I got—I put it all together, like, when I was in my late 20s or 30s. And I said, "That's what happened! Nadine was born." [laughs] It really did traumatize me.

Esther Vargas 1:18:24

Did that happen a lot? Did children—were children born in their own home?

Barbara Fabella 1:18:28

Yeah, born in the homes. But nobody told me. Nobody, you know—well I was young, too. How are you going to explain to a child? And, let's see, what else.

Unknown 1:18:46

So, I have about five minutes on the tape right now.

Barbara Fabella 1:18:48

Oh, okay. Okay, then I'll read that poem. [unclear]

Unknown 1:18:54

I can put another tape in too, but—

Barbara Fabella 1:18:57

My glasses—oh, here. Okay, I'm going to read the poem that I wrote about Chinatown. Okay. This poem is seen through the eyes of a four-year-old girl. I was four at the time. Okay. The title is "The Streets of Chinatown." Down the street of Soledad, I pull my little red wagon with my Shirley Temple doll. We're both mesmerized by the bright night lights. Like Christmas, busy streets are lit with colorful neon signs and lights. Out of the corner of my eye, one catches my attention. The Golden Dragon Saloon. We sneak a peek and then we hurry on by. People of all colors and races keep up with each other's paces. I remember mama-san at the old Chinese restaurant, with her long black hair all coiled up and her ruby lips mouthing, "Come to me, little [unclear]," she would say. But instead I would run away. Did they have babysitters in those days? What do I know? I was only four. There was a flower lady selling flowers and corsages each night as she walked from place to place, with her neatly combed, finger wave red hair and brightly colored lips. Military men visited on their pay day from the base not far away. Some might say, "Didn't they have babysitters in those days? And why isn't this child in bed?" I might answer, "I don't know. That was a long time ago, and I'm all grown up now." Still pulling my red wagon with Shirley in it, we pass by a cluster of pretty ladies with painted faces and store-bought hair, having conversations with well-dressed men. Strange how almost all of them are called Johns. What do I know? I'm only four. Almost every Sunday on the street where I lived, a "Mr. John" would pass me by to see a pretty lady with painted face and store-bought hair. After his visit, and with a big smile on his face, he would always stop by where I sat and say to me, "Put out your hand, little [unclear]," and a dollar he would give. "A dollar!" I would say. "This will buy me a lot of candy for many days." Now, who do you think had the biggest smile? "Mr. John" or me?

Esther Vargas 1:21:43

Do you want to share with us the picture that you have with it?

Barbara Fabella 1:21:47

Oh, this is the closest thing that kinda looked like me when I was that age, and I was always playing with cats. Those are my friends.

Esther Vargas 1:22:09

Okay, Barbara, thank you so much.

Allison Bostwick 1:22:10

Thank you.

Barbara Fabella 1:22:10

You're welcome.