

5-7-2022

## Interview with Helen (Jim's Chinese Restaurant)

Lucas Bugarin

Jasmine Venegas

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Interviewee: Helen

Interviewers: Lucas Bugarin, Jasmine Venegas

Date: May 7, 2022)

Location: 1584 Del Monte Blvd, Seaside, CA 93955

Collection: Food for Thought: Oral Histories of California's Asian-Pacific Foodways, JAPN 317: Pacific Food Empires, Spring 2022

Length: 00:22:47

Overseen by: Dr. Dustin Wright

**Biography:** Helen is a first generation Chinese immigrant who originated in Guangzhou China. Helen is one of the main owners of Jim's Chinese restaurant in Seaside, CA along with her husband. Helen specializes in cooking authentic Chinese food based on her cultural background and has continuously worked in the food industry for over 20 years. She began working on restaurants in San Francisco, CA but eventually opened up her own restaurant in Seaside and has kept a steady amount of loyal clientele ever since.

**Summary of Transcript:** (00:00:00) Helen gives a brief introduction regarding the restaurant's background, her motive for opening her own restaurant, and her background in the food industry. She goes in depth about her favorite dishes and the most popular dishes amongst her customers. In addition, she describes the benefits of healthy cooking and how she incorporates healthy eating within the restaurant's dishes. (00:04:06) Helen discusses the COVID pandemic and how it affected her restaurant. She goes on to discuss the amount of loyal customers and how she gained more attention to her business through the newspaper. (00:09:20) Helen discusses her previous restaurant experience and how she has adapted that to her current restaurant with the busy lunch and dinner rushes. (00:013:02-22:00) Helen describes the origin of the cuisine and how it represents her home back in China with various cultural dishes that are from her family's home in Guangzhou. She goes on to discuss more about the preparation of the food, the tools used for cooking, and the types of dishes.

### **Interview Transcript:**

**Jasmine Venegas 0:01** Hello everyone, my name is Jasmine Venegas, and I'm here with my partner Lucas Bugarin. And we're here interviewing Helen from Jim's Chinese restaurant in Seaside, California. So welcome, Helen! Yeah.

**Lucas Bugarin 0:14**

So our first question is, why did you decide to open this restaurant?

**Helen 0:19**

Because we only know the cooking my husband, he knows the cooking I'm a waiter for a long time. That's why I try to do my own business.

So we have a lot to experience for the cooking and the serving for the people. And then we have three kids we got to make some money for support for them. So I tried to do the business maybe better than the work for somebody

**Lucas Bugarin 0:54**

And beyond this restaurant how many years do you have in the food experience

**Helen 0:58**

23 years Yeah,

**Lucas Bugarin 1:05**

And what do you have like a favorite dish in your menu?

**Helen 1:09**

Yeah, but the Chow Fun is really famous in the in the Chinese dishes Chow Fun is really difficult. All of the food Chow Fun is really difficult Yeah, so our Hong Kong Noodle my Fun that's very difficult cooking. Yeah, so yeah the Chow Fun is what what is real Chinese yeah and Cantonese.

**Jasmine Venegas**

Yeah so really like representative of your background?

**Helen 1:37**

Yeah, yeah, yeah

**Lucas Bugarin 1:39**

Do you have, do you know any other dish that really represents your culture or your background?

**Helen 1:44**

My culture in the the job? The country? The perfect one! Oh, we do the best the country? In the in the city? Even San Francisco all the people coming down here they said they can't find as good congee at China Town either. So they find it here, yeah. Because we going and at the town we know who can make the really good porridge Yeah,

**Jasmine Venegas 2:11**

I'm gonna have to get that next time!

**Helen 2:13**

Yeah, and it's super healthy

**Jasmine Venegas 2:17**

Yeah, and it's super good for your health huh?

**Lucas Bugarin 2:20**

So why do you feel the need to make like to emphasize how healthy your food is?

**Helen 2:26**

Yeah, healthy food because if we use all of restaurants and then everything we not put any stuff we do the handroll. Everything yeah fresh is important, yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 2:44**

So would you say it's like authentic?

**Helen 2:46**

Yeah, all authentic. Yeah, yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 2:54**

So what is the meaning behind like the name of the restaurant?

**Helen 2:59**

I think and then I tried to put the Chinese name but I don't think so. Very confuse people, easy to remember. Haha. That's why I put the Jim's. Yeah. Jim's, Jim's very popular. So Americans really like this name so that's why I put this name in there.

**Jasmine Venegas 3:17**

That's fun. What about your recipes? Are they a secret or do you share them?

**Helen 3:25**

The secret? Not, not a lot of secret we just use the how to cook each, each whether we decide all the customer what they need then be put we prepare it for them even the choice you put different meat different favor then we cook for the customer flavor, yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 3:46**

So you really try to cater to your customers?

**Helen 3:49**

Yeah, I care about all of my customer.

**Jasmine Venegas 3:51**

Awww I can tell

**Helen 3:52**

Yeah I can I can be saying whatever they like and pick their favorite. I hope that everybody get paid the money they eat that good food. Their favorite, yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 4:04**

That's so amazing!

**Helen 4:05**

Yeah.

**Lucas Bugarin 4:06**

So in the past couple of years, a lot of restaurants have difficulty with a pandemic. Did you find any any difficulties owning a restaurant during this time?

**Jasmine Venegas 4:16**

Like during COVID? Like did COVID affect it?

**Helen 4:18**

Yeah, but the COVID we still good. Still alive, the old customer, to-go yeah, they're the same they're giving. Whatever they need. They still yeah, they still the same all the customers for 23 years.

**Jasmine Venegas 4:36**

Wow!

**Lucas Bugarin 4:36**

Wow!

**Helen 4:36**

The regular customer, even people who move out they coming here for this thing. They still look for my house my restaurant, they said I want to look for the restaurant still running. They want to try before the food. Yeah.

**Lucas Bugarin 4:52**

And do you feel you have a big like loyal customer base?

**Jasmine Venegas 4:59**

Like do you have like a lot of customers that come back?

**Helen 5:01**

Yeah same customers, yeah! They family, they're all alinity They all are lucky man. Yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 5:14**

Woww, that's amazing!

So when you were starting up your restaurant like was it hard like coming here?

**Helen 5:18**

Yeah from the beginning open the restaurant in 1999 and then before they only hamburger. That's right when I buy that, no customer at all and everyday's too slow only few customer know. And either before they don't have a like the phone that you do advertising easy. They only pay

the money for the newspaper to do that. So when I bought the restaurant all the money is empty so we don't have enough money for do the advertising. Only the local people they see me they ask me and then they helping me to put to all of the menus to selling the all the labor all the all the people local man. And and one day, one newspa-- Monterey County, the newspaper writer she coming here to eat she said "Your food is so delicious! How come you don't have any customer?" I said "Oh because I am new, I don't have any money to do the advertising." And she said ohh like but I don't know she she's a writer and one day see write the newspaper at the Monterey County.

**Jasmine Venegas 5:18**

Yeah

**Helen 5:37**

The big paper and then the people saw that then the everybody know. Yeah, that's why everybody coming and the running the good business. I'm really thank you for the writer. Yeah, she's a Monterey County the the taste, tasting everywhere that's why when she taste here and then the the food good then she put the newspaper.

**Jasmine Venegas 7:01**

Yeah, support the local businesses?

**Helen 7:01**

Yeah local, that's why a lot of people coming I do know that. That's why beginning I'm gonna keep all of the new customer and then they happy and then they come back again.

**Jasmine Venegas 7:03**

And then you get the same ones!

**Helen 7:17**

So many years I keep all of the good customers

**Lucas Bugarin 7:21**

Well, do you have anything to say for other people who would like to open their own business?

**Helen 7:26**

Uh..now the new business huh?

**Jasmine Venegas 7:37**

Like if someone was to open a new business like what advice could you give them?

**Helen 7:42**

I don't know.

**Jasmine Venegas 7:43**

You don't know? Yeah that's hard.

**Helen 7:46**

Nobody remind me yeah so I because if they don't be be busy yeah

**Lucas Bugarin 7:54**

I don't think any businesses are like yours. Your, your business is incredible.

Helen 7:58

Yeah, we are okay

**Jasmine Venegas 8:00**

One of a kind

**Helen 7:59**

Small, really small but I want to keep running good. I need the customer, I need the yeah fan. Fan, yeah. Fan. They look like the everybody look like they're coming home to eat the dinner.

**Jasmine Venegas 8:16**

Yeah

**Lucas Bugarin 8:24**

Do you have a least favorite part about owning a restaurant?

**Helen 8:28**

Lease, lease, leasing? For the for the contract?

**Jasmine Venegas 8:32**

No, like so I know that you enjoy owning a restaurant

**Helen 8:36**

Yeah

**Jasmine Venegas 8:36**

Are there any like just challenges or any bad things that you've had?

**Helen 8:39**

No no, no my owner really really nice they really take care of all for the all the renter. Yeah, we are okay so because they not lay up a lot.

**Jasmine Venegas 8:51**

Yeah

**Helen 8:52**

They keep price cost small we because of the pay a lot the bill so they know that so they still take care for the renter. Yeah, they know small you can not a lot the people right?

**Jasmine Venegas 9:08**

Yeah

**Helen 9:08**

So you're just running. Okay. Pay enough bill. Yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 9:13**

Does it get stressful? Like just owning a restaurant?

**Helen 9:17**

Yeah. The restaurant, it's crazy.

**Jasmine Venegas 9:20**

Crazy? Yeah.

**Helen 9:20**

Really crazy. They are not the, because they come in only one time so for lunch two hour. Dinner, three hour and then you gather that this time you got to the professional. Really clear and then that to take care of the first one. Yeah, if a lot you can do that. You got to have a lot of experience. They can't have all of the kitchen. Oh yeah. Before people wait too long. They're not happy. Yeah. And then a lunch short term for the all of the people. They only have 30 minutes or one hour to finish all of the food

**Jasmine Venegas 9:58**

Yah, like really busy during lunchtime?

**Helen 10:02**

Lunchtime only two hour before 11, 11:30 beginning at two o'clock this is so another 3,4,5 is the only filled yeah one by one only yeah not not a lot for that yeah lots of time really saw and dinner from five to 8 that's it yeah so this come time yeah not easy restaurant. Not easy. I tell you

**Jasmine Venegas 10:34**

Its a lot of work!

**Helen 10:35**

If you see my computer make good money yeah cooking its tired really tired you know

**Jasmine Venegas 10:45**

Yeah yeah



**Helen 10:47**

No choice

**Jasmine Venegas 10:48**

Yeah

**Helen 10:49**

Becoming US the English in that really really good so we learned a couple years yeah but still not not me but we gotta get the money and pay the family yeah the kid coming school we need the money we can go to college whatever so we only know who can cooking yeah better than we can live the job for, for

**Jasmine Venegas 11:15**

For your kids!

**Helen 11:16**

Sometimes you'll find a job you'll easily lose the job so business is no good you get fired whatever yeah and then you get to the running every day. Even before I work in San Francisco restaurant I gotta to work two jobs one in the morning one in the in the dinner along in San Francisco a lot of traffic a you gotta the every day at the low driving over there driving over there is hard you know, so I try to tired to driving every day. So I got to the drive opened my restaurant. So I can stay here for a whole day yes yeah no more driving traffic. Yeah, yeah. And then no packing San Francisco I tell my husband San Francisco really beautiful but a lot the people even the job not easy so too many people to find one job so we try leave there and go into the small town yeah we do the family and then I watch my kid yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 12:30**

Are you happy that your restaurant is here?

**Helen 12:32**

Yes. More good I like the small easy take care

**Jasmine Venegas 12:36**

Yeah

**Helen 12:37**

Even here you'll find a real cheerful is very hard. Yeah. No people learning cheerful right now. So we can find good people. So me and my husband no cook all the food and then the find the word the best chef in China from here.

**Jasmine Venegas 12:58**

Ohhhh!

**Helen 12:58**

So he's he's very good chef

**Jasmine Venegas 13:01**

Yeah, really good chef.

**Helen 13:02**

Yeah, he knows home all of the food. Okay, so the prepared at the Guangzhou

**Jasmine Venegas 13:02**

Yeah

**Helen 13:07**

Guangzhou is famous in China.

**Jasmine Venegas 13:11**

Oh yeah I know that place!

**Helen 13:12**

He know everything, everything

**Jasmine Venegas 13:15**

So its a lot of the food from that area?

**Helen 13:16**

Yeah, yeah from we have the cooking. Yeah, so we cooked the real Chinese

**Jasmine Venegas 13:23**

So are you, you don't really do much of the cooking then is it?

**Helen 13:25**

Because the kitchen very small yeah only by himself. In case his day off whatever he tired and then I cook I cook or my husband cook. My husband cook half the porridge everything my husband cooking oh that's what he cook thirty year over thirty year the porridge

**Jasmine Venegas 13:34**

Yeah just porridge. Thats cool!

**Helen 13:34**

Yeah all of a soup my husband they all like that the prepare duck, pork, bbq pork all of my husband do they did it. Yeah. So the chair for cooking and I know the all of the sauce I gather the taking customer I picked up the food that's why we've been learning the business so long.

**Jasmine Venegas: 13:29**

Yeah you pick upon all these things? Yeah.

**Helen: 14:22**

Yeah, I got I gotta take care for them hard it's hard to keep good customer they're learning so many restaurants knew when they open it was so many restaurants they opened

**Jasmine Venegas 14:36**

There's a lot of restaurants!

**Helen 14:39**

So many the label a lot of this cheap so many new, buffet, everything. So we still running okay, not lose all the business.

**Jasmine Venegas 14:50**

Okay, we'll make sure to tell all of our friends to come visit you.

**Helen 14:52**

Yeah, yeah, yeah

**Lucas Bugarin 14:55**

So just to clarify, what part of China is your family from?

**Helen 14:59**

Guangzhou

yeah that's the Guangzhou

very famous out by the Hong Kong that people eat good food. Yeah. Because of the fresh, taste good yeah

**Lucas Bugarin 15:15**

And what do you, do you want to say anything to any customers that come by?

**Jasmine Venegas 15:21**

Like Do you have a message that maybe you would want to tell future customers that we can share

**Helen 15:23**

Uh the message?

**Jasmine Venegas 15:28**

No message?

**Helen 15:29**

No message

**Jasmine Venegas 15:31**

You don't have anything you want to say?

**Helen 15:33**

Yeah

**Jasmine Venegas 15:34**

That's okay.

**Lucas Bugarin 15:39**

What are your kids favorite favorite dish?

**Helen 15:42**

My kids? My kids, yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 15:44**

Yeah what do they like about the restaurant?

**Helen 15:45**

They like chow fun my fun all of that and the sesame ball. They eat a lot and my fun chow fun my fried rice yea. My restaurant cook the fried rice for them the because we use the 20 inch the big wok

**Jasmine Venegas 16:01**

Yeah the wok, yeah

**Helen 16:02**

We fry at the wok and the cooking a lot the flavor yeah. Now the new style all the restaurants they use it only 11 inch the wok, the small one used to do one thing really big big big one to cooking so the taste different the fire more more flavor. And then you know look like more fast. Yeah,

**Jasmine Venegas 16:29**

So is there like a lot of like preparation that goes into like, preparing the food?

**Helen 16:32**

Yes the old Chinese Style

**Jasmine Venegas 16:34**

Yeah, so like for your dishes do you have to like prepare stuff like days before or...

**Helen 16:41**

No, no. Every day, everyday in the morning and we make all of the fresh ones yeah overnight. We never keep all of the old food or the overnight oh wow

**Jasmine Venegas 16:52**

yeah it's all fresh

**Helen 16:53**

Yeah all the first thing in the morning we got the eight nine o'clock maybe beginning to make all of the beef and chicken before cut all of the vegetables yeah fresh one and even the noodle, rice we cook the fresh one yeah every morning and the beginning all of the the appetizing egg roll one time everything here we do the hand job by the hand we never buy the factory.

**Jasmine Venegas 17:23**

Oh so you like wrap it yourself?

**Helen 17:23**

I'll use the hand to make all of the fresh the stir fry and paste the egg roll, fried wonton, everything at nighttime I put them all together to do the to all of the new ones the egg roll another day for the use.

**Jasmine Venegas 17:24**

Yeah, wow! Okay, do we have any other questions?

**Lucas Bugarin 17:50**

I think that's it.

**Jasmine Venegas 17:51**

Yeah, alright. So I think that's it.

**Helen 17:55**

And then we have beef stew

**Jasmine Venegas 17:57**

Oooh!

**Helen 17:58**

The beef stew is real Chinese

**Jasmine Venegas 18:00**

Real Chinese?

**Helen 18:01**

And then we do the professional beef stew. We use the very good up yeah, we only put up like the four hour a lot the good good dressing the beef the beef stew yeah so for hours for the meat that the boil yeah,

**Jasmine Venegas 18:25**

You have a lot of dishes up here.

**Helen 18:25**

Yeah, yeah, yeah thats why

**Jasmine Venegas 18:27**

A lot on your menu

**Helen 18:30**

And then the big menu. Yeah. The steamed bao is the I think the whole Monterey county only we serve it. Nobody serve it stemed bao is a really hard really difficult cooking even you are the fire not to burn they can cook

**Jasmine Venegas 18:50**

Ooh yeah

**Helen 18:50**

Like the fresh taste, yeah. Only a lot of water coming out yeah

**Jasmine Venegas 18:55**

Yeahh!

**Helen 18:59**

Okay, then we trying to make the dim sum a lot of people ask it.

**Jasmine Venegas 19:04**

Yessss, I like Dim Sum!

**Helen 19:04**

Yeah, I've been trying to make some, and the chicken feet is ahh so flavor.

**Jasmine Venegas 19:09**

Ooooh those are good!

**Helen 19:10**

Yeah, they so favorite. Plus the ah the sesame ball.

**Jasmine Venegas 19:13**

I love the sesame ball

**Helen 18:25**

We doing. So we do all of the the you know, the chicken feet, is a lot of work too so we boil the water.

**Jasmine Venegas 19:23**

Yeah, those take a lot of time

**Helen 18:25**

They take a lot of time, yeah they use a lot the the time to use of the heart and even the honey walnut, we make that so that not you can find outside we make the homemade walnut, honey walnut Yeah, we do the old one. Yeah.

**Jasmine Venegas 19:44**

Yeah, the sesame balls are really good, we like those ones!

**Helen 19:48**

Yeah so good, uh huh.

**Jasmine Venegas 19:49**

Yeah those are our favorite. So yeah. Do you like serve like many desserts here, or...

**Helen 19:57**

Desserts not a lot. Only sesame ball, banana. Yeah and this bun this bun is sweet. Yeah, a little sweet not super Yeah. Yeah. But the tastes really good

**Jasmine Venegas 20:10**

Alrighty then

**Helen 20:12**

Yeah, I only sell ice cream whatever but then that's it. Yeah. Too. You know people usually they eat a lot of food is when the sesame chicken oil if I want to tell you the orange chicken we use the real orange.

**Jasmine Venegas 20:35**

Oh like orange juice?

**Helen 20:36**

The fresh orange juice, we cut it the outer shell use inside the the meat

**Jasmine Venegas 20:44**

Yeah

**Helen 20:44**

We make the juice, and make orange lot of vitamin.

**Jasmine Venegas 20:36**

Yeah, I tasted it last time it tasted like real orange juice!

**Helen 20:48**

Yeah, the oranges. We use the fresh orange, and we not use the color whatever that's all in this all in restaurants.

**Jasmine Venegas 21:00**

Yeah

**Helen 21:00**

But make the orange.

**Jasmine Venegas 21:02**

Yeah, alrighty then. Okay. So I don't think we have any more questions. Yeah, but is there anything else you want to tell us? About your restaurant?

**Helen 21:14**

Yeah. You just put on the school? School. For the, for the report. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. How many year you still work still at the school?

**Jasmine Venegas 21:27**

So we're graduating this semester. But yeah.

**Helen 21:30**

That's so nice.

Yeah. You're so smart.

**Lucas Bugarin 21:34**

We're graduating. I'm going to continue on to be a teacher.

**Helen 21:37**

Ah, good for the teacher.

**Jasmine Venegas 21:39**

Yeah, we're local. So we'll come visit you.

**Helen 21:41**

Yeah. Oh, yeah. The local here! That's a really nice one.

**Jasmine Venegas 21:41**

Yeah.

**Helen 21:45**

So you graduate in this year?



**Jasmine Venegas 21:47**

Yeah. In two weeks

**Helen 21:48**

Two weeks? Ah, okay and make them the same?

**Jasmine Venegas 21:50**

Yeah.

**Helen 21:51**

The same college? Yeah. Yeah. She said 21? 21st! Yeah

**Jasmine Venegas 21:58**

Yeah so me and Megan will be graduating together.

**Helen 22:00**

Yeah. Congratulations. The same.

**Jasmine Venegas 22:03**

Yeah.

**Helen 22:04**

So yeah, so you still working at CSUMB?

**Jasmine Venegas 22:08**

Yeah, yeah

**Helen 22:09**

I know that a lot. The the teacher from there. They are they when they are students. They only eat here and then after that, they, they they all are working over there. Yeah, they come in a lot. So they took a lot of students. They took a lot of friends the students.

**Jasmine Venegas 22:31**

Thank you Helen for interviewing with us about our food.

**Helen 22:36**

Yeah thanks

**Jasmine Venegas 22:36**

It's three so we're gonna end the interview now but thank you so much!.

**Helen 22:39**

Thank you. I get something, egg roll. And the sesame ball for you

**Jasmine:**  
Okay yeah!!

**Jasmine Venegas 22:42**  
Thank you! This concludes our interview. Thank you so much.

**Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>**