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Interview with Gerald Cheang

Gerald Cheang

California State University, Monterey Bay

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Chinatown Renewal Project
Interviewee: Gerald Cheang
Interviewer: Kaydi Barrus
Date of Interview: October 31, 2008
Duration of Interview: 37:27

Kaydi Barrus 00:00

Ready? Alright, my name is Kaydi Barrus and I'm a junior at Cal State Monterey Bay. My partner, Brittany Moore, and I are interviewing Jerry Cheang on October 31, 2008, in the Confucius Church located in Salinas, California. This interview will serve as documentation of oral history for the Chinatown Revitalization Project and the Asian Cultural Encounter. Jerry, do you give me permission to record this interview?

Gerald Cheang 00:32

Yes, I do.

Kaydi Barrus 00:33

Okay. I'll start by asking you questions pertaining to your childhood and then further focus on your contributions and involvements with the Revitalization Project and also with the Asian Cultural Encounter. Where were you—when and where were you born?

Gerald Cheang 00:51

I was born in Stockton, California, on August 29, 1936.

Kaydi Barrus 00:56

Do you have any siblings?

Gerald Cheang 00:58

I have one sister.

Kaydi Barrus 00:59

One sister? Is she younger?

Gerald Cheang 01:01

Seven years younger than I.

Kaydi Barrus 01:02

Oh, okay. Where did your ancestors—were they from China or—

Gerald Cheang 01:09

My great grandfather was the initial immigrant. My grandfather on my dad's side—all my dad's family were born here. My mother's family, I have very little recollection of them because she was orphaned when she was quite young. And so she was raised by stepparents, who became stepparents to her.

Kaydi Barrus 01:33

Wow. Do you know how they came or—

Gerald Cheang 01:38

My mom's—the man that I knew as my mom's father, or my stepfather, came over illegally during the time of the Asian Exclusion Act, and he came in under a false name.

Kaydi Barrus 01:56

Oh, okay. What contributions do they have to Salinas?

Gerald Cheang 02:06

None, really, because I was raised in Stockton.

Kaydi Barrus 02:09

You were raised in Stockton? Okay. What kind of work experiences did you have growing up, like, jobs, or what did you do?

Gerald Cheang 02:18

Well, my family—my aunt, two of my aunts had restaurants in Stockton, and I started bussing tables and waiting on tables from the time I was nine years old.

Kaydi Barrus 02:28

Oh, wow. So was there a Chinatown in Stockton?

Gerald Cheang 02:31

Yes, a fairly large Chinatown.

Kaydi Barrus 02:34

Okay. So you worked in the restaurant that your aunt and uncle owned?

Gerald Cheang 02:40

Mm-hmm.

Kaydi Barrus 02:41

Okay. Why did you end up moving to Salinas?

Gerald Cheang 02:48

I'm a dentist, and I went to dental school in San Francisco. My wife's sister married a fellow who's a dentist here in Salinas. And so he interested us in the area, and so we moved down here. Having grown, well, we had two children while we were in dental school in San Francisco. And I especially didn't want them to be raised in the city. So we came down to Salinas, which we thought was a big cow town. And at the time we moved here, there were maybe 35,000 people. That was 45 years ago. It turned out to be pretty well as far as a place to raise kids.

Kaydi Barrus 03:27

You mentioned that there is a large population in Stockton for Chinatown. Did you guys live in the Chinatown?

Gerald Cheang 03:33

Yes, we lived on the fringes of Chinatown.

Kaydi Barrus 03:36

Okay. Like, what did you remember from it?

Gerald Cheang 03:43

Oh, there were a lot of things there. My mother's family was there for a long time. So we knew a lot of the people down in Chinatown, and there were all kinds of Chinese stores and groceries and things like that. And so we grew up being very Chinese.

Kaydi Barrus 03:59

Yeah. What did your mom do?

Gerald Cheang 04:03

My mom worked as a clerk for the National Dollar Stores.

Kaydi Barrus 04:08

Oh, okay. Can you describe some of your experiences as a child, like, did you guys speak Chinese growing up? Was that the primary language in your household?

Gerald Cheang 04:23

No, we spoke mainly English because I'm fourth generation.

Kaydi Barrus 04:27

Oh, Okay.

Gerald Cheang 04:28

My grandfather spoke a lot of Chinese. And so we spoke Chinese with him, and then when we went to Chinatown to shop you had to speak Chinese, otherwise you didn't get what you wanted.

Kaydi Barrus 04:42

Did you—what did you do, like, around the house? Did you help out around the house?

Gerald Cheang 04:47

Yeah, quite a bit because my mom went to work when I was about 10 years old. My sister was maybe three, so we had a babysitter, then I'd kind of look after her after I got out of school.

Kaydi Barrus 05:03

What extracurricular activities did you do growing up?

Gerald Cheang 05:08

Not much of anything. We got involved a little bit with high school government and things like that. But that was about all.

Kaydi Barrus 05:15

So you were just involved in, like, the government aspect?

Gerald Cheang 05:19

Mm-hmm, yeah. We didn't play sports or anything like—

Kaydi Barrus 05:20

—didn't play sports or anything?

Gerald Cheang 05:21

No, we didn't have time for that sort of thing.

Kaydi Barrus 05:26

What was some of your favorite meals growing up?

Gerald Cheang 05:29

Oh, we grew up during the Second World War, when things were rationed and everything else. And my mom could make one can of tuna feed a family of four very readily, and things like that we ate. We didn't have much meat or anything like that. So it was mainly a lot of Chinese food, too. We could eat vegetables and not need a lot of meat and fish and things like that.

Kaydi Barrus 05:53

How old were you during this time?

Gerald Cheang 05:56

Well, I was born in '36. So I was about five, six years old when Pearl Harbor broke out, and grew up during the Second World War as a kid.

Kaydi Barrus 06:07

What did your father do?

Gerald Cheang 06:09

He worked for department stores. He was a display manager at several department stores. And then during the war, he worked for the government at the ordnance depot up in Stockton, and he worked in shipping and things like that. They supplied a lot of the armaments for the troops in Europe and in Asia.

Kaydi Barrus 06:35

Did you guys celebrate any, like, Chinese traditions growing up?

Gerald Cheang 06:39

Yes, Chinese New Year was always a big thing. And then a lot of the Chinese holidays were celebrated. We went to Chinese school, Chinese language school six days a week after school. We'd go to school until about 3:30 in the afternoon, and then Chinese school would start at 5:30. And we'd be there until eight o'clock at night. And then on Saturday mornings, we'd go to school for three hours. And we went there to play.

Kaydi Barrus 07:07

[laughs] So, like, what did you guys do in Chinese school?

Gerald Cheang 07:13

We were supposed to learn to read and write and to speak Chinese. We, as I say, we spent a lot of time playing too. But they were pretty much disciplinarians there too. If you didn't do what you were supposed to do, you got corporally punished.

Kaydi Barrus 07:31

Did you ever get punished?

Gerald Cheang 07:32

Yes.

Kaydi Barrus 07:33

[laughs] What did they do?

Gerald Cheang 07:35

They spanked you.

Kaydi Barrus 07:36

Oh, man. Did, so—you and your friends were all obviously, like, troublemakers or—

Gerald Cheang 07:44

No, we were just, well—

Kaydi Barrus 07:46

Young kids.

Gerald Cheang 07:47

You know, the Chinese kids, when we went to regular school, the teachers always said, "Oh, Chinese children are so good. They're so obedient. And they do everything that we want to do, and they study hard." And then, so then when we went to Chinese school, we cut loose, and that's when we had our fun.

Kaydi Barrus 08:05

Was your parents, like, really hard on you guys growing up, in educational wise?

Gerald Cheang 08:11

Not really it. It was a thing where my mom went through high school and my dad got through the sixth grade. So, but—and yes, they wanted us to be educated, but then they never pushed us that much. They figured, okay, hey we raised you, and it's up to you to make up your own mind.

Kaydi Barrus 08:37

You said you celebrated, like, some of the traditions, the Chinese traditions. Like what kind of—how did you guys celebrate those?

Gerald Cheang 08:48

Usually it was just a matter of coming together and, you know, they say that culture is typified by, with food and things like that. And with the Chinese, a lot of their celebrations are typified with eating and food and things like that. You've probably heard that from interviewing some of the other people. But that's what it was, was there are traditional things that you eat that all have meaning that I didn't really know about. But mom said you have to have this or you have to have that because it's very important. So, yeah, like you always have to have chicken during Chinese New Year.

Kaydi Barrus 09:35

Why is that?

Gerald Cheang 09:37

It symbolizes something. I'm not really quite sure. All I know is that we passed that on to our kids, and my son is a bachelor, and he always goes to Kentucky Fried Chicken [Gerald and Kaydi laugh] on Chinese New Year.

Kaydi Barrus 09:50

[laughs] So when you got married, did you have a very, like, Chinese traditional wedding or—

Gerald Cheang 10:01

Well, we got married at—we were baptized Methodist, and we got married in the Methodist Church. But there were certain things that we had to go through to follow Chinese tradition. We were just talking about this the other night. My wife is the third child in the family, but she was the first to marry. And so Chinese tradition says that if one of the younger siblings is married before the older siblings, then we must present the older siblings with a pair of pants. And so my brother-in-laws—brothers-in-law—were each given a pair of pants.

Kaydi Barrus 10:44

Oh, interesting.

Gerald Cheang 10:44

And then we also had to present my in-laws, my future in-laws, with a roast pig and live chickens and wedding cookies and things like that.

Kaydi Barrus 11:01

Did you guys celebrate, like, traditional American holidays also?

Gerald Cheang 11:04

Oh, yeah. Always, always.

Kaydi Barrus 11:06

Yeah?

Gerald Cheang 11:10

I had to go to church on Easter, you know, so that you could sign your pledge for the rest of the year.

Kaydi Barrus 11:14

So you did go to church also?

Gerald Cheang 11:16

Yeah.

Kaydi Barrus 11:17

So you went to school five days a week, American school, and then Chinese school six days a week, church Sunday.

Gerald Cheang 11:24

Church on Sunday.

Kaydi Barrus 11:25

Busy. [laughs] So can you tell me about, like, educational background, like what school did you go to, elementary school?

Gerald Cheang 11:37

I went to elementary school in the Chinatown area, and then that school was quite small. There were only—it only went up to the sixth grade. And we had to go, in those days seventh and eighth grade were done at another school. And so we had to walk, what, eight, nine blocks to that school.

Kaydi Barrus 12:00

Oh, wow.

Gerald Cheang 12:00

And then after that, then—when I went to school, they had a new educational plan that was called the 6-4-4 plan. And they implemented that after I got out of the seventh grade. But anyway, what happens is that you went six years elementary school, and then there were four years of middle school, which was seventh, eighth, ninth, and 10th. And then the last four years were the 11th and 12th grades, which were combined with the junior college, so that we were able to take some—in those days, they didn't have advanced placement. So we were able to take classes through community college.

Kaydi Barrus 12:39

Oh, that's interesting. You weren't involved in sports, like you said—

Gerald Cheang 12:48

No, no.

Kaydi Barrus 12:49

—or just, no clubs. What was your favorite subject?

Gerald Cheang 12:55

I liked math and life sciences.

Kaydi Barrus 13:00

Where did you go for college?

Gerald Cheang 13:04

I went to a year at Cal. And I was—turned 17 in August, and went to school in September. And I found out, hey, this is really great. And I found out you didn't have to go to school. You just had to take exams. And even if you failed them, that was okay. And so I spent only a year at Cal [Kaydi laughs]. My transcript then was, the first year, first line said, awarded State of California scholarship. And the second line said, placed on academic probation. So I went back to the community college in Stockton and spent a couple of years there, and then went over to the University of Pacific, and I finished up there. Then after that, I went to school in San Francisco for dental school, which was—eventually became the University of the Pacific's dental school.

Kaydi Barrus 13:56

When did you know you wanted to be a dentist?

Gerald Cheang 14:00

[chuckles] I used to spend a lot of time in the dental chair. I spent a lot of time at the dental chair [unclear] rotten teeth.

Kaydi Barrus 14:07

Growing up?

Gerald Cheang 14:08

Mm-hmm. Yeah, so it was kind of interesting. In those days, parents, Chinese parents always said, "You want to be a doctor or an engineer?" And I didn't like—I liked life sciences, but I didn't like the other sciences like chemistry and physics that much. So I decided, okay, we'll go into something with life sciences. And then I won—and then so they said, "Well, you should become an MD." But I said, "I can't see people dying and things like that." So I went into dentistry. And it was fun. I liked working with my hands, and doing things like—

Kaydi Barrus 14:45

Cool. I'm going to ask you some questions about the renewal project now.

Gerald Cheang 14:52

Okay.

Kaydi Barrus 14:53

How did you get involved?

Gerald Cheang 14:55

How did I get involved with the renewal project? There was no else in the community that wanted to [laughs] volunteer to be on the board. My friend Louis Lee was starting to get involved with it. And he and I were talking about this, and we see eye to eye on a lot of things. And we felt that the community needed someone who would be willing to be on the Salinas Downtown Community Board and who would represent the community and bring forth our thoughts. Many of the Chinese people in the community could do it. But they were very shy about wanting to be with the community as a whole. So we've enjoyed it. We've seen some progress, and it's very exciting.

Kaydi Barrus 15:43

When you moved to Salinas, did you hear about the Chinatown or—

Gerald Cheang 15:48

When we first moved to Salinas—yeah, that was back in '63. And that was when Chinatown was still sort of active. We used to come down and have dinner down here and everything else, but we never did belong to any of the organizations that were in Chinatown. We belonged to the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, and also the Chinese Association of Salinas. But those have nothing to do with the Bing Kong Tong or the Suey Sing Tong or anything like that.

Kaydi Barrus 16:19

What inspired you to get involved with the revitalization project?

Gerald Cheang 16:28

It's—well, the thing is, if they're going to do anything, we wanted to have the Chinese community have a voice in what was going on down there too. And we wanted to make sure that the Chinese heritage was retained in the project, that it wouldn't be just a situation where they're going to bulldoze all of Chinatown and build a bunch of high rises and things like that. We wanted the Chinese culture to be remembered.

Kaydi Barrus 16:52

Mm-hmm. Hopes and aspirations for the project?

Gerald Cheang 16:57

We would really, really like to see some nice development, proper development. They're not overly developed. We want to see a place where, as I say, the Chinese cultural heritage, the Asian cultural

heritage, really be retained down there in a museum of some type. We also would like to see the homeless people taken care of down there really. There are so many people in Salinas who are very, very adamant about taking all the homeless people, putting them in a box and shipping them off. And that's not the way to treat people. But, and so, we hope that, you know, with being part of the project that we can see something growing from that, that these people can be retrained or—and taken care of. You know, that—so many of them actually, they were kind of cut loose by society. They're ex-Vietnam vets, and they said that even some, a lot of the Iraqi vets now, they're coming back from the war, and they're not in good shape emotionally. And yet, there are no facilities to really take care of them unless they're really, really in bad shape. And a lot of these people are very marginal, but they end up on the street.

Kaydi Barrus 18:21

I noticed—I saw some pictures of, like, what it might look like, and it looks very modern. Is that kind of where you guys are looking at? Or did you guys want to make it look like it used to look like back in the day?

Gerald Cheang 18:35

Yeah, we don't want it to look like a Disneyland type of Chinese project, you know, with all curlicues and everything else. There was an architect who came up from Tucson, Faye Tom, who has done some renewal projects, and he looked around, and he felt that he'd like to see preservation of a lot of the buildings. You know, renew them, but then kind of keep the same look of what Chinatown used to be like. And as I say, Chinatown never did look like a Disneyland depiction or what they have done in LA and all that other sort of things. But we'd like to see—like the Republic Cafe, that's the way Chinatown looked, and we'd like to see it retained and renewed that way. Yeah, there's the initial plan that came out. There's a lot of glass and a lot of stainless steel and stuff like that. That's not quite what we're looking at.

Kaydi Barrus 19:41

What are some of the upcoming new onsite projects for the community to get involved in to help with the revitalization?

Gerald Cheang 19:49

Well, actually, we're really counting a lot on CSUMB to get involved with more and more of the projects too. I understand that the green garden that they're planning is going to be done along with CSUMB's contributions. The community garden right now, it's days are not really numbered, but they are planning to put a low income project in on the property where it is now. And so the job of the [unclear] community board is to find an area for the garden to move to, eventually, within the next two to three years. There are a lot of ideas floating around. One of them is to go across the street where Sprint has their empty lot over there. There's a possibility that we could do something with the big lot on the corner of Soledad and Market Way. From what I understand, the Housing Authority is planning to build a new facility on the corner of Calle Cebu and Sherwood Drive, where the old one is now. And there was talk of possibly doing rooftop gardens and things like that, which would be really, really neat.

Kaydi Barrus 21:12

That's cool. What does the revitalization project mean to you?

Gerald Cheang 21:18

To me, it means that it's a way to preserve a lot of the history that's here in town and yet provide housing and development for people who are not wanting to be shunted away. We can retrain people. But yet, it's—hopefully the Chinatown project will be a good mixed project. It'll be a mixed use with a lot of new commercial activity in there, but also a mixture of low income housing and maybe some public housing, as well as market value housing, too.

Kaydi Barrus 22:08

So you guys wanted to incorporate housing as well as, like, local businesses—

Gerald Cheang 22:13

Yes.

Kaydi Barrus 22:13

—with the new Chinatown. Okay. What do you hope the project will bring to the community?

Gerald Cheang 22:21

A better understanding of everything that's going on socially, more than anything else too. That there are a lot of good people that are here in Salinas that just need a break.

Kaydi Barrus 22:35

Has there been anything interesting while working with the revitalization that you found that you didn't know about Chinatown?

Gerald Cheang 22:44

Yes. Just, well, even listening to some of the oral interviews that have been going on, and I've sat—I sat in on a few of them. And I've learned a lot about a lot of things from the old days of Chinatown, because as I say, I didn't come here until '63. And I didn't—I have friends who've told me about Chinatown, but to hear that people being interviewed and having them discuss what it was really, really like, it's quite interesting, too.

Kaydi Barrus 23:16

What's your responsibilities for being in the Asian Cultural Encounter?

Gerald Cheang 23:23

We're—well, I got roped into being chair of that particular committee, subcommittee. And, but it's very interesting. The thing that I like about it more than anything else, that it has brought the Chinese community together with the Japanese and the Filipino communities. We used to kind of, like, each go our own way. But now we're all sitting around the table talking and sharing ideas. And we have a goal, a mutual goal in mind.

Kaydi Barrus 23:55

What is the goal?

Gerald Cheang 23:56

That's, as I say, to preserve the Asian cultural heritage here in Salinas. And actually, we hope to expand it eventually. So much of the Chinatown was where the haven for the agricultural workers and all too. That's the historical thing with it. And eventually, we'd like to bring in the Hispanic community also, the Latino community, because after it was the Chinese, and then the Filipinos, and then the Japanese—or the Japanese, and then the Filipinos. And then the Hispanic, the Latino community came in, were involved with the Bracero program and the farmworkers. That was their recreational area.

Kaydi Barrus 24:37

Oh, cool. What, you—did you ever visit Chinatown, like, this Chinatown growing up, or was it brand new when you—or, not brand new, but your first time visiting in the 60s when you lived over here?

Gerald Cheang 25:02

What do you mean by that?

Kaydi Barrus 25:03

Did you, how—did you know about the Chinatown over here living in Stockton, or—

Gerald Cheang 25:09

No, not really. Not really. I sort of heard of it in a roundabout way, because going through high school, I worked in a gas station. And that was run by the Ahtye family. Well, the Ahtye family, one of the brothers there, married a girl from Salinas, who grew up on Soledad Street. And then his uncle also had a gas station here on Soledad Street years and years ago. And that's how he met his wife. And he was working with her, with his uncle down here. And so they would talk about Salinas. But to us Salinas always seemed to be so remote. It was far, far away.

Kaydi Barrus 25:55

Yeah. That concludes our interview. So, if there's anything else you want to—

Gerald Cheang 26:07

No, I think that's about it. Thank you very much.

Kaydi Barrus 26:09

Thank you very much.

Gerald Cheang 26:10

I hope we helped you.

Kaydi Barrus 26:12

Oh, you helped out, you helped us out a lot. Thank you very much.

Gerald Cheang 26:16

You're welcome.

Gerald Cheang 26:17

[interview resumes after pause] Okay, the thing that really excites me about what you're doing, and preserving the history, the oral histories of those of us who have been in Salinas for a while, is to pass this on to future generations and to new immigrants. There's so many of the new immigrants who have come to Salinas from China, and from Hong Kong, and areas like that, who don't understand the problems that many of the people who grew up here or were born here, went through many, many years ago. They assume that everything is just like peachy keen all the time. They didn't realize that there were many, many sanctions against Chinese and Asians as a whole—housing restrictions, job discrimination—and how through the years things have changed, and things have gotten better. But we want people who have immigrated here to understand that there were many hurdles that were, had to be faced by the people who were here. And that they've done very well for themselves, and that they should be respected for that. As I say, so many of them have come over, and they just expect that this is the land of milk and honey, and they can have anything that they want. And yeah, they work hard for it. They work hard for it, but they don't—again, they didn't, they only have to worry about the monetary part. They don't have to worry about the social aspects that many people went through. And hopefully too that we can set an example, that they will become involved with the community as a whole, that you can't just squirrel yourself away and do your own thing all the time. That there are other people out there. There's 125,000 other people out there that they should be involved with.

Kaydi Barrus 28:28

There's been talk about you guys trying to bring over a junk.

Gerald Cheang 28:32

[laughs] Yeah.

Kaydi Barrus 28:34

[laughs] What's going on with that?

Gerald Cheang 28:36

I think we opened up a can of worms [Kaydi laughs]. It would be very interesting. Dr. [unclear] from CSUMB was contacted by a lady from the San Mateo area, whose dad and a group of gentlemen from Taiwan, sailed a Chinese junk all the way across the Pacific back, oh, 50 years ago, somewhere in there—55 or 65. Anyway, they sailed this junk across. And I think they were kind of messed up because they said they wanted to go on and enter it in the Newport yacht race, which was kind of, like, a little ways away. And San Francisco was not quite the way to sail it, particularly there. But anyway, we were informed of that and that they're looking for a home for this. And so we're thinking that possibly this would be kind of a nice attraction, if we could get that into Chinatown, too. It's an Asian boat. And there aren't too many junks around, but the boat is not in a very good condition. It's—I don't know whether they have masts for it or sails for it, but the hull and everything is intact. But there—it needs a lot of work. But it would be quite interesting to have it down here. That's one thing. The other thing that we wanted to do to possibly attract people and get some interest going in the area was to redo the neon sign at the Old Republic Cafe. And that, if we can get that going—get a repainted and spruced up

and neon put back on there—it would be an attraction because it could be seen from Market Street as people drove by, and sort of like a beacon out there. We're also thinking about the—eventually having it green powered, so that we can work this in as a green thing as well. And that's the other thing that we're thinking about as far as the Asian culture museum. If and when it ever gets going down on Soledad Street, in the site, at the site of the Old Republic Cafe, is to make it green powered also. And so again, we'd like to work with CSUMB's departments that take care of that sort of thing. And we can kind of—we really liked CSUMB's contributions to what they, you know, we've been doing down there, too. And I think they're excited because with the service learning, they can make that as part of their projects, too. From the scientific standpoint, from the archival standpoint, and everything else.

Kaydi Barrus 31:36

Did you—was the Republic Cafe ever open when you came to Chinatown?

Gerald Cheang 31:40

Yes, that was the best Chinese restaurant in town.

Gerald Cheang 31:44

And the chef there was famous for several things. He made a particular dish that he was quite famous for. It was a bone—completely boned chicken that they stuffed with sweet rice. And then he would cook that and steam that and then deep fried it. And it was, whenever you talked about that particular dish, everyone knew that it came from Salinas. He also did a really, really good salt fish and pork hash. I think that everyone really knows about—the Japanese community loved that. They loved the Republic Cafe so much that they cut a hole in the back, their back fence so that when they wanted to go to dinner there after their meetings and things like that, they could just walk through that fence and go in through the back door of the Republic. But the Republic was the best Chinese restaurant for many, many years.

Kaydi Barrus 31:44

Yeah.

Kaydi Barrus 32:39

When did it end up closing?

Gerald Cheang 32:41

In the 80s.

Kaydi Barrus 32:42

Why was—

Gerald Cheang 32:43

Late 80s. People just got old.

Kaydi Barrus 32:46

Got old?

Gerald Cheang 32:46

Yeah, they retired, their children were sent away to school and they became engineers and different professions. And so no one wanted to come back and run the restaurant.

Kaydi Barrus 33:03

You mentioned that most Chinese families want their children to go into either medicine or engineering [unclear]—

Gerald Cheang 33:11

That was before, because again, if we talk about discrimination, there was always the glass ceiling. You did not get into business things unless you were the accountant or the bookkeeper. But you could never become the CEO. You could never move much up into administration unless you were—there were a lot of people who worked with the banks in Chinatown, who got to be vice presidents and things like that. But that's about—they never got into the main offices. So with science and things like that, there was no problem with language or anything like that. You know, it's difficult. Many of the Chinese families, they were bilingual, so that their English was not as good. The children's English was not as good as they could be. And so they were faced with problems, again, getting into the business world or anything like that. So the best thing for them was to go into engineering or medicine and things like that. On many of the medicine things, a lot of them became anesthesiologists and things like that, where they didn't have to talk to patients, and that sort of thing, too. So, but you can't change science. You know, it's cut and dry.

Kaydi Barrus 34:34

Yeah. I know the Chinese are really a close knit family. Did your grandparents live with you guys?

Gerald Cheang 34:43

No, no.

Kaydi Barrus 34:44

So it wasn't a big community in your house?

Gerald Cheang 34:47

No, no. Yeah, we see a lot of families that are still that way. But no, our families were never that way. We were close. But yet, I myself came from a fairly small family. My wife comes from a very large family and, but again, her parents didn't, you know, well, they didn't bring their parents over. They stayed in China. And there were, as far as the, all the family living together under one roof—no, that was not, we weren't familiar with that that much.

Kaydi Barrus 35:24

Did your grandparents ever talk about China? What they experienced when they were in China?

Gerald Cheang 35:31

Not really. Not really. [imitating grandparents] We are Americans now.

Kaydi Barrus 35:35

Yeah.

Gerald Cheang 35:37

And so they didn't really talk too much about China or anything else. I never knew my dad's family because, as I say, he is—the reason that he only went through the sixth grade was because his mom and dad were gone by the time he was 13. So he went to work driving a truck.

Kaydi Barrus 35:57

Okay. What was, like, your role with, like, in the house besides helping out with your sister? Did you work at the restaurant also?

Gerald Cheang 36:10

Yeah.

Kaydi Barrus 36:11

What was your job at the restaurant?

Gerald Cheang 36:14

Just, I was a busboy.

Kaydi Barrus 36:17

Busboy?

Gerald Cheang 36:17

Yeah, then I worked myself up. When I was 12, I got to be a waiter. But this was—these were little cafes that served working people. So it was nothing that was very, very pretentious. And we never had to worry about doing it just right. It was the old days. They had these places called hash houses, and that's what these restaurants were.

Kaydi Barrus 36:40

Louis mentioned that, you know, his family owned a grocery store and they pretty much, like, lived there almost. Did you guys, like, have, like, family dinners at the restaurant or—

Gerald Cheang 36:54

No, no, we'd always eat at home. Yeah.

Kaydi Barrus 36:56

It was work, and home for dinners?

Gerald Cheang 36:58

Yeah, because the restaurant, as I say, it was not a Chinese restaurant. It served American food.

Kaydi Barrus 37:05

Oh, okay. Okay.

Gerald Cheang 37:16

You need more?

Kaydi Barrus 37:17

No, I think that's good enough. Thank you very much.

Gerald Cheang 37:20

Thank you. Thank you.

Kaydi Barrus 37:21

Thank you.