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Interview with Wallace Ahyte

Wallace Ahyte

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Interviewee: Wallace Ahtye
Interviewer: Cierra Rauch and Guy Galzerano
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Wallace Ahtye 00:00

Twenty-four years ago, twenty-five years ago.

Cierra Rauch 00:03

No way.

Guy Galzerano 00:04

You still look wonderful

Cierra Rauch 00:06

Aging gracefully. [laughs]

Guy Galzerano 00:14

Here we are at Mr. Ahtye's place. It's around three o'clock in the afternoon. My name is Guy Galzerano.

Cierra Rauch 00:24

I'm Cierra Rauch.

Wallace Ahtye 00:26

And I'm Wally Ahtye.

Guy Galzerano 00:30

What we're going to be focusing on is the overview of Mr. Ahtye's family history, the Republic Cafe, and the history of Chinatown and how that's developed over the years. I'll start with the question: How did your family originate in Chinatown, and when?

Wallace Ahtye 00:54

Okay. Do you want me to start now?

Guy Galzerano 00:55

Sure.

Wallace Ahtye 00:56

Okay. Actually, I'm fourth generation here in the United States. And my great grandfather came over in 1850 to dig for gold. And when the gold went out, or gave out, he moved to San Francisco. But San Francisco, he tried to set up some kind of a company there, but there's a lot of competition. So, that's not my great grandfather. This is my grandfather who was born here in the United States. He came down from San Francisco to Salinas and set up a business here. And that was about 19—by the 1920s.

Guy Galzerano 01:48

So, what business did he set up. What was his first business?

Wallace Ahtye 01:51

Well, the first business [laughs] was a gambling casino. Yeah. And the building is still located on the corner of Soledad, and right now, it's called Market Way. It's that brick building, that two-story brick building, and there's a hotel on top, and the gambling casino is on the bottom.

Guy Galzerano 02:19

That's not the tong building, is it?

Wallace Ahtye 02:20

No, that's not the tong building. This is right on the corner of Soledad and Market Way, that two-story brick building. Next time you go by there, you can see it. And that's where my first home was. I was born in San Francisco, but I moved here in 1930. So we had a small apartment built just for us, in the back of the casino. One bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom. And that was it. So, my brother and I, and my mother and father, we had the same bedroom for twelve, thirteen years. Can you imagine that?

Guy Galzerano 03:06

What was your family's role in the community? Like, did they have any significance in the social aspect—

Wallace Ahtye 03:18

Well, he had a—my family—grandfather and the Chin family, Chin Bow family, were partners in the casino and the hotel. And being that we were citizens of the United States, we can own property, whereas everybody else in Chinatown, they were from the old country. They couldn't own property. That's because of the Chinese—are you familiar with the Chinese Exclusion Act? Yeah, okay. They couldn't own property, but you have to be a citizen to own property.

Cierra Rauch 04:00

So, was that common for immigrant families to have property purchased in their child's name, because their children were citizens?

Wallace Ahtye 04:14

Well, here's the way it came about. Chinatown was up one block on what is Bridge Street right now. And from 1890 to about 1920, that was Chinatown. And then it had a mysterious fire that just burned the whole Chinatown down. And there was a Mr. Sherwood who had land on Soledad Street, and he was kind enough to lease the property to any Chinese family that wanted to rebuild Chinatown. So, that's what he did. So, he owned the property, but the people wanted to build on that piece of property.

Guy Galzerano 05:07

Can you tell us some experiences you've had in the casino? Like, some of the memories, good memories, you remember?

Wallace Ahtye 05:15

Well, I don't usually go through the casino itself, but the casino, it's just one big room. And when you come into it, you come in through the front. The front of the casino was really a cigarette store, a candy and cigarette store. And you had to go through the candy and cigarettes, and they had a surveillance window there, which would unlock the doors for people that wanted to go into the casino.

Cierra Rauch 05:57

So, what sort of people came to the casino?

Wallace Ahtye 06:02

Anybody. I mean, anybody. We had Caucasians, and we had mostly Filipinos, because Filipinos, they love to gamble. And sometimes Spanish, but we had considerable Caucasians that—

Guy Galzerano 06:24

It must be open day and night.

Wallace Ahtye 06:26

Yeah, open day and night.

Guy Galzerano 06:27

Of course. So, when was—because this is very interesting—but when did the Republic Cafe start to—

Wallace Ahtye 06:40

Okay, this is the—casino was built in 1930, okay? Actually, everybody thought that the present location of the Republic Cafe was 37 Soledad. That was built in 1942. But we—actually, my father and Mr. Chin Bow opened up another restaurant about three doors down from there. And then, for about—I think 1938, somewhere around there. And then when we had the new one built, it was 1942.

Guy Galzerano 07:19

And what was the ownership like? I mean—

Wallace Ahtye 07:22

It was just straight fifty/fifty.

Guy Galzerano 07:25

Okay, co-owners with—

Wallace Ahtye 07:27

With the Chin Bows, Mr. Chin Bow.

Guy Galzerano 07:32

And you also owned a gas station?

Wallace Ahtye 07:35

Well, that was later on. That was later on. The casino came first, and then we bought some property across the street. And the property across the street was—used to be a grocery store first. It was 34—yeah, 34 Soledad Street. It was P.I. Market, and that was owned by Filipinos. And then we had another store next door to us does that the—original owners were, or original leasee, was a Japanese restaurant. And that was built probably 1935 or '36. And then around 1938, they built the gas station right on the corner.

Guy Galzerano 08:33

Is that still open?

Wallace Ahtye 08:35

No, everything is closed. Everything in China—everything is closed, and they made us tear down the gas station in 1965, 1966, because nobody was using it. We just closed it up at that particular time. So, they just levelled the whole thing down, the service station. And they made us take out the gas tank out of there.

Guy Galzerano 09:09

Well, more specifically on the Republic cafe, what kind of food did they cook, and what kind of people were coming in there.

Wallace Ahtye 09:20

Strictly Chinese food. Didn't even have coffee, just tea.

Guy Galzerano 09:29

Favorite course?

Wallace Ahtye 09:30

Favorite course? I don't know. They said that the Peking duck was the favorite of everybody. They say, nothing compares with it.

Cierra Rauch 09:44

So, who cooked the food?

Wallace Ahtye 09:47

Well, we had, I think, three Chinese cooks there.

Cierra Rauch 09:52

Were you friends with the cooks?

Wallace Ahtye 09:54

Yeah, sort of.

Guy Galzerano 09:56

Were all the employees Chinese?

Wallace Ahtye 09:58

Yeah.

Cierra Rauch 10:01

And was the cafe opened just for dinner, or was it open—

Wallace Ahtye 10:07

It was open about from eleven o'clock through about nine. So, it was lunch and dinner. But it's not like what you call lunch here when you think about lunch. I mean, it's all Chinese foods, so they can just pick out the menu, and it's the same menu for lunch or dinner.

Guy Galzerano 10:28

And the residents—there was people living in the building as well, correct?

Wallace Ahtye 10:33

Some of the cooks were living in the back, upstairs—upstairs in the back.

Cierra Rauch 10:41

So, I'm curious because I know that what we've heard of Chinatown is it had this really colorful nightlife. So, I'm wondering, was there a big difference between the lunchtime atmosphere as opposed to the evening atmosphere?

Wallace Ahtye 10:59

I think the evening atmosphere is more for family. All the families come in.

Cierra Rauch 11:07

Interesting. And then for lunchtime?

Wallace Ahtye 11:10

For lunch time, it's just probably workers.

Guy Galzerano 11:14

Why did you think the Republic Cafe was so popular in the community?

Wallace Ahtye 11:20

Well, it's one of the biggest Chinese restaurants. In fact, it was the biggest, at that particular time, the biggest Chinese restaurant in town. It would hold banquets up to a hundred and fifty people. We had a mezzanine upstairs that would hold about forty, fifty people, and downstairs another hundred and something. So, we just transformed the whole restaurant. We just broke down all the little booths and everything, moved it in, and put big round tables.

Guy Galzerano 11:58

What kind of events? How continuous were big events in—

Wallace Ahtye 12:04

Well, there's always Chinese New Year's. You know, like, the tongs will say, okay, we want to—so there's two tongs, so they would throw parties there. Anybody that gets married or anybody that has children—so, and it's not only Chinese. It's the Filipinos, and it's especially the Japanese. They were very good customers.

Guy Galzerano 12:30

Can you tell us the differences between the tongs, if any, or how you would become a tong? Just really quick.

Wallace Ahtye 12:41

It was two tongs. One was Suey Sing, and my father got along with Suey Sing. And there's Bing Kong, which is another one. So, there's only two in there. And what they do, they were fighting for space in Chinatown—I mean, not space, but membership. And the membership, you have—it's mostly for gambling. [unclear] gambling, oh, there must be about four or five different gambling casinos in Chinatown. So, the people that worked for Bing Kong, they had—they were on the, I guess, the east side—no, the west side, and the Suey Sings were on the east side. It's more or less like protection, and economic welfare, and immigration papers, and things like that.

Guy Galzerano 13:40

There's a lot of politics going through.

Wallace Ahtye 13:43

Back in the, I guess, pre-1930, 1920s, they were really, really fighting. I mean, they were shooting each other.

Cierra Rauch 13:54

In Chinatown?

Wallace Ahtye 13:55

In Chinatown. Yeah.

Guy Galzerano 13:56

Oh, I missed that date. When was that?

Wallace Ahtye 13:59

Before—in the 20s, 1920s. They were really strong there, and the thing is, Bing Kong and Suey Sing, they have branches all over the cities, especially Stockton, Sacramento, San Francisco, Oakland, and Salinas. Big strong tongs. They were fighting each other, actually shooting each other. I mean, if you talk to Wellington, he can say that, "Oh, [unclear] Shorty Lee. He was shot at." But I can talk to Chin

Bow, and their kids say, "Oh, I remember my father. They tried to assassinate him too." [laughs] So, they were just fighting each other back in there.

Guy Galzerano 14:50

And what was the day like after, like, a scrap, a tong scrap? What were you feeling? I mean, like—

Wallace Ahtye 15:03

No, that was before I was born. That was the 1920s. See, I came in 1930, so everything was kind of calmed down.

Guy Galzerano 15:16

I'm not very good at math.

Cierra Rauch 15:18

So, going back to the Republic Cafe, can you tell me, or tell Guy and I, who Mr. And Mrs. Yee were?

Wallace Ahtye 15:28

Mr. Yee?

Cierra Rauch 15:29

Mr. And Mrs. Yee, does that ring a bell?

Wallace Ahtye 15:30

Well, actually, our Chinese name is Yee. So, if you're talking about Yee, you might be talking about our family.

Cierra Rauch 15:41

Oh, okay. Your parents?

Wallace Ahtye 15:43

My parents.

Cierra Rauch 15:44

So, how were your parents? What were they like as people?

Wallace Ahtye 15:47

My mother was actually born in San Francisco, in Chinatown. And my mother had a—well, mother's family was eleven children, and she was the oldest female. So, when she was in the fifth grade, my grandmother needed help. So, they took her out of school in the fifth grade to help my grandmother, because all the other kids were growing up, I mean, eleven kids. And so, she didn't have much schooling—up until the fifth grade—and then she was married, and she moved down to Salinas. But she was strictly Chinese. Of course, she was born and raised in Chinatown, and when you're in Chinatown, that's all you spoke was Chinese.

Guy Galzerano 16:53

Oh, okay, yeah. Even, I mean, the Japanese, the Filipinos would speak their languages and—

Wallace Ahtye 17:01

Yeah. Well, they speak English. Everybody spoke English. But, I mean, when they talking to themself, yeah, talking in Filipino, or Japanese, or Chinese. So, back in the old days, that's all it was. It was just Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. And, of course, you had a few Hispanics there, and Caucasian would occasionally come down, eat at a restaurant, and gamble, or something like that.

Guy Galzerano 17:37

When did the Republic Cafe shut down, and how?

Wallace Ahtye 17:42

It was—that's very strange, you know. We kept on going, the restaurant kept on going from 1942 to 1988. And my mother and my aunt ran the front of the restaurant, and we had one cook, and somebody would wash the dishes in the back. And when they—finally we had to close, because the cook got sick and couldn't cook anymore, and we couldn't find anybody to run the restaurant. He was in his eighties. He was about eighty-two, eighty-three. And my mother, she was at eighty-eight, and my aunt was eighty-five. And those three were running the restaurant in 1988.

Guy Galzerano 18:45

Do you think the Republic Cafe's shutdown slowed down Chinatown's community?

Wallace Ahtye 18:53

Definitely. Definitely. I saw it, because I worked in Chinatown until 1965. And I can just see, around the 1950s, it seemed like all—well, about 1945, they closed down all the gambling dens. No more gambling. And then I think 50s, they didn't use the Filipinos as workers on the fields, but we got too old too, so they started importing the Hispanics around 1950, '55. And, of course, then all the pool halls and all the cafes, they all [unclear] towards Hispanics.

Guy Galzerano 19:45

Right, there was a lot of pool halls, weren't there?

Wallace Ahtye 19:47

Yeah, there was a lot of pool halls there, even back in the 1930s. We'd go in the pool hall all the time when I was a little kid.

Guy Galzerano 19:49

Pool shark.

Wallace Ahtye 19:53

Well, not really, but I liked to play it.

Cierra Rauch 20:05

So, given that the Republic Cafe was in Chinatown, do you think that attracted people to Chinatown, or do you think people were a little bit skeptical of coming into Chinatown, given its liveliness?

Wallace Ahtye 20:25

Actually, you know, when I was growing up in the 30s, in the 40s, and I had—we had our apartment behind the gambling den. Our front doors face Market Street. It was open all the time. You could just walk in there. And so did all the other families in Chinatown. I mean, you can walk in there, and you can go in there anytime you want, because it's always open. And nobody—service or anything. Not like right now, I mean.

Guy Galzerano 21:05

Yeah, we can go into that. I mean, how do you feel about the change, the transition, and the population there now? And—

Wallace Ahtye 21:16

Well, you can see as years go by that—in the 20s and 30s, and the 40s, in Chinatown on Soledad Street itself, we had about a dozen families, Chinese families, living in that one block. Some of those families are pretty big. Like Wellington, his family, they had thirteen children. And then the Jin family, who lived in the same house as Wellington Lee's family, they had ten children.

Cierra Rauch 22:01

Were they living there at the same time?

Wallace Ahtye 22:03

Well, I try to look back, and I said, well, I know because the Jin family were older, so they were born from 1972 to 1940-something. Wellington's family—oh, he didn't even remember having another family there, because he was about three, four years old when everybody else moved out. So, actually, I don't remember. I counted. I said, well, the Jin family, there's ten children. And they're all born there in that house. Okay, and Wellington's family, it had at least seven at that time. So, they had seventeen children, and a mother and father of both families, and the grandmother and the grandfather in that one house.

Cierra Rauch 23:03

Was that common for Chinese families that several generations live together?

Wallace Ahtye 23:09

Well, [unclear] it's the same generation. Oh, you mean? Yeah. That's right. Everybody took care of themselves. Grandfather, father, and yeah, they're all like that. And then across the street were the Chin families, the Chin Bow family. They had ten children.

Guy Galzerano 23:35

So, when you guys had big events at the Republic Cafe, you definitely had enough workers, just in case, you know, to work there. Or, like you said, it could hold 150 people at one time.

Wallace Ahtye 23:49

Yeah.

Guy Galzerano 23:50

So, you must—

Wallace Ahtye 23:53

That's for banquets, but just every day, it might hold fifty-something.

Guy Galzerano 24:00

And you only need two waitresses.

Wallace Ahtye 24:02

Yeah.

Guy Galzerano 24:04

Did you ever work there?

Wallace Ahtye 24:06

No.

Guy Galzerano 24:07

You never cooked [unclear]?

Wallace Ahtye 24:10

What I did was during the war years, 1943 and on up, we were old enough to work in the gas station, service station. So, we spent a lot of time at the service station, because everybody that works at the service station, they were all drafted and they went off to serve in the war. So, somebody had to work on it. So, my brother and I, we went there and we worked during the war years.

Cierra Rauch 24:43

Can you describe any changes that you saw in Chinatown during war time?

Wallace Ahtye 24:48

Yeah. [laughs] Yes, definitely. There was lots of soldiers coming in, and you had MPs all over the place. I think after a while, they made us close some of these gambling joints, family casinos, at that particular time. So, that's a big difference.

Cierra Rauch 25:25

So, it definitely affected just the economy in Chinatown, you would say, with the casinos closing?

Wallace Ahtye 25:33

Well, with the casinos closing, yeah, but then you'd see people in the beer taverns, because actually our restaurant also had a beer tavern next door, if you take a look at it, the Republic Cafe. And there used to be a Lotus Inn there. So, that was very, very lively. And the restaurant was very lively.

Guy Galzerano 26:07

What was Chinatown, the Republic Cafe, the Lotus Inn—what was that peak time of liveliness? And what was that like? Like, was that in the 60s?

Wallace Ahtye 26:18

Oh, no, no. Back in the 30s, 40s, and 50s. Just the 30s and 40s, it was really going gung ho. And then the 50s, pretty soon the Filipinos, they finally got too old and the younger generation didn't want to go out and work in the fields, of course. So, they had to get somebody. So, the Spanish in the 1950s started to come in. That was a big change at that time, in the 50s.

Cierra Rauch 27:00

So, can you describe some of your most vivid and, I guess, treasured memories of Chinatown?

Wallace Ahtye 27:07

Treasured? I don't know if I have any treasured. [Cierra laughs] Actually, working the service station, because you come into daily [unclear], especially the Filipinos. Just talking to them and serving them. I remember that for a long time.

Guy Galzerano 27:36

How long were you working in the service station?

Wallace Ahtye 27:39

Well, here's the funny thing. I graduated high school in '47, and I spent four or five years in UC Berkeley, and then I came back. I had an accounting degree, but my father says, "Well, why don't you just start to take over some of the things." I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So, we had the service station and the Lotus Inn and the Republic Cafe. And then we had two other rentals nearby.

Guy Galzerano 27:51

Yeah, I mean, an accounting degree from Berkeley. I guess you kind of get a—

Wallace Ahtye 28:24

But I didn't use that for a while, because nobody was taking over the service station. So, what I did is I took over the service station. So, I worked from the service station 1952 to 1965. That's thirteen years. So, then you could see the business was going down and down and down after that, from the 50s to the 60s. So, Chinatown wasn't like there was hustle and bump, you know, in the old days, in the 30s and 40s and 50s. But the 60s had gotten so bad that I said, well, [unclear], you know, trying to make a living here in Chinatown. So, I said, "I'm going out on my own, Dad." Of course, he wants to take care of us, so I said, I'm going out on my own. So, I went out on my own, and first couple of years I worked

for a tractor company in the accounting department. Then I went back to school and finally became a software engineer. Software engineer from 1970 until I retired in—what is it? 1992.

Guy Galzerano 29:50

And what did your father do?

Wallace Ahtye 29:53

He just took care of the business. I mean, there was the gambling place, and then he took care of the books for all the rest of the other businesses.

Guy Galzerano 30:07

What kind of things does he have to do to take care of it? Maybe more detail on, like—just business stuff?

Wallace Ahtye 30:19

It's all the money stuff. At the end of the day, you know, you have to count the cash, and you have to put it in big safe. We had a big safe at our house. It must have weighed about a ton.

Cierra Rauch 30:35

Wow, that's heavy.

Wallace Ahtye 30:38

That's very heavy. [Cierra laughs] That followed us, because we had in our old apartment, in back of the gambling den on the first floor, and then when we moved to the Republic Cafe, then we had an apartment upstairs. So, we moved that upstairs to the second floor, and it's been in there since—well, until we moved out, but the safe was still there. Well, somebody broke in there and tried to take that safe down the stairs. Halfway down, they gave up. The safe sat there for maybe another ten years or so. [Cierra and Guy laugh] Right in the middle we have a landing, in the middle there. It just sat right there in the—

Guy Galzerano 31:44

And it wasn't always boarded up like it is now, or how did they get in? Right?

Wallace Ahtye 31:52

It was all boarded up, but anybody that wants to get in through any place, they can get in, you know.

Guy Galzerano 32:02

Can you tell us more about—you kind of already talked about it a little bit—but the transition from the Republic Cafe shutting down and then the homeless moving in? Or people moving out of Chinatown and then the—

Wallace Ahtye 32:21

Yeah, first it was Dorothy's Kitchen that moved [unclear]. Dorothy's Kitchen, first of all, was on Market Street—no, probably it was more on West Market, and they moved to East Market Street. And then

they moved into our old gambling place. And then they moved over to their present position there. And that took about twenty-something years, but every year that goes by, there's more people that just hung around getting the free meal.

Guy Galzerano 33:03

How'd you feel, I mean, losing your old community? How does it feel?

Wallace Ahtye 33:09

Well, there's nothing you can do about it. I mean, you just watch it go down and—

Guy Galzerano 33:15

Right, and now we have a chance to bring it back a little bit with the museum.

Wallace Ahtye 33:20

That's right.

Guy Galzerano 33:20

We can talk about the museum. How do you see it inside the Republic Cafe?

Wallace Ahtye 33:29

If you look at it now, there's nothing in it. They tore the walls down. All you see now are two by fours. There's a lot to be done, but at least it's got a new roof on it, so it's—

Guy Galzerano 33:49

It's dry?

Wallace Ahtye 33:50

Yeah. But it's gonna take a lot of money, because—thanks to CSUMB, you know, we got a grant.

Guy Galzerano 34:02

Through Asian Cultural Experience?

Wallace Ahtye 34:04

Yeah. What they did was they tore the old roof down, and they tore all the walls and the flooring down because of asbestos, and they cleaned it all up. And that was a quarter of a million dollars just to clean it up and take it out. Just that thing. I thought, oh, a quarter of a million dollars, we can do a lot with a quarter of a million dollars, but you had to hire specialized companies to do it, and you're paying them top union wages.

Guy Galzerano 34:34

Right. Yeah, so it's a slow process.

Wallace Ahtye 34:38

And the whole process of moving it out to a place that, you know, you can throw the asbestos away. I mean, that's tens of thousands of dollars just to do that. So, [unclear] right now.

Guy Galzerano 34:57

Yeah. Do you have, like, a timeline in your head of when possibly—because it sounds like a lot of money, so I know it's a slow process, but—

Wallace Ahtye 35:07

It's a slow process. No, we have no idea. We have plans. I mean, first of all, you have to—it will cost another seventy thousand dollars to put in electrical wiring and plumbing, and putting toilets in the restrooms in there. Just putting that alone, it was at least seventy thousand dollars.

Guy Galzerano 35:34

Right. And we've been gathering a lot of photos, old photos, the originals and stuff. How do you think that'll integrate into the Republic Cafe, like, up on the walls? And do you know anything about the scanning process?

Wallace Ahtye 35:51

Well, I mean, yeah, I've got a lot of pictures. And, you know, it takes a while just to show all those pictures.

Cierra Rauch 36:07

How do you feel the projected museum will help with the revitalization, possibly, of Chinatown. Do you think it will help or—

Wallace Ahtye 36:18

It will take more than just a museum. You have to have people living there, because the only way that you get the homeless out, is if the homeless people that are just sitting out there sees something going on in town, they won't be staying there, because there's people going back and forth, doing their job or living there. That's the only way you can get rid of it. So, not only the museum, but, I mean, that would help a lot. Once you get housing and retail back in there, then you'll see the—you'll never get rid of homeless, because they have to go somewhere, but they will have to move somewhere else, because you'll see other people moving back in here. Until that day is—until the day that Dorothy's Kitchen moves away from Market Street, Chinatown, to another location. You'll always see homeless people there. Now that's part of the planning process of the slash Downtown Community Board. We'll move Dorothy's good Janelle location, which means that this homeless people will follow them away from Chinatown.

Guy Galzerano 37:49

Bringing the low-income housing—how often does the board meet?

Wallace Ahtye 37:55

Every month.

Guy Galzerano 37:55

Every month?

Wallace Ahtye 37:56

Every month, yeah. We have subcommittees. One of the subcommittees is somehow [unclear] gets in the way. Another committee with our Republic Cafe, which is the ACE, Asian Cultural Experience. And we have another committee that will try to reconnect Chinatown with downtown. We have another committee that's called SSS, and that's something like Sanitation, Safety—that goes along with trying to clean up Chinatown. So, I belong to two of them. So, that keeps me pretty busy.

Cierra Rauch 38:47

I can imagine.

Wallace Ahtye 38:48

No, three, because I belong to the board, the main board, and I belong to the Sanitation, Security and Safety, and I belong to ACE.

Cierra Rauch 38:59

Wow, you must be very busy. I understand you're also writing a book?

Wallace Ahtye 39:05

Well, I am.

Cierra Rauch 39:07

You are?

Wallace Ahtye 39:07

[unclear] because I had a heart condition a couple of years ago. I had an aortic valve, then I had a pacemaker, and then I had another congestive heart failure. So, that sort of set me back a little bit, but hopefully I'm back on track now.

Cierra Rauch 39:33

So, is the book—can you describe what it's going to be about? Is it about the history of Chinatown?

Wallace Ahtye 39:38

Just the history. Just the history. We haven't even talked about what goes on in Chinatown, because we actually had a Chinese school in Chinatown, and one room school. And there's about twenty of us, twenty, twenty-five of us. And it was an old rickety place. Of course, upstairs it was a [unclear] house where people come in, and they can pray or do what they want. And the downstairs was the one room Chinese school. One teacher and about twenty-five students, brainy, let's see, ranging in age from age six to about age fifteen or sixteen. And there's no restroom. So, I said, well—if you want to go to the restroom, you say, "Okay, I want to go to the restroom." We go out and down the block to where the Chin Bow residence is at 7 1/2 Soledad Street, and that's [laughs] the restroom [Cierra laughs] until

they build a new Chinese school in 1937. Okay, there was no playground when we were growing up. So, when we played, it was either in the alleys or on Soledad Street.

Guy Galzerano 41:26

And is that the garden now?

Wallace Ahtye 41:31

Yeah, that Chinese school was right on the corner. It's part of the garden.

Guy Galzerano 41:37

It's looking nice.

Wallace Ahtye 41:38

It looks nice, yeah.

Guy Galzerano 41:40

What about the Confucius church? When was that built and how does that play a role in the community?

Wallace Ahtye 41:48

A very big role. A very big role. In 1937, they built the Chinese school. And I attended that in 1939, I think, because in '37 my grandmother on my father's side got sick, so we moved up. My mother and I and my brother moved up to San Francisco for two years to help take care of my grandmother. So, we missed two years of attending school at the new school. But after 1938, we came back, and then I attended another three or four years. But Chinese school when it first was built, it was only—they had two classrooms and two offices and a large conference room, which we're still using as our conference room. Well, when that was built, then all the kids [unclear] Chinese school because it had a big playground.

Guy Galzerano 42:57

Which is the parking lot now?

Wallace Ahtye 42:59

No, which is the multipurpose room right now.

Cierra Rauch 43:06

What sort of classes were taught in Chinese school?

Wallace Ahtye 43:09

Well, it was reading and writing, just constantly reading and writing, reading and writing.

Cierra Rauch 43:19

In charact—

Wallace Ahtye 43:20

Yeah, in characters. But I couldn't tell—after all these years, you know, it's been a long time since I've done it, but the only thing I know how is to write my name, and maybe I can say, oh, these are numbers. [laughs] When we had Chinese school, we had to go to Chinese school six days a week. Six days a week. On weekdays, it's from six o'clock to eight o'clock. And on Saturdays, half day, from nine o'clock to twelve o'clock. Nine o'clock in the morning to twelve o'clock. So that kept us very busy.

Guy Galzerano 44:03

Right, yeah. Well, how is the Confucius church doing now? What are they using it for?

Wallace Ahtye 44:15

Right now—okay, we built the school in 1937, and then in 1980, we put in that multipurpose room. The parking lot, actually, was a street, believe it or not. That was actually a street, and the city was no longer using it, because they were bypassing that and using it for the Rossi Road, Rossi Street, comes across. So, they gave it to us. They gave us—that was a parking lot. And then we had that big multipurpose room now. [unclear] we sort of missed it as children, because we'd go to school all the time, and we lived all around Chinatown. You know, we used that quite often. You know, basketball, and it had swings and everything. We had a lot of fun there. We had a lot of doings there. But the thing is, there was no multipurpose room. So, we couldn't have a big meeting or a big celebration in it.

Guy Galzerano 45:28

And that happens now, doesn't it?

Wallace Ahtye 45:31

That's right. 1980, we put up that multipurpose room. No more playground.

Guy Galzerano 45:36

And the community still uses it to this day?

Wallace Ahtye 45:40

Yeah. Of course, right now, the people that use it mostly is the seniors. [laughs] I started there and I'm still using it. Okay, but we have a senior group that uses that facility for dinner, senior dinner. And we have a self-contained kitchen. We have something like four or five woks there. And we built an outdoor barbecue pit out there. We can hold—well, we can feed 200 people maximum. Not very often, but that's all we can we can—but our membership right now is about 180 people, seniors fifty-five and over. See that picture right there? The people, the senior people that are old—

Unknown 45:50

Do you want to talk some more?

Wallace Ahtye 47:06

Yeah. This represents all the people that are over eighty.

Cierra Rauch 47:14

Wow, over eighty?

Wallace Ahtye 47:18

Over eighty.

Guy Galzerano 47:19

Seniors.

Cierra Rauch 47:21

[unclear] over eighty.

Wallace Ahtye 47:23

You can see me in the background there. I'm one of the young ones there.

Cierra Rauch 47:28

[laughs] There you are.

Wallace Ahtye 47:31

And we have five people that are over ninety. And the one on the left-hand corner, on the bottom there, 101.

Cierra Rauch 47:39

Wow.

Guy Galzerano 47:40

And he's still alive.

Wallace Ahtye 47:41

He's still alive. That was taken three months ago. And his wife is a hundred this year. So, the chances of a husband and wife both living past a hundred is a million to one.

Cierra Rauch 48:07

A million to one?

Wallace Ahtye 48:09

And they still come to our doings.

Guy Galzerano 48:14

That's great. That's great. Who do you see moving into the housing, if it is built in Chinatown again? Maybe the seniors back again?

Wallace Ahtye 48:31

No, I don't think so. No. Gonna be low-income people probably that wants to come in.

Guy Galzerano 48:38

Right, it's not going to be—

Wallace Ahtye 48:40

It's not going to be like in the old days. Back in the old days, we had at least twelve Chinese families just in Soledad Street. And then on the peripherals, in the old days you see families just right outside of Chinatown living there. So, it's really closely-knit. In the old days, they were really closely-knit. Because that railroad track that crosses it, crosses by Chinatown, that was the dividing line between, say, you're on one side of the tracks, and everybody else is on the other side of the tracks. And that's the way it was.

Guy Galzerano 49:33

How do you—how are you guys proposing to maybe change and integrate the two communities again? You were talking about—

Wallace Ahtye 49:44

Well, first of all, that depends on the railroad, because they don't want to do anything. They just want to block everything out. But we have to somehow maybe build a bridge across, so we can cross the railroad tracks—a pedestrian bridge. And that's what we're working towards. It's like a bridge, but then you have to persuade Union Pacific to do something like that, because that's their property. That's one of the things that our Chinatown board is trying to do.

Guy Galzerano 50:30

Good. Is there any other interesting history in Chinatown that you want to tell us?

Wallace Ahtye 50:39

Yeah, between 1938 and 1980, there was no—the multipurpose room wasn't built then. Well, in 1952, we founded the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, and that sort of brought the community together, but you have to be a citizen. So, a big part of Chinatown was we sort of brought them together. You know, we had little doings, and we actually had a club room above—I don't know if you know where the corner of Pajaro and Market, there's about a four or five story men's building there now, but it used to be a [unclear] meat market there on the second floor, and we rented that out, and that was our club room until 1980, when we [unclear] was invited to share the facilities at the new multipurpose room.

Guy Galzerano 52:01

Are the Filipinos and the Japanese involved in in the rehabilitation of Chinatown?

Wallace Ahtye 52:09

Definitely. Definitely. In ACE, our main people are Japanese, Filipinos, and Chinese.

Guy Galzerano 52:23

Yeah, Asian Cultural Experience.

Wallace Ahtye 52:26

Yeah, that's right.

Guy Galzerano 52:27

So, of course.

Cierra Rauch 52:28

I'm just curious, why do you feel that it's important to be involved in an organization like ACE?

Wallace Ahtye 52:40

Because I'm the only—I guess I'm the only person that is young enough [laughs] to understand what the history of Chinatown was, the feeling that we have. In the old days, there was Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese, and we're still there in a way, you know? I mean, a little further away, but we're still there. And in order to further the historical value of Chinatown, we have to do something.

Cierra Rauch 53:24

So, you mentioned the feeling of Chinatown. Can you describe in a little bit more detail what that feeling was of Chinatown? How it felt?

Wallace Ahtye 53:35

Well, don't forget the Chinese Exclusion Act. That really split up everything. And so, when we were growing up there, you know, the Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese were right there. Everybody got along fine, you know, and everybody was very friendly. And it's just a feeling of knowing the people all those years, in the 30s and 40s and 50s. There's just something that's really special about knowing those people—not only your own race, but other races.

Guy Galzerano 54:21

Yeah, that's why bringing in the museum is very important, to show the whole experience and history of those cultures merging together.

Wallace Ahtye 54:34

Yeah, that's right. Especially the Filipinos, because the Japanese in 1942, they took them all away, you know. That really disrupted Japantown, and it was never the same after that. But the Filipinos were still there. I just remember, you know, just going to their cafes and especially the pool hall, and knowing everybody in Chinatown is something special.

Cierra Rauch 55:09

Did you ever—oh, I'm sorry.

Wallace Ahtye 55:10

And then being that I was working in the service station, I see them all the time.

Guy Galzerano 55:18

Right, yeah. So, oh, so it was the Filipinos coming in mostly?

Wallace Ahtye 55:24

Well, they were there already.

Guy Galzerano 55:26

Right. To the service station?

Wallace Ahtye 55:28

Yeah, our main customers were Filipinos.

Guy Galzerano 55:33

Would the other tongs come in?

Wallace Ahtye 55:38

No, they didn't. I would say after the 40s, the tongs being an influence to the Chinese community was on the downgrade, because we no longer needed them, because everybody was pretty well situated in their workplaces and everything, and most of the Chinese are starting to move away from Chinatown. And then pretty soon there was no—they closed down all the gambling dens, so they no longer controlled a big portion of the business.

Guy Galzerano 56:24

Was there anything else going on in the gambling dens? Or maybe—

Wallace Ahtye 56:33

Well, there was a funny thing that happened. One time they raided the pool hall—I mean, the gambling den—all of them, all at once. And our apartment was sort of—well, we had a backyard that goes into the gambling parlor. So, they went in there, and they axed our front door down. They axed it down. They tore it apart. And they raided it from two, three directions. They went in there, and they took out all the tables and chairs, and they just [unclear] it.

Guy Galzerano 57:23

This was the police?

Wallace Ahtye 57:24

Uh-huh.

Guy Galzerano 57:25

This was the—

Wallace Ahtye 57:26

This was the DA, Anthony Basile [?]. He was one that was behind all this. And then my mother, she was in the house. And my mother says, "Where's your search warrant?" They said, "We don't need one." They didn't have one. [unclear]

Guy Galzerano 57:57

How did they do that?

Wallace Ahtye 57:58

They did it. They did it. In those days, you can get to do anything you want, and nobody would say anything. I mean, we can say something, but who cares what you say? It's not—it doesn't affect them too much.

Cierra Rauch 57:58

That's illegal.

Guy Galzerano 58:18

Right, yeah. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Cierra Rauch 58:24

I had a question. This is kind of a specific question. Can you tell us—I hope you remember—who Momo was?

Wallace Ahtye 58:35

Oh, that's my aunt.

Cierra Rauch 58:36

That's your aunt? Oh, okay. I think it had come up in a couple of other interviews, and we were just curious if you could clarify.

Wallace Ahtye 58:45

She was one that had Chinese clothes on every single day.

Cierra Rauch 58:48

Every day?

Wallace Ahtye 58:49

Every single day, with the little bangs over the head. Yeah, I have a picture of her there.

Cierra Rauch 58:55

Did she work at the cafe?

Wallace Ahtye 58:57

Yes, she did for many, many years.

Cierra Rauch 58:59

Was she a waitress or—

Wallace Ahtye 59:00

A waitress. She worked up until 1988, just like my mother, the two of them.

Guy Galzerano 59:07

[all laugh] I was just thinking of her working in there. She probably made the—made it all—

Wallace Ahtye 59:26

Yeah, really kind of—wow, you know, here's this Chinese lady that—

Cierra Rauch 59:29

[laughs] So, do you think she attracted customers?

Wallace Ahtye 59:35

No, not really, but they respected her, really respected her, because I remember when—this is much later in years—a drunk man came in here, and she stood right up to him. "You go out! Right away!" The guy turned around, and he walked away. [laughs]

Cierra Rauch 1:00:00

Wow, so she was a real—

Wallace Ahtye 1:00:01

Yes.

Cierra Rauch 1:00:02

—tough lady.

Wallace Ahtye 1:00:03

She was a real tough lady. Boy, she was a tough lady.

Cierra Rauch 1:00:07

Were a lot of women tough in Chinatown, or was she just—

Wallace Ahtye 1:00:11

No, not really. She's real special, [laughs], real different, yeah.

Cierra Rauch 1:00:19

Sounds like a nice lady.

Guy Galzerano 1:00:23

Yeah, so if there's anything else you want to say—

Wallace Ahtye 1:00:30

Let's see. That's about it. The most important things. Those are the most important things.

Guy Galzerano 1:00:40

So, I want to thank you, Wally, for doing this interview, and I think we got a lot of information out of it, and very good.

Cierra Rauch 1:00:51

Yeah, thank you for welcoming us into your home and showing us some of your photos. It was really, really great.

Guy Galzerano 1:00:59

Yeah, best wishes to the Republic Cafe and the Asian Cultural Experience.

Wallace Ahtye 1:01:04

Thank you. [cut in recording] So, I'm the youngster.

Cierra Rauch 1:01:08

You're the youngster.

Wallace Ahtye 1:01:10

[unclear] in the old days.

Cierra Rauch 1:01:11

Yes, you're the one that's going to carry on the memories and make sure that they get passed on. That's awesome.

Guy Galzerano 1:01:19

Yeah, that's awesome, because we were talking to Wellington before and—I don't know why I said that.

Wallace Ahtye 1:01:29

Wellington was actually—he's about eighteen years younger than I am, so he missed a lot of the 1930s and 1940s, and what it really [unclear] just that one street.

Cierra Rauch 1:01:53

The prime time. The golden years.

Wallace Ahtye 1:01:56

In the old days, we had flags flying in Chinatown—all of them. Every business had one of those flags flying.

Cierra Rauch 1:02:10

The American—

Wallace Ahtye 1:02:11

No, not the American [unclear]. This is like another part of town, you know?

Cierra Rauch 1:02:24

So, do you go to the rodeos since you—

Wallace Ahtye 1:02:26

Not the rodeos. We went to the carnival.

Cierra Rauch 1:02:30

The carnival?

Wallace Ahtye 1:02:31

Do you know where the carnival was?

Cierra Rauch 1:02:33

No, I haven't gone to the carnival.

Wallace Ahtye 1:02:35

Oh, they don't have—oh, the carnival was way out of nowhere. We had—the carnival was right next to the train station.

Cierra Rauch 1:02:45

The train station in Salinas?

Wallace Ahtye 1:02:48

Mm-hmm.

Cierra Rauch 1:02:48

Oh, okay.

Wallace Ahtye 1:02:49

And then they had the rodeo parade. And we had floats, and we add a marching band. This was—they say this was the largest night parade west of Mississippi.

Cierra Rauch 1:03:07

Wow. And you had big—did the Chinese community have big floats, or—

Wallace Ahtye 1:03:15

Oh, that's one thing. Oh, man, I forgot all about that.

Cierra Rauch 1:03:19

Oh, no.

Wallace Ahtye 1:03:19

That was the most important thing.

Guy Galzerano 1:03:21

No, it wasn't.

Unknown 1:03:22

It's still recording. [laughs]

Cierra Rauch 1:03:23

Oh, tell us about it.

Wallace Ahtye 1:03:27

The Chinese American Citizen Alliance was born in 1952, and about 1953, we entered a float. I said, "Oh, this is the most beautiful float you've ever seen." Didn't get a prize at all. So, I said, next year, we're going to build the best float you've ever seen. By golly, five consecutive years we won sweepstakes. Better than the pros. Five years. And what we did, we had somebody—we had a farmer out in—north of town. And we built the float out there. Everybody came—well, thirty or forty of us. They went out there and they helped build a float.

Guy Galzerano 1:04:23

And what were these floats? I mean, what did they look like?

Wallace Ahtye 1:04:26

They had different—you'd have to look at the pictures of the floats. But what we did was—we were really the only ones that used, what do you call it, metallic paper that just—

Cierra Rauch 1:04:43

Really shiny.

Wallace Ahtye 1:04:44

—glistens. And it really cost a lot of money. I said, if we don't win, our float, we're going to be in deep trouble. I think we got five hundred dollars for first prize or something like that. We had to win in order to get our money back, because the paper was so expensive.

Cierra Rauch 1:05:07

Just to break even?

Wallace Ahtye 1:05:09

Just to break even. So, after five years, consecutive years, we said, we're getting tired of this. So, we didn't do it after that.

Cierra Rauch 1:05:16

Well, after five years of winning—

Wallace Ahtye 1:05:17

Five consecutive years of winning.

Guy Galzerano 1:05:20

What were those years?

Wallace Ahtye 1:05:21

In the '50s. In the late '50s, and maybe in the '60s.

Cierra Rauch 1:05:31

Does the parade still go on?

Wallace Ahtye 1:05:32

No. They tried a little bit, but it's not like what it used to be. I mean, they had marching bands from all over. Talk about floats. We had maybe thirty or forty, fifty floats.

Cierra Rauch 1:05:47

Oh, my God. Wow. And then would each of the communities, like the—would the Japanese community have a float, and the Filipinos?

Wallace Ahtye 1:05:55

I don't remember them. I don't think they did. I remember our floats. I remember after that first year, we were so disappointed. And then five consecutive years.

Cierra Rauch 1:06:09

It's so wonderful that you all would come together and work on this big float, this shiny thing, and parade down. That's so cool. [laughs]

Guy Galzerano 1:06:20

And I think you guys had a marching band as well, right? For a little bit?

Wallace Ahtye 1:06:25

That's right. I forgot about the marching band, Chinese school. When we were—this was 1938, '39, '40—I was part of the marching—the drum corps. I was a bugle. I had a bugle. All the boys had bugles, and then all the girls [unclear] drums.

Guy Galzerano 1:06:55

And how long did that last?

Wallace Ahtye 1:06:57

Oh, not too long. Of course, by the time—because you had to have enough children to do it. I remember most of the children that were part of the band, drum and bugle corps. They were five, six years older than I am. So, people don't attend Chinese school once they reach around fourteen or fifteen years of age. And pretty soon, they were all gone. So, we just didn't have enough people.

Cierra Rauch 1:07:28

So, you don't play any instruments?

Wallace Ahtye 1:07:32

Well, actually, I played high school band for four years.

Cierra Rauch 1:07:39

Did you go to Salinas High?

Wallace Ahtye 1:07:40

Yeah, only Salinas.

Cierra Rauch 1:07:42

The only, okay.

Wallace Ahtye 1:07:44

Only high school.

Cierra Rauch 1:07:46

That's right. There is only one.

Wallace Ahtye 1:07:48

Yeah, there's only one.

Cierra Rauch 1:07:49

I keep forgetting that, because now there's, like, a few—

Wallace Ahtye 1:07:53

Five. There's five of them now. Back in those days, back in the 1930s, the population was 7000. That doesn't include Alisal. Alisal was not part of Salinas. Inside Salinas was 7000 people population. You know what it is now?

Cierra Rauch 1:08:19

I could guess, but—

Guy Galzerano 1:08:20

200?

Wallace Ahtye 1:08:21

No, it's 155.

Cierra Rauch 1:08:23

I should have guessed. I was gonna say around 150,000. [laughs] Wow, huge now in comparison.

Guy Galzerano 1:08:33

Yes, indeed.

Wallace Ahtye 1:08:34

There was a lot of businesses along Market Street and Main Street that was Chinese. Chinese had a lot of restaurants all over the place, and they had three of them on Main Street. You know where Sang's is? Sang's Restaurant? That was one of them. [unclear] in the '40s. That's one of the restaurants. And we had general stores. We had two or three general stores, and we had a drugstore right there in the corner of Mark—not Market—Main Street and Market. And we'd go there quite often, because they had a soda fountain. But we don't go downtown too often. Maybe for motion pictures, or Pep Creamery. A lot of the young kids go there. We'd go there too. The people—I remember during the war years, people stood in line just to get into the movie houses.

Cierra Rauch 1:09:45

Really? Wow. Is that all the military presence?

Wallace Ahtye 1:09:51

Yeah, military presence. Yeah, I remember standing in line for half an hour just to get in there.

Cierra Rauch 1:09:57

Wow, that does seem like a long time.

Wallace Ahtye 1:10:00

Yeah.

Cierra Rauch 1:10:00

A half an hour? Oh, man, if I have to wait five minutes for a movie now, I'm not gonna see it. [laughs]

Wallace Ahtye 1:10:11

That was the only thing we can do, I mean, as far as entertainment.

Cierra Rauch 1:10:15

There wasn't a lot of other things around? No—

Wallace Ahtye 1:10:18

No. I mean, our organization wasn't set yet. The Chinese American Citizen Alliance wasn't set, so there was nothing else to do.

Guy Galzerano 1:10:30

Right. Run around the prostitutes.

Wallace Ahtye 1:10:36

They don't bother us.

Guy Galzerano 1:10:37

Right. No, yeah, exactly. They were friendly.

Wallace Ahtye 1:10:39

You know, up in the hotel, of the Republic Hotel, we had some prostitutes there, and when a person walks up there, they know exactly where to go, because each one of them has screen doors on it. So, that's where they were.

Cierra Rauch 1:10:57

Oh, interesting. They would see the screen door, and they would—

Wallace Ahtye 1:11:04

They know that's—so, they're just waiting and waiting and waiting.

Cierra Rauch 1:11:09

[laughs] Oh, wow.

Guy Galzerano 1:11:13

I'm glad we got that tail end. We got that on—

Wallace Ahtye 1:11:21

When I was a youngster, I didn't know where I was going to, but in later years [unclear], you know, that was an opium den. My father took me in an opium den, and you see people lying on mats, and they would just—

Cierra Rauch 1:11:38

And where was that on—

Wallace Ahtye 1:11:40

They were right next to 7 1/2 Soledad. 7 1/2 Soledad was the home of the Chin Bows, and right next to it, I remember. Because one of the sisters—we did an oral interview with one of the sisters. She said, "You know, on the side of our house, we had a side door that opened up, and you know what it was?" And he says, "No." "That's to go into the opium den, and if somebody raids the opium den, they can just open up the side door, and they go into [unclear]. [laughs]

Cierra Rauch 1:12:15

Who owned the opium den?

Wallace Ahtye 1:12:16

Well, I don't know who owned it, but it's only Chinese that get into it.

Cierra Rauch 1:12:23

Oh, only Chinese?

Wallace Ahtye 1:12:23

Only Chinese. I mean, it's strictly off limits to anybody.

Cierra Rauch 1:12:24

Oh, very exclusive. What did the opium den—do you remember what it looked like?

Wallace Ahtye 1:12:40

No, it's empty, and then you have mats—

Cierra Rauch 1:12:44

Mats all around?

Wallace Ahtye 1:12:46

And you just see people that are just lying down, and they're just—

Cierra Rauch 1:12:49

Smoking opium.

Guy Galzerano 1:12:51

What was the lighting like? Do you know?

Wallace Ahtye 1:12:57

No, it's dark. It's dark in there.

Cierra Rauch 1:13:01

Wow. Wouldn't hear of anything like that today.

Guy Galzerano 1:13:10

It's kind of like hookah. Hookah? But it's not. It's, like, you lounge around—

Wallace Ahtye 1:13:16

You know, in the gambling den, they had a cigarette store. I forgot my uncle ran the cigarette store, cigarette and candy store. And you walk inside—you walk in through it, and then there's a mirror right there, a person behind there. It's just a one-way mirror. You can see out. So, they can see who's coming in and who's coming out. So, in order to get into the gambling den, you have to go through two sets of doors. You go into one and you lock that door, and you go into another, and you [unclear]. So, it's all controlled by a person behind that one-way mirror. So, if it happened that there's a raid going on, they pressed a warning bell in the gambling den, and what happens is everybody, all the dealers, they put everything away into a big drawer, and they come out and they act like they're just playing poker.

Cierra Rauch 1:14:20

Oh, wow. Clever. That's interesting.

Guy Galzerano 1:14:38

I want to ask more questions, but I feel like we're done.

Wallace Ahtye 1:14:40

Go ahead.

Guy Galzerano 1:14:42

Well, okay. I forgot my question. It was—oh yeah. Were the opium dens sometimes, like, around the gambling places, or inside? I was just wondering.

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:00

No, it's further away. It's on [unclear] Street. It's only one block, but it's—

Guy Galzerano 1:15:07

Oh, okay. For some reason I thought—

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:09

No, it wouldn't be.

Cierra Rauch 1:15:12

I have another question. So, we had interviewed, last weekend, Loretta Lizama, and she—her mother owned Loretta's Cafe, which was across from the Republic Cafe?

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:28

I don't know if it's across or just down the street. I'm not sure. I forgot.

Cierra Rauch 1:15:33

Did you ever eat there?

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:35

Yeah.

Cierra Rauch 1:15:35

Do you like Filipino food? Cool, just curious.

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:41

Are you Filipino?

Cierra Rauch 1:15:42

I am.

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:43

You're Filipino?

Cierra Rauch 1:15:45

Filipino and German. [laughs]

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:53

The Filipinos were—they had a lot of cafes, and a lot of pool halls.

Cierra Rauch 1:15:58

Yeah.

Wallace Ahtye 1:15:59

They loved to play pool. Oh, they loved to play pool.

Cierra Rauch 1:16:04

And they like to gamble.

Wallace Ahtye 1:16:05

And they love to gamble. They love to gamble. If it weren't for the Filipinos, I don't think the gambling dens would do as well.

Cierra Rauch 1:16:16

Really? [laughs] Yeah, Filipinos, they love to gamble.

Wallace Ahtye 1:16:19

Yeah, families come in on the weekend, and the men go to the gambling dens, and they go into the cafe.

Cierra Rauch 1:16:20

So, the women and the children would go to the cafe, and the men would go and do their thing?

Wallace Ahtye 1:16:36

That's right.

Cierra Rauch 1:16:40

So, not a lot of women were gambling?

Wallace Ahtye 1:16:42

No, I can't think of any.

Cierra Rauch 1:16:47

Did you have to be a certain age to gamble?

Wallace Ahtye 1:16:49

I forgot.

Cierra Rauch 1:16:52

Can't just be twelve and—

Wallace Ahtye 1:16:54

I don't go through it too often. Sometimes I would, but I'd just go through my back way into my apartment. And at that particular time, when I saw my apartment, I said, boy, I'm so lucky that I have this apartment, because we're the only house, or living, that has a foundation. Everything else, all the houses are built, there's no foundation. They just put a house up there like that.

Cierra Rauch 1:17:33

Wow, interesting.

Wallace Ahtye 1:17:37

That's why you can see all those empty [unclear]. Those were—if you take a look at some of those old pictures, they didn't have any foundation at all. I don't see how those things held up, because they had two stories.

Cierra Rauch 1:17:50

That was, like, kind of dangerous with the fault line and all the earthquakes in California. They would crumble.

Wallace Ahtye 1:17:58

Well, we didn't have that. I don't remember having big earthquakes in those days. That was Carr Lake, part of Carr Lake. That's why nobody wanted to rent that place, because the lake comes up and every so often it keeps on going and it floods Chinatown.

Cierra Rauch 1:18:16

Which lake is this?

Wallace Ahtye 1:18:17

Carr Lake.

Cierra Rauch 1:18:18

Oh, I don't know where that is.

Guy Galzerano 1:18:21

C-A-R-R?

Wallace Ahtye 1:18:21

C-A-R-R. They're trying to buy all the—it's all farmland right now. And they're trying to buy all that land. The Japanese own all that land, and they're making a big park out of it.

Cierra Rauch 1:18:40

A park? A community park?

Wallace Ahtye 1:18:41

Yeah, a community park. That's what they're trying to do. But after a while—you know, back in the '20s, there was no control as far as Chinatown being flooded. But after a while, they dredged [unclear] to keep the water away from Chinatown, but for a long time, Chinatown—I remember walking past where the Chinese school is, the new Chinese school. I mean, I've gotten stuck in the mud, and I went down, down, down, down. [Cierra laughs] Eventually I had to take my boots off.

Cierra Rauch 1:19:31

Like quicksand or something.

Wallace Ahtye 1:19:33

Yeah, like quicksand.

Cierra Rauch 1:19:34

Oh my gosh, that must have been scary. Well, I have to get going, because I have to go to work.

Wallace Ahtye 1:19:44

Go to work?

Cierra Rauch 1:19:45

Yes.

Guy Galzerano 1:19:46

Yeah, we got good stuff.

Cierra Rauch 1:19:48

Gotta make that money. [laughs]

Wallace Ahtye 1:19:52

Yeah, that's right. In the old days, you know, when I went to college—this was UC Berkeley—tuition was thirty-five dollars a semester. Thirty-five dollars.

Cierra Rauch 1:20:07

At UC Berkeley?

Wallace Ahtye 1:20:09

At UC Berkeley.

Cierra Rauch 1:20:10

Wow.

Wallace Ahtye 1:20:11

But that was 1947.

Cierra Rauch 1:20:13

If only. Now it's, like, 25,000 a semester. That's crazy. Crazy, crazy. Well—

Guy Galzerano 1:20:28

Thanks, Wally.

Cierra Rauch 1:20:29

Yeah, once again, thank you so much for sharing all of your stories and your memories.

Wallace Ahtye 1:20:35

I think the last time was better. [all laugh] [unclear]

Cierra Rauch 1:20:46

[unclear] I think overall we have, like, a really nice overview of what Chinatown's like for you and just for the community in general, and the Chinese community and, like, even outside of Salinas, Chinatown.

Wallace Ahtye 1:21:01

Yeah, I didn't talk about the outside too, the families outside. I could talk about each individual family in—

Cierra Rauch 1:21:11

In an interview?

Wallace Ahtye 1:21:12

I'm trying to represent every family that had lived in Chinatown [unclear] that I knew of, because there were about twelve of them. So, I got the Chins, and then you got the Wellingtons. There was the Yee family right next to the Chins, and then there was the Yee family next to them, and the Lu family next to them. And then there's a family—well, there's so many of them.

Cierra Rauch 1:21:43

Do you do a lot of crossword puzzles? Is that why your memory is so sharp, that you can remember all the different people? [laughs]

Wallace Ahtye 1:21:51

No, no, no.

Cierra Rauch 1:21:53

I hear that helps.

Wallace Ahtye 1:21:55

I guess it helps. I'm the only one that—"Oh yeah, I remember him."

Cierra Rauch 1:22:00

[laughs] My grandpa is the same way. He's really sharp too, and he does a crypto every day.

Guy Galzerano 1:22:01

I don't have a release form, so—