

Father and Son (1995)

Maurice Chuck

In 1955 Everett Drumwright, U.S. consul general in Hong Kong, helped fan the fires of anti-Communist hysteria by charging that many Chinese were immigrating to the United States illegally, raising the specter of Communist infiltration. The Justice Department had been investigating Chinese immigration fraud since the late 1940s, but after China went Communist, and especially now with the release of the Drumwright report, they stepped up their efforts, which in turn caused a panic in the Chinese community. To avoid mass prosecutions and deportations, various community leaders helped to establish the Chinese Confession Program, a procedure by which a Chinese illegal immigrant could disclose his or her false status and become eligible for a suspension of deportation and permanent resident status. On the positive side, the Confession Program legalized the status of over eleven thousand Chinese Americans who confessed to having entered the United States fraudulently, allowing them to reclaim their real names, become naturalized citizens, and send for their relatives from China. On the negative side, the political right took advantage of the situation to persecute and purge the community of left-wing activists. The program also created bitter feelings among family members and relatives, and close to twenty thousand persons implicated by the confessions were subjected to undue stress and agony.

The following excerpt from a short story by Maurice Chuck, editor and publisher of two progressive newspapers, San Francisco Journal and Chinese Voice, is based on the true experiences of the author in the Chinese Confession Program. Chuck had immigrated to the United States in 1948 at the age of fifteen to join his father, who was himself a paper son. Against his father's wishes, he had become active in a left-wing organization, Min Qing (Chinese American Democratic Youth League), and often written articles for the China Daily News, a pro-Communist China newspaper. Both Min Qing and the China Daily News were targeted by federal investigators and eventually destroyed. According to "Father and Son," Chuck's radical views while serving in the U.S. Army also contributed to his indictment in 1962 for fraudulent en-



Maurice Chuck (holding banner honoring "labor heroes") at a Min Qing function in San Francisco, 1951. (Courtesy of Laura Lai)

try into the United States. After his father confessed to coming in as a paper son, he was subpoenaed to testify against his own son. The emotional stress this situation created in the father-son relationship was repeated many times over among other Chinese American families that found themselves caught in a similar predicament during the Cold War era.

The Greyhound bus sped along Highway 101 toward Seattle, Washington. However, the destination of Yu Rongzu and son Nianzu was not Seattle, but a town not far away, called Tacoma. Ten years ago, when Nianzu was serving in the Army, he was stationed nearby in Fort Lewis. Almost every weekend he would go to a Chinese restaurant in Tacoma for a Chinese meal. He also applied for his citizenship at the Immigration office there. Who would have thought that ten years later today he would revisit this town because he had to appear in court to defend his rights as a citizen? And his father, who was accompanying him on the trip, was actually going there as a witness for the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). . . .

In the summer of 1955, Nianzu had gotten into trouble with the Army. His speeches and his writings had gotten him into hot water. After he was indicted, all his books, papers, and diary while he was in the service were confiscated. At the military hearing, he was interrogated for over a week. To

Rongzu, his son's trial was the most stunning incident to occur during his decades of stay in the United States. He was frightened and worried sick. His friends and relatives distanced themselves from him, chiding him behind his back for having such an unworthy son.

As for Nianzu, he was completely taken by surprise. He never expected that the little dissent he had expressed against the government and the views he had held toward U.S.-China relations would bring such serious consequences.

The verdict from the hearing was guilty, and Nianzu was dishonorably discharged from the Army.

The Nianzu who returned home after being discharged fought often with his father over the incident. His father was constantly scolding him. "A man cannot survive on principles. You now hold a shameful and undesirable discharge. Who would dare or be willing to hire you? How are you going to live from now on?" What the father said was true, and for a long time, Nianzu remained unemployed. Except for enrolling in a couple of evening classes, he passed his days idly and in boredom. Finally, his unemployment problem was solved when his father dragged him to work as a kitchen helper. But after a few months, someone ratted on him to the owner and he was fired. Fortunately, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) went to bat for him and countersued the Army. In convicting him for his thoughts, they had stripped him of his human rights and his right to freedom of belief. The case dragged on for a long time, but finally his conviction was overturned, and Nianzu was reissued an honorable discharge.

Close on the heels of this reprieve, however, came the so-called Confession Program engineered by the INS, requiring the Chinese to come forth voluntarily to confess to illegal entry into the United States. The entire Chinatown was in turmoil; everyone was alarmed. Rongzu was admitted into the country and eventually became naturalized under the family name of Zhou. Whether he confessed or not would implicate a whole group of kinfolk. Rongzu had always been a timid man, afraid of trouble. He discussed the matter with some of the clan elders, who agreed that this was a chance for him to tell all to the INS and clear the records so he could get his status adjusted, reclaim his original name, and be naturalized again.

Nianzu objected to this, calling it a conspiracy. This Confession Program in effect made the involved party incriminate himself by admitting to illegal entry. After the confession, there was no guarantee that the individual would have his status adjusted. Besides, this problem, which had dogged most Chinese for several generations, was the result of the exclusion movement in the past against the Chinese in the United States, and was a product of history. The Confession Program was targeted at certain people and was a way for the INS to convict these unwelcome elements. Rongzu was half convinced by his son's explanation, which seemed to make sense, but he was berated by his clansmen, who said if he did not participate in the Confession Pro-

gram, he would jeopardize not only himself, but a whole bunch of clansmen as well. Finally, with pressure coming from all sides, he reluctantly headed for the INS to make a clean breast of everything.

Nianzu refused to confess. Not long after, he received an official letter from the INS ordering him to surrender his citizenship certificate; otherwise, he would have to suffer the consequences. He sought advice from the ACLU attorney, Besig, who told him, "You don't have to pay attention to them."

A mild, sunny afternoon. Grant Avenue in Chinatown, as usual, was hopping with activity, with thronging pedestrians and heavy traffic clogging the streets. Suddenly two burly Westerners appeared in the childcare center in Chinatown, where Nianzu was working, telling him in harsh tones, "We have orders to arrest you."

It was so unexpected that Nianzu was momentarily paralyzed with shock. The children and the teachers in the center were scared and confused, not understanding what was happening. Nianzu tried to remain calm. "What crime have I committed?" he asked. "How can you just come here and arrest me? Please show me your warrant."

"You are an illegal immigrant!" one of the officers said coldly. "Here's the warrant." He produced a document from his pocket, showed it to Nianzu, and quickly took it back. Then he handcuffed Nianzu.

"That's ridiculous! Not only did I enter the country legally, but I also hold an official U.S. Naturalization certificate," Nianzu countered angrily.

"Your father has already confessed to the INS that his real family name is Yu, not Zhou." The officers pushed Nianzu out the door, leaving the teachers to look at each other in dismay.

A police car was waiting at the curb. The officers shoved him inside, where he found his best friend, Chen Xuming, already sitting.

"They've arrested you, too?" Nianzu said in surprise.

"When they drove this way, I knew they were coming for you," said Xuming.

At the city jail, they were booked, fingerprinted, ushered into the showers, and finally photographed in prisoner uniforms. According to the law, they had the right to make one outside phone call. Nianzu called Besig at the ACLU, and told the attorney of the arrest of Xuming and himself. In less than two hours, Attorney Besig was at the jail and bailed the two of them out.

An hour before the trial, Nianzu went to see Attorney Wilson to discuss his case. Because Rongzu was a witness for the government, he did not accompany Nianzu, but arranged to meet him at the courthouse.

At the beginning of the trial, the judge said, "This is a case of illegal entry into the United States. Attorney Wilson, how does your client plead?"

"Your Honor, my client pleads not guilty," answered Attorney Wilson. Nianzu was called by the prosecution to the box. After he had been sworn in, the chief prosecuting attorney said, "Please state your name."

"My last name is Zhou, and my first name is Yunian."

"Is that your true name?"

"That is my legal name in the United States."

"When did you come to the U.S.?"

"In 1948."

"Did you come together with your father?"

"Yes."

"When did you apply for naturalization?"

"In 1954."

"What name did you use to apply for citizenship?"

"Zhou Yunian."

"What is your father's name?"

"Zhou Yurong."

At this point, the prosecuting attorney turned to the judge. "Your Honor, I would like to end my questioning here, but reserve the right to recall the defendant to the box."

"Do you have any questions for your client?" asked the judge of the defense attorney.

"Yes," said Attorney Wilson. Standing, he said, "Who gave you the name Zhou Yunian?"

"My father."

"Is your father in court? Please point him out."

"That is my father," said Nianzu, pointing to Rongzu.

"Is your father here to testify for you?" asked the attorney.

"No," answered Nianzu. "He has been summoned to testify on behalf of the prosecution."

Feigning surprise, the attorney said, "To testify against his own son for the prosecution!"

"I don't think he has any choice," said Nianzu.

"Your Honor, I have no more questions," said Attorney Wilson.

Then the prosecution summoned Yu Rongzu. After he had been sworn in, the attorney asked, "Please state your name."

"I am called Zhou Yurong."

"Is that your true name?"

"No," said Rongzu with discomfort. "But I have used that name."

"Then what is your true name?"

"Yu Rongzu."

"Is your family name Zhou or Yu?"

"It's Yu."

"Are you saying that you used a false family name to enter the U.S.?"

"Yes."

"So at the time you knew full well that you were using false papers to enter the U.S.?"

"I used the name Zhou . . ."

When it was time for Attorney Wilson to cross examine him, he kept pursuing two questions.

"Your son's name, Zhou Yunian, was a name given him by you. Right?"

"Right," answered Rongzu.

"Your son knew this name to be legal or illegal?"

"Legal, of course," said Rongzu. "Because I also used the family name Zhou to apply for naturalization."

The prosecuting attorney also questioned Rongzu. "Is it true you have already confessed to the INS that your true family name is really Yu instead of Zhou, that Zhou is a false name? And now you have reverted to your true name, and have adjusted your status under the name Yu Rongzu, and have been naturalized again."

"Yes."

After the two attorneys argued their cases, the judge ruled in favor of the prosecution. He thought the prosecution presented clear evidence that since the father had admitted to using a false family name to enter the country illegally, then the son, who had used the same false family name for immigration, also entered the country illegally.

The defense attorney's closing statement insisted that the son was innocent. Regardless of whether the name is true or false, what else can a son do but take his father's name? If a crime had been committed, then the crime was the father's, since he was the first to use the bogus family name.

However, the judge did not agree with the defense attorney's deductive reasoning. He thought that if the defendant had done what his father did, that is, accepted the advice of the INS and cooperated with the government by confessing and adjusting his status, subsequently reverting to his true family name and reapplying for naturalization, would not the problem have been solved? Yet the defendant gave up the chance and therefore must accept the consequences.

At the end, the judge asked Nianzu, "Do you have anything to say?"

"I do!" said Nianzu with firm conviction. "I believe what is really on trial here is not me, but the American judicial system."

"What do you mean by that?" The judge was not happy.

"Because today's problem is a result of past exclusionary acts against the Chinese by the U.S.," said Nianzu indignantly.

"Well, you do have the right to express yourself," said the judge. "America is a free and democratic country."

"Let me remind you, Your Honor," Nianzu continued. "The minute my grandfather and father entered as legal immigrants into this so-called democratic and free country, they immediately lost their freedom. Like the tens of thousands of Chinese in those days, they were confined to the detention center on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. Similarly I also lost my freedom the moment I entered this country when I was locked up by the INS."

Nianzu was found guilty and sentenced to three months in jail, and five years of probation after release. As he was being led away by a prison guard, Rongzu rushed up to him and, grasping his hands, cried out in anguish, "I am so sorry. It's I who have done this to you." And watching his son being taken away, Rongzu wept.

SOURCE: *The Literati*, October 1, 1995. Translator: Ellen Yeung

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"We gave workers a sense of dignity"

The Story of a Union Social Worker (1982)

Ah Quon McElrath

While conducting research on Chinese women in Hawaii in 1982, Judy Yung was told by a number of people to be sure to interview Ah Quon McElrath, a retired labor organizer who still maintained a passionate interest in the plight of the working class and the poor. During their ninety-minute interview, Yung could hear that passion in her voice, in her choice of words, and in the stories McElrath told nonstop, with an occasional outbreak of laughter as she reflected on her past.

Compared to other Chinese women in Hawaii, McElrath struck Yung as unusual, from her given name to her choice of profession and her radical politics. Born in Honolulu in 1915 of immigrant parents from Zhongshan District in Guangdong Province, McElrath explained that her given name was a diminutive of her Chinese name, Leong Yuk Quon, and that she was too embarrassed to tell anyone what Christian name actually appears on her birth certificate. (She took the surname McElrath after her marriage to union official Bob McElrath in 1941.) The sixth child in a family of seven children, McElrath grew up in poverty and had to work multiple jobs to support herself through college. She graduated from the University of Hawaii with a B.A. in anthropology and sociology in 1938. While her peers chose respectable professions such as teaching, law, and medicine, she chose to go into labor organizing, becoming the first social worker and the only woman on the staff of Local 142 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU).

Much of her interview with Yung delved into her childhood growing up in Hawaii, her political views on race, class, and gender discrimination, and how she became involved in labor organizing and the civil rights movement in the South. Yung found her to be straightforward and highly analytical in her responses. A born storyteller and a woman of strong political convictions, McElrath apparently enjoyed reminiscing about the past and providing anecdotes to make her points. Parts of her interview have been rearranged for a smoother read, but the words, manner of speech, and ideas remain very much hers.



Ah Quon McElrath teaching a class on union benefits and services to members of Local 142. (Courtesy of Ah Quon McElrath)

"WE ALL WORKED AT A VERY TENDER AGE"

I was born in 1915, in Honolulu, in a little spot called Iwilei, which was the official red-light district. And we had a house in an area that was very near the beach, filled with *kiaue* trees, and it was very convenient. My father was a part-time carpenter, hack driver, egg producer, gambler, alcohol maker—call it what you will, he was all those things. And, I suspect because it was cheap, we lived there for quite a number of years. See, my father died when I was about five, and so we had to make it on our own after he died.¹ My mother never really worked at any job at all. She had bound feet and barely spoke English. So we were a truly bilingual family as we were growing up.

Typical of all the immigrant women, she cooked, washed clothes, tended the chickens, did a bit of sewing for us. She'd make Chinese clothes for the girls. I remember going to school in pantaloons and the jackets that had the frog [buttons] on the sides. And one of the really charming stories I remember

1. In another interview that was published in Brigid O'Farrell and Joyce Kornbluh's *Rocking the Boat*, Ah Quon McElrath said her father was put in jail for smoking opium and later died of a ruptured appendix because the family was too poor to afford a doctor. After he died, the children were scattered among relatives and friends until the family moved into a company camp, where they lived among many other ethnic and poor families.

is that she used to make underclothes of sugar and rice bags, so that one side of your buttock would read "Honolulu," and the other one would read "Plantation." (laughter) You could never wash off that ink. (laughter)

There were seven [children]. I think two died at birth. And the story I like to tell about the place in the family as concerned my brother and me is that we were the sixth and the seventh child. Mother had me when she was forty-two and forty-four when she had my brother. So we said that, for all intents and purposes, we should have been idiots. (laughter) Well, it's interesting that we, who should have been idiots, were the only two in the family who went on to higher education—finished university. My brother got his master's in social work, and I did some graduate work at the School of Social Work at Michigan.

We all started working when we were quite young. We went out and picked *kiaue* beans and dried bones and sold them to the fertilizer company, because we lived very near the fertilizer company. At that time they used dray horses and they used the *kiaue* beans to feed the horses. And we'd also go out and pick brass that was discarded—that was on the beach or wherever we could find it and sell it. And then, of course, my older brother left school when he was sixteen so that he could go to work and support us. But we all worked at a very tender age. We worked in the pineapple canneries when we were twelve, thirteen. You know, there was no child labor law then. So what we would do was to rouge our faces, wear high heels, and stand outside the gate of a pineapple cannery and try to make ourselves tall so that the superintendent who was picking workers could see us. We could go five, six days at a time and never get picked. But then, the fruit kept coming in, and they needed more workers, so we had the opportunity to be picked. You know, my sister worked for five cents an hour. When I started, I was lucky: I think I made thirteen and a half cents an hour in the pineapple cannery. (laughter) And she [the oldest sister] went to Normal School, which was a teacher's training school, and at the age of eighteen, I believe, she got a teaching position. And that was how we were supported.

When I finished college in 1938, I really wanted to go on to graduate school, except that when I talked to my sociology professor about it, he said, "Well, Ah Quon, you've got two things which make it difficult. One, you're a woman. Two, you're Oriental." And I suppose I probably would have spat in his face maybe (laughter), if, one, I had more gumption, or two, if I didn't feel such a strong obligation to contribute to family support. See, at that time, the family had bought a piece of property near the university and then built a house. And everything that I earned, all the savings that I had from working in the cannery and doing five jobs when I was a senior in college, was taken out to pay for the house. So I didn't strike out and go on for graduate work, although I was very interested in further research and I felt that I wanted to go into the academic area. But it never happened.

"WE GAVE WORKERS A SENSE OF DIGNITY"

At the time, the legislature had established the Board of Public Welfare following the enactment of various titles of the Social Security Act. So I figured, gee, I'd move in there. When I went to work for the department, I helped to organize a union [for social workers and clerical staff], and it was on an industrial basis. We did a lot of things. We raised questions about housing, adequacy of welfare payment, adequacy of wages paid to social workers. Then I got married.² World War II came on, I worked for a couple of years. But all during this time I was still volunteering for the union, the ILWU, and I'd make speeches to longshoremen and tell them why I felt they should join the union, and worked with the wives of longshoremen to get them to get their husbands to join the union. Won a couple of elections, but didn't do very much good because it was just during the war and everything kind of stagnated. You know, there was that "no strike" pledge on the part of the AFL and CIO, and so we didn't get very far in longshore organizing. And I had a couple of children³ in the interim and I resigned from the department. And in 1946, when I was on leave, there was this big sugar strike. What I did was organize all of the welfare activities—trained people how to fill out applications, told them what they were entitled to, told them what the requirements were for sanitation, informed the people what they had to do—because we had units on four islands. There were 28,000 workers who went out on strike on twenty-six plantations. And that's a huge group to take care of.

Other than improving their working conditions through better wages, better fringe benefits, I think I am most proud of the fact that for the first time we gave a sense of dignity to immigrant workers who had been so put down by their bosses all of these years. We gave them a sense that they were worthwhile human beings. Let me tell you one anecdote that really highlights this kind of newfound feeling about themselves. In 1946, just before the sugar strike, I had gone out to volunteer my services as a social worker because of the tidal wave that had occurred on April First in the town of Hilo, on that island which had suffered the most damage from the tidal wave. We were sitting in the union hall waiting for me to get a ride to go out and do the investigations. A telephone call comes through, and someone answers the phone and he says, "No, I don't know what you got to do, but did you do this? Well, look, I tell you what, I'm going to put Frank Thompson on the phone."

2. In another interview, Ah Quon McElrath described her family's reaction to her marriage to Bob McElrath: "When I told my family I was going to get married to this 'haole,' a white, and a seaman to boot, 'My God! Don't you ever come home. You are not welcome.' I mean, here was a Chinese woman marrying a white man and a white who at the time had no job. This was unheard of. Shame on the family" (O'Farrell and Kornbluh, *Rocking the Boat*, p. 143).

3. Their daughter, Gail, was born in 1943, and their son, Brett, in 1945.

Frank Thompson was a man who came over here from Sacramento, an old IWW—you know, a Wobbly,⁴ a person who really sparked up the organizing of sugar workers on all of the islands. And seated in the room were Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Hawaiians, Portuguese, Spanish, all officers of the various units at that time of the ILWU. So Frank Thompson picks up the phone and he says, "Yeah, you tell that son-of-a-bitch to call me up and I'll be waiting right here." And the "son-of-a-bitch" was the manager, who had apparently forbade the workers to do a certain kind of thing. And so he hung up the phone. Few minutes later he gets a telephone call. Frank says, "This is Frank Thompson, ILWU organizer." And apparently the manager said, "Well, this is Joe Doe, the manager of so-and-so company." So Frank says, "Look, you no good son-of-a-bitch, you better just let those workers go to a meeting or we'll shut down your goddamn place."

And as he was talking this way, everybody's mouth dropped [open]. They just could not understand how anyone could talk that way to a plantation manager, who was a literal king of everything he surveyed. And in a way, this summarizes the kind of dignity that rank-and-file workers of all ethnic groups got. It had never happened before. That story, you see, has never been written. How do you write a story of how people gained a feeling of themselves as human beings with some degree of control over their jobs? And this is what the union gave them.

I am most proud of the fact that I helped to extend the level of understanding of people so that they could understand medical plans, they could understand pension plans, they could understand why these things are so important and feel that, by golly, they have a contribution to make, that they are the backbone of the union and that, in fact, it's only in building a sense of community through the union, helping one another, that we can really get ahead. It's an extremely fascinating thing when you have cane hauler operators, irrigators, rat catchers, packers, trimmers, or whatever it is, being officers of the particular union, running for business agents. Because all of our officers are elected officers; nobody is appointed to the job except the international office representatives here who are appointed by the international office in San Francisco. They're able to sit down with their bosses on an equal basis and say, "Look, we think that the houses are in a bad state of repair. Why don't you do this?" The whole provision for grievance procedure is extremely important in terms of investing in rank-and-file members the ability to sit down with a boss and say, "We think you are doing a wrong thing in not paying this man ten cents an hour on a temporary transfer," or, "We think you discriminated against him." That kind of thing.

4. Founded in 1905 in Chicago, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was established in opposition to the craft unionism of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and had as its objective the overthrow of capitalism by socialism.

I think one of the other kinds of things is that in our agreements, although it did take some time, we have eliminated the sex bias on wages. And while the ILWU may not be entirely responsible for it, at least we were the catalyst. Because we came at a time, right after World War II, when the returning AJAs [Americans of Japanese Ancestry], through the G.I. Bill of Rights and because of their experience overseas, had a new sense of themselves, even though 110,000 of them had been put into concentration camps. Through the G.I. Bill of Rights, they were able to go to school, become lawyers, become doctors—not that they hadn't become such before, but this was at least the impetus for them to move forward in the professions. And a number of things have been said about the ILWU. For example, Andrew Lind, who was for many years professor of sociology at the university, has said that more than any other organization in Hawaii, the ILWU was responsible for racial equality. John A. Burns, the late governor of this state, has said that it was the ILWU which brought true economic, political, and social democracy to the islands. He was pilloried for making that statement. But it is true. All these things might have come, but we brought them to the islands sooner. And that's why one has to feel a great deal of pride, joy, and happiness that one was in that particular fight and struggle, even though many of us personally suffered because of our identity with the labor movement.

During the Smith Act trial,⁵ I lost almost all of my friends. I used to walk down the street and when they'd see me, they'd cross the street. They wouldn't say hello to me. You know, the Cold War and all the anti-Communist feelings came to the front. I remember my kids suffering a great deal of disapprobation in school. And they'd come home and ask us why we worked for the union and why they were called "Communist." And it was tough on them and tough on us, because how do you tell your children, look, you believe sincerely in working people and their right to join unions of their own choosing and to feel, politically, however they wanted to feel? You know, we're supposed to be a democracy, capable, presumably, of embracing any kind of dissidence. And this wasn't true. It wasn't happening. So that made it difficult. And everybody seemed to think, "Well, my God, we fed on steaks every day of the week." That isn't true. You know, my husband who was an international representative,⁶ he was making \$75 a week. That ain't a hell of a lot of money. Kids had to go to school, you had to clothe them. I sewed all of the kids'

5. The Cold War period unleashed a vicious attack against militant unions like the ILWU, and union leaders in Hawaii who were accused of being Communist conspirators were put on trial for violating the provisions of the Smith Act. Ah Quon McElrath worked as a legal secretary for the law firm that was retained by the ILWU and helped to research the background of all potential witnesses in the trial.

6. Her husband, Bob McElrath, worked for the ILWU for over thirty years as a publicist and representative, and became the regional director in 1969.

clothes. I never bought anything. You know, I learned the lessons well from my mother. (*laughter*) God, I can remember the days when we were kids, eating lard and rice and *siyau* [soy sauce] because we were so poor.

"OURS IS A HIGHLY RACIST SOCIETY"

[During the civil rights days] I worked in an OEO program out of Tuskegee Institute.⁷ It merely solidified my feelings, which I had formed very early in the game, that ours is a highly racist society. Of course, it's highly sexist as well. But I got to know a lot of people, and I think I gave them some feeling [about] how important it was to join a union. I remember one of the early things that happened with the janitors at Auburn University. They were trying to form a union, and apparently the dean of students had heard about the organizing attempts. So he called all of the janitors and janitresses into the room, took his key, locked the door, threw the keys on the table in a very contemptuous fashion, and said, "Any one of you with guts enough, you'll pick up that key and open the door and you can walk out." That was literally threatening them. Of course, they caved in. They were making 50 cents an hour then, and I think they wanted to get 75 cents an hour. And so none of them continued in their attempts to form the union because it was so hard for them to get jobs. And that's understandable.

Although the AFL-CIO at the time supported the organizing efforts down south, there wasn't a lot of money put into the organizing of workers. They just didn't have it. They concentrated on basic industries. The South was always a very conservative bastion—always turned aside organizing. And I remember going to a Dan River textile factory to talk with one of the indigenous leaders in that particular county of Alabama, and asking him whether he felt there was a need for a tutorial center there to beef up the language skills of the black children. And he didn't know whether or not he could devote very much time because he was working as a mechanic there in the Dan River plant. And I said, "Gee, how much are you making?" He says, "\$2.50 an hour." I said, "My God, mechanics make a hell of a lot more than that in even unorganized plants up north." And he says, "Well, it sure beats chopping cotton for a dollar a day." (This was in 1966.)

I lived with a black family there in Lowndes County, where Viola Liuzzo and the two priests were shot.⁸ I lived a half a mile away from the jail where

7. In 1965 Ah Quon McElrath took a leave of absence from her ILWU job to do advanced study at the University of Michigan. She was assigned to work in the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) program of Tuskegee Institute, an accredited coeducational institution for African Americans in Alabama that emphasized industrial and vocational training.

8. Viola Liuzzo was a medical laboratory assistant who was married to Teamster Anthony Liuzzo. She was in Alabama to participate in the civil rights march to Selma when she was killed.

the priests were shot and killed. And it was so obvious that there was discrimination—just rank discrimination. For example, I remember going to an outside toilet in a black high school, and the seat was made of steel. And I sat on it. Oh my God, I jumped to the ceiling. It was so hot because this was in the summer, when it was 110 in the shade. Then you'd go to a white school, and there would be flush toilets and all that kind of stuff. And no paper in the black outhouses.

I remember living with Mrs. McCall for over a month, and I'd have to carry the water in from the well, pour it in a number three tub, and take a bath in the number three tub; then take out the water and throw it on the plants because there was really no water around. You couldn't just use it flagrantly. And in the morning when I brushed my teeth, fill up a glass about that high with water, brush your teeth, spit the water on the plants—that kind of thing. And then go out to the outhouse. So I made it a point never to drink anything that was diuretic in nature because it would mean that I'd have to get out at night, get the flashlight or light the lantern. And there was no running water in the house, so we did our dishwashing and everything by carrying water in from the well. And then, of course, what Mrs. McCall did was to buy a truckload of coal, and it was dumped right on the side of her house, and she used that for fuel, and we cooked on a pot-bellied stove sitting right in the middle of her kitchen.

I remember walking in to a garage in Fort Deposit and being just absolutely flabbergasted because I was very thirsty and I went to the water fountain—[one marked] "For Colored Only," and then the other, "For Whites." And I asked the shop foreman, "Oh, I thought you didn't do this kind of thing anymore, that the law eliminated that kind of stuff." And he says, "Well, these here people, they don't all mind doing this." And talking with patients who went to the doctors, for example, who still maintained the For Whites and For Coloreds separate entrances. And it was a fascinating eye-opener, simply because you got, at first hand, what race relations were down south. And because I was working on a health project, I could get a really good idea of what the power politics were—getting licenses for the doctors, trying to get the health department to give us chlorine tablets to put in the wells, and going through some of the very gross findings of the health examinations that we did.

We did over two thousand of them—men, women, and children. Some of these people had never had a physical examination before. So I had trained a lot of so-called paraprofessionals so that each one of us did this or that—the hemoglobin, the urine analysis, the vaginals, the pelvic examinations,

by three Ku Klux Klansmen on Highway 80 while transporting marchers between Montgomery and Selma.

and the family planning questionnaire. The gross findings showed that 90 percent of the people whom we examined had anemia of one degree or another, and we knew that a heck of a lot of it was because of tapeworms, which the people got because they couldn't afford buying shoes, and the lack of sanitation. You also got the very obese black women, simply because they ate a lot of starches. It was the cheapest thing.

My experience down south merely reinforced what I had known intellectually and what I had learned during World War II in some of my contacts with black servicemen. They'd come to the house and they would tell us these awful stories. And you get some feeling of how the whites treated the blacks. There was nothing benign about it, despite some of the histories on slavery and the "We treated our people very well" kind of business. I remember walking across the street to go to a Piggly-Wiggly store in this town, Fort Deposit, to get some food for lunch. I was with one black woman and two black men, and everybody stopped smack in the middle of the street and turned around and looked at us. And the reason for it is that they just didn't know what I was. See, one of the tactics we used was whenever you go to a new county, you go see the sheriff, the newspaper editor, and the mayor. Just let them know that you are in town and what you are doing. This was one way of ingratiating yourself into the power structure, the white power structure. And I remember going to see the sheriff in Green County, and there are two black women, three black men with me, and we told them what we were about. He just couldn't make out what I was. He looked at me. I'm not white, I'm not black, so what the hell am I? (*laughter*) And so when I said I was from Hawaii, oh, that broke the ice. "You're a hula-hula girl," he said. He was so gracious. "Yes, we all are here to help you in whatever way we can."

But we had some fairly harrowing experiences, too. I remember driving from Tuskegee, and we went through Alabama, on our way to Lowndes County, and there was this pimply young man who followed us in his car [and then passed us]. Well, on the divided highway there was just enough room for two cars, and he would never let us pass. He would look out of the car, and we knew something was amiss. And so when we had a chance, we very quickly moved out past him and we stopped at a place and called the chief of police and said that there seemed to be a car following us. And you see, at that time there were two white students and a black woman and myself. And we never made a white sit in the front with a black driver. So I would always ride in the front with a black driver and put the two white students [in the back]. We called the chief of police and told him that we thought we were being followed. We gave our car number, the description of the other car, the person in the other car, and as we were driving out we saw this young man turn right into a service station. And we were on our way. But it was a pretty harrowing ten minutes. Those kinds of things—I can just imagine how

they would have shot a person like Viola Liuzzo and killed those three civil rights workers.⁹

"A GOOD DEAL OF IT IS TIED UP WITH ECONOMICS"

As a member of a minority group, certainly my family and my friends and I suffered discrimination. Certainly [I was familiar with] the plantation system [in Hawaii], where representatives of all ethnic and cultural groups were imported as plantation laborers and were subject to racism. And while it may not seem to have been as oppressive as that in the South, you know, it was bad enough. For example, the official view of immigrant laborers can be found in the statement that Richard A. Cooke, who was president of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, once made, which was, "I view the importation of laborers no different from the importation of jute bags from India."

And then, of course, there was the segregation of ethnic groups into various segregated plantation camps: there's Codfish Camp, Pake Camp, Korean Camp, Japanese Camp, Spanish Camp, all of those kinds of names. And while it may have been done not for the overt purpose of segregating people but supposedly for the purpose of keeping each ethnic group within a homogeneous situation, nonetheless, a lot of the writings of sugar planters, especially following labor disputes, [showed] that they didn't want workers fraternizing with each other and talking with each other. The success of this kind of thing, in terms of Hawaiian labor history, is the fact that the Chinese, the Hawaiians, the Portuguese, the Filipinos, and the Japanese were able to break each other's strikes and not present a united front in their demands.

A good deal of it, you see, is tied up with economics, the burgeoning capitalist system, which was started here as a result of the Great Mahele, when the merchants and the representatives of missionary families could buy land, which was extremely important to the growth of the sugar industry.¹⁰ So that started the capitalist development here, and the accumulation of capital and all of these kinds of things that made it possible for them for over a century to wield economic, political, and social hegemony over the rest of the people. The Republican Party became the political arm of the rising industrialists in Hawaii, and for many, many years, for example, there was hardly a Democratic Party here, for the simple reason that people were afraid to join the Democratic Party. There's no doubt there was a financial oligarchy here, which completely controlled the lives of the people. It's a fascinating kind

9. In 1964, during the Freedom Summer campaign to register black voters in Mississippi, James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman were kidnapped, beaten, and shot to death by Klansmen.

10. The Great Mahele (division) of 1848 was a new land ownership system that divided the lands into three parts—for the king, chiefs, and tenants. It paved the way for foreigners to own land in Hawaii by purchasing it from chiefs who were eager to get rich quickly.

of even brush-over economic analysis of the islands when you look at the interlocking directorates. I remember our union did a chart once that showed they controlled all of the auxiliary industries and the banks. One thing about education is that it can be, if used correctly, corrosive of the kinds of things that a dominant society wants to hang on to. Because the more you read, the more you find out what's going on elsewhere. And that's the way I found out a lot of things, not just in Hawaii, but in the United States and in the rest of the world as well.

[How I came to this analysis of the situation], it's a combination of things. I remember, when I was in intermediate school, reading at that stage about what was happening in the Soviet Union. I think the second five-year plan or ten-year plan was being promulgated, and I was fascinated that here was this society that was organized in a completely different way, that apparently they were putting people to work, that there was a respect for all of the people, and that it was not based on making profit. The difference between a socialist and a capitalist economy—I was fascinated by that kind of thing. It was [also] a time that was very vibrant, you know, with the Spanish Civil War, the heavy organizing of the CIO, and the name of John L. Lewis right up there in front.¹¹ And the longshoremen here had already been organized in the ILA [International Longshoremen's Association], and then, after the General Strike in San Francisco, they became the ILWU. And they became involved in the Inland Boatmen's Union strike in 1938.¹²

I remember they used to have huge rallies in Aala Park. I used to go to those rallies and listen because the professors in economics who were Marxists talked about these things and I wanted to know what it was all about. And interestingly enough, there was a kind of sundry store there called the Dew Drop Inn [that] sold a left-wing periodical called *The New Masses*. And I used to buy that every week and read it. It was strictly a Marxist magazine. And it put a completely different complexion on events that up to then were interpreted in the strict, traditional way. Here was a kind of theory that seemed to make so much sense. That—plus the professors, plus going to those rallies—really interested me in the strike and what was going on. And so I read everything that there was to read. I made the acquaintance of Jack Hall, one of the early leaders of the strike, who subsequently was instrumental in the organizing of workers into the ILWU. I got to know him, and pretty soon I found myself helping them with the mailing of *The Voice of Labor*, which was a labor

11. John L. Lewis was president of the United Mine Workers of America and in 1935 helped establish the Committee for Industrial Organization, later called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which advocated organizing the labor movement by industry rather than by craft.

12. In 1938 longshoremen in Hawaii went on strike for 171 days for wage parity comparable to their West Coast counterparts, and won.

newspaper. And I remember going to the office and mixing flour and water. You know, that was the cheapest way of getting paste for your labels. And that was how it all started.

Then, of course, these professors and I used to go to forums. And then I remember I invited some person from the International Typographical Union to speak to a women's campus organization, and the administration put the kibosh on it and said he couldn't speak on campus. "This was too radical." But we managed to hold a lot of those meetings, and what we did in this particular case was to move him off campus. And I went to a number of benefits to raise money for Spain. Those kinds of things occurred during that period.

"IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE TOTAL EQUALITY"

I think that it's not possible to achieve complete racial, social equality for a number of reasons. One, the capitalist economy doesn't encompass that kind of philosophy. Two, I think that human behavior is such that one never really achieves full understanding of human beings, because of the uneven quality of education. And there will always be some people who will need, for either group or individual reasons, to scapegoat another group that appears different. In a dominant culture, such as the one we live in, which is white Western, any dissidence from that kind of culture will make it extremely difficult to achieve total equality.

I also think that, until we evolve or until there is a revolutionary change in the way men and women are put together, there will be inherent differences between men and women. I think you can erase a heck of a lot of the differences in terms of attitudes, in terms of education, but there are some basic anatomical and physiological differences. Short of a revolutionary change in the way we're put together, that will never make it possible for us to achieve total equality.

And equality can mean many different things. Some people argue equality in terms of becoming a combat soldier, that kind of stuff. Like the fight over whether the draft should have included women. Well, to me, that kind of argument is useless. I think we should spend our energy on finding alternative ways of settling our disputes instead of having war—although obviously, from a Marxian point of view, as long as you have a capitalist system competing against a socialist system, and the earth getting smaller and smaller in terms of access to raw materials, you ain't going to be able to, you see. But I feel that our energy should be spent on those kinds of things, rather than on whether or not women should be combat soldiers. That's like working for the nuclear freeze, or working for détente. It's like working for a reduction of our arms budget, rather than saying, "We need security." Security against what, when you're going to be pulverized anyway?

And I think that more women need to have that kind of understanding,

although apparently, instinctively, they understand this about [U.S. president Ronald] Reagan. Because there is less approval of Reagan's policies among women than there is among men, you see? And I think that [we need to concentrate on] affording women the opportunity for all kinds of ways in which to learn about themselves and others—through education, through forums, or whatever it might be—so that they will begin to see that some of the kinds of things that television and radio and magazines tell us are important are really unimportant. And that we spend our energies on things that make us truly human, truly compassionate, honest, caring human beings. That's the important thing about what we can do. And maybe out of that can arise the true equality that we're thinking about.

Following her retirement from the ILWU, Ah Quon McElrath worked for two years with the Villers Foundation (which became the well-known Families USA, Inc.) in Washington, D.C., making substantive changes in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. She also cofounded Hawaii's Committee on Welfare Concerns, a coalition of organizations in Hawaii responsible for legislative changes in public assistance payments, death with dignity, and universal health coverage. In 1988 McElrath was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Hawaii, where she presently serves as a member of the Board of Regents.

SOURCE: Ah Quon McElrath, interview with Judy Yung, Chinese Women of America Research Project, January 18, 1983, Honolulu, Hawaii. A version of this interview was published in *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 2003, pp. 15–22.

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“All the daddies were Chinese and all the mommies were white”

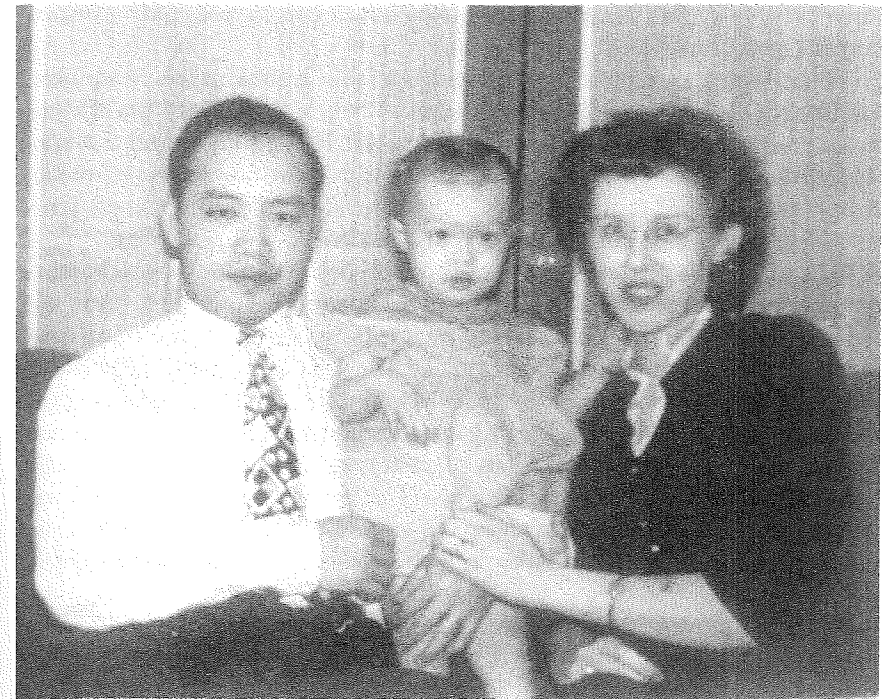
Growing Up Biracial in Minnesota (2002)

Sheila Chin Morris

Sheila Chin Morris was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1946. Her father, Harry Chin, was an immigrant from Guangdong Province; her mother was raised in Winnebago, Minnesota, and of German descent. Their second child, Roger, was born in 1948. The Chinese population in Minnesota at the time totaled 720, and the Chins were one of approximately one hundred Chinese American families residing in the Twin Cities area. As Morris recalls, there were many other interracial families in their social group. Many of the Chinese men had moved to the Midwest to escape Chinese persecution on the West Coast and to look for business and job opportunities. Most ended up doing laundry and restaurant work. And unlike many other states, there was no law against interracial marriage in Minnesota.

In the following interview conducted by Sherri Gebert-Fuller for the Minnesota Historical Society in 2002, Morris provides a personal account of her childhood while paying tribute to her father's courage as an immigrant and hardworking life as a cook. She painfully recalls the times that she was called names and made to feel ashamed of her racial background. Compounding matters were the many skeletons in her father's closet—that he had entered the country fraudulently as a “paper son” and that he had left behind in China a wife and daughter. Given the historical context of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Confession Program instigated by the American government during the Cold War period, and the break in diplomatic relations between China and the United States after 1949, it should come as no surprise that these same issues existed for other Chinese American families as well. But as Morris reveals in her interview, these secrets would have damaging consequences on every member of her family. Part of the healing process for her has been to share the story with others.

A graphic designer for over thirty years, Sheila Chin Morris resides in Waseca, Minnesota, with her husband, Rick, a florist and county commissioner. They have three grown children. She currently works as a photo archivist for the Waseca County Historical Society, and continues to freelance in graphic design.



Sheila Chin Morris with her parents, Harry and Laura Chin, in 1947. (Courtesy of Sheila Chin Morris)

“WAS THERE SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME?”

I remember when I was little, all of our good friends got together for dinners on Sunday afternoons and some holidays. All the daddies were Chinese and all the mommies were white. My mom was of German descent. She was from a small town in Minnesota—Winnebago, Minnesota—and my father left China when he was seventeen. They met in a Chinese restaurant in downtown St. Paul, where she was working as a waitress [and he, a cook]. I remember on Christmas Eve, my dad would always make beef, green pepper, and tomato chop suey because it was red and green and it looked Christmas-y.

I didn't think that we were very different than anybody else. But I remember—maybe I was six or seven—going over to my friend Sharon's house for supper and other people's cooking was very different. (chuckles) I had my first cauliflower with only butter on it and thought, “Gee, what the heck is this? Where's the gravy?” I thought everybody cooked their broccoli, cauliflower, and vegetables stir fry and had a little gravy and rice with it. And, I thought it was normal that my dad cooked when he was home for the evening,

and certainly on Sunday, he always cooked, even the pot roast. My mom was sort of the second fiddle.

When I was about ten years old, my dad tried running his own restaurant. He bought Twin Towns Take-Out on Lake Street. We moved from the east side of St. Paul, where I was very comfortable, where I knew everybody on the block, to South Minneapolis, in Richfield. My mother [said we] moved from a place where you had coffee in your housedress over the back fence to a place where you put on nylons and a hat just to go have coffee.

We went to the Sister Kenny School, where we made a few friends. I had a very good teacher, but I did have one or two negative experiences that year. Nobody had ever called me names or put me down for any reason. But, there was a little boy named Lyle in that class and when I think back, it was only ten years after World War II but people were still sensitive about the Japanese. I remember him really hurting me one day when I was in line with him. He moved so that he didn't have to be right next to me. Then, when he did, he quietly said to the other boy, "Oh, you have to stand next to *her*." You know, it made me feel very hurt and I started to think that there was something wrong with me. I started to look at myself in the mirror and wonder why he didn't like me.

Then, we moved from South Minneapolis to Roseville and I had just the opposite experience. Nobody ever treated me like that little Lyle did. I went to Fairview Junior High School. The first day of school, I remember two little boys getting up and letting me have their seat, so I was really confused at that point. (*laughter*) But then I also remember when I was in high school, I had a girlfriend who invited me to her house. When I met her mother for the first time, she looked at me and her first reaction was, "Oh, you're a pretty one," as if to say that intermarriage was okay if the kids came out like me.

MY CHINESE SIDE OF THE FAMILY

My father spoke Cantonese, but I never tried to learn Chinese formally until I was an adult. I found out later that my mother didn't want my dad to teach us Chinese. She loved Chinese art and the Chinese things that my dad gave her. She had a Kuan Yin statue, the Goddess of Mercy that held significance for her. In every other way, she embraced Chinese culture, but she didn't want to be left out of the conversation between my dad and us kids. She felt left out enough when his friends would come over and they would speak Chinese.

Chinese New Year was my immersion in the Chinese side of the family. When we were at home, we would have pot roast on Sundays or roast chicken or something Chinese, barbeque ribs. But, when we went to the On Leong¹

1. The On Leong Merchant's Association, counterpart to the Chinese Six Companies in

Chinese New Year's dinner, it was a lot of Chinese talking, a lot of, "What did he say, Dad?" There were huge round tables, banquet tables with ten people each. My dad was always so happy when he'd go there because he would see old friends and he could talk Chinese, and they would catch up on news. I'm sure there was some exchange about what was happening in China and if everybody's relatives were okay, and if there were new ways of helping each other out because it was kind of a support group for them.

The On Leong Association club was rented and upstairs over a Chinese restaurant. You'd go up the steps and you'd come into the main room, which had a lot of Chinese teakwood furniture and an altar with a Buddha. On New Year's, there would be incense burning and oranges and the boiled chicken before the statue of Buddha. You'd go down a hallway and one side was a big kitchen and there were always several members who would volunteer to cook. Then, on the other side, there were various rooms that you could go into. I think there was some gambling afterward in one of these rooms. From what I understand, this was also a place for new immigrant Chinese men. If they had absolutely no place to go on their first night, they could always get a bed there before they would find another place for them to stay.

MY FATHER, THE COOK

My first memory of visiting my dad at work was when he worked at the Snelling Cafe on Snelling [Avenue] and Selby [Avenue in St. Paul]. We'd always go to the backdoor of the restaurant, which was a screen door. And my dad was always dressed in white and he had his long apron on and his cook's hat, which I just loved, the puffy chef's hat. He'd be glad to see us and he'd say, "Well, what's going on, here? Who are these little kids?" We'd come in the kitchen and it was so hot and greasy! He'd show us how to get through the kitchen to the dining room, and then he'd have us on the stools at the counter and ask us what we wanted. He'd generally get us a dish of ice cream or maybe a Coke or something. He and my mom would talk, and then we'd be on our way. It was always a big deal. I always loved it, because the other cooks were always glad to see Harry's kids. So, they would maybe slip us a quarter or tell me how pretty I looked. (*laughter*)

I was always curious about what they were doing. When my dad was cooking chow mein—the wok was about thirty inches in diameter, it was huge. So, he'd bring out a big bin-full of ground pork and put that in with the oil and he'd stir fry that, and then he'd add a big bin-full of celery, and to stir it, you've got to use both arms going one clockwise, the other one counter

San Francisco, was established to serve the social, economic, and legal needs of Chinese immigrants in the Midwest.

clockwise at the same time, stirring all of this stuff. Then, you'd have to get it up to a boil and you'd add all the soy sauce, salt, sugar, and in those days MSG [monosodium glutamate]. Then, you have to make a big bowl full of cornstarch, and when it [the wok] was bubbling, you'd put in the cornstarch. You'd have to stir it really fast so it didn't get clumpy. So, my dad had very strong shoulders. He'd come home from work and, for years, I would, at the age of ten, eleven, or twelve, rub his feet with alcohol because his feet would be burning when he got home.

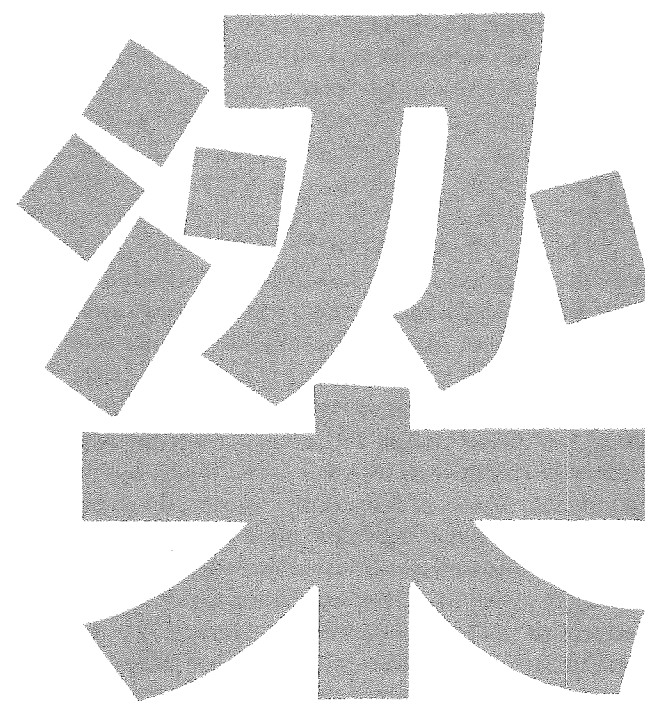
When he worked at the Snelling, he'd go to work at five-thirty or six in the morning to get all the American food, the roasts and chicken, whatever, going early in the morning. Then he'd come home at three. He would nap for an hour, go to Kee's Chow Mein at four and work till eight. He did that six days a week, and every other Sunday he worked an afternoon at Kee's. Occasionally, he'd ask me to rub his back and he'd stretch out on the floor in front of the TV and I'd sit up on top of him and just give him a really good backrub with some alcohol. He appreciated that.

Then, he got this job at the Nankin. I thought that was pretty cool because I knew about the reputation of the Nankin. By then I was all grown up and I had my own business in the IDS Center (Investors Diversified Services was the tallest building in Minneapolis then)—Sheila Chin Design, graphic design. I was designing cookbooks for Pillsbury and corporate logos for new businesses, posters. During those years, I loved to go see my dad at the Nankin. If I were working late, I'd go over for dinner, and if I could get in there and let him know I was there, then he'd treat me. (*laughter*)

My father was very proud of me. That's actually a great Chinese characteristic, I think: pride in your children and then, racking up your grandchildren and showing them off. Their children's success meant that they were successful, no matter what they were doing at the time. It goes back further, too. Getting to this country meant that they seized that opportunity, and the family is successively successful, so that is a point of real pride. When I went to college, it was hard and I had to decide whether I was really going to finish or not. Getting the degree meant, for me, being the first one on both sides of the family to get a college degree. So, I wanted to do that for both my parents, because neither one of them went past the eighth grade. I especially wanted to do it for my dad.

MY REAL CHINESE NAME

I was about thirteen or fourteen when my mother told me that Daddy might get deported. It was just frightening. We learned that President [John F.] Kennedy or Congress had said that if you just go through naturalization again, you'll be automatically forgiven [for being a paper son] and allowed to stay. I know that was because they found out how many families, American fam-



Business logo with the Chinese character "Liang" designed by Sheila Chin Morris in honor of her father's true surname. (Courtesy of Sheila Chin Morris)

ilies, were going to be absolutely uprooted and destroyed if they actually tried to deport all these fathers. I'm sure most of the Chinese men were in business, so that would have made a large dent in many local businesses.

Then I find out that his name is really Liang Cheung You, so that was a real bolt from left field. Then, my dad had the choice of going with his real name, Liang, or staying with Harry Chin. My dad doesn't like to make waves. I guess it was more important for him to just keep the order that we had had in our lives. The mortgage was in that name. Their marriage certificate was in that name. Our birth certificates were all in that name. Why go through all that change? And so he let our name be Chin.

That would be a second regret that I would have—first, he didn't teach me Chinese—second, that he didn't let me have my real Chinese name when he had the opportunity. I grew in reverence knowing that I have that name, but the only way I got to use it was when I was creating a new logo for myself. I always wanted a blind embossed letterhead. So, I took the Chi-

nese character for Liang and fit it into a nice little square box and blind embossed it on the letterhead that said, "Sheila Chin Design." Many people would ask me, "What does that character mean?" Then, I would say, "Well, it's our real Chinese family name." And I would quickly tell them about the "paper sons."

MY DAD'S OTHER FAMILY

I'm not sure which came first, the announcement about his name or the knowledge that my dad had another family. What happened was that one summer when I was fourteen, my mother said that a cousin was going to come to visit from China, that she had just gotten married, and that she was Uncle Johnny's daughter—Uncle Johnny was my "paper uncle," the pretend brother, from Milwaukee. Eventually, I was told that she was my sister and not my cousin. She had grown up in Hong Kong with her mother, who had been married to my dad before he left China. She was only two months old when my father left, and her mother had matched her with Ben, her husband, because he had American citizenship and a business in Philadelphia. He could bring her to the United States so she could see her father and live here.

I don't know what went on between my mom and dad over that issue. I never saw or heard fighting, and I don't remember actually seeing any tears either. I remember my mom trying to embrace the situation and make the best of it. I think it was very difficult for Susan [the Chinese sister] because her mother was still alive and living in Hong Kong at this time. I think my mother was assured that that wasn't going to be a problem. But of course, it did become a problem.

I was in college when Susan's mother came to the United States. Her name was Yuet, Yu-e-t (meaning "moon"). She came to Philadelphia and visited with Susan. When she came to Minneapolis, she wanted to see my dad. He saw her a few times and tried to send her away. "Go live with Susan or go back to Hong Kong or whatever, but I can't be with you." I don't know if he gave her money or what. But, I try to understand everybody's part in this and I have compassion for everybody, probably most of all for my dad, because I think he was really trying to take care of everybody. He tried to tell both my mother and Yuet what they wanted to hear, and I don't think he could follow through.

Our lives changed forever on September 19, 1970, when my mother took her own life. For whatever other reasons—poor health, depression, menopause, grown children—the situation between my parents had really worsened more than I realized. I was completely devastated with the death of my mother. I believe my brother still suffers from depression because of it. (I got counseling some years later and feel resolved now.)

When they finally did get together after my mom died, I was really curi-

ous about whether he was going to be happy, and that's part of how I came to accept her because she did make my dad happy. They only had six years together [she passed away in 1976 of lung cancer], but he was much more animated and sociable. They went out to dinner, and would go visit Chinese friends. I think he introduced her as his number one wife. She loved mahjongg, so they'd sometimes stay up late playing mahjongg with friends, or they would go to Las Vegas to gamble. She brought the old ways with her when she came. She brought stuff that he hadn't thought of making for years. There would be these funny little steamed cakes or dumplings and he would show it to me like it was a new artifact. He'd say, "Sheila, I haven't seen it since I was a boy in China. Look at this. This is called 'bun ga min' in Chinese."

I learned as I got to know her that she really did love Rog and me, and I knew she really loved my dad. It wasn't that she had to cultivate us as a second wife might have to do in other blended families. But she claimed us, that was that. She'd just revel in cooking for us. In fact, we became *extremely* close over the years, so all was forgiven, because she had her situation, too.

When I first heard about another family, I didn't think it had happened to anybody else, but of course, it's happened hundreds, maybe thousands of times to a lot of these Chinese men who were stranded in America, and they couldn't be reunited with their families during the whole Communist era. Many of them started new families. So I know I'm not the only one.

I feel that being the daughter of Harry Chin has given me an incredible depth that not everybody gets to experience. When I was a little girl, there were some times when I just hated being Chinese. I didn't want to be different. I just wanted to have blue eyes and light hair. I just wanted to blend in, to be one of the kids on the block. In some cases I was, but then in some cases, I definitely was not.

I grew up being afraid of people, not knowing whether they were going to love me or if they were going to, like when I was a little girl, call me a name. Even when I moved to this small town, Waseca, in 1980, I was thinking about the stereotypes. I'm a Chinese person, are they going to like me? None of that materialized. I've learned to celebrate my uniqueness, I've learned about communication, and I've learned about getting involved in communities. I think I've done a good job with my kids and I know I have a great marriage. I don't have a lot of money, but I *know* I feel like I'm a very successful person. If I die tomorrow, I'd die happy.

SOURCE: Sheila Chin Morris, interview with Sherri Gebert-Fuller, Minnesota Historical Society, October 2, 2002, Waseca, Minnesota. A version of this interview was published in Sherri Gebert-Fuller, *Chinese in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 83–87.

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"I always felt out of place there"

Growing Up Chinese in Mississippi (1982)

Bonnie C. Lew

By the time Bonnie Lew moved with her family from San Francisco Chinatown to the Mississippi Delta in 1954, Chinese had been settled in that area for over one hundred years. Recruited initially to replace freed African slaves after the Civil War, many Chinese found plantation work undesirable and moved on to running grocery stores that catered to black farmhands. Once established, they sent for family and helped other relatives to start grocery stores. The business required little English but long hours, the labor of all family members, and the ability of the Chinese to maintain good relations with both the black and white communities.

In this interview conducted by Judy Yung for the Chinese Women of America Research Project in 1982, Bonnie Lew candidly recalls what it was like growing up Chinese in Mississippi, "squished between the whites on top and the blacks on the bottom," and why she always felt so out of place there. She was eight years old when her family moved to Cleveland, Mississippi, to open a grocery store, and twenty-four years old when she finally moved back to California, where she founded the Chinese Folkdance Troupe in Stockton and today works as supervising librarian for the Stockton-San Joaquin Delta County Public Library.

MOVING FROM SAN FRANCISCO

My mom was born in San Francisco Chinatown and lived there all her life until she married my father. My father came over from China when he was ten or twelve. They met in a music club in Chinatown. I was the second born and middle child. I have an older brother who now lives in Concord [California] and a younger sister still in Mississippi. I guess I had a happy childhood in San Francisco, except that I remember staying with my grandmother a lot because both my parents worked. My mother worked during the day at Deb's Department Store and my father worked nights as a cook. Oftentimes