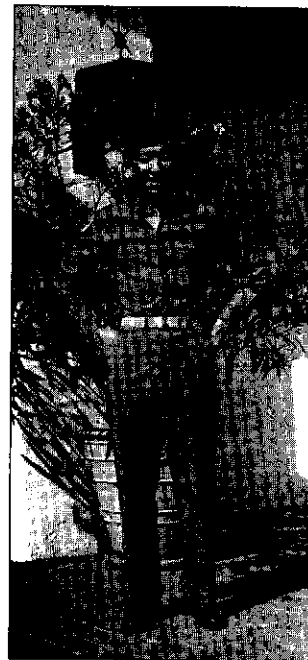


# THE ADVENTURES OF EDDIE FUNG

CHINATOWN KID • TEXAS COWBOY • PRISONER OF WAR



EDITED BY JUDY YUNG

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## PREFACE

I first met Eddie Fung in the summer of 2002. I was working on my fifth book, *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present*, and I needed a World War II story, preferably one told from the perspective of a Chinese American veteran. I asked Colonel Bill Strobebridge, a military historian who had conducted a study of Chinese Americans in World War II, if he could find me someone to interview. He came up with two possibilities. The first person had fought heroically in the front lines at Normandy, but he turned out to be a poor storyteller, one who gave short answers and stuck to the facts. Even though I conducted the interview in Chinese and did my best to make him feel comfortable, I could not get him to elaborate on the story or share his feelings on the matter. So I made arrangements to meet the second possibility, Eddie Fung, hoping that he would prove to be a more engaging storyteller.

We agreed to do the interview at Colonel Strobebridge's home in San Francisco. Prior to the interview, I did some background checking on Eddie Fung. I found out that he was an American-born Chinese who had grown up in San Francisco Chinatown like me, only he had preceded me by two decades. I was fifty-six years old, and he had just turned eighty. Colonel Strobebridge also told me that Eddie had the dubious distinction of being the only Chinese American soldier to be captured by the Japanese during World War II and that he had worked on the Burma-Siam railroad made



famous by the film *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Not knowing much about that history, I made a point of seeing the film before the interview. I was horrified by the brutal treatment of the prisoners under the Japanese and impressed by the courage and heroic actions of the POWs in the film. I hoped that Eddie would be forthcoming with details about how he as a Chinese American had fared and survived under such circumstances. The other interesting thing that I found out about Eddie was that he had run away from home to become a cowboy when he was sixteen. I was intrigued—a Chinese American cowboy? Although it was the World War II story I needed, I decided I would start at the beginning with his family history in order to get a fuller picture of his life and to put his World War II experience into a larger context.

Having conducted over 400 interviews with Chinese Americans for various book projects by then, I thought I had allowed plenty of time for his story—three whole hours. This interview, however, turned out differently. A solidly built man of short stature—5 feet 3 inches, and 120 pounds, to be exact—Eddie proved to be a natural storyteller with a fantastic memory for details, a precise way of expressing himself, a wonderful sense of humor, and a strong determination to tell the story right. In essence, he is every oral historian's dream come true. He also proved to be an unusual interviewee in that he was both introspective and analytical in his responses. I soon found out that he had an indirect way of answering my questions, often recreating conversations and connecting specific incidents from the past to make his point. Regardless of how long-winded he got, Eddie was never boring. In fact, he held me spellbound at our first meeting, and before I knew it, three hours had passed and we had not even gotten to World War II! Somehow, I got the rest of the story out of him in the next two hours before I had to leave for my next appointment. He gave me a pile of books to read about POWs and the Burma-Siam railroad, and I promised to send him the transcript and edited story for his approval.

It was not until I transcribed his interview that I realized what a gold mine I had found. I thought, this had to be how historian Theodore Rosen-garten must have felt when he happened upon Nate Shaw, an illiterate black sharecropper in Alabama with a story to tell, or how Alex Haley felt when he was asked to write Malcolm X's autobiography. They both spent hun-

dreds of hours interviewing their subjects and countless more writing their classic oral histories, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. I knew instinctively that there was a larger book to be written, although I did not think at the time that I was the right person to write it. Six months later, after I had completed a draft of his World War II story for *Chinese American Voices*, I contacted Eddie and hand-delivered the transcript and story to him for his approval. At the same time, I urged him to consider writing his memoirs, but he said with modesty that his story was not that unique or interesting. "Besides," he said, "I'm not a writer." I continued, however, to press him, and suggested that we do a longer interview. "If nothing else," I said, "we could deposit the tapes and transcript in an archive for the historical record and for the use of other researchers." He reluctantly agreed. Retired and a recent widower, he had the time. For me, the time was right as well, because for the next nine months I was on sabbatical from my job as professor of American Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Until then, my research and writing had primarily focused on Chinese American women. I never thought that I would be working on a book about a man's life, but the opportunity was too good to pass up.

We began meeting on Saturdays in the kitchen of his North Beach flat. I would set up the tape recorder and come prepared with questions about a certain period or aspect of his life. The agreement was that we would see how far we could take his story and that he would be completely open and honest with me. Although I kept reminding him that he had the right to refuse to answer any questions that made him feel uncomfortable, he never did—not even when I asked him about how he lost his virginity. At one point in our interviews, Eddie said, "You're the only one who knows the intimate details of my life. I've never even told my wife Lois." I felt honored by his complete trust in me and pleased by his willingness to cooperate with me fully. Each session ran for about four hours. I became enthralled by his story and by his voice. In between our sessions, I would transcribe the entire interview and come up with follow-up questions for our next session. One thing for sure, I felt very comfortable with him and looked forward to each of our weekend sessions.

Into our fifth session together, the unthinkable happened. We were sit-

ting on opposite sides of the kitchen table, as usual, and were on the topic of post-traumatic stress disorder and how Eddie had found a way to deal with the anger he felt after the war. "The first thing to do is to admit you have a problem and then what are you going to do about it?" Then he slipped in, "Just like I would like to come on to you, except that I know that our age difference—I mean, there's just no percentage for it. So the only thing I can do is enjoy your company while you're here, and that's it. You understand?" Then, almost in the same breath, he moved on to an incident in his childhood when his father taught him how to quell his flash temper. Later, when I listened to the tape and heard what he had tried to tell me, I felt flattered and troubled at the same time. I did not want to jeopardize or compromise our professional relationship and the book that was materializing so well. And there was the age difference—he was old enough to be my father. After some lengthy telephone conversations in the next few days, we decided to give in to Cupid's arrow but continue on with the book project. Fifty more hours of interviews later, we were married on April Fool's Day 2003. We deliberately chose that date because we did not think any of our family or friends would believe us.

In retrospect, our marriage helped rather than hindered the interview process and my understanding of how Eddie's character has been shaped by his family background and upbringing, his life as a cowboy in Texas, and his POW experience during World War II. His life story confirms the wise sayings "We are the sum total of our experiences" and "What does not break us makes us stronger." As his wife and (as he calls me) "his Boswell," I had immediate access to him and his extensive library collection on World War II, and I was able to ask him many personal questions as well as conduct follow-up interviews whenever I wanted. Indeed, I learned to keep the tape recorder ready and close by in case he came up with anything important and relevant in our daily conversations. In this way, we completed another twenty-five hours of recorded testimony. I also had access to his family and relatives, and his POW buddies, all of whom I met after we were married. However, as I soon discovered, no one really knows Eddie Fung very well, since he is a very private person. He has been especially reluctant about speaking of his POW experiences except to other POWs who share a similar past. As he said, "There is a common bond

between survivors that you cannot get membership into unless you have paid the initiation fee. This is true of all survivors—they can talk between and among themselves, but with great reluctance and difficulty to anyone else."

As my husband and the subject of the book, Eddie entrusted me with the writing of his story, but he had the final say over every word in the telling of that story. I gave him every chapter to review and correct as I wrote it, and we went over the final revisions together with a fine-tooth comb. Admittedly, I have influenced the outcome of the interview in my choice of questions and emphasis of focus because of my interest in Chinese American and women's history, but I have tried to provide Eddie with ample opportunities to add subjects or delete anything he did not want included. After transcribing all the interviews, which amounted to over 1,000 pages of text, I edited and rearranged selections from his interviews for a smoother read, while trying to remain faithful to his actual words and way of speaking. At times I relied on other published accounts and oral history interviews (see the bibliography) in order to add details or corroborate Eddie's version of the story. Ultimately, *The Adventures of Eddie Fung* is very much a collaborative life history project and autobiography of a Chinatown kid, Texas cowboy, and POW survivor, as told from his memories and in his own words. Using Rosengarten and Haley as my models and marshalling all my knowledge, sensitivities, and skills as a Chinese American historian and writer for this monumental task, my goal has been to do justice to Eddie's story as a survivor and to share with readers the many lessons in life that his story has to offer.

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## INTRODUCTION

The way Eddie Fung tells his life story, it has been one adventure after another, beginning with the time he ran away from home to be a cowboy to the time he joined the army and became a prisoner of war. At one level, *The Adventures of Eddie Fung* is a coming-of-age story, of a young man's quest to explore life to its fullest and in the process grow into manhood. At another level, Eddie's story offers us valuable insights into Chinatown life in the 1920s, the myth and reality of the American cowboy, and the survival tactics of a POW.

Very little has been written about the experiences of American-born Chinese in the early twentieth century. Only two autobiographies exist: Pardee Lowe's *Father and Glorious Descendant* and Jade Snow Wong's *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. Both books were published by major publishing houses at a time when U.S.-China relations were at their best and little was known about Chinese Americans.<sup>1</sup> The authors go to great lengths to explain Chinese family life and customs to an American audience and at the same time recount their problems dealing with intergenerational conflict at home and assimilation into mainstream society. Ultimately, Pardee Lowe and Jade Snow Wong demonstrate to readers how it is possible to "blend the conflicting streams of Chinese and American thought" and transcend racial prejudice without feeling embittered or immobilized. As Wong wrote in

the 1989 edition of her book, "Despite prejudice, I was never discouraged from carrying out my creed; because of prejudice, the effort is ongoing."<sup>2</sup>

Eddie Fung tells a distinctly different story of Chinese American life in the 1920s and 1930s. He does not speak in the voice of a cultural ambassador, to satisfy the curiosity or assuage the guilt of white America, but from the retrospective perspective of a wayward son who has come to terms with his ethnic identity. Eddie has fond memories of his childhood, bathed in the love and protection of his family and the old bachelor society of Chinatown. He recalls how the family and neighbors pulled together during the Depression and how his immigrant parents taught him to be frugal, self-reliant, resourceful, and a responsible member of society.

There is, however, also a dark side to living in Chinatown that Eddie shares with us. Growing up in the shadows of Chinese Exclusion, when anti-Chinese laws prohibited Chinese immigration and severely restricted Chinese American life, he resented the ghetto conditions and mentality of Chinatown. Many of the Chinese were illegal immigrants who had come to this country posed as "paper sons" of a merchant or U.S. citizen in order to circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred the further immigration of Chinese laborers to this country.<sup>3</sup> Eddie's own father crossed the Canadian border surreptitiously as the "manservant of a Caucasian gentleman." He later found a way to bring his wife and two adopted sons from China as a "paper wife" and as "paper sons." Always fearful of being discovered and deported, his father never explained to him why Eddie's older brothers had different surnames from the rest of the family or why he could not return to Canada or China for a visit. At the time, Eddie thought this duplicity and secrecy was just the way it was for people in Chinatown. Just about everyone lived in overcrowded tenement apartments and seemed afraid of venturing outside the boundaries of Chinatown. It was not until Eddie left home for summer camp and work as a live-in houseboy that he realized other people did not live the same way. They had spacious houses with front yards and backyards. "Okay, people don't have to live in Chinatown in cold-water flats," he reasoned. Certainly, he did not want to continue living that way, so he began to plan his escape.

Eddie had another reason for wanting to leave home—he resented his strict upbringing. Like many other second-generation Chinese Americans,

he was expected to do well in American school and Chinese school, to help out at home, to be obedient and respectful to his elders, to follow Chinese customs, and to never bring shame to the family by misbehaving. Yet at American school, through books and movies, and in his contacts with the outside world, he was encouraged to be a rugged individualist, to speak his mind, and to pursue any line of work or lifestyle he pleased. Many Chinese Americans at this time were torn between following the Chinese ways of their parents and following the American ways of mainstream society.<sup>4</sup> Eddie learned to accommodate cultural conflicts as they arose. "You might say that our generation had split personalities," he explained. "When we were inside the house, we were completely Chinese. When we were outside the house, we could be either all Chinese or all American or half and half." Being the curious and rambunctious kid he was, Eddie could not always meet his parents' expectations, nor be satisfied with the restrictions of Chinatown life. Yearning to explore the wider world and to pursue the romantic life of a cowboy on horseback, he decided to strike out on his own and try his luck in Texas. This decision would set Eddie apart from his Chinese American peers, most of whom remained stuck in Chinatown until World War II, when racial discrimination lessened and opportunities opened up for them.

By the time Eddie arrived in Texas in 1938, the Depression was drawing to a close and the cowboy days of cattle drives and open ranges that he had dreamed of were long gone. After the railroads came to Texas, getting the cattle to market became easier. Fewer men were needed to drive the smaller herds of cattle to the shipping points. Fenced ranching allowed ranchers to keep track of their cattle and to improve on their breed, but it meant that cowboys could no longer roam the open range with the cattle. Most work became seasonal, when cowhands were needed for the spring and fall roundups and branding. The rest of the year they were put to work maintaining windmills, repairing fences, and doing farm chores. Instead of the idyllic life Eddie had imagined, where "all you have to do is ride a horse and maybe herd a few cows," it turned out to be nothing but hard work. Any experienced cowpuncher could have told him, "He [would be] poorly fed, underpaid, overworked, deprived of sleep, and prone to boredom and loneliness."<sup>5</sup>

Considering how small in stature and how inexperienced Eddie was, it is amazing that anyone hired him. Eddie credits his success in landing a job to his eagerness to learn and his willingness to accept the low wage of ten dollars a month. His success also attests to the openness and friendliness of ranchers who were willing to give a young man an opportunity to prove himself. As Eddie found out, there was less racial discrimination on the ranch than in town. In 1940, African Americans and Mexicans made up 15 percent and 12 percent of the population in Texas, respectively. They each formed about 14 percent of the cowboy population. Although Jim Crow codes were still strictly enforced, cowboys of color were tolerated on the ranch as long as they had the skills to do the job.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, there were only 1,785 Asians (Chinese and Japanese Americans) in Texas in 1940, accounting for less than 1 percent of the population. Most of the Japanese were rice farmers in the Houston area, while the Chinese operated laundries, cafés, and grocery stores, and lived in segregated communities in El Paso and San Antonio. Small in number and not considered an economic threat to the Anglo population, the Chinese occupied a “gray area” in the black-white racial hierarchy in Texas. They were tolerated and better treated than African Americans and Mexicans, although in 1937 Anglo competitors did try to get an anti-alien land law passed that would have driven Chinese grocers out of business. The measure failed, however, due to opposition from the Chinese community.<sup>7</sup>

Eddie Fung may well have been the only Chinese cowboy in West Texas at the time, and as such he was treated more as a novelty than a threat. As he said, “I was only five feet tall and nonthreatening, so most people took me to be nothing more than a young adventurer.” The one Chinese stereotype that stuck to him, however, was that of the proverbial cook or houseboy. Eddie was offered that job more than once, but each time he refused, even though it meant higher wages and easier work. He had come to Texas to be a cowboy, and by the end of his second year he had proven to himself and to others that regardless of ethnicity or size he could do any job assigned to him.

From the vantage point of a Chinatown kid, Eddie shares with us what it was like to be a Texas cowboy in the 1930s. His first job at the Scarborough ranch taught him that cowboys worked hard from sunset to sunset. He had

to be a jack-of-all-trades—part mechanic, part vet, and part carpenter—in order to do all the tasks required of him. At his first roundup, Eddie learned how to flank a calf that was three times his weight. He also came to appreciate the code of conduct that most Texas cowboys still abide by—a mixture of rugged individualism, neighborly cooperation, and a strong sense of honor. “If a man gave you his word, there would be no need for a contract,” Eddie said. “And if you wanted to be formal about it, you shook hands—that was ironclad.” Contrary to the image of the uncouth and uneducated cowboy he had seen on the movie screen, most of the cowboys he came to know were gentle, courteous, and knowledgeable, and they were more than willing to show this greenhorn the tricks of the trade.<sup>8</sup> By the time Eddie was ready to move on to his next adventure, he realized how much he had grown under their tutelage. What he did not know then was how this education would help him become a good soldier and survivor in prison camp.

Most young Texans who joined the National Guard in the 1930s did it for the pay. Some did it for adventure or to make military service their career. But as far as Eddie was concerned, “Here’s another place where I can be around horses—I can join the cavalry!” By the time he got to Lubbock, Texas, to inquire about joining the army in May of 1940, Italy had seized Ethiopia, Japan had invaded China, and Germany had swept through most of Europe. Unbeknownst to Eddie, the United States was heading for war, and plans were being made to call for the draft and to mobilize the National Guard. Too young to be admitted into the army without parental consent, Eddie signed up with the Texas National Guard instead. Although he was the only Chinese American in his military unit, he never felt out of place and recalls that he got along fine with all the other men. His size posed more of a problem than his race or ethnicity. But once he proved that he could pull his share of the weight and pass basic training, he earned the respect of his officers and fellow soldiers.

Approximately one million African Americans, 33,000 Japanese Americans, and 15,000 Chinese Americans served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II. Until desegregation in the military was banned by executive order in 1948, African Americans were segregated into separate barracks and units and generally assigned menial duties. Because Japanese

Americans were considered "enemy aliens" after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, they were only allowed to serve in the Military Intelligence Service in the Pacific theater or in the all-Japanese 100th Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team in the European theater. In contrast, Chinese Americans were integrated into all branches of the military, with the exception of 1,200 men who were assigned to two all-Chinese units in the China-Burma-India theater.<sup>9</sup> With China and the United States at war against Japan, many Chinese Americans joined out of a strong sense of Chinese nationalism and American patriotism. Like Eddie, they experienced no blatant discrimination, and many would agree with Private Charles Leong, who wrote in 1944, "To G.I. Joe Wong in the army, a 'Chinaman's Chance' means a fair chance, not based on race or creed, but on the stuff of the man who wears the uniform of the U.S. Army."<sup>10</sup> In truth, Chinese Americans were caught between the white-over-black paradigm of race relations in the army. They did not suffer the same bigotry directed at African Americans, but neither were they fully accepted as equals by their white counterparts.<sup>11</sup>

While Eddie was training to be a machine gunner at Camp Bowie, Texas, war escalated on the two continents. Germany attacked the Balkans and Russia, and Japan, now a part of the Axis powers, took the French colonies of Indochina. As negotiations with Japan deteriorated, President Franklin D. Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in America, stopped oil supplies to Japan, and made General Douglas MacArthur commander of the U.S. Army in the Far East. Paralyzed financially and starved for the raw materials needed to keep its war machine going, Japan activated its plans to take over Asia. In November of 1941, Eddie's battalion was sent to the Philippines as reinforcements. En route to the Philippines, he recalls, Pearl Harbor was attacked, and his convoy was diverted to Australia. From there, the 2nd battalion was sent to Java to help the Netherlands defend its colonial outpost. They were no match for the Japanese army. Within a few days, the battle for Java was over, and Eddie became one of 140,000 Allied soldiers to be captured by the Japanese in the Pacific theater.<sup>12</sup> Along with 61,000 American, British, Australian, and Dutch prisoners, Eddie was sent to work on the Burma-Siam railroad—the largest use of POWs in any single project in the Pacific war. For the next forty-two months of captivity, the

men would suffer unimaginable brutality, diseases, and starvation in the POW camps. Those who survived the harrowing ordeal would bear the physical and mental scars of incarceration for the rest of their lives. Thus the refrain that is familiar to all of them, "We can forgive, but we can never forget."

Many books have been published and films made about the Pacific war, the experiences of POWs, and the building of the Burma-Siam railroad—the most well known being *Bridge on the River Kwai*. The 1957 Oscar-winning movie, however, gives a misleading account of how the bridge was built and destroyed as well as an erroneous impression of the relationships between the Japanese military, British commander, and prison labor force.<sup>13</sup> More accurate accounts can be found in Gavan Daws's *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* and Clifford Kinvig's *River Kwai Railway: The Story of the Burma-Siam Railroad*.<sup>14</sup> By now, there are also numerous oral histories and memoirs by POW survivors, many of whom worked on the "Death Railroad."<sup>15</sup> They each tell a different story about the life of a POW because no one was alike in their reaction to and interaction with their captors, nor in the way that they perceived and remembered the same events. Gavan Daws points out in his book, "Nationality determined the way POWs lived and died, and often *whether* they lived or died."<sup>16</sup> As Eddie's story bears out, personality and ethnicity were determining factors in the matter. What makes *The Adventures of Eddie Fung* different from other first-person accounts is Eddie's unique perspective and experiences as the only Chinese American to be captured by the Japanese.

According to Eddie, the first thing that crossed his mind after Allied forces capitulated to the Japanese on March 8, 1942, was, "My God, what are they going to do to Foo and me?" Eddie Fung and Frank "Foo" Fujita were the only two Asian American soldiers to be captured by the Japanese in what has been termed a war between the "yellow" race and the "white" race.<sup>17</sup> The assumption was that both would be immediately spotted by the Japanese, then tortured and killed for betraying the "yellow" race. Foo, whose father was Japanese and whose mother was a white American, was able to hide his racial background until his Japanese surname betrayed him in Nagasaki, where he was sent to work in the shipyards while Eddie was sent to Burma to work on the railroad. Foo steadfastly refused to denounce the

United States and participate in propaganda work in Japan, and as a result he was brutally beaten and assigned to latrine duty.<sup>18</sup> As for Eddie, although he was sometimes beaten because he was Chinese, he was never tortured. Instead, he found that his Chinese upbringing made it easier for him to adjust to the meager rice-and-vegetable diet, and to find ways to supplement it with throwaways such as animal organs and fish heads. Even his limited command of the Chinese language came in handy. It allowed him to trade with the local Chinese and to help his commanding officer communicate in writing with the Japanese engineers. Moreover, the domestic and scrounging skills he had acquired as a Chinatown kid proved useful in the camps. For example, Eddie was able to show the cooks how to use a wok, and the food and medicine he scrounged helped him and others to survive. In fact, it was while a prisoner of the Japanese that Eddie learned to appreciate his Chinese background, "I had finally come to terms with my past, and I was looking forward to going home and telling my mother, 'Okay, Mom, I understand what you and Pop have been trying to get through to me—about what it means to be Chinese—and I'm going to try and live up to it.'"

Ultimately, what kept Eddie alive and what makes his story so unique and interesting were his curiosity and desire to learn from his adventures and encounters in life. Even the details of railroad work come alive when seen through Eddie's curious eyes—how the Japanese organized the work crews, how jungles were cleared for the right-of-way, how bridges were built, how the tracks were laid, and how the men were practically worked to death during the "speedo" period. To Eddie, "any job is interesting as long as I'm learning something new." At the lowest point of his captivity, when he was hit with dysentery and malaria and down to sixty pounds, Eddie convinced himself to stay alive for no other reason than to satisfy his curiosity: "I wanted to see what the next day would bring; whether it was good, bad, or indifferent, I just wanted to know."

After the war was over, how did Eddie deal with the scars from his excruciating POW experience? In the final chapter of the book, he talks about going on eating binges, hoarding twenty pounds of coffee at a time, having nightmares, going without sleep for a whole year, and losing his temper over trifling matters. Some of his buddies became alcoholics. A few com-

mitted suicide. The V.A. Hospital was of no help, because at the time no one understood what we now know to be posttraumatic stress disorder and survivor's guilt. Even so, Eddie found a way to deal with the problem, and he managed to turn the negative experience into a positive learning experience. By the time we get to the end of Eddie's story, we can discern that he is finally at peace with himself. Upon reflection he said, "I've never regretted the war or the hardships I've suffered, because it made me a better man."

*The Adventures of Eddie Fung* is an important contribution to our understanding of Chinese American life, cowboy culture, and the experiences of American POWs in World War II. It is also a remarkable chronicle of a Chinatown boy's journey to manhood that will leave a lasting impression on our hearts and minds.

—JUDY YUNG

## ONE • GROWING UP IN CHINATOWN

*Pop named me Man Quong, which means “intellectually bright,” so my father had high expectations of me. Years later, when I visited our ancestral village in China for the first time, they knew right away who I was, because Pop had sent money back to celebrate my birth and I was written in the village genealogy book. From all of this, I suspect that he must have been very disappointed in me as I was growing up. But unfortunately, I cannot change my nature. I don’t know why I had itchy feet, why I was born curious, so curious that I had to see what was on the other side of the hill.*

### MY FATHER, FUNG CHONG POO

**M**y father, Fung Chong Poo, was a wetback—he sneaked in from Canada. According to people I talked to later, at one time he lived in Chinatown and worked as a kitchen helper in a downtown hotel in Nanaimo. He crossed the border posing as the manservant of a Caucasian gentleman—that was how he got into the U.S. My guess is that it was in the late 1890s, when he was in his early twenties. Dad was from Lei Yuen (Pearl Garden) village in Enping District, Guangdong Province (near Hong Kong). My mother, Ng Shee, was from Si Ji Yim (Lion’s Loin) village, also in Enping District. The funny thing about the Enping people, if you meet a married woman with the surname Fung, the chances are she used to be a Ng from somewhere around Si Ji Yim. And if you meet a married woman with the surname Ng, the chances are she was a Fung. You see, most vil-



lages in China at this time were inhabited by people with the same surname, and young people in one village were often arranged in marriage to prospective spouses in nearby villages. We're so intermarried within that area, it's almost incestuous!

I had two older adopted brothers who were born in China, and four older sisters and a younger brother who were born at home like me. My father, being a progressive man, chose to use a lady doctor instead of a midwife. The reason we had two adopted brothers was because after my parents got married in China and before Pop came over to America, it was thought that Mom was barren. So since he was going to find his fortune in the West, he decided to adopt two sons to keep her company in China. But when he finally got her over here in 1914, one year later, my older sister Mary was born! How did Pop get his wife and two sons over here when he was illegal? He had a brother in San Francisco who had a wife and three sons in China. As a merchant, he could have brought them to America, but he never intended to do so. Instead, he sold the papers to my father. Mom came over legally as my uncle's wife, and my oldest adopted brother, Al, came as my uncle's ten-year-old son, Ho Li Quong.<sup>1</sup> Somehow, Pop knew the Chinese consul general, and in 1939 the consul fixed it so that Mom and Uncle were divorced, and Mom and Pop got married. As to my second adopted brother, Francis, or Pee Wee as we called him, Pop was able to buy immigration papers for him to come in 1920 as Hom Sin Kay, the nine-year-old son of a native-born citizen. Both Al and Pee Wee retained their paper names because it would get too complicated. The consul general could only do so much.

This would create all kinds of problems for us later, like when I went overseas in November of 1941 and my mother said, "You stop in Honolulu and find out how Pee Wee is doing." At the time he was a seaman on the Matson lines. We had one day in Honolulu, so I went to the Seamen's Union. I was in uniform, and I said, "I want to find out if my brother is in port." "What's your brother's name?" I said, "Hom Sin Kay." He said, "What ship is he on?" I said, "Lurline." And he said, "Lurline is not in." So he said, "Who are you?" I said, "I'm his brother." So I pulled out my dog tag. He said, "You're Fung, Edward. How can he be your brother when his surname is Hom?" I said, "I don't know, but he's always been my brother." This "paper son" business—I just never thought anything of it because it was so common in Chinatown.

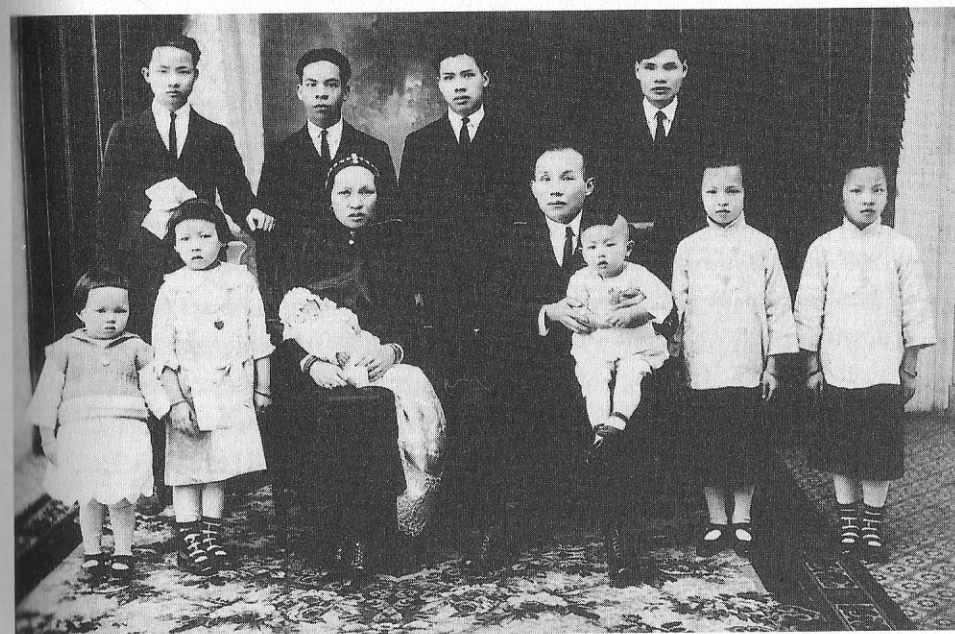


FIG. 1. Studio portrait of the Fung family, 1924. Left to right, front row: Grace, Minerva, mother Ng Shee (holding William), father Fung Chong Poo (holding Eddie), Mary, and Jessie; back row: cousin Tom Fung, Albert, cousin Harry Fung, and cousin Fung Woi Quong.

According to hearsay, Pop was a hell-raiser. When he was a young man, he wore a pigtail, which was required of all Chinese subjects during the reign of the Manchus (1644–1911). One day he was running an errand for his boss and he was impatient. He jumped off the cable car before it stopped and his queue wound around the stanchion. Basically, he fell under the cable car—that was how he lost his leg. He learned to be a jeweler and watchmaker because he had to find some job he could do sitting down. I remember when I was about eight, he gave me an alarm clock and showed me how to get started taking it apart. I took it all apart. He said, "Now put it back together." I couldn't do it, and he tried to show me. He said, "It's perfectly logical. This has to go in first, then this goes on top of this, and this goes alongside of it." It all made sense, but I couldn't do it. And, theoretically, the alarm clock is the easiest to repair!

My father was not the kind of man you asked personal questions about.

If he wanted you to know something, he would let you know. But I could tell through our little sessions—like the time he taught me how to make a bow and arrow—that he had many experiences to draw from. One time in 1937, when we had the coldest winter in many years, he said, “Do you think this is cold? In Montana I was at a ranch house, and when we threw a basin of water out the back porch, it would freeze before it hit the ground. Now *that’s* cold.” In retrospect, then, you can kind of backtrack and say, “How did he get into the United States from Canada?” It wasn’t straight down through Washington and Oregon; he must have taken a roundabout way, going down through Montana. Another time when I saw the movie *San Francisco*, with Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, and Jeanette MacDonald, I came home and he asked, “What movie did you see?” And I told him. He started reminiscing about the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, and how he had to stay at an encampment in the army presidio designated for Chinese people. He recalled how as soon as the bugler sounded retreat, which is the time to lower the flag, the horses would know exactly what they were supposed to do—pull caissons in formation. He said, “Just like the fire horses when they hear the fire alarm, they know that they have to go. All they need is the direction from the driver as to where.” So he was telling me about the army life that he saw as a refugee from the earthquake. Of course, I later found out that it was an advantage for the Chinese that the earthquake happened, because with all the birth records destroyed, they could then claim U.S. citizenship and help bring in a number of fictitious sons from China.

My father spoke fairly good English and he was a Christian, so I gather the reason I was named Edward was because of Reverend Edwards, a Methodist minister who had taught him English. When we were kids, every Thanksgiving my father would roast a turkey with all the trimmings, and he would also bake pumpkin pies. Then the whole family would take the streetcar and troop out to Sixth Avenue, where the Edwards sisters lived after the minister died. We always had Thanksgiving dinner with the spinster sisters until they went to live in a retirement home. We knew from *that* that Pop felt an obligation to Reverend Edwards. And when Chinese incur an obligation, it’s lifelong—it’s never paid off.

I also learned later from old-timers about how my father made his first

\$10,000. They said that during World War I, he was buying and salvaging gunnysacks used for bagging potatoes. If they were in good shape, he would pay a penny for it. If not, people would give it to him and he would spend his nights patching them. Everyone thought he was crazy because he rented a warehouse to store all these bags. He foresaw the scarcity of gunnysacks (used for bagging potatoes) after the war—that’s how he made his first bundle of money, selling gunnysacks. Pop was one of these guys who in the 1920s could see “strip cities,” all the way from San Francisco to San Jose. He was always traveling to Vallejo, Walnut Creek, and all sorts of places outside San Francisco, scouting out business opportunities. But if he made any money, he would use it to help people, not hoard it.

I think Pop helped at least four kinsmen come to the United States. I used to ask him why, because we could have used the money ourselves. He said, “No matter how rough you think you have it here, it’s much worse than you can imagine in China. So anytime I have a chance to help bring someone over, I will.” And he said, “I will not deprive you of any food, shelter, or clothing—you have the basics. All I want to do is give someone else the opportunity to have the same things.” He used to buy land in China from my uncle, who wanted the money more than the land, since he had no intention of ever going back to China. Pop was always helping out his village. I think they had some bandit problems one time. I remember so distinctly—Pop and Al were wrapping cartridges of .38—caliber bullets in toilet paper. Then they hid them in a grindstone before shipping it to China. I asked Al years later what that was all about, and he said, “We had to smuggle these cartridges to the villagers who had guns but could not buy any ammunition. Bandits were extorting money from the villagers for so-called protection.” So that was why they needed the bullets—to try and fend off the bandits.

My father kept a book of the monies that he had lent or expended to help bring people over from China. Theoretically, there was an agreement that the person’s family would pay him back if and when they could afford it. In other words, the debt was on the book. When my father passed away in 1940, Mom asked Al to try and collect some of the money. It turned out that people were not as ethical as Pop had thought. Many of them said, “We’ve already paid the debt back and your father must have forgotten to



mark it down.” Other people would deny that they were even indebted to my father. So after a couple of weeks of that, Mom told Al, “Put a notice in the Chinese papers that the Fungs do not owe anyone, nor are the Fungs owed by anyone else.” In other words, the slate’s wiped clean. She figured if anyone was going to honor his debt after the notice, he would still pay it. And it was at that point that the Fungs got a reputation for being *choi gee lo* (wealthy people), because they could afford to write off the debts. But that wasn’t true—Mom just didn’t want the aggravation.

You might say that my father was progressive in the way that he treated the girls in the family. Whenever his friends kidded him about having so many girls, he would say, “My girls are better than any of the sons you have.” Back in those times, that was high praise because girls didn’t really count for much. But he was that kind of a person. He didn’t care whether you were male or female. If you brought pride to him, you were bringing joy to him. When my sisters graduated from the prestigious Lowell High School and they wanted to go on to college, my father encouraged them to do so. All his peers laughed at him, “Why are you letting your girls go to college? They’re just going to get married and raise families.” He told them that education was something no one could take away from you. It didn’t matter if his daughters got married and had families, they could still be educated. All the girls went to the University of California, Berkeley. Mary went for optometry in 1938, and upon graduating she opened her own office at the corner of Sacramento and Grant. Jessie majored in anthropology and worked as a bookkeeper for Sherwin-Williams Paint Company before marrying Bill, an electrical engineer, and moving to Bakersfield. Number three, Minerva—we called her Mints—studied literature at Cal. She met and married Jim, a Caucasian guy who later became a psychologist. My parents did not approve; neither did his mother. Back then, they could not get married in California, so they got married in the state of Washington, where it was allowed.<sup>2</sup> My fourth sister, Grace, never attended college because she had asthma. Early on, when she was twelve or thirteen, she was sent to live with a family in Fresno, which would hopefully help her asthmatic condition.

Although my father was gentle and supportive of his daughters, he was hard on his sons. Have you ever heard the term *sa heng*? It’s a rattan whip.

That was what Pop used on my younger brother Bill and me whenever we did something bad—the usual kid stuff, like fighting or sneaking into theaters without paying or shoplifting at the dime store. We didn’t have any toys, so naturally when we were in a variety store and saw all these things, we would shoplift. Whenever Pop found out about it, he would whip us in no uncertain terms, saying that he didn’t want this sort of thing happening again. Anytime he whipped us, we had given him a reason—there was no question about that. It wasn’t child abuse. He was just trying to get a point across: there was proper behavior and there was improper behavior.

I would not go so far as to say that my father was a dictator. He often tried reasoning with me. One time after I had been reported fighting again, he took me aside and said, “Men reason, animals fight.” Another time he admonished me by saying that my behavior reflected poorly upon him as the father, and, by extension, the family name and the clan. He never went any further than that. He probably decided, if nothing else—even if I were puzzled by what he had said—maybe I would start thinking about it. I remember I used to have a flash temper and I would go around slamming doors in the house. One day my father was home and he saw that I was mad about something. After about four doors, he said, “Do you feel better now?” And I said, “What?” He said, “All that door slamming, what are you mad about?” And he said, “After you’re done slamming all those doors, do you feel any better? Has your problem gone away? Whatever you were angry about, it’s still there, right?” And I knew he was right.

#### MY MOTHER, NG SHEE

If Pop was the head of the household, Mom was the heart of the house. If we had a scrapped knee or a skinned elbow, we would go to Mom, and she would kiss it and make it well. If we had a problem that needed solving, we would go to Pop, although he just basically handed out edicts. Mom came from a fairly poor background, judging by the fact that she did not have bound feet.<sup>3</sup> As far as I know, Mom’s father was an itinerant herb dealer, and her brother was physically handicapped, so she had to take care of him all the time.<sup>4</sup> She never talked about herself except in a very peripheral way. For instance, when Bill and I would come in hot from play and we would

stick our heads under the faucet to drink cold water, Mom would be horrified, because she had seen cholera in her village. Of course, we told her, "Mom, this is America. Things like that don't happen." Every morning, she boiled a pot of water, put it in the tea caddy, and that was the water she drank. It was only when I saw the effects of cholera in the POW camps that I realized why it had made such a deep impression on her. When the girls started working and had a little money set aside, they asked my mom, "Would you like to go back to China for a visit?" She said, "Me go back *there*, where there's no running water and flush toilets? Absolutely not!" So Mom didn't have any romantic notions about what she had left. She was perfectly content, even though we didn't have much. One of the things I remember she always said when people were having problems adjusting to a new environment, she would always say *jun sui*, meaning "change of water." In other words, they had gone to an area where the water was different. I will never forget that, especially later in the camps, where every drop of water that passed our lips had to be boiled.

My mother was a housewife and she worked as a seamstress at home. She did very fine hand sewing of tailored suits, where she put in the linings in the suit coat, the vest, and the pants. And she hand made the buttonholes and sewed on the buttons. All she got was twenty-five cents a suit. It was considered a favor by the tailor to even give her that kind of work, because there were lots of people who would have been glad to have the work. She also made all our clothes—pants and shirts—on a Singer foot-treadle machine. When she found out from the sewing ladies that there were such things as hemmers and buttonhole attachments, she expressed one time that she wished she could have these attachments. So Pop went down to the Singer sewing machine display room and looked to see how these things were made. Then he came back to his shop and with scrap pieces of tin and copper, he tried to make what Mom wanted. Now these things were for electrical machines, so he would make it, try it out on Mom's machine, and if it didn't work exactly the way it was supposed to, he would take it back and modify it until he got it just right. So Mom got all these attachments meant for electrical machines for her foot-treadle machine, and that made her job a lot easier.

My dad never went to school, but he was self-educated. My mom, on the other hand, was illiterate in both Chinese and English. I guess with all

those kids, she never had time to learn English, even if Pop were willing to teach her. So when we started learning to speak English, Pop said, "Inside the house you will speak Cantonese, because it would be disrespectful to your mother. She would not understand a word you're saying." He also told us that in the company of strangers we should not speak Chinese because, regardless of what we were saying, they might take it the wrong way. When Mom wanted to go shopping, like at the Emporium, she would come to Commodore Stockton School and ask for me. The principal would know why she was coming. I would take her wherever she wanted to go and help her carry the packages. Then, of course, she always bargained. My sisters would tell her, "If the Emporium says it's nineteen cents a yard, you can't bargain." She might buy ten yards and she would say, "Ask the salesgirl if it would be cheaper." So I said, "Mom, they won't." She said, "Ask them anyway." I loved my mom dearly, so I would always ask. And the salesgirl would inevitably say, "No, it's not our policy." I would tell Mom. Then she was happy that I had asked. She couldn't make change, so she would hold out the money in her hand. She was never cheated, as far as I could see. We were never embarrassed by what my mom did because we realized that there was something in her background that made bargaining a part of her character. I remember her saying that in China she saw meat for sure once a year, and that was at New Year's, and maybe on her birthday. None of us, even living as we did in Chinatown, could quite picture that, because we always had food on the table.

My fondest memory of my mom has nothing to do with her working and slaving her fingers to the bone. My oldest brother's wife and Mom both had long hair, and we're talking about as far down as to the waist if it's hanging free. I remember Ah So (Auntie) and Mom would sit sort of side by side and they would groom each other's hair. Then, of course, they would braid it and wear it in a *gai* (bun). Mom had enough hair that she had to have two buns. Back in those days, we didn't even have shampoo. Mom used Chinese soap to wash her hair and *pow fah* (paste made from wood shavings) to dress it. Then I think it was around 1933 or '34 when the girls talked Mom into cutting off her hair. I know that for a lady it is a lot of weight on her scalp, and the care of the bobbed hair is a lot easier, but I sure missed that long hair.



My other fond memory of my mother would be her cooking. Mom was a good cook. I don't know where she got the training or how she learned it, but whenever relatives from Stockton came to town, they would hand Mom fifty dollars and all they wanted was for Mom to cook her specialties. And we all got to be participants in this feast—we were all going to eat. Now, her specialties were always bird's-nest or shark-fin soup—depending on which one the relative wanted: fried squab; West Lake duck; fried prawns; a dish of sea cucumber, abalone, and mushrooms; steamed chicken; steamed fish; and a vegetable dish.

The chicken and squab had to be fresh. There used to be poultry stores on Grant Avenue, right across the street from the old opera house. Mom would feel the breast and pick the one she wanted. She never had the market do the killing or cleaning—same thing with the squabs, even though she might be buying as many as four or six, depending on the size. She didn't want me to see her kill the squab, so she would strangle it inside a bag. Then we would defeather them, which was made easier by dipping them in hot water first. The reason she retained the blood in the carcass was so that when she deep-fried it, it would have that nice moist, dark color. With the chicken, she would cut the throat and drain the blood. That was when I learned about blood pudding. She would put the blood into a bowl and steam it. Blood pudding wasn't served at the banquet; it was just a question of not wasting it. Then Mom would have me help her pluck the chicken, and she would clean the insides and save the gizzards, the liver, and so on. If she had time, she would even save the chicken intestines and clean them thoroughly on the outside. Then she would take a chopstick and turn the intestines inside out and clean the inside, and then do the outside again, do the inside again, and make sure it was thoroughly clean. The intestines she would serve as a side dish to the family on another day. I learned early on from my mother that nothing should be wasted. So it was fairly natural for me, when I was in the prison camps, not to waste anything either.

My mom hardly left home except to go shopping. Naturally, every chance we had, we would try to get Mom out of the house and basically not be so concerned about whether all the clothes had been washed and ironed. I mean, the chores were endless when you consider there were six kids and no modern conveniences. Aside from the Chinese opera, she loved the

movies, especially the comedies, so every once in a while, my sisters would take her downtown to see movies like *Alice in Wonderland* or *Tom Sawyer*. The girls said Mom couldn't understand a word of English, but she knew exactly when to laugh and when to cry. Once they found out that she could enjoy a movie without understanding a word of English, they would take her more often. But usually her movies were confined to Chinatown. There were at least three theaters that showed Chinese movies during the daytime because at night they were converted to opera houses. She went maybe once or twice a month. I know it was only a nickel for me, and maybe ten cents for an adult. I didn't especially like the Chinese movies, but since Mom enjoyed them, I didn't mind going with her. But she definitely liked slapstick, and we never figured out how she picked that up.

#### GROWING UP POOR AT 842 WASHINGTON

Our family was not dirt-poor. There were no luxuries, but we had the basics—a roof over our heads, clean clothes—even if they were mended—and nutritious food. For the first nine years of my life, we lived at 842 Washington Street, on the third floor. There were five families on that floor. We had two rooms, for a total of nine people. All four girls slept in one room, and the three boys had the front room, which served as the living room in the daytime, the dining room at night, and our bedroom after dinner. There was a hall closet in between, where Mom and Pop slept. And they cut off an area no more than two feet by three feet for Mom's three-burner gas stove—that was her cooking space. There were two toilets and one community kitchen on our floor, and all the water came from that kitchen. Every Saturday night, we would bring water in by the buckets and use every container we had to boil water, and everyone would take turns taking a bath in the number-two washtub. It was a continuous water-bucket parade! Everyone in Chinatown lived like this. There were people in the building who lived in more restricted circumstances than us—four or five people in one room. Yet they managed as we all did.

I remember hand-me-downs in the sense that we didn't always have new clothes and new shoes. There was one pair of shoes that I just hated. I don't even remember where they came from. They had no shoelaces and required

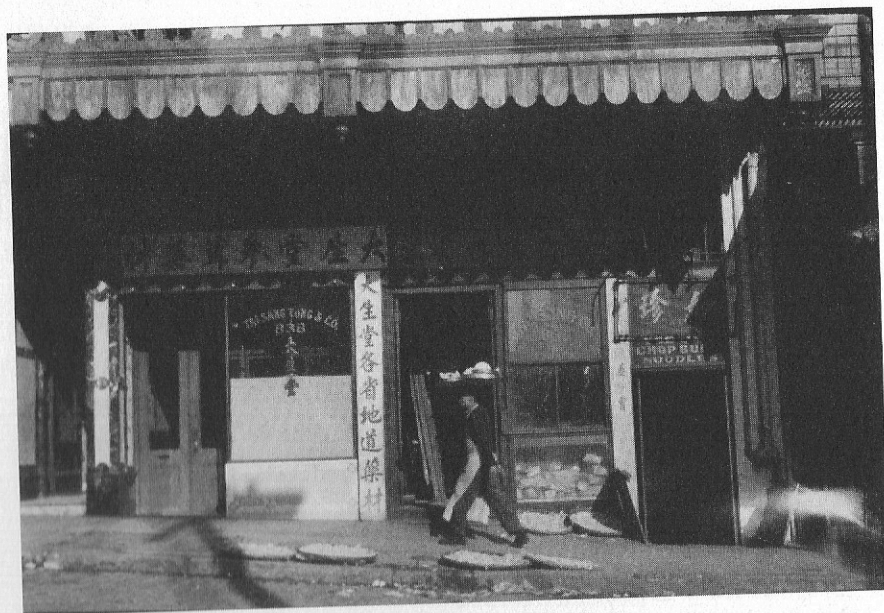


FIG. 2. Storefronts below 842 Washington Street, where Eddie lived in the 1920s. The waiter is delivering a tray of restaurant food that he balances on his head. Courtesy Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

a buttonhook to connect the mating hooks together. I could have sworn the shoes were made out of iron, because they never showed any signs of wear. Thank goodness I finally outgrew them! Even when we bought new shoes, we always bought them much larger so that we could grow into them. The one thing that I resented about hand-me-downs was sometimes I had to wear my sister's undies. Hand-me-downs, *that's* exactly what it means—handed down. When the girls had outgrown them, they were passed down. And if it just happened you were a boy—that was tough!

With my father's earnings as a watchmaker, we always managed. I don't remember ever eating breakfast until we started junior high school, but for lunch we had a piece of pastry or bread with milk. Our main meal together was supper, and that was when Mom would cook rice, soup, some vegetables, and a little meat. She would send me down to the Chinese grocery store to buy two and a half cents' worth of beef, two and a half cents' worth of pork, and that would be the meat ration for the day. Then, of course,

the vegetables—two bunches of *gai choy* (mustard greens) for a nickel, three bunches of bok choy for a nickel. In our time, you could *chaan* (ask for free) some *chong* (green onions), *mien seen jeong* (bean paste), or some liver. Any of the animal organs were free. Butcher town was down on Evans Street, and every Friday a big truck would come to Waverly and Washington with all these organs—tripe, hearts, stomachs, livers, kidneys, and so on, from all kinds of animals—and we could take anything we wanted. Any other time we wanted liver, we would go to any Chinese grocery store, preferably one that relatives ran or had shares in, and we would ask for a piece of liver for our cat. Everyone knew that the Fungs didn't have a cat, but they knew that we had six kids, so they would give us a commensurate-size piece of liver. That was so that we didn't lose face. We were going to help each other out, period. Otherwise, nobody was going to survive.

The only time we ever splurged was at Chinese New Year's. Mom would make the traditional vegetarian dish, *jai*, and we would have chicken for a change. She would also take out the beautiful, ornate wooden case with the compartments for the various sweetmeats. We could look, but "no touch," and definitely "no take." We knew it was for display and to impress the guests. Even the guests never really took things from the trays. If someone were visiting with kids, the parents would make sure that they didn't try to empty out the compartments. Later on, we would get a treat, and my favorite was the sugared coconut peelings. Of course, we always looked forward to getting *li see* (lucky money in a red envelope) from the adults. This was how we worked it: We had six kids in our family, and the Wong family on our floor had two girls. Now, suppose Mrs. Wong gave six of us a quarter each—that would be a dollar and a half. So Mom would keep track, and what happened was that Mom would make sure that the Wong family got back a buck and a half. The Wongs couldn't afford to give us a buck and a half, and we couldn't afford to give them six bits for each girl. But on the other hand, if we kind of kept track, we could each follow the tradition of giving kids *li see*, and there would be no net loss. We never kept the money from the *li see*, but every once in a while, Mom would say we could keep a nickel. The money was usually kept in circulation.

Everyone was expected to help out as much as they could. Mom sewed at home, and I remember the girls started out picking shrimp at a factory



on Clay Street. But after they got lice in their hair, Mom said, “No, no, we’re going to do this at home.” They basically worked in the living room of our small apartment. But after a year of that, my father put a stop to it, saying that it was more important for the girls to keep up with their schoolwork. I remember one other job we all took a hand in was wrapping Chinese characters that were printed on sheets of paper for the Chinatown lottery. We would all sit around the dinner table and bundle up sets of Chinese characters and put them in boxes. It was a lot of work for a penny a box. Later, the girls took on babysitting jobs outside Chinatown to bring in extra income.

If you didn’t help out earning spare change, you could always help out at home—cleaning house, getting water from the common kitchen, cooking, and so on. But everyone was expected to help in some way, and as we got older, we had more responsibilities. So I never had what was called a “childhood.” I started helping around the house when I was five or six years old, and I started working as a shoeshine boy when I was eight. It was a nickel for a shine. I would go over to Portsmouth Square with my shoe box filled with shoe polishes and brushes and ask people if they wanted a shine. Another place I would go to was the bail bond office on Merchant and Kearny, where the policemen sometimes hung out. By and by, I developed a steady clientele, and certain people would wait for me to come by to give them a shoeshine.

Then, when I was about nine years old, I started delivering newspapers. Tommy Yip, who lived across the hall from us, had a paper route with about 100 papers or subscribers. He offered me ten dollars a month to deliver half of the papers. Tommy was responsible for delivering the other half, and also for collecting from each subscriber. Later, I found out that each subscriber paid seventy-five cents a month for their subscription. So, for 100 papers, that would be seventy-five dollars. From that seventy-five dollars, Tommy paid *San Francisco News* fifty dollars, so he got twenty-five dollars. Well, he paid me ten dollars, so he was still ahead by fifteen dollars. But then, he could lose money if a subscriber defaulted, and ten dollars seemed like pretty good money to me. The first month I got my ten dollars, I walked up to Mom and I handed her the ten dollars, and I told her how I had earned it. She said, “No, Man (my Chinese name), I keep half and you keep half.”

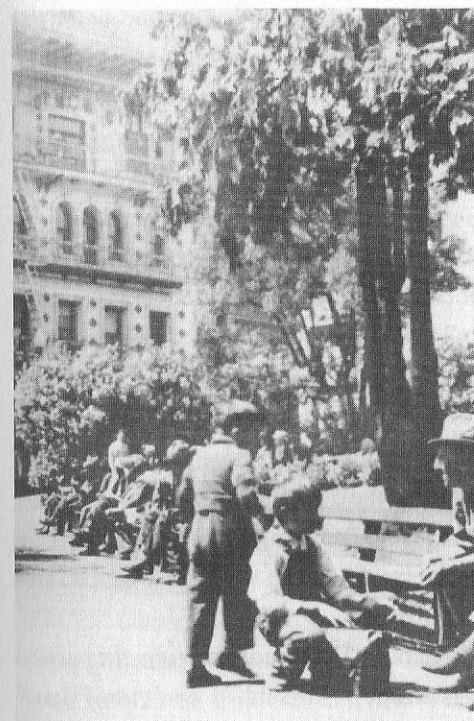


FIG. 3. Two boys—possibly Eddie and his brother Bill—shine shoes in Portsmouth Square, 1930s.

That’s the way it was—she would never take all my money. When I got my own paper route and was making a little more money, she still only took half.

#### THINGS GET BETTER AT 130 TRENTON

Somehow Pop saved enough money to buy a two-story house at 130 Trenton Street in Chinatown, and we were able to move there in 1931. Compared to 842 Washington, it was luxurious. We had four bedrooms—one for Mom and Pop, one for the girls, one for Al and his family, and one for Bill and me. There was a living room, a kitchen with hot running water, and a bathroom with a bathtub and toilet. The house also came with a back yard that Pop made into a garden. He loved to garden, and I remember he had a camellia bush that was the envy of Chinatown. We had a light well and windows in the front rooms, so the place was well lighted and ventilated.

I remember my sister Grace telling me years later that as soon as she got her first full-time job, she decided, "I'm going to get Mom a treat." She went to Montgomery Ward and she picked out a range and a refrigerator. She told the store to deliver it to 130 Trenton and set it up. She came home that night from work, looked around—no range, no refrigerator. She asked, "Mom, didn't someone deliver anything today?" She said, "Oh, some crazy *lo faan* (foreigner) tried to bring a stove and an icebox in here. I told him I didn't order anything and shooed him away." She said, "But Mom, that was for you, I got them for you." She looked at Grace and said, "I don't need a range; I don't need an icebox—don't spend your money that way." Finally, Pop went down to the used furniture store on Pacific and Stockton and picked up a range for ten dollars, and, of course, like any sensible Chinese woman of her time, Mom used the oven for storing pots and pans. As for the range, Mom said, "I don't need a range; gas burner is fine." Pop said, "No, now you have four burners." So, okay, she won't fight it, and she went ahead and started using it.

After my sisters started working and making more money, they asked her, "Don't you want a washing machine?" She said, "I don't need that." We're talking about hand scrubbing the sheets and cleaning all our comforters every once in a while. She would have to unbaste the linen and the cover, and she would wash all those and air out the batting, and all this by hand. Mom was one of these people who can always manage, even if a catastrophe were to hit. I mean, as far as she was concerned, she had hot water that came out of a tap, she didn't have to boil it on the stove—that was good enough for her. Mom taught us to work under any condition. Most people would call it primitive, but I think to her, it was just basic survival. I never heard her complain, although she had plenty of reasons to. She just took the attitude, "What good is it going to do to complain? The conditions aren't going to get better because you complain."

It was strange that I got to be so close to my mom, because it's usually the girls who get close to their moms. What was it Oscar Wilde said? "All women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That's his." You know, he's right! The first time I realized I could help Mom out was after we had moved to Trenton Street. She was washing sheets and clothes for at least eight people in a number-two washtub. She now had a

hot water tank, but she still had to heat up the water, because the hot water heater couldn't keep up with her. After she rinsed out the wash, I would help her turn the crank on the mangle while she fed the sheets or clothes through. Then I would help her hang the wash on the line to dry out over the backyard. She would be in front, and I would hand her the sheet so that she could clip a clothespin on it before feeding the line out. When it was dried, I would help her fold it up. Then I also found out that when she was preparing the evening meal, I could help her wash the vegetables, cut them up, and so on. That was my way of being close to my mom without being in her way. Of course, the girls were busy with schoolwork and trying to maintain good grades, so it felt almost natural that helping Mom would fall on me. She never complained, she never asked me, but, on the other hand, whenever we worked together, we coordinated pretty well.

There was only one time Mom got peeved at me. She was making rice wine, and, of course, any Chinese knows that rice wine is not wine—it's distilled whisky used for cooking. So Mom got everything started, and we were in the distillation process. She had all these empty bottles waiting, and it was drip, drip, drip. She told me, "I want you to watch these, and when a bottle gets full, I want you to slip in an empty bottle." It was going so slowly that I went out to play. I didn't realize I was out that long. When I came back, there was wine on the floor. I had never seen my mother so mad—she was ready to kill me! But she finally simmered down, and she said, "I want you to sit right here and watch. No going outside." She never struck me, but I knew she was peeved at me, and I knew she had cause to be peeved. So from then on, whenever she made rice wine, Mom would make absolutely sure I had a chair so that I could sit right there and watch every drip, drip, drip.

Things got better after we moved to Trenton Street, but our parents continued to stress the importance of being frugal and self-reliant to us. There were never leftovers as such. The only thing that we needed the cupboard for was Pop's marmalade, the unused butter, and a can of evaporated milk, usually with a piece of wax paper stuck into the opening. That was all we needed; everything else was in daily use. Once in a while, we got canned goods like corned beef from a family that was on welfare—this was during the Depression. I remember asking my father, "Why don't we just go



ahead and apply for welfare and get it ourselves?" He said, "No, these people are giving these things away because they don't want to waste it. We'll take it, but we're not going to ask for anything as long as we can get by." To this day, I call it *haan* (being frugal), and other people may call it something else. There are people who have thrown away canned meat or boxes of cereal. And when I see anything thrown away, I'll pick it up because I can't stand wasting food. I would literally throw away a five-dollar bill before I would throw away food, because food is food in hand; the five-dollar bill only represents the purchasing power to buy food.

I wasn't designated to be the scrounger for the family; it just came about naturally. The produce section used to be on Davis Street—a five-block spread between Jackson and California streets—before they moved to South San Francisco. When we needed vegetables, I would go down to the produce section, because I knew it from my paper route. I would scrounge carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, and whatever was available and bring them home to supplement our vegetable diet. On Clay Street, right below Kearny Street, was the poultry and fish wholesale area. The poultry market would put chicken feet, duck feet, and turkey feet in separate fifty-gallon drums, and anyone could come by and grab a sackful. Turkey feet were the primary pick because they had eatable tendons; then duck feet next. The fish markets would filet the fish, and fish being one of the cheapest meats you could buy at the time, they didn't worry about taking every bit of meat off. I would bring home fish heads and fish tails, and Mom would make a stew or use them to make a fish stock to go with the vegetables. The first time I brought vegetables home, Mom said, "Where did you get these?" I said, "From the produce section." And she said, "How much did it cost you?" I said, "Nothing, it's free. Anytime you want vegetables, I can get it for you." I added, "Different kinds, too." She said, "I understand." She didn't say, "You have to do it." She just appreciated the fact that I did it; the same thing with the fish heads, the turkey feet, and so on.

We never bought fresh bread or fresh pastries. On a weekly basis, my mother would hand me a quarter and I was supposed to run down to Eighth and Howard, where the day-old Langendorf Bakery was, and buy the weekly supply of bread and breakfast rolls. I had acquired a pair of roller skates, so without my mother's knowledge, I would use the roller skates to skate

down to Eighth and Howard. It was a pretty fast trip if I didn't fool around, except that I usually did. Crystal Palace used to be at Eighth and Market. It was at least half a square block, and it was all enclosed. They had different vendors selling cheese, smoked meats, bacon, hams, and staples—anything that you wanted to buy in the way of food. There were, of course, people like the snake oil salesman, who would put on a show to attract customers to their stands. And there were always free samples of squares of cheeses and salami, boloney, or whatever they were trying to push. So once I got to Eighth and Market, I would take off my skates and casually walk through Crystal Palace, taking in the food displays and spectacular demonstrations. Then I would put on my skates again and go to Eighth and Howard to do my shopping and come back. The bread was used to make sandwiches and the rolls for breakfast. Every afternoon at 4:00 Mom and Pop had toast and coffee. That was their daily ritual, when they both sat down for half an hour and relaxed.

We didn't start celebrating birthdays until we got more settled on Trenton Street, and, of course, with six kids, there was always someone's birthday or another. Mom had one rule—we could pick pork chops or hamburger, and there was always a cake from Victoria Pastry. If we wanted hamburger, she would go down to Duck Hing, which was on the corner of Washington and Wentworth. The butcher would say, "How many pounds do you want, Mrs. Fung?" And she would say, "X number of pounds." He would cut up a big chunk of chuck and show it to her. Then he would go and grind it. She didn't want hamburger that was already ground; she wanted to know exactly what went into that hamburger. Strangely enough, we would usually all pick hamburger. She would cook it and serve the patty on a sourdough bun—a regular American hamburger, but no French fries. I'm not sure where Mom picked it up, but she decided, "Okay, now that we can afford it, we're going to do it."

#### FAMILY RELATIONS

The birth order in our family was Mary, Jessie, Mints, Grace, me, and Bill. Regardless of the birth order, there's always someone who takes more responsibility than the other siblings, and in my family that was Jessie. She

was always the one who looked after us outside the house. She was bossy, but not to the point where it would bother me. There was no question that if she wanted you to do something, she would make sure you knew. When she and Mary were going to UC Berkeley, and on their way home one afternoon they encountered a masher, Jess took off her shoe and just beat him over the head. That's the kind of person Jess is. I mean, if you don't bother her, she's a perfectly cordial person, but if you bug her, you better stand aside because she's going to do something about it. I never could figure out why my father felt that I had to be the chaperone when Jess was perfectly capable of handling any situation. But then again, my father was old-fashioned. He believed that it was the responsibility of the



FIG. 4. The interior of the Crystal Palace Market at Market and Eighth streets, 1935. Courtesy San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

men in the family to protect the women. "I don't care if you blush, I don't care if you're standing one foot to the other," he said to me. "You're a man in the family, and you're to fulfill your obligations." And that was that!

When I was at the playground and people asked me who Grace was, I would say, "That's my *dei* (older sister). I always liked that about the Chinese family system. There was no question about whether your sister was older or younger, or whether an uncle was on the maternal side or the paternal side, and so on. I loved it because it was so orderly and you knew exactly where you stood in the family. When we were growing up, I didn't just say, "Hey, you, kid," to my brother Bill. I always addressed him as "*sai lo* (younger brother)," and he would call me "*gor* (older brother)." It was perfectly natural, and each member of the family would look out for the others in the family. All my sisters would have the responsibility of looking after me, and I would have to pay attention and answer to their authority. And I was supposed to take care of my younger brother. If I said anything to him, he was supposed to respond to my authority. But Bill, being much taller than I, always resented the fact that I was big brother and he was little brother. That was enough for us to get into a fight every day. Then, of course, Pop would hear about it. We always thought he was omnipotent. Here he was stuck in his watch repair shop, but he knew exactly what we had been up to because Chinatown was such a close-knit community.

In a way, I hated the fact that the boundaries of Chinatown were limited by Sacramento Street on the south, Pacific Avenue on the north, Kearny Street on the east, and Powell Street on the west. It was basically twelve square blocks. I didn't know the word "ghetto" then, but I knew that we were confined to living within these boundaries. On the other hand, the thing I loved about Chinatown was the fact that we were a very close-knit community. Everyone looked out for all the kids to make sure that they didn't get into trouble and that no one tried to molest them. And if any of us got into a fight, it would be reported to our parents. Just like this business about "It takes a village to raise a child," it was literally true in Chinatown. In our time, Chinatown was comprised largely of bachelors, because men couldn't bring their wives over for one reason or another, so all children were loved and appreciated. We knew that everyone cared.





FIG. 5. *From left to right: Eddie with his nephew Raymond, sister Grace, and brother Bill, 1930.*

## GOING TO SCHOOL

It was a big deal for me when I started preschool at five years old. It was held in the backyard of the Gum Moon school for girls on Washington Street—only a block away from home. I was only there from 9:00 to 12:00 in the morning. But I remember it was a big adventure, because when my mother took me to school in the morning, we had to cross Stockton Street. Then when I started first grade at Commodore Stockton Elementary School, I remember some of the kids who were homesick started crying almost immediately. But I loved school because of the novelty of being in a new situation. We were exposed to so much that we didn't know about—the multiplication tables, English grammar, classical music, geography, and so on. We used to read the Kiplinger newsletter, which showed us statistics on what a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or teacher earned—I guess to start us thinking about career choices. The teachers also exposed us to current events and economics—it was all new to me.

The only time I was ever absent from school was when my mother needed me to go downtown to interpret for her. Well, there was one other time I missed school. I remember it was a nice day, and I decided I was just going

to take a walk and enjoy the day. The next day, the principal, Miss Crow, called me into her office. She said, "Eddie, do you have a written excuse from your parents?" I said, "For what?" She said, "You were a truant yesterday." I said, "What's a truant?" And she said, "You know, playing hooky." I said, "I didn't think I was playing hooky. It was such a nice day, I just wanted to enjoy it." She said, "Okay, I'm going to let it go this time, but until you graduate from Commodore Stockton, you're supposed to attend school every day no matter how nice the day is." So I never did that again, because all she had to do was threaten to notify my parents, and that was enough to put the fear of God in me.

One other time, when I was in the third grade, Miss Crow asked the school nurse to measure our height and weight. The nurse was completely befuddled because we all refused. She didn't know what to make of it, so she consulted the only Chinese teacher at that time—Miss (Alice) Fong. She told her, "I'm coming across a disciplinary problem that I've never had before. All I asked them to do was to come up to the nurse's office to have their height and weight recorded. The kids all refused and they said, 'Tomorrow, we'll do it tomorrow.'" So Miss Fong told the nurse, "If you had come to me with the assignment, I would have told you not to do it today but notify the class that you're going to do it tomorrow." The nurse asked, "What's the problem?" And she replied, "The problem is that they want to be sure that they come to class with socks that don't have holes in them, or at least mended. That's why they're not willing to do it today, because some of the kids may have holey socks." The nurse thought that was real funny because she didn't care and she couldn't understand why we cared. We were only nine, ten years old, but we were already conscious of the fact that we had a standard to uphold. Sure enough, the next morning, the class marched right up to the nurse's office, took their shoes off, and had their height and weight recorded. I guess the teachers were learning about us at the same time we were learning from them.

I loved going to American school, but Chinese school was another matter. It went from 5:00 to 8:00 Monday to Friday, and from 9:00 to 12:00 on Saturday morning. I was probably seven when I started at Nam Kue, which was supposed to be the best Chinese school. Unfortunately, I was not a good student because I just had no interest in what they were trying to teach me—



things like Chinese calligraphy, literature, and history. By then, I had discovered a wider world outside of Chinatown, and that was what I was interested in. I flunked out of three Chinese schools before I finally persuaded my father to let me drop Chinese school altogether. When I realized it was costing him a buck and a quarter for each child he sent to Chinese school, I told him, "You're just wasting your money. I'm not getting anything out of it." So he decided, "Okay, we'll let you drop out before they throw you out again."

You might say that our generation had split personalities. When we were inside the house, we were completely Chinese. When we were outside the house, we could be either all Chinese or all American or half and half. When we were in American school, one standard applied, whereas another standard applied when we were in Chinese school. If I were out at a formal dinner, I would naturally spoon my soup outwardly and I would not slurp. If I were home, it would not matter how I dipped my spoon, but I would know to pick food from the part of the communal dish nearest me. In that sense, we always behaved according to where we were. But gradually I became more comfortable speaking English than Chinese. That is why my Chinese is frozen more or less as if I were an eleven-, twelve-year-old Chinese kid, and why I am not proficient in Chinese even though I grew up in Chinatown.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Growing up as we did, recreation was something that required ingenuity. In other words, everything we did, we did with anything. If we needed something like a shuttlecock, we made it—we didn't buy it, or we used a beanbag instead of a shuttlecock. Basically, aside from playing jacks, hopscotch, and double jump rope with my sisters, we boys played "kick the shuttlecock" and flew kites. When I was nine, I joined the Boy Scouts at the Chinatown YMCA. I remember distinctly one of the group leaders was Chester Lee, and he helped us through tenderfoot class, where we were taught how to tie knots, how to camp and start a fire without matches, and basic things like that. I remember that they tried to get us to buy uniforms, but we didn't have the money. They said it was possible to buy just one piece of the uniform to

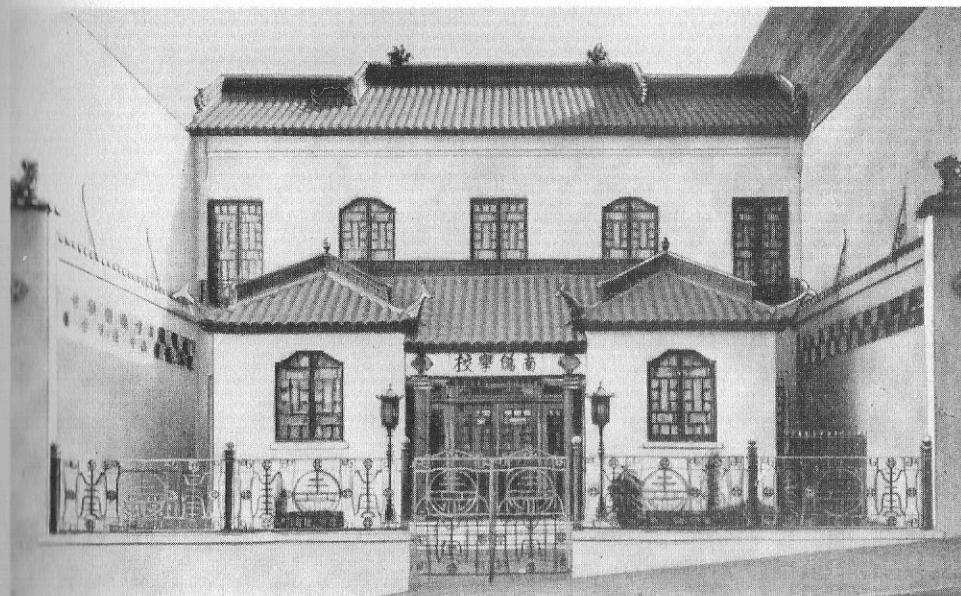


FIG. 6. *The Nam Kue Chinese School at 765 Sacramento Street. Courtesy California Historical Society, FN-23698.*

FIG. 7. *Eddie (center right) trying to light a firecracker in Chinatown during the New Year celebration, 1935. Courtesy San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*



indicate that you were a member. So we decided on the kerchief, since it was fairly reasonable in price. But I only stayed about a year because I didn't particularly care for the group activities. The other thing was that you had to pass a swimming test. I tried, but I was so lean and had so little body fat that I literally did not float. Now, they say that's impossible—you fill your lungs with air and you're supposed to float. But for some reason, I swam like a rock.

I remember spending a lot of time at the public library in Chinatown, and that was how I accidentally found J. W. Schultz. He wrote about the Plains Indians, particularly the Blackfeet, who were enemies of the Crows. No one told me about his books, but I read everything he wrote and just got more and more interested in the Plains Indians and how they lived off the land: "You're not a farmer, you're a hunter, and maybe a gatherer." It seemed like such a natural way of life: "You're not trying to conquer nature, you're part of nature." Indians didn't feel that they owned the land; rather, they were stewards of the land. They respected what Mother Nature had provided for them, so they only killed animals for their own survival and subsistence, not for profit. However, I didn't care for the part when they went on raiding parties against the Crows. I never thought of Indian life in those terms. I just thought it seemed like such a neat way to live.

I especially enjoyed *Seizer of Eagles*, a story about how this Indian boy hid himself in a hideout near the eagle's nest and waited for the chance to get his hands on some eagle feathers that he needed for a war bonnet. When the eagle landed, he reached up and grabbed both the legs, and held the bird until the eagle got tired of beating its wings or pecking at his hands to get free. Then he was able to take the feathers. Stories like this attracted me to the Indian way of life. A bow and arrow was just a natural implement to help them survive. And the way they utilized every bit of the buffalo for making teepees or clothing or moccasins, and boiling the hooves for glue—to me, it was just a natural way to live. Of course, I probably would not have lasted a week with the hardships that they had to endure every day. But on paper it sounded very romantic.

I remember one time we had a school project to design an Indian head. I don't know where I developed this tendency to go right to the source, but I decided the way to go about it was to ask an artist directly. So my



FIG. 8. *The Chinatown public library at 1135 Powell Street. Courtesy San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.*

classmate Ronald Ong and I marched over to Maynard Dixon's studio on Montgomery Street, and I said to him, "Mr. Dixon, we have a school project to try and design an Indian head for a trademark. Can you help us out?" Maynard Dixon was a well-known painter of Western art, and he had just returned from a painting trip to Boulder Dam. He started pulling out artifacts from his loft to show us—like Indian headdresses, blankets, peace pipes, and moccasins. He said he had done a lot of paintings of Indians, and he proceeded to show us some of the things that he had done. Then he made us a sketch. Here I had been exposed to the writings of J. W. Schultz, who wrote about the Blackfeet Indians, and now I was lucky enough to find an artist who not only specialized in painting Indians, but he had been up in Montana living and painting among the Blackfeet Indians! That evening I ran home and told my mom, "There's someone who's willing to teach me how to paint." Mom said, "No, no, no, you can't make a living doing that." Of course, she was right. In our time, we had to be very practical.



One of the customers on my paper route was a friend of C. S. Howard, who owned the famous racehorse Seabiscuit. Noticing my size—I was about four feet eight and eighty pounds soaking wet at the time—he asked me, “Do you like horses, Eddie?” I said, “Yes, but I’ve never been around them.” And he said, “My friend C. S. Howard is looking for an exercise boy.” I said, “What’s an exercise boy?” He said, “Well, he’s the person who takes the horses out in the morning and exercises them.” So I went home and told my mother, “I can be a jockey!” And she said, “I don’t want you hanging around with those gangsters.” To this day, I still wonder how in the world did she know horse racing was an unsavory trade when she lived and died in Chinatown, she didn’t read English, and she didn’t socialize with a lot of people? But my tendency has always been to do what I’m told not to do. So when Mom said I couldn’t be a jockey, I decided to find out what it was all about. I went out to the polo fields and began walking the horses between chukkers. For that, I got two bits per horse.

#### A TASTE OF LIFE OUTSIDE CHINATOWN

The school nurse was always concerned about the fact that some of us were underweight, so every summer they would send a group of us—about forty Chinese kids—to Hills Farm in Marin County to try and fatten us up. The farm was run by the school district, and there was no cost to our families. It was my first exposure to an American diet. We had things like prunes and cornflakes for breakfast, sandwiches and fruit for lunch, and spaghetti or macaroni and cheese for dinner. On Sundays we would have something special, like pot roast. I remember distinctly the first time we had beets. I thought it looked pretty bloody, but when I tasted it, it was sweet. I thought, “Holy smoke, this is entirely different from Chinese vegetables!” We ate three American meals a day, so that I gained four or five pounds by the end of summer. But within a month after I started school again, I would go back to my normal weight, which was underweight by the school nurse’s standards. So every summer for the next three years, they would schedule me to go to Hills Farm, and that was basically where I spent my summer vacations.

At Hills Farm, we had to take showers and recite the Lord’s Prayer before

we went to bed each night. There were planned group activities, but I was allowed to roam around on my own as long as I made it back in time for the meals. That was when I discovered things like lizards and dragonflies, and when I got interested in archery. I would cut a piece of rattan and string it, use reeds for the arrow, and put acorns on the tip of the arrow for the arrowhead. They had a dairy farm, and I would go out early in the morning to watch them milk the cows. That was my first encounter with rural life and the outdoors, and I was fascinated by it, mostly because I was a city kid who had always lived in very crowded quarters.

Later, Bill and I began spending our summers in Stockton, where Pop had a financial interest in a potato farm. We would stay there for a month or two, and that exposed me to farming life. Of course, Stockton was god-awful hot, and during the Depression years, you couldn’t make money in potatoes, but it was all a matter of timing. The farm employed thirty Chinese and Filipino men, who mainly worked out in the fields, plowing with horses. We got to feed the horses, drive the horse-drawn wagon, play around with a Caterpillar tractor, and learn to trap fish with a basket. We had chores to do, like gathering firewood, getting the eggs from the chicken coops, tending the vegetable patches, and helping the cook prepare meals, but it wasn’t hard work. Most of the time we went fishing and just ran around the farm. The cook grew long beans, tomatoes, and bok choy to feed the farmhands, and that was when I found out how sweet fresh vegetables could taste. It was also my first time using an outdoor privy, and I learned how human waste could be used for fertilizer.

At least once or twice during the summer, we would go into town with the workers after they were paid. Most of them would give us a nickel or dime to buy candy or go see a movie. While they went to the brothel or gambling house, Bill and I would cool off at the movie house. Most of the Filipino workers would dress up and spend their money freely in town, but there was one Filipino who never went to town and never gambled. I noticed that in his spare time in the evenings, he would make fishnets. He told me that he was hoping to go back to the Philippines and start a small fishing business. I always wondered what happened to him. Did he make it back to the Philippines and realize his dream? I couldn’t help but admire the man. Here he was working at slave wages during the Depression, but instead



of blowing his earnings in town like the others, he was saving to build a future.

There were other occasions when I got a taste of life outside Chinatown. One time we drove to San Jose to visit the Duk family. It was a weekend adventure because it took us half a day to get there on the two-lane road. Mrs. Duk had fig trees, and we were there at the right time of the year when the figs were ripe. Of course, we overdid it and had to run to the john frequently. A bunch of the ladies, including my mother, had a *balut* party. I was horrified when I saw these half-hatched eggs, and I thought, "Holy smoke, they're going to eat the things, feathers and all!" I found out later that they were supposed to be a delicacy.<sup>5</sup> That was the first time I had ever seen anyone with a house, a front yard, and a backyard. I thought, "Okay, people don't have to live in Chinatown in cold-water flats and conditions like that." That was also the first time I had ever met someone who looked Chinese but was, as I heard the ladies saying very softly, *boon tong faan*. I didn't know what that meant, so I asked my mother after we got home. She basically said, "He has a white father and a Chinese mother." And she told me that sometimes they look more Chinese and sometimes they look half and half, but very seldom do they look white. That was my first experience, besides Hills Farm and Stockton, going outside San Francisco. Those were the kinds of experiences that got me thinking, "There's got to be another world outside Chinatown!"

#### A HOUSEBOY IN ANTIOCH

I was determined to get out of Chinatown. The first time I ran away from home, I was thirteen. I got a job as a houseboy in Antioch with Dr. and Mrs. Nevius. Mrs. Nevius had a sister who worked at the Emporium, and she had put an ad in the paper for a houseboy. When I saw the ad, it said, "Five dollars a week and found." Well, the only definition I knew for "found" was the past tense of "find." So I went to the public library and there was this big unabridged dictionary on the stand, and I was looking for the word "found." The librarian saw I was puzzled and asked if she could help me. I said, "Well, I've got this word, 'found,' and I'm trying to find out what it means." I showed her the ad. She said, "Oh, I understand. That means you

get room and board." She said the reason they used that word was because "room and board" involved three words, and they were paying by the word for the ad. Anyhow, that was how I found the job.

Mrs. Nevius had to teach me how to be a houseboy. Like the first morning, when she was cooking breakfast, she fried some bacon. So, naturally, I expected her to fry the eggs in the bacon grease, because that was what we always did at home. What happened instead was that she took the bacon out and put it on a piece of paper towel to drain. Then she set out another pan, put in a pat of butter, and fried the eggs in that. And I was thinking, "Holy smoke, these Americans are strange people!" When it came to washing dishes—here I was used to bowls and chopsticks, and that was it. We wound up with a bowl of soapy water, and she told me, "First we wash the glasses, because they're the least dirty. Then you go from the least dirty to the dirtiest—pots and pans." All this was new to me. Like vacuuming—that was strange too. But she was very patient, and she eventually got me to do what she wanted me to do.

This was during the summer, when I got the job, and my brother found me within one day. I asked Al years later how he found me so quickly. He said, "It was very simple. I just went down to the bus station and asked if they had seen a Chinese kid, four and a half feet tall, going anywhere." He said he hit it on the first try because there were only two bus stations—Trailway on Fourth Street and Greyhound on Seventh Street. He went to Fourth Street first, and, sure enough, they said, "Yes, a little Chinese kid got on the bus to go to Antioch." After he found me, he called my dad. Pop said, "Okay, let him finish the job this summer, but he's to come back and finish school in the fall." When I got home, he said, "Aren't you happy at home?" I said, "Yes." Then he said, "Then why did you run away?" I said, "Well, you've always taught us to be independent and self-reliant." And he said, "There's a time and place for that. Not now! I want you to finish high school first."

#### LIVING IN GRASS VALLEY

In the fall I went back to Francisco Junior High School. I didn't really need the money from the houseboy job because I was making better money with

the paper route, but I had wanted to strike out on my own. As it turned out, I didn't finish junior high because my father retired from the watch repair business, turned it over to my brother Al, and became a partner in a butcher shop in Grass Valley. One reason he got into the butcher business was because my brother Pee Wee was a meat cutter on a passenger liner. He wanted to see if he could entice Pee Wee to be a land lover instead of a sailor. My father asked if I wanted to go along, saying how nice it would be to see snow in Grass Valley. He wasn't foolish enough to try and get me up there to work. He knew the change was what I wanted. So I went up there and started working in the meat market while I went to school.

The butcher shop was in the Hills Flat area, in a market that was owned by a Chinese family with the surname Yee. We just owned and operated the butcher shop. There were four meat cutters, my dad, and me—six people altogether. Basically, the shop was open from 8:00 in the morning to 10:00 at night. I remember the last thing we did at night was to put everything back into the walk-in icebox, so that the first thing we did in the morning was to put everything back out in the display case. It was kind of like a jewelry store, where the jeweler would put all the jewelry in a safe at night, and in the morning, he would put them back out. During the school day, I would get up early in the morning and start the display case. That would basically be the lunchmeats, hot dogs, bacon, and the hams—things that didn't require a lot of finesse—because the butchers preferred to put out the chops and the steaks themselves. Then I would head for school at around 7:30, stay there until 3:00 and sometimes 4:00, then come back to work at the meat counter until closing time. On weekends, I would put in full days.

I basically did all the grunt work, like slicing the lunch meat, keeping the meat trays full, grinding the hamburger, making sausage, and washing the windows on the display case inside and out. When the meat cutters were through with their jobs at the end of the day, they would take off. It was my job to stay behind and scrape off the butcher blocks, clean up the meat grinders and all the hand tools, put the knives away, and make sure that things in the walk-in icebox were neatly arranged. I was fourteen when I learned to be a meat cutter—that's really the only trade I know. The first thing I learned to do was how to bone—take the meat off the bone. That was how I learned to handle a knife, because I couldn't do any harm get-

ting pieces of meat off the bone. We used to get calves with the skin on and Pop would always take care of the skinning. I would watch him and he would show me what he was doing and why he was doing it that way. I learned that it was important not to cut the skin; otherwise, it would lose its value after it was cured. There was a knife for everything in the butcher shop—boning knife, skinning knife, steak knife, all kinds—and I learned how to use each one of them.

I was also given the responsibility of tallying the receipts at the end of the day. We had a lot of charge accounts, because most of our customers worked in the gold mines and they would get paid either by the week or the month. Every Friday night I would take all the checks and the monies and make up the deposit slips. This was even before I had had a business class in high school, and Pop would just show me what to do. He would check me out the first few times to make sure I had done everything right and that I had totaled everything up correctly. Then I would put everything in a tin cottage-cheese can and walk it over to the bank on Saturday morning. Here I was, no more than five feet tall and eighty-five pounds, walking from Hills Flat to downtown where the bank was—about a mile and a quarter. I was carrying money in this tin can—sometimes as much as \$400—and not once was I ever accosted. We were living at a time when you could do that.

We lived behind the supermarket in two cabins that we rented from a Mr. Coffin. I'll remember that name until the day I die! The cabins were at least ten feet wide and about sixteen feet deep, so we basically had two rooms easily. One room was for the bunk beds, and the other we used for eating, reading the newspaper, and so on. We had a cooking arrangement in the middle of the room, with cupboards, sink, and stove, so that was a natural partition between the two rooms. Mom, Pop, and I stayed in one cabin; Pee Wee and the other butchers stayed in the second cabin. As I recall, my mom was there about four months out of the year. She would prepare the meals, and people would eat in shifts because we couldn't all leave the shop at the same time. Other times, Pop would cook so the guys wouldn't have to do their own cooking. We were eating high on the hog because we could eat almost anything we wanted. We could have hamburger every day, or steaks and chops—that was something new for me. And I would use all



the scraps from the lunchmeats to make all kinds of sandwiches to take to school.

I started my first year of high school in Grass Valley. The thing I remember the most was English class, because they had a wide range of reading material that I probably would not have gotten in the San Francisco schools. It was all about old England, knighthood, and chivalry, like *Ivanhoe* and "The Charge of the Light Brigade." I also remember reading *Scaramouche* and *A Tale of Two Cities*—mostly historical novels. I probably had history, math, and science, but I don't have any recollection of those classes. But in woodshop, I remember guys were making their own skis. I asked Mom if I could learn to ski, and she said, "Oh, no, you'll break a leg, you'll break an arm, or break your neck." She was always so protective; her hair would probably turn gray if she knew what I had been doing without her knowledge. But as much as possible, I tried not to make her too apprehensive. So I didn't get a chance to ski—not even bobsledding or any of the snow sports. The other thing that was memorable was the fact that the creamery was about a block away from high school and they gave you a milkshake that was all you could do to finish for ten cents. Because they had their own dairy, the ice cream was homemade and fresh. I often ate my lunch there, but since I was lactose intolerant, it wouldn't do for me to have a milkshake every day.

As far as I can remember, most of the students were white, which was different from junior high school in San Francisco. But I had no problems with that. I remember one boy—a Jewish refugee from Germany—told us stories about how regimented life was in Germany and also how badly Jews were treated. That was why his family left, and that was the first I had ever heard of things like that happening in Europe. Except for another Chinese kid, George, I had very few friends. But then, even when I was attending school in San Francisco, I had no close friends. George and I weren't what you would call buddies. He was a year older and he had his own interests. But he had a car, so if I needed a ride, I would ask him. One time, we drove to San Francisco together for the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge—the only time I got away from Grass Valley.

It was in Grass Valley that I first started learning how to run. In P.E. they required everyone to get into some kind of physical activity. But when

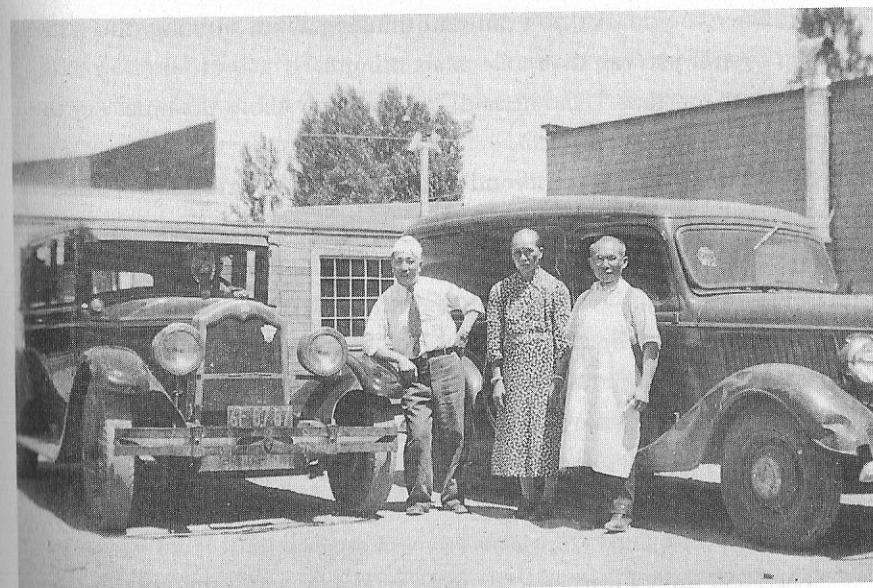


FIG. 9. Eddie's parents with one of the butchers (left) behind the store in Grass Valley in 1937.

I asked the gym teacher if I could take archery, he said, "No, you can't, you're not a girl." I said, "How about fencing?" And again he said, "Girls only." So I had to let that go too. I didn't want to play baseball, football, or any team sports like that, so I decided, "Okay, running is one activity I can do by myself." In the beginning, I would be lucky if I could make a quarter of a mile around the track. So the coach said, "What are you trying to do, Ed?" I said, "I'm going to try and run a mile." I was thinking of Glen Cunningham, who had overcome injuries from a fire at fifteen to become a world-renowned miler. He said, "Well, you're going to have to learn to jog first. If you have to, just walk." I said, "I already walk a lot." He said, "Jog then." So he showed me what to do. Pretty soon I could jog a mile. And he said, "Now, go for two. What you have to do is build up your legs so that you can go for five, six miles." This was long before the jogging craze took over. He said, "What you want to do is be able to get your second wind." That was the first time I had ever heard the term "second wind." He explained to me, "What happens is that you get to the point where you think you can run forever—that's when you have your second



wind. Once you do that, you can start thinking about running. You'll be doing good if you can do a mile in six minutes. If you can do it in five, you'll be in top class." And he said, "Don't worry about the time. Try to build up your stamina first."

Well, I never did get my second wind. He would tell me, "You're pushing too hard. Just work on it gradually. Don't worry about the time. Just build up your stamina." So that's what I did—I would just run to build up stamina. I would jog at about nine minutes to a mile, which is very slow, but it was more important to me that I jog long distances rather than run distances fast. I wasn't running for the team, relays, or anything else. I was just running for the enjoyment of it, even though I didn't enjoy it at the beginning, because it seemed like I wasn't making any progress. I was hoping to run five-minute miles, but I knew that I wasn't even close to that. So I just kept jogging.

The other thing I learned to do in Grass Valley was to shoot. I think it was one of the customers who first told me about the NRA club downtown. We were talking, and he found out I was interested in shooting and that I owned a single-shot, Irving .22 rifle—something I had purchased with earnings from my paper route. Back in those days, they weren't that strict about gun control, and the weapon only cost me a dollar and a half. Mom and Pop allowed me to keep it, after telling me to be sure not to hurt anyone with it. So this customer told me about the indoor course they had at the NRA, and he said, "They have people there who can teach you how to take care of guns and all the safety rules." I never became a member, but I would go there and try to learn to shoot accurately in their indoor range. That was when I got the most use out of my Irving .22. I wasn't interested in shooting game. I just wanted to learn to use a weapon, and that was all.

The first time I experienced snow was not in Grass Valley but in San Francisco in 1931. I remember Bill and I went out to an empty lot behind Chinese Hospital and we tried to gather up enough snow to make a snowball. But it was so soft and fluffy that by the time we put our hands on it, it would melt. So when Pop told me that Grass Valley had a lot of snow, I was fascinated by the idea of just seeing snow. I was only there for one winter, but it turned out to be one of the harshest winters they had ever had

in the Grass Valley and Nevada City area. In fact, the whole city was closed off for several weeks, and supplies were running low, so they were kind of worried about that. On the other hand, they knew that sooner or later, the weather would break and they would be able to get trucks up and back from Sacramento, where they got their supplies. But the first time it snowed, it was great because I didn't know what was involved. Eventually, I found out that there was snow to be shoveled off the sidewalk, and when I walked to school, I had to be careful about slipping or falling on the icy spots. Then I found out that even out in the hills, I couldn't just walk around, because I would be waist deep in snow. But still, it was a new experience for me, stomping around in the snow.

Living in Grass Valley was quite an experience, because coming from San Francisco Chinatown to wide-open country turned out to be a revelation for me. In San Francisco we had had to live in segregated quarters, whereas in Grass Valley we could live like other folks. Even though I didn't have all the time in the world to enjoy the outdoors, I didn't have to go far, because the Hills Flat market was in the outskirts of town. All I had to do was walk a couple of blocks and I would be out in the forest, so I did a lot of hiking. Since then, I've always enjoyed being outdoors and more or less by myself.

#### LOSING MY VIRGINITY

I was fifteen when I lost my virginity at a house of prostitution in Grass Valley. I used to deliver their order from the meat market and the grocery store, usually in the late morning or early afternoon. The ladies were not working during those hours. They were more or less just getting up and having their coffee, cigarettes, and so on. The first time I delivered their order, they kind of teased me. At that time, I blushed easily, and, of course, the more I blushed, the more they teased me. The madam came in and said, "Girls, girls, girls, don't tease the help." So that was basically my first encounter with the ladies.

Now, I had never had what is now commonly known as sex education. I had never asked my older brothers, who were raising their families, and I didn't talk to other guys about it in school. I knew nothing about sex. So

gradually, each time that I delivered an order, the ladies would tease me. Then they invited me in for coffee. That was how we got started as casual acquaintances. I wasn't one of their clients at that time, and I had no thoughts about becoming one. This was the first time I had ever talked to ladies who were not my sisters or my mother, because I had never talked to any of the girls at school. Little by little, I got to know them as ladies. When they found out I was from San Francisco, they started telling me how sometimes when they had spare time, they would go to San Francisco to do weekend shopping for clothes and so on.

I guess it was a couple of months later when I got up the nerve to walk up there one evening. A colored maid came to the door, and I guess she must have heard about me from the girls, because she yelled to the madam, "Eddie's here!" I almost turned around and ran down the stairs, I was so embarrassed. The madam said, "Are you here for what I think you're here for?" I said, "Well, I've never been *there* before." And she said, "Well, I think I have just the person to introduce you to the joys of sex." Of course, I found out later that there is no such thing as the joys of sex for a prostitute. They want to get the man to climax as quickly as possible and get him through in the shortest time possible. Of course, I wasn't aware of that then. But the first time, this young lady Marie treated me almost as if we were on a date. She gradually took me through the steps, and that night was when I lost my virginity.

I think I went back two or three times over a period of a year. And I always asked for Marie. I was bashful at the time, and I thought that if I stayed with one lady, it would make it a lot easier for me. The first time she had her period, and I went up there, the maid told me, "She's in flower." I didn't know what that meant, and she said, "Well, ladies have these periodically—usually once a month. But the other ladies are available." And I said, "No, I'll just wait." When I saw Marie the next time, I asked her, "What was all that about?" And she explained it all to me. They always treated me as a plaything in the sense that here was a kid who knew absolutely nothing about sex. In a way, they gave me a sex education. In return, I always treated them not as prostitutes but ladies I knew. The fact that I could purchase their favor or their time didn't make them any less ladies. And they treated me not as a client but as a special person.

As far as I can remember, they were all white ladies. I think the youngest

one was probably twenty-one or twenty-two, and the oldest, as much as thirty-three to thirty-five. For the year that I was in Grass Valley, the same five ladies worked there, so there wasn't a big turnover. At that time, it was a dollar and a half, and a man could pick any of the five. With Marie, we were always cordial to each other. I never asked her why; I mean, I had no idea how people got into this business. The madam was responsible for the welfare of the girls, and, as far as I could tell, there was no coercion. To them, it was just a way of making a living. I had heard stories in Chinatown about how slave girls were brought over and forced into prostitution, but these ladies didn't appear to be in that situation at all.<sup>6</sup>

#### A HOLIDAY IN VANCOUVER

In 1937 my father decided that he was going to send my brother Bill and me to China for a Chinese education. Of course, we had no say, but I remember Henry Fung, a close friend of the family, saying, "You guys are going to have a lot of fun. You'll get to sit on a water buffalo with a little flute and just tend the cows." That was probably what first put the idea of becoming a cowboy in my mind. We had our ID cards ready, and we were to ship out from Seattle. That was when Pop decided, "Okay, the whole family is going up there." That included my mother, my father, my four sisters, Bill, and me. Then he decided, "While we're here and the ship's not going to be sailing for a while, why don't you kids head up to Vancouver and have a holiday." He didn't want to go with us because he wasn't legal and he was still leery about being discovered. And Mom didn't want to go because she was afraid of getting hassled by the immigration authorities. So the six of us went to Vancouver by ourselves and spent about four days there. That was my first encounter with "blue Sundays," when everything was closed—all the theaters and all the shops—and we thought that was strange. Then when we came back to Seattle on the cruise ship, Pop decided the war situation in China looked too unsettled, and he said, "Nope, I'm not going to send you boys back."<sup>7</sup>

To show you how inexpensive that trip was, when we first got there that evening on the train, we went to a Chinese restaurant. Pop ordered food for the eight of us, and the whole meal was ten dollars. And for the first



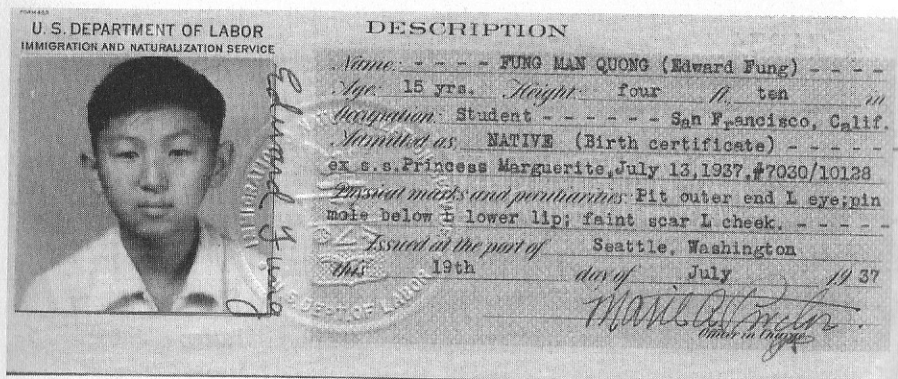


FIG. 10. Eddie's certificate of identity—required of all Chinese persons to prove their right to remain in and return to the United States.

time in my life, I saw my dad leave a silver dollar for a tip. My dad was worldly in the sense that even when he went to a coffee shop and had a twenty-five-cent lunch special, he would leave a tip. He had, in his vest pockets, nickels in a certain pocket, dimes in another, and so on. He told us, "Always leave a tip. You don't have to be extravagant, but leave something appropriate, even if it's only a nickel." We were always stringent in our spending, and we thought this was outright extravagant. But he told us, "When you're traveling, your behavior has to be different from what you do at home." As a Chinese businessman, he was always careful about protecting his character—how he was seen and how he behaved towards others.

The Vancouver trip reminded me of the time our family went on a picnic to Fleishacker Zoo. We made up a suit box full of sandwiches, dessert, fruits, and drinks. There may well have been as many as two of these suit boxes. The same thing was true when we went on the train to Seattle. We didn't eat on the train, except what we brought. I'll never forget how we walked from Fleishacker Zoo to the Playland. Give or take, it had to be at least two miles, and Pop could still outwalk us. He had an artificial limb and no knee joint, but that never stopped him.

## LEAVING HOME

When we got back from Seattle, I told my father that I had had enough of Grass Valley and that I would prefer to finish high school in San Francisco.

Back then, the high schools in the city were specialized. Commerce High School was exactly that—people went there to learn business things. Mission High was like a trade school, Galileo High was general ed, and Polytechnic High was basically polytechnical. Lowell, of course, was academic—college prep. I thought I wanted to become a mechanical engineer, without knowing what it was all about. It almost sounds foolish, but I saw one of these signs they have when they're putting up a building. The architect's name was followed by the mechanical engineer's name. For some reason, "Mechanical Engineer" caught my eye. I remember when I got to our drafting class at Polytechnic High School, Mr. Walker saw that my report card had been signed by Al as my guardian. He asked me, "How is Mr. Albert Quong your guardian?" And I said, "Well, he's my oldest brother, and my father wasn't around to sign the report card." So he said, "Albert Quong is your brother? Well then, I will expect you to make drawings as neatly as he did." And I thought, "Holy smoke, after twenty some odd years, he recognizes his name and remembers his work!" That sort of put me on my toes.

I finished my first year of high school, then I was thrown out in my sophomore year for being a wise guy. We got two grades in high school—one for academics and one for deportment. I could always get by with academics, but I always got low grades in deportment because I would talk back to the teacher. I didn't like authority, and I was getting antsy about leaving school. What happened at Poly was that the teacher in my English class gave me a failing grade for both. I protested because I didn't think I deserved the failing grade for my academic work. But she said, "Because your deportment was so bad, I'm failing you in both." When I protested to the principal, he said, "I have to go along with the teacher." I was already in the frame of mind to quit school anyway, so it didn't matter to me. It just gave me an excuse to leave school earlier.

I had been making plans to leave home from the time when I was in Antioch. I found out that when a student turned sixteen, he could no longer be considered a truant. So I decided that on my sixteenth birthday, I was going to leave home and go far away so my folks would no longer fuss over me. By then I was really into horses, and I figured the way to be around horses was to work on a ranch. I got a map of the United States and told my brother Bill to blindfold me. I said, "I'll take any state that is from Mon-



tana down to Texas. Somewhere along there, I'll find a cattle ranch." It was like "pin the tail on the donkey"—he spun me around and moved the map around, and where I pinned the tail turned out to be Midland, Texas. Of course, I didn't know that Midland was not a cattle town but an oil town! I had saved about a hundred dollars, and I figured *that* would last me at least two months if I didn't find a job right away. Then, of course, I had to have the bus fare. I decided to get a half-fare bus ticket for kids under twelve, so I got Bill, who was four inches taller than me, to go with me to Trailway to buy the ticket. He was the only one who knew what I was going to do, and he was sworn to secrecy.

I took off to the bus station by myself, lugging my belongings in my father's carpetbag. I had an alarm clock to make sure that I got up on time for work, and some toiletries. I even scrounged a bed sheet from home, just to be sure that I had linen. I had two extra shirts and just the pair of pants that I had on, because I figured if I were going to work at a ranch, I would have to buy Levi's and work clothes like that later. And I brought along a pair of cowboy boots that I had picked up during my first year at Poly. That was basically what I had when I left home. It was the beginning of an adventure. I never had any qualms about being able to make it on my own, even at that age. If I couldn't find work on a ranch, I would work elsewhere doing anything. I wasn't worried. One thing for sure, I was not about to go home any day soon.

## TWO • A CHINESE COWBOY IN TEXAS

*I've always had this romantic notion that as a cowboy all you have to do is ride a horse and maybe herd a few cows. Then I found out, no, no, you have to do things like build fences, maintain water tanks and windmills, and at some of the ranches you might even have to plant a crop or two to feed the horses and hogs. It was nothing but hard work. So, right away, my illusions of the movie cowboy were shattered. It was up to me to face the reality of the situation and start learning from that point.*

### LOOKING FOR WORK IN MIDLAND

When I got off the bus in Midland, the first thing I did was to ask people at the bus depot where I could find a room. At the time, it never occurred to me that someone might not want to rent a room to a Chinese person. I didn't think of myself as a Chinese and I didn't project myself as a Chinese. Besides, I was only five feet tall and non-threatening, so most people took me to be nothing more than a young adventurer. In fact, many of my Texan friends later told me, "We thought it was pretty funny. Here was a big city boy coming to Texas wanting to be a cowboy when most Texans would give their eyeteeth just to get away from that kind of life." Anyhow, this person at the depot told me about the Haley Hotel. He said, "It's very moderately priced and clean and not far from downtown."