



Gum Saan Journal

Volume 33, Number 1
2011

Introduction: Slices of Chinese American Life

By Judy Soo Hoo

Sam the Boss or Lum Hing

By Ronald James Wong, DDS

That's Not Chinese Food!

By Susie Szetzo Price

Discovering Ohana

By Bo-Gay Tong Salvador

The Great Famine and Poisonous Milk Powder

By Ann Lau

Me and Angie Jolie

By Linda Chong

The Anniversary Party

By Marshall Wong

Memphis Revisited, First Grade Impressions

By Shirley Chu-Ng

Published by



The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California



Copyright © 2011 by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

Publisher

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California
415 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.
Phone: 323-222-0856 Fax: 323-221-4162
Email: chssc@earthlink.net Website: www.chssc.org

2010-2011 Board of Directors

Gordon Hom, President
Susan Dickson, Vice President
Francine Redada, Vice President, Programs
Winifred Law, Secretary
Mei T. Ong, Membership Secretary
Dennis Lee, C.P.A., Treasurer
Kenneth L. Chan
Pedro Chan
Albert Chang, MD
Jenny Cho
Henry Leong
Richard Liu
Donald Loo
Eugene Moy
Diane Poon
William Tong

Gum Saan Journal

Editor: Susie Ling
Editorial Committee: Susie Ling, Icy Smith
Design and Production: Jennifer Thomas, Icy Smith

Article Submission

Gum Saan Journal is an annual publication. It solicits manuscripts that explore the historical, cultural, and humanistic aspects of Chinese American experiences, particularly relating to Southern California, as well as contemporary issues of relevance to the Chinese American community. Manuscripts should be approximately 3,000 words in length, using Chicago style of endnotes when necessary. If your manuscript is accepted for publication, you will be responsible for obtaining permission to reproduce any copyrighted materials used in your article.

Submissions should be addressed to:
Editorial Committee, Gum Saan Journal, CHSSC, 415 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, translated or transmitted in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.



Introduction: Slices of Chinese American Life

By Judy Soo Hoo

During the summer and fall of 2008, I had an opportunity to facilitate a writing workshop with members of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California directed at helping the participants write stories or narratives. Inspired by a previous oral history writing/performance workshop lead by playwright Henry Chan, our purpose was to encourage and develop community, family, and personal memories and narratives by members of the Chinese American community based on their lives or events in their lives. For eight Saturday mornings, a group of hardy and dedicated individuals gathered around a table at the downtown Chinese Historical Society of Southern California office to write, listen, comment, and support their fellow writers.

To encourage the participants to write, I used prompts or exercises to spark memories and harvest creativity. Some of the exercises included making a timeline of their life or writing about a memorable family event. I asked the participants to go where their impulses lead them and to follow a train of thought without censoring, to go down the path of their memories, to linger on details and characters, to find moments in their lifetime. Bit by bit, details began to emerge in sentences and paragraphs and eventually stories. The participants wrote and read their pieces around the table. As the weeks progressed, their voices became more personal, and more vivid. Finally, through the process of revision, they strove to find the right word or image to tell their story.

In February 2009, a reading of the works generated by the workshop was held at the Chinatown Public Library on a sun-soaked Saturday afternoon. For some writers, this was the first time that they had the opportunity to read their writing outside of the workshop. As the stories were told to an audience full of community members, friends, and family, I watched the audience





embrace the writers and their words, drawn in by their personal voices and experiences. I believe that every individual has the capacity for language and the ability to express oneself, if given the tools and desire. For Chinese Americans, it's imperative to pass along stories and personal narratives to family members and friends, as well as members of the larger community, to lay claim to history as well as the greater fabric of American life.

Much thanks to Anna Gee, who sparked conversation and helped to organize the workshop; Linda Chong, for offering her assistance in getting the stories in print; and Eugene Moy and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, for the space and support of the writing workshop and participants.

***About the Author:** Judy Soo Hoo, a writer and playwright, is currently finishing her MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts at UC Riverside. She is a second-generation Chinese American.*



Sam the Boss or Lum Hing

By Ronald James Wong, DDS

A few years ago, I saw a picture of a Chinese man holding a broom in a special exhibit at the Quicksilver Museum in New Almaden, California. I thought it unusual to have this man the focus of the exhibit. His name was "Chinese Sam." I remembered Aunt Grace mentioned our ancestor was from New Almaden and his name was "Sam the Boss." Could Chinese Sam be Sam the Boss or Lum Hing, who was the first generation of our family here in America? The father of Lily Lum, who married Hi Loy Wong from Fresno? The father of Charles Lum, who married Alma and lived in Selma? The



Ron Wong as his great-grandfather Lum Hing at Pioneer Day, New Almaden mine.

grandfather of Herbert Wong, Charley Wong, Lena Lew, Willie Wong, Grace Chow (Emory), Frank Wong (Nina), Raymond Wong (Ruth), Fred Wong (Alice), Marietta Ching (Dr. Phillip), Pearl Jean Luck (Charles), and George Wong (Violet)? The grandfather of Harold Lum, Bernice Leung (Elmer), Gladys Quan (Paul), Charles Lum Jr. (Ann), and Lillian Fung (David)?

You bet he was, and after some months of research, I gave a speech and told his story based on the facts, in the first person, as if I were Chinese Sam. I duplicated his dress as he was depicted in the museum photograph, with black vest, hat, and gold watch, and I sometimes spoke pidgin English, Spanish, and Chinese. It was all well received by the members of the Quicksilver Museum and their friends and sponsors on Pioneer Day.



Now a new book has been written about New Almaden mine, and Lum Hing is honored with a full-page photograph as the most famous Chinese of New Almaden. I provided the biographical information in the caption and also produced the photograph which was given to me by Sam's granddaughter and my second cousin, Bernice Leung. Go to page 117. The book is available at the gift shop at the Quicksilver Museum in New Almaden near San Jose. Images of America: New Almaden by Michael Boulland and Arthur Boudreault is published by Arcadia Publishing.

The authors, who are friends of mine and know me as Chinese Sam at the annual Pioneer Day, were careful to portray this pioneer as he was and not just as a stereotype with a broom. They want all to know that Sam was special. They preferred to use the family photograph from Bernice Lum Leung's collection in his formal dress. Read what I have to say about our own Lum Hing and be proud of his accomplishments as a man accepted and loved by the diverse community of the Almaden mine in the otherwise-hostile-to-"celestial" atmosphere of early California. They remember him because he was a special human being. He was our grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather. He was Sam the Boss.

Julie and I have dedicated a bench with a bronze inscription on the veranda of the Quicksilver Museum in his honor. Sit on it and think of our place in the history of California.

My name at birth was Lum Hing. I was known as "Chinese Sam" on the payroll of the quicksilver mine and as "Sam the Boss" to the miners and my family. I was born in the Year of the Dog in 1830. It was not an auspicious time because of floods and famine in my village near Canton.

The elements of Chinese science are wood, fire, metal, and water. My symbol in the Year of the Dog was metal. Earth is the source of metal. Metal can be liquefied by a wood fire into substances flowing like water. In New Almaden, the cinnabar ore was heated in retorts until it became liquid quicksilver, or mercury. Quicksilver was then used to extract and purify the gold from the hills of California.





Metal also encompasses competitiveness, business acumen, and adventure. So blessed by birth with these traits, I journey to San Francisco by boat with some of the first Chinese to arrive in 1850.

At the age of twenty, I step on the shores of California, known in China as “Gum Saan,” the Gold Mountain. My dialect is Szeyup, spoken in the four districts below Canton. My village name is Chu Ging Ho Leung Choon, roughly translated as a “cool place.” The first question other Chinese will ask is, “Where are you from?” My grandmother taught me how to answer.

Everyone should know from whence they came and remember also their ancestors who sacrificed. There is a Chinese saying, “Yum seuy, see yuen. When you drink water, remember its source.” I have in my home at China Camp a shrine to burn incense to honor those who came before.

It is my destiny to come to the mines of New Almaden where these transformations take place and unexpected opportunities allow me to fulfill my future.



Lum Hing in 1880 in Western garb.

The first thing I do is cut off my queue and get my hair styled in the Western manner. Then I spend the remainder of my travel money on a decent set of new clothes. I buy a satin tie, a nice white shirt, a suede leather vest, a soft black jacket, and a stylish hat. Everything made in America.

I hear they need help at the quicksilver mines at New Almaden. So I go there, hat in hand, and look the boss straight in the eye, in the manner of the White men, and ask him for a job. The boss likes my smile and hires me on my looks. I am





like no other Chinaman he's ever seen. Most have bamboo hats and khaki clothes. He needs someone that can speak Spanish, English, and Chinese, so I do it and say "Buenos dias, señor. Me llamo Sam and me longtime Californ'." Thus, Lum Hing becomes Chinese Sam.

They hire me to be chief cook at the boarding house on the hill to cook American, Spanish, and Chinese food. I quickly become fluent in Spanish so I can keep my job as "dai see fu" or Number One Cook. The boss's favorite is apple pie with a flaky crust and not too sweet crisp apples. I make a flaky golden crust with ice-cold lard cut into the flour. The family loves my cooking and the boss later proves to be a very good friend when I am in trouble and he misses his cook.

Life is good for me these days. Almaden mine provides me with a safe place to live and financial security. I am well known for my skills as a cook and the miners treat me with respect and show no prejudice. Most of all, I enjoy speaking in pidgin English, Spanish, and Cantonese. I am part of New Almaden and all have shown a great kindness to me.

The Cornish miners came from England and live in Englishtown. The Spanish miners came from the original city of Almaden, Spain, where cinnabar was mined to process gold as far back as Roman times. They live in Spanish Camp. Mexican miners came later with the Chinese who live in China Camp.

We have a New Almaden Rifle Club where I am able to learn how to shoot and, much to everyone's surprise, I seem to have a gift for hitting the mark. I have a good eye and steady aim and can shoot with the best of them. Hunting provides me with venison, which we Chinese prize highly for stews and herbal soups. Wild game is a gift from the gods. All the herbs I need are available in Dai Fow (San Francisco) Chinatown.

The singsong girls in San Jose love me because I dress like "bok quai," or White devil, and can speak English. I am a bachelor in paradise. But everyone makes at least one mistake in life, and I am no exception.

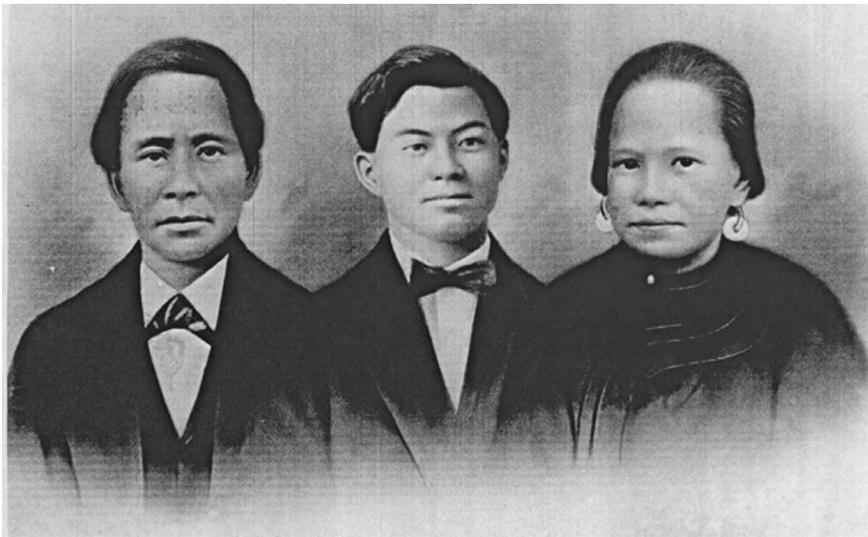
Let me tell you my love story. I was going on thirty and felt like settling down and having children, who I dearly love. My boss was good to me and



organized a store in China Camp so I could qualify to have a picture bride sent over from the Middle Kingdom. My store was in China Camp, near Englishtown. I sold things like lanterns, tobacco, and fuel. I was also made a shift boss to help hire Mexicans and Chinese. Thus, Lum Hing, who is Chinese Sam, also becomes Sam the Boss to the miners and my family.

It is said that all brides and babies are beautiful. I believe it. I never met Lum Shee before we married. She was only twelve and I was going on thirty. A go-between or matchmaker had to research back three generations to make sure there was no chance of insanity or disease and that the family in question was honorable. In other cultures, they pay more attention to pedigree when buying a horse or a dog than they do when looking for potential mates.

Lum Shee was everything I had ever wished for. I treated her like a princess at first. Every time she would wash her hair, I would kill a chicken and cook it with dried mushrooms, wood fungus, red dates, fresh ginger, raw peanuts, and a lot of good bourbon whiskey. She loved it and I loved her, and we loved each other on those long nights. I told her the soup was so she wouldn't have a headache after shampooing her hair. Truthfully, it was an aphrodisiac. I'll give you the recipe if you have trouble with your wife.



Lum Hing and his wife, Lee Lum Shee, and their son, Charles.



We had six children. Lily was my first-born, then Bruce, and two more sisters named Gum Foon and Gum Oy, then Charles, and finally baby sister, Chuh Wah. Most of them were delivered by Dr. Winn at our home right here in New Almaden. We moved to House #40 on Bertram Road. Alamitos Creek flows below and we love to fish for trout and salmon.

I did make one big mistake. A huge mistake. I lost my temper and control completely in an angry rage. Just once. I have learned my lesson and the whole incident is more or less a secret. As time goes by, I hope it will be best forgotten.

I had a pal I used to drink and gamble with. He was big for a Chinese and cocky too. We had lots of good times together when I was single. After my marriage, things changed. I gave up gambling and the pleasure houses in town and he changed too. He became envious of my job and success at the mine and my good fortune to marry Lum Shee. He started badmouthing me around the city and even passed untrue stories at Almaden. He was a lonely and frustrated man.

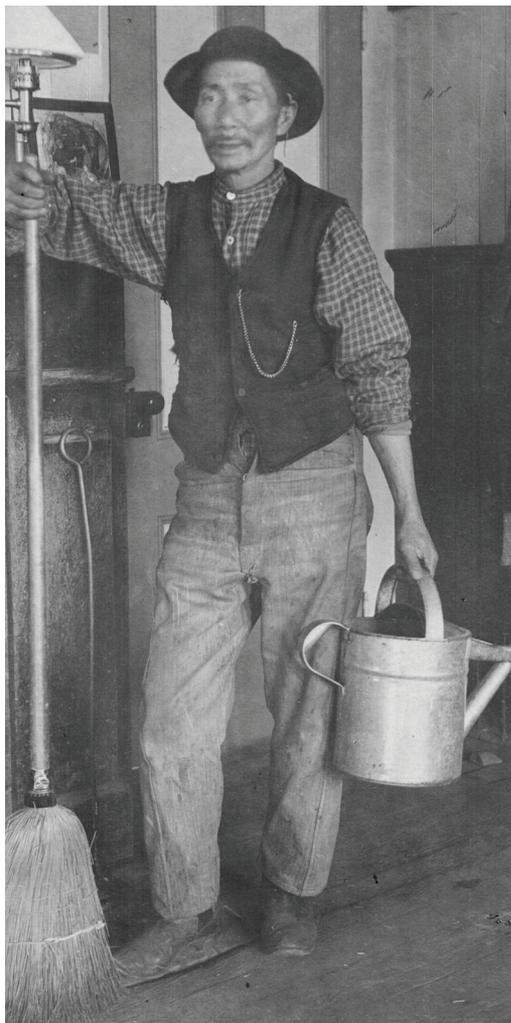
I was furious and followed him one day to San Jose and kept just out of sight. Finally, I caught up and confronted him with my anger of his lies. We had a bad argument and before he could strike, I shot him dead with my reliable cap-and-ball revolver. It wasn't much news that one Chinaman had killed another. It didn't matter much except to me and my boss.

The family missed their cook and apple pie. The boss missed his bacon and fried eggs for breakfast. He liked his egg whites crispy around the edges and the yolks sunny side up with the surface slightly steamed. It was my best trick, which required very hot peanut oil, a last-minute cover over the wok, and a quick toss onto the plate.

The boss hired a lawyer from San Francisco and I am ever grateful to the judge who acquitted me as acting in "self defense" and returned me to my duties at the mines. The quicksilver mining company never had a more grateful and hardworking man than me. My loyalty extended to my last breath.



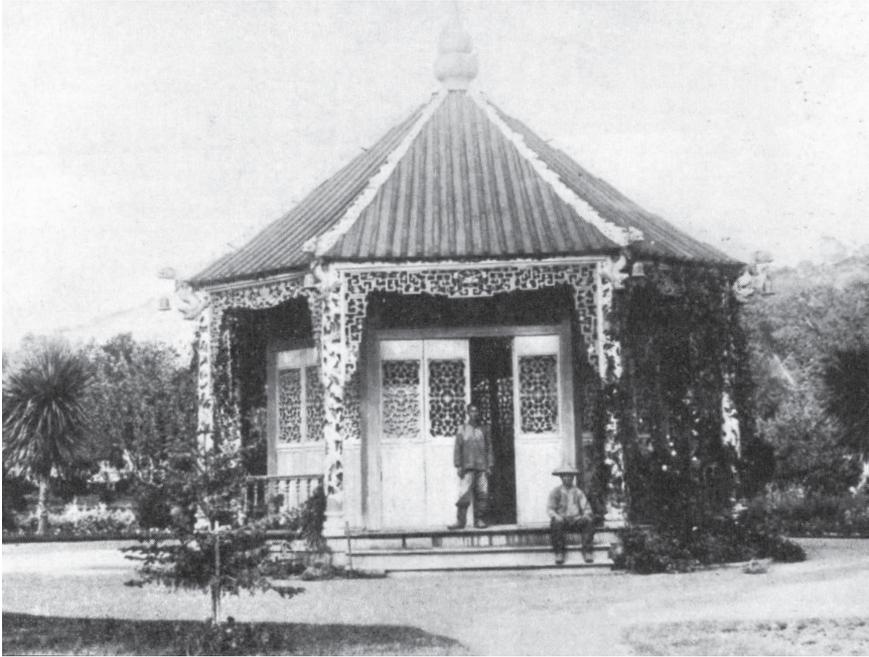
Epilogue: Chinese Sam passed of natural causes at the age of fifty-nine. When Sam died in February 1889, a collection was taken up by the miners and the quicksilver mining company to transport Sam's family and his remains back to China. Such was the love for Sam the Boss.



Lum Hing at the home of the doctor who delivered all his children. In appreciation, Lum Hing was the all-around handyman and green-thumbed gardener for his friend.

Widow Lum Shee, however, moved to the hills near San Francisco with her children. They were going to stay in California and be Americans. That's why my grandchildren are sixth-generation Californians. Every Chinese New Year, the family rode into San Francisco's Chinatown to celebrate the season in a fancy horse and carriage.

Sam's oldest daughter, Lily, married a businessman and Confucian scholar named Hi Loy Wong. He was twenty years her senior. She was thirteen. They lived in Fresno on Hawes Avenue on the Westside, where he had a successful produce company called Chong Jan. They had fourteen children. Lily was my grandmother and died in 1940. I was her favorite grandson, the only one that could turn his ear inside out to make her laugh.



In the early 1850s, a delegation representing the Emperor of China arrived at New Almaden to negotiate a contract for mercury. Grateful for the hospitality shown to his emissaries, the Emperor presented this Chinese pagoda as a gift across the Alamitos Creek. Photo reprinted with permission from Boulland and Boudreault's *New Almaden*.

***About the Author:** Ronald James Wong is a fourth-generation Californian born in Fresno. He was a contributing editor to US Archer magazine and published many articles on the sport of archery. Dr. Wong is a pediatric dentist.*







That's Not Chinese Food!

By Susie Szeto Price

I remember the first time I experienced chop suey as a Chinese person. I was seven, and had just moved from California to Florida. My mother was a young and spunky divorcee who had just left her friends and family behind in Los Angeles's Chinatown for an older Caucasian boyfriend named Chuck in South Florida.

On her first night there, however, right around dinner time, she suddenly realized what she would miss most about being away from California. As she pushed a shopping cart up and down the aisles of Winn-Dixie, past the bags of pork cracklins' and Little Debbie Snack Cakes, she sighed, "What are we going to eat?!" As it turned out, our first dinner in South Florida was steak and rice with no vegetables.

A few weeks after that first night, Chuck took us to a Chinese restaurant in Fort Lauderdale. My mom was homesick and I think he wanted her to feel better. I sat quietly at our table nibbling on fried wontons, and then I familiarized myself with the animals of the Chinese zodiac printed on our paper placemats. But other than that, I don't remember much else about the meal. However, what happened *after* the meal, I do remember well.

I was sitting in the backseat of Chuck's silver Cadillac Christine, when all of a sudden, my mother declared, "That was *not* Chinese food!"

"What do you mean that wasn't Chinese food?!" exclaimed Chuck.

From the plush velvety backseat of the car, I, too, was wondering, "What do you mean that wasn't Chinese food?!"

My mom ranted, "The Chinese food that was served in that restaurant was terrible! It tasted unlike anything I would find at home! The food





was too salty. The herbs and spices were plain! And sauce was poured over everything!” She concluded angrily, “That kind of Chinese food had been changed to suit American tastes. It is not what Chinese people would eat in China!”

As my mom and Chuck continued talking, I tried to make sense of what Mom was saying from the backseat of the car. All this time, I thought that Chinese food was just...Chinese food! But now, my mom was saying that there was Chinese food that Chinese people ate, and Chinese food that Americans ate, and that the Chinese food that Americans ate was not very good, and generally not recognizable to anyone who was a native from China, like my mom.

As I listened more, I learned that Americans did not know the difference between the Chinese food that Chinese people ate and the Chinese food that Americans ate. They thought it was all the same. And if you introduced the Chinese food that Chinese people ate to these Americans, they would not like it! But here I was, a Chinese girl from Hong Kong, China, eating Chinese food in Florida that Americans ate. And I didn't know the difference either!

Looking back, I don't know why I always remembered that night. But ever since then, I have been keenly aware of this “other Chinese food,” especially in cities where there were not a lot of Chinese people, because sure enough, there would be a Chinese restaurant, very much like the one where we ate in South Florida, serving the same menu items that my mother as a Chinese person from China would never recognize, let alone acknowledge, as Chinese food.

As I found out over time, these restaurants are everywhere: in major metropolitan areas, small rural towns in the South, Latino barrios in East L.A., the vast Kansas flatlands. It didn't matter how remote or far off the beaten track someplace was, chances were, you would find a Chinese restaurant.

So then I started to wonder: How long have these chop suey joints been around? And the answer opened up a whole new world for me. I found out that the Chinese had been in this country since the 1840s, and that they





panned rivers for gold, helped build the transcontinental railroad, washed people's laundry, and cooked people food.

On this last point, cooking people food...no one knows for sure when Americans first started eating chop suey, but let's just say that it would be totally conceivable to imagine a quintessentially American icon like a cowboy eating "chow" off a chuck wagon. Back then, like it is now, that cowboy would have eaten a quickly stir-fried combination of whatever meats and vegetables were available. At some point, the cowboy might ask, "What is this called? What am I eating?" And the Chinese cook might answer, *chap sui* or "chop suey," which meant "miscellaneous bits and pieces." From there, the cowboy might very innocently presume that *chap sui* was what all Chinese people ate. And since *chap sui* turned out to be so tasty to the Americans, there was no reason to stop cooking it!

And that's probably the story of how I came to eat chop suey (or some other stir-fried combination found only in America) that night in South Florida, when my mother declared, "That was *not* Chinese food!"

Years later, when I asked Mom about that night, she told me that in China, chop suey was what the poor people ate. The rich did not eat chop suey; they ate the *whole parts* of food, not the cut-up bits and pieces. So imagine a Chinese person's reaction when an American presumes that all Chinese people eat chop suey, or that chop suey is their national dish...! Yet through resourcefulness and serendipity, chop suey (and other American stir-fry inventions) have prevailed as one of the most popular types of cuisine in America. So strong is its appeal to the non-Chinese palate that even my mom, with all of her previous indignation, gave in, and learned how to cook sweet and sour pork, and beef and American broccoli, for her American-born husband.

So now, nearly thirty years later, what can I say I have learned from chop suey? Well, mainly these four points:

First, that cultural identity is not always fixed. Like food, people can change when they immigrate and are exposed to new thoughts and customs. For example, by coming here, both Chinese food and I have been





Americanized. We are no longer like the food or people of our respective Old Countries.

Second, people seem to have preconceptions of how things should be. When those preconceptions are not met, people sometimes feel confused or disappointed. I experience this reaction all the time from people when they learn how little I know about Chinese culture. I also remember how my husband used to tease me about not making decent rice.

Third, even in home countries where cultural identities originate, they too can absorb outside influences and thus change in various ways. In other words, even they're not "pure" or 100% authentic. (Coca-Cola being served at dim-sum in Hong Kong comes to mind.)

Fourth and finally, chop suey is not a recent invention in this country. It has been around since the 1840s and has been part of many an American tradition since then, including Mother's Day brunches, first dates, company parties, Friday night takeouts, etc. Might it be so bold to suggest that chop suey is simply American food?

As you can see, I have learned a lot from chop suey. I have learned about culture, identity, history, immigration, cultural preconceptions and misperceptions, change, adaptation, and the list goes on! Now that I have children of my own, I have even more reason to share with them what I have learned from this humble but fascinating dish.

About the Author: *Susie Szeto Price is raising two young children in Altadena, California.*





Discovering Ohana

By Bo-Gay Tong Salvador



It is a cool Friday evening in October 1996. We drive our rented Pontiac Grand Am over the San Francisco Bay Bridge to attend the first ever Tong Family Reunion. Traffic is thick. I bark out the directions to my husband, Bruce, as he drives us across the Bay to my first cousin Jo-Lynne's home in Alameda. My mother, Bo-Ching, and her older sister, Bo-Ling, sit quietly in the back seat. This morning we flew up from Los Angeles to attend a weekend of events beginning with this evening's kickoff reception, attended by my father's relatives, the Tong side of the family. Eager yet somewhat apprehensive, I will soon reunite with many of my cousins whom I haven't seen for about 30 years, and will meet other relatives—strangers to me—for the first time.





My mother seems as excited as I, but shows no sign of nervousness, most likely because she has kept in touch with many of my father's relatives since he died more than 25 years ago. She anticipates an enjoyable and comfortable family gathering. After all, she will simply be seeing once again those with whom she has corresponded and occasionally visited over these many years. My aunt loves parties and is never shy so I know she is also looking forward to this evening, even though she will know only a few people there. I do not know how Bruce feels at this point. He knows almost no one! We have been married only four years.

We find my cousin's home. The streets are dark in this quiet residential area, but bright welcoming light emanates from the windows of her 1920s two-story craftsman-style house. We park and help my mother and aunt get out of the car.

As we approach the front door, I hear footsteps and turn to see a smiling, handsome older man in a blue and white floral Hawaiian shirt walking up the steps behind us. In his arms are two big boxes of pineapples. Who is he? Why does he bring pineapples?

The scene inside is mildly chaotic. I see people everywhere, but recognize only a few. They sit or stand, huddled in small groups, in the foyer, the dining room, the living room, the kitchen. I'm related to everyone here? You've got to be kidding! We put on much needed paper nametags with the sticky backs. We grab a glass of wine and a few appetizers from the dining room table. My mother and aunt head for the living room. Bruce and I get to work, circulating from room to room, busily introducing ourselves to anyone we encounter. Who are you? How are we related? Who are your parents? What do you do? Where do you live? Where did you grow up? Who's in that photo? Who, what, where, when, why?

I feel like I'm at a cocktail party with a weird surreal twist; I am somehow related by blood to everyone present, although most are strangers to me. This is like one of those murder-mystery parties, but without a murder. Instead, it's a figure-out-how-you-are-related mystery party.





The noise of getting-to-know-you chatter and the laughter of discovery fill the house. No icebreakers needed here! I am exhilarated from taking in the energy and curiosity of this assortment of characters who have become my instant family.

I embrace first cousins, most of whom I have met only once or twice before. I meet many new faces: second cousins, and first and second cousins once and twice removed, from Colorado, New York, Louisiana, and Hawaii, as well as from the San Francisco Bay area.

My mother and aunt sit in comfortable chairs in the living room, where they have been holding court since the beginning of the evening, greeting and chatting with anyone who comes their way. Bruce and I move through the house, bumping into more people at every turn. How will I remember who's who? At least we have tomorrow to socialize again, at a banquet on a roving boat in the marina. My husband is enjoying the unraveling of the mysteries of the Tong family with me. Much to his astonishment, as well as mine, we seem to have acquired, in the span of one night, a house bursting with relatives.

And who brought the pineapples? Donald brought them, a longtime friend of the family in Honolulu. He doesn't think he is related to the Tong clan, but who knows, maybe way back somewhere there is a connection, he says. At the end of the evening, when the guests are leaving, Donald stands at the door, handing out pineapples. The pineapple, I later learn, is a Hawaiian symbol of hospitality. A perfect *aloha* gift!

This event, this first ever gathering of the Tong family, brought together in one place about 50 relatives—and a few who weren't sure whether they were related, but had a suspicion that maybe they were. This gathering marked the beginning of a journey, a journey that began rather late in my life, to establish a family of my own, to experience a sense of family. The Hawaiians have a fitting word for what I was experiencing at this gathering: *ohana*, which means extended family. *Ohana* can be used in a broader sense, to include those not necessarily related by blood but who are bound together as part of a larger sense of community.





I grew up as an only child in the isolated, sparsely populated, virtually all-White northern San Fernando Valley of the 1950s and '60s. With just my aunt, my mother's only sibling, living nearby, I never really experienced *ohana*. I always longed for a brother or sister. I didn't know what it meant to be part of an extended family.

I think I was essentially lonely during much of my childhood. In those days, it was not the norm to be placed in daycare or pre-school, nor were there many opportunities for the kinds of after-school and weekend activities in which children today are encouraged and even expected to participate. I had lots of friends at school and Sunday school, but rarely socialized with them during non-school hours. So as a young child, I spent a lot of time at home. I was a reader and read everything in sight. I took piano lessons and practiced a lot. Piano playing is a solitary endeavor; it can be said that it is also a lonely endeavor, but the piano kept me good company during my pre-teen years. I hated playing for other people (and I was called on to do that all too frequently), but I loved playing for myself.

While growing up, I only briefly met my first cousins, who were living in faraway places like New York City and New Orleans. A few of us were the same age, and when we met, we established a quick bond. We wrote to each other for a time during our adolescence, but after a while, I stopped writing. I was a first-class procrastinator and continually succumbed to that vicious cycle of first feeling guilty that I didn't write back right away, so I didn't write back at all, and eventually, they no longer wrote to me. With the exception of spending a summer with cousins in Honolulu, visits with relatives during my twenties and thirties were few and far between. After my father's death when I was 21, my mother diligently kept contact with my aunts, uncles, and various other relatives over the years. She would update me on the latest news and gossip, but I never took the initiative to establish any relationship on my own.

Looking back now, I realize that in my youth, I didn't understand the value of that special bond of kin. It didn't help that I prided myself as self-sufficient and independent. So, in a way, it made sense that I didn't see the need to seek out my own extended family and to strengthen the tenuous connection I had with them. I didn't see it even though the signs were there.





For instance, as a young adult, I dreaded the holidays. I yearned to have more family than only my mother and aunt; the three of us together were not that fun! And I missed my father. I'd rather spend Christmas with my good friend and her own *ohana*. They welcomed me as one of their own, and I loved their plentiful holiday spread, and all the good cheer and warm camaraderie at their gatherings. Geographic distance prevented me, or so I thought, from forging significant relationships with any of my own far-flung family, but I was wrong.

Since that first family reunion, the Tong family has reconnected for three more reunions. The second gathering in Honolulu reunited us, after 140 years, with a long lost Hawaiian branch of our family, increasing our *ohana* by untold hundreds!

The root word of *ohana*, *ohā*, refers to the taro plant, a staple considered by native Hawaiians to be the “staff of life”—a necessary food, such as bread or rice. Over these years, I have grown to realize that *ohana* is the staff of *my* life. It is a necessary food for my soul. I now have cousins whom I consider the sisters and brothers I never had. They enrich and nourish my life immensely. I will always be an only child, but I no longer feel so disconnected. I now belong to my own *ohana*, although I am just beginning to experience and understand what it really means to be part of one.

While still no relatives live in my city, in the years since this first reunion, some of us have traveled together, planned family reunions together, scanned family photos together, stayed at each other's homes, and spent holidays together. They are teaching me the meaning of *ohana*. They are teaching me the importance of family.

About the Author: *Bo-Gay Tong Salvador, a sixth-generation Chinese American and a fourth-generation Californian, grew up in the San Fernando Valley. She is a retired UCLA librarian who hopes to uncover and record stories about her family's history in Hawaii and California.*





The Great Famine and Poisonous Milk Powder

By Ann Lau



It is so sad. I have been waking up often in the middle of the night since the news came. I would get up, scan the Chinese netizens' comments on the Internet and want so much to scream. In a blog, a father apologized to his child for bringing him into this world and then allowing him to be sickened by the poisonous milk powder.

This food safety crisis brought back memories of growing up in Hong Kong, then a British colony, during China's Great Famine, which began in 1959. I remember going with my mother to the stores to send food items back to China. We would

send canned meat, canned vegetables, cans of oil, bars of soap, salted fish, as well as yards of cloth.

One day, the maid came home from the market and told my father that we should not buy any eggs, as the Americans had irradiated all the eggs. I remember vividly when my father retorted, "What rubbish! If the Americans irradiated the eggs, they would have to irradiate the people also."

That night, in the heat of Hong Kong's humid weather, I covered myself from head to toe with a blanket; I did not want to be irradiated by the Americans.





Years later, my husband's sister, who grew up in China's village during those times, told me that the villagers were instructed by the government not to eat the eggs they collected, since the eggs had been irradiated by the Americans; it was an attempt to stop them from stealing the eggs for food. The collected eggs were to be sold to Hong Kong in exchange for much needed foreign currency. The ploy backfired, because the people in Hong Kong also heard the story and refused to buy the eggs.

News of deaths from the famine made me feel so totally helpless then. I have the same feelings now of total helplessness.

I wrote to a group of acquaintances who are very much involved in civil rights for Chinese Americans. I raised the issue of whether or not Chinese Americans have a moral obligation to help protect the children in China.

One guy responded and argued that China's government had already "lifted 200 million people out of poverty in the last 30 years." His cavalier response bothered me tremendously. If we are so totally passionate about Chinese American civil rights, how can we be so totally dismissive of such a major catastrophe of our fellow ethnic Chinese? The story of the poisonous milk lingered for almost a year before one brave Chinese journalist finally reported it and identified the source of the children's illness.

We often complain about the U.S. government's treatment of the Chinese minority here in the U.S., yet we sometimes dismiss media stories about the mistreatment of the Tibetan minority in China as "China bashing."

Does one's passion in fighting for the rights of a group automatically get lost when one no longer needs it for oneself? Are we interested in only our own rights and care less about our fellow human beings? Is human nature fundamentally self-centered?

At this writing, close to 300,000 babies are reportedly sick in China from the poisonous milk powder. The parents have been prevented from suing the companies involved. In the U.S., the peanut butter crisis immediately brought out a Congressional hearing and demand for transparency, and no one doubted that million-dollar lawsuits would follow.





It is true that more than 200 million have been lifted from poverty in China. The Great Famine no longer happens. Yet the same system that led to the Great Famine has now led to the milk powder crisis.

Growing up, I often heard my mother lamenting that Chinese lives are cheap. I didn't agree with my mother, but kept my opinion to myself. After all, I belonged to the generation that never argued against our parents. Yet I often thought that Chinese lives should not be cheap; the Chinese themselves should not make it cheap. If we respect the lives of all, then no one can say that our lives are cheap.

***About the Author:** Ann Lau was born in China, raised in Hong Kong, and graduated from Salinas High School, UCLA, and USC. She has been an entrepreneur in the computer consulting business since 1983. Ann is a founding Board member of CHSSC.*



Me and Angie Jolie

By Linda Chong



She's Got Legs!

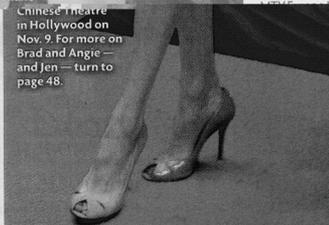
No wonder Brad goes gaga over her: Angelina Jolie sizzled on the red carpet in this sexy little Ralph Lauren number at the *Kung Fu*

premiere DVD release party at Grauman's

Chinese Theatre in Hollywood on Nov. 9. For more on Brad and Angie — and Jen — turn to page 48.

Could You? Jen o tears, as Brad ir marriage by Oprah how Angie ove of his life.

b Crossword
Crossword
ku
Scope
rheard



This week in *Star* November 24, 2008

Britney's son rushed to the hospital... Katie tells Tom she won't leave New York... How Barack Obama's kids will adjust... and much more!

StarShots

3-7 Brody Jenner and Jayde Nicole make waves... **John Travolta** goes topless... a little rain can't bug **Suri Cruise**... and more!

StarNews

14 Kristen Stewart: Wave of the Future! Some say the *Twilight* actress is lucky to kiss costar **Robert Pattinson**. But he's not the guy she wants to pucker up with.

16 Lindsay: I'm a Different Person Now. Lilo works to put her troubles behind her and finally opens up about gal pal **Samantha Ronson**.

18 Bond Bares All: Even though **Daniel Craig** suffered bumps and bruises while filming his role as 007, he says it's all in a day's work.

42 It's Over! **Sienna Miller** breaks up with her married beau **Balthazar Getty** over the phone!

43 Mel B: Under a Cloud As She Renews Her Vows. Plus: a nude picture scandal rocks the world of **Adrienne Bailon**.

52 Costume Party: **Katy Perry** changes outfits as often as she changes her tune at the

56 Katie to Tom: I'm Not Coming Home! Defiant Katie tells her famous hubby she has no intentions of leaving NYC after her Broadway show closes in January.

58 Heartbreak & Hope: **Ellen DeGeneres** and **Portia de Rossi** are determined to keep their nuptials valid despite California's gay marriage ban.

60 Adam Gregory: From Dud to Stud! See how the *90210* actor went from being totally geeky to totally gorgeous.

64 Hollywood Strip Show: The stars who dared to bare as exotic dancers.

CoverStories

40 Britney's Frantic Honors! **Darman's** *Five-0*! **Mad** weekend in Louisiana turns into hysteria when Brit's son **Jayden** is rushed to the ER.

44 America's First Sweethearts: **Malia** and **Sasha Obama** captured America's heart on the campaign trail. Learn all about their life in Chicago and what awaits them at the White House.

46 *Twilight's* lootsome Twosome: The dreamy **Darman's** *Five-0*! **Mad** weekend in Louisiana turns into hysteria when Brit's son **Jayden** is rushed to the ER.

54 DWTS Scandal: Cody Out of Control! Disney's **Cody Linley** makes unwanted moves off the floor, on two of his female costars.

48 How is brought f trashes the gushing to is the true l

EveryWeek

12 Tell <i>Star</i>	90 Cele
24 Normal/Not Normal	91 Star
26 Hot Sheet	92 Suck
36 Double Takes	94 Star
38 Worst of the Week	96 Ove

24 November 2008 *Star* Magazine.



In a few days, when the name of the winner of the 2008 Academy Award for Best Actress is announced, I will be very interested in seeing how my new BFF—a fellow mother, world traveler, and study in contradictions—fares. After all, I have her to thank for placing my son and I on the pages of at least two national celebrity gossip magazines.

I am speaking of none other than Angelina Jolie, whom we met last fall in what has certainly been one of the highlights of my less-than-decorated parenting career. Although Miss Jolie, or “Angie,” as I like to call her, has garnered acclaim and an Oscar nod for her starring role in the film noir thriller *Changeling*, it was at a Sunday morning party for an animated family feature where Theo and I met her.

In *Changeling*, Jolie’s character is a single mother who struggles to find her abducted son in 1930s Los Angeles. This got me thinking: Does the screen goddess, a biological mother of three and adoptive mother to three others, ever wrestle with self-doubt or struggle with parenting issues like the rest of us mere mortals? Are there ever days when she thinks, “This is the toughest role I’ve ever had to play!” And do she and her paramour, the handsome actor Brad Pitt, allow their toddler and twin babies to watch what they and their friends do on the big or little screens? (Pediatricians recommend no screen time for children under two, but I know I blew that one by a long shot.)

In fact, it was a result of my ongoing lowering of standards that my preschooler and I made it to this star-studded and media-blitzed event on November 9, 2008. Despite my pre-delivery vow to myself that I would severely restrict my boy’s exposure to commercialism and the world of passive consumption, I found myself joining two girlfriends and their offspring—also only children—for the release of a DVD sequel to *Kung Fu Panda*, a blockbuster from 2007 that features Jolie as the voice of a brave tigress. Despite turning down several playdates to see *Kung Fu Panda* in the theatres, this frustrated Asianist was swayed by two words that day: free movie.

The screening of the new featurette, *Secrets of the Furious Five*, was being held in one of the fabled Grauman’s Chinese Theatres, the patio of which is home to the footprints and handprints of screen legends such as Humphrey





Bogart and Marilyn Monroe as well as modern-day stars such as Tom Cruise and Julia Roberts. With its gaudy pillars and arches, cartoon-like renderings of traditional dragon motifs, and copious use of red and gold paints, the so-called Chinese theatres are the embodiment of Hollywood's fascination with things Chinese, circa the 1920s. Despite, or perhaps because of, all these reasons, it is considered a must-visit stop for tourists.

Being surrounded by all this faux *chinoiserie* only heightened my feelings of being a fraud. How could I allow my son to learn about Chinese mysticism and the martial arts through the anthropomorphized lens of Dreamworks Animation? Is that like letting your kid learn about the birds and the bees by encouraging him to talk to his buddies in gym class? With my background and education, shouldn't I be the one introducing him to Chinese folk tales and ancient sites such as Wudang Mountain, rather than letting a computer-generated marsupial voiced by comedian Jack Black do it?

The self-indulgent (and -deprecating) chatter in my mind was interrupted by the dropping of the velvet ropes signaling permission to approach the red carpet. Wow! What a street party and what a spread! My friends and I quickly ditched each other and went into self-preservation mode, making a beeline for the tables with the shortest wait to be served the continental breakfast with free coffee and juice. Although I am not a morning person, I remember thinking, maybe this was worth getting up early for after all.

I was extra delighted to discover that the street entertainment included Jason Chen, a Chinese acrobat we had hired to perform at my wedding nearly five years ago. He had since added a few more members to his retinue of unicyclists, jugglers, northern Chinese lion dancers, and contortionists! How cool to watch someone you know put on a show on this scale—and performing on the famous Hollywood Boulevard, no less!

Actually, I have the lion dancers and Theo to thank for the star sighting that was to come. It was by sheer accident that this jaded L.A. native and ex-reporter got so close to Jolie while my friends—whose predictions I had dismissed when they started prattling about getting there extra early to see the film's stars—watched from a distance. "Please," I said, as I rolled my eyes. Why would Dustin Hoffman show up to such an early morning affair





to tout a CGI-animated feature in which he had a supporting role? After all, the master thespian has been famous since the 1960s when he portrayed Benjamin Braddock in *The Graduate*. And Hollywood A-lister Angelina Jolie had only given birth to twin babies four months earlier. Surely she wouldn't be there when she could be at home with them or in bed with Brad Pitt. (Wrong on both counts; and Jack Black, who gave voice to the titular *Kung Fu Panda*, was at the well-attended affair, too.)

But back to the Chinese lion dancers. The lively shows are a drum-beating, heart-pounding spectacle that my son seemed to greatly enjoy as a baby but now considers terrifying. Like many aspects of childrearing, I do not quite understand his new fear since he should be increasingly capable of understanding that the legs beneath the *papier-mache* beasts belong to flesh-and-blood people and a lion dance is meant to be a fortuitous, not fearsome, occasion! Nevertheless, my kid's dread of the sequined, boisterous creatures forced me to walk away from the Chinese performance areas and straight into the paparazzi line.

So we joined the jostling hordes of people huddled around a roped-off, red-carpeted walkway that I had not noticed until that moment. People's eyes were transfixed on the south side of Hollywood Boulevard, near Highland Avenue, almost exactly in front of the El Capitan Theatre, close to where that fat, sardonic comedian Jimmy Kimmel tapes his live, late night shows. With no pushing or shoving, we made our way to the very front, though ostensibly not in a particularly desirable spot, because we were slightly cramped standing next to a sign that said something I never noticed.

That's when I spied an emaciated figure wearing a short, short black dress and gold stiletto heels. She was so ghoulishly thin that when, watching from behind, I saw her waving to the adoring crowd across the street, her hand looked freakishly out of proportion to the rest of her body. That is how I felt about her head, too, which was covered with somewhat stringy, raven tresses. I was further jarred by the sight of a cryptic series of black numbers and symbols tattooed along her back and shoulders. I later learned they represented the latitude and longitude points of her children's birthplaces. (With six kids and counting, she's setting herself up for a lot of bodily mutilation.) But my feelings of repulsion at the time were much stronger than any admiration I could possibly muster. Get a ring and fill it with your





kids' birthstones, I say. Indeed, she seemed more like Morticia from *The Addams Family* than Laura Croft, the tomb raider heroine.

Finally, she turned around, and there, less than ten feet away, was the megawatt smile and those famously full lips. It was Angelina Jolie (who I really think should play me in the Hollywood biopic of my life). I actually think Jolie is one of the most striking women in the film world, but today, she just looks a bit tired, and sad. Her eyes, though busily darting toward the cameras all around, look vacant and her face appears drawn. At least to me, that's how it seemed at the time.

But heck, what do I know? And with all the popular *and* critical success she has, with being desirable enough to lure Brad Pitt from his ex-wife Jennifer Aniston, and with her ability to crank out babies without losing her figure, what on earth does she have to feel blue about? If she can't snap out of it, what chance do the rest of us have? Anyway, she can afford the best therapy money can buy.

I console myself over my unglamorous life with flashbacks of some of Angelina Jolie's oft-publicized conflicts and problems: her dispute with her father, the celebrated actor Jon Voight; her strange on-camera kiss with her brother during an Oscar ceremony a few years back; the time she wore a vial of blood that came from ex-husband Billy Bob Thornton (who was already husband number two and she's only 33 now).

But wait, here's where the present-day story in Los Angeles gets better. As the crowds shout "Angie, Angie," I can hear the voices of what I think are entertainment and tabloid reporters shouting for her attention. At that point, she walks right over to me, and I am holding my then three-year-old son, whom I have no clue how this is affecting because I'm still a little stunned. She says, "Hi! Who is this?" I answer, "Hi, Angelina. This is Theo." And just to show that I'm not immune to the affliction of being star-struck and tongue-tied, I tell a white lie: "He's one of your biggest fans."

She smiles, strokes his little cheek, and squeezes his hand a little (the one that isn't squeezing my neck tightly because of all the commotion). As she walks away, she mumbles something about "panda." I figure out many minutes later that she probably said, "Watch *Kung Fu Panda*."





My husband and I joked that since she has adopted three children from Third World countries in Asia and Africa, and our Theo is on the underweight side, she may have been scoping him out and considering adding our little Chinese American boy to her growing brood (or should I say menagerie?) with Pitt, whom I'm sure would marry me if either of us was free at the same time.

Ironically, I had failed to bring a camera to this affair; I even left the house without my cell phone, which can at least take poor-quality photographs! To think, I probably would have given the event a pass had my friend not picked us up. My low expectations were joyously exceeded when the screening included free popcorn and soft drinks and we were given DVDs of *Kung Fu Panda* and its sequel on our way out.

About two weeks later, the other mom friend who attended the screening with us was standing in the checkout line at Target. It was moving extra slow, so she picked up a copy of *Star* magazine, a gossip rag she doesn't usually read. She headed for the table of contents and said she squealed in disbelief upon spotting a photograph of me, standing right behind Angelina, and clutching the figure of a small child dressed in red!

About a week after that, both of my mom friends went into Borders, where the celebrity-obsessed one started thumbing through a copy of *Life & Style Weekly*. She spotted another photograph of us with Angelina Jolie! Unfortunately, neither of them bought a copy—I would have paid them back—so I have to take their word for it.

So there you have it, the tale of how my “about face” on movies and the media led my young son and I to have an audience and be photographed with one of the biggest names in entertainment today.

About the Author: *Linda Chong is a member of CHSSC. Though Jolie did not win the Best Actress Oscar that year, the author (sometimes with her son in tow) continues to seek out free movie screenings and opportunities to hobnob with Hollywood stars.*





The Anniversary Party

By Marshall Wong

In 1986, when my parents celebrated their thirty-eighth wedding anniversary, my siblings, their spouses, and I decided to throw them a party. I don't think there was a particular reason that this anniversary deserved such attention. It was probably a late night conversation after way too much jug wine that resulted in a sentimental pact: We were going to give our parents and their friends an unforgettable experience. But like they say, "Be careful what you wish for."

Our enthusiasm fed on itself dangerously and we started coming up with more and more grandiose schemes. Forget the traditional banquet in a Chinese restaurant; everyone does that. Why throw an extravagant bash at some fancy Westside hotel or country club? It's so unimaginative. Instead, we decided to invite 38 (in tribute to their anniversary) of their closest friends for a spectacular meal, home-cooked by us. This would be at the "interesting" hillside home of their second son, in Glassell Park, with a spectacular panoramic view of...the railroad tracks (an area affectionately known by local gangbangers as Frogtown). The split-level home had one bathroom on the ground floor, and sets of sliding doors that had a tendency to fall off their tracks. From the street, there was no visible front door. One had to find the sweet spot in the wooden slats to knock hard and hope that the hosts inside would hear and electronically unhinge the invisible swinging wall to offer admission. In hindsight, it's amazing that none of the guests got left in the street.

We designed a less-than-elegant but sincere invitation using a photo from my parents' wedding banquet and bad hand lettering. The guest list wound up being 19 Chinese American couples, some of whom had known my parents since childhood, others since college, but all for at least three decades.





We planned a pan-Asian fusion menu: beef satay skewers, cold noodle salad, curried broccoli and chicken, shrimp, and cream cheese fried wonton; for the traditionalists, pei-don (preserved eggs) with sesame oil and scallions; and other dishes my memory has suppressed. Looking back, it spelled disaster all the way around.

We began food preparation the night before the party and continued throughout the next day. One of the important lasting lessons we learned was that you really can't take a recipe and quadruple it. The balance of ingredients can become, well, unbalanced. How can I begin to describe the culinary missteps? It wasn't until we started tasting the dishes a few hours before curtain time that we realized the magnitude of our errors.

We dumped too many noodles in the stockpot at one time. They wound up mushy, despite our best efforts. Similarly, we overcooked all the chicken and vegetables. We crowded too many beef skewers into the broiler and had trouble controlling the heat. They tasted like shoe leather with a cloying peanut sauce.

Each blunder raised our level of anxiety. We huddled panicked an hour before the guests arrived and considered our limited options. It was too late to cook new dishes or even make a run for takeout. We made another pact to survive this ill-conceived project and save the day in the only way we knew how: For the first hour, we pledged to serve nothing except champagne and store-bought sushi. We were going to get the guests liquored up so they wouldn't even know what they were eating.

The home was spotless and although design-wise eccentric, clearly presentable. Even the buffet looked beautiful. It's amazing how chopped scallions, Chinese parsley, and sesame seeds can hide the worst gastronomical sins.

The male offspring all wore tuxedo shirts and ties, all borrowed or thrift-store purchased, but matching, more or less. I'm surprised that none of the guests threw us their car keys or tipped us, mistaking us for valets.





We glanced at the clock and held our breath awaiting the arrival of the first guests. Suddenly, we heard muffled knocks in several locations followed by bewildered and impatient grunts. The front door swung open.

Our parents graciously greeted each couple and we were right behind them to pour champagne upon arrival and refills before anyone needed them. We circulated among the guests with wide smiles, offering California rolls and more refills. It worked. Before long, the level of laughter grew delightfully irritating, drowning out the background music.

When we summoned the guests to eat, we heard choruses of “What a lovely spread! Did you do all of this yourselves?” Their kind words were slightly slurred. The guests had a wonderful time. Their flushed faces beamed as they feasted on wilted Chinese chicken salad and shared memories. I glanced at one of my brothers with disbelief, thinking, “Can you believe it? We might actually pull this off.”

After everyone had eaten their fill, we called the room to order. The children graciously thanked everyone for coming, and sang our parents’ praises. We performed the Gershwin song “Embraceable You” in decent harmony and offered heartfelt toasts. After store-bought dessert, every single couple was photographed with my parents clutching a bright collection of helium-filled balloons. Everyone was glowing or at least flushed. The photos were permanent evidence of a wonderful but flawed event that displayed our everlasting love, supreme disorganization, mediocre cooking, and slightly off-key voices. It was a public display of a family’s strength and core.

Weeks and even months later, the guests sent my parents notes of appreciation for including them in this celebration. One auntie commented, “If my kids did this for me, I would have a stroke.” I assumed it was a compliment.

Given the chance, would we do things a little differently? I’d probably hire a caterer. But fundamentally, my parents didn’t care about anything else except that their children had tried. They offered us nothing but endless appreciation and unconditional love.





So in hindsight, when I look back on my life and think about the things of which I'm proud as well as my shortcomings, I am comforted by the knowledge that my parents never demanded perfection from me or their other children. They loved us for our good intentions. In their eyes, we couldn't fail.

***About the Author:** Marshall Wong is a fifth-generation Chinese American and a native of Los Angeles. He wrote a biography of his father, the late Judge Delbert Wong, that was published by the CHSSC in 2004.*





Memphis Revisited, First Grade Impressions

By Shirley Chu-Ng

After dusting off the chalk from her hands, the young teacher surveyed her bright cheery classroom. The wall above the blackboard was lined with the letters of the alphabet. There were colorful pictures and number charts surrounding the tiny desks that were arranged neatly in rows. As she took in a deep breath, the co-mingling smells of pencils, crayons, books, clay, and paper added a cozy feeling to her little classroom. Soon, her room would be filled with close to thirty small, fidgety children.

Her name was Miss Shirley Hartman, my first grade teacher. She was prepared for but dreaded the first days of the school year. Tennessee schools did not offer kindergarten. Most of the children had never been in a classroom or away from home before. The first few days were always challenging, but teaching was what she liked doing, and she truly enjoyed the children.

Miss Hartman, being born and bred in the South, never traveled beyond the Mason-Dixon Line. She was an attractive lady—slender, young, with blond hair and hazel-green eyes. Her attire was conservative but stylish. She always wore a dress to work. From her high-heel shoes that click-clacked on the hard tile floors to her manicured nails, red lipstick, and coiffed hair, she embodied the picture of a real southern belle. She even drove a shiny, red and white Chevrolet sedan to school every day. To the little girls, Miss Hartman was the ideal role model of southern femininity that they could aspire to become. To the little boys, she was the epitome of southern womanhood; or, in today's vernacular, she was hot!

Because Memphis was a large, urban city, she felt that her views were progressive and enlightened. But the year was 1954, and it was the age of segregation. She was a product of the times. She was proud of her White heritage.





In the South, politeness and manners ruled. Protocols were followed. Ladies were respectfully addressed as “Ma’am” and men as “Sir.” That was always...except if you were a Negro. The Negroes, or “colored,” as they preferred to be called, were considered inferior to the Whites and referred to by their first name or “boy” or “girl.”

When I was growing up, it was pretty much a Black and White world. We only knew of a handful of Chinese families that lived in the Memphis area. There were very few other ethnic groups that resided in the South. As I recall, when filling out forms, under “race” there were only three choices: White, Negro, and other. Through the process of elimination, I would check off the “other” box, probably thinking that the “O” could mean Oriental.



Shirley Chu with her father, Charlie Chu; mother, Lim Wai Nan; and brother, Howard. Her oldest brother, John, was still in China. Photo taken in the back of a grocery store.

The Chinese were allowed to share the same public facilities as the White people, eat at their restaurants, and live in their neighborhoods. We weren't considered colored, but at the same time, not quite on the same level as the Caucasian race. It was White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America most definitively depicted in the South. It was the law. It was their way of life and how God intended it to be.

Although Southerners had their racial biases, their prejudices were tempered by their genteel upbringing and Christian values. For the most part, they were



a friendly people with big hearts and a willingness to help. Our landlord's family helped my parents and always brought us presents at Christmas. The Christians would drive the Chinese children to their church on Sundays. Miss Hartman's family had a longtime friendship with a colored family who lived on their farm. It was often said that in the South, "the Negroes were loved individually" whereas, in the North, "the Negroes were loved as a group." Underlying racial tensions did not erupt into violence until much later.

Tennessee public schools were segregated into two completely separate systems. There was one for the White children and one for the colored children. It may have been a matter of convenience, or the lightness of one's skin color, or just because the law could only differentiate between Black or White, but the Chinese children attended the White public schools.

My older brother and I were the only Chinese in the entire school. Because we were Chinese, we were looked upon with curiosity more than anything else. Of course, there were people who made fun of us because we looked different. Generally, we were treated well by our schoolmates. Later, Chinese children would gain the reputation of being intelligent, studious, and well behaved...traits that teachers admired.



Shirley with her father, Charlie Chu; mother, Lim Wai Nan; and brother, Howard, in their first family car.



This year, Miss Hartman had been told that a little Chinese girl would be joining her class. She was looking forward to having such a unique student. She had probably never met a Chinese before. But, where was this little girl? Her students had filled their assigned seats, but my seat was empty.



**Family portrait of father Charlie Chu, mother Lim Wai Nan,
older brother John, and brother Howard.
Shirley is about seven years of age.**

When I first met Miss Hartman, I was crying my eyes out. Mrs. Wiley, the other first grade teacher, brought me to Miss Hartman. I had tried to follow my brother to his second grade classroom, but when he reached the stairs, I panicked, made a quick detour, and found my way to Mrs. Wiley's





room. She had been my brother's first grade teacher, and I wanted to stay with Mrs. Wiley. Miss Hartman tried to calm me down. "Hello Shirley, don't you want to be in my room? I want to be your teacher, and I'd like you to be with me. Don't you want to stay here with me? You're going to like it here. Did you know that we both have the same name? My first name is Shirley too, just like you..." In between sobs, I could only shake my head and say, "No, no, no."

I had never been away from my family before this, not even for an hour. Now, I had been thrust into a microcosm where people looked like the ones I watched on our black and white TV. They weren't anything like my family. They served awful tasting food like overcooked turnip greens and hominy for lunch. And, why do they pour sugar all over their rice before eating it? I used to hate lunchtime at school. Later, I would learn to love Southern food—BBQ pork sandwiches, grits, cornbread, and fried chicken. I would adopt their likes and dislikes, including their prejudices. But at this moment, a room full of little children were staring at me, and some of them began to cry too.

Somehow, Miss Hartman got the class calmed down that day. She continued to reassure me and gave all of us lots of hugs. She always had on the most pleasant perfume. In the following days, I accepted her as my teacher. During the year, she taught us all a lot of things: how to read and write, how to be friends, and how to play games. My classmates would later tell me how I would speak to them in a mixture of Chinese and English during first grade.

I grew up with the same classmates through ninth grade and into high school. By this time, things began to change. Cries for racial equality and integration filled the air. Restrictions to public venues, restrooms, water fountains, and buses were lifted. The phenomenon of "White flight" changed entire neighborhoods practically over night whenever a Negro family moved in. Most of my friends moved out of the Hollywood area of Memphis. During that period, the very foundation of the old South was shaken to its core.





Family portrait with John's wife and family when Shirley was in junior high.

After high school, I spent two years at UT Knoxville with a student population of more than 20,000, where I was the only Chinese American co-ed. I returned to Memphis for pharmacy school, where again, I was the only Chinese girl. I transferred to USC and made Los Angeles my home in 1971. My parents and brothers moved to New York. I seldom go back to Memphis now, but have kept in touch with my first grade friend, Frances Mayfield-Anderson. She had Miss Shirley Hartman's, now Mrs. Romine's, address.

A few weeks ago, I sent Mrs. Romine a copy of this story along with a letter, asking if she remembered me. She responded immediately by calling me. Yes, she did remember and agreed that my story told it exactly the way it was back then.

Mrs. Romine had continued to teach at Hollywood through the unsettling period of integration and worked under a Black principal. In later years, she became politically active, gaining the full support of the Black teachers and held office as president of the Memphis Teachers Association.



Mrs. Romine is now retired and still lives in Memphis with her husband. She has one daughter, and three adopted Black grandchildren. She speaks in the same soft southern voice as she recalls her life of teaching. Many things have changed since our first encounter that first day of school.

She remembers the '50s but embraces the present. She said that God had prepared her to love all children. She seemed content with her life. As we ended our conversation, she asked me to please call her Shirley instead of Mrs. Romine. I hesitated, then said, "Yes ma'am...of course..." At least, I'll try, I thought to myself.

To me she is still the gentle, soft-hearted southern lady who gave me lots of hugs and helped to introduce me to a new world outside my small Chinese world that I shared with my nuclear family.



Reunion with Miss Hartman and two other girls from her first grade class, Frances Mayfield-Anderson and Lillian Wickham Davis; Memphis, March 2010. Frances's father built a counting rack for Miss Hartman in 1954.

Two days ago, I received a large box from Mrs. Romine—oops, I mean Shirley. She had sent me a little wooden rocking chair painted in red and a set of Dick and Jane reading books, the ones we read in first grade. What a wonderful remembrance from a wonderful teacher!



***About the Author:** Shirley Chu-Ng was born in Memphis, Tennessee, the daughter of Chinese immigrants who made their home in the South during the post-World War II years. Shirley and her husband live in Monterey Park, California, and have two children. Shirley has published articles in pharmacy journals and currently practices pharmacy in Los Angeles.*



