Gum Saan Journal

Volume 38, Number 1
2016

Chinese Americans in the Legal Profession

Published by

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

Publisher
Chinese Historical Society of Southern California
411 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.
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Gum Saan Journal
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Front Cover Photos: Top row (left to right): You Chung Hong, Hiram Kwan, Albert Lum, Betty Tom Chu
Bottom row: Marguerite Chung Geftakis, Mia Frances Yamamoto, Mike Eng

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.

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Editorial Committee, Gum Saan Journal, CHSSC, 411 Bernard Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

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Foreword

by Susie Ling, Editor of *Gum Saan Journal*

When I was waiting to take my citizenship test in the 1980s, I marveled at how the officer seemed to mispronounce every single name he called. How do you mispronounce Wong? Lopez? Or Kim? Lines to LA's Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) office were incredulously long and basic information was tricky to come by. In his interview with *Gum Saan Journal,* immigration attorney Mike Eng explained that INS was being deliberately difficult; it was a 1980s form of racism. I didn't realize this until 35 years later. Mike Eng and his longtime collaborator, Stewart Kwoh, helped establish the Asian Law Collective in 1974, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center in 1983, and Asian Americans Advancing Justice in 1991 to challenge such racism. Despite their own important contributions, Mike and Stewart stood on the shoulders of other giants. This issue of *Gum Saan Journal* begins to explore the connections between the stalwarts that used the legal profession to bring about progress in Southern California.

Mike got into UCLA School of Law partly because his predecessor, Mia Yamamoto, demanded that the school accept more Asian American students. Mia formed the first Asian law students organization and then worked with (Judge) Dolly Gee and others, in the Asian Concerns Committee that became the Asian Pacific American Bar Association (APABA) by 1998. The coalescing of Asian American allies has been a key to gaining social progress. In the 1980s, Dolly was one of the Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association's (SCCLA) representative to that Asian Concerns Committee.

It was in 1976 that Albert Lum became the founding president of SCCLA, the first Asian American bar association. Albert got the idea of a Chinese American bar association after attending a party for Justice Elwood Lui given by Judge Delbert Wong. We paid tribute to Judge Delbert Wong in the 2004 issue of *Gum Saan Journal.* Albert worked for the largest Chinatown law firm: Kwan, Quan, Cohen and Lum, founded by Hiram Kwan.

Hiram joined the California Bar in 1953 and also helped the two pioneering women, Betty Tom Chu and Marguerite Chung Geftakys,

get their starts in the legal field. Hiram grew up in the tightknit Chinese American produce market world of Los Angeles. When he was five years old, Hiram attended the wedding of You Chung Hong near the Garnier Building, the community center of Old Chinatown.

Y.C. Hong was the first Chinese American admitted to the California Bar in 1923. While a student at USC Law, Y.C. struggled financially and had to depend on sympathetic classmates to lend him their textbooks. Despite his trail blazing practice headquartered in Chinatown, Y.C. was denied membership in the Los Angeles Bar Association. For fifty years, Y.C. Hong used his legal expertise to forward Chinese American civil rights. However, Y.C. should not have been the first California attorney of Chinese descent.

Our community recently learned that by 1888, Hong Yen Chang earned a law degree from Columbia University and was admitted to the New York Bar—becoming probably the first Chinese American lawyer in the United States. But he was denied acceptance to the California Bar in 1890 as he was considered a "Mongoloid." 125 years later, the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association of UC Davis—under the guidance of Professor Gabriel Chin—petitioned the California Supreme Court to posthumously admit Hong Yen Chang to the California Bar. These young lawyers were successful in 2015.

Attorney Hong Yen Chang.
(*Courtesy photo.*)

The last story of this issue of *Gum Saan Journal* is on Arnold Go, proprietor of George's Market in Pasadena. Ideally, this feature should have been included in *Gum Saan Journal's* Chinese Grocers Edition of 2006. But that's okay. Sometimes, you realize things later. We are continuously bringing better understanding and re-envisioning our history.

Chinese Americans in the Legal Profession

Y.C. Hong: Advocate for Chinese American Inclusion

By Li Wei Yang

Li Wei Yang is curator of Western American History at San Marino's Huntington Library. The Library's exhibition, Y.C. Hong: Advocate for Chinese American Inclusion, *chronicles the life of Y.C Hong and his family, his legal and civic accomplishments during the period of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and his contributions to the building and growth of the Los Angeles Chinese community.*

The name You Chung "Y.C." Hong may not sound familiar to most people living in and around Los Angeles, but to most long-time residents of Southern California's Chinese community, his name engenders a great deal of respect and pride. As one of the first Chinese Americans admitted into the State Bar of California, Y.C. was a major figure in the Los Angeles Chinese community. He was one of the founding members of the Los Angeles New Chinatown, an authority on U.S. immigration law, and an active proponent of equal rights for Chinese Americans.

Born on May 4, 1898 in San Francisco, California, Y.C. was the second child of a Chinese laborer's family. Shortly after his birth, Y.C. suffered a spinal cord injury from a fall that severely limited physical growth for the rest of his life. As a widow, Y.C.'s mother, Lee Hung Lin, single-handedly raised him and his sister, Helen, by working menial jobs in and around San Francisco's Chinatown. Like most Chinese kids in San Francisco, Y.C. attended the Oriental School and was awarded first prize for good scholarship. He then went on to attend Lowell High School but graduated from Berkeley High School in 1915. Then, Y.C. traveled around the U.S. in search of job opportunities and one of his first jobs was as a bookkeeper in a Chinese restaurant in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1918, his job search landed him in Los Angeles to work as a Chinese language translator for the U.S. Immigration Bureau. In 1920, Y.C. enrolled in the University of Southern California Law School's night class program while maintaining full-time work at the Immigration Bureau. One year before his graduation from USC, Y.C. took and passed the bar exam in 1923 and was admitted as one of the first Chinese Americans to the State Bar of California. At the time, this extraordinary accomplishment received wide coverage from the press, but Y.C. chose to stay in school to finish his bachelor of law degree in

1924 and continued on to earn his master of law degree in 1925. Still, Y.C. did not practice law right away, presumably because it was difficult for a young Chinese attorney to find employment at the time. Y.C. continued to work as a translator until 1927, when he decided to set up his own practice specializing in immigration law.

Y.C.'s first law office was situated on Los Angeles Street, near present-day Union Station. With the help of at least one secretary, his modest practice received hundreds of clients from the U.S. and China within the first three years. At this time, Chinese immigrants' hiring of attorneys was not a new phenomenon; it was widely perceived as a necessity for immigrants who did not possess the language and legal skills. An attorney's role was to guide them through the legal process by filing the appropriate documents, familiarizing the client of his or her rights, helping prepare for lengthy and often tricky interrogations, and contesting unfavorable decisions. Because Y.C. was known as one of the first Chinese Americans to pass the bar and for his early involvement with the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, his rock-solid reputation helped garner early success for the practice. As the archive at the Huntington Library shows, Y.C. processed more than 7,300 immigration case files in his lifetime. The majority of his clients were Chinese who were seeking admission into the U.S. as sons and wives of Chinese American citizens; another major group was the sons and wives of Chinese merchants. Many of these files contain long and extensive coaching papers and village maps that were essential for the immigrants to memorize their family history and village details during interrogations with immigration officials.

In addition to his working with Chinese clients seeking admission during the Exclusion Act era, Y. C. became an active and successful advocate for Chinese American equal rights. As early as 1925, Y.C. had written *A Plea for Relief* that was issued by the Chinese American Citizens Alliance to lobby Congress to allow non-citizen Chinese wives to join their American husbands in the U.S. In 1928, Y.C. and a number of prominent Chinese American activists traveled to Washington D.C. to testify before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in support of this important issue.

Even with the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, the Chinese in general were still considered undesirables in the eyes of many immigration policymakers. In the late 1940s, Y.C. and the Chinese

American Citizens Alliance asked Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas to investigate the American Consulate General in Canton, China, for nonconformance with the War Brides Act of 1945, which allowed noncitizen spouses and children of American military personnel to enter the U.S. In 1952, Y.C. was invited to give his expert opinion on immigration to President Truman's Commission on Immigration and Naturalization. The commission's report, *Whom Shall We Welcome,* was issued in 1953. The report urged reform to the nation's immigration system, which featured quotas based on race and national origin. In this summary, it is not possible to list all of Y.C.'s civic accomplishments, but the abovementioned examples demonstrate Y.C.'s ability to establish political connections and his lifelong dedication to advocating for Chinese American civic integration.

As major figures in the developments and growth of Los Angeles New Chinatown, Y.C. and his wife, Mabel Hong, commissioned Erle Webster and Adrian Wilson to design three buildings and the iconic East Gate on Gin Ling Way. Part of the design inspirations were drawn from the Hong family's extensive rare book holdings on Chinese art and history, which was compiled over many years by Mabel's working with rare book dealers in the U.S. and Europe. Moreover, New Chinatown was entirely owned and operated by Chinese Americans, and its bold, forward-thinking design ideas (all utility lines were buried underground) and numerous offerings have attracted countless visitors to the site.

When Y.C. announced the relocation of his law office to Gin Ling Way in New Chinatown in June 1938, the Hong buildings became symbols of Chinese American social, economic, and political inclusion in the U.S. for the thousands of potential clients who passed through Y.C.'s office to seek his counsel. In addition, Y.C. also spent countless hours writing correspondence, making telephone calls, and hosting dignitaries in his office on behalf of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (C.A.C.A.) to advocate for Chinese American equal rights. In a letter to his fellow C.A.C.A. members, after defeating a congressional effort to reintroduce laws to restrict non-citizen Chinese wives in 1949, he cautioned: "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." Such thinking was what propelled Y.C. and many other like-minded Chinese American leaders to continue the fight against any attempt to strip the rights of residents of Chinese ancestry.

Today, the Huntington Library is home to the Hong Family Papers. They form the centerpiece of the library's efforts to collect, preserve,

make available, and promote Chinese American history. The collection is a treasure trove of historical documents and artifacts, including correspondence, manuscripts, rare books, maps and photos of Old and New Chinatown, audio-visual materials, a rare 1930s Chinese typewriter, and more than 7,300 immigration case files (1904–1965) that were generated, prepared and presented by Y.C. These materials help tell the events in the life of Y.C. Hong that led to his becoming an advocate for Chinese American inclusion.

Y.C. Hong's business card/business flyer, ca. 1928.
(*From the collection at The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens.*)

Hiram W. Kwan

One of the most prominent attorneys in the Los Angeles Chinatown community since the 1950s is Hiram W. Kwan. This is excerpted from interviews in January 2015 with Suellen Cheng and in February 2015 with Anna Gee at Kwan's legal office at 200 S. San Pedro in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles.

Growing Up in Market Chinatown

I was born in Havana, Cuba on May 7, 1924. My maternal grandfather, Yee Ling, was the San Francisco manager for the Bank of Canton[1]. It was the only Chinese bank existing in the United States around the 1910s. It was at 555 Montgomery Street. The bank took care of Chinese remittances and import-export trade. My grandfather came on a merchant's visa and was allowed to bring his family.

My father, Andrew Kwan, was a derivative citizen through his father, who came before the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. My father came from Hoiping (Kaiping) and went through Angel Island when he was about 12. He went through the San Francisco public schools including Commodore Stockton, the "Oriental" school. He graduated around 1917 and went to work as a minor officer for the Bank of Canton because he was bilingual. The manager liked this young man and introduced him to his daughter, Susan Yee. That's how my parents met, and then wed. My oldest brother, Wellington, was born in 1922 in San Francisco.

The bank wanted to open a branch in Havana, Cuba and sent my father. My father had a U.S. passport so he could travel easily. After my birth in Cuba, we came back to the United States, and my father continued as a junior bank officer for another three years. When my maternal grandfather retired in 1928 and returned to Canton, my father decided that San Francisco was too cold and moved our family to Los Angeles. My five younger siblings were all born in Los Angeles. My paternal grandfather lived with us and helped take care of us. I don't know too much about his earlier history.

1 Records show that Yee Ling was Secretary of "Canton Bank," organized on October 1, 1907 in San Francisco—after the 1906 Earthquake. In 2002, the Bank of Canton was acquired by United Commercial Bank.

There weren't that many Chinese in Los Angeles. My father worked as the one bilingual Chinese with the Bank of California[2] at 1105 S. San Pedro Street until he retired in his 60's. Dad was very active in the Chinese American produce community. Dad was also the treasurer of our church.

The Bank of America also had a bilingual bank officer, Mr. David Kitman Woo, who serviced Chinese Americans. (That's Wilbur Woo's father.) The Chinese Americans who came to the banks needed to send remittances to China. Aside from the produce industry, there were Chinese restaurants, hand laundries, grocery stores, and some farming. About ten Chinese partners would pool about $100 each to start a grocery store or laundry.

Chinese Americans could own land, but there were deed restrictions imposed by previous owners. With 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the U.S. Supreme Court made racial covenants illegal. Still, real estate segregation was common practice until the mid-1960s. Chinese had to live in Chinatown, in Southcentral LA, or on the east side of town with Mexicans and Blacks.

I remember that my father earned $65/month into the 1930s; we were quite poor. Dad did do taxes and bookkeeping on the side. He also acquired a little stock in these Chinese businesses. We didn't have a car, and we would use "foot power" until Dad bought a Hupmobile. We lived on 28th Street near Central Avenue for a short time. Afterwards, we rented a house on 14th Street, an unrestricted area. That was about four or five blocks from Dad's place of employment. We walked to Chinese Congregational Church[3] at 734 East 9th Place. We went to Chinese school six days a week in the basement of that Church. We spoke Sze-yup at home and Cantonese and Mandarin at Chinese school. More importantly, we got a different view of the world.

Our family then moved to 757 East 20th Street, and I transferred to the Chinese school supported by the Presbyterian Church at 631 E. Adams Boulevard. Mr. Tom was the principal. I graduated from the highest level of Chinese school at that time. I think our rent was $20/month for our 5-room wooden house. My father saved enough money to buy the 20th Street property for $2000; he built on to it as more children came. We

2 Bank of California was established in 1864 and merged with Union Bank in 1996.
3 Established in 1924.

stayed there until after the war. It was across the street from a community center where Japanese gathered to report for evacuation during World War II.[4] There were a lot of Chinese families in this Adams community, but it was a mixed neighborhood. I remember the smell of the Hong Kong Noodle Company[5] that canned fried noodles and made fortune cookies. There were a couple of Chinese markets and three fresh chicken poultry shops—including one by a Jewish guy named Zacky, which was called Sam's Poultry Market.

There was also a Chinese Methodist Church in New Chinatown. The three Chinese churches would have social gatherings so we would meet a lot of Chinese youth. It was a segregated society; we didn't have too many Caucasian friends. As we couldn't join mainstream clubs, there was the Los Angeles Chinese Guardsmen with about 50 young men. We went deep sea fishing once and we sponsored dances. This probably started near 1940 with Dan Louie and Kenneth Jang. We were ambitious and a lot of us became professionals after our military service. Wah Qiu was the rival Chinatown group for basketball or baseball tournaments. We went to Chinatown about once or twice a month.

We had five boys and two sisters in our family. I attended Lafayette Junior High and then Polytechnic High.[6] My father did not believe in giving us allowances. But we found jobs thanks to my father's contacts. I worked at an asparagus farm one summer. My brother, Wellington, and I cleaned the Congregational Church. I delivered the *Examiner* paper in our neighborhood. When I was about 13, I started as a busboy and dishwasher on weekends for another Quan at Tuey Far Low in Old Chinatown. Wellington and I earned a dollar plus all we could eat for a 12-hour day. Wellington and I then worked as store clerks at the National Dollar Store near 4th and Broadway, owned by another Chinese. After my military service, I worked for Quon-Quon import-export business while I was going to law school. As Chinese Americans, we didn't have too many other work opportunities.

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4 Founded in the 1920s, Japanese Christian Church was at 814–830 East 20th Street, Los Angeles near Maple.

5 Established by David Jung in 1910 at 950 S. San Pedro.

6 Established in 1911, Lafayette closed in 1955. Mayor Tom Bradley attended Lafayette Junior High. LA Polytechnic High was established in 1897 and moved in 1905 to Washington Boulevard and Flower Street. In 1957, the renamed Francis Polytechnic High moved to the San Fernando Valley.

Joining the Military

We all thought about studying engineering and returning to work in China. There was so much prejudice in the U.S. that we planned to return to China for successful employment. That's one of the reasons we emphasized Chinese language education. But the war came. I found a job as a stock boy at a radio products company on 15th Street near my high school. Through them, I got a referral for a civil service position in San Francisco. I trained to be a radar operator at San Francisco City College. I then went to San Mateo Community College to finish an electrical engineering program. I passed my physical exam at Hamilton Field. I was accepted into the top-secret San Francisco Presidio radar detection school, destined for the Signal Corps. But Boeing's B-17 bombers-with its ten machine guns-proved to be a disappointment in battle. There grew a great need for bombardiers, navigators, and pilots. Such positions would open opportunity to be commissioned officers. However, the flunk-out rate was about 50%. I was accepted as an aviation cadet, became a navigator for the B-24, and went overseas. Many other Chinese from Cal and Stanford—and from the Guardsmen—also became bombardiers and navigators in the Army Air Corps. I was stationed in Hawaii, Philippines, Okinawa, Iwo Shima, and then Tokyo. I became a second lieutenant. After the war, I became a commanding officer for a company of 100. I then got promoted to the headquarters of the Fifth Air Force in Tokyo. I stayed on in the reserves for another 25 years after I was discharged.

Hiram Kwan in World War II.
(*Photo courtesy of Hiram Kwan.*)

It was fortuitous that the Army allowed Chinese Americans to get into officer training. The Navy only allowed Chinese Americans in the kitchen. Judge Delbert Wong, architect Gin D. Wong, and Judge James Yip all were

officers in World War II. There were about fifty of us. In 1946, we organized American Legion posts in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. We petitioned the U.S. government to open up the warbrides quota. I pulled in the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (C.A.C.A.) and other community groups. I remember going to the American Legion national convention. Flying Tigers' General Chennault's wife, Anna, and their daughter, helped lobby for that quota. That changed the Chinese American community. We still have about 100 members in our Chinatown Post 628 of which 80% are Chinese Americans. I became Commander when I re-enacted the Post in 2012.

Working with all kinds of people in the Army, I became more tolerant. I did notice that some of the Southerners were still fighting the Civil War. But we "yellow" folk were considered Caucasian. That was my actual classification in the files (laughs). The Army experience gave me a lot of confidence. That served me well when I became a prosecutor.

My Legal Practice

When I was five years old, I attended the wedding of Y.C. Hong, the first Chinese American attorney, at the Paris Inn near the Garnier Building in Old Chinatown.

The legal work needed in the Chinese American community was mostly done by Caucasians who charged high fees and did not speak our languages. Caucasian firms would not hire Chinese American attorneys, even into the 1960s.

My four brothers and I all earned the G.I. Bill with our military service. We had interest to be engineers; Wellington earned his degree in civil engineering. I used the G.I. Bill to obtain a finance degree from USC; I thought to be an accountant. But in 1948, China became communist, and we all knew we couldn't return to China. After the 1940s, we switched our allegiance to the United States.

We all decided to pursue law. David[7] finished Loyola Law School first in 1952. I graduated from USC Law in January of 1953 and took the bar in July. I joined the California bar in December of 1953. I was about the 6th

7 David Kwan is the father of Judge Robert N. Kwan of the Central District, and two other attorneys, Edward Michael Kwan and Susan Ten Kwan.

Chinese American in law. Wellington was admitted to the bar in 1957; he attended Southwestern Law in the evenings. Leo went to UCLA Law in the 1960s and then became a doctor.

I was worried about getting positions practicing law. I wanted to make sure I could make a living, at least as a teacher. I took some education courses and had a secondary credential. I did substitute teaching at Manual Arts and Belmont High. I taught business law at Los Angeles City College. Then I taught contract law and immigration law for about fifty years at USC, Pepperdine, and Southwestern Law. I continue to counsel people to be trained not for one career, but two or three.

After law school, I applied for a position at the U.S. Attorney's Office. Civil service depended on a written exam and an oral interview. I was the first Chinese American appointed to be a federal prosecutor in Los Angeles. There was one Japanese American and one Black before me in the U.S. Attorney's Office. There was a quota for one attorney per race. I was probably the only Chinese who applied, and I was a veteran to boot. I started with criminal cases: bank robberies, criminal fraud, income tax, deportations, etc. My boss told me to do what was right; I felt working in law was very satisfying. I was a federal prosecutor for three years and then special assistant after that.

I transferred to the civil side and did a lot of fraud cases. The Bank of America was doing a lot of false Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans through its subsidiaries. I didn't like that and rejected over 450 of their FHA cases. Bank of America sued the government. I got busy with depositions and found doctored files, false statements, etc. I was only two years out of law school, and I went against their attorney from Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher. In 1957, I sued Bank of America for punitive damages and helped the government get a $50 million settlement under the False Claim Act. I was already in private practice so the government appointed me special assistant to complete this case.

I started my own office in Chinatown in 1957. My first office was at the Chen Family Association at the 421 Bernard Street building.[8] The rent for that one-room was $40/month; I did my own typing. My first clerk was Betty Tom Chu who was going to law school. Then I formed a partnership

8 Gee How Oak Tien Association of the Chen, Hu, and Yuan families.

with the Chinatown insurance broker, Jimmy D. Jung. After that, I formed the largest Chinese American law firm in Los Angeles: Kwan, Quan, Cohen and Lum. We had twelve lawyers; four of them became judges. One of my partners was Al Lum, the first president of the Southern California Chinese American Lawyers Association. From fifty members, now there are about 500 members. Later, Richard Quan formed his own group in the Eighth and Figueroa area with another twelve attorneys. After a while, I went on my own.

I took on a case protecting homosexuals against the federal government in 1957. At that time, Immigration Services deported all homosexuals as they were automatically classified as psychopaths. I didn't like that law. I thought the deportation was illegal, and I challenged it. My client was George Fleuti, a Swiss resident who had come to the U.S. in 1952. I got the 9th Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse the order of deportation in *Rosenberg v. Fleuti* (1963). Conservative Whites and Chinese Americans didn't like that.

I handled a lot of Chinese confession cases after the government offered amnesty for paper sons in 1956. When I was a federal prosecutor, I was supposed to deport illegal Chinese with questionable backgrounds or allegedly communist. As a private attorney, I effectively helped people change their legal status. A lot of Chinese Americans were afraid and wouldn't confess. They had to protect family or friends and keep their false names. Their confession might cause other people to become deportable and/or have to hire an expensive attorney. For paper sons with families already in the United States, they didn't want to confess. Chinese Americans who had family in China were more likely to confess as their change of status might allow them to apply for their real family members to immigrate. Immigration Services didn't like that. I knew the prosecutors and local judges so I was 100% effective for my clients. I was aggressive, and I was never lazy.

I had a general practice, but I did a lot of immigration law. I liked helping immigrants. I joined the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) of Los Angeles. There were only about fifteen attorneys then. I later became president of that group. Some immigration lawyers were crooks. The average fee charged Chinese Americans was $3500 to get a green card, but the filing fee to get a green card was only $10—or $25 for

certain circumstances. I started charging $350, and I cornered the market. The Caucasian attorneys were angry at me for changing the market rate.

I helped a lot of people. I even had a case defending a Chinese madam and some gamblers. There was a client who smuggled 50 pounds of heroin into the United States; he was facing 40 years of prison. He had five children and a wife in Hong Kong. I encouraged him to admit liability and do ten years in jail. But he went with another attorney, lost his jury trial, and was sentenced to 40 years. I remember those cases. There was a laundryman in the Sawtelle area that was in the military service with me. I encouraged him to buy his own property. He went on to buy other neighboring properties, and he is a multimillionaire today. Another client could barely speak English. I encouraged her to learn English, become a citizen, and purchase property. She is doing well today.

I was involved in a lot of Chinatown activity. I helped the Chinese community form a lot of corporations and partnerships. I owned Kwong Dack Wo supermarket at 702 N. Spring Street.[9] With the grocery, I helped found a lot of small Chinese restaurants, including ABC Restaurant on New High Street that took over from Lime House restaurant in 1984. I was the one who chose the name of ABC Seafood to represent "Always Best Chinese." Later, we opened NBC Seafood on Atlantic Blvd. in Monterey Park. I also helped incorporate the 3rd restaurant of this series, CBS Seafood on Spring Street, meaning "Clearly Best Seafood" (laughs). That was opened in 1999. I helped and invested in the Chinese American banks.

Y. C. Hong and I were friends. He was the number one C.A.C.A. man. I've been with C.A.C.A. for about 45 years. I got into politics, and I did all I could to nurture the C.A.C.A. programs. I was active with the Four Families Association (Lung Kong Tin Yee) and then, the International Kwan Association. My father was an incorporator of the Lung Kong Tin Yee Association in old Chinatown. I was also active in Zhong Hua (CCBA). We have an identity as Chinese Americans.

Up to the 1950s, few Caucasian firms would hire Chinese persons. Peter Soohoo, one of the main founders of New Chinatown, was the exception as he worked as an engineer for the Department of Water and Power. When Chinese male workers came to the United States in the 19th century,

9 Kwong Dack Wo Market was next to Wai Sang Meat Market (700 N. Spring). Historically, this was the Giacomo Tononi Block with the San Fernando Hotel.

they were often over sixteen years of age and had no opportunity to get an education. They didn't have families so they played the Chinese lottery in hopes of making a few extra dollars. In the 1920-30s, there was a lot of bad media publicity and mainstream stereotypes against the Chinese bachelor community. After World War II, the image of the Chinese American improved thanks in part to those who served the U.S. armed forces.

But as Chinese Americans, we still have to worry about civil rights. Chinese are lucky they weren't sent to concentration camps like Japanese Americans. We served in the military, and we got higher education. After I got married, we tried to buy a house in Hancock Park and the realtor said, "Oh, the owner decided not to sell." That was a lie. The real estate agent didn't want to lose his future listings. Discrimination was rampant then. The leadership of African Americans in the 1950-60s civil rights movement was so important; we are also the beneficiaries. But discrimination was still evident into the 1980s. Change was slow to come. Muslims are dealing with backlash today.

I handled 30,000 cases in my 60 years; I guess I didn't sleep too much (laughs). I wasn't afraid even to take on murder cases. Now that I'm in my 90's, I'm working on retirement. Today we have hundreds of attorneys, judges, doctors, etc. who are of Chinese descent. Litigation work is very demanding; you have to work about 100 hours per week. My secret: vegetarian diet and a regular exercise regimen.

Albert C. Lum

Albert Lum in his office, 2015.

In 1975, Albert C. Lum was the founding president of the Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association (SCCLA), the first Asian American bar organization. He was admitted to the California bar in 1963 and began his private practice in Chinatown. Mr. Lum has served in various capacities with the Los Angeles County Bar Association, the State Bar, and in civic organizations in the Chinese American community. Albert and his two sons are partners of Lum Law Group with offices in Pasadena and Las Vegas. One son, Albert Justin Lum, was president of SCCLA in 2001–2001. This was excerpted from an interview in June of 2015.

Growing Up in Arkansas

I was born in 1934 in Arkansas. My mother was born in Mississippi, and my father was born in Guangzhou. My mother completed the second grade, and my father had had no education. My father learned to read Chinese with the *Chinese Times*, the only paper available at our time. Chinese in the American South were in the grocery business. There weren't that many restaurants or laundries. My great uncle started a grocery in Elaine, Arkansas, and my father came through Canada to Elaine. My mother's family also had a grocery in Mississippi. Later, my parents and siblings moved to West Memphis in Arkansas where I was born.[10]

West Memphis didn't want Chinese to own property, but my mother was tough. She bought a large lot in West Memphis, and she built a grocery store with living quarters in the back. I'm the youngest of six children. When Mom took my siblings to the nearby school, they would not enroll "colored" Chinese. My mother fought all the way. She got each of my siblings into that school and we all graduated from that high school.

My siblings were athletes in high school as was I. In the South, being an athlete was everything. Each of us was voted "best athlete" of our

10 According to the 2010 census, Elaine has a population of 636 with 1 Asian American, 37% White, and 61% Black. West Memphis had a population of 26,245 which was 64% Black, 34% White, and 0.4% Asian.

classes and won respect. In our Southern town, there wasn't a single act of discrimination against me by any person who knew our family because we were respected for our academic and athletic achievements. About 15 years ago, I went to a high school reunion. My classmates were respectful of me because I had become a lawyer.

However, there were numerous acts of discrimination by others. This was and is institutional discrimination. I remember movies I saw in Arkansas with Chinese wearing queues, lying on dirt streets, and sleeping on bricks. That was the stereotype image in many people's minds. I will never forget having stopped at a traffic light with my mother, when a kid on the bus bench pulled slanted eyes at me. Once, my cousin and I were sitting in a coffee shop, and a passerby deliberately whispered, "Chink." My cousin and I both jumped up and chased that guy. He ran into his car. I can still visualize his fear. There were similar incidents in those years.

After high school, I took a few courses in Memphis that went nowhere. At nineteen, I came out to Los Angeles. My older sister had married someone with a restaurant in LA's Chinatown. I had been to New Orleans and Memphis, but I was so isolated in the LA Chinese community. I was desperately looking to find work. I delivered phone books and got odd jobs. There was an ad in the *Los Angeles Times* for board markers at $195 per month at the Pacific Stock Exchange. I had put on my best clothes, and I scored 100% on their written exam. They didn't call me, but I got impatient and went down there. The White man said, "You have the smarts, but we can't hire you because you'll never make it." Board markers usually graduate to stockbrokers, and Chinese could not be stockbrokers.

I found work in Chinatown at United Poultry with Nelson and Mary Moy. I killed, cleaned, dressed, and delivered chicken for four months. Nelson gave me some valuable lessons, and he and Mary were good friends. Much later, I became their lawyer.

I joined the military in 1954. All my brothers served—in World War II, Korean War, and Vietnam. My timing was right as the Korean War was just beginning to end. I could have been shot from the front or the back if I had actually gone to Korea.

While in the army in North Carolina, there was a Jewish man named Warren Schwartz[11]. He had just finished law school at Columbia. We became friends, and he was my mentor. The Army personnel were certainly not of his intellectual level. However, he treated them all respectfully but as people who could not touch his interior dignity—although they tried. I watched his demeanor; although he was a lowly private, he earned respect from the master sergeant and even the company lieutenant. He impressed me. I thought maybe it was possible for me to also become a lawyer. I wanted to have his confident approach to life.

I met a lot of people in the Army. Before the Army, I thought people in suits were better than people in coveralls. But I learned better. A friend was a "Georgia *cracker*" with a 6th grade education. Another one of my friends was a person from Pennsylvania who later became a priest. And I met folks who had PhDs with whom I wouldn't get in a foxhole with.

I had a thought to transfer to Monterey to study Mandarin at the Army Language Institute. Warren said, "No. Get out of the Army. Go back to school." I ended up returning to the South. I graduated from New Orleans' Tulane University in three years with a Business Administration degree. I received $110 a month from the GI Bill; California gave me an extra $50 per month. That and working as a—what else—Chinese cook on the weekends, tutoring accounting, and serving as a library assistant helped me to survive.

I also remember my history professor at Tulane. She asked me about my ambitions. I said, "I'm thinking about law school." She said, "Why not?" I said, "Well, I'm Chinese…" She said, "What's that got to do with it?" I carried that in my memory as inspiration.

Being an Attorney in the 1960s

I got accepted to UCLA and USC law schools. I started at UCLA, but it was a day program and I had to work to survive. My older sister helped me get a job with the Internal Revenue Service. I re-registered for night classes at USC. I was admitted to the California bar in 1963. By then, I was

11 Professor Emeritus Warren F. Schwartz (1931-2014) taught at Georgetown Law School for about 30 years, where he specialized in torts and international trade and ran the Olin Program in Law and Economics. He received his LL.B. in 1954.

married with two children. My wife, Theresa, was born in Beijing and came over from Taiwan as a student in 1954.

In my law class, there was another Asian, a Filipina—Marion Lacadia Obera—who was our first to become a judge. Nowland Hong, an outstanding trial attorney whose father was the first Chinese American attorney in California, finished USC Law a couple of years before me; he worked at the City Attorney's office. Another of our USC contemporaries was Jin S. Lee. Richard Quan was finishing at UCLA. When I finished law school, there were about a dozen Chinese American lawyers in the area. By the time we had the first organizational meeting in 1975 for SCCLA (Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association), there were about 45 of us at the meeting.

After law school, I started working with Edward Ng, a CPA/attorney. Later, I worked with Hiram Kwan and Arthur D. Cohen on Broadway. We did ethnic community law—which means general law. The Chinese clientele thought that as an attorney, you should know everything. But I didn't know everything, and I had to learn by myself. Somebody may have been involved in an accident; somebody else might have immigration issues; and a third group might want to start a corporation and have tax questions. You knew that if you didn't take the case, nobody would take it. At that time, our Chinese clients couldn't go downtown and find somebody to understand them and take their case—without a substantial amount of money. As an early inexperienced Chinese American attorney, you had to watch yourself to make sure you didn't hurt your clients. But if you could help, you tried.

After a few years, I went to a firm downtown. Another attorney, Richard Kwan, led another group of Chinese American attorneys to open a very successful law firm in downtown LA. Now, there are many excellent Chinese American attorneys in every aspect of law, and there are many judges.

Around 1968 or 1969, I thought to take the orthodox approach to being an attorney; I joined the Los Angeles County Bar Association. The Association was established in 1878 and there were 7200 members at that time. (Today, it has 21,000 members.) At their lunch meetings, I would have nothing in common with the others at the table. They were all White and from major law firms. They had no concept of my clientele in Chinatown. I was a young Chinese attorney not from Harvard; they

had no reason to relate to me. Maybe I was ultra-paranoid, but I had an empty feeling.

In frustration, I contacted the president of the LA County Bar Association, Leonard S. Janofsky. We had lunch at the Dynasty Club in Chinatown. I told Leonard, "There's no encouragement of young minority attorneys." He said, "I'll appoint you chair of the Minority Education Committee." I then contacted other minority attorneys to give talks to school kids. I asked Johnny Cochran in his $500 suit to go to Jefferson High's assembly. I asked Johnny to drive up in his nice car, and tell those kids that there were other avenues of success outside of sports. I said, "If we get but one kid, don't you think it's worth it?" I hope we accomplished that. Cochran volunteered as did other minority attorneys. I went out to Irving Junior High in my neighborhood. But eventually, I walked away from the LA County Bar Association.

Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association (SCCLA)

That experience spurred me to put together an organization where I—and others like me—could socialize in the legal profession comfortably. SCCLA was not formed for political reasons. We wanted to network with people who were like us. In the 1970s, the number of Asian American attorneys was becoming noticeable, but rarely were we together at any bar association meeting.

Delbert Wong was our most prominent Chinese American attorney; he became the first Chinese American judge in the continental U.S. in 1959. Delbert was appointed to the bench by Governor Pat Brown. In 1975, Jerry Brown was the new governor, and he appointed Elwood Lui as the second Chinese American to the bench. Elwood was born in Los Angeles and graduated from UCLA Law in 1969. Delbert and Dolores had a dinner for Elwood. Hiram Kwan, Jimmy Yip, George Lee, Nowland Hong, Richard Quan, Michael Chang, Betty Tom Chu, and I were at that dinner. That's when we had a discussion that we should get together more regularly and organize our own bar association. About a dozen of us showed up for an informal meeting at Fong's in Chinatown. We then had a formal meeting at Golden Palace Restaurant with 45 or so in attendance. A few talked about forming an all-Asian bar association. I thought it was hard enough to get the Chinese together; I wanted to do something simple so it would last.

We first called ourselves the Los Angeles Chinese Lawyers Association. We had our inaugural dinner-dance on June 5, 1976 at the Golden Palace Restaurant, and I was installed as SCCLA's first president with Nowland as the President-Elect, Carol Mon Lee as Vice President, George S. Lee as Secretary, and Arthur Wong as Treasurer. Our guest speaker was Secretary of State March Fong Eu. There were about 300 in attendance. I thought it was fantastic.

We started with monthly meetings with guest speakers. I remember Vincent Bugliosi, the prosecutor of the Charles Manson case, was one of our luncheon speakers. Other speakers were community leaders, those running for political office, and the like. We had Circuit Judge Thomas Tang, Justice Harry Lowe, and Attorney General Evelle Younger as dinner speakers. If it weren't for the enthusiastic support of Nowland Hong, George Lee, and many others, SCCLA would have never survived.

The California State Bar had a convention once a year. To have delegates at this convention, a bar association had to have a minimum of 100

From left to right: Albert C. Lum, Poy Wong of Wong Family Association, Wilbur Woo of Cathay Bank, George Cheng of Cathay Bank, Governor Jerry Brown, Jack C. Lee of Yee Sing Chong, Judge Delbert Wong, Judge Elwood Lui, and Dr. Margin Lew. Circa 1970s.
(*Photo courtesy of Albert C. Lum.*)

members. LA County Bar Association had offered to put SCCLA under their wing and assign us a few delegates. I and others wanted to remain independent. We had a meeting in Nowland's office. It was Harry Mock who said, "Al, I'll do it." He did it. He got us 100 dues-paying members. Of course, you didn't have to be Chinese to pay our nominal dues. That way we became certified as an independent bar association with our own delegates.

Another important person was Tom Loo. Until now, Tom hosts summer parties for law students at his home in Malibu. Tom graduated from USC Law in 1968, and his three daughters all graduated from USC Law. Tom taught courses at USC Law School for 27 years as an adjunct professor, and is a partner in a major law firm.

The politicians took notice of our organization. For example, Jerry Brown appointed three Chinese American judges that were all members of our organization: Jimmy Yip, Harry Mock, and Ron Lew. SCCLA gave credibility. There were other SCCLA attorneys that were offered judgeships but did not choose that path. For me, there were other things I wanted to do. SCCLA gave its directors, officers, and members different opportunities in the field. Would someone like me ever have the chance to become president of the LA County Bar? No way, with institutional discrimination. But SCCLA provides leadership opportunity for its members and importantly, we also have a commitment to give back to our community.

Other Asian bar associations were formed after us. The founding of JABA (Japanese American Bar Association) was driven by Edward Kakita. Ed came to see me in Chinatown, and I gave him a copy of our by-laws. Jerry Brown appointed Ed to the Superior Court in 1980. Ed was born in Los Angeles and graduated from Hastings Law in 1965. The Asian American Bar Association in San Francisco was also formed in 1976. Subsequently, several other Asian bar associations were formed throughout the U.S., and a national bar association—NAPABA—was established in 1988. Today, the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association represents the interest of about 70 bar associations and 40,000 attorneys.

SCCLA is the first Asian American bar association. It is one of the most active and progressive bar associations in the country. Not only are there networking opportunities for our members, SCCLA has been co-sponsoring free legal clinics, now at the Asian Youth Center, since 2003. There are professional development opportunities, pro-bono services, and important

mentoring programs. SCCLA has organized toy drives and food baskets for low-income families for 27 years. We provide student scholarships and fellowships with the Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA. Their CEO, Stewart Kwoh, was also a SCCLA president in 1988-89. Most of all, SCCLA is an opportunity for like-minded individuals to meet each other.

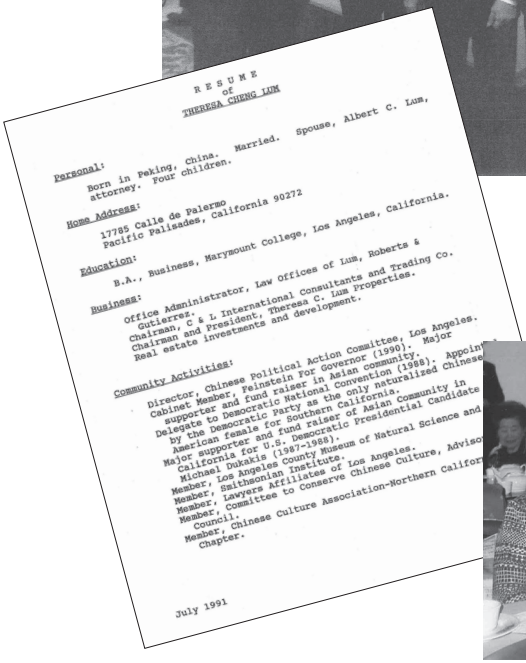
Community Organizing

I was fortunate to be able to participate in the Chinese community. My status as an attorney helped my community work. I was chair of the Chinatown Community Advisory Committee, president of the LA Chinese Chamber of Commerce, a director of the French Hospital, and Bradley's chair of the LA-Taipei Sister City Committee. I've been with Chinese American Citizens Alliance for about 50 years. I was lead counsel for the Chinatown redistricting issue. In 1986, they were talking about redistricting Chinatown into four city council districts. I didn't think that was right, and after consultation with USC Law professor, Erwin Chemerinsky, I worked to keep Chinatown in one district. Chemerinsky and the NAACP had filed their own redistricting case. As early as 1966, I organized with others, Asians Against Proposition 13. Proposition 13 was a discriminatory housing initiative, later held unconstitutional. Governor Pat Brown spoke at our gathering of 300–400 people.

In 1988, I worked with the Dukakis for President campaign, and I was active in Senator Diane Feinstein's campaigns. In 1992, Ed Roybal was retiring from Congress, and I threw my name in to succeed him in the 30th District. There were ten Democrats, but I was the only Asian American. Xavier Becerra won that Democratic primary and is still a member of the House.

Unfortunately, I still feel institutional racism. I was recently working on a case, and the opposing attorney said, "Do you have a hard time reading?" Was that a racist remark? Would he have said that to another White guy? In 2000, I felt compelled to write a letter printed in the *LA Daily Journal*. A young professional woman in the court house and I were vying for space and she said, "Why don't you go back to Asia where you came from?" I am a prior recipient of those remarks, so I was more amused than upset. I wrote, "This country did not become what it is because of the efforts of one group of color, religion or political beliefs. Is that so hard for any person to realize? No one group has the sole right to determine who can live in this country."

I often quote, "Success is not how high you climb, but how far you've travelled." My wife, Theresa, had been actively supportive of my career. She has done much in her own right. She passed away in August of 2015. She was a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother. Whatever my children and I have achieved, could not have been accomplished without her support and guidance. Theresa and I have four children: Jennifer, Mina, (Albert) Justin, and Robert. Jennifer is deputy general counsel at Cal Tech. She was a magistrate judge for the Central District of California and an Assistant United States Attorney. Mina is a banker in New York. Our sons are attorneys with Lum Law Group. We have ten grandchildren.



RESUME
of
THERESA CHENG LUM

Personal:
Born in Peking, China. Married. Spouse, Albert C. Lum, attorney. Four children.

Home Address:
17785 Calle de Palermo
Pacific Palisades, California 90272

Education:
B.A., Business, Marymount College, Los Angeles, California.

Business:
Office Administrator, Law Offices of Lum, Roberts & Gutierrez.
Chairman, C & L International Consultants and Trading Co.
Chairman and President, Theresa C. Lum Properties.
Real estate investments and development.

Community Activities:
Director, Chinese Political Action Committee, Los Angeles.
Cabinet Member, Feinstein For Governor (1990). Major supporter and fund raiser in Asian community.
Delegate to Democratic National Convention (1988). Appointed by the Democratic Party as the only naturalized Chinese American female for Southern California.
Major supporter and fund raiser of Asian Community in California for U.S. Democratic Presidential Candidate Michael Dukakis (1987-1988).
Member, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural Science and Smithsonian Institute.
Member, Lawyers Affiliates of Los Angeles.
Member, Committee to Conserve Chinese Culture, Advisory Council.
Member, Chinese Culture Association-Northern California Chapter.

July 1991

Albert C. Lum and family.
(Photos courtesy of Albert C. Lum.)

Mr. and Mrs. Lum.

Betty Tom Chu

The first Chinese American woman in Southern California to be admitted to the California bar in June of 1961, Betty Tom Chu is a prominent community leader. In 1973, Chu was a founding member of East-West Savings Bank and in 1981, she was founder and CEO of Trust Savings Bank in Monterey Park. She has taught at Los Angeles Community College and California College of Law. Betty Tom Chu was councilmember and mayor of Monterey Park, and she was a candidate for U.S. Congress in 2009. She is involved in a myriad of community and national civic organizations. This is excerpted from an interview in August of 2015.

Betty Tom Chu, 2015.

Gaslamp District in San Diego

I was born and raised in San Diego. My father, Tom Kan Choy, was one of the most prominent Chinese Americans in San Diego and had a number of businesses. From his grandfather, my father inherited a produce business and a farm. My father also opened a grocery and liquor store, a restaurant, gambling enterprises, and he sold illegal fireworks in the Chinatown area near 3rd and J Streets.

My paternal great-grandfather came to the U.S. alone in the 1800s. He returned to China during his later years; I believe he was concerned that the racial restrictions prohibited Chinese from being buried in California cemeteries. My grandfather was the oldest son and stayed in China to run the businesses in Guangzhou and Hong Kong. 3rd Grand Uncle was sent to the U.S. to take care of the family businesses. This included tourmaline mines in San Diego. At that time, the Empress Dowager loved these pink gems so they were exported to China. But 3rd Grand Uncle was a playboy; he got venereal disease from the brothels in the Chinatown area and had to go into a sanatorium. My great-grandfather sent my father, his oldest grandson, to the U.S. to take over the family businesses. Before my father came in 1920, he had to marry my mother, Yee Siu King. My father was

attending St. John's University in Shanghai[12] and came to San Diego on a student visa for Kelsey-Jenney Business College[13]. My father was bilingual.

I am an only child. When my mother was in the hospital, the doctor wanted her to choose an American name for me. My mother could pronounce "Betty" so that became my name. I grew up in the Gaslamp District, between Market Street and Island Avenue—right in the heart of the brothel and gambling activities. My father's grocery store and restaurant was a haven for the community. As a small child, I remember delivering day-old groceries to widows and the minister's family. Before kindergarten, I could read much of the Chinese newspapers. My kindergarten teacher saw that I was bright and helped me to read English at recess time; we were friends for life.

In the summers, we would live on our 100-acre farm in Mission Valley. It was a vegetable farm with celery, tomatoes, corn, lettuce, and the like. I would see how immigration officers would rough up "the wetbacks." These were *braceros* with whom I worked side by side. At our restaurant, I would huddle with our White waitresses, and I heard about them getting raped and beaten—often by the police. It made me angry. The police were also our customers. My dad would try to improve things for a few people. By nine years of age, I wanted to be lawyer. I wanted to take care of all these people.

When I was about six, my dad had been arrested for selling liquor illegally. Alcoholic Beverage Control had raided my father's back storage. My father had 5-gallon urns of Chinese herbal medicine, but they said he was bottling whiskey for sale. He was perturbed as he had never seen those bottles before. As the little precocious princess, I was always all over the place, and I knew the answer. I told my father's lawyer that the agents had brought in the bottles and filled them with the concoction from the 5-gallon urns. They tested the whiskey bottles, and indeed, the Alcoholic Beverage Control agent's fingerprints were all over them. The newspapers called it the "Squirrel Whiskey Case[14]."

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12 Established by American missionaries in 1879, the prestigious Anglican university is referred to as the "Harvard" of China.

13 Kelsey-Jenney was one of the oldest educational institutions in San Diego County. Established in 1887, the 7310 Miramar Road location was closed in 2002.

14 "Squirrel whiskey" is slang in the old West for alcohol of unknown composition that would "make men nutty and climb trees."

Along with other Chinese kids, I went to a local integrated elementary school—until I got in trouble in the third grade. During the war years, I was the only kid on the block with access to bubble gum. My godfather was the Chinese consul general. He often travelled between Calexico, Mexicali, and San Diego. And he kept me—his favorite—well supplied with bubble gum, a rationed treat. I used this as collateral to become the gang leader of the brothel and gambler kids. Our third grade teacher was Mrs. Vroom. She always wore her hair in a tight bun, and I wondered if that bun was real. I orchestrated the other kids to use the transom poles with hooks (for opening windows), to see if the hair bun might come off. It didn't.

My father had a lot of White friends, Black friends, and Filipino friends. One of the patrons of my father's restaurant was Dean Sherry. Dean Sherry was an attorney for the Catholic diocese of San Diego; he subsequently became a Superior Court judge in San Diego. Sherry encouraged my father to send me to a Catholic boarding school. I was the first Chinese at Academy of Our Lady of Peace[15], an elite institution. I did very well academically, but I could never get the first or second honors as it was reserved for students from the well-to-do families. When I finally did get recognized with number one honors, the nun made a speech that I had deserved the award for many years.

After World War II, the communists in China began extorting money from our family in China. My grandfather was poisoned by the communists in the 1950s. My grandmother had to crawl over clam shells and glass. She and the uncles were all placed under house arrest. My father sat down with my mother and me. Should we sell our properties and continue to send money to China? We did. Since I was a child, I had helped my father with the cashiering and accounting. I would write checks for my father to give to an "uncle" who would travel to Tijuana and send the money to China. For years, I petitioned for my grandmother to come to the U.S. I finally succeeded in 1966.

With this extortion going on in China, we no longer could afford tuition at the Academy. We moved to the farm, then sold the farm, and bought a smaller farm in El Cajon. I transferred to Grossmont High School, a public institution.

15 Founded in 1882 by Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

As I had suffered so much discrimination already as a Chinese American, I did not think I would be able to go to college easily. I thought that I should take the entrance exam early to broaden my chances. Not only did I pass the entrance exam, I got accepted into USC although I was only a high school junior. I was admitted due to a processing mistake by USC. Not knowing that it was a mistake, I decided I would grab this opportunity, so I took a correspondence course from UC Berkeley to get more units. I started USC in 1954.

As I was waiting for the Greyhound bus, my godfather was still giving me a long lecture on why I should stay in San Diego. He said that he agreed with my father that my chosen career path was not appropriate for a woman. Most women were going into teaching, nursing, and secretarial work.

At that time, there were about two dozen Asian Americans in all of USC with more Japanese than Chinese. There were about three other Chinese American women in my group. I first majored in political science but I didn't like it, so I switched to the business major. My undergraduate years were fun times. I met my husband-to-be, Robert, at the end of my Freshman year. I was in a couple of service organizations. I became a member of the Spurs, an elite service organization for Sophomores. However, I didn't even waste my time to apply to the Amazons, because that membership was exclusive to Juniors from the prestigious sororities. In those days, Chinese Americans were not accepted into the sororities. As a member of the Y Club, I attended the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations in San Francisco. I met members of the China delegation and became their personal guest for the U.N. meetings and parties.

While I was attending USC, I went back home because I needed money for tuition. A Mexican worker from another farm came to ask my father for shoes for his child so the child could go to school. My father told me to write a check. That's when I saw the low bank balance. I went back to Los Angeles without asking my dad for money. I got a job, and I finished my business degree in 3 ½ years.

USC School of Law

I entered USC law school in 1958. In law school, I was one of four women in an entering class of 200. About two-third of the class would

eventually be forced out. During my first year, I got called on by the faculty in practically every class—unlike my classmates. Whatever I said, it would be considered wrong. And then I would get castigated in front of the whole class. They obviously wanted to force me out.

Professor Henry E. Springmeyer in Torts was one of the worst. After weeks of this torture, Springmeyer said to me in front of the class, "You'll never become an attorney." I went to see him during his office hours, but he wasn't there. I finally caught him on the third try. I said, "I may be the dumbest student. But SC is not the only law school. I am going to finish a law school and I will pass the bar. I will become an attorney. You are not the judge of what I can do." He said, "Okay, okay, Miss Tom." He could hardly wait to get rid of me. I got one of my highest grades in his class. I graduated in the top ten percent of the class and finished ahead of my classmates in 2 ½ years. I thought this would give me time to take the bar and fail, and take the bar again.

I couldn't afford law school. I was working odd jobs. I went to the widow of my father's classmate at Kelsey-Jenney. I had to swallow my pride and ask her for a loan for tuition.

I met Hiram Kwan at the Chinese Presbyterian Church. I offered to do secretarial work for him for free; I got paid about 50 cents an hour. The other Chinese American attorneys at that time were David and Wellington Kwan, James Yip, and George Lee who worked near Ninth and San Pedro.

USC would set up job interviews for the seniors in the law school. Of course, I didn't get any interviews. I finally went to the office to inquire and the scheduler said, "Look at you. They won't even slam the door in your face as you can't even get a foot in the door! I'm not setting up interviews for you." So I went out to find my own interviews. I tried to go to a public agency to get more experience. The City Attorney said, "You couldn't handle a rape case." The Attorney General's office said, "No." The few women in the Attorney General's office were married to prominent attorneys. I stayed with Hiram as an attorney, earning less than when I was his secretary.

I wrote the winning briefs for the noted immigration case, *Rosenberg v. Fleuti,* and made the oral arguments at the United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit. But because I was in practice less than the required years, I was not eligible to make the oral arguments before the Supreme Court.

Community Service

In 1966, I went into private practice in Chinatown. I had a few clients. Most men wouldn't seek me out as an attorney. The women customers didn't have control over their business affairs, and therefore were not in need of legal services.

One of my objectives for going to law school was to serve my community by practicing immigration law. I would take on immigration clients but charged very little. In those days, Immigration Services was so horribly disorganized. They would never acknowledge receipt of applications, and they often lost records.

Two other situations gave me opportunity to serve my community: the Watts Riots and the representation of a client who wished to participate in the court sale of estate property.

Robert, a civil engineer with the Division of Highways, and I married in 1961 and we have three children. We were the first Chinese to buy a house in Monterey Park in 1962 after the CORE sit-in against housing discrimination.[16] During the 1965 Watts Riots, Bob used his pick-up truck to bring Chinese American families to safety at our house. We were eating in two shifts and sleeping all over the house. These families did not have the financial resources to purchase homes in alternative neighborhoods.

About the same time, I was helping a client buy property that required court approval. He said he would get the certified check needed by cashing in his gold coins kept in his bank's safety boxes. I thought it would be easier if he just got a loan. His bank wouldn't even give me the application form for that real estate loan. Chinese didn't even have the privilege of being denied a loan, because they couldn't get the application!

The Watts Riots and the inability for my client to obtain a loan application form provided the impetus for one of my community projects: to increase bank loan accessibility to the broader Chinese American community. Although it took me eight years and a denial of my first application, the charter for a savings and loan was finally approved. In

16 After the Freedom Rides of 1961 in the South, Congress of Racial Equality chapters in the West focused attention on housing discrimination. Members of CORE staged a 33-day sit-in in a housing tract in Monterey Park after the developer refused to sell homes to an African American couple. This was in March of 1962.

January of 1973, East West Savings and Loan Institution—now East West Bank—became the first federally-chartered savings institution controlled by Chinese Americans.

I have also helped form the group that built the first high rise medical office building at 625 W. College Street in Chinatown. I was also working to establish Chinatown's senior citizen housing by applying for matching federal grants. I wanted to help people who needed help.

I loved being in the legal field. I went into banking because it was the way I could best serve the community. I wanted to go back into law when I sold Trust Bank in 1995. But then I was pushed into political office. My first term on the Monterey Park City Council started in 2003.

I have mentored a lot of young people. Young women today should go into any profession they choose. Each person has their own values, principles, and talents. They need to utilize their talents to benefit their community. People should not go into law school because of family pressure. We need devoted people in all professions.

Betty Tom Chu at CHSSC dinner, 2007.

Marguerite Chung Geftakys

The first Chinese American woman to serve as an administrative law judge (1973-1991) in the state of California was Marguerite Chung Geftakys. While attending Southwestern School of Law, Chung was the only Asian American woman in her class. Marguerite is a fourth generation Chinese American, born in 1927 to James Alfred Chung, Sr. and Ruth Lamb Chung.

I was born in Los Angeles, California. I'm a fourth generation Chinese American on my father's side. My father, James Alfred Chung, Sr., was a wholesale food merchant in the San Pedro district. He was born in Los Angeles in 1905. My father's family did business as Thomas G. Chung, Co.; James A. Chung, Co.; and Golden South Produce Market. My paternal grandfather was knowledgeable in herbs, but he did not practice as an herbalist.

Marguerite Chung Geftakys, 2015.

On my mother's side, I'm the granddaughter of the first Chinese graduate from the University of Southern California's College of Medicine. My grandfather was born in Canton in 1865 and chosen by American missionaries in China to attend medical school in the United States. He migrated from Canton around 1893 to Los Angeles, where he enrolled at the University of Southern California's College of Medicine—the first such college in Los Angeles at the time.[17] He graduated in 1896 as Dr. Wah Jean, Lamb, M.D. We still have his original graduation invitation of June 4, 1896, which was held at the Los Angeles Theater. His class of ten graduates was the largest class as of that date. Dr. Lamb practiced briefly in San Francisco; in Butte, Montana from 1902 through 1929; and then in Los Angeles. My mother was born in Butte. I remember living with Grandpa Lamb when I was about 7 years old for about a year while my family moved from Salinas to Los Angeles. He taught me to wash the rice for the family dinner, and to always wash my hands in the kitchen sink immediately after entering the house from outside. I would wash my hands with a bar of Fels Naptha soap,

17 USC's College of Medicine was the first established in the region in 1885.

and then drop the soap in the sink to allow the water to run over the soap and wash it clean. Dr. Lamb passed on in 1942.

My older brother, James A. Chung, Jr., M.D.—fondly known to some as "Doonie"—carried on the example set by Grandpa Lamb. After serving as a navigator in the U.S. Air Force during World War II, he earned a degree from the University of Southern California's School of Medicine in 1958. Doonie's son, Bryan, is a practicing oral surgeon, having also graduated from USC's medical school.

I grew up in Los Angeles where my brother and I attended Los Angeles Polytechnic High School. We attended Chinese school as children, but we never became fluent in the Chinese language as the primary language spoken in our home was English. As a youngster, I dreamed of becoming a doctor and started out in a pre-med course at USC at the age of 17, only to be sidetracked by an early marriage and children in 1946, 1948, and 1950. Realizing that a career in medicine was no longer an option, I switched from pre-med to a Chinese studies major, and then to law.

People often ask me how I became interested in a career in law, given the fact that so many of my family are in the medical field. I was greatly influenced by two friends from my teenage years: Hiram and David Kwan, brothers and both practicing attorneys as adults. I had observed each brother in separate appearances in court and was truly smitten by the logic, common sense, and reason involved in courtroom procedures. The presentations of evidence, defenses, and applications of the law all seemed to fall into place and be so satisfyingly correct. I knew instantly that the practice of law was what I wanted as a career.

I told my father that I wanted to go to law school and become a lawyer. His advice was to the effect that any profession or vocation was acceptable (except as a barmaid involving alcoholic beverages), as long as it was honorable and done well. He valued labor and industry, and could see the dignity in even menial tasks if performed well. My parents embraced my plans for a future as a lawyer, and agreed to assist, i.e. help care for and raise my children, and otherwise stand by me. Clearly, my parents made it possible for me to go through school without detriment to my children. In 1957, I began the evening program at Southwestern School of Law and became a member of the California State Bar in 1963. But for my strong parents, it would not have happened.

I started the practice of law by renting a small office on Wilshire Boulevard—between Flower and Alvarado—from another attorney with the surname "Kwan." Unbeknown to me, this was the older brother of Hiram and David Kwan. The kindness Wellington, Hiram, and David extended to me will always be remembered and appreciated. However, within a few years, the need for a more structured practice was felt, and I took a position as staff counsel with the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, State of California. A staff counsel has the duty, *inter alia*, of representing the Department at disciplinary and licensing matters before the Office of Administrative Hearings, an independent entity separate and apart from the Department. After eight years as staff counsel, I received an appointment with the Office of Administrative Hearings in November of 1973.

An administrative law judge hears and conducts cases under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). The cases primarily involve disciplinary and licensing matters pertaining to licenses and licensees under the California Business and Profession Code, Education Code, Motor Vehicle Code, etc. There are approximately 80 California agencies issuing and governing these licenses, including but not limited to physicians and surgeons, physician's assistants, registered nurses, dentists, chiropractors, teachers, CPAs, realtors, vehicle salespeople, electronic repairers, barbers, beauticians, morticians, etc. The administrative law judge conducts and controls the hearings pursuant to the APA, the rules and regulations and other laws relevant thereto. At the conclusion of the hearing, the administrative law judge must base the decision on the preponderance of the evidence. This is unlike a criminal matter wherein the burden of proof is beyond reasonable doubt.

I spent as much time as I could with my family. I took my children to school in the morning, and I would come home to cook our meals. I didn't have time to join community organizations. I do regret that I didn't have more time for my five children; most working mothers have that regret.

In retrospect, I feel that neither my gender nor ancestral heritage has ever been detrimental to my professional life. I was always fortunate to have worked with intelligent, civil, well-mannered, and considerate colleagues. I retired at the end of 1991 and remarried a few years later. All five of my children are very much a part of my life. In all candor, I do not feel I can recommend the professional life of an attorney to any of my granddaughters, as aggression is a key factor for a successful lawyer,

an emotion that is incompatible with good health and long life. As an administrative law judge, fairness and judicial temperament are necessary, not aggression. I enjoyed my work as an administrative law judge.

Mia Frances Yamamoto

Mia Frances Yamamoto has been identified as one of the "100 Most Influential Lawyers in California" by the California Daily Journal *(2002) and a "Southern California Super Lawyer" by* Los Angeles Magazine. *She has received numerous awards including the "Spirit of Excellence Award" from the American Bar Association, and the "Trailblazer Award" from the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association. Mia is a transgender woman. Born in a concentration camp as Mike Yamamoto, Mia served in the Vietnam War before attending UCLA Law School, where she founded the UCLA Asian Pacific Islander Law Students Association (APILSA). She was a criminal public defender who established a private practice in 1985. Mia is a founding member of the Asian Pacific American Bar Association, the Asian Pacific American Women Law Alliance, and the Multicultural Bar Alliance. She is also on the Board of International Bridges to Justice, and instrumental in establishing IBJ's China Defender Program. This is from an interview in June of 2015 in Los Angeles.*

Mia Yamamoto in her office, 2015.

My Father's Path as an Attorney

I was born in Poston Concentration Camp in 1943. My dad, Elmer Shosaku Yamamoto, was the first Asian American to graduate from Loyola Law School in 1932. Loyola Law School started as St. Vincent's School of Law in 1920 and moved to Third and Broadway in 1929. Dad and his parents were born in Hawaii, and he came to the mainland to attend Loyola. Loyola listed Dad as one of their "50 Inspirational Alumni."

By the 1940s, Dad and our family were in Poston Concentration Camp in Arizona. Dad went to court several times against camp injustices, but he lost each time. After the war, he built a good career; he would do whatever came in the door to his office on First and San Pedro, in the San Pedro Firm Building. He had studied corporate law, but he couldn't practice that. He practiced community law, serving mostly Japanese Americans. I think

Legal staff at Camp I in Poston camp, January 1943. Left to right: Cap Tamura, Franklyn Sugiyama (22-7-C), Tom Masuda (31-5-B), Elmer Yamamoto (30-5-D), with Saburo Kido (National President of JACL, 215-2-D). *(Photo from Bancroft Library.)*

there were seven Japanese American attorneys in California before World War II.

In my father's days, the Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA) was segregated; its constitution only allowed Caucasian members. African Americans and Asian Americans were admitted to the California Bar and were licensed lawyers, but could not be hired by a White law firm or get referrals from LACBA. Minority attorneys could only work on the fringes of mainstream Los Angeles; they could not be involved in commerce, taxes, licensing, or the most significant collaborations. In the 1920s, the nonwhite attorneys formed a multiracial Blackstone Club in Los Angeles. By the 1940s, this became the Langston Bar Association, an African American organization. It was in the 1960s that the John Mercer Langston Bar—and other bar associations—was finally admitted as dues-paying members of the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Elmer Shosaku Yamamoto graduation photo from Loyola Law School, 1932.

Mike Yamamoto, 1966.

(Photo courtesy of Mia Yamamoto.)

Even when I was coming up, there was still such discrimination. I remember many Asian American clients telling me they would prefer a Jewish lawyer. We had to prove we were good enough.

My father died in 1957. I attended Cathedral High School in the Chinatown area and graduated in 1961. I went on to attend Los Angeles City College and Cal State LA. I wanted to finish my degree before I did my obligatory two years in the military in Vietnam. And I wanted to go to graduate school if I survived Vietnam. I joined the service right after graduation, intending to return by the fall of 1968.

I started at Fort Ord for training and was sent to 5th Army Headquarters in Chicago. When I got to Vietnam, I started with the 1st Cavalry and then with the 4th Infantry Division. I was stuck in miserable rain during the monsoons. After I got back to base camp in Pleiku, I got a job with Personnel in headquarters.

UCLA School of Law

I applied for law schools from Vietnam. I had first thought I would be a legal secretary, as I was fascinated by all these reams of paper that would come out of the machines. I was inspired by my father always helping people. For the longest time, I thought Dad was a therapist of some sort. As a boy, I would sit in his office reading comic books, waiting for our mother to pick us up. Clients would come in to the waiting room, and they would be very nervous, worriedly looking through their papers. When Dad greeted them, they would bow deeply with respect. After a while, they would leave his office clearly happy and relieved. Dad only had books in his office so what was he doing? What was he selling to make people feel better?

I had hoped to follow the family tradition and go to Loyola Law School. It was UCLA that accepted me right away. In 1968, there were about six or seven Asian Americans who entered our Class of 1971. We were the largest group of Asian Americans ever in any law school. Historically, there had been about two Asian Americans in any class. The year after us, there were only two Asian American admits at UCLA. At least one was a woman: Joyce Yoshioka, one of the smartest women I've ever known. We felt things had to change, and we started an Asian law students association in 1969, now Asian Pacific Islander Law Students Association (APILSA). Things were anarchistic and I don't remember if we even had a name for our organization. It was the 1960s, and we took radical action. In 1970, the Asian Law Students Association was established at USC Law School.

Shunji Asari, now Deputy Attorney General, tells this story, "Mike just told us, 'Follow me to the Dean's Office.'" We demanded Asian representation at the law school; we wanted curricula, Asian faculty, and Asians to be included in the existing minority admission program. Admission preference was in place for African Americans, Chicanos, and even Native Americans. One of my Asian law classmates had been turned down by LEOP (Legal Education Opportunity Program, established in 1969). By 1970, we were reviewing admission packets and recruiting for the Class of 1973. The number of Asian American law students became significant with the Class of 1974.

The other Asian law students were more studious than me. I got to know the other minority law students and other students involved in political activity. I could depend on their alliance. UCLA Law was a hotbed of activism. I was also an anti-war Vietnam veteran. I was very upset about my military experience; the War had so much racist overtones—and undertones.

The African American law students already warned me that the administration would argue that there weren't enough admission slots. And they said they were willing to give Asians some of the slots from their program to show their commitment. I never forgot that. Those people were amazingly just. At the time, BLSA (Black Law Students Association) had about twenty members and there were about thirty Chicano students. I remember three Black faculty then; they were great. Today, without the minority programs, the number of Black and Chicano students has been decimated.

UCLA didn't have Asian American faculty or curricula for a few more decades. They placated us. Still, I felt that it was most important to get the numbers of students. Mari Matsuda was the first Asian American faculty at UCLA Law in 1991, and then Jerry Kang joined the tenured ranks in 1995. Mari is an incredible teacher that started critical race studies, one of the most significant areas of legal scholarship. The curricula at UCLA Law was very academic, perhaps it wasn't very community-grounded. But that is similar to other scholastic pursuits at the graduate level.

The Bar Associations

In Los Angeles, SCCLA (Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association) started first in 1975. JABA (Japanese American Bar Association) started in 1976. KABA (Korean American Bar Association of Southern California) was established in 1980 and PABA (Philippine American Bar Association) was established in 1986. JABA founders have told me that their main goal then was to integrate the bench. They needed a bar association that could lobby for more Japanese American judges. I didn't join JABA at first. I thought they seemed focused on self-empowerment, and less focused on community advancement. I now recognize that having more judges is a part of community advancement. I thought of myself as an Asian American and I didn't want to be associated with just one ethnic group. I thought it would be de-evolution. I wanted to be part of a pan-Asian association. These Asian bar associations were classic trade organizations.

By the late 1970s, JABA established an Asian Concerns Committee (ACC) mainly because of student pressure. The activist students and young attorneys wanted to be involved with more community empowerment and engagement issues. In 1985, Howard Halm[18] became the president of JABA. If a Korean American could be president of JABA, I decided I would join. It was also at this time that there was a campaign to unseat Justices Rose Bird, Joseph Grodin, and Cruz Reynoso from the California Supreme Court. I wanted the Asian Concerns Committee to organize a campaign to support Rose Bird. I called a meeting in my office with representatives from SCCLA, KABA, and PABA. SCCLA representatives were Dolly Gee, Pam Chin, and Debbie Young. Dolly was an amazing young attorney. Angela Oh of KABA and Rico Bautista of PABA were part of this core. Other JABA attorneys were Barry Morinaka, Bob Kawahara, and Neil Nagano. We went out in the community to educate the voters. We lost this battle. But it was such a strong group of great allies. What was next for us?

The Asian Concerns Committee strategized to take unified political positions on issues in our community. We would bring these issues back to our respective bar associations. We advocated for benefits for Filipino

18 Howard L. Halm received his J.D. from the University of San Diego in 1968. He was the inaugural president of the Asian Pacific American Bar Association and president of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association in 2000-2001. Judge Halm was appointed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court in 2009.

veterans. We supported the rights of sexual minorities. We had our own newsletter. Some of us wanted a pan-Asian bar association; some hoped the four Asian ethnic bar associations would merge. It was very controversial. SCCLA was greatly opposed to a merger and had concerns about the integrity of their treasury. We struggled for about ten years. Dolly Gee came up with an answer: the four bar associations would be the founding members of APABA, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association. They would always have a representative on our Board. The founders would put out our own money. This was 1998. Our first president was Howard Halm who had then been president of JABA and KABA. Another early president was Jacqueline Nguyen[19]. We wanted to reflect diversity.

We started out to be something different. But we ended up being something the same. I think we took on the trappings of traditional bar associations. Perhaps, it is the inevitable unfolding of the dialectics of history. That's also my experience with Asian Pacific American Women Lawyers Alliance. That was established about 1993, but it became inactive for quite a while. Cynthia Loo rejuvenated that organization near 2006. I'm also a past president.

Asian Pacific American Bar Association, 2014.

19 Jacqueline Hong-Ngoc Nguyen graduated from UCLA Law in 1991 and was appointed a U.S. Circuit Judge in 2009 and then elevated to the U.S. Court of Appeals in 2012.

I'm a founding member of the Multicultural Bar Alliance (MCBA). There was an earlier minority bar association, but it fizzled out. In 1991, the Soon Ja Du/Latasha Harlins case caused Black and Asian attorneys to galvanize together. We met in the home of Reginald and Daisy Tseng Holmes in June. Reginald is a Black attorney and Daisy is Chinese American. Angela Oh and Howard Halm represented KABA, Dolly represented SCCLA, and I represented JABA. Carolyn Taylor, Brenda Penny, and George Mallory were also there. We were going to show the community that African American and Asian American attorneys were united, and that the racial tension caused by Latasha Harlins' killing was an aberration. We went together to schools, churches, and community organizations to show that we were allied. Quickly, the Asian bars joined in and then the Mexican American Bar Association. Still, MCBA failed as the 1992 Riots occurred. Today, there are 18 Los Angeles bar associations in the Multicultural Bar Alliance and it keeps growing. It is an important networking vehicle, especially of those hardcore dedicated volunteers. A few can often make the long-term difference as they've got vision. "The overcommitted are the only people who ever get anything done," Ramona Ripston of ACLU told me once.

SCCLA still flourishes, as do JABA, KABA, PABA, along with APABA and the Women's Alliance. We also have the Vietnamese American Bar Association of Southern California, the Thai American Bar Association, and the South Asian Bar Association. I go to many of their events. But we should not be about self-glorification. We don't need to be self-congratulatory. We should be more than trade associations; we should be here to empower our communities and to invest in the interests of our communities. We should be advancing racial justice. We need to speak for Cambodians, Thais, Laos, and Hmongs who are so underrepresented. I only know two Burmese attorneys. The undocumented are in their own closet. APABA's priority should be to empower underrepresented peoples.

I think Asian Americans are well represented in the legal profession today. There are three Asian Americans on California's Supreme Court. I'm far more interested today in focusing on Latino and African American representation. You need non-Latinos and non-Blacks advocating for this. It is not about self- interest, it is about social justice. We want to advance society, not just ourselves.

I now do human rights work with another Chinese American who graduated from UCLA Law and a former public defender, Karen Tse. Karen is founder and CEO of International Bridges to Justice.

Mike Eng

Mike Eng served in California's State Assembly from 2006 to 2012. He was chair of the Transportation, Banking and Finance, and Business and Professions and Consumer Protection subcommittees. He also served as a member of the Education Committee for three terms. In 2011, Eng's AB1088 was passed that requires state agencies to disaggregate data for Asian and Pacific Islander ethnic groups. In 2013, Mike Eng was elected as a Trustee of the Los Angeles Community College Board of Trustees. He is senior partner at the Eng and Nishimura Law Office. This is from an interview in June of 2015.

Honorable Mike Eng, 2015.

Hawaii Roots

My grandfather was the houseboy for the president of the Levi-Strauss company in San Francisco. As a reward for raising their children, Grandfather got a franchise to sell the Levi label "outside" the United States. Grandfather had immigrated just before the Chinese Exclusion Act so he was trapped here. In those days, Chinese men were cooks and then got promoted to the highest position under the glass ceiling: live-in houseboys. Grandfather gave the franchise to his sons, Frank and Herbert Eng. My father, Frank, was born in Oakland and he moved his young family to Hawaii in 1947 with this Levi's franchise. We went on one of the first Pan Am Clippers.

Within thirty days, my parents realized that the Levi's franchise was a horrible mistake. Levi jeans are very heavy and not very marketable in Hawaii. My parents became itinerant garment workers. They eventually opened up their own little warehouse. My parents came home regularly at 9 pm—after I had done about 6 hours of damage running around the community unsupervised.

My father spoke fluent Mandarin and Cantonese, and he served in World War II. Upon his return to Oakland, he faced extreme discrimination. He had garbage thrown at him as he looked for housing.

He actually told us he would never allow us to go to Chinese school. He did not want us to have "an accent"—as he rationalized that as the cause of the discrimination. I did speak some Cantonese with my grandparents.

In middle school, I was bullied. My teacher said that my verbal skills were the lowest scores she'd ever seen. I had bad eyesight and couldn't see the board. I didn't want to go to school to get beaten up. I became an at-risk youth.

Very fortunately, there was some intervention, and someone put me in a journalism class. I liked writing, and I liked working for the high school paper. I graduated from Kalani High, a public school, in 1964. I got a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Hawaii. I wanted to go into journalism but my parents said, "You'll never find a job." I was simultaneously working for my parents and then as an emergency room technician. I gained a master's degree in American Studies from the University of Hawaii by 1971. Many in the Hawaii community were very aware of Dr. Martin Luther King's movement, and this core of people would later become part of Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), formally established in 1992. I clerked for the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU).

UCLA and the Asian Law Collective

I was interested in the labor movement, and I applied to UCLA Law School on a fluke; there were no law schools in Hawaii. I also applied to Fuller Seminary. I was on the UCLA waiting list and I got accepted the Thursday afternoon before Monday class. I literally arrived in my *zoris* and aloha shirt. LA was such a culture shock. Fortunately, I knew some friends of friends who kind of adopted me and helped me get settled.

The class before us at UCLA Law had about four Asian Americans; we had about twenty. I would later become president of the Asian Pacific Islander Law Students Association. This was after the changes brought onto campus by the 1969 ethnic studies strike.

Law school is like boot camp with a weeding-out process. I was so afraid of flunking out. I would be at the library when it opened, and I would still be in the library when it closed. A classmate, Stewart Kwoh, asked me, "What are you doing at the library all the time?" I said, "I'm trying to learn the law." He said, "You won't learn law in the library." He took me to

Chinatown. On one of my first trips to Chinatown, I saw LAPD forcing Wah Ching members into a spread eagle position. The Asian American movement had already evolved; LA Chinatown had Chinatown Teenpost and the *Chinese Awareness* newspaper. In multiethnic Hawaii, I never even saw myself as Chinese American. I had to reposition my perspective.

Chinatown community activists challenged us, "Why are you going to law school? What are you doing to help people?" The law we were studying had little relevance to the Chinese American community. Job opportunities for attorneys to serve Asian Americans were very limited. The activists gave us the impetus to start a Chinatown legal clinic at 628 New Depot Street in 1972. We didn't know anything, but we could try to find answers. The issues flooding in were immigration, landlord tenant, and consumer protection. We were joined by law students from Loyola Marymount and USC. We understood enough Cantonese and had community translators to help. We got answers from Legal Aid on Alvarado Street, and from attorney Hiram Kwan, already an icon in Chinatown. By 1974, about 14 of us formed the Asian Law Collective.

I started doing research on Asian Americans and the law. This was before photocopy machines and computers! I was hanging out at the UCLA Asian American Studies Center with Lowell Chun-Hoon and Alan Moriyama. I found all these horrible legal cases in our history. There was *1854 People v. Hall, 1927 Gong Lum v. Rice, 1944 Korematsu v. United States*… After graduation, I put together a class on "Asian Americans and the Law." We expected about 20 in the class and we had 250 students! That class is being taught all over the United States today.

Law schools didn't even teach immigration law at that time. Loyola and UCLA were the first and second schools in the nation to offer immigration law courses. Stewart Kwoh and Antonia Hernández—later of MALDEF—helped start that course; Antonia was also in that Class of 1974.

There were a few immigration attorneys in Beverly Hills. Many people applied for immigration by themselves. In the private interviews with immigration officers, civil rights were often skirted. I knew people who would study for their citizenship test every day for three years. When they went in for their interview, an officer may intentionally slur his/her speech and within 60 seconds, that Asian would have failed the citizenship test. That would impact many many lives! I'll always remember a Korean man

who said, "I no pass, I die." He literally passed out, and they had to call the paramedics to the INS in downtown. I've handled 10,000 immigration cases. I've been in interview rooms as the attorney and been told, "Shut up or you will leave the room." I was with an American-born man of Japanese descent who was applying for his Japan-born wife. The first thing the officer said was "I want you to write down the names of all your sexual partners." It didn't matter to that officer that I was an attorney in the room. By going to these hearings, we found out their dirty little secrets. Immigration officers have had the same attitude and discretion for years. We filed many successful law suits and got cases reopened. We made a difference in changing that culture. The community needed our legal knowledge. You can only imagine how it was in criminal defense law!

By 1975, the Asian Law Collective opened an office near Darlings' Flowers on Temple Street, just near Beaudry. The space had a mud floor, and we had to put out planks whenever it rained. The official name of our office was Fay and Kwoh. Marion Fay and Stewart Kwoh's names were on the letterhead. The attorneys had a deal to make $300/month for three years. At that rate, you had to ask your date to pay for your meal… Our lease eventually ended. The other attorneys dispersed to pay their school loans and grow families and careers.

Stewart and I made a second pact. Stewart would take the nonprofit work and begin what would be the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, now Asian Americans Advancing Justice. He worked with Pastor Charles Yue of the First United Methodist Church on Flower and Olympic. I kept the paying clients. In 1978, I opened up an immigration office on Olympic and Union, Michael Eng's Law Office.

Citizenship, Voter Registration, and Political Representation

The Asian Pacific American Legal Center (APALC) officially opened in 1983. By 1985, my wife, Dr. Judy Chu, got elected to the Garvey School Board. We lived in Monterey Park, a city with a growing population of Chinese Americans. I knew that Asian Americans weren't registered to vote. They weren't registered because many weren't even citizens. We got great support from Willie Velasquez (1944-1988), founder of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project. Willie was a visionary and he understood the need for collaboration between ethnic groups. He gave us $10,000 to do a voter registration drive in Monterey Park which was already 60% Asian.

Are there Chinese Americans who would give money to a Latino voter registration project?

I proposed an idea of touring ten Asian ethnic communities in LA County. We asked Cambodians, Koreans, Filipinos, "Why aren't you applying for citizenship?" There were so many misconceptions that came out. One Cambodian said, "If we become citizens, we'll be arrested more often as we'd be subject to American laws." We formed a mass voter registration drive. We went nonstop for about ten years. Even today, there are 7 million people in California who are eligible to vote but who are not registered. Only about 73% of eligible citizens in California are registered. For Asian Americans, it is 60%.

We had to change the psyche of the new Asian American immigrants. No one was encouraging them to become citizens and to vote. I made a

Mike Eng on left at Chinese American Museum, 2015.

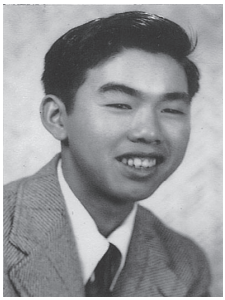
video on how to apply for citizenship for the Monterey Park Library, and it sold out ten times! Later, APALC developed an Emmy-winning instructional video that was translated into five Asian languages. APALC provided attorney referrals for those with more complicated immigration cases. We followed the successful model of NALEO, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. We owe them a tremendous debt. It is just like how Asian American studies owes a debt to African American studies.

It was tough to register people to vote. People understand why they need to be citizens, but the voting is a different hurdle. We went door-to-door and spent hours convincing people of this need. We worked together to change our community's mindset.

The next step was to penetrate representative government. In 2003, I joined the Monterey Park City Council and then in 2006, I became the Assembly representative of the 49th District. Now, I'm on the Board of the Los Angeles City Community Colleges.

George Go

On 14 Feb 2015, George Go was interviewed with his son, Arnold, and daughter, Susan, at his home in Pasadena, California. Earlier in 2007, George's niece, Kathy Go Ang, collected the family records from the San Francisco Immigration Center and compiled a unique family history.



George Go.

Madera Roots

My father was one of the seven brothers. Six came over to the U.S. while the eldest stayed in China. In China, my grandfather was in duck farming. There were hundreds of ducks all over. I don't know how, but he sent six of the kids over. Second Uncle came around 1910, followed by Third Uncle, Fourth Uncle, my father who was the fifth son and came in 1917, and then Sixth Uncle and Seventh Uncle. My father was Gong Ting Fong (1885-1951); his paper name was Go Dig Fong.

They all came in through San Francisco. After he got off the boat, my daddy's first job earned him five dollars per month at the Hop Lee Laundry. He slept on the table and worked all night. He worked about three to five years at the laundry, and then he got out of there. Five dollars a month is no good. The laundry belonged to a cousin. Most of the Chinese who came before 1930 were in farming or laundry. The next generation went to high school, pharmacy school, and engineering school; they didn't like to work seven days a week.

We are from Fah Yuen (Hua Xian), Sam Yup in Guangzhou. I was in the Fah

Form 430 APPLICATION FOR PRELIMINARY STATUS ORIGINAL

用所之證憑實立返而外由國美離欲生王爲專禀此 禀號壹

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
IMMIGRATION SERVICE

Office of Commissioner of Immigration
Port of San Francisco, Cal.
February 18, 1915

To Hon. Samuel W. Backus
Chinese and Immigrant Inspector, Commissioner of Immigration
Angel Island Cal.

SIR: It being my intention to leave the United States on a temporary visit abroad, departing and returning through the Chinese port of entry of Hong Kong, I hereby apply, under the provisions of Rule 16 of the Chinese Regulations, for preinvestigation of my claimed status as an American citizen by birth, submitting herewith such documentary proofs (if any) as I possess, and agreeing to appear at such time and place as you may designate, and to produce then and there witnesses, for oral examination regarding the claim made by me.

This application is submitted in triplicate with my photograph attached to each copy, as required by said rule.

Respectfully,

Signature in Chinese 簽名字名 唐 簽 高
Signature in English 簽名字名 Go Dig Fong
Residence 居住人之住址 No. 2 Nottingham Place

相 寄 的 表 亦 憑 國 九 而 來 Hop Lee 遊 紐 美 管
三 名 員 親 據 出 欵 回 亦 出 外 暫 員 理
輯 願 自 之 與 呈 世 之 蓋 個 埠 入 邦 離 知 外
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並 照 辦 人 查 有 在 三 該 去 港 由 國 我 入
限 例 房 到 驗 之 美 十 埠 將 華 出 現 口

Joseph C. Fallon
Witness to signature of applicant
Witness to signature of applicant
San Francisco

San Francisco, Cal.
April 1, 1915

Respectfully forwarded to
THE INSPECTOR IN CHARGE, Port of San Francisco, Cal.,
accompanied by triplicate hereof and report and transcripts of testimony, in accordance with Rule 16.

Chinese and Immigrant Inspector.

Port of SAN FRANCISCO
, 19

This is to certify that the person of Chinese descent named herein, and whose photograph is attached under the signature of the investigating officer and under my signature and seal, to the above application, has filed in my office the duplicate of this application, and evidence in corroboration of his claimed American birth. Upon his return to this port and his identification as the person to whom this paper, thus approved, is delivered, he will be permitted to reenter the United States, unless pending such return it has been found that his claim is false.

Samuel W. Backus
Inspector in Charge.

16-72

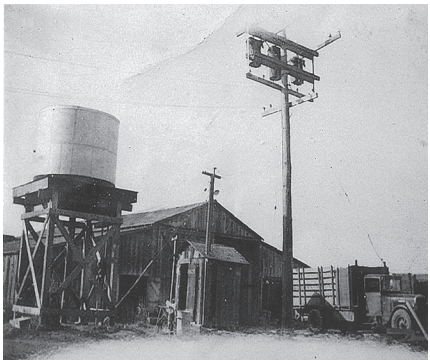
Papers of Go Dig Fong.

Gong Ting Fong (Go Dig Fong) and family
Front: May (Go) Wong, George Go, Woo Hing, Go Dig Fong, Nice (Go) Cho, Kong Go
Back: Tai (Go) Kong, So Chun Wong (Ching's husband), Young Go.

Yuen Benevolent Association. There were chapters in San Francisco, Visalia, and Los Angeles. All the old people are dying and I'm the only one left. We used to have meetings once in a while. In the city, there were Sze-yup who concentrated in the restaurant industry.

I was born in Madera in 1928, my parents' eighth and youngest child. There were about four Chinese families in Madera. Madera is north of Fresno and south of Merced in California's Central Valley. There were less than one hundred Chinese in Madera, and I was related to all of them. Uncles 3, 5, 6, and 7 started a farm in Madera. They believed that the best occupation for large families was farming. Later, they all split up. My Third Uncle had two sons with two farms. My daddy had one farm on Sunset Avenue, which was owned by Henry Cunningham. My Sixth Uncle had a farm. My Seventh Uncle finally moved to a farm in Porterville. We had a lot

of cousins work for us at the 300-acre farm. We farmed everything—strawberries, turnips, lettuce, you name it. Chinese could not buy land so we leased the land for 20 years.



Go Ranch.

I missed military service by six months. I was too young. My brother served in France in the Army Corps of Engineers. My Second Uncle's son went to Saipan, got a whole bunch of medals, and never came back.

My mother came to the U.S. in 1918. She was a Woo from the Sam Yup district. She went back to China in 1937 with my dad, my two sisters, and me. Her visa was only for twelve months. She went to visit her village.

Front: May (Go) Wong, Merry (Gong) Loo
Back: Lee Chun, Hank Gong, George Go, Chuck Gong.

But the Japanese were bombing her village and she couldn't get out. She stayed another twenty years while we left. We went back to China again in 1947 when I finished high school. I met my First Uncle. That's when I got married. My mom said, "You see your wife right there?" It was all pre-arranged. I left China within two years.

The communists killed my daddy. Dad had made a few bucks; he bought a new house[20]; and the communists said he was an American spy. He brought twenty blankets to give to his friends in the village, and they all turned around and said he was a spy. If they didn't say my daddy was a spy, the Red Guards would make them kneel on glass. One way or the other. They tied my daddy up and burned his feet. After six days, he admitted he was an American spy. He said, "no, no, no." They said, "yes, yes, yes" and tortured him. Four days later, he died. Dad died in 1951. We got my mom out in 1956.

Daughter Susan speaking: Everybody went through Angel Island. Dad was interviewed on Angel Island upon his return in 1938.

They said, "How many windows you got in your house?" I said, "Three." They said, "Oh, oh, you made a mistake. Go back." They wanted to be paid off. If you get a good lawyer, you get in. You have to memorize a stack of papers for the test. My dad went back to China maybe four or five times. It was only $50 by boat, second class.

There was also discrimination in Madera. I went to a theater once, and I wanted to buy an ice cream. They wouldn't wait on me. They waited on everybody else. After everybody else went back into the theater after the intermission, they said, "Okay, I wait on you now." That's how it was. Lady across the street from the farm took me to Methodist Church. People stepped on my foot, pushed me, and said, "What are you doing here? We don't want Chinese in this church." That was 1941.

George's Market in Pasadena[21]

After I came back from China in 1949, I had a little meat market in Berkeley, Famous Meats. I was partners with my brother-in-law, Orrin; he was also from Fah Yuen. Our baby, Susan, was coughing every day with

20 According to the family history, it was a large 4-story house lit by kerosene lamp.

21 George's Market at 494 N. Wilson was one of three ethnic markets featured in the *Pasadena Star-News* on March 2, 1987.

asthma. She was going to do the doctor every week. The doctor said, "Go to Los Angeles and it'll clear up." In 1954, we went to Bakersfield, and I had a partnership in Pumpkin Center**.** It didn't work out so I came to Pasadena in 1955. With the change of weather, Susan's asthma cleared up.

There were seven partners at Diamond Market at 45 W. Colorado Street in Pasadena. They started in 1938. My daddy gave my brother-in-law $1000 to buy a share of Diamond Market; Daddy was a silent partner. My brother-in-law had $500, so he got half a share. Everybody went through Diamond Market. Joe Kong is my cousin. George Young is another Gong. All the cousins knew my dad very well. So they gave me a break and gave me a job for $300–400/month.

After everybody got old, Ralph Chan sold Diamond Market in 1968. By then, Ralph owned Chan's Market at 1237 Lincoln (opened 1961) and I had George's Market on Wilson. They only wanted $16,000 for the whole Diamond Market building. I almost bought it. But I couldn't handle two places. Chinese have an old saying, "If you can't handle it, don't touch it." You'll lose money. It became a shoe store in Old Town Pasadena; they had shoes that cost about $400 a pair.

I worked for Diamond Market two or three years and then I found my own market. We started in an apartment on Walnut Street in Pasadena. I raised my kids, put them through college, and still came out. We made it.

Daughter Susan: I found my dad's 1955 check ledger. According to his records, he paid Gordon (no last name) rent on April 17, 1955 in the amount of $30.00 for a one bedroom duplex at 446 West Walnut.

I saw a market for lease at 494 Wilson, and I grabbed it. It was a neighborhood store owned by an American. After a couple of years, I bought the house next door. I needed the house next door for a parking lot. It was a 6000 square feet lot. I would deliver produce to Ann Lowe[22] of Pasadena, whatever she wanted. Ann Lowe taught Sunday school for Susan. She was nice. I delivered to some other customers, mostly elderly people. I didn't want to leave the store too long.

22 The Lowe family was featured in 2015 issue of *Gum Saan Journal*. Albert and Ann Lowe moved to Pasadena in 1939 and built several businesses in interior design and furniture sales. Albert and Ann—and their children and grandchildren—had been active in Pasadena civic organizations

David Young is my cousin. David Young lived in Pasadena but his market was in Temple City. He had a market on Fair Oaks in Pasadena for two years before he moved to Temple City. Susie's Kitchen was also their store[23]. David married Susie.

George's Market.

No one wanted to do laundry. Come on. First, they don't have the money to start. And laundry is too much work. Restaurants are Sze-yup. There were a few restaurants in Pasadena in the 1970s.

Son Arnold speaking: Like the House of Wong.[24]

Daughter Susan: They retired and leased to somebody else for a while. They later sold it to a body shop. There was also Lotus Inn[25]*. Also Sze-yup. We didn't know them. We didn't see other Chinese until 1966 when some came to Blair High School from Hong Kong. All of a sudden, there were Chinese in my class. We didn't really talk to each other. They were immigrants and very different from us, as they didn't speak English and I spoke pidgin Chinese. There was this one family with ten kids.*

Son Arnold: Actually, they were cousins with the same last name.

23 Susie's Kitchen was at 4819 Temple City Boulevard in Temple City. It was next door to "Young's Market" at the Lower Azusa Road junction.

24 House of Wong was on the north end of Colorado Boulevard, between Eloise and Altadena Drive.

25 Lotus Inn was located at 914 Fair Oaks, South Pasadena.

I rented my market for $200/month for two years. When I wanted to buy it, the escrow said, "no sale to Chinese." The lawyer had that deleted. I had no problems. I bought it for $20,000. The customers were Mexicans and Blacks; they all liked me.

Daughter Susan: They called you "Shanghai Jew."

They were just kidding me. There will always be discrimination.

Daughter Susan: People felt sorry for us "Chinese heathens." They invited us to church a lot. One of the customers took us to the church where Anne Lowe went. I got a lot of invitations to go to church. We used to go the Nazarene Church near USC. We stopped going after we got the store. Dad would have us pray at home.

Now I go to Chinese Alliance near Costco in Alhambra[26]. They also have one in Arcadia. It is trilingual with Mandarin and Cantonese.

My wife, Lai Fong Woo, worked 54 years, 7 days a week. She did the work of two people. She was fast and ordered supplies. I couldn't do it. We would order from a stack of catalogues, and it would be delivered by trucks. We bought from Harry Nim of United Grocers in Orange County; I think he was Sze-yup. I went to the produce market on Ninth Street twice a week, and I also got meat. I would shop around. I went at 4 am and came back at 8 am.

I worked too hard. My doctor told me to sell the market. I sold it at a loss.

My wife had three good years; she died in 2013. I always wanted to take her back to her village in Fah Yuen.

George and Lai Go in their market, 2010.

26 At 320 Cypress Ave since 2002, Chinese Alliance was found in the Silver Lake area in 1969.

Now, I have to see four or five doctors each month: eyes, heart, prostate, diabetes. I take seven pills every day.

Daughter Susan: My mom said that when they left China, she was going to be all American. We never went to Chinese school.

When my dad made produce deliveries to markets in Madera, we would go in and exchange out the old tomatoes and carrots. We would make their display look nice. Then we would get the order for the sale. I asked him, "Why do we do this?" He said, "You got to do this. Or else you won't get the sale." Others won't put in extra effort, but times were tough then. My dad spoke English well. My mom did the cooking, that's all.

Do you know how my dad got his driver's license? He bought a box of cigars and gave one to everyone. Forty years, he never had an accident. He did alright. He peddled his produce. He raised seven children. My brother-in-law is the most successful. He had markets in Fresno, Visalia, Exeter, and Kingsburg. They just built a new one in Fresno. My nephew is Raymond Wong, oldest son of Ching Gong Wong. He donated $200,000 to build a grammar school in China.

Being Chinese, we just have to work harder to succeed. You have to be better or cheaper to do business. Everybody strikes us down. All the kids in the Madera farm, everybody had to work—before school and after school. Before school, we picked strawberries for an hour. Safeway would get 200 boxes. At 9 o'clock, we'd go to school. At 4 pm, we'd come home and go to work.

At George's Market, we closed at 8 pm. We don't take long vacations. Sometimes, we would fly to see my cousins in Oakland from Burbank Airport. We would return the next day. I had about five fulltime employees: 3 Chinese, 1 Mexican, and 1 White. I kick myself that I sold the market too cheap.

Joining Organizations

Of course I vote. I'm 100% Republican. I've been voting since I was 21. I always vote. I don't know about Pasadena politics. I let them do what they want. What is a Chinese going to do?

I was a member of the Chinese Grocers Association. I went every year to their Christmas party. I didn't take on leadership because other people—

like Harry Jung—were smarter than me. Those people were smart. We got together and bought United Bank. I was a member. We also bought 100 housing units in Santa Monica and converted it to condos. I went in with $10,000 and came out with $30,000. Very, very good. Nice people.

Fah Yuen Benevolent Association is in Chinatown at 808 New Depot Street[27]; it was a three-bedroom house. I was president between 1980 and 1990. We had four-year terms. I was English secretary for about eight years. We used to use the house for our once-a-month meeting. But now, the young generation rent it out, and we have meetings at McDonald's or a coffee shop. We get about $1000/month for each bedroom, so $3000/month. Still, we lost our home base and our IRS tax-exempt status. The young leadership bought two more houses in San Bernardino. But they didn't concentrate in buying a place for the organization to meet. People from my village—like the mayor or Canton mayor—come to LA, and we need a place to visit. My nephew comes down from Visalia to entertain such dignitaries. The village would send people once a year to visit. We shouldn't just accumulate money; we need to do more for the community. When I was president, we supported the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, the Red Cross, the French Hospital, and scholarships. We did something for the community. Now we just have New Year banquets and picnics at a Temple City park. That's all they have. We still have 130 members. They all speak English now. We used to speak Cantonese.

When I was president, we bought 150 spaces at Rose Hills cemetery in Whittier. We only paid $200 each in 1980. We knew the big director and got plots in Alpine Meadow, Carnation, and Lupine areas. For our members, we give them a 20% discount on the $5000 lots. I bought twelve plots on my own.

I hope the Chinese will work together. The young kids are not doing it. We have a stack of history. But the young ones don't even know their family history. To my granddaughter, Sophia, I would say, "Lots of luck. It will be a bumpy road. Obama may not be here for you. There may be a recession. Times may be tough." My daddy taught me to watch out for your later years.

Photos courtesy of George Go.

27 Fah Yuen Benevolent Association was established in 1976 in Los Angeles and purchased the New Depot property in 1979.