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Dorothy Eng

Rosie the Riveter
World War II American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interviews conducted by
Robin Li
in 2011

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Dorothy Eng

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Interview1: June 9, 2011

Begin Audio File 1

Li: This is Robin Li, speaking with Dorothy Eng in Oakland, California, June 9, 2011, as part of the Rosie the Riveter National Park Service Project. Can you tell me your name and date of birth?

1-00:01:27

Eng: My name is Dorothy Chinn Eng. My birthdate is August 25, 1923.

Li: And where were you born?

1-00:01:32

Eng: I was born in San Francisco.

Li: So where in China were your parents when—?

1-00:01:44

Eng: Guangdong.

Li: Guangdong. And what brought them to the US?

1-00:01:49

Eng: Well, I guess opportunity. People were leaving China because of the war, the civil war, and so they were looking for opportunities in America. My father came as a teenager, and he was schooled in a church setting to become a house boy, and he worked as a house boy until he became of age, and then he went out on his own. He spent the rest of his life running a restaurant.

Li: Do you know what church school he went to?

1-00:02:26

Eng: The Presbyterian Church, located in Santa Barbara, CA. Many churches at that time had boarding schools for newcomers to convert to Christians. They studied the Bible and learned English language.

Li: So was your father, did he go to missionary school in China before he came to the US?

1-00:02:50

Eng: No.

Li: What did his family do in China? Do you know?

1-00:03:02

Eng: Probably farming, yes, they lived in a village.

Li: And so were your parents from the same village?

1-00:03:05

Eng: No, they were from neighboring villages.

Li:

Ah, right.

1-00:03:22

Eng: The Immigration Act of 1924 with the Asian Exclusion Act. In 1922 and 1923, there were many young men who went back to China to look for wives to bring, and that's when my mother came.

Li:

So what year did your father come to the US? Do you know?

1-00:03:32

Eng: I don't really know. I have that information.

Li:

He was a teenager.

1-00:03:38

Eng: Yes, but at the top of my head I don't know.

Li:

So did you have family in the US already, any relatives?

1-00:03:41

Eng: Yes. His grandfather had come in the 1800s, 1850s.

Li:

And then had returned?

1-00:03:55

Eng: He came, stayed, and then he went back, and he brought a wife over, and he had a second family. And so from that family one of the half brothers, I guess, recognized my father, his nephew, as his son.

Li:

Ah, and that's how your father came—

1-00:04:19

Eng: And that's how my father came as a citizen.

Li:

So when your father married, he married your mother in Guangdong, and then how long were they married before they came back to the US?

1-00:04:33

Eng: Well, I believe probably very shortly. There wasn't much time because they had to leave in '23.

Li:

Yes, and did they come to the Bay Area then?

1-00:04:42

Eng: They came to San Francisco.

Li:

Is that when your father started his restaurant business?

1-00:04:48

Eng: Shortly afterwards, yes.

Li:

How did he start the business?

1-00:04:53

Eng: Well, that was Depression time.

Li:

Yes.

1-00:04:57

Eng: The Chinese in Emeryville, let's see his name was Chinn Bok Hing. He had a big lottery business because there wasn't anything for Chinese people to do but run lotteries at that time, and he had a big lottery in Emeryville. In this restaurant they would have the restaurant front and in the back part of the restaurant was this huge gambling place for you to buy lottery. My father ran the restaurant, so he was a front for the lotteries.

Li:

Was this in the East Bay or in San Francisco?

1-00:05:41

Eng: Emeryville, in the East Bay.

Li:

In Emeryville.

1-00:05:44

Eng: Emeryville was a wide open city then.

Li:

Wow, and so did your family live in Emeryville?

1-00:05:47

Eng: We lived in Emeryville, I grew up in Emeryville. I went to school there and finished in Emery High School.

Li:

Did your mother speak English when she came to the country?

1-00:06:00

Eng: No.

Li:

Did she learn as she lived here?

1-00:06:01

Eng: It took her a long time. It was a very, very sad situation. She was very unhappy. She had no relatives, she had nobody except family.

Li:

Were there very many Cantonese in Emeryville?

1-00:06:12

Eng: There were three families, all Cantonese.

Li: What were—?

1-00:06:14

Eng: It was an all white town. All she had was me, her children, and her husband whom she hardly knew.

Li: Ah.

1-00:06:21

Eng: Yes, it was a very difficult time.

Li: Was she young?

1-00:06:26

Eng: Very young, very young. She was probably about sixteen or seventeen.

Li: So you were the first born?

1-00:06:34

Eng: I was the first born, and she commiserated with me. I was her friend, and I was the one who listened to her because there was nobody else.

Li: What did it mean for you to be Chinese in such a white area?

1-00:06:53

Eng: My father was very protective because he had seen the meanness to the Chinese, how they were treated, and he wanted to protect us because we were in a white community.

Li: Yes.

1-00:07:07

Eng: So we were restricted in many ways. As we were growing up, we didn't realize that, we resented the fact that we were so watched over.

Li: Mm, because you didn't understand.

1-00:07:18

Eng: We didn't understand, but later we did understand why.

Li: So was it a conscious choice for your parents to give you an English name and not a Chinese name do you think?

1-00:07:32

Eng: When the doctors delivered us, they asked them for a name, and I was named Dorothy after, I don't know who I was named after, but one of my sisters was named after a doctor, Dr. Loris Lamb. I remember when the third boy was born and we were talking about a name for him. A new candy bar had come out called O Henry, so we named him Henry. [laughter] I always remember that.

Li: So how many children were there total?

1-00:08:08

Eng: I had five brothers and five sisters.

Li: Oh, my goodness.

1-00:08:15

Eng: Yes, I was first.

Li: So did that mean you had a lot of responsibility?

1-00:08:16

Eng: I did. Yes, I did, yes. I matured very young.

Li: Did you enjoy that, or was it difficult?

1-00:08:29

Eng: No, it didn't really impact me in any way because that was just my life. You just did what you have to do, but I did say to myself that when I got out of high school that I might venture out on my own because there were younger brothers and sisters who should be taking over.

Li: Did you have to do a lot of translating for your mother in terms of language?

1-00:09:00

Eng: For my father.

Li: For your father as well?

1-00:09:00

Eng: For my father. My mother was very schooled in Chinese. She could read and write Chinese very well. My father could not. My father had what you call—what is it when you learn just a sufficient enough to manage, you can add and you can do simple things?

Li: Right, so literate.

1-00:09:24

Eng: Functional.

Li: Functionally literate, yes.

1-00:09:26

Eng: Yes, that's what he was. Whenever there were letters that had to be written or addressed, he would ask me to do it.

Li: How did your mother come to be so educated?

1-00:09:39

Eng: Because she comes from a Christian family in China, and her father was an herbalist and wanted his children to be educated and so she—

Li: For a woman at that time, that—

1-00:09:57

Eng: Yes, yes, yes.

Li: So did your family attend church growing up?

1-00:10:00

Eng: We couldn't because Emeryville to Oakland was a little distance, and we never had a car until really late. My father did get a car, but he couldn't drive it. I mean he could drive the car when there was nobody else on the street.

Li: Yes.

1-00:10:20

Eng: But as soon as another car appeared, he froze. He couldn't drive. But when he had help in the restaurant and the person could drive, he would ask them to drive. Sometimes we would go down to Chinatown to Chinese school. Sometimes he would hire somebody to come to our house and teach us Chinese.

Li: Do you know why your parents chose to live in Emeryville and not live in Chinatown in Oakland where there would be more Chinese?

1-00:10:55

Eng: I think it was just a matter of economics because he needed to be in charge, and how could he be in charge if we were living in Oakland and he was working in Emeryville?

Li: Right, he had to be close to the—

1-00:11:13

Eng: Yes, yes, yes.

Li: So you were born in 1923. What was it like during the Depression? Do you have memories of that time?

1-00:11:24

Eng: Oh, yes. My father fed us from the steam table in the restaurant. My mother didn't cook because she was always having babies. So it was just easier to feed us in the restaurant. I can remember our neighbors, our Italian neighbors who were getting food every month like potatoes and flour and sugar and whatever else they were giving out—

Li: From the government?

1-00:12:02

Eng: From the government, and I can remember Louie would come over with a pot and he'd say to my father, "we're out of food," and he had three children, "can you spare something for the children?" My father would dish up something so that he could feed the children. And then my other neighbor, they had their utilities cut off, so they had no electricity, had no gas, and they were cooking out in the yard. Well as children you're looking at that, that looks like fun, right? Why can't we do that? We didn't know they had no choice.

Li:

Was your father's business doing pretty well relatively—?

1-00:13:02

Eng: Well, probably, we just got by because we had a lot of industries. Across the street was a people's bakery, and up the street was the rubber factory, and then there were others, Sherwin Williams Paint, and we did a lunch. Then we were right across the street from Del Monte Cannery, but that was seasonal. But even so, out of season there were people working in the plant. Lunch was our big business.

Li:

What was most of the, what were the customers like?

1-00:13:47

Eng: Well, blue collar, and we did have an engineering firm, Bechtel had an office there and sometimes they would come down and eat in our restaurant.

Li:

Did you work in the restaurant at all?

1-00:14:01

Eng: As soon as I could reach the table, yes.

Li:

So you were helping at home—

1-00:14:05

Eng: Yes, right, yes.

Li:

So what was your social life like? Did you have time for one?

1-00:14:12

Eng: No, I didn't have a social life and I'll tell you, when I was in junior high school we had our first night dance, I played the violin, and I wanted very much to go to this dance. But, if I didn't leave the house by 6:00 o'clock I couldn't go out after that. The party didn't start until 8:00, so at 6:00 o'clock I would have to leave, go to a friend's house and stay there until 8:00 o'clock, go to the school and be a part of this dance.

Li:

Why could you not leave the house until 6:00?

1-00:14:54

Eng: My father said, "No, it's too late."

Li: Oh, so you could stay out later—

1-00:14:58

Eng: No. “It’s too late. You don’t go out at 8:00 o’clock at night.” At 9:00 o’clock my brother would be there to take me home. So that didn’t work too well. It was the last time. I never went to another dance. Yes, he was that strict.

Li: Were they very political, your parents? Either about Chinese politics or American politics—?

1-00:15:27

Eng: Well, I would hear them talking about things that were going on in China at that time, the Japanese invasion. There were a lot of people asking for money to support all this. It was a tough time. It was really a tough time.

Li: Do you remember them corresponding with family in China?

1-00:15:57

Eng: No, because I think at one point in time you weren’t able to correspond because there was just so much turmoil.

Li: Yes.

1-00:16:10

Eng: I remember my mother just losing track of her family, her parents. News would filter down and eventually she would learn that they had passed on and so, yes, it was hard.

Li: So it seemed like there was a sense of being in a war time—

1-00:16:35

Eng: It was.

Li: In your family before the American war.

1-00:16:37

Eng: It was, yes, yes, because they were overthrowing the Emperor at that time, Sun Yet Sen.

Li: So did your parents seem to have an affiliation or leaning towards one political party or the other—?

1-00:16:57

Eng: No. I don’t know.

Li: Or is just concerns for the family?

1-00:17:00

Eng: Just concerned, yes, yes.

Li: So before the US entered World War II, what did it mean for you to be an American? Did you feel like an American while you were living in Emeryville?

1-00:17:13

Eng: No. I did not. In fact, when I was in grammar school I hated it because I was never included, never included. All the years at grammar school I was not included in the classroom, I was not included in the playground. I can remember seeing myself going out during playtime, and I would be just standing there practically invisible. If I would go over to the rings because nobody else was there and start to swing, they would come and gather and push me off. The teachers were not there for you, the kids were just mean to you.

Li: So did you feel anyone was protecting you?

1-00:18:12

Eng: No, there was none. I can remember telling my mother I hated school. I hated to go there, and she would say, "Well, you don't go to school to make friends. You go to school to learn, so you study. Never mind them, just forget them."

Li: Did you enjoy the school work or—?

1-00:18:28

Eng: No, not really, not grammar school. It was very, very hateful time until I got to junior high school, and then I was given a chance to select my courses, and that was empowering and that opened me up. I took music, and I sang in the chorus and did these things that I liked, that I enjoyed.

Li: Did you find the teachers or adults who were kind?

1-00:19:07

Eng: Yes, and the teachers were very open, very different. We had a homemaker teacher who taught us sewing and cooking, homemaking, and she really took an interest in me, in helping me. Also, I had another teacher who was my English teacher and history teacher, and she also, too, and she was the one who engaged me in making presentations in the school assembly. She would stay after school to help me with my diction so that I could project my voice, and she spent a lot of time with me. It was through her and other teachers I'm sure that when I graduated from high school I was given a scholarship to UC Berkeley, which surprised me.

Li: Yes, so did your sense of belonging change in terms of your being an American as you found more acceptance in school and more support from your teachers?

1-00:20:20

Eng: There was not total acceptance because during those years there was outside of your school, the community. For instance, if I were to go down to shop at

H. C. Capwell's, I could walk in, and all the salespeople would be behind the counter. They would not come to wait on me. They would not come to wait on you. So you leave. The women, the Chinese people who were hired at H. C. Capwell's at that time were women to run the elevators, and they had to wear cheongsam, gloves, to run the elevator. I had a friend who finished college. She took millinery courses, and she was hoping to get into the millinery department. Yes, she could work in the millinery department, in the stock room! Yes, we grew up with that.

Li: So what was your vision for your future? Did you have aspirations, or what seemed possible to you at that time?

1-00:21:46

Eng: In my senior year the building that my father had the restaurant in was sold. So we had to move, and that's when he moved us to Oakland Chinatown. When we moved to Oakland Chinatown I realized how different our family was from people I met in the church. Culturally, we were very different because we were brought up as a Christian family. We celebrated Christmas, Easter, 4th of July, all of the American holidays, also Thanksgiving. People in Chinatown did not celebrate these holidays. They celebrated the Chinese holidays, a big difference. When I joined the church, I realized this. They were all very curious about me because I was so different. I think because like you said when you have a person, the new kid on the block, they always get that attention and people are curious. They want to follow you, find out about you and all that.

So I had that relationship with the people at the church, and when I found out that we needed to have a hospitality place for Chinese men in uniform because they had no place to go except to the bar, a restaurant or maybe to a movie house. They never got in touch with anybody in the community, and every man in uniform either came in or out of San Francisco. It was a main port of embarkation. I said, "That is a shame that not one church will have an open house, a place where men in service could come socialize, have a cookie with us, and relax."

Li: So how old were you when you—?

1-00:24:06

Eng: I was twenty-one.

Li: So you were attending UC Berkeley but living at home?

1-00:24:13

Eng: Yes. I lived at home. In December of that first semester, Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Li: Do you remember hearing the news?

1-00:24:24

Eng: Yes, I was at Bancroft Library. Sunday, about 4:30 or 5:00 o'clock I left. In those days newspapers were sold by newsboys, "Extra, extra," you buy a paper. So when I came out on Telegraph and these boys were selling newspapers and yelling, and I thought, "Wow, what's going on?" At home I found out. I finished the spring semester, next year, 1942, the federal government established a Cadet Nurses Corps, a program to train nurses to care for soldiers. So I thought, "Well, this is good for me," and enlisted.

Li:

Okay.

1-00:25:23

Eng: I moved to Children's Hospital in San Francisco, for Cadet Nurses Corps training. Unfortunately, I was infected with tuberculosis and did not finish the program. I recovered to earn an A.A. in medical assisting and worked with Dr. Jacob Yee, physician-surgeon, in Oakland Chinatown.

Li:

Was there recruiting for this nurse training program?

1-00:26:27

Eng: Yes, the Cadet Nurses Corps, to support the WWII military.

Li:

Okay.

1-00:26:30

Eng: There is a big exhibit about the Cadet Nurses Corps in Washington, DC at Arlington Cemetery.

Li:

Were many Chinese women recruited for this or—?

1-00:26:37

Eng: I don't know. I don't think so because my father said, "That is a terrible job," because all he could think about was the dirty bedpan.

Li:

Not the profession—

1-00:26:54

Eng: No, no, no, no. So I don't think that the Chinese people thought highly of nursing.

Li:

Did you get the sense that your parents wanted you to have a career, to work and to be educated?

1-00:27:09

Eng: My mother did. My mother from a very young age knew that she had to be dependent upon my father for her needs. She did not like that, and she didn't want me to live a life like that, so she would say, "Get an education, be independent, be able to take care of yourself, not have to depend on somebody."

Li: Was your father supportive of you taking a scholarship to Berkeley or—?

1-00:27:47

Eng: My father and I did not communicate. My father communicated to me through my mother, and I used to say to my mother, “Why can’t he tell me that?” But we didn’t have this closeness.

Li: So were you living at home? Oh, you said you went to San Francisco then.

1-00:28:10

Eng: Yes, with the Cadet Nurses Corps. There was no medication for TB, I had to be in bed for nine months to heal the lung, and then I went home.

Li: After returning from this, that you were working with the church then?

1-00:28:33

Eng: Yes, I was active in the Chinese Presbyterian Church.

Li: Did you make a lot of friends in Oakland Chinatown when you came—?

1-00:28:41

Eng: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

Li: How did you meet people?

1-00:28:46

Eng: In the church organizations.

Li: In the church?

1-00:28:44

Eng: Because church was the social center for Chinatown, four churches.

Li: Four churches, all different denominations?

1-00:28:57

Eng: There was Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Episcopal.

Li: Were they all Chinese?

1-00:29:03

Eng: Yes. Why, I don’t know, but we knew the people from the different churches, and I guess I liked organizing, I liked getting people together. I think that comes from being the eldest of younger children, sisters and brothers because it was my responsibility to entertain them. So that was a part of me, and so once a month I said, “All of our young people from the different churches should get together once a month.” So we all got together and we all knew each other, it was nice.

- Li: Did this group of churches feel like a core to the Oakland Chinatown? Were they an important part of the neighborhood?
- 1-00:29:56
Eng: Yes and no, because each church took care of their own.
- Li: Were they regionally associated, affiliated, or—?
- 1-00:30:11
Eng: Now I don't know. I know the Presbyterians were. The Baptists was rather independent. I think the Methodists have a central government, and I think the Episcopalians did too. Anyway, they're all different, and—
- Li: You said they took care of their own.
- 1-00:30:30
Eng: Yes, for instance, when Easter came they didn't have but in their own church an Easter egg hunt for their people. I used to read the newspapers, and I would read the social pages. I would look, and they would have fashion shows and lunches, they would have scholarship awards. They would have community-wide events. Why can't we have it in Chinatown? Why is it that if you don't belong a church you can't be a part of this? So we organized a city-wide Chinatown Easter egg hunt for several years, and the city gave us the use of, Lakeside Park. I have pictures of that. What I did was to bring it all together, inclusive, not exclusive.
- Li: You were talking about when you came to Chinatown how you culturally felt different. Did you begin to feel at home there and familiar with the practices, or did you continue to feel different when you were living in Chinatown?
- 1-00:32:08
Eng: I don't know that I continued to feel different while I was there, excited about knowing, getting to know, having friends. I had no friends in Emeryville.
- Li: You grew up speaking Cantonese with your mother?
- 1-00:32:20
Eng: Yes.
- Li: So when you went to Chinatown you had a common language with—
- 1-00:32:25
Eng: Yes, yes. The beautiful part of this story is that my mother when we moved to Oakland she found out that there was a class for adults to learn about government and become a citizen, and she signed up. She would say to us, "Okay, after dinner okay, watch so and do who's going to be home, watch whoever wants, she'd go to school. She passed and became a citizen, and this really upset my father. This really upset him because there was a little tension

there because she's more educated than he. So my mother for years would not vote just to keep the peace.

Li: Did it seem to change her to become a citizen? Did she seem—?

1-00:33:29

Eng: Oh, yes. She just blossomed, and when I think about her I remember the things that she's done with her life, it's just fantastic.

Li: Was she able to make friends and have a social group in Chinatown?

1-00:33:46

Eng: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. In the late years in life after everybody's left the house she volunteered to teach English to newcomers.

Li: Wow. Did you continue to be close then?

1-00:34:09

Eng: Yes. I was living in Fresno at the time, and whenever I could come out to Oakland I would let her know so that we spent time together.

Li: So I had a question about the Chinatown in Oakland and the Chinatown in San Francisco. Did they seem connected? Did they seem like two separate Chinatowns?

1-00:34:37

Eng: No, they're two separate Chinatowns.

Li: Yes, yes, and there wasn't much shared activity issues.

1-00:34:42

Eng: No, no. In those days you could walk down Chinatown and you know everybody.

Li: Yes, yes, and would you go to San Francisco Chinatown for any reason, to go out or to go to restaurants or—?

1-00:34:54

Eng: Yes, for special events.

Li: So tell me a little bit about the hospitality for the Chinese soldiers.

1-00:35:02

Eng: Okay. So I said, "This is really shameful that no church in this whole San Francisco Bay Area has opened their doors to welcome soldier friends. We want to know you, have a meal with you." What is so difficult about that? At Lake Tahoe there was a church movement to get all the high school, and college young people together in one place for a conference to exchange ideas, to meet and—

Li: Chinese students?

1-00:36:01

Eng: Yes, yes. I'll show you. It was at this conference that the ministers asked us as part of the program, "What is your church doing to help with the war effort?" People in Stockton, Sacramento and Portland and Seattle, down south Los Angeles and Bakersfield, Fresno, they all had open houses at the church. We have lunch, we ask them to stay, we invite them, we see them in town, we invite them. Nothing is happening here in our own Bay Area? So I came back and I said, "What's so hard about that? We could do that." So I proposed to the young people in my own church and said, "Hey, you know what? We should do this." We got the backing of the two ministers in the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church. They found help for us. Mrs. Nan Menker was a civic leader in Oakland, and a Methodist woman, and she came and she helped us. She helped us set up By-Laws and a Constitution, I mean a real strong foundation for this group to do this.

I then invited all the young women we knew from the four churches to come, and we talked about it, and they were very excited about doing this. So that's how we got started. But in the meantime some mothers came to my mother and said I was a bad influence, that this was not a good idea, that they didn't want their girls to be entertaining men in uniform. While we're saying we have brothers, we have classmates; we have relatives who are in uniform. They are in a foreign place. Hopefully, wherever they are somebody is there to welcome them, to give them a cookie or talk to them. That's all we're going to do there, and so mother said to me one day, she said, "You know, so and so's mother came and so and so's mother came and said that you're a bad influence. So I said to my mother I said, "Mom," I said, "You know, the minister at the Methodist Church and the minister at our church, they support this program." So I said, "Can I be wrong?" She never said a thing anymore.

Li: So how many girls were participating in this?

1-00:39:01

Eng: There were about thirty. There were over thirty to start with, and then we became a real focus because everybody wanted to be a part of this. We were only there Saturday nights from 7:00 until 11:00, and we were organized in committees. Somebody took care of refreshments, somebody took care of recorded music. We had a Victrola. Somebody took care of teaching ballroom dance, and somebody took care of games. We had the whole city of Oakland and Chinatown support our program. They contributed refreshments, and the city gave us the use of the clubhouse at the Lincoln Playground. It is still there. It was new then. It was built by WPA, or PWA, and it was very nice. I look at it now, it's so tiny! I don't know how we ever functioned in it. But it was really nice. We made a rule that when we closed Saturday night we'd see the guys out, and we'd stay together to clean up and leave together. We would

not leave with the guys because we didn't want to be seen "picking up guys." You can date them any other night in the week, but not Saturday night!

Li: So how did you connect with the soldiers that were coming through? Did you have—?

1-00:40:42

Eng: Word of mouth.

Li: Just word of mouth.

1-00:40:44

Eng: It's a miracle, it really is, just a word of mouth because there was no paper to advertise, there was nothing.

Li: You didn't talk to anyone in the military to advertise.

1-00:40:56

Eng: Oh, we did, oh yes, we did. As a matter of fact, in Alameda at the Naval Air Station, by the chaplain, who validated our program and came to our meetings. His presence maintained our focus.

Li: Okay.

1-00:41:14

Eng: Okay, and then in Vallejo there was a maritime base, I forget the name. They were also related to Oakland Chinatown center. I can't remember his rank, George Mew in Maritime Service invited the band to play at the dedication of the center! Yes, and so it was real, we got into this program late because it was already '44, and as a matter of fact, we were already in the offensive in Europe. After that we got this big, did you see this big trophy?

Li: Yes, when I came in, yes, yes, yes.

1-00:41:56

Eng: Yes, and the Chinese veterans in San Francisco presented that to us as recognition for what we did. It's quite amazing.

In April, 1946, Chinese Young Women's Society of Oakland was presented a War Service Award by Cathay Post #384, American Legion, in recognition of Outstanding Service to the Armed Forces of WWII. It was a huge honor to receive the 27" tall trophy topped with an eagle.

Li: Do you remember the feelings that motivated you to do this at the time? Was it a sense of American patriotism, was it a sense of Chinese community, or what were the, or was it more personal than that? Was it about your brothers and cousins and friends that were serving?

1-00:42:25

Eng: I think a large part of that comes from my upbringing with my siblings being inclusive, sharing, doing things together, and I just felt that this was something that our city could do together to serve the community to make it a better place. I can remember to really make this work because many of our women had jobs, and we would like to have meetings, planning meetings, during the week, but they would have to go home and they would have to eat, and then they'd come back, it would be late, some would not come back, and so in order to keep it together I said, "I will make a simple dinner on the night that we're going to have a meeting so that you can directly come from work so we can do all of this, to facilitate all of this I cooked."

Li: Were these women who would be working who worked before the war, or was this war time occupations?

1-00:43:33

Eng: This was war time.

Li: So were they working in the shipyards, or were they working—

1-00:43:37

Eng: Some were, some were working in offices.

Li: Okay, and did you consider doing that or was that not something that—?

1-00:43:44

Eng: No, because I had come out of this program, and I was working for Dr. Jacob Yee.

Li: Oh, right, because you had a job in medical office, yes.

1-00:43:56

Eng: Right.

Li: What was the most challenging part of making this happen, of bringing people together and actually having these Saturday night events take place? What was the most difficult part?

1-00:44:08

Eng: The most difficult part was getting people to take responsibility, to take office, because this was something that they have never done before, and they just didn't feel that they could do it. That was the most challenging, yes.

Li: So how would you motivate people to take these risks, and—

1-00:44:37

Eng: I would say, "If I can do it, you can do it. You do your best, and you learn." You're not born to know, but if you're willing to do it, you can learn from it. So the organization lasted for fifty years. When the war ended, though, I think

the stronger program of this whole organization was really the freeing of the women, the Chinese women. Before the war it was very important for the brothers to be educated, and the sisters went to work and pooled their finances so the brothers could have an education. Well, now the end of the war, they had free education, G.I. Bill.

Li: All the men.

1-00:45:39

Eng: All the men. Sisters don't have to earn money for them. But sisters ought to be encouraged to go to college to better herself. So that was the program that we adopted. I said, "Let us now offer scholarships to Chinese students, women," because there were scholarships out there, but they were never offered to a Chinese student.

Li: Were the young women in the group excited about this?

1-00:46:16

Eng: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. So we organized with letters to counselors in high schools for candidates, then getting candidates to submit letters and committees to study all this. It was a very busy time. But what they loved most was doing the fashion show, dressing up, and we had a lot of small, small stores at that time like Goldman's, Daisy Shop, and we would go in and say, "We want to do this, and can we have your fashions, feature your fashions?" They would work with us to do this, and we got a place where we do the fashions, we have lunch, and then we'd have door prizes and, oh, it was very fashionable. These are things that the white society's doing that we are not a part of.

Li: The non-Chinese society.

1-00:47:21

Eng: Non-Chinese you see, so it was something we had to create for ourselves.

Li: Was that your primary fundraiser then, the fashion shows?

1-00:47:28

Eng: No, we had big band ballroom dances, we had musical shows.

Li: Were the people who attended primarily Chinese?

1-00:47:41

Eng: No. tickets were sold to other people, co-workers, friends, etc.

Li: But the fashions you were showing were modern American fashions.

1-00:47:48

Eng: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Li: I wanted to back up and ask you about the Japanese during the war. I guess even before the war, did you know any Japanese while the war with China and Japan was going on, did you have any contact with Japanese Americans in Emeryville or—

1-00:48:08

Eng: Not in Emeryville, I didn't know any Japanese really until I was at UC Berkeley.

Li: Did you have preconceptions about Japanese people at that time?

1-00:48:18

Eng: Only what we were told by our family, that we mustn't patronize Japanese stores and buy Japanese, because they were our enemy in China.

Li: Yes, yes.

1-00:48:34

Eng: Right. But superficially we related to each other on campus. It was, we're here, we're not there.

Li: So when the bombing of Pearl Harbor happened, did the fact that it was the Japanese who were bombing the US feel, I don't know, familiar or not surprising given the Japanese experience in China up to that point. Was it—?

1-00:49:02

Eng: Well, we got a lot of news about what they were doing, the raping of Nanking and all of the killings, so that really was in the back of our minds, but at the same time when they were all moved from here to concentration camps, it was hurtful.

Li: You felt that injustice?

1-00:49:39

Eng: Yes, yes. But we were helpless.

Li: Because you had a sense of them being like you in the US.

1-00:49:48

Eng: Yes, right. So it was a very confusing time really.

Li: Yes.

1-00:49:56

Eng: Yes.

Li: Yes. So for most of the Chinese men that you were hosting, they were going to fight in the Pacific?

1-00:50:10

Eng: No, Chinese soldiers fought on several fronts—in Europe, the Pacific, and in China.

Li: Do you remember talking to them about their thoughts or feelings about going to war?

1-00:50:09

Eng: Oh, yes, yes, yes. One young man I remember, we had a kind of a connection with people in other cities like for instance, my cousin in Bakersfield. She had met this young man Mark and had given Mark my telephone number because he was coming to San Francisco. So Mark called me, and I invited him over. He came to my mother's house, and he never sat down. He was just walking back and forth, back and forth. It turned out that his destroyer had been torpedoed, and his ship had limped into Long Beach for I guess really emergency repairs and then the ship came to San Francisco to the shipyards for major repairs. Yes, he was definitely very frightened from that experience, and my own brother was on a destroyer, but I'd never heard anything really dangerous that he went through. But you don't talk about that, you just wish them well, we pray that they'll be back.

Li: Did they talk to you about any of their experiences as Chinese soldiers within the American army?

1-00:51:54

Eng: No we didn't, no. I think they all worked well together. I don't think there were any problems serving in the military because they all knew that they had to do what they had to do.

Li: Were the white soldiers going to similar functions at white churches as you were holding within the Chinese churches, like was this a common practice?

1-00:52:18

Eng: I don't know about church attendance, only about USO. There was a major USO all over the United States. I think they're federally governed, sponsored. As a matter of fact, there was one in Oakland USO, but Chinese never felt comfortable going there because they're all white. Are they, are they going to be friendly? How are we going to be treated?

Li: Right.

1-00:52:43

Eng: So when we were in training for this program, Edna Saake, one of our advisors, was in charge of the USO, and she said I want you to come and experience it, come to the USO and see how people do what they do and so on. But I couldn't get anybody to go with me because the Chinese women were just not comfortable about doing it. But I did go.

Li: What was it like?

1-00:53:19

Eng: It was very nice, very nice, and I remember dancing and I remember this young man. He was very nice, and he said something about going out afterwards for a snack or something. I said, "Oh, I thank you very much," and I said, "I don't think so." He was very nice about it; it was nice of him to ask.

Li: At that time if a Chinese soldier had gone to a USO dance, would him dancing with a non-Chinese woman be seen as okay, or—?

1-00:54:00

Eng: I don't know. I don't know. But I know that in New York there was more intercultural mixing than I think in San Francisco.

Li: So you didn't see a lot of that?

1-00:54:15

Eng: No, no, because what I know came from my late husband's experience.

Li: It was more on the East Coast.

1-00:54:24

Eng: Yes, he had non-Chinese friends, women friends.

Li: Because it seemed like maybe it was different for a Chinese girl to dance with a white boy than for a Chinese man to dance with a white girl, that it might have been seen differently.

1-00:54:38

Eng: So yes, white men are reputed to be protective of their women.

Li: Yes, yes. Who were the people who helped the most making this program happen? Who do you think—?

1-00:54:52

Eng: Nan Menker, Mrs. Nan Menker, and Edna Saake.

Li: How did you meet her? How did you—?

1-00:54:57

Eng: Nan Menker was introduced to us by Reverend Edward Lee, the minister of the Chinese Methodist Church. Yes, she was our leader.

Li: Where did she come from? Who was she?

1-00:55:24

Eng: She was a woman with strong faith in people of all cultures, in her church, and in the city government, very supportive and just a strong leader.

Li: You mentioned the social training program. Did she organize that?

1-00:55:40

Eng: Yes, yes. She had us in her home to demonstrate formal tea. What do Chinese women know about a tea? We don't do that, right?

Li:

Yes.

1-00:55:57

Eng: She had a tea so that she invited us so we'd know, and then we learned to make sandwiches, finger sandwiches through the "Y," YWCA had a program, homemakers' program. So there were a lot of things to indoctrinate us into the larger society through our program, is how I see it. Because we would never, never have been able to be comfortable to walk into the larger society.

Li:

It's interesting that even though you were Chinese American creating entertainment or hospitality for other Chinese Americans, the manner in which you did it in was very Western in terms of having teas, and was there any discussion of, "Oh, we should have a diem sum style lunch, or we should do something more typically Chinese," or was that a discussion that you had?

1-00:57:02

Eng: Yes, we would, sometimes when we had our meetings, especially when we welcomed the Chinese war brides. When the young men after the war could go back and marry and bring their wives here, we welcomed them, we welcomed the new war brides, and helped to have a relationship with them and discuss lifestyles or any questions they might have, and then we would have Chinese refreshments.

Li:

That must have been wonderful for those women to have—

1-00:57:42

Eng: Yes, yes, yes. So our program was quite large because we would help mothers in Chinatown who would be starting their children to school, and they would need help in registering the children or getting vaccinations or whatever. We were there to help them.

Li:

So you really were a women's society.

1-00:58:09

Eng: We were. We were the first Chinese community service society in Chinatown in Oakland 1944 to 1994. CYWS were the first.

Li:

So at your largest during the war time, how many members do you think you had?

1-00:58:26

Eng: Oh, gosh, there were just so many, there were so many, maybe hundreds. Hundreds, because everybody wanted to be a part of this.

Li:

Were students from Berkeley participating, or is it just Oakland Chinatown?

1-00:58:43

Eng: It was mostly Oakland Chinatown, yes. People who lived here.

Begin Audio File 2

Li: Oakland, California, part of the Rosie the Riveter National Park Service Project, this is Interview 1, Tape 2.

So we were talking at the end of the last tape about Nan Menker and her role in helping organize and administrate the society. So would she attend your weekly meetings?

2-00:00:31

Eng: Yes, yes.

Li: You said that she helped organize the training for hosting these hospitality events. Did she have a background in that planning, organization? Had she been active as a volunteer in organization?

2-00:00:51

Eng: Yes, yes, yes, very active in the Methodist Church and in city government as well.

Li: Did she have a connection with China or with Chinese people at all, was there prior to this?

2-00:01:07

Eng: I'm sorry to say that we did not get all of that history of her. That's really missing.

Li: How did the servicemen react to the—?

2-00:01:20

Eng: Oh, they were very pleased, very happy, very grateful to get to know, have a connection, and in addition to our Saturday nights, we would have addresses for all of these young men to wherever they're going, and we would send them a monthly letter. In this letter we would write about people who have come to our center, in case they know these people, they have a connection. So in those days we had to do it on these gel purple typing, and each page had to be hand printed. I have some of those that you could see. It was a real labor of love, so this was the Oak Chi Newsletter, and the hospitality place was called the Oak-Chi Center, Oakland Chinese Center, Oak-Chi Center, and the Oak-Chi News.

Li: Did you have permanent offices somewhere?

2-00:02:34

Eng: At my church. The Chinese Presbyterian Church, the church allowed us to use their facilities.

- Li: Since you requested addresses, you were able to keep track of how many servicemen had participated in your program.
- 2-00:02:47
Eng: Yes. Unfortunately, we didn't know our organization was going to last fifty years, and a lot of our papers were lost.
- Li: Oh.
- 2-00:02:56
Eng: Which is unfortunate. I had left the organization, I was sort of in and out. I had moved to Philadelphia and lived there for five years and then came back, and other people were in and out of the organization as well.
- Li: Yes. Before we leave the war I wanted to ask about, you had mentioned selling war bonds at the Richmond Shipyards. When were you doing that?
- 2-00:03:26
Eng: This was probably in '44, '45, yes.
- Li: How did you get involved?
- 2-00:03:35
Eng: Well, it was through Edna Saake. Edna Saake was USO, she was in charge of the city USO here, and so she would gather an entertainer, a speaker, and other people like me, to go as a group, maybe there were four or five of us. Then we would drive to the shipyards at lunch time and we'd be on a platform. So the entertainer would sing, or musician or whatever, and then talk about selling war bonds, and I pass out these, places to sell war bonds, and it would be no more than, less than an hour, we'd leave.
- Li: So would you go at lunch time, is that—?
- 2-00:04:27
Eng: Yes, it would be lunch time, and all the people come out of the shipyards with their brown bags, and they would stand around and eat their lunch and listen to the spiel, the entertainers.
- Li: Oh, and how many times did you do this?
- 2-00:04:42
Eng: Probably once a month. They would ask me to do it once a month, and I would go, as a Chinese person in support of WWII.
- Li: What kind of entertainers would go?
- 2-00:04:49
Eng: Sometimes it would be a singer, sometimes it would be a guitarist, or some kind of musical. Edna Saake was an entertainer herself before she retired to volunteer to work with USO and with us.

Li: How do you spell her last name?

2-00:05:11

Eng: S A A K E, Saake. Her husband had a picture frame business here in Oakland. It was a very well known business.

Li: So did you feel patriotic participating in this program, doing the war bonds?

2-00:05:33

Eng: Yes, yes, yes.

Li: Did any of your brothers serve in the military?

2-00:05:41

Eng: Both of my brothers, two older brothers were in the Navy, in the Second World War. A younger brother so he was in the Marines. Then the, the two younger brothers, in the Korean War.

Li: So what did the end of the war mean for you?

2-00:06:10

Eng: Well, during war this time I was courted by a sailor, Koney Eng, Navy man, from New York City. He was born in China. He came as a teenager, and my mother liked him. Well, he was quite impressive. I started to tell you about this young man, Mark, who was on a destroyer. Mark wanted a date with me for a Chinese dinner. So I made a date with him to meet him in Chinatown San Francisco for a Chinese dinner. When I got there it happened that the restaurant that I had chosen was closed for Chinese New Year's. In those days there was very little light in the streets because we had to have blackouts.

But it was very safe. I could take the train over to San Francisco alone and had no fear that anything would happen. When I got there I found, "Oh, my goodness, this restaurant is closed. I wonder if he's been here and left or shall I stay and wait?" So I stayed and waited, and then I saw two white hats come towards me, and I couldn't tell who they were until they got very close. Then I realized one was Mark and the other I didn't know, and so we started talking and I said, "Well, we'll have to find another restaurant to eat." It was a Thursday night, and so this other man, Koney, said he was going to leave because he had no idea of my relationship with Mark, so he was going to excuse himself. I just said, "Well, we're just going to have a meal together," I said, "Why don't you just join us if you have nothing else to do?" So the three of us ate.

Then I thought, "Well, now what do I do?" I've got two guys here, then I remembered that the YW has open house on Thursday nights, so I said, "That's where we'll go." I said, "When we're finished eating," I said, "I'm going to take you over to the YWCA, which is just across the street here, and you're going to meet a lot of women there, a lot of nice young ladies." That's

what we did. Then when at the evening I found out that Mark had to get back on his ship, but then Koney was stationed on Treasure Island, so that he could take any train crossing the bridge. At that time there were trains. So he and I walked to the train and as we got close to Treasure Island, I thanked him, it was nice to meet him, and I told him about Saturday night at the clubhouse, Oakland Chinese Center, but he didn't get off. He didn't get off, so I said, "Oh." So he rode to the end of the line and he walked me home to my house. So now he knows where I live. So, "Okay, all right, that's okay," but I was not interested in him because actually I was not interested in marriage because seeing my mother with all these wall to wall babies, "It's not for me." I'd rather be single. Anyway, it took him a while to penetrate, to get to me because he was always at my mother's house.

Li: And she liked him.

2-00:10:25

Eng: And she liked him, so then when the war ended he had to go back to New York to muster out. So his question to me was, "Shall I come back?" That was his way of proposing. "Shall I come back?" So I'll say, "Why not? Where else are you going to go?" So we were married. We went to Reno, as he had no family here and it's just simpler. So we married, and we struggled. We had the two children, and then we bought a house. Then he got a job that he liked which was in sales, wholesale poultry actually, so he was the contact man for Chinese business, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, wherever the Chinese cooked, he went and took orders, and he liked that job. But then suddenly he got pancreatic cancer.

Li: Oh, no.

2-00:11:40

Eng: So after we had a house, I guess it was second year, and he passed in 1952.

Li: Oh, so young.

2-00:11:50

Eng: Yes, he was very young, so I had children six and four when he passed, I was twenty-nine, and, of course, I had a lot of suitors, but no, no, it was just too much, too much for me to handle, I just could not, because my children did not want anybody else in the family. It was just too difficult, so I just thought, "Well, no, the children and I will manage."

Li: So did you ever remarry?

2-00:12:23

Eng: No, no I never remarried because I didn't see any reason for it.

Li: Yes, yes. So how old were you when you got married, when you had been married? Were you twenty—?

2-00:12:36

Eng: Well, I was widowed at twenty-nine, so my first child was born when I was twenty-three and the second at twenty-five.

Li:

Wow, so you were very young.

2-00:12:45

Eng: Yes, yes, yes, so we grew up as roommates. I like to think about that because I would tell me children, "You go to school, and I'm going to work, and we're going to share this house and we're going to share the work, we're roommates." [laughter] Yes, it was fun, and we had a lot of fun. We traveled together and we lived in Philadelphia for five years and had an exposure to a different lifestyle.

Li:

What brought you to Philadelphia?

2-00:13:23

Eng: Well, I tell you, the second year after his passing, I took the children on a train trip. This is something I've always thought I'd like to do, and we did it. The three of us took a train clear across the country, down the East Coast, and then down South and came back all summer. It was a big trip, it was wonderful, it was fun.

Li:

How brave a single mom, Chinese, traveling all across the United States.

2-00:13:52

Eng: Yes, yes, it was fun. While we were in the South we experienced the black and white, the colored, and so it was a wonderful experience.

Li:

There was still a lot of segregation at that time, though—

2-00:14:07

Eng: Lots. We got there, and the kids said, "One is black and one is white, well where do we go?" I said, "We're invisible." I said, "I guess we can have a choice, we'll pick white."

Li:

No one gave you any trouble?

2-00:14:22

Eng: Oh, no. Oh, no, But I didn't see anything on the train, so Yes, it was a real wonderful experience. When we were in Philadelphia I met a woman whom I had corresponded with. She'd married a cousin to my late husband, Henley. Her name was also Dorothy, so she was a Dorothy Eng, I'm a Dorothy Eng. I said, "I hope one day we'll meet," and we did. She had a boy who was just between the ages of my two so the three of them got along really, really nice.

Li:

How fun.

2-00:15:01

Eng: So Dorothy would take us out to crabbing, something we don't do here, and so we did a lot of different kind of events.

Li:

Did you stay with Dorothy then?

2-00:15:26

Eng: Oh, no, so that year we didn't. That year we went from Philadelphia to New York to my husband's side of the family, some cousins, and stayed for a week, and then Dorothy wanted us to come back and stay another week at her place, so we did. I had not thought about making any big changes in my life, but she brought it up, and she said, "Are you thinking about making a change in your life?" Well, I said, "Well, I hadn't thought about it." She said, "Well, if you want to make a change," she says, "Why don't you come here, because the house is big and Henley and I are out of town during the week in our restaurant, and so if you came here, you could kind of watch my kids?" because they had an older daughter as well in high school. So I said, "Well, I'll think about it." So we thought about it, and so I thought this was a good opportunity."

Li:

So did you sell your house?

2-00:16:26

Eng: No, no, no. You never sell your house, you lease it. You've got to have some place to come back to.

Li:

Yes.

2-00:16:40

Eng: Don't burn your bridges. So the following year we did go back to Philadelphia, and yes it was good for the kids because it gave them a new outlook in life away from the familiar friends and what they were doing and how they're missing their father. So it was good. We were there for five years. The people who had leased our house had enough money to buy their own, so they were moving out. "Okay," I said, "At the end of the school semester we're all going to go back because the house is empty."

Li:

Were they okay to come back?

2-00:17:24

Eng: Oh, yes, so we all came back.

Li:

Were they, was your house here, it wasn't this house?

2-00:17:27

Eng: No, no, it wasn't this house; it was one in East Oakland.

Li:

Okay, so was it closer to—

2-00:17:33

Eng: Smaller house.

Li: Closer to, so not close to Chinatown then, not—

2-00:17:39

Eng: No, no, it's on the other side of the lake.

Li: Where you stayed in Philadelphia, was that near the Philadelphia Chinatown?

2-00:17:45

Eng: Yes, it was, yes.

Li: So were your children's most experience of living near a Chinatown?

2-00:17:49

Eng: Yes, yes, and then we went to the Chinese church, but, oh no, we went, when we were here we went to a Chinese church sometimes. We didn't do that very often because this was one of the things that I was upset about. He told me that he was a Christian, and because I was very active in the church.

Li: Your husband—

2-00:18:18

Eng: At the time, yes. He said he was, but as soon as we were married Sundays, Sundays was not a church day. He wanted that time, so and we didn't go to church. So that sort of upset me. Yes, yes, so anyway, so we were there for five years, and we met a very wonderful Quaker family. I had not known anybody who was a Quaker, but I'd read about them because they're always doing really important things to better society. We're still in touch, we're still good friends. They've been in and out of our lives at different times.

Li: Did you do philanthropy work in Philadelphia work like you had done here? Did you get involved with organizations and—?

2-00:19:30

Eng: Yes, I was active in the church, and I was well, no, I don't think there were any other organizations except for the church.

Li: I wanted to ask you could you just describe for me a typical, the Saturday night hospitalities, just sort of how a typical night would work, what time you would show up, how the evening would go, what would happen?

2-00:19:55

Eng: Right. Well, we'd ask the women who were going to hostess because not everybody has to be there every Saturday night, but we had to have a core of people. I don't remember the number, maybe it was ten to 15 people? But they had to be there at 6:30 to set up everything so everything was in readiness because at 7:00 o'clock our guests would be arriving. We would have them

sign in, and take them around and introduce him to everybody. You never have one guest with you the whole evening. You could share this guest with everybody, and ask them what they would like to do, if they wanted to play cards or they wanted to dance, if they want to just visit. Talk about where they're from and just get acquainted, and we would sometimes have a program and we'd say all right, from 7:00 until 8:00 o'clock we're going to have dance lessons if you want to learn how to ball room dance because remember these kids they're coming off farms, they're coming out of laundries and restaurants, they didn't know how to dance. So we had to learn to dance, to learn how to teach them to dance see, and we would spend maybe a half an hour or an hour depending on the group and how the response is. Then we would have mixers with the circles, but just to keep things moving, and then we'd have refreshments and that would be it.

Li: How long would the evening last?

2-00:21:54

Eng: Until 11:00 o'clock, and at 11:00 o'clock we'd say, we played this music, "Good night, ladies," and that would be the theme song for leaving. We'd see the guys out.

Li: How long, would you have men who'd come back for several weeks, like how long would they be in the Bay Area before embarkation?

2-00:22:17

Eng: Yes, sometimes, we never know. We never know who's going to show up because they don't even know sometimes where they're going to be moving to or shipped out orders, so just whoever shows up.

Li: Typically was there an average number of servicemen who would attend each week?

2-00:22:40

Eng: Well, we'd probably have about fifteen or twenty. And we had two married women in our organization at that time, both of their husbands were overseas, and they came and they would do the game room and the conversation.

Li: In the game room would you have gambling, or—?

2-00:23:01

Eng: Game room would have cards or checkers or whatever the hostess brings to share because everybody who was in charge of that particular project also had to bring all of the equipment.

Li: So is there a moment or experience that seems really significant from that time that stands out as particularly memorable, those years that you worked with the hospitality?

2-00:23:54

Eng: I think that probably being recognized by the people in Chinatown was the most important, our own people supporting this program, and then secondly would be the City of Oakland because not only did the Chinese have their own hospitality house, but the blacks had their own hospitality house at that time at DeFremery Park in West Oakland. Then the USO was the white.

Li: Did you get any funding from the military or support from the government for your program?

2-00:24:49

Eng: The City of Oakland donated Lincoln Clubhouse for our programs. I was paid for the security of the building, so I had to be there every Saturday night.

Li: You were paid by the—

2-00:25:06

Eng: By the city. By the recreation department, so that was my responsibility so I had to be there every Saturday night.

Li: For students who were taught about what World War II meant for the Bay Area or for the home front experience, what do you think is the most important thing for them to understand about that era?

2-00:25:39

Eng: I guess because of the blackouts and because we were on the coast, we had these blackouts. That was very important for our security. I think that was the most important thing, that we could be attacked being on the coast.

Li: Did the war feel close, then?

2-00:26:07

Eng: Yes, because everybody had to have dark blinds, drapes, all the windows had to be blacked out, with no lights showing. We had a person in each block to walk around to be sure there were no lights shining from the house in order to be safe.

Li: Did you feel—?

2-00:26:40

Eng: Because we could be, yes.

Li: So there was a feeling of—

2-00:26:40

Eng: Oh, yes, we could be, we could be attacked. They could bomb us the same way they bombed Pearl Harbor.

Li: So I think that's something that people forgot about—

2-00:26:51

Eng: Right, we had bomb shelters that we could go and find refuge if we were not at home.

Li: Did you know where the closest bomb shelters—?

2-00:27:08

Eng: Yes, yes, there were public places, garages, that would be posted, but you had to learn, you had to know in case you were near there, where to go.

Li: So when the war ended, did you feel a sense of relief or a sense of—?

2-00:27:30

Eng: Yes, there was a sense of relief, but it was also a tough time economically, it was a tough time because here everybody's coming home, the men wanted their jobs back that the women had taken. The women had to leave, give their jobs back, and there was a housing shortage. There was a housing shortage throughout the whole war because people were moving into California to work at the shipyards, and when they came, there was no housing, no place to go. In 1943 President Roosevelt had then removed the law discrimination of the Chinese, but it takes many years for that to filter down to the people because they're still treating you the same way. I remember that in 1950 when we were ready to buy a house, we went to San Leandro in the Washington Manor they were just building new houses. Oh, this was ideal, three bedrooms and sure my husband is a veteran, we qualify, we went down there. No, they're not taking any orders until they're finished with this, maybe in a month. We go back, we went back twice. I said to my husband, "I don't think they're going to sell to us Chinese," but they didn't say that. So I said, "Okay, when we go back this time I'm just going to ask," and I did. I says, "Just what are our chances of getting a home here? We have been here, this is our third visit." He says, "Well, ma'am, there are no Asians here."

Li: That's all he said.

2-00:29:47

Eng: That's all he said. No, if I had been in a position of knowing an attorney and had some kind of inroads for a suit, I could have maybe made something of it, but when you don't have these tools, you just have to accept and you walk away. So I just said to him, "Well, I wish I had known that earlier. We wouldn't have wasted our time here," and left, and we bought another house.

Li: Did he use the word Asians?

2-00:30:23

Eng: Yes.

Li: Oh, did you feel like there was a distinction made between you and Japanese Americans during the war, after the war? I didn't matter?

2-00:30:32

Eng: No Asians, it didn't matter, didn't matter, yes. So at about the same time there was a young man on Grand Avenue, Horace Fong, and Horace Fong had married a white woman, and the white woman bought a house on Grand Avenue which was not open to Asians. After the house was purchased, Horace moved in, and the neighbors went berserk. They went to court, they sued him and a big, but Horace had money and Horace had people who could help him.

They went to court, and he won. He won. It was very costly, but he couldn't live there. Why would you want to? So he sold the place and went on with his life.

Li: With his wife.

2-00:31:34

Eng: Yes, to another place, I don't know where they went. But, yes, those were tough times.

Li: Did you find discrimination was worse after the war than before the war, or the same—?

2-00:31:56

Eng: Well, it wasn't always. I was just some people and some times and some places.

Li: But enough.

2-00:32:01

Eng: Yes, right. You never knew when it was going to happen because sometimes you can have a very nice relationship.

Li: Yes.

2-00:32:17

Eng: So we have overcome a lot.

Li: Was there discussion within the Chinese Young Women's Society to disband when the war ended?

2-00:32:29

Eng: Yes, it was a question of, "Well, we organized to do this, we have done it. Do we stop?" No, the women said, "No, we have so much fun doing all these creative things." They wanted to continue, and I said, "Well, if we're going to continue we have to have a program. We have to have a reason, so that's when I proposed that we do the scholarship thing. I said, "Because scholarships are never offered to the Asians." I said, "Let's do that and do our fashion show and lunches to raise money, and we can do big band dances to raise money, we can do musicals to raise money," and they loved it, they just love this challenge.

Li: So were you already been doing the work with the war brides and helping the mothers in Chinatown during the war, so you had expanded your charter—

2-00:33:32

Eng: Yes, and we had the Easter egg hunt and we just did, and we supported Chung Mei Boys Home when they were building the new dormitory. We did a big show, and raised a lot of money to help with that building. And Ming Quong Home for Girls. We donated towards their buildings and their programs. Later on when this young man in Michigan who was killed—

Li: Vincent Chin?

2-00:34:12

Eng: Yes, and so we sent money to support that—

Li: Wow.

2-00:34:18

Eng: So it opened a lot of doors, a lot of concerns that we could meet and do.

Li: Yes.

2-00:34:27

Eng: I think that was very empowering.

Li: For the women who really wanted to keep the society going, what do you think it meant for them to participate in these activities.

2-00:34:41

Eng: Well, I think one is recognition. I think that's a big part of it because whenever there was a big project going on there was always news items, and also they were recognized in Chinatown by people. I think that's important.

Li: After the war when the men came home, did the husband tend to support their wives participating in these activities or was there a sense of, "Oh, you should be home," and—

2-00:35:20

Eng: No, I didn't hear anything adverse to that because most of the women had jobs and had sort of their interests, it's like one of our church friends said when he retired, she said, "I married you for better or for worse, but not for lunch." She had her freedom, lunch. [laughter]

Li: Well, it seems like there was a sense of having your own life.

2-00:36:04

Eng: Yes. I think most of them were in that category.

Li: Yes. So can you tell me a little bit about the scholarship program, how you would find girls to participate?

2-00:36:15

Eng: Well, first of all they would send out letters to the counselors at the various high schools, that's all in Oakland and Alameda and San Leandro, just all in this whole Bay Area and asking them that we have this scholarship to offer and we would like to know if there's a candidate that they would like to tell us about. Then they get that response, it's an all year project. Then we get that response, and then we would contact that person, the student, and ask them if, we have this scholarship, and would they, they had a little kind of a question sheet about them to fill out, as to why they want to go to college and what they want to do with their life, just things like that. Then they would review and read all of this from the different places, and then they would make a selection about who's needy or who they should support. Then they would maybe have three or four that they want to meet personally and interview and then make a decision. Then when they had their fashion show and the lunch, this person would be a part of that. They would be introduced and honored.

Li: It was a one girl a year?

2-00:37:54

Eng: Yes, one girl, twenty-seven though, twenty-seven girls.

Li: Wow. Was it a full scholarship?

2-00:38:01

Eng: It was a full scholarship.

Li: Wow, wow.

2-00:38:08

Eng: It cost less then.

Li: Yes. So you mentioned on the phone that the name changed.

2-00:38:18

Eng: Yes, I think after, I guess in the thirtieth year or fortieth year, I don't remember which, they did drop the Y, the young.

Li: You became the Chinese Women's Society.

2-00:38:32

Eng: Chinese Women's Society, yes, right. So anyway, several of the women were just sort of in and out of the organization all the time, which was good. I was not active when we moved to Philadelphia. I came back in the sixties, and I was active then in the sixties. Then in the seventies I moved again to New York, and so I was out of it. Then from New York I went to Fresno, so I was there. Then I would be invited back as a founder. I was recognized as a founder I think in its fortieth year or maybe thirtieth year I don't remember. But anyway, so I was invited back to be a speaker, which was nice.

Li: Yes, and when did the organization disband.

2-00:39:33

Eng: It was in '94.

Li: Ninety-four.

2-00:39:34

Eng: In '94 we finally had a core group of people and we were talking about it, and I said, "Well, I think we organized for a specific reason, and we've done it." I said, "Let's just retire. Let's not die on the vine." Organizations just sort of filter out, I said, "Let's just say we're finished, we're disbanded."

Li: At fifty years.

2-00:39:59

Eng: Fifty years.

Li: Yes.

2-00:40:04

Eng: So we did, and it was then that Montgomery Hom, who graduated from San Francisco State, in the film program. He was like you, looking for history about war veterans, what the Chinese did during WWII, he could find nothing, and so about that, he says, "Wow, '94, if I'm going to get any documentation I have to do right now because these people are getting older."

Li: Yes.

2-00:40:40

Eng: Just by word of mouth it took him five years to gather all these people, tape them, get their oral histories, and so we have this "We Served With Pride" film. Have you heard of it?

Li: Yes.

2-00:40:55

Eng: Yes, so that came out of that.

Li: Oh.

2-00:41:00

Eng: I think he was having some financial problems with this. The Organization of Chinese in Washington, DC supported him. Then when they had the premiere in Washington, DC we were all invited, those of us who were a part of this documentary.

Li: What was it like to see your experiences sort of collected in this way with all those other wartime experiences?

2-00:41:35

Eng: Unbelievable. It's just unbelievable. I was just getting all this stuff out the other day this week, and I just, "My gosh, it just boggles my mind." When we were preparing for our fiftieth anniversary and we let it be known, the news, I think it was Channel 5 who came here and just filmed us in my house! I thought, "Oh, my goodness." It was just unbelievable.

Li:

Tell me how you came to meet President Clinton. What was—?

2-00:42:22

Eng: Well, a part of this program in Washington, DC was to have an audience with President Clinton. We had to send in some personal information, had to have clearance on all of us, and maybe it's going to happen and maybe it won't happen because it just depends on what's going on with the government, that's first. But it worked out, and we did get to see him in his Oval Office. We went in the West Gate, I guess they call it, and we were all there, and he was busy and he couldn't see us. We were in this narrow hallway, and so we were kind of blocking traffic, so they decided to open up the meeting room, the War Room, and put us in there because nobody ever goes in that War Room. But we were allowed to go in that War Room because they wanted us out of the way. We waited for the President to be free to see us. It was great.

Li:

That's right, you were such a participating, such a critical moment in our nation's history.

2-00:43:46

Eng: Yes, yes. Well, it's just a shame that nobody, the Chinese people didn't rise up to meet the challenge to fill a need.

Li:

Well, you did.

2-00:44:00

Eng: Yes, I was just very upset about that. It's like this firemen watching this guy drown and not going out there to, so what if you're not licensed to do this, help. So that's just my attitude, and I think that's a part of me I guess because I noticed that whenever there's an interview or somebody's recruiting or something like that at the senior center, they'll say we want somebody to do this, do that. Nobody responds. Nobody steps up to respond. I think that the real weakness, the real failing of the Chinese people, at least those that I know.

Li:

What do you think is behind that?

2-00:45:01

Eng: They just have a reluctance. I think there's a lot of fear, maybe they're afraid to be criticized, maybe they're afraid of failure, I don't know. One time there was a woman at the senior center who fainted. She fell off a chair, so they called 911, the ambulance came, so they said, "Somebody has to go with her."

Nobody, nobody responded, so I said I'll go, so I went with her. It's just these little things.

They were doing a documentary on big band dances, so this person was up there recruiting. We want somebody who's had ball room dancing; a lot of them had ball room dancing. Will you do this? Oh, no, no, no, no, I don't want to be seen. I ended up doing it just because nobody else is going to do it.

Li: Somebody said the most important historical events come out of people saying, "I'll do it."

2-00:46:32

Eng: Yes, right. So what's the big deal? What's the big deal?

Li: Is there anything else that you feel like you want to talk about or share about these experiences that we haven't talked about yet?

2-00:46:45

Eng: Oh, gosh, made some very good friends, I've learned a lot about Chinese culture, and it's been fun. Life is good.

Li: Thank you so much for talking with me.

[End of Interview]