

This is an interview for the International District Oral History Project with Jimmy Mar. We're at the Yick Fung Company on 705 South King Street. The interviewers are Ron Chew and Susan Kunimatsu. The first question again, difficult question, is when and where were you born, Jimmy?

Well, I was born here in Seattle, Washington, 1900 and 14.

Where were you raised?

I was born and raised right here in Seattle.

What did your parents do?

My parents ran an importing and exporting firm located here in the International District, better known as Chinatown.

And the name of the business was...?

The name of the business was Yick Fung Company.

What year did your father start up the business and how did he get the money to start it up?

My dad had arrived here in 1909 and he started the business in 1913. I believe some of his funds came from being an interpreter in Port Townsend helping the Immigration with some of the translation and interpreting.

Did he speak English, then?

He had a fairly good run of English, which he was self-taught.

So, he didn't really have that much of an education.

No, I don't believe so. Not that I know of.

Tell me about some of your first memories of the International District or Chinatown. Actually, I was born on 13th and Jackson, which is only about four or five blocks away from my dad's business. But, the only time we came down here were during the summertime when we would help our dad. But, later on, we just took over the business when my dad passed away.

How old were you then?

I was probably 28 or so.

Can you tell me a little more about your father's business. I understand there are a variety of different things that were housed under this one umbrella.

This store was started mostly for importing and exporting, which we took care of the restaurants. We're more or less a wholesaler. So, we supplied all the merchandise, equipment and stuff conducive to operating a restaurant. We were also agents for the Blue Funnel Line. An agency that was related to the parent organization in Hong Kong, which was Dodwell Company. Our ships were run once a month and all the people from the United States who wanted to go back to China and had just limited funds would come and

utilize our steamship company cause it was a lot cheaper than our other two competitors. Since we had an average of about 85 passengers every month, there was a need for someone to transport their baggage and a need to haul the passengers. So, my dad started a Yick Fung Express Company run by one of my brothers, and the China Cab Company was run by one of my older brothers so we don't overlap. Also, these people had to be fed and housed. So, at our store, we had cots on the second floor, which was provided for them to wait two or three days before the ship leaves. And, we also had a kitchen here with a cook who supplied two meals a day, nine in the morning and 4:30 in the evening. So, I think my dad thought about covering all the bases, and I think we did as far as assisting the passengers during their short stay here in Seattle, before their departure for the Orient.

It was a full service agency.
Right.

The passage was cheap because it was actually a freighter, right?
Yeah, and it takes longer. There's only two classes there: so-call (?), now they call it tourist class, but it was called steerage (?) at that time. And, the beds are stacked 10 high, like they do in the Army when they were transporting those people over. And, those that could afford it, we had 12 cabins on the ship.

People awaiting passage actually slept on the premises --
Slept here, right. That's why we had all these things furnished for them.

Was that atypical? Did people on more expensive ??? stay in hotels or was that --
Some of them would, yeah. Most of them would have the language barrier. So, that's why the Mar Hotel was erected at that time for their passengers, yeah.

How long was the actual voyage?
Our voyage took a maximum of 28 days, sometimes give or take two more days. But, they would stop at five more ports to load up and fill up before they would arrive at their destination, whereas other passenger lines, whether they had it or not, they go on time. Ours would stop on the way, say drop in Yokohama, or drop in Nagoya (?) or somewhere along the line.

You also transported livestock, didn't you?
Livestock. That's one of the features of the Blue Funnel Line. All livestock was kept in the deck and were slaughtered as the need presented itself. They had pigs, they had chicken. I think the only thing they didn't have were cows. But, everything was fresh. And, of course, being in the import-export business, we supplied the food, too.

Do you know how much it cost back in those days to --
Eighty-seven dollars, which was fairly expensive when you stop and think about it. I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was a hundred and some odd dollars. Less than \$200 to ride the Canadian Pacific and American Airline (?), which is strictly a passenger ship.

Were most people returning back to a --

Most of our passengers, when they come here, they're going back home to die. They don't come back.

These are not people going to see their --

No. I would think, maybe less than 10 percent would be coming back. And then, again, they would come here and stay overnight before they take the train back to wherever they came from, mid-west or east coast or whatever.

These people didn't have wives or family here, did they?

No. They were all back home because, in those days, females weren't allowed to come because of the Exclusion Act. So, they make these trips periodically, but most of the time, it's a one shot deal. They go home, they don't come back. They're elderly people.

So, they were part of that bachelor society?

Yeah. Although they were all married and had children, they still...they couldn't come. So, when it's time, they come back home. They do mail money home every month.

I know you mentioned in the other interview quite a number of jobs: restaurant, canneries, the China Cab, gambling places. Can you go over a little bit the things you've done? What was your first job?

The first job was working for Al Mar's dad in the gambling joint. During the weekends, around 18, 17, in that area. Just to make some lunch money. We were given five dollars a day. I ran the crap table. I worked an hour on, an hour off.

Was this down here?

Right where Kau Kau Restaurant is was where the gambling joint was located. It was called Atlas.

There were quite a number of lottery houses, weren't there?

They were either working in restaurants or lottery joints or gambling joints. This was prevalent throughout that period. Most of the gambling joints were stationed on Washington Street, but they were scattered all over. And, every organization or like the tongs had their own area to speak of. And, they ran all the gambling joints and all the lottery joints. If you belong to that club, you would of gotten a job right away.

Now, these were still technically illegal, so they weren't in storefronts or something. They were in --

They were storefronts, as wide open, just like it is now. Whether it was legalized or not legalized, they were going with the blessings of somebody.

So, they were very open?

Oh, sure. No problem.

What did you do after you worked at the gambling place?

Well, one of our schoolmates, Biff Hoffman, whose dad was a fir with Dabner, I mean with the funeral home. And then, one of the competition from San Francisco wanted to open up a branch office here called Dabner Fir Company. And, Mr. Hoffman and I went down to San Francisco, interviewed them and we came up here and we opened up an office here.

How old were you then?

Around the same age.

Who did you sell firs to?

We had a ready-made customer. We sold most of them to prostitutes. To be frank about it, that's where we started.

How did you connect with your --

We had a taxi cab company, remember? We hauled most of the gamblers and most of the prostitutes. Take them to and from work. Our cab company ran 24 hours a day. My brother would take care of the daytime and my other brothers would take care of the nighttime on a rotation. One month, you worked, cause they're all married. To be fair to each other. Susan work the morning time. Ron, you'll work the evening.

And then, you just sold it to these customers as they rode the cab.

Word gets around. Jimmy Mar is now associated with Dabner Fir Company. You need to get a good deal, go see him or come down to our office downtown on Fourth Avenue.

Did you work up in Alaska at all?

Yes. In the summertime, my dad was a contractor. And, we spent quite a few summers up there at Port Althorp, Alaska, southeastern Alaska. My dad supplied the manpower and of course, you have to include the food and everything else. Coming and going, either way.

What did you do in the canneries?

Mostly, I was a timekeeper.

The workers themselves, were they --

Mostly Filipinos. It's the seasonal workers that come in. We know who they are every summer. They want to come back and do the work. I think the minimum wage at that time was \$17.50 a month for the average worker. Overtime was \$5 and long shoring was 10 cents an hour. Five cents an hour and 10 cents an hour. I was getting \$100.

Was it typical that the Filipinos were the factory workers and the Chinese and others were more like the office workers?

Right. As soon as they finish the harvesting in Salinas and Wattville (?) where they have celery and lettuce and all that. Then, they drop everything and come for this. If they worked the spring thing, they would come here in April. Normally, the regular run of the salmon industry would be in July. So, they're back home by August.

How long was your dad doing this contracting stuff?

Forty years, maybe.

How old were you when you worked in Alaska?

I was about 17, 18.

You mentioned in your earlier interview, Jimmy, that you were manager of a place called the Rainbow Inn?

Yeah. Rainbow Inn was situated where the Senator Ballroom used to be. One of our cousins from San Francisco came up here. He was a restaurant operator, but he thought there was a need for a dime and dance place for people going to the Georgian (?) Room but couldn't afford it. Once a week, we had a national orchestra tour that comes by every year. These are all well-known musicians, musical groups. We would change every week. We were the only one that had tea dancing. That started from 11 to 12. They operated six days a week. The only day they were off was Sunday. A very nice place for people that like going out all the time without paying an arm and a leg for the darn stuff that you eat there. And then, we had dancing again from five to seven. Of course, at that time, tuxedos were worn formally. And then, from nine to one, strictly formal dining and dancing. Actually, it wasn't that expensive, but it was something that was not operating in Seattle at that time.

This was in the same location as the Senator Ballroom?

Yeah. That's Eighth and Union.

You mentioned tea dancing.

You come to dine and we would have an orchestra there playing for them. Some of the big hotels in California have that, but no one here. Even the Lippy Hotel (?) that time did not have it. We ran for about four and one-half years. Nineteen forty-six to to 52 or something like that.

You made reference to the China Cab. Where was that housed? Was it right here on King Street?

Right here on King Street. We had an outlet where the Oriental dry good is. And, also have on Jackson Street Tokyo Hotel. Used to be a restaurant there operated by one of our cousins. We also had a telephone stand over there.

So, you had two cabs then?

Two. Right.

What years did that operate?

I think that was in the 30s. All these things were going on simultaneously.

Were there any other cab companies down here?

Two years later, they had the Oriental Cab, which was located where Linyen is right now at Seventh and King. And then, a couple years later, the Canton Cab, which is located where Jordan Louie's building, Alps Hotel.

Who operated those other two cab companies?

The Chins operated the Oriental and the Canton Cab Company was operated by a different ethnic group.

Tell me how you became a funeral director? How did you get involved in that?

I got involved with Butterworth when I was commander of Cathay Post #186. This was directly after I was discharged from the Army in 1946 when they were returning a lot of Asian bodies back to Seattle and no one was taking care of them. And, since my dad was more or less affiliated with the funeral home prior to the war, being a commander, someone had to take care of it. So, they funneled everything through me. During this time, all the funeral homes wanted the business. This is the way it goes in this industry. It wasn't very good getting phone calls from all these companies day and night. Since my dad did some business with Holm (?) and Butterworth, they contacted me and I reluctantly consented to do all this. Since I was not licensed, the other funeral companies were giving Butterworth a little static. You have an employee here who is not even licensed. I went through their bar examination. It's not that difficult. That's how things started. It wasn't easy doing this thing because Chinese do not participate in this sort of industry. I don't believe there is another funeral director of Chinese descent that is operating even now. As far as embalmers consenters (?), there is none. Period. I think the Japanese community's the same thing. Art Susumi, who was doing this, saw there was a need. So, he went to school and he came out as an embalmer. I didn't go because I already had a business here.

We had heard stories of Mr. Susumi having difficulty marrying because people were reluctant to have a mortician in the family. Were people grateful for your services?

Oh, sure. I'm not an embalmer, a mortician. There was a need and someone had to do it for them. There's a little more difficulty running a Chinese funeral home than any other one. You have to do everything for them. Pick out the plots.

They don't plan in advance --

No. They don't. Art was fortunate because the Japanese community at that time would buy what you call a pre-need. They were opening up areas in Evergreen-Washelli at that time. I was also involved, but I sold zilch. He sold maybe three or four every week. These are pre-need plots, which is good because I think within the last 10 or 12 years, the Chinese would actually come there and talk to me the eventuality of dying and what has to be done. They know the plots are getting scarce now. Come on. Let's go and purchase some. This did not happen until only 10 or 12 years ago.

Why do you think the Chinese are so --

It's a superstition, Ron. That's what it is. Nothing else. They're afraid once they talk about it, they're going to die. So, Chinese especially, when they go to a hospital, go to a nursing home, they're not coming back anymore. So, a lot of them refrain from going there. Now,

I've spoken to quite a few groups. You finally realize these are the things that are going to happen. It's not that simple to have something staying with your kids all the time. It's not going to work.

What are some of the challenges of doing what you do? Is it difficult dealing with families during this period?

As far as dealing with families is concerned, in the Chinese ethnic groups, it's a little different from the Caucasian things where you would just call and this is what we offer. This is it. With the Chinese cases, you have to get pallbearers for them, get a minister for them, pick out the plot for them, wrap up the coins for them, write the thank you cards. It's a service. Actually, I should be doing it they seem to think....

There was never an actual funeral home in Chinatown or in Japantown? They always went outside the community?

Right. They always did. But now, since Art is here, he or less takes care of the Japanese. Technically, I'm supposed to take all the Chinese, but I have a bigger spread than he has. I get Caucasians, anything.

A lot of Chinese are buried at Lakeview. At least my relatives are. Most of them are buried at Lakeview because it was convenient. There's a bus that stops there and before they depart, they stay there for about 20 minutes.

This is a follow-up interview with Jimmy Mar for the International District Oral History Project. We're sitting at the Wing Luke Asian Museum at 407 Seventh Avenue South. Today's date is September 23, 1993.

Can you tell a little about some of the businesses that were down here in this area back when you were a youngster?

Well, they had quite a few restaurants here. The King Nam, the Twin Dragons, the Hong Kong, the King Fir and the Chinese Gardens were the main restaurants. The Chinese Gardens was more or less like a night club. They had live music. I think most of them did fairly good. These were all Cantonese-Toisan people that ran the business.

Other than restaurants, what other kinds of establishments were there down here? What kind of activities?

There's a few grocery stores, then the importing-exporting store. There were three of us at the time. And everyone seemed to be doing okay at that time. Of course, there were a lot of hand laundries, not only in the Chinatown area, but they were spread out more or less in the Central Area, in that neighborhood.

As far as the laundries, how many were there down here in this particular area?

I think there was about four. One run by the Wong family, and there was a Luke family that had a small place here.

Do you remember which particular places those two were?

Well, there's one down on Maynard, down maybe past Lane Street. Right next to a prostitution house there at the time. They took in hand laundry and they did their own ironing and everything else. There's no dry cleaning in those days.

Any other businesses that you can remember? Any tailor shops, any...?

There were no tailor shops in the early 20s. Not that I recall.

Were there a lot of gambling places?

Oh, sure. There were a lot of gambling places and lottery places. All the gambling was controlled by the Bing Kung Tong in Seattle. And then in Tacoma, it was the Hop Sing Tong. A gentlemen's agreement, you stay on your side of the fence, we'll stay in ours. They all ran their own gambling joints. The Wongs had one, the Mars had one, and the Chins had one. They controlled the lottery ticket companies. I think there were about five at that time. The Sunset Union, and a few of those were there. That serves as a place of employment for most of the Chinese that were here. So, you belonged to any one of those tongs, you naturally would get first preference in acquiring a job whether you want to work in the gambling joint or you want to work in the lottery.

During those early days, what were the other types of jobs that typically the Chinese would do?

There wasn't very much for them. They didn't have opportunities to get in any other type of business because they weren't being hired in the first place. Of course, we had our taxi cab companies going so, we helped employ quite a few of the ethnic groups.

Were they mostly working for themselves, then?

Oh, yeah. Most of them worked for themselves. You had more bosses than you had people (laughs).

So, it's the gambling places, the laundries, restaurants, anything else?

Well, at that time, Hankow was the only one that was serving American food. They were located on Jackson Street where Toda is right now. They employed quite a few people. Maybe three years later, the Japanese restaurants hired a few Chinese cooks there. We had our dispatch office at the Tokyo Cafe there anyway.

Which business from the old days are still around? I know your business has been around for a long time.

Wah Young is still here, and Kwan on Wing is the offshoot of Tuck Sing. They took over that place there.

Do you know when that change over took place?

I think around 1938. That's when the Chin family all disbanded there.

And then they sold it over to David's...?

David's family.

Tell me about the Yick Fung Company. Has the place changed much? The interior, how it's been used?

I think, Ron, we kept everything practically about the same because if you're going to change anything, you have to tear everything down and you'll never get those things back again. That's the only reason why we kept it the way it is.

The front has always been a little bit of a store to sell dry goods?

To restaurants. We're a private wholesaler, but you have to display your stuff so when the cooks come in, they can see what kind of merchandise you have. That's the reason why we're there. Like I said, we're 90 percent wholesale at that time.

When I was talking to Florence yesterday, she mentioned she serviced a lot of the Japanese places as well with the different produce. Who were your main customers?

Our main customers were Chinese restaurants. We also service Trader Vic's when they were here. And we did some stuff with the Davenport Hotel in Spokane. The reason why we services those was all the managers were Chinese at that time. Harry Chin was one of the connections. The name of the game is service, anyway because everyone else has the same product.

As far as the historical figures and colorful people in the area, I know Goon Dip's name had come up. Did you ever have a chance to meet him?

Oh, sure. He was more or less the official mayor of Chinatown. They were more prominent than everybody else because they had the Chichagof Coal Mine. Those were the people that ran that. It was up in Alaska. They made a lot of money. Lew Kay and Goon Dip and the Goon family were partners in that venture. Of course, they sold stocks and everything else.

What other enterprises did Goon Dip have in the community?

I think they dabbled a little bit in canneries, too. He was, more or less, like the Consul General here -- that type of work.

What kind of person was he -- do you remember?

A very astute person. He kept to himself quite often. But Lew Kay knew more English so he, more or less, took care of things there. That Wally Lew Kay's dad.

Did Goon Dip speak much English?

Not very much. Not very much.

He lived in the Milwaukee Hotel?

Right, upstairs. This is what they call *bak lau*. It's the one where you guys are -- upstairs.

How about Gobby's father, Woo Gen? Did you remember him at all?

Gobby's dad was, more or less, in the cannery business. After he passed away, he passed it on to his son, Morton who started the Yee Goon Company up there on Eighth and King. Strictly cannery.

How about Ah King or his son Albert King?

Albert King was our next door neighbor. He was in the importing-exporting business also. He took care of a few canneries. We all had a little shot at it. He's been our neighbor for quite a while. And then the sons took over and no one took over at all.

Do you know which particular canneries he serviced?

Quadra and Port Chatham, I believe. He had two that he took care of.

Tell me a little bit about him. I've heard his name a lot. This was before my time.

He had a big family and they all went to college. This was after -- when they were able to have the opportunity to go to college. And I think almost every one of his kids went to college. And no one came to help him to do it. I think Kermit Eng's father was the Chinese bookkeeper there. Anyway, he hired all the Eng guys to work in there, which is fine.

And that was the King Cheung Lung?

Right. Where Harbor City Barbecue is right now.

Do you know when that thing closed up?

I think in 1950. Early part of the '50s or latter part of the '40s.

Just looking at that particular block where the Yick Fung is, what's on the other side of your business? I'm trying to construct a little bit of a picture.
You mean across the street?

Yeah.

Across the street, the Bing Kung Tong had their building there, and they had the Mar Society there, my brother's barbershop and the Yee Family Association.

Now, where was your brother's barbershop?
Right next to the Mar Society, directly across the street from our store. 704 and a half.

What was the name of the barbershop?
Mar's Barbershop.

And you had talked about that being part of servicing the people coming in?
Sure.

Now the Mar Society, has that been there pretty much continuously as far as you know?
Right. We moved up from where Kau Kau Restaurant is, I think in 1938. We've been there ever since.

Was it upstairs before where Kau Kau is?
No, it was downstairs. And then, of course, we used upstairs for lodging. Before, someone has to watch the place, so they let someone stay there and do all the chores there.

How about on your side of block, where Yick Fung is? Are there any other businesses that used to be there?
Gom Hong was there, and King Fir is no longer. They're gone. The Lews have that as their family association. Downstairs, next to Gom Hong, they had the printing press there. That went out for a long, long time. I think that went out of existence maybe '50, I think 1950. But, all the stuff was kept there. In fact, the Chinese principal stayed there most of the time. Harry Woo.

Do you remember the Wah Cheung Company?
Sure. Wah Cheung Company's been there for quite a while and they had an express company, too. And they were servicing restaurants, same as we were. They're one of the oldest there.

They also had firecrackers, didn't they?
Well, they had a franchise. They were sole distributors. You know Chinese use firecrackers all the time, opening of a restaurant or whatever. So they were the sole

distributors. They were the only one, I believe. Nobody else even got into the thing, or else couldn't get into it.

Did they actually manufacture the firecrackers?

Oh, no. It was all set in a trap log (? 121). It came into our boat, on a freight. No manufacturing here. Those that were being manufactured were from Hits (?) Fireworks, anyway. That was down by Tacoma.

So, you were bringing some of those firecrackers in yourself?

No, we weren't bringing them in. They were using our steamship to get the products in. It was cheaper using our steamship than using one of those fast passenger ships.

And these would be firecrackers made in China?

Made in China. (?) from the port of Hong Kong.

How about the Quan Tuck -- was it a store at first?

It was a store. They had a little of everything. They had herbs, they had a little of everything. And Danny Woo's grandfather were the ones operating that one.

Was that there when you were a youngster?

Oh, sure. They were there already, yeah. As soon as they built the building, you know, everyone more or less moved in from Washington Street and came up here.

Do you remember that period at all? Any of the old Chinatown on Second and Washington?

Sure.

When did that changeover happen? When did they start moving all that stuff up here?

I think around 1927 or 28, in that era.

Why did the changeover happen?

Well, this is something new here. This is going to be the new Chinatown. And, that's the reason they all came into this area. There were hardly any vacancies over on Washington outside of those old buildings where all the lottery joints were.

Which businesses moved from the old Chinatown up here, then?

So-called merchants.

Like Quan Tuck?

Like Quan Tuck.

Did it used to be down in the old --

Oh, no, no, no. They weren't there. They weren't there. They started their partnership I think around '26. Yee Chao (?) was on Washington, Fifth and Washington. They moved over to where the Chinese Post is now.

How about Wah Young Company? Did they just start up here?

Just start up here, right. They probably had part of it in China, you know. Then, they just came over here.

And then, the Wah Cheung Company. Did they start down in the old Chinatown?

No. They started over here, too.

And this all would have been around the late 1920s?

Twenty-one, 22. Somewhere around there.

What about community festivals back in the old days? I've been around and I've seen the Seafair and some of the New Year stuff. Did they have any other kinds of festivals before down here, in this area?

The only other thing is when we started the Chinese Oriental Basketball Tournament. We had a festival going on for that. That's all the Asian participation throughout the United States, from Hawaii, Chicago. Mostly Japanese teams. There weren't too many Chinese teams at that time.

Where did they have the contests at?

We were in pretty good with Hec Edmundson, who was the coach of the University of Washington basketball team and they allowed us to use their place for practice. And then, Seattle U let us use their facilities during the tournament time. So then we had a dance and then a little festival. In conjunction with that, we had the first Chinese Oriental Queen contest at that time.

Where was that held?

That was out here in Seattle, yeah. In those days, we kept everything in Chinatown. Not that we wanted to go anywhere else. It's a Chinese function, so just keep the money in the community.

And, did you have it over at the Chong Wah?

Chong Wah most of the time. We had maybe a four-piece band or something like that.

Was this a local band?

Oh, yeah. Local. Mostly colored. Bumps Blackwell at that time was one of the leading orchestras from Garfield High School.

As far as the New Year celebration, has that changed very much from, let's say, 1920s, '30s to today?

It's changed, Ron, because we have a lot of new ethnic groups here, which is good because it started a lot more business, brought in more people. But, in those days, there wasn't that much cooperation from all the groups. You either had to be someone from the Chamber would do it or Chong Wah would take a lead in doing this. I think at that time,

the only one that were cooperating was the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce and Chong Wah.

Actually, do you remember when the Chamber was started? You were involved with that, weren't you?

Yes. My brother-in-law, Don Chin, started it. I think he did that in 1944, and I took over in 1945, when I was commander of Cathay Post.

Why was that started right around that time?

Well, it was a need to help the businesses here and rejuvenate Chinatown a little bit. There wasn't enough people coming down here. And those that were bringing people down here were kind of selfish. It was for themselves only. The Chamber tried to help all the businesses in the area. And that's why we started the Chamber. We tried to get them into a union but, that didn't work. I think when I called that meeting, we had about 14 participations at that time. I think Rick's dad was also there. He's also past president, Rick's dad. George Louie had the restaurant going. He ran (? 202) but, it never got off the ground for some reason. There was no dues, paying things or anything like that, but no one came to the meetings. I guess everybody was too busy making money.

I remember when I was a kid, there were rides and stuff down here?

Sure.

What was that?

For all the activities we had down here, whether it was a festival or queen or something (?), we contacted the carnival people. We got 15 percent, and that went back in the pot to help take care of all the expenses for... We had booths on the street and everything else.

What time period was this?

All this came after the war. It ran continuously until...I think the last 15 years or 20 years, things have changed. I mean, they got guys on there that didn't belong in the area. I mean, nothing against those people. They were doing their job, but I believe you had to have people participating from the area to know what's going on.

Was there any kind of a Moon Festival or anything like that?

They started the Moon Festival. That's what Rick was talking about. The booze and all the rides we had down here. We tied all that in together. But then, Moon Festival, during those times, it was so cold and we always got rained on. Oh, it was just pathetic.

So, you stopped doing that because --

Yeah. Because it wasn't feasible. I think we were charging 10 bucks for a booth or something like that, you know. But then, you have to do everything for them: the Health Department thing, mats on the floor. You know, it's quite tough even in those days, you know. And then, half the guys wouldn't want us to use their electricity. We had to beg and borrow for those things, from each store that was out there. They all wanted to be

plugged in there. But, it was very successful. It brought a lot of people down, Ron. And, that was the purpose of the thing, anyway. The Chamber.

So, it was a Chamber event?
Chamber project.

Do you remember the Bon Odori Festival? I understand it used to be down here in this area.

Over on Main Street. That's where all the Japanese businesses were. Believe it or not, in those days, they had a Japanese town, a Chinatown, and all that stuff.

Where was the dance? Was it just up on --
Up on the streets. That's all. There's nothing over there, you know. That's nothing but clay hills there, you know.

You're talking up on Main Street?
Right. Where the P-patch is, over there.

A lot of people mentioned that the area where Four Seas used to be a play field. That was an empty lot. You couldn't grow anything there because it's all clay. I think the Chinese school had a little building there, little shack there that they utilized over there. But, that was the playground for the community whatever was left at that time.

So, pretty much the kids who were down in the area. That's where they'd go to --
That's where they go to. That was the only place to go to. Collins Field House was just too far away. And most of the parents didn't want to leave their little kids walking up through that area, anyway. Even at that time.

Tell me about the Gong Yick Investment Company. How was that started?
Kong Yick Investment Company was started by Dan Goon, Luke Kay, my dad and a few of those people. They all chipped in money and they bought shares. And, that's how they came about. And, that's been going since 1918, I believe. It's still functioning. I think we're the only corporation that pays out dividends every year, whether it's small or otherwise.

Specifically, was it set up to do the building?
Do the building, right. They didn't have to worry about occupants because these guys already had their names in there. Let me in first, you know, and this sort of thing.

Specifically to build those two buildings?
Right.

What would you like to see happen now with those buildings? I've heard different people say that the future of the buildings is up in the air?
Yeah. Well, it's up for sale and the highest bid we got was a million and a half for each one. But, those people that wanted it would kick everybody out. Everybody has to go out.

Of course, you can't blame them when they invest that kind of money. But, we didn't sell it to them because it would be kind of unfair for me to kick Rick out or to kick you guys out. You've been here for so long. And, that's the only reason why we haven't sold the building. And, the other reason why we haven't sold the building is the only other bid that we got on top of the highest bid, now, these were investors from Hong Kong or where ever. And, that's about seven hundred thousand for each building. And, we figured we might as well just keep it. Why sell it for that? The apartments upstairs should be rejuvenated, but the funding is hard. It would be easy for us to put apartments like what we have now. But, the price, I wouldn't say it's prohibitive, but we can't get our rent back. We got to get at least \$450 or whatever and the people here, it doesn't call for that. And, the reason why we don't raise the rent too much is that most of the tenants we have, there isn't anything to fix (? 275). If it's minor, they'll take care of it. Unless it's a big fix, something's flooded, that's the only time they talk to us, which is fine. But, the younger kids aren't doing that anymore. I think they want leases. We don't have any leases for anyone, as long as I've been there.

Is Howard the one that does the managing there?

I do.

You do.

Yeah. They pay the rent. Come to us, pay the rent. We used to have collective agents too, but you can't find these guys. The last 25 years, we've been doing a lot better. We've had rental agencies come in and we pay them to it, but it just doesn't work. I guess their hours, you know, can't find these guys. They work four, five in the morning and they go to sleep. So, we changed over about, well, maybe 30 years ago.

You know, my family association upstairs, have they been there for...?

Quite a while. They took over when King Fir was gone.

Which would be about what time period, then?

Thirties, 35, yeah. The restaurant was gone for a long, long time. That's one of the oldest ones there.

Who was the owner of that restaurant?

The Engs. Fred Eng's dad started it, then it went right down the line to Jack. Then, they're all gone now.

Do you know why they just stopped?

I think they had a hard time getting cooks at that time. Cooks were in big demand, they want to hold you up. You don't blame them, I guess.

I just have a few final questions unless Debbie has anything. In general, what would you like to see happen to this area? I know you've been down here for so long. Probably at some point you're going to call it quits.

Sure.

What would you like to see happen to this area and in particular, your building, that whole strip there?

I actually believe that Chinatown Chamber of Commerce should take more responsibility. Stuff that they used to do long time ago, like put out a Chinese directory. I started that and we continued for five years. Then, we dropped it for some reason. Then, the Chinese Post picked it up. There's a lot of things they can do down here. I think they should be getting with it again. Like Chinese Information Center. They do a lot of things, you know. But, physically, I think it's the Chamber's responsibility to get the streets cleaned up, get more crossings stripped up and everything else. There's a lot of people getting hurt, but the Chinese don't report these things. If some white guy got hit, you'll hear about it all the time. If some guy's slipping in front of our place, where we made those covers, well we've had those things all the time. The Chinese, they don't think about those things. The protection's here, the security's here. They have no problems with that. Even though you don't see it, they're around.

You know, a lot of people have mentioned too, Back in the old days. I guess the community has changed. There used to be a lot more trust when you do business. That's right. You kept your doors open all the time. You weren't worried about anything. You practically knew everybody that was walking up and down the street. Whether it's good or bad, you knew exactly what your dad was doing, what my dad was doing. No one had any problems. There's no animosity or jealousy like there is now. But, I think it starts with the family. The kids, I think they all need help. This community center they're talking about, I wish they'd hurry up and do something about it because there's no place for the kids to go, really. If the groups were cooperative with each other, I think I'll help. But, they're not doing it, Ron. Everybody wants their own little identity. I don't think it's going to work.

How much longer are you going to do the Yick Fung?

The reason why I'm still there is because it's a place for Howard to hang his hat. He's single. We are more or less just keeping track of the customers that pay us on time and all the rest can go to Ricky's dad or go to whoever, you know. But, we don't need it anymore. I think these new businessmen that we have in town are very progressive and I think they're going to do it. Like the noodle companies. They're no longer just noodle companies. They have everything, you know, like Costco or any of those places. And that's good because all the customers are going to ask you, "Can you pick up --?" Ricky's in this kind of a business. "Can you pick me up a vintage something-and-something? (? 332)" And you get it for them, so why keep going around asking for the stuff. Bring it in yourself so you don't have to go. There's all the wholesale groceries anymore. I think it's still the same, though. Those American wholesalers, you have to order at least \$500 before they'll deliver. Might even be more now. But, now they got a one shot deal, one shot shopping. You can get everything now. They never used to carry mustard, sugar, all that stuff. They talking about flour and stuff like that. But, now they got ketchup, they got soy sauce. There's competition for us, but we don't care. We have enough to handle our own. But, they never used to have that. So, Golden Pheasant Noodle Company, they got

younger people doing it, and the same thing with Tsue Chong Noodle. Why did they build that place? Because the young Timmy and those guys consented to come back and work. And, Joe's son who lives in California. He used to come up here every summer to make money, go to college. Those two guys consented to do it, they had their meeting two years ago, and that's why they're in operation. But, those old guys have to let loose because they got a different operation. I mean, same thing with that restaurant when ???'s (? 344) was here, you know. Dad told him, this is your restaurant. It never materialized. Every time they came in they went to see Danny. It was a shame. But, that's the way it goes. In essence, they wanted to do it, I suppose, because of the kids, you know. But, they don't want to let go, either.

It makes it hard.

It makes it hard. Tsue Chong's got the problem now. I don't know whether Kenny told you or not but, just between us girls, you got to let the young kids do it. They have a different philosophy. They're trained differently. They're educated differently.

It's a different world.

It's a different world. Golden Pheasant Noodle, Larry's doing a bang up job. He knew nothing before. I said you better start going back to school. You learn some of these things because you got to keep up. So, they're both doing great. Cost them a bundle to start that new building there.

Do you think the Chinese will eventually move back in or they're gone?

I think they're gone. Look at my son. He's a dentist. He doesn't want to come back and do these things. But, like I say, to each his own. Things are changing. I would be just tickled to death they come back down here and work in the store. I got a ready made job for them. Just like Rick's dad had the restaurant. All he had to do was move in. But, he's into this. See? Not that it's not a good profession. It's just...you take a Caucasian. If he's a dentist, he wants his son to be a dentist, take over his practice. And the same thing with the physicians and the lawyers. But, it's changing now. Because even my attorney, who passed away now, his son is a lawyer. Come over and take over the immigration. Take some away from Danilov. But, no. He wants his own. I'm from Portland. I want to stay in Portland.

Did you ever want any of your kids to continue the business?

I thought maybe my son might. But, I can see that the reason why they come down every summer, I more or less forced them to come down, pick up the Chinese and talk to the Chinese people. But, after middle school, they're gone.

And you knew then that --

Oh, no. They're not going to do it. We're bilingual at home even though my wife and I are American-born and everything. But, you won't believe this, Ron. Everyone of them took Cantonese and Mandarin at University of Washington. I said, "Give me that money and pay me. I'll teach you. I'll take an hour off every day." This is true, Rick. All these kids. Every one of my kids took up that. I couldn't believe it. But, it helped them. Maybe some day, I'll

tell them what to do. You know, it's a lot better than trying to teach your own kids sometimes. Especially the language.

Did they pick up the Toisan?

Well, they tried to pick up the Cantonese. Toisan, they know. See? It's different entirely, you know. The sound, you know, is not that crude. It's not guttural-like. Every one of them took it at the University. In fact, some of them took it twice. I think the girls went back to Taiwan and picked that up, too. You know, they have the programs for those kids. Every one of mine went back. I think it's good for them.

So, you see more of the new immigrants coming into Chinatown versus the old taking over?

Right. The new ones coming in, they're a different breed of pups, Rick. I think those guys coming in now are so spoiled. They're used to having Grandpa or Dad sending money to them. They don't want to work. That was the problem with the Chinese restaurants now. They're getting a lot of Vietnamese people. These other guys don't want to work. They're spoiled brats. Well, you know, they get money sent to them all the time. They don't have to work, they don't have to worry about a place to live, where the next meal is coming from. They come over here. You want me to work as a dishwasher, work in the restaurant? No way. They don't want to do that. Of course, they don't have any training, either.

So, what were the first immigrants like?

First immigrants were energetic. They want to work because they know if they don't work, they're not going to eat. They're not going to help themselves, so they all go to school. These ESL classes that my wife teaches at Seattle community college. It's great for these people. It doesn't cost them anything. Costs you and I taxpayers' money, but I think it's great. They don't stay there forever, you know. As soon as they pick up something, they go. Like these guys that come in get on the roll. Two years, they're off, Rick. Run. They're off. Believe me. I was saying, it's a high figure, about 75 percent of them get off the roll after two years. Just make enough money to want to go out and try to do their own thing. We had those statistics checked when we were in the Army. They're talking about immigrants, not just Asians, everybody. They all seemed to do pretty good. Asians do better. Two years is max for them to be on the payroll, then they get off.

Anything else? Well, I think we'll release you.

Oh. I hope I've helped you guys.

Oh. This is really good, yeah.