Jane Wilson Narrator

Sherri Gebert-Fuller Interviewer

October 11, 2002

Minneapolis, Minnesota

SGF: Today is Friday, October 11, 2002. This is Sherri Gebert-Fuller and I am with Jane Wilson in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

So today, Jane, we're going to talk about your experiences with Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis and your years of work with the Chinese community. But before we get to that, I'd like to find out where you lived before you came to Minnesota and what were you doing, what was your profession?

JW: Before I came here in the summer of 1942, I had lived in the South. My father was a minister and we lived a number of places, mostly Georgia and the Carolinas. I graduated from high school in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, and attended four years of school, Asheville Normal and Teachers College, it was called at the time. It's no longer in existence, actually. It was a church-related school, very small women's college, and a teachers college.

When I graduated in 1937, I taught for five years in North Carolina, very, very small towns. When I came to Minnesota, I came to visit my brother, who'd already moved up here to go to the University [of Minnesota], and I came to spend the summer and I fell in love with Minneapolis. He had a house, took a house for the summer, in Kenwood, and I thought it was a beautiful place to live, beautiful city, and I decided that I would not go back to teaching.

This was in the war. The war had just started, and I decided the world was a little bit bigger than the textile town I had been living in, and I thought I would enjoy doing something else. So I went to business college in Minneapolis.

Then in the spring of 1943, I went to Washington, D.C., to work. I had a very interesting job. I worked for the British Air Commission, and all the men in the office were Britons. All the girls were Canadian. I was the only American girl in the office. I told them everything they needed to know about the United States. [Laughs] We had a wonderful time. And at the end of the war, they said they would send me back anywhere I wanted to go, wherever I considered home. I said, "I want to go back to Minneapolis," so that's where I came.

I joined Westminster Church because my brother had already joined there. We were Presbyterians, and it was the largest church, the most attractive church. It had wonderful music, much better than I'd ever heard in my life before, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I found out at the time that they had a Chinese Sunday school, and when I was teaching school, I had been in these small churches, and they asked me to teach Sunday school. I said, "No, I teach children all week. I don't want to teach them again on Sunday. They deserve somebody else."

And when I came here, I was no longer teaching school. I had no excuse. So when I was asked to teach in the Chinese Sunday school, I felt that would be very interesting, because prior to that time, prior to my coming to Minneapolis the first time, I'd never seen a Chinese person in my life in the small towns I lived in. Society wasn't as mobile in those days. Well, and there weren't as many Chinese people around, certainly not in Georgia and the Carolinas.

As a matter of fact, when I came to Minneapolis I had never in my life met anyone who had not been born in the United States. Everybody down South was either black or white, and they lived there for a couple of hundred years. I didn't know any of these exotic people like they had in Minnesota. [Laughs]

SGF: Somehow I don't see "Minnesota" and "exotic" going together, but—

JW: That's because you've lived here. But it was pretty exotic to me. It was wonderful.

SGF: And so what year did you start teaching at Westminster?

JW: 1946. The war was over in 1945, and I came back to Minneapolis and joined the church, and joined the Westminster Service Guild, which was the evening group of the women's work at Westminster. The Service Guild had undertaken responsibility for teaching the Chinese Sunday school that they've had, and I walked into it cold.

SGF: Now, before we go on, Westminster has had a long history working with—

JW: Westminster has had a long history, from 1882, I think, they began our Sunday school. They didn't begin it as a Sunday school. One man came. I used to think he was the first Chinese in Minnesota. Since rereading Sarah Mason's book, I have discovered that there were a number before him, possibly in St. Paul, but I do believe that he, Woo Yee Sing, was the first Chinese man.

Westminster at that time was located downtown Minneapolis where Dayton's is. It became Dayton's, and now it's Marshall Field's, on Seventh and Nicollet. This Chinese man, Woo Yee Sing, came to town and established his business, which I think in the beginning was the laundry and later on was a restaurant and a gift shop and so forth. But he was located downtown near Westminster Church, and the men, some of the elders of Westminster Church, became very interested in him and offered to help him. He needed business help. He needed language help, and they helped him with whatever they could, and then invited him to come to church. Well, he didn't speak English, so they undertook, some of these men, and I've forgotten the name of him, his name, to help him learn English and whatever else he needed.

After a while, Mr. Woo brought his brother, Woo Du Sing, and then eventually Woo Yee Sing brought a wife. To teach English to these newcoming immigrants, it was about a one-on-one

proposition, and it was the men of Westminster who started it in the beginning. Then as the wives came, the immigrant wives came, then the wives of the elders and other women in Westminster Church began to help, and it grew from that, from 1882. It rose and fell. There were strict immigration laws at the time, laws that do not reflect well on the history of the United States. But the newcomers would come and then they would get involved. But it went along more or less smoothly for a number of years.

Then the Westminster Service Guild got interested in it, along about in the 1920s, I think. By the time I started in 1946, the people who came to Sunday school, this was on Sunday afternoon after church that the Chinese came. They were adults and they had been here some years. Most of them spoke fairly good English, and they had teenage children, some older than that, who'd grown up in the Chinese Sunday school and in the public schools, and their English was fine.

My first class was a group of teenage girls who giggled all the time. I thought they were giggly because teenage girls giggle all the time, but they tell me now they giggled because I talked funny.

We thought maybe it was time to discontinue the afternoon Sunday school because everybody spoke English, until one afternoon—and I think it was in October 1947—there appeared on our doorstep, literally, a group of Chinese brides. Young men who had come up in the Sunday school, or at least come up in Minneapolis and were familiar with the Sunday school, who had been in the service and were permitted to bring in brides, had brought in their brides.

Now, these were a different kind of war brides. Like the English or even the Germans, whereas servicemen had met girls while they were abroad, these Chinese boys had lived in Minneapolis, and they may have been in the service. They may have been in China, but not necessarily even in Asia. But they were permitted to bring in a bride, and they were very anxious, eager, to get married and start a family, so their fathers would send them back to China to find a wife. Quite often the boys had a mother still living in China, and the mother would have a girl picked out for him, or would have an idea.

I have seen young men go over on a two-week vacation and meet a girl who perhaps his mother had chosen for him, get married, come back, and she would either come with him or more likely she would follow him by sea. He probably could fly on the military. I don't know about that. In 1946 there wasn't much flying back and forth at places. Maybe they did come on by ship. I'll look into that.

But here were all these brides at one time, who spoke no English. Just imagine the courage it took those girls to come halfway around the world with a man, married to a man they had met two weeks earlier, to come to a strange country and a strange language, with absolutely no friends. It amazes me. It really blows my mind when I think of that courage that it took. And they were very young. Some of them were—one woman says she was nineteen. I don't think she was that old. I think she was more like seventeen.

But anyway, they came, and the boys brought them to church, to the Sunday school in the afternoon. We had to scramble around and find teachers for all of them, because it was a one-on-

one proposition. There were already teachers who had been there for twenty, thirty years, and let me put this into the record. I can't name them all, and I should write down as many as I can, but there was one family of three sisters who had taught in the Sunday school, the Angst sisters, Edda Angst, Alice Angst, and Anne Angst Collins. They had taught as early as the 1920s. They had been teaching. They were all members of the Service Guild and they'd been teaching since the 1920, and they are well remembered to this day.

The superintendent of the Sunday school at that time was Nellie Scott. Miss Scott was an immigrant herself. She'd come from Ireland, but she's Protestant Irish. Scotch Irish, I guess you'd call it. She had moved here earlier and had come to Westminster, and she was very interested in the Chinese community. She very soon married a man named Lucas, Mr. Edward Lucas, and she then wanted to have fewer responsibilities with the Chinese. She continued to come for quite a while, until she and Mr. Lucas went away. They moved away, but she is also very well remembered, to this day. She's a very attractive young person.

And then there were a lot of others. Jane Brown was a longtime teacher, and Mary Day. Oh, Miss Day went back to the twenties, I'm sure. And Mrs. Katherine Mossman. But two of the most valuable helpers were themselves Chinese, and one was Mr. Henry Yep, who came with his family all the way from the other side of St. Paul—Payne Avenue, St. Paul—every Sunday afternoon. And Mrs. Minnie Wong, Mrs. Wong Gee, Gee-Mo she was called. She had come as an immigrant herself, as a bride, and by that time she must have been in her seventies. She's mentioned in Sarah Mason's book about Liang May Seen.

SGF: Oh, in the article.

JW: The article, in *Minnesota History*, the magazine by the Historical Society, Howard Woo's mother. We couldn't have done without Mrs. Wong; Gee-Mo, they called her.

SGF: Did these individuals come from St. Paul because they didn't have any classes in St. Paul, or they enjoyed the church and the classes?

JW: All I know is they'd always come to Westminster, and we have pictures of them, of Henry and his sons David Yep and Sam Yep. David had been married in China, and he eventually brought his wife and one son over, and they later had two more children. The youngest one was Joy. Then Sam went over and brought his bride back, and he had four daughters.

Well, these brides came in about 1947, not all of them at the same time, but a number of them. I'd say we had fourteen. I may not be quite right about that, but there are at least fourteen that I think of as having come about the same time. And next year we had fourteen new babies, and we were just in business, all of them.

SGF: Did your lessons change with the war brides and their children?

JW: Oh, yes. We tried to—well, we were all old-fashioned. I was old-fashioned, and it was Sunday school, and I knew how Sunday school had been conducted in my time, and so we would have a formal meeting and then they'd break up into groups by age, or by—you see, all these

brides would want to be together. And when they had babies, it was hard to get the babies away from them. It was hard for the teachers to teach the mothers with a baby on her lap, and we tried to get the babies to go in the next room. Well, that did not work the first year. I can see those babies now.

We finally figured out a way that the mothers would be in one room with the door open, and the babies, when they could walk, would be in another room with the door open, so that they knew they could go back and forth. But you know how babies are. They have this strange anxiety, and they didn't want to get—

SGF: So can you give me an example, say, of what you might have taught one Sunday afternoon?

JW: Well, with the mothers, with newcomers, none of us spoke Chinese, and they didn't all speak the same dialect. Most all of them were Cantonese. They had come from the same general location, but different villages, and each village has its own dialect. So there was nothing common between the teachers. They could understand each other. So you began wherever you thought you needed to.

For instance, if somebody had hurt their finger, okay, you'd learn to say "finger" and "hand" and "wrist," all of these words, whatever they needed. If the baby was sick, you'd talk about the baby, and use words.

But the first things, of course, they had to learn was, "What is your name?" and learn to write their names. "Where do you live? What is your address?" In other words, to answer the most common questions, and to be able to answer it in a way that a stranger could understand them. "What is your husband's name? Where does your husband work?" Things like that. It took a long time.

One thing that was a shock to me, from my way of teaching school, the difference between teaching schoolchildren and teaching them, we had no written language in common. They didn't have letters, words like we do. They have pictures. I didn't understand them. There was a concept that they understood, but it's not a concept that I understood, and they didn't understand my concept.

But we would talk about money, how to count money, how to get around on the streetcar. We had streetcars. Till the middle 1950s, there were streetcars; after that it was the bus. But they were all very smart. I've always had the feeling that any immigrant group is quite likely the cream of their society, in that they had to get up and go, pick themselves up by their bootstraps. So the smart ones were the ones who came, and as far as the Chinese are concerned, my experience certainly bears that out.

SGF: In relationship to the classes Westminster provided, were there other organizations? The YMCA comes to mind. I know that they used to offer English classes to Chinese men in the 1910s and 1920s.

JW: I was not aware of any other going on at that time. There may have been. We were teaching what is now called ESL, English as a Second Language. We didn't call it that. We just taught them what they needed to know. Now, as the years went by, we conducted Sunday school. We sang songs. The children were taught "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," and other songs, and the mothers learned them, too. Everything was new.

Some of us knew religion, and we had to discover how much, what they knew about religion, praying. Okay, you put your hands together and close your eyes and bow your head. Yes, they understood that. Now, what they were praying to, I don't know. It took a while to discover if they had any Christian background. But Christmas would come. What did Christmas mean? What was it all about? They would hear Christmas songs, and, of course, as the children grew up, they heard them in school. I don't want to get too far ahead of that, but it was a hard idea.

Another thing that was hard was to find out how much education they'd had at home, because, you see, China had been at war with Japan ten years before anybody else was at war with Japan. In fact, they don't refer to it as World War II, to them it's the Japan War. And they'd all had experiences, and it was a long time before they learned enough English to tell us, and some of them never did. Some of them never wanted to talk about what they went through.

One of the daughters, Judy Wong, tried to get stories from her mother's generation about things that had happened in China during the Japan War, the 1940s, and the mothers didn't want to talk about it. I've never quite understood it. I have a few ideas about it, because many times the refugees had to move from one place to another to get away from the Japanese, and there are some very dramatic stories there about how they did that, what happened to them. I'll have to write a book about that.

SGF: You have plenty of books to write.

JW: Oh, yes, I do. Some of them I've already written.

Where are we?

SGF: I just asked you if there are other organizations that you knew that helped the Chinese in Minneapolis. When these individuals attended Sunday school, were they encouraged to join, become members of the church?

JW: Not for a long time. Not until they were pretty well along. One story I'll tell about teaching the older members, the women. One time a woman came to me and she said, when she learned enough English, she told this story in her own way. She said, "My neighbor came to my house and wanted money."

And I said, "Did you know her?"

"Yes. She had a paper for me to sign, and she tried to tell me, but I don't know why she wanted money."

Well, I said, "That's the Community Chest." I knew that it was the time of the year when we had the Community Chest, and people go up and down the street collecting money for the Community Chest.

"Oh." She was very, "Well, what is that for?"

"Well, they give the money to the poor people who need things." So that was my cue to tell a story about the Good Samaritan.

"Oh. Oh, oh yes." They understood that. Christmas, Easter, and at Christmastime we urged everybody to go to church in the morning, the big service, and Easter the same thing. Easter was the only Sunday that they ever had two services, and you really made reservations for that, almost. It had to do with pew rentals. I don't want to get into that, because that's another story. [Laughter]

But they did, and they knew that if they said, "We want to come at eleven o'clock," that certain pews would be reserved for them, and they always, to this day, I think, sit in those same pews.

SGF: That was a question that came to mind as you were talking. Did these families integrate with other members of the church?

JW: Not in my time. Earlier days they had, and I learned that from reading Sarah Mason's story about Liang May Seen, which is in the Historical Society's magazine. In those days it was different, but not in my day. We would invite the ministers to come and visit, say, every three months, one of the ministers, and we would have a chapel service. That would show them how we behave in church, you know, and if it's more formal and you were quiet. And when the children got a little bit older, we wanted them to do that.

By the time they learned to speak English, and they certainly learned to speak English by Christmas—

[Tape interruption]

SGF: Really?

JW: Oh yes, by Christmas they were perfectly fluent in English, and they learned it from the other kids. Well, that's a very common phenomena, but I'd never met it before and I was impressed. And by the time they got that old, then they had regular Sunday school lessons like the other children did. In fact, we used the church's teaching series for them at that time.

But the problem with the mothers, well, they weren't—the challenges with teaching the mothers. It was just by the seat of our pants, because we had not been trained in that, and that's why it was one-on-one, and why such close relationships grew up with the teachers and everybody.

I was called superintendent. Most of my work was with the small children, but I was certainly well acquainted with all of them as they came up. It's been like a family relationship with me. In

fact, when they were very small, Judy Wong's mother, Pearl, she said, "Oh, the children talk about you at home."

I knew the children didn't speak English, and I said, "What do they call me?"

And she said, "Jangu."

I said, "What's that?"

She said, "That means Auntie Jane."

SGF: Jingo?

JW: Jingo. I always spelled it J-A-N-G-U. "Ah-goo" means Auntie. I learned that in Chinese. So I was Auntie Jane. And I wish they would all call me that still. I try to encourage them. Now they spell it J-I-N-G-O, but I don't care how they spell it, just that's what I like to have them call me. Judy was really the first one that I knew of who called me Jingo, and later on, when I moved to a different church, somebody had heard that my Chinese friends had called me Auntie, so they called me Auntie, too.

The church I go to now, a lot of people older than I am call me Aunt Jane. I'm known over there as Aunt Jane, to this day.

SGF: Do you have any sense of how many women and children you've taught over the years?

JW: Hundreds.

SGF: Hundreds?

JW: I bet I could name a hundred people that I know fairly well, and the children, to grownups, certainly that many.

Now, let me tell you—and I really want to get this on the record—why we discontinued the afternoon Sunday school. This was the Presbyterian Church, and the ministers belonged to a presbytery, which at that time included Minneapolis-St. Paul. I'm not sure but what St. Paul was a separate presbytery, but that's the next step up in the organization. One of our ministers, one of our assistant ministers, went to St. Paul to a meeting of presbytery, and somebody said to him, "Is it true that at Westminster you keep the Chinese segregated?"

This must have been in the early sixties, when the word *segregation* had just been invented in other respects and in different parts of the country. But he came back and reported that to the senior minister at Westminster, and the senior minister says, "Oh, then we won't have any more afternoon Sunday school."

I was appalled at that, because I knew how many people there were who did not speak English. He said, "I want all the Chinese to come to the morning Sunday school." That's the way it came

down to me. He didn't tell me; he sent word to me through someone who was close to him and also close to me. The person close to me said, "He says you're not to have any more afternoon Sunday schools next year. The children can all go to morning school. The adults can go to church."

I said, "I have no problem with the children going to morning Sunday school, which is where I think they should be, but the adults don't speak enough English."

And the word came back down to me, "Well, Jane can teach some of those adults in the morning if she wants to, but we're not going to have any more Sunday afternoon Sunday school."

The clergy at Westminster at that time, from the 1940s on, had permitted the Chinese to have a Sunday school in the afternoon. When invited, they would come once every few months.

SGF: The clergy?

JW: The clergy would come and have a chapel service. They rarely asked. We had a church budget of \$100 a year. We were asked to give a report, an annual report of how many people came and what was going on and who were the teachers. Other than that, it was my perception that we were there on sufferance. I was rarely invited to meetings of other church school teachers. Anything I wanted, I had to initiate. I had no supervision from them. I felt that they didn't care whether we were there or not. "Okay, you can do it if you want to."

But when this came out, I was very disappointed at it, and I did continue teaching. I felt that the clergy did not know enough about what was going on to have been willing to let it go, and to tell you the truth, even the other teachers and I didn't realize how much it meant to them. As I said before, here were these—

SGF: To the Chinese.

JW: —women who had come, strangers to this strange land, knowing no one, absolutely no one. If they had any connection with any other family in town, they were lucky. And here was a place where they could come and speak their own language, talk to people who had the same problems they had, right under our noses. I had no objection to that, and now I'm just horrified at the idea that we let them go, that we removed that.

As I look around today at the newcomers who are coming to Minnesota, this is the year 2002, forty, fifty-five years after I started, the way the Hmong community has come, and there are all kinds of support groups and language classes that are provided for them which were not available in those days.

As I have continued my connection with the Chinese community, I realize now more than ever before how much it meant to those women who had friends. And now they live scattered all over the county and they have telephones, and I am doing everything I can to encourage them to keep in touch with each other, because now some of them are widowed and feeling remote because

their children are grown and scattered, and the only thing they really have in common is their memories of that community.

SGF: So that still provides them with a support network of sorts.

JW: That's right. That's what it should. This Chinese senior citizens group started out with the idea of providing that, and it does, but the women, the people, and they have some men in that group, the people in that group now have come since Vietnam, mostly, certainly since long after the period that—in other words, they don't know me, or they don't know about the Sunday school.

I thought one time a year or so ago that it would be nice if that Chinese senior citizens group could meet at Westminster Church and the present regime at Westminster would welcome them with open arms, whereas I do not feel that they would have been welcomed forty years ago, thirty-five, forty years ago. But this current group of Chinese in the Chinese senior citizens, they don't know anything about Westminster, and they're afraid a church would be prone to proselytize. They're wary of the church idea.

SGF: What's the approximate age group that you're talking about?

JW: The senior citizens' group?

SGF: Right.

JW: There are two groups, and this is very interesting. The younger Chinese women started this group for the older Chinese women, and there are few of these Westminster people in the group. I'm invited, and I'm a member.

SGF: And aren't you an honorary member?

JW: I was elected honorary member one year, honorary citizen of the year, Chinese of the Year. But very few of them ever went to Westminster, so that there are two generations in that group. And that's one of the things that amazes me, is that this younger generation took the initiative of organizing it and pushing it for their older group.

SGF: And now they're part of that group. Now they're part of this, being senior citizens.

JW: That's right. Grace, for instance, Grace Wong, she's one of the leaders, for her mother-in-law. And her mother-in-law was one of my oldest friends at Westminster.

SGF: And who is that?

JW: Well, she's the one we call Fong-Mo. Her name is Yee Yoke Ying (Mrs. Wong), but they call her Fong-Mo. Now, those titles and addresses, forms of address, don't ask me to explain them, because I can't even get a scholar to agree with me as to what I have observed in it, but we

just know you call her Fong-Mo, so she's Fong-Mo. I'm Jingo. This new group knows me as Jingo.

The only two words I can read in Chinese is my own name, I can read that, and I used to know how to write it. If I think about it I can do it, but not very well. And the other one is the double happiness sign, because I see that up at weddings all the time. Do you know what that double happiness is? It's two squares, one over another, with a line through them and another just like it. I can write that. I can recognize that, because when you go to a wedding party, some restaurants have it up all the time, but they always have it up for weddings. That's the only word I can read, but I sure can eat it.

SGF: You can?

JW: Yes. I probably have eaten more good Chinese food than any Caucasian in the state of Minnesota, because I've gotten invited to, just think, fifty years of weddings and anniversaries and birthday parties, and they're great on birthday parties, and funeral parties, funeral meats, and I'm still going strong.

SGF: That food must be good for you.

JW: Oh, the food's good for me. It's certainly good food.

SGF: You just said something that made me think of another tangent, and that is, so if you've been going to weddings and funerals and birthday parties for fifty years, have you seen a change in how these events play out? Do you see less tradition in events? Do you see a return to traditional practices?

JW: I think the traditional wedding programs, parties, for one thing, they're terribly expensive. They have weddings, I have seen a few in my life, very traditional weddings and wedding parties, and that's one way the Chinese community stays with Westminster. Everybody who came through the Chinese Sunday school at Westminster, for weddings and funerals they come back, mostly, unless they've gone to another church. And many of them have become members of other churches, and are active, much to my joy, much to my joy. They tend to join the more evangelistic-style churches, the less formal than Westminster. I think they probably married somebody from a different group.

But I am constantly encouraged by the fact that so many of them are active in other churches. I got an e-mail just yesterday or the day before about a man who was brought up in Chinese Sunday school long before my time, and he left, he and his wife. He was grown when I came, and in the service. He got married right after the war, and they moved to California. He sent me an e-mail yesterday that his grandson—his grandson!—is now going to seminary, and it just thrilled me to tears. I was so happy to hear that.

They always have an American-style white bride, and then quite often they have, well, they might even have a small reception at the church, traditional type of wedding reception, and then

they have a big Chinese banquet afterwards. Not so many wedding parties lately. And funerals are the same way. They'll have a funeral at the church and then a banquet afterwards.

The last one I went to Lolita Woo's, the banquet was the night before the funeral, and there were five tables. In other words, five times ten people, but they were all family. I was the only person there who was not family. I'm quite often the only Caucasian in the party. A red egg party—do you know what a red egg party is?

SGF: No, I don't.

JW: Used to have a lot of those. A red egg party is given by the paternal grandparents, one month after the birth of their first grandson. And sometimes if the first child is a granddaughter, they'll have red egg parties for her.

The last red egg party I went to was about two years ago, and that was with a very Americanized family, very Americanized family, had been in the church for longer than I had. I think the parents had been married for quite a while before they had a little girl, so the grandparents gave a party, and it was the maternal grandparents that time. If they want to have a party for a new baby, they have it.

SGF: And why is it called a red egg party?

JW: Because they always serve red eggs, and they look like red Easter eggs. And why, I have no idea, but it's an old, old Chinese custom.

SGF: And red, if I'm remembering correctly—

JW: Oh, that's the celebratory. Weddings. I showed you those envelopes.

SGF: Yes.

JW: Red envelopes for gifts, New Year's gifts and birthday gifts and things like that is money in a little red envelope. You can buy them by the packet. All the Chinese ladies used to carry one in their purse with a few dollars in it as a present for a new baby or something.

At the red egg party, and this is traditional, I haven't seen one in quite a while like this, but the baby is dressed in Chinese red garments, like a little costume, and about halfway through the dinner, the paternal grandmother comes in very proudly carrying this baby and showing him off all around, and everybody admires the baby and has this little envelope with a little money in it, and tucks it in the baby's clothes. That makes a very sensible new baby present.

SGF: Yes, it does.

JW: And you can be as generous as you like, and the parents can do what they want to with the baby.

A wedding is a wedding banquet. I went to one of those where they had twenty tables. The bride changed her costume three times, and she would go around, and the bride and the groom and both sets of parents go around the dining room and drink toasts to thank the guests for coming to the party. And oh, my, they're very elaborate parties, too, very grand.

I went to one once where they had twenty tables, and they hadn't been in this country very long. The groom's family traditionally, traditionally, paid for the wedding. I think most of those customs are going by the board now, because they're terribly expensive.

The biggest party I ever went to was fifty tables out at Hotel Sofitel, and this was not a Chinese dinner. It was a Chinese family, and they had guests from all over the country. At fifty tables, that means five hundred people. They served prime rib, beautiful prime rib, nice and pink. Chinese people are not used to eating rare beef. Also, most of them are restaurateurs, and they know that if you don't like something that's put out, you send it back to the kitchen. So all that rare beef kept going back and forth to be zapped in the microwaves in the kitchen, and I was having a wonderful time with the rare beef at my end of the table.

A year later there was a baby boy, and they had a red egg party. Fifty tables at Hotel Sofitel, the same thing over again. That was the party to end all parties. I've never seen one like that before. When the history book—if anybody ever turns up and listens to this thing, they're going to recognize what that was, because that was quite a deal.

I am digressing.

SGF: That's all right, because I was going to turn your attention to Lakewood Cemetery before I move on to the next question, since we're talking about weddings and birthday parties, and that's the fact that Chinese didn't have a place to bury.

JW: Yes. I didn't know this for a long time. Somebody died and he was a longtime member of Westminster Church. The funeral was not at the church. Oh, that's one thing I hadn't talked about. The funeral might be at the church. I'll get to that later. The funeral might be at the church, and then after the funeral, on the way to the cemetery, the procession goes past the decedent's business place.

Mr. Wong Wen (Mr. Wong) died. He had once owned a restaurant on Hennepin Avenue, I think in probably the 800 block. At noon, we drove from Westminster Church down Hennepin Avenue, all the way to Seven Corners over near the University, where he later had a restaurant, down to his home, which is out near the airport, before we came back and went to Lakewood Cemetery. Because you go to these places and the cars stop, and somebody gets out and opens the front door—I think this is the way; I've never been close enough to really see—opens the front door to let the spirits mingle before you go on to somewhere else. In other words, you're not going to leave—now, this is an old, old Chinese custom, and I think they described it in the funeral of Woo Yee Sing.

But I have seen that to this day, to this day. Not the last two funerals, though, that we've been to, but I know that custom is still going on.

I have tried to suggest to clergy, and only one of them ever took me up on it, to suggest that that is the chance to review the long journey that this person took coming from China here, and going through his life. It's just following them through. Now, I think that could be done very well.

Then another funeral custom is, when you go and visit the mortuary and/or the funeral chapel, you are given a coin wrapped in white paper, and a sweet, a candy. It's some kind of hard candy wrapped in white paper. Those are gifts, bequests from the deceased to the friends that there should be no bitterness, a sweet, and the coin is for some pleasure.

I always put the sweet in my purse in case I got a coughing fit in church, and I put the coin in the collection plate somewhere. One year I had three dollars' worth of coins. The coin used to be a nickel and now it's a quarter at least.

Where was I before? Lakewood Cemetery.

SGF: Yes.

JW: Somebody died and we went to the cemetery on the far side of St. Paul, and I said, "Why are we going over there?"

"Well, because that's where his parents are buried."

"Did you ever live in St. Paul?"

No, never lived there, but Chinese people could not be buried in Lakewood Cemetery or in any cemetery in Minneapolis. I was quite shocked.

Then the story is, back in the 1950s, up until the middle 1950s, there was a streetcar that ran in Minneapolis, and that was the scandal. You'll have to read about that in the public papers. But a streetcar ran alongside Lakewood Cemetery up there, and when the streetcar was—I don't know, the cemetery is about 125 years old now, and I don't know about the streetcar. But anyway, it was arranged that the cemetery property, it was advantageous—

[Tape interruption]

SGF: All right.

JW: To get to Lakewood Cemetery, that was way out in the country, and it was advantageous to have the streetcar run out there, because people didn't have cars and they didn't have horses and buggies. So the cemetery gave the streetcar company an easement to run between the cemetery and Lake Calhoun, and they even built a little shelter out there, a nice little stone shelter for people to go.

When the streetcar quit running, the park board says, "Well, we'll take that property and expand the park property over there on the streetcar company."

This is the way I remember reading it in the newspaper. The cemetery said, "Oh, no. We didn't give you that property. We just gave you an easement to go by. That's our property. You'll just move the fence out past that right-of-way."

Now, that meant a nice long twenty-foot-wide strip, and you can imagine how many graves Lakewood cemetery could get out of that long strip that went right by there.

At that time, Mr. Walter James and some of the Chinese merchants bought a big strip of that land, that new property, and reserved it for Chinese, and he put up a nice-looking Chinese monument out there. I can't read it, but I'm sure it talks about pious things. So many, many, many of my friends are out there in that strip. I think that Chinese lot is now full. There are other Chinese burial sites in Lakewood that had nothing to do with that particular thing.

But at that time there were a lot of Chinese men living in Minneapolis alone, who had never married, or at least had never brought a wife over from China, and that was his main idea, Mr. [Walter] James' main idea. Mr. James was a wonderful person. I only met him once. I was familiar with his site. I don't think he belonged to Westminster. I never knew him at Westminster, but he was a very fine man and did a lot of good works. He had no children of his own, but he sponsored a great many who took his name. He's highly regarded. He ran the Nankin restaurant for years.

SGF: Which is very famous.

JW: Very famous. The Nankin was on the street level, and that was famous for years. The one upstairs, John's place, which was run by Mr. Woo Yee Sing and later his son Howard Woo and Howard's wife Lolita, of sainted memory, they were upstairs on Sixth Street.

SGF: In the same building?

JW: No, no, no. On Sixth Street. They had different restaurants. The Woo restaurant was very, very classical Chinese, I think, and beautifully decorated in classical ways. The one on the street was more popular as chow mein and chop suey-type things, which Chinese people laughingly don't eat.

SGF: [Laughs] Right.

JW: That's American food.

SGF: Yes.

JW: But it's good. I remember when we first came here, my brother took us to dinner there. My mother was very fond of the chow mein, and after I became acquainted with the Chinese and real Chinese food, I took my mother to dinner and she ordered chow mein. I said, "Mother, don't order that. That's not real Chinese."

She said, "It's so good, I can't imagine anything better." [Laughs] And she never tasted anything better.

SGF: That's true for a lot of people, their first Chinese food experience.

In addition to all the work you did at Sunday school and at Westminster Church, you also helped a lot of different individuals.

JW: Oh, yes, that was fun.

SGF: A variety of things.

JW: That was very fun. Once they got here and once the laws were changed, which they did after the war, they loosened up laws so that more people could come in, but the Chinese wanted to bring in their friends, their families and other relatives, and they needed help filling out papers, and I helped them fill out forms. If they had any problems, I would write letters for them.

There was one case where a family wanted to bring over their adopted son, and I'm writing a special story about that because it was long. Well, it was a series of stories, one family after another. But they wanted to bring in their adopted son. It was complicated by the fact that he was adopted, but he had been too recently adopted. The requirement was that they should have adopted him two years before they made the application, and it was just a few months short of that time.

They were very eager to bring in this boy, so finally they came to me and wanted me to write a letter to Senator [Hubert] Humphrey, and see if he would help them. So I wrote the story—and it was a very interesting story—to Senator Humphrey. So, sure enough, his office, he had a really good office staff going—for all I know, all the senators do, but that's the only one I had personal contact with—and they wrote to the immigration office in Hong Kong and they did a lot of investigating to check out this story.

Finally one day—this was interesting, I thought—one Saturday afternoon about four o'clock, of all things, I was outside working in the garden, and the phone rang and they said it was for me, so I washed my hands and I answered the phone.

"This is Senator Humphrey's office in Washington, and the senator has looked into the problem, and he has discovered that everything is as claimed, but the child cannot be brought in under the law. But Senator Humphrey will be happy to introduce a private bill," which he did. It took months and months, delay after delay, and lots of letters to get that bill through, and finally a bill came and this child, Ng Gim Bong, came, and he arrived safely, amid much rejoicing. I have all the letters.

SGF: All the original paperwork, right?

JW: All the original papers on that, except not the private bill signing. That's still there, and I don't even have a picture of it, with President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower's signature on it. That's what I really wanted, but I do have the *Congressional Record* reprint on it.

Then no sooner had this lady, Mrs. Wong, got her son here, adopted son, she wanted to bring her brother and sister-in-law and their five children and her mother. Well, that took a lot of writing. And once she got them here, she wanted to get her sister's family. Well, by that time everything had loosened up so there were very few problems about bringing her sister's family in. But things like that happened quite often, and I wrote a lot of letters, and I was glad to.

After I retired from all the Chinese, we had no more Sunday school and we got all the Chinese people here, I was sitting in my apartment up here in St. Louis Park and somebody started bringing to me Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese who had escaped from Vietnam. That was about twenty years ago, right after the Vietnam War, and they had all these boat people. They had these boys who literally in the dark of night got on boats and put out to sea, and they ran into pirates and all kinds of robbers and things. Terrible.

Well, those boys finally got here, through Catholic Charities, mostly, and then they wanted help learning English. They used to come to me, and they wanted—bringing their families over. So I started writing. That was a whole new career.

SGF: When you say they came to you, was that-

JW: They got a job. They would come and they'd get a job in a Chinese restaurant, and not knowing any English and needing help, "You go to Jingo."

SGF: So to you directly, not through the church.

JW: No, not to the church. As a matter of fact, I'd changed churches in the meantime. But, no, I had a whole family full of these boys, one after one after one. Each one came, then they wanted to get their families here and they wanted to get brides here. And one of them even came and she says, "My friend lives in Philadelphia. She needs help. Will you write a letter?"

I don't think I have much there. I tried to get those boys to tell me their stories, because they were such interesting stories, but I wasn't very successful with that. They were pretty busy. By that time, as soon as they learned enough English, well, the first thing they wanted to do was get a car, and I discouraged that as much as I could, because I knew the expense and the problems. But oh, no, got to get a driver's license and a car.

Then, of course, when they got married, they had to have a job, and they started restaurants. Oh, there's a whole string of restaurants. You know, I never hear from them anymore. They never invited me out to dinner. One of them did invite me to his wedding, and I had my picture taken with the bridal party, me sitting in the middle and the bride and groom standing behind me, and one set of parents on one side, and one on the other. I remembered to wear my red jacket to that one. That was fun. But I don't think about them, because I don't hear from them anymore.

SGF: I'm sure with a different sense of community, not having a central church or organization—

JW: That's right, and that's a good point. That's a good point. That's true.

SGF: Now, one thing I want you to talk about yet before I ask the next question is how many children you named. You say when the families arrived at the airport—

JW: Oh, yes. That's right. Well, this goes back before then. In the beginning, when all those brides came and had babies right away, I had already noticed that they all had Chinese names, and they were traditional. The grandmother, the paternal grandmother names them, and the name indicates what generation they are, too. Woo Yee Sing, Woo Du Sing, all of those things, Yee Yoke Ying (Mrs. Wong), Yang Yee Yoke Hing (Mrs. Lee), Yee Yoke Ha (Mrs. Ng), that's all one family, see, and the names have a meaning.

But if they gave them American names, and it was the style to give them American names—they don't do it now. The Hmong children keep their names. But if you didn't take care, they'd name all the little boys Johnny and all the little girls Mary, and there would be all kinds of Johnny Wongs and Mary Wongs around. So I encouraged them to give them other names, Judy, Jean, and Patty, and some of those. Linda—I don't think I named Linda, but, you know, they caught on to names.

But then when they began coming back, families, they would bring me a whole family to name. I remember one Sunday, I was searching through the church directory to pick out suitable names, or the phone book. Another family, Leeann Chin and her family came, and I named all of those children. They didn't always keep the name I gave them, but I named them. That was fun.

SGF: You served so many roles. That's what's so fascinating to me.

JW: Yes, but that's what aunts are for.

SGF: That's true. Kind aunts. All right. Tied to that, so you've been involved with the Chinese community for a long time.

JW: Fifty-odd years.

SGF: Fifty-odd years, and as an observer and a participant, what kinds of changes have you seen, and what things have stayed the same, as far as opportunities, professions?

JW: To the Chinese, the biggest thing is education. Absolutely education. Once they learn English, once those kids started to school, they went to school. They asked no favors, no favors. None of this "You've got to teach in my language. You've got to have a special teacher for me." They went to school, and they graduated, and most of them graduated at the tops of their classes, or way up there on the Honor Roll.

I remember the first one who went to college, of my kids, went to college, went to the University [of Minnesota] and she was going to graduate from the University. Have you ever been to a graduation at the University? This was in Northrop Auditorium, on a Sunday, a hot Sunday. We got there late, because I had to go to church first, and so we were sitting way up in the top of the balcony.

They gave us this program, fine print, page after page after page of names. It was in alphabetical order. Her name was Wong. Oh, I'm going to have to—and I started looking at the end of the line, and I couldn't find her name, so I started over. And then I noticed that all the honor students were named first, and they got to go first, and here she sashayed across that stage with this gold thing on her arm, you know, and we were free to leave. It was wonderful.

SGF: Pays to be a good student. [Laughter]

JW: It pays to be a good student. After a while, when I would get invited to a high school graduation, if it was going to be outdoors, I said, "I'll give you an extra five-dollar present if I don't have to come." [Laughs] I bought them off that way.

But no, I was so proud of them. Lawyers, doctors, architects. I know one family of four boys; the first one's an architect, the next one is a lawyer, and the third is a child psychiatrist, psychiatrist not psychologist, and the third one is a computer guru.

I told you the other day about this young girl who is principal in St. Paul, school principal in St. Paul. The Wong Wen family, thirteen children, three medical doctors, one professor, doctor of philosophy at Brandeis University, all in one family. They're all educated, all got university educations. I don't know how they got them. They must have worked awfully hard, I'm sure. Their father could have sent some of them, or helped them some. They probably lived at home. But imagine getting educations like that.

SGF: And that's a difference, isn't it, because before World War II I think of individuals like Stanley Chong and Howard Woo, they had college degrees, but they didn't necessarily have opportunities to use them.

JW: That's right. Howard did. Howard belonged to an architectural—

SGF: That's right, he did after a while.

JW: Industrial architect office. Stanley Chong was a very successful merchant, so he used that.

SGF: I guess the point I'm trying to make is, earlier in the twentieth century, usually Chinese individuals worked for Chinese individuals, whereas after the war, am I correct that more businesses—

JW: More open.

SGF: —were open to hiring?

JW: Yes, I think so.

SGF: Okay.

JW: One thing I've never quite understood was who did those income taxes for these restaurants. For the most part, they stayed on the good side of the law, no doubt about that. There were a few questions along back then. And then Chinese, traditionally, you can't tell them anything about money that they don't already know. They certainly are the bankers of the Orient. Look at Hong Kong.

There's one woman, a very close friend of mine, when I was in the investment business she would come into our office. She knew what she wanted to buy, and she'd reach down in the bottom of a shopping bag, a grocery shopping bag, and pull out thousands of dollars. Of course, we couldn't accept cash. She had to go down to the bank and deposit it in the bank and write a check. But I have been with her at the bank. She knows exactly what to do. Of course, I could never make her understand the difference between interest and dividends. She never learned to say *dividends*, but she knew what she was doing, and they were very successful. But it's the education that impresses me. They move, in one generation, into the professional caste.

SGF: What about roles of women within the community? Have you seen changes in that respect?

JW: Oh, in the new generation, yes. These little babies, fifty years ago were little babies, they can do anything they want now. And at least one of them, I can think of one lawyer, one doctor, except the doctor was a generation ahead of her. Oh no, they're absolutely Americanized. They can do anything, and they're very active, eager, aggressive. Nothing stops them from anything. It's just a joy to watch them. When we had that party the other day, they just took over.

SGF: And the party was to celebrate your—

JW: Yes. That's not what it started out. I wanted to get the mothers together for a reunion so that they would reconnect.

SGF: And these are the war bride mothers?

JW: The war bride mothers. And I think that helped, but it also reconnected the girls, too, the younger women. And then when we went back to Westminster, the three of them down there, they took over just like everybody else.

SGF: One of the questions I wanted to ask you is, does Westminster continue to play a role within the Chinese community? What is the church's role at this point in time, if any?

JW: They're increasingly—this regime at Westminster now, it's entirely different from what it was fifty years ago, or forty years ago. The current minister down there, Dr. Hart-Andersen, I don't mind telling his name, Dr. [Tim] Hart-Andersen himself was familiar with the Chinese

community in San Francisco, where he lived before this. He would love to get them back in there, and he had taken steps through me. I gave him a list of names, and he invited, and they all came and brought friends and family to that first—

SGF: This is the event in June.

JW: The event in June, which they called Heritage Sunday. Then they had a second service when they dedicated the new building, which was in early September. We had a Chinese presence at that. It was not as great as it had been earlier. But they don't have any Chinese connection as such now. They have one member of the community is one of those little baby girls grown up now. She's a deacon, and that's interesting. Doris Wong, very proud of her.

Many of them consider themselves members of Westminster because they went to Sunday school. They've not kept up their membership by making contributions, regular contributions, which is what really counts, the way the church counts them, but if you asked them, lots of them, if you asked them, they'd say, "Oh, I belong to Westminster." When they die or when somebody gets married, they go to Westminster. Not so many weddings anymore, but certainly funerals. They consider themselves—

SGF: So there's still a connection.

JW: Yes, but that's for the older generation. The younger ones have spread out into churches all over, and that thrills me. That's what they should do. They should go wherever they feel like. Like I said before, they tend more to go to the evangelistics.

The only other Chinese church I know of is one over on Larpenteur Avenue, nearer the University. But their primary language, other than English, is Mandarin, whereas my friends who went to Westminster were Cantonese. These are Mandarin, because most of the scholars at the University are Mandarin dialect. The written language is the same, but not the spoken language.

They have a great many Taiwanese, too, and they're more evangelistic types. I have this notion that they're Methodist. I don't know that. I went there once, and my impression was that it was Methodist. I think I must have looked at the hymnbook, in the front of the hymnbook to see who the publisher was, and I recognized it was a Methodist name. But they're different, more evangelistic type. But that's all right with me.

SGF: We've talked a lot about a wide variety of things, and an important question, I think, that should be asked is, with all these different experiences with the Chinese community over the years, which ones do you value the most? Which ones just warm your heart the most?

JW: Oh, it's all those little children and what they've developed into. I think of them as babies, because I can just see them as babies, and just seeing how they've grown up, it's very heartwarming.

SGF: And to know you've contributed.

JW: How they contribute to the community, yes.

SGF: Right, how they give back.

JW: And it proves today, we have all these foreigners coming in, immigrants coming in, legally or illegally, and how we need them. Here in this building where I am, full of senior citizens, we couldn't live without these entry-level people who take care of us. And they're not going to stay entry-level long, and that was certainly the story of the Chinese when they came in. One generation, and even now they're taxpayers, and they have Social Security deducted. And if they're illegal, they'll never see a cent of that.

I don't know about people from other countries coming in here, but with the Chinese it was education. Education was the answer.

SGF: Those are the questions I have for today. Did you want to add anything else?

JW: Oh, I'll think of that in the middle of the night tonight. [Laughter]

at to do and **SGF:** Well, for today we'll stop then, and if we want to do another interview, we shall.

JW: Okay. I've enjoyed this.