Isabel Suzanne Joe Wong
Narrator

Sarah Mason
Interviewer

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Sarah Mason **-SM**
Isabel Suzanne Joe Wong **-IW**

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SM: I'm talking to Isie Wong in Minneapolis on June 8, 1982. And this is an interview conducted for the Minnesota Historical Society by Sarah Mason. Can we just begin with your parents and your family then?

IW: Oh, okay. What I know about my family is basically . . . my family's history is basically what I was told by my father and by my mother. So, you know, that is just from them.

SM: Yes.

IW: My father was born in Canton of a family of nine children, and he was the last one. He was the baby. And apparently they had some money because they were able to raise . . . I think it was four girls and the five boys.

SM: Oh.

IW: My father's mother died when he was about eight years old. And the father . . . I don't know if I should say this, was a . . . he was . . . he was addicted to opium as all men of that time were, you know. I mean, men of money were able to smoke opium.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: And so, little by little, he would sell off his son and his children to, you know, maintain that habit.

SM: Yes.

IW: The mother's dying words were, "Don't ever sell my youngest son." But the father just was so drugged by opium that he . . . eventually, he did sell my father.

SM: Oh.

IW: And he sold him to another fairly wealthy family, but that did not have sons. And then they . . . they treated him badly, so he ran away from them and lived as a beggar for I don't know how many years.

SM: Oh . . .

IW: Until . . . he was caught and then returned to his home. And then . . .

SM: To his new home?

IW: To his old . . . you know, where his [unclear].

SM: Oh, to his original home?

IW: No, to the . . .

SM: Oh, to the wealthy family.

IW: Right, right. And then he was going to school one day and . . . and that family . . . so somebody kidnapped him.

SM: [Gasps]

IW: And he's had a very traumatic childhood.

SM: Oh, my. Yes.

IW: Yes. They kidnapped him and tried to hold him for ransom, but the family wouldn't pay the ransom money.

SM: So . . .

IW: The kidnappers sold my dad to another family who had a quite a bit of money, but the . . . the man was quite a bit . . . a lot, you know, really quite older. And he had married like a very young woman and never was able to have any kids. And then so they . . . they took my father in as their son.

SM: I see.

IW: And then like about . . . I don't know how many years later, they had a son. So then they didn't treat my father that well because it wasn't their flesh and blood. And then after that . . . another five or six years later, they had another son. So there was . . . there was . . .

SM: So they later . . . they altogether had two sons and then him.

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IW: Right. Yes. And there were two sons before my father but apparently they died.

SM: Oh.

IW: But not from the same wife. The man was getting older and he had a wife and she bore him two kids but they died, so then they bought my father.

SM: I see.

IW: And then he . . . you know, he married another lady and then bought my father.

SM: I see.

IW: And then had two little kids.

SM: Yes.

IW: So the two . . . two boys that they have are here in Minneapolis and we call them my . . . we call them our uncles even though they're not related by blood.

SM: Oh, so all three brothers are here in Minneapolis then.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: That's interesting. How did they happen to come to Minneapolis?

IW: Oh. Well, the story goes like this. My grandfather, the one that my . . . you know, my dad was living with them.

SM: Yes.

IW: He was extremely wealthy. And he had businesses like in Chicago, and also . . .

SM: Oh, really.

IW: Yes, like laundry, Laundromats.

SM: He had come . . . he had immigrated to America at some point?

IW: He had come to America, yes, for economic reasons.

SM: Oh. You don't know about when, do you?

IW: No, I really don't, because it's just . . . related to me by my brother and my father.

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SM: Oh. So he lived here while the family lived in China, including your father?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: I see.

IW: And then he went back to China like several times.

SM: Oh.

IW: And then my father came here because he . . . his father wanted him to run one of the . . . the Laundromats, wanted to work in one of the Laundromats.

SM: And that was here in Minnesota?

IW: Well, no, it was in . . . it was in New York.

SM: Oh, in New York.

IW: Yes.

SM: And he had a business in Chicago, too.

IW: Yes, in Chicago as well. Yes.

SM: Oh. But he wanted your father to come to New York to work.

IW: Yes. He eventually settled in Minneapolis because my uncle was in the Army . . . I believe he was in the army. And he was stationed someplace here in Minneapolis.

SM: This was not a real uncle?

IW: Yes, this is not the real . . . this is . . . yes.

SM: Oh, yes. This is the uncle of the . . .

IW: Yes. And I don't know anything about my father's biological family.

SM: Oh, I see. Yes.

IW: You know, he doesn't know anything about them either. I mean, he wouldn't know them from Adam now if he saw them.

SM: If he saw them.

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IW: Yes. He has no idea [unclear].

SM: But it was his biological family that had the business and his real grandfather . . . I mean his real father had . . .?

IW: No.

SM: Oh.

IW: It was his father that he was . . .

SM: The adopted.

IW: The father that . . . yes.

SM: Oh, the *last* adoption.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Oh.

IW: That he had the Laundromat and all the businesses in Chicago.

SM: I see. Oh, that's really . . .

IW: And he . . . in Chicago, I guess, Chicago's a big city for the Moys. And that's my father's, you know, adoptive name is Moy, you see.

SM: Oh, I see. Yes, Chicago is big with the Moys.

IW: Yes, big with the Moys. And they had like . . . oh, I don't know . . . it was like a . . . you know, a big family, you know, down there, so they were . . . my dad lived in Chicago for a while. He lived in New York for I don't know how many years. And then he was drafted into the Army.

SM: Oh.

IW: And he served in . . . in France and in Europe and . . .

SM: Oh, Second World War.

IW: Yes, Second World War. Yes. And then he . . . and my mom, he had married my mom at that time. Let's see, my story is getting a little mixed up.

SM: Oh. Before he was drafted he had married?

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IW: Yes, right. He was married in China to my mom.

SM: I see.

IW: And the marriage was arranged. My mom is two years older than my dad.

SM: I see.

IW: And after they married they had a son, my oldest brother. And then my father came to America. He went to . . . he landed in San Francisco and then took the train across country, across Canada.

SM: Oh.

IW: And went to New York where he . . . that was his port of entry.

SM: I see. And that's where his adoptive father had a business.

IW: Right. And where his adopted father had met him and went to meet him.

SM: Yes.

IW: They had to buy papers so, you know, you know how that went.

SM: Yes.

IW: So he came under the name of John Joe.

SM: I see. So that was another immigrant that lived there or . . . that had the name Joe?

IW: Right.

SM: That brought him. Yes.

IW: And said that he had, you know . . .

SM: I see.

IW: Had a father, a son, and so he was able to bring him in.

SM: Yes. Did he always use that spelling, J-O-E, or was it . . .?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Yes.

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IW: Yes, it was Romanized, I guess, because, you know, it was . . . I guess the Chinese would say [phonetically] Jo . . . Ling Jo, you know.

SM: Yes.

IW: And then they would . . . it's . . . you could spell it C-H-O-U, actually.

SM: Yes. Like [unclear].

IW: Yes.

SM: His name was Ling Jo, you said?

IW: No. Joe Jung.

SM: Oh, you just said that it . . . Joe Jung. J-U-N-G?

IW: Yes.

SM: Yes. Hmmm. So he was just a young boy at that time?

IW: Well, he was probably eighteen or nineteen.

SM: Oh.

IW: He was quite . . . yes, I guess, yes.

SM: Not a twelve year old or something.

IW: No. No. He was eight years old when he was first sold, see.

SM: Oh.

IW: And then he . . . well, what happened to him after that? Yes, then he . . . he didn't like the family that he was sold to. He ran away. They caught him. Then someone kidnapped him and then sold him to this other family. [Unclear] yes.

SM: And so this family that he was last adopted by . . .

IW: Yes. That's the family that . . .

SM: It was his father that was in America or [unclear]?

IW: Yes, right.

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SM: Father.

IW: Right, father. And he was the one that . . . I mean, he . . . that's the family that we associate with now as our, you know, our uncle who . . . and grandmother and so forth.

SM: I see. Yes. So they did accept him fairly well or . . .?

IW: Well, yes, but . . .

SM: His sons, the real sons were better treated, I suppose.

IW: Yes, right. You know, at first they didn't think they would have any other kids, you know.

SM: Yes.

IW: So they did treat him fairly well until . . . and then after they had their first son . . .

SM: He was . . . [sighs]

IW: Yes. Then things started getting bad for him, I guess.

SM: I see.

IW: But they did still want him to come to America and work in the Laundromat.

SM: Oh, to work.

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh, in a Laundromat or a laundry?

IW: In a laundry. Just a laundry.

SM: Yes. Well, did his mother, adoptive mother, then stay in China?

IW: Yes.

SM: Yes.

IW: She stayed in China.

SM: I see.

IW: And she didn't come over until I think it was about twelve years ago, I think.

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SM: Oh, I see.

IW: [Speaking to her toddler, Keaton Wong] Okay. Now I'm telling you the story about Grandpa.

SM: It's quite a story, too, you better listen. [Chuckles]

IW: [Chuckles] I know, it just sounds so strange to me, I . . . you know, when I was told that I just . . . I couldn't believe it. It just doesn't sound real that, you know, people would sell their kids and all that. But . . . that's what they did.

SM: Yes. Hard times, I suppose.

IW: Yes, because, you know, I've grown up with different values.

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, seeing that . . .

SM: World.

IW: Yes. See, on my mother's side they were . . . there were five children, weren't there? Yes. The first two were girls. And so they were either killed or just gotten rid of. And then the third one was my mother. So . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: But they didn't want to . . .

SM: But they kept her?

IW: Yes, they kept her, right. Because my grandmother just insisted, you know, we're not . . . the grandfather was . . . my mother's father was the one that didn't want the girls.

SM: Yes.

IW: And, you know, in China in those days they just . . . they thought it was the woman that determined the sex of the child.

SM: Oh . . .

IW: And they didn't know it was the male.

SM: They thought it was her fault.

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IW: Yes. So they would, you know, blame it all on the woman. And so my grandfather also came to America, on my mom's side. He was a principal at a school.

SM: This was your mother's father?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Oh.

IW: And he came to America and then I don't really know why, I imagine it's just economic reasons, because he heard that you could, you know, make a lot of money.

SM: Yes.

IW: So he came to America and he was a . . . in New York in his laundry and that's . . . and he died there, I guess, one night when someone tried to rob him, and they came in and killed him.

SM: Oh. No kidding.

IW: Yes, he died at the age of forty-two or something like that. He was really quite young. And my . . . meanwhile, my mother's mother in China, she was kind of a . . . a free spirit, I guess.

SM: Wow.

IW: From what my mother tells me. She changed my mother's name because . . . and she changed it to "Change of Luck" because after my grandfather went to America, she decided that, you know, she had been called all kinds of names because she only had girls. So she went out and she adopted a boy, two boys on her own.

SM: Isie's mother did. Excuse me, *your* mother.

IW: Yes, my mother's mother. My mother's mother. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes. Oh! Your mother's mother—your grandmother.

IW: Yes, right, my grandmother.

SM: I see. Adopted two boys?

IW: Two boys. Yes. [Speaking to her son] [Unclear] honey.

SM: [Chuckles] It is so tempting for him, Isie.

IW: Oh, excuse me, wait, one boy. I'm sorry.

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SM: Oh.

IW: I got the story all mixed up. [Speaking to her son] You can put it down and play with that.

[Clunky noises like something touching the recorder microphone]

SM: That isn't the wrong kind of switch is it?

[Clunky noises]

IW: [Speaking to her son] Don't play with that.

SM: Did they come from Canton, too, or . . .?

IW: Yes, they were all [unclear – everyone speaking at once].

SM: [Unclear] area but right in the city, do you think?

IW: I believe it was, yes.

SM: Yes.

[Keaton Wong cries loudly then suddenly quiets a little]

SM: Oh. Okay. It's too much for you, isn't it, Keaton? [Chuckles] But you'll be glad we taped this someday. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. And he'll remember it all.

SM: Yes. [Chuckles]

IW: If I can remember the story the way it goes . . . the way I was told it.

SM: So did their two families know each other? Or [unclear]?

IW: Well, no, I think it was kind of arranged through my . . .

Keaton Wong: Go play?

IW: You go play.

SM: [Chuckles]

Keaton Wong: Mommy, no!

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IW: Can Keaton go play?

Keaton Wong: Mommy go play, play with me?

SM: Do you want to [unclear] for a minute?

IW: Oh, maybe.

SM: Okay.

Keaton Wong: Mommy!

[Recording interruption]

IW: There were . . . it was arranged via a matchmaker, I think. I'm not really sure how they . . .

SM: A matchmaker in Canton?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: I see. And so did she and her children – you and so on . . . oh no, you were born here, weren't you?

IW: Yes.

SM: Stay in Canton then when your father came back here?

IW: Right. My mom stayed with her mother.

SM: Oh, with her mother. Oh.

IW: Yes, she was with . . . her . . . no, wait. Yes, that's right. She stayed with his mother and dad.

SM: Oh.

IW: And then she . . . when she had my oldest brother, she kind of left my oldest brother with her mother to take care of, because my oldest brother is approximately the same age as my uncle.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: My fifth uncle.

SM: Oh.

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IW: So there were too many kids for the . . . that family to take care of.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: Since it wasn't really her blood, I guess there was some resentment there in that my mother was living in the same house, you know.

SM: Oh, yes. Hmmm. So, let's see. That's your oldest brother.

IW: My oldest brother is maybe a year older than my fifth uncle. Or maybe even . . .

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: They're almost within . . . I would say within a year.

SM: Fifth uncle, you called him?

IW: Yes. Yes. We call him my fifth uncle and my . . . the brother that was younger than my . . . that was born after my dad was adopted is our fourth uncle.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: Because there were two boys ahead of my dad that had . . . had died.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And so he's considered a third . . . third son is what they call him. My dad is . . . to them is third uncle of his . . . of my uncle's kids.

SM: Oh, yes. I see. Yes. And so how many children did she have in China then?

IW: My mom just had one.

SM: Just the one.

IW: One, my brother. Yes. My oldest brother. And she didn't come over until 1947 right before the Communist regime took over.

SM: Oh, yes. And she came right to Minneapolis then?

IW: Yes.

SM: Yes. Let's see. When did your father move to Minneapolis? I think we left that out. [Chuckles]

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IW: Okay, he moved to Minneapolis after the war.

SM: Oh.

IW: He went to Chicago after the war.

SM: Oh, first to Chicago after the war.

IW: Yes. And then because my uncle was up here . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: He moved up here with my uncle. And they had a laundry up here with my uncle and he worked . . .

SM: So that was his brother, adoptive brother.

IW: Yes.

SM: I see.

IW: And that's how we ended up staying here.

SM: Yes. So then after the war your mother and your brother came.

IW: Came over, yes, in 1947.

SM: How old was your brother then?

IW: [speaking to her son] No buddy. [speaking to Sarah Mason] He was . . . I believe he was eight years old.

SM: Oh, so he was still a little boy more or less.

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, he remembered . . . he doesn't remember that much, but he does remember the Japanese coming into his village and bombing and the planes flying overhead and . . . and, you know, them running into these caves sort of to escape from bombs.

SM: Oh, bombing his village, did you say?

IW: Yes.

SM: So he went to live with some relatives in a more rural area while your mother was in Canton?

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IW: Yes, I think that's how it was. And then she eventually . . .

SM: She brought him.

IW: Brought him.

SM: I see. So they ran in the caves and so on.

IW: Yes.

SM: Hmmm.

IW: My mom did have a terrible hatred for the Japanese because she had seen what they had done to her village and to her . . . you know, her fields and whatever, her crops, and her family, and . . .

SM: Yes. I think that was pretty common in those years.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Because they were pretty cruel. Let's see. Then did they come into her village and take it or . . . [unclear]?

IW: I don't . . . I think they just went through it, you know.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And just swept through it and plundered and whatever. She just . . . she remembers them . . . I don't know if she saw it herself or she heard tales of the Japanese with, you know, had swords, had their swords planted in the ground and there would be a head on it, you know. She remembers that, she told me that that [unclear].

[Keaton Wong shouts loudly]

IW: What do you want [unclear]?

[Recording interruption]

SM: Yes.

IW: So . . .

SM: Yes. So that was in 1947.

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IW: Yes.

SM: And then were you the first child born here?

IW: No, my . . .

SM: Oh, you were . . .

IW: I have another brother.

SM: Ah. Okay.

IW: I have a brother who was born in 1948. My family moved to this laundry. They worked there for a couple years.

SM: Here in Minneapolis?

IW: Yes. Yes. North Minneapolis.

SM: Oh.

IW: Until they just decided that that . . . they didn't want to do that.

SM: They lived right at the laundry first of all?

IW: Yes. Yes. And then after my brother was born, it started getting a little more crowded, and then I was born in 1950. My brother was born in 1948, and I was born in 1950. And then it started getting a little bit crowded. They decided not to have a laundry. Oh, we lived in the projects, you know, the government projects on Olson [Memorial] Highway there.

SM: Oh.

IW: For two . . . I believe it was two years after I was born.

SM: Oh, after you were born.

IW: Yes. And my sister was born in 1951 and another sister in 1952, so, you know, there were so many little kids . . . [Chuckles]

SM: Two more sisters, yes.

IW: Yes.

SM: But you had given up the laundry when you lived on Olson Highway?

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IW: Yes, they had given up the laundry and they moved to Olson Highway.

SM: What did your father do then?

IW: He worked all sorts of various jobs. I guess they bought a house when I was two years old.

SM: Oh, in 1952?

IW: Yes. And my father was working . . . he was working with some Chinese restaurants. He would be like the busboy or the waiter or a cook.

SM: I see.

IW: He worked at the Nankin downtown for a while.

SM: Oh. Yes. What did he do there?

IW: He was a waiter.

SM: Yes.

IW: He was a bartender.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: And then he worked at Honeywell, too, for a while. He worked his way up to foreman.

SM: Oh.

IW: And he drove taxis. [Chuckles]

SM: He did everything!

IW: Yes, he really had a number of jobs. I can remember . . .

SM: Did he do all these at once or . . .?

IW: Yes, all of them at once.

SM: Oh!

IW: I remember him, the shifts that he had, he'd work like seven in the morning until two or three in the afternoon. [Speaking to her son] Okay. Alright.

SM: At Honeywell?

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IW: He'd get up really early in the morning, even [unclear] go and work. And it was at around three or so when we were at home and . . .

SM: That was from Honeywell?

IW: Yes, I think it was Honeywell.

Keaton Wong: [Excited babbling]

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: [Speaking to her son] Okay, better? [Speaking to Sarah Mason] And then he would go and work for hours driving a cab or being a waiter, and then . . . yes. Four hours driving cab, and then at night he would go and work at the restaurant as a bartender or he'd work as a waiter,

SM: At Nankin he would or . . .?

IW: Yes, I think it was at the Nankin. So he did that and then he'd go to sleep. Come home at about eleven or whatever and go to sleep and get up again and start the whole schedule again. He was really busy in those days. So he wasn't home.

SM: So you really didn't see him very much.

IW: No. No. And . . . let's see. When we were about, I think, six years old, he had saved up enough money to . . . or was it . . . I was seven. I was seven. He'd saved up enough money to buy a restaurant or a location to buy a small little restaurant.

SM: Oh.

IW: So my sister was born when I was about . . . I was seven or was it eight? I was eight.

SM: That was your youngest sister?

IW: Yes, my youngest sister, she was born in . . . oh, I was seven. 1957, that's right.

SM: 1957?

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh, so your sisters were born in 1951, 1952, and then 1957.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Okay. Ah. Okay. So she was born after he had bought the restaurant?

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IW: No, he had saved up enough money by then, and then when I was eight then he finally did purchase the restaurant.

SM: Oh, after she was born.

IW: Yes. Right.

SM: Like about 1958?

IW: Right. 1958, yes.

SM: Does he still have that restaurant then?

IW: Yes, my brother runs it now. It's a . . . it's really a takeout, it's not a restaurant [unclear] it's just a . . .

SM: Oh. Your oldest brother? Or he's the only brother?

IW: He's the second oldest.

SM: Oh.

IW: My oldest brother lives in New Jersey right now.

SM: Oh. So this is the second brother.

IW: Yes.

SM: Did I write down his birth? [Chuckles] I think so.

[Rustling paper noises]

IW: 1948.

SM: Oh, yes. You did mention it.

IW: [in background, speaking to her son] [Unclear] honey where are you going? [Unclear] I can't see you. I don't know where you're going.

[Keaton Wong crying]

SM: Yes, he seems . . .

IW: He knows he can't go outside if I'm not out there. So . . .

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[Keaton Wong crying loudly]

[Recording interruption]

SM: When you were little, maybe you could tell me sort of how your family worked? I mean, how it was organized, since your father was gone quite a lot. Was your mother sort of the boss or . . .?

IW: She wasn't the . . . no, not really. It was my older brother.

SM: Oh.

IW: I think that's probably where I got a lot of my . . . ideals and whatever. He was the authority figure for all of us, actually, since he was the man of the house. He's . . . he's eight years . . . no, wait. He's eleven years older than I am.

SM: Oh. Yes. So he was a lot older then.

IW: Yes. And so he kind of took command. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes, because your father was absent.

IW: Yes. And he spoke English better than my mother and so he would, you know, take us shopping and whatever. My mom doesn't speak any English at all. She just speaks Chinese.

SM: But he spoke pretty well then, he learned quickly when he came as a little boy.

IW: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

SM: Does he have no accent, or any, or . . .?

IW: No, he doesn't have an accent at all now, I don't think.

SM: Yes, I suppose when you come at eight you really wouldn't.

IW: Yes. Yes. And he really wanted to assimilate and be a part of the culture.

SM: Oh. Oh. Yes. So is he pretty much assimilated like you and the younger children or . . .?

IW: Oh . . . yes . . . Well, he still has a lot of Chinese values and ideas and stuff like that, but, you know, pretty much . . . he's a mechanical engineer.

SM: Oh.

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IW: And he works for the Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey.

SM: What is it called?

IW: It's called Picatinny.

SM: How do you spell that?

IW: P-I-C-A-T-E-N-N-Y. [The correct spelling is Picatinny.]

SM: Hmmm. Picatinny Arsenal.

IW: Yes, with the government.

SM: Oh. So he became a professional.

IW: Yes. Yes, he went to college for four years. He worked himself through college by . . .

SM: Did he go to the U [University of Minnesota]?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: He put himself through?

IW: Yes, by being, you know, a busboy and he worked at the Nankin and he, you know, did various odd jobs, I guess. So . . .

SM: Yes. What is his name?

IW: Roger.

SM: Roger Joe?

IW: Yes.

SM: I see. And so he sort of took over for your father, in a sense.

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, he did all the disciplining.

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, if we were . . . if we stepped out of line, he, you know . . . my mom would say, "You wait 'til your father comes home," or, you know, "We'll talk to your oldest brother about it," you know. [Chuckles]

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SM: Oh, yes.

IW: It was always like we feared him but, you know . . .

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: We also respected him, too. There was . . . yes, there was a bit of fear because he was very . . . very strict.

SM: Oh. I suppose he would *have* to be. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes.

SM: Well, was your father still really the authority? I mean, did he make the biggest decisions?

IW: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely, yes.

SM: Yes.

IW: Yes, yes. There wasn't any question about that, you know.

SM: I see.

IW: Whatever my father said, he just . . . you know, that was the answer, the definite answer.

SM: I see. But your brother carried out your father's decisions.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Well, what was your mother's role then? A sort of nurturing, caring role?

IW: Yes, yes. She was the . . . you know, she was the one that always had, you know.

SM: [Unclear].

IW: She had the meals ready for us, our clothes clean. She kept the house clean, you know.

SM: Oh, yes. Yes.

IW: I remember her mainly for that, you know. When I was little, I don't remember her doing much of . . . you know. I didn't think she did anything. [Chuckles] [Unclear].

SM: Well, that's typical of children, of course.

IW: Yes. Yes.

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SM: But she wasn't the leader then really like your brother was.

IW: No. No. No.

SM: So she took sort of a submissive role?

IW: Yes. Yes. I remember her telling us stories at that time, getting us ready for bed. And she would make the meals for my dad when he'd come home at these odd hours, you know. She would always have the meals ready for him. And she'd make everything for him just the way he liked it. I remember, because I know she likes her rice kind of gummy . . . not gummy but, you know, soft. And he likes his rice hard, like, you know, so you can crunch it almost. [Chuckles] And I mean, they're just extremely opposite. And when he was home for the whatever meals, the rice was always crunchy. [Laughter]

SM: Oh.

IW: And when we had meals without him it was kind of the way she liked. [Chuckles]

SM: That's the way it works I guess. [Chuckles] I see. So she really didn't influence you so much on ideals and so on?

IW: No.

SM: Or did she teach you some Chinese things?

IW: She taught me Chinese things but I didn't really . . . I don't think I . . . you know, I don't think I followed them or gave it as much value as I did for the things my brother taught us.

SM: Yes. Did she tell you stories about China and the family there?

IW: She did, yes. And, you know, and like Chinese fairy tales and, you know . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, about amazing things happening, you know. [Chuckles] Magical things. You know, things that kids are told when they're little.

SM: Oh, that's interesting. Do you retain most of that?

IW: Some of it I remember and some of it I just have a vague recollection of. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] So did she work outside the home?

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IW: Once . . . when my little sister was getting ready to be born, she did work outside the home. She worked at . . .

SM: When she was pregnant with your little sister?

IW: Yes. She worked cleaning celery at Moy's Café.

SM: Oh.

IW: We had . . . she [unclear] cook, you know. They were relatives and they were friends of ours [unclear] owned the Moy Café.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: She [unclear] cousins.

SM: [Unclear] cousin?

IW: Yes.

SM: The children were her husband's, or they were [unclear].

IW: They were like . . . they were my . . . [unclear] my father and the man who owned the Moy Café were first cousins.

SM: Oh, I see. They were . . . .

[Recording interruption]

SM: Your brothers and so on worked at the Moy Café, or mostly at Nankin, or . . .?

IW: Well, my brother and my dad both worked at the Nankin, but at different times, you know.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: And my brother . . . my dad worked at the Moy's Café also.

SM: I see. But not your brother?

IW: No, I don't think my brother ever worked there, no.

SM: Yes.

IW: My uncle worked there. He was a cook.

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SM: So it was more of the older generation.

IW: Yes.

SM: Yes. I see. Well, did your family emphasize a lot when you were young that it would be better to marry a Chinese man when you married?

IW: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely. Yes. They told us when . . . right from the beginning, you know. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, yes. Your brother would tell you?

IW: Yes. Pretty much he'd say, you know . . . he . . . actually, it wasn't as much him but my folks.

SM: Oh.

IW: And my brother really didn't feel that strongly one way or another.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: But because my folks felt that way, he felt he should also emphasize it.

SM: Hmmm.

IW: And he dated Caucasians while he was in high school and . . .

SM: This is your older brother?

IW: Yes. Right. When my father found out about it, he was extremely upset. And I remember one night he came home and . . . from one of those dates and . . .

SM: From where was he . . .?

IW: From a date with a Caucasian girl.

SM: Oh, when your brother did.

IW: Yes. And I don't know how he ever found out, but . . .

[Keaton Wong hollering]

IW: [Speaking to her son] Shhhh.

SM: [Chuckles]

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IW: But [chuckles] I don't know how my dad found out. But I remember him standing at the door with this broom like he was going to beat my brother for doing that. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh!

Keaton Wong: [Giggling]

SM: [Chuckles] He thinks it's funny. [Sighs]So it was really a serious issue.

IW: Yes. Yes. But it's over . . . you know, they didn't say it overtly, you know, but they kind of, you know, hinted around, you know, you don't marry anyone who isn't Chinese and . . .

SM: So it was well understood anyway.

IW: Yes. Yes. And then when he did date Caucasians, *then* it's when they would get upset, you know. I mean, everything was fine as long as you didn't, you know . . . they really let it be known . . . you know, they didn't say it in so many words but, you know, they just . . . once you step out of line and then they told you [unclear].

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: You know what I mean, they waited until you did something wrong, then they told you.

SM: I see.

IW: And then you learned from that at that point.

SM: Well, did you sort of understand it before that or . . .?

IW: Yes, I did kind of. . . I mean, it was understood that . . . but I didn't . . . you know, they never came right out and said, you know, you marry someone who's Chinese.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: In fact, my mother, by the time I was sixteen, she was thinking of having an arranged marriage.

SM: Oh, she was? From China?

IW: No.

SM: Oh, here.

IW: Arranging a marriage with me with somebody she knew in New York for me for this . . .

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SM: Yes. How did you feel about that? [Chuckles]

IW: Well, of course, I didn't [chuckles] . . . I didn't go for that because, you know, I told her I had . . . I remember we had, my mom and I, just in . . . you know, when I was a teenager we just had terrible fights.

SM: You didn't get along at all well?

IW: No. Not at all. When I was a teenager, when I started getting to the age where I could . . . [Speaking to her son] No, no, no.

[Keaton Wong crying]

SM: [Chuckles] Oh, dear. Maybe we should....

[Recording interruption]

SM: Well, was this largely a cultural gap and a generation gap?

IW: I think so, yes. I think it was both, because I remember we just had some awful fights and I don't know if we really . . . you know, have mended the gap.

SM: What were they over? Oh, [unclear].

IW: I mean, I talk to my mom, I still . . . and I love her and we're still friendly.

SM: Yes.

IW: But you know there are times when, you know, there are some things that she kind of wants to press on me. Well, why don't you do it this way? And it's . . . it's really, you know, I don't see any reason for doing something [unclear] and she says, "Well, that's the way I've always done it." You know.

SM: Oh. So she [unclear] on a Chinese way of doing things?

IW: I don't know if it's a Chinese way or . . .?

SM: Or maybe just a family way.

IW: Yes. Yes. I guess, let's see. I dated when I was about seventeen, you know, Caucasians. But, you know, I never told my family about it. I didn't want them to beat me up with a broom [chuckles] like they did to my brother.

SM: [Chuckles] Beginning when you were seventeen?

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IW: I think I was seventeen when I dated this one guy in my high school class, when I was young.

SM: Yes.

Keaton Wong: [Unclear babbling].

IW: Okay.

Keaton Wong: Okay!

SM: [Laughter] Well, did you think of marrying a Caucasian or you were just taking part in the high school life and . . .?

IW: I just . . . just to date and have a social life, I guess, is what I wanted to do.

SM: Yes.

IW: But, you know, when my mom says, "Oh no, you don't . . . " You know that's . . . all the American boys, you know, they take you out, they just . . . you know, then you won't be good for marriage anymore, you'll just be ruined and, you know, if . . . once you start dating that person then you have to marry them. And that's the way they were in China, you know.

SM: Oh, yes. That's the Chinese ideas, yes.

IW: And . . . I don't know. I guess, see, because I dated several Caucasian kids in my class, guys. You know, she thought that I was a prostitute.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: You know. And she would always question my . . . I guess my integrity, you know.

SM: Yes. Yes. She was probably so anxious and worried.

IW: Yes. Yes. Because she didn't know anything about these guys and . . . and I never brought them home to meet her because she couldn't speak English and . . . and I guess maybe I was ashamed of her, because she wouldn't meet people . . . and she didn't relate to people very well, or at least I didn't feel that she did.

SM: Yes. Did you bring girlfriends home or . . .?

IW: Oh, not many, because she was always . . . if I brought one girlfriend home and she started screaming at the girl.

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SM: [Chuckles]

IW: And that's when I decided, you know, I just can't have anyone meet her at all because she's not used to people who are not Chinese.

SM: Oh.

IW: If I had Chinese friends and brought them over, she still was kind of anxious and . . . real edgy about it. She'd kind of . . .

SM: Oh. Even if you brought Chinese friends?

IW: Yes. I dated this . . . she wanted me to date these Chinese guys.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: So she'd set me up with friends of her . . . sons of friends of hers. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes.

IW: And I'd go out with them and then she wouldn't care how late I'd stay out with them.

SM: Oh.

IW: It was . . . as long as he was Chinese, it was fine with her, she didn't care.

SM: She wanted you to get involved. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes, she did. [Chuckles] And I remember one Chinese guy she set me up with. We stayed out until two in the morning. I was only seventeen.

SM: Oh.

IW: And she didn't care. She just said, "Well, did you have a good time?" [Chuckles]

SM: She hoped you had. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. But I didn't . . . you know, I didn't like the guy and he didn't like me either so [chuckles] it didn't work out. But we were just . . . we went out because it was . . . you know, both our mothers wanted us to go out and so we did. And we went to his place and listened to records and . . .

SM: Oh. He was in the same situation you were.

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IW: Yes. [Chuckles] We were kind of thrown together. But I guess in my heart I . . . I don't think I would have married a Caucasian.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: Simply because our family, our cultures were so different.

SM: Yes.

IW: Our . . . you know, the ones, the Caucasian guys that I had dated, they just . . . you know, I couldn't see them coming home to meet my family and it was important for me, I guess, that my family accepted the guy I married and that I could bring my kids home to meet Grandma and Grandpa. And if I had married someone who wasn't Chinese, I don't think . . .

SM: It would be hard.

IW: Yes, I don't think it would work out.

SM: So, in the end, your . . .

IW: It might have, I don't know. [Chuckles]

SM: Maybe after a long time.

IW: Yes. That's why I was really lucky that I met Mike and I was glad, you know, we've gotten along so well.

SM: Well, he had sort of the same situation as yours with his family.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: So it really was more important to you at that point to maintain your family ties?

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, I guess it was. You know, at times I thought, well, I don't care.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: They don't like it, too bad. You know.

SM: Yes, that would be the other alternative, to sort of break off entirely, I suppose.

IW: Yes. And that's really . . .

SM: [Chuckles] [Unclear] watching this.

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IW: [Chuckles]

SM: [Laughing] Well trained. So sometimes you did think, to heck with it. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. And I thought, well, I don't care. I don't really want . . . you know, what's important? It's my life, I've got to lead it. Lead it and, you know, I've got to be happy with myself.

SM: Yes.

IW: But I don't know. Those teenage years were really kind of traumatic because, you know, we lived in an all-white neighborhood.

SM: Oh. Where was that?

IW: That was Northeast Minneapolis.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And anyway, Northeast is so closed, you know, it's kind of like a small little Peyton Place, you know.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: You know, everybody knew everybody sort of. Not a lot, but you know, we were the only Asian family there.

SM: Yes.

IW: And so we were kind of like an oddity. We stuck out like a sore thumb. And I think the guys that dated me, they . . . I couldn't be sure if they wanted to date me because I was Chinese and just wanted to know what I was like, or they dated me because they liked me or what. So I always had those doubts in my mind.

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, when I dated these guys. And I really never let myself get to the point where we would get serious at all with anyone.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: I would just say, well . . . as soon as I knew that they were getting serious, I would break it off and . . .

SM: Oh. Yes. So you really didn't want to continue it?

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IW: No, I . . . I didn't. No.

SM: But there wasn't anybody else to date.

IW: Yes.

SM: Was that more or less why or..?

IW: Right. There wasn't any . . . you know. There were those Chinese guys that my mom would set me up with.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: But you know, they were already . . . they had circles of their own friends that they were dating, you know, and seeing.

SM: Were they dating Caucasians, too?

IW: Yes. A lot of them were. And they would say to me, "You're the first Chinese girl I've ever dated." And I'd say, "You're the first Chinese guy." [Chuckles] First or second, you know.

SM: Yes, and it just seemed too artificial, I suppose, for one thing.

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, but we did it to make our parents happy and . . . you know.

SM: Yes. Well, where did you meet Mike? At the university?

IW: Yes. My sister had met his brother and . . . Mike was going to the U. And he had just broken up with his girlfriend.

SM: Yes.

IW: And so my sister said, "Why don't you . . .?" And I wasn't dating anyone at that time.

SM: Yes.

IW: And my sister said, "Why don't you come over and meet, you know, Dennis's brother?" And I really was hesitant, I [unclear]. [Chuckles]

SM: Sounded a little bit like the arranged . . . [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, with my mom. [Chuckles] But I did go meet him. And gee, I don't think we liked each other right off the bat either.

SM: [Chuckles] Things were stacked against you.

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IW: [Chuckles] Yes, right. I think it was that, you know. It was this . . . that idea that, you know.

SM: Yes. Had he just broken up with a Caucasian girl?

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: He was . . . I don't know if he told you that, but he was planning to marry her and he broke the news to his family and his father hit the roof.

SM: Yes.

IW: And his father is . . . you know, he doesn't say directly to Mike, you know, how he feels. He will tell his mother. And then his mother will relay the message to Mike.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: And his father will just rant and rave and carry on and scream at his mother for raising such a terrible child.

SM: [Chuckles] It's always the woman's fault.

IW: [Chuckles] And then relay the message to Mike. And Mike would get like a filtered down version of what, you know, is the wrath . . . And, you know, he would never get the wrath of his father the way the mother would, you know.

SM: Oh. Oh.

IW: His father would never show his anger to him in that fashion.

SM: Oh, because it was so important to maintain the oldest son-father relationship?

IW: I suppose. Yes, I suppose. I don't know what the reason was. Maybe it was just because of Neil himself, because of the way he is.

SM: Yes.

IW: But he doesn't want to hurt anyone's feelings. He's like that, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: [Chuckles] And yet he will just . . . his wife, he doesn't care. He'll hurt her feelings.

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SM: That's what she's for? [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: He doesn't want to hurt his *son's* feelings.

IW: Yes.

SM: Well, did it work at all that way in your family? Did your father send down the ultimatum? Or maybe your brother was more the intermediary?

IW: It was . . . yes, it was more my brother that kind of did it for us. And my mom . . .

SM: But did he get the wrath of your father? Or just the . . .?

IW: Yes, he did. He did, yes.

SM: Oh.

IW: It was always the oldest would get all the responsibilities of taking care of the one next . . . the one on down the line. Well, I was the oldest girl, so I was responsible for all my younger sisters.

SM: Oh.

IW: And if I'm . . . if any of them, if they messed up, I would get it. [Chuckles]

SM: So you were in charge of all the girls. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, right.

SM: Which was most of the children.

IW: Yes.

SM: Well, see. Two boys and three girls?

IW: Yes. Yes. And see my older . . .

SM: Oh, so they were pretty much divided.

IW: Yes. And the brother that was older than me, he would be responsible for me and, you know . . .

SM: Oh. Oh, it went all the way down.

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IW: Yes.

SM: Ah ha. So you got it from both your older brother and younger brother then.

IW: Yes. I'm . . . there's two boys above me and then I'm the oldest girl.

SM: Oh, yes. Okay.

IW: And then so I just . . . I got it from the two brothers. And my parents, if we . . . any of the girls messed up it was . . . I was the one, I had to answer to them, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: And see, they always felt that since I was the oldest, I was the leader, and they would follow me.

SM: I see.

IW: And so if someone did something wrong, of course, it was the leader that got it.

SM: Your fault. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, it was my fault. [Chuckles]

SM: Ah.

IW: So that's the way it was in our family. I don't know, you know, if other families worked that way. But . . . because there were so many of us, I guess, someone had to be responsible.

SM: Yes. Well, it was probably a pretty effective system. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, right. Yes, I didn't mess up very often! [Chuckles]

SM: But what about the older children? Of course, they have some advantages, too, I suppose. Or does the oldest girl have any advantages? Or is the oldest boy that . . .?

IW: No . . . I don't . . . I don't know.

SM: [Chuckles] Just the responsibility.

IW: I did have advantages in, you know, like clothes and things like that.

SM: Oh.

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IW: They would buy me the clothes and then we'd both fit in them and stuff like that.

SM: I see.

IW: I would get that and the new toys. Then I would play with them and then hand them down to my sisters. [Chuckles] And they didn't . . .

SM: I see. Yes. So you had *some* advantages. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, some. Yes.

SM: Not too many. [Chuckles] Maybe we should backtrack to when you started school. Did you know English when you started school?

IW: Very little.

SM: Oh.

IW: But I did know, you know, we had kids in the neighborhood that we played with. But Chinese was spoken in the home.

SM: Yes.

IW: And so we always . . . we spoke Chinese. And then went to grade school. I didn't speak that much English. I don't remember . . . you know, there's some I remember when I was little. When I was five I remember the teacher saying some things and I wouldn't understand her.

SM: Oh, and that was in Kindergarten then.

IW: Kindergarten, yes.

SM: Yes.

IW: And that was really a traumatic thing for me because my Kindergarten teacher . . . for Halloween—I remember this very distinctly—we had to make pumpkins.

SM: Yes.

IW: Out of orange paper. She gave everyone a piece of orange paper. And I . . . the way I saw it was a pumpkin was completely round, you know. Or not round but flat, had a funny shape. So I cut mine in kind of like an oval shape out of this piece of square or rectangle paper.

SM: [Chuckles]

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IW: And she just said to cut the corners, you know, around, so it would be like a big, funny shaped, you know, almost square shaped or rectangular shaped pumpkin.

SM: Oh.

IW: And that isn't the way I saw them, you know. Whenever I saw them they had a funny shape, so I cut mine that way. And she held it up to the class and she said, "See, this is what is a bad thing. Isn't it? Ahhh . . ." and, "So and this is wrong! It's not supposed to be done this way!"

SM: How mean of her!

IW: Yes! And I remember that. I just . . . I laid down on the ground and I was rolling around. I tried to find someplace to hide.

SM: At school?

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh . . .

IW: I remember trying to roll under . . . you know, roll under a desk or something, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: [Chuckles] Yes, and to pretend like I was never there.

SM: Were you crying or . . .?

IW: No, I wasn't crying, but . . .

SM: Oh, just really embarrassed.

IW: But just really embarrassed. I just wanted someplace to run and hide. It was . . . it was the most traumatic experience that I, you know, remember when I was . . . well, when I was in Kindergarten.

SM: Oh. Did she try to do anything to cheer you up or . . .?

IW: No.

SM: She didn't perceive anything, I suppose.

IW: No. She came under the table, she *pulled* me out. "Oh!" She says, "Come on out of there!" [Chuckles] Oh, gosh.

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SM: She sounds like a bully.

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh, that's too bad.

IW: Yes.

SM: Well, were you . . .? Do you remember any teasing or name calling and so on, too?

IW: Oh, yes. See, we went to . . . I went to an elementary school where it was [unclear].

SM: What was the name of it?

IW: It was Blaine School.

SM: Blaine School.

IW: It's torn down now but it's like over in North Minneapolis. And so there were a lot of black kids there, too.

SM: Yes.

IW: When I was in Kindergarten I didn't remember a lot of teasing, but I think as I got a little bit older like to third or fourth grade I remember them calling me ching ching chinaman, a jap, and . . . and all that. But I guess . . . it was even the black kids, you know, I didn't think the black kids would do that but they did, too.

SM: Yes, you would think they would understand.

IW: Yes, but . . .

SM: Hmmm. You said about in third and fourth. Then did you feel accepted among a certain group in the class or just pretty much out of it or . . .?

IW: No, I didn't really . . . I had one close friend, one little girl that I [unclear].

SM: That helps. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Was she Caucasian?

IW: Yes, she was Caucasian.

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SM: Did she live near you then?

IW: She lived like about three blocks from me. But I thought she lived a mile away. I thought she lived, you know . . . I thought I'd have to walk *forever* to get to her place. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: You know, now that I'm older and I go back there sometimes to drive through there, you know . . . She lived on Washington Avenue there and I drove by there and, you know, I'd see the house. It was just like a little . . . it was on top of this garage. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh.

IW: It was extremely poor. And we were poor, too, but you know, it didn't seem that way to me. And she only lives three blocks from my house and I thought, gee, she was *really* a long distance from me.

SM: Did you go to her house or did she come to your house at all?

IW: She asked me over to her house. I never . . . I don't . . . when we were little, we never asked people over to our house.

SM: Yes.

IW: My mother just . . . wouldn't allow it. You know. She wasn't . . . I didn't . . . I didn't get the feeling that she would be too friendly with the people that came to our house. [Chuckles] So I never asked people over. But they would always ask me over and, you know . . .

SM: Was that because she thought she'd sort of be . . . lose control of her . . . of the discipline or . . .?

IW: I suppose, and also probably because she didn't speak any English.

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, and if the kids came over and started talking to her, she wouldn't know what to tell them or what to say.

SM: Yes. Do you think it also was partly a kind of Chinese custom that you stay pretty much within your family or . . .? That's hard to know.

IW: I don't know [unclear].

SM: Because she was transplanted, so it was kind of a different situation.

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IW: Yes.

SM: Well, did she have friends here? [Unclear].

[Loud clattering dish type noises]

IW: She did. She had . . . oh, excuse me.

SM: [Chuckles] Yes, you'd better see what's happening.

[Recording interruption]

IW: Oh, I'm sure it will be . . . [Chuckles]

SM: Well, did you in later school years feel pretty much more a part of your class? Or say in junior high or anything?

IW: No. No, I never did. I had a couple friends, you know, in my junior high class.

SM: Yes.

IW: But they weren't close friends. I wouldn't say that I had any close friends. I . . . you know, got along well. I thought I got along well with all kinds of kids and all, you know, different, you know, both male and female. I thought I got along with them well while I was in school and stuff. But I didn't have close friends. And I never joined any of the cliques they had. It was very, very clique-ish at my high school.

SM: Oh.

IW: And, you know . . .

SM: This is in high school?

IW: Yes, in high school. And also junior high, too, I guess.

SM: Yes.

IW: But I never really got real close to any of the girls. The girls seemed . . . they thought I was kind of strange, I guess, because I was Chinese, for one. And guys really didn't know how to relate to me either because it's such a closed area. You know, there was one other family that was black there.

SM: Oh.

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IW: And he only stayed there a short time and then I think he . . . I think because of the prejudice in that area they . . . they finally left.

[Loud clattering noises]

[Recording interruption]

SM: ...that's, you know, usually a time when American girls really like to have those friends.

IW: Have friends, yes.

SM: And did you miss that?

IW: No.

SM: Or you just accepted it or . . .?

IW: No, I didn't miss it, and I really . . . because I have . . . I had two younger sisters.

SM: Oh, sure. Yes.

IW: That, you know, if I ever wanted to do something, I could, you know, take them along or . . .

SM: Well, that was lucky. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. Or I'd . . . you know, I felt good because I knew kids from each clique, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: And so I got to . . . you know, I was friendly with kids from each clique and then I'd do something with some kids from this one group. And then, you know, they'd ask me to do stuff with this other group. You know, so I got to know both really well.

SM: There were some advantages. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, I guess that was . . . yes.

SM: So you did begin to date like the other girls did, at about seventeen or something.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: And so you were pretty much following the same patterns they were.

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IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, but those . . . it was really . . . oh, I guess . . . It wasn't hard to go out with the guys, it was hard to . . . to, you know, watch . . . sit back and watch everyone all then have a good time and then you're not really sure of it, because, you know, at home your parents say [unclear].

SM: Oh. So you were sort of tense when you . . .

IW: [Unclear].

SM: You mean it wasn't hard . . .? You mean that many people asked you out, is that what you mean?

IW: Well, no. It's kind of . . . I wasn't sure if I should go out or if I should stay at home.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: And you know, I wasn't really . . .

SM: Oh, that must have been really . . . miserable. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. I mean, I thought, you know, gee, my parents told me not to go out with these Caucasian guys, you know.

SM: Yes.

IW: And not to go out, period. [Chuckles] You know. And I'd say, "Well, what do you want me to do? Sit at home?" And then, on the other hand, I . . . you know. I wanted to go out and have a good time, too. The rest of the kids were.

Keaton Wong: Mommy! Look!

IW: What happened?

[Recording interruption]

SM: Continuing on July 13, 1982. Could we talk a little bit about your university years? How you decided to go there. Whether your parents encouraged you or they opposed you?

IW: Oh no, they encouraged me to go to school. But they didn't give me the money to go. [Chuckles] They always, you know, especially my mother. She always encouraged us to get a good education.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: I think because her father was a principal.

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SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And also because my father was very smart when he was student. You know, he was always number one in his class.

SM: Oh.

IW: Otherwise he'd go home for a spanking or, you know, a beating. So he was . . . he encouraged that. I mean, it was always in his mind that we would go to college. My oldest brother went to the university. And so I just thought, well, I'll just go there, too. And because I could stay at home and live, I knew I couldn't afford to go unless I did that.

SM: That's what your brother did, too, or . . .?

IW: Yes, my brother stayed at home and he worked just so he could go to school.

SM: Did they help . . . your parents help you financially?

IW: No, not at all. Just . . . they just allowed me to stay at home without . . .

SM: Yes, that's a help, too.

IW: Yes. Yes. Right. And that's what they did for me, is they let me stay at home until I got tired of staying at home and then I moved out. [Chuckles]

SM: You were able to support yourself [unclear] too, or . . .?

IW: Yes, well, I was able to . . . I moved out to a friend's house for a while.

SM: Oh.

IW: Because I didn't want to stay at home anymore. You know, you're at that age where you want to be independent. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes. Yes.

IW: And do things on your own. So I stayed with a friend for a while, then I moved into a house. I got this opportunity to move into a house with a bunch of people I knew from the campus.

SM: Yes.

IW: And so they were like . . . let's see . . . there was some . . . one, two, three . . . I think it was four guys and three girls that lived together.

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SM: Oh. Oh, four guys.

IW: Yes. My parents didn't know the arrangement though.

SM: [Laughter]

IW: [Chuckles] I mean, it just . . . they just said . . . you know, I told them I was moving out, and that was that. And they never came to visit me. They were . . . my mom was extremely upset. My dad encouraged me to move. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, did he?

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh.

IW: Because he . . . he'd just as soon have me go anyway, he didn't want to support me. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh. Hmmm.

IW: Well, I don't think he cared one way or another, actually.

SM: You weren't really very far away.

IW: Yes. You know, it was still [unclear].

SM: But your mother was real upset?

IW: Oh, yes. She was . . . didn't want me to leave at all.

SM: Hmmm. I see. And so did you know of some . . . what you were going to study? Or you just went to start a general course or . . .?

IW: I went there with really no idea what I was going to do. I knew that that was something I was always going to do was go on to college. I mean, it was always . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: We always talked about it even when I was younger and . . .

SM: Yes.

IW: My father really encouraged it a lot, you know, so I thought I'd go.

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SM: Yes.

IW: I really didn't know until maybe my second year, I decided I'd go into English education.

SM: Oh.

IW: And I'd gotten into it for a year and a half, year and a quarter. And then, you know, heard about the teaching market, how bad it was. [Chuckles] And I got kind of disinterested in teaching anyway, because I got a chance to student teach. And I just . . .

SM: Oh, you got that far in it?

IW: Yes. Yes. And . . .

SM: You didn't like it too much?

IW: I didn't like it. No. [Chuckles] So I decided to go back . . . I quit for about a quarter. And I kind of didn't like that, you know, you lose that . . . you have that security of going to school. And, you know . . .

SM: Yes, [unclear] what you were doing.

IW: Yes, right. You wouldn't have to go out and be forced out into the world and get a job and all that, you know, a full time job. And so I was out of it for a quarter and then I went back to study nutrition.

SM: I see. So is the market still good in that field?

IW: In nutrition?

SM: Yes.

IW: Well, right now, you know, the market's not now . . . but . . .

SM: Yes, not good with anything, I guess, really.

IW: Yes. Not now. But I guess a couple years ago it was just glutted.

SM: Oh.

IW: [Unclear] in large cities where dieticians were a dime a dozen. And not only that, it was . . . [unclear] other . . . like food service supervisors were considered dieticians. You know, they were . . . dieticians were not considered a professional group, you know.

SM: Oh.

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IW: They weren't given . . .

SM: They weren't certified or something?

IW: Well, they were, but they just were not recognized, I guess.

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, like nurses, everyone knows that they're professionals. But dieticians, they very rarely think of them that way.

SM: Oh.

IW: And a lot of nurses were dieticians, you know.

SM: Ah.

IW: So, you know, they didn't get the recognition that they deserved. And then [unclear].

SM: Well, at the university, who were your friends? Mainly Caucasians or . . .?

IW: Hmmm. Yes, they were . . . everybody [unclear] Caucasians [unclear].

SM: Because most of the students there are [unclear].

IW: Yes. And then I did . . . you know, I tried to . . . I went to some of the Hong Kong Association meetings and things like that. I tried to meet other Asians on campus. And I went to those and met some guys that had come from Hong Kong to study there. I dated them for a little while but, you know, they didn't come from the same background.

SM: Yes.

IW: And so things were different [unclear]. We just didn't get along. I don't . . . I think they were just, you know, maybe it was culture and maybe it was just the fact that I knew I was doing it for my mother, you know. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, because she . . . she still said, you know, I should try and get to know some Chinese guys, you know, because you're getting to that age where you should get married and, you know.

SM: Yes. Well, were there more male students from Hong Kong than females?

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IW: Yes. Oh, yes.

SM: So they were sort of looking for more . . . yes.

IW: [Unclear] yes.

SM: Were there other Chinese student organizations at the time? I know there are quite a few now. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, at that time, I don't know. I just . . .

SM: That was the main one?

IW: Yes, the Hong Kong Association was all I remember [unclear].

SM: The others may be newer. Well, see, what year was this that you went to the university?

IW: I went to the U at 1968.

[Recording interruption]

SM: So that you really didn't feel much in common with the Chinese men from Hong Kong.

IW: No. No, I didn't.

SM: Was the Asian Alliance going then? Were you . . .?

IW: No, not at the time.

SM: Oh. Had it dropped? Was it too late for it? [Chuckles]

IW: I don't know. I don't know. I don't think it got started. I met Mike in 1970, and that's when it really . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: I think that's when . . .

SM: And it was strong then?

IW: Yes. I think that's when it was, you know.

SM: Oh, I see. So it hadn't been started yet. Ah ha.

IW: And I think I got interested in it because Mike was interested in it at that time.

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SM: Oh, in the early 1970s.

IW: Yes.

SM: Ah. I see. Then were you pretty active in it then or . . .?

IW: Well, initially, yes. But then, I don't know . . . our interests kind of faded. I don't know what happened. We just didn't get enough people to do things or . . .

SM: Yes. It had its peak years, I suppose.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: And then, I suppose, people graduated and then . . .

IW: Yes, the main people in it graduated and left. And then, you know, we didn't have strong people to carry on afterwards, so it kind of faded.

SM: I see. But did you meet friends that were . . . that became pretty good friends there at the Asian Alliance?

IW: Hmmm. I guess . . . I mean, I still see, you know, people from the Asian Alliance. And have contacts with them. But I wouldn't say they were *good* good friends, you know.

SM: [Chuckles] Not your closest friends, except Mike.

IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: So you really got into that through Mike?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: He was really active. Was he one of the founding members or his brother or . . .?

IW: Well, no, but he . . . he was like a . . . I think he was president for a while. I'm not sure if he was or one of the brothers were.

SM: Oh, yes. I think they both were pretty active in it.

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, and his cousin was also.

SM: Oh, his cousin Steve?

IW: Steve, yes.

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SM: Mmmm.

IW: He was also in it, too.

SM: Yes. So in the meantime before you met Mike, did you date Caucasians at the U then?

IW: Yes. Yes, I was . . .

SM: Just as in high school, too.

IW: Yes. Yes. And I, you know, to appease my mother, I guess, I dated some, you know, Chinese guys from this community. I mean . . .

SM: Oh, from the Twin Cities community?

IW: Right. Right.

SM: Oh. Would she arrange this? Or you just met them or . . .?

IW: Well . . . she would kind of . . . I guess she had a hand in it, you know. She . . . she would talk to their mothers and say, you know, why don't you get your son to date my daughter.

SM: Oh. She sort of [unclear] it. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: But they were Chinese Americans that grew up here?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Well, I'm sure by this time or even by high school or whatever you were really pretty much assimilated into American life.

IW: Yes.

SM: But you did speak Chinese.

IW: Yes.

SM: And you still do though also?

IW: But it's broken Chinese, I guess. [Chuckles]

SM: Broken. [Chuckles] Household.

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IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: But that still is what your folks speak at home when you . . .?

IW: Yes.

SM: All through your growing up you mainly spoke Chinese at home?

IW: Yes. Yes. My mother never learned English. At first, you know, she said she wanted to. But then after having all the kids and becoming so dependent on us, she kind of lost her incentive or motivation to learn English because we . . . we were always handy and she could count on us for anything, you know. So she never learned it.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: Now that she's older and has more time, she just feels that she's too old and she can't learn, so she won't.

SM: It is harder to learn late.

IW: Yes.

SM: But I suppose she was so busy with taking care of the children.

IW: Yes.

SM: Or did she consider going to any classes or . . .?

IW: She did when we were very, very young but my father . . .

SM: Oh, she did go?

IW: Yes. Well, she considered going to the same classes that Judy [unclear]'s mother was going to.

SM: Oh, I see. It was [unclear].

IW: Yes. But she didn't go because my father wouldn't babysit. Or couldn't babysit. He would have to stay home with us and take care of the kids and then he had those three jobs and so he really couldn't. And we couldn't afford to hire someone to take care of us.

SM: Oh. They didn't take the kids with them at all?

IW: Well, there were too many of us. [Chuckles]

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SM: [Unclear]. [Chuckles] There's a limit to how much you can concentrate.

IW: Yes.

SM: With your kids running [unclear].

IW: Yes.

SM: Well, she really was in a different situation from Judy's mother then in that she was older even when she came, wasn't she?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Have you any idea how old she was when she came?

IW: Let's see.

SM: Or if we figure from when she married, she was eighteen.

IW: I think she was born in 1918, was it?

SM: Oh. So when she came in 1947 . . .

IW: 1947.

SM: She was . . . twenty-nine then.

IW: Yes.

SM: So, well, that's not exactly old, but . . .

IW: Yes. But that would be older than say, Judy's mom, who was, you know.

SM: It would be really different coming as a bride, I think.

IW: Yes.

SM: And maybe they had a little different point of view. I've heard some people say that the WAGs [war brides] that came over had a very modern view.

IW: Mmmm.

SM: I mean, they were really anxious to adopt American hairstyles and [unclear] dress [unclear].

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IW: Yes.

SM: Partly because things had changed so much in China. [Chuckles]

IW: Oh, yes. Yes.

SM: You know, that was the post-war era and . . . that they grew up in, so they wanted to be . . . But how would you characterize your mother? Would she be much more traditional or . . .?

IW: Yes, I think so. Very much so.

SM: She wanted to keep the old ways.

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, I think so. I don't think she ever really wanted to become Americanized.

SM: Yes. Oh, so that's quite a difference, really.

IW: Yes. Yes. I think that really she thought, you know, it was too late for her or whatever, you know, [unclear].

SM: Yes. I suppose for some people it was just too . . . daring. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. And for her, I think, she is . . . she is kind of a . . . a timid person, really.

SM: Oh.

IW: She doesn't even . . .

SM: Oh, that would be the way women *should* be in the old school, I guess.

IW: Yes. Yes. And, you know, what my father said was pretty much the rule, you know.

SM: Yes.

IW: Whatever he wanted or his decisions . . . he'd make all the decisions. She'd say, well . . . you know, we'd ask her questions. She would say, "You'll just have to wait and ask your father."

SM: Oh, she couldn't make the decisions.

IW: She *wouldn't* make them. You know, because she always deferred to him.

SM: Yes. Well, this was, I suppose, the way she was brought up to be a good wife. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes.

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SM: Did she try to teach you those same things? Or did she realize you were in a different world or . . .?

IW: She knew I was incorrigible. She didn't . . . didn't even try. [Chuckles]

SM: [Laughter]

IW: [Chuckles]

SM: But did she ever say what kinds of things she was taught, to be submissive to authority or any . . .?

IW: No. No, she just . . . she would just, you know, show me all about . . . you know, like how to knit and cook and, you know, the real domestic-type things.

SM: Oh. I see. So she felt that was her duty to teach [unclear] to you.

IW: Yes.

SM: That was, I suppose, Chinese cooking.

IW: Yes.

SM: And sewing, did you say?

IW: Yes. And knitting. And all those little . . . I'm glad that she taught me that now.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: At that time, I didn't. [Chuckles]

SM: They're nice things to know.

IW: Yes.

SM: Yes. [Chuckles] She thought you were incorrigible.

IW: Yes. [Chuckles] But basically, me. My other sisters were, you know . . .

SM: Were they more docile?

IW: Yes, they were more willing to, you know, heed my mother's words and things, I guess.

SM: Oh. That's interesting, because sometimes the oldest ones are more willing to . . .

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IW: Yes. But I was . . . it wasn't . . .

SM: You were independent like your father. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles] Yes. I think so.

SM: Were they more docile about not dating Caucasians?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Oh.

IW: Well, they did on occasion, but they just didn't want to take the risk of being discovered and then, you know . . . My youngest sister is kind of like me, too. She dated a Caucasian guy, too, in high school and . . .

SM: Oh, she's the only one that did then, besides you?

IW: Yes. Besides me. My two others . . .

SM: How many were there? Four of you?

IW: Yes. Four girls. My two older sisters didn't date while they were in high school. I don't know if they were given the opportunity or what, but they didn't. They just didn't . . .

SM: So it does show that the same kind of upbringing has a different effect on different kids.

IW: Yes. Boy . . .

SM: [Chuckles] I guess that's pretty obvious.

IW: Yes. Well, also, you know, I was always responsible for the kids younger than me.

SM: Mmmm. Yes.

IW: And my brother was responsible for me. And my oldest brother was responsible for all of us.

SM: Yes.

IW: And, you know, whatever I did . . . whatever they did wrong, I would get the blame for it because I wasn't watching them, or I wasn't, you know, instructing them, you know, be careful, don't do this, or you know, Mom said not to do that, you know.

SM: Yes.

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IW: So it was always I'd get the blame for it. So it is different where you are in that as far as the Chinese are concerned, what . . .

SM: Oh, yes. So they were thinking about you partly. Or did you ever tell them not to date Caucasians?

IW: No. No, I never said anything to them about that at all. Because, you know, they could see I was dating Caucasians. They never . . .

SM: Never squealed on you. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles] No, they never did. Yes.

SM: So the children would sort of band together, I suppose, then.

IW: Yes. Yes, I guess so. I didn't . . . I didn't like the fact that I always had to be responsible for them. And if they, you know, did something terrible then I would get blamed for it because I was the oldest, you know.

SM: Well, do you think it was their position in the family and maybe partly the different temperament or . . .? That made them a little more docile.

IW: I don't know.

SM: Or was it just more pressure on them from both your brother and you?

IW: I don't know. Yes, well maybe . . . I don't know. I wonder if it is just that they, you know, their temperament is way.

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, they just happen to be . . .

SM: That could be.

IW: Yes. And also, you know, I'd probably get blamed for it and they didn't want me to get mad at them, so . . . [Chuckles]

SM: I see.

IW: They would say, "Well, Isie does it. Why can't we?"

SM: [Chuckles] Then you'd really get in trouble.

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IW: You know. Then I'd really be in big trouble. [Chuckles]

SM: Well, your younger sister though, was she a different . . . more like you?

IW: Yes, she was more like me and besides, she was like . . . she's seven years younger than I am.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And so, you know, my two sisters after me, they . . . we kind of grew up together, then all of a sudden there was this other little baby, you know.

SM: [Chuckles] Oh, yes.

IW: And you know, so she wasn't really, you know, part of the . . . a part of our little group, I guess. Until . . .

SM: Yes. So do you think your parents had relaxed that, their discipline by then?

IW: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely, definitely. [Chuckles] Yes.

SM: [Chuckles] That seems to happen. I see. So where was your brother by then? Was he off at the U or . . .?

IW: Yes. My brother was off to the U when my little sister was born and she really never got to know him real well.

SM: Oh. And so he wasn't here to sort of keep strict rule over her. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes, that's right. Yes, that's right because he was the strong arm, you know, because my dad wasn't around that much.

SM: Yes.

IW: And so it was my older brother that kind of . . .

SM: Oh. So she was just sort of under your mother's care then. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: You were still at home though through most of her childhood.

IW: Yes. Yes, I was home until she was . . . must have been seven or eight when I finally moved.

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SM: Oh, so she was still pretty young.

IW: Yes.

SM: So in her teenage years you weren't here much then?

IW: No. In fact, I don't really know that much about her teenage years. I was married at the time.

SM: Oh.

IW: I had gotten married. Yes, when she was [unclear].

SM: Was she the only child home then when she was a teenager? Or were your other sisters?

IW: My other sisters were home, too, yes.

SM: Did they then . . . when you left, did then the next one become the boss? Or . . .

IW: Oh, yes. Yes. That's what kind of . . . how it went. Yes. But she didn't . . . you know, my parents had pretty much relaxed in that, you know. [Chuckles]

SM: I see. Well, maybe you could just give me an idea of, you know, among these siblings, was there a difference in how assimilated they were or were you all just sort of totally assimilated? [Chuckles]

IW: Hmmm.

SM: Was your big brother as Americanized as the rest of you [unclear]?

IW: Mmmm. No, I don't . . . to this day, I don't think he's totally, you know . . . He feels more comfortable in a group with Chinese people.

SM: Oh, he does?

IW: I know that, yes. He . . . he . . .

SM: Well, he was eleven when he came, wasn't he?

IW: Yes. Yes. You know, with the Chinese culture he feels much more comfortable. And he still does a lot of traditional, you know, Chinese-type things, you know.

SM: Oh, he does?

IW: Yes. He kind of keeps to tradition pretty much.

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SM: Yes. Did he marry a Chinese?

IW: Chinese, yes. She came from . . .

SM: Chinese American or . . .?

IW: No, from Hong Kong.

SM: Oh. I see.

IW: And she kind of keeps up with the traditions there, too. So, you know, that kind of reinforces his, you know, Chinese culture more.

SM: Yes. Sure.

IW: My brother is really . . . my second brother is also a very Chinese man.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: Kind of like my mom, in a sense.

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, that he really doesn't feel comfortable in . . . in a . . . with a group of Caucasians. He feels better with Chinese because he speaks more Chinese than we do.

SM: Oh. I see. So is he more traditional than your older brother? Or are both very . . .?

IW: No, my older brother . . .

SM: Oh, he is more?

IW: Yes, than my second brother.

SM: Yes. He's the most traditional.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: And so do they speak Chinese in their homes now or . . .?

IW: My older brother?

SM: Yes.

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IW: I don't think he does.

SM: Yes.

IW: He does when he doesn't want to . . . you know, his kids to know.

SM: His wife knows English then.

IW: She speaks English, yes. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh. [Chuckles] I suppose if she grew up in Hong Kong she'd learned English.

IW: Yes. Oh, yes. She knows English.

SM: She's quite modern? Is she . . .?

IW: Yes. Oh, yes. She has her own little restaurant in New Jersey. Yes.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: She's a real modern lady. Just a real modern [unclear]. She owns a restaurant and she manages it herself.

SM: That's quite up and coming, isn't it. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: And what about your second brother's wife?

IW: She was from Hong Kong. He married her . . . let's see. How long ago was that . . .?

SM: Is she quite modern, too?

IW: Ah, no.

SM: Not so much.

IW: Not so much. She's . . . well, it got . . . my dad arranged it somehow.

SM: Oh.

IW: And I don't really know the full details of it. Because after their divorce they . . .

SM: Oh, this is the one that divorced.

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IW: Yes. They really didn't want to talk about it. She was a real . . . terrible person, in my estimation.

SM: Oh. Too bad.

IW: She married my brother so she could come to America, as it turned out.

SM: Oh, this was common.

IW: Yes. And five years or . . . was it five years? Maybe it was three years after she had married him, she . . . when she got here, she spoke a little bit of English. And then she . . . I think she went to school to learn English a little bit more. And then she had a child.

SM: After three years?

IW: I . . . I think was like after two years or so.

SM: Oh.

IW: Yes. And then she met another Chinese man here in the Twin Cities and she got entangled with him and . . . and got involved. And . . .

SM: He was from China or . . .?

IW: Yes, he was from China, and she had known him from China.

SM: Oh . . .

IW: And they met here . . .

SM: Do you think she knew him before?

IW: Well, I don't know. I . . . I don't know about her. But she . . . I know that she . . . after she was here for a couple years, then she obtained her citizenship, and also she got a driver's license. She took . . . you know, made my brother do all these things for her to . . . so that she could become self-sufficient and more independent.

SM: Yes.

IW: Then she took up with this other man and had his child. And . . .

SM: Oh, before the divorce even?

IW: Yes.

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SM: Oh . . .

IW: Well, even before my . . . my brother didn't know anything about this going on, you know.

SM: Oh. Poor guy.

IW: And then my brother . . . and then she was pregnant with my brother's child after she had the second child.

SM: [Gasps] Oh!

IW: And she had an abortion. And so my brother really felt terrible about that.

SM: Hmmm.

IW: And then they got their divorce and she moved to New York.

SM: With this other guy?

IW: No. This other man was married, too. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh! So it wasn't a plan they had cooked up from back in Hong Kong or something.

IW: No. No, he was . . . Yes, but they had known each other, I guess, for some time.

SM: Oh.

IW: She moved to New York, and I don't know what her status is now. But, you know, she's a crafty girl. I mean, she was really . . .

SM: Got everything she wanted! [Chuckles]

IW: Yes! Yes, and she . . .

SM: Did she . . . is she unmarried now, or . . .?

IW: I think so. She . . . when she was with my brother, she got . . . she learned English, she got her driver's license, she became a citizen. And then she also brought all of her family over—with my brother's money.

SM: [Laughing] Oh, no!

IW: [Chuckles]

SM: Boy, she really was an opportunist, wasn't she?

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IW: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes.

SM: Her whole family traveled? [Chuckles]

IW: She brought her whole family. Yes, her mother . . . and I guess her father wasn't alive, but she brought her mother and her mother's sister and their kids, all their kids. It was five boys.

SM: The sister's kids?

IW: Yes, the sister's kids. I guess she had another sister, but her sister didn't want to come, so . . . [Chuckles]

SM: Well, that really was an unlucky situation for your brother, really.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: And it . . . well, was it someone your father had known or was it through a matchmaker?

IW: I think it was through a matchmaker.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: You know, and my . . . my father got to . . .

SM: Should demand your money back [laughter] or something.

IW: Yes. [Chuckles] Yes. My father got to know the matchmaker.

SM: Oh.

IW: And the matchmaker said, "Oh, she's a good match." And she was a little bit older than any of the other women that they had on the list, I guess.

SM: Yes.

IW: And my dad said, "Well, she is okay, because my son is older." You know, my brother didn't get married until he was, I think . . . [Unclear] was twenty-four, so he was twenty-six. And his wife was twenty-five.

SM: So she was a little older for Chinese standards.

IW: Yes. Yes. And see, I think the reason was that she didn't have a father.

SM: Oh.

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IW: And a lot of families in Hong Kong, they want, you know, to have both parents [unclear]. You know. And little did we know that the whole scheme was to do all that.

SM: Oh, boy.

IW: Well, you know . . .

[Dog barks]

IW: Oh. [Chuckles] Wait.

[Dog barks]

IW: Oh, he's here [unclear].

[Dog barks]

[Recording interruption]

SM: Well, are you and your sisters about equally Americanized, would you say? Or are you more than they are?

IW: I think I'm more than any of them, actually.

SM: Oh, that's interesting.

IW: Me and my youngest sister, I guess, are more.

SM: Ah.

IW: We're more Americanized. And I think both of us, we feel more comfortable when we are with . . . in a Caucasian setting.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: Than in a group of Chinese people. We just . . . we really don't feel that comfortable. Because there . . . you know, there's so many traditional things that, you know, when you're young and you're in a position . . . see, you have to, you know, show respect to the elders and so on.

SM: Oh, yes.

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IW: You come up to anyone who's older than you, you have to come up to them and just say hello and say their name, you know. And to me, and to both my sisters, you know, that is kind of . . .

SM: Hard to know . . .

IW: Hard to . . . well, yes, it's hard to know that. And it's also hard to *do* that because when you don't really feel like doing it.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And you . . . it's kind of like you pay your respects to the elder person who's in that . . . you know, like in party situations or when we have get-togethers, you know, with families and whatnot.

SM: Yes.

IW: Or, you know, there's always someone who's the oldest there and you have to [unclear] you have to say hi to them. Even though this man doesn't know you from Adam.

SM: I see.

IW: You know, he . . .

SM: He expects it though.

IW: Yes, he expects it. He expects it from all the . . . the younger people there.

SM: Yes.

IW: And my sister and I, we just feel that that's ridiculous, you know. [Chuckles] Because we don't know him.

SM: [Laughter]

IW: And, you know, we have to go up there and pay our respects.

SM: [Chuckles] So you feel sort of uncomfortable doing these things.

IW: Yes, we do. We do really feel uncomfortable.

SM: Yes. But your two middle sisters then, they are comfortable with that?

IW: I think they . . . yes, that they'll do it and they just . . . you know, I don't know for sure.

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SM: [Chuckles]

IW: But I mean, I think they'll do it and they'll feel, you know, that's okay.

SM: Yes.

IW: They feel at ease with that, you know. But we just really . . . you know, we've talked about before where we just . . . just feel really uneasy with having to do that.

SM: Yes.

IW: And, you know, people that we don't know that are supposed to be related to us somehow and we really don't how related and . . .

SM: Oh, they are supposed to be related though?

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: Yes. And some of them aren't related, but they have the same last name.

SM: Oh. Yes.

IW: And so, you know, they're part of the clan. And so then you also pay them respect.

SM: I see. These would be at family parties or . . .?

IW: Yes, and . . .

SM: Clan parties.

IW: Yes. Yes. Or just any, you know, like weddings or birthdays and things like that, you know. We're expected to do that. And I don't know, it's just . . . their expectations of you, I guess, is . . . is what I really . . . I just [unclear].

SM: And language divides you, too.

IW: And language, too, yes. We . . . you know, I speak Chinese but I . . . I don't speak it well enough to communicate with them. And so I feel uncomfortable.

SM: Do they make fun of it at all? [Chuckles]

IW: Well, sometimes they do. Yes, they'll laugh.

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SM: Someone told me that they laugh. [Chuckles]

IW: Oh, yes. Yes, sometimes they just . . .

SM: That would be embarrassing.

IW: Yes. Sometimes they just laugh with each other and they think we don't understand, you know.

SM: [Chuckles] But you do.

IW: But we do. We can understand it but we can't always speak it, you know.

SM: Yes. It's much easier to understand.

IW: Yes. Yes, and so they'll just kind of say, oh, that you know, there's *jook sing* and *jook kok*, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: *Jook sing* means you were born here. And *jook sing* is a hollow bamboo, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: And *jook kok* means you're the true bamboo, you know. So that's what . . . if they're saying . . . they always ask you [unclear] are you a *jook sing* or a *jook kok*? And *jook kok* means, you know, born in China, the *real* thing. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, that means born in China.

IW: Yes, and *jook sing* means you're . . . you know, you're just a hollow reed, you know. [Chuckles] And so you look Chinese on the outside but the inside, there's nothing there, you know.

SM: Well, the *jook sing* would mean a bamboo? And *jook kok* would mean a different kind of . . .?

IW: Yes, *jook* is bamboo.

SM: Oh.

IW: *Jook kok* means the real thing, you know, the real bamboo. Real.

SM: Oh, the real bamboo.

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IW: Yes, it's the solid bamboo is what it means.

SM: Oh.

IW: And then *jook sing* means it's bamboo that's hollow, you know. It's been dried, you know.

SM: Oh. *Oh*, I see. Oh, yes. I was thinking . . . I thought all bamboo was hollow but it isn't when it's fresh.

IW: No. Yes, fresh. Yes.

SM: Yes. Oh. Very interesting. [Laughing] Dried up.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Oh. So they wouldn't probably think that of your bigger . . . your two older brothers [unclear].

IW: Well, it's just a matter . . . it just depends on where they were born.

SM: Oh! So it isn't how Americanized you are, how well you speak or anything like that.

IW: Yes, right. Right.

SM: Oh . . . it's something you can't help. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, right. And then but, you know, they'll compliment you if you are a *jook sing*, if you're born here, but you can speak Chinese well enough to them. They'll say, oh, well then that they're really *jook kok*, you know.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: You know, they speak just like a real *jook kok*.

SM: Ah ha. Well, other people in the second generation, the younger ones in the families have mentioned this kind of thing, too.

IW: Yes.

SM: One said he was really uncomfortable when they'd sort of laugh at his . . .

IW: Pronunciation. Yes.

SM: [Unclear].

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IW: And their pronunciation of certain words, I . . . you know, they'll say that about . . . they won't say that to my face but just say it behind me. But I can hear them, and I . . . you know.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: I know what they're saying.

SM: Yes. Well, as he said, well, after all, I could speak better English than them, but they don't think about that. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: That's not the important thing here. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles] Well, I don't know if I asked you. Did your father belong to any traditional organizations like [unclear] or did he have . . .?

IW: He belonged to the Chinese Merchants Association for a while.

SM: Oh, CAAM? [CAAM is the Chinese American Association of Minnesota.]

IW: Yes.

SM: Oh, yes. Or no, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, was it?

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Okay.

IW: Whatever [unclear].

SM: The results of that Chinese [unclear].

IW: He belonged to whatever those . . . because he was a businessman.

SM: Oh, sure.

IW: And so he belonged to all those Chinese Merchants and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

SM: I see.

IW: He was active in it for a little while but not for a long time.

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SM: Yes. While he was in the business.

IW: Yes, while he was in business. Yes. He has different . . . you know, he's kind of a wild guy so he kind of tries to do things on his own.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: [Chuckles] And, you know, once he got out of business, he just . . . you know, he didn't associate really [unclear].

SM: It wasn't that useful then to him.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Well, is Mike . . .? I think he is also more comfortable with Caucasian [unclear].

IW: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes.

SM: Sort of an equal [unclear].

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes.

SM: I'm sure your son will be. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: But are there some things you would like to retain in your family with Keaton and so on?

IW: Oh, yes. Yes. You know, the Chinese . . . I guess . . . I guess I'd like him to have that, that respect, you know, for the older people. But I don't . . . you know. I don't feel that . . . [chuckles] that way, but I'd like to see him have that. And I don't know, I guess that's hypocritical to want your child to respect his elders and yet on the other hand, I mean, I don't . . .

SM: Well, I guess you could respect [unclear] going through all the rituals of it, I would think.

IW: Yes. Yes, right. Right. It's a lot of ritual and [unclear].

SM: Do you teach him Chinese at all?

IW: Yes. Yes, a little bit. The little I find, oh, I'd like him to know that.

SM: He's just learning to talk. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. [Chuckles] Yes.

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SM: Well, I'm sure you'll teach him his heritage [unclear].

IW: Yes. Oh, yes.

SM: Right. Well, do you have any feelings about who he should marry or just . . .?

IW: Well, I don't know. I . . . I don't know. I guess I don't expect him to marry a Chinese, you know. And I will just, you know, if he marries whoever he marries, that's fine with me.

SM: Would you be more comfortable if he married a Chinese?

IW: Yes, I suppose I would. A Chinese girl who was Americanized. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes. It would have to be, I suppose. Unless . . . well, you never know. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. But it doesn't really matter, I guess. Never really thought of it that much. [Chuckles] I mean, he's only two years old! [Unclear].

SM: I don't think you're planning his marriage quite yet. [Chuckles]

IW: [Chuckles]

SM: Well, were both of your brothers' marriages then arranged with matchmakers?

IW: Yes, they were both arranged. Yes. My brother and his wife, they get along marvelously. They're . . . my brother is the dominant person and my sister-in-law is, you know, very timid when it comes to him.

SM: This is your . . . Roger's?

IW: Yes. Right. She . . . well, she kind of lets him make all the decisions and she puts up with his temper tantrums and whatnot. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: You know. And he loves it that way, so . . . that works out. [Chuckles

SM: That works out well. [Chuckles] So it isn't a sort of equal kind of relationship?

IW: It's not, no. I don't think so.

SM: [Unclear] or something.

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IW: I don't think so because, you know, he . . . he likes being the boss. He's always . . . because he was the oldest in our family and he pretty much carried the load.

SM: He's used to that.

IW: Yes. Right.

SM: And it would be hard to break the pattern, I think. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, he made the decision. I was probably the one he had the hardest time with because I was . . .

SM: Incorrigible. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles] I would always question him. He'd ask me, you know, to do something. And I'd say, "Well, why?" And he said, "Because I said so. Now do it." You know, and . . . [Chuckles]

SM: The poor guy was in sort of a bad position himself. [Chuckles]

IW: [Chuckles] Yes. That's right. Yes.

SM: Well, how about now? Do you get along really well now or . . .?

IW: Well, we get along but . . .

SM: It still lingers. [Laughter]

IW: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes. He still wants to tell me what to do and when to do and how to do it.

SM: [Chuckles] Oh, geez.

IW: And I still say no. I . . . I mean, I want to know *why* he wants me to do it that way.

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: He wants to tell me, "Just do it." [Chuckles] You know.

SM: Did your second brother marry again or [unclear]?

IW: No, he's not. He's unmarried right now.

SM: And does your first brother have [unclear] also?

IW: Oh, yes. He has two . . . two children. He has a girl . . . a boy first and then a girl.

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SM: Oh, he did everything right. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: And do they speak Chinese?

IW: Yes, they do. [Unclear] probably speak more than I do now. I've kind of forgotten some of it because Mike doesn't speak any Chinese.

SM: Mike doesn't speak any?

IW: Well, he speaks some but, you know, not very much. And since, you know, we don't usually speak it that often together with each other, we kind of lose . . . you know, you kind of lose it.

SM: Yes. Right. It's hard to make an effort to . . .

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: But they usually speak English in your brother's home?

IW: Oh, yes. I think so. Yes.

SM: Did they go to Chinese school or just taught in the home?

IW: The children? I don't think so. He just kind of taught them at home.

SM: [Unclear] Well, that's pretty . . . Oh. Your brother has children, too, right?

IW: He has one child, yes.

SM: Does he stay with him then?

IW: He stays with the wife [unclear].

SM: Oh, stays with the wife.

IW: Yes, in New York. I've never . . . I saw him once when he was a little child when they first had him. But after that I haven't seen him again.

SM: That's really too bad.

IW: Yes.

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SM: Well, we drained you dry. [Chuckles]

IW: Oh. [Chuckles]

SM: Let me just see if there's something that....

[Recording interruption]

IW: ...for, you know, well, there are some Chinese friends, too. But I mean, they are not . . .

SM: Oh, yes. You do seem to have some close friends among second generation and so on.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: Yes, and relatives, too, I suppose.

IW: Yes. Right. Yes.

SM: Well, the Chinese community is growing so fast now. Do you have any contact with these new arrivals or is that just sort of a group out there? [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, there's a big group there. I don't know . . .

SM: I guess that . . . I saw in the 1980 census figures that the Chinese population in Minnesota grew by a hundred percent from 1970 to 1980.

IW: Wow.

SM: Can you imagine? So that's, you know, a very large portion of the community.

IW: Hmmm. [Unclear].

SM: But so far we're . . . [chuckles] I don't think anybody knows really much about . . . I mean, what's happening.

IW: Yes.

SM: [Unclear] the immigrants themselves, probably.

IW: Yes.

SM: To know what kind of patterns there are developing.

IW: Yes. I don't know.

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SM: Or who's coming or anything. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. No, I don't know whether they are, you know, Cantonese speaking or Mandarin speaking.

SM: Yes.

IW: And that's kind of important, you know, when we, you know, look at . . .

SM: Yes, that would be.

IW: When you say Chinese people, you say, well, are they Cantonese speaking or Mandarin speaking?

SM: Yes, it's a big division.

IW: Because, yes . . . because generally, you know, you think of Mandarin as more like the elite class and where the Cantonese are farmer and the peasant class.

SM: Yes. Yes.

IW: You know, so . . .

SM: I imagine quite a few might be people that are coming as students.

IW: Oh, yes.

SM: And then marrying . . . bringing their fiancé or bringing their wife.

IW: Oh, yes.

SM: I did go through a lot of marriage records in Hennepin County and the others surrounding and it just seemed from the information that's on the marriage license applications that a lot of them seem to be associated with the university here.

IW: Mmmm.

SM: So they could be either Cantonese or Mandarin speakers, of course, but maybe there are quite a few Northern Chinese coming.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: [Unclear] know for sure.

IW: Yes.

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SM: It will be a while before we can figure that out. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. That's why we thought, you know, having the Asian American Alliance was . . . would be a real . . . you know, like a center where the Chinese could go, like a Chinese community center.

SM: Yes. Right.

IW: We were thinking of doing that with MAAP [Minnesota Asian American Project].

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, the project to develop some area which we could call like an Asian town, you know.

SM: Yes.

IW: Where we could have, you know, like a closer knit Asian community. So we'd know who is coming and who isn't.

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, doing what and where and . . . [Chuckles]

SM: You called it an Asian town?

IW: Like . . . yes. An Asia town or something.

SM: Would it be residential, too, then or business and cultural and . . .?

IW: Well, we were thinking . . . yes. Like everything.

SM: Yes.

IW: We were just . . . we drew up some plans and sat back and kind of, you know, brainstormed and dreamed, I guess.

SM: Yes.

IW: You know, we wanted to have like . . .

SM: I know that Frank Tsai was really interested in that.

IW: Yes. Yes, we wanted to have like a . . . maybe a Japanese garden there.

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SM: Oh.

IW: We wanted it to be like a community center where we could have places for meetings.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: We wanted to . . . well, we could have like a restaurant there [unclear].

SM: Sure. Businesses?

IW: Yes, business, small business. And we thought it would be nice to have maybe a resource center, you know.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: Like for incoming Asians, how they . . . where they can buy groceries, you know, and . . . even a grocery store there would be nice to [unclear].

SM: Yes.

IW: But just, you know, where to seek help if they need . . . you know, need that. For help housing or just to learn the language or any other needs that they might have, we thought that would be a nice thing to set up.

SM: Yes.

IW: But it just never took off. We wanted to have that area . . . if we could raise the money somehow, get that area over by the Coca Cola Bottling Plant over there, which [unclear].

SM: Oh, is that where was to be?

IW: Yes, the Saint Anthony Main area.

SM: Oh . . .

IW: Minneapolis was going to bid on it but . . . no. They weren't going to bid on it. It was some other company, individual private company that was going to bid on that land. That area was going to be open for bids.

SM: Ah.

IW: But we found out it was . . . if the city bid on it, then we just wouldn't have a chance, you know.

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SM: Oh.

IW: And but then we did find out another individual company was bidding on it and the city didn't want it, and then they changed their minds, you know.

SM: They decided to [unclear]. [Sighs] Too bad.

IW: And we couldn't get our money then, because that was . . . you know, that would be the best area, more centrally located.

SM: Yes, that would have been really good.

IW: Yes. It would have. It was really wonderful.

SM: It was really disappointing for a lot of people.

IW: Yes. So things kind of fell apart then. After Frank left, he didn't . . . you know, he put so much effort into that.

SM: I know. But he said though that if he thought it would . . . even at the last minute if he thought it *could* succeed, he'd stay. But I think he got pretty discouraged.

IW: Yes. I don't [unclear].

SM: Who knows, it might revive again in five years or something. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes.

SM: If all these people are coming that we hear about. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, right, get more people to . . .

SM: Of course, the new immigrants don't have that much time or energy to put into that kind of thing. Or maybe they do, I don't know.

IW: I don't know.

SM: I mean, they might be . . . busy surviving though.

IW: They might be . . . it might be even more of a . . . yes. Yes.

SM: Maybe though. I don't know.

IW: They might have more incentive to do it, too, because it would be like a centrally located spot for them to congregate and . . .

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SM: Oh, that's true. They might *need* it, of course, more than those others.

IW: Yes. Yes.

SM: We'll see what happens. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: Well, I think that was about all I was going to ask you. Oh. I was going to ask you just to clear up what you said about where your family lived on the Olson Highway.

IW: Yes.

SM: Was that a public housing thing?

IW: Yes. Yes. Governmental.

SM: Oh. Yes. I see. Were there other Chinese there at all or . . .?

IW: Mmmm. Not . . . no. No.

SM: Not really.

IW: It was just . . . just our family. I don't know why they . . . I think it was like after the laundry closed down and we had no other place to go. And so it was like a temporary thing.

SM: Yes. Sure.

IW: Because, you know, my father was not the type to take charity, you know. He felt that was . . . charity.

SM: Well, that wasn't exactly a charity, I mean . . .

IW: Yes, but . . .

SM: There were costs.

IW: Yes, right. But, you know, he didn't . . . he didn't . . . he never liked that type of thing, you know, where people would give him things.

SM: Yes. Actually, it's hard to get into them anyway, I suppose.

IW: Oh.

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SM: I mean, there's usually really long . . . I don't know what the situation was then. But there's certainly long lists now.

IW: Oh, really?

SM: But was it fairly pleasant there or . . .?

IW: They didn't like it. They didn't . . .

SM: Or you just saw it as a kind of temporary thing?

IW: Yes, it was a temporary thing. They didn't like it because, you know, they cooked their Chinese food.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: And they had complaints from a lot of neighbors there.

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, the smells of the . . . you know, they like the salted fish, and I guess that had the real . . . I remember that when I was young that they said the neighbors complained about it.

SM: Oh, that's too bad.

IW: And then when we moved into our house, our own house . . .

SM: You could do what you like. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes. They could do that.

SM: I suppose because they were so close together.

IW: Yes, the houses were right [unclear].

SM: I didn't know salted fish smelled that particularly. I remember liking to eat it a lot [chuckles] when we were little.

IW: [Unclear]. [Chuckles]

SM: We'd always be really happy when our parents went away, we would eat with the amah [nanny]. And she always had that. [Chuckles]

IW: Oh. [Chuckles]

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SM: Because I guess it was a really cheap food then.

IW: Yes. Yes. You have to kind of culture a taste for it. Mike doesn't like it at all.

SM: Oh, he doesn't.

IW: I love it.

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, because it kind of reminds me of when I was a kid to eat that stuff. But he . . . yes, he won't even let me cook it in the house.

SM: Oh, really. [Laughter]

IW: It smells.

SM: Oh, it does have a strong smell then.

IW: Yes, it does really smell.

SM: I don't remember that at all.

IW: Yes.

SM: Hmmm. [Chuckles]

IW: It's not unpleasant to me because I've smelled it ever since I was a child, but . . .

SM: Yes.

IW: To him it's really unpleasant. [Chuckles]

SM: Well, it seems as though Mike is more Americanized than his brother. Is he? I mean, I haven't met his brother, but what I've heard about him, that he speaks Chinese or something. Does he?

IW: His brother Dennis?

SM: Yes.

IW: Yes, he speaks Chinese. Yes.

SM: Oh.

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IW: I think Dennis is really . . .

SM: He's just more interested in it or . . .?

IW: More . . . yes. I think Dennis is more interested in it than Mike.

SM: Yes.

IW: But he just isn't terribly interested. I mean, he may be, but [unclear] rebellious type, too.

SM: Since he was the oldest son, he had so much on his shoulders. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles]

SM: Poor guy.

IW: Right. Yes.

SM: Yes. There were just a couple of other questions when I looked over your interview.

IW: Yes.

SM: Did you say that in Kindergarten you didn't have teasing? It wasn't until a little bit later?

IW: Well, I didn't notice it until [unclear].

SM: Oh, you didn't think about it, I suppose.

IW: Yes. I didn't really think that much of it because I just thought I was like everyone else, you know. And it didn't dawn on me that I was different. I thought that was . . .

SM: I suppose maybe Kindergarteners are young enough that they wouldn't maybe *know* the things to say or whatever.

IW: Yes. Yes, because it was . . . I went to this elementary school, Blaine School. It's torn down now, but there were a lot of black kids there, and Hispanic kids, and, you know, there was like a mix there. So I don't think they really made that much of a difference of it until they got a little bit older.

SM: Yes. So there you did experience it, at Blaine School?

IW: Yes.

SM: Yes.

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IW: Yes, I remember third grade [unclear] names they would call like . . . you know, they called me jap, you know, and they . . . [Chuckles]

SM: They didn't even get the ethnic group right. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, right. [Chuckles] Yes. I mean, if they're going to call me an ethnic name, they ought to . . . [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, and they did in junior high, too, and in high school. Especially like junior high, you know.

SM: Especially junior high, you said?

IW: Yes.

SM: Of course that's a difficult age anyway.

IW: Yes. Yes. But see, we . . . we had moved to Northeast then, you know.

SM: Oh.

IW: And Northeast Minneapolis was so closed to any type of . . . you know, different group, it's just either you're Polish and white [chuckles] or . . .

SM: Actually, it's an immigrant neighborhood, too.

IW: It is. It is.

SM: But it's all white.

IW: Yes. Right. And . . .

SM: Yes. That's funny.

IW: I remember in ninth grade, I think it was a black family that lived on this one corner in Northeast Minneapolis and they were harassed *so* much that they eventually moved.

SM: Oh. [Gasps]

IW: So it really was terrible. When we lived up on Thirty-Sixth and Northeast, our neighbors, they would make all these . . . I don't know if I told you that last time.

SM: No.

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IW: They'd make these little remarks. And this one family right next to us, they burned our grass.

SM: No kidding!

IW: To try and get rid of us.

SM: That's terrible!

IW: Did I . . . I didn't tell you?

SM: No, you didn't.

IW: Oh. Well, they . . . they themselves were immigrants. They came from . . .

SM: That's [unclear].

IW: Yes, they came from Poland.

SM: [Exasperated sigh]

IW: And but I guess they just didn't want any Chinese in their neighborhood. But the family next to them, they were Italian. And the family on the other side of our house, they were Polish. And, you know, there were some that were Scottish. But they were all, you know, immigrants. Their parents were like first generation here, you know.

SM: Yes. The parents that were living there then? Or were they second generation?

IW: Yes. The parents that were living there then were first generation, a lot of them.

SM: Were first generation. [Sighs] Oh!

IW: Yes, a lot of them. I can remember that, you know, they'd make all these ethnic foods and stuff like that for their kids. And I remember them being, you know, first generation meaning the first born in this country.

SM: Yes.

IW: Yes.

SM: Ah, that's a difficult term, I realize. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. Yes.

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SM: If you come when you're twelve, what are you? [Chuckles]

IW: Yes, right. [Chuckles] Yes, right. So, you know, it was a real ethnic neighborhood, just a different neighborhood.

SM: That's really something.

IW: But they just . . . you know, they would make comments . . .

SM: So it was racial rather than ethnic.

IW: Yes. Yes. Yes, that's right. Racist. Because they would make these comments to us so that we could hear them. We would be in the house eating supper . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: And there would . . . our window was right outside their back door. And they would say, "Oh, look at those chinks, they're using chopsticks, you know. They can't even use forks, you know."

SM: You're kidding!

IW: And you know, oh no, they were just . . . they were terrible. But the thing is that that Polish family that lived there, they were . . . they were [unclear] spoken, they spoke with broken English. They had adopted the two kids.

SM: Oh.

IW: And the two kids were the *real terrible* people, you know. They just . . .

SM: Oh . . .

IW: They were the ones that . . . I think it was the son that set the fire to the grass in our backyard. They just . . . they threw some gasoline on the backyard. You could tell that, you know, it was burned where the gasoline had landed and all of the grass was burned. And then the next day they, you know, while were all asleep, they threw a match down there.

SM: At night?

IW: Yes, it was like early morning or something. And then they'd [unclear] burn our grass. And we didn't even know until we got up the next morning and we smelled smoke. I mean, the smell was what probably . . .

SM: They could have burned your house down!

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IW: Yes, it could have. Yes. He was lucky he didn't do that, otherwise, you know, he would have been . . .

SM: Was he just a kid?

IW: Yes. Well, I think he was about eighteen when I was [unclear].

SM: Oh, not really a kid.

IW: No, he was old enough to know better. And he had a motorcycle. And he would come . . .

SM: Ugh. That type. [Chuckles]

IW: Yes. [Chuckles] And our bedrooms were right outside their driveway, so it was a strange situation. Our house was on the corner here. And, you know, our house was this way on the street [unclear] their driveway was here. And then our backyard—it was a little, small backyard—it was right here next to their garage. So he'd drive in every day with his motorcycle around two in the morning.

SM: Into your yard?

IW: Yes, he would just drive right in. And, you know, my father was . . . you know, he didn't know what to say. I mean, he didn't know if he should call the police, because if he did, they would just harass us all the more.

SM: Oh.

IW: And my mother was just terrified of him. She couldn't speak English, you know, and she would just yell back at them in Chinese, you know, if they said something to her.

SM: Oh. [Chuckles] That was a good idea.

IW: You know. [Chuckles] She would yell back at them in Chinese. [Chuckles] Otherwise, we got along with the other neighbors. Kids, we'd play with, you know, the other neighbors and stuff. But those were the only people. They just did *not* like us living next door to them.

SM: Mainly . . . it was that mainly one family that was bad?

IW: Yes. That one family.

SM: Or were there others, too, that . . .?

IW: Well, there were, you know, others that, you know, called us names and stuff, but they were not people that lived in our immediate neighborhood.

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SM: Oh. Oh, I see.

IW: The people that lived in our immediate neighborhood were really fairly nice to us. It was just that one family. I mean, they didn't associate with us. They never tried to talk to us or anything, they just kind of . . .

SM: Ignored you?

IW: Yes, ignored us. [Chuckles] But the other family actively tried to get us out of there. And I . . . you know, I tell people that, and they just think, oh, how could they do that at that time, you know. Because that was like 1960 and . . .

SM: Oh.

IW: You know, it was a fairly . . . it's a . . . it was a middle class neighborhood.

[Recording interruption]

SM: Did your mother have friends in the neighborhood?

IW: No, she didn't. You know, she couldn't speak English anyway, so that was difficult for her to try and communicate with them. Her only social outlet was talking on the phone with friends. Or, you know, visiting them if my father would take her there. But [unclear].

SM: He didn't usually want to take her?

IW: No. He didn't . . . he didn't want to socialize with her friends for some reason.

SM: Oh. Oh, they were different from his friends? They weren't the wives of his friends then.

IW: Yes, right. Oh, right. See, his friends were like the businessmen.

SM: Oh, I see.

IW: And they were like . . . oh, his gambling buddies, you now.

SM: I see.

IW: Her friends were more . . . oh, gee. They were more housewives, you know. And so he just didn't socialize with them and he didn't . . . he didn't particularly socialize with the husbands of her friends either because they were like . . . one of them was a professional man, he was a dentist and the other one . . . I don't know. I guess he was a restaurant owner, too, but he didn't have much in common with my dad. My dad was a gambler and this guy wasn't. He was a homebody and, you know, he didn't . . .

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SM: Where did she meet her friends? Or they were relatives?

IW: Some of them were relatives but a lot of them she knew from China.

SM: Oh.

IW: And they just happened to migrate to the same area.

SM: I see.

IW: Or they were, you know, classmates of hers.

SM: From the village?

IW: The village, yes. Or they were related to her or knew somebody who knew somebody from her village.

SM: Oh.

IW: And, you know, they'd just start talking and become friends that way. But normally my mom is not a real outgoing person. She doesn't go out of her way to make friends with people.

SM: So would these have been people that contacted her?

IW: Hmmm.

SM: When they knew she was here?

IW: I suppose they would, yes. I would suppose you would say, yes, they contacted her.

SM: I see.

IW: And then vice versa.

SM: So they were relatives not of your father's family but of her family.

IW: Yes. Yes. Or just friends from her village, too.

SM: Oh, yes.

IW: But not from his village.

SM: Well, who did the grocery shopping? Did your father take her to do it?

IW: Yes, my father would take her or my brother would take her.

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SM: I see.

IW: That's how anything ever got done was if my brother or my dad did it when we were young, you know.

SM: Oh, yes. But she would go with them?

IW: Yes. Yes. When we got older, you know, I think we all kind of . . . were responsible for our own . . . you know, when we were like twelve . . . ten or twelve, I believe, we had to save up our own money to buy our own clothes and buy our own shoes, and you know, our own personal things. And whatever we wanted, our toys, our own toys.

SM: Oh. [Chuckles]

IW: The only [chuckles] only time we got toys, you know, that we didn't have to buy ourselves . . . for ourselves were, you know, like during Christmas.

SM: Oh. Oh, so they did give you gifts of toys for Christmas?

IW: Oh, yes. Yes. Like my dad bought us bicycles, I remember that for Christmas one year.

SM: Oh. Hmmm.

IW: But like clothes and personal things we'd have to buy ourselves by saving up money. They did give us an allowance, fifty cents a week, and that was for . . . we'd have to do something for it. I mean, if we didn't do it, or, you know, like if our job was to take the garbage out and if we didn't do that, then we would not get our fifty cents, you know, for that week. [Chuckles]

SM: [Chuckles]

IW: And we only took out the garbage two days out of [unclear].

SM: [Chuckles]

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