

Shades of L.A. Interview Project  
Interview Summary  
Lillian **Wong** - 9/23/93  
Interviewer: Amy Kitchener  
1 Cassette Tape

---

**SIDE A, TAPE 1**

000 Silence

002 Introduction

005 Born March 31, 1911 in Los Angeles. Father was a herbalist. He came from China to L.A., set up an office, prescribed herbs for caucasian patients. Mother born in Ventura. Parents married in L.A. in 1910

014 Father's business located on Hill st. btw. 9th and 10th. Office was downstairs from where they lived, which is where she was born. Many caucasian patients referred to her father by a man who was a conductor on the southern Pacific Railway. Lots of people on trains were sick, coming from East for warm climate, hoping to get well. The conductor had been cured of a tumor by her father.

036 Family took Chinese medicine when growing up for colds, sore throats, flu. Many patients had digestive ailments. Chinese herbs are good treatment for such problems. Some patients had rheumatism, ulcers, sores. Father made ointments for these. Lots of Japanese children had rashes on their cheeks. Her father had a treatment for that as well.

052 Father learned his trade in canton, China--studied under a doctor and read medical books. once in U.S., had herbs sent from China. Some herbs he got from herb store in Chinatown. could tell what illness people had by their pulse.

064 Her mother sometimes translated/interpreted for her father who didn't know too much English. She also helped weigh the herbs. There was a room with drawers with different kinds of herbs. He would combine the herbs and cook them into a tea. Remedies were helpful--did work.

076 Mother spoke English and Chinese. She hadn't really known her grandparents. She only saw grandfather for a few years before he passed away. Maternal grandmother passed away when her mother was young. Father's parents were in China, but had died at an early age.

084 On mother's side, grandparents came to U.S. first. came to San Francisco and then to Ventura. Grandfather was a cook. He would go with harvesters. When they harvested wheat he would go along and cook for them. When harvest over, he was

a carpenter--he could do wood work. Built furniture and helped people build houses. Not sure when maternal grandparents came to the U.S. Her mother was born in 1888. Her eldest sister born in 1878. They must have come to the U.S. in the 1870s.

- 103 Mother's side of the family came to U.S. to make a better living. Father came because he had relatives here and he wanted to make a living by being a doctor. There was a Chinese community here and many believed in Chinese medicine more than in Western medicine. Had good clientele in Chinatown. He had an office there and he would go there in the evenings. In the daytime, he had American patients. The Chinatown office might have been on Marchasalt (?) st. Aunt lived on Apaplasa Street.
- 120 Has three step brothers who were born in China. Father's first wife died in China. Married her mother in 1910 in Los Angeles. Lillian is the oldest of that marriage. She has a younger brother and two sisters. All were born in Los Angeles.
- 128 First memories of Los Angeles. Sky was blue all the time. There were street cars. They lived on Hill and so they went every where by street car. There were also horse carriages. Would go to the MacArthur Park with their father on the street cars. Also went to Exposition Park and Lincoln Park. They would play in park and buy ice cream or pop corn, go to the museum in Exposition Park.
- 147 Father had a farm in the Valley--grew asparagus, corn, had fruit trees. step-brother managed it. Every weekend the family would go there. The first farm was in studio City. The other farm was in Sepulveda.
- 160 Important experiences. Remembers the end of World War I. People were selling extra papers. Soldiers coming home. There were a lot of parades then. On July 4th, they would go to see the fireworks. They also went to Venice Beach and Ocean Park, sometimes Long Beach, walk on the pier, etc.
- 177 She went to elementary school on Grand Street near 8th st. downtown. They moved to 14th Place--one block beyond Pico--between Main and Broadway. Then they transferred to 16th Street School, where the trade school now is. They went to Sentous Junior High, the convention center is located there now. Then, she went to L.A. High and U.S.C.
- 192 In elementary school, she was the only Chinese. Mother took her to school and would walk her home. They didn't socialize with the other students much. There was prejudice. Students would tease them: Chink, Chink

- Chinaman sitting on a rail, along came a railroad and chopped off his tail; Chinese eat mice. She didn't have any close friends. Didn't respond to taunts. Tried to do well in her studies and she got good grades. At St. Judith's Junior High her experiences were the same. At L.A. High she was the only Chinese girl. In those days, it was a snobby school. It was on the West side, there were hardly any blacks, it was in a good neighborhood. Had very few friends. Recalls going to bleachers for some event and no one would walk with her. People would isolate themselves and wouldn't socialize much with the Chinese. There were a few Japanese.
- 242 She joined the World Friendship Club at L.A. High--which had lots of different people in it. They studied about different nationalities and tried to learn about the culture of different cultures. She also enjoyed listening to debates after school. Enjoyed studying Spanish and wrote a Spanish column regularly for the paper. She had good grades and belonged to the Scholarship club.
- 271 Chinese community was scattered more then, not like today in Alhambra or Monterey Park. There were fewer families and they lived scattered in different neighborhoods.
- 281 Community Organizations. Men had organizations that they belonged to according to their last names. Her father was in the Four Brothers society--it is believed that there were people of four surnames who were brothers in China. If you have one of those surnames, you could join the society. Had benefits, sometimes sponsored Chinese Operas. There were women's clubs too. Her mother belonged to a Chinese Women's Club. There were Chinese American boys clubs--Citizen's Club (Chinese American Citizens League)--her brother wasn't a member because he went to China when he was 18 years old.
- 317 She went to the Chinese Congregational Church. Initially it was located in Chinatown and then it had services in the big Congregational church on Flower or Hope Street. Built their own church on Ninth Street near San Pedro st. There were three denominations: Methodist, Presbyterians, Congregationalists. All had missions in Chinatown. They had English classes, women's societies, Sunday school. Kids went for Sunday School.
- 342 When she was very young she would go to Chinatown to visit her aunt (mother's sister) and cousins who lived there. Every Saturday or Sunday, would go with her mother to spend the day with her aunt. Her father would see patients in Chinatown in the evening and accompany them home. When she was older, she would drive her father to buy medicine or

- groceries in Chinatown. Her father didn't think Chinatown was a good place for girls. Father was very protective.
- 366 Family moved from 14th Street to 16th Place because the owner wanted the house back so it could be torn down and made into a parking lot. It was very difficult to find a house in those days after World War I. There were fewer houses for rent. Also, because they were Chinese they could not buy property in California at the time. Mother would read paper to find out where houses for rent. When she would go to see the houses advertised she would be told that it had just been rented. Actually they didn't want to rent to Chinese. The house they finally found only had 2 bedrooms, and eleven people crowded in there (her family and her aunt's family). Other Chinese also had trouble finding houses. If a Chinese person bought a house, the next-door neighbor might sell their house.
- 418 Property could be bought under the names of American born children. Her family bought their farm under either her name or her cousin's name. Later, they bought a house on 48th Street (between Main and Broadway) under her name. Then, bought a house on Main Street near Vernon Avenue where her father practiced his business. Clients would still keep up with him when they moved.
- 454 Description of her father's business. How he brewed and served the medicine, bottled it. She would talk with patients when they came, but she never helped in the business.
- 469 Graduated from L.A. High in 1929. That fall, entered USC. Finished in 1933. She majored in Sociology. Knew it was hard for a Chinese person to find work in L.A. Thought she could be a social worker or go to China and teach English--minored in English. Her father always spoke of China in terms of "going home" wanted to retire there. Her father had kept in touch with relatives in China, sent money. There were 3 mothers, 12 brothers, and 6 sisters in her father's family. Family quarrels over inheritance. Her father helped relatives come to L.A.--nephews and grand nephews. some would work on his farm, other became cooks, waiters, bar boys in restaurants, others worked in his herb business.
- 432 Jobs available for Chinese Americans. Caroline Chan (died at 101) was the first Chinese teacher in the public school system--elementary school. But it was hard to find work in teaching. For this reason, many girls didn't go to college. would work for their fathers or in a restaurant. There weren't many opportunities. Men had problems too finding work.

- 556 Father encouraged kids to study a lot. All went to college. Experiences at use. There was a Chinese Students Club with 30 members. Very few were American born.
- 582 Parents' expectations for her. In Junior High, father had suggested she learn Spanish so she could help him if he opened a store in Mexicantown. But otherwise, her father hadn't expected her to help out.
- 603 Traditional roles for women. Women were quiet, good house wives, not many had careers in those days--some sold insurance or worked in factories, or had home businesses, restaurants.
- 636 On the Chinese New Years, had big meal. Observed Thanksgiving, X-mas. Also, had a lot of guests from China--Diplomats and scholars. Her father's hobby was cooking--enjoyed inviting people to the house for meals. Would prepare sharks fin, sea cucumber, chicken, ducks. Her family always had Chinese food at night. In the daytime, they would eat other things.
- 705 A month after she finished USC, she got married. Her husband was a student at CAL Tech--got Civil Engineering **M.A.** Met through Chinese student Club. They were married in July and then left for China in 1933 so her husband could find work. Her husband worked in Canton as a Civil Engineer and taught. The war started in 1937.

747 End of SIDE A, TAPE 1

---

**SIDE B, TAPE 1**

- 000 Silence
- 002 During the war, they went into the interior--West China. Husband worked on the Hunan-Burma Highway--used to transport ammunition from Burma to China. In 1937 they moved to Hong Kong because Canton had been bombed. She taught school there until she joined her husband in 1939. Their daughter was born in 1934.
- 021 When they first went to Canton, it was very westernized. Baptist church, schools in that area. A lot of people from America came there to give their kids an Chinese education. So transition wasn't hard. But in Hunan, conditions weren't very good. stayed there from 1939 to 1947. Husband worked on Highway, railway, and then worked on airfields for the American air force so they could bomb Japan from China.
- 050 Impressions in China. Sanitary conditions weren't good. In the interior of the country, no English speaking people

- except the G.I. 's. She had to learn another dialect in Hunan. Had learned Chinese growing up and in school.
- 075 Similarities and differences between Chinese Americans and Chinese. American born were considered by the Chinese to be more independent.
- 092 Son born in 1941 in Hunan, near the Burma border.
- 096 After World War II ended, went to another province where her husband was designing a bridge. Parents sent money for her to return in 1948--she returns with her son. In 1949, communists came and her husband, mother-in-law and daughter evacuated to Hong Kong. Had to start all over when he left China--wasn't recognized by the British government since he was American-educated. She joined her husband in Hong Kong and stayed until 1950.
- 136 After having been away 15 years, she experienced culture shock returning to Los Angeles. The city had grown. She had returned to L.A. via boat. She was very disoriented because everything was different.
- 158 Returned to Hong Kong in 1950. In 1952, her daughter graduated from High School--went to Texas for college. Lillian began to teach school again. When her daughter finished college (East Texas Baptist College and then San Francisco state), she got married. When her baby was 1 years old, they visited their parents in Hong Kong. They stayed and worked in Hong Kong. Son came to college at Redlands in 1961.
- 182 Family has gone back and forth between U.S. and China a lot. When Lillian's brother finished L.A. High, he went to China to study Chinese. Father had encouraged them to keep ties with China--he had wanted to return. Her brother studied medicine in China, did residency in the U.S. Her step brother is also a doctor. He came from China when he was 10 or 11, went to high school here, and attended USC, U.Penn, and Georgetown U. He went to China and worked in a hospital there.
- 213 Some parents in the U.S. took their children to China for a Chinese education and left them there. Why did parents want children to receive a Chinese education? It's hard to learn the language and the writing.
- 232 When she was growing up her family maintained some Chinese traditions--how to behave towards adults, guests, other family members.
- 261 Her mother was American born but she was very Chinese. They

always spoke Chinese at home.

- 280 When she was back in the U.S. between 1948 and 1950, got a job in a sewing factory--inspecting nylon panties--downtown. Mostly Chinese women, some Mexican women worked there. She was paid 85 cents an hour--\$28/week.
- 313 Not much relations between Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans in Los Angeles.
- 319 Her husband is fourth generation Baptist so she joined the Baptist church. In L.A. they attend a Chinese Baptist church in Monterey. Their church used to be in Chinatown on Yale street. In 1988, bought property on Pomona Blvd. between Atlantic and Garfield. It's not a large church.
- 335 Was in the U.S. in the beginning of the Great Depression. It was difficult for her father to pay the tuition at USC. He made a lot of sacrifices for them to go to college.
- 352 Most important event in her life was getting married.
- 354 She feels she is very Chinese in that she is submissive to her husband. Husband was involved in the men's department of the Baptist World Alliance--he was elected president of it. They travelled a lot for the Alliance between 1970 and 1980. She feels that assisting and accompanying her husband was her most important work.
- 388 Description of what they would do on these trips for the Baptist World Alliance. They went all around the world--to places where Chinese had never been. People had never seen Chinese people before in some of the places. Her husband's hobby is photography. They have pictures from all their trips.
- 428 In 1982, returned to the U.S. to live. But they had returned to visit several times--in 1960, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1970s--almost every year. The main office of the Baptist World Alliance was in D.C.
- 447 When she returned in 1960, she noticed a lot of changes. Had been in South America for a meeting. stayed two months in Los Angeles.
- 466 Daughter lives in New Jersey and her son lives in Los Angeles. They did not decide to return because Hong Kong is being returned to the People's Republic in 1997--it was time to retire and be near their family. Lillian's family is all in the Los Angeles area.
- 483 Now, they are very involved in their church as well as the

activities in the building(?) they are living in now. They like it because they are near the Chinese community--near restaurants, supermarkets, their church.

539 End of interview  
Remainder of tape is blank



LOS ANGELES PUBLIC LIBRARY  
SHADES OF L.A. INTERVIEW PROJECT  
TRANSCRIBED EXCERPTS

ACCESSION#

INTERVIEWEE: Lillian Wong  
INTERVIEWER: Amy Kitchener  
DATE: September 23, 1993  
LOCATION: Alhambra, CA  
ETHNICITY: Chinese American  
OTHERS PRESENT: None  
TRANSCRIBER: Sojin Kim

INTERVIEW NUMBER: SH-  
NUMBER OF DAT TAPES: 1  
NUMBER OF CASSETTE TAPES: 1

K: Kitchener  
W: Wong

These excerpts have been selected for the purposes and use of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection. They represent only small portions of the tape recorded interviews available for public use. Researchers are advised to refer to the actual tape recorded interviews.

---

Note: Interviews are recorded on DAT (Digital Audio Tape) and transferred to standard cassette tape for transcribing and listening purposes. THE three digit numbers are indexed from the cassette recording and not the original DAT recording. THESE numbers may be used as a guide for locating indexed information on the cassette tapes. In some cases, the numbers on the transcript may not correspond exactly to the counter readings on the cassette player.

---

**SIDE A, TAPE 1**

000 Silence

002 Introduction

LW: 005 I was born March 31, 1911.

AK: And where was that?

W: In LOS Angeles.

K: And who were your parents, and where were they from?

W: **My** father came from China. He was an Herbalist and he came to Los Angeles to set up an office where saw caucasian patients and prescribed herbs for them. My mother was born in Ventura. And they were married in Los Angeles in 1910.

K: And where was your father's business located?

W: It was located on Hill Street near 9th--between 9th and 10th in downtown Los Angeles. And that's where I was born.

K: At the family home--you also lived there?

W: Yes. It was an old Victorian house. The office was downstairs and we lived upstairs.

K: Did he also serve the Chinese American community?

W: **My** father?

K: Yeah, in his business.

W: Yes. It was located right in the downtown and so Americans would go to him for herbs.

K: Would it be their first exposure to Chinese exposure? This is intriguing to me how that worked?

W: I think most of them were. They were recommended by a friend who worked on the southern Pacific Railway. He was a conductor and he would see sick people coming to California for their health from the cold climate of the East and hoping to get well. And he would recommend Chinese herbs to them because he himself was cured. He had a big tumor and my father cured him of that. And so for every kind of illness, he himself would come to my father. And so he recommended lots and lots of people in that way.

036 Family took Chinese medicine when growing up for colds, sore throats, flu. Many patients had digestive ailments. Chinese herbs are good treatment for such problems. Some patients had rheumatism, ulcers, sores. Father made ointments for these. Lots of Japanese children had rashes on their cheeks. Her father had a treatment for that as well.

052 Father learned his trade in Canton, China--studied under a doctor and read medical books. Once in U.S., had herbs sent from China. Some herbs he got from herb store in Chinatown. could tell what illness people had by their pulse.

064 Her mother sometimes translated/interpreted for her father who didn't know too much English. She also helped weigh the herbs. There was a room with drawers with different kinds of herbs. He would combine the herbs and cook them into a tea. Remedies were helpful--did work.

076 Mother spoke English and Chinese. She hadn't really known her grandparents. She only saw grandfather for a few years before he passed away. Maternal grandmother passed away when her mother was young. Father's parents were in China, but had died at an early age.

K: 084 On your mother's side of the family of the family, who was the first person to come to the United States?

W: **My** grandparents. They came first to San Francisco and then to Ventura.

K: And what did they do there?

W: My grandfather was a cook. He would go with the harvesters. When they harvested wheat, they would bring him along and he would cook for them away from Ventura. And when the wheat harvest was over or whatever harvest was over, he would come back to Ventura and he could do woodwork. He was a carpenter, besides. So he built chairs and tables and helped people build houses.

K: What year do you think it was about that your maternal parents came to the United states?

W: I have no idea. My mother was born in 1888 and her eldest sister was born ten years before that, 1878. So they came to America in the 1870s.

K: 103 And do you know the reasons why they decided to come?

W: I think to make a better living.

K: What about for your father?

W: **My** father, yes he had relatives here and he wanted to make a living by being a doctor.

K: Had he heard that it would be a good business to bring Chinese medicine to the United states?

W: I think so. Because there was a Chinese community here and many believed in Chinese medicine more than in Western medicine. So he had quite a clientele in Chinatown. He would go there in the evenings and he had an office there. But in the daytime, they were the Americans who came to him for medicine.

K: And where was his office in Chinatown?

W: I'm not sure. Maybe it's Marchasalt Street. My aunt lived on Apaplasa. I think the other street was Marchasalt. There was an office that he went to in the evenings.

- 120 Has three step brothers who were born in China. Father's first wife died in China. Married her mother in 1910 in Los Angeles. Lillian is the oldest of that marriage. She has a younger brother and two sisters. All were born in Los Angeles.
- 128 First memories of Los Angeles. Sky was blue all the time. There were street cars. They lived on Hill and so they went everywhere by street car. There were also horse carriages. Would go to the MacArthur Park with their father on the Street cars. Also went to Exposition Park and Lincoln Park. They would play in park and buy ice cream or pop corn, go to the museum in Exposition Park.
- W: 147 My father had a farm in the Valley and my brother--my stepbrother--managed that. And so every weekend we would go there.
- K: Which Valley?
- W: The first farm was in studio City. And the other farm was in Sepulveda.
- K: And what was he growing?
- W: Asparagus. In both places it was Asparagus. And then they had fruit trees, and grew corn. We would go there on a weekend.
- K: Would you do work or what would your activities be?
- W: No, we'd just go there and walk around and maybe pick fruit.
- 160 Important experiences. Remembers the end of World War I. People were selling extra papers. Soldiers coming home. There were a lot of parades then. On July 4th, they would go to see the fireworks. They also went to Venice Beach and Ocean Park, sometimes Long Beach, walk on the pier, etc.
- 177 She went to elementary school on Grand Street near 8th St. downtown. They moved to 14th Place--one block beyond Pico--between Main and Broadway. Then they transferred to 16th Street School, where the trade school now is. They went to Sentous Junior High, the convention center is located there now. Then, she went to L.A. High and U.S.C.
- K: 190 The elementary school on Grand, what kind of experiences do you remember? Who were the students there and what was that like?

W: Well, I think I was only Chinese and after school--my mother would take me to school and she'd come and pick me up and walk home with me. And I remember when she was a little late in coming, a little Japanese boy would come around and tease me and maybe try to trip me.

K: What was that like being the only Chinese American in the school?

W: We didn't socialize too much with the other students I think. And then, there was prejudice. And the children would recite things about Chinese, you know. They'd call us "Chink," you know: "Chink, Chink Chinaman sitting on a rail, along came a railroad and chopped off his tail." And they'd yell things like that at us. And then they would say "Chinese eat mice." (laughs) And say different things about us. I didn't have any close friends.

K: How did you respond?

W: I didn't say anything but I did my best to get good grades. And so just buried myself into the studies and did all the assignments and got good grades.

K: What did your parents say? would you tell them about the things that were happening at school, you know the taunts and things that kids were saying to you?

W: What my parents would say? Oh, they'd say "Don't get into any trouble with the other children. Don't get into any fights. Don't argue. Just don't say anything."

K: So that was when you were at the Grand Avenue school. And then you went to--

W: --Same at Los Angeles Jr. High.

K: The same kind of experiences?

W: And at L.A. High, I was the only Chinese girl. And in those days L.A. High was pretty snobbish, no blacks hardly, and it was supposed to be a very--it was in a good neighborhood. I had very few friends then. Except one girl, she wanted to help me with her homework--she wanted me to help her with the homework. And so she socialized with me. But I remember going to the bleachers for some event; no one walked with me. And I remember asking a girl "May I walk with you to the bleachers?"<sup>11</sup> It was--people were so isolated. They isolated themselves and didn't socialize with the Chinese. There were a few Japanese.

242 But I joined the World Friendship Club. And there were different nationalities there.

[interruption]

K: 246 You were telling me about the Friendship Club-- International Friendship Club, what did that club do?

W: We studied about different nationalities and tried to learn about the culture of other countries and it consisted of people from various nationalities.

K: Was that a school club in L.A. High?

W: Yes.

K: So did you find satisfaction in that club?

W: Yes, I enjoyed that. And I enjoyed listening to debates. After school there would be oratorical contests and I would listen to those. And then I liked to study Spanish very much. And so we--I wrote in Spanish a column in Spanish, something about being a cat or something, and regularly I would have a column. And so in the end I got a medal for my excellence in Spanish when I graduated. And I also belonged to the scholarship--! had all A's and B's and straight A's the last three semesters of high school and so I belonged to that club.

271 Chinese community was scattered more then, not like today in Alhambra or Monterey Park. There were fewer families and they lived scattered in different neighborhoods.

K: 281 Were there particular organizations where people joined that were where the community came together?

W: Yes. Of course the men had their organizations according to their last names. If you had a certain last name, you belonged to a certain organization.

K: The benevolent society. Was your father in one of those?

W: Yes.

K: Which was his society? Which one is he in?

W: It's called the Four Brothers. They believed that long time ago in Chinese history there were people of four surnames who were brothers--who were like a fraternity. So if you had a surname of any of these four that you could join. And so they had an office and they had benefits and different programs.

K: Was it only for men?

W: Yeah. Only for men.

K: But they would have activities where families could come?

W: Yeah, sometimes they sponsored Chinese opera. The families would go to hear the opera. They had women's clubs too. I think my mother later on she belonged to Chinese Women's Club. And then they had Chinese American Boys Club--Citizen's--

K: --Did your brother---

W: --not my brother--but a Citizen's Club.

K: The Chinese American Citizens League. Was your family involved in that?

W: No, my brother went to China when he was 18 so he didn't have a chance to join.

K: 317 Was there a church that you went to?

W: Yes, I went to the Congregational Church. Friends would take me there.

K: Where was that?

W: In the beginning, the Chinese Congregational Church was in Chinatown and then it had services in the big congregational Church, either on Flower or Hope Street or somewhere there. And then they built their own church on San Pedro Street--9th Street near San Pedro. So there were three denominations: Methodist, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. All three had chapels or missions in Chinatown. And they taught--there were English classes for newcomers and they had women's societies, and they had Sunday School, and so on.

K: What do you remember about the Congregational church?

W: All we kids went there for Sunday school. And then during the service for adults, a Chinese preacher would preach. And then they had Sunday school picnics and other activities.

342 When she was very young she would go to Chinatown to visit her aunt (mother's sister) and cousins who lived there. Every Saturday or Sunday, would go with her mother to spend the day with her aunt. Her father would see patients in Chinatown in the evening and accompany them home. When she was older, she would drive her father to buy medicine or groceries in Chinatown. Her father didn't think Chinatown was a good place for girls. Father was very protective.

K: 364 So you were saying that you're family moved from Hill street to 14th?

W: 14th place.

K: Why was it that your family moved?

W: Because the owner wanted the house back to tear it down to make it into parking lot. And they never built on it for years and years and years. I think it still is a parking lot--they could make more money that way (laughs), you know how expensive parking is downtown. It was sort of opposite the May Company, very near there.

Oh, it was very difficult to find a house in those days. It was after the war--

K: World War I?

W: After world War I there were fewer houses for rent, and also because we were Chinese. And Chinese could not buy property in America or in California then. So we couldn't buy and to rent would be very difficult. My aunt who lived in Chinatown with her four children and her grandson moved in with us into that big Victorian house, maybe for about a year or so. And then we had to move. And so my mother, she was expecting her third child then, would read the paper and find out where houses were for rent, and she and my cousin would go and then would be told "Oh, we've just rented it"--whereas they did not rent to Chinese. And especially if they knew that there were so many; there were eleven of us. Everyday they would look for a house for a rent. And finally they found this place on 14th place, which was only a two bedroom house and we eleven people crowded in there. It was very--

K: --For how long were you there?

W: And then, not long after that the house next door was for rent, so my aunt moved there. And so it was just my father and mother and myself and a brother and a sister was born there. So there were just the five of us. And then later on, my aunt moved to San Diego.

K: so how long did it take them all together to find the new house.

W: I don't know. I was too young then. But my mother would say oh, how she just walked and walked the streets trying to find a place.

K: was that a common experience? Do you remember other people having a hard time finding a place and the stories they would tell?

W: 413 Yes, sometimes if a Chinese would buy a house here the



person next door would put up her house for sale. They didn't want to live near Chinese people.

K: 418 As a Chinese American could you buy property if the children were born in the United States?

w: Only under the child's name.

K: Did your family ever do that?

W: Yes, under my name they bought, I believe they bought the farm under my name or under my cousin's name. Then later, we moved to Hill Street near Pico and then later my father bought a house on 48th street and that was under my name.

K: 48th Street is--

W: --between Main and Broadway in L.A.

K: What neighborhood do they call that--48th Street--is that West Adams or Exposition--?

W: It's beyond Exposition and West Adams. I guess now they call it south Central because during the watts riots a lot of buildings were burned.

K: Did your father still own that house then.

W: No. Then they sold it and bought a big house on Main Street near Vernon Avenue and my father still had his practice. So he practiced, had his office downstairs and the family lived upstairs. But at that time, I was already in China. I didn't live in that house.

K: Did your father's clients follow him wherever he moved?

W: Yes. And some when they moved to another city, they would correspond and they would bring medicine and then when they wanted more my parents would send it to them through the mail. They would package the herbs and send it.

454 Description of her father's business. How he brewed and served the medicine, bottled it. She would talk with patients when they came, but she never helped in the business.

469 Graduated from L.A. High in 1929. That fall, entered use. Finished in 1933. She majored in sociology. Knew it was hard for a Chinese person to find work in L.A. Thought she could be a social worker or go to China and teach English--minored in English. Her father always spoke of China in terms of "going home" wanted to retire

there. Her father had kept in touch with relatives in China, sent money.

**W:** 604 My father had--there were 12 brothers. There were 3 mothers in the family, 12 brothers, and 6 sisters. And so they sort of fought over the inheritance that my grandfather left. He left a lot of land. And so they had quarrels. And so they would tell about their problems or tell hard life was and so on. AND he would write letters back and they would correspond.

And also he helped different members of his family to come to America; nephews and grandnephews to come to L.A. And some he put to work on the farm, and some would become cooks or waiters, bar boys in the restaurants--he would recommend work for them there. And several worked for him, brewing herbs and helping out in the herb business. And so he helped a lot of people, his own family, to come over.

432 Jobs available for Chinese Americans. Caroline Chan (died at 101) was the first Chinese teacher in the public school system--elementary school. But it was hard to find work in teaching. For this reason, many girls didn't go to college. Would work for their fathers or in a restaurant. There weren't many opportunities. Men had problems too finding work.

**K:** 556 How did it come about that you went to college--you were saying many girls went to college.

**W:** I don't know. My father always encouraged us all to study as much as we could. And so all the members of our family are college graduates. So we all went to college.

**K:** What experiences do you remember about attending USC? What was that like then, that was the late 20s?

**W:** Well, we had a Chinese Student Club. We met every month. I just studied, I think, more than anything else.

**K:** And what did the club do? About how many students were in the club?

**W:** only about 30. And several were from Hawaii. And very few American-born. Most were from China.

582 Parents' expectations for her. In Junior High, father had suggested she learn Spanish so she could help him if he opened a store in Mexicantown. But otherwise, her father hadn't expected her to help out.

603 Traditional roles for women. Women were quiet, good house wives, not many had careers in those days--some

sold insurance or worked in factories, or had home businesses, restaurants.

636 On the Chinese New Years, had big meal. Observed Thanksgiving, X-mas. Also, had a lot of guests from China--Diplomats and scholars. Her father's hobby was cooking--enjoyed inviting people to the house for meals. Would prepare sharks fin, sea cucumber, chicken, ducks. Her family always had Chinese food at night. In the daytime, they would eat other things.

K: 705 After you finished college at USC, what did you do then?

W: Got married the next month (laughs).

K: **How** did you meet your husband?

W: He was a student at Cal Tech. He went to University of Redlands first and then transferred to Cal Tech. for his Civil Engineering degree. Then, he got his Master's degree in Civil Engineering at the same time that I graduated from USC. And we got acquainted because our Chinese student Club would invite students from other universities; we met together and had a social time. And that's how I met him. And so we got married in July and sailed for China.

K: What year was that?

W: 1933.

K: And what were your plans for China?

W: He was going to find work in China. So he worked in the Public Works Department of Canton as a Civil Engineer. And then later he worked on the railroad, surveying for railroads. And in 1937 came the war. Then he joined ... in 1939 ... see '37 to '39-- well he taught engineering for a while too--but he worked on some railroads and then we went to the interior, West China---  
[tape ends]

747 End of **SIDE A, TAPE 1**

**SIDE B, TAPE 1**

000 Silence

002 During the war, they went into the interior--West China. Husband worked on the Hunan-Burma Highway--used to transport ammunition from Burma to China. In 1937 they moved to Hong Kong because Canton had been bombed. She taught school there until she joined her husband in

1939. Their daughter was born in 1934.

- 021 When they first went to Canton, it was very westernized. Baptist church, schools in that area. A lot of people from America came there to give their kids an Chinese education. So transition wasn't hard. But in Hunan, conditions weren't very good. Stayed there from 1939 to 1947. Husband worked on Highway, railway, and then worked on airfields for the American air force so they could bomb Japan from China.
- 050 Impressions in China. Sanitary conditions weren't good. In the interior of the country, no English speaking people except the G.I. 's. She had to learn another dialect in Hunan. Had learned Chinese growing up and in school.
- 075 Similarities and differences between Chinese Americans and Chinese. American born were considered by the Chinese to be more independent.
- 092 Son born in 1941 in Hunan, near the Burma border.
- 096 After World War II ended, went to another province where her husband was designing a bridge. Parents sent money for her to return in 1948--she returns with her son. In 1949, communists came and her husband, mother-in-law and daughter evacuated to Hong Kong. Had to start all over when he left China--wasn't recognized by the British government since he was American-educated. She joined her husband in Hong Kong and stayed until 1950.
- 136 After having been away 15 years, she experienced culture shock returning to Los Angeles. The city had grown. She had returned to L.A. via boat. She was very disoriented because everything was different.
- 158 Returned to Hong Kong in 1950. In 1952, her daughter graduated from High School--went to Texas for college. Lillian began to teach school again. When her daughter finished college (East Texas Baptist college and then San Francisco State), she got married. When her baby was 1 years old, they visited their parents in Hong Kong. They stayed and worked in Hong Kong. Son came to college at Redlands in 1961.

W: 179 My brother was 18--when he finished L.A. High, he went to China to study Chinese. So my father always encouraged us to keep our ties with China and he himself wanted to come back and he wanted his children to have a Chinese education.

K: Did he encourage your brother to go into medicine?

W: I think so. At first my brother wanted to study Chemistry or something like that. But then my father thought that medicine would be a good field. So he studeied medicine in China and came back here for his residency and worked in the County hospital here and in Boston City Hospital and in New York, NYU hospital. And my third brother, my step brother, is also a doctor; eye, ear, nose, and throat. He came from China when he was about 10 or 11, and went to high school here and went to USC and University of Pennsylvania, and Georgetown University, he graduated majoring in eye, ear, nose, and throat. And he went to China and he worked in a hospital there. So our family has been back and forth.

K: Was that common? Did a lot of families want their children to go--because you were saying that when you first went to Canto there were many Americans there. Do you find that in the first and second generation Americans that there was a lot of back and forth between China?

w: There was some but in Los Angeles, not too many. Some took their children back for Chinese education and left them there. But some didn't like it and so they came back.

216 Why did parents want children to receive a Chinese education? It's hard to learn the language and the writing.

232 When she was growing up her family maintained some Chinese traditions--how to behave towards adults, guests, other family members.

261 Her mother was American born but she was very Chinese. They always spoke Chinese at home.

280 When she was back in the U.S. between 1948 and 1950, got a job in a sewing factory--inspecting nylon panties--downtown. Mostly Chinese women, some Mexican women worked there. She was paid 85 cents an hour--\$28/week.

313 Not much relations between Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans in Los Angeles.

319 Her husband is fourth generation Baptist so she joined the Baptist church. In L.A. they attend a Chinese Baptist church in Monterey. Their church used to be in Chinatown on Yale Street. In 1988, bought property on Pomona Blvd. between Atlantic and Garfield. It's not a large church.

- 335 Was in the U.S. in the beginning of the Great Depression. It was difficult for her father to pay the tuition at USC. He made a lot of sacrifices for them to go to college.
- 352 Most important event in her life was getting married.
- 354 She feels she is very Chinese in that she is submissive to her husband. Husband was involved in the men's department of the Baptist World Alliance--he was elected president of it. They travelled a lot for the Alliance between 1970 and 1980. She feels that assisting and accompanying her husband was her most important work.
- 388 Description of what they would do on these trips for the Baptist World Alliance. They went all around the world--to places where Chinese had never been. People had never seen Chinese people before in some of the places. Her husband's hobby is photography. They have pictures from all their trips.
- 428 In 1982, returned to the U.S. to live. But they had returned to visit several times--in 1960, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1969, 1970s--almost every year. The main office of the Baptist World Alliance was in D.C.
- 447 When she returned in 1960, she noticed a lot of changes. Had been in South America for a meeting. stayed two months in Los Angeles.
- 466 Daughter lives in New Jersey and her son lives in Los Angeles. They did not decide to return because Hong Kong is being returned to the People's Republic in 1997--it was time to retire and be near their family. Lillian's family is all in the Los Angeles area.
- 483 Now, they are very involved in their church as well as the activities in the building(?) they are living in now. They like it because they are near the Chinese community--near restaurants, supermarkets, their church.
- 539 End of interview  
The remainder of tape is blank