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The following transcript has been reviewed by the interviewee. Due to edits requested, transcript may not match audio recording exactly.

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 436-001a, b

Interviewee: Joyce Chinn

Interviewer: unknown

Date of Interview: January 23, 1998

Project: From Far East to Old West Oral History Project

Note: The interviewee reviewed and finalized this transcript. Clarification of specific details are provided in brackets and in footnotes. Certain portions of the interview have been restricted at the request of the interviewee.

[The first 45 seconds of this audio has not been transcribed because it's about equipment placement for the purposes of the interview.]

Interviewer: Can you describe how you're related to the, what's your background in Butte?

Joyce Chinn: Well I was born in Butte in 1952. My family, both sides of my family, both my mother's family and my father's family were approximately turn-of-the-century immigrants into the state of Montana, into the United States. So it's a long history. I don't—

Interviewer: [unintelligible]

JC: You want me to direct my answers to Ray?

I: [unintelligible] right at the very beginning. [unintelligible sentence]. So, is there anybody else better connected in Butte than you are to Chinatown?

JC: Oh, I don't think so because I'm connected to both the Hum family and the Chinn family, and it turns out that they were sort of competing families in Butte's Chinatown. They were both very prominent families, and both belonged to different tongs—benevolent societies. So that when my father and mother got together, there was some controversy over that because the Hums and the Chinns didn't marry. They basically eloped, sort of defied grandparents and parents to do so. So my sister and I are then the only descendants of both those families.

Interviewer: You have pictures of your family from [unintelligible]. Could you show us the picture of [unintelligible] from the Hum family [unintelligible]?

JC: This is my...I don't know if you can see this very well, but this is my [Hum great-grandmother] grandmother. She was a picture bride as a matter of fact. She was an arranged marriage, more to the point, to my grandfather who had come over, probably in the 1880s. Of that, I'm not 100 percent sure. But he'd been in this country and working in Butte for a number of years before he was able to save enough money to send back to his country and tell his family to find him a bride. So, of course they went to the local matchmaker, and she looked at all the proper astrological signs of all the appropriate village girls and came up with my

grandmother [Amy Hum-Wu]. She's actually, I think she was close to 20 years younger than my grandfather when she married and so she was married to my grandfather by proxy in China. And the proxy was a rooster. They substituted the rooster for my grandfather, and so that when she came to this country, she was already married to him. They subsequently had seven children. One of which, the oldest of which, would be my grandmother who was born in 1902. This is Amy [shows picture]. She's the oldest of the seven children.

Interviewer: And the picture of your [Hum great-grandfather] grandfather was taken in Butte?

JC: This was taken in Butte, and my mother told me years ago that this is the picture that he had sent back to his family in order to show them what he looked like and that he was prosperous and living in Butte and was able to support a wife. I think that they probably showed this picture to my [great-grandmother] grandmother when she was very young and said this is your new husband. So here he is looking, you know, he's looking very prosperous with his hand on his books and sent back to impress the family.

Interviewer: You said that she came...that when he died, she went back to China?

JC: Well, they lived in Butte for a number of years. How do I—

I: And your grandmother [Amy] graduated from high school in Butte?

JC: My grandmother was born in 1902, and the rest of the children, of course, were born and raised in Butte also. So the span of years between the oldest, which was my grandmother, and the youngest child of the family was some 17 or 18 years. So by that time, my grandfather was in his 60s, and he died in Butte when my grandmother's youngest sibling, Auntie Anne...my Auntie Anne was an infant. So in those days, the tradition was, the Chinese felt that they always had to be buried in Chinese soil or their spirits...they had to be buried with their ancestors or they would be forever out of the family loop. So it was incumbent on my great grandmother to take her husband back to China. Also, she wanted to take her children back so that they could finally meet their Chinese families. You know, family was so important. So she loaded all of them...Here is this woman, who barely spoke any English, she's a widow now in Butte, Montana, of all sort of outrageous places. She loads up all seven children, and they all go back to China, bearing the body of my grandfather with them and take him to the home village so that he can be buried properly. So he's buried in China.

Interviewer: Then how is it that your mother ended up being born American but her mother was not considered American?

JC: Well, my mother, my grandmother had...All the children [of my grandmother's generation] again were born in America. So they had automatically [birthright] American citizenship. But, in those days, because of the Chinese exclusionary laws, or some laws subsequent to that, people who married Chinese citizens lost their U.S. citizenship. It was a law. So my Grandmother [Amy]

finished her high school education [in Butte] and began her college education in China, having gone there with her family to bury her father.

While she was there, she met a student—an architecture student—at the University of Beijing, which is Peking at that time, and they got married. After he graduated with his degree, he got to come to the United States and do post-graduate work in architecture in Philadelphia. So, of course, she came with him, and then my mother was born on American soil. So she had [birthright] American citizenship even though my grandmother, at that time, had lost hers. Had literally lost her citizenship for marrying a Chinese citizen.

Interviewer: How did your mother end up in Butte then?

JC: [laughs] Everybody went back to China, of course, when his [my grandfather's education [visa] was up. He lost his visa. So the whole family moved back to China, and he proceeded to work in Shanghai where my mother began to grow up. This is now the [1929]...My mother was born in 1927, and we're running into all the wars in China, all the Japanese invasion. My mother remembers the Japanese invasion of Shanghai¹. She remembers going to Catholic convent school where her parents were sending her and dodging the Japanese on street corners. She told me stories about the Japanese not liking the way somebody bowed at them and just beheading them on the spot. So she's going to school at this time.

My grandfather, trained as an architect, has now gotten involved with the Nationalist government. So he's running around the country. He's fleeing from the Communists and the Japanese. He's running around with the government of Chiang Kai-shek. My grandmother is raising her daughter and her youngest sister [and her baby son] in Shanghai, and she's working as a translator for the American Embassy. But the American Embassy finally pulls out, oh, in about...So my mother was 14 when her father died, so 1927...I'm not very good at math. Anyway, in the '30s, the early '30s, all the Westerners are pulling out and stranding those Chinese², that have worked with them and for them, to the Japanese and to the Communists. So my grandmother is now a widow³, and she now has two children and a younger sister that she's trying to raise. [pauses]

Let's see, I'm trying to get my dates straight. In 1947, when my mother was a teenager, my grandmother literally smuggled her out of the country and sent her back to Butte⁴ back to Butte to live with Great-grandmother [Hum], who had come back to Butte to avoid getting caught up in the conflict in China.

¹ The Japanese occupation of Shanghai.

² The correct year for death of my maternal grandfather is 1941. The Westerners began pulling out of China in the 1930s through the Second World War.

³ My grandfather died at the hands of the Japanese in about 1941.

⁴ Although my Grandmother Amy had lost her citizenship by marrying a Chinese national, my mother's birthright American citizenship was still valid. Grandmother Amy had smuggled a copy of Mother's birth certificate out of the U.S. Embassy in Shanghai before it closed, and used it to get Mother onto a boat full of Chinese students bound for San Francisco. Once Mother arrived in the U.S. she eventually made her way back to Butte.

Interviewer: Was this common for families to go back and forth to China?

JC: Well yeah, it was if you could afford it. You know, China slammed shut in the '40s. The doors just slammed shut, stranding a lot of Chinese in this country and then some Chinese who had made their homes in this country who were back in China, were caught—like my grandmother was caught. In fact, Rose Hum Lee was also caught. It depended on what kind of passport you could get. But yeah, the going back and forth was pretty common [before World War Two].

When people would die, they didn't want to be buried in the United States, they wanted to be buried back in the home village. But, between the '30s and until finally the Communists gained control, it was very difficult. Villages were being burned down. They were being overrun by the Japanese. So there were a lot of displaced Chinese literally wandering around the world. At various times, my [Hum] great-grandmother lived in Butte, then she lived back in China, then she lived in Hong Kong for a while, and then back to Butte, and then to Macau, always trying to get back to an established family [home], By that time, her seven children were strung out all over the world. Some were stranded in China. Some were stranded in the U.S. So she's trying to go back and forth, trying to hold her family together.

Interviewer: Did the same thing happen with the Chinn family [unintelligible], or did they pretty much stay in Butte for the [unintelligible]?

JC: They pretty much stayed in Butte⁵. My Chinn grandfather came to this country in, I think, 1980...I'm sorry, 1889. He came under different circumstances. He came as...a very few Chinese were allowed in to this country as merchant Chinese. Most Chinese who came to this country, came as laborers of some kind [single male laborers]. They came to work railroads, or they came to work mines. There was a very small window, right around the turn of the century, where a very few families of Chinese were allowed to come in order to establish Chinatowns to have some sort of mercantile center of Chinatowns in order to keep the—all these hordes of male Chinese workers—give them a home, keep them happy, keep them from rebelling, and basically to establish Chinatowns.

For the most part, Chinese women didn't immigrate to this country. They weren't allowed to. There were a lot of immigration laws that prohibited the immigration of Chinese women. Because the feeling was that if women came to this country, then the Chinese laborers would never leave. They would want to stay. They'd want to build homes. They'd want to become Americans. So, for the most part, they didn't come over.

⁵ Although, when my father was just 7 years old (which would be 1926 or 27), he and his two older brothers were sent back to China to live and study for a few years. I think he was there for maybe 3 years. My father and my Uncle Howard Chinn came home to Butte, but my Uncle Albert, the oldest son, died of an illness in China. I think he was 13 years old.

But that system didn't work out very well. Because you had hundreds, you had whole camps full of these Chinese guys and nothing to anchor them, nothing to keep them staying on the job. They would just sort of roam from job to job. So the U.S. government allowed a very few merchant Chinese to come. They had to come with money. They couldn't just come and be staked by some American company here. So my Chinn grandfather came with money. He came with a wife and already a child. They came to Butte, and I wish I knew why they came to Butte⁶, some family connection somehow. Probably one of their cousins or uncles or somebody was already working in Butte said, "Come to Butte. This is a good place. We need a merchant. We need a store."

So he came and began building what is now the center...what became the center of Chinatown in Butte. He built the Wah Chong Tai building and the Mai Wah buildings, which even now stand on West Mercury Street in Butte. I have pictures of them. They're three-story buildings, which is quite sizeable at that time for a Chinatown building. Inside those buildings, he established a mercantile, he established...there was an apothecary [at various times], there was a noodle parlor, there was a boarding house for the Chinese [workers] who had no families⁷. So he built a whole center there, and in the center of that, in one top floor⁸, he established a family—his and his then-infant⁹ daughter [Kay Chinn]. They later had 11 more children born in America, one of them was my father. Let's see...I have a picture of...This is my grandfather at some of his more prosperous times. Not all the children that he had are born here but most of them. This one is my father who in this picture is about seven or eight years old. Since my father's born in 1919, this would be 1927 maybe.

Interviewer: He looks very prosperous.

JC: He does. Well, this would be the kind of picture that a lot of Chinese families had taken at the time. They would use these pictures to send back to the family in China to show them how well they were doing so that everybody would get to know all the children. Having bright, healthy children and a lot of sons, as you can see, was a great accomplishment for him.

Interviewer: In the boarding house, you would have...You want to talk about the cost of going back to China—

[Break in audio]

⁶ Since this interview was recorded, I've found out that the connection to Butte originated in Seattle. My great-grandfather and some partners in Seattle originally came to Butte looking for opportunities to sell services to the Chinese working in and around Montana. My great-grandfather brought my grandfather over from China to take over the Butte enterprise.

⁷ There was also a bank for exchanging money to be sent home to China, as well as a Chinese doctor.

⁸ It was on part of one floor, not the top floor.

⁹ I'm actually uncertain of the age of Kay Chinn at the time of the Chinn family moving to Butte. I now believe she was well past infancy at that time.

I: So people who came and stayed in the boarding house, they had to pay so much for the boarding house. Can you talk a little bit about the indentured servant concept?

JC: Oh, yeah. The Chinese who worked in this country came, often they were recruited. It's a pretty standard system. A white company would send to China to a particular contractor, who would go through the Chinese countryside to various villages, and in the village, he would be looking for younger sons or landless people to sign up to go to America to work for a few years. The promises were extreme. "Come to the "gold mountain. You can make huge amounts of money."

In China, it's so populated that over the centuries these villages, which started out with a few acres of land, keep getting subdivided, subdivided, subdivided. So that if you're a second, third or fourth son, pretty much the only way you're going to make a fortune is to leave the village. So these procurers, I guess you would call them, would take advantage of that. They'd go in looking for sort of landless sons or even young Chinese men who had somehow lost their holdings, who just basically, they were second sons, third sons, or just landless people. They would promise them these extreme riches if they would sign up for two or three or four years, you know, working in the "gold mountain" which was the Chinese term for the United States. In turn, they would say, "Well, if you come work for me for five years, we'll pay your way over to America. We'll make sure that you have room and boarding. We'll make sure that you have food, and all you have to do is pay us a little bit out of your paycheck every month or every day, actually. The rest you can send back to your family or save or whatever you have to do, and pretty soon you'll be a rich man and you'll come back to your village a hero."

Well, the reality was...the reality was that expenses kept getting tacked onto these initial expenses. "Oh, yeah, well, I know you're trying to pay off your passage over here, but you also have to pay for food and you have to pay for your bedding and you have to buy everything at the company store. We don't really give you money. We just sort of keep track of the money that you make."¹⁰

So these guys would work for a long time, without family, without a support system. There were these roving camps of bachelors that lived in mining camps all over the West that followed the railroad from one side of the continent to the other, and that's how these Chinese became laundry people and cooks, because they had to establish their own communities. Some of them never did make enough money to get back. Then in the '30s and '40s when everything went to pieces in China, they became what anthropologists, sociologists call stranded. They were stranded Chinese. There was no home. Half the time their villages were completely destroyed or else communications between China and the U.S. were shut down. So they didn't know whether they had any family left. Or, even, a lot of them even lost their money. They were cheated. They were whatever. It's a pretty standard immigrant story, but again, my

¹⁰ While the indentured workers system certainly operated in Montana, not all Chinese workers were indentured. Some were sent out by their families in order to increase the family wealth by working in America. It's a misunderstanding to think all Chinese working in America were uneducated and lower class.

grandfather had...he was running essentially the do-all mercantile. He was the banker for the community. He was the broker. He helped get Chinese back and forth from China. He's reputed to have run a little opium den in Chinatown. In fact, he eventually got deported by the U.S. government. There was an implication of drugs.

Interviewer: About when was that?

JC: You know, nobody talks about that. It would have been about the time my father was probably a teenager. [pauses] I was trying to think of the chronology...It's sometimes hard to explain to people who didn't grow up in that community, what I call the "wall of silence" is like. I think, in all families and especially in immigrant families, there is an "I don't want to talk about that" thing going on, and for Chinese, some of it is because a lot of people, who came to this country, came illegally. Even the procurement was not always above board.

People lived in the United States and worked in the United States without proper visas. They came here without speaking the language, totally dependent on the procurement system to get here or else sponsorship by a quote "uncle" or "cousin". Because you could bring in family members, but you couldn't just come here. You just couldn't get on a boat and come to the United States. You had to have some kind of sponsorship, whether through procurement or an existing family member already living and working. So my grandfather would sponsor a lot of Chinese, and so I have cousins that are never really been cousins, because he was a Chinatown big shot, basically.

So you have a system where everybody is beholden to everybody else in ways that aren't completely above board and legal. So, later on, when you try to ask, "Well, where did Cousin Danny come from, or when did Grandfather go back to China?" they say, "Oh, we don't talk about that." Or, "Why did grandfather have to go back to China?" Well, my mother's side of the family, who of course were sort of feuding with my father's side of the family, would say that my [Chinn] grandfather was deported for having an opium den, and if so, it would have been probably in the '30s which would have landed him smack dab back in China in the middle of the Communist Revolution and the invasion of China by the Japanese and he disappeared. He disappeared for a while. Rumors surfaced about his being captured by the Communists because the Communists were then very suspicious of any Chinese who had spent that number of years in a Western country.

So, he's deported out of the United States and he's landed basically in a bed of thorns. I have a letter somewhere from his oldest daughter, my oldest aunt, who went to find him [his remains]. Basically went back in the '50s to find him—back to China—and did, in fact, finally find his grave. Supposedly, he was detained by the Communists and finally executed, and all of our family's lands and property in that village were confiscated. There's this very funny letter from my Aunt Kay talking about "Wing" somebody who survived the Communists and of course, [laughs] "'Wink, wink', we know how he did that, and now he has all of grandfather's lands and we know how that happened." It's a very entertaining letter. Who knows if it's true,

but I know that both my grandmothers, both my Hum grandmother [great-grandmother] and my Chinn grandmother ended up being stranded in this country raising their children alone.

Interviewer: You had talked about the uncle—

JC: And my father's relationship? Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, helping the uncles [unintelligible]

JC: During the Second World War, somewhat during the First World War, but mostly during the Second World War, the Chinese in droves—especially Chinese who lived in sort of what I call outposts but even Chinatown and especially in Hawaii—rushed to enlist in the army after the Japanese invaded¹¹...or after the Japanese bombing of Hawaii. The reason for that was because, of course, the Japanese had been for many years just desecrating China. Going in, literally murdering...Hundreds of thousands of people at a time were being killed in China by the Japanese.

So two things operated on the Chinese who were living in America. As soon as America got into war with the Japanese, the Chinese wanted to both prove that they were loyal Americans and that not all Asians were the same. In America, if you're Asian...The Chinese experienced a lot of prejudice and a lot of trouble because of the Japanese, because people in this country couldn't tell the difference between the Chinese and the Japanese. So Chinese, and even in fact American-born Japanese, when they were allowed to, rushed in droves to enlist in the army. They wanted to prove that they were loyal Americans, and they wanted to frankly go to war against the Japanese. So, the Chinatowns fell apart. When the procurement system was no longer necessary—the railroads were built, the mines were built—and the Chinese were basically just sort-of being a community. Just sort of perking along like any community does—pretty self-sustaining. They had stores, they had Chinese schools¹², and they were just living¹³. Then suddenly here comes the war, and, like a lot of communities, they get decimated of their young men. Well, this strands the women who are left with no support and getting no support from the white community, frankly, and getting a lot of prejudice.

In order to ensure the safety of their families who were left behind, a lot of the Chinese, when they went to war, told their families to go to California or go to New York or go to even Canada where there were big...there was safety in numbers. Go to the big Chinatowns where there were other Chinese. But they didn't want them stranded in these communities because the horror stories, especially when the Japanese were deported into the detainment camps, there was a huge fear in the Chinatowns that the same thing would happen to the Chinese. Right on the heels, of course, of the Second World War, came the Korean War, in which case this country was at war with the Chinese. So those who had stuck it out, many of them who had

¹¹ After the Japanese invaded Mongolia.

¹² They were also attending American schools.

¹³ They also had clubs.

stuck it out through the Second World War were not going to stay in the middle of Butte, Montana, for the Korean War unless they were so well known or so well entrenched like my father, that they just felt they could stick it out. ¹⁴

Then these guys are out in the war, and they're seeing a wider world and they're meeting...they're stationed at Edwards or some place in California and they're meeting nice Chinese girls from the Chinatown there. They're not going to come back to Butte. They're going to stay there. They're going to raise their families there, which in fact is what happened to some of my father's brothers. It's just kind of a fluke that my father found a nice Chinese girl to marry in the wilds of Montana. It was a pretty rare occurrence.

Interviewer: Even though it was the opposite—

JC: Even though it was the other family, sure. Which is why, again, my grandmother sent my mother away. Did I tell you that story about my grandmother? My [Hum] great-grandmother sending my mother away so she wouldn't get involved with my father. This is a nice story. I guess it's a nice story. Of course, my [Hum] grandmother is in China. She's stranded there, and she has managed to get her American-born daughter who has an American birth certificate...that was the only way...She smuggles my mother out of China, and my mother clutching, basically clutching, her birth certificate—her U.S. birth certificate. Gets to the United States and makes her way up to her grandmother in Butte. There she's...let's see, 1940s, she's just 20 years old, and my father is back from the war and he's nine years older than she is and he's instantly smitten. Here's this beautiful Chinese girl, but of course the families are warring. So my great-grandmother sees that her granddaughter is getting involved with one of those Chinn boys, and there's a bunch of them. She's getting involved with one of those Chinn boys. So she decides, ah, this isn't happening, and so she sends my mother off to school in Chicago. Arranges for her to live with a white family in Chicago—there's some connection there—and go to school there. So my mother goes to Roosevelt College, I think it is, in Chicago. But my father follows, and they elope and get married. So my mother never did finish school. They come back to Butte.

Interviewer: Then you and your sister are raised in Butte. You said you were the only Chinese [unintelligible]. Can you kind of describe what it was like?

JC: By the time my parents have eloped and by the time they make their way back to Butte, because my father's...You see, my father's mother was still alive then and she was failing. She was ill and he felt responsible.¹⁵ His brothers and sisters were strewn out all over the countryside. Some were still in the service and so my father was both taking care of his mother

¹⁴ In fact, my father who was in the Army Reserves at the start of the Korean War, went back into active duty.

¹⁵ This is a correction. My father's mother died in 1940. My father returned to Butte after the war in order to manage what was left of the family home, and to work on arranging for his mother's body to be returned to China. He never achieved her repatriation, and in the mid-1960s, the remaining family members interred her remains in a Butte cemetery.

and being the responsible stay-at-home son when he meets my mother. So, he brings my mother back to Butte and they move into the Wah Chong Tai. They move in the building with my grandmother, and that would be, let's see, my sister was born in 1949, so that would be 1949. Then I was born in 1952, so three years later. This is again after the war. There are very, very few young Chinese left. They're all this elderly, stranded population including the grandmothers, the great-grandmothers, these very few women who have been stranded and a whole sort of community of stranded elderly men are all living in Butte. So my sister and I are basically two of the last Chinese children to be born in Butte from that, what I call, prewar wave of [Chinese] immigration—the turn of the century immigration.

Later on, after the war, people brought Chinese war brides back to Butte. White men married Chinese people, and then some Chinese people, came, just found their way to Butte because at one time there had been a Chinatown and would move in, but that's sort of post-war. That's that second...it's a different kind of immigration. It's post-war. It's refugee immigration, if you will, as opposed to coming in to work in the country at the turn of the century to find your fortune in this country is different than being a refugee here.

So, my father sort of took it on himself to look after what we call, there's a term of honor in Chinese, it's called "Gung". It means "uncle", and it basically means any male associated with your family who's older than your father and worthy of respect¹⁶. So my sister and I grew up with what we called the "Gungs". My father would cook a whole bunch of food and we'd load it up into the station wagon in these packets, and we'd go around and we'd deposit them at these various places in uptown Butte where these Gungs were living. They were living in the remnants of laundries and building basements. In fact, there were some¹⁷...We were no longer living in the Wah Chong Tai at that time. We moved out when I was six because my mother wanted us to go to better schools.¹⁸ So, we were living in what is called the [Butte] Flats. It's just a suburban area of Butte.¹⁹ So we would go up to uptown Butte where there were these little apartments dotted around where these uncles were living two or three to an apartment. My father would take them food and he'd sit and he'd visit with them, and he'd sit down if they needed letters written or some official documents of some kind that needed translating, he would sit and he would work with them doing that. Kind of just sort of took care of them. Slowly one by one they just kind of died.

Interviewer: [unintelligible].

JC: [unintelligible] The Vukovichs, the Servichs (?), the "vichs".

Interviewer: Did you hear about the tunnels? Is that [unintelligible] silence, or is that—

¹⁶ This is a correction. "Gung" is an honorary title for any male associated with your family who's older than your father and worthy of respect.

¹⁷ There were some living in the basement apartments under the Mai Wah and Wah Chong Tai buildings.

¹⁸ She also didn't think the Mai Wah and Wah Chong Tai buildings were good places to raise children.

¹⁹ The Butte Flats are down below the mines and the Berkeley Pit.

JC: Everybody asks me about the Chinese tunnels, and my mother swears they exist...or swore, she's deceased. She always wanted to go through the basement of the Mai Wah and Wah Chong Tai buildings with a metal detector because she swore that the Chinese—of course these stranded uncles—these Chinese were burying their wealth in bags in the tunnels and in the walls of the Wah Chong Tai building. Maybe so, I don't know. But as for living in the tunnels or tunneling through Butte, the Chinese basically worked what the white people had abandoned. After they finished working for the white people, or in their spare time, they would go through and they would work parts of the mines that everybody else had given up on because it was just too damn hard to get those last little pieces of gold and silver and whatever out of there. The Chinese would go in, and they made the tunnels a little bit bigger but they...I don't think that...[laughs] I always heard stories about hordes of Chinese living in the tunnels under Butte, and I just don't think that's true. If that was the question.

Interviewer: Yeah. Then talk about being invisible, and when you were in high school, did you realize you stood out? How much of that have you heard that there was, as you were saying, the “wall of silence”? Would you describe a little bit about what your ancestors or your grandparents talked about with the “wall of silence”, and then what you yourself felt as a high school student?

JC: See, I didn't ever know my grandparents. My father's mother and father died before I was born. Well, actually so close to my being born. I think my sister was still alive when my grandmother died, and then somewhere between my sister being born and my being born, she died.²⁰ Anyway, I never did know her [or my Chinn grandfather].

Then Grandmother Amy, who is my mother's mother, was stranded in China. A couple of times, she did come over. She became very, very bitter towards the United States because of the loss of her U.S. citizenship and because of the way—this is politic—but the U.S. government had a very strange relationship with the Nationalist Chinese. They weren't always very supportive or honest, yet they treated the Nationalist Chinese as the true and rightful government of China, but they weren't very supportive. They would do things to...Basically, American-Chinese who were in China, the U.S. government wouldn't help them. So my grandmother was quite bitter towards the United States which sort of mellowed as she got older, but at that time, she couldn't get into the United States. Her husband had been killed by the Japanese. He had been captured and killed by the Japanese because of his connection to the Nationalist government. My mother [now living in Butte], had married the wrong side of the family²¹, so we were kind of cut loose, as it were. The Hum side of the family didn't have a whole lot to do with my sister and me. My mother felt very estranged from them because she had married my father, and my father's family was strewn all over the countryside.

²⁰ This is a correction. My father's mother died in 1940 before either my sister or I were born.

²¹ Correction: not the wrong side of the family; rather, my mother married into the Chinn family.

So growing up, we were Billy Chinn's daughters. Everybody knew my father. He was sort of...he was a character. He was a Butte character. He was always there when anything had to do with the Chinese. He was sort of the go-between between the Chinese and the larger community, and he'd also come back from the war a pretty celebrated war veteran. So we felt sort of doubly inspected, I guess. I remember going to high school and having those high school teachers remember my father's sisters. The principal of my grade school taught my father English in his grade school. She was that old. My sister and I would do something, and she, this principal would say, "Now, you're acting just like your Auntie Lily May." Well...Auntie Lily May, she's got grown kids of her own the same age. So we always had this sort of visibility that made us ultra, ultra-conscious of being very visible.

I remember in grade school they decided at one point to do, I don't know, the school pageant. In the school pageant, they had some little...I wish I could remember this better. It was just so excruciatingly embarrassing. They had a little skit that they were doing with a bunch of quote "geisha girls" and given that they had one Asian in the entire school—two of them actually, my sister which they dragged into something else—but they had me, and they had all these white girls. They dress all these white girls up in these sort of kimonos almost and made me stand up there in a little kimono and sing this really dumb song. Looking back on it, it was tokenism of the worst kind, but it was so unconscious because, of course, we're going to do this little skit, we're going to have all these little girls dress up as Asians, and we should have one real Asian in there, and we have one. So I'm in the fourth grade and these girls are sixth graders, and there's this vast difference between being in the fourth grade in grade school and having these sixth graders looming over you. I just remember being more petrified and more embarrassed than I think I've ever been in my entire life through this school pageant process. But those things were the kind of things that happened. People expected us to be instant mathematicians and piano prodigies, which neither of us was. My sister can barely plink out anything on the piano, and as you've noticed, I can't add five years to 1927 and come out with the—

[Break in audio]

If I had had my choice, if somebody says to me now, do you think it's okay for kids to grow up in that kind of isolated atmosphere without other people like them, I'd say no. I don't think it's good. I would not have wanted that for my child.

Interviewer: Do you think that, I mean, there was no question of you assimilating because you were American. Do you think that there was a question for your parents?

JC: Here's a story, my parents were bilingual, of course. They spoke both Chinese and English [fluently] and my mother growing up—even though she's American born—but she grew up in Shanghai. Shanghai was a very cosmopolitan city in the '20s and '30s. It was the gateway to China. It was where all the embassies, the Western embassies were. Shanghai is basically a created city. It's a city of commerce and industry created by Westerners as a gateway into China. So my mother grew up there and so she spoke three or four dialects of Chinese plus her

mother had her educated in the Catholic nun school²² so she learned a little French and she spoke English. So, she's fluent in all these languages and my father is fluent in Cantonese and American—American English. When I was growing up, they spoke Chinese to us. They spoke Chinese and English. It was like a lot of immigrant families. The line between one language and another was very fluid, and little kids grow up and they speak whatever they hear.

When my sister started grade school—this is Butte in...let's see, Yvonne is six years old in 1955. Yvonne starts grade school and she's...My parents have also taught us to read because they were those kind of people. So Yvonne could read a little and she could speak two languages, and the schools called my mother—my father was in the hospital at the time—they called my mother into conference and said to her, "You and your husband have to stop speaking Chinese at home." This is the prevailing feeling about education in those days. That we were going to grow up maladjusted if they didn't go to speaking one language. So my mother, who has this huge respect for education, immediately stops speaking Chinese at home, makes my father stop speaking Chinese to us. So from that day forward, we lost [began to lose] all of our Chinese. The thing is you can change that. You can stop speaking Slavic or Italian or Gaelic or whatever else, and those kids can grow up and be assimilated and blend in. But you can't change the way you look. So, all my life it's been "Do you speak Chinese?"

"Well, no, I don't anymore," and then having to explain why I don't. The Chinese who do speak Chinese—the American-born Chinese—and there are a lot in Chinatowns, kind of look down on you. They treat you as if your parents were too ignorant to teach you to speak right. So you get this sort of weird pulling going on. Even here in the District of Columbia, you find very many, we call them first generation, American-born Asians—Korean or Vietnamese—who don't speak Vietnamese. But that's okay. Now, it's accepted. But back then, there was a...you were outcast with the Chinese who had grown up speaking Chinese and you were outcast already with the whites. You were just sort of in a no-persons land of your own. But that was the education system back then and that's the way they did things, and my mother was 24 and intimidated.

Interviewer: The American Indian community faces the same thing.

JC: Yeah, yeah, and that was exactly that kind of dynamic.

Interviewer: You had talked to us earlier about your father introducing you to Mike Mansfield. Could you just tell the story again?

JC: Oh, Mike Mansfield, Senator Mike Mansfield, you know had spent many years living in Butte, and he had strong ties to the Chinese community. I think, even then, he was interested in Asia and things Asian and knew my father's family very well. This is years later when Senator Mansfield happened to be back in Butte [for Memorial Day] and having dinner at a restaurant called Lydia's at the same time my father and my sister and I were having dinner there. I was still in grade school, maybe seven or eight years old, and my father said "Come with me, I want

²² A school run by Catholic nuns.

you to meet somebody very important." He took us by the hand, and Senator Mansfield was standing by the entrance to the restaurant greeting people as he came through. My father walked up and said, "Senator, these are my daughters." I remember this enormously tall man bending all the way down. It seemed like it took him forever to get all the way down to my level, and he held out his hand and he shook mine. He said, "You know, your father is...I have a lot of respect for your father. He's a very important man," and my father saying, "Well this is a U.S. Senator. This is Senator Mansfield and don't ever forget him," and I never did. It's just a nice memory.

Years later, and I don't recall what the occasion was²³, but Senator Mansfield had my father and his war record entered into the Congressional Record, which I always mean to look up sometime. Just mention of him. So, it's nice.

Interviewer: Let's see. [unintelligible] any questions that you can think of. Any other things? We had talked about the driver's license—

JC: Oh, one of the uncles. [laughs] Oh, yes.

Interviewer: I don't have that one on tape, if you could just describe that one over again? [unintelligible] hasn't heard that one. It sort of relates a tale of how the Chinatown was [unintelligible].

JC: Well, the story is that back in the days when there were still these uncles [Gungs], these Chinese uncles with no family, living in various parts of Butte, one of them was related to my mother, and he would come down and visit us at our house almost every Sunday. He'd come down in his...he drove a Hudson in those days. My sister and I were still in grade school, and he would come down every Sunday. He was living in a laundry [what had once been a Chinese laundry] in uptown Butte, which had no real [full] bathroom. So he'd come down and he'd take a bath, and while he was taking a bath my father would cook dinner and then they'd sit and talk in Chinese. Uncle would pat us on the head and say, "Nice girls." So we got used to seeing him. We'd see his Hudson pull in every Sunday afternoon. He'd come pattering down.

Well, years later, I'm getting my driver's license. I'm 16 and I'm down there, and I've been studying and taking driver's ed and everything, getting my driver's license. I look out the window and here comes Uncle in his Hudson, driving up to the driver's examination station. He's been stopped, and he's been told he has to get a driver's license. So, for these many years, he's been driving his Hudson all over town without a driver's license. He doesn't speak English. But he's managing. So he comes in and so there's this huge coincidence, and I'm suddenly trying

²³ The occasion was that my father had just been appointed the first American Chinese Commander of a Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in the U.S. On Friday, June 5, 1994, Senator Mansfield commemorated that event by having the *Montana Standard* editorial of May 31, 1964, entitled "VFW Shows Way—'We Practice What We Preach'", entered into the official proceedings of the Congressional Record. Senator Mansfield sent a copy of that Record to my father, and included a personal note in the header. I still have that document.

to translate and I have just a tiny, tiny bit of Chinese. I am trying to translate and trying to explain to Uncle that he has to take this test or they won't give him a driver's license, and if he doesn't have a driver's license, he can no longer drive his Hudson. So we go through this confusion for a long time, and the people there are saying, "Well, he has to take the test."

I say, "He can't read English."

They're saying, "Well, then he can't have a driver's license."

And I'm saying, "Well, if he doesn't have a driver's license, how's he going to get around?" So, finally, we call my father. My father comes down, and they allow him to sit in a room and translate the driver's test. They'll do that for people who don't speak English. Well, of course, Gung [Uncle] fails the driver's test, and my father says, "You can't drive anymore."

So Gung says "Okay." Walks out the door, gets in his car, and drives off. He's like 80 or something at this time.

Interviewer: But did they ever arrest him again?

JC: No, no. This is Butte, and because my father knows half the police force and he explains that Gung only drives from uptown Butte down to our house on the Flats once a week to take a bath and have dinner with us, He's not a danger. They just sort of... this is the good old boys network. They just sort of turn their heads, sigh, and just leave him alone, and he continued to drive up until his death.

Interviewer: But there was, you had mentioned that Chinatown had sort of its own...Well, by the time you were living in Butte, there was not a Chinatown.

JC: Yeah, there was not.

Interviewer: But do you remember hearing people saying that people that...big powerful people—

[Break in audio]

JC: The sociology of Chinatowns in America is a really interesting story. Going back to the way people would come to a particular area in the United States—a lot of this is village procurement. So these people come to America, and they pick the places they go to or the Chinese group they associate with based on associations that originated in China. It's not just everybody ends up on the same boat. They have these strong village and family associations to begin with. So the way you get to Butte is because somebody from your village or somebody you know or somebody's, somebody's, somebody's affiliation brings you to Butte and you end

up staying here. Which is again back to you have centers of power within Chinatown upon which the outside, the dominant culture, has very little influence.

The Chinese people don't feel allegiance to the white community. They feel allegiance to each other by way of these family and professional associations. So, my grandfather [Chinn grandfather and great-grandfather] comes here as a merchant, and that's a very unusual thing. He comes with money, and he builds a town center, if you will. He builds a place where people can come and gather and, of course, the people who come are the ones who have this strong association with him. So, he becomes, in effect, the mayor of Chinatown. So, when the white community wants anything done, they don't go to the individuals because it's not going to happen. You can haul "Wing Chong" from the street and ask him to do something, but unless you speak Chinese and unless you have...that relationship has been okayed by the person who runs your tong...And a tong is basically a village [or neighborhood] association. It's a benevolent association. It's not the same as a gang, but it's, I guess, more like the mafia which is an analogy I don't always like to use. But it is kind of like that. My grandfather's holding your money for you. He's making sure it gets sent back [to your family in China]. He's making sure that your family understands what's going on.

These guys are illiterate too. I forgot to say. A lot of Chinese are illiterate in the sense of writing the Chinese language. There's not the school system in China. There wasn't then the [Western-style] school system in China where everybody learns to read and write. People speak [local dialects], but they don't write.²⁴ So, my grandfather and grandmother are writing letters.²⁵ They're doing all of these things. They're taking the place of the village elders. That is a structure the Chinese are used to using. The way in which things get done is by way of the village elder. They just pick up that system from China, and they move it to the U.S. So from the outside, it sometimes appears, it almost has sort of a gang-like structure. If you try to talk to an individual Chinese about something, he's going to refer you to, what amounts to, the village head man because these Chinese are also afraid. Some of them have, shall we say, shaky credentials. They also don't speak very good English, and their experience with the white culture has not always been the best. The white culture breaks promises. It takes money from them. So the place they feel safe is with other Chinese. If you have a Chinese who's articulate and worldly and who knows his way around the white community, then you're going to have him be your intermediary.

Interviewer: You had said too, earlier, that part of that fear is, and maybe some of that invisibility that was based on fear of deportation [unintelligible]. Did you have any stories about your ancestors talking about stuff like this?

JC: Oh, they don't. They don't talk about it. I think I might have mentioned at one point that Rose Hum Lee, who wrote the book *Chinese in the United States of America* as a sociologist, is a

²⁴ And there is not "universal" Chinese dialect.

²⁵ These letters will be sent back to China and read to the recipient by another villager who can read and write.

great-aunt of mine.²⁶ She was ostracized from the Chinese community for most of her life for writing that book. There was huge, huge resistance to having anybody, particularly one of our own, write about the Chinese in the United States of America. This does relate back to that sort of village structure that got imported into this country, into the Chinese Chinatowns. The Chinese did things in ways that weren't necessarily legal [or customary or understood] in the United States. But that's the way they'd always been done for centuries. They'd been done that way in China, and they just imported the system over here. Part of that is, I guess you might call...It could be misconstrued as sort of the buying and selling of people.

The Chinese didn't just get to this country through white company procurement. Some Chinese got to this country through family connections because they had to leave the village for one reason or another whether it was economic or whatever—a scandal of some kind. But the procurement system basically fell apart, oh I guess, in the early 20th century. So people were coming into this country no longer being procured by white companies [as cheap labor], but just getting out of China to find a place to work to make a fortune to go back to China. You got here through sponsorship by somebody who's already in China²⁷, and because of the exclusionary laws, the U.S. exclusionary laws [Chinese Exclusion Acts], it became more and more and more difficult to get in to this country legally. But there were loopholes and the loopholes were often family. If you had family who'd been in this country and had been working at an established business, you could be sponsored. You, as a father, could bring in your brother, or your nephew, or even your father at some point. So there were a lot of instant families, you see, where money would change hands, and suddenly this man, who had three sons, now had five. The sons would go by the new name, and if anybody from the larger community said, "Who's your father?" they would say, "Oh, my father is so and so." The white policeman or the white immigration guy would say, "I thought your father only had three sons."

"Oh no, no, I was born in China..." but of course...So there's obligation now, on top of responsibility, on top of blackmail.

[Break in audio]

According to...let's see if I can get this straight. This is one of those instance. Trying to sort out Chinese-American relationships then becomes very, very complicated because you never know who's telling you the truth. In fact, in my generation, you don't know the truth necessarily. You only know what somebody of an older generation has told you.

[This portion of the interview restricted at the request of the interviewee.]

But that's not unusual. It's not just the pressures from outside that keep the Chinese from talking about [family histories]...The phrase is "airing dirty laundry." You don't air your dirty laundry in front of whites. Not just because of the threats of legal repercussions or what, but

²⁶ Rose Hum Lee is my great-aunt on the Hum family side. She is my Grandmother Amy's sister.

²⁷ Correction: You go here through sponsorship by somebody who's already in the United States.

just because it's not done. We were sojourners in the United States. We were here to work to get rich and be heroes in our own country. We weren't here to colonize the United States. The Chinese didn't come to colonize the United States. The purpose of being here was to be rich enough to be rich in China. That was the reason to come.

It wasn't until after the [Second] World War that people became refugees. But my generation of Chinese aren't refugees. We're stranded by world events but we're not refugees. We didn't see ourselves as immigrants either. We saw ourselves as people who were getting rich in another country. Expats, if you were, would be a better description of how the Chinese regard us. Under those circumstances, the wider community, who didn't want us anyway in those days, didn't deserve to know more about the Chinese community than was absolutely necessary.

Interviewer: There is no effort at assimilation in that sense because there were many Chinese who wanted to go back.

JC: Oh, well, that was what we were...When my father's mother died, he literally had her remains stored in a funeral home in uptown Butte for nearly 20 years²⁸, trying to get her back to China to be buried. I think I was 16 when my father's oldest sister, the one who had been born in China, and she had gotten stranded in China, by the way [during World War 2]. She had married a Chinese citizen and gotten stranded back there. She finally got out of China when I was 15, got back to the United States, and found out that my father²⁹ had yet to bury grandmother. All these years my father's been trying to get a visa to get her body back to China so she can be buried in the home village. So my Aunt Kay comes to Butte. She's my father's older sister. She is, in this picture [shows photo], she is this woman. So you can see how much older than my father she is. She is just raising holy hell because my father remembers a China that doesn't exist anymore. Aunt Kay has lived in China through all this enormous upheaval and all these changes. It's now a Communist country. It's not done. They're not going to accept the body of this elderly Chinese woman, who left at the turn of the century, for burial. So all the brothers and sisters who are living³⁰ congregate [in Butte] from all over the country. They all arranged to bury Grandmother. But it was that important. It was that important. It wasn't until the oldest member of the family came to Butte and consented to have Grandmother buried in Butte that she was finally buried. But she [her remains] was stored in a vault in a funeral home in Butte for nearly 20 years. It was 18, yeah.³¹

Interviewer: Someone has told me that there were huge Chinese raids in Montana. That they would...there was a story that they were taken. [unintelligible] were taken.

²⁸ Correction: He stored her remains for decades, trying to get her back to China.

²⁹ Correction: Not just my father, the entire family living in Butte.

³⁰ They all lived in the United States.

³¹ Correction: My grandmother was stored in a vault for decades, from 1940 until the late 1960s, before she was buried in Butte.

JC: But the other thing you have to understand is that Chinese weren't allowed to be buried in “real” graveyards in Butte at that time. The other thing that Aunt Kay did was she took my sister and me to graveyard in literally Potters Field.³² She went through all the Butte records and dug up what she hoped were the graves [records of graves] of three of her brothers and sisters who had died as infants. If you were Chinese and you died, you weren't allowed to be buried in a real cemetery in Butte.

Interviewer: Do you know where that was?

JC: I can see it in my mind. I don't remember the name of the cemetery.³³ I'm sorry I don't. It's the one under the hill. The bump I call it. Not Mountain View, the one across Harrison Avenue from Mountain View back on the foothills of that mountain—that little hill...At the bottom of that hill there is an overgrown, or was, weedy patch of ground adjoining the official cemetery in which the Chinese and a few other people were, I suspect some other infidels, were allowed to bury their children in the early 20th century. But Aunt Kay found the graves and we had little gravestones erected in honor of her brothers and sisters.

Interviewer: In one of the cemeteries now, there is a section for the Chinese.

JC: My father's buried in a section.³⁴ We did, we were able to purchase a plot to bury Grandmother in with some Chinese...some later immigrant Chinese. Things opened up. After the war, things were different. Chinese who died after the war were able to be buried there. But Mountain View Cemetery accepted Chinese to be buried there. So my grandmother's buried there and my father's buried with her.

Interviewer: What about your mother?

JC: Where is my mother?

Interviewer: Yeah.

JC: My mother's buried in Denver. My parents' marriage collapsed after ten years. My mother remarried when I was...Let's see, they got divorced in 1959. It just barely lasted ten years. My mother became involved with a white man. He divorced his family to marry my mother. The story though is that they had to get married in Idaho, because in the state of Montana in 1959, it was still illegal for people of different colors, races to marry but it wasn't illegal in Idaho. My

³² She did this to search for graves.

³³ Since this interview was conducted, I have learned that my relatives were able to bury my grandmother and later my father in the main section of Mountain View Cemetery. The little Chinn siblings (one brother and two sisters) are buried in an isolated section of Mount Moriah with other mostly unidentified Asian graves. Some others have been found by their relatives, and there are markers in Chinese and Japanese there, but many remain unidentified. This section of Mount Moriah is mostly untended, unlike the rest of the cemetery. The volunteers at the Mai Wah Society in Butte have recently undertaken the upkeep of these graves, for which my family are very grateful.

³⁴ But it's not a section reserved for Chinese.

mother was drummed out of the city of Butte. She was basically driven out by public opinion. She lost custody of us. My father raised us in Butte after 1959 by himself. That's how I end up still growing up in Butte. My mother and her second husband are driven out of Butte because he's Mormon. He's divorced his wife and five kids to marry her. There's an interracial marriage. There are two broken families, and there is...one of which is a very prominent...one of Butte's own Chinese even though my mother was also one of Butte's own Chinese. But she didn't have the history my father did because she wasn't raised in Butte. So she basically fled to Denver, and she's buried in Denver.

Interviewer: Did she have some of the same problems there and elsewhere? Do you think Montana was more difficult because there were fewer Chinese than elsewhere?

JC: She had some difficulties. You know, even in the '60s, mixed marriages like that were uncommon. But it was a little better if you were a Chinese woman married to a white man. It was a little easier because a lot of people were assumed to have been married, to be war brides. So it was a little different. It wasn't so bad in Denver being a bigger city. But there were other...My mother had other friends who were Chinese women married to white men, most of whom came over through either being war brides. My mother was associated with the University of Denver Medical Center so she knew a lot of Chinese—Taiwanese Chinese. So she had a whole community there which she had never had in Butte. So, it wasn't quite as bad. But there were still some...He was excommunicated from the Mormon Church for marrying her. So it was a colorful past.

Interviewer: Yeah. So [unintelligible] it didn't work out.

JC: There were a lot of problems. My father had a lot of medical problems from the war, and my mother hated the isolation of Butte. She always wanted to move. My father felt obligated to hang on to the family homestead and maintain the tradition of the Chinese in Butte. Frankly, he would have been abandoning all the uncles [Gungs]³⁵, and she...That was a part of life [in Butte] she didn't like. She didn't like going out and taking care of the uncles. Some of these guys were bedridden and the only thing they're existing on is my father going in there and taking care of them. He actually managed to get a couple of them into nursing homes, but they have no social security. They have no insurance. They have no [or very little] benefits. They don't belong to any union. They're just stranded. They have no family.

Interviewer: Did you ever hear stories about the Butte boycott? About the Chinese?

JC: No. I don't know this story. I'd like to hear it. But I don't know that one.

Interviewer: I wasn't sure if your father or grandfather would have...I mean, I'm sure they were affected by it [unintelligible].

³⁵ He felt responsible for these men.

JC: Probably. My father, he was also well connected. This is back to my grandfather being sort of the village elder. I think that's how he gets connected to Mike Mansfield. But there are other prominent Butte families who championed the Chinese. That was a great help in some of the worst times. Then, being educated, moneyed Chinese, we weren't rich but we were moneyed set us apart from the "coolies". We weren't "coolie" Chinese. We were educated Chinese. You know, these are people who went to college. Rose Hum Lee and Amy both had college degrees. They were Chinese women in the '20s with college degrees. It was amazing. So we were different. We were different than the other Chinese.

Interviewer: You were talking about being a sojourner it was as if you yourself were a sojourner.

JC: I felt kind of stranded, sure. I don't...Again, because my family came here, I was raised with the expectation that...Even my father, back in the '60s, always wanted to take us back to China [to visit], always wanted to have a connection with Chinese. There is a sense in which some of the outpost Chinese communities, not so much...well even the big Chinatowns in the United States, became, in a way, a reflection of a China that didn't exist anymore. Relationships, even language, even things that disappeared in China because of communism, still existed in Chinatowns. So it was almost as if the Chinese left in the United States, and not just the United States but other countries around the world...There are Chinese communities in Singapore that are more traditional Chinese than China is.

Interviewer: Sort of like Chinatown in San Francisco.

JC: Exactly. And New York. And that's just beginning. Well not just beginning, but it's been changing over say the last 20 years because the doors are more open and there are more Chinese going back and forth. But for a while, when the doors to China were closed, the Chinese in the United States kept the flame burning of a more ancient China, of a different China, and respected the laws and the customs and the mores of that China. When they were disappearing in the mainland, were disappearing in the continent because of what the Communists were doing—burning books and killing scholars and destroying thousands of years' worth of Chinese culture. The Chinese in America were trying to hang on to that, were trying to hold onto that. So, part of it, so again, that's why you abandon the outpost³⁶ when you feel threatened and you move to San Francisco or New York or Chicago. Or Vancouver has a huge Chinatown, and Calgary.

Interviewer: Have you been to China?

JC: Yeah. In 1980, I went to China with my mother, although we couldn't get into [mainland] China because we're American born. At that time, it was still kind of difficult to get into China. Our visas were refused. We were all set to go, and our visas were refused. So we went to Hong Kong. We followed Grandmother's and Great-grandmother's trails as much as we could. We

³⁶ Outposts such as Butte and other small Chinatowns around the West.

went to Macau and Formosa-Taiwan and Hong Kong and Singapore and Bangkok. My grandmother, after she had gotten my mother out of China and into the United States, was herself stranded in China, again losing her U.S. citizenship because of her marriage to a Chinese citizen. And he's dead. She's the widow of a known Nationalist and she's worked for the American Embassy, and she was born in America even though she's lost her citizenship. She's in great danger. She's in huge danger in China. So she flees to Bangkok.³⁷

She spent many, many years living in a one-room or two-room apartment in Bangkok trying to raise her son who is China born ³⁸and of course can't get to America, and [support] herself. She flees out of China and lives in Bangkok. [laughs] Speaking of, her bitterness towards the United States was so great that she eventually went to work for *Look Japan*, which is this magazine. When she died, she in fact was working for *Look Japan*, and there was an obituary of her in the *New York Times*. When she was in Bangkok she worked for the United Nations in their Asia program and then went on to Japan to work for *Look Japan*—very bitter. So when she became ill with cancer back in 1965, my mother came to Washington, D.C., where she actually...I still have relatives here in Washington, D.C., trying to get my grandmother's passport reinstated so that she could bring her to this country to take care of her until she died. So she [my mother] made several trips back to Hong Kong and Bangkok. She got her [Grandmother] from Bangkok to Hong Kong, and there they got stalled for a number of months. So by the time the U.S. finally allowed my grandmother to come to this country, they moved her on a stretcher. She died just weeks after she got back to this country again. She died of pancreatic cancer. But the U.S. finally allowed her in. But they never completely reinstated her citizenship.

Interviewer: I think it's amazing to see how the laws affect one family. [unintelligible sentence]. Well, I don't have any other questions.

JC: Oh, thanks. [laughs]

Interviewer: We've talked about everything, and you're getting tired.

JC: Well, everybody must be getting kind of hungry.

Interviewer: [unintelligible] Do you mind if we get some pictures? We didn't show your great

[Break in audio]

JC: One of them was this picture, and I had not realized they had it at the Historical Society [Montana Historical Society in Helena, MT].

Interviewer: But I don't think they have a date on it, which is why I was asking you when.

³⁷ Correction: She leaves mainland China and eventually ends up in Bangkok.

³⁸ My uncles was nine years younger than my mother.

JC: That could be because I was supposed to—

[Break in audio]

I: [unintelligible].

JC: See how much of my story jives with what Uncle Howard told his children. Could be kind of interesting.

[End of Interview]