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Interview no. 257

Josephine Wong

Grace Got

Herlinda Leong

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Josephine Wong, Grace Got, and Herlinda Leong

INTERVIEWER: Richard Estrada

PROJECT:

DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 28, 1978

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO: 257

TRANSCRIPT NO: 257

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Sisters, daughters of Chinese immigrant father and Chinese/Aztec mother

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Background; how their grandfather and father came to Mexico; the Mexican Revolution; schooling in the United States and Hong Kong; their late brother; immigration attorney Wellington Chew; experiences growing up in a Mexican cultural environment.

Length of Interview: 1 hour Length of Transcript 25 pages

Josephine Wong, Grace Got, Herlinda Leong
July 28, 1978
By Ricardo Estrada

E: The interview is being conducted with the following persons. Could you give your names?

W: Josephine Wong

G: Grace Got

L: Herlinda Leong

E: These ladies are all sisters of the late Wellington Y. Chew of El Paso, Texas. The interview will be conducted with these three ladies. If there should be a comment, by a person other than the person I am speaking to at any given moment, they will preface remarks with their name. I want to ask Mrs. Wong a few questions. Mrs. Wong, where were you born?

W: In Juarez, Mexico.

E: Could you tell me the exact date of your birth?

W: December 7, 1915

E: Who were your parents?

W: Herlinda Wong and Antonio Y. Chew.

E: Could you tell me something about the background of each of your parents?

W: My mother was born in Guadalajara and came to Juarez in her teens. My father was born in China and came to Juarez, he must have been 15 or 16.

E: More or less in what year did your father get to Juarez?

W: I don't remember.

E: You say your mother was born in Guadalajara. Who were her parents? Do you have any idea?

W: Well, her father was Carlos Wong and her mother was Francisca Perez,

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as far as I know.

E: So does that mean that one of your grandparents was Mexican?

W: She was an Aztec.

E: She was an Aztec Indian?

W: Uh huh.

E: How do you know this? Was this a family tradition that you found out?

W: From conversations with my mother. She said that my grandmother was an Aztec princess.

E: Do you know much else about your grandparents?

W: Mostly about my grandfather. He first came over. He brought the laborers that built the railroads and when the railroads were finished then he went into Mexico and that's when he married my grandmother.

E: Are you talking about the railroads in the United States?

W: Uh huh.

E: Did they work from the west coast on to the Southwest, stopping here in El Paso? Or whereabouts did they stop?

W: That I don't know. But when the railroads were completed, he went on into Mexico

E: Do you know anything else about this importation of labor into the United States? Did you ever hear anything at all?

W: Well, in those days Chinese laborers were brought in. According to my mother, he was from a very wealthy family in Shiang-hai so when they were importing the labor, he brought his laborers over.

E: Had he immigrated from China to the United States?

W: No. He came with his laborers.

G: This is Grace Got. When he first immigrated from China, he went into Peru.

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E: Peru?

G: And married a Peruvian Indian which was his first wife. And there are children but we never...

E: Do you ever have any contact with them? Do they still live over there? Or descendants still probably live in Peru?

G: It's possible.

E: Now, does this mean then that, in other words, probably what happened was that an American company contracted with your grandfather in China for him to bring laborers over here or was he an entrepreneur who came over here and then hired these men in California, for example? Do you know what route he took? What exactly what he did?

W: He was an entrepreneur because when the railroad was completed, [near] all the railroads he built little hotels. And that was the first chain of hotels.

E: Do you know which railroad it was?

W: Well, it was in Mexico but I don't know...

E: But how about in the United States?

W: No, not in the United States. This was in Mexico.

E: O.K. In the United States. I think essentially what I'm trying to get at is did he himself come over with the laborers from China or did he hire these laborers once they were in the United States?

W: I guess I don't know about that. All I know is that he hired the laborers or brought the laborers.

E: Did he himself work for the railroads?

W: I guess so.

G: This is Grace Got. To my knowledge and conversations with my mother, he never returned to China. I mean he didn't return to China at that time.

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He did return in 1915 or 1916. So whatever becoming connected with hiring or working for the railroad or contracting with them, must have happened here in the United States.

E: Mrs. Wong, do you know more or less what date your grandfather crossed into Mexico?

W: No, I don't.

E: Would it have been in the 1880s? 1890s? Prior to what date do you think it would have been?

W: Prior to 1880.

E: In the 1880s or prior to 1880?

W: In the 1880s.

E: O.K. Did your mother ever tell you anything about your grandfather's activities in Mexico or exactly what he did?

W: They had a hotel.

E: A hotel?

W: No, he had a series of hotels.

E: A string of hotels.

W: And he traveled a lot.

E: Where were they located?

W: Guadalajara.

E: Now, the string of hotels. Were they located along the railroad?

W: Uh, huh. In those days our hotels were just rooms and restaurants.

E: Now do you know which railroad it was?

W: No, sir.

E: Was it the railroad stretching from Mexico City to Juarez? Or could it have been other side railroads?

W: It had to be from Guadalajara to Juarez.

E: But that would have entailed different railroads because the one that stretches from Mexico City to Juarez was known as the Mexican Central Railroad and there are other railroads that were built about the same time that are sort of railroads that feed into the Mexican Central. Where did he gain the capital to establish these little hotels? Do you have any idea?

W: I imagine he made quite a bit of money from the coolies that he brought from China to build the railroads and when that was completed I guess he started with one after another because when he established himself in Guadalajara Mother told me that he built the first opera house in Guadalajara and she used to tell me that he used to dress - top hat, tails, and the whole bit, so he must have been quite a

E: Do you have any idea where a man from China who comes over to the United States and Mexico and Peru contracting laborers, that he is influenced to the point that he acts in this manner, dresses in this manner, somewhat of an aristocrat?

W: Well, he came from a wealthy family.

E: He came from a well-to-do family, but apparently taken on western airs.

W: Well, he was ... I really don't know much about him but that I do remember that she used to tell me that he dressed that way I guess to go to the opera.

E: But obviously it's not the Chinese tradition at all.

W: In China the rich people are quite sophisticated.

E: But you are using the word "sophisticated" synonymously with western dress because the ancient regime certainly didn't dress in top hat and tails, did they?

W: No. I guess he picked it up either in Peru or Guadalajara.

E: Do you know much else about your grandfather other than the fact that he established hotels along the railroad and imported coolie labor?

W: I don't remember anything else. Do You?

E: Mrs. Got, how about you. Do you have any recollections about what your mother may have talked about in regard to your grandfather? What kind of a person he was?

G: Well, my conversations with my mother about my grandfather I got the impression that he came from a wealthy family and he was the type of person that were delving into the Chinese tradition.

E: Was he from Peking?

G: He was from Canton. At a very young age he left, migrated to Peru where he married a Peruvian Indian woman, and when she died he went to Mexico which seems logical to me. And then he married three times. The first time it was a Peruvian women; the Aztec Indian woman; and the third wife was a Spanish dancer he married during his travels.

E: But you all are descended from the Aztec?

G: Yes. And he was a maverick type of person and led an exciting life and liked the finer things and that accounted for his flamboyant way of dressing. He liked the showy kind of life.

E: What accounts for a man coming from Canton suddenly becoming very Westernized and dressing as you said a little while ago in top hat and tails and so forth? Where do you think he took on these western airs?

G: I don't think it's taking on Western airs. He was a sort of Chinese Columbus. He wasn't satisfied to live within the confines

E: But did people dress this way in Canton? Did anyone dress this way back there?

G: It's very possible. There were many, not so much missionaries, but

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Europeans that went into China and settled there and there were a lot of French, Germans...

E: Did you ever hear your mom say what languages your grandfather spoke? I'm sure you could make some logical assumptions.

G: Well, based on what I know about my mother, she just had a natural talent for languages. She picked them up very rapidly. Her native language was, of course, Spanish, and until she started to school. Although she went to school in Mexico, she went to an American missionary school and she learned English there. Prior to that she learned French because they lived in the hotel.

E: Did her father know all those languages?

G: Well, based on that, I would assume that she got this natural flair for languages.

E: Did she ever talk about any particular encouragement he might have given her as far as any education is concerned?

G: Not really, but he did put her in a school so he

E: What were the circumstances under which he took another wife after your mother's mother?

G: Well, he met this dancer and she must have been a pretty exciting kind of a person and he was traveling around the country and would be away from home for long periods of time so that must have been one of those situations where he met someone

E: Did he break ties with the woman in Guadalajara?

G: No. He didn't. But my mother always said that her mother died of a broken heart. And she may have been in poor health, and this may have been

E: At what age did your mother come up to the border?

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G: 1913?

E: To Juarez?

G: 1909, I guess. She first came to Juarez in 1909.

E: What were the circumstances of her coming north?

G: Well, she had completed her schooling and as I recall her father had come to Juarez, so she decided that she ...

E: Therefore her mother stayed back there or had her mother passed away by this time?

G: No. Her mother died before she even started at that school. She was very young.

E: What did she do when she got to Juarez?

G: I suppose she lived with her father and her stepmother.

E: Do any of you have any idea where she lived in Juarez?

G: No idea.

E: Her stepmother was the Spanish dancer?

G: Uh huh.

E: Did she go to school in Juarez?

G: No. She went to school in El Paso at the Palmore School.

E: So she was taking business courses? Did your grandfather have any kind of business in Juarez?

G: He apparently had come to Juarez on one of his business ventures but I have no idea what kind of He was a very enterprising man and very ambitious, you might say quote unquote a wheeler-dealer and I just feel that he was a very ...you know one business he would become bored with it and would go into another. Very versatile and got into a lot of different activities.

E: Mrs. Wong, when did you say you were born?

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W: 1913.

E: What are your first recollections of life here on the border? How old were you?

W: Well, I imagine I was around three.

E: Were you living in Juarez?

W: We were living in Juarez and it was sort of a barrio. You know, it was ...we had houses all around. They weren't tenements. Maybe you could say they would be considered tenements now, but they were considered houses then. We had rooms all around a courtyard with an outdoor facility.

E: Were you the eldest child? The first-born?

W: Yes.

E: What was your first language?

W: Spanish. No, Chinese. Then I learned Spanish. And then when I came to the United States I learned English.

E: Who taught you Chinese or Spanish. Your mother taught you Chinese and Spanish?

W: Yes. My mother and father spoke Chinese to me.

E: Where did you learn Spanish?

W: From the maid. Because she when to work early on.

E: Your mother? Where did your mother work?

W: Well, she worked in the movie house. She translated from English into Spanish.

E: Which movie house? The sub-titles?

W: The sub-titles. There was a movie house. ... There was La Garantia right here, right across the street from the plaza, and then there was a movie house across the street. And Avenida Juarez, is that the street that goes

up to the church?

E: Diez y Seis de Septiembre? It was called the Calle de Comercio back then.

W: Yeah. My father had a grocery store on one corner and the movie house on the other. She worked there and translated.

E: What do you know about your father's life?

W: Well he came over real young; his uncle brought him.

E: From where?

W: From China?

E: Where in China?

W: Hong Kong. I mean, Canton. He must have been very young.

G: This is Grace. He came over when he was eleven years old.

E: What else do you know about his formative years?

W: Not much. You mean in China?

E: Wherever.

W: I don't know much about his formative years in China. Do you?

L: This is Herlinda Leong. He was the oldest son. In China during those years when they sent their oldest sons to the United States or Mexico, it was to help the family earn money and bring it back. Since he was the oldest son he came with his uncle. The only thing I remember about those years was that one of his first jobs was a houseboy for a family in Mexico. He told me that...

E: Do you know where in Mexico?

L: It must have been Juarez. I'm not sure. He told me that because he was saying that one of the things he had to do was carry the baby and he hated to do that so he would pinch the baby so it would cry and not go to him. But that was the kind of work he did when he first came.

E: Do you know when your father was born?

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G: This is Grace. Let's see, he died in '39 and he was 50 .

E: So he was born in about 1889. Do you all think his first job was as a houseboy here in Juarez?

G: This is Grace Got. One time he was telling me that when he first came before he got his first job, what happened was a relative or friend would bring 'em over and that would be it. They were on their own.

E: Where did he cross? Did he cross in the States? I mean come to the port in the States?

G: He would have had to come through the United States and probably on into Mexico. I would say you are correct.

E: Why do you say that he would have had to come through the United States? Because a lot of Chinese came in through Sonora, for example, through the western, the Pacific coast.

G: I don't know.

E: But you do feel that he came to Juarez at an early age?

G: Yes, he did say that he was eleven years old.

E: Do any of you know what year your parents married?

W: This is Josephine Wong. She was very young. She was married at seventeen or eighteen, wasn't she? So... she was very popular. In fact, there was a feud going between my father's family and another family because, of course, when they got married they became very successful. And this man that owned the restaurant in Juarez wanted to marry her too and so ...

E: If you are the eldest and you were born in 1913, would it be logical to assume that they were married a year or two before that?

W: Probably a year before that.

E: 1912 then? The revolution in Mexico had already started. Do you ever hear your mom or dad talk about those years of the revolution prior to

your birth? The revolution started in 1910 and it first came to Juarez in May, 1911. And there was a battle. Do your parents ever talk about that at all?

W: I don't remember any part of that. Grace, do you remember?

G: No. Only that she told me about that, you know, how there was a restaurant like these cantinas. Villa used to send scouts in, you know, ahead of the troops and one scout that she got to know and he used to warn her that they were coming. That would give her time to round up, you know, not only her own family...

E: The Chinese colony?

G: And get 'em across and that's why I mentioned the headline about the Chinese...

E: Did any of you all get the impression from your conversations that Villa or any of the other revolutionary factions disliked Chinese?

G: Not really.

E: Why then would there be a warning. Was the warning to your mother not because of the fact that she was Chinese but because she was a disinterested party in this whole affair and didn't want her to get hurt?

L: This is Herlinda. I checked this story out with Chester Chope. She was good friends with this one scout that you mentioned ...

E: This was one of Villa's scouts?

L: Right. And she said there was a cantina nextdoor to the store and that's how she got acquainted with them because they would come into the store. And one time he told her how Villa's coming in and he told her the date and it's going to be a bad one and if there is any way you can get your family across the border at least for the duration of the battle, it would be much safer. So she went to the Immigration and talked to some

of her friends there and told them and said, "I'd like to have permission to bring my family and some of my people and I'll guarantee you that I'll see to it that they'll come back after the battle." So they said, "Well, I think they could arrange that. Just tell us how many people will come across?" And she said, "Oh, about 200." And he said, "200? Do you know what would happen if they saw 200 people going across the border? You'd start a stampede." So finally they agreed that they could wait at the border and after the first shot was fired they could go across but not until after that. So she got the people and got them across. And when they got across the border they were looking for some place to stay. And she said the only hotel that would take them in was the Gateway Hotel. And they always felt very, very close to them because they were the only ones that would take them in.

E: They were the only ones that would take them in because they were Chinese?

L: Probably.

E: Did any of you ever hear your mother or father mention a gentleman named Max Weber who happened to have been a German vice-consul in Ciudad Juarez during this time?

L: She may have mentioned him, but I don't remember names, you know.

E: I get the impression if you say that your mother was ...well, if she was bold enough to bring these 200 Chinese across the river, one gets the impression that she was pretty influential among the members of the Chinese colony in Juarez. How do you all explain this? What was there about her position in Juarez that made her the unofficial consul there?

L: Obviously because she had the command of the two languages and then later on mastered the Chinese language as well, after she married my father.

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She spoke all three languages fluently.

E: Mrs. Wong, we were talking about your impressions of life here on the border. Do you remember any of these episodes about crossing the bridge during the revolution at all?

W: No. I was too young. I must have been two and my brother was a baby.

E: By the way, who are your siblings? Who is not present here, brothers and sisters?

W: O.K. Starting at the top: Tony, Antonio Chew; Wellington.

E: Can you tell me something about their lives, more or less, when they were born, if they are still living and things like that.

W: My brother Antonio Y. Chew was born the year after I was, so that's 1914. Wellington was born two years...

G: I'm Grace Got. I was born in 1918. Wellington was born in 1920. Charlie was born in 1914.

E: These are the brothers and sisters that aren't here?

G: Uh huh. Gloria was born in 1925 and Fred [in] 1927 and the youngest brother Carlos [in] 1932.

E: You were all born to the same mother and father?

G: Yes. Four boys, four girls.

E: Those brothers and sisters that you have that aren't here, what happened to them? What are they doing? Are they still alive? Can you tell me something about their fortunes?

G: Tony is now a deputy for a consul in Los Angeles. He finished school at the University of Southern California. Wellington has passed away. He was an attorney.

E: When did he pass away?

G: Last year, in October and he took his law training at Southern Methodist

University. Tony also went to law school. Fred graduated as an engineer from UTEP, got his master's at Southern Methodist, and works for LTV. Gloria is a graduate of Mills College, in Oakland, California, and is now deputy director in the Bureau of Social Services in Los Angeles. Carlos, who is the youngest, lives in Santa Monica. He manages a hotel, restaurant-hotel.

E: Is he the only one of you with a Spanish first name?

G: Antonio, Herlinda, Josephina, Graciela, Gloria. Frederico was named after General Limon, was it? General Limon was his god-father.

E: Your mother was a very strong influence, obviously by having grown up in Mexico?

G: So was my father.

E: Did you ever have an inkling whether she felt more Mexican or more Chinese?

G: All three.

E: She felt equally at home with any member...?

L: Un huh, and so did we. And Jo and Tony, the first four. When Jo, Tony, Grace, and Wellington first started school, we didn't speak one word of English. Only Spanish.

E: No Chinese?

G: No Chinese. We learned that later.

E: Do you all still speak Spanish? Have any of you lost the ability to speak Spanish over the years?

L: We haven't lost the ability to speak Spanish. We have lost a lot of vocabulary although most of us use it in our work.

E: Is that right? How about Chinese? Do you use Chinese in your work?

L: Jo does.

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E: Do all of you speak Chinese?

L: All of us studied Chinese since we were six years old.

E: At the behest of your mother?

L: And my father.

E: Did any of you study in China?

L: Yes, all of us.

E: All of you studied in China?

L: Yes.

E: At whose behest?

L: At both my mother's and father's.

E: Where in China did you study?

G: Hong Kong. I stayed in Canton for a few months.

E: What about Wellington?

G: He went to the University of Lingnan.

L: This is Herlinda. He was in high school then, so he went to the middle school that was affiliated with the University of Lingnan. That University is now in Hong Kong.

E: Do you all have a working knowledge of Chinese before you went to China?

G: Very little.

E: How were you treated by your fellow students?

G: Now this is my own personal experience, but I went to a French convent so that I could study partly Chinese... .

E: So you didn't really get thrown into the milieu?

G: Not then. I would say that when I went China it was the first time that I really felt the full impact of being a foreigner. It was the first time that I really felt the prejudice for... .

E: On the part of the Chinese against you?

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G: Both ways. Well, ... what happened was that it was the first time that I got a little bit, not confused, but before I went to China I felt that going there I would, for the first time I'd feel that I ... what I really was. Of course by that time my father was realizing that we had missed out on some of our Chinese tradition and background. I wanted to feel the Chinese part of me.

E: You went to school where? In Hong Kong?

G: I went to school to the French convent in Hong Kong.

E: And Mrs. Leong, where did you go to school?

L: I also went to the French convent in Hong Kong but I went to the elementary school and it was all Chinese.

E: Mrs. Leong, will you characterize your time in Hong Kong as [inaudible] or find it trying in any way?

L: It was difficult in some respects because we went to school not knowing the language except in a very limited way. We spoke a different dialect. It was a trying experience to sit in class and not understand everything that is being said.

E: Mrs. Wong, where did you go to school?

W: When I went, we had tutors because we were too old to go to school.

E: But this was in China?

W: Um-hum. In Hong Kong.

E: Where in China?

W: In Hong Kong.

E: Hong Kong.

W: It isn't really China but she hired tutors and they would come to the house.

E: Your mother hired tutors for you? Did your mother accompany you?

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W: Um-hum. Either my mother or my father would accompany us on this trip.
They'd take turns.

E: They'd accompany all of you?

W: No, half of us would go with one and then the other half would go with the other.

E: Oh.

W: We could only stay nine months because of our visas.

E: Uh-huh.

W: It would take 28 days or 30 days to get back by boat.

E: You went by ship?

W: Yeah, there were no airplanes, so we took a month to go and a month to come back. We only stayed... .

E: When was the last time that you all went to... ?

G: In 1936 and we returned in 1938. This is Grace Got.

E: This is prior to the invasion of Manchuria?

G: They had just invaded and ... we came back. We had intended to stay longer but we knew it wouldn't be long before they'd be invading Canton so my mother decided it would be wise to leave immediately.

E: Uh-hum.

G: So we came back.

E: Mrs. Wong, did you grow up mostly here in El Paso?

W: Uh-hum.

E: Where did you go to school, in El Paso?.

W: You mean high school or ...?

E: No, any school. Elementary, Junior High, High?

W: First I went to Neil school. I don't imagine it's there now. Then I went to Morehead and then I went to El Paso High. Graduated from El Paso High

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then I went to the University of Texas.

E: At Austin?

W: At Austin.

E: When you went to El Paso High, how many Chinese were there attending?

W: Uh...

G: This is Grace. When Lun Kee was a senior, so when you went in as a freshman he was graduating. He was the only one.

W: But there had been a Chinese girl before me.

E: So there were only two when you were going, Mrs. Wong?

W: Uh-huh.

E: And the rest were mostly Anglo?

W: Anglo, Mexican,... like this.

E: You remember what ratio there was of Anglo, Mexican...?

W: There were mostly Anglo because all the Mexicans went to Bowie then.

E: Of those Mexicans that went to El Paso High, would you characterize them as being upper, middle or lower class?

W: They were El Pasoans. They were all lower-middle class but not lower class.

E: How did you find your years at El Paso High? I mean did you find them pleasant? Were there any instances of [prejudice] on ethnic grounds at all.

W: I only had one teacher that was prejudiced. The others were very... I had two that were prejudiced. One was prejudiced in favor of Jewish kids and the other one was just plain prejudiced. I don't know how she was about Mexicans but she was definitely prejudiced against me.

E: Because you were Chinese?

W: I guess so. However, I was straight A pupil, so there wasn't much she

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could do.

E: What were the circumstances under which you went to the University of Texas? How did you...?

W: Pick it?

E: Pick it?

W: I don't know. I don't know why I picked it but I wanted to go away. It was the closest school that I could go away to.

E: Mrs. Leong, where did you go to school, here in El Paso?

L: I went to Lamar School, then I went one semester to El Paso High School and then I went to Radford School.

E: You went to Radford? Kind of ritzy isn't it?

L: Well.

E: For back then, even now.

L: Um.

E: Where you the only person of Chinese descent at Radford.

L: Yes.

E: The other gals were from where.

L: Most of them were from here in El Paso, there were some from New Mexico, most of them were ranchers' daughters or girls that came from small towns where there was... .

E: Maybe upstate New Mexico?

L: Gallup, Albuquerque.

E: Santa Fe?

L: There was one from Santa Fe. There were some from Hobbs.

E: Did you ever experience any kind of discrimination because you were Chinese?

L: Not at Radford.

E: Did you have a good time there?

L: Yes, I really enjoyed it.

E: Where did you go to school after Radford?

L: I went to Mills college in Oakland.

E: How come you went to southern California.

L: I got a scholarship. [Chuckles]

W: Let me... can I interrupt?

E: Sure.

W: This is Josephine Wong. The reason she went to Radford was Dr. Templin was a friend of my mothers so when she died she called me and wanted Herlinda to go into Radford.

E: When your mother died.

W: Uh-hum. She said, "It's sort of a memorial to your mother and I'd like Herlinda to go." Oh, I had a fight on my hands with all the El Paso High teachers because we had all gone to El Paso High. So I finally told Dr. Templin, "I really can't send Herlinda unless I can send Gloria too." I said, "I really can't afford board and room even with a scholarship." She said, "All right then, I'll accept both Herlinda and Gloria; they can eat here, plus a scholarship and they can go home every night."

E: Oh, my word.

W: Then when she got ready to go to college she got her a scholarship with Mills.

E: Those must have been unique stipulations for you? Where you all the only ones allowed to go home at night then?

L: No, there were some others.

E: There were some others?

L: Uh-hum.

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G: This is Grace. Herlinda graduated as the valedictorian at Radford. We had a choice of five colleges.

L: Well, yeah, but the scholarship I got from Mills was a good scholarship.

E: Um-hum.

L: It was really the best one.

E: How about Wellington, what was his background? Wellington, where did he go to school?

W: He went to school at Lamar then, he went to El Paso High, then he went to SMU. He went to Texas A&M first and then he went to the service. When he came back, then he went to SMU, worked his way through SMU. Plus, having a wife plus having a child.

E: Did he ever talk about his military experience at all to you?

W: No, but it must have been rough. He was in the Battle of the Bulge.

E: I get the impression that you all were a rather lucky family in that you were pretty well educated, you apparently were highly motivated, you all did well in school, college educated, traveled to China, spoke three languages at least. Did you ever mix with the lower class people at all? Did you ever had any occasion to talk to them here in El Paso?

W: We had a very unusual mother, because I remember every Sunday she'd take us to visit people that... these two little old ladies...Do you remember them? In that little tenement? They were very poor and they were very old but we'd go and she'd always have something for us to eat. I guess that she did it so we would realize how lucky we were and how the poor people lived. She knew people from all walks of life and encouraged us to help the poor. She taught us... for that to be our way of life since we were so lucky we should help people that couldn't help themselves.

L: This is Herlinda. It was more than just teaching us ways we look

at...because all the people that worked in our stores were like part of the family.

E: In your stores. Which stores?

L: The grocery stores.

E: In Juarez?

L: Well, I only remember in El Paso. But everyone who worked in the store was a personal friend, a part of the family. They came to our home; we still keep in touch with them and there was really no distinction among our friends as far as economic status or their level of employment. They were just close friends.

G: This is Grace. It wasn't so much that she taught us, she exposed us to all the levels of economic status that we experienced in our family. When my father and mother were first married they were very, very poor. So we started with that group of people, socio-economic group of people, and as they advanced and became more solvent and continued to keep up the friendships they had made in the early years. They always took us and exposed us to... the part of our life. It wasn't so much that she wanted us to see how they lived but she didn't want us to forget, you know, that way of life.

E: Where did you all live in the 20s and 30s? What part of El Paso?

H: In the 20s, early 20s we must have lived in the back of the store.

E: Where was the store located?

H: At [inaudible] and Stanton. We first came over in 1921, that I remember.

E: This is a definitive move.

H: Yes.

E: From Juarez.

H: From Juarez, yes. We first moved into River Street and then...remember

the... not 501, but the one next door, and then we moved to the house behind the New China Grocery Number One which was located on Stanton Street.

E: So everything gravitated around south El Paso, far south El Paso.

H: Correct.

E: Was this always true? Up until the time you all left China?

H: Yes.

E: In California, have you all have occasion to talk about your experiences growing up, to Mexican friends?

H: Yes.

E: What do they find about all this? Are they surprised? Do you find them surprised that people of Chinese descent should have come from this part of the country and have that kind of an upbringing. Is there no particular reaction?

G: No, uh....

E: Mrs. Got is speaking.

G: Well if it's Spanish speaking people... there are many Mexicans that came from El Paso.

E: Sure, sure.

G: ...though Juarez. So it isn't that we found many people that knew my parents, and knew of our stores because...you know, a greater... .

E: Even over there.

G: Oh yes, a greater part of our business was our Juarez trade.

E: But those people who didn't know about the El Paso experience are they surprised to find out about the fact that you knew Spanish, the fact that you knew El Paso so well, and so forth.

L: This is Herlinda. I found alot of people that don't expect to hear me

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 speak Spanish. In the work that I do we have alot of Mexican friends;
 eighty percent of our student body speaks it.

E: Do you handle any slang at all?

L: Um...I know some, yeah.

E: Mrs. Wong, how about you.

W: Oh, well ... I talk to Mexican people all the time in my office.

E: In Spanish?

W: In Spanish. However, I quit speaking Spanish to them when I discovered
 that some were insulted if I spoke to them in Spanish.

E: Well, that's another question.

 [General laughter]

G: Now this is Grace Got, again. Now your question was do we handle any
 slang? This we weren't permitted to, by my mother, because her Spanish
 was excellent and she didn't want us to corrupt our Spanish. But we
 heard it and the first opportunity we had to use it, it was kind of fun
 to use it. We were very much aware of it. The people that I found that
 are more surprised are the ones that come from other parts of New Mexico
 or from South America or other countries. But I've always found the more
 you communicate with them in Spanish then, I find immediate acceptance.

E: This concludes my interview with Mrs. Wong, Mrs. Got, and Mrs. Leong.

End of interview