

Chapter Two

Arrival in a Period of Transition: 1943-1965

The years from 1943 to 1965 can be seen as a transition phase in the history of Asian Americans. The period began with immigration prohibited to most Asians and naturalization rights denied to all persons of Asian origins. It ended with the passage of legislation placing the immigration rights of Asians on a basis of equality with those of Europeans.

The repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 initiated the changes that occurred during this period. The repeal provided only a few entry slots for Chinese because entrants from China were still subject to the discriminatory quota system developed in 1924. However small the quota, the major change was that Chinese could now become naturalized citizens. After the end of World War II, the repeal made it possible for Chinese Americans who were citizens to bring spouses and children to the United States under the provisions of "family reunification" principles in existing immigration regulations. These entries were not restricted by the small annual quota. Various "War Brides" acts also facilitated the arrival of wives of Asian Americans who had served in the military. Refugee legislation in the 1950s also brought new Chinese arrivals from Asia. By 1952, all absolute exclusions of immigrants from Asia had been removed. Although quotas remained very small, naturalization rights were no longer limited on the basis of nationality or race. Thirteen years later, the Immigration Reform Act of 1965, discussed more fully in the Chapter Three, brought an end to this transition phase through a termination of the quota system and its discriminatory limits.

The effect of the changes was a noticeable increase in the arrival of Asian immigrants, notably wives and family of men already in the United States. Like several cases in Chapter One, men who had previously remained single returned to Asia to marry and then bring their new wives to America to start families here. In other cases, men who were already married used the new immigration opportunities to bring together families that had been split by the earlier restrictions.

The gradual easing of restrictions did not bring an end to illegal entries, particularly that of "paper sons" from China. There were still very limited opportunities for entry. Many Chinese already in the United States had arrived on papers that did not reflect their true identity, which complicated sponsoring of their true family. Furthermore, many who entered under family reunification categories were still illegal entrants because the people sponsoring them, usually a husband or

father, were themselves already here on false claims of citizenship. In the 1950's, the Federal government established a "confession" program that allowed people to admit their illegal status and reestablish their residence legally. While many took advantage of this program, gray areas in the requirements and suspicions based on past history led many others to maintain their silence and depend on their existing false papers.

This post war period saw significant changes in the social composition of Chinese and Filipino American communities. The increase in immigration from Asia produced a general growth in the Asian American populations as a whole, with a rise in the numbers of families in particular. The growth of an American born population was also accelerated. The impact on Japanese Americans was less notable because family based communities had become well established earlier, during the period when wives and children entered following the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907.

Another new element among Asian immigrants during this period were Asian wives of non-Asian U. S. servicemen. Their experience was different from that of other Asian immigrants during the period because, in most cases, they did not have any relatives of their own in the United States and often lived in isolation from Asian American communities. With the passage of time some of these wives and their children established such connections and their mixed origins began to raise questions of identity and community membership that have become more pressing with increasing out-marriage among Asian Americans in recent years.

Two of the accounts in this chapter are those of families with earlier connections in the United States, that is typical of arrivals from China during this period. The stories focus on life and adjustments during the 1940s, 1950s, and on to the present. The other account is the story of the marriage of a Black serviceman to a Japanese woman in the early 1960's and their later life in the United States. These stories also provide examples of new avenues of employment that developed during this period and all reflect the shift toward a more family based experience.

A Family Affair by H.K. (1)

They say that pictures are worth a thousand words. They can show one many things about when the picture was taken and under what circumstances. Pictures can bring back memories of days gone by. They can even bring people and events back to life. Pictures are reminders and reflections of the times past. I started this account by looking at my family album.

I was born in 196-- in Provo, Utah. How did I get from there to San Francisco,

California? Let me start with my grandfather Sammy Kwan. Sammy was born in 1898 and came to the United States in 1912 at the age of fourteen. He settled in Utah because, there were a fair number of Chinese there and they were building railroads in Idaho. After staying in the United States for a couple of years, he went back to China. He got married and had a daughter, Lien. Sammy then came back to the United States leaving his wife and daughter behind. After having Lien, his wife could not conceive again. That's when she adopted my dad, John. Back in Utah and Idaho, Sammy opened two Chinese restaurants.

In 1950, at the age of seventeen, John arrived in the United States. He came as the son of another man. In effect, John was a paper son whose paper father was a cousin from his village. He stayed in San Francisco for two weeks before heading up to Utah. He stayed in Provo for a couple of months then went to Ogden to work in one of Sammy's restaurant as a busboy and gradually up to chef. Sometime in the late 1950's, Sammy married Lilly. Lilly was an American born Chinese and was pregnant with someone else's baby. The natural father took off leaving her to fend for herself. Lilly was young and pretty, and since Sammy could not go back to China, and felt sorry for her, they got married. John lived next door to them in Ogden.

In 1955, John went back to China to get a wife. He got married in 1956 to my mother, Bik. They stayed in Hong Kong for a year because Bik got pregnant. On June 26, 1957 my sister Meiling was born. A few months later, the family arrived in San Francisco. Here, they stayed for a week and visited her father and various relatives.

The family then went to Provo. In Provo, they lived in the first floor of an apartment house. John worked as a chef in another of Sammy's restaurants. At the apartment, whenever Bik cooked salted fish, the upstairs neighbor would complain about the offensive smell. Bik did not understand English, so it was not until John came home from work that the message was relayed. Then on April 5, 1959, my second sister, Ida, was born. For a year more, they stayed at the apartment. Then one day, John told Bik to pack. He had bought a house two blocks away.

Sometime during this period, John opened up his own Chinese restaurant along with four other partners. He put up most of the money to open the restaurant. On January 16, 1961, Lida was born. On June 12, 1963, Gretta was born, then of course me. When Ida, Lida, and Gretta were born, John was not around to take Bik to the hospital. Instead, Anna, a relative, took her. I was the only one taken to the hospital by John. Anna talked with Bik every once in a while. They would gossip about things and about who was doing what. She was the only person that showed Bik how to shop for items, how to use appliances, what kind of shampoo to buy, and other things. Bik had used dish washing liquid as shampoo.

At least once a month, we would go and visit Sammy and his family, and our relatives in Ogden, Michael T. Kwan and family. They also owned a Chinese restaurant. Amy, the wife of one of John's partner, would also drop by and visit. Every year at Christmas, Sammy's son Jim, would drop by the house and give everyone a Christmas present. There was also a Japanese family, the Saitos, who occasionally visited. The wife would come over and try to talk with Bik. Bik still did not know much English.

The neighbors, except for the Johnsons, were very prejudiced against us. They told their children not to play with us, go into our house, or eat our food because we were dirty and our food was poison. The children didn't listen. They still played with us, went into our house, and ate our food despite what their parents said, although when they did eat our food, they ate it outside. The Johnsons were the most helpful and friendly. They helped John build a concrete wall and divider. They also offered any assistance that we needed. Though we lived in a heavily religious area, there was hardly any attempt to convert us to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although every once in a while we did go to Sunday services with our friends. Bik kept in touch with current events that were happening because the *Chinese Times* was sent to her once a week by her father in San Francisco. Her father would also send packages containing Chinese goods: sausages, dried fruit, preserves, canned fish, tea, Chinese medicines, and other Chinese items.

Then occurred the event that would change the family. Sometime in 196--, John found out that his partners had cheated him out of the business. They had put the restaurant into their names and left John out. Since John had put up most of the money, he lost it all. John got frustrated and angry. How was he going to feed his family? In a fit, he got a gun and shot Amy's husband. The husband survived and John was not sent to prison. He pleaded temporary insanity. The courts understood his situation and set him free with a provision that he could not become a naturalized citizen. Bik had wanted to move to San Francisco and this incident increased her desire but it was some time before the opportunity arose.

For a while, John did not have a job. So, the school provided free lunches to Meiling, Ida, and Lida. They had a program for the needy and that's how Gretta went to Head Start. When Bik had to go with Gretta to events, I accompanied them and got free lunches also. John eventually found a job in Wyoming. He worked as a chef in a restaurant of another relative of ours. He rented a place there. Since he had Mondays off, every Sunday he would drive back to Provo. In 1969, he bought a house in Cheyenne. We would then go there for Christmas and summers and visit our relatives. In 1972, he changed job locations again. This time he worked in South Dakota, in another relative's restaurant. The bad blood between the people involved in the shooting incident was still lying around. It was the cause of some of the

prejudice we experienced. So, in the summer of 1972, the family moved to Wyoming. We stayed for a year and then in the summer of 1973 the family, except for John, came to San Francisco. We stayed for the summer and stayed with Bik's parents. While we were there, John, Bik, and her parents bought an apartment house. Bik had told us that we were going to move to San Francisco because she wanted her children to marry Chinese. The incident with my father's partner only speeded up the process.

John did not move with the family, he stayed behind in South Dakota. We moved into one of our flats and started life in a new and different environment. Instead of having four seasons to live through, we live through two. There were are no white winters or scorching summers. Open space here is rare because everything is so close together.

Most of Bik's relative live here here in the Bay Area. Her mother, father, and some cousins live in San Francisco. The others live across the Bay Bridge. John's sister Lien, lives in San Leandro. At least once a month, we see our grandparents. We see our cousins only on special occasions. We see them at Red Egg and Ginger parties, weddings, banquets, Chinese New Years, and other get-togethers. Except during the summer, we see Lien only sporadically or on Christmas and Thanksgiving. In the summer, John comes out and spends a couple of months with the family. When he comes, the family visits Lien more frequently, and the family goes visiting: Reno, Great America, Marine World, Disneyland, and other places.

In San Francisco, friends are spread throughout the city. One has to travel far to socialize with friends. In Provo, they lived next door or within walking distance. The neighbors where we live now are ever changing. One does not know them long enough.

Moving to San Francisco allowed Bik to work. Since she does not know much English, she works as a seamstress. In Provo, she was a regular housewife. She sent the kids off to school and stayed home and managed the house. School was also different. It seemed that education in Provo was more advanced. Every so often, Bik has dreams of being back in Provo. Why? She does not know. San Francisco has given the family new opportunities to grow. They say that they would not be able to go to college, if we were still in Provo. Bik would also not have had the freedom and independence she now has.

Photographs bring back memories. Good ones and painful ones, but one must forge on ahead with life and learn from one's mistakes.

My Father's Immigration Experience by C. N. Yee(2)

My father was born in Canton, China in 1930. In the United States he is known to most as Jimmy. He is the youngest of four sons and has two younger sisters. My aunt told me that my grandmother also had two other children that died in infancy. Dad was raised in Toishan and Hong Kong, before he came to America. In Toishan, there were only ten houses in his village. The community was close-knit, everyone leaned on one another. They were basically all in the same economic state. Father's house was made of mud. It consisted of two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a small dining area. The bathroom was an outhouse that was shared by all.

The village was rural and everyone farmed for a living. My father and his siblings did agricultural work, too. "There was none of that I'm too tired, or I'll do it later stuff." "You did what you were supposed to do, no questions asked." My father is letting me know in a subtle way that I am lazy. My grandmother worked in the fields, planting vegetables or whatever was needed to survive. She brought her children along, carried them on her back when she had to. My father and his siblings are very close, always have been, so they took care of one another.

My grandfather was attending Fat Jing Law School in Canton. "It was a prestigious school," my father adds. My grandfather cannot really be credited for bringing up his children. He did not support them and rarely even visited. My father says that grandfather was trying to get an education. I think he could have done both. Not to despair though, great uncle, whom I refer to as Gung Gung, took on the responsibilities of his younger brother.

Gung Gung arrived in San Francisco in 1910. His father migrated to California in the mid 1800s. He was one of the men who laid the tracks for the Transcontinental Railroad. Gung Gung and his father opened a laundry business in San Francisco, which did well. They made many trips back to China and claimed, fictitiously, to have produced many sons. Great grandfather brought his other sons to San Francisco on his travels back and forth to China. Father says that on one occasion his father voyaged to America and was held in Angel Island for a short period of time. He couldn't stand the waiting and interrogations and asked to return to China. Grandfather then returned to law school, where he picked up the habit of smoking opium and rarely returned to his family. The last time my father saw his father was when grandfather returned to say he had graduated from law school. He showed everyone his diploma and took off to find a job. He was never seen again and my father believes that he was probably killed by the Japanese.

My Uncle John told me a different story. It's true that grandfather returned to his family upon graduating but he didn't leave in search of a job. He had become addicted to opium and was not being a dutiful husband or father. Gung Gung and grandfather had a big dispute. They argued, criticized each other and at the end of their conversation Gung Gung struck his brother. My grandfather, the one I never met, left and he was never seen again.

Gung Gung supported my father and his family throughout the years. He had married and had children of his own, but still felt the responsibility to care for his brother's family. Gung Gung never failed to send money, along with letters of encouragement for father's family. He promised that, one day, they would all be able to come to the United States.

When grandfather left, daddy was preparing to go to the United States as Gung Gung's son. My father was very excited he recalls. He had heard wonderful stories about San Francisco. He remembers Gung Gung as a father figure. "Gung Gung returned to China quite often." "I saw him more than my own father." Daddy was not sad about leaving his family. He loved them dearly. The only thing they had was each other, but Gung Gung promised that everyone would soon follow.

My father was only seven years old. He was more than eager to live in a better house, he hated working the farmland. Grandmother put my father in a tiny boat with an older man she had paid. They sailed from Toishan to Hong Kong, where my father was to depart for San Francisco. The war broke out, the Japanese were everywhere, everyone was forced to flee their villages. The Yee family hid in the mountains and my father was in Hong Kong, where he had arrived too late. Gung Gung and his sons had already departed for San Francisco. "I cried like hell! ... I was afraid, seven years old and sailing to Hong Kong with a stranger...By the time I got there I had been left behind." As my father told me this story, tears filled his eyes. My father recalls the war vividly. "Many years have passed, but I'll never forget the killing and torture."

Dad stayed in Hong Kong with Gung Gung's wife and daughters until it was safe to go back to his village and his family was reunited. He continued his schooling, as did his siblings. "The only fun we ever had was fishing after school...We weren't as lucky as you, we worked hard."

In 1950, my father went to Hong Kong and lived in an apartment that Gung Gung owned. He knew that he would be going to San Francisco soon. Gung Gung had sent for his older brother the year before. My father did not have a birth certificate like we do here in America. He simply had a document signed by his fellow villagers, testifying that he was who he said he was, born at a certain time, and the son of

Gung Gung, who was really his uncle. There was other important information that Gung Gung had instructed him to memorize.

The consulate in Hong Kong sent my father a letter regarding immigrating to the United States. He was told to meet with them. My father was very nervous. He knew that he was going to be questioned. He was glad he studied for the interrogation. He was asked the size of his home, the direction in which his house faced, if there were any windows, and many other questions. He was allowed to go to America.

Daddy waited about two weeks for Gung Gung to send him money. He was sad because time didn't permit him to say good-bye to his family. Father left Hong Kong with his papers, \$5, and a few pieces of clothing. He came to San Francisco on a Pan American airplane. Uncle John went to the airport to meet my father. They were not allowed to speak to one another. My Uncle John recalls that day vividly. "I gave a man twenty dollars to give to J. Yee, but when your father was released, I found that he never received it...You see, *Moi Moi*, it was given to J. Gee." My father and Uncle John laughed together. This is about the tenth time that I've heard this story.

Uncle John and my father were not allowed to speak because immigration officials were afraid that they would give one another passwords to help my father pass interrogations. My father was taken to "Immigration" on Sansome Street. He stayed there for twenty-one days waiting to be questioned, followed by three days of interrogation. "I knew that just because I made it here didn't mean I could stay...I had to answer questions like the ones they asked in Hong Kong." I thought that the days of paper sons were long over before my father came. I didn't know they were still interrogated at this time. My mother assured me that my father wasn't lying, she had been there three years earlier. My father said that the immigration officials were actually nice people. He had expected to be tortured because Uncle John had told my father stories about his six month stay on Angel Island. Uncle John must get his word in here. "When I came to Angel Island, I was very young and afraid...My father, your Gung Gung, drilled me in preparation...Your *ba ba* (father) had it easy compared to me." I can sense their hardships because Uncle John has become serious.

Once my father got out he was happy to see Uncle John waiting outside. My father claims that the only time he was scared was during interrogations, otherwise he was enormously happy to be in San Francisco. "I remember feeling free...I knew I would have a better life in the United States because my grandfather, uncles, and cousins made a good life for themselves...Oh yeah, I was worried about my family in China, but Gung Gung had already notified them that I was coming."

Uncle John says, "I took your father straight to the laundry (in the Tenderloin) to put him to work." Father saw many different races of people, different types of food to eat, and a lot of cars and traffic. At first he was taken in by all the different activities going on, but he knew that he would like it in San Francisco. At the laundry my father was reunited with Gung Gung, his uncles, cousins, and older brother. His older brother Tung Bak or Uncle Dick as we call him now, had arrived one year earlier, also as Gung Gung's paper son.

When father arrived in 1950, he was already twenty years old. The papers which he used to gain entrance into the United States, claimed that he was only sixteen. Uncle John enrolled my father into "Continuation School." Neither my father or my Uncle John can remember the exact name. Father studied there for one year, then transferred to Mission High School. That is where he received his high school diploma. He wanted to go to college and enrolled in City College of San Francisco. He dropped out after being there for two weeks. "Do you know how hard I had to work, Cindy? ...I worked from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., went to school from 8:30 to 3:00 and then went straight back to the laundry and worked until midnight..." "We ate there, slept there, worked there, our whole life was spent there." I had to ask Uncle John how he got through college. "Moi Moi, I grew up in San Francisco, knew the language, it easier for me...Your father only knew a little English when he arrived...Never look down on your father, Cindy, he had a hard life, he came with nothing and ended up a successful man." My father is being modest, and complains that he has nothing. I let the both of them know I'm proud of them.

The first three years my father worked in the laundry, Gung Gung paid him five dollars a week. The remainder of father's pay was sent back to China to help his family. My father and Uncle John did not have much to buy, five dollars a week was just enough. On Sundays, Gung Gung would close the shop for a couple of hours so that everyone could have some leisure time. My father and Uncle John liked to spend their free time in the photography studios in Chinatown. They would borrow suits and sports that customers had left cleaned.

After three years, Gung Gung paid my father fifty dollars a week. He sent money back to his family, and saved enough money to buy an old 1937 Ford. He took his automobile to "Adult School" on Franklin Street, where he had the engine rebuilt, free. Uncle John is my father's alibi, and says that the car ran very smoothly. My father claims that he didn't have much time to socialize. He hung around with his brother and cousins most of the time. When he did get a little more time off from the laundry, he cruised San Francisco in the '37 Ford.

The year was 1956. My father happened to be cruising by Galileo High School. This is where he met my mother. "I said 'looking good sweetheart,' but your mother

wasn't impressed...She spoke better English than I did because she came here when she was only nine." My mother denies that this is the way that they met. Mother says, "Dad said, 'hey, Olive Oyle, I'll be Popeye, want a ride in my ship?'" I suppose his ship was the '37 Ford. My father is blushing now. I'm embarrassed because that is such a corny line. It worked for my father though. Mother could have had her pick, father says she was very popular. "I didn't have much, but I had charm." My father is getting a little big-headed. Actually, my father was very handsome, and Uncle John says that father had a lot of women chasing him as well. I'm sure my father is holding back on his teenage stories. My father says that he went all out to impress my mother. He bought new clothes and a new 1956 Plymouth.

The following year, in 1957 my parents were married, one week after my mother graduated from high school. They went to Reno for the ceremony, where my father gambled everything that they had. Well almost, my mother had fifty dollars in her purse. With the fifty dollars they returned home and put a down payment on a house on Missouri Street. Their first home was located in the Potrero Hill district. My father continued working at the laundry for a few more years, and mother did accounting for Macy's. They sold their home and bought a store in the Excelsior district. There was a three bedroom apartment, with kitchen, bathroom, living and dining area on top. They wanted to be their own bosses and raise their family. By this time, 1960, they already had three children daughters. My parents had a sense for business. They planned to stay there long enough to build up more savings and invest in property. Their plans were delayed by another three kids. My only brother was born in 1962 and two more daughters were born in 1964 and 1965. They gave them all names starting with "C." By the time I was born in 1971 (obviously a mistake) they were ready for a change. They leased the store, rented the unit on top, and moved to a larger house in the Outer Mission.

In 1971, my father went to work for a supermarket in the southeastern part of San Francisco. He was manager of the liquor department for approximately twenty years. Mother worked for a computer firm at this time. My parents began investing in property after property. Eventually mother got so good at it, that she became a realtor/broker/appraiser/notary. We moved again in 1979, and once more in 1991. My mother enjoys moving to bigger and newer houses every so many years. The house we moved to in 1979 was brand new. My sister and I chose to stay in it and take over payments when my parents moved next door in 1991. My father wants me to move home because he is lonely. "The house is too big for your mother, sister and I." I hardly ever see my parents, even though I live next door.

My father retired in 1990. Recently, he went to see about getting his social security benefits and was rejected. He had forgotten that his documents still state that he is only 58 years old. His age was changed when he became a paper son. He

simply acted as if he was absent minded. He said he was not afraid because he became a citizen in 1979. I still remember quizzing him on who our governor was.

He feels a strong obligation to the Yee's who helped him succeed in the United States. Although his entire family arrived in the U.S. by 1965, he still sends money to his village in Canton and he has helped other families who were not as fortunate as he was. His picture is embedded in the tiles of a school he donated money to in China. My father used to take us to Yee Association activities when we were growing up. (I mean up until the time my siblings had become teenagers. I believe we are still growing up.) He encourages his children to learn more about the family although he doesn't see his side of the family very much anymore. They only get together during Chinese New Year, weddings and funerals, "such a shame," my father says. In fact, the last time I saw Uncle John, before this interview, was at my paternal grandmother's funeral earlier this year. That is when I met his new bride, who is only twenty-three. I ask my uncle John how old he is. "Seventy-something, you dead girl" he replies in Sze Yup. I really don't know how to translate it as it sounds in Chinese, "Slay Noi" perhaps.

My father says that many things have changed since he arrived in the United States. He acquired expensive taste in clothing for one thing. As I looked through old photographs with my father, trying to trigger his memory, I saw the young Jimmy Yee. He wore western style clothing, and posed sort of G. Q. style along sights in Golden Gate Park. His clothes could not have all be borrowed from the laundry. They were tailored suits, some of which I saw in his closet. I remember going shopping with my father while growing up. He only wanted to buy us expensive things, everything else was "lousy" he said. He tells me that he hasn't had a Chinese coat since he was very young. He's a Levi's and polo shirt man today.

My father thinks that Chinese food is the best food ever created. "It's cheap, it's good and it fills you up." Although he will eat Mexican, Italian, American, and most ethnic foods, he refuses to eat Japanese food. "Why do I want to eat their food?...I saw them chop off our heads with long swords, shop!" My mother agrees with him now and is now going on about Japanese people. Our family dinners out are usually at a Chinese restaurant, or at something like a Sizzler. My father thinks his kids are "too high class" for him because we enjoy dining out and eating a variety of different food.

Daddy enjoys gardening, although he hated it when he was in China. Whenever he upsets his children, we threaten to destroy his zucchini patch, or pick all of his tomatoes, or dig up the bok choy. We call him the Chinese Joe Carcioni. His pride and joy is his backyard as well as mine. He tore a section of my fence down so that he could walk from his backyard to mine. He has expanded his garden.

My father has changed in many ways. Uncle John says, "Your dad used to save everything, he was a Jew, but now he's generous." I guess my family is a bit prejudiced. I think that my father got off the plane and acculturated quickly. Most of his family was already in the United States. Of course he learned a lot of his ways from Uncle John. "Hey Hey, I didn't teach your dad how to spoil women." I say, "Sure! Seventy-something and just settling down now." I know I better keep my mouth shut because my father is giving me the eye.

My father has always been a very supportive man. He has always stressed the importance of an education. He is traditional in many ways. He says he will never allow his children to live with anyone of the opposite sex before marriage, he would prefer we all marry someone who is Chinese, and thinks men should always pay on a date. Father has also become more superstitious since my sister passed away a few years ago. He went out and bought a four foot statue of Quan Yin, the goddess of mercy, and also has Guan Gung plastered around the house. He's supposed to protect us all. He still celebrates many Chinese activities, Chinese New Year, Ching Ming, and tea ceremonies. He wants his children to retain some of his culture. He's proud of us, but always says that we're "Mo yoong" (no good). "You girls think you're tough because you're A.B.C.s, think you're better than F.O.B.s...Personally, I'm an F.O.P. -- fresh off the plane." My father is laughing at the joke he just made. I've heard it many times myself.

I feel the interview dragging and suspect that I'm about to hear about his evil kids. "You know John, my kids have no respect...They laugh at my life in China, my life here, and have no appreciation...They always talk back, and don't listen." This isn't true of course, my parents are actually my heroes. "Oh come on give me a break," I say. "See, she's talking back again." I adore my father, he cooks, cleans, shops, and raised all of his kids well. He even changed my diapers. A lot of men didn't do that, Uncle John reminds me.

My father still believes no one is better than another person. Some people just try harder he believes. "I never had a big position at a big company, but I worked hard to make a living for my family." My dad is absolutely right, he did. He never thinks that he is too good to repair things, fix a toilet, or haul things to the dump yard. He is always willing to help people out, all they have to do is ask. "Cindy, sometimes you have to help, do what you can to make someone's life easier." Uncle John agrees with my father. "If my relatives didn't help me, I would still be in China." My father is getting a bit sentimental. I have no objections about helping others. I am exactly the same way as my father. I just don't like to be taken advantage of.

My father will always have the sense of belonging because of the generations of Yee's who first came here, who are here now, and who will be born here in America. It is difficult to describe a life in a short paper. There are many stories my father would love to tell, many that I remember being told throughout my life. This is a brief history of my father's life that began in China, and is continuing in the United States. My father is reluctant to disclose much more information about his past. He is afraid my teacher will blackmail him on his illegal entry, he is also pained by parts of his past. I can hear it in his voice and see it in his face. He is happy to tell me of his life, yet is reluctant to disclose personal information to a teacher he doesn't know. I enjoyed spending time with my father during the interviews. He readily sat down beside me for numerous interviews and told me things that on one else in the family knows. He and I agree not to discuss those things around Uncle John. This assignment has brought my father and I even closer than we were. We now share something that none of my siblings share with him, his entire life.

A Romantic Beginning by Mayumi Stroy

Leaving one's country to emigrate to another for a romantic reason would be a good plot for a Hollywood movie or television mini series. It might also have been easier to write a script than to interview my mother. She is not a self-revealing person and does not willingly disclose feelings without encouragement. Even with my encouragement she found it hard and my first attempts at interviewing her left me frustrated. Her answer to every question was; "because daddy was an American," or a variation thereof.

A friend suggested that I ask background information first about where she was born, her childhood, and then later ask again about her emigration. With this suggestion in mind, I made a new list of questions and mailed them home. My mother dictated her reply to my sister, Yuri, and sent it back quickly. I was surprised at the length and detail that she went into, her answers revealed many emotions and experiences that my mother had never told me before. I learned much about her life and emigration that helped me to understand her better and feel closer to her. I felt proud and honored that she was able to share the story with me.

My mother was born in Edogawaku, Japan. Her family then moved to Nakamegaro but then, during the war, my mother and her sisters were sent to Nigata. She lived there for eight years with her aunt and was later joined by her mother when her father died. Her older brother was killed in the war. After the war the family moved back to Nakamegaro and opened a barber shop.

My parents met in Tokyo in 1961, through the introduction of a mutual friend. My father was in the U.S. Navy, stationed in Yokuska, and went often to visit my mother. They dated for two years before they were married. Usually it took six months to a year to process marriage papers for a an American sailor who wished to marry a Japanese woman but my father had a friend in the office handling such requests and he pushed the papers through in three months.

All the time they were dating they communicated primarily in Japanese, because his ship had been stationed in Yokuska for twelve years and he was almost fluent in Japanese, but my father was also teaching her English. Once, my father took my mother to see *Lilies of the Field*, a Sidney Poitier movie, at the Navy base. The movie was mostly in broken English and she was able to understand it, so she bragged to her friends and family, "I can understand English perfectly." When *West Side Story* came to the base my mother went to see it and was dismayed that she could not understand the movie at all!

My sister was born while my father was serving his third and last tour in Vietnam. My mother was depressed the whole nine months because she had no idea what she would do if my father had been killed. Luckily, the Navy cut the tour short and he got shore duty in Puerto Rico, where I was born. My mother's biggest difficulty in Puerto Rico was her lack of confidence in English. When she went to social gatherings with my father she was very quiet and timid, then when they got home she would ask him what everyone had said. She thought her English was terrible and that everyone would laugh at her. However, with help from a maid, who herself spoke only a little English, my mother eventually learned to speak English very well.

Another difficulty in Puerto Rico was her craving for Japanese food. There were no Japanese restaurants and getting ingredients was hard. She remembers crying to my father at three in the morning when she was pregnant and wanted *osoba* (Japanese noodles). Then she met another Japanese woman whose husband had a small farm not too distant from where my parents lived. The woman made Japanese food for my mother in exchange for her company. My father was then reassigned to his ship, the *USS Mars*, and we all moved back to Japan until the ship was assigned a new home port in Alameda, California. Soon after my father's ship left Japan we also had to leave. My mother had to get a Japanese passport and fill out papers for a permanent American visa. The process took eight weeks.

Before departure from Japan, her friends and family gave her a going away party and my mother said goodbye forever, because she did not know when she would be able to return. Her older sister begged her to stay, she was married but was getting a divorce and her husband was to take their daughter and she had nobody. A week

before we left she committed suicide. My mother had always told us that her sister had been killed in an auto accident and it wasn't until her reply to my questions that I found out the truth.

When my family moved to Alameda Naval base, my mother had a built-in social life. Everyone on the base had something in common and there was even a *USS Mars* Wives Club. My mother met a group of Japanese women who were also married to American sailors and they all became close friends. My mother's English was the best because of the three years in Puerto Rico, so instead of assuming a timid role she became the outgoing person who helped everyone with their English. My mother and her friends would venture off the base and randomly ride the confusing bus system of the East Bay. They would drag us kids along and we would end up lost in Berkeley or Oakland. After several of these outings, my mother became a whiz at the bus system. She knew her way around town better than my father.

The thing that surprised my mother the most about the United States was that the opportunity to make money was so fruitful. When my father was away for nine months in the South Pacific my mother got a job cleaning motels. After she learned to drive she began taking on house cleaning jobs. These paid three times as much as the motel work and she had to work six days a week to keep up with the demand. When my father returned he was upset that she was cleaning houses but my mother was determined to work so that the family could enjoy some otherwise unaffordable luxuries.

While my father was in the Navy, we lived on base and housing and schooling were all provided. The rent and all utilities were deducted from his paycheck so there were no separate bills to pay. My mother liked this but wanted her own home, she wanted the pleasure of painting her own walls or making an addition if she wanted to. She did not want her home to be the property of the government or anyone else. After my father retired from the Navy she got her wish.

The process was tedious and many of the financial aspects she did not understand. With the patience of the real estate agent, these foreign matters of interest and mortgages became familiar and after looking at several homes my mother chose a small, three bedroom house in San Leandro. It was only ten minutes away from my father's new job Peterson Tractor Co., and not too far from my mother's house cleaning clients in Oakland. The first problem my mother now faced was the financial burden and responsibilities. She had to keep track of mortgage payments, gas bills, phone bills, water bills, and garbage bills instead of having them automatically deducted as in the past. The new system was not as

difficult as she feared, however, and with her accounting background and handy *sodoban* (abacus) she soon had the bills paid and the checkbook balanced.

Another problem she foresaw was making new friends. In the Navy her social life was ready made and everyone had things in common but she was uncertain of the greeting she would get in the civilian world. So instead of waiting for everyone to come to our new home my mother went to them. She knocked on everyone's door and introduced herself and invited them to our house warming party. She was embarrassed doing this at first but everyone was open and nice and it became a fun rather than horrific event. My mother prepared wonton and egg rolls and my father cooked hot dogs and hamburgers. She did not think anyone would come as she watched the time of the a party approach, 7 pm. It might have been the savory smell of my father's barbecue that lured everyone but they all came. They loved my mother's cooking and were intrigued with my family's background. Our Navy friends came also and mingled with our new neighbors, by the end of the evening a card club was formed with a mixture of new neighbors and old Navy friends.

My parents moved again five years later. My mother was a pro now and knew exactly what to look for in a house and exactly what she expected from the real estate agent. In six months we sold our San Leandro home and moved to Pleasanton, where our neighbors were just as nice. History repeated itself and my parents had another house warming party with new neighbors, old neighbors, and old and dear Navy friends. The party did not end with a card club but it increased the scope of our friends and gave my mother an increased sense of belonging and acceptance she had not experienced before.

After reading my mother's reply, I phoned home and asked her if I could interview her and my father one last time. "Will you please stop by Japantown and buy me something?" my mother asked. "Please buy me ten *taiyakki* (Japanese sweet cakes), five *ompon* (another type of sweet cake), and some *osembe* (rice crackers)." I agreed only if she would make chicken curry. one of my favorite Japanese dishes. When I got home, I ate two bowls of curry and one bowl of rice with *furikake* (fried fish and seaweed) on it before I started my interview. Dorm food can never satisfy my appetite for any food, let alone Japanese food.

With my belly full of good food I started my interview. "Otosan (father), what was your family's reaction when you brought Okasan (mother) home?"

They loved her right away, but some friends of mine asked me why I didn't marry a Black woman, when there were some beautiful ones right there in South Carolina. When your mother and I walked down the streets in South

Carolina, people would stop and stare and watch us. But we have had no problems in California.

"Okasan, what was your family's reaction to Dad?"

Oh, they thought he was nice man. They liked him a lot. Besides they didn't know anything about Black people. To them he was just the same as they were but from a different place.

"Okasan, what did your friends say?"

Oh, they didn't think of daddy as a "guijin" (foreigner) because he could speak Japanese so well. They liked him and gave him the nick-name "akachan" (baby) because he had a baby face.

"Otosan, did you foresee any problems about your two different backgrounds? Like customs, religion, or the way you wanted raise your children?"

No, not at all. We just loved each other a lot and had to make a lot of compromises along the way, just like any other marriage. Our different backgrounds made our life more interesting and our children more colorful.

"Okasan, what were your expectations of your life after you got here?"

At first I didn't know what to expect, but after I got here and saw all the beautiful homes and the opportunity to make money, I knew I wanted to own a home and be able to send my children to college.

"Okasan, do you ever feel alienated from other Japanese people because you married a *koko-jin guijin* (Black foreigner)?"

Sometimes, when I go to Japantown and people see us together I can feel them looking at us. A friend once said I should never marry a Black man because they are lazy, but Japanese people are too prejudiced. They hate Koreans and they treat Chinese as if they were second class citizens. I wonder sometimes why that is but I don't know. Anyway, I am an American citizen now and I live here with my family and that is all that matters.

"Otosan, did you think your children would have any problems because they were *hambun hambun* (people who half Japanese and half a different race)?"

I didn't get married and start having children until I was thirty because I didn't want my children to grow up in the hateful atmosphere that I did in the South. A Black who is poor cannot offer his family anything but I, at least, could offer my children something and a lot of love. If they had any trouble I would just say, go on out there, I lived through the worst of it and so can you.

"This question is for both of you; what were your expectations for Yuri and myself?"

To be healthy children and happy, that's all.

My mother packed me some curry and I enjoyed the aroma of real food all the way back to the dorms in San Francisco. Before I left, I got a lecture about my bad driving habits and my father added that he would like to see a few boys calling me this summer and coming around so he could meet the ugly fool who wanted to steal his baby away.

The interview had been great and both my mother and my father had a lot to say. They felt comfortable talking to me and did not hold anything back. My sister joined us later and we reminisced about the past. My father put on a Sam Cook album and began to dance with my mother. "I remember this song came out when I just met your mother," he said as he spun her around in his arms. My sister and I looked on happily as we watched our parents, who were still falling in love with each other after so many years of marriage.

NOTES

1. Personal and place names have been changed at the request of the author.
2. Names have been changed at the request of the author.

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