

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE
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Anne T. Kent California Room**

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INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE TONG
by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
May 2, 1978

INTERVIEWEE: George Tong (GT); also Jan Tong (JT) and Robert Tong (RT)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 2, 1978
TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

- CE: Today is May 2, 1978 and continuing the Oral History Project of the Marin County Library, Mrs. Kent and I have the pleasure of being at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. George Tong in Fairfax, number 333 Cascade Drive. George Tong Jr., tell us that his family have been in California since the building of the Central Pacific Railroad. And that's a long time. Do you know George that was in 1869 or '70 when they started that railroad across the Sierra? But your mother told you that, George?
- GT: Yes, my mother told me that. What year or so forth, I don't know anything about it myself.
- CE: Well, then? What happened? Your grandfather came over.
- GT: He came over and then he went back to China. He saved his money and made his fortune and he went back to China. He build homes back in Canton and he bought some land and everything, so he was a pretty wealthy man at that time.
- CE: Did he buy the land in this area?
- GT: No, no, back in China. He used the money, went back to China.
- CE: I see.
- GT: And so I don't know after so many years after that then my father came over.
- CE: And he was George Tong.
- GT: And he was George Tong, yeah.
- CE: Was he married when he came over?

GT: Yes. As a matter of fact he had three children already in China before he came over.

JT: No, he had two and a half.

GT: Two, my father, two.

JT: Oh, he had two girls.

GT: Two girls, yeah, two children.

CE: And where did he settle, George? Here in Marin?

GT: In Marin County, yes.

CE: Did he ever tell you why he came to Marin?

GT: I don't know, I really don't. I was too -- I wasn't old enough to, you know -- I was just a baby. I don't know anything about my father. All I know is what my mother told me.

CE: So, he came here. And then what did he do? He go into business?

GT: Yes, he was peddling vegetables all around Marin County, door to door, horse and buggy.

CE: You got any old pictures of that somewhere around?

GT: No. I took some back to China, you know, with my mother, but I left it all over there when I went back in 1948.

CE: And then what happened?

GT: Then after that he decided to open up a grocery store. So he opened the grocery store. He named it the Panama Grocery.

CE: The Panama Grocery. Where was it located, George?

GT: In San Anselmo. What street was it, Mrs. Kent?

AK: San Anselmo Avenue.

CE: Can you sort of locate the site? Where would it be today, near the bank?

GT: Yes, right beside the bank, you know. What was that bank right on the corner?

CE: Bank of America.

GT: Yes. Bank of America.

CE: Right next to it.

GT: Yes, on the left hand side, yes, Bank of America. Now it's a parking lot.

CE: And what did he have there? Everything? Or was it mainly produce?

GT: No, he had groceries and produce.

CE: Groceries and produce.

GT: Weren't you one of the customers, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Oh, indeed yes.

JT: Mrs. Kent and Mrs. Marsh --

GT: Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Marsh, Harry Marsh. Do you remember him?

AK: Oh, yes.

GT: Yeah. He worked for the City of San Rafael. He was a very old friend of the family. As a matter of fact, he knew me pretty well.

AK: That was a good store, a wonderful store.

CE: Okay, now, you were born in San Rafael, George, at the Cottage Hospital. What's your birth date? When was that?

GT: July 17, 1930.

CE: 1930. Where did you go to school?

GT: Well, I never did go to school in Marin County, because after I was born, I think 18 months, wasn't it?

JT: Well, not tell me. You were born four months.

GT: Four months when my father passed away.

CE: Really?

GT: Yes, just four months old when my father --

CE: So you never knew your father?

GT: No. So just what my mother told me, that's all I know. Then I was eighteen months then, right.

JT: Then your mother don't understand one word English, and finally she move and live in San Francisco.

CE: Where?

GT: Then she moved to San Francisco after my father died.

CE: Did she keep the store or sell it?

GT: No, she sold it to Bing. At the time Bing was working for my father.

CE: I see, so she sold it to him.

GT: She sold it to Bing and Tom Fong and Harry Fong. They're three brothers: Tom, Harry and Bing. They bought the store from my mother.

CE: Then you were uprooted, then, and where did you go? San Francisco?

GT: Yeah. Then my mother went to San Francisco until I was about seventeen months old, so she decided she wanted to go back to China. So she took us all back to China. So I stayed in China.

CE: What do you mean? Your sister, Marie?

GT: Every one of us.

CE: All of you.

GT: She sold everything, and so we left Marin County, went back to China until I was nine years old.

CE: Well, really China mainland. Canton is really where you were brought up.

GT: Not -- not really.

CE: Well, the first nine years --

GT: Yeah, until I was nine years old, and then came the war, and I think it was 1939, 1940 when I came back to the States.

CE: All the family?

GT: No, just myself. My mother never wanted to come back here, because when she live here there was no Chinese around here, and she feel she's a stranger.

AK: She was homesick all the time.

GT: She was real homesick when she was here, because she only here short time; it was only few years; I think four or five years, after all the kids were born. So my father pass away. Now he bury on Daly City. And she took us all back to China until I was nine when I came back here.

CE: Where did you go?

GT: No, then I came back here. Then I --

CE: Did you have relatives in the city?

GT: No. My mother had a cousin, and he live on Washington Street, so I stayed with him for a few months. Then my mother write a letter to send me back to my

brother-in-law over in Arkansas. So I went to Arkansas, stayed there for a few years until --

CE: Went to school there --

GT: Went to school there. And then, when I was seventeen, I think, then she wanted me to go back to China, because she wanted me to get married. This is how I got married when I was 18.

CE: And your lovely wife, Jan, was selected by your family?

GT: No, by me.

CE: By you. How did you know that? You go home first?

GT: Because -- No, I wasn't planning to get married. My mother told me to come home because she was dying, sick, so she told me, which is not true. She only tricked me to go back.

CE: Tricked you?

GT: Yeah, to get married. So she line up all these girls for me to look at and everything, so I think she was the thirteenth girl I was looking at.

CE: Thirteenth.

GT: Yeah, that's when I saw her, and right away I said, "That's the girl."

CE: Did you know anything about George at all, Jan?

JT: No.

GT: She didn't have any choice.

JT: I don't have choice.

GT: In China, a girl doesn't have any choice at all.

CE: You were considered the eligible young man.

GT: Well, yes, because not too many American-born Chinese go back to China at the age of eighteen to get married. Because the most that go back to get married is the older man about thirty or forty to get a young wife. But I was one of very few that go in at eighteen to get married.

CE: I think that's wonderful.

GT: See, my mother sold the business, so with all her money, the insurance money, the store and everything she took it back, she built a beautiful home in the city.

CE: Did she?

GT: Oh yes, I had a beautiful childhood. When I was a kid, I really had a wonderful life, because my mother gave me everything. I had servants, everything, when I was a kid, because she used the money. She bought a big plantation. We had a big plantation in China. We had a house in the city, and a house in the country. But when the war came along, we lost everything. First we lost the home in the city in World War II when the Jap came along, and then she moved back to China, inland China, I mean in the village, and then the Commie came along, and they took that, the plantation, everything, so she died broke. You see I really felt sorry for her. I went back to see her in 1967-68, no, '67; Rickey was born 1966. Yeah, I went back 1967, the last time I saw her.

JT: In Hong Kong.

GT: Yeah.

CE: What, you rendezvoused in Hong Kong?

GT: Yeah, because I can't go into Red China.

CE: Is she still alive?

GT: No, she died, oh, Cindy is nine, nine years ago, right after my youngest girl born. I have four children.

CE: Oh, you have four children.

GT: I've got two boys and two girls.

CE: We have Robert and Richard and who --

GT: I've got a first one.

CE: What's your number one daughter's name?

GT: Susie. She's a nurse.

CE: Is she really?

GT: Yeah.

JT: And Robert. There's Ricky; there's Cindy.

GT: Cindy's last. I've got a girl, then two boys, then a girl.

CE: Just wonderful. Well, your mother -- So the circumstances wiped her out.

GT: Well, really, I had a tough childhood myself since the age of nine. I was on my own all my life, really, ever since I was nine years old. And I never had an opportunity to go to school, because I was kicked from family to family, and I just lived at different place and been working all my life. Then, after school, you know, I had three years schooling and --

CE: Do you speak Cantonese at home?

GT: Yes, we do. The wife and I, we do, yes.

CE: How about your children? Are they learning?

JT: A little bit.

GT: We try to teach them, but they won't listen; they won't use it.

CE: All right, you got married when you were eighteen. Did you come back to the United States directly, or did you live in China?

GT: No, after I got married and my mother don't want me to bring my wife over. She say if I bring her back to the States, then I would never go back. So she stayed with her for ten years after that. I came back myself.

JT: We married six months.

CE: You mean you were married six months, and you came home alone back to the States for ten years?

GT: Yes.

CE: That was your mother's hold on you.

GT: Yeah, because I believe -- See, what I believe in -- My mother had a tough life because her husband died and she brought up all three children. She gave us a good life when she can.

CE: When she could.

GT: Yeah, because up until I was nine years old, as I say, I live a good life, when I was nine, up until I was nine. I had servants; we had a beautiful home; she had a house; we have three story house always around us, beautiful home.

CE: Where was your home in the city?

GT: It's in Kong Moon. But anyway, it was a beautiful home, and she had given me servants and everything else, but the war came along, so everything gone, so there's nothing, so she --

CE: Wasn't that a difficult thing for you to do, to leave your wife for ten years?

GT: Well, look at this way: that's part of my life. I've been kicked around all of my life, like I say. When the Jap came along, and then my mother shoved me back to the States on my own, and I just came over when I was 10 years old, and I started working and just part time go to school. And then I went back to live with my brother-in-law back in -- He was pretty tough guy. He really --

CE: You mean in Arkansas?

GT: Yes.

CE: Okay, so you came ahead of Jan, and you're here. Do you get in the grocery business again following your father's footsteps? What did you do?

GT: Always in the grocery business.

CE: Always in the grocery business. Did you go to work for somebody initially?

GT: First I worked for my brother-in-law in Arkansas, and then when I came back here, I went back to work with Tom and Harry.

CE: Oh, the Fongs?

GT: The Fongs.

CE: Weren't they the people who bought your mother's store?

GT: Yes, right.

CE: You worked for them?

GT: I'm still working for them. I've been working for Fongs for quite a few number of years now.

CE: What do you call your market?

GT: The Fairfax Market.

CE: Where is it located?

GT: Bolinas Road, 14 Bolinas Road.

CE: 14 Bolinas Road. Have you ever thought of getting the market back?

GT: Well, we think about often, but you cannot.

CE: He wants too much money now.

GT: Yeah. I couldn't afford it.

JT: We always like to have that small business.

GT: Yeah, but I couldn't afford it. See, that's my -- But I consider myself pretty lucky though, really.

CE: Well, you have four children. You have a lovely home, George. You work hard.

GT: I work hard. I work six days all my life. When I was a kid was down in Arkansas, I was just 10 or 12 years old, I was work on Saturday; we work until twelve o'clock, every Saturday, seven days a week.

CE: Didn't hurt you.

GT: All my life I've been working, and then the Jap came along, and then I had to support my mother. I had to use always send all, every cent I got back, to support my mother, when the Commie came over there. After I got married her, then she lost her land, the plantation and everything, so I had to work and send the money to her and everything. Until 1959, I didn't have anything. When I brought her over, I was really saving everything, and I got about four thousand dollars, and that's when I put every cent in here for down deposit on this house.

CE: In 1959 you bought this?

GT: Yeah, 1960. She came in 1959.

JT: Yeah, but Bobbie born in 1960.

GT: Maybe first part of '61, then we bought.
JT: Yeah, we bought house in '61.
CE: Aren't you glad you bought in then, George?
GT: Yes. I save every cent I have, save four thousand dollars, and we put four thousand dollars down on this house, down payment.
CE: It's a beautiful home, and you keep the garden --
JT: Yeah, he's the one that buy the house, but I want to buy a house.
CE: Oh, we get the straight scoop now.
JT: He want to save the money for --
GT: I want to go into business; that's what I really wanted to do.
JT: But I say I want house first, and you look at a business that you like; you can sell the house and use the money to buy it.
CE: Pretty smart girl you've got here.
GT: Yeah.
CE: Not only pretty, but she's smart.
GT: Yeah. I'll tell you a secret about this house. When we bought this house, they want \$19,000 for it. You know what? She want to jew them down; we only pay fifteen for it.
CE: How did you do that, Jan?
GT: She just came from China only two years, she couldn't even speak one word of English yet.
CE: How did you do it? Did you just say no?
JT: Tell him, don't do it. I just so and --
GT: I was going to buy it, and she say, "No, no." We got it for fifteen. Because the people built this house; they build three houses in the Cascades: this house, that house over there and another house down below. They go broke. They owed the taxes and everything on it.
CE: They wanted money.
GT: They want my \$4,000. So that's how I got this house for the price it is.
CE: Beautiful, though. Well, look how it's appreciated; look at its value.
GT: You know, I did lots to the house. When I bought this house, the guys just built the house, nothing outside. I improve on this house, just a plain house.
JT: You go buy some plants. You can't see the house --
CE: It shows. Everywhere you look, it's beautiful. Put the shutters in and the paneling.
GT: Of course, I did all that myself. I do all the work myself.
CE: Well, you know George, people our age, and I could include myself, I'm older than you, went through tough times. It didn't hurt us too bad; it made us appreciate some things.
GT: No, no. This is a wonderful country, and if a guy really want to work, like myself, I'm not educated, I don't have any schooling, but I'm trying, and I work and I --
CE: You're pleasant. He's such a happy, pleasant man.
JT: Yes.
GT: One thing I got to admit: I've got a nice family, my children are good. My daughter, I raised her, she born in China, my oldest one.

CE: Oh, how did this come about, now? All right, she came --

GT: Well, see, what happened, I was back to marry her, and I came back, nine year before she come over.

CE: And then you went back.

GT: No, I didn't go back. She just came over with the girl.

JT: First we live in China; the Commies they don't let us out.

GT: First she's in Red China, she can't get out.

CE: Well, were you living with your family?

JT: No, with my mother-in-law.

GT: With my mother.

JT: Oh, I can't live with my mother. No Way! In China, don't allow that girl live with own mother.

CE: When you get married, you left the nest; you're out.

GT: Yes.

CE: How did you get along with her?

GT: Not very well. My mother didn't care for her at all, because she the one I pick her. My mother didn't like her because she said she too small. My mother wanted a daughter-in-law that husky and well built, that can work. And she seen the girl, great big girls, you know, and that what she want, and she against me because I pick her, and she didn't care for her because she say she too small and tiny.

CE: Look at the fine children she bore you.

GT: Yeah, look at my four how big they are, and she worry about all her grandchildren be little, small.

CE: They grow big in America.

GT: Yeah, they grow big. Look at how my oldest boy is, taller than I am. But they don't work as hard.

CE: Well, the one daughter is a nurse.

GT: She's a nurse.

CE: Is she the one that's married?

GT: Yes, she's married.

CE: You must be very proud of that achievement of her. You know to be a nurse and to get --

GT: You know you'd be surprised. She went to Drake; she an honor student. She won a scholarship with the College of Marin; she earned it her own. I'm really proud of her.

JT: He don't help one penny.

GT: I didn't spend one cent on that girl; she got her nurse and everything. She did it all on her own. She came over nine years old, not one word of English, and the kids at that Center School laugh at her, tease her, and she came out as honor student through Drake, and I'm very pleased.

CE: Well, you should be.

GT: I told my children, I say, "I never had opportunity you guys have, and I hope you guys, you know, make me proud of you, and I show them what you can do."

CE: Well now, does Robert and Richard -- Did they have ideas where they're going in life or what interests them?

GT: Well, Robert wanted to be in photography. He wanted to go into pictures and things like that; I don't know really. And then Richard, he say someday we want to become a CPA. I don't know, that's what he say.

CE: Nice to have one of those in the family.

GT: Well, I got one all ready, son-in-law.

CE: Have you? Oh, this fellow.

GT: He work with Levi. He's a certified accountant; he's a management with Levi and Company.

CE: Mrs. Kent did you know George's mother?

AK: Yes, I knew George's mother; I knew his father too. I knew his father before he went home to bring her back here. And he did go, and he brought her back, and at first I think she was kind of happy. But she was old China, and it was far from home, and she -- Well, she began having her babies. Well, they were about the same age as my girls.

CE: The twins.

AK: Of course we were all -- Everybody knew everybody else in San Anselmo in those days, and George was the most wonderful, big man. He was the most wonderful, big guy, and people would turn to him, and call him for all kinds of things. He looked forward to having a lovely home, like this I suppose, but one day he just died. Let's see, there were two children, you and Marie

GT: No three, three.

AK: And then after he died your mother told me she was pregnant.

GT: Yea, right, right, you're right.

AK: And that made her very unhappy. She wanted to go home and she wanted to get away. She sold the things to Bing, and she went to Chinatown just until everything was arranged for her money and for her to go back, and the baby was born in Chinatown.

GT: Right, the youngest one was born in Chinatown.

AK: But then she was most unhappy; she just wanted to go home.

GT: She was homesick. She was much homesick, because her mother still live in China, and all her family is in China.

CE: Well, now, weren't there some Chinese in Marin County, George, at that time?

AK: Well, yes, there were some but she --

CE: Weren't there a lot of them working for the Kent's?

AK: Well, they were men, you see.

GT: Well, most -- They don't have families. I think my father about the first family settle in Marin County. There was no family here.

AK: There was somebody in Mill Valley --

GT: Kee, that's a cousin, that's only our family originally.

AK: Yes. She was busy with the babies, and Mill Valley did seem a little bit out of the way. They didn't see each other too much, and she still didn't feel very settled. It was just too bad.

GT: I think that we were about the first real Chinese family in this Marin County.

AK: I don't think there were too many.

CE: Well, didn't the Town of San Anselmo think very highly of George's father and mother?

AK: Oh, yes. He was one of the first citizens of San Anselmo. He had the best market and San Anselmo was changing then. As I remember it, that was a very right angled little street, and they made it wide and made the curbs there then; it's right near the bakery. That was all made new at about that time. But nobody least of all the mother had ever expected anything. He was such a strong big fellow, nobody ever dreamed that anything would ever happen. I suppose it was his heart, I don't know.

CE: Did she ever tell you George?

GT: Yeah, it was really surprise how he died, just overnight; that's it and he's going.

AK: Was it his heart?

GT: I don't know. She never really talk about it, she always say he just died. That's what she told us. She never want to bring it up, you know, how he died and this and that.

AK: Oh, so it was a heartbreaking time for her.

GT: Yeah. But she never remarried, and she just brought us kids up. That's why I always believe in my mother and everything she want; that's her way. And when she want me to get married, so I got married, and when I came back, she didn't want me to bring my wife over, I just leave her there. That's all I can do, just do whatever she say.

CE: You're a son like, -- a wonderful son.

GT: Well, I'm not bragging, but I don't think Mina's son would do like I would do with my mother.

CE: No. Well, duty to you is not a dirty word, you see. You knew what you wanted to do and had to do.

GT: Yeah, because I feel this way, I want my wife with me. Number one, the first thing is, I didn't want to get married the first thing, I didn't want to get married because I was too young. But she want me to get married. I did that because she wanted me to get married, so I got married. After I got married, and I want to bring her back over here, and she say, "No, because once you bring your wife back, you would never return to China to see me." So I said okay, and I left her over there. Then I came back, and I think it was about three -- I forget, about two or three year later, then I got drafted in the army.

CE: Good old USA.

GT: Then I left here, Marin County, and went to Fort Ord at basic training and then they send me down south. And when I was down south, I tried to bring her over, when I was in the army. See, my mother told me, she said, "You cannot bring your wife over because -- " See, when my daughter was born I told them a ticket, my daughter to Hong Kong. I had to register, you know, as my daughter. So my mother, she say, "No, I didn't take your daughter out of there." She said, "We registered as a boy so make sure he can't go; take your wife with you." She go anyway, you know, to try to stop me to bring her over because she want me to return to her.

CE: Okay, now you made several trips back to China before your mother died, didn't you? Two or three?

GT: I made two trips.

CE: Two trips.

GT: I saw my mother twice, yes. Once in 1948 and once in 1968.
CE: And she died -- She died when?
GT: No, '67.
CE: And when did she die?
GT: '68.
CE: So you saw her pretty -- a year before she died.
GT: I went back in '67.
JT: No, What year Cindy born, 1968.
GT: She die in '68 and I went back in '67. She died in '68. My youngest daughter was born that year she died.
CE: Did she see any of your children, other than the first born?
GT: No, just the first one. Never seen the other three.
CE: She never saw them. You sent pictures?
GT: Right.
CE: All these years that you were separated, just correspondence?
GT: Not even that. She and I nothing.
JT: He don't have but one letter sent to me. He don't have one penny give to me, nothing.
GT: Everything got to go to my mother. In China, see, we taught our way, we respect our elders no matter who you are.
CE: Well, you mean you would write your mother, you would send your mother --
GT: Yeah, up to her to control the family. She's --
CE: Well, could you have slipped a note in to Jan?
GT: Well, we wasn't brought up that way.
CE: It never entered your mind to do that, in other words?
GT: I wouldn't dare to, because my mother wouldn't want me to do. It entered my mind to do it, yeah, but I wouldn't never want to cross my mother, because if -- She sooner or later going to find out, and would be more trouble for her.
CE: Well, was it socially all right to make an inquiry? "Give my love to Jan," or -- no?
GT: Oh, yeah, you can write that in the letter; you can do that but --
CE: But it goes to your mother.
GT: Yeah, it go to her.
CE: Would she always read them to you, Jan? No?
JT: Sometime I would be nosey. I want to find out how George is master all right? She say, yes, that's it.
GT: The old Chinese are that way.
CE: I think it's wonderful, our young generation could learn something from the Chinese.
GT: Our Chinese older generation, you don't dare to talk back to them. If they make up their mind what it is then that is what you go by, that is the law. You don't question them or this or that, and that's how we're taught; we respect the elder. Not only your mother. Say for instances your family, say Mrs. Kent, she one of our friend, and she older than I am, I suppose to give her the respect, because she's an elder.
CE: I was raised that way, too.

GT: See that's how we taught. We taught respect to our elders.
CE: And I think that courtesy should continue.
GT: What you think in your mind, that's your business, but you've got to pay them the respect for the age.
CE: I go for that.
GT: But not like my kid nowadays. You can talk to them, and they start hollering at this and that, you know, not the way we talk.
CE: They respect you and your wife.
GT: Oh they respect. Really I really can't complain about my children.
CE: No, you have good children.
GT: I really can't complain about my children at all. Just like my boys --
CE: When your daughter got married, or wanted to get married, how did you handle that?
GT: Well, I see what happened my daughter got married. A cousin came over from Canada; she came over to visit us. And then she ask my wife, she say, "Your daughter old enough, don't she want to get married? I know a nice boy on the other side of the bay." That's how they introduce --
CE: I see. You had an intermediary.
GT: Yes.
CE: Did you like him when you saw him?
JT: They know our family back in China.
GT: Oh, yeah, they know our family back in China. See one thing with us, our family back in China pretty well known, because my grandfather is a big man, because he's considered wealthy person.
CE: The one who came over for the railroad?
GT: Yeah. All we got to say his name, we such and such is the grandson of grandchildren, then right away people know who we are.
CE: What was his name again?
GT: In Chinese what is -- How you say that? Su Ping, that's Chinese name. So whenever you give his name, people in China know who he is.
CE: Open doors.
GT: They know who he is.
JT: Also, he is a doctor. He was a doctor and was a teacher too, and they hide the people. They go outside the street all pick up -- a very good man.
GT: Yeah, he can see a lot of wealthy people back in China, back in our village.
CE: Do you have any desire to go back to China? Bring your children there for a trip?
GT: No, no. To take them back to China to visit, but I don't want my children to go in China to live there.
CE: No, no I didn't mean that, but aren't they curious to see --
GT: I would love to take my -- My wife was; she was back in China this year.

End of side A

AK: Jan, when you went back last January you must have gone into the part of China that is Red China.
JT: Red China.
AK: Oh, can you tell us something?

JT: Well, I go -- Over there the people, they're real poor but they don't have not much to feed them, all vegetable, house, can't see them.

GT: People back in the village are real poor, and they don't have much to eat. All they do is just go to work and most of them; it's farming country. That's what, you know -- Our family came from Canton, the village, all farming country.

AK: They did let you take all those wonderful things in?

GT: Yes, yes, she did, she took quite a few things.

CE: What do you mean? What did you take in?

GT: The Commie allow you buy certain things, like, she took bicycle, she took sewing machine, sweater and things like that. They got a list that you can buy. So if you can so how the list and whatever food you can bring.

JT: Watch; I buy watch.

GT: Radio.

CE: But it wasn't hard for you to get a passport and a visa?

GT: No, it took a long time.

JT: Long time. I apply for two years.

GT: Two years ago. She didn't even know she was going to go. All of a sudden, Washington got a letter from say you can go and a certain time and was in January, suppose to go in the month of January.

CE: And how did you get there, Jan? Did you fly to Hong Kong?

JT: I fly from Oakland.

GT: Yeah, Oakland Airport.

JT: Airport and fly to Hong Kong, and I stay Hong Kong three days, and buy things, and buy a train ticket. And I took a train to go to Canton.

CE: Now how long a journey would that be? You cross over where to Kowloon and then go up?

JT: Yeah, from Kowloon.

CE: How long did that take you a couple of days?

JT: No.

GT: It's only about a hundred and some miles.

CE: Oh, it is?

JT: We took a train at eight o'clock, eight o'clock to go to Canton is four o'clock.

GT: It's not too far away from.

CE: Well, most of the Chinese in California immigrated from Canton.

GT: Right.

CE: And that seemed to be the place of departure, is it a large city, George?

GT: Well, Canton is more like county; that is what Canton is like, like Marin County.

JT: Oh, Canton like city.

CE: Is it a peninsula, or mouth of a river, or --

GT: Canton is a county.

JT: No, Sunmoise County.

GT: Canton big city like San Francisco.

CE: Is it modern city?

JT: Yeah.

GT: Well, in Canton itself, but we live in the outside skirts of Canton, in the village.

JT: Well, I stay in Canton one night, and I rent a Volkswagen bus and check all the packages.

CE: Oh, you rented a VW bus?

GT: With a driver; they drive you in.

CE: And put all this stuff in?

JT: Yeah.

CE: Where were you head for, his mother's home?

GT: No, no, her mother.

CE: Your mother. Now you're going to your mother?

JT: Yeah.

GT: See, my mother die already.

CE: So you don't have to go there. So you're going to see your own mother. And how long had it been since you'd seen your mother?

JT: I haven't seen my mother and father 21 year. See, I come over here 19 years and was in Hong Kong one and a half, see, before come over here. My father and mother really happy. My mother crying.

GT: You know people are sad back in China. Most people don't realize how bad it is in Commie China. People are poor; they don't have the opportunity we do over here. If you work hard you can earn your living and so forth, but, oh, in China, I don't care how hard you work, they only allow you so much.

CE: And with the change in the political situation, it's even more difficult, isn't it?

GT: Yeah. There is no opportunity like there is in this country. Most people don't realize it in this country; we got lots of freedom, but in China there is no freedom. Do as you're told, and that's it.

JT: And then they live in city.

CE: It wasn't always that way, your grandfather's time. What brought him probably to America and the many Chinese, was it the opportunity to make some --

GT: To make something, yeah.

CE: Some quick money and then --

GT: Yeah, that's what most Chinese -- Today Chinese are different because we settle here now, and we make a home here now, but the older Chinese just come over to make a fortune and go back to China, and that's where they want to go, just like my grandfather, see, but with us, with myself, you can forget about China; we not going to China as far as that go.

AK: You're right, that was their one thing.

CE: Well, the Chinese have always been -- Well at least for a good many years, for a generation, very well regarded in the Bay Area. It wasn't always that way, I know.

GT: The old Chinese, but the young generation a little bit different now, it's changed; they change quite a bit. I know usually Chinese people get a little more respect that they did today. Chinese get into everything, get into drugs, go to jail and everything else now today, not like it used to be.

JT: Not in China, no.

CE: Well, the social mores have changed everywhere, and I suppose it touches all cultures, George, and all ethnic groups.

JT: But in China, no drug, no gamble, nothing.

CE: Well, it's an autocratic government; they're calling all the shots, aren't they, George? You have no freedoms at all.

GT: Yeah, no freedom.

CE: You think that it's possible that will change?

GT: It's got to change; its got to take time. The country's poor and the government want to control, you know, get a little bit more money in there in the treasurer or whatever it is.

CE: I know, but since 1972 when we sent that mission to China and we are now sort of speaking to each other again after many years of silence, I mean the American government and the Chinese --

GT: I'll say one thing about China, they'll only let you see and hear what they want you to hear and see; you really don't know the whole story. But like herself, she's got a family over there, she went back over there and talk to the family, and they know how hard it is for them, and how hard she -- Just like her family, she told her brother, why don't he teach his children, get a little more education and so on and so forth. They say, "You can't. What I'm doing now -- I'm a farmer. My children got to be the farmer exactly the way I am."

CE: No branching away into any other field.

GT: No, right.

CE: How about their opportunity, say, if somebody sponsored them, can they get out of China?

GT: Well, she sponsored her brother for I don't know how many years now, can't get out.

JT: Four years all ready.

CE: Can't get out?

GT: We had Washington, immigration, everything, all approved over here to bring over, but the China won't let him out. She try to get her brother out now for a number of years. Everything over this side is all handled, everything okay, the American, he can come in the country soon as he let out of China, but the China won't let him come out, the Hong Kong. If he can get out of Hong Kong --

CE: It's a good thing you got Jan out.

GT: I didn't get her out; she got herself out. That girl is smart. She got herself out.

JT: My story is here --

GT: Oh, we -- Our story real strange story. It would take days and days to talk about it, our story, between my wife, my family.

CE: You should write this down for your children and your grandchildren.

GT: We had a real tough start. I really had a tough life when I was a kid, but like I say, I thank God I turn out, and I look at myself now. I've got four children and I'm considered pretty lucky.

CE: Yes, you've got some material things that a lot of people --

GT: Well I own my own home. I don't owe, it's mine, but we work hard for it so --

CE: Are you a religious man, George?

GT: Not really. No, I'm not a religious man.

CE: How about you, Jan?

JT: Well I live in China. China religion is Buddha; I believe in Buddha, but now --

CE: Buddha?

GT: Yeah, but I don't think she believe in that now.

JT: Now I live here, I follow the Americans. They believe in God; I believe in God.

AK: How about you and your baby? You were both born in China. How did you work that to get out?

JT: How I work to get out? He mother out of the country, go to Hong Kong. I tell her, you go to Hong Kong six months, you had to once a week, and my daughter out of country, go to Hong Kong, but my mother-in-law won't do it.

GT: You know how she got herself out of Hong Kong? See, in 1948, I went back to China, and my airplane ticket I left over there, my old ticket and things like that, I left them in China. And the pictures, the pictures and everything you know when it was 1948. So she used that and go to the city hall or whatever you call it back there, and told those people, "My husband just came back from the United States, and he's in Hong Kong. Now I got to go out and join him." And so she ask for a pass, just for temporary pass to go visit me, because I just come back from United States. This how she tricked those Commie guys. So they give her a pass which is not --

JT: I have passport.

GT: She just give them a pass to go out to -- She's supposed to return back to China, really. So she came out of Hong Kong, soon as she came out of Hong Kong, she write to me. She said, "I'm out of Hong Kong," so I went down there and got her over just like that, because I got the right to bring her over without any, no questions; just go to immigration.

CE: You mean that after that just this year you went back into China?

GT: Yeah.

CE: You'd think they'd be waiting for her.

GT: She's an American citizen now.

CE: You're a very smart one.

GT: After a few year she come home she got her -- She's an American citizen now, so there's nothing they can do about it.

JT: Well still, but you -- Every time you speak to somebody, you will be careful, you know. You think about what you talk to speak to the people, see.

CE: Did you dress very conservatively, Jan?

JT: No, just like that.

CE: Oh, really? Weren't you noticeable?

GT: Oh, no, they don't care. They treat them pretty well over there, especially the people from the United States.

JT: Oh, yeah, good, very good.

CE: They want to give a good impression.

GT: They wouldn't dare to cross you. They treat you okay as far as that goes. There's no problem for you to go over. If you're American citizen, you go over there, there's no problem.

CE: But, if you are a Chinese citizen --

GT: Yeah, that's different.

AK: But they didn't allow you any more food than your mother had to share?

JT: Well, I go over there; I have a food --

AK: You brought --

GT: No, they allow you, they allow you so much. First they ask you how long you going to stay, and they allow you, just like during the World War II, give a ration. We had the same thing here, this country. They give ration books.

CE: Her mother said, "My daughter is coming to visit. I need --"

GT: No, no, she got to go down and apply for them.

JT: I got to --

GT: You got to go to the city hall here, like you come to Fairfax and you go to city hall, so you show your passport, and you came for so long on visit, they give you the coupon to buy things with.

JT: And like I can eat, like every meal eat the rice; I can't eat my mother's. My mother's certain things don't have more for me.

GT: They only allow so much for them see. That's rations is what it is.

JT: Twenty pound rice a month.

CE: How much?

JT: Twenty pounds.

CE: Twenty pounds for how many people?

JT: For one people.

GT: Don't forget now in China the main meal is the rice.

CE: Yes, I realize that.

GT: So that isn't much.

JT: For morning breakfast and lunch all meal --

AK: All three meals.

JT: All three meals.

GT: Yeah, that's why most are hungry; they don't have much to eat.

AK: Not much in the way of meat for your father, the working man?

GT: No meat. Meat is hard thing to go buy.

CE: Fish?

GT: Real hard.

CE: Fowl? No. How do they stay well? They work hard.

JT: They work hard, but they raise chicken or something like that and some for government.

GT: What she saying is, you raise three chickens, I think, you got to give one to the government.

CE: I don't think that's any place for you, George.

GT: No, not for me.

CE: You've got too much enterprise.

GT: I don't want no part of China.

CE: Are you happy here now in this country?

JT: Oh, I'm really happy, yes. I come over here, I have freedom.

GT: That's why I say I consider myself very lucky. Until 1959 I live in a car with a suitcase. That's only from place to place, and that's why I'm so proud of my home, and my children, and I kind of stay put, really. I'm not going no where.

CE: Well, what's better than this? Where else do you want to go? Do you mean travel some day?

GT: Oh yeah.

CE: Don't you like to travel?

GT: I like to travel; not with myself, with wife, fine.
JT: He like to, but sometime you have to control your money.
GT: See that's why you got to sacrifice a lot of things. Well, the way I see it I -- My home come first, my children come first, and this run around here and there is really uncalled for, I don't need that. If I can afford it --
CE: You come here, you've got everything you need right here. Look at that, you've got your entertainment center, you've got your fish. What's that? Is that a statue of Kuan Yin up there?
GT: Yeah.
CE: Kuan Yin, goddess of mercy. Might I ask what it says over the mantle, those -- Is it good luck?
GT: Yes, it's good luck. That's what it means, yeah.
CE: Do you feel very American? You sure act it, George.
GT: Well, like I say I came to this country -- I came back to this country, I was nine years old; that's the rest of my whole life. I don't know anything about China.
CE: I mean being Chinese, does that ever bother you?
GT: Yes and no. Sometime it does, but I try not to let it bother me.
CE: When you were in the army, I bet, it was the toughest.
GT: No, that wasn't. When I was a kid and used to live with my brother-in-law in Arkansas, the three years I go to school. Every school I go to I have to fight a kid.
CE: But now as an adult you don't have any --
CE: No, no. When I first bought this house, they didn't want me to buy this house. They got a petition going around here; they don't want me to buy this house because I'm Chinese.
CE: Oh, but I bet they're all --
AK: Proud now.
GT: But like I told my kid, I say I'm outshine everybody around here. Look at my place; take a look everybody house.
CE: It's the best looking house on the whole road.
GT: That's right. I know it, and everybody know it. Everybody know what I got here. I don't even have a week out of it. That's what I tell my kid, "If somebody look down on you, don't try to fight them, show them what you can do." That's what I believe in it. I don't care how many words you can say, they can look at you, see what you done. You is what they have to judge by is not how many school you go to, or this and that. I don't have any schooling; you just judge the way you are. That is what I try to tell my children. I say, "Don't worry about what other people tell you or what they think of you, just show them."
CE: I think he has more wisdom than Confucius. Pretty smart, too.
GT: No, I'm not smart.
CE: Yes, you are. You're very perceptive young --
GT: Like I say, I brought up the hard way, and I been kicked around enough myself. Maybe I don't have the book learning like my kid or everybody else there, but I've been kicked around from place to place, and I take lots, you know.
JT: He know what he doing.
GT: I've been kicked around quite a bit.
CE: How come you're not working today? Did you knock off for us?

GT: No, I suppose to be working.
AK: He's doing it for you.
CE: He knocked off for us. Well, this is very good. Now we have a little more time.
AK: What about all those things up in there?
GT: This one, I think Robert got this certificate from a \$5,000 scholarship from *IJ* when he was at -- This one --
CE: Is this Robert or Richard?
GT: That's Robert, the oldest son.
CE: This Robert?
GT: That's Robert, he got a \$5000 scholarship for that, and both boys been *IJ* paper boys.
CE: What did you do to earn this, Robert?
RT: I competed against almost 800 carriers in the county and then went on to California and compete against 7,000 other carriers.
CE: What was the criteria used to give you this award?
RT: Public service and scholastic.
CE: Very good.
RT: Mostly public service.
GT: Robert, he's a Eagle Scout.
CE: That was four years ago.
RT: Eighth grade.
CE: Eagle Scout. Are you the young man interested in photography?
RT: Yes, try and go into biomedical photography.
CE: And by that I imagine you mean through the microscope.
RT: Right.
GT: Well, right now he got more to cook with; he's a volunteer fireman for the Fairfax Fire Department, and he's also with the Bay City Ambulance Company in San Anselmo. He's a pretty active kid; he never home. I don't know why he's home today.
CE: Dave O'Leava down there at Bay City?
RT: Yes.
CE: I know him very well.
RT: Bay City, they sponsor our Explorer group.
CE: They do?
RT: We have an Explorer group, and they just teach us everything that they do now. They sponsored me and six other kids through emergency medical techniques.
CE: You got a license for that? You got a license?
RT: EMT 1 license which is registered --
CE: Did Dave ever get his license?
RT: I believe so.
CE: You know, he has renal failure, and that's his problem, you know, kidneys.
RT: He's not working with United Medical Center anymore; he's working across the street for some kidney foundation.
CE: Well, that type of photography you're talking about would be in a medical center, I presume?

RT: Right. I'm trying to get a job at San Francisco Presbyterian Hospital this summer working, plus working with fire science, so I can either go with fire science or go into medical photography.

CE: Have you done some of this through the microscope yourself with a 35 mm camera?

RT: No, I've been working with the yearbook stuff at school and freelance photography the last two years. I'm working at the fire department now as a photographer.

CE: After a fire you take --

RT: During and after for training films and working with an investigator, arsonists.

CE: I think that Roy Farrington Jones does that for Ross and San Anselmo. When you do freelance, Robert, is it portraits or is it nature?

RT: I'm learning how to do portraits; a lot of it is just nature shots and landscape that have sold. Other jobs have been photocopying, or reproducing pictures.

CE: Do you have a darkroom in your home?

GT: We got one; I just build one last year.

CE: Oh, you did.

RT: We're still working on it.

GT: I build one back there for him last year; we haven't complete it yet. It's back --

CE: Well, we in this kind of work that Mrs. Kent and I are doing, for example, often times, like yesterday, we were interviewing a woman who has some interesting old photographs. Now many of these people will permit us to copy these photographs. You follow me. And then we have them blown up 8 x 10 and paid for. Could you be able to do something like that?

FT: That's what I do.

CE: Got the negatives or gave you a roll of 35 mm film and you could blow them up to 8 x 10s?

RT: What I do is reshoot the picture; take the picture down and I take a picture of the picture and reproduce it that way.

CE: Well, what I'm saying is that some of this is so valuable they don't want it to leave the house, but if I took a picture of the picture with my macro lens and got a roll of negatives to you, you could develop them?

RT: Right.

CE: Think about it and we'll talk further about it. Maybe we can give him some business. That would be good. I'd like to see some of your work later. All right, Jan, what else do you want to tell us?

JT: Well, really I don't speak the English well.

CE: I can understand.

AK: Very good.

CE: This is Robert. Now we know what his interests are. Where is Richard? Is he home?

GT: Richard, see, this, this is what he does.

CE: Oh, dear, this is the season.

GT: He has a paper route. He must be still newspaper; he must be delivering.

JT: I think so.

CE: Do you prepare dinner every night?

JT: Yeah.
CE: Everybody sit down at a definite hour, all at once, all the family?
JT: Yes.
CE: Nobody comes in late or says, "I'm not going home or --"
JT: Oh, sometime my boy had to stay at school.
GT: Well, something like that. But no, as rule, we always have dinner together; we always do.
JT: Yeah, we always do.
GT: Always wait for me come home to have dinner.
JT: Always wait for George come home, before eat dinner.
CE: Do you concentrate on Chinese dishes or do you have everything?
GT: No, half and half. We kind of mix Chinese.
CE: A mix. Do you go to the city to Chinatown once in a while?
GT: Once in a while; not too often, because we can buy most anything here.
CE: Yes. What do you think your market offers that most other markets don't have?
GT: I think service. For a small store, service is most important really. A small store like that, people come in, you know most of the customers.
CE: You run charge accounts?
GT: Oh, yeah they run charge accounts, yeah.
CE: Do you deliver?
GT: Yes, we do, yeah.
CE: That's important.
GT: Yeah, but its kind of get away from that. Most of our older customers all pass away; the older generation, and the younger generation believe in going to chain stores. You know, they kind of get away from it. But up until a couple of years ago we still got quite a few older customers, been there for years, but now one by one it's kind of pass on and kind of --
CE: How long has the store been there?
GT: Fifty years.
CE: Fifty! And you've been there about, what, about 30?
GT: Well, I started working in the store when I was, what 18? Yeah 18, 19 when I started working there. Yeah, it been about 30 year off and on, because I was in the army for a few years.
CE: Yes, you've been there about thirty years.
GT: Off and on. See, I started that store 30 years ago, when I first worked there, 29, 30 years ago, but off and on.
CE: Have you been in the store, Mrs. Kent?
AK: Oh, yes. And they have plants, too, you know.
GT: No, no, that's Harry.
AK: Oh, that's the other fellow.
GT: Harry close down now.
AK: Well now, didn't you carry them for a while?
GT: Yeah, see I did work for Harry, too. Harry when he first started was the only Fairfax market.
AK: When you first started was it called the Fairfax market?
GT: Right, right.

AK: Always, always.

GT: Yeah, because when I came back -- I just came back to Marin County when I was about 18, and I've been there ever since, except a few year went into the service. Then I came back and I been here ever since.

JT: You came back work for Harry.

GT: Yeah.

CE: What do you see ahead of you in your future that you would like to accomplish?

GT: Well the main thing I would please me very much just to see my four children to make something out of themselves. That would make me very pleased. That is my main goal, is to see my children fulfill a dream that I want, that I never had an opportunity to go to. See when I was a kid, I always wanted to be an artist or commercial art. That's what I really wanted when I was a kid, but I never had the opportunity to go to school. I had to just work, and that's all I ever know how to do. Now it's too late for me to try to change to something else; I'm too old for that.

CE: All right, you want them to succeed in whatever field interests them.

GT: Yeah, I don't care what the kid does. Just like I told them, I never want to say you got to do this or do that, as long as they make a living. Like I told them, they can be a garbage man or whatever, as long as they're good at whatever they do.

CE: Very good. Well, then would you like to travel a little bit?

GT: When my children grow older, yes. But right now I feel that I still have lots ahead of me to --

CE: They want to go to college or so and that's --

GT: Well, one thing about it, I feel this way, I don't have that kind of money to send my kid to college. I feel if you're bright enough, if you're smart enough, he can work himself through.

CE: Well, we have our community college here, too.

GT: Yeah, that's right. And I feel that I can give the guiding, and that's what I can offer the kid and give him a home, where they can go to school, come home, the mother's home, cook the meal for them, and I'm guiding them as much as I can. That's all I give my kid. I don't believe in -- Most of the people in this country, they got to give them allowance and this and that. I don't believe in that. I believe in the kid to earn what they want. Because like I told them, nobody give me anything. I earn what I get, and I believe in that.

CE: Look what it did to you; all those adroit situations made something out of you.

GT: But I still, you know, really get in a jam. Why, that's a different story, but I feel that my kids smart enough; they can make their own living. My daughter did, didn't cost me one cent. She a nurse, and she make good money now. And it didn't cost me one red cent to go to school.

JT: Also, she married. She bought her house.

GT: And it's the same thing I told this one right here. I say, if you want to go to school you can work your way through.

JT: And my daughter sometime, one week I go over there, her place.

CE: Where does she live?

GT: She live in Santa Venetia.

JT: We a family. We all --

GT: I try to get close to my kids as much as I can, try to stay together. Like the wife says, one week we go over her house and have dinner and sometimes she come over for dinner. I try stick to my kids.

CE: Well, that is one quality I love about the Chinese. Families are important.

GT: Just like my daughter, she have a home. I spend more time over there fixing her house up. Everything she does, I do her patio like I did mine, and I do that, you know, everything she want to do. She say, "Daddy I want to get this done," and I go over there and do all this work for her.

CE: Well, listen, George, we've taken up an hour of your valuable time and I want you to know what a pleasure its been for Mrs. Kent and I to come and meet you and talk with you and your lovely wife, Jan.

JT: Thank you.

CE: And every success to you.

GT: I was really glad to meet Mrs. Kent. I heard so much about her, and I never met her.

AK: Yes, you did George, but you forget.

GT: I did? When was that?

AK: Well --