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Angel Island Oral History Project
AIOH-1 Jip Chun
Interviewed by Brooke Butler
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JC: The only thing I remember is the stairwell with all the wire grating.

JC: You see, as far as Angel Island is concerned, because we came from Australia, as a trading merchant. And then, we were the first Chinese family to migrate from Australia to here. And on top of that, my father was very friendly with the American consulate in Melbourne. That's why when we came here, and you know they were going to detain us, they got a cable out and we were released the next day.

BB: My goodness.

JC: So, when we . . . the only thing I remember here now is that the stairwell had wire grating, you know like, [*inaudible*] there is a wire here so you can't jump. They took us, they separated us. And my mother and my sister was separated from us, they stayed one place. And the male members were put in another room. We had, I remember there was two beds in there and there was no other furniture.

BB: You had brothers that came with you, that were in there with you?

JC: You see, there were six. I got four steamship tickets here, and two are missing, that makes six, which means my father, mother, and the two of us that came from Hong Kong and the two that was born in Australia. Six.

BB: There was one sister and three brothers?

JC: Yeah, one sister and three brothers?

BB: You had one older brother?

JC: Yeah one older brother.

BB: And then a younger brother . . .

JC: Then there are two babies. You can see in the picture there. So that's about it. You know, because, see most the people do not keep records, and especially ones who came through Angel Island, you know a paper son. And then my father helped a lot of people out. I told [*inaudible*] I have the coaching data for a paper son. I don't know how. For somebody, but somehow it was among my father's paper, so now I got to place it maybe with the Angel Island Museum.

JC: All I remember is that we got off the boat and we went into the building, and we stayed overnight.

JC: I remember the stairs you went up and then you turned and then [*inaudible*] the wire grating between so that you couldn't jump over the railing.

JC: There was wire grating between, like a wire mesh. And I remember the room that we slept in was just two beds, no other furniture. And according to my father, when we arrived, after they had established, they knew who he was, his friend cabled back. They gave us dinner. The next morning we left.

BB: Do you remember the dinner at all?

JC: No, I don't even remember the dinner.

BB: So, when you came here, you came from Sydney?

JC: From Sydney, Australia.

BB: Were there a lot of people coming here from Sydney?

JC: No, we . . . I don't think there was any . . . no Chinese people. It was on the, it was a ocean liner. And see, we traveled first-class all the way through. It's like Erica says, I say, "I have the steamship tickets, they're first-class tickets." How much did they cost? I say, "I don't know." You see the other people came in like third-class and storage. So, our trip to the United States is entirely different from the others. A lot of the people that came in storage and went through immigration, they don't want to talk about it. Their experiences isn't that great. And they're very careful about what do, because there had been a lot of immigration raids. I remember not too long ago, [*inaudible*] immigration officers used to come out to restaurants out in the suburbs and they'd go into the kitchen to check the workers. And when they hear at work that immigration's coming, they beat it out the back door. There's a lot of information out there.

BB: So when did you go to New York?

JC: We stayed in San Francisco maybe . . . , actually we stayed in Oakland with my sister for maybe two months. And then we traveled by train across. And then we stopped in Chicago to see my uncle.

JC: I worked with my father. I was the only son that worked with him. Somehow I had a little more interest, a little more Chinese than the latest members of the family.

BB: When you say that you're more Chinese than the rest of the family, what do you mean by that?

JC: I take more interest in the family history and member of family, you know I talk to all them [*inaudible*] You see, a lot of the second generation, they become Americanized and float away; it's the same with every nationality.

BB: Since you took the first-class ocean liner, was it faster than other boats? How long did it take you?

JC: It's stated in the website that I brought. I think four weeks, three or four weeks. It's gotten faster. See, the old days, the steamship line that [*inaudible*] between the was mostly the President's Line or the Canadian Pacific Line. The President's Line, the liners were named after the presidents. You see that, on the steamship ticket, this is what the steamship was. And I think the one that we came on first is not named after a president. The steamship was marked on the ticket. I'll leave this with you people so that if you want to make a copy of it.

BB: So you were on the boat for almost a month. What did you do during all that time?

JC: Well you know, if you ever travel on an ocean liner, on the boat, there's shuffleboard and they got deck chairs and they come with beef broth. That's what I remember. And you can see the people who travel third-class and storage. I don't know what third-class and storage, I don't know [*inaudible*] how these people must have, Angel Island must have pictures of it.

BB: Does all this seem familiar at all to you?

JC: No, it's very See, like we came in towards the evening, and around dinnertime. And you don't see much, you just get off the boat and you go in this processing station, and then you're inside. And our experience was different from the others, because somehow . . . you could say we were given VIP treatment. We weren't hurled into the like storage bunker where they got just three decks a bed, I don't know how many decks they have here, two or three, at least two maybe three.

JC's daughter: What kind of boats did they bring up here?

JC: Not a rowboat.

JC's daughter: They were gas powered boats?

JC: Yeah, steamboats. The tender, the smaller boats that [*inaudible*].

JC: We didn't see much of the outside. I don't remember much of the outside. As a young kid, I just followed.

BB: The official from Melbourne sent a post to get you guys out of here?

JC: See, I remember my father cabled back to Australia, then the next morning we were released. They must have cabled back, because in those days, there were no telephones, no cell phones. It was cable, they must have cabled back, they released us the next day. See this is, see our family coming through here . . . we were the first Chinese family to come from Australia and it was a legal immigration. And there was a certain amount of . . . he had, his clearance was better. He wasn't an immigrant, a working immigrant.

BB: Did you have to go through the interrogation process like everybody else did?

JC: I remember we were given a physical. And what the physical was . . . I think at that time, they was checking was glaucoma, the eye disease. That's the only thing I remember. I don't know what the others had to do.

BB: Did they ask you lots of questions and sit you down, or were you out of there too quickly?

JC: No, they . . . I think they talked to my father, we weren't asked much.

BB: So you weren't in a room like this? [large room filled with three-tiered bunk beds]

JC: No, we had a big room with two beds in there, it was just the male members of the family slept there. They separated my mother and my sister.

JC's daughter: How many of you when you came over? Just four of you at that time?

JC: Five. Brother, me, Ivy, and Peter was a baby. The youngest was sick, didn't feel well. The carvings on the wall . . .

BB: Do you remember seeing any of the carvings on the wall?

JC: No, I never came into this. We just got railroaded in there.

JC's wife: Ivy and your mother would have been frightened because of [*inaudible*]

JC: And my father spoke English and my mother didn't.

JC: I'm surprised the bedroom still stays in my memory. And the stair. There was a stair you'd come up this way, and you come up the other way.

BB: Is that the restroom area up there?

JC: No, we were never in this section. I think they put us into . . . the way we came in was not like on the ship, there was bunk beds like this.

JC: The writing there, he must be a tombstone carver. The calligraphy is very good.

BB: Would somebody who had this skill have been educated?

JC: Yeah, he has educated. Because is written, the calligraphy is very good, you know the way it is, the form. Every word is almost like a block, the arrangement and the lining, and everything. The brush stoking is good. You see like here, the Chinese, it's like a penmanship. Ten days, let's see what he translates over here. [*checks for proper translation of poetry on wall – discovers that the translations are transposed*]

JC: When you're being detained, you have all the time in the world, outside being interrogated. This writing here and the carving is done by a very well-known, I mean well-trained carver, because each word is done very good, it is very proper. And he's a learned person, because he could write the poetry. It's not street language.

JC: I guess that when we came in here, we were in the administration building, there were no bunk beds there. Well, they gave us the VIP treatment. I'm not the usual one you want to interview with, you got to get some of the old timers. You see, right now, I'm 87 already.

BB: When you came over, do you remember what you brought with you? Did you have to leave some stuff in Australia?

JC: I think we just packed up and moved. I don't think we brought many things over. But the interesting thing, when you said that, when my sister cleaned out her house in New York, they threw out a vase and we recovered it. It turned out it was a flower bud vase, silver, that my mother brought over from Australia. We have that. I have, I collect a lot of junk.

BB: How long did you live in Australia?

JC: You see, the family was in the States since the 1800s. My father went there in 1916, and I don't remember when I went there with my mother. And then [*inaudible*] 1923.

BB: So, you went to school in Australia?

JC: Yeah, went to school.

JC: This shows the journey and then when the family reached San Francisco, they were detained one night at Angel Island Immigration Processing. After a letter of introduction from the Vice-Consulate, they were released. This is a *[inaudible]* and we came and migrated in, Section 6 merchant, Chinese Exclusion Act. We stayed in Oakland.

BB: With your father's sister?

JC: Yeah

BB: How long did you stay with her?

JC: Oh, maybe two, three months. The family went and traveled by train to Albany, New York, where the family had an Oriental Occidental restaurant. The fifth child was born there. In 1928, the Chuns settled in New York City. And *[inaudible] store* was established. And they were the first Chinese family to cross over into the Italian section.

BB: I notice here that it says you stopped over in Tahiti.

JC: Yeah. On to San Francisco, the boat stopped in Tahiti. And the only Chinese family, living in that time, they came and put a bag full of tropical fruit as a gift. My father went on shore, but we didn't. I remember that, we were too small to go, he just went on shore.

BB: So, did you eat all this fruit on the boat?

JC: Yeah, fruit and And there's the four steamship tickets.