

## **UC Davis**

### **Recent Work**

#### **Title**

AIOH-15, Bennie Woon Yep

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7j99z91x>

#### **Author**

Oral History Project, Angel Island

#### **Publication Date**

2005-05-24

AIOH-15, Bennie Woon Yep  
Interviewer Melody Chin  
May 24, 2005

11:00 – 12:45pm

Q: Where were you born?

- I was born in China – Canton, China....ah Gong Bac Haw, is the name of the village, or Sheng On Tun.

Q: And when were you born?

- Dec 23, 1904.

(D: When he came over to the United States, apparently he did not come over with his identification, he came over with his brother's; because when we were first born and celebrating birthdays and everything we always celebrated his birthday on May 20<sup>th</sup>. And then when my mother passed away and they were making their graveyard marker... because they were doing a double thing where they are buried together, they put his name on it, and then what's your birthdate? We said May the 20<sup>th</sup> and he said no, it's December 23. And...we told him where did you come up with December 23<sup>rd</sup>? What happened on May 20<sup>th</sup>? He told us that's my brother's birthday. So that's how we discovered, we had been celebrating his birthday on the wrong date all the time, because he never told us. He gave us this one date because that was on his identification, but it was his brother's birthdate. So far back 50 years we celebrated his birthday on the wrong month and date. So his birthday is actually December the 23<sup>rd</sup>.)

Q: How large was your family? Do you have brothers and sisters? How many children did your mother and father have?

- I have four sisters... three boys in my family. Me I have two daughters and one son...

Q: ...How many children did your mother and father have?

- Seven.

Q: So they had three boys and four girls?

- Yes.

Q: So were you the oldest or the youngest?

- The middle.

Q: What did your family do for a living? ...How did they work?

- They were farmers.

Q: What did they farm?

- Rice, rice and potatoes.

Q: Did you help them?

- When I can, yeah. I was just a young kid, that's all.

Q: So how much schooling did you have? ...Did you have school in China?

- Yeah, Chinese school

Q: How many years did you go?

- Three.

Q: What did you do... everyday?

- Nothing...Farm. We had vegetable... rice... we had no money to buy them.

Q: Did you get married in China?

- No. Married here in 1934 I think... See I was a poor boy when I came over to the United States. I lived in Stockton, as soon as I came over and lived in Stockton. Going to school, the first week in school, Benny, he said, get yourself and work in an American family so I been there, 7 days, I worked for an American family, and then I get married.

Q: How did you get to America? ... Like by boat or by airplane?

- No... I came by the boat, for a whole month on the ocean.

Q: Why did you come to America?

- When you're in China and somebody wants to help take you to America, they do that... Well because in China you got nothing to do. Anybody got money is people who come to the United States. They got money, they get no money in China, no money to get.

Q: How old were you? When you came to America.

- 17. I was still a single man, 17.

Q: What did you expect in America?

- Well I came over to the United States, didn't know how to speak English, I went to school during the daytime, work in an American family. On the first week I got a job, work in an American family. I stayed with American family for many years, for five years.

Q: ...Is that what you expected? Is that what though you would do?

- To get married? Until 1940.

Q: No, work with the family?

- ...When I came from China I was a poor boy. Anybody that had a daughter, they said don't go with Benny, he ain't no good. He got no family, no money. So all the parents told them not to see me. I was a poor boy then.

Q: When you came over to America, what did you think you would do here?

- They gave me a job to work with an American family... learn to cook, learn to clean the house, go to school for a few years. And I started painting. First I started painting pictures, beautiful pictures, but they were so cheap so I decided to paint words instead. Paint signs, I became a sign painter, the best in the United States.

Q: How did you prepare to come to America?

- Oh, a man he claimed I'm his son.

Q: Your uncle?

- Yeah, he was born in San Francisco. That's how I came...he was born in San Francisco during, before the San Francisco on fire, 1906, San Francisco was burned... Yeah he went to China and get married... That was in 1906 when San Francisco was on fire, a lot of people died.

Q: But how did you prepare to come to America? ...Did you pack a lot of stuff?

- No I just claimed to be his son.

Q: Did you pack things? ...In China what did you take with you to America?

- I had nothing. Nothing. I don't got anything. I just claimed to be his son, that's all.

Q: Did you know about Angel Island before you came to America?

- No, I didn't know anything.

Q: You never heard of it?

- No, I didn't know anything. All I know was that older Chinese people, that when the found gold discovered in the United States, so a lot of Chinese did their best to come to the United States to try to find gold. By the time they got here all the gold was gone. So they had to work in the farm, that's what. Chinese had a farm in the country, fruit, potato, vegetable like that. A lot of farmers is Chinese... in California. Yeah. That's why my father was all, come here for farming. That's the only way to find money, farming, sell vegetables, and fruit.

Q: During your trip, did you go alone or were you with someone? ...Who did you ride with?

- Supposed to be with my father.

Q: But who was it?

- He's died already.

Q: But who came with you?

- Goon suek.

Q: What's his relationship to you? Friend? Was he a relative or cousin? Or Uncle?

- Relative. Yeah... a cousin.

Q: Was he older?

- He claimed he was born in San Francisco...

Q: Where was he born? Was he born in China?

- In San Francisco. 1906 San Francisco was on fire, he was in there...

Q: He was your cousin?

- Yeah

Q: His parents, were they your aunts and uncles?

- What we call mom call.

Q: So did your parents and your uncle, did they live in the same town?

- In China? Yeah, in the same village.

Q: So what was your cousin's name?

- <laughing> Can't remember. Goon suek.

Q: ...How long were you on Angel Island?

- 1 month.

Q: So did you have a cot to sleep in? What did you sleep on, a bed?

- They got a bed.

Q: Did they give you food? Did they feed you?

- Yeah they feed me.... It's just like a jail.

Q: It was like a jail? How did you know, have you been to jail before?

- No <laughing>... you sleep on a metal bed.

Q: What did you sleep on the boat?

- I don't know. Just a regular mattress

Q: Did you pay for the boat trip? ...Did your cousin pay for the trip?

- Yeah.

Q: Did you have any money?

- I got no money.

Q: Did you have clothes, did you bring clothes with you?

- Yes very little, one or two clothes.

Q: What else did you bring with you on the boat?

- Oh his wife.

Q: Your cousin had a wife?

- Yeah, his wife and a kid.

Q: And a kid? ...How old was his child? A baby?

- ... Just a few... a few months.

Q: Did you bring other things with you?

(D: He didn't really have anything. They were really poor.)

Q: When you came from China, did you have shoes, pants and shirt?

- Just what I had on.

Q: ...So you had no extra clothes?

- No.

Q: so did you have extra shoes?

- No shoes.

Q: So did you have a little suitcase?

- No suitcase...

Q: Did you have food with you? Did you bring food?

- They gave us.

Q: Did you have a hat?

- I don't think so.

(D: From what we know of the times he has told us about his village, they were, most of those people were pretty poor, they wouldn't have possessions. His family had very little and sometimes what they had to eat was a little piece of meat and rice. And it was like whatever serving they were able to allow for their family. Everybody would get one bowl, and that's not necessary the kind of bowl we have. They would just, you got a serving, and you got a serving, and you got a serving. And it didn't sound like they had a lot)

Q: ...What was the boat like? ...What kind of boat were you on? Was it big?

- ... Merchant boat. It had an engine...

Q: Did it have sails?

- I don't know. I don't know anything at that time.

Q: Was it a nice boat?

- Yeah, it was a commercial boat. Japanese. It's owned by Japanese.

Q: Where did you sleep on the boat?

- In a room

Q: How many people were in the room?

- One, one woman.

Q: How old was the woman, was she old or young?

- She was old enough to get married. That's why she came over, to get married. Someone in San Francisco marry her...And she was sick all the way.

Q: ...So how long was the boat trip, was it long?

- A whole month.

Q: Was the boat crowded...Was there a lot of people on the boat?

- Yeah, it's a merchant boat with many passengers.

Q: How many?

- <laughing> I don't know how many. It was a full sized boat...Belonged to Japanese.

Q: Where, and what, did you eat on boat?

- Oh I landed in Hong Kong, from Hong Kong to San Francisco

Q: What kind of food did they give you?

-1<sup>st</sup> class.

Q: What is 1<sup>st</sup> class food. What did you eat?

- Oh, whatever they are, people eat.

Q: So what was it? Did you have rice?

- They got rice.

Q: Did you have meat?

- Yeah.

Q: Vegetable?

- They got vegetable

Q: Tea?

- Oh, I don't know. I was a kid, I don't know...

Q: I can see that, you eat what you can.

- You eat what they give you.

Q: Do you remember meeting any other passengers?

- I forget them.

Q: What did you do to pass the time? What did you do on the boat?

- I did nothing... just a passenger on the boat.

Q: ...Yes what did you do while the boat was crossing the ocean? Did you walk around? Did you make friends?

- Yeah I walk around. Well... no, don't make any friends. Everybody's a stranger.

Q: Were you frightened, nervous, scared?

- No, no, no.

Q: Did you encounter any problems on the boat?

- No problems, no problem... We stopped in Japan, we stopped in Manila, Hawaii. Yeah.

Q: What did they do when you stopped in all those places?

- Eat...Go to town and eat.

Q: They let you get off the boat?

- Yeah. They get off in the Shanghai.

Q: But did you have any money?

- No money

Q: Then how could you eat if you had no money?

- Well it is in the fare. It goes with the fare. You eat what they fix. You don't buy them, they feed you.

Q: When did you get to Angel Island? What month did you get to Angel Island... the United States?

- It set in September, we get here in October. A whole month.

Q: A whole month on the boat?

- Yeah. Then a whole month in Angel Island <laughing>. I got into San Francisco in November.

Q: ...Where did you first land?

- First they have to go through examination place, all the questions they asked you, to make them believe you. Then they let you in. They don't believe you, they put you in Angel Island. I stayed in Angel Island for a whole month.

Q: When they asked you questions did they believe you?

- They don't believe my age. They said you are too young to be 17, when they brought people over who were over 20 and they looked as small as I am, so I got in but just small. Four year difference from my paper birthday. They think I was just a kid. See the papers that I had said I was 17 years old but I was only 13, so that's why I was there for a whole month. So my father had to bring some younger looking kids of old age, so they believe that I was old age, not a young kid.

Q: ...How did they take you to Angel Island? ...When the ship you were on, came to the United States and they put you on Angel Island...

- ...Oh, I was 14 years old on it, the paper said I was 17, that's a 3 year difference...

Q: ...The boat you were on, was it the same boat? Did they take you off of one boat and put you on another boat to go to Angel Island? The same boat? The boat docked at Angel Island?

- They had a San Francisco boat to Angel Island. Not the same boat.

Q: They put you on a different boat...?

- Yeah. From San Francisco to Angel they had 2 boats a day.

Q: Two boats a day to take you from the boat to San Francisco? Or from the boat to Angel Island?

- To Angel Island.

Q: What were your first impressions of Angel Island? What did you think of Angel Island when you got there?



- In November

Q: What did you think about it, when you saw the land, when you saw the island?

- Nothing. I didn't think of anything.

Q: Were you afraid?

- No, nothing to be afraid of. They just put you there, that's all.

Q: What happened to your cousin?

- Oh they let him in into San Francisco.

Q: Did they keep you together or separate?

- They separate. They let him in San Francisco but put me in Angel Island.

Q: So you were in Angel Island by yourself?

- Yeah, not with the family.

Q: The family lived in San Francisco?

- Yeah.

Q: Did they come see you?

- Well, they're in San Francisco, they can't talk to me, I'm in Angel Island. They have to talk to the lawyers in San Francisco. They have to prove that I am a small boy, old age.

Q: Were the lawyers Chinese or American?

- Oh, Chinese. I was just a small boy at that time.

Q: How did they treat you when you first got to Angel Island...?

- How did they treat me? Oh they treat me pretty nice <laughing>. Oh they have a big building, all the Chinese sleep in the building. No families, just like going to jail, only in Angel Island... See in Angel Island, they have many Chinese young boys like I am. Many of them... They have a whole building, a whole upstairs of Chinese, and a whole other one of somebody else, they have Japanese, some Euro, Pilipino...

Q: ...How were the policemen, where they strict?

- There were no policemen to me, I don't know... They got a whole building of Chinese.

Q: ...How did they question you and examine you?

- Not bad...

Q: ... When the asked you questions were you in a room by yourself?

- I was by myself.

Q: Did they ask you about your parents?

- Yes.

Q: Did they ask you whether or not if you went to school?

- I don't remember all those things. They asked me my family.

Q: Were they tough, but were they kind?

- Well at first they don't believe, then they had to find somebody old and, uh, look young and small.

Q: Were they Asian or Caucasian asking you questions?

- I don't know. I don't remember those things.

Q: ...Where did you sleep?

- They have single bed thing, metal bed, single bed for a single person. The same kind of bed you go to jail I guess.

Q: How many other people were there?

- Lots of other people, a lot of Chinese, a whole building. A whole flat.

Q: In the same bedroom?

- Yeah. They got a single bed and metal. They had a big building.

Q: Where did you sleep on Angel Island?

- In a big building.

Q: Did you have a bunk bed or a bed by yourself?

- Oh, they have a bunk bed, bunk bed, bunk bed, for the whole building. They got maybe a hundred of Chinese in it. Some young and some old... A lot of Chinese come to the United States at that time... One bed after another, 3 beds on one side, one, two, three. Many other beds in the building.

Q: ...Was there other furniture in the room?

- No, just the beds.

Q: Were the conditions sanitary? ...Was the place clean?

- ...Oh it was not bad. I was just a kid, too young to know the difference... Metal bed, all metal, you know those metal single beds? That's what they had...One blanket.

Q: Did you have any privacy at Angel Island? Were you all in one room together? Were you in a room by yourself or were you with other people?

- ...No, with a lot of people.

Q: Even in the bathrooms?

- It was a public bathroom... When you want to go there you go there.

Q: ...What do you remember the most about Angel Island?

- Nothing special to remember. Just too much people in one building. In that one room in that building, a whole bunch of people. A bed here, a bed here, a bed here, a bed here. A whole lot of people.

Q: ...What kind of people were on Angel Island?

- All Chinese

Q: How old were they?...How old were some of the people that you stayed with?

- Mostly young people. More like single people

Q: Where in China were they from?

- More like single people

Q: ...Where in China were they from?

- ... Oh Canton. They all from Canton.

Q: What kind of jobs did they have? Were they rich or were they poor?

- They all poor <laughing>, all poor people.

Q: How long were they on Angel Island?... What about the other people on Angel Island?

- ...Oh same thing. Mostly about a month.

Q: How often did new people come over to Angel Island?

- I don't know, I don't remember... It all depends on different case. Some are less, some are longer.

Q: ...What did you do everyday on Angel Island?

- What did I do everyday in there? Nothing

Q: Well what did you do to pass the time?

- Talk to people

Q: Was there a schedule... ?

- Yeah I talked to them, I walked around. I played ball.

Q: What was the food like on Angel Island? How was it.

- I don't know. When you're young you don't know anything. Something to eat, you go and eat. Tell you to sleep, you go to sleep.

Q: What did they feed you?

- Oh pretty good. Rice, meat and vegetable. They have a big building.

Q: Were there any rules that you had to follow...?

- I don't know.

Q: Did they order you to do things?

- I have no idea. A lot of things I don't know. They don't tell me anything.

Q: Did people visit you on Angel Island?

- I don't remember.

Q: When you were on Angel Island was there any anybody living in San Francisco that you knew? Were there friends or relatives that lived in San Francisco while you were on Angel Island?

- No I don't know anybody.

Q: So when your cousin came with you, who did you stay with after you got off Angel Island?

- I don't remember.

Q: Did you stay with strangers or relatives?

- The people who came with me, they left right away.

Q: So the person that came with you did not worry about what happened to you, they just left?

- They don't go to Angel Island. They proved they were born in United States... San Francisco was burned in 1906. All the files were burned before 1906. They cannot not prove it because the library in San Francisco was all burned down. They cannot prove it... a lot of people got away from it.

(D: ...I know from when he talked, he was friendly but I don't know if he had friends, he was just a friendly person. But to have someone who takes you into their confidence and is like okay, I'll help you get onto the United States mainland or I'll help you find a place to live and all that. It didn't sound like that when he talked about that, that he had someone coaching him the ropes, so he had to learn the hard way.)

Q: When you left Angel Island where did you go?

- Stockton.

Q: How did you get to Stockton, did somebody bring you?

- The man that brought me over from China took me to Stockton.

(D: He did not actually spend time living in San Francisco when he came over to the United States. He did come to Stockton, and from there eventually he came to Sacramento. The first moment... actual living on land was in Stockton. There had a large Chinese community. I think because they had a lot of fields, they wanted them to do the work. So they were looking for hands, field hands, to go out and pick vegetables and whatever.

Q: When you got to Stockton did you do any work?

- No, I just stayed at the Stockton store.

Q: You stayed with the grocery store?

- Yeah. A grocery store, belonged to the Yep Family. All the Yeps that come from China go there.

Q: Oh, so when you went to Stockton there were some relatives there?

- Yeah.

Q: Did you know anybody?

- I know them once after I got there, I was just another Yep. That store was run by the Yep Family, so all the Yeps go there.

Q: Did they have a school for you on Angel Island?

- I go to American School... oh not on Angel Island. Angel Island was just for people to go to jail, you go to Angel Island it was like a jail...

Q: Is that because you were not a citizen?

- Yeah... It was only for people born in San Francisco.

Q: What was for people born in San Francisco?

- The Chinese. A lot of Chinese born in San Francisco...

Q: ... So all the people from Angel Island were they from China?

- There was people from Japan, from Italy, other people, was just for the foreigners.

Q: Did people teach you how to speak English on Angel Island?

- Oh, temporary. I don't remember at that time.

Q: Were there policeman on Angel Island?

- If there were I don't know.

Q: Were there policemen on Angel Island?

- If they did, I don't know.

Q: Did people steal things?

- If there was a problem I wouldn't know. I'm just another guy

Q: ...Did anybody cut your hair...?

- I don't remember that part. I know they got somebody cut hair... See there some people stay there long, some people not. Depends on how there are.

Q: ...Were there doctors on Angel Island if you were sick?

- I don't know. I was too young, I don't know.

Q: Was there poetry on the walls? Did people write on the wall while you were there?

- I don't know. That part I don't know. I was just a young kid, I don't know anything.

(D: He was actually later on when he was on the United States, he actually worked on Mare Island in the shipyard as a sign painter...)

Q: Did you see anyone pass coaching notes?...Did you see anyone pass notes?

- I don't remember all those things. That's too long ago...

Q: Do you remember any events that happened?

- I met some people I don't know.

Q: Do you remember any suicides?

- ... I think there are some. People hang themselves.

Q: Were there any riots? Did you see people fight...?

- No I didn't see any of them. I don't see any trouble.

Q: Was there any people singing or dancing?

- Who tell you to ask me all those questions? I don't know.

Q: Was there music on Angel Island?

- I don't remember that part. All newcomers, so I don't know.

Q: Can you describe how they interviewed you? ... How did they examine you?

- Talk to me? I can't remember all those things, too long ago

(Interview went on for 2 more minutes but Bennie continually was unable to answer anymore questions for this day)

Part 2

June 2, 2005

9:15-10:10am

Q: What did you do everyday on Angel Island? When you got up in the morning?

- We get up and eat breakfast.

Q: And then what? What did you do after that?

- We got up in the morning on Angel Island. We got up and ate breakfast. They had a playground down there for people tied up on the thing.

Q: What did you do later?

- We just lie down on the bed and go to sleep. We don't go to anyplace, there is no place to go, we were on the hill, you don't walk any further, from the building to the hill that's all. Most the time you lie down on your single bed and you take nap.

Q: What about later in the day, afternoon?

- They had a playground downstairs, but when you're a stranger you don't play nothing. I was a kid at that time, around 10-20 years old.

Q: What kinds of games did you play?

- Well there was handball, got a net where... you hit back, something like that. Most men, people were 10-30 years. Some people, some Chinese hanged themselves, because they cannot go in the United States...

...They don't believe I am what I said I am. I was only 13 years old, but people said I was 17 years old, 4 years difference. I was for 17 years old, I was supposed to be grown up, but I was only a small boy. For 13 years old a small boy. But they proved I am small because people are small, Chinese people are small. A young man, he was 24 years old, but he was only a small boy for a 24 year old. So they kind of all believe, like me, he was just another small boy, so they let me out.

Q: How did the staff treat you? How did they treat you?

- They not bad. When you're on Angel Island, they let you play around. When you're a young boy they can't walk around the hill. No, you don't go walk around the hill, they got a lot of trees. They got a playground.

Q: Who cleaned? ...Who washed and cleaned stuff?

- They got nobody I know...

Q: How many clothes did you bring with you when you came?

- Not anymore than what I got on. No, I don't got a lot of clothes on. I have got without many clothes to take. See I am from a poor family, a poor family go nothing. Very little clothes.

Q: Did you get sick?

- Did I get sick? No.

Q: Did anyone steal stuff? ... Did anyone get robbed while you were there...?

- You only had what you got on. You only got what you got on.

Q: Did you see any poetry on the walls? Did you see any writing on the walls?

- I don't remember seeing anything

Q: Did you see people pass notes?

- I don't remember all those things. It was too long ago... I don't notice it, I was too young. I was only 13 years old, but I claimed that I was 17, 17 supposed to be grown up, 13 was still a small boy.

Q: How did they examine you? Did they ask questions?

- They asked me questions but I can't remember what kind of questions. They asked how old you are and that's all, but they don't believe I was 17, I was actually 13 years old. Just four years younger.

Q: Where did they do that? Where did they ask you?

- In the boat when I first came in. Still in San Francisco... They found another young man but shorter, four years older than me, he looked like a small boy. It's just that some Chinese are small.

Q: How many people asked you?

- Just about 1 or 2.

Q: How long did they question you?

- For a whole month in Angel Island...

Q: When did you get on the boat? Were you in China?

- Hong Kong.

Q: Did people ask you questions while you were traveling over the ocean?

- No.

Q: Did they ask you questions when you got to Angel Island? ...You were still in the boat?  
- Yeah. In the boat, in San Francisco.

Q: Did they get you off the boat onto the island or did they ask you questions on the boat?  
- On the boat.

Q: Before you got off?  
- Yeah.

Q: So they didn't let you off without asking questions?  
- No.

Q: Did they ask you questions one by one or by whole group?  
- I think one by one.

Q: So then after they asked you question on the boat, then they let you get on the island?  
- Yeah, they don't believe my age. So they put me there.

Q: ...Did they make you stay on the boat longer because they didn't believe you?  
- No.

Q: They let you get on the Island?  
- Yeah, they take you to that island.

Q: How did you know they didn't believe you?  
- Well I was small boy, whose age was a grown up man.

Q: Did he tell you he thought you were lying?  
- Yeah... I was only 13 years old, but my brother was 17...Chinese people are small see. Even when they're grown up people they're not very big people, compared to Americans.

Q: How many times did they ask you how old you were?  
- Two or three times I guess. First they asked me when I was still on the boat, and they don't believe I am 17 years old, 'cause I was too small to be a 13 year old boy to be 17 years old... And then that's why I went to Angel Island. And then in about a month later, they came around and said they'll let you in now, 'cause they found I had a relative, he was 24 years old, he was a young kid that was also small. So they believed that maybe they are small people. So they let me in. So I had a relative, that's Sam Yep brother, he was small man. So they found out he had a small brother, and he was also a small man, so he came in small, so they let me in. So Sam Yep's brother was also a small man.

Q: ...How did you feel about being on Angel Island?  
- I don't know. I don't feel anything. I just did what they told me to do.

Q: Where sad, angry or happy?  
- I don't know.



Q: Were you upset?

- Well some people hanged themselves.

Q: Were you afraid? Scared?

- No. I just do what they said. There are some people hang themselves.

Q: You saw them hanged themselves?

- No, I have no idea.

Q: How do you know some of them hanged themselves?

- I read the words on the wall.

Q: What else did you see on the walls?

- Pictures.

Q: What kind of pictures?

- Things, words they write down in Chinese.

Q: What did they say?

- I don't remember.

Q: What kind of pictures?

- You know young boys can't paint pictures very good, just looked like somebody, that's all.

Q: Where did you go to after Angel Island?

- I went to San Francisco overnight and then I went to Stockton.

Q: By yourself?

- With a relative. He was supposed to be my father, but my uncle. They took my picture when I got to San Francisco.

Q: Since Angel Island what did you do for work?

- Go to school, learned English. And worked in a family, an American Family.

Q: When you first came to Stockton where did you live?

- In the store, the Yep store.

Q: And what did you do?

- In the day time I went to school.

Q: And where did you sleep?

- The second deck inside the store, on the floor.

Q: Did you have to work in the store?

- No, I go to school.

Q: What school?

- Oh... I forgot the name. For the children, young children. They looked at me, all the young kids look at me like I am grown up boy, said he's too big to go to the school. So they send me grown up boys school, where a lot of foreigners go, Japanese, Italian...Spanish, and Chinese, like all mixed up in one school. All foreigners. When I first go in there, the young teacher she asked me what my name was, I tell her my name. She said oh that doesn't sound very good, I'll call you Bennie, how about that. Okay? I said Okay. So that's how I became Bennie. She's a young lady. She told me she didn't get married because her boyfriend died in WWI.

Q: Is that where you learned English?

- Yes... all young kids. Mostly Japanese and Chinese, then Spanish. A lot of foreigners in Stockton, I was one of them. In one week of time, I was hired by a family, to do dusting, floor washing and put me to sleep in the garage, a single bed garage. And then when my cousin come, the man who brought me from China, he took me down to potato ranch. I learned how to plant potatoes, clean potatoes, and I became a farmer. When school opened, I came back to school again. For four years school. When I didn't go to school I worked for the family, I learned to speak English that way.

Q: Were you by yourself?

- Yeah.

Q: Was it a nice garage?

- <laughing> You know how nice a garage is? Single bed.

Q: Where did you go to the bathroom?

- I forgot about that part.

Q: When did you get married?

- Oh a long time. No family wanted to marry a man like me.

Q: Do you remember what year?

- ...1918...

Q: So you changed your name to Bennie?

- Yeah.

Q: Is it a legal name?

- Yeah.

Q: So you had a different name when you came over from China?

- Woon Yep.

Q: So you became a U.S. citizen?

- Yeah... it was 1918 or 1920, I forgot the year. I was pretty popular then. All the parents that had a daughter, they said don't go with Bennie, he's no good, have no money. They tell all their daughters that way. Whether I am good or not.... They tell the truth, I had no money, came from China, go to school, got no money. They think I am pretty good looking, so they

tell them don't go with him, he got no money. When I get to 24 years old, I drive a beautiful car for a rich lady. So the girls like me, they go, oh Bennie he drives an expensive automobile, they think it's my car.

Q: Did you visit Angel Island afterwards?

- Oh that was long, long ago... That was when I lived in Stockton. After WWII. I think I was in Stockton that time. When I moved to Sacramento, that's before I worked in Vallejo.

Q: Why did you go there?

- Well they, Stockton, they make a trip to Angel Island if you go there. I don't know why, that was a long time ago... Before I got married.

Q: How did you feel visiting again?

- Oh I don't feel bad. When you get there, they let you walk around there. Uhh, I forgot, I was in Stockton or Sacramento. It was an organization I belonged to, I forgot. It was a group of Chinese, not by myself, a whole bunch of us.

Q: Do you think it is important to tell other people about Angel Island?

- Well I went there twice after I got out... Oh yeah, out of curiosity it is important. The pictures there, the Chinese people draw on the wall, some of the people hanged themselves.

Q: So it is important because of the writing wall and the people hanging themselves?

- Yeah. There have been a lot of people there before I do.

Q: The pictures, you said the pictures had people hanging themselves?

- Yeah, people hanged themselves because they won't allow them to land in San Francisco, so they killed themselves instead of going back home. A lot of people.

Q: ...Did you see any one do that, hang themselves?

- No. I didn't see anyone hang themselves.

Q: Did you see any of the guards hit anyone?

- I don't remember, too long ago.

Q: Did any of the guards talk mean to you?

- Yeah. Well they give you 3 meals a day, morning, noon and night.

Q: Did the guards talk to you?

- Yeah.

Q: What did they say?

- I don't remember that, that's too long ago.

Q: Were they nice or were they mean?

- Oh they're pretty nice...

(D: ...There have even been times when he's been beaten up and he doesn't know how to express if he has anger towards people who does things like that... His wife had a business in

their home. And there were some people who pretended they had business with them. So he let them in the house, and then they dragged him around the house, trying to steal money. And they never did anything about trying to find the people who did it or press charges. He's very stoic. When bad things happen, if he survives, he just goes on. And I don't think, he doesn't always remember, especially if it's a stranger and they commit a bad act, he doesn't remember that much as if a friend or a relative who did that. So you're not going to get a lot of answers like that.)

Q: When you were coming over to Angel Island on the boat, where did you eat on the boat? ... You're on the boat in the middle of the ocean, and it's time to eat, where do you eat?

- Oh, we came on the 1<sup>st</sup> class section. The man on the boat is a rich man.

Q: So you were in the first class section?

- Yeah <laughing>. He was here in San Francisco before he went to China.

Q: Where did you eat on the boat?

- We eat with the rich people...

Q: In the dining room?

Yeah, you eat in the 1<sup>st</sup> class, we in the low class people but we eat 1<sup>st</sup> class. He was born in China, but he get here before the gold was discovered. And so he said he was born in San Francisco, because they cannot prove that he was not born in San Francisco because the courthouse was burned.

Q: In China, before you went on the boat, did you practice to pretend be your cousin?

- In China, I had to say what the man wanted me to say. I had to say what he tell me to say.

(D: Actually no, my dad was not supposed to go, he went last minute. My uncle went to get his brother, his 17 year old brother. They couldn't find him, his 17 year old brother went someplace. So my uncle was leaving and asked them do you want me to bring anyone else, and they picked him. So he had no time to practice. I don't know how much practice he had on the boat. He had to just remember that, you are your brother. You are 17 and that's all, because all the other circumstances are the same)

- The only thing they cannot prove was that I, that my father wasn't born in San Francisco. Because San Francisco was on fire, burned city hall. So all the people in San Francisco had no proof, burned city hall.