

UC Davis

Recent Work

Title

AIOH-6, Myron Ning Wong

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9pd6k1hd>

Author

Oral History Project, Angel Island

Publication Date

2005-05-29

AIOH-6, Myron Ning Wong
Interviewer Anna Cheng
May 29, 2005

KK: Where and when were you born?

MW: I was in Canton, on September 28, 1929

KK: How big was your family and what did your family do for a living?

MW: Well, my father was born in this country [America] and he was American-born.

KK: Do you know where in America he was born?

MW: Yes. Selma, California, about 30 miles from Fresno. Later he moved to Fresno... My father was a produce merchant.

KK: How is it that he was born in America and you were born in China?

MW: Well, in the old days, there were no Chinese ladies there [in America], so my dad had to go back to China to get married, so I was born back there [China], see. I think my went back to China when he was about four years old with his old family because I have three aunties and my dad, so my grandfather was here in business, so I think he sent the family back to China to build a home, you know, so he could go back and visit. Unfortunately, when they finished, my grandfather—while going back home—passed away in the ship. So I think my grandma and my aunties and my dad got stuck back in China, but I don't remember what year my dad came back. I don't know what year he went back to the United States, but I knew he came back and went to school there, and then later on he got married [in China]. At least, that's what I figure. **Check, kinda confusing—counter: 22**

KK: So was your whole family living together in China at any time?

MW: Yeah, the whole family.

KK: You're dad came back from America—

MW: He came back from America. You know the Chinese people there, there was an immigration law where American-born Chinese cannot bring their wife over, so my mother couldn't come over. So later, when the second World War started, the Japanese came and bombed our village, so my dad wrote my mom and said, 'Hey, you'd better get your two sons out of there. The Japanese are coming down.' So my brother and I came, but I still had a sister at home.

KK: Did you see your dad very often when you were young?

MW: I never saw him until I came over here. In the old days, it was different, they had to make a living. A lot of them didn't see their wife or kids for 15, 20 years, you know what I mean—they're trying to make a living but in the old days it was hard, very, very hard. There was discrimination; it was hard to find a job.

KK: How much schooling did you have?

MW: In China, I went to about the fourth grade, I started a little bit earlier, so I was lucky. My father sent money, so I was able to start a little early. Then I came over here [America] when I was... let's [pauses to think and counts to himself] about sixth grade maybe? Let's see, I was eleven, then there was grammar school, the junior high and high school. Three years of high school and that's about it—not much education here.

KK: No college at all?

MW: No, I didn't go.

KK: What did you do for a living?

MW: Well, at first, when I got out of high school, I worked in produce, working for a chain store for many years, driving a truck and everything. I delivered produce to the chain store. First in the wholesale produce at night in San Pedro, I worked there for six or seven year. Later I went to work for this chain store called Thrifty Mart—not Thrifty drugstore, Thrifty Mart. I think now they're called Smart and Final right now. So I delivered produce for them for fifteen years. Then I opened my own business in the retail/liquor business.

KK: What year was that when you went into your own business?

MW: [Looks over to his wife?] What year was it, Ma? 19-what? Seventy...? [Wife answers 68]. Yeah, 68, 1968.

KK: Ok. So the reason you came to the U.S., you said, was because the Japanese were invading, is that right?

MW: That's the main reason my dad said 'Hurry up and bring them over,' you know what I mean, because they had started bombing in our village already. So I'm sure that was the most important reason, otherwise I don't know what the situation was—we were young, we don't know any better, you know what I mean. When your mom and dad tell you what you're going to do, you're to do it [laughs].

KK: What was the village like where you lived?

MW: Um, you know, the whole of China is not that beautiful, but it's okay, you know. People are very nice, I know everybody in the old country. You know, the whole village

was a whole family. Everybody got along, the kids would play, it was a lot of fun. Yeah, in China, it was real tiny in the village, not like over here, it's different.

KK: So how did you prepare to come to America and what was your immigration status when you came?

MW: Well, I knew that I was already an American citizen. Because my dad was born here, I'm already an American citizen. We still had to study the questions, though, you know [laughs]. You know what I mean? But fortunately, my brother and I had a little schooling, so we could read the book they gave us. You know how it went, you had to answer questions. So that's about it, that's the only way we prepared.

KK: Did you know about Angel Island before you arrived?

MW: Nothing, we didn't know nothing. They [Wong's parents] said 'You're coming to America, so my mom, in the village, got one of those junk boats and got what they call travel agents, and they took us to Hong Kong. Then I met my cousin over there. He said he was going to bring us over here [to America]. He was in America, he went back, so my dad told him to help bring us [Wong and his brother], because we were young, help bring us over here.

KK: What kind of ship did you ride to America?

MW: [very grandly] the President Coolidge—the biggest ship in the old days.

KK: And where was your mother at the time?

MW: Well, my mother took us to Hong Kong, but then she went back to the village, took care of my sister.

KK: What that like, since it was just you and your brother, especially being so young?

MW: We grow up pretty fast in China. We had to do everything at home, so it seemed like there was nothing special for the two of us. Actually, we don't worry about anything, we just do what comes natural, you know? We were pretty grown up at that age.

KK: Do you know how much the trip cost?

MW: I don't know. My father arranged all that stuff, so I do not know.

KK: What were the conditions like on the boat? Where did you sleep on the trip?

MW: Well, the boat, we were way down on the bottom [laughs]: the lowest class. So they had bunkers over there and they kind of stuffed everybody—all the Chinese stayed on the bottom. When we went in, I remember my brother and I, we were in the end of

the ship, the President Coolidge. And I remember, everyday, we'd come up on the end of the ship, we would go in there and play shuffle, you know, with the board, in the ship.

KK: On the deck you'd play?

MW: On the deck, in the back of the ship. We could not go on any of the other classes, because they wouldn't allow you [laughs]. You've got to stay down there, they don't allow you to go anywhere but down there, you know. Yeah, I remember, we used to play shuffleboard down there and everything.

KK: How crowded was the boat? And did you guys have meals and so forth?

MW: Yeah, we had meals. Yeah, the boat's okay. As I said, we don't know any better, whatever they gave us, we can't complain [laughs].

KK: Was it really crowded though?

MW: Yeah, it was pretty crowded.

KK: And what were the meals like?

MW: Gee, to tell you the truth, I don't remember, Kevin. I don't remember that. When it was time to eat, we would just eat, we didn't pay no attention.

KK: Did you ever meet any of the passengers that you were on board with?

MW: No, we were kids and they were mostly grown-ups, but my cousin on board, he knew a friend who was in a certain class that he would visit. [Thoughtfully] The only adventure I remember was so funny. My grandma had some American money, dimes and nickels, and she gave it to us, so in the ship we saw one of the machines, the candy machines. We didn't know what a dime or a nickel was for, [starts laughing] so my brother and I put the money in and the candy comes—we got a big kick out of that. I still—we ate the mounds bar, you know the candy with the coconut inside, Mounds? They had that before, I remember, I'll never forget [laughs]. It was funny, we didn't know what a dime or nickel was, we saw that thing and said, 'Let's try it!'

KK: [laughs] That's pretty funny.

MW: I know!

KK: So how long were you on the ship when you were coming to America?

MW: Gee, I don't know. They say in those days, the Coolidge was supposed to one of the fastest ones. I think they said it was about 26 or 27 days—I think. I'm not sure, though, but they told me, that's about the best ship at the time.

KK: Who told you that?

MW: My uncle. But we [Wong and his brother] didn't pay no attention to how many days we were there, we just stayed there—when we'll come up, we come up [laughs].

KK: Was the sail there smooth? Were there any problems along the way?

MW: Yeah, it was very smooth. Only one time it got real rough, and I didn't get no seasickness, but my brother and my cousin got seasick, so I was pretty lucky. So I went upstairs and played by myself [laughs].

KK: Was that your first time on a boat.

MW: First time. In China, you got nothing in those days [laughs heartily]. That was our first time going anywhere

KK: Do you remember when you first arrived in Angel Island and how you got there?

MW: I think—well, 1940. But I don't know what month, but if you check it up—because the World Fair closed two days before I came aboard... So I think I stayed in Angel Island maybe about a month, because there was the fire, you know what I mean? They delayed interrogation because of it.

KK: How did they transport you to the barracks at Angel Island?

MW: When we got off the ship, they had one of those—in the old days, what did they called meatwiper **counter: 143**... they've got wires and everything, they put you in the back, they take you to Angel Island. And then they put you in one of the little motorboats where came and took us to Angel Island. It was one of those vans with wires, we were like criminals, you know [laughs], one of those.

KK: What was your first impression of Angel Island when you arrived there?

MW: To me, it was just another place [laughs]. That's where you're supposed to go, you're supposed to go. They tell you to go there, 'Okay,' you know what I mean? [laughs].

KK: How were you treated when you first arrived there? Was there a physical examination?

MW: Yeah, they did a physical on us a little bit, and then they treat us all right, I mean, you know, us kids, it was just my brother and I, we were the youngest ones there.

KK: What was the physical like?

MW: Well, they examined us. I remember we took our clothes off and examined us to see if we were sick or not, I guess. I don't know.

KK: And did they interrogate you right away?

MW: No, we had to wait, because of the fire, you know.

KK: So the fire happened the first day you got there then?

MW: No, we stayed about maybe a week or two, and then one night suddenly, midnight, I don't know. Somewhere, this guard came and kicked the door open, and we didn't understand English, but we know the door was there for fire, you know. And when he opened the door, boy, we saw the sky lit up: red, right on top a roof. My brother and I jumped out of there, ran outside. Boy, we got so scared, so we ran back and got some clothes on and some blankets and then ran back out. So everybody was running out, but actually, at nighttime, the fire always looks closer than it actually is. I think later they told us it started in the kitchen, and then went in the women's dormitory. It burned down the women's dormitory, I heard that. But that night, they had to put us over up in the back of the mountain, I remember a horse stable—you know, with the horses inside, the horse stable—we stayed overnight over there.

KK: Did it burn down the men's dormitory?

MW: No, men's didn't. Only the women's.

KK: And you were staying with the men's dormitory, right?

MW: Right, mm-hm.

KK: Did it get close to you then?

MW: No, it didn't. It only got the women's dormitory and part of the kitchen, that's what I heard. It started from there.

KK: What was the scene like when the fire happened? How were the people around you reacting? Were there a lot of people?

MW: Well, everybody was pretty calm. They heard 'Fire, fire!' and everybody went running through the door. Everybody was pretty calm, we just ran up, you know. Right outside was a yard. They got a fence around and they got trees and everything. Got a chain-link fence. So we run up the yard, away from the building because we saw the fire, you know. But everybody was pretty calm. Nobody was panicking or anything, we just ran.

KK: Do think anybody was happy maybe to see it burn down.

MW: [seriously] No, no, no. I don't think so. See, in the old day, we think different, you know. We accept what it is in everything. Nobody had a bad feeling about anything [laughs]. Everybody wanted to come to America, hoping to come up.

KK: That must have been helpful.

MW: Yeah.

KK: What were the living quarters like in Angel Island? How many people were you living with?

MW: In our floor, there were quite a few, quite a few bunkers. I mean, people lived down and up [gesturing with hands]. I don't remember exactly, but there were quite a few people.

KK: What were the conditions like? Was it sanitary, was it clean? Did anything strike you about it?

MW: No, not too much. Like I say, when you're from China, the conditions are pretty bad sometimes, so when you get there [America], you know, everything's clean [laughs]!

KK: So it's better than you were used to then?

MW: Well, yeah, it's not that dirty in China, but you know how things are. In China, the condition was everyone was poor. A majority were poor, so it was a little different, but it was okay.

KK: Was that how a lot of the people there felt, do you think? Did they think the same way?

MW: Yeah, well, they say, mostly, when we were kids, mostly, what we'd do is... downstairs they had a pool table, so my brother and I, when it was late at night—not too late—go down there and watch the grown-ups play pool. And then some of them would sit there and tell stories, smoke cigarettes and everything. We used to listen to stories, they would tell us ghost stories. We were scared to death [laughs]! And then...

KK: Was it just to you and your brother that they told those ghost stories?

MW: Well, they would tell ghost stories as a group over there, you know. We would just listen. We were scared to death, because in the old days, you know, those heaters with pipes, with water pipes, every now and then it would pop [imitates popping noise] [laughs]. People hung themselves over there, people killed themselves, which is true, so we were kind of scared, you know.

KK: So that actually did happen, that kind of stuff?

MW: Well, yeah, there were people who committed suicide. I didn't see it, but people did that because when they interrogate them, they couldn't come up. They'd lose face in China and, you know, they would kill themselves.

KK: So how did you hear about that happening?

MW: They [the grown-ups] told the stories. Because, hey, you've got nothing to do: tell stories, people'd play pool, that's about it... smoke cigarettes, the older ones. That's something to talk about and we would listen. Another thing, too, when we went up the mountain when the fire happened, in the stable, in the morning, they gave us a canteen to eat up there, like in the army. Everybody got one of those canteens and eat over there. And then later, they sent us back to the dormitory, but we had to eat in the bad, bad basketball court for a whole week, because the kitchen, I guess they didn't have it fixed up or something, so we would eat out of canteens for a whole week. Everybody'd get in line.

KK: What kind of food was it?

MW: [laughs] I don't know, we just eat what we got. But another thing interesting, though, before the fire, the regular food, my brother didn't like it, but we loved tomato ketchup with beef. But you had to order it ahead for, I don't know, 10 cents extra or 15 cents extra for it.

KK: You guys paid for your food?

MW: You don't have to pay, but for something special like that, you'd pay for it. It's special. But my brother and I, we like tomato ketchup with beef, it was a special. I don't know how much we paid, 10 cents or 15 cents more, but we'd get a special plate, you know [laughs]. We were pretty good when we were young, you know [laughs]?

KK: Yeah, it sounds like you guys didn't have very much trouble with getting food.

MW: Yeah [laughs].

KK: So how did you get the extra money by the way?

MW: My dad sent it to us

KK: Did you see your dad when you got there at Angel Island?

MW: Never did. Never did see him there.

KK: So he mailed the money to you?

MW: Somehow he sent it in. He lived in Fresno, so he'd go to San Francisco and he just sent it to the office, I guess. They'd say "Here's the money from your dad," you know what I mean?

KK: When did you finally get to see your dad?

MW: When everything—they said "Okay, on the questions, everything was right, you can go." That's when I saw my dad.

KK: So you did well on the interrogation then?

MW: Yeah, I did good. Otherwise I wouldn't be here. They'd probably have sent me back to China [laughs].

KK: So what was it like when you first met your dad?

MW: Great. I saw pictures of him, but I'd never seen him in person. We were happy, and he was happy.

KK: Do you remember what he said to you when you first met?

MW: Well, he just put his arms around us both, and we were little and he was a big guy.

KK: Do you remember what most of the people were like that you stayed with? Like what their ages were, what their jobs were?

MW: You mean in the immigration place?

KK: Uh huh.

MW: No, I don't know too much because we were kids and they looked at us as kids, you know? They'd play around with us, they'd come and pinch or hit us for fun, but that's it. But I'm sure they were 20-something year olds and 30-something year olds and older, you know. So when you see a kid like that, 11 or 12, hey. We didn't ask what they'd do, you know what I mean? You know, when you're 11 or 12, you can't ask grown-ups what they do. So that's about it.

KK: How often did new people come in and detainees leave? How often did people come and go at Angel Island?

MW: That I don't know. That I don't know. But I remember when they took all the documents to San Francisco, they'd come and take my brother and I and took us on this little boat and took us to San Francisco and put us in one of those vans with the wire and everything, then take us to the office where they questioned us.

KK: So they took you off of Angel Island for the questioning?

MW: Mm-hmm. We had to go to San Francisco, because all the documents were over there.

KK: And how many questionings did you guys have? Was it just one interrogation or more?

MW: Two times. We went up two times.

KK: How long were they?

MW: Uh, I don't remember. I don't think too long, but that's a whole-day deal, you know? But I don't remember. It wasn't too bad for us.

KK: Do you know how long you guys waited until you finally got interrogated?

MW: I think about a month. I'm not sure, you know, because otherwise it wouldn't be that long, you know? Because that's what my dad said, that I'm already an American citizen, so it's not hard, just a few questions, but then there was the fire, so that delayed everything. I think, though, I'm not sure. I'm pretty sure it was about a month.

KK: After the second interrogation, did they just let you go through?

MW: I had to come back for I don't know how long, then they said hey, they'll come and pick us up and that's it. My dad and my uncle met us in San Francisco there on the dock.

KK: What were the administrators like by the way? Like the interrogators and the people who ran Angel Island.

MW: They never bothered me, but I heard a lot of people talk about interrogators, they were pretty rough some of them. The grown-ups would talk a lot and say "So and so is rough," they said that this guy, so and so, but we didn't pay no attention. But they talk a lot like "Who questioned you?" "So and so," you know. I remember one name, a girl's name, a lady name, Harlan. It could be Helen, I don't know, in Chinese, they called them Holan. And there was another guy, this little short guy, he was tough and we'd talk about him, you know what I mean? He'd give real rough questions.

KK: So afterwards they'd be like, "That guy was a tough interrogator."

MW: Yeah, yeah, they'd be like who questioned that guy, was he tough, this and that. I heard them talk like that. Sometimes they'd tell stories about it.

KK: Did you ever see any people passing notes around, like coaching notes?

MW: No, I didn't.

KK: You mentioned that your dad gave you notes for the interrogation, right?

MW: That's at home. We studied. You know, everybody knew back then [before coming to the U.S.] you had to study. They'd ask you how your house is facing, this and that. How many steps in your house, all kinds of stuff like that, so we had to know that, you know what I mean? [laughs]

KK: Did that seem weird to you at all?

MW: It was weird. But to me, back then, we didn't think that was weird. That's just the way of life, you know what I mean? What are you gonna do? You want to come to America, you've got to do what they ask you, so you just know how to answer it. Maybe if you were grown up, things were a little different, you know, but we didn't know any better.

KK: If I were 11, I would probably feel the same way.

MW: Yeah, we didn't care. Everyday we'd get up, what we'd do was go play basketball in the back [laughs]. Go out at nighttime, or go downstairs and listen to the older people play pool and talk, that's about it.

KK: Do you know if there were any rules on Angel Island that you had to obey?

MW: I don't remember any of that stuff. None that I know of. They might have, but there was none that I know of.

KK: Do you know who did the cleaning and the laundry?

MW: We did it ourselves. My brother and I washed our own laundry and everything.

KK: By hand?

MW: Yeah, we did it by hand, no machine.

KK: Do you know what happened if you were sick on Angel Island? Would they treat you with their own doctors? How did it work?

MW: That I don't know. We were never sick.

KK: Do you know who cut hair at Angel Island?

MW: I didn't cut my hair over there.

KK: Did you ever see anybody have it cut though?

MW: I might see some people downstairs do something, but I really don't pay no attention. But I'm not sure. I cut my hair when I first came out to San Francisco. My dad took us to the barbershop, cut our hair [laughs]. I'm sure there were people, you know? But there were people they called "number one" and "number two." You know what that means? The guy that knows English, the translator, they called him "number one." And then the guy who knew a little bit was "number two," so, you see, anybody who wanted to talk to some American people, they had to go see "number one." I remember that there was a "number one" who knew some English.

KK: Did you ever have to go to him?

MW: No, I didn't. I don't pay no attention, we just have fun and play [laughs].

KK: Did you ever see any poetry on the walls while you were there?

MW: I saw them, but I don't pay no attention. When I went back here [his trip later on with his children and grandchildren] I saw that stuff, but I paid no attention to that stuff. They did a bunch of them.

KK: Like how much was there?

MW: Well, I think some walls had some, but as I said, we took it as nothing.

KK: Did you ever try reading any of them?

MW: No. I would take a look at the thing, but when you're a kid, you don't care.

KK: Did you read some of them the second time you went?

MW: Yeah, yeah, I read some of them. They were pretty good, you know.

KK: What did you think of them?

MW: Beautiful. See, most of the people who came to America were a lot of educated people, because they have family and got to be a little better to save some money when they come over, you know what I mean? So they were all good, educated people. They know how to write, everything, so that put a lot of beautiful stuff up. See, in China, whenever you come to America, you've got to have a better family background, you got to pay to come here, all kinds of stuff. It's money.

KK: So did your dad have a pretty good background?

MW: Well, my dad was a produce buyer. But since he was an American citizen, my dad being born here was no big deal.

KK: Because you were a naturalized citizen.

MW: Yeah. [Suddenly referring to a photo of his most recent visit to Angel Island in his album] See, they told me this section over here was the women's dormitory which went down. The whole thing. See, I remember for my place, there was a bridge that went all the way down near the—we passed the kitchen, we passed the women's dormitory to go down to the beach, but it's gone right now. But they told me, the tour guide told us that some guy donated some money to remember the women's dormitory that burned down. I'm sure you saw it when you were down there. I remember we'd go down to the beach and see the fireworks every night during the World Fair in Treasure Island.

KK: But you never got to see it in person with your dad.

MW: No, I missed by two days. They closed two days after they let us out. They meant for us to see the World Fair, but it was one of those things. I think because of the fire and everything, they delayed it, so that's why it got messed up.

KK: So when did the fire happen?

MW: Maybe two weeks after we got there. The World Fair was there for I think two or three years. The Treasure Island World Fair, I think it started in '39, I'm not sure, you've got to look at history, I was a kid, I don't know any better, but that's what I thought, you know what I mean? So they [the World Fair] were already there. When I was there, I don't know what month it was, but they were ready to close up, so I just missed it by two days. So I'm sure you could look in history. Maybe it was 1938 to 1940 or something like that. You could tell those people [the PHRC staff] to look it up and see what it is. In fact you'll find out exactly what month I got out of there if see two days after the World Fair. I don't even know what month it was to tell you the truth.

KK: So do you think you would have seen it if the fire didn't happen?

MW: Yeah. I would have. We were there.

KK: At least you got to see the fireworks.

MW: Far away. Real far away, you know. Angel Island and Treasure Island are a bit far away, but they would shoot it up at night and we would see it.

KK: Do you recall any extraordinary incidents while you were there, like people being punished or—you mentioned suicides, but you never got to see that, right?

MW: No. I just hear stories, you know?

KK: So it was all just stories that you heard then?

MW: Yeah, just stories. No, I don't see nobody commit suicide or anyone complain or get punished, no. None that I know of. You'd just talk about the suicides when they tell

stories, but that's about it. I didn't see any of that stuff. But some people stayed there a long time, you know. They might know a lot of stuff like that. But we just stayed there for a short time.

KK: About a month, right?

MW: About a month, I'm not sure to tell you the truth. But then being a kid is a little different from being a grown up, much, much different. No sense of time, you don't know what's going on. You know, it's just, do what you're supposed to do and that's about it.

KK: Were you ever given the results of your interrogation?

MW: I never did ask for it. They said I could get it, but I don't know, I never did.

KK: You didn't want to see it?

MW: I wanted to see it, but they said I could get it, but I don't know. Maybe you could it for me [laughs]. In Angel Island, you know, they say they've got the record or some kind of thing. My daughter might try to get it for me, I don't know.

KK: After your detention in Angel Island, what would you say the effect was it had on you? How did your experience impact you?

MW: Mmm, normal. I don't have any bad feelings. I was so glad to see my dad and come out and be in America.

KK: Why were you so happy to be in America?

MW: Well, I got to see my dad. The only thing was I missed my mom. But still...

KK: Did your mom get to come eventually?

MW: No, after the war, she didn't want to come. She was too old and everything, you know, so she said no, she never did come.

KK: So your dad took care of you and your brother the whole time?

MW: [in a solemn tone] Yeah.

KK: Did you ever get to see your mom after that?

MW: [softly] I never did. Because by that time, I had the business, I could come back, you know. I couldn't go back to see her, so she passed away a while back, you know. I never did.

KK: I'm sorry to hear that...

MW: Yeah.

KK: And now, could you briefly describe your family, work and social life after Angel Island.

MW: Well, I could say after Angel Island, I stayed in Fresno. 1941, Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. 1942, my dad moved over here to Los Angeles here. And then my older brother stayed in Fresno with my cousin, so I came here with my dad and then I went to school over here. During the war, this friend of my dad, he worked for these rich people as a houseboy. So the war started, they drafted him to the army, so these rich people asked my dad, "Do you know a nice boy who can come live with us and work over here?" So my dad selected me to go work over there. At that time, I was fourteen and a half years old. I worked there, I worked seven days a week, fourteen and a half year old or fifteen year old, I was going into junior high school, I think in the ninth grade, I'm not sure.

KK: What was junior high like?

MW: I went to John Brower Junior High over.

KK: Were you able to speak English at the time?

MW: Not too much, just a little bit.

KK: Was it tough, having to go to school and not knowing the language?

MW: Yeah, it was a little tough in English, but as I said, I worked in this house as a houseboy, and that was seven days a week. Sunday they would give me a half day off. After I cleaned the house, a half day off. I'd get up in the morning. About 6:30 or 7, I'm not sure, I made breakfast for them—coffee, soft-boiled egg, toast. This person I worked for was called McKieth, I think they were an investment banker, you know, the people that I worked for. So I took breakfast up to their bed to eat. After they're finished, I'd bring it down, wash the dishes and go to school. And then after school, I'd come back and help them with the dinner. I'd serve them dinner, I'd help in the kitchen. Then wash the dishes. After that, I do what I wanted to do. So I'd do the same thing until I finished high school. I lived there with them for four years. So I started out pretty early.

KK: Did you see your dad a lot during this time?

MW: Weekends. When I got my half day off, I'd see him. Summer vacation, they'd give me two half day off on Wednesdays and Sundays. And after I cleaned the house, I would usually leave the house at about 11 o'clock, so I'd come down to where my dad lives and see some of my friends.

KK: From school?

MW: Uh, yeah, growing up. We had grown up together. We know each other from a while back, we used to play, that's about it.

KK: What was it like when your brother decided to stay with your cousin and you were going to leave with your dad?

MW: Well, he said he'd like to stay over there, so [shrugs] it doesn't matter.

KK: You didn't try to convince him?

MW: No, my dad said, "Hey, why don't you want to go?" But he wanted to stay there. It's okay. But my dad went to see him all the time, you know, because he's a produce buyer. During the war, he was a produce buyer for the army, my dad. So he traveled a lot. That's the reason he put me to work over here. See, he would feel more safe if my brother was back there with my cousin, he wouldn't worry too much, you know what I mean? But over here, it's just him and I, so he would worry about me, that's why he put me at that house to work... Yeah. He sees him all the time.

KK: And you mentioned your cousin, the cousin you talked about earlier—was he with you guys the whole time?

MW: In Hong Kong. I mean he's an older man now, he's my dad's age.

KK: Is that the same cousin that your brother stayed with in Fresno afterwards?

MW: Yeah.

KK: So did he ever go through Angel Island too?

MW: To tell you the truth, I don't know. He's my dad's age. We were in the same village, he was my own cousin, "Wong." They'd say "Wong," you know, from the same village. We were all like brothers, we all watched each other.

KK: You already returned to Angel Island, right, last year...

MW: Yes.

KK: Was that your first time back?

MW: First time.

KK: Why did you decide to go back?

MW: Well, I wanted to show my kids what my experience was and how the thing looked like, you know? People don't know.

KK: So you feel that other people should know about it?

MW: I think they should. You know, it's history.

KK: Is there any other particular reason you think they should know about it?

MW: Well, I don't think so.

KK: Yeah, not very many people know about it.

MW: Well, yeah, it's just history, you know, just like everything else [laughs].