

Chinatown Reunion 2008

.....“Celebrating the Past”....”*Enjoying the Present*”....”Believing in the Future”...

“A Note of Appreciation”

Based upon the database developed for the reunion planning in 2001 and subsequent reunions of 2002, 2004, & 2006, many of us have been able to reconnect via electronic media and to meet each other again at the respective reunions over the years. A *“note of gratitude and appreciation”* to *Gladys Chin* and her team, (*Debbie* (Gong) Chiu, *Albert* Leong, *Barbara* (Lau) Chew, *Allan* Yee, *Lillian* (Chin) Cheu, *Eleanor* (Fong) Tang, *Matthew* Pon, *Kelvin* Ming, the late *Don Dick*, and others) for their tenacious efforts over the years in planning and ensuring that these memorable reunions became a successful reality in Las Vegas, NV.

Back in the 50's, Gladys was already in the NJ/NY circles directing social events and relationships when she got most of the Newark boys together with the NY Chinatown girls at Bradley Beach, NJ one summer. Many trips across the Holland Tunnel followed this initial get together. In turn, it was social reciprocity for a number of NY guys who went across the Hudson to date the NJ girls. The happy end result was that a number of close relationships and even marriages followed these social endeavors of the *NJ/NY “Trans-Hudson Connections”*.

Here it is the 2000's/07/08 and we may very well acknowledge *Gladys Chin* to be the *“Social Director of the 50's & 2000's”* A tribute and warm hearty toast should be made to Gladys and her team for their dedication and hard work in putting together these past Chinatown Reunions for the 40's/50's/60's crowd to enjoy. Again, we will be looking forward to a memorable, fun, and exciting 2008 Reunion with high expectations.

Looking back through my narrow prism of time (late40's-mid 60's) and those of my close friends and classmates (+/- 4 years) at the New York Chinatown of the 50's & 60's, one can see a close and small community where everyone basically knew one another, did a lot of things together, and looked after one another at times. The teachings and influences of our *Chinese family values*, coupled with the *moral compass* instilled in us by the teachings of the respective church groups and their related activities cannot be over emphasized. Many friendships that were developed back then are still intact today, having survived the distance drums of time & serving as a testimony to the *strength* and

bond of the *relationships* formed.

Distance memories of the 40's, 50's & 60's Chinatown era with a few tidbits from the past based on my experiences with the loving and caring support from family, church, friends, and classmates while growing up in Chinatown and beyond the 50's and 60's:

1948 -- Cornerstone laid for True Light Lutheran Church, Polaroid Camera is Introduced

1949 -- Bikini Swimsuits are the Fad, New York Yankees Defeat Brooklyn Dodgers to Win World Series

1950 -- Price of Average Home is \$8500.00, Start of Korean War

1951 -- Color TV is Introduced. Minimum Wage is 75 Cents per Hour, Baked Char Sue Bow--Latest Hit on Bayard St, Lin Heung Coffee Shop

1952 -- Dr. Salk Invent Polio Vaccine, Average Annual Salary is \$4500.00, Dr. Lee's-- the Best Shoeshine on Mott St. Costs 10 Cents

1953 -- IBM Introduces First Computer, A Gallon of Milk Costs 94 Cents, Price of a Bowl of "Just Wonton Soup" Costs 35 cents

1954 -- Postage Stamp Costs 3 Cents, Ray Croc Opens First McDonald

1955 -- DA Haircuts are the Fad, Third Ave El & Chatham Sq. Station are Demolished

1956 -- Elvis Presley Appears on Ed Sullivan Show, A Car Costs \$2,100.00, Lonnie's Coffee Shoppe Opens at 21 Mott St, ***Miss Chinatown NY--Debbie Gong***

From that ***Public School, PS 23*** on the corner of *Mulberry & Bayard Streets*, there was Mrs. Readon, 3rd grade; Miss Connelly, 4th grade; Mrs. Gellis, 5th grade; and Mrs. Brown (Miss Carbone) 6th grade. Mrs. Brown was an exceptional teacher and disciplinarian who taught us all the fundamentals in *Math* and *English* to prepare us for junior and senior high schools. Since girls were usually smarter than the boys at this age, two of our female classmates qualified for advance placement and completed 7th, 8th, and 9th grades in just 2 years, going on to ***Hunter College High School***. Many of us also attended Chinese School in the evenings, which really kept us busy and on the go all day with a part time job to add to the mix. This active schedule probably kept us out of trouble and may have been a blessing in disguise, as it also provided us with the basic training, skills, and experiences for multitasking later in life.

Next in the educational line was the "***physical combat zone***" of ***PS 130*** for 7th & 8th grades on the corner of *Hester and Baxter Streets* in **Little Italy**. It certainly was a diversified and engaging 2 year experience in *human interaction* and *explicit exposure to racial discrimination*. Here at PS 130 we were the minority, whereas; we had been the

majority at PS 23. In addition to receiving a normal education, we were going through a big social transition with regard to *abusive language usage, forward female behaviors & aggressive male attitudes*, and at times, even practicing the *art of self-defense*. It was certainly a different slice of experiences and **“life lessons learned”** in true living color in comparison to the PS 23 environment in Chinatown.

After PS 130, many of us were fortunate enough to be accepted by competitive exams to attend NYC's specialized academic high schools and a number of us went to ***Stuyvesant High School*** where we now entered an **“intellectual combat zone”** for the next four years. In the 1950's, Stuyvesant was an all boy school like ***Brooklyn Tech*** where the best and brightest competitive male students came from all over the city. ***Bronx Science*** was the only co-ed school of the specialized academic high schools in the 50's. Stuyvesant even had a *split session*, which afforded us an opportunity to have a part time job and to even participate in school athletic programs after school.

College was where our friends & classmates went in different directions to study science, engineering, medicine, law, business, finance, ministry, education, social sciences, etc. at various colleges and universities. After college it seemed like the ***professional, economic, and social worlds*** all opened up at once (60's). Being gainfully employed as a *electronic engineer* had many advantages since we finally had some money and were fortunate enough to work on America's 1960's aerospace challenge of sending **“astronauts to the moon and returning them to earth” (Apollo Program)** while still attending graduate school sponsored by the Grumman Aerospace Corp., for my engineering Masters, MBA, and initiating the 5 year process for my PE License. The professional life generated the economic means for providing one's social outlet of having summers spent in ***Southampton*** and ***Westhampton Beach, Long Island*** with winters skiing in ***Stowe, Vermont***. On many of these weekends, former classmates & friends from the Chinatown era were invited out to the summer beach house and/or to the winter ski chalet to enjoy the festivities and recreational/sport activities, or to simply relax in the ***sun & surf of the Atlantic Ocean*** or in the ***sun & snow of the beautiful Green Mountains of Vermont***.

One of the initial family benefits of an engineer's salary was that we were able to move my *Mom & Dad* to the new ***Bridgeview Apartments***, with all its modern amenities, at 50 Bayard St. A *proud & happy moment for them* and a small token of love and appreciation on our part for all they have done for us over the years. Our parents provided the guiding force and ever present inspirational model for our family and they

always encouraged my brothers and sisters *to be the best... that we can be... in everything we pursued in life.*

During the high school and college years of the 50's and early 60's, it was not just all work and school studies with no play. For many of the Chinatown crowd, there were always social functions to attend on any given weekend such as private parties; dances sponsored by various club(s) or group(s); college parties or dances; and church socials held after basketball games; or one could just shoot pocket pool or billiards with the guys. For the bowlers, there were the ***Roxy, Mid City, and City Hall Bowling Alleys*** to choose from and to find out where the real financial competition was taking place for the weekend. Some of us even went roller-skating at the ***Gay Blades Roller Rink.***

For an *exciting* evening filled with the *hot sizzling tempo* of Latin American dancing, there was the world famous ***Palladium*** on Broadway & 53rd St. Tito Puente and his Orchestra provided the music for some real fast paced moves and lively actions in step with the ***Mambo, Merengue, Rumba, Samba & Cha Cha.***

Organizations like the ***Chinese Christian Youth Conference (CCYC)*** had their annual summer and winter extended weekend retreats for social/sport/church related activities in ***Lake George, NY*** and the ***Berkshires in Pittsfield, MA.*** All in all, it was a very sociable fun period during a busy part of our active lives. We were constantly balancing school activities, working part time, and pausing a bit for partying, rest, and relaxation.

During 1965, the ***World's Fair in Flushing Meadows NY*** was the big event for both visitors and New Yorkers. Another historic and significant event was taking place in Washington DC with the passing of the ***Immigration Act of 1965*** by the United States Congress. This law would have a profound effect on Chinese and Asian immigration, later changing NYC's Chinatown and its population makeup. A brief highlight of *major past laws* will bring into focus the history of discrimination against Chinese and Asians in the United States and why the Asian American community today is the ***smallest minority group*** in this country.

If we fast reverse back in time to ***1882***, Congress had passed the ***Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882***, effectively prohibiting citizenship for Chinese immigrants and reinforcing the exclusion of Chinese immigrants. Several other immigration acts followed against other Asian groups; namely: the ***exclusion of Asian Indians in 1917***; the ***exclusion of Japanese in 1925***; and the ***exclusion of Filipinos in 1934.***

For the Chinese, It took 61 years later for the ***Magnuson Act of 1943*** to repeal the

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Chinese were now eligible for citizenship negating the 1790 racial bar. It also established a quota for Chinese immigrants to only 105 per year. Under the ***McCarran-Walter Act of 1952***, the law admitted only a certain number of immigrants of each nationality. The *ethnic quota for Chinese immigrants remained*, but it was now limited to 100 per year. Even laws that repealed the various biased exclusion acts continued to discriminate against Chinese and Asians.

Finally, the ***Immigration Act of 1965 abolished “national origin quotas”*** ending years of explicit discriminatory laws from the late 1800’s and first half of the 1900’s that targeted Chinese and Asians. The years following the 1965 law were periods where the number of Chinese and other Asian immigrants increased at a very rapid rate. This was reflected in changes across the United States, especially among the Chinese in NYC’s Chinatown community. When we were growing up in Chinatown during the late 40’s to mid 60’s, the great majority of us were of Cantonese decent and/or subgroups from Southern China. The new immigrants, many of who still came from Southern China also came from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Northern & Central China. Ethnic Chinese also came from other countries in Southeast Asia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines as either immigrants or refugees. Not only did the NYC Chinatown’s population demographics and business economic makeup changed, but the recently arrived immigrants also spoke their own respective Chinese language regional dialects; namely: ***Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, Taishanese, Fujianese, Hakka***, and others.

Chinatown was extending pass its historic area into the surrounding neighborhoods in lower Manhattan. These new immigrants and refugees of the 70’s/80’s/90’s provided the catalyst for the expansion of Manhattan’s Chinatown and the creation and growth of additional NYC Chinatowns in ***Flushing, Queens*** (along Main St. & Roosevelt Ave.); ***Sunset Park, Brooklyn*** (along 8th Ave); and ***Homecrest, Brooklyn*** (along Ave U).

It has been a long journey for many of us, *1st generation American Born Chinese (ABC)* who came from humble backgrounds and learned the ***street smarts*** of real life experiences in the streets and crowded tenements of Chinatown. For my classmates and friends who have passed through the NYC public schools, private schools, and on to college to pursue their professional fields of endeavor, it was quite an achievement when one considers all the obstacles that we had to overcome to enter the professional ranks of engineering, medicine, dentistry, law, business, finance, education, ministry, etc. These successful accomplishments were made possible by sacrifices from our parents and families through years of hard work and with our own burning desire to succeed in our

chosen profession.

*There were **no entitlements or handouts** along the way.* A large number of us have moved to the other NYC Boroughs, Long Island, Westchester County, Connecticut, New Jersey and many other states throughout the country. One can only speculate what the Chinese American and Asian American **population numbers, political influence & impact, professional profile, and social standing** would be today in the United States if the racially biased exclusion acts had never been passed by Congress.

However, we should be very proud of the fact that Chinese Americans and Asian Americans still **exhibit the highest professional grouping per population ratio** and a **higher average salary percentage above the norm.** The **best elite universities and colleges have accepted us on merit** and continue to have very *high enrollments* of Asian American students (**25-45%**).

In addition, the **top high schools** in the nation, which require *competitive entrance exams* in **New York City, Boston, and San Francisco** have a Asian American student population exceeding **65%-75%**. These statistical data speak well of Asian Americans in the United States and illustrates how far we have progressed, as we still comprise only about **4% of the total population** and are *classified as the smallest minority*. There are more facts and examples to highlight our professional and economic achievements throughout the years from the 50's & 60's to the present.

Although Chinese Americans are considered a minority group, we have made **significant contributions** in the sciences, engineering, technology, medicine, finance, education, and business contributing to the intellectual, cultural, and material wealth of America.

It may be another generation before our population size increases to a level where there will be a higher representation of Chinese Americans and Asian Americans in political circles to have an impact and contribute to the policies of both political parties and the direction of this country. That day will indeed be the...**tipping point** when Chinese Americans & Asian Americans will truly be a political force. This political challenge coupled with the many important contributions we have made over the years will let our voices and numbers be heard and counted in the *political-social-economic spheres of influence and governance*. We will continue to be proactive and contribute to the **greatness of this nation**....that we love and call home.

But **“let us enjoy the present”** and make the **February 2008 Reunion** a memorable one

among friends old and new.

The “***Best of Health***” to all and let us **swing into action** for the festivities and **play** like we did back in the **50’s & 60’s**

Last.. but not least, a simple “***Thank You***” to Gladys Chin, “***Social Director of the 50’s & 2000’s***” and her ***capable team*** for their time & efforts over the years, in their exceptional integrated planning and execution of these reunion events. It has impressed many of the Chinatown’s 40’s/50’s/60’s attendees in a “***touching and memorable way***”... ***imaginable.***

Best Regards,

Daniel (Danny) Lee

Division St--Chinatown (1950’s)

New York City, New York

February, 2008..... Chinese Year of the Mouse, 4706

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