

New York City Chinatown—“Remembrances of Our Time”—Family & Friends

Inviting your Comments and Related Experiences for the “NYC Chinatown Oral History Project Website” & “Memories of New York City Chinatown Website”....

Share your Thoughts, a Story or Two, Memorable Moments, or Unforgettable Narratives on the Chinatown Happenings/World Events of that Era When We Were Growing Up.....

Highlights....Essences of the late--1940's, 1950's, & early 1960's.....

1948 -- Cornerstone laid for True Light Lutheran Church; Polaroid Camera Introduced; Subway Ride-- Five Cents; Chinese Intercity Basketball Tournaments; The 1st 33 1/3 rpm LP was sold.

1949 -- Bikini Swimsuits are the Fad; NY Yankees Defeat Brooklyn Dodgers to Win World Series; The 1st 45 rpm Records Sold; China Became a Communist Country under Mao Tse-Tung.

1950 -- Price of Average Home-\$8500.00; NYC has Severe Water Shortage--Prolong Drought; USAF Academy Colorado Springs CO; US Population--151 Million; Start of Korean War.

1951 -- Color TV is Introduced; Minimum Wage is 75 Cents/Hour; Rock and Roll is the New Rage--Alan Freed; Baked Char Sue Bow-Latest Hit on Bayard St, Lin Heung Coffee Shoppe.

1952 -- Dr. Salk Discovers Polio Vaccine; Average Annual Salary is \$4500.00; Dr. Lee's- Best Shoeshine--10 Cents on Mott St; American Bandstand Makes Debut; US 1st Hydrogen Bomb.

1953 -- IBM's-1st Computer; Playboy Magazine Arrives; Bowl-“Just Wonton Soup”-35 cents; Chinatown Baseball Team in Ice Cream League; ***Lonnie's Coffee Shoppe Opens at 21 Mott St.***

1954 -- Postage Stamp-3 Cents; First McDonald Opens; TV Dinners Debuts; USS Nautilus 1st Atomic Submarine; Latin Dancing-Mambo, Cha Cha, Merengue the Latest Hot Sizzling Dances.

1955 -- DA Haircuts are the Fad; Third Ave El Demolished; Disneyland Opens in California.

1956 -- Elvis Presley on Ed Sullivan Show; A Car Costs \$2,100.00; Dow Jones at 500; NY Yankee Don Larsen Pitches 1st No Hitter in World Series; ***Miss Chinatown NY-Debbie Gong.***

1957---Ford Debuts the Edsel; Both NY Teams--Brooklyn Dodgers Play Last Game at Ebbets Field & NY Giants Play Last Game at Polo Grounds; Russia Launches Sputnik into Earth Orbit.

1958—Hula Hoop Craze; Harvard Tuition \$1200.00; Stereo Sound Introduced to Hi-Fi Fans; NASA Created for Space Age; US Launches Explorer 1; 1st Toyotas & Datsuns Imported to US.

1959---Compact Cars Debut-Corvaair, Falcon; Barbie Doll Debut-Mattel; Gas-25 Cents a Gallon; Movie Ticket-\$1.00; Boeing 707 Jetliner in Service; Alaska-49th State; Hawaii-50th State.

1960---Chubby Checker Introduces” The Twist Craze”; Fantasticks Opens in Greenwich Village and Start of a 42 year Run; US Population-180 Million; 1st Playboy Club Opens in Chicago.

1961---NY Yankee Roger Maris hits Record Setting 61 Home Runs; China's Population—650 Million; Berlin Wall--Separating East & West Germany; Peace Corps--President Kennedy.

1962---American Astronaut John Glenn Orbits Earth 3 Times; Cuban Missile Crisis; Diet Coke Introduced; Bosa Nova & Watusi the Latest Popular Dances; Playboy Club Opens in NYC.

1963---Average Worker Earns Over \$100.00 a Week; ATT Introduces Touch Tone Phone; Dr. ML King Jr.-“I Have a Dream Speech”; President Kennedy Assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

1964---Discotheques & Go-Go Dancing Cage; Beatles make TV Debut on Ed Sullivan Show; World's Fair in Flushing Meadows NY, 1964 & 1965; US Heavily Involved in Vietnam War.

1965---NYC Massive Blackout; Latest Fashions--Bell Bottom Trousers & Mini Skirts, Flip Top Cans for Soft Drink & Beer; US Congress Pass Immigration Act of 1965.

Chinatown as a Center of Activity.....

Chinatown provided the ***family and social connected infrastructure*** for all the Chinese in the greater NY Metropolitan area as witnessed by the *busy family activities* on Sundays' and the Family Associations' Banquets on successive Sundays' following the Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations and festivities in the 40's, 50's, and 60's. For young Chinese adults looking for a social setting and meeting new people, NYC's Chinatown was a *magnet* for ***socials'*** and ***sports'*** activities for kids and young adults from the NY Metropolitan area; Boston, MA; Philadelphia, PA; Washington, DC; and Newark, NJ right across the Hudson River & as far away as Toronto and Montreal, Canada. As a result, there were many relationships developed during these ***socials'*** and ***sports'*** events with *dating, steady-couples, long lasting friendships*, and even *marriages* for these young adults from the Chinatown community.

Settling in the NY/NJ Metropolitan Area....

Upon reminiscing back on our life in Chinatown, several questions that come to mind are: What were the ***events and circumstances*** that led our grandparents & parents, and families to settle in America and New York's Chinatown? The ***intriguing genealogy*** of why so many of the ***"Eng family lineage"*** all settled in Newark NJ and the surrounding NJ towns? Did our ancestors and families go through ***Angel Island*** in California or ***Ellis Island*** in New York for immigration processing?

Chinatown in the 40's and 50's.....

NYC's Chinatown back then had a border on the Bowery from Canal St. to Chatham Square wrapping around Worth and Mulberry Streets back to Canal St. (At one time the 3rd Ave El rumbled above the streets on the Bowery to Chatham Square before turning into Park Row to go down to City Hall or to South Ferry). The streets in Chinatown were Mott, Pell, Doyers, Park, Bayard, and Elizabeth Streets. On the peripheral of Chinatown were Forsyth, Chrystie, Division, Henry, East Broadway, Madison, Catherine, Oliver Street(s) and St. James Place

Overcoming Negative Stereotyping.....

In the Chinatown community, we had strong family values and close loving parents; a proactive family emphasis on education; proper church teaching and guidance; and good school teachers who helped frame our academic foundation and discipline for later educational, social, economic, and professional achievements. From our perspective, the negative American connotation of the Chinese laundryman, laborer, houseboy, Charlie-the waiter, etc. were all but eradicated in one generation by the successes and accomplishments made by the young adults who grew up in Chinatown and the surrounding metropolitan areas

Exceptional Generation of Kids.....

When we look back at our life in Chinatown and the greater surrounding NY Metropolitan area, our generation had a high percentage of smart, talented, and resourceful kids who were self motivated and driven through education and hard work to succeed in life. Our *small* Chinatown community produced a large number of success stories with our share of entrepreneurs, businessmen, and professionals. The results are a positive indicator of our many blessings and how we successfully managed life's challenges to be the ***"best you can be in life"***

Discrimination.....

We were made aware of discrimination against Chinese Americans when we were in high school and worked in Chinese restaurants on weekends and during the summers where we met waiters in their 30's --40's, who were college graduates from schools like Columbia, NYU, CCNY...etc. They had experienced difficulties getting jobs after graduation while their white classmates received job offers. In order to sustain themselves and their families, they started working in the restaurant business. After a few years of unsuccessfully trying to get jobs in their fields of study, one can appreciate the difficulties of trying to get higher level jobs when one's resume shows recent work experience as being a waiter or a bartender. However, a number of these industrious waiters and bartenders went on to start their own businesses and in the long run were probably better off financially in the business world.....must be that ***true Chinese entrepreneurial DNA in the blood.***

Small Minority's Many Significant Contributions.....

Although Chinese Americans are classified as a minority group, we have made ***significant contributions*** in the sciences, engineering, technology, medicine, finance, education, and businesses contributing to the ***intellectual, cultural, and material wealth of America.*** It may be another generation before the population size increases to a level where there will be a higher representation of Chinese Americans/Asian Americans in political circles to have a significant impact and become a major forceful influence on the policies of both political parties and the direction of this country. That day will indeed be the *tipping point* where Chinese Americans/Asian Americans will be ***a dynamic influential political force***

Chinatown Social Life.....

On the “**social scale**”, there was the **Ging Hawk Club** in the early 50's followed by the **Four Seas Club** on 22 Pell Street; the **Jade Club** on 20 E. Broadway; and other smaller social clubs in the late 50's and the 60's. The **Jaycees** hosted the annual New Year's Eve Dance Party in the early 60's at the Commodore Hotel and in subsequent years at the St. George Hotel in Brooklyn, NY. Many of the larger dances were held at the Mac Burney YMCA on 23rd St. and major NYC hotels; college dances sponsored by the respective Chinese Student Societies were held at the City College(s), Columbia, and NYU; and church socials were held after basketball games at True Light Church (True Light boy's and girl's basketball teams “Daughters of China” (DOC) and Mariners Temple.

Chinatown Teen Socials.....

The “**Teen Hops**” were held at the Transfiguration Catholic Church and Mariners Temple where many of the Chinatown teenagers were able to meet and socialize with teenagers from the other New York boroughs and New Jersey.

Bear Mountain Summer Family-Social Excursion.....

During the summer, everyone looked forward to the last Monday in July when the *Chinese American Restaurant Association* held its “**annual boat ride**” from **South Ferry** to **Bear Mountain** starting at 8:00 am and returning at 11:00 pm. Here was an opportunity to see old friends and meet new ones as there were all kinds of activities for people of all ages and it was truly a family outing with something for everyone to participate in from various games of chance; to dancing; to a table tennis contest; to a dance contest; to a food festival of great home cooked

food; to just plain socializing and meeting new people on the boat; to a picnic and swimming at Bear Mountain; and to the return trip under moon light and dancing away the night were memories to remember and cherish.

Sports, Recreation, & Relaxation.....

For various sports and ball games there were Columbus Park, Bridge Park, and Forsyth Park; and the gyms at the Church of All Nations, True Light Lutheran Church, Transfiguration Catholic Church, and Mariners Temple. Teams like the *Clowns, Mohawks, Cathy, Pirates, and Bengals* competed in basketball tournaments. True Light Church had a basketball team that competed with other Lutheran Churches in a Protestant Church League. For a little recreation & relaxation during the summer, there was **Coney Island** with the world famous “*Cyclone*” and “*Parachute*” rides with swimming at the “*Washington Baths*” (*Salt Water Pool*) and *Nathan’s hot dogs*. When we were able to drive, **Jones Beach** was the place to be with the white sand beaches and we concluded the day with a quiet beach party at night under the stars on the sand dunes. Many of the Chinatown families have homes or rentals in **Bradley Beach NJ** and “*Newark Ave.*” became “*Chinatown*” on the Jersey Shore during the summer months.

Annual Baby Contest—Columbus Park.....

Another annual event worth remembering was the “**Baby Contest**” held at Columbus Park as part of the annual **Chinese Community Club’s** (CCC) “**Field Day**” with games, refreshments, and socializing followed by a serious softball game with a team from Philadelphia’s Chinatown. Some of you may remember being crowned *King* or *Queen* or being the 1st or 2nd runner-up at the Baby Contest?

Recreational Weekend Retreats.....

Throughout the year there were many other social activities like the **Chinese Christian Youth Conference** (CCYC) and **China Institute** who had summer and winter social/sport/church related long weekend retreats to Pawling NY, Lake George NY, and the Berkshires in Pittsfield MA. Other groups like the **Long Island Chinese Circle** had their social functions for many of the people that moved out to Long Island.

Double Ten Celebration & Beauty Pageant.....

In addition to **Chinese New Year**, which was usually celebrated in January or February depending on the lunar calendar, the other big Chinese holiday which received a lot of attention was the *Chinese Independence Day* celebrated on *October 10th* or commonly known as “**Double Ten**”. “Under the direction of progressive minded organizers in the mid 50’s, the Chinatown community decided to initiate and participate in the **Miss Chinatown New York Contest** and to celebrate the “**Double Ten**” holiday with a grand parade consisting of a variety of sponsored imaginative parade floats hosted by beautiful contestants; Chinese School and True Light Marching Bands; Dragon Dance and Lion Dance; and dignitaries, both politicians and veterans’ organizations marching and winding its way through the narrow streets of Chinatown.

Miss Debbie Gong from Queens, NY was crowned “**Miss Chinatown New York**”.

Double Ten Celebration & Dance Contest.....

Since **Latin American dancing** was the hot tempo “*in craze*” at the time, a decision was made by the Chinatown planning committee to have a dance contest in **Mambo, Cha Cha, Merengue, Rumba, and Samba** with a judging panel led by “Killer” Joe Pirro from the world famous **Palladium on Broadway**. **Danny Lee** from Chinatown and **Carol Lee** (Chinese-Cuban) from Cuba were fortunate and privileged to be the winning couple of these five Latin American Dance Contest competitions, as part of the “**Double Ten**” celebration festivities

PS 23 Public School K--6th Grades.....

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. For the kids living on the peripheral streets of Chinatown, there was **PS 1 Public School, K—6TH grades** on Henry & Catherine Streets.

PS 130 Public School 7th & 8th Grades.....

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. 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. For the kids living on the peripheral streets of Chinatown, there was **JHS 65 for 7TH, 8th, & 9th grades** on Forsyth Street.

Chinese Schools.....

Then there was the old Chinese School on Mott St after going to American School all day. Many of us went to the old Chinese School before it was torn down and rebuilt as a Community Center and Chinese School. Parochial school was at the Transfiguration Catholic Church where they had both American and Chinese Schools.

Active Mix of Chinatown Academic & Social Life.....

During the high school and college years of the late 40’s, 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 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 or go bowling with your friends.

Tales of 37 Mott & 44 Mulberry Street.....47 Mott Street.....

There were the larger buildings like 37 Mott and 44 Mulberry. **37 Mott** is located in the center of Chinatown at the crossroads of Mott & Pell. It is like a little village within Chinatown where you probably knew some of the families even if you didn’t live there. **44 Mulberry** is right across the street from Columbus Park where the residents can appreciate the grass & trees in the park. Both buildings had many families and tons of untold stories and interesting tales to recall and tell.

47 Mott has a distinction all of its own since five medical doctors, a few Ph.D.’s, and engineers came from this building. What were the secrets to these academic & professional success stories?

Chinatown Canal St. Subway Station Conveniences to Entertainment & Shopping.....

From Chinatown, one can easily take the BMT to **42rd St. & Times Square** to see a movie at any number of theaters on the “*Great White Way*” or take in a movie & stage show at the Roxy or Radio City. **On 34th St. & Herald Square** and **14th St. & Union Square**, one can shop at top department stores like Macys and Gimbels. All these activities are within a one to three express stops from the Canal Street Station. One can even go over to **Downtown Brooklyn** to DeKalb Ave, one subway stop away, to see a movie at the Paramount, Fox, or Albee Theaters. Fulton Street is well known for great shopping in department stores like A&S, Loesers, and Namns.

Bowling as a Popular Activity.....

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*** a few blocks from the Roxy.

Chinatown Fair.....

A little penny arcade and play land which had a gift shop, ski ball & prizes, and a juke box under the Port Arthur Restaurant where the kids and tourist alike would enjoy themselves inside from the busy activities outside on Mott Street. Not Coney Island or Palisades Park penny arcades but enough fun & laughs for the Chinatown kids and tourist passing through...

Chinatown Post Office & Buddhist Temple.....

A US Post Office also known as the “*world’s smallest*” right in the heart of Chinatown where the packages overflowed on to the front sidewalk during the Christmas holiday season. The people waiting to get into the post office and the tourist waiting to visit the ***Buddhist Temple*** in the back of the building were all standing side by side on the sidewalk was a sight to remember.

Chinatown Pharmacy.....

The Chinatown Pharmacy on 47 Mott Street was the first Chinese owned western style pharmacy in New York City. Besides serving as a local drug store, it was also a meeting place, message center, and social hangout. The pharmacy working with the Chinese Community Club (CCC) sponsored a number of community events like Christmas parties for Chinatown children, athletic teams, Spring Field Day & Baby Parade, Chinese New Year Ballroom Dance, and a Chinese New Year Lion Dance troop.

Post Midnight--Little Snack... Noodles & Rice... ”Seow Yeah”

After a long day, a party, a dance, a movie, a date, or quality time with friends etc, “Seow Yeah” sounds like a delightful snack before retiring. This little snack could be an order of noodles on a platter with your choice of meat or seafood and vegetable cooked with your favorite sauce. Noodles can also be served in a soup with your favorite selection of ingredients to your taste. Rice dishes are steaming rice on a platter with your selected topping of meat, seafood, & vegetable in a sauce of your choice. There are a *large variety of menu selections written only in Chinese and posted on the wall* at Chinatown restaurants that specialize in this type of service. Popular among the noodle houses for “Seow Yeah” are Hong Fat, Sam Wo, and Wor Hop on Mott St.; New Lin Heung on Bayard St.; and Hop Kee on Doyers St. ***When did we ever sleep?***

Yum Cha—“Dim Sum”.....A Cantonese Delight.....

Remember the casual bakery and tea houses like Nom Wah on Doyers St. and Tung Kee on Chatham Square serving Dim Sum-- Shao Mai, Har Gow, Shrimp or Beef rolled in Foon, Char Sue & Steam Pork Bows, Egg Tarts etc. and many other tasty pastries; while, the more formal lunch time Yum Cha & Dim Sum were served at restaurants like Lee's, Pagoda, and Port Arthur. As Dim Sum grew in popularity, many smaller innovative coffee shoppes and bakeries were opened serving yummy Dim Sum and various types of savory specialties at competitive prices for us to enjoy. What other type of ethnic or world cuisine can be sampled from such a large variety of delicious Dim Sum dishes and assorted pastries at a reasonable price? The wonders of “Dim Sum” literally means: “to point to the heart’s desire”. *A gourmet’s delight indeed...*

Lonnie’s Coffee Shoppe.....

An *instant success* and a convenience meeting place for the high school, college, and young adult age groups to hang out and enjoy American food on the corner of Mott and Park St. The menu was simple and different with hamburgers, sandwiches, juices, sodas, ice cream, pastries, and coffee. Anyone interested in a **Lime Rickey** or **Egg Cream** with NYC’s one & only world famous **Sutter’s Pastries**? *Just yummy & a little tease.....for the sweet tooth among us....*

Final Thoughts & Request.....

My thoughts and remembrances of the Chinatown happenings and events of the 40’s, 50’s, and 60’s periods of our youth as experienced and seen through my prism. As we continue on our adventure and journey through life, let us be grateful to the ones who led the way for us in the 30’s and early 40’s by **celebrating the past** and for their many sacrifices and contributions. Do **enjoy the present**, *every moment of it*, and continue **believing in the future** to preserve the past for our children and grandchildren, to serve as a role model for them, to be inspired by how we, through a good education, overcame many challenges; learned a lot with hard work; had a fun time in the process; and maintained our strong family and religious values to succeed in life.

Your **thoughts, reflections, a short narrative**, or a **story or two** will go a long way towards preserving this rich and passionate history of our **Chinatown generation of the 40’s, 50’s and 60’s** for the present and future generations to strive to “**be the best they can be in life**”.

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Thanks...&... May Everyone Be in Good Health & All the Best....

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Chinese New Year 4711, “Year of the Snake”