

## Memories of Old Chinatown

By Rose (Wong) Chin

Walking through Mott Street in Old Chinatown one noted a small group of "boys" always standing in front of a small pharmacy run by pharmacist, Mr. Chu. Remember the smallest post office managed by Mei? Excited kids played in the newly opened Chinatown Fair. Across the street Port Arthur Restaurant with authentic Chinese carved furniture and a rare outdoor terrace for serving dinners. Coffee and sodas for teens at Lonnie's Coffee Shop was a favorite.

Chinese newsstands across from the Chinese School didn't have to compete with the American newsstands on Chatham Square selling "The Daily News" and "The Daily Mirror" for two cents.

Well known on Bayard Street was a pharmacy run by an Italian woman named "Susie" who provided assistance to her mostly Chinese customers with medication for various ailments.

Pell Street had Chinese herbal doctors and herbal stores, small coffee shops and restaurants, famous among them were Sugar Bowl, Pacific Restaurant and Bo Bo's.

Mulberry Street had mainly Italian businesses, butchers, outdoor vegetable vendors, cheese shops with freshly made cheeses hanging on strings, pizza parlors and pastry shops with Ferrara's being the most famous. On the corner was PS 23, which was attended by Italians and Chinese students.

During the early morning hours you would see the milkmen making their deliveries on horse drawn wagons, trucks with their fresh Chinese vegetables from the nearby farms of which Soon Hing Farms was one. Unforgettable.

The Annual Baby Contests held in Columbus Park hosted by Mr. Fred Wong or "Uncle" Shavey Lee, the Mayor of Chinatown, The Miss Chinatown Beauty contests and outdoor bazaars were some of the highlights of the year in Chinatown.

In Columbus Park, where young children playing happily and unattended, were the good times of a bygone era. There was the pretzel man selling his pretzels for two cents and five cents and a wading pool for those hot days.

One could hear the mah jong tiles clicking from the basements and back rooms of restaurants at all hours. Patrol cars would raid the basement gambling dens and haul all the gamblers off to jail for a few hours.

There was the Chinese opera at Sun Sing Theater on East Broadway, which was a treat, along with the Venice and Chatham Square theaters for movies and of course all the fireworks during Chinese New Year, which was deafening.

During World War II young girls would help solicit money for the China Relief Fund. Other fund raisers paraded through the streets carrying a huge flag of China. People would toss coins and bills from their apartment windows to help the cause.

There were many churches located throughout the neighborhood, Transfiguration Catholic Church, True Light Lutheran Church, which was originally located in a loft on the corner of Canal Street until it moved to its current location of Worth & Mulberry Streets., Trust in God Church and evangelical missions throughout.

Memories are gone, but not forgotten. A wonderful Chinatown with community spirit.