



News & Notes

Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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November 2003

■ PRESIDENT'S NOTE



>> CHSSC Fall 2003 Dinner - President, Linda Wong Smith;
Guest Speaker, Dr. Virginia Li; VP of Programs,
Eugene Moy - Empress Pavilion, L.A. Chinatown

Holiday Greetings!

Thank you to the members, friends and contributors who supported our Fall Dinner on November 7th.

Fall Dinner speaker, Dr. Virginia Li, gave a richly detailed history of her family's experiences in China during World War II. Her father was at one time the governor of Guangdong Province and her mother led efforts to establish orphanages and schools. When Virginia's family arrived in the U.S. after World War II, they began anew, in the restaurant business, allowing Virginia and her three siblings to finish their educations, attend college, and do postgraduate work. In her book, *From One Root Many Flowers*, Dr. Li tells of the discrimination and hardships her family endured in the U.S. after settling on the East Coast. This part of her story had a particular resonance for me, growing up in the Midwest in the 1950s & 1960s. Despite her travails, Virginia rose to a professorship at the esteemed Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health in the 1970's, then came West in 1982 to teach at UCLA's School of Public Health. Today, Virginia frequently travels to China to further her mother's work to improve women's and children's public health services.

Sunday afternoons at our Chinatown Heritage and Visitors Center are often serendipitous. Recently, I phoned Ms. Demetra Antimisariis to invite her to our Fall Dinner. We had such a delightful conversation that we became instant "chat buddies," and when I mentioned I was once a writer, she insisted I meet her daughter as soon as possible! She also told me that her mother is the Honorable Marguerite Chung Geftakys, a relative of

several World War II veterans profiled in our book, *Duty and Honor*. Our casual conversation was the genesis of a small reunion of Demetra's family at the Heritage Center the following Sunday, consisting of Marguerite; Demetra and her brother, Jimmy; and Demetra's two teenage daughters. One of our docents, Jim Fong, instantly recognized Marguerite as a classmate from high school days, and thus more connections were made.

Recently, we have entertained visitors and guests from around the world at the Heritage Center. Selia Tan, from Guangdong Province, is a graduate student at Azusa Pacific College doing research on the descendants of emigres from the former "Cantonese" districts of China. Selia has wisely tapped many of our resources in conducting her research. Henrieke Heeling, from Holland, is another graduate student who has visited us several times. Both young women attended our Fall Dinner. I hope you will enjoy a cup of tea with us on Sunday afternoons when the Heritage Center is open from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

I would like to acknowledge our Board member, Gilbert Hom's purchase and donation of an authentic Chinese tea ceremony set to the Society. Gilbert generously devotes much time and energy to CHSSC and it is time that those efforts be duly recognized.

On November 15th, Dr. Wing Mar and his wife, Joyce, graciously opened their home to the CHSSC Board for a planning retreat. Their daughter, Carolyn Sauvage-Mar, is a specialist in facilitating these events for non-profits and traveled from New York City to lead our activity.

Please come to our Annual Holiday Pot Luck Dinner, which takes the place of our regular monthly meeting on December 3rd, and bring your favorite food dishes, family and friends. I look forward to seeing you there.

Linda Wong Smith, President

■ DECEMBER PROGRAM

Wednesday, December 3, 2003, 6:30 p.m.

Castelar Elementary School

Multipurpose Room

840 Yale Street, Los Angeles, Chinatown

(Park on playground, enter on College Street
between Hill and Yale Streets)

ANNUAL HOLIDAY POTLUCK DINNER!

(PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FLYER FOR DETAILS)

❖ ANNOUNCEMENTS

\$1,000 Scholarship in Chinese American Studies

Thanks to our many generous sponsors, CHSSC has been offering a scholarship to college students with special interest in Chinese American studies. Our mission is to encourage another generation of scholars in this field. The 2004 Application Form is already on our website (www.chssc.org) and more leaflets will be sent to the major universities and colleges in the Southern California region. But we need the help of our members to make this scholarship successful. Please encourage people to apply. Volunteer to be a judge or to help out! And, of course, further monetary donations will be valued. For more information, contact Susie Ling at shling@pasadena.edu.

Holiday Bazaar - Sunday, December 21, 2003 Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Come and make your best deal on new and used holiday season gift items at CHSSC's Holiday Bazaar at our Chinatown Heritage and Visitors Center. Proceeds from the Bazaar will benefit the Chinatown Library's Chinese Heritage Collection. For more information, phone Randy in the CHSSC Office at 323-222-0856.

A Hearty Welcome to New CHSSC Members!

We extend a warm welcome to the following new members: M.G. Calney, Young Gee, Dr. Gregory V. and Angie Chew, Virginia Crane, Tony Francis, Russell Low, Phil Parlett, and Jun Rong Powell.

New CHSSC Board Secretary

Susie Ling has accepted the CHSSC Board's nomination and is our new Board Secretary. Congratulations!

It's Time to Renew Your CHSSC Membership!

It's CHSSC membership renewal time. Please add \$5 if you wish to receive our scholarly *Gum Saan Journal*. Checks should be sent to the CHSSC Office at P.O. Box 862647, Los Angeles, CA 90086-2647.

Volunteers for Holiday Pot Luck Dinner

We need a few volunteers to help set up, serve, and put things away at our Holiday Pot Luck Dinner on Wednesday, December 3rd. (See attached Flyer.) Thank you!

November General Meeting Refreshments

Thank you so much to Natalina Chew, Dorothy Lew, Ruth Lung, Andre Panczenko, Julie Raskoff, Beverly Shue and Donna Young for the variety of tasty refreshments at CHSSC's November 5, 2003 General Meeting.

❖ AROUND CHSSC

LOS ANGELES' FAR EAST CAFE

By Susie Ling

(On 31 January 2004, Saturday, at 4:30 p.m., the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California will join the Filipino American National Historical Society-Los Angeles Chapter,



and the Japanese American Historical Society of Southern California for potluck and program at the very newly renovated Far East Cafe on 347 First Street. Because of space limitations, please RSVP if you are able to join us with your family. We do welcome everyone. This will be a trip down memory lane for some but it is also an opportunity to make new friends with our sister historical societies.)

By the 1920s-1930s, the Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino pioneers in Los

Angeles were building communities. Each of the ethnic groups had their own associations, small businesses, and even sports leagues. For some early laborers, there were now young families with American-born children. Many of our ancestors congregated - for birthdays, weddings, funerals, graduations, and other occasions - at the Far East Cafe. The Far East Cafe is a symbol of Asian American community life. It was one of four Chinese restaurants in the heart of Little Tokyo. (Sanko Low; Nikko Low; and Lum were the other three.)

Far East Cafe was on First Street, right next to the Nishi Hongwangji Buddhist Temple. From 1937 to 1994 the Jung family ran the restaurant. After a day of Saturday evening shopping in Little Tokyo or just before a movie, families stopped for a treat at Far East Cafe. Filipino manongs might stop in for a bite before going to a boxing match in the 1940s. Al Mendoza of the Filipino American National Historical Society remembers, "In the 1950s, we headed for Far East Cafe after a game at Belmont High." Chinese herb doctors even had a convention at Far East Cafe. For lunch, many nearby city officials and police officers dropped by. Even Mayor Jimmy Hahn ate at the Cafe as a child, tagging along with his dad.

The current building was constructed in 1896. The bottom floor was retail space and originally, there was a combination of housing and office space on the upper floors, which had also been used as offices for a photo shop, dentist office, and a chick sexing school. Although there are few windows, the building has a beautiful skylight.

"I worked at Far East from age eleven to age twenty-one," boasts Dr. Andrew Chong of La Puente. "We all worked there. That restaurant supported the children of all five families. It put many of us kids through college and professional schools." Dr. Chong's grandfather, Goey Heoy Chong, came to Gum Saan in the early 1900s from Jung village in Toisan as a paper son. After working in San Francisco as a houseboy for three years to pay off his boat ticket, Grandpa Chong worked at a laundry house in Mason City, Iowa. "Grandpa didn't like San Francisco. He used to say, 'Whites won't cut my hair and Blacks won't shine my shoes,'" reports Dr. Chong. From Iowa, Grandpa joined Look Mar (nee Jung), Oak Hoey Chang, and Kwok Hoey Jeong, and one other Jung cousin to open Far East Cafe in 1937. J-town was a good location because Japanese liked Chinese food and the restaurant filled a niche as prices were reasonable. "That hom yuu was a nickel a plate! Later, the price rose to a dollar. Even in the 1980s, we had soda for fifty cents and beer for \$1.25," remembers Dr. Chong, "And we served a lot of food." There

was water chestnut hash, Chicago-style pork chowmein, and very red sweet and sour pork.

"When I was a busboy in the 1960s, I still remember a lot of male bachelor customers. But there were families too," said Dr. Chong. The cooks and waiters were mostly men as well. "The restaurant was our family. I would come to pitch in even after I was an optometrist. Those who were officially retired would come back once in a while. We felt the customers were our friends."

In the 1940s, the Jung family gave Japanese Americans returning from the camps free temporary lodging on the second floor. Food was also served on credit.

In 1994, the building was closed after damage from the Northridge Earthquake. In 2000, the Jung family donated the building to the Little Tokyo Service Center. With the help of numerous government funding agencies, private foundations, individual donors and historic preservation organizations, LTSC - a non-profit community organization - is renovating the building and the restaurant. The physical facade of the building - including the Chop Suey sign - and the unique partitions of the restaurant are historically preserved.

PAPER SON

By Linda Chong

Byron Yee's September 24th performance of his bittersweet autobiographical comedy, *Paper Son*, was well attended by dozens of CHSSC members and friends. Proudly representing the Society was President Linda Wong Smith who also arranged for tea and light refreshments at the cozy Gascon Center Theatre in West Los Angeles. Byron Yee generously donated the evening's proceeds to our organization and spent much time mingling with the CHSSC contingent after the show. Longtime CHSSC members Nadine Soohoo Levy and her niece, Elsie Chan, even approached Byron to pose for a "family photo" after learning from his monologue that his true surname is Szeto, and not Yee, as he had spent much of his life believing. ("Soohoo" is a variation-the pronunciation in Sze Yup dialect-on Szeto, which is also spelled "Situ.").

The deeply moving *Paper Son* focuses on Byron Yee's strained relationship with his father, whose untimely death from a heart attack robbed Byron of the opportunity to truly understand his family background and cultural heritage. Born and raised in white-dominated Oklahoma, he was propelled to begin his personal search after moving to California and being told early in his acting career that his options were limited because he "did not sound Chinese." Although his quest for knowledge was initially motivated by his need to develop a theatrical Chinese accent (one pre-audition cram session led him to seek the counsel of a waiter in San Francisco's Chinatown), it ultimately led him to the National Archives facility in San Bruno, where he learned of his father's difficult journey, and that of countless others like him, who assumed the role of "paper sons" to make better lives in the United States. In his one-man show (skillfully directed by Glen Chin), Byron discusses how his research deepened his understanding of an ugly period in American history-the era of the Chinese Exclusion Act-giving him far more appreciation and respect for his China-born father. Byron's show, which

received positive reviews from the *Los Angeles Times* and the *L.A. Weekly*, was scheduled to close in early November. For more information about *Paper Son*, Byron Yee, and future performances, visit www.paperson.com.

CASTELAR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HOLDS ALUMNI REUNION

On the afternoon of October 26, nearly three dozen people filled the game room of the Titan Student Union at Cal State Fullerton to attend a Castelar Elementary School reunion. Most of the participants were graduates of the class of 1975, but the "welcome mat" had been extended to everyone and anyone who ever attended the venerable Chinatown institution, regardless of when or if they graduated. On hand for the festivities was beloved, longtime former principal and CHSSC member, Dr. Bill Chun-Hoon. The day's activities included bowling, reminiscing, catching up, taking and exchanging photographs, and feasting on Hawaiian food from Shaka's restaurant in Monterey Park. Participants asked that the next reunion not be so long in coming.

-LC-

■ HEALTH & WELLNESS

What Is Alzheimer's Disease And How Can It Be Prevented?

By Dr. Betty C. Gaw

The First International Conference on the Integrative Medical Approach to the Prevention of Alzheimer's Disease convened in Tempe/Phoenix, Arizona on October 10-12, 2003 with twelve physicians and scientists presenting their expertise. The dedication of these experts has inspired me to share some of their knowledge and hope with you for deterring the progression of this devastating disease, through prevention and early treatment. Each of us has heard of or knows someone who has been felled by Alzheimer's Disease; my esteemed and brilliant pediatric professor, Dr. Benjamin M. Kagan, Director of the Department of Pediatrics, Cedars Sinai Hospital, was an Alzheimer's victim in his early eighties; President Ronald Reagan is living with this brain-destroying process.



● What Is Alzheimer's Disease?

In 1906, Dr. Alois Alzheimer, a German neurologist, described a 51 year old patient with pre-senile dementia, suffering severe progressive memory loss and disorientation, and dying from the disease four years later at age 55.

Alzheimer's Disease/AD is characterized by irreversible and unrelenting memory loss - leading to mood, personality and behavior changes, poor judgment, loss of social affect, and inability to perform activities of daily living. Every function of the brain is affected, from the fine cognition of recognizing family members, poor word recall and ability to hold a conversation, and such inappropriate behaviors as leaving a frying pan sizzling on the stove, wandering outside in a state of undress, or arriving at a banquet-dinner in shorts, sports shirt and sandals. Death from Alzheimer's Disease ensues.

from infections or pneumonia, usually an average of eight to ten years from the time of diagnosis. Currently, only fifty percent of AD patients are diagnosed, due to family members being ignorant, in denial, or not wishing to be stigmatized, while doctors shrug it off as senile dementia with the ignorant belief that no definitive treatment is available. This unwarranted ignorance is tragic because much can be done to stave off the progression of moderate to severe Alzheimer's Disease, saving society and families daily heartache and billions of dollars spent for health and long term care.

The first-time-ever convention for the prevention of AD was organized to disseminate crucial information to health care providers so they may become leaders in this field. It was my great privilege to attend it.

(Continued next month - or see the full article at chssc.org under "Heath & Wellness")

❑ UPCOMING EVENTS

November 28, 2003, 7:00 p.m.
YU HUA DISCUSSES AND SIGNS
TO LIVE & CHRONICLE OF A BLOOD MERCHANT
Pacific Asia Museum
 46 N. Las Robles, Pasadena
 626-449-2742 x 20

December 1, 2003, 6:30 p.m.
AUTHOR CARL CHU - FINDING CHINESE FOOD IN
LOS ANGELES
China Society Dinner Meeting
 Golden Dragon Restaurant, 960 N. Broadway, Chinatown
 Information: 213-628-8439 (Bob Lee)

December 4, 2003, 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.
TOY DRIVE
Asian Pacific American Legal Center
 1145 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA
 213-977-7500

December 12, 2003, 3:30 p.m.
"THE LEGEND OF ST. NICHOLAS"
Puppet Show (Free Event)
Chinatown Library
 213-620-0925

Through December 28, 2003
WAH MING CHANG AND TYRUS WONG: TWO
BEHIND THE SCENES (Retrospective)
Chinese Historical Society of America Museum,
San Francisco
 415-391-1188

❑ MISSION STATEMENT

The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California was organized in November, 1975. The purposes of the Society are: 1) to bring together people with a mutual interest in the important history and historical role of Chinese and Chinese Americans in Southern California; 2) to pursue, preserve, and communicate knowledge of this history, and 3) to promote the heritage of the Chinese and Chinese American community in support of a better appreciation of the rich, multi-cultural society of the United States.

❑ 2003-2004 CHSSC Officers

Linda Wong Smith - President
 Pete Chinn - Vice President
 Eugene Moy - V.P. Programs
 Ben Nakayama - Membership Secretary
 William Chew - Treasurer
 Franklin Mah - Financial Secretary
 Susie Ling, Secretary

❑ Board Members

Dr. Betty Gaw, Gilbert Hom, Dr. Wing Mar
 News 'n Notes Editor, Randy Bloch

November News 'n Notes Contributors: Linda Wong Smith, Susie Ling, Dr. Betty Gaw, Linda Chong



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