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Wong, Vinnie oral history interview conducted by Justin Murphy, March 15, 2024.
History Cambridge

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Interview with Vinnie Wong

March 15, 2024

Justin Murphy [00:00:01] Hi, this is Justin Murphy. I'm here with Wing Wong, who goes by Vinnie. Today's date is March 15th, 2024. We're here at the Hooper Lee Nichols House, and today we're doing an interview as part of the project we have discussing the Chinese American experience in Cambridge. We're also joined in the room by Vinnie's nephew, Richard Ning, who has also been interviewed for this project. So, Vinnie, I just want to confirm that you've agreed to be interviewed for this project. Is that correct?

Vinnie Wong [00:00:47] Yes.

Justin Murphy [00:00:48] Awesome. And can you tell me your date of birth and where you were born?

Vinnie Wong [00:00:55] I was born in Cambridge. November 1st, 1928.

Justin Murphy [00:01:03] 1928?

Vinnie Wong [00:01:04] Yes.

Justin Murphy [00:01:05] So you're you're almost coming up on your 96th birthday?

Vinnie Wong [00:01:10] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:01:13] Wow. Do you recall where in Cambridge you were born?

Vinnie Wong [00:01:18] Yes, I have a picture of it. Do you want to see it?

Justin Murphy [00:01:22] Not right now. Yeah. For the audio listeners, they may not be able to, to-

Vinnie Wong [00:01:26] It's-

Vinnie Wong [00:01:27] 96 Mount Auburn Street.

Justin Murphy [00:01:29] 96.

Vinnie Wong [00:01:30] It's- the building is now torn down, in another different building now. Bought by Harvard.

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Justin Murphy [00:01:38] I see, so it's since been torn down. It's now a Harvard building?

Vinnie Wong [00:01:42] It's a Harvard building now.

Justin Murphy [00:01:44] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:01:44] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:01:46] And is the, 96 Mount Auburn Street, that was also a location that was owned by your family for a business, right?

Vinnie Wong [00:01:57] Yes. But Mount Auburn Street is with the Boylston Street in between, and is now called J.F. Kennedy Street. Street.

Justin Murphy [00:02:14] Okay. So it was called Mount Auburn. But today, in 2024, it's the J.F. Kennedy, Street?

Vinnie Wong [00:02:21] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:02:22] Okay. So can you tell me a little bit about your- that home, if you can recall any stories about it? How long did your family live there?

Vinnie Wong [00:02:36] Well. I was born and in one of them my family had a restaurant in the same building.

Justin Murphy [00:02:47] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:02:48] We lived on the third floor, and the restaurant's on the second floor. And we had the restaurant on Boylston Street at that time. So, I don't know much about- moving from time to time. They moved to Story Street at one time. Then we moved to Grant Street for a little longer time and then we moved to Putnam Ave. So, I remember at Grant Street, we moved- I don't know much about Grant Street. And I went to school at Grant Street, at Saint Paul's School, up the corner there. Up to the- when I was six to to w-. Then we moved to aPutnam Ave. And I was in the second, second grade there.

Justin Murphy [00:03:49] Okay, so you probably spent about 1 or 2 years, at each of these-

Vinnie Wong [00:03:54] Yeah. I don't remember much about it, but just, very little, about going to school there and yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:04:02] Yeah. So tell me a little bit about growing up. What you can remember about the neighborhoods you grew up in. Or the school that you went to.

Vinnie Wong [00:04:14] Oh, We- I grew up, mostly on oh Putnam Ave. Yeah, we went back to Saint Paul's School up to the eighth grade. Then up to the eighth grade, so we went to high

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school after there. There was, went to Rindge High, and then across the street was the Cambridge High and Latin, which is now called Cambridge Rindge.

Richard Ning [00:04:47] Rindge Latin, Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:04:47] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:04:50] Great. So tell me a little bit about Saint Paul's Academy. How did you- is that a Catholic school? I'm guessing by name.

Vinnie Wong [00:05:00] Well, my parents didn't know too much. I'd spoke Chinese before I spoke English. Yeah. Yeah. And the priest came down, saw us playing outside. And says you ought to be in school. So the priest took us to school at Saint Paul's.

Justin Murphy [00:05:21] I see.

Vinnie Wong [00:05:23] So the whole family graduated from Saint Paul's. Then they went to Cambridge Latin after that. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:05:34] All right. So tell me a little bit more about, I guess getting, getting into Saint Paul's. So you said growing up, up until the age of six, you didn't speak much English at all, in your daily life?

Vinnie Wong [00:05:56] Well I'd get to know a little better, and so. But, I didn't- school I got kept back a couple of times because of my English.

Justin Murphy [00:06:13] And so, your parents- so through a priest who had met with your parents, that's when you got enrolled at Saint Paul's?

Vinnie Wong [00:06:23] I didn't get that.

Justin Murphy [00:06:25] Oh, sorry. I'll speak up a little bit more. So through, through, a priest happening to pass by your your parents house, that's how you got enrolled in Saint Paul's?

Vinnie Wong [00:06:37] Yes, yes. So the the the nuns treated us good, and they- we all sort of go up and then a couple of my sisters went to a Catholic High school, Matignon and Sacred Heart. Yeah, and the the rest of them went to Cambridge Latin.

Justin Murphy [00:07:01] Okay.

Richard Ning [00:07:01] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:07:03] So tell me a little bit about your immediate family. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Justin Murphy [00:07:11] Well, I got ten¹ brothers and sisters.

Justin Murphy [00:07:14] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:07:15] Yeah, seven girls.

Justin Murphy [00:07:22] Do do you remember all their names?

Vinnie Wong [00:07:27] Yes. Mary is my oldest sister. Then Vinnie, the second, Evelyn, Lotus, Ruby, Jean, Dorothy, Francis, Howard, and Tom.

Justin Murphy [00:07:47] Wow.

Justin Murphy [00:07:49] So you were the second oldest?

Vinnie Wong [00:07:50] I'm the second oldest.

Justin Murphy [00:07:51] Okay.

Justin Murphy [00:07:53] And so all ten of you ended up going through Saint Paul's, and then-

Vinnie Wong [00:07:59] No no no, when we moved to- what's- wh- when we moved to Putnam Ave, a couple of them went to a high school in Matignon and the Sacred Heart.

Justin Murphy [00:08:27] Okay, so your sisters ended up going to another [overlap] school at that point?

Vinnie Wong [00:08:31] [Overlap] Yeah yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:08:32] Okay. And so tell me a little bit more about, the restaurant that your family owned that was originally. Mount Auburn Street. What was the name of the restaurant?

Vinnie Wong [00:08:47] So we was on Grants, so we used to, my mother used to walk up to Boylston Street alot. and I remember that. But I meant, the wa- at time of the war, there was war time, and we had, did black curtains pull up for for the air raid. Get air raid wardens coming up to the restaurant. And, we had, ration. Ration food. There- you had to get coupons to buy meat and eggs and stuff like that. So, oh. So we needed some eggs that one time. I bought ten, ten books to the- well buy a te- ten dozen of eggs. And they refused me, and then they call a manager, he says, you got ten books, it's okay. He said that's a lot of eggs, huh?

Justin Murphy [00:09:56] Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:09:57] ten dozen.

¹ Upon review, the narrator's family has asked the record to reflect that Vinnie has nine brothers and sisters. Including him, his parents had ten children.

Justin Murphy [00:09:57] And you needed the eggs, for the restaurant or just for your your family?

Vinnie Wong [00:10:03] Well, we'd use it for both.

Justin Murphy [00:10:04] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:10:04] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:10:06] So what was the name of the the family restaurant again?

Vinnie Wong [00:10:10] It was, Young Lee.

Justin Murphy [00:10:11] Young Lee.

Vinnie Wong [00:10:12] Yes.

Justin Murphy [00:10:14] Okay. And when you were born, it was at Mount Auburn. Did that location change, over the years?

Vinnie Wong [00:10:21] That was what?

Justin Murphy [00:10:23] So it was originally at Mount Auburn Street, the restaurant, did it move to other locations?

Vinnie Wong [00:10:31] It was over a liquor store. So the restaurant was on the second floor, and we lived on the third floor.

Justin Murphy [00:10:37] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:10:37] Yeah, yeah, so I don't remember nothing about that.

Justin Murphy [00:10:43] Did the location of the restaurant change?

Vinnie Wong [00:10:48] O- on 13 Boylston Street. Yeah, that was. There was a Western Union underneath there. And there's a couple restaurants. Bernardi's and the liquor stores around.

Justin Murphy [00:11:04] And what- do you remember around what time, the restaurant location changed to Boylston Street?

Vinnie Wong [00:11:17] Well we hadn't- we had quite a few movie stars that came up. Anna May Wong, I remember going up there. You know Anna May Wong, heard of her? No?

Justin Murphy [00:11:31] No, what's that?

Vinnie Wong [00:11:32] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:11:33] Could you tell me more about that?

Vinnie Wong [00:11:35] Well, she came to the restaurant, and she met my sister, she gave her a couple passes to go to see her on Brattle, Brattle Theater.

Vinnie Wong [00:11:47] Was she, a singer or?

Vinnie Wong [00:11:50] No, she was very young. We were still in grade school, and, you know.

Justin Murphy [00:11:58] Sorry. I meant, you said Anna, Anna Wong -

Vinnie Wong [00:12:02] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:12:03] Was she a singer? What kind of-

Vinnie Wong [00:12:07] She's a movie star.

Justin Murphy [00:12:09] Movie star, okay yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:12:17] I think she was on that star- the movie-

Justin Murphy [00:12:25] What- Yeah, what movies did she star in? If you can recall.

Vinnie Wong [00:12:28] I don't remember.

Justin Murphy [00:12:29] That's okay. But she was probably famous around what time, would that be?

Vinnie Wong [00:12:36] Late, late '30s and '40s.

Justin Murphy [00:12:40] Great, I might have to look into some of movies then.

Richard Ning [00:12:43] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:12:46] And so were there any other notable people that you can remember that visited the Young Lee Restaurant?

Vinnie Wong [00:12:53] No, I, I don't, you know. There were- you used to have the ROTC marching all the time there.

Justin Murphy [00:13:03] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:13:03] Yeah. That marching up, they had - down the Charles River they had some kind of well, training things you know. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:13:20] And, did you ever help out in the restaurant, or who kind of worked or managed the restaurant?

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Vinnie Wong [00:13:28] Yeah, we started peeling potatoes and then I started doing errands and go, go to Chinatown, buy stuff..

Justin Murphy [00:13:36] How old were you when you were helping out?

Vinnie Wong [00:13:40] Well, that was about 7 or 8 years old, peeling potatoes, a little older, 15, 16, I went to Chinatown by train. It was only 10 cents. 10 cents then. Then it went up to 25, and so on.

Justin Murphy [00:13:57] Did did all, all of nine of your other siblings, did they also [overlap] help out?

Vinnie Wong [00:14:04] [overlap] Yes. They also pitched in and helped in the restaurant.

Justin Murphy [00:14:09] And I'm guessing did your- both your mom and your dad, they worked in the restaurant, too?

Justin Murphy [00:14:15] No. My mom stayed home with ten kids.

Justin Murphy [00:14:18] That makes sense, yeah. So it was mainly your dad that was managing the family restaurant?

Vinnie Wong [00:14:24] Yeah. You know as the kids grew older, she'd probably go up at weekends and help with a - out little. Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:14:31] Yeah. And so earlier you mentioned, some of the precautions you had to take in the restaurant, during World War Two. Could you tell me a little bit more about what life was like at that time in Cambridge? Especially for your family? During World War Two, what kind of precautions did you all have to take?

Vinnie Wong [00:14:57] What's that?

Justin Murphy [00:14:59] So you mentioned that during World War Two, you all had to use black curtains.

Vinnie Wong [00:15:05] Oh, yes.

Justin Murphy [00:15:05] [overlap] At the restaurant -

Vinnie Wong [00:15:06] [overlap] Ye- yes.

Justin Murphy [00:15:07] Can you tell me a little bit more about, the experience of living in Cambridge during World War Two?

Vinnie Wong [00:15:15] Well, during World War two, everything had, it had- was rationed. Cloth- clothing, shoes and, things. And, you have to have certain stamps to buy certain food. And then there's a limit on how many stamps you use, yeah.

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Justin Murphy [00:15:43] What impact did it have on your family, if you could remember any memories of kind of the rationing and how that impacted your family? Any conversations?

Vinnie Wong [00:15:55] Well. du- during the restaurant, we couldn't buy all of meat we want and now all that and then- Dur- during the late'30s, the restaurant was very slow. And if you made about 20 dollars a day that was- that was great. And then when the war came, and make maybe 40 dollars to 50 dollars, up to 100 dollars, was the greatest, at that time.

Justin Murphy [00:16:29] So, during the war time, the restaurant saw more business?

Vinnie Wong [00:16:34] Yes.

Justin Murphy [00:16:35] Yeah, oh. And so were there - did you have to change the menu because there were certain items you couldn't get?

Vinnie Wong [00:16:46] What's that?

Vinnie Wong [00:16:47] Did you have to make any changes to the- what you were serving because you couldn't get certain types of meat?

Vinnie Wong [00:16:54] Well, we'll just say when we run out, we says we- we're out. Yes. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:17:05] So I guess, tell me a little bit more about daily life, growing up with nine siblings. Did you all have a big house or what was the house like?

Vinnie Wong [00:17:18] Well. The house was a little- was bigger. We got evicted from Grant Street because we had- what's that - Six, six kids then at the- at that time, so we we b- got the house at Putnam Ave. And it got nine rooms, a duplex.

Justin Murphy [00:17:42] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:17:43] A duplex, nine rooms. At the corner of Flagg Street, and across the street was Kinnaird Street. Yeah. So.

Justin Murphy [00:17:52] Why-

Vinnie Wong [00:17:55] And Colton School was a little further down. That was the nearest school. But we finished at Saint Paul's school. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:18:02] Okay. So you all had some loyalty to Saint Paul's?

Vinnie Wong [00:18:06] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:18:08] Do you recall why you were evicted from the Grant Street house?

Vinnie Wong [00:18:16] Um, too too many kids.

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Justin Murphy [00:18:19] Oh, too many kids. There was like, a limit -

Vinnie Wong [00:18:21] Yeah, yeah we had six kids at that time. Yeah. I was about, seven, seven to eight years old.

Justin Murphy [00:18:34] So when you moved to the Putnam Ave location, what was what was the neighborhood like? Did you, did you play with other kids in the neighborhood? Did you just- I know you had a lot of siblings, so.

Vinnie Wong [00:18:46] Yeah. Yeah, we got a lot of kids. Well, it's mostly girl neighborhoods, with the girls. And so yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:18:57] Do you have any other memories from your childhood that kind of stick out? Different activities you would do often?

Vinnie Wong [00:19:06] No.

Justin Murphy [00:19:08] Okay. Do you remember, what you and your family would do for fun during that time growing up?

Vinnie Wong [00:19:16] Yeah. Would yeah, somewhere, yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:19:22] Yeah. Wha- what kind of activities, would you all do?

Vinnie Wong [00:19:27] Well, okay. I guess, during the war period, they had things going on in Chinatown. And you'd buy bonds and, made a lot of, bought a lot of bonds. 25 cents a stamp at 18.75, and then you get a bond. And then after ten years, you get 25 bucks. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:19:56] So during that period in your life, was there, a lot of Chinese Americans living in Cambridge at that time?

Vinnie Wong [00:20:08] Not much. There- we were the only Chinese restaurant in Harvard Square for a long time. Then Central Square had three, three, three restaurants. And Union Square had had one. And they had a little small restaurant that from the house. Yeah. In, Dover Street. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:20:35] Did you, did your family interact with other Chinese families in Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:20:43] Well, we had the other families in Chinatown. They'd go every, probably go up every Wednesday to Jordan Marsh for Dollar Day.

Justin Murphy [00:20:56] So you would mainly meet other Chinese folks [overlap] in in Chinatown?

Vinnie Wong [00:21:02] [overlap] Yeah, yeah. Not not not, not not many in Cambridge. Yeah.

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Justin Murphy [00:21:04] Okay. Okay. And what- so we talked a little bit about growing up as a kid. What was your high school experience like?

Vinnie Wong [00:21:20] Well, I wasn't really too bright, kept failing.

Justin Murphy [00:21:26] Did you? Did you have [overlap] a favorite subject?

Vinnie Wong [00:21:33] Hmm?

Justin Murphy [00:21:34] Did you have a favorite subject in school?

Vinnie Wong [00:21:38] Well, I I I, I like, history or, yeah, I know more about, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:21:45] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:21:45] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:21:48] And what was the- at that time it was called the Rindge Academy, right? The the school you went to?

Vinnie Wong [00:22:00] You know, I don't remember too much about that, being there. Just went on grade to grade then.

Justin Murphy [00:22:06] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:22:07] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:22:07] So after graduating high school, what what did you do next?

Vinnie Wong [00:22:12] Well, I didn't finish high school. I went to the service.

Justin Murphy [00:22:17] Oh okay, so you didn't finish high school?

Vinnie Wong [00:22:19] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:22:19] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:22:19] I went, I went four years of service, and then I went back and tried to graduate. So I graduated in '53.

Justin Murphy [00:22:30] Okay. So what- when did you start your service, in the military?

Vinnie Wong [00:22:38] What grade did I have?

Justin Murphy [00:22:41] What year did you go?

Vinnie Wong [00:22:43] [overlap] Because 40- I went in the service in '48, and I graduated in '53.

Justin Murphy [00:22:53] And-

Vinnie Wong [00:22:55] I got discharged in '52. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:23:00] All right. So would you mind sharing a little bit more about, your service? Where did you serve?

Vinnie Wong [00:23:06] Oh, well. Well, I went overseas at December 7th for- '48, ten days on sea. So I, I got seasick, right after the ship took off. And you know about two, two hours afterwards. Yeah, it went to the White Cliffs of Dover.

Justin Murphy [00:23:36] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:23:37] Ye- yeah. So we stopped there for about, maybe, 6 or 8 hours there. And they let us watch the White Cliffs of Dover. And then they had a pilot to take us to Berchtesgar- what's the name of that? Bremerhaven.

Justin Murphy [00:24:00] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:24:01] Yeah. And the pilot took us over because of the mines. They still had mines at the chan- English Channel.

Justin Murphy [00:24:11] Oh, in the English Channel?

Vinnie Wong [00:24:12] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:24:13] Okay, so you so you had to fly-

Vinnie Wong [00:24:14] At that- that was the English Channel, though. At the White Cliffs of Dover, that was part of the English Channel,.

Justin Murphy [00:24:21] Right.

Vinnie Wong [00:24:21] You know, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:24:23] And I think you said Brimmenhaven? Is that right? Brimhaven? The

Justin Murphy [00:24:30] Bre-Brem-, Bremenhaven.

Justin Murphy [00:24:33] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:24:33] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:24:34] And, what country is that?

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Vinnie Wong [00:24:36] Yeah. We'd stayed there, maybe about three days to get, get reassigned. Then we went to Stuttgart. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:24:46] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:24:46] Yeah. And so it tooks ten days. So about- December 17th we'd stayed. At Bremerhaven. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:24:58] Is that in Germany?

Vinnie Wong [00:25:01] Yeah. And then they took us to, to to to assign to. Just took us a lot of drilling and stuff like we were- anything else for the waiting time to, to be reassigned. I got Stuttgart Germany and was in a-

Justin Murphy [00:25:23] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:25:26] Three. Three, three, three fift- 358 General Hospital, there. At, yeah. Stay- stayed there- I had Christmas there. Yeah. And New Year's. Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:25:45] So what kind of work did you do in the hospital?

Vinnie Wong [00:25:48] I did mostly cooking.

Justin Murphy [00:25:50] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:25:50] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:25:53] Could you tell me a little bit more about your experience in the hospital?

Vinnie Wong [00:25:57] Well. I went, got assigned to- I did a little cooking and we did a little, store st- st- store keeping, and yeah and and, going, takin' out, bringing in food. And then, there was- out there they had a jailbreak there.

Justin Murphy [00:26:27] Oh,.

Vinnie Wong [00:26:28] Yeah. And I was bringing food back and I could, they- the MP stopped my truck and pointed their the rifle at me. I says, yeah I'm with the same, same army as you. And he said, oh,there's a jailbreak. Yeah, so.

Justin Murphy [00:26:46] So they wanted to make sure you were only bringing in food.

Justin Murphy [00:26:49] No one-

Vinnie Wong [00:26:49] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:26:49] No one else.

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Vinnie Wong [00:26:50] Yeah. So that they, they checked the truck. And then, okay, you can go. I mean, that was the first time that someone pointed a gun at me.

Justin Murphy [00:27:01] Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:27:01] Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:27:01] Well, that must have been frightening.

Vinnie Wong [00:27:03] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:27:05] And, and how long did, did you stay in Stuttgart at that-?

Vinnie Wong [00:27:10] About six months. Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:27:12] Okay. And did you serve anywhere else in Germany?

Vinnie Wong [00:27:16] And then I went to Munich. I, I was there for about a year. And I had, Christmas and New Year's there. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:27:31] And then were you also working as a cook there?

Vinnie Wong [00:27:35] Yeah, so I had a little more different jobs there. And. Yeah. I was working in the ward. Convalescent for one night. The nurse asked me, he said, hand me the tongs. I reached my hand and he gotta- she stopped me. She says, use the tongs. So I, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:27:59] Oh, you mean like the cooking tongs? Oh-

Vinnie Wong [00:28:01] No, the tongue tongs that would-

Justin Murphy [00:28:04] Oh, oh I see.

Vinnie Wong [00:28:04] Yeah yeah yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:28:05] So like the-

Vinnie Wong [00:28:06] Yeah. Said hand me the tongs, so I reached my hand, she said stop. Yeah. I said, I didn't know nothing about medical work then.

Justin Murphy [00:28:14] [overlap] Right.

Vinnie Wong [00:28:14] [overlap]Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:28:15] Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:28:15] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:28:17] And then after Munich. Where else did you, did you go?

Vinnie Wong [00:28:26] Then after that, I went to Garmisch, Germany.

Justin Murphy [00:28:32] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:28:33] And I was there for about a year. And I'd saw the passion play there. There every ten years to have a passion play on a tenth year. On the zero year.

Justin Murphy [00:28:48] Oh.

Vinnie Wong [00:28:48] Yeah. And they had service club there. And I've met- the ice skating together- Ice Capade, they they they practice there in Germany.

Justin Murphy [00:29:07] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:29:07] Yeah. Yeah, I met a couple of them there. Went skating with them.

Justin Murphy [00:29:12] Oh, so you skated with them too?

Vinnie Wong [00:29:15] Yeah, Yeah. That was in '50, '51. Yeah, yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:29:21] Did you-

Vinnie Wong [00:29:22] Met a couple guys from the Celtics that they off- their off season, they travel tours and yeah, the '50 team. I met about 3 or 4 of the '50 team there. Yeah. Shook hands with them and.

Justin Murphy [00:29:40] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:29:42] Yep, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:29:42] That's very cool. And that was all while you were serving in Germany?

Vinnie Wong [00:29:46] Yeah, in Germany. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:29:47] Wow. Very cool. And so after you were there, when, when did you come back to Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:30:02] And then I went to Nuremberg after that.

Justin Murphy [00:30:07] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:30:07] Yeah. So I, I visited Heidelberg. I went to Rome, I went to Belgium, and I went to, Switzerland, and yeah so.

Justin Murphy [00:30:27] Do you have any good memories of your kind of tour of Europe?

Vinnie Wong [00:30:31] Yeah, so I did- I climbed the Eiffel Tower, and I went to the Arch of Triumph.

Justin Murphy [00:30:38] Nice.

Vinnie Wong [00:30:38] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:30:40] Awesome. And so after your service, you, you end up coming back to Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:30:47] Yeah, I came back, I went to. Yeah, I was on the ship coming back, and then a guy had gangrene on on his toe. They had stopped the ship to give him the operation. Yeah, it took me a a day more- 11 days to come back. Yeah

Justin Murphy [00:31:08] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:31:09] And the same thing happens, that it stopped at the White Cliffs of Dover to take the ship back. Yeah. You know, back to New Jersey. Camp, Camp Kilmer, New Jersey.

Justin Murphy [00:31:26] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:31:26] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:31:28] So you spent some time in New Jersey?

Vinnie Wong [00:31:31] So, they released us from New Jersey. They had buses waiting for us to take us to Fort Devens. So, we went to Fort Devens and waited to get reassigned, to give us the furlough from there and then get reassigned to Watertown, Camp Watertown.

Justin Murphy [00:32:04] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:32:04] Yeah. It's '52. Yeah, I got discharged in June '52.

Justin Murphy [00:32:10] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:32:10] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:32:13] And then after you were discharged, where did you end up going? Where did you end up going after being discharged from the military?

Vinnie Wong [00:32:25] Oh, back to the restaurant.

Justin Murphy [00:32:27] Okay. So you went back to working at the Young Lee?

Vinnie Wong [00:32:30] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:32:36] Yeah. Tell, tell me a little bit more about that time. Did you go back to your family's place at Putnam Ave

Vinnie Wong [00:32:45] Oh, they they had moved. I came back to, Fort Devens and there's 4, 4 or 5 kids there's- they live in Mass and they says, let's take a taxi back. So, okay. Well, we took a taxi back, and they were going to a North station, and then they went by Harvard Square. I said, oh, let me off here. And so I got off there and, I looked around and I didn't know what to do. So, so I was, I was gonna go take a look at the restaurant. Get there, the restaurant has moved and the house has moved. Yeah so, to on Church Street.

Justin Murphy [00:33:32] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:33:32] Yeah. So I was going down to Church Street, and the cops saw me wandering around there and they picked me up. He says, what are you doing? I says, my folks just move and I don't know where they- I don't know where Upland Road is. And so they took me to Upland Road 2 o'clock in the morning.

Justin Murphy [00:33:52] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:33:52] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:33:53] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:33:54] 2 o'clock in the morning.

Justin Murphy [00:33:55] Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:33:58] And then they rang the doorbell and shine the lights on the house, and they didn't know what was happening. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:34:04] I was going to say. What was your, what was your family's reaction?

Vinnie Wong [00:34:12] I mean, they were really, their looks said, you didn't call you didn't- yeah. So that was no time to call. 2 o'clock in the morning. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:34:26] And so you you ended up working at, the Young Lee afterwards?

Vinnie Wong [00:34:31] Yeah. Yeah, I did have, my father had some friends doing electrical work for him. They asked if I wanted to would would help electricians, so then I says, okay. I did that for a little while. 75 cents an hour.

Justin Murphy [00:34:50] Wow. Well, how much with that compared to today? Was 75 cents a lot, not much at all?

Vinnie Wong [00:34:59] It was medium. Wasn't really that great neither you know? Yeah. Then I went to work for Harvard for a dollar 35. That was a little better. But that was still.

Justin Murphy [00:35:13] Were you working at Harvard as electrician or what kind of work were you doing?

Vinnie Wong [00:35:19] [overlap] Yeah yeah, in the kitchen. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:35:20] Oh, kitchen, okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:35:20] Yeah. Harvard Faculty Club.

Justin Murphy [00:35:22] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:35:23] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:35:24] Tell me a little bit more about that experience. What- were their differences between working in the family restaurant and working at Harvard Faculty Club?

Justin Murphy [00:35:37] Well, yeah it it it, there's the, they got. They work. They got bigger meals there to feed. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:35:48] Right.

Vinnie Wong [00:35:48] So sometimes you have enough do- They they also run out of whatever they have. But they had, they sold horsemeat during the war. At Harvard [overlap] Faculty Club.

Justin Murphy [00:36:06] The Harvard - really?

Vinnie Wong [00:36:06] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:36:06] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:36:07] They they get horse steak during the- at the during- the only place around that had horse steak. So they discontinued it- I don't know, sometime after I got there.

Vinnie Wong [00:36:21] They were trying to save the meat for the, [overlap] the soldiers?

Vinnie Wong [00:36:24] [overlap] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:36:24] Yeah, other types of meat. Wow. So at the faculty club, where you mainly making meals for just the faculty members? Were there other-

Vinnie Wong [00:36:34] Yes. Then they got other, other restaurants, where anybody could go. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:36:38] Okay. Would you make breakfast, lunch, dinner, or mainly dinner?

Vinnie Wong [00:36:44] Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:36:48] Okay. Beyond just serving faculty, were there other events that the faculty club would, you know, cater for?

Vinnie Wong [00:36:58] They had, they had big parties, they have weddings there, the birthday parties and so on. Li- like, you know, they got a lot a, lot of celebrities. They had Walter Brennan, there. Dorothy Kilgallen I saw there.

Justin Murphy [00:37:17] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:37:17] And and, I went to China during that time.

Justin Murphy [00:37:25] Oh, you were able to go to China?

Vinnie Wong [00:37:28] Yeah, yeah. And I came back the day after the shootout in China.

Justin Murphy [00:37:44] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:37:45] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:37:46] Could you could you tell me a little bit more about that? I'm not familiar.

Vinnie Wong [00:37:50] So what's in trying to get a plane to shorten my trip there. Yeah, I I I got to see the Great Wall. That's all I'll seen then, they were- everything was closed there.

Justin Murphy [00:38:07] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:38:08] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:38:08] What, what year was this?

Vinnie Wong [00:38:11] '89.

Justin Murphy [00:38:11] Oh, okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:38:12] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:38:14] Okay, so you had been, working at the Harvard Faculty Club for a while.

Vinnie Wong [00:38:20] Yeah. Then I went back to work the day after that. And the customers come and asked me, says, oh, you came back safe and all that and then. So.

Justin Murphy [00:38:36] Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:38:36] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:38:38] Would you mind letting me know what, what out are you referring to? Would that have been Tiananmen in '89.

Vinnie Wong [00:38:51] '89.

Justin Murphy [00:38:50] Yeah. The the shootout you're referring to. You mentioned some kind of conflict in China?

Vinnie Wong [00:38:58] The student's conflict.

Justin Murphy [00:39:00] Okay [overlap] yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:39:01] [overlap] Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah. They would have- there was a lot of things that. It's just starting to happen. And so we came back, but turned street cars upside down. Imagine that, turned the street car upside down?

Justin Murphy [00:39:19] Yeah, wow. So your trip to China, you mentioned going to the Great Wall. Were you mainly in Beijing?

Vinnie Wong [00:39:27] Yeah. This. This is in Beijing, during the-

Justin Murphy [00:39:30] Yep. Did you go anywhere else in China during your trip?

Vinnie Wong [00:39:35] I went to the- this is the northern part. And I went to the southern part too, like Canton. Yeah, yeah. There was a little more- was was a little- not steady, but were still things going on there too, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:39:58] So now your family, where did they trace their roots in China to?

Vinnie Wong [00:40:04] Well things. Oh, okay. I don't know.

Justin Murphy [00:40:14] You don't know? Okay. Yeah, I didn't know if, your family has connections in North China or southern China.

Vinnie Wong [00:40:21] Southern.

Justin Murphy [00:40:21] Southern?

Vinnie Wong [00:40:22] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:40:23] Okay. Did you have the opportunity to connect with any, distant relatives?

Vinnie Wong [00:40:31] I- no, but my wife did. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:40:35] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:40:36] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:40:36] Where where were her-

Vinnie Wong [00:40:38] The southern China, I could speak a little of the Sou- they got two, Cantonese and Toi- Toisanese language. I could speak Toisan. But Canton, I can understand but I can't speak. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:40:57] So Toisanese, is that what you grew up speaking at home?

Vinnie Wong [00:41:00] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:41:01] Okay. And you said your wife had some relatives that she was able to connect with?

Vinnie Wong [00:41:11] So they did a lot of spearfishing there.

Justin Murphy [00:41:15] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:41:15] That's running around with a spear.

Justin Murphy [00:41:18] Did you, did you try spearfishing?

Vinnie Wong [00:41:20] No I wouldn't, oh no.

Justin Murphy [00:41:27] How- How long was your trip in China?

Vinnie Wong [00:41:31] I went for a month.

Justin Murphy [00:41:32] Month? wow

Vinnie Wong [00:41:33] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:41:33] It's a long time.

Vinnie Wong [00:41:34] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:41:36] Well, I'm, I'm glad to hear you made it back safely. Afterwards.

Vinnie Wong [00:41:40] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:41:42] And so when did you start working at the Harvard Faculty Club?

Vinnie Wong [00:41:48] Oh maybe, maybe a year afterwards I did some little. Odd jobs in between there. Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:41:59] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:42:00] Got it.

Justin Murphy [00:42:02] Would that have been around nine- 1950-?

Vinnie Wong [00:42:06] Yeah, yeah, '59.

Justin Murphy [00:42:11] And you were still working there in 1989?

Vinnie Wong [00:42:15] Yes.

Justin Murphy [00:42:15] And how long did you work there for?

Justin Murphy [00:42:18] To '91.

Justin Murphy [00:42:19] 91? Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:42:20] Yeah. So I worked 29 years there. And 31 years retired.

Justin Murphy [00:42:29] Wow. Well, what a career. That is awesome. What, what other memories do you have of working at the Harvard Faculty Club?

Vinnie Wong [00:42:39] Well. We did a lot of parties. We did- they had different, all different kinds of people have parties. Chinese people, and Indian people, Japanese people. They have weddings there, and yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:42:59] That's great. Did you work at any other, places during that time? Did you do any other jobs?

Justin Murphy [00:43:06] No, no. It's just. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:43:10] Okay.

Richard Ning [00:43:11] Don't forget Frank's Steakhouse.

Vinnie Wong [00:43:12] Huh?

Richard Ning [00:43:13] Frank's Steakhouse.

Vinnie Wong [00:43:14] Oh oh, that was me. Yeah, during that, just a couple of years until he closed up. They, they took that place away from him, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:43:27] Yeah. Tell me, tell me more about Frank's Steakhouse. When did you, you did some work there?

Vinnie Wong [00:43:31] Yeah, I did weekend work, about, for a couple years.

Justin Murphy [00:43:38] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:43:38] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:43:39] What- what time was that?

Vinnie Wong [00:43:43] '70s

Justin Murphy [00:43:45] 70's?

Vinnie Wong [00:43:45] In, in the '70s.

Justin Murphy [00:43:46] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:43:46] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:43:47] How did you, how did you come to work at Frank's?

Vinnie Wong [00:43:53] He asked, me, you want to do some work, and weekend work there. I says, Okay sure, yeah, so I did, just weekend. Weekend work.

Justin Murphy [00:44:07] When you say he was at the manager of the, the restaurant or-

Vinnie Wong [00:44:13] He, Leo was my cousin.

Justin Murphy [00:44:16] Oh Okay, so your cousin Leo?

Vinnie Wong [00:44:17] [Overlap] Yeah, Yeah. Yeah. His cousin too.

Justin Murphy [00:44:21] And was he the- was he the owner of Franks?

Vinnie Wong [00:44:24] No, we were a franchise.

Justin Murphy [00:44:25] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:44:26] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:44:29] Okay. And, yeah, what was that experience like, working the weekends there? Did you enjoy working there?

Vinnie Wong [00:44:41] Oh, yes. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:44:42] Yeah. And did you also do cooking there? Did you also cook there?

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Vinnie Wong [00:44:50] N-No I just help, help out serving, you know. Yeah. We'd make up the order to put it together and that is, yeah. He did, he did most of the cooking there.

Justin Murphy [00:45:02] Okay. And you met you mentioned that after a couple of years, you stopped working there?

Vinnie Wong [00:45:10] Yeah, s-so I just, sort of retired from that. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:45:20] Oh okay. So you just kind of retired from doing that?

Vinnie Wong [00:45:23] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:45:23] Okay. And I know you mentioned your wife before. Is she also from Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:45:32] No.

Justin Murphy [00:45:33] Okay. How did you all meet?

Vinnie Wong [00:45:37] Oh in- in Hong Kong.

Vinnie Wong [00:45:39] Oh okay.

Justin Murphy [00:45:41] And then did you settle down in Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:45:46] Well, I, I was born in Cambridge, I'd never left it.

Justin Murphy [00:45:50] Okay. When did you all get married?

Vinnie Wong [00:45:57] '58. 1958, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:45:59] Okay. Did did you [overlap] buy a house in Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:46:03] That wa- that was the first trip. The second trip was, '89. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:46:08] Oh, okay. So you you had gone to China in 1958 [overlap] too?

Vinnie Wong [00:46:14] [overlap]Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:46:14] Okay. Did you mainly just spend time in Hong Kong?

Vinnie Wong [00:46:18] No, it was, it was a little rough then. Starting to get rough, and I didn't go anywhere. Then the '89, I went to Hong Kong. And then I went to China from there. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:46:36] So how long were you in China in 1958?

Vinnie Wong [00:46:42] I was in China most of the, most of the time. We probably st- to- about a week in Hong Kong.

Justin Murphy [00:46:54] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:46:54] And then, did a lot of traveling in China, Beijing and other places.

Justin Murphy [00:47:05] Okay, that was in-?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:08] Sh- Shanghai.

Justin Murphy [00:47:11] Was that in the 1950s or the 1980s?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:15] This this is 1989.

Justin Murphy [00:47:18] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:47:18] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:47:20] But then in the '50s, you had gone before?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:25] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:47:25] How long were you there in the '50s?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:28] Three, three months.

Justin Murphy [00:47:33] Three months. Okay. What what were you doing over there?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:37] Oh. Just visiting.

Vinnie Wong [00:47:38] Just visiting?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:39] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:47:40] Okay. Did you have, like, friends or relatives you were visiting?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:44] No.

Justin Murphy [00:47:44] Or just traveling?

Vinnie Wong [00:47:46] Yeah, yeah. Just traveling. One with my mother to see her family there.

Justin Murphy [00:47:53] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:47:54] Yeah.

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Justin Murphy [00:47:55] Nice. So you you married in 1958. Did you buy a house at that point, or where did you live?

Vinnie Wong [00:48:09] '58. That would've- living with my mother then. fif- then, or it's that she gave us the house, on Putnam Ave.

Justin Murphy [00:48:18] Oh okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:48:18] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:48:18] So you took over the Putnam Ave. [overlap] house?

Vinnie Wong [00:48:21] [Overlap] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:48:21] Nice. And then how many? Did you have any kids? Did you have any children?

Vinnie Wong [00:48:30] Ten.

Justin Murphy [00:48:31] You had, you had ten children?

Vinnie Wong [00:48:32] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:48:33] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:48:34] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:48:37] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:48:37] Yeah. I just gave you the name a while ago.

Justin Murphy [00:48:40] Oh, those are your siblings. But, you yourself-

Vinnie Wong [00:48:42] Oh, my kids?

Justin Murphy [00:48:43] Your kids, yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:48:44] Oh, I got five.

Justin Murphy [00:48:46] You have five?

Vinnie Wong [00:48:47] Yeah, yeah. Okay.

Justin Murphy [00:48:48] And what are their names?

Vinnie Wong [00:48:51] One in '59. '61. '62. '63. '67.

Justin Murphy [00:48:58] Wow. What, what are their names?

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Vinnie Wong [00:49:02] I got a boy first and four girls.

Justin Murphy [00:49:05] Okay. What were their names?

Vinnie Wong [00:49:12] Ronald. Karen. Lesley. Joyce and Denise. Yeah, I got two married. And two's going to get married this month.

Justin Murphy [00:49:27] Nice. What-

Richard Ning [00:49:29] Grand- Grandchildren getting married.

Justin Murphy [00:49:29] Oh, grandchildren?

Richard Ning [00:49:31] All of the five- all of the five kids are married.

Justin Murphy [00:49:34] Okay. Do they still live in Cambridge area?

Vinnie Wong [00:49:40] Oh, no. They're all away.

Justin Murphy [00:50:04] So at the point that they were growing up-

Vinnie Wong [00:50:08] So the oldest one is 65 now.

Justin Murphy [00:50:11] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [00:50:12] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:50:14] Was there, was there more of a Chinese community at that point in the '60s and '70s compared to when you were growing up?

Vinnie Wong [00:50:25] Yeah, sort of.

Justin Murphy [00:50:27] Yeah. Could you could you tell me more about that?

Vinnie Wong [00:50:32] Well. With, with the. Well, I don't remember too much. Yeah, so. Ronald, he was going to school. And then year after year. Year, Ronald, Karen, Les², then that they're- they, they all graduated at the Tobin School, which is right down the street where I live.

Justin Murphy [00:51:12] And I also wanted to ask, I guess, a little bit more about any experiences you and your career family would have, had as, Chinese-Americans in Cambridge. Because you mentioned there there weren't many Chinese Americans living in Cambridge. Did you did you feel, kind of any- I guess did you- how did you feel going about Cambridge? When you were growing up?

² Upon review, the narrator's family wishes to have the record note that Vinnie's other two children, Joyce and Denise, also went to the Tobin School

Vinnie Wong [00:51:52] Well, I feel most normal as any other kid going to school. That, that they were friendly and all all all this and that they tried to help me out and things, so I would understand. Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:52:14] And then so on this, for this project, we haven't, had too many female voices, for narrators. So I was wondering if you could kind of share also, any stories about your mom, that you remember growing up or your sisters?

Vinnie Wong [00:52:34] Well, my mom came in 1924.

Justin Murphy [00:52:44] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:52:45] She stayed at Seattle, immigration, for three days. And my father was staying at a hotel. That's all I remember about that. I, I ask, and then things go on.

Justin Murphy [00:53:12] So she came, she came to the US in 1924. Do you know where-

Vinnie Wong [00:53:20] And my Mother came from- yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:53:22] Oh, do you know where she came, [overlap] in China?

Vinnie Wong [00:53:24] [overlap] My father came in '26.

Justin Murphy [00:53:26] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:53:27] So he went back in '24. 1924. And that's 100 years ago, right?

Justin Murphy [00:53:35] Yeah, that is that is. And so do you- how did your mom get from Seattle to Boston, or Cambridge?

Vinnie Wong [00:53:45] Well, my father took them back.

Justin Murphy [00:53:48] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:53:48] Yeah. And I think they took three, three, three months by boat to get- they, they didn't have planes in those days.

Justin Murphy [00:54:03] So did they meet in China? And then they came-

Vinnie Wong [00:54:07] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:54:07] To U.S. together?

Vinnie Wong [00:54:08] Yeah. And in 1958, they didn't have jets yet. Yeah. So in 19- they took took me from Boston to San Francisco to Honolulu to Guam, Japan. And then Hong Kong.

Justin Murphy [00:54:34] So-

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Vinnie Wong [00:54:36] [Overlap] There were six planes at that time.

Justin Murphy [00:54:40] Okay, so you took six planes. How long did it- and that was for your trip to China [overlap] in the 1950s?

Vinnie Wong [00:54:47] [Overlap] Yeah, about a week.

Justin Murphy [00:54:48] About a week?

Vinnie Wong [00:54:49] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:54:49] Wow. I can only imagine. And so. Are there any other memories that you can remember, from the '60s and '70s when your kids were growing up? What type of things would you all do as a family?

Vinnie Wong [00:55:12] Well. Mostly work at the restaurant we didn't have. Yeah, my sisters didn't have too much of a college. Because, they needed- were needed at the restaurant, yeah. Yeah. My kids all went to college, and then.

Justin Murphy [00:55:34] So your sisters, were they working at the Young Lee Restaurant?

Vinnie Wong [00:55:38] They- they never worked there.

Vinnie Wong [00:55:41] Oh okay, where did they work?

Vinnie Wong [00:55:42] Yeah. So.

Justin Murphy [00:55:45] Where- where did they work?

Vinnie Wong [00:55:54] Where did they work?

Justin Murphy [00:55:57] That's okay. Okay. Where did where did your wife work?

Vinnie Wong [00:56:06] She worked for Watertown, there's a medical company that makes, these, what they call, tubes. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:56:24] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:56:24] Yeah. She worked there for, maybe about 15 years. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:56:30] Okay. And so were there any, like, community- Chinese community organizations that your family was a part of? Either when you were growing up or when you and your wife, started your family?

Vinnie Wong [00:56:51] No. My mother usually'd go to the Lee family. Just have a, have dinner with them at New Years and then, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:57:03] So the Lee family was-

Vinnie Wong [00:57:05] We had connections with Chinatown families, you know.

Justin Murphy [00:57:10] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:57:11] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:57:11] Was the Lee family a family in Cambridge or in China-?

Vinnie Wong [00:57:15] In Chinatown.

Justin Murphy [00:57:16] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:57:17] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:57:18] Yeah. Was that, like a family organization-?

Vinnie Wong [00:57:25] So, I usually go to the Wong family. I didn't have much time there, but I go there every once in a while, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:57:31] Okay. And then did your, immediate family- did you all do anything to celebrate any Chinese holidays?

Vinnie Wong [00:57:43] Yeah, we happen to have big parties at the at Chinese New Year's.

Justin Murphy [00:57:49] Yeah. Tell me a little bit about that. What was a typical Chinese New Year's party like for your family?

Vinnie Wong [00:57:56] Well, We'd they have a lot of different Chinese pastries and things like that. My mother used to make that. And then with him, his mother.

Justin Murphy [00:58:09] With Richard's mother?

Vinnie Wong [00:58:10] Yeah. Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [00:58:11] So we're, very close with his mother, with her. Yeah. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:58:20] And-

Vinnie Wong [00:58:20] So we all lived maybe about 3 or 4 blocks away. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:58:25] And remind me, Richard's mother's name?

Vinnie Wong [00:58:31] Richard, Richard's mother's Mary.

Justin Murphy [00:58:33] Okay. So the oldest. Your, your oldest sister?

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Vinnie Wong [00:58:36] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:58:39] Were there any favorite dishes that you would have at the Chinese New Year party? Any specific pastries that were your favorite?

Vinnie Wong [00:58:50] We always look forward to one. And we'd maybe have a few guests. And when we had the restaurant, we probably have a few guests that come often. Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:59:01] Would you, would you celebrate at the restaurant?

Vinnie Wong [00:59:04] Yes.

Justin Murphy [00:59:05] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:59:05] We'd at the restaurant and then at home.

Justin Murphy [00:59:08] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:59:08] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:59:08] So you'd have two parties?

Vinnie Wong [00:59:10] Yeah, two party.

Justin Murphy [00:59:11] Nice. And when you were growing up or, when you were raising your kids, were there any ways of celebrating Chinese New Year in Cambridge, like as a community or-?

Vinnie Wong [00:59:32] No. But the, the the Lee family and the Wong family always have a party, so yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:59:39] Okay, so the family organizations in Chinatown?

Vinnie Wong [00:59:42] Yeah, yeah.

Justin Murphy [00:59:43] Okay. And so, beyond your immediate family in Cambridge, you would also go, and celebrate there too? Would you also-

Vinnie Wong [00:59:57] No.

Justin Murphy [00:59:58] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [00:59:58] I would stay mostly at home.

Justin Murphy [01:00:01] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:00:01] Yeah.

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Justin Murphy [01:00:01] Yeah. And so. When you were raising your kids, what kind of activities would you like to do as a family? Were there places you would go around Cambridge? Any favorite shops or restaurants to go to?

Vinnie Wong [01:00:26] No, no. At the Chinese parties, the kids look forward for the red packages.

Justin Murphy [01:00:31] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:00:32] You heard about that, yeah?

Justin Murphy [01:00:33] Yep.

Vinnie Wong [01:00:33] Red package?

Justin Murphy [01:00:34] Yep.

Vinnie Wong [01:00:35] Yeah. All the kids look forward to it.

Justin Murphy [01:00:40] And in the 60s and 70s, when your kids were growing up. Were there activities you would go do as a family? Any that maybe go to the movies or something like that. Any traditions you had?

Vinnie Wong [01:00:56] Oh, I don't know. We don't have much time to go to the movies.

Justin Murphy [01:00:59] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:01:00] Then we did, or the- when the restaurants closed on Mondays, we would go to the movie theater.

Justin Murphy [01:01:08] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:01:10] Sometimes. Not all the time.

Justin Murphy [01:01:12] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:01:12] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:01:13] So you're mainly busy with the restaurants? During that time?

Vinnie Wong [01:01:18] Yeah. Yeah. The Young Lee's, yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:01:20] Yeah. Okay. So do you currently live in Cambridge now?

Vinnie Wong [01:01:29] Yes.

Justin Murphy [01:01:30] Okay. So you're still living here. And in what ways, from your perspective, has Cambridge changed? If it, if you feel it has changed.

Vinnie Wong [01:01:44] What do I what?

Justin Murphy [01:01:46] Do you feel that Cambridge has changed from the time growing up?

Vinnie Wong [01:01:50] Oh, yes.

Justin Murphy [01:01:51] Yeah. How so?

Vinnie Wong [01:01:53] The whole who- who- whole Cambridge has closed. We used to have a place in Harvard Square called the five and ten cent store, Woolworth's.

Justin Murphy [01:02:03] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:02:03] Yeah. And al-, a lot of new buildings going up, then the, the subway. They used to have, just a little place where they sell newspaper, and then they build a big place they sell magazines and everything else there. Yeah. And- there's so maybe about 2 or 3 stores left in Cambridge, the Dixons hardware store. And the Brattle Florist.

Justin Murphy [01:02:44] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:02:45] It is still there. Yeah. All of the drug stores are all gone from there.

Justin Murphy [01:02:51] Okay, so there were a lot of, different types of businesses. Now they're all closed? Yeah, what else has changed in, in your mind about the Cambridge community?

Vinnie Wong [01:03:08] I don't know.

Justin Murphy [01:03:10] Yeah.

Richard Ning [01:03:13] I suggest you can ask him about his experiences at the Cambridge Senior Center.

Justin Murphy [01:03:21] Okay.

Richard Ning [01:03:21] Which he was very active after he retired.

Justin Murphy [01:03:24] Okay, yeah. Vinnie, would you mind telling me about your work at the senior center?

Vinnie Wong [01:03:30] Well, I started going there, and they need help in their parties, so I helped do a lot of parties there.

Justin Murphy [01:03:45] How would you [overlap] help out?

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Vinnie Wong [01:03:45] I don't don't cook, I'd just, I would serve and set up and all that. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:03:52] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:03:54] So I've been going there since, ninety- '95.

Justin Murphy [01:04:02] Wow.

Vinnie Wong [01:04:03] So then it's been almost 30 years going there.

Justin Murphy [01:04:04] Yeah.

Vinnie Wong [01:04:05] Yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:04:08] What, what have been some enjoyable memories from going there?

Vinnie Wong [01:04:16] Oh, go on trips. A lot, a lot, trips in summer. Go for lobster. And then, other- go to the farm. And then-

Justin Murphy [01:04:31] Where? Yeah, what trips stand out as your favorites?

Vinnie Wong [01:04:38] They've got that that lobster trip in, Foster's, in New Hampshire. Oh, yeah. They go there once a year. And then they got, yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:04:52] Okay. And are there any other Cambridge community organizations that you've been a part of?

Vinnie Wong [01:05:03] No I haven't. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:05:04] Okay. Do you have- I guess, is there anything else you'd like to add? About growing up in Cambridge, your thoughts on Cambridge and your experience here?

Vinnie Wong [01:05:35] Yeah. I enjoy Cambridge a lot. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:05:39] Yeah. Well, what things do you enjoy most about it?

Vinnie Wong [01:05:45] I don't know.

Justin Murphy [01:05:46] Okay.

Vinnie Wong [01:05:53] Well, I guess that's about it. Yeah.

Justin Murphy [01:05:57] Okay. Well, I really appreciate your time today, Vinnie. And, for those listening, also, if you're interested in hearing more about Vinnie's military service, he also was part of an oral history project with Sarah Boyer. So I encourage you to listen to that as well, for

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more information about that. But that concludes today's interview. And again, thank you very much, Vinnie, for being here today.

Vinnie Wong [01:06:26] Okay, yeah. Yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW