

MARY LEE SHON
Interviewed on April 12, 1999,
with a follow-up on August 30, 1999
for purposes of clarification;
at her home, by
Frances Lomas Feldman

ABSTRACT: MARY LEE SHON

Mrs. Shon received a certificate in social work from USC in 1939, where she had majored in social work and religion. She was the first Korean to be graduated from the School of (then) Social Welfare at USC, and one of the first Korean social workers in the state. This interview describes her growing up years, the backgrounds and activities of her parents; her experiences as a Korean social worker working with Chinese and Koreans after the death of her husband, following 11 years of marriage and three small children; and the activities of her children as professionals: one an attorney, one a physician; one is a social worker.

Mrs. Shon has been a generous contributor to the scholarship fund of the Asian American students of the USC School of Social Work. Among other honors, she was honored by the General Alumni Association of the University of Southern California for her outstanding contributions to education and the community.

FELDMAN: Mary, tell me where your were born and what your growing up was like.

SHON: I was born in Sacramento Valley in the city of Woodland near Sacramento, California.

I'm a product of the first wave of Korean immigrants that came to America. My father, Pat, came by way of Hawaii in 1903. I can say, as an older American-Korean, that it was a period of utter destruction of man's humanity. They didn't know what civil rights were or what their rights were, but they thought that they were strangers from a distant land. My father was hired by a plantation company to interpret Korean for the laborers who came to the Islands of Maui and Oahu, and it was in 1903. He had earlier taught English for two years in a girl's school in Korea, directed by Dr. Horace Appendellier. He interpreted for the Korean laborers for four

years. He had always had the goal to get an education and return to Korea to help rebuild Korea when it became an independent country again. Sponsored by Dr. Pritchard, a Korean-American Presbyterian minister who served Los Angeles and Pasadena for 63 years, he enrolled in Occidental College in 1907. Dr. Pritchard was the only grandfather I ever knew. In 1910, my father graduated from Occidental. He then went to Stanford to study engineering, but this was too expensive for him, so he transferred to the University of California, Berkeley, where he could work in the fields to supplement his income. He still had the vision of returning to Korea some day. Before he could finish his studies at Berkeley, however, the Japanese took control of Korea. He knew he'd never be a free man, and he'd be dominated by that government. So he quit engineering, and he went into farming, which was closer to his heart – rice farming in Sacramento Valley.

Meanwhile, he asked my mother to follow him out here.

FELDMAN: So she came, but he had met her in Korea?

SHON: Their marriage was arranged between the two grandfathers by contract. My grandfather on my father's side was a medical doctor. That is in the old -- actually, in herb -- medicine. My other grandfather was the astrologer. They agreed that when they came of age, my father and my mother would get married. So at the age of 17, she entered their home. She said, "If I knew then what I later learned in America, I never would have gone into that home because" You see, my grandmother had passed away, and my grandfather was married to a younger woman, who just picked at my mother at all times. No matter what she did, it wasn't right. So she just picked at her. My mother said, "I would have walked out if I had known what I could get into in America."

Meanwhile, my dad had become a Christian in California. He wrote to her about the Christianity he had entered. So she went to a Methodist Mission and became Christianized. She put away in what they referred to as the “corner room”--- it’s what would be called in America, “muses,” like “idol worship,” but for Buddhism. She put those all away, and kept going to the Methodist Mission. In those days Koreans didn’t believe a woman should get an education, so by the dim light of a candle, she learned to read and write by herself. She’d sneak to the Mission and learn all this herself. Then she had the opportunity to come to America. It was 1911. And my mother came to Mare Island in San Francisco Bay. She knew that my father had gone into business. First he became a rice farmer, then he informed her that he was now hiring farm laborers to work on the various farms of other farmers. He then stopped rice farming and started in fruit and produce farming, and he’d hire men to pick all this produce....

FELDMAN: So he had his own farm now?

SHON: Yes. He hired all these people to work, and told her that she would have to do the cooking. Luckily, she had learned to cook as part of overseeing the servants in Korea; now she had to cook for 75 men. She was only four foot ten. Her waistline was only 22 inches. She was a little, tiny thing. She had to stand on big boxes to do the cooking and oversee all this massive cooking. She’d say, “How did I get into this type of life?” But being a dutiful wife, she followed right along with her husband’s instructions. At one time my father was one of the most wealthy Koreans in America. I remember as a young girl I said, “Gee, Pop, why didn’t you have that money when we were able to enjoy it?” He said, “Well, my fortune is now my children.”

By the end of the decade, my father decided to leave the Sacramento region to move

south. He and my mother lived for varying lengths of time in each of four towns on the way to Los Angeles, including Hollister and Tulare. In each town a child was born. There were four children: my older sister, Elizabeth Dolly Reed, received her education at Occidental College, where my dad had gone, too. Then she got a general secondary teaching credential and a master's degree at the University of Southern California. Then my younger brother graduated from Occidental. But when it came time for me to go to college, my dad said, "It's not fair to ask Occidental to take another child in on a half scholarship." They didn't give a full scholarship. My father was a very wise man and very modern. He said, "I have to have my children grow up in a modern social community." It was almost as if he had to prove himself.

We arrived in Los Angeles in the early 1920s. My father opened up a big grocery store in Highland Park. We were the third Asian family there----at that time, they called us Oriental. There were two Japanese families, and we were the third Asian family.

FELDMAN: Where in Highland Park was that?

SHON: On York Boulevard, near Avenue 57. Avenue 57 - it was number 1509. Mrs. Morgan rented the storefront and house behind. Next to her was a Dr. Orenstein, a German-American doctor, and he often traveled to Europe. There were pickets carrying signs. You know, I didn't understand the signs that said "no Japs or Chinks in Highland Park." Some of the white people didn't want another Oriental family in there. Dr. Orenstein said, "I'm gonna show these people that you can't do this in America. I went through it in Europe. If you people were to leave and wait for three months, I'll build a storefront in front of my place and you can move in there. You move in first, and I'll put up the storefront. So, Dr. Orenstein had rented us his house — it was on a much larger lot there. So we moved in.

FELDMAN: That was in Highland Park, then?

SHON: That was on York Boulevard at Avenue 57.

FELDMAN: Oh, right on York Boulevard.

SHON: Yes, right near Avenue 57. Are you familiar with the area?

FELDMAN: I know where it is, because I lived for several years in that area.

SHON: It was just before you get to that Marmion Way.

FELDMAN: Yes. Yes.

SHON: And then right up the street, you go up to Baltimore Elementary. I started there in the second week. The first school I entered was Rosemont Elementary over near the Teacher's Credit Union on Temple Street.

FELDMAN: That was a long way to go.

SHON: Yes, well, we didn't live on York Boulevard at that time. Our first residence was Two Olive Court on North Olive Street, because that's where the Presbyterian Church was, and that was the first place they went before they started spreading out to other places. But, my dad had looked all over and then found a place on North Hoover Street. That's when we went over to Rosemont Elementary. It was now time for us to really settle down after coming down from the north. We lived in Danuba last. You know that's in the Tulare County.

FELDMAN: Tulare, yes.

SHON: When I stop to think of my dad: he was really a very adventurous man.

FELDMAN: He must have been.

SHON: He wouldn't sit still. He always looked for something else. We grew up on York Boulevard, until I was in Luther Burbank Junior High School – all three of us went there. Then

we went to Benjamin Franklin High School.

In 1931, my dad was on the social committee for President Sigmund Rhee from Korea -- its very first president, because they were boys together in Korea. My dad always followed Sigmund Rhee.

FELDMAN: He had a very large, loyal following in America.

SHON: Yes, pretty much so. We stayed in Highland Park until 1931. All of a sudden, chain store markets started moving in, like Atlantic and Pacific, and Safeway. Our business started to go down, so my dad went into catering chop suey and chow mein. My mother made all the food, and he got a contract with Bullocks and Robinson's and Broadway Department Stores. He used to take gallons of this cooked food daily to each of those places.

FELDMAN: That must have been easier than cooking for 75 men.

SHON: That's right. He had contacted those three department stores. In 1931, some people came from Hawaii whom I wanted to visit, members of the party of Sigmund Rhee. My dad had a seven-passengers Willis-Knight car (it was just at the start of the Depression) and my dad was on the corner of Olympic and LaBrea, when this drunk white man hit my dad right on the right side of his seven-passenger car and kicked the car over. It killed my little sister instantly; a nine-year-old little girl. And because of that catastrophe, my dad and mother lost interest in everything. Every day they went to the cemetery, and the business went bankrupt. He moved us out of Highland Park, and we went to a house he found on 22nd near South Broadway. We still wanted to stay in the Highland Park school, so my dad drove us there to continue going to the school in Highland Park.

In the meantime, after he ended the chop suey business just like that, he found a place on

San Fernando Road, and started a little restaurant there, right across the street from all the boxcars banging each other all night and.....

FELDMAN: Right across from the railroad.....

SHON: Right across from the railroad and all. It was horrible, hearing all that clang, bang, boom all night long. We finally got used to it, though; it was 1940 when he found that place. Meanwhile, the War had broken out. I finished Franklin High School in 1939, and then I was ready to go to college. Miss Edith Hodgkins, the principal, said to my father, "Why don't you send her to the University of Southern California?" My dad said, "It's such a big institution. I don't think she'll have a chance there." So she called Dean Mary Sinclair Crawford. I'll never forget her; she was such a lady. I went to see her, and I was so afraid of seeing Dean Crawford, and I took my little father along. My dad was just barely five feet, and a kind of chubby little man. We went up to see Dean Crawford. She said, after hearing our story, "I think Mary Lee should come here." She took us down to see Dr. Von Kleinsmid, and he said, "We have your application for entrance to USC. Be sure I get these papers in my hand." But the last year of high school, I fooled around a lot. I had my buddies, I belonged to the girls' council, and the California Scholarship Society. I was well-qualified: all straight A's until I hit chemistry. I hated chemistry so much. I wanted to be a doctor at one time, but when I hit chemistry and algebra, that was it. No more was that a desire. I went back to see Dr. U.C. Willett; the Director of Admission. He said, "I'm very pleased to tell you, you've been awarded a four-year scholarship to the University of Southern California." My dad was so elated, he just jumped for joy. He went all over Southern California to show my admission to USC. He was so proud and happy.

The first year I was so afraid, I lost 25 pounds in one semester, because I stayed up all night to study. When I was there.....

FELDMAN: Did you live at the University, or did you live at home?

SHON: I lived at home. We couldn't afford to put me in a dormitory.

FELDMAN: Yes, and there weren't very many.

SHON: No, there weren't. But I was very religious at that time, and I had to have \$75 at the first admittance: library fees and laboratory fees, etcetera, etcetera. Seventy-five dollars! That was cruel-----I remember as a kid, when my shoes would wear out, I used to put cardboard in my shoes so my dad wouldn't know that my shoes were worn out. I didn't want him to worry, you know. Things were bad during the regime of Herbert Hoover. It was the Depression. All around us were soup lines and all that. So I said, "I'm going to go find that money. I'll find it. I'm not going to come home until I find it." I went way up in the hills, the LaBrea hills. There used to be wild flowers growing up there. It's a hill that's just straight up. I used to deliver all the groceries in a wagon and go way up those hills where our customers lived. I went up there; it was just getting dusk, and I'd finally given up. I went to see my customer, Mrs. Young, who lived on Baltimore and Avenue 57. She wasn't there, so I went to two of my favorite customers, and finally, just at dusk, I was just turning the corner when a Packard came along, and it was Mrs. Gaspard. She was a medical doctor's wife; (the only MD in the community) he had his office on York Boulevard. She said, "Where are you going, Mary Lee?" "Oh, I've been wandering around trying to figure out how I can get some money, because I need \$75 to go into USC." I'd gone this far, and I was determined to get in there, to go there. She said, "Don't worry about it, I have to do some errands and I'll take you home." She took me to her home,

and she gave me a \$100 check. She said to me, “Rest assured, you have no more worries.”

And so she gave me the hundred dollars. “That’s my present to you to enter the University of Southern California.” And boy, I was jumping with joy.

I took the streetcar - the W Car? No, the Number 5 Car. You know, it was W at that time on York Boulevard. I took the W and got downtown on something Broadway and got the J car, and went to ‘SC.

FELDMAN: And that went down the middle of University Avenue.

SHON: Yes. There used to be a cleaning shop there and a haberdashery shop right next to the campus. It’s amazing when you look back. In the meantime, when I took the social work courses and the sociology-----I still remember Dr. Emory Bougards and Martin Newmyer and that heavy-set man that taught all the courses that were so uninteresting, you know, statistics and all that—Dr. Mangold.

FELDMAN: You had statistics from him and not child welfare.

SHON: Yes. (Laughter) That was the most deadbeat classic. I’d stay up so late, the middle of the second year, I had eight, nine, ten classes all at one time. And Dr. Mangold wasn’t exactly an inspiring lecturer.

FELDMAN: (Laughter) I remember him very well.

SHON: (Laughter) I like him, though, you know. In the middle of the second class, I’d fall asleep, and he’d tell me that. I’d say, “I’m sorry, Dr. Mangold.” He’d say, “I understand. It’s something you’re not that interested in. That’s why you’re falling asleep.” I said, “I’ll try to stay awake and not insult you by falling asleep on your class.” But I always like Dr. Newmyer.

And there was a Dr. Vincent. I never took his class because his brother and sister-in-law, they

used to come to our restaurant and eat; the whole family did. He said, “I don’t know why you never come to my class.” “Because I’m afraid of your class. Somebody told me you always give the exams that are true and false, and I hate those tests.” So I never took a single one of his classes. He used to come and eat at our restaurant, but I never took any of his classes. I was taking a religion class from Dr. Knopf. Because he was part German, I think society caused him to die of a broken heart.

FELDMAN: I didn’t know that.

SHON: I talked with Dr. Knopf’s wife about him. He was a brilliant professor. He wrote many books. But I couldn’t understand why just because he had German blood in him – society in those days was very mean when it came to certain nationalities. But I didn’t get along with the Japanese on campus, because I was full Korean. I got into discussions. Do you remember the man, that taught government? Professor-----he was going by when I was having a discussion with Jack Meade, a Chinese, a German, a South American, and a couple of American, Caucasian-Americans. This Japanese guy said, “Well, we’re going to do the same thing to China that we did to Korea.” I said, “You’ve got a lot of nerve.” So I pushed one of them, and he fell right in the fish pond in front of the library. (Laughter) The big library.

FELDMAN: Doheny.

SHON: Doheny Memorial Library. I was on my way to Religion with Dr. Robert John Taylor. Dr. Taylor was tall. He reminded me of Abraham Lincoln. He came along and said, “Mary Lee, what were you just doing?” I said, “Knocking a stinker in the fish pond.”

(Laughter)

FELDMAN: You must have been very tiny in comparison to him

SHON: (Laughter) Oh, yes. I said, “I was on my way to Religion.” So one by one, they dropped out and the Japanese guy was very apologetic and bowed to Dr. Taylor. As he walked up the stairs he said, “Mary, was that a very Christian attitude for you to take?” (Laughter) I said, “I’m sorry, Dr. Taylor, but my Christianity does not spread over to militaristic Japan. I have nothing to say. He wondered what could he say to me? I kept in touch with him and his wife. Maybe once or twice every month I’d go to his home and cook Korean food for him and Mrs. Taylor. She’s a darling little lady. “Did you know that your favorite professor, he’s so quiet. I get more results from talking to the bare walls than I get from him,” she said to me.

In the meantime, when I was ready to graduate—oh, just before that, the Methodist Minister of Los Angeles said, “I understand you’re studying religion, and I really need a Sunday School teacher because there are 17 boys in this class. Three teachers have quit because they’re so bad. They just can’t do anything with them. They don’t listen. Do you suppose you could come over?” When I went over there the first Sunday, it seemed like I was looking at the Korean version of the Dead End Kids. That’s how mischievous they looked. I still see some of them now, you know. I remember when I had to play ball with them. We used to take a truck from Jefferson Boulevard to our restaurant. I’d treat them to lunch, but we walked back the whole way.

FELDMAN: Where was this church located?

SHON: They didn’t have enough money to buy a church, so it was a Brethren Church on 37th near Normandy. I think it was the United Brethren Church, owned by other people, not Methodists.

FELDMAN: But they had space.

SHON: I became the Sunday School Superintendent there. When I was ready to go into social work, I trained with the County Bureau of Indigent Relief. That's what it was called at that time.

FELDMAN: Yes, it was.

SHON: My supervising lady's name was Florence Durlin. So I worked with them in a squadron as a deputy. I went all over in a horrible hotel area in Los Angeles that had a lot of welfare clients. I didn't have a car, so I went by streetcar. You'd sign out, and if you didn't come back in time before the offices closed, they sent a car out after you, because some of those people were ----- well, you didn't want to be caught in a room all by yourself with them.

FELDMAN: This was in the downtown area?

SHON: Yes, in the Los Angeles Hotel Zone. We were told that when you hand them a pencil, don't take the pencil back. Just pretend that you forgot it and leave it there because some of them really have disease and germs on them. Then I started going to some of the homes out in that poor area in East Los Angeles. Two of the families had a lot of problems. I went to a Caucasian home where the wife was bed-ridden with a teenage daughter. And she always had fear in her eyes when I'd go in there. So did the wife. The guy was kind of rough and kind of prejudiced. He was in his late 50's. I told Miss Florence Durlin, the supervisor. I said, "There's something in there that makes you feel really uncomfortable." They had a little toddler and the older girl was about 16 years old. Why didn't she go to school? I found out that they were retarded, and he had two children by his daughter. They put him in the penitentiary and put the lady in a care home, and the kids in an institution for the retarded. In that day, they didn't educate them that closely as when we had those special ed classes in the LA Unified.

Then I went to this Mexican neighborhood. There were two houses: one in the front, one in the back. There was an older Caucasian lady in the back house. I'd go to the Mexican woman in the front house. It would turn out that she was collecting welfare from the County under two names. I told Miss Durlin they were doing it. They called her in and cut her welfare off.

FELDMAN: She had used two addresses.....

SHON: Yes. It was interesting, and yet it was kind of degrading. I also was a volunteer at the International Institute where I interpreted for all the older Koreans. I was the first American Korean Californian who was a social worker in this State. I took over work that my dad had done. He did immigration work, free of charge, for the International Institute, with the Immigration and Naturalization service. I did the same kind of work that he had done as a young man. The International Institute would ask me, and I'd go to the homes. I saw Lou Delindiga, whose second daughter, Mary, said, "Oh, my heavens. I knew you when you were a little child."

There was a man on welfare whose wife was hemorrhaging at the County Hospital. She needed eight blood transfusions. I think she had another child too quickly. I got the check to pay his rent and a grocery order and arranged to turn his lights and gas back on. I went by streetcar all the way to — what is that area the 5 Car used to go down? Southgate. I saw a sign that said Collier Market; I went in there and I said, "I'm Mary Chung Lee, social worker for the County, and I need to find Yung Su Lee." She said to me, "Oh, honey, you can't walk." At that time there were still dirt roads in Southgate. She said, "I'll call my daughter-in-law to watch the store for me, and I'll drive you over there." When I went to the door, this man came to the door,

carrying one baby. There also was a toddler. And there was one bigger than that toddler. I said, “Missur Lee?” I said that I was Korean. “I’m Mary Chung Lee, social worker, and I came here to tell you your rent is paid and all of your necessities are paid for and they’ll turn your water and gas on.” When I told him who I was, he started to cry. He said, “I can’t thank you enough!”

I had to go home by streetcar from Southgate all the way back to San Fernando Road. My mother complained; my dad never did. She said, “You’re late.” The restaurant was full of people. I used to wait on tables when I got home from college. I said, “Mom, don’t get me any worse, because now I’m so upset.” I told my dad, who was sitting there eating some dinner. I said, “The strangest thing happened to me. I went to this home, and I told him that I was Korean.” My dad spoke perfect English, but my mother — I had to explain some things in Korean. She said, “I hope God will not punish me. That man is your father’s adopted brother. They adopted each other as brothers.” My dad had saved his life in Hawaii, and another man’s who needed interpreting. They said they felt like brothers. One changed his name to Yung Su Lee, the other one to Su Lee. It sounded like my dad’s. My mother said, “That man double-crossed your father up in Sacramento and caused him to lose all his money.” She said she stood in front of him and said “Damn you. Someday I’ll see you eating food at the hands of one of my children. You’ll become so destitute.....” She was so angry. She told me, “I hope the good Lord will not punish me for damning that man.” Every time I’d give that man his money, he’d stand there and cry. He was too ashamed to come and find my dad.

My dad went to a political meeting, called because the Communists were moving in among the Koreans (in Korea). The other party was the one that followed Mr. Ahn. Have you

heard of Philip Ahn, the movie star? His father was one of the Nationalistic leaders of Korea. He died at the hands of Japanese. President Rhee's party, which was in sympathy with Mr. Ahn and against the communists, was represented. My father became infuriated with a man who was there that he had helped out. He lived in front of us. He turned on my dad, said to him, "You're nothing but a chop suey restaurant man now. What right do you have to talk about this?" My dad had a cerebral hemorrhage. He died the next morning. He never regained consciousness. That was on January 17, 1943.

FELDMAN: How old was your father then?

SHON: Only 59. He never got to have his 60th birthday. It is called "Honga" and all families celebrate the 60th birthday. My mother was two years older than my dad. We had already had a party for her at the International Institute. It was at 4th and Boyle Streets, you know; I did a lot of volunteer work there. We had had one for her. There were 2,000 people there: Caucasian ladies of the Pilgrim Congregational Church, Korean ladies, and the Chinese all donated food, which was very costly. But the American ladies, Caucasian-American ladies, made the potato salad and all the types of food they would have for a banquet or party. So we had three rooms of people eating. They had the music going in the center room for young people to dance. And then they had ethnic dancing on the stage. All the people continued eating. Then that group broke up into two groups. We had that party for my mom. Then we planned to send my dad and mother an automobile and let them drive through all the Central California Valley so they could see each other's friends.

Before my father died, he was so worried about Sammy, my younger brother, who wanted to go to medical school. I sat and typed letters to all of the medical schools in the country that I

could think of, trying to get my brother into med school. He was an alternate to get into USC, and he hadn't heard anything. So I wrote all these letters for my dad. He would see all the contingents of military troops going by on the railroad tracks across from our place. He was so worried about the war! (World War II) My sister, Dolly, was in San Francisco, working for the San Francisco Chronicle; she arrived just 45 minutes after my dad had passed on. Dolly and Sammy went to see Dr. Remson Bird, president of Occidental College at the time. Dr. Bird called up Dr. Von KleinSmid, who telephoned the Dean of the School of Medicine. This is before the children laid our father to rest. My father had asked Sammy to get into medical school, and we wanted to be sure dad's wish came true.

FELDMAN: Did your father know then whether Sammy was accepted into medical school?

SHON: No, he died before; that was January and Sammy was supposed to graduate from Occidental the last of May. Therefore, this was before he graduated. The people who would see Sammy on the grounds described him as broken-hearted about my dad going so suddenly. It took me at least a good six months before I could feel like doing work with those Koreans. I was so angry; you know, they were indirectly responsible for my dad's a cerebral hemorrhage. My mother and I then ran the restaurant for six months. When my mother had a breakdown, we closed it for good.

I was finally ready to go back to work. I couldn't get a job with the County. I don't know why. I said well, I want to do work among the Koreans, particularly, and I wanted to work with the Chinese in Los Angeles. But I then went to the Hollywood First Methodist Church, where I first met a minister named Dr. Ernest S. Lyons. There had been a split in the Methodist Church because of the slavery issue: the Methodist South and the Methodist North. The

Methodist South Church had control over all the Korean Churches. The North were the Chinese and the Filipino. It was logical that those three ethnic groups decided to unite and start the California Oriental Mission. When I met Dr. Lyons at the Hollywood Methodist Church, he said, "You're just the type of young person we want as a social worker. Would you be willing to start work with this conglomerate of three groups?" I said, "Yes, I would." So he drove me to San Francisco that following week. I started working with the churches in Los Angeles, Delano, Oakland, San Francisco, Stockton, Valejo, Sacramento, and Seattle, Washington. I used to travel up and down the coast. It was under the auspices of the national Social Work Bureau of the Methodist Church of Home Missions. I started to work with children and women. And I did interpreting for the Koreans.

FELDMAN: What did you do with them besides interpret?

SHON: Well, when they needed help like getting the children into certain schools, and old people needed to get false teeth or had trouble with their hearing, I'd go between the old folks and the medical people. It was interesting. I kept telling one lady, "You have 'com' trouble." "I haven't had com for ages. That's a persimmon." I meant "con." Con is liver, and com sounds similar. No wonder the missionaries had trouble in Korea.

Koreans were one of the most quickly Christianized nations in the Far East because at that time it was a personal type of religion. Koreans felt that it would give them personal salvation, so they turned to Methodist and the Presbyterian Missionaries, who had both landed in Korea on Easter Sunday morning of 1885. The Presbyterian was the man that was connected with Occidental College, Dr. Elkenmiller. And Dr. Horace McEuen, the Methodist, went with USC.

It was from Dr. Elkenmiller that my dad learned his English. There then were men working in the silver mines of Korea. The miners taught my dad cuss words in English, (Laughter). Dr. Elkenmiller said, “Where did you learn all those words, Ree?” “Down there with those men.” He said, “That’s the best language you know?” He was so infuriated, he went down and he punched a few of those fellows for teaching such words and said, “You came here to do mining, not to teach bad words to the Koreans.” (Laughter)

In San Francisco in 1949, my girlfriend said, “I want you to meet one of the nicest fellows from Hawaii.” I said, “I don’t want to meet some fellow.” She said, “Come on, come on and meet him.” I saw this good-looking man standing in the vestibule of the Methodist Church of San Francisco. He was born in Cuba and raised in Hawaii. His first language was Spanish. His name was Pedro Shon. Four years before he had seen articles about me in Chicago and New York, when he was traveling around. He told his parents, “I finally found the girl for me.” He had my girlfriend call my sister the next morning. She said, “Too bad, she just took her car and is heading down South.” He said, “Well, it’s no use. I’ll just go on home to Hawaii.” He told my future in-laws, “I finally met the Mary Chun Lee.” My girlfriend said, “Why don’t you write to her?” He said, “No, she’s not the type that will answer a letter.” I had to go back there, so I met him again in April of the following year. And I married him in July.

FELDMAN: Short romance.

SHON: Yes. I’ll tell you what. We get engaged, and he was going to go back to Hawaii. He said, “Oh, no, I’m not going to take that for an answer. I’m going to take you with me when I go back to Hawaii.” I married him on July the 2nd, near my mother’s birthday. Her birthday was on July 4th. I got married here in Los Angeles. No one here knew him or had ever seen

him, and he said, “I feel like I am somebody on display.” He stood there at the alter. All eyes were focused on him. “Who’s this joker that got Mary Chun Lee to get married?” I had planned to remain an old maid.

FELDMAN: What was your husband doing?

SHON: Oh, he was a chemist and a pharmacist, but he had just returned from Korea. He was in charge of the Property Custody Office under the United States of America Military Government, Seoul, Korea. He was the one who retrieved the property that was taken over by the Japanese and putting the property back into the Korean people’s hands. They called it the Property Custody Office. He spoke fluent Korean even though his first language was Spanish. His second one was Hawaiian.

FELDMAN: But he was Korean.

SHON: He was Korean, yes, born in Cuba. But my in-laws had traveled to twenty Central and South American countries, and my father-in-law was a chemist. He knew how to make mirrors, and he did a various types of work. My mother-in-law was a nurse. During the War she served with the Red Cross. I saw a presentation of Hawaii one night when someone came through talking about the early Koreans in Hawaii. When President Rhee was imprisoned by the Japanese, they were planning to kill him. What they said was they would do was to hang him by his arms and blow him up with water and beat him; they were ready to kill him, quietly. But some Koreans put him in a Chinese man’s coffin and sent him across the seas to America. Can you imagine? They bored holes in the sides of the coffin.

FELDMAN: I had heard that from Louise Yim. Did you know her?

SHON: Oh, gosh, that’s another story. I didn’t like her, because she used my father a great

deal. He did all the work, taking her with his old beat-up car all over, raising money. At the last, she got a little bit too greedy, and it kind of burned me up. So when Dean Crawford (Dean of Women) called me and said, "We're going to honor Louise." I said, "Dean Crawford, I won't go across the street to give that woman the time of day. I can't stand her." "Why Mary Chun Lee!" (Laughter)

FELDMAN: She must have been shocked.

SHON: She was. "I didn't expect that to come out of you." "I don't like her, so I won't go to see her get a presentation." You know, she did not yet have her degree, and President Von Kleinshmid had to give her a piece of paper so she could walk through the ceremony; she had already announced that she was graduating. She had to finish all her course work by way of mail after she went back to Korea. But I didn't like her. She always reminded me of being a little bit too greedy. Her niece got a degree in social work.

FELDMAN: Her niece?

SHON: Her niece. A grand niece, or somebody.

FELDMAN: Do you know her name?

SHON: Sammy met her, and she had the name of Yin. I think she's in the Chicago area. Sammy told me about her.

FELDMAN: I'll have to look her up in our Alumni Directory. I don't remember her.

SHON: I think her name is Son Bin Yin. Because of her aunt, I resented her. Then we asked Louise Yim to find my uncle. He was so poor, it didn't give her any incentive to really find him. So she said she couldn't find the way. My father said, "She's just lying. She didn't want to bother, because the old man is so poor." Sammy was in the Army Specialized Training

Program at the University of Southern California, where he got his medical degree and, also, his gold medals as a swimmer in the Olympic games. Sammy volunteered to go to Korea. When he arrived in Korea, they were presenting all the head medical officers to President Rhee, who went up to Sammy and said, "I think I know you." My brother said, "Don't you remember me? I'm Sammy Lee." The old man got tears in his eyes, and he embraced my brother. "This boy is one of my closest friends, and one who has followed me all the years of our lives. Anything in Korea, you can have." So the commanding general said, "I thought we were going to have an international situation. He wanted Sammy to live over there with him." Every week, Sammy went to have either dinner or lunch with President Rhee. He also went over to see my uncle; Sammy had gotten the secretary to find my uncle.

I had a friend who went through the University of Southern California for his doctorate: Dr. Carl Woo. I used to think that he was a big sissy. I was a tomboy type of girl, and he used to follow me on campus. I used to ditch him by going in the women's bathroom. I would ask the girl, "Do you see a Korean man sitting outside there?" "Yeah, he is." "Well, tell me when he dissolves, he's gone." And it was this Dr. Carl Woo. He followed me all the time around campus. Years later, he came back as the Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Korea. All the offices were at the Presbyterian Church on Jefferson and Budlong. All these head officers of the Korean Government came to be presented to the community. You know, when we were growing up, there were only about 740 Koreans in Los Angeles. We all knew each other: whose kids you were, where you went to school, all that. But after the opening of Korea, with immigration and war rights, the Los Angeles community grew to almost cataclysmic proportion. You can't believe all the big businesses that Korean are involved in now.

FELDMAN: Do you have any idea how many Koreans are in this area now?

SHON: In Southern California? About 300, 400,000. And there were only three churches in Los Angeles: the Presbyterian, which was on Jefferson and Budlong, was built there half a block down; the Methodists had their church on 29th and Orchard Avenue. Then there was the Christian Church founded by Sigmund Rhee on Ellendale Place. You know where Ellendale Place is?

FELDMAN: Yes.

SHON: I think the headquarters of President Rhee are still there on Ellendale. Meanwhile, when the immigrants started moving in, they got a church on Robertson Boulevard, about Ogilvie and Robertson. No, first we moved to Washington Boulevard ----- I think it was on the corner of Washington and Buckingham Road.

FELDMAN: Oh, in the Crenshaw area.

SHON: Yes, in the Crenshaw area. Then we moved over to Robertson Boulevard. My daughter-in-law's aunt goes to that church; I think it's still out toward the back. The minister used to be with the one that was on Washington, and after he passed away, his son became the minister. He's now at Westwood Methodist Church on Westwood Boulevard. Gradually they have moved westward; it's kind of surprising, because in the early days, Koreans were not welcome to go to Beverly Hills. Now they have homes in Beverly Hills, because they amassed fortunes, you know.

I used to work for Bullocks, downtown, and the reason why I was able to get a job there is that the superintendent of sales and the managing foreman were classmates of my dad's at Occidental College. We needed some money to buy our books, so my dad went to talk to Mr.

Yung. And Mr. Yung was the financial advisor to China from Occidental College. So they are all kind of intertwined. My sister got a job in the sportswear department. That was in the Collegian Section on the fourth floor. But in those days, so-called Orientals weren't supposed to be salespersons. It would kind of go against the grain to have the so-called Oriental waiting on you at a department store. I did stock work so I could see how to fold the sweaters a certain way and put them in the cases. One of the girls I worked with said, "I'm more afraid of the little stock girl than I am the buyer," because they used to pull the bottom one and mess all the rest of them up, and I'd raise heck with them and say, "You come back and do your own sweater piling." They'd say, "Okay, Mary Lee." So I worked eight hours a day for \$3.20. Can you imagine? Just \$3.20. Kids nowadays, their stomachs are too big. There's a phrase in Korean, (stated in Korean language).

FELDMAN: Say that again.

SHON: Because they're so content with eating well, they wouldn't lower themselves by going and working eight hours a day for only \$3.20. But that was big money.

FELDMAN: That was the prevailing wage.

SHON: Yes. I'd go on Monday and buy the books I had to have, but the rest of the books, I used to wait to 10:00 o'clock when the library would close, and I could get the reference books and take them home. I had bundles of books and when Dolly came to USC, she and I drove a little Plymouth Coupe from San Fernando Road to 'SC University. We'd pile the books in that little automobile. She got her advanced degrees at 'SC. Then she could get a job as a teacher. She went back to Bullocks in the Shopping Service Office. When I was in my travels in San Francisco, this Filipino man ---- one who was an attorney, and a doctor of medicine, he was in

the ----- what is that office that takes care of the dead people?

FELDMAN: The Coroner's Office.

SHON: Yes, in the Coroner's Office. And he said, "Mary, what you should do is get your sister to come up here, establish a residence, and then she could start teaching because there are so many Chinese up here; they use Oriental teachers. So Dolly went to San Francisco.

Meantime, she had to have a job in order to support herself while waiting for a teaching job. Dr. Byrd telephoned Mrs. Newhall ----- you know the City of Newhall?

FELDMAN: Yes, yes.

SHON: It was begun by the great-grandfather of the man who was the editor of the *World Magazine* section of the San Francisco Chronicle. He hired Dolly to work on the world news on this magazine that was in every Sunday edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She stayed with him 52 years.

FELDMAN: That long?

SHON: Every time he was promoted, he took her along. He bought a mansion up in Piru, and it was a big Catholic Home for the priests. Then down below was a little home made all of marble. That's where the nuns had lived. He bought that too, and everyone wanted to see that showplace of the mansion house. Scottie died just a few years back and, of course, Dolly retired. She lives up in San Francisco yet. But when she left to go there, my dad cried and cried, because it was the first time one of his children was leaving him. I said, "Pop, she's a grown young woman. She has to get out and spread her wings and see what life is like away from home."

FELDMAN: But that's hard for a father to take.

SHON: Yes. She still lives up there in San Francisco. Her health isn't too good, but she sounded pretty good when I talked to her yesterday. She got pneumonia a couple of months ago. That's what happens to older people who don't take care of themselves. She has one son. Her daughter-in-law's going to come so she'll have someone to take care of her for awhile. Her voice sounded really good. I know she's getting better because she's gotten fight back in her. Anyway, she said, "I would never want into go back in education." She trained at Manual Arts High School when she was earning her master's degree at 'SC. But she said, "I know those kids are much worse today." My training was in Watts.

My husband died very young: he had cancer. He had nodules on his lymph gland. My brother helped Dr. Percy take out the cancer, but at that time the doctor told him, "I think I saw the seed of the cancer going down toward his lungs."

FELDMAN: How long were you married then?

SHON: Eleven years. He kept saying, "I don't know what's the matter with my throat; it keeps hurting." I said, "You need to go see the doctor." He had lump on his shoulder, but it was a benign tumor. But then it spread to other parts of his body; it took two and one-half years. He was going to go back into pharmacy. He had a friend in a Thrifty Store who told him that anytime he wanted to, he could become a pharmacist in the Thrifty Drug Store. He went to Stockton to take the pharmaceutical test. He bled all the way up there, and when he came back, he said, "I don't know why, I bumped my leg somewhere." The cancer was spreading down to his extremities. Then he had cobalt therapy ----- he had fifty cobalt treatments. I drove him for the final cobalt treatment. That doctor should have put him in the hospital, but he said, "Are you going home?" I said, "Yes," So from Beverly Hills, I drove down Jefferson Boulevard and

brought him home. I lived on 37th and McClintock. You know where the Olin Hall of Engineering is?

FELDMAN: Yes, I do.

SHON: Right across the street was my home. I saw two of my mother-in-law's tenants on Jefferson Boulevard. I honked at them and asked them, "Could you follow me home? My husband's asleep in the back of the car." They carried him home, and forty-five minutes later he was dead. I called the fire department. I called my legal friend who was one of the children of my mother-in-law. She came over, and when the paramedics came, they said, "There's no reaction from his lung." I called up Murray Weir, my Jewish friend who was a doctor out in the Valley. He said, "Didn't the doctor tell you that he was going?" "No, no indications." "If I were you, I'd sue him for inhuman medical practice. If he sends you a bill, you tell me. I'll fix that fellow. He had no business sending him home; he could have died in the car while you were driving down the street."

The kids were all in school. The little guy, the one that lives with me now, was only three at the time. They were three, seven, nine and eleven. I was left alone with them. And when Kirby got old enough to fend for himself, he ----- all of my children went to 32nd Street School. They went through 32nd, John Adam Middle School. When it got time for them to go to high school, they didn't want to go to Manual Arts or the other school over there where mostly Japanese kids went. I went to see Dr. Robert Kelly, and asked him for permission to send them to University High School. Then my oldest son drove to Uni High every day. Two of them graduated from Uni, and the third one went to South Pasadena High School. I couldn't afford to buy a house in the middle range; I went everywhere trying to buy one. Then on a friend's

recommendation, I found one in South Pasadena, near Highland Park. So I bought this home in 1968 and my third child went to South Pasadena High School.

FELDMAN: You've been here since?

SHON: Yes. Meantime, when it got time for Debbie to go to college, she went to USC; they all wanted to go to the University of Southern California. Debbie went to pre-law there.

When it was time to go to law school, she was not admitted to USC Law School. I was very active then with the NEA (National Education Association), and I was on the Asian/American Task Force where you travel all over the United States and Hawaii, to counsel Asian parents about college and about what education would do for them. I was in Washington, D.C., and I told the head of the Task Force, a Black man, "You know, my daughter wants to go to law school, and when she approached this fellow from law school in Washington, D.C., he turned his back on her." He said, "I'll fix that guy." He wanted to see the Dean of the School of Law at Georgetown University. The young woman there said, "If her mother's that interested to get her child into law school, you tell her to be sure all her papers are placed directly into my hands."

Debbie became a clerk for a well-known Congressman, Diggs, of Michigan. He wrote a letter which said, "This girl has to get into law school." She then got into law school right away, into Georgetown. When Cory tried to get into med school, she didn't go to USC. I sent her across the United States; to George Washington Medical School. She finished high in her class there. So did Debbie. Debbie had a job right away; she went to work for the NEA, because I was very active with the NEA. She was with the Teacher's Rights Division.

I remember one time she went to S.I. Hiakawa, the Senator from California. He wouldn't sign one of the education bills; he was really indifferent to all proposed legislation

except any he proposed himself, and he was a poor senator. She knew where his car was parked and she put a car in front of it so he couldn't back up. (Laughter) She said, "I'm not going to let you out of this parking place until you go in and sign that bill. It's for all minorities." He went in, and he signed it. (Laughter) Meantime, she went to the law firm that had Senator Tunney in it, where she started working. She worked for a small firm at first. One of the men became head of Pick and Save. I guess he left law and went into private enterprise. Then she got into another one where the man became head of trade under Mr. Clinton. Debbie became assistant trade representative under Micky Kantor in Clinton's cabinet.

FELDMAN: Is that where she is now?

SHON: No. She was married on the Island of Maui. She told me this young man is an attorney, also. They worked with the same friend, a Jewish boy. She told me, "Andy proposed marriage. I told him my mother used to say, 'My family is all chop suey,' because there are so many nationalities." My brother, Sammy, married a Chinese girl, and my oldest daughter, Dolly, married a Jewish man, but she should have divorced him before she was even married to that big bum. I sat across from him at the dinner table, and my daughter Cory and I said, "Where were your eyes when you married this horrible piece of humanity across from me?" She said, "I wonder sometimes if I could take a rice pot and knock him over the head with it." Anyway, after 17 years of marriage, Dolly went to a rabbi in San Francisco, and he said, "You know, you've been a fool all these years. You should have dumped him the first year of marriage. He's no good for you. Dump him. Get rid of him." So she divorced him.

FELDMAN: She did?

SHON: She stayed single the rest of the year.

FELDMAN: Where is she now?

SHON: No, she remarried, another Jewish man, and her first husband died many years later.

Their son was a sheriff in Los Angeles County. So he flew up there. He buried his father, himself. His father never did anything for him or for Dolly. Something he'd always say was, "Well, you know, when I make my money....." Sammy said, "I could push his mouth in."

Whenever I'd mention that to her, she'd say, "Don't remind me. That was my fatal mistake."

(Laughter) The only redeeming thing was having Robert.

In the meantime, my daughter Debbie was with Mr. Clinton, and her husband taught law down in Australia. But he wanted to go into medicine, although he'd been an attorney for years.

They went down to Australia to live for a couple of years. Now Debbie's back here, working with a law firm. She teaches law at USC one night a week, on Wednesday; international and career law. It's an after-hours class like a

FELDMAN: Extension?

SHON: Yes. The kids like it. The dean had approached her to teach at 'SC at the School of Law.

FELDMAN: What's her full name?

SHON: Debbie Lelanie Shon. Her daddy gave her the name of Debbie. Lelanie is a Hawaiian name, which I gave her.

FELDMAN: Hawaiian.

SHON: Debbie Lelanie Shon. She uses her maiden name yet. She doesn't use her married name. She's down there on Wednesday afternoons, teaching that class. I haven't gone to watch her yet, but, one day she was called to England so she could not teach that class. Her husband

went over and taught it for her. He got a standing ovation, he did such a good job. (Laughter)
He didn't change to medicine after all. He's with the United Nations ----- some position where he's gone to Bosnia and all those troubled areas of the world. I hoped they wouldn't call him to this present fracas that's going on in Kosova, but that is where he is now. I asked Debbie, "What do you think of your president now?" She's non-committal.

FELDMAN: So you have one daughter who's a lawyer. What did the other children do?

SHON: The other daughter, Cory, is a medical doctor. She was in medicine in Malibu, and she got earthquaked, fired and flooded out of there. She couldn't wait for them to rebuild. She and the doctor who is the daughter-in-law of Dr. Howard House, left that area, and they came down to that big building that used to be occupied by Builder's Emporium. Prudential started a medical center there. And you know what the bums did? The building wasn't worth the commitment of their money, and they closed up the Center without even telling the young doctors. The fellows in charge knew. So Cory was floundering around for awhile, then she got the opportunity to go to Hawaii. She went to the Island of Maui, and she's with Kaiser in New Lelanie Town on the Island of Oahu. She said, "Mom, sometimes the senior citizens come in and they see my name Shon, and they say, 'Did you have a grandfather that ran drugstores in Honolulu?'" "Oh, yes, that's my paternal grandparent." They used to have the most interesting drugstore. It was like that place over in the Island of Maui. They'd sell everything from pencils to being a pharmacy. Then my husband also had one there. They had two pharmacies in Honolulu. Cory met a lot of people in Hawaii. They are very cordial. Of course, it seemed funny to be a member of the majority over there in Honolulu, because there are so many Asians there.

Debbie had been married on the Island of Maui, and the man who officiated was the Supreme Court Justice of Hawaii named Justice Moon. He just came last Saturday to speak before the Korean-American Leadership Coalition. I spoke in the morning — I was on a panel, speaking of the forgotten past, what had happened in the early days to the Koreans. Having done social work, I knew all the problems the kids had gone through to the present day. Then the Judge spoke in the evening. Sammy wanted to show his video of the Olympics and what was going on in Korea when he was stationed with the 121st Evacuation Hospital in Seoul, Korea ---- to Mi Jung Wu, Korea. I stayed till 4:30 and left with my young lady friend who now is principal at Third Street School in the Hancock Park area. Then there was a young man there who's known me since he was three years of age. He was a little late getting there, and when he saw me, he said, "Here comes the lady that made me marry that Caucasian girl. I was scared to death of Korean women." (Laughter) He was at the County Board of Education. Did you know the former County Superintendent is teaching at 'SC; Stuart Gothold?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes.

SHON: Wonderful man; he's just tall and very imposing. I really like him. I hope he comes in to the dinner on May 1st. (Editor's note: The USC General Alumni presented Mrs. Shon with an award on May First.)

FELDMAN: I'm going to be there, so maybe I'll see him.

SHON: Yes, Dr. Stuart Gothold -- a wonderful gentleman. He loves my kim chi. He's on the board for Fedco with my brother, Sammy. When he met Sammy, he said, "Tell her that I really miss her kim chi. Boy, she used to bring the best kim chi down to the County Offices." My young principal friend calls me the Kim Chi Diplomat. Dr. Handler ate my kim chi. So

did Dr. Johnston and all the Superintendents. Dr. Rueben Zacarias — I don't know if he's going to make the dinner --- I know for sure Dr. Dan Austin, who is the Chair of the whole staff, I think he's coming. I have to call him to be sure he received the invitation from the Alumni Office. But every once in a while, I bump into old buddies. I'll be standing someplace and, "Mary? Is it Mary Chun Lee?" I'd say, "Oh my gosh, I haven't seen you since 19— ." It's terrible how the years fly by. I'd say, "How did you know?" "You look just the way you did." "Don't tell me that. I've got gray hair, and I have arthritis and all the rest of that." But it's been an interesting, full life.

As I mentioned, I did social work until Herbert passed away. I knew I'd have to do something to raise my children. In the kind of social work I did, I did a lot of traveling. I had four little babies and three old babies: my mother-in-law, my father-in-law and my mother. My mother could assist me a good deal, but my mother-in-law just couldn't. Well, they were in their late 80's. My father-in-law died May the 10th, 1961. He had bleeding ulcers. I buried him on the 13th, and my husband died on the 15th. So I had two funerals within a week of each other. And the community said, "Well, she did great. Herbert was an only child. Well, her father-in-law just passed away." I couldn't believe it. I went to see Cecil Nunn, who was an Occidental man. He had charge of all the counselors of LA Unified School District. He said, "Gee, Mary, you have to have your degree in counseling, although I know you did that as a social worker. But we need elementary teachers, badly." So, under the Ford Foundation, I trained. I went to USC and got my teaching credential. Then I went into the field. I taught in East Los Angeles at Eastman Avenue for years. I was asked in what area I wanted to teach, and I said, "Well,....."

FELDMAN: Now, what years were those? When did you get your teaching credential?

SHON: Nineteen sixty-six.

FELDMAN: So that was more than 25 years after you already had your social work degree.

SHON: Yes. And that was good, because I had that degree to fall back on. My late father used to say to the older generation in the early days ----- they didn't believe that women should be that educated ---- so my dad said, "I want my daughters to achieve in the highest way possible. I don't believe that they should be married early and not see what life is like outside their own society. I want them to be prepared; if they would be married, and it wouldn't work out, they'd have something to fall back on.

FELDMAN: So you stayed in education afterwards?

SHON: Yes, so I taught in East LA for 12 years. And they found out I was a Korean-speaking teacher. I was the first Korean teacher of American heritage, and they took me to Hobart School at Hobart and Olympic. That's almost the center of the Korean community, in Korea Town. The principal there was a Raymond Howell. They needed a person at the Board of Education to develop Asian-American material. That was in '74. They said that there was a law in California that when teachers taught in predominantly black areas, they had to know about black history and the problems that were prevalent in that race. There was one who was Hispanic. A friend of mine who was on the board at this present time, was having a hard time with Mr. Kosamire --- I can't think of the mayor's name.

FELDMAN: Riordan.

SHON: Yes. He turned out three of the board members, you know. One was Jeff Horton, and the other one was that black lady, Barbara Boudreaux. I know them well. And George

Kireyama from Gardena area. He and I have worked together ever since '74. They're all good friends of mine. I developed the curriculum on Asian-American. It's the History, Culture, and Current Problems of Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and Samoan. Then I trained the staff, even the head ones up at the Board. of Education, so they'd know how to deal with these kids and why they had certain linguistic problems, and all that. I wrote the teacher's guide and the teacher's manual for LA Unified School District. After I finished that, I was at Hobart. The young woman in charge of the Asian program at the Board of Education wanted me to come there to work so I could develop all the ethnic material. I wrote film strips and books on the culture of Koreans, and at their 60th birthday, and on Children's Day ----- it was a Korean Children's Day ---- they used to have a Japanese Boys' Day, but then changed it to Children's Day because it was service to the community. It was interesting. And I helped develop some of the Filipino material and Samoan, and I taught pre-school in Gardena and at Torrance with the Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Korean. There were some Mexican kids there. Then in a school called Delores Street School, that was predominantly Samoan. I worked with Dr. Richard Cooper — I think he got his doctorate at USC. He was Superintendent of Area 5. All these schools were in the Area 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 8. And in 1974 and 1975 I taught Methods of Bilingual Education at USC.

FELDMAN: How did you go about getting the material for these different

SHON: I had to research all of the backlog of books and then also go to interview persons. Then I did more research in the bibliography and I had to put down the bibliography sources, you know. Then we taught the general public. There were schools all around LA Unified, even in the Valley, where there might be Caucasian teachers, and they'd come for inservice training for

White-American teachers about how to approach the kids. For example, they would celebrate kite day, and they would learn how to make all these kites of different ethnicities. That was very famous in Korea. They used to have National Kite Day in Korea, and the best kite made was given a prize. I used to give service to the museum over in Pasadena, you know.....

FELDMAN: The Norton Simon Museum?

SHON: No, the Pacific Asian Museum.

FELDMAN: Oh, Pacific Asia, of course.

SHON: The people at the museum kept saying, “You should really go and see the source of the old arts and culture of Korea. In 1948, when Sammy was going to try out for the first Olympic Games in London, England, I was asked to come out to Ohio, and I taught in the summer camp. There would be different groups coming in each week. For seven weeks I was in Lancaster, Ohio. There was a lady who was just a fantastic woman. She asked me, “Why don’t you go to Camp Minewonka? That’s run by the American Friend’s Service Committee.”

I went to that camp ---- at the Stony Lake in Michigan. I was a counselor there. There were 750 university college students that came there for a period of six weeks. It was one of the best experiences I ever had. I met some of the leading head men of education and of private business. I met Mr. ----- gosh, I can’t think of his name — but the son is still running the Ralston Cereal Company at Checkerboard Square in Michigan.

I went there, to a school as a keynote speaker, and I was a little late getting there, so I went to the desk and I said, “I’m Mary Chun Lee, keynote speaker for the week at the conference. Could you tell me where my accommodations are?” She said, “Yes, Ms. Lee, but there’s a young man who’s been sitting there waiting all day to see you.” I turned, and there’s this

good-looking, tall young man who stood up and bowed and said, “You’re the first Korean I’ve seen since I left Korea.” He was a young man who swam across the Hung River, ‘cause his mother told him that the North Koreans were going to force him to go into their Army. “You go ahead and go across to the Southern area of Korea.” He was befriended by some GI’s of the American Army, and they sponsored him and sent him to Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee. So Holly, this young man, went there. You could tell then, because he was very gaunt, that he’d been hungry. Now he was more healthy looking. He had told me how he bought a dozen oranges and ate one a day. He’d work in the student cooperative. Once when I was at the home of Dr. Walter Heinzman in Ohio, I said, “Tell him how you didn’t eat.” He pulled out his wallet and give Holly a \$100 bill so he would eat better.” So I started getting money for him. While I was there, we’d go down to the creamery where I’d buy him an ice cream cone. He said, “I’m embarrassed. I should be treating you, teacher.” I said, “Don’t worry. You just go right ahead.” And the little blonde girls just thought he was so handsome!

FELDMAN: Your views and your experiences are truly interesting. You’ll remember that when we first talked by phone about having this interview, you had to delay for a bit because you were putting together a statement for use at the Alumni Dinner. Is a copy of that available?

SHON: I’ll have to look for it, but I will send it to you.

FELDMAN: Thank you very much, Mary, for sharing this bit of your history with us. I look forward to receiving the material.