

**Maury Alvin Joe**  
**Trinity Episcopal Church – Pine Bluff, AR**

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**Interviewer: Dr. Zach Smith, University of Central Arkansas**

**Transcription: Kaden Hendrick, University of Central Arkansas**

**Length: 1 hour 34 minutes 3 seconds**

**Project: Arkansas Chinese Heritage Project**

**[Begin Maury Alvin Joe Interview]**

**00:00:00**

**Dr. Zach Smith:** I'll put the phone a little closer to you. So this is Dr. Zach Smith. I'm here with the University of Central Arkansas Center for Chinese Language and Culture. Today is June 28, 2023. And I'm here at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to talk to Mr. Maury Joe about his experiences growing up in Arkansas and his Chinese heritage. So to start, could you please state your full name, your date of birth, and your place of birth?

**00:00:27**

**Maury Alvin Joe:** My name is Maury Alvin Joe. Born July 31st, 1950 in Memphis, Tennessee.

**00:00:36**

**ZS:** Okay. So to start, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how your family first came to Arkansas.

**00:00:45**

**MJ:** My dad came to the United States when he was 10 years old. He was in Hoiping, China. He was the third out of a family of seven brothers and three sisters. My grandfather was chief of the village. A wealthy patron of the village came to my grandfather and said, I have the paperwork for my son who has passed away. Would you want to send one of your children to

America? My dad was the healthiest of the boys. And he said, well, he has to fight every day for food, so I might as well go to America and go over there and see if I can make better. So he came across the Pacific with his paper uncle and landed in Vancouver, Canada. Rode a train across Canada, crossed in the United States and landed in Fall River, Massachusetts. My dad had, he worked in the laundry for my uncle till he was probably eight or nine years old. And then, well actually he was 10, I'm sorry. And then after that, he went to work for a Chinese-worked in a Chinese restaurant and he made friends with a cook there.

He couldn't speak very well, very good English, nor writing, but my dad would translate for him. And so this cook taught him how to cook, and gave him lessons. He had friends that had come to Mississippi and had come in between, he landed in Arkansas, he landed in like 19, came over when he was 10 or so, he was 21, he was 10 years old. So he spent his childhood basically in Fall River, Massachusetts. But he had friends that, and his uncle, excuse me, his brother, was then, had come to Arkansas or come to Mississippi. You know, I said, well, come on down here, you know, we have a better, we have a grocery store, you don't have to work in the laundry. So he'd come down to visit his friends down there in Mississippi and then they kept a lot of friends, well, they're in Arkansas, we'll go over in Arkansas and visit them. So he came down to visit them and when the Depression hit in 29, he came, everything here went down, so he came down south to get rid of, to escape the Depression. So he landed in Pine Bluff in 1930, that's how he came to Pine Bluff. And when they came in 1930, so that meant he was like 19. So we, he didn't finish the eighth grade when he was in Massachusetts, Fall River, Massachusetts.

So he went to Pine Bluff High School and he played football for Allen Dunaway, Class A football. He was the first Chinese to play for Class A football in Arkansas. And he played, I think he was a year and a half, but that was when the football players, these were guys that graduated from high school, and they worked full-time jobs and they showed up for practice later on. If they showed up at all, and if they didn't show up, they showed up to play in the game. These guys were 29, 28, 25, 30 years old, in their prime. So that's how he came to

Arkansas. But at 130 pounds, he didn't handle it too well. He was, he got beat up pretty good. And so he, like that. But I think he ran to a lot of discrimination when he was in Pine Bluff. And that's because, well, you're in the South now, you know, and my dad was mistaken a lot of times for an American Indian because he was tall, dark-haired, thin. And where Alexander, the track and field is for Pine Bluff High School now, he used to be called the hardened drain. Before it was covered up, I think they would settle their differences in the hardened drain after school. So he didn't talk very much about that, but he did reference it a few times that, you know, they would settle differences that they had, you know, after school or on the lunch hours or whatever down there. But that's how he came to Pine Bluff. And one of the friends he knew had started a grocery store in Pine Bluff, Pine Bluff Market, Joe Gooley.

So I worked for him, you know, to get the grocery store going and they had a couple of stores here in Pine Bluff there on Main Street here in Pine Bluff. And he would try to go to school and try to work at the grocery store, but, you know, after a while, I just didn't think it didn't work out. So he nearly graduated from Pine Bluff High School. I think he would have been in the class of 1934, I believe, is what he told me one time. One of the things he did, he'd always regretted about not being able to finish high school there. So I transferred from the school I was going to, Washington Chapel, to finish up at Pine Bluff High School because, you know, help him out or make him, I don't know if it made him feel better or not. You know, I felt it was at least I could do for him, you know, growing up. But in the meantime, I'm trying to think now, is that gap. You know, he worked for, worked at Pine Bluff Market and when World War II broke out, he tried to enlist. Well, you know, he said, you know, I think at the time that they weren't taking just a certain age bracket of men to enlist. Well, he said it was that you were too old, you know, at the time, but at 41, he would have been, in the start, he would have been 30 at the time. So that rocked on for a while, but in the meantime, he worked at Grider Field as a mechanic and trained out there. And finally, I guess they kind of dropped the, or expanded the age limits. So he finally, he joined, but I think he, we had two different stories about this. Supposedly, the papers he came over on said he was born in 1914, but he was born actually in 1911. So he was three years younger than his papers. Well, he told the list, and I said, well, I

lied about my age so I could enlist. So he finally got in the Army, or in the Army Air Force, that's where he ended up going, and went to basic at Shepherd Field

in Wichita Falls, Texas. Well, when he got through basic. You know, everybody was supposed to get their advanced program AP training. Well, he said, well, nah, you gotta go through basic again. So he went through basic training twice, that I know of. And the reason I came, he said, well, you're not an American citizen. Well, you have to wait until the circuit judge comes along to swear you in as an American citizen, then we can advance you on to meet as a pilot, as a mechanic. So he's a mechanic, let's see. And yeah, I think it was in Fort Lincoln, I wanted to write that down, Lincoln, Nebraska. That's where he ended up being. He traveled all over the place. He, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Fort Lincoln, Nebraska, just different places that he traveled in. He ended up being a crew chief for C-47. I guess after his first time as a crew chief, you know, the pilot came and got him, and told him, you can fly with me, you know. And Dad said, okay, but he didn't know why. He said, well, then he got up in there and said, well, this proves to me that you did what you're supposed to for this plane. So, you know, like that. So that's when he ended up being a mechanic like that. But later on, I think he got out of it and went to be a cook like that, that's how it was. But anyway, that's how he ended up in the Air Force. Crazy World. And I think he was finally discharged at Fort Chaffee in 46, like where these papers were. I was able to find some information. Suppose these records were burned up in that St. Louis fire they had in the early 70s. And I had a guy that, suppose he had done a lot of research, so I read it somewhere about him, so I hired him to do it. He came here, he brought a few bits of information, but the last thing I got from him was his final pay voucher that he received at Fort Chaffee for, I think it was \$122 or something like that. Worked there for that, but anyway, it's like that.

**00:10:50**

**ZS:** Do you know why he originally became really interested in joining the armed services or the Air Force in particular?

00:10:55

**MJ:** Well, he felt like he had come over here and he was able to do well. And he also thought that he joined the service, a chance he'd go back to China, get in the China-Burma theater, get transferred over there. Well, he attempted that, but every time he would apply for a transfer, his commanding officer wouldn't do it. All I talked to him into saying, I need you here. Instead of the young ones over there, you don't need to go back over there. So when he left in 1921, he never went back until 1996, when he went back. And that was one of the things, there was a story in one of these Jefferson County journals about one of the ladies that did a story on him, biography on him, about the fact that he'd always regretted that because even though his father passed away, I think his mother, my grandmother lived to be like 92. And I think he always tried to send money back one way or another, some of his pay back to China, his family, and did that. But I guess when he was over here, he felt like, well, everybody is, they know we're signed up to lift and join the war effort, so he wanted to participate. So that's how it came about, he joined the Army Air Force, which is kind of ironic now, since the Army Air Force doesn't really exist. You see the Air Force, the Marines, the Navy, the Army and stuff like that. So he's got this level of thinking about how that now. And then when he passed away, actually it was 1986 when he went back, he finally found out his actual birthday, because my uncle, who was still alive at the time, he went to the family Bible and found that his birthday was October 28th, 1911. So after his trip to China, he celebrated two birthdays. He celebrated his favorite birthday in July, and then we celebrated again in October.

So we kind of made a running joke of it, but he said that was fine with him. The only thing that he had a problem with is that when he actually told him his birthday was, and the recruiter or whoever was saying it said, well, you're trying to get in, you're too old to get in. Or when he tried to change his birthday, when he was discharged, he said, no, you'll be trying to draw social security too early. Yeah, like that, so he didn't want to fight the system, so he just wanted to get out. So he said, well, you let it go at that. So he was discharged, papers say, July 14th, 1914. July 15th, 1914, so that's how that worked out. It was kind of a running joke, and his tombstone has his actual birthday, but his bronze marker that the governor provided for him has his paper birthday on it. So we just leave that as a puzzle for people to only know about it.

Someone told me, I heard here recently, said a person dies twice. The first time it was when they leave the earth, their heavenly body, and the second time is when people stopped mentioning their name. I started thinking about that, well, that's pretty true. People stopped talking about him then.

The reason I rang that up is that someone told me the other day about, well, somebody on Facebook was asking about your dad, which I don't do social media, because that's just me, I just, you know. I look at it as a waste of time, because I know people that, you know, that's all they do, they're consumed by it. But I've got other things to do, which may be just taking a nap, but I'd rather be taking a nap than do something like that. But I hear, you know, well, I keep up with my grandparents or my grandkids on Facebook, and that's good, and I'm glad, but I can't.

**00:15:04**

**ZS:** So speaking of names, I don't think you said, what is your dad's name?

**00:15:06**

**MJ:** My dad is Harry Sy Joe.

**00:15:12**

**ZS:** Do you know where the name Harry came from?

**00:15:14**

**MJ:** Well, Harry, that part I can't tell you, but actually, you know, Joe was really the name like his, actually, his name was Joe Samuuk. So he shortened his name from Samuuk to Sy. So his name was always known as Harry Sy Joe. But Harry, I can't really tell you exactly where it came from, but I know that that's what it was.

**00:15:40**

**ZS:** And then after he was discharged, he came back to Pine Bluff?

**00:15:43**

**MJ:** He came back to Pine Bluff, and that was in like 46. And then he started, he went back to work for Pine Bluff Market at the grocery store. But he also, I think that didn't work out too well. So he went back to Boston and worked in a restaurant up there. And in the meantime, he decided he wanted to start a family. So he had met my mother when he first came to, first time he came to Mississippi, I guess in the early 20s or, and then he started to try and get in touch with her again. And my grandmother said, no, Joe, you don't have any family here. You don't have any roots here, you know. You know, you're living, you work in Boston, you don't live here like that. So that went on for a couple of years. And finally, my grandmother, she consented to him to marry my mother. My mother and her younger sisters, they ran a grocery store in Crawfordville. My uncle was in the Marine Corps. That's Lawrence Howe's dad, William Howe. So they ran a grocery store in Crawfordville at the time.

**00:17:09**

**ZS:** And your mother was also Chinese?

**00:17:11**

**MJ:** Yes, she was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**00:17:14**

**ZS:** Okay.

**00:17:15**

**MJ:** And of course, we still ain't figured out how they got from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to, you know, Mississippi, but they ended up migrating to Mississippi. But when the time for them came to go to school, you know, the laws, they wouldn't let them go to school. So finally, they moved to Memphis where they were able to go to school at the time. My mother was the third of five sisters. Five sisters, yeah. And then, so she ran, and the older two sisters, they'd already married and left. So my mother and her two younger sisters had ran this store from when my uncle was gone. So that's how that transpired.

**00:17:58**

**ZS:** Do you know anything about her family or how her family came to Philadelphia? Or it's kind of that for her story and stuff?

**00:18:04**

**MJ:** I tell you, mom wouldn't ever talk a whole lot about that. Just like the, I guess it sounded like their family that wasn't, didn't have a good life, I guess, so she wouldn't talk about it. And we didn't really press her with it because she'd kind of just, you know, cut us off, said, nah, nah, nah, like that. So I wish, you know, I do have one aunt left, and I sent that, your questionnaire to her. And, cause she probably could fill you in better than I would, you know, and that's shame on me for not doing a better job about that. But, you know, mom just wanted to talk about that. Other than that, you know, she talked about opening the store and, you know, running while her uncle, her brother was gone. And then taking care of her grandmother. But other than that, she didn't really, she didn't say much about that.

**00:19:03**

**ZS:** And did your dad stay in touch with his brother?

**00:19:06**

**MJ:** He, they'd often owned my, my brother is actually, my uncle, excuse me, he's actually in this, he did receive a gold medal also. He's in this brochure that when they made the award ceremony, these are regional, because they're right in the middle of COVID. And this was held in September of 21. So we didn't go to that because of COVID, but they did, they did furnish a booklet of the awardees that were going to get a award. So my uncle's in that picture. I've got a picture of that and I'd like to show you. So, like I said, they, he had a falling out. He said something bad about my grandmother, or she did, his mother- his wife. So they, they really never really so-called made up, but I guess they got to the point where after he passed away, then she realized that was his only contact. So, you know, she was a little bit more receptive to us. We would go down and visit about once every five, six years, you know, it was, and I kept trying to keep touch with my cousins, but it just, you know, they seemed like they had their own life going on. So that's how that went.

I think the longest time I spent down there, I worked a Hurricane Alicia in 1983 that hit. So I went down there to Houston and Halloween day, I stayed till right before Thanksgiving. Worked down there and worked, and then after I got out here, I got in touch with them and, you know, they, they, they welcomed me pretty much. And so I worked six days a week and I took off on Sundays and went to visit them, you know, my boss couldn't, didn't say a whole lot about that. You know, we were working 10 hour days, 10, 12 hour days at the time. So, you know, they say, well, how's your day or rest? I said, okay, that's fine with me, you know. And I got to know him a little bit better at the time, but I just never just, you know, just reach up and call you and do that, you know, because I think I, I called her about, I found out about her. Her mom passed away just by chance, cause I just Googled her name and there was obituaries online. So, you know, I made arrangements, sent flowers at the funeral and I called her and she called my cousin, Susie, and she answered, she told me, look what's going on, but they'd also been, you want to have the floods in Houston. Well, they've been flooded out, you know, times they had temporary addresses at different places, so that's how that went. But just not really ever close, you know, they did send flowers for my mom's funeral, for dad's, but just, I don't know, something.

**ZS:** So, okay, so when your dad and mom got married and your mom's name is?

**00:22:10**

**MJ:** My mother's name was Margaret Howe.

**00:22:12**

**ZS:** Okay, Margaret Howe. So when Margaret and Harry got married, he was still in Boston, is that correct?

**00:22:19**

**MJ:** Boston.

**00:22:19**

**ZS:** Okay and so when did he come back to Pine Bluff?

**00:22:23**

**MJ:** Well, actually they got married in a little town called Earle, Arkansas.

**00:22:27**

**ZS:** Okay.

**00:22:28**

**MJ:** And then after that, they went to Boston to live up there, but my mother, she got homesick, so they came back to Arkansas, just briefly, was living with my grandmother and then he got a job opportunity to work in a grocery store in Houston. I guess his brother said, you know, they got a guy that wants to open a grocery store and he's willing to take on a partner. So we moved to Houston and this was in, like had to be the beginning of 1950, like that, or late 49 or early 50. Well, got down there and the Korean War broke out in June of 1950 and my mom was pregnant with me at the time. So, and my dad was on the inactive reserve for the Army Air Force and they got called up. So, you know, and I mean, so he didn't have a whole lot that he could do because he had to report to duty. So he ended up selling his family business. Like, he just, I don't think he even got his money out of it at when he did it, so they moved back to Crawfordville and that's why I was born in Memphis in July of 1950. And so he finally got a, he got a 90-day extension to try to get his papers, get his affairs settled and finally they decided, well, they had made a mistake then they called him up. So he filed a claim against the government, which that didn't work out, then it went nowhere. So that always had a bad taste in his mouth, you know, for something like that, because they shafted him out of his business in Houston, which in a way I'm glad because the times I've been to Houston, Houston made him sick because the weather was so hot and he went down there and he said, yeah, he said it made him anemic, you know, so on. And I guess that was the end of the claim because otherwise I would have been born in Houston. You know, like that, but that's how they went.

So they stayed with my grandmother after I was born. So he didn't have a job, so he came back to Pine Bluff and stayed with family down here and some friends and family that he had known, a good friend of his, and they stayed. And so my dad worked for, went to work for John Rust, the cotton picker, John Rust Foundation cotton picker, and then went for a while. And then he went to work for Coca-Cola, painting signs. Then he painted signs for Coca-Cola. And then finally he made friends with the mayor of Pine Bluff, Ophie Lights, Sr. And Ophie had a store and got to talking to him. And so they, he started renting a store for him. And so I think the store opened like in, I want to say in like 1952, I think, something like that. In 52. And so he became, he opened up the store as Joe's Food Center. That's how that went by. And so of course, and did real well there for a while until the national chain. Sunflower was the first, I think the first national grocery store chain to come to Pine Bluff. And right after that Safeway

came. So they started wiping out the mom and dad groceries like that. And so he did, you know, of course, a lot of the business, my dad was credit business, you know. And then I remember he had some customers, they'd call an award and we'd load up, load it up and take it to them. And so, you know, one couple that I remember very well now that lived where the bypass is in Pine Bluff, they were big fans of Budweiser. It was usually about three or four cases of Budweiser and about a dozen bottles of Garrett Snuff. And we always enjoy visiting them and we'd go visit them. They'd have pictures of them with the Clydesdales, you know, because they were big fans of it.

So it was, and then his other business, he had a few other ladies and gentlemen he had business with. And one guy who still keeps touch with today, she was a widow lady. She had seven boys and two girls. And each of the boys, the oldest boys, as they went into the service, they would come to my dad and said, whatever my mom buys from the store, you know, give her credit for it. And when I come from off, you know, off leave, I'll pay you. Well, I think he had three of the brothers did that. And she raised all the boys and family like that. And I still see a couple of them there still living in town like that. So he, dad had a good heart. He just, you know, but the, you know, what really got him, you know, the national chains of the grocery stores started wiping them all out. And then he'd have customers that had stuff for credit. And they wouldn't pay him. They see him they cross the other side of the street to keep him from confronting them. You know, and dad, I guess he just let bygones be bygones, you know, try to be, you know, well, I did what I was supposed to do, you know, help them out, things like that.

**00:28:16**

**ZS:** So when did those national chains move in? I'm just trying to see how long was the store in business from?

**00:28:21**

**MJ:** Stores and business like from 54 to like 19, I want to say like 65. 1965, like that, and then he finally got so bad when they took the store and cut it in half, just downsized to half size.

And, you know, I think he ended up getting a beer permit or liquor permit, you know, tried to, you know, generate a business, but it just got to be overwhelmed, you know, too much for him. And so, and I was in school, because I think he closed the store at the end of my sophomore year, which was in 66. And then he, what happened after that, some of his friends from South Arkansas, they decided they wanted to go in the restaurant business. And he had a guy that he had known for years that had a big restaurant in St. Louis. Well, he was in charge of, you know, actually he was the head cook of it. So they had my dad and two or three others, then they had about six or eight silent partners who all contribute, you know, financially backed them. Then they had opened the Magnolia Inn in Little Rock on Roosevelt Road. Well, they turned that into Bamboo Gardens. And were doing real well, but the problem with that is that the motel required them to open up for breakfast. And then, what happened after that, one of the cooks, he got real friendly with the bookkeeper, and they started having two sets of books. And then it turns out that the head cook that my dad knew from St. Louis, he was an alcoholic. He had keys to the liquor locker, so, you know, things went down from there, you know.

So my dad, he and one of the other good friends he had known all these years, decided they needed to get out. They wanted to buy their shares out, whatever equipment they brought up, because I think Dad brought up a stove and a couple of, you know, articles he had in the store. And he said, you know, just buy me out, you're not gonna go. There's too much going on like that. So my dad left the rest of the business in the end of 66, 68. And so, he worked for Safeway for about a year. Actually, it was 67, I'm sorry, 66, 67. And I was uh- finish school in spring of 66, 68. And, I mean the fall of the spring of 68, I'm confused. And then he worked for Safeway at that time. And spring of 69, I get a letter from my little sister, who is, she's 13 years old now. She says, guess who's going in the restaurant business. So, while my dad had the store, he had a big, you've seen the big woks they had. Well, he had one of those in the back that he would cook Chinese food to go. -Fried rice-. Mainly fried rice to go, every Wednesday. As he'd do that, sort of supplement the income. So, yeah, he did that. So, he rented an old beauty salon out on Dollar Way Road and it became Sy Joe Pagoda in the spring of 1969. That's how that started out.

So, I, of course, we found out that restaurant businesses in Pine Bluff, business is real good for about a year and then just suddenly just starts to dry out because other things go on. So, when we first started, it was, my mother was running the cash register. I was helping and we had two waitresses and two other big woks in the back. Well, after that year, things just kind of dried out. He had to let his people go, this, that, and the other. But at the same time, he had cultivated an audience- ya know- that loved his egg rolls, because he made egg rolls by hand. - Ya know.- He would shop around to find a crate of bok choy and he would cut the meat, cut the vegetable, cut them all by hand. What he would do, I guess it was really his secret to it, was the egg rolls you eat now used to have cabbage in it. Well, he used the white bok choy, what it is. And his secret to it was when he'd cook it, it'd be full of water. So, he'd take it and put it in a rice bag, put it in another one, put it in a wine press and just squeeze all the water out of it. That's how he, and then he mixes the ingredients, you know, like I'd mix them all by hand in a huge bowl about this big. I used to mix my hand in. He and my mom, they'd spend their mornings, after they got the ingredients ready, they'd be rolling egg rolls. And he had a deep fryer, he'd fry them, and he'd pre-fry them, that way he had them ran cold. All you do is pop them -in a micove- in a deep fryer at the restaurant like that.

**00:33:46**

**ZS:** Where did he get the bok choy from?

**00:33:48**

**MJ:** Bok choy, he got that from, I think, he used his connections with the produce guy at Safeway to get them, like that. He'd get them ordered with the crazy bok choy. You know, and probably then they would raise their own bean sprouts too. -We had- We lived in the house, the only installation on the walls was the wallpaper, that's how old my house was. But the big, huge crocks, I forgot how many gallons they hold, and every time, he had to drill holes in the bottom of them, you know and we'd raise bean sprouts in the bathroom, because that was the warmest room in the house, even in the wintertime, especially. So my sister grew up as a waitress in the restaurant business. And then after I grew, I finished my college, and I spent my summers -in a-

working for my dad in the restaurant business, everyone. And after I got a job, I spent my after hours working with my dad, like that, and vacation like that. When my sister went to college and got into med school, she asked him to, when she graduated from med school, would he retire? When she graduated med school in 1981, and he sold the business.

He was in business from 1969, 1981. And still had people that ya know, always, after he left the business, he had built a addition, or built a garage, he had a deep fryer, and he would continue to fix egg rolls and fried rice, you know. And he catered to some people that had asked him to come cater dinner for him, things like that. So I'd go over there and help him set up a deep fryer, you know, to help serve the food, something like that. So he did that probably for five or six years after he retired, because actually he lived for something else to do. He was always a person that just needed something to keep him busy. He raised a garden in the meantime, you know, things like that. So he did jack of all trades and a master of none, as they say, you know. -So-

**00:36:10**

**ZS:** And your siblings, you had a younger sister. Did you have any other siblings?

**00:36:13**

**MJ:** No, just to see my little sister, yeah. She's a administrator for the Veterans Clinic in Anchorage, Alaska. It's connected with the Elmendorf Air Base. They have a joint clinic there, as she said. She'd been up there since 1998. She was just home, like I said, about two weeks ago for a family reunion. And she adopted a little girl in China in 2003. So it was, you know, my parents, after I got married, they kept saying something about, you know, grandkids gonna, I jokingly said, I said, well, you may have to adopt. Of course, that didn't go over very well, my mom and dad, you know, they didn't like that. So my sister decided to adopt, and it turns out she got in under the wire because if she turned 50, they changed the rules, no single parents, had to be under 50, had to have so much money, you ain't gonna want that. So she was one of the last ones to adopt a child from China. But the little girl had a birth defect. Her left arm didn't

develop. From here, it was like short, and she only had, she had four fingers, but her thumb was just, for here, it was perfectly formed, but here, it was just a piece of skin, so like that. And she, of course, she had less handicaps than the ones that had the cleft palates and things like that, so, and she went, she adopted her. So. -She- And we went to her graduation a year ago this past May. So I can't believe it's been 16 years since she graduated, but anyway, that's as successful as when she, yeah.

She made the start, -she uh- she graduated UAMS, got a rotation in Muskogee, Oklahoma, VA, lived in Tulsa, she came back to Little Rock, worked there, and she got a job promotion, went to Honolulu, Hawaii. She was in Hawaii about two and a half years, she got a another promotion to Anchorage, Alaska, which I never thought she would have gone because when she was in Tulsa, those winters up there were a lot colder there in Little Rock. I swore, I swore she told me she never knew any place that was any colder than Tulsa. Well, you know, you can't get much colder than going to Anchorage right there, and that's still pretty warm compared to Juneau, any place in the north, like that, so.

**00:38:57**

**ZS:** So, okay, so when it comes to your dad's business, there's kind of this period of time where he was running the grocery store, kind of like when you were in grade school, and then right in the restaurant when you were in kind of college.

**00:39:09**

**MJ:** College, yeah, basically, yeah.

**00:39:11**

**ZS:** Okay, so let's rewind a little bit to the grocery store.

**00:39:14**

**MJ:** Okay.

**00:39:15**

**ZS:** I'm curious to know more about what kind of things did the store sell, and what kind of folks tended to shop there?

**00:39:25**

**MJ:** They sold your basic, you know, everything from, he'd ground his own hamburger meat. I'd see many a day, he'd be wrestling a half side of beef, you know, in a wok, he'd cut his own meat, ground his own hamburger meat. He'd grow, you know, just the regular items you sell in the store, you know, milk and cereal, you know, Cokes, just the regular staples that you would normally find in the supermarkets now. He had as much of a variety as you could get in that size of store. -And we- And we dealt with a lot of neighborhood families that traded with him. Not that many blacks, but there were more blacks that came around, because where he lived, he lived on 6th Street.-They had uh- 6th Street was right there by the railroad, and they had a restaurant right across the street called Ranch House, Ranch House. And, you know, they did a pretty good business, like that. You know, mostly middle class, middle class Americans, Arkansans, like that.

**00:40:37**

**ZS:** But so, so, because at this time, a lot of the towns were still pretty segregated, and I've talked to a lot of folks whose family stores were in black neighborhoods within the town, but your dad's store wasn't.

**00:40:49**

**MJ:** It was kind of right on the edge, basically. You know, I guess you got closer through part of the west and more blacks, we were kind of around the edge of them. Most of our neighbors were all white, and that's ones we dealt with. But there were a few that came, one that worked in a service station. He came, and he and his wife came, and they'd shop and set another, and there were some people that just lived down. The wife, they'd come and work. Of course, in traffic, you know, people were just coming up down the street and stop like that. -Uh-

**00:41:24**

**ZS:** And did your family live in the store in a building connected to the store?

**00:41:28**

**MJ:** No, we lived, my dad, after I moved to Pine Bluff in 1950, he was able to buy a house like that. So we lived separately, but we did have a kitchen and you know small living quarters in the back, you know, if we needed to. But basically, we had our own home at the time you know. And then he would raise, you know what a capon is? A capon is a rooster who's been desexed.

**00:41:58**

**ZS:** Okay.

**00:41:58**

**MJ:** About sixteen weeks old, he would raise baby chicks, and then he would go in there and do an operation. And fully grown, they were anywhere from 10 to 15 pounds, and the meat was just as tender as you get. So someone, I don't know if I've got that picture or not, but he had a sign that he painted that said, Capon, Birds of Distinction. -And that's- And that's another way he made the name for himself because the work got around, he raised capons like that, you know and people would come buy them, because you can cook them, it'd be similar to turkey,

because that would be chicken, like that. So in addition to the raised a garden, that's one of the things he did, you know. He painted a few signs, not that many you know, for other people, and asked him to paint like the other, you know, but that's how he spent -his business- his time. You know, when he wasn't working at the store you know, he was at home trying to raise a garden and stuff like that. Did a little woodworking and things like that, so. But yeah, the ones you know McGee and Dermot and like that, yeah, a lot of their business was mostly segregated, yeah. Like that, so.

**00:43:16**

**ZS:** So did your parents have any kind of like social connections in the community, or did you play with other kids in the community?

**00:43:23**

**MJ:** Well, yeah, I played with other kids. Matter of fact, when we had the store, I didn't speak any English. So when I was little, when they brought me to the store, I could play with some of their kids, and they'd come ask my dad, what was he talking about? We didn't understand him, you know. But until I was able to go to elementary school, I didn't speak any language but Chinese, because the ladies we were staying with that raised me during the day, that's all they spoke. So my dad said, well, we're not going to make you retain Chinese language, because it took him about a year and a half to learn how to speak English when he first came to the United States. And for an eighth grade education, he did real well. -He had- Well, he and my mom had beautiful handwriting, and I write like a chicken, you know. So he said, you know, what happened to you? But anyway, that's how that went.

So I did speak a little Chinese, but I forgot most of it now, you know. And it's a shame, because, you know, when we go visit my grandmother, she'd speak to me in Chinese, and I didn't know what to explain, you know, a clue. And then she'd snort at me, you know, and go on, you know. But by the time I was one of her grandkids, she's already had a whole house full of grandkids. So he was, well, you know, I got another grandkid, you know, and okay, and like

that, so. But she, you know, I know she thought of enough of us, you know, but, and just, you know, for a while, we were good for just to visit a little bit, and then it's time for you to leave, you know, you know. But I never did know my grandfather on my mom's side. But if you ever, have you been to the Delta Museum?

**00:45:12**

**ZS:** I have not been yet.

**00:45:14**

**MJ:** Supposedly, if I remember correctly, you go upstairs to the second floor, you get off the elevator, and you turn around the elevator, there's a big picture of a family there. That's my parents, my mother and father, my grandfather and grandmother, and all her sisters and brothers. They're there, it's taken, I think it was taken at Beulah, I think, Mississippi. Yeah, that's how they're, that's their contribution to the Chinese Museum, and so.

**00:45:45**

**ZS:** So you mentioned that the women who raised you kind of during the day, were they relatives, or-

**00:45:50**

**MJ:** Yeah, well, they were friends of my family that my dad knew, you know, that he'd made friends with, and some of them, basically what it is, you know, you're from the same village, you know, you're from Hoi Ping, well, they're all basically family. Their uncles are like that. So that's, you know, that's the one, some of the ladies that kept me at the time, you know, they spoke Chinese to me right, go out there and feed the chickens, and this, that, and the other. You know, that's how I spoke Chinese, you know, like I said, till I was able to go to elementary school.

00:46:20

**ZS:** Yeah.

00:46:20

**MJ:** I wish I did retain it, because, you know, I could, it's one of the things you would, if you'd ever, if I ever used it again, you wouldn't lose it, you know, like that, but I never did, I'd get a few words, and I'd get a gist of the conversation sometimes, but short terms, you know, I'm lost. My sister's the same way, you know, we don't have any, any Chinese, if you don't recognize a few words, and a few symbols, and things like that, but you miss it.

00:46:54

**ZS:** So you mentioned your mom was born in Philadelphia, grew up in the U.S., did she speak Chinese at all?

00:46:59

**MJ:** Yes, see my mother- yeah, because that's how, you know, and all her sisters, they still spoke Chinese.

00:47:07

**ZS:** Okay.

00:47:08

**MJ:** You know, basically, you had to, my grandmother, my grandmother, she just, I guess she just didn't want it, it was languages, English was too hard for her to pick up. She would speak it,

I could tell at the time, you know, when she wanted to, but it was just basically her speaking Chinese. And my, I've got an uncle, he's the baby of the family, he was the last one born, and he, and talking to his kids, he said sometimes, they'd listen to his conversations to his mother, and he would speak a little Chinese to them, something like that, but you know, that's never good, didn't ever retain it, so, miss it.

**00:47:50**

**ZS:** Did your family participate in any other kind of social events with other, you mentioned there were several other Chinese grocery stores in town, right? So did your family go to any social events with other Chinese-American families in town?

**00:48:03**

**MJ:** Well, usually in the summertime, we'd get together, well now it's Oakland Park, or now Martin Luther King Park, we'd have picnics, you know, picnics out there, or we'd get together in a caravan and go pick watercress. Watercress was a big deal, and we'd go to Hot Springs, we'd go up in one of the national parks in East, or West Fountain, then we'd trace off into the, down where you'd find a creek, and you know, find a place that had running fresh water, and that's usually watercress, and it'd be, you know, just hordes of them out there, just, you know, puttin' back, puttin' in tow sacks to put back home, you know, so that's kinda how our social was in the summertime, you know, social events. We got, that's how we got together, like I met Beverly, and you know, like that, or it was her dad, her mom and dad ran a grocery store in Pine Bluff, and her brother was a year younger than me, so we got the business like that, you know, we'd see each other, use that in the store, or something like that, or you know, write to them. And they'd play, Mahjong, on Sundays, usually, when they were closed, they'd get together and play, you know, and family would get together, and of course, they'd wanna have red egg parties, you know, and I think, if I remember correctly, when the baby's about a month old or so, they had a red egg party, you know, and they'd bring gifts and things like that.

**00:49:35**

**ZS:** Can you talk a little bit about, what is a red egg party?

**00:49:37**

**MJ:** Red egg party is a celebration of a baby's, I believe it's a month old birthday. That's the best way I can describe it. It may be more, I'll look that up, because I don't have any kids, so I don't know, but we'd go to red egg parties, from not only families around here, but some of the other families that we knew in Memphis, red egg parties like that. And I think Dad, he and several others, they just wanted to start a Chinese association, that one that Ping Fong was trying to merge into, the other ones are trying to develop into another association like that. And usually every summer, they would try to have some kind of a gathering, you know, of the Pimmers. You know, they'd have usually a tavern in Oakland Park to try to have something, or just a picnic, you know, like that. That's basically how they kept in touch like that.

**00:50:37**

**ZS:** As you said, your dad was involved in the Chinese association.

**00:50:40**

**MJ:** Yeah, he was one of the charter members of it at the time. You know, he and, well, I think all of them have passed away now, because I know Leland took it over, and then he just hadn't had any, all the families have moved out. You know, right now, there's, you know, basically myself, Beverly, Don Lum, and maybe in the ones that are, there are people that bought my dad's restaurant. Yeah, I told them it was a town. All the rest of them, they left. You know families have left, they moved off, moved to Texas, California, things like that.

**00:51:21**

**ZS:** Did you or your parents ever join, like, a church?

**00:51:26**

**MJ:** Yeah, we belonged to a Baptist church that lived about two blocks from where we lived. Matthew's War Church, we belong to that. And then finally, after I got married, my dad came back to the First United Methodist Church here in Pine Bluff, because when he first came to Pine Bluff, he made friends with a gentleman named Clyde Gray, and he brought him to a Methodist church. So we end up joining that church here 25 years ago, our kids, after I got married. I didn't get married till I was 41. I was a late bloomer. Well, it turns out I, you know, worked summers for my dad, weekends and holidays and stuff like that. So my wild oats, I didn't get to do it until after he retired. So when he retired in 1981, I had a full-time job, but I had transferred to another job with a phone company, and I was out of town a lot. So, plus I had, so I didn't have to work in the restaurant business. So I spread my wild oats, as they say, like I said. So for about 10 years, that's what I did. And finally, folks started saying, you need to think about settling down. I don't know about that, you know. As it turned out, my mom's sister, she matched me with my wife. She's from Cajun, Mississippi. She and her sister grew up in, brother grew up in a grocery store in Cajun that her grandfather started. Her grandfather-

**00:53:15**

**ZS:** This is your wife's family?

**00:53:16**

**MJ:** My wife's family, yeah. Her grandfather raised Chinese vegetables. He did so well, he would raise enough Chinese vegetables to ship by train to Chicago and New York. And he had a green thumb, to say the least. Yeah so, and the grocery store was started as a side business because, well, if I got a grocery store, I can order stuff from them, more supplies like that. Then again, at the same time, he opened the store up, you know, and that was his sideline. But mainly, he raised Chinese vegetables. And he did real well, way I could tell, because the times we'd go there, after he passed away to visit her aunt and uncle, who took over the store after she

and her sister left it, they moved in and took over. My sister would point out, well, he had a garden over here, or he had a garden over here, you know, and he just, he'd garden gardens everywhere. He could rent a place to grow vegetables, that's what he did. You know, they had a big, hot house down there behind the house that they built. So, that's how they survived like that. You know, just the small town, you know, they, of course, my sister, not my sister, my wife, you know, she and her sister, they work, you know, 12, one o'clock in the morning on Saturday, weekends, you know, they'd sell, you know, candy, anything from candy and lunch meat to beer, you know, and when they could, you know, when they had to, it was, it wasn't even labor law, there were labor laws, but, you know, for Chinese, you know, you grow up working in a store, you know, that's what you gotta do, so.

I didn't, I don't think I was old enough to, when you got the beer license, I didn't sell it much, I didn't think I'd have did that, cause Daddy wouldn't let me do that, but, you know, I sold cigarettes and, you know, candy, and stuff like that, all the other stuff like that, and tried to help as much as I could. But, you know, that was an age, you know, you're, you don't wanna be told what to do, you know, you'd rather do something else, other than work, so. But anyway, that's, you know, my growing up in a store. You know, like that, so- and of course, like I said, it's, you know, I felt compelled to help, you know, in the restaurant business, you know, because I think I ate more when I worked, you know, so. You know, that's how that went. Because I, you know, when I was a senior in college, he had done well enough in the restaurant business that he went back, he wanted to go back to Fall River, Massachusetts. So we loaded up the car with canned goods, and stuff like that, and went to Indianapolis, crossed again into Canada, went to Toronto, and see a gentleman that I thought was the closest thing to my grandfather that I ever had. He had retired, moved to Toronto.

We stopped by to see him, and then came back in through Fall River, and a lot of the old friends that still had restaurants up there, we stayed with him. We stayed in one of them, their summer house, they had a summer house, and ate lobster, shrimp, scallops, and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven, you know, all that kind of food, and came back down through Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and seen my cousin, who was a doctor in the Army at the time, and then came back through to Savannah, Georgia to visit an aunt and uncle, and went crabbing with

him. So I then visited a couple other friends in Birmingham, Alabama, made a 4,500 mile trip in the summer of 1971. So my sister and I always talk about that, because usually when I would drive, my sister, she'd get up there, she'd navigate for me, you know, Mom and Dad, they'd be taking naps, and like that or, you know, trying to relax, but it was a, I guess that was our big family trip we had.

We went back with him into China in 1986. He made friends with a couple that, her family lived, still lived in Hong Kong, and made arrangements to go back over there, so, and then he got a chance to go back to the village, you know, which was just, you know, for him, everything basically was the same. The bathroom was the same, the only thing different he could tell was the fact that instead of, they used to burn, all the trees were cut down during the Red Revolution over there now, so they burned wheat straw, rot straw over there, but then they still had to pump water in the kitchen, you know what I mean, the kitchen was separate from the rest of the living quarters, you wouldn't smoke it up. Tile floors, you know, and he had one brother who was still living, and three sisters. We got to meet two of the sisters that were there, the other one was born after he left. Oh, I think I, two of the sisters were born after he left, like that, I've got a picture of them, too.

So it was, for my sister and I, it was just real eye opening because we got to thinking, you know, we looked around and my cousins, they're all as tall as me or taller, but they had about 40 pounds on them, you know, just thin, you know, and they all worked, they worked as best they could, they did as much good, but a lot of them worked in the factories, you know, just had other jobs away from the village because there wasn't anything in the village for them to do anymore, you know, so they moved and they, either one of them, I think he hauled freight for our company and he had access to a vehicle, and you know, of course, at the time we went back in 86, that was the first time he'd been back in, you know, over 70 years, and you know, things had changed quite a bit for him, and got to see pictures of my grandfather and grandmother, and he'd always talked about them and everything, it was, for my sister and I, it was, oh, man, this, you know, just by the grace of God, as they say, that we were born in the United States, you know, because it just, you know, you just had to be the one my grandfather picked out to come, otherwise we'd have been over there, you know, one way or another, so that's how it worked out for us.

**00:59:58**

**ZS:** And you said your dad, did he continue to, like, send any money back during that time period?

**01:00:05**

**MJ:** He would, he would get letters from them, but his Chinese wasn't that good, so he'd take them down to this restaurant, and they'd translate for him, you know, how the family was doing, and how much they appreciated the money that he'd sent back, you know. I don't know how much he sent back, but he said, you know, as long as he was alive, you know, for me to do that, for him to do that, and I have a cousin now that, she lives in Albany, Louisiana, and when we had his 100th birthday party, I called her and invited her up there, and she brought her husband and little girl at the time, but I still keep in touch with her. She calls me her uncle now, they called him my dad grandfather when he was alive, because she came up when his birthday party came by, and so it was, it, but, you know, I stop and think about them and how things, you know, I'm sure she still can still mess with her parents and the cousins over there, so it's just, you know, real eye-opening as to how things, you know, like, could have been.

**01:01:16**

**ZS:** Yeah, you know, it's like this kind of parallel.

**01:01:18**

**MJ:** Yeah, yeah, you know, just the same world, you know, the same bathrooms, the same place it was, you know, 70 years ago when he was there when he was a kid, so-

**01:01:30**

**ZS:** You mentioned him, you know, being involved in the, you know, armed services and, you know, even in the Korean War. Did your dad ever talk about kind of like politics in China? Like, did he support the Nationalist Party and Chiang Kai-Shek, or did he ever-

**01:01:45**

**MJ:** I think he supported Nationalist Party, because the communists, they were, you know, when they had the revolution, they cut down all the fruit trees, all the ginkgo nuts and all that like that, so they wanted to make, grow more food, you know, so they didn't have any wood or anything like that, you know, and these things, I think from what he was able to hear from his brother over there, that things weren't all that good, you know, they weren't that great when he left, and they probably weren't that much better like that. But overall, he never did talk a whole lot about them, but I think he did, he did support Chiang Kai-Shek, you know, as much as he could, you know, and like I said, there was, when the cases came up, he would want to try to transfer over to a unit, going to the China- China Burma Theater, but it's, you know, he says, come here, oh no, I need you over here, you know.

That's what he'd always tell me, and he'd say, well, that's, because he thought that would be his best opportunity to go back to China to see his parents, and I know, I'm sure he regrets that, but, you know, I say, I guess it wasn't meant to be that way, I guess, I don't know, you know, but I'm glad we did go back, and then we went back in 2001, we went back to the village, and got to visit a little bit with them, but overall, you know, things didn't change that much over there at the time, and then 2003 we were going to go back, but that's when SARS hit, so we, they said it was, the tour guide we'd had- we had gotten hold of, he had made arrangements, he had businesses going in China at the time, and so he was, you know, when you know the custom agency, they know you by first name, then you travel quite a bit, you know, overseas like that, so he was real well versed in how to get along, how to get by, and that's why he married a girl from Hong Kong, and we went back in 2001, 2003, I take that back.

She went with us, and two of my aunts went at the same time, but that's when I had developed a cold, and then I thought I'd go over it, and then got home, and went out and did something to develop pneumonia, but they thought I had SARS, so I was sick as a dog, my

sister was, she was in UA that day, working at the VA hospital at the time, so she arranged me to come to emergency room, and the UAMS, they met me with a mask, to put a mask on, so they put me in isolation for 24 hours, because they thought I had SARS, so my sister said, well, that was your 15 minutes of fame, because you first thought about how you're the first case of SARS in Arkansas, and I said, well, I would have rather done it without that recognition, and then after they said I just had pneumonia, then I came back to work, my boss, he sent me to one of the, I worked in the central office for the AT&T, he sent me to the farthest office in town, which is out there in Whitehall, well, you need to report out there for the next couple of weeks, and then my wife, they told her, would you stay home for the first couple of weeks? We'll pay you, and sat in there, but don't come to work, because like I said, they thought I had SARS. It was fun.

**01:05:27**

**ZS:** Yeah, yeah, right.

**01:05:27**

**MJ:** You know, so, but when we left the airport, he had a cough, and sat in the other room, and said, you know, I told you- take these cough drops, and don't say anything, you know, and that was, and they weren't screening anything about the airport at the time, but they started doing it after we left, it was just, they got worse, so we, I guess we got out in time as they say, you know, like that, but that was my 15 minutes of glory. I guess we'll call it that, so to speak.

**01:06:04**

**ZS:** So we've jumped around quite a bit in time, but I'm curious to kind of go back a little bit, and hear a little bit more about your school experiences. So you- cause you mentioned, you hadn't really spoken much English until you got to elementary school, and I'm just kind of wondering, you know, the extent that you can remember, I mean, I imagine it must have been difficult to kind of start school, and suddenly have everyone in instruction in English.

**01:06:33**

**MJ:** Once I started in school, I don't think I really had, I don't recall any problems that I had in elementary school, because we found out with my nieces, you're like a sponge, you just automatically pick it up, and everything else, you know, kind of goes out the window. But like I said, when I was in elementary school, and beginnings of, like that, and so my dad, would really force me to retain Chinese language, you know, basically, basically what he told my sister and I, I said, you do the best you can, and if you've done the best you can, then that's all I ask of you.

**01:07:08**

**ZS:** Yeah.

**01:07:08**

**MJ:** You know, so that meant, you know, we did the best we could in our school, and so that's how we did, and I was doing pretty good there, till I decided to transfer from Washington General School, after my sophomore year, to Pine Bluff, and try to play sports, which turns out, I found that I had a one track mind, I either was academics, or sports, I couldn't do both, so, but, my sister was pretty good, she finished college in three years, and then got accepted to med school, and so- but after, I didn't have any, basically have any problems until like 10th grade, and I did pretty good.

**01:07:49**

**ZS:** Did you ever encounter any kind of, discrimination or prejudice?

**01:07:54**

**MJ:** Every once in a while, I'd run across somebody, that would make some side comment about, you know, being a- start of World War II, you know, of course, nobody would distinct between Japanese and Chinese, you know, so I occasionally would have a comment like that, but nothing that I recognized as being discrimination, but at the same time, you know, I recognize that people, that's the way they want to be, well, that's the way they want to be, I just stay away from them. You know like that- you know, so I never had that, any kind of, the form of discrimination that I would recognize as that, you know. But again, I was a tall, skinny kid you know, and it didn't quite look like Chinese, that you normally see, because you know the people I meet, you know, I said, I thought you'd be short and stocky. You know I said, no, you know, dad's six foot one and uncle's six foot you know, and the uncle my mom's side was over six foot, so you know, my genes, you know, helped me out in that aspect of the deal, but overall, didn't have any problems. Is- I did have, you know, would, I think it that we went to Washington Chapel.

I think it was only maybe one or two families that were there, that were Chinese kids there, but by the time I- they had left, they had moved, I think one of them had a grocery store, and they left and moved to Memphis, and grew up in a grocery store up there, so basically, my sister and I were the only two, that I remember, when, let's say, let's say it was a transfer student, an exchange student that came in. But, I think Washington Chapel didn't have the exchange student policy at the time, and I think Pine Bluff did, but I think they had, most of them, they came after- most of them were, one of them, in my senior year, she was from Sweden or someplace like that. I think she was, so I never really had any, you know, problems that I could recall, like that, you know and being picked on, so to speak, so.

**01:10:04**

**ZS:** Yeah.

**01:10:04**

**MJ:** I kind of stayed to myself, you know, and I had a few friends, I had more friends than Chapel, because I grew up with them, but when I went to Pine Bluff, there was only a few people that I hung around with, because I knew, I had classes with them, like that. It seemed to be you know, nice, but I found out that you know, when I went to Pine Bluff, that it was a different class of people, you know, more people that they had grown up together, they went to high school together, but you know their mothers and fathers were bankers, and lawyers, and things like that. You know, and dad, he ran a grocery store, you know, and he worked in business out in the restaurant business, so, you know, I just kind of stayed away from them I had classes with them, and stuff like that, but, you know, I'm sure I didn't hear any comments from any of them about that. One or two maybe, but I just ignored them, and just went on about my business, because, you know, but I, you know, I wouldn't like my dad, because- and my dad, and I can't really blame him, you know, he had to settle his differences, you know, and after school disagreements. But, I didn't have it, didn't have that problem, far and long, though, anyway, I didn't recognize it as a problem, if you remember, and it was a comment made, well I just, you know, it might hurt my things a little bit, so I just let it go, and go on like that.

**01:11:26**

**ZS:** You spent a lot of time working in the store, and then working in the restaurant, did you ever consider going into the restaurant business yourself?

**01:11:34**

**MJ:** Well, only after I had worked with a phone company, about three years, and it was really, see, I went to work in 74, and I transferred to another job, like about 79, I said something to him about it, he said, well, you know, you really started too late, because it would take me longer to teach you the rest of your business, you know, and I probably, you know, especially the deal about cooking, so I could, he cooked from taste, he didn't have a recipe you know and when he retired, people would ask him, well, you're gonna write a cookbook, or I want your recipe. Well, I don't have your recipes, in his head, or by taste, you know, and finally he was sitting down and he wrote the recipes out for two or three for our church cookbook that he made and like that, but he said, no, it's just you waited too late, you know, I guess I should have

been doing all this all along, you know, I thought about it, but then, you know, but the way things have gone now, you know, that was before the buffets hit.

And the buffets, if you don't do- you don't have a lot of turnover, it'd kill you, because you have leftovers, and what do you do with it, you know, of course, a lot of people, they recycled it, you know, but- and his stuff was all a lot of hard work, I mean- it was fresh, the preparation was like 90%, the cooking was only like 10%, because he had all his ingredients made, he had a soup pot, he kept going all the time, you know, but his ingredients are like bok choy, or water chestnuts, beets, sprouts, things like that, bamboo shoots came out of a can, usually, that's the best way you get them and- but overall, you know that's how he did it. But I probably I could never- never be able to duplicate his egg roll, the places I've gone to and eaten egg rolls, you know, now they're all pre-manufactured, they buy them by bulk. But his, you know every time I'd eaten one I said, man I could never- you know, copy this, you know.

**01:14:01**

**ZS:** Did he do most of the cooking for your family too?

**01:14:03**

**MJ:** He would cook, yes. Mom, at night, we got home and you know, she'd cook, and on Sundays, but usually he'd cook, we'd eat at the restaurant like that, he'd cook at night, there, same way at the store, you know, and Wednesday we'd cook Chinese food, you know, we'd have fried rice, that went in, go home, mom, you know, she cooked something, you know, like that, but, a general room, mom would cook at home, and he'd cook at either the store, or in the restaurant like that. It was one of the things I wish I'd learned to do, because my wife said, you're in a restaurant business you don't know how to cook, you know, and she really gives me a hard time about that, because I- I eat like a kid still.

**01:14:49**

**ZS:** What do you mean?

**01:14:52**

**MJ:** They keep having hog legs, because I, you know, of course I've cut back a little bit, you know, since I've gotten older, but, I still eat like a kid. You don't have any leftovers at our house. So, anyway, that's kind of, that's what I mean when I eat- like I still eat like a kid.

**01:15:09**

**ZS:** Did, did your parents ever cook, like, you know, American food or?

**01:15:15**

**MJ:** Oh yeah, they, you know, meatloaf, and you know, soups, things like that. Well, maybe we always had, usually had rice, every- at least one meal a day, made of rice. You know, and then all eat as a family, you know, and, you know, at night, a lot of times, it'd be, you know, like that. Weekends, especially, you know, Sunday afternoons, Sunday dinners mom would make rolls and stuff like that, and make cakes, stuff, pies, and cakes like that. Daddy he- he used to say, said he could make them, but I never did, he never did made them for us, because I guess when, he was in, Fall River, and you know, that guy, a pastry chef, talking about how to make cakes, pies, stuff like that, but he- I don't remember him making them for us. But, anyway, Mom- Mom usually, mostly rare conditions, occasionally, and she, you know get a duck or something, and put herbs and stuff in it you know- this is what you need to, you know, this is good for you and okay. If you say so, if you say so, okay. I didn't like that.

**01:16:28**

**ZS:** So, the last set of questions I have, are kind of about, you know, legacy, and community, and identity, and things like that, and maybe the first way to get into it, would be to ask, you

know, you mentioned that, your parents kind of helped set up, your meeting your wife. Was it important to your parents, that you marry Chinese?

**01:16:48**

**MJ:** Yeah, my dad had been married to a you know, I don't know how to say it, a girl that was not Chinese she wasn't Chinese, and what he told me now, the reason they got divorced is that she didn't realize he was Chinese, she thought he- like he looked, in the picture, he looked like an American Indian; dark, tall, thin, hazy, bone- and you know, so his experience with being married didn't work out that well and I think my mom, according to my aunt, she- her experience wasn't that good either. So, they kind of- they kind of were pushing, you know, me being married like that, because at the time I was dating somebody she had two kids and they liked her and everything, but, you know, they said, I don't know about getting married, you know, that's a- you gotta stop long and hard and think about that. And, the more I think about it now, and, the more I see it, is the fact that, if and when you have mixed marriages, different races, and they get divorced, the kids, you know, the kids are the ones that suffer you know, cause they're- they're called everything in the world, you know, and whether or not their grandparents accept them or not has a lot to do with it.

You know and I realize that the world is changing, and I'm- probably still a lot of old school things, but it's just hard, you know, for me, I could see the- I could see their point of view now cause I've been married, married you know, married 32 years, I got married when I was younger- older and didn't have any kids, so, but, it's probably the best thing, you know, cause I- after I was married eight months, I fell and broke my wrist, and I had a lot of complications from it. So for about 20 months I was pretty much handicapped, you know, I was off- I was at work, but I was, you know, light duty, stuff like that, so, you know, kids was the last thing I was wanting to- to start a family, which disappointed my parents, I know, but I said, well, you know, that's definitely one of the reasons my sister adopted a little girl like that. Her- she didn't get married, but I think she was gonna get married there was a guy, but he didn't he decided he didn't want to get married. Which I'm sure that hurt her, but, you know, and she talked me out of going to visit him, so I stayed away from him like that.

But, yeah, they- they pretty much harped on that quite a bit you know, and- and my friends, some of my friends that knew both my mom and dad said that, yeah, they- they pretty much were set for you to marry somebody Chinese, you know, so, you know, and I did have a couple of instances, I would date somebody who was Chinese, but you know they, we weren't all that compatible after all you know. One- one girl she was from Taiwan you know, and another girl she was her- her folks ran a grocery store down there in Dumas, but you just- we didn't see eye to eye I think so we just split up you know. that was it you know, so, that's how that went.

**01:20:31**

**ZS:** So, thinking about, now, do you feel like- let me put it this way, what does being Chinese American mean to you? Do you feel like being Chinese American is an important part of your identity? Is it something you think about a lot, or is it something that, doesn't come up?

**01:20:52**

**MJ:** Well I knew that I was different from a lot of people and you know, I didn't look the same you know, it is that part- part of your life that you when you go into society work with other people, other races like that, you kind of, step back a little bit, you know, and try to figure out, you know, where they're coming from you know. How they were raised or you know you kind of tell a little bit is you know, if they had, you know a decent upbringing, if they had- they're not wild, you know, act like they're wild, or, you know it'd be hard to work with, you know stuff like that. Yeah, I think it's important, but it's just, you just have to take it and kind of blend in with the society you know. The- that's basically how I look at it now, you know, you just get along, you know and, you know, if they recognize your Chinese, okay, well yeah, that's me, you know. I let it go at that, you know, I don't, I don't rub it in or you know bring it up or anything like that, you know, that may say something to me about it you know, what do you think about this you know, if something happens that nobody's you know these- these incidents we've had with the Americans and the Chinese, you know, a ship crossing another, or a plane buzzing or

nothing like that you know. I'm not anybody you know, ask me about that, but at the same time I can see that the government they're trying, the Chinese government, you know, they're, they're trying to expand, but why? You know, they got the largest, you know, population in the world, you know, they just- you know, it's just like, you know, Putin, you know, why?

You can't be happy with what you've got now and settle for what you've got, you know, it's just- I don't know, you know.

**01:22:56**

**ZS:** Are there any kind of, values that you, that you kind of learn from your parents, that you think are important to your life, that you, think of as being Chinese values?

**01:23:10**

**MJ:** Oh.

**01:23:14**

**ZS:** Or any traditions, or holidays, or any other aspect of, kind of, culture that you feel like you're, carrying on?

**01:23:20**

**MJ:** Well, I know I've gotten away from, a lot of the ones I was- and grown up with, like the Red Egg Party, something like that, because a lot of the, families we know now, you know, they've all got kids, they've all been, you know, they're all grown, it's that and other. We- we did get invited to, weddings of, you know, friends of my- of my wife's, and my, relatives of my, my family. Traditions, they're hard to- they're hard to carry on, if they- only if they know about them. You know, the only- I wouldn't call it a tradition, I guess it's more of a, taboos. And one of the things I always grew up I found out the hard way was that if you have a death in the

family, for a hundred days, the family doesn't do anything. They don't- they don't go anywhere, you know, they don't take- accept invitations or anything like that. They just- that's their mourning period for a hundred days. Which my dad always thought was- was ridiculous, you know. But I also, at the same time, if you went somewhere if you went to a funeral, and you didn't go by and visit somebody else, because they probably were superstitious, the fact that you came to visit, after you went to a funeral, you know, they didn't want that, you know. So you had to- you had to, watch, you know, who you went to visit, you know. Like I said, another- and one of the traditions I guess, that my parents always does, now my wife carries them on more now, more than I do now, is that you go visit somebody, you take them something. You know, take them a gift, like that. Or, you know, don't go empty handed, basically. That's what I'm saying. You know, and that's good.

And- and one thing she, she's kept up with me is that, whenever we see some of her, some of her relatives, that and the other, you- you should give out these red packages, called the, you know, red packages that have money, and stuff like that. That's kind of has gone by the wayside. But at the same time, that's, thank you notes have gone by the wayside too. If you get a thank you note, it might be, to a tweet, you know, written thank you notes, you know. I had a, my, my cousin, Lawrence's sister, she was- she's real good about, sending wedding gifts. You know, we had a cousin getting married, and something of the other. And, so she would contact everybody, and say, well, you know, if we'll give you this much money, you know, to contribute to your wedding gift, or such, you know, and we'll get a, you know, thank you note from them about that. Well, this last one, that one of my cousins, her daughter got married, we didn't get an invitation to it, but my- she wanted to, cause they sent him a gift, so we- everybody sent a gift, and got a thank you note. And, but that same, that thing happened the same thing, to one of my, wives cousins, you know, the one, her daughter got married, and we went to the wedding, and we have a gift, and we didn't get a thank you note for any of it. So, you know, it's- you have to recognize that, there's a tradition there, and if people want to carry on, with it, you know, that's pretty fine, if they don't, well, you know, but you do.

01:26:47.020 --> 01:26:47.840

But I'm old school, you know, and that's what I told my wife, I said, we don't get an invitation, we don't send a gift, you know, anymore. That's like- you know, I hate to be that way, you know, like that, in order to carry it on. And if, well, I guess, if you don't, I guess, if you don't carry it on, or exhibit it to your children, then, you know, they won't carry it on either, or you know even exist like that.

**01:27:13**

**ZS:** So, the last question I'll- I'll ask is, is simply that, you know, by participating in this project, you know, we're, we're working together to create an archive, so that this, this important part of the history of our state, and I think of Asian American history, is accessible to other folks. So, when you kind of think about, just in a broad sense, what you would most want, future generations of Arkansans or Americans, or perhaps Chinese Americans specifically, to know about, your parents' experiences, and your experiences growing up, what would, what would you most want future generations to know about? You know, your dad's story, and your mom's story?

**01:27:56**

**MJ:** That, no matter where you start at, if you have the, desire to do something, or want to be somebody, that you can do that. It doesn't make a difference, you know, if you're born, born the children of a lawyer, or a banker, or another, if you don't have that, desire to do, what you want to do, and be the best at it, then, you know, I think that's basically what it is and then that's not necessarily Chinese like that, it could go for everybody, you know, I look at it this way that, a lot of the problems that kids have nowadays, is the fact that, I believe, the discipline begins at home and that their parents set the example, set the example as to, what they want to be, how they want to get there, by hook or by crook, as they say. And that, you know, the goal is, if you set your goal, then you can meet that goal, if you want to work at it. That's kind of how- like my dad, you know came over here, was 10 years old, you know, didn't have anything, you know, and his- when he, he's supposed to work at the laundry, for my uncle, paper uncle, and then, the days, he would go play- play baseball, you know, with him, because you, whoever heard of

Chinese playing baseball, you know, and didn't get a chance, but he had a chance, you know, and a lot of things he did on his own. You know, because he didn't have a mother or father or somebody, the guy- he did have some older Chinese gentleman that gave him advice, you know, and kind of took him under his wing, but- but he, like he said, he came through life, and he made mistakes, but he learned from his mistakes, and like I've always said, you need to learn from your mistakes, and other people will, because you can't make them all, you know, you can make mistakes, but you try and learn from them, and definitely learn from somebody else's maybe something like that, so, just, just do the best you can, you know, and work at it you know.

And I think, I believe overall, you know, it doesn't make a difference, if it's your Chinese, or the Indian, or Pakistan, that, you know, God has a plan for everybody, and that plan, you know, you may not know what it is, but, you know, you're gonna, it gives you the, the need, the choice to make the right decision, you know, and the right- the right decision you make is based on your values, that were instilled by your parents, you know, my mom didn't- she never spoke a whole lot, she wasn't real vocal about things, but whenever she- whenever she wanted to make her point across, she would tell me, you know, you know, like she told them, one of the times that, you know, your dad's not real happy with you, you're not- you're not doing, what he asks you to do, you know, and she wouldn't tell me that very often, but I do remember those times, she did tell me, you know, and he would try and steal the same tune, but he, you know, he kind of, he did it in his own way, you know, he kind of figured out. Well, you know, maybe he figured out for his own, and after I reached about 25, I figured he wasn't as dumb as I thought he was, so, it took me that long to figure that out, and some people, it comes sooner or something- something later on, it took me a little bit longer, you know, but he- he was a good man, he tried to do the best he can, and he- you know, like I said, he made mistakes, but we all make mistakes, just have to learn from them, and go on, you know, try to- try to leave the world a little bit better place than when you came into it.

You know, like that, you know, that's the kind of way I feel about it, you know, you know, I may have some, I may have a little money left over, my inheritance, you know, and of course, you see all these ads, you know, for St. Jude's, Toronto's Hospital, Red Cross, you

know, and then, and the Wounded Warriors, and things like that, you know. And you know, if- if you have money, you contribute, you know, helps them, well, you know, that's what you need to do, you know, but at the same time, you don't want to be the ones that contribute, everything you got, you don't have anything to live on, you know, you don't have to spend everything, you have to give to these charities, you know, it's kind of like, you have to decide, you know. What you want to spend, spend your money on, what you don't, you know, what's, I guess, the need that you feel, it helps you feel better like that, it's like, I guess it was the day the tornado hit Little Rock, I had sent some money to Red Cross, because I usually send it, you know, once a year, but the deal is, you know, I hate to say this, but I sent one to, for a professor in college that I went to school with, he passed away, and at the time, so I sent him more on his name to that one, which now I get requests all the time from this particular charity, you know, so, and I realized they have to have money to work, do their work. So, you know, I said, well, in a weak moment, I'll break down, you know, write a check for them and go from there, yeah, basically, so, you know, try to make the world a little bit better place, as you leave it.

**01:33:34**

**ZS:** Well, thank you so much, Maury, I really appreciate you sharing your time, and your story, that's about your parents.

**01:33:39**

**MJ:** Well, you're welcome, I'm glad, you know, I know I'm not very, normally very talkative. I'm a very quiet person, usually have to have a few drinks to get loosened up, you know, I won't talk about my dad, or my mom, you know, or my sister, you know, I have stories to tell about them, you know, and they have stories to tell about me too, so sure.

**01:34:01**

**ZS:** Well, thanks.

