

EI-1466

FULL NAME: LEE HO

BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 9, 1919

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 10, 2007

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 87

RUNNING TIME: 62:01

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE

RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: CHARLES HOLLANDER

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ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE:

COUNTRY: HONG KONG, TRINIDAD

YEAR OF DEPARTURE: 1924

AGE: 4

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is September 10th of the year 2007. I'm here at Ellis Island with Mr. Lee Ho, who came here as a four-year-old. He came through Ellis Island at that time from Trinidad. He was born in the British -- what would you say, the British --

HO: Island of Hong Kong.

LEVINE: Island of Hong Kong, in -- he was born on December 9th, 1919, and when he was about two years old, he moved with his family to Trinidad, and it was from Trinidad that he came to the United States and through Ellis Island.

HO: That's correct.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and if we could start -- tell me your name when you were born.

HO: I was born December the 9th, 1919, under the name of -- my father's name was Sorzano, S-O-R-Z-A-N-O.

LEVINE: That was his last name.

HO: Yes, that was his last name. His first name was Sylvester.

LEVINE: Sylvester. And your father was in Hong Kong, but --

HO: No, he was not.

LEVINE: Oh.

HO: I didn't clarify that.

LEVINE: Okay.

HO: My mother – my mother was pregnant, I believe, when she went to Hong Kong, and my father did not go. He – he was not very much of an adventurer or traveler, and that was probably the reason why they separated, and he stayed in Trinidad. And my mother had another child, which was my sister. And my sister was just about – yeah, she – she was a baby. So she came with me to the island of – United States, Manhattan.

LEVINE: Okay. So in other words your mother was in Trinidad when she met your father?

HO: No, she was in Trinidad when I was – when I was born. She became pregnant during the time before she – or rather, let me put it this way: she was pregnant when she went to Hong Kong with a very close – my godmother, to be exact. She went to Trinidad – to Hong Kong with my godmother, who sort of presided over her—her welfare, and they lived together. She was a very good woman, and she took care of my mother and myself.

LEVINE: I see. And where was your mother coming from, with your godmother? Where was she coming from when she went to --

HO: Oh, from Trinidad, in other words. I -- I believe they travelled together.

LEVINE: Okay. So your mother was in Trinidad; she went to Hong Kong when she was pregnant with you.

HO: Yes.

LEVINE: With your godmother.

HO: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father, your biological father, was in Trinidad.

HO: That's correct.

LEVINE: Okay. And you said to me earlier he was, you thought, Spanish, Portuguese, perhaps --

HO: I think he was -- he was a mixture.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: As far as I know -- I can't be too exact about this, but I think it was Spanish. And my sister tells me that we could have been a mixture of Spanish and Italian, because Sorzano is an Italian -- seems to be an Italian name, because A-N-O -- there's a lot of Italians with A-N-O in ending. So that's why I say we are a mixture of Chinese and Eurasian, or -- or European.

LEVINE: So you're Eurasian -- and your mother is full-blooded Chinese.

HO: Yes.

LEVINE: Yes, okay. All right, so do you have any memories of Hong Kong?

HO: No.

LEVINE: None.

HO: No, I have none.

LEVINE: Okay. Do you have any sense of your mother's family, where they were from

HO: No, the only thing is that I recall is that they -- my grandparents were from Trinidad, and probably I would think that since most of the Chinese came from Hong Kong as indentured servants, and they went to Guyana, British Guiana at that time, and then they were indentured servants. And they usually had six or seven years, how many years they stayed there, and then they were free to relocate anywhere they wanted to. So since a lot of them were unhappy with the Guiana because it was very hot, and being a laborer there, and the opportunity, I think, was not conducive to further growth. So they -- they started to go to the West Indies. And a lot of Guianans -- Chinese Guianans went to Trinidad, and some of them went to Jamaica, some went to Barbados, some went to (pause) Cuba, St. Vincent -- all of the West Indian islands. But a great many of them went to

Trinidad first, and then to Jamaica and Cuba. That's why you see a lot of Cubans and look – they have a very Oriental look, because a great many of them, several thousand of them, settled in Cuba. And then even in New York City, you'll see a lot of restaurants that are Cuban and Chinese.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: So they – there are quite a mixture of them.

LEVINE: So in other words you suspect that your mother's – either parents, or grandparents or somebody in her family tree, was probably taken – they were probably taken as indentured servants.

HO: Probably, but I never knew that; it was never mentioned.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: The only thing mentioned is I've been reading the history and talking to some of my relatives, and the only relatives I had any close relationship at that time, in the last maybe ten years or so, was my cousins. Because my mother – on my mother's side, there were five girls and I think three boys, and I think they've all passed away now..

LEVINE: Did they stay in Trinidad?

HO: Yes, I think all of them, that I knew them, lived in Trinidad.

LEVINE: I see. So somebody went to Trinidad (pause) at some point, either grandparents, your mother's grandparents, or some --

HO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And all the children were there.

HO: Yes, all the children were born in Trinidad.

LEVINE: And your mother was the only one that left.

HO: No, I had a – her sister, one of her sisters, the youngest one, she left, and then she – she stayed with us for a while, and then she had a child, and they lived in California. So she lived with her daughter for many years, and her daughter had a child, and they still live in California.

LEVINE: So your mother came before she did.

HO: I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: Your mother came to this country before her younger sister --

HO: Oh, yes

LEVINE: And then her younger sister came and stayed with you.

HO: You see, my mother -- when my mother came here -- oh, I forgot to mention that, it's important -- any well-to-do Trinidadian, especially Chinese, had a maid, a servant. And my mother brought her maid with her, to take care of us. And of course my family said it was not a good idea, because she was a black woman. And they said "You know, the first thing she's going to do is to leave you when she gets her passage." -- my mother paid for her passage -- "She's going to leave you." My mother said, "Oh, no, she's very devoted to the children" -- myself and my sister. So anyway, she brought over the maid, and of course within a week she disappeared. She -- we even have her passport; she didn't even bring her passport with her. But anyway she disappeared; we never saw her again. So my mother of course took various types of jobs in this country, and the family we stayed in, I guess we may have known them through a relative in Trinidad. So that's why we had a place to stay, so we -- so we were boarded with them while my mother went to work, and my sister and myself used to be taken care of by this family.

LEVINE: I see. Well, let's back up a minute. What was your mother's full name?

HO: Viola Lee.

LEVINE: Viola Lee -- L-E-E was her maiden name?

HO: That was her maiden name.

LEVINE: I see. And so then when she came to this country, her name was Sorzano?

HO: Yes, it -- I don't know if the whole name -- it was Viola Lee Sorzano.

LEVINE: Sorzano, okay. And then do you know, did your mother ever tell you why she decided to come to this country when she did?

HO: Oh yes, yes. She felt that Trinidadians, and since I've been back there, were not -- most of them were not very progressive. So she did not want me to grow up in a country in which I would be another Trinidadian who would be sort of not well-to-do, unless I got a college education in Trinidad, or I went to England because that's what a lot of fairly well-to-do Trinidadians send their sons and daughters either to England or Montreal

in Canada. That's where they usually get their education. And they usually don't come – usually don't come back to Trinidad, except to visit. But they make a living in Canada, like Montreal or Toronto. And even today, in the last probably twenty years, a lot of them go to Seattle. A lot of Trinidadians like East Indians, Japanese, Chinese, settled in Seattle. That's their – become their, mostly their home – also East Indians.

LEVINE: Well now, was -- Trinidad was a British protectorate?

HO: Yes, it was always a British colony.

LEVINE: Colony.

HO: Until they got their independence about twenty years ago, like Jamaica and a lot of the other islands, Bermuda,

LEVINE: I see. So --

HO: Barbados.

LEVINE: So it would seem like if Hong Kong was under the British --

HO: Oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Then it was maybe simpler to go with a British passport.

HO: It was in 1999, I think, or 19 – yes, probably, Hong Kong got their independence.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, so your mother – it sounds as though your mother was fairly well off, if she had a maid?

HO: Yes, well, as I said before, if you're sort of middle-class in Trinidad, you usually had a maid.

LEVINE: Did your mother work in Trinidad?

HO: No, no. She – she went to –she got an education in a convent.

LEVINE: Oh, in Trinidad?

HO: In Trinidad, yes.

LEVINE: Now was her family there?

HO: Yes, her family was there.

LEVINE: Her mother, her father?

HO: Her mother and father, and so on like that.

LEVINE: Yes. So she was in a – she went to a convent. Does that mean she lived there?

HO: Yes, when she lived there, yes.

LEVINE: But did she live in the convent?

HO: She – for a while she lived in the convent; for how long I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And was that just like a Catholic school --

HO: Yes, it was a Catholic school.

LEVINE: Or was it more than that? Was she going into the – was she going to become a nun?

HO: No, no, it was like a school. It was a Catholic school because I do know that she studied piano, and she studied sewing and embroidery, and all the rest of the things that you learn in a convent. So they educate you quite well. You studied reading and writing and so on like that.

LEVINE: Well now, your mother sounds as though she had high aspirations for you.

HO: Oh yes, she did, yes. She did, yes.

LEVINE: Where did that come from, do you think?

HO: Well, the very fact is that she was, I would say, much more adventurous than the traditional Chinese at that time. But up to this point, in the last twenty-five years or so, I think that's changed a lot. A lot of them are quite progressive, and they – as I said before, they go to England or Canada or the United States. But the United States is not easy – was not an easy country to get into. You could get in as a – as a steward, as a tourist, or if you had somebody to take care of you or support you, it would – you know, you would have to have that done, and then it was easier as a tourist or as a steward to get into this country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So tell me what -- do you have memories of Trinidad – I mean, before you came?

HO: No, as a four-year-old --

LEVINE: Yes.

HO: No, I really don't have any.

LEVINE: Well then, why don't you say what your mother was like, what her personality – you said she was adventurous for her day.

HO: Yes, she – yes.

LEVINE: What was her personality like, her temperament?

HO: She was a very outgoing person, and she spoke English of course very well, since English was the native language of Trinidadians and Jamaicans and people from St. Kitts, Barbados, and so on like that. So she was very open, very friendly, and I would say she was quite intelligent. She knew her way around. So when she came here, she – well she had studied – in the convent, as I said before, she had studied piano and things like that. So when she came to this country, she worked in the garment factory, which most immigrants did.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

HO: And then (pause) – then, after the garment factory, she worked for a company, a beauty parlor, a huge beauty parlor called Inecto, and --

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

HO: I think it's spelled I-N-E-C-T-O, Inecto. And what she did, she was a sort of a receptionist to very wealthy people. So what she had to do was prepare them, if they were going to take a permanent or a facial or a manicure, she – they -- she – they would have their own little dressing room. And my mother would see that they had the newspapers, magazines, tea, coffee, or anything, and prepare them for their – the beautician. And so she did that for two years or more, and I guess they liked her quite well, because they used to give her gifts at Christmastime, and also sort of hand-me-downs from their children, very expensive clothes and so on like that, books like Tom Swift. So we got introduced to some sort of literature at that time; we were about eight or nine years old

LEVINE: I see. Well, when you first came here, you were four, so you weren't ready to go to school right away.

HO: No, because I didn't start my school in elementary school until I was six years old.

LEVINE: Okay. So when you first came here, you came to Manhattan?

HO: Yes.

LEVINE: And where were you in Manhattan in the beginning?

HO: We lived at that time in what was known as Harlem, around 116th Street and 8th Avenue, 7th Avenue, right near the park, not too far from Morningside Park, as I remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you stayed there – and was your godmother – no, your godmother wasn't with you when you came.

HO: No. My godmother continued to stay in China with her family, and she had many children. She had about four or five children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: So she stayed, and my mother left her.

LEVINE: Yes.

HO: But they corresponded/

LEVINE: I see. So who did you stay home with when your mother was working, and you – it was before you went to school.

HO: With this – with this lady, who had a couple of children herself. So she took care of us.

LEVINE: And you boarded --

HO: Yes, we were boarding, yes --

LEVINE: In her house.

HO: We had our own room. I guess it was a one-room, at that time.

LEVINE: Now was this woman – did she take in other boarders, or was it just your mother and you?

HO: Not that I recall --

LEVINE: Was she --

HO: Not that I recall. She might have had an extra boarder; she might have. I don't -- I'm not sure of that.

LEVINE: Was she a Trinidadian?

HO: She might have been; she might have been a Trinidadian, because she was what, I guess -- what they call a Creole, meaning there was a mixture of Black and Caucasian and what else I don't know.

LEVINE: I see. Do you remember this lady?

HO: Yes, I remember, yeah.

LEVINE: How do you remember her?

HO: She was -- she was -- I remember she was what I know in later years as a Creole, because she was bisque [ph] and a very sort of a brownish and -- she wasn't what you would call an Afro-American, so I -- so she was a Creole, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: And nice-looking, a heavy-set woman. And she took good, very good care of us, I remember. She -- because we had our breakfast with her and she fed us and so on like that.

LEVINE: I see. And that's when your mother went to work in the garment factory in the beginning.

HO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And now, did your mother then get divorced?

HO: No, she -- as a matter of fact, she never got a divorce, I remember. And my father died about twenty years ago. I think he was about -- maybe about sixty-five, something like that. And he worked for an American company in Trinidad called the Nestles [ph] Company.

LEVINE: Oh.

HO: So he worked there as a -- I think he was a bookkeeper or something like that.

LEVINE: I see. So your mother -- when did Mr. Ho come on the scene?

HO: Oh, probably when I was about (pause) -- maybe about twelve years old, probably about twelve years old, I think, I'm not sure of that.

LEVINE: Do you remember meeting him for the first time?

HO: Oh, yes, yes:

LEVINE: The first time you met him?

HO: Yes. He – he passed away about – about four years after we knew him.

LEVINE: Oh.

HO: Yes, he passed away. He had a – a liver problem. And so that's how I remember him. He was a good man.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How was he with you?

HO: Very fine. He enjoyed – I think he liked my sister very much; my sister was much younger – well not much younger, but she was two years younger.

LEVINE: Yes --

HO: And, yeah – he -- he took care of us very well; he supported the family for the time he was alive.

LEVINE: So your mother didn't have to work when --

HO: Oh, no, she did have to work.

LEVINE: Oh, she did. That's when she was working for the beauty --

HO: The beauty salon, yes.

LEVINE: The beauty salon. Your mother must have been pretty. Was she concerned with makeup --

HO: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And looks and hair and all that?

HO: Yes. Well, one thing, she knew about makeup, she knew about dressmaking. She could do a lot of dressmaking without patterns. Both my sister also could do sewing and -- without any pattern whatsoever. And she could create things, clothes, very well.

LEVINE: So she created her own clothing?

HO: I beg your pardon?

LEVINE: Did she make her own clothing?

HO: Oh, yes, yes, she did, yes.

LEVINE: Okay, so where were you when you started school? Where were you living?

HO: I was living in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Up in Harlem?

HO: Yes, around 116th Street.

LEVINE: So that's where you started school.

HO: Yes, that's where I -- yes.

LEVINE: And what was school like? Were you --well, you knew how to speak English.

HO: Oh yes, yes.

LEVINE: How was it for you, when you got into the bigger world of school

HO: Well, I had a speech problem; I probably still have it today but not as much. I was a stammerer; I used to stammer, and so I didn't do very well in school, because I -- I was embarrassed and, having a speech problem, I didn't do very well.

LEVINE: Well, do you have any sense, if you were to make a guess at why you were stammering? Was it an emotional thing?

HO: Someone or other (pause) -- my friend, my lady friend, tells me that I -- somehow or other, I can't remember exactly what it was -- but of course the speech pattern that I had prevented me from really being really a bright student. You see I recall that when I had to speak or recite or read anything, I would blame it on my eyesight. I would say, well, I can't, my eyesight was bad. So that prevented me from really speaking. I used to blame it on the fact that I couldn't see very well, but it was actually my speech difficulty.

LEVINE: I see. But you could see?

HO: Oh yes, I could see, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: But I did wear glasses; when I was about thirteen or fourteen, I started to wear glasses.

LEVINE: I see. Was that to throw people off, to make believe you could see?

HO: No, no, I really needed glasses.

LEVINE: You needed them, huh?

HO: Yes, and I still wear glasses. But fortunately, my eyesight is – I can still see you very well, and I can still read a telephone book without my glasses.

LEVINE: Oh, wow, that's pretty good.

HO: And right now the only glasses I wear is what they call a – a progressive lens. So I wear these progressive lenses because when I play tennis or when I drive, I – I need it to see the ball or to see signs, and I can't see anything from a distance here --

LEVINE: I see.

HO: Without my glasses.

LEVINE: I see. So when did you stop stammering?

HO: I still stammer. I still

LEVINE: You haven't stammered yet.

HO: No, but --

LEVINE: So far

HO: There are certain – like, certain numbers I can't say, but I can say them now: eight. I had difficulty with saying eight, so when I went onto an elevator, and at that time they used to have a – somebody, an elevator person.

LEVINE: Yes.

HO: So you used to have to say what floor you want. So I'd say, six, seven, and then when I'd say six, seven, then I could say eight, but I couldn't say it normally

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: And even today, but I guess I'm more or less not completely over it, but I – I still stammer a little bit. (Laughs)

LEVINE: Isn't that funny. Well, whatever scared you so you couldn't remember words like eight probably doesn't matter that much any more.

HO: No, it doesn't.

LEVINE: It doesn't bother you that much.

HO: No.

LEVINE: Yeah, that's great. Okay, so here you are, a little twelve-year-old, and you have a stammer, and so that makes you a little afraid to stand up and --

HO: Especially when I was in Brooklyn, I definitely had a speech difficulty, in English.

LEVINE: Was that when Mr. Ho was around, when you had the speech difficulty?

HO: Yeah, I would say that, yes, as far as I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah. And so, when Mr. Ho was around was when you moved to Brooklyn?

HO: Yes, that's when my mother met him, in Brooklyn, yes.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, so you went – did you finish grade school in Brooklyn then?

HO: Oh, yes, I did, yes.

LEVINE: And you went to --

HO: Right in Brooklyn Heights.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then high school, did you go?

HO: Yes, I went to Brooklyn Tech at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so how long did you stay in school, and then what did you do when you finished?

HO: I – I worked in many companies, starting, I guess – so many of them I don't remember, I was about fourteen, and then when I was in high

school, and I graduated from high school and then I went to college and then – but I worked in many companies, in factories, mostly, but what I recall most of all was I -- in the machine shop. I used to like machines.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

HO: And I was very competent, I would say, so I worked in several machine shops, as a – as a machinist. And – and then I [pause] – let's see [pause] – well, I did mechanical drawing and so on like that, and then I went to – I got a – I studied mechanical engineering, and then I went to work for – oh, many companies that [pause] – it was a mechanical type of trade.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

HO: And well, one – probably one of the last companies I worked for was, I worked for the UN, called UNIDO [ph] United Nations Industrial Corporation. And I got my job because when I went to Trinidad as a visitor for the first time to meet my relatives, I saw there were quite a few American industries in Trinidad, like I think Procter & Gamble was one of them I remember, and a lot of other companies.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HO: So I thought, well, if that was the case maybe I could get a job in Trinidad/ Since I know Trinidad a little bit and I was born there, I could see if can get a job. So when I came back from my vacation in Trinidad, I went to the British consul – I went to the Trinidadian consul, and I told them that my parents were from Trinidad, and I see there are a lot of American companies in Trinidad, and maybe I can get a job through the UN. And he said Yes, you could. So at that time he got one of the representatives in Trinidad (he was German) to interview me in the – in the United States, in New York City. So I got an interview from – at – we were interviewed at the Waldorf-Astoria, and he said yes, I think that with your background we will be opening up a – a company that was an engineering company Their thing was to get Trinidadians interested in mechanical – whatever to say – machine shop training. That was it. They would learn tool and die making. They would be able to go out into the industry in Trinidad with their background to do that sort of occupational work. So my job when I came to Trinidad was to enter into this huge factory that they started with Trinidad money – the Trinidad money and the UN money. So that's how I got into Unido. And it was supposed to be a job for – lasting anywhere from one to five years. But unfortunately they – this subsidy ran out, and I only worked there for about fourteen months.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: And then I came back to – I didn't come back, I came to Austria, to get my sort of a – indoctrination as far as letting them know what I did in Trinidad, and how I progressed, and did – did I learn anything, or did they get anything from my training there. So I went to Austria. Where did I go? I forget the company.

LEVINE: Austria? You went to the country of Austria?

HO: Yes.

LEVINE: Because, why did you go to Austria, because that was where the company--

HO: No, that was when my – my service was over in Trinidad, after I was in Trinidad for the company – the company, I forget the name of the company. But after I finished my services there for about fourteen months, then they sent me to Austria. They asked me, would I want to go back home or to Austria? They would prefer me to – what was the term, to get my – to let them – I forget the term that they used. [Debriefing?-- CH] But anyway, I was supposed to be interviewed and let them know --

LEVINE: What you had – what you would accomplish --

HO: How I performed there

LEVINE: In Trinidad --

HO: In Trinidad.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: How I performed, and did they get any real services from me.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: And so I spent two days there with this sort of an indoctrination. But I'm afraid, I'm sorry to say that the gentleman who interviewed me didn't really give me a good interview, and so I really didn't have an opportunity to let him really know --

LEVINE: How much you had done.

HO: He told me more about his family and his son, and so really that was more or less the two days of interview.

LEVINE: I see. . So, what was it like for you to be in Trinidad for those fourteen months?

HO: Oh, it was very, it was a very happy occasion, because I met my family -- for the second time. Because I said -- as I mentioned before, I met my family when I went for a two-week vacation, and that's when I mentioned to you that I noticed that there was opportunity in Trinidad for me, and especially for the UN -- with the UN. So -- so I learned about my family, I learned about the country, and then when I came and I worked for the UNIDO [ph], United Nations Industrial Corporation. I learned quite a bit about Trinidad, because I met my cousins; I had a lot of cousins at that time, both male and female. And my sister had worked in Trinidad when she -- she left me in the United States and she came to Trinidad. As a matter of fact she was a very good business person, as young as she was -- she was probably about, maybe about twenty-two or twenty-three. She worked and opened up a night club there with my uncle. And she was the manager of this night club, and it did very well. And so she was there about two years, but there were problems with the family, that -- so she decided that -- my uncle had a lady friend who wanted to be the manager, so they couldn't really have two managers, and she didn't really know much about the business, but she wanted to handle it. So at that time my sister felt that she would resign from the company, and so she came back to the States.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: We went together.

LEVINE: What did it mean to you to be around family, because really in this country, you didn't have much by way of family.

HO: No, I didn't have any family.

LEVINE: So what was it like to have this extended family?

HO: Well, I think it was a -- it was a very nice occasion. [long pause] (weeps) I don't know why.

LEVINE: Is it because it was a happy time, that it's upsetting, or because it was a sad time?

HO: Yes it was a very -- [pause] a very happy occasion. [long pause] That's about all I can say then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: I knew I'd be meeting them.

LEVINE: Did you actually go to college, did you become a mechanical engineer?

HO: Oh yes, yes.

LEVINE: Yes, so you really had a trade --

HO: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And an occupation and --

HO: And especially, as I say, things mechanical appealed to me, and it was easier than being in electronics or chemical engineering or civil engineering. Because I -- I had my early training in a factory as a -- as a [pause] toolmaker, sort of.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HO: As a -- as a more, not so much as a toolmaker as a machinist -- jigs and fixtures, that's what I did.

LEVINE: Jigs and fixtures.

HO: Jigs and fixtures is primarily what I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: So my training was that, so --

LEVINE: What's a jig?

HO: Usually, when you do any toolmaking -- let's say you had to do some drilling, a repetitive type of drilling. So you would have to make a fixture which you would put the particular model in a fixture, so you'd repeat the thing and then put it -- so you'd be able to continue the same repetitive type of drilling, precision type of drilling -- how deep, what size drill you had to use, and so on like that. That was a fixture. So if you had to do let's say something like that, drilling in a hole in there, you put this in there, and then you come down with a particular type of drill, and you drill it so far deep.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: So that's a drill fixture was.

LEVINE: Yes, I see. So when you came back from Austria, you came then back to the United States?

HO: Oh, no, when I came back, I traveled for about a year. I met my sister; we traveled for about a year throughout Germany, Holland, France, all those countries, England, Ireland, almost a year. Holland --

LEVINE: Was your mother alive at that time, when you and your sister traveled around?

HO: No, no, my mother was not alive. My mother died in about 1946.

LEVINE: Oh.

HO: So I was just about in my twenties, early twenties.

LEVINE: Are there any attitudes or values that your mother tried to instill in you? Were there ways that she tried to teach you about life?

HO: Oh yes, she wanted to be much more progressive; I don't know if I mentioned this earlier, that Trinidadians by and large, at that time, were not very progressive. (unintelligible) became just occupational people, not scholars or anything like that. And so consequently, that's why she took me from Trinidad and my sister to live in Manhattan. She felt that there'd be certainly much more opportunity. I don't know if that answers the question.

LEVINE: Yes, yes. Was she -- and I guess you accepted --

HO: Oh yes, yes.

LEVINE: Her ideas on that?

HO: Oh yes -- well, I didn't have any real -- my father, my stepfather at that time, he was a nice man, but -- he was -- he was well-educated; I say that because he knew how to write in Chinese, and even at that time, a lot of Chinese who came here didn't know how to write. So the very fact that he also did the bookkeeping at a company that he worked for -- a lot of Chinese had these little Chinese like --

LEVINE: Abacus?

HO: You see businesses, you see how it is in Chinatown --

LEVINE: Yes.

HO: A lot of these markets which they dispensed to restaurants, and so on like that. So that's what he did; he did all the bookkeeping for them.

LEVINE: Was he from Hong Kong too?

HO: He was from – I think he might have been from Toi Shan [ph], I don't know. But he was from – I think he was from the southern part of China, from the Canton area. Because that's where most of the indentured Chinese who came from China were from Canton. They were the southern Chinese. Most of the scholars, as I think if I'm correct, are from the northern part of China, like Shanghai, Peking. So they were more the educated type. The people from Canton usually were restaurant people, laundry people, agricultural, and so on like that.

LEVINE: Had he, had your stepfather himself immigrated

HO: I don't know, but I think he did, yes, I think he did, because I do know that -- my mother met him at the Chinese club. We used to live right around the corner from a Chinese club. That's where a lot of the Chinese from Canton, when they immigrated, they lived at this club. There were probably about twenty, thirty, forty people. It was about a two-story house, and everybody did a certain – they were assigned a certain type of work to do. If they knew how to cook, which my stepfather did, he knew how to cook – and some of them that didn't know how to cook, they did the cleaning and the laundry and things of that sort. So that's how they – they sort of got any expenses or their living, because they used to live there also. Besides, it was sort of like a boarding house for them.

LEVINE: A boarding house. Where was that?

HO: That was right on – right on Fulton Street, near Washington Avenue. Washington Avenue and I think [pause] near Adams Street, Washington and Adams Street.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn.

HO: In Brooklyn, right in Brooklyn Heights

LEVINE: I see

HO: Today, of course, there's a lot of these condominiums over there.

LEVINE: So did you have much to do with that Chinese boarding house?

HO: No, no, except the – like on the – the big holidays like Chinese New Year's, they used to have banquets. They had banquets there on special occasions, and that's how I got introduced – got introduced to these people.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: And that's why we – we associated with the Chinese at that time. But we drifted apart. Later on, as I got older, we sort of drifted apart from the Chinese, and we sort of mixed with Caucasians. But after I got to be about eighteen or nineteen years old, we got back with the Chinese. So that's how my – my life style was, with Chinese, with Americans – more or less like that.

LEVINE: How do you think about yourself now --

HO: Well --

LEVINE: As far as your Chinese part and your American --

HO: Well, for all these years, it's been with – with Caucasians. I do have some old friends who are Chinese, but very, very few of them. But when I was – well, when I was married, my wife – her – her first husband was Chinese. So that's how I got mixed up with a lot of Chinese people. And when we went on vacations, they were probably all Chinese people.

LEVINE: She was Chinese, your wife?

HO: Yes – no, no, my wife was Swedish.

LEVINE: Swedish? Oh, my goodness!

HO: [interposed] My wife was Swedish, yes. She was Swedish, and she was from the New England countries, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: If you know – near Springfield

LEVINE: Oh.

HO: Springfield, Massachusetts.

LEVINE: Yes.

HO: So that's where she met her husband, at that time. So, as I say, that we moved around with a Chinese – a Chinese circle at that time, and later on, when she got a divorce, then we got married, and so that's how we moved around with a Chinese circle.

LEVINE: I see.

HO: And then when I got a divorce after that, I didn't mix with Chinese people at all. I mixed with mostly Caucasian people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HO: And up to today it's mostly Caucasian people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you feel very satisfied that you have done in your life?

HO: Well – [pause] I -- I thought about that, and I really can't say that I've really done anything that I can be fully proud of. I didn't write a biography – (laughs) I --

LEVINE: Well, maybe something less grand but still satisfying.

HO: [interposed] I just became one of the several million in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HO: I – [pause] my life was all right, I would say. I was in – I travelled in Europe quite a bit. I travelled, as I mentioned before, to all these countries. I knew a lot of nice people, and even as today, life has been fine for me. I mean, I don't – I'm not impoverished; I have sufficient funds to – that I don't have to go on welfare, that I can share a little bit of my funds to anybody in my family who may need a few hundred dollars at any time. I feel that I can always do something for them.

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

HO: But there's nothing outstanding in my life that I can discuss.

LEVINE: Well, do you think – is there any advice you would give somebody coming to this country, as an immigrant?

HO: Well, I would probably say, is to – anybody, were they part of my family or not, would be certainly to get an education, because without an education, you just become another factory worker or a truck driver, or something which, a cab driver, which you would have to work for the rest of your life, and really not – your children wouldn't again be really dependent upon

you. In other words, what I'm merely saying is that you need an education today, and more so than you did twenty years ago. So that would be my advice to them --

LEVINE: Mm-hmm.

HO: To anybody, for that matter.

LEVINE: Yeah. Are you glad that you came to this country, that your mother came to this country?

HO: Oh yes, I've seen, because I've been back to Trinidad about four or five times. The only reason I don't go back any more is because I had a very loving cousin. He died of a -- about three years ago. And -- but he was the closest. I have -- his brother is fairly close, because he does a lot of correspondence with me. But he's not as close as my -- one who died. And his wife was a very nice person, but since her husband died, she moved to Seattle, because her son is there. He's a computer engineer. And so she was, I guess, kind of lonely. She had a lot of friends in Trinidad for many years, but nothing very close, so she moved to Seattle, and she's with her -- her son has a wife, and they live quite comfortably together.

LEVINE: It sounds like one of the highlights of your life was when you went back to Trinidad and worked there --

HO: Yeah.

LEVINE: For those fourteen months. Is that true?

HO: That's true, yes.

LEVINE: Yes. So in other words, that family, that family connection, I guess --

HO: Yes, that was the closest of my family.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HO: And they all -- they were always glad to see me, because my sister was there several times when she was very young, in her early twenties, and I didn't go back until I was -- gee, I don't know we even went -- oh, yeah -- I was probably about in my fifties when I went back there.

LEVINE: So why did you wait so long? Do you know why you didn't go back before that?

HO: (laughs) I don't have a good answer for that.

LEVINE: Maybe you were just busy with your life?

HO: [interposed] No, I didn't; I was never really too busy, I didn't have any – I worked, but – my sister went back, as I said before, several times, and I corresponded with her because she was the manager of this sort of night club. And it was only until she went back there a couple of times, and then when she came and she told me about the family, that I sort of said, well, maybe it's about time I go back, since I hadn't been back there, and I didn't know my father, and – by the time I went back, he had passed away also.

LEVINE: Mmm.

HO: So, I don't know if that answers your question about why did I wait so long. Well, maybe I inherited some of the genes from my father, that I didn't (laughs) – I didn't want to go anywhere. I didn't want to – I wasn't --

LEVINE: Oh, the non-adventuresome genes, right.

HO: But later on I broke away from that habit, because I went to --

LEVINE: [interposed] You travelled.

HO: To Europe several times, and even now in the last few years. I love to travel.

LEVINE: Oh, so you are an adventurer.

HO: [interposed] So I've been to Hawaii and I've been to the West Coast and so on like that. I have a cousin on the West Coast.

LEVINE: So what is this time of your life, now that you're retired and – how is life for you now? What do you look forward to?

HO: Well, life is pretty – pretty pleasant for me, except about three years ago, that's the first time I ever had a problem with my health. I suffered a mini-stroke.

LEVINE: Oh.

HO: So that's why I don't walk as well as I should; my balance is very bad. But the doctors said it could have been much worse. I didn't lose – only in the first few months that I lost the – the dexterity of my left hand and my left foot. But after about six months I recovered quite well. I didn't have any

speech pattern that I lost. But what has happened is that my balance has not been very good in the last – in the last three years, and I'm trying to recover it, but it doesn't seem to be going very well. I should use a cane, but I don't like to think that I'm disabled. But the doctor said, you know, you could have a bad fall, and as people like that, they usually break their hip and then it's very severe. So I'm thinking, well, maybe I'll do as he says, but I haven't done it yet.

LEVINE: Yet.

HO That's to use a cane.

LEVINE: Okay, well, we have about a minute left.

HO: Oh.

LEVINE: Is there anything you're looking forward to, that you think you're going to do?

HO I want to recover my – my health completely --

LEVINE: Good for you.

HO: As I used to, because I used to play a lot of tennis until the last three years, and --

LEVINE: Well, you've got to do exercises for balance.

HO I do that, and I've taken Tai Chi in the last two months, and I'm going back to it again.

LEVINE: Good.

HO: But – [pause] I don't know anything else that – my health is the most important, I guess, and I – I still want to travel. I still go to plays, I still go to – I still like theater and I still like to read. So as long as I can do that, I think my life would be fairly complete.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HO And I guess that covers it. Considering that a lot of other people have much -- much more difficulty – they have problems with their finances, and once they retire, they don't know what to do with themselves, but I still find that I have a lot to do.

LEVINE: Well, great, and I want to thank you for a lovely interview.

HO Well, Dr. Levine, I thank you for conducting this interview, and I enjoyed it very much.

LEVINE: Well, good. And we're going to put -- I'm going to make a copy of your birth certificate

HO Sure, okay.

LEVINE: And then if you were to send us a picture of you, as young as -- as close to four years old when you came here --

HO: Okay.

LEVINE: We'll put that in your file.

HO: Okay.

LEVINE: And I want to say that I've been speaking with Mr. Lee Ho, and he came here as a four-year-old from Trinidad, having been born in Hong Kong. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW