

EI-325

THOMAS LOUIE

BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 27, 1933

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CHINA, 1950

BORN: SOUTHERN CHINA

AGE AT IMMIGRATION: 18

ARRIVAL IN THE U.S. BY AIRPLANE

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.
It's Tuesday, May 25, 1993, and I'm here with Thomas Louie, who came from China in 1950 when he was eighteen years old. Well, I'm very happy that you're here and we're going to get your story on our tape. And I want to say welcome, and I want to start by asking you your birth date.

LOUIE: My birth date is August 27, 1933.

LEVINE: And you, where were you born in China?

LOUIE: I was born in Toy Sun Kwong Dung, China.

LEVINE: Could you spell that, please?

LOUIE: Toy Sun, T-O-Y, S-U-N. Kwong Dung, K-W-O-N-G, D-U-N-

G, China.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, where in China is that? Is it . . .

LOUIE: It's south part of China.

LEVINE: The south part, uh-huh. Now, did you live in the same area the whole time before you left China?

LOUIE: Yes.

LEVINE: You . . .

LOUIE: I lived the whole time, before I leave there.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, what do you remember? Did you live in a city? Was it a village? Was it country? Was it city? How would you describe it?

LOUIE: It's a village. But after the village, I have six years for the school. Then I go to the Toy Sun, that's the, that's a little city. I educate over there for the middle high school, middle school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, let's start, your very early life. What was your mother's name?

LOUIE: My mother's name was Wong See.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

LOUIE: Yeah. Wong, W-O-N-G, S-E-E.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

LOUIE: Is, you know, Wong Seng Wan. Wong, Sing, S-I-N-G,
Wan, W-A-N.

LEVINE: And your father's name.

LOUIE: My father's name is Yuk Ching Louie, Y-U-K, C-H-I-N-G,
L-O-U-I-E.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters?

LOUIE: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: What . . .

LOUIE: I have four, four sisters and three brothers.

LEVINE: And their names?

LOUIE: Their name is Pete Sen Louie. The second one is Ren
Sen Louie, and (?) Sen Louie. That's the brothers.
And the sister, Sue Chin Louie, Sue Ken Louie and Sue
Tee Louie, and Sue Shin Louie.

LEVINE: And where did you fit in as far as the birth order?

Were you the oldest?

LOUIE: I am the oldest one, the oldest son, you know, of my father, my parents.

LEVINE: You're the oldest son, and . . .

LOUIE: And, yeah.

LEVINE: Were the sisters, any sisters older?

LOUIE: Any sister, right.

LEVINE: You're the oldest of all.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: Let's see. So when you were a little boy, do you remember the house you lived in?

LOUIE: Oh, yes. I remember. The house is like the two, you know, two doors on each side, and it's, you know, two kitchens on each side, and the middle of the house is the living room, and the sides, on two sides, that's the bedrooms.

LEVINE: Why was it that you had two kitchens?

LOUIE: That day, you know, the whole village like this except

those, you know, the people very poor, it's only one room house. In other words, it's only, all, everything in the one room. But this is, like the custom-made. You know, you have to, all, same thing.

Almost the same, you know, this side two kitchens and two large bedrooms.

LEVINE: Now, did you live with, were your grandparents nearby at all?

LOUIE: Uh, yes. Lived with the grandparents and my father, my mother and all of my brothers and sisters. But by the time before, before I left for the United States, you know, some of my brothers and sisters not even born yet.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Now, can you remember how your mother or grandmother cooked? What was the cooking, what was the cooking particularly like?

LOUIE: My grandmother and my mother do the major job for cooking. They are cooking very good. But hands, you know, keeping busy. The fuel, you know, not like the United States. You don't use the natural gas or electrical or something like that. You have to use the wood or the grasses, you know, to make a fire.

LEVINE: So it was like an open fire on the floor?

LOUIE: Yes, open fire. This, too, is made by the brick.

LEVINE: So was the open fire right down on the ground?

LOUIE: Uh, not on the ground. It's on the ground, but it's true we have to make up, you know, like a stove. So it's an insulated fire, the pots put on the top of that.

LEVINE: And do you remember any dishes that your mother and grandmother cooked that you particularly liked when you were little?

LOUIE: Uh, usually, you know, they made the vegetables and some special, you know, (?). You know, chicken, they make very good with the steaming, then cook the vegetables on the side. It's really delicious.
(they laugh)

LEVINE: Now, what did your father do for work?

LOUIE: My father's work was a farmer in China, yeah. After he come here he worked as the, you know, the kitchen helper also.

LEVINE: He was a foreman, you said?

LOUIE: No, not a foreman. The farmer.

LEVINE: Oh, a farmer.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was he farming? What kind of food?

LOUIE: Uh, he farmed rice, raised the rice grass and the vegetables like the bok choy, you know. Like all the people, Chinese vegetables.

LEVINE: Now, did he sell these things?

LOUIE: We don't sell anything. We just make sufficient for ourself, for the, for the dinner.

LEVINE: I see, for the family.

LOUIE: For the family, right.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you go to school?

LOUIE: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: There? Like a grade school?

LOUIE: Yes, I went, yes. I went to the school, grade school

and middle high school.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember anything about school in China?

LOUIE: The school in China is a little different. When I was in the grade school I, it is a, you know, a small house in school, you know, to, like a small classroom in other words, you know. We have brought our own desk over there, and we, stationary, naturally. We have to put ourself, you know. We had to pay for the teacher. But at that time we had, you know, the currency. At that time, in China, it's not rich, not charge at all. You know, the teacher collected how many pounds of rice or something like that for one semester.

LEVINE: Oh! Huh. So you paid, your father paid with the rice he grew.

LOUIE: Yes. Like that, you know, sometimes it's twenty pounds or forty pounds, something like that, you know, for the master.

LEVINE: And was school strict?

LOUIE: Yes, very strict. We started getting up early in the morning about six o'clock, started, about seven

o'clock the school started already. We keep going until five o'clock in the evening. It's a lot of hours for school.

LEVINE: Five days a week?

LOUIE: Not five days, six days a week.

LEVINE: Six days.

LOUIE: Yes.

LEVINE: And in the season, did you have one season off the way we have summer off here, from school? Did you go to school then?

LOUIE: Uh, summer, you mean? Yes, we had summer school, but in the grade school it's not very, you know, not very often. But in the high school and the middle school, yes, they got a summer school for those, you know, who, you know, under grade. You know, in other words.

LEVINE: That needed extra help.

LOUIE: Extra help for the make it up.

LEVINE: I see. Now, when you were a little boy, did you think about coming to America?

LOUIE: I never think about coming to the United States.

LEVINE: No.

LOUIE: You know, by that time I never thought about it.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, then, you say it was a village. Was it a, was everyone poor there?

LOUIE: It's . . .

LEVINE: Was there a whole, was there a difference in the, in how comfortable the families were, or was everybody kind of on the same level of how rich or how poor they were?

LOUIE: You saw a whole lot of difference, you know. The people, somebody got the, you know, some like the parents or brothers, in the United States. They got more money if, you know, as the regular farmer, you know, just make a living. And some of them, you know, not even got any land or anything to raise anything. You know, they were poor. You know, the variation is from the bottom to a high level. You said, very great.

LEVINE: Well, now, did some children not go to school because

they couldn't afford to?

LOUIE: It's true.

LEVINE: You say you went away then, to the middle school and to the high school?

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: You, now, how did that work? You went to a different school, then?

LOUIE: Uh, the different school is, you know, when you go to middle school or high school, you have to go to the city. You know, the bigger city. And, you know, the village is only up to grade school, six years.

LEVINE: So the city that you went to was what?

LOUIE: Uh, Toy Sun.

LEVINE: Toy Sun. And did, how did you go to school? How did you physically get there?

LOUIE: Uh, we had to take the bus and go over there. Takes about almost an hour. The bus goes very slow to over there. But we have room and board over there.

LEVINE: Oh, so you stayed.

LOUIE: For the middle school, right.

LEVINE: So did you stay, was it six days a week, too?

LOUIE: Six days a week, yes. But after the second year of middle school it's five-and-a-half days. In other words, we start at eight until noon time.

LEVINE: Then would you stay there or would you go back to your village?

LOUIE: Uh, it's optional, but most of the time, you know, stay there.

LEVINE: And what was that like? What was the middle school like?

LOUIE: The middle school is like the, seems like the grade school over here. They have the different teachers for every subject. But the classroom the same, the teacher keep changing. You know, like the mathematics stays one, like the Chinese is one, English is another teacher.

LEVINE: So you were studying English in the middle school?

LOUIE: Uh, but, on the middle school yes, but not much, you

know, because no matter what, how we learn over there, but we couldn't speak it because, you know, we only have, after we learn. In other words, we are not used at all. That's why, you know.

LEVINE: So was it unusual for the children you knew to go on to high school?

LOUIE: Uh, it's unusual. Not many, not many at all.

LEVINE: And how about girls? Did the girls go as . . .

LOUIE: The girls, yes. And the Toy Sun seems better than the other district because we got a lot of people, a lot of, you know, parents or, you know, somebody in the United States, you know. They support them. So they have, you see, you know, got a better living.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was like being in the city after, when you left the village and you went to Toy Sun to be in the city, were there things about that that were different?

LOUIE: Yes, and the city is, yeah, it's different. Because, first of all, when I go over there the teachers speak Cantonese. I couldn't understand that, because we are on the verge, we speak the Toy Sun, you know, Toy Sun

language, you know. And China is, every little district have a different language. So, first of all, after getting used to the, how they, you know, how to listen the Cantonese voice. We couldn't, you know, understand that.

LEVINE: So you were speaking Toy Sun in your village?

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: And then you went to Toy Sun.

LOUIE: To Toy Sun city.

LEVINE: City.

LOUIE: It's the same . . .

LEVINE: And you couldn't speak Cantonese.

LOUIE: Cantonese, right.

LEVINE: Huh. So then, so then Cantonese would be one major, one major dialect.

LOUIE: That's the province, like in the United States that's a state. Just like the New York state or the, you know, like, let's say, California, that's a state, Canton.

LEVINE: I see. So how long, then, did you stay there?

LOUIE: Uh, you know, seventeen years stayed in the village in the Toy Sun. But in Toy Sun city, it's about three years.

LEVINE: I see. Now, was the second World War going, that was going on. Do you remember anything about that?

LOUIE: Yes, I can remember.

LEVINE: What do you remember?

LOUIE: Oh, the Japanese came in there, you know. Oh, they made get out the very rich to try to hide somewhere.

LEVINE: Where were you?

LOUIE: I could hear . . . Uh, Toy Sun. I could hear all the, you know, the gunfire, you know, the bombing. You know, it was terrible.

LEVINE: So you were, you were being boarded at your school when you remembered the Japanese coming in?

LOUIE: No. By that time I was about, about third grade.

LEVINE: Oh.

LOUIE: About third grade in grammar school.

LEVINE: I see. So you remember, do you remember any incidents that happened in the village that you witnessed?

LOUIE: Yes. I remember by that time, at, during the second World War, it's the starvation, you know. A lot of people had no food, nothing to eat, and die with starvation. I could see that. You know, almost one to every day sometimes, you know. Starvation, die by starvation.

LEVINE: And did you actually see soldiers come into your village?

LOUIE: I saw some of the Japanese pass by over there. The high way, they had a high way. But at that time, you know, I was a kid. You know what I'm saying? I remember. You know, when they make salutes, I don't know, the signal or something like that, put the, you know, put those rice, grain on each road.

LEVINE: They put, I'm sorry, on each road.

LOUIE: On each, you know, in the section. In other words, when I was a kid . . .

LEVINE: Yeah.

LOUIE: I'm so dare, you know, to mess it up. So I had that, oh, they say, how come you're so dare to do that? It seems it's a signal for the intersection.

LEVINE: So do you think seeing the war kind of up close that way and the starvation and everything . . .

LOUIE: Oh, yes. I saw.

LEVINE: Did you, do you think that affected you in your life?

LOUIE: It was affecting to my life because, first of all, you know, I haven't enough to eat. It's (?), you know. We depend, you know, the money sent for the support from the United States, you know, from my parents, you know. And, I mean, my grandparents. So, and it's harder now, you know, because nothing could go through, no communication, no postage. Nothing could go through by that time, during the second World War. So we haven't any money to buy anything. We depended on we raised the rice and the vegetables, but it's not enough for our family.

LEVINE: Were you able to farm? Was your father able to farm during that period of time?

LOUIE: He could farm, but, you know, not much land to, you know to raise.

LEVINE: To raise the crops.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother and father, or your grandparents, do you remember them telling you anything during that war time, anything that they told you about it?

LOUIE: Yes, I remember.

LEVINE: You remember?

LOUIE: Yeah, I remember. Yeah, by that time, you know, during the war, you know, we had, when we had some day, you know, we had to hide somewhere.

LEVINE: Like, where would you go?

LOUIE: It's that not much, almost nowhere to go. Sometimes, you know, we had to walk through, you know, like under the, under the tree or something like that, you know, to hide, even when we're afraid or something.

LEVINE: Well, what would happen if you were caught, if you

were found?

LOUIE: Uh, if, but, you know, actually, you know, they are not going to the village. We just scared in case, you know, they are coming.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Now, did you have brothers and sisters at that time?

LOUIE: Yes. By that time I have one brother and three sisters, by that time, during the second World War.

LEVINE: So you would all have to go and hide.

LOUIE: Go and hide, right.

LEVINE: Well, then after the war that's when you went to Toy Sun.

LOUIE: Right, yes.

LEVINE: And the you were there. Were you a particularly smart child? Is that how you happened to go to middle school and high school?

LOUIE: Uh, not particularly, you know, but I'm not smart one, but I, you know, I studied hard. I'm sure I did.
(he laughs) Right.

LEVINE: So did you know what you wanted to do when you grew up when you were in high school, say?

LOUIE: Uh, I planned it, but not as I wish. (he laughs)

LEVINE: What did you want? What did you think you wanted?

LOUIE: Well, first of all, first of all, I tried, you know, to be a doctor, you know. I tried to help every people as I could, you know. But, you know, it's, chemistry is so difficult for me, so I dropped out for that. Finally I find my own subject, you know, the mathematics.

LEVINE: That's your subject?

LOUIE: Yes, my subject.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you went into the mathematics field.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: Speaking about doctors, what kind of medicines, what kind of medical attention did people get in your village and also in Toy Sun?

LOUIE: In Toy Sun it's different type, but most is, more than ninety percent is Chinese doctor, and not (?). You

know, use the Chinese medicine. And, you know, like the ginseng, use all the different thing, those thing, for the vitamin, and use, like the different, even the ginger they would use for the medicine, you know.

LEVINE: These were natural . . .

LOUIE: Yeah, natural, natural.

LEVINE: . . . kinds of vitamins. Uh-huh.

LOUIE: And some of the, you know, the western doctors, too, but they use the, you know, the American way. But at that time, you know, I remember those drugs are very hard to eat, especially to serve, you know. It get in the mouth, you know. (he laughs) Well, it's like, it's stronger than the bitter. You know, the western medicine, you know, by that time. Not like now, you know, usually cherry syrup or something like that.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. So how about acupuncture? Was that something that was used there?

LOUIE: Uh, it's not very popular by that time over there in the village. Acupuncture, they, you know, they go on the city, you know, for those higher level, you know. They are different type of the medicine. I mean,

different way for cure. No medicine, I mean.

LEVINE: I see.

LOUIE: Yeah, acupuncture. They could cure that, but it's mostly for temporary, you know, not for the permanent, acupuncture.

LEVINE: But the everyday person didn't have that.

LOUIE: Nobody used that, no. Used the, you know, natural medicines. The herbs, all of those, you know, used it.

LEVINE: And what about, people like your grandmother, say. Did she, did she know these natural kinds of medicines? I mean, is this something that old and wise people knew about?

LOUIE: Yes. The older generation, yes. It's true. My grandmother, you know, she knew a lot, you know, for those. How to cure, you know, for, like catch cold or something like that or, you know, for those, all of those coughing or something like that, you know, use something to relieve.

LEVINE: Yeah.

LOUIE: She used all of those different kinds of herbs to take care of that.

LEVINE: And how about religion? What kind, was your family religious in any way?

LOUIE: Uh, before it's, you know, I couldn't say the religion. It's like the different, different, it's called the (?). It's like the, they honor Confucius. They got a lot of gods, in other words. It's not particularly one God. It's a lot of gods. Some of the god and some of them, you know, they're for to protect the village, all different kinds.

LEVINE: Well, where, did you go to any particular place to practice religion, or you would do it . . .

LOUIE: It's no need to practice. When we're in the village, you know, whatever you like to, you know, to go over there or buy something to honor or, you know, mostly, you know, cook the chicken, cook the chicken, meat and fish, go over there so, you know, to honor. After that, and bring it back. And, you know, but it's no particularly, you know, have one religion or one God. It's, in other words it's a lot of gods in the village.

LEVINE: How would you honor something? What would you do if you were honoring, let's say, the chicken? What would you do?

LOUIE: Cook the chicken and the pork, usually, and fish, and put the incense, you know, to, on, to go over there. Yeah. Like even, you know, in China when you got, raise the rice it's very good in that year it's called a good year, right. So we have to go over there to honor the god of the fields. Yeah.

LEVINE: So you would go to the field, and then you would burn incense?

LOUIE: Yes, and honor them. But, you know this is, it's mostly, I think, it's superstition. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Would there be, like, little prayers or something like that said?

LOUIE: Yes, little prayer. Like, you know, prayer, wishes, whatever, you know, in your mind, or say by words.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're going to pause here for a minute while we turn over the tape, and we'll continue in a minute.

LOUIE: All right.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're continuing now on Side B of the tape, and I just wanted to ask you if there's something else about life in China that you think we might discuss before we talk about you coming to the United States.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: So we talked about religion, we talked about medicine. We talked, how about family life?

LOUIE: The family life is easy, you know. Like the, in China you really like the family. You know, in other words, the grandparents live there, and the parents, you know, live away. All the grandchildren living together in the same house.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular member of your family?

LOUIE: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: Who were you closest with?

LOUIE: Mostly, you know, to my mother, you know, and my brothers.

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences with your mother when you were a little boy, things you did together, or stories she told you? Anything like that?

LOUIE: I remember, you know, very beginning when I was a little kid my mother is teaching by my father, you know. Only knew a few words in Chinese. My mother doesn't know much about the, you know, the Chinese. So she knew only one to ten or some of the, you know, the easy words, you know. She, she teach me, and, you know, one to ten, you know. (he laughs) And same thing, you know, to the calendar. You know, she could read it, you know. It's wonderful, you know, but she never go to school before. She could see the calendar and tell what day it is, you know, and see the clock and tell me what time it is.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So she taught you what she knew.

LOUIE: Yes, she taught me what she knew.

LEVINE: Well, what did she speak?

LOUIE: She speak Toy Sunese, Toy Sun language.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Toy Sun. Now, that's different from Chinese or Cantonese.

LOUIE: Yes, it's different.

LEVINE: So did you, did you have any activities as a family? Were there things you did either for fun or work that you did together as a family, anything like that?

LOUIE: By that time, you know, it moves from it's wish for the new year, you know, ready for the new year. It's very long waiting, you know. By that time we, you know, received [Chinese], you know, the red envelope, in other words, you know. We got more food, everything, celebrate all in the village. And one village after another village.

LEVINE: Would you go from one village to another?

LOUIE: Yes. And the visitation to all the villages, you know. After, a few days after New Year we had a lot of pastries. Pastry, you know.

LEVINE: Pastry?

LOUIE: Pastry, you know, bring it over and, you know. We

really enjoyed that. Especially we have much food by that time, right. We enjoyed to eat it.

LEVINE: So the new year was the most festive occasion.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: Of the year. And did you celebrate birthdays?

LOUIE: Uh, not very often, you know. By the time of the birthday, when we got money, you know, by checking, you know, for nice dinner. When, by that time we hadn't enough money just making one eight, (?) eight.

LEVINE: So, let's see. Well, how was it decided that your family would come to the United States?

LOUIE: Uh, by that time, you know, the Communists took over the mainland already. We had to try to make a living. First of all, you know, the Communist, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember . . .

LOUIE: Yeah. I remember I had been educated for half a year, you know, at the school, but I no intend to, I don't like that. I don't like (?), so I get out there, you know, and come to the United States.

LEVINE: Do you remember the differences that happened in your country, in China, with Communism, what changes?

LOUIE: It's a lot of change, I remember. First of all, seems is a reminder to everybody. In other words, they change the top level. They affect (?). But after the war, you know, then it's very rough for the people in the village.

LEVINE: How did it, how was it, what was harder?

LOUIE: Because, you know, it's hard to make a living over there. No matter how hard you work, they still got the same amount of pay. It's very low pay over there by that time. By that time I, you know, get out of there, you know, China, already.

LEVINE: So, in other words, you would be, were you farming then when you were there? Was your father still farming?

LOUIE: My father still farming over there for a while, and he get out of there to Hong Kong.

LEVINE: Oh. And when did he leave?

LOUIE: He is in the United States now. He left for Hong Kong

is about 19, 1954, or something like that.

LEVINE: Oh, so he was still in China when you left.

LOUIE: Yes, right.

LEVINE: You were the first of the family to leave?

LOUIE: Right. Besides, my grandfather was here a long time ago.

LEVINE: Oh.

LOUIE: My grandfather was here, I think it's 19, 1933. The year I . . .

LEVINE: Oh. The year you were born?

LOUIE: I was born, the year before I was born.

LEVINE: I see. Did your grandfather write to you and your family? Did your grandfather write to your mother and father from the United States?

LOUIE: Yes, he did.

LEVINE: So what did you think about the United States before you ever came here? Do you know what ideas you had about it?

LOUIE: Uh, well, the idea, I wish to come to the United States, I saw the history, I read, I mean, I read the book what the history, I know, you know, the different country, the country has the liberty and freedom. That's why, you know. I am, wish going to.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Is there anything else that you would say about life in Communist China?

LOUIE: The life over there, by that time, is very hard. Under the, you know, the control of Mao Tse Tung at that time. But, you know, right now I don't want to discuss it. It's different, you know, different people, you know. They run different way.

LEVINE: Did a lot of people that you knew, did they want to come to the United States?

LOUIE: Yes, I know. I know a lot of people, they want to come to the United States, but they can't.

LEVINE: Because of finances?

LOUIE: Not only the finances. It's, you know, there's no way to get into the United States because, you know, the, it's a, it made for the immigration to, in other words, it's to try for the immigration, maybe wait for

fifty years, you won't get a chance. So many people, in other words. And so small amount of the accept.

LEVINE: Yes. So how was it that you came? How was it, how was it that you got to come here?

LOUIE: I come here because, you know, I was, you know, my father, okay, go through my father was over here before, before the, you know, for employment. For the, like, you know, this citizen of the, the son of the citizen.

LEVINE: Oh. So your father came here about what year? Do you remember?

LOUIE: I couldn't remember that.

LEVINE: Okay. So he came, and was it his father who was here, your grandfather?

LOUIE: No, my grandfather apply me, apply me.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Your grandfather applied for you to come. And your grandfather was a citizen?

LOUIE: My grandfather was, right.

LEVINE: I see, I see. So do you remember planning to leave?

Do you remember what you packed to take with you?

LOUIE: It's a really simple when I come to the United States.
It's one suitcase and one shirt, two underwears.
That's all I had. And with five dollars U.S. money.

LEVINE: Do you remember saying goodbye to your family and
friends?

LOUIE: Yes, I did. And, you know, they, we met in Hong Kong,
left from the Hong Kong Airport.

LEVINE: How did . . .

LOUIE: But not every one with them. Some of them only. You
know, because by that time, you know, a lot of
brothers and sisters not allowed to get out of
mainland.

LEVINE: How did you go from your village to the airport?

LOUIE: Uh, from the village first have to take the boat to
the Hong Kong. Then the airport is Hong Kong, not in
Canton.

LEVINE: I see. Now, was your father in Hong Kong then?

LOUIE: Yeah. He was in Hong Kong by that time.

LEVINE: So did you stay in Hong Kong for any length of time?

LOUIE: Not very long. Only a few months.

LEVINE: Oh, a few months. Uh-huh. So how did you, how did Hong Kong compare with your province in China?

LOUIE: Uh, when you go to Hong Kong it seems a lot different. You see that, you know, the buildings, you know, is all, you know, tall buildings and even the electrical lights is on all the time, day and night, you know. It's entirely different, you know, than the village, the mainland.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else that struck you about Hong Kong when you first saw it?

LOUIE: When I first go to Hong Kong I remember for the transportation you've got to switch off, you know. When I get out of the boat we hire the rickshaw. In other words, it's the man that pull that. That was very popular by that time. And I go over there, I went over there, by that time a lot of people were there, to get out from the mainland. It's over three million people were there already, in a small city of Hong Kong.

LEVINE: So it was more crowded.

LOUIE: Very, very crowded, by 1950.

LEVINE: And the rickshaw, was that in Hong Kong?

LOUIE: Yes, rickshaw, by that time. It's, you know, that's 1950, the rickshaw.

LEVINE: Had you worked at all before you left China?

LOUIE: No, I never worked over there before.

LEVINE: Okay. So then you were with your father for those few months in Hong Kong?

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: And was your father, what was your father doing? Was he working there?

LOUIE: No. He's not working over there. He couldn't find a job. Because, you know, so many people, not enough jobs by that time, you know. It's over three million people in Hong Kong. Almost (?), you know. Every time you get out the street, you know, it seems like they get in the ferry or something like that, the people, all rocking.

LEVINE: Did your father go to Hong Kong expressly to find work?

LOUIE: No. See, I mean, he stay over there, try to get away from the political, you know, powers.

LEVINE: I see. So then did he return to China after you came to the United States, or did he stay in Hong Kong?

LOUIE: After he come to the United States, he didn't go back to Hong Kong nor the mainland, no.

LEVINE: Okay. So you left, and you arrived in some New York or Newark Airport, right.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: We're not sure exactly which one.

LOUIE: I'm not sure exactly which one.

LEVINE: Yeah. So then what? You came, you came from the airport to Ellis Island?

LOUIE: Uh, from the airport, yeah. Then get a cab. I remember. Get a cab, get in the hotel, leave in the night time, then come in this island in the morning.

LEVINE: Now, were there other people traveling with you that

also came to Ellis Island?

LOUIE: Uh, I think I am the only one come to the island by that time.

LEVINE: Well, now, why was it that you had to come here?

LOUIE: Uh, because after, you know, see the American consul, the first question there, "Did you go through from Hong Kong, then come over here to United States?" Then stay at the Ellis Island for another questionnaire before we leave.

LEVINE: So what happened? Tell me your first impression of coming, of Ellis Island.

LOUIE: The first time I come over here I thought, I get into New York City already. I'm wondering how come I am here. (he laughs) And we stayed in the hotel, in the morning come in there. I thought you go, you know, to somewhere, to New York City. I find out that's called the Ellis Island. I'm not even know what it is.

LEVINE: So what did it look like?

LOUIE: Uh, when I come in here, you know, I see a lot of

guards. I don't know what's going on there, you know. Island, gates, you know, at the morning. Then everybody, you know, got the trays, you know, on the chow line, you know, to get some food to eat for the breakfast, you know. I'm not used to what's going on over here. Nobody tell me, you know, have to stay here for what, you know, or anything.

LEVINE: Did you, could you speak English when you came?

LOUIE: No, I didn't.

LEVINE: So you didn't know, and nobody explained to you, why you were here.

LOUIE: Not like now, you know, with translator, you know. Very hard to get a translator by that time, you know, only for the formal questionnaire they got a translator.

LEVINE: So what happened to you once you were brought here?

LOUIE: When I was here, you know, I see a lot of, you know, about a thousand of the Chinese over here. And I ask them what's going on and they say that's the procedure, you know, to stay here. You know, some to stay here, over here already. You stay here, yeah.

I, maybe I am lucky, you know. I get out here, you know, only two weeks. But, anyhow I could, (?) at this place, very real, you know. I could see that, you know, walk around the hall over there, the big hall, and I think outside a little, you know, the place, you know, to play ball or something like that, you know.

LEVINE: Well, how were you treated here?

LOUIE: Well, it's not bad. Yeah. But I couldn't understand.

LEVINE: So then what kinds of questions were you asked in order to determine whether or not you had to stay?

LOUIE: Uh, usually, you know, as, you know, what's the date of birth, and your father's date of birth, and your grandfather's date of birth. You were very (?), you know. And what is the next, you know, various name or, you know, which (?), if you know what's their name, or something like that. You know, questions related to, have been to all, you know, to the map, and those, I don't know, they get all of that information already.

LEVINE: In other words, what was . . .

LOUIE: I got to match it, in other words.

LEVINE: They were trying to verify that you were . . .

LOUIE: Verify, verify. My answers match, too, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, meanwhile, was your grandfather supposed to meet you?

LOUIE: Yes.

LEVINE: And did he?

LOUIE: He did.

LEVINE: He came here.

LOUIE: He, no, he didn't come here. He is separate section to ask, you know. Not, when they ask question, usually one by one, you know. So they match, I think.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. So you had never met your grandfather.

LOUIE: Yeah, I did, later on, after I get out of here. And pick up at the airport.

LEVINE: You met him there?

LOUIE: Yeah, but only, you know, after I see about ten

minutes.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. What was it like to see your grandfather for the first time?

LOUIE: I was so happy, you know. I never seen him before.
(he laughs)

LEVINE: So then what happened? They asked all the questions and then what were you told?

LOUIE: They got no, in other words, when you are here, they are not ask you the question right away. Maybe, you know, a few weeks later, then get you up for ask the question. In other words, you know, you, when you are here, you don't know when they ask.

LEVINE: You don't know when they'll call you up and ask you.

LOUIE: That's right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, and was there any kind of entertainment while you were here?

LOUIE: No entertainment at all. I, you know, just a little shop over here, gift shop over here. We spend a few, you know, a few dollars to buy those, what was it, parcel to pay and, you know. These things are very

cheap at that time. (he laughs)

LEVINE: What did you do all day long while you were here?

LOUIE: And with the friends, buy the loose cards, playing cards, yeah. Make up those parcels, you know. That's it. Nothing to do, anyway, but go outside, play ball, but only at the day time, you know, at certain hours.

LEVINE: And how was the food?

LOUIE: The food was good.

LEVINE: And how about . . .

LOUIE: A lot of people, they don't like it, but I did.

LEVINE: And was the place clean?

LOUIE: Yeah, the place was clean, nice and clean.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there anything else that you remember particularly about your two weeks here at Ellis Island?

LOUIE: I remember, you know, when I see that, you know, oh, so beautiful, you know, the city, you know, the skyline. The World Trade Center was not built up yet, you know, but it still looked, you know, very tall

buildings over there, and the Statue of Liberty just next to that, you know. I thought everything, you know, oh, so beautiful, you know. If I could get out of here as soon as I could. (he laughs)

LEVINE: So tell me about when you did get out.

LOUIE: Uh, well, after, you know, maybe one or two days, you know. Then they released me, you know. I get out, you know. Before that, I think they got one ferry, you know, directly from here to the Manhattan, from Ellis Island.

LEVINE: And where did you go?

LOUIE: I go to Manhattan, Chinatown.

LEVINE: And what did you do then?

LOUIE: Find a place for sleep, you know. By that time, you know, we got all in one room, you know, with the big group of the people. It's about twenty people living in one big room.

LEVINE: Did you know these people?

LOUIE: I don't know but, you know, most are relatives and those, you know, the same family. In other words,

it's a Louie, you know, Louie family, a lot of people were there. Not the same village, but next for, you know, close around there.

LEVINE: I see. So what did you do, then? You were staying in this one big room with the Louie family. What did you do then?

LOUIE: After that, you know, the next morning, you know, I looked around and tried to get the school, you know. I found one and they, you know, for the school for the adults, you know. For adults in the church, the Transfiguration Church on Mott Street. That's the Catholic school. They help for, you know, for those new immigrants. So I went over there, you know, to the register for that.

LEVINE: Was that for night school?

LOUIE: Not night school, day school.

LEVINE: Day school. Uh-huh. And did you learn English? Is that what you learned there?

LOUIE: Yes, I learned over there. I have educate over there for, for a while. Then those, you know, sisters, they helped me to get into the eighth grade. It's very

hard, you know, for the newcomers. I studied very hard, you know, day and night, for to making up those homeworks, you know. Especially at the memorize those, what's it called, the catechism, for the church, you know. So we have those absolutely correct, you know.

LEVINE: Well, how did you feel about that, about learning catechism?

LOUIE: I feel fine, you know. It's, I got an idea, you know. It's a little different, you know. After that, then I, after graduating from eighth grade, then we take an exam for the high school. Finally I got accepted in the uptown, it's called Bishop Dubois. That's the Catholic high school at that time. But I could not afford to pay. They gave me, you know, a scholarship for that. When I graduate they helped me a lot by that time.

LEVINE: So then you went to day school, to high school?

LOUIE: Day school, high school. And I had, you know, the foundation, you know, like the mathematics. And, you know, I had learned it in China. So when I say that, you know, I had the middle school over there, so I

learned part of that, algebra, or something like that, physics. So I, so I could make it up, study very hard by graduating over there, three years instead of four years.

LEVINE: And then what did you do after that?

LOUIE: Uh, by that time I worked for the weekends. Even in the United School, the high school, I worked on the weekends for a living, you know, because, you know, my grandfather was very old by that time. He was over eighty already. So I couldn't, you know, expect that he worked too hard for that, you know. So I found a job for the weekends as a waiter in the restaurant, so I worked over there, you know, for the weekends. It's enough money for my, you know, transportation, and I find myself for another little apartment. So I concentrated to study.

LEVINE: Were you living with your grandfather?

LOUIE: Uh, no. He is still living over there as what I say, you know, the building over there.

LEVINE: On Mott Street?

LOUIE: Yes. I kept apartment to share with the, you know,

some other student, the friends. So study over there, and even over there I cooked by myself every day.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember things about the United States that struck you as very different when you were first coming here?

LOUIE: Yes, it's entirely different. Well, anyhow, no matter what, you know, no matter where, you've got to work hard. If you work hard you deserve. And in the United States same thing. I work hard, you know, I still struggle for a living. So I could support myself by that time, you know. I could take care of all donations, tuition, you know, for the school, and transportation, or something like that, and for cooking myself, you know. Not very, you know, rich dinner, but at least I could make a living.

LEVINE: For yourself. Okay. We're going to pause here, because we need to go on to another tape, so we'll stop here for a minute.

LOUIE: All right.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is the beginning of Tape Two. This is Janet Levine, and I'm speaking with Thomas Louie, who came from China in 1950 when he was eighteen. And we were talking now about the United States, and when you first came, and what about it was so different? You were saying hard work was . . .

LOUIE: Yeah. It was really different, you know. No matter where, you've got to work hard, you know. Yeah. Still deserve what you get.

LEVINE: Well, did you, did you feel that was true in China? I mean, if you work hard then you . . .

LOUIE: Ah, well, not really. You know, some people even, nobody work how hard it is, you know, in China. But still, you know, get a good living, you know. That's the difference.

LEVINE: Were there any other differences that you noticed about being here, living here?

LOUIE: Well, I feel living here is, you know, so, so comfortable, you know. The people, they are concerned about each other, and, you know, you could see that, like the, you know, the freedom, you know. You could

see the newspaper, you know, they, even the president do something wrong, they still, you know, have to criticize. That's a really different country.

LEVINE: Well, were you, when you first came here, were you glad you had come, or was it very difficult in the beginning?

LOUIE: It seems very difficult but, you know, for my age at the time, you know. But I don't think it is very difficult. But it is, you know, the only thing difficult is when I was in Hong Kong I am not sure, you know, to come in or not. That's it, you know. As soon as I come in, I don't think I will soon be able to come to the United States.

LEVINE: So you weren't thinking about going back. You were thinking of making your life here.

LOUIE: I didn't wish to go back there for, you know, only for a visit, it's all right. But not, you know, not go back there.

LEVINE: So, let's see. So you were here, and you moved into your own apartment so you could study when you were, you were in the Catholic high school here.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: And then after, you graduated in three years. And then what did you do next?

LOUIE: After I graduated, I couldn't afford to go to college. By that time, you know, I couldn't get a scholarship. Not many scholarship like now, you know. So no, no financial aid by that time. So I had to go to evening school at the Polytechnic Institute, Brooklyn, over there, for evening school. For, I was there for, I think about one-and-a-half years, for three semesters. After that, I draft by the army.

LEVINE: Oh. What were you studying at the Parker School in Brooklyn?

LOUIE: Uh, mathematics.

LEVINE: So you had decided that that was going to be your field?

LOUIE: Yes, I decided. But when I, even in the army I still took the correspondence course for mathematics.

LEVINE: And where did, where were you stationed in the army?

LOUIE: My station, first training, is Fort Dix, New Jersey.

After that transfer to the First Army Headquarters, but right now is the Governor's Island, New York. Just next to this island.

LEVINE: Yeah. So you, so you were stationed at Governor's Island?

LOUIE: Right. That's the First Army Headquarters. I stayed there for two years.

LEVINE: And what did you do there?

LOUIE: As a cook over there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what, what was going on there? What was the army doing at that time on Governor's Island?

LOUIE: Uh, it's not much activity by that time because at that, after Korean War, before Vietnam War. We don't do too much over there. But anyhow, you know, the military life, it really influenced, you know, my life.

LEVINE: It influenced your life?

LOUIE: Right. Some, you know, it seems more, you know, more organized and the, you know, just regulations, you know. It's good, you know, at least knows the

structure of the, you know.

LEVINE: You enjoyed your time in the army, did you?

LOUIE: Yes, I did enjoy.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, you were lucky to be between wars.

LOUIE: That's right. No war by that time. It's lucky, between wars.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, let's see. So then you came out of the army, and then what?

LOUIE: And, even when I was in the army I applied those planes, you know, available airplanes, went to Hong Kong to marry my wife.

LEVINE: Now, did you know your . . .

LOUIE: By that time it's 1959.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you were in . . .

LOUIE: I was still in the army.

LEVINE: You were still in the army.

LOUIE: Yeah, armed service.

LEVINE: When did you go in, actually? Do you remember when you were inducted into the army?

LOUIE: Uh, 1958.

LEVINE: Okay. So how did you know your wife?

LOUIE: Uh, introducing by my roommate.

LEVINE: Ah. Well, where did you meet? Where did you meet your wife?

LOUIE: The first meet is the, when I went to Hong Kong. But we did a lot of correspondence already to exchange the ideas, you know. (he laughs) Communicate, by letter.

LEVINE: Well, wait. Did you meet Mrs. Louie when you were in Hong Kong before you even came here when you were eighteen?

LOUIE: When I was eighteen I left Hong Kong.

LEVINE: Was that when you met your wife?

LOUIE: No, I didn't know her yet.

LEVINE: You didn't know her then.

LOUIE: No.

LEVINE: So then you came here, and it was your roommate that you had here.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: That introduced you.

LOUIE: Right.

LEVINE: By letter?

LOUIE: No. Not, yeah. After that, then by letter with her.

LEVINE: I see. So you corresponded?

LOUIE: Corresponded, yeah, weekly. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you got to know each other through letters, really.

LOUIE: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So when you were still in the army, you went to Hong Kong to get married.

LOUIE: Right. After marry, then maybe a couple of months finished my service for the active duty, two years. After completing two years, then for the reserve. But

I get an allowance after because I only have to go for the reserve on any camp because, you know, I marry already.

LEVINE: So then did you get your first full-time job after the service?

LOUIE: After, yes. Even, you know, by the time when I was in the army, I worked very hard, after hours, for the service in the army. I worked as a waiter in the officer's club in the army to, you know, earn a few bucks a day. And then I worked in Chinatown for Saturday and Sunday.

LEVINE: Oh, while you were still in the service you could do it on the weekend.

LOUIE: Even in the service. After the service, then I found my full-time job for, you know, in the restaurant as a waiter. I worked for a waiter, many years over there.

LEVINE: Were you, was that in Chinatown?

LOUIE: Not Chinatown. You know, somewhere around uptown, too. I got a full-time job at Ruby Foo before. That was a very famous restaurant in uptown.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, let's see. Then were you still living, were you living in Chinatown, or were you . . .

LOUIE: I still live in Chinatown but, you know, different building. You know, that's a new building built up not long ago.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, so how did, was this the first time that your wife had been in the United States, when she came here as your bride.

LOUIE: Yes, first time for her.

LEVINE: And did she like it?

LOUIE: She liked it.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

LOUIE: I'm wondering, she like, you know, the American food.

LEVINE: Yeah?

LOUIE: Yeah. Even Italian food. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, good. Now, do you have children?

LOUIE: Yes, I have.

LEVINE: What are your children's names?

LOUIE: Uh, I got three sons. The first one is a manager in the hardware store. The second one is working in the grocery as, you know, that stock, you know, or something like that, you know, the finances. And my third son is in school right now.

LEVINE: And what are your sons' names?

LOUIE: My first son is Andrew.

LEVINE: And your second?

LOUIE: The second one is Michael.

LEVINE: And the third.

LOUIE: The third one is James.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your wife's name?

LOUIE: Uh, Jenny Kyw Louie. K, in Chinese, K-Y-W Louie.

LEVINE: And what was your wife's maiden name?

LOUIE: Wan, W-A-N.

LEVINE: Let's see. So are there any historic events that happened during your lifetime that you remember and would say were particularly meaningful to you? Is

there anything that you can think of that happened in your life that was particularly meaningful that you remember?

LOUIE: Uh, I remember by that time is, you know, the hardest time is the, when I was, when I applied my wife over here, you know, had to look for a job and, you know, it's very hard to look for a full-time job by that time, you know. By that time, you know, I have to consider about, you know, looking around all like crazy. Then, you know, so many restaurants doesn't take me, so I still keep waiting for. One time, one day my uncle, you know, Louie, same family. So introduced me go over there, but I'm not sure go over there because, you know, it's the (?) for the last one is better restaurant, it's like the, like play politics over there. It's very easy (?) now. You mean for my life, or?

LEVINE: Well, I think also if there were . . .

LOUIE: Maybe I can i get your point about that.

LEVINE: Well, I was asking about, you know, historic events, like maybe when the second World War was over, do you remember where you were, or what happened, or maybe

some other event that, maybe a particular president being elected or anything like that that was particularly striking to you?

LOUIE: No, I think any striking to me, you know, because I was a young kid about that time. But I found myself, you know, it's very lucky. I, after I come to the United States I found out myself, you know, I'm still alive. You know, because by that time if you don't, way back to the second World War, about that time, if you're still alive, you're very lucky. Do I got your point?

LEVINE: Yes.

LOUIE: Yeah, that, you know. Yeah, I received that a lot of men my age, you know, has been gone already by that time.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you think coming here as an immigrant, were you prejudiced against at all because you were an immigrant in this country? Did you experience anything like that?

LOUIE: Well, I, you know, I think by that time, you know, when I come to, I think it's a lot of stuff, you know.

It's like too much paperwork by that time. And, very slow. Not busy at all. You know, sometimes, you know, the life is not as long as, you know. Sometimes it takes many years to, you know, to process, you know.

LEVINE: Well . . .

LOUIE: Maybe too much, or not enough people to work or . . .
(he laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, did you feel like being Chinese in this country had any drawbacks?

LOUIE: You mean . . .

LEVINE: Was it, did you feel that because you were Chinese somehow you didn't have as much opportunity or whatever?

LOUIE: I don't feel that way. I feel, you know. Sometimes maybe not fair, but not all.

LEVINE: Do you, when you look back on the fact that you came here, do you think that starting out in China and coming here made a big difference in the kind of person you are?

LOUIE: Yes, it's entirely different. After we, you know, I do what I want, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about, now, did you ever use your mathematics in your work life?

LOUIE: No, I never used at all when I worked. It's, not a point, not used at all, yeah. Anyhow, you know, you just got the theory, you know, got the idea, you know. All the things, you know, is smooth, you know.

LEVINE: You like efficiency, it sounds like.

LOUIE: Like efficiency, yeah.

LEVINE: And how about this period in your life? Is there anything that, I don't know, just ideas that you, that you have come to in your own life, that you would, that you would, that you would mention? Is there anything about this period in your life that's different for you?

LOUIE: Yes. You know, it's a little different after, you know. Yeah. After I started work, right, I earned my money, you know, I saved the money. I, you know, I do something for, you know, with the, got a group of friends, you know, organizing to form a cooperation

for the, you know, to be restaurants.

LEVINE: So you feel like you've had a happy and productive work life?

LOUIE: Yes, I like it.

LEVINE: Good. Okay. Is there any advice you would give to an immigrant coming here today based on your experience?

Like, if someone were to come here today from China and be new to the United States, is there anything you would say to them to be helpful to them?

LOUIE: Yeah. I tried to, you know, explain to them, you know, as, used my experience, you know, fight for the life, you know, how to, you know. But first of all, you know, you have to work hard on this. That's why I advise them, you know. And if you, no matter where you work at, loyalty. So that would be, no matter what, maybe later will be success.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, maybe that's a good point to stop on, unless there's something further you'd like to say before we close. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

LOUIE: Well, that's why, you know, as the beginning, you

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know, I still like the United States the best. Wish the United States forever keeping freedom and liberty to all.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much. This has been a most interesting talk. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's May 25, 1993, and I've been speaking with Thomas Louie, who came from China in 1950 when he was eighteen, and we are in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio, and we'll be signing off now.

END OF INTERVIEW