

**Cheng-Khee Chee
Sing Bee Ong
Narrators**

**Sarah Mason
Interviewer**

**July 12, 1979
Duluth, Minnesota**

Sarah Mason -**SM**
Cheng-Khee Chee -**CC**
Sing Bee Ong -**SO**

SM: I'm talking to Cheng-Khee Chee in Duluth, Minnesota on July 12, 1979. This is an interview conducted under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society and the interviewer is Sarah Mason.

Maybe you want to tell us first a little bit about your early life and where you came from?

CC: Hmmm, well . . . [chuckles]. Yes. I was born in China. [Unclear – a biography states Fengting but it doesn't sound like that is what he says here – the name may have been changed at some point?], China in Fujian Province. And do you want a date? [Chuckles]

SM: Yes. [Chuckles]

CC: I can never set the date straight. [Laughter]

SM: Oh. It's a different calendar. [Chuckles]

CC: Well, legal date, yes, it's January 14, 1933.

SM: Oh.

CC: It's a little bit different from the actual birthdate, but let's let it go that [unclear]. [Laughter]

SM: Just so we have a date.

CC: Yes. Yes. Actually, it should be 1934, that's the actual date, but the thing is that when I went to Malaysia, and they asked me, "How old are you?" Now, the Chinese way, you see, when you are born you are a year old.

SM: Oh.

CC: So when I say how old I was at that time, then they automatically put, you know, just count then and put it down, that year.

SM: Oh.

CC: But, you see, every document gets 1933. So I've got legal age as 1933, the actual age is I was born in 1934. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, I see. That's an interesting [unclear].

CC: Yes. Yes.

SO: And now he is an old man now.

[Laughter]

CC: I'm an old man, so . . .

SM: Aged you by a year!

CC: I don't care! [Laughter]

SM: When did you go to Malaysia?

CC: I went to Malaysia in 1948.

SM: I see.

CC: After the Second World War. Yes.

SM: Well I . . . I don't want to jump through your childhood. [Chuckles]

CC: Yes. Yes. Well, I did go to grade school in China, you know, so I had . . . how many years in China? So I spent about thirteen years or so in China. So I still have pretty clear memories.

SM: Oh, sure.

CC: You know, of things there.

SM: Right. Yes.

CC: And of course it's been over thirty years now. [Chuckles]

SM: Where in Fujian were you from?

CC: It's close to [unclear].

SM: Oh.

CC: [Unclear]. But actually, my district is called Xieng Yu.

SM: Xieng Yu?

CC: I suppose you can transliterate this as I-E-N-G, Y-U, or something like that.

SM: Okay.

CC: Xieng Yu.

SM: Yes.

CC: District. Fujian Province.

SM: I see. And what was your family background there?

CC: Farm. Farming.

SM: Yes.

CC: Yes.

SM: I see.

CC: I was born on a farm. But I didn't do much work because I went to school, you know. And there's respect, you know, this is a Chinese family tradition. When you send a kid to school, you know, you treat them as a scholar.

SM: Ah.

CC: Yes. So no dirty farm work. [Laughter] So I was just kind of lucky that way.

SM: Yes.

CC: Well, but I'd still, you know, tend to cows and, you know, do small things like that.

SM: Yes. I see.

CC: But not manual labor, you know, working on a farm like a farm hand, that type of thing.

SM: Were you the first son of your family? Or were there others?

CC: Well, I'm the youngest son in the family.

SM: The youngest son. Yes.

CC: Yes.

SM: Was that a big family?

CC: Yes, we have a big family. Let's see. I have three sisters and four brothers. By Chinese standards, it's not that large. You know, it's probably just medium-sized [chuckles] I would say.

SM: And then did you continue your education there?

CC: I finished up to fourth grade or so.

SM: Oh.

CC: Or fifth grade, I don't remember, something like that. Because when I go to Malaysia I have to study in the fifth grade, you know.

SM: I see.

CC: So I think I finished part of the fifth grade in China. So I studied the last two years of grade school in Malaysia. My hometown is Penang. P-E-N-A-N-G. Penang, Malaysia.

SM: Panang?

CC: P-E-N-A-N-G.

SM: I see.

CC: Malaysia. M-A-L-A-Y-S-I-A.

SM: Your whole family went there?

CC: Ah . . . yes, well, just part of them. Part of the family. I would still have some brothers and sisters who were married stayed in China.

SM: I see. And was that . . . did they move there because of the Communist regime?

CC: Ah . . . not because of that. I think it used, traditionally, you know, Fujian Province and Guangdong Province are very rugged, you know, hilly provinces. And life was pretty tough, you

know. So it's [unclear] that traditionally those people from those two places, you know, migrate to . . . immigrate to Southeast Asia.

SM: Yes.

CC: And many Cantonese people, of course, came to the United States. Maybe because of the major ports like Canton and [unclear] have a lot of early contacts with the foreign countries, so a lot of people immigrated to Southeast Asia. Same thing of our family moved to Malaysia. But of course before the government changed in China, you could go back and forth, you know, freely.

SM: Yes. Yes.

CC: When China changed government, and then because of the political differences, Malaysia and, you know, it was . . . it is part of the free world. And while [unclear] China of course is under the Social system, Socialist system. So because of the political differences, we couldn't, you know, visit or go back and forth freely as we were before. So that's why we pretty much settled down in Malaysia.

SM: I see. Yes. Are they . . . the rest of your family still there?

CC: Ah . . . in Malaysia.

SM: Yes.

CC: And I still have brothers in China.

SM: I see. So how did you happen to come to the United States?

CC: Well, I . . . of course, when I went to Malaysia and then of course I continued my education. You know, I finished my high school in my hometown, Penang. I regard it as my hometown, you know. Penang, although it's not the place I was born, there I regard it as my hometown, Penang.

SM: Yes.

CC: And then I went to college in Singapore. Nanyang University.

SM: Nanyang?

CC: N-A-N-Y-A-N-G. Nanyang. Nanyang means "southern seas" in Chinese.

SM: Was this a Chinese university?

CC: This is a . . . initially, yes, it was established by overseas Chinese. The university was established because a student could not . . . high school graduates could not go to China. Now, normally they could go to China for higher education.

SM: Yes.

CC: And then people attending say English high schools, they could go to England and Australia or [another] foreign country for education. But people who go to high school, a Chinese high school, had no place for them to go. Traditionally, they would go to China, you know.

SM: Yes. Oh, it was a recently established . . .

CC: For higher education, yes. But because they could not do it, and . . . the overseas Chinese felt that they should have a higher . . . an institute of higher education for them to go for further studies.

SM: I see.

CC: That's the initial idea, you know, that the university wants to have established.

SM: Yes.

CC: And now, of course, that university has become a national university of Singapore, one of the national universities of Singapore. So initially . . .

SM: So it's not in Chinese anymore or . . . ?

CC: Well, initially, of course, the medium of instruction was in Chinese. You know, basically in Chinese. But now it's English and even Malay.

SM: Oh wow.

CC: Yes. The Malaysian language now is, you know . . . and English. Both are used as mediums of instruction. Not just a simply Chinese university, you know.

SM: Yes. But some are given in Chinese and English, too?

CC: Certainly, yes.

SM: Ah.

CC: Like Chinese language and literature, maybe even geography, history, you know, more in the humanities area. But it has been all along bilingual, you know.

SM: Yes.

CC: Many textbooks on science and technology, you know, are actually textbooks imported from the United States or Great Britain.

SM: Yes. I think that's true in Europe as well.

CC: Yes. Yes.

SM: [Unclear.]

CC: And then I will go back to the question why . . . the reason why I came to the United States. Now after I graduated from Nanyang University, there was a need for trained . . . or for so-called professional librarians. And you know how . . . there was a great shortage at that time.

SM: In Asia?

CC: In Asia and particularly in Southeast Asia.

SM: I see.

CC: For trained librarians.

SM: Yes.

CC: That's what I . . . [coughs] Excuse me. I came here for professional training in library science.

SM: I see.

CC: And I applied to . . . I believe three universities or so. And Minnesota Library School was the first one to accept me, so I decided to come here. The reason, of course, I had two friends who came here a year before me.

SM: Ah.

CC: Ahead of me. So, you know, you always go to someplace where you have some friends. [Chuckles]

SO: Yes.

CC: In case of [chuckles] emergency or something, you'll feel more comfortable.

SM: I see. And that was in . . . what year was that?

CC: That was in 1962, September 1962. So I started library school in the fall, fall quarter.

SM: Oh, I see. How did you like the university? [Chuckles]

CC: Well, I didn't . . . There is . . . traditionally, there's a lot of Chinese students in the University of Minnesota. Always Midwest, Big Ten, particularly the Big Ten universities in the Midwest had very large numbers of Chinese students. And it's very well known.

SM: Is it?

CC: Minnesota, yes. University of Minnesota is very well known or familiar among the Chinese students.

SM: Yes. Even overseas Chinese students have heard of it, too.

CC: Yes. Yes.

SM: Hmmm.

CC: And I finished my library degree, my master's degree, in 1964. You know, it took me two years to finish the degree. Normally you see people would finish it the full American string they probably would finish in a year or year and a half or something like that, but because I didn't have any library courses before, so I had to take some prerequisites, the so-called five prerequisite courses, that took me out, you know, more than a quarter or so.

SM: Sure. Yes.

CC: So it took me a little longer to finish that.

SM: And then you came here immediately after?

CC: Well, I was going to continue, the Ph.D. program in education. I thought, you know, I had that, and then I would like to get another degree in education administration. And somehow, I don't know why, I tried it a quarter or so, and I don't . . . I hate to say that I don't like them, but . . . [Laughter] Simply say that, well, I . . . you know, I . . .

SM: Changed your mind? [Chuckles]

CC: I changed my mind. So . . . there was an opening up in Duluth at that time.

SM: I see.

CC: And now initially of course I would like to go back, that's probably my reason of coming here, for training and then go back to the home university, Nanyang University, to work there as a librarian.

SM: Oh. Yes.

CC: But before I went back at that time I thought that it would be good, you know, like [unclear] advisor that you stay a year and a half that's allowed by the U.S. government immigration law for practical training.

SM: Yes.

CC: You know, because I'd never worked in a library before. I worked in a library before I came as a . . . not as a professional librarian, you know.

SM: Yes.

CC: But it would be good to have after the training and get some experience to see how a library operates in this country would be helpful, you know, back home.

SM: Yes. Yes.

CC: And well, I was going to go home and why I didn't go home. [Laughter]

SM: That's the big question. [Chuckles]

CC: Well, I think the main thing was that . . . about two years or so later . . . well, one part, of course, you know, I liked the work here very much. And people here liked me. And at that time, even in the United States, you know, there was still a shortage of librarians.

SM: Yes.

CC: You know, I think about fifteen years ago. So I liked the job very much and they pretty much wanted me to stay.

SM: Yes.

CC: And I think that there is . . . there was a minor racial conflict, you know, in Malaysia at that time.

SM: Oh.

CC: You know, [unclear], many regions [unclear].

SM: Oh, I see. Yes.

CC: it was the same, a country like the United States, with many different races. And there was a racial conflict.

SM: Between the Chinese and the Malaysians?

CC: Between the Chinese and Malaysians then. It's unfortunate we have to, you know, talk about this kind of thing, but that was the fact then. That was [unclear] then.

SM: Yes.

CC: So both now . . . Bee was . . . Bee came, I think, about a year later, you know, when I'd started working here and then she came. Well, initially, she was coming to study education, for a master's degree in education.

SM: At Duluth?

CC: At the Duluth campus.

SM: Yes.

CC: Yes, in Duluth that was.

SM: I see.

SO: [Unclear] I didn't finish it.

SM: You didn't finish it?

SO: [Laughter] It didn't matter; then we had a child.

SM: [Chuckles] I see.

CC: We . . .

SO: Expecting the first baby then.

CC: We got married in that fall.

SO: Three quarters. I studied three quarters then I [unclear].

CC: Mmmm.

SM: Well, at least you got in three quarters.

SO: [Laughter]

SM: I see. Well, maybe we should just interrupt a minute to find out why you came and how did you happen to pick Minnesota?

SO: See, we knew each other in the college there, see.

SM: Oh, I see. There was a connection before.

SO: Yes.

SM: Oh, in Malaysia or . . . ?

SO: Nanyang, Nanyang University.

SM: Oh, I see.

CC: Yes. We went to the same university.

SM: I see. So you came because he was here then?

SO: Yes. I was teaching there and he was . . . he came. I was training . . . I studied for my teaching diploma in education.

SM: I see.

SO: For two years.

CC: We went to the same university and graduated at the same time.

SO: Same time.

SM: I see.

CC: I came over here for my training in the . . . well, I worked a year and a half before I came here for library training. And she was teaching in Singapore.

SM: I see.

CC: And at a certain time, she was working on her teaching certificate . . . diploma, they call it diploma in education.

SO: In education.

SM: Yes.

CC: To qualify you as a teacher.

SO: And I think in other universities.

CC: In the University of Singapore.

SM: I see.

CC: There are two universities in Singapore.

SO: Then I got my diploma, and then I quit teaching and came here to marry him.

[Laughter]

SM: I see. Once you got all certified. Once you got the diploma.

[Laughter]

CC: What a waste!

SM: Oh, I don't know.

SO: What a waste I've been. [Laughter]

SM: Oh someday the children will grow up. [Chuckles]

SO: Studied real hard and got my diploma and came here and married.

[Laughter]

CC: Teaching is . . . teaching and struggling with all that . . . diploma in education and then she decided to come here.

SM: Oh, I see. And so what year was that now?

SO: 1965.

SM: 1965. And then you married in the same year?

CC: Yes, we were married in August.

SO: August. August 28th.

CC: August the . . . 28th, yes.

SO: See, he would forget it.

SM: [Chuckles]

CC: Yes, really.

SM: [Chuckles] They always do.

CC: I waited until I had a summer vacation.

[Laughter]

CC: So that at least you can have, if not a honeymoon a honeymoon or something.

[Laughter]

CC: Now when you first started working here you were very careful about this kind of thing, you know.

SM: Yes, yes. Had the time off all the time. Yes.

SO: We really like it here.

CC: Yes.

SM: Did you?

SO: The first time I came here and people were so nice to me.

SM: Oh, really? Yes.

SO: You know, really friendly.

SM: So you felt really well received.

SO: Yes. Yes.

CC: Yes.

SM: Oh, that's nice.

SO: Although the weather was tough for me. [Laughter]

SM: Even for Minnesotans. I'm from Saint Louis and . . .

[Laughter]

SO: Oh [unclear].

CC: Summarize my story?

SM: Yes. Yes, it was a shock to me to come up here, too.

SO: Well, the first year when I was here, oh, a lot of snow. I haven't forgotten . . .

SM: Isn't there every year? Or was that worse?

CC: Oh, well, it was a severe year, I think. Severe winter.

SO: Oh, yes. Yes. I've still got a picture.

SM: Oh, I see. [Chuckles]

SO: I sent home.

SM: Oh. Was that pretty hard to get used to for you, too?

SO: Ah . . . not really.

SM: Not so bad.

SO: I think the second year I feel better.

SM: Oh.

SO: The first year was tough.

SM: Yes. [Chuckles]

CC: Well, you can adjust to these kinds of things, you know. You . . . you . . .

SO: [Unclear.]

CC: You're more than compensated with other things, you know. People are very warm and that compensates for the cold weather.

SO: Yes, people are very nice. [Chuckles] Very friendly.

SM: Do you think there's a connection? [Laughter] Cold weather, warm people? [Laughter]

SO: Yes.

SM: Do you think Minnesota is really a good place for immigrant people?

CC: I . . . I think so. I think people . . . although I haven't been to many other states, but from what I've heard . . .

SM: Yes.

CC: Well, I think it's because we have a large number of Scandinavian immigrants or whatever people tend to . . . you know, I don't know, it's now . . . and I think it must be, you know, a certain amount of truth that people are more liberal, you know, receiving people. I don't know, maybe it's a bias now, I haven't been to many other states.

SO: [Chuckles] [Unclear.]

CC: I probably shouldn't make that kind of statement. [Chuckles]

SM: Well, a lot of people have said that.

CC: Yes. I think I really like Minnesota.

SO: Quite friendly.

SO: We have a friend, she moved out . . . to out of state. And she still likes it here.

SM: Does she?

CC: Yes. Yes.

SO: Yes, she always mentioned the people here are different to other states.

SM: Oh.

CC: Yes.

SO: So friendly. Whenever you go out, you know, you don't know them. They will say, "Hi," or "Good day," or something like that.

SM: Yes.

CC: Yes.

SM: Is she Chinese, too?

CC: Yes. Yes.

SO: She's also Chinese.

CC: Yes, in fact, a few Chinese families [unclear] just moved to Florida and you know they feel that it's quite different.

SO: Her parents are still here.

SM: Oh. Oh, and her parents stayed here then.

CC: Yes.

SM: Oh. Were there more families here before? Have a number moved out or . . . ?

CC: Ah . . .

SM: Your acquaintances among the Chinese families.

CC: No . . . I think . . .

SO: Two moved out.

CC: Two, yes.

SM: Two have moved.

CC: As far as we know. That's because of the job, you know.

SM: Yes.

CC: When you change the job, you move.

SM: Yes, right.

CC: Yes.

SM: Are there others at the university?

CC: There is a family, yes. A Dr. Moy Fook Gum. M-O-Y, F-O-O-K, G-U-M.

SO: Yes, Hawaiian.

CC: G-U-M. Dr. Gum.

SM: Oh. He's Chinese from Hawaii?

CC: Chinese from Hawaii, yes.

SM: Oh, I see. What does he teach?

CC: He's a professor in psychology.

SM: I see.

CC: Psychology department.

SM: Has he been here a long time?

CC: Oh, he's been here . . . yes, longer than I am.

SM: Oh.

CC: At the university.

SM: I see.

CC: Well, I think he started . . . he started as a school counselor, yes, in . . . with the school, with the Duluth school district.

SM: Oh. He started . . . ?

CC: He started here as a counselor. I believe so.

SM: Oh, I see.

CC: And, you know, meantime he was working towards a Ph.D. He got his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago.

SM: Oh.

CC: And he started teaching at UMD. I don't know exactly what year, but I know that he was here when I came.

SM: I see. Well, where does your art interest come in here?

CC: Well, I always enjoyed painting. I've always liked to paint, you know, since grade school years. And I did a lot, grade schools, high schools, and in college years. Although I've never been to an art school or taken any formal art courses.

SM: Oh, I see.

CC: You know, that wasn't just . . . you know, there wasn't such a thing. In a university now of course in school, in high school, you have some, you know, art classes, maybe one class a

quarter or something like that in junior high, nothing in senior high. People just don't pay much attention to art or music. You know, you don't want to . . .

SM: Hmmm.

CC: So basically now, since . . . because I was very interested in it and worked very hard on my own, now I basically paint watercolor.

SM: Ah ha.

CC: There is also a reason for that. British . . . you know, England used to be very good in watercolor painting. And it was . . . Malaysia was a British colony for over a hundred years, you know, so I had the very strong influence in that. And in my hometown, Penang, there were two very nice, very good, outstanding watercolorists.

SM: Oh.

CC: You know, this whole influence on us as kids. And we subscribed to British art magazines and so on. This particular one, a magazine called *The Artist* that has always featured a page in watercolor painting, instructional type of article, you know, with nice color reproductions of watercolors and so on. That's how I got interested in that. I did a lot of paintings. In high school years we had . . . we had a so-called art society. I was a founder of that. [Laughter] Of the art society. We had a core of a dozen or so people who were very interested in that. And just went out painting after school, you know, day after day.

SM: Really.

CC: Right.

SM: Even though it wasn't encouraged much [unclear] in school.

CC: It wasn't encouraged, but because of the environment, I think.

SO: Yes.

SM: Oh.

CC: The community environment, the fact that we had two very outstanding watercolorists in the community.

SM: Oh. Well, did they take an interest in these high school students?

CC: Ah . . . they really don't. I don't know. They don't . . . but, you know, they are an influence on that, you know, their success stories and so on.

SO: As models.

CC: Encouraged the young people to get into that. [Chuckles]

SM: I see.

CC: And I don't know, many newspapers, you always read about these, you know, their painting is now entered or accepted by a salon in France and this kind of thing, you know. Art galleries, and where a show . . . some sort of a success story always encourages you to into that area. [Chuckles]

SM: Ah. So there were five or so high school students interested in that.

CC: Yes. Yes. And then, of course, my interest in that also, now though I don't have formal training, but I have the training in brushwork. You know, the Chinese students, they started very early, you know. As soon as they started school, they start to learn how to write with a brush. You know, we call it calligraphy. That's very good training for painting.

SM: Yes, that would be a good background for that.

SO: Yes.

CC: Yes. How to paint with a brush. So it's natural that you could draw with a brush, you know. And of course calligraphy itself is an art form, a pure art form.

SM: Yes.

CC: Yes. In traditional Chinese painting, actually, you know, it's almost inseparable.

SM: Yes.

CC: To the painting and calligraphy. You have to have good calligraphy, you know, to do good painting or vice versa.

SM: Have you studied Chinese art particularly or not particularly?

CC: I think from the very beginning I worked on both, on Western-style watercolor and then sometimes on my own I would do Chinese style watercolor.

SM: Oh.

CC: You know, and they're both basically watercolor, you know, water-based in contrast with paint, the oil paint.

SM: Oh, I see.

CC: So actually the other . . . essentially, the same kind of medium.

SM: Yes.

CC: Watercolor, water-based medium. The only difference is the emphasis . . . Oriental painting, of course, emphasizes on brushwork, brush technique, while Western painting maybe you emphasize more on . . . on light/dark, contrast, shapes, and that type of thing.

SM: Yes.

CC: You know, shading, [unclear], line drawing. But I've been doing it, you know, simultaneously. Both. And even now I've been doing the same kind of thing. Sometimes I get tired of one type, one type of painting and I will switch to the other.

SM: Hmmm. Well, after you've lived here fifteen years, do you feel more Western? [Chuckles] Does this come out in your painting?

CC: Well, I think it's . . . it might not be true. It might be half and half. And this is, I think, it's . . . it's my aim, and I think I'm probably aiming in creating some sort of style of my own that will combine both East and West. Now, probably later on I will show you some paintings that I, you know, to prove that that is the kind of thing that I'm aiming at.

SM: That would be nice.

CC: You know, I was . . . now I'm something that's East and that's West, and that's neither East and neither West, but yet both traditions can be seen in that. And I think that it's . . . reflects myself, you know. My idea or even my speech, you know, my English has a Chinese accent and if I speak Chinese now I might have some American accent or add in a few American words because you might not find words ready to translate into Chinese.

SM: Yes.

CC: So now I'm eating Chinese food but I also like steaks and . . . [Chuckles]

SO: And burgers.

CC: And burgers and other things.

SM: Yes.

CC: I drink tea and at the same time I drink coffee.

SM: [Chuckles]

SO: Yes.

CC: And other drinks, Coke and so on.

SO: He likes Coke better than tea now.

[Laughter]

SO: Now we hear it!

[Laughter]

SM: Well, it's interesting to wonder how this will be with your children now. Are they going to be more Western or more Chinese? [Chuckles]

CC: Well, definitely they are more American.

SM: They are.

CC: Definitely, yes.

SO: But they know how to speak Mandarin Chinese.

SM: Do they? Oh.

SO: Oh, yes.

CC: And I think that's probably the way it should be, you know. You are here and you have to be more of that. Of course, the only thing is that you shouldn't forget your cultural heritage.

SM: Right.

CC: And that's the main thing. You know, we are here and we are Americans and certainly, you know, these probably . . . they will be the main thing. Other things now, we certainly wanted to trace our cultural heritage. You know, we . . . some traditional values and so on, we would like to teach our kids. Other than that, we have, you know . . .

SO: [Unclear.]

SM: Yes. But you happen to know their roots and so on?

CC: Yes.

SO: Yes.

CC: And that, I think, is important. I think we're enriched now. You know, American culture is so rich because we pull all these cultures together. The Chinese has only the Chinese culture, while American has Chinese and what now, European, East, West, all kind of things here.

SM: That's true. Well, what about in the way you bring up your children or the structure of your family? Has that changed to a somewhat Western style or would you be living in a somewhat different way if you were . . . or bringing up your children in a different way if you were living in Malaysia or China?

CC: I'd probably . . . one thing, it wouldn't be that much different.

SM: Probably pretty much the same?

CC: Yes. Now, Malaysia...yes, as I mentioned before, was a British colony.

SM: Oh, sure.

CC: You know, for so long.

SM: Yes.

CC: And in many ways has been Westernized. And the fact that there are so many different people living in Malaysia.

SM: Yes.

CC: And by the pure Chinese standard, you know, we are not so pure. Because, you know, you've got a different kind of idea, and, you see, that's a change. Now we came to the United States. That's another change. You see, so I don't know how much it's changed.

SM: Yes, so you were pretty Westernized already.

SO: [Chuckles]

CC: Pretty Westernized.

SM: Yes. I see. Well, are some of your other relatives here? Parents or uncles or . . . ?

CC: No. We don't.

SM: It's just the . . .

CC: Just the . . . my immediate family.

SM: Yes. I see. Well, what about your background before you went to Malaysia? Were you from Fujian, too?

SO: My parents are still in Malaysia.

SM: Oh, your parents went, too.

SO: Yes. They are still in Malaysia.

CC: She was born in Malaysia.

SM: Oh.

SO: Yes, I've never been to China. [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, you haven't been to China. So you started out Westernized. [Chuckles]

SO: Yes.

SM: I see. I see, so you were born there.

SO: Yes.

SM: What year were you born there? Or do you want to say?

[Laughter]

CC: Oh, we went to the same school, you can sort of guess. [Chuckles] About the same, it should be close.

SM: Okay. [Chuckles] I see. So you've lived in Malaysia then all your childhood.

SO: Yes.

SM: Yes. Was that a pretty traditional Chinese family or had they begun to change somewhat?

SO: We were pretty traditional Chinese.

SM: Oh, yes. You spoke Chinese at home?

SO: Yes. Yes. I have five brothers and four sisters.

SO: That's a big family.

SM: I see. Yes. Well, what about, for instance, the kinds of things you would want for your children or how you'd want them to do at school and this kind of thing. Would you have pretty much the same goals as your parents would have for you?

CC: That is . . . I would say yes, we respect a great deal about learning and we really want them to do *well* in school just like my parents expected me to do so, and I think I tried pretty hard. Yes. [Chuckles] And we're very happy that my kids are doing, you know, doing very well.

SO: Yes, all doing very well. Yes.

SM: Yes.

SO: Even this one is not in school yet but . . . she knows.

SM: You can tell she *will* do well.

SO: Yes, she knows her mathematics, plus and minus.

SM: Oh.

CC: Yes, her brothers and sisters, they are teaching her.

SO: And she's [unclear].

SM: Yes.

SO: And she can spell out a few words already, [Chuckles]

CC: [Chuckles]

SM: Oh, that's wonderful.

SO: And violin.

CC: Yes, she plays the violin.

SM: A person of many talents.

SO: You want to play for them? Later, hmmm? [Chuckles]

CC: Later on, yes? If they've got the time.

SM: Will she play for us?

CC: Now, they've had a long day. [Chuckles]

SM: I bet it would be nice if she played for us. [Chuckles] Well, maybe we should . . . we would like to see some of your paintings.

CC: Yes. Yes.

SM: That would be nice.

CC: Maybe if you want I can give you some background, how I get these starting.

SM: Yes.

CC: When I came to library school, and then of course, you know, you are in a new environment and, you know, you hope to be successful in your own studies, so I didn't do anything then. And then I came up here to work. You know, when you're first starting on a new job, and particularly in a new country and you want to be very conscientious about that and so on. I didn't do any painting, or maybe an occasional painting, until 1973. And then I took a watercolor painting workshop at UMD offered by the art department. It was a six credit intensive type of workshop, watercolor workshop.

SM: Yes.

CC: I had a very good instructor from Utah State University. And I think that that got me started again, you know.

SM: Yes.

CC: I was very enthusiastic about that. So after that workshop I started to paint very regularly. But of course when you are working, you see, the most you can do is on the weekends.

SM: Yes.

CC: So I had to paint on Saturday, I had to paint on Sunday. Sometimes at night I would do some studies, you know. But my main painting time would be on Saturday or on Sunday. And that's about all. I wouldn't be able to do it during the daytime except maybe on holidays and so on.

SM: Yes.

CC: So my . . . the *major* part of my spare time, that's always spent in painting. That or painting-related things. Also studying other people's paintings or studying art theories and that type of thing.

SM: Yes.

CC: So basically I'm a self-taught artist.

SM: Yes.

CC: I think that the real encouragement or real boost came in 1975. My first painting was accepted by the American Watercolor Society Annual Show. And I was very happy about that because it's a very keen competition, it's a national show, you know. A lot of people wanted to get in, in the show. So that was a real moral boost, so you know, from then on, then of course, you know, you pursue one step ahead. You know, wanted to be . . . to work even harder. And of course then I think that year I was . . . that's a very important year to me. I had one painting, as I said, accepted by the American Watercolor Society.

SO: [Unclear]

CC: Another painting accepted by . . . yes, that was also selected to travel the country for a year.

SM: Oh. Hmmm.

CC: And I had another painting accepted by Watercolor USA. It's a . . . that is another show that is sponsored by Springfield Art Museum in Missouri.

SM: Mmmm.

CC: So it was also a national show that was a very keen, competitive type show, juried show. And the same year I had . . .

SO: Calendar.

CC: . . . my painting published in Northwestern Bell calendar.

SM: Oh.

CC: So that was a . . . that was really a good year for me.

SM: Yes. That was 1975?

CC: It all happened in 1975. Of course, I have other paintings in other regional shows and so on, but those are all the national competitions, so . . .

SM: I see.

CC: So as you see that I'm getting, you know, more serious, although it's . . . you know, just first national recognition, but I . . . I was more serious about, you know, painting my artwork.

SM: Yes.

CC: And then from then on, now as of now I have three paintings accepted by the American Watercolor Society Annual Show.

SM: Oh. Was that recently?

CC: 1978.

SO: Last year and this year.

CC: And this year, 1979.

SM: Oh.

CC: It was two years in a row. So I'm eligible for membership, now I'm qualified for membership. To be a member of the American Watercolor Society you have to have at least three paintings accepted by the Society's annual show. And then you can apply for it. Now, it does not mean that you will automatically become a member, you know, you will still have to wait until you . . . your work is judged again and be elected. You know, be elected to the membership.

SM: I see.

SO: All three paintings were traveling.

SM: Oh.

CC: They were all selected to travel the country for a year.

SM: Oh. I see.

CC: So also I . . . you know, I have found each year since, well, 1973, I have been at state shows, now every year that's the state fair, there's a fine arts exhibition I have. So I have many, many paintings in . . .

SO: Bicentennial. You won.

CC: [Laughter] I don't know if we want to go into all that detail or not. [Chuckles]

SM: Sure, why not.

CC: And I don't . . . I didn't even ask how much time you have. [Chuckles]

SM: We have plenty of time.

CC: [Chuckles]

SM: You won a prize [unclear]?

CC: Well, I think that I won a pretty important award that was in 1976.

SO: Rocky Mountain.

CC: The show was called Rocky Mountain . . .

SO: National.

CC: National Water Media Exhibition. And that's one of the most important watercolor . . . national watercolor shows. And that was the bicentennial year, and they . . . the Colorado, yes, also was the Colorado centennial year.

SM: Mmmm.

CC: So they give an award entitled Colorado Centennial Award. And I think that's probably the third highest award in the show. And I was very happy that that was . . .

SM: Oh.

CC: That was probably one of the first important awards I received.

SM: That's quite an honor.

CC: Yes.

SO: Did you lock your car?

SM: Not the front part of it, I guess.

SO: Did you have something important in there?

SM: I think the important things are in the trunk, aren't they? Is there anything else in the front? Yes, I think it's all in the trunk.

SO: Because I'm worried right now. Our neighbor across the street one time, their son parked their car there and somebody took something out of it.

SM: Oh. I think there's nothing in the main part.

CC: I think it's alright. I don't think [unclear]. These are the major things. I think I had a second painting published by Northwestern Bell Company. That was in 1978. Yes, 1978, that's correct.

So all of these things, you know, create some publicity to this town, that recognition, so I had people asking me to do watercolor workshops, teaching watercolors and all kinds of things. That's how I got into it. I taught [unclear] the first course in watercolor painting I taught was last spring quarter.

SM: Oh, you're teaching art here now, too.

CC: I'm also teaching, yes. I'm a full time librarian but at the same time, because of my artwork and my recognition nationally, so I was asked by the art department to teach a course in watercolor painting last spring quarter.

SM: I see.

CC: And it looks like that I'm going to be teaching continuously one course per quarter from now on.

SM: Oh, in addition to your full time here.

CC: In addition to my [unclear] library work. Of course, I. . . I was allowed to take the time off to teach in the classroom.

SM: Oh, I see. So it's . . .

CC: But preparation and so on is still, you know, out of my own time.

SM: Yes.

CC: It certainly takes up some of my painting time, but I think it's worth it, because you . . . when you teach you tend to be more careful and you study more, you're more analytical.

SM: Yes.

CC: You learn a lot from students and from the teaching experience. And more so that you have to keep up with the development, what is new in the field.

SM: Oh, yes.

SO: What kinds of things do you prefer to paint?

CC: Basically, I would say, mostly landscapes. But I tend to try to broaden. I paint also flowers and so on, sometimes. Animals and so on. But by and large I would say mostly landscape or cityscape.

SM: Yes.

CC: Yes.

SO: Let's show them some paintings. And let me make some tea.

CC: Yes.

SM: Oh, that's very nice of you. Well, I . . .

SO: There's our friend's painting.

CC: That's a friend of mine from Pittsburgh.

SO: [Unclear]

CC: Frank [unclear]. He's a good watercolorist, yes. He came last . . . a year ago. Or 1977, to the Midwest Watercolor Society Exhibition that was held at the Tweed Museum, the Tweed Museum at the University. And he came to do a demonstration for the members. And this was a demonstration painting.

SM: Oh.

SO: Oh.

SO: And he brought it and touched it up.

CC: He took it home and touched it up and sent it back to me.

SM: That's amazing.

CC: I wish very happy luck for the Chee family, or something like that.

SM: Yes. Nicely [unclear].

CC: With affection, or something. [Chuckles]

SM: Yes, that was very nice.

CC: He returned early this spring to do another demonstration. So we became very good friends now. It's a very nice painting.

SM: Yes. Well, maybe we could take a look at some of your . . .

CC: I will show you, yes, some of the work then.

SM: Well, thank you.