

TEMPE HISTORICAL MUSEUM  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #: OH-295  
NARRATOR: Arlene Chin  
INTERVIEWER: Aaron Monson  
DATE: September 3, 2008

AC = Arlene Chin  
INT = Interviewer  
\_\_\_\_\_ = Unintelligible  
(Italics) = Transcriber's notes

Side A

INT: Today is September 3, 2008, and we are at the Tempe Historical Museum with Arlene Chin to do a pluralism renovation interview. So let's go ahead and get started. I'd like to begin by asking you when and where you were born?

AC: I was born in San Francisco, California, February 3, 1965.

INT: And who was the first member of your family to come to Tempe, or the Valley if they didn't come directly to Tempe, and when?

AC: My father actually immigrated to San Francisco, he was the first member of my family, he was fifteen when he went to San Francisco. So we assembled there in San Francisco, and I moved to Arizona when I was eight years old, so '73? Yes, 1973. And I came with my immediate family, my mother and my father; my older brother stayed in San Francisco for about a year or so before he joined us.

INT: So your father came to the U.S. when he was fifteen. What year was that?

AC: 1938. He came through Angel Island (*Immigration Station*), which is a whole 'nother oral history project.

INT: Yes, I know quite a bit about Angel Island. They came from San Francisco; what was your parents' motivation for settling here? What kind of work did they do?

AC: They actually . . . and I think I have to talk about what he did in San Francisco for many years. My father owned a grocery store and ran the grocery store, primarily by himself, for about eighteen years, a small little grocery store in what is now a very popular place, in Noe Valley, that area of San Francisco. He was ready to sell it. My parents met some

people, and they talked to my parents about opening up a Chinese restaurant. Actually, we came to Phoenix first, and lived there for, I want to say less than a year, I'm a little bit fuzzy on the dates and the timeframe, but it was about a year or less, in Phoenix. And then we came out to Tempe, at a time when Tempe was booming and growing. So they came out here for business, to open a business.

INT: And when you moved to the Valley, to get a little more specific, since you first mentioned Phoenix and then coming to Tempe, where did your family live when you were growing up here? And again, if you can, give years, and also describe your home and who lived with you there.

AC: In Tempe, my father still lives in the same home. It's in south Tempe. Do you want the address?

INT: No, but maybe just the general neighborhood.

AC: Okay. Near Guadalupe and McClintock, just south of there. At the time, they were Hallcraft Homes, it was a brand new development, and in fact, one of my first impressions of Tempe when we moved out here—I came from a very urban setting in San Francisco—it seemed quite isolated to me; in fact, the Coco's at Broadway and Rural seemed to be the first sign of civilization as you came north on Rural Road. The house that I grew up in out here was one of the first in the neighborhood to be built. There were literally dirt roads out there still.

INT: Did you have any other family members or extended family members in the area, or was it simply you and your mom and dad?

AC: No; my immediate family. Aand growing up in San Francisco, with a lot of other Chinese people, relatives, friends, very close friends of the family, we didn't have that sense of community either. In fact, for many years growing up, I remember my mom and dad would, maybe twice a year, we would take road trips to L.A. or San Francisco to buy ingredients that my mom needed for, or felt that she needed, to cook with. And, in fact, a habit that my relatives, as they come out and visit us, even today, is, "Hey, we're coming out there; do you want anything?" The reality is now we have a lot of Asian grocery stores, and the population of Asian Americans in the area is quite huge now.

INT: So your father ran a grocery store; did your mother work?

AC: No, she took care of me, she stayed home.

INT: Full-time job?

AC: Full-time job, more than that. (laughter)

INT: How did your family spend time together?

AC: In San Francisco, or here?

INT: Here.

AC: Here, well, because of the new business . . . . When my mom moved out here, she started working; she didn't work while we were in San Francisco. And I was old enough then, and going to school, so that freed her up. But my parents, after we moved to Tempe, they actually sold their interest in the restaurant in Phoenix and they opened up another restaurant in Tempe, and it was at University and Rural. It was a Spud Nut Donuts. It became Hou Hou, which was their restaurant, then it became Greasy Tony's for many years, and now it's something else, it's about to be something else.

INT: Which corner, on University and Rural?

AC: It's on the southeast corner, right next door to the Shell station. It faces north, so it faces Cornerstone. And I remember for many years, there was talk about a theater opening up, which would have been the Cornerstone development. So they both worked there for many years. I want to say that we had it . . . let's see . . . fourth, fifth, sixth . . . they had that restaurant for about four years, four to five years. And then they sold it—the restaurant business is very hard—and my father went to work for General Semiconductor Industries in Tempe, and my mother went to work for Motorola, at a couple of the plants, but she ended up, when she retired, she worked at the one on Broadway. So they both worked.

INT: So then, when there was leisure time, how did your family spend it?

AC: Oh, I'm sorry, that was your question. There wasn't leisure time. Gosh, you know, there wasn't a lot of leisure time. That's interesting. When there was some down time, seeing friends. They, at the time, they had come from a place where they had many, many, many friends. My father grew up in San Francisco, and my mom lived there for many years. So their extended network, they didn't have that out here, so the friends that they were starting to gather, when there was time, when people weren't working, they would get together—dinners, just casual gatherings at the house, or when we were at the restaurant, at the restaurant.

INT: What about any sort of family traditions or holidays or special events that maybe came with you from San Francisco or even with your father from China?

AC: Less with my father from China, because he came to the U.S. when he was fifteen, so he was quite assimilated. Chinese New Year, just having that, that was something. Growing up, I grew up in a predominantly White culture, especially when we moved out here. And so for me, while all of the other families the big deal was Christmas, Christmas was less of a big celebration in our house. And it took me many years before I realized, "Oh, our big celebration is Chinese New Year, that's when we have all the great food and people come over," because that's what my parents grew up with. That's, if anything, that was a tradition they carried with them, whether it was what they grew up

with in China and then eventually while in San Francisco, because that was also celebrated there, but that was something consistent here.

INT: Can you share any interesting or funny stories about your parents, or maybe something they told you about some other family members? Anything that really stands out in your mind as interesting about your family, now's the chance to throw it out there.

AC: Interesting? Well, I'll tell you what's interesting, is how my father got here, through Angel Island. He was a "paper son," and I think that's one of the most interesting, maybe lesser-known, unless you're an historian.

INT: I read a book, actually, and I know all about it.

AC: Which one?

INT: At America's Gates, it's a story all about Chinese immigrants during the exclusion era, and detailed quite a bit about paper sons and assuming the identity of someone else's child on paper. But we're not here to talk about what I know, so go ahead.

AC: No, but I think that's one of the most interesting, if you're talking about my family and the history, I think that's an interesting part of my family, how my father, in his generation, probably ninety percent of men in his generation were paper sons. It was just a fact of life, that's how they got here.

*(A "paper son" is a term used for young Chinese immigrants coming to the United States prior to 1944 who claimed to be a son of a citizen but were, in fact, sons on paper only. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the only law in American history to deny citizenship or entry based upon a specific nationality. The only immigrants allowed into the U.S. were merchants, students, diplomats, and sons of citizens. Prior to the passage of this act, there was an open immigration policy to the United States. The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 destroyed city hall which contained all birth records in San Francisco. As a result, thousands of Chinese men claimed to have been born in San Francisco and the U.S. government had no choice but to accept their claims. --www.Answers.com, 4/2012)*

Other than that, yeah, there are funny stories; I don't know that any come to mind. But, I'll tell you this, in terms of family traditions now, the Chin family, every St. Patrick's Day, it's a tradition to have corned beef and cabbage. (laughter) And I asked my father once, "Was it okay that we celebrate St. Patrick's Day?" And he said, "Oh, yeah, everyone's Irish on St. Patrick's Day." So we've also adopted the name "the McChins." So that tends to be my father.

INT: I can tell you more about that book later, if you're interested.

AC: Yes.

INT: Let's talk a little bit, then, about your life in Tempe now, or in the Valley. Can you tell me where you've lived, and what's the name of your neighborhood? You don't have to give me your address, if you don't want to.

AC: Well, let me step back for a minute. And I think this relates to the school districts, or is there a separate section for schools?

INT: It doesn't matter; you can throw it out here.

AC: Okay. I think what's significant, when we moved to Tempe, was the neighborhood where I grew up, it was in the Kyrene School District, and they were building a neighborhood school. But what was interesting was, I ended up, in third grade, moving schools three times, because the district was expanding that quickly. I think that's a part of . . . and I think it coincided with the huge population and growth spurt in Tempe that needs to be acknowledged. That was a significant era for the growth of this area.

But, okay, fast forwarding to now. I live in the Evergreen neighborhood in Tempe at 2814 South George Drive. When it was time for me to buy my own house, I looked in areas in the east Valley, in Chandler, and different areas. But for some reason, I was never satisfied with what I found, because . . . . And a good friend of mine was my real estate agent, and he sat me down and said, "Well, something's up; we've seen a lot of homes, what's your problem?" And I said, "Well, I like Tempe, I want something in Tempe." And I was trying to be economically sound, to get, at the time, a bigger bang for the buck. That's what people were telling me—I could buy a bigger house or more of a house with less money in a place like Chandler. But I wouldn't have been happy. I wanted a place in Tempe. While I might have bought less house or paid more, I am quite happy living in Tempe. I intentionally chose it, and that's significant for me.

INT: How would you say, how is the sense of community, how's the relationship between you and your neighbors? Is it generally an open neighborhood? Do you get along?

AC: Yes. And this is great, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about my neighbors across the street that I've wanted to talk about for a while. To my right is a rental property; I think in Tempe you can't avoid that. But several of the homes on my street are owner-occupied, and for many, many years. Tom and Barbara Hudson live across the street from me. They are fantastic. They're retired, and every week I'm amazed by how wonderful it is. And I come home, and I just smile, and I think, "They're great; I love my neighborhood." Monday is our recycling day in my neighborhood. And I work, and sometimes I don't come home right at five. Well, every Monday, after I've pulled out my recycle bin—it seems like a small gesture—but Barbara or Tom will pull up my recycle bin for me and put it back where I have it. And it seems like a small gesture, but it means so much to me, because they're just taking care of me, they're watching out in the neighborhood. And sometimes, if a limb or a palm frond has blown into my yard or something, Barb goes and takes care of it and picks it up, because it's their neighborhood, too. I live in their neighborhood, they live in mine. And it's made an impression on me. It exemplifies for me what neighborhoods and neighbors do. Growing up in the house in

south Tempe, because they were new houses and new homes, the neighbors, to this day on my parents' left, the two houses to the immediate left, they're the same people that moved in when the house was built, and we've grown up with them, and my parents have grown old with them.

INT: What year was it that you moved in to your current house?

AC: My current house, I want to say, it was 1998, about ten years ago.

INT: Is there anything about your neighborhood that you feel stands out and makes it distinctive or unique?

AC: I don't think so. I think it's like most Tempe neighborhoods.

INT: Kind of typical?

AC: Um-hmm (*yes*).

INT: How does the City treat your neighborhood? Do you have the same services as other neighborhoods?

AC: Yes. And we're very close to the Tempe-Mesa border, but absolutely, quite responsive, the City services.

INT: And you've only lived there for ten years, but do you have a favorite or best memory of living in this neighborhood?

AC: I think it's the neighbors across the street. They really make that, they make me feel like I belong there, that we belong there together.

INT: And since you had mentioned before a little bit about the astronomical growth of the city, what are some of the biggest changes, otherwise, that you've seen in Tempe since you arrived?

AC: A change is that there are a lot of new people in Tempe. But what hasn't changed—I guess I see the contrast—is Tempe is still a small town in many ways. If you've lived here for any significant amount of time—it could be five years, it could be less than that—but you really, the sense of community here is palpable. We Tempeans have great . . . hmm . . . we have great expectations of our community, but we also, many of us have chosen to live here for whether it's the schools, the services, the community, the university. We get involved, and that might be, it could be one of the organizations in Tempe, but it could also just be participating in going to locally-owned places. “Oh, that's my favorite Trader Joe's; I always go to Changing Hands,” or whatever, because it's in Tempe. There's a great sense of pride in living in Tempe, and that hasn't changed. I know that your question was, “What has changed?” But I guess in contrast with the changes that have occurred, the downtown, the Mill Avenue, the urban living, all of those

developments are the most visible changes. But I guess the contrast is we still value our community.

INT: Then let me ask you a similar question. In your perspective, what, if anything, has been lost or sacrificed as Tempe has gone through this massive growth, and especially redevelopment?

AC: I'm nodding, because I do have an answer for that. Mill Avenue, while I think it's been great in the development, and I love that people are living down there as well as working down there, we've lost a lot of the locally-owned businesses. You know, the Gentle Strength Co-op, while I didn't shop there all of the time, I loved that we had it there. There are businesses . . . Those Were the Days had to close. It's expensive to run a business on Mill, and there's competition certainly. Changing Hands is doing well in its new location, but I think we've lost a lot of the locally-owned businesses and that feel, in that area, where I think I would love to see that back, independently-owned restaurants, cafes. I understand the need for corporate development and economic development, but I wish there was some way we could retain some of that.

INT: I'll ask you now a little different set of questions. What role does religious faith or spirituality have in your life?

AC: Hmm. More personally than publicly, I suppose. My spirituality is important to me, and I would claim that I hold spiritual beliefs. I think as an adult, growing up in a very Christian environment, exposed to non-denominational churches, Baptist churches, and not growing up with, I don't want to say restrictive, but my parents didn't have a lot of structured religious beliefs or structured church attendance. My mom became a Christian, as well as my brother, at some point in, I think it was in the late '70s, early '80s. I've realized as an adult that my spiritual beliefs have been shaped a lot by what I thought were Chinese cultural beliefs, but they're very Daoist and Buddhist, mixed with a lot of Christian cultural habits and beliefs. While I certainly celebrate Christmas, I interpersonally relate to people in a very Daoist and Buddhist way, which doesn't run counter to Christian beliefs, I've learned. So it's been interesting.

INT: So in that respect, since you've said you have kind of more personal spiritual beliefs than public, do you worship at a church or synagogue or temple?

AC: Not regularly, no.

INT: So there isn't anywhere that you would consider to be your home congregation, so to speak?

AC: No.

INT: Okay. You came to Tempe, or to the Valley, in 1972, '73, so you did go to school here for a little while, at least.

AC: For a long while, yes.

INT: Where did you complete your . . . . You were twelve years old, I guess, when you came here . . .

AC: No; eight.

INT: Eight; sorry.

AC: You're making me older, Aaron; let that be recorded.

INT: That's the ASU math, right there.

AC: Hey, hey! I'm an ASU grad; come on, now. That was your Ohio education.

INT: Right. So where did you go to school in the Valley?

AC: In Tempe? Well, in Phoenix, when we first moved here, I think the school was named Simpson Elementary School, and I wasn't there for very long. Let me think about this. Before we moved there . . . ah! On the way to Tempe, as we were moving to Tempe, we had the house built in Tempe, there was a short few months at Madison Elementary School, when we were in a rental house in Phoenix. Then we moved officially to Tempe, and I went to, first, Wagner was where I started, but because of the boom of the building of the schools, I started out at Wagner, then they split us up, this was in third grade, we were split. I was in Ms. Snedeker's class in third grade at Wagner, and then they split us up, the third-grade class, so that I was in Ms. Jones's class, finished out the year at what was, the physical location was Kyrene Junior High. They completed Kyrene del Norte, which was the neighborhood school, and that's where we started fourth grade. I was there from fourth to sixth grade, and then went to Kyrene Junior High for seventh and eighth grade, and then went to Corona del Sol (*High School*). I graduated from Corona, went to ASU, and also I have my Master's from NAU.

INT: What did you study at ASU?

AC: I started out as a Business student. I went in as a first-generation college student, not really knowing what a major was, thinking that I wanted to go into business. Along the way, I discovered the field of, or the area of, Organizational Communication. And when I changed my major, it was as if the clouds parted and the sun was shining. It was interesting, I was engaged as a student, and it was very similar in theory to business philosophy. And that's what I graduated with.

INT: Did you go on to get your Master's at NAU right away, or did you take time off in between?

AC: No. While I was an undergrad, in my junior year at some point, I went on a study abroad program, the Overseas Chinese Youth summer program in Taiwan, so I discovered

Taiwan. My father called that “boot camp to teach us how to be Chinese.” It was a lot of overseas Chinese, and they were connecting us to our culture.

Well, after I graduated with my undergraduate degree, a couple of friends that I knew from that program were spending several months in Taiwan for different internships, so I decided to go there and teach English. I taught English in Taiwan and loved it, it was interesting. While I thought I would take that opportunity to make some business contacts, because while I had changed my major, I still thought I was going to go into international business of some sort. Well, as I was teaching English, I discovered the field of education, and that I loved to work with people that way. And I came back thinking I still wanted to go into business, and I worked for the Gap Corporation in retail management, hoping eventually to land a gig at corporate, in their training area. Well, those were my plans, but those weren't the plans that were for me, apparently. Because then some friends working for the ASU Alumni Association called me and said that I might be interested in their open position. I applied, ended up working for the Alumni Association for three-and-a-half years, and I've pretty much stayed in education since then.

My NAU program was not until 2002, and it was while I was working in the Undergraduate Admissions office at ASU.

INT: So after NAU, after your Master's degree, what path has your career taken?

AC: Now I'm back to high school. I work in an area within Undergraduate Student Initiatives at ASU that's housed within the Admissions office. What I do is not pure admissions work; it's more a combination of outreach and admissions, working on access initiatives. I work with multiple school districts, to do two things primarily. One, to help—let's see, what's the easiest way to say this?—I help more students become university-eligible. The second charge that I have is to connect ASU resources with the schools, create partnerships.

INT: What would you say, then, is the greatest success in your career?

AC: Helping kids go to college. And you know what, it's going to go back to how I started this whole conversation—as my father came to this country at fifteen and always wanted to go to college, and he was, as I mentioned, a paper son, so he was not properly documented. I don't just help not-properly-documented kids, I help all students. I help students on tract, in gifted programs, but I do encounter—in Arizona, you can't help it—students that may be in that situation also. But plain and simple, I help kids go to college.

INT: Let me go back to something that you just said, that your father was not properly documented. He's lived here now for a long, long time.

AC: Seventy years.

INT: How did he become properly documented?

AC: You might be able to answer this better than I can. But there was an amnesty program for men who came into this country as paper sons, and my father took part in that. He also enlisted, at the start of World War II, in the U.S. Army and served this country. So I think all of those things helped his situation. And I think it was the amnesty program that really did it, but that's how he became properly documented.

INT: Okay; I think I just wanted to satisfy my own curiosity. So getting back to you, are you or were you ever involved in any civic organizations in Tempe? I know that you serve or served on the HRC; can you tell us about it?

AC: I do, the Human Relations Commission. I'm currently the vice chair of the Human Relations Commission. Do you want a descriptor about that?

INT: Sure.

AC: It is one of the City's commissions, a volunteer commission, that serves to help facilitate a voice for all people in the community, whether they live here, work here, or just come in and play here. Tempe is a very inclusive community, and what we do is to help, not insure that, but help work on those initiatives to promote that. It's one of our core values as a city, as a community, and what we do, like family values, the family has to continue to stoke and nurture them to make sure they continue to exist, and that's what we do.

I also serve on the Tempe Community Council, I'm currently the vice president of the Tempe Community Council. And the TCC serves as the . . . . In Tempe, we help coordinate the efforts to disseminate the human services funding in Tempe. It was created by some wise leaders in our community to minimize the politics of distribution of that funding. This is our primary goal of the TCC, and we gather a citizen panel or panels to go through the grant applications and interview process and decide on funding, which we then provide recommendations to the Mayor and Council for their final approval.

I also serve on the board of directors for a group called Tempe Leadership, which is an organization that is coming into its 24<sup>th</sup> year, but we are sponsored by the Tempe Chamber of Commerce, and we have been a leadership development group in town.

INT: And how long have you served on each of these organizations?

AC: I was afraid you would ask that; I can't remember.

INT: Even a rough idea.

AC: What year is it, '08? I'm going into my . . . so I'm in my fourth year . . . so what year is it . . . '04 or '05 for both TCC and HRC. I'm in my second year with the Tempe Leadership, roughly.

INT: And what prompted you to get involved with some of these organizations?

AC: Well, the first one I got involved with was the HRC. Once I finished my Master's, that was a goal of mine, to get involved in the community. Growing up in Tempe, I was involved in school. I was also involved in something called the Mayor's Youth Advisory Commission, MYAC, as a high school student. I think that was one of the activities that started all of this. I learned at that time that Tempe was very inclusive, not just by ethnic diversity, religious, gender, but also age. We're a very youth-oriented community, and I learned I had a voice at that time, and I knew that as an adult, I wanted to stay involved. I think that by living in Tempe, choosing to buy a house in Tempe, I knew that I would get involved in some way. I think that's what started it.

INT: Are there any other organizations or associations in Tempe that you would like to become involved in? Do you have time for anything else?

AC: I don't know. There's certainly . . . . Well, I have been invited to join one of the Kiwanis organizations, which I think I will; I'm not yet a member. I get involved in the activities of the Tempe Tarts—I don't know if you've ever heard of them; you should mention them.

INT: Why don't you tell me a little bit about the Tempe Tarts?

AC: Tempe Tarts is an informal group of women, mostly they're involved in some way in some community activities, but it's a Bunco group, but they raise funds, it's a fund-raising group, but it's a social group. So I'm involved with them.

But I guess the question was other activities. Kiwanis, certainly. There are many other nonprofit agencies in town, I'm sure that once I am off of some of these other boards, I'll get involved in. It could be TCAA, it could be Boys & Girls, it could be the Y, TCH, there are a lot of organizations that are worthwhile that I'm sure I'll do something with.

INT: Between the work that you've been doing and would like to do with all of these organizations, is there one contribution to the city of Tempe that you have made of which you're particularly proud?

AC: Not yet. I think I will continue to work. I don't know if there's one thing that I've done yet that is worth mentioning. I don't know if it ever will be, but I think what's important about community involvement are all of the small pieces are pretty important as well.

INT: So there aren't any ideas or items that you are really thinking about wanting to accomplish or trying to push through? You're smiling; maybe there's something.

AC: I don't know. Short of running for City Council, there are many ways to get involved, and I hope to continue to contribute. I just don't know.

INT: So you're thinking about running for City Council?

AC: No, no, no. (laughter) Did I sign something? No. As a person who was involved in student council and always involved in the community, that idea runs through your head; you may not be serious about it, and I don't know if that is a serious idea. I think I'm getting a great deal of enjoyment out of my community involvement right now, and I think that continuing to serve as a voice for the community is important. I just don't know; I think there are many ways to do it. But I don't think that there's anything significant that I've done.

You asked me what I was most proud of. It continues to be in education. I think that now, more than ever, having an education is critically important; not just personally, but socially, as far as economics, as about marketability, but about contributing. And I think helping people find that pathway continues to be an intimidating process for people, and if I can help people find that pathway, then I think that's significant, for me.

INT: Getting into some social issues, has there ever been a time where you, or perhaps your parents, living in Tempe or the Valley have experienced any form of exclusion or discrimination?

AC: Not overt. I think being one of the few Chinese families in the area, you felt isolated, but I don't think it was overt or intentional, certainly. No, nothing other than the typical schoolyard stuff, but nothing significant.

INT: Has there ever been a time where you have felt unsafe being or living in Tempe?

AC: When I first moved into my home—I live on a corner house, we have alleys in Tempe, and I have a wooden fence—I was broken into three times, over a course of several years. But I live on the Mesa-Tempe border, so I'm going to blame Mesa for this. (laughter) No, it's a crime of opportunity, and I think my house, where it was situated, with the fence, and the fact that I'm busy quite a bit, I was vulnerable. And I think at that time, that was the only time where I felt unsafe, immediately after a break-in. And I think that's a normal feeling, I don't think it's because of the city, I think it was because of the situation. Since then, I've taken measures to try to prevent that. I don't think it was because . . . . You know, crime happens in good neighborhoods, too, or especially. So I think it was more situational.

INT: Okay. I'm gonna take the opportunity now to flip the tape over, just so we don't cut you off on the next question, but we're almost to the end.

*(end of recording)*

### Side B

INT: And we're back. Can you tell me what businesses or events in Tempe do you feel have contributed most to the community? I know that's a very broad, sweeping question.

AC: Wow. It is. Because I'll give you first a general answer of "they all contribute." There's so many things going on event-wise in our community, we're quite a destination for events, that I think it all adds to the fabric.

I'm a big ASU fan, I'm a Sun Devil, so I'm going to say Sun Devil football games, certainly a lot of people go to those, and because it garners so much attention and traffic, everyone is aware when there's a football game. I would say that a lot of people come to Tempe for the Mill Avenue arts festival, and those I've seen in my lifetime grow quite a bit. I don't always go now, but it's always a good thing to attend. Some smaller events like the Empty Bowls event, I think, is great in Tempe. The Empty Bowls events are the ones where our schools and our Parks & Rec department will create the bowls, and it's to highlight the hunger issue; I think that's always a great event. But, again, there are events that I don't participate in, or haven't participated in, that while I'm aware of them and I think they're great, I mean to . . . I have a running list. The Tempe bike event is fantastic, because I think that brings all ages, and it unifies north and south Tempe, and that's a fun event for everyone. The Tardeada has become bigger in the city, I think that's significant.

INT: Well, here's an interesting question. Being Chinese American, what is your connection to the—or maybe you have no connection—to the Arizona Dragon Boat Association?

AC: Oh! I attended that for the first time this last year. It's excellent, enough so that I want to get involved next year. It was on my list, I finally got to go, I took my father, and I want to do it. I think more people should . . . Coincidentally, that event occurred on a weekend when there were about three or four events. That's one of the problems—we have so many things going on, you just can't get to everything. But it's a cool event. Have you gone?

INT: I have not. My cousin is a rower in the races, and I did an interview with the two founders, with Marcie Greenberg and Ronnie Sebastian, so if you are interested in doing it, I can \_\_\_\_\_.

AC: Yes, I know Marcie; Tempe's a small town, remember?

INT: Then I guess I don't need to tell you who to contact. Do you feel most connected to the community of Tempe or to a larger group of individuals in the Valley?

AC: Well, because I work at ASU, I automatically do feel connected to ASU as its own community. But also, while I'm at ASU, I'm a Tempean, and I feel very connected. Part of it is because of my involvement with certain organizations in Tempe that keeps me very connected, and I have an affinity for Tempe.

INT: And then, overall, how would you define your identity, on a personal level? Maybe considering things like ethnicity or gender or even your career.

AC: Okay, I'll give you a very, very honest answer. Because I grew up as "the little Chinese girl," I probably try to avoid those labels more than anyone else, and so I don't always describe myself in those ways or don't self-identify . . . . Umm, I take that back. Self-identification is something separate from how I describe myself, so I don't have a good answer for you, except that I don't always use those, because we're all so many things. What day is it and what time is it, and I'll tell you where I identify or what hat I'm wearing.

But in terms of community, and maybe I alluded to it, what groups do I identify with? Well, I work for ASU, and that is an interesting identity in and of itself, in this area, because it is such a visible place; I am a member of that community. Also, while I'm there, often I'll hear from colleagues, "Well, you're a Tempean"; I'm a Tempean, also. I'm certainly many other things, but those are good general descriptors.

INT: A couple more questions to sort of wrap the interview up. Can you tell me about a fondest memory or experience in Tempe for you, either in your own personal life or the development of the city? Something that stands out above all else?

AC: Sure. It's a little bit of an embarrassing moment, also. And may I qualify this by saying "thus far," because I'm sure there will be other significant moments as well as embarrassing ones. I think I was eighteen; it was the first year that Tempe was awarded the All-America City award (1984). I had served previously on the Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee. As a part of their application for the award, they included the Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee and our Youth Town Hall. I was invited to go to present to the final jury panel, this very intimidating jury panel, in San Antonio. And the reason why I mention this is other people you interview might mention it, it depends on who you interview, maybe not.

INT: Not so far.

AC: Harry Mitchell tells this story a lot, and Don Cassano has been telling this story also.

INT: I didn't get the chance to interview Harry Mitchell, unfortunately; I did interview Don, but he didn't mention it, as far as I know.

AC: Good; well, he told it recently. We were in front of the panel, and Governor Pyle led our presentation, with this great radio voice, and he's, you know, Governor Pyle. And there's this panel, and they're asking questions. And when he was done, you could tell that they didn't have any questions for him; it was a lock, but they felt like they had to ask something. So they're shuffling through papers, "Well, what about this youth commission?" And the point of their question was youth, so they pulled me up there. And the question was, "Really, how often do you get to meet with the Mayor?" And their point was, "Come on, is this one of those, 'Oh, yes, we have boards and commissions, this is a fluffy thing, let the kids play?'" And I talked about how while we live in a very urban and dynamic place, it's still a small town, like it was then. And the question was, "How often do you get to meet with the Mayor?" And I was nervous, I'll

admit to you, I blurted out the first thing I thought of, which was, “Well, any time we want to,” because what I was thinking was, really, we did. Whenever we had our meetings, the Mayor was usually in his office, and he’d stop by or we could stop in; we could talk to him, and pop into his office and chat with him whenever we wanted to, and that’s how he was. So imagine seeing, “So how often do you get to meet with the Mayor?” “Well, any time we want to!” “Ha, ha, ha,” laughter, whatever. And it was very innocent, very naïve, so it was embarrassing, but people like to tell that story, because they say it contributed to our first All-America City award, which was great, a great point for the city. I feel like one of those people that tripped and fell and turned on a light switch; I didn’t mean to do anything, but if that’s how it is, that’s fine. So that was, so far, one of the most significant for me.

INT: So then, to conclude the interview, since Tempe has grown so considerably, and the population of the Valley, as well, has become much more diverse, how do you see, in the future, the diverse populations kind of coming together and forming a more cohesive community? What steps need to be taken?

AC: It depends on how you define diversity. I’ll speak, first, for . . . Well, how could they come together?

I think continuing to leverage or to utilize resources like the Human Relations Commission. Because it is a group of individuals, and the fact that the City has committed resources and a staff, to include these values in how we operate and conduct ourselves as a city and a community, continues to be important. And I think that continuing to place value . . . I mean it’s like any family tradition; if you don’t celebrate it once in a while, you lose it and you forget about its importance. But also, like a family tradition, it’s, “Oh, we have to read *The Christmas Story* again,” something like that, but it’s still important, it’s the coming together. Even if you roll your eyes and go hesitantly, or you’ve gone ten times, ten years in a row, it’s still important to go, and it’s still important to do it, and it’s still important to talk about it, and to remind people—whether it’s younger people or people newer to our community—that, hey, this is something that we value.

So that’s why you have to continue to celebrate, not just our unique features, so when you talk about diversity and pluralism, to me, that’s valuing the differences in all of us. But also coming together as a community of, “This is great, look how cool we are and how fun we are, because we’re all kind of the same but kind of different at the same time, but we all kind of like the same things.” I would love to see more, and I think as the demographics of the city—and it will—change and grow and morph, that we continue to reflect and value the demographics, and some are seen and some aren’t so seen. So I think that’s important.

INT: Okay. I don’t have any further questions for you. While we’re on the record, I will give you an opportunity, if you have any final statements or final remarks that you would like to make, now is the time.

AC: Final statements? I've made everything up that I've said. (laughter) No, all kidding aside, I think this is one of those exercises that's very important, recognizing the diversity of our community, that we're a pluralistic society, and valuing that is a pretty cool thing to do. So I'm glad that you're doing this, and however I can be supportive, please let me know.

INT: All right, then, this will conclude the Tempe Historical Museum's pluralism renovation interview with Arlene Chin on September 3, 2008.

*(end of recording)*

Transcribed by Susan Jensen

April 2012

U:\CommunityServices\MUSEUM\OH Transcriptions\OH-295 Chin, Arlene.docx