

**University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections**

**MS 317. Archives for Research on Women and Gender Oral History Project**

**Barbara Yu Transcript, April 15, 1997**

**Barbara Yu:** ...she happened to be in a wheelchair, but she also is there, in the same, and Chandler, and they are two people who have been here, as I said, have been members for a long, long time.

**Ruthe Winegarten:** And what was Mabel's name?

**BY:** Mabel Bilharts, in fact, let me get the book for you and...

**RW:** O.K., and I'll see how this [pause in tape]

**RW:** This is Ruthe Winegarten and it is April the fifteenth, nineteen ninety-seven, and I'm going to be interviewing Barbara Yu in just a moment and her mom is Rose Wu, who is eighty-eight.

**BY:** This is Mabel, and then, Evelyn with Lauren, I think has been a member since the fifties. I'm pretty sure, there are two people I never knew had been here before...

**RW:** And there's something called the Chandler retirement home, or?

**BY:** Yes. Uh-huh. Now where is Evelyn? In the book, oh, here she is. And she's been a member since nineteen fifty.

**RW:** Wow. And they're both still articulate, and they...

**BY:** Yes, and both of them are able to, I think, um...yes, uh-huh

**RW:** So, when did you, tell me a little bit about yourself. Did you grow up in San Antonio?

**BY:** Yes. I'm a native San Antonian, and have lived here, ah, almost all of my life, and then in nineteen sixty, well, I lived in Chicago for a period. And then, um, then came back to San Antonio and was married in nineteen sixty-two. And my husband and I, he's from Shanghai, originally, and was living in Hong Kong at that time, so we lived in Hong Kong after we were married for about three years.

Until about sixty-five, and from sixty-five to seventy-three, we lived in New York. And then we, I, you know, persuaded him to come back to San Antonio, so we've been here since seventy-three.

**RW:** What was it like living in Hong Kong then?

**BY:** It was interesting. It was still, of course, just, it was very busy, very commercial and very, ah, very much a financial center, as it is now. Probably not as crowded, although it was extremely crowded, but ah, I have learned that, you know, various areas that were docks and wharves and things like that have now, and warehouses, are now developed into office buildings and apartments and things like that.

**RW:** Kind of a mega-complex, then.

**BY:** Yes. And when we moved there, of course, I had, um, when we were first married, we had our own little apartment, and most people in Hong Kong in those days lived in apartments, there were not many houses. And, um, so we had what they called an 'ama' which is a maid which helps, which does, and we had what they call, a, a, 'one foot kick ama.' A one foot kick does everything.

**RW:** What?

**BY:** Because in those days, I think it's probably not so true any more, but they used to have wash amas, baby amas, cooks and so, if you had a one foot kick, she did everything. And so we started with a one foot kick, and when our son was born, we also acquired a baby ama, so you know, it was a household at that point. And then when we moved to the United States in sixty-five, we settled in New York for a period of time.

**RW:** That's a great title for a short story, or something.

**BY:** One foot kick? It is funny. You know, the slang, colloquialism.

**RW:** Have you been back? Have you all been back to Hong Kong?

**BY:** No, no, we haven't. Unfortunately, we'd like very much to go, and I think we will, but not at this point, it's difficult. With my mother being eighty-eight, it's hard to really plan on stuff like that, it's just hard to get away for any length of time.

**RW:** Where was she born?

**BY:** Well, that's interesting. She was born in Tucson, Arizona.

**RW:** Really.

**BY:** In nineteen oh-nine, and when she was, you know, still really active and people would ask her, she'd say, you know, "I'm older than the state of Arizona." And she is. Because she was born in Arizona when it was a territory.

**RW:** That's funny.

**BY:** And so, um, my grandfather, on my, uh, mother's side, had come to the United States in the late eighteen hundreds to work on the railroad. And, um, he had saved a fair amount of money after—he was a cook with the crews—and he went back to China to be married. He married my grandmother, who was the daughter of, a, a concubine, and her husband was a goldsmith, which was a fairly affluent business. And, um, but because she was the daughter of a concubine, they felt that a marriage to, um, someone who was coming to the United States where there were so many more opportunities, was, uh, really going to be a good step for her, and it was. She came as a young girl, she was only about sixteen or seventeen, and, uh, I don't know if she could read or write, but she spoke Chinese only. And when she came and settled in Tucson, with my grandfather, that's where he decided he would live. They opened a grocery store in combination with a bakery and so she worked, she woke up—I mean I know that I heard stories about how they had to be up at three in the morning so they could bake the bread, and then, you know, sell it. And then my grandfather had a buggy, a horse and buggy, and he would take groceries and whatever to the different ranches. And, uh, it was interesting because he had credit. He gave credit and it was always amazing to me he was a very trusting person, and everyone

had a little notebook, each customer had a notebook, but he didn't keep the notebook, the customer kept the notebook.

**RW:** At their house, so whenever he came...

**BY:** Whenever he would come, he would add whatever it would be that they would buy. And they were—my mother's family is considered a pioneer family in Tucson, Arizona.

**RW:** Did your grandfather know your grandmother before he married her? Or did he go back just to find a bride?

**BY:** No. Yes. He went back specifically to find a bride, and I think that he was...

**RW:** It was an arranged marriage?

**BY:** Oh yes, they all were. He was about, uh, thirty-two, possibly at that time, and my grandmother was, as I said, about sixteen or seventeen.

**RW:** Those marriages probably worked as well as some others today...

**BY:** Oh, well, you know, they were, and my grandmother had ten children, and she...

**RW:** Did you know her?

**BY:** Yes. And she ran the grocery store while her husband did all this, you know, throughout the countryside, and um, she spoke, when I knew her, she spoke as much Spanish and she did English, in fact, more Spanish than English, more fluent in Spanish. Because her customers were...

**RW:** Hispanic...

**BY:** Mexican, and the Indians and the different people around that area. So, and then, of course, Chinese, but she spoke primarily broken English.

**RW:** And what position was your mother in the family?

**BY:** She was the oldest.

**RW:** She was the oldest.

**BY:** And she was the, um, she went through high school in Tucson, and because she was bilingual, in fact, she's trilingual, she speaks, Spanish and fluently as she does English and Chinese, as a high school student, she was called upon to interpret in the courts because she could speak Chinese, and you know, people came and had some sort of a problem or had to appear in court, she would act as an interpreter.

**RW:** How did they get to San Antonio? Did she marry and then move?

**BY:** My father, who was, uh, born in Bakersfield, uh, went, was taken back to China and came back to the United States at the age of fourteen. His father was a merchant and traveled back and forth from China to the United States. Now, my father's mother, um, had bound feet. I didn't know her in Hong Kong, when we lived in Hong Kong. And she was in her nineties, or close to her nineties at that time. And she did have bound feet, and still, you know, you could tell, and she had a remarkable mind, she really was very, very intelligent woman, although she couldn't read or write, as that was the case, women were just not educated. So she, um, when my grandfather traveled back and forth to the United States, doing importing or whatever, exporting, she took care of all of the family's properties and because he was able to make some money, he bought land and houses in this village. And she kept all, kept track of the rents and all the monies owed in her head. And, uh, this was well into her, you know, early eighties, when the communists took over and they had to leave. But she really did take care of the family business at home, during all of this time.

**RW:** You have some interesting women in your family.

**BY:** Yes. Very very very—and my mother, actually, there's some things...my mother was, when she, when my father was very active, he came back to the United States at the age of fourteen and went to school.

**RW:** What village, do you know, in China were they from?

**BY:** Well, they're from Guong Do (sp?)...it's around Canton, and actually what we are here, for the most part, the Chinese who, the earlier settlers in the United States south west, are from what they call

Tue Sam (sp?) the great mountain, it's the village which is closest to the great mountain. And so Tue Sam or Tai San (sp?), you know, whatever, is where most of us are from. And we speak a dialect, which is a derivation of Cantonese. So we're southern Chinese, as opposed to the people in Beijing who are the northern, Mandarin-speaking, or my husband, who is Shanghainese, that's the busiest, or used to be the busiest, and still is one of the busiest financial centers in China. But, um, the thing about my mother and father, he went back to China and was there during the revolutionary times when Sang (name, sp?) and Chiang Kai Shek took over the government. But he decided that he didn't really have that much future, or for whatever reason, decided to come to the United States. He was a member of the Kuo Men Tang (sp?) which is the nationalist party.

**RW:** When did he come to the United States?

**BY:** Uh, let's see, he was probably—I'm not sure when it was he came, but it must have been about the early nineteen twenties.

**RW:** After World War One, maybe?

**BY:** Yeah. I think it was after World War One. Yeah, and then he came to San Antonio with one of the—they used to have conventions, the Kuo Men Tang (sp?) as we say, had conventions. And in San Antonio, they had a convention, it must have been nineteen twenty-nine, nineteen thirty, and he—one of the other people who attended was, um, a cousin of my mother's. And he was from Tucson, so they became acquainted. This man's name was Paul Don, and Paul asked my father, who is Ted Wu, said, "Well, why don't you visit me in Tucson?" And so, on his way back to California, my father stopped in Tucson. And Paul had a pick-up truck, and my mother had a car, which was an Erskine (sp?). She was the only Chinese girl, at that time, in that city, that town really, to have a car, so Paul called my mother and said, "Rose, could we borrow, could I borrow your car, to show this friend of mine around town?" And my mother said, "Well, you can borrow my car, but," she said, "I'm driving." So, anyway that's how my mother and father met.

**RW:** And he never got to California.

**BY:** Well, he went to California and they corresponded, and they were married in, I guess, nineteen thirty.

**RW:** And then...

**BY:** And then he gave her a choice. He said, "We can live either in San Francisco, in that bay area, or we can go to San Antonio where I have relatives and where I can start a grocery store." And so my mother, I've heard this so often, she said, "Well, I went to see my banker." And she said, "Well, what do you think I should do? Should I go to San Francisco or should I go to San Antonio?" And the man said "Well, Rose, knowing you, you would rather be a big fish in a little pond than a little fish in a big pond. Go to San Antonio." So they ended up coming to San Antonio.

**RW:** And they opened a restaurant, or a grocery store, or what?

**BY:** They opened a grocery store where the present Hilton Palacio Del Rio is. That was Alamo Street, south Alamo, and they were there, um, for I guess, twenty years or longer. And then, um, my father opened a restaurant, which was called the Shangri-la, which was across the street on Alamo Street from the, what used to be the main post office. And then, during the nineteen forties, he decided he would build a restaurant, so he built a restaurant on Broadway, twenty six eleven Broadway, it was called Tai San (sp?). After his native village. And it was the, uh, largest Chinese restaurant in the south west at that time. He opened it and it had a seating capacity of two hundred. And, uh, an interesting sidelight is of course, there were very few Chinese—well, I mean the Chinese population was probably under a thousand at that point here in San Antonio. And there were no students so to speak, that would work as waitresses or waiters. So he hired, uh, black waiters who were people who had worked the country club. So, when he opened the restaurant, he had sixteen or eighteen black waiters. The maitre'd was someone who had worked at the country club and had sort of come out of retirement and I remember people coming to the restaurant saying, "This is really strange." Particularly people who were from the

west coast or the east coast. You know, a Chinese restaurant but you have black waiters, and, you know, that was the case. And we had, um, my father had probably, there were probably altogether about ten cooks, it was very large. And we had one, and he, because, Chinese food was really relatively a novelty for people here, but he had cooks who, he had about three Chinese cooks and then we had a black chef, who cooked, uh, the western cuisine. And so, on the menu, he would always have both, uh, to offer. And the first luncheon menus, they were priced around, you know the luncheon specials, I think they were around sixty-five cents, including beverage or whatever.

**RW:** Was that in the thirties?

**BY:** No, this was in the forties. It was after the Korean War, I think, that that he opened. I think he opened in forty-six or forty-seven.

**RW:** Sixty-five cents. Wow.

**BY:** And dinner was two fifty. And, you know, you had an entrée, plus appetizer and drink and dessert.

**RW:** And they had the restaurant for how long? About twenty years?

**BY:** Let's see. Mother sold it in nineteen, what was it, uh, she was about seventy, so it was about eighteen years ago would be, um, seventy something I guess.

**RW:** So they had it for quite a long time.

**BY:** Oh yes. Yes, very long.

**RW:** And did she work alongside him?

**BY:** Oh, yes, my mother was always very active in the business, and when my father died, she really carried on on her own, and she kept it going for a long, long time. And then when she, I think she's been, it's either, she either retired or—she retired between the age of seventy and seventy-five and so then we sold it.

**RW:** Did you have some brothers or sisters?

**BY:** I have um, one brother, who's in Houston, he's an attorney, and uh, a municipal judge. I have a sister, my sister Millie, who lives in New York, she's married to an architect. And she, uh, had, teaches Chinese cooking and has written a book which was published, a cookbook that was published I guess about four or five years ago now, and it's "Kosher Chinese Cooking."

**RW:** That's great.

**BY:** And, it's really, it's funny.

**RW:** So none of your, Rose, none of your parent's children took over the restaurant business, did they?

**BY:** No. None of us did. And my mother, uh, you know, went, uh, in this story, when they moved to San Antonio, my mother has always been an activist. And in the nineteen thirties, at one point, uh, there was a bill in the Texas legislature which was going to prohibit the sale of property to aliens, legal aliens, as well. And my mother, we have the paper clippings, she went to Austin and she was, I think, I'm trying to calculate how old she was at that point, she was about twenty-six. And she spoke against the passage of this bill, because she said, "I'm a native-born American, a United States citizen," she said, "but of course my hair is black and my eyes are black." And she said "And when you look at me, you can't tell whether I am or not." And she said, "So this bill would be prejudicial against people like me." And so, you know. Anyway, the bill didn't pass, so...

**RW:** Well, that took a lot of courage for her.

**BY:** Yeah, I always, you know, at the time, I—my mother has always been able to just go out and do whatever and speak out whatever she felt, and she, um, as I said, when I started to think about it, that was pretty young, twenty-six, to get up in front of the legislature.

**RW:** Before we switch to the Women's Club story, do you have a family photograph and clippings of things from Arizona and even China?

**BY:** Probably. Yes, I do. I mean, we do, we have a lot of stuff, it's just not very well catalogued. Unfortunately.

**RW:** Well, have you considered possibly donating or setting up a collection at the, our archives, at the Center for the Study of Women and Gender.

**BY:** I think we probably could, but now, my aunt Esther Tang in Tucson is, uh, has done that, has probably done a lot, and she's even, she has some printed material that's on the internet. She sent me a heavy bunch of stuff and I haven't even looked through it.

**RW:** Well, has any member of your family ever thought of doing a book about your family, I mean...

**BY:** We should. I really...

**RW:** It's such a very unusual story.

**BY:** It is.

**RW:** With the cultures and the Arizona, the Ku Men Tan (sp?)

**BY:** We have, really it's fascinating. My husband's family is really fascinating, as well, his parents were Boxer Rebellion scholarship recipients, and his mother is from Shanghai and his father was, was Ha Ga (sp?) which was, that group of people in China is known as guest people, because they were never ever as one province. They would travel and so, uh, and they met in the United States, Fisher and Dorothy. His parents. That's—so I have often thought I should sit down and at least, you know, do a tape for whoever comes after, because, it really, it really is interesting and there's a link that at one point, you know, if you don't put it down it's going to be lost.

**RW:** Well, maybe we can get a graduate student from UT San Antonio to work with you.

**BY:** Well, that would be interesting.

**RW:** Well, I mean, to, to you know, because sometimes it's really hard for a person to do their own, they say they're going to do it, and say they're going to take their tape recorder out, but it's easier if someone asks you questions and you can...

**BY:** It requires discipline too, you know...

**RW:** Yeah, but if you have a set, someone to work with, sometimes those things can get done. But, it sounds like a movie script.

**BY:** It could be, it could be.

**RW:** Who could play the lead?

**BY:** It's really, you know, I've often thought because we have nephews and nieces and children who really need to know all of this.

**BY:** And they probably don't know diddly squat about the Ku Men Tan (sp?) or Mao Tse Tung or any of those people. So did your father, um, grandfather continue with the Ku Men Tang (sp?) organization or...

**BY:** Oh my father was always very active and when he died...

**RW:** I didn't know they had like a U.S....

**BY:** And my father, also, it was kind of interesting because I remember, um, you know the family associations were very strong in San Antonio, as well.

**RW:** Right, right.

**BY:** And, he was a member of what they called the Om Myong (sp?) and there were other groups and they were very strong up until, I guess, the forties or the fifties, and then of course as people died, you have the, traditions that didn't have as much weight with the younger people so there isn't that continuation. But, um, oh yeah, he was very active, and my father was extremely—well, both my mother and my father were extremely active in the community, and when my father died in nineteen sixty, uh, two, or sixty-one, actually, um, the the city council at that time, or the city government passed a resolution, you know, in his honor.

**RW:** Memorializing him.

**BY:** Memorializing him.

**RW:** What was his name?

**BY:** His name was Theodore Hong (sp?) Wu. And my mother's maiden name was Rose Don and so her, she does continue to use her surname, her maiden name, so she signs Rose Don Wu.

**RW:** How do you spell Don? D-o-n?

**BY:** D-o-n. Her family name was Don Wa, with the Don being the last name—depending on the dialect, you see, you have different, because, my father, for whatever reason, used the Mandarin, actually, Wu means five. It's the number five, so it's the fifth plan. And in Cantonese, it's Eng, or Ng, so if you spell it in the Cantonese way, it's either E-n-g or N-g. And, but my father, when he came to the United States, or, you know, as a young man decided to go with the W-u. So that's unusual, because we're southern Chinese, as I said, and we use the Mandarin pronunciation for the name.

**RW:** Were you, did you have an opportunity to learn Chinese, uh, either from your mother or in school or after school school?

**BY:** Well, growing up, I spoke, you know, the Toisan (sp?) I could understand it, and I could still understand it. I'm not terribly fluent when it comes to speaking, but I can, I can do what's necessary. And when we lived in Hong Kong, of course my husband speaks mostly Shanghainese and Mandarin. He speaks a little Mandarin, mostly in Shanghainese, so we, we speak in English. It's just the—I don't speak Shanghainese and he doesn't speak Cantonese that well, or Toisan (sp?), and so we speak in English. But, um, I remember my sister also lived in Hong Kong for a period, but, one time in Hong Kong I went out to buy the party favors, my son, our son was going to be one year old and I decided—I passed the street vendor and he had all these little guns and holsters and cowboy hats and I thought, 'Perfect for a Texas birthday party.' So I bought all these things and I didn't have enough cash, so I said to him, in Cantonese, "Deliver these things to my husband's office." So he went to the office with these things and said, "This foreign lady asked me to deliver it." So I told you how my Chinese is not that great.

**RW:** Well, how did your mom get involved in the Women's Club here? Was it an outgrowth of her business activities, or...

**BY:** I think so. And she had friends, Mabel Bilharts (sp?) for one, was a member, and at that time another very good friend [end of side one]

[side two]

**RW:** We'll let it run a little bit, because it doesn't start recording until it's on a little bit. So I'm assuming that there was no prejudice against Chinese-Americans being in the Women's Club here.

**BY:** I don't believe so.

**RW:** I don't think there were any black members for quite a long time.

**BY:** Well, there was...

**RW:** There was, but not...

**BY:** But not for a long, long time. When I joined the club, we still had—and I don't know if anybody's spoken of this, but we had a secret committee.

**RW:** You did. Oh, boy, tell me about the secret committee.

**BY:** Um, you had to pass muster through the secret committee before you were actually accepted for membership.

**RW:** Really?

**BY:** Yes, now, see, I was, I became a member and I'm surprised to learn that I've been a member since nineteen seventy-five, but... And this was something, you know, I even served on a secret committee somewhere along the line.

**RW:** And they called it the secret committee?

**BY:** Well, it was a committee that nobody was supposed to know about, but we all knew about it.

And there were probably three people who served on that committee. And it was—and we, as time went on, of course, you know, I mean at the time I served on it I knew it was—we needed to get rid of it.

**RW:** What, what was the object of the secret committee?

**BY:** Well...

**RW:** To keep the, sort of, undesirables out?

**BY:** I think that was it. You know, you really, it was just sort of a screening process and if you were blackballed, you didn't get in. And this was something that—of course no one was supposed to know who was on that committee, and you didn't really want people to know, either, if you were serving on it. But I remember when I first became a member, you know, it was three or four years thereafter I was asked—and I did. Uh, but, you know, there was never any thought of blackballing anybody. We needed members, we wanted members, it was just kind of a...

**RW:** You didn't blackball anybody?

**BY:** No. No. No.

**RW:** Like someone who was quote, immoral or something like that?

**BY:** I think there was one time that there was some question about one particular applicant and it had to do—it was not because of race or anything like that, it had to do more with, as you say, whatever was happening with public, you know, perception. Uh, and I don't know whether she ever carried through with her application, I just heard some little, "Should we or shouldn't we," or would it be the thing to do? But, no, I think there were—when I joined the club, there was an element that was extremely conservative in many, many ways. I mean, and the secret committee was kind of a throwback to that. And, um, in the group that I was active with, was very outgoing—I think the thing the Woman's Club did provide is that you meet people with whom you have friendships that last a great, a long, long time. And, um, Kay Turner, for example, is someone I met through the club and I've known and kept up with and still hear—we still have a great deal of contact with each other and, um, Miram Benson, who's Miriam Nearman's daughter, through the club, so there are people that we have, we just keep up with during... Of course, the years of membership, things have changed, people's lives change, so it sort of

just ebbs and flows. But, um, before I became president the big situation was we were going down, I mean financially, we just did not have the resources to keep up this house. And so, um, one of the big, big, uh, disputes had to do with the rental of the club. That was the only way I could see that we could have any sort of financial income. We just needed it. Because we needed it—we need it again—but at that time, we needed to have the exterior painted, and lots of other things that needed to be done, and so we just talked about renting it and I had served—the same time I was serving on the board of the Southwest Craft Center, and that was very profitable for them. And that also was a non-profit organization.

**RW:** Oh, I see, and they rented out their space.

**BY:** Their gardens and weddings, particularly popular there. And I thought, this house would be wonderful for that. Um, and there were people who supported that view, and there were people who did not support that view, did not want to share with the public, they felt that the house was to be kept...

**RW:** In it's pristine...

**BY:** ...as possible, but then, which was a wonderful thing if you can keep it that way, but we can't. We don't have that kind of income through our membership. So, that was a pretty, uh, hotly debated situation. And one of the things we wanted to do, if we were going to rent it, we had thought, well, we needed—if you're going to rent it for weddings or wedding receptions, people are going to want to serve champagne or whatever, or wine.

**RW:** Did you have an anti-alcohol, uh, in your by-laws or something?

**BY:** It was interesting. No, well, yes, there was. There was actually one in the by-laws that we could not serve alcoholic beverages.

**RW:** So did you change that?

**BY:** Yes, we had to change the by-laws, we had to change a lot of minds and I don't think we ever really succeeded in getting total acceptance. But, enough of the membership understood that we needed to do something, and so we did, we were able to do that, so...

**RW:** What years, what year was that?

**BY:** I was president in eighty-six to eighty-eight.

**RW:** And that was under your jurisdiction?

**BY:** Right. And midway through, in eighty-seven was when we started to rent the club for parties.

**RW:** And how has it worked out? Have you all had any...

**BY:** Well, I think up until present that we do—we now have a housekeeper. Uh, or someone like Mary who is here all the time, we didn't have that when I joined the club, we had a couple who served—Theresa and Charles—and they lived in the apartment upstairs and Theresa cooked the luncheons and Charles served and they maintained the house and cleaned the house. Um, and it was alright, but, you know, it just, really, it really was not being used to its fullest. And so, uh, they left and then we had a person, a man, **BY** the name of Mr. Ray (sp?), and we all just called him Mister Man, and he came and he would cook. And, you know, through the years, different situations... But, um...

**RW:** When did you join? And did you join because your mom?

**BY:** Yes. Really, I had no intention of joining. And, um, let's see, I joined in seventy-five. And really, I had thought, 'I don't want to join,' because well, it just really wasn't what I thought would be something I would be interested in doing.

**RW:** Well, did you think they were little old ladies or something?

**BY:** Yes. Basically. And it was very much the case. And so, as I said, if it hadn't been for people like Kay Turner and Miriam Benson and there was, um, Fran Logston (sp?) at that time, I mean there were, I joined, and I joined the Friendship Roundtable, because at that time the Friendship Roundtable was really the younger people in the club. And, um, we were pretty active about different things and

so, um, I didn't really want to join, and it was my mother's friend, Bettye Womack, who said, "You're going to join." And she put me, I mean, she, uh, put my name up and called me one day and said, "Well, now you're a member of the Woman's Club." I mean, she did it, and that was it. I didn't want to be disagreeable, so I said, "O.K.," and I started coming in. At that time I didn't work, so it was kind of nice to have something. And we would see each other really quite frequently, several times a week, some of the friends in the club.

**RW:** You all got closer?

**BY:** Well, we had, we had, mutual interests you know, and we spent a lot of time...

**RW:** Like what? What were some of your mutual interests?

**BY:** Well, um, Kay was always very active in various organizations. She was, um, the um, the livestock situation, the livestock and rodeo. And Miriam was was starting a, she's quite artistic and she was starting a business. And I was, um, active in parents, um, council at TMI and Saint Luke's, you know, just different things. We would just get together and just have a good time at lunch, get together and just meet, have lunch and you know, whatever, or the club...

**RW:** You know when your mom joined?

**BY:** Well, she's down for nineteen sixty-three, I believe.

**RW:** Had she ever been the president?

**BY:** No.

**RW:** She was probably very busy with her business, her restaurant.

**BY:** Yeah, she really—let's see, Mama joined in nineteen sixty-two.

**RW:** Getting back to a couple things you brought up earlier, um, do you know when the secret committee went out of existence, or did it just fade away, or was it abolished, or what?

**BY:** I think it, uh, I think Ruth Steinhauser (sp?) and Eve Johnson were president—Ruth preceded me, uh, as president. And I think that it was between those two presidencies that we just let it die. We just

decided that there was no point in continuing it, and there were, I know there were—I said to uh, I know I felt that there was no point in having a committee like that, and that we could really, probably, if it were known, throughout, it would really be a black mark against the club. So, you know, it was just allowed to die out.

**RW:** You mentioned that when you joined, there was the organization—some members of the organization were conservative in some ways. Could you elaborate on that just a little bit? Possibly they didn't, they wanted to have the club exclusive and not rent it out, that was one way...

**BY:** Yes. And they didn't want, um, well the serving of liquor was something that they didn't really want. Wines and spirits and things like that. Uh, and it was just anything that would be suggested that really they felt was going to be, uh, someone taking over the house for things that they didn't approve of, were really just adamant about no—and um, the order of the day was to have people contribute things. I think there is a chair here that has my mother's name, and so that was a way to control, I think, what went on. I mean, if they wanted a certain piece of furniture, they would go to somebody and say, you know, "We need this." I know that the freezer was one. My mother being in the restaurant business, I mean, the freezer is pretty old now, but at the time, I think my mother gave toward the freezer.

**RW:** That's how they furnished it.

**BY:** Uh-huh, right. And, uh, it was just a whole different outlook. I think that it was, the purpose of the club at that point was just sort of, um, um, you know, exist for a certain kind of, uh, social activity and what was not deemed, you know, proper and appropriate, well, they just didn't have it.

**RW:** Well, did they—I know that the organization started out under Eleanor Brackenridge, who incidentally was a temperance worker, I think maybe that's where the feeling about alcohol...

**BY:** Could be.

**RW:** Active in the suffrage movement and political in that way. Over the years, I mean, has the organization been involved in any social and political issues in a broad sense? Like...

**BY:** Well, no, not really. I think that this has been primarily a, uh, an organization which has existed for social activity, um, and, uh, that is changing. I think our membership is—there again, if you don't evolve, you find that there is just not a lot of purpose for people. Um, and so I think that we are finding that we need to do more and I—at the time I was active, more active, our concerns were really more with the problems of just the house, the physical upkeep of the house. We were really in such bad straits and now I think that we are in the situation of having a little bit more money at our disposal, not enough to take care of the house, but there's some concerns that we need to look to. But we also, I think, recognize that we need to get into other areas. Now, for years, we have had the scholarship program. And we have tried to, to work with battered women.

**RW:** Really? Well, tell me about that.

**BY:** Well, we try to collect, um, things for the battered women's shelter, and we try to see what the needs are and become more involved. But, with the membership, we do have um, a membership at this point which is probably, um, older, in age than say, something like the Junior Forum or, uh, some of the other organizations. So, it's difficult. Now, one of the things someone mentioned to me the other day, and I thought, 'Well, that's good,' she said, "One of the things I think that the Woman's Club does is that they, it provides a place where older women, who are no longer really active, in the politics or in the business community, have a place to still come and visit and there's that social interaction which is provided." And I thought, 'Well, that's a good way to think of it.' Because at the time when, as I said, we were more active, our situation was that we wanted more younger women to come in and it was during that time that we decided to go to luncheon meetings as the general meeting, rather than tea meetings, because they—at the time, in the seventies and eighties, early eighties, we had two general meetings a month and they were both at about two thirty or three. Which is a very awkward time for

women who work or women who have families, because you have young children to pick up, that's right in the middle of the time that they need to do it.

**RW:** Carpool time.

**BY:** Right. And so, um, I decided, you know, let's just go with the luncheon meeting. We have our luncheon meetings for our roundtables, let's just go with—and that's when we started that.

**RW:** What are some of the other social needs or concerns you think the organization might be moving toward or—you have a social action committee or a social problems committee or anything like that?

**BY:** No, we don't. And I think that's a hangover from the past. We were very reluctant to take a, to take sides on a controversial issue. There is that feeling that we need to avoid controversy, and I'm not sure that it's not something...I really don't think it's something we're going to be able to avoid. And, but up until the present time, there is that reluctance to get, to be too active on one side or the other. And I know one of the things that they are very clear about is that we do not, um, we do not rent the house for any kind of political activity.

**RW:** Or civil rights?

**BY:** Well, civil rights, I think would be something. But, I mean, we don't take sides, certainly in support of candidates and that kind of thing.

**RW:** Like Lila Cockrell running for mayor.

**BY:** Right. Yeah. We would, uh, I'm not sure how they feel about, I mean, how most people feel about um, candidates, particularly, but I know that in the past, we've really just decided that we don't want to get involved.

**RW:** You probably have a non-profit tax exemption status, and you have to be careful.

**BY:** Yes, that's right.

**RW:** So what are some of the kinds of things—what are some of the other programs—I know social in the broad sense, but what are some of the other kinds of roundtables are there?

**BY:** Well, the roundtables, you know, that situation, when I joined the club there were something like eighteen roundtables. And I think we're down to, maybe seven?

**RW:** I see. So that, that is...

**BY:** And that's something—the roundtables were, of course, organized around the federation, the fact that you had these large departments, under which you had the various roundtables. And...

**RW:** Was it the General Federation of Women's Clubs? You all, of course, were associated...

**BY:** Yes, that's the umbrella, right, that's the umbrella organization, so we have the, the departments, which then, of course, sort of oversee the various—at least that's the way it used to be, I don't think that's the case anymore. Uh, the Soiree, for example, was formed, uh, probably around ten years ago, and that was an attempt to, to get people who worked and were not able to come to daytime meetings to come to evening meetings. And I think that roundtable is still fairly, in fact it is active, very active.

But, when I joined there was, you know, the Modernists, which was sort of a, kind of a, an ambiguous term in that you could do almost anything. And then there was Book Lovers, and I don't think that is a, a roundtable that exists anymore, and that was, uh, where a book review was given, or you know, someone would read a book and they would discuss it after, that was the program. And then there's uh, Noontide, and I never had much to do with the Noontide, but I, you know, it was—International Affairs is another one.

**RW:** And what do they do?

**BY:** Well, they used to discuss, um, world happenings, but I think now that they've really, have, just sort of got to the point where they report on various countries during the year, you know, just little...

**RW:** I wonder if they supported the United Nations or if they had any controversy about the...

**BY:** I don't believe there was any controversy. Now, I remember before my mother was a member of the Woman's Club that I took part, um, in the International Fashion Shows. That was one thing—and I

have a picture at home, you know, this whole gathering of women out in front of the club in different costumes.

**RW:** That must have been really interesting.

**BY:** Yeah. And it was uh, and we would come and we would be in the different, you know, um, the different program. So, I do remember that that has been a problem in that we had so many roundtables and they were, you know, they were jam packed, I mean, eighteen, you could imagine. Everybody met once a month for lunch.

**RW:** They were really popular.

**BY:** And they were popular. And some of the roundtables were, uh, bigger than others. One of the ones that has remained really constant and uh, well, um attended is Carousel. That's one that's survived quite a bit. And the new one is Fiesta, and that was formed for new members. And they had Garden Roundtable—now Spanish, Spanish Roundtable went out, I mean, for whatever reason they were not, and they used to have, uh, Meriendas (sp?) and you know, different programs, but that probably is something we sort of, not done as much...

**RW:** Well, I know that, that in Texas, the Women's Clubs founded most of the libraries in the state, and I'm not sure what role the Women's Club here has had in supporting the library, I don't they founded the library here, but they helped? I mean, I'm not sure.

**BY:** I, I think that that has probably been one of the weakest, weak, weaker things about the Woman's Club, the more weaker elements, that there hasn't been this push to get involved in a number of civic, um, situations. Um...

**RW:** Would you like to see it become more involved?

**BY:** I think that there was—I think it would have probably been a better thing to do earlier on, I think we are getting there. I think we have a membership now who are much more open to that. When I joined, there was this, um, you know, there was this tension between those who didn't want and those

who wanted to do it. So, I think the ones who were more actively inclined just fell away, or just sort of kept membership but really didn't participate that much.

**RW:** Well, maybe those older women have just gotten older and maybe passed on.

**BY:** Yeah, I'm really surprised, you know, as I look through the book, at how many people, um, I used to know, and you know, sort of no longer active or no longer here.

**RW:** Tell me a little bit about yourself. You are a realtor?

**BY:** Yes.

**RW:** And, uh, did you go to college, or?

**BY:** Yes, I went to Trinity.

**RW:** And what did you study?

**BY:** Well, [laughter], I studied, I majored in, uh, in drama or speech, really, and then, um, minored in history and then I taught school for a period of time.

**RW:** Elementary, or?

**BY:** No, middle school. And then...

**RW:** That's a tough age.

**BY:** It was, yes. I don't think I'd want to teach now.

**RW:** Where did you uh, what school did you teach at?

**BY:** I taught at Hawthorne.

**RW:** Not that I know where or what that is.

**BY:** Well now, it's a, an elementary school, but at that time, it was a junior high school.

**RW:** Where is it?

**BY:** It's over on Josephine, between Broadway and St. Mary's.

**RW:** Is it a predominantly Hispanic?

**BY:** At the time I taught there, it was not. But I think now, it may be, I'm not sure what it's like now.

**RW:** And so, uh, then you went, then you had some children, or...

**BY:** Well, actually what happened was when we were married and then we moved to New York and then came back, and then for a period of time I didn't work, and so I really took part in a lot of different things. I became active in the Southwest Foundation Forum, was on, was president for that.

**RW:** What's that?

**BY:** That is a group of women, it's an auxiliary organization to the Southwest Foundation for medical, biomedical research. And we served as a fundraising and just a support arm and it really does a lot of things with money which is raised. And then I was on the Craft Center board, as well, and had been on, you know, various, different things. And I decided somewhere along the line, that, particularly when our son graduated from high school, because we have an only son, I had thought, well, you know, I'll not work. And, after he graduated and went to college, I decided I really should get into something that was going to bring in some money as well as whatever else. And went into real estate.

**RW:** How long have you been into real estate?

**BY:** Well, almost fourteen or fifteen years at this point.

**RW:** Is this your own agency?

**BY:** No, I'm with Kuper Realty.

**RW:** When they answered the phone, I could never understand, Kuper?

**BY:** It's K-u-p-e-r, Kuper. And the Kuper family has had this, uh, agency for, I guess twenty some-odd years at this point. And the, uh, mother of Charles Kuper, he's our broker, is, um, a member of the Jerzik (sp?), she's Harry Jerzik's (sp?) daughter. And they were the family who had the Lone Star Brewery for years and years and years and, the art museum. So, um, she, you know, their connection with San Antonio was a long time and very—so, anyway, that's where we are at this point.

**RW:** In terms of your real estate business, have you, do you feel, have some of your clients been people you've met in the women's club, or...

**BY:** Uh, probably not so much. Well, you know, real estate is funny, because I think probably the most, the source of more of my customers or clients has been, I was on the Monte Vista Historical Association Board, and this has been a number of years ago.

**RW:** Is that an area of town?

**BY:** Yes, well, we are on the edge of Monte Vista.

**RW:** Is that a little town?

**BY:** No, it is an area which is historical in that the houses—we've received historical designation. And, it's an interesting area of the city in that it started, probably some of the houses were built at the turn of the century, and the ones on King's Highway or the ones, these really antebellum mansions with the pillars and—well, like this one, this is the Robert Ayres house. So the houses on King's Highway  
[end of tape]