

PATSY WONG
Sing Wong Restaurant – Portsmouth, VA

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Date: May 23, 2014

Location: Sing Wong Restaurant – Portsmouth, VA

Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: Forty minutes

Project: Tidewater VA Yock

[Begin Patsy Wong Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Wood: So it's Friday, May 23, 2014. This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance and I'm sitting here with Miss Patsy Wong. We're at Sing Wong Restaurant on High Street in Portsmouth, Virginia. Did I get all that right?

00:00:14

Patsy Wong: Yeah.

00:00:16

SW: And so Patsy I'm wondering if you wouldn't mind saying hello and introducing yourself for the tape telling me who you are and where we are.

00:00:23

PW: Oh hello. I'm Patsy and we're at Sing Wong Restaurant and this is Friday. Me and my husband run this restaurant and we're in Portsmouth, Virginia.

00:00:37

SW: And for the record will you tell me your birth date?

00:00:39

PW: Oh gee, okay my birthday is August 29th.

00:00:43

SW: What year?

00:00:43

PW: 1952.

00:00:46

SW: And Patsy if you wouldn't mind could you tell me how you got started in the restaurant business here?

00:00:51

PW: Oh well I started working because he works and so like after—okay his dad asked us after he wanted to retire, he asked both of us to come back and do the restaurant okay. That's how it—we came about working here.

00:01:08

SW: And what is your husband's name?

00:01:10

PW: Haymond—H-a-y-m-o-n-d, okay Wong, uh-huh, yes.

00:01:16

SW: And what are his parents—what's his father's name who had the business?

00:01:20

PW: Oh Foon—F-o-o-n—and then before that one was his grandparents.

00:01:27

SW: What are their names?

00:01:28

PW: Oh okay that's Sing Wong and Mee Sau Wong, okay, so they're the ones who actually started the restaurant and it started in 1965 and then okay how it started. Okay, grandfather and grandmother came over first from China okay. I'm not sure how long they were here but after they got everything settled and it was okay then they brought the family over which is Foon and—my father-in-law and mother-in-law okay. They brought them over and the family with them, okay and then they all worked here in the restaurant and—okay. And then worked here and I don't know, then after everybody started going to school and then they decided how they—what they wanted to do and all you know the kids went off to school. Everybody was still working here for I don't know how long. Okay I'm not sure how long that was. And I don't know from that—.

00:02:27

Okay the business is going good and I don't know, what else do you want to ask me?

You ask me something. Okay I'm running out of—. [*Laughs*]

00:02:37

SW: Okay, I'll jump in and ask you something.

00:02:38

PW: Oh okay.

00:02:38

SW: So do you know where in China Haymond's family is from?

00:02:42

PW: Oh ah—

00:02:45

SW: If you don't know that's okay, I just—I'm curious.

00:02:48

PW: I'm thinking it's—okay, he—okay he was born in Hong Kong but then they were raised in Canton, China, okay.

00:02:57

SW: Which is in the South right?

00:02:59

PW: I don't know that part. I don't—I don't know. [*Laughs*] You look it up.

00:03:03

SW: Okay, I'll look it up.

00:03:04

PW: Yeah.

00:03:05

SW: Now where did you grow up Patsy?

00:03:06

PW: Oh I grew up here in Virginia.

00:03:09

SW: In Portsmouth?

00:03:09

PW: No, I grew up in Norfolk, Virginia. Okay the city over the water, okay just the next city over, okay. And so kind of like okay most—okay I'd guess you say most people here in Virginia I guess they come over—. Well I was born here, America, so I guess—I know what the restaurant is because my parents did a restaurant too, not like this, okay. So it kind of like—it's like Chinese customs, you do that but you still—you can still be doing other things, okay.

00:03:42

Like my husband he worked for General Electric before he even came here. And I did like things—I did medical field like I was a medical lab technician you know drawing blood from people's arms you know. I did that stuff. So both of us had regular eight-hour jobs, and

then when his dad asked us to come back because he's the oldest son and it's kind of like custom. Okay when your dad asks you, you come on.

00:04:08

But he didn't want to, you know because we were working regular eight-hour jobs and we were okay. We could do it but then he asked us and I said, "Okay." So that's how we came about working okay. And then I don't—I don't know what you want. What else, you ask me.

[Laughs]

00:04:24

SW: So where—what—did you work at a hospital? Was it in Norfolk or—?

00:04:28

PW: Yeah, I worked at—I worked at—before it was called Norfolk General Hospital right on—in Norfolk. I worked there and then I did doctors' offices. I worked at Civil Service over there at Norfolk Naval Hospital. I did that. But he always did General Electric.

00:04:47

SW: And what did he do there?

00:04:48

PW: I have to say like let's say working with the TVs.

00:04:53

SW: Like an electrician?

00:04:54

PW: Yeah something like that, yeah. I don't know. He did a bunch of things. I don't—I don't know exactly all the different things he did. Yeah, yeah, okay—

00:05:02

SW: And what—what year did you guys stop working your jobs and come into the restaurant full time do you remember?

00:05:08

PW: He kind of—when he got off the boat that's how he describes himself—he came over when he was fifteen, yeah. Okay, got off the boat and was here. He worked here from like when he was fifteen—sixteen, let's put it like that. And then also was going to school, so that was kind of hard for him because he's the oldest and he worked here and go to school, like okay. Go to school and then come here and work and then go home, that's hard. And then the other younger ones I think they still did but they didn't have it as hard as him because usually the oldest one—the parents depend on the oldest one or ask like—you know what I mean. I think it's most families you dependent on the oldest one to say, “Hey, come to work,” and that kind of stuff. So that's what it was for him, it was hard.

00:05:59

SW: How many brothers and sisters did he have?

00:06:02

PW: He has two—let me see, I'm going to count—two brothers, three sisters, so that's a total of six kids in one family yeah, okay. And they all worked here. The youngest one, yeah he worked here but not as long since he was the youngest, yeah. So in the beginning, restaurant, I would say it was real busy so all kids worked, all kids worked in the back, all kids worked you know. It was very good and because he told me this was the only restaurant in the beginning, the only—there was—what I mean by that, the only restaurant and no fast food. There was no McDonalds, no Burger King and all that, okay and so once those came around he—they cut off all those sandwiches stuff and then they did more of what you see now, the menu now what we have okay.

00:07:01

SW: So there used to be sandwiches and—?

00:07:02

PW: Yeah, sandwiches, I don't know—yeah mostly sandwiches. I don't even—yeah but a lot of sandwiches because—

00:07:09

SW: Do you know what kinds of sandwiches?

00:07:11

PW: Oh like regular like I'd say hotdogs, hamburgers, fish, French fries—that kind of stuff 'cause remember I said back—it was the only restaurant here. So there was no competition. So

that's why it was really busy then. And this neighborhood where a lot of people would just walk here and come, which is good 'cause a lot of people in this neighborhood don't have a car okay.

00:07:41

SW: Was the neighborhood— has it always been historically since you've known it mostly African American?

00:07:47

PW: Yes.

00:07:47

SW: Community?

00:07:47

PW: Yes, yes. There was a project back here, it was called Ida Barber, all projects right back here and then when they tore it down and now I kind of call it projects but it's more on the line of houses now.

00:08:02

SW: It looks new. I was driving back around there.

00:08:06

PW: Yeah, it's—I don't know how—when it actually was torn—yeah okay new. Okay, so I would say—what people will tell me there's houses, okay how you call it—duplexes back there,

okay. So I think it's mostly African American, to my knowledge, okay. It could be other ones too.

00:08:30

SW: And do you know—you said you weren't sure how long the Ida Barber Projects were torn down? Has it been like twenty years?

00:08:38

PW: Gee I don't know but it's been—it was there a long, long time. I'll just put it like—I don't know the date, okay, I'm not sure. I'm the wrong person to ask on that date stuff, okay.

00:08:49

SW: Okay I'll hold back on the dates.

00:08:51

PW: Okay.

00:08:51

SW: I just wanted to ask you a couple more questions Patsy because you said your parents had a restaurant?

00:08:56

PW: Yes.

00:08:56

SW: What was the name of it?

00:08:57

PW: My—my parents was in Norfolk and that was called Dragon Gate, okay.

00:09:07

SW: And what kind of food was served?

00:09:09

PW: That was more on the line of more authentic Chinese food and it was a sit-down restaurant.

See, Sing Wong here is all take-out. Okay—

00:09:21

SW: Has it always been take-out?

00:09:23

PW: Yes. Well yeah, okay. We had a few tables before but it was still all take-out. It was no table service here okay.

00:09:35

SW: Does that make things a little easier for you guys?

00:09:37

PW: A little bit easier, yes, just serve the food and it's a faster turn-over okay, nobody hanging around, okay.

00:09:47

SW: And so could you tell me your parents' names?

00:09:51

PW: Oh okay, my parents' names are Edward and May Lee—L-e-e, okay.

00:09:56

SW: And did they—did their parents come here? I mean I wonder where your—your—

00:10:02

PW: Okay. Oh.

00:10:05

SW: If you can tell me.

00:10:05

PW: Okay, if I can—my mom's parents were born in Canton, China, okay. I know that. I'm not sure about my dad's parents, I'm not sure.

00:10:13

SW: Do you need to get that? [*Phone Rings*]

00:10:15

PW: Hold on. [*Patsy gets up to answer phone, the tape is paused.*]

00:10:16

SW: I'll pause while you get it.

00:10:16

PW: Okay, okay, go ahead.

00:10:17

SW: You were talking about your parents and where your parents—your parents are from Canton?

00:10:21

PW: No, my grandparents are. Canton, China but my mom was born here in Virginia and my dad was born in China, okay but I don't know what part of China 'cause he never talked about that. So that's hard to—and my dad is the type of person, I tried to pull it out and he said, "Ah you don't need to know that. I'm—I'm here, I'm good." I said, "Oh okay. Okay dad. Okay that's fine." Yeah.

00:10:47

SW: So you tried to ask him before and he's just kind of like nah?

00:10:51

PW: Yeah, even see—you know well he’s passed away now but even—. See for a long time I didn’t even know nothing about his family ‘cause he never really said nothing. And then finally it popped out: “Oh yeah, I got a brother in Canada. So gee, I’ve never known so I’ve never gone to see him.” And so when my mom and dad went there ‘cause he was getting older and so my mom said, “Okay we took some pictures. Here it is.” I said, “Oh gee mom! Okay, okay.”

[Laughs] But she was—she wouldn’t really bring it out either unless I really asked about it, I guess ‘cause it’s not—to them maybe it wasn’t that important and not that meaningful to talk about it I guess ‘cause they were so far away, okay. So that’s—that’s why I really didn’t know that much about my dad’s family. I just know all about my mom’s because they’re right here you know.

00:11:43

SW: Are they in Norfolk?

00:11:44

PW: Yeah, well like okay my mom’s parents after I don’t know when they came over exactly. I’m not sure but when they came over they stayed here and like they used to baby-sit me, so that’s how I know that but they died in the early ‘60s]1960s]. So and I was born in the ‘50s [1950s] so I’m—I don’t know them that well but I still remember them, yeah.

00:12:10

SW: What were your mother’s parents’ names?

00:12:12

PW: Oh gee, okay, okay, Joe and let's see—what was her name? Oh boy. Joe and—oh I don't know. I don't know my grandma's—sorry. I can't think of it. It's on that—the headstone and I can't think, okay.

00:12:30

SW: That's okay.

00:12:30

PW: Okay. Joe is the father, my grandfather okay, okay.

00:12:33

SW: And I just wanted to go back and ask you one more thing. You said that—

00:12:36

PW: Oh wait. I got it—I got it. Joe and Lock—L-o-c-k that's what—okay, okay, okay, all right.

00:12:45

SW: And what was it like—okay I just wanted to ask you what was it like growing up in Norfolk, like what do you remember most about it? Do you have any particular stories or memories about it?

00:12:54

PW: No, nothing—no, not really. I don't remember anything unusual just a normal childhood, hanging out with friends, being baby-sat with my grandparents. It was—okay let's say it was life

was easier I guess 'cause you didn't have—you didn't have to work 'cause I was a kid and I think it was easier. Things were cheaper. It's not—I guess being a child you don't know the stuff you do when you grow up, okay. So life was easier. You just played with all the other kids and you—I don't know, yeah I think life was easy going then. I didn't remember—I don't think, I didn't have any hardships. We didn't have that much money but still it was okay. Okay. but that's as far as I remember okay, nothing bad happened. I guess that's—you know so—.

00:13:51

SW: And your parents had a restaurant for a while?

00:13:55

PW: Ah—

00:13:56

SW: Did you ever help them with that restaurant?

00:13:57

PW: When I was older. See right when we got married that was around when I was twenty-five. Okay. We—I helped out at the restaurant because I was—no, wait a minute, back up there. I think I helped them before I actually got married that's right. Before I got married 'cause I was still living at home 'til I got married, okay. So I was still helping my parents at their restaurant 'cause it was near—it was what—about half an hour from the house. So I stayed at home which was good for me 'cause I could save a lot of money then, okay. So I helped my parents out and I

just helped them, like a regular kid would right and to save money by staying home before I actually got married.

00:14:40

SW: Now how did you and Haymond meet?

00:14:43

PW: Oh we met—we met at a—we met at a church—a church but he said we met at a party, so it could have been both—party and church okay. But I think my parents and his parents already knew each other okay. So that was okay then right, yeah, yeah, yeah. Everybody knew each other then, so—. And I think we—we dated for maybe about three years and then got married, okay. And I don't know. We're okay.

00:15:18

SW: Do y'all have kids?

00:15:18

PW: Yeah, we got two. I got—Daniel is my son and Christina is my daughter.

00:15:25

SW: Do they live here in the area?

00:15:26

PW: Yeah, my—my son works oh different jobs and then well he works at a bike shop and then my daughter is an engineer at the shipyard, Newport News Shipyard, okay. So they're still right here local, okay.

00:15:41

SW: I just wanted to ask you Patsy. You said that your husband came here when he was sixteen?

00:15:46

PW: Fifteen.

00:15:45

SW: Fifteen.

00:15:46

PW: Fifteen, okay.

00:15:48

SW: Were his parents here and they sent for him?

00:15:50

PW: No. He—he told me they all came together as a family but first grandfather and grandmother came over, got the restaurant, made sure everything—'cause I think it's like the thing you have to have a place of business or something here before you can bring your family or

bring whoever over. It's something—I don't know all those legal detailed stuff you know what I mean, so that's what that is 'cause once you bring a family over you got to have a job—money right and a place to stay. So that's what grandfather and grandmother got all that stuff straight and then the family came over, okay? Yeah, yeah.

00:16:30

SW: And I don't—you may not know the answer to this. I was just curious because I was talking to Jenny [Wong] yesterday and I'm—do you know. There are a lot of people—a lot of Chinese immigrants coming into this particular area, Norfolk, Portsmouth—do you know what brought people here to this particular area because she talked about a lot of people coming into San Francisco but then there were a lot of people coming here in this part of Virginia. And I didn't know if—

00:16:58

PW: Oh well. Something is pulling them here?

00:16:59

SW: Yeah, about this particular area?

00:17:02

PW: All I know is—I think we got a pretty—I don't know. There's a lot of Chinese people if you're a Wong which we are. There are a lot of Wong(s). See Jenny, she's a Wong too if you talked to her. She's a Wong. I'm a Wong. So we know each other. But a long time ago when I was single, her and me hung out. I used to hang out with all of them, all of them, so I think—. I

just don't know what pulls them here. This—maybe this area is a big influence of Chinese here, but there's also—what's the other one, Filipinos are here too. So they're kind of close together. So maybe it's just the community is—I don't know. Being in Tidewater area I would say it's slow-paced, slow okay and if you want that fine, but I think it's okay because I'm used to it because I have been to New York. That's way too fast for me, so but there's a lot of Chinese there.

00:17:59

I think people who they live and let's say people who lived in New York, maybe if they can't make a go 'cause it's very expensive, but they come here but you can make a go but it's harder 'cause it's slower paced. And the money is not as good but you—if you find the right place it just depends what you do, okay. Let's say it like that, you know it's hard. Any—I think anyplace you go it's hard to establish yourself—job or something, okay. *[Laughs]* Okay, like—

00:18:31

SW: I have a couple more questions.

00:18:33

PW: Oh okay. *[Laughs]*

00:18:35

SW: And in terms of your parents' restaurant and the restaurant here do you know if Jenny is like the—'cause Jenny's [Wong] family had the Norfolk Noodle Factory, were—was your family buying noodles from them or do you know if Haymond's family—?

00:18:46

PW: Yes, we were. [*Sounds of Haymond in the kitchen behind us preparing for lunch.*] Yes. We were, we were, okay. Okay, her father was Park Wong. He's the one who is the owner of the [Norfolk] Noodle Factory. She told you that. Okay, and yes, we were buying noodles from him for a long time when he was in business. Then he retired and then his sons took over. I don't know which one. And then I think after they gave up that noodle place it was in Norfolk then the son—the son opened up his own place and I still brought—I bought noodles from his son, okay. And then when he sold his place then I'm buying noodles from somebody else, okay. So it's how—I mean it's all going together, right, is that what you're asking me? Okay, okay.

00:19:40

SW: And do you—did your parents serve yock-a-mein at their restaurant?

00:19:45

PW: No, no, no, they didn't, no. It's okay let's say I would say noodles are in a more of a—this area like African American neighborhoods okay you can sell it in the other neighborhoods but it's kind of hard 'cause it doesn't—I think it doesn't sell as well okay. I'll put it like that.

00:20:10

SW: So you're saying—can you explain what yock is? It's popular here in this area.

00:20:17

PW: Okay.

00:20:17

SW: Is that what you're saying?

00:20:18

PW: Okay, yes.

00:20:19

SW: Is that—you know—

00:20:19

PW: Yeah, I'll say it's popular in the Tidewater area but not that many restaurants sell it 'cause it's kind of a cheap, reasonable thing and it's simple—it's simple. And okay, it's just a simple and fast thing to cook. Okay, all right, the noodles are made up—you call them yock noodles and the noodles are just made from flour and water. That's all the ingredients is, okay, so when you serve—when you get a yock it's just—you already have the noodles like almost cooked three-fourths of the time, okay. And then when a customer orders you get the portion and you heat it in your water, like they heat it up, okay, put the noodles in the box. Most of the time you had ketchup or usually it's ketchup or some people like the gravy, okay. Either way it's still a yock, and—

00:21:18

SW: What kind of gravy are we talking like turkey gravy or—?

00:21:23

PW: Okay it's the gravy made—no, uh-uh it's the gravy just made with flour and water and seasoning. Okay, that type of gravy okay. We call it brown gravy okay. All right, so after that then the meat for the yock can be pork, chicken, beef, shrimp, or sausage, okay. If it's the pork or chicken that's boiled meat, beef or shrimp—those meats are stir-fried in the wok and add sautéed onions to it, and the sausage are the Philadelphia hot sausages. Okay, so you can do—those are the five choices of meat and then we put um, okay and then the pork, chicken, and sausage are the ones we put the raw chopped onions on it if you prefer. Okay or you can leave them off. And then some people can have an option of adding a boiled egg, okay.

00:22:25

SW: Do many people do that?

00:22:27

PW: It depends their preference. Okay, let's put it like that. Or, also if you don't like the raw chopped onions some people ask for the sautéed onions on top. You can do that. There's different variations. I guess it depends on what people ask and we can do it. What's another way? Some people ask—oh they can add green peppers on top, sautéed green peppers on top, okay, you can do—you can do different variations of what a customer wants, okay. It's based on the ingredients that we have here at the restaurant okay, all right. So and it comes I don't know—what else do you want to know? Oh okay—

00:23:11

SW: Can you describe it—for people—obviously this is audio so you can't see it but when you—when I came in and ordered it the other day obviously I did not know what I was doing and you had to take the cayenne pepper away from me before I hurt myself. But you—you—you—when it's done people order the yock and then you—you give it to them and they—could you talk about how—the bottle of fixings?

00:23:33

PW: Oh okay, okay. After you get your box of yock you got your noodles, your—and your meat, okay. I sit it up on the counter and I let the customers season it, okay. Usually the seasoning that goes—will go in it—soy sauce, apple cider vinegar, and red pepper. It's up to the customer to use what they want or what they like okay. Let's put it like that but mostly—the most important ingredient I would say is the soy sauce 'cause that's what gives it the real true taste of a yock because when I hand them the yock it's just plain unless you count the ketchup as a seasoning, okay. And then so usually I would recommend putting enough soy sauce, a touch of vinegar, and a touch of pepper. That's what I recommend. After that it's up to the customer if they want to do over that amount okay. It's up to them, all right, so—.

00:24:30

SW: And Patsy do you ever get people who request it without the ketchup with more like a broth?

00:24:34

PW: Oh yeah. Okay. You can—okay yeah some people—some people wants ketchup or no ketchup or a little ketchup. They can do that and you add broth like chicken broth from our soup pot. That kind of gives it more flavor or makes it more soupy, yeah, okay yeah you can do that too, uh-huh.

00:24:59

SW: And do you—do you like say would you and your husband eat yock at home?

00:25:04

PW: Hmm, no, to tell you the truth because it's a little bit too much soy sauce for me. I prefer the food where it's actually as you cook it you season it then. Don't—I don't like it you just add it on the top. I don't like it like that. But that doesn't mean it's no good. So most people do like yock just for the taste of it, okay, but it could be anybody eats it. You don't—any nationality if they get used to it and if they like it they will be able to eat this.

00:25:34

SW: And can you also talk, you said something—I thought it was really great when you said about like it's the recipe and the way you eat it it's just like—it's just like a—something that you just do using memory like and it's also about personal taste, so you fix it to just however people like it.

00:25:49

PW: Uh-huh.

00:25:50

SW: Well let's go back to the recipe, you said there really is no recipe for it?

00:25:54

PW: 'Cause you're just—there's no recipe 'cause you're just cooking noodles, like you're cooking noodles—you're boiling the noodle in the water. That's all there is. There's no recipes, no measuring it right. I mean there's no ingredients 'cause all you got is noodles, the meat that you just add that portion of meat to it and your ketchup or whatever—it could be ketchup or gravy or no—or no topping on that noodle, okay, yeah. So I don't—

00:26:24

SW: And I want to ask you about the spelling. You guys spell it y-a-k-e-t, can you talk—do you know anything about the spelling because there's so many different ways?

00:26:31

PW: Oh no, I don't know. I've seen it like yock, y-o-c-k, or yocket—y-a-k-e-t. No, I don't know about the spelling. It's just me seeing it somewhere and that's how I write it or say it. Oh some people call it like—they can call it box of noodles and then you can say soy sauce and they refer to that as “black john.”

00:26:58

SW: Soy sauce is “black john?”

00:26:58

PW: Well some people call it that.

00:27:00

SW: Oh.

00:27:00

PW: Okay, I'm just giving—'cause maybe you didn't know that.

00:27:02

SW: I never heard that before.

00:27:03

PW: See I learned that here, so—. [*Laughs*] Yeah, they call it black john. Like sometimes—and also here I—I don't know, I'll just—we sell, when you—uncooked noodles you call it dry yock. You can call it that. We sell that here. So people can take it home and cook it or wherever and then we sell the soy sauce too.

00:27:24

SW: Do you sell a lot of that here like both—like the dry yock?

00:27:28

PW: We sell the cooked one and the dry yock, yes because people like we have a lot of—. Okay since this restaurant has been here for a while we go through a lot of generations so then people who lived here like grew up here, they lived here and then let's say they finished school and they

move away or their job takes them away so when they come back in town. They're going to order some yock or—and if they want to take some home to cook themselves then I sell them the dry yock. So that's why we sell a lot when people are in here. They come from out of town and they want to get it or they live somewhere where they don't sell the yock so they buy the dry yock and they take it home and do their thing at home, okay. Yeah, but yes, I think—since we've been here a while I think we have a—let's say we have a loyal clientele that comes here which is good for us and good for them. And so I—you know I see a lot of families go through this place you know. Yeah, young and old, yeah, yeah.

00:28:35

SW: I just have one more question for you.

00:28:40

PW: Oh okay.

00:28:40

SW: I'm wondering you know you guys sell other food on the menu. There's different dishes, but do you think yock—do you sell more yock than anything or does it—do you have a lot of yock sales here in terms of—?

00:28:52

PW: Okay, the things that we sell the most here are the yocks and the sausage which is the Philadelphia hot sausage with—we serve it with white rice and gravy. We sell that a lot here.

Those two items we sell a lot. The other ones we sell—we sell pretty much the other ones but those two are on top of the list the yocks and the sausage on top of the list.

00:29:15

SW: Do you know how long the restaurant has been serving the sausage?

00:29:17

PW: Oh since the—the yock and the sausage have started since—hold on let me double check. The sausage and the yock—*[double checking with Haymond off-mic]*.

00:29:52

Haymond Wong: *[Off-mic]* When I was here they only served those—at the same time.

00:29:57

PW: Okay, that's what I meant. Okay, so the yock and the sausage has—we've been selling that since 1965, okay. And in the beginning for the restaurant it was mostly more of American sandwiches like fish sandwiches, hotdogs and hamburgers. After that when the fast food restaurants came around then we served more of the—okay how should I—yock, fried rice, egg foo-yang, lo-mein, those. And this restaurant is more like an old—old-fashioned so we serve basic Chinese, okay.

00:30:39

SW: And so you switched from the sandwiches to the basic Chinese foods because there is like—

00:30:45

PW: The fast food and more people I think more people were going for more authentic or simple—that's what they come to us now, because now we're an old—fashioned restaurant and what I mean 'cause we serve it the old way, the old way. Like the newer restaurants are restaurants that pop up that are newer than us let's put—they're going to add ingredients. And that changes the taste of it. It's—I don't know, more—it's not their way, it's not the old way like older generation. Like let's say someone who is sixty or seventy they're used to the old way. Don't add like a lot of seasoning. You still add it but you don't—they're not used to like something with tomatoes. You don't put tomatoes, you don't put—we don't do no tomatoes. We don't do nothing sweet here with sugar. We don't use sugar. So a lot of restaurants now they sweeten up their food. We don't do that here. That's not the true Chinese way or the way we do it, okay. We don't do that here.

00:31:50

Okay. A lot of younger generations they like sweet, sweet, sweet. That's just what it is, okay, like they use a lot of duck stuff. I—I still have some customers but we stick to our old-fashioned way because that's what works for us—that's what sells and they still like it. We have a lot of old-time customers and regular—a lot of new customers. They come and try it and they say, "Oh I like this. I like this better than the other stuff." I think we just keep it simple you know and that's what works. That's what works for us, yeah, so—you know.

00:32:25

SW: Patsy I don't have any other questions for you but is there any—? Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important for people to know about the restaurant or about yock or anything that I didn't ask you that you want to add?

00:32:38

PW: No. I don't know. No, I don't know unless you know something. Okay, I told you about the yock. What was in it, I don't know, you didn't get a picture yet. I know you didn't. Okay let me see what else? I told you what we sell and what's in it and how we serve it. I don't know, what else you want or need? I don't know, what else do you need to know? I told you the meats, right, is that all you wanted to know—what's in it and what makes it up? We get the noodles from the noodle factory. We don't make that. Okay, we don't make that, okay and I told you what—the ingredients of a noodle.

00:33:16

SW: I do have one more question because I've heard from other people that—that mostly when—I don't know if you're seeing this in your restaurant, do you see mostly older customers ordering yock as opposed to younger customers or does it—is there really not really a rhyme or reason to that?

00:33:29

PW: Uh-hm, uh-hm, no. Well I see—I think I'm going back to what I said because we've been here—okay we're a third generation now. Okay, him and me, so let's say we—we grew up with our customers, so I'm going to see a—let's say it was a mother in the beginning [*Laughs*] and

now it's a grandmother and then so on, so I'm going to still see those same people and then they're still going to bring their family 'cause they're—let's say the grandmother was here and then she brought her daughter or son here and then now they bring their kids. So I'm going to see that whole generation because if they grew up on yock and they like it okay then they'll still keep coming. So that's going to be all different ages right there, okay, all right. So I think in this restaurant I'm calling it family oriented too, okay. So we serve—that's what's good too, right?

[Laughs]

00:34:34

SW: That must—that must feel pretty incredible though to see people return with their families and you know through the years.

00:34:39

PW: Yeah, it is. It's fortunate for us that we still have that kind of clientele, the loyal—that they come to—. That's why we keep what they like as long as it's working for us and we're able to provide that service for them. So we can do that you know, do it in a way that's good for both—on both sides—us and the customer okay.

00:35:08

SW: Do you think either one of your children will want to take over when you guys are ready to retire?

00:35:12

PW: No, I don't think so. No, this is a—being in a restaurant is a hard job. And it's long hours. They grew up here when they were younger so they got their own jobs now and you know it's hard. It's more than a—it's more than an eight-hour like we—I would say from 11:00 to 11:00 that's 12. I'm saying we put in thirteen or fourteen hours a day on like weekend days. So it is hard. It's hard if you got a family 'cause in the beginning when we first took over my—his mom was still here and helping us. And that's when I still had the kids and I would do my daily thing of mother stuff like they were still in school. Like I'd go get them, pick them up, bring them here. We did homework which was hard. And then we could leave on time but then—then my mother-in-law was still here helping so I could go home with the kids. But yeah, that's hard that way, yeah. That's why this—it's hard when you have kids or have a family okay. Yeah, so that's hard 'cause I think a lot of people now who come over um, they have their kids at a restaurant. It's good and bad but it's hard on the kids and they get—they hate it after a while. I have to admit that, they hate it 'cause they don't get to hang out with their friends, you know. That's what I mean. It's a hard life.

00:36:34

I've adjusted because I think it—that was an adjustment period because my mother-in-law was here to help us out. And then I made that adjustment. After my kids were gone and grown up then I said well it's still hard for us 'cause sometimes we just have to take off and do what we can, okay yeah, yeah, just like any business. When it's your own business you—that's the sacrifice you got to make, yeah, okay. Okay, I don't know what else do you want to know?

00:37:02

SW: I don't—I'm going to let you go Patsy because I've taken up like—I think we've been talking for almost forty minutes now. Can you believe that? I told you twenty, so—

00:37:08

PW: Well whatever. I know but you didn't take no pictures. You want to take your pictures or what—what else you want to ask me real quick?

00:37:15

SW: I don't really have any other questions.

00:37:16

PW: I don't know. Well do you—

00:37:18

SW: Is there anything you want to say?

00:37:18

PW: I think I gave you everything that you wanted or that I think you want, yeah. Well you can call me up if you want to if you think of something or you find out something you didn't know or whatever, right.

00:37:33

SW: Okay.

00:37:38

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] The neighborhood— [*Off-mic*]

00:37:39

PW: I told her.

00:37:40

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] What we brought out.

00:37:42

PW: I told her it's not just older people eat it. It's any people 'cause we see a lot of families.

00:37:46

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] Yock—people what you call that—minority people at that time, they—that's what they eat yock and sauces. And you know a lot of new restaurants they don't have that.

00:38:02

PW: Because you can't make money off that. I think I read that in your article.

00:38:07

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] They put gravy instead of ketchup.

00:38:09

SW: Yeah.

00:38:10

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] So you know there's different types of style eating. And only people here in Tidewater that's how they eat the—the—. So you know you pour the—they put gravy on it.

00:38:28

SW: Yeah, that woman who came in when I came in she—she—yeah she remembered that.

00:38:31

PW: She said oh, you know yeah.

00:38:32

SW: She was like I don't like that but yeah it's interesting. Just because when I was talking to a couple people they said—and this is just historically—you know that—that a lot of the—the neighborhoods like the African American community at a time when there wasn't a lot of money they used a lot of like—they used whatever they could get and ketchup was one of the things.

00:38:53

PW: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah.

00:38:54

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] You could get a box of yock for less than \$2 at that time and so it's a meal for them. That's how they started. [*Laughs*]

00:39:01

SW: Yeah, yeah.

00:39:04

PW: So something cheap.

00:39:05

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] You go to the other neighborhoods, you know fancy restaurants they don't sell that stuff because they couldn't—couldn't sell them because nobody wanted to eat those.

00:39:13

SW: Yeah.

00:39:13

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] So you know—

00:39:14

SW: That's real interesting.

00:39:16

HW: [*Off mic from kitchen*] That—you got the right idea. That's how it started.

00:39:19

SW: Yeah. Well thank you. Patsy thank you for doing this.

00:39:24

PW: Oh no, no problem, no problem at all, yeah.

00:39:26

SW: I'm going—

00:39:27

PW: Okay. [*Laughs*]

00:39:27

[End Patsy Wong Interview]