

The School Years

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Pre-school

I do not remember when I started formal schooling. I do have a clear memory of attending Maryknoll Kindergarten 瑪利诺幼儿园 in Kowloon in 1938/9. I remember how I fussed about going to kindergarten on the first day, but mother took me there anyway. I was scared to enter the classroom, but mother promised to wait just outside. Within a short while, I felt comfortable there and made no noise. I remained so for the school year my parents stayed in Hong Kong, 1938-39.

Grade School, ?? to 1946

Back in Shanghai, I attended 2nd grade at McTyeire #1 Primary School 中西第一小学 for a year. I transferred to JueMin Primary School 觉民小学 for 3rd to 6th grades, graduating in 1946. JueMin was known for its high academic and disciplinary standards. One thing I remember is the student seating in the classrooms. It was alternately a boy, a girl, a boy, a girl. In those awkward ages of 10-13, girls did not talk to boys. So, by alternating boys and girls, classroom chatter was not an issue. JueMin introduced English language classes in the 3rd grade. We were also given Japanese lessons during the Japanese occupation years of Shanghai/ ending in 1945.

Junior High, 1946-49

For junior high, 7th - 9th grades, I was enrolled in the Catholic high school for boys, St. Francis Xavier College 圣芳济中学, run by Marist Brothers. SFXC was known for its high disciplinary and academic standards, with strong English language requirements. Outside of class, we were crazy about American movies which had just returned to Shanghai after the war. SFXC had no afternoon classes on Wednesdays and Saturdays, so matinee movies on those days were routine. Mother and I lived in the Savoy Apartments as did her sisters and family and my cousins Louis and Paul Chiang, and Bobby Ling. Louis and I rode our bicycles to SFXC, a 15-minute ride from the Savoy. We also bicycled to the movies. Our favorite theaters were the Roxy for MGM movies, the Majestic and the Nanking for 20th Century and Paramount productions, the Grand and the Cathay for Warner Brothers and Universal pictures. Two favorite movies in those years were Warner Brothers' CASABLANCA with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman and 20th Century Fox's STATE FAIR starring Jeanne Crain and Dana Andrews, featuring Rodgers and Hammerstein music and lyrics. I so loved both movies that I saw each 3 times in 2 weeks. CASABLANCA remains my all-time favorite even today. I knew nothing about Rodgers/Hammerstein then, but I loved all the tunes in STATE FAIR. Not until the 1960s in the USA did I

realize STATE FAIR was an early collaboration of R&H. All the tunes in R&H musicals are my favorites.

Senior High, 1949-52

Cousins Louis, Paul and their parents left Shanghai in May 1949 for Hong Kong as the Communist forces pushed towards Shanghai. Within months, the Communist Liberation Army marched in. I moved to St. John's Middle School 圣约翰中学 for boys, for 102 grades, 1949-52. By then, I had moved to dad's house near St. John's University 圣约翰大学 which I knew I would enter after high school. SJMS was also heavy in English. It was located on the same campus behind the University. Those were the noisiest classes ever. Under the People's Republic of China, many teachers were reluctant to exert control on the students who were intentionally disruptive, just for fun. We took advantage of the less authoritative teachers who begged us in vain to be quiet and remain in place during classes. We would do as we chose in those rebellious years. Thinking back, I realize some of the teachers were only 4-5 years older than we were. They just happened to be in the unfortunate position of trying to control naughty, ill-mannered students.

Throughout the senior high years, mother made sure that I had the ambition to pursue a college education in the USA. Life under the new Chinese regime was more oppressive and the relationship with the Western countries was frowned up. Mother left Shanghai for Hong Kong to pursue a life in the free world, also to pave the way for me outside of China.

The year 1952 saw massive changes in the Chinese higher education system. All universities were reorganized according to academic disciplines. Missionary-founded universities, such as St. John's University, were disbanded and eliminated. Engineering, liberal arts, medical departments, etc. from all universities were merged into specialty universities to consolidate talents. When I graduated from high school in 1952, at age 18, little did I know that it would be 10 more years before the end of my college days and the beginning of a career in 1962.

College, 1952-55

I was very lucky to be accepted into JiaoTong University 交通大学 in Shanghai, famed for its engineering programs, This meant I was able to stay at home in Shanghai. On my first day in the Mechanical Engineering Department in JiaoTong, I found I had been assigned to the 2-year curriculum, specializing in Metal Processing. The 1952 reorganization of higher education created abbreviated curricula in all universities to move students faster into the work force. Medical schools offered a 3-year curriculum and engineering schools, a 2-year option. The regular curricula

were still offered. Not happy with a 2-year college program, I delayed a year and I basically loafed 1952-53. In 1953, I returned to the 2-year curriculum in the controlled situation. In those years, college tuition and room and board were free for all students. Not wanting to stay in the dormitory of supervised and controlled life with unsatisfactory room and board standards, I requested permission to stay at home, a 10-minute bike ride. I was surprised to receive a small sum of money in compensation for not taking the room/board option at school. By staying at home, I attended classes only, skipping all the political and group activities which were highly regimented for all students of different backgrounds. I attended classes on weekdays only. At home, I was free to enjoy the company of relatives and friends and activities, especially those in the church.

Fellow students were from all parts of the country, many from rural areas and some with revolutionary military backgrounds. Most Shanghai friends from high school were dispersed into different universities away from Shanghai. Having lost my circle of familiar students and in the increasingly repressive social environment, I was careful about expressing my opinion. Personal thoughts and family background were best kept private. Most importantly, I was not to say anything politically inappropriate. I suppressed my feelings to be successful in dealing with other students and all people. I knew that some students, especially from more rural areas, could well report to student supervisors on behaviors or comments which were not to their revolutionary liking. A slight misstep could have sent me off to a self-criticism session, or even worse. The 2-year curriculum ended with an internship before graduation. Our class was assigned to a machine tool factory in ShenYang 沈阳 in northeast China for one month. I did what was expected of us. We slept in a large room of cement floor with no beds. We had to rely on our own mats and blankets. Meals were taken in mass dining halls. With the internship completed, I graduated in 1955.

A Job after College Graduation, 1955-57

All college graduates waited for the announcement of the national job assignment 国家统一分配. I expected, but feared, to be sent to northeastern China where most industries were located. Surprisingly and luckily, I was assigned to a meter-manufacturing factory on the far side of Shanghai. Again, I was able to stay at home, even though the one-way bus ride took 1+ hours. One of my concerns was the one weekly off day from work, Tuesday. Shanghai was suffering a significant electric power shortage, so factories were assigned different off-days of operation. Tuesdays-off at my factory meant no Sunday church service for me.

I joined the work force in September, 1955. For the next year and a half, I worked in the machine tool design department of the factory. Most fellow

workers were from different districts of Shanghai. I soon found co-workers easier to get along with than the students at JiaoTong. For one thing, we were all from Shanghai, speaking the same dialect living in the same city. We made small talks over our drawing boards. Most co-workers had less formal education and they looked up to me, a college graduate. Our conversations were apolitical in nature and we knew we had life-long jobs. During my year and a half on the job, I received a few awards as a model worker and, for sure, I continued to be politically correct.

In late 1956, the political atmosphere was relaxed and I knew it was time to apply for an exit visa to Hong Kong which had always been my vision since mother left in 1952. Luckily, I was granted one. I left Shanghai in February 1957, on a train for GuangZhou 广州. At the Shanghai North Rail Station, Pastor Yang of Shanghai Community Church saw me off and introduced me to Tony Cane, an Australian from a youth delegation who had visited the church the day before. The Australian group were on the same train to Hong Kong via GuangZhou. Tony Cane was fond of classical music, an expert on Haydn. Over the 2-day train ride, I spent both afternoons with Tony. I was aware that there were chaperones assigned to cover the visitors, so I was careful on what we talked about. I knew that, if I said anything deemed inappropriate by the chaperones, a report could stop my exit from China at the border. Tony provided a great opportunity for me to converse in English and to get a glimpse of the outside world, so different from my life in China. I had pleasant conversations with Tony on music and church. I kept in touch with Tony Cane who lived in Sydney, Australia.

In GuangZhou we switched to a train to ShenZhen 深圳, a small town with border-crossing controls to Hong Kong, British Crown Colony. I was allowed to carry an equivalent of US \$10 for the train fare to Hong Kong Central. Mother waited for me at the Hong Kong side of the border, holding the formal entry permit from the Hong Kong Government. This document had been issued on the basis that I was a student at Maryknoll in 1938. It was February 22, 1957, George Washington's birthday, the day of my re-birth into the free world. Without this official entry permit, I would have to go to Macau to wait for an opportunity on an illegal fishing boat at some cost.

Hong Kong Technical College 香港工專, 1957-58

They were great strokes of luck, graduating from JiaoTong University and a job, both in Shanghai and the entering in Hong Kong. Mother made sure that I would do well in Hong Kong to prepare me for ultimate objective of college education in the USA. I had only an equivalent of a junior college education at the prestigious JiaoTong University. I needed to catch up at least in English. Through special arrangement, I entered Hong Kong

Technical College's Mechanical Engineering Department in the middle of the 2nd half of its 3-year program of courses conducted in English. All students were local Cantonese speakers. With the unusual surname of Suez and from Shanghai, I made a phenomenal appearance in the middle of a semester. Instructors were either British or local Cantonese speaking Chinese, yet everybody knew I could only communicate in English, as my Cantonese was non-existent. I graduated in a class of 23 in June 1958.

In mid-August 1958, I boarded SS PRESIDENT CLEVELAND of American President Lines for San Francisco, with calling ports at Yokohama and Honolulu. My stay in Hong Kong was just 18 months during which I learned to survive in the free world, in English. Mother provided the means and the opportunity for me to attend the University of Texas in Austin. The USA Consulate in Hong Kong required students to have a formal acceptance from a college and a bank deposit of an amount to cover the duration of studies. In my case, UT tuition was \$200/semester, and \$500 was deemed enough for everything for a semester. I was accepted into the junior year for a BS degree in 2 years. The bank account required US\$2000, a financial demand on mother. The choice of the University of Texas was easy because cousin Louis Chiang entered UT two years earlier in to the College of Engineering. In fact, Louis also graduated from Hong Kong Technical College.

The University of Texas, Austin, 1958-61

I stayed in Austin for 3 years to complete the BSME degree. Those were the happiest years of my life. I lived in a co-operative student residence where all residents performed kitchen and house duties 3 hours per week. Campus Guild had only one hired employee, a full time cook. All building operations were handled by elected resident students: an accountant, a kitchen manager who worked with the cook, a building manager, a president and a secretary who handled admin matters. The co-op was like an inexpensive fraternity house of mostly undergraduate students. It also had the atmosphere of a dormitory with military discipline. I soon found that American students, young men of 18-22, were conscientious and responsible. The few graduate students were mature, analytical and practical. All Americans were fun loving with carefree habits. There were 80 residents in Campus Guild, but never would there be more than 60 students in the big study hall with 80 desk stations. The house rules were set up by the charter of the co-op and rigidly enforced. Co-op meetings were held twice per semester, following the Roberts Rules of Procedures. Campus Guild was one of many of UT campus residences operating under the guidelines of the UT office of student societies. On campus, student bodies managed extra-curriculum activities. The appointment of officers in each organization was through free and voluntary elections by students. It was an eye-opener for me of a democratic society, so very different from my life in China.

Even though I was admitted as a junior at UT with transferred credits from Shanghai's JiaoTong and Hong Kong Technical College, there was no freshmen English course to claim credit. So at UT, I had to take Freshman English for Foreign Students. In sophomore, there were American History and American Government courses for foreign students. Freshman English for Foreign Students met 6 times a week with very basic material. I remember how local freshmen in Campus Guild complained of the massive reading assignments in their Freshman English course, while I got easy A's in both semesters. Among the many things I learned in American Government was 'filibuster' which I had not clearly understood in the lecture. When I went to the library for the reading assignment on filibuster, I was confronted with a lengthy family recipe offered by a senator from Louisiana during a famous filibuster. I realized, then, that the reading assignment was an amusing approach to getting across the concept of filibuster.

I moved into an on-campus apartment with 3 other fellow Chinese students at UT, Frank Sun 沈怀侠, H.H.Wang 王璿衡, and Robert Tsai 蔡浩. During my 2nd year in Austin. Cousin Paul Chiang 江齐贤 was also in Austin. We are still in touch 60 years after our UT days. I returned to Campus Guild for my 3rd year at UT to experience the American life.

I graduated in 1961 with the highest grade-point average in the College of Engineering, and with the Hamilton Award. I was also inducted into Tau Beta Pi and Pi Tau Sigma, honorary engineering societies. On the eve of the last day of final exams, when I was in the study hall of Campus Guild, I was paged for a visitor at the entrance. As I dashed there, I was ambushed, kidnapped and driven in the back of a pickup truck to the Littlefield Fountain in front of the UT Tower. There I was thrown ceremoniously into the fountain, a reward to the graduate with a high grade. Back when I first arrived at Campus Guild in 1958, I asked a fellow resident student why many kids in the co-op would tease me. The answer was the kids liked me. If they had not liked me, they would not have bothered with me.

Football games in the fall season were the biggest, most exciting events. The UT Longhorns team did very well under coach Darrell Royal during the years I was at UT Austin. The Longhorns clinched the Southwest Conference Championship in 1962, the year after I left Austin. My days in UT in Austin and in Campus Guild were the happiest days of my life. UT gave me happy and carefree days as long as I managed my studies for the degree. Texas was a great state and Texans were kind and fun people with big hearts.

Summer Job during College Years, 1959, 1960, & 1961

Many Chinese students at UT had summer jobs in Pocono Mountains resorts in Pennsylvania as bus boys or waiters. I had the good fortune to have a 9-5 job, 5 days a week in the research facility of American Machinery & Foundry Co., in Springdale, CT, just north of Stamford. Cousin William Chen 陈国伟, son of Aunt Hilda Yen 颜雅清, was a research scientist there and he arranged the summer job in 1959 at \$80/week. Aunt Hilda invited me to stay with her in her house in South Norwalk, CT, a 30-minute drive. I was fortunate to find a researcher living in South Norwalk giving me rides.

The summer job arrangement lasted for 3 summers, 1959, 1960, and 1961. Each summer, I was able to save up to \$1000 which came in handy for the school year. Aunt Hilda bought a new Rambler in the summer of 1960 and gave me her old Mercury which I drove back to Austin for my last full school year at UT. I proudly displayed a UT decal on the rear window of the Mercury with a Connecticut license plate.

Graduate School at M.I.T., 1961-62

I was accepted by M.I.T. for a Master's degree in engineering at the fall semester of 1961. M.I.T. was the most coveted higher education institution for science and engineering. Even though the tuition was \$1250/semester, I was fortunate to receive the C.T .Loo Scholarship from China Institute in New York City. M.I.T. did not have a colorful campus life and M.I.T. students were very serious about academic activities. In fact, the whole campus atmosphere was seriously formal. I stayed in the Graduate House, a dormitory building across Massachusetts Avenue from the M.I.T. main entrance. At UT, I was not known to play bridge. Somehow it became known at M.I.T. and I was dragged off to play bridge for an hour after supper. That became a routine. Watching UT football games on Saturdays was a custom in Austin, in attendance at Memorial Stadium or on TV for out-of-town games. M.I.T. did not have a football team, a big disappointment. I completed the master's degree course work in 2 semesters and did the MS thesis in the summer, June-July 1962. For these last 2 months, I stayed at the home of Dr. & Mrs. S.C. Wang 王守竟. Aunt Ling Nyi 费令仪, Mrs. Wang, was mother's high school classmate. The Wangs lived in Watertown, just west of Harvard Square, a 15-minute drive from M.I.T. It was a 10-year effort from high school graduation in Shanghai to the Master's degree, 1952-62. My job at IBM in Poughkeepsie started in August 1962.



Graduation at JiaoTong University, Shanghai, 1955



Graduation at Hong Kong Technical College, 1958



The Connecticut Plate Mercury at The University of Texas, May 1961

