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### Interview by Choi Pik Wah Zoe

Pik Wah, Zoe CHOI

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## Translation of the Transcription

- Zoe:** Mrs. Choi, our interview is going to start now. First of all, where and when were you born?
- Mrs. Choi:** Mainland China, 1954
- Zoe:** How old are you now?
- Mrs. Choi:** 46
- Zoe:** What was your father's occupation?
- Mrs. Choi:** Fisherman.
- Zoe:** Was he a fisherman in his whole life?
- Mrs. Choi:** He wasn't a fisherman when I was four.
- Zoe:** Later became...
- Mrs. Choi:** He became a farmer. And two or three years later, he became a Brick maker, those bricks were made for building houses.
- Zoe:** How about your mother?
- Mrs. Choi:** Same.
- Zoe:** The job of your mother was the same as your father?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** Was your father the main breadwinner in your family?
- Mrs. Choi:** Father, mother and sister.
- Zoe:** Had they ever been unemployed?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** When? Why?
- Mrs. Choi:** About 1967 when 67strilee happened in Hong Kong. There was very dangerous and inconvenient to work.
- Zoe:** How did it affect your family life?
- Mrs. Choi:** Only a little bit impact. We could catch fish, shrimp, curb, etc, because my parents have ever been fishermen.
- Zoe:** How many brother and sister do you have?
- Mrs. Choi:** I have one elder sister and two younger brothers.
- Zoe:** Are you the third daughter?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** How was the relationship among you and them?
- Mrs. Choi:** Quite good.
- Zoe:** Keep a good relationship among five?
- Mrs. Choi:** mm...basically, yes.
- Zoe:** Have your family moved?

**Mrs. Choi:** Once... we had moved once... once...move from the boat to the wooden house, and from the wooden house to a building.

**Zoe:** When you were a child?

**Mrs. Choi:** When I was a child...once.

**Zoe:** You mean from the boat to the wooden house?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes...moved to a wooden house.

**Zoe:** How old were you at that time?

**Mrs. Choi:** About six years old.

**Zoe:** Why?

**Mrs. Choi:** It was because we didn't engaged in fishing after we came to Hong Kong.

**Zoe:** That mean your father were not fisherman anymore?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes.

**Zoe:** Can you briefly describe your house during your childhood?

**Mrs. Choi:** You mean the slum? (Zoe nodded) The slum was built above the water, and under the house was water and mud, and also frogs. ( smiling )

**Zoe:** Then how were the bedrooms, kitchen and washroom arranged?

**Mrs. Choi:** There was one room in a slum, and there were two slums. It was a kitchen beside the slums and then a washroom.

**Zoe:** You mean you had two slums, each with one room; the first slum, the second slum, beside them was the kitchen, and then the washroom?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes...Yes...

**Zoe:** Who took care of you when you were a child?

**Mrs. Choi:** My parents. But they needed to work so we had to be independent.

**Zoe:** When did u need not your parents to look after u?

**Mrs. Choi:** About five or six years old.

**Zoe:** Would your parents punish you when you were a child?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes.

**Zoe:** What kind of punishment did you recieve?

**Mrs. Choi:** Physical punishment.

**Zoe:** That mean beating you?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes.

**Zoe:** They beat you by what means?

**Mrs. Choi:** By sticks.

- Zoe:** Could u remember why they beat u?
- Mrs. Choi:** Did something wrong or being lazy then they would use wood or stick beat us.
- Zoe:** Were there any differences in punishing boys and girls?
- Mrs. Choi:** Similar.
- Zoe:** Basically the same?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** How did u spend your holiday?
- Mrs. Choi:** No holiday... no holiday in the whole year.
- Zoe:** No holiday in the whole year? Needed to work even on Saturday and Sunday?
- Mrs. Choi:** To us...there was no holiday, Saturday and Sunday, we had to work everyday.
- Zoe:** Although no holiday, would you play with other children?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes, after dinner and working.
- Zoe:** Whom did u play with?
- Mrs. Choi:** My neighbors.
- Zoe:** What games did u play?
- Mrs. Choi:** Rope-skipping, marbles playing, cartoon cards playing, etc. for the others .... I've forgotten.
- Zoe:** Did you have any habbies?
- Mrs. Choi:** No.
- Zoe:** When do u usually go to sleep?
- Mrs. Choi:** Around five to six o'clock in the morning.
- Zoe:** Have you ever eaten something special?
- Mrs. Choi:** Special? No!
- Zoe:** What did you usually eat at dinner?
- Mrs. Choi:** Fish and vegetables. But we seldom ate meat.
- Zoe:** Usually eat those cheap stuffs such as fish and vegetables?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** Who cooked dinner?
- Mrs. Choi:** Mainly father... mother sometimes did.
- Zoe:** You no need to cook?
- Mrs. Choi:** No! My sister and I need to cook since we were seven years old.
- Zoe:** How did the housework distribute in your family? Did everybody need to do?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes, But those who needed to work will bear less.

- Zoe:** You bear more housework, didn't u?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** What kind of housework you needed to do?
- Mrs. Choi:** Cooking and washing clothes.
- Zoe:** How did you wash the clothes?
- Mrs. Choi:** Brought the clothes to the river to wash.
- Zoe:** By hand?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes.
- Zoe:** Do you have any special experience?
- Mrs. Choi:** Of course! Because washing clothes near the river is dangerous and as I didn't know how to swim, I was frightened to be drowned.
- Zoe:** That means, you felt scared once you washed clothes?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes. During winter, since it is too cold to push your fingers into the river, I would even cry when I squatted washing my clothes near the river. (laughing)
- Zoe:** You had to finish the task even you cried?
- Mrs. Choi:** Of course. Either I finished my job or I would be beaten.
- Zoe:** Did you need to look after your younger brothers?
- Mrs. Choi:** As I was not much older than my younger brother, it is difficult for me to do so, so my second elder sister looked after them.
- Zoe:** Did you realize that there was sexual discrimination? In your home or at work?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes. There was sexual discrimination both at home and in society.
- Zoe:** Was that against male or female?
- Mrs. Choi:** Of course against female.
- Zoe:** How? Could you explain that?
- Mrs. Choi:** At that time my father often said that the girls needed not go to school. He thought that it was useless, as it only benefited others (i.e. the girls' husband and his family), and that it didn't matter whether girls were illiterates or not. Our family often argued on this issue. (sounded having no choice)
- Zoe:** Did you receive any education?
- Mrs. Choi:** No.
- Zoe:** You mean you have never been in school?
- Mrs. Choi:** Yes...never.

**Zoe: Did you fight for the chance to be educated?**

**Mrs. Choi: Yes**

**Zoe: Did yourself fight for that?**

**Mrs. Choi: No. It was my sister who fought for us.**

**Zoe: How was the result?**

**Mrs. Choi: Quarrel.**

**Zoe: That means you failed.**

**Mrs. Choi: Yes. They argued frequently, at last, I couldn't tolerate it so that I gave up the educational opportunity.**

**Zoe: Did all your three sisters ever receive education?**

**Mrs. Choi: Yes. My second elder sister has studied for a year.**

**Zoe: Why?**

**Mrs. Choi: Because my eldest sister fought for her but when she fought for me, my father opposed it. (sounded having no choice)**

**Zoe: How about your younger brothers?**

**Mrs. Choi: they all finished their primary school. That wasn't because my father didn't allow them to continue their studies. It was because they were unwilling to continue.**

**Zoe: Did you get angry with your parents?**

**Mrs. Choi: At first...a little...but now I don't. Because the older generation may be stubborn so I won't blame them. They are indeed my parents.**

**Zoe: Have you ever got a job?**

**Mrs. Choi: Yes. I had to work when I was very young.**

**Zoe: How old were you then?**

**Mrs. Choi: I had to look after my cousin when I was 5 or 6 years old.**

**Zoe: How old was she then?**

**Mrs. Choi: Only a few-month old.**

**Zoe: You had to look after a baby when you were still a little girl?**

**Mrs. Choi: Yes. And the job lasted for a whole day. It was really a hard and stressful job. Since my uncle and aunt went to work every morning, they would leave their daughter for me to look after. I was very scared because I was afraid of causing an accident. I remember once, when I crossed a bridge with my baby niece on my back, both of us fell into the nearby river due to my carelessness. We were nearly drowned to death. Fortunately, one of our relatives saved us and we were in good condition. However, my Mum considered that it was my fault, she chased**

me and beat me. She could not catch me since I ran few rounds around the pond. But I stopped running and let her beat me finally. My body was full of bruises. I still remember my eldest sister said, “She’s just a little girl. If our younger niece died, she would die also. Don’t you feel you’re wrong with treating her in this way?” (smiling)

Zoe: Is this incident unforgettable?

Mrs. Choi: Yes! We still mention it sometimes even at present.

Zoe: Did you still keep on looking after your younger cousin then?

Mrs. Choi: Yes...until I was six.

Zoe: what kind of work did u do after six?

Mrs. Choi: I started cooking with my second elder sister when I was about seven.

Zoe: Cooked for your family?

Mrs. Choi: Yes. Because our home was far away from the brick-making site. We had to cook the lunch for our parents, elder sister and younger brothers who worked there.

Zoe: How long was it?

Mrs. Choi: It took about half an hour.

Zoe: Till when did you do so since you were seven?

Mrs. Choi: Around ten years old.

Zoe: Take the food (e.g. coffee) to the customers in a “Tai Pai Tong” in Yuen Long.

Mrs. Choi: Did you need to stay overnight?

Mrs. Choi: Yes.

Zoe: When did you finish the work at that time?

Mrs. Choi: Around eight o’clock.

Zoe: When did u wake up?

Mrs. Choi: Before the dawn, around 5 o’clock in the morning because I need to shoulder buckets of water from the street from my home.

Zoe: How long you did this job?

Mrs. Choi: Not so long! Around one year, then I became a worker selling “dim sum” in a Chinese restaurant.

Zoe: Until?

Mrs. Choi: Until twelve, then I became a worker in the factory.

Zoe: What kind of factory?

Mrs. Choi: Garment manufacturing factory.

**Zoe:** You have worked in factory since twelve?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes.

**Zoe:** Do you think that the treatment of boys and girls were different at that time?

**Mrs. Choi:** Many differences. When I was young, my parents would only bring my younger brothers to restaurants. Girls rarely had chances to go there. But my father somehow treated me well since he sometimes would also bring me to restaurants.  
(smiling)

**Zoe:** That mean there was sexual discrimination?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes, very serious.

**Zoe:** Was the same situation applied to your neighbors and relatives?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes.

**Zoe:** Could you tell me the differences between the lives of nowadays' children and those of children in the past?

**Mrs. Choi:** Nowadays' children are more fortunate than us. They possess what they want. But it's natural because times changes. I don't feel envy.

**Zoe:** What's the biggest difference?

**Mrs. Choi:** Education, eating as well as myself.

**Zoe:** Did your childhood influence your adulthood?

**Mrs. Choi:** Sure.

**Zoe:** How?

**Mrs. Choi:** No knowledge.

**Zoe:** How did you relate to your family?

**Mrs. Choi:** Not bad.

**Zoe:** Is it true that you have good relationship with your siblings because you supported each other when you were young?

**Mrs. Choi:** Yes, it improved our relationship.

**Zoe:** Mrs. Choi, finally I would like you to describe your childhood with a few words.

**Mrs. Choi:** My childhood....sometimes happy, sometimes not, but the most important thing is to make happiness out of bitterness. So when I was unhappy, I went fishing and play water. Then I would be happy.

**Zoe:** "Making happiness out of bitterness" is the description of your childhood?



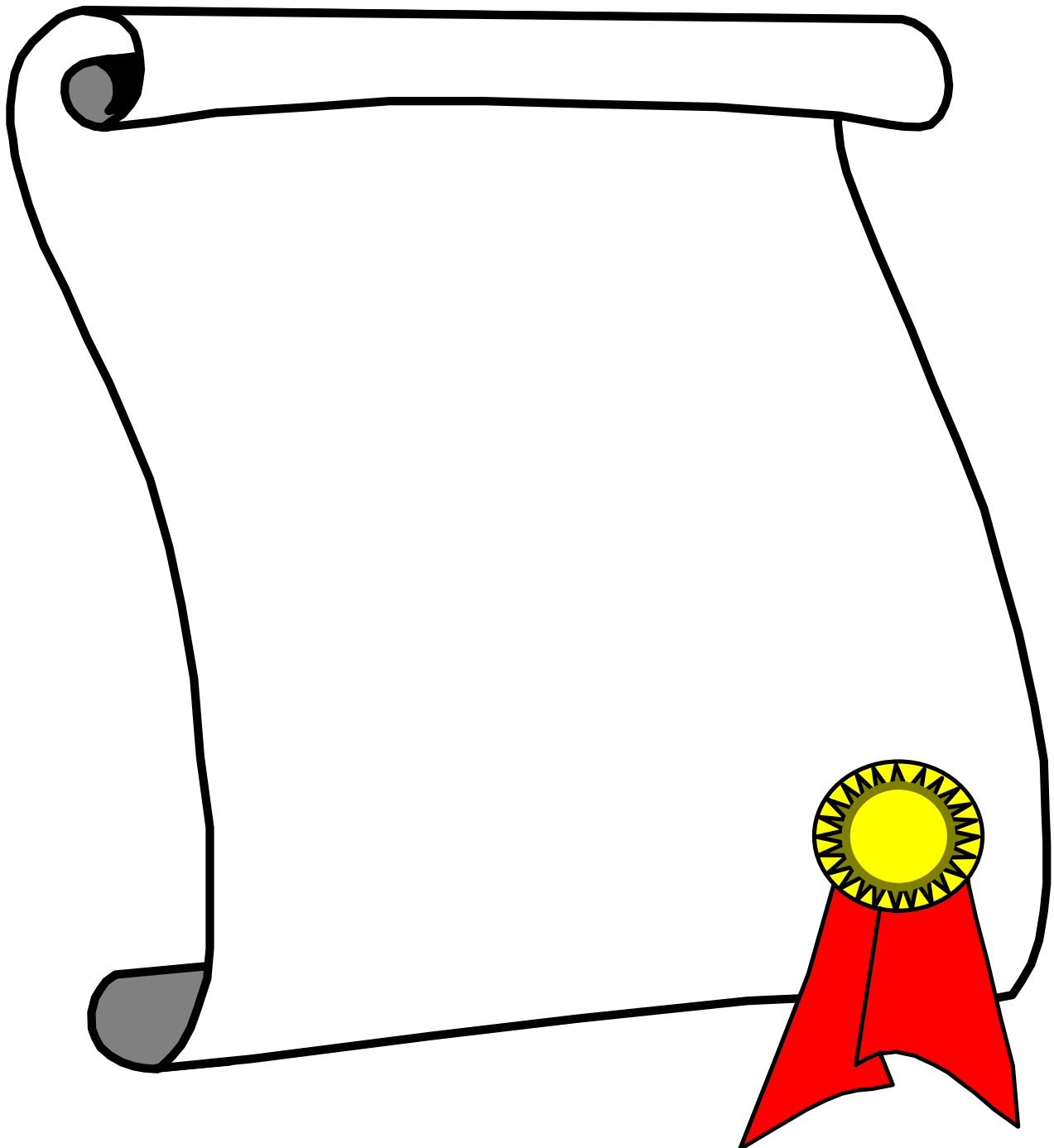
Name: Choi pik wah, Zoe  
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**Mrs. Choi: Yes.**

**Zoe: Thank you very much.**

*This is the end of the interview with Mrs. CHOI on  
23-3-2000. The interviewer was CHOI PIK WAH, ZOE.*

*(1074319)*



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