

Chapter 2 Berkeley

We were met at the San Francisco airport by Albert King, James' older brother, and my baptismal godfather. Albert was studying at Wayne State in Detroit, but his fiancée was in San Francisco and he came often, and we were lucky that he was in town. He had made arrangements for my brother and I to stay at the International House and took us there after collecting us at the airport.

International House was a huge Moorish styled structure at the edge of the U.C. Berkeley campus, built with funds donated by the Rockefeller family. It houses foreign students from all over the world. So that we foreign students can get acclimated to the United States, the I-house also houses some U.S. graduate students so that we can interact and learn from these older local students. I suppose that was preferable to putting us with some immature undergrads, such as those residing at the fraternity houses nearby. Those frat boys refers to the I-house as the "Zoo", as in their eyes the I-house was filled with all sorts of strange and exotic creatures. We, on the other hand, were intrigued by their rowdy weekend beer parties and their loose carefree ways. Every year, at the week of the "Big Game", the annual football contest between the archrivals Stanford and U.C. Berkeley (known familiarly as "Cal"), those frat houses will be decorated with colorful and animated scenes showing the Cal "Bear" slaughtering the Stanford "Indians", and lots of partying would be going on. Stanford later changed their mascot name from "Indians" to "Cardinals" in the 70's in deference to political correctness.

Dining at the I-house was in a large mess hall, cafeteria style, all you can eat. I must have put on twenty pounds the first year. There were no meals served on Sunday evenings. That was our chance to go out and try some of the restaurants in town. There were two Chinese restaurants, "Wing Kong" and another one whose name escapes me now. A Singapore Chinese boy from a wealthy family, studying business administration, owned a big new Oldsmobile and six or seven of us Chinese boys will pile into his car to go to one or the other of the Chinese restaurants. The Chinese food in those days were still of the "Chop Suey" variety but those were quite a treat for us still, after a whole week of American food. We were amazed by the thick chinaware used in those restaurants, which we later learned, working as waiters and busboys in our summer jobs, is so that they don't break as easily in handling and machine washing. Rice always came heaping full, which

the waiter must have squeezed two full bowls together and then removed the top bowl, forming a rounded dome over the bowl served. Also, the food dishes were always jumbo sized, which most Chinese restaurants now, especially those that cater to non-Chinese clientele, still maintain this jumbo serving practice. For us growing boys, of course the more the merrier.

For eating outside of the regular 3 meals, there was a small coffee shop in I-house where you can order hamburgers, sandwiches, and other American snack foods. To this day, I still think their hamburger is the best I have ever tasted. Perhaps any hamburger would taste great at 11:30 at night, after booking it the whole evening, but the memory of those I-house hamburgers has not been topped to this day. That coffee shop sits directly over the eastern end of Bancroft Way, at the top of a slope. Sitting at one of their window tables, you can look down Bancroft, which stretches straight down until it ends at the San Francisco Bay many miles away. I used to wonder what lies at the other end. At the end of the second semester, when I bought a second hand bicycle, I rode downhill all the way, to satisfy my curiosity. Unfortunately it took several hours for me to peddle and walk the bike uphill back to I-house.

The first week, we went through the process of registering for the different classes. That took place in a large gym with roped off pathways and many stations where you were given all sorts of forms, which were filled and then collected at other stations down the line. It was quite an assembly line. In fact, hundreds of upper class students earn some extra spending money working the line during reg week. I did that in my upper years also. One year, several fraternity boys working at the line printed up a bunch of official looking forms asking for name, address and phone number and handed them out to select good looking incoming freshman girls and which was then collected by accomplices further down the line. They ended up with quite an impressive dating file.

The freshman classes were huge, mostly held in large auditoriums holding many hundred students per class. Those theatre sized auditoriums were in columnated buildings with names such as Wheeler, Dwinelle, Life Science, and Engineering; they became our regular haunts. The professor lectures using microphones and projectors. Then, at some other time, we split up into smaller study groups of 10 to 20 students, headed by a Teaching Assistant, who then gave us the more detailed treatment of the subject, when we can ask questions and have discussions. The homework assignments

were corrected by Readers, who were paid assistants to the Teaching Assistants. I worked as a Reader for some years and when at graduate school, worked as a Teaching Assistant and also as a Teaching Associate. Teaching Associates actually get to lecture same as a professor but you get the not so desirable 7 a.m. classes and the classes were much smaller. Being a Teaching Associate was, for me, a real blessing. It normally took 4 hours to prepare for an one hour lecture. You have to know the subject thoroughly in order to be able to answer the questions that your students may come up with. This is how I got to know the subject which formed the basis for my Ph.D. research. When I was doing the teaching, I realized that I only got maybe 20% of what the professor was trying to teach me that first time around.

Those four years at Berkeley went like a blink. Later on, many of my St. Joseph's classmates came to Berkeley also and we became quite a social group. Dominic Kam, Robert Yan, Reginald Mak, Philip Tom, Levi Lee, all lived at one time or another in that now infamous Hearst Street apartment. The time spent there was still the highlight of those younger years!