

Way We Were

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Dick Mon's Park City Childhood, part two

By Emily P. Beeson, archivist

Thomas Richard Mon (known as “Dick” or “Richard” to his friends) was born in Park City on June 14, 1931, likely at his family home at 284 Farrel Alley. (Photo) Richard was the youngest of five children born to Robert and Lillian Mon, Chinese immigrants who came to Park City around 1924. The Mon house was next to Poison Ditch, where Chinatown had been decades earlier. There Richard's father grew radishes, carrots, beans and watercress in his garden, often using them at his Main Street restaurant, Bob's Café.

Richard's many fond memories of Park City include having fun and getting into trouble with friends like Bob Caldwell, Lou Giacoma, Dick Turner, Larry Horan and Freddie Brunyer. One day he and his friends did a chemical test in one of the Central Hotel's closets where Lou and Bob lived “We said, ‘let's try that,’ so we turned the hotel out in [no time]. The grandmother and mother were really upset,” he laughed, remembering how the chemical test put off a rotten egg smell. Despite not having much money, the kids played marbles, horseshoes, basketball and baseball behind the Safeway—today's 350 Main—always repairing the baseball with as much tape as they could find or afford. (Photo)

One poignant memory occurred at his father's restaurant when the radio announced Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Richard said it was “hard to believe.... Just, I guess kind of a shock; [people] didn't know what to believe.” As a Chinese American, Richard doesn't remember his family facing any discrimination, before or after the War, but he did remember when Japanese and Japanese Americans were sent to Topaz and, more locally, to Keetley to farm during the War. Richard's three brothers, William, Frank and Lincoln, served in the armed forces. When he saw an “I'm a Chinese American” badge, he thought it “was unusual because there weren't many Asians around then. So I thought it was kind of funny. I think my brothers had them. I don't know where they got them....Now that I think back, it's kind of unusual,” since everyone in this small town knew the Mons.

After Richard and his family moved to the Bay Area in 1944, Richard received a letter from his eighth grade English class, writing to say they missed him. Many of Richard's

Park City memories occurred in that southern space between Rossi Hill and Main Street, but the landscape has since changed. What was once his home, basketball court, and baseball field is now dwarfed by the upper China Bridge Parking Lot. But, as Richard said when he visited this summer, “That’s progress!”

Captions (For Digi.44.9: The view has changed from the front porch of the Mon home at 284 Farrel Avenue (Swede Alley today) across to the Marsac School and China Bridge. (For Digi.44.6: The Gin and Mon boys take a break from playing baseball. (Notice the taped baseball.) Top L–R Thon Gin, Frank Mon; bottom L–R Wayne Gin, Richard Mon.)

