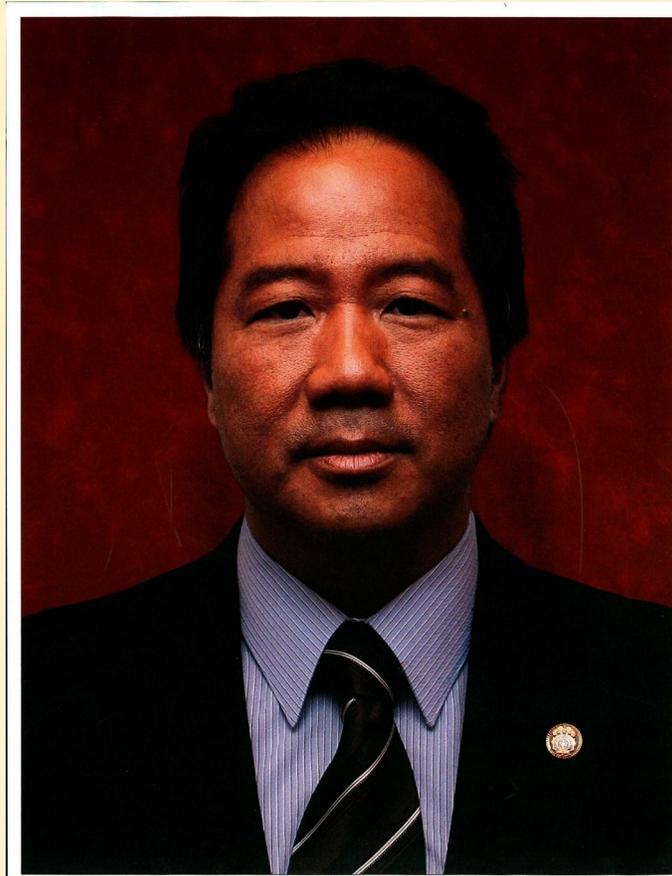


David E. Chong



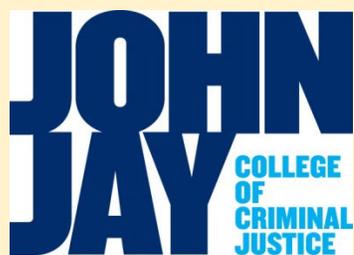
Lloyd Sealy Library
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
City University of New York

Oral History Interview
with
David E. Chong

Interviewed by
Jeffrey A. Kroessler
May 24, 2010

Justice in New York: An Oral History

No. 13



Justice in New York: An Oral History

Preface

President Jeremy Travis initiated Justice in New York: An Oral History in 2006. Based in the Lloyd Sealy Library, the project was made possible through a generous grant from Jules B. Kroll, President of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Foundation. The goal was to interview criminal justice leaders – district attorneys, police commissioners and members of the department, elected officials, defense attorneys, and advocates, individuals concerned with the workings of the system.

Each interview is recorded on cassette tapes and/or a digital recorder. The original is deposited in Special Collections in the library. Each transcript is bound and the volume is cataloged and placed on the shelves. A digital copy is available through the library's web site, as are selected audio clips from the interviews (<http://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/>).

Oral history is a problematic endeavor. The interview is only as good as the questions asked and the willingness of the interview subject to be open and honest. Some remain guarded, others become expansive. Sometimes memory fails, and details, names and dates are confused. Some individuals have their own set story, and an oral history will add little that is new or especially insightful. Other individuals use the interview as an opportunity to sum up a career; on occasion that means gliding over unpleasant or difficult details. Our purpose was to allow each individual to tell his or her story. In each case, the final transcript has been approved by the interview subject.

Even with those caveats, what emerges from these interviews is more than a collection of personal reminiscences. The interviews shed light on controversies and policy decisions of a particular historical moment. At times, the interviews verge on the philosophical, as with discussion of capital punishment, race relations, or the decriminalization of controlled substances. Always, the interviews contribute to our understanding of the many facets of the criminal justice system – law enforcement, prosecution, incarceration, prisoner re-entry, and electoral politics – and reveal how New York has changed over the decades, as have social and cultural attitudes.

Justice in New York: An Oral History stretches across more than half a century, from the 1950s to the 2010s. Those years saw an unprecedented rise in social unrest and violent crime in the city, and then an equally dramatic drop in crime and disorder. If the interviews have an overarching theme, it is how the city – the police, courts, elected officials, and advocates – addressed and, yes, overcame those challenges. These men and women were actors in that drama, and their narratives stand on their own. The truth or mendacity of the story is for the reader to assess.

Chief Librarian Larry E. Sullivan guided this project from the start and participated in several interviews. Interim Chief Librarian Bonnie Nelson oversaw the creation of a new website for Criminal Justice in New York, a portal for the oral histories, trial transcripts, images and documents from Special Collections, and other resources. Special Collections librarian Ellen Belcher, cataloging librarian Marlene Kandel, and emerging technologies librarian Robin Davis contributed to the success of this project.

Jeffrey A. Kroessler
2013

David E. Chong
Chronology

1958	Born in Toronto, Canada
1969	Family moved to College Point, Queens, from the Lower East Side
1976	Graduated from Flushing High School
1978	Graduated from Queensborough Community College
August 1980	Graduated from John Jay College of Criminal Justice
September 1980	Joined the N.Y.P.D. and entered the Police Academy
19xx	Received Masters of Public Administration from Marist College
2002	Commanding Officer of the Counter-Terrorism Bureau's Global Intelligence Unit, formed soon after attack on the World Trade Center.
November 2002	Retired from the N.Y.P.D. with the rank of Lieutenant Commander of Detectives after a 22-year career.
November 2002	Deputy Commissioner of Public Safety, City of White Plains
May 2006	Police Commissioner, City of Mount Vernon
2007	Received the "Excellence in Leadership" award from the Department of Homeland Security
January 2010	Public Safety Commissioner, City of White Plains

David E. Chong

May 24, 2010

JK You've come a far way from Toronto, Canada.

Chong I have, actually. I was born in Toronto, Canada. My grandfather was actually a General in Chiang Kai-shek's Army, and after the Second World War, he was granted citizenship by the British, and he decided to move his family to Toronto, Canada, and settled in the original Chinatown, down in Toronto, Canada.

JK Was this before the fall of China to Mao and the Communists?

Chong No. It was actually around the same time, because as I got a little older, I would speak to my grandfather, and my grandfather would give me bits and pieces. One of the last things that I remember as a teenager, before my grandfather passed away, and we had a discussion when I went back and visited him, was that he was always angered in the respect that he thought that the Chinese or whoever, he was in charge of the Nationalist Army, and he said that the Chinese were very splintered. They had to fight the Japanese on one front, and were promised a lot by the allied forces. And then, they also had to fight themselves on the Communist front, and they said that if he could have gotten Mao's armies, those peoples in the Civil War, together with them, that the Japanese, they could have won their war against the Japanese. So, that was his whole flux. You know, originally, he went to Formosa, which is now Taiwan, and the Nationalist Government settled in Formosa, and then from there, because he was a trained general by the British, he actually was awarded citizenship, and he went to Canada and. When he went and settled in Canada in the very early 1950s, he actually settled in what is now one of the largest Chinatowns on the East Coast.

JK Why did your family come to New York?

Chong Well, I was part of a broken family. What had happened was, my mother got divorced and I was raised by my grandparents, and my mom left the family and left me with my grandparents and came to New York to find another life after she was divorced. She came to New York and she ended up finding another husband, and they didn't have a lot of money at the time. They moved down – they were down on the Lower East Side, in one of the public housing projects. And they sent for me. So, I came to New York in the late 1960s, and I started down on the Lower East Side, and eventually, they got the American Dream and they moved out to College Point and they were able to buy a house. But my first couple of years in New York, I remember quite vividly when the Mets won the World Series in 1969, was when my mom and my step-father bought a house, a very modest house out in College Point, Queens.

JK Moving close to the winners out there at Shea!

Chong Moving very close to Shea Stadium, that's correct.

JK And are you a Mets fan still?

Chong No. I'll be quite honest with you. I've always been a Yankees fan. Although I like the Mets, I cannot compare them with my New York Yankees.

JK Yes, I'm a Yankees fan, too, against my better judgment. So, that explains how you went to Queensborough Community College.

Chong Yes. When I went out to Queens, I ended up going to Flushing High School. I was actually kind of a pretty rough-and-tumble street kid. Probably drove my mom and my step-father crazy. My step-father was very strict, old-fashioned Chinese. Yes, I was a latch-key kid. My mom was working, my step-father would work. You know, they had the American dream. They were able to buy their house at College Point, and I was a real street kid. I hung out in the streets, I hung out with gangs. I went to Flushing High School, and I didn't really try that hard, although my marks were above average. I enjoyed being in the streets more than I enjoyed studying at that time, to be quite honest with you.

JK When you say 'gangs,' I take it that's not quite the same kind of gang problem that you face today, that cities face today?

Chong No, it's different era. Back then, we didn't have, or very few of us, would have access to guns. Back then, when I say 'gangs,' it was groups of people hanging out together, doing what I would call now nonsensical kid stuff and beating our chests and saying that this areas was ours, and if any other kid came into this area, we'd beat them up or we'd get rid of them or whatever. But no, no sense in what I truly learned was gangs later on in my career in policing. We certainly didn't extort people, we certainly didn't have the organization to have gambling rings or commit robberies or even homicides or shootings or anything like that. We were basically street corner thugs, beating our chests.

JK A far cry from the Ghost Shadows in Chinatown.

Chong A far cry from the Ghost Shadows¹ and the Flying Dragons,² which I eventually did infiltrate as an undercover.

JK One of the questions I always ask is, how do you tell the difference between idiot kid stuff and real dangerous crime? I mean, you're a kid. Most kids do idiot kid stuff and teenage madness, and then you have other issues where it's a serious criminal intent, serious criminal behavior and trajectory. So, how would you distinguish that now as Commissioner and throughout your career?

Chong Well, I think that when we were kids, in these so-called street corner thug groups and everything else, it was just biding time and really not having much of a sense of direction or organization or where to go. And it was opportunities, opportunities to create havoc, opportunities to have thrills, opportunities to do things such as that, whereas

when I really got into a real gang, there was a very structured leadership to the organization. There were goals. There were goals of capturing more street blocks. There were monetary goals. When you're with a group of guys hanging out on the corner, the monetary goals are just to be able to get things, you know, to be able to go out that night and eat well, or to be able to buy marijuana or alcohol or whatever; they were goals for kicks. As a part of a structured gang, there were goals for an organization and completely different, and also the ability to be promoted by people on top of you, actually older people. When I was undercover and infiltrated a real gang, we actually had people on top of us, older people, not teenage gang members, but older people, in their 20s and in their 30s, and even in their 40s, that were enablers. They would enable us. They would enable us through giving us weapons. They would enable us through giving us places to live and sleep, and giving us our resources. Whereas when we were kids, street corner thugs, as thuggish as we were, we would go home and end up sleeping in our own beds in our own houses. And then when we gathered together on a specific night, then we were the tough guys on the corner. So, there's a much, a tremendous difference.

JK And you have to distinguish that now, being a police commissioner and a police officer, you had to distinguish, are these guys real threats or are these guys just jerky kids?

Chong Right. There's part of adolescence growing up and beating your chest, and having adolescent thrills and games, and thinking that you're something that you really are not. And then there's real viscous terror, and there's a big distinction between the two.

JK You went from Queensborough Community to John Jay College. Was it in your mind to be a police officer, or did you go to John Jay kind of eeney, meeney, miney?

Chong No, actually, that's a funny story because, not to age myself, but that was during the disco era. I graduated high school in 1976, when disco was really big and pumping, and going very well. And it was actually the Bicentennial of the United States in 1976. So, I was working at a disco. I was making, actually, very good money for being a kid, to be quite honest with you. I had been working at a catering house in Queens and it became a disco, as a lot of these places became, because of the money. I was very young and I was making tremendous amounts of money, pocket money, being in the disco and actually helping manage the disco and helping manage how it operated and everything else. The owner of this catering house, who had given me my job and I had worked for him, now, I had started for him as a bus boy and as a simple maintenance person, and being seventeen years old, was sort of like an assistant manager for him. He had told me that I had a great career in business, I had a great career in restaurant, catering, management, and he wanted me to go to college and get a degree in business. So, coming out of high school, I didn't, again, coming out of an urban high school, such as Flushing High School, I was never in with the top scholars of the school. I wasn't a part of the newspaper. I wasn't part of that. I was more in with the common kids. And coming from a family who never had a college education, I wasn't directed, whereas I see now with my own children and with my colleagues and their children where college is so

very important, and they're directed from a very early age to compete for the best colleges. I never had that direction from my family. I am the first in my family to have a college education. So, where I should have been working very hard in high school towards getting into a so-called name college, that never crossed my mind. I was making very, very good money, cash money, doing what I was doing. I was having the time of my life as a kid, and all of a sudden, I was graduating high school, and what was I going to do? The only person who told me, "Hey, you know what? You should go to college and you should get a college degree and maybe stay with me forever," which is kind of funny, "but maybe stay with me and do well in business." So I really had no direction. I took what I thought was the easiest way out, and that was to go to Queensborough Community College. I had to have a major in something, so I majored in Business Marketing and Finance.

JK And then went from there to, you could have stopped right at an A.A.

Chong Well, what happened was, when I was in Queensborough, I was taking that and going towards my Associate's Degree, and one day, the story is, one day we were out at the beach and a friend of ours in a group of about twenty-five of us, wanted to go into New York City and take the police exam. We all made fun of him, and we said, "Are you crazy?" We would go into New York City and have fun, but why would we go into New York City and take the police exam? But he convinced me to go in with him and I took the police exam, and I ended up scoring very well on it. I think I scored, like, a ninety-eight on the police exam.

JK Whew! That's a surprise!

Chong And it was the first civil service exam I ever took in my life, and I scored very well on it, and then I started to get the letters from the New York City Police Academy. I really didn't know policemen at the time. I didn't know anything about policemen, except that I kind of, as a kid, didn't like them, and that they would interfere with things that I wanted to do as a kid. And so, I knew nothing about the culture, I knew nothing about policing. But all of a sudden, I started getting all these letters from the Police Department, because I scored so well on their exam. And so, I decided at that time, I graduated Queensborough, maybe I should go for a Bachelor's Degree. And everybody said if you want to know about police and you want to meet police and you want to learn a little bit about policing, John Jay College of Criminal Justice was the college to go to. So, I applied to John Jay College and I was accepted in John Jay College in 1978. In 1979, I was called for the Police Department, but I had a year to go to get my Bachelor's Degree, and quite honestly, I was having too much fun and I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a policeman or not. So, what I decided to do was, I decided to defer my hiring from the 1979 class, which was, quite honestly, the first class for a long time at the New York City Police Department, because they had faced budget problems and they had lay-offs and everything else.³ So this was the first class in a long time. And I deferred that hiring, and I stayed at John Jay College and graduated in 1980, and in September of 1980 was hired by the New York City Police Department.

JK There are a couple of things about choosing to do this. One is, this is a very chaotic time on the streets of New York. I mean, as a kid, you're used to it and it's the water you're swimming in. But as an adult, you're looking at this thinking, geez, this is a really dangerous city, these are really dangerous situations. Parts of this city are kind of out-of-control neighborhoods, between the drugs and the violence. And, on top of that, they had police lay-offs and no hiring of police officers for years and years. So, it's not an auspicious time to be joining the Department.

Chong It's funny that you say that. As a kid, you really think you're invincible. And at that time, I had a feeling, as all of being young, that I was invincible. I remember quite honestly being in the classroom and listening to my professors at John Jay College, and some of them required us to read the daily newspapers, which we all did anyways.

JK Kids don't do that today, by the way. They do not do that today.

Chong Well, this is way before the Internet, this is way before even beepers and cell phones. We had none of that. And many of my professors required us to read the newspapers. I remember as a kid, because I lived in Queens now, so, as a kid, I used to take a bus and two subway trains to get to college. And how you killed time in college, well, certainly, I should have been reading my text books, but instead I was reading the *New York Post* or the *Daily News*, and on the cover of the *New York Post* and the *Daily News*, typically what I would do, and I'm being very honest with you, is that the first thing I do is that, I read the newspaper from the back.

JK Me, too!

Chong Which is the Sports Section and the sports headlines! So, as a kid, going to college, I would have my book bag, and I would get on a bus. I had a bus pass. I would get on the bus, and I'd get off on Main Street Flushing to take the train, and I would go and I would buy my two newspapers, the *Daily News* and the *New York Post*, because that was my reading material to get me into school, where I should have been reading my text books, but I was reading the *New York Post* and the *Daily News*. And on the back pages at that time, we had some very, very, I think bad sports teams at that time. We're talking about 1980. I don't think our sports teams were very good. I was always very disappointed in reading the newspapers on how bad our sports teams were doing. But then, eventually, I would read from back cover to front cover, and the front covers were always screaming about very high profile crimes that were occurring throughout the city, and very scary things that were going on, and I wanted to, you know, I think some time along that route with my professors and reading the newspapers and the headlines and feeling invincible, somewhere along that line, my mind clicked in that, 'Hey, you know what? Maybe I can make a difference, and this is not bad.' While I was going to school – the beauty about going to John Jay College, and everybody was very direct when I was thinking about going to a four-year college, was that you're going to be sitting in classrooms with police officers, with real, live police officers, sitting in classrooms, side-by-side. So, you're a twenty-year-old kid, but you're going to be sitting in a classroom besides a man who carries a gun and a badge. And that was very true. And it was pretty

amazing because some of these people were willing to talk to me because I was a fellow student with them, and they were willing to tell me about life as a police officer, and how it was, and they knew that I was going to be hired by the police department. I had certainly some people that were very positive and pushed me, and I had some people that were not very positive, but very negative! But the beauty about the school was I sat in classrooms with, and back then there were three different police departments, so I sat in classrooms with people that were in the Transit Police, I sat in classrooms with people that were in the Housing Police, certainly New York City police officers and Corrections Officers and a whole variety of things. I got a real-life education by being able to sit in the classroom with these people, reading the newspapers and being a city kid myself, and considering myself to be a pretty tough, savvy street kid. Actually, what had happened was one day, and knowing that I was on the police list, one day I will tell you that right before I graduated, I was on the subway and two guys were getting a little rough with each other, and back then, the subways, if you look at them now, they were a scary place. A lot of graffiti, a lot of panhandling. Actually, pretty intimidating pan-handling, where people would actually just come up to you and stare you in the face and stick their hands out and ask for money and stuff. You know, they were hot, muggy, and it was a different kind of subway system back then. But nobody really bothered me because I had that street kid look, and I was sort of like a tough guy, and I was ready to fight with anybody who would think that they wanted to fight with me. It was a completely different attitude.

JK And the subways had real broken windows, not just the theory “broken windows.”

Chong And I remember we used to ride between the trains, and people would just leave dirt on the floor. It was a completely different vision of the subways today. I remember what really turned me on one time was I was a student at John Jay and I was riding the subway home, and two guys were getting rough with each other. Very rough with each other. A guy jumped out, a very crowded train and a guy jumped out and pulled a badge from outside of, he was wearing a badge around his neck. He pulled the badge out and he got involved with these two guys. It was a pretty big brawl in the subway. And I jumped right into the fray! We ended up, I ended up helping this officer, who I found out was an off-duty police officer. I ended up helping this off-duty police officer handcuff one of these combatants. I never got any credit for it, never said anything to anybody. The train stopped at the next station and I saw all these uniforms flood the train, and everybody, and actually, I think I was even actually pushed to the side. But I remember saying to myself, “Wow, you’ve really changed. You did something. You jumped in and you helped the police officer, and you weren’t afraid to help a police officer,” whereas we always avoided police officers. So, I think from that point on, I had made a conscientious decision that as soon as I graduated from school, I was going to join the Police Department. And I did. I graduated from school in the summer of 1980 and I joined the Police Department basically a month later, in September of 1980.

JK It’s unusual in those years for a Chinese-American to be joining the force. There wasn’t a large Chinese American presence in the police force at that time. How did you feel you fit in? Were there any issues, being Chinese in the Academy and then early in the department?

Chong You know, it's funny you would mention that. No, there weren't very many Asian Americans. In a police department this size, you would, and now, looking back, it's pretty amazing, but I was one of probably two dozen Asian-American police officers when I got sworn-in.

JK The whole force?

Chong In the whole New York City Police Department, which, at that time, was twenty-six thousand, twenty-seven thousand people. I was one of maybe two dozen police officers at that time that were of Asian-American descent. So, it was pretty amazing. But I will tell you that when I joined, there were a couple of Asian American police officers that I considered my mentors. They were already New York City police, and the funny thing about it was, I guess the highest rank that we had at that time was a Detective. But Detectives always had that aura about them and everything. I met a couple of them and they sort of guided me along my way, although I wanted, yes, I was a tough guy to guide. You know, they wanted me to carry the flag of an Asian-American on the department. It was something new to me, but I just wanted to carry the flag of being a police officer. So, I did both, I believe. I joined the police department with the first female Asian that was ever hired, Agnes Chan. She was the first female Asian officer ever hired on the department. And a Korean-American police officer, Robert Chung. And another Asian-American police officer, Yu Sing Yee. So, the four of us, that was unheard of, four Asian-American police officers joining the Police Department in one Academy class. It was pretty awesome.

JK The City was changing at that time, because the immigration law had changed in 1965. So, we were getting a larger influx of Asians into the City of New York, and it takes a while before the City's institutions catch up to the population, whether it's school teachers or police officers or any other public servant.

Chong That was one thing. And the other thing was that, listening to some of the veterans, the Police Department, when I took my exam, there were no height requirements. Some of the requirements that had made it very difficult for Asian-Americans or Hispanic-Americans or other folks to join the department, some of the physical requirements, such as height, were eliminated. Again, these were some of the barriers that were written down that were very difficult. You know, it showed that people didn't, as long as they were physically fit and they could do the job physically, you didn't have to be five foot nine. You didn't have to have these certain barriers that knocked out a whole part of your population that could be police officers. And also, the dynamics of New York City turning around, that whole melting pot sort of thing, coming to light, I think all of that all played a role at that particular time. My Academy class was not that big, in comparison with later on, seeing how large the Academy classes were. My Academy class was about six hundred and some odd people. Later on, we would go on to find Academy classes of over two thousand people, but mine was six hundred and some odd people. And remember, mine was the second Academy class hired after a long time of not hiring brand new people.

JK Yes, in 1976 we laid off thousands of police officers, and then didn't hire any more. The force was down ten thousand from its high point by the time we started hiring.

Chong Right. And in 1979, it was the new exam that I had taken, and I believe the first group in 1979 was only a few hundred. And then the second group was 1980, which was the group that I was in, and that was about six hundred. So, we were hired then. And it was really strange, and it was really strange coming from somebody that didn't have a real structured background to joining the New York City Police Academy, which was very structured.

JK When you graduated, you very quickly went undercover.

Chong I did. I graduated and, what had happened was, when I was first in the application process, and I believe I was already, I had passed everything. I had passed all my backgrounds and everything. There came a point of time when I was brought into a back room and I was interviewed by what later on, as I learned more about the department, was the Intelligence Division. And at that time, I was asked if I.

JK You were eighteen or nineteen years old?

Chong No, I was twenty years old at that time. And at that time, I was asked if I would consider an undercover assignment. Of course, all of this was very new to me, and I had nobody to really run this by. So, I was asked if I would consider an undercover assignment, and would I consider not going to the Police Academy, although I would be hired by the New York City Police Department, and postponing my Police Academy training, and working as what they would call a 'deep undercover' for the New York City Police Department. I didn't know what to do at the time.

JK Yes! That's a tough decision.

Chong And I had really not a lot of people to speak to, but I was at John Jay College, and you can't look back on any of the things that you did, but I had spoken to two people that I really didn't know that well, but I knew that they were policemen. One of them was a professor. I said, "Hey, the strangest thing happened to me when I was down there getting my medical, my final medical approval. They called me into a side room and some lieutenant asked me if I would postpone my Academy training, be hired by New York City and do undercover work." And both of the people that I had approached told me absolutely not, don't do that, that that is something that you shouldn't do. You know, in retrospect, I guess in ways, they had their own opinions. They were both people that had been in the department a long time, and I guess in retrospect, they had their opinions. I should maybe have asked more people, but I didn't have the people to ask. I didn't know who to ask, and quite honestly, when I left that room, I was told by the person that was asking me if I wanted to be undercover, not to speak to anybody. So, I was very confused. What I did was I came back and I told them, "You know what? I want to be a policeman. I want to wear a uniform and I want to be in the street. I want to

be a policeman.” That’s what I learned from college, how to be a policeman. That’s what I want to be. So, there was no pressure. There was a ‘thank-you’ and I was sworn-in with all the other recruits, and I was in the newspapers, and they took pictures of us and everything else, and I went to the Police Academy. Later on, I would find out that some people do take that other career path and do the deep undercover stuff. I joined the Police Department. I graduated from the Academy. I went out to NSU, they called it. I went out to NSU. I was very aggressive. From NSU, I went to the 77th Precinct.

JK What is NSU?

Chong Neighborhood Stabilization Unit. It was a rookie training unit. Then I went to the 77th Precinct, and I was doing very well in the 77th Precinct. It was Bedford Stuyvesant, and the funny thing was, I was really the first Asian cop that anybody had ever seen! It was funny because I went to the 77th Precinct, Bedford Stuyvesant, Crown Heights, and it was all old-timers. There were no young cops. I went in there, and I went in there and they all looked at me and they said, “What are you doing here? Why aren’t you in Chinatown?” You know, “Why aren’t you in the 5th Precinct? Who did you piss off?”

JK Because we all pissed someone off to get out here!

Chong Right! And, unfortunately, that was known as a dumping ground, unfortunately. I didn’t know any of that. I didn’t know any of the culture. But later on, I found out that that was so-called a ‘punishment precinct’ for people who were sent. You know, it was a very high crime precinct, extremely high crime, extremely violent precinct at the time, one of the leaders in homicides throughout the city. But I learned a lot. I learned a lot. I got injured in a shooting very badly, and then I remember somebody, and I can’t remember who it was, but some Chief visited me at the hospital, and they were all talking and everything, and I was a kid and they said, “Oh, you know what? He did good.” They said, “Where would you like to go?” And back then, you know, being tough guy that I was, I said, “I’d love to go to the Tactical Patrol Force,” which was at the time, the so-called Marine Corps or the Green Berets of the Police Department. Give me a reputation, at least. So, I ended up going to the Tactical Patrol Force because I did such a good job during the shooting, and I was assigned to the Tactical Patrol Force. While I was in the Tactical Patrol Force, which basically was a unit that they would put up in the highest crime areas in the city, and told us to just, quite honestly, rouse people and make our presence felt. You know, we were known as the people who would come in and quell civil disturbance. We were put in the highest crime areas of the city, on-foot patrol, flooding an area, and back then, I guess, if you look at it back then, the closest thing to no tolerance as possible. But not a very friendly community, so-called oriented group of officers. Actually, the precinct officers would complain that we would come in and step on everybody’s toes and make enemies with everybody that they had fostered relationships with, and then we would leave. But our job was to basically go in and just crush crime, as they would say it back then. Go in and crush crime. Issue tickets, arrest people, crush crime. And so, that’s what I did. One night, it was very early in my career, it was New Year’s Eve, and the FALN bombed New York City.⁴ A call came over the

radio, and if you remember, some of those bombs were down by 26 Federal Plaza, Police Plaza, right by Chinatown. A call came over the radio, a citywide call, that anybody that spoke Chinese-American was to respond down to the 5th Precinct because they were looking for interpreters. I responded down to the 5th Precinct because the call came over the radio, and I ended up working a couple days interpreting with my Cantonese, interpreting possible Chinese witnesses to the bombings. I was noticed by certain people and then what happened is that eventually, that detail lasted for a few months, and eventually I was approached and asked if I would go undercover and do undercover work, which I did.

JK Going back to the shooting, do you want to describe what happened in the 77th Precinct?

Chong Well, I was a rookie police officer. I mean, a real serious rookie police officer! Less than a year on patrol.

JK Yes, and in one of the most dangerous Precincts in the City.

Chong Yes. And actually, I had to be assigned to a pool post. They had a public swimming pool, and I had been assigned to a pool post. I had worked the pool and I was on my way walking back to the Precinct from the pool, and as I was walking back to the Precinct from the pool, a call came over of a 10-85, where one of the officers was calling for a back-up unit and said that he had a robbery in progress on the street. I happened to be about two blocks away, just walking back to the Precinct, and hearing it on the radio, ran the two blocks. A 10-85 is an officer needs additional units. We considered the 7-7 an A-House, a tough guy precinct. No one would ever, it's funny, part of the culture, nobody would call it 10-13, because a 10-13 is officer down and officer needs assistance, and quite honestly, this was a 10-13, but in our tough guy culture, it wasn't considered a tough guy to call a 10-13. So, it was a 10-85 Forthwith, which is basically a 10-13! But you learn things like this. So, the officer went over the air and called a 10-85 Forthwith, which is really a 10-13. And he was explaining that he had a robbery in progress, shots fired. I was two blocks away, and I ran the two blocks. When I got there, there was an officer exchanging gun fire with a suspect. I got into the scene, I saw the two exchanging gunfire. What had happened was a bread truck was making a delivery, and a suspect went to hold up the bread truck and robbed the driver of the bread truck, and the officer basically walked into it and they exchanged gunfire. When I got to the scene, they were exchanging gunfire. I exchanged gunfire. I started to fire shots. And the suspect ran into a building, and back then, there were smoke shops. These were stores that had record labels that were taped to the windows that you couldn't look in, and everything else. And quite honestly, there were no records for sale in these stores. What they were were they were just store fronts that would sell marijuana. They would sell nickel and dime bags of marijuana to people they knew. You know, head shops. They would sell pipes and rolling paper and stuff, but they would tape their windows up with LPs, records, to cover everything that was going on. We exchanged gunfire, both myself and this other officer, with this guy, and the guy ran into the smoke shop. I ran, being young, stupid and aggressive, instead of waiting for back-up, I ran into the store after the guy. As I ran into

the store after the guy, we exchanged gunfire in the doorway, as I was backing out of the store, the guy threw a huge, huge chair on top of me, and that chair struck my head and struck my neck, and then the Emergency Services Officers pulled me out of the line-of-fire and they went in, and there's actually an old picture of me, because I had gotten up, I was so angry, I had gotten up, and there's an old picture of me with a bunch of cops, dragging this guy out of the store. But I was injured quite badly. I had damage to my spine. I had damage to my neck and I suffered a major concussion. It was a very bad injury.

JK But that didn't deter you from similar actions in the rest of your career?

Chong No, actually.

JK You take risks.

Chong In the police culture, because I wasn't really out of the Academy that long, so, all of my buddies were calling me up saying, "Wow, look at you! You're in the newspapers! Wow! Look at what you did! You're going to get a big medal!" And all this other stuff. But I was truly, by that time, I was entrenched. I was entrenched in the culture, and I couldn't get enough of it. I really couldn't get enough of it. I couldn't get enough of the adrenaline, I couldn't get enough of the camaraderie, I couldn't get enough of the action. You know, even to a point where we would get off-duty, officers would go and they would tailgate, and I would join them tailgating and everything else, and it was just all part of the culture. Drinking was part of the culture back then, and it was part of the way, I guess, the senior guys, guys would relieve stress. They would smoke, they would drink.

JK Together?

Chong Together. These were the same guys that you worked with for eight hours, and then after you'd work your eight hours you'd sit around and drink and kvetch and smoke and talk and eat for another five hours. So I had gotten caught up in that whole culture.

JK You agreed to go undercover?

Chong Yes.

JK Which is a little different than going deep undercover. Deep undercover would have meant that no one really would have known you were a police officer unless something, unless you were arrested or some such, but undercover, how was your mission explained to you, and what actually was your mission?

Chong Well, it was funny because there was not a lot of explanation. The Police Department, we're talking now Police Department 1982.

JK These are still very rough years.

Chong These are very rough years, and a police department that was still very militaristic. A police department that was very strict and very militaristic. Much different than the young people that you deal with now. You know, back then, the culture was very strict and the culture was very militaristic. So, you didn't ask, you know, nowadays, supervisors have to be everywhere, you have to have sergeants respond to arrest situations, captains are responding to arrest situations. Anything that's possibly, anything that's press-worthy, you have brass all over the place. That's sort of the way I run my police department now. But back then, you never really saw brass, as a police officer.

Side 2

Chong A weakness, number one, that you would call a supervisor, because you would expect as a police officer, to know what you're doing. And number two, you didn't want to bother the sergeant or anybody.

JK "What, you can't handle this? Why are you calling me?"

Chong Right. So, it was a completely different culture, and as far as the commanding officer of the precinct, number one, what we used to say is that the sergeant was the boss, and you never bothered the boss. The lieutenant was the prince, and he was always in the castle, and you never bothered the prince while he was in his castle. You just didn't bother with the prince in his castle. And the commanding officer was God, and you never did anything with the commanding officer. If you were ever even to bump into him in the parking lot, all you would do is salute him and run the other way. That was the culture. That really was the culture. And I think the bosses acted the same way, also. You know, the bosses expected that. So, what I'm getting at was when I was offered the assignment, it was more of a, kind of like, "Well, we got something we got to do. Do you want to be assigned to organized crime, OCCD?" I said, "Well, do I have a choice?" "No, you don't have a decision. You've got the guts to do it?" "Yes." "Okay, report on Monday." So, that was basically it. It wasn't a lot of discussion. It wasn't a lot of anything. It was just that, "We want a Chinese guy, you speak the language, report on Monday."

JK But you speak Cantonese, and at the time, a lot of the new immigrants.

Chong No.

JK Not yet?

Chong No. At that time, it was basically Cantonese.

JK Hong Kong?

Chong Yes. Cantonese and, well, Hong Kong is Cantonese, a southern Chinese dialect. Taishanese and Cantonese. But basically, Cantonese was the majority of the language at the time. The Fukienese and the Mandarin and all that came later. But at that time, it was basic Cantonese. I spoke it fluently, and that's what they were looking for. That was basically it. I was in TTF and I was doing this thing for Terrorism Task Force, and I was approached by, I believe it was a lieutenant, and the lieutenant said, "Do you want to do this?" I said, "I'm not" – and the next thing I know, I was up in an inspector's office, an inspector I had never seen before. I went up to the inspector's office at 1 Police Plaza, and the inspector yelled at me and --

JK You don't want to keep going up those floors.

Chong Right. He yelled at me, screamed at me, showed me a gold detective's badge, and basically said to me if I do a good job, I'll be a detective one day. And I think that's what pushed me over the edge, when he pulled out that gold detective badge and he showed it to me. He said, "If you do a good job, one day if you're lucky, you'll get one of these." He dismissed me and said, "On Monday you'll report to 1 Police Plaza." That's what happened. On Monday, I reported to 1 Police Plaza, and I was effectively an undercover then.

JK What were they trying to get information on? What did they expect you to do, or were you just out there, finding what you could?

Chong No. Again, in retrospect and looking back at it, when I first joined, I didn't know what they wanted me to do. But in retrospect, in looking at it, they had a real problem with organized crime. They had a problem with traditional organized crime and non-traditional organized crime. And Chinese organized crime was really rearing its ugly head, and now we were talking about violence on the Lower East Side, and in Asian communities, I guess, that the police department had never experienced before. This was the time that the gangs were really starting to beat their chests, and really starting to be very noticeable and violent.

JK It's partially a function of a much younger population coming into Chinatown and growing up in Chinatown, which we did not have for decades. It was a very controlled population and very dominated by elders, for generations, it seemed like, and now, like the rest of the city, youth is breaking out, and it's a very violent environment.

Chong Right. And it was. It was a very violent environment. There were more young people than ever, and they were getting so-called "westernized," whereas the family structure was no longer the over-all controlling element in these young people's lives. It was the same thing that I had sort of started to go towards, the excitement, the adrenaline, the power. But now I got a real good insight on it because the Asian gangs were, like all gangs, were concentrated in their own communities, victimizing their own people. Very rarely would you have an Asian gang go out to a Caucasian or a Black neighborhood and extort Black stores or African-American stores or Hispanic stores or Italian stores. You know, they preyed on their own. And the Police Department, I quickly

learned, had a major problem with this. Now, I'm sure that other communities had problems, too, because when I joined, went into the undercover ranks, was the first time I started meeting young people like myself, not just of Asian descent, young Hispanic people that were doing the same kind of things I was doing. Young Italian people that were doing some of the same things that I was doing. And young African-American people, undercovers. We were all doing the same thing, basically, but in our own directed areas.

JK That's interesting. Were all of you undercovers meeting together?

Chong No, we wouldn't all meet together, but what happened is that, it's funny, because one of the things, and all of this was starting to be developed, and this was, again, before the era of cell phones, before the era of pagers or anything like that. So, what they would have is they would have us go to – for instance, we were not supposed to carry the typical police gun. The typical police gun, we were always taught the typical police gun was the .38 revolver. Blue .38 revolver. Policemen carry a blue .38 revolver. The gun was blue metal, .38 revolver. That's what policemen carried. Bad guys carry all the other things, but policemen in the New York City Police Department, that was their gun. It was either a two-inch revolver or a four-inch revolver for uniform; two-inch revolver for detectives and plain clothes. So, one of the first things we did, we didn't want for them to give us a persona of not being a policemen. We had to qualify with a gun that was not a typical police gun. So, they would send you up to the range, and when you went up to the range, that's when you would bump into an African-American guy and an Hispanic guy and whatever, and you knew you were all in the police range, so you all looked at each other, and we were all in blue jeans and cut-off t-shirts, and I had a ponytail and earrings. You know, we were all looking at each other and we were like, "Wow, we're cops!" And we were qualifying with non-cop guns. These were the times that you would get to meet these guys and gals. Very few gals, mostly guys, and you would get to meet them and would say, "Wow, oh, wow, you're assigned, I didn't know! Okay!" And we were very careful on what we would ask each other. We were told, quite simply, we were not to discuss what we were doing, but we would bump into each other and sometimes they would have a classroom to show us how to work recording devices, and you would go to a group and, I guess, they'd have a couple of technicians there to show you how to work recording devices, and you'd go there, and all of a sudden, you'd bump into three or four other undercovers, and we were all getting trained in the same thing, of how to work a Nagra tape recorder, or how to work recording devices and things like that, so that's where you would bump into them. But I'm not sure. Eventually in my career, I ended up supervising undercovers and sending people to a real undercover school, where people go and they teach you how to be an undercover. I never attended that school.

JK They just sent you undercover? "Okay, you're undercover now."

Chong They just sent me undercover. That was basically what it was. "You're undercover." They told me that they had taken me out of the system and I had a detective explain to me that if you were to bump into anybody that you knew from my very limited

time in patrol, that you were to ignore them and walk away from them. And then, when we were patrolmen and we were in uniform, we were always taught that if you see somebody that you recognize as a policeman, and he's not dressed as a policeman anymore, to ignore them and not to acknowledge them. Or, if you were to acknowledge them and they ignored you, walk away from them. Don't push the issue. So, that was what, that was the extent of my undercover work, was that if I was in doing any of my assignments and I was to see an officer that I recognized from the TPF or an officer that I recognized from the 77th or an officer that I recognized from the Police Academy, that I was to ignore them, and that they would know if they called out my name and I just walked away and ignored them, that they would know better not to continue to call out my name.

JK So, what actually were you doing?

Chong It actually started very simple. I actually, the first thing I did was I went into the Chinese community and I was just to be able to listen and to be able to adapt, and it was not that difficult for me, because when I first came to the United States, I was in the Chinese community! And so, I just basically went back and hung out in the coffee shops where gang members were. I hung out in some of the stores where things were going on, and there was all kinds of stuff going on. There was gambling, there was prostitution, there was all kinds of stuff going on. And quite honestly, Atlantic City wasn't in its heyday yet. So, I was just hanging out and going into the casinos, and just getting myself familiarized and getting people familiar with me. That was the extent of what my job was. I would go and I would call in, and they told me to have a pocketful of dimes, and then, while I was undercover, it turned to quarters. But it was to have a pocketful of dimes, and to know where all the pay phones were. And to check in every so often at a telephone number, and I would just call in and say, "This is" and I'd give a code name, "I'm checking in." And that was the extent of it.

JK To make sure that you were okay?

Chong Yes. I think it was more to just check in because I never, you know, in retrospect, in looking at it, I never had really any back-up. I had nothing. I had nothing and not a lot was expected of me, really, except that I could carry a gun if I wanted. I was told really not to carry a badge. I was told not to carry my ID card, but I could carry a gun! I was told back then that if you ran into a problem where you had to use your gun and uniformed officers came, and God forbid, because the big thing was not to blow your cover. But if you ran into a life-and-death situation where you had to blow your cover, to start spitting out police jargon. And if you started spitting out police jargon such as "10-63, I'm going on meal" and "10-90 X – that's unfounded," or you started spitting out police jargon, that the uniformed officer would realize that you were a police officer. Start spitting out, "You have 28 for a day off," or whatever, and just say things like that, and they would realize that you were a police officer. Because they told you not to carry identification with you but you could carry a gun. But it was not a police gun, it was an undercover gun. So, it was a weapon that normally police officers didn't carry.

JK And it was important for you to carry a gun?

Chong I would think that that was my choice. But because I had already been entrenched in the culture of policing for a little bit, where you would carry your gun, back then, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, always be prepared to take police action. I think if I would have went undercover immediately, when that person approached me, before I went to the Police Academy, I had never, I mean, I had seen guns. I had friends that had guns, but I had never carried one. The first time I really fired a gun was when I was in the Police Academy. So, now I had gotten used to carrying a gun with me all the time, and now I was undercover and I was given the choice. You know, it's you. Do you want to carry it? You don't want to carry it. What do you want to do? My choice was, because I was so used to carrying a gun, I carried it. But there were times that I didn't bring it with me. There were times that, and I think part of the fear was to be confronted by police officers. My fear really wasn't, at the time, that much of the bad guys. My fear was not being recognized by the good guys. And if I had this undercover gun with me, and by that time, I was allowed to grow my hair long, I was allowed to wear earrings, and I was allowed to.

JK You had to do all that. You're a young guy.

Chong Yes. I was allowed to revert back to my days in high school and in college, which I did. And now, thinking about it, well, here's a kid who looks like a high school kid, a bad kid, or just a street kid, let's say, and he's got a gun on him! So, now, what would the uniformed officer think? And it's not a police gun. And back then, there weren't very many Chinese police officers or Asian-American police officers. So, you put all of that in a barrel.

JK They have no reason to expect that you would be a police officer.

Chong Right. None whatsoever. And part of my job was to look as non-police as possible. To look as non-establishment, as non-law enforcement as possible. That was part of my job. So, because of that, when you think about it in retrospect, there were times I didn't carry my gun because I knew that there would be a lot of police officers in the street, and I didn't want to carry my gun. And I will tell you that there were times where I was put up against the wall by uniformed police officers and searched! And I said to myself, "Thank goodness I didn't have a gun because they would have arrested me!"

JK Yes. Well, that's the whole stop-and-frisk business going on!

Chong Yeah! But again, I just didn't, so I was very careful when I carried a gun. When I met with bad people that I knew were really bad people, I did carry a gun. And then what I did was, when I got more familiar in Chinatown, then they started using me. They started using my observations for search warrants. They started using my intelligence for raids. They started using all of that. But again, not so much, I was directed in the Chinatown area, but I had the entire Chinatown, and I could just get as much information as I could from all around Chinatown, and then just feed the

information back. And after I fed the information back, they would start using it for probable cause for search warrants. They started raiding the casinos. They started raiding the prostitution houses. They started raiding the gang houses. And it was from my information that I was providing them. And eventually, I got to get into the gang, the Flying Dragons.

JK You got into the gang?

Chong I got into the Flying Dragons, yes.

JK Which meant what, exactly? I don't mean the initiation rites.

Chong But I became a gang member, and I was actually a part of the Flying Dragons down in Chinatown. And we had rivals. We had the Ghost Shadows, we had the Tung On Boys. We had rival gangs. But the big rival was the Ghost Shadows. I had gotten in with the Flying Dragons, and I was a Flying Dragon.

JK And that puts you in a position of not observing criminal activity, but participating in criminal activity?

Chong Which everybody knew about. It's funny, but back then an officer's statement, an undercover's statement, or an undercover's word was very good. You didn't necessarily need to have all the audio visual and all this other stuff. When they could, they would. I said, listen, I'm going to be meeting here, I'm going to go there. And they said, "Okay." And again, technology wasn't, they would have to literally pull a van up and try to videotape me, meeting with gang guys and hanging out with gang guys. And in Chinatown, everybody knew you were there! So, it was very difficult for them to do it. But then again, our work was good. The things that we did and the things that we said and we documented, was good for court.

JK I'm trying to understand how the guys in the Flying Dragons said, "Come on, you're exactly what we're looking for."

Chong No, no. What happened was.

JK You must have developed some sort of reputation.

Chong I developed a reputation. I went to a couple of the martial arts schools, where these guys were working on martial arts. I fought with a couple of them. I started hanging out, going up to the tea shops with them and coffee shops with them, I went out to the discos with them and stuff. And then, the next thing you knew, they said to me, "Why don't you." I also had, we had informants that were entrenched, that were also vouching for me, upper level people that were vouching for my status, which made me legitimate. And eventually, I was dating the girls. Eventually, they had set me up in an undercover apartment, so I had an undercover apartment, and guys would come over and hang out in the undercover apartment.

JK Was your apartment wired?

Chong Yes, to a degree. Very primitively, but to a degree. I had recording devices in it, but it was primitive back then. You know, we still had the clocks with the numbers on them, and the big hands on them. But yes, it was wired. What we did was, eventually, I just meshed into them and they said, "Hey, listen. You're a Dragon. You're a member of us. That's it." And I was accepted. I became a member, and I ran with them for a couple of years.

JK Were they especially violent?

Chong They could be. They could be. They could be very violent when they felt their territory was being threatened, and they could be very violent when they were directed to be violent to people that didn't pay off their debts.

JK Gambling debts, usually?

Chong Well, it was gambling debts. It was usury debts. They would make loans and people didn't pay the, and the usury rates were very high. So, the loansharking bets, the gambling bets. Just the intimidation. You know, you had to buy your groceries, if you had a restaurant, you had to buy your groceries from these people. I mean, it was organized. It was true organized crime. You had to buy your groceries from these people. You had to pay a street tax to these people. It was a very, very organized, it was organized crime. The gang part of it was the street, thuggery and the fear. The organization part of it was the business part of it, and it made a lot of money. I mean, we were doing things with smuggling girls and prostitution rings and transporting weapons and drugs. There was all kinds of stuff. And the gangs were the look-outs and the muscle. When you made it in the gang, you were slowly given sort of bigger jobs within the organization. Transporting weapons, transporting drugs. Protecting girls. And then, eventually, committing homicides.

JK These are girls brought from China?

Chong Yeah, these were girls brought from China. They were brought from China or the Philippines. They were basically brought here as domestics, thinking that they were going to get a domestic job. We were into alien smuggling; that was the other thing. Now, what do you do when you have a room full of aliens that you're waiting for the final payment? So, we would keep these people until the organization finally got their payment from whoever sponsored them to come into the country. So, we would sometimes sit guard over twenty men in a room.

JK You're intersecting legal businesses, legitimate businesses?

Chong Yes.

JK And the line between an illegal business and a legal business, in this context, is a little fuzzy.

Chong It's very fuzzy because a lot of these people would have legitimate businesses, but they were involved in the alien smuggling. They were involved in a lot of the labor crimes because there were no unions. So, if you needed a cook for your kitchen, or you needed a waiter, or you needed somebody to clean your restaurant, typically it was somebody who was illegal, that was smuggled into the country, that owed a debt to the smugglers, and then you, as a restaurant owner, were forced to hire these people so they could pay off their debt. Everything was, and if you wanted to buy your groceries to make your food, you had to buy your rice from certain distributors, you had to buy your vegetables from other distributors. It was a very organized thing.

JK Did any major cases come out of this, and when did you get out?

Chong Yes, there were quite a few big cases that came out of this, both federal cases and local cases that came out of this. Eventually, when I got out, we had done a couple of major gang sweeps down in Chinatown. Federal RICO cases down in Chinatown. I believe one part of it was that we were actually going to, or there was discussion of us actually killing a District Attorney. I remember quite vividly that I brought that information back, and that's when everybody took a breath and said, "Well, we can't let you kill the Assistant District Attorney who was prosecuting gang cases, so we think we ought to bring all these people down." So, we took a bunch of people down, and eventually, I was phased out, but as I was being phased out, the difficult part was trying to convince them that now that I was being phased out, that I was a police officer, and an undercover police officer, and not an informant, which being an informant was basically a contract for death. It was a difficult period, it really was. I mean, we were arresting people left and right on my information and on my intelligence that I had gathered for years. We were locking people up and indicting people and putting people away, and really breaking the back of some of these gangs. But while we were doing this, now I started to be exposed. And now the gangs, and they had some very powerful attorneys, the gangs were saying, "Produce this undercover. Produce this undercover in court. Produce the undercover in court." And they had made a conscientious decision, "Okay, we're going to produce him," and I went into numerous courtrooms, and although I didn't say my name, they saw my face. And they saw that shiny gold detective badge around my neck, and I would walk in and I would be produced. And the word got out very quickly of who I was and how I infiltrated and all this other stuff. You know, part of the lore down in Chinatown for quite some time. And it was a very difficult, quite honestly, for me to re-adjust, because I had really gotten very close to a lot of these people. I had gone to their weddings and I had dated some of their daughters, and I was hanging out with them, and we had done a lot of stuff, and now they looked at me, you know, half the community looked at me as a hero and the other half of the community looked at me as a traitor.

JK I would say more than half of the community looked at you as a hero.

Chong So, it was tough. Like I said, half the community looked at me as a hero; the other half looked at me as a traitor. You know, how could I do this to my own? And it was difficult even for me. But in the meantime, I had earned my detective badge, which I had coveted. It was a tremendous, tremendous experience for me, and I learned a lot. I learned a lot about the inner workings of the Chinese community that quite honestly, I didn't even know about. I had no idea. I didn't know about it. So, I learned a lot. I learned about, and the thing that upset me the most was that these were bad guys, and they were victimizing the Chinese community. Tremendously victimizing them. So, that's what kept me focused, was that these were really, really bad guys. And they were earning money in bad ways, and off the backs of some very hard-working people. That kept me focused. And then I did something really stupid. I took a police exam to be a sergeant when I was an undercover. And then, what happened is that I got called! They said, "Listen, you're going to be a sergeant," and I remember that my Chief actually went, because I was promoted in private, I was promoted to detective in private, and I was promoted to sergeant in private. And my Chief went to then-Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward and said, "We'd like to keep him as a sergeant." Back then the policy was no! If you make supervisor, if you make sergeant, you have to go out on patrol. And so, they adhered by the policy, regardless of how many cases I was involved in, and what kind of work I was doing and everything else. I went back out on patrol as a sergeant.

JK It sounds like you were ready to make a move in some ways.

Chong You know, in some ways it was very refreshing. I had been so eliminated from what routine police work was all about that I didn't even really quite know what police work was all about. And the funniest story is that now I'm a sergeant, and I really don't know too much about police work. I know about undercover work. And I know a lot about investigative work, from what I learned from the investigators. But I certainly didn't know how to be a police sergeant in uniform on patrol. So I go to sergeant school and I get promoted to sergeant in a private ceremony, because they were trying to keep me. And then the word came that they couldn't keep me, so they sent me out to the 104th Precinct out in Queens, and of course, I go to the 104th Precinct out in Queens, and here I am, twenty-some-odd years old with sergeant stripes on my arms, and I'm a boss! A policeman! In the 104th Precinct there were a lot of senior policemen.

JK Where is the 104th?

Chong Middle Village, Ridgewood.

JK God, that's the middle of Queens. That's Queens Queens.

Chong Well, no. It's actually on the Bushwick border. It's Ridgewood, Middle Village, that area of Queens right on the Brooklyn/Queens border. We were known for our cemeteries. Hundreds of acres of cemeteries. But it was a very big precinct. I got sent out there, and it was eye-opening because I had uniforms that I hardly had ever worn and now I had stripes sewn onto them and I remember quite clearly there was nobody more nervous in the room than me, the first night I had to call a roll call. I walked into the

room, and here I was, a kid that spent the majority of his short career in undercover work, very limited time in uniform, and here I was, calling a roll call, and I was looking at all twenty year veterans. I was calling roll call, and I was the boss! But it was a good, it was good. I mean, I learned a lot. You learn how to deal with people in a different way, but it was culture shock for me, it really was. I was very lucky, I had good Lieutenants and I had a good support network of other sergeants that I could rely on. And we made it work. I wasn't there very long. I was only there, quite honestly, for half of my probationary period, and I was brought back into organized crime.

JK Well, we should leave it there, because it's been almost an hour-and-a-half, and you're running a police department.

Chong Yes. So, we'll make another date to finish this?

JK That would be terrific. So, thank you very much.

Chong Thank you. I really appreciate it.

End

David E. Chong, May 24, 2010

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¹ Immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia founded the Ghost Shadows in Chinatown in 1971; reportedly controlled by the On Leung Merchants Association, the gang engaged in extortion, drug trafficking, and other criminal activity, and was active in the 1980s and 1990s. Four leaders became informants in 1996 and the resulting cases essentially destroyed the gang.

² Immigrants founded the Flying Dragons in Chinatown in 1967; the gang was affiliated with the Hip Sing Tong and engaged in heroin trafficking, gambling, and extortion. In 1994, 33 gang members were indicted on federal racketeering charges.

³ On June 30, 1975, the end of the fiscal year, the Beame administration announced massive layoffs: 5,034 police officers, 2,127 firemen, 2,934 sanitation workers, 534 correction officers, and 2,000 municipal employees. With the layoffs, retirements, and cancellation of new classes at the Police Academy, the NYPD shrank from 31,000 to 21,000 by 1980.

⁴ Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional was a terrorist organization seeking the independence of Puerto Rico. On New Year's Eve, 1982, they planted bombs at 1 Police Plaza, the building housing the United States Attorney's office at 1 St. Andrew's Place, the FBI offices at 26 Federal Plaza, and the Federal Courthouse at Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn. Police Officer Rocco Pascarella was badly injured when the bomb exploded at Police Headquarters, losing his left leg, the fingers on his right hand, and most of his sight.