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DOC AND RUTH

As the train pulled into the Oakland Station on that cloudy June morning in 1943, I was excited about being in California for the first time, but even more I was looking forward to meeting the Youngs.

Leroy Young, better known as Doc, was one of Paul's F.B.I. colleagues, the first one I was to meet. He and his wife Ruth were visiting her family on vacation and were meeting us during our day-long layover in Oakland. The flurry of meeting the Youngs and seeing to the transfer of our luggage to the evening train for Portland made me forget momentarily that Paul and I were very hungry. After breakfast the day before, our train had divided, with the half containing the dining car heading southwest for San Diego while we went on to Oakland. So, we had missed lunch and dinner, having had a doughnut apiece, the largess of an army lieutenant who had "requisitioned" them from a corporal who had leaped off the train and bought out the snack bar at the little Arizona station.

Ruth's concern that we might be hungry reminded us very vividly that we were indeed starving. We went to her family's home and she prepared us a hasty brunch to tide us over to an early dinner. It was the first of our long-time enjoyment of her wonderful meals, albeit this time strictly American. It was easy to feel comfortable with the friendly Youngs, as we chatted during our meal. Soon, however, we crossed over to San Francisco for a short tour of the city. We ended in the Chinatown area at a large, beautiful Chinese restaurant. When we were seated, Doc Young told us that he would order for us. We were astounded to hear a musical series of words in Chinese from Doc, ending with "family style" in English. The waiter spoke at length in Chinese, we assumed repeating the order and ending with "family style" in English. Doc smiled and nodded.



Doc had grown up in Philadelphia, where he had earned his medical degree as well as a doctor of philosophy. While he was interning, he taught himself Japanese, a knowledge which accounted for

his being on the West Coast with the F.B.I. He served as translator for the cryptanalysts, of whom Paul was one. His English was flawless. After all it was closer to his first language than Mandarin was. During the years we knew the Youngs I never got accustomed to the fact that he and Ruth would occasionally speak to each other in Chinese, although Ruth spoke Cantonese instead of Mandarin. With his language ability, one more dialect was no problem to him. Somehow, I always felt comfortable with their speaking words I didn't understand. I really liked the sound of it.

The meal began with a cabbage soup that was nothing short of glorious. I was happy that I could begin eating without having to struggle with chopsticks. But when they came, the Youngs gave us expert instructions, and I was delighted to learn that I could use them. The Youngs chatted about San Francisco, their experience of living in Portland, Oregon, during the early part of World War II, the occasional difficulty they had because people were wary of Oriental-appearing people, not knowing whether they were Japanese or Chinese. Actually, the prejudice against Chinese dated back to the time when many Chinese were brought to this country for cheap labor to build the railroads. It was an eye-opening lesson for me, fresh out of highly segregated Texas. To my surprise, the Portlanders were very critical of the social and economic barriers in the South!

The dinner was different from any of the Chinese food I'd ever had before, and it was indeed served "family style." I enjoyed it thoroughly. All too soon, the pleasant meal ended, for Paul and I had to return to the train station to begin the overnight trip to our new home in Oregon.

This, of course, was not the only time we visited with Leroy and Ruth. The times we were with them at their apartment were always outstanding as we got better and better acquainted. My education in Chinese cuisine continued as Ruth produced magical dishes from her tiny Pullman kitchen -- birds' nest soup, exciting new versions of familiar and unfamiliar vegetables, and even squid. I was fascinated watching Ruth sliver, slice, and dice vegetables, chicken, and fish with her lethal looking Chinese cleaver.



Visiting the Youngs was even more enjoyable after their first child, Lester, was born. I was intrigued with their difficulty in giving Lester his Chinese name. As the Youngs told us, the custom was that Leroy's oldest sister was privileged to select the baby's Chinese name. With the difficulty of communicating by mail from coast to coast during wartime, the Youngs had problems with the fact that they didn't care for the tonal quality of the baby's name. Doc was a sensitive musician. Our American ears could not distinguish between the music of the name they finally accepted and the discordant one they rejected.

From the Youngs we continued to learn, not only their fascinating personalities and their Chinese culture, but also much about our own culture. Doc's finely educated taste in music introduced us to such masterpieces as the Bach B Minor Mass, which he termed the greatest music ever written. With the Youngs, we listened to the entire Mass one evening. Because of that introduction, Paul jumped at the opportunity to sing it in the community chorus when we were in graduate school in Chapel Hill. He can still sing the various choral movements by heart today.

Despite our looking forward to the end of the War and the return of peace, we were saddened when the Youngs were the first to leave Portland. They had a dream of going around the world, living for extended periods in different countries while Doc practiced medicine. The first leg of their journey was to the Philippines, where Doc's medicine was sorely needed.

We continued to hear from the Youngs for a number of years. Young Lester quickly became multilingual in the Philippines, where he picked up several native languages, notably Tagalog, as well as continuing with his English and Chinese. The Youngs were sure that they had a working theory of learning language, when they observed that Lester always replied in the language in which he was addressed. He was followed by a little sister, however, who learned all the languages she heard, too, but was not successful in keeping them distinct. Her replies were an apparent random mixture of all the tongues she knew, her own polyglot. As time for the children to enter school approached, the Youngs reevaluated their plan to go around the world, deciding to return to their roots. They went to Ithaca, New York, where Doc joined the faculty of the medical school at Cornell University.

Gradually as Paul and I moved about the United States, we lost track of the Youngs. Last week, we received a thick letter from them, still in Ithaca, giving us a brief look at their lives since we last heard. (How they found us is an interesting story in itself.) Their children are pursuing meaningful careers and their grandchildren, mostly in college, are showing promise of fulfilling the family legacy of achievement. We're looking forward to continuing our interrupted friendship and learning more details of what happened in those lost decades.